Changes in Promotional Channels for Songs

The last major shift in church music that was occurring in the previous three decades was the way in which new songs reached the local congregations.

The Hymnal As The Song Source

Since the Protestant Reformation, books of liturgy and prayer grew up connected to specific denominational groups. Hymns were no different. They were prescribed through the tradition you belonged to, and the release of a new hymnal volume was a major undertaking for both publishers and churches.

For generations of Christian worshipers the hymnal provided the lyrical guide for congregants, the music source for the musicians (mostly piano), and the song source for leaders developing their repertoire. The changes that accompanied modern worship forced the functions embodied by the hymnal to be disseminated into several different functions, as can be seen in *Figure 1 – Forty Years of Church Music Resources* on page 54.

Word Of Mouth

With the advent of popularized worship music, from the 70s forward, the minister's reliance on the hymnal as the repertoire for the local church began to change. Through most of the 70s and 80s much of the popularization of new songs came simply through word of mouth. One remembers songs like "Change My Heart O God" (by Eddie Espinosa) or even parts of songs, like the chorus

of "Awesome God" (by Rich Mullins) making it to local churches by a friend's recommendation. The great songs spread like wild fire through the tinder dry American church.

Early Continuity Clubs And Events

By the early 90s each of the three major worship music publishers (Integrity, Maranatha and Vineyard) were capable recording and publishing organizations. The advent of digital audio (CDs) and other technologies allowed recordings to improve so that live settings gave good demonstrations of the newest songs. Continuity clubs proliferated new songs to the churches through regular releases of new albums with corresponding songbooks. These clubs became the new repertoire song source for churches.

The popularity of continuity clubs waned in the late 90s when the best new songs began appearing in separately released projects, such as *Worship Together's Revivial Generation* series. By this time, the use of internet marketing (via its WorshipTogether.com site) and touring events had become a primer for new songs, as Worship Together rose to promote the songs of the writers from Passion, Kingsway UK and other EMI labels.

Radio Writes the Playlist

With the popularity of worship music reaching its apex in the first five years of the 21st century, CCM artists Michael W. Smith, Sonicflood, Third Day, Chris Tomlin and others had driven the songs to popular Christian radio. This signaled the most recent shift in the source of new songs for church repertoires – Christian radio.

Music Industry Struggles

During the first decade of the 21st century, the music industry (including the Christian and worship music genres) became the first media victim of the internet age. A number of companies involved have imploded or merged. The music industry found itself under siege from rampant illegal copying and downloading of songs. Soon, revenues were evaporating and financial statements were hemorrhaging red ink. Previously large music companies were now remnant staffs servicing only the most popular artists and repertoire.

Some companies are still producing resources but only for a few remaining very popular brand names such as Hillsong and Chris Tomlin, which continue to garner significant exposure through radio play of their songs.