Noise, Dissonance and the Twentieth-Century Spiritual Crisis: Synchresis in Chion's *Requiem*

Sarah L. Jacobs and Paul Rudy

University of Missouri – Kansas City Conservatory of Music
sljww8@umkc.edu
rudyp@umkc.edu

Abstract

Michel Chion's Requiem (1973) exhibits an iconoclastic use of traditional religious texts. The second half of the twentieth century had inaugurated a time of radical cultural change; a crisis of faith existed, as changes in religious thought occurred too fast for new forms of expression to develop. Old rituals and categories were no longer adequate to describe the human experience, yet there continued to be a need for religious expression. A parallel crisis was developing in music, as classical music became enshrined in old forms. Composers, recognizing the inadequacy of old models of expression for contemporary spiritual and musical needs, sometimes placed religious themes and texts into new contexts, resulting in a mingling of the sacred and the profane which may appear to be shocking or even blasphemous. This paper is a part of a larger study of such works from the 1960s and 70s, examining how this blending of contexts might be interpreted. It examines how Chion uses noise as symbol, and how he creates dissonance through ironic juxtaposition of text, material and sonic treatment relying on synchresis to forge meaning.

1 Introduction

Michel Chion's *Requiem*, which had its premiere in 1973, was awarded the 1978 Grand prix du disque of the Académie du disque français. While it has received positive recognition among devotees of electroacoustic music, it is not difficult to imagine that among other audiences its reception might be less affirmative. To a congregation of worshippers in a church, for example, Chion's *Requiem* would certainly be considered irreverent, if not blasphemous. In a concert setting, it would likely be encountered with resistance among even the most open-minded of listeners who are more accustomed to Requiems by Mozart, Verdi, or Fauré. An analysis with a focus on its surprising (and sometimes shocking) aspects reveals that noise is a primary symbol for the clashing musical and religious ideals of the twentieth century. Meaning is conveyed through context, reference, sonic treatment (such as morphology), and layering (polyphony).

The collision of old and new ideologies in both music and religion becomes the primary message of *Requiem*. Synchresis, Chion's own notion of superimposing incongruous image and sound in film (1994) is carried out here purely with sound through the referential nature of chosen source and the ironic treatment of that material. The very opening of the work sets up the frame through the juxtaposition of a grating pitched noise and recited text from the "Requiem Aeternam"

Musical Example 1: 01 0.00:00-01:00 (1')

In this analysis, the cultural and religious clashes of the twentieth century will be mapped onto the choice of source material as well as the ironic treatment of that source throughout *Requiem*. The unorthodox juxtaposition of text and sound material serves to create dissonance in the narrative structure of the work. It also calls into question conventional interpretations of the religious text and the customary use of traditional musical material to express that text. Several divergent planes are fused together into a single paradoxical sonic landscape fraught with challenges to the listener.

Chion's *Requiem* was written against the background of a crisis of faith, which Leonard Bernstein described as "the principal crisis of our century" (Bernstein 1997). The polarity of religious fundamentalism and radical atheism is easily identified in contemporary culture. The first is a rigid adherence to established principles, and the second a complete rejection of those inherited formulations. In the third century, many of the myths which were commonly created in ancient cultures to express the inexpressible became, in a literalized form, the very basis for Christianity (Harpur 2004). Today, expanded scientific knowledge and awareness of a pluralistic world make these literal understandings untenable. As this literalization is the only interpretation offered by Christian theism, the only reasonable response, to many people, would seem to be atheism. Yet a spiritual impulse remains. There is a human need to express a relationship to the unlimited, but ritual emptied of its meaning does not satisfy that need. The continuing hunger for spiritual connection amid a growing

discomfort with religious tradition is the basis of Chion's ironic discourse. Chion succeeds in representing this dilemma through specifically referential material, a feat which is only possible in music without text through the use of recorded sound.

A similar crisis also existed in music. As technology has developed, the sound and visual material that can be included in music-making has radically expanded. The commonly accepted definition of music, which includes only what Trevor Wishart has called "lattice-oriented," notation-structured sound (1996), is a dogma which began to be challenged in the twentieth century. Listeners who are confronted with new sounds are often reticent to expand their definition of "music" to include these sounds. On the other side of the spectrum musical innovators often avoid stylistic elements from the past, or hold them at arms' length, using them only in an unassimilated form, as in parody. But, as Pierre Boulez points out, this type of reference "in fact betrays the inability to absorb, it betrays the weakness of a stylistic conception unable to 'phagocytose' what it takes hold of" (Boulez 1986). But in music, as in religion, there can be an assimilation of past forms and materials with present ideas and realities.

As a musical work with an unorthodox selection and treatment of sound materials in the setting of a religious text, Chion's *Requiem* stands at the intersection of the spiritual and musical crises of the twentieth century. Chion's achievement is the synthesis of fresh musical procedures with one of oldest Western musical structures.

In *Audio-vision,* Chion invents the word "synchresis" to describe the fusion of a particular image with an unrelated sound when they occur simultaneously in film (1994). This union of opposing elements is an intuitive mental unfolding, not based on rational logic. Walter Murch, in his introduction to the book, says that these incongruities "can open up a perceptual vacuum into which the mind of the audience must inevitably rush" (Chion 1994). While Chion and Murch apply the notion of synchresis to film, the same process of reconciling two contradictory elements can also be applied to music. The absence of the visual element causes an even stronger engagement of the listener's imagination, because the ears are not competing with the eyes for perceptual dominance. By their newly formed association, the paradoxical components influence and transform each other; when the elements involved are replete with meaningful associations of their own, the potential for metaphoric reinterpretation is enormous. Synchresis, then, in the purely musical, acousmatic context of Chion's *Requiem,* is the fusion of seemingly incongruous sonic material with religious text and structure; the result is an innovative work that challenges previous ideas about spirituality and music on every conceivable level.

2 Materials: noise, dissonance, and context

As described by Chion, the formal design of *Requiem* is "based on a system of echoes and correspondence that is organized in a symmetrical fashion around an axis found in …the sixth movement (Évangile), where a symbolic rupture of the tape occurs, a breaking of the piece itself, that opens a gap of eternity in the flow of time, allowing a glimpse of 'something else'" (Chion 1973).

Musical example 2: 06 01:15-02:35 (1'20")

This is a sonic representation of the process which Chion intends to happen in the listener's mind when it is confronted with disparate elements; a metaphor successfully conveyed in the association of two different things fosters perception of a more profound truth than can be derived from a simple, literal understanding.

2.1 Noise

The dramatic narrative of Chion's work consists of the Latin texts one would expect to find in a Requiem setting, with the addition of Biblical texts: a Gospel reading, an excerpt from an epistle (both in French), and the Lord's Prayer. The inclusion of the Biblical passages indicates that Chion's model is a worship setting, rather than a concert rendition of a Requiem Mass; this causes the listener to seek meanings more strongly associated with the desire for a connection between God and humanity. In addition, a subtle use of reverberation locates the noise section in a cathedral space.

The rupture, gap and flow Chion talks about are evident even in the first minute of the work. Noise is prominent, and moreover, Chion provides us with a key to his use of it throughout the work. After the opening percussive burst, a sustained, pitched noise passage migrates from A-flat to C (both slightly sharp). A sonogram reveals two aspects (perceptible with careful listening): first, a harmonic spectrum which drifts (and as a result becomes more dissonant) and second, the presence of two layers of source.

Musical Example 3: 01 0.00-01:05

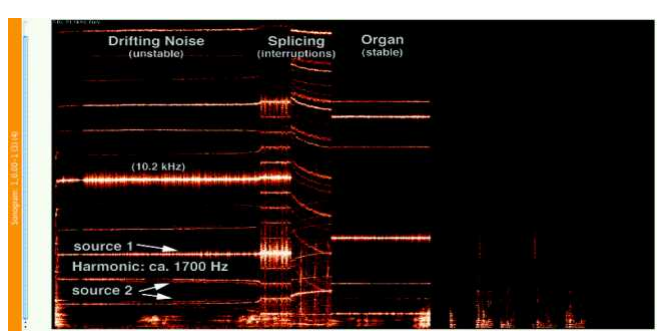

Figure 1: Sonogram of Requiem , 0.00-01:05

Furthermore, one can see Chion's use of "splicing" (a "cinematic" cut between scenes). The first occurrence of this widens the noise bands of the sustained components and shifts the pitch center to C. This is followed by a second splice to rapidly glissing material with clashing filtered noise frequency bands. The cadence of this opening phrase is on a sustained organ-like sound which is thinner in number of partials present, and also stable in pitch. Rupture is expressed through the use of tape editing techniques (juxtaposition through splicing) and flow maps onto noise shaping (morphology), pitch drift and silence, which occurs immediately before the text recitation. Clearly, dissonance is increased by destabilizing pitch, widening noise bands, and the disruptive splicing of these textures, as well as the very use of this unexpected material, which clashes with the lattice-based (tonal) nature of traditional Requiem settings that typical Mass listeners would be expecting.

Within the familiar narrative, Chion uses noise as a framing device, demarcating each movement or portion of a movement, and setting it in its own sonic environment. One function of noise is that it reduces or obscures the comprehensibility of the acoustic environment (Truax 1992). Noise in the context of splicing is heard as disturbing to the textual flow of the *Requiem*; it provides disruptions in the continuity, which serve to engage the listener's attention. These disruptions invite, and perhaps even force the listener to instinctively project himself or herself into the spaces between the noise, because that is where meaning can be found. Beyond using noise as a formal marker, Chion uses it at strategic points to weaken, and paradoxically to strengthen, the listener's relationship to the environment. Presented with a disruption in meaning, the listener's impulse is to attempt to reestablish connection with that meaning.

Musical example 4: 08 00:41-01:41 (1")

One type of noise Chion uses prominently reinforces the active engagement of the listener in a way that is particularly ingenious. In several places throughout the work, its course is suddenly interrupted by brief periods of referential white noise, denoting the sound of a radio dial being turned. The implication here is that the listener is directly involved in tuning the radio as if trying to find a station. The disruption, itself representing a meaningful sound environment (radio tuning) momentarily severs the listener from another meaningful sound environment (a particular passage of text), and strengthens the connection by forcing the listener to seek reestablishment with something recognizable. A third dimension of tension is added when we realize that the "tuned" segments (as if we have found a station), contain actual motivic material which remains invariant throughout the work. The result is an incongruity between the context of tuning, which would create the expectation of hearing different sources with each new station, and the resultant invariant sounds actually achieved by Chion's tuning!

Musical example 5: 04 03:25-04:00 (35")

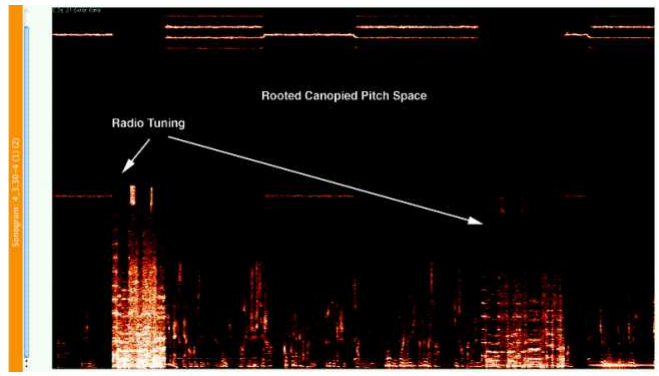

Figure 2: Sonogram of Dies Irae, 3:30-4:00 (30")

The cinematic cut of the radio dial can easily be seen, as can the canopied (high) and rooted (low) pitch space (Smalley, 1986), with a gap in between. The conceptual distance between the text and radio tuning is mapped onto a separation in pitch space, creating a multi-dimensional gap that the mind of the listener must seek to fill.

Thus, noise as an isolating factor can be seen as a symbol for the twentieth-century crisis of faith. As church rituals and teachings based on pre-modern worldviews became increasingly dissonant with post-modern understandings, a large percentage of adherents to the Christian faith began to feel alienated from the object of their worship. This disconnection of the human from the divine renders religious ritual meaningless. The noise which frequently interrupts the text in Chion's *Requiem*, then, symbolizes the loss of meaning and the growing irrelevance of church rituals to everyday life. Chion does give us moments of stability (the sustained pitched sounds) to grasp onto in this example, and seems to be reminding us that estrangement resulting from anachronistic religious beliefs and practices does not silence the spiritual impulse. We continue to try to traverse the breach, even while using antiquated forms.

2.2 Transcontextual relationships

Chion draws a connection between the religious text and the realities of daily experience by blending the two contexts in seemingly incongruous ways. Passages of the Mass are recited in sonic settings which evoke everyday scenes as diverse as illness, sexual intimacy, and a telephone call. Sometimes larger concepts, including militarism and evil, are implied. The recorded medium enables Chion to invoke a wealth of references which carry networks of associations far removed from the notion of a liturgical rite or a formal concert. The combination and interaction of

these associations cause the listener to view each element, whether sacred or profane, in unexpected ways.

The opening movement contains one of the most surprising synchretic moments. The words "Requiem aeterna dona eis, et lux perpetua luceat eis" are recited by a woman and a man who seem to be engaged in a sexual activity. While it is not immediately overt, the strong implication is that the woman awakens the man from sleep, and seductively arouses him into a physical interaction which grows more passionate.

Musical example 6: 01 01:32-02:34 (1'02")

The urgency is intensified by the fragmentation of the text, especially the isolation of the word "dona" ("give").

Musical example 7: 01 03:33-03:55 (22")

The incongruity of a religious text expressed through sexual activity is heightened because the woman initiates the interaction. While this is not particularly shocking in the context of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 70s, Chion's decision to make the woman the instigator is subtly important. At the time *Requiem* was written, the Roman Catholic Church was facing challenges to the "premise that female sexuality in the context of marriage and reproduction is always submissive, or at least is never imbued with authority, and is only rarely imbued with agency" (Kalbian 2005).

Again, Chion contextualizes the female voice with noise. Three distinct aural elements are present: the voice, sustained pitch (B-flat, slightly flat) and noise. A sonogram of this passage clearly shows the "interference" of noise.

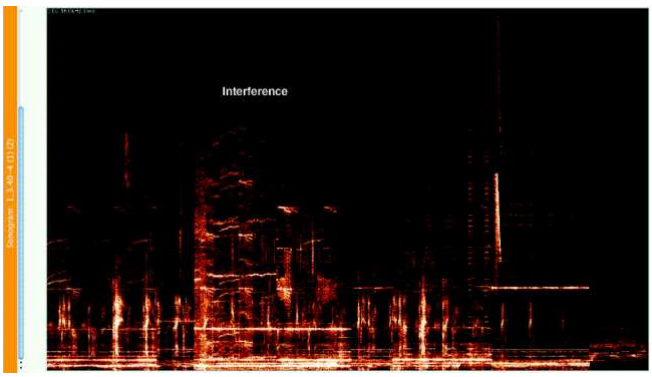

Figure 3: Requiem Aeternam, 3:40-4:30

By placing a sexually assertive female voice into a Mass text, Chion seems to be making a statement about the controversy surrounding the Church's teachings on gender roles.

The use of sexual imagery as a metaphor for divine-human intimacy is not without liturgical and Biblical precedent. A vivid example is the fertility theme which was once very prominent in the Easter Vigil liturgy. The use of this symbolism to characterize Easter as the renewal of creation was revived in 1956 by Pope Pius XI; the portion of the liturgy which enacts the blessing of the baptismal water was overtly sexual. In this rite, the priest plunges the large, phallus-shaped candle three times into the baptismal font, which represents the womb of the mother Church. As this ritual is performed, the priest speaks in increasingly higher tones, and when the candle is fully lowered, he breathes over the water in the form of the Greek letter *psi*, signifying "life." The ritual conjures the notion of virility, and connects the spiritual rebirth of newly baptized members with the very dawn of creation.

Musical example 8: 01 04:06-04:27 (21")

In a modification which illustrates the Church's ambivalence toward sexuality, the 1970 version of the liturgy greatly diminished this powerful, life-affirming imagery, eliminating much of the symbolic action, and suggesting that the priest *may* lower the candle into the water, either once or three times. (Roman Missal, 1970)

The Bible is also replete with the use of human intimacy as a metaphor for the relationship between God and humanity. An obvious example is the Song of Songs, a text from the Hebrew Scriptures which is in the form of erotic poetry. In the Christian New Testament, the church is often referred to as the "Bride of Christ" and the "Body of Christ." One of the ironies of the Christian tradition is that, while professing a doctrine of incarnation, the belief that divinity took human form, Christianity is, "among the world religions, perhaps the most ambivalent about the goodness of the human body, its development, its activities, and its appetites" (Gudorf, 1994).

As Denis Smalley suggests, when a composer leads the listener to an awareness of multiple simultaneous contexts, that composer is often "concerned with inducing a particular attitude towards the material" (Smalley 1992). It is clear, therefore, that Chion's *Requiem* can be understood as a critical commentary on the church's repressive attitude about sexuality. The suppression and avoidance of its own strikingly appropriate sexual imagery has robbed Christianity of a powerful metaphor to express the intimate meeting of the human with the divine.

Aside from the recovery of a potent metaphor for mankind's spiritual yearning, sexuality itself may be viewed in a new way as a result of Chion's blending of contexts. He elevates the notion of sexuality by associating the sexual act with a spiritual context. The convergence of sex, creation, and life/death imagery in Chion's work yields a multiplicity of connections and possible interpretations, including the suggestion of a need for reformation of sexual ethics in the Church and a new vision of sexuality in general.

These are transcontextual relationships operating on the religious plane; Chion creates similar interlocking networks of connections on the musical plane. Transcontextual

associations are not limited to the blending of the sacred with the profane, but also arise from the unexpected pairing of a familiar text with an electroacoustic sound world. By choosing an established musical design for his composition, Chion expands what is included in the definition of a "Requiem," just as the use of unconventional sound materials expands the definition of "music." At the same time, he extends the boundaries of what might have been thought possible or appropriate subject matter for composers of electroacoustic music, especially those who may have had an antipathy for materials and forms of the past.

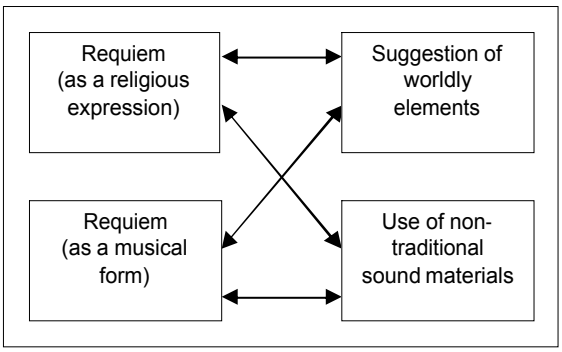

Figure 4: Diagram showing multi-dimensional interaction of contexts.

2.3 Dissonance

In *Requiem,* religious notions collide with musical material. Previous examples show an obvious dissonance between noise interference and the voice (juxtaposition of musical material) and the meaning of the text (religious notions). Through electronic treatment of the voice, Chion also maps the life/death paradox onto the notion of young and old. Throughout the work, Chion juxtaposes children's voices with adult voices, presenting them simultaneously or in proximate succession, creating yet another synchretic dissonance. This conjunction of young and old invites the listener's exploration of questions surrounding childhood and adulthood, and whether they can be viewed simultaneously as separate entities and as part of the same continuum.

Kyrie. The first incidence of contrast between adult and child voices occurs in the Kyrie. For this portion of the work, Chion enlisted the help of his friend, composer Michèle Bokanovski, whom he asked to recite the words "Kyrie eleison" and "Christe eleison" into the telephone, in the most neutral tone possible. For the recording, Chion simply held a microphone to the telephone receiver, thus filtering the spectral qualities of her voice, resulting in a distant sound. Spatial remoteness creates psychological distance (Smalley 1992), giving her pleas for mercy a disconnected, alienated quality.

Musical example 9: 02 00:00-00:29 (29")

The lack of inflection in her voice has an impact on the perception of the temporal dimension as well, as the continuity of pitch does not create a sense of moving forward in time. For one utterance, the recording is accelerated, with the resultant pitch shift reflecting a child's voice, yet it is clearly the same person speaking.

Musical example 10: 02 00:53-01:04 (11")

With the impression of timelessness that Chion has set up, the effect is one of temporal collapse; the listener might view the speaker's life non-temporally: she is at the same time both child and adult. In this example he conveys the notion of distance, and a specific space, not only through the "telephone" filtering, but also through the voyeuristic eavesdropping on a conversation. Throughout the work, Chion presents many such contrasts of non-temporal and teleological treatments of time and space, a thorough exploration of which is beyond the scope of this study.

The woman-child's one-sided telephone conversation, in which she pleads for mercy in such an indifferent manner, suggests the impersonal nature of our technological society. In this telephone call, it sounds like there is no one on the other end, listening. The flatness of tone intimates a numbing, perhaps resulting from thousands of years of pleading for mercy and receiving no response. This has the effect of temporal collapse on a cosmic scale. James Carse, professor of the history and literature of religion at New York University, has referred to the crisis of faith in similar terms: "How do we speak to someone we do not know, whom we cannot see or hear, who never speaks back at the other end of the phone? What is worse, when Christians insist that this is a God who listens, they do so on the basis that God became one of us, living our life and dying our death. But this is a harsh teaching. It is almost like saying that God not only does not speak back but that he hung up the phone 2,000 years ago" (Carse 1995). Through filtering (however crudely enacted), Chion maps a common technological experience easily recognizable through sound (speaking through a phone) with the spiritual quagmire of "is God really listening?"

Epistle. Another intermixing of adult and child voices occurs in the reading of the Epistle. Chion's selection of the text from 1 Corinthians 15 is significant, because it unites contradictory notions about life and death in Christian theology. Referring to the sound of a trumpet, it is stated that this sound signals a particular event: the paradoxical and therefore not rationally comprehensible conflation of death and victory.

Musical example 11: 03 00:06-00:48 (42")

A child's voice reads this text, stumbling over words and thus giving the impression that he does not understand what he is reading. Only when he reaches the interjection with its imposing word – "O Death!" – does he read with vocal inflection, conveying that he understands that there is

momentousness in the sentences, "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?"

Musical example 12: 03 00:48-01:00 (12")

Concurrently, in the background, a man's voice is reading the same text, but with expression, which suggests that he has a grasp of the meaning. However, the listener already has doubts about the child's ability to comprehend such a paradoxical concept; with the simultaneous reading by man and boy, there is a sense that it is the same person at different stages of maturity, and one might be led to question whether an adult understands the mystery at any higher level. Chion mixes the boy's voice closer to the sonic surface, giving it a heightened presence over the man's voice. That, combined with the weariness of the man's delivery, suggests that with age faith in old symbols gets tired, and less exuberant.

One cannot help but connect this passage with the opening to I Corinthians Chapter 13 which states, "If I speak in the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." There is thus a strengthened association of noise with meaninglessness, in contrast to the signification conveyed by the trumpet sound. The chapter closes with "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully…" If the listener does indeed draw a connection to this passage, it has the effect of causing the boy and the man to be viewed as the same person, calling into question the chimera that as we age, we acquire better understanding of the mysteries of life and death.

Sanctus. One of the most improbable collections of synchretic dissonance in Chion's *Requiem* is in the Sanctus movement, where context (the sanctus) and its method of delivery (material) challenge the listener to think far beyond the surface of sound. This passage begins with what sounds like a pair of evil gremlins uttering a word which eventually becomes recognizable as "sanctus," or "holy."

Musical example 13: 07 00:15-00:58 (43")

The diabolical nature of their character is suggested by the strident manner in which they speak the word. The inhuman quality results from a higher component of noise in their voices: from accentuation on the sibilants and of the word "sanctus," and the throatiness of the vocal delivery. They are then joined by a third creature, who also speaks the word in a violent, distorted tone, while a human-sounding person is apparently being tortured.

Musical example 14: 07 01:18-01:38 (20")

This is perhaps the point of greatest dissonance within *Requiem*. Not only are the sounds themselves grating, evocative, edgy, and evil-sounding (because of their noise components), but there is dissonance between the meaning of the text and the way its sonic delivery challenges traditional notions of the word "holy." Chion's Sanctus would suggest that the Church, rather than being an agent of reconciliation with God, is itself in need of redemption!

Musical example 15: 07 01:44-02:08 (22")

3 Addressing the Spiritual Crisis

The presence of such blatantly horrendous evil in conjunction with one of the most sacred parts of the liturgy raises intriguing questions about evil, which is certainly the most perplexing, unresolved issue in religious thought. If God is all-powerful and all-good, how is evil to be explained? The presence of children in this setting further expands the matter, highlighting another paradoxical notion in Christian theology. The doctrine of original sin, Christianity's attempt to explain the presence of evil in the world, holds that evil inheres even in children, who in popular thought are regarded as innocent and pure.

A growing number of religious thinkers within mainstream Christianity are beginning to reject the doctrine of original sin and with it the idea of vicarious atonement, which provide one foundation for the meaning of the Eucharistic meal. These doctrines are based on the premise that man was created perfect, and that God, enraged at mankind's fall from perfection, required the blood sacrifice of his own child to atone for the sins of the world. This casts God in the role of a heinous monster, and colors the Eucharistic meal as a celebration of unthinkable evil. Within Christianity, there has always been a certain veneration of physical suffering, as evidenced by the high regard given to martyrs throughout history. The popularity of Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ*, at least in the United States, would suggest that this idea persists. The natural consequence of the paradigm of a bloodthirsty God is a mindset wherein "violence is redemptive, war is justified, bloodshed is the way of salvation" (Spong 2005).

These beliefs and symbols, which have been considered foundational to Christianity, are now being scrutinized and even abandoned by devout Christians, but uncomfortably, there exists no established belief system, no rich network of meaningful symbols to take their place. The existential anxiety caused by this shaking of previously held beliefs is at the heart of the crisis of faith in the modern world. The growing obsolescence of Christianity's symbols and rituals is what Chion calls our attention to in *Requiem.*

The reception of a work like Chion's *Requiem*, and the interpretation of it, depends on the level of shared associations the audience would have with each of the multiple context it presents. A high degree of attachment to the importance of the materials – such outward expressions as the liturgical rite, or the musical form – would interfere with the reception of the composer's message. The question

is one of intention: is Chion being hostile, offensive, disrespectful or irreverent? Or is he categorically separating the "sacredness" of the Mass as a vessel from the sacredness of the divine connection it seeks to inspire? It is clear that he intends simultaneously to draw us into and out of the Mass itself, depicting the ironies and tensions brought about in the twentieth-century collision of science and spirituality. This seems irrefutable in the "Libera me," when an intimately recorded slurping of water (the blood of Christ, which in itself is an absurd, grotesque, even cannibalistic notion) becomes a violent, spitting expulsion. Also referenced here is the sexuality of the opening movement; the slurp takes the identity of a kiss.

Musical example 16: 10 5:57-6:40 (48")

In this case, Chion turns an established meaning on its head: cleansing and redemption are not found in internalizing the blood of Christ, but in rejecting that ancient symbol. The death of old ideas is often a painful prerequisite to the formation of new rituals, expressions which might realign humanity's spiritual values with modern views and new discoveries. By casting new metaphors, Chion succeeds in maintaining the spiritual foundation and meaning of the Mass while at the same time subverting its traditional outdated manifestations.

4 Conclusion: Synchresis

In *Requiem,* Michel Chion employs dissonance in a multifarious way, ingeniously uniting distinct and independent contexts. In tonal music, the word dissonance means unrelieved tension between musical pitches and rhythms, demanding resolution. In Chion's work, dissonance takes the form of noise, used in the vertical dimension as a phrase-delineating device, and in the horizontal dimension, continuing and changing over time as it weaves through and confronts the texture of the narrative. Dissonance is also found in the uniting of opposing ideas, and in the iconoclastic use of materials traditionally held to be sacred. Noise, or dissonance, can also be understood as a metaphor for the musical and spiritual crises of the twentieth century. As post-modern understandings increasingly diverge from pre-modern beliefs and practices, a chasm of incomprehensibility and meaninglessness is created. Chion further widens this chasm of incomprehensibility while at the same time forcing us to navigate it. From the utter naïveté of children's voices to diabolical noise-based assaults, Chion compels our minds to seek reconciliation through a labyrinth of "synchretic dissonance."

He accomplishes this through a cinematic treatment of sound. Context (Mass setting, church, etc.) and recognizable source (chanting, radio tuning, cathedral reverb, etc.) collide directly with the staging and handling of these materials. Noise becomes a key element in the demarcation/disturbance of phrase structure, and also a morphological tool to enact one of the twentieth-century composer's newest tools: timbral progression. Dissonance exists, not only within the timbral confines of material and its development, but also between content and context through ironic text delivery and treatment. Chion forces us to search for deeper meaning, to search for a reconciliation of powerful sonic images, which is only made possible in the music world through recorded media. He develops timbre based on a sound's sonic properties, while at the same time inviting us to embrace the recognition and associations of those sounds. Timbral progression and development becomes a powerful symbol for spiritual growth. In this, perhaps, lies the biggest irony of the *Requiem*: a reliance on the soundscape context of the Church and Requiem, while at the same time objectifying the sound through pure sonic treatment. *Requiem* not only confronts the spiritual and musical crises of the twentieth century, but also the predicament of the new post-World War II electroacoustic recorded media explosion: to recognize or not to recognize. In the end, Chion traverses in and out of both in a spiritual odyssey of sound.

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