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## Singing Heaven Down to Earth: Spiritual Journeys, Eschatological Sounds, and Community Formation in Evangelical Conference Worship

MONIQUE INGALLS / Independent Scholar

You have come on a pilgrimage to experience an event in which God will speak . . . The point of being here is to meet God and to let him shape the direction of your life. (Urbana Conference director Jim Tebbe)

We have come, not for the music or the speakers . . . we have come here to meet God. (Passion Conference founder and director Louie Giglio)

Each year, tens of thousands of US evangelical Christians embark on religious journeys in search of a transformative personal experience of God. The vast majority of these pilgrims do not travel to sacred Christian sites in Israel or the Mediterranean, or to important places in US Christian history; rather, they convene at sports arenas and stadiums for multi-day Christian conferences. As they travel to these conferences on planes, buses, trains, and subways, evangelical pilgrims frequently strike up conversations with strangers who often turn out to be fellow travelers. Downtown hotels in major US cities sell out of rooms as large groups of conference-goers fill their lobbies. In anticipation of the conference's opening session, participants form snaking lines spilling out of the doors of the sports stadium in which it will be held. While standing in line, veterans of previous conferences share memories of their past experiences while new attendees animatedly describe the parts of the conference they are looking forward to the most, whether they be inspiring messages from the speakers, relevant topics of interest addressed in the afternoon seminars, or moving worship times. The atmosphere is both festive and expectant. Although spending time with friends and exploring a new city are certainly draws, most attendees say they have come for a more serious

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purpose: to “meet God” and to allow God to change their lives through the multifaceted, multi-day conference experience.

This article examines music at two interdenominational, multi-day events for evangelical college students—the Urbana and Passion conferences—through the lens of pilgrimage. The purpose of this article is to further the ethnomusicological exploration of sacred travel and the crucial role that music plays within it. Through close ethnographic exploration, this article examines a central discourse in each conference’s musical worship: a conversation about heaven or the end of time, which will be referred to as the *eschatological discourse*.<sup>1</sup> Following a brief theoretical overview of ethnomusicological literature on music and pilgrimage and a contextualization of evangelical conferences in North America, I show, first, how the eschatological discourse is embedded in song lyrics and in the way participants and leaders verbally frame the conferences’ musical activities. An extended side-by-side analysis of the performance of one worship song from each conference shows how participants are led to understand their singing as participation with the heavenly community, a contribution to the “sound of heaven.”

Secondly, I explore how musical style and social organization also serve as forms of eschatological discourse, demonstrating the marked contrast between the sounds, styles, and social configurations the respective conference organizers chose for corporate worship at these two events. I argue that because sound represents and signals a set of identifications between the gathered participants and the eschatological community, examining these specifically musical elements is important for understanding how each conference represents ideal social relationships in heaven and on earth. While a comparison of verbal discourses reveals broad similarities between these conferences’ eschatological imaginations, an examination of musical discourse reveals several crucial differences in how the Urbana and Passion Conferences represent the global evangelical community and how difference should be understood and treated within it. In the conclusion, I suggest that these differences may point toward—as well as contribute to—a growing split in the way US evangelicals approach contemporary political and societal issues.

As case studies, this article uses the Urbana Conference and the Passion Conference, two well-known US evangelical student conferences similar in scope, size, and age demographics. These conferences were held back to back during winter break of 2006–2007: the triennial Urbana conference, a five-day gathering of 23,000 college-aged attendees in St. Louis’s Edward Jones Dome and Convention Center, was held from December 27 to 31, 2006, while the annual Passion Conference drew 22,000 participants between the ages of 18 and 25 to Atlanta’s Gwinnett Arena over the period of January 1–4, 2007.

## **Gathering at the (Post)Modern Tent of Meeting: Locating the Evangelical Conference Pilgrimage**

Conferences like Passion and Urbana have historical antecedents that include tent revival meetings and multi-city evangelistic crusades. For much of US history, multi-day regional and national conferences have been sites of spiritual formation and transformation within evangelical Christianity (McLoughlin 1980; Hatch 1989; York 2000; Stowe 2002). Since the mid-twentieth century, interdenominational rallies and conferences more specifically focused on high school and college-aged students have become evangelical mainstays (Eskridge 1998; Wuthnow 1988; York 2000). These events are often sponsored or promoted by evangelical campus organizations such as Campus Crusade for Christ, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, the Navigators, or the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. In 2001, the combined membership of evangelical campus organizations in the United States totaled an estimated 210,000 students (Schmalzbauer 2007:2).<sup>2</sup>

Both the Urbana and Passion conferences drew evangelical college students across regions of the US and across racial and ethnic backgrounds.<sup>3</sup> Since its first conference in 1946, the triennial Urbana Conference has been organized and sponsored by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, a Christian campus organization active on over 500 US campuses with an estimated 35,000 actively involved students.<sup>4</sup> Passion, the newer of the two conferences, grew out of a college campus ministry, originally called Choice Ministries, at Baylor University, a Baptist institution. Passion grew into a national conference from a series of annual regional events held in various cities in Texas and Tennessee. Passion has been popularized by Baptist college ministries, by interdenominational ministries such as Campus Crusade for Christ—the largest Christian campus ministry, which currently has over 60,000 participating students in the US—and by its well-known live worship recordings.<sup>5</sup>

In order to understand the journeys to these evangelical conferences as pilgrimages, it is helpful to consider recent contributions to the study of sacred travel. Scholars from a variety of disciplines have contributed to the reinvigoration of pilgrimage studies as they have explored the important role of faith journeys in creating sacred spaces that inform a variety of communal and individual identities (Eade and Sallnow 1991; Stoddard and Morinis 1997; Swatos and Tomasi 2002; Coleman and Eade 2004; Margry 2008). Following Philip Bohlman's influential work articulating music's role in European pilgrimage and politics (1996), several ethnomusicological studies have focused on the role of music in pilgrimage and sacred travel (Muller 1999; Reily 2002; Greene 2003). These studies explore how music in pilgrimage serves as a multi-faceted mediator

between sacred space and physical place (Greene 2003), how pilgrim journeys create sacred space and time (Muller 1999), and how music enables pilgrims to enact belief through bodily practice (Reily 2002). This article builds from the foregoing ethnomusicological literature and contributes to it by showing how music is used to create a formative conference experience that instills not only beliefs and values, but also a set of social ideals that influence how evangelicals understand themselves as a community.

In addition, this article adds to the literature by considering pilgrimage as the construction of space considered independently of place. These pilgrim journeys deemphasize physical place, and their formative experiences reside wholly in the events occurring in a space that itself must be constructed and reframed. Although the 2007 Passion Conference was held in Atlanta, Georgia, it has also been held in other major cities throughout the United States, including Nashville, Chicago, and Los Angeles. The Urbana Conference was named for its original location at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, but has retained its name with its recent move to a larger venue in St. Louis, Missouri.

To address this nontraditional conception of pilgrimage within evangelical Christianity, it is helpful to draw models from recent scholarship in the anthropology of Christianity and in religious studies. Sociologist of religion Martyn Percy has argued that journeys to charismatic Christian revivals such as the "Toronto Blessing," which drew tens of thousands of travelers to a suburban Toronto church and later to satellite churches across the UK and Europe, can be considered forms of "postmodern pilgrimage" centered not on physical objects or sites, but on a particular kind of experience (1998). Like travelling to these revival centers, travel to conferences like Urbana and Passion can productively be explored as pilgrim journeys, which Percy helpfully describes as "journey[s] to a place that is beyond 'ordinary' religious control, in order to gain an extraordinary religious experience" (ibid.:282).

Congregational singing—an activity participants at Urbana and Passion described simply as "worship"—is a central component of the conference experience, framing the times of preaching and teaching and facilitating a divine encounter which often acts as a catalyst for personal and communal transformation. There are few conference events that are not interwoven with musical worship. Table 1 shows the similarities between Passion's and Urbana's daily schedules, and illustrates the ways in which musical worship is woven into nearly every one of the day's events. Conference attendees begin the morning by singing a few songs before the Bible study. Morning and evening main sessions are structured like an evangelical church service, with speakers bookended by twenty to forty minutes of worship during which a designated vocalist or team leads the gathered throng in congregational singing. Participating in musical worship

comprises from one quarter to one half of these two-hour general sessions. At both Passion and Urbana, musical worship was among the variety of topics addressed in afternoon seminars among which conference attendees could choose. Worship opportunities extended even into the late evening at both conferences, integrated formally within optional musical events and informally into small group prayer time. As Table 1 shows, during one conference day attendees easily participate in singing between twenty and forty worship songs, which translates to somewhere between an hour and a half and three hours of singing.

Music's role is particularly integral to the conference experience because it is one of the few ritual elements used to create sacred space and to designate the conference meeting as a sacred event. Both anthropologist Simon Coleman and sociologist Martyn Percy have argued that the "sacred center" of Protestant pilgrimage comprises not specific places or physical objects, but rather portable practices and discourses intended to be "transferable back into more localized ecclesial contexts" (Percy 1998:284), which charismatic personalities at center stage help to interpret for participants (Coleman 2004). The sacred center of the evangelical conference pilgrimage, then, is a space of ritual enactment created by a multi-part performance of which music is a central component.

The sites and sounds of the Urbana and Passion conferences illustrate how congregational worship music creates sacred space and mediates between the conference gathering and the ideal community in heaven. Examining the intersections of belief and experience in musical performance—particularly congregational singing—at evangelical conferences shows what sorts of communal identifications are being performed, indexed, and encouraged, and holds further implications for

**Table 1. Daily Schedule for the Urbana 06 and Passion 07 Conferences**

Urbana 06		Passion 07	
8:30–10:00 AM	Morning Bible Study (2–3 songs)	9:00–10:30 AM	Morning Bible Study (3–4 songs)
10:45 AM–12:30 PM	Morning General Session (7–10 songs)	10:45 AM–12:30 PM	Morning Main Session (7–10 songs)
2:00–5:30 PM	Afternoon Seminars (50+ concurrent)	2:00–3:30 PM	Afternoon Seminars (15 concurrent)
7:30–9:30 PM	Evening General Session (7–10 songs)	7:00–9:30 PM	Evening Main Session (7–10 songs)
9:30–11:00 PM	(Optional) Extended Session, Concert, or Worship (5–10 songs)	11:15 PM–1:00 AM	(Optional) "Late Nite" Worship (10–15 songs)

how the broader evangelical religious community is imagined. Exploring musical performance at these two conferences reveals a significant divergence in the way participants at Passion and Urbana are encouraged to position themselves and their gatherings in relationship to the broader global Christian community, which may have far-reaching social and political implications.

### **Communities Imagined and Imaginary: Conference Worship and Eschatological Sound**

In conversing with participants before and after Urbana and Passion, one particular interpretation of the event emerged from their accounts: the idea that the conference gathering was an experience of the heavenly community on earth. One nineteen-year-old student commented that the worship times were “a taste of heaven” that made him “really look forward to that time when I will be part of worshipping the Lord with countless more than 24,000” (email, Monci Roca, 12 January 2007). When explaining to me why she believed that congregational worship at Passion was such a powerful experience for participants, one female attendee commented:

It's the coming together of a body of believers . . . And it's almost like a small reflection of what it will be like in heaven, when you're there for one purpose: you're there to glorify God, and you're going to be amazed by his presence. And it's almost like a small, tiny part of what it will be like in heaven to [be with] people that you don't even know, but you're united in God and through Christ. It's such an amazing thing. (Interview, Amy Anderson, 11 April 2008, Atlanta)

While there were undoubtedly a number of commonly held religious beliefs that conference worship reinforced, these conversations highlight perhaps the most prevalent theological discourse at both conferences: a conversation about heaven or the end of time which I will refer to as the “eschatological discourse.” This discourse—particularly in reference to musical worship—formed the set of interpretive lenses through which participants were invited to interpret their musical actions, to understand the purpose of the gathered community, and to explain the meaning of the conference as a whole.

One of the most powerful and pervasive forms of eschatological discourse could be heard resonating within and around the conferences' congregational singing events. The field accounts below sketch a musical picture of congregational singing at each conference and show, by interpreting the singing as the “sound of heaven,” how the songs of these earthly gatherings link them with the heavenly community.

On the opening night of the triennial Urbana conference on December 27, 2006, I sit in the midst of an excited crowd of an estimated 23,000 college students



gathered in St. Louis' Edward Jones Dome. Attendees stream into the stadium, filling the sloping bleachers on three sides of the dome which face a wide front stage. The gathered participants cheer loudly when the twelve members of the Urbana Worship Team ascend the left side of the stage. Worship leader Daryl Black, an African American man who looks to be in his late twenties, takes his seat at the keyboard and welcomes the crowd. After leading the gathered congregation in two upbeat gospel-inflected and rock style songs, the team begins to play an energetic, jazz-inflected instrumental introduction, with two trumpets playing close harmonies over a chord riff established by the band's guitarists. The excited crowd begins clapping on the offbeats as the worship band vocalists sing in unison a prayer for the strength "to exalt and to extend Jesus' name globally." The vocalists break into three-part, gospel-inflected harmonies to express the chorus's petition: "Cover the earth with Your glory/Cover the earth with the sound of heaven."<sup>6</sup> The second verse of the song continues the theme of the first: a prayer that the "sound of heaven" be used to extend God's kingdom on earth. After repeating the chorus at a louder dynamic level, the crowd joins the worship team in the prayer that forms the song's bridge: "Open up the heavenlies/Let a new sound be released." As the worship team and crowd repeat the bridge several times, the crowd raises a loud shout that covers the sonic spaces between the song's lyrics.

\* \* \*

One week later, on January 3, 2007, I find a seat in Atlanta's Phillips Arena a few minutes before the beginning of the evening session on the third day of the Passion Conference. Cheers erupt as the band led by well-known worship leader David Crowder, a lanky white man in his late twenties sporting a hipster look with large glasses and bushy hair, ascends the central stage along with his band of five other young white male instrumentalists. Bright lights of all colors flash from the stage, and a series of screens arranged in varying heights and angles show elaborate camera shots of the band that alternate with abstract imagery underneath the song lyrics. Across the expanse of the arena, the excited conference crowd forms a billowing sea of moving, singing bodies.

Crowder leads the conference participants in singing several rousing rock anthems; then, in the middle of his set, comes a moment of silence. A hush falls over the crowd. As the screens reveal the next song's title to be "O Praise Him," Crowder begins strumming softly an eighth-note rhythm over a four-chord vamp, subdued but with latent energy.<sup>7</sup> With minimal instrumentation, Crowder sings the opening strains of the song softly, as if in a posture of listening: "Turn your ear/to heaven and hear/the noise inside . . ." A transitional section between verse and chorus exhorts the gathered crowd to join in so that the strains of their song can be added to the sound of heaven.

At the chorus, the rest of the band joins Crowder, and the gathered crowd sings loudly: "O praise Him/He is Holy, yeah!" The song's second verse exhorts participants to "turn your gaze/to heaven and raise/a joyous noise." After singing the words "a joyous noise" comes an extended pause between the lyrical phrases, and participants let out a collective roar, filling the arena with yells, screams, and whistles. After repeating the song's chorus twice, Crowder leads the crowd in a long bridge section comprising the repeated vocables: "Oh, la la la la . . ." After



another three iterations of the chorus, the song ends on an unresolved chord and the crowd breaks into loud cheers and applause.

Both songs described in the accounts above afford the gathered conference participants a way to perform the eschaton, inviting them to extend the song of heaven to earth, and, in the process, to imagine their gathered conference community in relationship to the ideal heavenly community. In the Urbana participants' singing of "Cover the Earth," a song that juxtaposes eschatological imagery from various biblical sources, the dominion of God's kingdom covering the earth is represented by sound. The chorus's repeated prayer ("Cover the earth with your glory!") asks for God to bring God's kingdom to earth, represented sonically by a "new sound" being released from heaven—a sound that is then extended to earth through the agency of singers serving as God's "instruments." Speech, song, and shouting—the joyful sounds of the faithful—are all sonic agents in preparing the way for God's kingdom to come to earth.

Likewise, the performance of "O Praise Him" at the Passion Conference provided a telling illustration of how the worship space is imagined and performed as a sonic interchange between heaven and earth. In the first verse, the lyrics depict the singers as listeners eavesdropping on the sound of heaven, who are then invited to join the unceasing song. In the second verse, the gathered crowd is exhorted to raise a "joyous noise," which is then taken up in heaven. Up until the bridge, the song's lyrics largely comprise singing about singing: the verses describe sacred sound (heaven's "noise," "the sound of salvation," "the sound of rescued ones") and the content of the heavenly song. The chorus exhorts the gathered crowd to sing ("O praise Him!"), and grounds the singing in the transcendence of God ("He is Holy!"). The bridge section is where this musical action is finally accomplished: the sung vocables can be understood as the "joyous noise," as earthly and heavenly songs become one.

The eschatological discourse that is a recurrent trope in these conference songs also informed the interpretation of the event that prominent speakers and worship leaders advanced from the stage. As conference attendees sang songs that explicitly linked their corporate sound with the loud voice of the heavenly community, worship leaders urged participants to worship together around the throne with the hosts of heaven, and speakers compared the large gatherings to eschatological worship around the heavenly throne.

This pervasive linkage of actual conference worship with ideal heavenly worship strongly suggests that attendees' musical performances created a space where their social ideals and religious beliefs were conjoined and mutually reinforcing. In her account of Brazilian Catholic pilgrimage, Suzel Reily describes this "musical mode of ritual orchestration" as "enchantment," and explains music's mediating role as follows:

Through musical performance, religious discourse and aesthetic experience become inextricably intertwined, inclining participants to experience the ritual space as an encounter with the moral order of the sacred. In such an enchanted world, participants construct and simultaneously experience the harmonious order that could reign in their society. (Reily 2002:17)

As in this Brazilian pilgrimage, the centrality of communal singing at Passion and Urbana foregrounds the overriding importance of sound—especially musical sound—in an encounter with the heavenly social order on earth. Music enables evangelical conference attendees to experience their beliefs about the afterlife by enfolded them in the “sound of heaven.” The experience of being part of a vast gathering of Christians singing together, so indelibly imprinted within participants’ memories, is used to interpret biblical accounts of the ideal community at the end of time. One such commonly invoked passage from the book of Revelation describes a large multitude comprising “people from every tongue, tribe, and nation” gathered in worship around the throne of God (Revelation 7:9–10). In performing these songs corporately, the gathered conference assemblies are in effect enacting the beliefs, ethics, and aesthetics of the Christian eschaton.

The processes at work within evangelical conference worship in creating and conflating earthly and heavenly communities can be understood as both emplacing an *imagined* community and forming an *imaginary* one. Historian Benedict Anderson’s category of imagined community refers to a body of people too large to meet face to face who are nevertheless united by a shared discursive framework that has been enabled by various mass media technologies (Anderson 1989; Hannerz 1997). Conferences, as pilgrimage sites enabled by a shared cultural amalgam of print, video, internet, and musical media, can be understood as spaces in which the evangelical imagined community becomes temporarily emplaced, embodied by the actions and expressions of conference participants and leaders alike. Conference worship is characterized, as one earlier conversation partner put it, by worshipping alongside “other people you’re not ordinarily with,” and these fellow conference attendees from other regions of the US—and sometimes other parts of the world—represent to one another the translocal evangelical community.

Conference worship serves not only as a space in which the evangelical imagined community is (re)presented to itself: participants are also encouraged to interpret their corporate worship experiences as a foretaste of worship with the heavenly community. To explain this added dynamic, Anderson’s category of imagined community can be put into fruitful dialogue with literary critic Phillip Wegner’s notion of the imaginary community. For Wegner, imaginary communities are formed by a common vision provided by a “narrative utopia”

in utopian literature, in which “description itself serves as what in other contexts we think of as action or plot, so that social and cultural space and communal identity slowly emerge before our eyes” (2002:xviii). Wegner argues that people use narrative utopias not for mere escapism but to imagine and create new constellations of social relations; in other words, narrative utopias enable the formation of imaginary communities that “have material, pedagogical, and ultimately political effects, shaping the ways people understand and, as a consequence, act in their worlds” (ibid.:xvi). In the context of corporate worship at evangelical conferences like Passion and Urbana, commonly held beliefs about heaven function similarly to Wegner’s narrative utopia, with the important caveat that participants ardently believe in the real, physical existence of their idyllic place. For participants, biblical narrative and personal experience become conjoined in a dialectical relationship: the experience of conference worship is used to interpret evangelical narratives and beliefs about the eschaton, and vice versa.

Participants’ collective performance during conference worship does the cultural work of uniting an imagined community—the translocal community of evangelical Christians—with an imaginary community—the heavenly throng worshipping around the throne of God. In other words, as the conference gathering brings together the evangelical imagined community across space, it also comes to represent the imaginary community across—or, perhaps better, beyond—time.

### **The Sound of Heaven: Musical Style and Social Organization as Eschatological Discourse**

The previous section has shown how the Passion and Urbana Conferences, as transformative sites of sacred experience, use the eschatological discourse as an interpretive frame for conference worship. Verbal discourse, including song lyrics and words of exhortation and encouragement from the stage during the worship songs, helps participants interpret their experiences in a way that conflates the imagined community on earth and the imaginary community in heaven.

Verbal discourse about the eschaton, however, does not form the entire blueprint of the heavenly community. In this section, I contend that musical style and social organization serve as parallel forms of eschatological discourse that also help participants to experience and participate in the “sound of heaven.” While the verbal eschatological discourses in congregational singing are nearly identical at the Urbana and Passion Conferences, an examination of musical style and social organization reveals several crucial differences between how participants at the two conferences are led to understand social relationships between members of their heavenly—and, by extension, earthly—communities. While the same evangelical beliefs ostensibly form the blueprint of the imaginary

community in each conference, distinctions which arise within each conference's collective musical performance suggest very different understandings of the translocal evangelical imagined community.

Several recent ethnomusicological studies of congregational singing have demonstrated that religious communities use musical style as ideological or ethical discourse (Summit 2000; Rommen 2007; Engelhardt 2009). Timothy Rommen suggests that for Trinidadian Christians, musical style is employed and interpreted discursively, "put to use in order to achieve certain goals . . . [which] are informed by overarching ethical concerns" (2007:35–36). In his exploration of the meaning of musical style within Estonian Orthodox congregational singing, Jeffers Engelhardt discusses ways in which the "rightness" of congregational singing "registers an emergent moral order and reveals how religious ideology and musical ontology conflate in notions of musico-religious orthodoxy" (2009:33).

The Urbana and Passion conferences held in common certain aspects of an "evangelical musico-religious orthodoxy," including musical practices, basic beliefs about worship, and musical ontology. During both conferences, professional or semi-professional musicians on a front stage led the gathered crowd in singing worship songs in current popular music styles. Worship song lyrics were projected onto large screens throughout the arenas underneath images of the worship leaders onstage. During musical worship, participants employed a common language of evangelical expressive practice. While singing, worshipers raised their hands, closed their eyes, and alternately raised their faces to heaven or bowed their heads in deferent prayer. Leaders and participants at the two conferences also shared many beliefs about the role of music in worship and spiritual life, including participants' expectation of a personal encounter with God during congregational singing. During these times, God was said to "speak," to "minister," or to "be real to" individuals. Participants at these conferences also shared a core tenet of evangelical musical ontology: that music, in and of itself, is a morally neutral carrier of the Christian message, and thus any musical style can be used in worship. This pervasive evangelical ideology of musical neutrality—that style does not matter—has emerged from a broader evangelical discourse known as the "worship wars," as one solution to disagreements over the use of contemporary (i.e., popular) cultural forms in worship.<sup>8</sup>

In his study of contemporary Jewish worship, Jeffrey Summit focuses on musical "junctures of choice"—moments in which a community chooses among a set of musical resources—and explores the ways in which these choices form a particular style that differentiates segments of the community (2000). For some religious communities, musical style itself is one of these variables. Because evangelical Christianity claims that any musical style can be used to praise God, examining which styles are employed or omitted will demonstrate how

the evangelical community in the US understands itself and is positioning itself in relationship to local and translocal Others within the global Christian community. Examining the style and the social organization of music at the Passion and Urbana conferences as two important junctures of choice illustrates how these two evangelical conferences constitute the social ideals of the eschatological community differently. Two detailed subsections below contrast Passion's model, which uses an "after-party" as a governing metaphor for heaven, where social interaction is variously segregated by ethnic and group identity or subordinated to white evangelical norms; and Urbana's model, which emphasizes the importance of "rehearsing" social ideals on earth in practice for diverse yet integrated expressions of praise in heaven.

### Heaven as "God's After-Party" at the Passion Conference

At the Passion 2007 conference, nearly all of the worship songs led by Passion's roster of worship leaders emulated a mainstream rock style. Within US evangelicalism, this style is known as "modern worship music," an "edgier" worship style that uses musical materials from mainstream rock rather than the adult-contemporary genre from which previous styles of contemporary worship songs drew (Ingalls 2008). Modern worship music is characterized by rock-band instrumentation: standard pop-rock song forms, harmonies built upon cyclic chord riffs, and rhythmically complex, pentatonic melodies. With very few exceptions, each congregational song performed at Passion conformed to these genre characteristics of modern worship.

The modern worship music at Passion drew not only from the sounds of rock, but also from its normative social organization, which scholars in popular music studies have noted is often centered on white male subjectivity (Frith and McRobbie 1978; Walser 1993; Cohen 1997). The Passion program given to each attendee at the beginning of the conference advertised six worship leaders for the main sessions, each of whom was a white male at the helm of a small band of five to eight other predominantly white and male instrumentalists and vocalists. Out of dozens of congregational songs sung during main sessions at the four-day conference, there were only two exceptions to this pattern. In one evening session, an African American guest worship leader led one song (still in the predominant modern worship style), and during two different main sessions, a song was led by a female vocalist (who served as a backup singer during the rest of the conference). Further reinforcing the individualistic dynamic of rock performance, during each Passion main session only one worship leader at a time led the congregational singing. In fact, there was not one instance during the entire conference in which two or more Passion worship leaders ascended the stage to lead worship together as a team.

In the entire Passion 07 conference, there was only one instance in which a musical style outside the standard pop-rock modern worship was heard from the stage, and, revealingly, this moment was used as part of the speaker's message related to heaven. At the Passion Conference, two successive evening sessions were spent on the topic of heaven and the afterlife. Conference founder Louie Giglio's talk given on the last evening of the Passion Conference used musical anecdotes that connected a specific vision of worship in the eschaton to understandings of Christian community on earth.

In that talk, he ascended the square stage at the center of the large arena. The stage was unadorned except for a lone prop placed in the center: a large sheet-glass window. After reading a few verses from the book of Acts, Giglio launched his lesson for the evening on the topic of heaven, "God's after-party." He then walked across the stage to the window prop and told the crowd: "We're going to peek into heaven for a little bit because I want you to know what's going on up there. Something like this is going on in heaven." As he slowly slid open the window, sound began to fill the stadium: a West African call and response song accompanied by clapping and hand drums.

Giglio declared, "That's the party!" The crowd seemed confused; there was widespread murmuring punctuated by a few awkward claps. Giglio took the opportunity to give an impromptu lesson in world Christianity, exhorting participants to get excited about the sounds of heaven. Giglio said a second time, "so the party sounds a little bit like this up in heaven." He again raised the window, this time to what sounded like mariachi music. This time the audience, on cue, cheered loudly.

After closing the window a second time, Giglio told the crowd, "there'll be something for you up in heaven, too. Maybe when you get there, it will be something more like this." Giglio lifted the window a third time, and the strains of Passion worship leader Chris Tomlin's well-known rock-influenced worship song "Holy Is the Lord" filled the stadium. Loud cheers, whistles, and applause erupted from the crowd. Giglio spent the rest of his presentation expounding the importance of spreading the Christian faith and ended with a challenge: "So let's get this party started by telling everybody on the planet that they have an invitation, and the party will start and the music of heaven will fill our lives."

This moment is instructive because it shows how musical style and social organization are connected within the Passion Conference's eschatological discourse, and reveals the way Passion locates itself and its participants in relationship to both the heavenly community and the earthly global Christian community. While Giglio freely admitted during his talk that he did not know what heaven's music actually sounded like, the musical illustrations he gave in this lesson, when interpreted through the lenses of worship throughout the

Passion conference, have telling implications for his view of how earthly and heavenly evangelical communities might be imagined and constituted. Giglio used a metaphor from the popular music industry as his governing metaphor for the afterlife: heaven is presented as the ultimate after-party at the end of time. The Christian's responsibility to others is framed as extending to "the nations" a backstage pass to heaven.

In Giglio's anecdote, musical style serves as an icon of nations or "people groups," essentialized groups according to which Giglio's after-party of heaven seems to be segregated. In Giglio's segregated eschaton, there is recognition of the presence of (Christian) Others in heaven, but there is little interaction between the predominantly white, Southern US "self" and the global (Christian) "Other" beyond being in the same place (heaven) and worshipping the same God, albeit with mutually unintelligible forms of expression. In this model of the afterlife, relationships with o/Others, with the exception of foreign missionary endeavors, are not presented as part of the Christian social ideal—indeed, they are not even imagined to be present in heaven itself. Instead, groups of people separated by race, nation, language, and culture are presented as discrete, independent, reified entities, worshipping in their own way in a musically bounded Paradise.

The use of stylistic signifiers in Giglio's illustration may seem to promote diversity within local and global evangelicalism; however, other types of evidence from Passion seem to promote the idea that Christian unity is achieved through assimilation to the cultural—in particular, the musical—norms of US evangelical Christianity. Giglio gave his "Heaven's After-Party" message as a preface to the following day's announcement of Passion's upcoming 2007–2008 conference tour to several major world cities on six continents. I learned from personal conversations that representatives from several of these cities in South America, Europe, and Asia had been flown in to experience the Passion conference in Atlanta and take word back to their respective countries.

During and after Passion's world tour, I attended four additional Passion regional conferences and artist concert tours during 2008 and 2009, curious to see how or if the Passion worship leaders' and speakers' experience on the world tour had influenced their representations of the earthly or heavenly communities and whether their experiences would be characterized by an increased cultural diversity or the continuation of white Christian hegemony.

What I found was much the same rhetoric about the global Christian community, with one particular song at each of these events serving to stand in for the inclusion of the nations and peoples outside the white US evangelical mainstream. At each of the events I attended, in the middle of one of his worship sets, Passion worship leader Chris Tomlin would lead the gathered crowd in singing his popular song "How Great Is Our God." In the middle of the song, he would



break into a brief segment of speaking and teaching, after which he would sing the chorus of the song in a growing succession of languages. At one Toronto area event, Tomlin framed the song by recounting his powerful experience of singing with Christians from all over the world during the Passion Conference's world tour. Tomlin commented that "no matter the color of their skin, or their language, or their story, when we came together, we were all brothers and sisters worshipping the same God." As Tomlin sang the four-line chorus in Portuguese, Russian, Indonesian, and French to the gathered assembly, no song lyrics appeared on the main screen—rather, the gathered conference crowd sat in silence, watching Tomlin voice foreign sounds to a familiar tune.

While the rhetoric of speakers and worship leaders at Passion encourages Christian unity across national, ethnic, and racial lines, the rhetoric of musical style suggests a conflicting interpretation of how the North American conference attendees are encouraged to imagine their own relationships with others in the earthly imagined community of which they are a part. Tomlin's framing of "Christian unity" as everyone coming together to sing the same song in their own language but in the musical tongue of predominantly white North American evangelical Christianity reinforces US Christianity's cultural dominance in relationship to broader world Christianity as well as to the ethnically diverse Christian community in North America.

### **Earthly Rehearsals for the Heavenly Choir at the Urbana Conference**

At Urbana, as at Passion, frequent reference was made to the eschatological gathering, as participants voiced through song the biblical narrative of the end-of-time gathering, and as worship leaders and speakers drew comparisons between the present gathered community and the future heavenly one. Musical style and social organization, however, differentiated the musical worship at Urbana from that at Passion. The strategic choices of a wide range of musical styles and a diverse team of musicians who shared musical leadership signaled a very different eschatological vision which provided participants a very different set of social ideals and models for imagining their earthly and heavenly communities.

At Urbana, especially during congregational singing, a strong emphasis was placed on showing the diversity of the Christian community in the US and abroad. The Urbana Conference Handbook given to each registered participant framed the gathering and the worship leadership with the following statement:

We who have gathered at Urbana 06 reflect the fullness of the body of Christ as described in Scripture—a unified group of people with different gifts, traditions, backgrounds, and cultures, praising God together. We will experience God and the

splendor and complexity of his creativity through the style of worship from different nations and cultures. (*Urbana Handbook*:85)

The following is an account from my fieldnotes to illustrate how Urbana used musical style and social organization in an attempt to accomplish these ends.

On the third day of the Urbana conference, I find a seat in the sea of chairs on the floor of the Edward Jones Dome shortly before the evening session is to begin. The worship band is leading several upbeat urban gospel- and rock-inflected worship songs as participants gather for the evening session. The band is composed of twelve members who are always on stage at the same time. Each band member shares in the responsibilities of serving as principal vocalist, leading the conference gathering in prayer, and exhorting participants to sing. While each band member looks to be in their mid-twenties to early thirties, the band is markedly diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender, including Latino, Asian, black, and white instrumentalists and vocalists under the leadership of an African American worship leader.

I had noticed an interesting progression in the worship band's choice of songs since Urbana had begun. During the opening session three days prior, the worship sets had included mainly well-known contemporary worship songs set to either rock, folk, or contemporary gospel styles. In each session since, the Urbana worship team had introduced one or two new worship songs in other styles, frequently in languages other than English, often—though not always—led by the cultural “representative” on the worship team. The music chosen during this particular evening's session serves to reinforce the trend. Achlaï Ernest, a Caribbean-born Canadian pianist and vocalist, leads the gathering in singing “Il Ma Sauvé” (He's My Savior), a calypso-inflected chorus in French, and teaches them a simple two-step dance pattern. Worship team director Daryl Black then leads the congregation in a contemporary African American gospel song and then a slower worship ballad he composed, with verses that alternate between English and Spanish. Musical leadership is then passed to Asian American vocalist and guitarist Joshua Koh, who leads the assembly in the well-known worship song “We Fall Down” with alternating verses in Mandarin and English. With their eyes on the giant screens onto which the lyrics are projected, a group of white students behind me sing loudly the transliterated Mandarin words “wo hu han sheng jie, sheng jie, sheng jie,” which correspond musically to the well-known chorus lyrics “we cry holy, holy, holy.” To my right stands a group of four Chinese and Chinese American college students from Arizona. The young man beside me sings softly the Mandarin words with closed eyes and palms extended upward.

As described in this field account, the musical styles used in the Urbana Conference's corporate worship times were notably eclectic, drawing from a range of styles from a variety of contemporary popular musical traditions nearly as varied as the ethnic, national, and regional backgrounds of the musicians in the worship band. Termed “multi-ethnic worship,” these stylistic choices point to a very different social ideal from the one referenced at Passion, with Urbana characterized by a posture of purposeful inclusivity.

This emphasis on unity through diverse expressions of worship was often explained in terms of the eschatological narrative, relating the earthly community to the heavenly one. In one teaching moment in between songs, worship director Daryl Black connected Urbana's musical worship to the ultimate eschatological gathering, telling the crowd, "We've been singing these songs to show the diversity of the Kingdom of God. We sing songs in different languages to help prepare you for what God has planned." He then connected God's ultimate plan for the community at the end of time with the relationships with others formed in daily life on earth, telling the assembly: "Your mission begins where you are . . . We need to know how to engage with other people."

In contrast to the view promoted at the Passion Conference of heaven as the ultimate goal—an eternal after-party where Christian responsibility to other party-goers ends when the invitations are passed out—Urbana employed a very different governing metaphor for worship. At Urbana, musical worship on earth was represented as a rehearsal for the worship in heaven. This rehearsal entails ethical behavior towards o/Others and building relationships across dividing lines of race/ethnicity and gender. The social structure of music making, styles of music, and variety of languages used in the worship songs at Urbana encouraged conference attendees to add to their own expressive vocabulary of worship through appreciating and incorporating into their own expressions the practices of o/Other worshippers.<sup>9</sup>

This practice was powerfully represented on the last evening of Urbana when participants were given an opportunity to join in a musical representation of the ideal earthly and heavenly communities by participating in the Unity Choir. The choir of two hundred participants, rehearsed by Urbana's worship team throughout the week, led the conference gathering in three songs sung in three-part gospel-inflected harmonies. The choir's final song was "Hallelujah, Salvation and Glory," a song known in African American congregations as "Revelations 19:1" for the passage from which its text derives. In framing the final song, Daryl Black read to the conference choir a passage from the fourth chapter of Revelation that describes a vision of the great eschatological gathering around the throne in heaven, explaining to the students that this heavenly gathering should serve as the model for Christian worship on earth.

During the choir's performance, the video cameras—which throughout the conference had focused almost exclusively on the members of the worship team onstage—scanned the uplifted and often rapturous faces of the choir. As conference attendees of varied racial and ethnic backgrounds stood beside one another with faces uplifted and hands raised high, the colorful faces and hands that stood out against the choir members' uniform white tops became at once a re-presentation of the Urbana conference to itself, an icon of the ideal unity of global Christianity, and a foretaste of the eschatological gathering at the end of

time. As the Unity Choir's final song, the performance of "Hallelujah, Salvation and Glory" served for participants as both a culmination and a foreshadowing, musically representing the eschatological image where representatives from every tongue, tribe, and nation together sing the multipart, multivoiced song in overlapping but harmonizing parts in one heavenly choir. Choir members spoke of singing with the Unity Choir as one of their most powerful experiences at the Urbana conference.

The Unity Choir provided a unique opportunity for conference attendees to participate in leading worship, and, in the process, to represent the conference community—and an idealized image of the global Christian community—to itself. For many conference attendees, the Unity Choir visibly and audibly evoked the great multitude at the eschatological gathering in Revelation where representatives from "every tongue, tribe, and nation" worship around God's throne using the very words of "Hallelujah, Salvation, and Glory" (Revelation 19:1). Interpreted through the eschatological discourse, Urbana's "multi-ethnic" worship became a powerful musical symbol of the earthly relationships which are viewed as essential features of the life to come. In this model, signified by the diverse Urbana worship team's modeling of musical reciprocity in both musical style and song leadership, participants were taught that relationships with o/ Others are an important part of their worship.

The differences between Passion's and Urbana's eschatological imagination as expressed through musical style portray two very different ways of imaging both earthly and heavenly community, as suggested by the two distinct governing metaphors they used to describe the social ideals established during conference worship. On the one hand, Passion participants were invited to understand their purpose on earth as extending invitations to heaven's grand after-party. In other words, they should invest time and money in the Christian missionary endeavor, use social justice as a means for proselytism, and support the organization's world tour, which in addition to spreading its Christian message, served to popularize a form of worship music modeled on American popular music. On the other hand, Urbana's participants were asked to use earth as a rehearsal for the eschaton, embodying social relationships between the individuals singing around the throne of God in the present by forming relationships with and being challenged by people outside of the white American evangelical mainstream.

### **Concluding Thoughts: Pilgrimage and Practice**

Evangelical pilgrimages to student conferences like Passion and Urbana enable powerful experiences that have a potential to influence practice on local and translocal levels. By bringing together evangelical students from across regional, national, and ethnic boundary lines to worship and learn together,

and by providing models for belonging to a religious community, these conferences encourage the formation of translocal evangelical identities embodied in powerful experiences. As one student memorably commented after the Passion Conference, being a part of such a large gathering of fellow Christian students made the event “almost *more* sacred than church” to her.

By exploring the eschatological discourse embodied in the congregational worship of the Urbana 2006 and Passion 2007 conferences, I have argued that the experiential power of evangelical conference worship—the feeling that the large gathering is “more sacred than church”—is due in large part to the conflation of imagined and imaginary communities. By audibly and visually representing the end of time to the gathered community, conference worship becomes, in the sacred imagination of a large group of young evangelicals, the image and sound of the worship around God’s throne.

Because conferences draw individuals and groups from across regions and increasingly from around the world, they play an important role in mediating between local and translocal dimensions of the evangelical religious community. Interdenominational conferences like Passion and Urbana are excellent examples of what Timothy Rommen has called “alternative sacred spaces” (2007:105). They are spaces in which a common set of convictions either previously held by participants or formed during the course of the conference enable social experimentation.

While a pilgrimage is a journey out of the participants’ ordinary time and place into a realm of spiritual experience, there is often a strong connection between ritual and the structuring of daily life (Bohlman 1996; Greene 2003; Coleman and Eade 2004). Philip Bohlman writes that music not only embodies the ideals of the religious community, but also provides a “means for mapping out the domains” of the intersections between spiritual ideas and daily life in the present world (1996:407).

Conference music in particular, as a portable practice carried by evangelical pilgrims back to their home churches and college groups, becomes a means for the local enactment of the eschatological community. Indeed, ideas and practices encountered in these translocal alternative spaces have profoundly influenced worship practices at the local level of churches and campus ministries (York 2000; Poloma 2003; Ingalls 2008; Nekola 2009). As participants’ ideas are informed by the conferences’ models of worship, the shape of their imagined and imaginary communities changes, and this change can profoundly affect other ideas and practices in political and social domains.

While the rhetoric of heavenly community used in both the Urbana and Passion conferences was drawn from the same biblical sources, the conflation of these two communities and the ideal shape that they took were very different. This was due in large part to differences expressed through the conferences’

specifically musical rhetoric of style and social organization. Over the course of the two conferences, musical style signified very different orientations toward relationships between o/Others in the community. The Urbana Conference was concerned with representing the sound of heaven as necessarily inter-relational and dialogical, presenting in its musical leadership a wide variety of evangelical subject positions. By contrast, at the Passion Conference the model of individual worship leaders reinforced white male leadership, the spiritual autonomy of US Christianity, and Christian identification centered on a largely mono-cultural religious community.

While local adaptation of conference practice rarely results in wholesale emulation, Passion's and Urbana's differences in eschatological imagination and social relations embodied in musical discourse can be observed in musical choices made on the local level. During my post-conference fieldwork in the winter and spring of 2007, I had numerous opportunities to observe ways in which musical practices from these large conference gatherings were translated to local spaces, as college-aged participants drew from their experiences and variously adopted and adapted the conference's songs, styles, and performance techniques. I observed several college campus groups at both secular and Christian universities in which Urbana's influence was prominent in conscious attempts at inclusive worship.<sup>10</sup> Individuals in these campus ministries who had been to Urbana spoke about Urbana transforming not only their spiritual lives and vocational interests but also the way they believed congregational worship should be practiced. In Urbana-influenced groups, I observed white students incorporating African praise songs they had learned at the conference, student groups who were predominantly Asian American incorporating Latin-flavored songs sung in Spanish from the Urbana live worship album, and female students taking prominent roles in leading worship. Conversations with several group members highlighted how influential Urbana had been not only on the group's musical choices, but also on expanding their notions of how the global Christian community is constituted.

Passion-influenced campus groups and college fellowships, on the other hand, seemed not to have experienced a change in how they understood themselves as part of a global Christian community so much as a personal recommitment to evangelical piety. When asked specifically about the influence of Passion on their church and campus college fellowships, attendees pointed not to structural or ideological changes but rather to a change in the level of their own individual spiritual commitment. The Passion Conference produced recommitments to engage more frequently and seriously in such devotional practices as praying, Bible reading, proselytization, and musical worship. Tim, a college freshman attendee, summed up the influence of the Passion Conference on his college campus group: "Everyone in my college group has started worshipping

from their hearts. All the songs are the same, but I think everyone is trying to concentrate on what they are singing to God. We are all taking our worship time much more seriously.”

These stylistic differences index divergent ideas about the social ideals that exist within contemporary evangelical Christianity and may lead to very different ways of practicing Christianity. These differences between how community is imagined and constituted—for Passion, as a largely monocultural community with predominantly male leadership; for Urbana, an intentionally intercultural community encouraging leadership among those often marginalized—may be both a reflection of and an instigating factor for increasingly complex social and political affiliations among young evangelical Christians. As recent sociological and journalistic studies have shown, evangelical religious identity is increasingly fractured across political lines, with younger evangelicals and non-white evangelicals moving left of the evangelical mainstream on such social and ethical issues as immigration reform, economic policies, and climate change.<sup>11</sup> The difference between Passion’s and Urbana’s social ideals grounded in differing eschatological visions can be understood as a microcosm of these political tensions within contemporary evangelicalism. While there is undoubtedly further work to be done, exploring the influence of these conferences in local communities in the US may reveal that where worship music is more homogenous in style, the eschatological imagination is limited to the dominant group and its concerns. However, in spaces where musical choices are often consciously eclectic, human relationships may be foregrounded along with Divine communion, and worshipers may exhibit an increased awareness of systemic issues and concerns for justice and reconciliation.

Examining music at student conference like Passion and Urbana, then, not only provides a way of understanding the theology, religious experience, and ethical formation of evangelical students. It is also a window into understanding contemporary ideological and cultural currents within the broad North American evangelical Christian “imagined community.” More broadly, it serves to show how pilgrimage enables one twenty-first century religious group to build community, negotiate difference, and construct a religious imagination in a globalizing world.

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## Notes

1. I use the term “eschatological discourse” to refer to evangelical notions of both the (present) heavenly community and the community at the end of time, particularly as depicted in the book of Revelation. While formal theological discourse generally separates these ideas, I use the terms “eschaton” and “heaven” interchangeably throughout this article because 1) they both refer broadly to humanity’s ultimate end, whether conceived as the afterlife (heaven) or the end of time (the eschaton), and because 2) these notions are frequently conflated more generally within both the conferences and evangelical discourse.

2. Evangelical campus ministries have thrived as religious observance has undergone a resurgence among American college students. In 2007, the Social Science Research Council commissioned a series of essays on collegiate religious practice as part of their work on Religion and the Public Sphere. The resulting essay collection from leading researchers, titled “The Religious Engagements of American Undergraduates,” gives a detailed portrayal of US college students’ religious practice, including a statistical overview of evangelical campus life, several essays on evangelical student groups, and a comprehensive bibliography. It is available at <http://religion.ssrc.org/reforum/>.

3. Both the Urbana and Passion conferences drew attention to statistics that showed the wide reach of their conferences. Urbana 2006 emphasized its ethnic/racial diversity, with white attendees comprising 60%, Asian attendees 29%, and the remaining 10% including black, Latino/a, and other ethnicities. Approximately 3% of Urbana’s attendees came to the conference from outside the US, with Japan, the UK, and Mexico leading the percentage of international attendees (Miller 2006). Although detailed statistics were not available from Passion, at Passion 07 every US state was represented. Passion also had a similar, if perhaps not as sizeable, Asian minority, as well as a marked presence of international students from Central America, Europe, and Southeast Asia.

4. Statistics are taken from InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (2010), “Vital Statistics,” at <http://www.intervarsity.org/about/our/vital-statistics> (accessed 30 September 2010). Urbana’s focus has traditionally been on cross-cultural missions, though in recent years a more general theme of treating all professions as Christian vocations has predominated.

5. Statistics are taken from Campus Crusade for Christ (2010), “Facts and Statistics,” at <http://campuscrusadeforchrist.com/about-us/facts-and-statistics> (accessed 30 September 2010). Since their first album *Live Worship From the 268 Generation* (1998), the Passion Conference has released a worship album or live songs from the conference. The founder and main speaker of the Passion conference, Louie Giglio, founded the record label sixstepsrecords to promote songs and worship leaders from the conference. Many of these songs went on to become well-known in the US and internationally. For instance, according to Christian Copyright Licensing reports, Chris Tomlin’s song “How Great Is Our God” was one of the top five most frequently sung worship songs in US churches between 2006 and 2010. (Reports for copyright periods from August 1997 to August 2010 can be accessed at [www.ccli.com/Support/LicenseCoverage/Top25Lists.aspx](http://www.ccli.com/Support/LicenseCoverage/Top25Lists.aspx).)

6. “Cover the Earth With Your Glory” was written by Cindy Cruse-Ratcliff, Israel Houghton, and Meleasa Houghton and is copyrighted 2003 by Integrity’s Praise! Music, Lakewood Ministries Music, and My Other Publishing Company, administered by Integrity. Unofficial lyrics can be found on numerous song lyric websites. Official lyrics are available with a subscription to Christian Copyright Licensing, International (CCLI) at [ccli.com](http://ccli.com).

7. The song “O Praise Him” was written by David Crowder and is copyrighted 2003 by *worshiptogether.com* songs and sixsteps Music, administered by EMI Christian Music Publishing. Unofficial lyrics can be found on numerous song lyric websites. Official lyrics are available with a subscription to Christian Copyright Licensing, International (CCLI) at [ccli.com](http://ccli.com).

8. The designation “worship wars” is used broadly among evangelicals to describe the heated debates over styles of music in congregational worship that took place in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Beginning in the late 1970s, evangelical churches across denominations began to adopt contemporary congregational songs generally known as “praise and worship” or “contem-

porary worship” songs. These songs originated in predominantly charismatic Christian churches and drew from recent popular musical styles including rock, folk, adult contemporary, and R&B. The adoption of these new songs produced a flood of discourse on a wide variety of music- and worship-related topics, including musical ontology, the theology of worship, and the role of music in worship. For ethnomusicological and musicological analyses of the worship wars, see Dueck (2003), Ingalls (2008), and Nekola (2009). For evangelical historical and/or theological accounts, see Byars (2002), Dawn and Taylor (2003), Frame (1997), Redman (2004), and York (2003).

9. As Connie Oi-Yan Wong (2006) has shown in her exploration of worship music within the Pacific Rim Chinese Christian diaspora, language use is one of the primary tools for signaling identification with the transnational Christian community and for expressing a cosmopolitan Christian identity. See Wong (ibid.) for further reflection on worship music in East Asian contexts and transnational mediascapes.

10. Colleges visited during this period of field research included Wheaton College, Calvin College, Vanderbilt University, and Belmont University.

11. Shortly before the 2008 US elections, ethicist David Gushee called on cultural observers to “acknowledge that the evangelical political landscape is fragmented along right/center/left lines” (Gushee 2008b:1). He went on to comment that the “evangelical center” may be moving left, led predominantly by non-white evangelicals and young evangelicals between the ages of 18 and 29. Other sociological and political studies and journalistic sources have emphasized the growing diversity of the evangelical political commitments. For further scholarly and journalistic perspectives on shifting evangelical political orientations, see Banerjee (2008), Freedman (2009), Goodstein (2008), Gushee (2008a), and Smith (2000).

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