

FINDING GRACE IN THE CONCERT HALL: COMMUNITY AND MEANING
AMONG SPRINGSTEEN FANS

By

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FINDING GRACE IN THE CONCERT HALL

COMMUNITY AND MEANING AMONG SPRINGSTEEN FANS

Thesis under the direction of Lynn S. Neal, Ph. D. Professor of Religion

Bruce Springsteen's music and performances have provided an emotional outlet for thousands of fans all over the world. Using the statements of these fans, as well as the life and music of Springsteen, this paper documents the reasons why, as well as the ways in which fans are inspired to create a community. This community reflects both their emotional and spiritual attachment as well as their attempts to live according to the moral precepts they find through this music. Springsteen himself has laid the groundwork for this community through his words, music, and deeds. To many, these feelings and values are as valid and alive as any other spiritual tradition, and are a legitimate spiritual outlet.

The thoughts and actions of these fans, and the motivating forces behind them, allow a glimpse into how nontraditional spiritual values can be formed and acted on outside the gates of what is normally seen as conventional church-going behavior. By acknowledging the legitimacy of personal spiritual connection outside a sectarian landscape, it is hoped that appreciation and tolerance for different belief systems and system formations can be cultivated and nourished.

INTRODUCTION

Joining the Church of Bruce and the Ministry of Rock 'n Roll

“May your faith give us faith, may your hope give us hope...”

(Into the Fire, 2002)

Living in Upstate New York in 1999, I was already a card-carrying member of AARP, and far removed from the rockin' and rollin' days of my youth, when I could spend days on end listening and dancing to rock music. But one blustery winter's day while walking down Main Street something caught my eye. The poster in the music store window was advertising tickets for Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band's first show together in fourteen years. Seeing this, I remembered that moment twenty four years before when I first 'discovered' Bruce, as his fans familiarly refer to him. The album was *Born to Run*, and the poetry and imagery had overwhelmed me with its emotion and understanding. But life moves on, babies are born, and life and locale changes. After seeing him in concert once in 1975, I gave little thought to either the man or the music over the course of the next two decades. Life got in the way as it always does, and the demands of job, home and family, as well as living in remote areas of the country where rock artists did not tend to tour, superseded concert attendance. Thirty plus years went by like a fading memory. But something pulled at me when I saw this poster, and I decided to buy tickets and go eventhough I had long since given up attending rock concerts. I dutifully lined up at the appointed ticket-buying time and waited in line with thirty or so other people that morning to get my two ducats to the show – no mean feat as I later came to realize.

Three months later I found myself in an arena with many thousands of other fans, with a dawning realization that I was a novice among acolytes. In spite of the fact that Bruce had not toured with this band in fourteen years, everyone seemed to know all the songs, participating as a group in a display of gestures and call-and-response to the performance. The anthropologically-inclined side of me saw this as ‘interesting’ while the emotionally hungry side felt the meaning and emotion in the building. Something was happening here. I was overwhelmed and nearly speechless by Mr. Springsteen’s performance as well as the lyrical content of his songs. I passed the three hours enthusiastically and then headed home, dodging the deer on the interstate and mulling over every nuance of the evening..

I spent some time reflecting about the emotions that the concert evoked within me, and came to no real conclusions other than the rather trite ‘music is the universal language’ kind of thing. Some time shortly after this show, I read that Springsteen and company were playing a show in Charlotte, North Carolina. I had a friend who lived in North Carolina, and so I called her and asked her to get us tickets for the event. She and I went, and again, I experienced a sense of wonder at the amount of emotion that flooded me, emotion that I at first wrote off as contagious enthusiasm. In fact, only one other ‘public’ experience in my life even came close to resembling my Springsteen experience, and that was a Billy Graham Crusade I attended as a young teen. Springsteen’s music and words spoke to me, to some inner longing, as much as Billy Graham had some forty years earlier, and this was both intriguing and mystifying. I had never been a ‘joiner,’ never been really passionate about anything. I listened to this man sing:

*“I believe in the love that you gave me,
I believe in the faith that can save me,*

I believe in the hope and I pray

That someday it may raise me

Above these badlands...

For the ones who had a notion,

a notion deep inside

That it ain't no sin to be glad you're alive" (Badlands, 1978)

I felt some emotional cog slip into place feeling a part of something bigger than myself, something bigger than that room with 18,000 people in it, but something that included all of us there. How do you put a name to this feeling, to this communion? This man was singing to the audience, not at them; the audience was the “you” in the song. Bruce was singing our shared experiences and emotions, creating a common frame of reference that was inclusive of all of us in the arena. Yes, he told us in song, I have felt that despair, but look! There’s hope here too... I found myself suddenly seeing the audience as comrades, fellow travelers on this rocky road called life. “No retreat, baby, no surrender” (No Surrender 1986). Without ever having exchanged a word with another fan, I knew we were sharing something meaningful and potent even if I could not name that feeling.

And I felt just as surely that the man singing on stage was being not only honest and straight-forward, but also completely sincere and earnest. After this show I began to comb the internet to see what I could find out about the man Bruce Springsteen, to verify the impressions I felt. I wanted to know why he gave me hope, and if this was something others felt, or if I was suffering from some sort of mid-life crisis of faith, or simply slipping into early-onset dementia. It was during this process that I began to have some idea of the vastness and depth of the Springsteen community. I discovered websites where one could obtain unofficial copies of live concerts (“not for sale – trade only”), get

advance notification of ticket sales for shows, buy or sell tickets (“face value only”), discuss my favorite song or the quality of my day, and even find a brownie recipe (“use miniature marshmallows ONLY”). Here were people who were sharing their lives, in varying degrees, with each other on the basis of nothing more tangible than an interest in a musician. I was as welcome in this community as in any church congregation of which I had ever been a part.

“Come on up for *The Rising*...” The journey continues...

(*The Rising*, 2002)

The September 11, 2001 tragedy may eventually claim to be the inspiration for any number of urban myths; Springsteen can make claim to one of those. Legend claims that: “A few days after 11 September, Bruce Springsteen was pulling out of a beach parking lot in the Jersey Shore town of Sea Bright when a fan rode by. The man rolled down his window, shouted ‘We need you!’ and drove on. It was the kind of moment, Springsteen says, that made his career worthwhile. ‘That’s part of my job. It’s an honour to find that place in the audience’s life (themorningnews.org/archives/opinions/i_Know_youre_lonely_for_words_that_i_aint_spoken.php). And I thought, well, I’ve probably been a part of this guy’s life for a while, and people wanna see other people they know, they wanna be around things they’re familiar with. So he may need to see me right about now. That made me sense, like, ‘Oh, I have a job to do.’” (Binelli 2002: 64). Shortly after, Springsteen performed on the televised “A Tribute to Heroes,” the first of many benefits held to raise money for the survivors of that day, singing “My City of Ruins,” a song written about Asbury Park, but eerily fitting for the occasion.

The album *The Rising* was recorded and released and a promotional world tour commenced before the first anniversary of this tragedy. This collection of songs focused not on revenge or blind patriotism, but on healing the wounds the September 11th attack had left. I found out about the tour through the internet sites I had begun to visit, and made plans to again attend the Albany, NY show. This time, however, I could enlist no one to go with me, and so went alone. To this point in my life, I had never attended a concert or theatrical performance alone; this was new territory for me. Yet, I went unhesitatingly because I wanted to see if that first rush of emotion and feeling I felt in Albany could be duplicated, or if it was a fluke; perhaps I had merely been caught up in the moment, perhaps it was a singular experience not able to be replicated. In the intervening months, I would come to question what I had felt, and I needed to test my feelings.

This proved to be a terrific and transforming experience for me. And that is what it truly was – an *experience* - so much more than a rock 'n' roll concert. My initial response from two years prior was validated. In some fashion, I felt redeemed and forgiven for all my bad life decisions. My response was completely emotional and un-intellectual, and utterly unexplainable in the moment. I felt in unison with the crowd, in communion with the spirit, in sync with the music. This time I left wanting more, and not at some distant as yet unscheduled time in the future: I wanted it NOW. To feel a part – me, a fifty-three year old middle-aged woman – of this joyous, raucous celebration of life, love, friendship, and music was an extraordinary encounter, in the very literal sense of the word - *extraordinary*. I experienced transcendence, inclusion, and redemption, and a part of the performance. Then I realized I wanted to know *why* I wanted more, and *why* I

felt these decidedly spiritual and emotional waves. I needed to know more, to understand why.

Sitting alone in the concert hall, I heard and felt a truth and sincerity in the music engulfing me, a truth that touched me in a way no other music or musician had ever done. I am a child of the rock and roll generation; I cut my teeth to Elvis, learned to drive to the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, and had been 'saved' by Billy Graham - twice. What I felt after seeing Springsteen more clearly resembled the raw emotion I felt at the Billy Graham Crusades attended rather than the multitude of rock and roll shows seen in the course of the past thirty-eight years. I felt this man speaking to my heart, to my life's wins and losses. He identified with my struggles and frustrations, while not waiting for me to identify with him, and perhaps that is his talent and genius. Bruce places the onus of understanding on himself, and not the listener. His job is to convince us that he knows what we know, to provide us with hope, and not to ask us to understand him. Sitting there, I felt as surely as I knew my own name that this man needed me as much as I needed him. Later readings verified his absolute acknowledgement of his personal need for audience acceptance and approval, as well as his feelings of insecurity and displacement as an adolescent; but his performance said it all. He was able to articulate all the angst and frustrations of life, while offering the gift that there is always hope, "*that faith will be rewarded, dreams will not be thwarted*" (Land of Hope and Dreams, 2001). And I accepted his covenant of faith - "*you be true to me and I'll be true to you*" (Be True, 1988) - baptized in the flames of the fiery ministry of rock and roll. My conversion was completed that night; I believed him when he said "*Grab your suitcase and your ticket, thunder's rollin' down the track*" (Land of Hope and Dreams, 2001). I was now a devout,

devoted “Tramp,” (as the faithful refer to themselves, taken from the line “*tramps like us, baby we were born to run*” from the Springsteen song *Born to Run*, 1975).

Prior to the Albany concert in December 2002, I knew that one of the Springsteen fan sites – greasylake.org – had planned a get together before the show, but I had been too apprehensive and anxious to attend. After all, I was already far past prime rockin’ and rollin’ age. I believed that most of the attendees would be decades younger than myself - weren’t all people who went to rock concerts twenty-three at the most? I had noticed older people – my age cohorts – at the shows I attended, but I doubted that these were the people haunting the fan sites I had been reading. Mature adults do not attend rock concerts and meet total strangers in restaurants or bars, or so I thought.

However, over that winter of 2002-2003, I began to realize that the dimensions of devotion to the Springsteen credo and values did not exclude my peer group, but rather embraced all age groups, and perhaps most especially mine because of the shared historical time (after all, we were the same age, Bruce and I). I began reading and posting on several websites and cultivated at least an e-relationship with many fans. By the end of The Rising tour (all tours tend to be named after the album they support), I had attended several fan site organized tailgate get-togethers and met dozens of fans of all ages and geographical locations. These people were from a variety of lifestyles, but almost to a ‘man’ (and yes, the preponderance of fans I met were male, contrary to what might be the popular assumption of fans being women) they were possessed by the same spirit that I was – the spirit cast by a man of conviction, empathy, and intuitive understanding, a blue-collar prophet. These traits seemed contagious, and the fans I met were trying – each in his or her own way – to exercise the emotions and values depicted in Springsteen’s songs.

At one such gathering of 200-300 fans in August of 2003, I managed to collect nearly \$3000 for the Second Harvest Food Bank of New Jersey in less than an hour. Total strangers were shoving fifty dollar bills into my hand. No one asked for receipts, or questioned my motives; for weeks after, checks kept arriving in the mail. If you were to ask any of these people what made them donate this money to a total stranger, the answer would have been something in the vein of “because she’s a fan, she wouldn’t deceive us” or some similar sentiment.

Curious as to why this man and his music could motivate strangers to toss money at me, I began to explore Springsteen’s back catalog of songs, reading lyrics and listening to album after album. It is all there in his lyrics, laid naked for the pilgrim to see: concerns about justice and fairness, about friendship and honesty, about rejection and personal revelation, and ultimately, redemption. There is little mystery about Bruce Springsteen, only stark openness that appears to reveal his soul to any and all comers. It would seem that he believes what he writes, and further lives what he believes. For thirty-five plus years, people have been trying to see ‘behind’ the man, to expose his ugly, soft under-belly, and to date no one has. Either he is genuine, or he is the all-time absolute best actor. His fans – and I include myself in that multitude – have decided he is the ‘real deal.’

What further intrigued me was the way that Springsteen fans referred to the concerts, and to their discovery of his music and fan community; the language was that of religion, where fans spoke of “conversions” and “redemption,” “epiphanies” and “faith.” Concerts are congregations of the faithful gathered in joyous celebration with the Minister of Rock and Roll, Bruce Springsteen. To be clear, not one fan I have ever

spoken with has ever alluded to Springsteen being a deity. Yet the obvious fact remains that many fans take away from his music and performances much of the feeling and comfort that a traditional worship service offers – by their own assertions. Moreover, the connection that individual fans feel towards each other mirrors the connections members of worship-communities share, and is reflected in a number of group activities and actions.

In the following pages, I illustrate the ways in which Springsteen has sown the seeds for this fan community, and laid the groundwork for this spiritual ‘home’ the fans have created, influenced by his words, music, and deeds. This home works to provide much of the same sorts of emotional, social, and spiritual sustenance that traditional worship communities offer, as explained and defined by the fans themselves. By identifying with the persona of Bruce Springsteen and his working-class, ordinary Joe image, fans derive more than entertainment from his performances and music, finding faith and inspiration that serves them in their daily lives. My approach to this subject uses the anthropological notion of an insider, or *emic*, perspective because of my own involvement with, and within, the Springsteen community. Much of the information included in this thesis comes from personal experience and participant observation, as well as from conversations over the years with members of the fan community and concert audiences. In particular, two websites that are representative of the fan community have been invaluable sources of information: www.greasylake.org and www.backstreets.com. Fans from all over the world post on these sites that operate as cyber bulletin boards and that serve as the locus for much of the social activity and fund raising efforts common in the fan community. Using participant-observation as my

approach and the words of the people involved, I also show the ways in which fan admiration and love have manifested as charitable actions patterned after the real – or assumed – actions of Mr. Springsteen.

(Note: All lyrics that appear in this paper, unless otherwise noted, are written by Bruce Springsteen and can be found in Appendix 1).

CHAPTER 1

RELEASING RELIGION

*“We pray for your love, Lord
We pray for the lost, Lord
We pray for this world, Lord
We pray for the strength, Lord
We pray for the strength, Lord”*
(My City of Ruins, 2002)

“Religion” said Dr. Gregory House, on a recent episode of the currently-popular television show *House*, “is a symptom of irrational belief and groundless hope.” This fictional persona, House, was attempting to diagnose a patient who had recently converted to Hasidic Judaism; he considered this conversion to be a *symptom* of her undiagnosed condition, and therefore of diagnostic significance rather than spiritual importance (as it turns out, there was no connection between the two). As on this show, religion comes at us through all mediums these days, whether in the form of fictionalized characters on a TV drama, Christian rock on the radio, or televangelists attempting to save our souls; it is everywhere. And just as we are assaulted with any number and kinds of religious messages daily, so are we confronted with multiple concepts of what religion *is*.

Clifford Geertz says that religion is a set of symbols that “establish powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations,” and that offer an ultimate explanation of the world (Pals 2006: 270). Durkheim says these symbols unite us into “moral communities” where we are concerned not simply with our individual well-being, but rather with the welfare of the group (Pals 2006: 96). In these days of frozen dinners for one, single-cup coffee makers, solitary internet communication, and rabid

individualism, many people search for that “moral community” and sense of belonging. The (institutionalized) Church - regardless of religion or denomination - is no longer the sole proprietor of this territory - if it ever was - as many seek far and wide for some reason to believe, and some place to belong. Various people, it seems, are either replacing traditional religion with more meaningful spiritual practices or are adding other resources to supplement their traditional religion. In the twenty-first century, what theologies, products, and forms will offer us solace and spiritual nourishment, what will provide us with a sense of community or belonging to something bigger than ourselves? What will inspire and challenge us to become better people?

As institutionalized religious practices become more polarized and polarizing, many people find themselves unfulfilled by conventional services and rituals. Organized religion has become more, well, *organized*. Formal religion has diminished as a source of comfort and inspiration for many people and for some music has stepped in to fill the gaps (Lynch 2006). According to a recent survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, mainline Protestant churches are suffering diminishing congregations and more people are declaring themselves ‘unaffiliated.’ Church attendance is falling as well as participation in the rites and rituals associated with religion such as Christenings, baptisms and church weddings (Lynch 2006: 481). And this loss is not restricted to Christianity; synagogues and mosques (in non-Muslim majority countries) are also suffering (Lynch 2006: 481). More than twenty-five percent of the people surveyed have left the faith of their family of origin, while twenty-five percent of the adults aged eighteen to twenty-nine deny any religious affiliation at all. Among the age group that includes most Springsteen fans, ages thirty to forty-nine, forty

percent claim no religious affiliation (pewforum.org). This might help account for the spiritual identification many fans have with the music; there is no need to worry about conflicts with church dogma or policies if there is no church. But to claim no religious affiliation is not the same as claiming no spirituality.

Additionally, the areas of heaviest fan population in the United States – the states of Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Maryland and Virginia - corresponds geographically with those polled who self-identified as unaffiliated (pewforum.org). This information is submitted anecdotally, and in no way implies that all Northeast corridor residents claiming no religious affiliation are Bruce Springsteen fans, or the reverse. (Springsteen's core audience initially was cultivated in the bars and clubs on a circuit that extended from Asbury Park north through Boston, and south through the beach towns of Virginia; when he began recording, it was the radio stations in these areas that were responsible for the bulk of airplay he initially received.) However, the information/statistics are suggestive.

There may also be some connection between the lack of official church association and the large number of Springsteen fans in Europe, where secularization has been the rule rather than the exception – what *Religion and Ethics Weekly* refers to as “Europe's long and dramatic decline in church attendance” (see also Lynch 2006). As Gordon Lynch says, “...alternative spiritualities are providing social spaces and cultural resources for religious affiliation, identities, and meaning-construction beyond the walls of the church, synagogue, or mosque (2006:482).” This alternative spirituality carries its congregants into the concert hall and the ‘ministry’ of Bruce.

“I’m just out here searchin’ for my own piece of the cross...”
(I’ll Work for Your Love, 2007)

To ferret out the meaning individuals derive from anything in their lives it becomes necessary to focus on action and active involvement. Lynch states “...it is inadequate to make inferences about the values and beliefs of Western culture simply through studying popular culture ‘texts’ (2004: 164).” People tend to take the information that they need to make a decision or to find personal meaning and make it work for them. This interpretation of ‘meaning’ cannot be controlled by the producer of the resource used, or manipulated to ‘give’ meaning, but rather the meaning may be translated differently (decoded) and independently depending on each consumer’s own individual circumstance and taste – through a personal lens (Lynch 2004: 163). Stuart Hall calls the delivery system by which this information is received - and used effectively in popular culture - as “encoding” (Lynch 2004: 163). Information is presented in such a way as to extract a particular response or interpretation. But during the “decoding” process, the ‘audience’ or receptor (consumer) decodes the information in a manner that best suits them, sometimes creating different meanings than those initially intended, meanings that are situationally dependent (Lynch 2004: 165). Here is where individuals determine what is meaningful for them, based on their own personal needs. It is not useful therefore to try to interpret these encoded messages without observing the specific situation within which the message is delivered, and where the people involved decode for themselves. Herein lays the value of participant observation and conversation, where one can have the opportunity to *qualitatively* describe the whys and hows of individuals’ actions and beliefs based on context, *their* context.

Until fairly recently, the domain of assigning appropriate labels to cultural/spiritual rites and customs has resided in the academy (Chidester 1996:760). Academics and scholars have told us what is and is not a “real” religion, what constitutes a cult, and what is simply social practice and custom. Other outside attempts (academic and scholarly) to identify practices and belief systems as religion have been ridiculed and dismissed out of hand (Chidester 1996: 760). Many of the new religious movements have been called “cults” and denied the status of religion. Instead they have been labeled as “entrepreneurial businesses, politically subversive movements, or coercive, mind-controlling, and brain-washing ‘cults’ (Chidester 1996: 760).” The ordinary man and woman feeling something outside the parameters of proscribed “official” religion in unorthodox settings had no way – and apparently no authority – to determine or even translate the spirituality of these feelings.

However, recent scholarship and the myriad forms of popular culture have challenged this narrow definition of religion. Popular culture – “that which is (or has been) accepted or approved of by large groups of people (Forbes 2000: 4)” – can be a conduit into another world (Albanese 1999: 465), a world where we can explore meanings and meaningfulness for ourselves. In these other worlds, we can experience a place of transcendence from the trials and travails of ordinary life. Popular culture can provide a platform upon which our definitions of religion can be expanded and grow to accommodate new ways of ‘believing.’ Cultural religion reflects our search for religious experience and our need for a feeling of community based on mutual involvement in something beyond the traditional definition of religion, as well as our right to define “religion” for ourselves (Albanese 1999: 465). Seekers find their own way across this

landscape, searching for that transcendent moment, that feeling of connection and inclusion, that one "...face that ain't looking through me" (Badlands, 1978).

David Chidester proposes that religion be classified as an activity that is organized and that functions as traditional churches do (1996: 744). In this rendering, religion is comprised of symbols and systems of symbols that are sacred, and that imbue the world with value for 'believers' that utilize these symbols (Chidester 1996: 744). Chidester maintains that the explication of religion is "constantly at stake in the interchanges of cultural discourses and practices (1996: 745)," an attribute that keeps it vital and growing. Chidester's analysis of baseball as religion provides us with a good, working model for identifying the Springsteen fan community as a 'congregation' using this skeletal framework of *continuity*, *uniformity*, *sacred space*, and *sacred time* (1996: 745).

Looking through this lens, *continuity* is maintained by the musician's (Springsteen) thirty-five plus year career of thoughtful lyrics and public appearances. Steadfastness of viewpoint and delivery as well as personal civic activity has created a model of ideals over time with his blue-collar/everyman persona, cementing his position as Bard of the working class. A large part of Springsteen's audience has been attending his shows for most of these thirty-five years, and sharing the memories of these shows with other, younger fans maintains the legacy and myths that surround Springsteen. *Uniformity* and a sense of belonging emanate from the mutual admiration for Mr. Springsteen, and from the fans' attendance at shows. Fans know that they are in the company of other acolytes and trust is established (to varying degrees) around this fact; there is a belief that fans all maintain and practice similar core values. The concert hall or

stadium becomes a place filled with like-minded individuals - “tramps” all - joined in mutual admiration and trust (again, a reference to the song Born to Run and the line “tramps like us”). The concert spot itself represents the *sacred space* and is similar to one’s customary place of worship, a place where all believers are welcome. This is also the spot of *sacred time* and ritual, where congregants can celebrate the music itself as well as celebrate *in* the music. To a lesser extent, this sense of ‘home’ can be derived from recordings, but the real celebration of faith takes place in the concert hall. True believers travel from city to city, attending and participating in as many services as possible. Just as outsiders unfamiliar with the rituals and responses required of congregants at, say, a Catholic worship service may be confounded by the service, so may outsiders or non-fans be confounded by the activities of the audience during a show. Their performed ‘rituals’ – the pumping of fists during “Badlands” or the chorus of oh-oh-oh-ohs sung only by the audience during the same song, the audience singing the first verse of “Hungry Heart” before the band chimes in - help define and delineate believer from non-believer, and affirm and reinforce the “social solidarity of a community...meeting personal needs and reinforcing social integration” (Chidester 1996: 748). Not coincidentally, in this same article, Chidester also speaks about the “...inherently religious character of rock ‘n roll” (1996: 753).

Popular music, in the guise of rock and roll, and its inherent attitude of *dis*-organization and looming chaos has presented some seekers with a replacement of or supplement to the community once found through religion: Bruce Springsteen and the devoted fan community that surrounds him. In many ways this community now functions as both a social network and a spiritual community. Much as the organized church has in

the past, the Springsteen congregation offers belonging and support and presents a vehicle for doing “good works.” For numerous fans, the music and concert events and pre-concert gatherings offer the same support, relief, release, and connection that traditional worship services offer their congregations. “Belief systems always rest upon a social base...and in modern society the social structures” underpinning commitment have moved away from the society at large to smaller units of shared experience (Roof 1978: 52). As the church once did, and still does for some, the music, person, and concert experience of the audience at a Bruce Springsteen concert offers transformation and transcendence through the “majesty, the ministry of rock and roll” (Springsteen in concert). These are hard things to talk about – the genesis of feelings, the origins of emotion and faith, but they cannot be denied because there is no scientific measure of meaning, no “big-bang” theory of origin. If this were truly the case, no one could ever meaningfully discuss faith.

Rock and roll, as any music devotee knows, had its beginnings in the gospel music heard in churches, mixed with a little rhythm and blues, a dollop of jazz, a splash of country and western, and a heavy influence of African American culture. “Rockin” is a term that could as easily refer to spiritual rapture as to music and its physicality. Music has always been a vehicle for transporting oneself out of the ordinary into the *extraordinary*, with words, music, and rhythm weaving together to create an oasis “where time and history” are put on hold (Albanese 1999: 495). Music helps us pay attention to the difficult “questions and concerns of human existence,” to make meaning out of a meaningless world (Pinn 2003:2, 4) We use music not necessarily in a conscious and deliberately spiritual way, but we nevertheless use it to deal with issues of ultimate

concern (Pinn 2003:9). Here in this “other world,” there is a sense of what Catherine Albanese calls “instant community” (1999: 494) similar to an evangelical revival, where strangers become friends bonding over a mutually and similarly felt experience. This description fits the Springsteen fan community.

Rock and roll music is also used in the process of constructing adult identities in teenagers – or perhaps it is more accurate to say it *was* used; each generation develops its own music, and rock and roll belongs to the baby-boomer generation, the post-WW II babies of the fifties and sixties. As Joseph Kotarba says, “The music and musical culture they grew up with has stayed with them and has become the soundtrack of American culture...people who, over the course of their lives, have come to use rock ‘n’ roll as a source of meaning for their joys and sorrows” (Kotarba 2002: 103-104). But this music is no longer the sole province of youth: the youth of today have moved past rock music to embrace hip-hop, techno, and house music as their modes of expression. The baby boomers are not only the first rock and roll generation to age out, we may be the *only* rock and roll generation. Rock music is now for the most part relegated to the ‘classic rock’ radio stations and VH1-Classic television channel. It is, however, an indelible part of many aging adults’ lives, at least in this western world culture. Music has always been used through the ages by people to reconstruct a point in time, and to summon up memories. So the aging boomers use rock ‘n’ roll; for it **is** the soundtrack to our lives, the background noise to our joys and our disappointments, our great hopes and our dashed dreams. And to have a meaningful artist who has aged with us, remained vital, and not drifted into nostalgia to become a rock caricature, tells us that we too can still maintain the optimism and vitality of our younger selves.

Rock 'n roll can also function as a tool to teach religious beliefs and values, and is increasingly melded into Protestant and Catholic liturgy (Kotarba 2002: 122). Many churches offer special services for their congregations, targeting younger church members with a more contemporary form of worship, often using rock combos to deliver the musical component of the service. This past winter I attended a "U2-charist" at a local Episcopal Church, a communion service designed entirely around the music and lyrics of the rock band U2. And this April, a Methodist Church in Greensboro will be conducting services during the month of April around the songs of Bruce Springsteen. (See Appendix 4).

Given this, the analysis of rock 'n' roll as religion is a natural, but why Bruce Springsteen? Why are legions of fans the world over so dedicated and devoted to this particular musician? His music and lyrics are meaningful, his imagery vivid, and his stage show is decidedly that – a stage performance part Broadway, part carnival, part down-home gospel tent revival; yet even the trite and cheesy parts delight and engage the fans, as some part of Mr. Springsteen shines through. His sincerity is never in doubt by his 'followers.' As one fan, a Methodist minister I call Reverend B, told me, Springsteen speaks to the human condition, something to which we can all relate (Reverend B.).

"We'll let blood build a bridge, over mountains draped in stars"
(Worlds Apart, 2002)

Springsteen's appeal has roots in his lyrical history of visible integrity, empathy, understanding and compassion as well as his perceived personal sincerity and genuineness. Of no little contribution to his *persona* is his history of quietly contributing to charities and causes that dates back more than twenty-five years. In the fashion of

effective organizations, not unlike religious outreach organizations and missions, Springsteen has allocated funds for food banks working with the unemployed, workers' unions, and organizations that provide home repairs for the needy (Walker 2004). Since 1984, he has invited local food banks and other charitable organizations to set up collections in the arenas and stadiums where he plays. At each show, he will make a plea from the stage for attendees to please consider contributing and working with these organizations to help facilitate change. ("In the end, nobody wins unless everybody wins" is an oft-quoted phrase repeated at shows during the Born in the USA Tour that exemplifies how fans see him.) Usually, there is a song dedicated to these workers on what Springsteen calls "the front lines." These are not the glamorous causes of the celebrity world, or the Hollywood-touted disease du jour foundations, but rather the low-profile, gritty organizations trying to help the hardworking man and woman, the migrant farm worker, the people on the margins of society. In his own words: "I want to try and just work more directly with people; try to find some way to tie into the communities we come into" (Walker 2004). His concern for social justice for those least represented and/or able to advocate for themselves is obvious and reminiscent of many of the finest spiritual and community leaders. Part of his appeal to his fans is this "everyman" persona, his concern for the plight of the hard-working, struggling American, where his sincerity and genuineness seem almost palpable.

While this common-man persona Bruce projects may be part public relations fabrication, his facade has not slipped during his thirty-five years in the spotlight under the scrutiny of an ever-increasingly cynical public. His steadfastness of ideals and his consistent actions support the persona his fans see, and they respect as well as revere

Bruce. He is continually heralded as being one of us, a man who knows and remembers his origins and roots. In reading hundreds of accounts of encounters with Bruce I have seen no negative responses, heard no story of rudeness or even the ordinary day to day unpleasantness that even the best of us can sometimes exhibit. Most fans respect his privacy when he is with his family, and the lore has it that citizens of his hometown territory in New Jersey are fiercely protective of his privacy. To better understand how his fans come to this place, it becomes necessary to know more about Bruce Springsteen and the forces that helped shape the man he has become.

CHAPTER 2

GENESIS

“I come from down in the valley where mister when you’re young they bring you up to do like your daddy done”

(The River, 1980)

To understand a person – and the people who hold him or her in esteem - it is necessary to know the texture, the fabric of his or her life, the emotional warp and woof that results in the finished cloth. Bruce Frederick Springsteen was born September 23, 1949, and raised in Freehold, New Jersey to working class parents of Dutch, Irish and Italian ancestry. The section of town where his family resided was lower-middle-working class, and his neighborhood, known as “Texas” because of the large number of southerners who’d migrated there, was on the proverbial wrong side of the tracks (Marsh 2004: 24). His childhood and adolescence are outwardly unremarkable. Mom Adele worked as a secretary and dad Douglas filled any number of different jobs including bus driver, prison guard and mill worker. The family lived for many years with one or the other set of grandparents when financially strapped. The oldest child, Bruce has two sisters, Pamela and Virginia. Life in blue-collar New Jersey was not easy for the family, with Douglas moving from job to job. The tension and frustration the elder Mr. Springsteen carried with him influenced his son in ways that would manifest years later in song and story on stage in a public exorcism and attempt to understand and make sense of his parents’ experiences. In Springsteen’s own words:

“There was a promise of a right to a decent life, that you didn’t have to live and die like my old man did” (Smith 2002: 135).

“When I was really young, I don’t remember thinkin’ about it

much. But as I got older, I watched my father...how he would come home from work and just sit in the kitchen all night. Like there was somethin' dyin' inside of him, or like he'd never had a chance to live...until I started to feel there was somethin' dyin' inside of me" (Marsh 2004:319).

Years later, when inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, he would admit to the audience that the working-man's clothes he wore in concert was his way of honoring his father (Sawyer 2004: 2).

Bruce relates that he did not really start living until he 'found' music in the form of rock 'n roll. In his own words: "I lived half of my first 13 years in a trance. I was thinking of things, but I was always on the outside looking in (Sandford 1999: 15)." Music became his anchor and hope. "The only thing that kept me from giving up when I was young was in the rock 'n' roll music I heard – that there was a meaning in life, a meaning in living" (Smith 2002: 135). This belief in a "meaningful life" will continue to echo throughout his career. In one concert tale often told early on in his career, Bruce talks about a nun at St. Rose of Lima elementary school who stuffed him into a trashcan under her desk because that is where, she said, he belonged. This story reveals that Springsteen's feelings of separateness and alienation formed early on in his childhood, and they have remained vivid. At 7, Bruce saw Elvis Presley appear on the Ed Sullivan Show, and decided to become a musician. As every Springsteen disciple knows, his mother Adele took out a loan to buy a teenaged Bruce a guitar, an act memorialized in the Springsteen song *The Wish* (1998):

*Dirty old street all slushed up in the rain and snow
Little boy and his ma shivering outside a rundown music store window
That night on top of a Christmas tree shines one beautiful star
And lying underneath a brand-new Japanese guitar
I remember in the morning, ma, hearing your alarm clock ring
I'd lie in bed and listen to you gettin' ready for work
The sound of your makeup case on the sink
And the ladies at the office, all lipstick, perfume and rustlin' skirts
And how proud and happy you always looked walking home from work
If pa's eyes were windows into a world so deadly and true
You couldn't stop me from looking but you kept me from crawlin' through
And if it's a funny old world, mama, where a little boy's wishes come true
Well I got a few in my pocket and a special one just for you
It ain't no phone call on Sunday, flowers or a mother's day card
It ain't no house on a hill with a garden and a nice little yard
I got my hot rod down on Bond Street, I'm older but you'll know me in a
glance
We'll find us a little rock 'n roll bar and baby we'll go out and dance
Well it was me in my Beatle boots, you in pink curlers and matador pants
Pullin' me up off the couch to do the twist for my uncles and aunts
Well I found a girl of my own now, ma, I popped the question on your
birthday
She stood waiting on the front porch while you were telling me to get out
there*

*And say what it was that I had to say
 Last night we all sat around laughing at the things that guitar brought us
 And I laid awake thinking 'bout the other things it's brought us
 Well tonight I'm takin' requests here in the kitchen
 This one's for you, ma, let me come right out and say it
 It's overdue, but baby, if you're looking for a sad song, well I ain't gonna
 play it.*

These decidedly un-rock-like lyrics thanking his mother, a decidedly unlikely topic for a rock musician, give some glimpse into the attraction his music will eventually offer many millions of fans the world over. After all, how many other popular musicians have written songs of gratitude to their mothers? The lyrics of the above song indicate the debt and love that Springsteen obviously feels for his mother. He credits her with saving him from his father's life, from keeping him from "crawling through" into that dead world of limited possibilities and abandoned hope. His mother opened up the possibility of a world of freedom and release, symbolized in that guitar. But, he tells her in this song, he hasn't changed. "I'm older but you'll know me in a glance." Adele Springsteen had an obvious impact on her son's view of the working life as something in which to take pride.

His relationship with his father, however, was tense and difficult, as the elder Springsteen had no understanding or tolerance for his son's musical aspirations. Family and life conflicts became the fodder of on-stage stories; the Springsteen-lore is replete with many of these concert stories of paternal conflict preceding certain songs, "It's My Life" among them:

*"I used to always have to go back home. And I'd stand there
 in that driveway, afraid to go in the house, and I could see*

the screen door, I could see the light of my pop's cigarette. And I remember I just couldn't wait until I was old enough to take him out once. I used to slick my hair back real tight so he couldn't tell how long it was getting'. And try to sneak through the kitchen. But the old man he'd catch me every night and he'd drag me back into the kitchen...we'd start talkin' about nothin' much. How I was doin'. Pretty soon he'd ask me what I thought I was doin' with myself, and we'd always end up screamin' at each other. My mother she'd always end up runnin' in from the front room, cryin' and tryin' to pull him off me, try to keep us from fightin' with each other. And I'd always, I'd always end up runnin' out the back door...tellin' him how it was my life and I was gonna do what I wanted to do." Bruce Springsteen (Marsh 2003:25-26).

It was at this point that Bruce would launch into the song "It's My Life," not one he'd written, but obviously one with which he emotionally identified.

A male friend once told me that if you wanted to make a man cry, just ask him about his father. Bruce obviously carried around many conflicting feelings about his own father and what sort of role he played in his life, and again, this is one of the things that fans can relate to – the conflicts with our families, and the cascade of emotions we can experience when dealing with our families. Bruce also talked about his father's referring to "that goddamned guitar." (Since his father's death in 1998 these stories have migrated

into the oral history, and are no longer used by him in his performances) One frequently told tale was that of Bruce's convalescing from a motorcycle accident at home, and his father paying a barber to come to the house to cut Bruce's unruly long hair. Yet when Bruce was rejected by the Selective Service Board and classified 4-F (physically unfit for service) in the late sixties, Douglas Springsteen's reaction was a quiet but heartfelt "Good." This was, after all, in 1968, and the Vietnam War with its military draft posed a reality for teenaged boys that the Iraq War does not for today's youth. By telling this story, Springsteen was releasing any resentment towards his father, and acknowledging that Douglas was not the uncaring father depicted in the previous story. And by doing this in a performance, he provided an example for men in the audience who perhaps had their own father issues.

Despite circumstances that could have made him a bitter and mean young man, Bruce Springsteen showed a level of understanding, empathy, and compassion towards his father as he aged and matured. The 1980 album *The River* included the song "Independence Day" that illustrated his capacity for empathy and forgiveness.

Well, Papa go to bed now it's getting late

Nothing we can say can change anything now

I'll be leavin' in the morning from St. Mary's gate

We wouldn't change this thing even if we could somehow

Cause the darkness of this house has got the best of us

There's a darkness in this town that's got us too

But they can't touch me now

and you can't touch me now

They ain't gonna do to me
What I watched them do to you
Now I don't know what it always was with us
We chose the words, and yeah, we drew the lines
There was just no way this house could hold the two of us
I guess that we were just too much of the same kind.

These are not the words of a grudge-holding, rebelling adolescent, but an understanding adult, and the sort of lyrics upon which Springsteen's emotional legacy is built. There is an understanding in this song of the forces that pluck at us, over which we have no control; we can only change how we deal with these forces in spite of the outcome. Our responsibility is in the way we deal with situations that we have no control over. This song is also a public forgiveness of his father, as well as an apology to Douglas Springsteen: "I guess that we were just too much of the same kind." His words come from situations understood if not experienced, and this empathy pours out in his music; his songs show a remarkable ability to understand whatever situation he is writing about, whether it is an illegal immigrant working in a methamphetamine lab, or a Vietnam veteran seeking work. Songs of love and moon and June we are accustomed to hearing from other musicians, but Springsteen's lyrics mine the deeper emotional waters of unwed mothers and desolate souls searching for a little peace and happiness, walking on the backstreets looking for hope.

Many of his songs sound potentially autobiographical, and indeed there must be a component of self in any good writing. But Springsteen disavows literal historiography

saying “the songs are not literally autobiographical but in some way they’re emotionally autobiographical” (Primeaux 1996: 8). However, in “Songs,” Springsteen admits to some actual history, telling the reader that “I often wrote from a child’s point of view: ‘Mansion on the Hill,’ ‘Used Cars,’ ‘My Father’s House’ – these are all stories that came directly out of my experience with my family” (2003: 138). In concert, Springsteen told the story of an old family car that didn’t have reverse gear, so his father would park the car on a hill so it would be easier to start driving. The words to “Used Car (1982)” reflect more than mere auto-frustration:

My little sister’s in the front seat with an ice cream cone
My Ma’s in the backseat sittin’ all alone
As my Pa steers her slow out of the lot
for a test drive down Michigan Avenue
Now my Ma she fingers her wedding band
And watches the salesman stare at my old man’s hands
He’s tellin’ us ‘bout the break he’d
give us if he could but he just can’t
Well if I could swear I know just what I’d do
Now mister, the day the lottery I win
I ain’t ever gonna ride in no used car again
Now the neighbors come from near and far
As we pull up in our brand-new used car
I wish he’d just hit the gas and let out a cry
And tell ‘em all they can kiss our asses goodbye

My dad he sweats the same job from mornin' to morn
Me I walk home on the same dirty streets where I was born
Up the block I can hear my little sister
in the front seat blowin' that horn
The sounds echo all down Michigan Avenue
Now mister, the day my number comes in
I ain't ever gonna ride in no used car again

It is lyrics in this vein, of the songs quoted above that give the public a window into Springsteen's childhood and the forces that helped shape the man he has become. The examples are there for the world to read, hear, and see, and have been analyzed and dissected by pop writers and scholars alike. Fans have heard his music and recognize the humanity of the writer, felt his compassion via his music, and judged him accordingly. They feel connected to this man, who most have never and will never meet, but who nevertheless is as familiar as a lover.

Fans know their history - the Springsteen creation myth, if you will. The elder Springsteens took their life's savings and moved from their home in Freehold, New Jersey to California in 1969, but nineteen year old Bruce decided to remain in New Jersey pursuing his music, moving to the shore community of Asbury Park. And here the 'legend' begins to take shape. Springsteen's name has come to be inextricably intertwined with that of Asbury Park, New Jersey, a seedy little seaside town on the Jersey shore immortalized on his first album *Greetings from Asbury Park* (1973). Asbury at the time – and perhaps presently - suffered from run-of-the-mill political corruption, and funds targeted for urban development never manifested in change for the city. As

subject to racial conflict as the rest of late 60's and early 70's urban America, July 1970 saw race riots in Asbury Park (<http://www.beyondthepalace.com/newjersey/asburypark.>). Nevertheless, there was a flourishing music scene that included any number of bands, one of which was Bruce Springsteen's, in whatever the moment revealed: The Castiles, Earth, Child, Dr. Zoom and the Sonic Boom, Steel Mill, and the Bruce Springsteen Band to name some incarnations of his bands. It was an "era of shared apartments and skimpy meals" (Cross 1989: 26).

The legendary record executive John Hammond signed Springsteen to a recording contract with Columbia Records in 1972, and released *Greetings from Asbury Park* in 1973. In May of 1974, rock critic Jon Landau of Boston's *Real Paper* was present at a Springsteen performance at the Harvard Theater, and wrote the prescient, legendary "I have seen the future of rock and roll and its name is Bruce Springsteen" review (Marsh 1987: 155). Springsteen's live performances, where he forged his connection to his audience through both his musical outreach and his active attempts to involve them, were becoming legendary, and his fans many and loyal. Somehow, his absolute sincerity cut through any rock 'n' roll pretenses and touched those who saw him perform.

But it was with the release of his third album, the critically acclaimed *Born to Run*, that the rest of the country and the world began to hear the name Bruce Springsteen and his nickname, 'the Boss.' Both *Newsweek* and *Time* magazines featured his face on the cover of their respective magazines the same week in 1975. Springsteen and his music had become ubiquitous, so much so that during his first visit and performances in London, Springsteen rebelled and tore down posters promoting his concert there. Again, these are the unlikely actions of a future rock-icon, but that are indicative of the kind of man and

performer Bruce was and still is. In his words, “I wasn’t interested in immediate success or how much each particular record sold. I was interested in becoming part of people’s lives and, hopefully, growing up with them – growing up together” (Sawyer 2004: 1). Instinctively, fans feel this.

Springsteen’s live shows, constructed as if made of fire and performed from the heart, continued to create a loyal following, and his fame grew quickly. The ferocity and zeal with which he performed as well as the prolonged performances of three, four, even four and a half hours became the stuff of legends. Because of contractual and legal issues, however, (he had fired and brought suit against his manager Mike Appel during the recording of *Born to Run*) he was legally prohibited from recording until his legal problems were resolved (Sawyers 9). When he finally reentered the recording studio two years later slightly more jaded and disillusioned with the record business after this legal struggle, it was with a stylistically more somber and adult set of songs. “After *Born to Run* I wanted to write about life in the close confines of the small towns I grew up in...I felt a sense of accountability to the people I’d grown up alongside of...I wanted to ensure that my music continued to have value and a sense of place” (Springsteen 2003:66).

“I believe in the love that can save me...”
(Badlands, 1978)

The strength of Springsteen’s character and its reflection in his lyrics becomes important when critically looking at his fan following. His “sense of place and value” are evidenced in both his writings and in his presented persona, and create a loyal and devoted fan-base. Put quite simply, fans believe what he sings and what he says. He is not seen as infallible or impervious to human failings; his more politically conservative

fans see his politics as naïve and simplistic. Indeed, the break-up of his first marriage to Julianne Phillips was acted out on the pages of tabloids all over the world. Yet somehow even this marital dissolution seemed to work in Springsteen's favor, earning him more emotional capital with his audience; he left his super-model wife for a back-up singer in his band, a real 'Jersey girl,' Patti Scialfa, and married her. They have remained married and have three children together.

Over the course of the past thirty-five years, the musicians performing behind Springsteen as the E Street Band have maintained a constant line-up, with only one break from performing together. These band members had played together since their teens, some members for as long as twenty years, when Springsteen "fired" them in 1989. For reasons only truly known to Springsteen, he formed a new touring band and recorded two albums. The loyal fans took this break-up hard, and never really embraced what came to be known as the "other band." For nearly 15 years the E Street Band had been the foils for Springsteen's on-stage antics, and their personas seemed entwined with Bruce's. Even the name of the band, "The E Street," harkened back to their teenage years, as the house where they practiced was on E Street. Fans felt a little betrayed: these were extended family members, almost as beloved as Bruce himself. (Some never truly forgave Bruce for this, and posts regularly show up on the internet still debating the quality of the music produced with them). The E Street Band members themselves were for the most part silent. The 'break-up' continued until January 1995, when the E Street band reunited with Bruce to record several cuts for his *Greatest Hits* compact disc. And in 1999, Springsteen accompanied by the reunited E Street Band launched their Reunion Tour, playing 120

shows in eighty two countries, concluding with ten shows at New York's Madison Square Garden.

A musicologist's analysis of Springsteen's music and performance cites expression rather than "virtuosic control" as the lynchpin of his work: the audience experiences and internalizes his performance as an "honest man giving his emotional all" (Berger & Del Negro 2004: 58, 59). This succinct summation says what millions of fans have been saying for thirty five years. Berger and Del Negro describe Springsteen fans as "engaging in romantic detail vertigo" and state that the listeners' attention is drawn more to the emotion and meaning than to the technical rendering of the performance (2004: 59). Ultimately, these scholars maintain that this reflexivity is important to performance:

"the reflexive metacommentary by which a performer signals her awareness of herself as a participant in an interaction – and by which she signals her awareness of the audience's attention to her – colors and informs all of the 'primary' communication in the performance and plays a crucial role in the overall aesthetics of the event"

(Berger & DelNegro, 2004: 95).

The translation of this for Springsteen and fans is that Bruce knows – as do the fans – that the audience is an integral part of the event. He feeds off the audience, and gives them responsibility for a more highly charged performance or a less energetic show, playing them like another instrument in his performing repertoire. For example, during a 1980

performance in Stockholm, Bruce acknowledged his growing awareness of the necessity of audience involvement:

There's a Marvin Gaye and Tammy Terrell song: it's called 'It Takes Two.' In the song, Marvin Gaye sings, 'It takes two to make a dream come true.' And I guess that's why we're here tonight talking to you and you guys are talking to us. Because it's funny, you know, on this tour since we've been over here, I've learned...I've learned a lot over here. I've learned the importance of the audience, the importance of you in the show. Because we come out and we play, and we play hard and try to tell you about the things that mean a lot to us, and when you respond the way you have tonight and last night, it's like...it's a big, like '*me too*,' you know. It's in a buncha little things. I want you to know that it means a lot to us...(Marsh 2003:282)

For performances during his younger years, an important part of his compact with his followers was throwing himself – literally – into the audience, being carried by their hands, and getting deposited back on-stage with the audience's help. Today, an older Bruce, no longer any more able to perform these strenuous physical gyrations than the rest of us fifty-somethings, has replaced these audience-dives with moving to the edge of the stage and encouraging the lucky faithful to strum his guitar, while others touch the edges of his jeans or boots. A communion of sort, sharing guitar strings and denim

instead of bread and wine, there is no fear here; Bruce trusts his audience in the same way they trust him. This is part of the covenant that has given birth to the community and unity fans feel with each other and with Bruce Springsteen, and that creates a climate conducive to actively witnessing for Bruce, honoring both his humanity and our own by actively working for a better world and striving for personal integrity: “Baby you be true to me and I’ll be true to you” (Be True, 1988). To be ‘true’ to him, we need to be ‘true’ to each other and ourselves.

CHAPTER THREE

'Tramps Like Us...'

(Born to Run, 1975)

William Romanowski says the popularity of any "...given cultural element is directly proportional to the degree to which that element is reflective of audience beliefs and values" (2001: 18). This is certainly true of Springsteen's audiences, but with a twist: the 'faithful' see themselves as a reflection of the ideals espoused by Springsteen. The lyrical content of his music contained within the popular culture rubric finds itself dealing with emotions readily experienced by the majority. And because music can work as a conveyance system of shared meanings, a component of religion and culture both, the lines can further blur when sitting in the audience. George Barna's categorization of Christians suggests that those people he calls *cultural Christians* (in Romanowski 2001, 28) hold this idea of works-based faith, again echoed in the Springsteen fan community. This is not to say that all Springsteen fans are either religious or Christian, however. Romanowski claims also that it is a *perspective* that makes a work religious, that "...there is something right about the way he creates popular music," and that the music "...captures a sense of religious longing and daily struggle that resonates..." with listeners (2001:93, 30).

But what, exactly, is a **fan**? One working definition in use now, that of an enthusiastic supporter of a sports team or celebrity, differs considerably from the original definition of a religious zealot (Cavicchi 1998: 38). Yet there is a component of the zealot in any true fan. To be a fan indicates a certain level of devotion to the object of one's fandom. Most fans initially become 'converts' and experience this transformation

through an introduction to and identification with the music and lyrics. The language these converts use is that of spiritual conversion, not unlike the language and imagery a recently 'saved' Christian might use, calling themselves 'believers (Steven).'" One French fan told me that she attended her first concert in 1992 and "saw the face of God (janiss)."

Some terms commonly used to describe a Springsteen-event are 'redemption' and 'salvation,' most decidedly religious, as is the burning need the converted masses feel to bring others into the fold, to convert them. Being a Springsteen fan is not unlike being a missionary for Bruce.

In the Springsteen-world, there are 'casual fans' and 'real fans:' a casual fan might attend a concert, but would probably not alter life-plans to do so, while a 'real fan' does whatever it takes within their means to attend a show. Every 'real' fan knows exactly how many times they have seen Springsteen, with some fans counting triple-digit performances as proof of their devotion. Springsteen fans also proclaim their solidarity with each other, casual or true, and exhibit this unity at shows by responding at various times during the performance with specific hand gestures and vocal responses. As one 'follower' stated, "...any one Bruce fan could somehow speak for ALL Bruce fans...part of being a Bruce fan was being a member of the shared history of the Bruce fan Community. You knew any Bruce fan was a friend of any other Bruce fan" (Steven). Going to a concert is like spending time with 20,000 of your closest friends you've not yet met.

"making grown men cry and women dance"
 (Bruce Springsteen on "60 Minutes")

Who are these fans? Most are men, more evident in the European audiences than in the United States. A cursory examination of the audience in Cologne, Germany at a

December 2007 concert revealed an approximate ratio of men to women around six to one; the Paris audience appeared even more male, with what looked to be about a ten to one ratio, male to female. Concert goers assured me that part of this was due to the “crazy Italian men fans” that traveled all over Europe following Bruce in concert. Indeed, at the Paris show of December 2007, there looked to be twenty to thirty men in the “pit” (the standing area closest to the stage) all wearing orange shirts, and waving Italian flags. In the Bruce-fandom world, the Italian fans are legendary, with fans of other nations wistfully coveting shows in Italy.

A recently published book of fan stories, *For You*, contains the fan-written and contributed stories of what Bruce means to them as well as stories relating personal encounters with him. The stories presented in the following chapters echo the same themes found in Kirsch’s book, of “finding” Springsteen and what that means to the individual. These fans self-identify to whatever extent they are comfortable, using either their actual given names or screen names. In examining the book, I tallied up the gender of the contributors, and found that some one hundred and sixty three were identifiable as males, while sixty seven were women; sixteen I classified as gender unknown, as the names were either unisex or unknown to me (Kirsch 2007). This supports what I have observed at concerts and the larger number of male attendees.

In terms of age, fans run the spectrum from very young (under ten) to over sixty. The majority of fans range between forty to fifty years old. In 2007 I asked people (on a fansite where I am a member, www.greasylake.org) to email me and tell me a little about their bruce-ness. Thirty four people responded, and the majority were between the ages of forty-one to fifty (thirteen). Nine people were between the ages of thirty-one and forty,

while seven people were age eighteen to thirty. There were two respondents over sixty, and three between fifty-one and sixty.

For the most part, the people who communicated with me were well educated, with all but two people having at least some college. Twelve were women, with again the majority being male. Most of these particular fans had at least some college education, with two indicating a doctorate. Incomes were spilt almost equally for those who answered, with seventeen people making less than fifty thousand dollars a year, and seventeen people making more than fifty thousand dollars a year. Their occupations spanned everything from judges (one) and lawyers (two) to a full-time homemaker and a chef. No one reported being a manual laborer, and everyone for the most part seemed to have white-collar jobs.

This casual polling also revealed that twenty of these fans did not regularly attend any church, temple, or mosque other than The Church of Bruce; one devoted congregant however, who has attended over fourteen shows and who has been a fan for twenty five years, reported he was a Bible student at a Jehovah Witnesses' Kingdom Hall. When asked, the fans expressed seeing no conflict between the spiritual nourishment they received through Springsteen and his music and whatever 'regular' church they attended. The feeling seemed to be that whatever faith you found that helped you get through the day was valid, regardless of where you found it: finding it in Bruce just makes sense to his fans.

One of the things I queried the cyber-site about was how many times people had seen Springsteen. Answers varied from once to over two hundred times, with a riotous variation between the two. Almost everyone collects "brucelegs" – bootleg recordings

made surreptitiously of Bruce's live performances that stretch back to the late sixties. These brucelegs serve as a sort of communal offering, freely traded and supplied to the faithful, all done gratuitously. Indeed, those individuals who are found to be selling these recordings and videos are severely chastised and frequently excommunicated from the loyal Springsteen congregation. At the very least, the offender's name is spread far and wide amongst the community, with his or her sins revealed to all via the electronic sources available to the fans- websites, cyber bulletin boards, and emails.

This (mostly) unspoken ethical rule also applies to the reselling of tickets to concerts. Springsteen tickets are among the hardest concert tickets to come by, and because of this, fans who do manage to get tickets often will get more than they personally need. These "spare" tickets are then offered up at face-value or less to other fans. It is also not uncommon for fans to "faerie" (as these bestowers of spare tickets are called) others – to give away a ticket to a loyal disciple. I have been both the recipient and the faerie, receiving a coveted Christmas performance ticket from someone I never met, gratis, and likewise buying a ticket for someone, freely giving this to him. While it may be better to give than receive, receiving is definitely a joy not to be denied! At present, I am in receipt of a ticket for an Atlanta performance scheduled for late April sent to me by someone I know only by screen name, with the understanding I can pay him when I see him. I have no address, meeting place, or even a real name for this person! The community truly does operate on the principle of treating others as you would be treated. "The thinking is, if you're a fan of Bruce, it means you can be trusted. You're an honest person and you can sleep on my couch" (Perusse). The community works on this ethical principle, again assumed to be derived from Springsteen's own actions. It is not

quite WWBD (what would Bruce do) but it is close to that. Fans who act outside of the accepted behavioral parameters and violate these “bruce-ethics” (my term, not commonly used by fans) are chastised as not being “real” fans, or not “listening” to Bruce; “real” fans act in accordance with the principles that they find in Springsteen’s music.

“Everybody’s got a hungry heart”

(Hungry Heart, 1980)

“...when I see Bruce Springsteen reaching to his audience –
to every corner of a large arena, to every mind in the hall –
I find the kind of fulfillment and community that only the
best friendships and kinships might bring one, which is to say,
I see an oath of love and meaning played out with a full heart.”

Mikal Gilmore (Marsh 2004: 433-34)

While I have personally only witnessed concerts in three different countries – France, Germany, and the United States, I have nevertheless met fans from at least eleven different countries. The connection is the same with these fans as with my own countrymen and women – all things Bruce ties us together. Courtesies are extended and trust freely given, simply on the basis of our mutual membership in the Church of Bruce.

My first experience meeting a foreign Bruce fan happened in 2004 Northern Ireland. Through a mutual but equally unmet friend, I was given the name and phone number of a family living outside Belfast – husband and wife were both avid fans and members of a cyber bulletin board sponsored by Sony Music – bruce.springsteen.net. In spite of our all being members of this site, I had never ‘spoken’ to J. or D. until we

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actually arrived in Northern Ireland. I called, introduced myself, and we made plans to meet that week. My traveling companion and I arrived early one afternoon at their lovely cottage, and immediately jumped head-first into Bruce-lore, comparing concerts and favorite songs. We had a wonderful time, and when we left we were no longer strangers.

During a recent trip to Europe to observe Springsteen and fans, I met a number of fans from all over Europe, as well as some expatriate Americans. The language and emotions expressed echoed that of American fans, even if the audience responses differ slightly. (Euro-fans tend to be more enthusiastic and loud, waving and clapping in a hypnotic, synchronized fashion.) One German fan in front of me in line said that every man wants to be him while every woman wants to meet him. Another Danish fan who had driven eight hours to see a show in Berlin, and who had just finished driving another five to get to Cologne said he traveled to see Bruce as much as he could. I was also assured that the German audience at this show would make American audiences pale in comparison, a point of great pride for the Europeans. *Hobbes*, a German fan, proudly showed me a tattoo of Bruce's signature right where he'd signed her arm. She expressed the idea that Bruce was her emotional and spiritual light in a dark reality.

Aussiebrucefan, an Australian, is a drug and alcohol rehabilitation counselor who says he was attracted to Bruce because of the "music, lyrics, and social responsibility thing." S. also from Australia, says she can't wait to make the Asbury pilgrimage during the next tour. Springsteen has appeared in Australia and New Zealand, but not with any sort of regularity, and so fans 'down under' must travel to him. *Corvettesue*, from New Zealand says that "...integrity and Bruce" has given her a whole new life and many friends where she once had few. In talking, she also used the term "Church of Bruce,"

and when I commented that he did not give us actual direction, she vehemently replied “But he does.” These fans see the guidance and moral challenges set forth in Springsteen’s music as guidelines and suggestions for a mode of behavior in their personal lives, much as a member of any religious community follows the examples set by its spiritual leader. It is not necessary for Springsteen to say “This is what you must do or not do.” His songs, if examined as parables, contain their own moral, their own cause and effect outcome. *Blueguitar*, an American, had this to say:

He was great, but flawed as we all are. He knew it, and wasn’t afraid to admit it. A rock and roller? Sure, but to me he was so much more. He inspired me to do more with my life, to go out into the world and make a difference. To do MY job a little better, just like he did. To know you had given your all, just like he did. I believe in the power and faith that Bruce Springsteen preaches about.

Fan *all4eddie* took his autistic son to a recent concert, along with a particularly meaningful sign he wanted Bruce to read:

Bruce stopped playing, read every word, and seemed to be a little choked up...then he reaches out and hands Eddie his harmonica, needless to say the tears began to flow, my hands were shaking as they are now retelling this story...our sign read “Your music taught our autistic son to speak.”

Brianzai says Bruce provides “a place of mercy and healing.” *Hanaree* explains “ it again feels like God speaking directly to me through these words: *I will provide for you/I’ll stand by your side/ you’ll need a good companion for this part of the ride...* Bruce

provides spiritual connection.” *BjorntorunMN* told me that Bruce was the one thing that provided him comfort on “those dark nights” after a bad divorce and job loss. And Reverend Suzanne Meyer posits: “Bruce incarnates his message, becomes a conduit for hope” and calls his concerts “nothing less than revival meetings.” Clearly, for these fans Springsteen provides spiritual sustenance and all that implies: hope, understanding, forgiveness, and redemption as well as community and acceptance and a connection to something ineffable and greater than the sum of all these parts. Clearly, there is a spiritual element and energy here that works as well as any religious service.

One of the common threads that run through most fan meet-ups is the initial ‘witnessing’ that takes place; each person wants to relate their conversion story, to share how they ‘came’ to Bruce. The discussions usually then migrate to “what’s your favorite song?” and “how many times have you seen him?” In an odd sort of way, these add social capital to the exchange – the more shows, the greater number of “Bruce-points.” This also serves as a way of making an initial connection to each other, and in a way, validating one’s character. In short, the more avid a fan, the greater the internalization of the message conveyed through the performance, and therefore, the more trustworthy the person.

When discussing any given show, fans will not only ask how the band sounded, but also what Bruce’s energy was like, as well as how the audience responded. Missed cues or sour notes play less into the fans’ enjoyment than the entire experience as a whole. Flaws in the performance sometimes actually seem to enhance the experience and make it more personalized. Seeing the human side of Springsteen and the band in the form of forgotten lyrics or missed cues comes to be endearing and relished as a shared human

experience between fan and performer. The feeling that Bruce is human, he is really one of us prevails, as does the idea that “we” are an important component of the performance.

Outside of the concert hall, fans commune on-line at one of several cyber fan-sites discussing a myriad of topics, not all limited to Springsteen-world. The membership to these sites is free and most are open to anyone with the exception of several sites that are by invitation-only; memberships on these open sites number in the thousands. At www.greasylake.org, membership stands at 11,392, while www.backstreets.com boasts over 20,000. These cyber-communities offer a way to connect with like-minded people and talk. There are forums for discussing just-Bruce related topics and activities, forums for seeking and finding song chords for musicians, forums for acquiring copies of compact disks of entire concerts that have been surreptitiously recorded, and others for just general discussion and moral support. It is on these websites that the feeling of community becomes accentuated and nurtured. There are parties planned, softball games organized, and personal alliances set up. When a tour is in full-swing, fans ‘gather’ at their computers at the show time of whatever city Springsteen and company are performing in to await word of what is being performed, vicariously experiencing the show. Called the set-list watch, a fan at the concert text messages or calls someone else to post on the internet what is being played so that the ‘watchers’ can keep track of songs played. This functions as a kind of round-table, where small talk is exchanged and personal experiences shared while waiting the three to six minutes it takes for the present song to be completed. Fans also keep track of where those members present in the venue are in relation to the stage, which promotes a kind of vicarious experience. While nowhere close to the experience of being at the show, the set-list watch helps to expand

each cyber participant's knowledge of and relation to the other fans on-line participating. After the show, attendees will post their impressions and reviews for those who were not there, all of which serves to reinforce the inclusiveness and community on the 'boards' and in the greater Springsteen community.

CHAPTER FOUR

COMMUNITY IN THE SPRINGSTEEN FAN FAMILY

“You can’t break the ties that bind...”

(The Ties that Bind, 1980)

Because the word ‘community’ is so often used, it is necessary to specify exactly how I am using it in the context of the Bruce Springsteen fan community. Social science literature provides many different conceptual ideas of what constitutes community. The term has been used in the past to identify an actual geographical location as well as to indicate a connection with others who share common customs and identities (Brown 2002: 3). In his 1995 book, Amitai Etzioni described the important aspects of community: “What is needed, rather, is a strengthening of the bonds that tie people to one another, enabling them to overcome isolation and alienation...to establish in communities the moral voice that leads people to encourage one another to behave more virtuously than they would otherwise (iii).” In this sense, the Springsteen fan community definitely fits within the parameters of Etzioni’s description, and Bruce is that moral voice that ties us together.

The fan community also occupies a geographical space, but that space is fluid, changing from one concert venue to another, in this sense creating a global community. The concert audience in any country will have fans from any number of countries who have traveled to see Springsteen and to meet others who share their love of his music. I have met fans from Denmark, Italy, England, Ireland, Sweden, Germany, Canada, Singapore and Australia at concerts in New Jersey, as well as at concerts in Cologne,

Germany and Paris, France. Indeed, I have met some of these same fans in New Jersey **and** Europe.

If a 'community' needs a unifying principle, as some scholars have said (Keller 2003: 3), the Springsteen community has that in the music, performances, and person of Springsteen. Fans are able to overcome feelings of isolation, if only temporarily and occasionally, when in the presence, either real-time or cyber-time, of other fans who understand how they feel. Yet, some scholars have defined this feeling as communitarianism rather than community: "to qualify for community, social categorizations must be translated into a consciousness of a kind, a sense of belonging, and a shared identity, past or future (Keller 2003: 8)." Community is then concrete and rooted in place, while communitarianism is abstract and more a set of moral principles (Keller 2003: 8). The Springsteen fan community fulfills the criteria for both community and communitarianism, with the qualification of the fixed geographical space as defined above in the form of the concert arena; our shared identity is Bruce.

However, we need to reconfigure the idea of community as requiring a location, and give consideration to the cyber-communities of which so many people are members. These on-line 'communities' help to fulfill the need we all crave to fill "...regardless of race, gender, culture, or social class: acceptance (Bugeja 2005: 1)." While people may want to posit that the age of technology has adversely affected us and created a sense of isolation, which it undoubtedly has, in this internet-age the network has become a hometown to some (Bugeja 2005: 3). "Neighbors" are as close as our keyboard and internet connection. This may be as good as it gets for those who immerse themselves in

video games and on-line communication, a surrogate for live, human connection. (Waldinger 2005).

Springsteen fans make use of these virtual-communities – “social aggregations that emerge from the [internet] to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace (Rheingold 1993: 5).” These cyber-sites are usually fan-run, and offer a glimpse into the Springsteen-fan world. They represent community, offering a unifying principle (Springsteen and his music) and filling a variety of functions. The fan-site serves as a place to discuss current and personal events, share emotions, get the latest updates on the musician’s activities and news, and to form friendships. Some fan-sites have extremely lively forums for political discussions that often become heated; mutual admiration does not necessarily translate into homogeneous politics!

Writing about the Protestant Church in 1978, Wade Clark Roof describes the “primacy of belonging” aspect of community:

Participation in the religious community exposes the believer to others sharing the faith, which, in turn, helps to reinforce personal commitments...religion fulfills a quasi-ethnic role in providing a sense of belonging, the meaning aspects of religion...intimately rooted in the belonging. (54).

Following this reasoning, Bruce fans are therefore not only members of the same ‘church,’ but also their own ‘ethnic’ group, with a shared culture. Attending concerts reaffirms the belief in Bruce and in the fan community solidarity.

Several of the larger Springsteen fan cyber-sites are administered and moderated over by non-American fans (further indicating his popularity outside the United States). *Cosmickid* is the Danish architect and founder of one of the largest of these fan sites, greasylake.org. He saw his first Bruce concert in 1988 and was dramatically impacted by it:

Something had changed in me. When I realized the possibilities of the Internet I knew I'd found my medium... Real people getting together over a shared passion. And real people, strangers, once again grabbing each other's hands, if only virtually, just like I'd seen them do that night. ...a life-altering experience that I still feel today. It's been one hell of a ride and still is.

Cosmickid is only one of many fervent non-American followers, and he like many of the others has made the 'pilgrimage' to Asbury Park, and the legendary bar, the Stone Pony where Bruce was a regular fixture early on in his career. Visitors can take a tour of Asbury Park and Freehold, New Jersey, seeing the places mentioned in Springsteen's earlier songs, and the sites of his youth (njrockmap.com). Almost every European fan that I have spoken with who has visited the United States has made a point to make this pilgrimage to eat pizza at Federici's (a local pizzeria), have a beer at the StonePony, take their picture in front of Madame Marie's fortune telling stand, and cruise down Kingsley – all places and things that have meaning for the fan, and are part of the Springsteen

mythology. These pilgrimages are not unlike the Holy Land tours I observed when in Israel.

When asked what the internet fan community meant to the people frequenting these Springsteen websites, the responses I received indicated the similar and repeated belief that anyone who is a fan of Bruce is welcome. Likewise, the fans on these sites felt at ease, at home. *"We are a group of people that share the same passion and love for Bruce...{the website bulletin board is} our home away from home if you will"* (GL1). Attending concerts is likened to *"...where you can meet and bond with total strangers...it is like nothing I have experienced"*(GL2) Another fan says *"...being in this community is like a neighborhood...when someone is in need there's usually a great bunch of folks willing to step up"* (btx1). The fans readily display the depths to which Springsteen has influenced them, and he is credited as such: *"we all appreciate that Bruce has enriched our lives to a greater or lesser degree, to a point where people who have not yet 'got Bruce' will never understand"* (GL4). Another member of greasylake.org says *"I think of the 'Radio Nowhere' lyric, 'trying to make a connection to you' and I think that is what this community is about: human connection...TO BE TRULY ALIVE!"* (GL5) Doah expresses his feeling particularly well, using the bible to support his vision:

Now, outside of Greasy Lake and Springsteen, and
 the second I saw the word "community" in your post,
 the very first thing I think of is Acts 2:41-42 and
 Acts 4:32-37. Those two passages are the most
 beautiful picture of a community I have ever read
 with things like, "fellowship," "shared meals," and

having things in common. Community, in general,
 is the best we can be a part of this side of Heaven. (GL 6)

“And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things in common.” (Acts 4: 32)

The sense of community among Springsteen fans is palpable and across the board taken for granted, much as a member of a religious group takes for granted his or her fellow members’ beliefs. This fan society is indeed inclusive and embracing (Turner 1982: 51).

One of the important things that the Springsteen fans – those active on these ‘boards’ as they are called – experience is their shared sense of ‘getting it.’ Invariably, this term is always used when discussing the depths of feeling Springsteen and his music and performances elicit. Victor Turner called this *spontaneous communitas*, this “getting it,” and described it as “...a flash of lucid mutual understanding on the existential level. When even two people believe that they experience unity, all people are felt by these two, even if only for a flash, to be one” (1982: 47-48). In this way, fans relate directly to one another, free of “culturally defined encumbrances” (Turner 1982: 48). Turner calls communitas the “shared flow” (1986: 133), and this is indeed how it feels, an emotion flowing from one fan to another, an electric jolt of mutual understanding. Cultural differences fall away and become inconsequential and language is no barrier. There is something visceral and elemental also about this flash of instant communion.

This “flow” translates into activities as diverse as strangers hugging during a particularly intense musical moment during a show, or in giving what the world outside

the fan community would call a total stranger a ride to or from a show, or offering these strangers places to stay. It is evidenced in the free trading or giving away of concert recordings called 'bootlegs;' and this good will and shared emotional state ultimately creates the climate for the charity works done in Bruce Springsteen's name.

A more cynical – and hence, less fan-accepted – analysis is that a devotee of any particular cultural commodity is in actuality *not* a member of a real community, but rather a member of a consumption-community; the feeling of community lasts not much past the act of consumption itself (the concert), "...and then fades away, which is why we must consume repeatedly" (Joe). I feel it necessary here to emphasize that the speaker "Joe" is by his own admission NOT a 'fan'. It is too simple an explanation, and while it may apply to concert-goers of other groups, the idea of community as an act of consumption does not hold up. Some fans on these websites have never seen a concert, only vicariously experiencing a live show through reviews or listening to brucelegs, yet still feel the inclusion of the community. And the demonstrable evidence points to the contrary – Springsteen fans conduct themselves as a community beyond and outside of the concert-going milieu and spread the good news.

CHAPTER FIVE

LISTENING FOR THE LIBERATED WORD

“American religion needs an American voice...As Jesus was a man of the people who spoke to them out of the experience of their day to day lives and proclaimed justice and freedom even in the midst of oppression – good news to the captive, etc. – so too must we listen for that liberating word in today’s vernacular.” (Reverend S. Meyer)

A thoughtful and deliberate writer, Springsteen’s early lyrics center around themes familiar to and of concern to many people – belonging, inclusion, freedom, and future. These themes transcend age groups, and as one teenaged fan wrote: “What I love most about his music is I can hear him tell a story and yea I’ve been in that situation, and in some cases take advice he gave back in 1985 and apply to 2004...whenever I hear something in his music that I can relate to it draws me closer to it” (*badscooter*). ‘Converts’ see their own experiences reflected in Springsteen’s words. His honesty and the hope highlighted in his songs provide members of the ‘congregation’ with the tools – philosophy, philanthropy, compassion – to cope in an increasingly inhospitable society. Devotees find solace in these songs in much the same way that devoutly practicing religious people find solace in the sacred texts of their religions. There is a Springsteen line appropriate for most any event.

As mentioned previously, Springsteen describes his music and songs as being “...not literally autobiographical...but in some way they’re emotionally

autobiographical...some emotional thread you've tried to use to make your own way through what can feel like a particularly imponderable existence" (Primeaux 1996: 8,17). In this we, his audience, can see ourselves. He is obviously not singing about himself, but about those people suffering, hurting and struggling in this 'imponderable existence.' It is this "empathetic identification," this "reaching out to the other for the other" (Primeaux 1996: 96) that the fans respond to, coupled with his apparent authenticity and corresponding behavior. His fans in some fashion trust in his work as a reflection of the man, and appreciate his fierce commitment to his audience (Smith 2002: 123). It is also this identification that leads to the "works of faith" performed by a variety of the initiated, as described in the next chapter.

Connecting Mr. Springsteen's music to faith and spirituality is not difficult for one who has listened to his music, and indeed, numerous articles in both the popular press and professional journals by clergy and lay people alike attest to this. Biblical allusions abound in his lyrics while portraying themes of alienation and community, hope, betrayal, redemption, grace and generosity (Yamin 1990: 17). Sermons have been written using his lyrics (see appendix 2). While calling himself a 'lapsed-Catholic,' Springsteen seems unable – and unwilling – to escape his Catholic upbringing. Christopher Stratton, in his piece "Springsteen and the Minor Prophets" likens Bruce to Micah: both are seeking to imbue a nation with moral guidance, "drawing them back to God" and giving hope back to the people while proclaiming the "culpability of all" (2007). Stratton may be speaking in hyperbole when he proclaims, by quoting Abraham Joshua Heschel, that Springsteen is one "...whose image is our refuge in distress, and whose voice and vision sustain our faith.' His red baseball cap and blue jeans are to America what camel's hair

and locust were to ancient Israel” (2007). But to his fans, Springsteen does function as a source of both inspiration and solace. And yes, some do apotheosize him. As one fan said, “...in the end, the only church that’s ever worked for me is the Church of Bruce Springsteen...I don’t think he’s the Messiah, although he may very well be a Bodhisattiva” (Somerset 2007).

Sowing Seeds of Spirituality: The Covenant

“Show a Little Faith, There’s Magic in the Night” (Thunder Road 1975)

“I know this is idealistic but part of the idea our band had from the beginning was that you did not have to lose your connection to the people you write for. I don’t believe that fame or success means that you lose that connection, and I don’t believe that makin’ more money means you lose it. Because that’s not where the essence of what you are lies. That’s not what separates people. What separates people are the things that are in their heart. So I can just never surrender to that idea. Because I know that before I started playing, I was alone. And one of the reasons I picked up the guitar was that I wanted to be part of something...and I ain’t about to give it up now...one of the things always on my mind to do was to maintain connections with the people I’d grown up with, and the sense of community where I came from...the danger of fame is in *forgetting*...” Bruce Springsteen (Marsh 2004: 315)

There is little doubt that a Springsteen concert awards the faithful with a sense of community and communion, if not holiness. This sense of connection that Springsteen mentions in the above quote works to form the basis of the covenant between Bruce and his fans, to never forget who and where he came from, and the debt and responsibility he owes his followers: to be honest and ‘true’ to his audience while expecting the same in return. And it is what creates the intimacy and sense of connection *with* Springsteen. This is also an oecumenical congregation, embracing all faiths. While the imagery in Springsteen’s songs is decidedly Christian, and more pointedly Catholic, the lyrics read in such a way as to be more inclusive should one choose to look past the Christian images. One long-standing and stalwart fan has written a book, “Greetings from Bury Park,” that details growing up Muslim in England, and how Springsteen played a part in his maturation (Manzour 2007). Another beloved fan tale tells the “parable” of a young man who met Bruce in a movie theatre and invited him home to meet his parents; this young man was an Orthodox Jew, wearing the garb of his sect. All are welcome in the Ministry of Rock and Roll, an embracing and inclusive congregation.

Mircea Eliade said that the spiritual man lives near his sacred space to be closer to his God, to share the mystery and might of the “divine presence;” this is the spot where he can receive “the revelation of a reality” beyond that of his ordinary life (1959:24). Bruce has said that some people pray and some people play music (Yamin 1990: 3). The concert hall serves as Springsteen’s divine/sacred space, and he is able to pass this holiness on to his congregants, the faithful fans gathered for the ‘service.’ George Yamin, in the *Journal of Religious Studies*, says that Springsteen’s music is “nothing less than a modern-day theological epic – implicitly written in accordance with a single,

comprehensive design – in which Springsteen assimilates and reinterprets, in terms suitable for his listeners, many of the essential ideas of the Hebrew-Christian tradition” (Yamin 1990: 4).

“Rock and roll,” says Danny Duncan Collum, “is a communal affair” (2000: 55), and indeed Springsteen and his audience know this. This is the basis of the covenant Springsteen has implicitly made with his fans: “you be true to me, and I’ll be true to you.” He has stated time and again in numerous interviews that his is a job, and he owes his audience honesty and sincerity, as well as a damn good rock show. He seems self-reflective enough to realize and acknowledge that the fans are in part responsible for keeping his creative impulses flowing. “...I think that’s what people come for; they want to be lifted up and grounded at the same time...hey, you’re not alone, I’m not alone...” (Graff 2005: xx). When questioned about his absolute complete abandon in concert and why he seemed to give so much of himself, he answered:

There may be no tomorrow...if you start rationing, you’re living
life bit by bit...that’s what I get the most satisfaction out of: to know
that tonight when I go to bed I did my best. If you go to the show,
the kid has a ticket for tonight. He’s got no ticket for the show in L.A.
or New York...You can’t live on what you did yesterday or plan what’s
gonna happen tomorrow. That’s what rock ‘n’ roll is” a promise, an
oath. It’s about being as true as you can be at any particular moment.

(Cross 1989: 81)

In concert during The Ghost of Tom Joad Tour, a more mature and older Bruce said:

Our mission is a search for beauty, and in beauty there is

hope, and in hope there is some sense of divine love, of faith, of community and possibility, of things that would combat the brutality and the violence and the suffering. That's what I'm trying to lay out there. It's a survival guide.

For many of his faithful, his music is exactly that – a survival guide fed on divine love. “I believe in the love that you gave me, I believe in the faith that can save me, I believe in the hope and I pray that someday it may raise me above these badlands” (Springsteen 2003: 71) – these words could be as easily directed to his God as well as his audience. And the audience responds as joyously as any congregation responding to the Gospel, the Q’uran, or any other sacred text or hymn.

One group of dedicated fans from Northern California refers to itself, with more than a little seriousness, as the “Church of Bruce” (Sanders 2003), a term echoed in other fan communities. “Bruce feeds my soul...it’s like a religion, you just can’t explain it,” says one fan, while another says “He gives us hope love and faith...it’s like church. I get spiritually uplifted” (Sanders 2003). The terms used by many fans when describing their Springsteen connection include hyperbolic terms such as transformative, life-changing, redemptive, and other expressions usually associated with a deeply religious experience.

Good news, good works

Of no small significance is the way in which fans also unite to help each other out. One of the members of the group mentioned above fell on hard times recently, losing health, employment, and housing. Unknown to this person, the group took up a collection and presented fan x with a sizeable check to help defray living expenses. And some years

ago, on the official Sony Springsteen website now lost to the Ethernet, brucepringsteen.net, one California fan was homeless and jobless as a result of devastating wildfires that had spread through Southern California. She posted her plight, and the members of a forum thread called “Tramps Like Us” took up a collection and sent money as well as catnip and cat food for the fan’s cat to help her through those hard times. This same group of fans also managed to get a Christmas tree and presents to a single-mom fan who’d recently lost her home and job. Other fans collect toiletries to send to military personnel in Iraq while maintaining a neutral position on the war itself. These supply drives and charitable collections could be the equivalent of the passing of the collection plate in other houses of worship.

The Clergy is also represented among the Springsteen faithful. Reverend B. is the 44 year old senior minister at a Methodist church in North Carolina. A graduate of a Kentucky Baptist Divinity School, he chose to leave the Baptist church and become a Methodist minister after what he called a “fundamentalist takeover.” He and his wife have been Springsteen fans for over thirty years, and have seen any number of live shows. This April, Reverend B is planning a series of sermons and services crafted around the songs of Bruce Springsteen. (See appendix 2) His church offers two services on Sundays: a 9am contemporary service, complete with a rock ensemble made up of congregation members, and an 11 o’clock service that he termed more traditional. He has no qualms about conducting the 9 o’clock services, but says he is carefully weighing how to present the Springsteen songs to his more traditional audience. I asked him if he felt any misgivings about using contemporary rock songs within the context of his religious service, and he replied, “Not at all. Bruce speaks to the human condition that we all

experience; I will just need to present it more carefully at my later service.” He also believes that the music connects to “something deeper.” This plays into the supposition posited by Gordon Lynch that there is a longing felt by many people for a spirituality that is “liberated from the certainties of the institutional Church...” and who are looking for spiritual inspiration, for want of a better term, from someone who is more like themselves, someone with whom they can more readily identify (Lynch 2004: 163). The idea that a Springsteen concert can closely resemble a religious service – albeit a high-spirited one – did not seem like a foreign idea to Reverend B. I asked him why he chose Springsteen, and he replied because the music was fairly popular and referenced spiritual things in the lyrics. In the past, he has constructed sermons and services around other music and, given Bruce’s scheduled appearance in April, he decided that now was the proper time for Springsteen.

Reverend B, who has a long-standing familiarity and love of Springsteen’s music, took his then 17 year old son with him to see The Rising Tour in Greensboro on December 8, 2002, and called it “One of the best nights I had with my teenager. When he went into ‘The Rising’ my son turned to me and said ‘Dad, I’ve never seen anything so amazing!’” He went on to speak about the healing that this particular tour and album provided for many fans after the horrific events of September 11, 2001. Reverend B was so taken with the performance and the emotional fulfillment it provided that he went to see another show in Chapel Hill the following spring. (This is a repeated pattern amongst Springsteen fans, the need to see multiple shows on any given tour.)

Reverend B also spoke about the shared – actual or assumed – character of mutual fans, and the trust this shared musical experience creates, echoing opinions of other fans

with whom I have spoken. Many devotees see a deeper meaning in their musical experience, citing the stimulus to "...never sit back...always remember that we are here for others, not just for ourselves. And I think that's also a basic tenet of religion. I do good things because it's the right thing to do...and I think that is a core of many songs (*LOFG*).” One practicing, deeply Christian fan told me:

I realize that the joyful exuberance I feel at a Bruce Springsteen concert is God-given, just as Bruce's creative genius and masterful performing skills are God-given. Just as I am made up of body, soul, and spirit in a way I can't explain, but know to be true, Bruce's songs connect with my spirit and thereby enrich my life. My life has followed the wonderful, fulfilling, surprising path that God, in His wisdom, has laid out for me. In some mysterious, unnamable fashion, Bruce Springsteen, the man, and his music has accompanied me along the journey. Perhaps that is why our creator God who made us in His image gave us the gift of art. I cannot imagine my life without the art of Bruce Springsteen.

(jj)

This ineffable quality again repeats in fans' descriptions of what they hear and feel both in and through Springsteen's music. (It is of interest to note here that the above quoted person is the mother of five and not your typical rock and roll fan – if there even is such a creature.) Other fans talk about Springsteen's songs as "...God speaking directly to me through these words" (*hanaree*), or connecting them to "...a better/higher realization and

recognition” (*yark*). *Hardgirloneasystreet* says: “...I was truly in the church of Bruce. I believe that some people are put on this earth to unite us, move us, fill us with joy. That is Bruce.” *Blueguitar* had this to say about a recent show:

He (Bruce) made his case for fighting back against the squalor with nothing but sweat drenched desire, his own personal fight to open the door and let people dance away their own demons with a physically demanding show that was touched with the stirring intellectuality and spiritual hope, all in the guise of a rock and roll show...Bruce used the echo and call to get them (the audience) to respond to him...Bruce sang, “It’s all right, it’s all right, it’s all right,” and the audience threw up their hands and yelled back “yeah,” a positive confirmation to counter this world of pain and negativity.

In concert, Bruce can take his audience from “...hell to this blessed life...in the spiritual Church of Springsteen...the only redemption that matters is the “Beat of your heart, the beat of your heart, the beat of your heart” (*blueguitar*).

The Reverend Suzanne Meyer, the Unitarian minister who sees Springsteen as the “America’s religious voice”, has also fashioned a service and sermon around Bruce Springsteen. (See appendix 3) In a personal email, she stated that the author “...of a new gospel is anyone who has the courage and conviction to step out of the crowd and speak the truth...” and she sees Springsteen as one of these messengers. The desire to introduce family and friends to the experience of Springsteen’s live shows and to share

the emotional and spiritual connection is another common trait of the Springsteen fan community. While 'finding' Bruce may have been a solitary and individual experience similar to the Protestant "born again" conversion (Cavicchi 1998:43), the 'convert' now imbued with such joy wishes to share it. Every fan I have spoken with has related the experience of taking a close friend or loved one to a show in the hopes that lightning will strike, the uninitiated's eyes will be opened, and another fan will be imbued with the joy and converted. In particular, many parents take their children in the hopes of creating that bridge of communication music can provide and facilitating their 'conversion.' I have met families of three generations of Springsteen fans at shows: Mom H. brought both her eighty-plus year old mother and teenaged daughter to a 2003 show in Boston. It is a common sight to see families in the audience with children of all ages. While in France to attend a concert in 2007, I met a family from the U.S. – Mom, Dad, and three pre-teen and teenaged children attempting to obtain tickets to the Springsteen show in Paris. Much like the joy that is found in a newly-embraced religious belief, sharing Bruce and watching the convert 'get it' creates a feeling of sanctity and holy gratitude.

CHAPTER SIX

SPIRIT IN THE NIGHT – GOOD NEWS THROUGH SOCIAL JUSTICE

“...and remember, nobody wins unless everybody wins”

Bruce Springsteen in concert

“Ye shall know them by their fruits.” Matthew 7: 16

On September 20, 1981, Bruce played a sold-out concert in Los Angeles, with all the proceeds going to the Vietnam Veterans Association, raising over a quarter of a million dollars: “Without Bruce and that evening, we would not have made it, we would have had to close down” said then-VVA president Bob Muller (Marsh 2004: 310). At the beginning of that night’s performance, Muller took the stage and addressed the audience. One particular poignant section of speech talked about the lack of help that the Vietnam Vets were getting from the government or private industry:

It’s a little bit ironic that for the years that we’ve been tryin,’ when the businesses haven’t come behind us and the political leaders have failed to rally behind us that, when you remember the divisions within our own generation about the war, it ultimately turns out to be the very symbol of our generation – rock and roll! – that brings us together. And it is rock and roll that is going to provide the healing process that everybody needs. (Marsh 2004: 313).

Without Springsteen, Muller says, there would have been no Vietnam Veterans movement (Marsh 2004:314).

This benefit was one of the initial examples of the “*nobody wins unless everybody wins*” tenet that was an often spoken line by Bruce while onstage during the mid to late eighties, the Springsteen equivalent of the Golden Rule, frequently repeated by his fans, and one he seems to take to heart. This line may also reflect a literal manifestation of what Bruce was – and still - is doing behind the scenes, and away from the public eye and tabloids. Springsteen has been privately and without fanfare supporting a number of charitable organizations over the past several decades.

Prior to 1984, Springsteen and the E Street Band, or Springsteen solo, had appeared at several big-name rock and roll benefits. The near - catastrophic disaster at Pennsylvania’s Three Mile Island prompted a group of West Coast musicians to form MUSE – Musicians United for Safe Energy – and to organize an all-star fund raiser at Madison Square Garden in New York City in late 1979 that came to be known via album and video as *No Nukes* (Marsh 2003:214). While *No Nukes* was a moderate success, it was the Vietnam Vets’ benefit that seems to have been the real spiritual turning point for Bruce. In an interview with Rolling Stone Magazine’s Kurt Loder, Springsteen said:

I want to try and just work more directly with people,
try to find some way that my band can tie into the
communities that we come into...human politics. I think
that people on their own can do a lot...Where do the
aesthetic issues that you write about intersect with some
sort of concrete action, some direct involvement in the
communities that your audience comes from? (Marsh 2003:489).

Springsteen and his management team began to search for groups around the country that benefited “the hungry, the homeless, and the unemployed” (Marsh 2003:489).

This was done without fanfare and publicity, and to this day, it is difficult tracking all of Springsteen’s charitable donations. In each city he visited, he met with local groups, expressing his “concern for depressed conditions” in the communities, and presented them with a significant donation; there was a stipulation included with the donation, though, that the organization wait until after the first show to discuss the contribution (Marsh 2003: 498). [When asked by the press why he chose not to make a statement, his assistant Barbara Carr replied, “This *is* his statement” (Marsh 2003: 498).] He began making announcements from the stage encouraging his fans to get involved, either through donations, or by working with the organizations. At a show in Syracuse, New York he asked if anyone in the audience could donate a forklift to the new Food Bank of Central New York; within a week, someone did (Marsh 2003: 510). A favorite cause, and one that he still actively supports, the local food banks and representatives were invited to collect at each performance; tickets were also provided to be auctioned off with proceeds going to the food bank. These organizations helped the people that Bruce most related to, people who must have reminded him of his childhood and what his life could have been.

These charitable connections happened, and continue to happen, in each and every city visited and in each and every country as well. In England, Springsteen contributed to a local miners’ union strike fund, donating some 16,000 pounds to the Miners’ Wives Support Group. In Australia, he donated to the Childrens Hospital/Youth Ward, the Prince Alexander Hospital Transplant Trust Fund, and the Vietnam Veterans

Association of Australia. In Japan, Springsteen's people had to dig hard to find an appropriate social organization as food banks did not exist there; instead, he donated to a fund that helped "unmarriageable widows of men who had died in traffic accidents" (Marsh 2003:530). In Clifton, Arizona, Springsteen provided the means to keep the People's Clinic open in a town ravaged by a years-long copper miners' strike. Days away from closing, Bruce's donation enabled the clinic to move to a better facility and remain open (Marsh 2003: 500). In Los Angeles County, he visited the union hall for steelworkers Local 1845 and participated in a theater workshop, leaving concert tickets for the union members (Marsh 2003: 501).

For Springsteen, the American Dream "...ain't about two cars in the garage. It's about people living and working together without steppin' on each other" (Marsh 2003: 503-04). He literally put his money where his populist mouth was to the tune of \$10,000 to \$25,000 depending on the venue (Marsh 2003: 493-94). He continues to do this today, supporting the Second Harvest Food Banks as well as the Community for Fairness and Dignity for the Homeless, and the National Union for the Homeless, among other causes (See appendix 4 for a partial list of charities to which he now regularly contributes – some two dozen different organizations). Recently, a minister in North Carolina told me that each time Springsteen plays in the state, he donates \$10,000 to the Christian Urban Ministry – but I was unable to verify this. It is policy apparently in the Springsteen management organization to decline to talk about what Bruce must see as a private matter. The best leaders lead by example, and Bruce has set the bar high; fans see his efforts to contribute to change and feel inspired to do so themselves – maybe not all fans, and not

to the extent that Bruce does, but we try and do what we can. “Nobody wins unless everybody wins.”

More recently, it appears that Springsteen’s interest in, and support of, local food growing initiatives has been increasing. At a recent show in Rochester, New York (March 6, 2008), an organization called “Rochester Roots” had representatives collecting in the arena. When I approached a worker and attempted to find out if Bruce had made a monetary donation, the worker quite politely told me that she was not free to give me that information, consistent with Springsteen policy. This organization, according to their literature, is committed to creating a local and sustainable food system that is “nutritionally, ecologically, and economically sound” through education, advocacy and community development. They also run a school community garden project, turning underutilized schoolyards into urban gardens; at present, they work with three local elementary schools located in areas of Rochester “where food insecurity is high” (rochesterroots.org).

In the same vein, a recent email alerted me to the news that Springsteen’s people had contacted a Greensboro grassroots group related to the University of North Carolina-Greensboro campus. Called Project Greenleaf (Greenleaf.uncg.edu), it is a similar type of program as the Rochester organization, and they have been invited to ‘pass the hat’ at the upcoming April 2008 show. Their website states:

The mission of Project Green Leaf is to promote and support a local agro-food system. Project Green Leaf is dedicated to sustaining local agriculture by strengthening community between farmers and consumers, thus providing for better

quality of living.

By promoting various activities, such as direct marketing and educational/outreach programs, we assist in developing the connections necessary for a local agro-food system.

According to Project Greenleaf's founder, the Springsteen representative who made contact stated that Greenleaf was "the wave of the future." These initiatives are in line philosophically with the organizations in which Bruce has historically been interested, organizations that allow people to help themselves.

In addition to the food bank donations all over the country, Springsteen also gives freely of his services in diverse settings and for diverse reasons. He has performed benefits to keep a struggling magazine afloat (Pulitzer prize winning author Robert Cole's "Double Take"), to buy uniforms and instruments for the Asbury Park High School marching band as well as emergency medical equipment for the local rescue squad (Christmas shows), for his children's school (Rumson County Day School), for the Light of Day foundation which funds Parkinson's Disease research, and for the Kristen Ann Carr Sarcoma Fund, as well as a fund raiser in Pittsburg after floods there in 2004. Rarely will Bruce appear at the more celebrity-laden charity events.

This idea of sharing the best of ourselves, to help "everybody win," can be seen in the number of charitable events and organizations organized *in* Springsteen's name. One such site is run by the Orel family who also host a website with many different kinds of Springsteen trivia and information (matt.orel.ws/index.html). But additionally, the Orel family has made an arrangement with the website amazon.com to act as a portal to Amazon. Any purchases made by using the Orel link to Amazon result in a commission

that the Orel family then matches and donates to a charity favored by Bruce Springsteen. (See appendix 5 for an accounting from the fourth fiscal quarter of 2005 through the third fiscal quarter of 2007). For the first three quarters of 2007, this family distributed \$265 to three different charities. You can also read reviews of some of the several dozens shows that Matt, the webmaster and involved Springsteen fan, has attended.

Dedicated fans following Springsteen's example have organized and made sizable donations to a number of charities. Prior to a recent show in Buffalo, New York, members of the website backstreets.com organized a pre-show party. Fans signing up for the party paid ten dollars, and this got them a name tag with their screen name on it and assorted appetizers. People had donated a variety of items to be raffled off, and the proceeds of this raffle, along with the ten dollar fees minus the restaurant bill, was donated to the Western New York branch of Second Harvest Food Bank – some \$500.00. As mentioned previously, at a 2003 show, I was able to collect nearly \$2000 in a matter of minutes at a tailgate party of another website, greasylake.org. Currently, backstreets.com members are sponsoring a women's build day at a Habitat for Humanity site in New Jersey; twenty women have signed up to help build this house, the maximum number of volunteers Habitat can handle that day.

One of the most ambitious of the fan initiatives is the “**Bruce Sent Me**” campaign (www.brucesentme.com). To quote from the website,

“The idea is to demonstrate in a tangible way what a difference the music we love can make in the world...

‘WITH THESE HANDS’ we are making a difference.

Bruce Sent Me is not interested in collecting your money.

We simply want to inspire you to share and to look out for those less fortunate. We were moved by Bruce's encouragement to "rise up" and we are simply here to pass that thought along. Although Bruce Springsteen is not affiliated in any way with **Bruce Sent Me** (if you're looking for his official site, a link is provided below), we'd like to believe he approves of the way we heeded his advice. If you feel it too, please share this idea with others in any way you feel comfortable. To borrow a phrase from the Boss, "Turn it up!"

(note: "Turn it up" is a line from "Mary's Place")

The idea for "**Bruce Sent Me**" had its birth in a posting on the fan site Backstreets.com encouraging fans to heed Bruce's evening 'public service announcement' as he called it, and donate to suggested charities. Within days, thousands of dollars were raised (Brucesentme). A notice on the home page of the site says succinctly that "**Bruce Sent Me** is not interested in collecting your money. We simply want to inspire you to share and look out for those less fortunate." Were it not for the concerned spirit of Bruce himself, it is doubtful that this site would exist. Shortly after its inception and just prior to Thanksgiving, the only refrigerated truck owned by the Community Food Bank of New Jersey was involved with an accident on the New Jersey Turnpike, losing its entire shipment of 2000 turkeys targeted for needy families. Within a week, **Bruce Sent Me** raised \$6000 to assist in the replacement of the truck and the

Thanksgiving turkeys (Strauss 2003: 1). (Note: Bruce himself has been known to simply drop in to the warehouse of the food bank to help unload trucks.) Links on the **Bruce Sent Me** site take one directly to America's Second Harvest Food Banks website, where the food bank has arranged that donations can be acknowledged as **Bruce Sent Me** donations (http://www.secondharvest.org/how_to_help/Bruce_Sent_Me.html).

What, really, can be more spiritual than doing 'good works,' to treat each human being with the dignity and respect awarded them by the Creator? Words come cheaply, but actions again can be love made manifest. These deeds are all a direct result of fans being touched by Bruce's music and more pointedly his humanity and compassion; this is a tangible way for fans to honor their avatar. Without his example, likely none of this fan-sponsored altruism would take place.

And faith **will** be rewarded sometimes: on July 31, 2004, during a Habitat for Humanity work day organized by btxers, as members of the backstreets.com website are known, Springsteen showed up to share pizza and beers at the end of the day (Celano 2004. see photo in appendix 2). Whether by word, music, or deed, Bruce serves as a moral compass in some fashion for his followers, reminding us that we are, indeed, our brothers' keeper, and we are all out here on this road together.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WITNESS FOR BRUCE

“I’ll work for your love, dear, I’ll work for your love”

(I’ll Work for Your Love, 2007)

To understand the emotional depths of fan involvement in the community both actual and virtual, it is best to hear what fans have to say themselves, to hear their witnessing and conversion stories as they tell them in their own words. The stories all have a familiar ring and progression: alone, hearing a song that strikes a chord, experiencing a sudden epiphany and realization of joy – again, not unlike my experience being saved at a Billy Graham Crusade. And this also feeds into the sense of shared experience, knowing that fellow fans have felt this way, have been hit by the same bolt of Springsteen. The only identification used for these stories are screen names used on internet bulletin boards. Some of these stories deserve to be told unedited, while others will be excerpted. The names used are the screen names used on-line.

SpringsteenMagic:

When I was born, my parents – especially my father – were huge Bruce fans. I grew up on his music...the first song I remember my dad playing for me was “Thunder Road”, on the Greatest Hits CD. As I grew up, I learned to appreciate the music more and more. My dad was diagnosed with MS before I was born. As I got older, he began to get sicker, and was eventually put in the hospital, unable to walk or use his arms. My sister and I were there with him all the time and he would always

ask my mom to put on his Bruce CDs. *The Rising* album came out when he was in the hospital, and I still remember listening to it with him for the first time. I can't really describe it, but I remember not saying a word the whole time the album ran...Bruce began to be extremely important to me...I began to start my own Bruce collection, and his music helped me a lot when my dad was sick. My father passed away almost three years ago, and *The Rising* was the album that got me through it. Some of my best times with my dad I associate with Bruce, because his music was always in the background. I remember his face when his cousin brought him a t-shirt from The Rising tour...I hadn't seen him smile like that in a while. Hearing "Thunder Road" live in Hamilton was absolutely incredible – I couldn't help but cry, I was extremely moved, and felt like my dad was there somehow. The last few years have been rough for me, and I can honestly say that – at times – as strange as it sounds, I felt like Bruce was my best friend, and the only one who understood what I felt, because I heard it all in his songs. So as much as I love the rock 'n' roll aspect to his songs, the words that he has written have meant so much more to me, and really helped shape who I am today.

This notion of Bruce “understanding” who his fans are, what they are going through, is a strand that runs through many fan stories and no doubt accounts for much of the emotional attachment many fans feel. The question of whether this is true is insignificant to the feeling.

Passiac factory says that a Springsteen performance gives “...a chance for my old heart to beat young again...”. *Misadventure* says the shows are “...communal rituals...it’s not unlike church. It’s also a sort of contact – communion. Bruce responds to his audience...he feeds off of us and we feed off of him.” Another younger fan, *Doah*, says:

It’s not just simply good rock ‘n’ roll. I find it more like a spiritual experience. I would also swear that there’s some sort of chemical reaction that occurs in my body that causes euphoria! I know I’ve mentioned the “spiritual” word to you before, but I mean it. The only other analogy I can come up with is a drug. My wife has asked me before, “honey, do you have to see him more than once a week? You’re seeing him Monday, why do you have to see him on Tuesday?” I’m like, Well, does a heroin addict say, “you know, I already shot up last night so I think I’ll pass tonight.” I don’t think so!

Again, the experiencing of euphoria is also something found in the evangelical experience of being ‘born again.’ In this sense, fans are ‘born anew’ at each performance they attend. Other comments state that seeing Springsteen recharges spiritual and emotional batteries.

The faithful all have a ‘come-to-Bruce’ story that usually involves hearing a particular song for the first time. “I went home and put on side one...I didn’t play anything but side two for a month” (*diane*). Some stories are a bit more involved and poignant, such as *NC*’s:

In Dec. 1980 I moved to Palmer Alaska. I was miserable because I had to leave my school & friends. I hated it here. It was a small town about 40 miles from Anchorage. The night before John Lennon was shot (note: 12/8/80) I was in my room and found on the top shelve of my closet and old clock radio. I remember the color was a god-awful dull yellow. Wasn’t sure if it even worked but I plugged it in. Sure enough it worked. I was able to pick up an album oriented rock station out of Anchorage. At 10:00 pm every Sunday they would play an album in its entirety. As fate would have it that Sun. night they played *The River*. BOTH ALBUMS! Anyway, That night I was in my room with the lights off and the curtains open watching the aurora borealis and I listened to every song... every word. Sometimes I think back and wonder what if I had not found that old clock radio in my closet.

Redheadfromtoronto remembers hearing the title song from the album mentioned above, *The River*, on her grandmother’s white kitchen radio, and being “haunted by the ending.” “Now those memories come back to haunt me, they haunt me like a curse. Is a dream a lie if it don’t come true, or is it something worse...”

Leahinjersey says she first identified with the *Tunnel of Love* album, written during a time of emotional turmoil for Springsteen: “I was going through a divorce from my first husband, some major depression...”. *Whores and gamblers* story started with the *Live 75-85* set of albums: “the songs the stories of teenage angst. Dedicating a song to the young people ‘Because the next time they are going to be looking to you, and you will need a lot of information to know what you are going to do.’...Everything was like Bruce speaking directly to me.” Some years later, this man and his wife were separating, and he:

...grabbed a random tape and stuck it in. “Darkness” (note: Darkness on the Edge of Town, from the album of the same name) was playing and while I had heard the song many times before, something struck a chord in the lyrics to that song. Suddenly my Bruceness was rededicated. *LINNYC* (Live in New York City, a dvd) picked up where *Live 75-85* left off. It was different, things had changed people had grown up, but Bruce was there singing directly to me and knowing exactly what I needed to hear. It took me to 2002 to get to a live show but I have since been to 8. Bruce music has been the soundtrack of my life.

BigOldDinosaur says that after seeing a show, “...I was completely hooked. I’d never seen someone perform with such energy, just laying it all out there like that. 4 days later I went to Utica, and the odyssey had begun and is still continuing 160+ shows later.”

And *chestercat*, a late-comer to the fold has this to say about her first concert at the age of forty in 2002: “A couple of bars into the first song, I got hit by something. I started to sob and cried pretty much through the whole thing. *Roostershmoos* and I went back the next night...” Other fans speak of being “baptized in the fires of the majesty, the ministry of rock ‘n’ roll.” The passion and fervor that fills these fan-recollections is obvious and potent, and reminiscent of the religious fever of a revival meeting. The sentiments of *unigus* sums up the feelings of most in the Springsteen community, but more pointedly those participants on the various internet sites:

Bruce has always been the soundtrack of my life...he has always vocalized my thoughts, fears, hopes, and dreams. His songs always remind me of people and places, connecting me in ways I never would have fathomed, bringing me to a better/higher realization and recognition...I am so thankful that I'm in the presence of friends that I will never have to explain that to cause you to GET IT.

This is one common sentiment repeated over and over by fans, regardless of their geographical location, gender, sexual orientation or social class - that Bruce has provided them with the soundtrack of their lives, Bruce ‘understands’ them. Close to fifty percent of all fans I have spoken with over the years have expressed these feelings.. Given that Springsteen has long been called the quintessential ‘American’ artist, I found it curious that fans in other countries would also feel this way. The American love affair with the automobile, and the car imagery in Springsteen’s songs do not seem very European. Invariably, however, when I questioned fans in Germany and France about this, and what they found to identify with in Bruce’s music, their answers dismissed his ‘American-

ness' and focused on his humanity and the greater human themes of love and sorrow, rejection and redemption, fulfillment and disappointment.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

“Tomorrow There’ll be Sunshine and All this Darkness Past”
(Land of Hope and Dreams, 2001)

“Now I’m out here on this road, alone on this road tonight
I close my eyes and feel so many friends around me in the early evening light.
And the miles we have come, and the battles won and lost
Are just so many roads traveled, and just so many rivers crossed.
And I ask God for the strength and faith in one another
‘Cause it’s a good night for a ride ‘cross this river to the other side
My blood brothers.”
(Blood Brothers, 1995)

This thesis has documented the ways in which fans have created a community and a spiritual home for themselves, open and welcoming to all those likewise inspired by the words, music, and deeds of Bruce Springsteen. Springsteen has himself laid the groundwork for this and consequently can claim some credit for the positive ways in which his fans are working towards maintaining this community and doing good work in the world. To paraphrase Springsteen: the world we carry in our hearts is waiting, we just need to help manifest its potential greatness. By their own accounts, these congregants have been supplied with spiritual/emotional sustenance, gaining solace and companionship in some fashion equal to the comfort and companionship provided by church congregations or ministerial counseling. Bruce says this is his job:

That’s my business, that’s what it’s all about – trying to

connect to you. It comes down to trying to make people happy, feel less lonely, but also about being a conduit for a dialogue about the events of the day, the issues that impact people's lives, personal and social and political and religious. That's how I always saw the job of our band. That was my service...I can't do it by myself. I need my audience.. You're in that room together, that dark room together. (Levy 2007: 52).

For this man Bruce Springsteen, rock 'n' roll is serious business, sacred business. "What are the things that bring you ecstasy and bliss, what are the things that bring on the darkness...what can we do together to combat those things?" (Levy 2007:52). His music and performances serve as a conduit for the faithful to that larger sense of the divine, the light that counters the darkness, the vehicle for some of that ecstasy and bliss we all need in our lives. And if the truer measure of religion is found in what it does for its believers rather than what it *is*, then fans really are closer to being a congregation than a mere audience (Mazur & McCarthy 2001:5). For those without close religious affiliations, this connection with Springsteen and fellow fans presents a way out of isolation and alienation and a way into relationship, a refuge and solace from everyday life every bit as legitimate and meaningful as any religious institution. What Bruce has in common with all of the great religious leaders throughout time is his way of speaking. Ultimately, when talking about spiritual leaders, we are talking about story-tellers. Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed – their stories captured the people, drew them in and left them open to the higher truths of existence and faith. And if there is one thing that Bruce Springsteen is, it

is a storyteller of the people. As Sarfraz Manzoor, a Muslim and devoted Springsteen disciple says, Springsteen fans are “defined not by geography, race, or religion, but by passion” (2007:103). *Bosstan950* sums it up:

In our world of Bruce we get to forget our problems for 2
and a half hours or so. We hide on the backstreets and as
dogs on Main Street howl, we howl and dance and sing and
hug and love and live and die in the company of our blood
brothers and sisters.

Thank you Bruce and thank you my blood brothers and
sisters for being with me on this part of the ride. We may all
agree to disagree. We have our fights. But in the end we all
share the music, a bond that we may bend but we cannot and
will not break.

***“Tonight my baby and me we’re gonna ride to the sea,
and wash these sins off our hands.”***

(‘Racing’ in the Street, 1978)

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APPENDIX 1

Interviews

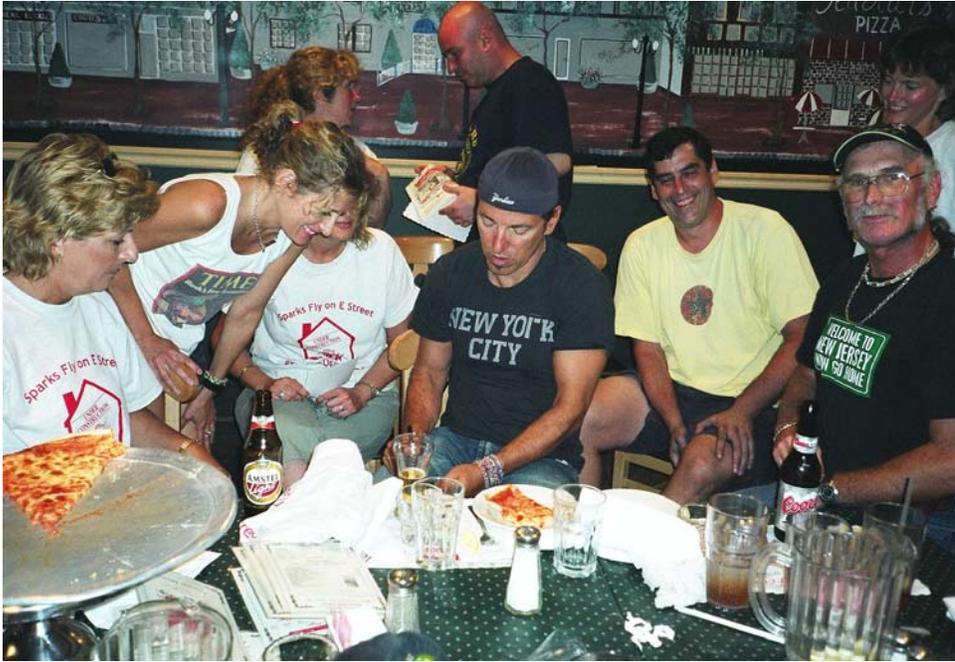
Cosmickid	July 25, 2003.
Badscooter	February 28, 2007
Chestercat	April 16, 2007
Hanaree	March 7, 2007
Jj	March 12, 2007
LeapOfFaithGirl (LOFG)	March 23, 2007
Scout	March 1, 2007
Chestercat	March 1, 2007
Roostershmoo	March 1, 2007
Unigus	March 3, 2007
Aussiebrucefan	May 28, 2007
S	May 30, 2007
Corvettesue	June 4, 2007
Whoresandgamblers	August 14, 2007
Bigolddinosaur	August 20, 2007
Blueguitar	October 30, 2007.
Hobbs	December 13, 2007
Janiss	December 17, 2007
Doah	February 15, 2008
Meyer, Rev. Suzanne	January 21, 2008
Reverend B	February 26, 2008

All4Eddie	February 29, 2008
Misadventure	March 2, 2008
NC	March 2, 2008
Deano	March 3, 2008
Brianzai	March 3, 2008
Mitch	March 10, 2008
Barefootgirl & Littlegun	March 10, 2008
SpringsteenMagic	March 15, 2008
BjorntorunMN	March 16, 2008
Hardgirloneasystreet	March 16, 2008
Wandasf	March 28, 2008
Redheadfromtoronto	March 28, 2008

APPENDIX 2

The following photographs illustrate the average Springsteen fan's age-range, the majority over thirty-five.

**Bruce Springsteen at pizza party after a Habitat for Humanity work day
with members of www.backstreets.com July, 2004**

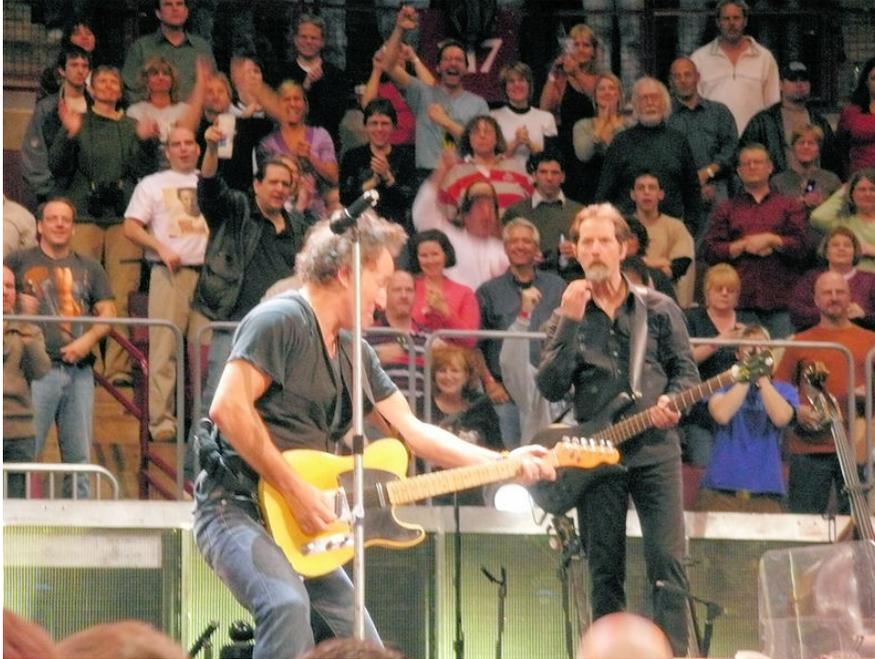


Used by permission by photographer, I'measilyfound
Pre-concert gathering in Buffalo, NY. For backstreets.com members 3/7/08



Used by permission of photographer, cruisin'tobruce

Audience shot Columbus, Ohio 3/24/08



From www.backstreets.com/btx

Playing to the audience Houston, Texas 4/13/08



www.Backstreets.com

APPENDIX 3

LYRICS

I have included the lyrics of the songs quoted in the body of this thesis. The lyrics form a bridge between Bruce Springsteen and his fans, providing fans with a glimpse into the heart and mind of the artist. Additionally, they provide doctrinal support for fans' actions and good works. While religious symbolism can be found in the lyrics, this was not my focus.

“Into the fire”

The sky was falling and streaked with blood
 I heard you calling me, then you disappeared into the dust
 Up the stairs, into the fire
 Up the stairs, into the fire
 I need your kiss, but love and **duty called you someplace higher**
 Somewhere up the stairs, into the fire

May your strength give us strength
May your faith give us faith
May your hope give us hope
May your love give us love

May your strength give us strength
 May your faith give us faith
 May your hope give us hope
 May your love give us love

You gave your love to see, in fields of red and autumn brown
 You gave your love to me and lay your young body down
 Up the stairs, into the fire
 Up the stairs, into the fire
 I need you near, but love and duty called you someplace higher
 Somewhere up the stairs, into the fire

May your strength give us strength
 May your faith give us faith
 May your hope give us hope
 May your love give us love

May your strength give us strength
 May your faith give us faith
 May your hope give us hope
 May your love give us love

May your strength give us strength
 May your faith give us faith
 May your hope give us hope
 May your love give us love

It was dark, too dark to see, you held me in the light you gave
 You lay your hand on me
 Then walked into the darkness of your smoky grave
 Up the stairs, into the fire
 Up the stairs, into the fire
 I need your kiss, but love and duty called you someplace higher
 Somewhere up the stairs, into the fire

May your strength give us strength
 May your faith give us faith
 May your hope give us hope
 May your love give us love

May your strength give us strength
 May your faith give us faith
 May your hope give us hope
 May your love give us love

May your strength give us strength
 May your faith give us faith
 May your hope give us hope
 May your love give us love

May your strength give us strength
 May your faith give us faith
 May your hope give us hope
 May your love give us love

May your love bring us love

“Badlands”

Lights out tonight, trouble in the heartland
 Got a head-on collision, smashin’ in my guts man
 I’m caught in a crossfire, that I don’t understand
 But there’s one thing I know for sure, girl
 I don’t give a damn
 For the same old played out scenes,
 I don’t give a damn

For just the in-betweens
 Honey I want the heart I want the soul, I want control, right now
Talk about a dream, try to make it real
You wake up in the night
With a fear so real
Spend your life waiting
For a moment that just don't come
Well don't waste your time waiting

Badlands you gotta live it every day
 Let the broken hearts stand
 As the price you've gotta pay
 We'll keep pushin' till it's understood
 And these badlands start treating us good

Workin' in the field till you get your back burned
 Workin' 'neath the wheels till you get your facts learned
 Baby I got my facts learned real good right now
 You better get it straight darling
 Poor man wanna be rich, rich man wanna be king
 And a king ain't satisfied till he rules everything
 I wanna go out tonight, I wanna find out what I got
 Now I believe in the love that you gave me
 I believe in the faith that could save me
 I believe in the hope and I pray that some day
 It will raise me above these

Badlands...

For the ones who had a notion, a notion deep inside
 That it ain't no sin to be glad you're alive
 I wanna find one face that ain't looking through me
 I wanna find one place, I wanna spit in the face of these

Badlands

“The Rising”

Can't see nothin' in front of me
 Can't see nothin' coming up behind
 I make my way through this darkness
 I can't feel nothing but this chain that binds me
 Lost track of how far I've gone
 How far I've gone, how high I've climbed

On my back's a sixty pound stone
 On my shoulder a half mile of line

Come on up for the rising
 Come on up, lay your hands in mine
 Come on up for the rising
 Come on up for the rising tonight

Left the house this morning
 Bells ringing filled the air
 Wearin' the cross of my calling
 On wheels of fire I come rollin' down here

Come on up for the rising
 Come on up, lay your hands in mine
 Come on up for the rising
 Come on up for the rising tonight

Li,li, li,li,li,li, li,li,li

There's spirits above and behind me
 Faces gone black, eyes burnin' bright
 May their precious blood bind me
 Lord, as I stand before your fiery light

Li,li, li,li,li,li, li,li,li

I see you Mary in the garden
 In the garden of a thousand sighs
 There's holy pictures of our children
 Dancin' in a sky filled with light
 May I feel your arms around me
 May I feel your blood mix with mine
 A dream of life comes to me
 Like a catfish dancin' on the end of my line

Sky of blackness and sorrow (a dream of life)
 Sky of love, sky of tears (a dream of life)
 Sky of glory and sadness (a dream of life)
 Sky of mercy, sky of fear (a dream of life)
 Sky of memory and shadow (a dream of life)
 Your burnin' wind fills my arms tonight
 Sky of longing and emptiness (a dream of life)
 Sky of fullness, sky of blessed life

Come on up for the rising

Come on up, lay your hands in mine
 Come on up for the rising
 Come on up for the rising tonight

Li,li, li,li,li,li, li,li,li

“My City of Ruins” (As performed on A Tribute to Heroes, mourning those lost on 9/11/01)

This is a prayer for our fallen brothers and sisters.

There is a blood red circle
 on the cold dark ground
 and the rain is falling down
 The church door's blown open
 I can hear the organ's song,
 but the congregation's gone

My city of ruins
 My city of ruins

Now the sweet bells of mercy
 drift through the evening trees,
 young men on the corner
 like scattered leaves,
 the boarded up windows,
 the empty streets
 While my brother's down on his knees

My city of ruins
 My city of ruins

Come on, rise up!
 Come on, rise up!

Now's there's tears on the pillow,
 darlin' where we slept
 and you took my heart when you left
 Without your sweet kiss
 my soul is lost, my friend

Tell me how do I begin again?

My city's in ruins
My city's in ruins

Now with these hands,
with these hands,
with these hands,
I pray lord
With these hands,
with these hands,
I pray for the strength, Lord
With these hands,
with these hands,
I pray for the faith, Lord
We pray for your love, Lord
We pray for the lost, Lord
We pray for this world, Lord
We pray for the strength, Lord
We pray for the strength, Lord

Come on
Come on
Come on, rise up
Come on, rise up

“Land of Hope and Dreams”

Grab your ticket and your suitcase
thunder's rolling down the tracks
don't know where you're goin'
but you know you won't be back
well darlin' if you're weary
lay your head upon my chest
we'll take what we can carry
and we'll leave behind the rest

Big wheels roll through fields
 where sunlight streams
 Meet me in a land of hope and dreams

**Well I will provide for you
 And I will stand by your side
 You'll need a good companion now
 For this part of the ride
 Well leave behind your sorrows
 Let this day be the last
 Well tomorrow they'll be sunshine
 and all this darkness past**

Big wheels roll through fields
 where sunlight streams
 Meet me in a land of hope and dreams

**This train carries saints and sinners
 This train carries losers and winners
 This Train carries whores and gamblers
 This Train carries midnight ramblers
 This Train carries broken hearted
 This Train carries souls departed
 This Train dreams will not be thwarted
 This Train faith will be rewarded
 This Train carries fools and kings
 This Train hear the big wheels singing
 This Train bells of freedom ringing**

“Be True”

Your scrapbook's filled with pictures of all your leading men
 Well baby don't put my picture in there with them
 Don't make us some little girls dream that can't ever come true
 That only serves to hurt us and make you cry like you do
 Well baby don't do it to me and I won't do it to you

You've seen all the romantic movies you dream you take the boys home
 But when the action fades your left all alone
 You deserve better than this little girl can't you see you too
 Do you need somebody to prove it to you?

Well baby you prove it to me and I'll prove it to you.

Now every night you go out looking for true love's satisfaction
 But in the morning you end up settling for lights, camera, action

And another cameo role with some bit-player you're befriended
 Your gonna go broken hearted looking for that happy ending
 Well girl your gonna end up just another lonely ticket sold (stub)
 Crying alone in the theater as the credits roll

You see I won't be like those other guys
 Who filled your head with pretty lies
 And dreams that can never come true

Well listen
 Baby you be true to me and I'll be true to you

"Born to Run"

In the day we sweat it out in the streets of a runaway American dream
 At night we ride through mansions of glory in suicide machines
 Sprung from cages out on highway 9,
 Chrome wheeled, fuel injected and steppin' out over the line
 Baby this town rips the bones from your back
 It's a death trap, it's a suicide rap
 We gotta get out while we're young
 `Cause tramps like us, baby we were born to run

Wendy let me in I wanna be your friend
 I want to guard your dreams and visions
 Just wrap your legs round these velvet rims
 and strap your hands across my engines
 Together we could break this trap
 We'll run till we drop, baby we'll never go back
 Will you walk with me out on the wire
 `Cause baby I'm just a scared and lonely rider
 But I gotta find out how it feels
 I want to know if love is wild, girl I want to know if love is real

Beyond the Palace hemi-powered drones scream down the boulevard
 The girls comb their hair in rearview mirrors
 And the boys try to look so hard
 The amusement park rises bold and stark
 Kids are huddled on the beach in a mist
 I wanna die with you Wendy on the streets tonight

In an everlasting kiss

The highway's jammed with broken heroes on a last chance power drive
 Everybody's out on the run tonight but there's no place left to hide
 Together Wendy we'll live with the sadness
 I'll love you with all the madness in my soul
 Someday girl I don't know when we're gonna get to that place
 Where we really want to go and we'll walk in the sun
 But till then tramps like us baby we were born to run

“Reason to Believe”

Seen a man standin' over a dead dog lyin' by the highway in a ditch
 He's lookin' down kinda puzzled pokin' that dog with a stick
 Got his car door flung open he's standin' out on Highway 31
 Like if he stood there long enough that dog'd get up and run
Struck me kinda funny seem kinda funny sir to me
At the end of every hard earned day people find some reason to believe

Now Mary Lou loved Johnny with a love mean and true
 She said “Baby I'll work for you every day and bring my money home to you”
 One day he up and left her and ever since that
 She waits down at the end of that dirt road for young Johnny to come back
 Struck me kinda funny seemed kind of funny sir to me
 How at the end of every hard earned day people find some reason to believe

Take a baby to the river Kyle William they called him
 Wash the baby in the water take away little Kyle's sin
 In a whitewash shotgun shack an old man passes away
 Take his body to the graveyard and over him they pray
 Lord won't you tell us tell us what does it mean
 Still at the end of every hard earned day people find some reason to believe

Congregation gathers down by the riverside
 Preacher stands with his Bible groom stands waitin' for his bride
 Congregation gone and the sun sets behind a weepin' willow tree
 Groom stands alone and watches the river rush on so effortlessly
 Lord and he's wonderin' where can his baby be
 Still at the end of every hard earned day
 people find some reason to believe

“I’ll Work for Your Love”

Pour me a drink Theresa
 In one of those glasses you dust off
 And I’ll watch the bones in your back
 Like the stations of the cross

’Round your hair the sun lifts a halo
 At your lips a crown of thorns
 Whatever other deals goin’ down
 To this one I’m sworn

I’ll work for your love, dear
I’ll work for your love
What others may want for free
I’ll work for your love

The dust of civilizations
 And loves sweet remains
 Slip off of your fingers
 And come driftin’ down like rain

The pages of Revelation
 Lie open in your empty eyes of blue
 I watch you slip that comb through your hair and this I promise you

I’ll work for your love, dear
 I’ll work for your love
 What others may want for free
 I’ll work for your love

Your tears, they fill the rosary
 At your feet, my temple of bones
 Here in this perdition we go on and on

Now our city of peace has crumbled
 Our book of faith’s been tossed
 And I’m just out here searchin’
 For my own piece of the cross

The late afternoon sun fills the room
 With the mist of the garden before the fall I watch your hands smooth the front of your
 blouse and seven drops of blood fall

I’ll work for your love, dear
 I’ll work for your love

What others may want for free
I'll work for your love

“Hungry heart”

Got a wife and kids in Baltimore Jack
I went out for a ride and I never went back
Like a river that don't know where it's flowing
I took a wrong turn and I just kept going

Everybody's got a hungry heart
Everybody's got a hungry heart
Lay down your money and you play your part
Everybody's got a hungry heart

I met her in a Kingstown bar
We fell in love I knew it had to end
We took what we had and we ripped it apart
Now here I am down in Kingstown again

Everybody's got a hungry heart...

Everybody needs a place to rest
Everybody wants to have a home
Don't make no difference what nobody says
Ain't nobody like to be alone

Everybody's got a hungry heart

“Worlds Apart”

I hold you in my arms, that's when it starts
I seek faith in you kiss, and comfort in your heart
I taste the seed upon your lips, lay my tongue upon your scars
But when I look into your eyes, we stand worlds apart

Where the distant oceans sing, and rise to the plain
In this dry and troubled country your beauty remains
Down from the mountain roads where the highway rolls to dark
'Neath Allah's blessed rain, we remain worlds apart

Sometimes the truth just ain't enough

Or it's too much in times like this
 Let's throw the truth away, we'll find it in this kiss
 In your skin upon my skin, in the beating of our hearts
 May the living let us in, before the dead tear us apart

We'll let blood build a bridge, over mountains draped in stars
 I'll meet you on the ridge, between these worlds apart
 We've got this moment now to live, then it's all just dust and dark
 Let love give what it gives
 Let's let love give what it gives

“The River”

I come from down in the valley where mister when you're young
 They bring you up to do like your daddy done
 Me and Mary we met in high school when she was just seventeen
 We'd ride out of that valley down to where the fields were green

We'd go down to the river
 And into the river we'd dive
 Oh down to the river we'd ride

Then I got Mary pregnant and man that was all she wrote
 And for my nineteen birthday I got a union card and a wedding coat
 We went down to the courthouse and the judge put it all to rest
 No wedding day smiles no walk down the aisle
 No flowers no wedding dress
 That night we went down to the river
 And into the river we'd dive
 On down to the river we did ride

I got a job working construction for the Johnstown Company
But lately there ain't been much work on account of the economy
Now all them things that seemed so important
Well mister they vanished right into the air
Now I just act like I don't remember, Mary acts like she don't care
But I remember us riding in my brother's car
Her body tan and wet down at the reservoir
At night on them banks I'd lie awake
And pull her close just to feel each breath she'd take
Now those memories come back to haunt me, they haunt me like a curse
Is a dream a lie if it don't come true
Or is it something worse that sends me
 Down to the river though I know the river is dry

Down to the river, my baby and I
 Oh down to the river we ride

“Independence Day”

Well Papa go to bed now it's getting late
 Nothing we can say is gonna change anything now
 I'll be leaving in the morning from St. Mary's Gate
 We wouldn't change this thing even if we could somehow
 `Cause the darkness of this house has got the best of us
 There's a darkness in this town that's got us too
 But they can't touch me now and you can't touch me now
 They ain't gonna do to me what I watched them do to you

So say goodbye it's Independence Day
 It's Independence Day all down the line
 Just say goodbye it's Independence Day
 It's Independence Day this time

Now I don't know what it always was with us
 We chose the words and yeah we drew the lines
 There was just no way this house could hold the two of us
 I guess that we were just too much of the same kind

Well say goodbye it's Independence Day
 All boys must run away come Independence Day
 So say goodbye it's Independence Day
 All men must make their way come Independence Day

Now the rooms are all empty down at Frankie's joint
 And the highway she's deserted down to Breaker's Point
 There's a lot of people leaving town now
 Leaving their friends their homes
 At night they walk that dark and dusty highway all alone

Well Papa go to bed now it's getting late
 Nothing we can say can change anything now
 Because there's just different people coming down here now
 And they see things in different ways
 And soon everything we've known will just be swept away

So say goodbye it's Independence Day
Papa now I know the things you wanted that you could not say

**But won't you just say goodbye it's Independence Day
I swear I never meant to take those things away**

“The Ties That Bind”

You been hurt and you're all cried out you say
You walk down the street pushin' people outta your way
You packed your bags and all alone you wanna ride,
You don't want nothin', don't need no one by your side
You're walkin' tough baby, but you're walkin' blind

Chorus:

The ties that bind
Now you can't break the ties that bind

**Cheap romance, it's all just a crutch
You don't want nothin' that anybody can touch
You're so afraid of being somebody's fool
Not walkin' tough baby, not walkin' cool
You walk cool, but darlin',
can you walk the line
And face the ties that bind
The ties that bind
Now you can't break the ties that bind**

I would rather feel the hurt inside,
yes I would darlin',
Than know the emptiness your heart must hide,
Yes I would darlin', yes I would darlin',
Yes I would baby

You sit and wonder just who's gonna stop the rain
Who'll ease the sadness, who's gonna quiet the pain
It's a long dark highway and a thin white line
Connecting baby, your heart to mine
We're runnin' now but darlin' we will stand in time
To face the ties that bind
The ties that bind
Now you can't break the ties that bind
You can't forsake the ties that bind

“Thunder Road “

The screen door slams, Mary's dress sways
 Like a vision she dances across the porch, as the radio plays
 Roy Orbison singing for the lonely
 Hey that's me and I want you only
 Don't turn me home again, I just can't face myself alone again
 Don't run back inside, darling you know just what I'm here for
 So you're scared and you're thinking
 That maybe we ain't that young anymore
 Show a little faith, there's magic in the night
 You ain't a beauty, but hey you're alright
 Oh and that's alright with me

You can hide 'neath your covers and study your pain
 Make crosses from your lovers, throw roses in the rain
 Waste your summer praying in vain
 For a savior to rise from these streets
 Well now I'm no hero, that's understood
 All the redemption I can offer, girl, is beneath this dirty hood
 With a chance to make it good somehow
 Hey what else can we do now?
 Except roll down the window and let the wind blow back your hair
 Well the night's busting open
 This two lanes will take us anywhere
 We got one last chance to make it real
 To trade in these wings on some wheels
 Climb in back: Heaven's waiting on down the tracks
 Oh-oh come take my hand
 Riding out tonight to case the promised land
 Oh-oh Thunder Road, oh Thunder Road, oh Thunder Road,
 Lying out there like a killer in the sun
 Hey I know it's late we can make it if we run
 Oh Thunder Road, sit tight take hold, Thunder Road

Well I got this guitar and I learned how to make it talk
 And my car's out back if you're ready to take that long walk
 From your front porch to my front seat
 The door's open but the ride it ain't free
And I know you're lonely and there's words that I ain't spoken
But tonight we'll be free, all the promises'll be broken
There were ghosts in the eyes of all the boys you sent away
They haunt this dusty beach road
In the skeleton frames of burned out Chevrolets
They scream your name at night in the street
Your graduation gown lies in rags at their feet

And in the lonely cool before dawn
 you hear their engines roaring on
 But when you get to the porch they're gone
 On the wind, so Mary climb in
 It's a town full of losers and I'm pulling out of here to win.

“Blood Brothers “

We played king of the mountain out on the end
 The world come chargin' up the hill, and we were women and men
 Now there's so much that time, time and memory fade away
 We got our own roads to ride and chances we gotta take
 We stood side by side each one fightin' for the other
 We said until we died we'd always be blood brothers

Now the hardness of this world slowly grinds your dreams away
 Makin' a fool's joke out of the promises we make
 And what once seemed black and white turns to so many shades of gray
 We lose ourselves in work to do and bills to pay
 And it's a ride, ride, ride, and there ain't much cover
 With no one runnin' by your side my blood brother

On through the houses of the dead past those fallen in their tracks
 Always movin' ahead and never lookin' back
 Now I'm out here on this road
 Alone on this road tonight
 Close my eyes and feel so many
 friends around me
 In the early evening light
 And the miles we have come
 And the battles won and lost
 Are just so many roads traveled
 So many rivers crossed
 And I ask God for the strength
 And faith in one another
 'Cause it's a good night for a ride
 'Cross this river to the other side
 My blood brothers

“Racing in the Street”

I got a sixty-nine Chevy with a 396
 Fuelie heads and a Hurst on the floor
 She's waiting tonight down in the parking lot

Outside the Seven-Eleven store
 Me and my partner Sonny built her straight out of scratch
 And he rides with me from town to town
 We only run for the money got no strings attached
 We shut `em up and then we shut `em down

Tonight tonight the strip's just right
 I wanna blow `em off in my first heat
 Summer's here and the time is right
 We're goin' racin' in the street

We take all the action we can meet
 And we cover all the northeast state
 When the strip shuts down we run `em in the street
 From the fire roads to the interstate
 Some guys they just give up living
 And start dying little by little piece by piece
 Some guys come home from work and wash up
 Then go racin' in the street

Tonight tonight the strip's just right
 I wanna blow `em all out of their seats
 Calling out around the world
 We're going racin' in the street

I met her on the strip three years ago
 In a Camaro with this dude from L.A.
 I blew that Camaro off my back and drove that little girl away
 But now there's wrinkles around my baby's eyes
 And she cries herself to sleep at night
 When I come home the house is dark
 She sighs "Baby did you make it all right"
 She sits on the porch of her daddy's house
 But all her pretty dreams are torn
 She stares off alone into the night
 With the eyes of one who hates for just being born

**For all the shut-down strangers and hot rod angels
 Rumbling through this promised land
 Tonight my baby and me we're gonna ride to the sea
 And wash these sins off our hands
 Tonight tonight the highway's bright
 Out of our way mister you best keep
 `Cause summer's here and the time is right
 We're goin' racin' in the street**

APPENDIX 4

Church Bulletin from Grace Church United Methodist, service that I attended, written around “Hungry Heart” by Reverend B.

<i>ORDER OF WORSHIP</i>		
April 6, 2008	THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER	11:00 a.m.
WE GATHER TO PRAISE GOD		
GATHERING <i>(You are invited to sign the friendship registers located at the end of each pew.)</i>		
PRELUDE	<i>Interlude II'</i>	Dennis Bedard
<i>(We center ourselves for worship as the light of Christ is brought into our midst.)</i>		
*CALL TO WORSHIP		
You satisfy the hungry heart with gift of finest wheat, come give to us, saving Lord, the bread of life to eat. We've come to sing our praise and gratitude to You, As we worship, Lord, share with us Your heavenly food.		
*HYMN NO. 154	<i>All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name</i>	Cocreation
*PRAYER OF CONFESSION		
All merciful and loving God, as we come before you this day, we acknowledge that we each have a deep hunger in our heart. We confess, however, that we have tried to fill this hunger with things that will not satisfy. Forgive us, we pray. And by the power of your Holy Spirit, lead us into a deeper relationship with Jesus the Christ, who is the bread of life. Amen. <i>(Let us observe a moment of silence for personal confession.)</i>		
*ASSURANCE OF PARDON		
Hear the Good News! In the name of Christ, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God!		
WE OFFER OUR PRAYERS AND GIFTS TO GOD		
*THE GLORIA PATRI		Hymnal, page 71
*SHARING THE PEACE OF CHRIST <i>(You are invited to offer the peace of Christ to those with whom you worship.)</i>		

RESPONSE NO. 347	<i>Spirit Song</i>	Spirit Song
O let the Son of God enfold you with his Spirit and his love. Let him fill your heart and satisfy your soul. O let him have the things that hold you; and his Spirit like a dove will descend upon your life and make it whole.		
OFFERTORY	<i>He Who Will Suffer God to Guide Him</i>	J. S. Bach
*DOXOLOGY NO. 95	<i>Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow</i>	OLD 100th
WE HEAR GOD'S WORD PROCLAIMED		
A TIME WITH CHILDREN Pastor Mike		
*SCRIPTURE LESSON John 6:35		
SERMON	<i>The Gospel According to Bruce Springsteen</i> Part 1: Hungry Heart	Pastor Morris
ANTHEM	<i>A Heart to Serve</i>	Crescent
WE CELEBRATE HOLY COMMUNION		
INVITATION TO THE LORD'S TABLE		
THE PRAYER OF GREAT THANKSGIVING AND LORD'S PRAYER		Hymnal, page 17
*GIVING THE BREAD AND CUP <i>(As the usher's direct, all are welcome to come to the Lord's Table, receive the sacrament of God's grace and spend a few moments in prayer at the altar before returning to your seat. As we receive the elements you are invited to joyfully sing Hymns Nos. 629, 189, and 614.)</i>		
*HYMN NO. 400	<i>Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing</i>	Nettleton
*BLESSING AND DISMISSAL <i>(The light of Christ leads us out to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the world.)</i>		
*POSTLUDE	<i>Let the Merry Bells Ring Round (from Allegro)</i>	G.F. Handel
WE TAKE GOD'S WORD INTO THE WORLD		
*As you are able, please stand		

GRACE CHURCH UNITED METHODIST

SUNDAY, APRIL 6, 2008

9:00 AND 11:00 A.M.

The Gospel According to Bruce Springsteen *Part 1: Hungry Heart*

Welcome to Grace Church! We're thrilled you're here! This morning we're beginning a brand new sermon series entitled *The Gospel According to Bruce Springsteen*. Why are we sharing a sermon series on Bruce Springsteen? Well, there are three reasons.

First, Bruce Springsteen will be giving a concert at the Greensboro Coliseum on Monday, April 28. Second, like many of you, I'm a huge Springsteen fan so I thought this would be a great way for us to get ready to see Bruce. Third and most importantly however, for over thirty years, Bruce Springsteen's music has described the human condition.

In this series, we'll use four Springsteen songs to describe struggles we all have as human beings. Then we'll explore what our faith has to say about dealing with those struggles. Today we begin with the song *Hungry Heart*. Whether you're a Bruce Springsteen fan or not, we think you'll find this series helpful. Again, we're thrilled to have you at Grace!

Blessings,



Pastor Morris

P.S. At our 9:00 a.m. service, our worship band, *Agents of Grace*, will perform each Springsteen Song. At our 11:00 a.m. service, our excellent chancel choir will share exciting new music related to the theme of the day. Thanks to both groups for helping out with this series!

Sunday, March 30, 2008
Attendance
Worship - 223
Sunday School/Small Groups - 105

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New to Grace?

There's still time, come find out more about us! We'd like to invite you to *Discovering Grace*. *Discovering Grace* is a membership inquiry and orientation class for those interested in joining Grace Church. The class gives participants a brief history of Methodism, an overview of our beliefs, and reviews the many ministries of Grace. **The class will be held this Sunday morning, April 6th, beginning at 9:50 and will conclude by 10:40. We'll be meeting in room #12, 1st floor of the Education Building.** The class will be led by Pastor Morris (mbrown@grace-methodist.com) and Pastor Mike (mmoran@grace-methodist.com). Please let one of them know if you plan on attending, or call Judi in the church office at 272-2171.

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Please visit our web site at www.grace-methodist.com

The Gospel According to Bruce Springsteen

We're glad you're here for the first of four Sundays in April highlighting songs by the legendary performer, Bruce Springsteen. We will use them to explore the human condition and to talk about what our faith has to say about dealing with those struggles.



Hungry Heart

by
Bruce Springsteen

Got a wife and kids in Baltimore, Jack
I went out for a ride and I never went back
Like a river that don't know where its flowing
I took a wrong turn and I just kept going

Everybody's got a hungry heart
Everybody's got a hungry heart
Lay down your money and you play your part
Everybody's got a hungry heart

I met her in a Kingstown bar
We fell in love I knew it had to end
We took what we had and we ripped it apart
Now here I am down in Kingstown again

Everybody's got a hungry heart..

Everybody needs a place to rest
Everybody wants to have a home
Don't make no difference what nobody says
Ain't nobody like to be alone

Everybody's got a hungry heart..

April 6 - Hungry Heart

April 13 - Brilliant Disguise

April 20 - My City of Ruins

April 27 - Devils and Dust

APPENDIX 5

(Text of a sermon written and presented by the Reverend Meyer.)

“The Gospel According To Bruce”

By Reverend S. Meyer

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
 Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
 The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
 The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
 The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deck hand
 singing on the steamboat deck,
 The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing
 as he stands,
 The woodcutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning,
 or at noon intermission or at sundown,
 The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work,
 or of the girl sewing or washing,
 Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
 The day what belongs to the day-at night the party of young
 fellows, robust, friendly,
 Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

“For You O Democracy”-- Walt Whitman

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO BRUCE

When I say the word “Gospel” what comes to mind? Do you think of the Holy Scriptures? Do you think of a style of music that developed in storefront churches? That word Gospel simply means “good news.” Throughout history, especially in times of struggle, crisis, and social turmoil, men and women have emerged from the masses, stepped forward and proclaimed a new and liberating vision of life. And for those, especially those most affected by the social and cultural upheaval, typically the working poor, this new proclamation has been very good news indeed. We hear that word Gospel, what comes to mind is the church, but in fact time and again those who have proclaimed good news to the poor and freedom to the captive, have been outsiders, at odds with the religious establishment, and the political status quo. The author of a new Gospel is anyone who has the courage and the conviction to step out of the crowd and speak the truth: times are bad, people are hurting, honest men and women can’t get ahead. But, brothers, sisters we are not helpless or hopeless, there is a better way.

And low and behold, the people hear that good news, and it resonates within their souls. It enables them to see that they are not powerless cogs in a machine, neither are they pawns or puppets. This Gospel is not about pie in the sky when you die, but rather this good news enables people to see beyond themselves into a future that holds real promise.

Once upon a time in America, a New Jersey boy named Walt Whitman heard America singing. Today, New Jersey’s Bruce Springsteen also hears America singing, hears our pain, and suffering, but also hears the beauty, nobility, and vitality of our songs.

According to professor Jerry Gill who teaches philosophy and religious studies at the College of St. Rose in Albany, New York: "Springsteen's music speaks for a large

segment of the American public, particularly those on the lower half of the socioeconomic spectrum, blue collar young adults. The reality of such folk is a far cry from the yuppie world of Madison Avenue and prime-time television. Springsteen focuses on the personal dimension of the American dream gone sour, against the backdrop of a severe economic recession and urban wastelands. County roads, criss-crossing between deserted farmlands, polluting oil refineries, and boarded-up textile mills, comprise the warp and woof of Bruce's vision of America on the move.

I had a job, I had a girl
I had something going, mister, in this world
I got laid off, down at the lumber yard
Our love went bad, times got hard
Now I work down at the carwash?
Where all it ever does is rain
Don't you feel like a rider on a Downbound Train

And yet, there is also an undeniable joy, a transformative and redemptive quality within his music, which goes beyond mere social commentary. He laments certain aspects of American life, but he also affirms specific values and creates opportunities for renewal as well."

Here is what Bruce Springsteen says about his own work. (August 5, 2004) "Over the years I've tried to think long and hard about what it means to be American: about the distinctive identity and position we have in the world, and how that position is best

carried. I've tried to write songs that speak to our pride and criticize our failures: who we are, what we stand for, why we fight. Personally, for the last 25 years I have always stayed one step away from partisan politics. Instead, I have been partisan about a set of ideals: economic justice, civil rights, a humane foreign policy, freedom and a decent life for all of our citizens. Through my work, I've always tried to ask hard questions. Why is it that the wealthiest nation in the world finds it so hard to keep its promise and faith with its weakest citizens? Why do we continue to find it so difficult to see beyond the veil of race? How do we conduct ourselves during difficult times without killing the things we hold dear? Why does the fulfillment of our promise as a people always seem to be just within grasp yet forever out of reach?"

Eric Schumacher-Rasmussen writes: Springsteen realizes that the only way to really deal with the pain of living in hard times is to reach out to those around you, and to believe that the possibility of redemption exists not just through God or in some afterlife but here and now. And no matter what your spiritual beliefs are this world is the only one you can change. Like Springsteen so often shouted during his tent-revival preacher shtick on his 1999-2000 tour, when he spoke of the "ministry" of rock 'n' roll: "I can't promise you life everlasting. But I can promise you life right now."

Bruce is saying, "Reach out to each other." Black, white, brown, blue collar, white collar, pink collar, no collar, gay, straight, male, female, upper, lower, middle class, working poor: wake up, we have been separated by these labels, intentionally divided and pitted against each other, made to regard each other as the enemy and the source of our pain.

Divided as we are, we are doomed. Doomed unless we are willing to overcome our fears and our prejudices to join forces against the powers and principalities that have deliberately fragmented and exploited us. "Nobody wins unless everybody wins. Do you believe that what we are together is greater than what any of us can be alone? Do you believe that we can connect to something deeper and more meaningful than individual success if we take each other's hands?"

The concert hall is a far cry from church, but according to philosopher Jerry Gill, when Bruce performs, the Holy is palpably present. "Divine love and grace, as well as judgment, cannot exist in a vacuum or entirely separate from their human forms. Thus, wherever human commitment, love, and hope are affirmed and embodied, there too is God. In this way, Springsteen's work can be understood as creating a space where divine reality may be encountered, albeit indirectly."

Springsteen doesn't preach guilt or shame, the tools of most preachers. Nor does he preach fear, the tool of most politicians. He encourages his disciples, not to put their faith in him, but keep faith with their dreams and their own capacity to keep hope alive.

We are living in a nation sharply divided across spiritual and religious and ideological lines. For a while, after 9/11 we were united in our common grief, but in these days prior to a national election, we seem more deeply divided than ever. Our politicians, preachers and pundits have let us down. We must look to our poets, and our songwriters, for a common vision. To a generation that is both cynical about patriotic jingoism--my country right or wrong---as well as religion---pie in the sky when you die-- Bruce calls us to see ourselves as Americans, just as we are: our broken promise, our cravings for wealth and power; the cruel ways in which we have turned our backs on our

most vulnerable citizens. But Springsteen is also calling us back to our core values as Americans. In "Land of Hope and Dreams" he envisions a train that carried "saints and sinners" and "losers and winners" to a land where "dreams will not be thwarted" and "faith will be rewarded." The song's beauty comes from in its simple profession of faith in the power of community." Even amidst the cries of despair, the rage, the pain, and the fears, Bruce Springsteen still hears America singing,... He hears our pain, but also our beauty and strength.

Amen

APPENDIX 6

Following is a list of charities to which Bruce Springsteen has donated his time and efforts, or his proceeds from recorded material. *This list is provided for informational purposes only.*

Kristen Ann Carr Fund

Endows scholarship for the study of soft-tissue sarcoma at Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

World Hunger Year

Founded by the musician Harry Chapin in 1975, this fund seeks to end world hunger and poverty by addressing their root causes and promoting self-reliance.

Iraq Veterans Against the War

Founded by veterans in 2004, they seek to give a voice to the large number of active-duty service people and veterans who oppose this war.

The New Orleans Musician's Clinic

This mission seeks to sustain Louisiana's musicians in mind, body, and spirit by developing access to primary and preventative health services.

Give Us Your Poor

Seeks to create a revolution in public awareness, dispel myths, and inspire action towards ending epidemic homelessness in the U.S.

Second Harvest

Founded in 1979, this is the largest domestic hunger relief organization in the U.S. providing nearly a billion pounds of food each year to those in need.

Bob Woodruff Family Fund

Assists service members injured while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces, with special emphasis placed on “hidden signature injuries” of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Musicians on Call

Uses music and entertainment to promote and complement the healing process for patients.

Greater Philadelphia Chapter of the A.L.S. Association

Helping people with A.L.S. to live with the disease, as well as supporting research for a cure.

Community Foodbank of New Jersey**Hungry for Music**

Begun as an annual benefit for the homeless, the primary mission is to aid in cultivating the self-esteem of disadvantaged children through music education.

Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation

Goal is to “transform” the lives of those veterans affected by this war, as well as the reconciliation of war-torn societies and providing assistance to the innocent victims of those wars.

Fallen Patriot Fund

Established to help families of U.S. military personnel killed or injured during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Special Olympics

Provides sports training and athletic competition for individuals with mental retardation.

Nordoff-Robbins Center for Music Therapy

Aids autistic and physically disabled children through music therapy.

City of Hope

Dedicated to the prevention, care, and cure of cancer and other life threatening disease through innovative research and patient-care.

T.J. Martell Foundation

Founded by record executive T.J. Martell as the result of a promise he made to his dying son, who succumbed to leukemia at age 19.

Cancer and AIDS have also been added to their program.

Special People United to Ride (SPUR)

Established in Monmouth County, NJ in 1981, SPUR works with the Park System in providing individuals with physical and mental disabilities with horseback riding lessons.

Smithsonian Folkways**The Pediatric AIDS Foundation****Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center****Amnesty International**

The Rainforest Foundation

The Woody Guthrie Foundation and Archives

The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame

SOURCE: <http://matt.orel.ws>

AFTERWORD

On April 17, 2008, Danny Federici, organ, accordion, and glockenspiel player with Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band for over forty years, lost his battle with melanoma. Since then, fans on the website www.backstreets.com have raised over \$12,000.00 for the Danny Federici Melanoma Fund, more good works focused around Springsteen and his music (<http://www.backstreets.com/btx/viewtopic.php?t=88430&start=0>). Following Danny's death, concerts over the next few months were opened with a video montage tribute to Danny, along with Springsteen's personal stories about Danny. This public mourning allowed fans to share the sorrow felt by Bruce and the band, yet another gesture embracing the fan family. This can be viewed at www.brucespringsteen.net/news/index.html.

It is rumored that Bruce sang "Fourth of July, Asbury Park" to Danny in the hospital the night before he died.