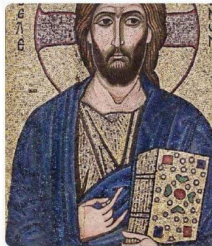


# Heavy metal and religion

When mom makes you go to church but  
you're still metal



# I. Overview

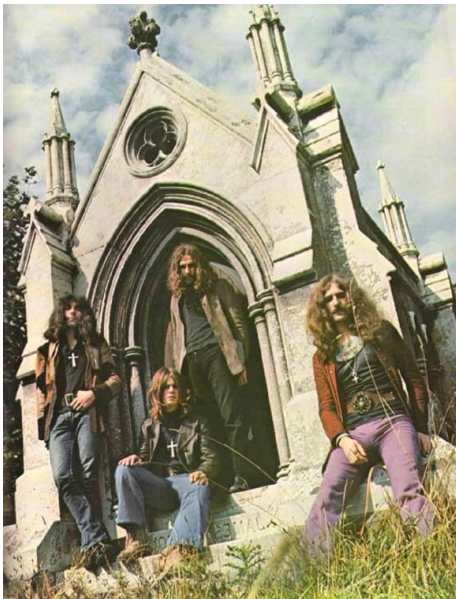
*Now, let my people go  
Land of Goshen  
Go, I will be with thee*

-Creeping Death by **Metallica**

# I. Overview

- The relationship between heavy metal and religion is complex.
  - ① Metal music is often inspired by religion. Religious imagery and themes are adapted but not as a criticism nor as an expression of belief.
  - ② Religion can serve as a focal point for rebelling against authority. Some metal artists view religion as an oppressive institution.
  - ③ Heavy metal can be a pipeline for religious expression. Metal music can convey religious belief. Heavy metal may also function as a surrogate religion.

## II. Religious inspiration



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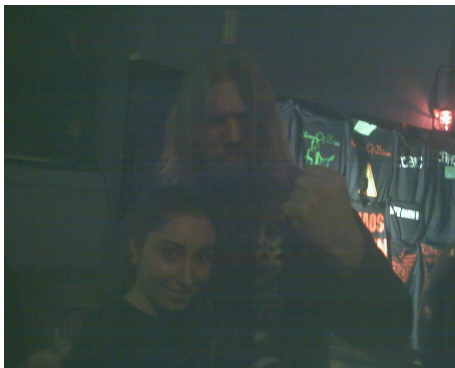
- The **Symphony X** album *Paradise Lost* is a concept album based on John Milton's epic poem of the same name.
  - The poem concerns the biblical story of the fall of man: the temptation of Adam and Eve by the fallen angel Satan and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden.
- *You wake up where's the tomb? Will Easter come, enter my room? The Lord weeps with me. But my tears fall for you.*  
- Gethsemane by **Nightwish**
- *Heaven must be more than this. When angels waken with a kiss. Sacred hearts won't take the pain. But mine will never be the same.* - Surrounded by **Dream Theater**

## II. Religious inspiration

- *“We are not a Christian rock band. I am a Catholic, but I don’t use the music to proselytize; that’s not what we are about. I think that a lot of the images and phrases found in biblical stories are brilliant. The words associated with religion and Bible stories evoke very powerful images. When I write lyrics, I am into the sound of words and try to tell stories, so I draw on them.”*  
- John Petrucci of **Dream Theater**

## II. Religious inspiration

- **Pagan metal** draws heavily from pre-Christian religions of Northern Europe, such as the Old Norse religion and ancient Celtic religions.
- Death metal band **Amon Amarth** embrace the Viking aesthetic with “rowing pits.”



### III. Rebellion against authority

- Heavy metal is often viewed as hostile towards religion, specifically Christianity.
  - For some, heavy metal's appropriation of Christian symbols represents the very worst kind of blasphemy.
  - However, occult imagery is not necessarily a religious statement, but an appeal to the devil as a principle of chaos and freedom (Weinstein, 2000).
  - Heavy metal's overall philosophy is not directly anti-Christian, but rather anti-authoritarian. However, some bands and subgenres stand in thematic opposition to Christianity.



### III. Rebellion against authority

- **Rotting Christ** is a Greek black metal band the group has faced controversy due to their name and overall aesthetic.
- **Megadeth's** Dave Mustaine, a born-again Christian, refused to play on the same bill with them in 2005.
- In 2018, two band members were arrested in Tbilisi, Georgia and placed on a “list of unwanted people for reasons of national security” that labeled them as “Satanists” and “suspects of terrorism.”

### III. Rebellion against authority

- *“Rotting Christ, it’s a quite offensive name for many people. But I keep this name because I believe that all religions are rotting. [There is] a lack of freedom. Actually, I have found very interesting ideas from religions, but I don’t like it when someone exploits someone else’s beliefs and phobias. There are thousands of people — millions of people — that are ready to kill each other because of someone else’s beliefs.”* - Sakis Tolis of **Rotting Christ**

## IV. Religious belief and expression



Christian Metal Band, **Stryper**

- Christian metal generally operates from the perspective of Evangelical Christianity, emphasizing the power of music for missionary efforts.

## IV. Religious belief and expression

- There are Christian metal bands in virtually every subgenre of metal.
  - “Unblack metal” shares musical characteristics with black metal but with Christian lyrics.
  - **Christian metalcore** became very popular in the 2000s. These bands conform to the conventions of the subgenre, but what sets them apart is that they articulate their Christian identity to appeal to a specific audience.
    - *You'll find it in the veil of night, where solitude is born. In the emptiness of broken flesh, at the mercy of the thorns.* - Thorns by **Demon Hunter**

## IV. Religious belief and expression

- What if metal is drawn to the religious because it aspires towards a similar goal? What if it is not in opposition to religion, but in competition with it?
- Metal culture provides its “followers” with a particular worldview and way of interpreting their place in society.
- Metal culture has rituals and symbols that are particularized as are those of any religious faith.
- It provides a cultural identity, a sense of community, and feelings of belonging.

# References

- Weinstein, D. (2000). Heavy metal: The music and its culture. Da Capo Press.
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