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LITURGICAL MUSIC AS RITUAL SYMBOL

A Case Study of Jacques Berthier's Taizé Music

Judith Marie Kubicki



PEETERS

CHAPTER THREE
PHILOSOPHIES AND THEOLOGIES OF SYMBOL:
TAIZÉ MUSIC AS RITUAL SYMBOL

INTRODUCTION

If indeed music-making – and in particular, the singing of the Taizé chants – is both integral to the liturgy and ministerial, then ritual music-making provides something more than simply “a nobler aspect” to the rites or “a more graceful expression to prayer.”¹ The thesis of this paper is that the symbolic nature of music and music-making provides the possibility that music is both integral to the liturgy and ministerial.

Chapter two employed a musical hermeneutics which approached the chants of Taizé as a field of humanly significant action. This hermeneutic is based on the conviction that music has referential power. It allowed us to identify textual inclusions and structural tropes which serve as hermeneutical windows for interpreting how these chants mediate meaning.

The task of this chapter is to explore several aspects of symbol theory in order to discover how music, and specifically, the music of Taizé, can be said to be symbolic. This will include an examination and application of principles of symbol theory and semiotics and also theologies of symbol which promise to assist our efforts to discover how music functions as symbol within the liturgy and how the singing of the Taizé chants can be described as symbolizing activity.

Since this paper regards music not only as symbol, but also as an art form, the ideas of various thinkers in the philosophy of art called aesthetics will be applied to the analysis of ritual music. Furthermore, because the art form being studied is performed at Taizé in Christian liturgy, various theologies of symbol will be used to address the question of music as ritual symbol. Lastly, because this paper is examining music's power to signify, that is, to mediate meaning, certain approaches in the field of semiotics will be engaged to analyze how music mediates

¹ “*Musicam Sacram*,” 5.

meaning, particularly in a ritual context. Since semiotics is a relatively new field of study, having developed significantly since the 1970's in both Europe and the United States, a brief introduction to semiotics and a rationale for its application to the study of liturgy will clarify its role in this study.

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) and Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) are considered the two founders of contemporary semiotics, a tradition which has its roots in ancient Greece. Charles Morris, a semiotician who built on the theoretical foundations of Charles Sanders Peirce, has defined "semiosis" as the process in which something functions as a sign.² The related term "semiotic" was adapted by John Locke from the Greek Stoics.³ In contemporary usage, the terms semiosis, semiotics, and semiology have all been employed to describe the signifying process and the study of the process. Charles Peirce's followers have used the term *semiotic* to describe their elaboration of his conceptual framework, while Ferdinand de Saussure's followers have used the term *semiologie* to describe their application of his conceptual framework for analyzing language to other sign phenomena.⁴ In general, today semiotics is considered the discipline which concerns itself with both verbal and non-verbal signs.⁵

In his writings,⁶ Peirce identifies three dimensions of approach to the analysis of signs in semiotics: the semantic, the pragmatic, and the syntactic. Wilson Coker, whose work builds on the tradition of C.S. Peirce and Charles Morris, explains these terms in this way:

² Charles MORRIS, "Foundations of the Theory of Signs," in *Foundations of the Unity of Science: Toward an International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, ed. Otto NEURATH, Rudolf CARNAP, and Charles MORRIS, vol. 1, nos. 1-10 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 81.

³ Charles MORRIS, *Signification and Significance: A Study of the Relations of Signs and Values* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1964), 1.

⁴ Jan Michael JONCAS, "Musical Semiotics and Liturgical Musicology: Theoretical Foundations and Analytic Techniques," *Ecclesia Orans* 8 (1991): 183.

⁵ Gerard M. Lukken, "Semiotics and the Study of Liturgy," *Studia Liturgica* 17 (1987): 109.

⁶ Peirce himself published approximately twelve thousand printed pages of his writings and lectures. In addition, the known manuscripts of unpublished materials runs to approximately eighty thousand pages. Two different editions of Peirce's writings have been consulted for this study. Because Peirce often provides several definitions for the same term, as is the case, for example, of his term *interpretant*, directly quoting a succinct definition is not possible.

The dimension of *semantics* concerns the relations of signs to their contexts and to what they signify. The kinds of signs, their ordering, and their relations to one another are the dimension of *syntactics*. And the dimension of *pragmatics* treats the relations of signs to their interpreters.⁷

Each of these dimensions looks at a different aspect of the process of signification. In engaging in semiotics, the meaning of a sign is considered in terms of its relation to all three dimensions since it is generated by their interaction.

If semiotic analysis is concerned with the analysis of signs, it follows that such analysis can be fruitful in the study of the liturgy as a complex of symbols. The musical semiologist Gino Stefani argues for the appropriateness of applying semiotics to the analysis of the liturgy when he explains:

The liturgy ... is to be performed following the laws of Christian worship and those that regulate the action and expression of human groups. ... [T]he liturgy is an ensemble of signs, that is to say, of actions in which the dominant value is situated in the order of signification ... That is why it is correct to consider liturgical science as a branch of semiology, the general science of signs. ... It is thus normal for semiological reflection to devolve upon the liturgy insofar as it is human communication, just as it is normal to appeal to theology to clarify the purposes and content of the liturgy insofar as it is a sacred action and to psycho-sociology to analyze the celebration insofar as it is a human action *tout court*.⁸

Stefani makes two points pertinent to the concerns of this study. The first is that liturgy is an ensemble of signs or symbols.⁹ The second is that the liturgy is an action whose dominant value is situated in the order of signification. If the liturgy is an ensemble of signs or symbols, music is one of those symbols. If liturgy is an action, then music-making can be described as symbolizing activity.

⁷ Wilson COKER, *Music and Meaning: A Theoretical Introduction to Musical Aesthetics* (New York: The Free Press, 1972), 2.

⁸ The original French text is found in Gino STEFANI, "Essai sur les communications sonores dans la liturgie," *Paroisse et liturgie* 52 (1970): 99-100. This translation is by Jan Michael JONCAS and is found in his essay "Musical Semiotics and Liturgical Musicology: Theoretical Foundations and Analytic Techniques," *Ecclesia Orans* 8 (1990): 198-199.

⁹ As noted above in chapter one, the terms *sign* and *symbol* are often used interchangeably to designate the same reality. Stefani's use of sign in this context appears to follow this practice.

Furthermore, the semiotic method is particularly important to the analysis of liturgical sources because it pays just as much attention to the non-verbal in these sources as it does to the verbal. Whereas it has often been the practice to analyze liturgical sources by methods adopted from literary studies, even when those sources are not literary texts, semiotics provides the conceptual apparatus for approaching the analysis of such ritual objects as actions, gestures, movements in space, the space itself, images, vestments, and music by taking into account their non-verbal aspects.¹⁰

The last chapter described how Berthier's music of Taizé situates the assembly in specific relationships to one another and within the Christian tradition. This ability of the Taizé chants to mediate meaning and create connections requires further philosophical and theological investigation in order to explain how the music of Taizé operates as ritual symbol. This chapter will pursue such an investigation into the nature of symbol and music's symbolic properties.

THE NATURE OF SYMBOL

Symbolic thought and symbolic behavior are among the most characteristic features of human life. Indeed, the whole progress of human culture, including the origin of language, of art, and of religion may be said to be based on these phenomena.¹¹ Several of the documents examined in chapter one either directly or indirectly allude to the fact that, like so many other significant human actions, doing liturgy is engaging in symbolic activity. However, in several instances¹² the terms *sign* and *symbol* appear to

¹⁰ LUKKEN, "Semiotics," 114. Lukken is a member of a research group called "Semanet" which applies the semiotics of A.J. Greimas, of the Saussurian school, to the liturgy. While the article referred to here is specifically pointing out the relevance of Greimassian semiotics to an analysis of the liturgy, his conclusions are also applicable to the Peircean school since several of its members, including such scholars as Wilson Coker and Charles Boilès, have applied semiotics to the study of musical signification. See Gerard LUKKEN and Mark SEARLE, *Semiotics and Church Architecture: Applying the Semiotics of A.J. Greimas and the Paris School to the Analysis of Church Buildings*, Liturgia Condenda (Kampen, the Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1993). This work is a good example of how semiotics can provide the conceptual apparatus for analyzing non-verbal liturgical sources.

¹¹ Ernst CASSIRER, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), 27.

¹² These examples are included in chapter one: *Music in Catholic Worship* 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 23 and *Liturgical Music Today* 60.

be used interchangeably to describe the same reality. This study does not view the two terms as synonymous. Therefore, before discussing the nature of symbol, I will identify the primary distinctions between *sign* and *symbol* that are being assumed in using the two terms in this study.

Charles Peirce distinguishes three types of signs: *iconic*, *indexical* and *symbolic*. Charles Boilès, an ethnomusicologist and semiotician of the Peircean school, offers the following definitions of the three types: A sign is *iconic* if it in some way imitates or "mimics" that which it represents. A sign is *indexical* if it points to something or indicates its existence, usually in time and space. A sign is *symbolic* if it represents something which has no direct relationship to the form or natural properties of the sign itself.¹³ Furthermore, a symbol is polysemous and multivocal. That is, it presents many layers of meaning and allows for a variety of interpretations.

These brief explanations, however, do not suffice to explain the difference between *sign* and *symbol*. Since, in this study, *symbol* will be distinguished from *sign* and studied within a philosophical and theological framework, several distinctions commonly made in these disciplines will be examined.

The theologian Paul Tillich points out that there is one important characteristic which signs and symbols have in common: both point to something beyond themselves. The decisive difference between the two is that signs do not participate in the reality to which they point. Symbols do.¹⁴

Tillich enumerates several characteristics which distinguish symbols from signs. Symbols open up levels of reality which are otherwise closed to us. This is particularly true of the arts, for they create symbols which provide access to a dimension of reality that cannot be reached in any other way. In addition, symbols also provide access to dimensions of a person's inner life which correspond to those levels of reality. Lastly, symbols cannot be produced intentionally nor invented. Rather, they grow out of the individual or social unconscious and die when the situation changes.¹⁵

In his book, *Meaning*, the philosopher Michael Polanyi presents a detailed discussion of the difference between indicators – his term for

¹³ Charles L. BOILÈS, "Processes of Musical Semiosis," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 14 (1982): 34-35.

¹⁴ TILlich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 41-42.

¹⁵ TILlich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 42-43.

signs – and symbols. Polanyi's schema for explaining the different dynamics involved in signs and symbols can help to elucidate Paul Tillich's distinctions.

According to Polanyi's schema, indicators, that is signs, point in a subsidiary way to that focal integration upon which they bear. These indicators possess little interest in themselves. Rather, the interest lies in the object to which they point.

Polanyi uses the example of the name of a building and the building itself. The name of the building functions as the subsidiary (S) pointing to the building which is the true object of focal attention (F).¹⁶ Polanyi diagrams the operation of indicators in this way:



The name of the building, the subsidiary, is labeled “-ii” to indicate that it lacks interest. The building itself, the focal meaning, is labelled “+ii” to indicate that it possesses interest. Polanyi notes that the integration resulting from this dynamic is self-centered because it is made *from* the self as center, including all the subsidiaries in which we dwell, *to* the object of our focal attention.¹⁸

On the other hand, Polanyi presents symbols as that phenomena of meaning in which subsidiary clues do not function as indicators pointing our way to something else. Rather, in the act of symbolizing it is the subsidiary clues that are of intrinsic interest to us because they enter into meanings in such a way that we are “carried away” by these meanings. Within this dynamic, our persons are involved in a way quite different from that described in the self-centered integration of indicators. In the case of symbols, our involvement is of such a nature that the relation of “bearing upon” and the location of intrinsic interest is much more complex.¹⁹ Polanyi diagrams symbolization in this way:



¹⁶ Michael POLANYI and Harry PROSCH, *Meaning* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), 70-71.

¹⁷ POLANYI, *Meaning*, 70.

¹⁸ POLANYI, *Meaning*, 71.

¹⁹ POLANYI, *Meaning*, 71.

²⁰ POLANYI, *Meaning*, 72.

The position of the plus and minus signs are reversed in order to demonstrate that now the subsidiary clues are more interesting to us than the focal object. Using the American flag as an example, Polanyi explains that what gives the flag meaning is that we put our whole existence as lived in our country into it. Without that surrender of ourselves into that piece of cloth it would remain only a piece of cloth and not a flag, that is, a symbol of our country. It is our diffuse and boundless memories of our nation's existence and our life in it that give the flag meaning by becoming embodied and fused in it.²¹

A straight arrow cannot illustrate this dynamic. Therefore Polanyi devises an arrow loop in order to illustrate the way our perception of the focal object in symbolization also “carries us back toward (and so provides us with a perceptual embodiment of) those diffuse memories of our lives (i.e., of ourselves) which bore upon the focal object to begin with.”²²

Thus the symbol can be said to “carry us away,” since it is in surrendering ourselves that we, as selves, are drawn into the meaning of the symbol. Polanyi illustrates this integration of our existence by redrawing the diagram in this way:



What is significant in Polanyi's scheme is his illustration of the participation of the subject in the coming to meaning of the symbol. In surrendering ourselves, we accomplish the integration of those diffuse parts of ourselves that are related to the symbol. Thus our surrender to the symbol is at the same time our being carried away by it.²⁴

Polanyi's insights highlight important distinctions between signs and symbols. On the one hand, signs function on the level of cognition, providing us with information. Symbols, on the other hand, function on the level of recognition, providing instead not information but integration, both within a subject and between subjects. Furthermore, Polanyi's scheme demonstrates how meaning comes to subjects through their past experiences and within a particular cultural and social milieu

²¹ POLANYI, *Meaning*, 72-73.

²² POLANYI, *Meaning*, 73.

²³ POLANYI, *Meaning*, 72.

²⁴ POLANYI, *Meaning*, 73.

which involves relationships with other subjects. Thus Polanyi's analysis of the apprehension of meaning provides a basis for building a theory of symbol appropriate to ritual music.

The etymology of the word symbol corroborates Polanyi's insights. The word "symbol" derives from the Greek word "symballein" which literally means "to throw together." The ancient practice of "symbolon" involved cutting an object in two. Partners in a contract would each retain one part of the symbolon, which separately possessed no value, but which when joined with the other half "symbolized" or confirmed the agreement between two partners. Thus it was the agreement between two partners which established the symbol. It functioned as an expression of a social pact based on mutual recognition in the rejoining of the two halves. In this way it was a mediator of identity.²⁵

Our contemporary understanding of symbol has developed and broadened beyond this original usage. The theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet, in referring to the ancient practice of "symbolon," observes that "the semantic field of the word 'symbol' has been extended to every element (object, word, gesture, person ...) that, exchanged within a group, somewhat like a pass-word, permits the group as a whole or individuals therein to recognize one another and identify themselves."²⁶ A common element in the original usage of the term, as well as in Polanyi's and Chauvet's understanding of the symbolic process, is that a symbol mediates recognition within a community or social world.

In distinguishing between sign and symbol, Chauvet adopts Eugene Ortigues's distinctions.²⁷ In *Le discours et le symbole*, Ortigues explains that the sign refers to something of another order than itself. The symbol, on the other hand, introduces us into an order to which it itself belongs. This order is a cultural realm completely different from that of immediately experienced reality, one presupposed to be an order of meaning in its radical otherness.²⁸

Louis-Marie Chauvet captures the radical nature of symbolizing to human life when he explains:

²⁵ Louis-Marie CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick MADIGAN and Madeleine BEAUMONT (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 112.

²⁶ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 112.

²⁷ Ortigues's distinctions are similar to those made by Tillich. Cf. p. 97.

²⁸ Eugene ORTIGUES, *Le discours et le symbole* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1962), 65, 210. Cited in Louis-Marie CHAUVET, 112-113.

Reality is never present to us except in a mediated way, which is to say, constructed out of the symbolic network of the culture which fashions us. This symbolic order designates the system of connections between the different elements and levels of a culture (economic, social, political, ideological – ethics, philosophy, religion . . .), a system forming a coherent whole that allows the social group and individuals to orient themselves in space, find their place in time, and in general situate themselves in the world in a significant way – in short, to find their identity in a world that makes "sense," even if, as C. Levi-Strauss says, there always remains an inextinguishable residue of signifiers to which we can never give adequate meanings.²⁹

In this statement, Chauvet identifies the foundational principle of his sacramental reinterpretation of Christian existence. It is the principle that all reality is mediated. His explanation includes two points which are important for examining the nature of music as symbol in liturgy. The first is that symbols mediate reality by negotiating connections. These connections, secondly, allow subjects both as members of a social group and as individuals to make sense of their world and to find their identity by discovering relationships. Symbolizing, then, is a dynamic which involves the active participation of subjects in mediating connections and in discovering their identity and place in their social world.

Michael Lawler, also working in the area of sacramental theology, has likewise underscored the importance of understanding the dynamics of symbolizing in the liturgy. Like Chauvet, Lawler highlights the importance of the action of the human subject in symbolizing when he explains:

It is the symboling activity of the human subject that makes possible symbolic transformation, that is, the transformation of a mere sensible reality into a more than merely sensible symbol embodying meaning. Such transformation depends ultimately on the human subject, not on some communion of natures between a sensible reality and a meaning which leads, by some ineluctable law, to their union as symbol and meaning. The total process of symbolization from beginning to end, from the first moment of the interpretation of the sensible reality into a symbol to the final moment of the transformation of that symbol, is controlled by the human symbolizer, and not by either the symbol or its meanings.³⁰

²⁹ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 84-85.

³⁰ Michael G. LAWLER, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Contemporary Sacramental Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 11.

The distinction between signs and symbols, then, turns on whether subjects are taken into account.³¹ The symbol clearly stands on the side of the subject who produces him/herself in producing the symbol. Furthermore, the effects of meaning produced by the symbol are understood as effects of the subject, whereby the subject recognizes him/herself in the effects and identifies him/herself with them.³² Both Chauvet and Lawler focus on the importance of the subject in the creation of a symbol's meaning.³³

Thus far we can say that a symbol is a mediation of recognition which evokes participation and allows an individual or a social group to orient themselves, that is, to discover their identity and their place within their world. This is especially true of the symbols operative in ritual since ritual provides those most contingent and culturally determined aspects which are the very epitome of mediation.³⁴

Chauvet further elucidates his understanding of the nature of symbol and sacrament by highlighting the foundational nature of embodiment. According to Chauvet, the body is the primordial and arch-symbolic form of mediation and the basis for all subjective identification.³⁵ That is, the body is "the primordial place of every symbolic joining of the 'inside' and the 'outside.'"³⁶ It is the body that places human beings in the world and it is the body that is the entry place where the entire symbolic order takes root in us as human beings.³⁷

To support his assertion, Chauvet quotes D. Dubarle, who explains that the living body is indeed, "the arch-symbol of the whole symbolic order."³⁸ Chauvet realizes that such a premise is important for a theology of the sacraments since the ritual symbolism which constitutes them has the body for its setting. Furthermore, such a premise is important for a theory of music as ritual symbol since music-making, more than any other artistic enterprise, involves the body in an intimate and integral

³¹ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 110.

³² CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 116, 119.

³³ Other scholars, notably Susanne K. Langer and Jean-Jacques Nattiez, also situate the symbol's source of meaning in the subject. Their ideas regarding symbol will be presented later in this study.

³⁴ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 110-111.

³⁵ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 111.

³⁶ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 147.

³⁷ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 147.

³⁸ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 151.

way. Indeed, according to Church tradition, the most "spiritual" communication of God, even that of the Holy Spirit itself, takes place through a process of symbolizing which is eminently "sensory and bodily."³⁹

Using his theology of symbol as a foundation, Chauvet develops a theology of sacrament by focusing on the body as arch-symbol. In this respect he is proceeding with a method similar to that of Karl Rahner who constructed his theology of sacrament on his understanding of the symbolic relationship of the body to the soul. A brief look at the development of Rahner's ideas will further elucidate those of Chauvet.

Rahner begins his enquiry into the notion of symbol by looking at the ontology of symbolic reality in general. His first axiom is that "all beings are by their nature symbolic, because they necessarily 'express' themselves in order to attain their own nature."⁴⁰ Rahner sets out "to look for the highest and most primordial manner in which one reality can represent another . . ."⁴¹ This supreme and primal representation, in which one reality renders another present, Rahner calls a symbol.⁴² Further, Rahner explains that the symbol, strictly speaking, "is the self-realization of a being in another, which is constitutive of its essence."⁴³ For Rahner, a symbol is not primarily considered a relationship between two different beings which are given the function of indicating one another by a third. Rather, a being is symbolic in itself because the expression which it retains while constituting itself as the "other" is the way in which it communicates itself to itself.⁴⁴

For Rahner, the paradigmatic symbol is the human subject. Following Thomistic doctrine that the soul is the substantial form of the body, Rahner explains that the soul exists insofar as it embodies itself, that is, expresses itself in the body. The body, though distinct from the soul, is not a separate part. Rather, the body is the phenomenon, that is, the mode of the soul's presence and appearance.⁴⁵ Thus the body is the

³⁹ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 140.

⁴⁰ KARL RAHNER, "The Theology of Symbol," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, *More Recent Writings*, trans. Kevin SMYTH (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 224.

⁴¹ RAHNER, "The Theology of Symbol," 225.

⁴² RAHNER, "The Theology of Symbol," 225.

⁴³ RAHNER, "The Theology of Symbol," 234.

⁴⁴ RAHNER, "The Theology of Symbol," 230.

⁴⁵ LOUIS ROBERTS, *The Achievement of Karl Rahner* (New York: Herder and Herder, Inc., 1967), 35.

symbol or self-realization of the soul which "renders itself present and makes its 'appearance' in the body which is distinct from it."⁴⁶ In other words, "the body is the manifestation of the soul, through which and in which the soul realizes its own essence."⁴⁷

The body, then, is truly the symbol of the self. Since the body so completely comes from the self and expresses the self, it is indeed *the* way in which we are present to self and to others. It would be impossible to be ourselves or be present to one another without being embodied.⁴⁸

To highlight this aspect of corporality, Chauvet explains that "the human being does not have a body, but is body."⁴⁹ This "I-body" – his designation for each person's physical body – is irreducible to any other and yet similar to every other. Furthermore, this "I-body," exists only as woven, inhabited and spoken by the triple body of culture, tradition, and nature. In other words, it is the place where the triple body – social, ancestral, and cosmic – is symbolically joined.⁵⁰

For Louis-Marie Chauvet both the body and language are in their essence symbolic since both function, not as instrument, but as mediation. Following Rahner's line of reasoning, Chauvet concludes that, just as human subjects come to be through the mediation of their bodies, so do they come to be in language which is constitutive of all truly human experience.⁵¹

But exactly how does Chauvet define language? In chapter three of *Symbol and Sacrament* he states that "there is no human reality, however interior or intimate, except through the mediation of language or quasi-language⁵² that gives it a body by expressing it."⁵³ He continues, quoting E. Ortigues, who explains that "whether the expression be verbal, facial, or gestural, it 'indicates an act of presence which acts itself out for

⁴⁶ RAHNER, "The Theology of Symbol," 247.

⁴⁷ Karl RAHNER, *The Church and the Sacraments*, trans. W.J. O'HARA (Herder and Herder, 1963), 37.

⁴⁸ Michael SKELLEY, *The Liturgy of the World: Karl Rahner's Theology of Worship*, forward by Rembert G. WEAKLAND (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 37-38.

⁴⁹ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 149.

⁵⁰ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 149-150.

⁵¹ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 87.

⁵² CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 87, n. 8, Chauvet defines the term "quasi-languages" to include both "supra-language": that made up of gestures, mime, and all artistic endeavor, as well as "infra-language": that made up of the archaic impulses of the unconscious.

itself ..."⁵⁴ In other words, "every impression can take form (a human, significant form) only in the expression that accomplishes it, and every thought 'forms itself by expressing itself.'"⁵⁵

Thus, in using the term "language," Chauvet's definition is broad enough to include a variety of forms of expression beyond strictly "words," or "morphemes."⁵⁶ Just as he had pointed out that the semantic field of the word "symbol" had been extended beyond that of the word "symbolon," so, too, does he extend the definition of "language."⁵⁷

Similarly, Michael Polanyi talks about the need to expand the concept of a class of meanings that covers all cases of meaning distinct from the meanings of perception, skills, and such part-whole relations as we meet in nature. He suggests that the word "semantic" be used for all kinds of artificial meanings. By these he means all those contrived by human persons. Normally, the use of the term "semantics" is limited to the meanings achieved by language.⁵⁸ His suggested expansion will allow us later in this investigation to apply the term "semantic" to include meanings conveyed by music. This is important, since in order to adequately explore the nature of meaning in music, it is essential not to define meaning solely as a reflection of some linguistic meaning.⁵⁹ Therefore,

⁵³ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 90.

⁵⁴ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 65.

⁵⁵ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 65.

⁵⁶ Webster defines a morpheme as any word or part of a word, as an affix or combining form, that conveys meaning, cannot be further divided into smaller elements conveying meaning, and usually occurs in various contexts with relatively stable meaning.

⁵⁷ Scholars in the field of musical semiotics debate the appropriateness of using linguistic models to interpret musical meaning. I have chosen to adopt the position of such semioticians as Willem Marie SPEELMAN who regard music as a discourse and therefore a type of language. On page ix of *The Generation of Meaning in Liturgical Songs: A Semiotic Analysis of Five Liturgical Songs as Syncretic Discourse*, Speelman explains that, "the word semiotics is used to indicate languages, e.g. music and literature are semiotics ..."

⁵⁸ POLANYI, *Meaning*, 74. Since about 1970, a great deal of work has been done in the fields of general semiology and the semiology of music by scholars both in Europe and in the United States. Cf. Coker's definitions of Peirce's three dimensions of semiotics on p. 95. According to Coker, semantics is the study of the relations of signs to their contexts and to what they signify. In addition to Coker, Peirce's categories have been employed by Charles Boilès in several of his essays. In his comparative semiology, Jean-Jacques Nattiez was originally interested in the music-language comparison.

⁵⁹ Jean-Jacques NATTIEZ, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, trans. Carolyn ABBATE (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 9.

unless otherwise indicated, this study operates with these expanded definitions of "language" and "semantics" in order to allow the broadest possible interpretation and application of these notions to the functioning of music as symbol.

MUSIC AS SYMBOL

Thus far we have determined that the definition of symbol operative in this paper can be expressed in this way: a symbol is a mediation of recognition which evokes participation and allows an individual or a social group to orient themselves, that is, to discover their identity and their place within their world. If we are to be justified in calling music a "symbol," we need to demonstrate that music does indeed function in this way. In addition, we need to address the specific questions regarding the method or framework for analyzing the symbolic nature of music and music-making.

Philosophers since the time of the ancient Greeks have been struggling with the question of music and meaning. Indeed, many of our suppositions about the potential of music to embody meaning and to influence human life and behavior go back to the writings of such thinkers as Aristotle. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle includes music, along with epic poetry, tragedy, comedy and dithyrambic poetry as forms which in their general conception are modes of imitation. Aristotle explains that in instrumental music, imitation is produced by rhythm or "harmony."⁶⁰ What music imitates is action, defined by Aristotle not as physical activity, but a movement-of-the-spirit that results from a combination of thought and character. By "imitation," Aristotle means, not a superficial copying, but rather the representation of the countless forms which the life of the human spirit may take, in the medium of a particular art. In music, that medium is sound.⁶¹

Aristotle's *Politics* discusses the nature of music as imitation in this way:

...even in mere melodies there is an imitation of character, for the musical modes differ essentially from one another, and those who hear them are differently affected by each ... The same principles apply to rhythms;

⁶⁰ *Aristotle's Poetics*, trans. S.H. BUCHER, introduction by Francis FERGUSON (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1961), I, 2-5.

⁶¹ *Aristotle's Poetics*, VI, 5-6.

some have a character of rest, others of motion, and of these latter again, some have a more vulgar, others a nobler movement.⁶²

In this description of music as imitation, Aristotle expresses the belief that music can influence the character or disposition of persons so that their characters or dispositions change. This is possible, Aristotle reasons, because music has character and the means to communicate this character to the listener.⁶³

Although Aristotle does not speak explicitly about the nature of music as a symbolic phenomenon, many of his ideas provide the ground work for building a symbolic theory of music. His idea that music imitates a "movement of the spirit" and represents "the countless forms of the life of the human spirit" situates the locus of music in the human subject and in the potential of music to evoke recognition and thereby influence integration or the formation of character.

Since Aristotle, further questions have evolved regarding the nature of music, its ability to signify, its power to refer, and the possibility of apprehending and analyzing its meaning. Since it is beyond both the scope and the purpose of this study to present a comprehensive presentation or critique of the various theories which have been developed, only representative theories which have a direct bearing on the questions of this study will be included here.

The question of musical reference continues to perplex scholars. The typical articulation of the argument is that if music can be said to possess signification, that is, to have meaning, it must be possible to establish reference. In other words, if music has meaning, it must refer to something. Furthermore, theories of reference usually distinguish between internal and external reference.

Those theorists who emphasize music as pure form, such as Eduard Hanslick, conclude that the ideas expressed by music are first and foremost purely musical ideas.⁶⁴ In other words, music refers primarily to itself. This dynamic is often referred to as internal reference.

⁶² ARISTOTLE, *The Politics*, ed. Stephen EVERSON (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1340 a, 18-22.

⁶³ Göran SÖRBOM, "Aristotle on Music as Representation," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52 (Winter 1994), 41.

⁶⁴ Eduard HANSLICK, *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution Towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey PAYZANT from the eighth edition (1891) of *Vom Musicalisch-Schönen: ein Beitrag zur Revision der Asthetik der Tonkunst* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1986), 10.

Most scholars, however, subscribe to the theory that music is capable of both internal and external reference. For example, Leonard B. Meyer believes that music is capable of expressing meaning in both ways: as a pure play of forms and as a symbolic fact with the potential to refer to something. In other words, music does have the power to refer to things outside itself, thereby evoking associations and connotations relative to the world of ideas, sentiments, and physical objects. Such designative meanings are often less precise, less conceptually clear, and less logically articulated than those arising in linguistic communication, but this does not make them less powerful or significant.⁶⁵

In a similar way, Gordon Epperson's study of the philosophic theory of music is built on the notion that the auditory characteristics of music – what Aristotle identifies as rhythm and harmony – are its medium of communication. Epperson defines music as “a symbolic mode of human discourse, in which meanings are aurally apprehended through auditory entities.”⁶⁶

However, any approach which sets up a one-to-one correspondence between particular musical properties or structures and a specific idea or emotion, views music, not as a symbol, but as a sign. In light of the distinctions made earlier in this paper between sign and symbol, such an exercise approaches signification in music as indexical.⁶⁷ The study of the symbolic nature of music, however, requires that music be approached, not simply as a constellation of sounds with predictable referential properties, but as the activity of human subjects.

As the musical semiologist Jean-Jacques Nattiez has observed, the anthropological perspective favored by ethnomusicologists understands music not only as “a play of forms and structures, but as products functionally related to the social, and most often ritual contexts in which they appear ...”⁶⁸ Thus Nattiez does not see the two perspectives on musical reference incompatible. Rather, he points out that it is “probably right to see in music an element which is at once *endosemantic* (the structures refer to structures) and *exosemantic* (referral to the outside

⁶⁵ Leonard B. MEYER, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas: Patterns and Predictions in Twentieth Century Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 6.

⁶⁶ Gordon EPPERSON, *The Musical Symbol: A Study of the Philosophic Theory of Music* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1967), 214.

⁶⁷ Cf. Peirce's distinction of three types of signs p. 97.

⁶⁸ Jean-Jacques NATTIEZ, “Reflections on the Development of Semiology in Music,” trans. Katharine ELLIS, *Music Analysis* 8 (1989): 22.

world).⁶⁹ Furthermore, the relative importance which is attributed to these two dimensions, in Nattiez's judgment, “varies according to historical period, aesthetics, culture and the individual.”⁷⁰

In this respect, Nattiez echoes Jean Molino's illustration of music's multiple signifying properties:

The sonic phenomena produced by music are indeed, at the same time, icons: they can imitate the clamors of the world and evoke them, or be simply the images of our feelings – a long tradition which cannot be so easily dismissed has considered them as such; indices: depending on the case, they may be the cause or the consequence or the simple concomitants of other phenomena which they evoke; symbols: in that they are entities defined and preserved through a social tradition and a consensus which endow them with the right to exist.⁷¹

Molino attributes to music the properties of all three of the dimensions of signs originally identified by Peirce. In response to Molino's description of music as, at the same time, an icon, an index, or a symbol, Nattiez concludes that if music can be all three, “it is proof that music is first and foremost a *symbolic fact*.”⁷²

Nattiez's musical semiotics synthesizes in a coherent theory many of the issues regarding the symbolic nature of music. A careful look at his approach will assist in synthesizing philosophical and theological notions of symbol and in elucidating music as symbolizing activity.

Two principles are foundational to Nattiez's semiology of music. The first is that the *interpretant* is the root of the symbolic operation. The second is that a symbolic form necessarily has three dimensions: the *poietic*, the *immanent* or *neutral*, and the *esthetic*.⁷³

⁶⁹ NATTIEZ, “Reflections on the Development of Semiology in Music,” 22.

⁷⁰ NATTIEZ, “Reflections on the Development of Semiology in Music,” 22.

⁷¹ JEAN MOLINO, “Fait musical et sémiologie de la musique,” *Musique en jeu* 17(1975): 45. Cited in Jean-Jacques NATTIEZ, “The Contribution of Musical Semiotics to the Semiotic Discussion in General,” in *A Perfusion of Signs*, ed. Thomas A. SEBEOK (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 123.

⁷² NATTIEZ, “The Contribution of Musical Semiotics,” 124. Also cf. BOILÉS, “Processes of Musical Semiotics,” 34-35. Nattiez's own work follows Boilés's understanding of Peirce's three distinctions.

⁷³ NATTIEZ, “Reflections on the Development of Semiology in Music,” 57. Nattiez derives his use of the term “esthesis” from a lecture of Paul VALÉRY for the Collège de France in 1945. Valéry coined the neologism for that lecture, using it instead of “aesthetic” in order to avoid possible confusions. Since the word “aesthetic” is commonly

Nattiez's understanding of the role of the interpretant in the symbolic operation is built on Charles Peirce's notion of the infinite interpretant. For Peirce, the interpretant is the habit by which a sign is interpreted.⁷⁴ Incorporating Peirce's notion of interpretant into a working definition, Nattiez describes a symbolic form as "a sign, or a collection of signs, to which an infinite complex of interpretants is linked ..."⁷⁵

The notion of the interpretant enables Nattiez to describe the dynamic of symbolic meaning as "a proliferation of interpretants when an object of any kind is placed for the individual relative to his or her lived experience. The meaning of an object of any kind is the constellation of interpretants drawn from the lived experience of the sign's user – the "producer" or "receiver" – in a given situation."⁷⁶

There are two significant points in Nattiez's definition. The first is that there is a proliferation or constellation of interpretants. This notion corroborates the generally accepted view that symbols are by nature multi-vocal or polysemous. The second is that the source of meaning is in the lived experience of the sign's user. The richness and variety of that lived experience thus accounts for an infinite possibility of interpretants.

Nattiez applies the Peircean notion of the infinite and dynamic interpretant to specific examples, including music, when he says:

...an object, whatever (a sentence, a painting, a social conduct, a musical work...), takes on a meaning for an individual who perceives it when he relates the object to his *experience-domain*, or the set of all other objects, concepts, or data of the world which make up all or part of his experience. To be more direct: meanings are created when an object is related to a horizon or a background.⁷⁷

Applying Nattiez's summation specifically to his example of a musical work, we can say that musical meanings are created when a piece of music is related to a horizon or background. This focus on the "experience-domain" accounts for the multiple layers of symbolic meaning. It

associated with a response to beauty in the arts and good taste, Nattiez chose the word "esthetic" in order to emphasize the fact that the process he is referring to is more complex. This will be explained in greater detail later in the chapter. See NATTIEZ, *Music and Discourse*, 12.

⁷⁴ BOILÈS, "Processes of Musical Semiosis," 31.

⁷⁵ NATTIEZ, *Music and Discourse*, 8.

⁷⁶ NATTIEZ, *Music and Discourse*, 10.

⁷⁷ NATTIEZ, "The Contribution of Musical Semiotics," 126.

also accounts for the inability of philosophers of music to establish strict rules of reference, despite countless attempts.

In addition to his application of the Peircean notion of the interpretant to his musical semiotics, Nattiez's incorporation and development of Jean Molino's theory of tri-partition is likewise an essential part of his musical semiotic. Nattiez explains it in this way:

For him, [Molino] the domains that semiology studies are symbolic facts, insofar as there are no texts or musical works which are not the product of compositional strategies (the domain studied by poietics) and which do not give rise to strategies of perception (the domain covered by esthetics). Between these two there lies the study of the neutral or immanent level, i.e. the study of structures which are not prejudged *a priori* as pertaining either to poietics or to esthetics.⁷⁸

Musical works, therefore, are symbolic facts resulting from the interaction of three dimensions: the strategy of composition Molino calls poietics, the strategy of perception he calls esthetics, and the structures of the musical work, which he calls the neutral or immanent level.

Nattiez underlines the fact that this schema does not follow the usual direct lines we understand in a simple act of communication. The classic schema for communication can be diagrammed in the following manner:

"Producer" → Message → Receiver⁷⁹

But semiology is not concerned with the science of communication. Instead, Nattiez substitutes the following diagram, one that only makes sense when interpreted from the perspective of the theory of the interpretant:

Poietic Process Esthetic Process
"Producer" → Trace ← Receiver⁸⁰

By reversing the direction of the second arrow, Nattiez is pointing out that a symbolic form – which he calls *trace*⁸¹ – is not simply an intermediary

⁷⁸ NATTIEZ, "Reflections on the Development of Semiology in Music," 35.

⁷⁹ NATTIEZ, *Music and Discourse*, 16.

⁸⁰ NATTIEZ, *Music and Discourse*, 17.

⁸¹ *Trace* is Nattiez's term for what Molino calls the *immanent* or *neutral* level. He uses the term to refer to the material reality of the work, i.e., its live production and the score that result from the poietic process. According to Nattiez, the symbolic form is

in the process of communication. Rather, the symbolic form is the result of a complex *process* of creation, the poietic process, which involves both the form and the content. But the symbolic form is also the point of departure for a complex process of reception, the esthetic process, which *reconstructs* a "message." Using Molino's schema, Nattiez presents a theory of symbolic function which sees communication as only one of several possible results of the symbolic process.⁸²

One of the significant aspects of Molino's tripartite schema is that it recognizes the importance of going beyond analysis of immanent structures. In this respect, it allows us to move beyond the limitations of a strict musical reference and still take into account the messages manifested on the level of musical syntax. However, analysis cannot be limited to the neutral or immanent level. The poietic level lurks beneath the surface of the immanent even as the immanent is the springboard for the esthetic. The interpretive task is to identify the interpretants from the point of view of each of the three dimensions and establish their relationships to each other.⁸³

This does not mean that efforts to determine a correspondence between meaning and musical material as such are abandoned, but that identifying such correspondence is only one aspect of the process. There can be no stable or predictable relation between a particular music feature and a given meaning because the relation is always the result of a complex combination of variables which includes not only the immanent, but also the poietic and esthetic dimensions.⁸⁴

Notice that this schema situates the immanent or neutral level between the poietic and esthetic in such a way that the symbolic object mediates a dynamic process of creation and a reception which actively engages the "recipient" in a reconstruction achieved against the horizon of his/her experience. This horizon corresponds to Polanyi's description of "our whole, lived existence" and our "boundless memories" which become embodied and fused in the focal object.⁸⁵ Furthermore, this

embodied physically in the form of a *trace* accessible to the five senses. He uses the word *trace* to indicate that the poietic process cannot immediately be read within the symbolic form since the esthetic process is heavily dependent on the lived experience of the receiver. See NATTIEZ, *Music and Discourse*, 12, 15.

⁸² NATTIEZ, *Music and Discourse*, 17.

⁸³ NATTIEZ, *Music and Discourse*, 28-29.

⁸⁴ NATTIEZ, "The Contribution of Musical Semiotics," 128.

⁸⁵ POLANYI, *Meaning*, 72-73.

schema supports Chauvet's and Lawler's conviction that symbolizing activity is rooted in the activity of human subjects.⁸⁶

THE NATURE OF SONG AS MUSICAL SYMBOL

Thus far we have explored various theories and theologies of symbol and semiotics of music. The next task is to consider the particular characteristics of the musical genre under study in this paper – liturgical song – in order to discover how the combination of music and text may be said to operate symbolically. Since many of the documents discussed in chapter one described music's role in relation to liturgical texts, this question is pertinent to the present study.

For the most part, the Taizé chants were composed to be performed as songs.⁸⁷ That is, each piece is a unit consisting of music and text. Several theories have attempted to describe or account for the relationship between music and text. A common position is that the purpose of the music is to communicate or supplement the meaning of the text. Several of the church documents on liturgy and music examined in chapter one subscribe to this point of view.⁸⁸ On the other hand, Friedrich Nietzsche, in discussing the poetry of the folk song, has argued that melody is primary and universal, and that the poetry of the folk song is stretched to the utmost that it might imitate music.⁸⁹ While Nietzsche's philosophy of music may not be considered a prime source of insight into liturgical music, his thesis does provide the opportunity to reexamine presuppositions regarding the relationship of music to text.

In answer to the question regarding how the Church has incorporated singing and music in its liturgy, Joseph Gelineau explains:

⁸⁶ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 110 and LAWLER, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 11.

⁸⁷ BERTHIER, vol. 2, instrumental, iii. The foreword explains that while the instrumental parts were meant to be performed in conjunction with the vocal music, they may also be performed as independent instrumental pieces in the same spirit and style as their vocal counterparts. Therefore, even in those instances when a vocal piece is performed as an instrumental, that is, without the singing of the text, the conception of the piece remains vocal.

⁸⁸ Those documents which most explicitly hold this view include *TLS* 1; *SC* 112; and *MCW* 23.

⁸⁹ FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *The Birth of Tragedy*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. Walter KAUFMANN (New York: The Modern Library, 1968), 53.

Today, music is a discipline with a separate existence, and singing is clearly distinguished from mere speech. These distinctions did not obtain in the cultural milieu of the early Church. Hebrew and Greek have no separate word for music. The frontier between singing and speaking was far less precise.⁹⁰

Gelineau's comment about the lack of clear distinctions between speech and song in the early Church's experience at worship reflects a way of thinking which views speech and song as two poles on a continuum of human vocal expressiveness. The musical anthropologist John Blacking, on the other hand, views the distinctions in another way:

It is often assumed that song is an extension or embellishment of speech, which is the primary mode of communication, and that there is a continuum of increasing formalization from speech to song. But song is not inherently either a more or a less restricted code than speech: the relative dominance of song or speech, as of their affective and cognitive elements, in any genre or performance of a genre, depends not so much on some absolute attributes that speech and song might have, as on people's "intentions to mean" in different social situations, and on their motivation and the psychological assumptions that they invoke.⁹¹

Blacking takes the anthropological perspective that situates meaning neither in musical structures nor in text because of some innate power of either, but in the intentions of the human subjects within a specific context. If the church, in the liturgical rite as a "social situation," intends to highlight the texts, Blacking's statement suggests that the "intention to mean" is what gives the text "relative dominance."

In Peircean terms, Blacking is saying that the syntactic dimension, that is, the structures of the music and the text, are not the sole determinant of meaning. Rather, the social situation or context in which the songs are sung, that is, the semantic dimension, and the people's intention to mean, that is, the pragmatic dimension, all contribute to the overall meaning and significance of a song.

⁹⁰ Joseph GELINEAU, "Music and Singing in the Liturgy," in *The Study of the Liturgy*, eds. Cheslyn JONES, Geoffrey WAINWRIGHT, and Edward YARNOLD (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 444.

⁹¹ John BLACKING, "The Structure of Musical Discourse: The Problem of the Song Text," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 14 (1982): 19.

Others in the field of musical semiotics have tackled this question from another perspective. Armen T. Marsoobian, who builds her semiotic approach on Peirce's infinite interpretant, "eschews the notion that communication is primarily the transmission of some content or message between individuals or groups."⁹² Refining Peirce's notion of the interpretant in order to make room for nonpropositional forms of meaning, she distinguishes between exhibitivite and assertive propositions. For example, understanding the meaning of a poem, Marsoobian points out, has as much to do with the "how" of its structure as with the "what" of its reference. In other words, the relations exhibited or manifested within the poem give us its poetic meaning. In Peircean terms, the "exhibitivite" interpretant is the aesthetic meaning of the poem.⁹³

Marsoobian makes the following distinction. When the process of shaping and the product as shaped is central, we produce in the exhibitivite mode. When citing evidence in behalf of our product is central, we produce in the assertive mode.⁹⁴

Marsoobian applies these principles to a semiotic analysis of opera, reading the entire operatic drama as a complex and integrated phenomenon. In doing so, she refuses to reduce the meaning of the opera to the meaning of the libretto. Rather, she explains, "the interplay between the words and the formal structures of the music (its so-called syntax) articulates the meaning of the opera. Meaning here ... is not asserted in the propositional content of the libretto but exhibited in the interplay between words and music."⁹⁵

These insights can be particularly helpful when applied to liturgical analysis. The language of the liturgy is not propositional but confessional. Both the glory of God and the faith of the assembly are confessed and manifested or *exhibited*. Therefore, the ritual "as shaped or arrayed" is of central concern. Its meaning is not asserted, but exhibited by means of a variety of ritual symbols. Ritual song is one of those ritual symbols. From a Peircean perspective, then, we can say that a song, as an exhibitivite art form, is greater than the sum of its parts.

The musical semiotician, Willem Marie Speelman is of a similar opinion regarding the nature of song. Although the framework for his

⁹² Armen T. MARSOOBIAN, "Saying, Singing, or Semiotics: 'Prima la Musica e poi le Parole' Revisited," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54 (Summer 1996): 269.

⁹³ MARSOOBIAN, "Saying, Singing, or Semiotics," 269-271.

⁹⁴ MARSOOBIAN, "Saying, Singing, or Semiotics," 271.

⁹⁵ MARSOOBIAN, "Saying, Singing, or Semiotics," 274.

semiotic approach is explicitly Greimassian – a semiotician from the Saussurian rather than the Peircean school – his work on liturgical songs reaches similar conclusions to those of Marsoobian.

In his analysis of liturgical songs, Speelman acknowledges that to analyze the musical and literary discourses separately is not yet to have analyzed the song, since the song is a specific function between music and text.⁹⁶ Therefore, even though he approaches music and text, and the expression and content of both, as quasi-autonomous discourses, yet he views this autonomy as relative. All four aspects are related to the song as an integrity, creating what Speelman calls a *syncretic discourse*. In other words, the musical discourse conditions the literary discourse and vice versa, and the expression and content forms of both condition one another.⁹⁷

Furthermore, in addition to the fact that Speelman views these four aspects – the musical expression and content and the textual expression and content – as all contributing to the integrity which is the song, he also views the context as an essential element in the enunciation of the song. In the specific case of the liturgy as context he says:

A point of departure is that the liturgy conditions the song, but that the song realizes the liturgy together with other liturgical discourses, like architecture, movements, vestments, icons, texts, etc. These heterogeneous discourses constitute liturgy in their togetherness. Liturgy in its turn conditions these discourses; it is the enunciative domain in which they are brought together.⁹⁸

Speelman's point is that meaning is the result of a complex interplay between the great variety of symbols which constitute the liturgical action. Song is one among many liturgical discourses enunciated within the context of the liturgy.

Throughout this study, social or cultural context has been identified as an important factor in the coming-to-be of a symbol and its meaning. Polanyi alludes to this when he speaks of the subsidiaries and diffuse memories which bear upon a symbol's meaning. Similarly, Lawler points out that meaning comes to subjects within a particular social and

⁹⁶ Willem Marie SPEELMAN, *The Generation of Meaning in Liturgical Songs: A Semiotic Analysis of Five Liturgical Songs as Syncretic Discourse*, Liturgia condenda 4 (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1995), xi.

⁹⁷ SPEELMAN, *The Generation of Meaning in Liturgical Songs*, xiii, 32.

⁹⁸ SPEELMAN, *The Generation of Meaning in Liturgical Songs*, xiv.

cultural milieu. Indeed, Chauvet sees the social or cultural context as the very symbolic network through which all of reality is mediated. Symbols do not operate in isolation. Rather, they mutually condition and illuminate one another.⁹⁹ Like the “half” in the ancient practice of symbolon, a symbol retains its value only through the place it occupies within the whole or to the extent that it represents the whole. That is why every symbol of necessity must bring with itself the cultural and social context within which it operates. Ultimately, it is by this indirect reference to the “whole” that the symbol becomes an agent of recognition and identification between subjects.¹⁰⁰

Although musical “purists” or “formalists” such as Eduard Hanslick, Igor Stravinsky, and Leonard Bernstein have argued that the musically significant needs to be identified first and foremost with the purely musical,¹⁰¹ other theorists, particularly those influenced by post-modernist writings and the contemporary emphasis on pluralism, insist that musical meaning can only be interpreted within the institutional and societal context where the musical works are created, presented, and enjoyed.¹⁰² Philosophers such as Lydia Goehr and Claire Detels have made explicit efforts to link our understanding of music to its social, political, and cultural contexts.¹⁰³ What they are suggesting is the use of “experience-based” categories which would study music within the contexts in which it is composed, performed, heard, taught, danced, moved, worked, or prayed.¹⁰⁴ These observations correspond to Nattiez's insight that individuals perceive meaning within the horizon of their “experience-domains.”

Charles Boilès is particularly noted for his emphasis on the importance of attending to the cultural context in any systematic interpretation of musical symbols. He believes that the interpretation of a symbol will vary according to the context in which that symbol is used. As a

⁹⁹ Avery DULLES, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 19.

¹⁰⁰ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 115.

¹⁰¹ NATTIEZ, *Music and Discourse*, 112.

¹⁰² Philip ALPERSON, “Introduction: New Directions in the Philosophy of Music,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52 (Winter 1994), 8.

¹⁰³ Lydia GOEHR, “Political Music and the Politics of Music,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52 (Winter 1994), 101.

¹⁰⁴ Claire, DETELS, “Autonomist/Formalist Aesthetics, Music Theory, and the Feminist Paradigm of Soft Boundaries,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52 (Winter 1994), 119-122.

result, although some symbols may appear to have the same physical properties, the contexts may indicate that they are not identical even if they appear to be so. This accounts for the situation in which a given sign object may have two or more unrelated meanings.¹⁰⁵

Closely related to the issue of context is the necessity of attending to *cultural codes*. Borrowing from the semiologist Roman Jakobson, Nattiez points out that, in addition to requiring a context, a message, if it is to be operative, also requires a code which is fully, or at least partially common to the addresser and the addressee. In addition, a *contact*, that is, a physical channel and psychological connection between the two are necessary to enable them to enter and to remain in communication.¹⁰⁶ That is, every symbolic expression tends toward a discourse of cognition where something is said. A minimum knowledge is required if a symbol is to be able to exercise its power. In regard to music, this would include some knowledge of the cultural codes which enable the listener or performer to understand the music. Without this, music, like any other symbol about which nothing could be said, would dissolve into pure imagination. Such a situation would reduce the musical symbol to the Romantic ideology of art for art's sake.¹⁰⁷

Umberto Eco has written extensively on the importance of interpreting codes within a cultural context when he pointed out that "one hypothesis of semiotics is that underpinning every process of communication there exist rules or codes, which rest upon certain cultural conventions."¹⁰⁸ While Eco points out that everything depends on "knowing" the codes, he nevertheless acknowledges that they may be different for producer and receiver. In other words, Eco recognizes the fundamental discrepancy between the poetic and the esthetic. Furthermore, in his conception of multiple meanings, he cites as a fundamental precept the notion of the Peircean interpretant.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ BOILES, "The Processes of Musical Semiosis," 32.

¹⁰⁶ NATTIEZ, *Music and Discourse*, 18.

¹⁰⁷ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 128.

¹⁰⁸ See NATTIEZ, *Music and Discourse*, 20. A discrepancy in Nattiez's citation made it impossible to verify the source of this direct quote. A parenthetical reference cites the following: Umberto ECO, *A Theory of Semiotics*, Advances in Semiotics series, gen. ed., Thomas A. SEBEOK, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 13. It appears that information on pages 8 and 13 are the source for Nattiez's own formulation of Eco's ideas.

¹⁰⁹ NATTIEZ, *Music and Discourse*, 21.

As Chauvet points out, whether ritual elements be religious, political, mythic or poetic, they can only function symbolically insofar as they are correlative to the other elements that are constitutive of the ritual in which they are located.¹¹⁰ Therefore, since understanding music's ability to symbolize in a liturgical setting – the goal of this present study – can not be achieved while isolating music or removing it from that context, the next section of this paper will examine music's symbolic role within that ritual called liturgy.

MUSIC AS RITUAL SYMBOL

Tom Driver's description of religious ritual helps to set the scene for this section of our study:

Religion's being danced out, sung out, sat out in silence, or lined out liturgically, with ideation playing a secondary role, is not something confined to religion's early stages but is characteristic of religion as long as it is vital. This does not mean, of course, that ritual is mindless, not anti-intellectual. It means that its form of intelligence is more similar to that of the arts than to conceptual theology, just as the intelligence of poetry is a different order from that of philosophy or literary criticism.¹¹¹

Here Driver points out that the symbolism of the arts has always been an essential element of religious ritual. This is not a characteristic limited to the rituals of primitive religion. Furthermore, this role of the arts takes precedence over the role of the intellectual or conceptual because, by its nature, ritual is more closely akin to the arts than to propositional discourse.

In other words, the language of ritual is the language of the arts. And Driver rightly claims that artistic discourse is of a different order than philosophy, theology, or literary criticism. In Marsoobian terms, we can say that the language of ritual is *exhibitive*, and for that reason possesses a greater affinity with music than with theological discourse. In both cases, the process of shaping and the product as shaped are of primary importance.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 115.

¹¹¹ Tom F. DRIVER, *The Magic of Ritual: Our Need for Liberating Rites that Transform Our Lives and Our Communities* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 84.

¹¹² Cf. Wade T. WHEELLOCK, "The Problem of Ritual Language: From Information to Situation," *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50 (1982): 56-58. In this

The theologian Avery Dulles argues that the deeper insights of revelatory knowledge are not imparted first of all through theology's propositional discourse. Instead, Dulles identifies the ecclesial-transformative approach to theology as one in which symbolism in worship plays a key role in apprehending revelation. This approach views symbolic communication as imbued with a depth of meaning that surpasses conceptual thinking and propositional speech.¹¹³ In this approach,

the primary subject matter of theology is taken to be the saving self-communication of God through the symbolic events and words of Scripture, especially in Jesus Christ as the 'mediator and fullness of all revelation.' A privileged locus for the apprehension of this subject matter is the worship of the Church, in which the biblical and traditional symbols are proclaimed and "re-presented" in ways that call for active participation (at least in mind and heart) on the part of the congregation. The interplay of symbols in community worship arouses and directs the worshipers' tacit powers of apprehension so as to instill a personal familiarity with the Christian mysteries.¹¹⁴

According to Dulles, then, theology is expressed symbolically in worship. More specifically, one of the primary purposes of that symbolic expression is the apprehension of revelation. This is achieved through the active participation of the congregation in the symbols celebrated which allows for discernment of meaning and communion with the sacred mysteries. Symbols transmit the message of faith by forming the imagination and affectivity of the worshipping community who appropriate the symbols and "dwell in" their meaning.¹¹⁵

One of the key elements of ritual is participation, understood in this context to be an engagement in participatory knowledge. The symbols interactive within ritual lure us into situating ourselves within the universe of meaning and value which it opens up to us.¹¹⁶ Nathan Mitchell

article Wheelock argues that an essential difference between ritual utterances and ordinary language is that ritual utterances convey little or no information. In other words, they are not propositional, but exhibitively. This is true whether the text be tied to song or not. A discussion of the nature of ritual language will be more fully developed in chapter five.

¹¹³ DULLES, *Craft of Theology*, 18.

¹¹⁴ DULLES, *Craft of Theology*, 19.

¹¹⁵ DULLES, *Craft of Theology*, 23.

¹¹⁶ Avery DULLES, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1983), 58.

points out that ritual symbols are not objects to be manipulated, but an environment to be inhabited: places to live, breathing spaces that help us discover life's possibilities.¹¹⁷ Because of the power of symbols to make present the reality which they symbolize, inviting participation in themselves enables the worshipers to participate in the reality to which they point – the saving presence and action of God. Lawler describes this reality as "living into" the symbols.¹¹⁸

In a unique way, music as symbol invites the worshiper to participate in and inhabit its world. Such activities as singing, playing, listening, or moving with the rhythms of the music can mediate a participatory knowledge, a "living into" the music, that allows our bodies and our spirits to breath with its rhythms and phrases in such a way that they reveal the saving presence of God and our communion with the entire assembly. Such participation engages us on the level of subjects in an acoustic space which is fluid. For unlike visual space, acoustic space does not contain a thing but is itself a sphere delineated by activity. This acoustic activity is translated by the human imagination as evidence of the presence of life, of animation, and particularly, of human presence.¹¹⁹

Victor Zuckerkandl's investigation of the reason why people engage in song, particularly folk song, led him to a number of important insights regarding the activity of singing. In examining a variety of different activities and settings in which people sang, he concluded that the common element in all the situations is that people sing when they abandon themselves wholly to whatever they are doing. This abandonment is not for its own sake, that is, in order to forget themselves. Rather, this self-abandonment is an enlargement, an enhancement of the self which results in the breaking down of barriers: it is a transcendence of separation which is transformed into a togetherness.¹²⁰

In this way, participation in ritual song corresponds to that dynamic described by Polanyi: by drawing us into the activity of music-making, singing carries us out of ourselves. This movement introduces us into realms of awareness not normally accessible to discursive thought. As a result, ritual song as symbol puts us in touch with the power to which

¹¹⁷ MITCHELL, "Symbols Are Actions, Not Objects," 1-2.

¹¹⁸ LAWLER, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 23, 19.

¹¹⁹ Edward FOLEY, "Toward a Sound Theology" *Studia Liturgica* 23 (1993), 127.

¹²⁰ Victor ZUCKERKANDL, *Sound and Symbol*, vol. 2, trans. Willard R. TRASK (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), 23.

it points and opens up to us levels of reality which might otherwise be closed to us.

Nattiez's application of the tri-partition schema (the poietic, immanent, and esthetic levels) to music as symbol provides another way for understanding how music draws us in. Music as ritual symbol enables participation because its infinite web of interpretations engages our imagination so that we might interpret the music's meaning from within our unique "experience-domain." This occurs when music as ritual symbol becomes the point of departure for the complex process of reception, the esthetic process, which reconstructs a meaning or message.

Religious symbols have a character that "points to the ultimate level of being, to ultimate reality, to being itself, to meaning itself."¹²¹ In and through the music used in worship, the sacred is proclaimed, realized, and celebrated as present and active by those who are drawn into this symbol with the disposition of faith.¹²² This effects a permanent solidarity between the worshipers and the sacred, thereby carrying out the process of hierophanization.¹²³

In addition to inviting participation and pointing beyond itself, ritual symbols, insofar as they involve the knower as person, have the potential to mediate transformation. By shifting our center of awareness symbols can change our values.¹²⁴ According to Chauvet's theory of symbolizing, this dynamic is constantly in process as symbols continue to offer new opportunities for human subjects to make sense of their world and find their identity within it. This is especially true of aesthetic or art symbols within the liturgy since, in their innermost nature, they reveal both what we are and the various possible and actual appearances of the world within a Christian faith context. Therefore, as we are assimilated or integrated into the world of the art symbol, we open up to the possibility of intentional self-transcendence: we can become different persons if we allow ourselves to be carried away by

¹²¹ Paul TILICH, "Art and Ultimate Reality," in *Art, Creativity and the Sacred*, ed. Diane APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1984), 109-110.

¹²² LAWLER, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 23-25.

¹²³ DULLES, *Models of Revelation*, 134. By hierophanization, Dulles means that process whereby religious meaning or the sacred mysteries unfold or are revealed to the worshiper.

¹²⁴ DULLES, *Models of Revelation*, 136.

new faith meanings and orient ourselves in new ways to our place within that faith world.¹²⁵

Lawler calls a symbol that functions in this way within liturgy a "prophetic" symbol, and describes it as a provocation to personal action, interaction, and reaction that affects the worshiper's total being. Without this personal response, the symbol does not come fully alive for the worshiper.¹²⁶ This point highlights once again the centrality of the role of the subject in the act of symbolizing. As Chauvet explains, the effects of meaning produced by the symbol are effects of the subject, whereby the subject recognizes him/herself in the effects and identifies him/herself with them. In Polanyi's schema, the subject operates from within his/her diffuse memories of personal experiences and from within a particular social and cultural context, what Nattiez would call a horizon. Such engagement of the subject with the symbol effects a symbol's ability to mediate change or transformation.

According to Chauvet, by engaging with symbols and dwelling in the symbolic order, subjects build themselves by building their world.¹²⁷ This "building" of themselves suggests the process of change that is inherent in the process of transformation. By means of this "symbolic exchange,"¹²⁸ subjects weave or reweave alliances and recognize themselves as members of a social group in which they find their identity. It is a process which provides the possibility of becoming and living as subjects.¹²⁹

By enacting this symbolic exchange ritually, liturgy can have a powerful influence on our commitment and behavior, if, as Polanyi suggests, the symbols mediate recognition and if we allow ourselves to be "carried away" by their meaning. Because liturgical symbols mediate relationships between subjects, the liturgy can direct our response beyond the ritual act itself to our daily living with our brothers and sisters. Working

¹²⁵ Robert E. INNIS, "Art, Symbol, and Consciousness: A Polanyi Gloss on Susan Langer and Nelson Goodman," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 17 (December 1977): 475-476.

¹²⁶ LAWLER, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 12, 25.

¹²⁷ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 86.

¹²⁸ Chauvet uses the term "symbolic exchange" to describe the distinctive way in which subjects come to be in their relations to other subjects. This exchange or interaction occurs in the symbolic order and is characterized by a three-fold process of gift, reception of the gift, and return-gift. In Chauvet's view, this process structures every significant human relationship. See CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 99-109.

¹²⁹ CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 106-107.

on worshippers like an incantation, Dulles explains, the symbols of the liturgy can stir the imagination, release hidden energies in the soul, give strength and stability to the personality and arouse the will to consistent and committed action.¹³⁰ All of this assumes, of course, that the symbols employed can be deciphered within the cultural or social contexts in which they are enacted. If subjects lack the cultural codes necessary to understand a particular symbol or system of symbols, a mediation of recognition and integration is impeded.

As with all liturgical symbols, music has the potential to communicate to the worshipping assembly the challenge to live a fuller life with God in Christ. But how is it that the symbolizing activity of music in ritual actually operates as an influence in Christian transformation? Don Saliers asserts that ritual music has the power of transformation by forming, over time, the imagination and affectivity of the Christian assembly. It does this by "forming and expressing those emotions which constitute the very Christian life itself."¹³¹

Saliers builds his thesis on the premise that worship itself both forms and expresses a characteristic set of emotions and attitudes in participants. In this regard, his understanding of the role of worship corresponds to Susanne Langer's description of ritual when she says:

Ritual "expresses feelings" in the logical rather than the physiological sense. It may have what Aristotle called "cathartic" value, but that is not its characteristic; it is primarily an *articulation* of feelings. The ultimate product of such articulation is not a simple emotion, but a complex, permanent *attitude*. This attitude, which is the worshippers' response to the insight given by the sacred symbols, is an emotional pattern, which governs all individual lives. It cannot be recognized through any clearer medium than that of formalized gesture; yet in this cryptic form it is recognized, and yields a strong sense of tribal or congregational unity, of rightness and security. A rite regularly performed is the constant reiteration of sentiments toward "first and last things"; it is not a free expression of emotions, but a disciplined rehearsal of "right attitudes."¹³²

Saliers builds his argument on Langer's theory that ritual is an articulation of feelings and on her distinction between simple emotion and a

¹³⁰ DULLES, *Models of Revelation*, 137.

¹³¹ DON E. SALIERS, "The Integrity of Sung Prayer," *Worship* 55 (July 1981): 293.

¹³² SUSANNE K. LANGER, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art*, 3d edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), 153.

complex, permanent attitude or deep emotion. Taking Langer's remark that the ultimate product of ritual repeatedly performed is an emotional pattern which governs the lives of individual subjects, Saliers concludes that the music used in worship, particularly congregational song, assists, not only in articulating, but also in forming the deep emotions particular to the Christian life. Furthermore, it is in the process of repeatedly articulating these "right attitudes" that transformation can be effected. In other words, singing praise or thanksgiving, contrition or forgiveness has the ability to form the singers in those Christian attitudes. By *exhibiting* these Christian attitudes – to use Marsoobian's terminology – we participate through our music-making in the process of being shaped or formed in those very attitudes. Therefore, specific musical choices will either lead the assembly toward or away from the deep patterns of emotion which constitute the Christian life. Over time, for good or for ill, assemblies will be shaped by their musical choices. In this way, the emotional range of their worship music will either enhance or inhibit their ability to enter into those praisings, repentings, lamentings, hopings, longings, rejoicing, and thankings that are peculiar to the heart of Christian worship.¹³³

TAIZÉ MUSIC AS RITUAL SYMBOL

The various theories and theologies of symbol which have been examined in this chapter provide us with the tools for investigating how Taizé music functions as ritual symbol. Several aspects of these theories and theologies have emerged as particularly applicable to this study.

Chauvet points out that human subjects, through their participation in symbolizing activity, are enabled to recognize their identity, negotiate connections, build their world, and engage in the process of Christian transformation. The specific symbolizing activity in question here is liturgical singing.

Singing the Berthier chants during the liturgies at Taizé involves each person, first of all, on the physical level. Making music – whether it be singing, playing an instrument, moving with the rhythms of the songs, or listening – is an activity which involves the body. This physical participation, furthermore, is an entree into a deeper participation. Polanyi

¹³³ SALIERS, "Sung Prayer," 294-295.

explains that symbolizing activity involves the dynamic whereby a person is carried away by the meanings in the subsidiary clues. In the case of the Taizé chants, a person's diffuse and boundless memories of his or her life become embodied and fused in the singing so that abandonment or surrender to the meaning of the symbol becomes possible. In the process, a person can recognize him/herself as a person of faith, a person in relationship with God, and a person in relationship with others, both those present and those absent from the liturgy. Further, one experiences oneself in a common bond with the other singers. This type of recognition makes it possible to imagine a world where Christian faith can become unifying rather than divisive, where national and denominational barriers can be overcome. Even more so, the act of singing brings that world about, even if only while the liturgy lasts.

Singing the chants enables the music-makers to express such Christian attitudes as faith, trust, praise, love, thanksgiving, and repentance and to experience a world where divisions are overcome. Indeed, the very act of entering into the common effort of singing is a gesture of moving outside of oneself and allowing oneself to be carried away by the song of the group. Zuckerkandl describes this abandonment as an enhancement of the self which results in the breaking down of barriers.¹³⁴ The Taizé chants enable the singers to transcend the separation which is the existential reality of the pilgrims so that the "rehearsing" of Christian unity, that is, the unity experienced in the singing, might eventually be realized outside the ritual event. Such an experience can shift the participants' center of awareness and be transformative if they allow themselves to be carried away by meanings mediated through the singing.

Nattiez's explanation of the *esthetic* dimension offers yet another perspective on the dynamic of participation. According to the tripartite schema he appropriates from Molino, the esthetic process is a complex process of reception which reconstructs the "message." This requires an active involvement of both the "sender" and "receiver." In the case of the Taizé chants this means that the meaning mediated by singing the chants is part of the complex interplay between the process of creation, involving all those who participate in this process – composer, collaborators, performers – and the process of reception. The various activities of composing, singing, playing, listening, interpreting, and receiving the

¹³⁴ ZUCKERKANDL, *Sound and Symbol*, 23.

liturgical songs of Taizé draw each music-maker into participating in the generation of meaning.

This generation of meaning occurs within each person's particular horizon or experience-domain. In regard to the Taizé chants, one aspect of that horizon is the liturgical prayer of Taizé as it is celebrated within the Christian tradition. Another aspect is the international community of Christians participating in the prayer. Added to the ritual context and the entire Taizé pilgrimage experience is a constellation of interpretants experienced within the personal horizon of each individual engaged in the Taizé prayer. This personal horizon includes, not only an individual's experience of Taizé prayer and the Taizé pilgrimage experience, but also, as Polanyi describes them, the diffuse and boundless memories "of a person's life that become embodied and fused" in the symbolizing activity.¹³⁵

Scholars of the Peircean school remind us that three dimensions of signification determine symbolic meaning: the semantic, the syntactic and the pragmatic. For this reason, the relation of Taizé music to the ritual context and what it signifies, the various types of symbols in Taizé liturgical prayer and their relations to each other, and the relation of Taizé music to the music-makers all contribute to the generation of meaning.

In other words, the meaning of singing the Taizé chants can only be most fully interpreted within the larger context of the ritual activity. This requires taking into account the interplay between the singing of the songs, the proclamation of the Scriptures, the recitation of prayers, the gestures, and the keeping of the silences. In addition, the influence of other ritual elements such as the visual, tactile, and olfactory also need to be included in the interpretive process.

By insisting on the importance of studying symbol in context, the theories and theologies of symbol in this chapter have raised questions regarding the symbolic role of music in the ritual process. In order to address this question in greater depth, the next chapter will examine the ritual theory of Victor Turner. His work on symbolic process can further assist in focusing on Berthier's music as symbolizing activity within the setting of Taizé ritual prayer and within the larger setting of the Taizé experience as pilgrimage process. In addition, Turner's theoretical framework for interpreting symbols, in looking at three dimensions of significance, complements and supports Charles Peirce's approach to semiotic analysis as an analysis of the semantic, the pragmatic, and the syntactic dimensions.

¹³⁵ POLANYI, *Meaning*, 72-73.