Analysis of Hozier’s “Take Me to Church”

The song “Take me to Church” by folk-rock singer Andrew John Hozier Byrne, also known as Hozier, became a huge hit when it was released in 2013. When first listening to it, it is easy to mistake it as a song praising the Christian church, due to its gospel style and catchy chorus. However, this is the opposite of Hozier’s intention. Due to the fact that the entirety of the song is a metaphor, many do not realize how deep and controversial the topic really is. Throughout the song “Take Me to Church,” Hozier criticizes the attitude that many Christian churches hold towards sex and sexuality.

Hozier includes several metaphors in the song alluding to Christianity, including the comparison of his lover to a God and his love for her to a religion. The use of these metaphors can be perceived as an act of rebellion. For example, Hozier sings “If I’m a Pagan of the good times/ my lover’s the sunlight/to keep the goddess on my side/she demands a sacrifice”. Hozier compares his lover to a goddess who demands a sacrifice from him, this most likely being physical intimacy. Earlier in the song Hozier states that his lover “knows everybody’s disapproval” and that he “should’ve worshipped her sooner”. His relationship is looked down upon by the church, and so he chooses to worship his lover instead because of his strong feelings for her. It can be assumed that Hozier is talking about many church’s views on things that they see as “sexually immoral,” such as premarital sex and homosexuality. Another example is the line “I’ll tell you my sins and you can sharpen your knife.” Hozier implies that when people sin, many churches often turn against them. He sings “Every Sunday’s getting more bleak with fresh poison each week.” Hozier compares the church’s teachings to poison, implying that many Christian churches manipulate people with their teachings. He implies that every week the church is causing him to lose his faith.

Hozier also uses the contrast between the music and the lyrics to get the message across. The lyrics in the song are criticizing the church. However, the music has a soulful gospel style, using common instruments used in gospel music such as a saxophone and a clarinet. Hozier also repeatedly sings “amen,” as if he is singing a prayer after speaking to his lover. He is purposefully singing about worshipping his lover with church-style music in the background. This is most likely an attack on the people who see his relationship as sinful. Hozier is challenging the Bible, as it is considered a sin to worship false idols. It can also be assumed that Hozier uses this style for the song to show how strong his feelings are for his lover, implying that she is a god in his eyes. She brings the joy and faith into his life that the church and religion is failing to do. He mocks the church and praises his lover at the same time, insinuating that his lover is doing the church’s job.

Hozier uses commonly used Christian phrases to prove his point about the intolerance of the church. For example, he sings “In the madness and soil of that sad earthly scene/ only then I am human/ only then I am clean.” The phrase “sad earthly scene” is used by some churches to refer to sexual intercourse outside of marriage or in a homosexual relationship, while the use of the word “clean” most likely refers to the use of the word “clean” by Christians when referring to something as pure and holy. Hozier states that he only feels clean when he is being intimate with his lover, implying that although many people consider his relationship to be wrong and impure, it feels right and pure when he is with her. By using harsh words that have been used against him by the church, he attempts to point out the church’s hypocrisy as a place that is supposed to be a safe haven. For example, when referring to the church’s view on his relationship, he sings “We were born sick, you heard them say it.” Although the song depicts a relationship between himself and a woman, Hozier most likely includes this line as a reference to the common use of the word sick by some churches when referring to homosexual relationships. This is further proven in the music video for the song, which features a gay couple and depicts the cruelty, hatred, and violence that many are subjected to because of the church. The entirety of the video is in black and white, setting a dreary and ominous tone. It features happy and intimate scenes between them and begins with one of the men burying a locked box. This is meant to symbolize him being forced to lock away and bury his feelings because of the opinions of the church. He is hunted by masked men throughout the video and is eventually captured and beaten as his box is dug up and thrown into a fire. Hozier implies that the church often tries to control people and take away their free will as well as shame them.

In “Take Me to Church”, Hozier condemns the judgment that he has seen from many Christian churches, using their own words against them to show that what they consider sinful brings him happiness. He makes several bold choices, most likely realizing that a good portion of the audience will be offended. It is likely that he intends for them to be offended, as he gives several examples of offensive phrases used by the church. He wants to expose the audience to the harsh truth of the pain that many have overcome due to the church and the shaming that they are subjected to. He is not necessarily attacking the religion, but the structure of the church and its teachings. Hozier advocates for the LGBTQ community and those who have faced discrimination and calls attention to the hypocrisy and hatred that is displayed by many who consider themselves to be holy and pure.