

CHAPTER 4

When the Wind is the Answer: The Use of Bob Dylan Songs in Worship Services in Protestant Churches

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Abstract: The songs of Bob Dylan are often used in the worship services of Protestant, and especially Lutheran, churches in Scandinavia. Since the mid-1990s more than 100 so-called Dylan masses have been celebrated in Norway alone. This can be explained partly by the fact that Dylan has been recognized as a major artist in all sections of society, and partly by the fact that the national Lutheran churches have accepted popular music as a natural part of their worship. In this article, I look more closely at the reasons behind the use of Bob Dylan's music in worship in Scandinavia and examine the discussion around this that has been going on within church communities. My empirical basis consists of interviews with ten ministers and church musicians. The material shows that different types of argumentation are used with regard to the use of Dylan's music in the church, and that this is related to the respondent's approach to popular culture in general and the way in which they regard the worship service.

Keywords: worship service, Dylan mass, Protestant church, liturgy, Niebuhr

Sammendrag: Sangene til Bob Dylan brukes ofte i gudstjenestene til protestantiske, og spesielt lutherske, kirker i Skandinavia. Siden midten av 1990-tallet har mer enn 100 såkalte Dylan-messer blitt gjennomført bare i Norge. Dette har å gjøre med at Bob Dylan er blitt anerkjent som en stor kunstner i alle deler av samfunnet og at de nasjonale lutherske kirkene har akseptert populær musikk som en naturlig del av gudstjenesten. I denne artikkelen ser jeg nærmere på bakgrunnen for at Bob Dylans musikk blir brukt i kirken og tar for meg diskursen innad i kirkene. Det empiriske grunnlaget er intervjuer med ti prester og kirkemusikere. Materialet viser at det ligger ulike typer argumentasjon til grunn for bruken av Dylans musikk i kirken, og at

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dette henger sammen med informantens tilnærming til populærkultur generelt og måten de betrakter gudstjenesten på.

Stikkord: gudstjeneste, Dylan-messe, protestantisk kirke, liturgi, Niebuhr

Introduction

Each year about 10 Protestant churches in Norway use Bob Dylan songs in their services. In some cases, Dylan's lyrics are an integrated part of the liturgy. Since the mid-1990s, the so-called Dylan Mass has been used in more than 100 churches across the country, mainly in evangelical Lutheran ones. The frequent use of the Dylan mass nowadays is a paradox, since Dylan's intense Christian phase dates to the years 1979–81. The popularity of the Dylan mass thus has more to do with the churches' changing attitudes towards popular culture than with Dylan's relation to the Christian faith.

The Dylan mass is not an exceptional example of the use of contemporary popular music in Protestant churches. Johnny Cash masses, Elvis masses, and U2 masses have also been used recently in Norwegian churches. In some cases, even dance band and heavy metal masses have been performed.¹

Music style is not the only aspect of church services that has changed over time – song lyrics have also changed. During the 1970s and 80s popular songs had to include a Christian message in order to be accepted for use in church services. There have been intense discussions in clerical circles about what kind of song lyrics could be accepted. During the last 20–30 years there has been a gradual change, towards accepting that songs without any clear connection to the Christian message may also be used in worship.

Most of the songs used in the churches have lyrics that can be related to the Christian message. When it comes to Dylan songs, it is not always easy to grasp their meaning. A song can often be interpreted in different ways. This means that quite a few Dylan songs can be seen by some as having a

¹ <https://www.nrk.no/trondelag/heavyrock-gudstjeneste-i-selbu-1.7305233>, viewed May 6, 2019.

Christian message and by others as being regular love songs. This makes it both easy and difficult to use Dylan songs in a church setting.

Because of his Jewish background Bob Dylan was not regarded a Christian during the 1960s and early 1970s, even though his album *John Wesley Harding* (1968) was full of biblical references and allusions. Earlier, Dylan had already used biblical imagery in songs like “When the Ship Comes In” (1963) and “I Shall Be Released” (1967). Dylan’s relation to the Christian faith changed in the late 1970s. In 1978, he had a conversion experience and became a member of the charismatic-evangelical Vineyard fellowship. His “born-again period” resulted in three gospel albums: *Slow Train Coming*, *Saved* and *Shot of Love*. Dylan’s conversion led Christians to embrace him.

During the 1980s and 1990s Dylan continued to sing his overtly Christian songs. He played “Gotta Serve Somebody” from his Christian album trilogy as recently as spring 2019, on his tour in Europe. Even if Dylan’s own songs from the 1990s and 2000s are not explicitly Christian, biblical allusions have continued to constitute a substantial part of his lyrics. Today, many Christians still look on Bob Dylan as a true believer. But the question remains: why were Protestant churches reluctant to include Dylan songs in worship for such a long time, while nowadays they are so eager to conduct Dylan masses?

The way Dylan songs are used in church varies a lot. In this article, I will look at the way churches are using Dylan’s music in services. How to explain the diverse types of use? Does it have anything to do with the theological positions of the particular denomination or the views of the local ministers and church musicians? Are there theological differences between free churches and established churches on this matter?

Music in Church

The issue of church music and worship styles has been a sensitive question that has divided the Christian Church for centuries. Some consider older church music to be sacred, and more recent music to be close to blasphemy. Others view older music as outdated and consider more recent music to be a gift from God.

In the history of the Church, music has been closely connected to liturgy that is the fixed element of a worship service.² Over the centuries, liturgies became so complex that only trained ministers and musicians could follow them, while lay people remained passive observers. The split between Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches was partly due to disagreement about the language to be used in the liturgy and the hymns. The 16th century Reformation was a move to rekindle worship service so that the whole congregation could take part.

The Catholic Church is, today, still reluctant to introduce popular music into church services. Different popes have had different views on popular music. In 1997 the late pope John Paul II promoted a rock concert at the *23rd Italian Eucharistic Congress* in Bologna. Among other artists, Bob Dylan was invited to the event. He performed three songs: “Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door”, “A Hard Rain’s Gonna Fall” and “Forever Young”. After the concert the pope shook hands with Dylan and gave a short sermon based on another Dylan song, “Blowin’ in the Wind”. To the young audience he said:

On the road of music this evening, Jesus met you. A representative of yours said on your behalf that the answer is blowing in the wind. Yes, it is true. On the wind there is the voice and breath of the Holy Spirit. You asked me: how many roads must a man walk down before you can call him a man? I answer you: just one. One only. It is the road of a man. And this is Jesus Christ, who said ‘I am the way’.³

John Paul’s successor, pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Alois Ratzinger), was, on the other hand, known to have a strong dislike of popular music. In one of his books, he reveals that he tried to stop the whole Bologna concert from taking place because he regarded Bob Dylan as a kind of “prophet” whose beliefs were at odds with the Roman Catholic Church. In his book *Spirit of the Liturgy* (2000) Ratzinger warns against the inclusion of popular music in the Mass.

² The Greek meaning of liturgy is “public work”.

³ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1544924/Pope-tried-to-stop-concert-by-Bob-Dylan.html>

And although Ratzinger's views are not representative for all Catholics it is fair to say that the Catholic Church has adopted a conservative stance on these matters. Protestant Churches, on the other hand, have generally had a more inclusive view on the use of "secular music" in worship. However, within Protestant Churches, the use of music has from time to time been a source of disagreement and conflict, not least within the Low Church movement. The Church of Norway, for example, consists of about 1200 congregations with their own church buildings. Within this established Church, one finds both High Church and Low Church congregations. The former are mostly associated with cathedrals in the larger cities and the latter with parishes situated in the countryside.

In a church service Christians gather together for an intimate communion with the Lord. People speak to Him in prayer, praise and thanksgiving. The Lord comes to the people, speaks to them and blesses them through His Word and Sacrament. The worship service is seen by Christians as a foretaste of the heavenly life to come. The liturgical tradition is the starting point for all local forms of worship. A regular mass includes the following elements: An opening Hymn of praise/The Trinitarian Invocation/Confession of Sins and Absolution/The Introit/The Kyrie (an expression of the emptiness without God)/The Gloria (thanksgiving)/The Salutation/The Collect prayer/The Epistle (reading from the New Testament)/The offertory (confession)/ The offering/Prayers/The sacrament (the Holy Communion)/The Sanctus/The Lord's Prayer/The Words of Institution/The Distribution, when kneel before the altar and receive the sacrament/Communion hymn/The Thanksgiving/Salutation/Closing Hymn/Silent Prayer.

The two main elements in Christian worship are *the Word* (part II), which relates back to synagogue worship, and the *Holy Communion* (part III), which relates to Jesus's last supper with the disciples. The order of the worship has developed around these two elements. They are introduced by *The Gathering* (part I) that points in the direction of the Word, and rounded off by *the Sending* (part V) that leads us from the table of communion out into service in the world. In the middle of the service, as a bridge between the Word and the Holy Communion, we find *prayers* and *intercessions* (part IV) for the church and the world.

Previous research of the use of popular music in protestant churches

As mentioned above, there have been significant changes in the use of music styles in Norwegian churches in recent years. Parallel with these changes, sociologically informed research projects have been carried out. One of them is the project, *Liturgy in motion* (Balsnes, 2017; Balsnes & Mosveen, 2016). According to Balsnes (2017, p. 36) modern popular music is the kind of music that has increased most in church services during the last 30 years. The same goes for music performed in church concerts. What is new is that liturgical music itself in the Church of Norway is now strongly influenced by popular music.

Since 2003 the Church of Norway has been implementing a reform in its worship service. Changes to liturgical music are part of this reform. During the reform period the congregations were able to choose freely among traditional Church music and various sorts of contemporary church music. According to a recent study, about one third of the congregations chose popular or contemporary liturgical music for their services, while two thirds continued to use traditional liturgical music (Balsnes & Mostøl, 2016). Those congregations willing to reform the liturgical music share certain characteristics that separate them from congregations that hold onto traditional music styles. The study distinguished between High Church and Low Church congregations. Those congregations that chose contemporary music in their services more often than others had a Low Church orientation, meaning that they were liberal when it comes to form and style, and emphasized the idea of the music being relevant for the people and close to what they usually listen to. This means that the choice of liturgical music is a good indicator of the spiritual life of the congregation. The High Church cathedral congregations, on the other hand, leaned towards traditional liturgical music (Balsnes, 2017, p. 207).

Since 2012 every congregation in the Church of Norway has been able to choose its own liturgical music freely. In this situation about one third of the congregations have chosen popular or contemporary music for use in services, while the other two thirds have chosen more traditional types of liturgical music (Balsnes & Mostøl, 2016). The result is that what was not

comme il faut as music for use in church only a few years back is now officially sanctioned by the church leadership. Here, too, the kind of choice made reflects, at least to some extent, a congregation's spiritual culture. The same influence from contemporary music can be seen in the hymn book (Balsnes, 2017, p. 48).

Another relevant Norwegian research project is RESEP – “Religion as aestheticizing practice”. This project has looked at the use of music in different types of Christian congregation in Norway over time. The main hypothesis of the project is that dogmatic and cognitive dimensions of religion are giving way to more sensual, emotional, narrative, and thus aesthetic aspects.

In the more than 20 empirical subprojects evidence for a shift away from dogma and correct teaching towards more emphasis on feelings and aesthetics occur. Many of the research projects focused on the use of music within churches and prayer houses in Norway. Contemporary music has for a long time been accepted in Lutheran free churches and in low church movements in Norway. During recent years this kind of music has gradually found its place also within Church of Norway congregations, that is the former state church. Even if a broad process of aestheticization is taking place in the churches not least within the field of musical expressions tensions between cognitive and dogmatic and aesthetical approaches towards religion is still present (Repstad & Trysnes, 2013).

The popular tradition of Christmas church concerts has probably paved the way for the use of secular music in church. In Norway and the other Scandinavian countries popular musical artists use churches in Advent to present various kinds of Christmas music. Secular songs are often combined with Christian songs during these concerts (Repstad & Trysnes, 2013). The artists' relation to Christianity also varies, but even if only a few call themselves true Christians most have a positive attitude towards the Christian faith. Christmas concerts can be seen as a way of building bridges between worship in church and general culture (Repstad & Trysnes 2013).

Little has been written from an academic point of view about the use of Dylan's songs in churches in the Nordic countries. However, a limited study of the use of Dylan's songs in church was included in the RESEP project (Botvar, 2013). One of the findings was that since his conversion to the

Christian faith in the late '70s Bob Dylan has attracted as fans a considerable number of Christians. Those fans that themselves are Christians also tend to look on Dylan as a true Christian while non-Christian fans do not see him this way. When the Dylan songs are translated into Norwegian to be used in church, the Christians elements in the lyrics are stressed.

Another scientific contribution to the discussion about Scandinavian churches and Dylan is sociologist Andreas Häger's article "Dylan Goes to Church: The Use of Bob Dylan's Music in Protestant Churches" (Häger, 2018). In his article Häger compares three Dylan masses, two from Sweden and one from the US. In the article he discusses how the Dylan masses contribute to the construction of popular beliefs about Bob Dylan's relation to religion. The main question in Häger's article is how the two cultural spheres of church and rock music relate and how they can be combined. Some research, then, has been conducted into the use of Dylan's music in Scandinavian churches. It is also important to bear in mind that this phenomenon is part of the growing trend of using popular and secular music in church. This is another reason why it deserves even more attention and study from church sociology than it is enjoying at the moment.

Data material and research questions

My empirical material consists of programs and text from nine Dylan masses in Norway and Sweden, observations from four masses I myself have attended and interviews with eleven theologians/vicars or church musicians. Five of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, two by phone and three by mail. Out of the interviews, eight were with vicars or theologians who had worked as vicars and two were with church musicians.

The documents were leaflets and programs gathered from Dylan masses, seven Norwegian ones and two from Sweden. Eight out of nine masses were conducted in Lutheran majority churches and one in a Lutheran free church. In a few cases, I have access to all the spoken words during the mass, including the sermons. In addition, I have some limited data about a couple of other Dylan masses conducted in Scandinavia. I will focus mainly on the masses about which I have comprehensive data and on the interviews with church employees.

In the remaining part of this article, I will focus on three questions. How are Dylan songs integrated in the mass structure? What are the motivations that pastors and church musicians have for using Dylan's music and lyrics in a sermon? What are the main arguments for and against such use? The first question will be discussed on the basis of data about the structure and organization of the Dylan masses and the two last based on qualitative interviews.⁴

Dylan as liturgy

The first Dylan mass in Norway took place in 1996 in a former cinema that had been taken over by the Lutheran Free Church in Oslo. The songs used in the mass were all translated into Norwegian by a team of pastors with relations to both the Lutheran Free Church and the Church of Norway (the former state church). The songs were carefully selected to fit with certain parts of the liturgy, and the whole Dylan mass functioned very well alongside the liturgy. Later, this first version became a model for future masses. Many congregations have used at least parts of it in their own Dylan masses. One of the most distinct differences between the masses is between those that use the original songs in English and those that use versions translated into Norwegian. Free Church congregations tend to use Norwegian translations of the songs while the Church of Norway congregations usually adhere to the original English version. This could of course have something to do with differences in the audiences, but it probably also reflects ideological or theological differences. How clearly does the message have to be presented? In addition, how far can the church go in adapting a song lyric to the message of the church?

Since the same persons are often involved, there is not always a significant difference between a Dylan mass used in a Free Church and in a Church of Norway congregation. The Free Church pastor Sven Aasmundtveit has been active in many of the Dylan masses. Together with two colleagues, he has translated most of the Dylan songs that are used in

4 Altogether 11 persons were interviewed, 8 pastors and 3 church musicians. 5 of the pastors were interviewed face to face. The rest of the interviews were shorter and done by mail or telephone.

the standard Dylan mass in Norway. The mass that was developed by the team of ministers in the mid-1990s includes songs from different phases in Dylan's career, even if the majority are taken from his Christian period (1979–1981). Most of the songs selected for the mass have a distinct Christian message while others connect to Christianity in a subtler way.

I have focused on Dylan masses that have integrated the songs into the liturgy of the mass. Leaflets that show the lyrics and where the songs are sequenced in the liturgy accompanied all those I am referring to. Not all masses included all the traditional liturgical elements. Two out of nine, for example, did not include communion. This makes it disputable if they should be called a mass at all – perhaps “concert” is nearer the mark? However, these two masses resembled a traditional mass in that they had a big church choir and used classical, acoustic instruments. From some of the informants I received detailed descriptions of the mass and, in some cases, I also received a transcript of the sermon given by the minister.

Table 1 shows the songs performed at ten Dylan masses in Lutheran cathedrals and free churches in Norway and Sweden during the period 1996–2017 and their place in the liturgy.

The song “Ring them bells” (1989) tends to be used as opening hymn in a Dylan mass. The song was composed after Dylan's evangelical phase but has an immediate relevance for a church service. The same goes for songs like “Knockin' on Heaven's Door” and “I shall be Released”, both being released before Dylan's conversion to Christianity. “The Times they are a-Changin'”, one of Dylan's first hits, has been used as an opener in those Dylan masses that adopted the model worked out in the free church.⁵

Most of the songs used in the Dylan mass include references to the Bible and are thus related to the Christian message. This is most clearly the case for the songs taken from the three gospel albums. Of special interest are the inclusions of songs that are normally not seen as proclaiming a Christian message. Songs taken from post-gospel albums include “License to Kill” (1983), “Sweetheart Like You” (1983), “Emotionally Yours” (1985), “What Good am I?” (1989), “Make You Feel My Love” (1997) and “Not

⁵ Dylan used this song as an opener in his shows in 1981 when he was still in his gospel phase.

The Elements of the Liturgy	Oslo 1996, Larvik 1997 (songs in Norwegian)	Oslo 2011, Moss 2012 (Songs in English)	Lidar church 2013, 2016, 2017 (most songs in English)	Malmö 2013? Västerås 2016 (songs both in Swedish and English)
Part I Gathering				
Opening hymn	The Times They Are A-Changin' (1963)	Ring Them Bells (1989)	Ring Them Bells (1989)	Shelter from the Storm (1974)
Introitus	Man Gave Names to All the Animals (1979)		Knockin' on Heaven's Door (1973)	Knockin' on Heaven's Door (1973)
Confession of sin	A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall (1962)		I Threw it All Away (1969)	Emotionally Yours (1985)
Kyrie	License to Kill (1983)	Pressing On (1980)	Lay Down Your Weary Tune (1964)	
Absolution	I Shall Be Released (1967)			I Shall Be Released (1967)
Gloria	Knockin' on Heaven's Door (1973)	Father of Night (1970)	New Morning (1970)	
Credo	I Believe in You (1997)	I Believe in You (1979)	I Believe in You (1979)	
Part II The Word				
Reading	When You Gonna Wake Up? (1979)		I Shall Be Released (1967)	Ring Them Bells (1989)
Part III Intercession				
Offertorium	Every Grain of Sand (1981)	Every Grain of Sand (1981)	Every Grain of Sand (1981)	
Agnus Dei				
Part IV Communion				
Sanctus	Saving Grace (1980)	In the Garden (1979)/ When He Returns (1979)	Make You Feel My Love (1997)	Lord, Protect My Child (1983)
Agnus Dei		Solid Rock (1980)		Make You Feel My Love (1997)
Part V Sending				
The Blessing/ Benediction	Forever Young (1974)		Forever Young (1974)	Mr. Tambourine Man (1965)
Postlude	All Along the Watchtower (1968)		Love Minus Zero/No Limit (1965?)	Blowin' In the Wind (1962)

Table 1. The structure of the Dylan mass in various Lutheran congregations in Norway and Sweden, 1996–2017.

Dark Yet” (1997). These songs do not include an unequivocal religious message. Nevertheless, they may be interpreted as having some relation to Christian ideas. This relationship to the Christian message is however often reinforced when the song is translated into Norwegian with the purpose of being used in church. When translated into local language it becomes easier for ordinary churchgoers to see the relevance that the song may have in a Christian context. “Forever Young”, the song Dylan wrote to his son Jacob, is often used as a Benediction at the end of the service. In some cases, well-known songs like “Blowin’ in the Wind” (1963) and “All Along the Watchtower” (1967) could also be used as the final song during silent prayers.

What distinguishes the masses – apart from some variation in song selection and the language the songs are sung in – is to what extent the songs are selected to match the liturgical elements.

The High Church congregations (such as those in cathedrals in larger cities) tend to prefer a Dylan mass that resembles a church concert. In such a mass, there is no communion and no sing-along. On the other hand, the High Church masses follow strictly the traditional elements in the liturgy and only use songs from Dylan’s gospel period. In some ways, the High Church Dylan mass is most in line with the traditional Christian mass from before the Reformation and its introduction of local language and popular music in churches.

From time to time Dylan as a person is also a theme in the sermons. In one of them Dylan’s conversion to Christianity was highlighted. However, it was not made clear in this mass that his evangelical phase had ended (in 1981) and that Dylan’s life stance later had become more multifaceted.

In a sermon held during another of these masses Dylan’s life after the gospel phase is commented upon: “Many of you may think that Dylan’s evangelical phase was rather bizarre (...) Later Dylan became introspective and uncertain about his own viewpoints. Christian ethics always has our neighbour as its focus. Our sin is just to be concerned with ourselves. This implies that we turn away from both God and our neighbour: ‘If I shut myself off so I can’t hear you cry / What Good am I?’” (“What good am I?” is the title of a Dylan song from 1989).

Unlike some of the other sermons preached in these masses, this one does not fail to refer to songs from the time after Dylan's evangelical years, when he appears more uncertain of his religious views. The sermon makes use of a song from 1989 to make the point that the greatest of all sins is to turn away from *Thy neighbour*.

The Dylan masses for which I have data can be divided into three categories:

- a) The rock mass: characterized by original lyrics in English, sparse use of liturgy, not necessarily including communion, more like a concert than a mass. Electric instruments. Usually not on Sunday morning, non-regular church audience.
- b) The High Church mass: often classical instruments, use of the standard liturgy of the mass, songs are performed in English, not always including communion, no sing-along.
- c) The Low Church mass (both in Lutheran Free Church and Church of Norway congregations): often acoustic instruments, active use of the ordinary church staff, songs/text integrated in liturgy, communion, text often translated into Norwegian/Swedish, held on Sunday morning.

Dylan mass - the discourse

Academic discussions about theology and popular culture often refer to the theory or model put forward by sociologist and theologian H. Richard Niebuhr. In his book *Christ and Culture* (1951) he formulates a theoretical model on how different Christian groups approach cultural expressions.

Some decades later the scholar Gordon Lynch (2005) still makes use of Niebuhr's typology when he seeks an understanding of the relationship between theology and (popular) culture. Even if the theological differences between Christian groups may have weakened after 50 years of ecumenical cooperation, the typology is still useful for empirical analyses of the relationship between Christian theology and popular culture. Niebuhr identifies five different positions Christians can take when they want to understand culture:

1. Christ against Culture. This position is characterized by a clear opposition between the truth embodied in Christ and particular forms of contemporary culture. Christians adopting this approach must choose between following Christ or engaging in contemporary culture. This is a view often taken by sect-like Christian groups.
2. The Christ of Culture. This is the opposite position to the first approach and adopts a far more positive view of the potential of human culture. Certain forms of culture are seen as embodying Christ's truth. As examples of these positions, Niebuhr points to various forms of Protestant liberalism.
3. Christ above Culture. This third approach interprets the products of human culture as gifts of God. Human culture may have positive elements within it and may point people towards Christ. This approach is associated with "creation-centered" Catholic theology, which places strong emphasis on the possibility of receiving revelation in the context of day-to-day life.
4. Christ and culture in paradox. In this approach Christ and culture are seen as separate and autonomous parts of human life. The approach is exemplified in Luther's belief that the state demanded respect and obedience. Human culture, despite its flaws, must be tolerated and worked within.
5. Christ the transformer of culture. This final approach shares the belief of the first and fourth of these approaches in the fundamentally flawed nature of human culture. But unlike the Christ against culture model, it advocates engagement with, rather than withdrawal from, culture. Contemporary forms of culture should be critiqued and challenged and ultimately transformed in order to reflect the truth of Christ.

According to Lynch these five positions differ on the question of whether human nature can be seen as a mediator of goodness and truth. Other questions relate to how truth is revealed in us. Some of the perspectives (3–5) allow for a constructive dialogue between theological norms and popular culture, while perspectives 1–2 do not (Lynch, 2005, p. 101).

Most of my informants were enthusiastic about the idea of using Dylan in a church service. This comes as no surprise since most had already been involved in such masses and could in some cases be described as “Dylan fans” themselves, even if they refused to apply this label to themselves. Sometimes their arguments were presented in biblical language, like the informant who states that “Dylan is a worthy successor of the prophets of the Old Testament, like Jeremiah”.

Still, within the group of 11 respondents I found different positions on the use of popular culture in church worship. In the following I will discuss how the respondents from both the Lutheran majority church and from Lutheran free churches relate to the model of Niebuhr and what arguments they use to legitimize their views. I will concentrate on the views of 5 ministers since they were the ones I interviewed most extensively and therefore it is possible to place their views precisely in the model proposed by Niebuhr.

None of my informants adheres to the approach called *Christ against culture*. The former pope Joseph Ratzinger, however, as mentioned earlier in this article, clearly represents this approach. In his view popular culture is fundamentally compromised and beyond redemption. This makes any dialogue between theological norms and popular culture impossible.

At the other extreme, we find the perspective *Christ of culture*, which sees all human forms as potentially representing the truth of Christ. One of the theologians, a former minister, I interviewed represents this position. We can call him Albert (60 years +). He practiced as a minister for many years but is now in Academia. He is very positive towards the use of Dylan material in church, including in the mass. One of his arguments is that Bob Dylan is well-known and may have an appeal to those members who seldom go to church apart from attending rituals such as baptism, confirmation, weddings and burials. According to Albert the American gospel music that is often used in sing-the-praise masses (*lovsangsmesser*) in Lutheran churches is connected to the pietistic revivalist movement, and thus alienates those church members who have no relation to this particular culture. He finds the music of Bob Dylan more inclusive. One of the main functions of music, in his view, is recognition – that people are familiar with the music and can mirror themselves in the lyrics.

According to Albert, this can better be accomplished by popular music than by traditional hymns or psalms. Albert therefore welcomes changes in the mass based on the introduction of popular music. Contrary to some other respondents, he does not see the translation of Dylan's lyrics into Norwegian as problematic as long as the translations meet high standards of artistic quality. He mentions that 35–40 of Dylan's songs can easily be transferred to the church hymnal preferably in Norwegian translations. One of the problems he finds with today's services is that they follow a strict scheme and do not easily accommodate a wide range of feelings. However, while Albert is open for translations of Dylan songs into Norwegian, he does not belong to the category *Christ the transformer*. Using translation to make the songs more suitable for a church setting is, in his view, only acceptable if the songs fulfil strict artistic requirements. He does not think this is always the case with today's Dylan masses.

Another male minister, George (50+), represents the *Christ above culture* category. This approach sees theological reflection as making a constructive contribution to interpreting and critiquing cultural values and practices. In certain cases, human culture is seen as a force for goodness and truth, but not always. George is critical of some elements from popular culture that are incorporated into masses in Lutheran churches. In the past he has conducted more than one Dylan mass as minister. But gradually he has changed his views about these masses. Today, he thinks that such masses are highly problematic, not because the Christian mass cannot tolerate being influenced by popular music, but because the message of the songs does not always match the framework of a mass in the Lutheran church. He now thinks that the songs should be used in their original English version and not be interpreted by the representatives of the church. George is more comfortable letting Dylan's songs speak for themselves in a church concert rather than placing them in the structure of a mass. George is very concerned about which songs should be used in a church setting. A crucial point in George's thinking is that the songs Dylan wrote during his evangelical phase (1979–81) do not match the type of Christen belief that the Church of Norway stands for. The church is far more liberal than Dylan was when he wrote these songs. George thus doesn't think that these songs should be performed in the Church of Norway today.

Niebuhr's fourth category *Christ and culture in paradox* represents the classical Lutheran perspective – that is, to respect cultural expressions outside the church but not wanting to mix them with what is going on inside the church. Two of the ministers in the Church of Norway that I interviewed are leaning towards this position. Since I am studying only Lutheran churches it is a paradox that not more than two of the respondents represent this perspective. One of the ministers, Richard (40+), clearly falls into this category. Susan (50+) also leans in this direction even if she is not as easily categorized.

Richard works in the Church of Norway, mainly with young people. He is personally very fond of Bob Dylan and uses his songs to get inspiration for writing sermons. Richard admires the Dylan's songs and even states that "Dylan is touched by the hand of God". Despite this, Richard hesitates to use the songs in a mass. To him Dylan does not belong in a Lutheran church. His main argument is that this is a misuse of great artistic work. Richard cannot imagine how the songs of Dylan can be used in a service without abusing the songs or the composer in one way or another. "What would Dylan have done?" he asks rhetorically. By putting the songs into a mass, the scope of interpretation becomes limited, and the artist is placed in a setting where he does not belong. If Dylan's songs are to be used in a church setting, something he opposes, at least one should, in his view, stick to the newest songs because these are the only ones that we know Dylan stands by today. Richard calls the way Dylan has been used in the Church of Norway in the past "dishonest". A Dylan mass will, he maintains, most likely turn into a worship of Dylan and not of God. He has attended these masses himself. They leave him dissatisfied, partly because he realized that the people involved were saluting Dylan instead of God.

Susan is the other minister who is sceptical towards the Dylan mass. She sees Dylan as an important figure in contemporary culture and thinks he plays an important role in criticizing all those in power, including those in the church. Susan does not completely oppose all use of Dylan songs in a church setting. However, she thinks that it is very difficult to find the right way of doing this, and is critical towards the contemporary Dylan mass. What she fears the most is that the church should make

Dylan less complex than he is and paint a picture of him that he himself would not feel comfortable with. At the same time, she thinks it is fair to use one or two Dylan songs in a service, but more problematic to build a complete mass around his songs. Susan is very concerned about being authentic and true to the material she herself uses in a mass. The only way to do justice to both the artist and the church would, in her opinion, be to make Dylan write a mass himself, the same way as composers like Mozart, Bach and Arvo Pärt have done before him.

The remaining approach, *Christ the transformer of culture*, permits an adjustment of popular culture in order to make it correspond with the message of the church. Those who subscribe to such a view think human culture needs to be transformed in order for it to be a force for goodness and truth.

One of the ministers, Johnny (60+), falls into this category. He is a pastor in the Lutheran free church. He has been involved in Dylan masses in which the songs were translated into Norwegian. In these masses the text was printed on paper and distributed to the congregation. Johnny thinks it is important that the message comes out clearly. Even if he doesn't think the evangelical songs are among Dylan's best, he still thinks they are best suited for a mass because they have a clear Christian message. Like some of the other theologians in my material Johnny finds that many of Dylan's songs contain Christian elements. In order to make the attendees understand the underlying Christian message it is necessary, he thinks, to have the songs translated into Norwegian. As an example, he mentions the 1997 song "Make you feel my love". According to Johnny, many people do not catch the underlying Christian content of this song. In order to legitimize the use of Dylan's songs in the church services he mentions that Dylan himself plays with his own songs and even from time to time changes their wording. Johnny is, however, aware of the criticism that has been directed towards the Dylan mass from other theologians. He is not afraid that the mass would become an occasion for worshipping Dylan rather than God. Instead he argues: "it is important to bring everyday experiences into the mass. And popular culture is an important part of people's everyday life".

The remaining 6 respondents, church musicians and ministers, belong to one of the two groups *Christ above culture* or *Christ the transformer of culture*. The difference between the two has to do with the degree of

criticism towards popular culture. Most of the informants are eager to construct new types of the mass that appeal to people that do not go often to church. It is difficult to detect second thoughts about the Dylan masses among these respondents.

Several of them argue that the church needs to be renewed in order to remain relevant for people today. The inclusion of popular music in church services is one way of doing this. Some of them also refer to a desire to draw new kinds of people to church. One of the positive side effects of the Dylan mass is that it makes it easier to reach out to those sections of the population that seldom go to church, such as middle-aged men.

“To reach out” is a key concept in the argumentation for introducing Dylan songs into church services. Another argument is that today’s churchgoers often have a closer relationship to songs from mainstream pop culture than to the songs and hymns in the church hymnal. This is a persuasive argument for including well-known Dylan songs in services.

Church musicians often play an active role when it comes to choosing the music to be used in a mass. One of the church musicians states that as leader of the church choir he is always open for ways to renew the repertoire and find new songs for use in services. Apart from the Dylan mass, this musician’s choir has been engaged in a U2 mass and in blues and jazz masses based on the music of popular artists. When picking artists, he always searches for content that can lift the spirit up even if it isn’t an explicitly Christian song. What he is looking for is “a piece of lyric with meaning”. This church musician goes on to say, “A Dylan mass can make the congregation aware of the fact that popular music sometimes contains lyrics that are just as pious as traditional hymns.” Even if this respondent promotes a liberal view of popular music, he still believes there is a limit to what can be accepted in a church. To make his point clear he mentions the example of a heavy metal band of Satanists; “I would probably not let them play in my church”, he says. This statement reflects a theological position: popular cultural elements should fit in with the purpose of the mass. The question that is actualized is: What is the meaning of a mass?

Another church musician argues that rap music is of no offence so long as it “promotes a positive view of life”. However, the view that the mass should only correspond to positive life-affirming feelings is not

shared by every respondent. One of the female ministers states that “the songs [of Dylan] live their own life and take on their own meanings”. In the Dylan mass she recommends that the congregation should keep in touch with their feelings and do what they feel is right at any given moment: “... if this is to clap, then clap, if it is to weep, just weep”, she says. Furthermore, Albert (see the interview reported above) presents the argument that the Christian mass is a place for all sorts of feelings, and not only the feelgood type.

Concluding remarks

My material has been taken from so-called Dylan masses being held in Lutheran congregations in Norway and Sweden in recent years. Even if a lot of water has passed under the bridge since the Reformation introduced popular elements in the mass, the question is still how to get lay people to participate in, and feel that they participate in, the mass. Translating songs from English to the local language is still controversial, as is the question of what kind of music should be allowed in the church.

In recent years several different types of Dylan mass have been used in Lutheran churches in Scandinavia: from the High Church mass in English with choir and orchestra to a Low Church version in Norwegian. The most commonly used mass was laid down by a group of ministers and others in the beginning of the 1990s and has remained unchanged since then. In both Norway and Sweden, we find that this popular Dylan mass is the work of a few enthusiastic ministers and church musicians.

Only two out of eleven respondents argue against the use of Bob Dylan in a Christian service. This is not because they don't find a Christian message in many Dylan songs. Their reason is the classical Lutheran one: they do not want to mix the sphere of popular culture with the sphere of the Church. By adopting a Dylan mass, the church, so their argument goes, runs the risk of limiting the art of Dylan and putting the artist in a box where he does not belong.

The remaining informants, be they ministers or church musicians, are positive towards the use of popular culture in a mass. They have no hesitation in using the songs of Bob Dylan in a church service in order to

underline certain aspects of the Christian message or in making them fit with elements in the liturgy. Their arguments typically point in an instrumentalist direction.

The interviews have revealed that there are different views among ministers and church musicians in Lutheran Churches in Scandinavia regarding the use of elements from popular culture in worship. In addition, it is striking to find significant differences in views about the purpose of putting such elements into the mass. Some of my respondents argue that popular cultural elements should be used to strengthen the feelgood character of the mass.

By acting according to this reasoning one runs the risk not only of ignoring the content and true message of the Dylan songs themselves, but also of going against the very intention behind the Christian mass.

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