

MUSIC FOR GOD'S SAKE

AN EXAMINATION OF THE SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS OF MY MUSIC

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"For the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" Matthew 9:37-38.

The reason for the present essay is to chronicle my development as a composer and a thinker (an "intuiter" might perhaps be a more apt word) during the years that I have been professionally engaged in composing music—roughly from 1980 onwards. The essay will focus on the underlying forces that have and continue to shape my music and my life and, occasionally, on works of mine that exemplify the expression of these forces through music. The structure of this essay is similar in many ways to the ideas about structure it espouses. It starts at the beginning and follows a more or less unpremeditated path through the past quarter century with occasional stops at moments of important realizations in belief, thought and sound. In this sense at least, it is less 'structured' than previous essays, as my more recent compositions are less 'structured' than earlier ones, or it may be that it adheres to a deeper structure than the surface organization we normally understand by this term.

My ideas and convictions about life and art have not changed very much over the past twenty-five years of my life as a professional composer; they have gradually evolved and, recently, have reached a new level of clarity, which requires that they be considered against their proper background. This background is my faith in God and my belief in the potential of our species to attain a higher level of spiritual communion with the Divine and with each other than is presently the case. With varying degrees of clarity, these thoughts have always been with me as far back as I can remember. I just did not have the inclination or perhaps the courage to openly share them with other people as the sole product of my religious faith as opposed to an artist's prerogative, a more nebulous and 'safe' abstraction for most people. I think my choice to do so now is also symptomatic of a sense of urgency that I feel: that certain things must be said and be said publicly; that a stance must be taken by everyone who desires to take a stance but for various reasons is reluctant to do so; that one can no longer wait for someone else to start doing so first.

Music is a personal journey of course, and some times navigational maps that guide the end-users—in my case, my listeners—in the use of the music may be more confusing than helpful. After all, music is its very own narrative and a perceptive listening should reveal a great deal about the internal structure not only of the music but also of the composer. However, for better or worse, textual narratives have always accompanied art music since its beginning and these, sometimes more than the music itself, have given rise to schools, aesthetic and ideological polemics, etc. throughout the course of western music history. All of the above notwithstanding, if listeners are interested in knowing how my music came about and what kind of values and belief systems have given rise to

it, this essay may be helpful in some small way. If not, they can use the music for their own purpose, so long as they make an honest effort not to dishonor the source of inspiration that made this music possible in the first place. I have grown to be more sensitive to this latter point, because of recent experiences, particularly in collaborative contexts, but primarily because I increasingly believe that the music I write does not originate from a point in space and time that I habitually understand as “I” but from a deeper more fundamental source that my own comprehension has not been able to penetrate (consciously, that is), and for which I am acting at best as a conduit or a catalyst. Furthermore, it is my belief that this creative “channeling” is a process that takes place in every truly creative individual, regardless of whether or not others acknowledge it as being so. Creative enterprises in which the deeper connection with a transpersonal creative source is absent and the only thing displayed is mere technical mastery of artistic material are, for me at least, poor substitutes for true art and creativity.

The Spiritual Foundation of my music.

I don't pretend to speak for anyone else when I say this but, at this present moment in our collective experience of time and place, I cannot imagine any reason for music other than a deep spiritual communion with our fellow human beings and the glory of our Maker (who I am sure is worthy of far greater praise than my poor intimations into the world of organized sound are capable of). The deeper I descent into my own search for the essence of composition, the more engaged I become with religious eschatology, and not just Christian.¹ Once you take the “...isms” (and the accompanying schisms) out of the way, the essence of every great monotheistic religion in the world is the fatherhood/motherhood of God and the brotherhood/sisterhood of human beings. God is not a Christian, a Moslem or a Jew. (S)He cannot be contained within definitions, creeds, genders, or historical particulars, although all of the above can be part of our experience of the divine. This is not a criticism of existing, past or future religious traditions. Many of these traditions have been the salt that has preserved human spirituality through many centuries, however imperfectly at times they may have contributed to this ‘preserving’ process (or however this ‘preserving’ process may have at times alienated and victimized the heterodox or members of a specific race, gender or sexual/political orientation). If asked to define their essence, most religious traditions would probably define it more or less as above. The collective state of health of the various religious and spiritual practices of humankind is an external measuring device of our collective spiritual ascent. Humanity is constantly tested before it is given the keys to the next level of its evolution—an evolution whose structure resembles in many ways the parable of the Prodigal Son of the Gospels: an initial wish for emancipation and separation, followed by a rebellion of some kind, followed by a fall from grace, followed by a difficult and painful decision to return home, followed by the implementation of this decision.

My broader understanding of religion in no way compromises my deep belief in the entity who has become the main protagonist in the spiritual evolution of our species; who at various phases of this evolution has entered the three dimensional (earth) realm under

¹ I am officially a member of the Greek-Orthodox Church.

various identities, the last and most significant of which was as Yeshua of Nazareth; who was the first to lay His own ego aside and make His will one with the Father, thus becoming the Christ and the living Son of God; who has been the spiritual force behind every form of worship of the One God; who (I believe) will return again to usher a new era in our evolution, in the doorway of which we find ourselves at present. In this present moment in time, He is the only driving force that makes me want to write music. Nothing else is to me now a strong enough motivation for composing and for pursuing a career as a composer.

Over the more than twenty years of existence as a professional composer, I have developed a compositional technique and a language that others recognize and identify as my own, which in turn suggests that by now I should have attained a certain facility at composing music, whatever the particular composing circumstances might be. However, when I divorce myself from this spiritual source of creativity for whatever reason, I find myself incapable of writing anything of substance and, increasingly, anything at all. In the process of trying to understand the forces that shape me as a composer and other composers I know and whose development I follow with interest, I have come to the realization that creative empowerment—a prerequisite for any truly creative act—is the result of an artist's allegiance with a source of empowerment. This 'allegiance' can remain unarticulated to such degree that the creative individual who enters into it may hardly be aware of doing so, but it is nonetheless real. It is so real, in fact, that a major shift of allegiance may cause deep crisis within the psyche of an artist.

Identifying the source of our creative allegiance and naming it is an empowering act in its own right. Whether it is God, a false god, worldly ambition, greed...you name it, this process of identifying our source of empowerment intensifies the empowerment process. If you know what is behind your desires, this knowledge makes you more focused and more likely to fulfill your desires and attain your goals—or, conversely, change them if they prove counterproductive. Whatever the immediate political cost of 'standing up to be counted' is, the long-term benefit outweighs the short-term setbacks. But beyond political costs and benefits, naming your creative source and guiding light is an act of belonging, of tracing and ultimately acknowledging your spiritual connection. This act is the best medicine against our deep-seated fear of anonymity and oblivion that is the principal source of most of our present-day neuroses—personal, social, artistic. Besides, if you are convinced as I am that the composer's role is that of a conduit or a "medium", failure to acknowledge the source responsible for your creative work would be nothing short of forgery or plagiarism, or simply ingratitude.

Back in the late 1970's, I remember hearing American composer Morton Feldman, my composition teacher at the time, describing his own experience with composing in similar terms (thinking of himself as someone who *documented* the compositional process, as opposed to originating it) and I never fully understood what he meant until I became conscious of experiencing this myself. In fact at that time, a time of spiritual turbulence for me, I often considered his descriptions as a cynical way on his part of ascribing added artistic importance to his work. No doubt some readers of the present essay may have similar misgivings about my reasons for writing this. Be that as it may, the desire to

explore and expose my own spiritual motivations is stronger than the risk of being thought of as a cynic.

Religion versus Science

My faith is very real to me; more real now than ever. I used to read the Bible and think that many of its great stories were exaggerations related by people who witnessed something very powerful but beyond their comprehension and their ability to record it objectively. I was in the same boat with a lot of religious people of our era who cannot reconcile the alleged extraordinary interactions between God and humans in the past with the apparent withdrawal of God from human affairs in our present age. So, at some deep level that we do not particularly care to discuss publicly, we begin to unconsciously accept a mythic element in the biblical narrative, something that is real at some *other* level of consciousness but not at the level of *reality* as we habitually understand it. That other level can be the domain of religion or mythology, while physical reality becomes the domain of hard science.

This schizophrenic existence has been imposed on us by our own desire to serve two masters with conflicting interests. These masters are *not* God and science. It is God and our desire for social legitimacy and upward mobility within a secular (i.e. godless) world. I do not see science and God at odds with one another. I consider science to be nothing other than the decoding of some rather small part of the essence of God. The tools that science employs for this task will not (cannot) enable it to do more than scratch the surface of this undertaking, powerful as the results of this ‘scratching’ may be. Because God is not an essence apart from us, it is very difficult to probe this essence by external (scientific) means. God’s interaction with the physical realm in consonance with our present understanding of physical law is a rather limited manifestation of a larger far more complex interaction that cannot be sensed by ordinary means, except in extraordinary circumstances.

Because science endorses the principle of the “simplest explanation” as a first principle in its discourse, and because science excludes from such explanation anything that cannot be independently or empirically confirmed or isolated and repeated in a laboratory setting, the scientifically “simple” explanation can sometimes become a rather complex and convoluted one. The paradoxes that modern physics have arrived at by way of scientific explanation, may point the way to something beyond the ability of the mind to comprehend in non-mathematical terms but, this having been said, they do not constitute scientific proof of the existence of a non-physical realm, let alone God.² Proof, however,

² These paradoxes and their theoretical interpretations have helped deconstruct our sense of physical reality and reduce it to a perceptual illusion. In their search for a “unified theory of everything” (combining the findings of Quantum Mechanics with those of the General Theory of Relativity), modern physicists have questioned some of the most fundamental building blocks of science and everyday experience such as the concept of Time. Physicist Julian Barbour, for example, advocates that Time is an illusion that has no reality outside our brain (Julian Barbour: *The End of Time: The Next Revolution in Physics*. 1999. Oxford University Press). For many years religion has been dismissed by the scientifically-minded as mere fantasy. Now our waking reality is dismissed by modern physics as a similar fantasy. Even in the minds of the

is something that only the scientific mind—and the mind that has been conditioned by scientific language games—craves for. It is not at all a component of the religious experience and of the mind that delights in such experiences. In religion, the craving for proof is, if anything, an indicator of possible absence of inner religious life.

There is a language problem in modern science or, more correctly, there is a growing gap between mathematics, the language of science, and its ability to convey some empirical “truth” to non-scientists. For a “naïve empiricist”³ some of the ordinary language explanations of subatomic phenomena by quantum mechanics are as counter to one’s immediate experience and understanding of the physical world as the possibility of the “resurrection from the dead” as advocated by religion. In fact, a modern scientist who is aware that in its innermost structure matter is not that different from energy and that what we call life is in fact a series of codes that one day it may be possible to reactivate at will, may find the concept of the “resurrection from the dead” less alien and less “impossible” than a naïve empiricist might. The point over which the present-day scientist and the religious believer may part company is the means by which something like this might be possible. For the scientist, it is still science fiction or a futurist dream. For the religious person, it is within us to will through faith, for Will is our greatest endowment from God, but it is also the cause of our original downfall from Grace.

As a result of my own rethinking of the paradigms that science and religion lay bare before us, I have started reading the Bible again in a completely new light. No, I do not consider biblical lore to be an unquestionable given. I do not place my faith in a narrow interpretation of the written word and try to date the beginning of the world by counting the number of human generations since Adam as recorded in the Bible. In fact, I consider the so-called fundamentalist reliance on the authority of religious text and the cumulative tradition that has resulted from textual interpretations, as opposed to religious instinct, to be a spiritual derailment of sorts. In fact, this spiritual derailment can often be traced back to the authors of these texts, who sometimes resort to “worldly” means to defend the authority of their pronouncements.⁴ However, questioning the current validity of a religious text should not be guided by the dictates of present-day scientific knowledge and the paradigm that gives this knowledge social legitimacy, but by the inner conviction

worldly-minded, this deconstruction of physical reality has an empowering effect upon spirituality and religion.

³ Bertrand Russell uses the term “naïve empiricism” to describe the notion that scientific truth is the truth that can be confirmed by observation. He further states that there is little ‘concreteness’ in the evidence that is given to us by our sensory mechanisms and which we readily accept as empirical truth. Bertrand Russell: *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*, p. 15. 1980. Union Paperbacks. London.

⁴ Such as the various neatly contrived groups of “fourteen generations” from Abraham through King David and the deportation to Babylon as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew in order to defend the claim that Jesus was the linear descendant of David and therefore the much awaited Hebrew Messiah (Matthew 1: 1-17). By contrast, Jesus’ own assertion of His own authority made no claim to hereditary, but rather to spiritual lineage. He said “if I am not acting as my Father would, do not believe me. But if I am, accept the evidence of my deeds, even if you do not believe me, so that you may recognize that the Father is in me, and I in the Father” (John 10:37-38)

that illuminates the way we think and feel about the world. This inner conviction tells me that the records of the ministry of Christ as captured in the Gospels and the records of the extraordinary relationship between the Hebrews and their God are not exaggerations; they are, if anything, understatements by witnesses who were not perhaps aware of the full import of what they were witnessing or recording for future generations.

It may very well be that my own mind is rapidly transforming into a “mythic” mind but, be that as it may, I no longer recognize anything as mythic in the biblical narrative of the Gospels. As I suggested earlier, science’s ‘simplest explanation’ is a method loaded with cultural and other assumptions. Science’s overconfidence in the faculties that can produce the “simplest explanation” may easily lead it astray from its goal. Admittedly, such limited reading of true scientific aspirations and methodology is as myopic as the wholesale acceptance and endorsement of religious texts as literal historical documents, the latter unfortunately being advanced in defense of creationism by some spiritually dubious and politically unscrupulous individuals and groups that I suspect have very little to do with true spirituality and true religious experience. I do not see creation and evolution as mutually exclusive. I believe the Genesis narrative to be an allegory of creation, not a literal historical record, and I find the Darwinian theory of evolution to raise as many questions as it provides answers. More than a century old, the concept of self-guided evolution or evolution caused by random mutation (“*caused*”, as opposed to “*affected*” by such means), simply does not confirm what most of us feel about ourselves. And what we *feel* within us has been within us from the very beginning of our evolutionary ascent; it is the code to our own prehistory. *It is within ourselves where we will find the truth about our past, and it is within ourselves where we will meet our God and creator.* It is this encounter that will enable us to ‘mutate’ into our next stage of our evolution towards Theosis.

The fact is that, every time science is seen as encroaching or invading the space formerly occupied by religion (and consequently, every time it poses an existential threat on religion), it only encroaches on a space formerly occupied by a misreading of religion or, conversely, it may be a misreading by science that overtakes that space. Both of these fields of human endeavor are after one and the same Truth. Neither advocates the existence of multiple, contradictory “truths”—although there may be, temporarily, contradictory *understandings* of truth. Our personal religious experience, therefore, should not feel threatened by science. Jesus said “the Truth shall set you free”. This could be as much a motto for science as for religion. True religion and true science can never be on a collision course but the worlds of the spiritually-minded and the worldly-wise can be, and invariably are.

Musical Paradigms

Throughout the history of the western world, art music has been caught between two seemingly conflicting paradigms: the religious and the scientific. This conflict has fuelled music’s development over the centuries, a development that resembles a palindrome swing with an ever widening span. For most of the twentieth century the palindrome swung towards the side of science, creating in the process a pseudo-scientific discourse

for music's own defense and legitimacy, and then during the last few decades of the century it swung all the way to the opposite side with art music becoming neo-(or pseudo-)medieval. This seemingly widening chasm between science and religion with music caught in between appears to contradict my conclusions above. As I already suggested, the reason for this contradiction has to do with the fact that in reality no chasm exists between religion and science as such, only between *technocratic* understandings of religion and science which are unfortunately prevalent in our era.

In previous essays I have used both the scientific paradigm⁵ (entropic dynamic systems) and the religious one⁶ (the parable of the Prodigal Son) to describe the evolution of western classical music, which started with the advent of polyphony and ended sometime in the 1950's with John Cage and his contemporaries. Both types of models are effective in understanding something about the process that gave impetus to historical change in western music: the choice of one or the other says more about our own positioning with regards to spirituality than about the actual music described by these models. Both models point towards the "end of history" as an ultimate eschatological target. Whether this "end of history" for western music is the state of maximal entropy of the 1950's *avant-garde* in the scientific model or the "fulfillment of time", as the latter is understood in religious terms and it is increasingly becoming an inner experience for many people, may be symptomatic of one's own positioning but the signs for both are identical. There is a convergence of expectation, even though the object of our expectation may have different names or characteristics for each one of us. The whole premise may still be dismissed by critics as "millennial mentality" or the "mentality of round numbers" but, as I pointed out earlier, four years after the millennium this is still a surging, not a subsiding, phenomenon. In fact, speaking for myself always, the more charged I become by this surge of religious expectation, the less inclined I feel to viewing history in terms of paradigms for reasons that I will explain presently.

To view history in terms of paradigms is tantamount to defending one's understanding of history from the perceived threat of different understandings by other people. Any kind of theory is—in postmodern terms, at least—a language game⁷. The prize for winning this language game is *legitimation*. Therefore an effectively worded theory has as its ultimate goal—again in rather cynical postmodern terms—the conversion or swaying of others. I believe it to be psychologically true, however, that we are most interested in convincing others when we are advocating something about which we are not entirely convinced ourselves, at least not to the point that the subject of our advocacy has become a *lived* experience within us. In situations like this, we find comfort in belonging to a group of like minders, for there is safety in numbers. If such a group does not exist, we feel the impulsive urge to create one.

⁵ Cf. *Ritual versus Performance: The Future of Concert Music*. www.hatzis.com (under Writings)
Cf. *Towards a New Musical Paradigm. Music* www.hatzis.com (under Writings)

⁶ Cf. *The Orchestra as Metaphor*. www.hatzis.com (under Writings)

⁷ Jean-François Lyotard: *The Mostmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Translation from the French by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. 1984. University of Minnesota Press.

It is perhaps ironic, but also symptomatic of the pervasive power of postmodernity and language games, that, by virtue of the fact that I am writing this essay, I am inevitably revealing myself as a person of weak faith, meaning that I seek company for my beliefs in order to convince myself of their validity. One of the serious weaknesses of postmodernism is its inability to accept the possibility of Truth as something that lies beyond the relativity of multiple “truths”—the stuff of language games. Having initially been enamored by postmodernism’s exposé of the imperialistic tendencies of modernism, I eventually hit this brick wall hard enough to know that in its deeper essence postmodernism was nihilistic, even when it masqueraded as agnostic humility and an endorsement of the ‘other’. This realization ran contrary to my own grid and my innate experience of spirituality and the divine. St. Paul’s said “I will trap the wise in their own cleverness”⁸, and this is as good a definition—and moral exegesis—of postmodernity as any I have come across. It is an aphorism that is central to my own desire to divorce musical creativity from textual defenses and therefore from the idea of models and paradigms as a means of experiencing Truth. To truly understand our passage through time and space is to *embody* time and space within the simple act of living in the moment and to be conscious of this embodiment. When we have mastered this state of mind we will have the faith to “move mountains” and to move others by empowering them, not subjugating them by means of language games. Until this happens, however, perhaps there is a place in the world for allegory, metaphor, parable (*and* paradigm) so that we may convey through “transposition” (for lack of a better term) something of the essence of that which has not yet been experienced in its most primal and direct form.

Musical Structure as Metaphor

Allegory or metaphor is a means by which I have tried to address the question of musical structure in my own work for quite some time. I have found over the years that, because of the fact that music is less specific than ordinary language, and therefore less able to create specific “transpositions” of one set of meanings onto another as ordinary language can, it is possible for music to convey deeper and more profound “transpositions”, as opposed to specific (widely agreed upon) ones. For a musical metaphor to work, it must be primal and able to stir deep psychological processes below the cognitive mechanisms of consciousness. Even then, the music will only convey the essence of the metaphor, not its specifics, regardless of whether or not specifics are encoded at the input end of the communication wire.

By means of elaboration, consider the following. The end of the previous paragraph is a language metaphor. Everyone who is familiar with the development of electronic communications in our present civilization (and that would presumably be *everyone*) would instantly understand what the terms “input” and “communication wire” mean in connection with musical communication. It is not that specific reference of this kind cannot take place within musical communication. It can. The opening of Beethoven’s “*Des Adieu*” piano sonata, for example, is allegedly an inversion in the minor mode of

⁸ St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians 1:19-20.

the coach “arrival” signal, the principal means of inter-city public transportation at the time. Presuming that this signal signified the happiness of arrival in the minds of his contemporaries, Beethoven evokes in his opening motif the sadness of departure by means of inversion and minor transformation of the original. For the specific semiotic world of the Viennese in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this metaphor might have been specifically understood but, as soon as the modes of transportation changed and the memory of the old signifiers faded, the potency of Beethoven’s metaphor faded with them, assuming of course it was there in the first place. However, more primal metaphors (rhythmic pulse as a metaphor of heart-beat and therefore physical life, or timpani rolls in an orchestration as a metaphor of thunder and therefore an external environment suddenly turning hostile) are still potent even in an age when electronic amplification and accompanying hearing loss have certainly diminished the traditional potency of these sounds. These more primal metaphors are also more universal and less likely to move in and out of currency with our rapidly changing technological environment and its cultural referents.

Religious metaphor on the other hand is more resistant to these changing modes of reference. After all, it aims to depict the timelessness of our spiritual essence and values. As such it lends itself to musical use more readily, for it is less dependent, although not entirely immune, to change. It can be quite potent and powerful with people who either have already developed the ability to respond to external spiritual stimuli or have a hibernating predisposition waiting to be awakened by such stimuli. On the other hand, it can be completely ineffective with people who have “cooled off” their inner core to such a degree that no external stimulation may reverse this process, except perhaps God’s grace alone.

From a worldly (read: materialist) standpoint, structure is a physical container that gives shape to the physical substance it contains. The relationship between the substance and the container is not as haphazard as this metaphor would indicate, for in musical composition it is possible for the structure to control the material it contains down to the minutest detail. In fact most new ideas about structure that have emerged in twentieth century western art music have moved towards either significantly *more* or significantly *less* control of the compositional material than was the case in previous centuries. It can be argued that most of these ideas on structure are in fact metaphors for ideas about social organization, regardless of whether or not their proponents understood them as such. The proposed total organization of European serialism and the proposed organizational abdication of John Cage’s “New York School of the Fifties” (Cage, Earl Brown, Morton Feldman, Christian Wolf) on one hand and their equivalent social counterparts at roughly the same time (the Stalinist Soviet experiment in the Total Society and the concurrent movements in political anarchy elsewhere) reached similar dead-ends simply because they all had one thing in common: their belief that what was being organized through these various systems were small individual and indivisible units of quanta of energy—musical notes or human beings in each case. It is not uncommon in the writings of mid-twentieth century proponents of total serialism to find them identifying the hierarchical “inner” structure of a single musical sound (the fundamental and its overtones) as a “problem” that stubbornly refused to go away and which contradicted the concept of total

organization of compositional material along serialist principles.⁹ Similarly, systems of total social organization and control find the inner world of their constituents, which may be individually or collectively expressed as spirituality or religion, to be a stumbling block in their own efforts to permeate every aspect of the social structure; therefore, they become openly hostile to it, for it stands in the way of the legitimation (and, ultimately, implementation) of such systems.

From the above we see that musical structure can be seen—and has functioned in the musical cognition of many—as a metaphor for social processes. Also, more importantly perhaps, we can see that there is a deeper implication of spiritual impoverishment in the majority of twentieth century western art music because of our inability or unwillingness to understand the fundamental building block of music, the single musical event, as capable of having an inner life of its own, moreover a life that could—should—determine its external behavior. This deeper metaphor (life *within* the single note or absence thereof representing inner human life or absence thereof) is perhaps single-handedly responsible for the aversion that many classical music listeners feel towards a lot of twentieth century music.

Realizing that this metaphor acts powerfully on listeners was single-handedly responsible for the first turning point in my own development as a composer during the late seventies, while I was still a doctoral student in Buffalo, NY. My first creative response to this insight was to formally extend the inner universe of a single musical sound to various levels of magnification encompassing the domains of harmony, rhythm and form in the context of a composition¹⁰. This pervasive (fractal) manifestation/revelation of the inner life of a single musical sound was perhaps too perfect to cause a significant resonance with listeners whose inner experience of the world was rather more conflicted, including my own at the time, and for this reason the *Law of One*—the work in question—felt more like a mantra for meditation than a linearly unfolding piece of music that released enough musical information over time to keep the listener engaged. As a composition, *The Law of One* existed entirely outside of time. One's temporal experience of it was similar to the one you have when you watch a finely crafted jewel slowly turning in front of your eyes. Even before it has completed a full rotation, you already know what the rest will look like, so the experience holds no surprises for you¹¹.

The idea behind *The Law of One* is still valid, I believe, but now it represents for me a state of mind that I must spiritually evolve towards before I can make such a work useful to my own development or to that of others. To resonate with the work's metaphor, one needs to advance to a certain level of perception that can experience time and space for

⁹ Cf. *How Time Passes*, (Die Reihe, Volume 3 (1957), pp. 10 - 40. Theodore Presser Company, Pennsylvania). This was one of the reasons why Stockhausen was attracted from early on purely generated electronic sounds (as opposed to acoustic ones) as a more appropriate material for serial organization.

¹⁰ Cf. *The Law of One: Recursive Structures in Composition*. *Organized Sound* Volume 3, No. 1, pp. 17 -25. Summer 1998. Cambridge University Press. Also at: www.hatzis.com (under Writings)

¹¹ In fact, physicist Julian Barbour's concept of Time as an elaborate "shape space" (see footnote on page 2) is very similar to the concept of time proposed in *The Law of One*.

what they really are—illusions of the mind—and freely rest in the embrace that is created by their absence, the embrace of God. The only possible difference between this essentially Buddhist metaphor and the Christian metaphor, which was concurrently forming within me and seeking expression in my work, was that in the latter, the path to such a destination can never be a solitary one: you must hold the hand of at least one other person while getting there and to do that honestly you must resonate with that person's inner experience, not just your own, no matter how lofty yours may be. In this sense, *The Law of One* was a useful metaphor in some respects and not in others. The Christian path to that same destination, which was set by Him who through His own sacrifice made the path passable in the first place, is to be “all things to all people”, that is to say that one must inspire trust, earn trust, and hold that trust placed on him/her by others sacred at all times and at all costs. This path involves reaching out, acknowledging not only the ultimate destination of the path but others' predicament of the present moment. It also involves experiencing this predicament first-hand in order to be able to allow others to resonate with you and embark with you on the journey. And to ensure that you are doing this for all the right reasons, an added instruction is given in the Gospels that you should “treat others as you would treat yourself”.

How can this path be represented in the realm of musical structure? The first thing that is clear is that it must be an experience “through time” not outside of it, because most people's experience of the world is temporal and it is therefore through time that the communication of extra-temporal truth must be and has been manifested in the world. So the next turning point in my compositional approach was to understand musical structure not as a container of material but as a path that is being discovered by the composer as (s)he walks along it and in a way that the listener feels that (s)he walks the same path along with the composer, encounters the same promises and obstacles, and hopefully draws similar conclusions as the composer from all these experiences. Walking this path should in turn point in the direction of Truth and ultimate human purpose. From this perspective, musical structure plays the same role in the musical revelation of truth that Christ's parables play in the revelation of religious truth. They are not simple-minded metaphors for use by simple-minded people, but a gentle and non-doctrinal hinting at profound archetypes that are felt more powerfully by the listener precisely because of their simplicity. Keeping in mind the previous discussion about the difference between ordinary language and music and my claim that ultimate musical structure is not an analyzable ‘foreground’ perceptual phenomenon (meaning that it is the result of rather complex cognitive processing by the listener's mind and psyche that lies beyond present-day musico-analytical precepts), one may begin to see that the simplicity and carrying power of parable can be a powerful way of creating musical structures, that is structures that can be decoded at some deep level by the listener with no further aid from musical education or general cultural conditioning.

My *Confessional*¹², a concerto-like work for cello and orchestra (1997), is a good example of this. It is based on the Byzantine chant “*Ton Nymphona Sou Vlepo...*” (“I behold your bridal chamber, my Lord, and I do not wear the proper vestments to enter it”).

¹² *Confessional* for cello and orchestra. . Cf. www.hatzis.com (under Principal Compositions).

The chant itself is played in its entirety twice in the opening by the cello soloist against a drone held by the orchestra. The structure of the work is a series of strange and occasionally bizarre sonic wonderings by the soloist and the orchestra during which the opening motif of the chant is never absent but the contexts within which it exists as an almost faded memory are certainly incompatible with its own spiritual content. What is played out musically in the structure is the parable of the Prodigal Son. Towards the end of the work there is a difficult return home—“difficult” in both figurative and literal terms—with the cello increasingly at odds with the “Enlightenment” era music played by the orchestra. Further to the implications of secularism of the specific musical style, the orchestra “rationalizes” the soloist’s continuous obsession with the chant by turning it into an imperceptibly slow fugue against which the solo cellist plays in a different tempo, acknowledging but no longer accepting the orchestra’s prevailing worldview. As the fugue reaches a half cadence, which is traditionally the point where in an actual concerto you might have a *cadenza* performed by the soloist (the ultimate celebration of individual ego in classical music), the soloist literally shuts off the progression of the fugue and the orchestra as a whole and plays unaccompanied the concluding phrase of the opening Byzantine chant.

Musically, the work sounds incomplete. The listener’s first reaction is that the compositional process has been abandoned for no apparent reason—that is for no reason that may have been suggested by the thematic development of the material itself. This usually denotes a mode of listening that is too close to the conventional concepts of thematic development and an overall form that pre-determines to a great degree the progress of this development. A different mode of listening, that of detecting deeper metaphors, would have revealed that there is a fundamental difference between the opening and the closing versions of the chant in that in the beginning the orchestra is supporting the chant with a “confirming” drone, representing perhaps a creed, a religious tradition or a spiritual support group of some kind while, after the cathartic experience of the fall and decision to return to his/her spiritual centre, the soloist *internalizes* the experience of the chant and restates it without the need for external support. It is now a lived experience, not a creedal one. Additionally, to those at least who know the meaning of the words of the chant or have read them in the program notes, the meaning of the text is played out in the musical structure. The text reads: “I behold your bridal chamber my Savior and I do not wear the proper vestments to enter in”. Towards the end of the work when the musical counterpoint has reached its greatest complexity, with the chant presented fugally by the orchestra and the cello accompanied by a small number of other instruments riding on top of the fugue in polyrhythmic configurations, both the composer and the soloist realize that they “do not wear the proper vestments” to complete the musical undertaking. In not concluding the work, they simply admit that enlightenment, the condition of being in the company of God’s glory, has not been attained by them; they have only been offered a passing glimpse of it¹³. This metaphor is then the work’s

¹³ I believe that for similar reasons, J. S. Bach did not complete the final fugue of his ultimate contrapuntal masterpiece, *The Art of the Fugue*; not because he died immediately afterwards, as it is generally believed, but because at the moment of summation—where the three independent fugal subjects of the last fugue combine in counterpoint, and is furthermore hinted that the fourth voice would (could) be the main subject

deeper structure and it requires that the work remains incomplete at the conventional (surface) structural level in order for the deeper structure to be articulated.

Originality versus Imitation

Most contemporary art music composers of the past few generations have been taught to consider personal artistic freedom as the supreme goal of creativity. Our society since the Renaissance and particularly since the Enlightenment has been obsessed with originality, individuality and freedom from pressures that society places upon individuals, real or imagined. For a long time the most sacred tenet of contemporary music and art has been emancipation from anything that might even remotely appear to be socially sanctioned. In the early stages of this process, these ideas and their artistic results were exciting and even useful, inasmuch as they deconstructed an outworn model of artistic legitimacy and promised its replacement with a new and more exciting one. Unfortunately, as it nearly always happens with new ideas whose most redeeming aspect is their ‘newness’ or their variance from convention, artistic radicalism transformed into artistic conservatism in a few short decades. Conservatism and freedom are traditionally strange bedfellows and this leads to the paradox of our present day, whereby the disciples of the original voices of twentieth century artistic radicalism—who still swear by the doctrines of ‘artistic emancipation’ and ‘originality’—are now the establishment that forms the conservative backdrop in opposition to which new ideas emerge and thrive.

In contrast, many of the composers who created the truly original music of the past three decades were people who did not invest significant currency to the above ideas of ‘artistic emancipation’, ‘originality’, etc., drawing instead their inspiration from age-old musical and spiritual traditions. They created music that did not aspire to be original at all costs, and which, in so doing, was refreshingly original. Whether it was a secular reconfiguring of geographically distant spiritual musical traditions, as with American minimalism of the 1960’s, or with the slightly more recent religious minimalism by several Eastern European composers and increasingly from other parts of the world, these more recent artistic trends proved that it is possible to have new music that is independent of the modernist obsession with the ‘new’.

With regards to my own music, I do not consider myself to be an original composer, but an imitator, nor do I wish that I were any other way. As I mentioned above, I think of myself a follower of a Master who was—and is, to the extent that we allow Him to be—all things to all people. A follower is at best of circumstances an imitator, who:

- is trying to assume as much of the pattern that his/her master sets forth as is humanly possible;
- is not concerned about retaining an individuality that is distinct from that of his/her master;
- does not feel threatened living in the shadow of his/her master.

of the entire cycle—Bach, a devout Christian, must have felt that to complete the last fugue would be an artistic act of arrogance, which run contrary to his disposition and faith.

Making feeble attempts to be such a follower myself, to the extent that I am able to control and lay aside my artistic and personal ego, I consider it a step in the right direction when:

- I discover that I am no longer concerned with questions of musical originality or stylistic distinctiveness;
- I do not find my desire to communicate deeply with as many people as I possibly can to be a compromise of my artistic freedom;
- I do not feel that by reaching out I spread myself too thin artistically;
- the only aesthetic concern in my work is how to make my music understood by the people I am trying to reach.

Spiritual energy is inexhaustible and the more you give the more you end up having. This is a lesson that I have been learning for a while now from contact with my own students as well as with listeners of my music. I used to think—and to some extent still do—that composition was its own reward but I now know that it pales in significance to the reward of being aware that you and/or your music is making a difference, however small, to someone else's life. For me there is no reward greater than that, except perhaps the clarity that it imparts on me afterwards as a creative individual and as a human being. The interesting thing is that, during the course of growing musically and humanly along this path, I have never felt that my own personal or artistic freedom has been compromised in any way. Conversely, I am aware of several composers, including a few composition students of mine, who, when they speak of artistic freedom and uncompromising artistic standards, what they really speak about is political correctness, peer pressure and fitting within a group upon which they believe their own legitimation as artists depends.

It has been argued that one of the driving forces of creativity may be our awareness of our own mortality. We fear death and we want to conquer it through our artistic offspring which we hope will survive us and live on. Partly because of prevailing cultural norms since the Enlightenment, we tend to think nowadays that making an original imprint with our work increases its chances of survival within the rather saturated information overload of today's culture. However, it is not just the cultural heritage of the Enlightenment that induces such thinking. This thinking is also in line with our survival strategies at a biological level. A species whose members are different from one another stands a better chance of surviving its most potent enemy, the invisible world of germs and viruses. If this is what is at the bottom of our relentless drive to be different, then it is evident that we condition our minds and our psyche to adapt to situations which do not really apply to them but rather to our physical survival alone. Like other biological programs within us that at some point in our evolution as a species were crucial to our survival but now they have become detrimental (for example our instinctive need to procreate which is now resulting in disastrous demographic explosions in some parts of the world), the intense drive for artistic originality or appearances thereof is probably responsible for many neuroses that plague our artistic and social life.

Woody Allen said “I don't want to achieve immortality through my work; I want to achieve it through not dying.”¹⁴ Wit aside, I feel that this statement considered from a slightly different angle encapsulates my own spiritual orientation towards life and art. By ‘living’ and ‘dying’ I do not mean physical death, which I see as nothing more than the crossing of a threshold—one of several; I mean spiritual retardation and death that can become a living hell within the span of this life and beyond. Spiritual death is another definition of the separation between our source, which is God, and us. Like teenagers coming of age, we believe that the only way we can define and understand ourselves is in opposition to that which represents authority in our lives. In spiritual terms, artistic emancipation raised to a supreme moral value is not unlike a teenage rebellion against one’s parents. Furthermore, it leads to the dead ends and paradoxes that modern art has already encountered during the course of its own coming of age. After Cage, there is no longer a theoretical or a moral case that can convincingly be made for artistic emancipation. There is simply nothing left to emancipate from. Like in the parable of the Prodigal Son, this was the furthest point from home and historically speaking we have already begun treading the path back. Once this becomes consciousness for an increasing number of people, the gates to our parents’ home should start opening for one and all and the distant sounds of celebration for our return should start being heard more distinctly.

Musical Style and Ego

In music and art, the accepted evidence of originality has been what we vaguely describe as “style”. In most cases this is not much more than a set of compositional and other preferences that a composer develops over a period of time in his/her work. The more unusual this collection of preferences is, the more “individual” the composer is considered to be. These preferences usually apply to foreground material and more rarely to ways of organizing this material into foreground structures. Even more rarely still, someone comes along who proposes an approach to the organization of compositional material that is radical enough to be thought of as a philosophy about sound and its structure. I do not wish to downplay important contributions to the history of western music by many a great artist, but I will submit that all of the above activity is to the world of spirit what the activity of an arranger is to composition or, more accurately, it resembles the activity of an arranger who is not aware of the fact that there is an original composition by someone else behind what (s)he is creating.

The patterns (and patents) to our own creativity lie in a realm which many of us do not readily acknowledge as real. As individual creators we are but mere arrangers of these patterns. At some deeper level we are someone else’s composition and for this reason we cannot be *original* composers ourselves. If we continue to be in denial of our own author, then all we can really do is fabricate *personas* of originality and market these personas to those who are also in denial of their own author. They will probably accept our version because at the same time they will be marketing a similar version of themselves to us. This continuous exchange of personas is what we have habitually come to understand as

¹⁴ Various attributed to Woody Allen, however the actual source is unknown to the author.

the “real” world in our everyday lives. In music, the elements that define these personas as distinct from one another are what we have habitually come to understand as “style”.

Personas are not as useless or counterproductive as the previous paragraph might suggest. If they represent the way through which many people understand themselves and each other, then they can be a stepping stone in our reaching out to other people. Understanding something about someone else’s self-created persona is helpful to understanding that person’s needs, fears, anxieties, insecurities, etc., and this, in turn, may reveal to us something about our own needs, fears, anxieties, insecurities, etc. It helps us to see the severed umbilical chord that once connected us with our spiritual source. We would probably detect this severance in others before we are aware of it in our own lives—something that Christ warned us about in His Sermon on the Mount of Olives—but however we may become aware of it, it is a starting point in our spiritual recovery. So, if personas have a role to play in this recovery, they cannot be all bad.

This approach to human personas is very similar to my approach to musical style. From the start of my professional career as a composer, I considered style to be a way for me to understand better the human predicament. What others saw as rampant eclecticism in my music, was for me a way of creatively experiencing the multiplicity of human experience. In contrast to my early works, like the *Law of One*, which represented perfect, self-contained universes, I now saw myself as a small piece of a larger mosaic, which, no matter how interesting it might—or might not—be in itself, it drew its substance and its meaning from its position within a larger design. The reasoning was that, the more I understood about the other pieces of the mosaic, the better I should be able to see the outlines of the overall pattern which would otherwise be invisible to me.

For many years I immersed myself in experiencing humanity by creatively engaging with its multiple musical expressions gradually widening my understanding both geographically and chronologically. I was not interested in having a smorgasbord of styles in my work which simply co-existed in a collage-like fashion, but in resolving within the background structure seemingly irreconcilable differences between conflicting foreground materials. The more contradictory the compositional materials were in the foreground, the more challenging the background structure became and, therefore, the more attractive this process was to me as a compositional exercise. Most of my music during the 1980s and 90s was informed by these interests. This was a symptom of a deeper process that I was not consciously aware of at the time.

In rather broad strokes, the outline of this deeper process goes as follows: after a period of spiritual rebellion during my late teens and most of my twenties, certain events in my life during the year 1980—whose nature is not of direct import to this discussion—acted as a catalyst in renewing my commitment to serving God, which I had made during my childhood years. Renewing it was easier than living up to it. It took years—it is still taking years—to re-position my center of gravity outside of the self, both creatively and humanly, which is a prerequisite to any substantial spiritual transformation. This painfully slow process has left indelible imprints on my work throughout the past quarter century that I have been active as a composer. As I mentioned previously, the imprint of

this process on my work during the 1980s and 90s was this ever-widening inclusiveness at the foreground compositional level accompanied by the development of musical structures that were able to accommodate and rationalize at a deeper (but still technical) level the contradictions on the musical surface.

Since most of the surface musical ‘personas’ that were incorporated into my music at the time were secular in nature, my music of that period sounded and was generally regarded as predominately secular. Unbeknownst to me, however, my music was gradually becoming more things to more people and its growing inclusiveness was the first faint evidence of ego removal in my work. It is also interesting that, perhaps because of the fact that one’s creativity sometimes draws from a deeper well than one’s ordinary life does, this evidence was more discernible in my music than in my life which at that time was quite conflicted and (according to other people’s testimonies) considerably egocentric. A slow transformation was unmistakably in progress, nevertheless, and the record of this transformation was not only the increasing stylistic inclusiveness at the surface level of my music but, more importantly, the gradual opening-up and deepening of the musical structure.

My endo-musical rationalization of this process at the time was that structure was the last frontier in the evolution of musical style. The twentieth-century’s relentless quest for new compositional material had reached a point of exhaustion, and experimentation in this area was increasingly rewarded with diminishing returns. On the other hand, due to its open-ended nature, research in musical structure is inexhaustible. In contrast to *The Law of One*, where structure and material were inextricably interconnected, in my work of this period the challenge was to maintain my hold on form, while the hold on material was gradually abandoned. I regarded my material not as musical styles that I had mastered, but as ‘found objects’ whose meaning in their original context was appreciably altered in the context of my own work to allow for different musical semantics to be articulated compositionally. Artistic ego was simply persuaded to recede one layer behind the surface, allowing for the surface layer to be opened up and be shared by other musical viewpoints.

This artistic process of the ‘receding ego’ in my music intensified during the 1990s. Three events played a pivotal role in it. The first was my exposure to the throat games of the Inuit, Canada’s arctic inhabitants, and my desire to familiarize myself creatively with their culture in a way that did not constitute cultural appropriation on my part. A visit to the Arctic, several compositions inspired by this culture, and an essay on the issue of appropriation of native cultures¹⁵ were the creative fruits of this interest. The second event was a commission in 1994 by Soundstreams Canada, an organization that produced a concert which was to be a creative encounter between British composer John Tavener and myself. This was the beginning of my exposure to the music of composers who had already creatively dealt at a much greater length than I with the question of ego in composition and this encounter had a profound influence on me as a composer at the time. *Heirmos*, my own creative answer to this encounter with Tavener was a work that not

¹⁵ *Footprints in New Snow: Postmodernism or Cultural Appropriation?* www.hatzis.com (under Writings)

only displayed a new degree of ego removal in my creative development, but also introduced me to the vast world of choral music that has become ever since a staple of my compositional output. The third, and perhaps most important, event was that in 1990 my daughter, Maria, was born. My growing and deepening relationship with my fiercely independent daughter, who is now entering adolescence, had from the start been for me a test case for the relationship that we as children might have with our own spiritual parentage. The everyday delights and tensions in the parent/child relationship are in many ways analogous to the more profound relationship between God and a human being endowed with free will. This relationship and the challenges that await it in the upcoming crucial years is one of the greatest opportunities that I have been blessed with in this life.

As with Tavener, Arvo Pärt, and other composers of the era, the stylistic imprint of deepening spirituality in music was a sound that could be and has been described as neo-medieval. In fact, the “return home” in the Parable of the Prodigal Son means, externally at least, that one must walk the same path backwards. Viewed from their stylistic results (not from their accompanying critique), Post-modernity and Neo-Medievalism are such a walk backwards. This retreat to musical sources was for me perhaps the widening of the same opening-up process that my music was undergoing during the previous decade, except for the fact that now it was more conscious and that the creative ego receded even further into the background, relinquishing control in the process of not only foreground material but also foreground aspects of structure. *Heirmos* and the subsequent large-scale choral works (*Kyrie*, *De Angelis*, *Everlasting Light*) would have not been possible without this withdrawal of ego from what we conventionally understand as musical structure. The role of foreground structure in my music was gradually replaced with the role of ritual. *Kyrie* and *Everlasting Light* are in fact conceived and structured as rituals. *Everlasting Light* is a work that may be dismembered and be incorporated into an actual funeral or commemoration service.

Yet another paradigm shift

Although I have discussed my musical development in convenient time chunks each one of which spans a decade, the actual watershed moments in this development have taken place on the year three or four of each decade, thus: 1983-84, 1993-94, and 2003-04—closer therefore to my own personal ‘decades’, having been born in 1953. This present essay then, written in 2004, addresses my need to consciously chronicle and explain the most recent watershed moment in my development. Previously, the process of opening-up musical material to as much diversity as possible culminated in a large-scale multimedia work called *Constantinople* where in the foreground there are clashes of not only musical genres and styles, but also of surface and creedal views on religion, namely Christianity and Islam. Although born and raised a Greek Orthodox Christian, I have always viewed religion as a phenomenon that by its nature cannot be compartmentalized. The most painful experience in my own religious life is when adherents to one Christian creed address adherents to a different creed as ‘infidels’, ‘apostates’ or even ‘traitors’, an attitude that was not uncommon during my own upbringing or in my experience with different religious communities since then. This is not unique to the Christian world. The Islamic and the Jewish (and I suspect other) worlds are plagued by similar intrusions of

the spirit of division and dissent, which are made possible by close-mindedness and political agendas rather than by an unselfish desire to serve God and our fellow human beings.

My own manner of addressing this is to follow an inward path towards the source of my own faith, Christ Himself. When I find myself in a situation that I have to address questions of this kind, I ask “what would Jesus have done in a situation like this?” Since this path is fraught with spiritual danger—your displaced ego can disguise itself as “Christ” in this internal dialogue and lead you to a worse predicament than the one you had before your spiritual evolution commenced—I rely on the three things that I know that they have not failed me in the past: the Gospels, prayer and the confidence in the fact that Christ is watching and that He does not wish that I should perish spiritually in the course of my search for Him. This path can be very solitary in some ways and also alienating to people who do not share my intense veneration of Christ. Up until now, my music and my attitude towards religion and other people’s faith was one of accommodation and of acknowledgement. The problem with this attitude is that relationship with God is not a surface phenomenon but the deepest possible relationship attainable. Surface acknowledgement may result in momentary truce, but not in long-lasting peace. The only possible path to truly connecting with others is through our own common spiritual source and this is a relationship that simply cannot be mediated (or worse, negotiated) on the surface. It goes deeper than religious and cultural ‘handshakes’; deeper than creeds or textual definitions of the Divine. It goes all the way to the source of the spring from which we all draw our life and meaning.

In view of this, going backwards to the musical heritage of the Middle-Ages is not getting closer to God. Learning from human experience of the past is of course very important and, for me personally, drawing from the music of my own Greek-Orthodox heritage helps me connect with my childhood experience of God before it was corrupted by the worries and temptations of the world. While this rededication inevitably brings back to memory long-forgotten moments of childhood and their accompanying musical experiences (in my case, the music of my Byzantine heritage), it is also clear to me that any possible meeting with God is ahead of us, not behind us. Musically then as well as spiritually, the mode of expression that I am searching for lies somewhere in the future and not in the past. In this search, the Christ pattern can be the only guiding light. He was all things to all people. He reasoned with children and fisher folk, He spoke in simple parables to people of all walks of life and political, social and moral status, and in so doing he alienated the worldly-wise as well as the theologians of His time—not all, for teachers of the Law, like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who understood the inner connection between His teachings and theirs, accepted Him for who He was. But their colleagues, as well as the majority of those in secular and religious authority at the time, dismissed Him as a populist and agitator of the masses.

What can a composer learn from this pattern? I have learned:

- That the greatest of all sacred traditions is the living, beating hearts of everyday people trying to survive physically and spiritually in their everyday lives;

- That these living, beating hearts are the true Temple of God. He abides there and calls us to enter;
- That all of these living, beating hearts are a single hologram of *one* heart, *one* fall and *one* redemption.

The musical pattern that this translates to ultimately points in the direction of non-elitist music. I don't mean music that is devoid of complex or deep content, but rather music that is delivered in a language that everyone can understand. In our present moment in time, this of course is popular music. Having been trained in the academic system that prizes elitism as something of great importance, it took me quite a while to embrace this pattern as a possible answer to the question of musical style within the field of contemporary art music.

Sepulcher of Life

There have been popular music references in several of my compositions for quite some time now. However, reference is one thing and outright use is another. *Constantinople*, the multimedia work I mentioned earlier which was composed in the summer of 2000, was already a watershed work for me as far as my interest in musical genres of various world cultures was concerned, for it involved outright use of these genres rather than limited reference to them. *Sepulcher of Life*, a 30-minute-long work for soprano, Middle-Eastern vocalist (alto), large choir and orchestra completed in New Year's Day 2004, took a decisive step further in this direction, in that this motion from elitist to popular music became the metaphor of the work's background structure. The work chronicles the latest segment in my own evolution as a composer and as a Christian that spans a period of a few months, from October 2003 to the beginning of 2004 and (hopefully) beyond.

This short period was fraught with change and growth. The catalytic moment in this change was a visit to the ruins of Gizeh in Egypt in early October 2003. My own search for details on Jesus' life over and beyond those mentioned in the canonical Gospels have led me to two sources: Catholic visionary Anne Catherine Emmerich's day-to-day account of Jesus' ministry during His last three years on earth¹⁶ and American mystic Edgar Cayce's account of the early life of Jesus and of the extensive "infrastructure" among the Essenes of Mount Carmel that set the groundwork for Christ's advent¹⁷. Cayce's account in particular was an eye-opener for me, for without contradicting any of the information provided in the Gospels, it explains in a remarkable way the cosmic significance of that particular incarnation and how our vast human history and geography 'converged' at that particular moment in time to produce the seed of everyone's salvation, not just of the members of one religious sect.

In Cayce's account, the Great Pyramid in Gizeh is an important record that has a significant role to play in the present moment of our evolution as a species and is

¹⁶ Ven. Anne Catherine Emmerich: *The Life of Jesus Christ and Biblical Revelations*. 1979. Tan Books and Publishers. Rockford, Illinois 61105.

¹⁷ *Edgar Cayce's Story of Jesus*. Selected and edited by Jeffrey Furst. Berkley Books, New York.

intricately connected with the story of Christ and its present-day extension. All of that was at the back of my mind when I visited Gizeh and no doubt it influenced my experience, which was overwhelming, but the fact is that, soon after my return to Canada, a great many things that lurked in the background as nebulous psychological archetypes suddenly started pushing to the surface and they transformed into an overwhelming and all-consuming spiritual experience.

My original intention for *Sepulcher of Life* was to create a setting of the encomium “*I zoe en tapho*” (“Life in the Sepulcher”) which is sung in Greek Orthodox churches on Good Friday. Powerful and of cosmic dimensions, this is one of the most popular hymns of the Byzantine hymnology. Anyone in Greece who goes to church even occasionally knows the melody and some of the words. The opening motif of the encomium combines with an instrumental motif inspired by the empty sarcophagus of the Great Pyramid of Gizeh (which according to Cayce’ was to signify that in our days the proper understanding of death will be made clear to us) to form the compositional material of the first two movements of the work. From the outset then, the concepts of the empty sarcophagus of Gizeh and Christ’s Holy Sepulcher, both signifying Death as a passage to Life, are combined and developed together. The compositional language and foreground structure of the first movement are quite stern, angular and weighty, like the Great Pyramid itself. Extremes in register, dynamics and orchestration help to prepare one emotionally for the subsequent deepening process which will gradually lead the listener to the background structure and the deeper meaning of the work.

In *Encomium*, the second movement, the Good Friday encomium is finally sung in its entirety by the chorus and immediately afterwards by the chorus and the audience. The audience’s involvement at this moment in the composition of the work is significant. In the mystery of Christ’s Passion there can be no passive observers. The meaning of His sacrifice can only be experienced with *resonance* and *empathy* between the individual soul and the path of salvation that is opened up for it through His Passion. The path has been opened up by God. The resonance with it can only be initiated by the individual and, once the choice has been made, the path must be walked for the resonance to remain active. For this reason, the opportunity for the audience to participate in the unfolding of the work’s structure is central to the structure itself and its metaphor thereof.

The ethical issue that I was faced with as a composer with regards to this opening up of the work’s structure to include the audience was that the audience may very well comprise of individuals of various faiths who may feel that they are put ‘on the spot’ with such an invitation to join in. This is a difficult question to address in a totally satisfying manner, particularly since the Hellenistic and Latin texts of the hymnology of the Holy Week of the earlier churches, principally the Catholic and the Orthodox, are fraught with anti-Semitic references that could rightfully offend adherents of the Jewish faith in the audience as well as in the choir. The first step for me was to clean up the texts (or the selections used in the work) of all such reference. In the ongoing debate as to whether it is advisable to apply hindsight to early Christian texts as opposed to respecting their historical authenticity, I am firmly in favor of the former, at least as far as present day use of these texts in liturgical settings is concern. However, even devoid of their anti-Semitic

reference, these texts may still be at variance with someone else's religious beliefs. My hope is that audience members will not feel intimidated in the presence of someone else's faith, for beyond the particulars of each faith we are all celebrating the fatherhood/motherhood of God and the brotherhood/sisterhood of the human family. I know that choirs, usually consisting of members belonging to various faiths, have for a long time managed to address this question along similar lines of argument (and consensus).

I know that I am dwelling for an inordinate length of time on the issue of the audience participation in the *Sepulcher of Life* but there is another aspect of this moment in the work that deserves mention. There are five verses of the original encomium used in my work followed by a reiteration of the first verse, so six all together. The first three verses have distinct orchestral treatments and the remaining three are sung over a repetition of the orchestral material of the first three. Most of my musician friends who have heard the recording of the work have indicated that the repetition of the music of the first three verses is not really working and is a weak moment in the thematic unfolding of the work as a whole. This astute and, moreover, accurate observation is something that I had played in my mind and my heart endlessly while composing the work—as to whether or not I should use only three verses of the encomium or repeat the music and introduce three more verses over the repetition. In the end I decided for the latter for the following reason. The music at this point ceases to be a linear structure and becomes instead a ritual. It is the ritual of spiritual *communion* where people connect deeply through singing together. In moments like this, the linear unfolding that music theorists understand as form ceases to be important and pales in comparison to the deeper structure that this rare moment of collective communion represents and reveals in the music. As with *Confessional*, which I mentioned earlier, foreground structure is sacrificed to the deeper metaphor that is the true structure of the work. In this case, this metaphor is not the text of the chant but the very act of engaging the audience.

Myrrh-Bearer, the third movement of the work is a departure from the relative stylistic consistency of the first two movements. It plays a parenthetical role in the overall structure in more than one way. I had already written half of the finale by the time I realized that I needed another movement between it and the *Encomium*. On the surface, the stylistic uniqueness of the fourth movement required a 'counterweight' to provide some sort of balance, but more importantly, I felt that the luminous view of death in the last movement would be best offset against a darker view of death that has been prevalent in the culture of the first Christian aeon, and which in turn is an inheritance from the pre-Christian pagan world. In Jesus' circle no one was affected by this view of death more than Mary Magdalene.

Mary Magdalene has been a key figure in my understanding of the mystery of Christ's life and passion. She has been the inspiration for a number of my compositions, and recently—in fact immediately after completing *Sepulcher of Life*—I wrote *The Troparion of Kassiani*, a work that explores musically Mary Magdalene's inner world and her

relationship to her Master.¹⁸ Mary was so intensely attached to Jesus that, even though by many accounts she was the most esoteric of His Apostles, the thought of losing the physical man drove her to deep despair. Hers is not the same pain as that felt by His mother, who was from the outset a willing party in the cosmic redemption plan that involved her and her Son. Magdalene's pain was dark, and so overwhelming that she failed to recognize the risen Christ in the garden on Resurrection morn, mistaking Him instead for the gardener. For the voice of Magdalene, I chose Maryem Tollar, the Cairo-born classical Arabic singer who has contributed with her haunting voice to my earlier work, *Constantinople*. The genre of this movement ranges from the lyrical baroque setting of the encomium theme to the dark and slightly anarchic overlapping improvisations of the alto voice, the solo violin, and two 'moaning' trombones in a style reminiscent of gypsy music (for some reason, I find gypsy music to be a very appropriate musical description of Magdalene's despair). At the end of this movement, as the voice resigns in utter hopelessness, the orchestra rises to a luminous chord that sets the stage for the final movement.

The final movement, whose title is the same as the work itself, was one of those rare moments in my own work when 'the spirit took me' to places where I was not quite prepared to go. By the end of the *Encomium* movement I was feeling that the medieval texts and chant were not enough to carry me across the centuries to the depiction of the present moment in our collective spiritual ascent; these texts were important in the second movement of the work but could not alone sustain the requirements of the finale. I mentioned earlier that our "face-to-face" encounter with God lies ahead of us, not behind us and therefore the music that may express it—if any human-made music is ever capable of rising to the task—must be something that is not entirely drawn from the past but is very much of the present. As I discussed earlier in this essay, my understanding of music as language prompted me to examine the kind of language that Christ used to reveal the deeper mysteries of God to His disciples and His audience. This prompted me in turn to re-examine pop music as an appropriate medium for expression within the world of classical music. I decided to jump into this no-man's-land (speaking for myself, always) with both feet and write my own lyrics as well as the music. The text is a meditation on the interconnectedness of life, death, love and Christ that is much more universal and cosmic in approach than any of the current Christian denominational creeds. It encapsulates my own view of Christ and His place in our world. I copy the text below, for it is central to my own view of life and art as discussed in this essay:

*What is life other than dreams that float
inside the sepulcher of space and time?
A burst of consciousness transforming void
and galaxies of burning stars.
What is life other than dying dreams?*

*What is death other than open gates
to lives we dreamt of in the still of night?*

¹⁸ *The Troparion of Kassiani* for soprano and SATB choir. Cf. www.hatzis.com > [Principal Compositions](#) > [The Troparion of Kassiani](#).

*The birth in a different place, a different time;
in worlds that lie beyond the grave;
(in worlds that beat within our heart).
What is death other than gates of love?*

*What is love other than heightened life:
the quest for union with our common source,
our common destiny, our common plight?
The Life that died so we may live.
The Life that lived so we may love.
What is love other than life in Christ?*

*What is Christ other than Love made flesh
to bring all flesh back to the source of love?
A Sun resplendent with life-giving force,
a moon reflecting radiant light.
What is Christ other than Life Revealed,
a Sepulcher of Life?*

Popular versus Elitist music

The music of this movement (some of the most beautiful music I have ever been able to capture on paper) has been almost consistently a stumbling block for several of my musician friends that I have used as ‘test listeners’ for the work soon after its completion. One of them simply stated that the style of the music, or rather what it evokes, represents the worse affront to human intellect he could possibly think of. He was referring of course to popular music of the Walt Disney or Hollywood variety. For him everything that is wrong with classical contemporary music today is caused by the rampant commercialization of the music industry that allows for virtually nothing to exist beyond its reach. Having been active for many years within the artistic field known as classical contemporary music, I see my music partly as a critique of my own field in addition to its other, far more universal mission. Being familiar with the predominant ideas—and phobias—within this genre, I can understand how popular culture can be felt as a threat to the survival of elitist music. Unwittingly, it can be a check to the latter’s overreaching sense of social legitimacy, and can therefore undermine its sources of funding, principally government and corporate sponsorship, which in turn funds along the lines of social legitimacy and prestige, but also (increasingly) critical listening mass and community. This is enough cause for popular music to be demonized by the intellectual and artistic elite.

The whole problem, of course, can be seen from a different vantage point. Whatever the causes and—possibly detrimental to some—effects may be of this phenomenon, we may be witnessing in popular music the birth of a new common practice, unlike any common practice before it. If we agreed for a moment that it was possible to understand western music practices in terms of a continuously shifting hegemony of (music-consuming) social classes, we could perhaps see the entire history of western music as a roughly outlined pattern whereby Medieval and Renaissance music were the ‘common practice’ of the aristocracy and the church, Baroque, Classical and Romantic music were the

‘common practice’ of the bourgeoisie—the predominant consumer class of that time—and its brainchild, the Enlightenment, while jazz and pop music were until recently the ‘common practice’ of the lower-middle and working classes. I say “until recently” because, with popular culture winning rampantly the postmodern language game of legitimation across a wide cross-section of the social gamut, the common practice of popular music can no longer be easily identified as belonging to a specific class, as the previous musical common practices have, but to music-consuming (and increasingly legitimating) society in general.

Is pop music an intentional and systematic brainwash of the masses by sinister centers of social/political power, as some conspiracy theorists in the contemporary art music world and within various world music cultures would have us believe? It is not easy to answer this with a “yes” or “no”, certainly not from a spiritual or theological perspective. If you are thinking of a concerted effort to “take over the world” by means of a pop music brainwash, the obvious answer is “no”. But the fact that the multi-billion dollar music industry has been overrun by greed and worldly ambition with little regard for the end-user as anything other than a purchasing/consuming target is upon reflection a subversion of spirituality and a continuous retardation of our collective spiritual quotient. As I have alluded earlier (in the case of serialism seen as a metaphor for systems of total social control), any cybernetic system that for whatever reason sees the operating unit as an indivisible point rather as a hologram of the whole ends up subverting both the unit and the whole.

A subversion of this kind usually invites counter-subversion and the recent phenomenon of illegal downloading of music over the internet with little sympathy among music consumers for the cries of the industry that this constitutes theft is an early symptom of this counter-subversion phenomenon¹⁹. The dire predicament that the music industry finds itself presently is an indictment, not of the language it has developed, but of what it says (and aims to accomplish by saying it) through this language. The language and the message need not be one and the same thing, even when they are bundled together in the minds of many. Let me clarify this by a historical example. The spirit of Christianity in the early stages of its dissemination was in sharp contrast with the spirit of the predominately Hellenistic (pagan) culture of the time. However, that did not stop Paul and the early Apostles of the church from using the Greek language to spread their distinctively different message because that was the language most widely spoken across the vast Roman Empire. One could argue therefore that the Hellenistic language was used

¹⁹ When the very phenomenon that the music and entertainment industries construe as “theft” is widespread to the extent that it becomes a common practice by a great many members of society who choose to defy legal logic and threat of repercussions, then one may argue that it is no longer theft as such but a symptom of a widespread rethinking of the social contract. Social revolutions such as the French or the Russian could be (and have been) construed by some as acts of collective theft, but history does not regard them as such in retrospect. It is also interesting to note that the practitioners of illegal music downloading are “armed” for their undertaking by the electronics industry which in many instances is the same industry that holds the rights to the content that is being illegally downloaded. Capitalism is so obsessed with profit that it will seek it against its own long-term interest and even at the cost of its own survival.

to subvert Hellenism and establish Christianity in its place; that the language was used to subvert the very message that in the minds of most people it was inextricably tied to.

Sometimes the very thing that appears to plague us with its imposition may also be a hidden opportunity for us to turn things around. If we believe, for example, that popular music is a language that addresses the lowest common denominator among audiences, this may be perhaps because many of the artists who are in a position to raise this denominator refuse to speak it. Like with any language, the first thing that one learns is vocabulary, not syntax. So it is the vocabulary, not the syntax, of popular music that is of interest in the present discussion. At the risk of over-generalizing, vocabulary is a communication tool while syntax is a compositional tool and, as soon as one recognizes this, communication with large numbers of people need not be artistically compromising. The real problem usually is that classical composers and performers have an almost religious attachment to classical (in this I also include *avant-garde*) music vocabulary. The fear of letting go of something or, more accurately, of enriching it by assimilating outside influences, is conservative, counterproductive, and it will ultimately lead to the extinction of the very thing we so strongly wish to hold on to.

In a previous essay²⁰ I mentioned that when most classical concert goers think of orchestral music, they think of the sound of the common practice orchestra. This is the referent against which they comprehend any orchestral sonority or texture, whatever its nature or stylistic bias. I would like to revise this statement somewhat here, by stating that, with the decrease and aging demographic of symphony orchestra audiences and the incremental increase of movie viewers in front of theater screens and/or home entertainment systems, the real referent for orchestral music for most people is increasingly the soundtrack orchestra and its ever expanding vocabulary of sonorities—both acoustic and electronic. It is not unusual for uninitiated concert listeners to identify the sound of an atonal orchestral texture as “dark” or “creepy” simply because they have heard a similar texture in soundtracks accompanying “dark” or “creepy” moments in movies. While the syntax of movie soundtrack scores is determined by the image sequences that the soundtracks are subservient to, there is no reason why in concert music a similar vocabulary could not be articulated by a syntax that is more appropriate for the concert stage, where the music is the central focus of the listener’s attention. As soon as the audience senses that they and the composer speak the same language, they may be willing to go to great lengths to establish a more profound semantic communication with the composer. The last movement of my *Sepulcher of Life* subscribes to this theory wholeheartedly and is the most recent watershed moment in my own development as a composer.

There is, of course, a more important reason for this choice, which is the Master/disciple paradigm that I mentioned earlier. Christ spoke in simple commonly understood language that held no mystery in its vocabulary or syntax. The mystery was the *message* that was delivered via this simple means and the paradox is that those who were trained in grammar and syntax proved to be least equipped to understand His message. The

²⁰ Cf. *The Orchestra as Metaphor*. www.hatzis.com (under Writings)

simplicity of the delivery—the fact that *everyone* could understand it—threatened the religious establishment’s privileged position and unique authority. Christ’s message leveled the legitimation field between priesthood and laity. This was the real threat (that the individual human heart is the new Temple within which God will meet each and every one of us, and that in this Temple we alone are the priests and the laity), not the fact that He addressed the lowest common social and educational denominator and allegedly compromised religious truth in the process. If you replace “religious” with “artistic” in the above sentence, the elitist vs. popular question becomes a moral one and, for anyone who believes that Christ is someone worth imitating, it is a question that must be pondered upon and answered with circumspect but also with urgency. This is what I have attempted to do recently in my own life and work.

Closing Thoughts

This essay discusses rather loosely ideas and feelings that have not yet become fully a way of life for me. I am aware of their import and urgency, but it takes more than awareness to turn this knowledge into the powerful personal and transpersonal experience that it can and should be. I hope that one day I will reach a level of simplicity that will enable me to live and create music accordingly but, until then, I have to live with the inner contradiction between what I clearly sense and believe as true and what I have been so far able to attain in my own life and work. In this and probably every other sense, I have violated the rule that stipulates that one should preach as one lives and live as one preaches. However, I find it essential that, in our present moment of neo-Essenic expectancy, we should be discussing these concepts even though we have not made ourselves yet worthy of embodying them, whatever the hidden spiritual dangers of doing so may be. My instinct tells me that we are nearing a watershed moment in our own collective evolution as a species, a moment that is the culmination of hopes (and fears) of countless generations of human beings for several millennia.

Our ecological, political, psychological, and technological prognostications converge at some point in the near future, as a point of ultimate crisis beyond which we cannot go except perhaps by means of some fundamental change in our make up as human beings and as society at large. These same prognostications stipulate that our present rate of change is not significant enough to carry us across the divide of this impending crisis. Cynics will argue that it is precisely this pressure that has made age-old prophesies about an imminent revelation of God to humanity fashionable again. I believe that this pressure is a symptom, not the cause, and that the impending geopolitical crisis is the birth pangs of the New Age, as has been promised, as Christ’s Passion has made possible, and as shall be delivered in spite of our shortcomings. Our role—everyone’s, that is—is to make the final preparations in haste for the Bridegroom’s party, which, as has been suggested in the parable of the ten virgins, will commence at the darkest moment of our collective night. To believe that Christians will be on the preferred—or worse, exclusive—guest list in this party is to profess little understanding of the Master of masters, for He is not a respecter of persons, professed beliefs, creedal constructs and empty rituals, but of the purity of heart that lies hidden deep within each one of us, and sometimes in the most

unsuspected places around us, whatever such a heart may be professing or acting out on the surface.

He was all things to all people then, since then, and more than ever now and He has pointed out by example the path that needs to be walked. As a musician and a human being, I feel that I must follow my conductor's cue. I believe that it is urgent to do so now for, in the rotating cycles and seasons of the spirit, this is harvest time.

April 2004