

known to stand in any need of demonstration; but it does give rise to the question of whether this conjunction of music with worship is something accidental, or whether there is not some natural foundation for it. There are some who maintain that all the arts originate in religion. Not a few myths represent music as being an art divinely revealed (Orpheus, Krishna, etc). In any case, no one can deny that we owe to the ancient religions the majority of those monuments which enable us to reconstruct the history of the different arts. Is art, therefore, a specially privileged means whereby man may grasp the divine? Or is it some form of magic? Is it compatible with Christian worship? And if it is, what place does the art of music hold in liturgical rites? These questions lead us to consider, first of all, the relationships between rite and art, and then those between music and liturgy.

## A. RITUAL IS ART

### a) *Ritual Gesture and Natural Gesture*

A man at prayer stands upright before his god with hands outstretched and palms turned towards heaven; or he turns toward Mecca and prostrates himself; a priest approaches an altar in procession and kisses the altar; a muezzin chants the *shahada* or a deacon chants the Gospel; a choir of monks sings psalms: in all these instances and in many others the behavior of a man at his worship differs markedly from that of his ordinary life. The ritual gesture, although it is a human gesture and has (at least in principle) a meaning for the one who makes it, is nevertheless not an absolutely "natural" gesture. The sacred minister in the temple does not walk, speak or dress precisely as he does in his own home or in the street. For he is "celebrating."

In ritualizing his gesture, a man always modifies the appearance of some spontaneous gesture; by transforming it thus he elevates or ennobles it in two ways. He removes it from the sphere of the "ordinary" by imposing a certain restraint upon the manifestation of his emotions; and by doing so he infuses into it the attitude of respect proper to a sacred action. That is why it is called "hieratic." Secondly, in a ritual action, he adds "convention" to nature; by a certain uniformity in their religious behavior the adherents of a faith both realize and show that they share the same faith; hence there results a certain fixity of ritual required by the social and permanent character of worship.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Individual stylization and social convention, as modifications of normal human behavior, are not specific to ritual gesture but are found in every "civilization." They are an ingredient, more or less marked, of every form of "education" and of "culture." They are to be found in human activities such as speech, eating, love-making, work, etc. If they are enfeebled or disappear, the corresponding actions become less human and more material. It is, however, specific to ritual to accentuate these factors (stylization and convention) so as better to signify (as we shall see later on) the order of the sacred, to which rite pertains, and not merely the spiritual or social order.

convention = result of man good? (Lousseau) man sinner? (Girard)

### b) *Art and Nature*

If we now examine the behavior of an artist, we shall find that in the exercise of his art he, too, departs from what might seem natural. The dancer does not walk, as ordinary people do, by simply putting one foot before the other. Sometimes he leaps, as if freed from his own weight; at other times he glides like a being with wings who has no need, in his progress, for any contact with earth;<sup>25</sup> sometimes he stands still like a quivering aspen. Does he want to make us forget that we are glued to the earth and that we can only move about by the alternate use of those two levers which we call our legs? The poet, in his turn, seems to take pleasure in pulling to pieces the ordinary language which we call prose. He writes what he wants to say in the form of verses; he subjects words to numbers and durations; he uses the recurrence of accents, metric feet, calculation of syllables, rhymes and assonances. What is the purpose of all this "artifice"? And what painter cherishes the ideal of portraying nature exactly as it appears to the eye? And as for the musician, scorning the infinite variety of sounds that he can hear in the song of a bird, in the inflections of human speech or in the frequencies of a siren, he arbitrarily chooses just a few notes from which he constructs a scale.

So it is not by chance that the two words "natural" and "artificial" oppose each other as antinomic terms. When art intervenes it unmakes nature in order to make it otherwise. Yet nature is beautiful, so beautiful that the artist can never hope to surpass its beauty. If the artist is not content with nature as it is, that is because he has in mind some other order of beauty. He is trying to interpret the most profound yearning which is inscribed in the heart of man: to discover the world which lies beyond this visible world.<sup>26</sup> For this world will pass away, whereas man aspires to the eternal. He tends to fashion for himself that which nothing in the whole world displays to him. So the artist takes possession of nature in order to make it express something which it is not.<sup>27</sup> In this world he wants to make another world appear, a

<sup>25</sup> The first variant is more common in the West, the second in the Far East. "It is one of the rules of classical art in Japan that all natural elements are excluded. Nature in itself is pushed aside as being something raw. One must kill the natural elements and then attempt to reproduce the same action by means of art . . . for example, the smooth walk in the *Nô*" (Toshinobu Ashiara, *L'esprit de la danse japonaise*).

<sup>26</sup> Although they do not directly refer to the supernatural, these sentences of A. Malraux express well the attempt to pass beyond nature, which is an element of all art worthy of the name: "As against the representation of the world, artists want to create another world—not merely another representation—for their own use" (*Les voix du silence*, p. 599); "No matter where or when, sacred styles refuse to imitate life, and demand to transform it or transcend it . . . they require that the relationships between shapes in their work should be different from those which are to be seen in life" (*ibid.*, p. 593).

<sup>27</sup> Then what are we to say about the classical axiom: Art should imitate nature? Although careful attention to nature has been, and continues to be, a condition for any marked progress in all the arts, one can maintain without paradox that the deliberate adoption, since the Renaissance, of the principle of imitation of nature as the rational ideal of art has led to a

world fashioned according to his own supernatural desires. And so, by rhythm and cadence, the poet pretends that his words bring into existence the substance of what they express. The dancer portrays a new mode of existence, entirely free. The painter gives form and color to the invisible, and the musician, in the sonorous language of sound evolved by his own spirit, speaks of realities which transcend speech.

Art, like rite, wrests nature away from its worldly existence; it refuses to consider nature as something merely useful or pleasant. It modifies the perceptible form of things which already signify the invisible, in order to impress on them more deeply the lineaments of that reality of which it dreams. In conclusion, because art is a language whereby man expresses a spiritual message to others like himself, it enters, as does rite, into the "convention" presupposed by every civilization. Every culture has its own standards of aesthetics through which its own social appreciation of what is beautiful and what is ugly is strongly refracted.<sup>28</sup>

### c) Sacred and Profane

Rite and art behave in a similar manner toward nature—neither of them will adopt nature as it is. And the reason is the same in both cases—explicit in the first, often implicit in the second: both are looking beyond nature.

This common approach is proper to man in his religion, and is but the expression of his effort to make contact with the world of the divine or sacred. The presence and action of the transcendent Being cannot be manifested here below except by some kind of a breach, for God is the totally Other. His appearance in this world is not possible apart from a breach or rupture of the natural order. That is why sacred things or gestures necessarily show themselves as somehow wrested from the profane. A sacred place is railed off from cultivated land or walled off from the inhabited city, is removed from all ordinary natural use and dedicated exclusively to a religious progressive secularization of art (i.e., to its confinement to the things of this world). The present crisis in art, which is turning towards the abstract and non-representative, is very significant. It is the resurgence of art's will to live, its refusal to allow itself to be immersed in imitation, in reporting, in publicity, etc., all of these being just "worldly" forms of human relationships. It is easy to understand also that religious art is in special need of escaping from a simple "restoration of nature" which would empty it of all manifestations of the transcendent. It remains true, however, that Christian art, because it is the handmaid of revelation, will never be able to dispense with a representational content (music to accompany words; statues to be the objects of a spiritual cult, etc.). Representation and meaning, far from being alien, are of the very essence of all true symbolism.

<sup>28</sup> Perfection of form is the basis, in the object itself, of perceptible beauty. But the actual perception of beauty in the sensible sign depends on the subject. St. Thomas defines the beautiful as *id quod visum placet*. We can never insist too much on the extent to which the individual, in his act of appreciation, depends on his cultural milieu. Music provides many examples of this fact. One has only to listen to a melody conceived in a scale different from that to which one is accustomed, to derive the painful impression that it is "out of tune." Another example: to be properly appreciated, Coptic and Syrian ecclesiastical chant have to be sung in a nasal tone; to us this seems terribly disagreeable and ugly.

but still drunk

purpose. It is "consecrated." When God enters this world to sanctify it, there is a breach in the world's finitude. The sacred sign is an opening upon the "beyond."<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, to make Himself understood by men, the Word of God assumed a strange accent: "Do penance . . . Blessed are those who mourn . . . He who loses his soul shall save it." Just as His voice calmed the winds and the sea, just as it commanded the demons, so also it had to conquer the noise of this world and its sin. The voice of God resounded as a voice from on high: "Father, make thy name known. And at this, a voice came from heaven: 'I have made it known and will yet make it known.' Thereupon the multitude which stood listening declared that it had thundered; but some of them said, 'An angel has spoken to him'" (John 12:28-29).

On the level of signs, the sacred is contrasted with the profane as art is contrasted with nature.

### d) Cult and Art

Thus one can understand how cult, which is made up of sacred signs, allies itself by preference with art; for the liturgy, like art, is not content with nature as a means for expressing its mystery.

The believer who approaches the mysteries of his faith can do so only through the medium of religious rites. But does not the artist, by means of shapes and sounds, most wonderfully evoke that new creation to which the man of religion aspires? And cult imparts the hidden reality which art only suggests in sensible signs. Nothing but a religious rite can fully grant what the artist wants. In fact, if faith be not vain, the rite of the believer "verifies" (makes true) the work of the artist. Only here can the sign truly effect what it signifies.

This efficacy is not by any means due to the rite itself, still less to art. It is an illusion for a man to think that he can acquire a spiritual reality by means of a human sign; it is magic to think that he can act upon God. Signs can mediate the divine only if God Himself has chosen to make use of them to mediate His grace, and this is true only if they are mysteries of revealed religion. Hence, in the Christian religion alone can a rite be truly a sacrament; only there can art be a living introduction to the new creation in the Holy Spirit.

<sup>29</sup> However, it would not be correct to identify the sacred with the breach or rupture we have mentioned. The one is only the manifestation of the other. We must ever remember that sacredness or profaneness are not *in* the things. There are only sacred things and profane things. For the real sign is not a thing but an act: a meeting of two liberties.

On the other hand, the manifestation of the holy God in this world is not limited to the breach by means of which He appears in it. It is directed to the sanctification of man and of the world; and this sanctification is an invisible act. It is here that "sacred" means something different for the Christian and for the pagan; the signs of the liturgy are not of the same order as those of art, because of their power to mediate supernatural grace.

On the other hand, it is possible to celebrate liturgy without necessarily making any demands on any of the fine arts. By works of fine art we mean whatever creative architects, sculptors, poets or musicians have produced at various times in history. Music, indeed, is more closely allied to the sacred rites than any of the other arts; yet, when liturgy is not celebrated in its solemn form, and in the administration of most of the sacraments, music is not employed at all.

The relationship between arts and liturgy can be studied from several viewpoints. One may concentrate on the creative act of the artist who is expressing himself, or else on the results of his artistic activity, namely, the work of art. Or again, the artist may be striving above all to achieve a work that is good and true (its beauty being the fruit of these qualities), or he may be concerned primarily with its formal quality as a sign (its moral effect being then secondary). Yet again, the person who sees or hears this work of art may seek primarily his own esthetic pleasure, or he may strive in the first place to make spiritual contact with the realities signified by the work of art. In these three pairs of alternatives the liturgy is not directly concerned with anything except the last one, namely, spiritual contact with the reality signified.

Worship is action. In rite and sacrament the individual or the community seeks to *sacrum facere*, to do this holy thing, to make it holy for God. If one of the arts is brought into this sacred action, the purpose of using this art is not to produce some work of art beautiful in its form, but to produce some spiritual reality of which this form is the effective sign. It is the religious action which is essential; the artistic action which conditions it is only relative and accessory.<sup>31</sup> The worthy and beautiful collective expression of community prayer normally calls for song; but it does not of itself require this or that particular melody.<sup>32</sup>

To this first distinction between the artistic activity of the subject and the objective work of art which he uses, there correspond two attitudes—or rather, two tendencies—on the part both of the creative artist and of the person who makes use of an already existing work of art.

One whose task it is to provide his fellow men with the works of art which they need for their spiritual worship can either put his fellow men first or he can put his work first. If he puts them first, he models himself on the artisan who, while intent on making something useful, strives above all to help those who use it to rise up to the highest spiritual dispositions. That is why he wants to make it as fine and as meaningful as possible. This chalice, a cup from which consecrated wine is to be drunk, must be rich and

<sup>31</sup> Not in the sense of being superfluous, but of being accidental. This is the way in which music, though not pertaining to the essence of liturgy, is nevertheless an integral part of it.

<sup>32</sup> Stated as a principle, this does not contradict the fact that, for reasons of discipline based on history and sociology, the liturgy does in certain instances prescribe particular forms of melodic recitative, and, in nearly all instances, particular literary forms.

### e) Practical Art and Fine Art in the Liturgy

The Christian liturgy, worship of the true God revealed in Jesus Christ, shows clearly enough that it can less afford to dispense with art than can any other form of cult. The vestments of the sacred ministers, the literary forms of the Collects and Prefaces, the chant of common prayers, the movements of the ceremonial, the architecture of the place of worship, sacred actions and sacred objects are all more or less ritualized, thanks to the art of man.

Nevertheless, it is equally certain that Christian worship, which is worship in spirit and in truth, is in its celebration more free than any other from definite ties with this or that concrete form of art. Apart from the matter required for validity of the sacraments, which involves but simple and common elements such as water, oil, bread and wine, the liturgy is not by its nature bound up with any particular language, style of music, or architectural form.<sup>30</sup> The very diversity of the Christian rites, and the different ways in which they have developed during the course of history, is proof of this. Further, in case of necessity, it is possible to celebrate Mass not merely without any singing, or in some place other than a church, but even without vestments or any objects artistically made. It is sufficient to fulfill, in the name of the Church, with a little bread and wine, the command of our Lord: "Do this in memory of me."

We must examine this double statement more deeply because it will lead us to establish, within the very idea of liturgical art, a distinction of great importance. It is true, on the one hand, that the celebration always requires art. The sacrificial Supper of the Lord, even when celebrated in the most primitive circumstances, remains ever a ritual meal. The art of man enters into it necessarily, and that in several ways. First of all, in the material for sacrifice: the food for the ritual Sacrifice cannot be any fruit of the earth in its natural condition, such as wheat or grapes; it has to be a product of human work, bread kneaded and baked, wine pressed and fermented. Further, this meal does not retain any elements pertaining to an ordinary human meal except those needed for its symbolism: its ordering is completely governed by the "convention" of the New Alliance. It is not a matter of sustaining bodily life or even of enjoying a meal among good friends, but of doing again that which Jesus did—taking bread, breaking it and distributing it in an act of thanksgiving which calls to mind His death and resurrection. All these ceremonies, even when stripped to their bare essentials, are still "artificial" acts taken in the strict sense.

<sup>30</sup> See J. Wagner, "L'art liturgique et la pastorale," *La Maison Dieu*, 47-48 (1956), p. 108 ff. At the beginning of his remarkable article the author formulates the thesis that the liturgy "is not bound to make use of art, can do without its service or even renounce it." We would agree with the first part of the proposition, but think that the second must take into account the distinction between practical arts and fine arts which we are about to discuss.

beautiful because thereby it will teach men to respect and to adore the Sacrament of the New Testament. This melody, intended to express the people's cry of supplication in a *Kyrie eleison*, or their thanksgiving in an *Alleluia*, must be charged musically with emotion because thereby it will deepen the sentiments of prayer or of praise expressed by the words. But it is also possible for this artist to change his creative ideals<sup>33</sup> by striving primarily to produce a work of art intended to be admired for its own sake, a precious thing to win the esteem of connoisseurs, a refined piece which will stand as an achievement of human skill, irrespective of whether it is actually used in divine worship or not. The artistic *chef-d'oeuvre*, thus displayed as an esthetic symbol of the religious thoughts or sentiments of a culture, will more naturally find its true place in a museum or concert hall than in the liturgy. In the celebration of the sacred mysteries no work of art should set itself up as the aim and object of the soul's movements; a *chef-d'oeuvre* which attracts too much attention to itself runs the risk of looking like a *hors d'oeuvre*. The liturgy requires from its handmaids that they should stimulate "prayer within beauty," not that they should "foster beauty within prayer."

The point of view of the believer who is taking part in the rites corresponds to that of the creative artist; for in the liturgy none should be purely spectators or purely auditors, but all should be agents. For them liturgical art is always "practical" art, for every rite is concerned with faith in action. Worship, to adopt a distinction made by St. Augustine, finds place only for signs that are *useful*—useful not merely to the ceremonies but to salvation; it has no room for signs which are merely *pleasurable*. The former signs employ the attractions inherent in beautiful actions for the purpose of penetrating more deeply into the mystery; the latter draw both sensitive and spiritual faculties to themselves as their goal. Now there is no denying that some chants, such as simple psalmody, stimulate the singer to pray the inspired text, while certain performances of great works of art "*se font écouter*," i.e., demand for themselves the attention of the listeners.

There is, however, something common to all these aspects of liturgical art as<sup>34</sup> By this we do not intend to cast aspersions on the qualities specific to the artist in favor of those specific to the artisan, in order to define the functions of the man engaged in creating liturgical art. But it is interesting to note that neither antiquity nor liturgy has ever needed this distinction because, in both of them, the good artisan was an artist, and the artist never ceased to be an artisan. The distinction became necessary only after the Renaissance. Although the artist remained, as did the artisan, directly at the service of society, he became distinguished as a man of genius, and society paid the tribute of admiration not only to his works but also to his personality. The romantic idea of the artist and of his inspiration came to isolate him from the common run of mortals and to endow with an aura of distinction the individual work of art. The era of the museum—with its "Exhibition by X" or its "Concert of the works of Z"—on the one hand, and the era of industrial utilitarianism with its technical levelling on the other, do but accentuate this opposition. Observe, however, that the balance of this evolution is not entirely negative; it has aided the progress of the arts. Moreover it is not by any means irreversible.

viewed from three different standpoints—that of the sacred reality to be signified, that of him who is to provide the expression of it, and that of him who has to make it his own. All three of them show that worship presupposes, in the signs which constitute it, a personal action which is both on the plane of the senses and also spiritual (which we will designate as practical art), yet neither approves nor disapproves of the "beautiful things" which are its means of expression (which we will designate as "works of fine art"). The more any activity is truly that of its agent and the more fully it enters into the ritual action, the more suited it is for use in worship; whereas the more it becomes an esthetic entity tending to be a manifestation of human culture in its own right, the less suited it is for use in worship.

Hence, in the role which art fulfills in rite, we must distinguish between the greater or lesser part that it plays in constituting the rite. The consequences of this distinction will appear when we come to study the function of the items sung within the liturgy and the choice of their musical settings.<sup>34</sup>

## B. LITURGY HAS NEED OF SONG

Among all the forms of art which liturgy draws into its service, music holds a privileged place, especially in the form of song. Sacred music, declared Pius XII, "is more closely associated with divine worship than most of the other fine arts, such as architecture, painting or sculpture. The function of these is to provide a worthy setting for the divine rites. But music, on the other hand, occupies the chief place in the actual performance of the ceremonies and sacred rites" (MSD 13).<sup>34a</sup> Let us examine the basis of this statement.

<sup>34</sup> Observe that even when the distinction between artistic action and the resulting work of art is clear, it still remains difficult to fix with any precision the line of demarcation between practical art and fine art, which also includes both action and the result of action, though with a different emphasis. The part of the "agent" is here very considerable. Even when he is singing the sober recitative of a Gospel chant, it is possible for a deacon to be "listening to himself" in a way which could divert the attention of the faithful from the message he proclaims to his melody or his voice, while the singer of a Mozart aria might succeed in causing himself to be utterly forgotten and yet draw his hearers into a pure act of prayer.

The education both of faith and of religious feeling plays a decisive part in these differences. One man prefers a Mass celebrated without any decorative accessories according to the mere essentials of its rite, in a Romanesque crypt with bare walls; another prays with more fervor amid the splendors of a baroque church at a Mass adorned with the fullest ceremonies and accompanied by an orchestra.

No doubt there are many mansions in the house of the Father. Nevertheless, it is a defensible proposition that a refinement of esthetic taste and a deepening of faith both work in the same direction toward an appreciation of simplicity. Just as the superficial mind loves the gaudy and flamboyant, while the man of culture appreciates the purity of form patient neither of addition nor subtraction, so the less well instructed Christian seeks the reassuring assistance of signs which stimulate his religious feeling to help his too human piety, while a more mature faith prefers for its contemplation aids which are as transparent as possible. The more a sign is denuded of essentials, the richer seems its evocative power in the spiritual order. (But this does not mean the sign should be disincarnate!)

<sup>34a</sup> Cf. CL 112.