

Sarah Walton

Dr. Luttrell

English 1001

29 September 2024

### Take Me Away From the Church: A Rhetorical Analysis

Released in the fall of 2013, *Take Me to Church* was the debut hit single of an unknown Irish musician named Hozier. The song is an open criticism of the Catholic Church and other institutions that attempt to control sexuality. *Take Me to Church* was doing well when it first released, but it wasn't until the music video uploaded to Youtube in March of 2014 that it sprang into popular consciousness. The music video, in full black and white, followed two men in a relationship suffering violence and ostracization for loving each other. Hozier has said the video's content was a reaction to Russia's Anti-LGBTQ+ Laws. The law from 2013 banned "Gay Propaganda," making any Queer media illegal. The passing of this law caused an increase in Anti-LGBTQ+ protests and violence. Any safe spaces or resources for Queer People in Russia were shut down and taken away. Countries like Russia didn't decide on a random Tuesday to start making life harder for Queer people because it's fun, it is a form of control that was most likely learned from seeing how the Catholic Church runs. The song *Take Me to Church* uses storytelling and literary devices like, Allusion, Imagery, Metaphor, and Repetition, to argue that institutions like the Catholic Church misuse their power to oppress their members, and many times, they use and demonize sexuality and love to do it.

Written in Hozier's attic when he was 23, *Take me to Church* explicitly critiques the Catholic Church, and conveys the complicated relationship many people have with the

Institution and their own sexuality. In different interviews Hozier remarks on how he finds it funny that his song is on religious playlists. Seeing Christians have taken a liking to it believing it's something for the Church though it is criticizing the institution and it is overtly sexual in nature.

*Take Me to Church* follows the speaker as they talk about their lover and as they recognize the pain and self-hatred the Catholic Church has given them. During the song, the speaker begins to place their lover in the role of the Church, offering their lover the allegiance and obedience they once gave to the Church. There are moments of repeated "Amen"s throughout the song solidifying that the song stands as its own prayer. The speaker professes how they would follow and worship their lover as they point out and criticize the behavior and hypocrisies of the Catholic Church. The song closes with the speaker repeating and promising their devotion to their lover in place of the Church, showing that being taken to church, is being taken to her.

In order to bring validity to Hozier's claims that there is something wrong with how the Catholic Church, and institutions like it function, he uses his own experience, and his knowledge of religion to validate his perspective. In Verse 1, the speaker talks about the pain caused by the Church, through allusions, references, tradition and scripture to prove his knowledge and experiences making him worthy to speak his truth. "Every Sunday's gettin' more bleak A fresh poison each week We were born sick, you heard them say it, My church offers no absolutes She tells me, "Worship in the bedroom"" (Hozier 7-11) In this excerpt, the speaker talks about the damage going to church has done to them, calling it fresh poison and referencing how churches

will call Queer people, sick, or if they're Evangelical enough, how everyone is sick. The second thing to validate his authority on the topic is the line, "She tells me, "Worship in the bedroom."" This line is multiple things in one. It is a reference to sex and the tradition of praying before bed. The line also is an allusion to a story from the New Testament where Jesus tells people how to be a good follower of God, saying, when you pray, you should not do it for all to see, but close your door, and pray in your room while no one is watching. Referencing a specific point the Bible gives the speaker authority and proof that they were a Christian. With the mix of honesty of one's experience and the knowledge of Catholic text, how could one question your authority on this topic? In verse 1, Hozier gives the speaker authority to speak on the church's behavior by proving his knowledge on Catholic tradition and scripture, but by also talking about his own experience.

Hozier uses the speaker's narrative replacing the Church for their Lover as a criticism for the Catholic Church. Through his use of allusion, imagery and metaphor, he proves that the church misuses its power. In Verse 2 of *Take Me to Church*, Hozier uses logic to reason that the riches the church has taken from the people is immoral and deserves to benefit the people and not the Church. "Drain the whole sea, get somethin' shiny. Somethin' meaty for the main course, That's a fine lookin' high horse, What you got in the stable? We've a lot of starvin' faithful, That looks tasty, that looks plenty This is hungry work." (Hozier 32-36) These lines from Verse 2 are full of references to the problems with the Catholic Church and its dark past. "Whole Sea" is an allusion to the "Holy Sea" or the Vatican, the symbol of the Catholic Church, its Global importance, and the unnecessary opulence riches the Church has. The imagery that comes with draining a sea allows the reader to get a grasp how great the riches of the church are. This line is

a metaphor as well stating, taking your things back from the church is as impossible as trying to drain a sea. These large, and immense, masses of water that are not afraid to take and drown you. This line stands to paint how large and rich the church is and how it is impossible to drain it's resources. The rest of the verse follows by saying the people should take back the fruits of the pain, labor, and faithfulness to help the common man. A High Horse is mentioned, referencing the "Holier than thou," attitude many clergymen present while not following the Bible's teachings. As an Irish man, Hozier knows a lot about the controlling nature of the Catholic Church, and how it perpetrated slavery, oppression, and the impoverishment of his people. Verse 2, references the needless riches of the church, and uses logic to argue the fruits of the people's labor should stand to feed them when they are suffering for the Church's gain.

The most important way Hozier conveys his argument that the church is damaging, needlessly oppressive, and incorrectly controlling of sexuality is through emotion. The way Hozier portrays the speaker, their relationship to the Church, and their lover, paints a person traumatized by their religion trying to love while carrying the scars of how they were taught to see sexuality, love, and their own identity. Through the text, Hozier appeals to the audience showing how the Church and institutions like it make people feel terrible for something pure, innate, and human. The use of storytelling and literary devices used by Hozier in the Chorus and first Verse allow the audience to understand and empathize with the speaker. Proving his point through appealing to emotions. The line from Verse 1, "We were born sick, you heard them say it." (Hozier 9) was previously mentioned. Hozier uses that phrase to call on the audience to listen and feel with the speaker. *Imagine being called inherently sick, all the time. By the institution that is supposed to love, guide, and lead you.* The Chorus is another moment of an appeal to

emotion. "I'll worship like a dog at the shrine of your lies, I'll tell you my sins and you can sharpen your knife, Offer me that deathless death, Oh, good God, let me give you my life." (Hozier 19-22) The lyrics are desperate with the speaker comparing themselves to a dog, begging the Lover for the same attention the Church gave them. These lyrics show how in love the speaker is. Allowing the audience to connect to the love and longing felt by the speaker, but it does something else. The use of these lyrics being projected on the Lover who is supposed to replace the Church says a lot. If the speaker is asking the replacement for the Church to treat them this way, does that mean this is the way the Church treated them? Treating the speaker like a dog, insinuating physical harm, and the relinquishment of one's life. The imagery shared with the audience allows them to see the pain and mistreatment the speaker has suffered by the hands of the church. The consistent repetition and tone of the song adds to the way the song is shaped and the argument given. As the speaker replaces the church, the music and tone of the song wrap around them creating a prayer and the feeling and emotion one may feel in church. Every time the chorus is sung, it repeats. The repetition evokes the nature of prayer. Most prayers, in the Catholic Tradition, have to be repeated several times. All of these elements form this prayer, appealing to the audience, and creating a sacred moment in the speaker's time of struggle.

The Catholic Church has been one of the longest standing and pervasive institutions on the earth. A large part of Catholic teaching has dealt with sex and people's bodies. Throughout history, women have been demonized for their bodies, Queer people and people of color have been treated poorly by the Church and its members, and even its followers have suffered because the teachings have been used to control and oppress populations. Through the song *Take Me to Church*, Hozier presents the experience of many people that grew up in the church, feeling

wrong or evil for who they love or their existence as a sexual being, which all humans are. Hozier uses the song to criticize the Catholic Church and other institutions that follow in their footsteps for controlling their followers and shaming them for their existence or what naturally comes to them as humans. To prove the argument, Hozier used storytelling and literary devices to appeal to emotion, prove authority on the topic, and appeal to logic.

*Take Me to Church* is certified five times platinum with more than 2.7 billion streams on Spotify alone, the song resonates with many, and is seen as an anthem for the Queer community that was raised under Christianity. Over 11 years after the release of the song, Hozier sings *Take Me to Church* at every concert. Reaffirming the message that no institution should force people to suppress their love and sexuality. *Take Me to Church* and its message resonates with so many because of how truthful the song is and how it uses the motifs most recognizable from the church to create a new prayer. One that sees all people for who they are, acknowledges their pain, and gives the grace and love they deserved to receive from the people that profess to care for them.