

**“If I die before I wake, at least in Heaven I can skate”**

***Teaching religion through popular music***

**Candidate: Mads Thorstensen**



**Thesis advisor: Carl Petter Opsahl, PhD**

**Master thesis in religion and society**

**University of Oslo**

**Faculty of Theology**

**Spring 2015**



**“If I die before I wake, at least in Heaven I can skate”**

*Teaching religion through popular music*

© Mads Thorstensen, 2015

«If I die before I wake, at least in Heaven I can skate» - *Teaching religion through popular music*

Author: Mads Thorstensen

<http://www.duo.uio.no/>

Print: Reprosentralen, University of Oslo

## Acknowledgements

Over the course of working on this thesis for longer than I care to admit, there have been many whose support, contribution and motivational conversations have been invaluable in seeing this project being completed. It has been a long, hard run, and you and many others helped make it possible. My gratitude and thankfulness to all those who have stood by me all this time.

I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis advisor, **Carl Petter Opsahl, Phd**, for his many contributions and remarkably vast knowledge of both religion and music. His doctoral dissertation inspired and shaped this project to no small end, and for that and our many good conversations I am immensely thankful.

For her constant (un-)conditional support, I am grateful to my dear **Anne Emilie Berge**. Whether it was by proof-reading, brainstorming or listening to me incessantly rant on about my ideas and whatnot, you were always there to make sure things got done. For that, I am forever grateful.

For proof-reading like only he knows how, I would like to express my gratitude to my good colleague **Kieron Hunter**. Thank you for being as strict with me as you are with our pupils.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their support during this period. You have been too many to count, let alone name, but for your suggestions and advice I am thankful. You know who you are.

Mads Thorstensen

May 2015

## Table of contents

1 Introduction.....	8
1.1 Thesis question .....	10
1.2 Thesis purpose .....	10
1.3 Previous research .....	12
1.4 Thesis framework .....	16
1.4.1 School subject and its curriculum .....	17
1.4.2 Eschatology .....	21
1.4.3 Choice of artists, gender and genre .....	22
1.5 Methodology .....	24
1.6 Research ethics.....	28
2 Christian eschatology in popular music .....	31
2.1 Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds .....	32
2.1.1 “The Mercy seat” – on judgement in Christian eschatology .....	33
2.2 Lauryn Hill .....	43
2.2.1 “Final hour” – an alternate view on judgement in Christian eschatology.....	44
2.3 Conclusion.....	53
3 Jewish eschatology in popular music .....	54
3.1 Matisyahu .....	55
3.1.1 “King without a crown” – On the concept of Moshiach .....	56
3.1.2 «Jerusalem (Out of Darkness comes light)» - Regarding the role of Jerusalem in Jewish identity and eschatology .....	65
3.1.3 “One day” – On <i>olam ha-ba</i> , the “world to come” .....	75
3.2 Conclusion.....	80
4 Criticism of religion and eschatology .....	82
4.1 OPM .....	83

4.1.1 “Heaven is a half-pipe” – a critical look at the Christian concept of Heaven .....	84
4.2 Tori Amos.....	91
4.2.1 «Crucify» - a critical look at the role of sin and judgment in Christianity .....	92
4.3 Conclusion.....	101
5 Teaching religion through popular music .....	102
5.1 Popular music and religion .....	102
5.2 Popular music vs religious music .....	104
5.3 Pros and cons of teaching religion through popular music.....	106
6 Thesis conclusion.....	110
7 Bibliography.....	111





# 1 Introduction

Popular music is perhaps one of the most omnipresent cultural mediums of our time. Whether through the speakers in shop, at the gym or from the comfort of your own headphones, it is clear that music plays an important role in our society, to such an extent that we see its presence in school classrooms as well. For pupils and teachers alike, the comfort of having music while you work serves the dual purpose of blocking out distractions as well as a motivating factor. I think most of us can relate to popular music in some form or another.

As a teacher, I have been curious as to how we can make use of the omnipresence of popular music. While it serves as a great way of keeping pupils quiet and focused while working on something else, I believe that we at that point are not taking it as serious as we could. Likewise, as a teacher you are constantly looking for new and improved methods of teaching which can help the pupils process the subject matter. This led me to the idea of combining the student's interest for popular music with the teaching of subject matter. This led me to searching resource banks for teachers and students alike, looking for sample lesson plans which had the same idea. While it became clear that this is not a new idea, the following conversations with colleagues further underlined the fact that this is a teaching method that is used and known with several examples: Addressing minority issues in Norway through the use of Norwegian rappers such as *Karpe Diem* and *Don Martin*; observing Native American history through the works of *Johnny Cash*. Traditional Norwegian folk songs illustrated through the use of folk rock from bands such as *Gåte* and *Bergtatt*. And lest we forget; worker's rights through the use of Norwegian folk icon *Lillebjørn Nilsen*. What all of these lesson plans have in common is that they treat popular music as a serious medium for conveying ideas. However, what all of these instances were lacking was an academic, theoretical framework backing them up. The pivotal moment which gave me the idea for this thesis came when I came across the lyrics to the song *Into my arms* by *Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds* in a now outdated English textbook. While proposed as a text teaching pupils about emotional language use relating to love, I found it to have another relevant use: The lyrics could be interpreted as highly religiously influenced. This spawned the idea which eventually

led to this thesis: Can we combine a pupil's predilection for popular music with the teaching of a complex topic such as religion? And if we decide to do so, what benefits can be gained? Can we, with pedagogical backing, combine the benefits of prevalent teen culture with academic gains?

The first attempt at using popular music analysis when focusing on religion came shortly after, when the pupils in a history class were provided with Matisyahu's *Jerusalem* as additional source material when trying to understand both sides of the Israeli-Palestine conflict from an insider perspective. The song lyrics and music video were only one part of the material provided for the pupils, yet many of them made extensive use of them when they were to answer the tasks that followed. Not only that, but their ability to correlate information from the song with the subject matter caught me by surprise. Since then I tried similar exercises in a variety of classes, with similar positive result being noticed in pupil's replies. This, and other similar examples, culminates in this thesis.

## **1.1 Thesis question**

The title of this thesis is *"If I die before I wake, at least in Heaven I can skate – Teaching religion through popular music."* The question this thesis seeks to provide an answer to is:

- *How can popular music analysis be a beneficial teaching method within the school subject of religion?*

In order to further elaborate on the thesis topic question, this thesis will aim to also provide answers to the following related questions:

- *How can knowledge of intertextual references between religious texts and popular music songs improve a pupil's understanding of the subject matter?*
- *How can the use of popular music analysis raise pupil awareness of religious influence on popular cultural expressions and culture in general?*
- *How can the use of popular music make the subject matter more relatable for pupils?*

In summary, this thesis presupposes that working with popular music within the subject of religion can benefit the pupil's understanding of the subject matter in several different ways. How we will observe below, as we address the thesis' purpose.

## **1.2 Thesis purpose**

The aim of this thesis is to illustrate how popular music can play a role when teaching about religion. Specifically it aims to demonstrate how the listening to and analysis of select songs can greatly add to the pupils' understanding of and relation to the subject matter. It is the aim of this thesis to, by drawing on previous research within the fields of musicology, religious studies and pedagogics, advocate the use of popular music analysis as a beneficial teaching method. The benefits of this will be illustrated through example analyses of select popular music songs from a variety of artists.

The reason for choosing popular music as the object of analysis is one eligible choice amongst many. As technology and pop culture advances, we can observe religious influence on films, computer games and books to mention a few. When we here decide to look at how this affect popular music, it is because of its prevalence in teen culture. Music has become

an almost omnipresent force in the daily life of many, at school as well as elsewhere. It is this constant exposure to a medium which may contain religious influences which this thesis seeks to observe more closely. This thesis proposes that there are several advantages to incorporating the popular music medium into religion classes. For now, we will break down and observe the above-mentioned thesis questions:

The first question is “How can popular music analysis be a beneficial teaching method within the school subject of religion?” By posing this question, this thesis presupposes that the method has merit. As we will observe in the chapters *previous research* and *methodology*, the religious influence on popular culture media is not in any way a revolutionary thought. Combining this with didactic methodology normally used for similar media such as religious music, we can tentatively arrive at the conclusion that the inclusion of popular music analysis into a teacher’s repertoire has merit. As for the “how” it can benefit the pupil’s learning, we move on to observe the related questions.

The first related question asks how knowledge of intertextual references between religious texts and popular music can improve a pupil’s understanding of the subject. For this to be beneficial, we need to prepare the pupils by exposing them to the sources needed for these references to make sense. During the course of this thesis, analyses will be prefaced by suggested contextual information which might be beneficial for pupils to know prior to the analysis proper. Secondly, we will for the purpose of this thesis consider pop songs to be *authentic texts*, which are texts not constructed specifically for the classroom setting. The effect this has will be further addressed in the didactics chapter, but for now we can consider authentic texts with religious messages as a clear example of the religion being “alive,” not just something that exists in ancient texts. The benefits a pupil can reap from such an understanding will be explored in detailed in the didactics chapter.

The second related question presupposes another statement: Many pupils are not consciously aware of to what extent religious thought has an impact on popular culture and culture in general. This is not to say that pupils are not aware, but more that they may not be equipped with the contextual information necessary to facilitate such understanding. Thus, it is the aim of this thesis to illustrate how, by exposing pupils to popular music with religious messages, their awareness of religious influences can be improved. The reasoning

for this question is further explored when observing the subject curriculum plan, in the chapter *School subject and curriculum* as well as the didactics chapter.

Thirdly, this thesis proposes that the use of popular music when teaching religion can make the subject matter more relatable for pupils. This is by far a more dubious statement, as it will be strongly influenced by the student body and their preferences and predilections. However, the general idea is one of relevance and the ability to relate to the subject matter within the pupil's own frame of reference. Thus, we will in the didactics chapter reflect on how, according to pedagogic theory, the use of popular culture media can make a pupil relate more easily to the subject matter due to it being "more relevant" than ancient texts.

This thesis will refer back to these questions throughout the chapters. For now, we will observe what relevant research forms the basis of this project.

### **1.3 Previous research**

This thesis draws on elements from different academic disciplines. It operates in the intersection between musicology, religious studies and pedagogics. This poses several challenges when establishing a literary basis for its background. In order to place this thesis within a larger academic framework, this chapter will observe different publications from an assortment of academic fields and how they influence and shape the aim and objective of the thesis. The works presented have all influenced the form and objective of the thesis. Thus their mention in this chapter aims to elaborate on how this can be observed in the thesis proper.

The main inspiration for this thesis comes from the author Simon Frith, specifically the essay anthology named *Taking popular music seriously: Selected essays*.<sup>1</sup> This anthology includes essays spanning several decades, with titles such as *Youth and music (1978)* and "*The magic that can set you free*": *The ideology of Folk and the myth of the rock community (1981)*, as well as many others. They all share one common trait: They take the art of popular music seriously. Frith is not content to simply understand popular music as a mass produced entertainment medium for the masses, he has advocated the academic study of the genre

---

<sup>1</sup> Frith, Simon. *Taking popular music seriously: Selected essays (Ashgate contemporary thinkers on critical musicology series)*. 2007, Ashgate, England.

for years. While the link between his works and this thesis are tentatively based on the title alone, the inherent sentiment of advocating the academic study of popular music is at the core of this thesis' objective when it considers using popular music as a tool for teaching religion.

Another work of Frith's that merits attention is his book *Performing rites – on the value of popular music*.<sup>2</sup> The title hints towards a religious reference, however the book addresses the difficulties inherent in studying popular music. Several of these considerations form the basis used for analysis in this thesis, and will thus be more thoroughly explored in the chapter *research methodology* later on.

Still at the intersection of social studies and musicology, David Brackett's book *Interpreting popular music*<sup>3</sup> is essential in formulating the methodology this thesis utilizes. The short summary on the back of the book illustrates its mission quite succinctly:

*There is a well-developed vocabulary for discussing classical music, but when it comes to popular music, how do we analyze its effects and its meaning? David Brackett draws from the disciplines of cultural studies and music theory to demonstrate how listeners form opinions about popular songs, and how they come to attribute a rich variety of meanings to them. [...] Brackett develops a set of tools for looking at both the formal and cultural dimensions of popular music of all kinds.*<sup>4</sup>

What this book adds to the thesis is a vocabulary used to describe how opinions are formed by the listener when they are subjected to popular music. This will be used to describe how pupils might form their own understanding and intertextual references when working with the topic matter. The specific terms and ideas which this book contributes to the thesis will be more thoroughly elaborated on in the research methodology chapter.

While the above-mentioned works focus on the study of popular music from a social studies point of view, we now observe select sources which deal with music in general and popular music in relation to the study of religion.

In the book *Det folk vil ha – religion og populærkultur* ("What people want – religion and popular culture")<sup>5</sup> the authors observe how religious sentiment and influence is rampant in

---

<sup>2</sup> Frith, Simon. *Performing rites – On the value of popular music*. 1996, Oxford University Press, Oxford, England.

<sup>3</sup> Brackett, David. *Interpreting popular music*. 2000, University of California Press, Berkeley, US

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. – Back cover

<sup>5</sup> Endsjø, Dag Øistein and Lied, Liv Ingeborg. *Det folk vil ha – religion og populærkultur*. 2011, Universitetsforlaget.

expressions of popular culture. Addressing such diverse popular culture topics as advertisement, amusement parks and film, the over-lying message of the book is that religious influence is present in popular culture to a larger extent than most might believe, simply put because it is “What people want.” Of particular interest for this thesis is the chapter on the religious influence on contributions to the Eurovision Song Contest (“Melodi Grand Prix”), the annual pan-European music contest. While the examples provided are of interest of themselves, a remark made when summarizing their findings under the sub-heading *Den religiøse popmusikken* (“*The religious popular music*”) merits attention:

*[...]But religion is not – and never has been – limited to the strict confines represented by that which can most clearly be defined as strictly religious categories. Nor has religion been exclusively synonymous with gravity and depth, as there has always been more shallow and less grave aspects which can more easily be combined with the general openness of popular culture.*<sup>6</sup>

This observation is important because it addresses a sentiment shared by authors such as Frith and Sylvan mentioned earlier; popular music needs to be taken seriously. If not, we ignore a part of our culture which severely influences many aspects of people’s lives.

Sharing an aim similar to Endsjø and Lied, Robert W. Kvalvaags book *Fra Moses til Marley – Det gamle testamentets teologi og virkningshistorie* (“*From Moses to Marley – Old testament theology and effective history*”)<sup>7</sup> aims to illustrate how The Old Testament has, and continues to, profoundly impact Western worldview and culture in general, and parts of the popular culture specifically. With references to the Old Testament linked to modern artists such as Nick Cave, Patti Smith and Bob Marley, the book’s discussion of their relationship has severely influenced how the analyses of this thesis are shaped.

A recent addition within the field of religion and popular culture is the Norwegian-language publication *Bibelen i populærkulturen* (“*The Bible in popular culture*”) by Løland, Martinsen and Skippervold.<sup>8</sup> By posing the question “Was there actually an apple in the Garden of Eden?” the authors aim to shed light on how the Bible is used and parodied in popular culture, as well as where this inspiration comes from. For the purpose of this thesis, the

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. – Page 52, own translation

<sup>7</sup> Kvalvåg, Robert W. *Fra Moses til Marley – Det gamle testamentets teologi og virkningshistorie*. 2003, Fagbokforlaget, Bergen, Norway

<sup>8</sup> Løland, Martinsen & Skippervold – *Bibelen i populærkulturen*. 2014, Scandinavian Academic Press, Oslo, Norway

chapter *Johannes Åpenbaring – Apokalypsen og slutten på verden slik vi kjenner den*<sup>9</sup> («Revelations – The Apocalypse and the end of the world as we know it») in which the authors discuss the eschatological message inherent in Johnny Cash's song *The man comes around*, serves as a great guide and inspiration for how to work with and observe eschatological imagery in pop music.

*Call me the seeker – Listening to religion in popular music*<sup>10</sup> edited by Michael J. Gilmour is an example of a book aiming to add to the field of popular culture studies by focusing on the relationship between popular music and religion. It is a compilation of works of various authors, its main contribution to an ever-growing field of study is the wide variety of musical genres it covers; from U2 to Metallica, from rap to rave. The variety of religious topics and musical genres directly lead to the variety of genres which is the topic of this thesis' analyses. This book also includes chapters from two different contributors who look at different works of Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds. While not directly affecting the analysis of Nick Cave's *Mercy Seat* found later in this thesis, they do observe similar occurrences of religious influence on his works.

In his doctoral dissertation titled *Dance to my ministry: Exploring Hip-hop spirituality*<sup>11</sup>, Carl Petter Opsahl explores the relationship between the popular music genre hip-hop and its own brand of spirituality. Observing what is described as a form of hybrid spirituality, Opsahl notes that it draws on influences from various religious traditions such as Christianity and Islam as well as other less easily-defined sources. Studying diverse artists within the genre such as Lauryn Hill and the Wu-Tang Clan, this dissertation serves as an inspiration for this thesis, mainly affecting its choice of artists. It further provides a detailed insight into the effective history and influence of Islam on hip-hop culture and music, a religious tradition which will not be covered in this thesis.

Pedagogic and didactic sources relating to the use of popular culture in religion-related school subjects are challenging to come by. While the use of popular culture in teaching is nothing new, the specific topic of music seems to be somewhat underrepresented. One source dealing with music with regard to teaching religion is the didactic-oriented book

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. – page 201

<sup>10</sup> Gilmour, Michael J. *Call me the seeker – listening to religion in popular music*. 2005, Continuum, New York, US

<sup>11</sup> Opsahl, Carl Petter. *Dance to my ministry: Exploring hip-hop spirituality*. Doctoral dissertation at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo. 2012



*Religions- og livssynsdidaktikk – en innføring* (“Religion and life view-didactics – An introduction”) edited by Helje Kringlebotn Sødal<sup>12</sup>. Described as a practical handbook in the didactics of teaching religion within the Norwegian educational system, the chapter by Sødal and Geir Winje entitled *Music* elaborates on how music can be a part of the teaching of religion. The focus is on music within specific religious traditions, and most of the chapter deals with using music that falls within the various established musical traditions of the different religions. It is only at the end of the chapter the authors open the proverbial door for what this thesis focuses on, namely popular music with religious themes and references. Thus the book serves as a starting point, from which the topic of this thesis springs. Furthermore, this chapter serves as a guide to various pitfalls and problems inherent in the use of music within the religion subject, which will be further addresses in the final part of this thesis. It is worth noting that the book deals primarily with the subject *religion, livssyn og etikk* (REL-01), the obligatory subject taught in elementary and lower secondary school. The focus of this thesis, as elaborated on under *Thesis framework* below, will be on the subject *religion og etikk* (RLE-01) taught in upper secondary school. Though these two subjects have similar curricula, there are differences in how they are taught as well as their aim. This thesis will elaborate on the parts of Sødal and Winje’s text which are applicable for both subjects.

#### **1.4 Thesis framework**

As mentioned earlier, this thesis advocates the use of popular music when teaching religion. This chapter will elaborate on the framework surrounding this, as well as explain how said framework is understood. The chapter will include a general introduction to the subject *religion og etikk* (“Religion and ethics”) and how it affects the thesis framework, as well as discuss which considerations were made when formulating the framework proper.

---

<sup>12</sup> Sødal, Helje Kringlebotn (red.) *Religions- og livssynsdidaktikk – en innføring*. 4th edition. 2009, Høyskoleforlaget (Norwegian Academic Press), Kristiansand, Norway

### 1.4.1 School subject and its curriculum

Firstly, we will address the subject *religion and ethics*<sup>13</sup> (REL1-01) and its position within the Norwegian educational system. The subject is obligatory for pupils attending the *general studies programme*, a line of study intended to prepare pupils for higher education. The subject is taught in the third and final year of *videregående skole*, the Norwegian equivalent of the final year of upper secondary school. It is worth noting that there is a similar subject named *religion, livssyn og etikk* (RLE1-01) which is obligatory for pupils attending primary and lower secondary school in Norway. While the subjects share similarities between their curricula, this thesis focuses solely on the subject taught in upper secondary school (REL1-01). This is a conscious choice, as to cover both subjects in depth is beyond the scope of this thesis. Some comparisons will be drawn between their respective curricula when appropriate, but only as a means to elaborate on the topic matter discussed.

Under the heading *purpose*, the Norwegian directorate of education and training (henceforth addressed by its Norwegian abbreviation *UDIR*) elaborates on what purpose the subject is intended to serve. Observe:

*Religion and ethics is both a knowledge subject and a subject that aims to raise awareness and shape attitudes. The subject emphasises religious and philosophical traditions in Norwegian, European and international contexts.*<sup>14</sup>

In its own words, the subject is intended to shape the attitudes of the pupils on the topics of religion and ethics. It also notes that it aims to raise awareness of religious belief and thought. We further observe:

*Religious, ethical and philosophical questions are important for each individual, and for society as a whole, both as the basis for who we are and as a source of conflict. Mutual tolerance across the differences in religion and views on life is a necessity for peaceful co-existence in a multicultural and multi-religious society.*<sup>15</sup>

From this we understand that the subject is intended to advocate tolerance in a multicultural and multi-religious society. It further specifies that the subject is intended to challenge pupils on difficult religious, ethical and philosophical questions. It expresses that

---

<sup>13</sup> Information about the subject can be found on the webpages of the Norwegian directorate of education and training (Utdanningsdirektoratet, "UDIR"). URL: <http://www.udir.no/kl06/REL1-01/Hele/?lplang=eng> – retrieved 11.03.15

<sup>14</sup> Utdanningsdirektoratet. *Religion and ethics – common core subjects in Programme for general studies (English version) - Purpose*. 2006. URL: <http://www.udir.no/kl06/REL1-01/Hele/Formaal/?lplang=eng> – retrieved 11.03.15

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

these can be a source of conflict, which the subject addresses specifically within its curriculum plan which will be addresses below. We further observe:

*The subject shall contribute to knowledge on and respect for various religious, views on life and ethical standpoints in local, national and global perspectives. Education in the subject shall develop the theoretical and practical competence to analyse and compare religions, views on life and philosophical disciplines.<sup>16</sup>*

We note two main points in the excerpt above: The subject is intended to provide pupils with knowledge of and about different religions, but also respect for them. Specifically, the subject is to instil these qualities in pupils by developing their ability to analyse and compare religious as well as philosophical views. Keeping that statement in mind, we observe the final paragraph:

*As a subject aiming to raise awareness and shape attitudes, religion and ethics shall also open for reflection on the pupil's own identity and own choices in life. The teaching in the subject shall stimulate each pupil to interpret life and attitudes.<sup>17</sup>*

We now observe that the holistic aim of the subject is to develop the tools and techniques needed by the pupils in order to reflect, as the subject states, on their own identity. It also aims to raise awareness, an aim shared by this thesis. As previously discussed under the heading *thesis purpose*, a part of the aim of this thesis is to make students aware of the presence of religious messages within popular music. This in turn will have two benefits. Through the use of popular music as a teaching tool, pupils will firstly be better able to identify different expressions of religious sentiment. Secondly they will be more capable of relating to and interpreting said sentiments when interpreting “life and attitudes”.

Furthermore, every subject curricula includes what are called *basic skills*. These basic skills are common across all curriculum plans, with each further elaborating on how each is to be integrated into the specific subject. The idea behind this is that these basic skills are fundamental in a pupil’s academic and personal development; hence they are to be practiced in every subject, albeit to various degrees depending on the subject. These basic skills are described as *being able to express oneself orally, being able to express oneself in*

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

*writing, being able to read, being able to do mathematics and being able to use digital tools.*<sup>18</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, we observe how the basic skill *reading* is described:

*Being able to read in the subject of religion and ethics means being able to interpret and reflect on religions and philosophical texts and pictures. Reading also means understanding issues, uncovering arguments and identifying main points of view in different texts, and processing and assessing information.*<sup>19</sup>

In this excerpt we recognize several points which this thesis will discuss. If we consider popular music pieces and their respective music videos as composite texts consisting of lyrics, audio and video, we can see them as providing material for interpretation from several different points of view. Specifically, that pupils are to be to interpret texts containing religious and philosophical references, from which they should be able to uncover arguments and identify different points of views are all goals which the use of popular music pieces can add to. Likewise, using alternate sources such as popular music will challenge the pupils' ability to process and assess information.

With the aim of further defining the framework of this thesis, we move on to the specific curriculum plan of the subject. In order to do this, we must first address how the subject is structured. Following the general purpose of the subject as noted above, the subject is further structured by dividing the subject into four *main subject areas; theory of religion and criticism of religion, Islam and an elective religion, Christianity and Philosophy, ethics and views on life/humanism.*<sup>20</sup> These four main subject areas are further divided into *competence aims*<sup>21</sup>. The difference between these two levels can be understood as main subject areas dealing with the overlying reasoning for the topic being included in the subject, while competence aims deal specifically with what the pupils are to be capable of by the end of the subject.

With regard to the main subject areas, this thesis aims to cover three of the four areas mentioned above; *theory of religion and criticism of religion, Islam and an elective religion and Christianity.* The reason for this is to demonstrate how the inclusion of popular music

---

<sup>18</sup> Utdanningsdirektoratet. *Religion and ethics – common core subjects in Programme for general studies (English version) – Basic skills.* 2006. URL: [http://www.udir.no/kl06/REL1-01/Hele/Grunnleggende\\_ferdigheter/?lplang=eng](http://www.udir.no/kl06/REL1-01/Hele/Grunnleggende_ferdigheter/?lplang=eng) – retrieved 28.03.15

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Utdanningsdirektoratet. *Religion and ethics – common core subjects in Programme for general studies (English version) – Main subject areas.* 2006. URL: <http://www.udir.no/kl06/REL1-01/Hele/Hovedomraader/?lplang=eng> – retrieved 11.03.15

<sup>21</sup> Utdanningsdirektoratet. *Religion and ethics – common core subjects in Programme for general studies (English version) – Competence aims.* 2006. URL: <http://www.udir.no/kl06/REL1-01/Hele/Kompetansemaal/?lplang=eng> – retrieved 11.03.15

analysis into the teaching repertoire can be beneficial to not only specific parts of the subject curriculum, but rather be applied as a teaching technique to the subject as a whole. In order to illustrate this, the songs chosen for this analysis relate to the subject areas of Christianity, Judaism (as an elective religion) and the area of criticism of religion, in order to cover a wide variety of topic from the curriculum.

At this point, we need to address why the religion of Islam, being the only religion specifically named in the main subject areas beside Christianity, is omitted from this thesis. This conscious choice is made for several reasons, but primarily to limit the different topics and sources covered by this thesis. The inclusion of another religious tradition would dilute the thesis further. Previous works which focus on the influence and effective history of Islam on popular music include Opsahl's doctoral dissertation "Dance to my ministry"<sup>22</sup> which provides a detailed analysis of this.

The conscious choice of these three fields serves to further establish a concrete framework for the thesis, as well as having a common denominator between them. The artists whose songs draw on a Christian frame of reference draw their inspiration from and make use of intertextual references to the Holy Bible. Likewise, the Jewish artist chosen for analysis draws on the Hebrew Bible. This provides us with a common point of origin for our analyses, The Holy Bible, for which this thesis will use the New International version<sup>23</sup> as reference. While the subject area of criticism of religion incorporates additional sources other than the Holy Bible, the songs specifically chosen for analysis share the common trait of criticising either organized religion as a whole, or Christianity specifically.

The other level of the curriculum plan we need to consider is the *competence aims*. These are, as mentioned above, a further specification of what the pupil should be able to do at the end of the subject. These are more specific than the main subject areas, and differ from topic to topic. We can see examples of how these are phrased by observing three select competence aims from the main subject area Christianity:

---

<sup>22</sup> Opsahl, Carl Petter. *Dance to my ministry: Exploring hip-hop spirituality*. Doctoral dissertation at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo. 2012

<sup>23</sup> *The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

*The aims of the studies are to enable pupils to:*

- *elaborate on key features of Christianity*
- *interpret some important texts from the Bible and Christian tradition*
- *describe and analyze some aesthetic and ritual expressions in Christianity*<sup>24</sup>

These three competence aims serve to illustrate that the primary aim of the subject is to enable pupils to perform certain academic tasks, but they do not specify how this is to be achieved. What this does is provide the teacher with freedom to practice different teaching methods in order to achieve the end objective. It is with this freedom in mind that this thesis advocates the use of popular music analysis. How the teaching method eventually is employed is of course the prerogative of the specific teacher, but this thesis aims to advocate the use of popular music analysis as a beneficial method to further understanding of, and interest in, religious texts and their influence on popular culture. As a pre-emptive example: While analysing the song *Mercy Seat* by Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds might provide some insight into Christian doctrine dealing with judgement and Purgatory, it can potentially greatly add to the pupil's understanding of the topic when combined with reading either source literature or text books excerpts which cover the same doctrine. This will be further elaborated on prior to each analysis, with the intent of providing ideas on which topic the song in question can be used and which competency aims are relevant.

### **1.4.2 Eschatology**

In order to further provide the thesis with a cohesive framework, the choice is made to limit the analysis to one aspect of religious doctrine, namely the field of *eschatology*. What this limitation does is that it allows us to narrow the focus of the thesis. This should not be understood as a limitation on the usefulness of popular music analysis when teaching religion, but rather as a means of providing the thesis with a distinct framework within which to conduct analyses, as well as opening up the possibility of comparing separate analyses.

This thesis bases its understanding of eschatology on the *Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*<sup>25</sup>, which describes the field of eschatology as “the study of the final end of things, the ultimate

---

<sup>24</sup> Utdanningsdirektoratet. *Religion and ethics – common core subjects in Programme for general studies (English version) – Competence aims*. 2006. URL: <http://www.udir.no/kl06/REL1-01/Hele/Kompetansemaal/?!plang=eng> – retrieved 11.03.15

<sup>25</sup> Walls, Jerry L. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*. 2008, Oxford University Press Inc, New York, US

resolution of the entire creation.”<sup>26</sup> Including such topics as doctrinal views of Heaven and Hell, Death and judgement, eschatology can be seen as a large topic with a wide scope. It also concerns the very human need to understand what happens when life ends. The songs selected for analysis for this thesis touch upon these topics in very different manners, thus presenting several different views on similar doctrinal ideas.

The reason for choosing eschatology specifically also relates to its prevalence within popular culture. Whether it be relating to the apocalyptic interpretation of the end of the Mayan calendar a few years back, or the post-apocalyptic setting of many films or other fitting examples, eschatological topics are prevalent in popular culture. As these occurrences and references are too extensive to address in detail in this thesis, we refer to the doctoral dissertation of Opsahl, “Dance to my Ministry”, in which the relationship between eschatology and *Nation of Islam* doctrine is discussed in detail<sup>27</sup>, as well as the chapter *Johannes’ Åpenbaring – Apokalypse og slutten på verden slik vi kjenner den nå* (“Revelations – The apocalypse and the end of the world as we know it”) in the book *Bibelen i populærkulturen*.<sup>28</sup> While these two sources in no manner provide a full picture of how prevalent eschatological thought is in popular culture, they do provide us with a detailed insight on how it can relate to popular music in some of its forms.

As understanding of eschatological doctrine is crucial in understanding the analyses of this thesis, each analysis chapter will be prefaced by a short summary of the eschatological doctrines relevant to their content.

### **1.4.3 Choice of artists, gender and genre**

The final part of the thesis framework we need to address concerns the choice of artists whose songs are eligible for analysis. While eschatological subject matter, as mentioned above, is one main criterion, this thesis also strives to illustrate the plurality of artists whose work can be utilized. As such, the three final criteria considered are the choice of artists, the *musical genre* within which they perform and the artist’s *gender*.

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. – page 4

<sup>27</sup> Opsahl, Carl Petter. *Dance to my ministry: Exploring hip-hop spirituality*. Doctoral dissertation at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo. 2012 – pdf page 351-353

<sup>28</sup> Løland, Martinsen & Skippervold – *Bibelen i populærkulturen*. 2014, Scandinavian Academic Press, Oslo, Norway – page 201- 230

The choice of which artists and songs to include in this thesis has been a continuous process. As will be further elaborated on below, the artists selected should represent a diverse and varied cross-section of different popular music genres, as well as representing both genders. Furthermore, this thesis' focus on popular music with a religious element serves to differentiate them from performers within niche genres with clear religious messages such as *Christian rock*. The conscious choice to not focus on these genres is due to the target audience of such genres, as well as popularity. While it would be easy to find religious sentiment with songs of the Christian rock/pop genre, we have to consider the possibility that their target audience is specific to mainly adherents of the same faith. This differs from popular music in general, which we can see as having a much wider target audience. This relates to popularity as well; aiming for a wider target audience leads to a potentially larger following. With this in mind, this thesis elects to focus on popular music with religious messages from such varied genres as rock, rap, reggae and pop ballads. The benefits of this is two-fold: Firstly it illustrates that religious sentiment is not something that is exclusive to one form of music, but rather something that can be found across the board. Secondly, it increases the chance of using songs that are close to the pupil's own musical preference, further enhancing the possibility that they will enjoy working with it.

The artist's *gender* is important when considering the aim of this thesis. The inclusion of both female and male artists widens the scope of potential songs for analysis, as well as having the added benefit of providing pupils with subject matter both from their own as well as the opposite gender. This also opens up the possibility of expanding the analysis beyond the topic of religion, allowing for interpretations from a gender perspective as well as social criticism in general. These frames of reference are inherently build into the subject, with competency aims relating to gender present in both main subject areas relating to religions<sup>29</sup>, and social criticism as part of the *Theory of religion and criticism of religion* area.<sup>30</sup>

Given all of the criteria above, this thesis will analyse songs from the artists Nick Cave, Tori Amos, Matisyahu, OPM and Lauryn Hill. This provides us with a varied assortment of songs

---

<sup>29</sup> Utdanningsdirektoratet. *Religion and ethics – common core subjects in Programme for general studies (English version) – Competence aims*. 2006. URL: <http://www.udir.no/kl06/REL1-01/Hele/Kompetansemaal/?!plang=eng> – retrieved 11.03.15

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



from artists within different genres and genders as well as covering an assortment of religious sentiments drawn from several different traditions.

## 1.5 Methodology

In this chapter, we'll observe the research methodology employed during the course of this thesis. It will elaborate on the methodology used in both the analysis part as well as the didactics part. It will also note influential authors and how their views, of popular music in particular, affect the methodology.

Firstly, the analyses found in this thesis follow a *hermeneutical* approach to text interpretation. If we understand hermeneutics as the analysis of text products, we start seeing similarities between it and popular music analysis. Keeping in mind that hermeneutics historically have related to analysis of Bible texts, we see a further relation between methodology and the topic matter this thesis aims to analyse.

This thesis relies on the book *Hermeneutics – An introduction to interpretive theory* by Porter and Robinson<sup>31</sup> for its understanding of hermeneutics as applied to analyses throughout this thesis. While the authors present a detailed and in-depth walkthrough of the history of hermeneutics and its different iterations, their main sentiment is what affects the methodology of this thesis the most. This can be clearly summed up in one quote:

*[...]most hermeneuts no longer try to answer what a particular passage “really means” in a complete and total way or what an author “really intended”. Few today would be so bold as to claim to know “the Truth” beyond a shadow of doubt.<sup>32</sup>*

This statement holds true for the aim of this thesis. Through the process of interpreting the possible interpretations of the tripartite relationship between author (artist), text (lyrics) and reader (listener), the aim of the thesis is to present how, when we draw upon different sources of contextual and intertextual information relating to the song in question, we can arrive at a myriad of plausible interpretations, depending on what we choose to include in our frame of reference.

---

<sup>31</sup> Porter, Stanley E and Robinson, Jason C. *Hermeneutics – an introduction to interpretive theory*. 2011, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Com Grand Rapids, US

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. – page 6

Given that the intent of this thesis is to advocate the use of popular music analysis as a teaching method within religion, we find that a basic use of hermeneutics comes up short in discussing all that which can factor in. Firstly, we observe that popular music pieces are a complex structure potentially consisting of three components; the written lyrics, the vocal performance of said lyrics and the official music video. Thusly, we need to take into consideration that depending on the components used or not, the interpretation of the topic matter can vary greatly. Thus the importance of understanding and interpreting popular music as a discipline with its own merits and focus points becomes important. For this we observe how authors Simon Frith and David Brackett perceive similar challenges.

In *Performing rites*, Frith argues that we need to consider the performance of the lyrics as an interpretive dimension in of itself. In his own words:

*Once we grasp that the issue in lyrical analysis is not words, but words in performance, then various new analytical possibilities open up. Lyrics, that is, are a form of rhetoric or oratory; we have to treat them in terms of the persuasive relationship set up between singer and listener.*<sup>33</sup>

This is an important point to note, as we have to keep in mind that while song lyrics can be read as text only, they are not intended to be. Their purpose is to be performed. This factors in both the performer and listener on an entirely different level than between the author and the reader of a written text. We have to account for tonality, emphasis and the general performance of the singer, all of which can affect the interpretation of the piece in question. This is contrary to the written text, where all of these factors are primarily up to the sole interpretation of the reader alone. We see this sentiment being elaborated on further by Frith;

*From this perspective, a song doesn't exist to convey the meaning of the words; rather, the words exist to convey the meaning of the song. [...] Pop songs, that is, work with and on the spoken language.*<sup>34</sup>

This leaves us with an interesting challenge when aiming to analyse popular music; where to begin? From Frith's point of view, the answer is that we have to consider the lyrics *in performance*, the performed song as our original vantage point. While this does not in any way discredit a solely textual approach to popular music, it does point out that this method

---

<sup>33</sup> Frith, Simon. *Performing rites – On the value of popular music*. 1996, Oxford University Press, Oxford, England. – page 166

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* – page 166

would be lacking a vital part of the proverbial puzzle; the way the performer intended the song to be “read”. This is taken into consideration when interpreting popular music in this thesis by allowing for interpretations based on the lyrics, the lyrics in performance or the music video, a combination of the above. As will be demonstrated several times during the analyses, different interpretations can be made more or less likely depending on which parts are the objects of analysis at any given time.

The second angle we have to consider is presented in the book *Interpreting popular music* by David Brackett. As mentioned in the *previous research* chapter, the aim of the author is to establish a vocabulary used for understanding how listeners form opinions in their encounter with popular music. In the book’s preface, we observe the author explaining the main point brought forth by his research;

*In the end, this study leaned further and further away from the idea that the most important components in musical meaning could be found in internal musical relationships; instead, it sought to come to terms with the idea that musical meaning is socially constructed – even the type of musical meaning that seems to derive from internal musical relationships.<sup>35</sup>*

The key phrase here is that “musical meaning is socially constructed.” Shying away from the idea that we construct our own meaning in a vacuum, Brackett proposes that the listener’s socio-cultural sphere of influence affects the listener’s process of formulating meaning. As an example to clarify this statement, we can observe this point by pre-emptively observing the song *Jerusalem (Out of Darkness comes light)* by Matisyahu, an object of analysis later on in this thesis. The song can be interpreted as addressing solely Jewish history, or the history of oppression in general. The listener’s predilection to either of the possible interpretations hinges on their own socio-cultural frame of reference as well as contextual knowledge: If they know little about the history of oppression and work with only the lyrics of the song, the likely interpretation is that they will consider the song to be about the oppression of Jews. If they possess contextual knowledge, are able to draw parallels between historical events and work with the official music video as well, they are more likely to go for a more all-encompassing interpretation relating to the history of oppression as a whole. It is this effect that needs to be taken into account when proposing the use of popular music analysis when teaching religion, for instance by making sure the pupil’s frame of reference includes

---

<sup>35</sup> Brackett, David. *Interpreting popular music*. 2000, University of California Press, Berkeley, US – Preface, page ix

the necessary background information needed to facilitate understanding of the subject matter.

In order to further elaborate on how this frame of reference can come into effect when subjecting listeners to popular music, Brackett cites musicologist Gino Stefani's model of musical competence, which divides the listener's musical competence into five levels:

*General codes (GQ): basic conventions through which we perceive or construct or interpret every experience (and therefore every sound experience). This is the "anthropological" level of musical competence that everyone may exercise;*

*Social practices (SP): cultural institutions such as language, religion, industrial work, technology, sciences etc., including musical practices (concert, ballet, opera, criticism);*

*Musical techniques (MT): theories, methods, and devices which are more or less specific and exclusive to musical practices, such as instrumental techniques, scales, composition forms, etc. It is at this level one usually finds the definition of music as "the art of sounds";*

*Styles (ST): historical periods, cultural movements, authors, or groups of works: that is, the particular ways in which MT, SP and GQ are concretely realized;*

*Opus (OP): single musical works or events in their concrete individuality.<sup>36</sup>*

Brackett further cites Stefani as dividing these levels of musical competence into two broad categories; *high competence* and *popular competence*.<sup>37</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, we understand high competence as the focus on pieces as autonomous, stand-alone works, while popular competence focuses on an experience more related to the GQ and SP levels. Brackett further notes how a listener's understanding ("signification effect") varies depending on their competence:

*Moreover, the degree to which a piece may be decoded depends on the range of levels available to an individual listener: a maximum "signification effect" would occur when a piece is interpreted on all levels; a relatively weak effect would occur if a General Code were interpreted without any information from the other levels, or, conversely, if a piece were interpreted purely on the Op level – as would occur if a piece were perceived solely as an autonomous work, without any social significance or connotative meaning.<sup>38</sup>*

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. – page 12

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. – page 13

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. – page 13

For the purpose of this thesis' aim, we can understand these levels of musical competence from a pedagogical point of view; the understanding and interpretation of a particular piece of popular music by a pupil will depend on, and be affected by, their frame of reference and ability to observe context as part of their continuous process towards formulating a meaning. Thus, if we perceive the aim of popular music analysis within teaching to be to have pupils formulate opinions and analyses which place their opinions into a larger context, we need to provide them with the contextual information and academic tools to do so. While having pupils present their immediate reactions to songs based on a preliminary listen-through might have some merit, it will be based more on the GQ level of personal preference and emotion rather than the more intellectual levels. Thus we need to consider the pupil's frame of reference and competence level when considering how to utilize popular music analysis when teaching. In order to take this into account, this thesis will preface each analysis with a suggestion of relevant contextual information for the song, and strive to consider how different interpretations are made possible depending on the frame of reference of the interpreter.

In summary, the methodological approach of this thesis is inherently hermeneutic, but with certain addendums. The analyses will have to consider how different interpretations are made possible depending on whether the object of analysis is the song lyrics, the lyrics performed or including the official music video. Furthermore, the analyses have to take into consideration the context within which the song exists, taking into account the performer and other possibly relevant information which might have an effect on the analysis and any interpretations thereof.

## **1.6 Research ethics**

As with any project with a clear aim, there is the risk of being affected by *confirmation bias*. This thesis presupposes that the songs selected for analysis contain both general religious references as well as those specifically relating to eschatology. In order to avoid any form of confirmation bias, the songs selected for analysis have been through a rigorous process of preliminary analyses in which several potential songs have been eliminated for lack of fitting

content. The songs which made the cut have been found to make use of references and language which can be interpreted as either generally religious or eschatological.

In a similar manner to the above, we need to be careful with not *attributing opinions* to the artists whose songs are analysed. As this thesis uses a hermeneutical approach to content analysis and interpretation, we need to clearly define which, if any, of the possible interpretations are the artist's, and which are the result of the interpretation of the thesis author. This becomes a complex process when we have to take contextual information relevant for the songs into account. Thus we note that all interpretations regarding the analysis content, unless otherwise stated, are the result of the interpretation of this thesis' author, and not the artist in question.

For the purpose of this thesis, we consider song lyrics as *authentic texts*, which are texts that are not made specifically for teaching. This entails that they are not written specifically for classroom use. This also means that they can contain material which might be considered inappropriate for the classroom situation. Within the subject of religion and ethics, this question is most often raised when it comes to using material that can be considered to be more "preaching" rather than teaching. According to the curriculum plan of school subjects relating to religion within the Norwegian school system, the principle idea is that the subjects are to teach the pupils about religions from an academic point of view, not from a missioning view. We can see this addressed directly in the *purpose* part of the *Religion, livssyn og etikk* curriculum plan:

*The Education Act presupposes that the teaching [...of religion] is to be objective, critical and pluralistic. This presupposes that it is factual, impartial and that all the different world religions and views of life are presented with respect. There should be no preaching or religious practice in teaching.*<sup>39</sup>

The issue of how to make use of religious texts which are inherently "preaching" was addressed in the OSCE rapport titled *Toledo guiding principles on teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools* of 2008<sup>40</sup>, which states that the use of religious material is allowed in classrooms, provided the aim of their use is to provide a perspective on the

---

<sup>39</sup> Utdanningsdirektoratet. *Religion, livssyn og etikk - Formål*. 2006. URL: <http://www.udir.no/kl06/RLE1-01/Hele/Formaal/> - retrieved 12.04.05 – Own translation as there is no official translation published

<sup>40</sup> Organization for Security and cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Office for democratic institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) – *Toledo guiding principles on teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools*. 2008. URL: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/29154?download=true> – pdf page 54 - retrieved 05.04.15

religion. Thus we can consider the use of popular music songs as eligible, provided the aim of their use is to provide another perspective on the religion. If we expand on this idea to not only include religious ideas but also politically volatile opinions, the following analysis of the song *Jerusalem* by the artist Matisyahu is a great example of why this needs to be considered. The issues dealing with song will be addressed specifically in its analysis.

## 2 Christian eschatology in popular music

The following chapter will present analyses of two songs which make use of a Christian frame of reference for their eschatological views; *The Mercy Seat* by Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds and *Final Hour* by Lauryn Hill. As neither song presents a clear view on which, if any specific at all, denomination of Christianity they draw their inspiration from, this introduction will address the relevant eschatological topics from a general point of view.

Eschatology within a Christian frame of reference can be understood as the parts of doctrine dealing with coming of the Messiah, death and final judgement as well as the concepts of Heaven and Hell as future states of being. Both songs selected for analysis in this chapter deal specifically with the topic of final judgement and death, but from somewhat different angles. While *Final hour* reads as a warning about how to live your life up until the final hour of judgement, *The Mercy Seat* is presented as the thoughts of a man on death row, in which we are presented with his thoughts on the upcoming execution and his impending final judgement. Thus they can be perceived as addressing two sides of the same coin, yet from quite different angles.

In order to fully grasp the allusions and references presented in these songs, we need to have a basic understanding of how sin and judgement factors in to the Christian eschatological doctrine. This thesis proposes the following as a general framework for understanding: *sins* are actions taken by man against the rules and tenants of the religion. The precedence for this understanding stems for the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, as presented in the Book of Genesis. The actions undertaken by Adam and Eve here lead to the doctrinal concept of *Original sin*, for which Jesus Christ is crucified to atone for. The concept of *final judgement* can be in its simplest form be understood as a tallying of the books, listing a person's good deeds and sins upon Death, in order to determine whether or not the person in question is allow entrance to Heaven, or sent to Hell. While there are distinct variations of doctrine within different denominations of Christianity<sup>41</sup>, this thesis proposes a basic understanding as the one presented above as the general level of

---

<sup>41</sup> See Walls, Jerry L. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*. 2008, Oxford University Press Inc, New York, US – Part 2; *Eschatology in distinct Christian traditions and theological movements* for more information on various differences between denominations.



knowledge needed to understand the upcoming analyses. Any specific difference in understanding required for the specific songs will be presented in the analysis proper.

## 2.1 Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds

Nick Cave is the lead singer of the world-renowned band *Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds*. Formed in 1983<sup>42</sup>, the band has released 15 studio albums under their own name, as well as many others under different side projects. Given the nickname “*Rock music’s Prince of Darkness*”<sup>43</sup> by many music critics, Cave’s music is well known for drawing on Biblical narratives and allusions. In an interview the British newspaper *The Guardian*, Cave had the following to say about it:

*“The brutality of the Old Testament inspired me, the stories and grand gestures. I wrote that stuff up and it influenced the way I saw the world. What I’m trying to say is I didn’t walk around in a rage thinking God is a hateful god. I was influenced by looking at the Bible, and it suited me in my life vision at the time to see things in that way.”*<sup>44</sup>

For the purpose of this thesis, we will analyze and interpret the song *The Mercy Seat* off the 1988 album *Tender prey*.<sup>45</sup> The first song of the album and a staple of their live performances ever since, Cave himself selected the song as the band’s best in an interview with *Uncut* music magazine published online in February 2015. When asked why, he commented:

*It’s a really great song – it’s the staple song of the Bad Seeds live, mainly because it has the capacity to lend itself to seemingly infinite variations, and it can adapt to whatever we happen to be into at the time – a folk song, or a headbanger number*<sup>46</sup>

As we will analyze and interpret the eschatological content of the song, this comment becomes interesting in that it indirectly comments on said content itself. Judgement comes in an infinite variety; hence the song about it can take many forms and still be popular

---

<sup>42</sup> As the artists’ official website, [www.nickcave.com](http://www.nickcave.com) (retrived 20.04.15) contains little or no biographical information, all information is referred from the artist’s Wikipedia page unless otherwise specified. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nick\\_Cave](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nick_Cave) - retrieved 20.04.15

<sup>43</sup> Anderson, Kyle for Entertainment Weekly – *The unbearable Lightness of being Nick Cave* – URL: <http://www.ew.com/article/2014/09/05/unbearable-lightness-being-nick-cave> - retrieved 20.04.15

<sup>44</sup> Hattenstone, Simon for *The Guardian* – *Old Nick* – URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2008/feb/23/popandrock.features> - retrieved 20.04.15

<sup>45</sup> Nick Cave – Discography on wikipedia.org. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nick\\_Cave#Discography](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nick_Cave#Discography) – retrieved 20.04.15

<sup>46</sup> *Uncut* – *Nick Cave’s 30 best songs* – URL: [http://www.uncut.co.uk/features/nick-cave-s-30-greatest-songs-chosen-by-the-bad-seeds-his-famous-fans-and-cave-himself-37741#disqus\\_thread](http://www.uncut.co.uk/features/nick-cave-s-30-greatest-songs-chosen-by-the-bad-seeds-his-famous-fans-and-cave-himself-37741#disqus_thread) – retrieved 20.04.15

amongst fans, as their ability to relate to it will depend on their own frame of reference. *The Mercy Seat* tells the story of a man on death row, and his musing surrounding his upcoming judgement and execution. As the official music video for the song contains theatrical elements referring directly to the narrative of the lyrics, it will be analyzed alongside the lyrics.

With regard to intertextual references, there are several direct references and more subtle allusions to biblical texts found in the lyrics. Knowledge of these can be beneficial for pupils working with the song, thus these will be presented in the analysis when appropriate. As for eschatological content, the song makes use of eschatological doctrine with a distinctively Christian Old testament feel. Knowledge of the difference between Old and New Testaments can be of benefit for pupils, but is not crucial depending on the frame of reference within which the song is interpreted. With regard to the subject curriculum, working with the song can help pupils achieve the aims of the following competency aims from the *Christianity* main subject area:

- describe and reflect on key features of Christian ethics
- interpret some important texts from the Bible and Christian tradition<sup>47</sup>

If one desires a broader frame of reference within which to interpret the song, it can also serve as a stepping stone for observing how Christian doctrines have changed over the course of the years, and how different denominations and traditions within Christianity interpret doctrine differently. With that in mind, we can observe the following secondary competency aims:

- elaborate on examples of continuity and change in the history of Christianity in and outside Europe
- present two confessional forms of Christianity today<sup>48</sup>

### **2.1.1 “The Mercy seat” – on judgement in Christian eschatology**

*The Mercy Seat* follows the story of an “I” persona, with the overlying narrative being him sitting on Death Row awaiting his execution. As the song is performed from a first person view, we need to remember the ethical considerations presented earlier in this thesis. Thus,

---

<sup>47</sup> Utdanningsdirektoratet. *Religion and ethics – common core subjects in Programme for general studies (English version) – Competence aims*. 2006. URL: <http://www.udir.no/kl06/REL1-01/Hele/Kompetansemaal/?!plang=eng> – retrieved 11.03.15

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

we note that any references to “the singer” or “I” persona refers to the fictitious character in the lyrics and official music video, and not Nick Cave himself.

Before we begin observing the lyrics proper, we note two different frames of reference from which we can view the lyrical content. While the lyrics are inherently eschatological by way of what they present, we can easily spot several non-religious components which, if so desired, can lead to a very “down to earth” interpretation of the song. For the purpose of this analysis we will focus on the religious aspect of the content, thus making use of allusions and direct references to Biblical content and concepts. As several verses of the song refer more to the concept of *apophenia* than any eschatological subject matter, the verses with religious references will be the focus of this analysis. However, given the clear indication of non-religious content as well, we will address those when appropriate.

The first part of the song takes the form of a spoken monologue, in which the “I” states:

*It began when they come took me from my home  
And put me in Dead Row,  
Of which I am nearly wholly innocent, you know.  
And i'll say it again  
I..am..not..afraid..to..die.<sup>49</sup>*

In the official video<sup>50</sup>, we see Nick Cave himself performing as the “I” persona, performing this monologue from what looks like a run-down cell. He addresses the camera directly, which can be interpreted as breaching the fourth wall and the “I” telling the story directly to his audience. The first thing we note in this excerpt is that he confirms that he is indeed on an actual Death Row, as evident by the video. This confirmation serves to add gravity to the lyrics; if one only were to pay attention to the lyrics of the song, one could conclude that, with the religious references presented later in the song, that the “I” is talking about a metaphorical state of judgement. With the same scene in the video being quite explicit, we can deduce that this being an actual cell on Death row is a likely interpretation. For the purpose of this analysis, we note that both interpretations are eligible, depending on what the overlying aim of the analysis.

---

<sup>49</sup> *The Mercy seat* lyrics on nickcave.com. URL: <http://nickcave.com/lyrics/nick-cave-bad-seeds/tender-prey/mercy-seat/> - retrieved 20.04.15

<sup>50</sup> Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds – *The Mercy Seat* on youtube.com. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ahr4KFI79WI> – retrieved 20.04.15

The second element we note is the sentence “Of which I am nearly wholly innocent, you know.” Observing this sentence from a grammatical point of view, with the “I”’s innocence being “nearly wholly”, can leave us with the impression that there is a hint of deception in the wording. If the “I” believed that he was innocent, there is no reason for modifying the word innocence in such a manner. Thus, he hints at the fact that there is some truth to the accusations made against him. The lyrics in performance in the music video adds further merit to this interpretation, as Cave’s performance puts the emphasis on the word “nearly” as opposed to “innocent.” This makes for an interesting turn of events coming to the final sentence of the excerpt: “I..am..not..afraid..to...die.” The emphasis and staccato performance of these words adds gravity to them, which is further underlined by the video flashing the word “DIE” across the screen. While there are several different ways in which we can interpret this, we will observe it as confirming the fact that the “I” is in fact to be executed.

While we at this point are still quite early in the lyrics, we can note our first preliminary theme, which is one of doubt. This stems from the fact that the above interpretation of the monologue can lead the listener to question whether or not the “I” actually is guilty of the accusations for which he has been convicted. After all, he does cast some doubt over the verdict by conditioning his innocence. If we take the eschatological frame of reference into account, his statement actually casts further doubt about his verdict. He quite emphatically states that he is not afraid to die, which is indicative of him not being afraid of the judgement that is in store for him. Thus, can he possibly be innocent? Or at least, to some extent, feel that he will be absolved of his sins come final judgement? This possible duality will be further explored as we move further into the lyrics, but for now we note that there is an element of doubt inherent in the narrative.

The monologue narrative continues in the first verse:

*I began to warm and chill  
To objects and their fields,  
A ragged cup, a twisted mop  
The face of Jesus in my soup  
Those sinister dinner meals  
The meal trolley’s wicked wheels*

*A hooked bone rising from my food  
All things either good or ungood.*<sup>51</sup>

At first listen, these seemingly unconnected statements can cause some confusion in the listener. At the most basic level of understanding, these references to what the “I” sees and experiences in his cell can be considered as a simple descriptive narrative. However, the wording hides a deeper meaning. Ascribing actual tactile feelings such as “warm” and “chill” to inanimate objects and their “fields” can be seen as indications of a more complex situation than initially evident. The “I” goes on to further attribute negative adjectives to objects; “ragged cups,” “twisted mop”, “sinister” meals and “wicked wheels.” What all of these objects have in common is that they are inherently incapable of being what the “I” describes them as. This is a clear indication of *apophenia*,<sup>52</sup> the term for seeing patterns in random information and attributing meaning to meaningless observations.<sup>53</sup> This concept has been seen in connection with the onset of schizophrenia, but such an interpretation is beyond the scope of this analysis.

From a religious frame of reference, we can observe some references to eschatological subject matter. The fact that the “I” sees the face of Jesus in his soup is the only element directly referring to redemption in the entire song. In a similar manner to the word “DIE” mentioned earlier, the word “JESUS” flashes across the video. Furthermore, we note that the references to dinner deals can refer to the tradition of the last meal, a tradition in which the condemned prison gets to order one last meal of their choosing. Connecting this line with the Last supper from the Jesus narrative indicates that the “I” is close to his execution, as was Jesus at the time of the Last supper. This lends some understanding to the fact that the “I” observed the meal trolley’s wheels as “wicked”; while the sound of them does not carry any inherent “ungoodness,” his connection between the sound of the wheels and them bringing him his final meal is indicative of his imminent execution.

The final line of the first verse does lend itself to an interesting challenge when it comes to interpretation. The “I” chooses to categorize all things as either “good” or “ungood.” The

---

<sup>51</sup> *The Mercy seat* lyrics on nickcave.com. URL: <http://nickcave.com/lyrics/nick-cave-bad-seeds/tender-prey/mercy-seat/> - retrieved 20.04.15

<sup>52</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, a rudimentary understanding of this term is sufficient, as going in-depth in a complex psychological phenomenon is beyond the scope of this chapter. While it is clearly possible to view this song from within a psychological frame of reference with a focus on apophenia, it is not the main focus of this thesis.

<sup>53</sup> *Apophenia* on wikipedia.org. URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apophenia> - retrieved 20.04.15

choice of using a non-word such as “ungood” as opposed to “bad” or “evil” is an interesting choice, as it indicates that within the mind of the “I”, these things are not inherently bad. Rather, they are simply “not good.” If we again defer to the Jesus narrative, we start to see a strong connection between the two. Jesus’ crucifixion was, according to the Christian narrative a good thing, as his act of sacrifice served to redeem humanity. Thus, is it possible that the “I” sees his upcoming execution as, if not necessarily a “good” thing, then at least not a bad, but rather an “ungood” thing? After all, he has thus far unequivocally stated that he is not afraid to die. Again, we are reminded of the doubt thematic, as the “I” seems to be struggling with coming to terms with how to perceive his impending judgement.

We now move on to observe the chorus of the song. This segment is repeated many times during the song, with minor variations observed in each:

*And the mercy seat is waiting  
And I think my head is burning  
And in a way I’m yearning  
To be done with all this measuring of truth.  
An eye for an eye  
A tooth for a tooth  
And anyway I told the truth  
And I’m not afraid to die.<sup>54</sup>*

The mention of “The Mercy Seat” serves a dual purpose in this song. From a Biblical frame of reference, the Mercy Seat is understood as the top of the Ark of the Covenant,<sup>55</sup> the container within which the Stone tablets on which the Ten commandments of Christianity and Judaism are to be kept. This reference to the Commandments, understood for the purpose of this thesis as rules of conduct, is further strengthened by observing that the lyrics refer to the Old testament concept of justice “an eye for an eye”, as seen is Leviticus 24:19-21:

---

<sup>54</sup> *The Mercy seat* lyrics on nickcave.com. URL: <http://nickcave.com/lyrics/nick-cave-bad-seeds/tender-prey/mercy-seat/> - retrieved 20.04.15

<sup>55</sup> Biblical texts contain several references to this item, for example in *Exodus 25:17 – The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>19</sup> Anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner:<sup>20</sup> fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The one who has inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury. <sup>21</sup> Whoever kills an animal must make restitution, but whoever kills a human being is to be put to death.<sup>56</sup>

Taking all these references into account, the sentence “And in a way I’m yearning to be done with all this measuring of truth” can be interpreted as the convicted “I” is looking forward to his execution being over, as he sees it as an “eye for an eye” kind of judgement. As this sentiment stems from the Old Testament, the earlier inclusion of a Jesus reference can be seen as indicative of the convict not putting any faith in the worldly “life for a life” style of judgement, but rather waits for his actual final judgement upon his eventual death. As Jesus is well known for his “turn the other cheek”<sup>57</sup> mentality, we can interpret this segment as the convict contrasting the justice he receives on Earth as possibly contrary to the judgement which actually matters to him, the impending judgement in Heaven. As he thus far has stated that he is not afraid to die, we can likely interpret this as the “I” being fairly certain that he will not be judged in a similar manner come final judgement.

The next verse we need to observe is the following:

*I hear stories from the chamber  
How Christ was born into a manger  
And like some ragged stranger  
Died upon the cross  
And might I say it seems so fitting in its way  
He was a carpenter by trade  
Or at least that’s what I’m told.<sup>58</sup>*

“The chamber” in this segment can possibly refer to the fact that prisoners on Death Row are offered to talk with religious authorities such as priests if they so desire. Thus, hearing this story from the chamber can be a reference to him talking to a minister. Another likely interpretation, given the previous references to the Ark of the Covenant, is that the chamber in question is *the holiest of holies*, the chamber behind the altar in the fabled Temple of

---

<sup>56</sup> *Leviticus 24:19-21 – The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>57</sup> *Matthew 5:38-42 – The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>58</sup> *The Mercy seat lyrics on nickcave.com. URL: <http://nickcave.com/lyrics/nick-cave-bad-seeds/tender-prey/mercy-seat/> - retrieved 20.04.15*

Jerusalem, in which the Ark is said to have resided,<sup>59</sup> and by extension from the chambers of a priest. The fact that the condemned calls what he is told as “stories” could indicate that he does not put much faith in what he hears, as he follows it up by stating “or at least that’s what I’m told.” This refers to the part of the narrative where Jesus dies upon the cross, which the narrator somewhat ironically states is “fitting in its way.” Again, we are presented with an element of doubt on behalf of the “I”, which serves a dual purpose; if the stories told about Jesus can be doubted, how does that reflect on his own story?

This doubt is further reflected in how the “I” narrator suddenly describes his hands in the following segment:

*Like my good hand I  
Tattooed E.V.I.L. across it's brother's fist  
That filthy five! They did nothing to challenge or resist.*<sup>60</sup>

At this point, it seems as if the condemned cannot accept responsibility for his actions. In an act of anthropomorphication, he labels one of his hand evil, and accuses the other of not preventing the crime in question. The use of the term “brother” could indicate an allusion to how others did not step in to prevent the crime, further disconnecting the condemned from his responsibility. This duality of his person could reflect back to the idea of schizophrenia, but at this point there is only circumstantial evidence to that effect.

The next verse brings us back to the Mercy Seat narrative of the song:

*In Heaven His throne is made of gold  
The ark of His testament is stowed  
A throne from which I'm told  
All history does unfold.  
Down here it's made of wood & wire  
And my body is on fire  
And God is never far away.*<sup>61</sup>

Of interest in this verse is the fact that it can be interpreted as the condemned further distancing himself from his guilt and responsibility. The lyrics liken the Throne of God with

---

<sup>59</sup> Amongst others described in *Hebrews 9:3 The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>60</sup> *The Mercy seat lyrics on nickcave.com.* URL: <http://nickcave.com/lyrics/nick-cave-bad-seeds/tender-prey/mercy-seat/> - retrieved 20.04.15

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.



the electric chair, as they both inherently contain an element of judgement in their purpose. Yet, there is an unspoken question which serves to further cast the condemned's guilt into question. If all of history "unfolds" from God's throne, this presupposes a form of predetermination. Thus, if God intended for history to unfold the way it did, can the condemned be held accountable for his actions?

The final verse we will observe in this analysis follows the "I"'s narrative when he is about to be executed:

*Into the mercy seat I climb  
My head is shaved, my head is wired  
And like a moth that tries  
To enter the bright eye  
I go shuffling out of life  
Just to hide in death awhile  
And anyway I never lied.<sup>62</sup>*

From a worldly point of view, this segment states that the "I" is about to be executed in the electric chair. The shaving of the head and wiring are all part of this process. Of particular interest is the final line, as the narrator feels the need to yet again affirm that he did not lie. However, is this a reference to the fact that he is not afraid to die, or to his initial claim of conditional innocence?

The remainder of the lyrics consists of the chorus being repeated over and over, with slight alterations to the text in each. In the interest of brevity, we observe these changes to the text and narrative together:

*And I've got nothing left to lose  
And I'm not afraid to die.  
  
And anyway there was no proof  
Nor a motive why.  
  
And in a way I'm helping  
To be done with all this twisting of the truth.  
A lie for a lie  
And a truth for a truth*

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

*And in a way I'm spoiling  
All the fun with all this truth and consequence.*

*An eye for an eye  
And a truth for a truth  
And anyway I told the truth  
And I'm not afraid to die.*

*A life for a life  
And a truth for a truth  
And anyway there was no proof  
But I'm not afraid to tell a lie.*

*And anyway I told the truth  
But I'm afraid I told a lie.<sup>63</sup>*

At this point, the music is at an emphatic crescendo, further underlining the gravity of the lyrics. The use of heavy-handed drumming and an equally heavy keyboard use further serves to stress the gravity of what happens; a man's execution in the electric chair. But if we look past the wordly component of the narrative, we again see the inherent theme of doubt being brought to fore. Each of these changes to the lyrical narrative could in of itself be the subject of extensive analysis, but for the sake of clarity we observe them together as indicative of the diametrically opposed feelings of relief and doubt the "I" proposes. Up until the final two parts of the excerpt, he reaffirms his previous statement that he is not afraid to die. This repetition can in of itself be observed as a red flag; why does he choose to emphasize this again and again? It can be interpreted as him convincing himself that he will receive fair judgement after his death. We can affirm this interpretation by noting that he tells us there was "nor a motive why" for his crime, and that "anyway there was no proof" for his crime. If we presuppose that these two statements are true, he has been condemned not by the evidence, but by his fellow man. This would lead him to put faith in that he will be fairly judged in Heaven, as he believes that he is in fact wrongly condemned.

Keeping in mind that doubt is a reoccurring theme in the lyrics, we note that all which the condemned has stated so far unravels as we come to the final two parts of the excerpt above. The three lines "I'm not afraid to tell a lie," "And anyway I told the truth" and "But

---

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

I'm afraid I told a lie," cast all of that which has been said before into doubt. Firstly, he affirms that he could have told a lie. Then he states that he told the truth, but then questions whether he did. If we observe the whole lyrical narrative under one, this begs the question of which, if any, lie he told? Did he lie about not being afraid of dying? Did he lie when he said he was conditionally innocent? Or did he in fact lie when he said he was not afraid of lying? While there is not enough evidence to unequivocally conclude in any direction, we note that his blaming of his one hand for doing something wrong, thus distancing himself from his actions, could be the source of this doubt. Perhaps he, upon the verge of death and this close to his final judgement comes to the realization that he is indeed guilty after all. This leads him to the realization that what he has yearned for to come, might not actually be as he expected. As God is considered to be omniscient, he will know the truth of what transpired. So what if the condemned was wrong, and his awaited redemption is not to come?

While there are several more elements of the lyrics and music video that in of themselves should merit attention, we can from the above conclude that there is a significant discussion of guilt and doubt relating to judgement present in this song. Combining the heavily Biblical influenced lyrics with the Death Row prisoner narrative conjures up the image of a person who is struggling with coming to terms with his own impending death and the final judgement which awaits him. It is possible to interpret this as a brewing crisis of faith, as the back and forth of the "I" narrative can leave the listener wondering what actually transpired, not to speak of what is to come. What becomes clear at the very end is that the condemned "I" suddenly dreads what is to come. This emphasis makes clear the importance the lyrics puts on the impending final judgement, which is ultimately out of the "I"'s hands.

In summary, we also note that there is an inherent criticism of placing emphasis on "worldly" judgement rather than the final one which bases itself on religious doctrine. Thus, it is possible to see it as a commentary on the "life for a life" mentality inherent in the death penalty. If one desires to expand the analysis' frame of reference to include social commentary, it is wholly possible to use this song as a basis for a discussion on how the death penalty, which relates more closely to Old Testament doctrine than the New Testament, has a place in society or not. After all, who is eventually to judge a person for his or her actions?

## 2.2 Lauryn Hill

Lauryn Hill<sup>64</sup> is an internationally acclaimed performer within the hip-hop and soul genres. Coming into the public eye as part of the American hip-hop group *The Fugees* alongside fellow performers Wyclef Jean and Pras with the album *The Score* in 1996, the group garnered commercial and critical acclaim, topping the American Billboard charts as well as others, including the Norwegian sales chart *VG-lista*.<sup>65</sup> Following the group's breakup in 1997, Hill released her solo album *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* in 1998. The album garnered high-universal praise from critics, many of whom cite Hill as a strong female voice on the topics of love, life and God.<sup>66</sup> From this album comes the track "Final Hour," which is the subject of this analysis.

The song draws on references from several different sources, key amongst which is understanding of the importance of eschatology and the role judgement plays in Christian doctrine. As such, a preliminary understanding of this can be greatly beneficial to the pupil's understanding of the subject matter. This particular analysis can be helpful in having pupils achieve the following select competency aims from the main subject area *Christianity*:

- *Elaborate on key features of Christianity*
- *Describe and analyse some aesthetic and ritual expressions in Christianity*
- *Interpret some important texts from the Bible and Christian tradition*<sup>67</sup>

To a lesser extent, depending on what the desired objective is, we can see this analysis as touching upon the following competency aims of the main subject areas *Christianity* and *Theory of religion and criticism of religion*:

- *Discuss and elaborate on the views of Christianity on gender and gender roles*
- *Present, discuss and elaborate on different dimensions of religions: theory, myths and narratives, rituals, experiences, ethics, social organisation, art and material expressions*
- *Discuss and elaborate on different forms of searching for religions in our time*<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> As the official artist website <http://www.lauryn-hill.com/> (retrieved 01.04.15) is devoid of any personal information, all information on the artist herself references the artist's wikipedia.org article. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lauryn\\_Hill](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lauryn_Hill) - retrieved 01.04.15

<sup>65</sup> *The Score (Fugees album)* on wikipedia.org. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Score\\_\(Fugees\\_album\)#Charts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Score_(Fugees_album)#Charts) – retrieved 01.04.15

<sup>66</sup> *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill – Critical reception* on Wikipedia.org. URL:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Miseducation\\_of\\_Lauryn\\_Hill#Critical\\_reception](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Miseducation_of_Lauryn_Hill#Critical_reception) – retrieved 01.04.15

<sup>67</sup> Utdanningsdirektoratet. *Religion and ethics – common core subjects in Programme for general studies (English version) – Competence aims*. 2006. URL: <http://www.udir.no/kl06/REL1-01/Hele/Kompetansemaal/?!plang=eng> – retrieved 11.03.15

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

In order to further facilitate understanding of the themes of the song, the pupils should have some knowledge and understanding of Jewish and African-American history. While not crucial to the understanding of the eschatological content of the song, it will help pupils place the song within a larger contextual frame of reference, especially with regard to possible interpretations regarding social commentary and criticism.

### **2.2.1 “Final hour” – an alternate view on judgement in Christian eschatology**

*Final Hour* is the 7<sup>th</sup> track of the afore-mentioned album, Lauryn Hill’s first album as a solo artist, following her immense success as part of *The Fugees*. Released in 1998, the album garnered high on universal praise from critics, who did not miss the obvious spiritual references inherent in her work. Of particular interest is a comment made by writer and music reviewer Ann Powers in the New York Times newspaper:

*Her religious fervor is not what makes "Miseducation" exceptional; it is the way that her faith, based more in experience and feeling than in doctrine, leads her to connect the sacred to the secular in music that touches the essence of soul"<sup>69</sup>*

This comment merits attention for several reasons. Firstly, Powers notes that there is a “religious fervor” in Hill’s music. The use of such an intense term proposes that religion plays an important role in the music and by extension for the artist. Secondly, we note that Hill’s faith is described as being based on “experience and feeling” rather than religious doctrine. This conjures up the image of someone who not only has read the doctrinal texts, but rather one who has lived and experienced them before coming to believe in them. Finally, Powers describes Hill’s ability to “connect the sacred to the secular in music.” These three points are important, as they mirror the lyrical structure of *Final hour*; the song starts out with Hill addressing her fame and success, before the lyrics take on a more religious aspect. This analysis will observe how *Final Hour* can be interpreted as a telling of the personal journey of Hill, and how her personal narrative relates to the Christian doctrine of judgment and redemption. Likewise, we take into account how the lyrics can be interpreted as a cautionary tale for those who would focus on the mundane rather than the divine. As there is no official music video for the song released, the analysis will focus on the lyrics and song.

---

<sup>69</sup> Powers, Ann. Review: *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*. 1998, New York Times. URL: <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/08/23/arts/pop-jazz-crossing-back-over-from-profane-to-sacred.html> - retrieved 01.04.15

The first verse primarily deals with Hill addressing and looking back at her immensely successful career up to the point of release of *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*. The gravity of her message is stated in the first lines:

*I treat this like my thesis*

*Well written topic*

*Broken down into pieces*

*I introduce then produce*

*Words so profuse*<sup>70</sup>

Firstly, we note that Hill compares this song to her “thesis”, an analogy drawing parallel to the theses written by graduate students. From this, we can gather that she refers to the amount of work that goes into writing an academic thesis, which are to be well-written and extensive. The goal of any academic thesis should be to add to the academic canon on a subject, a further parallel which fits with the intent of Hill. Right from the start, she proclaims that we are to take her message serious, as she has much to tell and will, in a sense, educate the listener by sharing her wisdom.

Moving forward, we begin to see the duality of the message Hill offers:

*Like I’m deuce*

*Two people both equal*

*Like I’m Gemini*

*Rather Simeon*<sup>71</sup>

Hill proposes that she can be seen as two people, with “deuce” being a slang for “two.” These two people are to be considered equal. *Gemini*, also known as *the twins*, refers to the zodiac sign Hill’s born in, which further stresses the idea that she can be seen as two different yet related persons. *Simeon* is a more difficult reference to interpret, as there are several references to both religious and mundane people of the same name. One likely interpretation is that she here refers to *Simeon the God-recipient*, the “just and devout” man

---

<sup>70</sup> Hill, Lauryn – *Final Hour* on Azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/laurynhill/finalhour.html> - retrieved 01.04.15

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

of Jerusalem described in Luke 2:25-35<sup>72</sup>. In the biblical narrative Simeon receives a visit from the Holy Spirit, which told him that he would not die before he had seen Jesus Christ. Given this interpretation, we can see the reference to Simeon as a symbolic parallel to Hill, who too has found faith.

*If I jimmy on this lock I could pop it*

*You can't stop it*

*Drop it*<sup>73</sup>

This segment further adds to the weight of Hill's words; to jimmy open a lock is to force it open, hence Hill proposes that she does not even need a key, as she has found a way to open the proverbial lock on her own. This short segment mirrors what Powers described in her review; Hill's knowledge and wisdom is based more on experience than doctrine. She was not simply handed the proverbial key, but had to figure out her own way towards becoming who she is.

The remainder of the first verse continues along the same lines. In various phrasings, Hill demands respect for the work she has done, and the experience she has accumulated. She is making headlines internationally, while her critics are insignificant in comparison. We can interpret the multitudes of references to her success as Hill demanding respect, both for her achievements and from those who would criticize her. Making use of comparisons to granite and steel as incredibly hard materials, she further emphasizes that idea that she cannot be broken or hurt by the critics. While this analysis focuses on the religious aspects of the lyrics, we note that it is possible to perceive this song as both social commentary as well as commenting on gender perspectives. As these perspectives are secondary for the purpose of this analysis, we will address these throughout the analysis when appropriate.

As the first verse comes to an end, we notice a change in the lyrical content. By way of the chorus, we observe a transition from Hill talking almost exclusively about her fame and success to something more esoteric:

---

<sup>72</sup> Luke 2:25-35 – *The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>73</sup> Hill, Lauryn – *Final Hour* on Azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/laurynhill/finalhour.html> - retrieved 01.04.15

*You could get the money*

*You could get the power*

*But keep your eyes on the final hour<sup>74</sup>*

The purpose this transition serves is two-fold. Lyrically it bridges the first and second verses. But it also serves as a foreshadowing of Hill shifting her focus from her worldly success, represented here by money and power, to something more profound. What the expression “the final hour” involves at this point is not made clear, but if we combine the religious references of the first verse with the gravity of the message Hill proposes, we can see this as a tentative reference to the religious message Hill is to profess. This change in narrative continues in the beginning of the second verse:

*I’m about to change the focus from the richest to the brokest*

*I wrote this opus, to reverse the hypnosis*

*Whoever’s closest to the line gonna win it*

*You gonna fall try to ball while my team win the pennant<sup>75</sup>*

Having spent most of the first verse addressing her success and her place among the richest, Hill proclaims that she will now focus on the less fortunate. This sentiment is eerily reminiscent of what Jesus Christ professes in Matthew 20:16: “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”<sup>76</sup> Combining this with another reference from the Gospel of Matthew, we see the sentiment strengthened ever further: “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”<sup>77</sup> The biblical sentiment shared by these two excerpts is that those who are humble and of faith are the ones who will, in the words of Hill, “win the pennant.” This opposed to the ones who are not, who will “fall trying to ball.” When Hill states that she “wrote this opus to reverse the hypnosis,” we can interpret her as stating that her agenda is to have people open their eyes to the truth, rather than focusing blindly on the accumulation of worldly riches. Hill continues to address the same sentiment:

---

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Matthew 20:16 – *The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>77</sup> Matthew 5:5 – *The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*



*Make a slum lord be the tenant, give his money to kids to spend it*

*And then amend it, every law that ever prevented*

*Our survival since our arrival documented in the Bible*

*Like Moses and Aaron*

*Things gon' change, it's apparent*<sup>78</sup>

In an almost Robin Hood-esque manner, Hill proposes a role reversal which entails taking money from the rich and giving it to the poor, once again mirroring the sentiment of having the last come first. She then blends together events in world history with Biblical narratives to further cement their similarities. A likely interpretation of the second and third line in the excerpt above is that she refers to the arrival of African slaves to the Americas, and the laws which oppressed them. She draws a further parallel to the biblical narrative of Jews in captivity in Egypt, who in turn was led to freedom by the biblical characters Moses and Aaron as described in the book of Exodus.

Moving from a historical perspective to a personal one, the final lines of the second verse clarify how we are to interpret “the final hour”:

*And all the transparent gonna be seen through*

*Let God redeem you, keep your deen true*

*You can get the green too*

*Watch out what you cling to, observe how a queen do*

*And I remain calm reading the 73<sup>rd</sup> psalm,*

*Cause with all that's going on I got the world in my palm*<sup>79</sup>

With this verse it becomes clear that Hill is referring to the day of judgement within Christian doctrine. The first clear reference is that the “transparent gonna be seen through,” which refers to the idea that upon your final judgement God, being all-knowing, will be able to see through your façade and what you hide behind. Hence you need to make sure that you do what is right in life, so you can face judgement with a clear conscience.

---

<sup>78</sup> Hill, Lauryn – *Final Hour* on Azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/laurynhill/finalhour.html> - retrieved 01.04.15

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

Hill further makes clear that the way out of this conundrum is to “Let God redeem you”, clearly stating that the path to salvation is to find God and to follow the teachings. Following this, we find the curious phrase “keep your deen true.” “Deen” is likely a reference to an Arabic word, which means the way one should behave in order to live in accordance with divine law.<sup>80</sup> The use of an Arabic expression most often associated with Islam might seem curious. However, we note that this is not the only reference Hill makes to Islam during the song, as we will elaborate on later in this analysis.

The next part of the verse can be interpreted as a warning to the listener. When stating that “You can get the green too,” Hill makes the point that this is not necessarily an either-or situation. To strive for wealth and fame is not necessarily counter to living a pious life according to the *deen*, provided you have your priorities straight. Thus, if you follow Hill’s example (“observe how a queen do”) and you are careful not to focus too much on worldly achievements, you too can achieve what she has. This sentiment is further strengthened by Hill’s reference to Psalm 73. She states that she can be calm while reading it, which can be interpreted as further cementing her faith in having found her way.

Psalm 73, known as “a psalm of Asaph”<sup>81</sup> can be most simply understood as discussing a crisis of faith when faced with adversity and inequality. In the psalm, the “I” persona observes that the rich around him have it better than he. What is the point of striving to “keep my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence” when “every morning brings new punishments.”<sup>82</sup> The “I” comes to the conclusion that this is all part of God testing the faithful, as the one who keeps his faith will be better off come final judgement. When Hill states that she can remain calm while reading this, it can be interpreted as her stating that she, while being rich and famous, also has found faith. Furthermore, she proposes that she has been through a crisis of faith similar to the “I” of the psalm. The references to inequality and oppression earlier along with the psalm can lead us to interpret the verse as describing Hill moving from having a crisis of faith while observing the injustice and inequality of the world, to then having success of her own, to finding faith.

---

<sup>80</sup> «Deen» on wikipedia.org. URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D%C4%ABn> – retrieved 01.04.15

<sup>81</sup> *Psalm 73 – The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>82</sup> *Psalm 73:13-14 – The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

As the song transitions from the second to the third and final verse, we hear the chorus repeated again. While this might be a choice made solely for the lyrical structure of the song, we can also see this serving as a “reminder of the reminder;” despite all you hear, the important message of the chorus is what you need to keep in mind. It serves as a double entendre, both reminding us of the crucial part of the message and repeating it at the same time.

The third verse can also be seen as the third part of the narrative told in the song. We can interpret the first verse as discussing Hill’s worldly achievements, and the second telling of her coming to terms with her faith. The third verse then describes the present, and how the first two parts of the narrative have culminated. We observe this in several lines of the final verse:

*Now I be breaking bread sipping Manischewitz wine*

*Pay no mind party like it’s 1999 [...]*

*Now I’m a get the mozzarella like a Rockafeller*

*Still be in the church in Lalibella, singing hymns acappella*

*Whether posed in Mirabella in Couture*

*Or collecting residuals off The Score*

*I’m makin’ sure*

*I’m with the 144<sup>83</sup>*

What these lines have in common is that they put both worldly achievements and religious ones side-by-side. While Hill might be drinking expensive wine and eating fancy because of her success with the rap group *The Fugees*, she is still focused on the spiritual. We can interpret “breaking bread” as a reference to the bread of the Eucharist, with “the church in Lalibella” directly referring to the rock-hewn churches of Ethiopia. As in the first verse, we note that Hill does not perceive this as contradictory. She can relish in the joys the world has to offer, while at the same time adhering to her faith. The next line of the verse makes this

---

<sup>83</sup> Hill, Lauryn – *Final Hour* on Azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/laurynhill/finalhour.html> - retrieved 01.04.15

quite clear: “I’m making sure I’m with the 144.”<sup>84</sup> Taken into context with the previous two lines, we see Hill telling us that even though she might be enjoying the perks of her success, she still makes sure she keeps true to her faith.

The number 144’s significance can be found in the Book of Revelations, the biblical book famous for presenting the apocalyptic narrative of the New Testament. It describes in detail what will happen come the end of times. While the number can be observed several times during this text, we make particular note of two occurrences:

*2 Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: <sup>3</sup> “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.” <sup>4</sup> Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.<sup>85</sup>*

*3 And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. <sup>4</sup> These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.<sup>86</sup>*

In the context of the biblical narrative, the number signifies those of the ancient tribes of Israel who, being pure of heart and faith, will be saved come the end times. While which criteria this decision is based on is open to interpretation, we note a telling verse from Revelations 14: “No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.”<sup>87</sup> For the purpose of this analysis, we can construe this as Hill telling the listener that while she is enjoying what life has to offer, she makes sure to keep true to her faith and its tenets. This because when the “final hour” comes, this is what ultimately matters. The sentiment continues in the next two lines:

*I’ve been here before this ain’t a battle, this is war*

*Word to Boonie, I make salat like a sunni<sup>88</sup>*

By pointing out the difference between the singular battle and a continuous war, Hill stresses the fact that adhering to your faith is a continuous process, not just something you

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Revelations 7:2-4 – *The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>86</sup> Revelations 14:3-4 – *The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>87</sup> Revelations 14:5 – *The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>88</sup> Hill, Lauryn – *Final Hour* on Azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/laurynhill/finalhour.html> - retrieved 01.04.15

do in one difficult situation. This is made clear by referencing the Islamic concept of *salat*, the daily prayer and one of the *five pillars* of Islam.<sup>89</sup> The effect of using an Islamic term is two-fold: Firstly it reflects the ideal of praying often, not just when in need, mirroring the reference to war just above. Secondly, it pays tribute to the fact that Islam has had a significant impact on hip-hop culture<sup>90</sup>, which leads us to why Hill can follow this with the line “Get diplomatic immunity in every ghetto community”<sup>91</sup>. With this, Hill states that her story is universal and meaningful to every resident of any ghetto, as her story is the universal underdog story with a “rags to riches” narrative applicable to everyone, provided you work for it. Thus, she can claim respect in every ghetto community, regardless of faith.

As we come to the final part of the song, we encounter another reminder of what can be considered the overall theme of the song:

*But it ain't what you cop, it's about what you keep*

*And even if there are leaks, you can't capsize this ship*

*Cause I baptize my lips every time I take a sip*<sup>92</sup>

Playing around with the difference between the informal term *cop*, meaning to get something, as opposed to *keep*, Hill again stresses the idea that it is not about what material gains you can cop during life that matters, but rather what you can keep. If we see this in conjunction to the difference made between worldly gains and faith, we can interpret *what you keep* as a reference to wisdom and knowledge – While material goods might be taken away from you, nothing can take away your faith.

The ship in this context uses a well-known metaphor for church and faith. By stressing the fact that her ship might have leaks, we can see Hill stating that she might not be perfect. But despite this, her faith cannot be “capsized,” because she continues to believe and reaffirm her faith.

In summary, we can see that the song “Final hour” is a song about the importance of faith, and about what is actually important in life. It can be seen as the personal narrative of

---

<sup>89</sup> *Salat* on wikipedia.org, URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salat> - retrieved 01.04.15

<sup>90</sup> For further elaboration on the topic, see Opsahl, Carl Petter. *Dance to my ministry: Exploring hip-hop spirituality*. Doctoral dissertation at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo. 2012

<sup>91</sup> Hill, Lauryn – *Final Hour* on Azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/laurynhill/finalhour.html> - retrieved 01.04.15

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

Lauryn Hill, who through the telling of her story tries to impart her hard-earned knowledge of what is important on the listener. She stresses the importance of faith when faced with adversity, oppression and inequality, and warns about envy and lack of faith. With this in mind, it is quite possible to perceive this song as not only featuring a religious theme, but also one of social commentary and criticism, in particular from a gender perspective. Being a female artist of no small stature, large parts of the first verse is Hill demanding the respect she deserves for what she has accomplished. Thus we have to take into account that pupils working with this song will conclude differently with regard to message and theme, depending on their frame of reference.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

Having observed and analysed two songs from within a Christian frame of reference, we note that both artists address the eschatological concepts of judgement from two very different points of view; while *The Mercy Seat* tells the story of a condemned man awaiting his final judgement, *Final hour* reminds us to focus on how we can avoid dreading the final judgement when it eventually comes. Thus, both songs can be used to illustrate different parts of the doctrine for students. While both songs are complex in their lyrical structure, previous knowledge of eschatological doctrine acquired before and during preparation can serve to illustrate how artists deal with the difficult topics of doubt and judgement, and how doctrinal view on it differs within the same religion.

### 3 Jewish eschatology in popular music

Eschatological ideas and doctrines are very much present within Judaism. While some scholars suggest that the parts of the Hebrew bible dealing with eschatological ideas are “[...] more suggestive than concrete in its actual teaching,”<sup>93</sup> interpretations and teachings with a clear eschatological view of the world are easily found. We begin by noting two interesting quotes regarding Jewish eschatology:

*If human society is to be radically transformed, so must the persons who populate it be radically transformed.*

*[...]Jewish eschatology has always been concerned with the rewards due to righteous individuals and the punishments due to wicked ones in the other world.<sup>94</sup>*

From this we can formulate a basic understanding of what Jewish eschatology entails. The world is its current state imperfect. For this to change, man needs to change. Thus we see a focus on rewards and punishment, which intent is to reform man into something better, which in turn will lead to a better world. With regard to the analyses to follow, we need to observe two specific terms relating to Jewish eschatology.

The *moshiach* refers to the Jewish belief in a messianic character. While there is, and has been, an ongoing debate whether or not to attribute this persona to the Christian Jesus Christ, there are doctrinal references which presents a different view. For the purpose of the analyses that follow, we can summarize the Jewish idea of *moshiach* as a great political leader who, amongst other tasks, will reunite all Jews in the land of Israel, rebuild the fabled Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem and be a crucial part in what is to be the ushering in of an age of peace and prosperity for all man who adhere to God.<sup>95</sup> Having a basic understanding of this concept is crucial when analyzing and interpreting the song *King without a Crown*, which is presented below.

The second term we need to note is the idea of a future world that is to come, *olam-ha-ba*. As a general description, we note that this time to come will follow the arrival of the

---

<sup>93</sup> Walls, Jerry L. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*. 2008, Oxford University Press Inc, New York, US – page 114

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. – page 113

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. – pages 124-126

*moshiach* and the achievements which he is to perform. Thus, when all of these above-mentioned goals are achieved, the time of peace and prosperity described in several biblical and rabbinic sources can be achieved.<sup>96</sup> Understanding this ideal future becomes important when analyzing the songs *Jerusalem (Out of Darkness comes Light)* and *One day*.

For the purpose of analysis, this part of the thesis will consider three songs by the same artist as one, as they each deal with different parts of Jewish doctrine. If we combine the lyrical themes of all three we are presented with a detailed walkthrough of the Jewish doctrine of eschatology. With regard to competency aims, the following select aims from the main subject area *elective religion* illustrate what the songs can help the pupils achieve:

- *elaborate on key features in the religion and discuss and elaborate on important characteristics of the religion's ethics*
- *describe and analyse some aesthetic and ritual expressions in the religion*<sup>97</sup>

Given that the songs in question presuppose some contextual knowledge of Jewish history and history in general in order to be analyzed to their full extent, we can consider the following secondary competency aims from the main subject areas of *Theory of religion and criticism of religion* and *elective religion* as relevant depending on the frame of reference and aim of the analysis:

- *discuss and elaborate on the religion's view on other religions and views on life*
- *discuss and elaborate on cooperation and tensions between religions and views on life and reflect on the pluralist society as an ethical and philosophical challenge*
- *present, discuss and elaborate on different dimensions of religions: theory, myths and narratives, rituals, experiences, ethics, social organization, art and material expressions*<sup>98</sup>

### 3.1 Matisyahu

Matthew Paul Miller, better known by his Hebrew stage name *Matisyahu*,<sup>99</sup> is a Jewish-American rapper and reggae artist. He is known for drawing on orthodox Jewish doctrine in

---

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. – pages 124-126

<sup>97</sup> Utdanningsdirektoratet. *Religion and ethics – common core subjects in Programme for general studies (English version) – Competence aims*. 2006. URL: <http://www.udir.no/k106/REL1-01/Hele/Kompetansemaal/?lplang=eng> – retrieved 11.03.15

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> As the official artist website <http://matisyahuworld.com/> (retrieved 02.04.15) contains little or no personal information about the artist, all information about the artist himself references the artist's Wikipedia article. URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matisyahu> - retrieved 02.04.15



his music. Matisyahu has enjoyed success since 2004, with the studio album *Youth* of 2006 being of particular interest.

The Jewish influence inherent in his earliest albums is of particular interest for this thesis. Having been brought up as a re-constructionist Jew in his early years, he was affiliated with the Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidic community in New York during the time of the recording of *Youth*.<sup>100</sup> This affiliation and its influence on him can be clearly observed in his lyrics and in the themes of his songs. While his religious adherence and appearance has changed in recent years, spiritual themes still play a major part in his works.

Another clear influence can be observed in the style of singing Matisyahu is known for. Combining elements from the reggae, rap and beatboxing genres, he also draws inspiration from the singing style of the traditional Jewish cantor. Several parts of his songs bear a striking resemblance in tone to traditional Jewish chants, further strengthening the ties.

For the purpose of analysis, this thesis looks at three of Matisyahu's songs: *King without a crown* and *Jerusalem (Out of Darkness comes light)* from the album *Youth* released in 2006, and *One Day* from the album *Light* released in 2009.

### **3.1.1 "King without a crown" – On the concept of Moshiach**

The song *King without a crown* by the artist *Matisyahu* was first published on his 2004 studio album *Shake off the dust... Arise*, with a slightly shorter version published on the studio album *Youth* released in 2006.<sup>101</sup> Before we dive into the analysis proper, we should observe the frame of reference which connects this song to Jewish eschatology; the song title and the *moshiach*.

For the astute listener, both the song title as well as the reference to *moshiach* point towards a specific part of Jewish doctrine relating to the messianic character of *moshiach*. As de Lange explains:

---

<sup>100</sup> *Matisyahu* on Wikipedia.org. URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matisyahu#2001.E2.80.932007> – retrieved 02.04.15

<sup>101</sup> The major difference between these two versions is the omission of some lines of text in the 2005 version. Furthermore the official video for the song features the lyrics of the *Youth* version. Thus this analysis will feature the 2006 version of the song

*The doctrine of the Messiah is one of the most distinctive ideas of classical Judaism. Hermann Cohen called it 'the most significant and original product of the Jewish spirit.' The roots of the idea are found in the Bible, together with the term mashiah, which means 'anointed with oil', and can refer to an office holder, such as a king or high priest, who is anointed at his installation.<sup>102</sup>*

Based on these two points, interpreting *King without a crown* from an eschatological frame of reference should lead to an eligible analysis of the song as both concepts referenced related to *olam-ha-ba*, the world that is to come. As we move on to analyze the lyrics proper, this connection becomes more evident.

In the first lines of the lyrics, Matisyahu sets the stage by addressing his relationship towards God:

*You're all that I have and you're all that I need,  
Each and every day I pray to get to know you, please  
I want to be close to you, yes I'm so hungry  
You're like water from my soul when it gets thirsty<sup>103</sup>*

These first few lines conjure up an image of a deeply religious person as well as serving to illustrate the importance of God in his life. The lines do bear a striking similarity to the sentiment presented in Psalm 63, specifically the first verse:

*You, God, are my God,  
Earnestly I seek you;  
I thirst for you,  
My whole being longs for you,  
In a dry and parched land  
Where there is no water.<sup>104</sup>*

In these two sources we observe a clear religious motivation behind the song. Furthermore, the wording "in a dry and parched land" tells us that the singer possibly perceives himself in

---

<sup>102</sup> De Lange, Nicholas. *An introduction to Judaism, second edition*. 2011, Cambridge University Press, UK – page 196

<sup>103</sup> *Matisyahu – King without a crown* on Azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/matisyahu/kingwithoutacrown54153.html> - retrieved 01.02.15

<sup>104</sup> *Psalm 63:1 – The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

not only in spiritual need, but also that the mundane world he resides in is dry and parched. Whether this is an actual description or rather a spiritual one is difficult to say conclusively. It does however serve as a foreshadowing of the eschatological topics addressed in the songs *Jerusalem* and *One Day*, which will be extensively analyzed later in this chapter.

Keeping in mind both the mundane and spiritual interpretations mentioned above, we observe the subsequent part of the first verse:

*With these demons surround all around to bring me down to negativity*

*But I believe, yes I believe, I said I believe*

*I'll stand on my own two feet*

*Won't be brought down on one knee*

*Fight with all my might and get these demons to flee<sup>105</sup>*

With this, we can observe a clear reference to both a spiritual as well as a possible mundane struggle. From the spiritual perspective we note that the singer perceives “these demons” all around him, challenging his faith and trying to lead him into temptation. Yet with his faith strong and affirmed, he will not be brought to submission, poetically alluded to by the line “Won’t be brought down on one knee.” The final line of the excerpt emphasizes his faith, that he’ll fight off temptations and rid himself of his demons. All of these references clearly illustrate how the singer stays strong in his belief, despite the challenges of ever-present temptation. While the song clearly deals with this on a personal “I” level, it does also clearly reference both the spiritual struggles present in Judeo-Christian traditions, as well as mirroring the larger conflict between good and evil found within the same traditions.

If we observe the same excerpt from a mundane perspective, we can observe a possible worldly interpretation of the struggle the singer addresses. While this link is quite tentative at this point in the lyrics, it becomes much clearer as we analyze the last segment of the first verse:

---

<sup>105</sup> *Matisyahu – King without a crown* on Azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/matisyahu/kingwithoutacrown54153.html> - retrieved 01.02.15

*HaShem's rays fire blaze burn bright and I believe*

*HaShem's rays fire blaze burn bright and I believe*

*Out of darkness comes light, twilight unto the heights*

*Crown Heights burnin' up all through till twilight*<sup>106</sup>

The use of *HaShem*, a Hebrew reference to God, further emphasizes the spiritual component of the song. His light, poetically referenced with a plethora of expressions associated with strong fires (rays, blaze, burn bright) indicates that the singer sees God's light, and by extension God's message, clearly. This segment is full of metaphorical references well known within Judeo-Christian traditions, all of which allude to faith being the beacon in the dark which leads you away from temptation and darkness into the proverbial light.

The lines referencing *Crown Heights* merits attention in this regard. "Crown Heights" seem to directly reference a neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. This part of the city is well known for featuring a substantial Jewish community, as well as being the worldwide headquarters of the *Chabad-Lubavitch* Hasidic Jewish movement.<sup>107</sup> While this in itself can lead us to the tentative interpretation that Matisyahu sees the residents of Crown Heights as a beacon of faith, we can strengthen that argument further by observing that Hasidic Jews of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement have a strong belief in the coming of the Messiah.<sup>108</sup> We can likewise not ignore that fact that Matisyahu himself at the time of release of *King without a crown* was a personal adherent of the movement.<sup>109</sup> This further strengthens the idea of Crown Heights/Chabad-Lubavitch movement as an important symbol. There is also a possible reference to Exodus 13:21;

*By the day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.*<sup>110</sup>

If we draw a parallel between the lyric excerpt and the Exodus quote, as well as keeping in mind the different uses of the word "twilight," we arrive at a likely interpretation that Matisyahu sees the Jewish community of Crown Heights as a guide in both the proverbial

---

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> <http://crownheights.info/> retrieved 01.02.15 and *Crown Heights* on Wikipedia.org. URL:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown\\_Heights,\\_Brooklyn#Demographics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown_Heights,_Brooklyn#Demographics) retrieved 01.02.15

<sup>108</sup> De Lange, Nicholas. *An introduction to Judaism, second edition*. 2011, Cambridge University Press, UK – page 196

<sup>109</sup> *Matisyahu* on Wikipedia.org. URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matisyahu#2001.E2.80.932007> – retrieved 01.02.15

<sup>110</sup> *Exodus 13:21 – The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

and actual wilderness; just as the Lord guided the Jews in the desert by appearing as a pillar of fire, so does the Jews of Crown Heights in the contemporary “dry and parched land.” We can interpret the final two lines of the first verse as a confirmation of this by Matisyahu himself:

*Said thank you to my God, now I finally got it right*

*And I'll fight with all of my heart, and all of my soul, and all of my might<sup>111</sup>*

If we combine the different interpretations presented above, we can by the first verse arrive at the conclusion that Matisyahu on a mundane level has found the movement he later will adhere to. On a spiritual level it appears as if he has addressed a spiritual crisis, then describes how he's come to find his “spiritual home.” While there at this point in the lyrics have not been any strong references to eschatology, we can thus far observe two possible, yet tentative references; the parallel between Exodus 13:21 and Crown Heights, as well as Matisyahu who finally “got it right,” finding his spiritual home. Both these allegorical references can be interpreted as mundane as well as spiritual journeys, both guided by the light of God. God is seen as leading the Jews of Exodus to the Promised Land, just as God has lead Matisyahu to a movement of likeminded peers. Furthermore, the line “Crown Heights burnin' up all through till twilight” does provide us with an intriguing interpretation; if we assume an eschatological frame of reference, we can perceive this as foreshadowing the concept of olam-ha-ba. This will be further elaborated on and observed in the analyses of Jerusalem and One day later in this chapter. If one subscribes to the idea that the coming of the Messiah is close, an idea which the Chabad-Lubavitch movement adheres to, the metaphorical use of twilight as the transitional period between day and night can easily be interpreted as the singer telling us that we are on said threshold, and moving towards something new, in which the residents of Crown Heights will be our guides.

As we move on to the chorus, the basis for an eschatological frame of reference becomes clear:

---

<sup>111</sup> *Matisyahu – King without a crown* on Azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/matisyahu/kingwithoutacrown54153.html> - retrieved 01.02.15

*What's this feeling?*

*My love will rip a hole in the ceiling*

*I give myself to you from the essence of my being and I*

*Sing to my God, songs of love and healing*

*I want Moshiach now*<sup>112</sup>

The first four lines of the chorus excerpt conjure up the image of a person with a strong religious conviction. The idea of giving yourself “from the essence of my being” can, combined with the elaboration Matisyahu makes in the previous verse, be interpreted as giving your holistic self up to God; “[...] with all of my heart, all of my soul, and all of my might” does speak to a complete dedication to God. Thus we come to the defining line of the chorus: “I want Moshiach now.”

As presented earlier, the term *Moshiach* features prominently within the Chabad-Lubavitch movement as well as within Judaism in general. Referring to the website Chabad.org<sup>113</sup>, we find the following explanation as to what the concept entails:

*The Messianic Redemption will be ushered in by a person, a human leader, a descendant of Kings David and Solomon, who will reinstate the Davidic royal dynasty. According to tradition, Moshiach will be wiser than Solomon, and a prophet around the level of Moses.*<sup>114</sup>

For the purpose of this analysis, this quote serves a dual purpose. Firstly it does strengthen the previous tentative links to eschatology mentioned earlier by providing us with a direct link between the lyrics and Jewish eschatological doctrine. Secondly, it connects *King without a crown* with the two analyses that will follow later in this chapter; the coming of the Moshiach will signal the coming of the Messianic redemption and following that:

*If the person succeeded in all these endeavors, and then rebuilds the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and facilitates the ingathering of the Jews to the Land of Israel—then we are certain that he is the Moshiach.*<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> As Matisyahu at the time of *King without a crown*'s release adheres to this movement, it is deemed as a relevant source of information on the topic, as the movement's interpretation of doctrine has influenced the artist's.

<sup>114</sup> *Who is the Moshiach? - The basics* on Chabad.org. URL: [http://www.chabad.org/library/moshiach/article\\_cdo/aid/1121893/jewish/The-Basics.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/moshiach/article_cdo/aid/1121893/jewish/The-Basics.htm) retrieved 04.02.15

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

The combined analyses of all three songs will be further elaborated on in the conclusion of this chapter. For now, we can observe that Matisyahu, having found his faith in God, wishes that the Messianic redemption, with all that which it entails, can be swiftly brought to fruition.

As we move on to the second verse of the song, we see Matisyahu seemingly addressing listeners directly, speaking about who one should dedicate oneself to God. What the lyrics now seem to address is that one should put faith in God, and dedicate oneself wholly to the faith, and how this can help the listener. Observe:

*Strippin' away the layers and reveal your soul*

*Got to give yourself up and then you become whole*

*You're a slave to yourself and you don't even know<sup>116</sup>*

From these lines we can infer that in order to live life to the fullest; you have to dedicate yourself to the belief in God. Using the term “slave,” an obviously derogative term, gives the impression that if you focus on yourself, you yourself cannot become whole. For that, faith in God is needed. This sentiment is further strengthened by observing the next few lines:

*If you're trying to stay high, bound to stay low*

*You want God but you can't deflate your ego*

*If you're already there, then there's nowhere to go*

*If your cup is already full, then it's bound to overflow<sup>117</sup>*

While not explicitly used, this part of the verse does call the term *pride* to mind. This interpretation is made stronger by comparing the excerpt above with Proverbs 16:18, which seems to address a similar issue: “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”<sup>118</sup> If you try to achieve greatness on your own, not thinking that you need any help, you're bound to never reach your full potential. You might want God by your side, but unless you can “deflate your ego,” meaning come to terms with your own ego and accepting God's help, it will not happen. The final two lines of the excerpt address the same dilemma from a

---

<sup>116</sup> Matisyahu – King without a crown on Azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/matisyahu/kingwithoutacrown54153.html> - retrieved 01.02.15

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Proverbs 16:18 – The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)

different perspective; if you think you have reached your full potential, then there's no room for improvement. Likewise, if you think you have everything made then something more, in this case God's presence in your life will be too much. Accepting that you're not perfect and complete without faith in God is, according to Matisyahu, the first step on the path to improvement. He explicitly states this in the following two lines of verse:

*If you're drowning in the waters and you can't stay afloat*

*Ask HaShem for mercy, and he'll throw you a rope*<sup>119</sup>

At this point we find our first reference to the song title, with the line "Like a king without a crown, you keep falling down."<sup>120</sup> Given the understanding of this expression as presented by de Lange earlier in this analysis, we are led to the likely interpretation that this line of verse has to be interpreted metaphorically: While a king without a crown can refer to an anointed leader from Jewish history, it should in this context be interpreted as one who has not been anointed, and thus not reached his full potential. This can also be interpreted in relation to the topic of pride addressed earlier in the verse; you might consider yourself king, but you will fall unless you've been anointed by God. The culmination of this verse leads us back to the metaphorical beacons of light mentioned in the first verse: "Makin' room for his love and a fire gonna blaze."<sup>121</sup> If you accept God into your life, you will have the beacon of light to guide you through.

As we come to the third and final verse of the song, we can interpret Matisyahu as coming to a conclusion on his lesson on how you should live according to God. First, we observe how the Moshiach is to lead the Jewish people:

*During the Messianic Era, the Moshiach will serve a dual role. He will be a monarch, ruling over all of humanity with kindness and justice, and upholding the law of the Torah— 613 commandments for the Jews, and seven for the non-jews. He will also be the ultimate teacher, the conduit for the deepest and most profound dimensions of the Torah which will then be revealed by G-d*<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>119</sup> *Matisyahu – King without a crown* on Azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/matisyahu/kingwithoutacrown54153.html> - retrieved 01.02.15

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> *Who is the Moshiach? - The basics* on Chabad.org. URL: [http://www.chabad.org/library/moshiach/article\\_cdo/aid/1121893/jewish/The-Basics.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/moshiach/article_cdo/aid/1121893/jewish/The-Basics.htm) retrieved 04.02.15



The dual role of the Moshiach is both to lead and to teach the people about the Torah. Comparing this to the third verse, there are some striking similarities. Firstly, the first two lines can be interpreted as a paraphrasing of Psalm 121:1-2 (Psalm on the left, Matisyahu's lyrics on the right):

<b>121:1</b> <i>I lift up my eyes to the mountains – where does my help come from?</i>	<i>See I lift up my eyes, Where my help come from</i>
<b>121:2</b> <i>My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.</i> <sup>123</sup>	<i>And I seen it circling around from the mountain Thunder!</i> <sup>124</sup>

This excerpt seems to reiterate the sentiment of the previous verse, but note the change from “the mountains” plural in the psalm to “the mountain” singular in Matisyahu’s version. This can be interpreted as a reference to Mount Sinai, where Moses presented the Ten Commandments from God to the Jews in Exodus 20:1-17.<sup>125</sup> These God-given laws are fundamental in understanding how to live as a Jew. When we also note that Chabad.org states that the Moshiach will be “a prophet around the level of Moses” the parallel becomes quite clear; Matisyahu sees the hopefully imminent coming of the Moshiach as a pivotal moment for the Jewish diaspora.

The final excerpt of the lyrics which needs to be addressed is the following: “You keep my mind at ease and my soul at rest. You’re not vexed.”<sup>126</sup> While similar in sentiment to several of the previous excerpts, this line tells us something quite important about Matisyahu’s faith. His faith in God gives him comfort in life. Furthermore, the fact that he addresses God directly (“You”) speaks to his belief that he, while previously uncertain, now has found the right path and the faith of God. God is described as “not vexed,” which we can take as a reference to God being forgiving of those who waiver in their faith, as long as they return to the pious path.

In summary, we can note that *King without a crown* does present clear religious and eschatological component in its lyrics. But putting the eschatological frame of reference

---

<sup>123</sup> Psalm 121:1-2 – *The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>124</sup> Matisyahu – *King without a crown* on Azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/matisyahu/kingwithoutacrown54153.html> - retrieved 01.02.15

<sup>125</sup> Exodus 20:1-17 – *The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>126</sup> Matisyahu – *King without a crown* on Azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/matisyahu/kingwithoutacrown54153.html> - retrieved 01.02.15

aside, is there a possible non-religious interpretation of the message as well? If we look past the religious language of the analysis, there does seem to be a worldly call by Matisyahu for listeners to strive to be the best that they can ever be. If we, in order to realise our full potential, accept that we need inspiration and support, we can become better people. While doing a non-religious interpretation of this song on its own might provide a tentative interpretation at best, this changes when the song is addressed in relation to the songs *Jerusalem* and *One day*, analyses of which will follow in this chapter.

### **3.1.2 «Jerusalem (Out of Darkness comes light)» - Regarding the role of Jerusalem in Jewish identity and eschatology**

To say that Jerusalem and Israel play an important part in Jewish thought would be an understatement. To address the important role these play as well as how it relates to Jewish eschatology, we will look at the song *Jerusalem (Out of Darkness comes light)* by Matisyahu of the album *Youth* (2006)<sup>127</sup>. Before we address the analysis proper, we need to note that this particular analysis presents us with an additional complication when considered for use in the classroom. As it addresses the city of Jerusalem, we need to be aware of the effect this can have on a classroom. Jerusalem, being a key issue in the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict, is a topic which can be potentially volatile, depending on the pupils in the group and their political inclinations and associations. Thus, it is crucial that the frame of reference within which this song is to be analyzed is made clear for the pupils before they begin working with it. This analysis makes use of a mostly religious frame of reference, while presenting some elements and interpretations which can be used as a starting point for a politically aimed analysis if that is the intent.

Analyzing this song presents us with a particular challenge. If we consider the song lyrics in isolation, it will most likely lead to a narrower, religion-focused interpretation. However, if seen in conjunction with the official music video it is likely to lead to a wider, more all-encompassing interpretation. This will serve to illustrate how, when expanding the frame of

---

<sup>127</sup> There are two versions of the track, the single-released *Jerusalem (Out of Darkness comes light)* which also has an official music video, and the shorter version simply titled *Jerusalem*, recorded over a reggae-dancehall rhythm. This analysis, as it takes into account the music video, is based on the *Out of Darkness comes light* version.

reference of the analysis, the topic of the lyrics change from solely referencing Jewish doctrine to a more inclusive interpretation given the topics covered in the music video.

The track *Jerusalem (Out of Darkness comes light)*, in short, addresses the love and longing Jews have for the city of Jerusalem, and by extension the nation of Israel. In addition, it deals with the persecution of Jews over the course of history. Lyrically, it is inspired by one of the most well-known biblical psalms, namely Psalm 137. In particular, *Jerusalem's* chorus is a paraphrasing of the following passage (original psalm on the left, Matisyahu's version on the right):

**137:5** *If I forget you, Jerusalem  
may my right hand forget its skill!*

**137:6** *May my tongue cling to the roof of my  
mouth,  
if I do not remember you,<sup>128</sup>*

*Jerusalem, if I forget you, fire not gonna come  
from me tongue.*

*Jerusalem, if I forget you,  
let my right hand forget what it's supposed to  
do.<sup>129</sup>*

The chorus brings to mind the exalted position the city of Jerusalem and Israel ("*The dwelling of his Majesty*")<sup>130</sup> in the Jewish faith. Both the lines "Fire not gonna come from me tongue" and "let my right hand forget what it's supposed to do" can be interpreted as losing yourself and your abilities if you chose to abandon Jerusalem, an intrinsic part of the Jewish identity. In the context of a rapper/singer especially, the idea of losing your ability to "spit fire" is a grave prospect indeed. Abandoning Jerusalem can, in this context, be considered to be tantamount to losing yourself. If we observe the preceding verses of psalm 137 as well, we see an added perspective which preempts the following verses of the song:

**137:3** *for there our captors asked us for songs,*

*our tormentors demanded songs of joy;*

*They said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"*

**137:4** *How can we sing the songs of the LORD*

---

<sup>128</sup> *Psalm 137:5-6 – The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>129</sup> *Matisyahu – Jerusalem* on Letssingit.com. URL: <http://artists.letssingit.com/matisyahu-lyrics-jerusalem-tf4lmg> - retrieved 07.02.15

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

*while in a foreign land?*<sup>131</sup>

If we equate Zion with the city of Jerusalem, we see how important the city is. How can the captors (in this case Babylonians) demand that the captives (Jews) should sing songs of joy, when the source of their joy (Zion/Jerusalem) is kept from them? The verse 137:4 also preempts the sentiment of the Jewish diaspora to come, and can be perceived as holding true to this day. Until Jerusalem is wholly Jewish again, how can there be joy?

The link to the Jewish diaspora becomes evident as we observe the first verse of the song:

*In the ancient days, we will return with no delay*

*Picking up the bounty and the spoils on our way*<sup>132</sup>

The wording of this segment can lead to quite a few different interpretations, one of which is that this segment refers to the Jews returning to Jerusalem as “victorious,” having picked up what they have learned and acquired along the way. As the “reacquiring” of Jerusalem is part of Jewish eschatology, there does seem to be a sentiment that the manifest destiny of the Jews is to at some point once again control Jerusalem. The diaspora is further referred to in the following lines of verse:

*We’ve been traveling from state to state*

*And them don’t understand what they say*

*3000 years with no place to be*<sup>133</sup>

This reference can be understood to be a straight-forward summary of Jewish diaspora history. It also refers to the Hebrew language which the Jews brought with them while traveling to places where either they could not understand the native residents or the native residents could not understand them.

Moving from the mundane to the spiritual, Matisyahu makes a strong statement about the importance of Jerusalem within the Jewish faith;

---

<sup>131</sup> *Psalm 137:3-4 – The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>132</sup> *Matisyahu – Jerusalem* on Letssingit.com. URL: <http://artists.letssingit.com/matisyahu-lyrics-jerusalem-tf4lmgf> - retrieved 07.02.15

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

*They want me to give up my milk and honey*

*Don't you see, it's not about the land or the sea*

*Not the country but the dwelling of his majesty<sup>134</sup>*

This short segment contains two clear Bible references. In Exodus 3:8, where God appears to Moses as the burning bush, we find the following wording used to describe the Promised land of the Jews:

*3:8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey<sup>135</sup>*

While the *milk and honey* does seem to be an allegorical reference to a bountiful land, the more important sentiment to note is that God himself (“I” in the above excerpt) appeared to Moses as the burning bush, telling him that he were to bring them to the land in question. Thus, we see an example of the divine-given right of the Jewish people to the land of what was to become Israel. Matisyahu takes this a step further by addressing those who might think Jews have no claim to the land in question:

*Don't you see, it's not about the land or the sea*

*Not the country but the dwelling of his Majesty<sup>136</sup>*

At this point, it is clear that in the view of Matisyahu, we are not to perceive Israel as just a nation, but rather as “*the dwelling of his Majesty,*” or God. Taking into account the song’s name, this might be a reference to the Temple at Temple mount, or to the Jewish concept of *Shekinah*, a Hebrew expression used to denote the place where the divine presence of God resides. The sentiment of Jerusalem and Israel being something more than earthly real estate is quite strong in the lyrics.

Moving on to the second verse of the song, we observe the first line as further elaborating on the religious importance of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem:

*Rebuild the temple and the crown of glory<sup>137</sup>*

---

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Exodus 3:8 - *The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>136</sup> Matisyahu – *Jerusalem* on Letssingit.com. URL: <http://artists.letssingit.com/matisyahu-lyrics-jerusalem-tf4lmgf> - retrieved 07.02.15

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

The temple in this context is a clear reference to the Temple at Temple Mount, further cementing the eschatological frame of reference within which this analysis works. The expression *Crown of Glory* is referenced several times in the bible<sup>138</sup>. If seen in conjunction with the previous analysis of *King without a crown*, we can see this as a foreshadowing of the Moshiach's role within Jewish eschatology; as a regent who, with the grace of God, will lead the people of the world into a new age.

Diverging from the tendency of these analyses to analyze shorter segments of the song lyrics on their own, we will observe the remainder of the second verse as a whole:

*Years gone by, about sixty*

*We were burned in the oven in this century*

*And the gas tried to choke, but it couldn't choke me*

*I will not lie down, and will not fall asleep*

*And they come overseas, yes they're trying to be free*

*Erase the demons out of our memory*

*Change your name and your identity*

*Afraid of the truth and our dark history*

*Why is everybody always chasing we*

*Cut off the roots from your family tree*

*Don't you know that's not the way to be*<sup>139</sup>

While the first verse of the song features a clear religious component, the topic inherent in the second verse seems to address *identity*. Matisyahu clearly references the Holocaust and how it affected Jews. Yet despite the persecution faced by Jews, he will not submit (“I will not lie down, and will not fall asleep.”) Furthermore, he then seems to address a certain group of Jews, specifically those who “came overseas,” fleeing persecution. The following

---

<sup>138</sup> For instance in Proverbs 4:9, Proverbs 16:31, Isaiah 28:5 and Isaiah 62:3. All in *The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV)*, (1973/2011)

<sup>139</sup> Matisyahu – Jerusalem on Letssingit.com. URL: <http://artists.letssingit.com/matisyahu-lyrics-jerusalem-tf4lmg> - retrieved 07.02.15

lines of verse can be interpreted as a call for those who tried to flee persecution by leaving their “Jewishness” behind; changing names to fit in, trying to hide their heritage and fearing their dark history. The final line clearly states that it is “not the way to be,” which if paraphrased as not the way one should have to live, can be interpreted as Matisyahu calling for those who have fled from their heritage to return to the proverbial fold. If seen within the larger frame of reference of these analyses, this can easily be seen as Matisyahu calling for Jews to remember who they are, and to return to their Jewish ways yet again. This sentiment continues onto the third verse:

*Caught up in these ways, and the world's gone craze*

*Don't you know it's just a phase*

*Case of Simon says<sup>140</sup>*

“These ways,” referring back to the previous verse, states that because some have lost their way, the world has taken a turn for the worse. This can be seen as heavily religious influenced sentiment if seen in context with the line “Case of Simon says.” *Simon says* is a popular kid’s game wherein the goal is for the participants of the game to follow the instructions of the leader, “Simon.” For such a short line in the lyrics, the impact is quite strong. Matisyahu is equating Jews to the participants of a game of Simon says, literally stating that they are only doing what someone else is telling them to do, blindly following instructions. To Matisyahu, this goes counter to what Jews should do. After all, “this is just a phase.” This statement can be interpreted as referencing the Jewish diaspora, and their eventual return to Jerusalem, which in of itself further refers to the Jewish eschatological belief of Jerusalem being rebuilt by the Moshiach as part of the transition towards *olam-ha-ba*. Matisyahu continues along this train of thought by stating that:

*If I forget the truth then my words won't penetrate*

*Babylon burning in the place, can't see through the haze*

*Chop down all of them dirty ways*

*That's the price that you pay for selling lies to the youth*

*No way, not ok, oh no way, not ok, hey<sup>141</sup>*

---

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

“The truth” Matisyahu mentions refers back to the chorus, and thus to the importance of not forgetting the importance of Jerusalem. The inclusion of Babylon in the lyrics calls to mind the period where Jews were the captives of the Babylonians, a period when Jews were kept from Jerusalem. While this in of itself merits the mention of Babylon, the fact that it is burning is a clear reference to the faith of the biblical city, as mentioned in several books of both the Hebrew bible and the New Testament<sup>142</sup>. In the context of this song, Babylon can be seen as a stand-in for all who would keep Jews from Jerusalem. This interpretation is further strengthened by the line “that’s the price that you pay for selling lies to the youth” which can be seen as referencing both the fate of Babylon, but also by extension the fate of all who would strive to keep Jews from their rightful place in Jerusalem. As such, Matisyahu could be stating that the manifest destiny of the Jews is to once again control Jerusalem, and that those who would stand in their way or try to lead them astray will face consequences, whether figuratively or literally, of biblical proportions.

The final part of the song is a line sampled and paraphrased from Matthew Wilder’s song “Break my stride”<sup>143</sup>

*Ain’t no one gonna break my stride*

*Ain’t no one that can hold me down*

*Oh no, I got to keep on moving*<sup>144</sup>

With his paraphrasing of this sample, Matisyahu seems to stress the fact that no one (i.e. oppressors) can “hold me down.” As such, despite historical events, one must move on.

Up until this point, this analysis has focused on making use of a Jewish-religious frame of reference when analyzing. With that in mind, we can easily conclude that this song addresses the importance of Jerusalem in Jewish doctrine and nothing else. While this in of itself is not wrong, the introduction to this analysis hinted at how the song might fit into a wider context depending on which frame of reference is used when analyzing. With that in

---

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> For instance in *Revelations 18 – The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>143</sup> *Matthew Wilder – Break my stride* on Oldielyrics.com URL: [http://www.aldielyrics.com/lyrics/matthew\\_wilder/break\\_my\\_stride.html](http://www.aldielyrics.com/lyrics/matthew_wilder/break_my_stride.html) retrieved 07.02.15

<sup>144</sup> *Matisyahu – Jerusalem* on Letssingit.com. URL: <http://artists.letssingit.com/matisyahu-lyrics-jerusalem-tf4lmgf> - retrieved 07.02.15



mind, this analysis will now take the official music video<sup>145</sup> into account when explaining how the interpretation of this song changes when observed from a different analytical perspective.

In the introduction to this analysis we noted that there are two different versions of the Jerusalem song published; the album version and the single version with the accompanying official music video as well as the phrase “Out of Darkness comes light” added to the title. The difference between these two versions merits attention, therefore the video is worthy of a separate analysis.

Firstly, we can note that the analysis so far has been based on the single version. But, as there is no difference between the album and single versions with regard to the lyrics, the analysis done is just as apt for either version. So what changes when we include the extended title and the music video?

“Out of Darkness comes light” mimics the sentiment in Isaiah 8:19, aptly titled “The Darkness turns to Light.”<sup>146</sup> The link is further strengthened by observing Isaiah 9:2-3 specifically:

*9:2 The people walking in darkness*

*have seen a great light;*

*on those living in the land of deep darkness*

*a light has dawned*

*9:3 You have enlarged the nation*

*and increased their joy<sup>147</sup>*

The addition of “out of darkness comes light” to the title of the song brings this bible verse into play. The sentiment addresses seems to mimic several well-known allegories Matisyahu frequently makes use of; the believers being a beacon of light in a dark world and God being your guiding light as addressed in *King without a crown*. Likewise, we cannot ignore the

---

<sup>145</sup> Matisyahu – Jerusalem (Out of Darkness comes Light) on youtube.com – URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8ULw0Zgaw> – retrieved 07.02.15

<sup>146</sup> *Isaiah 8:19 (Title) – The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>147</sup> *Isaiah 9:2-3 – The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

transitional imagery inherent in the phrase. As we move from darkness to the light, we move from despair to joy, as evident in Isaiah 9:3. This image of transition also mimics several sentiments used by Matisyahu in both *King without a crown* on a personal level, as well as in the upcoming *One day* on the macro level.

Taking the official music video into account, we observe both of the above-mentioned interpretations quite clearly. While the background, which we can equate to the world of today, is pitch black, there are several sources of light; Matisyahu himself, the other people, and the “image wall” they create out of their memories. The “image wall” symbolism will be thoroughly explored below; we can at this point note that the light imagery tells us that the light or hope in this dark world stems from the people who reside in it. The same imagery features prominently in *One Day*, which will be discussed in detail below.

A point that speaks towards an inclusive interpretation of the lyrics can be seen in the official music video<sup>148</sup>. During the course of the video, we see several people from various backgrounds observing images of people with reverence, either with joy or sorrow. These images slowly come together to form a “wall” where people gather to reminisce of those dear to them. While some of the images clearly refer to Jews, some of the images refer to other historical events, with oppression being the common denominator. For example, an image of Martin Luther King Jr. refers to the Civil Rights Movement in the US, and by proxy the oppression of African-Americans.

The “image wall” itself merits attention. As people gather at the “wall of memories,” the video shows Matisyahu at the wall, calling out the lyrics while pounding the wall, in a style eerily reminiscent of Jews praying at the Western Wall (i.e. “Wailing Wall”) of the Temple in Jerusalem. This reference is further emphasized by Matisyahu himself adding a picture of the actual “Wailing Wall” to the image wall. While the lyrical crescendo at this point serves to emphasize the lyrics, the religious image reference is clear. If one considers the different people in the scene alongside Matisyahu’s “wailing” at the wall, it can be interpreted as if everyone who has suffered under the yoke of oppression should embrace their history, and use it to move on.

---

<sup>148</sup> Matisyahu – Jerusalem (Out of Darkness comes Light) – URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8ULlw0Zgaw> – retrieved 07.02.15

The fact that people of different ethnicities and religions other than Jews add to the symbolic wall does provide us with another interesting possible interpretation. In the video, these people are literally helping Matisyahu, who in this context is a representative of the Jews, rebuild a metaphorical Temple, adding their own memories to his. This detail, while subtle, can be interpreted as being of great significance. Firstly, we can see their participation as the symbolic parallel mentioned above. Secondly, if we interpret it using an eschatological frame of reference, there is a striking reference to the concept of *olam-ha-ba*, the world that is to come in Jewish eschatology. While this concept will be thoroughly examined later in this chapter when analyzing the song *One Day*, we can now note that within Jewish eschatology, the messianic leader that is to come is to be a leader of not only the Jews, but also the remainder of the world. Furthermore, the God of Israel will be recognized as the one true God by all nations of the world, and a new era of peace and prosperity is to come. If we take this into account, the symbolism of the people adding to the image wall in the video can be interpreted as a call for all the people of the world to help rebuild not just a metaphorical temple, but the actual one. Rebuilding the Temple is part of what needs to happen before mankind can transition into the next peaceful era, hence it is in the interest of all to help make this happen. In other words, the world should support Jews in fulfilling their manifest destiny of reclaiming Jerusalem, as the end result is, according to Jewish eschatology, better for all.

While it is clearly possible to see this as a through-and-through “Jewish” song, the imagery and lyrics also lend credence to a more all-encompassing interpretation. In a sense, all those who have suffered from oppression have their “Jerusalem,” their dream which at one point was denied to them, but for which they still must strive to achieve. The benefits of including inclusive interpretations regarding people of different creeds and ethnicities in an analysis of what is apparently a song relating to Jewish thought and doctrine might be tentative at this point, it has to be considered in relation to how Jewish eschatology describes the *olam ha-ba*, the world that is to come. This part of Jewish doctrine will be described more thoroughly below, when analyzing the song *One Day*.

### 3.1.3 “One Day” – On *olam ha-ba*, the “world to come”

*Olam ha-ba*, translated as the “world to come” in English is a prevalent thought throughout Jewish eschatology. While the interpretations of what this concept specifically entails vary depending on the specific religious movements within Judaism, there are certain aspects shared. In the book of Isaiah, the follow passages illustrate serve to illustrate:

*He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples.*

*They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.*

*Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.*<sup>149</sup>

Furthermore, the book of Isaiah makes use of several allegorical statements to enforce the peaceful nature inherent in the “world to come:”

*The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat,*

*The calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.*<sup>150</sup>

From this alone, we can deduce that *olam ha-ba* can be described a peaceful era for all humanity; former enemies will cease fighting, and work together towards a peaceful coexistence.

For the purpose of analyzing *One Day*, it is important to consider the frame of reference of the analysis. Given that the song lyrics themselves, as opposed to *King without a crown* and *Jerusalem*, do not reference Judaism directly, it becomes important to not attribute opinion to the artist. Thusly, it is important to note that the following analysis is a possible interpretation of the lyrics, when they are presented in context with its official music video as well as the previous works of the artist.

In an interview with the online music magazine spinner.com (now AOLradio), Matisyahu stated regarding *One Day* that “One Day is the song I’ve been wanting to make since I started my career. It’s an anthem of hope with a big beat, the kind of song that makes you bob your head and open your heart at the same time.” This is eerily reminiscent of the descriptions of *olam-ha-ba* found in various scripture, in that it can be considered as describing a state where people come together in the hope of a better world, whether it is a

---

<sup>149</sup> Isaiah 2:4 – *The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), 1973/2011*

<sup>150</sup> Isaiah 11:6 – *The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), 1973/2011*

religious state such as *olam-ha-ba* or simply the state of transcendence inherent in a concert.

Given that we can describe the time of *olam-ha-ba* as a peaceful state of coexistence and cooperation, how does Matisyahu's song allude to this? Firstly, observe the second verse:

*Sometimes in my tears I drown  
But I never let it get me down  
So when negativity surrounds  
I know someday it'll all turn around because...*<sup>151</sup>

At this point, we cannot conclude much more than Matisyahu is certain that the state of the world at some point will change to the better. In the third verse, he elaborates:

*All my life I been waitin' for  
I been prayin' for, for the people to say  
That we don't want to fight no more  
They'll be no more wars  
And our children will play, one day*<sup>152</sup>

At this point, the references to religious doctrines become clearer. Matisyahu states that there will be no more fighting. This is a clear reference to Isaiah 2:4, where the weapons of war are made into plowshares and nations essentially declare peace in modern terms. Furthermore, we can consider the line "*and our children will play*" as a reference to Isaiah 11:6; while the wording in this bible verse is clearly allegorical, a less poetic interpretation can be that people of different nations and ethnicities now will be able to live together in harmony. This interpretation is further strengthened when taking the official music video of *One Day* into account, which will be addressed later in the analysis.

Matisyahu's final verse, in addition to being the end of the song, fits with the proposed eschatological theme of the song. Consider:

*One day this all will change  
Treat people the same  
Stop with the violence down with the hate*

---

<sup>151</sup> Matisyahu – *One day* on Songlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.songlyrics.com/matisyahu/one-day-lyrics/> - retrieved 08.02.15

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

*One day we'll all be free and proud  
To be under the same sun  
Singing songs of freedom like...*<sup>153</sup>

Given a religious interpretation, it is possible to see the line “*singing songs of freedom*” as reference to Psalm 137, specifically the first part:

*There on the poplars  
we hung our harps,  
for there our captors asked us for songs,  
our tormentors demanded songs of joy;  
they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”  
How can we sing the songs of the LORD  
while in a foreign land?*<sup>154</sup>

Psalm 137 clearly refers to the Jewish people during the period of Babylonian slavery. However, as we move on to a more all-encompassing interpretation of the song, Matisyahu seems to indirectly pose the listener a question: If we’re looking forward to a time when all will be “*free and proud [...] singing songs of freedom,*” can this be achieved while some, Jews or non-Jews still are, literally or figuratively, enslaved?

So far, this analysis has considered the lyrics of *One Day* from a religious frame of reference. As with the previously analyzed *King without a crown* and *Jerusalem*, it becomes clear that is quite possible to do an analysis of *One day* as a song referencing solely Jews. However, in contrast to *Jerusalem*, this poses several questions regarding the lyrics, as well as the doctrinal reference to *olam-ha-ba*, which, as demonstrated above, does require an inclusive interpretation. At this point, taking the official music video of *One day* into account demonstrates how we, by expanding our frame of reference for the analysis, will arrive at a more likely, all-encompassing interpretation of the song.

In the official music video<sup>155</sup> we see several people putting up posters of Matisyahu across what is likely an American city, based on the American flag on the building visible at the 1:27 mark as well as the English language road signs visible throughout the video. The city in

---

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Psalm 137 – *The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>155</sup> Matisyahu – *One day* on youtube.com – URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRmBChQzPs> – retrieved 24.10.14

question is likely New York, given Matisyahu's connection to the Crown Heights district as well as the major Jewish presence there as mentioned in the analysis of *King without a crown*. Another likely reason for this choice could be the apparent multitude of people of different ethnic and national origins who make the metropolis their home, which fits with the theme of the song.

In the video, which is almost exclusively filmed in monochrome, features people of different ethnic origins all moving around the city, putting up "live posters" of Matisyahu singing the lyrics of *One Day*. At this point, we can already conclude that the symbolism behind this is that this is a message that transcends ethnic or national origins, a message that is from, and for, man as a whole. This interpretation neatly adheres to the concept of *olam-ha-ba*, where we see all peoples of the world coming together in peace. Furthermore, this interpretation is strengthened by the observation that as the music video progresses, several of the people who are putting up posters appear in the posters themselves, all performing the same symbolic gesture of raising their hand with one finger raised towards the sky as Matisyahu does. From this, we can construe that Matisyahu intends for his message to be not only his (or possibly by extension, Jewish), but a common goal for humanity that can only be achieved together as a whole. This interpretation can be strengthened further by observing the mood of the video's participants throughout. As the video begins, they can be seen on a train heading towards the city, in what can only be described as a somber mood. As the video progresses, we see them smiling more and more as they "spread the message", which finally culminates with them all sitting together on a bench in the final scene, smiling. This almost banal change serves to further cement the symbolic message inherent in the lyrics; if we all can agree to work together towards a common goal, we can arrive at a time of peaceful coexistence.

The video is, as mentioned earlier, almost exclusively filmed in monochrome black and white. The notable exceptions to this is the posters of Matisyahu, as well as the video participants, that are put up across town, as well as the occasional flicker of color in the video proper. These minor details are not without their symbolic significance, and bear a striking resemblance to the imagery utilized in the *Jerusalem* music video. As the monochrome coloration of the video can be interpreted as symbolizing a bleak world where there's conflict and suffering, the occasional flicker of light and color can just as easily be

interpreted as symbolic as glimmers of hope. If considered in relation to the doctrine surrounding *olam-ha-ba*, there are striking similarities between the narratives in how the world will transition from bad to better. The fact that the video proper does not change from monochrome black and white to full color at any point further signifies that the world, while there are glimmers of hope here and there, has not yet transitioned from the earthly *olam ha'zez* ("this world") to *olam-ha-ba* ("the world to come").

The posters in the video also need to be considered in this regard. Firstly, they are not static posters in the common sense, but posters with live images of Matisyahu and others. This can be interpreted as stating that the message is not something static, something that is old, but rather a living message that symbolizes change. While it is quite possible to interpret this as critique of old doctrines and as a call for "a new message," there's not enough evidence in the video for this to be definitive. What we can interpret this as, is that the message "of old" is still alive and well even in a new age

The colouration of the posters is significant, especially in contrast to the monochrome "world" of the video. For the first part of the video, the posters of Matisyahu appear in the same monochrome colours as the rest of the video. This, however, changes at the 0:47 mark, which corresponds with the lyrics transitioning from the second to the third verse. Consider the first two verses:

*Sometimes I lay under the moon  
And I thank God I'm breathin'  
Then I pray don't take me soon  
'Cause I am here for a reason*

*Sometimes in my tears I drown  
But I never let it get me down  
So when negativity surrounds  
I know someday it'll all turn around because<sup>156</sup>*

At this point, Matisyahu is addressing the state of the world as is. The world is fraught with suffering ("*sometimes in my tears I drown*"), yet he thanks God he's still here, as there still is work to be done ("*'Cause I am here for a reason.*") What's to be done can be interpreted as

---

<sup>156</sup> Matisyahu – *One day* on Songlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.songlyrics.com/matisyahu/one-day-lyrics/> - retrieved 08.02.15



him spreading the message of hope inherent in his song, specifically referenced in the final line of the second verse. (“*I know someday it’ll all turn around because.*”). At this point, the tone of the song changes with the vocals entering a crescendo, as well as the first appearance of drums in the music. Both changes serve to emphasize a transition, which is also clearly seen in the lyrics as we come to the chorus:

*All my life I been waitin' for  
I been prayin' for, for the people to say  
That we don't want to fight no more  
They'll be no more wars  
And our children will play, one day  
One day, one day, one day... (x2)<sup>157</sup>*

The change in the music and vocals at this point, combined with the sudden addition of color to the posters of Matisyahu all combine to signify the transition from focusing on the present and negative state of the world, to the future and hopeful view the doctrine of *olam-ha-ba* holds for the world.

In summary, we can observe that the song *One day* can easily be interpreted as a song with a positive view on the future. Drawing on allusions and references to scripture, Matisyahu present the idea of a future world where peace and prosperity is to be had by all who choose to work towards it.

### **3.2 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have observed three songs of the Jewish artist Matisyahu. While they on their own can be interpreted as presenting different parts of the Jewish eschatological doctrine, they shine when observed together. Seen as parts of a whole, they present us with a comprehensive walkthrough of the concepts of *moshiach*, the importance of Jerusalem and *olam-ha-ba*, which together provides us with an insight into Jewish eschatology. One crucial element which differentiates Jewish eschatology from others is the inclusion of people of other faiths in their future “perfect” world. As noted by author David Novak:

---

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

*If any human being can only be positively related to God within Judaism, which is sufficient enough to get him or her a portion in the world to come, then the difference between a Jew and a gentile – irrespective of his or her gentile religion – is indeed one of kind.*<sup>158</sup>

By observing this statement, we can understand Jewish eschatology as surprisingly inclusive compared to others, as observed in the analysis of *One day*. Understanding these elements and others offers up several angles of comparison, which will be further elaborated on in the didactics chapter of this thesis.

---

<sup>158</sup> Walls, Jerry L. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*. 2008, Oxford University Press Inc, New York, US – pages 120

## 4 Criticism of religion and eschatology

In a thesis which proposes the use of popular music as a tool for teaching religion, the inclusion of analyses which focus on being critical of religion might come across as a bit counter-intuitive. In order to further elaborate on the reason for including the two following analyses, we observe the official description of the main subject area *Theory of religion and criticism of religion*, specifically the part directly relating to criticism of religion:

*The main subject area introduces analytical tools as the basis for a holistic and balanced understanding of religions. The main subject area also focuses on fundamental issues arising from the role of religions in society.*<sup>159</sup>

Based on this excerpt, we can understand that the overlying reason for the inclusion of this topic in the subject is to provide pupils with a “holistic and balanced understanding of religions,” which also should include the ability to address it from a critical point of view. The main subject area also recognizes that there “fundamental issues arising from the role of religions in society,” which the pupils are to be able to address and discuss on. Thus it is the argument of this thesis that in order to present the viability of popular music analysis within the field of religion, we need to observe its viability across as large a possible part of the curriculum. This presents us with a challenge when comparing the analytical material to that which is used when analyzing songs previously in this thesis; while songs such as *Mercy Seat* and *One day* address what are clearly eschatological topics from within a religious frame of reference, the songs chosen for this chapter lean more towards topics of social criticism and commentary. This leads to secondary perspectives such as social criticism and gender issues coming more to the front. During the analyses in this chapter these will be addressed to a larger extent than in previous analysis, with the main purpose still being eschatological topics and references.

---

<sup>159</sup> Utdanningsdirektoratet. *Religion and ethics – common core subjects in Programme for general studies (English version) – Main subject areas*. 2006. URL: <http://www.udir.no/kl06/REL1-01/Hele/Hovedomraader/?lplang=eng> – retrieved 11.03.15

## 4.1 OPM

The southern Californian hip-hop band OPM came into the public sphere in 2000 with their debut album *Menace to sobriety*. Stating that the band name is an acronym for “Opening people’s minds,” the band is most well-known for their debut single *Heaven is a half-pipe* of the same year, which several critics dubbed “the skateboarder’s anthem.”<sup>160</sup> The single went on to win the *Kerrang! Award for best single* in 2001<sup>161</sup>, an award offered by the British music magazine *Kerrang!*.<sup>162</sup> This song is of particular interest because of the analogous reference to the Christian idea of Heaven, with which the lyrics propose some issues.

While this song clearly features a critical view of the Christian concept of Heaven, social commentary and criticism of how society treats those who make different choices is quite prominent. For the purpose of competency aims, we note that in order to achieve the “holistic and balanced understanding” the main subject area of *criticism of religion* proposes, we include competency aims from both the criticism and Christianity subject areas. Working with this song can help pupils work towards achieving the following competency aims:

- elaborate on and assess different types of criticism on religions and views on life
- elaborate on key features of Christianity
- describe and reflect on key features of Christian ethics<sup>163</sup>

With regard to contextual knowledge, it is beneficial for pupils to know how the skating community has been viewed negatively by mainstream society throughout history. The lyrics reference two important people within the American skateboarding scene, Christian “Christ” Hosoi and Mike McGill, but in-depth knowledge of their achievements is not a necessary prerequisite for understanding the themes of the song.

---

<sup>160</sup> Official artist website OPMden – *Bio* – URL: <http://www.opmden.com/bio> - retrieved 05.04.15

<sup>161</sup> *List of Kerrang! Award winners* on wikipedia.org. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Kerrang!Award\\_winners#2001](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Kerrang!Award_winners#2001) – retrieved 05.04.15

<sup>162</sup> For more information, see official website <http://www.kerrang.com/> (retrieved 05.04.15) or the Wikipedia article. URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kerrang!> – retrieved 05.04.15

<sup>163</sup> Utdanningsdirektoratet. *Religion and ethics – common core subjects in Programme for general studies (English version) – Competence aims*. 2006. URL: <http://www.udir.no/kl06/REL1-01/Hele/Kompetansemaal/?!plang=eng> – retrieved 11.03.15

#### 4.1.1 “Heaven is a half-pipe” – a critical look at the Christian concept of Heaven

The most obvious starting point for this analysis is with the title: “Heaven is a half-pipe.” Right off the bat we are presented with a view that runs seemingly contradictory to the Christian view of Heaven. OPM starts off by proposing that to them, the ideal version of Heaven entails a half-pipe, and thus the opportunity to skate. This not only conflicts with the traditional view of Heaven often depicted by historical accounts and artists, with angels on clouds and pearly gates, but also features the first social commentary; given that the skating community throughout recent history has been looked down on by society in general, the idea of a skater proposing how Heaven is might run counter to how many Christian groups believe it to be.

As the lyrics continue, the details of this view are made more and more clear, as well as going into detail on the band’s view of what Heaven is like. What motivates this view is addressed in the first lines:

*“If I die before I wake  
At least in Heaven I can skate  
'Cause right now on earth I can't do jack  
Without the man up on my back”*<sup>164</sup>

The use of the term “Heaven” could possibly refer to several different religions. The first two lines of this song are however indicative of a Christian frame of reference. Two lines paraphrase the classic Christian children’s bedtime prayer *Now I lay me down to sleep*, alluding specifically to the last two lines: “If I shall die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.”<sup>165</sup> These lines also, when seen in performance, set the tone for how the lyrics can be interpreted. We note that the singer neglects to finish the afore-mentioned prayer, but rather concludes quite definitively that if he were to die in his sleep, at least he will go to a place where he is allowed to skate. Thus he affirms his belief that he will indeed come to Heaven, as well as his disregard for conventional norms in Christianity. The next two lines explain how the singer has come to this controversial conclusion. Following the doctrinal idea that Heaven is a place where you can be free from oppression, the singer’s logical conclusion is that since he and other skaters have “the man up on my back” here on Earth,

---

<sup>164</sup> OPM – *Heaven is a half-pipe* on azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/opm/heavenisahalfpipe.html> - retrieved 05.04.15

<sup>165</sup> Munger, Nancy et.al. *Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep: Action Prayers, Poems, and Songs for Bedtime*. 1994, Augsburg Books

Heaven must be the opposite. The use of “the man” in this context opens up for several possible interpretations. If we consider the phrase as a reference to the authority, we can interpret this as both a reference to the police as well as to a religious authority or indeed God himself. All interpretations of this double entendre can be considered likely interpretations depending on the frame of reference within which the song is viewed, as we will see illustrated later in this analysis.

As we move on to the first verse, we see the singer elaborating on how his view of Heaven is:

*Now Heaven would be a DJ,*

*Spinning dub all night long*

*And Heaven would be just kicking back,*

*with Jesus packing my bong<sup>166</sup>*

From this preliminary description, we can conclude that the singer likens his ideal Heaven to what he perceives as a perfect situation. “Kicking back” while listening to music is an ideal situation many can relate to, but which many would not see to be in accordance with a traditional view of Heaven. Moving on to a phrase which many would consider blasphemous, the singer further states that having Jesus “packing my bong” fits with his ideal Heaven. By associating the Christian ideal of Jesus with drug use further stresses that the singer does not share the same ideals as the Christian majority. This sentiment of can be further observed in the last part of the first verse:

*And if you don't believe in Jesus,*

*Then Muhammad or Buddha too.*

*And while the world is warring,*

*We just sit back and laugh at you, singing<sup>167</sup>*

While it is indeed possible to interpret these lines as a continuation of the blasphemous sentiment seen earlier, we also observe the inherent inclusiveness which the lyrics propose. While the first part of the song indicates a Christian frame of reference, the singer now

---

<sup>166</sup> OPM – *Heaven is a half-pipe* on azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/opm/heavenisahalfpipe.html> - retrieved 05.04.15

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

proposes that regardless of faith, you are considered welcome in his version of Heaven. This interpretation fits well with the idea of a non-exclusive view of Heaven indicated earlier. Furthermore, we can see this inclusiveness stressed in the final two lines. By referencing the key personas of three major world faiths, the singer states that it does not matter which religious authority you adhere to, provided you share their view of non-oppression. Thus, if you do so, you can sit back with the rest of those who share your views, and laugh at those left on Earth who continue to quarrel. While the link at this point is quite tentative, we can see this as an indication of how the singer feels about religion, which will be further explored later in this analysis.

Moving on to the second verse, the singer's idea of Heaven and the reasoning behind it becomes clearer:

*Now when most people think of Heaven,*

*They see those Pearly gates*

*But I looked a little closer*

*And there's a sign that says "do not skate"<sup>168</sup>*

The first two lines clearly reference the idea of the entrance to Heaven, based on the description of New Jerusalem found in the Book of Revelation:

<sup>21</sup> *The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.*<sup>169</sup>

By making use of this almost stereotypical reference to scripture and how it is perceived in popular culture, the singer further stresses that his idea runs counter to common perceptions of Heaven. Furthermore, he notes that there is a sign stating "Do not skate." The purpose of these lines can be interpreted two-fold: Firstly, it stresses that idea that the singer's view of Heaven runs counter to what can be considered "mainstream." Secondly, it alludes to a situation commonly encountered by skaters in real life; signs prohibiting skating in certain areas are not uncommon. Thus, we can interpret this as further stressing the fact that skaters, because of their activities, are restricted from entering certain areas both in life

---

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Revelations 21:21 – *The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

and in Heaven, lest they decide to adhere to mainstream norms and give up skating. The remainder of the second verse counters the above restrictions by further describing how the singer sees Heaven:

*So if you wanna come to my Heaven,  
Well we're all gonna have a ball  
And everyone you know is welcome,  
'cause we got no gates or walls, singing<sup>170</sup>*

In its simplest form, we can interpret this as the singer stating that by removing the gates and walls of the metaphor, there is no place left to hang a sign. Hence, all can get in and enjoy themselves. Observing it more closely, we can clearly see how the singer uses the gates and walls as a metaphor for oppressive restrictions and norms which people adhere to. In his eyes breaking these down will allow people to enjoy themselves together without fear of what they consider oppressive rules. Taking this a step further, we can see this in conjunction with the chorus, in which the singer affirms that there indeed is a Heaven like this. Combining these two references can lead to us to a tentative link to the anarchy sentiment inherent in many subcultures, as will be further explored below. Between the second and third verse we observe that the chorus is altered slightly. Specifically, the final two lines are changed:

*'cause right now on Earth I can't do shit,  
Without the man fucking with it<sup>171</sup>*

While the sentiment in both versions of the chorus are similar, the use of curse words such as “shit” and “fucking” in the text is a further example of the singer going against accepted norms of society. While cursing may not be considered bad in some social contexts, their use is generally frowned upon in certain religious groups. Thus we can see this as another example of how the singer stresses the oppressiveness of said groups and their norms.

The third verse differs slightly in structure from the previous two, relating more closely to rap than the singing of the first and second verse. For the purpose of this thesis, we can

---

<sup>170</sup> OPM – *Heaven is a half-pipe* on azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/opm/heavenisahalfpipe.html> - retrieved 05.04.15

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.



break the content of the third verse into two main parts; being judged and following your idols.

Firstly, we observe how the singer perceives his eventual encounter with the pearly gates:

*And then I got to the gate*

*Pulled out a list that I'd been calling fate*

*I'm sorry friend you can't come in*

*You got a list here that doesn't end*<sup>172</sup>

This part of the lyrics refers to the popular idea of Saint Peter being the caretaker of the pearly gates and the keeper of the “keys to the kingdom,” in reference to Matthew 16:19:

*<sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*<sup>173</sup>

A popular interpretation of this bible verse is that St. Peter, being the guarding of the gates, has control and say over who is allowed into Heaven. Thus it is a likely interpretation that the “I” person in the lyrical excerpt above refers to St. Peter stating that the singer is not allowed in due to the actions on his “list,” understood as what he has done and not done in life. The verse goes on to list some of these, such as doing drugs and skipping school. What these acts have in common is that they run counter to the “accepted norms” of society. Thus, by performing these actions, the singer is denied Heaven according to conventional norms. The singer’s reaction to this can be neatly summed up by noting one line in the verse: “With all your rules you got to chill.”<sup>174</sup> We can interpret this as the singer speaking up against all the rules imposed on him by society.

The verse makes references to two icons within skating culture; Christian “Christ” Hosoi and Mike McGill. It is within these references we see how the singer proposes that he follows the lead of his idols rather than the conventional ones. Christian Hosoi, nicknamed “Christ”, is a famous skater, born-again Christian and ordained pastor.<sup>175</sup> Also known for his prior history

---

<sup>172</sup> OPM – *Heaven is a half-pipe* on azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/opm/heavenisahalfpipe.html> - retrieved 05.04.15

<sup>173</sup> *Matthew 16:19 – The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>174</sup> OPM – *Heaven is a half-pipe* on azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/opm/heavenisahalfpipe.html> - retrieved 05.04.15

<sup>175</sup> Hosoi’s official site [www.hosoiskates.com](http://www.hosoiskates.com) (retrieved 05.04.15) is down, thus information on the person refers to the Wikipedia article. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian\\_Hosoi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Hosoi) - retrieved 05.04.15

of drug abuse, we can interpret the singer referencing him as an indication of how they view their idols as people who have done wrong, yet set things right. The double entendre inherent in the verse line “We’ll be busting Christ Airs until we get to Heaven”<sup>176</sup> further cements this, as it plays on the name “Christ” both referring to Jesus Christ and to Christian Hosoi. “Air” refers to a category of skateboard tricks performed while in mid-air, further stressing the fact that the singer does not see any contradiction in skating and religion. In a similar manner, we can view the inclusion of Mike McGill as another icon the singer would rather emulate. McGill<sup>177</sup> is an American skateboarder most famous for inventing the “McTwist” trick. In the context of this analysis, we can see the addition of these two iconic skateboarders as the singer finding idols to follow outside of the commonly accepted Christian frame of reference. This likely interpretation further cements the understanding of their view of Heaven as a place where the “criteria” for being allowed in are different. In order to get into a Heaven where the main feature is a half-pipe, who better to have as your idols than those who are great in one? Thus the singer recognizes the talent of those who have come before him and chooses to follow their leads, in a way not that dissimilar from how people of faith follow the leads of their icons.

Furthermore, we have to note the direct and indirect references to the anarchy sentiment inherent in many subcultures which are present in the song. As noted earlier on, the singer’s definitive conclusion in the chorus that there indeed is a Heaven with no gates, no walls and no restrictions, what he proposes is a nod towards the anarchy sentiment. The fact that the singer has the audacity to tell St.Peter to “chill” with all the rules is further indication of such a sentiment. The singer then states that he will continue to follow his idols no matter what his “list” says. It is thus possible to interpret the theme of this song as anarchistic.

The official music video for *Heaven is a half-pipe*<sup>178</sup> was released at the same time as the single. For the purpose of this analysis, we make note of a few elements of the video which strengthen the interpretations presented in the lyrical analysis above.

Firstly, we note the setting of the video. The entirety of the video is shot in an arid, desert-like landscape with little or no vegetation, with the only significant feature being a half-pipe.

---

<sup>176</sup> OPM – *Heaven is a half-pipe* on azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/opm/heavenisahalfpipe.html> - retrieved 05.04.15

<sup>177</sup> Personal information found on his official web shop. URL: <http://wp.mcgillsskateshop.com/mcgill/> - retrieved 05.04.15

<sup>178</sup> OPM – *Heaven is a half-pipe* on youtube.com. URL: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCSJzw6QM\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCSJzw6QM_Q) - retrieved 05.04.15

In a manner similar to what we see in the lyrics of Matisyahu's *King without a crown*, we can interpret this as a reference to the first verse of Psalm 63:

*You, God, are my God,  
Earnestly I seek you;  
I thirst for you,  
My whole being longs for you,  
In a dry and parched land  
Where there is no water.<sup>179</sup>*

The arid landscape surrounding the half-pipe serves as an elegant reference to the “dry and parched land” without water, which symbolizes a world without purpose and without God. By placing the half-pipe in the middle of this, the video stresses the fact that the singer has indeed found his purpose through skating. Thus it further strengthens the song’s link between the half-pipe and the Christian idea of Heaven.

Secondly, we note how the lead singer “hovers” over the half-pipe in parts of the video. At certain points in the video, the singer holds his arms out to the side, seemingly mimicking Jesus Christ on the cross. This presents us with the possible interpretation that the singer, all the while likening himself to Jesus, acts as a “prophet” for his message of an inclusive Heaven. If we allow ourselves to liken the two persons, we will note several similarities; both preached their message in the desert, both had people who had come before them and paved their way. But perhaps most importantly; both preached a message where those who were oppressed were to be included. In the case of Jesus Christ, we note the idea presented earlier in this thesis when analyzing *Final Hour* by Lauryn Hill: “So the last will be first, and the first will be last”<sup>180</sup> and “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the Earth.”<sup>181</sup> The sentiment inherent in these two bible verses mirrors the message presented in the song lyrics; those who are welcome in the song’s version of Heaven are the ones who are oppressed on Earth, and the ones who accept others and agree to enjoy life together regardless of whether or not they have different views.

---

<sup>179</sup> *Psalm 63:1 – The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>180</sup> *Matthew 20:16 – The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>181</sup> *Matthew 5:5 – The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

In summary, we can during this analysis observe how OPM speak out against the restrictions imposed on them Christian doctrine, and how society reacts to those who do not fall within what is considered “the norm.” As noted prior to this analysis, the most likely interpretation of the song depends on the frame of reference and objective of the analysis. But regardless of whether we choose to view the song from as criticism of religion or as criticism of society in general the theme of the song is the same; we need to allow people to have their own views of what is correct behavior, and respect them for it.

## 4.2 Tori Amos

Tori Amos<sup>182</sup> is an internationally acclaimed singer-songwriter with a classical music background. The recipient of various awards and eight Grammy nominations, she is perhaps most well-known for using the piano as her main instrument, and for her idiosyncratic live performances. She has been noted by several critics and music reviewers for making music tackling difficult topics such as sexuality, religion and personal tragedies.<sup>183</sup> It is with this frame of reference we will now observe the song *Crucify*.

The song draws on several sources for references and contextual information. For the purpose of this analysis, the main focus is on the angle of religious criticism, contextually and lyrically aimed towards the Christian faith. Thus prior knowledge of from the main subject area *criticism of religion* is essential for an academic understanding of the criticism inherent in the text. Likewise, an understanding of the roles sin and judgement play within Christian doctrine is preferable, though not essential depending on the aim of the analysis. In analysing this song, the pupils are working towards achieving the following select competency aims from the main subject area *Theory of religion and criticism of religion*:

- elaborate on and assess different types of criticism on religions and views on life
- discuss and elaborate on different forms of searching for religions in our time
- present, discuss and elaborate on different dimensions of religions: theory, myths and narratives, rituals, experiences, ethics, social organization, art and material expressions<sup>184</sup>

---

<sup>182</sup> As the official artist website [www.toriamos.com](http://www.toriamos.com) (retrieved 20.04.15) contains little or no personal information about the artist, all information about the artist herself references the artist’s Wikipedia article. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tori\\_Amos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tori_Amos) - retrieved 20.04.15

<sup>183</sup> Last.fm Originals. *Tori Amos gives The Last Word on Unrepentant Geraldines*. URL: <http://originals.last.fm/the-last-word/tori-amos-2/> - published 12.06.14 – retrieved 20.04.15

<sup>184</sup> Utdanningsdirektoratet. *Religion and ethics – common core subjects in Programme for general studies (English version) – Competence aims*. 2006. URL: <http://www.udir.no/kl06/REL1-01/Hele/Kompetansemaal/?!plang=eng> – retrieved 11.03.15

While the first competency aim is an obvious choice, we will observe elements of religious longing to justify looking into how people search for religion in our time. Likewise, the experiences observed by the singer give us room to work with how religious experiences affect people, how the ethics of a religion come into play and how the social organization of a certain religious community can play a role.

If we open up to the possibility of alternate frames of references for the analysis, we can throughout the song observe obvious criticism of the Christian doctrine of sin and judgement, as well as some comments relating to gender perspectives. While these are not the focus of this analysis, we note that by altering the focus of the analysis, we can also have pupils work towards achieving several other competency aims, specifically from the main subject area *Christianity*:

- *elaborate on key features of Christianity*
- *describe and reflect on key features of Christian ethics*
- *discuss and elaborate on the views of Christianity on gender and gender roles*<sup>185</sup>

#### **4.2.1 «Crucify» - a critical look at the role of sin and judgment in Christianity**

“Crucify” is the first track of the album *Little Earthquakes* released in 1992, with the official music video released the same year. While there are several versions of this track released at various dates, this analysis will base itself on the EP/single version used for the music video. The differences between the different versions are minute and in performance only, but will be pointed out when appropriate.

The obvious starting point for this analysis is with the title itself: *Crucify*. Immediately we are drawn towards remembering the Christian narrative of Jesus Christ’s passion story, ending with the eponymous crucifixion. This activation of previous religious knowledge draws the listener towards a certain predisposition regarding the lyrics; the lyrical narrative will, in at least some regard, either allude to or reference what can be perceived as the quintessential narrative of Christianity. The effect this can have on the listener will of course be subjective, depending on their personal frame of reference. However, drawing on contextual knowledge

---

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

about the artist as mentioned in the artist introduction can lead to a different starting point. As such, this analysis will utilize a contextual frame of reference, aiming to illustrate how this song can be interpreted as taking a critical stand against the role of sin and judgment in Christianity specifically, and to a lesser extent organized religion as a whole. Furthermore, this analysis will address how the singer switches between the singular subjective “I” and the plural “we” and what effect this can have on the interpretation of the lyrics.

In the first verse, Amos sings from a subjective point of view, possibly drawing the listener towards the conclusion that what we are hearing is a personal story. Observe:

*Every finger in the room is pointing at me  
I want to spit in their faces then I get afraid of what that could bring  
I got a bowling ball in my stomach I got a desert in my mouth  
Figures that my courage would choose to sell out now<sup>186</sup>*

“Pointing fingers” is a gesture usually associated with someone assigning blame, or at the very least this should be interpreted as a negative gesture. What kind of room this takes place in is not clear. But whether we interpret this as being in a church or a general location, the sentiment stays the same; someone is singling her out in a negative manner. Her reaction to this is complex; while wanting to address their berating (“I want to spit in their faces”) she fears what the reaction to this might bring. This sentiment can be interpreted in various ways; we can either perceive it as a basic human sentiment of being afraid of people’s reactions, or relate it to the Jesus narrative, specifically the concept of “turning the other cheek,” as seen in Matthew 5:38-42<sup>187</sup>. Remembering this part of Jesus’ teaching leaves our “I” in a predicament; if she does not answer them, she is accepting their judgment of her. If she does answer their accusations, she is effectively going against the teachings of the religion. As such, we can interpret her as trapped in a “damned if you do, damned if you do not” situation, with no apparent way out. As we move on we see the subjective perspective strengthened, as the singer mentions a “bowling ball in my stomach,” a line alluding to the proverbial “knot in my stomach,” describing a feeling of strong anxiety. Furthermore, the phrase “desert in my mouth,” while most likely further elaborating on the anxiety already present, can also allude to the sentiment discussed when analyzing

---

<sup>186</sup> *Tori Amos – Crucify* on metrolyrics.com. URL: <http://www.metrolyrics.com/crucify-lyrics-tori-amos.html> - retrieved 19.02.15

<sup>187</sup> *Matthew 5:38-42– The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

Matisyahu's *King without a Crown* in an earlier chapter; using allusions to deserts and parched land as a symbol for lacking faith.<sup>188</sup>

The final line of the first verse merits attention due to the possible contextual interpretations. Firstly, it is quite possible to interpret the line "figures that my courage would choose to sell out now" literally, that while she would like to stand against those berating her, her courage fails her. However, if we allow for a contextual frame of reference, the first verse bears striking similarities to the Jesus narrative, specifically Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane as described in Matthew 26. This chapter contains the famous scene where Jesus ask "may this cup be taken from me,"<sup>189</sup> often interpreted as a very human moment of doubt. In earlier verses Jesus is described as "overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," which can be likened to the feelings described by the singer. As the narrative goes, Jesus is well aware of what is to come at this point, and thus his asking God if "this cup can be taken from me" can be likened to losing one's courage. Thus we can see the first verse, combined with the title of the song, as strongly alluding to the Jesus narrative. While just a tentative similarity as this point, the analysis will continue to draw upon these links to, in the conclusion, illustrate how the intended similarities between the two narratives become stronger.

Moving on to the bridge between verse and chorus, we still follow the subjective narrative of the female "I". At this point it's worth noting that both the chorus and bridge are repeated several times during the lyrics, with the final line changing each time. As such, we will address these changes as they appear. First, we observe the first bridge:

*I've been looking for a savior in these dirty streets  
Looking for a savior beneath these dirty sheets  
I've been raising up my hands drive another nail in  
Just what God needs one more victim<sup>190</sup>*

In this bridge we see her struggling with coming to terms with her own religious doubt. The first two lines can be interpreted as her trying to find faith in the world ("dirty streets") as well as in the carnal ("dirty sheets"), yet not finding it. The act described in the line "raising

---

<sup>188</sup> As found in *Psalm 63:1 – The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>189</sup> *Matthew 26:36-43 – The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>190</sup> *Tori Amos – Crucify* on metrolyrics.com. URL: <http://www.metrolyrics.com/crucify-lyrics-tori-amos.html> - retrieved 19.02.15

up my hands” can in of itself be likened to the act of worship, and thusly be interpreted as her stating that she has tried being faithful. The reaction to this, “drive another nail in” again draws on the Jesus allusion, metaphorically stating that even though she has tried adhering to the faith, she is still judged as a result of the judgmental finger-pointers mentioned in the first verse. The final line brings this point home, as she somewhat sarcastically states that this is “Just what God needs, one more victim.” If we again utilize a contextual frame of reference, “victim” can be seen as alluding to Jesus once again, while it at the same time can, within a larger scope, be seen as the singer stating that there have been countless victims since the first, with her being the last one in a long line. At this point, we are more clearly seeing how this song can be interpreted as being strongly critical of judgement as a important part of religion. After all, why would God need another victim?

The chorus drives this point further home. We also observe how the singer suddenly alternates between the subjective “I” and the collective “we”:

*Why do we crucify ourselves?  
Everyday I crucify myself  
And nothing I do is good enough for you  
I crucify myself*

*Everyday I crucify myself  
And my heart is sick of being  
I said, "My heart is sick of being in  
Chains, chains"<sup>191</sup>*

While the lyrics up until this point seemingly have addressed the I’s personal conflict, we observe that she now includes the collective “we,” speaking to the masses and asking the question of “why do we crucify ourselves?” Interpreting what the intended meaning of the word *crucify* is in this context is complicated, but we will offer two possible interpretations. Firstly, we can interpret it as the final act which all the judgment mentioned earlier in the song leads up to. Thus the question she poses becomes “why do we judge each other” to the point where a metaphorical crucifixion is the end result? This in of itself can be perceived as taking a stand against the importance of sin within Christianity, as sinful acts are what leads

---

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.



to judgement. However, there is also the possible interpretation that, if we allow for the contextual frame of reference, this alludes to the Jesus narrative once again. Specifically, the doctrinal concept that Jesus was crucified to atone for human sins. If we base our interpretation on this idea, the result is that we, the subjects, crucify ourselves in attempt to atone for the sins of others, in this case the sin of judging others. Within Christian doctrine the act of judgement is reserved for God, yet if we follow her line of reasoning, most judgement addressed in the lyrics can be attributed to other people, thus we are leading each other to being crucified. We can back up this interpretation by observing Matthew 7:1-3:

*7 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

*3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"<sup>192</sup>*

If we take this bible reference into account, we can interpret the singer as saying people are too quick to judge, which can result in the circular argument that judging others leads to others judging you, to which the end result is the metaphorical crucifixion. We can furthermore observe the sentiment in the verse line "and nothing I do is good enough for you," given that "you" in this context is understood as the plural "you" meaning other people and not God, as further emphasizing how people should not be quick to judge others. This sentiment can be seen as mimicking the one in John 8, where Jesus is asked by the Pharisees for advice on how they should proceed judging a woman "caught in adultery." The bible verse states that Jesus said: "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."<sup>193</sup> The fact that the singer in the first bridge states that she has been looking for a savior "beneath these dirty sheets" can be seen as a possible allusion to the woman "caught in adultery" in this bible verse, further strengthening the perceived dissonance between Jesus' take on judgment as presented in the Bible and how the singer perceives it in actual life.

Returning from the collective "we" to the subjective "I", we observe the final two lines of the chorus, specifically the notion that the singer's heart is "sick of being in chains." The fact that

---

<sup>192</sup> *Matthew 7:1-3 – The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>193</sup> *John 8:7– The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

it is the heart rather than the body leads to a metaphorical interpretation that she feels suppressed by her beliefs. Within the larger frame of reference of the song as a whole the listener is led to the interpretation that the singer's faith is not something that strengthens her, but rather something that binds and oppresses her. We can see this as reverse-mirroring the sentiment first discussed in the analysis of Matisyahu's song *King without a Crown*; where he becomes whole and realizes his full potential by giving himself wholly to his belief, the singer in *Crucify* feels bound and oppressed by the same. This sentiment further serves to strengthen the interpretation that she sees religious belief as something that pulls you down rather than raising you up.

As we move on to the second verse interpretation becomes quite difficult, as depending on how you perceive and interpret the extensive use of metaphors and allusions can lead to several different interpretations. Given a religious frame of reference which takes the Jesus narrative into account, this analysis will propose the following plausible interpretation.

Observe:

*Got a kick for a dog begging for love  
I gotta have my suffering so that I can have my cross  
I know a cat named Easter, he says, "Will you ever learn  
You're just an empty cage girl if you kill the bird"<sup>194</sup>*

Firstly, we'll note a few factors from the verse. "A cat named Easter," if we take the Jesus narrative into account, seems to allude to Jesus, as the crucifixion takes place during what is now known as Easter. The "bird", following a similar logic, can be seen as a reference to the Holy Spirit, which is represented by a dove on several occasions in the Bible.<sup>195</sup> This leaves us with a tentative link to the Holy Trinity, with one other animal mentioned; the dog. While we might strain our creativity trying to find a metaphor or biblical reference that link these two seemingly incompatible words, we can't ignore the simple fact that it can be seen as an anagram; "dog" spelled backwards spells "God." With that in mind we can interpret this verse as referring to the Holy Trinity, and by extension God. Of course we note that the third part of the Holy Trinity should not be God but the Father. If we for now allow the singer a poetic licence, the connection is further strengthened below.

---

<sup>194</sup> *Tori Amos – Crucify* on metrolyrics.com. URL: <http://www.metrolyrics.com/crucify-lyrics-tori-amos.html> - retrieved 19.02.15

<sup>195</sup> For instance in *Matthew 3:16* and *Luke 3:22* in *The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

With this in mind, we observe that the verse is fairly critical of religion. Seen as a whole, the verse seems to state that you can't have one without the other; if you accept this faith, you have to accept that sin and judgment is part of it. Especially the second and fourth lines seem to underline this statement; if you do not accept your suffering, you will not receive the absolution of your sins which the cross symbolizes. Furthermore, the fact that you're "just an empty cage girl if you kill the bird" can be seen as an allusion to the act of being filled by the Holy Spirit seen several times in the bible<sup>196</sup>. Finally, we can observe that a dog, often described as "man's best friend" and as a symbol of faithfulness, brings to mind someone that is utterly faithful. We can further strengthen the link to the Holy Trinity by observing the similarities between the roles of Fathers and dogs, both who are normally considered to be symbols of faithfulness and dedication. If we combine the traits attributed and described above, we are lead to the likely interpretation that the singer states that her problem with faith is that you cannot accept just part of it. This leads to her, if she wants to take part, having to accept that sin and judgement is part of it. As noted several times during this analysis, this is something she cannot seem to accept. We can see this sentiment strengthened further by observing the second bridge, which directly follows the aforementioned verse:

*I've been looking for a savior in these dirty streets  
Looking for a savior beneath these dirty sheets  
I've been raising up my hands, drive another nail in  
Got enough guilt to start my own religion<sup>197</sup>*

While the first three lines are similar to the first bridge, the final line seemingly sarcastically states that with the amount of guilt she feels, she could very well start her own religion. This is where we can see her as alluding not only to Christianity, but to other religions which incorporate sin and judgment as a vital part of their doctrine as well. This statement, if perceived sarcastically as her tone would imply, fits with the larger whole of her being critical of judgment being an essential part of religion; the same judgement that in her opinion compels people to metaphorically crucify themselves. Rather than religion being a positive force in people's lives, she seems to imply that it can just as easily be a negative one. This can be observed as we move on to the remainder of the song.

---

<sup>196</sup> For instance in Acts 9:17 in *The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

<sup>197</sup> *Tori Amos – Crucify* on metrolyrics.com. URL: <http://www.metrolyrics.com/crucify-lyrics-tori-amos.html> - retrieved 19.02.15

As there are no further verses in the remainder of the song, we will now observe that while the chorus and bridge are repeated, there are subtle changes to the lyrics which merit attention. Following the verse addressed above the chorus is repeated once, after which there is segment where the singer, almost in a wailing tone, states “Please save me, I cry.”<sup>198</sup> The pleading tone of her voice in this segment can be interpreted as a plea for help, calling out for someone to save her. Whether this is supposed to be interpreted in connection to the chains mentioned in the chorus just prior or as a call for someone to free her in general is somewhat unclear. Yet both interpretations merit attention, as they both fall within what we have proposed as the general theme of the song several times already; according to the singer, salvation is not to be found within religion, hence salvation must come from somewhere else.

Following this the bridge is repeated one last time, with the final line once again changed:

*Looking for a savior in these dirty streets*  
*Looking for a savior beneath these dirty sheets*  
*I've been raising up my hands, drive another nail in*  
*Where are those Angels when you need them?*<sup>199</sup>

The mention of angels can, if we keep to the Christian narrative, be seen as alluding to the role of angels as messengers and guides. So depending on how we choose to interpret this statement, she can be seen as metaphorically asking for guidance in her time of need, yet not finding it. However, as with the previous two bridges, the tone of the singer’s voice does lead to the likely interpretation of this being a sarcastic remark on her behalf, basically stating that they will not be there even though doctrine tells you that they will.

Following this we see the chorus repeated once, before the singer repeats the phrase “Why do we crucify ourselves?” several times over, finally ending the song with the words “Every day.”<sup>200</sup> This can in of itself be seen as the singer underlining the main theme of her song, repeating the same question which has already been asked several times during the song proper over and over again. Ending with the words “Every day” further stresses the gravity

---

<sup>198</sup> *Tori Amos – Crucify* on metrolyrics.com. URL: <http://www.metrolyrics.com/crucify-lyrics-tori-amos.html> - retrieved 19.02.15

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

of this question, as it is according to the singer a question that affects us every day and thus needing to be addressed.

The official music video<sup>201</sup> for this song merits attention, as addressing it within the analysis adds another frame of reference. Firstly, we note that the only person appearing in the video is the artist herself. While this could be interpreted as the song being a personal message from the artist herself, we should be careful to attribute the above-mentioned interpretations to her personally. What we can interpret this as, is that the message can be attributed to the subjective “I” of the lyrics. What this does is that it strengthens the relational aspect of the lyrics; this is not something esoteric, but rather a way of making the message about people rather than about the message itself. Of particular note is the appearance of water in the music video, especially in relation to the white bathtub. In one particular scene, we see the empty tub on stage, with a large quantity of water being dropped from above, immediately overflowing the tub. We can interpret the water as symbolizing the judgment passed on the subjective “I”, alluding to the proverbial “drop of water that makes the cup overflow.” With that in mind, we can interpret this as a symbol of being overwhelmed by the constant judgement passed by others. As the scene continues, we see the artist enter the tub, after which she proceeds to sing the lyrics while drenched in water. A possible way of interpreting this, if we take into account that she in the video enters the tub freely, is that even though she herself and others judge her, here symbolized by being wet, she stands up for herself and continues on. In a sense, there is the possible opinion that she is strong enough to continue on, having faced the judgement.

In conclusion we can note that the song *Crucify* addresses the idea that while Christianity specifically, and by extension religion as a whole, according to the singer places too much emphasis on the doctrine of sin and judgment. In particular, the singer seems to struggle with the fact that it is adherents of the religion themselves that judge each other, which in turn can lead the recipient of said judgement to overly judge themselves. As noted earlier in this analysis we can see this in relation to the expression “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone.” Furthermore, we cannot ignore the fact that there is a social criticism component present in the song. Given a different frame of reference, it is quite possible to interpret the song as a commentary on the “cult of appearance” and focus

---

<sup>201</sup> *Tori Amos – Crucify* on youtube.com. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jpCKlxdHTs> – retrieved 19.02.15

on outer beauty in Western societies. Likewise, it is possible to view this song from a gender perspective, in which Amos places herself within the Jesus narrative by drawing on parallels throughout the song. With several competency aims dealing with gender and gender roles in the subject curriculum, it is a possible angle of attack as well. Thus the song can be open to several different yet relevant analyses, depending on the aim of the teacher.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter we have observed how two very different artists, OPM and Tori Amos, both speak out against certain constraints imposed by them due to religious doctrine. Common between them is the feeling of not being free to make their own choices, as society puts restrictions on them based on a view which they cannot agree with. Whether it be acknowledgement of minority or sub-cultural views which OPM wants recognition for, or the oppressive judgement of life choices presented by Tori Amos, both songs have in common that they would like the listener to expand their frame of reference beyond that which religious doctrine proposes, and to think for themselves. Using songs like these as objects of analysis or starting points for discussions on related topics can possibly bring forth a personal relation to the topic with pupils, thus drawing them further into the subject matter.

## 5 Teaching religion through popular music

In the previous three chapters, we have analysed and interpreted a selection of popular music songs with regard to their inherent religious content. Along the way we have observed how the content of these songs can relate to different parts of the subject curricula of the school subject *Religion and ethics*. These analyses are intended to serve as a “proof of concept” for the main thesis question proposed in chapter 1.1: Select popular music pieces do contain religious subject matter which can fill a role in the teaching of religion. In this chapter, we will elaborate on how and why the use of popular music when teaching about religion can be a beneficial teaching method. In order to remind ourselves of the initial proposed benefits, the questions first proposed in chapter 1.1 are repeated below:

- *How can knowledge of intertextual references between religious texts and popular music songs improve a pupil’s understanding of the subject matter?*
- *How can the use of popular music analysis raise pupil awareness of religious influence on popular cultural expressions and culture in general?*
- *How can the use of popular music make the subject matter more relatable for pupils?*

As further elaborated on in chapter 1.2, this thesis proposed that pupils can potentially greatly benefit from the use of popular music in the Religion and ethics subject; specifically with regard to general awareness of religious influence on culture in general and pop culture specifically, intertextuality between pop culture and religious literature and the use of authentic texts with a religious component as proof of religion being a “living” phenomenon with relevance for pupil’s lives regardless of their own religious predilections.

### 5.1 Popular music and religion

In his book *Traces of the Spirit – The religious dimensions of popular music*, author Robin Sylvan goes in-depth into the different levels on which music can affect a person, and specifically the similarities between music and religion on an effective level. While his argumentation is too complex and extensive to go into detail in in this thesis, we note two

excerpts of relevance for this thesis. Firstly, after noting how music can affect a person on, amongst others, the psychological and sociocultural levels, Sylvan tentatively concludes:

*[Music] is the vehicle par excellence for a complex multidimensional phenomenon like religion.*<sup>202</sup>

This sentiment mirrors what we have observed earlier in this thesis, for instance in the book *Det folk vil ha* by Endsjø and Lied. We can build on this argument further, by noting the fact that some form of musical or performance tradition can be found in most every religion in the world. Whether it is reciting the Quran in Islam, the singing of hymns and psalms in Christianity or the cantor in Judaism, some form of performance is present and valued. In other words, Sylvan is in no way the first to discover this connection. Furthermore, when discussing the connection between music and religion, Sylvan makes another observation regarding messages inherent in music:

*[...] this power is present in music, whether it is consciously recognized or not.*<sup>203</sup>

This statement is important when we observe the point of awareness presented in the subject curriculum plan under the heading *purpose*, first noted in chapter 1.4 of this thesis. If we presuppose the ideas presented by Sylvan, we conclude that popular music is capable of carrying with it messages which can be inherently religious, and that they can have an effect on people whether they consciously recognize it or not. Thus, we can address the second sub-question of this thesis: As religious messages are indeed present in select popular music, making use of them when teaching pupils can serve to raise awareness of the effect religion can have on culture in general and pop culture specifically. We can take this reasoning a step further if we take Stefano's levels of musical competence, cited by Brackett<sup>204</sup> in chapter 1.5 of this thesis, into account. By default, exposing pupils to a popular music song without any contextual information or preparation will most likely lead to them formulating an opinion based mostly on the *general codes (GQ)* and *social practices (SP)* levels of interpretation. While the SP level does include religion as a category, not having the necessary contextual information needed to make the connection between the song and a religion can lead to this not happening. If one were to play a song in a religion and ethics class, the likelihood of pupils making such a connection increases, but we have to consider this a distinct and

---

<sup>202</sup> Sylvan, Robin. *Traces of the Spirit – The religious dimensions of popular music*. 2002, NYU Press – Kindle edition. Page 21

<sup>203</sup> Ibid. - Page 42

<sup>204</sup> Brackett, David. *Interpreting popular music*. 2000, University of California Press, Berkeley, US – page 12



specific context. This is not when most popular music is observed. Quite to the contrary, pupils are exposed to popular music on an almost omnipresent level, where this connection is not necessarily at the fore of their mind. Thus, we note that in order to achieve a high *signification effect*<sup>205</sup>, we need to make pupils aware of the presence of religion in popular culture, and provide them with the necessary academic knowledge and tools to recognize and understand what they are exposed to. Thus we can through providing them with the above-mentioned knowledge and tools likely observe an increased ability on the behalf of the pupils to observe religious messages and the effect it has on pop culture specifically, and culture in general, thus raising their awareness.

## 5.2 Popular music vs religious music

Sødal's book *Religions- og livssynsdidaktikk – en innføring* ("Religion and life view-didactics – An introduction")<sup>206</sup>, as mentioned in chapter 1.3, reflects on the benefits and difficulties surrounding the use of religious music in a classroom situation. While their focus is on music from within various established religious traditions, they do open the proverbial door for the use of music more at home in the "popular" genre. We will now observe how much of their reflection on the use of religious music is equally relevant and important for the use of popular music.

Firstly, we note that the authors Sødal and Winje elaborate on the importance of not excluding the musical dimension of religions from teaching:

*In order for pupils to achieve a holistic understanding of what religion is, singing and music should be a part the teaching of religions. Singing and music help illustrate several religious dimensions: Lyrics shed light on doctrine, communal singing and observance of music creates a sense of community between adherents, and music is part of many rituals.*<sup>207</sup>

The importance of music within different religious traditions is, by merit of its inherent importance, something the pupils need to be aware of and exposed to in order to fully understand religion. Furthermore, we note that music does include an emotional

---

<sup>205</sup> Brackett, David. *Interpreting popular music*. 2000, University of California Press, Berkeley, US – page 13

<sup>206</sup> Sødal, Helje Kringlebotn (red.) *Religions- og livssynsdidaktikk – en innføring*. 4th edition. 2009, Høgskoleforlaget (Norwegian Academic Press), Kristiansand, Norway

<sup>207</sup> Ibid. – page 139 – own translation

component, with which pupils need to be familiar in order to further understanding and respect for religious beliefs.

Sødal and Winje further propose several criteria for the selection of musical material for use in the classroom.<sup>208</sup> Firstly, the musical preferences and interests of pupils need to be taken into account when choosing specific music. This criterion reflects what Brackett notes as the signification effect at its most basic; if the pupil likes the music on a GQ level, their willingness to work with it is likely to increase. In order to take this into account, this thesis included both genre and artist's gender as criteria when selecting songs for analysis. Expanding the number of songs eligible for analysis increases the likelihood of pupils liking them. If one is so inclined, giving the pupils the choice of which songs they would like to work with and why can add another dimension to any assignment. Having them explain their choices based on their knowledge of the songs and topics at hand will have the pupils demonstrating independent reflection, another trait they are to develop during the course.

Secondly, the music selected should be representative of the subject matter one is working with. This poses a challenge when using popular music, as many artists are not openly adherents of any specific tradition. Thus it is up to the teacher to evaluate whether or not the song in question is representative and thus suitable for use. For the purpose of this thesis, making sure there are more than one song from within a certain religious tradition serves to demonstrate, albeit with a small number of songs, that there are a many to choose from provided one has done the legwork beforehand.

Thirdly, one needs to take into account the variety of music present in a religious tradition. For the purpose of this thesis, we note that one would be doing the pupils a disservice by only exposing them to popular music with a religious message, thus ignoring the musical traditions inherent in each religion. This ties in closely with the issue of representability mentioned above. Again, having several options within a certain religious tradition should help deal with this. Using both religious music and popular music with religious messages further opens up the possibility of comparative analyses, adding yet another dimension to the methodology.

---

<sup>208</sup> Ibid. – page 148-149

Finally, Sødal and Winje note *relatability* as a possible criterion. With regard to religious music, this can be an issue of having pupils trying to relate to music outside of the styles and genres they are used to relate to. For this thesis, we expand on this issue by observing how relatability can be an issue when dealing with pupils who adhere to a religious tradition.

It is clear that the use of religious and popular music when teaching about religion share many similar challenges. With the thoughts of Sødal and Winje in mind, we now observe the potential benefits and difficulties surrounding the use of popular music.

### **5.3 Pros and cons of teaching religion through popular music**

As first mentioned in chapter 1.2, this thesis considers popular music songs as a type of *authentic texts*; that is texts which are not written for nor altered with the classroom situation in mind. Oxford University Press's blog on English for academic purposes (EAP) defines authentic texts thusly:

*An authentic text is usually taken to mean a text which was not written for the language classroom, and which hasn't been messed with – it retains its original vocabulary and grammar, and bits of the text have not been cut out. Preferably it is unprocessed, i.e. not retyped, so it still looks the same as it always did: the same font and graphics. In other words, authentic texts are written for any purpose other than language learning, and are intact rather than processed, adapted, or simplified.*<sup>209</sup>

While the above excerpt focuses on authentic texts in a language-learning classroom, the sentiment is transferable to any teaching situation regardless of subject. The idea that one makes use of a text which is authentic and not “messed with” carries with it both benefits and difficulties. On the one hand, pupils are exposed to material written “for the real world” and not the classroom. This leads to it not using an adapted language, and perhaps not being completely in-line with how a regular classroom text is constructed.

As we for the purpose of this thesis consider popular music as examples of authentic texts, what effect can this have on pupil learning and relevance? We will observe this in three ways: *Authentic texts as an insider perspective, language use and authentic texts as “living texts.”* But before we address these points of view, we need to remind ourselves of the

---

<sup>209</sup> de Chazal, Edward. *Using authentic texts in the EAP classroom for English Language Teaching Global blog*. URL: <http://oupeltglobalblog.com/tag/authentic-texts/> - published 03.07.14. Oxford University Press. Retrieved 20.04.15

relevant restrictions imposed on such use of authentic texts. As first mentioned in chapter 1.6, any teaching done within the religion and ethics subjects is to be inherently academic and not theological, that is with the intent of missioning to the pupils. This leaves the teacher with a dilemma, as much of the authentic material readily available is from an insider perspective, and thus inherently “preaching.” This challenge was addressed in the *Toledo guiding principles on teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools* of 2008<sup>210</sup>, which, slightly paraphrased, states that the use of authentic, “preaching” texts is acceptable, provided it is used for the purpose of academic learning. With that in mind, we confirm that using popular music with an inherent religious message is acceptable within the purview of religion classrooms.

For the purpose of this thesis, we understand the *insider perspective* when talking about religious source material as source material written by someone who adheres to a specific tradition, and thus writes with that tradition in mind. Examples of this can be sermons held by religious authorities which make use of religious argumentation, or popular music with an inherent religious message performed by an artist from the same tradition. While we should be careful likening the doctrinal gravity of a religious authority and an artist, we observe that they can both be considered to be speaking from an insider perspective. As such, using popular music can present us with a view from “within” a religious tradition, from someone who uses religious argumentation and reasoning behind their message. This provides us with an added benefit, as the likelihood of having access to people with insider perspectives from every religious tradition is unlikely at best. Thus, we have the opportunity to present these view to pupils in a more readily accessible manner, making sure the pupils are exposed to these kinds of perspectives as well.

On the topic of *language use*, we note that the use of authentic popular music texts can be both beneficial as well as difficult. On the positive side, we can through the careful selection of material, provide the pupils with songs which are more in line with their own use of language than what can be expected of academic sources, like text books and other source material. This thesis argues that this ties in to the concept of *relatability*. In the same way youth ministers will adapt their language to better suit their target audience, popular music

---

<sup>210</sup> Organization for Security and cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Office for democratic institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) – *Toledo guiding principles on teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools*. 2008. URL: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/29154?download=true> – pdf page 54 - retrieved 05.04.15

is inherently directed at an as large as possible target audience. This will inherently affect the language used, as using a narrow, doctrinal vocabulary will most likely alienate those who do not know them. Similarly, making use of a more day-to-day vocabulary more colloquially known and understood can facilitate the learning process of pupils by making the source material in question more understandable and relatable.

On the other hand, we need to note that *language use* just as easily can be potentially detrimental to the learning process, depending on the inherent language skills of the pupils in question. While difficulties related to *slang terms* and *expressions related to specific religious traditions* can be pre-empted by providing pupils with vocabulary sheets and explanations, language skills in general can pose a greater challenge. Observing this from within the context of the Norwegian educational system, we can presuppose that pupils in their final year of upper secondary have, at the very least, an average command of the English language due to its prevalence in both youth and popular culture, not to mention it being a school subject since age 7.<sup>211</sup> Even so, we cannot deny that the use of authentic texts with their inherent unabridged vocabulary and grammar can pose a challenge. This is not a unique challenge only for the use of popular music, but a challenge inherent in any use of source material from a language other than the pupil's mother tongue, and thus must be taken into consideration with regard to the pupil group when selecting authentic texts for use in the classroom.

The use of authentic texts carries with an additional challenge which we need to be aware of. While we argue that the use of modern language and interpretations can make the subject more relatable for some pupils, we must be aware of the possibility that it can also make it less relatable and at worst offensive to pupils who adhere to the tradition in question. This is due to possible perceptions of the song being "incorrect" or "offensive" in its interpretation or presentation of the religious tradition. This is by no means a challenge unique to the use of popular music, but rather a challenge inherent in the subject as a whole. Never the less, it is something the teacher needs to be vary of and prepared for, based on their knowledge of the pupils who make up their class.

---

<sup>211</sup> Obligatory English classes start in the second grade of elementary school, which pupils attend at around age 7. URL: <http://www.udir.no/kl06/ENG1-03/Hele/Kompetansemaal/Kompetansemaal-etter-2-arstrinn/?lplang=eng> – retrieved 01.05.15

The final point this thesis will argue is also connected to the idea of relatability. As popular music pieces are a product of their time, we will argue the point that there are examples of *living texts*. By this, we understand popular music as contemporary examples of the relevance of older religious texts, many of whose age are numbered in millennia. By drawing on references from older holy texts, we can see these songs as advocates of the relevance of their content and messages in a modern age. Combining this with a more modern and relatable language spoken by contemporary artists rather than religious authorities can make the subject matter more relatable for pupils. Furthermore, by combining these modern interpretations of the older texts with a reading of the said texts can further strengthen the perceived relevance of them. While the result of such an approach will vary depending on the pupil group in question, an increased signification effect of the actual holy texts is likely to occur through the use of contemporary interpretations.

## 6 Thesis conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have strived to illustrate how the inclusion of popular music analysis and interpretation in the teaching of religion can be beneficial for pupils. In conclusion, I believe that the answer is indeed positive.

By way of observing the framework within which the school subject *religion and ethics* is to be taught, we noted how the analysis of popular music fits within the established framework and can help pupils work towards achieving the level of competency which the subject curriculum expects of them come the end of term. As we moved on to the actual analyses of popular music songs, I strived to explain how their inherently religious messages can be seen in relation to a selection of the competency aims pupils are to work towards. Along the way, I have tried to exemplify cases of intertextuality between the various religious texts and song lyrics, with the intent of illustrating their close relationship. Finally, I have tried to note how the songs can be the object of analysis from several different points of view depending on what the aim of their use is, again with the intent of demonstrating their versatility as source material and the variety of interpretations made possible by their use.

With the framework, methodology and analyses in mind, I debated the benefits and challenges related to their use in a classroom situation from a didactic point of view. As with any teaching methodology there are challenges which must be considered. Never the less it is my belief that the potential benefits stemming from the authenticity and relatability of popular music merits its inclusion into a religion and ethics teacher's methodology repertoire, and by extension in the repertoire of teachers within the social sciences.

## 7 Bibliography

### Written publications

Brackett, David. *Interpreting popular music*. 2000, University of California Press, Berkeley, US

De Lange, Nicholas. *An introduction to Judaism, second edition*. 2011, Cambridge University Press, UK

Endsjø, Dag Øistein and Lied, Liv Ingeborg. *Det folk vil ha – religion og populærkultur*. 2011, Universitetsforlaget.

Frith, Simon. *Performing rites – On the value of popular music*. 1996, Oxford University Press, Oxford, England.

Frith, Simon. *Taking popular music seriously: Selected essays (Ashgate contemporary thinkers on critical musicology series)*. 2007, Ashgate, England.

Gilmour, Michael J. *Call me the seeker – listening to religion in popular music*. 2005, Continuum, New York, US

Kvalvåg, Robert W. *Fra Moses til Marley – Det gamle testamentets teologi og virkningshistorie*. 2003, Fagbokforlaget, Bergen, Norway

Løland, Martinsen & Skippervold – *Bibelen i populærkulturen*. 2014, Scandinavian Academic Press, Oslo, Norway

Munger, Nancy et.al. *Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep: Action Prayers, Poems, and Songs for Bedtime*. 1994, Augsburg Books

Opsahl, Carl Petter. *Dance to my ministry: Exploring hip-hop spirituality*. Doctoral dissertation at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo. 2012

Porter, Stanley E and Robinson, Jason C. *Hermeneutics – an introduction to interpretive theory*. 2011, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Com Grand Rapids, US



Sylvan, Robin. *Traces of the Spirit – The religious dimensions of popular music*. 2002, NYU Press – Kindle edition downloaded through Amazon.co.uk

Sødal, Helje Kringlebotn (red.) *Religions- og livssynsdidaktikk – en innføring*. 4th edition. 2009, Høyskoleforlaget (Norwegian Academic Press), Kristiansand, Norway

*The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), (1973/2011)*

Walls, Jerry L. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*. 2008, Oxford University Press Inc, New York, US

### Online resources

de Chazal, Edward. *Using authentic texts in the EAP classroom for English Language Teaching Global blog*. URL: <http://oupeltglobalblog.com/tag/authentic-texts/> - published 03.07.14. Oxford University Press. Retrieved 20.04.15

Organization for Security and cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Office for democratic institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) – *Toledo guiding principles on teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools*. 2008. URL: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/29154?download=true> - retrieved 05.04.15

Utdanningsdirektoratet. *English – English subject curriculum (English version) – Competency aims*. 2013. URL: <http://www.udir.no/kl06/ENG1-03/Hele/Kompetansemaal/Kompetansemal-etter-2-arstrinn/?lplang=eng> – retrieved 01.05.15

Utdanningsdirektoratet. *Religion and ethics – common core subjects in Programme for general studies (English version) - Purpose*. 2006. URL: <http://www.udir.no/kl06/REL1-01/Hele/Formaal/?lplang=eng> – retrieved 11.03.15

Utdanningsdirektoratet. *Religion and ethics – common core subjects in Programme for general studies (English version) – Basic skills*. 2006. URL: [http://www.udir.no/kl06/REL1-01/Hele/Grunnleggende\\_ferdigheter/?lplang=eng](http://www.udir.no/kl06/REL1-01/Hele/Grunnleggende_ferdigheter/?lplang=eng) – retrieved 28.03.15

Utdanningsdirektoratet. *Religion and ethics – common core subjects in Programme for general studies (English version) – Main subject areas*. 2006. URL: <http://www.udir.no/kl06/REL1-01/Hele/Hovedomraader/?lplang=eng> – retrieved 11.03.15

Utdanningsdirektoratet. *Religion and ethics – common core subjects in Programme for general studies (English version) – Competence aims*. 2006. URL: <http://www.udir.no/kl06/REL1-01/Hele/Kompetansemaal/?lplang=eng> – retrieved 11.03.15

Utdanningsdirektoratet. *Religion, livssyn og etikk - Formål*. 2006. URL: <http://www.udir.no/kl06/RLE1-01/Hele/Formaal/> - retrieved 12.04.05

### **Online resources for artist information, song lyrics and music videos (in order of appearance)**

#### **Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds – *The Mercy Seat***

Anderson, Kyle for Entertainment Weekly – *The unbearable Lightness of being Nick Cave* – URL: <http://www.ew.com/article/2014/09/05/unbearable-lightness-being-nick-cave> - retrieved 20.04.15

*Apophenia* on wikipedia.org. URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apophenia> - retrieved 20.04.15

Hattenstone, Simon for The Guardian – *Old Nick* – URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2008/feb/23/popandrock.features> - retrieved 20.04.15

*Nick Cave* on Wikipedia.org. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nick\\_Cave](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nick_Cave) - retrieved 20.04.15

Nick Cave – Discography on wikipedia.org. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nick\\_Cave#Discography](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nick_Cave#Discography) – retrieved 20.04.15

Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds – *The Mercy Seat* on youtube.com. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ahr4KFI79WI> – retrieved 20.04.15

Official artist website Nickcave.com. URL: [www.nickcave.com](http://www.nickcave.com) – retrieved 20.04.15

*The Mercy seat* lyrics on nickcave.com. URL: <http://nickcave.com/lyrics/nick-cave-bad-seeds/tender-prey/mercy-seat/> - retrieved 20.04.15

Uncut – *Nick Cave's 30 best songs* – URL: [http://www.uncut.co.uk/features/nick-cave-s-30-greatest-songs-chosen-by-the-bad-seeds-his-famous-fans-and-cave-himself-37741#disqus\\_thread](http://www.uncut.co.uk/features/nick-cave-s-30-greatest-songs-chosen-by-the-bad-seeds-his-famous-fans-and-cave-himself-37741#disqus_thread) – retrieved 20.04.15

### **Lauryn Hill – *Final Hour***

«Deen» on wikipedia.org. URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D%C4%ABn> – retrieved 01.04.15

Hill, Lauryn – *Final Hour* on Azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/laurynhill/finalhour.html> - retrieved 01.04.15

*Lauryn Hill* on Wikipedia.org. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lauryn\\_Hill](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lauryn_Hill) - retrieved 01.04.15

Official artist website *Lauryn-Hill.com*. URL: <http://www.lauryn-hill.com/> - retrieved 01.04.15

Powers, Ann. *Review: The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*. 1998, New York Times. URL: <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/08/23/arts/pop-jazz-crossing-back-over-from-profane-to-sacred.html> - retrieved 01.04.15

*Salat* on wikipedia.org, URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salat> - retrieved 01.04.15

*The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill – Critical reception* on Wikipedia.org. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Miseducation\\_of\\_Lauryn\\_Hill#Critical\\_reception](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Miseducation_of_Lauryn_Hill#Critical_reception) – retrieved 01.04.15

*The Score (Fugees album)* on wikipedia.org. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Score\\_\(Fugees\\_album\)#Charts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Score_(Fugees_album)#Charts) – retrieved 01.04.15

### **Matisyahu – *King without a crown, Jerusalem (Out of Darkness comes Light) and One Day***

Crown Heights community website. URL: <http://crownheights.info/> retrieved 01.02.15

*Crown Heights* on Wikipedia.org. URL:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown\\_Heights,\\_Brooklyn#Demographics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown_Heights,_Brooklyn#Demographics) retrieved 01.02.15

*Matisyahu – Jerusalem* on Letssingit.com. URL: <http://artists.letssingit.com/matisyahu-lyrics-jerusalem-tf4lmg> - retrieved 07.02.15

*Matisyahu – Jerusalem (Out of Darkness comes Light)* on youtube.com – URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8ULlw0Zgaw> – retrieved 07.02.15

*Matisyahu – King without a crown* on Azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/matisyahu/kingwithoutacrown54153.html> - retrieved 01.02.15

*Matisyahu – One day* on Songlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.songlyrics.com/matisyahu/one-day-lyrics/> - retrieved 08.02.15

*Matisyahu – One day* on youtube.com – URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRmBChQjZPs> – retrieved 24.10.14

*Matisyahu* on Wikipedia.org. URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matisyahu#2001.E2.80.932007> – retrieved 02.04.15

*Matthew Wilder – Break my stride* on Oldielyrics.com URL: [http://www.oldielyrics.com/lyrics/matthew\\_wilder/break\\_my\\_stride.html](http://www.oldielyrics.com/lyrics/matthew_wilder/break_my_stride.html) retrieved 07.02.15

Official artist website *Matisyahuworld.com*. URL: [www.matisyahuworld.com](http://www.matisyahuworld.com) – retrieved 02.04.15

*Who is the Moshiach? - The basics* on Chabad.org. URL: [http://www.chabad.org/library/moshiach/article\\_cdo/aid/1121893/jewish/The-Basics.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/moshiach/article_cdo/aid/1121893/jewish/The-Basics.htm) retrieved 04.02.15

### **OPM – *Heaven is a half-pipe***

Christian Hosoi's official website URL: [www.hosoiskates.com](http://www.hosoiskates.com) – now defunct - attempted retrieved 05.04.15

*Christian Hosoi* on Wikipedia.org. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian\\_Hosoi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Hosoi) - retrieved 05.04.15

*List of Kerrang! Award winners* on wikipedia.org. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Kerrang!\\_Award\\_winners#2001](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Kerrang!_Award_winners#2001) – retrieved 05.04.15

*McGill* on McGillsskateshop.com. URL: <http://wp.mcgillsskateshop.com/mcgill/> - retrieved 05.04.15

Official artist website OPMden – *Bio* – URL: <http://www.opmden.com/bio> - retrieved 05.04.15

OPM – *Heaven is a half-pipe* on azlyrics.com. URL: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/opm/heavenisahalfpipe.html> - retrieved 05.04.15

OPM – *Heaven is a half-pipe* on youtube.com. URL: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCSJzw6QM\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCSJzw6QM_Q) – retrieved 05.04.15

### **Tori Amos – *Crucify***

Last.fm Originals. *Tori Amos gives The Last Word on Unrepentant Geraldines*. URL: <http://originals.last.fm/the-last-word/tori-amos-2/> - published 12.06.14 – retrieved 20.04.15

*Tori Amos* official artist website. URL: [www.toriamos.com](http://www.toriamos.com) – retrieved 20.04.15

*Tori Amos* on Wikipedia.org. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tori\\_Amos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tori_Amos) - retrieved 20.04.15

*Tori Amos – Crucify* on metrolyrics.com. URL: <http://www.metrolyrics.com/crucify-lyrics-tori-amos.html> - retrieved 19.02.15

*Tori Amos – Crucify* on youtube.com. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ipCKIxdHTs> – retrieved 19.02.15

