

## The Roots of the Contemporary Christian Music Movement

In this lecture, we will be looking at a few key personalities and movements that helped kick-start the Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) movement, without trying to be exhaustive in our study. There are popular names that we won't even touch on in this lecture. There were many CCM artists back then, and now there is an absolute myriad of bands and artists playing different flavours of CCM.

The sounds of the Contemporary Christian Music movement came from the secular music of the day, and this is still true with today's CCM.

We will start during the countercultural revolution of America in the 60s. A reactionary group arose out of the hippies of the counterculture, called the Jesus movement.

### The Jesus Movement

The Jesus people wanted to keep their rock and roll music, but have Jesus too. To varying degrees, they brought the baggage of the world with them into their new-found faith. However, it was a watered-down Christianity with roots of rebellion, lacking sound doctrine, but accompanied by a preaching emphasis on prophecies concerning the end times.

They would continue to produce and sing along to the same sounds in music that they had enjoyed before they were 'saved,' but would change the lyrics to fit Christian themes.

Explo 72 was possibly the single biggest event to stage the music of the Jesus movement, which was to become Contemporary Christian Music, with an estimated 80,000 in attendance. One source reports that there were an estimated 250,000 at one day's event. It is hard to pin down the numbers. Billy Graham spoke six times at the conference. The final event was an eight-hour long Christian music festival, dubbed 'The Christian Woodstock.' Some of the featured artists included Love Song, Larry Norman, Children of the Day, Johnny Cash, and Barry McGuire.

Jesus told us that the Gospel would not be popular, so we ought to sit up and ask questions when we see such a popular event like that. Something is probably wrong—and in this case it was.

Matt 7:13-14 'Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.'

Luke 6:26 'Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.'

I am not saying that some people didn't get saved as these events, but it was certainly a seed-bed for confusion. If you removed the music, I wonder what kind of numbers they would have had.

If the single biggest force upon the development of Contemporary Christian Music was the Jesus movement, maybe the single biggest influence in terms of personalities were those who had involvement with Chuck Smith's Calvary Chapel in Mesa Costa, California. We will examine Calvary Chapel's influence soon.

The time of the Jesus movement was a time of great confusion. Christ and Krishna were interchangeable. The feelings created by rock music were confused for true worship. Of course, the idea of a long-haired-sensitive-non-judgmental-hippie Jesus was born out of this time. Acid trips were even viewed as a gateway to Christianity by many. For example, one lady (Sandy Heefner testified): 'I took my LSD, laid down on the floor a couple of hours and when I could get together to get up, I got up as a Christian. It's just that simple.' (*Calvary Chapel and Maranatha Music*, by David Cloud)

1 John 2:18 'Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.'

### **Lonnie Frisbee and Chuck Smith**

One important observation is that the Contemporary Christian Music movement has long been associated with the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. Signs, wonders, and miracles have surrounded the CCM world right from the beginning.

Lonnie Frisbee was born in 1949 and died in 1993. He was at the roots of the Jesus People movement in America in the late 1960s and the 1970s. He grew up in a dysfunctional home, but was quite gifted in visual art and dancing. When he was 15, he left home and the same year he got involved in the Laguna beach's gay scene with a friend. He searched for meaning, and tried mysticism and the occult. He would sometimes take his friends to Tahquitz Canyon, where they would smoke weed, get naked, and drop acid. On one of these trips, he read to his friends from the Gospel of John, and then baptised them at Tahquitz Falls. There was no clear testimony that this man was saved. Frisbee reported that God also showed him in an acid trip that he would preach to many people.

After joining Calvary Chapel in Mesa Costa, California, he began his public career of preaching and baptising. Frisbee looked like a long-haired Jesus, and this image made a huge impression on people. He even had a jacket with a picture of Jesus that he had painted on the back. This jacket was used to transfer the Spirit to people.

Frisbee was cool, full of charisma, but possessed an image of gravity and persuasiveness. But despite all impressions, Christians of the end-times must not be deceived by such men and their teaching. He imbibed and taught a counterfeit form of Christianity, and the mindset of non-judgmentalism. His way subtly taught that Jesus was not only a challenge to the norm, but a kind of rebel. He would also party like the world on Saturday evenings, and preach on Sunday mornings. His image became so popular that people would call out his name on the streets when he walked in Denmark, South Africa, and Great Britain. He was integral to the enormous growth of the Calvary Chapel and Vineyard movements, and by 2005, each of these movements had 1000 churches across the planet.

A man called Chuck Smith, was ministering at a church called Calvary Chapel, in Costa Mesa, California. He was interested to meet a hippie, so he asked his daughter's boyfriend to introduce him to one. He brought home Lonnie Frisbee. 'With his long brown hair, long craggily beard, dusty clothing, scent of Mary Jane [marijuana] and glint of his last LSD trip in his eyes, he showed up out of nowhere, at the height of the '60s, literally on Chuck Smith's doorstep.' (*The First Jesus Freak*, Matt Coker, *OC Weekly*, Thursday, March 3, 2005.)

Frisbee found a much-desired father figure in Smith. Within a very short time, Frisbee was given an upfront ministry and preaching role, after Smith's wife received a 'prophecy' of a movement that would spread across the United States and into different parts of the world. It was very unwise of Smith to allow Frisbee into this role without first grounding him thoroughly in the Word, holy living, and separation from the world. There ought to be a proven record of faithfulness in Christian living generally before one is entrusted with such a weighty responsibility as teaching God's Word. Frisbee began to pack the place full of hippies, and membership skyrocketed.

'By [Smith's] accepting the young people pretty much as they were even for Christian service--long hair, immodest clothing, rock & roll, culturally liberal thinking--Calvary Chapel exploded in growth from one small church to a mega-church and beyond to a large association of churches.' (*Calvary Chapel and Maranatha Music*, by David Cloud)

Ezek 22:26 'Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed *difference* between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.'

God's ministers and His people in general need to make a clear distinction between what is worldly and what is holy. In the time of the Jesus movement, this distinction was being largely eroded away, as if it didn't matter what the Bible said about long hair, holiness, modesty, repentance, or worldliness in music.

It was during Lonnie Frisbee's time at Calvary Chapel that Chuck Smith let rock music into the church. He had previously felt that rock music didn't really have a place in the church, until he met the members of the rock band *Love Song*.

The members of *Love Song* were living together in 1969 when one of the band members, Fred Fields came into contact with Campus Crusade for Christ.

'Hearing about the hippie preacher Lonnie Frisbee and the "great things" that were happening over at Calvary Chapel, Field pestered his bandmates into attending one of the evening services...Within two weeks, everyone in the band had undergone separate conversion experiences, and by early 1970, all were in regular attendance at Calvary Chapel. About a month after they had been baptized, Lonnie Frisbee encouraged the band to see Chuck Smith one Wednesday afternoon to tell him they had written some new songs they would like to play for him. Agreeing to hear them, Smith accompanied the band to the parking lot, where they brought out their guitars and played several songs. Smith reportedly

began to weep, telling the band, in the memory of lead guitarist Tommy Coomes, he had “been praying for something like this for a year.” That night the soft rock, country-tinged sound of Love Song became part of Calvary Chapel, and soon they became a regular feature of Lonnie Frisbee’s Bible studies.’ (*God’s Forever Family*, Larry Eskridge)

Member of the Love Song band, Chuck Girard, says: ‘We were just rock ‘n’ rollers that were singin’ about Jesus. Somebody else later on called it ‘Contemporary Christian Music.’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PsGZLPR68Dk&list=PLUImRbyE74hgSLXSgVbkJsZyT7HooHbJt&index=3>)

Chuck Smith relates the impact this band’s music had on him in the beginning:

‘As they started playing, I felt just the warmth of God’s Spirit coming over me. I started weeping.’

‘That night for the young people...What an evening, I’ll never forget it! When these guys started to play, Heaven came down, and glory filled our souls! And Oh, it was just exciting, it was just dynamite, and it was really the beginning of this music of worship and praise that was so relevant and up to the moment, up to the hour. This is what God is doing today!’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZZqtyYiVQQ>)

Folks, this is not a testing mindset. Scripture commands us to prove all things.

Their song ‘A Love Song’ became the top song on the airwaves of Manila, Philippines in 1972. The band became known as ‘the Christian Beatles’ to many.

One of their songs was about Calvary Chapel itself, and was called *Little Country Church on the Edge of Town*:

*Preacher isn’t talkin’ ‘bout religion no more,  
He just wants to praise the Lord...  
And it’s very plain to see, It’s not the way it used to be...  
Long hair, short hair, some coats and ties,  
People finally comin’ around,  
Lookin’ past the hair and straight into the eyes,  
People finally comin’ around.*

This is actually speaking about the breakdown of dress standards when attending church, the weakening of Biblical preaching, and the un-Biblical practice of long hair on men.

There were other bands that came to join Calvary Chapel, including: Children of the Day, Good News, Gentle Faith, Selah, Blessed Hope, Mustard Seed Faith, The Way, and Country Faith, as well as solo singers.

‘Inspired by the surfeit of musical talent at their fingertips, Smith and Frisbee decided in early 1970 that special concerts were the next logical step in their outreach to young people.’ (*God’s Forever Family*, Larry Eskridge)

Soon, these concerts outgrew the 300-seat Calvary Chapel, and they had to meet in a Circus tent. Thousands of young people were attracted to these concerts, and many 'conversions' were reported. Chuck Smith then decided to found an organisation called *Maranatha! Music* in 1971 to record the music of his bands. *Maranatha! Music* is still a big leader in the sound of Contemporary Christian Music even today, and was the instrument to spearhead the music of the Jesus People, which became known as Contemporary Christian Music.

'Musically, the "Calvary Chapel sound" was all over the map: folk, light pop, soft rock, country. But one thing it was not was hard rock. As Chuck Smith told journalist Ed Plowman in an interview, he personally favoured the term "contemporary gospel" to "rock" and was leery of music that "moves the body more than the soul.'" (*God's Forever Family*, Larry Eskridge)

The problem was that once the camel got his nose through the tent-flap, there was no stopping him from coming in. Smith should have paid closer attention to his reservations about rock in the beginning.

After about four years holding the unofficial position of youth pastor at Calvary Chapel, Frisbee left. Some differences became evident between the two men, and Frisbee distanced himself from Smith. However, he had already made a huge impact as a hippie preacher on the Jesus People movement through the work at Calvary Chapel.

Frisbee later joined John Wimber, who led another Calvary Chapel at Yorba Linda, which was to become Vineyard Church. To Frisbee, Wimber became another father figure. They both shared a vision for the future of the Pentecostal movement.

Wimber prayed to see God's presence. At a Mother's Day church service in 1980, Frisbee called for the young people to come forward. As they did, they were overcome with frenzy, falling to the floor. After this, Wimber tried to explain to the church elders what had happened. 'Before he could finish his defense, Frisbee burst into the room, walked straight to the angriest elder and screamed, "You need to have the experience of God!" The elder shook uncontrollably, fell to the floor and rolled around.' (*The First Jesus Freak*, Matt Coker, *OC Weekly*, Thursday, March 3, 2005.)

Folks, that is not a work of the Spirit of God. That is chaos, disorder, and disrespect.

The night after the mother's day event, Wimber was asking God to show him if it was of him.

'By 5 A.M. John was desperate. He cried out to God, "Lord, if this is you, please tell me." A moment later the phone rang and a pastor friend of ours from Denver, Colorado, was on the line. "John," he said, "I'm sorry I'm calling so early, but I have something really strange to tell you. I don't know what it means, but God wants me to say, 'It's me, John.'" That was all John needed. He didn't have to understand the trembling or why everything happened as it did; all he needed to know was Holy Spirit [sic] did it.' (Testimony of John's wife Carol, cited by John MacArthur in *Charismatic Chaos*, p. 189)

Once again, this is an example of Satan's deception, and somebody who didn't use the Scriptures to prove and test what was of God and what was not. God is not the author of confusion.

1 Cor 14:33 'For God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.'

Frisbee ministered with John Wimber until Wimber found out about a homosexual affair that Frisbee had been involved in with a man from another church, and confronted him. Frisbee admitted his sin, and agreed to leave.

Frisbee died of AIDS at the age of 43. His funeral was held at Crystal Cathedral. Chuck Smith spoke at the funeral, and likened Frisbee to Samson, who was used of God although he fell victim to his own failings. However, Frisbee has been used of Satan to create much confusion, and whereas Samson had saving faith (see Hebrews 11), we would do well to heed the words of John: 1 John 3:7 'Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.' Sadly, it is doubtful that Frisbee was even saved.

### **Larry Norman**

Larry Norman is known as the father of Christian rock. 'While Love Song epitomized the quiet, melodic side of the developing genre, the oeuvre [artistic work] of Larry Norman was the embodiment of its raucous rock 'n' roll edge.' (*God's Forever Family*, Larry Eskridge)

Eskridge reports that Norman was raised in a conservative Southern Baptist home, but that he dropped out of college to join the band *People!* In 1966. He visited a Pentecostal church in 1967, and experienced 'a fullness in the Holy Spirit.'

Norman influenced the Jesus People through his song about the second coming, called "I Wish We'd All Been Ready.' He represented a more outright rebel attitude. At first, Christian bookstores didn't even want to sell his music, because it was so blatantly rebellious. One of his popular songs that epitomized this rebellion was called: *Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music?* Here are some of the lyrics:

*I want the People to know That He saved my soul,  
But I still like to listen to the radio, They say Rock 'n Roll is wrong,  
They'll give me one more chance. I feel so good I want to get up & dance.  
I know what's right, I know what's wrong, I don't confuse it.  
All I'm really trying to say Is, Why should the devil have all the good  
music?*

*I've been filled, I feel okay, Jesus is the rock and He rolled my blues  
away.*

*They say to cut my hair, they're driving me insane. I grew it out long to*

*make room for my brain.*

*But sometimes people don't understand, What's a good boy doing in a  
Rock n' Roll band.*

*There's nothing wrong with playing the blues licks, If you've got a  
reason, I want to hear it.*

*why should the Devil Have all the Good Music?*

*I've been filled, I feel okay, Jesus is the rock and He rolled my blues  
away.*

*I ain't knockin' the hymns, just give me a song that has a beat,  
I ain't knockin' the hymns, just give me a song that moves my feet,  
I don't like any of them funeral marches, I ain't dead yet.*

### **Marsha Stevens**

'If Larry Norman is to be called the father of Christian Rock, then Marsha Stevens certainly deserves to be known as the mother of contemporary Christian music.' (*The Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Music*, Sept. 2002)

'She founded Children of the Day, the first group that was published by *Maranatha! Music*. (Notice how much of this stems back to Chuck Smith's influence!) Her song "For Those Tears I Died" represents the mysticism that permeated the Jesus People movement.' (*Calvary Chapel and Maranatha Music*, David Cloud)

Listen to the words of her song. You will notice a mystical message that doesn't talk about sin, the need for repentance, or a clear way of salvation:

*You said You'd come and share all my sorrows,  
You said You'd be there for all my tomorrows;  
I came so close to sending You away,  
But just like You promised You came there to stay;  
I just had to pray!*

*Jesus, I give You my heart and my soul,  
I know that without God I'd never be whole;  
Savior, You opened all the right doors,  
And I thank You and praise You from earth's humble shores;  
Take me I'm Yours.*

*And Jesus said, "Come to the water, stand by My side,  
I know you are thirsty, you won't be denied;  
I felt ev'ry teardrop when in darkness you cried,  
And I strove to remind you that for those tears I died."*

She is also famous for the Song 'Come to the Water.'

‘Stevens’ testimony of salvation is that during a Bible study she had a vision of herself walking with Jesus near a deep blue river.’ (*Calvary Chapel and Maranatha Music*, David Cloud)

Today she lives in a lesbian relationship, and together with her partner she runs a ministry called BALM—short for ‘Born-Again Lesbian Music.’

### **Keith Green**

He was raised in a Jewish home and was exposed to the Christian Science scene growing up. Even as a child, Keith Green had a goal of early stardom, which was encouraged by his parents. He was already recording with DECCA (a recording company) at age 11. But at age 15, he wanted to get as far away from Los Angeles as possible. So he left with an old van and \$175 in search of life’s meaning. He opened himself up to drugs, in search of truth and spiritual experience. In 1972 he got scared by a bad trip in which he thought it was predicted that aliens would come and get him at a certain predetermined date. This made him very afraid.

He began reading the teachings of Jesus, and together with his friend Bob Fishkind, they adopted Jesus as their new ‘guru,’ although his understanding of Jesus was still very hazy. Through his acquaintance with CCM artist Randy Stonehill, he was persuaded at last to attend a Bible study. Randy actually persuaded Keith to embrace the whole Bible, not just parts of it. It seems that Keith actually got saved around that time.

Keith persistently tried to get a rock recording contract with secular recording companies, but was repeatedly turned down, even though he had amazing talent. At last, he came to believe that God was actually directing him away from this to produce Christian rock. He pursued this with a passion, but he also seemed to have an amazing passion for the Word of God. He came to believe that it was wrong to sell the Gospel, and because of conscience, he successfully requested to break out of the contract he was presently in.

Keith was actually discipled by Ken Gulliksen, who at one stage was one of the performers at Calvary Chapel, along with others such as *Love Song*. He also used to hold Bible studies through his ministry, the Vineyard. This then became the rapidly growing Vineyard movement that was led by John Wimber.

‘Among those who gravitated toward the Vineyard were musicians, all of them famous today—Keith Green, who accepted Christ during one of Gulliksen's Bible studies, Bob Dylan, Debbie Boone, Randy Stonehill and Larry Norman.’ (*The Legacy of a Humble Hero*, by Julia Loren; 2007, in *Charisma Magazine*)

Keith and his wife Melody started End Times Ministries. Together they shared a passion to reach the lost with the Gospel through music. They also had a ministry providing a home and Bible teaching to many down-and-out kinds of people.

One of his mentors testifies that during Keith’s life, there was always an evident ‘tension between law and grace.’ Keith hated to see Christians abusing the grace of God, and it seems that he really did want to please God, even though, sadly, he was mistaken on the music issue.



'...He preached repentance and warned against "easy believism." ...And he preached plainly against the errors of Roman Catholicism in *The Catholic Chronicles*, something that no other CCM artist has done, to my knowledge...Though Green spoke the truth about Rome, he made the error of saying that he knew "many loving, committed believers" within Catholicism.' (David Cloud's article: *Keith Green*, citing from *No Compromise, The Life Story of Keith Green*, p. 236)

He did, however, receive many warnings about his rock music. In response to this, he wrote his book entitled *Can God use Rock Music?* David Cloud makes the following observations:

'Keith Green brazenly defended the use of rock music in the service of the Lord. In July 1982, he was killed in a plane crash. Earlier that year he had published a book titled *Can God Use Rock Music?* in which he strongly argued for the use of rock music by Christians and denounced those who warn against it.'

In that book, Keith took the stance that most Christians now hold, when he wrote: '...I believe that music, in itself, is a neutral force.' (Keith Green, *Can God Use Rock Music?*)

Whatever his motives of sincerity, and whatever zeal he had for God, we need not try to speculate. While remembering that there are many CCM artists who no doubt love the Lord and do sincerely want to serve Him with their music, we must acknowledge the light we have been given on this subject, and move away from their error.

My father used to love Keith Green's music, and the Greens were my parents' heroes in their early married life for a while, until they realised the problem with CCM. I praise the Lord that He revealed the music issue to Dad early in life. Personally, the sound of Keith Green's soft rock appeals to my flesh. I know for myself that if I had grown up with that, it could well have taken me far away into the relativistic circles of Christianity, if not becoming a stepping stone right away into the world.

I can understand those who would defend his music so fiercely. He was probably a truly spiritual man, but music is such a powerful thing, that we must not be deceived about it, even if someone who uses it is spiritual. We must seek to follow human examples only as they follow Christ. Where they deviate, we must not follow.

1 Cor 11:1 'Be ye followers of me, even as I also *am* of Christ.'

1 Thess 5:21-23 'Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

-- Pastor James West