

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY IN THE LYRICS OF THE ROCK GROUP U2

A Pro Gradu Thesis

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Christianity's relationship with rock'n'roll is a less than favourable one – in search of answers, rock has constantly looked to mysticism, or non-western religions. Christianity has always been the predominant Western system of beliefs, but its values are not the values of rock music –

Thus writes Neil McCormick, an editor of *Hot Press*, the major Irish music and entertainment magazine (Stokes 1985:46). He had just found out that three members of U2, the promising Irish rock band from Dublin, were Christians. McCormick may well be right in what he says about the values of rock, and he may, indeed, be right in what he says about the unfavourable relationship between rock and Christianity. However, I am going to argue that despite of the difference between the values of rock and Christianity U2 have been able to express Christian ideas in their lyrics throughout their career as a rock band. Despite of the fact that they have a Christian background U2 have attained and kept a position as a dominant rock group, and proved that rock and Christianity are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Since “Christian”, the core concept in this thesis may prove confusing, it is necessary to make clear the meaning and use of it at an early point. One problem with the words “Christianity” and “Christian” is their different, even opposite, uses in varied contexts. In this thesis I define “Christian” as someone having personal belief in God and Jesus Christ rather than as just a member of a Christian church. “Christianity”, then, is not a system such as the Lutheran state church in Finland, for example, but has more the meaning of Christ's body consisting of people believing in Jesus Christ all over the world, as in Bible (Rom 12:5, 1 Cor 6:15, 12:27, Eph 1:23). Another problem is that defining, without knowing a person's thoughts, who is a Christian and who is not is practically impossible. My aim is not to prove that U2 are Christians but it is a presumption which works as a background for the interpretation of the lyrics. “Christian” and “believer” are words that the members of U2 (that is the three quarters of them: Larry Mullen Jr, David Evans, known as The Edge, and Paul David Hewson, known as Bono) apply to themselves in interviews. The view of U2

as Christians is also backed up by other background material (see Bowler 1993, Dunphy 1987, Stockman 2001, and Stokes 1985, for example) plus the lyrics themselves.

U2's career in relation to spirituality has already been surveyed by Steve Stockman in his book *Walk on: the Spiritual Journey of U2* (2001). However, Stockman's aim is to prove that U2 are Christians, and he describes their faith as a "journey", a process during their career as a rock band. My approach is different – a consistent analysis of the lyrics. Stockman's book was available for me only at a late point; my thesis was practically finished. There may be similar conclusions and overlapping of ideas in my work, but these are co-incidental.

This is a thematic study and will concentrate on the spiritual side of the U2 lyrics; that is Christian spiritual as opposed to religion or spirituality in general. I referred earlier to the opposite uses of the term "Christian": it is generally applied both to person as a part of system – religion – that is social and possibly, in the case of state churches, even political, and to a person with personal Christian belief. Religion, in general, represents the system of spiritual belief of any kind, but spirituality here is used to refer to the personal side of (Christian) belief, to avoid the ritualistic and non-personal connotations of religion. "Religion" and "religious" are of course used where they are appropriate. My choice of words is also based on the words of Bono, the writer of most of the lyrics for U2. In the British rock magazine NME (Cook 1982:28) Bono answers a question concerning religion:

Yes. I have this hunger in me. Everywhere I look I see the evidence of a creator. I don't see it as religion, which has cut my people in two. I don't see Jesus Christ as being in any part of religion. Religion to me is almost like when God leaves - and then people devise a set of rules to fill the space.

My personal interest in U2 and so the source of this study dates back to spring 1997. I saw a critique on the newly published U2 album *Pop* in a Finnish music magazine. The critic quoted the three first lines of 'Mofo', the third song of the record:

Lookin' for to save my save my soul  
 Lookin' in the places where no flowers grow  
 Lookin' for to fill that God shaped hole

I was surprised at the idea of a well established rock group singing about God and bought the record to see if the theme would reoccur on the whole record. It did so. Later I came to notice that all U2 records referred to Christian ideas or contained Christian images in them. An interesting trait in U2 lyrics was the mixing of the sexual and spiritual in the context of love. These are the constant themes through the whole production of U2 and I have divided them into two sections: 1) faith, and 2) love; themes in which sexuality and spirituality are mixed. Other sub-themes of these are raised as well when seen necessary. I have chosen to look on faith rather than faith and doubt, as I did in my pro seminar paper, since it is obvious that the theme of doubt is subsumed by faith. Here, I define as "faith" any Christian imagery or reference to Christian ideas based on the Bible; or straight references to Bible or other Christian literature; or Christian thinking derived on the basis of the Bible. The Bible is understood to include both the Old and the New Testament. I will refer to both the King James Translation (KJ) and Good New Bible (GNB), whichever seems more likely to be the source of the reference in the lyrics. GNB is sometimes preferred to KJ – most often in pointing to general Biblical ideas and images – because it is more understandable and close to the language of today.

I will look at all of the ten full time records of U2 and have divided them into four sections, or chronological eras. The division is somewhat arbitrary and created for convenience, but there is still evidence and reason for it. Each era consists of three records except the last era, which concentrates only on the latest album *All That You Can't Leave Behind* (2000; hereafter *ATYCLB*), and at the same time will work as a pre-conclusion collecting some of the ideas together as it seems that *ATYCLB* is a "back to the roots" -record. The First Era consists of *Boy* (1980), *October* (1981) and *War* (1983) since these are the most openly Christian records of U2. *Boy* is not as obvious in its Christian content, but belongs to this era simply because it is the first U2 record. There is a change in *War*, since it is more concrete in its issues than the

two previous records, and it is also more outgoing and aggressive record both in its lyrics and music. But as the division is based mainly on the lyrics, *War* belongs to the First Era. *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984) starts the Second Era, as it has lost almost all straight references to Christianity and its musical style is less aggressive and impressionistic. The political and social dimension started in *War* (1983) continues and develops in the Second Era of *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984; hereafter *UF*), *The Joshua Tree* (1987; hereafter *JT*) and *Rattle and Hum* (1988; hereafter *RH*). *RH* contains partly same songs as *JT*. This is also the time when love lyrics increase in number and lyrics begin to have third person, as Bono himself points out when discussing the song 'Silver and Gold' (*Artists United Against Apartheid* 1985, *RH* 1988) in an interview by the British rock magazine NME (Thrills 1986:12). The Third Era begins with *Achtung Baby* (1991; hereafter *AB*), which is a completely different record from the previous ones in its musical style. Also the outer appearance of the band, the records and the tours change drastically at this point. *AB* is also a record apparently with only love songs in it, and the Christian references become more subliminal than in the previous records. *Zooropa* (1993) is stylistically much like *AB*. There is considerable delay between *Pop* (1997) and *Zooropa* (1993) but *Pop* continues the apparent superficiality, in fact takes it into its peak along with the PopMart tour, the concept of which was wholly based on supermarkets and the present consumerism culture. *Pop* also most drastically brings out the difference between the outer kitsch appearance of the band and the lyrics that contain personal and spiritual issues.

Before going to the records, I will start with rock culture and its relation to Christianity and Ireland, and then continue by describing the change in relation to religion in Ireland from the past to present. In the section on the band and its members I will shortly deal with the three other members and then concentrate on Bono, the vocalist, because he writes most of the lyrics - with occasional help from The Edge, the guitarist. Bono is also the person who has been most interviewed and asked about his beliefs.

## 2. THE IRISH CONTEXT

### 2.1. Rock

Youth culture is a social phenomenon that emerged after the Second World War and rock music was one of the ways in which it was established. The origins of rock are seen to be in the music of black Americans, in the development of rhythm and blues. In the southern states of USA rock was resisted by some fundamentalist white Christian groups<sup>1</sup>. Seeing black musicians as idols of white children even led to a claim that rock was a black conspiracy against white people (Halme 1994:71). Black people were seen as savage and uncivilised, and overtly sexual. The music originating from black sources and sold to white people had to be 'cleaned up for white consumption' (Bennett 2001:12) – which meant reducing sexuality and spontaneity. The white fear of a 'black conspiracy' may well be the source of the now common way of talking about rock as the Devil's music: even before rock jazz and blues, both originally black music genres, were called the Devil's music each at their time. The origin of the thought, though, probably dates further back in time, to the early Christian church. It "opposed professional music altogether, citing its association with immoral theater, pagan ritual, and state militarism. Musicians had to abandon their work to convert to Christianity." (Dasilva 1984:81) In 313 Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire and after that vocal music became part of worship. Instrumental music was not allowed (Loft, 1950:17-22, as quoted in Dasilva).

Even today this division between popular music, especially the part of it defined as rock, and Christianity exists. Rock is associated with sex, drugs and general self

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<sup>1</sup> Christian fundamentalists interpret the Bible literally. For example, Genesis describes God creating the earth in seven days, in the order of plants, sea animals, birds, animals walking on earth, and finally human beings. The order is in accordance with the theory of evolution, but fundamentalist interpretation holds that all the steps took place within seven days, not days as metaphors of certain evolutionary eras but days as 24 hour units. In USA, some of the Christian fundamentalist groups have political connections; the division between ideology and religion is not distinguishable. (See page 41 on *Rattle and Hum* and KKK.)

indulgence, but there have been Christian rockers despite this fact – such as Bob Dylan, Van Morrison, Marvin Gaye, Patti Smith, and Stevie Wonder. Even Elvis Presley, the king of rock himself, was a son of Pentecostal family. The secret of Elvis's success has often been claimed to be his white skin connected to "black soul", he was the first white singer to mix black and white influences in a way that led to success both in the USA and worldwide. In the 50s his "gyrating pelvis" caused moral panic to the parents of the Elvis fans (Bennett 2001:14). His performing on TV in the Steve Allen Show was almost banned, but Elvis was let perform dressed up in tails and singing 'Hound Dog' to a live basset hound (Shumway as quoted in Bennett 2001:14).

Moral panics have been part of rock scene since the beginning. Both the media and the public saw punk as a social problem rather than as a music genre (Harron as quoted in Bennett 2001:61). It was associated with lack of moral values, or lack of values altogether. The Sex Pistol's 'God Save The Queen' and its line "God save the Queen, she ain't no human being" was seen to attack the head of the nation and thus became the anthem of anti-nationalism. When the heavy metal genre was developed in the late 1960s onwards, it became associated with occultism and Satanism because of some references to Satanism and black magic in the lyrics (Bennett 2001:53-55). In the US, in 1985 the British rock artist Ozzy Osbourne's song 'Suicide Solution' (*Blizzard of Ozz*, 1980) was accused of causing a 19-year-old fan to commit suicide. The case was dropped because it was seen as violating the constitutional right of freedom of speech. In 1990, similarly in US, Judas Priest was accused of causing a young fan's suicide and the attempted suicide of a friend of the fan by back-masking, the recording procedure in which the song is recorded backwards to include subliminal messages. When played forwards in the normal way the secret messages were supposed to affect the minds of the listeners without them knowing about it. The case was dropped because of lack of evidence.

Reggae is associated with Rastafarianism, which is a religious way of thinking developed in Jamaica as a counter effect to colonialism and slavery (Bennett 2001:77). Colonialism was partly justified by the Europeans' reading of the Bible,



black being associated with Satan ('Black Satan') and white with Jesus ('snow-white Lamb of God'). Rastafarianism offered a way of positive self-identification with black culture and origins by interpreting the Bible differently. In Rastafarianism, Haile Selassie's accession to the throne of Ethiopia is seen as a fulfilment of a Biblical prophecy. One of the most famous reggae artists to include Rastafarian anti-colonialist ideas in their songs is the Jamaican singer-songwriter, the late Bob Marley and his group The Wailers.

It seems that there is a tendency to label every new music genre - or indeed every new invention - as a Devil's trick to fool people. This is partly due to the psychological tendency to fear everything new, and label it as fast as possible to be able to deal with it. Art, even rock music, often tries to fight against this tendency. In the case of Black Sabbath it is particularly interesting that the group was labelled as Satanist: The symbol of the band is a cross, not turned upside down, which would be a Satanist symbol, but worn and shown in the traditional way as the Christians would have it. Many of the lyrics are hard to interpret as "pro-Satan"; they do not support Satanist ideology but Satan belongs rather to "them" than to "us" or "me". This is true with, for example, 'Into the Void' (*Master of Reality* 1971). In 'War Pigs' (*Speak of the Devil* 1982) army generals – the "war pigs" – are compared to "witches in black masses", and the song expects the generals will be crawling on their knees on the Judgement Day when "hand of God has struck the hour" and "Satan, laughing, spreads his wings". 'After Forever' (*Master of Reality* 1971) is hard to interpret as hostile to the Christian message of God as love:

Could it be you're afraid of what your friends might say  
 If they knew you believe in God above?  
 They should realize before they criticize  
 That God is the only way to love

Maybe the picture of Black Sabbath as Satanist is due to the appearance of the band, especially the leading figure Ozzy Osbourne, and the videos meant to shock and sell records. How moral it is to promote record sales with associations to

Satanism, and not to deny the accusations that causes, is, of course, another question.

All this is not to say that there would be no real connections to Satanism in any song in any music genre and every suspected case is just a misunderstanding. There are groups that really are overtly hostile to Christian faith and its values. Some of this can be due to a desire to shock, and some to the need to sell more records, but it does not have to mean that Satanist ideology would not be of any importance to the members of these groups.

In Ireland, Satanism is not a popular way of promoting record sales. Seriously speaking, I will soon discuss the importance of the Catholic Church and Christian religion in Ireland, but I will look at rock and Ireland first.

## **2.2. Rock and Ireland**

In the 60s and 70s the live music scene in Ireland was dominated by the showbands; they had at least seven members, played cover versions and wore suits (Clayton-Lea 1992:7). Then new beat, in mid-60s, and progressive rock, in late 60s, emerged and the music scene changed: show bands were still popular in rural areas but elsewhere the new musical genres were gaining ground. In the end of the 60s rock had been established by the expanding youth culture.

Irish traditional music gained international audience only in the 80s, and has since found diverse forms. According to Clayton-Lea (1992:39-40), traditional music is defined by its relation to oral transmission. Tradition is passed on – whether music or words – orally. Irish traditional music has its roots in the ordinary dance music of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and it survived with the emigrants, who fled the Irish famine for America in the middle of the 1800s. Later, the Irish traditional music was brought back from America and it mixed with the regional styles of the counties in Ireland. In 1960s traditional music experienced change: folk and rock mixed when folk went electric.

One of the first Irish rock successes outside Ireland was Thin Lizzy, formed in 1970, and described as “a blues, folk, and progressive rock outfit” (Sawyers 2000: 237). The band was lead by Phil Lynott, the singer and bassist. Another international success, Gary Moore, played guitar in Thin Lizzy, before which he belonged to several bands including Skid Row, Dr Strangely Strange, and Gary Moore Band. After Thin Lizzy – even though Moore co-worked with Thin Lizzy on several occasions later as well – he played in Colosseum, a British jazz/rock fusion group, and G-force, a hard rock band he formed in Los Angeles. Moore was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, like Van Morrison, who formed Them with guitarist Bill Harrison in 1963. Van Morrison was a commercial success in Ireland, but did not gain ground in USA, unlike Gary Moore who may have been more popular abroad than in Ireland.

In Tua Nua, formed in 1982, “mixed Celtic instrumentation with a rock beat set”, and one of its members was Sinéad O’Connor – then only fourteen (Sawyers 2000:233). O’Connor’s first solo record was *The Lion and the Cobra* (1987). She became a worldwide success with her version of ‘Nothing Compares 2 U’, a song by Prince. Other well-known Irish female artists are the two Brennan sisters, Maire Brennan and Enya. Maire Brennan is the singer in Clannad, formed 1970. Clannad became internationally acclaimed as a result of the ‘Theme from Harry’s Game’ in 1982. The song was composed for a British TV series about an undercover agent in Northern Ireland, and soon Clannad recorded music for another TV series: Robin Hood (Clayton-Lea 1992:107). Clannad has also recorded ‘In A Lifetime’ (*Macalla* 1985) with Bono. Enya, the younger sister of Maire, was for a short time member of Clannad but pursued solo career. Her music could be described as enigmatic and mystical, and has Celtic influences. Since its release in 1992, Enya’s *Shepherd’s Moon* has sold more than three million records worldwide (Sawyers 2000:2). The whole record sales of Enya are about 33 million worldwide (Sawyers 2000:236).

Clannad have used Irish Gaelic in their songs, “in the early years of their career, they sang almost exclusively in Irish” (2000:116). Many Irish bands have taken influences from Irish traditional music, Altan, “considered the best Irish group

around” (Sawyers 2000:116), and Dé Danann, for example. One of the newest international successes is the Corrs, coming from the east coast of Ireland and formed by four siblings; fiddler Sharon, drummer Caroline, lead singer Andrea and key-boardist-guitarist Jim. The music of the Corrs is pop with Celtic influences, even though the influences are much less obvious and fewer than in the previously mentioned groups.

The one musical genre important when talking about U2 is punk. Punk emerged in Britain in the 70s; protesting against social injustice and its creed being that everyone can make music. U2 was formed on the basis of the ideals of punk: only the drummer, Larry Mullen Jr, could really play when the group started. According to Clayton-Lea (1992:18) U2 “didn’t belong to any Irish tradition, and took their inspiration from the English post-punk scene”. Although U2’s music is not punk – it is far too well composed, clear and skilled, even though the first works of U2 have traces of punk. Despite the fact that U2 did not look to Irish traditional music for their inspiration – there were such internationally acclaimed folk groups as The Dubliners, The Pogues and The Chieftains around – they have had some influences: In *Boy* (1980) ‘An Cat Dubh’ is written in Irish Gaelic and the uilleann pipes and fiddle are used in *October* (1981). ‘Van Diemen’s Land’ in *Rattle and Hum* (1988) is a ballad with Irish tone to it. However, U2’s musical style does not fit well with any particular genre, and it could be described generally as international rock.

It is obvious that the success of U2 has made it easier for the Irish artists to gain international audience. U2 was not the first Irish band to achieve international success, but became the band to which every new band in the 80s Ireland trying to break through – and many only tried – was compared. U2’s career from a small band in Ireland to worldwide fame and over 20 years of success in international music business is without counterpart.

During the years of U2’s career Ireland has changed, in the recent years drastically. I will discuss the change in the next section, especially in terms of religion.

### **2.3. Religion and Ireland**

In his book *Changed Utterly, Ireland and the New Irish Psyche* (2001) Michael O'Connell, a lecturer in social psychology in the Dublin University, writes on the change in Ireland from 1990s to 2000. He bases his conclusions on the difference between what is defined as two different 'Irish Psyches'; the old Irish psyche dominated by the Catholic Church, and the new Irish psyche that has developed in the economic boom Ireland has experienced in recent years. He perceives the difference between these two to be both good and bad: there has been development towards more social pluralism and a freer atmosphere, in sexual matters especially, but at the same time individualism and materialism have largely substituted the social values that the Church provided. O'Connell (2001:3) describes the fast and vast change of atmosphere in the 1990-2000: "In 1991, Richard Branson's Virgin Megastore in the centre of Dublin was pursued by the Gardai for making condoms available for sale. Now we would happily wear condoms on our head in public if we felt it was the fashionable thing to do."

This is a funny and maybe even exaggerated view of sexual behaviour in Ireland, since later in his book O'Connell repeats another social psychologist's recent note that the young Irish females were less knowledgeable in the details of menstruation than the young Canadian males, and only 30% of the Irish would report problems in their sexual health to their doctors because of embarrassment (O'Connell 2001:77, 78).

In the case of Virgin Megastore, it was actually U2 that paid for the fees issued at the Irish Family Planning Association (Bowler 1993:94, Chatterton 2001:49-50). Since 1991, successive change has occurred: Contraception is now available. Homosexuality was decriminalised in 1993. Divorce and remarriage were accepted by law in 1996 (O'Connell 2001:78). However, abortion is still illegal in almost every case; only if the mother's life is in danger is abortion allowed.

All the changes towards freedom of choice in sexual behaviour listed above reflect the decrease of the power of the Catholic Church. Its influence in the past has been

vast. O'Connell (2001:21) writes on the all pervasive influence of the Catholic Church on Irish people in relating to the old Irish psyche:

The Catholic Church was fundamental in structuring how Irish people lived, how they related to one another and how they viewed the world. It made decisions as practical as to who got certain jobs; it managed schools, hospitals and churches; it provided definitions of what it meant to be a "decent" person as well as parameters within which government policy should (and did) operate. It hovered at birth and death. (O'Connell 2001:21)

Eamon Dunphy, an Irish author and a sports commentator, has similar views on the huge influence of the Catholic Church in his controversial – Neil McCormick, a music writer and a friend of U2, accused Dunphy of inaccuracies relating to musical and biographical details in an article he wrote for Hot Press (Stokes 1990:96-105) – book *The Unforgettable Fire* (1987). At the time the members of U2 were born and raised – the 1960s and 70s – religion had much stronger impact on people's lives than today when Ireland is highly secularised. The Catholic Church is the dominant church in The Republic of Ireland and has affected even the lives of those who belong to the Church of Ireland or other Protestant churches, although the minority was not totally ignored in the constitution in 1937. In 1940s and 50s, around the time the parents of U2's members were getting married and starting families, mixed marriages were not common. In such cases the Catholic Church expected the protestant bride or groom to turn Catholic, or take a course in Catholic teaching (Dunphy 1987:13-14). The Catholic spouse of the forthcoming marriage would have to petition the Pope for permission to marry and the non-Catholic would have to sign papers assuring the children would be raised in Catholic faith. If the wedding ceremony took place in a Catholic church, it was unlit and without any signs of celebration, such as flowers or candles on the altar, to show the disapproval of the Roman Catholic Church, the one true church.

Also education in Ireland has been divided along religious lines; Trinity College in Dublin was a Protestant University and Catholics wishing to study there would have to leave their church until 1971, when the Catholic Church was urged by the government "to reconsider its policy of academic contamination" (Dunphy 1997:13).

In economical matters, the development of Ireland seems to be, unfortunately, the same as in other Western democratic countries. When it comes to the distribution of wealth gained by the economic boom in Ireland, it appears that not much has been done, for example, for education or health: in 1997 Irish spending on education was less than OECD average (O’Connell 2001:114). According to the *CIA World Factbook 2000* Ireland is the most high in inequality measures compared to ten other EU countries; Finland, Sweden, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, France, and UK, in the order of least unequal first and most unequal last (O’Connell 2001:105). In UN report on Human Development (2001), concerning the proportion of people living in poverty in 17 wealthiest OECD countries chosen for the survey, Ireland ranked second (UK was third, and US first).

Ireland has experienced a vast change in a short time. This does not have to mean that the Irish Psyche has changed completely, especially when it comes to the generation born before the economic boom and secularisation by the weakened position of the Catholic Church. “Catholic guilt” has not thoroughly disappeared as can be seen later in the chapters concerning the lyrics of U2. Before that, I will shortly introduce the members and the history of the band.

### **3. THE BAND**

#### **3.2. The members**

Larry Mullen Junior, the drummer of U2, was born to father Larry Mullen Senior and mother Maureen Gaffney in Artane, Dublin on 31 October 1961 (Bowler 1993:14). Larry – all the members of U2 will be called by their first names, as Larry and Adam, or by their artist names, as The Edge and Bono – is the only one in the band whose parents are both Catholic. He started taking drum lessons when he was nine and was actually the only one musically accomplished when the band was started. Larry joined the Post Office Workers Union Band in 1975. He is described as “rather quiet”, and he gives the least interviews in the band.

Adam Clayton was born in Chinnor, Oxfordshire in March 13 1960 (Bowler 1993:10). His father, Brian, was a Royal Air force pilot, and mother, Jo, a former air hostess. The family moved from England to Dublin when Adam was five, for his father joined Aer Lingus, the Irish National Airline. Adam was a person who looked different from most of the pupils in Mount Temple: he drank coffee in class room, wore a caftan and a fur from Afghanistan; hippy clothes a few years after it had been trendy. Adam is the only one in the band who does not confess to be a Christian, though he respects religion (Dunphy 1987:174).

David Evans alias The Edge was born in Barking, England; East London 8 August 1961 (Bowler 1993:13). Both of his parents are Welsh. His father, Garvin, is an elder of the Presbyterian Church, and his mother, Gwenda, is a Baptist. The family moved to Dublin when David was a year old. Along with learning to play the guitar he took piano lessons. The Edge is characterised as “quick and intelligent, self-contained and amusing” (Bowler 1993:13).

Paul Hewson alias Bono Vox, generally known as Bono, was born in Dublin on May 10 1960 (Bowler 1993:12), of a mixed marriage: His mother, Irene Rankin, was a Protestant and his father, Bobby, a Catholic. They got married in a Protestant church. Bono was raised a Protestant, although the original intention was that he become a Catholic. On Sundays Bono and his mother went to the Protestant service of the Church of Ireland and his father to the Catholic mass. This has clearly affected Bono’s suspicion of organized religion and the way it separates people. In September 1974 Bono’s mother died of a brain haemorrhage; she collapsed at her father’s funeral and died four days later (Dunphy 1987:33). Bono suffered because of the loss: his mother had been the most important member of the family to him; she had given him the comfort the men in the family could not provide. In 21 August 1982, Bono married Alison Stewart, who had been a pupil in Mount Temple as well (Bowler 1993:13, Dunphy 1987:201). Bono is said to be a “garrulous extrovert” (Bowler 1993:13), but Bono himself gives a different picture in a *Hot Press* interview with Liam Mackey in 1983 (Stokes 1985:92), in which he claims to be ‘self-confessed ‘introvert and extrovert’’. Even though Bono is often seen as the most



important member of U2, obviously because he is the singer, songwriter and most public member of U2, it was Larry who formed the band.

### 3.1. U2

In autumn 1976 Larry Mullen Junior, looking to form a band, put a note on the notice board in Dublin Mount Temple High School (Bowler 1993:9). Several people showed up but the first formation consisted of Paul Hewson, later known as Bono (vocals), David Evans alias The Edge (guitar), Dick Evans (guitar) and Adam Clayton (bass). At quite an early state Dick Evans, David Evans's brother, left the band. The band was first called Feedback, and on their second concert, and thereon, Hype (Bowler 1993:19), before becoming U2. The name comes from the American spy plane U2 (Bowler 1993:25, Dunphy 1987:5). On 6 May 1960, during the cold war, a U2 crashed in Russia (USSR at that time) and the case became known worldwide as the 'U2 incident'. The name was chosen also for its ambiguity; U2 can be heard as 'you two' or 'you too'.

Mount Temple was the first comprehensive, non-denominational, co-educational school in Ireland (Bowler 1993:11). Unlike in many Irish schools, no uniforms were worn. It is significant that all the members of U2 should come from different religious backgrounds, which would have not been possible in other schools, and which can be seen as the unifying power of the music and/or Christian faith shared regardless of sectarianism. Particularly interesting in this sense is Bono's mixed background.

In the beginning of the eighties and their career as a rock band the three Christian members of U2 - Larry, The Edge and Bono - belonged to a charismatic Christian group called Shalom (Bowler 1993:33, Dunphy 1987:134). Shalom was not organized or controlled by either of the established churches, The Catholic Church or the Protestant Church of Ireland: the group congregated at the homes of the members, studying the Scriptures and praying. There was emphasis on the Holy Spirit, as in Charismatic Christian groups in general. Speaking in tongues (glossalalia) was not an uncommon phenomenon: a person praying might start to speak a foreign language without having ever studied it, or a language not recorded among the languages of the world at all; either speaking between him/herself and God, or explaining what is said to others as a personal message from God; or still one person

might explain as another is speaking. Two band members, Bono and The Edge, were baptised in the sea (Dunphy 1987:149, Chatterton 2001:185). In the beginning there was no big clash between the values of the rock world and the Christian values of the members, but when the band gained publicity, the situation changed. At some point the Shalom group started to put more pressure on the life-style of the members – there was a demand to surrender one’s ego, “dying to oneself” – and concentrated less on the Scriptures. The U2 members were pushed to make a decision between the band and the Shalom group (Bowler 1993:84, Dunphy 1987:167,181,191). Some time there was a feeling that there should not be a band at all. Bono talked about the situation in a *Hot Press* interview in December 1988 (Stokes 1990:140): “The Edge and myself left the band for a while, certainly in our heads. But nobody else would have us!” This period caused a spiritual crisis which can be clearly seen in the lyrics of *October* (1981), the most openly Christian record of U2. The crisis continued at the time of *War* (1983) as well.

Up to this day U2 has published 12 records (of which 10 are full-timed studio LPs): *Boy* (1980), *October* (1981), *War* (1983), *Under A Blood Red Sky* (1983, LIVE), *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984), *Wide Awake in America* (1985, EP), *The Joshua Tree* (1987), *Rattle and Hum* (1988), *Achtung Baby* (1991), *Zooropa* (1993), *Pop* (1997) and *All That You Can’t Leave Behind* (2000). Worldwide success came with *The Joshua Tree*, which sold about 16 million copies (Chatterton 2001:106). U2 have sold over 100 million records.

*Boy*, *October* and *War* (1980-1983) belong to an era during which U2 became established in Ireland and Britain, and the work to attain musical ground in USA was started. From the Christian Spiritual perspective this is the period when U2 faced a crisis arising from the clash between the Shalom group and the rock band; how could Christians play ‘Devil’s music’? The clash led to the most openly spiritual lyrics of U2.

## 4. THE FIRST ERA: *BOY, OCTOBER AND WAR*

### 4.1. Faith

I will now move on from describing the musical and spiritual background of U2 to the analysis of the lyrics. I will discuss each chronological era of U2's production in terms of the two themes of faith and love separately.

Even though The First Era contains the most openly Christian lyrics of U2, and the most Christian album of U2, *October*, there is an exception: *Boy*. This record does not contain obvious Christian images; the lyrics are associated with death ('Out of Control'), suicide ('A Day without Me') and sexual maturation ('Twilight', 'Stories for Boys'). In 'I Will Follow', though, the line "I was lost, I am found" could refer to being found, saved, in the Christian sense, and in 'The Electric co.' "I've found me way home" might have the same meaning. In the Bible, one of Jesus' metaphors for spiritual awakening is the parable of a man finding a lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7), or a woman finding a lost silver coin (Luke 15:8-10). 'I Will Follow' itself could refer to following in a Christian sense, meaning following Jesus as teacher and spiritual leader. Blindness is also a theme in 'I Will Follow', and this blindness can be seen as spiritual blindness, as it connects to the same theme in *October* (1981).

The title song in *October* sets the atmosphere in the record, even though it is not the first song:

October  
And the trees are stripped bare  
Of all they wear  
What do I care

October  
And kingdoms rise  
And kingdoms fall  
But you go on

And on

No spring is mentioned, but as binary opposition to autumn there is the concept of spring, and this binary opposition is generally used in poetry to express the end or

beginning of something abstract, a feeling for instance. In autumn everything seems to die, and in the spring everything seems to gain life again, to “resurrect”. “Kingdoms rise/And kingdoms fall” also refer to cyclical occurrence of events; just as seasons change in the rather short period of time called a year, so do the kingdoms. Kingdom as concept is something rather long-lasting, but comparing it to a time of the year decreases the power and durability associated with it. The one kingdom that goes on and on despite the others falling is, obviously, the kingdom of God.

The western system of beliefs understands time more as linear than cyclical. Naming the album *October* “was in part meant to reflect the cold cynicism that gripped the world, (...) conjuring up the autumnal darkness that coloured some of the music on the record” (Bowler 1993:87). It is possible to claim that the cyclical time “autumn” in the lyrics then stands for linear time “close to the end of the world”. This interpretation is as well backed up by other references to apocalypse in the record. In this sense “October” would be what “night” is in the Bible (Romans 13:12), the time before the end of the world. Christ’s second coming is the dawn, the metaphorical equivalent of the spring. The lyrics could also refer to human condition, “bare” standing for “naked”. The trees are humanized, they “wear” rather than have leaves. Human beings are as naked as the trees in the autumn in the day of doom when all the secrets are to be exposed (Rom 2:16). However, it seems that “the trees are stripped bare” in present tense and not in the future. It may be that nakedness stands for the notion that nothing can be hidden from God’s eyes (Heb 4:13). “What do I care” could be interpreted simply as nonchalance, or then as assurance of the non-significance of the things happening again and again, because in spite of that “you go on/ And on”. The lyrics could be compared to the book of Ecclesiastes (1:4): “Generations come and generations go, but the world stays just the same”. This would support the first interpretation of the meaning of “What do I care”, since Ecclesiastes is a rather gloomy and hopeless book, but I would still go for the second interpretation that there is still hope since there is something that goes on, namely God’s kingdom.

On the record *October* the names of the songs ‘Gloria’, ‘Rejoice’ and ‘Fire’ come out as explicitly Christian. The first song ‘Gloria’ expresses insecurity and seeks the acceptance of God:

Gloria...  
 I try to sing this song  
 I, I try to stand up  
 But I can’t find my feet  
 I try, I try to speak up  
 But only in you I am complete

Gloria...in te domine  
 Gloria...exultate  
 Gloria...Gloria  
 Oh Lord, loosen my lips

I try to sing this song  
 I, I try to get in  
 But I can’t find the door  
 The door is open  
 You’re standing there  
 You let me in

Gloria...in te domine  
 Gloria...exultate  
 Oh Lord, if I had anything  
 Anything at all  
 I’d give it to you  
 I’d give it to you

Gloria...Gloria...

The singer/’T’ seems to be looking for help from God, or Jesus, who are often addressed almost as the same person (John 12:44-45). The concept of Holy Trinity regards God as three persons: God, his son Jesus and the Holy Spirit. ‘Lord’ is a common way of addressing God in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament ‘Lord’ is often applied to Jesus as well. ‘Door’ is a Biblical metaphor for Jesus (John 10:9, KJ; GNB has ‘gate’). In this song the door, however, does not seem to be Christ, but a way out which Jesus is guarding. The pressure of writing a song is intertwined with the pressure felt at the spiritual level. In the lines ‘Oh Lord, if I had anything, anything at all/ I’d give it to you’ there seems to be a feeling of not being able to offer anything, as if the sacrifice of Jesus had to be paid back or the singer/’T’ would find it hard to believe the grace of God is enough to save a person, as taught in

Protestant faith. Maybe this is partly due to the guilt of belonging to a rock group and not being totally committing to God, as expected in the Shalom group. Also, the Catholic church has or at least has had a different approach to sin and forgiveness than Protestant churches, and Bono, having experience of both, is feeling “Catholic guilt”, trying to resolve the situation he feels problematic. In the Catholic Church confession of sins is crucial for salvation; if a person dies when s/he is not in the state of grace, i.e. free of mortal sin, s/he will not be saved. The person must repent and approach Jesus in the Sacrament of Penance to be forgiven. Good deeds also work towards the salvation, but only if they are performed in the state of grace (on the Catholic Church, see, for example, the net site of The Augustine Club at Columbia University: <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/augustine/a/faq-cc.html#q12>). In Protestant churches salvation becomes true at the moment of turning into faith, and can be lost only by giving up the faith completely.

In ‘Gloria’ God is exulted in Latin words, possibly originating from the Psalms 29 (30) and 70 (71). “In te domine” may be from Psalm 70 (verse 1): “In te Domine speravi non confundar in aeternum”, translated in King James as “In thee, O Lord, I have hoped, let me never be put to confusion”. “Exultate” possibly comes from Psalm 29 (verse 2): “Exaltabo te Domine quoniam suscepisti me nec delectasti inimicos meos super me”. King James reads: “I will extol thee, O Lord, for thou hast upheld me: and hast not made my enemies to rejoice over me” (Blanchard 1995). How much of the original context and meaning of the Psalms is carried over to the lyrics of ‘Gloria’, and whether the choice of words was conscious in this respect is hard to say, but clearly there is confusion in both the lyrics and the Psalm 70. “In te domine” is more clear in its origin and it would also fit even if the choice is unconscious of the original Psalm, since *October* was recorded in a situation where Bono’s lyrical notes had been stolen and he “wrote words live on the microphone” (Bowler 1993:95). “Exultate” is vaguer, and as being only one word, is possibly not very firmly in connection with the Psalm but in general use. But it would be interesting to speculate that there was an unconscious connection to the Psalm 29, since there

was a need to meet the deadline and produce a record, in spite of the problems and possible doubt of other people of U2 succeeding.

Confusion continues in 'Rejoice':

And what am I to do  
 What in the world am I to say  
 There's nothing else to do  
 He says you'll change the world someday

There is no referent for the person pronoun "he" in the song, neither is there one for "you". "He" could be anyone addressing the "I" as "you", which would create the meaning that someone believes the "I", obviously the singer himself, will change the world. Considering that the album is overtly spiritual, "he" could be someone who talks about "you", who in turn could be someone else than the singer, i.e. Jesus. "He", then, could be a priest or a leader of a religious group. Unfortunately the words in the record are not often clear, and the last line in the quoted stanza has been interpreted by the net source I have used (marcolino.com) to be "He says he'll change the world someday". This would make it easier to see the "he" as Jesus, but I suspect this, because after my hearing the latter person pronoun is really "you" and not "he".

In the end of 'Rejoice' the "I"/singer is looking inward:

And what am I to do  
 Just tell me what I am supposed to say  
 I can't change the world  
 But I can change the world in me  
 If I rejoice

"I can't change the world" could be addressed to the "he" who in the previously quoted stanza believed the "I" would be able to do so. Instead the "I" wants to change himself, "the world" in him. For this the "I" could be looking for guidance from God: "I don't know what to change".

In 'Fire' Bono professes: "There's a fire in me". In Christianity fire is one of the symbols of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:2-4). Fire could, of course, refer to an inner fire without spirituality, some kind of urge or need to do things; or sexual passion, both of which are often described as fire burning inside a person. The origin of the lines "The



sun is burning black”, “And the moon is running red” and “The stars are falling down” is found in Revelations (6:12-14, also Matt 24:29, Mark 13:24-25, Luke 21:25, Acts 2:20.) All three appear in Revelations as signs of the second coming of the Christ. As ‘Fire’ ends “I’m going home”, and heaven is described as home in the Bible (John 14:2, 2 Cor 5:8), the home could be heaven, or the new heaven and earth created after the end of the world (Rev 21:1).

In ‘Tomorrow’ the lyrics mix the desire for the return of Jesus with the need for the mother who has died. “There’s a black car parked at the side of the road” refers to the funeral of Bono’s mother and the word “mother” is voiced explicitly as well. This leads to the thought of the song being about Bono’s mother, but the need for healing love is looked for from two directions, mother and God (or Jesus): “Who healed the wounds/ Who heals the scars”. Just before these two lines Jesus is implicitly referred to: “Who tore the curtain/ And who was he for”. According to the Bible (Matt 27:50-51, Mark 15:37-38, Luke 23:45) the curtain of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom at the moment of Jesus’ death on the cross. He obviously did not tear the curtain, but the event is connected to him and the curtain is generally understood to have been torn by God. The person is also referred as “he”, and therefore this part of the song cannot be on Bono’s mother but Jesus, and God. Close to the end of the song the lyrics make this clear:

Open up to the love of God  
To the love of he who made the blind to see  
He’s coming back  
He’s coming back  
Oh, believe

There seems to be mixed feelings on the coming of Christ. “Won’t you come back tomorrow/ Can I sleep tonight” suggests a slight fear to me. In the Bible God’s people are warned against falling asleep, spiritually (Matt 24:42-44, Mark 13:33-37, Luke 12:35-40, Eph 5:14-15, I Thess 5:6, Rev 16:15). “I want you to be back tomorrow” is ambiguous, it could refer to mother as well, to a child’s wish to have his mother back against the reality of death. The song does not explicitly state that Bono’s mother is dead, but it is a fact well known from interviews. Of course also

the desire for Jesus' return can be genuine, as the lyrics express: "Cause I want you, I want you/ I really want you" and "I want you to be back tomorrow/ Will you be back tomorrow". The last lines of the song are interesting: 'I'm gonna be there mother/ I'm going out there/ .../ And you're gonna be there'. The writer is going to meet his mother, or wants to meet his mother. But his mother is dead. The meeting could, once again, be something that happens in a child's mind, but it is possible that the writer is thinking about meeting his mother in heaven. "I'm going out there" suggests the first interpretation, but at the end of the song after repeating "I'm going out there, mother" there can be heard a single line "Jesus coming". This could suggest a situation where the child or grown up singer would go out to wait for Jesus coming and for seeing his mother again. There is, as well, enough ambiguity in the song as a whole that this interpretation is possible. Also, after losing a family member people often expect to see them again after their own death, or in this case, when Jesus comes back.

The apocalyptic theme appears heavily in *War* (1983) as well. The line "Wipe the tears from your eyes" in 'Sunday Bloody Sunday' might echo Revelations (7:17, 21:4), even though it is in the form of command and not a proposition like in the original passage in the Bible (Rev 21:4, KJ): "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes". The command form is found in the lyrics on the record sleeve, but when listening to the record there can be heard either "oh" or "I'll" in the beginning of the line. It is unclear which one it is, but "I'll" would suit the context. If it is "I'll", it is either the 'I' in the song, the writer of the song, or God that is going to wipe the tears.

'Seconds' builds an apocalyptic world scene at the time of the Cold War. It reminds us of the fact that world could be destroyed in nuclear annihilation: "It takes a second to say goodbye,/ Push the button and pull the plug, say goodbye". The Biblical reference becomes clear in the second stanza:

Lightning flashes across the sky  
 From east to west you do or die  
 Like a thief in the night,  
 You see the world by candlelight

The images are similar to those in Matt 24:27 (GNB): “For the Son of Man will come like the lightning which flashes across the whole sky from the east to the west”. The image of the thief is found in Revelations 16:15 (GNB, also Matt 24:42-44): “Listen! I am coming like a thief!”

Slight Biblical echoes are found in ‘New Year’s Day’ as well:

Under a blood-red sky  
A crowd has gathered in black and white  
Arms entwined, the chosen few

“Blood red sky” could refer to sunset or sunrise on the New Years Day, but as well to the apocalyptic image of the moon turning red (Rev 6:12-14), as in ‘Fire’ in *October*. The crowd can be a group of people celebrating the New Year and the hope for future, and the “chosen few” suggests that this crowd of people has rights different from others. It could be a group politically or socially “chosen few”, but the crowd might as well be God’s chosen people waiting for the return of Jesus.

The theme of redemption appears in ‘With a shout’ (*October*), which seems at first to be a meaningless collection of words: “Where to go/ To the side of a hill/ Blood was spilt/ we were still/ looking at each other”. After a couple of lines “Jerusalem” is repeated twice. Jerusalem is a key word here: on which hill in Jerusalem was the blood spilt? It was on Golgotha that Jesus was put on the cross. The name of the song ‘With a Shout’ probably refers to the command “shout it out” in the lyrics, but it could also refer to Jesus’ death, as he cried out in a loud shout when he died on the cross (Matt 27:46, Mark 15:34). It is probably this death on a cross the “we” in the song are shouting out. In the Bible there is a passage where Jesus’ disciples praise God loudly in public and the Pharisees ask Jesus to tell his disciples to be quiet. To this Jesus answers (Luke 19:40, GNB): “I tell you that if they keep quiet, the stones themselves will start shouting.” It seems to me that this song follows the same pattern as ‘Tomorrow’: first the lyrics are unclear, ambiguous; but towards the end the (Christian) spiritual content of the song appears, or increases if it has been faint or vague. As ‘With a Shout’ proceeds there come the lines: ‘I

wanna go/ To the foot of the Messiah/ To the foot of he who made me see”. Messiah is another name for Jesus, a Hebrew title meaning “the anointed one”. The Greek word “Christ” is its equivalent<sup>1</sup>.

In ‘I Threw a Brick through a Window’ (*October*) Jesus is seen as a brother (compare to ‘The First Time’ in *Zooropa*, p. 71-73), one of his human qualifications in the Bible (Rom 8:29, Heb 2:17). “Brother” can also be another person, a brother in belief, but it is not clear which is meant. At some point, though, “brother” and “way” are closely connected, which suggests the brother is Jesus. In John 14:6 Jesus says: “I am the way, the truth and the life”. Regarding this, it is possible to see the lines “There is another way out of here/ In my brother, brother” having this meaning; Jesus as a way to heaven in the same way as in the Bible, or as a way out of a situation felt frustrating. Also, the metaphor of spiritual blindness (John 9:39) is seen in “No one, no one is blinder/ Who will, who will not see/ No one, no one is blinder than me.” At first it seems the singer is blaming others for being blind, but the last line points the finger back at himself. The name of the song ‘I Threw a Brick through the Window’ suggests violence and maybe it is this violence to which the singer is pointing. Violence and blindness going together is a theme that appears in *War* (1983), and *Pop* (1997), belonging to the Third Era, as well.

The idea of surrendering oneself to God appears in the song ‘Surrender’ (*War*), in which the protagonist Sadie is considering suicide: “She got herself up on the 48<sup>th</sup> floor/ Got to find out, find out/ What she’s living for”. Most of the song is on her, “she”, but in the end of the song it is not clear if it tells about Sadie or the writer himself, since “she” turns “I”:

It’s in the air, it’s everywhere I look for you  
It’s in the things I do and say  
But if I want to live I’ve got to die to myself some day

“You” is God (Dunphy 1987:209). In a *Hot Press* interview (Stokes 1990:80) Bono is asked about the line “and you give yourself away and you give yourself away” in

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<sup>1</sup> Most net sources have “To the foot of the Messiah”, but some – a minority – suggest that the last words are “Mount Zion” and not “Messiah”.

‘With or Without You’ (*JT* 1987). He answers the next posed question, “But there is a spiritual value about giving yourself, your ego, away?”, as follows: “That goes back to the song ‘Surrender’. I always believed in the Biblical idea that unless the seed dies, is almost crushed to the ground, it won’t bear fruit.” The Biblical idea Bono refers to is found in John 12:24. Thus, there is spiritual value, which also clearly shows in the line “But if I want to live I’ve got to die to myself some day”. It echoes Jesus’ words in Matt 10:39 (GNB): “Those who try to gain their own life will lose it; but those who lose their life for my sake will gain it.” These words do not have to be interpreted as literal dying, but as “giving oneself away”, placing the spiritual life before everything else.

The demand of surrendering one’s ego is opposite to the ego-boosting and self-indulgence expected in rock. Bono explains the insecurity of expressing Christian belief in rock music in an introduction he wrote for the Book of Psalms, published in a series of Pocket Canons (*Wire*, u2-list digest, volume 19991101; 1 November 1999):

We wanted to put something explicitly spiritual on the record to balance the politics and the romance of it; like Bob Marley or Marvin Gaye would. We thought about the psalms: Psalm 40. There was some squirming. We were a very “white” rock group, and such plundering of the scriptures was taboo for a white rock group unless it was in the “service of Satan”. Or worse, Goth.

The song ‘40’ seems somewhat altered from the original Psalm 40; it is not as long, for example, but the source is clear. “How long to sing this song”, taken from the Psalm 6 (verse 3) and added as refrain to ‘40’, seems the general theme of *War* (1983). It is also a line in ‘Sunday Bloody Sunday’: “How long, how long must we sing this song?” This is lamenting, as in Psalm 6, but in the ‘40’ the lyrics promise “I will sing a new song”. There is a more optimistic tone to this, as in the Psalm itself (40:3): “And he hath put a new song in my mouth” (KJ), or “He taught me to sing a new song” (GNB).

As the name reveals, ‘Sunday Bloody Sunday’ comments on the problematic situation in the Northern Ireland: On Bloody Sunday, 30 January 1972, in

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Londonderry 13 people were killed by the British security forces. The original Bloody Sunday dates back to 1920<sup>1</sup>.

The battle in the song, though, might be a battle within a person seen against the background of the frustrating world situation, because "the trenches" are "dug within our hearts". The song ends:

The real battle just begun  
To claim the victory Jesus won  
On a Sunday bloody Sunday,  
Sunday, bloody Sunday.

The "victory Jesus won" here probably means victory over death, which is contrary to the victory in war, where death, in the end, is the one who wins: "There's many lost, but tell me who has won?"

Perhaps due to the explicit spirituality of the records *October* and *War* the First Era is rather scarce in love songs. There are some, though, and it is these few that I will now discuss.

#### 4.2. Love

On *October* (1981) only 'Stranger in the Strange Land' and 'I Fall Down' contain faint elements of an ordinary love song, but basically no love songs with sexual references, typical to U2, are found on this record. On *War* (1983) there are several songs in which love can be seen from, at least, two different angles: spiritual love is mixed with sexual love. 'Drowning Man', an image that appears on the latest U2 album *All That You Can't Leave Behind* (2000) as well, looks like an ordinary love song with typical "Take my hand" and "Hold on and don't let go/ Of my love", but the end of the song refers to the book of Isaiah:

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<sup>1</sup> In November 21st 1920, Michael Collins, the leader of the Irish revolutionary forces, ordered assassination of 14 British intelligence officers. In the same day, as a counter attack the British troops opened fire at the spectators of a football match in Croke Park, a sports stadium in Dublin. Sources differ in the number of dead and injured: 12-14 people died, and 62 to hundreds were injured. The day became known as the Bloody Sunday.

Hold on, hold on tightly  
 Rise up, rise up with wings  
 Like eagles you'll run, you'll run  
 You'll run and not grow weary

In King James Version the passage in Isaiah 40:31 goes:

But they that wait upon the Lord  
 shall renew their strength;  
 they shall mount up with wings as eagles;  
 they shall run, and not be weary;  
 and they shall walk, and not faint.

The GNB reads much alike, the significant last three lines going “They will rise on wings like eagles;/ they will run and not get weary;/ they will walk and not grow weak.” Regarding this, the love in the song could be interpreted as God’s love as well: “This love lasts forever”. In rock lyrics love generally lasts forever but put against the spiritual background of U2, I think it is perfectly possible to claim that this song is not only of sexual love but of spiritual love of God as well.

In ‘Two Hearts Beat as One’ the spiritual side of the relationship is introduced at the beginning. “I don’t know my right from left,/ or my right from wrong” is an echo from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:3), even though the words are taken out of context. Also the fear of being a fool either for a girl or for God appears: “But if I’m a fool for you/ That’s something.” The Shalom-style Christianity was considered eccentric or freakish by many outsiders, as many small groups of Christians still are. The line “Is this love out of fashion?” can be seen as referring to the same idea of not being considered up-to-date. Love “out of fashion” can be seen as “conservative” love between a man and a woman, love that highlights the emotional, romantic love side of the relationship and not the sexual exploitation of one-night stands. And still, it can be seen as the love between God and a human being as well, in the Nietzschean tradition of God being dead, meaning out of fashion. In the last stanza “I’ll shine my spirit aloud” is spiritual, but the song ends in the sexual sense of love: “I said don’t stop the dance/ Baby this is not our last chance.” I would not expect the ‘baby’ to be God, but who knows.

It can be asked if U2's mixing spiritual images with sexual encounter is in any way revolutionary or different from the general way of rock lyrics using "angel" as synonym for "baby" or "speaking in tongues" as equal to the euphoric feeling of orgasm. This can be viewed in two ways: on the one hand, as doing things in the way of rock culture, giving in to it. On the other hand, as three fourths of the members of U2 are Christians, and Christians are not expected to talk about or promote sex, it is a more complex question and can be seen as a statement. The view of Bible and Christianity as asexual or anti-sexual is not quite well based, even though sexuality still seems one of the most sensitive issues in the Christian churches. In the Bible, love between man and woman is used as a metaphor for the relationship between God and his people. In Revelations (18:23, 21:2, 21:9, 22:17) God's people are the "bride" and Jesus who comes back to take his people with him is the "groom". This metaphor appears in U2's lyrics as well, in 'Until the End of the World' in *Achtung Baby* (1991): "we were sitting as close together as a bride and groom" (see pages 68-71). The Song of Solomon (Song of Songs in GNB) has sometimes been explained as a metaphor of the love of God, even though it is explicitly sexual love that the book describes.

Considering the facts above, U2 can be seen as only continuing the Biblical way of using sexual love as a metaphor for the spiritual love of God, even though, in U2's case, the direction of interpretation can go either way. Spiritual may stand for the sexual as well as the sexual for the spiritual. The context, though, creates problems, since rock music generally avoids pro-Christian messages, and people do not necessarily see the spiritual dimension in the lyrics. Thus, the spiritual level of the lyrical ambiguity may be lost for those who are used to seeing only the sexual level of rock music; and the apparently sexual content of the lyrics may seem contemptuous for those who feel themselves committed to the Christian faith. Considering this, it is intriguing how popular U2 have become, and still are, even though they have such an unpopular commitment in rock world as Christian faith. Would it not be expected that both sides of the potential group of listeners, the Christians and the non-Christians, would disapprove of U2? But they have not, regarding the record sales;



the ambiguity of the lyrics has worked in favour of U2. It may simply be that people feel themselves free to take what they want to see as the primary meaning of the lyrics, and discard the level that possibly annoys them. And, what is more important in the context of rock music is, of course, the music itself. Listeners appreciate the music, and the message of the lyrics comes only second.

In U2's case, though, I see the lyrics and the message more significant than in the rock lyrics of "I love you, baby" in general. If the First Era was an era of spiritual crisis and openness, the Second Era is less so. Explicit Christian references seem to almost disappear in *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984). In *The Joshua Tree* (1987) and *Rattle and Hum* (1988) they reappear, but the emphasis has moved from spirituality itself to social and political phenomena. The Second Era takes the new direction that was already seen in *War* (1983): the spiritual intertwines with the social and political.

## **5. THE SECOND ERA: *THE UNFORGETTABLE FIRE, JOSHUA TREE AND RATTLE AND HUM***

### **5.1. Faith**

Even though the main way to express spiritual commitment in the lyrics of the Second Era seems to be social and political consciousness, there still are songs that contain Christian references and images as such. 'I Still Haven't Found what I'm Looking for' in *JT* (1987) and 'When Love Comes to Town' in *RH* (1988) are of this kind.

In the gatefold sleeve cover of *The Joshua Tree* album there is a photograph of a Joshua tree, a giant cactus or palm like tree growing in the Californian desert. According to a legend the tree was called after the prophet Joshua, because the branches seem to reach up to the sky as if arms raised in supplication (Bowler 1993:211). 'I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For' is probably the most famous U2 song of the *JT* album, the Second Era, and maybe even the whole U2 production. It is a gospel song, even though it does not necessarily sound like one, as pointed out by The Edge in the movie *Rattle and Hum* (1988), shot in USA during The Joshua Tree tour. In the album *RH* (1988) the song is performed together with

the New Voices of Freedom, a black gospel choir from New York, and this time the song is a gospel song musically as well. The nature of a gospel song becomes clear in the lyrics:

I have climbed the highest mountains  
 I have run through the fields  
 Only to be with you  
 Only to be with you

I have run I have crawled  
 I have scaled these city walls  
 Only to be with you  
 But I still haven't found  
 What I'm looking for  
 But I still haven't found  
 What I'm looking for

I have kissed honey lips  
 Felt the healing in her fingertips  
 It burned like fire  
 This burning desire  
 I have spoke with the tongue of angels  
 I have held the hand of the devil  
 It was warm in the night  
 I was cold as a stone  
 But I still haven't found  
 What I'm looking for  
 But I still haven't found  
 What I'm looking for

I believe in the Kingdom Come  
 Then all the colours will bleed into one  
 But yes I'm still running  
 You broke the bonds  
 You loosened the chains  
 You carried the cross  
 And my shame  
 And my shame  
 You know I believe it  
 But I still haven't found  
 What I'm looking for  
 But I still haven't found  
 What I'm looking for

The last stanza is most clear in its Christian content. Until this point there has been ambiguity in the person whom the song is addressed to, once again this is a song which “mixes God with women” (see the section on Love, page 46). But the last stanza begins with a reference to Kingdom of God, “Kingdom Come”, even though the word God is not included in the lyrics. The prayer of Our Father includes the lines

“Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done” (Matt 6:10, Luke 11:2, KJ). Jesus is addressed to as the carrier of the cross and the sins of the human kind, even though, once again, the word Jesus or any of its equivalents is not explicitly mentioned. This is one of the ways in which U2 lyrics work: they have a Christian content, but they do not necessarily have explicit wording but slight reference that has enough content to produce the Christian meaning, if the listener/reader wants to see it there. In this particular era this is the main way, even though in *RH* (1988) there are explicit references; the clearest ones in ‘Love Rescue Me’ and ‘When Love Comes to Town’ (see below).

In ‘I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking for’ “shame” stands for sin. It is the result of sin, the feeling, but in the Bible shame often seems the equivalent of punishment, and sometimes appears in context that creates connotations with hell (I John 2:28, Rev 16:15). ‘Running’ is used as a metaphor for spiritual life in the Bible (for example, 1 Cor 9:24, Heb 12:1), but in the song it could as well be seen as a journey, running after what is looked for, whatever that is. The most intriguing line in the lyrics is “Then all the colours will bleed into one”. The colours might be the different peoples of the world, meaning that everyone is equal, but there are other choices of interpretation as well. White is a non-colour, which has all the colours in it. If all the colours bleed into one, the one colour will then be white. (To be politically correct: by this I do not mean to imply that the white people is the only good race’.) White has many connotations, such as light, purity, innocence, death, unlimited space. White is also the colour of Jesus, the Lamb of God, as is red, the colour of blood. In communion the red wine symbolises the blood of Christ in Protestant faith, and in the Catholic faith the wine is actually believed to turn into the blood of Christ at the moment of the consecration. If the colours bleed into one, this might suggest unity in Christ, in belief and in this life, or after the second coming of Christ. White could also stand for the everlasting daytime, since according to the Bible there is no night when the new heaven and earth are created (Rev 21:25, 22:5).

‘When Love Comes to Town’ (*RH* 1988) compares to ‘I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For’ in its reference to Jesus as the redeemer. The difference is in

the straightforwardness of the reference and the weight the lyrics put on the writer's/"I's" own sins which he clearly believes to have lead to Jesus' death:

I was there when they crucified my Lord  
 I held the scabbard when the soldier drew his sword  
 I threw the dice when they pierced his side  
 But I've seen love conquer the great divide

Now there is "Lord", one of the titles of Jesus. According to John 19:31-37, Jesus' side was pierced by a soldier with a sword to check if he was really dead. The dice comes from the John 19:23-24 (also Matt 27:35, Mark 15:24, and Psalm 22:18, which is quoted in John 19:24 as a prophecy) where the soldiers throw dice for Jesus clothes even though it seems that the writer has connected the throwing of dice to a later event in the events of Good Friday than John. The great divide is the divide between human beings and God, caused by sin. Because of all this, 'When Love Comes to Town' may be a parable of love coming in to a person, a person's turning into faith. Town stands for the person, and the love either for love as emotion or God as love. According to 1 John (4:16) "God is love". The turning into faith possibility may be implied in "When I looked up I saw the Devil looking down/ But my Lord He played the guitar/ The day love came to town." Rock is often referred to as the Devil's music, but here, interestingly, Jesus plays the guitar. The Devil is looking at the "I" from above, but Jesus is the one taking action. The word order, the added "He" strengthens this impression. Also, guitar is the most positively charged instrument among the band instruments, associated with skill and power. The best players are often seen as "guitar heroes". So here it is Jesus who is the "guitar hero", and not the Devil.

'God Part II' (*RH*) plunges into the gap between the excess and success of rock life and Christian values:

Don't believe the devil I don't believe his book  
 But the truth is not the same without the lies he made up  
 I don't believe in excess success is to give  
 I don't believe in riches but you should see where I live  
 I... I believe in love

The lyrics of 'God Part II' could be seen as a confession of sins. The writer/'I' does not believe the devil, but there still seems to be some function for him: truth is not truth if it is not challenged by lie. The second stanza deals with sexual want: 'Don't believe in forced entry I don't believe in rape/ But every time she passes by wild thoughts escape'; and violence: "I don't believe in deathrow, skidrow or the gangs/ Don't believe in the Uzi it just went off in my hand". The third stanza introduces drugs: "Don't believe in cocaine I got a speedball in my head".

In the fourth stanza the writer confesses "I don't believe rock'n'roll can really change the world". What is going to change the world then? As every stanza ends in the words "I...I believe in love", it is probably love. The song ends: "I feel like I'm falling, like I'm spinning on a wheel/ It always stops beside a name a presence I can feel". Whose presence is it? As the song is dedicated to John Lennon, it might be his, but it might as well be Jesus' or God's, or the presence of the Holy Spirit.

In *The Joshua Tree* (1987) touching the flame in 'Where the Streets Have No Name' can be seen as the same kind of reference to Holy Spirit as in 'Fire' in *October* (1981). *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984), though, has got its name from an exhibition of paintings and drawings made by the survivors of the nuclear bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Even so, the fire can be seen having connotations to the spiritual fire of Martin Luther King Jr, a black Baptist pastor who lead the Civil Rights movement in the 60s. King was a confessing Christian and his principle in the demonstrations was non-violence and passive resistance. Two songs in *UF*, 'Pride' and 'MLK' were inspired by his life. 'Pride' probably refers to Jesus as well as to Martin Luther King Jr himself. The line "One man betrayed with a kiss" refers to assassination of King in 1968, and Jesus was betrayed with a kiss on the mouth by Judas Iscariot. There could be a double meaning in the line "What more in the name of love". Love can be simply love as emotion, but as above, love could be God, and thus it is possible to claim that "in the name of love" is also "in the name of God". This at least in the sense that love and God represent Christian values, and it is these values in the name of which Martin Luther King lived.

The theme of human rights, the social and political aspect, is central in *Rattle and Hum* (1988) as well. 'Pride' (*UF* 1984) and 'Bullet the Blue Sky' (*JT* 1987), are included. 'Bullet the Blue Sky' is a song inspired in 1986 by a visit to El Salvador where USA was interfering with the internal politics of the country with armed forces (Bowler 1993:205). 'Silver and Gold' is written by Bono for the record *Artists Against Apartheid* (1985) (Thrills 1986:12) and tells metaphorically about the economical oppression that the black majority suffers from the part of the white minority in power in South Africa. 'Freedom for My People' is an excerpt from a song of two black street performers, Sterling Magee and Adam Gussow. 'Freedom for My People' resembles the negro spiritual 'Go Down Moses' (based on Exodus 7:14 onwards) in its idea, both ask for liberation of their people: the first of the blacks in the USA ('AI need some freedom/ Freedom for my people'), the second the same, but through the story of the Israelites in Egypt ("Go down Moses, 'way down in Egypt's land/ tell ole Pharaoh let my people go!"). 'Heartland' and 'Angel of Harlem' are of black women, one working on a cotton field in Mississippi, the other the famous singer Billie Holiday. In 'Heartland', "In the towers of steel belief goes on and on", probably refers to the strong faith which helped black people in slavery and which has since been inheritance of many African Americans.

Another song with issues of social justice in *RH* is 'Van Diemen's Land', a song written by The Edge of the Irish deportees to Australia:

Now kings will rule and the poor will toil  
And tear their hands as they tear the soil  
But a day will come in the dawning age  
When an honest man sees an honest wage

The lyrics have common ground with 'God Part II' mentioned above. 'God Part II' refuses to believe that nothing can be done to social injustice: "Don't believe them when they tell me there ain't no cure/ The rich stay healthy the sick stay poor"; and Van Diemen's Land believes there will come a day when justice is done. "Dawning age" may be understood as belief in the possibility of human change. But if a

Christian interpretation is applied, it could, once again, be belief in everyone being judged rightly in the doomsday, dawning age referring to the new heaven and earth.

In the Bible Jesus talks about the same issues (Mark 4:25, GNB; also Matt 13:12, Luke 19:26): “Those who have something will be given more, and those who have nothing will have taken away from them even the little they have”. This is primarily interpreted spiritually; meaning that those who believe will receive more knowledge of God and those who do not believe will not. But there is the basis of the parable, the very concrete meaning, of people receiving more material wealth if they already have it and people losing their property if they do not have the social security and status that wealth provides. ‘Van Diemen’s Land’ has similar ideas: “Still the gunman rules and widows pay/ A scarlet coat now a black beret”. In the Old Testament there are several warnings against ill-treatment of widows and orphans, or reminds that they are under God’s protection (for example; Exodus 22:22, Deuteronomy 10:18, Psalms 68:5, Isaiah 1:17). At the time of *JT* and *RH*, in December 1988, Bono gave an interview for *Hot Press* (Stokes 1990:142), in which he talks very intimately about, among other issues, his faith. On the relationship between faith and social justice Bono says: “Well, to me faith in Jesus Christ that is not aligned with social justice, that is not aligned with the poor – it’s nothing. How can you read the Gospel of Luke the physician and call yourself a Christian and have health cuts? How can you not work towards the ends of social justice?”

The country at the centre of most of the lyrics dealing with social justice is America, the US. The sub-heading of *U2, Rattle and Hum: The Official Book of the U2 Movie*, “A journey into the heartland of two Americas”, suggests the same ambiguity in attitude towards America as the lyrics in *JT* (1987) and *RH* (1988). ‘In God’s Country’ (*JT*) is a rather positive song on America, stating “We need new dreams tonight” and asking “Set me alight/ We’ll punch a hole through the night”. There is still some ambiguity in the lyrics:

She is liberty  
And she comes to rescue me  
Hope, faith, her vanity  
The greatest gift is gold

The notion underlying America is that it is God's country: there was a sense of mission when the settlers came and found their new life in the continent. The Statue of Liberty, to which "She is liberty" probably refers to (Thrills 1987:24), has often been the first thing that the immigrants to America have seen when arriving to New York. The statute is associated with the notions of freedom, justice and hope for better future. In the lyrics there is also "faith", obviously to underline the idea of God's country. There is ambiguity, since hope and faith are not followed by love but vanity. "The Greatest gift is gold" probably refers to the gold fever, people seeking their future in the New Continent, but also stands somehow in opposition to the virtues of hope and faith: is it just greed that drives the people in America, God's country, and not faith and hope? Or are faith and hope only used as an ideological excuse to gain the gold, material wealth? The ending of the song is similarly ambiguous:

Naked flame  
 She stands with a naked flame  
 I stand with the sons of Cain  
 Burned by the fire of love  
 Burned by the fire of love  
 Love...

According to Genesis (4:1-2) Adam and Eve's son Cain was a farmer whereas the other son Abel became a shepherd. Cain killed his brother, because he saw that God liked more the sheep Abel offered as sacrifice than his corn. "Sons of Cain" may refer to the farmers in USA, and most likely to the farmers in Southern States. The new settlers to America were farmers whereas among the native peoples of America there were tribes that wandered after the animals they hunted for living. (It is necessary to add that not all Indians were nomads but some were farmers as well.) The settlers often killed Native Americans and destroyed their livelihood. In this sense it could be claimed that the settlers were Cain and the Indians were Abel.

"She stands with a naked flame" and "I stand with the sons of Cain" are juxtaposed. "She" is the Statue of Liberty standing with the torch in her hand; America with the flame of spirit, understood as courage and will to survive. Flame could also symbolise the Spirit in the Christian sense, and there would still be faith in



America, in both of its meanings: the writer still believes in the good in America, or believes that there are people in America who have faith in the Christian sense. The “I”, though, stands among the sons of Cain, and it may be that he is thinking himself as one of the “sinners”. The lyrics describe a dream: “Dreamed I saw a desert rose/  
Dress torn in ribbons”. Desert rose and the statue of liberty are both female personifications of America. The end of the song may be a metaphorical image in a dream: The “I” cannot reach the ideals the woman, America, represents, and he remains with the sons of Cain. He is burned by the fire of love, which is a rather positive expression in connection with the negative impression of Cain. A possible interpretation is that “sons of Cain” are human beings in general: even though the “I” is a sinner like the rest of the “sons of Cain” he still feels love, or is reached by a love that comes outside. This, in the Christian perspective, can be seen as the love of God.

‘Bullet the Blue Sky’ (*JT* 1987, *RH* 1988) refers to Genesis as well, to the story of Jacob: “In the locust wind comes a rattle and hum/ Jacob wrestled the angel/ And the angel was overcome”. In Genesis (32:23-33) it is not exactly said that it was an angel that Jacob wrestled, but this is a general belief as the man in the story does not tell his name and tells Jacob that he will no longer be called Jacob but Israel<sup>1</sup>. Jacob’s wrestling in the lyrics might signify the already mentioned sense of mission and myth of America as God’s country. America rose from a small settlement of colonies into a world power. It performed an impossible feat as Jacob did by defeating the angel. Also, America and Israel have had good political relationships.

The name of the album *Rattle and Hum* comes from the lines of ‘Bullet the Blue Sky’ quoted above. In Exodus the locusts are one of the disasters striking Egypt, but the locust wind with its rattle and hum can as well be connected to the image of the fighter planes in ‘Bullet the Blue Sky’. There is threat in the same way as in the beginning of the lyrics: “In the howling wind comes a stinging rain/ See it driving nails/

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<sup>1</sup> The name “Israel” resembles in sound the Hebrew for “he struggles with God” or “God struggles”.

Into the souls on the tree of pain”. “Nails” and “tree of pain” raise an image of the cross and crucifixion; possibly the suffering of the people of El Salvador is compared to Jesus’ suffering on the cross.

‘Bullet the Blue Sky’ is ambiguous in its relationship to America like ‘In God’s Country’, but its position towards America is much more critical. ‘Bullet the Blue Sky’ refers to the politics of the Reagan era, and to the darker side of fundamentalism, but describes America as well as a place where refugees seek for security. Wrestling the angel is followed by **A**Plant a demon seed, you raise a flower of fire/ See them burning crosses, see the flames, higher and higher”. “Burning crosses” probably refers to Ku Klux Klan, a secret association founded in the Southern States of USA after the Civil War when black people were proclaimed free from slavery. The KKK holds a fundamental Christian ideology of the Bible as a White book, even though this is probably just an excuse for the attacks on the black people, whose liberation was feared to harm the economical position of the Southern white farmers. In addition to being anti-black, KKK was anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish. The Ku Klux Klan still exists today, and its ideology has been used by many new organisations trying to promote the idea of America for White Americans. Some of the organisations support such ideas as the anti-abortion and anti-immigration campaigns.

Demon seed may refer to the USA helping the government of El Salvador to fight against the socialist guerrillas. Since demon is an evil spirit **A**flower of fire” and **A**flames” obviously have different meaning than fire of spirit, or at least of a good spirit. There is quite a different tone to them than **A**the naked flame” and **A**fire of love” in ‘In God’s Country’. At the same time as interfering with internal politics of the countries of Central America, the USA is keeping itself out of the problems it has caused, as if it had nothing to do with them: “Outside is America”. People run “Into the arms of America”, which points to America as a place for refugees, even though the line can be interpreted otherwise as well, arms being the very fighter planes mentioned in the lyrics (Thrills 1987:24). In the sense of refugees, America is both the cause and cure, but in the sense of armament the picture is even gloomier: the one



These chains no longer bind me  
 Nor the shackles at my feet  
 Outside are the prisoners  
 Inside the free (set them free)

The temperature and fever could be physical phenomena; the man is ill. But on the track in the album *RH* the singer, Bono, says that the song is “about a man in a shanty town in southern Johannesburg”, and continues: “the man is sick, and looking at the barrel of white South Africa. A man who is at the point where he is ready to take up arms against his oppressor”. So there is aggression as well.

In Psalms (4:7) there is a verse “But the joy that you have given me is more than they will ever have with all their corn and wine”. Maybe the idea in the song is the same; dignity and spiritual values mean more than possessions. There is also a paradox: people outside the prison are prisoners and the physically imprisoned are actually free. How is this explained? There may be some connection to the Biblical idea of the liberating power of truth. In the gospel of John, Jesus talks about truth setting his disciples free. People ask how they would become free as they have never been slaves and Jesus explains that “everyone who sins is a slave of sin” (8:34), and a bit later says: “If the Son sets you free, then you will be really free” (8:36). In this song, the prisoner is free because he is not bound by the sin of oppressing but the oppressor is. In this sense the oppressor is a slave and the oppressed is not. I do not claim that the lyrics draw from this particular passage in the Bible but they do exploit the idea of slavery: “Yes, captains and kings in the slave ships hold”. America long held black slaves, and now when it or other Western Countries do not have literal slaves they do have economical slaves.

Social justice has long been part of U2’s lyrics. *War* (1983) was the first record to tackle this issue, but the records in the Third Era, *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984), *Joshua Tree* (1987) and *Rattle and Hum* (1988), are all politically- or socially-conscious. U2 are members of Amnesty International and Greenpeace. In their Joshua Tree tour in 1987-1988 U2 were gaining new members for Amnesty. Bono especially has been socially active, in recent years he has been working for the Jubilee 2000 movement, renamed Drop the Debt in 2001. The goal of the

organisation is to get debts of the poorest 52 countries cancelled so that the nations could restore their economy and social system. Most of these countries are in the continent of Africa. Jubilee 2000 was based on the Biblical idea found in the Book of Leviticus. According to Leviticus (25:8-10), one of the regulations God gave to Moses was that every 49 year is a Year of Restoration, when debts should be forgotten and slaves should be set free.

To promote the cause of the poorer nations Bono has founded DATA (Debt, AIDS, Trade in Africa), which provides short-term economic aid, lowered trade embargoes and money to fight AIDS, in return for democracy, accountability and transparency in governments across that continent (Africa)” (Tyranziel 2002:54). This work, which is generally referred to as Debt Relief, is based mainly in the USA, which as the world power has a central role in the debt cancellation of the poorer nations.

In a net interview made by Anthony DeCurtis in February 2001, Bono talks about the failings of the Christian church in promoting the idea of equality and the current challenge of Christianity regarding to the Debt Relief:

Now, for all its failings and its perversions over the last 2,000 years-- and as much as every exponent of this faith has attempted to dodge this idea-- it is unarguably the central tenet of Christianity: that everybody is equal in God's eyes. So you cannot, as a Christian, walk away from Africa. America will be judged by God if, in its plenty, it crosses the road from 23 million people suffering from HIV, the leprosy of the day. What's up on trial here is Christianity itself. You cannot walk away from this and call yourself a Christian and sit in power. Distance does not decide who is your brother and who is not. The church is going to have to become the conscience of the free market if it's to have any meaning in this world-- and stop being its apologist.

These are hard words, but the approach of Debt Relief has not been emotional but rational. The cause of the poorer nations is promoted rather as “a financial and security issue for America” (Tyranziel 2002:54), and whether God judges America is not the issue here but the social justice felt to be at the core of Christian faith. This connection can be found in most of the lyrics analysed in this chapter. Christian system of faith is not seen untouchable by greed and human perversion, but there is demand to put Christian faith into action and not to leave it on the level of mere system of beliefs, or an excuse for pursuing ones own good at the expense of others.

'Bullet the Blue Sky' is rooted in social justice, but the threatening atmosphere has almost apocalyptic dimension to it. The only clear reference to Revelations in the Second Era seems to be in 'One Tree Hill' (*JT*). Maybe another song, 'All Along the Watchtower' (*RH*) contains apocalyptic ideas: "There are many 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". But this song is written by Bob Dylan and not U2. Bob Dylan, though, has included clear Christian messages in many of his lyrics, and it is obvious that the song has not ended up on the record by accident.

'One Tree Hill' (*JT* 1987) is a song dedicated to Gregg Carroll, Bono's personal assistant, who died in a motor cycle accident in 1986. "I'll see you again when the stars fall from the sky/ And the moon has turned red over One Tree Hill", refers to the idea of life after death, but in this the meeting of the friend is placed in the end of the world as suggested by the apocalyptic omens of falling stars and red moon, and not after the writer's own death. This obviously refers to the Christian belief in resurrection at the time of Jesus' return. It is possible to claim that the writer of the lyrics is expecting a quick return of Jesus. Basically the Christian belief does not hold the view that people are put aside as if sleeping before the end of the world and resurrection, but that the person who has died knows whether he is in heaven or hell. Also, it is generally believed that after death the deceased is going to meet the relatives and friends passed away before him/her – expecting, of course, that they are in the same "place". If the writer expects to see his friend at the end of the world, he does not expect himself to die before the resurrection and therefore would expect the second coming of Christ to take place within his lifetime. But there is of course the possibility that the writer has chosen his words only to create a more poetical impact.

Faith in the Second Era is, as we have seen, intertwined with social and political issues, even to the extent that the typical U2 love songs mixing the sexual and the spiritual dimensions are left in a minority. There are, though, some songs with both spiritual and sexual elements, and it is these that I will look into next.

## 5.2. Love

The love songs that contain clear Christian reference are rather scarce in the Second Era; there are more of them than in the First Era but less than in the third. ‘I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For’ contains several metaphors, which can be understood either as imagery belonging to Christian belief or imagery already belonging to the general storage of love songs: fire, desire, honey and healing. “Tongue of angels” and “hand of the devil” are more obvious in their spiritual content, but still can be interpreted as sexual imagery. Fire and desire refer to either spiritual uplift or sexual desire. “I have kissed honey lips” seems only sexual, containing no spiritual reference, but honey appears in Song of Songs (4:11) to praise the taste of the lips and tongue of the bride. As argued before, Song of Songs is inherently sexual, but still has been interpreted as metaphor for the love God feels for his people. Tongue of angels and hand of devil could refer to the happiness and suffering of love, respectively. Tongue of angels in Christianity is speaking in tongues (glossalalia), but sexually it might refer to orgasm or sexual satisfaction in other senses. In the context of a love song the highest mountains are trials that the lover meets on the way to his loved one, but mountain is also an important Biblical image – not surprising considering the geographical situation of Israel. In the Old Testament there are over 150 references to the word “mountain”. In the Psalms, for example, King David puts his faith in God: “He is the God who makes me strong, who makes my pathway safe. He makes me sure-footed as a deer; he keeps me safe on the mountains (Psalm 18:32-33, GNB; KJ has “high places”).

The title track of *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984) is another love song with the Biblical image of mountain. There is an echo both from the Psalms and the book of Isaiah: “And if the mountains should crumble/ or disappear into the sea.” The passage in the Psalms (46:2, GNB) goes: “So we will not be afraid, even if the earth is shaken and mountains fall into the ocean depths”. Isaiah (54:10, GNB), for its part, reads: “The mountains and hills may crumble, but my love for you will never end; I will keep for ever my promise of peace.”

Even though not clearly a love song, 'Bad' (*UF* 1984) could be seen as some kind of continuation of 'Surrender' in *War* (1983). In the lyrics a drug addict (Bowler 1993:172) is seeking a way out:

If you twist and turn away  
 If you tear yourself in two again  
 If I could, yes I would  
 If I could, I would  
 Let it go  
 Surrender  
 Dislocate

If I could throw this  
 Lifeless lifeline to the wind  
 Leave this heart of clay  
 See you walk, walk away  
 Into the night  
 And through the rain  
 Into the half-light  
 And through the flame

"Heart of clay", "flame", "spirit" and "light" could be seen as having spiritual connotations. In the Bible a human being is compared to clay (Job 10:9, 33:6, Isaiah 64:8, Jer 18:6). Clay is the material of which human being is made, this, of course, metaphorically. Clay connotes either weakness and ephemeral human life; or then plasticity and changeability of human heart or soul: "We are like clay, and you are like the potter" (Isaiah 64:8, GNB). In the lyrics of 'Bad', it is likely that "heart of clay" connotes weakness; it is dry and lifeless like the lifeline left behind. There is a wish for a new beginning – or then for death, if heart of clay is understood as metonymy of the whole body of a human being. The heart was seen as the container of the human spirit and life force before the scientific development made head and brain the centre of human body.

To whom the personal pronouns refer to is unclear, there seems to be two persons in the song. It might be that there are two sides of that person, good and bad, as the beginning of the song suggests: "if you could tear yourself in two again". The problem is that at some points of the song "you" seems to be passive construction and at others it could refer to another person than the "I". There might



be someone trying to help the drug addict. What, for example, is the meaning of the lines:

If I could throw myself  
Set your spirit free  
I'd lead your heart away  
See you break, break away  
Into the light  
And to the day

Whose spirit is to be set free? It is not “my” spirit, but it is “your” spirit. There is a possibility that it is God’s spirit, but it might as well be that the “I” is not the drug addict but a friend who wants to help, “lead your heart away”.

There is a line later: “This Desperation/ Dislocation/ Separation/ Condemnation/ Revelation/ In temptation/ Isolation/ Desolation”. Dislocation, separation, condemnation, and isolation all point to someone taken apart from connection with other people. Desperation and desolation are the consequences of separation. As the song is on drug addiction, they can be seen as the results of that addiction. The name of the song is ambiguous in this respect: Is the person bad? Does s/he feel bad? Does s/he feel s/he is bad? Or is s/he seen as bad by others? Temptation and condemnation go together, condemnation is a result from giving in to temptation, and condemnation leads to isolation. The drug addict is condemned by other people, separated from them. Condemnation in the Christian sense is separation from God in the same way as condemnation by people is separation from others. Revelation is harder to connect to the context; it might be that the drug addict has woken up to the reality of the addiction. The song ends: “I’m wide awake/ I’m wide awake/ Wide awake/ I’m not sleeping, oh no, no, no”. Is “awake” just awake in the sense of not sleeping, or is it being spiritually awake? If the “I” in the song is not only the imaginative “I”, but contains feelings of the writer, Bono, as a rock star trying to connect with his audience, there may be more spiritual meaning to the words “I’m wide awake” and “Revelation”. “Surrender” in the song could mean surrendering oneself to drugs or to an audience, or surrendering in a spiritual sense.

'Indian Summer Sky' follows 'Bad' and contains the lines "If I could, I would" again. The song ends:

To lose along the way  
The spark that set the flame  
To flicker and to fade  
On this the longest day

So wind blow through to my heart  
So wind blow through my soul  
(repeated about four times)

You give yourself to this the longest day  
You give yourself  
You give it all away

The spark that set the flame could be an initiation of a love affair, and that love is now about to fade. But this is a reference to fire among many other references in U2 lyrics, it is possible that it is spiritual fire that the writer/"I" is afraid of losing. Also, wind cannot be wind as a natural phenomenon: could such a wind blow through heart and soul? Soul is a concept that connects the image of wind to phenomenon outside the world understood as physical. Wind here could be a rush of emotion, for example a feeling of relief and purity. Still, wind is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit in the Bible (John 3:8).

When it comes to giving oneself away, the 'Indian Summer Sky' is much like 'Bad'. The same theme appears in 'With or Without You' in *The Joshua Tree* (1987) as well: "And you give yourself away/ And you give yourself away/ And you give/..." This can, once again, be interpreted either as giving oneself to the audience, revealing oneself in a personal way, or giving oneself to God, or to another person.

'Love Rescue Me' (*RH* 1988) is written together by Bono and Bob Dylan, and refers to the Psalm 23 (verse 4, KJ): "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow/ Yet I will fear no evil". The Psalm has "valley of the shadow of death", of which the death is left out in the lyrics. The song continues: "I have cursed thy rod and staff/ They no longer comfort me/ Love rescue me". This is different from the original passage in the Bible, which continues assuring: "for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me". (There is, of course, no "love rescue me" in the

Bible.) The change is probably to create ironic effect or to confess lack of faith. The love that is asked for rescue could be love in three senses: love as emotion, love as a woman/lover as synonym for honey or baby, and God as love. “Love rescue me/ Come forth and speak to me/ Raise me up and don’t let me fall” has a somewhat Biblical tone to it, resembling the language of the Psalms. There is same kind of hope for a new future as in ‘Bad’, but ‘Love Rescue Me’ is more assuring. ‘I’m here without a name in the palace of my shame” changes in the end to:

I’ve conquered my past  
 The future is here at last  
 I stand at the entrance  
 To a new world I can see  
 The ruins to the right of me  
 Will soon have lost sight of me  
 Love rescue me

‘Wire’ (*UF*) possibly has a faint echo from the bed time prayer “Now I lay me down to sleep/ Pray The Lord my soul to keep/ If I die before I wake/ Pray The Lord my soul to take” in the lines “So lay me down/ My soul to give/ So lay me down/ The longest sleep”. ‘Wire’ is a love song and a rather cruel one, and the sexual impression overruns the spiritual. This time heart is not clay but stone, and cold. The lyrics raise an impression of the problems of keeping the love alive, and the suffering and friction caused by hopes and fears in a relationship. The song ends:

I give you hope  
 Here’s the rope  
 Here’s the rope  
 Now... swing away!

There are several other love songs in the Second Era where Christian images appear but which do not have actually a Christian theme. ‘Desire’ and ‘Hawkmoon 269’ (both in *RH* 1988) both have a preacher as an image. In ‘Desire’ a rock star and a preacher are compared: “I’m like a preacher/ Stealing hearts at a travelling show”. A rock star stands in front of people and above them, the same physical position as a preacher usually has in a congregation. Like rock stars, some preachers, go on “tours”, delivering their speech in many places. In ‘Hawkmoon 269’ there is a long

list of comparisons, one of which is “Like the preacher needs pain/ Like tongues of flame/ Like a blind man’s cane/... I need your love”. The first line probably suggests, in addition to the need of love, that a preacher might not reach his listeners if they did not have suffering in their lives, or possibly that preachers have their position because they have the knowledge of the weaknesses, the pain, of the people they are talking to.

In *The Joshua Tree* (1987) appears the cliché of a woman as an “angel or devil” in ‘A Trip Through Your Wires’, and in *Rattle and Hum* (1988) ‘Angel of Harlem’ describes Billie Holiday, to whom the song is dedicated, as “An angel in devil’s shoes”. As Billie Holiday was a famous blues singer “Salvation in the blues” probably does not mean that blues saves souls but another kind of salvation: the healing power of music, or the enjoyment of it.

The Second Era is richer in straight spiritual references, the theme of faith, than it is in love songs mixing the sexual and the spiritual. The next, the Third Era, takes a completely new direction. The social and political dimension of faith is still there, but falls in to the background when the personal, both in love and faith, takes ground. *Achtung Baby*, the first record of the Third Era, concentrates totally on love songs, and *Zooropa* and *Pop* seem to reassess faith.

## **6. THE THIRD ERA: ACHTUNG BABY, ZOOROPA AND POP**

### **6.1. Faith**

There is a clear difference in the musical style and outer appearance of U2 between the second and the Third Era. All the records of the Third Era, *Achtung Baby* (1991), *Zooropa* (1993) and *Pop* (1997) use colourful art on their covers, compared to the black and white pictures of *The Joshua Tree* (1987) and *Rattle and Hum* (1988). *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984) is a transitional form: the photograph on the cover is black and white, but red and gold is used otherwise. It is notable that *All That You Can’t Leave Behind* (2000), discussed in the next

chapter, also has a black and white photography and sleeve design. This suggests that the band is “going back to their roots”.

Although the artwork on the covers of *AB*, *Zooropa* and *Pop* is colourful and complicated in a post-modern way, the lyrics need not be seen as superficial. For example, *Pop* (1997) is designed to look as if the record celebrated kitsch and consumerism, but the lyrics of the songs bring out deep spiritual and personal themes. The search for contact with God and Jesus, and the fear of losing it seem to be major themes. *AB* (1991) and *Zooropa* (1993) seem to have the same kind of feel of loss, and guilt.

One of the themes of this era is the difference between religion and faith/belief (in the context of Christianity). In *Zooropa* (1993) ‘Wanderer’, a song written for Johnny Cash, presents the church almost as opposite to God:

I stopped outside a church house  
Where the citizens like to sit  
They say they want the kingdom  
But they don't want God in it

At this point it is necessary to remind the reader of Bono's definition of religion and its difference compared to Jesus (Cook 1982:28), as already quoted in the introduction of this thesis:

Yes. I have this hunger in me. Everywhere I look I see the evidence of a creator. I don't see it as religion, which has cut my people in two. I don't see Jesus Christ as being in any part of religion. Religion to me is almost like when God leaves – and then people devise a set of rules to fill the space.

This is not an unbiblical idea, since in the Old Testament in Isaiah 29:13 God rebukes the Israelites (GNB): “These people claim to worship me, but their words are meaningless, and their hearts are somewhere else. Their religion is nothing but human rules and traditions, which they have simply memorized.” Jesus and religion are often seen as opposites. This idea is not far away from the view of the ‘T’ in ‘Wanderer’ since later in the song Jesus is put in contrast with the church:

I went out searching, lookin' for one good man  
A spirit who would not bend or break  
Who would sit at his father's right hand

The word “Jesus” does not appear until five lines later, in the latter part of the lyrics, but hints are given that point to him. According to the Bible, after his resurrection Jesus took his place on the right side of his father, God (Mark 16:19). The line “A spirit who would not bend or break” allows two different interpretations: either the spirit itself will not break, or the spirit will not bend or break something else. According to Isaiah’s (42:3, quoted also in Matt 12:20) prophesy of the forthcoming Messiah “He will not break off a bent reed/ or put out a flickering lamp”. Both verbs, bend and break, are included, bend as a past participle. Also “A lone good man” connects to Jesus: he never committed a sin and was the only one in the human race in this regard.

The position of the **AI**’ in the song is intriguing:

I went out walking with a Bible and a gun  
 The word of God lay heavy on my heart  
 I was sure I was the one  
 Now Jesus, don’t you wait up  
 Jesus, I’ll be home soon  
 Yeah I went out for the papers  
 Told her I’d be back by noon

“A Bible and a gun” associates with fundamentalism; extreme religious views may lead into conflict, or are used as an excuse for creating one. This may also refer to the situation in Northern Ireland:

I went drifting  
 Through the capitals of tin  
 Where men can’t walk  
 Or freely talk  
 And sons turn their fathers in

“Sons turn their fathers in” may refer to religious division in a family, or in general. In the Bible, Jesus speaks about the persecutions that will come to those who follow him (Matt 10:21, GNB, also Mark 13:12): “Men will hand over their own brothers to be put to death, and fathers will do the same to their children; children will turn against their parents and have them put to death.” “The capitals of tin” creates an impression that this is ordinary life everywhere, the general human condition. There is

a reference to heaven, or to the New Jerusalem, in the song; “the streets paved with gold” resembles Revelations 21:18: “the city itself was made of pure gold”, and 21:21: “The street of the city was of pure gold”. “I passed by a thousand signs/ Looking for my own name” may refer to Revelations as well, in Rev 2:17 “those who win”, obviously the ones who are saved, will receive a new name written in a white stone. Looking for a name may also mean that the “I” has no home, is spiritually homeless. The description of the place could go with the more or less imaginary city “under an atomic sky”, and as the “I” finds “a city without a soul” under the streets paved with gold, it is probably not heaven in question but a perverted version of it. And, considering the world situation, this perverted version can be just another city today, or in the future.

“I was sure I was the one” suggests that the “I” thinks he is Jesus, or someone like him, a chosen one. He might have mental problems or then everything is mere imagination, thoughts when he is going out like every day in his life. Whatever the mental state of the “I” in the song is, he is looking for Jesus and only stops outside the church house. Jesus is clearly set as opposite to the church: in ‘Wanderer’ the physical church seems to be just a place, full of people but empty of God, and Jesus is to be looked for somewhere else than inside the church house.

Against this background it is easier to understand the line “I have no religion” in the title track, and opening song, of *Zooropa* (1993). The same kind of idea of church and religion being inadequate appears in *AB* (1991), in ‘Acrobat’: “Yeah I’d break bread and wine/ If there was a church I could receive in/ Cos I need it now”. The writer still needs the communion, but has trouble finding a place where he would feel comfortable taking it. The lines might also mirror Bono’s mixed religious identity between the Catholic and Protestant church. ‘Some Days Are Better Than Others’ (*Zooropa*) also points to this fact, Bono is “lookin’ for Jesus and His mother”. Jesus’ mother Mary is not central in Protestant churches, but in the Catholic Church Mary is an important character to whom people can pray and ask to be a mediator between themselves and God. Interestingly, if the lines are quoted wholly – “Some days you feel like a bit of a baby/ Lookin’ for Jesus and his mother” – the word “baby” creates

other associations. This can be an expression of childish behaviour or feeling, but there is also a Biblical basis for calling oneself a baby or child. In the Bible one of God's titles is Father and God addresses his people as children several times. Already in the Old Testament, in Isaiah 45:11, God says: "You have no right to question me about my children", children meaning the Israelites. In the New Testament this idea is brought further. It is no longer only the Israelites that are God's children; it is now everyone believing in Jesus Christ (Rom 8:14, Gal 3:26-28). In the Romans (8:15, GNB) the relation of God as Father and the Christians as children is made clear: "For the Spirit that God has given you does not make you slaves and cause you to be afraid; instead, the Spirit makes you God's children, and by the Spirit's power we cry out to God, 'Father! My Father!'"

Disregarding the feminine side of God may be connected to the want for Mary in the Catholic Church. In the modern western culture it is easier to associate to the mother than to father when one feels like a baby, and maybe it is because of this that it is Jesus and his mother that are looked for in the lyrics and not Jesus and his father.

'Wake up Dead Man' in *Pop* (1997) is a characteristically Protestant song as it looks for help from Jesus and asks him to act as a mediator:

Jesus, I'm waiting here boss  
I know you're looking out for us  
but maybe your hands aren't free  
your Father, he made the world in seven  
He's in charge of heaven  
will you put a word in for me

God is seen as father, and rather as father of Jesus. "He made the world in seven" refers to Genesis (2:2-3), according to which God created the world in seven days. Jesus is seen as a mediator; the "I" approaches God in his name (John 14:6). This is the core concept of Christianity: Jesus is the son of God who was sacrificed for the sins of humankind and because of this God can be approached without offering any sacrifices but confiding in Jesus. In 'Wake up Dead Man' Jesus is talked to in at least three stanzas (1, 2 and 4), but it is unclear who is addressed in the third stanza, maybe it is still Jesus. Or is it Jesus speaking now: "Listen to your words they'll tell



you what to do/ listen over the rhythm that's confusing you...”?

In ‘Mofo’ (short for “motherfucker”) (*Pop* 1997) the three lines I quoted in the introduction of this thesis bring out the need to look for assurance for salvation: “Lookin’ for to save my save my soul/ lookin’ in the places where no flowers grow/ lookin’ for to fill that GOD shaped hole”. The Catholic Church teaches of salvation differently from the Protestant churches. Protestant faith teaches that salvation comes true at the moment of turning to faith and is not lost if the person him/herself does not let go of the faith. In the dogma of the Catholic Church salvation is less certain (see page 21). Maybe there is this conflict between Catholic and Protestant faith going on in the mind of the writer, or then it is simply just uncertainty that any Christian would feel sometimes.

As well as in ‘God Part II’ (*RH* 1988) in the Second Era, the gap between rock life and Christianity appears in ‘Mofo’: “Got the swing got the sway got my straw in lemonade/ still looking for the face I had before the world was made”. “Straw in lemonade” is the excess and success of rock life, the life of a celebrity. The face is juxtaposed with the swing and sway of rock life, which “lookin’ for baby Jesus under the trash” suggests as well. In the beginning of his gospel John writes about “the Word” that existed before creation. In Christian literature, the Word, Greek “logos”, is interpreted as either God’s word that called creation into being, or Jesus’ personal pre-existence (New Dictionary of Theology). I do not suggest that the writer of the lyrics thinks he is Jesus but that there seems to be a belief that everything existed, maybe as God’s thought, before it came into physical being. Perhaps the thought is that the face that existed before the world was made is not distorted by sin.

‘Gone’ (*Pop* 1997) is another song with guilt for earthly success as it begins: “you get to feel so guilty got so much for so little”. A little later there is a line “You change your name but that’s okay/ it’s necessary/ and what you leave behind you don’t miss anyway”. Bono changed his original name Paul Hewson to Bono Vox, and what was left behind was the everyday life before rock stardom. The line close to the end of ‘Gone’ – “what you thought was freedom was just greed” – probably comments on the gap between rock life and spiritual life: what was thought as mere irony and

experimentation was actually greed for the thing itself, rock life and all it could provide.

‘Fly’ in *Achtung Baby* (1991) has something similar in regard to matters of conscience: **A**It’s no secret that a conscience can sometimes be a pest’. ‘Acrobat’, also in *AB*, recognises the difference between words and actions: **A**And I must be/ An acrobat/ To talk like this/ And act like that’. This is presented in the context of a love song, but it could be understood as personal or human condition in general. ‘The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak’, as the Bible puts it (Matt 26:41, GNB, also Mark 14:38). ‘Acrobat’ points to where the enemy comes from:

Don’t believe what you hear  
 Don’t believe what you see  
 If you just close your eyes  
 You can feel the enemy

The enemy is the person herself (“When I first met you girl” proves that it is a female that is addressed to), or if “you” is used as a passive construction, the enemy is the generic self. Another, worse, interpretation could be the devil.

‘The Fly’ ends:

Oh yeah  
 It’s no secret that the stars are falling from the sky  
 The universe exploding ‘cosa one man’s lie  
 Look I gotta go  
 Yeah I’m running outta change  
 There’s a lot of things  
 If I could I’d rearrange

In *NME* (Bailie, June 1992:14) Bono commented on ‘The Fly’ that “The way I saw ‘The Fly’ was like an obscene phone call from hell, but the guy likes it there”. I wonder if this hell could be understood as the world we live in, as well. The beginning of ‘The Fly’ has a common line with the last stanza: “It’s no secret that the stars are falling from the sky”. The next two lines are: “It’s no secret our world is in darkness tonight/ They say the sun is sometimes eclipsed by a moon”. Falling stars, darkness and eclipse of the sun all have apocalyptic associations. That the sun is eclipsed by a and not the moon, though, gives an impression that the place is not the world as we

know it but someplace else, like another planet – or the already mentioned hell. ‘The Fly’ could be called some kind of science fiction gospel: even ‘the universe’ is “exploding ‘cosa one man’s lie’”. In NME (Bailie, June 1992:14), when the interviewer asks if the line is a reference to Original Sin, Bono answers that “We were going to call the album ‘Adam’, and that’s why we shot Adam in all his glory”. “Adam in all his glory” refers to the nude pose of Adam Clayton on the cover sleeve of *Achtung Baby*. So it is obviously Adam of the Genesis and the Original Sin that the line refers to – if the answer is not a joke.

In the Third Era the general theme of guilt connects with consumerism. Rock is associated with excess, success and over-consumption. Consumerism is commented on in *Zooropa* (1993) and *Pop* (1997). *Pop* possibly comments on the modern Irish society in 1990s, as it was released in 1997, at the time of the economical boom in Ireland. In ‘The Playboy Mansion’ banks are like cathedrals, and in ‘Last Night on Earth’ someone is living, not surprisingly, as if it was the last night on earth. ‘Lookin’ for baby Jesus under the trash’ could also refer to this; under the cover of trash there is still something more deep and valuable.

The title song of *Zooropa* (1993) starts with the question “(what do you want?)” repeated twice and continues with a list of lines taken from TV commercials and advertisements. There is a line in German, which is translated in parentheses “(a step ahead through technology)”. Later there is the line: “Through appliance of science/ We’ve got that ring of confidence”. The lyrics continue:

And I have no compass  
 And I have no map  
 And I have no reasons  
 No reasons to get back

And I have no religion  
 And I don’t know what’s what  
 And I don’t know the limit  
 The limit of what we’ve got

There seems to be a void between the commercial lines and the view of the “I” in the song. The confidence and sense of direction that science and technique bring is opposed to the “I’s” not having either a compass or a map. The “I”, though, does not

seem to have any intentions to go back either, so maybe he is content with the present situation. It seems that the ‘I’ is in between, has no direction or certain knowledge. Not knowing “what’s what” could be confusion or numbness caused by the post-modern world, or rock life. Edge’s lyrics in ‘Numb’ (*Zooropa*) deal with the same issue.

The already mentioned ‘I have no religion’ is particularly intriguing in the context of ‘not knowing what’s what’. The writer/‘I’ seems to have lost faith. But knowing the writer’s negative view over organised religion, it could be a reference to the number of dogmatic differences among Christian churches. The writer may also be implying that not everything needs to be known: “Uncertainty can be a guiding light”. The interpretation of the ‘I’ not counting on the all-capable power of science and technology is also backed up by this line. Limit might refer to either the limits of the human race or the limits of the band – its gift being song writing – suggesting there is no limit to the human knowledge and there is no limit to the musical expression. In the Old Testament there is the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9; GNB has “Tower of Babylon”). It describes how the people of the whole world had one language and decided to build a city with a tower that reaches the sky. God saw that “and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do” (Genesis 11:6, KJ), and therefore God mixed the languages of people and scattered them all over the world. Perhaps ‘Zooropa’ echoes the voices of modern “Babylon”.

‘If God Will Send His Angels’ is set in Christmas time, and the Christmas is not a happy one. The person in the song does not see evidence of God; he has become doubtful for the question of suffering in the world. What he sees is just “the cops collecting for the cons” and he asks: “So where is the hope and where is the faith... and the love?” It is unclear if the person has lost faith or if he is just disappointed at the world. In the end he says: ‘Jesus never let me down you know Jesus used to show me the score/then they put Jesus in show business now it’s hard to get in the door’. Bono has often criticised American TV preachers and money earning by religion. This line may fill the same purpose as Bono’s comment ‘But the God I believe in isn’t in need of cash, mister!’, spoken in between ‘Bullet the Blue Sky’ in

the Joshua Tree tour 1997-1998 (*RH* 1988, the album and the film). The song can also be seen as criticism of the consumerism of Christmas. Jesus has been turned into a plastic figure standing in a shop window with the Father Christmas who does not have anything to do with Christ's birthday.

The second stanza of 'If God Will Send His Angels' goes:

God has got his phone off the hook babe would he even pick up if he could?  
it's been a while since we saw that child hangin' 'round this neighbourhood  
see His mother dealing in a doorway see Father Christmas with a begging bowl  
Jesus sister's eyes are a blister... THE HIGH STREET never looked so low

"That child" is probably Jesus, because it is Christmas time and God is mentioned. It is as if "that child" referred back to God, which creates an impression that God and "that child" are the same person. Though, "that" may be added in the lyrics only as it appears in spoken language. The connection between God and Jesus is described in the Bible by Jesus' words (John 12:44-45, GNB): "Whoever believes in me believes not only in me but also in him who sent me. Whoever sees me sees also him who sent me." Both God and Jesus are missing from the picture of the neighbourhood and the High Street. What is left is Mary, the eternal virgin in Catholic faith, trying to earn her living as a whore, and Father Christmas begging in the street corner. The whole stanza is easy to understand as a metaphor for the increase of secular and material values against the decrease of Christian values symbolised here by God, Jesus and Mary. Father Christmas, who is associated with giving and not taking, and a nun, who has lost her sight for helping others, add to this impression. The high-low axis comes clear in the High Street looking low. There may be no particular reason why the High Street is written in capitals, since there are some other random lines capitalised in the cover sleeve lyrics as well, but capitals are usually used for emphasis. Both Mary and Father Christmas have been lowered into a position with very low social status. High Street is only a name, the life there are low": people and their dignity are sold just as goods are.

In 'The Playboy Mansion' the consumer heaven runs ironically parallel to the Christian concept of heaven. 'Playboy Mansion' starts:

If coke is a mystery  
 and michael jackson... history  
 if beauty is truth  
 and surgery the fountain of youth

what am I to do  
 have I got the gifts to get me through  
 the gates of that mansion

Later in the song talk shows are confession, banks are like cathedrals and “chance is a kind of religion/where you’re damned for plain hard luck”. This is probably a reference to casinos, TV quiz or stock markets. The modern secular life and mass media culture seem to have taken the place of the Christian values, and Coke has replaced religious mystery; Michael Jackson replaces Jesus as historical figure; instead of inner truth people seek for outer beauty; instead of eternal life through faith people look for fountain of youth through plastic surgery.

Playboy mansion is associated with soft-core pornography; it refers to the Hugh Hefner’s Playboy Empire. Maybe ‘The Playboy Mansion’ has similar themes as ‘If God Will Send His Angels’: when people “buy” the consumerism culture and consent to the models of life it offers they at the same time sell themselves, sell their dignity. Pornography makes sexuality a commodity, “almost dehumanizes it”, to quote the words of The Edge on “the Playboy ideal” in the interview by the Guitar World (Graff 1997:170). Instead of their place in heaven people worry about their status in the right social circles, symbolised in the lyrics by the playboy mansion. Playboy mansion is a substitute for heaven; to get there people even have to pass through gates: “It’s who you know that gets you through/ the gates of the playboy mansion”. This may not be suggested by the lyrics, but it is who you know that gets you through the gates of the heaven as well, namely Jesus. The lines “though I can’t say why/ I know I’ve got to believe” can be interpreted in this two-dimensional way as well: is it the belief of the gambler, or is it belief in the Christian sense?

The impression of the Playboy mansion as a commercial substitute for heaven is most clear in the last stanza of the song. It echoes from the Book of Revelations (7:17, 21:4, also Isaiah 60:20), as seen by comparing the following passages; the first is from ‘Playboy Mansion’, the second from the Bible (Rev 21:4, KJ):

then will there be no time of sorrow  
 then will there be no time for pain  
 then will there be no time of sorrow  
 then will there be no time for shame

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

The name of the song 'If God Will Send His Angels' and its refrain

HEy IF GOD WILL SEND HIS ANGELS  
 AND IF GOD WILL SEND A SIGN  
 WELL IF GOD WILL SEND HIS ANGELS  
 WHERE DO WE GO?

could be a reference to Revelations as well, as pointed out by Hannu Natri in a publication of U2 Finland – an organised group of U2 fans in Finland – *Pop Mart and Other Lovey Dovey Stuff* (Ekblad 1997:112). In the Bible the passage reads (Matt 24:30-31, GNB): “Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky (...) The great trumpet will sound, and he will send out his angels to the four corners of the earth, and they will gather his chosen people from one end of the world to the other.” The atmosphere in the song is sad, not much hope is seen and the coming of angels might not be good. Would the person in question be taken or left?

NME refers to 'Fly' in *Achtung Baby* (1991) as “the key song in U2's current 'Paradise Lost' era” (Baillie, March 1992:24). The whole third era could be put under this title: Paradise Lost. In *AB* there is Judas and his destiny ('Until the End of the world'); Original Sin and apocalyptic omens (both in 'Fly'). In *Zooropa* the "T" runs away from his brother Jesus and throws away the key he got to his father's, i.e. God's, kingdom. Even though in the lyrics of 'Wake up Dead Man' there is clearly belief in the existence of the one to whom the **AI** – possibly and quite certainly the writer of the song – is praying, there is fear that Jesus might not have time for his problems, that Jesus' hands are not free to help him. In 'Staring at the Sun' the same doubtful question is in the form "God is good but will he listen". This might, though, refer more to the religion used as a badge to recognise the two sides of the conflict in Northern Ireland than to any personal faith as the two lines before the question go

“intransigence is all around... military still in town/ armour plated suits and ties... daddy just won't say goodbye”. The ending of ‘Wake up Dead Man’ seems to be asking for a second chance in life: “If there's an order in all of this disorder/is it like a tape recorder?/ can we rewind it just once more”. It seems that even though the person doubts God/Jesus, even challenges the Creator/Jesus, in the end he is again questioning himself, asking if there is something he should do differently in his life.

The Third Era is abundant with spiritual references, even though they are often “subliminal”, i.e. not obvious, especially in the case of *Achtung Baby* (1991). *Pop* (1997) is more straightforward with its spiritual content, except for the love songs. Love songs with spiritual content, though, appear in the Third Era to greater extent than in any other eras.

## 6.2. Love

When asked about the possible unified point of view in *Achtung Baby*, Bono explains that what unifies the record is that all the songs are love songs – “even if they are fucked up love songs” (Baillie, June 1992:14). A few lines later he continues:

I think we're supposed to choose between the flesh and the spirit, when we're... both. I think rock'n'roll has more contradictions than any other art form. Whether it's between art and commerce, idealism and nihilism, it goes on and on. And the flesh versus the spirit is one of those contradictions.

In this light ‘Mysterious Ways’ is something different than just another love song, which is what it looks like when seen/heard for the first time. The last stanza goes:



It's alright... it's alright... It's alright  
 She moves in mysterious ways  
 It's alright... it's alright... It's alright  
 We move through miracle days  
 Spirit moves in mysterious ways  
 She moves with it  
 She moves with it  
 Lift my days and light up my nights

It is first “she” who moves in mysterious ways, but two lines later it is “Spirit”. It cannot be said whether Spirit is written with a capital letter only because it is in the beginning of a line or if it would be written in capital otherwise as well. In that case it would be certain that it is a personal spirit, the Holy Spirit. Also, The Holy Spirit is sometimes seen as the feminine part of the Holy Trinity, and in the lyrics the “she”, the woman of the song, and the “Spirit” are interrelated. “She moves with it”, “it” being the Spirit. The previous, second last stanza contains mysterious ideas:

One day you'll look back  
 And you'll see  
 Where  
 You were held now  
 By this love  
 While  
 You could stand  
 There  
 And not move on this moment  
 Follow this feeling

It seems that the lover cannot understand the situation he is in before a long time has passed. It is possible that there is a hint of spiritual guidance in the song, to being lead by the Spirit – who would have not heard that “the ways of the Lord are mysterious”? One day the person will be looking back in time and understand “where he was held”; the reason why things were like they were, or what would have happened if they had not been as they were. The idea is similar to the lines “What you don't have you don't need it now/ What you don't know you can feel it somehow” in ‘Beautiful Day’ in *ATYCLB* (2000). Both put weight on the feeling, something that is seen as an unreliable basis for making decisions in modern day life. Feeling is also seen as something not quite tangible, as opposed to reason, just as soul and body, spirit and flesh are seen opposed to each other. The trend in modern

thinking and science has long been the one of reason and body: biology is seen as the major motivator in life and its proceedings. Even love is seen as biology. In 'Mysterious Ways' this is not the case, love is not explained: "You've been living underground/ Eating from a can/ You've been running away/ From what you can't understand." And a little later:

Johnny take a dive  
 With your sister in the rain  
 Let her talk about the things  
 You can't explain  
 To touch is to heal  
 To hurt is to steal  
 If you want to kiss the sky  
 Better learn how to kneel... (on your knees boy!)

The scientific world view is one of reason and logic: A is higher than B; but the Biblical world view is one of paradoxes: A seems to be higher than B, but, in fact, B is higher than A. There are many passages in the Bible where Jesus uses a paradox to teach his disciples. For example in the gospel of Mark Jesus says to the disciples who have been arguing who is the greatest of them (Mark 9:35, GNB): "Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all." "If you want to kiss the sky/ Better learn how to kneel" might be sexual in its outer content, it possibly refers to oral sex, but on another level the lines contain a paradox: if you want to get high, you have to get down first. This might also be connected to the idea of first looking for the kingdom of God, and then receiving all the rest in life (Matt 6:33), since kneeling down is a traditional position for praying.

Another song with an unconventional sexual dimension to it in *AB* (1991) is 'One'. Bowler (1993:278) is of the opinion that 'One' is "apparently written as a conversation between a homosexual man dying of AIDS and his father", who does not approve of his son's lifestyle. Even so, it is obvious that the lyrics are ambiguous to the extent that the relationship in the song is far easier to understand as one between man and woman than as one between father and son. Still, there remains a question: does this interpretation rise from the lyrics or is it a result of the fact that love between man and woman is generally seen as the only model for love, and is

thus the kind of love that this song evokes in the mind as well? For example, the second stanza is hard to understand as anything else than a sexual love relationship:

You say  
 One love  
 One life  
 When it's one need  
 In the night  
 It's one love  
 We get to share it  
 It leaves you baby  
 If you don't care for it

The next stanza is more ambiguous:

Did I disappoint you?  
 Or leave a bad taste in your mouth?  
 You act like you never had love  
 And you want me to go without

This is easier to see as a relationship between a son and his father. It is possible to understand the lyrics as a demand for equal recognition for all love, whether it is love between man and woman, two men as lovers, or between father and son. The lyrics also attack hypocrisy:

Have you come here for forgiveness  
 Have you come to raise the dead  
 Have you come here to play Jesus  
 To the lepers in your head

Both of the figures of speech, raising the dead and playing Jesus to lepers in one's head, are Biblical. In the gospel of John (11:38-44), Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, and in Mark (5:35-42) there is a similar story on Jairus' daughter. In Luke (17:12-14) Jesus cures ten lepers. The first metaphor of raising the dead in the lyrics could be interpreted as raising memories of a love affair, but it can also refer to the memories of being a child to a father. The second metaphor, playing Jesus to lepers, can be understood as the son blaming his father for being hypocritical, for seeing him as a leper. His father is trying to "cure" him from homosexuality as Jesus cured the leper. Lepers at the Jesus' time were people who were seen as untouchable, and today people suffering from AIDS, especially homosexuals, are often seen the same

way. Maybe this is what Bono meant with the HIV being the leprosy of the day, in the net interview quoted above (page 44). Also the love between two people of same sex is often seen as something dirty, *Auntouchable*". Maybe in 'One' the father is the *Ayou*" in the next passage:

You say  
 Love is a temple  
 Love a higher law  
 Love is a temple  
 Love the higher law

A temple is a holy place, like a church. In the Bible a temple is also used as metaphor for the human body as the container of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). So, love is seen sacred and holy, and maybe the father sees it as holy matrimony, the only possible and acceptable kind of love. It is a matter of grammar how you understand these lines: it is either "Love is a temple, love (is) the higher law" or "Love is a temple, love the higher law" as a command. It could, of course, be as well that the first two lines are a proposition and the second two a command: "Love is a temple, love is a higher law, love is a temple, love the higher law". In the Biblical sense love is the higher law since it fulfils the law, all laws. In Matthew 22:34-40 (also Mark 12:28-31) the Pharisee asks Jesus which is the greatest commandment in the law. To this Jesus gives the command to love God and other people. Also Bono himself refers to this concept in an interview in December 1988 (Stokes, 1990:140), at the time of *JT* and *RH*, the two previous records before *AB* (1991). He has been talking about punk as a middle-class movement and goes on to anarchists:

Mind you, I'm fascinated by anarchists. In terms of belief they're the only ones, I feel, because I think that the Judaeo/Christian belief in love as the higher law, the spirit leading you and no-one knowing where it goes to - I think that's very close to anarchy. Religion has suppressed this aspect of Christ's teaching about living by the spirit, which is essentially, 'hands-off motherfuckers - this is my life and it's between me and God and no-one else'.

The ending of the song is more positive than the beginning. In the beginning the protagonist is hurt and disappointed, even bitter, but in the end the lyrics address the audience as sisters and brothers, and the song turns into a claim for commonness, the

oneness of humanity in spite of differences:

One love  
 One blood  
 One life  
 You got to do what you should

One life  
 With each other  
 Sisters  
 Brothers

One life  
 But we're not the same  
 We get to carry each other  
 Carry each other

One love, blood and life all point to common origin and connection of all people. "You got to do what you should" remind us of duty, possibly doing the right thing. Sister or brother is a Biblical way of addressing a fellow Christian (for ex, Matt 12:50, Mark 3:33-35, Rom 8:29), and carrying the burden of fellow Christians is advocated in the Bible, as well (Rom 15:1, Gal 6:2). In Luke (15:4, also Matt 18:12) Jesus tells the parable of the shepherd looking for one missing lamb and carrying it back home.

Another two-dimensional love song in *AB* is 'Until the End of the World':

Haven't seen you in quite a while  
 I was down the hold, just passing time  
 Last time we met it was a low-lit room  
 We were as close together as bride and groom  
 We ate the food, we drank the wine  
 Everybody having a good time  
 Except you  
 You were talking about the end of the world

I took the money, I spiked your drink  
 You miss too much these days if you stop to think  
 You led me on with those innocent eyes  
 And you know I love the element of surprise  
 In the garden I was playing the tart  
 I kissed your lips and broke your heart  
 You, you were acting like it was the end of the world

In my dream I was drowning my sorrows  
 But my sorrows they learned to swim  
 Surrounding me, going down on me  
 Spilling over the brim

In waves of regret, waves of joy  
 I reached out for the one I tried to destroy  
 You, you said you'd wait until the end of the world

The first stanza creates the picture of two lovers in a very intimate situation: “low-lit room” and “as close together as a bride and groom” refer to situation where sex is liable to take place. In the second stanza it is as if the one of the lovers is stealing money or otherwise betraying the other, the result being heartbreak. Afterwards the betrayer repents.

Now, if this is interpreted as an ordinary love song, the first thing that comes into mind is that the lovers are a man and a woman and there is a story of relationship ending, “the end of the world”. But if the reader is let know that the lyrics refer to a central Biblical story of Judas betraying Jesus, and are seen through Judas’s eyes (Bowler 1993: 276), what happens? The lyrics work both as a traditional love song and as a different kind of love song producing new connotations.

The song differs from ordinary love lyrics in the way it takes the sexual connotations of such words as “bride”, “innocent eyes” and “tart” usually connected to women into relationship between two men, Jesus and Judas. The last supper is referred to in “We were sitting as close together as bride and groom/ We ate the food, we drank the wine”. According to John 21:20-24, it was John himself who sat closest to Jesus in the table, and asked who was going to betray Jesus. It is not clear where Judas was sitting, but he must have been somewhere close to Jesus, because Jesus shows his betrayer by dipping bread in sauce and giving it to Judas (John 13:21-30). It might be that he was next to Jesus, but even if he was not, it is obvious that the feeling in the last supper was one of closeness and the disciples were close to Jesus in that sense.

The thirty silver coins Judas received for the betrayal of Jesus are referred to in “I took the money/ I spiked your drink.” There is no spiking drink in the Bible, but the line might just refer to the wine drunk in the last supper. This also brings associations to prostitution, taking money for something seen as immoral, or trying to get sex by getting the partner drunk. There are associations with seductive behaviour. “You led

me on with those innocent eyes” puts Jesus in the position of seducer, and shows the classic attitude towards women as the source of sexual power: it is as if the woman/Jesus made the man/Judas do what he did. The parts, though, are changed right after this: “In the garden I was playing the tart/ I kissed your lips and broke your heart”. The sign to show that Jesus was the one to be arrested was a kiss on the mouth. The betrayal took place in the garden of Gethsemane; garden is also a place that is sexually charged for its general use as a scene for sexual encounter in art. This might be due to its connotations to the Garden of Eden and the Original Sin, which has been misunderstood as sex.

The second stanza is a turning point in the lyrics, because after this Jesus is no longer put in the position of a woman: Judas turns into a tart. It is as if both of the men were now women, taking the role of a woman. This leads to homosexual connotations, especially in the last stanza where the waves of regret and joy might be associated with some sort of sexual encounter. Also, drowning sorrows is followed by “Surrounding me, going down on me/ Spilling over the brim”. The order of lines suggests that it is sorrow that is so overwhelming, but if the two lines are associated with what follows it adds up to sexual impression; not to mention the sexual double meaning of “going down on me”. The feelings of both shame and guilt (regret), and enjoyment (joy) are associated with sex, especially some forms of sex, such as oral sex and masturbation. Bowler and Dray in their book *U2, a Conspiracy of Hope* (1993:277) have come to the conclusion that it is definitely sexual encounter that the lyrics describe, and that this reduces the religious dimension of the lyrics. Jesus and sexuality is a sensitive issue but as said before, the lyrics can be interpreted in – at least – two ways, and if the sexual interpretation is kept apart from the religious interpretation, this song needs not imply that there was something sexual between Jesus and Judas. In my opinion, the sexual connotations need not reduce the spiritual dimension.

The title of the song ‘Until the End of the World’ is particularly ambiguous and sets the whole scene. When everybody else is enjoying themselves there is somebody who is not and talks about the end of the world. In the last stanza that

somebody says s/he will wait until the end of the world. If this is a lover, s/he will wait for the other one, in spite of the heartbreak. If it is Jesus, the ending is more gloomy, even threatening: Jesus standing there waiting for Judas who betrayed him. If the lover's role and attitude is carried over to Jesus, there might be a suggestion of Jesus having kind feelings towards Judas. This, of course, is unorthodox thinking, since according to Bible Judas was lost. Even though, does this have to mean that Jesus had no compassion for Judas? The events in the lyrics are central to the concepts of salvation and damnation, the last judgment. As the writer of the song, Bono, puts it when talking of 'Until the End of the World' (Bailie, June 1992:14): "Judas, from whatever way you look at it, is a fascinating creature, because in one sense, by committing his crime, he introduced us to Grace." If Judas had not betrayed Jesus, Jesus would not have been crucified and he would not have carried the sins of the human kind to the cross. Without Judas, Jesus would not have been able to complete his work as the redeemer; making salvation attainable not through law but through grace.

In *Zooropa* (1993) 'The First Time' has a similar spiritual dimension as 'Until the End of the World' in *AB* (1991):

I have a lover  
 A lover like no other  
 She got soul, soul, soul, sweet soul  
 And she teach me how to sing

Shows me colours when there's none to see  
 Gives me hope when I can't believe that  
 For the first time I feel love

I have a brother  
 When I'm a brother in need  
 I spend my whole time running  
 He spends his running after me

When I feel myself goin' down  
 I just call and he comes around  
 But for the first time I feel love

My father is a rich man  
 He wears a rich man's cloak  
 Gave me the keys to his kingdom (coming)  
 Gave me a cup of gold  
 He said "I have many mansions



And there are many rooms to see”  
 But I left by the back door  
 And threw away the key...  
 For the first time  
 For the first time  
 For the first time  
 I feel love

The lyrics can be divided into three parts each of which can be seen as concerning one of the dimensions of the Holy Trinity: the “lover” is the Holy Spirit, the “brother” is Jesus and the “father” is God. The most evidence for this interpretation comes from the last stanza concerning father/God; the first two are more ambiguous. There are several references to Biblical stories. One of them is the parable of the three servants in Matthew 25:14-30 (or ten servants in Luke 19:11-27) who were given gold coins (talents, or pounds, in KJ) and told to do their best with them while the master was away. The “cup of gold” probably refers to this parable. God is often described as a rich man owning property such as Vineyard (Luke 20:9-16 or 18, and Matt 21:33-46, Mk 12:1-12), or a king with his kingdom. The mansions with their rooms remind us of the passage in the Bible in John 14:2: “There are many rooms in my father’s house”. In the same chapter Jesus speaks about the Holy Spirit (John 14:26, GNB; also John 14:16-17, and 15:26): “The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you.” The things the lover does are not described by the verb “help”, but “showing colours” and “giving hope” include the idea of helping. “And she teach me how to sing”, has the verb “teach”, used in the passage to describe the work of the Holy Spirit. The Christian members of U2 believe their musical abilities are a gift from God (Bowler 1993:143), and maybe it is this that the lyrics refer to. As mentioned before, the Holy Spirit is sometimes seen as the feminine part of the Holy Trinity. The mixing of women with God (in this case the Spirit) is apparent here as well, as in many other U2 lyrics.

Jesus is qualified as brother for example in the Romans (8:29). The “I” seems to be running away from his brother, and father as well: “But I left by the back door and threw away the key”. Both running away and throwing away the key have the same

symbolic meaning. This is possibly fear for love, since it is “the first time” the “I” feels love. Another interpretation could be fear of losing faith, or not having enough of it. “How far are you gonna go/ Before you loose your way back home?” in ‘Trying To Throw Your Arms Around The World’ (*AB*) could be interpreted similarly. There might be the question of the limits of a believer, when it is actually too late to turn back?

In ‘So Cruel’ (*AB*), ‘Who’s Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses’ (*AB*), and ‘Stay (Far Away, So Close!)’ (*Zooropa*) women are described as angels, or otherwise heavenly creatures. In ‘So Cruel’ “Her skin is pale like God’s only dove/ Screams like an angel for your love”. “God’s only dove” is a figure of speech, which stands for something very white and pure: it quite obviously refers to the dove, the bodily form of The Holy Spirit, that came down from heaven on Jesus when Jesus was baptised (Matt 3:16, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22, John 1:32). In ‘Who’s Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses’ “The hunter will sin... for your ivory skin...” and there is the exclamation “Halluiah”, followed by “heaven’s white rose”. Hallujah is originally shouted to exalt God; here it connects with the woman. Both ivory and white rose refer to something white, as the dove in ‘So Cruel’, and white is the symbol for purity and innocence. Here, though, the hunter will sin for this white skin. In ‘Stay (Far Away, So Close!)’ “an angel hits the ground”. The angel is probably the woman in the song, who is beaten by her husband or boyfriend: “You say when he hits you, you don’t mind/ Because when he hurts you, you feel alive”. As the woman is – quite a cliché, and not the first time – an angel, she is seen as innocent victim. In ‘Last Night on Earth’ in *Pop* (1997) there is a different kind of woman: “she’s living like it’s the last night on earth” and “she’s not waiting on a saviour to come”. A saviour is obviously an ordinary man, not Jesus, because there is the indefinite article and the first letter of saviour is not written in capitals. The parallelism of the mundane lifestyle of single woman and the apocalyptic waiting of Saviour in the song is quite like the one in ‘The Playboy Mansion’, even if not as strong.

In *Pop* (1997), though, the sexual and spiritual do not mix to the same extent as in *AB*. In ‘Discotheque’, for example, the only faint hint of spirituality is in the lines,

speaking of love: “it’s not a trick... you can’t learn it/ it’s the way you don’t pay that’s okay ‘cause you can’t earn it”. In Christianity love is a different concept than in the modern consumerist society, which calls sex “love”, and expects something back for the love given. Most of ‘Discotheque’ seems to be celebrating this kind of love, but these lines show that the singer does have a different view of love. Love is “the way”; it cannot be paid for, and it is not earned. As pointed out before, in Christianity love is seen as gift from God, and salvation cannot be earned but it is given for God’s grace. There are, of course, other possible interpretations of the song as a whole. “You just can’t get enough of this lovie dovie stuff”, could as well be a drug addict praising drugs in a disco as someone seeing love as worthy of striving for.

In ‘Do You Feel Loved’ “take these hands they’re good for nothing”, “take these boots they’re going nowhere/you know these boots don’t want to stray” and “you got my head filled with songs” could be interpreted as addressing God as well as a woman. God as the source of musical gifts has already been referred to above (p. 73). But the lyrics continue: “take my shirt go on take it off me/ you can tear it up/ if you can tie me down”. I do not believe these words are addressed to God. ‘Do You Feel Loved’ dwell on sexual fantasies, as does ‘If You Wear That Velvet Dress’, and both seek to find help in prayer (quoted respectively): “Take this tangle of a conversation/ and turn it into your own prayer”; and “It’s okay... the struggle for things not to say/ I never listened to you anyway/ and I got my own hands to pray...”. In ‘If You Wear That Velvet Dress’ there is also the line “Who’ll catch the star when it falls”, which seems to continue the long line of falling stars in the history of U2 lyrics. But this probably is not a reference to apocalypse. And possibly neither to the old 1950’s song “Catch a falling star/ and put it in your pocket”, but just to the sexually-charged moment at hand.

‘Ultra Violet (Light My Way)’ (AB 1991) is somewhat similar:

Sometimes I feel like I don’t know  
 Sometimes I feel like checking out  
 I wanna get it wrong  
 Can’t always be strong  
 And love it won’t be long...

It seems that sexuality has always a slight sense of guilt: to not want is to be strong, to want is to be wrong.

'Please' and 'Staring at the sun' (both in *Pop*) are love songs which draw their dramatic side from the problems of Northern Ireland.' In 'Please' someone is scorned for her using religion as a weapon:

your catholic blues  
 your convent shoes  
 your stick on tattoos  
 now they're making the news  
 your holy war  
 your northern star  
 your sermon on the mount  
 from the boot of your car  
 please... please... please get up off your knees... please... please... leave me out of this  
 please  
 so love is hard and love is tough  
 but love is not what you're thinking of

Religion, represented for example by "holy war" and "sermon on the mount" is put in opposite position with love, as the protagonist brings out his view of love in "so love is hard and love is tough/ but love is not what you're thinking of". Getting up off one's knees suggests the position of prayer, and a false attitude of the woman in the opinion of the "T" in the song. "And you never knew that the heaven you keep you stole" possibly suggests that the woman is holding a view of herself and her motivations as right and justified by higher purpose, but this is only "stealing": the idea is stolen, and it has nothing to do with the original and true "heaven", possibly signifying Christian ideals. This could be seen as differentiation of religion and faith; the woman uses religion as a badge for identification in the "war", and knows not the core of faith: love.

In 'Staring at the Sun' (*Pop*) two people lying on the grass are "stuck together with God's glue", which is, obviously, love. The song brings the problems of the Northern Ireland out again: "intransigence is all around... military still in town/armour plated suits and ties... daddy just won't say goodbye/referee won't blow the whistle God is good but will HE listen". The song also refers to the image of blindness, being "afraid of what you'll find if you took a look inside", and rather going blind than doing

that. This blindness is more spiritual blindness than physical. Violence and blindness seem to go together in U2 lyrics (compare *Pop* to *October*, 1981 and *War*, 1983), and they are always opposed by love, God's glue that holds together instead of breaking up, like war and violence do.

The last "era", *All That You Can't Leave Behind*, contains similar ideas and images as all the previous albums of U2. Christian spirituality is present, both in love and other songs; and as we will see, the social and political dimension has not disappeared either.

## **7. ALL THAT YOU CAN'T LEAVE BEHIND**

### **7.1. Faith**

*All That You Can't Leave Behind* (2000), as said before, seems to be a "back to the roots" -album. Its cover is black and white, the main style of the first and second eras, and the musical style is simpler than in the Third Era. The spiritual dimension is included already in the cover photograph: the code in the departure sign of the airport – J 33-3 – is a reference to Jeremiah 33:3 (virgin.net and worldpop.com, among others). In the photograph the members of U2 seem to be waiting for their call for the flight, and it can be interpreted as a metaphor. The arrow pointing right in the departure sign signifies direction, and the airport stands for such things as movement, travel and journey. The direction, then, is where the numbers of the sign point to: Jeremiah 33:3. In the passage God says to the Israelites (GNB): "Call to me, and I will answer you; I will tell you wonderful and marvellous things that you know nothing about." The Christian interpretation of the Bible holds that everything promised for the Israelites is promised for the non-Jewish Christians as well. The metaphor of the airport thus has many possible interpretations, one of which can be – and quite obviously is – "God is my co-pilot": in the journey of life God should be asked for, or is worth asking for, the direction. That direction is found in the Bible.

The cover photograph is not the only symbolic sign in the record sleeve; there are small pictures in front of the song titles. For example, 'Elevation' has the sign of an

elevator, figures of a man and a woman in a box with two arrows pointing upwards; and 'New York' has an apple for the nick name of "Big Apple". 'Grace' has a dove. A dove is often used as a symbol of peace, but another interpretation is more likely: the dove is not pictured from the side perspective as the dove of peace usually is but from above with wings spread. There are lines drawn outwards of the tail to show movement, and as the dove has its beak downwards, this creates an impression that the dove is descending. In the Bible, the Holy Spirit descended from the heaven in the form of a dove when Jesus was baptised (Matt 3:16, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22, John 1:32). (See the section on the Third Era, and 'So Cruel' (AB 1991), page 72). 'Grace', though, does not mention the Holy Spirit, but the word "Grace" is introduced in the very beginning:

Grace, she takes the blame  
 She covers the shame  
 Removes the stain  
 It could be her name

Grace, it's the name for a girl  
 It's also a thought that changed the world  
 And when she walks on the street  
 You can hear the strings  
 Grace finds goodness in everything

"Grace" is not only a name but "a thought" as well. Whose thought could be seen as powerful enough to change the world? God is not mentioned in the lyrics, but the lyrics point to the difference between grace and karma: 'She travels outside of karma'. Karma is a notion originating from Hinduism, a non-Christian system of belief, and the law of karma is that the deeds of a person will affect his/her fate in the next life. Bad deeds lead to a lower position in the caste system, and good deeds to higher. The law of karma affects all living things, animals and plants as well, since life is one whole and the differences are only hierarchical. There is the possibility of finally escaping the cycle of rebirth through the process of perfection (Hattstein 1997:12).

Since "Grace" is "outside of karma", the lyrics obviously refer to the core of Christianity: bad deeds, sins, do not affect the fate of a person, if that person is within the reach of God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, the son of God. In Christian

faith there is no rebirth into another life but eternal life – or eternal death, i.e. hell – after death. It is notable that in the Bible, in the Gospel of John, the disciples ask Jesus about a man who was born blind whether he is blind because of his own sins or his parents' sins. The disciples seem to believe that sins can be punished in this life, a notion close to karma. Jesus, though, denies this, since the purpose of his life is to bring God's grace available to people (John 9:3): "His blindness has nothing to do with his sins or his parents' sins. He is blind so that God's power might be seen at work in him."

The notion of karma appears also in the album *Rattle and Hum* (1988) in 'God Part II', where karma is only a matter of this life (on 'God Part II' see pages 35-36). Bono expresses his anger towards Albert Goldman, a celebrity chronicler who wrote the controversial book *The Lives of John Lennon*: "I don't believe in Goldman his type like a curse/ Instant karma's gonna get him if I don't get him first". John Lennon, to whom 'God Part II' is dedicated to, wrote a song called 'God' in 1970 (*John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band*). In it he lists things he does not believe in; including the Bible, Buddha and Jesus. 'God Part II' is Bono's answer to, or continuation of, this song (Stokes 1990:27). The notion of "instant karma" comes from Lennon's song 'Instant karma! (We All Shine On)' (single, 1970), the first line of which goes "Instant Karma's gonna get you".

The lyrics of 'Grace' express the effect of grace in many ways: it "removes the stain", as above, for example. The last stanza of 'Grace' goes:

What once was hurt  
 What once was friction  
 What left a mark  
 No longer stings  
 Because Grace makes beauty  
 Out of ugly things

Grace makes beauty out of ugly things

"Blame", "shame" and "stain" in the first stanza, and "mark" in the last all stand for sin. Sin is connoted with dirt, or blood on white clothes. In the Old Testament, Isaiah 1:18 (GNB), God says: "Your sins are red but they will become snow white". The

nouns “hurt” and “friction”, and the verb “sting” point to the relationship between God and people; or between two human beings, as “Grace” can also be a girl’s name. There is something, i.e. the sin, that affects the closeness felt in the relationship. The adjective “ugly” represents the effect of sin on a human being: the whole being is distorted by sin. “Ugly things”, though, can be deeds as well, and then grace will be able to change those things, or their outcomes, to their opposite; out of ugliness becomes beauty, out of bad becomes good.

On “Grace”, the song says also that “she carries a world on her hips” and “She carries a pearl in perfect condition”. The world is “a world” and not “the world” as would be expected if it was the planet earth or the world as human race that is seen as the object of the all embracing power of grace. “Carry” and “hips” create connotations with pregnancy. It may be that the “world” and “pearl” is a child, and in spiritual sense something that Grace conceals; another world. As for the pearl, in the Bible (Matt 13:45-46) there is a parable of a man who sold all his property to buy one perfect pearl he had been looking for all his life. The pearl is a metaphor for the Kingdom of Heaven, but obviously can be used to describe grace as well, since the access to the Kingdom of Heaven is through grace only. The pearl, though, could be a symbol of something very valuable in general, for example, love.

‘Beautiful Day’ mentions grace as well: “You thought you’d found a friend to take you out of this place/ Someone you could lend a hand in return for grace”. ‘Beautiful Day’ seems like a story of a new beginning in someone’s life. The someone might be the Noah of Genesis as well as the lyrical “I”, who for the most of the song is replaced by the passive “you”. There is a similar poetic construction in ‘Beautiful Day’ as in ‘Wake up Dead Man’ (*Pop* 1997). Both contain a set of lines; in ‘Beautiful Day’ seven lines beginning with “see”; such as: “See the world in green and blue/ See China right in front of you”. And in ‘Wake up Dead Man’ eight lines start with “listen”: “listen to your words they’ll tell you what to do/ listen over the rhythm that’s confusing you”. In ‘Beautiful Day’ the two last lines of the construction go: “See the bird with a leaf in her mouth/ After the flood all the colours came out”. Noah was chosen by God to build a boat in which two of each species and Noah’s



family would be saved during a great flood that God decided to cause because of the sins of the human beings. It was a dove that Noah sent from the boat and that brought back a sign of land, an olive leaf, after the flood (Genesis 8:10-11). The colours coming out in the lyrics could stand for the rainbow that God set as the sign of his covenant with Noah, promising that he would never again destroy “all living beings” nor the earth by flood (Genesis 9:8-17, GNB).

Water is the element that connects the first song ‘Beautiful Day’ to the second song ‘Stuck in a Moment You Can’t Get out of’. Whereas Noah, or whoever the lyrical “I” is, is given a new beginning, in ‘Stuck in a Moment You Can’t Get out of’ there is an end:

I was unconscious, half asleep  
 The water is warm till you discover how deep...  
 I wasn’t jumping... for me it was a fall  
 It’s a long way down to nothing at all

The song is written for Michael Hutchence (Stokes 2001:148), the singer of INXS and a friend of Bono, who committed suicide in 1997. Knowing this, “water” can be seen as referring to death by drowning, and “fall” and “jumping” to death by jumping off a roof, for example. Both figures of speech give a picture of the “I” as not knowing what he is doing; he is “unconscious”, as if drowning by falling asleep in a bath tub, and he does not actively jump but just falls. The stanza quoted above is the only one in which the “you” addressed can be seen speaking as “I”. In all other stanzas “I” is easier to interpret as the person talking to “you”, the one who is stuck in the moment. As the person is let talk as “I”, he is given voice and a chance to explain himself. There is no judgement or blame in the lyrics, even though suicide has long been, and to some extent still is, a sensitive issue, tabu, for the Christian churches. Also, the song uses both the present and the past: it is hard to tell if the person addressed is alive or dead, or if the “I” just misses him because he is somewhere else at the moment:

I will not forsake, the colours that you bring  
 But the nights that you filled with fireworks  
 They left you with nothing  
 I am still enchanted by the light you brought to me  
 I still listen through your ears, through your eyes I can see

In the first line of the fourth stanza there is the present tense of “bring”, but in the fourth the past. The second and third lines have past tense. If these lines are connected to Hutchence, he is talked to as if he was still alive, but somewhere else. “I’m still enchanted by the light you brought to me/ I still listen through your ears, and through your eyes I can see” can be addressed to a friend, but this friend could as well be Jesus. In the Bible, Jesus refers to himself as the light of the world (John 8:12, 12:35-36, 12:46). But, of course, light can be seen as comfort or happiness a friend brings. Even though the song is written for Hutchence, it seems like a love song addressed to a woman; “baby” and “darling” may be used for men too, but they do connote more with women, especially if the singer is a man. For the ambiguity of the “you” the song could be addressed to two, or even three different persons at the same time: a woman, a friend – Hutchence or friend in general sense – and Jesus. There is no clear evidence that the lyrics would address Jesus at this, or some other, point but there may be a connection in “I still listen through your ears, through your eyes I can see” with the refrain of ‘When I Look at the World’ (see below).

There is similar ambiguity with the referent of “you” in ‘When I Look at the World’ as in ‘Stuck in a moment You Can’t Get out of’. At different points of the song, “You” can be understood at least in three different ways. Let us look at the three first stanzas:

When you look at the world  
 What is it that you see?  
 People find all kinds of things  
 That bring them to their knees  
 I see an expression  
 So clear and so true  
 That it changes the atmosphere  
 When you walk into the room

So I try to be like you  
 Try to feel it like you do  
 But without you it’s no use  
 I can’t see what you see  
 When I look at the world

When the night is someone else’s  
 And you’re trying to get some sleep  
 When your thoughts are too expensive

To ever want to keep  
 When there's all kinds of chaos  
 and everyone is walking lame  
 You don't even blink now, do you  
 Or even look away

In the first stanza, the “you” in the first line can be anyone, probably the listener of the song. But who is the “you” that walks into the room? Through the whole second stanza, the refrain, “you” clearly is someone addressed, probably the same person who walked into the room in the end of the first stanza. In the beginning of the third stanza, “you” may be passive construction; “I” has simply been replaced by “you”. But “you” in the second last line may once again be the person addressed in the refrain; the tag question would seem inappropriate if the “you” was simply replacing the first person.

The question of who is the “you” may find answer in the ending of the song – in the same way as in ‘Tomorrow’ and ‘With a Shout’ in *October*, and ‘Mysterious Ways’ in *AB*:

I'm in the waiting room  
 Can't see for the smoke  
 I think of you and your holy book  
 While the rest of us choke

Who is the “you” with the holy book? It could be anyone possessing a holy book of any religion, or the holy book of the Judaeo-Christians, i.e. the Bible. It is quite likely, though, that the “you” is God – or Jesus. The Bible is often referred to as the Word of God, and in Christian faith God is seen as the source of inspiration for the writers of the books of the Bible. Among the various denominations and theological orientations there are, though, differences in how much God is seen as having influenced the words of the writers.

“You” may be understood as Jesus, since, in the Bible, Jesus is set as an example for believers (John 13:15, 1 Pet 2:21), and in the refrain the “I” wants to be like the “you”, and says that without the “you” it is no use. In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells his disciples to remain in his love (John 15:9); otherwise they will not succeed in their work as the preachers of the Gospel (John 15:5, GNB): “I am the wine, and you are

the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me.” (Emphasis added.) Of course, the “you” could be anyone the “I” admires, and whose view he would like to ask for. But there are as well other word choices that support the interpretation of “you” as God/Jesus. In the first stanza, kneeling down is suggested. The position gives an impression of something valued and respected; and kneeling down is also the traditional position in prayer. The “all kinds of things” that bring people “to their knees” may then refer to the different religions or systems of faith; or material things like money, cars, houses; or things valued like friends, spouse, children etc. “All kinds of chaos” refer to the binary opposition between chaos and order. The opposite of the Greek word “khaos” is “kosmos” (cosmos), and in addition to order, “world” and “universe” are recorded among its meanings. God is seen as the bringer of order out of chaos as God created the universe (Genesis 1:1). “Everyone is walking lame” suggests helplessness. If the “you” in “You don’t even blink now, do you?/ Or even look away” is Jesus, he may be seen as confident, and not avoiding or disregarding the problems of people.

In the last stanza the “I” is in the “waiting room”. This may be a similar metaphor as the cover photograph; the “I” is smoking while waiting for flight. This can be interpreted as recognising the reality, or closeness, of death. The “I” thinks of the Bible “while the rest of us choke”. Are “the rest of us” people who are damned? Choking connotes death by smoke or water, for example. As mentioned above (page 29), ‘Drowning Man’ in *War* (1983) is a love song in which the love can be interpreted as love between God and human as well as the love between two human beings. Drowning, then, may be spiritual drowning; fear of losing salvation. In the Bible, damnation is often referred to as dying (for ex, Luke 13:3, John 10:28, Acts 13:41). “Smoke” also connotes with the fires of hell, but, then again, the “I” may be just a heavy smoker.

In the “While the rest of us choke” there may be a reference to Hutchence, as well as worry about the salvation of souls. Hutchence committed suicide by hanging himself, and possibly the writer is wondering why the lives of some people are

destroyed while he is safe, perhaps due to his belief. This may be described in the themes of night and day, light and darkness. At the end of the song ‘Stuck in a Moment You Can’t Get out of’, the dichotomy of night and day appears:

And if the night runs over  
 And if the day won’t last  
 And if our way should falter  
 Along the stony pass

And if the night runs over  
 And if the day won’t last  
 And if your way should falter  
 Along the stony pass  
 It’s just a moment  
 This time will pass

In the Bible, the fight between good and evil is described by the forces of darkness and light (Luke 1:79, John 1:5, John 3:19, John 12:35, Acts 26:18, Col 1:13, 1 Thess 5:5, and many others). But night here is more likely a mental state, or feeling; depression can lead to suicide, which may have been the case with Hutchence as well. The day, then, is the moment when the depression eases. The word choice ‘Falter along the stony pass’, seems Biblical, possibly it traces back to the Psalms. ‘Stony pass’ could be compared to the ‘valley of the shadow’ in Psalm 23. ‘This time’ can be the hard period of life, but may be understood as the time that will no longer exist after the end of the world. Or is the last stanza, like ‘One’ (AB 1993), ending in generalisation, asking the listener not to resort to committing suicide? The rather positive musical tone in the song suggests this.

The theme of darkness and light appears also in ‘Walk on’:

If the darkness is to keep us apart  
 And if the daylight feels like it’s a long way off  
 And if your glass heart should crack  
 And for a second you turn back  
 Oh no, be strong

‘Walk on’ seems a gospel anthem, similar to ‘I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking for’ (JH 1987). The song encourages us to “walk on”, to continue in the chosen path. This path may be spiritual, in the way of the Psalm 44 (verse 18, KJ; GNB does not have the same word choice): “Our heart is not turned back, neither

have our steps declined from thy way”. ‘Walk On’ could be seen as connecting with ‘I Will Follow’ in *Boy*, where the person followed could be Jesus: the path started in 1980 still continues in the year 2000.

The path may also be one of human rights, as ‘Walk on’ is dedicated to Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the non-violent movement for human rights and democracy in Burma (Myanmar), and a winner of the 1991 Nobel Prize in peace. This interpretation is also backed up by the symbol Amnesty International, a candle surrounded by barbed wire, placed in front of the title of the song. Thus, “You’re packing a suitcase for a place none of us has been/ A place that has to be believed to be seen” can be ideal: the woman fights for a better future and expansion of freedom of thought and human rights – she could be compared to Martin Luther King in this respect. Or then the meaning could be spiritual; the place to be believed before seen could be heaven. “That’s where the hurt is”, the definition of “home” in the song, though, does not support this view. “Home” is one of the metaphors for heaven, and according to the Bible there will not be pain or sorrow.

‘Kite’ also might refer to heaven:

Who’s to say where the wind will take you  
 Who’s to know what it is will break you  
 I don’t know which way the wind will blow  
 Who’s to know when the time has come around  
 Don’t want to see you cry  
 I know that this is not goodbye

The song is written about Bono’s relationship with his children, and his father, who was seriously ill at the time of writing (Stokes 2001:153). The “I” could as well be Bono’s father talking to Bono, or Bono talking to his children. If the “I” is seen as Bono’s father “Who’s to know when the time has come around” refers to death. The last line of the stanza expects that the “I” will meet the “you” again. This may, of course, be a meeting by chance, as it would be if a father was talking to his children leaving home and starting their own lives, but it may as well be meeting after death. “Wind” may be the spirit of God, or the intuition of human soul telling the right way to go. Not knowing which way the wind will blow may refer to the gospel of John (3:8,

GNB): “The wind blows wherever it wishes; you hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. It is like that with everyone who is born of the Spirit”.

‘Peace on Earth’ longs for heaven on Earth, but despite the rather positive tone of the music there is anger:

Heaven on Earth  
 We need it now  
 I’m sick of all of this  
 Hanging around  
 Sick of sorrow  
 Sick of pain  
 Sick of hearing again and again  
 That’s there gonna be  
 Peace on Earth

“Sorrow” and “pain” could be seen as an echo from Revelations (21:4), like the one in ‘Playboy Mansion’: “then will there be no time of sorrow/ then will there be no time for pain” (see page 61). “Peace on Earth” may be peace in this world; or in the other that comes after the end of the world. There is frustration: when will this peace promised for such a long time actually arrive? The frustration and anger may be directed at people who keep on talking about peace never really achieving it; or then God, whose promises seem to keep on waiting for fulfilment for too long. ‘Peace on Earth’ asks the “How long?” of ‘Sunday Bloody Sunday’ (*War* 1983) without voicing it explicitly. Both songs do not only express hope for peace in general, but especially point to the situation in Northern Ireland. ‘Peace on Earth’ mentions five names; Sean, Julia, Gareth, Ann and Breda. These are names of some of the victims of the Omagh car bomb, which left 29 dead and over 200 injured in August 1998. The last name, Breda, is obviously Breda Devine who was only 21 months old at the time of her death.

The next track after ‘Peace on Earth’ is ‘When I Look at the World’, which may suggest that the last mentioned is addressed to Jesus, as expected above. The first expresses anger, but looks for help from Jesus in the end; and the second admits the helplessness of a human being right from the beginning. In ‘Peace on Earth’ Jesus’ name is explicitly mentioned, it is even as if Jesus had written the whole song:

Jesus could you take the time  
 To throw a drowning man a line  
 Peace on Earth  
 Tell the ones who hear no sound  
 Whose sons are living in the ground  
 Peace on Earth

Jesus this song you wrote  
 The words are sticking in my throat  
 Peace on Earth  
 Hear it every Christmas time  
 But hope and history won't rhyme  
 So what's it worth?  
 This peace on Earth

As mentioned a couple of times before, the Christian members of U2 believe that their musical abilities are a gift from God (Bowler 1993:143). “Jesus this song you wrote”, then, probably means the song is inspired by Jesus, and not literally written by him.

“Drowning man” is a thematic connection to *War* (1983); ‘Drowning Man’ is a track in *War*. The song refers to Isaiah, and the “I” asks “Take my hand, take my hand/ Hold on, hold on tightly”: the one to save the man from drowning can as well be God as a woman. Asking for Jesus to throw a line in ‘Peace on Earth’ has a similar function with ‘Wake up Dead Man’s’ (*Pop* 1997) “will you put a word in for me”. The “dead man” can be seen as a similar metaphor of spiritual dying, or fear of losing salvation, as a drowning man is. ‘Dead Man’s’ “listen as hope and peace try to rhyme/ listen over marching bands playing out their time”, similarly, compares to “Hope and history won’t rhyme”.

As we have seen, in *ATYCLB* there are clear similarities to the previous production of U2 in relating to the theme of faith. The mixing of the spiritual and sexual is also present.

## 7.2. Love

There are elements of a love song in almost all of the tracks in *ATYCLB* (2000), the exceptions being ‘Peace on Earth’ and ‘New York’. ‘When I Look at the World’ may be interpreted as a love song, but it is more a song about admiration than a



prototypical love song about love between a man and woman, and the object of adulation can as well be a man as a woman. More traditional U2 love lyrics are found in 'Grace', 'Elevation', 'In a Little While' and 'Wild Honey'. 'Grace' describes qualities of a certain kind of woman and God's grace at the same time. The three other songs are less clear in their Christian spiritual content, 'Elevation' having the most spiritual references of them, and 'In a Little While' being hardly spiritual at all.

In 'Elevation' the idea of spiritual elevation is intertwined with sexual elevation:

High, higher than the sun  
 You shoot me from a gun  
 I need you to elevate me here,  
 At the corner of your lips  
 As the orbit of your hips  
 Eclipse, You elevate my soul

"Lips" and "hips" are obviously sexual; they are physically central in the sex act. "Sun" and "gun" are metaphorical. Sun associates with heat, and the highest position of sun, the zenith, which in turn associates with the highest point of sexual arousal, i.e. orgasm. "Gun" is a stereotypical phallus symbol, and "shooting from a gun" describes sexual energy, and possibly ejaculation. The eclipsing orbit of hips is hard to interpret as anything else than a sexual act; something is shadowing the woman's hips as the moon shadows the sun. Obviously, none of these figures of language are spiritual; only "elevating the soul" makes it possible to interpret the song spiritually. Sexual arousal and spiritual uplift are intertwined. The lyrics can be compared to 'Even Better than the Real Thing's' (AB 1991) "Take me higher", even though there is even less chance to see this as a any kind of spiritual reference. 'Elevation', unlike 'Even Better than the Real Thing', develops from overtly sexual to more spiritually elevated song:

A star lit up like a cigar  
 Strung out like a guitar  
 Maybe you could educate my mind  
 Explain all these controls  
 I can't sing but I've got soul  
 The goal is elevation

A mole, living in a hole  
 Digging up my soul  
 Going down, excavation  
 I and I in the sky  
 You make me feel like I can fly  
 So high, elevation

Love, lift me out of these blues  
 Won't you tell me something true  
 I believe in you

Needless to say, “cigar” and “guitar” are similar sexual symbols as gun, but after them there is a change in the lyrics. Education of mind brings out the dichotomy of mind and body; and the differentiation of spiritual and sexual is possible to make at this point. The sexual urge, the body, is generally seen as lower than the spiritual capacity, the mind. Spiritual may here be understood both as belonging to mind and soul. In the Victorian era woman's role was to be an educator of her family; she passed on knowledge, especially spiritual knowledge, to her children. In the case of the husband, the wife was expected to educate his uncontrolled sexual urges, as the woman was seen as more moral than man. This thought has not thoroughly, if at all, disappeared in the modern society.

The lyrics, though, do not seem to seek for control. “I've lost all self-control”, in the beginning of the second stanza, and “I's” hope that the “you” would be able to “explain all these controls” in the third stanza, rather express desire to liberate oneself from controls. The controls may be spiritual, as well as sexual, because “I can't sing but I've got soul” obviously once again refers to the musical ability as a gift from God (Bowler 1993:143). Bono has several times claimed that he cannot actually sing, or could not in the beginning of the career of U2. “The goal is elevation” probably refers to the goal of the music of U2, since “soul” can also refer to the quality of voice and the “soul” of soul music. Soul, in its origin, is black music, and black music is often both openly sexual and spiritual at the same time. Rock music is usually seen only as sexual liberation, but the rock of U2 seeks for spiritual liberation as well.

The idea of education appears also in ‘Beautiful Day’, in the additional refrain “Touch me, take me to that other place/ Teach me, I know I'm not a hopeless case“. “Teach me” is replaced by “reach me” in the second time it is used. “Other place”

can be understood in two ways; both spiritual and sexual experiences are sometimes described by moving into another dimension. Touching, teaching, and reaching can all have sexual interpretation, but they could as well be seen as the work of the Spirit of God (see pages 71-72 on 'The First Time'). In the Psalm 32 (verse 8, GNB), God says "I will teach you the way you should go; I will instruct you and advise you". The New Testament describes the work of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; similar passages in Luke 12:12, 1 John 2:27): "The Helper, the Holy Spirit (...) will teach you everything".

'Grace' is an example of the typical love song of U2: it has a girl and God's grace mixed. A similar idea to "She covers the shame" in 'Grace' is found in 'I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking for' (JT 1987): "You carried the cross/ And my shame". Shame stands for sin and its punishment, i.e. hell. It is "she" who does the healing ('I Still...'); and it "she" who covers the shame and takes the blame ('Grace'). The healing power of love, either sexual or spiritual, is found in 'Mysterious Ways' (AB 1991) as well: "To touch is to heal". In U2 lyrics, different spiritual dimensions are humanised or personalised as a "she". In 'Grace' "she" is God's grace; in 'I Still...' "she" is compared to Jesus; and in 'Mysterious Ways' "she" is mixed with the Spirit. 'Beautiful Day' links to 'Mysterious Ways' in its way to use "her", as well: "You're in the mud, in the maze of her imagination."

'In a Little While' is clearly a love song addressed to Bono's wife, Alison. "Spanish eyes" is a metonymy for Alison, and has been used before in the single tracks 'Spanish eyes' (B-side in *I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking for*, 1987), and in 'The Sweetest Thing' (B-side in *Where the Streets Have No Name*, 1987). But the title, 'In a Little While', connects with the "It's just a moment/ This time will pass" in 'Stuck in a Moment You Can't Get out of'. There may be a slight reference to spiritual expectation – i.e. the second coming of Christ – as well as to sexual one, but the lyrics do not really support this view.

'Wild Honey' seems to mix evolutionary and theological thinking. It speaks of days when "we were swinging from the trees" and when the "T" "was a monkey/ stealing honey from a swarm of bees". A bit later the lyrics ask:

Did I know you?  
 Did I know you even then?  
 Before the clocks kept time  
 Before the world was made

“Before the world was made” echoes ‘Mofo’s’ (*Pop* 1997) “still looking for the face I had before the world was made” (on ‘Mofo’ see page 55). The “you” is apparently a woman, but the song continues: “From the cruel sun/ You were shelter/ You were my shelter and my shade”. Cruel sun can refer to radiation, the different kind of atmosphere that existed in the evolutionary eras before the mammals proved the best adapted for the new, colder atmosphere. However, “sun”, “shelter” and “shade” may have their origin in A Hymn of Praise in Isaiah 25:4 (GNB): “The poor and the helpless have fled to you and have been safe in times of trouble. You give them shelter from storms and shade from the burning heat.” Thus the “I” may be asking for his origin in “Did I know you”: did the “I” “know God”; exist spiritually before he was actually born? As for the name, ‘Wild honey’, honey is used in the Bible; in Song of Songs (4:11, Song of Solomon in *KJ*) the man compares the taste of the woman’s lips and tongue to the taste of honey. The lyrics also mention garden – “I know your garden is full/ But is there sweetness at all?” – which may refer to paradise, even though the previous two lines of the same stanza – “I send you flowers/ Cut flowers for your hall” – bring the song to modern times. “Garden” can also be the other admirers of the woman, whom the “I” does not believe make her satisfied or happy.

‘Walk on’ has the same view of love as many other U2 songs: “And love is not the easy thing/ The only baggage you can bring/ Is all that you can’t leave behind”. Love, in Christian perspective, leads to sacrifice: “The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them” (John 15:13). Love appears in *ATYCLB* in the same two basic ways as in previous U2 production: firstly, the sexual love can stand for the spiritual love (of God), or vice versa, and secondly, love in a general sense is understood as something “not easy”, and more than only sexual love between a man and woman.

As well as similar love themes, *ATYCLB* (2000) contains the same themes of faith as the nine previous albums. Jesus is explicitly referred to in 'Peace on Earth', God and The Holy Spirit are implied in 'Grace'. 'Peace on Earth' presents Jesus as the redeemer, if not as straightforwardly as 'Wake up Dead Man' in *Pop* (1997): "Jesus could you take the time to throw a drowning man a line". There is clearly both hope and fear; 'Beautiful Day' is a metaphor of a new beginning, but even though 'When I Look at the World' can be seen as a promise to follow Jesus, it asks in the way of "And what am I to do", in 'Rejoice' (*October*): "Tell me, tell me, what do you see?/ Tell me, tell me, what's wrong with me". 'Peace on Earth' angrily – note the quite short vowel length of "peace" in the track – asks "So what's it worth?/ This peace on Earth". In the opinion of the "I", obviously the writer, Kingdom of God would be of use right now, but how long it does to take it become true?

## 8. CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the whole U2 production contains Christian ideas and images. My aim in this thesis has been to show the Christian references and ideals in the lyrics, not to anyway judge their dogmatic orthodoxy or make any claims on the depth of belief. Proving one's state of Christianity is an almost impossible task, and besides, U2's career in relation to spirituality has already been surveyed by Steve Stockman, who has a rather different approach from mine in his book *Walk on: the Spiritual Journey of U2* (2001). Stockman does look at some of the lyrics, but his work is not a consistent analysis of all the U2 lyrics in terms of the themes of faith and love. He rather describes the faith of the three Christian members of U2 – Larry Mullen Jr, The Edge and Bono – as a journey, and draws on bibliographical information more heavily than I have done.

All together, I think I have reached my goal, and proved my hypothesis right in its core expectations: in U2 production faith and love are constant themes, and closely intertwined. U2 lyrics contain many Christian ideas and images; some in the form of straight or almost straight Biblical quotations, some as images or thoughts that have their basis in the Bible. Love songs often have both sexual and spiritual connotations,

but the extent of spiritual references differs from only a faint hint to quite clear references to Bible.

There are clear differences between the three main eras I have divided in U2 production in this research. The First Era, consisting of *Boy* (1980), *October* (1981) and *War* (1983), is the most openly Christian, and almost no love songs are found—except in *War*. *October* is the most heavily Christian record of this era; and of U2 production in general. Many of the Biblical references in the First Era are apocalyptic, which theme almost disappears in the Second Era of *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984), *Joshua Tree* (1987) and *Rattle and Hum* (1988). In the Third Era (*Achtung Baby* 1991, *Zooropa* 1993 and *Pop* 1997) references to Revelations increase again; apocalyptic issues are one of the most prevailing themes of *Pop*. *ATYCLB* (2000) is not very apocalyptic in its imagery, but ‘Peace on Earth’ can be seen as waiting for the Kingdom of God both in the sense of peace on earth as it is now, and peace on earth in an apocalyptic sense.

The Second Era is the most socially conscious of all the eras, and it could be named the Era of Social Justice. The centre of the lyrics changes from spiritual issues to political and social ones, but the social consciousness is based on faith. Such themes as the Civil Rights movement, apartheid and economical oppression are spiritually involved. The theme of love in the Second Era is rather scarce in its spiritual dimension; ‘I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking for’ in *The Joshua Tree* (1987) is probably the only song in this period with consistent mixing of sexual and spiritual imagery in the lyrics.

Most surprising fact concerning the Third Era is the abundance of both the faith themes and love themes mixing the sexual and spiritual. I expected fewer and less apparent spiritual references than in the previous eras. This may be due to the change in appearance of the band, the records and the shows: the difference between *Rattle and Hum* (1988), belonging to the Second Era, and *Achtung Baby* (1991) starting the Third, is drastic both in the musical style and outer appearance. Despite the apparent superficiality, Christian spiritual references are abundant – and not even as implicit as I expected. Religion versus faith/Jesus, The Holy Trinity, Catholic and

Protestant influences, apocalyptic issues, increase of secularism and decrease of Christian values are all part of the Third Era. Even though many U2 songs are vague and seemingly only sexual, the spiritual dimension is found in many of them. *Achtung Baby* is the most abundant of the Third Era in this respect; it contains love songs with spiritual dimensions to them, many of them unconventional. 'One', 'Until the End of the World', and 'Mysterious Ways' are all of this kind.

*All That You Can't Leave Behind* (2000) returns to more basic song writing after the experimentation of the Third Era, but it has several lyrical connections to all the three previous eras: it uses Christian imagery in similar ways, and mixes the sexual and spiritual in love songs. After the flood, God's sign of the promise of peace shows in the sky, and even if got stuck in a moment there will be elevation in a little while and the stony pass can be safely crossed, because grace travels outside of karma.

As for further research, I propose a study on the rock magazines, the style in which the reporters write on rock musicians, or a certain group, for example U2. In U2's case there is a number of references to Biblical issues, for example NME has titles such as "The Band of Holy Joy" and "The Gospel of Heaven and Hell". Also, it would be interesting to find out, how Christianity is worked out sociologically in the context of rock. How did, for example, Bob Dylan and Stevie Wonder manage as Christians? And are there differences between the USA, Ireland and Britain, for example. The problem with such a study, though, might be the scarcity of material –if the rock stars themselves do not consent to interview. It would also be interesting to see a research project on the Christian imagery used by Black Sabbath; how Satanist are the lyrics actually? The origin of rock as Devil's music would deserve a study of its own: how much the white prejudices against black people affected this concept, and how, for example, do the Christian and African influences mix in the blues lyrics of African Americans?

U2 has proven itself to be both musically, socially, and politically valid for over 20 years. Besides this, their achievements as a rock band prove that there is not as large division between rock and Christianity as generally believed. After all, devil does not have all the best music.





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Note:

As the primary source, I used the lyrics printed on the record sleeves of the albums. Some albums do not have lyrics printed in their record sleeves, and when this was the case, I used a net site, marcolino.com. The net site was used primarily with *Boy*, *October*, *Zooropa* and *The Joshua Tree*. *War* and *The Unforgettable Fire* have only some of the lyrics printed in their sleeves, and the net site was used with the missing lyrics. *The Joshua Tree* and *Zooropa* have record sleeves, but they were not available for me. At some points also other net sources than the marcolino.com were consulted for comparison, and of course any noted differences also called for personal hearing of the lyrics in the albums.

The net site for the lyrics:

<<http://www.marcolino.com/u/u2/2.html>>  
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Rattle and Hum. USA, 1988.



They definitely seem like mystics. Get creative add favorite songs/lyrics and personal experience also. U2 are mystical geniuses, they sing of spirituality without the religion getting in the way. Your question proves that it's not just an Irish thing, it's Universal for those of us who love and truly connect with another's soul. Source(s) Not every band with Christian lyrics gets lumped in with "Christian Rock." You might be surprised by who has escaped that label. Posted on April 12, 2013, 18:57 GMT. This has worked out pretty well for them given that they are one of the most popular rock acts of all time. Most U2 songs have Christian themes, but here's some examples from their catalog. "40" from War has lyrics lifted from Psalm 40: I waited patiently on the Lord / He inclined and heard my cry / He lifted me up out of the pits / And out of the miry clay.