

3(D) Review { By Walt Mueller }

SONG/VIDEO: "Take Me to Church"
by Hozier

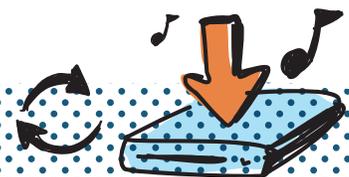
Background/summary:

A little over a year before the **October, 7 2014** release of his self-titled debut album, Andrew Hozier-Byrne posted a video for his debut tune, "Take Me To Church." Known simply by his middle name, Hozier ("hoh-zee-er") is a **24-year-old Irish singer/songwriter/musician** who is quickly becoming a force in the music world. This Gospel-influenced track quickly went viral on social media, charting at #1 in Ireland, and is now climbing the U.S. Charts. The song challenges the church and the long-held doctrine of original sin, raises awareness of violence against the LGBT community, and **promotes boundary-free sexual expression.**



DISCOVER: What is the message/worldview?

- The song opens with the singer contrasting the traditional church and organized religion with his new alternative "church" . . . this new church being the embrace, experience and worship of sexual intimacy of any type, absent of the sexual repression he believes is taught by the Scriptures: **"My lover's got humor/She's the giggle at a funeral/Knows everybody's disapproval/I should've worshipped her sooner. . . My church offers no absolutes/She tells me 'Worship in the bedroom'/The only heaven I'll be sent to/Is when I'm alone with you."**
- He criticizes the doctrine of original sin, which says that we are all born sinners and are in need of redemption: **"Every Sunday's getting more bleak/A fresh poison each week/'We were born sick,' you heard them say it. . . I was born sick but I love it."** Instead, he believes in the inherent goodness of humanity, which in turn makes it possible to live without any need for divine forgiveness.
- Hozier says that the song is **"about how organizations like the Catholic Church undermine what it is to be human and loving someone else."** He sings against any institution that undermines humanity by repressing sexuality as he believes **"there is no greater celebration of life, nothing more human than the sexual act."**
- The song's video treatment shows a specific example of sexual bias and oppression as a homosexual couple is pursued by a gang of Russian thugs. The violent mob burns down a house and beats one of the men. This represents the outworking of what Hozier calls the **"offensive, backward, barbaric"** doctrine of original sin.
- Throughout the video, the homosexual couple is seen burying and digging up a small locked chest that is also chained. While the chest may represent the homosexuality that these men treasure or perhaps are forced by society to keep secret, Hozier will not reveal what the chest and its presence really signify. He says, **"I think it's better that it's open for whomever to decide what it means."**
- For Hozier, sex is sacramental and brings salvation. He says it is **"worth worshipping"** because unlike the Church's **"God,"** sex is very natural, very tangible and real, life-giving, and at the core of what makes us human. He uses traditional and familiar Christian language to make his point: **"No masters or kings/When the ritual begins/There is no sweeter innocence than our gentle sin/In the madness and soil of that sad earthly scene/Only then am I human/Only then am I clean/Amen. Amen. Amen."**



DISCERN: How does it stand in light of the biblical message/worldview?



- The video's depiction of human violence against homosexuals is horrifying and serves as a much-needed reminder of a reality which must be addressed and condemned. Violence against **any** human being because of sexual orientation is wrong, especially when it is perpetrated in the name of Christ or Christianity. Sadly, there are those in the Christian church who misinterpret truth and totally misrepresent Christ by lacking a clear understanding of grace. When Jesus confronted the woman who had been caught in adultery, he did so with compassion, love, and grace. He did not pick up and throw stones. Rather, he stopped the self-righteous religious people who did. Jesus showed her compassion by telling her to **"go and sin no more"** (John 8:11).
- The misrepresentation of Christ by so-called Christians is often responsible for misunderstandings of and hatred towards Christ and the Christian faith. But this cannot eclipse a proper understanding of the doctrine of original sin (Romans 5:12; Psalm 14:2-3; Ecclesiastes 9:3; Psalm 51:5, etc.) or be used as an excuse to deny our need to be born again through a relationship with the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In fact, without a proper understanding of how lost we are in our sin, we have no sense of our deep need for or understanding of the saving work of Christ (Ephesians 2). We need Jesus to fix us because we are broken in ways that only he can fix.
- Every human being has been created by God for a relationship with God. Even though this relationship has been broken by sin, we still have eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Consequently, since we have been made for worship we continue to worship, even if who/what we choose to worship is not the one true God. Hozier reflects this reality by choosing to worship sex, seeing the sex act as redemptive. The Scriptures teach us that while sex is **not** God, sex **is** a good and wonderful gift **from** God (Genesis 1&2). Sex is not redemptive. Rather, it is a good gift from the only God who redeems.
- God has given us borders and boundaries for the gift of our sexuality. His clearly stated will in the Scriptures is that sex is for one man and one woman to experience together within the boundary of an exclusive, life-long, monogamous, covenantal marriage. Together, a husband and wife indulge their sexuality for the purpose of consummating their marital union, fostering intimacy, having children, and experiencing pleasure.
- The Church is the earthly bride and body of Christ that gathers regularly for worship, and then is commanded to move into every nook and cranny of the world as salt and light to advance the Kingdom of God. Still, people who choose not to worship the one true God of the Bible will worship at a **"church"** of their own making. Hozier is promoting a **"church"** that ultimately idolizes humanity and sexuality.

DECIDE: What do I do with it?

- **"Take Me To Church"** should awaken us to a reality in the church that must be corrected. The song sadly yet accurately portrays the fact that at times, we misinterpret and apply theology in ways that dishonor the very God we claim to follow. Instead, proper theology and doctrine should always result in proper Godly practice. A balance of truth **and** grace is needed, especially when we engage with those who struggle with same-sex attraction.
- Hozier's message will play well with and be embraced by an emerging generation that has not only grown up in a world that has a diminished moral compass, but who are looking for new forms of belief and behavior that reflect the contemporary virtues of plurality, diversity, and tolerance. Consequently, **"Take Me To Church"** reminds us to **"take"** our children to church by living out the command of Deuteronomy 6. . . to engage in 24/7 lives of Christian education and nurture with our children. Only by first knowing the truth will they be able to discern right options for belief and behavior from wrong options for belief and behavior.
- Since Hozier's **"Take Me To Church"** will soon be seen and heard by most kids, it's worth viewing and processing together in both the home and youth group. Parents and youth workers should use the song to start conversations on sex, sexuality, the church, sin, compassion, etc. Help them to understand original sin, which in turn will fill them with gratitude for the saving work of Jesus Christ. Help kids see that not only should they actively seek to integrate their faith into all of life (including their sexuality), but that God wills for them to be actively involved in His body, the church.
- Use the video as a diagnostic tool with students. Show it to them and ask them what they think of the song's lyrical and visual message. Listen carefully as they share their opinions and beliefs. Then, offer correctives to the song's erroneous messages, while affirming the song's message condemning violence.

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