"Bridging the Musical and Scriptural Generation Gap":
The Jesus People Movement and *Jesus Christ Superstar*

By

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Jean L. Bosch

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Abstract

Jesus Christ Superstar, a "rock opera" written by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice and first staged in 1971, enjoyed a significant amount of popularity in the United States at the end of the "long sixties" era. However, American Christians were divided in their reactions to the fusion of religion and popular culture in *Superstar*: supporters hailed the piece as a means to reawaken interest in Christianity among a disillusioned youth generation, but detractors criticized the work as "sacrilegious" and "irreverent." At the same time *Superstar* entered the American public eye, the Jesus People Movement (ca 1967-1974), an unprecedented Christian revival among youth, was gaining momentum and spreading eastward from California. Like *Superstar*, the Jesus People blended Christian practice and narrative with vernacular culture in a manner that had a polarizing effect among contemporary Christians. This study contextualizes *Superstar* with the Jesus People Movement in order to examine how the moment in American religious history at the end of the long sixties created the conditions for *Superstar* to become both popular and controversial.

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Jesus music records and Jesus People buttons. I especially want to thank the Mustard Seed Church in Lawrence, Kansas for showing me what a Jesus People fellowship could grow into and the fruit it could bear over the course of four decades. Mustard Seed congregants Pieter Willems, Barry Foster, and Karen Oliver are particularly deserving of recognition for patiently enduring my endless questions.

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Soli Deo Gloria.

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Introduction

On June 21, 1971, a psychedelic image of Jesus filled the cover of *Time* magazine. The accompanying article was entitled "The New Rebel Cry: Jesus Is Coming!" and documented what *Time* dubbed "the Jesus Revolution": an unprecedented and primarily youth-led wave of Christian revival that was sweeping eastward across the United States from California. Featured prominently in *Time*'s coverage was the Jesus People Movement, made up of a new breed of Christians (dubbed "Jesus Freaks") emerging from the ranks of former druggies, disillusioned revolutionaries, and other members of the 1960s counterculture. Four months later, on October 25, Jesus again dominated *Time*'s cover—this time represented by actor Jeff Fenholt swathed in yards of gold lamé as the title character in Broadway's new rock opera, *Jesus Christ Superstar*. The concept album that evolved into the theatrical version did not meet with widespread success when it was first introduced in Great Britain. In the United States, however, the album sold 2.5 million copies by opening night of the Broadway production, which enjoyed a run of 711 performances.[1] Jesus was "in," and the national media was taking note.

In addition to their near simultaneity, the Jesus People Movement[2] and *Superstar* have striking similarities. Each was built on a fascination with the person of Jesus. Each combined vernacular culture and religion to appeal to the youth of America. Each reframed Christian narrative and experience outside of the established church. Through these innovations, each "performance" provoked heated conversation among (and about) Christian groups. Rice credits luck with *Jesus Christ Superstar*'s explosive popularity as both an album and a rock opera, but

[1] Clive Barnes, "Theater: Christ's Passion Transported to the Stage in Guise of Serious Pop," *New York Times*, 13 October 1971; Elizabeth Wollman, *The Theater Will Rock: A History of the Rock Musical from* Hair *to* Hedwig (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), 94.

[2] The movement is sometimes called simply the "Jesus Movement," but since that label is sometimes applied to the initial spread of Christianity in the first century, this study uses the term "Jesus People Movement."

the timing of the show's debut in relation to the peak of the Jesus People Movement suggests that *Superstar*'s rise in fame is related to a specific moment of American social and religious history in the early 1970s.

The year 1971 fell near the end of what historian Arthur Marwick terms the "long sixties," a period lasting approximately from 1958 to 1974 that encompassed a cultural revolution in the United States and much of Western Europe.[3] During this extended decade, American newspapers screamed headlines about polarizing events that forever altered the social fabric of the United States, such as the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, the rise of the youth counterculture, the sexual revolution, and the Cold War. The role of religion, too, was shifting. Church attendance in most Western nations was in decline, atheists became more vocal in society, and younger generations in particular found the influx of Eastern religions and alternative spiritualities appealing. In *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, Hugh McLeod goes as far as to suggest that the era marks the end of Christendom, the religious, political, and social order that prevailed in predominantly Christian-populated Europe from the Middle Ages onward and later spread to the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand after colonization.[4] The church in America did not die out as an institution, but with the weakening perception of the United States as a "Christian nation," its status as a common, unifying force within communities and an authoritative voice on morality was crumbling. The role of Christianity was nebulous in an increasingly pluralistic and secular American society.

In the midst of this tempestuous cultural swirl, *Superstar* crossed the Atlantic and docked in the realm of American popular culture. *Superstar*, a sung-through concept album and later

[3] Arthur Marwick, "Introduction: Locating Key Texts Amid the Distinctive Landscape of the Sixties" in *Windows on the Sixties: Exploring Key Texts of Media and Culture*, ed. Anthony Aldgate, James Chapman, and Arthur Marwick (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2000), xii.
[4] Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 255-256.

Broadway show, retold the Passion story through rock music and offered a fresh look at the life and death of Jesus. Hailed as a step toward "bridging the musical and scriptural generation gap,"[5] *Superstar* seemed like the perfect tool to breathe life into the two-dimensional Jesus of stained glass windows and prove that Christian narrative could still be relevant in a post-Christian society. In particular, many Christians hoped that the "rock opera," as *Superstar* was termed, would be a vehicle for communicating with the youth generation, for whom rock music was an attraction but institutional churches were not. However, *Superstar* did not meet with universal acceptance among Christians. In fact, some Christians strongly opposed the rock opera enough to picket the theatre on opening night or write letters of protest to the local media. Given the demand for cultural relevance in Christianity, why the impassioned negative reactions? Placing *Superstar* in conversation with the Jesus People Movement, a concurrent example of merging vernacular culture with Christianity, may shed some light on this question.

The Jesus People Movement and *Superstar* developed along closely parallel timelines. Composer Andrew Lloyd Webber and lyricist Tim Rice began work on *Superstar* in 1969, while the Jesus People Movement was still in its formative stages and largely under the radar of the media. Publicity for both events peaked around 1971, in which *Superstar*'s concept album enjoyed the greatest popularity, the rock opera opened on Broadway, and almost every major national periodical published a story on the Jesus People. By the mid-1970s, both events had largely faded from view. Despite their concomitant growth and similarities in fusing Christianity and popular culture, however, there are few definite links between the two events. Ironically, the most obvious connection between the pair is the presence of Jesus People outside of the Mark Hellinger Theatre on opening night of *Superstar*'s Broadway production—not as audience

[5] Michael Braun with Richard Eckford and Peter Stimpson, comp., *Jesus Christ Superstar: The Authorised Version* (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1972), 35. Note that this resource is not paginated in the traditional sense; page numbers for this study begin with "1" directly following the copyright page.

members, but as protesters. Nevertheless, the simultaneity of the two events was certainly a matter of importance to contemporary observers, as evidenced by the almost inevitable mention of *Superstar* in any article or study on the Jesus People as well as passing references to the Jesus People in media on *Superstar*. What, then, is the relationship between the Jesus People Movement and Lloyd Webber and Rice's timely rock opera?

Historians in the burgeoning world of musical theatre scholarship often mention but make little of the connection between the two phenomena, but scholars in religious studies have taken up the conversation. In *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*, Stephen Prothero suggests that the joint rise of the Jesus People, *Superstar*, and another Gospel-based musical, *Godspell*, demonstrated and encouraged increasing Jesus-centrism in American Christianity. Prothero links the mounting fascination with Jesus to the increasing awareness of religious pluralism during the long sixties: all Americans, regardless of religious background, could lay claim to the human-maybe-divine Jesus as an icon, a symbol of the *cultural* religion of the United States.[6]

Jesus People historian Larry Eskridge posits the most interesting historical argument about *Superstar* and the Jesus People Movement. Eskridge argues that the popularity of *Superstar* and the controversy which it generated was a crucial factor in creating "a cultural atmosphere which meshed spiritual themes, rock music and the counterculture into an understandable cultural template" which engendered interest in the unusual fusion of counterculture and religion materializing among the Jesus People.[7] In particular, Eskridge suggests that the hype over *Superstar* led to the explosion of media coverage for the Jesus People

[6] Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux: 2003).
[7] Larry Eskridge, "God's Forever Family: the Jesus People Movement in America, 1966-1977" (PhD diss., University of Stirling, 2005), 185.

in 1971, which not only established that the phenomenon was, indeed, a "movement," but also laid the groundwork for the movement to spread rapidly across the nation. In addition to Eskridge's observations, there are suggestions that the relationship was not unidirectional: in a review of *Superstar* for *Time*, William Bender and Timothy Foote claim that the rock opera's popularity was "a symptom and partial result" of the Jesus People Movement.[8] The subtle interplay between the two events is complex and fluid, but Eskridge is probably correct is placing the primary emphasis on the joint media coverage that created momentum for interest in the two events based out of opposite coasts.

This study, however, is not primarily concerned with identifying a causal relationship between the Jesus People Movement and *Superstar*. Instead, this study will contextualize *Superstar* with the Jesus People Movement in order to explain how the moment in American religious history at the end of the long sixties created the conditions for *Superstar* to become both popular and controversial. Passion plays have not historically been huge commercial successes in modern times, but little in musical theatre or biblically-based theatre scholarship to date has deeply probed the reason for an unexpected Broadway hit based on religious material. Though *Superstar* was not designed to function under the auspices of organized religion, its use of the Passion narrative gave many Americans sufficient cause to consider the show as a religious artifact, which, as this study will argue, was a crucial element of the rock opera's success. The explosive growth of the Jesus People Movement indicates that there was a hunger for an alternative, youth-friendly manner of practicing Christianity, and a comparison of the movement with *Superstar* reveals that the rock opera gained momentum because it, too, promised fulfillment of this demand. However, both events proved polarizing within the

[8] William Bender and Timothy Foote, "Gold Rush to Golgotha," *Time*, 25 October 1971.

American Christian community: reactions to the fusion of vernacular culture and religion ranged from outright horror to eager acceptance.

This study will also seek to answer the question of why the Jesus People and *Superstar* provoked such widely disparate reactions within American Christianity. This is a question that becomes even more intriguing in light of the respective fates of the two events in the decades since the long sixties: while the Jesus People Movement was eventually absorbed into mainstream Christianity, *Superstar* continues to be viewed with suspicion by a significant segment of the Christian community.

A note should be made here about who is considered a "Christian" in this study. The term is problematic, for the "end of Christendom" raised interesting questions about what it means to be a Christian—is it based on belief? On membership in a particular community of faith? On going through the correct rituals and rites of passage? On nationality or family heritage? On wearing the right clothes, singing the right songs, or using the correct terminology? These are important questions that will surface multiple times in the coming pages. For the purposes of determining the reactions of "Christians" to the Jesus People and *Superstar*, however, some criteria for inclusion and exclusion must be made. This study treats as Christians those who professed Christian belief either explicitly through claiming the designation or implicitly through participation in an acknowledged Christian congregation or denomination

On occasion, it will be helpful to discuss various subgroups of Christianity. In addition to denominational designations such as Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, etc., a useful term is "evangelical." Evangelicalism crosses denominational boundaries, and an evangelical Christian, according to D. Michael Lindsay, is someone who believes first "that the Bible is the supreme authority for religious belief and practice," second, "that he or she has a

personal relationship with Jesus Christ," and third, "that one should take a transforming, activist approach to faith."[9] A closely related term is "fundamentalism," which, in Christianity, emphasizes a literal interpretation of the Bible.[10] Also, an important classification when discussing the Jesus People is what this study will call the "established church," a loosely-defined term for Christians who identified with mainstream American culture as opposed to the countercultural tendencies of the Jesus People; as the name suggests, the "established church" symbolized for the Jesus People Christianity that had become too institutionalized.

Musical theatre is a growing field in scholarship, and *Superstar* has received a moderate amount of critical attention from theatre scholars and musicologists. Most of the recent studies that include *Superstar* focus on analysis of form and primarily position the show within the history of musicals as an early example of rock music on Broadway.[11] Jessica Sternfeld's *The Megamusical* and Ronda Rice Winderl's unpublished dissertation, *New York Professional Productions Depicting the Gospel, 1970-1982*, offer what are by far the most comprehensive studies of Lloyd Webber and Rice's rock opera. Both monographs provide in-depth historical study of the original production, Sternfeld arguing that *Superstar* served as the prototype of the spectacular, big-budget "megamusicals" of the last three decades of the twentieth century, and Winderl (writing in 1985) commenting on the then-recent trend of adapting the New Testament for the commercial stage. Winderl's primary focus is dramaturgical analysis and staging techniques rather than sociological investigation, but she concludes her dissertation by

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[9] D. Michael Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.

[10] The more specific theological emphases of fundamentalists will be explored more fully in Chapter One.

[11] For examples, see Wollman; Ethan Mordden, *One More Kiss: The Broadway Musical in the 1970s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); and Scott Warfield, "From *Hair* to *Rent*: Is 'Rock' a Four-letter Word on Broadway?" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, ed. William A. Everett and Paul R. Laird (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Joseph P. Swain's *The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.: 2002) offers a refreshing exception by focusing on the narrative and characterization; he frames the show as a musical adaptation of history rather than an interpretation of sacred writ.

observing, "The most direct extension of this study of gospel productions could be an investigation isolating those sociological factors engendering the emergence of these productions and the reciprocal effects which society and the theatre have incurred as a result."[12] Leading musical theatre scholars such as John Bush Jones, Andrea Most, and Bruce Kirle have set a precedent for interpreting musicals such as *Oklahoma!* and *South Pacific* within their original social contexts, as Winderl recommends. *Jesus Christ Superstar* is one of many musicals that merits but has not yet received such a critical reading, and this study explores one of many avenues of putting the rock opera into conversation with the social history surrounding its genesis.

Most discussions of *Superstar* mention that another musical about the life of Christ opened in May of 1971, five months before the Lloyd Webber-Rice version of the Passion debuted in its theatrical form. John-Michael Tebelak and Stephen Schwartz's *Godspell*, based primarily on the gospel of Matthew, began its run on Off-Broadway before transferring to Broadway in 1976. The show portrayed Jesus and his disciples as clowns, drawing inspiration from theologian Harvey Cox's *Feast of Fools*, which addresses the role of festivity and fantasy in Christian faith. Like *Superstar, Godspell* transferred Christian narrative to the structures of the commercial theatre and positioned itself between religion and entertainment.[13] However, while *Godspell* achieved a measure of fame in American society (besides lengthy runs on Off-Broadway and Broadway, the song "Day By Day" went to #11 on the top 40 charts[14]), it did not generate either the level of hype or the amount of controversy that surrounded *Superstar*. Thus,

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[12] Ronda Rice Winderl, *New York Professional Productions Depicting the Gospel, 1970-1982*, (PhD diss, New York University, 1985), 317.

[13] In fact, musical theatre scholars are quicker to analyze the religious content of *Godspell* than those of *Superstar*. For example, Joseph Swain devotes an entire chapter to analysis of *Godspell* as religious experience in *The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey*.

[14] Carol de Giere, *Defying Gravity: The Creative Career of Stephen Schwartz, from* Godspell *to* Wicked (Milwaukee: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books, 2008), 68.

Godspell is a less potent example of the tension in the relationship between Christianity and culture in the long sixties. For this reason, this study focuses on *Superstar*, but *Godspell* remains ripe fodder for future scholarship on the religious and social context of musical theatre.

One way to highlight the manners in which the Jesus People Movement and *Jesus Christ Superstar* were similar products of their cultural context is to frame both events as performances. In the mid-twentieth century, Erving Goffman and other sociologists began actively applying theatrical metaphors to everyday life with the idea that "all the world's a stage," and performance studies scholars have since explored the ways in which social performances embody the cultural, political, and historical processes in which they are embedded. Some components of each of the two events in consideration in this study have obvious performative qualities, such as the worship services and street preaching of the Jesus People Movement and the original stage production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*. The performance lens, however, creates space to investigate other ways that these events embodied aspects of and reactions to the surrounding culture. To that end, the first chapter of this study will examine how the Jesus People Movement "performed" various emphases of the counterculture as they developed a unique manner of practicing Christianity, and the second chapter will demonstrate how *Superstar* shared many of the same tendencies in performance. The third chapter will then bring the two events together with an analysis of the reactions that each received from the greater Christian community in the United States.

Chapter One: The Jesus People Movement

Starting in 1969, an underground newspaper called the *Hollywood Free Paper* hit the streets of Los Angeles and slowly gained an audience across the United States. Filled with slang-ridden articles, eye-catching cartoons, and groovy graphics, at first glance the *HFP* resembled the other throw-away tabloids that became popular among the counterculture during the long sixties. However, the message of the *HFP* stood in stark contrast to the endorsements of drugs, free love, and revolution in most underground newspapers in circulation in Southern California:

> Well, we're not rapping about positive thinking or playing religious games. Nope. That's just as phony as the drug trip. We're rapping about a Person—Jesus Christ. And if you can dig Him (that means to depend on Him to put your head together) then you're in for some heavy surprises!! He'll turn you on to a spiritual high for the rest of forever.[15]

The attention-grabbing headlines of the *HFP* frequently were tailored to the political and social interests of the newspaper's countercultural audience but then turned the conversation to matters of personal spirituality: "Pollution Conspiracy!" referred to pollution of the mind, not the earth, and "Free the Prisoners" dealt not with Vietnam POWs, but liberation from the bondage of sin—and inevitably, Jesus was the *HFP*'s answer to the world's problems.

The *HFP* became one of the most well-known manifestations of the Jesus People Movement, an unprecedented wave of conservative Christianity that began in the counterculture and then swept through the youth generation across the nation. In the midst of concerns that Christianity was no longer relevant to Americans at the end of the long sixties, a renaissance of fundamentalist Christian belief among the counterculture was an unforseen event. According to

[15]"Jesus Is Better Than Hash," *Hollywood Free Paper* 3, no. 7, 1971, quoted in Ronald M. Enroth, Edward E. Ericson, Jr., and C. Breckinridge Peters, *The Jesus People: Old-Time Religion in the Age of Aquarius* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 76.

Jesus People Movement historian David Di Sabatino, the vast majority of Jesus People held to the "fundamentals of the faith" (Christ's virgin birth, Christ's death as an atonement for the sins of humanity, Christ's bodily resurrection, Christ's physical return to earth to establish the kingdom of God, and the Bible as the inspired and wholly inerrant word of God), putting them in theological accord with most fundamentalist Christians.[16] However, the Jesus People did not have the same way of interacting with the surrounding culture as did Christians in their parents' generations. In 1972, three sociologists from Westmont College in Santa Barbara, Ronald M. Enroth, Edward E. Ericson, and C. Breckinridge Peters, published a sociological study on the Jesus People Movement. They comment, "Fundamentalists will be confused because the Jesus People say the right things in the wrong language. Besides, they are long-haired, hippie-looking, and alienated from the established churches. Theologically, the Jesus People are fundamentalists; sociologically, they are not."[17] Indeed, as Chapter Three will elucidate, Christians from established churches often expressed a great deal of perplexity when confronted with the Jesus People's amalgamation of the counterculture and mainstream Christian belief. The presence of Jesus People in a congregation provoked more than one church split.

The Jesus People Movement is typically classified as a religious movement, but part of what made it distinct was its unique approach to culture. While preachers raged in pulpits about the evils of long hair on men,[18] the Jesus People let their hair grow out, put on fringed jackets and beads, and swayed to the rhythms of popular music. Furthermore, the Jesus People began copying the language, music, and structures of the counterculture for their own purposes. They

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[16]David Di Sabatino, *The Jesus People Movement: An Annotated Bibliography and General Resource* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 5. Notably, this also meant that the Jesus People disagreed with more liberal streams of theology (such as "Death of God theology") that were gaining prominence in the United States in the middle of the twentieth century and that emphasized biblical criticism and held a doubtful attitude towards the miraculous.

[17] Enroth, Ericson, and Peters, 17.

[18] For example, see Jack Hyles' sermon "Jesus Had Short Hair," which was first delivered in 1971 (Fundamental Forum Electronic Press, first electronic printing 1997, http://www.jackhyles.com/sh_hair.htm).

spoke the street argot, but they talked about Jesus. They formed rock bands, but substituted evangelistic or worshipful lyrics. They opened nightclubs, but they used them to preach the gospel. The intent of this chapter is not to provide a comprehensive historical overview of the Jesus People Movement, but to demonstrate the unique ways in which the Jesus People borrowed from and exploited the culture around them. This fluid relationship fed into the creation of the Jesus People subculture with a unique brand of the practice of Christianity—a social performance worth evaluating. After a brief introduction of the Jesus People Movement, this chapter examines three facets of the Jesus People Movement's bidirectional relationship with the counterculture from which they emerged: invoking communication patterns familiar to the counterculture, catering to the experience-oriented youth generation, and moving the locus of activities outside of designated church buildings.

Who are the Jesus People?

The Jesus People Movement, which lasted from approximately 1967 to 1974, did not consist of a single, organized body of people. In the early 1970s, however, American journalists, sociologists, and religious leaders began to recognize that in the midst of declining church attendance, there were pockets of young people turning to Christianity with a zeal which, in many cases, they had formerly applied to political activism or the pursuit of pleasure. By the end of 1971, almost every major news magazine in the United States had published a story on the "Jesus Revolution," and many Americans became aware of a growing subculture alternatively termed as "Jesus People," "Street Christians," and "Jesus Freaks." Scholars can only guess at the total number involved in the Jesus People Movement (though it may be in the hundreds of thousands), especially since, as most of the major periodicals reported, the spiritual enthusiasm and cultural idiosyncrasies spilled over to existing denominations and had a profound effect on

youth and campus ministries across the nation.[19] The sphere and influence of the movement far exceeded the boundaries of recognizable groups of Jesus People.

If the total number of Jesus People has proven elusive, the precise starting point of the movement is equally uncertain. Most Jesus People historians recognize Ted and Liz Wise's ministry to the San Francisco counterculture, which will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter, as a crucial starting point, but the movement as a whole grew organically from several separate groups that sprang up independently on the West Coast, especially California, starting around 1967. The first Jesus People organizations—the term is used loosely here, for anti-institutionalism was rampant in the early days of the movement—were largely comprised of new Christians with roots in the counterculture. When these former hippies and political radicals professed faith in Jesus Christ, they often abandoned former lifestyles of drug use and free love, but they did not necessarily trade in their beads and tie-dye for suits or discard their aversion to the "establishment."

The blend of counterculture and Christianity was present but less extreme as the movement expanded eastward. Established groups from the California and the West Coast soon began to spread to other parts of the nation. Linda Meissner's Jesus People Army, originally based out of Seattle, is a notable example of a local group that sent out successful satellite groups to locations such as Milwaukee and later Chicago. Similarly, the semi-nomadic Children of God[20] spent time in California and Texas before establishing colonies in several states across the

[19] Enroth, Ericson, and Peters, writing in 1972, consider 300,000, the number offered by David Wilkerson, to be overstated (15). An article in *Time* puts the estimate of Jesus People in the several thousands, possibly hundreds of thousands if those undergoing revival in established churches are included in the count, but the article also comments on the difficulty of even guessing at figures (59).

[20] The Children of God was a highly publicized group that was largely responsible for perceptions of the Jesus People as members of cults due to its authoritarian structure, exclusivist views, and unorthodox and sometimes questionable recruitment methods, including reports of kidnappings and "flirty fishing" (i.e. using prostitution as bait). For these reasons, historians often relegate the Children of God to the outskirts of the Jesus People

country from Colorado to New York and later going international with outposts in Europe, Canada, and Mexico.

The groups migrating eastward, however, were not the only representatives of the Jesus People Movement to dwell in other regions of the nation. As several of the major periodicals noted, the hippies-turned-Jesus Freaks were part of what was emerging as a larger development in America. For example, in addition to noting the recent rash of fascination with Jesus in pop culture (in pieces such as *Superstar*), *Time*'s cover story on the "Jesus Revolution" lists the California variety of Jesus People as one of three strains of the trend that was beginning to be called a movement. More culturally aligned with middle-class America and less detached from institutional Christianity were what *Time* called the "Straight People," (mostly young) Christians who were active in campus and youth groups that were gaining momentum and moving away from their denominational specificity. Among Catholics, so-called "Catholic Pentecostals," embraced the gifts of the Spirit and more emotionalism than is typical within their denomination.[21] As the movement progressed, the fastest-growing demographic of Jesus People in America shifted from former street people to white, suburban youth.

This study primarily focuses on the Jesus People groups in California that intentionally ministered to the counterculture, which make ideal cases studies for two reasons: first, they held the widest spheres of influence and highest level of publicity within the movement, and second, their extreme blend of counterculture and Christianity provoked the most response, both positive and negative, from other American Christians. However, it is important to recognize that the winds of the Jesus People Movement were felt in communities across the nation. Although most young (and young at heart) Christians who remained in their established congregations were less

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Movement. For further reading, see Chapter 2 of Enroth, Ericson, and Peters as well as Chapter 6 in Robert S. Ellwood, Jr, *One Way: The Jesus Movement and Its Meaning* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

[21] "The New Rebel Cry: Jesus is Coming!," *Time*, 21 June 1971, 59.

extreme examples of applying countercultural tendencies to their practices of faith, many of them listened to Jesus music, renounced a life of drug and sexual experimentations, proudly sported the t-shirts and bumper stickers with catchy slogans, developed ministries outside of church buildings, generally evidenced a new zeal for participation in all aspects of Christian expression, or all of the above. Just as significant for this study was the ability of these nationwide Jesus Freaks (for many of them claimed the title) to make the reality of the Jesus People Movement personal to many in their own circles and evidence to the Church at large that a shift was taking place in the practice of Christianity among the youth generation.

Despite the lack of formal coherence within the movement, Enroth, Ericson, and Peters, attempt to identify some defining characteristics of the movement (though they acknowledge that there are exceptions). First, Jesus People proclaimed the "simple gospel," the seemingly uncomplicated message that "Jesus saves." Second, they held strong eschatological views that they were living in the last days and Jesus' return to earth would occur within their generation. Third, the majority of Jesus People were charismatic: they embraced the gifts of the spirit, speaking in tongues and the other physical manifestations of the Spirit associated with Pentecostalism. Fourth, the Jesus People stressed the importance of community, an area they felt was lacking in the institutional church. This list of characteristics focuses on the theological emphases of the Jesus People, but each emphasis was manifested in the *practice* of Christianity within the movement. The Jesus People's eschatological views fueled their evangelistic efforts, and the simple gospel was the primary influencing factor on their methods of sharing the gospel. Their charismatic tendencies could hardly have been detected in the first place had they not incorporated speaking in tongues and prayers for healing into their worship services. The emphasis on community could only be fully realized if they actually tried to develop a sense of

community in their own fellowships, and for many Jesus People, this involved living in communes.

Communicating with the Counterculture

As any junior high student wishing to become part of the popular crowd soon learns, winning the acceptance of a group is closely connected with learning how to practice the culture: what to say, what to wear, with whom to talk, where to hang out…the list of cultural nuances could continue indefinitely. Arthur Blessitt, nicknamed "the Minister of the Sunset Strip," describes his early days preaching the gospel in Hollywood:

> I…let my hair grow longer and learned a quick lesson in dress. A collar or a business suit wouldn't get you anywhere. The first time I walked into a trip room I wore a tie and suit. The heads panicked. They thought I was a narc (narcotics agent) out to bust them. After that I switched to turtlenecks and psychedelically patterned shirts, slacks or bell bottoms, and sandals.[22]

The Jesus People Movement took root and rapidly expanded in part because its early fellowships and ministries operated in communication patterns familiar to their surrounding subculture, from the groovy dress and street argot to media like underground newspapers and political activist-style demonstrations.

The youth counterculture of the 1960s did not emerge because of their variations on the English language, per se, but as they surfaced as a group, a distinctive feature was their use and development of slang, much of it drawn from the nonconformist beatniks of the 1950s. During the Jesus People Movement, the indigenous members of the counterculture (those who were hippies when they converted to Christianity) continued to use the street language to which they were accustomed, and the missionaries to the counterculture (those who ministered on the streets with evangelistic and humanitarian aims) often found adopting the "hip" speech patterns a useful

[22] Arthur Blessitt, *Turned on to Jesus* (New York: Hawthorne, 1971) http://www.blessitt.com/turned_jesus .

and sometimes necessary tool. In addition to dressing down to fit in with the crowd on Sunset Boulevard, Arthur Blessitt recounts, "I learned their language, and scores were brought to the Lord in conversations that began, 'Hey, man, I know you're strung out. But there's a better way. Let me turn you on to a trip with an everlasting high. Jesus, man, He loves you. He won't hassle you. He'll put it all together.'"[23]

One of the Jesus People's most common linguistic tactics for reaching the youth generation was to make full use of the counterculture's buzzwords by offering Jesus as a substitute for other thrills. Has your life literally gone to pot? Jesus is the ultimate trip, the everlasting high. Failed to find nirvana? Jesus is all about peace and love. The system got you down? Don't worry, Jesus won't hassle you—it's not religion, it's a relationship. The Baby Boomer generation that came of age in the long sixties manifested a hunger for personal experience. The countercultural slang, especially the drug-related variety, lent itself to describing experiences. Not only was the idea of a "Jesus high" appealing to hippies, it also canalized their thinking and speech toward an emotion-based understanding of Christianity.

Building off of commandeered counterculture vocabulary originally employed for outreach purposes, the Jesus Freak subculture became populated with a distinctive set of catchphrases and symbols. Indeed, the term "Jesus Freak" itself was similar to "Yankee Doodle" during the American Revolution: initially a derogatory comparison to hippie "drug freaks," the Jesus People defiantly adopted the label as a badge of honor. Cheers such as "Give me a J! (J!) Give me an E! (E!)…What does that spell? (Jesus!)" and "What will get you higher than acid? Jesus!" soon accompanied Jesus People gatherings.[24] One of the most prevalent rallying cries during the movement was "One way—the Jesus way!" with the accompanying gesture of an

[23] Blessitt.
[24] William S. Cannon, *The Jesus Revolution: New Inspiration for Evangelicals* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971), 99.

upraised fist with forefinger pointing upward (a takeoff of the New Left's clenched fist). [25] The *HFP* supported itself in part by running the Jesus People Emporium, a mail-order store for posters, buttons, bumper stickers, and other merchandise sporting hip graphics and slogans like "Jesus is my bag," "Smile, God loves you," and "Repent! Boycott Hell."[26]

Jack Sparks and the Christian World Liberation Front had an unusual ministry on the University of California, Berkeley campus that relied heavily on using the counterculture's own communication methods. Sparks, a former statistics professor at Penn State, quit his job and moved to Berkeley in 1968 with his wife and three other couples in order to reach out to the youth of Berkeley, an activist-friendly campus known as the birthplace of the Free Speech Movement and as a hub for the New Left. His strategy was "to drop into the lifestyle of the changing youth culture and—insofar as we see that culture not violating biblical standards—to adopt the culture and thereby have an increased opportunity to build a body of believers."[27] Like Blessitt, Sparks assumed the speech and dress habits of the counterculture, growing a beard, donning blue jeans and work shirts, and endeavoring to "dig" the jargon of the Berkeley students.

Sparks and his wife began inviting students over to their house for "Bible raps," which consisted of worship time (with both hymns and more contemporary music), a brief message and discussion time led by Sparks, oral Bible reading, and passing the hat, a twist on traditional offering times in which participants were invited to put extra money in but also take money out if they had need. By 1972, the raps were well-attended, drawing crowds of up to 200. The dress code was decidedly informal and peppered liberally with tie-dye shirts, Afros, and bare feet, and

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[25] Ellwood, 63.
[26] Lowell D. Streiker, *The Jesus Trip: Advent of the Jesus Freaks* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 114, 117; Jesus People Emporium Advertisement, *Hollywood Free Paper* 4, no. 1, January 1972, 6.
[27] Quoted in *Vanguard*, March 1971, 22, quoted in Enroth, Ericson, and Peters, 108.

the participants comfortably chimed in with calls of "right on" and "far out."[28] Sparks' messages were unpretentious, trading theological terminology for a mixture of street slang and Scripture. He explicated one biblical passage, "There are no spiritual giants, dig it? The evangelizer is no closer to the Father than some poor little guy who is barely able to push a broom. Man, that's why it's so great."[29] The Bible raps, which became a fixture of several Jesus People ministries, created a participatory space for countercultural converts to interact with the Scriptures in language they understood.

Sparks and fellow CWLF worker Paul Raudenbush took the attempt to speak to the counterculture in their own dialect to a new level with their translation of Scripture into street slang. *Letters to Street Christians*, written under the pseudonym of "Two Brothers from Berkeley," paraphrased the New Testament Epistles in hip language familiar to the youth culture. The King James Version of Ephesians 1:4 reads, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." Instead, Sparks and Raudenbush offered their youth audience, "Can You dig it? Before He even made the world He picked us as his children, to be totally liberated from ourselves without blame for all the bad things we have done."[30] Although the translation loses poetic merit and the weight and theological nuance of terms such as "holy," the text closely follows the original, just with the substitutions of popular phrases like "dig it" and "liberated from ourselves." *Letters to Street Christians* shows some concern for hermeneutical accuracy, but as was common with the Jesus People, it defers a measure of theological depth in favor of an open door for communication with a people group who might find a more traditional rendering of the text

[28] Brian Vachon, *A Time to Be Born* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), 17; Streiker, 95.
[29] Vachon, *A Time to Be Born*, 18.
[30] Quoted in Di Sabatino, 74.

unattractive or inaccessible. The paraphrased New Testament apparently found a large readership, for the book sold 100,000 copies in 1971.[31]

The CWLF's chief ministry outlets—the Bible raps, the formation of communal Christian houses, the publication of an underground newspaper, care for drug users, and food distribution—were typical of the Jesus People, and they were better than most groups in the movement about providing training and discipleship opportunities for new converts.[32] However, the CWLF also possessed an unusual aptitude for effectively aping the strategies of the New Left for their own ends and occasionally developed creative methods of making their voice heard amidst the bustling activism present on the Berkeley campus. They adopted an aggressive evangelistic stance to suit their confrontational milieu, and in many cases, their tactics involved drawing attention through clever imitations of New Left events and literature—even the organization's name was chosen as a play on the radical Third World Liberation Front.[33] At an anti-war rally, 200 CWLF members showed up not only to distribute evangelistic literature, but also to march along with their own set of signs reading "I'd Walk a Mile for Jesus" and "War the Curse—Jesus the Cure."[34] When the leftists cheered on the Vietcong with "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh, the NLF is Gonna Win!," the CWLF struck up their own cries of "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh, Jesus Christ is Gonna Win!"[35] On another occasion, the CWLF took advantage of a Billy Graham's 1971 Northern California Crusade in Oakland to sponsor buses labeled "People's Committee to Investigate Billy Graham." CWLF members challenged students to make up their

[31] Eskridge, "God's Forever Family," 196.
[32] Ellwood, 119; Enroth, Ericson, and Peters, 106, 111.
[33] Enroth, Ericson, and Peters, 109. The Third World Liberation Front was a coalition of multi-cultural students on the Berkeley campus; their 1969 strike resulted in the formation of one of the first ethnic studies departments in the United States.
[34] Erling Jorstad, *That New-time Religion: The Jesus Revival in America* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 53.
[35] Enroth, Ericson, and Peters, 105. The NLF is an acronym for the National Liberation Front, or Vietcong.

minds about Graham after examining him for themselves. Boarding the buses were several skeptics, some of whom returned home with conversion stories.[36]

The CWLF also hosted their own large-scale events on the Berkeley campus designed to pique the interest of student radicals. In 1970, the CWLF presented a speech by Chinese refugee Calvin Chao on Sproul Steps, a frequent site of activist rallies and protests since the student-led Free Speech Movement in 1964 and 1965. Unlike most Sproul Steps speakers of the era, however, Chao denounced Mao and contrasted him with the hope found in the leadership of Jesus Christ. The speech drew both a crowd of around 1,000 people and the ire of Maoists on campus, who set the nearby ROTC building ablaze, threw rocks at windows, and set up a competing sound system next to Chao in order to yell at the crowd.[37] Chao's audience may not have been able to hear all of his presentation, but the event certainly attracted attention and made it clear that there was an alternative to the leftists' shouting.

Also in the fashion of activist groups on campus, the CWLF published and distributed large quantities of literature, including tracts, pamphlets, and comic books that caught the reader's attention with a title of general or activist interest but always included a message of salvation through Jesus in hip language. For example, the "Peoples Medical Handbook" offered advice on nutritious eating, warnings about the ill effects of various drugs, and instructions for proper injury care before suggesting that mental health can be attained by "knowing Jesus and talking with him."[38] When the leftist Berkeley Liberation Movement circulated pamphlets entitled "Berkeley Liberation Program" that laid out the group's agenda, the CWLF responded

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[36] Russell Chandler, "Northern California Crusade: Decisive Hour for 21,000," *Christianity Today*, 27 August 1971, 1059.
[37] Edward E. Plowman, "Battle for Berkeley," *Christianity Today*, 8 May 1970, 752.
[38] Streiker, 90, 102. In addition, the handbook was officially printed under the name "Christian Revolutionary Medical Committee," an alias of the CWLF. David R. Swartz, "The New Left and Evangelical Radicalism." *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 3, no. 2 (2010): 89.

with pamphlets identical in size, shape and format but opposite in content. The CWLF replaced a picture of Chairman Mao with an illustration of Christ and matched the thirteen points of the "Berkeley Liberation Program" with thirteen points of their own. Instead of "We will destroy the university unless it serves the people," the CWLF proposed that "He [Jesus] will destroy the powers that bind us as we turn to Him, the only One who truly serves the people," and in place of the claim "We will defend ourselves against law and order," the new version read, "He will eliminate fear of tyrannical forces and powers."[39]

The CWLF's unique methods of mimicking the anti-war and revolutionary rhetoric of the New Left resulted in a continual proclamation of Jesus as the ultimate solution to war. Thus, in the CWLF's literature, Jesus was most often portrayed as the Liberator. This Christological emphasis is clearly seen CWLF's "Wanted: Jesus Christ," which was first printed in their underground newspaper, *Right On!*, and then reproduced in the *HFP* and *Time* and as a popular poster. Accompanying an image of Christ is the following notice:

> WANTED: JESUS CHRIST
> ALIAS: THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF GOD, KING OF KINGS, LORD OF LORDS, PRINCE OF PEACE, ETC.
> -Notorious Leader of an underground liberation movement
> -Wanted for the following charges:
> -Practicing medicine, winemaking and food distribution without a license.
> -Interfering with businessmen in the temple.
> -Associating with known criminals, radicals, subversives, prostitutes and street people.
> -Claiming to have the authority to make people into God's children.
> -APPEARANCE: Typical hippie type—long hair, beard, robe, sandals.
> -Hangs around slum areas, few rich friends, often sneaks out into the desert.
> -BEWARE: This man is extremely dangerous. His insidiously inflammatory message is particularly dangerous to young people who haven't been taught to ignore him yet. He changes men and claims to set them free.
> WARNING: HE IS STILL AT LARGE![40]

[39] A comparison of the text of the two pamphlets can be found on Enroth, Ericson, and Peters, 104.
[40] Streiker, 18; "The New Rebel Cry," 56.

In speaking the language of New Left, the CWLF accentuated the aspects of Jesus' character that most closely reflected the values of their target audience. This Wanted Jesus was a rebel, a strong leader, a threat to the establishment, and a defender of the outcast and the oppressed, and a hippie—or almost a hippie, at any rate. An important distinction is that the notice claimed that Jesus had the *appearance* of a hippie, which stops short of associating Jesus with the free love and drug-friendly lifestyle that "straight" Americans often linked to the hippie image.

"Listen to Your Heart Instead": Appealing to Emotion

Though the CWLF catered to the speech and dress of the counterculture, their collegiate mission field at Berkeley and their educated leadership in people like Jack Sparks gave them a far more intellectual tone than the Jesus People Movement as a whole. Most bands of Jesus freaks placed an emphasis on heart over head that was consistent with the experience-oriented outlook of the youth generation. Raised on television and other rapidly developing new forms of media as well as in possession of disposable income to spend on music and entertainment, many youth of the long sixties had a propensity for thrill-seeking and living in the moment.[41] In the counterculture, America's youth took the quest for the ultimate experience to new levels as they sought fulfillment in the seemingly unlimited pleasure of drugs and free love, the opportunities to fight for a greater cause with political and social rallies, the proffered power and control of the occult, or Eastern religions' promise of inner peace. When hippies "turned on to Jesus," however, they found fertile ground for experiential highs and emotionalism in their newfound spiritual lives.

Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California is the most well-known example of a church that was able to overcome the anti-institutional leanings of the youth generation to effectively attract and maintain a congregation of Jesus freaks. The church, founded in the late 1960s by

[41] Marwick, xiv-xx.

Rev. Chuck Smith, started a Wednesday night Bible study for young people that grew from a dozen members in 1969 to as many as a thousand in 1971.[42] After Smith sided with the youth over issues of dress, several of the older members left the congregation, but others stayed, fascinated by the growing phenomenon. Suits and ties could still be spotted amongst the crowds of long-haired hippies with bare feet and suburban youth clad in jeans and "One Way" t-shirts. Enroth, Ericson, and Peters credit the atmosphere of love and acceptance, an example set by the leadership and older members, with the explosive growth of the church and the unique blend of "straights" and "freaks."[43] Assistant pastor L.E. Romaine, a retired military man, commented fondly of the young congregants, "They're liable to hug you to death. I walked in here with my military white side walls and encountered more long-hairs and beards in six months than I'd seen in years. They hugged me and threw their arms around me. They didn't know who I was; their love just overflows."[44] Physical displays of affection and other demonstrations of emotion were atypical for most mainline congregations, but hugs and prayer huddles were frequent components of Calvary Chapel activities.

During Wednesday night Bible studies during the early 1970s, the crowds overflowed the main sanctuary, and people spilled over into the aisles and onto a side patio. The order of service was relaxed and prominently featured extended times of testimony open to anyone in attendance and worship led by one of Calvary Chapel's several contemporary-style bands. This part of the evening might take two hours, followed by a message typically delivered by Chuck Smith or long-haired and bearded youth pastor Lonnie Frisbee. Smith and Frisbee did not preach from behind a pulpit but settled on a stool or stood casually on the platform to speak conversationally to the crowd about a passage of Scripture. Throughout the service, the crowd expressed their

[42] Enroth, Ericson, and Peters, 89.
[43] Ibid., 88.
[44] Ibid., 88-89.

agreement and appreciation with shouts of "praise the Lord" and "right on" or holding up the "One Way" finger.[45] The evening concluded with an altar call, inviting participants to come forward in order to commit their lives to Christ. The altar call, a standard of camp revival meetings during the Second Great Awakening in nineteenth century America, suited the participatory nature of the Jesus People Movement. There were probably thousands at Calvary Chapel alone who responded to the call to make their relationship with Jesus something personal.[46]

After large services, attendees often lingered for an informal gathering for extended worship, prayer, and relationship building called "Afterglow." The name is appropriate for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that it conjures the idea of a rendition of "Kumbaya" around a campfire. Enroth, Ericson, and Peters describe the emotional ambiance:

> Often they will form a big circle, heads lifted upward, softly singing and praying. After closing into a tightly packed prayer huddle or concluding the session with reverent singing of the Lord's Prayer, small groups slowly scatter or cluster off to the side, some speaking softly, others laughing joyously. To them, Jesus is "so heavy man, it's beautiful."[47]

The Afterglow meetings created an atmosphere that affirmed unity within the group and with the Divine, but participants were also encouraged to pray for the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" and receive the gift of speaking in tongues.[48]

Like many in the Jesus People Movement, Calvary Chapel was open to the practice of the charismata, or spiritual gifts.[49] Pentecostalism gained a strong hold in America through a series

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[45] The service overview is drawn from various descriptions gathered ca 1970-1972: Ellwood, 75-76; Enroth, 86-88; and Vachon, *A Time to Be Born*, 84-96.

[46] At the peak of the movement, both Brian Vachon (*A Time to Be Born*, 89) and Enroth, Ericson, and Peters (86) offer reports of over 100 altar call respondents at Calvary Chapel services.

[47] Enroth, Ericson, and Peters, 89.

[48] Betty Price and Everett Hullum, Jr., "The Jesus Explosion," in *Jesus People Come Alive*, ed. Walter L. Knight (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House publishers, 1971), 35. In Pentecostal and charismatic congregations, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is considered a separate experience from water baptism in which the Holy Spirit is thought to descend on the believer. The phenomenon is usually evidenced by the manifestation of speaking in tongues, or "glossolalia," the utterance of seemingly random and nonsensical syllables in prayer.

of revivals in the early twentieth century, but most mainline denominations avoided the charismata, and some even preached a cessationist theology, declaring any alleged practice of spiritual gifts after the time of the New Testament to be invalid. However, a wave of charismatic revival rose up within several mainline denominations (including Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Catholic) in the early 1960s.[50] These newly charismatic pockets within established churches generally kept their practice of the spiritual gifts quiet since the emotional excesses and unusual physical manifestations[51] associated with Pentecostalism often carried a stigma in American society. The Jesus People, on the other hand, had fewer inhibitions. Fascination with spiritual gifts spread like wildfire among the Jesus People, who were both largely indifferent to what established churches thought and attracted to the opportunity for personal involvement and the potential for dramatic power of the results. Not all groups within the Jesus People Movement were openly charismatic like Calvary Chapel, but most were accepting of those who did wish to practice the spiritual gifts.

Some of the most heavily publicized images from the Jesus People Movement were from the monthly beach baptismal services.[52] The sweeping ocean vista provided a grand, romantic setting, and sometimes over a thousand onlookers would line the cliffs of Corona del Mar State Beach to watch dozens of Christians, many of them new converts, undergo the rite of baptism. Some bystanders made the decision to be baptized on the spur of the moment, and the informal event accommodated their spontaneity; Smith announced that baptism was open to anyone who

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[49] These gifts, outlined in 1 Corinthians 12, include what are believed to be supernatural displays of the power of the Holy Spirit through a Christian, such as prophecy, healing, and speaking in tongues.

[50] "The New Rebel Cry," 59; and Nick Willems, *History of the Mustard Seed* (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2008), 2-3.

[51] These include the charismata but also more extraordinary manifestations (such as shaking, being "slain in the Spirit," spontaneous laughter, etc.) that were characteristic of Pentecostal revivals but not prevalent among the Jesus People.

[52] See, for example, Vachon, *A Time to Be Born*, 98-110; or Brian Vachon, "The Jesus Movement Is Upon Us," *Look*, February 9, 1971.

had accepted Christ as Savior and God had laid it on his or her heart to be baptized.[53] Those who "felt led" to be baptized, were guided into waist-deep water by Smith or another person on the ministry team. In of lieu of formal instructional classes, each minister explained to the baptismal candidate the scriptural basis for baptism in order to give individual attention to each person in the midst of the mass ritual.[54] After a brief prayer, the minister would plug the candidate's nose and lean him or her back for immersion in the ocean water.[55] Often the minister would embrace the freshly baptized Christian in a bear hug (whether or not the two had been acquainted for longer than a few minutes) before walking back to shore with their arms around each other's shoulders or waists.[56] Back on dry land, the newly baptized might find friends (or strangers) for more hugs, take a moment for solitary prayer in a corner of the rocks, or give a jubilant cry of elation for the world to hear.[57] Journalist Brian Vachon took in the sentimental sight and observed, "As a total scene, it was as if one overpowering cone of happiness was emanating from that sheltered beach area, a palpable aura of oneness, gladness swelling from the water and enveloping the cove."[58]

"Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music?": Rock Music and the Jesus People

According to historian Arthur Marwick, one of the primary characteristics of the long sixties was "A participatory, innovatory, and uninhibited popular culture, whose central component was rock music, which in effect became a kind of universal language."[59] Calvary Chapel and other Jesus People groups were among the first Christians to engage with the youth culture through the medium of rock music, taking up the brazen cry of early Christian rocker

[53] Enroth, Ericson, and Peters, 86.
[54] Ibid., 92-93.
[55] Vachon, *A Time to Be Born*, 102.
[56] Enroth, Ericson, and Peters, 88-89; *The Jesus People* (Ventura, CA: Pyramid Films, 1972).
[57] Vachon, *A Time to Be Born*, 102-103.
[58] Ibid., 102.
[59] Marwick, xviii.

Larry Norman (as adapted from Martin Luther): "Why should the devil have all the good music?" From the perspective of the established church, however, this was a bold move since rock, "the music of rebellion," was on shaky ground with American Christianity from its inception. David Wilkerson, one of the most prominent evangelists of the mid-twentieth century, recalled being so influenced by sermons on the evils of rock and roll that his first book was entitled *Rock and Roll—The Devil's Heartbeat*, which listed sixteen sins supposedly caused by listening to rock music.[60] Christians had been wary of rock ever since encountering Elvis' gyrating hips and the teenage hysteria surrounding his rise to fame. Then in 1966, John Lennon made the claim that the Beatles were "more popular than Jesus," which, according to scholar Mark Sullivan, provided the catalyst for conservative Christians to launch a moral crusade against rock music.[61] David A. Noebel, a leader in the anti-rock movement, accused rock music (and the Beatles in particular) with hypnotism, communism, and influencing listeners to turn to drugs and sexual promiscuity.[62] Rock was probably the last musical style that mid-century Christians would have expected to use in worship.

In the mid-1960s, Bob Dylan opened the floodgates for rock music of social and political import. According to disk jockey Bill Huie, such openness to serious subject matter in popular music led to a rash of "God-rock," or rock music played on top 40 radio stations that used Jesus or Christian imagery as subject matter. Songwriters proposed many solutions for the world's ills, from drugs to Eastern religions, but they also offered a remedy more familiar to Americans:

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[60] David Wilkerson, "Confessions of a rock'n'roll hater" (Lindale, TX: *The Evangelist*, 1982), quoted in Mark Sullivan, "'More Popular Than Jesus': The Beatles and the Religious Far Right," *Popular Music* 6, no. 3 (1987): 322. The purpose of "Confessions of a rock'n'roll hater" was actually to rescind his earlier statements about rock and roll, claiming that his earlier bias was more cultural than religious and arguing for acceptance of rock music in the interest of Church unity.

[61] Sullivan, 316.

[62] Ibid., 314-316.

Jesus.[63] The Billboard charts in 1970 and 1971 included hits such as "Bridge Over Troubled Water," "Put Your Hand in the Hand (of the Man from Galilee)," "O Happy Day," Judy Collins' new rendition of "Amazing Grace," as well as songs from *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Some within the Jesus People Movement accepted "God-rock" as an appropriate expression of their faith, but usually on their own terms. One issue of the *HFP* featured artistically rendered lyrics from George Harrison's "Hear Me Lord" (making no reference to the background chanting of "Hare Krishna" or Harrison's connections to Hinduism) in conjunction with an article on Norman Greenbaum's "Spirit in the Sky." The brief commentary on the latter piece affirms the song's message but makes a point of offering a biblical basis for the song's vague theology and pointing the listener toward Jesus: "If you're thinking straight, you'll want to be with God after death. Norman Greenbaum says how! He says the way is through Jesus. The Bible backs him up and says the same thing: 'Jesus is the way, truth and life and no one can get to God except through Him.'"[64] As the coming chapters will discuss, *Superstar* eventually failed to win the approval of most Jesus People, but it was not on account of the show's strong rock beats.

However, the Jesus People Movement found its fullest musical manifestation in songs written in the rock style but intended specifically for worship or evangelistic purposes.[65] Before God-rock burst onto the national popular culture scene in the early 1970s, "Jesus music" emerged in the late 1960s as musicians began blending gospel, rock, and other popular music forms in youth groups and Christian coffee houses. Jesus music is primarily defined by the content of its lyrics, and artistic styles generally included some combination of gospel, country,

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[63] Mary Violet Burns, "The New Sound," in *Jesus People Come Alive*, ed. Walter L. Knight (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House publishers, 1971), 92, 94.

[64] *Hollywood Free Paper* 3, no. 5, 2 March 1971, 6-7. Norman Greenbaum was not, in fact, Christian, but an agnostic Jew who wanted to write a "religious song" because, as he told *Hit Parader* in 1971, "Jesus is popular." (Eskridge, "God's Forever Family," 182.)

[65] Mary Violet Burns labels this brand of music "rock-God" to differentiate it from "God-rock," but the term never garnered widespread use (Knight, 92).

folk, blues, and hard rock.[66] If parents heard some of the early examples of Jesus music, they may have felt that some of their fears about rock music were confirmed. Some of the more rock-oriented songs adopted the attitude as well as the musical style of rock, and the "music of rebellion" provided some Jesus People with an outlet for their anti-institutional sentiments. Larry Norman, probably the most well-known rocker of Jesus music, encouraged Christians to share the love of Jesus by singing the "Sweet Sweet Song of Salvation" to people everywhere and exhorted spiritual dabblers to "Forget Your Hexagram," but he also lashed out against the institutional church in songs like "Right Here in America":

> I'm addressing this song to the church,
> 'Cause I've been to your churches and sat in your pews,
> And heard sermons on just how much money you'll need for the year,
> And I've heard you make reference to Mexicans, Chinamen, Niggers and Jews;
> And I gather you wish we would all disappear;
> And you call yourselves Christians when really you're not,
> You're living your life as you please.[67]

A disagreement over Norman's attitude in the song led to a parting (albeit a friendly one) between the rocker and one of his primary performance venues, a Christian coffee house sponsored by Hollywood Presbyterian Church called the Salt Company.[68]

Not all Jesus music took on the defiant tone common to Norman's work, but the vast majority of it emphasized the theme of experiencing God through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.[69] The overwhelming emphasis was on drawing people to Jesus. A popular tune by the group Love Song used a folk-rock style but had an evangelistic message:

> Think about what Jesus said
> Before you let your mind reject him.
> Listen to your heart instead,

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[66] Di Sabatino, 156.
[67] Larry Norman, "Right Here in America," quoted in Enroth, Ericson, and Peters, 80.
[68] Enroth, Ericson, and Peters, 80.
[69] Di Sabatino, 156.

And you will accept him.[70]

Many popular worship songs were based directly on biblical passages, such as "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you" from Matthew 6:33. The simple chord structures of most rock and pop music also fit the youth generation's longing for individual participation. Amateur guitarists could lead worship at informal gatherings with knowledge of only a few chords, and most songs were simple with repetitive verses and choruses that could be learned quickly. A common worship method also involved playing a few recurring chords while meditatively dwelling on a single word or phrase (such as "hallelujah" or "praise God"), which sometimes segued into a time of singing in tongues.

With the development of Christian rock music among the Jesus People came the structure of the rock concert. Calvary Chapel sponsored monthly rock concerts as an evangelistic outreach. Betty Price and Everett Hullum, Jr. report that at one "Everlasting Living Waters Rock Concert" held at a local high school, there were around 1700 teens and young adults crammed into the auditorium, about 1000 stuffed into the gymnasium, and several hundred more waiting outside to grab a seat should another attendee leave. Five bands, all based out of Calvary Chapel, rotated between the gym and auditorium. Price and Hullum describe a performance by the band Love Song: "Their song has a strong beat, and the crowd claps in time with it, hands pounding cadence until they explode, on the last notes, into applause. From all over the audience comes the sign: index finger extended, pointed toward heaven." Once again, the Jesus People's emotionalism and participatory emphasis discovered a vehicle for the expression of faith in the practices drawn from the culture around them. The youths stayed engaged to the end, as well:

[70] *The Jesus People* (Ventura, CA: Pyramid Films, 1972).

Chuck Smith extended an altar call at the conclusion of the evening, and hundreds went forward.[71]

Taking the Gospel to the Streets

Throughout the history of America, church buildings have been Christians' primary locations for worship, fellowship, and ministry. There are notable exceptions, of course, primarily for the purpose of living a life dedicated to God apart from the bulk of society, as in the case of monasteries, or with the intention of doing outreach to the larger community with ministries such as soup kitchens. The Jesus People, however, rarely used church buildings as centers of community. Though some Jesus Freaks chose to attend local congregations, most of the fellowships formed by Jesus People met and ministered in places that previously had little formal connection to religious activity. None of their chosen locations were unique in the history of American Christianity—the Shakers, too, had embraced communal living, George Whitefield and other great evangelists had taken to open-air preaching on streets and marketplaces, and Social Gospel proponents in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries planted various humanitarian-focused mission outposts in inner cities. However, from communes to coffeehouses, most Jesus People had a distinctive urge to transplant their activities outside of the boundaries of culturally defined sacred space, and they often did so without the backing of an established congregation. The CWLF focused its efforts on a college campus, and Calvary Chapel (as an organized church an anomaly in the Jesus People Movement) utilized beach baptisms and rock concerts at high schools, but perhaps the quintessential example of moving the physical locus of community outside of church buildings is found in the story of Ted and Liz Wise, the first documented example of former hippies intentionally ministering to the counterculture from which they came.

[71] Knight, 30-31.

The Wises, two heavy drug users and former beatniks from Sausalito, California, became Christians in 1966 through contact with a local Baptist church. However, after their conversion they quickly clashed with the leadership of the church that, according to Ted, did not look much like the fellowships in the Book of Acts and hesitated to accept Ted's long hair and the couple's efforts to use church facilities to minister to friends and acquaintances from the counterculture.[72] As a result, the Wises decided to distance themselves from organized religion and take as a role model the early believers in Jerusalem, as recorded in Acts 2:44-45: "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need."[73] Together with a few other couples who had recently turned from drugs to Jesus, the Wises sold all their possessions and moved into a two-story farmhouse that would eventually become known as The House of Acts. The men took odd jobs to support the newly-established Christian commune, but they kept their schedules flexible enough to engage in outreach activities to the growing counterculture in San Francisco.[74]

The group's other outpost took the form of a coffee house called The Living Room in the Haight-Asbury district of San Francisco, the mecca for hippies during the 1967 Summer of Love. A few local pastors agreed to support the ministry financially, and the Wises and their fellow laborers set up a folding table and a few chairs in a rented storefront. The coffee house became their mission base for evangelistic activities. They would walk the streets to rap about Jesus with anyone who would listen and then extend an invitation to The Living Room for some food (usually soup), more conversation about Jesus, and, if needed, a place to "crash."[75] The free food and lodging were major attractions for many Haight-Asbury residents since the many of the

[72] "Jason Questions a Jesus Freak," 2.
[73] All Bible references are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
[74] Jason Cronn, "Jason Questions a Jesus Freak," 13 September 1997, 4, http://ldolphin.org/wise/.
[75] Di Sabatino, 7-8.

thousands of hippies in the overcrowded district had migrated to California without money, jobs, or housing.[76] According to one estimate, the Wises and their friends made contact with between 30,000 and 50,000 people over a period of two years through their coffeehouse ministry.[77] By taking the gospel to the counterculture instead of bringing the counterculture to church buildings, the Wises and their friends set the precedent for the Jesus People Movement's relocation through communes (also known as "Jesus Houses"), coffee houses, and street evangelism.

The desire for community among the Jesus People was frequently coupled with an interpretation of the passage in Acts 2 as a literal mandate, which sparked a wave of Christian communes. Once again, no reliable statistics on the Jesus People numbers are available, but in *The 60's Communes: The Hippies and Beyond*, Timothy Miller speculates that of the tens of thousands of communes in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, Jesus freaks probably inhabited several thousand.[78] The more radical, exclusivist groups like the well-publicized Children of God saw communal life as a necessity of their faith. They believed that as the only group of true believers, they needed to isolate themselves from the influences of the world to prepare for the imminent rapture. Such sects, however, were the exception rather than the rule. Many more groups, including the CWLF and Calvary Chapel, established communes as ministry launch pads and temporary housing for new converts and others who wished to receive intensive discipleship training or transition from a life on the streets.

With the large number of communes affiliated with the Jesus People Movement, it is difficult to generalize activities in the Jesus Houses, but most groups prioritized evangelism as

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[76] John C. McWilliams estimates that around 15,000 hippies had moved into the Haight-Asbury district by June of 1966, and the number continued to rise through the Summer of Love in 1967 (*The 1960s Cultural Revolution* [Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000], 69-70).
[77] Enroth, Ericson, and Peters, 13.
[78] Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), xviii, 94, quoted in Prothero, 140.

well as communal worship, prayer, and Bible study. Robert S. Ellwood visited a commune called the House of Emmanuel in Sumas, Washington in 1970, and he reported that in the midst of the picturesque mountainous setting, the approximately fifty poverty-stricken residents sheltered in a large army tent and small bungalow with little evidence of upkeep, foraged for food, and made do with a solitary outhouse, water pump, and wood-burning stove. Despite this, the Jesus People at the House of Emmanuel, most of whom used their stay as rehabilitation from their hippie days, enthusiastically rode an old bus into Seattle for evangelistic outreaches and met for hours at a time for prayer meetings in the old army tent despite the lack of creature comforts.[79] A far more structured example is found in a Los Angeles commune called the Joel House. Staffed by a mature couple as house parents and a director with a seminary degree, the Joel House served as a halfway house for young men coming out of a life of drugs. The weekly schedule included church meetings, counseling, rap sessions, and daily Bible studies, and the house often sent out street evangelism teams. Most Joel House residents did not stay longer than six months but transitioned on to other stages of life.[80]

Some Jesus Houses, such as The House of Acts, allowed or even encouraged their members to attend Sunday services with a local congregation. The majority, however, fellowshipped chiefly within their own groups, either out of a desire to segregate themselves from the rest of society (like the Children of God) or out of feeling frustrated and disenfranchised with established religion. Instead, most commune residents saw their primary loyalty to the Church, the universal body of Christ as a whole that includes anyone who professes Jesus as Lord and Savior. As one commune member said, "We don't go to church. We are the church."[81] Her distinction recognizes the church (or Church, rather) as a group of people instead of a

[79] Ellwood, 100.
[80] "The House of Alvarado Street," *Jesus People* 3, no. 1, Spring 1974, 6.
[81] "The Jesus People," *Newsweek*, 22 Mar. 1971, 97.

building or event and identifies Christianity as something that must be embodied and lived out instead of passively received. The establishment and rapid growth of Jesus Houses was a cry to infuse Christianity into every aspect of daily life.

Like The Living Room, Jesus People from communes, youth organizations, and even the "hip" churches that made efforts to reach the counterculture found coffee house ministries effective in reaching youth who would not set foot within a church building. Several coffee houses sprang up around the nation with casual atmospheres, free food, and often live entertainment, but one of the more interesting twists on the coffee house idea was Arthur Blessitt's His Place in Hollywood. Established in a decrepit edifice that had once been a recording studio, Blessitt described His Place as a "combination church and gospel nightclub."[82] His Place was open during the day with free food (often leftover bagels from local Jewish bakeries), counselors available to respond to those who responded to the evangelistic tracts that Blessitt distributed on the streets, and access to the quiet prayer room upstairs. During the evenings, however, the main meeting room was usually packed with druggies, bikers, nightclub dancers, hippies, and runaways. The evening activities varied, but they usually included "hip" music by gospel or other Jesus music groups, and Blessitt usually preached around midnight during "Soul Sessions," in which he would relate the gospel in street language, encouraging his "congregation" to "turn on to Jesus." One of the most unusual rituals at His Place was the "toilet service." Blessitt recounts:

> Whenever a doper gives his heart to Christ, we move him straight into the john. Once I counted eighteen bodies squeezed into our little bathroom. "I don't need this any more [*sic*], I'm high on the Lord," the typical convert declares. He pulls out his cache of grass, reds, speed, or acid and drops it into the bowl. At each toilet service I read the soaring, life-changing verse from 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." This is

[82] Blessitt.

> followed by prayer and by the ex-doper giving his testimony…. Among the junkies on the Boulevard, the word is still that His Place has the hottest head in town.[83]

Even the bathrooms at His Place were deemed suitable locations for taking the next step in a spiritual journey. Despite the unorthodox congregation and their sometimes unruly behavior (on one memorable evening someone flagrantly violated the no-drug rule and put acid in the Kool-Aid), Blessitt and his staff claimed that His Place was "a sanctuary of God, as sacred as a cathedral."[84]

The Jesus People established gathering places outside of church buildings to create spaces specifically to minister to the counterculture, but their evangelistic outreaches sought to take new territory, or at least to rescue people from the streets and bring them back to their communes, coffee houses, and other bases. Driven by their apocalyptic belief that the return of Christ was imminent, intentional evangelism was a primary focus for many Jesus People fellowships. Witnessing groups often took to the streets to engage with individuals they met. Robert Ellwood reports seeing long-haired, denim jacket-wearing young men on Hollywood Boulevard—a site of his previous encounters with Satanists and chanters seeking Krishna consciousness—handing out tracts and urging each passerby to repent and accept Christ before he returns.[85] Common evangelism tools included throw-away underground newspapers like the *Hollywood Free Press* and tracts, whether procured from large evangelistic ministries like Campus Crusade or developed by individual evangelists like Arthur Blessitt.

The one-on-one style of evangelism was probably more common during the Jesus People Movement, but occasionally Jesus freaks took to the streets in a more vocal style. A 1972 film entitled *The Jesus People* contains footage of Jesus People picketing at night in front of occult

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[83] Blessitt.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ellwood, ix.

shops and signs advertising nude entertainments in San Francisco's North Beach District.[86] The marchers sing rousing anthems like "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" and "This Little Light of Mine" while carrying signs emblazoned with images of the "One Way" finger or reading "Boycott Hell with Jesus" and "Try God's Love." One girl hands a tract to a bystander as she and the other picketers move on. The next scene of the film shows members of the group open-air preaching. A black youth proclaims a message of God's love to a gathering crowd, and the other picketers affirm his speech with cries of "Right on!" Another young man holds up his jacket, which sports a cross inside a Star of David and the words "JEWS FOR JESUS," while declaring that he does not relate to the Pope or Billy Graham, but he does relate to the Jew Jesus and his Jewish apostles.[87] A girl gives her testimony of finding freedom from the occult through Christ. Like George Whitfield, John Wesley, William Booth and other revivalists of the past, the Jesus People loudly broadcast the gospel outdoors in the public arena

Some established churches did manage to attract and minister to large amounts of disenchanted youth, but aside from an unusual willingness to interact with the counterculture in the first place, one of the defining characteristics of the organized churches that usually considered part of the Jesus People Movement was their proactive approach to literally creating space for the youth. Among their other ministries, Calvary Chapel established communes that ministered extensively to the homeless youth population. Hollywood Presbyterian Church ran a flourishing coffee house known for their concerts. Bethel Tabernacle in Redondo Beach, California sent out street evangelism teams several times a week. The church buildings

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[86] *The Jesus People* (Ventura, CA: Pyramid Films, 1972).

[87] A disproportionate number of Jesus People were of Jewish heritage. Many of these Christians considered themselves "completed" instead of "converted" Jews and continued to boldly display their "Jewishness" instead of attempting to blend in with the mainstream Christian culture. In addition, the young man in this film clip is not a member of the organization called Jews for Jesus, which was not founded until 1973; apparently the label was used in an unofficial way to refer to the Messianic Jews within the Jesus People Movement. (See Ellwood, 58, 122.)

themselves also became available to countercultural people, saved or unsaved. Ted Wise initially met hostility when he tried to use the facilities of the Baptist church he attended to provide meals for his acquaintances from the street. These churches, however, not only opened their doors to hippies, drug addicts, and other people off the street, but they also rearranged their schedules to accommodate them. In order to reach a generation that did not like to be bound by the rules of the establishment, churches offered their buildings as hang-out spots during the day and allowed small groups to stay late to pray, worship, or chat after organized events.

The Jesus People did not consider their faith to be rooted in a specific physical location. To the Jesus People, any space could be used for religious purposes, and when they did utilize widely-recognized sacred spaces (such as church buildings), they did not view these spaces as beyond the reach of their unorthodox worship practices. Although many Jesus People fellowships grew organically outside of institutional churches, evangelists quickly recognized the value of "neutral" locations for reaching those otherwise disenfranchised by established churches. They created spaces in which street people would feel comfortable and then actively bid them enter. Perhaps Arthur Blessitt best summed up the attitude of the movement: "The Lord doesn't mind where a soul is won. He offers salvation and everlasting life to those who come to Him in a church, a stadium, a nightclub, skid row, a jail cell, the private office of a corporation executive, as well as the sidewalk. The paramount consideration is leading the lost to Christ wherever contact can be made."[88]

The Jesus People Movement clearly demonstrates that at the end of the long sixties there was a significant demand in the United States for a brand of Christianity that related to youth on their own cultural terms. When presented with opportunities to engage with religion while maintaining their clothing styles, speech patterns, expressions of emotion, musical preferences,

[88] Blessitt.

and hang-out spots, the receptivity of countercultural youth to Christianity increased markedly. Partly by chance and partly by design, *Jesus Christ Superstar* also tapped into the desire for a "relevant" take on Christianity. The second chapter of this study will examine how *Superstar* embodied this hunger on the stage using strategies similar to the social performance of the Jesus People Movement.

Chapter Two: *Jesus Christ Superstar*

In October of 1970, the record company Decca was slated to release a new rock album by the young composer-lyricist team Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice. The concept album, an unusual work entitled *Jesus Christ Superstar*, used rock music to tell the story of the week leading up to Jesus' crucifixion. In addition to its use of popular music and contemporary language, *Superstar* also differed from traditional Passion narratives in other ways: the rock opera made Judas a main character and portrayed him in a sympathetic light; hinted at a possible romantic relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene; and emphasized Jesus' humanity, potentially (depending on one's interpretation of the show) to the exclusion of his divinity.

Decca executives debated the proper way to market a record with such a curious combination of religious themes and popular music, and in *Rock Opera: The Creation of* Jesus Christ Superstar *from Record Album to Broadway Show and Motion Picture*, Ellis Nassour recounts an interesting turn of events in the executives' plan for the album's debut:

> The official premiere for the trade and consumer press was to be held in Decca's recording studios on West Fifty-seventh Street, where the album could be heard under the proper audio conditions. This changed when Decca vice-president Milt Gabler wondered out loud at a meeting: "Wouldn't it be great if the premiere could be held in a church?"
>
> Everyone laughed, but [Vice President of Marketing and Creative Services Tony] Martell's eyes lit up. Some thought Gabler was joking. "You can't present a record like *Jesus Christ Superstar* in a church!" blurted one of those present.
>
> "Why not?" asked Richard Gersh, the head of the publicity firm retained by the label. "You've got clergy flipping over the single, using it in their Sunday schools and sermons. It would certainly bring in a lot of extra publicity. I mean the whole package has been put together with such good taste, presenting it in a church would be just the extra added touch."[89]

[89] Ellis Nassour with Richard Broderick, *Rock Opera: The Creation of* Jesus Christ Superstar *from Record Album to Broadway Show and Motion Picture* (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1973), 62-63. It should also be noted that Milt Gabler's background was Jewish, and the same may have been true for others in attendance at this meeting. Thus, the executives' association of *Superstar* with a church and subsequent notions of protocol at the premiere may have been influenced by backgrounds in a religious tradition other than Christianity. (Billy Crystal, *700 Sundays* [New York: Warner Books, 2005], 27.)

This is clearly a sensational account and one for which Nassour offers no citation,[90] but the passage does foreground several issues raised by the debatable status of *Superstar* as a religious artifact. First, *Superstar* was being released as a rock album by a recording company, not under the direct jurisdiction of any Christian congregation or denomination. In addition, as the record executives were aware, the record would cross a line for many Americans in terms of what was appropriate for presentation in a church building, a place often regarded as sacred space. The unnamed participant in the above conversation did not state his objection to debuting *Superstar* in a church, but it may have been related to the album's use of rock music (a far cry from a Bach fugue played on an organ), its release as a commercialized product of pop culture, its willingness to question traditional Christian doctrine, or possibly all three. On the other hand, *Superstar*'s mass appeal and use of Christian narrative had already proven to be adequate incentive for clergy to use the single "Superstar" for their own didactic purposes. Also important to consider is Decca's status as a commercial recording company: though it is difficult to thoroughly ascertain Decca's motives, as Gersh's remarks reflect, an appeal to America's large population of Christians as consumers was in Decca's financial interest.

Though *Superstar* did not appeal as directly to the counterculture as the Jesus People Movement, it displayed several of the broad strategies that made the movement attractive to the youth of the long sixties. This chapter will first give a brief overview of *Superstar*'s history, and will then demonstrate how *Superstar* employed on stage many of the same tactics that Jesus People Movement used off stage. These include: vernacular communication strategies (in this

[90] Jessica Sternfeld offers a brief source critique for *Rock Opera* in the notes of *The Megamusical* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006). She notes that Ellis Nassour and his co-author Richard Broderick were both employees of Decca's parent company, MCA, and their writing betrays a bias toward MCA's influence and interests. In addition, though they offer several quotations from those involved in the development of *Superstar*, they frequently fail to cite their sources. Their first-hand accounts provide valuable insight, but they cannot always be assumed to be verbatim records of conversations and should be examined critically (390).

case in the book and lyrics); an appeal to the youth generation's experience-orientation through music; and the explicit discussions of Christianity outside of designated church buildings.

The Birth of a Superstar

In 1969, while the Jesus People in California were singing in coffee houses and handing out the first editions of the *Hollywood Free Paper* on street corners, Lloyd Webber and Rice began developing *Superstar* across the Atlantic in England. They originally conceived of the rock opera as a stage production but decided to start with a recorded album as a demonstration disc for theatrical producers–a natural move since Rice had previous experience in the music recording industry.[91] Due to the record company's desire to give the risky combination of religion and pop culture a trial run before financing a full album, the rock opera was first introduced to the public as a single (the title song, "Superstar") in November of 1969. The single barely created a stir in England, but a significant number of American radio stations took notice of the song's "controversial" theme: some stations boycotted the record; others boasted high approval rates among polled listeners for the song; and still others took advantage of the opportunity to host discussion programs with clergy as special guests.[92] The international success, both in the United States and elsewhere, paved the way for the release of the full concept album the following October and multiple touring concert versions over the following year.[93] Thus heralded, *Superstar* finally arrived on Broadway in October of 1971.[94]

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[91] Braun, 10.
[92] Michael Walsh, *Andrew Lloyd Webber: His Life and Works: A Critical Biography* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1997), 66.
[93] Some of the concert versions were "official" since they were sponsored by the Robert Stigwood Organization, the co-producing company for the Broadway production. Many "unofficial" community and touring concert versions sprang up around the country, resulting in a series of lawsuits by the Stigwood Organization that effectively shut down most unauthorized productions (Braun, 98, 103-105).
[94] There is also a 1973 movie version of *Superstar*, and the year 2000 saw both a revival stage production on Broadway and a remake of the movie.

Lloyd Webber and Rice settled on a retelling of the Passion for their project in part because the young composer and lyricist were well aware of the potentially contentious nature of their subject matter, and they hoped to use the controversy to advance their careers.[95] However, their motivations also had roots in their personal religious backgrounds. Both were immersed in the church growing up (Lloyd Webber's father was a church organist and Rice attended a Catholic school for a year) and were nominally Anglican. Neither man, however, approached the character of Jesus from a position of faith. Both men stated in a number of interviews that they ultimately rejected Christ's divinity and preferred to look at him as an inspiring human to whom they could relate.[96] However, when Lloyd Webber and Rice were looking for an attention-grabbing topic, they turned to the biblical material woven into fabric of their childhoods. Lloyd Webber commented, "If one had had religion sort of rammed down one's throat when one was in school, it was inevitable, I should think, that [Christ] would be one of the first subjects one would choose."[97] *Superstar*'s creators recognized Jesus as a great historical figure and one of the most highly influential men on all of Western society and felt that a reexamination of his life was a worthy and relevant topic in the mid-twentieth century.[98] In other words, Lloyd Webber and Rice considered the stories of Jesus a part of their *cultural heritage* even if they denied the religious claims based on his life. This cultural rather, than religious, approach to Christianity virtually ensured that *Superstar* would take greater liberties with its source material than conventional Passion plays.

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[95]Braun, 10; Guy Flatley, "They Wrote It—and They're Glad," *New York Times*, 31 October 1971, D34.
[96] Examples include: Interview with David Frost (Braun, 89); Flatley D34; and William Bender, "Rock Passion," *Time*, 9 November 1970.
[97] Nassour, 21.
[98]Frost interview (Braun 23, 78); Flatley, D34.

Modernizing Jesus: The Book and Lyrics of *Superstar*

The action of *Superstar* generally reflects the plot progression of the biblical accounts of the week of Jesus' death. Jesus spends time teaching his disciples, triumphantly enters into Jerusalem amidst the people's celebrations, overturns the moneychangers' tables at the temple, and dines with the disciples at the Last Supper. After his solitary prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus is arrested, tried, and ultimately crucified. The focus occasionally shifts to other key characters for scenes such as the priests' resolution to seek Jesus' death, Peter's denial of his association with Jesus, and Judas' betrayal and eventual suicide. However, audiences quickly discovered that *Superstar*'s approach to the story differed in both message and form from any of the Gospel accounts or other popular retellings of Jesus' life. Lloyd Webber and Rice employed contemporary communication methods to offer a decidedly unconventional portrait of Jesus and the people involved in the events surrounding his betrayal and death.

Rice's colloquial lyrics proved an apt companion for Lloyd Webber's unusual score. While *Superstar*'s libretto does not pack in slang terms to the level of the *Hollywood Free Press*, Tim Rice laced popular jargon and anachronisms through the generally contemporary wording. The second verse of the original "Superstar" single demonstrates Rice's style:

> Tell me what you think about your friends at the top
> Who do you think besides yourself's the pick of the crop?
> Buddha, was he where it's at, is he where you are?
> Could Mohammed move a mountain or was that just P.R.?
> Did you mean to die like that, was that a mistake, or
> Did you know your messy death would be a record breaker?

Sternfeld remarks about the original "Superstar" single: "Evident in this first single is Rice's flair with slang; although his tone is generally modern, he often reserves the truly trendy for moments of irony or sarcasm. The speaker's thoughts on whether the Buddha was 'where it's at' or whether Mohammed's mountain-moving was 'just P.R.' are particularly biting examples of

Rice's efficient, pointed slang."[99] This observation is true of the rest of rock opera as well. Jesus lapses into the cant of the long sixties only occasionally, but slang accompanies Judas in his more cynical moments, the Priests in their biting criticism of Jesus and the crowds, the shallow disciples' naïve enthusiasm, and Herod's arrogant mocking. The libretto does not call attention to the contemporary institutional church or modern practice of Christianity.

One of the advantages of storytelling is that the *actions* of characters can demonstrate abstract concepts instead of relying on articulation of precise terminology. Rice, of course, was not interested in presenting a theological discourse, and the narrative medium of *Superstar* allowed him to eschew discussions of "atonement," "justification," and other theologically-flavored language; even the word "sin" is absent from the libretto. Neither Jesus nor any of the other characters utilizes the ecclesiastical wording that audiences might have heard from the pulpit on Sunday morning. In general, Rice avoids describing the story of the Passion through the lens of subsequent church history. (The one tongue-in-cheek exception is the anachronism he gives the self-important disciples in "The Last Supper": "Then when we retire we can write the gospels/So they'll still talk about us when we've died.") Individual audience members could, of course, apply theological nomenclature to their understanding of the story if they wished, but Rice does not make explicit doctrinal connections.

Like the Jesus People, *Superstar* presents a different view of Jesus than typically seen in mainstream American Christianity. As the Jesus People described Jesus in their own language and framed him in contexts that spoke to their own situations, Jesus emerged as the liberator and the laid-back hippie friend. Similarly, the Jesus of *Superstar*, channeled through the devices of the rock idiom and modern vernacular, falls into a well-known archetype of the long sixties—the political hero, the countercultural defender of the people against the establishment, the public

[99] Sternfeld, 17.

icon—and demonstrates aspects of his humanity that related to the fascinations and emphases of the youth of the long sixties—anger, righteous indignation, disillusionment, even sexuality. Jesus was recreated anew for another generation.

Superstar's opening number, "Heaven on Their Minds," immediately alerts the audience that *Superstar* will invite them to view Jesus through a fresh lens. Judas encourages his listeners to "strip away the myth from the man," and in his apostrophic song, he accuses Jesus of believing that he is God, a claim Judas attributes to the masses, not Jesus himself. Instead of a deity, Judas positions Jesus as a social and political trailblazer whose personal fame stands in the way of effecting societal change: "You've begun to matter more/Than the things you say." Judas also introduces the political situation. Though he is vague on details, not even mentioning Rome, Israel, or the Jewish people by name, he makes it clear that Jesus' actions could tip the precarious balance of power in an oppressed nation: "Listen, Jesus, do you care for your race?/Don't you see we must keep in our place?/We are occupied—have you forgotten how put down we are?" According to Judas, the idealistic but naïve mob gathering around Jesus could attract the wrong kind of attention from the authorities.

In the midst of the crowd's adoring praise of their leader, the priests' scheming against Jesus further solidifies his role as social hero of the masses. The specificity of the priests' historical role within Jewish society is almost entirely irrelevant in *Superstar*. Indeed, though the very title of "priest" implies a sacred occupation, neither the action nor the dialogue of *Superstar* indicates that the priests serve a religious function. Instead, they become a more general representation of political authorities. Lloyd Webber commented, "The priests represent the establishment. They're establishment people, not Jewish people."[100] The priests' complaints

[100] Flatley, D34.

about Jesus in "This Jesus Must Die" are political in nature, not religious.[101] They are concerned that the zeal of his eager followers will spill into actions that create trouble for Roman-occupied Israel. Caiaphas sings:

> I see bad things arising—the crowd crown him king
> Which the Romans would ban
> I see blood and destruction, our elimination because of one man
> Blood and destruction because of one man

The priests never mention the word "Messiah," much less allude to its origins in the Hebrew Scriptures.[102] Rice gives the antagonistic priests more slang than most characters as they discuss how to handle "this Jesusmania" and dispose of the "miracle wonderman—hero of fools." In particular, their language towards the people is incredibly harsh. To the priests, the masses are a "howling mob of blockheads" and Jesus' "half-witted fans." Thus, the negative, controlling characterization of the priests sets up the dramatic conflict of Jesus, the liberator the people believe has the power to throw off Roman rule, versus the priestly establishment, who are more concerned about preserving Israel as a nation (and arguably their own positions of power) than the freedom of the people.

As the priests plot Jesus' downfall, the crowd cannot stop singing the praises of their new leader. Their exuberant songs prove that they see Jesus as more than just a respected political and social leader: he is a public icon—a superstar. In "Hosanna," Lloyd Webber and Rice's version of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the adoring members of the crowd address Jesus familiarly as they try to garner even a bit of his attention, singing "Hey JC, JC won't you smile at me?" At this point in the story, the Gospel of Luke records, "And some of the Pharisees

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[101] For the 1973 movie version, Lloyd Webber and Rice wrote another song for the priests, "Then We Are Decided," which preceded "This Jesus Must Die." The new song elaborated further on the priests' motives and stakes but still primarily framed their concerns as political in nature.

[102] Only Judas and Pilate mention a Messiah, and they both use the term in the context of a hero of the people. Again, Rice relies on the audience to supply the combined religious and political significance of an expected Jewish Messiah, as well as its translation into the Greek, Christ.

from among the multitude said unto him, 'Master, rebuke thy disciples.' And he answered and said unto them, "I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out!'"[103] In Lloyd Webber and Rice's expanded version, Caiaphas unleashes another pejorative invective against the people as he admonishes Jesus in a low growl:

> Tell the rabble to be quiet, we anticipate a riot
> This common crowd is much too loud
> Tell the mob who sing your song that they are fools and they are wrong
> They are a curse, they should disperse

Jesus takes on a defiant tone as he responds with a triumphant melody ushered in by a brass fanfare blast and cymbal crash:

> Why waste your breath moaning at the crowd?
> Nothing can be done to stop the shouting
> If every tongue was still the noise would still continue
> The rocks and stones themselves would start to sing

Apparently enjoying the celebration, Jesus proceeds to join the people in their next rousing chorus of "Hosanna, Heysanna." Jesus has proven that he will be a voice for the masses against the tyranny of the establishment.

The show of devotion to Jesus continues in the following song, "Simon Zealotes." Simon attempts to show Jesus that he has the support and power to challenge the power of Rome. However, the people's devotion is not only to the cause of the struggle against the establishment, but also to Jesus himself. Simon sings, "There must be over fifty thousand/Screaming love and more for you," and the crowd cries out for Jesus' attention and human interaction with their leader: "Jesus, I am with you/Touch me, touch me, Jesus!" This time, however, Jesus has a very different response to the crowd's adoration. He breaks in with the song "Poor Jerusalem" and hints that the crowd's enthusiasm is simplistic, telling them that they do not really understand the meaning of power and glory, the very things they offer to him as their chosen captain. Instead,

[103] Luke 19:39-40.

Jesus foreshadows his crucifixion and connects power and glory to death: "To conquer death, you only have to die." The line could easily be taken as a reference to the Christian belief that Jesus' death on the cross provided a means for all people to overcome death, but in the context of Jesus as a hero of the people, it is not surprising that *Superstar*'s Christ drew comparisons to slain leaders Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy.[104]

Jesus' relationship with one of his followers, Mary Magdalene, provides a particularly humanizing view of Jesus. According to Rice, he and Lloyd Webber added the character of Mary Magdalene in part for pragmatic reasons: the need for a principal female character and the variety her folk ballads add to the rock score.[105] However, the long sixties were also the advent of the sexual revolution, and the inclusion of a leading lady created the opportunity to explore questions of Jesus' sexuality with new frankness. Mary first appears in the scene at Bethany with Jesus and his disciples. While Jesus chides his disciples for being too eager to hurry the timing of his entry into Jerusalem in "What's the Buzz," Mary tries to attend to his (very human) needs. When Mary offers to "cool down [his] face a bit," Jesus responds favorably, telling the disciples that "She alone has tried to give me what I need right here and now." Although clearly devoted, most of Jesus' followers are principally interested in Jesus as the leader who will achieve their own liberation from Rome. Mary, on the other hand, is drawn to Jesus as a person—and as a man. In "I Don't Know How to Love Him," Mary confesses to the audience (though not to Jesus) that she loves him but that she is confused by her feelings and uncertain if or how she should express them. The text does not make it clear if a romantic relationship has actually gone any farther than Mary's feelings, but in response to audience outcries about a possible liaison, Rice bluntly stated in an interview, "Only a moron or a gorilla could say that

[104] Bender and Foote.
[105] Winderl, 113.

Christ and Mary had an affair. The last verse of Mary's song proves there was no affair…. 'Yet if he said he loved me, I'd be lost, I'd be frightened.'"[106] Jesus never discusses his feelings toward Mary, but Mary's declaration of her love begs the question of whether or not he returns her sentiments. His tender attitude towards Mary and words of appreciation for her could be construed as the gentleness of a kind leader or the gratitude of a humanly weary man, but they could (and often were) perceived as evidence of amorous feelings toward Mary.

Superstar's Mary Magdalene is actually a conflation of three women from the Gospels, Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, and the woman caught in adultery in John 8. There is no direct scriptural evidence to support this amalgamation, but it does have precedent in Christian tradition dating back to the works of St. Augustine of Hippo and Pope Gregory the Great.[107] Several other adaptations of the Passion combine two or three of these women, including Mel Gibson's 2004 film *The Passion of the Christ*.

Superstar's text (at least in terms of music and lyrics) ultimately leaves the matter of Jesus' divinity unsettled. On the one hand, murmurs of supernatural activity surround him. It is clear that miracles have been a part of Jesus' rise to fame, even though the text does not indicate that he actually performs any healings or multiplies food during the course of the rock opera. He seems to have foreknowledge of his death, and he accurately predicts Peter's denial. During "I Don't Know How to Love Him," Mary Magdalene reassures herself that "he's a man—he's just a man," and yet she senses that he is *not* like other men and cannot bring herself to declare her love to him. On the other hand, *Superstar*'s characterization of Jesus emphasizes his humanity in a way that borders on the fallible. An often irritable, sometimes childish, and possibly promiscuous depiction of Jesus does not align well with the Christian doctrine that as both fully

[106] Quoted in Flatley, D34.
[107] Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Man Born to Be King*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 25-26.

God and fully man, Jesus lived a human life yet without sin. In the end, Lloyd Webber and Rice even sidestep the resurrection, the linchpin of Christianity's argument for Jesus' divinity, and effectively avoid taking a firm stand on Christ's godhood by ending *Superstar* after the crucifixion.

Superstar aims to interrogate, not to answer, and the rock opera's complex and paradoxical portrayal of Christ does, indeed, succeed in calling into question the meaning of Jesus' life and death. Judas returns after his death to assume the posture of an Everyman and join a choir in giving voice to the question that has lurked in the background of the entirety of the rock opera: "Jesus Christ Superstar, do you think you're what they say you are?" *Superstar* is an intentionally open text, using its questioning stance to invite audience members to decide for themselves about the truth of Jesus' life work and very nature.

James R. Huffman considers the openness of *Superstar*'s text a major factor in its widespread popularity. The rock opera capitalizes on the propensity of audiences for what he calls "inertia," or "the adaptation of a piece to one's own beliefs and prejudices."[108] Huffman comments, "Works like *Jesus Christ Superstar*, which 'ask the right questions' but allow each individual to provide his own answers, will be appropriated by nearly all—the atheist, the agnostic, and the believer…Since *Superstar* is basically neutral, it can profit from nearly everyone's inertia."[109] For *Superstar*, the line between sacred and secular is partially determined by the worldview which the individual audience member brings to the text. Though not all Christians granted approval to *Superstar* in the end, the lack of an identifiable theological position creates space for Christians to superimpose their own beliefs about the significance of the Passion on Lloyd Webber and Rice's retelling. Conversely, *Superstar* is sufficiently

[108] James R. Huffman, "Jesus Christ Superstar—Popular Art and Unpopular Criticism," *Journal of Popular Culture* 6, no. 2 (1972), 269.
[109] Ibid., 266.

detached from its Christian heritage that those outside of the Christian faith can seek new meaning in a well-known cultural myth or merely enjoy a good story.

Evoking Emotion Through Music

Musicologist Jessica Sternfeld places *Superstar* as the prototype of the "megamusical," a form of musical theatre that dominated Broadway for much of the 1970s and 1980s.[110] Among the characteristics of the megamusical are high emotion and sweeping music, and in *Superstar*, Andrew Lloyd Webber (who would later help to shape the form by composing other megamusicals such as *Cats* and *Phantom of the Opera*) displays an early talent for soaring, passionate melodies. As with the Jesus People, *Superstar*'s popularity bears witness to the emotionalism and experience-orientation of the youth generation during the long sixties. A major component of *Superstar*'s strategy of giving a fresh look at both Judas and Jesus is to get the audience to identify with the characters' emotions; the music of the piece plays a large role in accomplishing this.

Jessica Sternfeld describes the opening notes of the overture: "…over a low tritone pedal point, an electric guitar begins to wail. It is a dissonant, serious line, free in tempo, and immediately unsettling. It rises, pulling the pedal point with it. The electric guitar then grows insistent, launching into a driving tempo. A full orchestra and a full rock band join."[111] The overture boldly declares that it is about to usher in a story told through rock music, an anomaly in the practice of Christianity (as the Jesus People found) as well as on Broadway. There were, however, some precedents for combining the genres of rock and musical theatre by the time Lloyd Webber and Rice began crafting *Superstar*. *Hair* brought rock music to off-Broadway in 1967 and Broadway the following year, and British rock band The Who released the album of

[110] Sternfeld, 19, 66.
[111] Ibid., 8.

their "rock opera," *Tommy* in 1969. The idea of combining "rock" and "opera" provided a fitting fusion of Rice's interests in pop and rock with Lloyd Webber's classical training and also lent the suggestion that the work would be both relevant to contemporary society and serious in subject matter.[112] In addition, Rice and Lloyd Webber gave their developing work a sung-through score with little spoken dialogue, more like an opera than a piece of then-typical Broadway fare. For this reason, most musical theatre scholars continue to preserve Rice and Lloyd Webber's designation of *Superstar* as a rock opera.

Nevertheless, the score of *Superstar* does not consist entirely of rock music. Lloyd Webber described the rock opera as "about half rock music and the other half both classical and show music."[113] Bender and Foote of *Time* dubbed the eclectic combination of music styles as "pastiche," which would become one of critics' favorite terms to characterize Lloyd Webber's work in subsequent years.[114] Several of the songs show rock influences, but the musical numbers range from rock ("Heaven on Their Minds") to folk ballads ("I Don't Know How to Love Him"), from more traditional orchestral pieces ("John 19:41") to jazz age rags ("King Herod's Song").[115] Though the songs are not unified in style, they generally represent modern, Western musical modes. Little in the rock opera resembles sacred music of the day, even though Lloyd Webber used choirs for backup vocals on the original album. According to one album review, the choral response to Judas' betrayal of Jesus to the priests ("Well done Judas/Good old Judas") is "the only real hint of religious music in the whole piece."[116] Also absent from the music is any identifiable historical or ethnic setting. Instead of recalling first-century Palestine

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[112] Nassour, 21.
[113] Braun, 11.
[114] Bender and Foote; see also Sternfeld, 61, 86.
[115] For a thorough discussion of Lloyd Webber's diverse musical material in *Superstar*, see Sternfeld, 27-54; and Swain, 319-329.
[116] Braun, 40.

or specifically Jewish characters, the Passion narrative is musically removed from its original temporal and geographical context.[117] Thus suspended in a timeless, universal state, *Superstar*'s Passion takes on a mythological feel, readily available for translation into a variety of cultural idioms.

Scholar Ulrich Prinz observes that one of the dramaturgical strengths of Lloyd Webber's pastiche style is that it enhances the characterization by assigning various characters their own distinct sounds.[118] The musical material assigned to various characters is intertwined with the emotions they express and the general attitude they adopt. For example, Herod's rag tune is playful and provides apt expression for a superficial character who is chiefly interested in being entertained by Jesus' miracles (sadly ironic, of course, since he holds Jesus' life in his hands). This use of distinctive musical styles is most pronounced in the representation of the two main characters, Judas and Jesus. The rest of this section demonstrates how each interacts with the text to create the emotional identification associated with him.

Judas' sound is established immediately in "Heaven on Their Minds." The driving rock number gives Judas an angry, almost disgusted tone, and the first time he utters Jesus' name, it is through an anguished rock tenor scream. This disgruntled posture follows Judas throughout *Superstar*, underscored by the hard rock sound of his songs. He is almost always accompanied by electric guitars, he usually sings in a gloomy minor key, and many of his numbers have a frenzied pace that mix uncertainty with an insistent push for action. The rock music accentuates and propels his confrontational attitude in all his interactions with Jesus, and Judas' frustration

[117] In contrast, *Fiddler on the Roof*, a 1964 musical which was still running on Broadway at the time *Superstar* opened, relied on the development of a specific Jewish musical idiom as a unifying feature. See Swain, 270-294.
[118] Ulrich Prinz, "Jesus Christ Superstar-eine Passion in Rock," *Musik und Bildung* 4 (April 1972), 194-199, cited in Swain, 319.

grows until his emotional turmoil climaxes in the final moments before his suicide during "Judas' Death."

Responding physically to the cruelty Jesus is suffering as a result of the betrayal ("My God! I saw him—he looked three-quarters dead!/And he was so bad I had to turn my head"), Judas approaches the priests in a panic. The relentless electric guitar riff in the accompaniment echos Judas' visceral reaction, which seems liable to overwhelm him at any moment. He expresses his remorse over his actions, but the priests cut off his frenetic melody to coldly reaffirm that he made the right choice. Finding no comfort from the human authorities, Judas resumes his increasingly hysterical cries and instead addresses an absent Christ. Confused and reproachful, he laments, "For I have been saddled with the murder of you/I shall be dragged through the slime and the mud/I have been spattered with innocent blood." He cuts off abruptly and switches to a soft but bewildered reprise of Mary's "I Don't Know How to Love Him." Now unsure of Jesus' identity and his own relationship to the Superstar who is "not a king—he's just the same/As anyone I know," Judas's outward railings turn to introspective reflections with the slower tempo. Then the familiar guitar chords from the opening of "Heaven on Their Minds" reappear and crescendo. This time, however, Judas' line is not "My mind is clearer now" but "My mind is in darkness now," and it is apparent that the despair that had barely been held at bay throughout the song is now overtaking him. Jessica Sternfeld describes the end of the piece:

> His thoughts are scattered, he is no longer capable of singing much by way of tune; the score suggests rhythms for only some of his phrases, and there are almost no pitches indicated. The form of the vocal line is lost. His phrases float unsteadily over the grinding stability of the ostinato, which grows in volume and force beneath his words.[119]

He expresses his turmoil by accusing God with repeated screams of "You have murdered me!" The audience assumes Judas' fate as a choir softly but jarringly overlaps the incessant guitar riff

[119] Sternfeld, 43.

with elongated chords of "Poor old Judas/So long Judas." The extended view of Judas' mind and feelings in the moments preceding his death takes the audience on a whirlwind tour of emotion. Perhaps they will, as Lloyd Webber and Rice hoped, see Judas with eyes of sympathy, or at least with pity.

Joseph Swain observes that throughout *Superstar*, Lloyd Webber employs *contrafactum*, the device of repeating musical material but replacing the lyrics with new and often unrelated text.[120] Swain further comments that the device serves to unify the whole rock opera, and it sometimes, though not always, serves the dramatic purpose of drawing connections between characters or situations. The use of *contrafactum* highlights an emotional connection between the three uses of the "Gethsemane" theme: Jesus' brief world-weary reflections in "The Temple," the fullest expression of the musical material during Jesus' doubtful prayer in "Gethsemane," and "John 19:41," the song after the crucifixion which concludes the rock opera.

In *Superstar*, Jesus is subject to all the mental and emotional pressures that accompany the life of an iconic leader, and he continually displays very human emotions in response. A case in point is "The Temple," a two-part song which encompasses the well-known story of Jesus cleansing the temple as well as an interpolated encounter between Jesus and a group of lepers. The scene begins with merchants in the temple advertising their wares in a rhythmic ostinato in a 7/4 time signature.[121] Their hypnotic, insistent appeals to customers build until Jesus cuts in suddenly with lines taken almost directly from the biblical accounts of the temple cleansing: "My temple should be a house of prayer/But you have made it a den of thieves."[122] His screams crescendo into piercing, elongated howls of "Get out! Get out!" Almost immediately, however, Jesus' mood changes from furious to melancholy. Here is the first

[120] Swain, 320.
[121] Sternfeld, 32-33; Walsh, 68.
[122] Compare with Matthew 21:13, Mark 11:17, and Luke 19:46. A variation is found in John 2:16.

appearance of the musical material that later reappears in "Gethsemane" and "John 19:41." Shifting to a minor key, Jesus softly expresses his weariness: "My time is almost through/Little left to do/After all I've tried for three years, seems like thirty." Jesus has shown emotion in earlier songs, but for the first time, Jesus' façade of confidence lifts, and the audience realizes that perhaps everything is *not* alright in Jesus' inner world. Yet Jesus does not have long for introspection. A group of lepers commences a retarded version of the music of the merchants' earlier shouts to the crowd (another instance of *contrafactum*). Their relentless entreaties are still aggressive, but the lepers' pleas are not for patronage but for healing from Jesus. The tempo accelerates until Jesus apparently becomes overwhelmed by their frenzied, intense cries for help, and he sings over the lepers' demands, "There's too many of you—don't push me/There's too little of me—don't crowd me." Finally, Jesus becomes unable to cope with the demands of the crowd, and the accompaniment cuts out just in time to leave exposed his scream of "Heal yourselves!"

Jesus' mental and emotional turmoil comes to a head in his solo, "Gethsemane," both the fullest realization of the "Gethsemane" theme and the most in-depth exploration of his character in *Superstar*. Slowly succumbing to the mounting pressures from his adoring followers and armed with the knowledge that his death is imminent, Jesus pours out his misgivings in prayer. This is one of the few times during *Superstar* that a character invokes God,[123] and Jesus takes on a questioning posture during his conversation with the invisible Divine. He starts off softly, using the same minor melody from his melancholy section in the middle of "The Temple" to admit his weariness and waning certainty of the path marked out for him. His doubt and disillusionment eventually give way to anger as he demands to crescendoing accompaniment,

[123] The other occasions are during Judas' final anguished moments before he commits suicide ("Judas' Death") and Jesus' words on the cross ("The Crucifixion").

"Show me there's a reason for your wanting me to die/You're far too keen on where and how and not so hot on why." No apparent response is forthcoming, and Jesus' lines grow increasingly childish and sarcastic. Over long, bold notes, Jesus wails, "Just watch me die!" By the end of the song, Jesus has acquired a more subdued resignation, though the lyrics do not betray a stronger sense of purpose—his only expressed reason for going to the cross is that it is God's will. Once again, *Superstar*'s Jesus shows his human side, and his emotional arc ranges from exhaustion to uncertainty, wrath to resignation.

The final appearance of the "Gethsemane" theme is the instrumental piece "John 19:41." Positioned after "The Crucifixion," the song concludes the rock opera. It resurrects the melancholy theme used to express Jesus' weariness in "The Temple" and his doubts in "Gethsemane," but there is no indication of whether Jesus himself will be resurrected. The legato melody lines played on strings over sustained chords invite an air of gloom to settle over *Superstar*'s finale. The Scripture passage referenced in the song's title reads, "Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid." *Superstar* lays Jesus to rest in the tomb (figuratively, if not actually onstage) and leaves the audience members free to draw their own conclusions about the implications of his death. However, the general mood of "John 19:41" is one of heaviness and unfulfilled longing. Through the "Gethsemane" theme, the last thing with which the audience is left is a reminder of Jesus' disillusionment, uncertainty, and lack of purpose. Gone are the electric guitars that accompanied Judas' defiant queries at the opening of *Superstar*, but the gentler orchestral sound leaves the rock opera's questions unanswered.

Taking the Gospel to the Theatre

Some Christians hoped that an album and stage production like *Superstar* would have the advantage of crossing the generation gap and drawing youth who would not set foot inside a church building. After all, the album could be played in the convenience of one's own home, the concert versions that toured after the album was released often took place in community buildings, and the stage version opened in a Broadway theatre. In some cases, such hopes proved correct, and *Superstar* fed into the increasing "hipness" of Jesus among the youth generation. However, as the openness of the text was filled in through performance, both as depicted on a stage and in the social performance surrounding the various presentations of *Superstar*, there was also the possibility to decrease the potential religious meaning of the piece. This section will contrast two examples of how *Superstar*'s text was performed during key moments in the rock opera's production history, the album premiere and the opening night of the Broadway production.

The chosen location for *Superstar*'s American album premiere was St. Peter's Lutheran Church, a large, gothic-style edifice located at Lexington and 54th Street in Manhattan.[124] A letter from Tom Morgan, Decca's director of artist and repertoire, to the staff of St. Peter's appealed to the spiritual significance of the piece and appropriateness of a church as a venue by saying, "We feel that it will be a meaningful religious experience in the music idiom that has something to say for everyone of today."[125] St. Peter's agreed to Decca's request, and the event

[124] This church building is no longer standing. In 1977, St. Peter's moved to a new location on the same block (located at 619 Lexington Avenue) after the building that housed the *Superstar* album premiere was sold to make room for the new Citigroup building. As an interesting side note, their new building also houses an off-Broadway theatre, located below street level. "About Us: Our Story," St. Peter's Lutheran Church, http://www.saintpeters.org/aboutus/index.html; "St. Peter's Church," *New York Magazine* http://nymag.com/listings/attraction/saint-peters-church/.
[125] Braun, 26.

was set for 3:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M. on the afternoon of Tuesday, October 27, 1970.[126] Around 400 media reviewers and clergy members were invited to the album premiere for *Superstar,* and perhaps the formal, engraved invitations were the first clues to the attendees that the event would not look much like the casual release parties typical for rock albums.[127]

The album premiere was built around a musical work using a popular form of music, yet the planned format of the event did, indeed, reflect an attitude of decorum and solemnity. Bill Levy, Decca's director of creative services, commented, "I wanted it to be extremely dignified—I didn't want to give them any cause to say 'how could they do that? It's bad enough to use the name Jesus Christ but this!' So I said if it's an opera let's treat it like an opera" [punctuation original].[128] An attitude of reverence was helped along by the physical space of the church, a large, stone, gothic-style structure with ornate stained glass windows, a Biblically-themed mural, and an altar adorned with a large golden cross at the front of the sanctuary. To the existing physical space, Decca's event planners added touches to enhance the atmosphere, such as placing flowers around the sanctuary, and they hung a scrim in front of the altar space with appropriate lighting to allow for both a slide show and a spotlight on the cross behind the scrim at appropriate moments.

The program for the premiere was also designed with reverence in mind. Nassour reports that when the guests arrived, "Carnationed ushers took the congregation to their pews, the church lights dimmed, the velvety tones of the organ hushed, and the image of Jesus appeared on a

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[126] Braun, 25-26.
[127] Nassour, 68.
[128] Quoted in Braun, 26. The significance of *Superstar* as a conflation of popular "rock" and classical "opera" was the subject of much comment among the album's reviewers, but a thorough discussion of that juxtaposition is a subject for another study. *Superstar*'s claim to be an opera may have influenced the formality of the album premiere, but Levy's comment indicates that averting a potential uproar among religious groups took precedence over an appeal to high art.

screen above the altar."[129] Portions of the rock opera were played for the audience in conjunction with a slide presentation featuring the song lyrics against what *Rolling Stone* referred to as "a background of *groovy* mediaeval and renaissance paintings—angles from the Sistine Chapel, gothic church facades, and angels making a joyful noise."[130] The slides showed images, in other words, associate with the roots of Christianity, thus framing *Superstar* as part of a long and noble tradition of religiously inspired art. Several record executives made comments during the ceremonial unveiling of the album, and Lloyd Webber and Rice served as co-hosts for the event. *Superstar*'s creators narrated the development of the opera's plot between songs while a light shone on the cross on the altar behind the scrim, once again pulling the audience's attention back to Christ's crucifixion.[131] The 56-minute program must have been well-received, for the audience offered Rice and Lloyd Webber a standing ovation at the end of the presentation before adjourning to the informal reception in the downstairs reception hall of St. Peter's.

At least three reviews in periodicals that sent representatives to the album launch (*Rolling Stone*, *Time,* and *Billboard Magazine*) gave *Superstar* favorable reviews, and the unusual manner of presentation at the premiere merited comment in two of those magazines (*Rolling Stone* and *Billboard Magazine*). Also, it is perhaps worth noting that all three gave significant attention to the religious aspects of the record: *Rolling Stone* cites positive comments from clergy members (obtained at the premiere reception?) and mentions future applications of rock for communicating spiritual messages.[132] William Bender for *Time* highlights the album's narrative and characterization as a new take on the Biblical story.[133] Claude Hall for *Billboard* takes the opportunity to comment on the recent trend of spiritually-themed songs in the recording

[129] Nassour, 9.
[130] *Rolling Stone* review of *Superstar* in Braun, 31.
[131] Nassour, 71; *Rolling Stone* in Braun, 31.
[132] *Rolling Stone* in Braun, 31-34.
[133] Bender.

industry.[134] The generally positive press coverage may or may not have been related to the way that the album release was staged, but Decca found the device of premiering the album in a church effective enough to continue using it with other *Superstar* launch parties at West Hollywood Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles and at churches in Toronto, Chicago, Atlanta, and Dallas.[135] Each time, Decca tried to frame the event as an occasion of religious import, and the record companies and clergy seemed to accept the album as appropriate for presentation in sacred space.

Like the concept album, the Broadway production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* was developed within the structures of commercial entertainment business. MCA, the parent company of Decca, once again financed the venture, this time sharing producing responsibilities with the Robert Stigwood Organisation, an independent record production company. Director Tom O'Horgan came from the ranks of off-off-Broadway and had recently directed the Broadway version of "the American tribal love-rock musical" *Hair*, bringing with him a host of experimental theatre techniques. The production staff went through a typical theatrical casting process with Actors' Equity and open call auditions before deciding to retain Yvonne Elliman as Mary Magdalene and Barry Dennen as Pilate from the concept album and also selecting former *Hair* cast member Ben Vereen to step in as Judas and Broadway newcomer Jeff Fenholt to play Jesus. The production process introduced a few innovations into the world of musical theatre, such as organic rehearsal techniques and a significant use of microphones, but many of *Superstar*'s contributions to the development of musical theatre had more to do with its personnel (e.g. O'Horgan's off-off-Broadway background) or unusual formal aspects (such as the employment of rock music) than its connections to religion.

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[134] Claude Hall, "Trade Gets R'n'R(eligion)," *Billboard*, 7 November 1970, 1, 12.
[135] *Rolling Stone* in Braun, 33-34; Nassour, 73.

The theatrical production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* opened on October 12, 1971, almost a year after the album was released, in the Mark Hellinger Theatre, located at 51st Street and Broadway.[136] Opening night of *Superstar* on Broadway, however, was a considerably different affair from the album premiere at St. Peter's Lutheran Church. As in the case of the album launch, the commercially-based producers and production staff organized both the final artistic product and the other elements that contributed to the opening night event. However, this time the grand unveiling was more in line with the norms for its genre, a commercially-sponsored piece of theatre in a secular theatre building marked as a place of entertainment by its large marquee signs on the exterior, the orchestra-mezzanine-balcony seating facing a stage in the main auditorium, and a box office requiring payment for passage from one to the other.

Audience members (and other bystanders) experienced the event of *Superstar*'s opening night festivities before even setting foot inside the Mark Hellinger. The street outside the theatre became the stage for one of the most dramatic performances of the sacred meeting the secular to emerge during *Superstar*'s history. For example, Ellis Nassour snapped a picture of a vendor selling pendants with what appears to be the profile of a person, perhaps an image of Christ. The pendants are hanging from a wooden cross that has a black and white drawing of Jesus in a crown of thorns with the word "SUPERSTAR" above him. Once again, the commercial met the religious, but not in a manner pleasing to the theatre personnel: the photo caption notes that a manager asked him to leave.[137]

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[136] In an ironic twist (particularly for this study), the Mark Hellinger no longer functions as a Broadway theatre and instead houses the nondenominational Times Square Church (Nicholas Van Hoogstraten, *Lost Broadway Theatres*, revised ed. [New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997], 253). Also, sources used in this study differ on the precise seating capacity of the Mark Hellinger. Chuck Lawliss cites a figure of 1,603 in *The New York Theatre Sourcebook* ([New York: Simon & Schuster: 1990], 57), but his count was published in 1990 and also includes 20 spots for standing room. Nassour claim that the theatre seated 1,572 (37).

[137] Photo in Nassour, 69.

Religious groups who objected to the aspects of the rock opera showed up outside the theatre as well.[138] Protesters, some of whom were self-identified Jesus People,[139] lined the sidewalks outside of the theatre, carrying signs such as "Jesus Christ ~~Superstar~~ Lamb of God" and handing out leaflets denouncing *Superstar*. The approximately 30 demonstrators were a small but vocal force. Although detained on the opposite side of the street from the Mark Hellinger, they walked around singing "This Little Light of Mine," and shouting the popular Jesus People chants such as "One way Jesus, one way Jesus!" and "Give me a J, give me and E, give me an S…"[140] When the parade of celebrities began (another hallmark of a major commercial entertainment event), Nassour reports renewed vigor among the ranks of protesters, who tried to divert media attention back onto their cause.[141]

Once the audience was assembled inside the Mark Hellinger, the curtain finally rose on *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Or, rather, the wall reclined. Instead of a curtain, the production sported a three-paneled wall that slowly angled back, revealing three figures perched on top, not dismounting until the wall lowered completely to become the stage floor.[142] Tom O'Horgan once said, "I like to fill the stage with things to look at."[143] Spectacle, one of Aristotle's six elements of drama, has long been reckoned a part of theatrical appeal, but O'Horgan made spectacle his specialty.[144] His favorite trick was utilizing sets and costumes that transformed

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[138] It is worth noting that many Jewish groups also objected to *Superstar*. Guy Flatley wrote after opening night: "And, perhaps most damning of all, the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith expressed alarm over what they viewed as the resurrection of the stereotype of the Jew as Christ killer. They worried aloud that the seeds of mistrust sown by 'Jesus Christ Superstar' might result in a rebirth of bitterness between Christians and Jews" (D1). However, the presence of Jewish protesters outside the Mark Hellinger on opening night remains unconfirmed, so the Jewish objections do not figure heavily in the present discussion.
[139] George Gent, "'Superstar': The Cheers and Jeers Build," *New York Times*, October 14, 1971, 56.
[140] Nassour, 138.
[141] Ibid., 138.
[142] Ibid., 141-142.
[143] "The Cerebral Trip Is Over," *Time*, 25 October 1971. http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,877337,00.html.
[144] Though twenty-first century musical theatre audiences may not find O'Horgan's level of spectacle shocking, it was definitely out of the extraordinary on Broadway in 1971. Jessica Sternfeld argues in *The Megamusical* that

from one thing into another onstage. One prominent example was the cocoon in which Christ emerged before his crucifixion. The layers of the cocoon were peeled away to reveal a $20,000 gold lamé robe that when stretched out by chorus members filled the entire stage. Other oddities included an ambiguous "universe box" that lowered over Christ's head during his prayer in "Gethsemane," a transvestite Herod entering out of a giant dragon's mouth, the priests' descent into view on a bridge made of bones, and Christ's first entrance ascending out of a giant chalice in a stunt reviewer Jack Kroll calls "a kind of deus ex Dixie Cup."[145]

The original biblical narrative still provided the main plot for the show, as it had in the concept album (the only alteration to the score for the Broadway production was the addition of one song, "Could We Start Again, Please?"), but O'Horgan appears to have expressed little interest in drawing other connections to the Bible or Christianity in his directorial concept. O'Horgan consistently emphasized emotional over cerebral impact, and while he wanted to create a "spiritual experience," he saw "no need to have nude scenes or outrages against the church."[146] In other words, if he engaged at all with existing religious communities, he wanted it to be on an experiential, not an intellectual level. Some remnants of Christian imagery remained in the production; for example, Jeff Fenholt looked like stereotypical Western images of Jesus with long hair, a beard, and a simple white robe. However, even what is probably the most commonly used symbol of Christianity in the West was removed from the production. Instead of dying on a cross, Christ was crucified on what one review called "a Daliesque golden triangle."[147]

Superstar actually served as the prototype for the subsequent "megamusicals" such as *Cats* and *Les Misérables* that made thrilling visual elements standard components of many Broadway productions.

[145]Jack Kroll, "Theater," *Newsweek*, 25 October 1971, 84.

[146] Walsh, 74-75.

[147] Bender and Foote.

The critical response to *Superstar*'s theatrical debut was mixed, chiefly due to the over-the-top stylings of Tom O'Horgan. A few reviewers had positive comments for the director (such as Douglas Watt writing for *The Daily News*), but most had harsh words for O'Horgan. Of the many decorative effects, Clive Barnes wrote in the *New York Times*, "The total effect is brilliant but cheap," and John Simon for the *New York Magazine* referred to them as "all-purpose inventiveness, giant gimmickry signifying nothing."[148] Even Watt, who called the show "a triumph," said that it was "so stunningly effective a theatrical experience that I am still finding it difficult to compose my thoughts about it."[149] In other words, for better or for worse, the spectacle overwhelmed every other aspect of the show.

In contrast to the reviews of the albums, the religious overtones of the piece are not a major focal point for any of the major theatre reviewers. This may be because the album had already been in circulation for a year and discussions the Rice-Lloyd Webber version of the Passion had already become trite, but perhaps there is another reason for the general lack of attention. Theatres are generally associated with commercial entertainment, not religious experience, and O'Horgan's production concept did little to account for the difference. Musicologist Jessica Sternfeld notes, "Critics were more than disturbed by what they were seeing, because it was nonsensical and weird and because it obliterated the score."[150] The same might be claimed for the narrative (religious or otherwise) as for the music. Any spiritual statement or experience that might have otherwise been made was lost amidst the constant visual stimulation. Reviewer Jack Richardson remarked in the Jewish magazine *Commentary*, "By the evening's end, one is left wondering about nothing more significant than how O'Horgan is going to pull off the crucifixion scene, and whether it can possibly top the Expulsion-of-the-Money-

[148]Barnes; John Simon, "Jesus Christ Superclub-Star," *New York*, 25 October 1971.
[149] Watt review from *The Daily News* in Braun, 121.
[150] Sternfeld, 56.

Lenders-from-the-Temple number in the first act."[151] In contrast to the album release, the stage production of *Superstar* seemed unable to initiate serious religious discourse.

Without a performance of *Superstar* that intentionally framed the show as a work of religious importance, its religious significance had the potential to be greatly diminished. The open text by itself was not enough to sustain the claim that *Superstar* would "bridge the generational and scriptural gap." The questions that created the initial interest in *Superstar* were still present but perhaps obscured in their presentation: critics show more evidence of leaving the theatre stunned by the spectacle than mulling over the query of "Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ, who are you? What have you sacrificed?"

[151] Jack Richardson, "Jesus on Broadway," *Commentary*, December 1971, 38.

Chapter Three: The Form and Content Split

The Jesus People Movement and *Superstar* both stand out at the end of the long sixties as events that foregrounded the interplay of culture with Christian narrative and practice. Echoing the counterculture, both pieces utilized contemporary communication methods, emphasized emotion and experience, and moved the spatial locus of activity outside of the institutional church. The novel fusions of culture and religion found in these two events presented a challenge to what most American Christians knew as "church as usual." The first half of this chapter will take a look at some of the initial reactions to the Jesus People Movement's and *Superstar*'s appropriation of cultural forms for religious purposes. However, while the two events are similar in form, there are some telling differences in content. Thus, *Superstar*'s juxtaposition of popular cultural forms with the Passion narrative evoked responses from American Christians that were very different from those they gave to the Jesus People Movement. It is these reactions that the second half of this chapter will address. Finally, this study will conclude with a discussion of the legacies of the Jesus People Movement and *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

Form

In many cases, the first reaction of the established churches and their members to their new congregants from the counterculture evinced an inclination to put distance between themselves and those who would later be called Jesus People. The Living Room and The House of Acts were formed in part because the Wises felt that their Baptist church was reluctant to accept their hippie garb and propensity for bringing more friends with countercultural inclinations into the church building. (Though, in all fairness, the Baptist church did help out with the rent for The Living Room's Haight-Asbury storefront.) Like many pastors who chose to

gear their services to a younger crowd, Chuck Smith lost a large percentage of his original congregation when he supported the attire choices of the younger service attendees; one departing member allegedly complained that the rivets on blue jeans were marring the pews and the bare feet were soiling the carpet.[152] Jack Sparks, too, lost financial support from some Christians who told him that "The way you live and your hairstyle and your dress and the kinds of activities that you're carrying on are cutting you off from the people who are the backbone of this country."[153]

Certainly, not all "straight" Christians reacted negatively toward their countercultural brethren, and several Christians chose to support and encourage the unique blend of counterculture and Christianity germinating in California. Jack Sparks, Chuck Smith, and others like them were willing to enter the fray wholeheartedly and contributed greatly to the momentum of the movement, usually with the financial backing of individuals and congregations who saw the potential for outreach to the counterculture. However, the real turn of the tide for the perception of the Jesus People within the church at large came in 1971 when the press took note of the long-haired evangelists on street corners, the communes more interested in Bible raps than acid trips, and the occasional church full of ecstatic youth worshiping to contemporary sounds. Now identified as part of a "movement," the Jesus People became a source of fascination for many Americans as they read the deluge of articles published in secular periodicals, national Christian magazines, and denominational publications, all of which were followed by a string of books offering first-hand accounts of the movement. Instead of condemning the Jesus People's dress, slang, music, or emotionalism, the first wave of media attention generally regarded most of the departures from mainstream culture as quaint curiosities. With only the occasional

[152] Enroth, Ericson, and Peters, 88.
[153] Ibid., 108.

dissenter, the media reactions to the Jesus People, especially among Christians, ranged from cautiously hopeful to wildly enthusiastic. For all Americans, the Jesus People were a heartening indication that the youth generation might still have some use for the values of past generations, and among Christians, many looked to the Jesus People as the sign of an imminent revival and a bridge to the youth otherwise lost to the counterculture.[154] The Jesus People were not universally accepted, but they had made a good first impression on the nation.

One of the major concerns that did emerge about the methods of the Jesus People was that it was only a fad. Could the movement possibly outlast the temporary popularity of the Jesus bumper stickers and t-shirts or the emotional "Jesus high"? It was a justified concern, for some claimed the "Jesus Freak" label for a season and then moved on when the next best thing came along. For example, Jesus People chronicler Edward E. Plowman reports, "At one Tennessee church not long ago a scheduled weekend of meetings went on instead for 35 nights, with 2,000 reported conversions. Three months later, a spokesman said everything had returned to prerevival normality. The kids had gone as quickly as they had come."[155] However, as the movement gained longevity, converts like Ted and Liz Wise proved that it was possible both to retain some countercultural tendencies and show evidence of Christian belief. Fears that the faith of the Jesus People was fake or short-lived began to fade. A series of writings published by David Wilkerson, a well-known pastor and evangelist who had frequent contact with Jesus People through his youth ministry, demonstrates such a gradual shift in opinion. In his 1969 book *Purple Violet Squish*, Wilkerson regards the blend of Christianity and the counterculture with disgust and considers their lifestyle outside boundaries of Christianity. By the 1971 publication *Get Your Hands Off My Throat*, Wilkerson is still skeptical of the Jesus People, but

[154] Eskridge, "God's Forever Family," 201.
[155] Quoted in "The 'Jesus Movement': Impact on Youth, Church," *U.S. News & World Report*, 20 March 1972, 9.

he writes, "I don't ridicule hippies and long hairs anymore. I'm learning not to be disturbed by their wild clothes or their revolutionary language." Finally, in 1972, Wilkerson seems to have come to terms with the movement as a genuine "move of the Spirit," and begins to focus his efforts on training Jesus Freaks instead of warning against them in a series of pamphlets published as *The Jesus Person Maturity Manual*.[156]

An added factor contributing to the favorable reception of the Jesus People was the endorsement of Billy Graham. A household name for Americans during the 1960s, Graham carried a great deal of weight with Christians and especially the conservative evangelicals. As Larry Eskridge has demonstrated, Graham's struggles with his own rebellious son Franklin prompted him to undertake a personal crusade to understand the youth generation. The well-known evangelist even let his hair get shaggy and disguised himself in order to make conversation with marchers at a "love-in" demonstrations and political rallies.[157] Serving as the Grand Marshal at the 1971 Rose Bowl Parade, Graham noticed enthusiastic Jesus People chanting "One way—the Jesus way!" while holding up extended index fingers and handing out copies of the *HFP*. Graham eagerly raised his own "one way" sign and was so inspired that he wrote a book entitled *The Jesus Generation*. Though the book is an explanation of the dire spiritual condition of the long sixties' youth generation, Graham's tone is confident and optimistic, and he holds up the emerging Jesus Revolution as evidence that there is hope for wandering youth in turning to Jesus.

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[156] Di Sabatino traces the evolution of Wilkerson's attitude in entries 0261-0265 in *The Jesus People Movement: An Annotated Bibliography and General Resource*, 77-78. Wilkerson's three books cited here are *Purple Violet Squish* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1969); *Get Your Hands Off My Throat* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971); and *The Jesus Person Maturity Manual* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1972).

[157] Larry Eskridge, "'One Way': Billy Graham, the Jesus Generation, and the Idea of an Evangelical Youth Culture," *Church History* 67, no. 1 (1998): 88-89.

Like the Jesus People Movement, *Superstar* had an almost instantaneously polarizing effect that revealed a number of contradictions. Some radio stations banned the single "Superstar" as soon as it was released, while others not only played the record but also capitalized on the opportunity for a special feature by bringing in religious leaders for a discussion panel.[158] Decca received letters from pastors that brought both declarations of congregational boycotts on all records produced by the studio as well as requests for lyrics for use in sermons.[159] Even the Vatican did not present a united opinion on the piece: the Pope's radio station played the album in its entirety, declaring it "a work of considerable importance," but *L'Osservatore*, the official Vatican newspaper, heavily criticized the rock opera.[160] As an article in *Time* observed, many of the audience members filing inside the Mark Hellinger during *Superstar*'s run belonged to the same denominations as the protesters holding disapproving placards on the street outside the theatre.[161]

Many of the initial complaints were, as might be expected, related to the portrayal of Christ through a popular form of media. Some, like Frank Garlock of fundamentalist Bob Jones University, decried *Superstar* because the story was told through rock, which was inherently "against Christ."[162] Other references to *Superstar* as "irreverent" and "sacrilegious" may also be related to the show's music and slang, though a more prevalently stated objection was to the commercialism associated with the project. One letter to Decca expressed in no uncertain terms: "I thought you were a very reputable Company but anyone that has to stoop that low as to use our Lord's name to make money is not better than the scum of the earth. I never heard the album

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[158] Nassour, 32.
[159] Nassour, 33; Braun, 53-54.
[160] Nassour, 94, Braun, 49.
[161] Bender and Foote.
[162] Linda Martin and Kerry Segrave, *Anti-rock: The Opposition to Rock'n'Roll* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), 181-184.

nor would I waste hard earned money to listen to it."[163] These claims that *Superstar* was "anti-religious," whether because of the musical style or the rock opera's production through the for-profit music industry, were often personal attacks on Decca or others involved in the production and carried an emotional, offended edge. It is evident that *Superstar* had touched a nerve for many Christians in America.

Suspicion towards applying rock music and blatant commercialism to religious material was certainly a factor fueling the debate surrounding *Superstar,* and it cannot be ignored, especially since a mistrust of rock music was probably far more widespread than available source material (reviews, letters to the editor, published letters to Decca, etc.) indicates. However, a large number of Christian reviewers, clergy, and other audience members actually applauded *Superstar*'s contemporary style as a genuine attempt to communicate across the generation gap. Reverend Dr. Ernest R. Palen of the Middle Collegiate Church in Manhattan commented after hearing the album, "It is an amazing revelation of the deeper spiritual and meaningful subjects to which rock music can really be turned."[164] Many were quick to point out that Bach's St. Matthew's Passion had been popular fare in its day and that Martin Luther had appropriated popular tunes for his hymns. Eagerly seizing on something that might make Christianity more relevant in a post-Christian society, particularly to a disinterested youth generation, several churches "baptized" *Superstar* and used the work in their own contexts. On April 3, 1971, the *New York Times* advertised at least six Palm Sunday or Good Friday services that would feature either music or a sermon title drawn from the rock opera, including a full concert version sponsored by Madison Avenue Baptist Church and the Bel Canto Opera Company.[165] At Fifth

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[163] Braun, 53.
[164] Braun, 35.
[165] "Palm Sunday and Other Services," *New York Times*, 3 April 1971, 37; "Special Musical Events Will Mark Holy Week" *New York Times*, 3 April 1971, 36.

Avenue Presbyterian in New York, a pastor reportedly baptized a baby "In the name of the Father, the Holy Ghost, and Jesus Christ Superstar."[166] Of the several unauthorized concert versions which sprang up around the country (and were often pursued with lawsuits by *Superstar*'s producers), many were sponsored by churches and religious organizations. Churches that reappropriated *Superstar* laid claim to the piece as a part of their own religious narrative, expressing a hope that Americans who recognized the story as part of their *cultural* heritage would look unto the now-popular Jesus as a source of meaning in their own lives.

At first glance, it appeared that *Superstar* would fill the same void in American Christianity as the Jesus People Movement by providing a much-needed link to the youth culture of the long sixties. The rock opera certainly had the ability to draw attention with its catchy tunes, trendy lyrics, and innovative take on an old story. Attracting an audience is a start, but if *Superstar* was to make Christianity culturally relevant to the youth generation, it had to create dialogue and build a bridge that would stand longer than an evening's entertainment. The long-term impact of *Superstar* indicates that the show had more bearing on the world of musical theatre than within the sphere of religion. A further comparison of the Christian community's mixed reactions to the Jesus People and *Superstar* suggests that it was the content, not the form, of the rock opera that made the difference.

Content

The culturally hip packaging of the Jesus People Movement and *Superstar* did, indeed, draw fire from many Christians, but there is also evidence that the desire for relevance in a post-Christian society created at least a partial openness to cultural experimentation within American Christianity. However, there were other points of tension and controversy surrounding the Jesus People Movement and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and these issues had less to do with the cultural

[166] "The New Rebel Cry," 61.

forms employed in the two events than the content and messages expressed through those forms. With these issues, Christians spent less time addressing whether or not rock music or long hair or commercial theatre buildings were appropriate for blending with Christianity and more time discussing whether or not such mixtures were *productive* explorations of Christianity. Here is where a major difference between Christians' reactions to the Jesus People Movement and *Jesus Christ Superstar* begins to materialize.

In the midst of the generally positive tone toward the Jesus People during the initial media blitz and in the critical studies that followed in subsequent years, a few chief criticisms of the movement emerged, but they were not focused on condemning the specific cultural habits of the Jesus People. Instead, the main concern became lack of theological depth and the possible limitations that the Jesus People Movement's countercultural tendencies might have on progressing in that regard. For example, street slang made for easy sloganeering and a means of sharing the gospel within the counterculture, but it also imposed limitations on the theological depth of conversations. Enroth, Ericson, and Peters, as well as other commentators on the movement, particularly criticized the *HFP* for making the "simple gospel" that Jesus saves too simplistic to sustain a believer through the practical and ethical decisions of everyday life or to promote social engagement.[167] The *HFP* could ask "How Moral is War?" and then point to Jesus as the answer to spiritual warfare, but the simple gospel alone did not answer more complex questions about how the Christian should respond to Vietnam. In addition, many observers of the Jesus People Movement found the open emotionalism refreshing and a source of critique to the more staid church at large, but some added the cautions that constant reliance on experience, like the simple gospel, shut out consideration of intellectual concerns. By ideologically—and often spatially—separating themselves from established churches, movement

[167] Enroth, Ericson, and Peters, 75-77.

observers claimed, Jesus People cut themselves off from the lessons of church history as well as the practical aid and wisdom of older Christians. Enroth, Ericson, and Peters offer a solution: "We see, then, the need for the Jesus People to come together with church Christians. What is needed is a linking of the intense personal experience of the Jesus People with the mature reflection of adults, of the enthusiastic zeal of the new with the stability of the old, of youth with age, of hip with straight."[168] The call for cooperation was another plea to put aside the cultural differences and focus on the more important issues of proper teaching and discipleship.

Despite identifying some theological shallowness, movement observers still found much to be praised. As noted in Chapter One, the Jesus People's basic beliefs were in line with fundamental evangelicalism. Billy Graham recognized the pitfalls of superficiality, emotionalism, and anti-establishment sentiments within the movement, but he commended many of their emphases, including Jesus-centrism, Biblical authority, experiencing a relationship with Christ, and zeal for evangelism.[169] The Jesus People often put more energy into the search for experience with the Divine than delineating finer theological points, but their commitment to their core doctrine was the defining feature that challenged American Christians to look upon the Jesus People as part of the same religious body—tie-dye shirts, rock music, Christian communes and all.

In the end, the common doctrine also unlocked the potential for fruitful interaction between the Jesus People and the established church. An illustration of this is found in the creation of the *Jesus People* magazine, an outgrowth of the *HFP*. The final edition, published in the spring of 1974, shows evidence that leaders in the Jesus People Movement were acting on the advice of other Christians and that the established church was attempting to work with the Jesus

[168] Enroth, Ericson, and Peters, 244.
[169] Billy Graham, *The Jesus Generation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 16-22.

People instead of merely observe them. The magazine retains the upbeat tone of the *HFP*, but the cover declares a different focus: "Teaching & Training: Emphases of the Jesus People Gatherings." A pastor who served on the Pastoral Advisory Board of Jesus People International (a panel whose existence would have been out of the question at the movement's start) contributed an editorial piece, and, like the rest of the magazine, the article uses language that is vernacular but no longer laced with street slang. News stories highlight a Jesus House but also comment on the work of various established churches from around the country.[170] Other editions of the *Jesus People* magazine included a cut-out issue of the *HFP*, which still preserved its countercultural flair, but the insert was intended to be given away as an evangelistic tool, not to serve as a primary source of spiritual nourishment for those who were already Christians.[171] The Jesus People still found the culturally relevant "hook" of the *HFP* useful for evangelism, but they also began to provide materials that sacrificed some of the "hipness" for theological depth.

On the other hand, the content of *Superstar* garnered a much more uneasy reception from American Christians. Some argued that any opportunity to discuss Jesus that the secular entertainment offered had to be a good thing. Malcolm Boyd, an Episcopal priest, summarizes this view:

> Many church folk are thankful for any religious or secular crumbs that fall from a fattened table in these lean days. A great big commercial hit that pays attention to Jesus might even make the church seem to be 'relevant.' (Power to the Apostles.) 'Youth' might be attracted by means of exploitation to unchanged dogma, ritual and social attitudes. Best of all, Jesus might become 'news.' He might become (say a prayer) a real superstar to fill all the church buildings again. These church folk say, in effect: 'Don't criticize this show. Thank God for it.[172]

Despite Boyd's tongue in cheek tone, this opinion could be justified through the occasional anecdotes that indicate an introduction or reintroduction to Jesus through *Superstar* served

[170] *Jesus People* 3, no. 1, Spring 1974.
[171] *Jesus People* 2, no. 4, Autumn 1973.
[172] Malcolm Boyd, "A Priest Says, 'It Doesn't Have a Soul,'" *New York Times*, 24 October 1971, D1.

spiritual ends. Take, for example, the case of Yvonne Elliman, the actress who played Mary Magdalene. Elliman had little knowledge of the Gospel accounts before accepting the role of Mary (initially she thought Mary Magdalene was Mary the mother of Jesus), and when asked in an interview if her views on Jesus or God had changed during her involvement with the rock opera, she responded that *Superstar* had given her the opportunity to learn more about the man Jesus, though she did not know how to accept him at present. "I'm getting it slowly," she said, "and maybe some day [*sic*], I'll…accept Him as my Saviour, anything could happen."[173] The Jesus People Movement carried many hopes of the established church for outreach to a lost generation, and, to a lesser extent, *Superstar*'s combination of hipness and religious subject matter was upheld as a possible bridge to disenchanted and disinterested youth.

Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that such hopes were not in vain. One young listener wrote a fan letter to ecstatically report his change of attitude after hearing the album:

> To Whom It May Concern:
>
> I have recently bought one of your records "JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR"! wow! It was one of the most toughest records I ever bought! I am 15 and thought all religion was bunk! But after hearing this cool record, I feel more close to Jesus than I've ever felt before! I think it would make a great movie! Have you ever thought of it?
>
> Peacefully yours,
> Mike Schiminsky
>
> P.S. Make more albums like that!
>
> "JESUS IS COOL"[174]

There is, of course, the possibility that Mike Schiminsky's enthusiasm for Jesus lasted no longer than his fascination with the record, but apparently his initial reaction to the rock opera replaced an indifferent if not disdainful view of Jesus with a positive one.

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[173] Frost interview in Braun, 54, 86-87.
[174] Braun, 161.

One might say that the rock opera could have an almost Brechtian effect in "making strange" a familiar story through devices such as detaching the narrative from its original social and historical context, applying contemporary slang and music, emphasizing Jesus' humanity, and removing the narrative from its usual sacred space in a church. Christian commentators also argued that *Superstar*'s portrayal of the week before Christ's death could provide a fresh lens for the Gospel accounts for those who already expressed belief in him as Savior. According to this view, the rock opera's focus on the characters and plot events of the Passion story was enough to lend *Superstar* theological weight. In response to criticism that Jesus' divinity was ignored in the rock opera, Houston resident Kathleen V. Sharkey wrote to *Time*: "In fact, the very 'putting aside' of the idea of God for a while enabled me, for the first time, to really see and understand Jesus as man. He had doubts and fears, but did make the ultimate sacrifice. Through this production I came to know him more as man, and this experience enabled me to love him more as God."[175] For Sharkey, the defamiliarization brought new meaning to a story on which her faith rested, and she reports a deepening of her faith as a result. As *Christian Century* reviewer Stephen C. Rose commented, "Surely the medium of the opera—folk, country, and gospel, as well as rock—is one of the key modes for really doing theology today because it forces us back to the reality of the story. It compels us to wrestle with the persona of the biblical narrative."[176]

However, other Christians, especially conservative evangelicals, expressed the opinion that getting Jesus on the commercial stage was not a victory in and of itself. In addition, their specific complaints about historical and theological inaccuracies reveal a claim that the depiction of Jesus needed to be consistent with the scriptural portrayal of Christ. Several historical and theological inaccuracies troubled these Christian reviewers. The emphasized role and

[175] "Letters, Nov. 15, 1971," *Time*. 15 November 1971.
[176] Stephen C. Rose, "Theology Undone," *Christian Century*, 10 November 1971, 1334.

sympathetic portrayal of Judas provoked concern that Judas was more of a laudable hero (or antihero) of the story than Jesus. Dr. William A. Marra, a professor at Fordham University and the vice president of the conservative Catholic organization Pro Ecclesia, complained that *Superstar* denied Jesus' divinity and portrayed him as "a mere man with Judas as the star."[177] The suggested sexual relationship between Jesus and Mary, which was made more explicit in the original Broadway production, compromised the possibility of Christ's divinity for many Christians. One opening night picketer carried a sign reading, "Mary said 'He is my Lord' not He is my lover."[178] Billy Graham, who gave his support so willingly to the Jesus People, found merit in asking the question "Who are you, Jesus Christ Superstar?" but did not give the rock opera his full endorsement. He thought the approach to Jesus was irreverent, but his final judgment was based on the content of the show: "Its fatal flaw is that it doesn't go far enough—it leaves Christ in the grave. And without the Resurrection there is no Christianity, no forgiveness, no faith, no hope—nothing but a hoax."[179]

Many Jesus People, too, criticized *Superstar*, and they often shared Graham's complaint: Duane Pederson, the editor of the *HFP*, also cited the lack of resurrection as his main objection, as did the youth leader for the Jesus People from Manhattan's Calvary Baptist Church that picketed outside of the theatre on *Superstar*'s opening night.[180] Kathy Seay, a member of a Jesus People organization in Los Angeles, gave an impassioned objection to the changes made to the original text:

> They turn the whole thing around to where Judas was really a good guy and Jesus was bad. They make a mockery of the Gospel, the Crucifixion, the Blood, the Son of God and the price paid for sins. I've never heard anything so awful and hideous in my whole

[177] Gent, 56.
[178] Nassour, 139.
[179] Graham, 131.
[180] "Duane's Interview with Paul Asay," 10 February 2007, http://hollywoodfreepaper.org/interview.php?id=2. http://hollywoodfreepaper.org/interview.php?id=2; Nassour, 138.

> life. Any kid who believes in Jesus Christ as the Son of God will feel the way I do. It made me sick to my stomach when I read the text.[181]

Ending the rock opera with the crucifixion left the text open to interpretation, but, for Graham and the Jesus People, the absence of a victory over the grave combined with a questioning and vacillating Christ gave little reason for an audience to think that the Passion narrative drawn from the Gospels, a title meaning "good news," might carry glad tidings to anyone.

The very openness of the text that made widespread appeal across religious lines possible became problematic for many Christians who claimed that *Superstar*'s story no longer bore a strong enough resemblance to the key historical events that undergird Christian belief and doctrine to be of significant religious value. In other words, in destabilizing the narrative and choosing to ask questions rather than give answers, *Superstar* lost most of its identifiable theological grounding. This is a crucial difference between *Superstar* and the Jesus People: the Jesus People made clear their theological position, which was established on the foundation that Jesus is Lord and Savior. In this sense, one might say that the Jesus People Movement was a relatively "closed" performance text, in contrast to *Superstar*'s open text. This critical distinction is likely what made possible the more complete acceptance and assimilation of the Jesus People Movement into normative American Christianity in comparison with the continued segment of Christians regarding *Superstar* with skepticism during its heyday at the end of the long sixties and into the present day.

The "simple gospel" of the Jesus People Movement had the potential to present a shallow theological understanding, but, according to Christian doctrine, the basic message that "Jesus saves" is not inherently incorrect, either. On the other hand, *Superstar* leaves a measure of space for those who wish to infuse Christian theology into the rock opera's text, but its basic posture

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[181] Kroll, 84.

calls into question underlying tenets of Christian belief. *If* there was no resurrection, *if* Jesus was not divine, or *if* Jesus was not sinless as a result of a liaison with Mary, then, in Christian theology, Jesus' death on the cross could not have had any atoning value for the sins of the world, and the crux of Christian belief topples. For someone who is searching for religious meaning in *Superstar*, what, then, is the purpose of pursuing "what ifs" if they can never lead to a satisfactory theological answer? Without the right content, the rock opera is limited in terms of its ability to serve as a productive path to religious ends.

Superstar proves that the Passion narrative can be retold with a Jesus who expresses the doubts and fears of a fading superstar, may or may not be divine, and stays on the cross. The only problem with that approach, the Jesus People and other protesters would say, is that the story itself no longer carries much importance—it is reduced to merely a good story.

Concluding Thoughts

In the fall of 1973, Ronald M. Enroth (of Enroth, Ericson, and Peters) asked "Where Have All the Jesus People Gone?" in the evangelical periodical *Eternity*, and other journalists echoed his query over the next few years. The answer, they discovered, was chiefly into established churches. That is not to say that the fate of the movement was to disappear as if it had never happened: as many of the Jesus People began to slip quietly into mainline denominations or found independent charismatic congregations, they often brought with them their experience-oriented and culturally relevant brand of Christianity.[182] Larry Eskridge identifies several long-term effects of the movement, including the development of the Contemporary Christian Music industry, the incorporation of more contemporary styles into worship services, an increased emphasis on youth programs, and the rise of seeker-sensitive

[182] Eskridge, "God's Forever Family," 305-306.

megachurches.[183] Each of these ramifications closely mirrors the Jesus People Movement's openness to borrowing liberally from the surrounding popular culture. This suggests that the Jesus People's challenge to the established churches to decouple stylistic expression from sincere Christian belief was a turning point in American Christians' openness to a greater level of cultural engagement. It is not unreasonable to surmise that *Superstar*, *Godspell*, and other God-rock from the era also played a role in demonstrating that popular culture could serve a viable role in practicing religion.

The initial religious controversy helped to catapult *Superstar* into the limelight, but by the time it hit Broadway, it had a life of its own. *Superstar* has gone on to become a fixture in musical theatre, both on stage and film, and it contributed several innovations to the genre such as solidifying the idea of a "rock opera," transforming a concept album into a fully staged production, using microphones onstage, blending a rock band with a full orchestra, and, despite the negative reviews for O'Horgan, employing vast amounts of spectacle and scenery. If nothing else, *Superstar* has an uncontested place in the history of musical theatre as the first major hit for two giants of the genre, Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, known for their joint work on *Evita* (1979) and *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (1982) as well as their separate projects such as *Cats* (1981), *The Phantom of the Opera* (1988), *The Lion King* (1997), and *Aida* (2000).

Lasting contributions to the relationship the world of religious theatre are more difficult to spot, but Ronda Rice Winderl comments:

> The overt response this viewpoint elicited from the religious community was significant not only because it forced that group to interface with the theatre and recognize its potential for promoting religious subjects and ideas, but also because it encouraged the

[183] Ibid., 345-383.

> clergy to try to relate the Gospel to youth who had demonstrated their interest in a Jesus with whom they could identify.[184]

Winderl suggests that *Superstar* and *Godspell* (both making their professional debuts in 1971) may have paved the way for other professional theatre productions in New York based on the Gospels to open over the next decade.[185] She specifically cites *Your Arms Too Short to Box with God* (1976), *St. Mark's Gospel* (1978), and *Cotton Patch Gospel* (1981), and she observes that of the five (including *Godspell*), *Superstar* was by far the most unfaithful to the biblical text. In light of the present study, it is also interesting to note that none of the other four productions engendered *Superstar*'s amount of controversy or enjoyed its initial level of widespread popularity. Although other factors, such as the prerelease of the single and later concept album, contributed to *Superstar*'s success, it is significant that the forms of some of the other productions also attempted to give a fresh look at the Gospels with a contemporary flair, but none had content that matched *Superstar*'s openness of text or controversial departures from Scripture. A more comprehensive study is needed to parse out the relationship between commercial viability and approaches to biblical adaptation, but this cursory comparison suggests that historically there has been an inverse relationship between widespread appeal and fidelity to sacred text on the American commercial stage. In adaptation of the Bible, the balance between cultural applicability and theological depth is precarious, and, as the conservative Christian reactions to *Superstar* demonstrate, pleasing everyone is a virtually impossible task. Even as *Superstar*'s sacrifice of theological precision created a pathway to make the story relevant to those from outside the Christian tradition, it alienated a portion of the Christian community with its liberal interpretation of Scripture. Explication of this tension may serve as a piece of wisdom to theatrical producers, but for those who do prioritize fidelity to the Scriptures in biblical

[184] Winderl, 304-305.
[185] Ibid., 290.

adaptation, it also offers a challenge to find creative ways to make the message culturally accessible while remaining true to the source text.

In *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*, Stephen Prothero states, "American culture has long been both Christian and plural, both secular and religious, and much of the dynamism of U.S. religious history derives from that paradox."[186] In the midst of that paradox, Prothero identifies Jesus as the figure who has crossed the boundaries easily between Christian and plural, secular and religious. This certainly proved true in the latter years of the long sixties, for just as the institutional church faced a loss of authority with the "end of Christendom," Jesus somehow managed to slip out of cathedral walls and into the world of popular culture, where he continued to fascinate a generation who claimed him for their own.

[186] Prothero, 7.

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