

"Punk Rock Calvinists Who Hate the Modern Worship Movement": Ritual, Power, and  
White Masculinity in Mars Hill Church's Worship Music

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**Abstract**

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Music

This dissertation presents a critical case study of Mars Hill Church from its founding in 1998 through its closure in 2014 through the lens of the church's music ministry. Led by charismatic and controversial pastor Mark Driscoll, Mars Hill Church began as a small Bible study and grew into a fifteen-site megachurch across five states, largely drawing young adults between ages 18 and 35. Facing a cascade of scandals and accusations in 2014, Driscoll resigned as lead pastor and the church soon closed and dispersed. Tracing this bounded history through interviews with former members and musicians, archival print and web-based materials, published texts and books, and various participant-observation experiences at Mars Hill campuses before and during the collapse, I explore the multifaceted role of musicians as agents in perpetuating the

church's youth culture orientation, precipitating church growth, centering and inculcating certain theologies, and patterning embodied worship experiences.

I begin with an exploration of the history of Christian missions, detailing how 20th century European and American missionaries began to decouple Western cultural norms and practices from Christian orthodoxy, focusing instead on infusing Christian messages into indigenous cultural practices. This "missional" framework animated the rise of Christian rock 'n' roll and the Christian Contemporary Music industry. Mars Hill leaders adopted missional discourses to center the genres of punk and post-punk, perceived as authentic local practices in the Seattle context. I thus explore the cultural constructions of punk rock and the adaptations to punk's founding ideologies, politics, aesthetics, and practices that grunge and indie rock musicians and audiences forged to expand aesthetic bounds, form new audiences, and adapt to economic changes. Further, I detail how the church's musical performances of worship songs, Protestant hymns, and new music in the genres of punk, grunge, and indie rock served multiple roles, allowing the church to accrue subcultural capital in the Seattle music scene while simultaneously differentiating Mars Hill as a masculine religious movement within American evangelicalism.

Yet Mars Hill Church underwent phases of massive organizational change in the course of its existence, with an effect on polity, theology, and musical style. To account for these intersecting changes, I draw my theoretical framework from the field of ritual studies at the boundary of performance theory, particularly following Catherine Bell who views ritual as a vantage point from which to analyze the production of power and meaning through habituated action. Bell explores how actions, interactions, and speech

endow objects, texts, certain personnel or modes of relationship, and so on with meaning(s) that are variously shared, rendering collective ontologies and theologies that pattern political outcomes. While ritual theory affords an encompassing lens of the processes relevant to the production of power, critical theories of gender, race, and class inform my study as intersectional axes of analysis, particularly detailing Driscoll's strident privileging of men and hypermasculinity.

As a central node of organizational change, I examine Driscoll and Mars Hill Church's adoption into New Calvinism, a paradenominational movement spanning the Southern Baptist Convention, the Presbyterian Church in America, and various non-denominational adherents. I argue that New Calvinist discourses and theologies lent Driscoll a totalizing operational framework of authority and submission that infused the church's polity, theology, and music ministry, leading to the broad disempowerment of elders, laity and artists. This dissertation thus offers ritual studies as a productive theoretical frame for ethnomusicological research, while furthering academic inquiry into the ways that streams of American Evangelicalism and punk, grunge, and indie rock subcultures variously inform the broad scale production of power and authority in American culture.

*To my parents, Deborah and George Haynes, who taught me to value curiosity, compassion, exploration, and education, and my husband Michael Marchesini who offers endless support that sustains me every day.*

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The University of Washington Ethnomusicology department faculty and interdisciplinary faculty on my committee each unlocked a new universe of curiosity, possibility, and analysis during my time as a graduate student. I am daily grateful for the opportunity to spend years in the classroom and community honing my interests and skills, and for the generous financial support provided through scholarships and assistantships throughout my time in graduate school. Dr. Shannon Dudley introduced me to new ways of understanding music-making and community. He routinely challenged me toward greater precision, deeper understanding, and broader inquiry in my research. Dr. James K. Wellman Jr. inspired my interest in megachurch research and introduced me to this project's underlying theoretical framework in ritual studies. He consistently provided invaluable support as a mentor. Dr. José Antonio Lucero offered generous support, input, and guidance throughout this project, far exceeding his role as a Graduate Student Representative.

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and read each draft with a close eye to detail, always with enthusiasm and genuine encouragement. I am deeply grateful to Christina for her positivity, support, and rigorous feedback. She made this project possible.

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I'm especially grateful for the long, meandering discussions and Facebook threads that provoke new insights and foster deeper understanding.

In the midst of this dissertation project, I am grateful to the many interlocutors who allowed me insight into Mars Hill's community and ideology. I stepped into the Mars Hill orbit at an inopportune time, just as the church garnered international media attention amid its dramatic collapse. Each person who spoke to me did so on condition of my care with their story, trusting that I would deepen the conversation rather than exacerbate the incendiary drama. I hope this resulting project succeeds in this objective, and that we might continue this conversation.

Thanks also to the critical mentorship and support of the pastors I worked with as a budding music minister. I gained a critical interpretive lens for this project through my own experience as a music leader in churches, even while the traditions and theologies in the contexts where I led differed greatly from Mars Hill's. Thank you to Pastor Erik Wilson Weiberg, Pastor Laurie Jones, and the choir at Ballard First Lutheran Church in Seattle for helping me grow as a leader and music minister. Thank you to Rev. Jan Reynolds and Alan Choy at First Presbyterian Church of San Rafael for collaborating open-heartedly.

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grateful they paved the path in pursuing graduate education before me and understand the long, thankless, and uncertain road toward a Ph.D. My siblings Aidar and Aigerim each teach me the value of family, hard work, and educational achievement as I witness their strength, patience, and tenacity. I am sincerely proud of each of them. My in-laws Frank and Cora Trujillo housed, fed, supported, and championed Michael and me as graduate students, and I'm grateful for their care and encouragement. I am also grateful for my nephew Oscar, niece Rain, and cousins Vivian and Stone who delight and inspire Michael and me, and bring so much joy to our lives!

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In the spring of 1990 I attended my first retreat and after a late night of worship with a few hundred farmers and college professors I knelt down by an Idaho river and prayed. It was at that time that I quite unexpectedly received my call. God told me, "Mark, I have called you out from among many to lead men." I then began to serve in leadership for a ministry.

*Mark Driscoll's account of his call to ministry, written in 1998<sup>1</sup>*

### **Introduction: Ritual, Music, and Power**

In the early 1990s, newly-weds Mark and Grace Driscoll arrived in the Seattle metropolitan area with recently-obtained college degrees and a mission to serve in ministry. While Grace, the daughter of a pastor, had long practiced her Christian faith, her husband Mark grew up in a Catholic home and converted to evangelical Protestant Christianity with Grace's guidance while in college. Initially, both volunteered as college ministry interns at the non-denominational Antioch Bible Church in Kirkland, a suburb just east of Seattle.<sup>2</sup> Via the Bible study, Driscoll met Mike Gunn, a pastor with the collegiate ministry Athletes in Action at the University of Washington, and Leif Moi, host of Street Talk, a nationally syndicated Christian radio show.<sup>3</sup>

Moi and Gunn, in their 30s and 40s and with considerably more ministerial experience than the newly-converted 26 year-old Driscoll, found resonance with Driscoll's vision for planting a new religious community. According to Driscoll, together

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Driscoll. "Seasons of Grace: The Story of Mars Hill," *Mars Hill Fellowship*, archived website captured December 10, 2000, accessed October 16, 2017, [http://web.archive.org/web/20001210191200/http://www.marshill.fm:80/who/our\\_history.htm](http://web.archive.org/web/20001210191200/http://www.marshill.fm:80/who/our_history.htm)

<sup>2</sup> "History: Antioch Bible Church," accessed October 16, 2017, <http://www.abchurch.org/about-us/history.html>. Antioch, founded in 1984 by Ken "Hutch" Hutcherson, an African American retired professional football player, had established a national reputation as a "leader in cross-cultural ministry," focused on racial reconciliation and multiethnic community, values that emphatically would not continue in the Antioch church plant.

<sup>3</sup> "Local Missions//Church Planting//Mike & Donna Gunn," Oceanside Christian Fellowship, accessed October 16, 2017, <http://www.ocfchurch.com/ministries/mission-old/global/gunn>; "Elder Profiles: Lief Moi," *Mars Hill Fellowship*, archived website captured March 6, 2001, accessed October 16, 2017, [http://web.archive.org/web/20010306123036/http://www.marshill.fm:80/who/elders/profile\\_lmoi.htm](http://web.archive.org/web/20010306123036/http://www.marshill.fm:80/who/elders/profile_lmoi.htm)

they "began dreaming about the possibility of planting an urban church for an emerging postmodern generation in one of the least churched cities in the U.S."<sup>4</sup> In October 1996, with Antioch's continued financial support, Gunn, Moi, and Driscoll launched Mars Hill Fellowship with a gathering of about a dozen people in a small, stuffy upstairs room in Emmanuel Bible Church in North Seattle.<sup>5</sup> This new church populated by "college students and indie rockers" held weekly evening services with around 10-20 people in attendance.<sup>6</sup>

Eighteen years later, on August 24, 2014, I entered the largest of Mars Hill's fifteen campuses strewn across four U.S. states, a massive 1500-seat theater in a downtown Bellevue, Washington, shopping center. I arrived minutes after worship began, and was escorted by an usher to a lone empty seat on the far side of the cavernous, windowless sanctuary where tiers of seats faced a state-of-the art stage.<sup>7</sup> The church's large indie rock worship band, Kings Kaleidoscope, led an emotional congregation in singing "How Great the Father's Love for Us" at a slow, droning pace, mournful fiddle interludes punctuating sorrowful verses about sin and redemption. Massive screens flanked the stage, dictating the hymn's lyrics in a bold sans serif font.

Beautiful high-definition photos of Mars Hill's congregants and iconic images were mounted in a minimalist, textured collage on the stage's back wall, with pieces of

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<sup>4</sup> Driscoll. "Seasons of Grace."

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> "The Story of Mars Hill Church," *Mars Hill Fellowship*, archived website captured May 23, 2015, accessed October 28, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20150523122826/http://marshill.com:80/>

<sup>7</sup> "John Danz Building: 600 106th Ave NE, Bellevue, WA 98004," Sterling Realty Organization, accessed October 16, 2017, <http://www.sterlingrealty.com/john-danz-building/>

white string delicately connecting the pictures. Center stage hung a photo of two people in a friendly embrace, superimposed with text quoting the day's scripture, 1 John 4: 7: LOVE ONE ANOTHER. I sat tense amid thousands of majority-white, professional 20- and 30-somethings as Mark Driscoll, embroiled in months of controversy over alleged financial dishonesty and patterns of abuse, took the stage for what would be his final address to his 15,000 member church. It was the only time I ever saw him preach in-person.

This dissertation presents a critical history of Mars Hill Church from its founding in 1996 through its closure in 2014 through the refracting lens of the church's music ministry. I observe the role of ritual in the production of power within Mars Hill through an examination of authority and submission, including the complicated ways the church used music to perform and privilege iterations of white masculinity. I detail how the church's musical performances of worship songs, Protestant hymns, and new music in the genres of punk, grunge, and indie rock served to differentiate Mars Hill as a "masculine" religious movement. While ritual theory affords an encompassing lens of the processes relevant to the production of power, critical theories of gender, race, and class inform my study as intersectional axes of analysis. This project participates in furthering academic inquiry into the ways that streams of American Evangelicalism and punk, grunge, and indie rock subcultures variously inform and perpetuate the dominance of whiteness and hyper-masculinity in American culture.

I began my inquiry into Mars Hill in 2011, attending the church for the first time late that year. As a Christian of the millennial generation, I long took interest in the success of the evangelical church movement in reaching a large, youthful demographic infused with energy for a religious tradition in decline.<sup>8</sup> Mars Hill Church successfully appealed to a doubly elusive demographic: young people in their 20s and 30s in the Pacific Northwest. In the post-2000 era, Millennials and Gen-Xers reported a precipitous decline in religious participation; according to a 2012 Gallup poll, 27% of survey respondents between the ages of 18 and 29 reported they had no religious preference, compared to 17.8% of the general public.<sup>9</sup> This trend proved more pronounced in the Pacific Northwest area, spanning Northern California, Oregon, and Washington. Patricia O'Connell Killen's 2004 study in the region revealed that only 38.1% of respondents in Washington State regularly participated in religious institutions, compared with a 60% national average.<sup>10</sup>

As a young, churchgoing, Christian-identified member of that Pacific Northwestern demographic, I have come to locate my own positionality as overlapping and intersecting multiply with the community at Mars Hill, as well. I subscribe to a comparatively liberal iteration of Reformed Christianity, raised in a Presbyterian Church (USA) congregation in Montana. Like many at Mars Hill, I regard my Christian journey

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<sup>8</sup> "America's Changing Religious Landscape," Pew Research Center for Religion & Public Life, last modified May 12, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

<sup>9</sup> Lydia Saad, "In U.S., Rise in Religious 'Nones' Slows in 2012," Gallup News: Politics, last modified January 10, 2013, accessed October 16, 2017, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/159785/rise-religious-nones-slows-2012.aspx>; George H. Gallup, Jr., "The Religiosity Cycle," Gallup News, last modified June 4, 2002, accessed October 16, 2017, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/6124/Religiosity-Cycle.aspx>.

<sup>10</sup> Patricia O'Connell Killen and Mark A. Shipley. "Surveying the Religious Landscape: Historical Trends and Current Patterns in Oregon, Washington, and Alaska." *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone*, ed. Patricia O'Connell Killen and Mark Silk (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004), 28.

as sincere and committed, and have worked and volunteered in church contexts as a missionary and musician at local and national levels for many years.

While in graduate school, I worked as a music minister at a historic Scandinavian church in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America set a mere mile away from Mars Hill's flagship location in the Ballard neighborhood, an old Seattle fishing village. But while I directed an aging church choir in singing four-part octavos and hymns, nearby Mars Hill Church cultivated a hip community in their 20s and 30s, pioneering new ways to infuse praise and worship with classic Protestant hymnody and a signature indie rock sound by drawing from genres of music popular in the Seattle music scene.

I knew indie's sounds and networks in part as a long-time fan of indie music, but also as a member of that music scene where I played cello in chamber-folk rock bands. And as my study of the church progressed, I increasingly realized the extent of my integration with members of Mars Hill's worship bands, surprised to discover that numerous musicians with whom I had played, collaborated, and recorded had attended and served at the church from its earliest years to its closing chapter. Though I did not know all of this when I first attended the church in 2011, I immediately heard the influences of indie rock in this music ministry, and this familiar but novel approach to music and worship intrigued me. I intuited that music was likely a key to this church's vast success among my peers. In a 2014 paper, I explored how Mars Hill church found a relevant place among Pacific Northwest youth, a demographic with declining religious affiliation.<sup>11</sup> I sought to learn the potent and intersecting roles of music, rhetoric, and pop

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<sup>11</sup> Maren Haynes, "Heaven, Hell, and Hipsters: Attracting Young Adults to Megachurches through Hybrid Symbols of Religion and Popular Culture in the Pacific Northwest, U.S.A." *Ecclesial Practices* 1, issue 2 (2014): 207-228.

culture in creating a successful youth-oriented church, an inquiry I continue in this dissertation.

Given Mars Hill's popularity, my initial dissertation research plan was to study Mars Hill as a growing church popular among 18- to 35-year old indie rock-loving hipsters in the Pacific Northwest. Methodologically, I intended to conduct participant-observation research, attending all of Mars Hill's locations across Washington, Oregon, California, and New Mexico to interrogate the function of local music and aesthetics amid a corporate multisite church model. As the cornerstone of my study, I aimed to observe performed and embodied worship, dimensions of the church's exterior and interior spaces, and examine my own embodied experience as a participant in this environment.

Like many churchgoers, however, I was stunned by the rapid and dramatic collapse of the church, a cascade of events that began to snowball in the summer of 2014. Writing on August 24, 2014, I noted, "when I attend the church, my alienation from the church body is immediately evident - no warm greeters welcome at the door. Few make eye contact. When I initiate small talk, I am met with curt tones and skeptical smiles. Mars Hill occupies the liminal space of a transition under the microscope of the United States media." The church had entered a prolonged state of crisis, offering few in-roads to an inquisitive researcher.

For a few months, I considered changing course and selecting a new field site. I decided to continue exploring Mars Hill amid the church's decline in part because the music, discourses, and people perpetually interested me. However, the 2016 election season and victory of President Donald J. Trump implicated white evangelical

Christianity in ways inextricable from Mars Hill Church, a realization that also helped to motivate the completion of this project. The Trump campaign harnessed white male identity politics at intersection with religious and cultural dominance, each consistent with Mark Driscoll's theological frame. Further, Trump's campaign indicated a dominance-based, hierarchical leadership orientation I identified within Mars Hill.

The Trump campaign's success cannot be understood apart from white evangelical support. White evangelicals formed Trump's core base in the 2016 election, and a year into his Presidency remain one of his most reliably supportive constituencies, even while said support appears to be waning.<sup>12</sup> Generally, I do not know the voting habits of my informants within Mars Hill (I suspect a range of political orientations), but Trump's leadership style and preference for white, cisgender, heterosexual, male, Christian identities fit comfortably with Mars Hill's discourses, theologies, and practices. If Mars Hill's structures and theologies are consistent with trends in American evangelicalism as a whole, it is clear that church cultures pattern and practice ideologies and leadership hierarchies that inform political movements. I expect modern evangelicalism to remain a potent political force in the United States, and it proves crucial to understand the structures and practices that inculcate said political outcomes.

I thus maintained a focus on the former Mars Hill Church by altering my research plan. I began by interviewing journalists and defectors already on the record critiquing the church in the public sphere. On August 3, 2014, I attended a public protest staged by

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<sup>12</sup> Gregory Smith and Jessica Martínez. "How the faithful voted: A preliminary 2016 analysis," Pew Research Center Fact Tank, November 9, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/>; Peter Weber, "Trump's support among white evangelicals has dropped 17 points since February," *The Week*, December 8, 2017, <http://theweek.com/speedreads/742212/trumps-support-among-white-evangelicals-dropped-17-points-since-february>.

around fifty people outside Mars Hill's Bellevue campus. Assembled with picket signs like, "We Are Not Anonymous," "Resign, Mark," "How Many Atheists Will Mark Driscoll Produce?," "Stop Objectifying Women," "Love Means Telling the Truth," and "No More Shunning," the gathering signaled Mars Hill's long history of questionable practices, ranging from misogyny to excommunications. Striking up conversations with protestors, I learned many had attended or worked at the church for many years and suffered personally and directly as former pastors, elders, and members. I approached protestors to inquire about interviewing them, and received several responses.

Protestors with particularly damaging stories included Merle and Rob Smith, South African founders of Agathos, an NGO supporting South African and Zambian children orphaned by the AIDS crisis. The Smiths followed their children to Mars Hill Church, but quickly increased their involvement, assuming mentor and teacher roles to Driscoll and other pastors and congregants.<sup>13</sup> However, when the Smiths left Mars Hill amid a particularly controversial era in 2007, Mars Hill—a significant donor to Agathos—ceased their financial support for the ministry. According to Rob Smith, "Agathos lost about 85% of its support," barely recovering in order to continue their work.<sup>14</sup> Another protestor, a young man named Andrew, revealed his Mars Hill story to blogger Matthew Paul Turner, an alarming tale picked up by Seattle's alternative newspaper *The Stranger* in an exposé called "Church or Cult? The Control-Freaky Ways

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<sup>13</sup> Merle Smith. Interview with the author. Everett, Washington, October 24, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Rob Thain Smith, "Mars Hill Church: True religion does not abandon orphans and widows in their distress," Musings from Under the Bus, last modified February 13, 2015, <https://musingsfromunderthebus.wordpress.com/2015/02/13/mars-hill-church-true-religion-does-not-abandon-orphans-and-widows-in-their-distress/>

of Mars Hill Church."<sup>15</sup> The piece detailed interior workings of extended, overreaching disciplinary procedures, as Andrew leaked a trove of internal documents to Turner who posted them with names redacted, but otherwise unedited.

I soon learned that stories like the Smiths' and Andrew's abounded, giving rise to proto-church gatherings, support networks, and websites designed to provide solidarity for people harmed by the church's structures and personnel. These included blogs such as Mars Hill Refuge, Joyful Exiles, Repentant Pastor, Mars Hill Was Us, and We Love Mars Hill, as well as Facebook groups such as Dear Pastor Mark & Mars Hill: We Are Not Anonymous.<sup>16</sup> Defectors from the church rallied in proto-networks, especially toward the end of the life of Mars Hill, with Patheos blogger Warren Throckmorton and a blog by former Mars Hill member by the alias of Wenatchee the Hatchet serving as primary portals for leaked documents, testimonies, rumors, and analysis.<sup>17</sup> As the church collapsed, I met and networked with a variety of journalists, authors, and activists, including Jim Henderson and Becky Garrison, who all played a role in chronicling—and variously hastening—Mars Hill's eventual demise. While in the chapters of my

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<sup>15</sup> Matthew Paul Turner, "Mark Driscoll's Church Discipline Contract: Looking for True Repentance at Mars Hill Church? Sign on the Dotted Line," last modified January 24, 2012, <http://web.archive.org/web/20140209052207/http://matthewpaulturner.com/2012/01/24/jesus-needs-new-prmark-driscolls-church-discipline-contract-looking-for-true-repentance-at-mars-hill-church-sign-on-the-dotted-line/>; Brendan Kiley, "Church or Cult? The Control-Freaky Ways of Mars Hill Church," *The Stranger*, February 1, 2012, <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/church-or-cult/Content?oid=12172001>.

<sup>16</sup> Mars Hill Refuge, <http://marshillrefuge.blogspot.com/>; Joyful Exiles, <https://joyfulexiles.com/>; Repentant Pastor, retrieved from Internet Archive website captured March 16, 2015, <http://web.archive.org/web/20150316030654/http://repentantpastor.com/>; Mars Hill Was Us, <http://marshillwasus.blogspot.com/p/what-this-is-what-this-is-not.html>; We Love Mars Hill, <http://welovemarshall.com/>.

<sup>17</sup> Warren Throckmorton, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/warrenthrockmorton/>; Wenatchee the Hatchet, <http://wenatcheethehatchet.blogspot.com/>.

dissertation I rarely quote from these conversations, familiarity with these detrimental parts of Mars Hill's history inflects my interpretation of the church's history.

When Driscoll stepped aside and church leaders announced its closing, a vast new array of voices began to come forward with interest in discussing the arc of Mars Hill's history. As I shared my own experience as a Christian, music minister, and indie rock musician, Mars Hill's church musicians took interest in speaking about their experience in hopes that this study would emerge as a deeper, more thoughtful critique and story than those published in the media frenzy of the church meltdown. In total, I spoke with about twenty-five former Mars Hill members, elders, and pastors in the course of my project, who represented a range of experiences, opinions, and tenures of involvement in the church. I spoke with people wholly supportive of the church's mission, some grieving the church's closure as an immense loss, and people who attended for several years, but indicated minimal interest or investment in the church. I interviewed people active for only one or two years who left the church annoyed but unscathed, and also spoke with long-invested insiders, some active for fifteen years or more. Among my interviewees, several remained committed to carrying on Mars Hill's theology and mission, while others harbored lasting hurt, anger, and feelings of betrayal that led them to other churches or away from Christianity altogether.

While my interviewees present varied interpretations of Mars Hill, the collapse of the church laid to rest the aggressive and polarizing tensions, conflicts, and politics characterizing its final chapter. After Driscoll stepped down in October 2014 and the remaining leadership announced it would dissolve the Mars Hill entity, I received phone calls and e-mail replies from individuals ready to explore their own experiences, process

the lesser-known elements of the church's interior history, and reckon their positive memories and cherished relationships from their time in the church with their difficult emotions and guilt in the wake of its collapse. Interviews became vulnerable, critical, and complicated conversations, some lasting three or four hours, describing Mars Hill as a place that affected people intimately and personally. Mars Hill aided people in generating life-giving arts, relationships, and intellectual and spiritual growth, while also abusing, defaming, and harassing people—often simultaneously.

I hope this dissertation captures Mars Hill's complexity. To arrive at a nuanced portrayal, methodologically I engage Foucault's genealogical approach to discursive analysis, derived from an archeological approach interrogating the development and maintenance of canonical archives. According to Barry Smart, this includes vocabulary, statements, and ideologies that have been censored, discarded, repeated, or recycled over time, as well as the relationships between individuals, groups, and classes and their various points of access to the creation and adoption of discourses.<sup>18</sup> The archeological method surrounds analysis of the conditions by which knowledge and events are selected for canonization and how these operate to form and structure "the real world." Foucault demands rigor in this pursuit, expecting engagement with an inexhaustible collection of resources, emerging from multiple positions, perspectives, and interests to diversify rather than unify narrative perspectives.

In efforts to respect Foucault's demands, this study places a wide variety of resources and perspectives in conversation. Alongside interviews, I consulted archival print, audio, and video resources produced by church personnel and by outside

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<sup>18</sup> Barry Smart, *Michel Foucault: Critical Assessments* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 40.

commentators. These include archived websites, official church publications and other multimedia resources produced by church personnel, outside commentary from journalists and bloggers, and material from other sources, such as government archives and indie rock blogs, that elucidate Mars Hill's niche and identity.

The church took pride in early adoption of an Internet presence, launching [marshill.fm](http://marshill.fm), its first website, in 1998. Mars Hill's official site moved to [marshillchurch.org](http://marshillchurch.org) around 2005, and to [marshill.com](http://marshill.com) around 2011. The church's consistent web presence, documented on official church sites and through special projects and content archives like [The Paradox](http://theparadox.org) ([theparadox.org](http://theparadox.org)), [Acts29](http://acts29.com) ([acts29.com](http://acts29.com)), [Vox Pop](http://voxpopnetwork.com) ([voxpopnetwork.com](http://voxpopnetwork.com)), and [The Resurgence](http://theresurgence.com) ([theresurgence.com](http://theresurgence.com)), provides significant data to track continuity and change in church rhetoric, theology, and mission, as well as documenting musical repertoire and personnel. The Wayback Machine Internet archive ([web.archive.org](http://web.archive.org)) hosts versions of each of these websites from 1998 to 2015, although some data from these websites has disappeared, especially when the site transitioned to a Flash interface in 2005. Archived versions of these websites track discourse, images, musical track lists and lyrics, and minor but important details of the church's quotidian existence, like elder and deacon profiles, church locations, and service times.

Driscoll and church personnel published a vast tome of materials, including books, videos, and music, that have also proven important resources in this project. Driscoll authored or co-authored nineteen books and pamphlets, many of them sermon transcriptions or paraphrases, between 2004 and 2014. These resources prove variously useful in understanding the public face of the church from Driscoll's perspective.

The church regularly recorded live and studio performances of worship music from the earliest years. Mars Hill released their first worship music album, *Mars Hill Worship One*, in 1999 with extensive liner notes and CD-ROM bonus videos.<sup>19</sup> The church continued to release live and studio albums at intervals throughout its eighteen years, accelerating releases in 2012 with the launch of an official label, Mars Hill Music. I located all but one of these albums, which provided an incredible record of continuity and change in the music ministry. In total, I found audio or video of nearly 500 unique song performances consisting of original songs and hymn covers. After organizing these performances by title, year, and band, a tacit canon emerged with nearly 70 song titles performed by two or more bands over the course of the church's history. Five or more bands performed 20 of these song titles. In my analysis of the church's music and lyrics, I draw largely from this canon of oft-repeated songs.

I am especially indebted to the intrepid work of archivists such as Ben Vandermeer at the website Mars Hill Was who have rigorously sought to locate, preserve, and share a vast trove of archival materials from Mars Hill's history. These materials include sermon recordings and transcripts beginning in 2000, links to archived websites, videos, handouts, newsletters, e-news, internal memos, a short-running 'zine called *Vox Pop*, music recordings and chord sheets, among other documents. Notably, archivists produced an exact replica of Mars Hill's final website in December 2014, complete with every blog post and streaming audio and video.<sup>20</sup> *Mars Hill Was* also circulated a public survey to former members of Mars Hill, generating nearly 200

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<sup>19</sup> *Mars Hill Worship One*, Mars Hill Records, 1998, CD.

<sup>20</sup> A full archive of Mars Hill's final website is available at [marshill.se/marshill/](http://marshill.se/marshill/)

responses. The survey captures the depth of involvement and salient experiences of members, data I made use of in this study.<sup>21</sup> Many of these resources, tracking most of Mars Hill's eighteen years, remain publically available.

Outside the church, reporters and commentators from a wide ideological and audience spectrum profiled the church at various junctures in its history. Expository and critical pieces in local and national newspapers, magazines, blogs, documentary films, and books create a multimedia record of the church through interviews, photographs, audio, video, and commentary. These range from everyday documentation of church-sponsored events and concerts, like show reviews in the local Seattle alt-newspaper *The Stranger*, to in-depth snapshots of the church at a particular moment, such as Ann Powers' long-form 2006 profile of the church's bands in the magazine *Blender*.<sup>22</sup> The church's fame aided the formation of such an extensive and varied archive, as the church reached national prominence early in its formation. Scholars, including anthropologists Jessica Johnson (2010) and James Bielo (2014), sociologist Jennifer McKinney (2009), geographer Justin Tse (2014), and others have productively interrogated Mars Hill at various junctures, and I draw from their work, as well.

Disrupting the church as a singular entity in the production of its own insular culture, it proves critical to look beyond the boundaries of its products and discourses, or those primarily concerned with the church, to broader cultural frameworks, developments, juridical and legal systems, aesthetic approaches, social networks, and scenes. Mars Hill's formation and function is best understood in the larger context of

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<sup>21</sup> Survey responses available at [marshillwasus.blogspot.com](http://marshillwasus.blogspot.com)

<sup>22</sup> Ann Powers. "The Emo-Driven Life," *Blender*, December 2005, 134-139.

movements in the broader American and International church (chapters two and five) Seattle city government (chapter three), and the punk and post-punk music scene (addressed throughout). I thus draw extensively from literature ranging from city ordinances to punk and post-punk histories.

Foucault describes the genealogical method as “gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary,” requiring “patience and a knowledge of details” and depending on “a vast accumulation of source material,” a method I employ, even as I recognize that a thoroughly adequate representation of such materials is highly elusive cum impossible.<sup>23</sup> I find it necessary to emphasize that my narrative arises from the extensive, yet limited, resources I consulted and centered; these are necessarily partial and biased. Many Mars Hill stories exist, and deserve consideration per a Foucaultian genealogy which disrupts reliance on unitary approaches by “exposing the contingency and multiplicity of events affecting the past.”<sup>24</sup> This study indicates the fragility of representation, given the range of multiple perspectives and overlooked salient details.

As one node of these multiplicities, this study privileges conversations and interpretations offered by former music ministry personnel. Nearly from its founding, the regular attention from national news entities focused steadily on celebrity pastor Mark Driscoll's charismatic and polarizing leadership and rhetorical style. Sole focus on Driscoll, though, overdetermines the function of any single node of authority in shaping the cultural norms of institutions or societies. By shifting the gaze between Driscoll and music ministry personnel, I wish to complicate the hyperfocus on Driscoll's persona,

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<sup>23</sup> Michel Foucault. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D. F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 139.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

biography, and charisma in constructing power relationships within Mars Hill by expanding the purview of analysis to other leaders and members.

Mars Hill's musicians represent a rare intermediate locus of power in this church that, over time, increasingly reflected the singular vision of Driscoll and a small group of other executive-level leaders. Over the church's sixteen years, while the music ministry changed drastically in style and structure, musicians remained the only people to consistently share the stage with Driscoll or lead significant portions of services at local church campuses. At the highest levels, personnel remained fairly static for the duration of the church's history. Further, every service at every location, live worship bands took the stage for at least fifteen or twenty minutes with original or hand-picked songs and arrangements. These progenitors of a central aspect of Mars Hill's culture are frequently celebrated for their artistic contributions, expertise as players, or their celebrity in other sectors of the music scene. But they are often overlooked as active creators, shapers, and— occasionally—disrupters of theological authority and agency.

Centering these voices introduces several key problems, however. First, they indicate only the artistic, performative, and theological intentions from the position of the producers. This obscures how the musical sounds, aesthetic experiences, and theological messages were variously interpreted and adopted by members of the congregation, which undoubtedly would introduce a wider degree of variance. Further, as Mars Hill increasingly became a hierarchical church model with a narrow vision of a "godly" leader, a large degree of demographic homogeneity united the majority of music staff and volunteers. With remarkably few exceptions, I interviewed white, heterosexual, cisgender men, most raised in Christian households. I contacted numerous musicians outside this

demographic, and interviewed spouses of some women involved over the years, but received no replies from the many women I attempted to contact who intimately shaped the music ministry. I did interview several women involved in and employed by the church, but none involved directly in the music ministry. I interviewed one African American man, Jevon Washington, who served on staff and participated in music and pastoral ministry.

### **Ritual Theory as a Lens for Music Research**

A bird's eye view of this dissertation reveals how Mars Hill dramatically changed in the years between its opening and closing. Many of these changes relate to elements of its size, musical sound, aesthetic style, and governance and polity. As the church grew over eighteen years from fifteen members to an alleged 15,000, it remained oriented toward youth culture, attracting a demographic of 18-35 year-olds throughout its whole existence. The church's aesthetic culture meandered with the always-changing music preferences of its core constituency through several iterations of a fairly unified pop culture stream: punk and late grunge would morph into indie rock, carrying all the signifiers and community values of these subcultures with it. Thus, it is clear that Mars Hill produced its organizational identity at a close and permeable boundary with a niche, largely local, stream in popular culture. This was partly because many mavens and producers of Seattle's popular culture performed at the church, and partly because the church actively recruited this population by studiously appealing to local aesthetic tastes and preferences.

By centering music as a node that refracts a spectrum of embedded knowledges and perspectives ranging from the propositional to the practiced, I have found that ritual

studies offers a useful interdisciplinary lens for examining how musical practices iteratively inform a larger cultural context, appropriate for answering the opaque omnipresent question, "what does music do?" In considering the disciplinary framework that drives this dissertation, I confronted the issue of whether to situate it theoretically within ritual theory or performance theory. Indeed, leading ritual theorists Ronald Grimes and Catherine Bell both indicate the degree to which their conception of ritual theory shares a permeable boundary with performance theory. Grimes explores the interstices between media and ritual, and while he defines these as distinct spheres, he draws media and ritual together with the doubly useful lens of performance and dramaturgy.<sup>25</sup> He does not as readily define the boundary between performance and ritual, instead resolving this tension by defining theater and ritual as two different modes of performance, and arguing, "performance theories of ritual are the most useful beginning points."<sup>26</sup> This suggests the broader tendency for theorists of ritual and performance to slip between terms.

Within performance studies, Jeffrey C. Alexander integrates a notion of the performed with the ritual to arrive at the term "cultural performances," defined as "the social process by which actors, individually or in concert, display for others the meaning of their social situation," symbolically making actions and gestures available to others as signs of motives and explanations.<sup>27</sup> He quotes performance theorist Richard Schechner,

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<sup>25</sup> Ronald L. Grimes, "Ritual and the Media," in *Practicing Religion in the Age of Media: Explorations in Media, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Stewart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 230.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performances between Ritual and Strategy," *Sociological Theory*, 22, no. 4 (December 2004), 529-30.

who posits "all performance has at its core a ritual action," by reversal: "all ritual has at its core a performative act."<sup>28</sup> With the primary and subsidiary category in question, one is led to wonder whether a useful distinction exists between ritual and performance at all.

Cautiously, I give preference to the term "ritual" in this study, even while performance studies tacitly inform my approach. In part, I draw my preference for ritual from emic discourses in the field of evangelical Christian music where worship and performance tend to operate as a binary opposition. Musicologist Joshua Busman describes "a near-constant tension between ideals of 'true worship' and 'just performing'" in praise and worship music discourses.<sup>29</sup> Ethnomusicologist Monique Ingalls handles this tension in Derridean terms as "performance under erasure," indicated in her writing as "~~performance~~."<sup>30</sup> This discourse, though less salient in my research, emerged among Mars Hill music personnel who either eschewed the term performance or used it as a pejorative, legitimizing ritual performance by what they saw as its "authenticity," or distance from artifice or pretense.

From within these disciplines, each indicates permeability with the other in large part because they draw broadly from work across the social sciences and humanities. Ritual and performance studies each demonstrate the value of interdisciplinary study and inquiry, and provide a lens for repositioning oneself in relation to the "object" of inquiry, and indeed of "objectifying" at all. Further, as interdisciplinary methodologies and

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<sup>28</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy," in *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, and Jason L. Mast (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 38.

<sup>29</sup> Joshua Kalin Busman, "(Re)Sounding passion: Listening to American evangelical worship music, 1997-2015" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2015), 146.

<sup>30</sup> Monique Marie Ingalls, "Awesome in this place: Sound, space, and identity in contemporary North American evangelical worship" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania), 202.

theories, ritual and performance studies each introduce methodological humility on the part of the researcher or observer, mindful that the process of meaning-making always coheres at intersections with processes, relationships, ideologies, cultural systems, etc... outside the perception of the researcher. Barry Shank, in his theorization of scene locates the coherence of scene at intersection of “far more semiotic information is produced than can be rationally parsed,” a broad and permeable boundary applicable also to a genealogical approach to ritual.<sup>31</sup>

Ritual studies has long identified cultural events like musical performances and religious services as sites that distill cultural values. While the discrete discipline of ritual studies did not emerge until the late 1970s, early 20th-century functionalist movements in anthropology (Weber, 1905; Durkheim, 1912; Malinowski, 1922; Gluckman, 1949) interrogated rites as analogous to broader societies, complex systems whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. Anthropologists of ritual and religion inquired into the function of ritual in the production of social stability, useful for the maintenance of a dynamic collective homeostasis. Drama, sound, objects, visual art, and language are each understood participate in the maintenance of social cohesion.

Functionalist models gave way to structuralist studies in ritual (Evans-Pritchard, 1956; Douglas, 1966; Geertz, 1966; Turner, 1969; Lévi-Strauss, 1978), who extrapolated from a Saussurian linguistic model to posit how symbolic action might be textualized as a mode of communication. Saussure (1967), who posited that lexical signs (such as the word "chair") related to fixed object relationships (denoting the idea of a chair), influenced structuralists who similarly understood the denotation of ritual actions and

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<sup>31</sup> Barry Shank, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994), 122.

their meanings as largely dyadic, static and stable within cultural contexts. Structuralists understood minute social practices like ritual actions as symbolically analogous to larger-scale social practice, common underlying structures that characterize all human action and behavior.

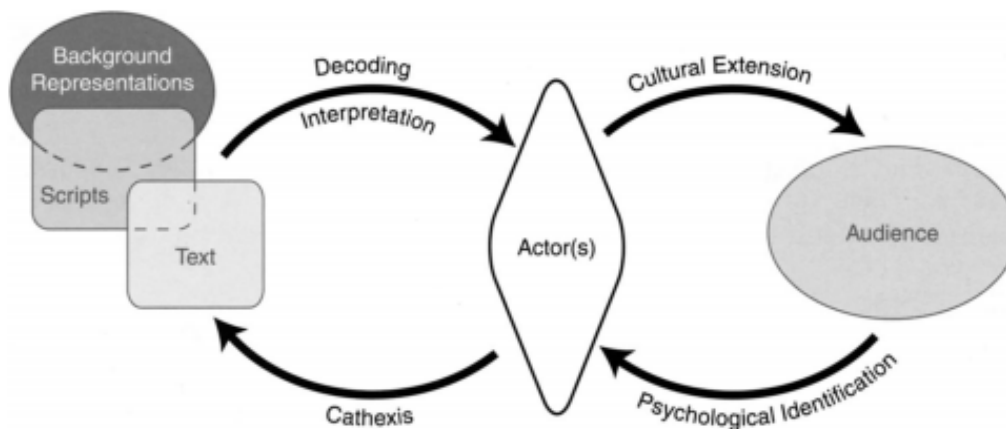
In the current era, theorists advocate a move away from fixed structuralist explanatory mechanisms, critiquing these as laden with Western dualistic ethnocentricity. Rather than positing that any static ritual meanings exist within human populations, post-structuralists inquire about the roles of social location and power in determining symbolic meaning. As such, meanings are construed particularistically, produced within microcontexts wrought with variance and polysemy, often patterned by relationships.<sup>32</sup> I subscribe to this mode of understanding ritual, and find its highly interdisciplinary potentiality, informed by semiotics, linguistics, performance, network, and practice theories, among others, very useful in my study.

The interrogation of performance, or bodies-at-ritual, informs my approach. Jeffrey C. Alexander's theorization of cultural performances provides a useful starting point to consider how the body's performances interact with background representations, scripts, and texts, pretexts for forming shared meanings among audiences and actors (see

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<sup>32</sup> Sociologist Mark Gottdiener (*Postmodern Semiotics*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995) endeavors to deal more readily with polysemy and its interaction with power within the field of Peircian semiotics, a discipline the author calls socio-semiotics. According to Gottdiener, "the premise of socio-semiotics is that any cultural object is both an object of use in a social system with a generative history and social context, and is also a component in a system of signification." Socio-semiotics especially seeks to engage with problem of polysemy, defined as "the ambiguous nature of the signifier and the possibility (likelihood, actually) that any given signifier would be interpreted as linked to a different signified by different people."<sup>32</sup> Gottdiener thus emphasizes the imperative to "analyze the articulation of several sign systems for any given cultural object." Furthermore, he argues that "the meaning of cultural objects and their use as expressive symbols in society remains a function of cultural context and interactive process, of particular semantic fields and of the knowledge-power articulation."<sup>32</sup> In short, a study like this one reveals the necessity of interrogating the always-slippery production of sign-object connections, especially as they are variously shared, but also variously distinct, within social groups.

Figure 1). For Alexander, cultural performances decode and interpret such background cultural representations, scripts, and texts. When successful, cultural performances garner an audience's psychological identification with the actor's representation, or dramatization, of background representations. Identification with the actors and scripts in turn reifies said representations.<sup>33</sup>



**Figure 1: Alexander's diagram of successful cultural performances**

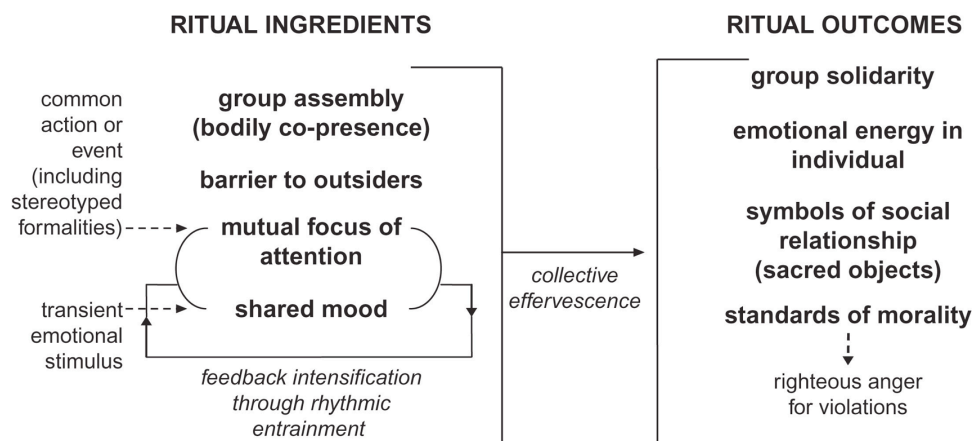
Alexander's model indicates the role of the actor's body in enacting and producing cultural scripts and texts; however, the role of the audience in Alexander's model is tertiary and mediated by the actors. I find sociologist Randall Collins' approach to interaction rituals useful in considering how group events like church services produce privileged meanings, states of mind, "sacred objects," and social relationships shared among co-present participants, bridging the agency and affect of performers and audiences.<sup>34</sup> Collins aims to synthesize earlier sociological models of ritual theory from Erving Goffman and Emile Durkheim defining ritual as "a mechanism of mutually focused emotion and attention producing a momentarily shared reality, which thereby

<sup>33</sup> Alexander, "Cultural Pragmatics," *Sociological Theory*, 531.

<sup>34</sup> Randall Collins. *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

generates solidarity and symbols of group membership."<sup>35</sup> As individuals undergo ritual experiences in the presence of others, the salience of those shared realities compound, and important outcomes of ritual interaction, which Collins borrows from Goffman in calling interaction ritual chains, beget symbols of group membership and emotional energy, Collin's primary contribution to the model.

These heightened experiences impel members to repeat their participation in such activities. As Collins' model demonstrates (see Figure 2), rituals are generated in myriad circumstances, from instantaneous interpersonal communications to multigenerational institutionalization.<sup>36</sup> Collins' model intends to provide an explanatory mechanism for successful, energy-producing human communication that impels repeat participation in ritual activities (conceived broadly). Emotional energy is generated in multifaceted ways, but energy stars, in the form of charismatic leaders individuals, are able to increase the EE level of others, forming a bond of admiration.



**Figure 2: Randall Collins' Interaction Ritual Chains model**

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 48.

James K. Wellman Jr., Katie E. Corcoran, and Kate Stockly's 2014 study tests Collins' model, interrogating the efficacy of heightened emotion in compelling repeat participation in megachurch rituals. Their study of twelve churches supports their hypothesis that "interaction rituals produce positive emotional energy nourishing membership symbols that are charged with emotional significance, feelings of morality, and a generally heightened spirituality."<sup>37</sup> These findings challenge a few tenets of Collins' model, finding that successful megachurches in fact seem to reduce the barriers to membership Collins describes. For example, consistent with Alexander's inclusion of background representations in his cultural performances model, Wellman et. al. note that the use of rock-style music "allows individuals to draw on cultural capital they already have from participation in the secular world, rather than requiring specific denominational knowledge/cultural membership capital."<sup>38</sup> This article compellingly demonstrates how emotion-producing experiences, entrained by collective effervescence in community, contribute directly to church growth, a conclusion with clear applicability to Mars Hill's rock concert-like context.

While Alexander's and Collins' models are useful as observational tools, both insufficiently detail the telescoping interactions of minute, local productions of power with broader, society-wide patterns of power. Catherine Bell's practice-oriented approach attends to ritual as "first and foremost a strategy for the construction of certain types of power that are displayed in the relationships between members effective within particular

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<sup>37</sup> Wellman, James K., Katie E. Corcoran and Kate Stockly-Meyerdirk. "God is like a Drug...": Explaining Interaction Ritual Chains in American Megachurches," *Sociological Forum*, 29, no. 3 (September 2014): 650-672.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 659.

social organizations."<sup>39</sup> Her definition of “ritual” encompasses the constitutive process of differentiating and privileging particular activities; deliberately manipulating time and space; restricting codes of communication; endowing distinct and specialized personnel, objects, texts and dress with power; inducing particular physical or mental states; and the involvement of a particular constituency.

Bell uses the concept of *ritualization* in order to "draw attention to the way in which certain social actions strategically distinguish themselves in relation to other actions."<sup>40</sup> Thus Bell examines and critiques ritual as an activity which stands in a special, elevated sphere from ordinary activities; however, Bell also attends to the ways differentiation and privileging link up with processes of practice and habituation.

Individual sedimented actions, when shared within a semiotic and regulatory context, become—as Foucault argued (and Bell quotes)—“the place where the most minute and local social practices are linked up with the large scale organization of power.”<sup>41</sup>

Bell situates her definition of ritual within critical studies, placing the negotiation of social relationships at the center of her analysis of ritual. She argues that rituals are "characterized by relations of dominance and subjugation," coining the phrase *redemptive hegemony*, a synthesis of Burridge’s notion of “redemptive process” and Gramsci’s notion of “hegemony.”<sup>42</sup> Bell argues that the core function of ritual is to normalize unequal power dynamics and devote ceremony to the acceptance and thus propagation of

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<sup>39</sup> Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 197.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 84. Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, trans. Louis Marks (New York: International Publishers, 1957), 174-176 and 186-187. Kenelm Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activity* (New York, Schocken Books, 1969), 4-8.

preferred ideologies, states of mind, objects and texts, and social relationships. This is done through a variety of tactics, but include manipulations of the body and vague uses of language.

In Bell's view, ritual is fundamentally practical—that is, a practice of values and priorities intended to be generalized to the broader context. Bell states,

Ritual mastery is the ability - not equally shared, desired or recognized - to 1) take and remake schemes from the shared culture that can strategically nuance, privilege, or transform, 2) deploy them in the formulation of a privileged ritual experience, which in turn 3) impresses them in a new form upon agents able to deploy them in a variety of circumstances beyond the circumference of the rite itself.<sup>43</sup>

This renders ritual inherently political, as a series of acts and events repeated to produce the appearance of something essential or even natural, ranging from the primacy of certain texts or grand narratives to the presumption that certain persons ought to lead in the home, church, boardroom, or nation. Bell's conception of ritual helpfully blurs the line between curated or marked events, like church services or protests, and more quotidian habits, such as gossiping or brushing one's teeth, attending to these as continua of practices that participate in the construction of reality.

Each chapter of this dissertation engages with the interactions between ritual and power, discussing how the church negotiated the empowerment of certain ideas (ontologies, theologies), musical styles and genres, locations and geographies, and personnel at intersections of gender, class, and race. At times, my analysis focuses on minute and mundane details, such as the content of anonymous blog posts or sermon quotes; at others, it deals with broad scale institutional change, such as drastic shifts in church polity, or the formation of new projects like Mars Hill Music. The mundane and

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<sup>43</sup> Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 116.

the structural are interconnected. As discourses, theologies, and musical practices and elements such as lyrics and music genre interact and intertwine in a community of practice, a series of privileged meanings emerge that compound over time, revealing and producing broader political outcomes.

### **Critical Studies of Race, Class, and Gender**

Bell's theory of ritual and power intellectually links to critical studies of gender, class, and race, which similarly argue that broad-scale power is produced iterative, sedimented prioritizations. As an explanatory starting point, in viewing the website of elders and pastors at Mars Hill, the church's highest-order executive leaders, demographic homogeneity links them.<sup>44</sup> Consistently, the church exclusively empowered heterosexual, Christian men as executive leaders. Among the forty-eight pastors on-staff in Mars Hill's final chapter, around 90% were white. While demographic homogeneity characterizes many United States churches, I am curious to track the processes that render these predictable empowerments. Following Crenshaw, I aim in this study to interrogate the role of ritual, centering on music and discourse, in normative social empowerment across a wide series of intersectional identities.<sup>45</sup> In particular, I observe the role of ritual in the co-formational elements of gender, class, and race that coherently predicted the persons, ideas, and musical traditions privileged and prioritized at Mars Hill, even while these variously shifted and changed in the course of the church's institutional growth.

Mark Driscoll set out to "preach the Bible, plant churches, and train men," emphasizing male headship influenced by "hypermasculine" exemplars, conflating

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<sup>44</sup> "Mars Hill Pastors" Mars Hill Church Archive, accessed October 16, 2017, <http://marshill.se/marshill/pastors>

<sup>45</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review*, 43, no. 6 (1991), 1241-1299.

"godly leaders" with mixed martial artists and Ultimate Fighters.<sup>46</sup> I interrogate the many ways Driscoll and others at Mars Hill used music to promote hypermasculinity. This analysis draws upon Judith Butler who understands construction of gender as emerging as an intelligible pastiche from "the legacy of sedimented acts rather than a predetermined or foreclosed structure, essence or fact, whether natural, cultural, or linguistic."<sup>47</sup>

Ideations and idealizations of gender are produced multiply, and thus differ culturally and demographically, but also temporally and geographically. The idealized performance of gender is thus always situated in simultaneous local and non-local spheres of practice, standing in relationships of both tension and elision with multiple alternative modalities. Because of this multiplicity, the enactment of gender may be decoupled from biological sex. Indeed, queer theory introduces multiple praxis models where gendered performances "cross" biological sex traits.

Masculinity studies emerges from this construction model. Connell and Messerschmidt offer that "masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body of personal traits of individuals. Masculinities are configurations of practiced that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting."<sup>48</sup> Practices of masculinity and the intertwined traits through which ideal masculinity is defined and enacted depend largely on temporal, geographical,

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<sup>46</sup> Molly Worthen, "Who Would Jesus Smack Down?," *New York Times Magazine*, January 6, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/11/magazine/11punk-t.html>

<sup>47</sup> Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theater Journal*, 40, no. 4 (December 1988), 523.

<sup>48</sup> R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society*, 19, no. 6 (2005), 836.

and other demographic factors. Indeed this study shows how masculinity was continually navigated, negotiated, and contested at various junctures in Mars Hill's history.

As I explore in chapters four, five, and six, Driscoll's traits of "manly men" shift throughout the years at intersection with economic class. These class-based masculinities also beget changes to the church's music. In the church's early years, as first discussed by blogger Wenatchee the Hatchet, Driscoll defines exemplary masculinity through a wide variety of working-class tropes, including the redneck or hillbilly, the suburban union carpenter, and the soldier.<sup>49</sup> Punk rock, emerging from a similar working-class masculinity, predominated at the church in these early years. However, as the church began to grow—and the church's donation base expanded—Mars Hill grew economically viable. At this time, Driscoll's exemplars changed, emphasizing the role of comparatively docile middle-class leader, provider and protector husband and father, an image anthropologist Jessica Johnson calls the "citizen soldier."<sup>50</sup> The church embraced New Calvinism around this time, centering a national theological movement arising from seminary professors and university students, a similarly middle-class constituency. Musically, this coincided with embrace of indie rock, a music that arose from middle-class, educated "nerds."

Throughout the dissertation, gender and class also interlink with presumptions of whiteness in the church. In each chapter, I discuss the politics of race in evangelical congregational music, punk rock, grunge, and indie rock, showing how whiteness is

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<sup>49</sup> Wenatchee the Hatchet, "The Evolution of Markulinity: combining a blue collar Jesus with an initiation process to solve a problem of male lethargy or disposability in urban settings, Dead Men as initiation rite," July 11, 2015, <http://wenatcheethehatchet.blogspot.com/2015/07/the-evolution-of-markulinity-combining.html>

<sup>50</sup> Jessica Johnson, "The Citizen-Soldier: Masculinity, War, and Sacrifice at an Emerging Church in Seattle, Washington," *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 33, no. 2, (November 2010), 326-251.

negotiated, asserted, or presumed in various ways. In 2011, Mars Hill sought to expand for the first time into "America's most diverse zip code," the Rainier Valley in South Seattle.<sup>51</sup> While I detail the church's persistent but tacit cultural whiteness throughout the dissertation, in chapter eight, I explore how Mars Hill's eventual adoption of indie rock as a core component of the church's brand ritually functioned to disempower local artists and musicians when the church finally sought to reach a non-white constituency, described by one former church employee as "imperialistic."<sup>52</sup>

### **Doctrinal and Polity Shifts: New Calvinism, Authority, and Submission**

While this dissertation observes the many ways Mars Hill privileged and ritualized white masculinity at intersection with shifting economic class-based identity, it also details a broader theological and practical obsession with authority and submission that influenced major ecclesial and doctrinal shifts within the church. Mars Hill began with a shared leadership structure, detailed in chapter three, that granted each elder, including preaching pastors, an equal executive vote. Even while the church denied lay members any political power, and excluded women from serving on the elder board from the beginning, the board modeled a somewhat co-equal structure at its founding. By the church's closing, this shared leadership structure had transformed, with three executive elders (Driscoll, Sutton Turner, and Dave Bruskas) at the helm, an outside board consisting of non-church personnel at the intermediate level. Elders retained only scraps of remaining executive power. These dramatic changes to church leadership are chronicled in each chapter.

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<sup>51</sup> Seattle Times Staff, "Seattle's Rainier Valley, one of America's 'Dynamic Neighborhoods,'" *The Seattle Times*, June 20, 2010, accessed October 16, 2017, <http://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/seattles-rainier-valley-one-of-americas-dynamic-neighborhoods/>

<sup>52</sup> Jevon Washington. Interview with the author. Phone interview, March 16, 2016.

The concepts of authority and submission underscored radical changes to the deeply-held beliefs at the center of the church's doctrine. At its foundry, the Mars Hill organization promoted theologies depicting God as accepting, loving, and responsive to humankind. Such beliefs, ritualized by Sunday sermons and worship songs, and formalized through the church's leadership structure and focus on arts, indicate a theology, soteriology (beliefs about the nature of salvation), and anthropology, rendering a certain ontological eternal order.

But the church's depiction of God's core characteristics began to change with the adoption of Calvinism, centering the authority of a totally sovereign God who preordains every aspect of human experience from the quotidian to the eternal. Humans thus emerge as totally submissive to God a wholly altered ontology and anthropology, co-influenced and ritualized through rhetoric, music, and polity. This dissertation shows how a church organization can radically redefine its doctrinal message, even about fundamental precepts such as the nature of God, the meaning of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and the availability of salvation, over the course of only a few short years.

Anticipating criticism of my approach to Calvinist theology, I wish to emphasize that I only seek to represent a narrow and particularistic sliver of Calvinism. As an ethnomusicologist, my expertise in the field of theology is extremely limited, and I do not claim to speak about Calvinist theology in order to evaluate truth claims or proximate orthodoxy. I see Mars Hill's Calvinism as a local idiosyncratic deployment of a complex, multivalent, 500-year wellspring of theological thought and debate. Even within the New Calvinist field, Mars Hill's status as a non-denominational church and the concomitant detachment from institutionalized doctrine and governance produced a highly unusual

outcome as Mars Hill repeatedly renegotiated its theological center and dramatically changed its governance structure three times in its relatively brief eighteen years. As I discuss the role of Calvinist theology in Mars Hill's music, authoritarian leadership structure, and white masculinity, I approach this theology through the lens of discourse, interrogating Calvinism's function as a sort of folk or emic theology that may be deployed in radically different ways depending on context. I focus on Mars Hill's particular iteration of Calvinism (and the slightly broader but still idiosyncratic field of New Calvinism) in order to draw attention to the salient theologies privileged at Mars Hill, and the process of ritualizing a few key elements through repeated, habituated actions such as music.

Thus this dissertation details ritual as habituated practice in a bounded cultural sector with shared regulatory and semiotic frameworks. Ritual functions in permeable interactions with peripheral cultural scenes and sectors, that function processually and iteratively to produce privileged propositions about reality (including theology) and ideal social relationships. Thus practices are, at their core, political—that is, constitutive of the "real world," i.e. how reality is conceived, experienced, and acted upon, and how the universe of privileged "meanings" produced within the church, or other shared cultural contexts, congeal as social hierarchies, governmental structures, epistemologies, canons, and so on. At the same time, this study shows how slippery every aspect of the production of a "privileged" reality can be, even within a massive organization that creates tomes of published discourse asserting an ever-consolidating claim to orthodoxy.

### **Chapter Summaries**

Each chapter endeavors an analysis of the production of power at Mars Hill through ritual and music performance. In chapter two, I situate Mars Hill's aesthetic and discursive culture in a broader historical context, detailing the rise of rock 'n' roll in the white American evangelical church. I interrogate the theological and discursive shifts that took place within American Christianity to pivot from the general rejection of rock 'n' roll, deemed "the Devil's music," to its near ubiquity in some evangelical circles. I trace these themes in both Catholic and Protestant Christian arenas detailing how mission, culture, race, and music intertwine. This chapter also discusses the rise of the Contemporary Christian Music industry and congregational Praise and Worship music, both streams that Mars Hill Church simultaneously employed and consciously opposed in their music ministry. These historical contexts prove necessary to comprehend Mars Hill's use of punk, grunge, and indie rock alongside Protestant hymns in their music ministry.

In chapter three, I discuss Mars Hill's earliest iterations of their theology and music, both situated within a frame I call "radical welcome." Mars Hill originated as a church focused toward welcoming a broad constituency of people, conceptualizing, theologizing, and performing this welcome both inwardly through *attractional* worship and outwardly through *missional* methods. I observe that the church focused its mission on a narrow constituency, represented by the punk and postpunk community coalescing around a church-run music venue called The Paradox, that tacitly centered the musics and subjectivities of young, white, working class men. This constituency, by then representing a hip national counterculture, in turn aided Mars Hill in accruing the social

capital to grow the church, recruit musicians from the scene to play in its bands, and form a distinctive punk and postpunk music ministry based around local genres.

Chapter four details how Mars Hill pivoted away from this theology of radical welcome, instead seeking to explicitly attract and cultivate "manly men." By looking at Driscoll's early writings, I argue that a central ideology of masculine supremacy, conceived particularly in opposition to the evangelical mainstream, began to predominate at Mars Hill, exemplified in performance tropes drawn from a pastiche of white, working-class figures. These intersected with the subjectivities represented by punk, grunge, and the emerging indie rock scene, also predicated on performances of white working-class masculinity. From early on, punk, grunge, and indie rock served as the vectors through which Mars Hill intentionally created a "masculine" music ministry.

Around 2003, a major shift in Mars Hill's theology took place, centering an idiosyncratic interpretation of Reformed theology. Chapter five focuses on the emergence and articulation of this theology at Mars Hill, first locating the church in a broader "resurgence" of Reformed theology within evangelicalism called "New Calvinism," then showing the impact of New Calvinism on Mars Hill's music with an emphasis on song lyrics. I detail how Mars Hill's selective adoption of key New Calvinist theological positions emphasized God's sovereign authority and human submission, detailing how this theology generalized to a broader ecclesial and relational structure.

In chapter six, I look at how this new affiliation with the national New Reformed community, a movement centering college educated, upper-middle class evangelicals, complicated Mars Hill's working-class identity. I argue that the church's adoption of New Calvinism coincided with genre shifts in the church's music, with Mars Hill's music

ministry increasingly adopted the aesthetics and logics of indie rock, simultaneously interrogating the major changes in the indie rock field that repositioned it as a music for upper-middle class, educated "nerds"—qualities intersecting the privileged identities within New Calvinism. Lastly, I trace a shift in executive oversight within Mars Hill's music ministry that renegotiated theological and performative priorities and prescriptions.

Chapter seven traces the latter era in Mars Hill's expansion, including the founding of a new record label, Mars Hill Music, poaching Jon Dunn from Tooth & Nail's A&R team. In this era of consolidation, excellence, and unified branding, I argue that the church crystallized its message and sound, centering Calvinist doctrine and high-energy indie-pop. However, the record label did not last long, and Mars Hill soon partnered with Tooth & Nail's pop-oriented imprint BEC Recordings to release future records, another move that changed the church's branding and identity.

In chapter eight, I explore how Mars Hill Music's focus on concise branding foreclosed a genuinely missional approach to arts, impairing relationality, especially in multiethnic neighborhoods. I detail Mars Hill's expansion into the diverse Rainier Beach neighborhood, showing how the church used indie rock to impose cultural dominance. I end with a conclusion detailing the final iteration of Mars Hill's polity, one that effectively divested elders of any executive power, and underscored the closing of the church amid an era of scandal, defection, and criticism.

In the early days, the language we used was—what we're trying to get at in gathered worship is an appropriate response to God's initiation amongst these particular people in this particular place in this particular time. [...] We started using the term *missional* worship trying to have the mindset of a missionary, or in some ways a missiologist, as musicians and worship leaders, as well. And that is, we live in a particular place and time, and so the most appropriate response to how God is initiating amongst this particular people in this place and time is probably going to come from within that people rather than from without. And this is how I saw it.

*Interview with Tim Smith*<sup>53</sup>

## Chapter Two

### **Music, Inculturation, and Mission: Christ and Culture in the Jesus Rock Revolution**

The above quote from Mars Hill's long-time music pastor Tim Smith illuminates how Mars Hill personnel conceived of an ideological and theological orientation toward the use of arts and music in worship. Particularly in its early years, Mars Hill's music staff placed emphasis on a "missional" orientation, placing local styles and genres of art and music at the center of its ministerial priorities. Identifying "indie rock," and previously the streams of punk and grunge popular among Seattle youth subcultures, as an indigenous art form for Mars Hill's congregants, the church focused on creating a music ministry rooted in the sounds of Seattle's underground music.

In 2017, the congregational music field is rife with popular music-inflected styles, inclusive of jazz liturgies, Holy Hip Hop, and the incorporation of top 40 pop hits in worship. However, in international Christian discourse, this subjective and relativistic approach to arts and music emerged recently, in the mid-20th century. In previous centuries of colonial expansion, missionary evangelists conceived of Western European culture as interconnected with sanctity, imposing Western European art music worldwide

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<sup>53</sup> Tim Smith. Interview with the author. Phone interview, October 14, 2015.

while often banning indigenous expressions, regarding them as demonic. This chapter will situate Mars Hill's key missional approach to arts in a broader historical context to explore the theological, discursive, and philosophical shifts in American Christianity, and particularly within white evangelicalism, that succeeded in sanctioning rock 'n' roll, ominously nicknamed "the Devil's music," for appropriate use in congregational worship.

Further, I will discuss the development of the Christian music industry. Mars Hill personnel expressed a conflicted orientation to the Christian music industry, critiquing its "middle-of-the-road" sound as generic and overly emotive, but also clearly envying the reach its artists had in shaping the American Christian soundscape from radio to gathered worship. Attempting numerous times to launch a successful record label, Driscoll and others at Mars Hill sought to infiltrate and influence the national Christian music industry. While each successive chapter will detail Mars Hill's positions on the Christian music industry, this chapter offers context for the broad field of Christian rock and pop music.

### **Baptizing "The Devil's Music"**

In the 1920s, when jazz music burst as a national youth subculture, its popularity provoked a moral panic. Writing for the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1921, Anne Shaw Faulkner warned, "never in the history of our land have there been such immoral conditions among our young people, and in the surveys made by many organizations regarding these conditions, the blame is laid on jazz music and its evil influence on the young people of to-day."<sup>54</sup> In the subsequent generation, a new musical form supplanted this moral panic: Rock 'n' roll music. In the 1950s, Reverend Jimmy Snow, a friend and

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<sup>54</sup> Anne Shaw Faulkner. "Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation?" *Ladies Home Journal*, August, 1921, 16.

collaborator of Elvis Presley's before turning to a career in the ministry, echoed this sentiment saying, "I believe with all of my heart that [rock 'n' roll music] is a contributing factor to the juvenile delinquency of today."<sup>55</sup> Many white American Christians stood in agreement with Snow's sentiments, regarding rock 'n' roll as "the Devil's music."

Music scholar John Haines argues that opposition to rock music's reputation for luring teens into wayward, especially sexual, behavior united previously distant white Evangelical and Neo-Pentecostal groups in efforts to respond to the perceived cultural degeneration of America's youth in a unified Christian voice.<sup>56</sup> But Haines also emphasizes that the oppositional posture such Christians exhibited toward rock music and its antecedents was inextricable from white America's theological framework, conflating cultural practices with associated values.<sup>57</sup> The white Protestant critique elided rock 'n' roll's African antecedents with demonic savagery. For instance, writing for Christian Crusade Publications in 1966, Christian commentator David Noebel critiqued rock as a contemporary manifestation of "African beat music" and possession ritual, decrying the music as "a designed reversion to savagery," excessive in its loud volume, emphasis on rhythm ("the African beat") and neglect of melody and harmony, and its polyrhythmic or syncopated "broken meter," a critique echoed by evangelicals like Bob Larson, Frank Garlock, and later by Wendell Babcock.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Jimmy Snow, "1950s preacher vs rock'n'roll music." Filmed 1956. YouTube video, 03:03. Posted October 3, 2014. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBDy7mKJ\\_VU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBDy7mKJ_VU).

<sup>56</sup> John Haines, "The Emergence of Jesus Rock: On Taming the 'African Beat,'" *Black Music Research Journal*, 31, no. 2 (Fall 2011), 244.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 232-233.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 233; Andrew Mall. "'The stars are underground': Undergrounds, mainstreams, and Christian popular music" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2012), 110-111. Noebel's commentary rightfully acknowledges the "strong current of West African religious sensibility" which persisted in American slave societies as, for example, Bahian Candomble, Haitian Vodun, Cuban Santeria.

However, as racial integration progressed in the 1960s and 70s, many white Protestants grew to embrace rock 'n' roll music, albeit through a philosophical reframing sufficient for accommodating its "devilish" style. White pioneers in the realm of Christian rock first emerged within a countercultural youth movement within the 1960s revival of interdenominational conservative Protestantism. Larry Norman, widely considered the first pioneer in Jesus rock, recalled, "when I was young, I heard Elvis Presley sing 'Hound Dog' on the radio, and I began to wonder why there couldn't be church music that sounded a little more modern."<sup>59</sup> Rather, he noticed that "most people seemed convinced that rock and roll was of the devil and that God would never use it," a perception Norman sought to counter.<sup>60</sup>

Norman, a long-haired California white hippie, grew up in a Baptist household, but initiated his career as a rock musician in San Francisco's 1960s counterculture. As a young songwriter and bandleader, his rock band People! garnered a large local and national following, opening for psychedelic rock greats like The Doors, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and Van Morrison. After a conversion experience, he left People! and joined the Jesus Movement, a grassroots collaborative in Southern California that sought an authentic, community-based Christian alternative to liberal rationality and 1960s "permissiveness" by marrying "the beliefs of old-time evangelical religion to the youthful energy and media-savvy of the 1960s counterculture."<sup>61</sup> By harnessing the

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<sup>59</sup> Larry Norman. "Forward—1979" in *Contemporary Christian Music: Where It Came from, What It Is, Where It's Going* by Paul Baker (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1985), xi.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, xii.

<sup>61</sup> Monique Ingalls, "Awesome in this place: Sound, space, and identity in contemporary North American evangelical worship," (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 55; Joshua Busman, "(Re)sounding Passion: Listening to American evangelical worship music," (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2015), 26.

entrepreneurialism and flexibility typical of American evangelicalism, Norman and other musicians of the Jesus Generation initiated a sort of synthesis between white Christianity and its alleged discursive opposite, rock 'n' roll.

### *Defining Evangelicalism*

According to Shawn David Young, the left-leaning Jesus People grappled with postmodernism and cultural pluralism, but nonetheless self-identified as "evangelical," a contested but discursively useful term designated by a "consistent pattern of convictions and attitudes," even across theological and political diversity.<sup>62</sup> According to Mark Noll, the term originates in eighteenth century renewal movements and nineteenth and twentieth century revivalism, exemplified by preachers like Charles Grandison Finney, D. L. Moody, and Billy Graham.<sup>63</sup> Historian David Bebbington names four core attributes that characterize a loose consensus of evangelical theology: 1) *Conversion*, or an intentional turn from sin and repentance to faith in Christ; 2) *Activism*, or the desire for the conversion of others and consequent outreach; 3) *Biblicism*, or the belief that all spiritual truth is located in the pages of the Bible; and 4) *Crucicentrism*, or ascription to the doctrine of atonement, believing Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross absolves the sins of humanity in an act of grace.<sup>64</sup>

Evangelicalism centers the individual in the salvation narrative, whether through agentive choice or Divine election. The "Truth" in the salvation story pertains to the one-

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<sup>62</sup> Shawn David Young, *Grey Sabbath: The Evangelical Left and the Evolution of Christian Rock* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 7.

<sup>63</sup> Mark Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 2001), 13.

<sup>64</sup> David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 7-13.

on-one relationship fostered between each individual person and God. Christ redeems sinful humans in an inward, grace-filled act: the human frame may look the same, but the interior heart and its convictions have been re-formed; thus evangelicals emphasize individual morality and reformation. This individualized frame has far-reaching implications. For example, Francois Furstenberg interconnects this ideation with the formation of the autonomous individual within liberal political theory; according to Furstenberg, evangelicals' notion that "grace is located in within each individual ... helped lay the foundations for a conception of individual autonomy which would eventually serve as the basis for liberal citizenship."<sup>65</sup> But the hyper-focus on the individual also tends against viewing societal problems as systematic.<sup>66</sup>

Noll, while affirming Bebbington's four doctrinal positions, adds several additional characteristics of evangelicals arising from his observations: Evangelicalism, for Noll, is characterized by its 1) Complexity as a culture that "has always been diverse, flexible, adaptable, and multiform;" 2) Popular character, in its populism and orientation toward innovative beliefs and behaviors; and 3) Innovative but informal networks of communication, which "have sustained the transnational character of evangelicalism and given it much of its distinctive shape."<sup>67</sup> Evangelicals tend toward religious entrepreneurialism predicated on an orientation toward forms that appeal broadly and adapt easily. Thus many evangelical groups tend against denominational structures,

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<sup>65</sup> Francois Furstenberg. *In the Name of the Father: Washington's Legacy, Slavery, and the Making of a Nation*, (New York, Penguin, 2006), p. unknown

<sup>66</sup> Mark Noll. "Logic of Evangelicalism and the Challenges of Philanthropy," *Lake Institute on Faith and Giving* (Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, 2007), 5.

<sup>67</sup> Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity*, 14-15.

which accounts for the broad doctrinal, liturgical, and ecclesial diversities that exist among churches self-identified as evangelical.

For Noll, this total set of characteristics distinguishes evangelicals from several other groups. Doctrinally, the Bebbington quadrilateral variously departs from core Mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic theologies, as well as groups like Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Eastern Orthodox, Unitarian-Universalists, Jews, and other religious minorities. Noll also distinguishes between African American Christians and white evangelicals in spite of a large degree of doctrinal agreement due to historical antipathies and exclusions. In particular, white evangelicals' public and political defense of slavery, opposition to Civil Rights, and persistent support for the racial status-quo, combined with white evangelicals' disdain for elements of African ritual retained in the worship of black Christians, underlies this continued divide, even while these positions do not characterize all white evangelicals.<sup>68</sup>

Even by its closing in 2014, Mars Hill mirrored the racial silos in the evangelical church and Christianity as a whole. At Mars Hill's closing, only around 10% of the church's pastoral staff were people of color. Mars Hill's cultural whiteness extended to its privileged theological and musical resources, as well, an iteration of cultural imperialism that eventually limited Mars Hill's attempts to expand into racially diverse areas of Seattle. Like at Mars Hill, racial division in American Christianity has been extremely persistent into the 2010s. In the Trump era, 81% of white, born-again evangelicals voted for Trump in the 2016 Presidential election, an even larger share than Trump's sweep

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 14.

among 58% of white voters.<sup>69</sup> While data surrounding African American born-again evangelical voting behavior is not available, exit polls indicate Black support for Trump around 8%.<sup>70</sup>

Implicit racial implications characterized the theological moves that succeeded in sanctifying rock 'n' roll for white evangelicals. Broadly, the Jesus People applied the evangelical framework of salvation to rock 'n' roll music. Like the sinful human body and soul redeemed for Christ, the mere form of rock music, once understood as sinful, could be redeemed to participate in the Christ story as a form of activism. Thus as newly convicted Christians with intimate musical ties and experience in rock 'n' roll, musicians like Norman Christianized rock music. Norman and other musicians raised in rock 'n' roll and the hippie subculture generalized this strategy of Christianization to other aspects of their ministry, effecting a cultural shift in the relationship between the sacred and the secular, whereby the secular underwent a sort of redemptive baptism and resultant resignification.

The lyrics to Norman's 1972 blues rock song "Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music" open with a polemical challenge to the prevailing discourses differentiating Christianity from rock 'n' roll music saying, "People say to me that Jesus and rock and roll can never go together/But I think they're wrong!" Norman continues,

I want the people to know that He saved my soul  
But I still like to listen to the radio,  
They say that "Rock 'n roll is wrong, give you one more chance"  
I said "I Feel so good, I gotta get up and dance"

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<sup>69</sup> Gregory Smith and Jessica Martínez. "How the faithful voted: A preliminary 2016 analysis," Pew Research Center Fact Tank, November 9, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/>.

<sup>70</sup> "How Groups Voted 2016," Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, Cornell University, accessed October 18, 2017, <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/polls/us-elections/how-groups-voted/groups-voted-2016/>.

I know what's right, I know what's wrong, I don't confuse it  
 Well, all I'm really tryin' to say is  
 Why should the devil have all the good music?<sup>71</sup>

The song reverses Jimmie Snow's assertion decrying rock music "how you *feel* when you sing it." For Norman, the music makes him feel good, moves his feet, and inspires him to get up and dance—it is, by proxy, declared "good." Norman attributes this good rock 'n' roll feeling to Jesus, stating "Jesus is the rock and he rolled by blues away!" The form of this music, and the good feelings that accompany it, should not be sole property of the Devil, but can belong to Jesus Christ.

### **New Approaches to Localized Missiology**

This process of resignifying rock music coincided with a global, ecumenical reckoning around the field of missions that interrogated conventional doctrinal attitudes and prescriptions toward global cultural practices. The colonial mandate for missions, the process by which the church pursues growth through evangelizing and church planting, intertwined with the destructive legacy of cultural imperialism. From the fifteenth century forward, Christianization involved cultural genocide where European missionaries eviscerated entire signifying systems, including languages, styles of dress, and musical, religious, ritual, and family systems. In many cases, the church violently and coercively sought to suppress cultural indigeneity, conflating Western cultural forms with Christian orthopraxy.

In the 20th century, initiated by Christian leadership in the two-thirds world, and concurring broadly with global postcolonial political revolutions and social reforms, the church began to renegotiate and reauthorize the sanctity, or sanctifying potential, of

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<sup>71</sup> Larry Norman. "Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music," *Only Visiting This Planet*, Verve Records, 1972, vinyl record.

indigenous cultural objects and practices. Framed as a reorientation toward *Missio Dei*, or God's mission on earth, a large consortium of scholars and church leaders in Western Europe and North America including Karl Barthes, David Bosch, and Jurgen Moltman began the process of decoupling Western cultural norms and practices from Christian orthodoxy in the 1960s. This was a broadly ecumenical movement oriented toward reforming Western missionaries' relationship to subaltern cultures and Christianities in post-Christendom and a postcolonial context.

Among Catholics, The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) convened from 1962-1965, initiating new paths to missiological evangelism, especially with regard to the meaning and value of cultures, and processes of liturgical adaptation and inculturation. Shifting from a centralized model, Vatican II established missions as a primary duty of local churches and bishops as "witnesses of solidarity and partnership, and as expressions of mutual encounter, exchange, and enrichment."<sup>72</sup> By foregrounding localization and mutual relationship, this position affirmed "a fundamentally new interpretation of the purpose of mission and the role of missionaries and mission agencies" based in ecumenical dialogue and aims toward human flourishing.<sup>73</sup>

In a papal decree, *Ad Gentes*, Pope Paul VI challenged the imperialist outcomes of the doctrine of inculturation which understood Christianity as a universalized culture and Christian conversion as a process of cultural conformity.<sup>74</sup> Instead, *Ad Gentes*

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<sup>72</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 380.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Ad Gentes* [Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church], December 7, 1965. Vatican Website, accessed October 18, 2017, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651207\\_ad-gentes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html)

affirmed cultural diversity, promoting a Christianity, analogous to Jesus' incarnation, that manifested in culturally particular ways. Spanish Jesuit priest and missionary Pedro Arrupe, writing in 1978, understood inculturation as "the 'incarnation' of the Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience ... finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question."<sup>75</sup>

Senegalese priest Justin Ukpong echoed this view in 1984, understanding inculturation as that which "involves immersing Christianity in the local cultures of the people."<sup>76</sup> In the Catholic context, then, local indigenous culture—language, styles of dress, musical forms and instruments, and so on—now was newly understood as a sufficient vector through which Christ might speak.

Out of this renewed understanding, the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy emerged from the Second Vatican Council, decreeing that Biblical readings, previously recited in Latin, should normally be recited in the vernacular language of the worshipping community. This also granted permission to translate the mass into the vernacular, paving the way for a surge in artistic and musical activity through folk masses. In the United States, though, while the church suddenly allowed English-language hymns, very few existed. Initially, young Catholics introduced secular pop hits and old spirituals popularized in the 1950s folk revival like "Kumbaya" and "Michael Row the Boat Ashore." This soon led to the composition of new, original songs for use in worship. Indeed, Mark Allan Powell's 2002 *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Music* names Ray Repp's 1966 *Mass for Young Americans*, written in response to Vatican II

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<sup>75</sup> Pedro Arrupe, "On Inculturation." Letter to the Whole Society of Jesus, *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu*, 17 (1978), 230.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Francis Anekwe Oborji (ed.), *Concepts of Mission: The Evolution of Contemporary Missiology*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006), 20-21.

(and predating the Jesus Movement), as the first pioneering form of the folk mass and a precursor to the Christian rock music industry.<sup>77</sup>

Among Protestants, Church of Scotland bishop Lesslie Newbigin is widely cited as catalyzing a reorientation toward missiology. Newbigin, deployed as a missionary to India from 1936 until 1974, initially conflated a spread Western values and cultural products with the promotion of the gospel; however, he soon recognized the inadequacies of this view, and adopted and advocated for a missions model predicated on forming relationships. According to Newbigin, when he returned to Britain, he encountered the newly post-Christian, postmodern England as "much harder than anything I met in India."<sup>78</sup> He began to apply his foreign missionary principles to the youth he encountered in England.<sup>79</sup> Newbigin catalyzed a turn toward viewing the West and its youth as a mission field.

Influenced by Newbigin, evangelicals convened the first of a series of conferences to evaluate the function and strategy of Christian mission and its orientation to culture. Initiated by a committee headed by Billy Graham, the 1974 International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland, drew more than 2,300 evangelical leaders from 150 countries. The Congress's resulting covenant affirmed a commitment to the task of evangelizing every continent stating, "more than two-thirds of all humanity

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<sup>77</sup> Ken Canedo, *Keep the Fire Burning: The Folk Mass Revolution*, (Portland, OR: Pastoral Press, 2009), 7.

<sup>78</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda: An Autobiography*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 235.

<sup>79</sup> Kenneth D. Gordon, "Newbigin as Preacher and Exegete," in *Theology in Missionary Perspective: Lesslie Newbigin's Legacy*, ed. Mark T. B. Laing and Paul Weston (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 99.

have yet to be evangelised."<sup>80</sup> But it also affirmed that "the gospel does not presuppose the superiority of any culture to another, but evaluates all cultures according to its own criteria of truth and righteousness, and insists on moral absolutes in every culture." The covenant calls for "imaginative pioneering methods" in evangelism, resulting in the rise of churches "deeply rooted in Christ and closely related to their culture." It admonishes churches to "seek to transform and enrich culture, all for the glory of God."<sup>81</sup>

*The Willowbank Report*, which proceeded from the 1978 gathering of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, called for a "radical concept of indigenous church life" by which "each church may discover and express its selfhood as the body of Christ within its own culture."<sup>82</sup> Thus the report celebrates the rights of congregations to indigenize, to "'sing and dance' the gospel in [their] own cultural medium" as a universal church defined as a "multi-racial, multi-national, multi-ethnic community."<sup>83</sup> *The Willowbank Report* raised complications in approaching practices or cultural elements perceived as evil or with evil associations. The report offers that "if the evil is in the association only ... we believe it is right to seek to 'baptize' it into Christ."<sup>84</sup> This authorized the process by which "evil" popular musical idioms could feasibly be Christianized, then, continuing "it is the principle on which William Booth operated when he set Christian words to popular music, asking why the devil should have all the

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<sup>80</sup> "The Lausanne Covenant: The Urgency of the Evangelistic Task," August 1, 1974, *Lausanne Movement*, accessed October 18, 2017, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant>.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, "10. Evangelism and Culture."

<sup>82</sup> "Lausanne Occasional Paper 2—The Willowbank Report: Consultation on Gospel and Culture: 8. Church and Culture, a. Older, Traditional Approaches," 1978. *Lausanne Movement*, accessed October 18, 2017, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-2>.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, "E. The Danger of Provincialism."

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, "F. The Danger of Syncretism."

best tunes."<sup>85</sup> Thus while intended to reform Western postures toward global cultures in the mission field, the auxiliary outgrowth of this reorientation included a shift toward sanctifying American youth culture, conceived as its own form of indigenous cultural expression.

In the mid-1980s, The Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) sought to formalize Newbigin's orientation toward youth culture, viewing North American youth as a sort of indigenous community with its own native cultural language. GOCN grew under the leadership of George R. Hunsburger, an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA), former missionary to Kenya, and professor at Western Seminary.<sup>86</sup> GOCN, considered "a progressive research network in the field of missiology," thus introduced the use of a new term to describe this local missions focus: Missional. Missional living has since emerged as a buzzword among younger evangelicals, especially those constituting the Emerging Church movement, a loosely networked group of young majority-evangelical church leaders and communities focused on redefining Christian faith and life in post-Christendom, postmodern society.

Theorists of missional living position it against the "theopolitical disaster of colonialism," instead arguing that a missional orientation roots in an intercultural hermeneutic. Missional living thus ideally challenges conventional theological discourse such that the missionary movement "appeals to all peoples irrespective of their cultural,

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen. "Missional Church: A Historical and Theological Analysis of an Ecclesiological Tradition." *International Review of Mission*, 102, no. 2 (November 2013.), 257.

ethnic or political borders."<sup>87</sup> This movement introduces the concept of "radical contextuality," an orientation toward centering local cultures.<sup>88</sup>

### **Missiology and the Emerging Church**

At Mars Hill, missional methods and discourses intermingled with similar aims toward cultural contextuality within the early 2000s burgeoning, diverse Emerging Church movement, a national trend in loosely-networked churches that sought to engage with postmodern approaches to worship, diverse theologies, and diffused leadership. The Emerging Church label grew out of a conference series hosted by the Leadership Network aimed at young church leaders.<sup>89</sup> Mark Driscoll embraced the term "Emerging Church" to describe Mars Hill for many years, though he regarded the church a member of its theologically conservative stream.<sup>90</sup> Emerging churches represent a wide variety of theological and political perspectives, described on Wikipedia as spanning "Protestant, post-Protestant, evangelical, post-evangelical, liberal, post-liberal, conservative, post-conservative, anabaptist, reformed, charismatic, neocharismatic, and post-charismatic," but held together by their common approach to culture.<sup>91</sup> In an article for *The Christian Post*, reporter Lillian Kwon described the movement as characterized by "flexible

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<sup>87</sup> David Congdon. 2015. "Toward a Dialectical Intercultural Hermeneutic," *The Mission of Demythologizing: Rudolf Bultmann's Dialectical Theology*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2015), 506.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 507-8.

<sup>89</sup> Jason Wollschleger. "Off the Map? Locating the Emerging Church: A Comparative Case Study of Congregations in the Pacific Northwest," *Review of Religious Research*, 54, no. 1 (March 2012), 70.

<sup>90</sup> Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 22.

<sup>91</sup> "Emerging church," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, accessed October 18, 2017, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emerging\\_church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emerging_church).

methodology and efforts to be culturally relevant."<sup>92</sup> While the Emerging Church soon splintered into political factions, efforts to integrate the Christian methods with youth culture remained embedded in the many churches and fellowships that grew out of this movement.

According to sociologist Jason Wollschleger, the roots of the Emerging Church movement trace back to megachurches' strategies for church growth implemented in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In attempting to reach the "missing demographic" of young Generation Xers, evangelical churches innovated a "church within a church" model, building and subsidizing wholly alternative services aimed at young adults.<sup>93</sup> These worship services and small groups, according to Gibbs and Bolger, were "characterized by loud, passionate worship music directed toward God and believer (not the seeker); David Letterman-style, irreverent banter; raw, narrative preaching; Friends (the popular TV series) type relationships; and later, candles and the arts."<sup>94</sup> Mars Hill adopted the language of the Emerging Church and conformed closely to the movement's characteristic aesthetics, music, and preaching.

Driscoll, Smith, and others within the emerging church of Mars Hill adopted Newbigin's missional language. Driscoll first became acquainted with the missional church movement through Dr. George Hunsberger, a founding leader of the Gospel and Our Culture Network, who spoke at a Seattle conference hosted by Leadership Network

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<sup>92</sup> Lillian Kwon, "Mars Hill Pastor Ditches 'Emerging' Label for Jesus," *The Christian Post*, February 27, 2008, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/mars-hill-pastor-ditches-emerging-label-for-jesus-31344/>.

<sup>93</sup> Wollschleger, "Off the Map?," 70.

<sup>94</sup> Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 30.

in the mid-1990s.<sup>95</sup> Smith adopted Newbigin's orientation toward understanding youth music as an "indigenous practice," analogous to any other cultural practice worldwide. The missional ministry framework motivated the church's early and very formative interactions with the punk, grunge, and indie rock scene in Seattle that underscored Mars Hill's broad success in attracting young people and in forming a distinctive music ministry.

### **The Evangelical Reformation: New Calvinism**

Mars Hill's theological center began to shift as Driscoll began to critique the "junk drawer" relativism of the emerging church movement.<sup>96</sup> By 2003, Driscoll declared, "I'll show you my theological underwear. I'm a Calvinist," joining a burgeoning cohort of adherents to Reformed Theology within the evangelical, missional field.<sup>97</sup> By situating himself within the "resurgence" of Reformed theology, Driscoll joined and later came to lead a growing cohort that grew prominent in the early to mid-2000s as a critical mass of evangelical figures began to explore and embrace tenets and texts in the canon of Reformed theology.

The New Calvinist movement first gained widespread attention through Collin Hansen's 2006 article for *Christianity Today* where Hansen highlighted the leadership of major figures like Joshua Harris, C.J. Mahaney, Louie Giglio, John Piper, Al Mohler, and

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<sup>95</sup> Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.*, 108.

<sup>96</sup> Kwon, "Mars Hill Pastor Ditches 'Emerging' Label," *The Christian Post*.

<sup>97</sup> Mark Driscoll, "11 Steps to Becoming a Jerk For Jesus." Sermon, Mars Hill Church, Seattle, June 8, 2003, [http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20030608\\_11-steps-to-becoming-a-jerk-for-jesus\\_en\\_transcript.pdf](http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20030608_11-steps-to-becoming-a-jerk-for-jesus_en_transcript.pdf).

Wayne Grudem who represented the core of this movement.<sup>98</sup> Hansen soon followed up with a 2008 book that profiled churches leading in the resurgence of Reformed theology, including Mars Hill Church.<sup>99</sup> Hansen termed this trend the "Young, Restless, and Reformed Movement" (YRR or YRRM), but it would soon acquire other names. Following the Reformed tradition's long-utilized shorthand "Calvinist," the Reformed resurgence has embraced the term "New Calvinism" (distinct from Kuyper's Dutch neo-Calvinism of the early 20th century).

According to Driscoll, New Calvinists differentiate from traditional Calvinism through missional methods, orientation to the city, embrace of the Holy Spirit, and ecumenical bridge-building with other Christian groups. He says,

1. Old Calvinism was fundamental or liberal and separated from or syncretized with culture. New Calvinism is missional and seeks to create and redeem culture.
2. Old Calvinism fled from the cities. New Calvinism is flooding into cities.
3. Old Calvinism was cessationistic and fearful of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. New Calvinism is continuationist and joyful in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.
4. Old Calvinism was fearful and suspicious of other Christians and burned bridges. New Calvinism loves all Christians and builds bridges between them.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Collin Hansen, "Young, Restless, Reformed," *Christianity Today*, September 22, 2006, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/september/42.32.html>.

<sup>99</sup> Collin Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journey with the New Calvinists*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008).

<sup>100</sup> Mark Driscoll. "Time Magazine Names New Calvinism 3rd Most Powerful Idea," *The Resurgence*, archived website captured November 28, 2014, accessed October 2, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20141128093630/http://theresurgence.com/2009/03/12/time-magazine-names-new-calvinism-3rd-most-powerful-idea>.

Driscoll coined the term "reformission," as "a radical call to reform the church's traditionally flawed view of mission" rooted in cultural supremacy.<sup>101</sup>

The contemporary resurgence of New Calvinism in the United States took place both inside and outside existing denominational structures. The second-largest Presbyterian denomination, the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA), adheres to Calvinist doctrine and socially conservative principles. The PCA emerged nationally from a series of denominational schisms, splitting from the larger Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PC[USA]) denomination as the Presbyterian Church of the Confederate States with slavery proponents in 1861, and splitting again as the Presbyterian Church of America to reject ordination of women in 1973.<sup>102</sup> While no longer explicitly advocating white supremacist tenets held in the first schism, the PCA retains its historical theological conservatism with a Calvinist orientation, and still does not ordain women. New Calvinist figures like Tim Keller, Ligon Duncan, Kevin DeYoung, Mark Chapell, and R.C. Sproul received education, training, and ordination within the PCA.

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is another key Protestant denomination leading the Calvinist resurgence. Like in the PCA, the SBC emerged from a schism between pro-slavery Baptists and their Northern counterparts in 1845. Further, the SBC denomination does not officially support the ordination of women to pastoral or ministerial positions; however, the denomination affirms the rights of autonomous

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<sup>101</sup> Mark Driscoll. *The Radical Reformission*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 18.

<sup>102</sup> Darryl G. Hart and John Muether *Seeking a Better Country: 300 Years of American Presbyterianism* (Phillipsburg, PA: P&R Publishing, 2007), 192.

congregations to determine whether to call a female pastor.<sup>103</sup> Several SBC churches are thus led by women.<sup>104</sup> Consistent with other Baptist denominations, the SBC holds no formal position on doctrines of soteriology, subscribing instead to an institutional model that allows for autonomy at the local church level.

A shift in SBC seminary leadership in the mid-1990s significantly impacted the rise of Calvinism across the denomination. In 1993, 33-year-old Dr. Al Mohler assumed the Presidency at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS).<sup>105</sup> In response to the progressive views of his predecessor Roy Honeycutt, Mohler sought to purge the liberal faction from SBTS' ranks. Mohler revived a founding requirement: as a prerequisite for ongoing employment, Mohler required all SBTS faculty to sign the seminary's founding document, the 1858 "Abstract of Principles," which centered biblical inerrancy and predestination-oriented theology.<sup>106</sup> Fully 96% of SBTS' faculty refused to sign the statement and consequently left the seminary; new hires that followed necessarily aligned with the statement's positions and in turn produced the country's largest seminary devoted to conservative Calvinist theological orthodoxy.<sup>107</sup> This movement within the SBC has proven extremely controversial, but influential. Many leaders in the New Calvinist movement obtained theological education, formation, and ordination in the SBC,

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<sup>103</sup> "Frequently Asked Questions—Can Women Be Deacons or Pastors in the SBC?" *Southern Baptist Convention*, accessed October 18, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/faqs.asp>.

<sup>104</sup> Bob Allen. "NC church, first to ordain a woman, calls its first female pastor," *Baptist News Global*, April 15, 2014, <https://baptistnews.com/article/pioneering-n-c-church-calls-woman-pastor/#.WT7O4PryszY>

<sup>105</sup> Mohler's installation followed a decade of controversy over his moderate predecessor Roy Honeycutt's leadership, criticized for taking the seminary in a theologically liberal direction.

<sup>106</sup> "The Abstract of Principles," *Founders Ministries*, accessed October 18, 2017, <http://founders.org/study-center/abstract/>.

<sup>107</sup> Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed*, 72

including Louie Giglio, John Piper, Matt Chandler, Mark Dever, and others. Most of these leaders hold doctoral degrees from Baptist seminaries.

Adherents to New Calvinism within the SBC remain a minority group. According to a LifeWay Research survey in 2007, only around 10% of leaders surveyed in the SBC identified themselves as five-point Calvinists, compared to 30% of recent SBC seminary graduates.<sup>108</sup> Thus New Calvinists in the SBC have forged connections with those in the PCA who share views toward Calvinist principles and complementarian gender relationships. These groups also found resonance with leaders in non-denominational evangelical church movements, such as Mark Driscoll, D.A. Carson, C.J. Mahaney, Joshua Harris.

The doctrinal agreement between academics and pastors in the PCA, SBC, and non-denominational churches soon gave rise to a variety of interdenominational parachurch organizations oriented toward the evangelicalism and Reformed theology such as Acts 29, 9Marks, Redeemer: City to City, Together for the Gospel, The Gospel Coalition, and The Resurgence. These parachurch ministries variously offer trainings, conferences, and resources like books, blog posts, podcasts, and published interviews. The organizations share many of their leaders in common, and have grown to constitute proto-denomination in the American church united by shared commitments to Reformed Theology, Biblical inerrancy, exclusively male leadership, and missional approaches to modern worship music and art.

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<sup>108</sup> Jeff Robinson, "Study: Recent grads 3 times more likely to be Calvinists," *Baptist Press News*, last modified November 27, 2007, accessed 18 October, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20120515150400/http://bpnews.net/BPnews.asp?ID=26914>.

## The Rise of a Christian Music Industry

Across a range of Christian denominations and networks, renegotiated theological positions around culture and evangelism in ecumenical Christianity have established a powerfully useful and enduring theological frame for absolving and sanctifying secular products like music and arts. Over time, this would cohere into a new orientation: that products of culture are value-neutral, and can be used for holy or demonic purposes depending on their lyrical content and the intentions of the performer. This view of music as a morally neutral force was articulated as early as 1971 by William J. Peterson, executive editor of the conservative *Eternity* magazine, who wrote, "we have to remember, strictly speaking, music is amoral," a view that would grow increasingly dominant through the 1980s and 90s.<sup>109</sup> *CCM Magazine* printed "The Christian Rocker's Creed" in 1988 saying, "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all music was created equal, that no instrument or style of music is in itself evil, that the diversity of musical expression which flows forth from man [sic] is but one evidence of the boundless creativity of our Heavenly Father."<sup>110</sup> This new paradigm sanctioned all musical styles as theoretically available for productive use in evangelism and the church.

The emphasis thus shifted toward the content, or message, contained within the music, replacing genre or style as the locus of music's perceived morality. Congregational music scholar Joshua Busman describes the development of cultural value-neutrality as initiating an "Information Age" operational model in Christianity, which would come to regard the substance Christian doctrine and the medium of cultural forms as essentially

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<sup>109</sup> William J. Peterson, "O, What a Fantastic New Day for Christian Music," *Eternity*, April, 1971. .

<sup>110</sup> "Christian Rocker's Creed," *Contemporary Christian Music Magazine*, November, 1988, 12.

separable.<sup>111</sup> But sanctified "indigenous" forms could also be used in service to evangelical activism in order to bring new people to Christ. Thus the Jesus People prioritized communicating the urgent "information" of Christian soteriology through "any means necessary," and identified the most direct and efficient path to reaching the uninitiated as through their own cultural mediums and forms.<sup>112</sup> Christianizing secular culture had the function of making Christianity relatable as the superior cognate to other experiences. For the Jesus People, according to Haines, "the closer their music came to that of those they wanted to convert, the better."<sup>113</sup> Cultural relatability was seen as key to facilitating conversions.

By sanctifying rock 'n' roll's youth culture through zealous, charismatic Christianity, a ritually potent musical movement emerged from the Jesus Freaks, generating strong emotional responses. In a 1973 study by sociologist Robert Ellwood, he wrote "the ability of Jesus rock and gospel melodies to generate rich, powerful feelings in a mood- and emotion-oriented age has brought and held the movement together."<sup>114</sup> Ingalls describes the paradigmatic image of the Jesus Movement as "a group of young people sitting in a circle, playing guitars and singing new devotional songs termed 'Jesus music,'" but such experiences ranged from folksy camp singalongs to loud, raucous, all-night celebrations.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Joshua Busman, "(Re)sounding Passion," 30.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Haines, "The Emergence of Jesus Rock," 240.

<sup>114</sup> Ellwood, Robert S. *One Way: The Jesus Movement and its Meaning*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973, quoted in David Stowe, *No Sympathy for the Devil: Christian Pop Music and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 19.

<sup>115</sup> Stowe, *No Sympathy for the Devil*, 20.

Through emotive worship services performed in relatable youth-oriented musical styles, Christian rock music swept the nation. Jesus Music initially spread through networks in emerging non-denominational churches like Calvary Chapel, His Place, The Living Room, The Salt Company, and Vineyard Christian Fellowship.<sup>116</sup> The Calvary Chapel, founded by charismatic pastor Chuck Smith and a small group of his followers who broke away from the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel in Santa Ana, CA, was among the first to center Jesus Music in their worship. Smith, in partnership with "hippie evangelist" Lonnie Frisbee, converted his home into a church, and established a commune called House of Miracles for other Christian hippies.<sup>117</sup> The Calvary Chapel soon developed an umbrella organization called *Maranatha! Music* to produce and disseminate Jesus Music.<sup>118</sup> While building a new facility to accommodate the thousands of young people attracted to the church, Calvary Chapel staged concerts and worship services in a giant outdoor circus tent, and witnessed a steady, rapid growth in the number of young people in attendance.<sup>119</sup>

Prominent evangelical leader Billy Graham, struggling with reaching his own rebellious teenage son, seized on youth counterculture's sudden embrace of old-time Evangelical religion via rock music. Together with Campus Crusade for Christ, Graham organized Explo '72 (commonly called "Godstock" in reference to it being a Christian version of Woodstock), a massive youth-oriented training event culminating in a day-

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<sup>116</sup> Mall, "The stars are underground," 106.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>118</sup> Busman, "(Re)sounding Passion," 40.

<sup>119</sup> "History of Calvary Chapel," *Calvary Chapel Eastside*, accessed on October 18, 2017, <http://www.cceschurch.com/about/history-of-calvary-chapel/>.

long music festival in Dallas, Texas, that reportedly attracted over 150,000 people.<sup>120</sup>

Explo '72 secured a connection between previously disparate subcultures: Jesus People hippies and more conservative Christian youth involved in evangelical groups like Campus Crusade for Christ.<sup>121</sup>

As the nation's leading celebrity evangelist, Graham represented the critical fulcrum to unite such groups and precipitated evangelicals' broad acceptance of youth music. According to Larry Eskridge,

The fact that America's leading evangelist could tolerate the movement's hippie eccentricities undoubtedly eased its acceptance in many evangelical quarters. Moreover, Graham's approval contributed a sense of legitimization for those evangelicals ... who eagerly adapted the styles, symbols, music, and rhetoric of the Jesus Movement to their own purposes.<sup>122</sup>

Graham's public and unequivocal blessing of the Jesus Movement through Explo '72 catalyzed the mainstream acceptance of Jesus Music that would soon follow. Formerly skeptical evangelical leaders in declining denominations began to embrace the Jesus People, their leadership, their music, and their methods.

This new, exciting genre soon injected a new vigor into extant Christian record labels, firmly established by the 1960s through the Southern and Black Gospel industries, that grew in vast and diverse directions with the Jesus Movement. After the 1967 success of Billy Ray Hearn's original folk musical *Good News!*, an enormous hit producing sheet music and vinyl sales for Nashville-based Broadman Press, the Southern Gospel label Word Records hired Hearn to continue creating youth-oriented folk rock Christian

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<sup>120</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism*, (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), 326.

<sup>121</sup> Busman, "(Re)sounding Passion," 34.

<sup>122</sup> Eskridge, "One Way," 85. Quoted in Busman, "(Re)Sounding Passion," 34.

musicals to distribute to congregations.<sup>123</sup> Maranatha!, in partnership with Creative Sound, possibly the earliest Christian record label, released its first full-length album in 1971, *The Everlastin' Living Jesus Music Concert*, which immediately sold out.<sup>124</sup>

A host of new Christian labels and recording projects soon proceeded from Explo '72, beginning with the album release of recordings of select performances from the event called *Jesus Sound Explosion*, released by Strawberry Creek Productions in San Bernardino, CA. The album telegraphed this new era of racial integration, featuring black gospel artists like Andre Crouch and the Disciples and Willa Dorsey alongside rockers like Larry Norman and Johnny Cash, even while this vision of interracial Christianity was not representative of Explo '72's constituency, reported by *Christianity Today* as 95% white.<sup>125</sup>

After Explo '72, Word launched Myrrh Records as a popular music subsidiary headed by Billy Ray Hearn.<sup>126</sup> Recognizing this underserved market, Myrrh pioneered a successful niche industry with notable artists like Nancy Honeytree, Second Chapter of Acts, and later, Amy Grant. Other West Coast Christian labels dedicated to Jesus Rock soon followed. Popular singer Pat Boone and Liberty Records' Irv Kessler established Lamb & Lion Records in 1972, focused on the new music of the Jesus People.<sup>127</sup> After

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<sup>123</sup> Mall, "The stars are underground," 106; John J. Thompson, *Raised by Wolves: The Story of Christian Rock & Roll*, (Toronto: ECW Press, 2000), 43. Mall also notes that Christian labels often adopted new Christian rock music later than their secular counterparts.

<sup>124</sup> Baker, *Contemporary Christian Music*, 39; Thompson, *Raised by Wolves*, 81.

<sup>125</sup> Busman, "(Re)sounding passion," 34-35; *Jesus Sound Explosion*, Andre Crouch and the Disciples, Larry Norman, Connie Smith, et. al., (San Bernardino: Strawberry Creek Productions, 1972). Accessed October 23, 2017, <https://www.amazon.com/Jesus-Sound-Explosion-Crouch-Disciples/dp/B001A7YLP2>.

<sup>126</sup> Mall, "The stars are underground," 107.

<sup>127</sup> Elliot Tiegel, "Pat Boone Opens Center to Aid 'Jesus Music,'" *Billboard Magazine*, July 3, 1972, 3.

the expiration of Larry Norman's contract with Capitol Records leftover from his time in People!, Norman pursued new avenues for Christian rock music production, establishing Solid Rock Records in 1975. Billy Ray Hearn left Myrrh to found Sparrow Records in Southern California in 1976.<sup>128</sup>

Major labels, observing market success among this burgeoning industry, also began to acquire Christian labels. In 1974, ABC Records bought Word Records, thus increasing national distribution. MCA acquired Christian label Song Bird Records in 1979. And CBS Records established a Priority Records as a new gospel music subsidiary in 1981.<sup>129</sup> Major labels' acquisition of Christian music labels and groups continued into the 1990s and 2000s following the media consolidation trend in the secular music industry. EMI purchased Sparrow in 1992; Geffen Records acquired distribution rights to Christian label Reunion Records in 1990, and by 1995, BMG owned the label. The Warner Music Group (of AOL/Time Warner Inc.) purchased Word Entertainment for \$84.1 million. In 2002, Epic and Columbia Records' Christian music division assumed responsibility for distributing Integrity Inc.'s releases.<sup>130</sup> Christian music proved a good business opportunity.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Mall, "The stars are underground," 109.

<sup>129</sup> Busman, "(Re)sounding passion," 35.

<sup>130</sup> Anna Nekola, "Between this world and the next: The musical "worship wars" and evangelical ideology in the United States, 1960-2005," (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin - Madison, 2009), 233-234.

<sup>131</sup> Busman, "(Re)sounding passion," 38. In 2016, each of the remaining major labels—Universal Music Group (now home to EMI, MCA, and Capitol), Warner Music Group, and Sony Music Entertainment (BMG and Columbia)—maintain a network of Christian music subsidiaries. Regarding any perceived ambiguity to this end, CBS Records' deputy president M. Richard Asher clarified their Priority acquisition saying, "I won't pretend that we're here because of some new burst of religious faith. We're here purely and simply because we're excited about gospel's potential to sell records."

Throughout the 1970s, the Christian music industry continued to expand, with the foundation of new record labels and breakout stars. Progressively, a parallel pop culture industry of Christian commodities arose, marketed as lifestyle products to Christian-identified consumers. Within the nascent Christian recording industry, a new diversified market of music genres led to a Christian publication, *Contemporary Christian Music*, first published by former disc jockey John Styll in 1978, operating as Christian cognate to *Rolling Stone* magazine, reviewing songs, albums, and shows. Its title and acronym, *CCM*, soon became a pseudonym for the Christian music industry as a whole.<sup>132</sup>

Though differentiated by a porous boundary, by the late 1970s and early '80s, the Christian popular music industry began to distinguish songs intended for use by congregations, and studio-produced music intended for listening. These are commonly differentiated as *praise and worship music*, characterized by musically simplistic songs, lyrically subjective songs intended for experiential worship, and *message music*, intended for listening, which adhered more closely to popular music styles.<sup>133</sup> Maranatha! Music, representing the praise and worship division, discontinued contracts for its presentational CCM musicians, instead orienting toward music for use in congregational worship.<sup>134</sup> Southeastern Christian record labels like Word and Sparrow soon absorbed Maranatha!'s popular message music artists, initiating a shift in the locus of CCM production.

Since the 1980s, Maranatha!-style praise and worship music, intended for congregational singing, adopted a "middle-of-the-road" style that "walked a fine line between sounding 'contemporary' and appealing more broadly across age demographics

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<sup>132</sup> Mall, "The stars are underground," 109.

<sup>133</sup> Busman, "(Re)sounding passion," 42.

<sup>134</sup> Ingalls, "Awesome in this place," 76-77.

and denominational and regional backgrounds" in a resultant sound described by John J. Thompson as "more palatable ... than the rock and roll of Larry Norman or Daniel Amos."<sup>135</sup> Thus 1980s praise and worship music generally appealed to a more conservative audience, but forged a "contemporary" sound born of soft rock styles, distinct from both southern gospel and rock 'n' roll, through use of synthesizer-forward ensembles, light percussion, and mixed-ensemble vocals.<sup>136</sup> Monique Ingalls describes these recordings as simultaneously "professional" in their high production value, but also "highly accessible, characterized musically by small melodic ranges and relatively simple rhythms, and usually recorded in keys designed for congregational singing." Instrumental arrangements, too, were often designed to accommodate the basic skill levels of amateur church musicians.<sup>137</sup>

Because such music is written with the intention of reproduction and use congregational worship, negotiations around fair use and intellectual property inevitably arose. In 1976, musician Dennis Fitzpatrick sued the Archdiocese of Chicago for \$3.2 million dollars, claiming the latter had copied and distributed lyrics and lead sheets for portions of folk masses written and owned by Fitzpatrick, a former employee of the Diocese. Fitzpatrick won the suit and collected damages in 1984. Though he would eventually lose \$3 million of that total in an appeal the next year, the implications of the lawsuit sparked the development of a blanket "permission of use" model for non-commercial activities such as the copying of lead sheets and lyrics. Howard Rachinski, an evangelical music minister based in Portland, Oregon, initiated the development of this

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<sup>135</sup> Thompson, *Raised by Wolves*, 87; Ingalls, "Awesome in this place," 95.

<sup>136</sup> Ingalls, "Awesome in this place," 95.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

license, launching Starpraise Ministries as a prototype in 1985. In 1988, he coordinated with the UK-based Christian Music Association to form Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI). Today, CCLI serves over 200,000 churches worldwide and represents around 3,000 publishers.<sup>138</sup>

### **Building a Core Audience**

My interviews with members of Mars Hill's worship staff indicate a critique of many aspects of this Christian recording industry, from sound to production, licensing to lyrics. In particular, Mars Hill personnel lampooned the developments of so-called "Jesus is my boyfriend" music, music that ambiguously portrayed faith via romantic imagery. Lyrically, 80s and 90s worship music grew to emphasize the subjective relational intimacy of a personal relationship with Christ, a shift catalyzed by John Wimber, a former pastor at Calvary Chapel and a founding pastor of the Vineyard Church. These songs, written in the second person and replacing "Jesus" with "you," incorporated images from romantic and sexual love.<sup>139</sup>

For example, the Eddie Espinosa's 1982 "Closer to Thee" pleads for intimacy, repeating "Lord, I want to be closer to Thee."<sup>140</sup> Rick Founds' 1990 release "Jesus Draw Me Close" uses the metaphor of physical intimacy saying, "Jesus draw me close/closer Lord to You/let the world around me fade away."<sup>141</sup> Vineyard's 1998 album *Intimacy* features twelve tracks centering a personal, subjective, love-oriented Christian

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<sup>138</sup> Busman, "(Re)sounding passion," 48-49.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51

<sup>140</sup> Eddie Espinosa, "Closer to Thee," 1982, Mercy/Vineyard Publishing.

<sup>141</sup> Rick Founds, "Jesus Draw Me Close," 1990, Universal Music - Brentwood Benson Publishing.

relationship.<sup>142</sup> Lionel Adey refers to these as *subjective* songs, differentiated from objective and reflexive types.<sup>143</sup>

This subjective approach to worship music's lyrics has enjoyed enduring influence. Lyrics to the song "Breathe," performed by Michael W. Smith on his album *Worship* (1995), typify the lyrical simplification and subjective turn in the praise and worship genre.<sup>144</sup> The verses, while referencing Christian sacraments and jargon like "Holy presence," "your Word," and "daily bread" never mentions Jesus or God, but rather pleads in the second person, "I'm desperate for you/I'm lost without you." Bethel music's 2011 "Love Came Down" recounts, "Love came down and rescued me/love came down and set me free/I am yours, I am forever yours."<sup>145</sup> This compositional style has maintained popularity and market dominance.

Mars Hill personnel also consistently critiqued the pop-country sound and listenership of much CCM music. Maranatha! music's move from California to Nashville, Tennessee, which spurred an increasingly regional aesthetic and consumer base, shaped by both its proximity to the country music industry. In a 2010 interview with ethnomusicologist Andrew Mall, Provident Records executive Blaine Barcus described their market core as follows:

The core is—I'm sure people have told you—the soccer mom, it is the female soccer mom. That's who core Christian AC [adult contemporary] radio is aimed at ... It is the female listener, twenty-five to forty-five,

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<sup>142</sup> *Intimacy: 12 Worship Songs of Love to the Lord*, Scott Underwood, Brent Helming, and Brian Doerksen, June 1, 1998, Vineyard Music.

<sup>143</sup> Busman, "(Re)sounding passion," 51; citing Lionel Adey. *Hymns and the Christian Myth* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986).

<sup>144</sup> Michael W. Smith, "Breathe" by Marie Barnett, 2001, *Worship*, Reunion Records.

<sup>145</sup> "Love Came Down" by Brian Johnson, Jenn Johnson, Jeremy Riddle, Ian McIntosh, and Jeremy Edwardson, 2009, Bethel Music Publishing/Mercy Vineyard Publishing.

something like that. But musically, I think the core is pretty pop. I call it middle-America pop, with a slight country flavor. It is primarily church-going evangelicals in the red states, primarily in the south and southeast ... If I think about it, almost ninety percent of even the artists I look at are from the southeast part of the country.<sup>146</sup>

A 2007 *Industry Overview* report by the Gospel Music Association (GMA) reinforced this image, finding that the core Christian music consumer is likely to be female, married, affluent, and living in a large household outside of densely populated areas, most likely in the south or southeast.<sup>147</sup>

Barcus also remarked on the overlaps between the middle-of-the-road Christian music buyer and the country music buyer stating, "I think demographically there's similarities."<sup>148</sup> Such resonances then shape stylistic similarities to country music, emphasizing narrative forms and acoustic guitar. Describing Provident artists Mac Powell (Third Day), Bart Millard (MercyMe) and Mark Hall (Casting Crowns), Barcus noted their shared southern twang, saying "all those guys are from the south. They all have a little bit of a southern thing in their voice ... Even stylistically, there's a little bit of a country pop to it."<sup>149</sup> In 2017, the three largest Christian record labels—EMI Christian Music Group, Provident Label Group, and Word Entertainment—remain located in Nashville. The greater middle Tennessee region also supports the Gospel Music

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<sup>146</sup> Mall, "The stars are underground," 212.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 212-213. The overlap is, however, intended as sonically subtle: it is possible to "go too country," with too much steel guitar, mandolin, or fiddle. CCM thus maintains some sonic distance from country music.

Association industry trade group and other Christian media and entertainment institutions.<sup>150</sup>

### **Christian Music Peripheries and Subcultures**

However, the Christian music industry's multiplex and neoliberal networks also include a variety of labels dedicated to peripheral or subcultural musical genres outside the hegemony of Nashville's sounds and networks. Pertinent to Mars Hill's music is the emergence of labels dedicated to Christian punk, grunge, hardcore, metal, and indie rock. Though late-1980s Christian punk, grunge, hardcore, and metal musicians struggled to find an audience. However, when alternative 1990s bands like Sonic Youth, Nirvana, and Nine Inch Nails overtook the mainstream with their pop-inflected punk music, according to John J. Thompson, "youth pastors across the country simultaneously convulsed" as they watched the church grow increasingly irrelevant to pierced, tattooed antiestablishment teens.<sup>151</sup>

Just as the Jesus Movement negotiated the rift between pop culture and church, Christian-identified fans of the emerging punk subaltern would find a place within the highly adaptive evangelical marketplace. Word established a subsidiary series called Word Associated Labels to attract and promote fringe-genre Christian rock bands.<sup>152</sup> Frontline Records, founded in 1986 by Jimmy Kempner in Santa Ana, California, initiated the early adoption of Christian rock, rap, dance-pop, and hip hop, forging a "truly classic alternative, rap, metal, and rock" music label.<sup>153</sup> But one of the most

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>151</sup> Thompson, *Raised by Wolves*, 172.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>153</sup> Chris Well, "News," *7Ball* (18, 1998), 20.

successful Christian alternative labels emerged from Brandon Ebel, originally hired as one of Frontline's phone sales employees in California.<sup>154</sup>

Ebel, the son of a pastor with a vast knowledge of Christian music but also a fan of underground music he spun as a KBVR student radio disk jockey during his college years at Oregon State University, participated as a maven in the underground Christian rock scene. In 1993, after unsuccessfully pitching Christian DIY punk bands to Frontline's A&R department, he decided to launch a dedicated Christian punk label called Tooth & Nail. Tooth & Nail's first release—Wish For Eden's *Pet the Fish*—would be followed up with releases from Blenderhead, Starflyer 59, and MxPx, among many others.<sup>155</sup> Ebel moved Tooth & Nail to Seattle in 1994 where he continued to develop the brand as a Christian label representing postpunk genres including electropop, grunge, hardcore, punk rock, shoegaze, and thrash metal. He soon expanded the Tooth & Nail market with imprints BEC and Solid State, respectively focused on adult-oriented contemporary pop and aggressive rock styles to augment Tooth & Nail's focus on alternative rock and punk.<sup>156</sup> Many musicians and employees at Tooth & Nail attended and played music at Mars Hill, a point I will elaborate in the next chapter.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter situates Mars Hill within the broader field of trends in American Evangelicalism, showing how discourses of mission and inculturation interact with theological beliefs around the ethics of style. As Mars Hill began to establish its distinctive underground punk, grunge, and indie rock music ministry, the church

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<sup>154</sup> Thompson, *Raised by Wolves*, 176.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

studiously drew upon the missional living movement's discourses and practices, while self-consciously allying with Christian music fringe represented by Tooth & Nail. Mars Hill identified these styles of music as Seattle's indigenous youth culture, born from a subcultural demographic they sought to attract. But Mars Hill's also used these music genres to intentionally differentiate themselves from the Contemporary Christian Music industry and congregational Praise and Worship music. In the next two chapters, I will detail how Mars Hill's missional stance impacted the church's unique evangelistic strategies (chapter 3), and then discuss how Mars Hill performed opposition to the Christian Music industry (chapter 4).

NARRATOR: Seattle, Washington, is one of the most culturally distinctive metropolitan areas in America. Its music scene alone provides the perfect accompaniment for the postmodern age. From punk to grunge to indie rock the Seattle Sound is unmistakable. In six years, the city's Mars Hill Church has grown from twelve attendees to twelve hundred. From the beginning, Mars Hill has incorporated Seattle's many musical styles into its worship...

MARK DRISCOLL: To mediate the truth of Jesus through culture, you need to speak the same language as the people in the culture. What that means is, musically, it should sound the same as everything else that is being played, but content should be different and should be something that does align itself with the truth of scripture and the truth of Jesus.

*From The Changing Face of Worship  
Documentary Film, 2003*<sup>157</sup>

### Chapter Three

#### **"The Church of Immaculate Loophole": Attractional Worship and Missional Outreach**

Writing for *Mother Jones* magazine in 1998, Lori Leibovich profiled a brand new Seattle church "designed to do nothing less than rescue a generation from an un-Christian fate."<sup>158</sup> She depicted this new Mars Hill Fellowship as a church bathed in the milieu of cultural secularism, harnessing Generation-X ennui, skepticism, and cynicism to show disaffection with the Christian mainstream and posit a viable alternative. Key to this alternative was a sense of acceptance for outsiders. As Driscoll explained in the exposé, "you can be gay or punk and we'll treat you like everybody else. Even if you never become a Christian, we're still friends."<sup>159</sup> Founded with three equally ranking pastors

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<sup>157</sup> "Mars Hill Church and Mark Driscoll in 2003," from *The Changing Face of Worship - The Church in a Postmodern World*. Directed by Bernie Hargis. *FamilyNet Home Video*, 2003. Accessed October 23, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggsN\\_3CdkJk&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggsN_3CdkJk&feature=youtu.be).

<sup>158</sup> Lori Leibovich, "Generation: Inside fundamentalism's answer to MTV: the postmodern church," *Mother Jones Magazine*, July/August 1998, accessed October 23, 2017, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/1998/07/generation>.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

and a board of elders, the church modeled this acceptance through shared leadership. This new postmodern church movement sought to emphasize and practice radical acceptance and a balance of power.

This chapter will examine Mars Hill's early posture of acceptance, detailing the role of ritual elements of polity, music, performance, and identity, keys to Mars Hill's early public face as a church that welcomed and empowered many different kinds of people. I will examine elements of localized theology and praxis that animated the musical repercussions of its outward-facing missional ministry approaches and inward-facing attractional ministry. I argue that the church focused on missionizing a narrow constituency, represented by the punk and postpunk community, centering the musical preferences and subjectivities of young, white, working class men. This constituency, by then representing a hip national counterculture, in turn aided Mars Hill in accruing subcultural capital necessary to grow the church, recruit musicians from the scene to play in its bands, and form a distinctive punk and postpunk music ministry based around local genres. However, I also show that Mars Hill's early music ministers already cohered in representative Christian subculture of Seattle-based Tooth & Nail Records.

### **Growing a Missional and Attractional Church**

By 1998, Gunn, Moi, and Driscoll's fledgling church had grown from a Bible study to a small fellowship, meeting twice on Sundays in different rented North Seattle locations.<sup>160</sup> That same year, Driscoll and David Nicholas, the founding pastor of Spanish River Church (Presbyterian Church of America) in Florida, founded a church-planting

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<sup>160</sup> Mark Driscoll, "Our History: Seasons of Grace: The Story of Mars Hill," *Mars Hill*, archived website captured March 5, 2001, accessed October 23, 2017, [http://web.archive.org/web/20010305230251/http://www.marshill.fm:80/who/our\\_history.htm](http://web.archive.org/web/20010305230251/http://www.marshill.fm:80/who/our_history.htm).

network called Acts 29.<sup>161</sup> Together, they aimed to plant one thousand new churches characterized by theological clarity, cultural engagement, and missional innovation all over the world, borrowing language from *The Gospel and Our Culture's* George Hunsberger and the missional living movement.<sup>162</sup> By 2001, Acts 29 played a role in establishing 15 new churches across the United States and Canada, and in assisting with plants in Brazil, Mexico, Haiti, India, and Cuba, bringing these pastors together for regular trainings to share resources, stories, and best practices.<sup>163</sup>

In flagship Seattle, Mars Hill's three founding pastors—Gunn, Moi, and Driscoll—modeled a local version of Acts 29's missional approach to pastoral empowerment and church planting. The three continued to share preaching and leadership duties. Further, they expanded executive oversight to include two non-employees.<sup>164</sup> While the church never allowed women to serve in any executive roles, the church's earliest iteration of polity established some representative governance by expanding decision-making power to lay representatives. According to Moi, the church's early bylaws established that these five governing male executives, or elders, each had one vote. Any major decisions required unanimous consent.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> "About: What We Are," *Acts 29*, accessed October 23, 2017, <http://www.acts29.com/about/>.

<sup>163</sup> "Church Profiles," *Acts 29*, archived website captured April 8, 2001, accessed March 15, 2017, [http://web.archive.org/web/20010408173738/http://www.a29.org:80/who\\_involved\\_church\\_profiles.htm](http://web.archive.org/web/20010408173738/http://www.a29.org:80/who_involved_church_profiles.htm).

<sup>164</sup> "Elder Profiles: Chris Knutzen," *Mars Hill*, archived website captured March 6, 2001, accessed October 23, 2017, [http://web.archive.org/web/20010306123332/http://www.marshill.fm:80/who/elders/profile\\_knutzen.htm](http://web.archive.org/web/20010306123332/http://www.marshill.fm:80/who/elders/profile_knutzen.htm).

<sup>165</sup> Leif Moi, "Leif Moi's Confession," *Repentant Pastor*, March 29, 2014, archived website captured October 29, 2016, <http://web.archive.org/web/20161029142829/http://repentantpastor.com/confessions/lief-mois-confession-2/>.

These five leaders—three founding pastors and two at-large elders—held in common a theologically conservative interpretation of Christian doctrine, but aimed to build a church that welcomed people regardless of adherence to such doctrine. In 1998, their website read, "Mars Hill is a community of individuals with diverse backgrounds, personalities, philosophies, ideas and visions; united by a relationship with Christ," a position allowing for diversity even while pursuing a common conception of divinity.<sup>166</sup> According to Leibovich, Mars Hill held classes on evangelical feminism, and Driscoll held the position that "the Bible is clear that men and women are both created by God in His image and likeness and totally equal in every way."<sup>167</sup> Even while the church officially aligned with the religious right's positions on abortion and homosexuality, the church de-emphasized these in favor of "loving the sinners" in humility because, as Driscoll claimed, "I think we're all screwed up, some of us are just better at hiding it."<sup>168</sup> Publically, Mars Hill sought to build its identity around radical welcome.

In Mark Driscoll's 2006 memoir of Mars Hill's history, he identified a bifold ministerial strategy pertaining to ministry's relationship to the broader culture: attractional and missional. These principles deeply inflected Mars Hill's approach to the arts. Driscoll defines attractional ministry as that of a church that "functions as a purveyor of religious goods and services," and thus the goal of the church is to understand the broader community, and attract those people into the church by adequately serving their

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<sup>166</sup> "Who We Are," *Mars Hill*, archived website captured February 4, 2001, accessed October 23, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20010204131600/http://www.marshill.fm:80/who/index.htm>.

<sup>167</sup> Leibovich, "Generation."

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

felt needs.<sup>169</sup> Mars Hill's congregational music ministry effectively sought to attract people in by serving the felt need of creating a space for "lost people" within the church, especially by celebrating and empowering artists and musicians.<sup>170</sup> This led Mars Hill's early inward-facing congregational music ministry to perform a consistent posture of acceptance toward people, their artistic contributions, and their various perspectives, theological viewpoints, and life stages.

Mars Hill's early core values indicate their arts-based approach to attractational ministry. Under a tab called "What We Believe," Mars Hill's website emphasized four key principles: 1) meaning, 2) beauty, 3) Truth, and 4) community.<sup>171</sup> The definitions of meaning and beauty each centered the creative arts, the value of personhood, and cultural relativism. If God created humanity, humanity's artistic creations were understood to transitively participate in God's creativity.

Because arts provided a venue to comprehend the creative work of God, the church sought to place artists at the center of its ministerial priorities. Driscoll, a long-time music fan, endeavored to start a church record label, and so church musicians began to collaborate on a compact disc release in 1998. In the liner notes of this first CD, *Mars Hill Worship One*, Driscoll implores all faith communities to encourage and empower artists "filled with prophetic imagination to create like their Creator."<sup>172</sup> He admonishes "fellow pastors to welcome artists into community with them, and to provide the freedom

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<sup>169</sup> Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 25.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>171</sup> "What We Believe," *Mars Hill*, archived website captured February 4, 2001, accessed October 23, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20010204134200/http://www.marshall.fm:80/believe/index.htm>.

<sup>172</sup> *Mars Hill Worship One*, Mars Hill Records, 1998, liner notes.

and direction to worship in ways yet unseen."<sup>173</sup> The album, concordant with this perspective, features ten original songs, nine written by Mars Hill member Paul Mossberger.

Mars Hill ritualized radical welcome in the lyrics and performance practices of their music ministry. Theologically, *Mars Hill Worship One's* lyrics consistently depict Christ and God as giving, loving, merciful, gentle, and compassionate toward people. Songs like "Isaiah 55," "Psalm 46," "The Hope Song" (based on Psalm 27), and "Romans 12:1-2" quote or paraphrase scripture; others reference Christian figures and stories like Lazarus or Jesus' calming of the raging sea.<sup>174</sup> "Stand Firm," though, references the Mars Hill community saying, "bankrupt, burned and tired, like a bombed out city/thin lipped, stony eyed, with no joy or pity/that is what some of us were."<sup>175</sup> The song juxtaposes Christian life against this the nihilistic depiction of the 1990s Gen-X ennui continuing, "gentle, full of peace, love and patient kindness/guarded by self-control and faith and goodness/that's the hope of what we'll be."<sup>176</sup> The album depicts a Jesus whose "promise heals our lives" and calls human souls to be saved "from abuses of our power/from injustice and the systems that devour/from suspicion and control/from the burden of conforming to the strong," an antiauthoritarian, nonconformist message that emphasized community.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> All songs featured on *Mars Hill Worship One*.

<sup>175</sup> Paul Mossberger, "Stand Firm," *Mars Hill Worship One*, Mars Hill Records, 1998.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid

<sup>177</sup> Paul Mossberger, "Prayer of Thanks" and "Prayer," *Mars Hill Worship One*, Mars Hill Records, 1998.

If Mars Hill's discourses indicated that arts and music evinced the creative impulse of God working through humans, it also showed God as responsive and relational to human initiation. The song "Trust the Vine" by Mossberger recounts the gospel story of Jesus calming the storm, claiming God's "ears have heard our cries" when we "shake him, wake him, crying 'why are you asleep?'"<sup>178</sup> Jesus responds by calming the winds. Humans have agency to petition God who, in turn, is responsive to those initiations. Further, humans have the capacity to seek God and pursue righteousness using "minds to think hearts to love, and hands able to serve."<sup>179</sup> Humans may "seek after truth, liberty, and justice for man."<sup>180</sup> Song lyrics describe a God who implores and is responsive to human action.

The theology of the early Mars Hill era is perhaps exemplified in the only traditional hymn cover on the album, "Be Thou My Vision," Mary Elizabeth Byrne's translation of a fifth-century Irish poem by monk Dallan Forgaill. This hymn describes the incarnation of "the Lord" within the human self so that God might dwell wholly through the person's intentions, possessions, and actions: in their vision, wisdom, treasure, and heart. The theology is summarized by the final line in the second stanza, "Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one," where God's initiation flows through the actions of people.<sup>181</sup> By theological extension, these early songs, intended for corporate worship, are embedded in discourses and lyrics that perform deep acceptance, interrelationship, and interaction between God and humanity.

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<sup>178</sup> Paul Mossberger, "Trust the Vine," *Mars Hill Worship One*, Mars Hill Records, 1998.

<sup>179</sup> Mossberger, "Prayer of Thanks."

<sup>180</sup> Ibid

<sup>181</sup> "Be Thou My Vision," *Mars Hill Worship One*, Mars Hill Records, 1998.

At this time, Mars Hill embraced the worship team model of music leadership, another mode through which Mars Hill ritualized their theology of acceptance through musical performance. This entailed a large and often rotating group of musicians leading music and corporate congregational singing. The personnel featured on the *Mars Hill Worship One* album shows the wide range of people involved in the music ministry. A core group of six musicians, led by Paul Mossberger and Brad Currah, with Tim O'Haver, Bart Milner, Liz Kirkman, and Sean Dimond play guitar, drums, alt percussion, bass, and sing lead and background vocals.<sup>182</sup> Nineteen additional musicians provide vocals, instrumentals, samples, and other guitar and synth on various songs.<sup>183</sup> If the album accurately represented the flux of musicians involved in Mars Hill's worship team at the time, it indicates a participatory ethos, involving many people in performance roles.<sup>184</sup> The ensemble was sufficiently flexible to create space for different levels of involvement and musical skill, ranging from core membership to alternate musician to disk jockey, allowing for maximum incorporation of personnel. Mars Hill's attractional ministry served and empowered artists, and displayed a welcoming posture both theologically and ritually.

Missional ministries, as cognates to attractional ones, send "Christians out of the church and into the culture to serve as missionaries through relationships."<sup>185</sup> In the previous chapter, I discussed how international shifts in the field of missions precipitated

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<sup>182</sup> *Mars Hill Worship One*, Mars Hill Records, 1998, liner notes.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 26.

<sup>185</sup> Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.*, 26.

the subsequent turn toward viewing North America's youth culture as a sort of "mission field," a concept born of Lesslie Newbigin's contribution to missional methodology, arguing for embrace of extant cultural practices rather than importation of a foreign culture and musical canon. This missional position animated Mars Hill's orientation toward Seattle's youth culture.

In an interview with me, music minister Tim Smith communicated how the church's position on missionality centered music and arts, seeing artists' contributions as a critical way to localize the Christian message:

We started using the term missional worship, trying to have the mindset of a missionary, or in some ways, a missiologist, as musicians and worship leaders, as well. And that is, we live in a particular place and time and so the most appropriate response of how God is initiating amongst us particular people in this place and time will probably come from within that people rather than from without. This is how I saw it.<sup>186</sup>

At Mars Hill, Smith continued, "we're steeped in the indie rock culture of Seattle," but "you can be ethnically and culturally a lot of different things while being a faithful follower of Jesus," emphasizing that punk and post-punk represented a sort of indigenous culture for the young people of Seattle.<sup>187</sup> The early Mars Hill staff would come to understand the burgeoning punk, hardcore punk, grunge, and indie music scene in Seattle in the late 1990s and early 2000s as a sort of ethnic culture to embrace and incorporate into their approach to sacred music.

Mars Hill's earliest album release indicates a missional acceptance of the punk, grunge, and indie scene. Mars Hill's first staff musician, Brad Currah, fronted the art-grunge band Springchamber, who a reviewer described as a "blend [of] an industrial

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<sup>186</sup> Tim Smith. Interview with the author. Phone interview, October 14, 2015.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

synth backdrop with solid rock writing ... [resulting in] a sort of post-alternative cyber-art-rock with haunting lyrics, great vocals and awesome instrumentation."<sup>188</sup> Luke Abrams played with indie punk band Supine to Sit on Lovitt Records, and also fronted the Mars Hill band Team Strike Force. By cultivating a young, innovative musician base from across the city's underground scene, Mars Hill was poised to establish a creative approach to worship music deeply rooted in the aesthetics and networks of Seattle's local music.

Mars Hill's first CD release, *Mars Hill Worship One*, draws largely from the lineage of punk and postpunk popular in the late 1990s, but in a creative pastiche. The musical genres on this album pinball between grunge, shoegaze, electronica, jazz, soul, ska, and world music. Sonic experimentation and diversity, featuring instruments like digeridoo and penny whistle, samples from chant, a backbeat reggae skank, harmonica swells, and extended-chord harmonies characterize the album's musical borrowings. This sonic experimentation, rooted largely in postpunk while flirting with Celtic, folk, and reggae music served as yet another performance of acceptance from within Mars Hill's missional discursive framework.

### **Missional Outreach: The Paradox Music Venue**

Mars Hill also practiced missional living by founding a popular all-ages music venue near the University of Washington. As the church began to grow, leaders realized the need to purchase a space to regularly house worship services, eventually inhabiting a historical theater for worship services on Sundays and concerts on weekdays and

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<sup>188</sup> "Springchamber: Reviews," *Electroglyph*, accessed October 23, 2016, <http://www.electroglyph.com/springchamber/music.htm>.

Saturdays.<sup>189</sup> Previously, Mars Hill operated as a pop-up church, hopscotching to different locations, first meeting in a room rented for free in the upstairs of a Woodland Park church in North Seattle, then renting space in Laurelhurst in Northeast Seattle, and later moving to First Presbyterian Church downtown.<sup>190</sup> The transient church required a crew of volunteers to stage its weekly worship services, sometimes producing two or three services per Sunday each at different locations. This required a sound system and projector, setting up microphones and amplifiers for the band and preacher, hauling and setting up chairs, and preparing the characteristic brooding décor of dozens of lit candles and dark fabric.<sup>191</sup> With this volunteer labor, the church subsisted through weekly and sometimes daily upheaval, but soon sought to obtain a stable building.

In 1999, Mark Driscoll and Leif Moi simultaneously secured two buildings for Mars Hill Church. Christ's Bible Church, an aging and declining church at the corner of Earl and 80th in the Seattle neighborhood of Ballard, arranged with Driscoll to transfer ownership of their 8,000 square foot building to Mars Hill Fellowship. According to Driscoll, the building transfer cost Mars Hill nothing, and the deal was finalized in early 2000.<sup>192</sup> Simultaneously, founding elder Lief Moi purchased one of Seattle's oldest theaters, located in the University District near the University of Washington's flagship campus, a neighborhood known locally as the U-District.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Mark Driscoll, "Our History: Seasons of Grace."

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Annika Mongen. Interview with the author. Berkeley, CA, December 1, 2014.

<sup>192</sup> Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.*, 116-124.

<sup>193</sup> Mark Driscoll, "Our History: Seasons of Grace."

### *Seattle's Teen Dance Ordinance*

What would become of Mars Hill's newly acquired theater in the U-District requires a bit of context beginning in mid-1980s Seattle. In 1985, an all-ages venue in a rundown church on Boren Avenue in Seattle called The Monastery came under legal scrutiny for allowing illegal drugs as well as underage drinking and sexual conduct on the premises.<sup>194</sup> This joined a pattern of unlawful activity around all-ages venues, including a 1985 stabbing and fatal shooting outside Skoochie's, Seattle's largest teen dance hall. The incidents prompted closer examination of the laws governing Seattle's teen music scene. In May 1985, the *Seattle Times* reported that the City Council President Norm Rice proposed to regulate teen-age dance clubs.<sup>195</sup>

An undercover police investigation of The Monastery's staff and ownership concluded that the club operated as a haven for underage drug dealing and consumption, and child prostitution. The King County Superior Court found the club a moral and public nuisance by the court under King County law, and Washington State permanently enjoined the club owners from establishing, operating, or conducting such activities henceforth.<sup>196</sup> The Seattle City Council soon generalized this ruling by passing the Teen Dance Ordinance (TDO) on July 30, 1985, restricting for-profit dance halls with occupancy limits exceeding 150 patrons.<sup>197</sup> In summary, SMC 6.294.040 Teen Dance

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<sup>194</sup> Peyton Whitely, "Young Supporters Oppose Monastery Closure," *The Seattle Times*, May 2, 1985, accessed October 23, 2017, [https://seattletdoproject.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/may-2-1985\\_young-supporters-oppose-monastery-closure.pdf](https://seattletdoproject.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/may-2-1985_young-supporters-oppose-monastery-closure.pdf).

<sup>195</sup> "Teen-Aged Dance Clubs, Proposed Regulations Generally On Target," *The Seattle Times*, May 3, 1985, accessed October 23, 2017, [https://seattletdoproject.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/may-3-1985\\_teen-aged-dance-clubs-proposed-regulations-generally-on-target.pdf](https://seattletdoproject.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/may-3-1985_teen-aged-dance-clubs-proposed-regulations-generally-on-target.pdf).

<sup>197</sup> Duff Wilson, "New Plan to Curb Teen Dance Halls," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, July 10, 1985, accessed October 23, 2017, [https://seattletdoproject.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/july-10-1985\\_new-plan-to-curb-teen-dance-halls.pdf](https://seattletdoproject.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/july-10-1985_new-plan-to-curb-teen-dance-halls.pdf).

prohibited entry of teenagers from any for-profit dance hall, defined as “any place where teen dance is conducted, operated or maintained.” In most cases, the Teen Dance Ordinance, or TDO, targeted bars that generated majority revenue from alcohol sales and thus only held occasional underage-exclusive events or created a barrier in the venue to separate underage youth from the bar area.

The TDO broadly established that any venue hosting all-ages concerts must limit in-and-out privileges, mandate removal of intoxicated persons, and abide by insurance and personnel requirements. Though cities across Washington State enacted similar ordinances designed to limit underage participation in the music scene, Seattle's proved particularly onerous for club owners.<sup>198</sup> First, to operate any all-ages show, the law required venues to purchase comprehensive liability insurance in the amount of one million dollars.<sup>199</sup> Further, Seattle's TDO required venues to staff their premises with a minimum of two persons trained in law enforcement, in addition to at least one off-duty Seattle police officer to patrol public areas abutting the dance hall. While not the original intent of the law, the cost burdens associated with insurance and security personnel effectively shuttered the all-ages music scene in the Seattle city limits. The law exempted non-profit entities from these restrictions.

By 1999, nearly fifteen years from the TDO's inception, only two venues in the Seattle city limits offered shows for underage patrons.<sup>200</sup> The Velvet Elvis Arts Lounge

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<sup>198</sup> "TDO Comparisons: Comparison chart of teen dance laws in major Washington cities," *Seattle Teen Dance Ordinance Project*, accessed October 23, 2017, <https://seattletdoproject.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/tdo-comparison-chart.pdf>.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid. By comparison, Everett and Spokane required \$500,000 in insurance, while Bellevue, Redmond, King County, and Tacoma required none.

<sup>200</sup> Jeff Bettger. Interview with the author. Seattle, WA, October 24, 2014.

operated as a non-profit theater, staging small-scale stage productions during prime weekend hours on Friday and Saturday nights while hosting matinee and weeknight all-ages rock shows. Another club, RKCNDY, attempted to function as a for-profit business. But without revenue from alcohol sales, the all-ages music scene struggled with the TDO in effect.

On June 27th, 1999, the editorial board of Seattle's *The Stranger* reported,

Bad news for all-ages music fans: the Velvet Elvis Arts Lounge announced last week that the non-profit arts space will close at the end of June, due to volunteer burnout and a pessimistic assessment of the future for an alternative arts space in the high-rent, sports- and beer-oriented Pioneer Square. [...] Its all-ages concert programming was second to none, bringing in most of the Northwest's best bands along with many touring groups who wanted to play all-ages shows in town. With the impending demolition of RKCNDY, this brings the number of all-ages live-music clubs in Seattle to a dangerously low number. Anyone want to start a new all-ages venue in Seattle's current restrictive legal climate? Anyone?<sup>201</sup>

Thus in this post-grunge era, as Seattle's music scene grew to constitute a major national force with an enormous grassroots production engine, youth under the age of 21 suddenly had no remaining venue to house their vibrant music scene. The sudden near-simultaneous closure of the city's only remaining all-ages venues shook the underage music community, leaving only the Old Firehouse Teen Center, located east of Lake Washington in Redmond about a half hour from central Seattle, to regularly host all-ages shows.<sup>202</sup> This left a significant void in the Seattle scene.

In an interview with Mars Hill churchgoer and local Seattle musician Jeff Bettger, he noted that the simultaneous closure of RKCNDY and the Velvet Elvis amid the

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<sup>201</sup> "Culture Wars," *The Stranger*, June 27, 1999, accessed October 23, 2017, <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/culture-wars/Content?oid=1374>.

<sup>202</sup> Dusty Henry and Sharlese Metcalf. "We Just Want to Play Shows: An Oral History of Redmond's Old Fire House Teen Center (Part 1)," *KEXP*, September 28, 2017, <http://blog.kexp.org/2017/09/28/we-just-want-to-play-shows-an-oral-history-of-redmonds-old-fire-house-teen-center-part-1/>.

strictures of the Teen Dance Ordinance offered Mars Hill an interesting possibility due to the law's non-profit exemption clause. As he explained, "we were essentially, in that time period, the 'Church of Immaculate Loophole' ... where we could do this thing because we were a church and a nonprofit."<sup>203</sup> Mars Hill's newly acquired theater space in a hip neighborhood seemed an outstanding fit to house a new music venue and thus expand their missional ministry objectives.

While not in the heart of the city, the theater was located at the north end of the University District and thus near college students, a high school, hip bars, book shops and coffee houses, and on numerous bus lines. It proved a great location to foster condensed artistic activity in a scene geared toward 18-21 year olds. Following significant volunteer-initiated renovations, tearing out the seats, replacing the curtains, and painting, Mars Hill thus established their first church location while filling a void in Seattle's scene by opening a club named The Paradox in late 1999.<sup>204</sup> The Paradox operated as an alcohol-free venue with an espresso stand in the front.

Initially, according to Bettger, Moi hired an agent who booked adult contemporary bands to play at The Paradox. Soon Bettger, pseudonymously Jeff Suffering, an experimental art-punk musician, offered to book a punk show, recruiting local bands Tight Bros From Way Back When and Blood Brothers to play alongside his own band, Raft of Dead Monkeys. When the show proved a success, Bettger assumed much of the booking responsibility, recruiting area bands to play at The Paradox.<sup>205</sup> The

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<sup>203</sup> Bettger. Interview with the author.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

venue held around 250 people and henceforth operated as a full-time, all-ages concert venue during the week while holding worship services on Sunday evenings.

For three years, The Paradox arose as a countercultural force in Seattle. The venue hosted shows nearly every day, and sometimes two on weekend days, featuring local and national punk, hardcore, grunge, and indie rock bands.<sup>206</sup> The following bands, listed on The Paradox's website in 2005, were featured, many of which eventually garnered enormous listenerships:

A Life Once Lost, Alkaline Trio, Bane, Bleeding Through, The Blood Brothers, Botch, Brand New, Bright Eyes, Cex, Champion, Converge, Cursive, Damien Jurado, Dead to Fall, Death Cab for Cutie, Deerhoof, Denali, Desaparecidos, Dolour, The Divorce, From Autumn to Ashes, Gatsby's American Dream, Give up the Ghost, The Good Life, Himsa, The Hoods, Hope Conspiracy, Hot Hot Heat, Ida, Inked in Blood, IQU, Damien Jurado, Kane Hodder, The Long Winters, Low, Minus the Bear, Misery Signals, Most Precious Blood, Norma Jean, Officer Negative, Pedro the Lion, The Pale, Q and not U, Rasputina, The Red Chord, Rilo Kiley, Rufio, The Six Parts Seven, Starflyer 59, Static Lullaby, Taking Back Sunday, Rosie Thomas, Trial, Underoath, Unearth, Velvet Teen, Vendetta Red, Rocky Votolato, Jason Webley, Where Eagles Dare, Xui Xui [sic], Zao and many, many more.<sup>207</sup>

While the Teen Dance Ordinance effectively shuttered the landscape for all-ages shows, it created an ideal opening for a well-positioned nonprofit like Mars Hill to very effectively reach local young people.

Joel Brown and Tim Smith, former leaders of Mars Hill's music ministry, each emphasized how The Paradox operated discursively as a missional ministry within Mars Hill's operational framework. By providing a community space for expression, this early manifestation of Mars Hill's missional framework allowed Mars Hill's ethos of acceptance that animated their congregational ministry to extend into the broader

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<sup>206</sup> Joel Brown. Interview with the author. Tacoma, WA, July 14, 2015.

<sup>207</sup> "About Us," *Paradox*, archived website captured February 6, 2005, accessed October 23, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20050206224106/http://www.theparadox.org/site/node/view/3>.

community.<sup>208</sup> Mars Hill's staff sought to equally welcome bands popular in alternative Christian circles and those that, as one member conveyed, played "clearly satanic speed metal."<sup>209</sup> Staging queer straightedge, angsty hardcore, weepy emo, and once a Japanese punk band that got naked amid a show, The Paradox proudly professed an explicit openness for everyone who attended the popular all-ages venue in the University District.<sup>210</sup>

The community responded positively and enthusiastically. Seattle's local alternative arts paper *The Stranger* celebrated the venue, dedicating a regular column to all-ages music with The Paradox at its center, calling it a "mecca for smaller local bands to get their stage bearings, as well as playing host to national acts."<sup>211</sup> Music journalist for *The Stranger* Megan Seling regularly attended, promoted, and reviewed concerts, and even occasionally dedicated her column to non-musical issues like Paradox employee profiles and space renovations. Driscoll maintained a distance from The Paradox, allowing it to operate not as an evangelism tool, but as a space for local youth music to thrive, regardless of whether the community created at The Paradox begot Mars Hill churchgoers.<sup>212</sup>

### **Punk, Grunge, and Indie: The Boundaries of Missional Outreach**

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<sup>208</sup> Smith, interview with the author; Brown, interview with the author

<sup>209</sup> Brown, interview with the author.

<sup>210</sup> "The Paradox and the Naked Japanese Dude," *God's Work, Our Witness* documentary film, December 4, 2011. Accessed October 23, 2017, <http://marshill.se/marshill/media/gods-work-our-witness/gods-work-our-witness/the-paradox-and-the-naked-japanese-dude>.

<sup>211</sup> Megan Seling, "Underage: At the Paradox," *The Stranger*, December 12, 2002. Accessed October 23, 2017, <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/underage/Content?oid=12810>.

<sup>212</sup> "The Paradox and the Naked Japanese Dude," *God's Work, Our Witness*.

While Mars Hill personnel emphasized that the missional Paradox welcomed all people, the venue almost exclusively centered punk, hardcore punk, grunge, and early indie music, interrelated genres representing particular and bounded communities of white young men. The Paradox also represented a conscientious decision to center the musical preferences of a fairly narrow constituency in the midst of the broader community in Seattle. The music genres of punk, grunge, and indie together represent a broad arc of artistic production that bring Mars Hill's core constituency, even from its earliest years, into focus. Although punk, hardcore punk, grunge, and indie rock exist now as discrete genres, the grunge and indie are variant iterations of punk rock ideology, aesthetics, and orientations. Though the next chapter will detail how, in the early years, Mark Driscoll and Mars Hill intentionally ritualized white, working class masculinity in part through use of punk and grunge music in worship, a discussion of punk rock's genesis, political objectives, and narrow constituency also reveal the preferential demographic missionally served by The Paradox.

Scholars generally locate punk rock's genesis in post-World War II Great Britain. Benj Demott argues that British punk rock was a “generational-specific symbolic system” pertaining to white, working class young men—a response to post-war poverty and the squalid living and working conditions that eroded kinship patterns and community ties.<sup>213</sup> Dancis and Dixon contrast the origins of British punk with the genesis of the American punk movement in the early 1970s, which they regard as more performative and less political. This, however, would shift in the late 1970s and early 80s as punk increasingly brought attention to “white, male-centered economic social injustices through both music

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<sup>213</sup> Benj Demott. "The Future is Unwritten: Working-Class Youth Subcultures in England and America." *Critical Texts* 5: 1 (1988), 42.

and style of dress articulating punk conceptions of masculinity and male working-class culture.”<sup>214</sup> Punk rock researchers Malott and Peña identify the movement as a “counterhegemonic tradition of resistance,” a community of organic intellectuals who developed and asserted a knowledge and culture based not in traditional schooling, but in the protest movement.<sup>215</sup>

Since its genesis, punk rock has operated as a protest music for white, working-class young men, arising as a reaction to economic circumstances. Writing in 1978, Bruce Dancis described punk rock as

not only an energetic aesthetic attack on the dominant trends within popular music, but also a working-class protest against youthful unemployment, poverty, government censorship, authoritarianism, racism, fascism, the record industry, the star system, and the traditional performer/audience relationships.<sup>216</sup>

This extended to critiques around the music industry's economic inaccessibility. In the baby boom generation, the proliferating American rock ‘n’ roll industry established a professional class of musicians and industry personnel who effectively monopolized the market. Corporate vertical integration monetized and streamlined music creation, production, and promotion. If an independent band sought to produce an album for any of the “big six” majors (then CBS, RCA, WEA, MCA, Polygram, and Capitol), they

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<sup>214</sup> Curry Malott and Milagros Peña, *Punk Rockers' Revolution: A Pedagogy of Race, Class, and Gender* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004), 24.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>216</sup> Bruce Dancis, "Safety Pins and Class Struggle: Punk Rock and the Left," *Socialist Review*, 8, no. 3 (May-June, 1978), 59.

required an immense budget starting around \$70,000 for studio time alone, thus barring the majority of musicians from creating records.<sup>217</sup>

In response, an “explosion of independent rock music-making production” soon followed in the mid-1970s.<sup>218</sup> As a populist, democratic, working class, countercultural musical movement born of anticapitalist resistance, punk rock sought to undermine hegemonic economies and their associated values.<sup>219</sup> Early champions of punk rock saw its aesthetic and political antecedents in avant-garde poetry, the visual arts, and music, identifying a proto-punk orientation in early experimental rock groups like the Velvet Underground, the MC5, and the New York Dolls, and 1960s British hard rock groups like the Who, the Kinks, and the Rolling Stones. These were rockers whose music relied not on technical skill or production value, but masculine “red-blooded attitude” and conviction.<sup>220</sup> Punk’s anti-authoritarian ethos saturated its culture and influenced its unique aesthetic. In reaction to the theatrics and costumes common to the era’s glam rock, disco, soft rock, and pop stars, variously coded as feminine, punk rockers assumed “torn tee-shirts and a simple music which is relatively easy to learn to play,” replacing staged theatrics like elaborate costumes, props, light shows, fog machines, and dense orchestration.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Simon Frith. *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock 'n' Roll* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 147.

<sup>218</sup> Simon Frith. "Formalism, Realism, and Leisure: The Case of Punk (1980)." *The Subcultures Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton. (New York: Routledge, 1997), 168.

<sup>219</sup> Malott and Peña, *Punk Rockers' Revolution*, 27.

<sup>220</sup> Dancis, "Safety Pins and Class Struggle," 61.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

Punk artists' minimalist orientation to music, employing few chords and a limited melodic range, democratized music. Anyone could play; anyone could sing. And so while British bands like the Sex Pistols, the Clash, and American bands like The Ramones, Black Flag, and the Dead Kennedys arose as national and international phenomena, local punk scenes proliferated in areas with substantial youth subcultures. While the de-emphasis of technical skills allowed many unlikely people into the punk rock performance sphere, punk established its boundaries tacitly by, as Dancis argues, staging "frontal assault on the leading aesthetic and commercial tendencies in rock music," overwhelming the senses with its speed, volume, and distortion, indicators of its status as an authentic masculine alternative to the mainstream.<sup>222</sup> This assault extended from aesthetics to lyrics, often spitting in-your-face socio-political critiques.

The interpolation of accessible but aggressive playing styles with socio-politically conscious lyrics is exemplified by West coast band the Dead Kennedys' first recording in 1978, "California Über Alles."<sup>223</sup> The song compares California governor Jerry Brown to Hitler, predicting a fascism born of prescriptions from the hippie era: "Zen fascists will control you/100% natural/You will jog for the master race/And always wear the happy face." Similarly, Black Flag's "Rise Above," from their 1981 album *Damaged*, exemplifies punk's fast-tempo, in-your-face aggression. The lyrics critique a society of authoritarian overreach saying, "Society's arms of control/Think they're smart, can't think for themselves/Laugh at us behind our backs /I find satisfaction in what they lack/We are

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>223</sup> Dead Kennedys, "California Über Alles," lyrics by Jello Biafra and John Greenway, *Optional Music*, June 1979.

tired of your abuse/Try to stop us, but it's no use."<sup>224</sup> Punk rock staged a frontal assault on the senses, bucking norms, questioning overreaches of state power, and resisting fascism and conformity.

As performatively angry, intentionally excessive, and highly critical members of the disaffected, working class underground, it is unsurprising that punk scholar Stacy Thompson describes the relationship between punks and commodity capitalism as “conflicted.”<sup>225</sup> She identifies the 1970s punk sensibility as one that intentionally created “economic strategies for resisting capitalism.”<sup>226</sup> Punk rockers, creating music intended to grate against mainstream tastes and thus thwart major record labels’ platinum sales-orientation, sought artistic autonomy by assuming roles along the chain of artistic production and dissemination.<sup>227</sup> Musicians recorded on low-grade or obsolete equipment, using lo-fi 4-track cassette recorders or recording live. Artist networks and friends handled reproduction and distribution, or, as punk grew, small labels who disseminated music at low-or-no profit.

Punk artists' embrace of self-produced records, distribution, and marketing fostered a totalizing ethic of collectivism and co-production that became known as do-it-yourself, or DIY. While in later years punk would earn an enormous audience, thus attracting attention from the major labels, Frith identifies punk’s struggle to maintain

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<sup>224</sup> Black Flag, "Rise Above" by Greg Ginn, *Damaged*, SST Records, December 5, 1981.

<sup>225</sup> Stacy Thompson, *Punk Productions: Unfinished Business*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 120.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>227</sup> Alan O'Connor, *Punk Record Labels and the Struggle for Autonomy: The Emergence of DIY* (New York: Lexington Books, 2008), xi.

independent financial viability as a failure.<sup>228</sup> However, Thompson argues that punk's so-called economic failure connoted success within early punk rock's ideological system. Citing punk rock's class critique and commitment to economic resistance, commercial success proved antithetical to its core values.<sup>229</sup> Mark Sinker claims, "punk is not (and cannot and must not be) about winning, or even making shift to win," and that "all punk codes were always intended to fail" in the consumer marketplace, as punk rockers eschewed mainstream acceptance.<sup>230</sup>

Insofar as punk's full-frontal protest succeeded, its concerns consistently centered young, working class, white men. While retrospective histories of punk often celebrate all-female bands, horizontal gender relationships, and queer performances of gender in the American punk community, punk scholar Lauraine Leblanc's ethnography of women in the punk scene reveals the felt ways punk established itself as a majority male subculture. She situates punk's performative norms within working-class masculinity citing "the cool pose, the sexual objectification of women, the disdain for the feminine world of learning, and the valorization of violence."<sup>231</sup> Drawing from Messerschmidt's studies in masculinity, she emphasizes that working- and lower-class masculinities, by comparison to their middle-class counterparts, emphasize attributes of "toughness, coolness, and aggressiveness."<sup>232</sup> By the 1980s, she claims, "punk had become resolutely

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<sup>228</sup> Thompson, *Punk Productions*, 142.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>230</sup> Mark Sinker. "Concrete, so as to self-destruct: The etiquette of punk, its habits, rules, values, and dilemmas." In *Punk Rock: So What?: The Cultural Legacy of Punk*, ed, Roger Sabin (New York: Routledge, 1999), 136.

<sup>231</sup> Lauraine Leblanc, *Pretty in Punk: Girl's Gender Resistance in a Boy's Subculture*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

masculine" rather than the accepting and diverse territory its progenitors sometimes claim.<sup>233</sup>

Further, though punk aesthetics and ideals resonated widely giving rise to splintering punk subcultures comprised of Latinx punks, queer punks, Jewish punks, feminist punks, and even neo-Nazi punks (among others), scholars posit that punk rock's enduring legacy centers around left-leaning white, working class, heterosexual young men. Punk, as a recognizably white counterculture, surfaced as a politically, socially, and aesthetically meaningful articulation as early as the 1960s. Robert Cristgau, writer for the *Village Voice* explained the subculture thusly:

Put young, relatively unskilled white musicians from an industrial city together with some electric guitars, grant them aesthetic acuteness by nature or nurture, and eventually it's bound to happen: rock and roll that differentiates itself from its (fundamentally black and rural) sources by taking on the crude, ugly, perhaps brutal facts of the (white and urban) prevailing culture, rather than hiding behind its bland facade. The underlying idea of this rock and roll will be to harness late industrial capitalism in a love-hate relationship whose difficulties are acknowledged, and sometimes disarmed, by means of ironic aesthetic strategies: formal rigidity, role-playing, humor.<sup>234</sup>

The mainstream of punk rock constructed and maintained identity boundaries even as it articulated class critique, thus representing and performing disaffected white masculinity.

In Seattle, the related music genre of grunge, drawing its postures and aesthetics from both the countercultural punk scene and from mainstream heavy metal, emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Defined by its sonic heaviness, ironic stance, and self-conscious concern for the economics of production, "grunge represented a rapprochement

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Robert Cristgau. "A Cult Explodes... and a Movement is Born." *The Village Voice*, (October 24, 1977). Archived website captured March 10, 2010. Accessed October 23, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20100310075449/http://www.robertchristgau.com/xg/music/avantpunk-77.php>.

of the marginal and the mainstream."<sup>235</sup> Against punk rock's solidly contrarian ethos of critique and negation, grunge rock held a comparatively ambivalent view of dominant culture, reluctantly embracing star-culture status and corporate success and expansion, even while lampooning and parodying its own ambitions to success.

For instance, Seattle-based indie label Sub Pop emerged from Bruce Pavitt's Olympia, Washington radio show and 'zine where he argued in earnest for the localization and dehomogenization of popular culture:

Only by supporting new ideas by local artists, bands, and record labels can the U.S. expect any kind of dynamic social/cultural change in the 1980s. This is because the mass homogenization of our culture is due to the claustrophobic centralization of our culture. We need diverse, regionalized, localized approaches to all forms of art, music, and politics.<sup>236</sup>

By 1986, though, the label assumed the self-consciously ironic tagline of "The new thing: the big thing: the God thing: a multinational entertainment conglomerate based in the Pacific Northwest," cheekily placing its ambitions in ambiguous territory.<sup>237</sup> This ironic posture, "permitting the speaker to suggest two meanings, earnest and 'sarcastic,' while taking responsibility for neither," situated the grunge industry in an always-ambiguous relationship to the mainstream and underground.<sup>238</sup>

But grunge would indeed come to dominate the world: former Sub Pop band Nirvana recorded their breakout album *Nevermind* with DCG in 1991; their breakout

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<sup>235</sup> Alan Edward Larsen. "Selling (Out) the Local Scene: Grunge and Globalization" (PhD diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 2008), 4.

<sup>236</sup> Bruce Pavitt. "Introduction: New Pop! Manifesto," in *Subterranean Pop #1*, May 1980. Accessed October 23, 2017, [http://www.kreecs.com/subpop/index\\_1.html](http://www.kreecs.com/subpop/index_1.html).

<sup>237</sup> Paul Brannigan. *This is a Call: The Life and Times of Dave Grohl* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2011), 104.

<sup>238</sup> Tim Appelo, "How to Read Kurt Cobain's Journals: A Guide for the Perplexed," *Slate*, last modified November 15, 2002, [http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2002/11/how\\_to\\_read\\_kurt\\_cobains\\_journals.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2002/11/how_to_read_kurt_cobains_journals.html).

single "Smells Like Teen Spirit" arose as a runaway hit. The album soon sold over 400,000 copies per week in the latter months of 1991 displacing Michael Jackson's *Dangerous* as Billboard's #1 album in the United States. The album eventually sold over seven million copies in the United States, over 30 million worldwide, and initiated a culture shift in popular music toward the so-called underground, bringing the white cultural periphery into the pop culture center.<sup>239</sup> Grunge proceeded to saturate the American market, voicing mass youth culture of the early 1990s and morphing into a commercial medium differentiated as the category "alternative music." Grunge came to symbolize "authentic" working class masculinity while embracing star status and eventual upward mobility.

Amid this posture of irony, grunge scholar Alan Edward Larson calls the genre's performativity a "retro working class drag," foregrounding signifiers of white working-class masculinity such as t-shirts, flannel, work boots, canvas sneakers, and unkempt hair. Sub Pop marketed their musicians' working-class origins claiming, "our bands were all lumberjacks. Or they painted bridges."<sup>240</sup> Thus the grunge hero signified the "loser," market-failures in the 1980s economic climate which left nearly a quarter of the workforce with only part-time or temporary jobs, while gutting economic safety nets for the jobless.<sup>241</sup>

Though born in Seattle, grunge resonated widely as a music for a dispossessed

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<sup>239</sup> James Montgomery, "Nirvana's *Nevermind*, By the Numbers," *MTV*, last modified September 23, 2011, <http://www.mtv.com/news/1671298/nevermind-nirvana-album/>.

<sup>240</sup> Larsen, "Selling (out) the local scene," 19.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

generation of suburban youth.<sup>242</sup> The "heaviness" of grunge, a simultaneous performance of the increasing loss of "heavy industry" in the US economy and a performance of the angry, disaffected "heavy" weight of economic depression, provided a mass-culture soundtrack for an ailing populous.<sup>243</sup> Meanwhile, grunge musicians, labels, and even its generating city of Seattle accrued status and capital, a thoroughly ironic paradox.

Initially, indie rock intervened in mass-culture/working-class grunge paradox by positing a return to the authentic DIY economic orientation of punk rock. Out of this DIY ethos, the new moniker of "indie," simply referring to independent music, emerged from this marginal, white cultural complex.<sup>244</sup> Early indie maintained punk's economic orientations as outgrowths of working class communities forging new, localized, accessible economies rooted in social networks. While indie grew increasingly diffuse and corporatized through the mid-2000s, a point I will revisit in chapter six, in the late 1990s, indie musicians experimented beyond the aggressive, assaulting, or heavy aesthetics of punk rock and grunge, dabbling in soft core, math rock, new wave, twee, and pop sounds.<sup>245</sup> However, indie remained rooted to its punk and grunge cousins by placing emphasis on the means of production as the site of its authenticity, creating art "created outside of the mainstream and without corporate financing," an independent ethos consistent with punk rock's "market failure" paradigm.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Rupa Huq, *Beyond Subculture: Pop, Youth and Identity in a Postcolonial World* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 139.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>244</sup> Kaya Oakes, *Slanted and Enchanted: The Evolution of Indie Culture* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2009), 137.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>246</sup> Catherine Andrews. "If it's cool, creative and different, it's indie," *CNN Entertainment*, last modified October 13, 2006, <http://www.cnn.com/2006/SHOWBIZ/Music/09/19/indie.overview/>.

## **The Paradox and Subcultural Capital**

Mars Hill's vast monetary and personnel investment in The Paradox theater venue given the "market failure" status of punk and, variously, grunge and indie rock, seems counterproductive to the church's goals of growth and success, especially since the venue hemorrhaged money without sale of alcohol. Yet because The Paradox filled a critical gap within the Seattle all-ages music scene it served to develop and solidify an enduring bond between Mars Hill Church and the broader artistic community in Seattle. Mars Hill's early associations with the punk, grunge, and indie rock scene soon began to inspire local artists to check out the church, successfully drawing Seattle youth to Mars Hill via the scene at The Paradox. Many interviewees cited The Paradox as their entry point for becoming involved in Mars Hill. For instance, Kevin Barrans, a member of Seattle-based band The Maldives, recalled, "I used to go to shows at The Paradox, and I played in bands and knew people in bands, and eventually a lot of the people I knew in bands were going to [Mars Hill]."<sup>247</sup> The Paradox served as the initial attraction, but Barrans soon grew very active in Mars Hill's music ministry, playing in worship bands at the church for over ten years.

Over time, Mars Hill's music ministry grew increasingly populated by members of the broader Seattle band scene. Most members of Mars Hill bands also played in local bands. Several standout musicians such as drummers Matt Johnson and James McAlister, guitarist Jessica Dobson, and engineer/multi-instrumentalist Brian Eichelberger worked and toured with nationally-recognized indie acts including The Shins, Rocky Votolato, Spoon, Beck, Pedro the Lion, Sufjan Stevens, Rufus Wainwright, and Jeff Buckley. The

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<sup>247</sup> Kevin Barrans. Interview with the author. Seattle, WA, August 10, 2015.

sounds of punk, grunge, and indie rock thus crossed spheres from band members' non-church projects into the church's unique approach to music ministry, which I will detail in coming chapters.

Mars Hill musician Tim Smith explained that this close interrelationship between Mars Hill Church and the Seattle music scene critically shaped Mars Hill's music ministry in the long run saying, "if you want to know part of how the music came to be what it was, there's lots of factors, but this period of time was one of the most important ones."<sup>248</sup> While these intersections thoroughly shaped the sounds of Mars Hill's music, the venue also enabled the church to accrue social and cultural capital associated with this particular genre of cultural production and its constituency of consumers among punk and post-punk's white, working class young men.<sup>249</sup>

### **An Extant Subculture: Tooth & Nail Records**

However, Mars Hill's insistence on The Paradox as a uniquely missional outpost for punk, hardcore, grunge, and indie music is complicated. Even while Mars Hill personnel built critical relationships and interstices through The Paradox that influenced their congregational music, the church did not innovate a new subculture within Seattle at the intersection of punk-postpunk and Christian music. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Seattle-based record label Tooth & Nail already represented this intersection, creating Christian alternative and underground music.

Artists and fans connected with Tooth & Nail, most of them simultaneously Christian and underground music fans, represented the most reliable constituency

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<sup>248</sup> Smith, interview with the author.

<sup>249</sup> Pierre Bourdieu. "The Forms of Capital," *Handbook of Theory of Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986).

attracted to Mars Hill Church. Ebel's Tooth & Nail, though rooted in Seattle, never officially tethered itself to a church or denomination. Thus when Mars Hill Church and its young Generation X-era preacher emerged in Seattle, Bettger and others like him saw the church as an interstitial fit for the seemingly contradictory cultures in which they participated. In a 2014 interview with me, Bettger recalled his reaction to first encountering Mars Hill.

Simultaneously being into punk rock and skateboarding about the time I was 13, and being a Christian, I was always not Christian enough for the Christians and too Christian for the non-Christians. So I grew up in this tension. And that sort of translated. So when I moved to the city finally and there's this church [Mars Hill] of people who were creative, and understood culture, and were more or less embracing the fact that I was somebody who made what I made in culture, there was a great amount of solidarity and comfort in that community and that people.<sup>250</sup>

Bettger joined the church and co-founded the longest-running worship band at Mars Hill, Team Strike Force, remaining involved at Mars Hill for the next sixteen years.

Indeed, as Mars Hill solidified its reputation as a grunge church, many Tooth & Nail musicians participated in its music ministry.<sup>251</sup> Tooth & Nail bands with members who also played at Mars Hill included Blenderhead, Damien Jurado, Demon Hunter, Frodus, Matt & Toby, Ninety Pound Wuss, The Out\_Circuit, Pedro the Lion, Roadside Monument, Starflyer 59, and Watashi Wa. Several members served as the fulcrum of this interrelationship: Matt Johnson, a prolific musician who played in Starflyer 59, Emery, Blenderhead, Roadside Monument, and many other bands, served as a musician at Mars Hill Church for sixteen years alongside Bettger. Matt Carter and Toby Morrell, of Matt &

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<sup>250</sup> Bettger, interview with the author.

<sup>251</sup> John MacArthur. "Grunge Christianity and Cussing Pastors? What Next?" *Crosswalk*, last modified February 26, 2007, <http://www.crosswalk.com/church/pastors-or-leadership/grunge-christianity-and-cussing-pastors-what-next-11530376.html>.

Toby and Emery, each served in music ministry at Mars Hill; Carter attended for ten years. Jon Dunn, a member of the Tooth & Nail band Demon Hunter and later director of A&R for the label, later worked at Mars Hill.<sup>252</sup> Even Brandon Ebel, founder and CEO of Tooth & Nail, was a long-time Mars Hill member.<sup>253</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Early on, Mars Hill positioned itself as a radical and accepting iteration of Christianity for a "thin-lipped, burned out" Gen-X youth culture, creating a church predicated on shared leadership and radical welcome. Mars Hill originated as a church focused on welcoming a broad constituency of people, conceptualizing, theologizing, and performing this welcome both inwardly through attractional worship and outwardly through missional methods. However, I argue this radical welcome was, in fact, only narrowly welcoming to a bounded constituency represented by the punk, hardcore, grunge, and indie scene, a network that intersected with the extant Christian subculture of Tooth & Nail records. In the next chapter, I discuss how Mars Hill's embrace of these music genres interacted with tropes of working class masculinity that together built an intentionally hypermasculine Christian movement.

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<sup>252</sup> Jonathan Dunn. "From Fan to Family: My Life's Story," *Tooth & Nail Records: The Official Blog*, last modified April 7, 2010, <http://www.toothandnail.com/blog/tag/staff/>.

<sup>253</sup> Mark Driscoll, "Mars Hill Music is Partnering with Tooth & Nail," *Mars Hill Church*, last modified January 15, 2013. Archived website captured February 28, 2014, <http://web.archive.org/web/20140328093500/http://marshill.com/2013/01/15/mars-hill-music-is-partnering-with-tooth-nail>.

The Bible would give you the impression that if you walked into a Christian church, you should see masculinity, and you should see men who are masculine. Not just male, biologically masculine, but actually masculine in their essence and in their conduct. And it's not that way.

You know why schools, Christian schools, Christian churches, Christian ministries are primarily female? Because the church is feminine.

*Men and Masculinity* sermon, Mark Driscoll  
October 28, 2001<sup>254</sup>

## Chapter Four

### **Punk and the "Pussified Nation": Mark Driscoll's Blue Collar Gospel**

Mike Gunn, Leif Moi, and Mark Driscoll sought to found a Mars Hill predicated on a sense of acceptance, with shared leadership, de-emphasis of anti-gay and anti-feminist rhetoric typical of the evangelical right, a relational and missional orientation to the broader community, and a mission statement centering the contributions of artists. The church operated locations in Ballard (the "Earl Building"), the University District (The Paradox Theater), and South Seattle with Driscoll largely preaching in the North Seattle locations and Gunn preaching in South Seattle.

Meanwhile, Mars Hill remained active in the Acts 29 church planting network and, in October 2002, determined that Mars Hill's South Seattle community required a different approach to ministry and would function best as its own plant. Gunn thus exited Mars Hill to assume the role as the lead pastor of the new autonomous Harambee Church, which remained in the Acts 29 network of missional churches.<sup>255</sup> In 2017, Gunn

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<sup>254</sup> Mark Driscoll. "Men and Masculinity." Sermon. Mars Hill Church, Seattle, October 28, 2001, [http://download.marshall.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20011028\\_men-and-masculinity\\_en\\_transcript.pdf](http://download.marshall.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20011028_men-and-masculinity_en_transcript.pdf)

<sup>255</sup> Mike Gunn. "About Harambee: Our Story," *Harambee Church*, archived website captured June 14, 2006. Accessed October 25, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20060614231405/http://www.harambeechurch2.org:80/aboutHarambee.php>.

continues to serve as lead pastor at Harambee Church, although it is no longer a part of Acts 29.<sup>256</sup> Meanwhile, Moi managed a construction company, owned and operated The Paradox, and broadcast his radio show, StreetTalk ministries. Mark Driscoll increasingly began to helm the preaching duties and public face of Mars Hill Church.

In his 2006 memoir *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church*, Driscoll re-imagined this early phase of the church's growth. In spite of the welcoming public face evinced by historical documents at the church at the time, he stated in his book, "our church would never have a sign out front that said 'Everyone welcome,' because I did not want everyone."<sup>257</sup> He came to this conclusion when a large family sought to join Mars Hill church pending their children's participation in church music by playing handbells. Upon hearing their performance, Driscoll states, "I guess [this is] what you consider a lovely song if your dad is not a construction worker who drives an El Camino, like my dad."<sup>258</sup> The family left the church. The welcoming face of Mars Hill turned dramatically, predicated on centering music that Driscoll perceived might appeal to an El Camino-driving construction worker.

Under Driscoll's growing leadership, a new core orientation, one deeply inflected by the intersecting dynamics of gender and class, began to shape the total direction of the church. I argue that Driscoll increasingly positioned the church as a radical masculine outsider against the perceived femininity of American culture, but especially both the evangelical mainstream and liberal mainline Protestantism. This chapter examines the

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<sup>256</sup> "Find Churches," *Acts 29*, accessed October 25, 2017, <http://www.acts29.com/find-churches/>.

<sup>257</sup> Mark Driscoll. *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 63.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*

production of white working-class masculinity at Mars Hill *vis-à-vis* Mark Driscoll's own identity and idealized versions of masculinity. Building from chapter three, I show how punk, grunge, and indie variously served as cultural modes to construct and perform regional white, blue-collar masculine subjecthood.

### **Defining Masculinity**

From its outset, Mars Hill leaders quietly restricted decision-making power to men, barring women from pastoral and elder positions. Women served in leadership as support staff, musicians, and deacons, but never in executive positions. However, on Mars Hill's website between 2000 and 2002, this implicit gender disparity was never explicitly named, described, or theologized (as it would be later). For instance, the description of elders defines the position in gender-neutral language; the essays accompanying each element of the church's beliefs speaks of men and women in equal terms, though sometimes uses "man" as a catch-all for "humanity."<sup>259</sup> Even Mars Hill's doctrinal statement, taken verbatim from Antioch Bible Church and buried as a sub-link on Mars Hill's "What We Believe" page, did not mention any differentiation between men and women.<sup>260</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, the church fostered a public image of acceptance and equality.

Yet Driscoll's beliefs around gender began to spill out, albeit through the anonymous forum of an online message board where Driscoll started provocative

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<sup>259</sup> "Elder Profiles: Mars Hill Elders," *Mars Hill*. Archived website captured August 3, 2002, [http://web.archive.org/web/20020803230657/http://www.marshill.fm:80/who/elder\\_profiles.htm](http://web.archive.org/web/20020803230657/http://www.marshill.fm:80/who/elder_profiles.htm); Mark Driscoll, "Truth: Essay on Truth," *Mars Hill*. Archived website captured June 14, 2002, <http://web.archive.org/web/20020614093510/http://www.marshill.fm:80/believe/truth.htm>.

<sup>260</sup> "Doctrinal Statement: Mars Hill's Official Doctrine," *Mars Hill*. Archived website captured October 19, 2002, [http://web.archive.org/web/20021019232139/http://www.marshill.fm:80/believe/doctrinal\\_statement\\_view.htm](http://web.archive.org/web/20021019232139/http://www.marshill.fm:80/believe/doctrinal_statement_view.htm).

conversations under the pseudonym William Wallace II. In 2000, "Wallace" posted a lengthy rant decrying the perceived feminization, or "pussification," of American culture and Christianity. He attacked femininity in the abstract, but also directed his ire at the power and agency of women and "non-manly" men within evangelical Christianity:

We live in a completely pussified nation.

We could get every man, real man as opposed to pussified James Dobson knock-off crying Promise Keeping homoerotic worship loving mama's boy sensitive emasculated neutered exact male replica evangellyfish, and have a conference in a phone booth. It all began with Adam, the first of the pussified nation, who kept his mouth shut and watched everything fall headlong down the slippery slide of hell/feminism when he shut his mouth and listened to his wife who thought Satan was a good theologian when he should have lead her and exercised his delegated authority as king of the planet. As a result, he was cursed for listening to his wife and every man since has been his pussified sit quietly by and watch a nation of men be raised by bitter penis envying burned feministed single mothers who make sure that Johnny grows up to be a very nice woman who sits down to pee [sic].<sup>261</sup>

He continued this incendiary rant at great length, even stating that "hell looks like a good place because at least a man is in charge, has a bit of order and let's men spit and scratch as needed [sic]."<sup>262</sup> His point is clear: Satan is a better master than any woman.

While Driscoll's authorship of this rant was not discovered until 2014, its themes nonetheless inflected Driscoll's longstanding critique of American society and Christianity as overly feminine. Driscoll's earliest systematic and theological articulation of his views on gender appeared in a 2001 sermon entitled *Men and Masculinity*.<sup>263</sup> In it,

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<sup>261</sup> William Wallace II. "Pussified Nation," *Mars Hill: Midrash Blog*, last modified December 5, 2000. Archived website captured September 21, 2002, <http://web.archive.org/web/20020921060555/http://www.marshill.fm:80/ubb/Forum1/HTML/000048.html>.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Driscoll, "Men and Masculinity."

Driscoll took the position that, in a "Christian church, you should see masculinity, you should see men who are masculine. Not just male, biologically male, but actually masculine in their essence and in their conduct."<sup>264</sup> He contended that churches, across the liberal and conservative spectrums, presented a feminized Christianity. He looks instead to Judaism and Islam, traditions he constructs as more authentically masculine.

This chapter will endeavor to understand how Driscoll constructed and privileged a particular iteration of Christian masculinity that inflected his theological system, reading of the Bible, and, by extension, approaches to music and performance that arose from the church. Driscoll produced an immense canon of discourse around masculinity, articulating defined limits around preferred (hegemonic) masculine characteristics through the figure of the so-called "Manly Man." Through ritual elements of discourse and music, Mars Hill privileged an iteration of masculinity drawn from a pastiche of working class tropes.

### **Idealizing Hard-Scrabble, Working-Class Masculinity**

Driscoll's *Men and Masculinity* sermon, and others like it, constructs and privileges a masculinity predicated on models derived from Driscoll's upbringing in a "blue-collar, hardworking, union family."<sup>265</sup> Driscoll refers to his upbringing in a hard-scrabble family as "very masculine," linking male labor, breadwinning, protectionism, and sacrifice. In order to escape abusive cycles in the Driscoll lineage, the patriarch, Joe, moved his large Irish Catholic family from Grand Forks, North Dakota, to SeaTac, Washington, in the 1970s where he worked as a union drywaller. The Driscoll family

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

lived near the SeaTac airport in a neighborhood Mark described as "in the ghetto," an alleged site of drive-by shootings, gangs, prostitution, and drugs.<sup>266</sup> Mark, the eldest of five children, claims to have undertaken a protectionist role for his siblings serving as a shield against their rough neighborhood. These values infused the figure of the Manly Man that arose as a hegemonic construction at Mars Hill.

Driscoll conflates protectionist, sacrificial blue-collar labor with exemplary masculinity. Driscoll describes his father as an El Camino-driving construction worker who sacrificed his physical health in order to provide for his family, and as the "heavy" disciplinarian between his two parents.<sup>267</sup> Clearly unable to pay for extraneous goods, Mark's father thrust his children into paid labor at an early age. In order to afford his first car, Mark obtained his first job at age 15, falsifying his birth certificate to clear the legal working age. At 16, he again falsified the document to pass for eighteen and secure work as a dockhand.

This labor—wearying or exploitive labor, regardless of monetary compensation—authenticated masculinity in the Driscoll household. For instance, despite laborious sacrifices made by the patriarch to provide for his large family, Mark's family remained "a poor, working-class, high moral value home."<sup>268</sup> Thus labor, while it produced a work ethic that Driscoll credited with conditioning his future success, did not result in concomitant financial security for the Driscoll family.<sup>269</sup> When Mark attended

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Brian Dodd. "Live Blog—50 Leadership Quotes from Mark Driscoll at 'Most Excellent Way to Lead' Conference." *Brian Dodd On Leadership*, last modified March 3, 2016,

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

Washington State University after high school, he claimed, "I was the first man in the history of my family to go to college."<sup>270</sup> Indeed, Mark's generation was the first to achieve upward mobility through higher education and professional work.

Driscollian masculinity was performed, above all, in and through familial relationships. In 2000, Driscoll crudely spelled out eight priorities for entraining the traits of a manly man in terms of how such a man worships his God, takes a bride, pleases a bride, uses his penis, fathers his children, pastors his family, engages sinful men, and earns a living.<sup>271</sup> Most of these traits relate to duties as a husband, sexual partner, father, and provider, orienting to the atomized nuclear family wherein a singular man holds dominion. A manly man orients his duties to primarily serve as head of the family, and labors to support his wife and children. Yet embedded in this family man portrayal of manliness is Driscoll's famous crassness. Known as the "cussing pastor," Driscoll did not ascribe to performances of disciplined and docile mores associated with upper class Christianities.

Driscoll distinguished Mars Hill's brand of Christianity by promoting Christian masculinity through theological concepts and a patriarchal leadership structure. Theologically, Driscoll placed maleness at the center of God's selfhood, claiming that the name "God" connotes masculinity. In the *Men and Masculinity* sermon, Driscoll argued, "God, throughout the scripture, is referred to as our 'Father,' never as mother. And Jesus is referred to as the Son of God, never the daughter of God. He is our brother, and not our

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Wallace, "Pussified Nation."

sister.”<sup>272</sup> Driscoll later argued that “God reveals himself to us as Father we are to honor him as Father. And if we say that God the Father is a woman, now we’re not worshipping God, we’re worshipping Goddess.”<sup>273</sup> The gendered Holy Spirit proceeds from the masculine God and Son, assimilated as a masculine entity.<sup>274</sup> Driscoll conceived of God as a masculine Father, Son and Spirit, and thus only empowered male elders and pastors, defining these as “male leaders of the church. By male we mean not just anatomically male, but manly men,” indicative of a particular code of performative traits.

### **Biblical Exemplars and Working-Class Tropes**

Driscoll's oratory and writings contain a detailed pedagogy of “manly man” traits, drawn from a pastiche of white working-class tropes: the rural redneck or hillbilly, the suburban union laborer, the soldier, and the ultimate fighter. As noted by blogger Wenatchee the Hatchet, Driscoll communicates this through Biblical exemplars, described as aggressive, blue-collar figures. In 2000, Driscoll described the New Testament's John the Baptist as a Grizzly Adams-like mountain man, and later as “a complete freaky WWE nut job.”<sup>275</sup> In a 2005 sermon, Driscoll described the figure of Laban in Genesis chapter 24 as “a white guy with a white tank top who drives a white El Camino,” continuing that Laban is “the crazy, hillbilly, redneck in the story with a tank

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<sup>272</sup> Driscoll, “Men and Masculinity.”

<sup>273</sup> Mark Driscoll, “Trinity: God Is.” Sermon, Mars Hill Church, Seattle, March 30, 2008, [http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20080330\\_trinity-god-is\\_en\\_transcript.pdf](http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20080330_trinity-god-is_en_transcript.pdf).

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Mark Driscoll, “John the Baptizer,” Sermon. Mars Hill Church, Seattle, October 8, 2000, [http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20001008\\_john-the-baptizer\\_en\\_transcript.pdf](http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20001008_john-the-baptizer_en_transcript.pdf).

top who changes his own oil."<sup>276</sup> Contextualizing of Biblical characters to a self-referential context, Driscoll's early exemplars elided with a pastiche of white, working class subjectivities.

Driscoll also depicted Jesus through the lens of these tropes describing him as "born to a teenage virgin in a dumpy rural hick town," and, like Driscoll, the son of a "blue-collar carpenter."<sup>277</sup> Driscoll emphasizes that Jesus originated in a blue-collar family, grew up to be a working class carpenter. For Driscoll, Jesus has an edgy, aggressive, and violent streak, as well. One of Driscoll's favored images of Jesus, first introduced in 2000, frames him as a bare-fisted fighter who "gets totally bent and goes fight club."<sup>278</sup> He extends the image, describing Jesus as a revolutionary warrior "with a whip in his hand and another hand flipping tables, declaring war," even saying "he looks like Braveheart William Wallace," the character from whom Driscoll borrowed his anonymous pseudonym. In the images of Jesus in the book of Revelation, Driscoll reads Jesus who is a "great warrior" who declares war on all the nations. Jesus, though variously also depicted as a peaceable, loving teacher and friend, is understood as a working-class, ultimate fighting warrior-hero.

Extending from these warrior tropes, Driscoll claimed to encourage displays of masculinity through physical altercations. For instance, Driscoll, writing as William Wallace, depicted his early experience in Christian men's groups as "a men's community

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<sup>276</sup> Mark Driscoll, "Isaac Marries Rebekah," Sermon. Mars Hill Church, Seattle, March 13, 2005, [http://download.marshall.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20050313\\_isaac-marries-rebekah\\_en\\_transcript.pdf](http://download.marshall.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20050313_isaac-marries-rebekah_en_transcript.pdf).

<sup>277</sup> Mark Driscoll, "Divine Wine and Holy Humor," Sermon. Mars Hill Church, Seattle, October 22, 2000, [http://download.marshall.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20001022\\_divine-wine-and-holy-humor\\_en\\_transcript.pdf](http://download.marshall.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20001022_divine-wine-and-holy-humor_en_transcript.pdf).

<sup>278</sup> Mark Driscoll, "Angry Worship," Sermon. Mars Hill Church, Seattle, November 12, 2000, [http://download.marshall.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20001112\\_angry-worship\\_en\\_transcript.pdf](http://download.marshall.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20001112_angry-worship_en_transcript.pdf).

living home where we had many male lesbians who had no authority over them and would squawk when confronted."<sup>279</sup> In response, Driscoll reported, "we bought gloves, headgear, and mouthpieces and began our own redeemed Fight Club. War turned out to be much speedier than negotiation."<sup>280</sup> Driscoll parlayed this non-negotiable approach to disagreement into Mars Hill's Dead Men groups, "boot camps" for creating hardened manly men. Blogger Wenatchee the Hatchet described Dead Men as a "massive hazing ritual" "that would determine who was in and who was out as a contributor to the culture of Mars Hill" between 2000-2001.<sup>281</sup> One then-member of Mars Hill Church portrayed these as rowdy but apparently non-physical theological debates over Christian controversies like infant baptism and the tenants of Calvinism.<sup>282</sup>

### **Performing Opposition to "Feminized" Christianity**

In his 2006 breakout book, Driscoll continued to reiterate his caustic critique on "feminized" churches spanning a broad spectrum. He claims that more liberal churches, largely among the mainline Protestant denominations, ordain women, marry gay people, and portray Jesus as a "halo-diaper Christ" he perceives as "little more than a marginalized Galilean peasant."<sup>283</sup> Regarding mainline and Catholic pastors and priests, he decries "men wearing dresses," eviscerating one Seattle pastor for "wearing a very

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<sup>279</sup> William Wallace II. "Pussified Nation," *Mars Hill Midrash Forum*, January 21, 2001. Archived website captured January 28, 2001, <http://web.archive.org/web/20010128181900/http://www.marshill.fm:80/ubb/Forum1/HTML/000048-8.html>.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Wenatchee the Hatchet, "The Evolution of Markulinity: combining a blue collar Jesus with an initiation process to solve a problem of male lethargy or disposability in urban settings, Dead Mean [sic] as initiation rite," *Wenatchee the Hatchet*, last modified July 11, 2015, <https://wenatcheethehatchet.blogspot.kr/2015/07/the-evolution-of-markulinity-combining.html>.

<sup>282</sup> Jeremiah Lawson, e-mail message to the author, October 11, 2016.

<sup>283</sup> Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformission Rev.*, 42.

nice, flowing, cutting-edge-of-1536 robe."<sup>284</sup> Driscoll, who converted to Christianity in college, recalled fearing that "I would have to become very feminine. 'Cause all the guys I knew who were Christians were just very – very soft, very tender, very sort of weak guys."<sup>285</sup> Amid *Confessions'* pages, he proclaims, "I fashion myself as the self-appointed leader of a heterosexual male backlash."<sup>286</sup> Thus, a core objective in Driscoll's church planting surrounded masculinizing a Christianity whose gendered identities and performances he perceived as hyper-feminized.

While Driscoll's critiques of Christianity's feminization extend to Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity, and the Protestant Mainline, the evangelical mainstream and its musical culture received the most directed ire in Driscoll's oratory and writing, and also in my interviews with former members. In chapter two, I chronicled the rise of a Christian music marketplace characterized very broadly by the Jesus Peoples' emotive and ecstatic worship experiences, praise and worship music's intimate lyrics, Christian Contemporary Music's consolidation to Nashville, the industry's shift toward broadly-appealing "middle-of-the-road" aesthetics rooted in pop country, and the emergence of a core consumer base described by one industry executive as the "soccer mom." It is against the tendencies and tropes of this industry, constructed as feminized, that Mars Hill personnel positioned the church as a radical masculine outsider. In Driscoll's writings, music represents the locus of mainstream evangelicalism's femininity, spanning its leadership, forms, and lyrics.

Mars Hill leaders and members expressed disdain for various elements of

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>285</sup> Driscoll, "Men and Masculinity."

<sup>286</sup> Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.*, 147.

evangelical culture. Driscoll lampooned evangelical music leaders as "weepy worship dudes" and "effeminate anatomically male" worship leaders who "seem to be very in touch with their feelings and exceedingly chickified from playing too much acoustic guitar and singing prom songs to Jesus while channeling Michael Bolton and flipping their hair."<sup>287</sup> Driscoll's focus on worship leaders' feminized performance of gender extended to the evangelical praise and worship music's intimate, vaguely erotic language, also perceived as a component of effeminacy. Jeff Bettger recalled, "Mark [Driscoll] kept belittling people who would write about Jesus as lover."<sup>288</sup> Bettger recalled that he and other Mars Hill pastors ridiculed evangelical mass culture together saying, "we mocked it and made fun of [evangelical culture] because it said [things like] 'Jesus, come inside me,' like, 'you grow bigger and bigger inside me,'" parodying the sexual lyrics in these songs.<sup>289</sup>

Opposition to the evangelical mainstream conditioned Mars Hill's participation in the Christian music industry's codified systems and structures. Regarding Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI), Tim Smith told me,

We really hated a lot of modern Christian worship music. ... [So] we almost had kind of as a badge of honor that we didn't have a CCLI license - so, we didn't have a CCLI license, and were pretty committed to not playing anything that was on CCLI.

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<sup>287</sup> Molly Worthen, "Who Would Jesus Smack Down?" *New York Times Magazine*, last modified January 6, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/11/magazine/11punk-t.html>; Alex Murahsko, "Ministry Asks Seattle Pastor to Apologize Over Worship Leader Comment," *The Christian Post*, last modified July 15, 2011, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/gay-ministry-upset-with-pastor-mark-driscolls-flippant-facebook-comment-52330/>; Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.*, 146.

<sup>288</sup> Bettger, interview with author.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*

So, we wrote a lot of music, and Mark and I started talking, and we were like, "we want something that folks can - that's a little more familiar to them, but I don't want to do these kind of trite, simple worship choruses that were so popular."<sup>290</sup>

Eschewing the "trite, simple" forms then typical of American praise and worship music, Mars Hill focused instead on writing original music and performing hymn covers in alt rock idioms, conceived as superior for their complexity, depth, and hip alterity—set in opposition to the simple, mainstream, vaguely sexual, feminized, majority evangelical culture.

Proudly avoiding CCLI, church leaders also encouraged worship musicians not to pursue copyright licensing for their original music. Offering song downloads and lead sheets for free on its website, the church's musicians largely forewent licensing. Instead, Mars Hill musicians licensed songs under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 3.0 License, allowing free use of sharing and adaptation.<sup>291</sup> This limited artists' access to statistics tracking the use of their music, and also precluded collecting royalties for original creations.

### **Creating Working-class, Masculine Worship Music**

Punk, grunge, and indie rock offered useful extant cultural formations through which to assert Mars Hill's masculinized iteration of Christian music ministry. As detailed in the previous chapter, punk rock emerged in post-WWII Britain and the United States as protest music expressing the social and political grievances of constituencies of

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<sup>290</sup> Smith, interview with the author.

<sup>291</sup> "Attribution 3.0 United States (CC by 3.0 US)," *Creative Commons*, accessed October 30, 2017, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/us/>. For an example, see the lead sheet for Team Strike Force's original song "Destructor" at [http://download.marshall.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20090322\\_destructor\\_by\\_sackcloth-and-ashes\\_song\\_sheet.pdf](http://download.marshall.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20090322_destructor_by_sackcloth-and-ashes_song_sheet.pdf).

young, white, working-class men—the community with which Mark Driscoll felt belonging. Punk gave rise to other aesthetic variants held together by commitment to DIY ethics, resulting in grunge music and early indie rock, also arising from young, working-class men. This music proved suitable to Driscoll's blue-collar gospel.

By selecting for dimensions of punk, grunge, and various streams of indie rock, Mars Hill integrated this white-working class music genre into its blue-collar gospel, a hedge against inauthentic, feminized mass-culture evangelical Christianity. For instance, in an interview with Mars Hill's music director Tim Smith, he explained that Driscoll and musicians involved early on "really couldn't stand Christian music in general. They felt it was a half-assed knockoff of other music trying to imitate music and use music only for its value to communicate 'Truth.'"<sup>292</sup> Smith cynically interpreted evangelical mass media as phony and opportunist, inauthentically appropriating popular culture in order to attract the masses.<sup>293</sup> Mars Hill, by contrast, understood itself as attracting a base of Seattle's musicians through missionality, thus forming an "authentic" pop culture music ministry from the initiations of their congregants, described as "a bunch of white indie rocker kids."<sup>294</sup> Mars Hill's worship music performed a self-conscious opposition to the evangelical mainstream, selecting for differentiated structures, leaders, genres, lyrics, and musical forms.

This iteration of punk/grunge/indie music ministry performed a multifaceted discursive distinction to the evangelical mainstream, constructed in a manner coherent with Sarah Thornton's 1996 study of dances and discotheques, and their cultures and

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<sup>292</sup> Smith, interview with the author.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformission Rev.*, 93.

subcultures.<sup>295</sup> Thornton puts forth a highly binarian structure, that, as she points out, serves a discursive function within certain musical subcultures.<sup>296</sup> Yet the implications of these discursively exclusivist subcultures and mainstreams are useful neither for their veracity nor for their immutability, but for their functionality in producing and maintaining the boundaries of imagined distinctiveness. This binary very well represents the discourses I heard at Mars Hill from Driscoll and other staff and churchgoers that succeeded in marking off Mars Hill as a cultural formation that intersected with the loosely-boundaried punk, grunge, and selected indie rock genres and their oppositional relationship to the mainstream, thus producing a differentiated and privileged subjective category<sup>297</sup>:

<b>Us</b>	<b>Them</b>
Alternative	Mainstream
Hip/cool	Straight/square
Independent	Commercial
Authentic	False/phony
Rebellious/radical	Conformist/conservative
Insider knowledge	Easily accessible information
Minority(*)	Majority
Heterogeneous	Homogenous
Youth	Family/middle-aged
Classless	Classed
Masculine culture	Feminine culture

Monolithic constructions of the mainstream serve as useful ways to mark an alternate or subaltern identity. As Thornton writes,

For many youthful imaginations, the mainstream is a powerful way to put themselves in the bigger picture, imagine their social world, assert their cultural worth, claim their subcultural capital. As such, the mainstream is a

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<sup>295</sup> Sarah Thornton. *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1996).

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

trope which betrays how beliefs and tastes which ensue from a complex social structure, in turn, determine the shape of social life.<sup>298</sup>

The discursive formation described by Thornton surfaced at Mars Hill, mapping these categories instead onto various evangelical subcultures to successfully position Mars Hill against the Christian mainstream.

Under Driscoll's leadership, Mars Hill adopted a variety of performative modes through which to assert their distinctively masculine, white working-class evangelical identity through music. Around 2000, Mars Hill abandoned an earlier "worship team" model, adopted from evangelical mass culture, in favor of a "band model." According to worship pastor Joel Brown, the worship team model was "sort of a conglomeration of random musicians that happen to be scheduled because they're available that week."<sup>299</sup> In a worship team model, musicians share a limited, common repertoire of songs, and conform to a central middle-of-the-road aesthetic, capable of substituting different players while retaining the same sound. Music pastor Tim Smith described the worship team model as limited because "you have to keep things more homogenous, you have to keep the arrangements more standardized."<sup>300</sup> While the worship team model does offer expediency (Brown mentioned that Mars Hill occasionally used this model when necessary), to Mars Hill's staff and music personnel, it represented the conventions of evangelical mass-culture's over-homogenization and simplification.

Mars Hill's music ministers, most of whom were members of bands in Seattle, viewed a heterogeneous band model as preferable. Mars Hill musicians thus began to

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Brown, interview with the author.

<sup>300</sup> Smith, interview with the author.

form bands comprised of stable personnel who rehearsed together to form a cohesive, recognizable sound with original songs and unique arrangements. Brown described this formation as arising from the Seattle music scene where bands came together as "friends that we play music with."<sup>301</sup> He continued, "we know each other, we understand each other musically, and we have relationship and we have a common language."<sup>302</sup> Because each Mars Hill campus supported several bands that rotated the responsibility for leading worship each week, the band model created heterogeneous, multiplex, and highly differentiated aesthetic experiences from band to band, even as they cohered to a common formation of Mars Hill's identity by performing some iteration of punk or post-punk worship music. Two of Mars Hill's early bands, Team Strike Force and The Mars Hillbillies, represent two distinctive approaches to genre and composition that nonetheless both solidly represented the church's white, working-class, masculine identity performed through genres related to punk and postpunk.

Team Strike Force represented the Pacific Northwest evangelical underground, performing boundary-pushing, ambiguously ironic, original songs. The band's members—Luke Abrams, Jeff "Suffering" Bettger, Matt Johnson, Rose Johnson, Andy Garcia, and Andy Myers—played in a range of Seattle-based bands, some signed to secular indie labels, including *Supine to Sit* (Lovitt Records), *The Out\_Circuit* (Lujo Records), *Suffering and the Hideous Thieves* (Lujo Records), and others to *Tooth & Nail*, including *Roadside Monument*, *Starflyer 59*, and *90 Pound Wuss*. Thus these musicians represented a wide swath of the Seattle scene. The personnel inspired a sense of local

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<sup>301</sup> Brown, interview with the author.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*

star-power around Team Strike Force for interviewees Ezekiel Rudrick and Peter Mansen, who both mentioned that Johnson and Bettger's music drew them to the church.<sup>303</sup>

Although described as "punk rock" by Driscoll in 2006, Team Strike Force seems to draw most of its associations with punk from the outside projects of its members. The band's recorded music features the spare avant-indie guitar rock sound of bands like the Velvet Underground, Pavement, Dinosaur Jr., and Seattle's Modest Mouse. With standard instrumentation of dry electric guitar, bass, drums and occasional keyboard, instruments and vocals occupy distinct and separate sonic space. Chord progressions and instrumental arrangements are largely straightforward and simple; on this basic palate, their rotating cast of lead vocalists sing in a mumbling, nasal and flat voice with inexact intonation and hazy diction. These elements conjure the punk "everyman" aesthetic of the unsophisticated novice. When Rose Johnson enters with backup vocals, they feel only variously rehearsed, sometimes achieving a lazy harmony, sometimes doubling the lead singer's pitches.

The aesthetic markers of the band's punk-like democratic amateurism obscure a series of sophisticated elements that mark the band as a singular creative entity. For instance, the song "Yahweh" features Luke Abrams as a lead vocalist who, while marked by inexactitude, in fact masters complex melodies.<sup>304</sup> For instance, the opening phrases of the song "Yahweh," released on the 2001 record *Tension*, feature octave leaps, short melismatic runs, and irregular, syncopated rhythms (Figure 3).

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<sup>303</sup> Ezekiel Rudrick, interview with the author. Skype, August 9, 2015; Peter Mansen, interview with the author. Phone, August 14, 2015.

<sup>304</sup> Team Strike Force. "Yahweh," *Tension*, Mars Hill Records, 2001.

Yah - weh, \_\_\_ if I can't \_\_\_ find \_\_\_ my \_\_\_ way \_\_\_ at pre - sent,

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Yah \_\_\_ weh, \_\_\_ your mer - cies \_\_\_ taste \_\_\_ so \_\_\_ sweet \_\_\_ and \_\_\_ true. \_\_\_

Figure 3: "Yahweh" by Team Strike Force, transcription by the author

This irregular, syncopated, approach to melody continues later in the album in the song "The Day the Sun Stood Still."<sup>305</sup> The song begins with finger-picked guitar in a simple 3/4 meter, and uses only the tonic, sub-dominant, and dominant (I, IV, and V) chords throughout the song. Amid these simple elements, the band incorporates a variety of complexities in melody, harmony, rhythm, and meter. The melody, centered around F#, the dominant in the key of B, evokes a modal sound. The melody extends through several phrases, with little repetition until the chorus begins. Borrowing from the disjointed dynamicism of grunge, Team Strike Force marks each section break through dynamic and rhythmic changes. For instance, the dynamics moving from *mezzo-forte* in the opening verse to a *subito fortissimo* on the lyrics "Holy is the Lord (Figure 4)."

<sup>305</sup> Team Strike Force, "The Day the Sun Stood Still," *Tension*, Mars Hill Records, 2001.

*mf* The sun stood still — far ov - er Gi - be - on, — Hung

o - ver — the val - ley of A - ja - lon. — The sun re - mained and the

moon cried out *ff* Ho - ly is the Lord!

Figure 4: "The Day the Sun Stood Still" by Team Strike Force, transcription by the author.

The song proceeds with a pre-chorus, alternating between 6/8 and 3/4 meters through seven bars before introducing another shift in the chorus. Here, the band foregrounds a new, upbeat, singable melody with a repeated rhythm. But in the last iteration of the rhythmic motif, the band introduces an irregular 4/4 bar (Figure 5):

Don't turn the light. Don't turn the light out. Don't turn the

light — out — on — me.

Figure 5: "The Day the Sun Stood Still" by Team Strike Force, transcription by the author.

Team Strike Force experimented with mixed meter on several of their songs, including their most popular and oft-repeated song "Destructor" which begins in 3/4 at 133 BPM and moves to 4/4 in the pre-chorus and chorus at the faster tempo of 140 BMP.<sup>306</sup>

Team Strike Force's music thus reveals a series of rehearsed complexities, masked by the aesthetics of amateurism, that would prove difficult to replicate with a rotating cast

<sup>306</sup> Team Strike Force, "Destructor," Live performance, January 5, 2003.

of musicians with minimal practice time. The band's musical borrowings, rooted in punk's everyman simplicities, grunge's dynamicism, and indie's math rock-oriented meter changes, forged a distinctive cross-genre Pacific Northwest-based style (and the band proved famously difficult for the congregation to follow). This enactment of the "band model" at once differentiated Mars Hill's music from the evangelical mainstream and forged Team Strike Force's sonic affiliation to the Pacific Northwest punk, grunge, and indie scene.

But Team Strike Force's members also understood their distinctiveness against the evangelical mainstream's "Jesus as lover" lyrics. By comparison, Team Strike Force wrote "very sin-focused and God heavy" songs, consistently with Mark Driscoll's masculinized ultimate fighter Christ, focused on darker subjects like judgment and wrath.<sup>307</sup> The song "Destructor" exemplified this focus for musician Jeff Bettger. The song opens with images of God's aggression toward humanity, recalling destructive floods and burning curses.<sup>308</sup> Their song "I Will Not Bow Down" continues to theologize acts of suffering and violence, explicitly naming the tortuous desserts of sinfulness: "if I receive what I deserve/surely I would be cast into/consuming fire, burning sulfur/eternal distance from my Father."<sup>309</sup> Similarly, the song "Promise Breakers" puts forth an image of execution stating, "I am a promise breaker/hanging in the gallows."<sup>310</sup> Team Strike Force's lyrics depict a God consistent with Driscoll's picture of an aggressive, masculine Jesus.

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<sup>307</sup> Bettger, interview with the author.

<sup>308</sup> Team Strike Force, "Destructor."

<sup>309</sup> Team Strike Force, "I Will Not Bow Down," *Tension*, Mars Hill Records, 2001.

<sup>310</sup> Team Strike Force, "Promise Breakers," *Tension*, Mars Hill Records, 2001.

Yet Bettger treads between earnestness and exaggerations in his description of these lyrics. In recalling Team Strike Force's approach to lyrical composition he stated, "we extrapolated to our utmost extremes."<sup>311</sup> This places Team Strike Force's lyrics within the logic of grunge's irony, where literal and exaggerated approaches intertwine. Lyrics thus forged a perceptible and enduring boundary between the evangelical mainstream and Mars Hill. Songs foregrounded violent and aggressive religious images, deemed too inflammatory for the middle-of-the-road mainstream. But musicians commonly flirted with exaggerated language, a tactic drawing an implied boundary between distinguishing insiders and unknowing outsiders. Thus Team Strike Force's adoption of the band model, genre, and lyrics each participated in performing differentiation between "masculine" Mars Hill and the "feminine" evangelical mainstream.

### **Alt-Country Worship Music**

The Mars Hillbillies, an "old rootsy" band active at Mars Hill in the early 2000s, exemplifies a contrasting approach to the band model, genre, and lyrics that nonetheless also positions the band within punk, grunge, and indie rock. Tim Smith, a musical novice with no band experience prior to attending Mars Hill, founded The Mars Hillbillies. In his 2006 memoir, Driscoll idealized the rustic masculinity of mountain man-esque Smith, calling him "a guy who brewed his own beer, smoked a pipe, rock climbed, river rafted, carried a knife on his belt, and talked about what he thought more than what he felt."<sup>312</sup> Smith described The Mars Hillbillies as drawing simultaneously from the throwback

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<sup>311</sup> Bettger, interview with the author.

<sup>312</sup> Confessions, 147.

soundtrack to the Cohen Brothers' 2000 film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* and "a whole movement called 'No Depression' named after the Carter Family song, 'No Depression.'"<sup>313</sup> The band, consistent with the vague mountain man rurality of Smith's mythical persona, drew upon the burgeoning alt-country genre, playing hymn covers in the style of old time Southern folk music.

Scholars Barbara Ching and Pamela Fox describe the alt-country genre as "an assortment of features, including a rhetoric of taste, ties to community tradition, and the cultivation of a contemporary, discerning community of liberal-minded fans distinct from the audience for mainstream country music."<sup>314</sup> Alt-country pioneers like Uncle Tupelo's Jeff Tweedy, Jay Farrar, and Mike Heidorn posited a nostalgic reclamation of the "raw violence, despair, and excess" of old time country greats like George Jones, Johnny Cash, and Merle Haggard.<sup>315</sup> Uncle Tupelo's 1990 album *No Depression*, named for their cover of the Carter Family's 1936 song, is widely cited as the progenitor for the "No Depression Movement" named above by Smith, a network of alternative roots rock bands that spawned a long-running publication, website, and music festival of the same name.

The genre claims its "alt-" prefix simultaneously from alignment with punk and grunge aesthetics and ideologies, and also its distance from the Nashville-based country music industry. Uncle Tupelo, for instance, names its influences as both arising from acoustic, gritty country music and from punk bands like The Minute Men, "kicking up the volume, picking up the beat," and selectively centering vintage sonic markers of

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<sup>313</sup> Smith, interview with the author.

<sup>314</sup> Barbara Ching and Pamela Fox. "Introduction: The Importance of Being Ironic—Toward a Theory and Critique of Alt.Country Music," in *Old Roots, New Routes: The Cultural Politics of Alt.Country Music*, ed. Pamela Fox and Barbara Ching (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

country music like slide guitar, accordion, and fiddle.<sup>316</sup> But alt-country primarily aligns with punk in critiquing the centralization, commodification and homogenization of country music, perceived as employing conservative stylistic boundaries to appeal to broad market tastes. Instead, alt-country musicians posit that a do-it-yourself production ethic secures artistic autonomy and thus stylistic diversification.<sup>317</sup> It positions itself as marginal to the country music mainstream via both aesthetics and capital: an unfettered, hip, pure, authentic alternative to mass-mediated country.<sup>318</sup>

However, positing indie alt-country as southern old time country's autonomous authentic inheritance introduces contradictions. Most bands in the alt-country genre live in urban areas, most of them in Northern states. For instance, Uncle Tupelo formed in the mid-size Midwestern city of Bellevair, IL; after the band split, its members took the alt-country genre into new projects. Tupelo's Tweedy formed Wilco in Chicago; the others moved to St. Louis, MO, where Farrar formed Son Volt and Heidorn formed Bottle Rockets. The *No Depression* magazine, website, and festival were founded by Seattleites Grant Alden and Peter Blackstock; today, Seattle's Kim Ruehl serves as the project's main staffperson.

Instead, one might view thrust of the song "No Depression" as causal for alt-country's efficacy. The song's lyrics posit a means of escape from life's present conditions singing, "I'm going where there's no depression." While the song originated as a Depression-era eschatological spiritual, for Uncle Tupelo and their suburban white listenership, the song conveyed a "sense of escape from postmodern alienation and an

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 18.

irreligious angst."<sup>319</sup> Ethnomusicologist Hilary Johnson argues that urban, educated, middle-class whites have long produced discourses of Appalachia as a simulacrum of escape. She argues that 'Appalachia' has emerged as "an imagined home of white authenticity" with figures like the "backwoodsman" presenting a Celtic-Irish American rugged, rural, white masculinity.<sup>320</sup> Further, the Mars Hillbillies' ownership of Appalachian escapism participates in producing imagined horizontality between Driscoll's various white, working class tropes. These serve as exaggerated masculine exemplars, combining diverse blue-collar subjects in a resultant pastiche of the Mars Hill Manly Man.

Returning to alt-country as a site of differentiation, discourses arising from the genre clearly elide with those marking the relationship between Mars Hill and the evangelical mainstream. Nashville operates as a discursive site representing mainstream commodification, crossing both spheres. Nashville indeed functions as the primary site for both sectors: CCM and commercial country share aesthetics and personnel across permeable and imprecise boundaries. Andrew Mall's study of CCM in Nashville indicates how the city's parallel Christian and country music industries share networks of recording studios, songwriters, studio musicians, and support staff.<sup>321</sup> For Mars Hill, adoption of alt-country thus performs opposition to Nashville through both genres, masculinizing Christian music and country music through the marginal, hip, DIY logics arising from punk and grunge.

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<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>320</sup> Hilary Johnson. "'An Enchanting Place Apart': Imagining Appalachia in Indie Folk." Paper presented to the Society for Ethnomusicology Conference, Indianapolis, IA, November 2013.

<sup>321</sup> Andrew Mall, "'The stars are underground': Undergrounds, mainstreams, and Christian popular music," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2012), 69.

Smith described the Mars Hillbillies' sound as an outgrowth of the No Depression movement. Conjuring old country greats, the Hillbillies' repertoire is comprised largely of old hymn covers like Hank Williams' "I Saw the Light" (released in 1948) and the Carters' "No Depression" (released in 1936). They also introduced classic songs from American hymnody, including revival-era hymn "Wondrous Love" (written in 1811), Southern gospel song "I'll Fly Away" (written in 1929), and "When the Roll is Called Up Yonder" (written in 1893), a staple in Moody and Sankey's hymnals. The Hillbillies' covers read many hymns through the extant lenses of country greats—Johnny Cash and Willie Nelson each performed versions of "When the Roll is Called Up Yonder;" "I'll Fly Away" was famously interpreted by George Jones and Lucinda Williams, and a version by Gillian Welch and Allison Krauss is featured on the *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000) film soundtrack.

The Mars Hillbillies performed gritty, high-energy versions of these songs, a clear nod to alt-country's punk influences. Their version of "No Depression" runs at a pop punk-like speed of 145 BPM, nearly twice the 80 BPM tempo of the Carter Family original. It is also significantly faster than Uncle Tupelo's 1990 version at 120 BPM. On the Carter Family's version vocals are accompanied by an acoustic guitar, featuring the Carter picking style with bass notes on the main beats and the upper string chords strummed on the off-beats. Replicating the offbeat chords, The Hillbillies forwarded snare-centered drums, with steady, loud hits doubling the rhythm guitar's offbeat strums. Further, the version employs a large dynamic range, achieved largely through textural density—sparse verses set drum and lead guitar against solo vocals, while the choruses

feature three-part harmonies, countermelodies in the slide guitar, and doubled harmonies in the honky tonk-style piano playing and on the Hammond organ.

The performance of "grit" in these cover versions is achieved through the use of low instrumental and vocal ranges. Uncle Tupelo and the Mars Hillbillies perform the song in the key of C, a major third lower than the original Carter version in E, making use of the lead singers' baritone ranges. But the Hillbillies' sound employs a perceptibly lower frequency range than Uncle Tupelo's version through instrumentation. Over bass and guitar, Uncle Tupelo's version features a 12-string guitar, the shimmering high-octave frequencies cutting through the mix. By contrast, The Hillbillies' version is performed on a six-string hollow-body electric guitar, and melodies are played in the instrument's lower mid-range. The lead guitar player switches to rhythmic low-string power chords when the vocal melody comes in. Higher-frequency instruments and vocalists do contribute to the mix, but they serve to augment the low, raw grumble of the standard instrumentation. The resultant sound of the Mars Hillbillies' version is comparatively faster in tempo and lower in range than either the Carter Family or Uncle Tupelo's versions, thus masculinizing the hymn.

The practice of performing traditional hymn covers introduced another key differentiation between the Hillbillies' sound and that of the evangelical mainstream. Smith told me, "Mars Hill married the idea of traditional hymns with modern music. And that was kind of a new thing for its time."<sup>322</sup> The value of hymn covers lay in the lyrics, perceived as more intellectual, complex, and polyvalent than the homogenous, middle-of-the-road CCM worship choruses. As Smith continued, "you look at an old hymn, and

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<sup>322</sup> Smith, interview with the author.

they're rich with theology, they're rich with kind of a metacognition."<sup>323</sup> In addition to selecting hymns already covered by country music predecessors, Smith's band also introduced hymns perceived as theologically rich.

For example, various bands (including the Mars Hillbillies) performed the hymn "Man of Sorrows" throughout Mars Hill's eighteen years.<sup>324</sup> The song, written in 1875 by Phillip Bliss, an American-born Congregational evangelist, recounts the theology of penal substitutionary atonement, centering how Christ's suffering, humiliation, and death served as a ransom for humankind<sup>325</sup>:

Man of sorrows what a name  
for the Son of God, who came  
ruined sinners to reclaim:  
Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,  
in my place condemned he stood,  
sealed my pardon with his blood:  
Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Guilty, helpless, lost were we;  
blameless Lamb of God is he,  
for atonement, can it be:  
Hallelujah, what a Savior!

He was lifted up to die;  
"It is finished" was his cry;  
now in heaven exalted high:  
Hallelujah, what a Savior!

When he comes, our glorious King,  
all his ransomed home to bring,  
then anew this song we'll sing:

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Mars Hillbillies, "Man of Sorrows," live performance recorded June 13, 2004.

<sup>325</sup> "Man of Sorrows, What a Name," *Hymnary*, accessed October 25, 2017, [https://hymnary.org/text/man\\_of\\_sorrows\\_what\\_a\\_name](https://hymnary.org/text/man_of_sorrows_what_a_name).

Hallelujah, what a Savior!<sup>326</sup>

The Mars Hillbillies' cover represents a faithful version of Bliss' lyrics, performing all five verses.

However, the Mars Hillbillies' version departs significantly from the original in terms of its melody and rhythm. As shown in Figure 6, Bliss' original is written with functional harmony and non-syncopated rhythm, opening and closing on the dominant note of the chord:

Man of Sor - rows, what a name for the Son of God, who came.

Ru - ined sin - ners to re - claim Hal - le - lu - jah, what a Sav - ior!

Figure 6: "Man of Sorrows" melody by Philip Bliss, transcription by the author

The Hillbillies' version by comparison, as shown in Figure 7, features syncopations, melismas, and rhythmic irregularities from verse to verse, learned best by ear. It is sung at the comparatively slow tempo of 150 BPM.

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

Man — of — Sor - rows, — what a — name —

5 for the — Son — of God who — came. —

9 Ru - ined sin - ners — to — re - claim, — Hal - le-

13 lu - - - - jah, what a Sav - - - - ior.

Figure 7: "Man of Sorrows" cover by The Mars Hillbillies (2004), transcription by the author

Consistent with the close harmony style in country music, the song is performed in gentle homophonic three-part vocal harmonies, each reproducing the rhythm of Smith's lead vocals. A sparse, lonesome harmonica and an egg shaker accompany acoustic rhythm guitar, folding the song into the alt-country genre.

The original worship music of Team Strike Force and hymn covers of the Mars Hillbillies demonstrate two distinct strategies of performing differentiation from the evangelical mainstream, effective in attracting new churchgoers. Andrew Jacobson, who began attending Mars Hill after leaving the Lutheran church of his upbringing, opened our interview by emphasizing how different Mars Hill's music was from the evangelical praise and worship music he previously performed in church saying,

The first thing I noticed right off the bat [at Mars Hill] was the music. And I didn't hate it. Cause, you know, coming from the church where I was [previously serving as a music minister], every time I played a song, I died a little inside. ... Way back then, it was "Shine, Jesus, Shine," and "Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord." Yeah, the stuff you don't wanna do.<sup>327</sup>

<sup>327</sup> Andrew Jacobson. Interview with the author, Seattle, WA, June 6, 2015.

The songs he names are famous tokens of the Nashville aesthetic— Integrity Records of Nashville released both "Shine, Jesus, Shine" by Graham Kendrick (1990) and "Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord" by Paul Baloche (1998). Michael W. Smith popularized the latter on his 2001 album *Worship*, released by Reunion Records. Jacobsen is clear that Mars Hill produced something better than the "bad" music coming out of the mainstream Christian music industry.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown how Driscoll discarded the concept of radical welcome, replacing it with a central ideology of masculine supremacy, conceived particularly in opposition to the evangelical mainstream, exemplified in performance tropes drawn from a pastiche of white, blue-collar figures. These intersected well with the subjectivities represented by punk, grunge, and the emerging indie rock scene, also predicated on performances of white working-class masculinity. From early on, punk, grunge, and indie rock served as the vectors through which Mars Hill intentionally created a masculine music ministry for manly men. In the next chapters, I will discuss another major pivot to Mars Hill's theology, centering an idiosyncratic interpretation of Reformed Theology called New Calvinism. I will explore how the networks and theologies of New Calvinism inspired changes to Mars Hill's polity, discourses, performances of masculinity, and music.

## Chapter Five

### **"I'll Show You My Theological Underwear. I'm a Calvinist": Self-Efficacy, Agency, and Submission in Driscoll's New Calvinism**

By 2002, Mars Hill hosted five services per week in three rented locations across Seattle. The church continued to grow at a rapid rate, surpassing the space limits of their North Ballard and U District sanctuaries. To accommodate this growth, Mars Hill soon purchased a former Marine supply in the warehouse district of Ballard, and with volunteer help, renovated the new space on a shoestring budget. The new massive building could accommodate the extant Seattle membership, so the three disbursed churches moved into the Ballard space in early 2003. With Driscoll installed as the primarily preaching pastor, the new Ballard location hosted three Sunday morning services and a night service to accommodate their extant membership, with many traveling from former locations around Seattle.<sup>328</sup> Mars Hill was thriving, but also radically changing as Driscoll began to clarify and systematize his own theological beliefs.

As detailed in chapter three, Mars Hill's earliest web statements and musical products overwhelmingly evince an accepting, loving, kind, gentle, and compassionate Christ, slowly undone by Driscoll's hypermasculine interpretation of Christianity, performed through punk and alt-country music, as he increasingly helmed the pulpit. Theologically, Mars Hill's doctrinal center began to shift, adopting an iteration of Reformed Theology in the stream of the mid-2000s New Calvinist movement,

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<sup>328</sup> "The Story of Mars Hill Church," *Mars Hill*, archived website captured October 30, 2015, accessed October 27, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20151030033121/http://marshill.com:80/>.

characterized by missional methods, gender complementarianism, and an emphasis on God's sole sovereignty.

This chapter will explore Mark Driscoll's embrace of New Calvinism with an overview of the movement's key theological positions. I will then explore how Mars Hill ritualized a New Calvinist theology, emphasizing authority and submission. I argue that the ritual act of performing Mars Hill's idiosyncratic interpretation of hypermasculine Calvinist themes through song produced a body politics of reduced self-efficacy at Mars Hill. I will then discuss the musical implications of Mars Hill's adoption of gender complementarianism via a niche interpretation of Trinitarian theology.

Even while Mars Hill adopted the Reformed doctrinal statement of planting congregation Antioch Bible Church from its foundry, Driscoll kept a distance from Calvinist theology in the Mars Hill Fellowship's early years.<sup>329</sup> In sermons, Driscoll questioned Calvinism's theological orthodoxy, ridiculing the "religious, freaky, weird, extreme, controlling nut jobs" who only adhere to a single theologian like John Calvin, calling them theological extremists. Consistent with his foregrounding a working-class gospel message, Driscoll particularly derided the intense theological study and doctrinal precision associated with Calvinism as overly pretentious, lampooning pastors with "more degrees than Fahrenheit."<sup>330</sup> Instead, as explored in chapters three and four, Mars

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<sup>329</sup> "Mars Hill Official Doctrine," *Mars Hill*, archived website captured March 3, 2001, accessed October 27, 2017, [https://web.archive.org/web/20010303185253/http://www.marshill.fm/believe/doctrinal\\_statement.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20010303185253/http://www.marshill.fm/believe/doctrinal_statement.htm).

<sup>330</sup> Mark Driscoll. *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 64.

Hill focused on missional methods in efforts to reach as many "lost people" as possible through art and relationship-building.

In 2003, Driscoll's skepticism toward Calvinism began to shift. In a sermon entitled "11 Steps to Becoming a Jerk For Jesus," Driscoll announced, "I'll show you my theological underwear. I'm a Calvinist."<sup>331</sup> Henceforth, Driscoll would express increasing familiarity with and preference for Calvinist theology and the broader Reformed tradition, joining with a Calvinist minority of leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA), and miscellaneous non-denominational pastors, as discussed in chapter two. After the release of his 2004 book *The Radical Reformation: Reaching Out Without Selling Out*, Mars Hill hosted the first Reformation conference in Seattle, inviting Calvinist preacher John Piper as the keynote speaker.<sup>332</sup> Driscoll preached his first sermon discussing the Calvinist tenet of total depravity in late 2004, and Reformed theology would grow as a regular theme.

As mentioned in chapter two, Driscoll joined a paradenominational New Reformed cohort spanning the Southern Baptist Convention, Presbyterian Church of America, and various non-denominational pastors in a Reformed resurgence movement called New Calvinism. The resurgence of Reformed theology among self-described evangelicals grew, in part, out of a series of critiques of the modern worship movement, aimed simultaneously at the "junk drawer" relativism of the emerging church and the "buddy Christ" evangelical mainstream. For instance, New Calvinist author Collin

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<sup>331</sup> Mark Driscoll. "11 Steps to Becoming a Jerk For Jesus," Sermon. Mars Hill Church, Seattle, June 8, 2003, [http://download.marshall.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20030608\\_11-steps-to-becoming-a-jerk-for-jesus\\_en\\_transcript.pdf](http://download.marshall.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20030608_11-steps-to-becoming-a-jerk-for-jesus_en_transcript.pdf).

<sup>332</sup> The slate of speakers at the 2004 Reformation Conference are available at <http://theresurgencereport.com/resurgence/series/reformation-2004>.

Hansen critiqued the evangelical church of his upbringing saying, "today's church has relaxed standards for holiness and disconnected itself from history."<sup>333</sup> Consistent with Mars Hill's critiques of evangelical music, young Reformers like Hansen began to see the "seeker sensitive," "come as you are" culture in evangelicalism as "generic" and meaningless, regarding it as too self help-oriented and entertainment-focused.<sup>334</sup>

Driscoll is today regarded as a controversial figure in the New Calvinist movement. After the unfolding scandals that led to the Mars Hill's closure in 2014, Driscoll was removed from leadership by New Calvinist networks, including The Gospel Coalition where he served as a founding board member, and Acts 29, which he cofounded with David Nicholas in 1998. Yet, for a time, Driscoll and Mars Hill led the field as a missionally-oriented hipster church led by a firey and charismatic pastor, and contributed multiply to its discourses, networks, and structures.

Driscoll's main contributions included the parachurch networks of Acts 29 and The Resurgence. The Acts 29 church planting network stands among the leading New Calvinism-oriented parachurch organizations, affirming "missional innovation" through "cultural engagement," "the sovereignty of God in saving sinners," and "the equality of male and female and the principle of male servant leadership" focused on recruiting, promoting, and training men to lead new church plants.<sup>335</sup> As of August 2016, Acts 29 claims to have planted 600 churches across five continents.<sup>336</sup> Driscoll launched The

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<sup>333</sup> Collin Hansen. *Young, Restless, and Reformed* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 11.

<sup>334</sup> Collin Hansen, "Young, Restless, Reformed," *Christianity Today*, September 22, 2006, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/september/42.32.html>.

<sup>335</sup> "About," *Acts 29*, accessed October 27, 2017, <http://www.acts29.com/about/>.

<sup>336</sup> Yoshito Noguchi, "Celebrate Our 600th Church," *Acts 29*, last modified August 2, 2016, accessed October 27, 2017, <http://www.acts29.com/celebrate-600th-church/>.

Resurgence blog in 2006 as a "missional theology cooperative website" to share resources among masculine evangelical pastors.<sup>337</sup> The website served a dual function to both network and equip like-minded leaders.

The Resurgence quickly grew from a blog into a multimedia publishing house featuring articles, book reviews, Biblical and cultural commentaries, tools and curriculum for ministry, podcasts, sermon downloads, and music. Its biggest initiatives included a music arm for Mars Hill bands (Re:Sound), a print publishing arm in partnership with Crossway books (Re:Lit), an unaccredited "Master's level theology program" (Re:Train), and an annual conference (Resurgence).<sup>338</sup> Though little of The Resurgence's official literature centers Calvinist theology, The Resurgence's contributors primarily include Mars Hill leaders and other New Calvinist leaders. For instance, their inaugural conference in 2006 featured Joshua Harris, Ed Stetzer, Tim Keller, Matt Chandler, and Eric Mason, all celebrities in the New Calvinist circuit.<sup>339</sup>

In an interview with Joel Brown, he described New Calvinism as reactionary and oppositional to both the modern worship movement and liberal theology, perceiving both as "not very concerned with historical doctrines."<sup>340</sup> Modern worship music and American evangelicalism offered "ambiguous" theologies, sometimes based in an attempt

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<sup>337</sup> "About" *The Resurgence*, archived website captured February 18, 2007, accessed October 27, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20070218054200/http://theresurgence.com:80/about>.

<sup>338</sup> These were each firmly established by 2012, <http://web.archive.org/web/20121002063523/http://theresurgence.com/>

<sup>339</sup> "Reform and Resurge Conference: 2006" *The Resurgence*, archived website captured August 11, 2006, accessed October 27, 2017, [http://web.archive.org/web/20060811220637/http://www.theresurgence.com/reform\\_resurge\\_conference\\_2006](http://web.archive.org/web/20060811220637/http://www.theresurgence.com/reform_resurge_conference_2006).

<sup>340</sup> Joel Brown. Interview with the author. July 14, 2015.

to "impress God" and garner eternal acceptance.<sup>341</sup> Meanwhile, liberal theologians forged new interpretations of historical doctrines such as atonement theology, whereas New Calvinists sought to emphasize earlier interpretations. Echoing these sentiments, Baptist theologian Al Mohler described young Calvinists as "more committed, more theologically intense, more theologically curious, more self-aware and self-conscious as believers" than their mainstream counterparts.<sup>342</sup> Continuing, Mohler posited that New Calvinists offer "young people a countercultural alternative with deep roots,"<sup>343</sup> claiming to have "rediscovered," or at least re-emphasized, theologies articulated by the major figures in the 16th-century Protestant Reformation.

The major reformers adopted by the New Calvinists include Martin Luther (1483-1546) of Germany, John Calvin (1509-1564) of France, and Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) of Switzerland, among others, who critiqued the Catholic church and subverted its hegemony in Europe, thus redefining Christian theology around the centrality of scripture, sufficiency of faith in salvation, and the doctrine of grace.<sup>344</sup> In brief, the Reformers arose out of Enlightenment-era Europe and thus emphasized the locus of the individual believer, promoting greater access to rites like communion, Biblical literacy and interpretation, and participation in church governance. From the major reformers arose the earliest iterations of a non-Catholic European Christianity including Lutheranism, Presbyterianism, Congregationalism, and the Dutch Reformed Church,

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Hansen, "Young, Restless, and Reformed," *Christianity Today*.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> Brad Vermurlen. "Reformed resurgence: A field-theoretic analysis of religious strength (and weakness) in advanced modernity," (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2016), 27-30.

among many others. New Calvinists follow later Reformed revivalists like Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) and Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892), as well.

Historically, Calvinist doctrine—a complex theological system—has given rise to a wide variety of traditions, interpretations, and church structures. New Calvinism represents a numerically marginal movement within American evangelicalism, particularly spanning the Presbyterian Church of America, the Southern Baptist Convention, and various non-denominational churches like Mars Hill. New Calvinists largely reject Calvinist interpretations by the largest Reformed denominations in the United States such as the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), The Dutch Reformed Church, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the United Church of Christ, critiquing these denominations' liberal interpretation of Christianity. Thus this chapter does not endeavor a historical overview, analysis, or critique of Calvinism as a whole, but rather seeks to elucidate shared beliefs and cultural trends uniting the demographically small New Calvinist movement.

While the New Calvinist movement occupies a distinct place within American evangelicalism, the movement is comparatively small and difficult to locate within the overall evangelical field. According to a 2010 survey conducted by the Barna Group, around 3 in 10 Protestant clergy define their church as Reformed; however, many of these do not fit the New Calvinist profile.<sup>345</sup> Further, this number appears unchanged across a generation, suggesting that adherents to the Reformed Tradition are numerically stagnant. According to sociologist Brad Vermurlen, then, locating the power and

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<sup>345</sup> Barna Group, “Is There a ‘Reformed’ Movement in American Churches?” *Barna*, November 15, 2010, accessed October 26, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/is-there-a-reformed-movement-in-american-churches/>.

influence of the New Calvinist movement "is less about this kind of numerical growth," but rather "it is about relational, game-like contestation and the struggle for symbolic capital and power in one's field."<sup>346</sup> The New Calvinists cohere both around distinct institutions, networks of celebrity, and vectors of distribution, but discursively operate as a distinct group within American Christianity, and particularly evangelicalism, that has been vying for theological, philosophical, and material dominance for nearly 20 years. Following Driscoll's own terminology, one might think of the New Calvinists as a bounded "tribe" within American evangelicalism, marked by key theologies, positions, and politics.<sup>347</sup>

### **Main Themes in New Calvinist Theology**

Theologically, belief in God's ultimate and total sovereignty stands at the center of the New Reformed movement. In 2009, *Time* magazine named New Calvinism #3 of "10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now," articulating God's sovereignty as the uniting feature of New Calvinist theology:

John Calvin's 16th century reply to medieval Catholicism's buy-your-way-out-of-purgatory excesses is Evangelicalism's latest success story, complete with an utterly sovereign and micromanaging deity, sinful and puny humanity, and the combination's logical consequence, predestination: the belief that before time's dawn, God decided whom he would save (or not), unaffected by any subsequent human action or decision.<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Vermurlen, "Reformed resurgence," 4.

<sup>347</sup> Driscoll's 2013 *Call to Resurgence* (Tyndale) is oriented around differentiation of so-called "tribes," conceived generally in terms of binaries.

<sup>348</sup> David Van Biema. "Ten Ideas Changing the World Right Now: New Calvinism," *TIME*, March 12, 2009, accessed October 27, 2017, [http://web.archive.org/web/20140311194800/http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1884779\\_1884782\\_1884760,00.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20140311194800/http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1884779_1884782_1884760,00.html)

Driscoll articulated this position in 2007 saying, "Proverbs says that even when a die is rolled, that the numbers that come up are chosen by God, that He is in everything, from the overarching grandiose rule of all creation, all the way down to where you park when you go to the grocery store."<sup>349</sup> New Calvinists affirm of God's ultimate control in all matters, from the quotidian to the eternal.

A soteriological system extends from this presupposition, where God stands as the sole agent in initiating and achieving the salvation of all people. Many New Calvinists adopt the five-point acronym "TULIP" to summarize Calvinist doctrine, a shorthand of Calvin's key points consolidated by his followers in a 1611 polemic, but popularized in the United States in the 1960s. Humans, removed from God by the fall recorded in the book of Genesis, exist totally depraved by sin and thus lack sufficient goodness to effectively choose God and thereby participate in our own salvation. So consumed by sin, humans deserve eternal torment. God alone intercedes to enact salvation and forgiveness, electing selected people unconditionally for salvation, without regard for their character or actions. God offers only limited atonement, disbursing saving grace through Jesus only to these elect. Yet the saved find God's grace irresistible, and are drawn to God who secures for them eternal salvation. God alone accomplishes salvation—humans play no

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<sup>349</sup> Mark Driscoll. "God's Hand in Our Suffering," Sermon. Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, January 7, 2007, accessed October 27, 2017, [http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20070107\\_gods-hand-in-our-suffering\\_en\\_transcript.pdf](http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20070107_gods-hand-in-our-suffering_en_transcript.pdf). Driscoll continues, as an important theological point, that God is also good and orders things in the favor of people.

role.<sup>350</sup> This is distinguished from the Arminian position that posits one must make a conscious decision to accept and follow Jesus.<sup>351</sup>

The theology of total depravity posits that humans cannot remove themselves from a wholly perverted and sinful nature. Driscoll argues that our sin deserves God's wrath, paraphrasing Romans 6:23, "the wage for sin is death," and continuing "when you sin, you die."<sup>352</sup> Drawn from the Biblical tradition of atonement through animal sacrifice, Driscoll understands the theology of atonement to be accomplished through the human sacrifice of Jesus, dying as a "substitute in the place of the sinful people."<sup>353</sup> As Driscoll explains, "[Jesus] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only ours but also the sins of the whole world."<sup>354</sup> Driscoll summarizes this story by saying, "Jesus Christ substituted himself in our place. He suffered. He died physically. He was separated from the Father and the Holy Spirit and died spiritually. He did so as a substitute in our place. He did so to pay the penalty for our sins because the wage for sin is death," a succinct overview of Reformed penal substitutionary atonement theology.<sup>355</sup>

Driscoll and co-author Gary Breshears introduced an idiosyncratic alternative into the Armenian-Calvinist debate, arguing for a position called "unlimited limited atonement," or modified Calvinism. Driscoll and Breshears argue that, "by dying for

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<sup>350</sup> Vermurlen, "Reformed resurgence," 30-38.

<sup>351</sup> Mark Driscoll and Gary Breshears. *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 268.

<sup>352</sup> Mark Driscoll. "Jesus Died in Our Place," Sermon, Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, October 2, 2005, [http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20051002\\_jesus-died-in-our-place\\_en\\_transcript.pdf](http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20051002_jesus-died-in-our-place_en_transcript.pdf).

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid*

everyone, Jesus purchased everyone as his possession, and he then applies his forgiveness to the elect—those in Christ—by grace, and applies his wrath to the non-elect—those who reject Christ."<sup>356</sup> The distinction is subtle, but allows the modified Calvinist to understand Christ's death on the cross as sufficient for accomplishing salvation for all people, although only the elect are in effect saved. In practice, this position still understands substitutionary atonement as accomplished totally by God through Jesus—human agency plays no role.

### **Tenets of New Calvinist Theology in Mars Hill Church's Music**

In a review of the lyrics in songs performed at Mars Hill from around 2003 forward, selected hymn covers and original songs written by a wide variety of Mars Hill song leaders began to stress tenets of Calvinist theology, emphasizing God's sole sovereignty, penal substitutionary atonement, and humanity's total depravity. These starkly compare to the lyrics in *Mars Hill Worship One* (1998) detailed in chapter three. For example, Joe Day's 2002 song "Tomorrow" describes God's cosmic sovereignty saying, "Tomorrow, Lord is yours/Lodged in your sovereign hand/And if its sun arise and shine/It shines by your command."<sup>357</sup> This message is echoed in the hymn cover "Praise to the Lord," originally written by German Calvinist theologian and hymn writer Joachim Neander in 1680, first recorded by a band at Mars Hill around 2003. The hymn opens, "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation," and continuing in a later verse

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<sup>356</sup> Driscoll and Breshears, *Doctrine*, 270.

<sup>357</sup> Joe Day, "Tomorrow." *Grace*, November 2010.

"Praise to the Lord who o'er all things so wondrously reigneth," exalting God's power and order.<sup>358</sup>

Original songs and hymn covers in this era also began to center the total depravity of humankind and the distance from God human agency creates, often personalizing this message through use of first-person narrative. Team Strike Force's 2001 "New Found Hope" introduced this concept into Mars Hill's worship songs, saying, "I bought my own destruction/Thought I could run/But you sought me, brought me back." "Consume Me," an original song by Team Strike Force, opens, "My illness I held, forever in love with/All the things I should have hated/Perpetuating the distance between us/Like a river flooding its bed," depicting how the perversion of human desire creates a chasm between God and humanity.<sup>359</sup>

God is depicted as the sole agent intervening to secure salvation for the elect. For example, Tim Smith's band The Parsons introduced the hymn cover "'Tis Not that I did Choose Thee" around 2004, written by British Congregationalist Josiah Conder in 1836. It opens, "'Tis not that I did choose Thee/For a war that could not be/This heart would still refuse Thee/hast Thou not chosen me," indicating God's sole intervention in securing salvation.<sup>360</sup> Joe Day's 2002 "I Look at the Cross" centers God's agency on the redemption story, saying "redemption came and gave me a name."<sup>361</sup> As Red Letter's "Confession" states, "I've been chosen."

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<sup>358</sup> The Parsons, "Praise to the Lord," live recording, Mars Hill Church, Seattle, October 3, 2003.

<sup>359</sup> Team Strike Force, "Consume Me," *Tension*, Mars Hill Records, 2001.

<sup>360</sup> The Parsons, "'Tis Not that I Did Choose Thee," live recording, Mars Hill Church, Seattle, February 29, 2004.

<sup>361</sup> Joe Day, "I Look at the Cross," 2002.

Consistent with Mark Driscoll's hypermasculine image of Jesus as a "pride fighter with a tattoo down His leg, a sword in His hand and the commitment to make someone bleed" detailed in chapter four, Mars Hill's music often included graphic, violent, and extreme imagery to communicate theological ideas.<sup>362</sup> Though some images come from Biblical sources or hymn covers, many originate in the imaginations of Mars Hill's hymn writers. For instance, Mars Hill musicians occasionally selected or wrote songs that depict the bodily torment associated with Jesus' atoning death in gruesome images of blood and wounds. Tim Smith's band introduced a cover of the hymn "Nothing But the Blood of Jesus" around 2002, beginning, "What can wash away my sin?/Nothing but the blood of Jesus/ What can make me whole again?/Nothing but the blood of Jesus," and repeating the refrain throughout the song.<sup>363</sup> Similarly, Joe Day's original song "I Look at the Cross" (2002) states, "I look at the blood/Pours down from his wounds/Scars which should have been mine." The song "One Righteous Man" (2008) by Joel Brown delivers a gruesome picture of atonement, stating,

Despite any plea, the verdict will be:  
 "Guilty as charged! Now, beat him till no one can tell...  
 Who He once was, then hang up His body with nails!"

Surely up there, our sorrow He bears  
 See how He shakes, life slowly escapes  
 The King is crushed, collapsing his lungs  
 Showering the nations in blood  
 Yet this is the way His Father has chosen to pay  
 One righteous Man has many more righteous men made<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> Mark Driscoll, Rob Bell, Lauren Winner, et. al., "Seven Big Questions on Where the Church is Headed," *Relevant Magazine*, 24 (2007). Accessed October 25, 2017, [http://web.archive.org/web/20071013102203/http://relevantmagazine.com/god\\_article.php?id=7418](http://web.archive.org/web/20071013102203/http://relevantmagazine.com/god_article.php?id=7418).

<sup>363</sup> The Parsons, "Nothing But the Blood," live recording, Mars Hill Church, Seattle, August 4, 2002.

<sup>364</sup> Red Letter. "One Righteous Man" by Joel Brown, 2008.

God's wrath is depicted as violent and deserved by humans, though heaped onto Jesus as a substitutionary sacrifice.

Songs indicate that humans not only deserve God's vengeance and torment, but that these modes deserve reverence. As mentioned in the last chapter, Team Strike Force's approach to songwriting sometimes "extrapolated to our utmost extremes" with exaggerated imagery.<sup>365</sup> Team Strike Force's song "Destructor" celebrates God's destruction of the earth saying, "from the first time you flooded the earth/to the last time you burned off the curse/to the way that you hated your Son/when you hung all the sins of the world," each examples of the how "God will have his glory one way or another."<sup>366</sup> It paints a graphic image of the apocalypse where "the host of God will come to destroy" the earth because "sin is a declaration of war."<sup>367</sup> Such destruction is even depicted as bringing God pleasure, as indicated in Joel Brown and Cam Huxford's song "You Have Opened My Mouth" that states "His delight is when we become broken inside."<sup>368</sup> Across a range of authors and examples, Mars Hill's depiction of Calvinism and substitutionary atonement theology sometimes borders on the masochistic.

While less violent, many more songs take the theology of God's sole sovereignty a step further to emphasize God's sole authorship of any worshipful or positive action enacted by humans, totally removing individual agency. In Joel Brown's 2007 "Led to the Slaughter," asks God to "expose our prideful motives," "clothe us with humility," and

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<sup>365</sup> Jeff Bettger. Interview with the author. Seattle, WA, October 24, 2014.

<sup>366</sup> Team Strike Force. "Destructor" by Luke Abrams, Jeff Bettger, and Joel Brown, 2000.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid

<sup>368</sup> Red Letter. "You Have Opened My Mouth" by Joel Brown and Cam Huxford IV, 2008.

even somatically "collapse our knees beneath us."<sup>369</sup> So too does Brown's 2006 "Author and Perfecter" consolidate God's sole agency to "change us from the inside" and "turn us from the foolish ways we go."<sup>370</sup> Void of verbiage indicating the plausibility of action, the singers may implore God to act, but only God holds sole agency, ranging from somatic action to spiritual purification. In a broad range of hymns from Mars Hill's canon, the church's iteration of Calvinism consistently, and sometimes violently, emphasizes the total impotency of human action or self-efficacy in the face of God's totalizing control and wrath.

Contrary to the idea of God's total agency, however, several songs depict the humanity's rotten and contrarian tendencies by depicting a degree of free will that always results in a sinful path. Red Letter's 2006 "Confession" opens with an evocative description of disobedience saying, "I was obstinate, my neck: an iron tendon/my head was like a stone/I did what I wanted/wretched, wretched, bound/gagged and shackled/You give life—I ignored it."<sup>371</sup> Brown's "Led to the Slaughter" states, "we have sought a savior in garbage heaps," evidence of humans' ability to seek, but never find, a salvific path.<sup>372</sup>

Songs do indicate one mode of agentive action reserved for the elect: that of effusive praise of God. For example, Team Strike Force recorded a cover of St. Francis of Assisi's "All Creatures of Our God and King" (1225) hymn in 2006 that begins, "All creatures of our God and King/Lift up your voice and with us sing/Alleluia! Alleluia!"

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<sup>369</sup> Red Letter. "Led to the Slaughter" by Joel Brown, 2007.

<sup>370</sup> Red Letter. "Author and Perfecter," Joel Brown, 2006.

<sup>371</sup> Red Letter. "Confession" by Joel Brown, live recording, 2007.

<sup>372</sup> Brown, "Led to the Slaughter."

continuing through several verses that implore the moon, the wind, the clouds, the earth, and "all things" to praise God.<sup>373</sup> The opening lyrics to "Oh, Great is Our God," an original Mars Hill song written by Brian Eichelberger in 2009, also gushes with exuberant praise:

Oh, great is our God, and we should worship greatly  
 No song is too loud, no orchestra too stately  
 To hail the majesty of our King  
 So lift our voices loud as we sing<sup>374</sup>

The song continues in this mode, stating "let everyone give thanks because our God is great." Many other original songs and covers, such as "How Great Thou Art" and "Praise to the Lord," reiterate this theme of unequivocal praise.

Even while musicians like Joel Brown contributed significantly to the production of a New Calvinist musical repertoire, in an interview with Brown, he recognized how Mars Hill's interpretation of Calvinist doctrine resulted in a narrow theological orthodoxy. Brown described the origins of New Calvinism's narrow doctrinal focus as rooted in New Calvinism's reactionary, oppositional posture to both the modern worship movement and liberal theology. According to Brown, New Calvinism adopted a narrow set of doctrinal positions, like penal substitutionary atonement and TULIP theology, as a definitive counter-response to such ambiguities. By primarily defining their positions and theologies against other movements in American Protestantism, though, Brown found Mars Hill divorced from the breadth of Reformed theology, even ignoring the varied theological foci and the doctrinal nuances contained in Calvin's own writings.<sup>375</sup> For

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<sup>373</sup> Team Strike Force, "All Creatures of Our God and King," live recording, January 1, 2006.

<sup>374</sup> The Sing Team. "Oh! Great is Our God!" by Brian Eichelberger, 2009.

<sup>375</sup> Joel Brown. Interview with the author. Tacoma, WA, July 14, 2015.

instance, on TULIP theology, Brown contended, Calvin "may have agreed with it, but the five points of Calvinism weren't written by Calvin. Those kinds of things were responsive."<sup>376</sup> Brown emphasized that Calvin himself articulated a wealth of perspectives contra the orthodoxy of New Calvinism.

### **Embodying and Ritualizing Reduced Self-Efficacy**

While Driscoll's preaching offered churchgoers ideas for contemplation, defining and staking theological positions, the act of singing, much like recitation, implies not the exterior contemplative, but the interior incorporative, taking positions into or onto one's own body. Judith Butler's 2015 *Notes on a Theory of Public Assembly* posits that this acting in consort produces a body politic, even while it may be temporary.<sup>377</sup> While Butler argues for co-present bodies' potential to disrupt conventional power hegemonies, I argue that the collective participation gathered bodies singing personalized Calvinist theology based around human inefficacy produced a discursive hegemony, an agreed-upon center for understanding the futility human agency to produce anything good.

By singing about personal depravity, dessert of somatic punishment, and total inefficacy to choose the good, Mars Hill's music suggested a sense of decreased self-efficacy on the part of the individual, an issue detailed by political scientists Madsen and Snow in their 1991 study of charismatic leadership.<sup>378</sup> Madsen and Snow argue that self-efficacy, defined as "the subjective assessment of one's own capacity to deal with environmentally-posed challenges," influences a broad range of coping efforts,

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

<sup>377</sup> Judith Butler. *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 9.

<sup>378</sup> Douglas Madsen and Peter G. Snow. *The Charismatic Bond: Political Behavior in Time of Crisis* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1991).

"including physiological stress reactions, thought patterns, and emotional responses."<sup>379</sup>

Drawing from the Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, they posit that "people who perceive themselves to be efficacious are prepared resolutely to confront environmental demands."<sup>380</sup> Those who believe themselves to lack efficacy, especially amid crisis whether political or personal, are vulnerable to what Bandura calls "proxy control," seeking security in bonding with a "dominant and seemingly effective figure"—oftentimes a leader who appears to act on their behalf, but also seems approachable and within the sphere of influence.<sup>381</sup> Madsen and Snow note that this tendency is particularly prevalent in religious organizations, and evident in the language surrounding conversion.

The ritualization of decreased self-efficacy increasingly generalized across spheres of the church alongside a cognate of submission to God's will. These tenets framed many of Mars Hill's theological positions. By Bandura's hypothesis, consistent ritualization of this lack of self-efficacy produced a power vacuum for a proxy leader, perceived as capable of enacting the agency denied the individual. Mars Hill's canon of songs plainly attribute this agentive power to God through Jesus; however, a review of Driscoll's rhetoric reveals slippage between Driscoll's often coercive requests of congregation members and other leaders, and attributions of such acts to God's plan or mission.

For instance, in a 2007 sermon, Driscoll outlined three instances where Mars Hill congregants quit professional, high-paying jobs to volunteer or work for the church. One story detailed how he had long courted James Noriega, the pastor of Doxa Church in

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 15.

West Seattle who served as a drug and alcohol counselor through Union Gospel Mission, to conjoin his church with Mars Hill.<sup>382</sup> According to Driscoll,

I said, "Give us the building, resign as elders, work through the membership process, work through the eldership process. I guarantee you nothing – no power, no job, no eldership. If you meet the qualifications and the men vote you in, we'll make you an elder, but I guarantee you no job. Nothing. If you believe it's right for Jesus, give us the building, resign, give up all power of authority, give up your position. Walk away from it all for the cause of Jesus." He said, "Okay, I think it's best for Jesus." He resigned, voted to hand us the building and the people.<sup>383</sup>

Attributing the ask to Jesus, Noriega gifted a \$5 million, 50,000 square-foot building with an extant church zoning permit to Mars Hill—one Driscoll reported a long-standing interest in obtaining.<sup>384</sup> Noriega ceded his professional position and dissolved his church organization, including staff positions.

Driscoll framed Noriega's submission to his will in a supposed no-strings-attached gift through the theological lens of submission to God. The church elders soon voted Noriega onto the Mars Hill Board of Directors, a position framed as independent from this massive gift. Driscoll justified this arrangement by a pivot to grace saying of Noriega, "God opposes the proud and he gives grace to the humble."<sup>385</sup> Entangled in this message was an inextricable conflation of God's will and Driscoll's amid a Calvinist frame that easily confused one for the other.

This heavy-handed de-emphasis of individual efficacy or agency evident in the church's music soon infected Mars Hill's ecclesial structure via the church bylaws (see Figure 8). Prior to 2007, Mars Hill's bylaws stated that a team of elected executive elders

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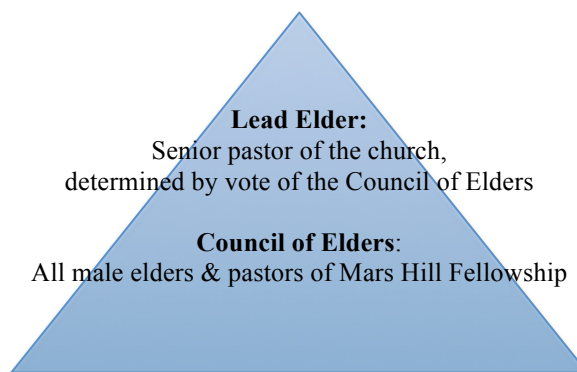
<sup>382</sup> Mark Driscoll. "Joy in Humility," Sermon. Mars Hill Church, Seattle, November 4, 2007.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Mark Driscoll. "Prayer and Planning," Sermon. Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, February 25, 2007.

<sup>385</sup> Driscoll, "Joy in Humility."

had legal authority to oversee the "organizational influence" over the entire church.<sup>386</sup> According to Article VI of these bylaws, these elders underwent a nominating and voting process for approval, and served a two-year term.<sup>387</sup> Article VII then specifies that the broader elder council, consisting of several dozen members, held executive power to review and vote on any contentious issue. While the elder board is conceived as a co-equal power arrangement, Article I establishes that "the Council of Elders determines a lead elder, who functions as the first among equals and is the lead pastor for the church," thus creating a two-tier hierarchy. However, the bylaws do not delegate any reserved executive powers to the lead pastor aside from the vaguely-worded responsibility to lead the Elders and church in obedience to God and scripture.<sup>388</sup>



**Figure 8: Mars Hill's leadership hierarchy established by bylaws prior to 2007**

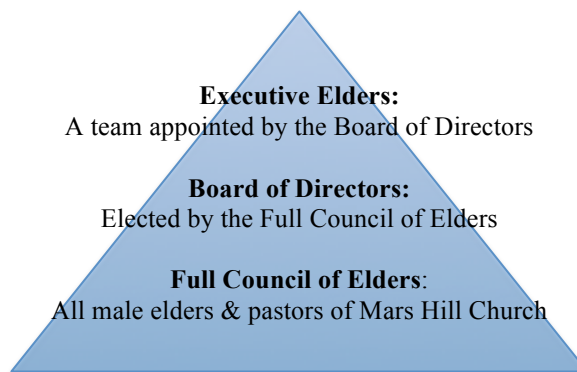
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<sup>386</sup> "Bylaws of Mars Hill Fellowship," *Joyful Exiles*, accessed October 27, 2017, <https://joyfulexiles.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/bylaws-prior-to-10-29-2007-official-mars-hill-church-bylaws-2-11-06-rev.pdf>.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*

This coequal power arrangement soon changed. In 2007, Driscoll proposed bylaws changes to change the governance structure to a three-level ecclesial hierarchy with an intermediate Board of Directors<sup>389</sup>:



**Figure 8: Mars Hill's leadership hierarchy established by 2007 bylaws**

The newly-created Board of Directors assumed sweeping executive power, inclusive of control over bylaws, disciplinary procedures, the ability to overrule Executive Elders, and manage money and property.<sup>390</sup> The 2007 bylaws also installed a permanent appointed Executive Elder Team, sometimes called "Executive Pastors," within the Board of Directors, tasked with "establishing a vision for the church," and "directing and managing" Mars Hill operations. The Executive Pastors appointed in 2007 consisted of preaching pastor Mark Driscoll, lead pastor Jamie Munson, and pastors Scott Thomas and Tim Beltz.

<sup>389</sup> "Bylaws of Mars Hill Fellowship," September 25, 2007, accessed October 27, 2017, <https://joyfulexiles.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/elders-by-laws-revised-draft-by-pastor-paul-petry-9-25-2007.pdf>.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

Article IV delegated limited reserved powers to the Full Council of Elders, including election of the Board of Directors, approval to any amendments to Mars Hill's doctrinal statement, discipline or removal of an elder, and approval of any changes to the bylaws.<sup>391</sup> Even while the bylaws shifted the main executive duties to the Board of Directors and Executive Elder team, the bylaws established a process by which the Full Council of Elders could overturn any decision made by the upper-tier management.<sup>392</sup> However, the bylaws divested the Full Council of Elders of their coequal executive status, functionally consolidating power into the hands the Executive Elder Team and Board of Directors. This change enabled a more dexterous Mars Hill enterprise capable now of very rapid growth, requiring minimal consent, a point that will be detailed in the next chapter. But it had the important auxiliary function of legally disempowering the broader elder board.

The restriction of elder power occurred in lockstep with Driscoll and Mars Hill's increasing fame in New Reformed circles and use of selective Calvinism in worship. Yet these changes to the bylaws lay bare the selective interpretation of the Reformed tradition to which Driscoll subscribed. Calvin, though partial to deferent obedience, advocated for a mixed government of aristocracy and democracy marked by collegial checks and balances of power in civic and ecclesial polity.<sup>393</sup> Thus one interviewee remarked, "Mark says he's Reformed, but he basically explicitly rejects all of the checks and balances in ecclesiology that anyone who's actually Reformed would say need to be in there. You

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

<sup>393</sup> Harro Höpfl. *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 126.

need interior and exterior accountability."<sup>394</sup> Driscoll's church, dramatically oriented toward rapid growth and entrepreneurialism, would progressively remove mutual accountability in order to accommodate unencumbered expansion, replacing collegiality with a strident hierarchy.

Within the church, this consolidation of authority drew criticism, though namely from several interior elders who rightly recognized the usurpation of their share of power. Staff elders Paul Petry and Bent Meyer publically debated Driscoll's bylaw changes.<sup>395</sup> Driscoll, in turn, criticized their stance by citing their disobedient "unhealthy distrust in the senior leadership" and "disregarding the accepted elder protocol" as justifications.<sup>396</sup> In a sermon called "Fathers and Fighting" delivered shortly thereafter, he rebuked "obstinate" church leaders saying, "they need to be dealt with in a very strong manner," which could include firing spiritual leaders.<sup>397</sup> According to a letter written by Paul Petry on January 26th, 2008, Driscoll fired Meyer and Petry immediately after preaching this sermon.<sup>398</sup>

On January 27th, 2008, one day after the "Fathers and Fighting" sermon, Driscoll delivered an address for an Acts 29 meeting intersecting the church's mission and a prescription for dealing with debate or shared power within that mission. Driscoll

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<sup>394</sup> Jeremiah Lawson. Interview with the author, Seattle, WA, July 3, 2015.

<sup>395</sup> Janet I. Tu. "Firing of pastors roils Mars Hill Church," *The Seattle Times*, last modified November 18, 2007, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/firing-of-pastors-roils-mars-hill-church/>.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.; <https://joyfulexiles.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/09-14-2007-statement-for-trial.pdf>

<sup>397</sup> Mark Driscoll. "Fathers and Fighting," Sermon. Mars Hill Church, Seattle, September 30, 2007, [http://download.marshall.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20070930\\_fathers-and-fighting\\_en\\_transcript.pdf](http://download.marshall.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20070930_fathers-and-fighting_en_transcript.pdf).

<sup>398</sup> [http://download.marshall.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20070930\\_fathers-and-fighting\\_en\\_transcript.pdf](http://download.marshall.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20070930_fathers-and-fighting_en_transcript.pdf)

articulated a clear and straightforward hierarchy of authority in his remarks, tacitly centering Driscoll's vision for mission as the rightful one and his authority as sole guide:

You cast vision for your mission; and if people don't sign up, you move on....

Too many guys waste too much time trying to move stiff-necked, stubborn, obstinate people. I am all about blessed subtraction. There is a pile of dead bodies behind the Mars Hill bus (laughs) and by God's grace it'll be a mountain by the time we're done.

You either get on the bus or you get run over by the bus. Those are the options; but the bus ain't gonna stop. And I'm just a—I'm just a guy who is like, "Look, we love ya, but, this is what we're doing."

There's a few kinda people. There's people who get in the way of the bus—they gotta get run over. There are people who wanna take turns driving the bus—they gotta get thrown off.<sup>399</sup>

In these remarks, Driscoll drew from a passage in Isaiah quoted in the lyrics to Joel Brown's song "Confession" (2006) to rebuke "stiff-necked," "obstinate" pastors within Mars Hill's organization. Further, the church's definition of mission is altogether changed from its earlier missional definition, previously understood as an approach to culture recognizing the universality of God's creative overflow. The terminology of mission is muddled, as Driscoll instead describes the church's mission as the singular vision he cast.

### **New Calvinism's Theology of Gender Complementarianism**

New Calvinism offered a theologized system of authority and submission, based around God's sole sovereignty. Another New Calvinist uniting tenet, gender complementarianism, also aided in formalizing and theologizing Driscoll's perspective around gender roles described in chapter four. Institutionally, gender

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<sup>399</sup> Ken Silva. "Mark Driscoll's dead bodies and Chris Rosebrough with 'another one's off the bus,'" *Apprising Ministries*, last modified July 3, 2012. Accessed October 26, 2017, <http://apprising.org/2012/07/03/mark-driscolls-dead-bodies-and-chris-rosebrough-with-another-ones-off-the-bus/>. Silva embedded a recording of Driscoll's remarks on his blog post.

complementarianism is advocated by the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW), founded in 1987 by New Calvinist figures Wayne Grudem, John Piper, and Wayne House. In 1991, Crossway Books, the leading publisher of New Calvinist titles and authors, published *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, a collection of essays edited by Grudem and Piper, a text that continues to frame the major theological arguments around gender dynamics within the New Calvinist movement.<sup>400</sup>

Even while Driscoll introduced concepts related to women's position as the "complementor," "helper," and "completer" of men as early as 2001, Driscoll first explicitly introduced the language of gender complementarianism in 2006 in a sermon called "Under Authority Like Christ."<sup>401</sup> In the sermon, he defined gender complementarianism as a belief that men and women are created as ontological equals in the eyes of God, but also should occupy distinct positions in the church, home, and society. Complementarianism posits that women and men are partners in every aspect of ministry aside from the office of elder, a position that includes executive leadership and preaching and teaching duties. In a later document, Driscoll describes this division of labor thusly: "Paul emphatically commanded that women should not teach or have authority over men in the church," a mandate that restricts women to leadership roles

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<sup>400</sup> *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991).

<sup>401</sup> Mark Driscoll. "Men as Husbands," Sermon. Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, November 4, 2001. [http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20011104\\_men-as-husbands\\_en\\_transcript.pdf](http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20011104_men-as-husbands_en_transcript.pdf); Mark Driscoll. "Under Authority Like Christ," Sermon. Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, July 23, 2006, [http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20060723\\_under-authority-like-christ\\_en\\_transcript.pdf](http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20060723_under-authority-like-christ_en_transcript.pdf).

over other women and children.<sup>402</sup> While women may participate in ministry, only men—"manly men"—may serve in roles as teachers and authorities, particularly in executive roles.<sup>403</sup> By 2010, Mars Hill named gender complementarianism as one of the church's four core values.<sup>404</sup>

In Driscoll's 2006 "Under Authority Like Christ" sermon, his view of gender complementarianism indicates its roots in functional subordinationism, an unusual interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Trinitarian theology regards the ontology of God, understood as simultaneously three persons—God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit—and one, monotheistic God. Functional subordinationism posits a hierarchy of submission among the members of the Trinity that is understood as analogous to male-female relationships.<sup>405</sup>

Functional subordinationism is a minority view of Trinitarian theology that gained broad traction among New Calvinists via an essay by Thomas Schreiner in Grudem and Piper's edited collection.<sup>406</sup> In the essay, Schreiner claims adherence to a Nicæan ontological understanding of the Trinity of consubstantiation, but advocates that an eternal functional hierarchy characterizes the relationship between the three persons, arguing that because Jesus submits to God's will in New Testament passages, functionally

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<sup>402</sup> "This is Mars Hill: 2010 Annual Report," [https://halfabridge.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/20110130\\_mars-hill-church-annual-report-fy10\\_document.pdf](https://halfabridge.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/20110130_mars-hill-church-annual-report-fy10_document.pdf).

<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

<sup>405</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner. "Head Coverings, Prophecies, and the Trinity: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 128.

<sup>406</sup> This is also variously called Eternal Subordination of the Son (ESS), and Eternal Functional Authority-Submission (ERAS)

God and Jesus do not operate as equals.<sup>407</sup> Schreiner's argument then exegetes 1 Corinthians 11:3: "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God," using this passage to argue, that, as described by Millard Erickson, "God's headship over Christ is to be taken as a teaching that the Father has authority over the Son, and this implies that the man has similar authority over the woman."<sup>408</sup> The essay thus advances the view that Jesus' eternal functional submission to God models proper relationships between men and women.<sup>409</sup> In his "Under Authority Like Christ" sermon, Driscoll follows Schreiner's argument verbatim.

While the Eternal Functional Subordinationist perspective is widely espoused by New Calvinists advocating gender complementarianism, few other theologians adopt this view. The conventional doctrine of the Trinity posits a monotheistic God who exists in three parts. In brief, Trinitarian theology solidified under Emperor Constantine in the third century when the ecumenical Council of Nicaea affirmed consensus around this doctrine in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.<sup>410</sup> The creed defines the relationship between God and Christ as coequal and consubstantial, with Jesus "begotten, not made,

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<sup>407</sup> Such doctrine does not seem to implicate the Holy Spirit, but Driscoll does highlight the etymology of a Greek word often translated as "spirit"—paraclete, a term meaning counselor or helper. Some critics regard this controversial view a revised Arian heresy. (Athanasius)

<sup>408</sup> Millard Erickson. *Who's Tampering with the Trinity?: An Assessment of the Subordination Debate*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2009), 34.

<sup>409</sup> Schreiner situates his interpretation of the term "head" in broader context, citing to antecedent theologian Charles Hodge's 1907 *Systematic Theology*. Dave Miller also locates antecedents in the writings of systematic theologians Augustus Hopkins Strong (1907), Louis Berkoff (1941), and Charles Hodge (1871): Dave Miller, "The Eternal Subordination of the Son is the Historic Doctrine of the Church," *SBC Voices*, last modified January 26, 2011, accessed October 27, 2017, <http://sbcvoices.com/the-eternal-subordination-of-the-son-is-the-historic-doctrine-of-the-church/>.

<sup>410</sup> "Nicene Creed," *Encyclopædia Britannica* online, accessed October 24, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nicene-Creed>

of one being" with God. In the same way, the Holy Spirit proceeds from God and Jesus, a unified ontology of substance, intention, and divinity, described the theologian Francis Joseph Hall as "one and undivided," "co-equal in essence as well as co-eternal."<sup>411</sup> Conventional views of the Trinity do not generally advocate a hierarchy between the members. Thus functional subordinationism has drawn critiques from a variety of theologians whose concerns range from cautious skepticism to accusations of heresy.<sup>412</sup>

In Mars Hill's music, this gender hierarchy was performed in numerous ways. Mark Driscoll advocated for a clear gender binary and highly divergent performances of masculinity and femininity, especially in idealized performative masculinities desired in worship music leaders (described in chapter 3). As Driscoll tightly regulated queer identities through viciously anti-trans\* discourse, any personnel promoted to leadership within Mars Hill also conformed to binarian, cis-hetero performances of gender, including within music ministry teams. I will thus refer to male and female voices, acknowledging the trans\* and queer erasures this binarian formation promotes.

Although women were permitted to play in and even lead bands at Mars Hill, in practice, only a few examples surface in which women play a leading role. In a review of around 100 song recordings by nine different bands of both live and studio recorded songs between 1999 and 2006, I found most recordings featured both men and women singing amplified vocals. However, only around thirteen recordings feature a woman singing the lead vocal part. In the remainder, women sing back-up harmony vocals. When women did sing the lead melody, however, I found only three examples where a male

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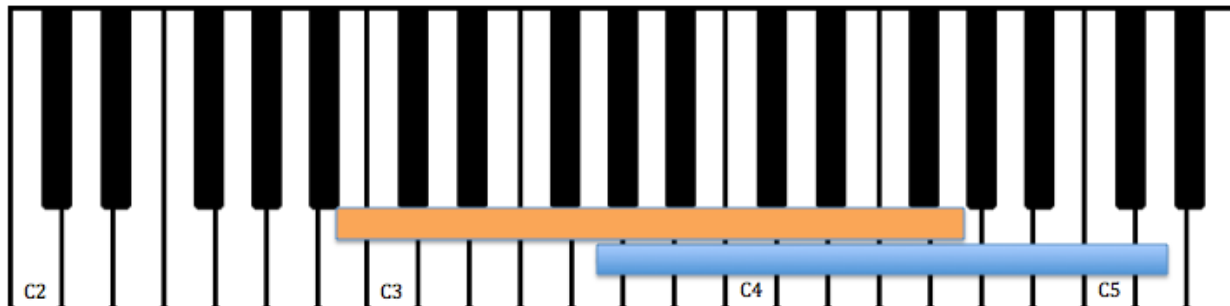
<sup>411</sup> Francis Joseph Hall. *The Trinity* (New York, London, Bombay, and Calcutta: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910), 148.

<sup>412</sup> Kevin Giles details these debates in *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debates* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

vocalist sang a back-up or harmony part. Usually, when a woman sings melody, other women sing harmony. With a few exceptions, these performance practices are consistent with Mars Hill's adoption of the view that men should lead other men and women, while women may only lead other women.

The gender disparity in music leadership and roles remained fairly consistent throughout Mars Hill's existence. Several bands, including the Ball and Chain Gang (jokingly named so because it was led by several married couples), Mint, and, somewhat ironically, Sons of Thunder featured women as their main lead singers. Each of these bands dissolved by 2010, and while other bands like Kenosis and Ghost Ship sometimes featured lead female vocalists on select songs, no future bands with regular female lead singers surfaced in the church's latter years.

While male and female songleaders usually performed the same songs in similar arrangements, an analysis of performances of randomly-selected songs reveals a disparity with regard to pitch range between male and female lead vocalists, one way in musicians performed binarian gender formations. As shown in Figure 9, when male voices led songs, their pitch range usually extended from a low pitch of B2 to a high pitch of C4. A few outlying voices, notably tenor Luke Abrams of Team Strike Force who sings a G4 on the band's 2001 recording of the song "New Found Hope," reach beyond these pitches. Female voices often sing an octave above this range, with the majority singing between B3 and B4. However, their outlying pitches reach much lower, down to a G4, and not quite as high, up to a D5.



**Figure 9: The top bar represents the range of pitches sung by male lead singers in randomly selected examples across a range of bands between 2001-2005. The lower bar represents the range of pitches sung by female leaders in every example found from 2001-2005.**

This disparity of range combined with the near-exclusive leadership of male vocalists at Mars Hill ritualized submission through musical performance, limiting experiential performances of genuine worship to the male voice. As an example, "Oh! Great is our God!," an original song written for Mars Hill worship by Brian Eichelberger in 2009, is a simple verse-chorus pop song. The song opens with a solo acoustic guitar strumming two bright major chords, accompanied by percussive hand-claps.<sup>413</sup> A crowd of vocalists begin the verse, and sing together throughout the song. However, the voices have a distinct hierarchy in the sonic mix. Only one voice, Eichelberger, sings in a lower octave (D3-B3), and his voice is mixed much louder than the others. Eichelberger sings in a rich full voice in the center of his range. A choir of higher voices, singing in the range D4-B4, sing together in unison, an octave above Eichelberger. This chorus of voices sounds ambient behind Eichelberger. They index group singing during Mars Hill's service, but the individual singers' voices are not identifiable. Thus an individual male voice sonically "leads" a choir of female singers.

During the chorus, sung in a slightly higher range, Eichelberger's voice rises to meet higher voices, and they sing in unison. Here, the key changes from bright D major,

<sup>413</sup> The Sing Team, "Oh! Great is Our God!" by Brian Eichelberger, 2009.

and the chords center around A minor (the minor dominant) and remain destabilized throughout most of the chorus. The subject of the song's lyrics also shifts from singing about God in the third person to singing to God in second person. This destabilized chord progression coincides with the words "We sing your praise and pour forth your fame/we will bless your name/let everyone give thanks, because our God is great." During this destabilized time talking directly to God, Eichelberger's voice rises up and sings in a range from A3-G4, in the same range as the female singers. One can hear the strain in Eichelberger's voice on the higher notes, but he never "crosses" into falsetto, continuing to perform in his full voice, despite the high range.

Eichelberger's strained voice indicates a sense of yearning, a value musicologist Monique Ingalls connects to the semiotics of authenticity within American evangelical worship music. Authenticity in evangelical discourses is centered around performer intent, and privileges worship to God over personal gain. Ingalls recognizes that vocal or bodily techniques that index effort, including straining to reach certain notes, or contorting the face into serious, impassioned expression create markers of "authentic" or worshipful expression.<sup>414</sup> Thus when Eichelberger sings this chorus in the high part of his range, the strain in his voice authenticates his passion. Eichelberger strains again to sing a portion of the next verse, "we sing from our souls, affected by His greatness," performing his soul's affect.

This authentication was unavailable, then, to the female voices in the band in the chorus of this song. The song's chorus is centered around notes in Eichelberger's upper-mid range, around A3-D4. While this is a comfortable range for the male voice, these are

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<sup>414</sup> Monique Ingalls. "Awesome in this Place: Sound, Space, and Identity in Contemporary North American Evangelical Worship," (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 211-12.

mid-to-low range notes for a typical female voice. Only on Eichelberger's strained notes do the women sing in their mid-range, an expression of comfort and not effort. The embodied semiotics of the vocal performance in "Oh! Great is Our God!" thus suit discourses of authenticity for the male voice only. In the most impassioned portion of the song, women sing in their low chest voices, while the men reach and yearn for higher notes, indexical of a higher status with God.

Given the pronounced dimorphic qualities of male and female voices privileged at Mars Hill, one must wonder whether these performed rituals of piety and devotion are equally accessible by members of "both" genders within the Mars Hill context. The band's primary responsibility surrounded group leadership, encouraging congregants to experience God and group solidarity through the performance of music. The lyrics of "Oh! Great is Our God!" illustrate the importance of collective singing, featuring only collective pronouns. But the embodied experience and attendant affect in the majority of Mars Hill's songs are "written in/on," and thus native to, a male voice, marginalizing the female range of expression and access to authentic worship, a performance of women's "eternal functional submission" to men.

### **Conclusion**

Driscoll's adoption of and acceptance into the networks of New Calvinism systematized elements of his theological system, extending from church governance to gender, to center a hierarchy of authority and submission. These principles, ritualized in various ways through the music ministry, eventually participated in two outcomes: Mars Hill's first major restructuring of their ecclesial governance, divesting elders of a degree of power, and the increasingly formalized view and practice of gender

complementarianism of women's eternal functional submission to men. The next chapter discusses further changes to Mars Hill's leadership structure and music in a season of massive growth, showing how both New Calvinism and Mars Hill's success problematized the "blue collar gospel" of earlier eras. Mars Hill shifted away from a punk rock ethos to fully embrace indie rock, meanwhile standardizing its Calvinistic lyrics.

## Chapter Six

### **Multisite Expansion: Music, Structure, and Identity Amid an Era of Proliferation and Growth-Oriented**

Mars Hill's acquisition of a 40,000 square-foot warehouse in Ballard allowed the church to seat 1,000 people at each service and, by December 2005, the church held four services every Sunday, with Driscoll preaching at 9:00 AM, 11:15 AM, 5:00 PM and 7:15 PM.<sup>415</sup> But the church continued to grow beyond this capacity, and congregants surpassed the limits of the space. The next phase of growth soon catalyzed enormous changes in the structure at Mars Hill. In 2006, the church leaders expanded Mars Hill Ballard into a second building and added a satellite campus in Shoreline, the suburb immediately north of Seattle.<sup>416</sup> In this new plant, instead of following the former model with a new autonomous church with its own local preacher (consistent with the Acts 29 model), Mars Hill experimented with a new technology-oriented model on the rise in churches across America: the multisite church.

Every Sunday, Driscoll preached a live sermon at Ballard. The next week, the recorded sermon would play as a movie on the big screen at the Shoreline campus.<sup>417</sup> Even while Shoreline maintained its own lead pastor who occasionally preached, small groups, elders, deacons, and worship band, the bulk of the Sunday service would feature

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<sup>415</sup> "Who We Are: Our History," *Mars Hill Church*, website captured May 2, 2006, accessed October 27, 2017, [http://web.archive.org/web/20060502191939/http://lite.marshillchurch.org:80/site/who\\_we\\_are/our\\_history/](http://web.archive.org/web/20060502191939/http://lite.marshillchurch.org:80/site/who_we_are/our_history/); "New for the Week" *Mars Hill Church*, archived website captured December 27, 2005, accessed October 27, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20051227095959/http://lite.marshillchurch.org:80/>.

<sup>416</sup> "Mars Hill Expansion: New building scheduled to open fall 2006," *Vox Pop*, December 4, 2005, 8; "Sunday Services," *Mars Hill Church*, archived website captured February 2, 2006, accessed October 27, 2017, [http://web.archive.org/web/20060202013224/http://lite.marshillchurch.org:80/site/sunday\\_services/](http://web.archive.org/web/20060202013224/http://lite.marshillchurch.org:80/site/sunday_services/).

<sup>417</sup> Mark Bergin. "The North Face: Shoreline campus offers model for future Mars Hill expansion," *Vox Pop*, December 4, 2005, 3.

Driscoll's hour-long "video sermons" on the big screen.<sup>418</sup> This new multisite adjustment offered a replicable model for expansion, and set the new agenda for Mars Hill's rapid church proliferation from 2006. By the end of that year, Mars Hill purchased properties in the West Seattle and Lake City neighborhoods, and established Mars Hill satellite campuses at each.<sup>419</sup> By the end of 2007, Mark Driscoll preached remotely at five Mars Hill locations throughout the Seattle area: Ballard, Downtown, Eastside, Shoreline, Wedgwood, and West Seattle.<sup>420</sup>

In many ways, this new multisite era, marked by an increasingly consolidated Calvinist message, Driscoll's rising singularity as the preaching pastor across every church, and new changes in bylaws that endowed a small minority of leaders with the majority of executive oversight, included massive shifts in the church's identity and brand. In this chapter, I argue that Mars Hill's blue-collar punk rock identity began to recede in this era, replaced by indie rock, a genre with punk roots that had largely abandoned its working class associations and politics by the mid-2000s. I show how Mars Hill's music ministry increasingly adopted the aesthetics, logics, and performances of masculinity from indie rock, simultaneously interrogating the major changes in the indie rock field that repositioned it as a music for upper-middle class, educated "nerds"—producing a music culture suited to the privileged identities within New Calvinism. Lastly, I trace a shift in executive oversight within Mars Hill's music ministry that renegotiated theological and performative priorities and prescriptions.

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<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

<sup>419</sup> "History," *Mars Hill Church*, archived website captured August 19, 2008, accessed October 28, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20080819022926/http://www.marshillchurch.org/about/history>.

<sup>420</sup> "Home," *Mars Hill Church*, archived website captured December 14, 2007, accessed October 28, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20071214113517/http://www.marshillchurch.org:80/>

## Proliferation of Music for New Multisite Churches

Mars Hill's newly centered mission of church growth and the emphasis on submission that accompanied it precipitated a change in the structure and function of church music. In the prior era, the different Mars Hill locations each hosted one or more bands to lead regular worship services. In 2002, Mars Hill's website archive hosted material from fourteen different bands.<sup>421</sup> It appears that bands often exchanged personnel and song arrangements, even covering original songs written in other churches in the Acts 29 network.<sup>422</sup> By 2003, the consolidation of disbursed churches to one central location met a concomitant reduction in musicians, centering a small minority of personnel. In 2004, the church website shows only four remaining bands, including the long-running Team Strike Force, the new Ball and Chain Gang (BCG), and two bands led by music director Tim Smith (The Mars Hillbillies and The Parsons).<sup>423</sup>

The new multisite franchise model brought a quick turnaround, from consolidation to proliferation. The five multisite churches established in 2006-07 required an infrastructure capable of blending live and recorded worship elements in a widening

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<sup>421</sup> "Worship Archives: Music Archives," *Mars Hill Church*, archived website captured December 5, 2002, accessed October 28, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20021205210619/http://marshill.fm:80/worship/archives.htm>. Archives include performances by The Parsons, Smith Family Gospel Singers, Team Strike Force, Self Improvement, The Transients, Jesse Smith Band, The Excursion, Paradox Worship Consortium, Paradox Worship Team, They Who Shall Remain Nameless, Sons of Thunder, Buck Lopez and the Amazing Tabernacle Choir, Mars Hill Glee Club, Ezekiel's Cookout, and the Lee Majors. The 1997 release from the Mars Hill Worship Team still featured on the website, as did the two 2002 releases, *Advent* and *Tension*, found here: <http://web.archive.org/web/20021205130523/http://www.marshill.fm:80/worship/index.htm>.

<sup>422</sup> Joe Day. Interview with the author. Phone interview, September 28, 2016. Unfortunately, few music credits remain from that era as the website from 2002-2003 is almost entirely scrubbed from Internet history.

<sup>423</sup> "MP3/Audio: Worship Music: Bands," *Mars Hill Church*, archived website captured August 22, 2004, accessed October 28, 2017, [http://web.archive.org/web/20040822003959/http://lite.marshillchurch.org/site/mp3\\_audio/worship\\_music/bands/](http://web.archive.org/web/20040822003959/http://lite.marshillchurch.org/site/mp3_audio/worship_music/bands/). See the left sidebar. A few members also established a classical choral ensemble for the Advent season in 2003.

variety of locations. Even while the sermon was broadcast from a distance, services at every campus opened and closed with music played by a live band. As Mars Hill planted new churches, so too did new bands surface. Such rapid growth required recruitment of new musicians capable of leading multiple services at each respective campus on a given week.

Under the leadership of Tim Smith and other long-running band members Matt Johnson, Joel Brown, Brian Eichelberger, and Nathan Burke, the church began to announce quarterly open calls for new musicians.<sup>424</sup> From September 2007 to September 2008, Mars Hill had grown its music ministry from eight to eighteen bands, ranging from throwback dance pop to roots rock to blues-funk.<sup>425</sup> Early in 2009, Driscoll claimed 8,000 weekly churchgoers, and put out a broad call for "Nine Hundred Men" to help plant new churches and lead bands; following this push, Smith estimated that at its height he managed a music staff of 40, and between 200 and 300 volunteer musicians.<sup>426</sup>

Following in the missional model at the core of Mars Hill's identity, each band's makeup and sound loosely matched the perceived artistic preferences of their core demographic constituency. Eichelberger, in his early 20s, led pop-indie music inspired by

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<sup>424</sup> Matt Johnson. "Making the Band Follow Up," *Vox Pop Network*, last modified January 30, 2008, accessed October 28, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20080404103618/http://voxpathnetwork.com:80/doxologist/2008/01/30/making-the-band-follow-up/>.

<sup>425</sup> "Song Repository," *Vox Pop Network*, archived website captured September 7, 2008, accessed October 28, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20080907025805/http://voxpathnetwork.com/doxologist/bands-songs/>. Bands included Achilles Heel, Ashborne, Brothers of the Empty Tomb (BET), Dawn of Eschaton, E-Pop, Ex Nihilo, Ghost Ship, Gospelcopter, The Justice League, Loma, Mint, Northern Conspiracy, Red Letter, Rocket Minor, Sons of Thunder, Team Strike Force, and Torn Curtain. <http://web.archive.org/web/20080907025805/http://voxpathnetwork.com/doxologist/bands-songs/>

<sup>426</sup> Mark Driscoll. "I Need Nine Hundred Men: Calling All Potential Church Planters and Multi Site Campus Pastors," *The Resurgence*, archived website captured February 16, 2009, accessed October 27, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20090216191114/http://theresurgence.com/>.

bands like Death Cab for Cutie, Ben Folds, Lovedrug, Sufjan Stevens, and MuteMath at the Ballard campus, a moderate walk from Seattle Pacific University and hip, up-and-coming downtown Ballard.<sup>427</sup> Day, then in his late 20s, relocated from an Acts 29 church in Mount Vernon, an hour North of Seattle, to lead an acoustic folk band inspired by Emmylou Harris, Tom Waits, and The Arcade Fire for a majority young families in the suburb of Shoreline.<sup>428</sup> This model would loosely continue; however, by generically tailoring proliferate bands to expanding demographics, the newly-established Mars Hill core brand, with Driscoll's face and persona at the center, faced dilution.

Acknowledging Mars Hill as a "predominantly a white-bread bunch," Gareth Best, in his mid-30s and a founding member of Chicago jump band The Mighty Blue Kings, connected with "white soul singer" James Armstrong to lead a "soul-inflected Motown-ish" band in West Seattle.<sup>429</sup> Calling themselves the Brothers of the Empty Tomb, or the BET, an obvious play on Black Entertainment Television, descriptions of the band trafficked in similar racial tropes, describing Armstrong's performances in an afro wig, and noting that the band would be helpful in teaching Mars Hill "a sense of rhythm and learning to clap along to the backbeat."<sup>430</sup> While black musicians and genres of music rarely featured at Mars Hill, and often received tokenized or exotic treatment (a point I will detail further in the following chapter), Best's significant experience as a jump blues musician propelled the band to create soul- and funk-inspired arrangements of

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<sup>427</sup> "Bands that Rock the Flock," *Vox Pop*, December 3, 2006, 8.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>429</sup> Matt Johnson. "Brother from Another Mother: How James Armstrong became a Brother of the Empty Tomb," *Vox Pop*, December 3, 2006, 6.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

Mars Hill's favorite tunes, covering original songs by other Mars Hill musicians, performing hymn covers, and writing new material for Mars Hill's more suburban West Seattle campus.

Mars Hill member Mike Hansen also introduced the Mars Hill community to a broader segment of Reformed evangelical music. Hansen, a long-time fan of 1990s hip hop and an alleged aspiring "hip hop mogul," became an avid listener of Christian hip hop music after converting to Christianity in his 20s.<sup>431</sup> He soon founded God's Block ministries to stage Christian hip hop shows in Seattle, supporting local artists like Willie Will, also a Mars Hill member, and raising money to host touring artists.<sup>432</sup> God's Block particularly championed the work of Reformed hip hop artists on labels like Cross Movement Records, Lamp Mode Recordings, and Reach Records, bringing big-name talent like Lecrae, Flame, and The Ambassador to Seattle.<sup>433</sup> Hansen maintained God's Block as an autonomous ministry, but Mars Hill Church provided support through funding, media, and advertising, inviting artists like Lecrae to perform during Mars Hill worship services while on tour.<sup>434</sup> Out of this partnership, Lecrae and Driscoll formed a relationship. Lecrae featured as one of the few African American voices at Resurgence events, and even sampled Driscoll and other New Calvinist preachers on his albums.<sup>435</sup>

### **Becoming an Indie Church**

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<sup>431</sup> Andrew Myers. "This Ain't Your Block, This Is God's Block," *Vox Pop*, June 3, 2007, 12.

<sup>432</sup> Mike Hansen. Interview with the author. Phone interview, September 8, 2016.

<sup>433</sup> Myers, "This Ain't Your Block," 12-13.

<sup>434</sup> Hansen, interview with the author.

<sup>435</sup> Lecrae Moore. "Rebel Intro, feat. Mark Driscoll," *Rebel*, Reach Records, September 30, 2008; "Killa (What is Sin), feat. Mark Driscoll," *Rehab*, Reach Records, September 28, 2010.

The transition of both the church and the venue to Ballard and the rapid growth of new multisite church locations coincided with a slow but perceptible genre shift in the music privileged by Mars Hill Church, especially in the church's congregational music ministry. The church no longer fostered an identity that coalesced with punk rock values, especially as the church's orientation toward a "blue collar gospel" seemed at odds with the church's upward mobility and a far less welcoming systematic theology, Reformed theology, predicated on predestination's permanent exclusions—not everyone was welcome, either by the church or into eternal salvation. Everyman punk rock and its close cousins of hardcore, grunge, and alt-country moved from the center of Mars Hill's music into the outer recesses. Even while other genres like soul and hip hop found a place in Mars Hill's music ministry, mid-2000s indie rock formed the core of Mars Hill's sound.

### **The Rise of Indie Rock**

In many ways, indie rock's symbolic and cultural system served as an ideal music to accommodate these class- and status-based changes at Mars Hill, yet still maintain the outsider-status and concomitant subcultural capital that animated both Mars Hill and the broader New Calvinist movement. The term indie, simply referring to independent music, first arose to define the anti-capitalist ethic of production musicians in the punk rock era of the 1970s, described at length in chapter three. As punk rock's co-constitutive marginal position in terms of social class and aesthetics began to expand outward into new genre categories, associations with the working class began to shift. As explored in chapter four, grunge rock maintained punk's marginal working class identity, but introduced a dose of sarcasm as the genre burst into—and would come to comprise—the mainstream.

As grunge grew increasingly popular, it broadened the category of inclusion, shifting the performance of white social marginality to those who felt a sense of apathetic disaffection in the 1990s—ironically incorporating white, middle-class suburban teenagers who regarded themselves disaffected. Thus the boundaries of center and periphery in pop and rock music grew murky and complicated, especially with regard to the marginal social status of post-punk music and its fans, now no longer defined by economic class.

Following the market success of grunge's marginal-as-center revolution in the 1990s, the emerging "marginal" category of hip, offbeat indie rock followed a swift path to the mainstream. Artists like Kimye Dawson, Leslie Feist, and Kevin Barnes each initiated their artistic careers with indie labels, and—unlike Nirvana whose move to the "Big Six" Warner subsidiary Geffen Records precipitated their success—remained associated with indie labels well into their epochs of popularity. Yet these artists on indie labels increasingly found success by conventional music industry metrics. For instance, the 2005 *Garden State* soundtrack, featuring indie artists like Frou Frou, The Shins, and Iron and Wine's cover of Postal Service sold 1.3 million copies and was certified Platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America.<sup>436</sup> Kimye Dawson's twee-pop 2007 soundtrack to the film *Juno* hit number one on the *Billboard 200* chart.<sup>437</sup> Feist's 2007 album *The Reminder* earned four Grammy nominations and five Juno

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<sup>436</sup> Michael Paoletta. "One Man, One Soundtrack," *Billboard*, September 22, 2007, 32; Reggie Ugwu, "Listening in the Abyss: The Lasting Legacy of the 'Garden State' Soundtrack," *Buzzfeed News*, last modified August 4, 2014, accessed October 28, 2017, [https://www.buzzfeed.com/reggieugwu/the-garden-state-soundtrack-at-10?utm\\_term=.vwJl5m8Mj#.faW1vVg2k](https://www.buzzfeed.com/reggieugwu/the-garden-state-soundtrack-at-10?utm_term=.vwJl5m8Mj#.faW1vVg2k).

<sup>437</sup> "Billboard Charts Archive: Billboard 200 - 2008 Archive," *Billboard*, accessed October 27, 2017, <http://www.billboard.com/archive/charts/2008/billboard-200>;

awards.<sup>438</sup> By 2011, Canadian indie band Arcade Fire won the U.S. Grammy for Album of the Year, the Canadian Juno for Album of the Year, and the Brit Award for Best International Album for their third album, *The Suburbs*, originally released on indie label Merge Records in 2010.<sup>439</sup>

In spite of the veneer of indie's market success, early 2000s indie artists came of age in an era of significant cultural shifts within the mass media industry. In 1999, nineteen year-old college dropout Shawn Fanning launched a pioneering new platform called Napster. Napster allowed users to share files "peer-to-peer," or P2P, and gained mass popularity when users discovered they could share their digital music libraries through the platform. Other users all over the country and world could then download these files. The site gained popularity quickly, growing to 80 million users in a few years, and inspiring copycat services like Gnutella, Kazaa, Morpheus, and Audiogalaxy.<sup>440</sup>

This explosion in the availability of professionally recorded music precipitated cultural shifts in commercial music production and consumption that influenced the direction of indie rock. Services like Napster seemed to take a sledgehammer to the industry conglomerates, creating a platform—albeit an illegal one—that enabled users to quickly and easily acquire these products for free. Many young people in the era obtained vast libraries of free music from these services, each album worth about \$12 to \$15 if purchased in a record store. The record industry began to panic as these services undermined their consumer base. A 2004 study by Forrester Research estimated that

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<sup>438</sup> "The Reminder," *Wikipedia*, accessed October 28, 2017, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Reminder](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Reminder).

<sup>439</sup> "The Suburbs," *Wikipedia*, accessed October 28, 2017, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Suburbs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Suburbs).

<sup>440</sup> Michael Gowan. "Requiem for Napster," *PC World*, last modified May 18, 2002, accessed October 28, 2017, [https://www.pcworld.idg.com.au/article/22380/requiem\\_napster/](https://www.pcworld.idg.com.au/article/22380/requiem_napster/).

Internet file sharing undermined record labels' revenues by an estimated \$700 million.<sup>441</sup> In response the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) sued Napster and upwards of 18,000 individuals who used the platform.<sup>442</sup> Yet the RIAA's hopes of halting the ruin of its business model never materialized. Napster and other services offered a seductive platform for music fans to listen to new, unknown albums and artists easily and freely, now untethered to the economic scarcity inherent in paying a steep price for each individual album. Even while not buoyed by the marketing apparatuses of "Big Six" backed artists, indie artists now could circulate through fan networks and find new listenerships.

However, in the long run, record labels large and small found themselves struggling to innovate revenue streams in a new era of freely available music, and responded by signing fewer artists and offering more limited benefits. Over time, artists began to experiment with a new series of strategies for obtaining market success via individualized, neoliberal alignment with the capitalist marketplace. For example, the band OK Go (a band described as "indie" even though they signed to Capitol Records in advance of their freshman 2002 album) grew frustrated with their "Big Six" label when Capitol disabled embedding services on a 2006 video that had gone viral, thus limiting the video's reach.<sup>443</sup> By 2010, OK Go decided to break with Capitol to found their own label, Paracadute. The band then pursued a corporate sponsor relationship with State

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<sup>441</sup> David Hajdu. "The iPod Blues," *The New Republic*, March 29, 2004, 25.

<sup>442</sup> Amanda Holpuch. "Minnesota woman to pay \$220,000 fine for illegally downloaded songs," *The Guardian*, last modified September 11, 2012, accessed October 27, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2012/sep/11/minnesota-woman-songs-illegally-downloaded>.

<sup>443</sup> Helen Walters. "Inside the OK Go/State Farm Deal," *Media Buzz*, accessed October 28, 2017, <http://mediabuzz.monster.com/news/articles/903-inside-the-ok-go-state-farm-deal>.

Farm Insurance who, since then, has funded and advertised through OK Go's series of zany, creative music videos that routinely go viral. While the sponsorship model is unique, individualized corporate relationships are common: In 2007, Feist featured in an Apple commercial and Barnes' band Of Montreal starred in a spot for T-Mobile, among many others.<sup>444</sup>

Since the early 2000s, indie artists have often remained "independent" due to the economic realities of the consumer marketplace. With depressed revenues, major labels sign fewer artists, and with the Internet's many platforms for self-promotion, labels expect artists to cultivate a recognizable brand and large fan base in advance of signing in order to ensure financial viability through live concerts, merchandise, and special fan perks. Given these realities, indie artists exhibit a much different attitude toward punk's DIY economic purity, regarding the neoliberal domain of the marketplace positively when it functions in their favor. In 2007, Of Montreal's Kevin Barnes openly defied the trope of the punk rock "sell out," viewing the capitalist marketplace as an arena of metaphorical sexual power and dominance:

[S]elling out is a good thing. It is an important thing. If we didn't do it, we'd be fucked, quite literally, by everyone bigger than us physically who found us fuckable.

The pseudo-nihilistic punk rockers of the 70's created an impossible code in which no one can actually live by. It's such garbage. The idea that anyone who attempts to do anything commercial is a sell out is completely out of touch with reality. The punk rock manifesto is one of anarchy and intolerance. The punk rockers polluted our minds. They offered a solution that had no future.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> "1234 iPod Video Nano Ad," YouTube video, 00:30, posted November 13, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvTQ1ZhaSjo>; "Of Montreal T Mobile Commercial," YouTube video, 00:30, posted November 19, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEsog-acVIA>.

<sup>445</sup> Kevin Barnes. "Selling Out Isn't Possible," *Stereogum*, last modified November 16, 2007, accessed October 28, 2017, [http://www.stereogum.com/7208/of\\_montreal\\_art\\_brut\\_do\\_tmobile/franchises/op-ed/](http://www.stereogum.com/7208/of_montreal_art_brut_do_tmobile/franchises/op-ed/).

Barnes continues as an apologist for capitalism, saying “it’s impossible to be a sellout in a capitalist society,” and admonishes his audience to think about how to manipulate the system for personal gain.<sup>446</sup>

### **Indie's Operational Logic: Otherness and Class-Based Elitism**

Although indie emerged from the aesthetic stream and anticapitalist logics of punk rock, it transformed and was transformed by shifts in the music industry markets, re-inventing punk's Do-it-Yourself orientation within an atomized, adrift Internet culture of free music and necessary self-promotion. Yet, discourses around indie also show the persistence of another punk trope—an enduring sense of otherness—that has remained a differentiating mechanism simultaneously separating indie from the mainstream and from its musical antecedents.<sup>447</sup> Oakes describes this otherness as “one of the operative tenets of indie culture,” but contrasts this dimension of indie subculture with the outsider trope in punk rock. Even while the music industry proved inaccessible to artists for economic reasons, indie fans and artists grew to critique the music mainstream's profit-obsessed systems and broadly-appealing aesthetics as undesirable, homogeneous, suburban, middle-of-the-road and populist: an indictment of its unoriginality and low-brow status. As demonstrated by Barnes' quote above, over time, punk rock's class critique eventually evaporated from indie's operational logic, replaced by what indie scholar Tony Kirschner

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<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

<sup>447</sup> Kaya Oakes. *Slanted and Enchanted: The Evolution of Indie Culture* (New York: Holt Paperback, 2009), 63.

calls "the production of class difference and elitism" marked by "a temperate atmosphere of modesty and restraint."<sup>448</sup>

This class dimension crucially shifted indie's posture toward the mainstream, even while still oppositional. As described in chapter three, punk rock's anticapitalist posture of resistance arose as a response to the inaccessibility of the mainstream record industry. Punks responded to the inaccessibility of the recording industry by doing it themselves—recording on discarded or outdated systems, procured for free or cheap. But, a generation later, this independence from studios interlaced with a sense of disruption borrowed from the tech world, thus proffering status—indie's consumers differentiated their art from the mainstream by highlighting indie's entrepreneurial and experimental approach to music not easily consumed by the mainstream masses. Nitsuh Abebe, reviewing the past "Decade in Indie" for the preeminent indie blog *Pitchfork* in 2010 called indie "pop music for the thoughtful person--the *sophisticated* boom boom," "artisanal-rock" of math nerds, twee boys, lo-fi analog purists, avid record collectors, and so on.<sup>449</sup>

Much like Mars Hill's blue collar gospel, various streams of indie drew its "art rock" connotations from a pastiche of antecedents drawn from Anglophone white rock history—spanning The Carter Family, The Velvet Underground, David Bowie, David Byrne, Leonard Cohen (though primarily the 1960s white pop/rock stream)—mimicking the songwriting styles, vocal affect, instrumentation, gear, and recording technology

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<sup>448</sup> Tony Louis Kirschner. "Producing class: Indie rock and cultural studies," (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2002), 9 and 5.

<sup>449</sup> Nitsuh Abebe. "The Decade in Indie," *Pitchfork*, last modified February 25, 2010, accessed October 28, 2017, <https://pitchfork.com/features/article/7704-the-decade-in-indie/>.

evident on these records.<sup>450</sup> David Buckley argues that "post-punk revivals of older musical styles...highlighted the increasingly reflexive nature of music making" drawing faithfully from a "variety of genres and styles."<sup>451</sup> Thus new musical production morphed from an act of innovation to an act of "musical archaeology." Quoting David Buckley's history of R.E.M., he continues, "a great rock group ... needed a pop *historian* [emphasis in the original]."<sup>452</sup> By extension, indie connoisseurs fostered a preference for meticulous vintage-style artisanship, ranging from the musical to the technological. In the digital age, capable of transforming every laptop into a low-budget recording studio, these preferred articles of technology—vinyl records, vintage gear, analog tape studios—in fact cost a great deal more to produce (and consume).<sup>453</sup> Yet, they evince the cultivated palate, historical knowledge, aesthetic sensibilities, and broad musical vocabulary theoretically required to adequately appreciate "sophisticated," high-brow indie music, all evidence of its burgeoning status as the music of the bourgeoisie.

Indie's class dimension is further indicated by its close relationship to spheres of higher education.<sup>454</sup> The artistic contributions of college students and other young people in their surrounding areas fostered robust and dense youth culture-oriented environments crucial for indie music's flourishing—even while most college students do not necessarily listen to indie music. Instead, non-commercial college and educational radio

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<sup>450</sup> Matthew Bannister. "'Loaded': indie guitar rock, canonism, white masculinities," *Popular Music*, 25, no. 1 (2006), 77-78.

<sup>451</sup> Matthew Bannister. *White Boys, White Noise: Masculinities and 1980s Indie Guitar Rock* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 128.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>453</sup> Bannister, "Loaded," 89.

<sup>454</sup> Kirschner, "Producing class," 106.

stations have long served as indie music's most reliable network of distribution.<sup>455</sup>

Further, networks of small-scale fanzines and newspapers, simple low-budget recording equipment, cassette tape distribution, local venues, and college radio stations championed non-commercial music.<sup>456</sup> Colleges also offered entertainment budgets and student-oriented venue scenes at their peripheries, thus growing as hospitable stops for touring bands.

Against this backdrop, Kirschener argues, "it is not surprising that many of the most notable American indie scenes have occurred in towns that are home to elite public universities, or at least the 'flagship school' for the region," from Austin, Texas, to Lawrence, Kansas.<sup>457</sup> Seattle's indie scene followed this trend as the city's reputation as a grunge haven for disaffected, poor, uneducated kids like the Nirvana crew receded rapidly. Home to the University of Washington, Seattle University, and Seattle Pacific University, the city's universities soon gained a reputation as destinations for ambitious young people.<sup>458</sup>

The marginal, now conceived as preferable or discerning, status of indie linked with the maintenance of artistic and creative freedom that might result in off-center, excessive, original or otherwise strange approaches to lyrics, form, timbre, and volume. Indie musicians argued that non-major labels fostered space for artistic exploration and variation, vague conditions that posited aesthetic boundaries for "indie" as a genre. For instance, Allmusic.com's definition of indie rock emphasizes that the music dabbles

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<sup>455</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>456</sup> Kirshner details each of these spheres' contributions to the rise of indie in his dissertation.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>458</sup> citation?

widely, free to push boundaries and experiment with sonic extremes, excesses, and even inaccessibility:

The music may be too whimsical and innocent; too weird; too sensitive and melancholy; too soft and delicate; too dreamy and hypnotic; too personal and intimately revealing in its lyrics; too low-fidelity and low-budget in its production; too angular in its melodies and riffs; too raw, skronky and abrasive; wrapped in too many sheets of Sonic Youth/Dinosaur Jr./Pixies/Jesus & Mary Chain-style guitar noise; too oblique and fractured in its song structures; too influenced by experimental or otherwise unpopular musical styles.<sup>459</sup>

Like their punk and grunge counterparts and antecedents, indie labels offered their artists creative control over such excesses without concern for the broadness of its appeal.

With creative control, excess, and experimentation at its center, few meaningful aesthetic conditions mark off indie as an exact genre. Nitsuh Abebe, writing for the high-profile indie blog *Pitchfork*, called "indie" a "baggy, contingent word," a "whole loose umbrella of stuff" that "has usually included huge splits and tensions."<sup>460</sup> Indie critics like Abebe and Sean Nelson (a musician, also), however, understand indie as an ideologically meaningful big tent under which bands and artists as aesthetically varied as Beat Happening, Hüsker Dü, Sonic Youth, Nirvana, Dinosaur Jr., Uncle Tupelo, Belle and Sebastian, Sufjan Stevens, The Shins, David Bazan, M.I.A., and Joanna Newsom might reasonably be grouped.<sup>461</sup>

Citing the strong ideological and identity aspects of indie's claims to marginality, Abebe celebrates indie as "a joyously weird dumping ground for loads of misfit sounds,"

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<sup>459</sup> "Pop/Rock, Alternative/Indie Rock, Indie Rock," *AllMusic*, accessed October 27, 2017, <https://www.allmusic.com/style/indie-rock-ma0000004453>.

<sup>460</sup> Abebe, "Decade in Indie."

<sup>461</sup> Sean Nelson. "Let's (Not) Get it On," *The Stranger*, last modified June 25, 2009, accessed October 28, 2017, <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/lets-not-get-it-on/Content?oid=1740140>.

as a metaphor for the subjectively misfit, malcontented, and off-beat young people who found haven in indie rock.<sup>462</sup> The indie-hipster grew to connote the skinny, glasses-wearing, nerdy, bookish white kid or, as Oakes describes, the “brainy, curious people drawn to schools in smallish towns with good bookstores, coffeehouses, and clubs.”<sup>463</sup> Contrary to punk's and grunge's postures of in-your-face aggression and intentional sonic offensiveness born of working-class masculinities, indie's adherents asserted their "otherness" by way of a sensitive intellectualism, wrought by intelligently keen, wry and discerning culture mavens—the thoughtful, docile, bourgeois bodies of largely white, educated, upper-middle class young people largely located in coastal urban centers or hip college town havens in the so-called flyover states.<sup>464</sup>

Indie music's core fan base coalesced as the oft-maligned "hipster," defined simultaneously by an opposition to pop culture but also by their ironic dominance within emerging pop culture of the late-2000s and 2010s.<sup>465</sup> Similar to grunge's "working class drag," hipsters appropriated cultural signifiers of the working class, adopting plain v-neck tee-shirts, plastic rimmed glasses, vintage bicycles, Converse Chuck Taylor sneakers, Pabst Blue Ribbon beer, and American Spirit cigarette habits key to their differentiated style.<sup>466</sup> This distinctive aesthetic quickly parlayed into successful indie brands built around sales of whimsical vintage-style clothing and retro-kitsch lifestyle products, most

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<sup>462</sup> Abebe, "Decade in Indie."

<sup>463</sup> Deborah Cohen. "How Indie Rock Changed the World," *The Atlantic*, June 2015, accessed October 28, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/06/how-indie-rock-changed-the-world/392057/>; Oakes, *Slanted and Enchanted*, 139.

<sup>464</sup> Kirschener, "Producing class," 112.

<sup>465</sup> Linton Weeks. "The Hipsterification of America," *NPR*, last modified November 17, 2011, accessed October 27, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/2011/11/16/142387490/the-hipsterification-of-america>

<sup>466</sup> Oakes, *Slanted and Enchanted*, 203.

notably Urban Outfitters, owned by Richard Hayne, an ardent Republican and party donor.<sup>467</sup> The self-proclaimed "Godfather of Hipsterdom," *Vice Media* co-founder Gavin McInnes, also has ties to right-wing politics, founding the alt-right-affiliated Proud Boys in 2016, described as a "'Western chauvinist' fraternity" that promotes identity politics for white cis-gender men and opposes "political correctness."<sup>468</sup>

### **Mars Hill Bands**

The growing number of bands at Mars Hill locations fit into this "baggy, contingent" aesthetic category of indie rock. Between 2007 and 2010, the church's number of bands included the female-led electro-pop band Mint, the acoustic duo Sackcloth and Ashes, emo-indie E-Pop, and the darker, sludgier Red Letter. Writing on these bands' sound both church and outside publications stressed links to indie rock figures, bands, and sounds. For instance, an in-church 'zine called *Vox Pop* emphasized how Joe Day's band Northern Conspiracy has more "grit than suburbia – more Pedro the Lion than Michael W. Smith," combining "traditional lyrics with a rocked-out aesthetic for a distinctly Mars-Hillian effect."<sup>469</sup> Key to "Mars-Hillian" sound was a proximal aesthetic with indie bands.

Many other publications of the era highlight Mars Hill's indie rock sound.

Profiling Mars Hill for 2005 *Blender Magazine* article, Ann Powers wrote, "Team Strike

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<sup>467</sup> Jonathan Valania. "Clothes Make the Man," *Philadelphia Weekly*, last modified June 11, 2003. Archived website captured January 11, 2012, accessed October 27, 2017, [http://web.archive.org/web/20120119005736/http://www.philadelphiaweekly.com:80/news-and-opinion/cover-story/clothes\\_make\\_the\\_man-38368134.html?page=3&comments=1&showAll=](http://web.archive.org/web/20120119005736/http://www.philadelphiaweekly.com:80/news-and-opinion/cover-story/clothes_make_the_man-38368134.html?page=3&comments=1&showAll=).

<sup>468</sup> Will Sommer. "The fratty Proud Boys are the alt right's weirdest new phenomenon," *Medium*, February 5, 2017, accessed October 28, 2017, <https://medium.com/@willsommer/the-fratty-proud-boys-are-the-alt-rights-weirdest-new-phenomenon-7572b31e50f2>

<sup>469</sup> Mark Bergin, "New Mars Hill Music: The latest Live CD is a Northern Conspiracy," *Vox Pop*, February 4, 2007, 14.

Force have the earnestness and daring of the best indie rock," noting that their songs "would sound great on college radio."<sup>470</sup> Andrew Beaujon's 2006 book *Body Piercing Saved My Life* notes that Mars Hill's bands are "all dressed, as is most of the congregation, as if they were going to see Weezer."<sup>471</sup> Beaujon quotes Driscoll as stating, "Death Cab for Cutie, Modest Mouse, Karate—that's definitely more what I'm into. I'd much rather have our bands signed to regular labels, in regular bars and clubs."<sup>472</sup> Brett McCracken's 2010 book *Hipster Christianity* described Mars Hill's church's bands as playing "indie rock versions of classic hymns," continuing, "a band called Sound and Vision performed math-rock arrangements of songs including 'How Deep the Father's Love for Us' and 'All Creatures of Our God and King,' complete with Nintendo-sounding beeps."<sup>473</sup> By the mid-2000s, the generic label "indie rock" thoroughly replaced punk and grunge descriptors across Mars Hill's music and journalism, also reading semiotically to visiting journalists across a range of media.

Indie cache would increase as the church's branding and marketing apparatus eventually took hold through a new record label project, initiated in 2012, called Mars Hill Music, which I will analyze in more detail in the next chapter. The church's website featured a guitarist's feet and knees wearing skinny jeans and Converse Chuck Taylors, with one foot poised on a volume pedal on a massive pedal board, a vintage guitar to one

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<sup>470</sup> Ann Powers. "The Emo-Driven Life," *Blender*, December 2005, 137.

<sup>471</sup> Andrew Beaujon. *Body Piercing Saved My Life: Inside the Phenomenon of Christian Rock* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2006), 106.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>473</sup> Brett McCracken. *Hipster Christianity: When Church and Cool Collide* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 119.

side of the frame.<sup>474</sup> The website's band descriptions used "indie rock" as the primary adjective for numerous bands, and otherwise emphasized alternative rock, roots-rock, and folk descriptors, all born out of indie-oriented genres.

In *Hipster Christianity*, Brett McCracken observes that, against the marginal "nerd" masculinities prevalent in the hipster indie rock scene, Driscoll appears as "a curious anomaly of Christian hipsterdom, one that breaks all the traditional rules of being a hipster and yet manages to be strangely attractive to many, many hipsters."<sup>475</sup> While surely Driscoll's fraternity boy-esque masculinity affronted the sensibilities of many Seattle hipsters, the church's increasing intellectualism centered on doctrinal Calvinism, its new location in hipster-centered Ballard, and its upward mobility oriented at once toward disruption and growth discretely intersected with hipster identities and preferences. The church embraced its reputation as indie rock mavens in hipster Christianity.

### **Hipster Christianity: Redefining Masculinity, Reframing Class**

Mark Driscoll's rising status as a New Calvinist star, coupled with the growth of the church's numbers and property acquisitions, required a re-configuration of one of his core positions: that of the white working-class gospel. The New Calvinist coalition is led in large part by figures like Al Mohler and John Piper who hold doctoral degrees, sometimes multiple, and teach and lead in the religious academy. No longer could Driscoll stand among his ministry cohort and lampoon pastors with "more degrees than

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<sup>474</sup> "Mars Hill Music," *Mars Hill Church Archive*, accessed October 28, 2017, <http://marshill.se/marshall/music>.

<sup>475</sup> McCracken, *Hipster Christianity*, 105.

Fahrenheit."<sup>476</sup> Driscoll started at Mars Hill with a Bachelor of Arts degree in communications, but in the mid-2000s quietly pursued a Master of Arts degree in exegetical theology.<sup>477</sup> And, with one of Mars Hill's campuses situated in the University District mere blocks from the University of Washington, the youth-oriented multisite church drew in quite a few degree-seeking college students, and would begin to drift slowly away from working-class subjectivity and the musical genres intersecting that class dimension.

Driscoll came to reframe the Mars Hill "manly man," discussed in chapter four, around the image of the upwardly mobile Seattle yuppie. Writing in 2008, anthropologist Jessica Johnson defined Driscoll's strategy as appealing to "young entrepreneurial men in their 20s and 30s in Seattle," consistent with the church's website which in 2007 described their congregants as spanning "Democrats and Republicans, soccer moms and indie rockers, carnivores and vegans, trendy bohemians and Microsoft nerds."<sup>478</sup> No longer did Driscoll center blue-collar men or punk rock youth, even shifting his characterization of lower-class whiteness to one steeped in stereotypes and caricatures. For instance, in a 2008 sermon, he framed the figure of Noah as "a guy in swim trunks and cowboy boots, drunk on moonshine with a John Deere cap, sitting around playing

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<sup>476</sup> Mark Driscoll. *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 64.

<sup>477</sup> His exact dates of matriculation and graduation are unclear, but Driscoll claims to have received a Master's Degree in Exegetical Theology from the evangelical Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon. "About Pastor Mark Driscoll," *Mark Driscoll Ministries*, accessed October 28, 2017, <https://markdriscoll.org/about/>.

<sup>478</sup> Jessica Johnson, "The Citizen-Soldier: Masculinity, War, and Sacrifice at an Emerging Church in Seattle, Washington," *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 33, no. 2 (November 2010), 333; "What We Believe," *Mars Hill Church*, archived website captured March 30, 2007, accessed October 28, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070330235435/http://www.marshall.fm/ubb/Forum2/HTML/000043.html>.

Texas hold'em [sic] with his uncle daddy, eating Hot Pockets."<sup>479</sup> During the live sermon, he displayed an image of this depiction of Noah, featuring a visibly drunk, unkempt man holding a 12-pack of Pabst Blue Ribbon beer and wearing a NASCAR tee-shirt, a vast departure from the blue-collar exemplars of Driscoll's earlier era.<sup>480</sup>

Though still consistent with staunch gender complementarianism, Driscoll began to emphasize manliness centered on the responsibilities of family headship. In Johnson's account, she states that Driscoll's preached that to "man-up," male congregants must conform to a "neoliberal ideology of responsibility" that included the following prescriptions—"stop having sex outside of marriage, get a job, marry a Christian woman, have kids, and provide for his family."<sup>481</sup> He defined the performative aspects of manliness differently as well, discussing how it can indeed be "masculine for a man to go ice skating and watch the play *Cinderella*" in the context of parenting and family life.<sup>482</sup> The church's 2010 annual report defines the "manly man" not as "those who can punch the hardest, argue the best, or get their own way no matter what," but as those "known for their prayer lives and for modeling Christlike service and being practically responsible in their homes as well as in the workplace."<sup>483</sup> This rhetoric significantly strayed from Driscoll's Ultimate Fighter Jesus, presenting a comparatively docile masculinity.

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<sup>479</sup> Mark Driscoll, "Humor," Sermon. Mars Hill Church, Seattle, January 13, 2008, [http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20080113\\_humor\\_en\\_transcript.pdf](http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20080113_humor_en_transcript.pdf).

<sup>480</sup> Mark Driscoll. "Driscoll's vision of Noah." Filmed January 13, 2008. YouTube video, 1:42. Posted February 14, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7dmIzNMjsU>

<sup>481</sup> Johnson, "Citizen Soldier," 333.

<sup>482</sup> Mark Driscoll. "Men and Marriage," Sermon. Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, January 29, 2012, [http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20120129\\_men-and-marriage\\_en\\_transcript.pdf](http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20120129_men-and-marriage_en_transcript.pdf).

<sup>483</sup> Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears. *Vintage Church: Timeless Truths and Timely Methods* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 65.

Driscoll, now focused on rapidly expanding the Mars Hill franchise by planting new churches, began to center a metaphor of a formal military fraternity, largely supplanting the autonomous MMA or street fighter trope. In a 2007 sermon called "Air War and Ground War," Driscoll defined the parameters and strategies of the war.<sup>484</sup> While he never explicitly defined the war's adversaries, Johnson deduced the enemies as "feminists and 'effeminate' men who skew Biblical gender roles," and "false prophets and liberal preachers."<sup>485</sup> In an interview, Andrew Jacobsen described the two components of Mars Hill's war strategy thusly: "On Sunday, you got the 'air war,' being preaching and music, and that large gospel context. And throughout the week, you've got the 'ground war' being community groups and living life together."<sup>486</sup> The "air war" strategy, according to Driscoll, aimed to reach large masses of people, while the "ground war" intended to reach people individually and within small groups.

In a 2007 video for *The Resurgence*, set in a military cemetery, Driscoll defined "a good soldier" in the church planting war against the mainstream evangelical trope of "a really nice guy who could sing prom songs to Jesus who's really good at setting up chairs," and an image of Jesus as a "gay hippie in a dress," yet another iteration of Driscoll's objective to masculinize Christianity.<sup>487</sup> He portrayed a "good soldier" by contrast as "a guy who can hold his ground, fight heretics [and] weirdos," defining a pastor as someone who is "far more like a soldier readying up for battle than the typical

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<sup>484</sup> Mark Driscoll. "Air War and Ground War," Sermon. Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, June 3, 2007, [http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20070603\\_air-war-and-ground-war\\_en\\_transcript.pdf](http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20070603_air-war-and-ground-war_en_transcript.pdf).

<sup>485</sup> Johnson, "Citizen Soldier," 338.

<sup>486</sup> Andrew Jacobson. Interview with the author, Seattle, WA, June 6, 2015.

<sup>487</sup> Mark Driscoll. "A Good Soldier." *The Resurgence*, YouTube video, 09:06. Posted April 28, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrIKbCz3n4>.

pastor who's able to just love people and counsel them," continuing, "the body count is really high in the church planting war." Driscoll centered the paramount role of the pastor in the war, on a mission to gather men (especially those in their 20s) and "force" them to become manly men. Intermingling this war imagery with comparatively docile middle class mores consistent with gender complementarianism's male headship, the video emphasizes how churches should teach young men "how to get married," "how to have sex with their wife at least once a day," "how to have money," how to have children," "how to pay their bills," "how to father their sons," and instruct their daughters.<sup>488</sup>

Notably, Driscoll prescribes the "mission" in the war through images of "gathering" and "forcing," a departure from the "attractational" and "missional" rhetoric of Mars Hill's earlier era (described in chapter three). With the urgency of a war metaphor, Driscoll portrayed Mars Hill churchgoers as missionaries on "Crusade" as a unified fraternal army of masculine church planters on a mission under Driscoll's command, compelled by the duty to serve the church.<sup>489</sup> The duty of submission, rooted in Driscoll's interpretation of Calvinist theology, was thus portrayed as central to this mission. The companion notes to a 2007 sermon clarified that this war could not be fought with politics, morality, behavior modification, religion, or education.<sup>490</sup> Rather, the document emphasized that in order to "glorify God and make Jesus beautiful to a lost world" one must foremost "a) Be submissive to rulers" and "b) Be obedient to appointed authorities,"

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<sup>488</sup> Ibid.

<sup>489</sup> Driscoll, "Air War and Ground War" sermon.

<sup>490</sup> Scott Thomas. "Titus: Setting Things Straight: From Chaos to Christ," sermon notes. Mars Hill Church, July 29, 2007, [http://download.marshall.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20070729\\_doing-good-in-a-bad-world\\_document\\_9223.pdf](http://download.marshall.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20070729_doing-good-in-a-bad-world_document_9223.pdf).

later emphasizing "order in our church."<sup>491</sup> To grow the Mars Hill fraternity, the church fostered a deferent militaristic hierarchy of pastor-leaders and congregant-soldiers, defining the role of music minister as comprising the front line of the air war.

Mars Hill's shift to a multisite model coincided with a tipping point in Mars Hill's national reputation and success. While Driscoll, first tapped as a keynote speaker by the Leadership Network circa 1996, had long toured the conference circuit as a guest speaker on young adult ministry, his reputation spread following the release of his 2006 book *Confessions of a Reformission Rev: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church*.<sup>492</sup> As discussed in chapters two, three, and five, Driscoll staked the ground of Mars Hill's theology and identity in the portmanteau of the reformed and missional movements, coining the term "Reformission" in 2004. In his 2006 book, he plotted a history of Mars Hill Church from founding to present, using his church's story as an instruction manual in missions, church governance, and religious entrepreneurship that grew Driscoll's little Antioch church plant from zero to ten thousand people in ten years. By the end of 2006, Acts 29 claimed over 85 church plants in the United States, as well as churches in Canada and India.<sup>493</sup> Mars Hill Church, meanwhile, tracked attendance at between four and five thousand people every week, and was named the 15th fastest-

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<sup>491</sup> Ibid.

<sup>492</sup> Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformission Rev*.

<sup>493</sup> "All Churches," *Acts 29 Network*, archived website captured January 25, 2007, accessed October 28, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20070125095616/http://www.acts29network.org/all-churches/>.

growing church in the U.S. by *Outreach* magazine and the 23rd most influential church in the U.S. by *The Church Report* magazine.<sup>494</sup>

No longer a hard-scrabble, barely-solvent DIY entity, Mars Hill's close relationship to the Seattle punk and early indie rock scene began to recede. After transitioning to their Ballard campus, the church closed down The Paradox theater venue in the U District in February 2003. It eventually emerged again at the Ballard campus a year later under direction of managers Alicia Blake and Liz Martin; however, the relationship between The Paradox and the church changed with Blake and Martin explicitly calling it a "landlord/tenant situation," stressing the distance between the church's increasingly public anti-feminist and homophobic stances and the venue's open-door policy.<sup>495</sup> Soon after, in October 2006, Mars Hill staff informed Blake and Martin that the church would dissolve the agnostic venue in an effort to "tie the all-ages music venue in closer to the church."<sup>496</sup> While Mars Hill staff hoped keep the venue afloat, it never recovered its status as a preeminent Seattle performance space, thus divorcing itself from the broader Seattle music scene. Seattle-area pastor and indie rock drummer Alissa

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<sup>494</sup> "Press Room: Mars Hill Vitals," *Mars Hill Church*, archived website captured December 19, 2006, accessed October 28, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20061219235707/http://beta.marshillchurch.org/Content/PressRoom>.

<sup>495</sup> Megan Seling. "Underage: At the New Paradox," *The Stranger*, November 20, 2003, accessed October 28, 2017, <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/underage/Content?oid=16333>; Megan Seling. "Underage: Skinny Productions," *The Stranger*, November 30, 2006, accessed October 28, 2017, <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/underage/Content?oid=110908>; Alicia Blake and Liz Martin. "Letters to the Editor: The Paradox Rocks," *The Stranger*, May 18, 2006, accessed October 28, 2017, <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/letters-to-the-editor/Content?oid=34055>.

<sup>496</sup> Megan Seling. "Changes at the Paradox," *The Stranger*, October 12, 2006, accessed October 28, 2017, <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/changes-at-the-paradox/Content?oid=87896> .

Newton opined that the church may have already brought aboard "enough cool, young people from the Paradox to not need it anymore" to attract new members.<sup>497</sup>

### **Disrupting Uniformity: Theological and Sonic Multivocality**

Amid this period of expansion, Driscoll's sole presence as lead preaching pastor across churches had the effect of clearly standardizing the weekly message at every Mars Hill church location. But music genre and repertoire maintained some of the artistic mutivocality upon which Mars Hill was founded. In 2008, the church published a "Song Repository" with live recordings and song sheets from sixteen different bands.<sup>498</sup> Over 250 unique performances are represented here, with nearly 140 different songs. Around thirty of these songs were performed by multiple bands, but the vast majority of songs—over 100 songs—were idiosyncratic, performed only once by a single band. These unique performances show how the proliferation of Mars Hill's franchises led to an initial explosion in musical expression across campuses where bands retained autonomy to write new music and author new hymn arrangements with little standardization or oversight.

While many songs from the song repository drew from Biblical passages or classic hymnody to maintain continuity with Driscoll's Calvinist theology as described in the previous chapter, three examples illustrate various divergences from Mars Hill orthodoxy. E-Pop's "I Will Praise You as Long as I Live," written by bandleader Brian

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<sup>497</sup> Kathleen Tarrant. "How Christianity Infiltrated Seattle Music with a Little Help from Mars Hill Church and the City Council," *The Stranger*, December 23, 2015, accessed October 27, 2017, <http://www.thestranger.com/music/feature/2015/12/23/23297826/how-christianity-infiltrated-seattles-music-scene-with-a-little-help-from-mars-hill-church-and-the-city-council>.

<sup>498</sup> "Song Repository," *Vox Pop Network*.

Eichelberger in 2005, represents the pop-rock side of Mars Hill's music.<sup>499</sup> Bright, major-chord, straight quarter-note guitar chunks underscore fluid, syncopated vocals during the verses, but reduce to a lush string duet on the pre-chorus before breaking into an anthemic chorus. While lyrically the song, a paraphrase of Psalm 63, follows the Bible-based conventions of Mars Hill music, its second verse harkens CCM's permeable barrier between love songs and worship music saying, "all day I think of you. In my bed at night I cannot help but think of you. Because you are my help, my soul clings to you—you're the only thing that holds me up." The song suggests an obsessive, nearly erotic yearning for the object of the song, presumably God or Jesus, but never explicitly named. Within Mars Hill's rhetoric, such compositional strategies in worship music is coded as feminine, and thus stands in contrast to Mars Hill's masculinized worship music at large.

The Shoreline campus band Northern Conspiracy's cover of Taylor Sorensen's "Gloria 34" (a paraphrase of Psalm 34) counters the emerging Calvinist theme of God's sovereignty.<sup>500</sup> The song begins, "I sought for the King and he heard me," placing the initiation of the relationship between God and the lyricist in the hands of the latter. Later, the chorus beckons "all you people" to "taste and see that the Lord is good," a universalist departure from theologies of limited atonement. Further, the song's cyclical form is consistent with the broader CCM music movement widely ridiculed by Mars Hill members, featuring only three parts: verse, pre-chorus, and chorus, each repeated several times. The verse offers four lyrically dense phrases, but the prechorus is only a repeat of the word "Gloria," while the chorus repeats a short couplet. While this song was quite

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<sup>499</sup> Brian Eichelberger. "As Long as I Live," 2005. Lyrics available at [http://marshill.se/marshill/files/2012/04/03/20120403\\_as-long-as-i-live\\_by\\_team\\_song\\_sheet.pdf](http://marshill.se/marshill/files/2012/04/03/20120403_as-long-as-i-live_by_team_song_sheet.pdf).

<sup>500</sup> Taylor Sorenson, "Gloria (Psalm 34)," CCLI 2671077.

popular at Mars Hill, and by various bands, its structure and lyrics vastly departed from Mars Hill's established orthopraxis.

Perhaps the greatest outlier, though, is Red Letter's "Suantraí Seoithín Seo," a cover of a traditional Irish lullaby.<sup>501</sup> I am unsure of the original use of the song in worship, but it is sung by Kevin Barrans entirely in Gaelic, and with spare accompaniment. The song arises from Irish mythology, wherein "there was a belief that children were in danger of being abducted by fairies and exchanged for an old or sickly fairy – a 'changeling' – that would inhabit the child's body, and soon die."<sup>502</sup> The fairy was said to enter a child through the eye; thus, to protect against abduction, many lullabies admonished children to shut their eyes and sleep soundly.

*Seoithín, seo hó,  
mo stór é, mo leanbh  
Mo sheod gan chealg,  
mo chuid den tsaol mhór  
Seoithín, seo hó,  
is mór é an taitneamh  
Mo stóirín ina leaba  
ina chodladh gan brón.  
A leanbh mo chléibh,  
go n-éirí do chodladh leat  
Séan agus sonas  
a choíche in do chóir  
Tá mise le do thaobh  
ag guí ort na mbeannacht  
Seoithín, a leanbh,  
ní imeoidh tú leo.*

Translation:

On the roof of the house  
There are bright fairies  
Playing and drinking

<sup>501</sup> Recording available at <http://marshill.se/marshill/music/albums/red-letter-live>

<sup>502</sup> "Cartlanna Sheosaimh Uí Éanaí: Seoithín Seo-hó," *Joe Heaney*, accessed October 28, 2017, <https://www.joeheaney.org/en/seoithin-seo-ho/>.

Under the gentle rays of the spring moon  
 Here they come  
 To call my child out  
 Wishing to draw him  
 Into the fairy mound  
 My child, my heart  
 Sleep soundly and well  
 May good luck and happiness  
 Forever be yours  
 I'm here at your side  
 Praying blessings upon you  
 Hushaby, hush  
 You're not going with them<sup>503</sup>

Driscoll, who openly regarded most religious traditions and expressions as heresy (even within Protestant Christianity), most likely did not inquire about the spiritual roots at the heart of this lullaby. But the song acknowledges pluralism and yet remained available to stream on Mars Hill's website until the church closed.<sup>504</sup>

### **"The Meat and Potatoes List": Concision and Branding**

This variety, especially as music selections departed from the "mission" of Mars Hill doctrinally and generically, soon changed. Driscoll, though passionate about the music ministry and very involved in early days, had largely delegated music ministry oversight to pastor Tim Smith who sought to establish some continuity across a wide and growing swath of churches, instituting a rotating list of 25-30 songs "that should be kind of the staple diet—the meat and potatoes—across all our bands."<sup>505</sup> This list came to be known colloquially among Mars Hill musicians as the "Meat and Potatoes List," consisting of "tested and proven" songs whose lyrics cohered with Mars Hill's core

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<sup>503</sup> Translation by Joe Heaney.

<sup>504</sup> Red Letter. "Suantraí Seoithín Seo," *Red Letter Live*, Mars Hill Church, accessed October 28, 2017, <http://marshill.se/marshill/music/albums/red-letter-live>.

<sup>505</sup> Tim Smith. Interview with the author. Phone interview, October 14, 2015.

doctrine, while also being songs "people liked to sing and seemed to connect with."<sup>506</sup> Each week at every campus, bands were expected to play at least half their repertoire from this list, and especially to open the service with these more familiar and standard songs. According to Smith, the Meat and Potatoes list "created some commonality, so if people went around to different services, or different locations, they would hear some familiar songs wherever they went."<sup>507</sup> The Meat and Potatoes list thus introduced some consistency and standardization of a core message among all the Mars Hill bands.

The Meat and Potatoes list shifted and rotated over time, but always included a mix of classic hymns, Mars Hill originals, and other miscellaneous popular songs in CCM. Smith sent me a copy of the Fall/Winter 2011 Meat and Potatoes List (see Table 1), which highlights the church's overwhelming preference for classic hymns largely written in the 19th century in the British and Anglo-American traditions.<sup>508</sup> Consistent with the "white bread" nature of Mars Hill as a whole, it is notable that white composers wrote all the songs on the list:

**Table 1: Mars Hill's 2011 "Meat and Potatoes" List**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Composer/Author</b>	<b>Type</b>
All Creatures of Our God and King	Music: William Draper (1919) Text: St. Francis of Assisi (1225)	Hymn Cover
Amazing Grace	Music: William Walker (1835) Text: John Newton (1779)	Hymn Cover
Be Thou My Vision	Music: Slane tune (Traditional Irish, first hymn setting published 1927) Trans: Mary Byrne (1905) Text: Anonymous, Ireland (8th Century)	Hymn Cover

<sup>506</sup> Ibid.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid. One musician explained that bands "could not divert from that list of songs;" however, Smith's description of the list counters that characterization.

<sup>508</sup> Hymn cover credits are drawn from [www.hymnary.org](http://www.hymnary.org).

Before the Throne	Charitee Lees Bancroft (1863)	Hymn Cover
Christ is Risen	Joe Day and Seth Fikkert (2006)	Mars Hill Original
Come Thou Fount	Music: Nettleton Text: Robert Robinson (1758)	Hymn Cover
Doxology	Thomas Ken (1674)	Hymn Cover
Grace Alone	Dustin Kensrue (2013)	Mars Hill Original
Here is Love	Music: Robert Lowry (1876) Text: William Rees, translated by William Edwards (19th century)	Hymn Cover
How Deep the Father's Love	Stuart Townend (1995)	Hymn Cover
How Great Thou Art	Carl Gustav Boberg (20th century)	Hymn Cover
I Surrender All	Judson W. Van De Venter (1869)	Hymn Cover
In Christ Alone	Keith Getty and Stuart Townend (2001)	Hymn Cover
Jesus Paid it All	Elvina M. Hall (1865)	Hymn Cover
Just As I Am	Charlotte Elliot (19th century)	Hymn Cover
Man of Sorrows	Philip Bliss (1875)	Hymn Cover
My God, My Father	Charlotte Elliot (1834)	Hymn Cover
Nothing but the Blood of Jesus	Robert Lowry (1876)	Hymn Cover
Oh, Great is Our God	Brian Eichelberger (2009)	Mars Hill Original
One God	Cam Huxford (2010)	Mars Hill Original
Praise to the Lord, the Almighty	Music: Lobe Den Herren Text: Joachim Neander (1680)	Hymn Cover
Solid Rock ("My Hope is Built on Nothing Less")	Edward Mote (1834)	Hymn Cover
The Church's One Foundation	Music: "Aurelia" by Samuel S. Wesley (1864) Text: S. J. Stone (1866)	Hymn Cover
To God All Praise and Glory	Johann Jakob Schütz (1685)	Hymn Cover

Smith spoke especially about the importance of sound doctrine in shaping this Meat and Potatoes list, describing the variously haphazard and non-doctrinal approaches to songwriting that had characterized Mars Hill's earlier music. For instance, he told me that in Mars Hill's earliest days, some core songwriters did not subscribe to Christianity

and wrote songs that were "super arty and didn't really say anything about God."<sup>509</sup> In this new era, Smith and the music ministry team culled these songs. By contrast, some songs featured language from the Bible or sermons that, when decontextualized, failed to make sense. Smith recalled a Team Strike Force song inspired by language from one of Driscoll's sermons that, in an odd paraphrase of Proverbs, included the line, "I'll trust you with my shovel knee deep in manure."<sup>510</sup> As the sermon receded from collective memory, the song's lyrical referents grew obscure and convoluted, and thus required a change.

But the progressive shift to five-point Calvinism centering God's sovereignty and substitutionary atonement theology underscored the majority of the music ministry's choices to center or discard certain songs. As Driscoll's focus shifted to systematic theology and "sound doctrine," substitutionary atonement grew to comprise the core of nearly every song on the Meat and Potatoes List. Song selections increasingly crystallized the message that Jesus' death on the cross reconciled sinners to God by his substitutionary sacrifice, emphasizing that God's work alone accomplished this saving act.

Many songs echoed these tenets in detail, but Smith especially praised Keith Getty and Stuart Townsend's 2001 song "In Christ Alone" as basically a complete systematic theology, calling it "a high Christology set to music."<sup>511</sup> Its lyrics read:

In Christ alone my hope is found;  
He is my light, my strength, my song;  
This cornerstone, this solid ground,  
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.  
What heights of love, what depths of peace,

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<sup>509</sup> Smith. Interview with the author.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid.

When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!  
 My comforter, my all in all—  
 Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone, Who took on flesh,  
 Fullness of God in helpless babe!  
 This gift of love and righteousness,  
 Scorned by the ones He came to save.  
 Till on that cross as Jesus died,  
 The wrath of God was satisfied;  
 For ev'ry sin on Him was laid—  
 Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,  
 Light of the world by darkness slain;  
 Then bursting forth in glorious day,  
 Up from the grave He rose again!  
 And as He stands in victory,  
 Sin's curse has lost its grip on me;  
 For I am His and He is mine—  
 Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death—  
 This is the pow'r of Christ in me;  
 From life's first cry to final breath,  
 Jesus commands my destiny.  
 No pow'r of hell, no scheme of man,  
 Can ever pluck me from His hand;  
 Till He returns or calls me home—  
 Here in the pow'r of Christ I'll stand.<sup>512</sup>

This song, with lyrical words and a tuneful melody, grew as a favorite primarily because it clearly and succinctly communicated the dense theology at the core of Mars Hill's identity.

At the same time, some musicians questioned the orthodoxy of lyrics in long-running favorite songs. Andrew Jacobson recalled his realization that the song "I'll Fly Away" failed to center Calvinist theology:

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<sup>512</sup> "In Christ Alone" lyrics:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5314f856e4b02a8d2514a273/t/54d1327be4b07cf788e873f5/1422996091549/In+Christ+Alone+Chords+KK.pdf>

We did that [song] for a good 5-6 months. Then, we sat down and said, 'You know what? The words are all about me. I'll fly away, like *I'll* fly away.' So, we said 'we're not gonna play that ever again. It's about me. We're done.' So, it really needed to be focused on God primarily—His saving power for you.<sup>513</sup>

"I'll Fly Away" was thus conceived outside the boundaries of Mars Hill's growing center of Calvinist orthodoxy and therefore abandoned it.

### **Navigating Artistic Freedom vs. "Appropriateness" in Musical Style**

Although now required to primarily learn doctrinally sound songs from this short list, bands maintained a degree of artistic freedom through song arrangements. Bands could experiment with artistic elements like genre, key, tempo, time signature, and instrumentation, and thus the same song could sound quite different from band to band. For instance, Team Strike Force's 2008 version of "All Creatures of Our God and King" begins with a loud, confrontational homophonic opening riff. Their version features dense instrumentation with a full band and numerous guitar and vocal parts. Dramatic changes in density characterize the song, with dramatic changes in volume and texture. The opening riff returns as an interlude between verses. Further, the verses are written in mixed meter, alternating between sections in 7/4 and 6/4.

By contrast, Red Letter's version, recorded in 2007, begins with a snare drum 16th-note roll over syncopated bass drum and tom hits, with only a sparse bass line to outline harmonic changes. The song generally retains a moderate 4/4 throughout, never changing meter. But contrast is managed in other ways. When Joel Brown's solo vocals come in, 16th-note piano arpeggios match the rapid drum roll. Like the Strike Force version, the song features abrupt density changes, sometimes dropping back to a single

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<sup>513</sup> Jacobson. Interview with the author.

guitar line, then erupting with the whole ensemble. Between verses, a solo guitar plays a contrasting modal guitar riff. Lastly, they close the song with an outro of a repeated "Alleluia," an anthem building sound and energy through the end of the song.

These two versions retain a fairly similar instrumentation and style, and also render the contours of the main vocal melody in ways that remain faithful to Draper's original. Both are played in the key of E, and utilize the same lyrics in all three verses. Each band offers a distinct interpretation, however, by exploring different textures, dynamics, countermelodies, interludes, forms, and time signatures. Other Mars Hill bands' versions of this same song vary from spare acoustic versions (Sackcloth and Ashes) to synth-forward, heavily orchestrated multi-instrumental pop covers (King's Kaleidoscope).

Even while some artistic expression remained, pivoting toward church growth also included a progressive culling of styles and songs that had proven, in Smith's words, "inappropriate" for various reasons over time. As Smith explained,

We would talk a lot about appropriateness. So, for example, speed metal or hardcore punk are perfectly acceptable forms of worship through music, but they'd be more of a personal offering of worship, whereas they're not the most appropriate, corporately. It's hard to participate in congregational singing if led by a speed metal band. It's harder to follow, and obviously the lyrics are harder to follow, and it creates a cultural stumbling block for people who just aren't gonna get into it.<sup>514</sup>

While Smith still believed that music genre was "neutral" for communicating Biblical truth, he differentiated between those styles appropriate for private vs. public worship. Recognizing that certain subcultural music styles might prove alienating for the uninitiated, he implicitly advocated a more "middle-of-the-road" approach to genre.

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<sup>514</sup> Smith, interview with the author.

Musicians began to talk openly about corporate leadership in music, selecting for styles and songs that fostered more general congregational participation, oriented toward an ever-broadening base of Mars Hill churchgoers—no longer constrained to the arty punk rock types who populated Mars Hill's earliest gatherings.

### **Conclusion**

Mars Hill's identity and branding shifted significantly as the church grew, centering a comparatively docile masculinity alongside an indie rock-oriented music ministry. The rapidly-expanding church now consolidated a consistent message and image, useful in this new era of proliferation through the multisite church model. However, many aspects of the church's growth model also required discarding some the church's core founding principles as welcoming church community, shared leadership and eldership, and genuinely missional methods slowly receded in favor of Calvinist orthodoxy, concision, and replicability. In the next chapter, I continue to explore how Mars Hill accommodated multisite expansion by abandoning their missional methods, centering a concise version of indie rock, and again altering their governance structure.

These days I often wonder if Driscoll actually had a musical theology, or if he saw music purely as a tactical means to an end. In the early days, he wasn't going the traditional route of church planting, so he went where the counterculture was. To buy cred, he needed the musicians, and so he created space for them.

In the later days, the countercultural movement converged with mainstream evangelicalism, and again, to buy cred, he needed the musicians - just not the artsy ones he had. So he changed the requirements of what it meant to be a Mars Hill musician.

*Interview with Joe Day*<sup>515</sup>

## Chapter Seven

### **"Gunning to Take Over Christian Radio": The Founding and Failure of Mars Hill Music**

This chapter details the establishment of a new record label, Mars Hill Music, and the shift to a music ministry defined by an ethos of expansion, excellence, and international influence. In 2006, Mars Hill adapted to a multisite model church where Driscoll preached live at one campus and by video at another. As discussed in the previous chapter, this new replicable model for expansion, met with a 2007 bylaws change that reduced decision-making oversight to only a few voices, soon led to rapid proliferation. By 2008, the church operated seven campuses across Western Washington. In 2009, the church began to experiment with this model beyond the borders of Washington State, opening its first out-of-state church in Albuquerque, New Mexico.<sup>516</sup> In 2012, the church enacted its largest single expansion to date with the simultaneous opening of four new churches, two in the Seattle area and two out of state in Portland,

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<sup>515</sup> Joe Day, interview with the author. Phone interview, September 28, 2016

<sup>516</sup> Janet I. Tu. "Mars Hill Church empire expands," *The Seattle Times*, last modified August 30, 2011, accessed October 30, 2017, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/mars-hill-church-empire-expands/>.

Oregon, and Orange County, California.<sup>517</sup> By February 2012, the church operated fourteen campuses across four states.<sup>518</sup>

In 2011, Driscoll brought aboard Jon Dunn, former Artists & Repertoire director at Tooth & Nail, to found a new church record label. As Dunn assumed control over Mars Hill's artistic production, his leadership encouraged a crystallized approach to Mars Hill's brand, predicated on Calvinist lyrics and an energetic indie pop sound.<sup>519</sup> I explore Dunn's priorities for Mars Hill Music, and show how his vision catalyzed changes to sound and personnel within Mars Hill's music ministry. Further, I explain how this partnership formalized the long history of symbiosis between Mars Hill and Tooth & Nail records, and later led to a merger between Mars Hill Music and Tooth & Nail imprint, BEC recordings.

### **"We're Starting a Record Label": Mars Hill Music**

By May of 2012, Mars Hill boasted 41 weekly services at fourteen locations and upwards of 35 bands leading at their many churches, and on May 2, 2012, Dunn and Driscoll released a video to announce the launch of a new Mars Hill Music record label that touched on the major elements of Mars Hill's identity and theology.<sup>520</sup> A culmination of Mars Hill's core goals and beliefs, the video launch emphasized the new label's aim to reach young men, to engage in cultural forms beyond the "Christian cul-de-sac" based in

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<sup>517</sup> Ibid.

<sup>518</sup> "Locations," *Mars Hill Church*, archived website captured February 18, 2012, accessed October 30, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20120218122100/http://marshill.com:80/nav/visit>.

<sup>519</sup> Seth Sommerfield. "Mars Hill's Musical Mission," *Seattle Met*, last modified September 16, 2013, accessed October 30, 2017, <https://www.seattlemet.com/articles/2013/9/16/mars-hills-musical-mission-october-2013>.

<sup>520</sup> Mark Driscoll and Jon Dunn. "We're Starting a Record Label': Pastor Mark Interviews Jon Dunn," YouTube video, 06:32, posted May 2, 2012, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDr0B59\\_jZA&t=29s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDr0B59_jZA&t=29s).

Nashville, to center sound doctrine, and to trust artists who are "already on mission" in creating new music for worship.<sup>521</sup>

Driscoll's stated goal for the label surrounded its global reach. Where once the church largely shunned the "chickified" mainstream Christian music industry, this announcement drew upon militaristic imagery instead, intending to invade and overtake Evangelical music. The video opened, "[we're] trying to take over Christian radio and give an alternative to prom songs for Jesus leading the march."<sup>522</sup> Via Driscoll's militaristic images, the army of masculine Mars Hill Calvinists stood poised to conquer the "weepy worship dudes" comprising the core of the modern worship movement.

Dunn's description of the new label hedged Driscoll's militaristic language, distancing the new Mars Hill Music project from the long-cultivated identity of the church as a rogue masculine outsider positioned against the modern worship movement. In an interview with *Christianity Today*, Dunn remarked,

The first thing people often think of when they hear Mars Hill Music is that we're a group of punk rock Calvinists who hate the modern worship movement. Mars Hill Music is setting out to change that perception. Our music is not an expression against anything but instead an outgrowth of our theology, who we are, and the communities our churches are in.<sup>523</sup>

Instead, Dunn attempted to re-frame Mars Hill's music ministry as the result of Seattle's geographic distance and Mars Hill's artistic autonomy saying, "for the last 10 years, we've kind of been off the grid, off the radar, doing our own thing."<sup>524</sup> Mars Hill Music,

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<sup>521</sup> Ibid.

<sup>522</sup> Driscoll and Dunn, "We're Starting a Record Label."

<sup>523</sup> Alex Murashko. "Seattle-Based Megachurch Launches Mars Hill Music," *The Christian Post*, last modified June 7, 2012, accessed November 3, 2017, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/seattle-based-megachurch-launches-mars-hill-music-label-76203/>.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

as Dunn portrayed it, sought not to overtake the Christian marketplace, but to share music, arrangements, and artistic approaches. From the outset, Dunn muddled Mars Hill Music's posture toward the evangelical mainstream.

When Driscoll recruited Jon Dunn and brought him aboard in January of 2011, the church's music ministry structure emphasized local oversight with pastors at each individual campus hiring and overseeing their own music staff, as detailed in chapter six.<sup>525</sup> Each campus largely recruited musicians from among attendees, and so each location took a missional initiation for church music from the skills, passions, and preferences of their community members. Even while Smith's "Meat and Potatoes List" created some continuity in the songs heard from church-to-church, each band still exercised creativity through widely varied arrangements and interpretations, ranging from funk to roots rock, as detailed in the chapter.

Thus when Dunn assumed the newly created position to oversee the music ministry, he found a diffuse range of musical approaches at individual Mars Hill campuses with little centralized oversight.<sup>526</sup> According to Dunn, he began his tenure with a campus audit, sometimes visiting three or four campuses in one day. At the time, he reported, "there was some cool stuff going on and some terribly scary stuff going on," depending on the campus.<sup>527</sup> Dunn led in the process of selecting for "good" approaches to the music ministry, combining these into a central resource to instruct and reform the "bad" approaches. Dunn's vision, in consultation with a team of other musicians and

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<sup>525</sup> Jonathan Dunn. Interview with the author. Phone interview, September 11, 2015.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

pastors, set the priorities for a newly centralized music ministry.<sup>528</sup> Together, they determined a hierarchy of core priorities, defined as "theological alignment," "a communal/congregational perspective," and "artisticness" [sic].<sup>529</sup> These three priorities had a range of effects within Mars Hill Music as the label took shape, honed a unified brand, and distributed that brand among local campuses.

### **Theological Alignment**

Echoing sentiments from an earlier era, Dunn affirmed Mars Hill's emphasis on theological depth by comparison to perceptions of the modern worship movement. Dunn looked to Protestant hymnody as a model for poetic, singable music with dense theological themes; indeed, the first official Mars Hill Music recordings downplayed original songs, featuring only hymn covers.<sup>530</sup> Instead of placing focus on musical elements like cadences, melodies, and hooks, Dunn said, "what we wanted to do was strip all that back and just get it right theologically, and do the dissection work to get it to fit the other parts we usually think of as songwriters."<sup>531</sup> Songwriters worked together with a team of pastors to workshop lyrics apart from the music.<sup>532</sup>

Working together with pastors, worship song lyrics increasingly conformed to Mars Hill's core Reformed doctrines, emphasizing the sole sovereignty of God and penal substitutionary atonement. The lyrics to Modern Post's 2013 song "Grace Alone," written

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<sup>528</sup> Ibid.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid

<sup>532</sup> Ibid. Pastors who assisted in workshopping song lyrics included Dr. Justin Holcomb, Bill Clem, and Matt Jensen.

by Dustin Kensrue, evince a clear, dense Reformed theology.<sup>533</sup> The title "Grace Alone" summons the doctrine "sola gratia," one of the five *solae* articulated in the Protestant Reformation. Each successive verse describes this story of grace through the lens of a person of the Trinity, beginning with "Father" and proceeding to "Jesus" and "Spirit," showing how each plays a distinct but unified role. Artfully and personally, Kensrue reviews Calvinist TULIP theology beginning with the doctrine of total depravity and tracing the subject's path to salvation enacted solely by the grace of God.

*Verse 1*

I was an orphan, lost at the fall;  
 Running away when I'd hear you call,  
 But Father, you worked your will.  
 I had no righteousness of my own  
 I had no right to draw near your throne,  
 But Father, you loved me still.

And in love, before you laid the world's foundation,  
 You predestined to adopt me as your own.  
 You have raised me up so high above my station;  
 I'm a child of God by grace, and grace alone

*Verse 2*

You left your home to seek out the lost;  
 You knew the great and terrible cost  
 But Jesus, your face was set.  
 I worked my fingers down to the bone;  
 But nothing I did could ever atone,  
 But Jesus, you paid my debt.

By your blood I have redemption and salvation.  
 Lord you died that I might reap what you have sown,  
 And you rose that I might be a new creation.  
 I am born again by grace, and grace alone.

*Verse Three*

I was darkness all of my life,  
 I never knew the day from the night,  
 But Spirit, you made me see.

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<sup>533</sup> Dustin Kensrue. "Grace Alone." CCLI 7004659, 2013.

I swore I knew the way on my own;  
 Head full of rocks, a heart made of stone  
 But Spirit, you moved in me.

And at your touch my sleeping spirit was awakened;  
 On my darkened heart the light of Christ has shone.  
 Called into a kingdom that cannot shaken;  
 Heaven's citizen by grace, and grace alone.

*Outro*

So I'll stand in faith by grace, and grace alone  
 I will run the race by grace, and grace alone  
 I will slay my sin by grace, and grace alone  
 I will reach the end by grace, and grace alone

"Grace Alone" represents Mars Hill's intentional, dense, and crystalline approach to integrating tenets of Reformed theology into their worship music. In the first verse, God, the Father, predestined the singer for salvation before the advent of creation. In the second verse, Jesus paid the debt of sin no human work could accomplish, laying down his life in a substitutionary atonement for human sin and thereby justifying the singer to God. In the third verse, the Holy Spirit awakens the singer to the aforementioned realities that a stubborn heart and head could not understand on their own. Each verse emphasizes the sole agency of God in every aspect of salvation—even the subject's bare acknowledgement of salvation is understood as enacted by God.

Even while most artists participated in the crystallization of Calvinist doctrine across Mars Hill Music, several interviewees also indicated that a narrow focus on select elements of Calvinist theology and substitutionary atonement simultaneously foreclosed theological breadth, nuance, and variety. Pastor Joel Brown critiqued this trend in Mars Hill's worship music saying, "we became very limited in our doctrine" by growing "so fixated on substitutionary atonement and justification."<sup>534</sup> Peter Mansen, a bandmate of

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<sup>534</sup> Joel Brown. Interview with the author, Tacoma, WA, July 14, 2015.

Brown's, echoed this critique of Mars Hill's approach to atonement theology calling Driscoll's interpretation "so nuanced" that it "basically disagreed with most other Christians in the world" across the Catholic and Protestant spectrum.<sup>535</sup> In Brown's view, these theological tenets presented a "a very one-track diet," continuing, "if you eat steak all day every day, you start to have intestinal problems."<sup>536</sup> In retrospect, he believed this narrow theological focus grew unhealthy at Mars Hill.

### **Prioritizing Energetic Responses**

In his survey of Mars Hill's different campuses, Dunn also discovered a range of congregational participation in singing. Dunn observed that for some bands, the congregation's participation "was not really a priority."<sup>537</sup> In part, many songs proved challenging for the congregation to learn. Further, bands sometimes grew tired of playing a song, and discarded it before the congregation had learned it adequately to sing with confidence. Dunn and other musicians, drawing on literature by Harold Best, believed congregational singing should "be an experience of the body worshipping together"—a corporate activity that enraptured every person's attention and body.<sup>538</sup>

Dunn observed fans' response to popular artists as a model for an ideal embodied response to Mars Hill's worship music. Dunn remarked, "some of the greatest worship leaders of our generation are probably Jay Z and Kings of Leon. Those guys are incredibly passionate about what it is they worship and they lead people in worship of

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<sup>535</sup> Peter Mansen. Interview with the author, phone interview, August 14, 2015.

<sup>536</sup> Brown, interview with the author.

<sup>537</sup> Dunn, interview with the author.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid

whatever it is they're worshipping."<sup>539</sup> Dunn used Kings of Leon's song "Sex is on Fire" as an example saying, "people love that song, people respond to that song. When you play that for a hundred thousand people, a hundred thousand people are screaming 'your sex is on fire.'"<sup>540</sup> Dunn viewed the message contained in song and the way people responded to it as acts of worship. He asked, "if we truly believe that God is greater and better than his creation and sex, why is it that people aren't responding likewise to the music that we're producing?"<sup>541</sup> Going forward, Dunn sought to oversee a music ministry that would incite a congregational response similar to a rock or hip hop show.

Joel Brown's 2012 blog post on the Mars Hill website called "What I Learned About Worship from... Karaoke?" indicates how Mars Hill built a pedagogy of worship around the demonstrable embodied responses for popular music.<sup>542</sup> He reflected that, he has "always hated karaoke" "because of the cheapening it does to those who put real heart into writing and playing real songs with real instruments."<sup>543</sup> Yet, in an evening of impromptu karaoke with Mars Hill's music and production volunteers, Brown observed the group move from apprehension to uninhibited joy: "everyone was dancing and really going for it." Yet, he reflected that he "rarely, if ever, [had] seen us responding this way in our church services."<sup>544</sup> Borrowing his somatic authentication frame from this karaoke

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<sup>539</sup> Ibid

<sup>540</sup> Ibid

<sup>541</sup> Ibid

<sup>542</sup> Joel Brown. "What I learned about worship from... karaoke?" last modified May 4, 2012, archived website captured May 14, 2013, <http://web.archive.org/web/20130514113420/http://marshill.com/2012/05/04/what-i-learned-about-worship-from-karaoke>.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid

experience, he issued a prayer that "we would let go of our inhibitions and allow the Spirit of God to move in us, expressing as much or more during time of gathered worship as we do when we celebrate in other contexts," naming "our favorite bands' concerts" in a list of examples.<sup>545</sup>

Dunn noted that the music should "move somebody" emotionally.<sup>546</sup> Worship leaders, Dunn observed, sang out of their deepest, most impassioned beliefs, and thus a successful performance ought to communicate this passion. Dunn observed, "I think a lot of Protestantism has killed the passion," and Christian culture seemed to believe "passions were bad."<sup>547</sup> This perspective represented a kind of about-face for Mars Hill's music ministry, once averse to emotive, passionate Christian music represented by Nashville-based CCM. Under Dunn's leadership, though, performances of passion came to the forefront. By desiring the somatic responses in worship that mirrored the passion Brown and Dunn perceived during popular music concerts and karaoke sessions, Mars Hill's music shifted to genres and styles that would elicit similar responses to worship music from congregants. This shift significantly altered the music ministry.

Musician Joe Day recalled that Mars Hill Music leaders like Dunn placed a great deal of emphasis on how the congregation responded to the church's music by evaluating whether or not people clapped, yelled, put their hands in the air, and sang really loudly when a band played.<sup>548</sup> While this series of embodied responses may have proven appropriate in a variety of other environments, such responses were incongruent with the

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<sup>545</sup> Ibid

<sup>546</sup> Dunn, interview with the author.

<sup>547</sup> Interview with Dunn

<sup>548</sup> Joe Day. Interview with the author. Phone interview, September 28, 2016.

indie rock context of Mars Hill. In my fieldwork, I attended Mars Hill and observed worship participants' embodied responses to the worship music at the Ballard, U District, and Bellevue campuses. Participants nodded their heads in time to the music, and clapped to the beat when encouraged by the ministry teams. However, I noted a general atmosphere of muted response—only one exuberant listener in the front row raised her hands during a performance by a Ballard campus band, and she seemed out of place.

Mars Hill members' responses to the worship music did, however, seem congruous with my experience in the local Seattle indie scene. Indie music, as discussed in chapter six, had grown out of punk and grunge's energetic, sweaty mosh pits, but over time increasingly adopted Western art music's cerebral orientation to staid, contemplative connoisseurship. *Pitchfork's* Nitsuh Abebe describes indie as "po-faced and insular and lacking in passion," polite and predictable music enjoyed by "a self-congratulatory system of people in plaid shirts playing to audiences with their arms crossed"—and no one danced.<sup>549</sup> Staid and awkward, the indie scene downplayed rock 'n' roll's characteristic virility, muting the body and its urges.<sup>550</sup>

The vast indie scene is no somatic monolith, but my extensive experience as a musician and audience member in Seattle's indie music scene between 2009 and 2015 was largely consistent with Abebe's description. With few exceptions, indie concerts featured a cadre of quiet, intent fans appreciating the music with stationary bodies, save a head bob or understated foot tap. Increasingly, big-name touring indie musicians from Animal Collective to Fleet Foxes held shows in theater venues with rows of seats

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<sup>549</sup> Nitsuh Abebe. "The Decade in Indie," *Pitchfork*, last modified February 25, 2010, accessed October 28, 2017, <https://pitchfork.com/features/article/7704-the-decade-in-indie/>.

<sup>550</sup> Sean Nelson. "Let's (Not) Get It On," *The Stranger*, June 25, 2009, accessed October 30, 2017, <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/lets-not-get-it-on/Content?oid=1740140>.

constraining movement.<sup>551</sup> Thus passion might be felt, but not overtly expressed by the body. If Mars Hill members, like much of Seattle's indie community, showed passion and appreciation for their favorite Seattle bands by bobbing their heads or tapping their feet with crossed arms, then, this similar response likely patterned their behavioral response to indie worship music.

As Mars Hill Music increasingly emphasized observable, embodied responses to worship bands, this in turn changed the sound and style of the music to center sounds likely to elicit desired responses. Mars Hill's music adjusted to elicit an energetic or celebratory response, adjusting tempo, rhythmic momentum, and arrangements to create more sonic interest and build energy throughout songs. Average tempos increased dramatically; for instance, the songs on Mars Hill's 2008 12-track compilation album *Rain City Hymnal* have an average tempo of around 88 BPM, ranging from E-Pop's slow version of "Solid Rock" at 65 BPM to a version of "Here is Love" at 162 BPM. Only three songs on the album have a tempo above 100 BPM; most reside between 70 and 80. By contrast, the 14-track 2013 compilation *Mars Hill Worship Sampler*, while still featuring a large range in tempos from Kenosis' "Depth of Mercy" at 58 BPM to Citizens' "In Tenderness" at 172 BPM, the album's songs average around 110 BPM. Seven of these feature tempos well above 100 BPM.

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<sup>551</sup> The "cerebral" aspects of indie indicate continuity with Western music's Cartesian skepticism with and control of the body, evidenced in other indie musicians' and critics' writings on the scene. The late 90s straight-edge movement, started in Washington D.C. by the band Minor Threat, embraced a semi-puritanical orientation, eschewing drinking, drugs, and casual sex. Indie musician and critic Sean Nelson describes control of the body vis a vis sexuality, describing the scene's "disdain for the clichés of rock virility," claiming sexuality's "abstractions and deconstructions," but ultimately masking a slate of discomforts, hostilities, and embarrassments about "sex of any kind." In response, Nelson recalled muting his own "vulgar or predictable" sexual urges in his art.

Further, arrangements grew much more composed, complicated, and intricate, designed to build energy throughout the song. For example, Citizens' *Already/Not Yet* version of the hymn "Nothing But the Blood," energy builds through layers of polyrhythm (see transcription in Figure 10). The song opens with four-on-the-floor bass drum hits against a syncopated piano line. An electric guitar enters, strumming single pitches in eighth notes. Over these fixed patterns, the lead tenor sings the traditional melody of the hymn's first verse. Building energy, the rhythm guitar changes its line midway through the verse. On the second verse, the drum set alters its riff, adding additional rhythmic interest. At the conclusion of the second verse, a second electric guitar plays an interlude over the polyrhythmic texture:



2

Nothing But the Blood

8

T

Pno.

E.Gtr.

D. S.

12

T

What can wash a - way my sin?

Pno.

E.Gtr.

D. S.

12

Detailed description: This is a musical score for the hymn 'Nothing But the Blood'. It consists of two systems of four staves each. The instruments are Tenor (T), Piano (Pno.), Electric Guitar (E.Gtr.), and Double Bass (D.S.). The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 8/8. The first system starts at measure 8. The Tenor part has whole rests. The Piano part plays a melody of eighth notes: D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. The Electric Guitar part plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment: D4, E4, F#4, G4. The Double Bass part plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment: D3, E3, F#3, G3. The second system starts at measure 12. The Tenor part has whole rests for the first two measures, then sings the lyrics 'What can wash a - way my sin?' with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, D5, C5. The Piano, Electric Guitar, and Double Bass parts continue with their respective parts from the first system.

## Nothing But the Blood

3

15

T

8

No-thing but the blood of Je - sus. What can make me whole a - gain?

15

Pno.

15

E.Gtr.

15

D. S.

19

T

8

No-thing but the blood of Je - sus. Oh, pre-cious is the flow

19

Pno.

19

E.Gtr.

19

D. S.

4

## Nothing But the Blood

The image displays a musical score for the song "Nothing But the Blood" by Kings Kaleidoscope. It consists of two systems of staves, each containing four parts: Tenor (T), Piano (Pno.), Electric Guitar (E.Gtr.), and Drums (D. S.).

**System 1 (Measures 23-26):**

- Tenor (T):** Measures 23-26. Lyrics: "that makes me white as snow. No o - ther fount I know,"
- Piano (Pno.):** Measures 23-26. Features a syncopated, dotted eighth-note pattern.
- Electric Guitar (E.Gtr.):** Measures 23-26. Features a syncopated, dotted eighth-note pattern.
- Drums (D. S.):** Measures 23-26. Features a syncopated bass drum pattern.

**System 2 (Measures 27-30):**

- Tenor (T):** Measures 27-30. Lyrics: "no - thing but the blood of Je - - - sus."
- Piano (Pno.):** Measures 27-30. Features a syncopated, dotted eighth-note pattern.
- Electric Guitar (E.Gtr.):** Measures 27-30. Features a syncopated, dotted eighth-note pattern.
- Drums (D. S.):** Measures 27-30. Features a syncopated bass drum pattern.

The score is written in a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a common time signature (C). The vocal line includes a fermata over the final note of measure 26 and the first note of measure 27.

Figure 10: Kings Kaleidoscope's arrangement of "Nothing But the Blood of Jesus" (2011), introduction, verse one, and refrain one. Transcription by the author.

As the third verse begins, the texture changes abruptly. All syncopated parts drop out, and a standard rock band sound prevails. This continues through the first half of the verse, but then the drummer returns to a syncopated line while energy builds through the

sound of group vocals on the song's refrain. At the conclusion of the verse, the chord progression changes, and the pianist plays an eight bar interlude. On the third repeat of the refrain, the texture changes again, dropping back to only quarter-note bass drum hits, highlighting the sound of group singing in the background. This continues, punctuated by one loud electric guitar strum, building energy. The song ends with one more loud, energetic interlude, repeating the new piano riff over a raucous four-on-the-floor pattern in the drums (see Figure 11).

<b>Form</b>	<b>Texture</b>	<b>Instrumentation/Vocal Entrances and Changes</b>	
Introduction	Polyrhythmic	Piano, bass drum, electric guitar	
Verse 1		Tenor enters	
Refrain 1		Electric guitar part changes	
Interlude			
Verse 2		Drum part changes	
Refrain 2			
Interlude		Electric guitar solo	
Verse 3		Homophonic	Syncopated parts stop
Refrain 3			Group vocals enter in unison, tambourine enters
Interlude			Chord progression changes, new piano riff
Refrain 4	Instruments drop out, only bass drum and group vocals		
Refrain 5	Add big guitar hits		
Interlude		Big hits on drums, piano riff solo	

**Figure 11: Form outline of "Nothing But the Blood of Jesus" by Citizens & Saints, 2011**

The dynamicism of this arrangement comes into even clearer view by comparison to the outline of Tim Smith's band's cover of this same song in 2008 (Figure 12). Aside from the spare vocal duet in the opening of the song, the piece maintains a steady texture, adding fiddle solos and a bit of *rubato* at the conclusion of verses to maintain interest. It is, however, a much more simple, straightforward arrangement of the song. By contrast, Citizens' arrangement of "Nothing But the Blood" cleverly exploits textural and chord progression changes to sustain interest and build energy throughout the piece.

<b>Form</b>	<b>Texture</b>	<b>Instrumentation: Entrances and Changes</b>
Verse 1	Vocal duet	Largely a cappella; occasional guitar strums
Verse 2	Vocal duet	Add band: Acoustic guitar, fiddle, drums, bass
Interlude	Fiddle solo	Band accompaniment
Verse 3	Vocal duet	Band accompaniment, ends with rubato section

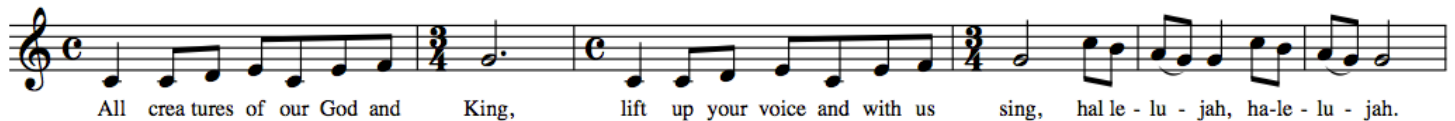
Interlude	Fiddle solo	
Verse 4	Vocal duet	Ends with rubato section, Hammond organ fill
Interlude	Fiddle solo	

**Figure 12: Form outline of "Nothing But the Blood of Jesus" by The Mars Hillbillies, 2008**

A comparison of two versions of the song "All Creatures of Our God and King" further illustrates the changes to tempo and arrangement that characterized this latter chapter in Mars Hill's history. Team Strike Force's 2006 version of the song features standard rock band instrumentation with lead and rhythm guitar, drums, and bass. The song's instrumentation remains fairly constant with all instruments playing nearly throughout, and with little variance to the arrangement from verse to verse. Light distortion on the guitars adds textural density. The band adds sonic interest with a syncopated instrumental riff between verses (Figure 13) and changing meter, alternating between 4/4 and 3/4 (Figure 14). The song moves at a sludgy pace, around 70 BPM. Team Strike Force's simple arrangement of the song maintains a low-grade, steady energy throughout. Changes in meter add cerebral interest for an initiated listener, but the arrangement is otherwise fairly static.



**Figure 13: Instrumental riff in introduction and interludes, transcription by the author**



**Figure 14: Changing meter on the verses, transcription by the author**

King's Kaleidoscope's 2012 version exploits instrumentation, arrangement, texture, and rhythm to create frequent changes that succeed in building energy and engagement throughout the song. The ten-member band includes a horn section, string

section, and two drum sets. Each song is artfully arranged to utilize the various combinations of timbres and playing techniques available. The piece opens with a muted, shimmering synthesizer that rapidly swells. The song then proceeds in 4/4 meter at a rapid tempo of around 160 BPM with a synthesizer line layering in a series of riffs in two and three note patterns, creating an polymetric feel. Pizzicato strings and glockenspiel eventually join the layered synth lines. Over this ephemeral texture, the lead guitar strums a simple syncopated pattern while the lead vocalist sings the first verse. When the verse ends, the texture changes abruptly. The guitar plays chords in straight quarter notes, a trumpet surges in on a melodic riff, and the band's signature dueling drum sets enter. The song builds energy with a through-composed arrangement featuring this wide selection of instruments.

Toward the end of the song, the dense instrumentation drops back, a half-time feel predominates, and the band builds an extended outro. A refrain of "hallelujah" repeats eighteen times (Figure 15), carrying the song to the end:



**Figure 15: "Hallelujah" outro anthem, transcription by the author**

The band accompanies this simple melody by reusing the main riffs from the body of the song, layering them in to create a new effect. Loud quarter-note cymbal crashes and bass drum hits on 2 and 4 anchor the song in a slow, heavy, and anthem-like 4/4. By adding instruments and riffs with every successive repeat, the outro builds energy to the end of the song. Even while the song's 5:07 length is unusually long among Mars Hill's worship music, it sustains listener interest by frequent changes to texture and tempo.

Several of these aspects facilitate the desired somatic responses valued at Mars Hill. King's Kaleidoscope's version features a consistent 4/4 time signature at a fast tempo that creates a more predictable and energetic pattern for moving to the music. Further, the outro, first introduced in an arrangement by Red Letter in 2006, provides a counterbalance to the song's theologically dense lyrics penned in the 13th century. This provides an opportunity for the listener to respond by taking eyes off the text and just singing the simple, repeated word "hallelujah" while the band builds the song to a massive climax. King's Kaleidoscope's version adds sonic complexity, but also encourages the response of embodied participation.

Other Mars Hill bands followed the trend of introducing simple, repeated sections into dense hymn covers. For instance, Red Letter's 2012 arrangement of "Here is Love," a longtime Mars Hill favorite, introduces an outro repeating "hallelujah! Hallelujah! Jesus washed my sins away!" Ghost Ship's 2011 version of "Just As I Am" also adds a repeated "hallelujah" in the outro. In several cases, however, Mars Hill's musicians borrowed outro material from popular musicians within CCM. For instance, Citizens' 2012 arrangement of "Amazing Grace" adds a bridge by sixsteprecords (EMI) star Chris Tomlin with the repeated lyrics "my chains are gone, I've been set free/my God, my savior has ransomed me." King's Kaleidoscope's version of "Jesus Paid it All" covered an outro, "oh praise the one who paid my debt and raised this life up from the dead," originally written by CCM musician Alex Nifong and performed by Kristian Stanfill. Complicating Mars Hill's oppositional posture contra the Christian worship movement, Mars Hill's new response-driven motive resulted in more frequent borrowings from CCM's forms and compositional devices.

The changes to sound are matched by changes to the accessibility of performance practice. The Mars Hillbillies and, to a degree, Team Strike Force oriented their sound to the everyman aesthetics of the post-punk, early indie scene. Presumably, anyone with a musical background could play this music. However, the addition of complex arrangements with fairly difficult syncopations and a more complicated form introduced a demand for musical experience and professionalism beyond the demands of Mars Hill's earlier "everyman" bands. Even while earlier bands featured a wide range of personnel from the local Seattle scene, the scene at large made bold claims of valuing a participatory ethos, oriented to idealistic musicians who could produce creative music without a musical education or professional chops.

By centering a different set of aesthetic values ostensibly based on factors of theological and somatic authentication, but tacitly demanding heightened musical proficiency and professionalism, Mars Hill soon adjusted their musical personnel. The church introduced an "American Idol"-style audition process where interested bands played in front of a panel that included leaders like Tim Smith, Joel Brown, and Brian Eichelberger. Ezekiel Rudrick, who auditioned in this format, recalled this as a "weird, bureaucratic audition process" where "you play and they take you back and give you notes" on the band's strengths and weaknesses.<sup>552</sup> Rudrick explained that his band "did a really fucked up version of 'Amazing Grace'" that the panel seemed to like.<sup>553</sup> But the panel also critiqued the lead singer's voice as sounding too much like the mumble of Bob Dylan, encouraging the lead singer to use better diction so "the congregation could

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<sup>552</sup> Ezekiel Rudrick. Interview with the author. Skype interview, August 9, 2015.

<sup>553</sup> Ibid.

understand the words."<sup>554</sup> The audition process offered an opportunity to vet bands against the rising standards of Mars Hill Music.

When these American Idol-style auditions failed to yield satisfactory personnel from within the local churches, Dunn began to recruit outside talent to helm Mars Hill's flagship churches. In 2011, he hired Zach Bolen who relocated from Georgia to lead a new band, Citizens, at the U-District campus.<sup>555</sup> The church's discourse around Bolen's worship leadership style and theology reiterated his "energy," "visible emotion and passion."<sup>556</sup> In 2012, Dunn recruited Dustin Kensrue, leader of the nationally-known post-hardcore/experimental band Thrice, to lead music at the new flagship Mars Hill campus in Bellevue, WA.<sup>557</sup> Kensrue, known for theologically dense songwriting that exemplified Mars Hill's aims toward doctrinal alignment, previously led a band at Mars Hill's Orange County campus, and relocated to Washington State for the new position. However, over time it became apparent to Kensrue that his star power drove the decision to relocate him.<sup>558</sup> He told me, "I had a higher profile than any of the guys there, and I'm sure Mark liked that." These leaders, recruited outside the local context of the Seattle music scene, joined Mars Hill's large creative team to articulate a cohesive sound and brand for Mars Hill Music.

The rise in non-local leadership met a concomitant de-emphasis of the church's missional orientation toward genre and style. In a 2013 interview between Ghost Ship

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<sup>554</sup> Ibid.

<sup>555</sup> Dunn, interview with the author.

<sup>556</sup> "Repeat the Sounding Joy': Citizens & Saints: About," *Mars Hill Church Archive*, accessed October 30, 2017, <http://marshill.se/marshill/music/albums/repeat-the-sounding-joy>

<sup>557</sup> Sommerfield, "Mars Hill's Musical Mission."

<sup>558</sup> Dustin Kensrue. Interview with the author. Phone interview, October 27, 2015.

leader Cam Huxford and *The Worship Cohort's* Rob Rash, Huxford articulated the rising tension between local cultural context and wider appeal for musicians at Mars Hill.<sup>559</sup> He began by emphasizing the primacy of the local church saying, "we want everything we do musically to flow out of ministry at a local church. So, we always keep that context the main thing."<sup>560</sup> He reflects that Mars Hill's music and bands had only recently grown beyond initiation by local church members and volunteers.

However, with Mars Hill's growth orientation, Huxford described the reasons he believed Mars Hill Music needed to move beyond local cultural contexts. The remainder of the interview elucidates the shifting discourses at Mars Hill with regard to a missional framework. Huxford de-emphasizes the importance of a local cultural context saying,

Musically, you don't need to go out of your way to micro-contextualize. Five years ago I was probably more doing that—like, I'm in this music scene in this certain part of Seattle. What is going on like right here?—But over the years, I've realized, just for all of us, the context is always widening. So you need to be able to proclaim the gospel in a wide variety of contexts. Like, the band Ghost Ship—if we can only contextualize to that one scene in Seattle, then we wouldn't be reaching very many people.<sup>561</sup>

Localization is perceived as contrary to an effective outreach strategy because it places limits on the number of people who might be reached. Furthermore, Huxford articulates a critique of observing and replicating local culture, calling this practice "bad missionary work."<sup>562</sup> Instead, he argues that missionaries and worship pastors should use write in musical styles consistent with their own personal cultural backgrounds and preferences.

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<sup>559</sup> "Worship Cohort Interview with Cam Huxford (Ghost Ship)." YouTube video, 21:02, posted November 8, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwHcKq9uw4U>.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid.

Instead, Mars Hill leadership emphasized a standard "end user" experience across Mars Hill campuses. Tim Smith explained that this essentially flipped the music ministry paradigm wholesale, shifting from "a more grassroots, do-it-yourself music ethic to something that was a little bit more organized in favor of growth an expansion."<sup>563</sup> Kensrue, now in the role of lead worship pastor, and Dunn "encouraged bandleaders and worship directors to stick to existing arrangements and play them the way that they've already been worked out," drawing from the Mars Hill Music records.<sup>564</sup> This especially impacted suburban churches and those far from "cultural epicenters" perceived as lacking the cultural ingenuity of the more central churches.<sup>565</sup> Brown recalled, "I think this was a big division toward the end where Central is trying to figure out, 'okay, how do we get there to be a consistent experience for someone who is visiting a Mars Hill Church location and people in the local church are trying, to varying degrees, to figure out what does it mean for us to be a church right here and just do what church is here?'"<sup>566</sup> This produced a tension between centering local expression and standardizing a recognizable church-wide brand.

### **Mars Hill Music Acquired by Tooth & Nail**

In spite of concise branding and rising performance standards, the Mars Hill Music record label did not last. Eight months after announcing the label's launch, Mars Hill announced a partnership with Tooth & Nail records, folding the church's breakout bands into the label's BEC Recordings imprint, comprised of artists producing

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<sup>563</sup> Tim Smith. Interview with the author. Phone interview, October 14, 2015.

<sup>564</sup> Joel Brown. Interview with the author. Phone interview, November 10, 2015.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid.

<sup>566</sup> Ibid.

"commercial pop."<sup>567</sup> Aided by Dunn's long tenure with Tooth & Nail and founder/President Brandon Ebel's connections with Mars Hill Church, the new partnership formalized the two institutions' long history of symbiosis. Mars Hill Music's first release under the BEC imprint featured a sampler of ten indie-style bands: Citizens, Ghost Ship, The Modern Post, Kenosis, Kings Kaleidoscope, The Sing Team, Joe Day, and Ramshackle Orchestra.<sup>568</sup>

None of my interviewees addressed the merger between Mars Hill Music and BEC Recordings, nor the changes to style and branding that followed from it. However, the merger clearly drew Mars Hill Music's artists and branding into close alignment with BEC's image. Dominated by white male-centered Christian indie/alt-rock artists like Kutless, Bebo Norman, 7eventh Time Down, and All Things New, BEC elevated Mars Hill Music projects consistent with BEC's core product and, in turn, Dunn built Mars Hill Music's identity as a label in close alignment with BEC's preexisting image.<sup>569</sup> Brian Eichelberger's Motown-inspired Sing Team, Cam Huxford's roots-rock band Ghost Ship, and college student Chad Gardner's pop-driven King's Kaleidoscope, all leaders who started leading worship as Mars Hill members, rose to the top. Dunn featured these bands on Mars Hill's website and BEC initiated its album releases with LPs by Citizens. Bands that did not fit the BEC profile moved to the perimeter of Mars Hill Music's emphasis with many recordings and band profiles, like those by Team Strike Force and the funk

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<sup>567</sup> Mark Driscoll. "Mars Hill Music is Partnering with Tooth & Nail," *Mars Hill Church Archive*, last modified January 15, 2013, <http://marshill.se/marshill/2013/01/15/mars-hill-music-is-partnering-with-tooth-nail>.

<sup>568</sup> Various artists. *Mars Hill Music: Worship Sampler*. Mars Hill Music/BEC Recordings, B00B4GLJ9U, 2013.

<sup>569</sup> "Interview with Mars Hill's Jonathan Dunn," *Worship Leader*, archived website captured October 18, 2012, accessed October 30, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20121018062307/http://worshipleader.com/interviewjonathandunn/>.

and soul band Brothers of the Empty Tomb, removed from Mars Hill's website by the end of 2013 even while the bands still played in worship.

After releasing the *Mars Hill Music: Worship Sampler* album in March of 2013, Mars Hill artists briefly dominated BEC's rosters with full-length LP releases from Citizens (after changing their name to Citizens & Saints) in March, Ghost Ship's *The Good King* in June, a re-release of Kensur's *Water & the Blood* in October, and a Christmas album by Citizen & Saints in December. In November of 2014, Citizens & Saints released a second full-length, *Join the Triumph*, and in March of 2015 (after Mars Hill had already closed), re-released *Sin*, Kings Kaleidoscope's first full-length initially recorded at Mars Hill in 2011.

By partnering with Tooth & Nail, Mars Hill Music was now partially owned by one of the largest Christian music conglomerates in Nashville. While Tooth & Nail and its imprints retained an autonomous sound and image oriented toward subcultural music genres, the label had long been co-owned by a Nashville-based Christian music conglomerate led by CCM pioneer Billy Rae Hearn. In 2000, EMI's Christian Music Group (CMG) acquired 50% of Tooth & Nail, relocating some offices and studios from Seattle to Nashville.<sup>570</sup> By 2010, EMI CMG led the Christian Contemporary Music field, owning Credential, EMI Gospel, ForeFront, and Sparrow, and joining with sixsteprecords for licensing, distribution, and publishing.<sup>571</sup> The large conglomerate grew larger and more dominant when Universal Music Group acquired EMI in 2012, and soon merged

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<sup>570</sup> Mall. "The stars are underground," 71.

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

with Capitol Records in 2013.<sup>572</sup> In 2013, the partnership accelerated as Hearn's Capitol Christian Music Group purchased Tooth & Nail's back catalog.<sup>573</sup>

### **Conclusion**

As Mars Hill expanded its geographic reach by planting new multisite campuses across numerous Western states, the church sought to hone a unified image and brand that extended to the music ministry, now consolidated under Mars Hill Music within BEC Recordings. While Mars Hill Music forged a distinctive, high-energy indie rock sound with a crystalline Calvinist message, the focus on building a concise brand around these cultural and theological elements foreclosed empowerment of local expression emanating from each individual church. In the next chapter, I explore how the move toward concise branding, aligned with BEC's image, impacted congregational music at the local church level, especially as Mars Hill sought to plant new multiethnic churches in the multisite model.

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<sup>572</sup> "Capitol Records," Wikipedia.

<sup>573</sup> "CCMG Purchases Tooth & Nail Catalog," *All Access Music Group*, last modified March 13, 2013, <https://www.allaccess.com/net-news/archive/story/116306/ccmg-purchases-tooth-nail-catalog>.

## Chapter Eight

### "It's Not Our Brand": The End of Missional Music

The previous chapter detailed how Mars Hill Music's focus on certain congregational responses, increasingly non-local music leadership, and marginalization of hyperlocal approaches to genre fundamentally altered the sound of the music at the heart of the Mars Hill brand. After partnering with BEC Recordings in 2013, staff deleted most of the historical content from Mars Hill's music page on the website, replacing it with content by only eleven active bands and solo artists representing the crystallized approach to Calvinist lyrics and high-energy indie-pop style that Mars Hill Music/BEC sought to market.<sup>574</sup> Mars Hill leadership's attention to missional methods predicated on learning from the local community and raising up creative music leaders atrophied, giving way to a focus on "conforming to a standard."<sup>575</sup> On the local level, Mars Hill Music shifted away from a local approach to music in favor of a more unified, organized indie rock music ministry.

Mars Hill's massive expansion effort coincided with other initiatives, in the "air war" and "ground war." Mars Hill initiated a Mars Hill Global, a diffuse umbrella of domestic and international "missions" initiatives that included planting and resourcing churches in India, Ethiopia, and Latin America with translations of Driscoll's books and sermons.<sup>576</sup> Mars Hill Global sought to reach masses around the world by providing free

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<sup>574</sup> "Mars Hill Music: All Albums," *Mars Hill Church*, archived website captured November 4, 2013, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20131104053103/http://marshill.com:80/music/albums>.

<sup>575</sup> Brown. Interview with the author.

<sup>576</sup> "Mars Hill Global," *Mars Hill Church*, archived website captured April 12, 2012, <http://web.archive.org/web/20120412202616/http://marshill.com:80/global>

resources, reporting over 10 million sermon downloads per year, over three million website views, and hundreds of new, local church plants through the Acts 29 Network.<sup>577</sup> Under Driscoll's leadership and vision, Mars Hill began to span the globe, ripe with innovative ministry ideas.

In this chapter, I will detail the impacts of Mars Hill's concise branding on both the local church level and within Mars Hill Music. In this era of consolidation, excellence, and unification, I argue that the church pivoted to a cultural dominance model and thus in practice abandoned their missional approach to arts and music, most evident at the church's new campus in the racially diverse Rainier Valley. I will then discuss further changes to the governance structure of Mars Hill Church that again further disempowered the broader elder board and church employees, showing how this new phase of power consolidation limited Mars Hill Music's creative autonomy within the broader church structure.

In Mars Hill's latter years, the church's multisite expansion continued to accelerate and, in 2012 Mars Hill announced the plant of its first intentionally multiethnic campus in the South Seattle neighborhood of Rainier Beach.<sup>578</sup> Pastor Tim Gaydos touted its location in "the most diverse ZIP code in the nation, the 98118."<sup>579</sup> Emphasizing Rainier Beach as home to immigrants from "over seventy nationalities" with "twenty languages,"

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<sup>577</sup> Ibid.

<sup>578</sup> Seattle Times Staff. "Seattle's Rainier Valley, one of America's 'Dynamic Neighborhoods,'" *The Seattle Times*, last modified June 20, 2010, <https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/seattles-rainier-valley-one-of-americas-dynamic-neighborhoods/>.

<sup>579</sup> Tim Gaydos. "The Launch of Mars Hill Rainier Valley," *Mars Hill Church*, last modified January 18, 2012, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20120515154832/http://marshill.com/2012/01/18/the-launch-of-mars-hill-rainier-valley>.

Gaydos likened the new Mars Hill location to an international mission field saying, "we send missionaries off to—across the world to the nations. Well, the nations are here in Seattle."<sup>580</sup> Mars Hill had begun to plant churches in Ethiopia and India through Mars Hill Global, and clearly saw Rainier Valley as another international outpost for mission.

The discourses around this South Seattle church plant indicate Mars Hill staff's overemphasis on the community's deficiencies from the outset of the launch. Early descriptions of the neighborhood characterize it as blighted and wanton. Gaydos emphasized Rainier Valley's "systemic failures," including gang violence, educational problems, and economic issues.<sup>581</sup> He claimed that Mars Hill sought to "bring a sense of peace" to the community "by reaching out to the neighborhood gangs, Buddhists, religious and spiritually-minded, single mothers, school-dropouts, and absentee fathers with Jesus' gospel."<sup>582</sup> Though Gaydos conceded that Rainier Valley was rife with religious organizations—"there are more than 20 faiths practiced"—he argues, there's "not a lot of Jesus," apparently overlooking upwards of sixty active Catholic and Protestant churches in the zip code.<sup>583</sup>

Gaydos initially led the church plant, bringing along two of Mars Hill's few African American long-time volunteers to assist with the plant: William Wilson and Jevon Washington. Wilson, an older man in his 30s, grew up in Rainier Valley where he

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<sup>580</sup> Mark Driscoll. "All Things to All People," Sermon. Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, January 8, 2012, [http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20120108\\_all-things-to-all-people\\_en\\_transcript.pdf](http://download.marshill.se/files/collection/documents/PDF/20120108_all-things-to-all-people_en_transcript.pdf). Driscoll interviews various pastors and volunteers throughout the sermon.

<sup>581</sup> Gaydos, "The Launch of Mars Hill Rainier Valley."

<sup>582</sup> Ibid.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid. Churches found by Google search.

claimed he "did a lot of sin" before encountering Christianity.<sup>584</sup> Wilson also initiated a Christian rap career under the name Willie Will, performing as a peripheral member of the Reformed hip hop scene.<sup>585</sup> Jevon Washington, in his early 20s, found Reformed theology through music, convicted of the messages conveyed by Lecrae, Tedashii, and other Reformed hip hop artists.<sup>586</sup> His introduction to Mars Hill came through Gods Block ministry, the project of another Mars Hill attendee Mike Hansen who produced Reformed hip hop shows in Seattle.<sup>587</sup> Wilson and Washington rose through the ranks as volunteers, eventually becoming deacons, elders, and paid Mars Hill staff.

Wilson hired Tyler Smith to lead the music ministry at the Rainier Beach plant. Smith, a white musician raised in the multiethnic community of Sea-Tac, had a diverse musical background. In advance of the Mars Hill Rainier Valley's launch, Smith brought together musicians from among prospective congregants at Mars Hill Rainier Valley, founding a band described as "an unlikely group of people God put together for the purpose of leading worship through song at Mars Hill Rainier Valley."<sup>588</sup> The ten-member, racially diverse group called itself The Collective and played funk covers of Mars Hill favorites.

Willie Wilson's brother Deland Wilson led a second musical project, traveling nearly an hour from Everett, Washington, to lead music every few weeks. According to

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<sup>584</sup> Driscoll, "All Things to All People."

<sup>585</sup> "Artist Profile: Willie Will," *New Release Today*, last modified June 4, 2007, [http://www.newreleasetoday.com/artistdetail.php?artist\\_id=24](http://www.newreleasetoday.com/artistdetail.php?artist_id=24).

<sup>586</sup> Jevon Washington. Interview with the author. Skype, March 16, 2016.

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>588</sup> "Mars Hill Music: The Collective," *Facebook* page, accessed November 1, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/pg/TheCollectiveMHC/about/>.

Joel Brown, Deland Wilson "had this R&B career he was trying to get off the ground, and really had no connection whatsoever to what was happening at Mars Hill Church. And so he would come in and just kind of do whatever his thing was."<sup>589</sup> Brown recalled that Wilson did attend the church regularly, and thus did not align closely with the church's core doctrine so closely managed by the central music team. Brown recalled, "[Wilson] would play some songs that were coming from a completely different perspective" in terms of doctrine, sometimes contradicting Mars Hill's core beliefs.<sup>590</sup>

Thus the staff at Mars Hill Rainier Valley began to establish a distinctive music ministry model. The Collective did not resemble the close-knit, organic band model, but conformed more closely to a worship team with many members. Deland Wilson's contributions to the church's music were not a product of the local church, and also did not express the core doctrinal values at the heart of Mars Hill. But the new church had ideal leadership in two talented hip hop artists, Wilson and Washington, and began to take steps toward a distinctive, community-centered arts ministry. For instance, a video called "Krumping in Rainier Valley - Night of Community and Worship," shows a Mars Hill team performing the street dance form with roots in Christianity.<sup>591</sup>

With regard to local cultural forms, Mars Hill's music ministry had long tacitly de-emphasized non-white musical expressions. Among the 200 unique song titles various Mars Hill bands over the years, all songs—with only exception, "Down to the River to Pray," possibly an African American spiritual—have a white author, even while many

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<sup>589</sup> Brown, interview with the author.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid.

<sup>591</sup> "Krumping in Rainier Valley - Night of Community and Worship," YouTube video, 03:19, posted May 4, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOjtxXj5V3U>.

songs do have deep roots in many diverse Christian traditions. With regard to genre, I have explored in detail how punk, grunge, and indie rock also arise from predominantly white communities, even while other intersecting demographic factors shifted massively over time.

However, several projects did bring historically non-white music genres into the church. As described in chapter six, Gareth Best, a founding member of acclaimed Chicago jump blues band Mighty Blue Kings, led the band BET (Brothers of the Empty Tomb; an obvious and problematic play on Black Entertainment Television) at Mars Hill Downtown. BET performed "straight up Soul [sic]" covers of Mars Hill favorites like "All My Tears" and "Nothing But the Blood," with funky bass fills, a heavy backbeat, Hammond organ solos, and even bringing a call-and-response relationship between the lead and back-up vocalists at times.

The all-white band enjoyed a great reputation at Mars Hill, but was pushed to the periphery of church's brand when Mars Hill Music partnered with BEC Recordings. The BET continued to perform until the church's closing and even initiated a record while involved with the church, but no mention of them existed on Mars Hill's website after mid-2013. In 2014, BET began a full-length album project independently of Mars Hill Music.<sup>592</sup> BET did not fit the Mars Hill brand and image.

Joel Brown reinforced this belief, indicating that he heard frequent complaints from upper leadership about BET's sound and style, questioning whether the band and others like it represented an "indigenous expression" of Mars Hill community's culture. In

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<sup>592</sup> Brothers of the Empty Tomb Facebook page. Comment posted August 18, 2014. Accessed November 1, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/Brothers-of-the-Empty-Tomb-14358553313/>.

2013, an old-time gospel band started at the West Seattle campus, and the congregation's response to the band indicated some discomfort with the style. Brown recalled,

a lot of the people who were unfamiliar with that genre of music were just kind of like deer in headlights when that band would play, you know. They were just going, "I don't really know how to engage with this." It's sort of like if you took your grandma to a punk rock concert or something. She'd just sort of be in stun mode. There's just such a cultural--there's, like, culture shock happening.<sup>593</sup>

Mars Hill sought to foster experiences entirely consistent with the presumed cultural backgrounds of certain congregants, interpreting the average Mars Hill-goer's experience of a gospel band as a challenging culture shock.

Outside Mars Hill, Jevon Washington built a small name for himself as a Reformed hip hop artist, and also occasionally performed verses in worship with different Mars Hill bands. He wrote a verse to Kings Kaleidoscope's version of "Gloria" and released it on one of his personal albums.<sup>594</sup> When Chad Gardner, the leader of Kings Kaleidoscope and a huge fan of hip hop music, heard it, he loved it, and invited Washington to perform live with the band.<sup>595</sup> Soon Kensrue, Bolen, and others recognized Washington's talent and recruited him for various projects and performances. For instance, a phone-camera 2012 recording from the Resurgence conference features a verse by Washington on the opening of Kings Kaleidoscope's "Amazing Grace."<sup>596</sup>

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<sup>593</sup> Brown, interview with the author.

<sup>594</sup> Washington, interview with the author.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid.

<sup>596</sup> "King's Kaleidoscope Intro Jam Feat: Jevon Washington," YouTube video, 02:57, posted January 13, 2012.

Yet Washington never featured in any official Mars Hill videos or recordings. He recalled, "they would never put rap music on a video—'it's not our brand' is what they'd say."<sup>597</sup> Yet his additions of rap verses represented an organic, missional project initiated by a long-time church member and leader. As described in chapter seven, Mars Hill Music's disinterest in featuring Washington's verses signaled a broader departure from the church's founding commitment to missional living.

Washington felt the church's attitude toward African American styles of music joined a pattern of devaluing African American Christian traditions and lived experience. For instance, in pursuit of a standard "end user" experience, Mars Hill leaders soon encouraged musicians across all churches to learn arrangements of Mars Hill tunes in the style of Citizens, King's Kaleidoscope, The Sing Team, Ghost Ship, The Modern Post and other indie rock projects assumed by BEC Recordings and arising out of church contexts serving hipsters at majority white North Seattle Mars Hill campuses. Brown recalled that Tyler Smith "got really discouraged by the request for him to do something more in line with what was happening at the other churches" as it muted the distinctive creative voice of The Collective.<sup>598</sup> Brown believed Smith had an openness to the repertoire, but desired to do the music in the band's own characteristic style as had been encouraged prior.

### **White Hipsterism as Cultural Imperialism**

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<sup>597</sup> Washington, interview with the author.

<sup>598</sup> Brown, interview with the author.

Jevon Washington noticed that Mars Hill leadership implicitly supplanted local music with the cultural markers of white hipsterism, from clothes to music, indicating limited interest in the cultural context of the Rainier Valley church plant. He recalled,

I think, culturally, if you look at what everybody wore, I mean for the long time that I was there, the common dress at Mars Hill was these weird looking shoes, jeans or boots, and then plaid. Everybody wore plaid. That was like the way that everybody dressed.

And then everybody did music that was folky. So everyone just did that. So, as an African American, I would communicate it as—that's the dominant culture. And even in evangelicalism and Christianity, the dominant culture is white culture.

So [Mars Hill] came in with the mentality of the church was, "here is our white church to save you poor Black people and you poor Asians and adapt to our culture. Come sit down. Listen to this music--the way we do music. Sing our songs. Wear our clothes. Do what we say. And Jesus will love you."<sup>599</sup>

The cultural products of white hipsterism and indie music, perceived by Washington as the dominant culture in Seattle, prescribed cultural expression in conjunction with the message of Christianity, a total contrast to the missional objective to exegete "how God is initiating amongst this particular people in this place and time."<sup>600</sup> At the Rainier Valley church plant, Mars Hill Church abandoned its missional core value, supplanting it with a unified indie church brand.

Contra the image painted by Gaydos, Washington relished the opportunity to break open the Mars Hill paradigm and plant a healthy multiethnic church in Rainier Valley. A conversation with Washington revealed a host of issues in his preparation to

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<sup>599</sup> Washington, interview with the author.

<sup>600</sup> Smith, interview with the author, quoted in chapter two.

lead a new church plant, especially rife with unexamined racial dynamics. In Washington's telling, Mars Hill had only three black people on staff at the time: Washington, Wilson, and one staff member in human resources. The choice to place two black staff members together in Rainier Valley felt to Washington like plain tokenism. Washington explained, "they thought that black means *urban poor*... They just threw the black guy in there and it was like, 'yeah, we got a black guy.'"<sup>601</sup> Washington felt he and Wilson ended up in their roles simply due to their skin color. Both lacked preparation to do the job well, and Washington stressed that his and Wilson's leadership styles did not complement one other well.

Washington soon grew critical of Mars Hill's strategy in multiethnic church planting. Soon, Washington attended a conference to learn from other New Calvinist leaders like Eric Mason who successfully planted multiethnic churches. At the conference, he took an informal survey of attendees, asking whether they thought Mars Hill should plant a multiethnic church. In response Washington recalled, "I can't tell you how many 'no's' I got. It was like you wanted to go to the prom, and you just kept getting shut down by all these different girls."<sup>602</sup> Washington realized that Mars Hill's leadership and structure did not indicate preparedness to plant a multiethnic church.

Mars Hill's multisite and leadership structure troubled most respondents: Mark Driscoll's larger-than-life presence on the big screen sent a message, "black people: you listen to the white guy that's on the screen."<sup>603</sup> Washington noted, "people still feel like slaves. It's still the white guy who's in charge of the black guy and their community,"

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<sup>601</sup> Ibid.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid.

with the cognate of devaluing the contributions of the few black leaders on staff at Mars Hill.<sup>604</sup> The ministerial issue cycled back to the core missional values now cast aside by the Mars Hill staff who lacked intimate knowledge of the context, failed to engage with local cultural forms, and did not adequately empower local leaders.

The broader context of New Calvinism fed the devaluation of black Christianity, rife with what Eric Mason has called "theological imperialism." Washington summarized Mason's view that white evangelicals hold a widespread belief that "black people have bad theology."<sup>605</sup> Washington recounted that historic racial exclusions in the Reformed church prevented black Christians from receiving theological education and attending Reformed churches. Even while Lamp Mode and Reach Records artists precipitated a massive embrace of reformed theology in the black community, longstanding racial divisions within the Reformed field persisted. Washington recalled a conversation he had with the legendary New Calvinist preacher and writer John Piper where he asked, "in all your years of studying the Bible and preaching, you consult commentaries—how many of those were written by African Americans?" Piper thought for a moment before responding, "none."<sup>606</sup>

Washington brought his critiques of Mars Hill's multiethnic multisite model to Executive Elder Dave Bruskas. He admonished Bruskas, "Mark can't be on the screen. It can't be about Mark," imploring Bruskas that Mars Hill should emphasize the empowerment of local leadership.<sup>607</sup> Washington argued that incarnational multiethnic

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<sup>604</sup> Ibid.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid.

ministry required costs—sacrifices to structure and money—on the local church level. Washington implored Bruskas that Mars Hill needed to "make sure you're empowering indigenous leaders, African American minorities—giving them actual power, tangible power, responsibility. And that they're competent in their job."<sup>608</sup> Washington delivered this critique as his ultimatum to the church. Upon a tepid reception, he withdrew his name from consideration for lead pastor at the Rainer Beach campus and began to look for another job outside Mars Hill. When I spoke with him in 2016, he relocated his family to Memphis, Tennessee, to work with Eric Mason at Cornerstone Church, a successful multiethnic church within the New Calvinist movement.

Simultaneously, Mars Hill began to expand internationally through Mars Hill Global, resourcing evangelical church plants in Ethiopia and India. While limited information about these church plants exists, the videos intended to market these initiatives to donors at domestic Mars Hill churches utilize music to reinforce white cultural dominance through indie rock. For instance, Mars Hill Global released a video entitled "The Extended Family of Mars Hill Global" set in Dilla, Ethiopia, and narrated by Executive Elder Sutton Turner.<sup>609</sup> The video's narration is accompanied by a backing track featuring instrumental sections of Kings Kaleidoscope's 2012 arrangement of "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus." For around five seconds, a group of Ethiopian men audibly sing a song in Amharic, but even this short clip retains the instrumental accompaniment of Kings Kaleidoscope's song. As energy builds through the video, the Amharic song fades and Kings Kaleidoscope's instrumental swells, drenched with brass,

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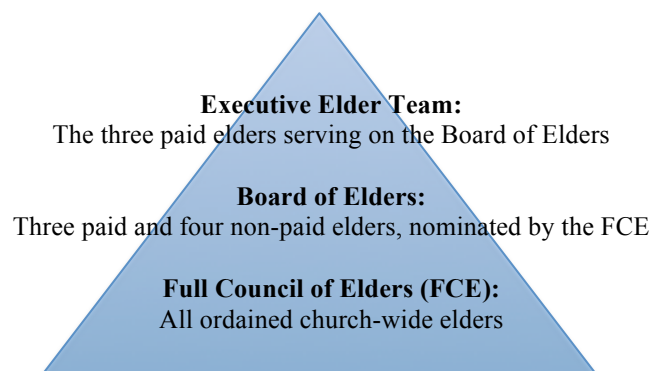
<sup>608</sup> Ibid.

<sup>609</sup> Sutton Turner. "The Extended Family of Mars Hill Global," YouTube video, 01:33, posted April 22, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YPmd9vn7V8>.

glockenspiel, and loud drums. Another similar video narrated by Turner features visual footage of Ethiopian pastors singing and dancing, but their music is inaudible. Instead, instrumental portions of Kings Kaleidoscope's cover of "In Christ Alone" accompany the imagery.<sup>610</sup>

### **Continued Consolidation of Power**

As Mars Hill's spread its consolidated indie brand into majority non-white churches, further changes to Mars Hill's governance structure reinforced the church's streamlined continuity, facilitating rapid growth. As described in chapter five, the Mars Hill entity had already instituted major changes to the bylaws in 2007, causing an uproar that led to several firings. In 2011, the church tweaked the bylaws again, reaffirming a tripartite leadership hierarchy similar to the one established in 2007 (Figure 16)<sup>611</sup>:



**Figure 16: Mars Hill's leadership hierarchy established by 2011 bylaws**

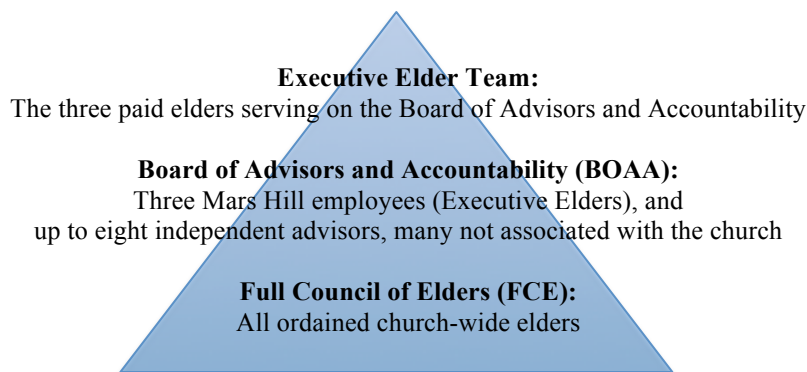
This iteration of the bylaws endowed the Executive Elder board with the power to "exercise, between meetings of the board, all the powers and authority of the board in the

<sup>610</sup> Warren Throckmorton. "Mars Hill Global Videos Removed from You Tube," YouTube video, 02:47, posted July 20, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFiD7XkYtPk>.

<sup>611</sup> John Sutton Turner. "Amended & Restated Bylaws of Mars Hill Church," November 8, 2011. Archived by Warren Throckmorton, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://wp.patheos.com.s3.amazonaws.com/blogs/warrenthrockmorton/files/2014/03/MHC-Bylaws-11-08-11.pdf>.

management of the business and affairs of the church," granting the Executive Elders relative autonomy to make personnel decisions, negotiations and contracts with employees and contractors, supervision of assets and operations of the church, and all acquisitions and sales of property.<sup>612</sup> Executive Elders held full executive power aside from the ability to approve new elders or amend the church's doctrinal statement, reserved for the Full Council of Elders.<sup>613</sup>

This consolidation of executive power continued. On May 3, 2012, the day after the Mars Hill Music record label announcement, another important change took place in Mars Hill's governance structure that influenced the future growth and direction of the church's new record label project.<sup>614</sup> As shown in Figure 17, Driscoll and the executive elder board once again amended the church's bylaws to restructure the hierarchy:



**Figure 17: Mars Hill's leadership hierarchy as established by the 2012 bylaws**

The 2012 iteration of the church bylaws introduced an intermediate, independent Board of Advisors and Accountability (BOAA). The BOAA consisted of two sets of designated

<sup>612</sup> Ibid., 12-14.

<sup>613</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>614</sup> John Sutton Turner. "Second Amended and Restated Bylaws of Mars Hill Church," May 3, 2012. Archived by Warren Throckmorton, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://wp.patheos.com.s3.amazonaws.com/blogs/warrenthrockmorton/files/2014/03/MHC-BYLAWS-1.pdf>.

personnel, 1) three Mars Hill employees, designated as Executive Elders, and 2) a board of up to eight non-employee advisors who may or may not be members of the church.<sup>615</sup> Crucial to the designation as a BOAA member was his "independent" status. The bylaws specified nine conditions of "independence," including that he not be employed by Mars Hill church, nor be subordinate to other church employees or board members.<sup>616</sup> While overseen by the BOAA as a whole, the 2012 bylaws reaffirmed the Executive Elder Team's oversight to manage "the day-to-day affairs of the Church and [ensure] execution of the church's mission and strategic objectives," consistent with the 2011 bylaws.<sup>617</sup>

2013 additions to the BOAA included four Mars Hill elders and two advisors without Mars Hill ties: Paul David Tripp of Ohio, and James MacDonald of Illinois, and Dr. Larry Osborne of California, variously leaders in New Calvinist or multisite churches.<sup>618</sup> It appears Mars Hill established this independent BOAA board to satisfy accreditation requirements for the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA).<sup>619</sup> While the establishment of such a board aligned with conventions in evangelical churches as a whole, this power change nonetheless introduced a chasm of distance between the Full Council of Elders and the Executive Elder team. In the wake of

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<sup>615</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>616</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>617</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>618</sup> "Dr. Paul Tripp Joins Mars Hill's Board of Advisors and Accountability," *Mars Hill Church*, last modified November 23, 2013. Archived website captured November 27, 2013, <http://web.archive.org/web/20131127012315/http://marshill.com/2013/11/23/dr-paul-tripp-joins-mars-hill-s-board-of-advisors-and-accountability>.

<sup>619</sup> Morgan Lee. "Was Driscoll's Board a Problem?," *Christianity Today*, last modified October 17, 2014, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/october/mars-hill-mark-driscoll-board-governance.html>.

the 2012 bylaws changes, elders held no legal or functional power in the everyday operations of Mars Hill Church.

For the remaining short years of the church, Dave Bruskas, Sutton Turner, and Mark Driscoll helmed the church as Executive Elders, buffered by the independent BOAA. The Executive Elder team—Mark Driscoll, Sutton Turner, and Dave Bruskas—held unilateral power. Turner and, to a lesser degree, Bruskas served Driscoll's vision for growth with little restraint and thus became Driscoll's enforcers. Indeed Kensrue recalled, "the way that they had skewed the power structure toward the end, it really was just [Driscoll] with kind of this facade of a team with teams under it--it really was just him."<sup>620</sup> Thus in practice these organizational changes divested Mars Hill personnel of functional institutional power, shifting nearly all consequential decision-making authority to Driscoll via the Executive Elders.

### **Power Hierarchy Changes' Impact on Mars Hill Music**

The consequences of such a consolidation of power permeated nearly every aspect of the church, including the music ministry and new record label, Mars Hill Music. In discussing what would become of Mars Hill Music, Tim Smith explained to me that the label became a low priority within Mars Hill's broader organization, but nevertheless experienced the effects of a consolidating hierarchy of power. The impacts of this ecclesial structure on Mars Hill Music analogize to broader authoritarian trends in the organization as a whole.

Within Mars Hill Music, interviewees expressed a mutual feeling of powerlessness. For starters, with new church plants, acquisitions of property, initiatives

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<sup>620</sup> Kensrue, interview with the author.

like Mars Hill Global, and a new theological school, Mars Hill hemorrhaged money even while donations streamed in from an expanding number of congregants. Thus Mars Hill Music operated on a small budget, while the church's operating budget exceeded several million dollars, including Driscoll's annual compensation package valued around \$600,000.<sup>621</sup> The production of Mars Hill's services and albums relied upon a steady stream of volunteer labor, demanding enormous commitment from their volunteers. Increasingly bands played services for many weeks in a row without reprieve and put in upwards of 15 hours of work per Sunday.<sup>622</sup>

In spite of the massive time commitments expected of Mars Hill musicians and the relatively small budget allocated to musical projects, within Mars Hill Music, staff fostered collegial, healthy, mutual artistic relationships. Each person I spoke with regarded the music staff at Mars Hill as an incredibly talented and committed group of people brought into community by excellent leadership by people like Dunn, Brown, and Smith. Mars Hill's emphasis on professionalism and perfectionism, auxiliary outcomes of its hypermasculinity and product-orientation, fostered a cohesive vision, and those brought aboard shared intimately in the visions projected. Yet Mars Hill Music staff felt out of control of the music ministry's direction. Every interviewee pointed up the chain of command: Day recalled that Kensrue oversaw Mars Hill worship bands; Kensrue recalled that Dunn oversaw Mars Hill Music. But neither Dunn nor Kensrue held power to make executive-level decisions. Even while Kensrue and Dunn allegedly held the power to

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<sup>621</sup> Joel Connelly. "What Mark Driscoll made at Mars Hill Church," *Seattle PI*, last modified November 20, 2014, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://blog.seattlepi.com/seattlepolitics/2014/11/20/mars-hill-church-what-pastor-mark-driscoll-made-at-his-mega-church/>.

<sup>622</sup> Mansen, interview with the author; Brown, interview with the author.

shape and hone local church-level production, the Executive Elders created barriers to creative agency.

In the latter years of the church, Kensrue recalled being "stopped every five feet with a new piece of red tape."<sup>623</sup> Instead of placing focus on artistic projects or pastoral duties, Kensrue spent much of his time writing proposals for the Executive Elder team for their review and approval. Executive Elders now held outside power to make unilateral decisions, sometimes derailing longstanding projects for seemingly arbitrary reasons. Mars Hill Music might sit on a record for months because, for instance, because "someone didn't like the artwork."<sup>624</sup> Once, MHM staff and a large group of volunteers worked closely with a radio station for a live Christmas special. Executive staff did not approve of the collaboration and overrode the staff to cancel the project.

Unilateral executive decisions became commonplace, divesting Mars Hill Music staff and artists of their power. For instance, Joe Day recalled:

At the worst of it, being out in Shoreline, there was a Sunday where one of our bands was up and the Driscolls just happened to show up this particular Sunday and sat through the service.

And when it was over— actually, I think it was before it was over—our lead pastor had an e-mail in his inbox from Driscoll saying "this band never leads again." No conversation, just kind of an order.<sup>625</sup>

The band never performed again. This attitude from Mars Hill central indicated a growing disregard for the autonomous functions of Mars Hill artists and local church

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<sup>623</sup> Kensrue, interview with the author.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid.

<sup>625</sup> Day, interview with the author.

campuses, prioritizing standardized quality and style over ministerial priorities like relationship, creativity, and trust.

As these unilateral power moves grew increasingly common, Mars Hill Central succeeded in disempowering the talented artists brought aboard with Mars Hill Music. Personnel either conformed to Driscoll's vision and mission, or left the church by choice or force. In the midst of this culture, the staff at Mars Hill began to rapidly turn over. Jevon Washington recalled that Mars Hill was "really performance driven," oriented to a flawless execution, especially during Sunday services.<sup>626</sup> He continued,

If you don't perform, you're done. And if you're not on mission, you're done. They don't play games. If you're not on mission, you're labeled as deceitful, not on board, you know? Your expiration date was really close. Like milk. The turnover rate at Mars Hill was absolutely ridiculous. So, for a person to work there for over a year, you were look at as like an OG—an original gangster on the block.<sup>627</sup>

Mars Hill personnel worked under constant threat of termination, coerced into submission without space for dissent or complaint. Washington recalled feeling he "better say yes to everything they want me to do," or else face termination.<sup>628</sup>

Even in termination, Mars Hill elders held little power. Embedded in termination contracts were mandatory binding arbitration (called "Christian Alternative Dispute Resolution") and non-disparagement clauses, foreclosing "the right to a trial by Court or jury with respect to the matters covered in [the] Agreement," and agreeing not to "make any negative or disparaging remarks about Mars Hill or its elders, deacons, officers,

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<sup>626</sup> Washington, interview with the author.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid

<sup>628</sup> Ibid.

employees, managers, ministries, or business practices."<sup>629</sup> Ecclesially and legally, the Mars Hill entity held the authority to bend employees to the will of the leadership, even beyond the term of employment.

### **Conclusion**

In Mars Hill's latter years, an emphasis on consolidation, excellence, and unified branding largely supplanted its earlier missional framework. Further, Mars Hill leaders once again amended the church bylaws to consolidate executive power and facilitate rapid church growth. This expansion orientation especially impacted the direction of the new multiethnic church plant in Rainier Beach, as Driscoll held increasingly unitary executive power, and high-energy indie rock grew to comprise the core brand of Mars Hill Church.

In the next chapter I will show how Mars Hill's leadership continued to foreclose multivocality, changing bylaws once again in a manner that consolidated power in the hands of a few leaders. This process further disempowered elders and pastors, eventually affecting Mars Hill Music's ability to autonomously create new music or initiatives without stringent oversight by Driscoll. I argue that these progressive shifts toward an authoritarian structure eventually incited a mass exodus of leaders that, alongside other incidents that caused public strife, led to the church's collapse.

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<sup>629</sup> Sutton Turner. "Separation and Release Agreement," Mars Hill Church. Archived by Warren Throckmorton, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://wp.patheos.com.s3.amazonaws.com/blogs/warrenthrockmorton/files/2014/03/MH-Separation-and-Release-Agreement-1.pdf>.

## Epilogue

### **"A Deliberate and Deft Grab for Power": The Unraveling**

In 1998, Mars Hill Fellowship began as a church predicated on shared leadership and a missional approach to arts and culture rooted in the subcultural music of Seattle's punk, grunge, and indie scene. Growing from a small church rooted in white, working class masculine identity, Driscoll and the church eventually adopted New Calvinist theology and established a national reputation that initiated shifts in the church's branding and marketing. Mars Hill progressively focused on authority and submission, drawn from New Calvinism's interpretation of the doctrine of sovereignty and Trinitarian functional subordinationism's links to gender complementarianism. Themes of authority and submission infused the church's worship life and ecclesial structure, with elements of musical performance mirroring changes in the church's bylaws that progressively divested elders and pastors of ecclesial power. With the advent of the Mars Hill Music record label and its partnership with BEC Recordings, the church abandoned its focus on missional, localized ministry, instead ritualizing a streamlined brand of Calvinist, indie rock worship music now to be performed in similar ways across its fifteen multisite churches. Meanwhile, Driscoll served as the sole preaching pastor by video.

This dissertation has detailed intersecting aspects of Calvinist theology and a slowly-morphing structure that together produced and sustained a progressively controlling culture of authoritarianism at Mars Hill. In particular, it holds a wide variety of parties accountable to these changes in the power structure. The music ministry, though perpetuated by people disempowered by the consolidating leadership structure, consistently produced a music culture that, through performance, ritualized divestment of

power through New Calvinist lyrics, privileging of masculinity, a performance hierarchy that made the laity irrelevant, and an internal structure that eventually divested of meaningful interest in local people, culture, and missional strategies. This concluding chapter will detail the events in the church's final months that led to its eventual collapse.

### **Voices of Dissent**

In the wake of the 2012 bylaws, elders and staff had few official channels for voicing dissent within the organization. To file a complaint about executive management, one was led into a labyrinthine series of steps leading to the BOAA and back to the Executive Elder team. Thus personnel had no discernable process for voicing concerns, and instead faced a threat of termination for complaints for being "off mission."<sup>630</sup>

Without a channel for input within the Mars Hill organization, voices critical of the church began to accumulate through alternative media and blogs. In January 2012, Christian author Matthew Paul Turner published a bombshell leak on his blog detailing Mars Hill's disciplinary proceedings.<sup>631</sup> The story centered around a young man named Andrew who dated, then cheated on, the daughter of a Mars Hill pastor. Turner recounted Andrew's story of repentance, discipline, excommunication, and shunning, even publishing a copy of an official "disciplinary contract" given to Andrew by the church.<sup>632</sup>

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<sup>630</sup> Washington, interview with the author.

<sup>631</sup> Matthew Paul Turner. "Mark Driscoll's Church Discipline Contract: Looking for True Repentance at Mars Hill? Sign on the Dotted Line," *Matthew Paul Turner*, last modified January 23, 2012. Archived website captured January 29, 2012, <http://web.archive.org/web/20120129144147/http://matthewpaulturner.net/jesus-needs-new-pr/mark-driscolls-church-discipline-contract-looking-for-true-repentance-at-mars-hill-church-sign-on-the-dotted-line/>.

<sup>632</sup> Ibid.

That same month, a blog called *Mars Hill Refuge* emerged where former members recounted personal stories of their Mars Hill experiences.<sup>633</sup>

Stories like Andrew's catalyzed furious criticism. Formerly a friend of the church in the days of The Paradox, Seattle's alternative newspaper *The Stranger* published a series of stories critical of Mars Hill's authority structure beginning in February 2012. Brandon Kiley's investigative piece "Church or Cult? The Control-Freaky Ways of Mars Hill Church" examined the questionable authoritarian leadership tendencies within Driscoll's empire.<sup>634</sup> It departed from a critique of a clause in Mars Hill's membership contract that stated that a member "must formally agree to submit to the 'authority' of the Mars Hill leadership."<sup>635</sup> Kiley tracked various exploitations of this clause, regaling tales of excessive disciplinary plans for minor "sins," and draconian excommunication actions for defectors, tales corroborated in my own interviews with Mars Hill attendees. In March of 2012, a blog called *Joyful Exiles* emerged with former members detailing their own stories of abuse, corroborating Kiley's depiction of Mars Hill's disciplinary practices.<sup>636</sup>

The leaks began to accelerate as increasing numbers of pastors and employees realized the limits of their power. In May 2013, former pastor Dave Kraft submitted "formal charges" against Driscoll.<sup>637</sup> Kraft accused Driscoll of lacking self-control and

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<sup>633</sup> Mars Hill Refuge, [marshillrefuge.blogspot.com](http://marshillrefuge.blogspot.com)

<sup>634</sup> Brendan Kiley. "Church or Cult? The Control-Freaky Ways of Mars Hill Church," *The Stranger*, last modified February 1, 2012, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/church-or-cult/Content?oid=12172001>.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>636</sup> Joyful Exiles, [joyfulexiles.com](http://joyfulexiles.com).

<sup>637</sup> Dave Kraft. "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God... I do!" *Dave Kraft*, last modified March 8, 2014, accessed November 1, 2017,

discipline, and being domineering, verbally violent, arrogant, and quick-tempered. By Mars Hill's own agreed-upon criteria, Kraft argued that Driscoll failed to adhere to minimum qualifications for leadership. Seeing no movement to correct behaviors, Kraft resigned from leadership in September 2013. However, when on March 7, 2014 the church posted a statement about Kraft's charges claiming "he was satisfied with the steps taken to address his concerns," Kraft opted to correct the record.<sup>638</sup> In March 2014, posted excerpts from his letter to the BOAA on his personal blog, and listing his demands for Mars Hill Church.

Several elder letters soon followed. In August, twenty-one former pastors issued a joint Statement of Formal Charges and Issues.<sup>639</sup> The letter, co-signed by Dave Kraft, echoed many of Kraft's earlier concerns. It included a recitation of twenty-five pertinent incidents dating back to April 2010, and a series of supporting documents. Co-signers included co-founder Lief Moi, James Noriega (who Driscoll had convinced to give up his ministry and building), and musicians Jeff Bettger, Matt Johnson, and Zach Bolen.<sup>640</sup> While the authors of the letter intended for it to remain confidential, it soon leaked to Patheos blogger Warren Throckmorton where it rapidly accumulated readership.

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<http://davekraft.squarespace.com/posts/2014/3/8/do-you-swear-to-tell-the-truth-the-whole-truth-and-nothing-b.html>.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid.

<sup>639</sup> Warren Throckmorton. "Twenty-One Former Mars Hill Church Pastors Bring Charges Against Mark Driscoll," last modified August 21, 2014, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/warrenthrockmorton/2014/08/21/former-mars-hill-church-pastors-bring-formal-charges-against-mark-driscoll/>. Throckmorton's blog links to PDFs of these documents.

<sup>640</sup> Dave Kraft, Jeff Bettger, Phil Poirier, etc. al. "Statement of Formal Charges and Issues - Mark Driscoll," accessed November 1, 2017, <http://wp.production.patheos.com/blogs/warrenthrockmorton/files/2014/08/FormalCharges-Driscoll-814.pdf>.

August 22, 2014, nine current pastors signed on to a letter inquiring into Kraft's charges and demanding Driscoll's temporary resignation from the role of lead pastor.<sup>641</sup> The content of the letter recounts a conversation between Dustin Kensrue, a cosigner who appeared to spearhead the letter, and former BOAA member Paul Tripp who indicated Driscoll's lack of fitness for the position. For instance, Kensrue quotes Tripp as saying, "this is without a doubt, the most abusive, coercive ministry culture I have ever been involved with" [sic].<sup>642</sup> Within two weeks, only one of these co-signers, James Rose, remained on staff while the remainder volunteered their resignation or succumbed to layoffs.<sup>643</sup>

Kensrue resigned on September 1, 2014, and issued a transparent and damning statement focused on the divestment of elder power.<sup>644</sup> He opened by stating that "after writing and signing the letter that I wrote to the Full Council of Elders my options were to essentially do nothing and keep my mouth closed, to keep pressing internally until they were forced to fire me, or to resign."<sup>645</sup> Choosing the latter, he admonished the "unhealthy, fear-driven, self-protective leadership culture at MH."<sup>646</sup> In particular, Kensrue shared his horror at realizing Mars Hill polity had divested elders of all their

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<sup>641</sup> Dustin Kensrue, Drew Hensley, Mark Dunford, et. al. "Concerns and Critical Information for the Elders of Mars Hill Church," accessed November 1, 2017, <http://wp.production.patheos.com/blogs/warrenthrockmorton/files/2014/08/Concerns-and-Critical-Information-for-the-Elders-of-Mars-Hill-Church.pdf>.

<sup>642</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>643</sup> Warren Throckmorton. "Nine Mars Hill Elders Took a Bold Stand and Now Eight Are Gone," last modified September 9, 2014, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/warrenthrockmorton/2014/09/09/nine-former-mars-hill-church-elders-took-a-bold-stand-and-now-eight-are-gone/>.

<sup>644</sup> Dustin Kensrue. "My Resignation and the Future of Mars Hill Church," September 3, 2014.

<sup>645</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>646</sup> *Ibid.*

functional power stating, "if 61 of 63 elders across Mars Hill all shared the same conviction that something needed to change, it simply wouldn't matter."<sup>647</sup> He continued, "at this point, continuing to even call the [Full Council of Elders] a *council* is essentially a ruse and a farce."<sup>648</sup> In the course of a decade, Kensrue observed that Mars Hill elders had totally lost their functional power.

Kensrue deftly saw this usurpation of power occurring via a shift in the theological view of eldership, arguing that "this theological shift points to the likelihood that this consolidation of authority and the revision of the bylaws is not, as it has been presented, an oversight or an unintentional byproduct of solving some other set of problems, but rather a deliberate and deft grab for power."<sup>649</sup> In Kensrue's view, the interplay between a shifting theological center and constant changes to polity at Mars Hill produced a doubly potent, intentional atmosphere of disempowerment, leaving Driscoll as the lone leader atop a heap of powerless followers.

### **The Church Collapsed**

Internal issues and leaks met other growing concerns among outside observers of the church. In November 2012, Christian talk show host Janet Mefferd found near-verbatim passages of theologian Peter Jones' work in Driscoll's 2013 book *A Call to Resurgence*.<sup>650</sup> She brought to Driscoll's attention in a live studio interview, and posted the proof on her website. Soon, Mefferd deleted evidence from her website, but already

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<sup>647</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>649</sup> Ibid.

<sup>650</sup> Ruth Graham. "The Evangelical Celebrity Machine," *Slate*, last modified December 11, 2013, [http://www.slate.com/articles/life/faithbased/2013/12/mark\\_driscoll\\_plagiarism\\_accusations\\_janet\\_mefferd\\_accused\\_the\\_seattle\\_pastor.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/life/faithbased/2013/12/mark_driscoll_plagiarism_accusations_janet_mefferd_accused_the_seattle_pastor.html).

the incident had caught the attention of prominent Christian news sources and blogs, including Relevant Magazine, Religion News Service, Christianity Today, and Christian Post. It also piqued the interest of Patheos blogger Warren Throckmorton who followed scandalous developments and host leaked content until well past the church's closing.

Adding to the plagiarism charges, it was soon uncovered that Driscoll spent \$210,000 of Mars Hill donations on a Result Source campaign intended to boost sales of his 2012 book *Real Marriage*.<sup>651</sup> The book peaked at #1 on the New York Times hardcover advice bestseller list on January 22, 2012, a unlikely feat without Result Source's assistance.<sup>652</sup> Meanwhile, after former members demanded transparency, Sutton Turner released information detailing how Mars Hill Global spent funds understood as earmarked for international missions on domestic projects like Acts 29 church planting.<sup>653</sup> This combination enraged donors, and led to a free-fall for the Driscoll empire.

Church leaders pleaded for last-minute donations in late June 2014, the church's expenses outweighing donations for the first time in a decade or longer.<sup>654</sup> Former members and leaders, led by ex-pastor Paul Petry and his wife Joanna, staged a public protest outside Mars Hill's Bellevue campus on August 3, 2014, which drew over 60

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<sup>651</sup> Caroline Kellogg. "Can Bestseller Lists Be Bought?" *Los Angeles Times*, last modified March 6, 2014, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/books/jacketcopy/la-et-jc-pastor-contract-resultsource-bestseller-lists-20140305-story.html#axzz2vCwCm0fo>.

<sup>652</sup> Ibid.

<sup>653</sup> Brendan Kiley. "Why the Mars Hill Faithful Have Started to Question Mark," *The Stranger*, last modified July 30, 2014, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/why-the-mars-hill-faithful-have-started-to-question-mark/Content?oid=20257920>.

<sup>654</sup> Author's observation of Mars Hill Church - Bellevue service, June 29, 2014.

former Mars Hill affiliates.<sup>655</sup> Members streamed out of Mars Hill, and the church closed several locations through the summer months of 2014. Shortly thereafter, the Acts 29 Network voted to remove Driscoll from their leadership.<sup>656</sup>

On August 24, 2014, Driscoll returned to the pulpit for the first time since beginning a five-week vacation. At the conclusion of a conventional hour-long sermon, he sat on a stool adjacent to the lectern. From there, he issued a tearful apology, announcing the beginning of a formal grievance process during which time Driscoll will not preach, govern the church, or fulfill speaking obligations for a minimum of six weeks.<sup>657</sup> The crowd, packing Mars Hill's large Bellevue campus for an extended 10:30 AM service, wiped tears from their faces, with shouts of "we love you, Mark!" echoing around the cavernous, modern warehouse space.<sup>658</sup> Driscoll never would return to the Mars Hill pulpit, replaced by Executive Elder Dave Bruskas.

The church would not survive like this for long. On October 14th, Driscoll voluntarily resigned from Mars Hill Church in a public letter sent to BOAA Michael Van Skaik saying, "recent months have proven unhealthy for our family—even physically unsafe at times—and we believe the time has now come for the elders to choose new

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<sup>655</sup> Joel Connelly. "Ex-Mars Hill Church members: 'We are not anonymous,'" *Seattle PI*, last modified July 25, 2014, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://blog.seattlepi.com/seattlepolitics/2014/07/25/ex-mars-hill-church-members-we-are-not-anonymous/>.

<sup>656</sup> Warren Throckmorton. "Acts 29 Removes Co-founder Mark Driscoll and Mars Hill Church from Membership (UPDATED)," *Patheos*, last modified August 8, 2014, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/warrenthrockmorton/2014/08/08/acts-29-network-removes-co-founder-mark-driscoll-and-mars-hill-church-from-membership/>.

<sup>657</sup> Author's observation of Mars Hill Church - Bellevue service, August 8, 2014.

<sup>658</sup> *Ibid.*

pastoral leadership for Mars Hill."<sup>659</sup> Bruskas assumed the role of lead pastor briefly, but only two weeks later announced via blog post that the Mars Hill board "concluded that rather than remaining a centralized multisite church with video-led teaching distributed to multiple locations, the best future for each of our existing local churches is for them to become autonomous self-governed entities," intending to break Mars Hill franchises into autonomous churches with local preaching pastors.<sup>660</sup>

I attended Mars Hill's U District campus a month later, on September 28, arriving to a sparse crowd of around 20 congregants.<sup>661</sup> A lone worship leader stood on stage with an amplified acoustic guitar to lead the community in singing hymns, ending his set to the anemic crowd with "Be Thou My Vision," a longstanding Mars Hill favorite since its 1998 *Mars Hill Worship One* album.<sup>662</sup> According to my field notes, "amazingly, the congregation clapped along and brought an amicable spirit to the service," an act of goodwill in a palpably difficult moment. The crowd grew to a peak of around 75 people by the time Bruskas began his sermon, displayed on the screen at by videocast. But when the ushers took the offering, I saw one sole check to the church lying in the basket as it passed by me.

On November 1, Bruskas announced that Mars Hill would disband by the end of

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<sup>659</sup> Sarah Pulliam Bailey. "Exclusive: Mark Driscoll's resignation letter from Mars Hill Church," *Religion News Service*, last modified October 15, 2014, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://religionnews.com/2014/10/15/exclusive-mark-driscolls-resignation-letter-to-mars-hill-church/>.

<sup>660</sup> Dave Bruskas. "Local Mission, Local Churches," *Mars Hill Church Archive*, last modified October 31, 2014, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://marshill.se/marshill/2014/10/31/local-mission-local-churches>.

<sup>661</sup> Author's observation of Mars Hill Church - U District service, September 28, 2014.

<sup>662</sup> *Ibid.*

the year.<sup>663</sup> The Mars Hill entity officially dissolved on January 1st, 2015.

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<sup>663</sup> Warren Throckmorton. "Megachurch Mars Hill to close Doors: What Does the Future Hold Now?," *The Daily Beast*, last modified November 2, 2014, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/11/02/megachurch-mars-hill-to-close-doors-what-does-the-future-hold-now.html>.

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