

Is Bob Dylan's "Make you feel my love" just an 'ordinary' love song?

'Make you feel my love' was recorded in 1997 for the album 'Time out of Mind'. Ever since that time the song has been covered many times by a lot of artists, e.g. Billy Joel, Garth Brooks, Adele, etc. Apart from that, the song is performed in all sorts of Talent Shows all over the world. The result of all this is, that the song is now well known to the public at large. We have reason enough to believe that the vast majority of the general public feels that 'Make you feel my love' is just an "ordinary" love song about romantic feelings between two persons and in which you should not search for any deeper spiritual meaning. For quite some years after the release of the song in 1997 I had been thinking too that the song, no matter how beautifully composed, is indeed nothing more than just an 'ordinary' love song. Love songs, of which thousands and thousands have been composed over the years. In Pop culture "love", in all sorts of forms and variations, has been the main theme for many decades. The bulk of these love songs remain 'down to earth', in the style of "Love, love me do, you know I love you, I'll always be true, so please love me do".

Although Dylan himself wrote about romantic love in a down to earth manner in "I threw it all away": *"Love is all there is, it makes the world go 'round, love and only love, it can't be denied. No matter what you think about it, you just won't be able do without it"* it is at the same time true that Dylan nowadays hardly ever writes material which is not capable of multiple interpretation.

During Dylan's 2004 CBS 60 Minutes interview, the late Ed Bradley quoted from Chronicles where Dylan wrote about the impact of his lyrics: ***"For sure my lyrics have struck nerves that have never been struck before"*** subsequently Bradley asked Dylan: "How do you feel when you listen to or perform all those songs today?" Dylan replied: ***"They (that is the songs) change their meanings over periods of time. They change their meanings for different situations that a person is in and they hold up because they are so wide, there so many levels in them"***.

When we apply Dylan's statement to "Make you feel my love" you may be in a situation where for you this is just a beautiful but yet 'ordinary' love song, that's all you hear in it. For somebody else it may be a very suitable wedding song to confirm mutual commitment to eternal love in matrimony- love till death do us part.

As said, I always thought that "Make you feel my love" was no more than just an 'ordinary' love song, until a couple of years ago I found out that the song

may **also** be interpreted in a spiritual way. Before we delve deeper into this, let's put our finger on what this song is **not**: a sign that Bob Dylan suffered from a reactive depression. Dr A.T. Bradford recently published a book called: "Out of the Dark Woods – Dylan, Depression and Faith – (The Messages behind the Music of Bob Dylan.)". In 1986 Dylan had married his gospel back-up singer, Carolyn Dennis. She filed for divorce in 1990. According to Dr Bradford, a British family doctor and government health Commissioner, the emotional trauma caused by the divorce triggered off in Dylan a severe reactive depression. This depression was responsible for the choice of the title of his next album -of original material- "Time Out Of Mind." "Time Out Of (my) Mind" summed up the state of Dylan's mental condition at the time. Bradford says that *all* songs on the album – "Make you feel my love" obviously also included - show symptoms of moderate-severe reactive depression. Compelling as Dr Bradford's arguments may be that indeed Dylan suffered from a reactive depression, and that there are a lot of traces of these symptoms also in the lyrics of "Time out of Mind", I do not see any traces of these symptoms in the song "Make you feel my love". On the contrary, in the song the poet goes to great length to reassure and convince the 'you' in the song of his enduring love, friendship and commitment through the darkest hour of any circumstance. A person suffering from a reactive depression would not be capable of this. The song says that no matter how hard the rain blows in your face, even when there is no one there to dry your tears, no matter how hard the storms are raging on the rolling sea and on the highway of regret, the poet is always there to offer you a warm embrace, and to hold you for a million years, to go to the end of the earth for you, to make you feel his love. It is a song of great comfort, not at all a song that shows the symptoms of depression by the composer.

A couple of years ago I found out that "Make you feel my love" may **also** be interpreted in a different, spiritual way. There is some rich Biblical imagery in the song to support this interpretation.

In this interpretation the "I" in the song is Jesus. Jesus speaks through the mouth of Dylan. Jesus had spoken before through the mouth of Dylan in the Stanley Brother's bluegrass spiritual "*I am the man Thomas*", a song which he performed 59 times in concert at the beginning of this century. There is of course a difference. The "I" in "I am the man Thomas" cannot be anybody else but Jesus. In "Make you feel my love" the "I" could very well be Jesus but not necessarily.

Let us take a look at some of the Biblical imagery in this song: We read:" ***nothing that I wouldn't do, go to the ends of the earth for you, to make you feel my love***". 'The ends of the earth' is an expression which is often used in

the Bible. In the Psalms for a start, the expression is used 15 times. Most of the time the expression 'the ends of the earth' refers to the unlimited power of God which reaches to 'the ends of the earth'. He makes his love and power felt everywhere, in every out of the way corner, in every nook and cranny of this earth. Everywhere people are summoned to recognize His splendour and majesty. The good news of Jesus spread to the ends of the earth (Romans 10:18). The apostles are sent out to the ends of the earth (Matthew 28:19) to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. There is nothing Jesus wouldn't do, He really goes to 'the ends of the earth' for us, to bring us the good message and to make us feel His love. When the task of the disciples will have been accomplished Jesus will return, like Dylan has sung in a lot of show openers this year: ***'Jesus is coming back, coming back to gather his jewels'***. (By the way, Dylan uses the word "jewels" in opposition to the three jewels of Buddhism). We read the expression 'ends of the earth' also in Mark 13:27: *"And then He (Jesus) will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heaven"*. "Ring them bells where the four winds blow", Dylan earlier wrote.

We find another element of rich biblical imagery when we read: ***'I'd go hungry, I'd go black and blue, I'd go crawling down the avenue, Oh there's nothing that I wouldn't do to make you feel my love'***. Jesus was tempted by the devil and had fasted for forty days and nights and afterwards he was very hungry (Matthew 4:2). He'd go hungry for us. But even more significant is the expression ***"I'd go crawling down the avenue"***, because this is exactly what Jesus did in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39) where we read that he fell on his face and prayed in great anguish, crawling down the avenue and begging his Father: *'let this cup pass from me'*. Indeed, there is nothing Jesus wouldn't do, to make you feel His love.

Once you have learned to understand this song in this way, it is a beautiful expression of love and commitment from Jesus for all his followers. Jesus 'got nothing but affection for all those who sail with Him'. When there is no one there to dry your tears, *"He will wipe away every tear from your eyes"* (Revelation 21:4), He takes you in his arms and offers you a warm embrace and He will hold you for a million years, He will never ever let you go. You can rest assured, He will never do you wrong. No matter how full of turmoil the times may be, *"the winds of change are blowing wild and free"*, the best is still to come when He returns: *"You ain't see nothing like me yet"*.

My conclusion is that a spiritual interpretation of this song is as valid as any other interpretation and that in view of the Biblical imagery that is used in the

song, an interpretation whereby Jesus speaks through the mouth of Dylan, has solid ground in the lyrics of the song. If you are willing to respond to this article, please press 'reacties' below.