

Byzantine, Early Christian and Esoteric Influences in my Compositions (The Troparion of Kassiani)

Christos Hatzis

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Greek Orthodox Church music, which in Greece, the country of my birth, is known as “Byzantine music”, has been with me as early as I can remember. It formed a large component of the soundscape of my childhood and adolescence, along with popular music and light classics, as well as the urban and rural sounds of Greece. My immediate family was not musical. However, Sotirios Schinas, my maternal grandfather, a very conservative publisher and editor of Greek Orthodox literature, was also a teacher of Byzantine music and he is responsible for quite a few, albeit futile, attempts to teach me “the music of the angels” as he called it. At about the same time, due to the more gentle—and therefore more effective—persuasive prowess of my mother, I joined the psaltery at the Church of the Transfiguration of our Saviour, our local parish church, which also happened to be one of the largest cathedrals at the time in Volos, my home town. While my grandfather was naturally pleased that I had joined the psaltery, he was disappointed that I only functioned there as a drone-keeper to Yiannis Vassiliou, the celebrated cantor in our home town, instead of being advanced to the chant singers, a task that would have required familiarity with the Byzantine music notation which my grandfather unsuccessfully, and to my regret now, had been trying to teach me all along.

My resentment against the educational advances of my maternal grandfather had to do with more than his own authoritarian and dogmatic approach to things religious. At an instinctive and emotional level I was very attached and committed to the teachings of

Christ, a commitment that, with the exception of roughly ten years during my late teens and early twenties, I have maintained throughout my life. At an intellectual level, however, my rebel, questioning nature could not come to terms with any kind of self-pronounced authority on God, personal or institutional—a problem that I am still grappling with today. I owed this rebel nature to my father, who, before his marriage to my mother, had been a political prisoner in a concentration camp courtesy of the ultra right wing political faction in Greece, which held sway at the time, and which had the unqualified and official support of the Greek Orthodox Church. Regarded as suspect by the political and religious establishment, my father spent his latter years as a parish council member, giving freely of himself to our parish church which he and my mother helped build and operate, even amidst the suspicion of his fellow parishioners who, in spite their personal affection towards him, were also influenced by the all-pervasive church politics and its anti-left political posturing.

All this left a rather unpleasant taste in my mouth as far as the Church and its representatives were concerned, some inspiring exceptions notwithstanding. Later on, I found that I could not draw any musical inspiration from my own musical heritage, and as a result I left Greece, went for music studies to the United States and reluctantly embraced modernism as an aesthetic philosophy because I felt at the time that it liberated me from the necessity to come to terms with my own musical roots and childhood demons. From the 1980s onwards, however, I began to realize that living in psychological denial was not a fertile path to significant musical accomplishment, and that the artistic and cultural heritage of Byzantium and two millennia of Christianity should not be bundled in my mind with my own distaste for the politics of the Church—ancient and present. My new reasoning was that, if I was dissatisfied with the politics of the Church as a worldly institution, then I should be able to trace them backwards to their roots, try to understand the forces that precipitated them, and perhaps relish in, and commit to, the kind of Christianity that preceded politics.

The early years of Christianity are known to us from secondary sources. There is scant independent and unprejudiced information about these times and many of our theories as

to what might have taken place right after the Crucifixion is conjecture based on readings of conflicting witnesses and pseudo-witnesses particularly those from the Orthodox and Gnostic traditions. The study of these sources is very significant of course, as is the spiritual strength one can draw from repeatedly reading the Bible, but drawing rational conclusions and/or conjectures from such study is only part of what I was looking for. I needed something that could resonate with me at a very personal level, and then very powerfully; the kind of inner resonance we call faith—born within ourselves, not instilled by any external influence or authority unless independently desired by the seeker. I believe that faith and intuition are prerequisites for true creativity. Being an artist and not a historian, my own personal tradition is the history of intuition and intuitives: artists, visionaries, and people from various walks of life, from within and without the Church, who have kept alive this ancient flame of God’s mystical interaction with humanity and His¹ infrequent, albeit profound and life-altering manifestations within human history. Church lore is full of such records but so are spiritual traditions that have developed outside the acceptance boundaries of the official Church. I looked for information anywhere I could find it, trusting that my inner compass would guide me through this huge depository of information, the contents of which range all the way from the profound to the ridiculous.

One such source that has had a profound influence in my thinking and worldview is the residual information collected from the trance psychic “readings” by American visionary Edgar Cayce who died shortly before the end of WWII. I say “residual” because most of this information emerged from trance readings requested for other purposes, either physical healings or life advice. However, due to the fact that more than 14,000 such readings have been documented, taken down in shorthand during each trance, there is a wealth of residual information which, when combined and cross-referenced, presents an incredible picture of certain eras of human history, one of them being Palestine around the time of Christ. There were other sources of information besides Cayce, the most significant ones being sources that I had a direct interaction with during the early eighties and which con-

¹ I use “He” or “His” referring to God only as a means of convenience. I do not believe that a gender-specific description applies to the Divine and I beg the reader to read these masculine descriptions as gender-neutral.

firmed and occasionally expanded on the Cayce information. All of this information, in addition to my continuous readings of the known sources, that is the official and apocryphal books of the New Testament, the Nag Hamadi Gnostic library, The Dead Sea Scrolls and various writings about the large variety of spiritual traditions before and during the first Christian century, tested against my own intuition, amalgamated into a personal understanding of what it must have been like in Galilee and Judea during the time that my Master walked on earth and the forces that must have shaped the course of His Church immediately after His Ascension.

I am not more than cursorily interested in the actual music of the early Church. My main interest is in understanding the members of Christ's immediate circle, the very people who shaped the course of human history of the past two millennia with a force that no other historical event has since or is likely to in the discernible future, and who have served as inspiration for an increasing number of my works over the years. The music that interests me is the kind that emanates from the mystical resonance between humans and the Divine, so pronounced at that particular time and place: the feelings of awe by the residents of Bethlehem and the nearby shepherds, when the heavens heralded in song the coming of the Second Adam as they had done during the coming of the First; the feelings of the crowd during the speech on the Mount of Olives; the intense subconscious connection between total strangers during the Pentecost when everyone was hearing Peter speak in their own tongue, while he was speaking to them probably in Aramaic, the pure love-force pervading the early *agapae*, the Christian love-feasts, and of course the powerful resonance that heals and raises from the dead as in Christ's countless miracles. For such things to actually happen, raised vibration, hyper-awareness and creative channeling are required, the same psychic conditions that are prerequisites for the composition of inspired works, but in infinitely greater dosages.

In all of the above, music and resonance are ever-present. This is the incorporeal "music of the spheres" which so many people experienced so deeply and so effortlessly during that seminal moment in our evolution as a species. This "music of the spheres" is pervasive. String Theory, the first mathematical "Theory of Everything", advocates that it is

indeed this “music of the spheres” as microscopic strings pulsing at different “harmonic” frequencies through several dimensions, including those of space and time, that determines the nature of everything that we perceive around us, all the way from the microscopic world of Quantum Mechanics to the macroscopic world of the Theory of Relativity. While any conceivable connection between present-day Physics and the phenomena in Bethlehem in A.D. 1 may still be a great leap of the imagination as far as physics is concerned, a great leap of the imagination is what we as artists do and must. We may be among the few remaining members of our species that still nurture the mythic element in our lives and in our industry, a pursuit that has been abandoned wholesale in our technologically advanced societies with dire psychological and sociological consequences. By “mythic”, I do not mean unreal or impossible; quite the contrary. I am referring to a rich realm of possibility that lies outside the rationalist matrix, which, since the time of Aristotle, we have increasingly accepted as all-inclusive in our philosophical thinking and science.

Of course I am also interested in the kind of music that most of us understand by the term. When actual music is mentioned in my sources—like, when in a reference to the Last Supper, Edgar Cayce mentions that, at the conclusion of the supper, Jesus and his disciples sang the ninety-first Psalm (“*He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty*”) with Jesus accompanying them on the harp—this is particularly fascinating to me: the musician in me is intrigued. When I first encountered this last reference in particular I sensed a chill up my spine because I also remembered from my studies of religious history as a youth a tiny piece of sculpture dating back to the first century A.D., I believe, depicting Christ as a seated musician playing the harp.

The value of the Cayce and similar information to me as an artist is not just in the light that it sheds into dark corners of Church history; it is primarily in the connections that it makes across time and space that take tribalism out of Christianity and Judaism, and replace it with universality. For example, the connection that Cayce makes between the Great Pyramid of Gizeh, as a Temple of Initiation, and Jesus was utterly fascinating to

me. According to Cayce, the edifice was built more than ten thousand years before Christ as a test for the initiates of the cult of Hermes Trismegistos, who, according to Cayce, was its original architect. (Hermes, or Enoch in Hebrew, was according to Cayce one of several manifestations on the earth plain of the soul entity known to us as Yeshua of Nazareth)². As a young initiate in Egypt (together with his cousin, John), Jesus attained the highest order in the Pyramid initiation rituals—that order representing the way of the Cross as a means of attaining Life and making the process of overcoming death clear to the rest of humanity, the latter symbolized by the empty sarcophagus in the King’s Chamber. Far from compromising my Christian faith, this lateral connection between Jesus of Nazareth and the mystery religions of his time took it to a much deeper and universal level for me and also one that non-Christians could begin to unravel and ponder upon. This story and my own personal experience when I visited Gizeth in 2003 became the inspiration for my choral symphony, *Sepulcher of Life*, a continuous and progressive meditation in four movements on the words “life”, “death”, “love” and “Christ”. The music treats the connection between the Great Pyramid, and Christ as a springboard for a meditation on human origin and destiny. Similarly, the connection which Cayce pointed out between the Book of Revelation and our endocrine system (the “seven churches”, the “seven angels”, the “seven bowls”, etc. standing for transformative processes with our seven energy centres or *charkas*—which are in turn associated with the endocrine glands), inspired my first musical foray into the Apocalypse in my cross-over, hour-long cantata called *Wormwood*, for bass baritone, pop/rap singer, child soprano, choir and piano trio. Again, this is a connection that takes an apocalyptic vision that is presently on a collision course with human history and turns it into something infinitely more personal and universal at the same time—a guide and aid in our war against our own private demons.

² As was Zend, the father of the first Zoroaster, according to Cayce, and founder of the Zoroastrian religion. The Magi who visited Christ soon after His birth in the Gospel accounts were in search of the founder of their own religion who was expected to return to the earth plain according to their own Zoroastrian prophecies and astrological calculations. They found him in the person of Yeshua of Nazareth. Along with their gifts, they left their calling cards with the Essene leaders at Mt. Carmel who later sent Jesus for studies to Egypt, Persia and India and back to Egypt again before He embarked on His brief Galilean and Judean ministry at the age of thirty.

Cayce's Christ cannot be easily dismissed as a Jewish heretic. Not if, according to Cayce, He was also Melchizedek, "the priest of Salem, without father and without mother, without days or years, but a living human being in flesh made manifest in the earth from the desire of the Father-God to prepare an escape for man". As Melchizedek he blessed Abraham the patriarch of three great monotheistic religions: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Jesus' controversial statement "Abraham saw my day and was glad thereof" as recorded in the gospels, or Paul's description of Jesus as "High Priest of the order of Melchizedek" in his Epistle to the Hebrews (which, according to Cayce, was actually authored by Barnabas, Paul's traveling companion) can be understood in a completely new light if Cayce's identification of Jesus with Melchizedek is correct. Jesus' association with Jewish history does not stop here either. As Joseph, the firstborn of Jacob and Rachel, sold by his brothers out of jealousy to traveling merchants and ending up as the Egyptian ruler's favourite, he is responsible for bringing his people into Egypt. As Joshua, the mouthpiece of Moses, he was responsible for taking his people out of Egypt and relocating them to the Promised Land. Also as Jeshua, the scribe, he authored or translated many of the books of the Old Testament including the ones that predicted his own magnificent advent as the much awaited Messiah and the Living Son of God. Cayce said that there is hardly an instance in world history when the One Creative Force or God has been worshiped that this soul entity known to us as Adam-Hermes-Zend-Melchizedek-Joseph-Joshua-Jeshua- Jesus (to mention but a few names) was not present in body or in spirit. When we lay aside our ego and we ask that His will be manifested through us, He is there, as He was there, at the head of the Geneva Convention at a private invitation of American president Woodrow Wilson, according to Cayce, when the latter's call for the creation of the League of Nations³ fell on deaf ears, with all the catastrophic consequences thereof that led to WWII.

These connections across time and space and between seemingly unrelated categories of human experience, do not involve only concepts and precepts, but also people—you and me. We are individuals with a rich tapestry of experience across a wide geography and

³ It is widely rumored that Edgar Cayce may be the source of the concept of the League of Nations. Two trance readings that he gave for President Woodrow Wilson at the White House whose contents are still unknown preceded Wilson's introduction of the LoN concept in Geneva.

chronology; with a constant desire to build upon previous successes and to learn from previous errors; in a constant struggle to “raise our vibrations” until, like a perfume in the air about us, we can begin to sense the presence of our Maker and begin to act as co-creators with Him. On this world stage, the sets and props change all the time but the main actors remain the same: playing different roles in different, minimally written and mostly improvised scripts, but always bringing into our roles our own real-life experience. Alternating between villains and sages, well-known but mostly socially “invisible” personalities, leaders and followers, these lived roles add to our arsenal of experience and, depending on our constantly exercised choices, may accelerate or retard our evolutionary ascent. Understanding people under such light becomes not just an exercise in curiosity but a life lesson learned through the experience accumulated by others. When these “others” also happen to be the people who formed the radius that closely absorbed the incredible radiation emanating outwards from the greatest “achiever” of the human race so far, the living Son of God, then the study of these people and of the radiation marks indelibly left upon them is a way of understanding something about the Christ, if we are not ready yet to make a personal connection with Him directly.

The most remarkable of these remarkable people and also the most controversial was without a doubt Mary Magdalene. She was a major cause of her Master’s increasing alienation from Orthodox Jewry. Due to her well known past, she was an easy target and so was Jesus for allowing her to exist and thrive within his inner circle. Her past and her strong passion and outpouring of her soul at Jesus’ feet at every opportunity may have alienated her from not only Jesus’ detractors, but also from many of his supporters. It was not only her past but also her role as an unattached woman in the company of pious men that must have scandalized almost everyone within the Jewish society of the time. Most members of Jesus’ company were Essenes, a society of strict moral code, even more strict than that of the Jerusalem-based Jews. The former expected the advent of a Messiah that would liberate them from the clutches of evil, identified in their writings as the Roman conquerors of Judea and/or the Greeks before them. Within their ranks, the Essenes encompassed the agitators and the pacifists, the mystics and the Zealots and the “expectant ones” (this is what the name meant). They were singled out for abuse by both Herod and

the Romans who feared them not as a military threat (they were no match for Roman military technology and know-how) but because of their Messianic fervour that could escalate into unmanageable all-out warfare, as it did in 70 A.D. to the detriment of all Jews in Palestine.

Jihad was not a word in any vocabulary at that time, but it would have described a great cross-section of the Essenes perfectly. The study of the Essenes would be a valuable lesson for those who are interested in understanding fundamentalist Muslim militancy today. John the Forerunner, Jesus' second cousin, was clearly an Essene, for his behaviour and pronouncements as documented in the Gospels are very much in line with the Essenic documents discovered less than a century ago, known as The Dead Sea Scrolls. Mary and her son, Jesus, were the fulfillment of Essenic expectancy of many generations. This was a community nourished by the schools of the prophets, established by Elijah, whose whole purpose was to make the advent of the Great One possible through their ranks. And there He was: the son of Mary, the latter selected by an Angel of God on the steps of the Essenic temple of Mount Carmel as a thirteen year old virgin to become a channel for divine manifestation into the world of human beings.

Think for a moment of this woman, Mariam, a young girl of sixteen found with no human's child, although some wondered about that too. Now she is slightly older, living an ordinary life somewhere in the outskirts of Capernaum raising a child, the only child his age in that town. Think of the other families in the area whose children died under the knife of a ruthless ruler, a knife that was seeking not their children but this particular child who was still alive and among them. Think of the resentment, the pressure, the gossip, the questioning of the mother who "kept everything in her heart" and did not discuss her son with anyone; think of the Messianic rumors emanating from Carmel and spreading like forest fire among the Esseno-philes of Galilee. This child, protected by some, resented by others, and closely watched by everyone, was the hope and the fear of an entire community. After the age of twelve—soon after the documented incident in the Temple in Jerusalem—He was taken from the family and was sent for studies first in Mt. Carmel and then in Egypt, Persia and India and back to Egypt again, that is to the lands of

the sages who came to Judea to worship him soon after he was born. Now he has reportedly returned, ready to fulfill his long awaited royal mission but...instead he hangs out with “lowlifes”, tax collectors and women of questionable repute, spends endless days in the desert starving, does not engage in fiery Essenic speeches like his cousin John, does nothing to concentrate political and religious power to his person so that the much awaited revolution against Rome aided by legions of heavenly hosts may finally begin.

Could Mary and those around her been wrong about what she saw and heard that day at Carmel when she was still a youth? Even though in her heart of hearts she knew that this child was not like any other, the pressure on her by almost everyone around her, including her own family, must have been unbearable, and this odd behaviour since her son’s return must have been puzzling even to her. Here she is trying to put a proper wedding for her niece who is marrying into one of the richest families in Galilee, the Zebedees, somewhat embarrassed by the fact that the limited financial means of her family at that time were no match for the groom’s expectations for the occasion, an embarrassment which became even more pronounced by the fact that half-way through the three-day celebrations the wine she had secured for the occasion had run out. Then she hears that her son has entered town with a positively “mixed” company: at the low end of the respectability scale, the long estranged sister of two of the groom’s guests, Lazarus and Martha from Bethany, a Hellenic Jew and an outcast to her family for she had become a influential Roman courtesan in Jerusalem; on the opposite end of the respectability scale, the groom’s two younger brothers, the Sons of Thunder, James and John, the latter in control of most of the fisheries in Galilee with powerful business connections with the Romans and the Temple in Jerusalem.

Seeing her son for the first time after his long absence abroad and nearly overwhelmed by the rumors that run wild since His return, even the mother of this uncommon creature was in need of a sign. Could he do something about the wine? He did what she asked, but he also indicated to her that he was not in this world to take care of the needs of his physical family or of the militant aspirations of many members of the cult that gave rise to her and (by extension) Him. The wedding at Cana was also notable because the reconciliation

between Mary Magdalene and her siblings took place there but, more importantly, Mary, the Queen of Heaven, met Mary, the courtesan and undoubtedly the cause of many sleepless nights, for the first time.

These two women, Mary the mother and Mary the Prostitute and *Protapostolos* according to the Gnostics, are the two feminine pillars between which the Christ archetype pulses and breaths life. They unwittingly became the biblical contributors to the virgin/whore Archetype which, along with the Virgin Birth, was commonplace in Greek mythology to the point that it has caused some contemporary biblical scholars to claim that Christ may have been a sheer invention of the Hellenistic world, because He embodies so many of the preexisting archetypes in Hellenistic thought, particularly the Hermetic and Dionysian traditions that flourished at about the same time. That Christ may have been incarnated to fulfill all the prophets, not only the Hebrew ones, may be dismissed as wishful thinking or, conversely, it may point towards a more universal role for Jesus of Nazareth that by far transcends the limited matrix onto which the Christ phenomenon has been mapped until now. I strongly believe that the Christ, as He has come down to us from predominantly Hellenistic-Christian sources, is not a forgery. The similarities between Him and the mythology of the Greek world as well as the oriental Mystery Religions of the time can be understood in terms of psychological Archetypes as expounded by Carl Jung, particularly in connection with Christ, as the Archetype of Self, and His shadow, the Anti-christ. There is no doubt that, partly because of His international education but primarily because of his awareness of His own destiny, Jesus of Nazareth knew all the loose ends in many spiritual traditions that needed to be tied together by his legacy⁴.

⁴ Matthew goes out of his way to point out the sometimes deliberate fulfillment of Hebrew prophesy that Jesus' life and choices engendered, but Carl Jung and others point to larger symbolisms that would have evaded these early biographers of the Lord. One such symbol is the following. As Christ was about to herald and indelibly dominate the Piscean Age, which is symbolized by the sign of Pisces (the twelfth sign of the zodiac cycle), He chooses twelve fishermen as His Apostles. The Piscean Eon's secondary symbol is the sign exactly opposite of Pisces on the zodiac cycle, Virgo. The Virgin mother of God soon became the second most prominent element of the Christian pantheon, no doubt because of ever increasingly Hellenistic influence on Christian theology. Even though this knowledge may feed the doubters with ammunition against the supernatural claims of Christianity, it also points to a divine plan for humankind which acknowledges and confirms the many spheres of celestial influence within which human destiny must unfold. There are always two ways of looking at everything, and faith and inner certainty is the discriminating factor.

Mary, the Mother of Christ, a presence whose karmic lineage can be traced back to the first woman, Eve, to whom God promised that her offspring would “crash the head of the Serpent”, as Christ clearly did with His Crucifixion and Resurrection, is according to Cayce the twin soul of the Master, separated into male and female at the advent of humanity as we know it⁵, as alluded to in the Book of Genesis. To our comprehension she is therefore as remote or as close to us as Christ Himself. Mary Magdalene, on the other hand, is a character brimming with human frailty but also unimaginable power; shrouded in mystery, exerting a powerful influence throughout history beyond easy comprehension, if the recent craze with the “DaVinci Code” is any indication. She is dark and inaccessible in some ways, but she also exemplifies the personal relationship to Christ that we are all called to develop. She is also closer to us, more real in this sense. I am speaking of course about the kind of reality that we have come to readily accept and which both mystics and particle physicists will tell you is not “real” at all.

Mary Magdalene and her complex psyche has been a source of inspiration for a number of my compositions during the past twenty-five years, starting with *Arcana*, a song cycle on texts by the late Canadian poet Gwendolyn MacEwen, and continuing more recently with *Myrrh Bearer*, the third movement of *Sepulcher of Life*, and further still with my quintessential “Magdalene” work, *The Troparion of Kassiani* to which I will pay special attention presently. The “Magdalene view” of the world and of Christ is of unending fascination and inspiration for me. Her relationship to Christ is a key relationship that may help us decode the “Christ pattern”, the pattern we are all called upon to assume in order to spiritually advance through it. Her relationship to Jesus was direct and unmediated, profound and explosive at the same time. The orthodox call her “*Issapostolos*” (equal to the Apostles), while the Gnostics call her *Protapostolos* (the first or highest of the Apostles), who was displaced from her exalted status within the Apostolic Church by the Apostles themselves soon after Jesus’ demise because of envy and for the fact that she was a woman. According to the Gnostics, she was instructed by Jesus to lead his Church

⁵ The “Mitochondrial Eve”, as recent research in genetics refers to her, appearing about 200,000 years ago, according to Cayce and modern genetics.

after his passing, but such instruction would have been on a collision course with the predominately patriarchal male Jewish company that Jesus kept.

It is not clear from the historical sources whether it was the Gnostics who simply looked for champions of their version of Christianity in people from Jesus' company who were not already aggressively championed by the Orthodox (such as Mary and Thomas) or whether the characters of Mary and Thomas were downplayed in the Orthodox accounts simply because they were already prominently championed by the Gnostics and were therefore guilty by association. But even the Orthodox accounts show internal discrepancy in the case of Magdalene. Among the disciples there was support and resentment for her to varying degrees. The most supportive were Peter and John, two of the most prominent leaders in the Apostolic Church. But even Peter, who according to Cayce was the source (with Barnabas) of the first hand information in the Gospel according to Mark—incidentally the Gospel that establishes Mary Magdalene as the first witness of Christ's Resurrection, was ambivalent about her future role in the Church. Always the seeker of the middle course, which was something that he was criticized for by Paul himself, Peter could not make an accommodation of the magnitude that Mary's prominent establishment within the Church required. He and the other disciples were groomed for three years to wait for Christ's Resurrection in three days' time from His Crucifixion. Yet, when Mary walked into the chamber where they were hiding and announced to them that she had met and talked with the risen Lord, no one believed her, presumably not for the outrageousness of her claim, but because of the possible claims to leadership that having witnessed the Resurrection before anyone else must have implied. Peter had to go and check for himself. Eventually as the witnesses of the Resurrection multiplied, Mary was vindicated but that hardly improved her position. She had her Master's unqualified support, but not critical support amongst His followers.

But what happened to this woman who is mentioned so often in the Gospels in connection with Jesus? Why there is no word about her at all in the Acts of the Apostles?⁶ Some

⁶ It may well be that Luke's Acts written under the influence of Paul, who is featured as the main protagonist, may reflect his own low esteem of women, and not Luke's. It is not surprising then that references to

esoteric sources see an embittered Mary leaving the company and retiring in isolation in Jericho away from the affairs of the Church. If that is true, then the worldly politics I mentioned earlier in connection with the Church started that glorious day of the Resurrection, or even earlier, during Christ's ministry. For example, in the Orthodox accounts we encounter Mrs. Zebedee, the mother of James and John, lobbying the Lord for an exalted place for her sons in His Kingdom to the outrage of the rest of the Apostles. We also see Judas, who was hoping for an imminent proclamation of Jesus as King according to the Essenic plan for their Messiah but who was increasingly dismayed by the company's complete lack of interest in lobbying and/or fundraising towards such goal, totally lose control when Mary spent a small fortune on aromatic oils to wash the feet of Jesus at her home in Bethany. A few days later when, after their triumphant entry into Jerusalem and His Master's failure to rally the crowd into a rouse against the Romans, Judas finally made a long contemplated decision to force his Master in a position of having to act (having already witnessed first hand His incredible powers). He was unaware or unwilling to see that the only choice possible was the one that Jesus took: a most selfless choice for the salvation of humankind, the true test and accomplishment of a real King: His very own ritual self-sacrifice.

Throughout this jockeying around her Master for influence, or the furtherance of political/military agendas by both friends and foes, Mary Magdalene must have seen the dark clouds collecting in the Christian horizon from early on. A visionary and charismatic by nature and a "knower of the All", which is the very essence of the universe according to the Gnostics, Mary must have considered her profound clairvoyance as a curse rather than a gift. This much she must have shared with her Master. Combine this with her low esteem of men, given where she'd been before she met the only man that she ever admired and worshiped, and you can get a glimpse of the darkness that Magdalene must have been living in: desiring her Master as man, but worshiping Him as God, while being patiently taught by Him the power of not yielding to one's carnal desires. This much she must have learned, but accepting the fact that He must die for the cause of a humanity

Mary Magdalene would be absent in such a document. Paul had no indulgence for questionable moral standards or his Master's indulgence for people with such.

that she did not hold in high esteem, must have been more than she could readily accept. She did not have His “long view”—God’s patience in indulging humans in their exercise of their free will while constantly creating escape exits from the private hells that we create for ourselves and others daily. She sized the human weakness flocking around Jesus and saw disaster down the road. But her Master knew that God, without stepping on anyone’s toes, will still coax history to the ultimate destination for humanity: *theosis*, which is oneness with God. He knew that the state of fallen angels that we have chosen for ourselves from the beginning of Time would, like in the parable of the Prodigal Son, lead us back to our source and final destiny. If our individual and collective will led us astray, God would discretely point to an alternative. If God would do this for each one of us, He would do no less for His own Church. I have always wondered why, if he was to play such a prominent role in saving the Church from near extinction and making the Gospel known to the nations, Paul was not drawn to the Master as a young man, when the latter walked on Earth; why his conversion in a powerful vision did not happen earlier when he could have benefited from Christ’s direct instruction in the flesh. The only answer I can come up with is that Paul was God’s tramp card, the “just in case” alternate scenario; one of those escape exits I mentioned earlier.

Paul’s “delivery” by divine interference to the Christian Church, was not a mockery of the decisions the Church fathers made before Saul’s advent as Paul. Because the Apostles chose away from the Magdalenian paradigm—one of intuition, inner knowledge and personal contact with the divine—and towards a conservative Jewish stance, they inevitably and unwittingly attracted onto themselves a God-sent conservative new “Jewish” leader, Paul, although one who was visionary enough to establish the decisive bridge between that which was about to deteriorate to yet another Jewish heresy and the pagan world which, lost in the cultural and religious relativism of the empire, was ready for the Salvationist rigor of Christianity. That the other Apostles could have not made that decisive crossing over the Jewish/pagan divide on their own is obvious: even after the Resurrection and the baptism by fire of the Pentecost, they continued to congregate and worship in the Temple in Jerusalem, that is even while derided there by the powerful factions that persecuted their Master. They still had no consciousness other than that of being devout

Jews. Paul, a pragmatist and strategist at heart but also a dogmatist in the time-honoured Jewish tradition, managed to alter the Mosaic matrix just enough to make it acceptable to the pagans and to conceptually dress the new religion in a way that it had an emerging theology, shadowing the predominant pagan precepts of the time. It gave the new religion all the essential qualities that would make it a candidate for the empire's official religion by Constantine's time.

As he has stated repeatedly, Paul was interested in an exemplary Christian life according to a strict moral code on behalf of the members of the Church and in administrative coherence by which an unambiguous message was disseminated and creedal consistency was maintained. He had a profound distaste for the "speaking in tongues" and the apocalyptic tenor of the early Christian congregations, particularly the Gnostic, and for women playing any significant role in Church affairs. So, was it Paul who single-handedly established or inspired the political ultra-conservative mindset of the Christian Church that has led into so many impasses in the present day? I believe that this mindset (including Pauline Christianity as a whole) is the result of an earlier decision before Paul's conversion to Christianity. It was the decision by the Apostles not to follow the path that Mary Magdalene represented in the days following the Resurrection and allow instead their traditional upbringing and the considerable community pressure get the better of them, instead of the incredible spiritual adventure that Jesus opened their eyes to during their apprenticeship with him. We should probably add pragmatism to this mix: a woman-led movement within Judaism at that time would have no chance of success whatsoever, although, as Cayce tells us, the Essenes at the time were led by a woman, the prophetess Judy, who became Jesus' first teacher. Whatever the reason, the karma of this collective decision is still haunting us to this very day but, to be fair, it may also account for the fact that Christianity has survived as a worldly institution for as long as it has. It might have splintered into a million pieces and disappeared like the Gnostic cults did, although the Apostolic Church has experienced its own share of splintering along its long life.

On that glorious day of the Resurrection and the days, weeks and months that followed, Mary must have felt scorned and rejected by men once again, like the countless times be-

fore she had met the Son of God. Even though she was completely healed by the Master, the healing did not deprive her of her life-experiences and the character she developed as a result of them. It would be too much to ask even from a saint not to see gender discrimination into the apostolic decision. She must have felt betrayed and rejected and she must have chosen confinement away from the politics of the new movement, living in bitterness, no doubt, but also in the spiritual company and burning memory of the only man she ever loved.

Nine centuries later, in Constantinople, another scorned woman, Cassia (or Kassiani in Greek), an abbess, composer, and poet, discovered a fellow sufferer in Mary Magdalene's story. According to tradition Cassia, the first woman composer in history whose work survives today, was shunned by emperor Theophilus as a possible bride during an imperial bridal show because of her response to a sexist slur of his (he said that women were the source of sin, implying Eve, and she responded that women were also the source of salvation implying Mary, the mother of Christ). Rejected by men, both Cassia and Magdalene found solace in God. In exploring Magdalene's emotional state, in her best known masterpiece, *The Troparion of Kassiani*, Cassia is exploring her own and the result is powerful and sublime at the same time.

The Troparion of Kassiani is still sung in Greek Orthodox Churches on the evening of Holy Wednesday and is by far the longest and perhaps the most significant chant in the Greek Orthodox hymnology. I have heard it sung each year since I was too young to remember at the psaltery in my own parish church in Volos where I intoned drones against the cantor's highly melismatic chanting. Ever since I embarked on my professional career as a composer, the text of this chant has always been a candidate for a musical setting. The opportunity presented itself early in the millennium when the English Chamber Choir was preparing their second Byzantine Festival in London and inquired about commissioning a new work from me for the occasion. When I suggested *The Troparion of Kassiani* as a possible text to be set to music, they appropriately themed the whole festival "Women in Byzantium". The premiere of the work took place in the magnificent St.

Paul's Cathedral in London, the other major work on the program being John Tavener's *Myrrh Bearer*, a mostly text-less work also inspired by *The Troparion of Kassiani*.

Cassia's Magdalene constantly bounces between depths of despair and heights of spiritual passion, often with wild mood swings in the process. The depictions of utter darkness and cosmic majesty often within a single sentence, as well as the passionate pleading for mercy and the intense spiritual devotion that borders on the erotic ("*I will wash your immaculate feet with a thousand kisses and wipe them with the locks of my hair*") makes this a quintessential text for setting to music. In my musical scrutiny of this enigmatic figure, I have followed my own intimations on the text and its central character, but also my own personal connection to this text throughout my life. The Byzantine (Greek Orthodox) music is ever-present in this work. My setting starts and ends with it but in the course of the work one encounters other, quite diverse music genres, such as Western European classical music, minimalism and atonality. At one point members of the choir are even asked to improvise freely in the 'Blues' style. Far from being a stylistic smorgasbord, this eclecticism in the music is meant to serve the emotional/psychological underpinnings of the text.

In terms of its content, I have divided the text into five sections: the first and the last are devotional and confessional in nature; the second is dark (Mary Magdalene describing the pull that sin and darkness has upon her); the third is full of cosmic splendour while the fourth is a brief description of the original fall in Paradise. Each of these sections is delineated musically in a different manner: the first and last in predominately Byzantine and Western European sacred music genres; the second with rather dark tone clusters and disconcerting, continuous vocal glissandi; the third in the style of high Romanticism while the fourth is set in a style of Western minimalism and Blues (the description of the fear that overcame Eve at the sound of God's feet in Paradise). Furthermore, the fact that the commission of this work was intended from the outset for a premiere at St. Paul's Cathedral in London, one of the great churches of Christendom with an amazingly long acoustic resonance, was taken into account in the composition of the *Troparion*. The work is

designed to thrive in a large acoustic space where intense moments in the music (and continuous *glissandi*) become animated and three-dimensional.

In closing this presentation I should say that in my mind, conditioned as it has been with my own personal meditations on the people who have become the continuing objects of my veneration, as they have been for millions of other people on this planet, my understanding of Christ and religion is such that when I think about music, there is no separation between sacred and secular music. I do not think that Christ would have made a distinction either. True, He called things as being “of this world” and “not of this world” but music in its highest definition is by nature the substance that spiritually holds the physical world—and us in it—together. Even works which do not display any obvious connection to sacred themes are to me sacred works because life itself is sacred. If in my more recent works there is a greater incidence of the music that I grew up with, which is predominately but not exclusively the music of the Greek Orthodox Church, it means I think that I am finally coming to terms with the demons of my childhood and adolescence: to be indignant about my maternal grandfather’s and other people’s intolerance and dogmatism, would be equivalent to refusing to acknowledge and heal the intolerance and dogmatism that resides within me.

It is clear from what I have said so far that I do not see Church history as an object on an anatomical table, but neither do I see it as a sequence of infallible choices, safely beyond the reach of scrutiny. Thinking of it rather as something living and precious, I often wonder what Christianity would have been like today if different choices were made at important junctures of its development. At moments like these, my limited but mystical understanding of things informs me that God cannot be far away from the affairs of the world, even when the world chooses to be far from God. God’s most precious gift to us, which makes us unique in this universe, is our free will: to determine our own destiny; to learn and grow through its application; to even choose to defy the very giver of this gift and the very laws that set us in motion. Respect for our free will makes it impossible for God to interfere with human affairs directly or even know in advance the choices we are likely to make. Cayce said that “it is only when man decides that God knows the end

thereof”. This is as true with individuals as it is with the Church as a whole. But God’s respect for our free will does not spell indifference on His behalf. For every wrong turn there is a window of opportunity that opens to invite us back to the only possible path there is for us. Because of my faith in the divine to see us through each and every time, I do not despair about the bleakness that dominates the affairs of our world today. If we make the right choices in our own lives, and resolve to always be our “Brother’s Keeper”, I believe that God will do the rest.

During the late eighties I made a brief pilgrimage to Mt. Athos, a monastic self-governing community of men in Northern Greece, which is one of few remnants of the once powerful Byzantine Empire that have enjoyed uninterrupted existence since the first Christian Millennium. On that occasion I had the privilege of meeting in person the late Elder Paisios, a man who has by now (particularly since his passing away) become a legend amongst the Eastern Orthodox communities, and who is informally worshipped as a Saint. “Gheron Paisios” as the Greeks called him, said that at some point in my career I should pay homage to the music that I grew up with, that is the Byzantine music tradition of the Greek Orthodox Church, for “this is the music of the Angels”. I still don’t know what kind of music the Angels sing (although I suspect it is much less self-conscious than mine) but the composition of *The Troparion of Kassiani* has accorded me moments of pure spiritual delight and deep communion with our common source and ultimate destiny. I am, therefore, grateful to Elder Paisios for his suggestion and to my Lord and Master and Mary Magdalene, His *Protapostolos* or *Issapostolos*, for the inspiration.

Endnote:

I first became aware of Edgar Cayce in 1980 from some popular literature about him that I found in a “new age” bookstore. Normally, that would have been enough to dissuade me from further study but, somehow, my interest peaked with every new piece of information about this “sleeping prophet”, as he was generally referred to. At about the same time I came across the name of, and some scant biographical information on, Anne Catherine Emmerich, an early nineteenth century Catholic nun, stigmatic and visionary, whose visions about the three years of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth in Palestine are a rich source of non-canonic information about Christ. I finally read the four volume record of her visions, “The Life of Jesus Christ and Biblical Revelations” during the late nineties, by which time I was already quite familiar with Cayce’s account of the same period of time.

Emmerich's account of the same events, although with considerably more minute detail is often at variance with Cayce's. While the wealth of residual material about the time and place (minute details about names, relationships, what people wore, ate, how they lived, even what they thought, etc.) provided by Emmerich is nothing less than astonishing and her reasoning why certain characters behaved in a certain manner at certain times is nearly always convincing, my instinct has always weighted in in favour of Cayce's account. In the space below I will try to explain my afterthoughts as to why this has been the case.

Both Emmerich and Cayce lived their lives in relative or total poverty, Emmerich by circumstances and Cayce mostly by choice. Emmerich was born and raised poor and, when her Augustinian Order was suppressed by Napoleon, she spent her latter years bed-ridden and in physical agony, dependent on the charity of her townsfolk. Cayce and his family lived quite a few times below the poverty line, but even in the financially darkest moments of his life he refused offers to gain financially from his gift, allowing instead those benefited from it to offer him whatever they could or nothing at all. So, both of them used their gift with trepidation and recognition of the fact that it could not be exploited for profit, which is evidence (at least to me) that their gift was genuine.

So, why it is then that two genuine people with a genuine gift report on the same events so differently? In the early days of my familiarity with these two accounts, I must admit that this discrepancy did challenge my own faith in the accuracy of the information, exacerbated also by the fact that it has given skeptics ammunition in their claim that these visions are nothing but a hoax. But it also helped me to understand better the nature of "channeling" and receiving information through clairvoyant means.

Anne Catherine Emmerich received her visions in a semi-conscious state, reportedly aware of her surroundings and capable of engaging in conversation with the person who was recording her visions during the last five years of her life. That person was the poet Clemens Brentano, a celebrated literary figure of his time and a personal friend of Goethe, who, upon meeting Emmerich, devoted the rest of his life in recording and processing the information that came from the visionary nun. The fact that the material presented very serious organizational problems to Brentano who, for eighteen years after Emmerich's death, was unable to organize it into a coherent narrative and therefore it remained unpublished until after his death, implies that significant amounts of "processing" may have already taken place after the material was first obtained. It may also imply a different kind of processing which must have been taking place *during* the recording of these visions. Emmerich's "indulgence" in (one would think) insignificant detail of purely historical interest (of clothing, food, minute descriptions of places with enough detail for someone to draw an accurate map of entire sections of a town), is unlikely to have naturally and voluntarily flowed out of the visionary nun, and it is more likely that it may have been coaxed from her by Brentano. He must have seen the obvious benefit to science from the rich historical detail thus obtained which could then be cross-referenced with the existing and future historical knowledge of the era in question. Furthermore, Emmerich's strong and unwavering faith in the Catholic doctrine must have been (one would think) a self-imposed filter in the articulations of her visions. Not once in the four volumes of visionary insight has the nun psychically seen or heard anything that would be in even slight variance with the accepted canon of the Church. This of course is commonplace with visionaries functioning entirely within the *corpus* of a religious organization. Their visions are invariably filtered by their own belief system and end up confirming every aspect of it.

Edgar Cayce is a rather unique case in this respect. He was also a devout Christian in the American fundamentalist tradition, and a very successful and popular Sunday school teacher. His own fundamentalist upbringing is even more limiting than the rich metaphysical world of the Catholic Church that nourished Emmerich. In his waking state, he was always uncomfortable with his sleeping clairvoyance and for the longest time he habitually suspected and questioned its source. His culture did not have tolerance for visionaries and saints, like the Catholic world of Emmerich, and Cayce struggled for the greatest part of his life for a semblance of normalcy that would enable him to exist as a fundamentalist Christian within his religious community. Given the fact, however, that he was completely unconscious when he gave his psychic information, and that upon awakening he, a high-school drop-out, was baffled by the wealth of medical, pharmaceutical and other information that emerged from his trance state (terms and expressions he did not understand at all or know what they referred to but all the same seemed to help with the physical ailments of his fellow human beings), it is reasonable to assume that Cayce's process of bringing this information to the fore underwent a far less significant filtering process than in Emmerich's case.

Cayce's reason for going into trance was to help others with health problems, after he managed to cure himself and his wife early on in life through this source of psychic information. So when many years later, at the request of an Ohio-based publisher, he gave his first "life reading" (life advise as opposed to health advise), a Pandora's Box opened that threw Cayce into an existential crisis, and along with him our view of the past, present and future of our species. This new depository of information that included such "taboo" subjects as reincarnation, Atlantis, Egypt circa 10,000 BC., and Jesus' two blood-brothers and sister, were as unacceptable to the waking Cayce as to most Christians of his time or even the present. As a simple Christian who read the entire Bible once every year of his life, Cayce struggled with this new information and it took him a long time to accept it and reconcile it with his Biblical knowledge and understanding. The cost of accepting this information to him personally was enormous. He was alienated from his own church and his Sunday school post, but he never stopped preaching the Bible to the new circle of people that gathered around him in Virginia Beach where he spent the latter years of his life.

Cayce's view of human history has for the most part been at variance with scientific knowledge during his life and the time since his death in 1945. However, recent advances in genetic research particularly in connection with *Mitochondrial DNA* begin to bear Cayce out, particularly the story, dates and distribution of the *Haplogroup X*, which Cayce describes as mass migrations towards Europe, North Africa and the Americas during the years preceding the final and previous destructions of Atlantis. Whether this is a mere coincidence or the beginning of a convergence between scientific knowledge and the Cayce information is less important than the fact that the psychological and ethical matrix which emerges from the Cayce information particularly in connection with present day Christianity is one that addresses and successfully answers a great many of the existential questions that increasingly besiege us as individuals and groups. Whereas Emmerich's Christ is the cosmic founder of the Catholic Church, with everything outside of its confines considered simply heretic or misguided, Cayce's Christ is a cosmic force that embraces all religions, past present and future, and non-institutional spirituality as a whole. It is directly connected to every positive effort in the worship of the One Creative Force or God throughout history, therefore it is a stronger proposition for our own and future eras, hence my preference towards the latter.