

CHAPTER 7

Hard Rain: The End of Times and Christian Modernism in the Work of Bob Dylan

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Abstract: In Denmark it is still common to characterize Bob Dylan as a left wing protest singer. However, this view is unjustified. On the contrary, Christianity is central to his songwriting, and not only in the period around 1980, when he presented himself as a believing Christian. Religiosity is not only the basis of Dylan's work from the debut in 1962 to today, but the very core of many of his songs. Sustained by a large number of quotes from, and references to, the Bible, the theme of the flood and judgement day is one of the themes running through Dylan's songs, and, based on a belief in providence, it is used to criticize secular modernity. However, this criticism is formulated in a modernistic language of images, and therefore Dylan can be characterized as a Christian modernist. He can be compared to T. S. Eliot, and uses an indirect, dialogical and dialectical method reminiscent of Søren Kierkegaard: to speak of Christian belief in the language of modernity with the purpose of re-Christening modernity.

Keywords: Christian modernism, Bible quotes, the End of Times, The Flood, Providence, dialectical method

Sammendrag: I Danmark er det stadig almindeligt at betegne Bob Dylan som en venstreorienteret protestsanger. Det er der ikke belæg for. Derimod står kristendommen helt centralt i hans sangskrivning, og vel at mærke ikke kun i den periode omkring 1980, hvor han trådte frem som erklæret kristen. Det religiøse danner ikke bare grundlag for Dylans værk lige fra debuten i 1962 til i dag, men udgør kernen i mange af hans sange. Igenem et meget stort antal citater fra og henvisninger til Bibelen går som en af de røde tråde i Dylans sange temaet syndflod og dommedag –

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hvilket på baggrund af en forsynstro anvendes til en kritik af den sekulære modernitet. Men denne kritik formuleres i et modernistisk billedsprog, således at man kan betegne Dylan som en kristen modernist, sammenlignelig med T. S. Eliot. Han anvender en indirekte, dialogisk og dialektisk metode, som minder om Søren Kierkegaards: at tale om kristentro i modernitetens sprog, med det formål at genkristne moderniteten.

Stikord: Kristen modernisme, Bibel-citater, de sidste tider, syndflod, forsynstro, dialektisk metode

Introduction

In David Yaffe's book, *Bob Dylan. Like a Complete Unknown*, there is a statement that undoubtedly expresses how a very large number of people, not least in Denmark, perceive Dylan: "Indeed, if anything has been constant in Dylan's career, it's change" (Yaffe, 2011, p. xvii). Another view is expressed in Stephen H. Webb's *Dylan Redeemed. From Highway 61 to Saved*: "More continuities than discontinuities mark his oeuvre. As much as he kept reinventing himself, he also remained very much the same artist" (Webb, 2006, p. 62).

Yaffe is right in saying that Dylan, with his changeability, is a symptom of modernity. But in my opinion, Webb's point of view is much closer to the core, namely that Dylan is also the counterpart to modernity by virtue of something persistent. Dylan's body of work is constituted by a never-ending process, but seen as a whole this process contains a number of constant elements that run through his career from its beginning to the present, and these constants constitute the themes in Dylan's production and assert in different ways, but each time with equal power, a statement, which is rephrased in song after song, on record after record.

I see at least two constants in Dylan's songs. Firstly, there is Christianity, which is the core of countless of his songs, and which manifests itself partly in the form of an astronomically large number of Bible references and allusions, and partly in the form of constantly recurring metaphors relating in particular to deluge and the end of time – metaphors that are used for a theologically motivated criticism of secular modernity. Secondly, there is a certain type of modern poetry that corresponds with T. S. Eliot's Christian and tradition-renewing poetry. In addition, Dylan has an artistic way of expressing the message of the text reminiscent of Søren Kierkegaard's.

Modernity and modernism

Bob Dylan's songs reflect an experience of modernity: everything is in flux, everything streams. As it is succinctly put in the song "To Ramona": "Everything passes / Everything changes." The constant change must inevitably result in individuals who, like rolling stones, never have a resting place and do not possess any fixed value, but are strangers in the wilderness – as expressed in the chorus of one of Dylan's most famous songs, "Like a Rolling Stone": "How does it feel / To be on your own / With no direction home / Like a complete unknown / Like a rolling stone?"

This is an existential condition that is probably filled with endless possibilities in its constant motion, and therefore can trigger a considerable amount of energy, but which also has a flip side and comes with a cost: uncertainty and disorientation, a mental suffocation as a result of the sense that nothing is permanent, that everything has fallen apart and broken in pieces. The entire song "Everything Is Broken" is one long list of broken pieces, so that virtually no earthly phenomenon is left out. However, it is not the world as such that is broken, but the modern world: "Broken hands on broken plows / Broken treaties, broken vows / [...] / People bending broken rules". This is a reference to Luke 9:57–62, where Jesus requires of his disciples that they take leave of all their belongings in order to follow him: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." The point of "Everything Is Broken" is precisely that modernity, instead of putting a hand on the Lord's plow, itself creates and breaks all rules, with the result that everything is broken – even to an apocalyptic extent, because Dylan's song on a more general level alludes to Isa 24:18–23, the prophecy of the last judgment: "The earth is utterly broken down."

An example of how this experience of modernity on a profound level has consequences for the form of Dylan's songs is found in "Subterranean Homesick Blues". This song denotes Dylan's stylistic shift from folk music – voice, guitar and harmonica – to electric rock'n' roll, which would eventually have immense importance for popular music, where such a combination of rock and modern poetry would hitherto have been unthinkable.

The song is a modernist expression. Form and content are similar to each other: the quick and the febrile – yes, you could say nervous – pace

of the music is quite similar to the compression and fragmentation in and of the text, with its continued accumulation of rhyme and breaking down of the normal syntax of the language. The breathlessness of the experience of the surrounding world has, in other words, as a formal consequence a mosaic-like description of a nervous breakdown. The surrounding modernity creates a huge pressure of alienation and paranoia. The general hopelessness evokes feelings of frustration and insecurity. And yet there is a nightmarish logic behind it all: an experience of inevitability in the midst of chaos. Look for instance at the beginning of the second stanza:

Maggie comes fleet foot
 Face full of black soot
 Talkin' that the heat put
 Plants in the bed but
 The phone's tapped anyway
 Maggie says that many say
 They must bust in early May
 Orders from the D. A. [District Attorney]
 Look out kid
 Don't matter what you did
 Walk on your tiptoes
 Don't tie no bows (Dylan, 2014, p. 172, last line corrected after listening)

The stanza is shaped so that the listener gets the feeling that not only are all members of society subject to monitoring and eavesdropping, but nature itself is controlled by the District Attorney. Since the subject or “main character” of the text has realized this state of affairs, he can inform the “you” of the text that it really does not matter how one reacts, it will all end in the same way. As a consequence, the wisest thing to do is to go quiet about it and not form lasting relationships to other people. In the current situation the best life possible is to go into hiding and go underground – as spelled out in the title of the song.

In the midst of the seemingly chaotic structure, this is a very tightly organized text. For instance, there is a pronounced formal similarity between the stanzas: firstly, observations from a society going down the

drain, and some of the demands this society requires of its citizens are presented, and then, secondly, follows the inquiry to the “you”, the listener that is presumably parodic and useless.

Yet another characteristic of much modernist literature, an extensive intertextuality, is seen, albeit in a surprising way. “Subterranean Home-sick Blues” combines the 1950’s rock’n’roll musician Chuck Berry and the English 19th century poet Robert Browning! (Specifically Berry’s song “Too Much Monkey Business” and Browning’s poem “Up At A Villa – Down In The City”, from *Men and Women*, 1855). The purpose of the intertextuality of the song is to highlight obvious artistic preconditions for the vision of life and formality of the song. Dylan’s extremely original take is the *combination* of the fine arts and popular culture: in the midst of pop music he expresses in a modernistic way the experience of modernity.

Flood and judgment day

However, it is still common to label Dylan as “protest singer”. His breakthrough was in the beginning of the 1960s, but it made sense to call him a protest singer for only a couple of years at the most, but he is often portrayed as if he has hardly done anything worth noticing since. This is a completely unfair limitation of Dylan, who wrongly is made into something static when the truth is that he in his persistent volatility never has been tied to either a specific period or to the Left, which, especially in Denmark, has been a widely-held view.

It might make sense to call Dylan a protest singer. But it requires an understanding of what the protest that runs through the whole of his career is based on and aimed at. Dylan writes on the background of a Christian view of life and his protest concerns the secularized modernity and its ideological delusions. Already in the traditional folk and blues songs from the debut album *Bob Dylan* this religious aspect is central. Dylan had ample opportunity to choose to sing protest songs expressing a critique of society, but this element is almost completely absent from this album where instead a large number of Christian spirituals and gospel songs are included.

This theme is even more evident if, for example, one – on the basis of *The Lyrics* – realizes how many religious songs Dylan wrote in the

beginning of his career which he did not release on his first records. A striking example is “Let Me Die in My Footsteps”: “There’s been rumors of war and wars that have been / The meaning of life has been lost in the wind / And some people thinking that the end is close by / ‘Stead of learning to live they are learning to die”. This is apparently a typical protest song about a current topic: fear of war in the early 1960s. But the basis of the criticism of Cold War society and the perspective of the song’s alternative is included in the allusion to Matt. 24:6, where Jesus predicts the destruction of Jerusalem and his own second coming: “And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet”. Everything must perish as a prerequisite for the return of Jesus and the salvation for those who persevere in the faith.

Another example is the song “Long Ago, Far Away”, where the first and last stanza say: “To preach of peace and brotherhood, oh, what might be the cost / A man he did it long ago and they hung him on a cross / Long ago, far away / Those things don’t happen nowadays”. This is, after all, an elegant combination of social satire, protest singing, and the formulation of a Christian viewpoint, because contemporary society is criticized with the Bible as the background: the story of him who preached love and was crucified for it.

Not even on the next two Dylan records, which presumably mark the culmination of his protest songs, do the political and protest songs dominate. Around half of the songs on *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* (1963) and *The Times They Are A-Changin’* (1964) are neither political nor protest songs. Moreover, quite a number of the songs, which at first glance appear to be ideologically politicizing, are seen, on closer inspection, to be protesting with a much profounder, religious meaning. And finally, Dylan has himself often – both in the 1960s and later – rejected interpretations of these songs as timebound and political protests.

Dylan’s most famous song, “Blowin’ in the Wind”, is generally regarded as a political protest song, yes, even *the* political song of the period giving voice to the struggle for freedom, peace and civil rights in the 1960s. However, the lyrics contain a number of elements that all point in a different direction:

How many seas must have a white dove sail
 Before she sleeps in the sand?
 [...]
 Yes, 'n' how many years can a mountain exist
 Before it's washed to the sea?
 [...]
 Yes 'n' how many times can a man turn his head
 And pretend he just doesn't see?
 [...]
 Yes, 'n' how many ears must one man have
 Before he can hear people cry?
 [...]
 The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind

Several allusions to the Bible are found here; e.g. to Ezek. 12:2, "Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house." To have eyes without seeing and ears without hearing as a sign of godlessness and lack of belief is imagery found throughout the Bible (Mark 8:18, Matt. 13:36–43 and Rev. 2:7).

The lines about the pigeon flying over the waters until it finally reaches the shore alludes to Gen. 8:8–14, which recounts that Noah releases a dove after the flood in order to discover if there is any dry land. The lines about the mountains which are washed in the sea allude to Ps. 46:1–3: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea". In other words, the song contains biblical imagery of an apocalyptic threat that only trust in God can avert.

Moreover the chorus of the song about the answer that is blowing in the wind alludes to the Bible; that is, to Jesus' answer to Nicodemus' question about how one is reborn in order to get into the kingdom of God: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but it canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). The answer that blows in the wind turns out to be the rebirth into eternal life by virtue of faith in Jesus

Christ. No wonder that Dylan in 1978 stated: “Blowin’ in the Wind’ has always been a spiritual” (Yaffe, 2011, p. 100).

When the song “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” was released, it was perceived as a timely protest-song against a world filled with nuclear bombs and leakage. This interpretation has been strongly opposed by Dylan in interviews: “It’s not atomic rain [...] I mean some sort of end that’s just got to happen” (1963), and “Line after line after line, trying to capture the feeling of nothingness” (1965; both Heylin, 1991, p. 57). Dylan obviously connects the song with something much more universal than a current political situation.

The song consists of a series of images of a dying world, an apocalypse of the last of times: modernity. Just as the imagery clearly alludes to a variety of quotes from the Bible, the “I” of the song takes on a Moses-like role as the one who comes down from the mountain to speak the will of God, and a disciple-like role as the one to praise God: “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. [...] Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:14–16). The goal of the song is to make people aware that the rainfall is a deluge, like the one in Genesis chapters 6–8. However, the point is that although the “I” of the song knows about the order of things he cannot save anyone from the flood, not even himself. He cannot, like Christ, walk on water (Matt. 14:22–34).

Rain as a warning and image of flood and apocalypse runs like a wide stream throughout Dylan’s song production – just think of the titles of his first two live recordings, *Before the Flood* (1974) and *Hard Rain* (1976). As a direct continuation of “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” one can consider the song “The Times They Are A-Changin’”. It was seen as a song of protest over the current situation – yes, even as an optimistic battle song against rulers of all kinds, and the 1960s counter culture embraced it as one of its hymns. Also in this case Dylan opposed this widespread interpretation, and he made it clear that the song is not only or primarily about the difference between an older and a younger mindset: “It happened maybe that those were the only words I could find to separate aliveness from deadness. It had nothing to do with age” (McGregor, 1972, p. 10–11).

Strictly speaking, the song is not only addressed at rulers or those in power, but is a universal encouragement and warning to all people. Metaphorically in a direct continuation of “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall”, it says in the first stanza: “Come gather ‘round people wherever you roam / And admit that the waters around you have grown / And accept it soon you’ll be drenched to the bone / If your time to you is worth savin’ / Then you better start swimmin’ or you’ll sink like a stone.” The flood is rising and if one does not realize that we are living in the last hours of modernity, one will drown.

Even though “The Times They Are A-Changin’” also is an apocalyptic warning, this song contains an opportunity to be saved; namely to listen to the song and follow its advice and begin to swim. The song offers an insight which can prompt the listeners to give up the life they have lived until now and stop believing that they are in charge, existentially speaking, of their lives – and instead give room for something different and better. What this might be, the last stanza is about:

The line it is drawn, the curse it is cast
 The slow one now will later be fast
 As the present now will later be past
 The order is rapidly fadin’
 And the first one now will later be last
 For the times they are a-changin’

In this song, too, we see an intertextual conversation with the Bible, e.g. Matt. 19:30, Mark 10:31, Matt. 20:16, and Luke 13:30: “But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.” The fundamental change in the song is to be understood as the biblical inversion of all values, the reward for leaving worldly arrangements and choosing God’s. Even the title of Dylan’s song could be a reference to Dan. 2:21, where it is said of God: “And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings.”

The theme of Dylan’s song is that each and every person must be conscious of his or her false circumstances in life and of the collapse of the secular world, characterized as it is by wealth and power – in other words, must reach a point zero, where all the usual is removed so that the real

thing can appear. A breakdown is necessary so that real values again can be built. This is why the metaphor of the deluge is so appropriate. It refers to the crisis that erases everything apart from a belief in continuation after the point zero.

Dylan's shift from acoustic folk music to electric blues and rock is almost always interpreted as one of the most striking examples of the variability and lack of constants in his career. However, this is at most only one side of the coin. The other is that the central theme and the recurring metaphors from the first records are continued on the electric records in the middle of the 1960s, only in a new musical suit or costume and with a more wild and surreal imagery.

A good example is the last two lines in the above mentioned "Subterranean Homesick Blues": "The pump don't work 'cause the vandals / Took the handles"; in other words, a continuation of the metaphor of the deluge from the early songs. The water is still rising and it is the people themselves who prevent it from being pumped away. And at the end of the second stanza of the song we have: "You don't need a weatherman / To know which way the wind blows", and at the end of the third: "Don't follow leaders / Watch the parkin' meters" – lines that are not only idiomatic bon mots, but are closely connected to the deepest themes of the song: that the wind is blowing rain, and that the remaining time in the parking meter is running out, because the end of times, the flood or deluge, is near.

Another song on the same record is "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)", which is one of Dylan's most comprehensive and intense show-downs with modernity. The song consists of a catalogue of disgust an "I" feels by observing contemporary society where the sameness of things are overwhelming and everything is reduced to insignificance, in the sense that nothing is sacred except the rush to ensure profits and elevate oneself to a godlike status. The song is definitely a protest against the rulers in power, but the protest has a much broader and deeper purpose: an almost universal protest against an unholy world, a frustration filled with sorrow and rage aimed at the falsehood of modernity, its lies, propaganda, dishonesty, mendacity, pretense, hypocrisy and godlessness, without any sacred ideal to live up to:

Darkness at the break of noon
 Shadows even the silver spoon
 The handmade blade, the child's balloon
 Eclipses both the sun and moon
 To understand you know too soon
 There is no sense in trying
 [...]

Disillusioned words like bullets bark
 As human gods aim for their mark
 Make everything from toy guns that spark
 To flesh-colored Christs that glow in the dark
 It's easy to see without looking too far
 That not much is really sacred
 [...]

Although the masters make the rules
 For the wise men and the fools
 I got nothing, Ma, to live up to
 [...]

While money doesn't talk, it swears
 Obscenity, who really cares
 Propaganda, all is phony

The song is to be understood as an apocalyptic cry, and all its signs of the end of times alludes to Matt. 24:1–29, where Jesus predicts the destruction of Jerusalem. The destruction of the godless man-made is here rendered by the eclipse of the sun, the moon and the stars, see also the song “Desolation Row”: “Now the moon is almost hidden / The stars are beginning to hide”, as it is a number of places in the Bible, e.g. Amos 8:9, Joel 3:15, Isa. 13:9–11, Matt. 27:45 and Rev. 6:12.

Dylan's song opens precisely with the apocalyptic darkness at noon, where the silver spoon, honor, power, wealth, in fact everything man-made, is darkened by the self-inflicted plagues, the death of Christ and the day of judgment.

“It's Alright, Ma” concludes with the prospect of a hope: the “I” has had enough and asks a “you” if he or she might propose something different.

This corresponds closely with those parts of the Bible the song alludes to, where the destruction, the crucifixion and the darkness on the day of judgment are preconditions for something totally different to happen: the resurrection of Jesus and the second coming.

Dylan is, in other words, to be placed within an apocalyptic and eschatological mindset, where the prevailing injustice is contrasted with the future glory, as the earthly world is directed by hidden, heavenly powers, so that the imminent end of times is always linked with a judgment, due to apostasy from God. Judgment is equal to a moral purification, which is the penalty for the apostasy, and the purification is a prerequisite for forgiveness and a restoration of the original relationship with God that shows itself in the transformation of the world to a just kingdom. The punishment often comes in the form of natural disasters, flooding, or an eclipse of the sun.

A fundamental and recurring theme is, in other words, present in Bob Dylan's production of songs from the debut to the middle of the 1960s, quite unaffected by the changes he made in the period. Either one must state that Dylan never or very rarely wrote political protest songs, or that he right from the beginning was a protest singer in a much broader sense than writing ideological battle songs tied to a current political situation.

At the same time as his image as a protest singer was established, Dylan opposed this very same understanding of him. See for instance this statement in connection with the release of *Another Side of Bob Dylan* in 1964: "Those records I've made, I'll stand behind them, but some of that was jumping into the scene to be heard" (Heylin, 1991, p. 97). Dylan had a keen eye for his times and delivered, at least apparently, the product that the "zeitgeist" wanted. He thereby in no time achieved a position as the voice for the emerging youth rebellion, to be the darling of the civil rights movement and the Left by doing what the audience wanted to hear. Dylan's songs were only rarely political protests aimed at current events; they were, rather, apocalyptic, Bible-inspired visions and warnings about and against a time that with its ungodly pride, calls down the deluge and the day of judgment.

In his autobiography, *Chronicles*, Dylan repeatedly rejects the 1960s "zeitgeist" and the use of him as the voice of a new generation: "I had very

little in common with and knew even less about a generation that I was supposed to be the voice of” (Dylan, 2004, p. 115). Dylan sees the decade and this generation as steeped in narcissism, and he enumerates sarcastically the absurd consequences of the dream of the decade of wanting to transcend all boundaries (Dylan, 2004, p. 90).

In 1986, Dylan stated in an interview with Bill Flanagan: “Most people walking around have this strange conception that they are born good, that they’re really good people – but the *world* has just made a mess out of their lives. I have another point of view” (Webb, 2006, p. 92). That man is fundamentally good, and that evil stems from the objectionable features of society, is the 1960s viewpoint and in general the attitude of the political-ideological way of thinking: problems are created by society and can therefore be solved politically. It is not Dylan’s point of view, and it was not in the 1960s or since. As Dylan stated during a concert on December 5, 1979: “You know we’re living in the end times. I don’t think there’s anybody ... who doesn’t feel that in their heart. The scriptures say, ‘In the last days, perilous times shall be at hand. Men shall become lovers of their own selves. Blasphemous, heavy and highminded’” (Heylin, 1991, p. 334).

When Jesus predicts the destruction of Jerusalem, he compares the people of his own time with those who lived in the time of Noah: “For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away” (Matthew 24:38–39). As we see, the title of Dylan’s first live recording is a direct quote from this passage in the Bible. In the Bible as well as in the work of Dylan the problem is the haughty self-aggrandizement, which is the eschatological sign that we are living in the end times just before a new deluge. And precisely for that reason, the theme of deluge and its associated metaphors run like a thread through Dylan’s song work. Just think of songs with titles like “Crash on the Levee / Down in the Flood”, “High Water (For Charley Patton)”, and “The Levee’s Gonna Break”. In metaphorical language steeped in the Old and New Testament Dylan tells that only a Christian inversion of all the currently reigning values will prevent the water from rising further.

In the song “Need a Woman” it says: “Searching for the truth the way God designed it / The truth is I might drown before I find it.” In his formulation of modernity and Christianity Dylan’s song work really asks the question whether modernity is flooded in the deluge before it reaches faith, or whether it can escape the deluge through a repetition, or re-making, of the faith.

Christian Modernism

Bob Dylan did not really belong to the early 1960s protest movements. In an even stronger mode he rejected the “zeitgeist” of the decade’s later years – the counter culture, flower power, the generation of ’68 – which he neither ideologically, politically, or musically was part of at any time. On the contrary, he made use of a motorcycle accident in the summer of 1966 to withdraw completely from the public. When he resurfaced with the record *John Wesley Harding* in December of 1967, there was here and in the records that followed a new simplicity, with even more quotations from and references to the Bible, and there was country music, exploration of traditional and popular music within the American tradition – all in all a strongly contrarian attempt to conclusively dispel the myth of him being the voice of the 60s and a mouthpiece for a generation. What is most striking in Dylan’s career ever since has been the deliberate anachronism in the positions, a distancing of himself from an unbearable contemporary society, the continuing repudiation of the moral values of the times, and of the expectations of the audience. As Dylan outspokenly expressed it in an interview in *USA Today*, September 21, 1989:

From ‘66 on, I was trying to raise a family, and that was contrary to the whole epidemic of the ‘60s. Most people were running away from home and trying to run away from their parents. [...] My family was more important to me than any kind of generational ‘60s thing. Still is. To find some meaning in the sixties for me is real far-fetched ... The sixties will be forgotten. (Webb, 2006, p. 34–35)

Dylan still maintains this viewpoint in *Chronicles*, where he emphasizes his distance to the modern, ungodly world, and instead connects himself with tradition in a downright archaic way: God-fearing, irremovable

moral values that modernity surely has supplanted, but which the individual can and must find (Dylan, 2004, p. 235–36).

Or, as Dylan states it artistically in one of the songs that was recorded in a basement in Woodstock in the summer of 1967, “You Ain’t Goin’ Nowhere”: “Strap yourself to the tree with roots / You ain’t goin’ nowhere.” While the 1960s worshipped the rootlessness and the present moment and made grand plans for a secular, humanistic future, Dylan literally went underground, and from down there he sang about being rooted, about tradition and Christian faith as oppositional tools in a forceful criticism of modernity.

It is certainly possible to argue that Dylan not only culturally and religiously, but also politically, has always been a conservative. The first person who, to my knowledge, made this claim was Steven Goldberg in the article “Bob Dylan and the Poetry of Salvation”, in 1970:

His emphasis on personal, as opposed to societal, salvation could very possibly leave him feeling most at home with a political philosophy that emphasizes the individual’s right to be left alone to his own search for God. [...] If Dylan does tend toward conservatism, it is because conservatism, at least theoretically, mirrors his distrust of political routes to salvation. (McGregor 1972, p. 374)

A much more elaborate argument for a similar view is found in Stephen H. Webb’s *Dylan Redeemed* (2006). Håvard Rem concludes in his article “That’s Where You Belong. Den verdikonservative og flerkulturelle Bob Dylan”: “Bob Dylan should not be portrayed primarily as a protest singer on the Left. First of all, Bob Dylan is a conservative artist” (Botvar, 2011, p. 71 my translation). And finally, it is stated quite remarkably in *Chronicles*: “I had a primitive way of looking at things and I liked country fair politics. My favorite politician was Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, who reminded me of Tom Mix, and there wasn’t any way to explain that to anybody” (Dylan, 2004, p. 283). No, for the 68-generation it must have been hard to comprehend that their hero and mouthpiece thought positively of strongly conservative Goldwater – and of Tom Mix, the most popular cowboy-star of the era of silent movies ...

In the song “All Along the Watchtower”, the third and final stanza reads: “All along the watchtower, princes kept the view / While all the

women came and went, barefoot servants, too / Outside in the distance a wildcat did growl / Two riders were approaching, the wind began to howl.” All the elements of this stanza, the watchtower, the rich city, the two riders and the howling wind, allude to Isaiah 21:1–10, the prophecy of the fall of Babylon.

Thus, also “All Along the Watchtower” is to be understood as an actualization of the Bible, and as an apocalyptic prophecy. The fall of Babylon is in Dylan’s song equated with the last days of modernity, brought forth by godlessness, warned of by the wind, and announced by the two riders. Who are these riders who in the song are called “the joker” and “the thief”? As Jesper Tang has pointed out in *Bob Dylan smiler!* (Tang, 1972, p. 167–68), a joker in a game is the one who does not have a fixed value beforehand. The joker is therefore without identity, or rather the one who can freely seize and exchange a number of identities. But if the joker is liberated from the fixed hierarchy of values, this does not mean that he is free from being part of the game. Freedom is thus only being free to a never-ending play of roles, which, keeping in mind its endless possibilities and options, involves the risk of existential confusion and rootlessness.

It is, in other words, possible to identify the joker with Dylan himself and interpret the song’s first stanza as a text about his songwriting: “‘There must be some way out of here,’ said the joker to the thief / ‘There’s too much confusion, I can’t get no relief / Businessmen, they drink my wine, plowmen dig my earth / None of them along the line know what any of it is worth’”. Dylan knows of, and can distance himself from, the values of modernity. To approach the constantly changing nature of modernity with constant change has been Dylan’s method, but the risk of using it is twofold. Firstly, that one is not interpreted and understood, and is therefore merely seen as yet another expression of that very modernity that one wanted to challenge. And secondly, that one gets lost in the labyrinth and becomes a part of it, rather than finding a way through it. Dylan the Jokerman knows of a way out, but cannot find it himself.

His companion, however, can. The thief says: “‘No reason to get excited,’ the thief, he kindly spoke / ‘There are many here among us who feel that life is but a joke / But you and I, we’ve been through that, and

this is not our fate / So let us not talk falsely now, the hour is getting late”’. The thief, unlike the joker, is neither confused nor desperate. His insight and viewpoint are that the chaos of modernity is not a fixed destiny, but something one can get through by speaking the truth at the end of time. In other words, the thief has gained an identity by virtue of his criticism of modernity and thus has a set of values to act upon.

This is not strange at all, because the thief in Dylan’s song is equated with Christ. After the prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus predicts his own return and demands vigilance from his disciples, as well as likening himself to a thief who comes at night (Matt. 24:42–44). In addition, the song contains a reference to Revelation: “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand” (1:3 – cf. Matthew 26:45, where Jesus, just before his capture, says to the disciples: “[...] behold, the hour is at hand”), that is, “the hour is getting late”, as the hour generally speaking is in Revelation, where the fall of Babylon is a general symbol of the godless confusion just before the day of judgment.

In conclusion, one can say that “All Along the Watchtower” is a song about how the Christian artist with his art attempts to convert the secularized modernity. While being a modernist expression of contemporary times, Dylan’s songs are simultaneously a critique of the “zeitgeist”. Dylan uses the language of modernity and elaborates on it in a dialectical way in order to contradict the view of life it is usually associated with, which is why it is reasonable to call Dylan a Christian modernist.

Artists of this kind can be difficult to characterize and recognize, primarily because one is influenced by the erroneous and reductive idea from secular modernity that it is impossible to be both religious and modern at the same time. That is why Dylan is often framed as belonging only to the political protest of the 1960s, and why his religiousness is usually isolated to the years around 1980, the time when he in a very direct way declared himself to be a Christian.

But Dylan’s song work is in all its phases religious and has deep roots in tradition, as well as being part of the contemporary situation both thematically and aesthetically. He is an artist who finds himself in the tension between tradition and modernity, between religious faith and the

secular world, and has on this basis produced a song work that combines a Christian view of life with a modernist strategy, aesthetically speaking.

There is, in other words, not only one kind of modernism, as is often claimed in, for example, Denmark, namely the one sanctioned by the secular segment of society, for there exist at the same time other kinds of modernism. It can be argued that roughly speaking two mainstreams in the many kinds of modernism in the twentieth century can be found. Dylan's kind of modernism is far removed from the one that is often connected with the American poet Ezra Pound, which might be described as the avant-garde breaking down of tradition, and is more in line with the one that is represented by the Anglo-American poet T. S. Eliot, restorative modernism. In the essay "Tradition and The Practice of Poetry" (1936) Eliot states that the task of poetry is always to make something old into something new. Neither Eliot nor Dylan chooses or breaks with tradition; tradition is something to elaborate on and renew. Understood this way, modernism is not a break with tradition, but a part of it. That Dylan knows about this discussion of modernism is evident from "Desolation Row", in the lines: "And Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot / Fighting in the captain's tower".

It is obvious that Dylan as a person and an artist represents a religiously motivated resistance against modernity, but as with Eliot it is a resistance that is formulated in a modern way, a protest, that is so much stronger because it is expressed in a contemporary idiom. Eliot's and Dylan's modernism are at the same time a protest against secular modernity and a positive testimony to the possibility of faith even during this time. Dylan's originality is not least that he as a Christian modernist is capable of continuing, in an innovative and contemporary way, what is Christian, and of reshaping tradition into modernity.

In Dylan's extensive use of elements of tradition – loans, reuse, allusions – he makes them his own, in recontextualizing them through a new interpretation of the material in a new context. The melting pot his songs thereby turn into is an intertextual modernism that is comparable to Eliot's: the intention is not to break away from tradition, but on the other hand to bring together elements from various parts of tradition in an unconventional and personal way. In other words: tradition in transition.

Christian protest

For a period around 1980 Bob Dylan emerged as a Christian and released some records that were bluntly edifying and openly sermonizing. This period in Dylan's career is usually called "the Christian phase". But the point is still that Dylan's songs before and after this time also are religious, and that the difference mainly is that Dylan is more directly outspoken, the Christian faith is presented as an open confession instead of something that must be interpreted from the many allusions. Similarly, Dylan's songs from this period are webs of biblical quotes; there are indeed several songs in which almost every single word is taken from the Bible. The proselytizing Christian albums are thus not departures from, but continuations of, the theme and method of Dylan's older songs: what had hitherto been implicit is now explicit.

The transitional album is generally considered to be *Street-Legal* (1978). What the material-secular world has to offer is not enough, just as physical love is not. In the song "Señor" (which in Spanish also means God) it is thus stated in the last stanza: "Señor, señor, let's overturn these tables / Disconnect these cables / This place don't make sense to me no more / Can you tell me what we're waiting for, señor?". The song is a prayer that God will intervene as soon as possible in a world that makes no sense. The stanza contains an allusion to Matthew and the cleansing of the Temple (21: 12–13). Modernity has transformed the house of God, indeed the whole world, to a marketplace and a den of thieves, and the "I" waits for God to cleanse it all.

The following album, *Slow Train Coming* (1979), includes the song "When You Gonna Wake Up?", which is an all-encompassing critique of the secular world, but at the same time even more direct in pointing to an alternative. All human organizations are fraudulent, the ways of thinking poison, rightwing as well as leftwing ideologies are stifling, innocence is thrown in jail, churches and schools, doctors and the laws: everything is broken and everything destroys, while modernity is chasing material wealth and continues to dream on in its illusions of self-glorification. The only thing in the song that is not a fraud or an emptiness is God who sent his Son to us, so that he could die for us and thus atone for our sins. One of the countless biblical quotes in the song is a motif and theme, from

its title to its refrain: “[...] I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee” (Rev. 3: 1–3). At this late hour, and just prior to divine judgement of humankind’s inadequacies, it is important for modernity to wake up from the death of disbelief.

The songs on these records are certainly protest songs, and as such among the most implacable Dylan has ever written. Indeed, he was and remained a protest singer, but undeniably in a much more profound way than the protest of the 1960s generation, because Dylan, on a Christian basis, knows man’s weakness.

This is why it says in the song “Gotta Serve Somebody” from the same album: “You may be a construction worker working on a home / You may be living in a mansion, you might live in a dome / [...] // But you’re gonna have to serve somebody.” To serve is crucial because the humble service unites all and breaks down all the constructions of humankind.

Therefore, nothing could hardly be more wrong than the contemporary reception of Dylan’s “Christian phase” and the insistence that he, from a self-righteous position, was about to judge some people and acquit others. On the contrary, everything existing is criticized with an unprecedented ferocity, because all are equal in the self-inflicted flood, and in the light of God’s judgment all human deeds are indicted. And the choice is extremely simple: “Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord / But you’re gonna have to serve somebody”, an allusion to Matt. 6:24, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

History repeats itself. Just like in 1965, when Dylan substituted the folk music slogans with electrified modernism, and in the late 1960s when he in a contrarian manner and in opposition to the hippies, the counter culture, and the generation of 1968 moved to the countryside and recorded country music and pop music: he was yelled at. His Christianity was,

especially in liberal and academic circles in the US and in supposedly open-minded Denmark, called fundamentalist and reactionary, though he had never before been so openly and relentlessly critical of society.

That Christianity, after the openly sermonizing albums, has not been preached in the same straightforward and missionary way since has led to the widespread assumption that Bob Dylan is no longer a Christian believer and that because of this his songs express disillusionment. But Christianity in no way disappeared from Dylan's songs; he just returned to the more indirect, alluding method. In an interview with *The New York Times* on 28th September 1997, Dylan said:

Those old songs are my lexicon and my prayer book. All my beliefs come out of those old songs, literally [...]. You can find all my philosophy in those old songs. I believe in a God of time and space, but if people ask me about that, my impulse is to point them back toward those songs. I believe in Hank Williams singing "I Saw the Light." I've seen the light, too. (Dettmar, 2009, p. 24)

Dylan was probably having a personal crisis in the mid-1980s, and one of the consequences was the most fruitless and uninspired years in his career. But it is characteristic that when Dylan makes a comeback with *Oh Mercy* in 1989, it is – with the exception of the albums containing direct preaching from around 1980 – perhaps the most pronounced Christian album of his entire production. On *Oh Mercy*, there is, of course, the customary apocalyptic hatred of modernity, not least represented by the opening song "Political World", which is a tightlipped denunciation of any secular ideology. But the album also includes a number of soul-searching and evangelical songs which bear witness to Christian belief and a more graceful recognition that sin is not only culpable, but also an inevitable part of human existence, for example in the song "Ring Them Bells". In this song the bells are ringing just before judgment day so the sheep can be separated from the goats – and so that the sleeping paganism in modernity can be awakened and come to believe in something else than the rush hour and worldly affairs. The mountains in the last days of modernity and paganism are filled with doomed and lost sheep. It is obvious that the song is yet another apocalyptic warning to secular modernity, which with its disbelief evokes the apocalypse

and the judgment: man has shattered the difference between good and evil. However, at the same time the song expresses hope in that it not only describes the moment just before the end of time, but also circles around the possibility of awakening and conversion: that the Kingdom of Heaven is near, salvation through the good shepherd, and the return of Jesus Christ.

The fact that the metaphors of the flood were being continued on the albums of the following decade has already been mentioned. What remains to be stated is that the theme of Dylan's albums the last 15–20 years has been that the carnal love and the pursuit of earthly happiness might seize the mind, but never fulfill and always disappoint and hurt, since all human capacities and ideas fall short when it comes to what is essential. This is why it is vital to seek God before the judgment is delivered (see for example "Sugar Baby").

Confidence and Paradise

While, as we have seen, one constantly recurring theme in Dylan's song work is Christian belief with an emphasis on the judgment aspect, often expressed through metaphors of flood and judgment, another aspect of Christian faith is also constantly visible, namely the idea of paradise, frequently expressed in metaphors of mountains.

On the album *Shot of Love* (1981) there is the masterful, modern hymn "Every Grain of Sand". The song is not like most of the other songs from this period. It is not a reflection of direct edification, but is about moving towards the Christian faith by going through doubt. The confession is linked with distress and need, the temptation is latent, just as the sound of the divine presence in the world sometimes turns out to be just the sound of oneself, of one's desire to experience the meaning and cohesion of everything. The Christian faith is depicted not as a static result, but as a living process. The song thus gives the listener and modernity a point of identification in that everything changes, that nothing lasts. However, the song also claims that everything can always be repeated on the other side of change and doubt, because of the belief that behind all the preliminary appearances an eternal Creator is present in everything we meet and

experience, and that nothing therefore is without meaning or purpose. See the allusion in the song to Matt. 10:30, “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”

The encounter with God’s creation is in this way the renewal of the faith that individuals cannot by themselves maintain. See the last line and its allusion to Matt. 10:26–33, the call for fearlessness on the basis that not even a sparrow “shall not fall on the ground without your Father”. This is the opposite of the situation in the beginning of the song, the flood of tears from man himself drowning any hope – and which very well could allude to Psalms: “The rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law” (119:136).

Thus, if doubt is written into the song, the root of this doubt is placed with the self, that is, man, and not as a doubt of the existence of God. It is a song about man’s inability to always maintain his faith, not a song about the non-existence of God. When the person reaches out, she or he finds God. Even in “the fury of the moment,” in those moments where life hurts, or where it feels like God is holding back his grace, the person in the song feels the presence of God.

The song’s title and the whole theme allude to Ps. 139:17–18: “How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand.” This conclusion is reached as the psalmist recognizes that God sees through him, is always close to him, and that God is the one for whom everything is bright, and the one who formed him in secret and puts his whole life right. Man is not able to comprehend the omnipresence of God, but can only approach in the shape of faith: “Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.” (Ps. 139:5–6). In other words, “Every Grain of Sand” is a song that expresses faith in divine providence. The belief that everything is happening for a cause that is all-encompassing, but in turn completely or almost hidden from man, and which can therefore only be relied upon through faith. The meaning and the sacred found in the everyday life, also in adversity and suffering, because God has created it all, it is all part of his plan, and thus everything is a manifestation of God’s ruling and grace.

Based on providence it is no wonder that Dylan has always had the view that God is everywhere, behind and in creation. In an interview with Neil Hickey in *TV Guide*, September 11, 1976, Dylan said: “I can see God in a daisy, – in the wind and the rain. I see creation just about everywhere” (Thomsen & Schnack, 1998, p. 110). This belief in God’s omnipresence in creation is expressed in the early song “Lay Down Your Weary Tune”, in which humans are invited to stop their own weary song, and instead find rest and meaning in the song God sings to us through the creation.

It is striking in this context that Dylan’s visions of doomsday are very often expressed in images from nature: flood, rain, wind and thunder. But also his visions of paradise are expressed in images from nature. A good example is the final song of *Time Out of Mind*, the long “Highlands”. A portion of this song is about being distanced from, and without contact with, the immediate environment. The mundane everyday reality of modernity feels like a rat race, a stale monotony, a jail of opacity, where nothing seems to have context or be meaningful, and where the person feels lost, also as a result of having made the wrong choices.

A second layer in this song of distance and self-criticism circles around the longing for otherness, another place or state of mind in which everything makes sense; a meaning that is not created by humans, but which presents itself to the person in the song through images from nature. The entire song bears witness to the notion that its title “Highlands” does not refer to any specific geographical location, but to paradise, understood as a transcendental part of the mind and/or as eternity. It is obvious that this is an allusion to a poem by Robert Burns, “My Heart’s in the Highlands” (1790). In Dylan’s song the metaphor of the Highlands is expanded to include the paradisiacal, whether that is what the heart belongs to in this world, or it is the home that, according to the faith of the I-person, awaits man on the other side of death. The Highlands are, in other words, a metaphor for religious longing. It is striking that the paradisiacal finds its image in the Highlands – that is, the opposite of the lowlands, which are the first to be inundated by the great flood, in the day of judgment.

Just as the flood flows through Dylan’s songs, so there are many places where the dream of the paradisiacal place or the paradisiacal state of

mind is linked to mountains. The early song “Let Me Die in My Footsteps”, which as mentioned above is a Christian apocalyptic critique of contemporary society, also, in opposition to the fallen world of today, contains the following dream: “Let me drink from the waters where the mountain streams flood / Let the smell of wildflowers flow free through my blood / Let me sleep in your meadows with the green grassy leaves”. In the song “Time Passes Slowly” Dylan sings: “Time passes slowly up here in the mountains / We sat beside bridges and walked beside fountains / Catch the wild fishes that float through the stream”. In the song “Hurricane” this imagination of paradise resurfaces, here disguised as the boxer Rubin Carter’s longing: “Up to some paradise / Where the trout streams flow and the air is nice”. In this Arcadia, a pastoral ideal landscape, time has stopped and the water is under control – as opposed to the rest of the modern world, where the water level relentlessly rises, and time is ticking towards the end of time.

It is therefore quite remarkable that God in the prayer “Father of Night” is God for everything, night as well as day, darkness and light, the mountains and the rain, love and suffering. The God who is prayed to in Dylan’s hymn has created everything in nature and inhabits our dreams, hearts and memories, and this God controls the rivers (referring to Proverbs 21: 1, “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will”), as well as the rain and the flood, but also love, mountains and grace.

The indirect method

With the box set *Biograph* from 1985 come two booklets, which among other things consist of Cameron Crowe’s interview with Bob Dylan, where he applies shorter or longer remarks to a number of his songs. His comment on “Every Grain of Sand” is:

Everything is crooked now and the signs all point you the wrong way – it’s like we’re living at the time of the Tower of Babel, all our tongues are confused. [...] it comes from the Bible, so it can be cast off as being too quote religious. Make something religious and people don’t have to deal with it, they can say it’s

irrelevant. 'Repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand.' That scares the shit out of people. They'd like to avoid that. [...] There does come a time, though, when you have to face the facts and the truth is true whether you wanna believe it or not, it doesn't need you to make it true... That lie about everybody having their own truth inside of them has done a lot of damage and made people crazy. Did you ever hear that to conquer your enemy, you must repent first, fall down on your knees and beg for mercy? [...] I do know that God hates a proud look. [...] Maybe in the '90's or possibly in the next century people will look upon the '80's as the age of masturbation, when it was taken to the limit [...]. I like to keep my values scripturally straight though – I like to stay part of that stuff that don't change. [...] What's changed? When did Abraham break his father's idols. I think it was last Tuesday. God is still the judge and the devil still rules the world so what's different? (Crowe, 1985, p. 48–49)

First, those comments originate from the time where Dylan, according to widespread belief deeply disillusioned, had left Christianity – which is clearly just not the case.

Secondly, Dylan as usual puts forth his scathing criticism of secular modernity with the small change that its image, the godless Babylon, is supplemented by the Tower of Babel, the high rising tower that mankind, according to Genesis chapter 11, built so as not to be scattered. But to prevent the people from thus breaking the law of God, God confused their mother tongues and scattered them all over the earth. Dylan's point is that modern man's feeling of greatness is ungodly masturbation, and that the modern view that every human being are in possession of the truth within himself or herself is a dangerous expression of madness – because the only truth in a Christian sense is the one that God has bestowed upon us through Jesus Christ, and therefore modernity should not cultivate pride, but humbly pray.

Thirdly, Dylan expresses the view that time, history and development are, when it comes to fundamental things, categories that can be visual deceptions, since nothing changes: God has always been and still is the judge, and the devil still reigns in the earthly world. In some sense Dylan himself is a man of modernity, but a man who, because of his Christian belief, longs to be part of a world which does not change, but is eternal and absolute – that is, is not subject to the changes and relativity of modernity. He also claims that the truth of human existence is not modernity's,

that everything floats and streams, but Christianity's, that everything is created by the eternal God.

Fourthly, Dylan more than suggests the reason for, and nature of, the particular way in which he has artistically communicated Christianity to the public. Since modernity neither believes in, nor wants to see, life in the light of religion, it rejects any direct talk of what Christianity is and what it requires. It is, therefore, in the context of modernity better to speak indirectly about the Christian point of view.

For that reason Dylan has used a dialectical method throughout most of his career. In order to make modern, secularized people interested in being part of the conversation of what Christian faith is, he has spoken of Christian faith in the language of modernity. But certainly with the aim of making modernity Christian again.

In this manner, Dylan's view, theme and method are comparable to those of Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55), since he too expressed his Christian views on life to a secular modernity by translating the Christian into the form and language of modernity. The method is about leading modern man away from the place where he or she is to another place. But that is precisely why everything must begin from the point where they are. Thus, one begins where the person who needs help is, and seduces to what is Christian. This is a method which Kierkegaard in *Om min Forfatter-Virksomhed* (1851) describes as “*deceiving into Truth*” (Kierkegaard, 1997–2012, vol. 13: 13, “*at bedrage ind i det Sande*”).

For both Kierkegaard and Dylan, in other words, the nature of the contact with the individual reader or listener is crucial, and a very large number of songs from throughout Dylan's career are shaped like inquiries, in that an “I” verbally reaches out to a “you” and tries to establish a dialogue. The dialogic request to the listener is thus another constant in Dylan's songs, but it manifests itself in very different ways. One could again point to “Blowin' in the Wind” where the answers indeed do blow in the wind, but potentially are present in the questions themselves, as the song by asking them indirectly calls on the listener to consider the answer.

The song “With God on Our Side” (*The Times They Are A-Changin'*) seems, at first acquaintance, to be a one-dimensional protest song where the good guys and the bad guys, right and wrong, are established from

the beginning. But toward the end the song suddenly surprises the listener profoundly in that there is an allusion to Luke 22: 48:

Through many dark hour
 I've been thinkin' about this
 That Jesus Christ was
 Betrayed by a kiss
 But I can't think of you
 You'll have to decide
 Whether Judas Iscariot
 Had God on his side

The poet neither can nor wants to answer on the listener's behalf, but can ask the question, and thus try to make the individual listener think and act for himself. Is Judas an example of the abuse of free will? Or is providence leading Judas to the betrayal as a necessary element in the story of Jesus Christ: no death, no resurrection? And if Judas had God on his side, who doesn't?

This method of making the listener think and act for himself Dylan describes in the song "Lay, Lady, Lay" (*Nashville Skyline*, 1969), which appears, at first listen, to be just a macho-like love song in country style, but on closer inspection reveals itself as a meta-song about Dylan's special relationship to his listener: "Lay, lady, lay, lay across my big brass bed / Whatever colors you have in your mind / I'll show them to you and you'll see them shine". To listen to Dylan is to be seduced – not in a passive sense as is most often seen in modern art and entertainment, but on the contrary to be activated and visible in one's understanding of, and relation to, the text.

It is therefore not possible to remain neutral to Bob Dylan's songs, because you learn something about yourself by listening to them.

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