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ANNOTATION

This thesis will attempt to observe the shift from the religious confession Bob Dylan was born in, Judaism, to Christianity in the albums the artist released between 1979 and 1983. This includes the influence of the cultural climate in the United States of America, and the elements of the musical genres of folk, rock and gospel Dylan turns to.

KEYWORDS

Judaism, Christianity, Jesus Christ, king David, Messiah, eschatology, Vietnam war, energy crisis, Evangelicalism, Fundamentalism, Moral Majority, counterculture, folk, rock gospel.

NÁZEV

Gotta Serve Somebody: role náboženství v písňové tvorbě Boba Dylana

ANOTACE

Tato práce se pokusí o prozkoumání přesunu Boba Dylana z rozeného židovství ke křesťanství v jeho albech vydaných mezi lety 1979 a 1983. S tím souvisí vliv kulturního klima Spojených Států Amerických a dále promítající se vlastnosti hudebních žánrů folku, rocku a gospelu.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Židovství, křesťanství, Ježíš Kristus, král David, Mesiáš, eschatologie, válka ve Vietnamu, ekonomická krize, evangelické křesťanství, fundamentalismus, morální většina, kontrakultura, folk, rock, gospel.

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to observe the influence Christianity had on the Jewish-born songwriter Bob Dylan between 1979 and 1983; namely on his albums *Slow Train Coming*, *Saved*, and *Shot of Love*. These albums will then also be compared to Dylan's subsequent album *Infields*, which is not explicitly considered to be a Christian work.

The thesis will be divided into theoretical and practical parts. The theoretical part of this work will then be divided into several topics. The first topic will briefly discuss the essentials of Dylan's life. This chapter will work mainly with two different sources: Howard Sounes' *Down the Highway: the life of Bob Dylan* and *The political world of Bob Dylan* by Jeff Taylor and Chad Israelson.

The second chapter will introduce the basic concepts of Christianity and Judaism: mainly what they have in common and their key differences. As this is an incredibly complex and sensitive topic, this chapter will only focus on the most basic points, which will be applicable to Dylan's work. For the introduction to both religions, I will refer to *Religion in America* by Julia Mitchell Corbett and *America, religions and religion* by Catherine L. Albanese. I will also pursue further definitions in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* by F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, and *The Encyclopedia of Religion* by Lindsey Jones. The information on both religions respectively will be drawn from books edited by Matt Stefon: *Judaism: history, belief, and practice* and *Christianity: history, belief, and practice*.

Historical and political background of the 1970s and the 1980s will be the focal point of the third chapter. This part will aim to examine the depressive atmosphere which permeated the American scene at the time, and how it affected Dylan. This chapter will also analyze the tenure of several presidents, from Nixon to Reagan, and the impact each had on America. The information for political context comes from *American evangelicals: a contemporary history of a mainstream religious movement* by Barry Hankins, and *America, a concise history* by James A. Henretta, David Brody and Lynn Dumenil. The politic, social and economic climate in 1970s America is a topic I have previously pursued in my essay "Struggling America in the 1970s."

Lastly, the final chapter of the theoretical part will delve into the three prominent musical genres in the work of Bob Dylan - folk, rock and gospel. All of these genres will be introduced, and then compared to the artist himself. I will use the book *Exploring American folk music, ethnic,*

grassroots, and regional traditions in the United States by Kip Lornell to analyze folk. For rock: the essays “Prolegomena to any aesthetics of rock music” by Bruce Baugh and Bernice Martin’s “The sacralization of disorder: symbolism in rock music.” And lastly for gospel I will refer predominantly to the essays from *A Cambridge companion to blues and gospel*, edited by Alan Moore.

In the practical part, with the help of chosen literature, mainly *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet* by Seth Rogovoy, *Time out of mind: the lives of Bob Dylan* by Ian Bell, and *Dylan — what happened* by Paul Williams, I will attempt to apply the gained knowledge and then observe the meaning and usage of both Judaism and Christianity and how that evolves throughout the selected albums, with a later attempt at a conclusion. To describe the voice narrating the songs, words Dylan and narrator will be used interchangeably. For lyric quotations I will refer to the book *Lyrics: 1962-2001* by Bob Dylan.¹

¹ Dylan, Bob. *The Lyrics, 1962-2001*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 399–486.

1 How it came to be. The context

Dylan's so-called "Gospel Years" were preceded by a period of rather unfortunate events. Howard Sounes in *Down the Highway*² follows Dylan's journey through those years. His marriage to Sara was coming to a climactic end, allegedly³ caused by Dylan's womanizing disposition. The divorce cost him considerably, as she was granted half of the shared marital property, including music rights, and later won their children's custody. The movie he directed, *Renaldo and Clara*, a seemingly autobiographically inspired film including a concert footage, was a costly debacle. By this time, Dylan had started relationships with a number of female backup singers supporting the band, most of them Christian. The following album, *Street-Legal*, released in 1978, did not receive Dylan's appreciation, mainly because he was dissatisfied with the result, later earning mixed reviews from critics as well. One of the album's songs, "Señor" ("*Tales of Yankee Power*") Sounes⁴ calls a "signpost" to Christianity, noting the appearance of biblical references, namely "Señor" posing as a Messiah-like figure. Rogovoy⁵ specifies the mentions of "Armageddon," the linguistic connection of "Señor" to the Latin word for "lord," and the prophetic nature of the song.

In the late 1970s, the popularity of Christianity in music was on a rise. Before Dylan gave an official statement about his conversion to a different faith, a couple of signs about what was to come had appeared, like giving a guitar full of New Testament quotes to his friend's son at the end of 1978. Later after a concert in San Diego Dylan started wearing a cross thrown on the stage by a fan. This cultivated into what Evangelists call a born-again experience when Dylan experienced a deeply spiritual encounter when he felt Jesus right beside him. Sounes⁶ believes it could've been caused by the at-the-time girlfriend Mary Alice Artes, also born-again, that introduced him to the evangelical church in Los Angeles, the Vineyard Fellowship. There he had himself baptized and attended Bible studies for three months in early 1979.⁷

All three albums, *Slow Train Coming*, *Saved*, and *Shot of Love*, are consistent in themes of apocalypse and the promise of salvation that appears in Christian literature. One of the objects

² Howard Sounes: *Down the Highway* (New York: Grove Press, 2001) 308–309.

³ Bell, Ian. *Time out of Mind, Time out of Mind: The Lives of Bob Dylan*. (New York: Pegasus Books LLC, 2014), 152, McCarron, Andrew. *Light Come Shining: the transformations of Bob Dylan*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 77.

⁴ Sounes, *Down the highway*, 319.

⁵ Rogovoy, Seth. *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 186.

⁶ Sounes, *Down the Highway*, 325.

⁷ Sounes, *Down the highway*, 326.

of the church's studies was an interpretation of the Old and New Testament's prophetic books by one of Vineyard pastors, Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, which is discussed by Jeff Taylor and Chad Israelson in *The Political World of Bob Dylan*,⁸ where they observe the amount of influence Lindsey had on Dylan's work. Hal Lindsey's dispensationalist teachings stand on an eschatological basis, believing that the second coming of Jesus is nigh. This can be observed throughout the albums. Lindsey was a dispensationalist, which was a Christian denomination focusing on biblical prophecy and the second coming of Jesus. Taylor and Israelson⁹ speculate that Dylan could have been charmed by dispensationalism's promise of salvation not only for Christians but Israeli also.

His conversion would not be as scandalous if it was not Evangelical Christianity, at the time a religious denomination whose rise in popularity can be credited to an increasing activity in the political field, and whose representatives weren't afraid of preaching conservative values.

⁸ Taylor, Jeff, Chad Israelson. *The political world of Bob Dylan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 159

⁹ Taylor, *The political world*, 159.

2 Religion. Stuck between two worlds

Christianity came into existence as an outgrowth of Judaism, which means that both religions share partial history, culture, as well as literature. The Christian Old Testament is based on the Jewish Bible, which is also known as Tanakh. As such, both religions are therefore monotheistic and both characterize their respective Gods with interchangeable attributes, such as being all-creating, righteous, just, merciful, and loving. According to Stefon¹⁰, the Israelites had named God Yahweh, while Christians follow the concept of the Holy Trinity; a belief that God is represented by the following: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Although seemingly polytheistic, as Stefon states, Trinitarian Christians are of the conviction that all three form the Godhead.¹¹

Furthermore, both religions have a unique title for the human relationship with God: a covenant. The Oxford Dictionary of The Christian Church describes a covenant as “a bond entered voluntarily by two parties by which each party pledges to do something for the other.”¹² Most notable appearance of the concept of a covenant is in “Covenant Woman” from the album *Saved*. It is consensually acknowledged that there have been several covenants throughout history, the most recent appears to be the one in the New Testament with Jesus. The nature of a covenant between man and God is most commonly defined by the Ten Commandments, a unique lifestyle organized in a way approved by the scriptures. Both Judaism and Christianity expect failure to succeed in a perfectly faithful life, as humans are prone to sin. The way to repent is by commitment and worship. Both religions practice worship in individual and corporate ways by praying in private as well as within their respective communities. Important historical events have their respective holidays and festivals.¹³

2.1 Judaism

Judaism is a complex religion divided into several branches that differ from each other, yet each branch shares certain common characteristics. In order to simplify the topic, this part will focus on the commonalities that all branches of Judaism share.

¹⁰ Matt Stefon, *Judaism: History, Belief, Practice* (New York: Britannica Educational Publishing, 2012), 284.

¹¹ Matt Stefon, *Christianity: History, belief, practice* (New York: Britannica Educational Publishing, 2012), XIV.

¹² F. L. Cross, E. A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of The Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, Third edition, 1997), 425.

¹³ Julia Mitchell Corbett, *Religion in America*, 2.ed (New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1994), 44–45.

The most fundamental collection of religious texts to the Jews is the **Hebrew Bible**, also known as *Tanakh*. Carr¹⁴ explains that Tanakh is the combination of names of the three main parts, Torah, Neviim, and Ketuviin. The most important is the Torah.

As Corbett¹⁵ describes, Jews are defined by two main religious **texts**; the Torah and the Talmud. Torah, also known as the Pentateuch, or the Five Books of Moses, is a collection of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. The Pentateuch consists of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These scriptures are of documenting nature, they recount events, but also include prophecies. Additionally, as a word, Torah represents the way of Jewish life.

Talmud is a following commentary including different interpretations of the Tanakh. The pillar of the Scriptures is the Ten Commandments, also called the Decalogue.¹⁶ Cross¹⁷ also states that the contemporary Ten Commandments represent common moral principles, with the exception of two rules; “prohibition of images and observing the Sabbath.” Corbett¹⁸ then further divides commandments into those concerning the relationship to God and those relating to others.

In Judaism, **God** is absolutely unique and cannot be represented in any material way. This is the reason why Jesus is not the Messiah for the Jews as he is for Christians. Jewish Messiah is a political liberator.¹⁹

Moral law

According to *America, religions and religion*,²⁰ God gave Moses two tablets of the Law. The Ten Commandments, and a longer one describing social relationships, ceremonial requirements, and morning and evening recitations of Shema. Its function is to remind them of the code they live by: to love God and one another, to act the right way is not enough, one must also have the right heart. These commandments are called mitzvahs or the moral law and are a universal ethical message. Some of these teachings were later used in American reforming, especially the concept of Jewish chosenness and spreading justice.

¹⁴ Carr, David M. *The Hebrew Bible: A contemporary introduction to the Christian Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), 3.

¹⁵ Corbett, *Religion in America*, 126–129

¹⁶ Corbett, *Religion in America*, 126–127.

¹⁷ Cross, Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 382.

¹⁸ Corbett, *Religion in America*, 126–129.

¹⁹ Corbett, *Religion in America*, 128.

²⁰ Albanese, Catherine L. *America: Religions and religion*, 4th ed. (Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth, 2007), 52.

Moral principles of Judaism are recorded in Torah.²¹ George Robinson in the book *Essential Judaism, A complete guide to beliefs, customs and rituals*²² describes all 613 commandments as follows: their scriptures require kindness in many forms. Assistance in sickness, being hospitable to strangers, even in forms of lodging, and preventing the death of others if possible. To follow the ten commandments, and to act lawfully if injustice is happening. “Evil speech,” meaning any gossip or slander is prohibited. Another field of their moral principles is for doing justice, also called charity. These acts are usually done financially, but more importantly with one’s entire being. Acts of charity are possible for both the living and the dead. Charity is a way to redeem a sin in God’s eyes. *Tzedakah* is a tradition taking place before Sabbath that requires everyone to give, however, the amount depends on their financial stability. The act of helping anonymously on both ends is considered the highest act of charity. One such way to do that is through establishments to help the poor.

Mitzvot also address ethical behavior and forms of justice, because interpersonal relationships are of equal importance to the human-God relationship. Contrary to individualism-driven Protestantism, Judaism emphasizes the importance of the ethical conduct of their whole society. Justice, mercy, and humility before God are the three behavioral requirements. According to Robinson,²³ the rules of war are more lenient than in other ancient cultures. Unjust social acts are addressed in *Mishpatim, Exodus*. Death penalties were scarcely applied, instead, the jurisdiction turned to long prison sentences in places of murder cases. The “eye for an eye” principle is understood in the form of “an injury for an injury.” The correct understanding, however, is proper compensation for causing the injury and the time it will take to heal it. Perhaps the most relevant is the Jewish pursuit in *tikkun olam*, the *repair of the world*, because Jews are chosen by God to devote their lives to improving the world. This consists, amongst others, of fairness in business, fair wages for workers, and no pointless violence against animals.

The Jewish **covenant** compels its people to care for not only each other but also for the outsiders, the less fortunate, and the animals. Everything is God’s creation, therefore even enemies should be treated fairly. The covenant Jews have with God makes them God’s chosen people in the sense that they have unique responsibilities. Their shared history and the covenant

²¹ Mendy Hecht. “The 613 Commandments (Mitzvot),” accessed October 10, 2022, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/756399/jewish/The-613-Commandments-Mitzvot.htm

²² Robinson, George. *Essential Judaism: a complete guide to beliefs, customs and rituals* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 205–212

²³ Robinson, *Essential Judaism*, 208.

bind all Jews together as the people of Israel.²⁴ This is supported further by Jones,²⁵ who describes these pledges as stipulations that regulate people's behavior towards each other, regarded as responsibilities to the less fortunate. These responsibilities apply to the whole nation of Israel. Added to that is the need to present offerings of gratefulness to God from the priests on behalf of the people.

The imminent **apocalypse** is a repetitive theme in Dylan's Christian albums. As Christianity and its eschatological predictions root in Judaism, it originates in the apocalyptic literature of early Judaism. Stefon²⁶ describes apocalyptic literature as a genre foretelling the events at the end of the world, usually supernaturally caused. There is a pessimistic view of the present. The earliest works were by the Prophets and lacked chronological structure and eschatological terms. Later they added expectations of an apocalyptic scenario consisting of an imminent crisis, a universal judgment, and a supernatural resolution. The Book of David contains one of the most famous apocalypses – the rule of four kings, oppressors, ended by a “savior” that replaces them as a monarch.

The biblical king **David**, just like Jesus Christ, supplies Dylan's thirst for inspiration. According to *Judaism: History, belief, practice*.²⁷ The biblical king David was a wise king of Israel (circa 1000 – 962 BCE). He was the first to successfully built an empire of Israel and he managed this by cunning political moves and by binding smaller kingdoms etc. by marriage. He is the “primary symbol of the bond between God and nation.” The regal title of his line, *hameshiach*, will in the future be transformed into a derivation of the word messiah. David represents both the founding of political power and symbolizes a central facet of Jewish religious faith. As he was the right-hand man to YHWH (the name of Israel's God), who was the true king of Israel, David was his king-priest. Observed by Gilmour,²⁸ the character of David notably appears in the unreleased “All over You,” recorded in 1963, in “When the Ship Comes In” from *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, 1964, in *Infidels'* “I and I.” Gilmour also notes that Dylan's fascination with king David centralizes on the time when he was an outlaw, which parallels Dylan's interest with rebel characters.

²⁴ Corbett, *Religion in America*, 128–129.

²⁵ Jones, Lindsey. *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Farmington Hills, MI: Thompson Gale, 2005), 4857.

²⁶ Stefon, *Judaism: History, Belief, Practice*, 148.

²⁷ Stefon, *Judaism: History, Belief, Practice*, 277–284.

²⁸ Gilmour, J. Michael. *Tangled Up in The Bible: Bob Dylan&Scripture* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), 87.

2.2 Christianity

The spiritual experience Dylan went through can be attributed to **Evangelicalism**, I will work with its aspects. As Julia Mitchell Corbett states in *Religion in America*,²⁹ Evangelicalism being based on Puritanism seeks the salvation of humankind through acceptance of Jesus as their savior and God as the only Lord, since that is the only way to save one's inherently sinful soul. A crucial role plays a so-called born-again experience. Evangelicals describe this religious event as the very moment that Jesus Christ came to their lives as a Lord and Savior. An exact time and place are of significance. One of the most important aspects of Evangelicalism is the mission to spread their faith among others, usually by voicing out the positivity that their relationship with Jesus bestows upon them. This act of intended conversion of others is called witnessing. This is closely followed by how public American Evangelicalism presents itself, forming groups to help with witnessing, especially on college campuses, but also in other departments, such as medicine, philosophy, literature, music, etc.

Fundamentalism, however ideologically similar may seem, is regarded as more assertive and, unlike Evangelicalism, has a traditional approach for considering modern scholarships. There is, just like in the past, an emphasis on personal morality.³⁰

American culture is based on the religion of **Protestantism**, which has accompanied it since the original migrations. Protestantism is a predominant religion in America, forming the very heart of American culture, constructing the so-called Civil religion. Incoming religions often adapted to the American Protestant mainstream by taking on some characteristics. This preserved the plurality of religions and at the same time guaranteed the smooth coexistence of cultures. The history of America and the formation of Protestantism as Public Protestantism dates to Calvinist Christians and the first Puritan settlers. The original leaders shaped the colonies according to their religion. Original Protestantism and its focus on the individual were well suited to survive in the harsh American landscape. Over time, however, Calvinist Christianity transformed its essence into a materialistic one, as a response to a governmental decision to exclude churches from receiving financial support from the government and therefore had to get it from their supporters.³¹

²⁹ Corbett, *Religion in America*, 180–181.

³⁰ Corbett, *Religion in America*, 183.

³¹ Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion* 256–259

Albanese divides religion into three elements, ethics, symbols, and theology. Protestant **ethics** are also understood as norms and behaviors. Their most important aspect of religious life was moralism. Adding to that, religious freedom and democratic equality were important in the initial stages of the colonies because of all the immigrants of varying nationalities and religious confessions. This evolved with the establishment of the Constitution in 1789, where it is explicitly stated that the state cannot banish a religion or create one. To simplify organizational purposes, the preferred religious groups became denominations. The importance of the Bible, Sunday school, pamphlet literature, and missionary efforts were shared by most Christian denominations. Activism was a big thing for Protestantism, because of the shallow history the religion had in the new lands. More members needed to be lured by something. In order to prevent barbarism, education had to be spread, so Protestants established colleges. Their educational system mirrored their mentality, reductionism, to keep everything as simple and straightforward, in education this transformed into non intellectualism, an effort to limit theoretical and non-practical teaching. And since Americans had the notion that European history is no longer theirs, they simplified and changed it.³²

Rituals are based on the idea of revivalism. Jones describes revivalism as a phenomenon with the aim of acculturating and adjusting different sociocultural groups that could have been in conflict.³³ A revivalist ritual is held in a sacred place, the atmosphere of the sacred time is created with the help of religious speeches, this situation brings together various religious emotions, for example, the burden of sin, the outcome of sin, pleasantness of conversion and heaven. The perfect setting for the church activities was with active participants that understood the burden of sin. The act of conversion had to be done with the effort of searching. To be authentic, a conversion would be expressed in the reformed character of Christian lives. Zealous converts participated in reform work, and religious liberty – revivalism presented a democratic God that accepted anyone from any social and financial status.³⁴

Theology is also referred to as a belief system, stresses the importance of the individual, introduces higher law, which is above human law, and follows millennialist and perfectionism. Great importance is placed on self-reliance while being involved in cultural affairs. The need to submit to rules in such an individual environment would be justified by the authority of a higher law, made by God, which inspired any written law. The higher law inspired

³² Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 260–262.

³³ Lindsey, *Encyclopedia of religion*, 7784.

³⁴ Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 262–263.

millennialism, a biblical concept awaiting the return of Jesus, which was expected to happen at the end of the millennium. They, the pre-millennials, were chosen to prepare the world before Jesus arrives – “save” (convert), others or bring social reforms. Millennial chosenness is presented in “manifest destiny,” which can be understood as a justification for driving Native Americans out of their land, actions which they defended as a will of God and the higher law.³⁵

Motifs in Dylan’s work:

According to *Christianity: History, belief, practice*,³⁶ the **Christian God** is different from Judaism especially because the concept/persona of God is divided into three categories: The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit. The Son, Jesus, preached the words of the Father, God, and due to that they are sometimes referred to as Oneness. This relationship is used by Christians as a blueprint for their relationship with God. He is constantly involved through miracles – miraculous healing, humans have no power in this whatsoever. The creation of the world is understood as God’s self-revelation. We can observe the transformation of the portrayal of God in Dylan’s Christian albums. *Slow Train Coming* is more about intimidation, for instance in “When You Gonna Wake Up” and its line “God don’t make promises that he don’t keep,” in “When He Returns,” Rogovoy³⁷ interprets the “iron rod” in the first stanza as a metaphorical reference to the word of God, then further commenting on God’s all-perceiving nature. In *Saved*, Dylan portrays “his” Christian God as a loving, forgiving, miraculous, and just figure. The most notable from *Infidels* is the arguable “Jokerman,” whose underlined message could as much as ridicule God.

As a direct opposite to God to represent evil, the devil, **Satan**, appears in the Bible. In the Hebrew scriptures, he is depicted as an autonomous being existing beside God, verifying the endurance of the faithful. The idea of the rebelling creation, ruler of the underground, infamous for leading people astray, comes later. He is the tempter, the true antagonist to Jesus’ story that attempts to beguile Jesus. Satan is the representation of sin; he rejects God’s superiority and aims for equality in status.³⁸ Dylan uses the imagery of the devil in songs like “Trouble in Mind,” “Saved,” and especially “Man of Peace” to amplify his convictions about the threats of sin.

³⁵ Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 263–264

³⁶ Stefon, *Christianity: History, belief, practice*, 82–107.

³⁷ Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: Prophet, mystic, poet*, 209.

³⁸ Stefon, *Christianity: History, belief, practice*, 89.

The character of **Jesus** plays an important role in Dylan's Christian and post-Christian work. According to *Christianity: history, belief, practice*,³⁹ Jesus Christ represents prophetic aspects and redemption. His divinity as the Son of God was established with his resurrection. There are however several interpretations to this occurrence: in Mark's Gospel, Jesus gains divinity at baptism when he is infused with the Holy Spirit. In John's Gospel, Jesus was born divine. It is believed that Jesus knew what he was because he could feel God's powers in him. The concept of Jesus as a Messiah is based on Ancient Judaism which believed that the Messiah would originate from David's descendants and will build an earthly kingdom of God. This expectation can be described as that of a political Messiah. On the contrary, the Christian vision of a Messiah, the heavenly Messiah, would come as a Son of God and was expected to build a heavenly kingdom. This concept is different from the eschatological expectations of Judaism. Ancient Judaism anticipated the resurrection (in the kingdom of peace) only for the final generation to live through the arrival of the Messiah. The (Christian) heavenly kingdom of God, however, grants resurrection to all generations of the faithful. The character of Jesus is one of the most central motifs of these albums and appears both directly and indirectly. To Dylan, Jesus is a figure of great respect and, one could say, an idol. Some⁴⁰ read Dylan's portrayal of Jesus as a sort of self-projection. And some⁴¹ observe the appearance of Christ-like figures before these albums as well, such as the sword-swallower in the "Ballad of a Thin Man,"

Eschatology,⁴² also called "last things," and in its literal definition approximately "of or relating to the end of the world," is the most essential purpose of the Christian faith. The expectations of salvation in the form of the Kingdom of God, ruled by Jesus, are ever looming. The imagery associated with the Christian end, the afterlife, and immortality of the soul spent in heaven, served as a consolidation, especially in times of suffering. Two forms of eschatology exist – individual and collective. The individual predicts the individual's judgment by God and the fruitlessness of any attempts to change the world. The collective one speculates a "public manifestation of God's justice,"⁴³ readying themselves for universal salvation.

As we will later observe, Dylan applies the issue of his **suffering** through the "gospel" albums. The concept has a special meaning in Christian theology. Christians use suffering as a method

³⁹ Stefon, *Christianity: History, belief, practice*, 93.

⁴⁰ Gilmour, *Tangled Up in the Bible*, 40.

⁴¹ Clinton Spargo, Anne K. Ream. "Bob Dylan and religion," in *A Cambridge companion to Bob Dylan*, ed. Kevin J. H. Dettmar (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 93.

⁴² Stefon, *Christianity: History, belief, practice*, 117–118.

⁴³ Stefon, *Christianity: History, belief, practice*, 118.

to connect to Jesus, a “messianic self-understanding of Jesus himself.”⁴⁴ The religion glorifies suffering through fighting sin per Jesus’ words, as it is a means that leads to resurrection.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Stefon, *Christianity: History, belief, practice*, 111.

⁴⁵ Stefon, *Christianity: History, belief, practice*, 111

3 American climate. The atmosphere that shadowed the torn poet

Dylan's conversion came to exist during some of the most turbulent times. The 1970s were marked by the continuing distrust towards the Government and the Liberals, which persisted from the previous decade. One of the biggest factors, which caused the distrust to spread was the Vietnam War. Henretta et al address the events of the **American Vietnam War era** in *America, a concise history*.⁴⁶ The ongoing failures of the Vietnam war tore the United States into two, causing unrest and protests in opposition to it. This anti-war sentiment carried to the presidential elections of 1968. In addition to that, two tragedies had shaken the populace: the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr., followed by more student unrest answered by police violence at Columbia University, and that of the Senator of the Democratic Party, Robert Kennedy, that debilitated the very Party Johnson belonged to.

The movement that opposed the governing right-wing came to be known as **counterculture**, containing liberals and those against the war. Reeves'⁴⁷ definition as follows: what started as "rebellious youth" of 1920s and beatniks from 1950s, rebelling against unreasonable laws, violence and hatred, continued to provoke the young minds and from 1967 another label, "hippie" came to exist. The "hippie" mentality affected the young generation and prompted to "challenge the traditional values of bourgeois culture - reason, progress, order, achievement, social responsibility remained in the following decades."⁴⁸

The culmination of the anti-war protests happened in August at a Democratic convention in Chicago, where around 10 000 self-called "Yippies," also known as the Youth International Party, aimed to garner media exposure by increasingly vulgar methods of attracting attention. These demonstrations turned increasingly violent while being broadcasted all over the world. The general public was appalled and took a supportive posture toward the government's new pro-war approach.⁴⁹

The following president, a Republican, **Richard Nixon**, took advantage of the conservative preference. His victory granted the Republican Party a reawakening, while also uncovering how

⁴⁶ Henretta, James A., David Brody, Lynn Dumenil. *America, a concise history*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St.Martin's, 2006), 903–905.

⁴⁷ Reeves, Thomas C. *Twentieth Century America, a brief history* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 186–187.

⁴⁸ Reeves, *Twentieth Century America*, 187.

⁴⁹ Henretta et al, *America, a concise history*, 906.

split the country had been. The failing morale of soldiers, and the increasingly publicized brutality of the war, along with the fact that the States still weren't victorious, forced Nixon to end the Vietnam War by signing the Paris Peace Accords in 1973. The aftermath accounted for 58,000 dead, the problem of the 1980s - post-traumatic stress disorder, the inability to readapt, and the "Vietnam syndrome."⁵⁰ It was the first war America lost, and it belongs to the most abhorred to this day. The expected communist takeover of Asia never happened. The containment policy had to be reevaluated. There was no disruption of the American alliances.⁵¹ Furthermore, it led to a greater hesitancy to enter military conflicts in foreign lands, the reorganization of the military, and changes in legislation. This also further impacted the economic and social spheres. Funds that would have been otherwise spent to help with the inflation and invested into social programs and domestic reforms. The American military success was uncovered to be a lie and furthered the wariness Americans felt towards their government.⁵²

This era is depicted by Reeves,⁵³ who says that "the demonstrations" happened almost daily for the whole upcoming decade. The weight of importance was apparently caused by the media exposure and its way of presenting only the worst footage.

Dylan reminisces about the era in his autobiography *Chronicles, volume one*⁵⁴. According to him, America was depressed, angry, and violent, student protests turned brutal, and the fast-paced changes society was going through. He recounts how he resisted the anti-state demonstrations when they wanted to make him the face of the movement. *The political world of Bob Dylan* on the other hand, observes how the political events affected his performance on stage, such as him wearing a mask depicting Nixon's face; though never being explicitly political. To support this claim, Taylor et al⁵⁵ include Dylan's negative stance on the Counterculture and their attempts to iconize Dylan as their representative, Dylan's war-critique-filled songs saw the light of existence in the 1970s and 1980s.

The 1970s underwent an economic downturn that caused uncertainty about the future. What persisted was the sentiment on social improvement, feminism, and environmentalism. Henretta et al⁵⁶ observes the presidency of Richard Nixon, the Republican movement, and the events of

⁵⁰ Henretta et al, *America, a concise history*, 907–912.

⁵¹ Reeves, *Twentieth Century America*, 209–211.

⁵² Henretta et al, *America, a concise history*, 911—913.

⁵³ Reeves, *Twentieth Century America*, 184–185

⁵⁴ Bob Dylan: *Chronicles, volume one* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 113–114.

⁵⁵ Taylor et al, *The political world of Bob Dylan*, 86.

⁵⁶ Henretta et al, *America, a concise history*, 915–920.

the Watergate scandal. The following years under Nixon led to an advancement of the conservative movement while making attempts at fixing the struggles in the economy and improving the environment and social welfare systems. His presidential accomplishments were outweighed by the Watergate scandal, another blow to the trustworthiness of political leaders. The core issue of Watergate was the discovery that the president either gives approval or gives direct orders on illegal surveillance. The Watergate apartment complex, belonging to Democratic National Committee, was invaded by Nixon's intelligence hunters. The cover-up was lacking and the evidence led to the White House, which was followed by a number of similar incriminations. Nixon was forced to resign in August 1974. Watergate thus embodied the representation of cynicism towards politicians and the government that the Americans felt.

The Vietnam war and the *energy crisis* were accountable for a number of dire consequences. "The federal deficit, spiraling inflation, decrease in productivity, rise in unemployment, stagflation (the combination of inflation and unemployment), lower standards of living, difficulties with home ownership, the dissolution of savings, and deindustrialization."⁵⁷ The United States' own production of oil stopped being enough for their needs, forcing them to depend on the foreign market, especially the Middle East. Oil prices rose exponentially throughout the war and inflation weakened States, the damages were varied – the stagnation of the American automobile industry created by the need to buy more fuel-efficient cars from other countries, the creeping fear of realizing how powerless America was against external forces. With the termination of many factories, the population shifted to industrially prospering cities like Houston and Los Angeles.

The energy crisis was caused by an embargo by Arab nations, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, or **OPEC** for short, when they raised oil prices initially by 70 percent, and later nearly quadrupled.⁵⁸ This came to an end a year later. The outcome of the: a shortage of gasoline, drops in automobile sales, the economic inflation, and the GNP, gross national product, plummeting.⁵⁹

Public dissatisfaction gave way to progress and social movements. The activism of the 1960s and 1970s was titled "a rights revolution." Henretta et al⁶⁰ described the decade's **reforms**. Environmentalism, social justice, rights of races, genders, and sexes were all part of the

⁵⁷Henretta et al, *America, a concise history*, 924–928.

⁵⁸ Vlčková, Kamila. "Struggling America in the 1970." 2022. University of Pardubice. Unpublished paper.

⁵⁹ Reeves, *Twentieth Century America*, 212.

⁶⁰ Henretta et al, *America, a concise history*, 928–930.

discussion. A new trend of a healthy lifestyle full of sports, vegetarianism, and pesticide-free food spurred from the need for the self-fulfillment of the young generation while also coming from the newly found environmental awareness. A scale of new spiritual movements to help people find themselves came into existence. A number of the protesters and activists of the previous decade either aimed for social changes directly through careers in fields such as education, law, and medicine, by joining the leftist side of the Democratic Party or founding organizations to ease life in a community.

Henretta et al⁶¹ explores the noteworthy progress of **feminism**. Services and organizations geared towards women were established for health, access to education and job opportunities. Women's lives were also improved by the increase of control over their reproductive rights in the form of contraceptives. Additionally, the effort to prioritize a mother's life over fetus' and the freedom of abortion during the first trimester was attempted in the 1970s as evidenced by the *Roe v. Wade* case in 1973. This issue then divided America further into two opposing sides: those who supported abortions, called pro-choice, and those, who stood against it, called pro-life. The strongest pro-life supporters were mostly Roman Catholics. Conservatives saw this as something that could be described as an oppression of traditional roles and felt the need to express their dissatisfaction. Reeves⁶² comments on how the Conservatives saw the Women's liberation movement as an enemy, because many rather radical feminist women challenged the female role in the traditional family.

Likewise, **Racial minorities** continued the battle for their rights. Native Americans made claims to restore their lands and autonomy. Additionally, they were given financial compensation. The biggest backlash though came with the attempt to desegregate children in schools through busing and integration in classes. The disgruntlement on both sides, white and black parents, pressured the government to abandon this plan. The number of black students had risen as a response to the affirmative actions mentioned before. Because of this, the black population gained access to more employment options. The discontent of the white population created an opportunity for the upcoming efforts to disestablish these reforms.⁶³

The biggest impact upon the black minority and their fight for equality came from the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. The outbreak that resulted from this was

⁶¹ Henretta et al, *America, a concise history*, 930–931.

⁶² Reeves, *Twentieth Century America*, 189–191.

⁶³ Henretta et al, *America, a concise history*, 933–937.

massive, the violence of the black rioters and the fact that their leaders supported such behavior was, on one hand, perceived as a threat to the white majority, while on the other hand, had some whites feeling sympathetic towards the cause, defending their reasoning.⁶⁴

All the aforementioned movements were in a strong opposition towards conservatism and **Evangelical** Christianity. The newly given rights to minorities as well as the increased taxes, in order to support them, were believed to be taken directly from the rest of the American citizens. Working and middle-class Americans disliked the impact the energy crisis had on their financial stability. This dissatisfaction manifested itself in many forms. Riots of taxpayers caused the Government to pass several bills which benefited the protesters. The first one to appear was the California's Proposition 13, which reduced property taxes of middle-class owners and therefore caused the reduction of funds aimed at schools and the institutions helping the poor.⁶⁵

Evangelicals were a prominent conservative force, establishing their own schools, newspapers, and even a Broadcasting Network, through which they practiced a so-called televangelism – spreading evangelism through televised transmission.⁶⁶ According to Henretta et al,⁶⁷ a Gallup poll in 1976 revealed that about a quarter of Americans were affiliated with the evangelical movements. Moreover, the then presidential candidate Jimmy Carter publicized his affiliation in the presidential campaign in the same year. Henretta et al⁶⁸ also discuss the Evangelical engagement, namely abortion, interracial busing, sex education, pornography, feminism, and gay rights. In 1979, Jerry Falwell, founded the Moral Majority, “a political group pursuing to spread of Christian” family values, “such as traditional gender roles, heterosexuality, and family cohesion.”⁶⁹

Critical role in the political sphere of late 1970s to 1980s held the **Moral Majority**, a lobbying organization founded by Jerry Falwell in 1979, which was part of the New Right.⁷⁰ They took a vow to preserve democracy and protect the United States from a moral and spiritual decline. To ensure this, they focused on the revival of traditional American values of the fundamentalist Christianity, such as emphasis on purity and a return to past ideals. Their novel approach helped

⁶⁴ Reeves, *Twentieth-Century America*, 188.

⁶⁵ Henretta et al, *America, a concise history*, 937–938.

⁶⁶ Henretta et al, *America, a concise history*, 938.

⁶⁷ Henretta et al, *America, a concise history*, 937.

⁶⁸ Henretta et al, *America, a concise history*, 937—938.

⁶⁹ Henretta et al, *America, a concise history*, 938.

⁷⁰ Corbett, *Religion in America*, 185.

the New Right regain respectability and support. Its rise to power was further elevated by the Watergate scandal, which undermined the federal government's authority and credibility in the public eye.⁷¹ Barry Hankins⁷² analyses how the New Religious Right achieved such a powerful position in the Republican Party. They found support in the presidency of Jimmy Carter, who, however, was not conservative enough. Americans in the 1960s and 1970s experienced a decline in sexual education in schools, which was mainly caused by the initiative of Conservative Christian women. Another thing they pursued was the return of prayers to public schools. A meeting between a number of conservative Republican activists including a fundamentalist preacher Jerry Falwell took place in 1979. Falwell was a charming man and had a mob of radio and television audiences resulting from his shows. The group decided he would be the New Religious Right's representative. The main objective of the later-called Moral Majority was to politically unify those following the Decalogue to vote in unison. In the end, all kinds of religious conservatives were welcomed. After the presidential election of 1980 and Ronald Reagan's victory, evangelicals gained considerable influence in the Republican Party.

Following the scandal, **Gerald Ford** replaced Nixon in the presidential office. As stated by Henretta et al⁷³ he miscalculated the effects of the inflation and therefore caused the biggest economic decline since the Great Depression. Ford was seen by the public as reserved and incompetent. During his tenure, next to no progress was made regarding the relationship with the Soviet Union. Moreover, the pressure for modernization in Iran caused the infuriation of the extremist part of fundamental Muslims.

Not even the successive president **Jimmy Carter**, managed to improve the reputability of the Government. His pursuit of prioritizing the production of oil and gas on domestic soil was not effective. On the contrary, the prices rose by 55 percent after a revolution in Iran in 1979, when the oil supply was cut off.⁷⁴

Reeves⁷⁵ observes that another economic calamity befell the United States in 1980s - tens of thousands of businesses went **bankrupt**. Many corporations moved production to third world countries because of cheap labor, which resulted in a rise of unemployment. As a response to

⁷¹Henretta et al, *America, a concise history*, 938–939.

⁷²Barry Hankins, *American Evangelicals: a contemporary history of a mainstream religious movement* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield publishing Group, Inc., 2009), 141–149.

⁷³ Henretta et al, *America, a concise history*, 939.

⁷⁴ Henretta et al, *America, a concise history*, 939–940.

⁷⁵ Reeves, *Twentieth-Century America* 224–225.

the energy crisis, the Department of Energy was founded, which was not successful in stopping the escalation of consumer price rise and foreign oil dependency.

Carter's stance towards the Iranian revolution were, however, his greatest mistake. As Henretta et al⁷⁶ states: His lack of action allowed the fundamentalist Muslims to overthrow the American-supported government and take over 50 hostages, releasing them with the conclusion of Carter's presidency fourteen months later. This failure to deal with foreign affairs represented the weakening hold America had over the world. An occurrence that was to be expected, since the World War II weakened Western Europe, Japan, Middle East regained economic stability. This had a considerable psychological impact on Americans.

The following president **Ronald Reagan** was a charismatic conservative. His policy is what he called "dynamic conservatism." Its aim was to help the nation learn independence in a way that would allow the Government to lessen its involvement, called deregulation. His administration stood against extreme environmental activism and the new regulations on the automobile industry, furthermore, they attempted to shut down the Energy Department. To battle the weakened economy, they intended to cut taxes and federal spending.⁷⁷ While the difference between social classes grew, welfare and benefits to the poor draining the federal budget, which later made Reagan to restrict such assistance. The overturn came in 1983, when GNP grew, the issue of unemployment lessened, and inflation lowered.

Furthermore, he entertained The New Right's ideas to ensure their support and because of this they felt that he posed hope of a return to the traditional values and economic and international power.⁷⁸ His policies stood against most of the aforementioned affirmative and anti-segregation actions.⁷⁹

Reagan considerably increased military budget and advocated against communism, supporting any anti-Soviet actions by signing the Reagan Doctrine. Intimidated by this, the leader of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev proceeded to make several attempts to mend the American-Soviet relations. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 marked the end of the Cold War.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Henretta et al, *America, a concise history*, 941–944.

⁷⁷ Reeves, *Twentieth-Century America* 235–237.

⁷⁸ Reeves, *Twentieth-Century America* 237.

⁷⁹ Reeves, *Twentieth-Century America* 237.

⁸⁰ Reeves, *Twentieth-Century America*, 253–254.

4 The journey of music, from folk to gospel

4.1 Folk

Bob Dylan belonged to a movement called the folk revival, which differed from traditional folk by not being performed by those of regional, racial, and ethnic groups typical to traditional folk. Lornell⁸¹ describes the origins and characteristics of folk revivals. Folk experiences such revivals every couple of decades, and there was one happening during the baby boom. The particular mood for this revival evokes nostalgia for the times before the Vietnam war.

The baby boom revival folk musicians were inspired by the folk musicians of the 1930s Depression. As a response to the events of the decade, musicians turned to folk to express their discontent. As a result, protest songs that represented the people occurred. One such musician was Woody Guthrie, Dylan's role model. Guthrie voiced his socialist opinions since the late 30s. He and others, like Pete Seeger, another Dylan's inspiration, supported the American Communist Party. During the Second World War, the working class found a representation in this. While most songs certainly were politically charged, the themes of escapism and return to traditional values were present as well.⁸²

The 1960s folk revival was just as politically motivated, and the singers believed their songs would bring change. The decade had a number of important historical events coming, mainly the progressing Vietnam war and the civil rights movement, the so-called difficult themes. Folk music was riding the waves of great popularity, recording with some prominent companies.⁸³

Lornell⁸⁴ characterizes Dylan's folk as rooted in the inspiration from Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and others. His songs are topical (sociopolitical critique, love, faith), and he sends personal messages aimed at a general audience. Taylor⁸⁵ adds his observations on the song "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" from *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, a song following an unjust end of an African American woman at the hands of a rich and entitled white man. Themes like this and the songwriting form classified him between the community of folk singers while the approach of handling the topics separated, later leading to a separation.

⁸¹ Lornell, Kip. *Exploring American Folk Music: ethnic, grassroots, and regional traditions in the United States*, 3rd ed. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 281—282.

⁸² Lornell, *Exploring American Folk Music* 284–285

⁸³ Lornell, *Exploring American Folk Music*, 291–293.

⁸⁴ Lornell, *Exploring American Folk Music*, 302.

⁸⁵ Taylor et al, *The political world of Bob Dylan*, 99–100.

Lornell⁸⁶ also comments on Dylan's style of folk. According to him, at first, Dylan was not a folk musician, but a musician playing folk music, he was inspired by traditional music, and as such his initial performances consisted of his own interpretations of folk songs. Lornell⁸⁷ describes Dylan's folk as not too connected to the traditional one, his songs carrying personal messages in an objective way.

4.2 Rock

The transformation to rock is according to Taylor and Israelson⁸⁸ an expression of personal freedom. His early rock is described as impressionistic, challenging the audience's imagination. This transformation allowed him to further his topic repertoire.

Rock is performance-oriented, and usually simple in form. Unlike how traditional music focuses on form and composition, rock focuses on the matter of music. Matter meaning the experience sound carries, how the music feels, and how it affects the body. Individual tones carry meaning, every single one a way of expressing oneself. Just like voice, the electric guitar holds an expressive function. The guitar holds the expressive function just as much as the voice does. Respect for the written material is not as important, even mistakes are a part of the performance. What makes rock music good is generally subjective, but there are several assessment elements, such as rhythm. Because rock is meant for the dance floor, it ought to be able to get the audience moving, and even a badly composed song can achieve that through a great performance. The emotion contained in the performance. Tastefully applied loudness and the caused vibrations affecting the body also plays into the performer's expression.⁸⁹

Youth culture has a special take on what is "sacred". They choose to express themselves through anti-structure principles that help them form "communities." Anarchism, taboo-breaking, etc., varies in expression – fashion, behavior, and music style. Another commonality is with the "sacralization" of the performer. This can especially be applied to Dylan and his "counterculture" audience that attempted to idolize him as their leader.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Lornell, *Exploring American Folk Music*, 284.

⁸⁷ Lornell, *Exploring American Folk Music*, 301–302.

⁸⁸ Taylor et al, *The political world of Bob Dylan*, 109.

⁸⁹ Bruce Baugh, "Prolegomena to Any Aesthetics of Rock Music," in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 1 (Winter 1993), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/431967>

⁹⁰ Bernice Martin. "The Sacralization of Disorder: Symbolism in Rock music," in *Sociological Analysis* 40, no. 2 (Summer 1979), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3709782>

4.3 Gospel

Dylan found inspiration in the African American gospel music. As I previously mentioned, hints at gospel already appeared in *Street Legal*, with the female backup trio and several Christian themes in songs like “Señor,” and even in some preceding work.⁹¹

American Gospel music, the one Dylan incorporates into the discussed albums, is a music style of predominantly black Americans, but it is not exclusive to them. “Contemporary Christian,” a corresponding music genre, appears in the white Christian repertoire.⁹² Gospel can be used as a term to relate to both the genre and the piano style. The main motifs appearing in songs are “blessing, lamentation, and woes and lamentation.”⁹³ Both gospel and the closely related blues share similar imagery. Guido Van Rijn⁹⁴ analyses all the various types of imagery these genres can contain. Among biblical imagery, those about nature and everyday existence also appear, and as Headlam⁹⁵ observes, these are used to “represent the hopes, aspirations, fears, and humanity as well as a continued cry for individual and collective freedom.”⁹⁶

The Lomax approach used to analyze gospel observes the cohesiveness that is typical for this music style, which is created by the **briefness and repetitiveness** of the melody. This allows the audience to be drawn in and participate. Another observation by Lomax tells us about the association between music and the expression of certain emotions and how this association can to an extent function as an emotion evoker, as Jungr⁹⁷ comments.

Jungr⁹⁸ also mentions the different kinds of **produced sounds** associated with certain emotions that are once again particular to gospel. Along with Lomax, Jo Estill, Alfred Wolfsohn, and what these men respectively observed in vocal production are the varying features, vocal parameters, and forms. Relevant for analyzing the gospel elements in Dylan’s albums are Jungr’s⁹⁹ interpretations of the Wolfsohn approach, which says that the target feeling of gospel

⁹¹ Spargo et al, *The Cambridge companion to Bob Dylan*, 93.

⁹² Dave Headlam, “Appropriation of Blues and Gospel in Popular Music,” in *The Cambridge companion to blues and gospel*, ed. Allan Moore (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 182.

⁹³ Horace Clarence Boyer. “Contemporary gospel music,” in *The black perspective in music* 7 no.1. (Spring, 1975), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1214427>.

⁹⁴ Guido van Rijn, “Imagery in the Lyrics: an Initial Approach,” in *The Cambridge companion to blues and gospel*, ed. Allan Moore (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 141–157.

⁹⁵ Headlam, “Appropriation,” 183–186.

⁹⁶ Headlam, “Appropriation,” 183

⁹⁷ Barb Jungr. “Vocal expression in the blues and gospel,” in *The Cambridge companion to blues and gospel*, ed. Allan Moore (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 103–104.

⁹⁸ Jungr, “Vocal expression,” 104–109.

⁹⁹ Jungr, “Vocal expression,” 109.

performance is an attempt to reach heaven, salvation. The singers express emotions to help them feel certain catharsis and the spiritual proximity of God.

One of the most important **aspects** of gospel music is the body rhythm,¹⁰⁰ which includes clapping, thumping, and swinging body. Clapping or tapping is essential to gospel, because it reinforces rhythm. Boyer¹⁰¹ notes how the piano is the instrument to accompany gospel music while the guitar is used for quartet singing. The changing nature of gospel follows on this topic:¹⁰² what started as religious music produced by slaves later became the “Negro spirituals,” which are inspired from West African music, where physical or vocal participation is typical, with a call-and-response or similar structure, where the “call” symbolizes the leader of the singing, and “response” the rest of the group, repeating a short response.

Gospel is used for open **expression** of deeply felt emotions, and connection to the audience. One of the main features is improvisation, adding to the authentic experience that is generated from the usual lack of sheet music, an aspect that originated in the slavery ages.¹⁰³ Gospel sounds are not for studio recorded experience, on the contrary, the true gospel experience lies in live performance, the connection with the audience.¹⁰⁴

Dylan’s music transition is perceived as an ideological rift, a revolution in personal consciousness perceived by many as having a corrupting effect on his music. Dylanologists view the conversion as an example of his individualism.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Boyer, “Contemporary gospel music,” 30.

¹⁰¹ Boyer, “Contemporary gospel music,” 31.

¹⁰² Joyce Marie Jackson, *The Changing Nature of Gospel Music: A Southern Case Study* 187-188

¹⁰³ Don Cubic. “The development of gospel music.” Moore, Alan. *The Cambridge companion to blues and gospel*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 50.

¹⁰⁴ Light, Alan. “Bob Dylan as a performer,” in *The Cambridge companion to Bob Dylan*, ed Kevin J.H. Dettmar (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 64.

¹⁰⁵ Spargo, “Bob Dylan and religion,” 87.

5 The journey of music, from folk to gospel

5.1 Slow Train Coming

Dylan turning to the Bible for inspiration is nothing new, yet content of the following albums exhibits more explicit Biblical references. Some songs from the album “Slow Train Coming” are written in a rather dark mood. The opening song “Slow Train” and “When You Gonna Wake Up?” contain prophetic lines about the world we live in, while the rest of the album carries the notion and challenges listeners to reconsider their values, such as “Gotta Serve Somebody,” or “Gotta Change My Way of Thinking.” On the other hand, some songs display a lighter mood, such as “Man Gave Names to All the Animals, and “Precious Angel.” However, the strongest mood present throughout the albums is Dylan’s self-righteousness, which is carried in the songs’ messages.

“**Gotta Serve Somebody**” is one of the best explanations for Dylan’s conversion. It serves as a message to the public, in its simplicity, no matter who you are, how powerful and influential, when the (biblical) end comes we will all be equal. As Williams¹⁰⁶ says, the song is not overly Evangelical, yet the content is powerful.

Dylan’s self-referentiality can be observed in most stanzas. In the first stanza, there could be a reference to his favorite boxer Rubin “the Hurricane” Carter, in the second stanza he mentions his occupation - “rock’n’roll addict,” then, “drugs at your command, women in a cage.” The fifth stanza, “You may be a preacher with your spiritual pride,” could be aimed at fake, self-centered religious preachers, or it could be a form of self-reflective confession. And in the last stanza, he presents himself perhaps to show us that it does not matter in what relation to him you are, the rules still apply.

Perhaps “Gotta Serve Somebody” is a follow up to the album *Empire Burlesque* and its underlining message of serving two masters – the spiritual one (God) and the earthly one (the Devil). This concept can be found in the Sermon of the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and Gilmour¹⁰⁷ analyses Dylan’s interpretation. He observes the similarity to Matthew 6:24, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other,” “ye cannot serve God and mammon [money].” This could indicate the evolution of Dylan’s perception of the temptation of sin.

¹⁰⁶ Williams, Paul. *Dylan—What Happened*. (South Michigan: Entwistle Books, 1980), 85–86.

¹⁰⁷ Gilmour, *Tangled Up in the Bible*, 59-60.

“**Precious Angel**” has a more ambiguous tone than other songs. A dedication to a treasured woman, the melody is auspicious, but carries a heavy message. A threat that is aimed at the unbelievers, which Day¹⁰⁸ interprets as the absolute consequences caused by human actions.

Now there is a spiritual warfare and flesh and blood breaking down

Ya either got faith or ya got unbelief and there’s no neutral ground

The third stanza follows in this conviction. Here he observes the blindness of his surroundings and their attempts to coax him into inactivity. The last line, “when men will beg God to kill them and they won’t be able to die,” is a reference to Revelation 9:6: “and in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.” This puts the song in an eschatological setting, anticipating the Christian end of the world.

While the initial impression pushes the narrative of a man finding the truth because of this “angel,” a woman of a religious belief. Her exact identity is hinted at, “our forefathers were slaves,” but never truly revealed, just as whether Dylan follows the same religion or not. Opposed to “precious angel,” another woman in this song, a “sister,” does not share this conviction, as indicated in the fourth stanza: “You were telling him about Buddha, you were telling him about Mohammed in the same breath/You never mentioned one time the Man who came and died a criminal’s death.”

The narrator’s description of “precious angel” is as a sort of a mentor, a woman whose origins are not so different from his, as Dylan, the narrator, comes from an ethnicity with bound history, and her¹⁰⁹ from an enslaved one. Day¹¹⁰ observes, that her influence is both symbolic and literal – “queen of my flesh” indicates physical intimacy, “lamp of my soul” spiritual guidance.

“**I Believe in You**” is a confession of loyalty despite being misunderstood by his peers. Even though his peers are reluctant to believe this change of perspective, the narrator is set in his conviction. This song is one of the few that do not come across as arrogant as others, what we get instead is a love song devoted to an unnamed entity – Jesus, God, Dylan’s new girlfriend, or perhaps even Sara.

A sense of us against others, the defensiveness of the song does not have a reason to be credited to his new faith because it was written before the religious backlash Dylan was facing after the

¹⁰⁸ Day, Aidan. *Jokerman: reading the lyrics of Bob Dylan* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 98.

¹⁰⁹ Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 198–200.

¹¹⁰ Day, *Jokerman: reading the lyrics of Bob Dylan*, 107

release of *Slow Train Coming*. The sense of self-pity is evident throughout the song and implies that, if read in the context of the Christian conversion, Dylan had already received some form of negative feedback. However, if we compare the line “they’d like to drive me from this town” to Luke 4:28-29, where Jesus was driven out from Nazareth, the narrator could be relating himself to Jesus.¹¹¹

“**Slow Train**”

This song, while less explicit in the showcase of Christian symbolism, also points at the growing dissatisfaction and frustration Dylan felt towards the political climate of the time. The first stanza addresses the oil crisis, and how America is losing power to other nations, namely the Arabic states. Dylan compares them to kings, signifying their perceived superiority and power over America. It could also suggest that the American Government was losing control and becoming weak.

Another, even more powerful quote comes from the second stanza. This is where Dylan drives home his growing antipathy for the Government. By stating that Jefferson is turning over in his grave, Dylan declares that one of the Founding Fathers, the ones responsible for birthing the nation and shaping it into one of the most powerful nations in the world, would be ashamed of what it has become. That he, and subsequently all of the Founding Fathers, would not be proud of what the current leaders did to the nation. By using such a powerful symbol of patriotism, Dylan punctuates his dissatisfaction with the situation.

Rogovoy¹¹² views the song as Dylan’s criticism of a sociopolitical nature, a prophecy set in an apocalyptic time. The mood is written in the likeness of *Jeremiah* and *Isaiah*, meaning he is appealing to people to submit to God. The prophecy carried signalizes that the possible end of the world is coming and the consequences of not following his warnings will be dire. Another interpretation of the “slow train” is the anticipation of the second coming of Jesus. Both of these elements are found in the book of *Revelation* that is discussed by Hal Lindsey in *The late great planet earth*, as well as the books of *Daniel* and *Ezekiel* in the *Bible*. Rogovoy argues that this outcome, Dylan’s inspiration from the story of Jesus, could have been anticipated, because of his long-term fascination with prophecies and the apocalypse.

“**Gotta Change My Way Of Thinking**” can be read as another sociopolitical critique in an eschatological setting, but could also be seen as Dylan projecting his personal troubles,

¹¹¹ Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 200.

¹¹² Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 194–196.

especially in the line “gonna stop being influenced by fools.” The narrative follows in “Slow Train’s” footsteps, warning from the incoming Rapture after recounting all kinds of wrongs: “moral debasement in direct violation of biblical law.” Sang with conviction, which could, again, come off as hypocritical – who Dylan is to judge who is or is not a fool.

A significant feature of this song is the explicit mention of Jesus for the first time in the album, but portrayed as a fear-inducing, threatening one, more like the one depicted in the Old Testament and similar to the nature of the Hebrew prophets.¹¹³ The line “Jesus said be ready For you know not the hour in which I come” can be acknowledged to Mathew 24:42, “watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come,” and “there is a kingdom called heaven. A place where there is no pain of birth” perhaps an allusion to Genesis 3:16: after being cast out of the Paradise, God increased the female pain of childbirth, and the follow up in Revelation 21:4, that states that in the new heaven, there will be no pain.

“**Do Right to Me Baby (Do Unto Others)**” has a lighter mood compared to the aforementioned songs. Another intimate view of Dylan’s inner thoughts. Only this time he uses a reversed version of the golden rule. The unaltered version can be found in Luke 6:31 and Mathew 7:12, but here Dylan establishes that he will treat you well only after you treat him well. The song implies that he is the exception to the golden rule. This gives a self-righteous mood that is very characteristic of his Christian era. The first stanza is already strongly personal, with no judging, hurting, or betraying anybody, and reversed, makes one wonder what inspired this. The final stanza, especially the final line, implies the narrator puts his version of the golden rule above any other moral system: “don’t put my faith in nobody, not even a scientist.”

One of the specific Christian references can be found in the line “don't wanna wink at nobody, don't wanna be winked at,” which can be accredited to the Old Testament’s Psalm 35:19 and Proverbs 6:13; 10:10; 16:30, where winking is described as a non-desirable action, and, according to Williams¹¹⁴, the narrator expresses his wishes for his fans to stop objectifying him. The line about judging can be compared to Matthew 7:1 and Luke 6:37: “do not judge, or you too will be judged.”

One does wonder, how after all the self-assuredness throughout the album does Dylan plan on not judging anyone and not treating “nobody like they was dirt.”

¹¹³ Rogovoy *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 205.

¹¹⁴ Williams, *Dylan—what happened*, 18.

“**When You Gonna Wake Up**” is another strongly self-righteous sociopolitical critique in an imperious tone. The narrator is infuriated by all that is happening around him and feels the need to speak his heart out. The inexplicit story focuses on the United States and the at-the-time events. He shares his concerns on the panic around communism:

“Counterfeit philosophies have polluted all your thoughts
Karl Marx has got ya by the throat,
Henry Kissinger’s got you tied up in knots.”

And in the song’s second part, the narrator expresses his objections about the utilitarian use of religion, which he perceives as shallow and hypocritical:

“Do you ever wonder just what God requires?
You think He’s just an errand boy to satisfy
your wandering desires”

However, as Williams¹¹⁵ observes, the narrator himself comes off as somewhat shallow, never giving any suggestions on reforms, or improvements.

“**Man Gave Names To All The Animals**,” a song of a somewhat simple nature, is traditionally considered as a children’s song. The catch of the song’s rhyme is in the way Adam names the animals. The concept, wholly innocent, includes the animal connected to evil itself, the serpent, which remains unnamed. Perhaps the hidden message of the song is that evil can be present at every, even seemingly peaceful, corner.

“**When He Returns**” fits the most in the gospel genre with its acoustic piano accompaniment. Dylan’s wistful voice confesses the strength of his faith and expresses the anticipation of “his” return. “His” identity is omitted.¹¹⁶

The “iron hand” in the first stanza could refer to the brute Hebrews’ taskmasters, and the “iron rod” could refer to Moses’ miraculous staff found in Isaiah 11:1-4. Another interpretation of “rod” is the word of God. Inspiration to the line “he knows your needs even before you ask” comes from Jeremiah 20:12, and to “he sees your deeds” from Amos 4:13: “he recounts to a person what were his deeds.”¹¹⁷

The song “*Trouble in Mind*” is not included in the official release of the album, but appears in *The Bootleg Series Volume 13*. The narrator here confesses the hardships that burden his mind

¹¹⁵ Williams, *Dylan—what happened*, 89–91.

¹¹⁶ Williams, *Dylan—what happened*, 95–98

¹¹⁷ Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 209–210.

- being tempted by sin, Satan, luring him in with power and glory. The confession is addressed to God and may seem arrogant, but Williams¹¹⁸ concludes it serves as a mask to hide humility in order to persuade the audience that this change in perspective is justified.

In the stanza “here comes Satan, prince of the power of the air” Dylan looks back at his life as a celebrity and contemplates its vanity. Rogovoy here focuses on the lines “he’s gonna deaden your conscience ‘till you worship the work of your own hands/You’ll be serving strangers in a strange, forsaken land.” The temptation of idolatry, sins of materialistic nature, and the worship of corporeal gods is discussed in the Bible, notably in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-5), being chased out of the Promised land the Prophets is believe to be caused by the sin of idolatry (Isaiah 2:8, Jeremiah 1:16).¹¹⁹

The stanza “When the deeds that you do don’t add up to zero/It’s what’s inside that counts, ask any war hero” seems as if saying Dylan is comparing himself to a soldier that upon returning from war, is praised and celebrated, but the horrors from his experience haunt him still. And that a feeling like this may come to us too.¹²⁰

5.2 Saved

The album, except for “Are You Ready” and “Yonder Comes Sin,” leaves the threatening tone to *Slow Train*, and instead focuses on expressing the gratefulness for having been saved and the appreciation he feels for his savior.

The inner sleeve of the album was decorated with a quote from Jeremiah 31:31: “Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.” The intentions behind this decision are unclear. The “house of Judah” is interpreted as Jews, and the “new covenant” could imply the offer to convert to Christianity. Such converts generally belong to messianic Judaism or its branch, Jews for Jesus.¹²¹

Rogovoy observes the album consists of songs that personally and theologically explore Jesus and his connection to Jewish heritage.¹²² Bell adds that it is this album where Dylan “would

¹¹⁸ Williams, *Dylan—what happened*, 21.

¹¹⁹ Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 210.

¹²⁰ Williams, *Dylan—what happened*, 23.

¹²¹ Bell, Ian. *Time out of Mind: The Lives of Bob Dylan* (New York: Pegasus Books LLC, 2014), 201–202.

¹²² Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 211.

cover all the angles where his monosemous preaching was concerned,” and that the public considered this album as “redundant.”¹²³

The opening song of the album, “**A satisfied mind**,” is an old country song Dylan used to sing in his early New York days. Here, Dylan created a call-and-response rendition with the backup choir.¹²⁴ It is simple in content. Perhaps a throwback to “Trouble in mind,” he makes sure the audience knows the singer is certain his mind is content with the conversion and stresses how wealth, power, and fame don’t necessarily grant you a happy life.

“**Saved**” has a tune with strong gospel characteristics. Here Dylan addresses God to express appreciation for saving him. In the refrain, the narrator announces his life was saved “by the blood of the lamb,” but it is uncertain what the “lamb” refers to because as much as it can refer to Jesus, it can refer to Jewish origin of Passover, when to save themselves from the ten plagues, Hebrew slaves in Egypt marked their doorposts with lamb’s blood. The biblical characters Joseph and Job indirectly appear in the second stanza, specifically in the line “Freed me from the pit.” Dylan compares himself to the story of Joseph (Genesis 37), who was out of jealousy thrown into a well (Dylan in a pit). And the line “he bought me for a price” refers to the Book of Job, where a man was resurrected by God for the price of atonement and repentance. He does not enlighten us with the information on what the price for resurrection was.¹²⁵

While analyzing “Saved,” Williams¹²⁶ observes the frequency of the worded “blinded” that Dylan uses in his songs. He also notes how the gratefulness of this song comes off as more “casual.” The line “No one tried to rescue me. Nobody would dare” interprets as Dylan appreciating the restrictiveness of Christianity because it offers boundaries required to sustain his faith and tame his ego. Williams also understands the songs nature as depicting Dylan’s frustrations from the previous couple of years.¹²⁷

“**Covenant Woman**”

Another spiritual love song that follows the footsteps of “Precious Angel,” “Covenant Woman” is possibly directed express gratitude to the same woman, his spiritual mentor, that prayed for him. According to Rogovoy¹²⁸, the narrator implies that there are differences between their

¹²³ Bell, *Time out of Mind*, 213.

¹²⁴ Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 212.

¹²⁵ Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 212–213.

¹²⁶ Williams, *Dylan—what happened*, 108–109.

¹²⁷ Williams, *Dylan—what happened*, 18.

¹²⁸ Rogovoy *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 213–214.

faiths, as can be seen here: “You know we are strangers in a land we are passing through,” and “I’ll be right by your side, I’ve got a covenant too.” The formulation of this line implies that their covenants are slightly different. And just like in “Precious Angel,” if we read this in the context of Mary Alice Artes, his at that time girlfriend, her as an African American woman and his origin as a Jew, these lines apply - Jews as cast-away and African Americans as imported slaves.

“**What can I do for you**” is a confession of gratefulness to the Lord for enabling him to live. The song is simple, subtle, evocative, and sincere.¹²⁹ The rhythm and melody emphasize the meaning. Gospel chorus appears behind the lines “What can I do for you.” As this song functions as a love song to God, who, in order to accept this confession, is portrayed anthropomorphically.¹³⁰

We can observe similar imagery to “Covenant Woman,” freedom from slavery, being spiritually fulfilled. And once again, there are references to both Judaism and Christianity. Both religions are referenced: the concept of being liberated from a bond is of Jewish origin. Feeling renewed inside is a Christian characteristic and the concept of chosenness belongs to both religions.¹³¹ The implied covenant creates a subconscious conflict between the two religions.

“**Solid Rock**” unravels an insecurity Dylan was battling before his conversion. Although both the first and the second stanza imply Jesus as the Savior, the notion of God as a “bedrock of existence” is a Jewish belief and comes from Deuteronomy 32, where God is called Tzur Yisroel, the Rock of Israel. The second stanza, “It’s the ways of the flesh to war against the spirit,” grapples with the struggle between good and evil that belongs to Judaism.¹³² Therefore, we can observe a disparity, or perhaps it is more fitting to say a unification, between the two religions.

The first stanza, specifically the lines “For me He was chastised, for me He was hated” gives off a feeling of self-pity. Then later, in “people are expecting a false peace to come,” he turns to his self-assuredness and criticizes a “false peace” that is anticipated by others.

“**Pressing on**” is a straightforward gospel song, a call-and-response arrangement, in which the melody encourages the audience to lean into the song’s message. The inspiration is taken from the pessimistic writings of King Solomon (which is quoted in Ecclesiastes). The first stanza

¹²⁹ Williams, *Dylan—what happened*, 19.

¹³⁰ Williams, *Dylan—what happened*, 118.

¹³¹ Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 214–216.

¹³² Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 216.

addresses the backlash he received from his peers and others. The second stanza's first line is a play on Isaiah 52:2 "Shake the dust from yourself" combined with the story of Lot's wife that did not heed an angel's warning and looked back at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, found in Genesis 19:17. And later in the stanza Dylan once again reminds us of the temptations of sin and how it is ingrained in our nature.¹³³

Another gospel song of simpler nature, "**In the Garden**" retells the story of Jesus in the form of questions, to accentuate the inequity towards Christ. The story is out-of-order. The garden in question is the garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus' journey ends with his arrest.¹³⁴

The song draws inspiration from the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, and from the Gospel according to John. There is a hidden symbolism of the "cup" in the lines "his cup that's coming to me, I must drink it." Throughout the Gospels as well as the Bible, a "cup" represents destiny, and in Psalm 16, the fulfillment of destiny.¹³⁵

The line "When He rose from dead, did they believe?" references Dylan's fascination with death and rebirth, and also the vivid description of his born-again experience, which he described as physical, painful, comparable to dying and being revived. It is also the only song from the "gospel trilogy" that contains the term *born again*: "Nicodemus came at night so he wouldn't be seen by men/Saying 'Master, tell me why a man must be born again.'"¹³⁶

"**Saving Grace**" Is one of the few songs that do not include any accusations or arrogance, this song is gentle, another spiritual love song. The word "grace" here is a Christian term for God's forgiveness. However, the narrator is once again elusive in answering to only one religion. The line "in a pine box for all eternity" in the second stanza refers to a traditional Jewish burial ritual.¹³⁷ This could imply the narrator simply acknowledges his origin, or it could also mean that he is not afraid of combining the religions, just like in "Solid Rock."

"**Are you ready**" closes the album with a rhythmical call-and-response anticipation of the Rapture. Unlike most other songs exploring the topic of the Rapture, the narrator is certain Jesus will come. The lines "Am I ready to lay down my life for the brethren/And to take my cross?" pose as another self-identification to Jesus.

¹³³ Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 217-218.

¹³⁴ Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 218.

¹³⁵ McCarron, *Light come shining*, 96.

¹³⁶ McCarron, *Light come shining*, 96-97.

¹³⁷ Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 218.

“**Yonder Comes Sin**” is a song not included in the album despite having been recorded at the same time. A pessimistic social critique accusing his surroundings of being tempted by sin and being pretentious. Rogovoy¹³⁸ categorizes this as one of the most profoundly prophetic songs of the album and observes how Dylan compares himself to the prophet Jeremiah, namely in the tenth and eleventh stanzas, where the narrator shares how he is condemned for telling the truth as well.

He also addresses his stance on racism in the fourth stanza, describing the woman’s outward appearance as foreign, but saying that she is no different on the inside.

5.3 Shot of Love

Continues in the righteous and self-assured mood of the previous albums. According to some interpretations,¹³⁹ the album lacks valuable artistic and religious content. There is a sensation of real-life struggles of a believer in the album, which is most prominent in the headliner, “Every Grain of Sand.” Bell¹⁴⁰ describes Dylan as “against prescriptive authority,” anyone disagreeing with him or with a different opinion.

The meaning of “**Shot of Love**” is ambiguous, but it is clear that Dylan is still feels the lack of something. There is no explicit statement on who is to provide this shot. There are, however, hints, specifically in the last stanza, where we are informed that this required love is not of physical nature, as Day¹⁴¹ observes.

Less of a critique, more of an observation, “**The Groom’s Still Waiting at the Altar**” contains the narrator naming his social and political observations and personal commentary, as seen in the first stanza. A direct interpretation has not been agreed upon, perhaps it is an allegory for ruined expectations. The refrain opposes the stanzas and brings a notion of hope.¹⁴²

Not a straightforward gospel, but gospel “tinted.” In “**Every Grain of Sand**” we see a shift from the arrogant stance Dylan’s Christian songs had possessed so far. A sense of dread and existential despair resounds through the song. Here he seems doubtful, retrospective, and perhaps even regretful. The song seems to represent Dylan’s closure to the past. The opening line is a direct reference to the Jewish Day of Atonement - “In the time of my confession, in the

¹³⁸ Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 221–222.

¹³⁹ Bell, *Time out of Mind*, 256.

¹⁴⁰ Bell, *Time out of Mind*, 257.

¹⁴¹ Day, Aidan. *Jokerman: reading the lyrics of Bob Dylan*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 100.

¹⁴² Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 229–230.

hour of my deepest need. When the pool of tears beneath my feet flood every newborn seed.” The Day of Atonement, a traditional event held once a year, serves to renew one’s relationship with God and is experienced directly with God, a ritual of personal confession of sins and inadequacies. The narrator expresses how he fears all his actions would still leave his existence insignificant. This is a confession to God, unspecified whether Christian or Jewish, where he prays for forgiveness. The inspiration to the central image of the song, the “every grain of sand,” might come from Psalm 139:16-18, and is mixed with the Book of Life, the literature accompanying the Day of Atonement.¹⁴³

Several interpretations comment on the likeness to *Auguries of Innocence* by William Blake because of the use of the same imagery. Bell¹⁴⁴ believes this to be misplaced, because in the theological plane of the song, while Blake’s heaven is contained in a single flower, Dylan has a different grasp of what heaven entails: God is present in everything and everything is equal in his creation.

5.4 Infidels

Infidels, according to some¹⁴⁵, functions as a transitional work and marks the end of Dylan’s gospel-flavored period. While most agree, Bell¹⁴⁶ believes this change was influenced by the recording company, Columbia, that nudged Dylan to drop such explicit religiousness. Lethem¹⁴⁷ perceives the album as an attempt to convince the singer’s audience of biblical elements in his work. The work’s narrative exudes a yearning for the acceptance of his fans, who felt betrayed, and signifies the counterculture’s perception of Dylan’s re-emergence as their figure.

The album presents its religiosity with moderation, with “Jokerman” as its highlight. The predominant focus is placed on social and political issues, with the exception of “Sweetheart Like You.” The narrator’s tone is no longer as self-assured as it used to be.

¹⁴³ Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 230–234.

¹⁴⁴ Bell, *Time out of Mind*, 241.

¹⁴⁵ Epstein, Mark Daniel. *The Ballad of Bob Dylan* (New York: HarperCollins, 2022), “Young Blood.”

¹⁴⁶ Bell, *Time out of Mind*, 274–275.

¹⁴⁷ Lethem, Jonathan. “Infidels (1983),” in *The Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan*, ed. Kevin J. H. Dettmar, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 161–163.

In “**Jokerman**,” the center of the song revolves around the enigmatic character of “Jokerman.” The narrator’s description does not ascribe him one alignment, he is nor solely evil, nor good. There is a dichotomy of all contradictions. The identity of this persona is unknown, but we can observe different interpretations. For example, Rogovoy¹⁴⁸ visualizes Dylan himself, Jesus, God, the Jewish Messiah, Dylan’s early musical group the Jokers, as well as a combination of the aforementioned. Bell¹⁴⁹ observes that Dylan admitted his inspiration came from Caribbean legends about spirits called jumbis’, somewhat evil spirits with murderous intentions, that present themselves in varying visages: “shedding off one more layer of skin.” Bell continues with analyzing “jokerman’s” nature, “the trickster, the image manipulator, the inveterate myth-maker,”¹⁵⁰ as Dylan projecting his own legend,” no longer so sure about Christ’s active involvement. The messiah here is portrayed as uncaring towards the Antichrist, observed, for instance, in the last stanza. Epstein¹⁵¹ further comments on the interpretation of “jokerman” as the God of the Old Testament that observes the world’s despair. He also adds, that “jokerman” is doomed to be a victim of the trickery he himself creates.

While there is no explicit meaning to the song, Gilmour¹⁵² interprets the song as a warning against deceptions preying on faithful, and according to Bell,¹⁵³ the underlined message is alluring enough to make the Apocalypse sound convincing. Bell points out how the music video is very imagery-inducing, present and political, and how Dylan wasn’t very partial since the idea was not his. Bell further analyses the song in its content – about gods, and the human ability to touch divinity with uncertainty of a response. World will be spared its usual biblical faith. If we visualize Jesus as the “jokerman,” here he is portrayed having certain features of pagan gods: dancing, an activity the jumbis’ did while possessing people. Another concept of dancing Jesus can also go back to an old English carol, “Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day,” that presented the time Jesus spent on Earth as a “celestial dance.”¹⁵⁴

References to the character of the king David appears in the stanzas. “Michelangelo indeed could’ve carved out your features” could refer to the fact that Michelangelo carved a statue of Israel’s King David, and might as well refer to Jesus’ Davidic ancestry.¹⁵⁵ The line “shedding

¹⁴⁸ Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 237.

¹⁴⁹ Bell, *Time out of Mind*, 288.

¹⁵⁰ Bell, *Time out of Mind*, 290.

¹⁵¹ Epstein, *The Ballad of Bob Dylan*, “Young Blood.”

¹⁵² Gilmour, *Tangled Up in the Bible*, 40.

¹⁵³ Bell, *Time out of Mind*, 289.

¹⁵⁴ Bell, *Time out of Mind*, 291.

¹⁵⁵ Gilmour, *Tangled Up in the Bible*, 140.

off one more layer of skin” could indicate Dylan’s perception of his and king David’s mostly failed attempts to avoid the temptation of *yetzer hara* by changing appearance and behavior. The line “You’re the man of the mountains, you can walk on the clouds” might also apply to both him and David, and comes from Daniel’s vision of the messiah, Daniel 7:13–14.¹⁵⁶

Several quotes from the Bible appear in this song. For instance, the opening “standing on the waters casting your bread,” is an image from the Jewish Days of Awe, specifically a scene from *taschlich*.¹⁵⁷ In the final stanza, the line “a woman just gave birth to a prince today and dressed him in scarlet” can be attributed to Revelation 12, which recounts how the prophet John had a vision that included Satan, a red dragon. There is perhaps a parallel between the red dragon, and the child from the song’s last stanza, which is believed to be Jesus, dressed in red. The narrator here is relating to the biblical imagery of Jesus’ life as an innocent prophet that is often despised for the words he provides.¹⁵⁸

Final paragraph: According to Gilmour,¹⁵⁹ the contents of this song confirm that Dylan’s fascination with the bible isn’t over yet, but simply changed in form. Gilmour further observes that the message of the song lies in the picture of possibly putting faith into a deceit.

“**Neighborhood bully**” is a political song indirectly addressing the history of Israel from the perspective of an oppressed nation. Rogovoy¹⁶⁰ categorizes it as Dylan’s strongest self-identification song, there is no uncertainty of the narrator’s words. It is not confirmed, but “bully” could represent Israel in the early 1980s – Jews bombed an Iraqi nuclear reactor and invaded Lebanon. Rogovoy further observes that the term “bully” has a sarcastic function that is meant to indicate the real “bullies.”

“**Man of Peace**” tells a narrative of pretense with good intentions, hiding the truth behind an artificial peace. Ambiguosness of the true identity of “Satan,” is he pretending to be a Messiah? Or is he the original man of peace? The first stanza recounts all kinds of wrong-doers, who stand either as Devil incarnates or his henchmen. Rogovoy suspects that he is implying that these people of good intentions convinced him about converting to Christianity, were in reality evil. The last stanza personalizes the song, an occurrence that happens often in Dylan’s work. The last stanza is similar to the last stanza in “Neighborhood Bully,” “Jokerman” and “I

¹⁵⁶ Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 238.

¹⁵⁷ Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 236.

¹⁵⁸ Gilmour, *Tangled Up in the Bible*, 40–43.

¹⁵⁹ Gilmour, *Tangled Up in the Bible*, 40.

¹⁶⁰ Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 239.

and I.” The narrator seems to reminisce on when his family, namely his mother, and a family friend confronted him about his Christianity. Rogovoy observes how this provides a sense of earnestness to the song, because Dylan rarely sings about his mother. In the final line, if we switch “You know” for “I hear” as he does in the live performance, it implies Jesus is the Satan that comes as a man of peace.¹⁶¹

“**Union Sundown**” is patriotic song, a satirical social and political critique addressing the dependent state of the United States’ economy on foreign nations. The final stanza mentions the violent nature of American colonizing.

In “**I and I**,” Rogovoy¹⁶² observes the continual nature of Infidels’ return to Judaism, like potentially referencing his journey to Damascus in the line “took an untrodden path once, where the swift don’t win the race” which is a paraphrase of Ecclesiastes 9:11 “the race is not won by the swift,” followed by “it goes to the worthy, who can divide the word of truth.” Day¹⁶³ interprets the usage of Ecclesiastes 9:11 as a consciousness of the earthly vanity.

A throwback to “Do Right to Me Baby” might be interpreted from the refrain’s “I and I,” when compared to “eye and eye, tooth for tooth” from Leviticus 24:20, which continues with “...as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again.”

The second line of the refrain: “In creation where one’s nature neither honors nor forgives” could indicate how the world around us corrupted the human nature. Or it could foretell the divine intervention transforming the human nature so that following the evolved golden rule would be a norm and honoring and forgiving would no longer burden humans.¹⁶⁴

The stanza containing “been so long since a strange woman has slept in my bed” could signify Dylan’s turn away from the constricting Christianity. Is she a literal stranger or is there a different meaning to the word. Day¹⁶⁵ wonders whether she is “strange” because she is sleeping – the unconscious mind transforming from her conscious version, followed by how when she wakes, “she’ll want me to talk. I got nothin’ to say, ‘specially about whatever was.”

¹⁶¹ Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 243.

¹⁶² Rogovoy, *Bob Dylan: prophet, mystic, poet*, 238–239.

¹⁶³ Day, *Jokerman: reading the lyrics of Bob Dylan*, 124.

¹⁶⁴ Day, *Jokerman: reading the lyrics of Bob Dylan*, 131.

¹⁶⁵ Day, *Jokerman: reading the lyrics of Bob Dylan*, 127.

Conclusion

My bachelor's thesis focuses on four albums from Bob Dylan's work: *Slow Train Coming*, *Saved*, *Shot of Love*, and *Infidels*, and on the three primary elements relevant for their analysis. The first element are the religious traditions of Judaism and Christianity. The second is the decline of the political and economic situation during and after the Vietnam War. I also discuss the religious-secular conflict between the traditional and fundamentalist Moral Majority, and their civil counterpart, the liberal counterculture. The musical genres typical for Dylan's work are the last element. Folk, rock and gospel, each of these genres has somehow affected the author and these albums.

In the practical part, I analyzed individual songs and observed the manifestations of the mentioned elements in the albums. The political situation is primarily reflected in "Slow Train" from *Slow Train Coming*, which informs us about the incoming apocalypse, refers to the energy crisis caused by the Arab nations, and criticizes the US government. "Yonder Comes Sin" contains a passage revealing Dylan's disapproving views on racism. The theme in the fourth album *Infidels*, namely the songs "Neighborhood Bully," where he describes the unfair treatment of the Jewish people, and "Union Sundown," in which he shares his opinion about the insufficiency of the United States.

The musical tradition of folk influenced the content of Dylan's work. As part of the folk revival of the sixties, Dylan carried with him anti-political impulses that accompany him to this day. The move to rock broadened his horizons of artistic expression and with its help he built a certain cult of personality. Perhaps he came to gospel through the natural development of his religious inspirations, perhaps through the natural development of musical experimentation. In any case, it has given us several albums of intimate spiritual utterances.

Christian theology served Dylan as a basis for ideological expression. In *Slow Train Coming*, he introduces us to a musician disillusioned with life who is presented with the possibility of redemption. And Dylan is convinced of the truth of this vision. All the selected albums contain references and inspirations from both Christianity and Judaism. In the album *Saved*, Dylan presents his intentions, which is to convey the faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah to the hearts of all, regardless of religious affiliation. In *Infidels* he returns to primarily secular themes. But in the ambiguous song "Jokerman" he reveals to us a form of self-reflection that doubts

Resumé

Má bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na čtyři alba z tvorby Boba Dylana: *Slow Train Coming*, *Saved*, *Shot of Love*, *Infidels* a na tři primární prvky pro jejich analýzu. Prvním prvkem jsou náboženské tradice židovství a křesťanství. Druhým je politická a ekonomická situace za i po válce ve Vietnamu, v jejímž průběhu i po ní se Spojené státy těšily celonárodnímu úpadku. Prostor věnuji i nábožensko-sekulárnímu konfliktu mezi tradiční a fundamentalistickou Morální většinou a jejich civilními oponenty, liberální kontrakulturou. Posledním prvkem jsou hudební žánry typické pro Dylanovu tvorbu: folk, rock a gospel, každý z těchto žánrů se nějakým způsobem promítl na autorovi i v těchto albech.

V praktické části jsem analyzovala jednotlivé písně a pozorovala projevy zmíněných prvků v albech. Politická situace se projevuje primárně v "Slow Train" z *Slow Train Coming*, pojednávající o přicházející apokalypse, odkazuje na energetickou krizi z rukou arabských států a kritizuje americkou vládu. "Yonder Comes Sin" obsahuje pasáž odhalující Dylanův nesouhlasný názor na rasismus. Dále se téma objevuje ve čtvrtém albu *Infidels*, jmenovitě písních "Neighbourhood Bully," kde popisuje nespravedlivé nakládání s židovským národem, a "Union Sundown," ve které sdílí svůj názor na nesoběstačnost Spojených Států.

Hudební tradice folku ovlivnila obsah Dylanovi tvorby. Dylan si jako součást folkového revivalu šedesátých let odnesl proti-politické podněty, které ho doprovázejí do teď. Přesun k rocku mu rozšířil obzory umělecké exprese a s jehož pomocí si vybudoval jistý kult osobnosti. Ke gospelu se možná dostal přirozeným vývojem jeho náboženských inspirací, možná přirozeným vývojem hudebního experimentu. V každém případě se nám díky tomu dostalo několik alb intimních duchovních výpovědí.

Křesťanská teologie sloužila Dylanovi jako podklad pro ideologické vyjádření. V *Slow Train Coming* nám představuje muzikanta zhrzeného životem, kterému byla představena možnost vykoupení. A Dylan je přesvědčen o pravdivosti této vize. Ve všech vybraných albech se objevují odkazy a inspirace jak křesťanství, tak židovství. V albu *Saved* Dylan představuje své úmysly, a to jest předat víru v Ježíše Krista jako Mesiáše do srdcí všech, nehledě na náboženské vyznání. V *Infidels* se navrácí k především sekulárním tématům. V nejednoznačné písni „Jokerman“ nám, možná sebereflexí, odkrývá jistou formu pochybností.

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