

Bob Dylan's 'Pay in Blood' – an analysis by Kees de Graaf .

Introduction.

'Pay in Blood' is another intriguing and fascinating song from the album 'Tempest'. At first glance the lyrics of this song seem to dripping in blood, are full of hatred, violence and vengeance of a battered, spiteful, poet who apparently has a hard believing whether he will make it back home alive and who is ready- without showing any mercy whatsoever - to have his enemies pay in full for all the wrongs they have done.

In some sort of a sense, the song breathes the same atmosphere as some songs on Dylan's album 'Modern Times'. On that album and on 'Tempest' as well, and in particular in this song, we see some of the violent struggle, abundantly present in the Old Testament where the resistance against the promised road, which will ultimately lead to the promised Savior, the Messiah – Yeshua- Jesus, is so strong and violent that there is no alternative left but to combat this resistance with equally violent weapons. In this respect the New Testament has taken a new and decisive turn and we will also find this back in the song - as we will see later on.

The key to understanding the song is hidden in the refrain: **'I pay in blood, but not my own'**. Raised in the Jewish tradition and faith, Dylan is fully aware of what 'to pay in blood' means. The Thora makes it clear that life itself – the soul of man, in Hebrew 'Nefesh' – is in the blood of a man. This principle of the life being in the blood is made clear in Leviticus 17:11: "*For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar. It is the blood that makes atonement for one's life*". Reconciliation between God and man has to be made and can only be achieved through payment in blood. In the Thora, in the Old Testament, animals took the place of man and were sacrificed on the altar and the blood of these animals brought about reconciliation between God and man. This was all done in anticipation of the real Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who came and sacrificed himself by shedding his precious blood and by doing so ransomed the world (I Peter 1:19). Jesus Christ paid in full by his blood for the sins of the whole world. So when the poet says: **'I pay in blood'** it is as if he were saying: "*I'm no better a man than anyone else in this fallen world. I fully participate in the human condition. The human condition is in itself full of evil, of hatred, of violence, of vengeance and retribution, I see this when I look around this world, and when I'm honest, I find it also in myself. This world is hopelessly forlorn and so am I. To set things right there is only one way out. Reconciliation – redemption- payment – atonement - has to be made. There is only one sacrifice that God will accept to reconcile himself with this world and with me personally and that is through payment in blood. That is why I can only pay in blood. This blood is nothing else than myself, not only my soul but also **'legs and arms and body and bone'**. At the same time I find that I'm a sinner and because I am a sinner I **cannot** pay with my **own** blood. I need somebody else to pay for me, somebody who takes my place and who is not a sinner. There is only one person who is not a sinner and whose sacrifice of his blood will be accepted by God, and that is the blood of Jesus Christ, He*

will pay with His blood instead of mine and that is why I say: 'I pay in blood, but not my own'.

This concept is called '**substitution**' and there can hardly be any doubt that this is what Dylan has had in mind here. It is all about redemption, whether we like it or not.

On the other hand, when we compare the core of this song with some of the songs of his so-called Christian trilogy – "Slow Train coming", "Saved" and "Shot of Love" – something important has changed. In songs like '*I believe in you*' it is "them" – non believers, infidels - against Dylan and his newly found faith: '**they** like to drive me from this town, **they** show me to the door and say don't come back no more' and also in one of the most controversial of all Dylan songs Dylan ever made 'Property of Jesus', it is again "them" against Dylan. '*Resent him (Dylan) to the bone*' followed by the Dylan's bitter retort: '*You got something better; you've got a heart of stone*'.

But in this song he confesses: '**My head's so hard, must be made of stone**'. It is no longer only just "them" against me. He confesses that he has an equal part in the mess we all created. The point he wants to make is that no man or woman on this earth, whether he or she is a Christian or not, or no matter what other faith he or she practices, has the power within **himself** or **herself** to rise above the wicked condition of the human condition we are all in. Redemptive power has to come from elsewhere and can never be found in the human condition itself. Humanity makes matters only worse. It is exactly the reason why he says: '*I pay in blood, **but not my own***'.

On the internet some have argued that the verses of the song represent a dialogue between a slave and his master; the slave is meant in those verses which speak of pain, suffering and hardship and the master is meant in those verses which speak of revenge, retribution, punishment and violence. Implicitly the whole institution of slavery is tackled and the western nations, including America, are '*accused of murder*' for so long having kept up a system of human repression, just for financial gain. Although, as we will see, not all verses deal with this issue and the perspective shifts continuously, yet I think there is a lot of truth in the notion that a large part of this song deals with slavery and its horrible consequences. That the song for a large part is about slavery may be backed up by Dylan's recent RS interview. In this interview Bob Dylan says that stigma of slavery ruined America and he has a hard time believing the country can get rid of this shame because it was '*founded on the backs of slaves*.' Dylan goes on to say that in America "*people are at each other's throats just because they are of a different color; it will hold any nation back*." Dylan also said: "*If slavery had been given up in a more peaceful way, America would be far ahead today*."

At the same time, Dylan would not be Dylan if he would not take the issue of slavery to a deeper and more spiritual level. The poet has the intention to cut to the core of slavery – of human bondage - and in such a situation harsh words cannot be avoided to picture the dark reality of this slavery. Only when we come to understanding what is at the core of human bondage we start coming aware of its terrible consequences and of the only way to get out of it and that is through redemption – payment in blood.

Actually, slavery, human bondage, started at the beginning of mankind when as Dylan says

metaphorically **'Someone slipped a drug in your wine, and when you gulped it down and crossed the line'**. This is another way, a poetic way, of expressing what went wrong with man in the beginning, in the Garden of Eden. Wine symbolizes the ultimate communion between God and man. One day this communion will be restored (Mat 26:29). In the beginning, in the Garden of Eden, man deliberately broke this communion and willingly gulped down the treacherous words of Satan and by doing so crossed a fatal line. From that day on mankind became **enslaved** to Satan. His enemy became his master. Through all ages, in an ill attempt to free mankind from the yoke of slavery we have seen that, in turns, slaves have become masters and masters have become slaves. Only redemption, interference, from above is capable of breaking this morbid chain of events, this deadly cycle. But it goes even further than that. Human sin is the mother of all slavery. Redemption from slavery, initially brought out by the exodus of Israel from the slave house of Egypt, was only the beginning; it was fully materialized when Jesus – through his payment in blood - bought mankind free from the slave house of sin .But it did not stop there. Those bought free are subsequently transformed through the Holy Spirit. This transformation is described i.e. in 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18: *'For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image'* . By the way, this is quite something else Dylan spoke about in his recent *Rolling Stone* interview. Dylan did not speak about 'Transformation' but he spoke about 'Transfiguration' a process which he said he had undergone in the sixties. 'Transfiguration' however, is usually reserved to Christ only (see e.g. Mat. 17:2). So when a 'normal' human being – no matter who he or she is – assumes that some kind of a 'Transfiguration' has happened to him or herself, a lot of alarm bells have to start ringing. When you hear people talk about a 'Transfiguration' experience you'd better watch out. 'Transfiguration' imaginations may easily lead to misplaced *'delusions of grandeur'* which may ultimately lead to *'the disease of conceit'*.

Transformation – or inward renewal through the Holy Spirit – has two main aspects and we can recognize at least one these aspects in **'Pay in blood'**. The first thing Transformation causes is: pain and suffering. Transformation changes the heart. That is never an easy process. Dylan – in the context of talking about slavery in his RS interview- : *"You have to change your heart if you want to change."* The second aspect of Transformation is joy and gratitude but we do not find this in this song. Having said this, we take a look at the first verse:

'Well I'm grinding my life out, steady and sure, nothing more wretched than what I must endure' seems partly inspired by the poet Ovid. The Poems of Exile: 'Tristia and the Black Sea Letters' Book V says:

*'You write that I should divert these mournful days with writing, stop my wits rotting from neglect. That's hard advice, my friend: poems emerge as the product of happiness- need peace of mind- but my fate's shaken by adverse gales, there could be **nothing more wretched than what I endure'**.*

Dylan's words ***Well I'm grinding my life out, steady and sure, nothing more wretched than what I must endure*** immediately takes our mind into the realm of slavery. One thinks of hard, strenuous and monotonous slavery work over an indefinite period of time without any prospect of relief and in violation of all basic human rights. Your life is grinded out as if you are in some prison where you are stuck under a millstone, the friction of which pulverizes your life, steady but sure, or like the poet Milton once wrote: *'send thee into the common prison, there to grind'*. ***'Nothing more wretched than what I must endure'*** is as it says in Proverbs 15:15: *'All the days of the oppressed are wretched'*. It recalls not only the wretched days of the poet's ancestors the, the Hebrews, who were enslaved in Egypt as Exodus 3: 7 says: *"I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering"* but it is also a bitter complaint of all slaves and oppressed of all ages.

As said, the concept of slavery has not only a social aspect but also a personal, spiritual aspect. Man must be redeemed from his enslavement to sin and set free. It involves the changing of his heart and this is likewise a very painful process. No matter how beautiful the outcome in the end may be, this learning process feels like ***grinding your life out***, and what you come across in this process of renewal, what you endure feels very wretched indeed. The apostle Paul – and any other person going through a process chastening for that matter – is aware of this inner conflict this process evokes and like Paul sometimes has to confess: *"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"* (Romans 7:24). ***"I'm drenched in the light that shines from the sun"*** whereby ***'sun'*** may also be understood as 'Son' as 'Christ'. When one is drenched in the light that comes from the 'Son', from Jesus, it may mean that one is so enlightened that one becomes the gift of discernment, the trait of judging wisely and objectively in all circumstances. Strictly speaking only God, including the Son, owns this gift to perfection and has the authority to use it. When an adulterous woman was brought to Jesus (John 8:5), Jesus had the perfect right to say ***"I could stone you to death for the wrongs that you done"*** but He voluntarily refrained from His right to take up the first stone and to stone her to death and decided to let her go. But in the hands of sinners, oppressors and slave-drivers, this gift of discernment turns into an arbitrary, despotic, illegal means of retaliation and revenge from which there is no escape. ***'Sooner or later you make a mistake, I'll put you in a chain that you never will break, legs and arms and body and bone'*** emphasizes once again that there is no escape once innocent people are in the hands of oppressors who have no other objective but to exploit other people for their own gain. The inclination towards revenge and abuse of power is deeply rooted in the human condition, is at the bottom of all our hearts, and is always after complete submission of any opponent, to tie him in unbreakable chains, ***'legs and arms and body and bone'***. This chain of events can only be broken if payment in blood is made, but – as outlined in our first article - it cannot be the blood of the human condition itself, that is why it says: ***'I pay in blood, but not my own'***.

We move on to the second verse of the song:

***'Night after night, day after day, they strip your useless hopes away,
the more I take, the more I give, the more I die, the more I live.
I got something in my pocket make your eyeballs swim,
I got dogs could tear you limb from limb,
I'm circling around the Southern Zone,
I pay in blood, but not my own'.***

In ***'Night after night, day after day, they strip your useless hopes away'*** we see again that once you're in the slave-driver's hands, any hopes of a livable future are reduced to zero. On a deeper, spiritual level, these words refer to the healing power of the Holy Spirit, in a continuous process of inner renewal, the Spirit dashes, strips, any hope the human condition may have to redeem itself from the cycle of death under its own power. Apart from this, also this line seems partly inspired by Ovid Book III of The Black Sea Letters which has: *"When I return to this place, gods and heaven are left behind me: the Pontic shore is close – too close to Styx. And if my fight goes against Fate's prohibitions, then strip me, Maximus, of my useless hopes"*.

In ***"The more I take, the more I give, the more I die, the more I live"*** the poet alludes to the teachings of Jesus and Paul. There seems to be something paradoxical in these words. These words seem contrary to received opinion and common sense; something which in appearance is absurd, but yet may be true in fact. It all has to do with the process of inward renewal by the Spirit, which is a precondition to get rid of all slavery in its deepest sense. If you surrender to this process, it looks as if you are a loser (confirmed further on in the song by: *'Low cards are what I've got'*) when in fact you have a winning hand. When you give more than you take, you end up with nothing. Ending up with nothing because you chose to give instead of take is only absurd when you do not reckon with the blessing of God which ultimately is behind everything, just as it says in Acts 20:35: *"You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'.*

The words ***"the more I die, the more I live"*** seem equally paradoxical and absurd. These words allude to what Jesus says in Mat. 10:39: *'If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it'.* The process of change, of inward renewal is a painful process and feels like dying but in the end it leads to life in abundance. In this respect Hebrew 12:11 rings true: *"No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way"*.

When we hear the words: ***"I got something in my pocket make your eyeballs swim, I got dogs could tear you limb from limb, I'm circlin' around the Southern Zone"*** the swing apparently has moved to the highest point if its opposite direction, but it all happens within the same personality. The slave and the slave-driver are one and the same person. On the one hand, the process of change has softened and humiliated his heart – *'the more I take the more I give'* – but on the other hand, the alter ego representing revenge, retaliation, the slave driver's attitude, is still very much present within himself, lingers at the bottom of his

heart, and is ready to lash out mercilessly. But the good news is that the poet is aware of the fact that this dark craving for bloody revenge still lingers at the bottom of his heart.

Awareness of these dark feelings is the first precondition to combat those feelings of hatred and revenge, and that is exactly what the Spirit wants to bring about in a man. If you want to combat those feelings it is necessary to look into the mirror, and to become conscious of those feelings. The worst thing that could happen to a man is when he deceives himself and when he thinks that he does not have those kinds of morbid feelings and that he is a better person than anyone else. ***"I got something in my pocket make your eyeballs swim, I got dogs could tear you limb from limb"*** proves that he has the weaponry and the means available to strike his opponents a mortal blow and that he is ready to use these weapons in such a way that his enemies will never get up again. The dogs are ready and will tear you apart limb from limb, in the same way as dogs tear apart an escaping slave or prisoner.

"I'm circlin' around the Southern Zone" at first glance reminds you of the so-called 'Southern Zone' which stretches from the South African Cape to the border between Zimbabwe and Zambia, formed by the Zambezi River. It is more likely however, that this is an allusion to the Southern part of America. The South of America held on much longer to slavery than the North. So when it says ***"I'm circlin' around the Southern Zone"*** it may give you the idea of some sort of vulture, a vampire maybe, circling around in the Southern States of America to find new blood, new victims to enslave. For all these ugly things, payment in blood is necessary, but once again we say: it cannot be his own blood, redemptive blood from elsewhere is necessary.

"Low cards are what I've got

But I'll play this hand whether I like it or not

I'm sworn to uphold the laws of God

You can put me out in front of a firing squad

I've been out and around with the rowdy men

Just like you my handsome friend

My head's so hard, must be made of stone

I pay in blood, but not my own"

In most games of cards when you find out that you have received low cards, you say to yourself: ***"Low cards are what I've got"***, and you simply say: 'I pass', but in this case the player is determined to play on and says ***"I'll play this hand whether I like it or not"***. The question of whether 'he' likes it or not to play on seems just as irrelevant as the question of whether 'you' like it or not. Whether he likes it or not is not even a question. Nevertheless he at least suggests that he is not going to like it to play on and implicitly suggests that the vast majority of his fans and followers are not going to like it either. *'You can't win with a losing hand'* Dylan wrote in *'Things have changed'*. What is Dylan hinting at here? Part of the answer is in what Dylan wrote in the song *'Series of Dreams'*: *'And the cards are no good that you're holding, unless they're from another world'*. When, in this world, you say: ***"I'm sworn to uphold the laws of God"*** you have a very low card indeed, at least so it seems. Although it is a very high card in this other world, a world you can't see with your eyes, here

on earth it is a very unpopular card indeed and although it's a card he does not like to play, - in fact nobody would like to play this card at all- he *has* to play it, he has sworn to play it. Why? Well, I think that the 60 minutes CBS television interview Bob Dylan gave in 2004 might give us an important clue. In this interview Dylan is asked why after so many years he still out there on stage, performing all of his songs on tour. After emphasizing that he doesn't take any of it for granted, Dylan gives the following reply: *"It goes back to that destiny thing. I mean, I made a bargain with it, you know, long time ago. And I'm holding up my end"*. On the question what his bargain was, Dylan answers: *"to get where I am now"*. And asked whom he made that bargain with he answers: *"With the Chief Commander, in this earth and in a world we can't see"*. No matter how elusive this answer may sound, one may easily read between the lines that *his* part of the bargain, as Dylan sees it, might have been that Dylan would **"uphold the laws of God"**, he has even **'sworn'** to uphold the laws of God. Upholding the laws of God may mean that Dylan feels that as an artist he has to act as **'watchtower'**, to warn people, in some sort of a way just like the old biblical Prophets once did, that this world is doomed. It may be the reason why the song *'All along the watchtower'* which dwells on this subject, has run like a continuous thread through almost all of his gigs for so many years. He seems convinced that he has a mission to fulfill in life and he has found a way to express his determination that he will adhere to the principles of this mission, that's why he says: **"You can put me out in front of a firing squad"**. If this is necessary he is ready to give his life for his conviction and to become a martyr. Even being put out in front of a firing squad will not make him change his mind; he will uphold the laws of God, no matter what happens to him.

The words **"I've been out and around with the rowdy men"** are heard differently. Since there is no official transcription, some hear **'rising'** men instead of **'rowdy'** men. **'Rowdy'** may mean 'disturbing the public peace' and that is exactly what Dylan has been doing all his life, e.g. what he did when he wrote all these protest songs in the sixties, therefore 'rowdy' seems to fit better than 'rising'. He has been **'out and around'** e.g. with the 'rowdy' sixties 'counterculture' and adds **"just like you my handsome friend"**. **"Handsome"** means pleasing in appearance especially by reason of conformity to ideals of form and proportion, also agreeable to the correct (political) taste. Therefore, when he says **"my handsome friend"** there is an undercurrent of irony and bitter sarcasm in his words. His so-called **"handsome friends"** followed and supported him as long as long as the *"voice of the sixties counter culture"* – as they saw him – was mainstream, popular and suited their political agenda. Later on however, for example in the late seventies, when Dylan converted to a very unpopular type of Christianity, most of these former friends, who could not get their neck around this, were gone. Dylan has always had a stubbornness, always going in the opposite direction of what the experts say, that is why he goes on to say that **"My head's so hard, must be made of stone"** shows his determination and stubbornness not to back down on - what he regards - as critical issues. His handsome friends follow the main stream and retreat when it no longer suits their agenda but he is ready to persist and to walk the line till the

very end. Why? Because he says: ***"I pay in blood, but not my own"***. The price paid for him is just too high to give in.

***'Another politician pumping out the piss
Another ragged beggar blowing you a kiss
You've got the same eyes that your mother does
If only you could prove who your father was
Someone must've slipped a drug in your wine
You gulped it down and you crossed the line
Man can't live by bread alone
I pay in blood, but not my own'.***

When Dylan says ***"Another politician pumping out the piss"*** some analysts on the internet see this as a disillusioned septuagenarian's attack on the politicians, the state of modern politics, and vested interests who rule this earth for their own ends and without any moral or human compass, others see it as some reference to the attitude of 'many of the more prominent Christians in America who supposedly pay for their own sins in another's blood (Christ's) and yet have very little compassion or forgiveness to offer anyone else'. True as these connotations may be, it goes deeper than that. When we consider this verse as a whole, it looks as it refers to what happened to Jesus when He was in the final stages of his life here on earth.

"Another politician pumping out the piss" may also very well refer to the governor and politician Pontius Pilate, who in spite of the fact that he was deeply convinced that Jesus was innocent, nevertheless handed over Jesus to the Sanhedrin to be crucified, apparently for political reasons only. Pilate violated justice just to save his own political neck, as we may read in John 19:12: ***"Then Pilate tried to release him, but the Jewish leaders shouted, "If you release this man, you are no 'friend of Caesar'. Anyone who declares himself a king is a rebel against Caesar."*** This notion just tipped the balance in Jesus's lawsuit when seen from a secular point of view. ***"Pumping out the piss"*** was particularly illustrated when Pilate copiously and ostentatiously washed his hands publicly, to fake innocence for the shedding of the blood of Jesus. (Matt. 27:24).

"Another ragged beggar blowing you a kiss" may be a poetical reflection on what happened to Jesus as he was on his way to Jerusalem and entered the town of Jericho, less than a week before he was condemned and crucified by Pilate. We read of this in Mark 10:46. There was this ***blind beggar*** Bartimaeus who shouted to Jesus: ***"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"*** Jesus healed his blindness. It shows that no matter how brutally Jesus was rejected by the authorities, he kept on standing up for the blind and the poor and the downtrodden.

Some have argued on the internet that ***"You've got the same eyes that your mother does; If only you could prove who your father was"*** may represent Dylan's retort to some 48 year old man from Rhode Island, who claims to be Dylan's bastard son. There is hardly any credence in this story however, and even if it were true, it would be very unlikely that a private person like Dylan would refer to such an intimate matter in a song. Within the

context it is therefore much more likely that this episode refers to Jesus. It all has to do with the claim from Jesus that He is the Son of God and that God is his Father and for that reason He was conceived by the Holy Spirit through the Virgin Mary. The Pharisees reject this claim as the dialogue of John 8:13-19 shows: *"The Pharisees replied, "You are making those claims about yourself! Such testimony is not valid." Jesus told them, "These claims are valid even though I make them about myself. For I know where I came from and where I am going, but you don't know this about me. You judge me by human standards, but I do not judge anyone. And if I did, my judgment would be correct in every respect because I am not alone. **The Father** who sent me is with me. Your own law says that if two people agree about something, their witness is accepted as fact. I am one witness, and **my Father** who sent me is the other. "Where is your father?" they asked. Jesus answered, "Since you don't know who I am, you don't know who my **Father** is. If you knew me, you would also know my **Father**."* But not only the Pharisees but also some of the closest followers of Jesus, the Apostles initially had a hard believing Jesus's claim and at that time equally felt the need for 'proof'. We read of this in John 14:8 when the Apostle Philip said to Jesus: *"Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."*

Dylan goes on to say metaphorically: **'Someone slipped a drug in your wine, and when you gulped it down and crossed the line'**. This scene is not based on the gospel and therefore cannot be attributed to what happened to Jesus after his crucifixion. It is true, Jesus drank a taste of wine on the cross but only **after** his mission on the cross had been fulfilled (John 18:28-30) and he drank it voluntarily, knowing what he was doing, and apart from this, this drinking of sour wine in which there was no drug at all - certainly did not cause his death. As said earlier **'Someone slipped a drug in your wine, and when you gulped it down and crossed the line'** is rather about human bondage and slavery and is another way, a poetic way, of expressing what went wrong with man in the beginning, in the Garden of Eden. Wine symbolizes the ultimate communion between God and man. One day this communion will be restored (Mat 26:29). In the beginning, in the Garden of Eden, man deliberately broke this communion and willingly gulped down the treacherous words of Satan and by doing so crossed a fatal line. From that day on mankind became **enslaved** to Satan.

'Man can't live by bread alone' is a direct quote from Jesus (reciting Moses who said the same in Deuteronomy 8:3). Jesus was led into the desert and had fasted for forty day and nights and in the end became very hungry. The devil tempted Jesus to use His super natural powers and to turn the stones of the desert into loaves of bread. Jesus refused categorically as we may read in Matt. 4:4: *"But He (Jesus) answered and said, "It is written, **Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God**"*. The meaning is that in order to obtain his daily bread man entirely depends on the charity and grace of God and *not* on his own capabilities. Food is a gift from God. He needs to look up to his creator to get it. Salvation too is a gift from God. To obtain salvation payment has to be made in blood. Man cannot pay however, therefore is has to be someone else's blood; that is why again the refrain follows: **'I pay in blood, but not my own'**.

***'How I made it back home, nobody knows
Or how I survived so many blows
I've been through hell, what good did it do?
You bastard! I'm supposed to respect you?
I'll give you justice, I'll fathom/fatten your purse
Show me your moral virtue first
Hear me holler and hear me moan
I pay in blood but not my own'.***

The question is, are the words ***'How I made it back home, nobody knows, or how I survived so many blows'*** just an illustration of the 'survival of the fittest', an expression of the resilience of the human race, that no matter how hard the human race is oppressed, it will always come out on top and it will always survive, no matter how hard it is struck, or is there more to it? There is certainly a lot of truth in this argument of human endurance. Yet we feel that there are strong arguments to think that this verse too is for the larger part about Jesus, albeit in covert terms as so often in Dylan's work, in words which although they cannot be directly derived from the gospel, they nevertheless force themselves upon you as somehow connected with the gospel. Jesus ***'made it back home'***. His home is in Heaven, at the right hand of God the Father. He left his home, the heavens, when he incarnated and –apart from His divine nature - adopted the human nature through the Virgin Mary. He became Man to ***'pay in blood'*** for the sins of the entire mankind. Jesus is the One Dylan points at in the refrain of the song when he says: ***'I pay in blood but not my own'***. For Jesus this payment meant indescribable pain, torture and suffering both physically and mentally, culminating in His crucifixion and the worst suffering of all when He was forsaken by God the Father (Mat. 27:46). He received blow after blow but yet he survived. He died on the cross but rose from the dead after three days and ascended back to Heaven: ***'He made it back home'***. How He – Jesus- made it? Dylan says: ***'Nobody knows'***, this is of course seen from a human perspective. No living soul under the sun can fathom the depth of His sufferings or grasp the glorious power by which Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to Heaven. Only God knows. In fact, whatever happened to Jesus, it all went according to God's plan.

When Dylan goes on to say: ***'I've been through hell, what good did it do?'*** this reflects Matt. 27:46 where Jesus on the cross, in bitter agony, cries out with a loud voice: ***'My God, My God why have you forsaken me?'***. Some theologians have argued that Hell is the place where God is ***not*** present, and that Hell is the place of absolute absence of God. So being forsaken by God the Father, with whom He has an eternal and most beloved relationship, is *the* equivalent of going through Hell, which at the same time also meant that the devil and all the demons had free rein to hurl themselves on Jesus and bring his suffering to its culminating point, to a point which no human being has ever endured or will ever endure.

'What good did it do?' is the poetical equivalent of Jesus saying ***'Why? Why have you forsaken me?'***. This outcry of Jesus again has to be seen from a human perspective, to be understood as the suffering as the Son of **Man**. From a divine point of view however, ***it did a lot of*** good .It is the best thing that could ever have happened to the poet. This is not

explicitly stated but is silently implied. Jesus, going as deep down as Hell and covered with the wrath of God, realized **payment in blood** for mankind to its full extent and made the refrain of the song true: **'I pay in blood, but not my own'**. It was not my blood but it was Jesus's blood.

The words **'You bastard! I'm supposed to respect you?'** adds insult to injury for Jesus. So much surrendering love from Jesus was met with the most extreme hostility from his opponents. Some have argued that the Talmud states that Jesus was a bastard born of adultery (Yebamoth, folio 49b). However, this is a matter of interpretation; since the name of Jesus is not mentioned in this section of the Talmud, this interpretation is to be regarded as highly controversial and speculative and should for that reason be rejected. That is not to say that Jesus was (is) not called a bastard son by others. He was and He is. We also refer to what we already said about the line: **"You've got the same eyes that your mother does; If only you could prove who your father was"**. But it even goes further than that. In the gospels we also hear of a false and wicked accusation that Jesus was empowered by the devil (the demons). Luke 11:15: *'No wonder he can cast out demons. He gets his power from Satan, the prince of demons'*. **'I'm supposed to respect you?'** is a rhetorical question showing utter contempt and it not only refers to Jesus being falsely called a bastard son but also to His humble, low birth from Nazareth. John 1:46: *"Can anything good come from Nazareth?"*.

The poet dwells on the same subject as he goes on to say: **'I'll give you justice, I'll fatten your purse, show me your moral virtue first'**. Some here some alternative lyrics here: **'I'll fathom your purse'** instead of **'fatten'** and **'show me your moral that you reversed'** instead of **'show me your moral virtue first'**, but within the context this seems less appropriate. Also these words are best understood if you regard them as addressed to Jesus. These words resound in the gospel. **'I'll fatten your purse'** may almost be literally applicable to Jesus since Jesus had no money and he sent forth his disciples without money in their pockets (Mat. 10:9). One day they asked Jesus: *"By what authority are you doing all these things? Who gave you the right?"*(Luke 20:2). Luke 11:16 says: *'Others, trying to test Jesus, demanded that he show them a miraculous sign from heaven to prove his authority'*. It is as if people said to Jesus: 'we will accept you and follow you and do you justice, we will fatten your purse but you must first accept *our* conditions and follow *our* political agenda. Free us from the Romans and give us bread. Stop talking about your heavenly mission, unless you can proof to us by a miraculous sign that you are – as you claim - sent by God the Father. **'Show your moral virtue first'**, sounds as if they reprimand Him: 'who gave you the authority to judge us; on what moral virtue are you doing all these things!'. **'Hear me holler and hear me moan'** means: hear my said and bitter complaint, how on earth is it possible that so much love from Jesus is met with such fervent hostility? This world has really gone mad and nobody is capable to break this morbid deadlock. It stresses even more the need for redemption and substitution at the highest possible price and that is payment through blood. It is once again the reason why the refrain follows: **'I pay in blood, but not my own'**. We come to the final verse of the song:

*'You get your lover in the bed
Come here, I'll break your lousy head
Our nation must be saved and freed
You've been accused of murder, how do you plead?
This is how I spend my days
I came to bury, not to praise
I'll drink my fill and sleep alone
I play in blood, but not my own'.*

Sexual dissipations and abuse, extreme violence, nationalism and racism seem to have ruled the earth throughout the ages. Sexual dissipations- to get as many lovers in your bed as you possibly can, and extreme violence – **'Come here, I'll break your lousy head'** – go hand in hand in this forlorn world. **'Our nation must be saved and freed'** has been the standard slogan to justify racism, nationalism and ethnic cleansing for many centuries and at all places in the world. **'Our nation must be saved and freed'** *also* may easily lead to individual human rights of innocent people being sacrificed on the altar of nationalism. This is exactly what happened to Jesus and may lurk at the background of what the poet tries to tell us here. We read of this in John 11:47-50: *"Then the leading priests and Pharisees called the high council together. "What are we going to do?" they asked each other. "This man (Jesus) certainly performs many miraculous signs. If we allow him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him. Then the Roman army will come and **destroy** both our Temple and our **nation**."* Caiaphas, who was high priest at that time, said, *"You don't know what you're talking about! You don't realize that it's better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole **nation** to be destroyed."* It is as if Caiaphas says: **'Our nation must be saved and freed, I'm gonna do whatever circumstances require'** and Caiaphas goes on to say in John 11:50: *"You don't realize that it's better for you that one man (Jesus) should die for the people than for the whole **nation** to be destroyed."*

When human rights of ethnic groups, minorities (e.g. slaves) or of individuals are sacrificed for the benefit of the nation, this may lead to accusations of downright murder, that is why it now says: **'You've been accused of murder, how do you plead?'**. Some have quite rightly argued that America – and in fact the the whole western world- may be accused of murder for having built an entire society on the institution of slavery for such a long time, only for financial gain. But there are more layers in this accusation. It looks as if Dylan also takes this accusation of murder to a more personal, individual level and in the end focusses the attention on the murder of Jesus Christ. It is as if K. Kristofferson's *"They killed Him"* – covered by Dylan on his album "Knocked out Loaded" re-echoes here. This song deals with the fact that some of the noblest and greatest men in history were violently killed. "They" killed Mahatma Gandhi who *'knew his duty, and the price he had to pay'*, and "they" killed Martin Luther King, who *'made the bells of freedom ring today'*. But then the song describes the murder of Jesus Christ:

*'The only Son of God Almighty
The Holy One called Jesus Christ*

*Healed the lame and fed the hungry
And for his love they took His life away
On the road to glory where the story never ends
Just the Holy Son of man we'll never understand'*

The question that is now raised in the song about all those innocent killings is: **'How do you plead?'** How do you deal with this accusation? Well, the implicit answer is that we, as mankind and as individuals, must plead guilty. And if we are guilty we have to face condemnation. This song makes us clear that in the eyes of the poet there is only way to escape eternal condemnation is to accept the notion that redemption is needed and payment is necessary. Man cannot pay through his own strength and power and has to conclude: **'I pay in blood but not my own'**. But before this conclusion is again drawn Dylan takes one more detour: **'This is how I spend my days, I came to bury, not to praise'**. *'This is how spend my days'*, means this is what I've been contemplating for so long, by day and by night: **'I came to bury not to praise'**. This line **'I came to bury not to praise'** is taken from Mark Antony's funeral oration in Shakespeare's play 'Julius Caesar' (Act 3, Scene 2). Mark Antony delivers a speech about the assassinated Caesar. After Brutus has spoken, Mark Antony goes on to say:

'Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears

I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.

The evil that men do lives after them;

The good is oft interred with their bones;

So let it be with Caesar'.

If we to try to find out why Dylan uses this line **'I came to bury not to praise'** here and take a closer look at this play, things are not what they seem. Mark Antony is fully aware of what happened to Caesar and he knows who the conspirators are, including Brutus, but Antony is only allowed to speak to the crowd on the condition that he does not implicate Brutus or anyone else in the death of Caesar and Antony swears that he will not implicate anybody. Yet in a stealthily way Antony tries to turn the crowd against the conspirators in order to revenge the murder of Caesar. Antony does this through speaking in some sort of rhetorical double tongue; he repeatedly, and sarcastically, refers to Brutus as an 'honorable' man, and through this exaggerating repetition he tries to impugn Brutus to the crowd and covertly incites the crowd to riot against Brutus and the conspirators. Antony's speech means the inverse of its language. We often see this in politics. But not only Mark Antony, we also see another politician, Brutus, **'pumping out the piss'**. Brutus slew Caesar, yet he says in his speech: *'If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of Caesar's, to him I say that Brutus love to Caesar was no less than his. If then that friend demands why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer: Not that I loved Caesar less but I loved Rome more'*. (Act 3, scene 2). What Brutus says sounds as if he says: **'but our nation must be saved and freed'**. This comes close to what Caiaphas said about Jesus. John 11:50: *"Caiaphas, who was high priest at that time, said, "You don't know what you're talking about! You don't realize that it's better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be*

destroyed.”. Somehow Dylan makes a link from Antony and Brutus to Jesus, maybe to show that dirty politics always leads to utmost injustice. Apart from the Caesar connection, **‘I came to bury, not to praise’**, within the context of the song, it may also be a reference to Romans 6:4: *“For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives”*, meaning that Christ has come to bury our old and bad nature. It may look as if the poet gives us this message: ‘In this song I came to tell you some inconvenient truth and you are not going to like it, I came to bury which is never a pleasant thing to do, and I certainly did not come to play up to you, to praise you, to give you a good feeling, you have to remember that I pay in blood, payment in blood is serious business because the price is very high price, in fact nobody could ever pay a higher price than his own blood and it has been paid for me, somebody else –Jesus - did it for me so it is not my own blood’. Because of this payment peace and abundance has now come into my life and that’s why I conclude: **‘I’ll drink my fill and sleep alone’**.

“Fill” as a noun means a full supply, as much as supplies want; as much as gives complete satisfaction .It is a direct quote from the Bible. Ps 36:9 *“They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house; And You give them to drink of the river of Your delights”* .Leviticus 25:19 *“Ye shall eat your fill.”* The idea behind is that once you are reconciled with God, His presence in your life will give you hugh abundance and everything you need to reach your destination will be yours. **‘to sleep alone’** underlines this idea of peace and quiet that has come over the poet, exactly as Psalm 4:8 says: *“In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O LORD, will keep me safe.”*. Cover him over and let him sleep till the new morning has arrived. He can lay at rest because he paid in blood- though it is not his own.