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Hayley Dantona
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Holding Other's Hands Up High

by Hayley Dantona

(English 1130)

Today there are over three-hundred million people living in the United States, and among these people there are literally hundreds of millions of different stances and viewpoints on any number of issues. However, even when the majority of the country seems to agree on something, for example, the unpopularity of the Afghanistan war, it seems that the people have a hard time coming together to stand up for themselves. This issue is addressed in Linkin Park's "Hands Held High" from their album *Minutes to Midnight*. The song, written by Mike Shinoda, uses religious themes to convey the idea that nothing will change in the United States until the people can stand together against political tyranny.

The song begins by insisting again and again the need for the people to rise up and open their eyes to the damage being done by the more powerful people in the society. The singer immediately sets himself up as a guide; he tells his listeners what he has to say is important and he can help them understand: "Healing the blind I promise to let the sun in" (line 7). This is the first religious allusion, referring to Jesus's power to heal the man who was born blind, in this way Shinoda hoped to "heal" the closed eyes of the American people and shed light on what was really going on in the country.

He then turns to the wealthy leaders, pointing a finger at them, asserting that they don't understand what the common people go through. The lyrics continue on with:

Asking you to have compassion and have some respect
For a leader so nervous in an obvious way
Stuttering and mumbling for nightly news to replay
And the rest of the world watching at the end of the day
In their living room laughing like "What did he say?" (lines 20-24)

Shinoda is here now attempting to do what he said he would: open their eyes. These rich people that are controlling all the decisions and money in the country are asking the rest of the nation to practically bow in respect to one man—who, at the time this song was produced in 2007, was President George W. Bush, someone who "stuttered" quite often. He is trying to explain that they may be sitting there listening to this "leader," but they don't seem to be taking him seriously, as they are "laughing" at what he is saying.

Shinoda's objective in uniting the people and opening their eyes is to show them how the rich are taking advantage of the poor people in society. He uses the lyrics to bring up what he seems to deem a lie: "Like this war's really just a different brand of war/ Like it doesn't cater to rich and abandon poor" (lines 15-16). Basically, Shinoda is warning that although the government *says* this new war is different, it is fundamentally the same; people will still die and those people dying will be the lower classes of society, the people who make up the soldiers in the army. And while these "abandon[ed] poor" are out fighting their war, the rich will be sitting in "...the back of the jet" and "...laughing their way to the bank and cashing the cheque [check]" (lines 17 and 19). Both lines show his low opinion of the more wealthy individuals, attempting to convey that even though they already have their own jets he believes they do not care for the soldiers and are still making money off of the war effort. Regardless of the power the wealthy have over the poor, the song maintains that if the common people could just stop mindlessly—and "blindly"—following the political leaders,

then they could make a difference.

Aside from the thinly veiled political themes and distrust throughout the song there are slightly less blatant religious themes. After alluding to Jesus healing the blind there are several lines before the second reference is mentioned, this one more obvious: “It’s ironic at times like this you pray/ but a bomb blew the mosque up yesterday” (lines 40-14). Whether or not a mosque was actually blown up, or if it was just planned but never carried out, Shinoda is so upfront about his anger over this that he doesn’t even try to conceal his meaning. It really would be difficult to find anything more ironic than desperately searching for a place of sanctity to pray about war because the place that is *supposed* to be a sanctuary was blown up in the war.

The final religious theme exists in the last two lines of the song; there are several ways to interpret these lines, but they are clearly religious in nature. These final lines are: “With hands held high and the sky so blue/ As the ocean opens up to swallow you” (lines 55-56). Shinoda takes the image of holding hands up towards the sky from a Biblical story titled “Israel Defeats the Amalekites.” In this story Moses goes to the top of a hill with two other men, when he held his hands up the Israelites began to win the battle and when he lowered his hands they began to lose. The Bible says, “Moses’ arms soon became so tired he could no longer hold them up. So Aaron and Hur found a stone for him to sit on. Then they stood on each side of Moses, holding up his hands. So his hands held steady until sunset” (Exodus 17:12). Even though it was up to Moses holding his hands to the sky for them to win their battle, it was very difficult to do all day and he grew tired. It was because of the help from others that Moses was able to accomplish what was needed from him. This verse specifically brings together Shinoda’s meaning that one person cannot do it alone; it takes the combined effort of everyone to lift their hands to the sky and do great things.

Regardless of this song having been written over seven years ago about a war that seems to never end, even today, it can still be put into context for many other events and issues with American society. Shinoda’s use of religious images is fitting, as the war in question is with a society whose religion is very important to them, but also adds another, underlying depth to the song. Through Linkin Park’s strange blend of alternative rock, rap and metal music, Shinoda is able to broadcast his message to the masses: nothing will change unless everyone contributes their effort to the same cause, united.

Works Cited

- The Holy Bible: New International Version, Containing the Old Testament and the New Testament.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible, 1978. Print.
- Bennington, Chester and Mike Shinoda. “Hands Held High.” *Minutes to Midnight*. Linkin Park. Rick Ruben, 2007. CD.

"Hands Held High"

Turn my mic up louder I got to say something
Light weights step to the side when we come in
Feel it in your chest the syllables get pumping
People on the street they panic and start running (4)
Words on loose leaf sheet complete coming
I jump in my mind and summon the rhyme, I'm dumping
Healing the blind I promise to let the sun in
Sick of the dark ways we march to the drumming (8)
Jump when they tell us that they wanna see jumping
Fuck that I wanna see some fists pumping
Risk something, take back what's yours
Say something that you know they might attack you for (12)
Cause I'm sick of being treated like I had before
Like it's stupid standing for what I'm standing for
Like this war's really just a different brand of war
Like it doesn't cater to rich and abandon poor (16)
Like they understand you in the back of the jet
When you can't put gas in your tank
These fuckers are laughing their way to the bank and cashing the cheque
Asking you to have compassion and have some respect (20)
For a leader so nervous in an obvious way
Stuttering and mumbling for nightly news to replay
And the rest of the world watching at the end of the day
In their living room laughing like "What did he say?" (24)

[Chorus:]
Amen
Amen
Amen
Amen (28)
Amen

In my living room watching but I am not laughing
Cause when it gets tense I know what might happen
World is cold the bold men take action (32)
Have to react or get blown into fractions
Ten years old it's something to see
Another kid my age drugged under a jeep
Taken and bound and found later under a tree (36)
I wonder if he had thought the next one could be me
Do you see the soldiers they're out today
They brush the dust from bullet proof vests away
It's ironic at times like this you pray (40)
But a bomb blew the mosque up yesterday

There's bombs in the buses, bikes, roads
Inside your market, your shops, your clothes

My dad he's got a lot of fear I know (44)

But enough pride inside not to let that show

My brother had a book he would hold with pride

A little red cover with a broken spine

On the back he hand-wrote a quote inside, (48)

"When the rich wage war it's the poor who die."

Meanwhile, the leader just talks away

Stuttering and mumbling for nightly news to replay

And the rest of the world watching at the end of the day (52)

Both scared and angry like "What did he say?"

[Chorus x6]

[X6]

With hands held high into the sky so blue,

As the ocean opens up to swallow you. (56)