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## Blue Suede Shoes to Doc Martin boots: Music, Protest and Implicit Religion

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### Abstract

This paper will focus on two seemingly disparate music based case studies – Elvis and punk rock – and their associated ‘religions’. An argument will be made that Elvis and ‘his religion’ could be viewed as what is often represented as a traditional ‘Catholic’ tradition with pilgrimages, flowers, candles, prayers and miracles (including resurrection). Ethics and charity work are undertaken as emulation or invocation of Elvis rather than a morally driven action or compulsion. Concurrently, punk music (in its various forms) could be viewed as what is traditionally represented as ‘Protestant’ with its stringent self-reliance, rejection of hierarchy and questioning of authority, its crucial importance on questioning, action and black and white view of the world. Ethics form a key part of punk and are driven by strong morality and a desire to wrest change. However the dialogue between these two case studies (and indeed geographies of USA and UK) can be made all the more coherent and fruitful when structured through an Implicit Religion framework and thus stand in tribute to Edward Bailey and the partnerships he sought to create through Implicit Religion.

### Edward Bailey

It is a privilege to share this paper with Francis Stewart whose work and scholarship I admire and whom I met through Edward Bailey. The introduction and the case study on Punk are Francis’s work. My contribution to the article is this section on Elvis Presley. I write here as a commentator and as a fan who will admit that Elvis ‘lifts her spirit’. I owe my exploration of this topic to a conversation with Edward Bailey. I was new to the network and as a young empirical historian was trying to make sense of the range of disciplines I witnessed at play in the discussions. In conversation with Edward I explained that whilst I was enjoying the discussions immensely, I felt that I could never contribute a paper. Edward asked about my interests and I explained that I have a specialism in religion in the Third Reich and that my Masters had been on the history of medieval English shrines. He also managed to have me confess to being an Elvis fan. My first visit to Graceland offered me a glimpse of the kind of pilgrimage I had noted in my medieval research. I offer here a brief overview on Elvis and religion some 26 years after my first paper was presented at the Denton conference. I offer it in tribute to Edward’s patience, kindness and openness of mind and heart.

The privilege of sharing the writing of this paper with Christine King is a direct result of Edward Bailey, a man entirely willing to step outside his own comfort zones and experiences to encourage what he saw in others – their passions, insights and experiences. Taking, as always, none of the credit for himself Edward would gently guide them, especially young scholars such as myself, into a realisation of the conversations and applications of Implicit Religion within their work, their just forming ideas or their additional passions. The result would always be work and conversation that was deeper than it otherwise would have been. More than this though, through Edward’s work with the Denton conference, he created connections for people, not just as scholars but as support networks and most importantly as friends. Diverse backgrounds, ranges of political stances and interests, the full spectrum of academic standing were somehow corralled by the force of Edward’s kindness, openness and natural curiosity all under the umbrella of Implicit Religion. I offer this paper as a committed punk and anarchist who delights in considering them both as her religion and

acknowledges, with deep gratitude, the impact that Edward Bailey had was enormous, unrepayable and only glimpsed through this collaboration with Christine. This paper is intended to reflect the Denton tone and conversation much beloved by Edward rather than a strictly formal academic paper.

### Introduction

‘For some fans, Elvis is a deity only next to Jesus in some indefinable pantheon. He meant as much to his fans spiritually before his death as he does now, when they can imagine him waiting in heaven. A bumper sticker that proclaims ‘ELVIS LIVES’ is more than fundamental idiocy about linguistics. It quickens a faith’. (Tharpe, 1983:11)<sup>i</sup>

‘Man, oh man, what I want you to see

Is that the Big E

Is inside of you and me’ (Nixon)<sup>ii</sup>

“Some live a life of indecision, strung out over petty schisms.

Me, I heard G.B.H. I made a decision,

Punk Rock is my religion.”(Rancid)<sup>iii</sup>

There has been a lengthy tradition of studying the importance of music in engaging with, expressing and understanding religious ideas and actions. Traditionally this is focused on music associated with the traditions and institutions of an explicit religion. For example, Isabel Rivers and David Wykes focus on the creation and place of the hymn within the Anglican and smaller evangelical Protestant traditions (2011)<sup>iv</sup>; Stephen Marini writes on gospel music within Black Pentecostal churches and troubadour music amongst Catholic Charismatics (2003)<sup>v</sup>; Guy Beck contrasts the verbal power of poetic recitation within Islam to yogic sound in Hinduism (2006)<sup>vi</sup>. Likewise there is a growing turn towards considering the use and appearance of popular music within religious traditions amongst some scholars. For example, Conrad Ostwalt explores the Christian rock music as it is expressed in America as well as the popularity of Christian singers such as Amy Grant (2003)<sup>vii</sup>; Gordon Lynch explores the use or inclusion of ambient electronic music within evangelical and post-evangelical worship groups (2002)<sup>viii</sup>; Marcus Moberg explores the use and connections between metal music and Finnish church traditions (Bossius, Till & Moberg, 2011)<sup>ix</sup>.

However, recent years have seen an increase in an exploration of popular culture music both as a religion and as a means of better understanding the concept of religion. Typically this is focused on the West (and often on the USA although increasingly on the UK as well) but does cover a wide range of musical styles and subcultures. For example, Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey Mahan devote an entire section of their book “Religion and Popular Culture in America” to the topic, entitling it *Popular Culture as religion*<sup>x</sup>; Melanie Takahashi explores the role of the DJ as a technoshaman within Rave culture<sup>xi</sup> while Maxine L. Grossman considers the theological concept of salvific love in

contemporary country music (Gilmour 2005<sup>1</sup>)<sup>xii</sup>; Monica Miller, Anthony Pinn and Bernard ‘Bun B’ Freeman have written on the appearance and use of religious language and imagery (such as Jesus chains) in hip-hop (2015)<sup>xiii</sup>; Christopher Partridge examines the links between Rastafarianism as it developed in the UK and dub reggae music (2010)<sup>xiv</sup>.

It is to this latter group that this paper seeks to contribute and indeed widen through the application of Edward Bailey’s analytical framework of Implicit Religion being applied to two very different, and yet connected, specific case studies – Elvis fandom and punk rock adherence. In addition to serving as a memorial to the work and legacy of Bailey this paper is predicated upon the notion that the model (Implicit Religion) for identifying a secular phenomenon as ‘implicitly religious’ can be tested on any social movement. As such then, this paper will be structured to first understand the connection and history of Implicit Religion as it has been applied to popular music, then it will move into the two case studies. Elvis fans will be explored first, this is both chronologically intended and religiously linked as this section will argue that many of the fans approach to Elvis and his legacy and mythology could be described and indeed shed light upon what is traditionally considered to be a ‘Catholic’ tradition. Following this the punk subculture will be explored – a subculture that would not have existed without the protest music and actions of rock and roll – and will be examined as to the legitimacy of describing it as both what is traditionally considered ‘Protestant’ and the next stage of approaching religion. The paper will then draw the case studies together through the common ground of music, fandom and Implicit Religion as an analytical tool to draw some conclusions.

#### Implicit Religion and the study of ‘popular’ music

There is a justifiable interest, given the importance in the late C20 and C21st century society of ‘popular’ music in examining the beliefs, language and behaviour of fans of two differing musical cultures, each in their origins movements of protest i.e. that of Rock and Roll and of Punk to see if the concept of Implicit Religion helps us understand what is going on in each case. Indeed it would not be the first time that popular music has been explored through Implicit Religion, in the last five years the journal has had 5 different engagements with popular music of varying types. Owen Coggins has utilised Implicit Religion in his study of Drone Metal’s Gravetemple (18:2, 209 -231)<sup>xv</sup>; Peter Donovan explored a range of musical types as an aid to philosophizing about religion (17:2, 127 – 138)<sup>xvi</sup>; John Johnston examined the Christian themes contained within the heavy metal music of Birmingham band Black Sabbath (17:3, 321 – 335)<sup>xvii</sup>; Kevin Lewis delved into the religious meanings and secular uses of the very popular ‘Amazing Grace’ which he titled “America’s heirloom Song” (16:3, 277 – 288)<sup>xviii</sup> and Francis Stewart engaged with Straight Edge punk to explore both the explicit and implicit religiosity found in the subculture’s music, actions and ideologies (15:3, 259 – 288)<sup>xix</sup>.

Of course the repeated motif of musical exploration, in part, comes from Edward’s own documented understanding of music as a potential spiritual modality with emotional resonance. He recorded it amongst his interviewees (2006: 62), as something that transports the individual and connects them to something deeper and far beyond the materiality and aural pleasure of the music itself. Edward understood or connected it with the motivation of an individual to want to seek to express some form of spirituality or Implicit Religion, it, the motivation, was key to the person making a

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<sup>1</sup> The ‘seeker’ in the title of the book refers to both a religious seeker and the song ‘The Seeker’ by The Who.

commitment – the first of Edward’s three criteria of Implicit Religion. (2006: 8). The other two being: integrating foci and intensive concerns with extensive effects.

Utilising Implicit Religion within the study of popular music enables a synthesising of Adorno’s conception of music and art as *“no art can be pinned down as to what it says, and yet it speaks ... [because]...while the idea of truth liberated from illusion remains essential to art, it is not in art’s power to escape from illusion”* (2002: 122) with musicology’s conceptualising of music as a form of social text. John Shepherd argues that music goes far beyond social knowledge<sup>2</sup> through the realm of social signifier and into that of social text (1991). That is, that meaning can be found and created through music (including sound) that helps to shape the culture or society it is born from because *“music, as sound, cannot help but stress the integrative and relational in human life, that is, the way in which we are all in constant and dynamic touch with the world.”* (Shepherd, 1991: 217) This is very much a neo-Durkheimian<sup>3</sup> understanding of the role of music (particularly music as ritual) but with the addition that by considering the role of religion alongside the popular music of the two subcultures or groups (Elvis and punk) the elements that are actually post-Durkheimian<sup>4</sup> are made much clearer and thus able to reveal far more about how we conceptualise and engage with the notion of religion itself in the West.

What this is pointing to is that culture, religion, society and its attendant expressions (including music and art) is not static, but rather continually evolves, adapts and renegotiates itself. Consequently, how we understand those varying elements of organisation, structure and expression must equally continue to develop and both authors would strongly argue that Implicit Religion is one such important step in the methodology of doing so. It is, of course, a two way process – in examining how those conceptions of society have changed we are also able to better understand the beliefs, language and behaviours of members of the two case study subcultures and in particular can draw on the emphasis of protest at the core of each to better understand why religion itself has altered in the West. We begin with the case study of Elvis and his fans.

### Elvis Aaron Presley (1935 – 1977)

There is a vast and growing literature on Elvis and the Graceland pilgrimage continues. A growing number of web sites, from the reverent to the scurrilous, are dedicated to Elvis. There are a number of scholarly books and articles, a range of art works featuring Elvis, often in a religious context, as well as plays and novels. There are sightings of the now elderly Elvis in local supermarkets and chip shops. There are websites claiming his ancestry as Scots, Welsh, American Indian, Jewish and more. I have not quoted references to these sources here. Edward once said that ideas matter more than footnotes.

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<sup>2</sup> A particular musical style carries the cultural and social implications it does only because the group or society in question externally imposes a set of meanings or significance on the music in a manner completely arbitrary to the music’s basic qualities. (Shepherd, 1991: 12)

<sup>3</sup> Religion is partially disembedded from the traditional social structure of kinship and village life but comes to serve as an expression of a larger social identity, typically in the West this is the nation state.

<sup>4</sup> Radical individualism no longer relates to a social form. Instead individuals are oriented to their own very diverse forms of spirituality and no longer think of their religion in terms of overarching social formations. This is often connected strongly, in the West, with Generation X and subsequent generations.

Elvis's image and name are deeply embedded in popular culture and are instantly recognizable. There are Basketball games in America where a place is always saved for Elvis. Children asked who Elvis was gave a fascinating range of answers, including 'he invented the guitar' and 'he lives in heaven, which is called Graceland, and he watches over us'. The vast number of amateur and professional Elvis impersonators who represent Presley at all stages of his career are from a wide range of nationalities and ages. His cultural legacy is widely acknowledged and his music continues to be played. How Elvis became an archetype and moved from being the rebel whose music and sexually explicit movements terrified post war America to an international icon is interesting in its own right, and relevant to the fans' devotion to Elvis, although not the direct subject for this essay.

'Elvis religion' is part of the celebration of Elvis life and career as one of the most successful and earliest superstars. The debate about the meaning of celebrity in modern society continues. Elvis and his estate can be seen as exploitative, with fans living a fantasy life instead of seeking to improve their own lives. On the other hand, Elvis, in life and after life, can be seen to unite people across differing social and educational backgrounds. The rebellion of his early years may still be alive in his fans from 'old rockers' to new converts.

Elvis symbolizes a number of key elements of twentieth century American culture. In an age when America's influence spread over the world, so Elvis and his music travelled with it. It is an urban myth that the three English words most often spoken around the world are 'Jesus, Coca-Cola and Elvis'. His image encompasses issues of myth, modernity as well as identity. For fans the crucial messages are about Elvis's perceived rebellion, his energy and sensuality, all still mediated through his music and films. Elvis said very little in public. His most famous quote is probably 'there is a rebel inside everyone'.

There are other messages of importance. At the heart of these are the contradictions of life. Presley was born poor and fulfilled the American Dream- he became not a President but, even better, a King. He had all the adulation and riches that modern society values. Yet he led a life of loneliness, isolated and exploited by those around him and died a pitiful death. Fans talk of his 'martyrdom', of him giving up his life to produce the music that has changed theirs. The complexities of his life and death, together with his exceptional, although untrained, voice and his beauty combine to create something 'other' yet still accessible to any fan. The writer Alan Bleasdale described Elvis as 'the only Greek God of the twentieth century'.

Elvis Presley is more than a rock star and more than a dead celebrity or a universal image. For his fans, some eighty years after his birth, 'Elvis lives', and his music, his films and the evocation of his name have the power to transform moods and even lives. He is for them, 'The King'. Since his death there has been a steady and continuing wealth of stories and studies, covered by the press, in literature and online of Presley's fans and the emotional impact they describe that Elvis still has on their lives. Fans describe how his music allows them to experience something deep inside or beyond themselves. There is an argument for seeing this as an implicit religion and for recognizing that for some being an Elvis fan has impact on those 'values and motivations' which Implicit Religion studies attempt to acknowledge.

The pattern is complex. Amongst fans and in the language of commentators there is a mix of explicitly religious and spiritual references alongside the reports of the 'life- enhancing' impact his music appears to have. These range from descriptions and analysis of the immense outpouring of

emotion at his funeral and subsequently at his graveside to the reporting of examples of Elvis 'sightings' by those who believe that he is still alive. There are also reports of psychic experiences of the dead Elvis and of healings in his name. Elvis alive or Elvis speaking from beyond the grave: the contradictions continue.

Alongside the pot-pourri of Elvis stories and Elvis experiences there is what has been described as 'the metaphysical Elvis'. This Elvis is experienced especially at Graceland, his former home and the site of his grave. Here the argument for an Elvis implicit religion becomes even stronger. It is also here that the spiritual takes a form most obviously compared to that of medieval or contemporary catholic pilgrimage. The 'Elvis Week' held at Graceland includes an evening candlelight vigil at his graveside on the anniversary of his death. Like the Graceland estate it continues to attract large crowds and it is now streamed live around the world.

The crowds that gather quietly outside the walls of Graceland include people from a wide range of nationalities, backgrounds and ages. Some are dressed as Elvis at various stages of his career and there are usually some children in Elvis costumes. Some wear badges or the official T shirt bearing the theme for that year's celebrations. Favourites from past ceremonies are still popular and include the picture of Elvis as a young boy with the logo, 'The Boy born to be King' and the logo 'He Touched Me'. Elvis was known for his impetuous generosity, and fans seek to emulate him. Fan clubs organize events for charity and the anniversary event has a theme stressing the good that he did. One year, for example, one of the two recordings Elvis made with a social message, 'In the Ghetto' (the other is 'If I can Dream') was played and there was a collection for the homeless.

To visit Presley's graveside in Graceland is to visit what looks and feels like a holy place with elements of the language, emotions and artefacts associated with a popular catholic shrine, medieval or modern. As with any pilgrimage, the visit is not by chance. There is an expressed intention to visit Graceland on this occasion and for a purpose. Some people are there to 'feel close' to Elvis, some for healing, some simply to pay tribute and 'say thank you'. There is undoubtedly a 'communitas' of the gathered crowds. There are offerings of flowers, wreaths, gifts of soft toys, candles, and poems. There are messages written for Elvis to read and prayers for and to him. People are quiet and respectful; some pray or sing religious songs, often Elvis' religious songs which include Ave Maria as well as many gospel songs.

People gather in small groups and light their candles. Some are singing. Elvis impersonators representing Elvis, between them, at all the familiar stages of his career, including some children, mingle with the crowds. Formal words of remembrance and dedication are spoken by fan club official standing at what looks like an altar as a powerful P.A. system blasts out an Elvis song. Because of the geography of Graceland, this appears to come out of the sky, above the heads of the crowd. People often look up. The procession begins. Those in wheelchairs and the infirm go first. The vast crowds that follow carrying candles, flowers and gifts, mean that the event takes several hours and lasts well into the night. After the procession and time spent at the graveside, fans return to Elvis Presley Boulevard and the shared emotion is expressed sometimes in tears, or in quiet reflection. As the crowd slowly disperses, 'Next Year at Graceland' is commonly heard as a farewell between the visitors.

Part of a medieval pilgrim's task was to purchase pilgrim 'signs', brooches or small religious items, as evidence that they had indeed undertaken the journey. Graceland is no exception and here the

business of souvenirs is alive and well, just as it was and is at the shrines of saints. At modern day Graceland, it is possible to buy a range of memorabilia. These include fragments of clothes allegedly once worn by the singer and coins, small phials of earth and 'holy' water from the Graceland estate. At the same time more conventional souvenirs such as badges, tea towels or models of Elvis act as pilgrim 'signs'. Even before death sealed his sainthood, there were hints about the collection of Elvis 'relics'. Not just was there a strong business in the selling of memorabilia, but sawdust from the stadium where he had performed was available with the promise that this might contain elements of his sweat. There is the much prized wart, allegedly found in the carpet at Graceland by a visiting fan and the manufactured Elvis mouse mats, showing him in the image of the Sacred Heart or the Elvis 'prayer mat'.

If there is an implicit religion here, why does it take this overtly 'catholic' form? Presley's roots were in the Deep South and were Pentecostal. Graceland is situated on the outskirts of Memphis, Tennessee, in the heart of Bible belt. It is reported that Elvis retained a love of gospel music and developed a fascination with popular spiritual writings. Although elements of his stage show used dramatic symbols from mythology, there is no evidence that he saw himself in any religious or quasi-religious light. He certainly did not intend to form his own cult.

It is interesting to consider why this part of the implicitly religious response to Presley takes this form. At one level this is because of his death. It is the body of Presley which is the focus for tribute and which constitutes the equivalent of a 'shrine'. Although the singer's music, films and life history are all part of his mystique, it is only at his death that the gates of Graceland were opened and Elvis became accessible to fans in a way that he never was in his lifetime. Serious fans (or 'devout fans', as they often describe themselves) either have made the journey to Graceland or would like to.

At another level the contradictions of the Elvis phenomenon lead to a traditional response; a celebration of his life, sorrow at his death and a prayer for his survival. There is a belief that he has, as is written on the wall outside Graceland, 'moved to a better town'. For some people he plays the role of a saint, very much like some of the popular and unofficial saints of medieval Europe. Catholicism also offers a more visual, mystical and overt model for showing the respect and or veneration fans want to pay.

Is this really an implicit religion, with all its mix of the traditional, the modern, secular and holy imagery? It could be argued that what is observable in the fans response to the life, legacy and death of Presley here is no more than tourism, the seizing of a sharp commercial opportunity and the enthusiasm of the media for a good story. Critics of the association of the label 'implicit religion' with the Presley phenomenon would argue that fans would not recognize such a description of what happens at Presley's graveside or in their views about him and his significance in their lives.

The argument here is not, however, that Graceland should join the catalogue of great catholic pilgrimage sites. It is not argued that fans who view and speak of Elvis in ways that might be seen as 'implicitly' religious are consciously creating or being part of a new religion. Nevertheless, it is possible and, it is argued, valid to view the phenomenon of the visits to Elvis' grave as 'pilgrimage' much as this is observable at both medieval and modern Christian shrines.

The context is not, however, entirely secular or implicit. Some visitors bring personal religious beliefs to their fandom and of these there are examples of individuals and groups who believe that what

they experience, particularly at Graceland, helps them in their Christian faith. Religious objects and prayers are left by the graveside and prayers are offered for Elvis's soul in heaven. There are others with or without religious beliefs, for whom Elvis plays a significant part in their lives, comparable less to a hobby and more to a living faith. To apply the template of religion to what is observable at Graceland and amongst Elvis fans therefore may provide, at the very least, a tool better to understand a phenomenon worthy of analysis. This fulfils one of the guiding principles of Edward Bailey's arguments about the value of the model of Implicit Religion. It is to the credit of Edward that he was willing to see the potential for a new way of understanding the Elvis phenomenon and the importance of this for our wider understanding of spirituality as much as he did with the case study to follow, that of Punk culture.

### Punk Rock (1977(ish) - ?)

The nature and action of protest is endemic within most iterations of punk rock, in some regards out with the exhibitionist fashion element protest is the most well-known feature of the subculture. However, in engaging and utilising protest, punks are stepping into an extensive history of protest through music. In particular music that is focused on wresting or creating social change through protest. Typically these are found within subcultures such as the music of Bob Marley, the anti-Vietnam music of Hippie and Folk bands and the counter-culture revolution that created songs about women's rights and liberation, US foreign policy and racism. There are, of course, historical precedents to subcultural protest music intended for consumption. We find these in the use and reworking of gospel songs by African slaves and their descendants on American plantations (Epstien, 1963: 195 – 212)<sup>xx</sup> or Irish music being utilised to create protest against and attempts to subvert the ruling British government. (Donahue, 1998: 1089 – 1120)<sup>xxi</sup>

Not all protest music is dramatic, protest can also take the form of individual, quiet progression, or a merging of genres to create something new that awakens an understanding of the power of music to a different audience. In particular we must acknowledge the protest element when we consider the merging of African-American song styles and influences with gospel, country, blues and early rock music (typically considered at the time the purview of White people) at a time when racial segregation was prevalent and the Jim Crow laws were still in effect. Of this era of singers, Elvis is undoubtedly one of most recognised and important, alongside people like Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard and many others. Their music helped to break down multiple barriers of race, class and music genres, often to great personal cost.

Of course rock music, and many other genres as well, develops a quick ability to forget its origins, and some might argue purpose. In the UK and the USA in particular rock music become something of a behemoth. A bloated spectacle with little substance or depth, sometimes with very little beyond the music style to distinguish it from pop music. Concerts and live performances were becoming priced out of the range of working class people and musicians indulged themselves in long solos that had no connection with the majority of their audience. In short rock had become middle class and middle aged, more concerned with profit which it found in a persona of "a respectable, grown-up art form." (Atkinson, 1999: 506)<sup>xxii</sup>

It was in part a reaction to this version of rock music that punk was spawned, but only in part. There were significant cultural factors that also led to the formation of punk. By the mid-70s there was severe economic decline in the UK and class and environment led to definitive economic barriers in

the USA, the hippie dream of a utopia had been smothered in the smoke of capitalism and the hash pipe, while harder drugs were being used in a wider range of households and professions, more children than ever were being raised in single parent, divorced and reconstituted family structures and the education system in both countries was in freefall and complete disarray. In short the system was broken and those who had promised to fix it or create something new had failed. Unemployment amongst young people in the UK was the highest it had ever been in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and life on the dole does nothing to temper one's mood towards the 'system' or the government.

"Punk put the rebellion back into rock, adding an injection of raw, enraged energy, laced, at least sometimes, with a smirking humour. Rejecting the overblown sounds of their contemporaries, the punk bands went back to basics, unleashing a barrage of short, sharp songs that struck a chord with a generation of angry, angst-ridden teenagers." (Atkinson, 506: 1999)

A part of putting "the rebellion back into rock" was in being aware of the history that one is a part of and allowing that to bring influence into what is being created. While not, perhaps, sonically obvious the lyrics orientated themselves towards the protests of the time and demonstrated an awareness of previous protests. The Clash were overtly anti-racism and anti-Nazi at a time when fascist political organisations were highly active and prominent within the UK. The song "White Riot" is about the Brixton race riots of 1977, while "White Man in Hammersmith Palais" acknowledges and celebrates the influences of black musicians on contemporary music, and indeed many of their later releases consciously mixed punk with reggae, funk and rockabilly.

The Ramones provided commentary and insight into the stultifying life of growing up in a very deprived area of New York City (Queens) and not being able to see a future beyond that which social conventions and barriers dictate for such socio-economic backgrounds. Their songs were aggressive and energetic and their sing-a-long chorus helped to reconnect the music with the audience, who would clamour over one another to be closest to the mic when that part of the song kicked in. Their frustration for themselves and their contemporaries is palatable in every song, but perhaps most of all in the, now classic, 'Sedated' which contains the line "No-where to go and nothing to do, I wanna be sedated" (1979, Sire Records)

Stiff Little Fingers brought the political and religious divisions of Northern Ireland (this was during the height of The Troubles) to an audience not entirely understanding of the situation through songs such as "Wasted Life", "Tin Soldier" and "Each Dollar a Bullet". They later expanded to create musical reactions to the British government's refusal to intervene on behalf of John McCarthy who was kidnapped alongside Terry Waite and Brian Keenan in Beirut and held hostage, the song is called "Under a Beirut Moon" and currently the band are focused on the economic depression in the UK and the role / responsibility of the bankers, the child abuse scandals in the Catholic Church and the lead singers personal struggle with severe depression in their latest album 2014's "No Turning Back."

The Dead Kennedy's, an American punk band, took aim at a number of social issues such as exploitive rents and landlords, lack of support for the poor and destitute and political figures such as the governor of California Jerry Brown. These are found in their songs "California Uber Allies", "Let's Lynch the Landlord", "Kill the Poor" and "Holiday in Cambodia". In addition to the musical protest, the lead singer, Jello Biafra, also pursued action to create change by running in local San Francisco elections.<sup>xxiii</sup> He later became the spokesman against censorship, as a direct result of many of the band's singles being banned from radio play. Other bands, especially in the UK, took as their

inspiration the long standing protests surrounding animal rights and exploitation, women's rights, equality, racism and immigration. This can be seen in the body of work created by bands such as Crass, Conflict, The Slits, and Flux of Pink Indians.

Utilising Marx, Simon Firth argues that "Music, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social, the mind in the body and the body in the mind; identity, like music, is both ethics and aesthetics." (Firth, 1996: 109)<sup>xxiv</sup> Echoing Marx, Firth is demonstrating that while the self must always be an imagined self that imagination relies upon a particular organisation of social, physical and material forces and it is in this assertion that we can pick up on the Implicit Religion found within punk and continue the narrative begun on the case study of Elvis above.

A part of imagining ones 'self' is understanding the history that one is a part, the reality that the well-worn path one treads was created by others and to them a debt is owed. However it should also contain new elements necessary to survive, thrive and develop. Some of these are formed through social, physical and material forces of the community, subculture, nation state and other factors such as class, gender and race one belongs to (we are not singular beings after all but exist as multiple indices) and experiences. Some of the new elements are borne purely from the imagination that is sparked when one realises what has gone wrong in the current system and decides to undertake protest or means to change / improve it.

Within punk we saw (above) the desire to challenge and change the stagnant pomposity that some elements of rock music had become. However punk was so much more than that. In taking on the music industry it simultaneously challenged political, economic, educational systems as well as prevailing social, class and race norms. Punk was by no means successful in all that it sought to change and challenge. It faced a myriad of problems, including from within. For example, it remains dominated by white, working class males and the narrative and experiences of people of colour, women and alternative sexualities and genders are subdued and often only found within specific texts created by members of those identities rather than in generic books about punk.<sup>xxv</sup> In addition there are those who self-identify as punk and yet hold far right views.

The Elvis case study above demonstrated how the worship and reaction to Elvis often paralleled a traditional understanding of 'Catholic' Christianity. There are a number of parallels that can be sighted between punk and the emergence of Protestant Christianity. Of the Reformation, Richard Tarnas writes:

"Armed with the thunderous moral power of an Old Testament prophet, Luther defiantly confronted the Roman Catholic papacy's patent neglect of the original Christian faith revealed in the Bible. Sparked by Luther's rebellion, an insuperable cultural reaction swept through the sixteenth century, decisively reasserting the Christian religion while simultaneously shattering the unity of Western Christianity." (1991: 233)<sup>xxvi</sup>

The rupture of the unity of Christianity and the eventual emergence of the Protestant church involved a number of factors – selling of plenary indulgences, the celibacy of priests, the authority of the Pope and the excessive veneration of the Saints amongst others – and within this we can see a parallel with the rupture or rejection of rock music by early punks because of the former's move away from its original perceived purpose as the music which spoke to and for the ordinary people

and provided a challenge, or in some cases even a threat, as well as entertainment. The result being the creation of a new genre of popular music that attempted to return rock to its purpose, its past and its position as a means of protest and social commentary.

Punk was deemed even more of a threat than anything which had been created before, although an argument can certainly be made that such a perception was based on a lack of historical awareness of the role of music in the past as outlined above. Largely this was predicated upon the visual impact of punks – the colourful hairstyles, the ripped and torn outfits and the adornment of symbols that held specific cultural meaning or taboos at that time such as bloodied tampons being worn as earrings or brooches and the swastika being worn as an armband.<sup>5</sup> However it was also in reaction to their behaviour – profanity on live television (Marcus, 1990:10) and in their lyrics, spitting and violent dancing (Robb, 2006:2).<sup>xxvii</sup> Much as Luther was called to account for his beliefs and actions at The Diet of Worms in 1521, so punk was discussed at the highest authority in the UK – parliament, although it should be noted no punk was granted access to the site of authority (Westminster) or the opportunity to speak for / defend / explain the subculture. (Savage 1991)<sup>xxviii</sup>

Continuing with the history of the Protestant Church additional parallels can be observed. The Protestant Church did not emerge from the Reformation as a united, coherent entity. Rather, the insistence of the reformers on not continuing the belief of infallible interpretation meant that anyone could, in theory, create their own church. In practise, of course, this was driven by broader agendas than theological reform as kingdoms did not want to continue paying taxes to Rome, or monarchs wanted to divorce and remarry and so appointed themselves as the head of the church of their country (Henry VIII for example). Quickly and repeatedly new branches grew and then themselves developed offshoots for multiple and different reasons. Some wanted to follow the teachings of specific theologians or preachers such as Calvin, Knox or Wesley, others divided or split over social issues of the time such as slavery, for example the Free Methodist formed on that basis (amongst other smaller disagreements). Some branches of the Protestant church found themselves persecuted by larger, more dominant or powerful branches linked with the monarchy, for example the Covenanters in Scotland were tortured, executed and eventually fled to Ireland due to the Anglican Church. Today Protestant Christianity is an almost bewildering array of denominations, offshoots and independent churches that follow a myriad of different theological strands, teachings and structures.

Perhaps an inevitable part of the nature of humans, or of creating a coherent world view but punk has fared little better than Protestant Christianity in terms of unification. Shortly after its inception it rapidly began to be described in the media as different genres of music – post-punk, new wave, hardcore, pop-punk, classic punk, ska punk and punk rock. A bewildering situation of anyone pre or early teens just discovering the music to try to navigate. Partly this was an attempt by the media to take control of something that it was not entirely certain of and yet was a part of none the less. Compartmentalising music makes it easier to commodify, review and sell as a consumable and the media performs key functions within that. However much of the fracturing occurred amongst the punks themselves, some because of a desire to control something they felt vital to their own sense of identity, others to try and prevent it being taken over by outside forces and some for no other

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth remembering this is only 30 years after the end of the Second World War and the Holocaust, the memory of which would have been very much a part of the psyche of their parents and grandparents.

reason than simply because they could. For a minority, especially in the USA, there was an attempt to be a part of something simply because it was 'different' and unexpected rather than a genuine love for the music or understanding of the politics and culture.

Some punk bands added to the division by wanting to be seen as different or distinct from other bands. For example, those who followed in the tide of Crass wanted to be seen as more anarchist and activist than bands such as The Clash. Others divided over musical impetus, for example hardcore sought a more down tuned, faster approach to playing that did necessitate ability rather than simply having a go (as was promoted by simple 3 chord punk). For example, compare bands such as Black Flag or Minor Threat with Eater or Rudi. Some emerged from or were created through moral issues such as Straight Edge which was predicated upon a lifestyle dedicated to abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, drugs and promiscuous sex, or the Riot Grrls which was formed to focus on and improve the role of women, or bands such as Earth Crisis who focused on environmental concerns and animal rights. Finally there were some who formed their own version of punk on the basis of religious beliefs such as Krishnacore, Dharma Punx, Christian punk and Taqwacore. Increasingly today there are individuals within punk who do not abide by strict demarcations and so create a multi-faceted approach to their punk identity enjoying aspects from a range of different 'denominations' as it were.

The parallels between punk and traditionally understood Protestant Christianity are not merely in the path of the two movements, but exist much deeper in the comparison of the beliefs held within both. As I have already outlined above the Reformation was a direct challenge to the monopoly and authority of the Catholic church, then simply the Christian church, however the theological beliefs that drove such a challenge are also worthy of brief exploration.

"In defence of the Church and its continued unity, Catholic theologians argued that the Church's sacramental institutions were both valuable and necessary, and that its doctrinal tradition, which interpreted and elaborated the original revelation, held genuine spiritual authority... But the reformers argued that the church had replaced faith in the person of Christ with faith in the doctrine of the Church. It had thereby vitiated the potency of the original Christian revelation and placed the Church opaquely in the middle of man's relation to God. Only direct contact with the Bible could bring the human soul direct contact with Christ. In the Protestant vision, true Christianity was founded on 'faith alone', 'grace alone' and 'Scripture alone'." (Tarnas, 1991: 236)

Sola fide (faith alone), sola gratia (grace alone) and sola scriptura (scripture alone) were the doctrinal keystones of the Protestant tradition. Sola fide maintained that believers were justified before God (and thus saved) by faith alone anchored with sola gratia, the grace of God rather than actions performed at the command or insistence of the Church (confession, absolution, purchase of holy relics and so on). The individual relationship between God and the person that matters as understood through the scripture and in particular through the teaching found that within the Bible – specifically 1 Peter 2:5 and 1 Timothy 2:5 – that believers are a "holy priesthood", with the High Priest found in the figure of Christ. As such then, there is direct access to God through Christ and so no necessity for an earthly mediator. The Catholic concept of the priesthood and the hierarchy that it promoted / sustained was seen as having no warrant in Scripture and viewed as a perversion or mis-application of the Old Testament Aaronic or Levitical priesthood which was clearly fulfilled in Christ. (Bagchi & Steinmetz, 2004)<sup>xix</sup>

To summarise, within these key Protestant doctrines we see a questioning of authority, specifically the (self-appointed) authority of man, a rejection of hierarchy and thus a demand for a re-ordering of the world (what later became known as The Christian Truth) and a stringent self-reliance and responsibility with support provided directly by God (later discussed by Weber as manifesting itself through The Protestant Work Ethic). It is a direct challenge on the Catholic Church's monopoly on knowledge-making and dissemination, with individual faith being privileged over institutional authority and dogma.

To return to punk, it is important when we make this comparison to state from the beginning that a significant number of punks hold no religious beliefs with many following an anarchist principle of 'no gods, no masters'. That being acknowledged, there are still fruitful gains in making such a comparison through the lens of Implicit Religion. As mentioned above, it was felt by a large number of initial punks that rock music had lost its way, it had capitulated to the desires and conventions of multinational companies whose interest was solely that of profit. In addition rock had become strained and distorted through bearing the weight of the egos of stratospheric rock "stars". In other words, a hierarchy had been formed with the success of a few leading to the interests and profit of the corporation. Media outlets feed this further and created the interpretation of the 'doctrine' of rock. They could literally make or break careers, they set tastes and trends and ensured a constant demand for compliant pop stars.

Alongside other musical subcultures and social trends, punk directly challenged that hierarchy and authority, that strangle hold as it were. Punk bands pushed the belief that anyone could have a go, music was played because it was loved, fun or the individual needed to express it as a primal need. Talent and experience were unnecessary, instruments could be stolen or borrowed from another band and anyone could set up a live performance. In addition, a wide industry was grown around the music that was mediated and closely guarded by the punks, that of band promotion, tour managing, fanzine writing, and tape swapping. No one person controlled this and so no hierarchy could exist.<sup>6</sup> However it was not enough to simply challenge musical norms, social and cultural ills and authority were also directly and lyrically challenged, as demonstrated above.

Faith is placed, not in God or the church, but in punk and in yourself. That is considered to be sufficient to make sense of the world and the self's place within it. In other words, their faith in punk and its attendant fecundities as sufficient to form an imagined self with a place in the world acted as Bailey's "integrating foci" (the "commitment" that Bailey also outlined has been focused on punk itself). This is not isolated, but rather similar to the Protestant notion, comes combined with a subcultural notion of grace that follows a very typical Protestant understanding of that concept, that is salvation and justification offered when undeserved and unwarranted. In explaining why he created an oral archive of punk, John Robb (The Membranes) writes:

"Punk terrified the establishment.

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<sup>6</sup> Although there is no space for it within this article, a strong argument could be made that in recent years the attempts, by some, to control the memory of punk is, in a way, creating a different hierarchy and authority – one predicated on when one was born and the role one played within early punk, thus excluding and marginalising those of us not lucky enough to have been born early enough or even at the beginning of punk. Although in so doing they are negating the very concept of that which they are trying to control, because punk delighted in, amongst other things, dismantling cultural ownership and questioning the very notion of authenticity.

Punk made me want to get onstage and make music.

Punk made me change my world.

Punk.

Punk saved my life.

And I wanted to know why.” (2006:3)

There are numerous other accounts and narratives that provide a similar tale – an individual considering that punk saved their life, that punk choose them, offered them something new. (see Peterson, 2009; Glasper 2004 and Lahickey 1999) They cannot pin point why punk choose them and they seem to be unaware that they are often a part of creating that which is offering them salvation. They are very clear that they did not deserve it (often telling of drink or drug problems, deprived or abusive childhoods, poor record of education, poverty, low socio-economic backgrounds or an ignorance of music itself) and are conscious of their own ability to extend salvation to themselves, often referring to an unshakeable belief that they were headed for prison, an early grave or both. In embracing, welcoming and working with the ‘grace’ of punk they are, to borrow the words of Charles Taylor “imbued with some sense of higher purpose.” (Josephson, 1962: 11)<sup>xxx</sup>

A case can be made that in answering or fulfilling that higher purpose is not only an example of Bailey’s “intensive concern with extensive effects”, but also parallels the doctrine of sola scriptura (after a fashion). That is, that instead of a sacred text that followers believe either literally is or represents the word of God, the scripture is that of the discourse and key political ideas that are intertwined within punk – primarily forms of anarchism or socialism and intersectionality of oppression. Raising awareness of, protesting against and finding ways to overcome said oppressions are a means of engaging with and fulfilling the sense of higher purpose. This is not to say that they were or are particularly successful in combining them into a coherent or well-developed social and political theory or in articulating it to others. (O’Hara, 1999: 27)<sup>xxxi</sup> Instead the message is often drowned out through a (impenetrable if one does not like it) wall of noise, nihilistic expressions designed to shock rather than reflect true positions and a blurring of the boundary between art and everyday life. Often within punk that which could be considered sola scriptura is contained with the phrase of “non-conformist”.

“Punks question conformity not only by looking and sounding different (which has debatable importance), but by questioning the prevailing modes of thought. Questions about things that others take for granted related to work, race, sex, and our own selves are not asked by the conformist whose ideas are determined by those around her. The nonconformist does not rely on others to determine her own reality.” (O’Hara, 1999: 28)

In many regards this above quote could just as easily have been written about the emerging Protestant Church as it is has about punks. Both were a form of protest at what had become the prevailing and dominant norm with the recognition that said norm had become oppressive and corrupt and needed to be challenged and changed. Edward Bailey long argued that examining so called secular movements, phenomenon’s and modes of being for aspects that could typically be described as ‘religious’ can reveal new insights and ways of understanding what really matters to people and why. This case study has attempted to apply that principle to punk by examining it in

comparison with the emergence of the Protestant Church as well as within its own standing and tradition. The final section will draw some conclusions from both case studies and the work and approach of Edward Bailey.

### Concluding thoughts

“The decade of the 1960s saw itself as a hinge between two worlds, which we have subsequently learned to call ‘modernism’ and ‘postmodernism’. Naturally, there is room for journalistic and scholarly debate regarding their characteristics, causes and core (and exact title) but few dispute that a change of culture, of greater significance than the changes in the decades immediately, before and after, took place in the Western world then. Indeed, 1968 has become a shorthand symbol in its own right. One of the signs that an age was ending was the fascination, on the part of religious people, with secularization. ... How to understand the new situation is not immediately obvious. That we need to understand it, both for practical purposes and in order to understand ourselves, is clear. That, with the odd exceptions (‘swan songs’), the secularization these arouses little overt controversy at present suggests that this is a good moment to articulate a new model which may find widespread agreement.” (Bailey, 2001: 1 -3)<sup>xxxii</sup>

The articulation of a new model is precisely what Edward set out to create, and what he termed Implicit Religion. The search for meaning in life was not, at the hinge of modernism and postmodernism, limited in scope to traditional religious institutions and practices. People were seeking and eventually created new ways of finding meaning for themselves, of understanding the world, of making commitments and allowing them to influence their attitudes and behaviours. Often, and increasingly, they are located within activities or identities more commonly called ‘secular’ such as the arts – drama, music, literature; employment – caring professions, finance; and sports to name but a few. Edward recognised this and rather than dismiss it as fandom or over-zealous workers, he looked for patterns and ways to understand it. This led to his discovery that such an examination could reveal new insights into how we understand and engage with religion, especially in the West (but by no means limited to it).

The patterns that he noticed he eventually distilled to three criteria around which his analytical tool of Implicit Religion was structured. They have been utilised in the above two case studies and are commitment, integrating foci and intensive concerns with extensive effects. Although the creator and originator of this framework, Edward was not jealous and guarded with it, he offered it to all and did not restrict how and to what they applied it as a means of making a genuine examination. That spirit of generosity, collegiality and willingness to give of himself is the reason for the two authors giving just a little insight into that which forms their own identity and lifestyles, in memory and honour of the man who taught them how to do so in a way that reveals more about religion and the construction and study of it. Beyond musical history punk and Elvis may seem to have little in common, but in applying the tools of Implicit Religion a narrative emerges that demonstrates the cyclical nature of patterns of faith. Through it we can trace a reiteration of ‘Catholic’ ideas and behaviours towards Elvis and his memory and a reconfiguration of the emergence of the Protestant church within the creation and development of punk through the notion of protest. Were it not for Edward and his work, this type of examination and consideration would not be possible and for that we both remain forever grateful and indebted.

To the memory and work of Edward Ian Bailey.

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<sup>i</sup> J.L.Tharpe (ed) in 'Elvis, Images and Fancies', W.H.Allen, London, 1983

<sup>ii</sup> From the Lyrics of 'Elvis is Everywhere' by Mojo Nixon

<sup>iii</sup> 'You Want it, You Got it' from the album *Let the Dominos fall*, (Epitaph Records, 2009)

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