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**Taylor Swift as Religion: The Deification of an International Pop Music Superstar and the  
Ramifications of Fame, with a Comparison to *Vox Lux***

Jessica Cotturone

REL-211: Religion and Film

Dr. Wolff

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70,000 people are on their feet for over three straight hours in a packed stadium, dressed in outfits they spent months planning, friendship bracelets adorning their wrists. The fans scream at the top of their lungs, dance, and sing along word for word as the music fills the air. All of the money and effort they spent getting tickets becomes more than worth it as they are swept up in the mass of people cheering in awe and admiration of the artist who brought them all there: Taylor Swift. The twelve-time Grammy Award winner, 2023 TIME Person of the Year, and successful businesswoman has made an indelible impact on the world. Her current tour, The Eras Tour, has boosted the economy of every location she has visited and is likely to be the highest-grossing concert tour in history. Furthermore, Taylor Swift is the most-streamed female artist on Spotify of all time, with over 26 billion streams in 2023,<sup>1</sup> and she has a deeply devoted, enthusiastic fan base. Her name appears in all facets of the media, included in advertisements for entirely unrelated products, because all companies want to latch onto her success. However, Swift has not fallen into this position of fame, but has had a long journey to get her to where she is today. Her dedicated fans do not just love her because they like listening to her music, but because she has achieved a much greater significance in their lives. In this paper, I will argue that the culture surrounding Taylor Swift is a religion in which the singer is idolized and revered as a religious figure by her followers, aptly named Swifties. I will demonstrate the role of myths and rituals in this religion and how they strengthen and sustain Swifties' faith in her. Through a comparison of Swift and the main character in the film *Vox Lux*, I will explore the deification of celebrities in the pop music industry, the ramifications of idolization and fame on their lives, and the way these religious figures influence society.

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<sup>1</sup> "List of Most-Streamed Artists on Spotify," *Wikiwand*, [https://www.wikiwand.com/en/List\\_of\\_most-streamed\\_artists\\_on\\_Spotify#Most-streamed\\_artists](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/List_of_most-streamed_artists_on_Spotify#Most-streamed_artists)

Despite the secular context of the pop music industry as a facet of popular culture, the culture surrounding Taylor Swift fits the definitions of religion proposed by scholars who have accepted a broader interpretation of the term. American anthropologist Clifford Geertz defines religion as a set of models that depict the juxtaposition of two versions of reality: the world we believe we live in and the one we wish we lived in. In other words, religion combines the beliefs of how the world is and how it ought to be. In Geertz's view, these models influence how people view and respond to life by inspiring moods and motivations in them.<sup>2</sup> Taylor Swift's songs serve as a model of the world as it is because they are often written about her own experiences and encapsulate many of the same feelings and struggles that her fans encounter. However, the imaginative, romantic elements of her songs suggest another world, one with everlasting love and harmony, where society is not plagued by sexism and hate. By traipsing the line between realism and idealism, Swift's songs may cause her supporters to adopt certain moods and gain motivation as they recognize the problems in society and desire to move towards the imagined futures. Swifties may also gain motivation in trying to be more like their idol, a topic I will explore more later. In comparison, Celeste, the main character in *Vox Lux*, is a pop music icon who rose to fame after surviving a school shooting as a young teenager. Like Swift, Celeste serves as a religious figure in her world and is idolized by many. However, Celeste tries to mainly inspire positive, lighthearted moods in her fans and motivate them to ignore the suffering that is occurring in the world, instead of addressing it like Swift does. Celeste's fans desire to act like her and wish to emulate the confidence and bravery she displays.

Geertz also believes that the main purpose of religion is to attempt to organize the chaos that is inherent in one's life.<sup>3</sup> It is noteworthy that he does not believe religion is meant to

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<sup>2</sup> John Lyden, *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 22.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

eliminate people's problems by explaining them away, but instead believes that religion should provide a structure and guide to make the chaos seem somewhat orderly. Thus, challenges will still occur, but religion is there to assist people in getting through these difficulties and to remind them that life is meaningful. Similarly, Swift's attempts to describe the human experience and life as a woman aim to orient Swifties and guide them through life's pitfalls and struggles. She does not attempt to dismiss the problems in her life or in the world, but instead draws on the emotion she experiences because of these difficulties. By doing this, she provides validation and meaning to Swifties' lived experiences while serving as a positive force of joy in their lives due to how much they idolize her. Meanwhile, Celeste tries to evoke positive emotions through her songs in order to help distract fans from their problems and get them through tough times.

Another construction of religion has been proposed by religious scholar Meghan Johnston Aelabouni, who defines the topic as "a communal, narrative, and performative activity that both envisions and enacts worlds."<sup>4</sup> The religion surrounding Taylor Swift fits all of Aelabouni's criteria. Worshiping Taylor Swift is a communal activity because her followers have a shared love and adoration for the artist, and they interact at concerts and on social media, such as through fan pages. The culture is narrative due to Taylor Swift's lyrics through which she tells her story and creates an emotional bond with her fans. Finally, the culture is performative because of the rituals Swifties use to show their devotion to the singer-songwriter, which I will analyze later. Taylor Swift has created a world of her own through her songs, her concerts, and her actions, and Swifties have been absorbed into this spiritual realm of her creation.

Taylor Swift's lyrics serve the purpose of myths in the Swiftie faith, for they lead devotees through a powerful journey of emotional exploration and trigger the formation of strong parasocial bonds. Wendy Doniger defines myths as stories that grapple with important cultural

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<sup>4</sup> Meghan Johnston Aelabouni, "White Womanhood and/as American Empire in *Arrival* and *Annihilation*" (2020), 2.

questions and concerns, especially love, sex, purpose in life, gender roles, pain, and death.<sup>5</sup>

Swift's songs acknowledge a wide range of emotions and express concerns that resonate with fans around the world. Her intimate songwriting and expertly-crafted lyrics encapsulates human experiences including romantic love and infatuation, heartache, death, and mental illness.<sup>6</sup> Out of all these topics, love is the most pervasive theme in her collection of songs.<sup>7</sup> Swift's vivid descriptions capture the all-encompassing feeling of romantic love that many people long for. Through her expert storytelling, listeners are led through a fantasy in which they get to briefly experience the overwhelming, profound feeling of falling in love. The journey into this world of imagined reality relates to Romanian historian Mircea Eliade's belief that myths allow people to temporarily visit an alternate reality.<sup>8</sup> In this state, they briefly forget their own problems and surroundings and become immersed in the world that is being rendered through the story of the myth. This alternate reality exists in parallel to one's true reality, and it is often entered when a person reads a book or watches a movie and temporarily forgets where they are. The same kind of parallel reality occurs when Swifties listen to Taylor's songs. They may mentally enter the world that the songwriter skillfully depicts through vivid descriptions of emotion. Furthermore, through this powerful expression of human emotion, Taylor Swift makes people feel like they are not alone and are part of a larger community of women who share a similar narrative to them.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>6</sup> The song "marjorie" describes how the memory of a lost loved one lives on in one's head. "Bigger Than the Whole Sky" and "Ronan" grapple with the inexplicable pain of a child's death. "All Too Well," "The Moment I Knew," "Death by a Thousand Cuts," and "happiness" provide vivid descriptions of heartbreak and pain, with lyrics such as "My eyes leak acid rain on the pillow where you used to lay your head" and "I'm a crumpled up piece of paper lying here." Her song "Clean" speaks to people with mental illnesses and abuse, skillfully depicting pain in the context of falling rain. One line, "The water filled my lungs, I screamed so loud but no one heard a thing," [Taylor Swift, "Clean"] perfectly encapsulates the feeling that one is drowning in suffering and no one realizes the pain they are going through.

<sup>7</sup> The topic is presented in many different ways in songs such as "King of My Heart," "Dress," "Call It What You Want," "Lover," "Paper Rings," "This Love," "Love Story," and "Red." Lyrics illustrating love include "Can I go where you go? Can we always be this close forever and ever?" (from "Lover") and "I want to wear his initial on a chain 'round my neck... not because he owns me, but 'cause he really knows me" (from "Call It What You Want").

<sup>8</sup> John Lyden, *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 57.

Fans who have had the opportunity to meet Swift have often told her that she made them feel like they mattered and that she helped them get through difficult times in their life. Some fans have even expressed that they do not know where they would be without her strong influence on their lives.<sup>9</sup> This is evidence of the deep parasocial relationships Swifties have with their idol, to the point where they may feel that they know her personally. Due to the potency of her narratives and the way they build her fans' feeling of emotional connection to her, Taylor Swift's lyrics satisfy the definitions of myth, a key component of religion.

Rituals also play an important role in fans' worship of Taylor Swift. John Lyden, scholar in religious studies, contends that ritual, the performance element of religion, is crucial for giving meaning to religious beliefs and values.<sup>10</sup> It is through rituals such as going to Swift's concerts, singing along word for word to her songs, chanting her name, painting the number 13 (Swift's lucky number) on the back of one's hand, and going to see the Eras Tour Movie that fans show their love and devotion to the esteemed singer-songwriter. Before attending an Eras Tour concert, Swifties memorize song lyrics, speculate about what surprise songs Taylor will perform, and plan their outfits months in advance. At the concert, they sing, dance, scream, and chant in unity as they worship the woman they have all come to see perform. They cheer as loudly as possible during the traditional five- to ten-minute standing ovation following each performance of "Champagne Problems" halfway through the concert. They sing out the words of the songs like praises and appear to lose themselves in the moment, reveling in the glory of the singer standing in front of them. Similarly, in *Vox Lux*, fans at Celeste's concert stand, cheer, and chant her name. They, too, appear caught up in the moment, like they have temporarily forgotten about the problems existing outside the space they are currently in. The behavior of both Taylor and

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<sup>9</sup> Seen in a number of videos and reels on Instagram.

<sup>10</sup> John Lyden, *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 62.

Celeste's crowds is reminiscent of the singing of worship songs in many Christian churches, where people might close their eyes and stand, singing praises to God with their arms in the air. Moreover, Lyden emphasizes that religious rituals are a way of enacting myths and bringing them to life,<sup>11</sup> and this is much the case with the formation of the friendship bracelet ritual among Swifties. As a result of the line "So make the friendship bracelets, take the moment and taste it"<sup>12</sup> in the song "You're On Your Own Kid" from her recent album *Midnights*, fans started making friendship bracelets with Swift's song names on them. They then exchange these bracelets at Eras Tour concerts, further building the sense of community among Swifties, similar to the practice of Sharing the Peace during Christian church services.<sup>13</sup> One line in a song was enough for her fans to create an entirely new tradition, demonstrating the value and importance Swifties attribute to every word Taylor writes.

Beyond all of these specific rituals, attending an Eras Tour concert often evokes feelings characteristic of a religious experience for many people. Vogue journalist Hannah Summerhill describes the overwhelming, transformative journey that she experienced while attending the Eras Tour concert. Even though she was not a Swiftie prior to the concert, the religious experience she had while at the concert converted her into a believer. She recalls a friend commenting "Welcome to church" on her Instagram post from the concert and remarks, "In this faith, each glance, dress, and word Swift selects is deeply significant. Every minor feeling is major."<sup>14</sup> Summerhill's reaction to the Eras Tour concert and the way it promptly turned her into a Swiftie, marveling at the artist's remarkable ability to keep tens of thousands of people

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>12</sup> Taylor Swift, "You're On Your Own Kid," written and produced with Jack Antonoff, recorded and released in 2022, track 5 on *Midnights*.

<sup>13</sup> Sharing the Peace is a practice in which Christian church-goers walk around and greet other members of the congregation with the phrase "Peace be with you" and occasionally a handshake, at a specified time during the service. It is a way of building community and recognizing that all Christians are blessed and loved by God.

<sup>14</sup> Hannah Summerhill, "The Summer I Turned Swiftie," *Vogue* (2023), <https://www.vogue.com/article/the-summer-i-turned-swiftie>



intimately connected and involved for almost four hours, is emblematic of the ritualistic experience that is the Eras Tour.<sup>15</sup> When I went to an Eras Tour concert, it felt like a religious experience. I could not believe I was actually there, watching my idol perform the songs I have spent hundreds of hours listening to. I felt intimately connected to both Taylor and the crowd of fans that surrounded me, and I would have stayed all night if I could, entranced by the lights, music, and scenery. Rituals like going to concerts provide a way for Swifties to discover or create meaning in their religion and show their devotion to the beloved artist.

Deification and fame may seem like the ultimate dream come true, but they can cause immense struggles and harm to celebrities like Taylor Swift and Celeste. Especially as female singers who rose to stardom at a young age, Taylor and Celeste's lives have been indubitably shaped by immense societal pressure and misogynistic ideologies. In the depiction of Celeste as a 31-year-old celebrity in *Vox Lux*, it is clear that she has lost herself since we last saw her as an intelligent, brave, and kind young girl. Celeste seems to have turned into a machine, churning out songs and performances for the men who prosper off of her success. She is constantly used by these men and does not have much of her own money on account of how much is taken from her and how much she has to use to pay her staff. In the film, while she is not on stage or on camera, we see Celeste having mental breakdowns, yelling at her sister and her daughter, and seeming resentful at the life she feels she does not have control over. She has suffered drug and alcohol abuse, as many celebrities have as a result of the pressures of fame. In fact, she once drank herself blind on moonshine, nearly killing her. We can hence conclude that ever since she first became famous as a teenager, she has been treated like a pawn in the system, and years of

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<sup>15</sup> On a special Taylor Swift episode in the podcast "Material Girls," Margaret H. Willison notes, "When you go to an Eras concert it is like you're going to see your best friend get married... there is a sense of pride and mutuality and mutual understanding that completely informs why it's so important and so special." [Hannah McGregor, Marcelle Kosman, "Taylor Swift x Intimate Publics with Margaret H. Willison," *Material Girls* (2023).]

manipulation and public attention have worn her down into a shell of who she used to be. On the outside, she appears confident and self-controlled, but beyond the public eye, the toll that fame has taken on her physical, mental, and emotional well-being is irrefutable. Hence, I believe one of the main objectives of the film *Vox Lux* is to use Celeste's story to spotlight the way pop music culture can shred celebrities' self dignity and humanity.

Meanwhile, Taylor Swift is a real life example of a celebrity who has faced significant challenges and struggled to maintain her sense of identity and self-worth in the midst of fame and unreasonable societal expectations. Due to her rise to fame at an early age like Celeste and her innate desire to please people, Taylor Swift's image has been shaped largely by societal pressure. As a religious figure in society, Taylor is held to higher standards than the average woman, and her massive following is accompanied by unrealistic expectations based on the perception of her as an almost larger than life, godlike persona. For years, she has attempted to please her adoring fans and gain the approval of her harshest critics by attempting to conform to their lofty expectations. However, reinventing herself so many times to try to fit the ideal mold of an idol in society has caused her to question her humanity and identity. She reflects, "Since I was 15 years old, if people criticized me for something, I changed it. So you realize you might be this amalgamation of criticisms that were hurled at you, and not an actual person who's made any of these choices themselves."<sup>16</sup> This sentiment correlates to how Celeste was manipulated into being the figurehead that people wanted her to be, such that she was no longer defined by her own decisions and desires. Furthermore, in her documentary *Miss Americana*, Swift reveals that about ten years ago during her *1989* era, she struggled with an eating disorder brought on by the unrealistic beauty standards of American society and the criticism she received about her body. She reluctantly admits that she used to starve herself and believed she was supposed to feel

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<sup>16</sup> Lana Wilson, dir., *Taylor Swift: Miss Americana* (2020).

like she was about to pass out halfway through a concert.<sup>17</sup> This mindset is one that many women struggle with due to societal expectations and portrayals of women's bodies in the media, but being a public, deified figure who is constantly analyzed, looked at, and judged served as additional ammunition that fueled Swift's eating disorder. Moreover, expressing the difficulty of maintaining one's sense of self when being held to the standard of a godlike figure, Swift has confessed, "I struggle with the idea that my life has become unmanageably sized and [...] I just struggle with the idea of not feeling like a person."<sup>18</sup> This expression of her feelings relates to both Taylor and Celeste's difficulty in finding their humanity when the world treats them like they are not normal people.

Taylor's stardom has also caused her to receive severe criticism about her singing and songwriting, since being a successful young woman makes her a target for detractors who view her as a threat. In the past and still today, she has received hate from people who claim that she cannot sing and speculate that she does not actually write her songs. She notes, "I had been widely and publicly slammed for my singing voice and was first encountering the infuriating question that is unfortunately still lobbed at me to this day: does she really write her songs?"<sup>19</sup> It is likely that the harsh criticism and doubts directed towards her stem from the internalized misogyny that exists in our society. The fact that much of the world refused to acknowledge her talent for many years may be because they resisted the feminine narrative of her songs. Her songwriting skills were undermined because of her gender and age, and dissenters doubted that a woman would be able to write so many popular songs. Although fame brings with it millions of new supporters, it unfortunately also paves the way for more haters to voice their opinions. A

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Taylor Swift, "Behind the Song! [Anti-Hero]" *Instagram video* (October 2, 2022), [https://www.instagram.com/reel/CjPMULyPp9V/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/reel/CjPMULyPp9V/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link).

<sup>19</sup> Taylor Swift, "Speak Now (Taylor's Version) [Prologue]," (2023).

key moment in Swift's career occurred when Kanye West stole the microphone from her as a teenager while she was in the middle giving her acceptance speech at the 2009 Video Music Awards to declare that Beyonce should have won the award.<sup>20</sup> This famous scandal is indicative of the constant threats and doubts about her talent that would follow Swift for many years as a young woman in the music industry.

Religious figures such as priests and spiritual gurus are expected to demonstrate purity and sanctity, and Swift, as a type of religious figure, is treated similarly. Though Swift's dating life should be her own personal business, the media has consistently inserted itself into her relationships. Taylor Swift has been widely criticized and shamed for being a "serial dater," due to her many boyfriends, in the eyes of the public. Taylor has expressed how much she was hurt by "the trivialization of my songwriting as if it were a predatory act of a boy crazy psychopath, the media co-signing of this narrative."<sup>21</sup> Jokes about Taylor's number of boyfriends have had a serious impact on her reputation, and the media has used Taylor's dating life as a means of public entertainment and amusement for years. It is doubtful that a man would be judged in the same way for dating the same number of people, demonstrating the inherent misogyny and gender biases in society. The media reduced Taylor to an object for the public to mock, and this impacted both her and her relationships. Since she felt like she could not be seen in public with any man, even just a friend, without the media making assumptions and magnifying the interactions, she once again changed her life based on society's expectations of her. Taylor voices, "I swore off hanging out with guys, dating, flirting, or anything that could be weaponized against me by a culture that claimed to believe in liberating women but consistently treated me

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<sup>20</sup> Constance Grady, "How the Taylor Swift-Kanye West VMAs scandal became a perfect American morality tale," *Vox* (2019), <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/8/26/20828559/taylor-swift-kanye-west-2009-mtv-vm-as-explained>.

<sup>21</sup> Taylor Swift, "1989 (Taylor's Version) [Prologue]," (2023).

with the harsh moral codes of the Victorian Era.”<sup>22</sup> Despite constantly reforming herself to be the model of femininity that society desires, she still was never fully accepted, and she realized that she could no longer let society’s impossible expectations dictate her actions. Even after she has made the decision to stop letting fame and criticism define her life, Taylor’s status as a public figure has continued to hinder her relationships throughout the years as she encounters immense scrutiny. Paparazzi and news outlets wait eagerly for any signs of indiscretions by the female icon.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, even a firm mindset and a determination to not let fame diminish one’s humanity and identity cannot fully erase the impact the fame and public attention can have on a celebrity’s life, especially for someone as exalted as Taylor Swift. In our patriarchal society, many young female superstars like Swift fall victim to the ramifications of deification that denigrate their talents and threaten their relationships.

Instead of letting herself become a pawn in the patriarchal system like Celeste, Taylor Swift has constructed herself as a role model and symbol of female empowerment by rebelling against the system that tries to restrain her. As a result of fame and deification, Celeste lost herself and succumbed to being controlled by powerful men; meanwhile, Taylor found herself because she discovered her voice and was not afraid to use it. In regard to her mindset and response to the harsh criticisms she faced early on in her career, she reveals that “[her] stubbornness in the face of doubters and dissenters would become [her] coping mechanism through my entire career from that point forward.”<sup>24</sup> She has since refused to be taken down and in fact has used her platform to speak up against injustice. Swift has taken numerous risks by publicly identifying the misogynistic attitudes of society that are woven into society as a result of

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Swift has even expressed how the paparazzi and public scrutiny make her feel as if she is being hunted, like the lyrics “They are the hunters, we are the foxes and we run” in her song “I Know Places.” Similarly, in “The Lakes,” Taylor conveys her desire to escape from her life at times, writing, “I’m not cut out for all these cynical clones, these hunters with cell phones.” (Taylor Swift)

<sup>24</sup> Taylor Swift, “Speak Now (Taylor’s Version) [Prologue].”

the long-reigning patriarchy and illustrating the ways they have harmed her. For instance, in her song “The Man” from the album *Lover*, Swift calls attention to the problematic ways misogyny and male-dominated society have affected her life and career. She divulges her frustration in her lyric “I’m so sick of running as fast as I can, wondering if I’d get there quicker if I was a man.”<sup>25</sup> The battle women must face to make a name for themselves is one that has existed for centuries, as patriarchal ideals are deeply rooted in our culture, so this lyric speaks to many women’s experiences. Furthermore, Swift criticizes the damaging double standard between men and women, feeling that if she were a man, “They’d say I hustled, put in the work. They wouldn’t shake their heads and question how much of this I deserve.”<sup>26</sup> Swift even dresses up as a man in the music video for the song to further emphasize her point. The empowering lyrics in this song help women feel that their voices are being heard and inspire them to overcome the patriarchal barriers society imposes on them in their own lives. Releasing this song was a risk because Swift knew she would receive backlash from such controversial lyrics that threaten the gender hierarchy. However, she has repeatedly chosen to speak her mind and share her opinions through songs like “The Man” and in interviews<sup>27</sup> and speeches instead of staying silent, thus empowering young women who idolize her to do the same. Swifties want to emulate the woman they worship, similar to how Christians want to be more like Jesus Christ. Additionally, Swifties often refer to Taylor as “Mother,” a term of love and respect that mirrors the way Jesus is referred to as “Our Father” in Christianity. Vogue journalist Hannah Summerhill writes,

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<sup>25</sup> Taylor Swift, “The Man,” written and produced with Joe Little, recorded and released in 2019, track 4 on *Lover*.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> One famous and controversial quote she shared in an interview is “A man is allowed to react. A woman can only overreact,” bringing attention to the sexism that plagues the music industry and the difference in the societal expectations between men and women. Many men have felt threatened by Swift due to comments such as this because she is attempting to upend the patriarchal hierarchy that they wish to keep in place. [Erin Donnelly, “Taylor Swift calls out music industry sexism: ‘A man is allowed to react. A woman can only overreact’,” *Yahoo!Entertainment* (2019), <https://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/taylor-swift-slams-sexism-music-industry-151302641.html>.]

“Swifties yearn to relate to the woman who makes the minutiae monumental, the highly personal universal.”<sup>28</sup> Swift’s status as a godlike figure and the deep admiration Swifties have for her influence them to want to follow in her example. Thus, Swift’s feminist ideals become their ideals, for religious followers tend to want to adhere to their leader’s system of beliefs. In this way, Swift serves as a role model, since she is a woman who has worked her way to the top despite the obstacles and has spoken her mind about systems of injustice, breaking down patriarchal barriers along the way. In doing so she inspires the next generation of young women to strive to follow her lead in asserting themselves against the patriarchal system that attempts to diminish them, thus empowering them to achieve their ideal futures.

In addition to serving as a role model for women around the world, Taylor Swift has used her platform and her far-reaching influence to enact other forms of change in the world. While Celeste avoids making political statements and simply tries to distract her fans from thinking about the mass shootings occurring in the nation, Taylor encourages political change. She has urged fans to vote in elections and has even spoken out against certain candidates who she believed should not be in positions of power, despite potentially risking her career in the process.<sup>29</sup> People often look to their religious figures and role models for guidance and advice, so her input may have encouraged them to take their word and go vote in these elections, possibly changing the course of history. Additionally, she has brought public awareness to the issue of artists owning their own music, a topic that received little attention before Taylor Swift brought it into the light. Scott Borchetta, founder of Big Machine Records who Taylor had worked with for nearly 15 years and recorded her first six albums with, sold Taylor’s record label and master

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<sup>28</sup> Hannah Summerhill, “The Summer I Turned Swiftie,” *Vogue* (2023), <https://www.vogue.com/article/the-summer-i-turned-swiftie>.

<sup>29</sup> Lana Wilson, dir., *Taylor Swift: Miss Americana* (2020). In the documentary, it is revealed that Swift’s father advised against her making a political statement because of the disastrous effects it could potentially have on her career, but she was determined and took the risk anyway because she felt the need to speak up.

recordings to Scooter Braun. She began rerecording all of the six stolen albums, calling them “Taylor’s Versions,” versions of the songs that owns and makes exclusive money off of instead of having her profits go into some other man’s pocket. Swifties have recognized the importance of artists owning their work and have vowed to listen to the new versions of the songs until the old versions that were stolen become history. Swift’s rerecording project may pave the way for other artists to take similar action if they are ever in the same kind of situation. Furthermore, Swift has advocated for LGBTQ+ rights, including releasing the song “You Need to Calm Down,” which urges people to stop caring so much about what others are doing and let people live their authentic lives. In addition, her Eras Tour has had strong positive effects on the United States economy and the economies of the other countries she has visited. By using her platform to inspire real change in the world, Taylor Swift has embraced her deification in a completely different way than Celeste, who mainly just wanted her fans to have fun, even though both are viewed as idols and treated similarly in their respective worlds.

Today’s culture surrounding the influential singer-songwriter Taylor Swift qualifies as a religion and has a major impact on society. Though this religion is similar to the religious culture surrounding Celeste in *Vox Lux*, Swift experiences her stardom in a dramatically different way than Celeste does in the film’s portrayal of celebrity deification. There is a strong connection between Swift and the fans who idolize her and listen to her songs as a way of coping with life. They express their everlasting devotion to the woman who gives voice to their experiences and makes them feel understood, and in return Swift frequently expresses her gratitude at their support and shows how much she values her fans. Swifties form a special community based on the bond they establish with the singer through her powerful lyrics and emotional concerts. Although members of this community may swarm her in public places and overly scrutinize her



actions and relationships, their support of the artist is overall positive, and both Swift and her fans are empowered through this relationship. She is a strong force for women in society today and has not lost her humanity in the face of fame. Unlike Celeste, she uses her platform to inspire change in the world and illuminate problems, not try to pretend they do not exist. As a young girl growing up on a Christmas tree farm in Pennsylvania, I am sure Taylor Swift never imagined that she would have millions of followers worshiping the ground she walks on and thousands of people she has never met willing to die for her. However, she worked hard and overcame even the toughest obstacles, obtaining her dream and irrevocably changing the world in the process, inspiring women around the globe to follow their dreams. When I danced to “Shake it Off” with my friends in my elementary school variety show, I had no idea the impact that Taylor Swift would have on my life and the lives of so many others. I did not know then how strong my faith in her would grow to be, yet I do not know where I would be today without her influence on my life. This past summer, as I stood alongside tens of thousands of other fans in a packed stadium in Chicago, celebrating my birthday at the concert of a lifetime, I was flooded with joy to even be in the same vicinity and breathe the same air as my idol, my queen, and the one and only Miss Americana: Taylor Swift.

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