Neoclassic Objectivism Meets Catholic Ritual: The Musical Philosophy of Joseph Samson

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A little-known side of neoclassicism is its outgrowth in religious art, including music for the rites of the Catholic Church. The two might seem antithetical at first: neoclassicism was brittle and brash, ironic and irreverent, acerbic and astringent, a style for worldly and world-weary youths who lurked evenings at Le Bœuf sur le toit; Catholic church music in the interbellum was conservative and insular, devoted to sincere expression of personal piety and faith. Both looked to the past, one to the eighteenth century and the other to the sixteenth or earlier. Nonetheless, they did have a few things in common. Both neoclassicism and Catholicism came into fashion among European intellectuals, especially in Paris, by promising order and universality at a moment of bewildering change after the First World War.[1] It was no accident that Stravinsky, Cocteau, Auric, Poulenc, Nadia Boulanger, Arthur Lourié, Boris de Schloezer, Roland-Manuel, and even Satie (to cite only the musicians) would sooner or later embrace religious orthodoxy, though not always for long. As a style, neoclassicism had a distinct hieratic streak, seen in works from Satie's *Socrate* and Virgil Thomson's *Capital Capitals* to any number of Stravinsky creations.[2] Conversely, not even ecclesiastical art could ignore the Neoclassic zeitgeist, unmistakable in the strange angular churches left

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by this era, in whose austere interiors, decorated by neo-medieval guilds, the turn against 'theatrical' Romantic religiosity joined with modernist impersonality and reduction of ornament.[3] And in Weimar Germany, at least (we have no equivalent surveys for France), composers looking for a modern, functional, unsentimental service music found what they wanted in the pandiatonic linearity and fluid temporality of neoclassicism.[4]

Above all, then, it was the reaction against Romantic doctrines of art as a medium for the expression of personal feeling that built a bridge between neoclassicism and Catholicism. While difficult to separate from the broader formalism and rationalism of high modernity, this trend in music-philosophical discourse, which I will call 'objectivism', had particularly close ties to musical neoclassicism, as illustrated in notorious pronouncements by Stravinsky ('My Octuor is a musical object'; 'music is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to *express* anything').[5] At the same time, it owed a debt to the intellectual revival of French Catholicism in the 1920s, seen especially in the interactions of Stravinsky and other Neoclassical figures with the circle of Jacques Maritain.[6] Yet no one has considered how, conversely, interwar objectivism of the Stravinskian variety might have manifested in the aesthetic discourse of church music.

In the French-speaking world, the figure closest to that intersection was Joseph Samson (1888–1957). Best known as a practitioner of church music – he directed the Dijon Cathedral choir (1930–57) and left a dozen or so mass settings – Samson also spent a lot of time thinking about the basics of religious art.[7] Among his publications, *Palestrina, ou la Poésie de l'exactitude* (1939) summarises his thought as it had taken shape in articles and notes going back into the 1920s; in this dense yet diffuse book the masses of Palestrina serve as pretext for reflections on liturgical art, and indeed art in general. The unpublished writings include a voluminous archive in the Bibliothèque municipale de Dijon[8] (which I am far from having thoroughly exploited) as well as substantial correspondence with fellow church musicians, such as Paul Berthier, Guy de Lioncourt,[9] Albert Alain and Clément Besse;[10] with secular musicians including Arthur Honegger[11] and Charles Kœchlin (with whom Samson struck up an important relationship around 1929);[12] and with the Catholic intellectuals Maritain,[13] Henri Ghéon,[14] Paul Claudel,[15] and Jacques Copeau.[16] The latter provided a tenuous connection to Stravinsky, who was sufficiently taken with Samson's recordings to want to hire the Dijon choir, built into an outstanding ensemble by Samson's predecessor René Moissenet (1850–1939), for his 1934 opera-oratorio *Perséphone* (in the end the two apparently never met).[17] Samson also gained access to the pages of *La Revue musicale* through a connection with its editor André Cœuroy,[18] a Dijon native, who

in the late 1920s was praising Stravinsky's objectivity over Schoenberg's hyper-Romanticism.[19] All this material reveals a musician keen to follow the movement of ideas, whose ability to quote Reverdy and Gide, Proust and Pirandello, stands out in the intellectually arid landscape of contemporary French church music. Indeed, among French musicians it is Samson, along with the Russian transplant Lourié, who best fits the interwar type of the 'Catholic intellectual'.

SAMSON'S OBJECTIVISM

To appreciate Samson's work as a confluence between Neoclassic objectivism and intellectual traditions native to church music, we have to examine what he wrote on the philosophy of music before relating this to wider contemporary trends. In this section I describe the complicated ideas developed in his public and private writings from his first large essay *À l'ombre de la cathédrale enchantée* (1927–28) to the Palestrina book finished a decade later. In this literary activity, Samson was trying first and foremost to work out for himself a sort of philosophy of liturgical music, starting from the basic conception, still relatively novel at the time, of *musique liturgique* as a genre set apart from all others by its special function (though in practice he often strays into philosophising about music or art in general without keeping the two spheres clearly separate).[20] The main thrust of his argumentation is to identify artistic liturgicality (my word but his idea) with 'objectivité'.

'Objectivity' means, in the first place, functionality, subordination of artistic style to a thing external to it – such as a religious ritual.[21] Samson is dominated by the notion of constraint, of working with givens: ritual (he tends to write simply of 'la liturgie', but has in mind the Tridentine Mass) entails content that is both fixed for all time by authoritative tradition and sufficiently concrete to have implications for musical style. The precise nature of this content (a matter of prescribed words, movements, etc.), and the precise extent of the resulting constraints, hold less interest for Samson than the basic renunciation of the *moi* that 'the liturgy' imposes on anyone who would contribute to it. Samson continually likens the liturgical artist to a worker or craftsman called upon to fashion an object from a given material, according to set specifications: 'the musician *assembles* a mass the way one assembles a house from concrete: within the imposed frame, he pours his music';[22] or 'constructs – if I may – *machines* that find their essential beauty in their exact and harmonious conformity to the object pursued'.[23] 'Objectivity' in this sense is therefore the exact opposite of *l'art pour l'art*, a doctrine that Samson explicitly rejects.[24]

Liturgical objectivity is bound to curtail self-expression due to the nature of the liturgical 'object', which is orant and sacramental but also 'social par définition', i.e. communal and public.[25] Samson never denied that such an activity might involve emotions or feelings or sentiments, but he distinguished between the kinds of feelings held by one person and those, necessarily more generalised, that a whole multitude could share. In that light, for an artist to try to express his *vie intérieure* or *sensibilité* in a liturgical work leads to trouble. As the analogy with construction makes clear, liturgical creativity for Samson is basically an activity guided by the intellect: like an artisan making liturgical furnishings, the composer writing a mass strives for fitness, and the product offers about as much opportunity for self-expression as a ciborium or a chasuble.

Having stressed objectivity and impersonality, Samson hastens to salvage expression and personality, calling on two distinct arguments in his various passes at this problem.[26] First, he simply points out that the liturgy, for all its constraints, does still leave a certain room for freedom within which the artist can exercise his individuality; it may not allow for a personal 'style', but it tolerates a personal 'manière' or 'techniques' or 'nuances'.[27] No doubt aware that artists would find this unsatisfying, Samson elsewhere advances a quite different, more ambitious, self-consciously paradoxical argument, namely that functional constraints, far from inhibiting creativity, can actually stimulate it. His explanations are difficult to construe, beyond the commonplace that necessity is the mother of invention, that challenges force us to grow; like a poet who turns an arbitrarily rigid form into a virtuoso display of rhyme, the musician might embrace the inflexible *cadre* of the mass as a test of resourcefulness, an obstacle to abstract musical working that exists to be overcome. Seemingly adapting the neo-Thomist distinction between the 'individual' and the 'person', he points out the potential discrepancy between individuality and personal growth (since to have a distinct identity is to have limits), thus setting up an opposition between accentuation of the *moi* and 'l'élargissement d[u] moi'.[28]

All this concern with functional constraint sits uneasily in Samson's thought alongside a desire to assimilate liturgical music to absolute music (*la musique pure*), created and appreciable with form alone in mind. The tension culminates in Samson's idiosyncratic doctrine of liturgical text-setting, ostensibly based on his minute analyses of Palestrina, according to which the composer should merely 'expose' the liturgical words and not 'illustrate' or 'dramatise' or 'sentimentalise' them.[29] More specifically, one should treat them as 'a kind of purely phonetic material', imitating in music only what is 'musical' in the words, i.e. their form (especially their rhythm), not their signification.[30] Rather than amplifying verbal

meaning, music serves merely to add a further element of beauty, achieved by its own intrinsic laws. Now, Samson hesitates to prescribe total detachment from signification, conceding that the composer might express the grammatical structure of the text, or even take inspiration from its sense at some quite general level;[31] without elaborating on this implicit distinction, he directs his censure particularly at text-painting (musical imitation of physical objects evoked textually) and at settings that amplify a text's emotional potential, 'squeezing an emotional pulp out of the word' as though to represent some individual's subjective reaction. [32] Comparing a mass by Widor (his own teacher, but cited as a representative of bad Romantic religiosity) to another by Dufay, he commends the latter for resisting any temptation to exploit the 'ressources sentimentales' offered by the text.[33]

Having emancipated liturgical music to follow its own intrinsically musical laws, Samson feels obliged to resolve what he calls 'the problem raised by expression in *la musique pure*' – i.e., to develop something like a theory of musical meaning in general.[34] Here again, his main concern lies in reconciling objectivity and impersonality with expression and personality – an aspiration that leads him into subtle distinctions but also a certain amount of muddle.

Samson grants that pure music can and should be 'expressive', have 'expression'. But he distinguishes 'expression' from the composer's feelings, or the communication thereof: 'One passage by Bach sings of melancholy, another of joy, but none tells me about the joy or sadness of Bach on some particular day'.[35] Expression resides in the music itself and perhaps in the listener, without involving the creator at all – more than anything, what Samson rejects is the conception of art as communication of an author's message or inspiration (belittled as 'effusions', 'confidences'). Then again, walking back his artisanal ideal, he admits that, after all, one's feelings (*sensibilité*) can hardly be excluded from creative activity, that creativity guided only by *savoir* or *goût* becomes artificial, factitious, formulaic. Opting for a compromise, he decides simply that the *intelligence* must keep the *sensibilité* in check.[36]

When it comes to 'expression' in the sense of the listener's reaction, Samson distinguishes it from *émotion* or *sentiment*, especially of the more visceral kind, to which, he complains, it is often reduced. He proposes to expand the concept to the point of assimilating it to that of meaning in general: 'a work of art is expressive whenever it expresses something – a form, a gesture, an attitude or a thought just as well as a *sentiment*'.[37] Further, he sometimes defines 'expression' so as to exclude sentiment altogether and correspond to something purely aesthetic or even intellectual. He identifies such a thing as 'expression […] of an essentially, fundamentally musical kind',[38] and evokes the formalist commonplace that music

'expresses' only itself, effectively collapsing expression into beauty, content into form:[39] 'Just as a play of colours is expressive in itself […] there exists a musical expression derived only from the play of elements intrinsic to music'.[40] This purely musical expression appeals to a specific 'sens musical' situated somewhere between physical sensation and emotion ('le système nerveux', 'le système affectif') on the one hand and the intellect on the other. Or perhaps belonging to the latter: Samson often characterises musical appreciation as a faculty of *l'esprit*, citing the notion of 'émotion intellectuelle' (from Camille Mauclair) or 'émotion de pensée' (Henri Brémond).[41] The goal of art, on his account, is to delectate the mind; he contrasts 'the joy that [artistic] works can offer to the *esprit*' (or, more pointedly, 'the joy that they dispense to the intelligence') to inferior sensory stimulation ('affective movements', 'commotion of the nerves').[42]

And yet, elsewhere, Samson merely calls for restraint of musical emotion, taking up the ideal of 'juste mesure' dear to classicism; the difference between healthy *expression* or *lyrisme* and deplorable *sentimentalité* or *sentimentalisme* comes down to a simple matter of degree.[43] Or again, he frames his imperative in terms of authorial intent: composers need not *try* to express themselves or move listeners, because a well-made work will do both on its own – and, moreover, trying to express and arouse is self-defeating. As Samson explained in a letter to Guy de Lioncourt, who had initiated the correspondence to voice reservations about the Palestrina book, 'Expression of the <u>self</u>, and even touching souls, are no longer for me anything more than results. Results independent of us. They cannot be the goal. The artist stands to gain, for the sake of the purity of his art, by not thinking about them'.[44] More cryptically, when trying to formulate this position in his notes Samson put the responsibility for expression squarely on the listener: '[Liturgical music] will not seek to act on the listeners; it will seek rather to be such that each of them may, ~~incited~~ by means of it, act on himself'.[45]

From these music-philosophical reflections Samson extrapolates a philosophy of musical performance, one with implications for performance style and editing (again, it can be hard to tell whether he is discussing music in general, liturgical music, or Renaissance polyphony). Unsurprisingly, he endorses an ethos and style typical of the 'modernist' or 'geometrical' performance practice emerging at the time:[46] the performer must strive to execute the notation precisely, to bring out its shapes while producing a beautiful sonic material, and not to express his feelings (which only introduce distortion and sap control) nor to excite anyone else's (which the music will take care of on its own if well written and realised).[47] Like the composer with 'the liturgy', the performer sacrifices individuality to the objective givens of the score. Specifically, Samson denounces what he calls a 'Romantic' performing

style that relies on contrasts of speed and intensity ('nuances de mouvement et de force') to dramatise a score in hopes of stirring up the crowd.[48] He also rejects the expressive markings routinely introduced into editions of old polyphony, not as unhistorical but as unnecessary (since anyone with a *sens musical* can work out the right shaping from the shape of the notes themselves), as discommodious (since they merely record some individual's extraneous, 'subjective' tastes) and as contrary to his anti-Romantic aesthetic. It should go without saying that these propositions are one thing, and what Samson actually did as a performer another; a study of the recordings that he made with the Dijon choir from the early 1930s onwards might well find more 'Romanticism' than the writings would lead one to expect.

In the foregoing I have tried to summarise Samson's music-philosophical thought sufficiently to enable readers to appreciate, in the next section, how it related to other discourses of its time and earlier. I could spend many more paragraphs working through its complexities, ambiguities and contradictions; Samson adopts a wariness of simple answers and a taste for reconciling opposites (not to mention an ambitious scope) that lead him to considerable subtlety but also inevitable impasses. Moreover, his claims shift considerably according to the sources engaged with, though they evolve little in the long run. The informed reader will already have spotted any number of reminiscences of better-known texts, to which we now turn.

SAMSON'S OBJECTIVISM IN CONTEXT

What was it that made Samson so preoccupied with 'objectivity'? I see no particular event or circumstance to hold responsible – only the people and, especially, the books to which he gravitated. A brief sketch of his own evolution in his 1940 letter to Lioncourt tends to confirm this hypothesis: 'Beginning, like most, from a quite narrow conception of art as the exclusive expression of the self, I slowly moved, under very diverse influences (especially Maritain, [Romano] Guardini, the liturgy), towards a detached conception'.[49] Though his early criticism is concerned mostly with 'modern' style in religious art, his slow movement had probably begun by the mid 1920s, the heyday of Neoclassic objectivism, judging from the studied inexpressivity in some of his contemporary liturgical compositions;[50] after 1926, his post as M^{gr} Moissenet's assistant gave him the leisure to enunciate his 'detached conception' in more extensive writings, starting with *À l'ombre de la cathédrale enchantée*. Samson probably absorbed his objectivism from the prevailing postwar

atmosphere, and subsequently nourished it on diverse influences indeed: his archive reveals a remarkably wide reading, and his texts can dissolve into a patchwork of borrowings from Claudel, Valéry, Maurice Denis, etc. (Maritain and Guardini he in fact cites rarely, but only because he had thoroughly assimilated them). In the rest of this section I parse these 'influences' into their main schools of thought.

Samson's remarks on meaning in *la musique pure* belong to venerable traditions of formalism, aestheticism and absolute music. Most of the key notions – music expressing only itself, the specifically aesthetic sense, intrinsically musical beauty – had such long histories and wide diffusion by 1930 that it hardly matters where he got them. Indeed, when he attributes them to specific sources these are often rather old, as with the letters of Flaubert, those of Saint-Saëns and Maurice Denis's 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme' (1890), though he also relies heavily on Pierre Lasserre's *Philosophie du goût musical* (1922).

Samson's hankering after order, hierarchy and absolutes obviously drew its urgency, if not its content, from the climate of *rappel à l'ordre* ensuant to the war, its chaotic aftermath and the first wave of modernism. His radical rejection of modern liberalism and individualism obviously belongs to the new world of authoritarian politics. But can we be more specific? In particular, given his profile and milieu, one inevitably wonders what he owed to Charles Maurras and Action française. This is hard to say. Samson often sounds very Maurrassian, as in his veneration for 'l'intelligence' (recalling Maurras's *L'Avenir de l'intelligence* or Henri Massis's manifesto 'Pour un parti de l'intelligence'), his denunciation of 'subjectivism' ('two centuries of subjectivism have so obliterated for us the idea of order that establishes and maintains the hierarchy of values and subjects art to its function', he laments)[51] and his invective against Romanticism and the nineteenth century ('le stupide XIX^{e} siècle', in Léon Daudet's phrase), built into his explicitly pre-Romantic paradigm of the artist as craftsman and even servant.[52] Then again, similar talking points could also be found with non- or anti-Maurrassian classicists such as Cocteau or Julien Benda,[53] and Samson rarely cites Action française writers (he does cite books on art written by Lasserre and by Louis Dimier after each had broken with Maurras). Of course, his writings mostly postdate the 1926 papal condemnation of the movement (not that all Catholics heeded it); perhaps not coincidentally, Samson wrote for the right-wing *Revue française* in the early 1920s but subsequently for *La Vie catholique* and *La Vie spirituelle*, both founded to steer Catholics away from Maurras. On balance, then, the most we can say is that his ideology smacks of interwar Catholic corporatism, whose relationship to the new radical right was famously complex.

Contemporary music-historical beliefs also inform this ideology. In line with a powerful tradition among Catholics and church musicians, Samson took Palestrina as the ideal model of liturgical music, if not music in general. In particular, he engages with long-running debates over the existence of emotion, expression, subjectivity or personality in sacred music predating the rise of figured bass and 'modern tonality' – the musical side of a grand historiographical debate over the origins of modern individualism.[54] Since the early nineteenth century at the latest, innumerable authors had suggested that such music represented only a cerebral play of counterpoint, oblivious to individual feelings and worldly passions and even to the sense of the text. Though Samson criticises such claims as much as he repeats them, he drew support for his objectivism from two observations about Palestrina's masses, no doubt based on his own intensive study of the repertoire but potentially informed by any number of musicological sources: that they incorporate extensive borrowing, calling into question the ideals of personality and contemporaneity that Samson had championed in church music early in his career;[55] and that they seem utterly indifferent to the meaning of the words, with dissimilar texts set to the same music and dissimilar musical settings used for the same text.

Much of Samson's thought, and especially his functionalistic stress on ritual constraint, joins existing discourses in the aesthetics of religious art, some of them going back well into the nineteenth century or beyond. Catholic literature on the subject had long since developed, in response to the kind of Romantic religiosity that embraced emotion and drama, a tradition of anti-individualism manifested, musically, in a preference for invisible and anonymous performers, choral forces to the exclusion of soloists, understated performance style, melodies drawn from the common fund of plainchant, and generic styles shared amongst many composers.[56] The sources inveigh constantly against tone-painting, theatricality, sentimentalism, 'the passions'. Samson absorbed this aesthetic of impersonal austerity most directly from two of his mentors, namely Moissenet, a foe of 'nuance' in ecclesiastical singing who, in his rare writings, stressed the collective, meditative function of liturgical music to the exclusion of personal expression,[57] and the abbé Clément Besse (1870–1923), himself a Moissenet protégé, whose hostility to 'subjectivism' in choral performance and to Romanticism in general was rooted in neo-Thomist philosophy (which he taught at the Institut catholique alongside Maritain) and the doctrines of Action française.[58] Samson also followed closely the writings of figures such as Maurice Denis, Alexandre Cingria (*La décadence de l'art sacré*, 1917) and Maurice Brillant (*L'art chrétien en France au XX^e siècle*, 1927) who led a post-1918 movement of 'renewal' in Catholic visual

art, spearheading a revolution in taste that stigmatised Romantic religious art as sentimental (in French: *fade*, *mièvre*; in English: 'maudlin', 'mawkish').[59] His views opposed him to the tribe of musicians affiliated with the Schola Cantorum, who continued the unabashed Romanticism of their master Vincent d'Indy: d'Indy's successor Lioncourt defended the old-fashioned conception of music as a medium of emotional expression in his exchanges with Samson, while the choirmaster Maurice Gay, another *scholiste*, replied to articles published by Samson in *La Petite Maîtrise*, noting with alarm that 'his aesthetic is opposed to that of the Schola and of d'Indy' (the journal's official patrons).[60]

Given the centrality of 'the liturgy' to Samson's thinking, one might expect to find one of his main influences in the so-called liturgical movement, begun around 1910 and going strong in the 1930s. Yet this phenomenon, native to Belgium and the Rhineland, gained little following in France until after the next war,[61] and Samson shows little if any awareness of it beyond Guardini's bestseller *Vom Geist der Liturgie* (1918), which he must have gotten to know only after its translation in 1929. Moreover, Samson's quest for aesthetic perfection in the sacred service, possible only with expert musicians, would have put him at odds with the movement's emphasis on active congregational participation, as it indeed did after 1945.[62] From Guardini he took mainly an emphasis on the communality of ritual, something that had already proved congenial to advocates of austere modernism in religious art such as the architect Rudolf Schwarz and the musician Hermann Schroeder, whose ideology resembles his own.[63]

Finally, for all its continuity with tradition, Samson's thought owes much to the authors who were enunciating objectivist philosophies of art in 1920s France, the *maîtres à penser* of neoclassicism: Jacques Rivière, Cocteau, Gide and especially Valéry and Maritain. He also appreciated the Catholic writer Maurice Brillant, a critic acquainted with Stravinsky, Poulenc, Milhaud, Honegger and Auric and a cheerleader of objectivism in performance style and liturgical art;[64] Samson's archive contains several clippings of Brillant's articles, and he apparently sent drafts of the *Palestrina* material to Brillant for feedback.[65] He was also abreast of the critiques of Neoclassic objectivism, such as Kœchlin's essay 'Du rôle de la sensibilité dans la musique' (1929).[66] Samson certainly recognised the timeliness of his objectivism; already in *À l'ombre de la cathédrale enchantée*, his 1927 study of M^{gr} Moissenet, he presented his predecessor's detached performance ethos as something likely to appeal to *les jeunes*.[67] More provocatively, in a 1935 article that would become the introduction to *Palestrina* he drew a parallel between 'Tra le sollecitudini' (a papal regulation on church music from 1903) and the spirit of *Le Coq et l'Harlequin* and *Le Bœuf sur le toit*,[68] trying to suggest, as he explained to a

scandalised Guy de Lioncourt, that liturgical austerity comported with and even anticipated the anti-Romanticism of the 1920s: 'from Rome to Montparnasse our whole age agrees on this point: down with bombast!'[69] He also elaborated, in his next letter, on the importance of Satie's *Socrate* in catalysing the 'concern with detachment, *dépouillement*, objectivity that had been nagging me':[70] he found there for the first time a total commitment to 'ascèse expressive',[71] one that made this cantata, as he wrote elsewhere, 'the exemplar of a contemporary style that could serve as a model for our composers of sacred music'.[72]

Among contemporary Neoclassicists, Samson cites the Stravinsky of *Chroniques de ma vie* about a half dozen times (as well as one of Stravinsky's interviews and Boris de Schloezer's *Igor Stravinsky*). Four ideas associated with the Russian composer figure prominently in his thought, whether or not he took them directly from the *Chroniques*:

1. The text-setting method of treating words as mere units of sound, deployed by Stravinsky in *Œdipus Rex* and much discussed ever since.[73] Already in *À l'ombre de la cathédrale enchantée*, Samson attributes to Palestrina a similar detachment towards the liturgical texts;[74] though ostensibly drawing on his study of Palestrina's masses, he could conceivably by this time have encountered the earliest publicisations of Stravinsky's approach (notably in a 1927 article by Lourié).[75] Whatever the case, in *Palestrina* Samson explicitly likens the Roman master's text-setting to that expounded in Stravinsky's *Chroniques*[76] (which itself invokes the old polyphonists, allegedly obliged to avoid sentimentality and individualism in the service of the church),[77] and his more developed exposition of it in this book is unmistakably Stravinskian.

2. Discourse about different kinds of 'time' manifested in music. References to 'psychological time', 'ontological time', 'musical time' and the like, all derived in one way or another from Bergson, abound in musicography of the interwar period, especially in connection to Stravinsky – in articles by Lourié (1925–28), in the *Chroniques* and an important review of it by Gilbert Gadoffre (pseudonym Gilbert Brangues, 1936) and in a 1939 essay by Pierre Suvchinsky that found its way into Stravinsky's *Poétique musicale*.[78] Samson joins this tradition in two footnotes in *Palestrina*, which assert that early and modern music 'est une qualification du temps', by contrast to Romantic music which expresses or elicits emotion.[79] So with Samson, at least, this kind of temporal mumbo-jumbo simply stands in for formalism ('Music qualifies time' meaning that music gives time a form, that it is form in motion), as seen in his elaboration of the theory for Guy de Lioncourt:

> For me, music is a qualification of time. To my sense this definition is broader and truer than the old definition of music as an expression of sentiments. […] [M]usic qualifies real time. I mean that this time that would otherwise be 'empty' is now 'filled' with something, furnished in a certain manner. And it is then, but only secondarily, that the listener is put in a certain state. Music only reaches our feelings [*état sensible*] by qualifying time.[80]

Samson refers to no sources here or in the *Palestrina* footnotes, but he could hardly have come up with such notions all on his own; he was probably echoing one or more of the sources mentioned above (though when writing *Palestrina* he could not yet have known Suvchinsky's article, the most developed of them).

3. The conception of the creative artist as an *ouvrier*.[81] This surely goes back to Maritain's *Art et scholastique*, whence it had diffused widely by the 1930s. Samson cites the *Chroniques de ma vie* as concurring with Maritain on this point;[82] did he realise that Stravinsky and his assistants were in fact borrowing from Maritain?

4. The conception of the performer as a mere executant. Samson approvingly cites this point in the *Chroniques*,[83] but by 1935 had certainly already arrived at similar views, notably under the influence of Moissenet and Besse.

CLOSING REMARKS

Samson's archive offers a more complete picture of his thought than do his publications alone. It reveals not so much what Samson thought on matters not treated in the public writings (which are fairly extensive and already cover most of his interests thoroughly) as insight into the formation of his ideas, his reasons for writing. Especially, his notes and drafts refer much more openly to sources tidied away in the published texts, betraying what he was reading and, more importantly, what he was doing with it. One can see him trying out ideas, adding, changing, retracting passages. Also, the unpublished writings often express the same ideas as the published ones but in rougher terms that, ironically, are easier to grasp.

The analysis of Samson's thought illustrates the discursive complexity of interwar objectivism, a mixture of diverse sources and intellectual traditions, including traditional liturgical austerity, traditional classicism and formalism, the 1920s *rappel à l'ordre*, the collectivism of the liturgical movement, neo-Thomism, the classicism of the *NRF* group and that of Action française, the ideas of the

musicians associated with neoclassicism and beliefs about early music. Some of these currents of thought had been around for a long time, and others arose from specific developments after the world war. The whole thrust of what Samson has to say, and even his increasingly punchy style (it is revealing to listen to his voice, which you can do at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K57aRRMIMpI [last accessed 26 May 2025]), is self-consciously a product of the hard-bitten world that had emerged from the trenches, where the musician spent four years, shorn of the old mustachios and frippery and curlicues. Yet at the same time, in substance, his 'souci de détachement, de dépouillement, d'objectivité' prolongs discourses on religious art that go back a century to the likes of Dom Guéranger. The line between what is Catholic and what is typically 'modern' for the time can be hard to draw, and I find this interesting.

The case of Samson also reminds us that objectivism – or, at any rate, debate over emotion, expression, subjectivity and personality – flourished in musical discourse right through the 1930s. Certainly, a reaction had set in by about 1927 as figures such as Lourié and Maritain began to nuance their positions and distance themselves from the provocative declarations associated with a stridently mechanical neoclassicism.[84] And, certainly, the common historiographical narrative of a turn towards a 'new humanism' in the 1930s has truth to it. Still, the objectivism of the Stravinsky *Chroniques* and *Poétique musicale* represents more than just an isolated holdout: for many other writers in the 1930s, Samson not least among them, 'Romanticism', 'sentimentalism' and 'subjectivism' remained the great enemy, a bugbear to be overcome with more sophisticated conceptions of expression. Moreover, insofar as it elevated 'collective' sentiments over self-expression, the typically 1930s preoccupation with mass appeal through monumental simplicity, at first glance inimical to dry Neoclassical irony, could at least give a second wind to Neoclassical impersonality.

Notes

1 See Sylvain Caron and Michel Duchesneau, 'La musique et la foi entre les deux guerres. Vers un nouvel humanisme ?', in: *Musique, art et religion dans l'entre-deux-guerres*, ed. by Sylvain Caron and Michel Duchesneau, Lyon: Symétrie, 2009, pp. 1–2.

2 On these particular examples see respectively Samuel N. Dorf, 'Erik Satie's *Socrate* (1918), Myths of Marsyas, and *Un style dépouillé*', *Current Musicology*, 98, 2014, pp. 95–119 and Carol J. Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 256–257. On Stravinsky, where to begin? See e.g. Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: A Creative Spring: Russia and France, 1882–1934*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1999 and Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works through* Mavra, vol. 2, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

3 See e.g. Isabelle Saint-Martin, *Art chrétien/art sacré. Regards du catholicisme sur l'art (France, XIXe-XXe siècle)*, Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014 and *Les Ateliers d'art sacré (1919-1947). Rêves et réalités d'une ambition collective*, ed. by Isabelle Saint-Martin and Fabienne Stahl, Rome: Campisano and Paris: Hermann, 2023.

4 See the relevant chapters in *Geschichte der katholischen Kirchenmusik*, vol. 2 *Vom Tridentinum bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. by Karl Gustav Fellerer, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1976 and *Enzyklopädie der Kirchenmusik*, Band 1 *Geschichte der Kirchenmusik*, vol. 3 *Das 19. und frühe 20. Jahrhundert: historisches Bewusstsein und neue Aufbrüche*, ed. by Wolfgang Hochstein and Christoph Krummacher, Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 2013.

5 For overviews see Edward Lippman, *A History of Western Musical Aesthetics*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992, pp. 398–414 and Albrecht Riethmüller, 'Objektivierung und Entsubjektivierung', in: *Geschichte der Musik im 20. Jahrhundert: 1925–1945*, ed. by Albrecht Riethmüller, Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 2006, pp. 26–32. On the Stravinsky declarations see e.g. Richard Taruskin, 'Did He Mean It?', *Studia musicologica*, LVI/1, 2015, pp. 91–122.

6 See e.g. Maureen A. Carr, *Multiple Masks: Neoclassicism in Stravinsky's Works on Greek Subjects*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002 and Valérie Dufour, *Stravinski et ses exégètes (1910-1940)*, Brussels: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2006.

7 For a thumbnail biography see Bernadette Lespinard, *Les passions du chœur. La musique chorale et ses pratiques en France 1800-1950*, Paris: Fayard, 2018, pp. 273–274. I have not managed to consult Vincent Morel, 'Joseph Samson (1888-1957) : un maître de chapelle à l'ombre d'une cathédrale enchantée', *mémoire de maîtrise*, Université de Bourgogne, 2006.

8 See http://patrimoine.bm-dijon.fr/pleade/ead.html?id=FR212316101_samson#!{%22content%22:[%22FR212316101_samson_e0000011%22,true,%22%22]} [last accessed 26 May 2025].

9 Both in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, département de la Musique, fonds Berthier-de Lioncourt.

10 Both in the private archive of the Alain family, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; see Aurélie Gommier-Decourt, 'Albert Alain (1880-1971), organiste et compositeur français', doctoral thesis, Université de Paris IV, 1999.

11 I extrapolate from Pascal Lécroart's presentation 'Musique et signification : autour d'un échange épistolaire entre Joseph Samson et Arthur Honegger' given at a 2007 conference on Samson (see https://calenda.org/193646) [last accessed 26 May 2025]; the author has not responded to my request for information.

12 In the Bibliothèque musicale La Grange-Fleuret, fonds Charles Kœchlin.

13 One letter survives in the Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire de Strasbourg, fonds Jacques et Raïssa Maritain.

14 Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Manuscrits, fonds Henri Ghéon.

15 Published in *Paul Claudel : correspondance musicale*, ed. by Pascal Lécroart, Geneva: Papillon, 2007.

16 See Tamara Levitz, *Modernist Mysteries:* Perséphone, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 178 (though Levitz calls him 'Jean-François Samson', the name of his son); the correspondence in the fonds Jacques Copeau (Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Arts du spectacle) awaits full cataloguing.

17 *Ibid*. Cf. letter from Joseph Samson to Guy de Lioncourt, 29 Feb. 1940, Bibliothèque nationale de France, VM FONDS 178 BDL (NLA 451): 'Je ne connais pas Stravinsky personnellement.'

18 See Samson's letter to Charles Kœchlin numbered '14' (c. 1929), Bibliothèque musicale La Grange-Fleuret, B 444. Samson's correspondence with Cœuroy appears not to survive.

19 See Philippe Gumplowicz, *Les résonances de l'ombre. Musique et identités, de Wagner au jazz*, Paris: Fayard, 2012, pp. 189–191.

20 See esp. Jean-Yves Hameline, 'De l'usage de l'adjectif *liturgique*, ou les Éléments d'une grammaire de l'assentiment cultuel', *La Maison-Dieu*, 222, 2000, pp. 79–106.

21 See esp. Joseph Samson, 'Les données liturgiques et la composition musicale', *La Vie spirituelle*, XLII/3, March 1935, pp. 154–170 (reprised as the introduction to *Palestrina*).

22 'le musicien *monte* une messe comme on monte une maison en béton ; dans un cadre imposé, il coule sa musique.' Joseph Samson, 'Réflexions sur les messes polyphoniques – II', *La Petite Maîtrise*, 228, May 1932, p. 38. Cf. Id., *Palestrina, ou la Poésie de l'exactitude*, Geneva: Henn, 1939, p. 205.

23 'il construit – qu'on nous passe l'expression – des *machines* qui trouvent leur essentielle beauté dans leur exacte et harmonieuse conformité à l'objet poursuivi.' Samson, *Palestrina*, p. 204.

24 Samson, *Palestrina*, p. 201.

25 Samson, *Palestrina*, p. 17.

26 See esp. Samson, *Palestrina*, pp. 15, 21–23, 112–115.

27 Samson, *Palestrina*, pp. 98–99.

28 Samson, *Palestrina*, p. 23.

29 See esp. Samson, *Palestrina*, Ch. V ('Texte et musique').

30 'une sorte de donnée purement phonétique' (Samson, *Palestrina*, p. 73).

31 Samson, *Palestrina*, pp. 70–71.

32 '[Palestrina] n'a pas à presser le mot pour en faire jaillir une pulpe émotionnelle' (Samson, *Palestrina*, p. 84; see also p. 106).

33 Joseph Samson, 'Art choral liturgique – Notes éparses', Bibliothèque municipale de Dijon, MS 3069/9, p. 1.

34 'le problème que soulève l'expression dans la musique pure' (Samson, *Palestrina*, p. 202).

35 'telle page de Bach chante la mélancolie, telle autre la joie ; mais aucune ne m'entretient de la joie ou de la tristesse de Bach ce jour-là' (Joseph Samson, *À l'ombre de la cathédrale enchantée*, as quoted in the review by Robert Jardillier, *La Revue musicale*, X/10, Nov. 1929, p. 79). I have not been able to consult this pamphlet beyond two excerpts published in *La Tribune de Saint-Gervais*.

36 Samson, *Palestrina*, p. 17.

37 'une œuvre d'art est expressive dès qu'elle exprime quelque chose, une forme, un geste, une attitude, une pensée aussi bien qu'un sentiment' (Samson, *Palestrina*, p. 108).

38 'expression […] d'ordre essentiellement, fondamentalement musical' (Samson, 'Réflexions sur les messes polyphoniques', p. 38).

39 See e.g. Samson, *Palestrina*, p. 202.

40 'De même qu'un jeu de couleurs par soi-même est expressif […] il existe une expression musicale fondée sur le seul jeu des éléments propres à la musique.' (Samson, *Palestrina*, p. 108).

41 Samson, *Palestrina*, p. 201, probably referring to Brémond's *La Poésie pure* and Mauclair's *Eugène Delacroix*.

42 'la joie que ces œuvres peuvent offrir à l'esprit'; 'la joie qu'elles dispensent à l'intelligence'; 'les mouvements affectifs'; 'l'ébranlement nerveux' (Samson, 'Réflexions sur les messes polyphoniques', p. 39. Cf. Samson, *Palestrina*, pp. 107–108).

43 'les ardeurs de la vie affective, si elles pénètrent normalement la prière liturgique, doivent toujours garder dans l'expression une juste mesure. Par là, l'art liturgique prend analogie avec ce que nous avons coutume d'appeler art classique' (Samson, *Palestrina*, p. 18).

44 'L'expression du moi, l'atteinte des âmes même ne sont plus pour moi que des résultats. Des résultats indépendants de nous. Elles ne peuvent être le but cherché. L'artiste a intérêt – pour la pureté de son art – à n'y pas songer' (letter from Samson to Guy de Lioncourt, 26 March 1940, Bibliothèque nationale de France, VM FONDS 178 BDL [NLA 451]).

45 'Elle ne cherchera pas à agir sur les auditeurs ; elle cherchera plutôt à être telle que chacun d'eux puisse, ~~incité~~ grâce à elle, agir sur soi[-]même' (Joseph Samson, 'Notes de lecture diverses', Bibliothèque municipale de Dijon, MS 3080/7 [n.p.]).

46 For an overview see Jeanice Brooks, *The Musical Work of Nadia Boulanger: Performing Past and Future between the Wars*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 77–81.

47 See esp. Samson, *Palestrina*, Ch. VIII ('L'exécution').

48 Samson, *Palestrina*, p. 122.

49 'Parti – comme la plupart – d'une conception très étroite : l'art expression exclusive du moi, lentement je me suis acheminé, sous des influences très diverses (notamment Maritain, Guardini, la liturgie) vers une conception détachée' (letter from Samson to Lioncourt, 26 March 1940).

50 See e.g. Joseph Samson, *Messe 'Orbis factor', pour trois voix égales*, Paris: Bureau d'édition de la Schola Cantorum, [1926].

51 'deux siècles de subjectivisme ont à tel point oblitéré chez nous la notion d'ordre qui établit la hiérarchie des valeurs, la maintient, et soumet l'art à sa fonction' (Samson, 'Les données liturgiques et la composition musicale', p. 155–56).

52 See e.g. Samson, *Palestrina*, p. 204.

53 See Antoine Compagnon, *Les antimodernes, de Joseph de Maistre à Roland Barthes*, Paris: Gallimard, 2005, p. 306. For a contemporary viewpoint see *Le procès de l'intelligence*, [ed. by Paul Archambault], Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1922.

54 For an overview see Katharine Ellis, *Interpreting the Musical Past: Early Music in Nineteenth-Century France*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, Ch. 6.

55 See especially Samson's manuscript 'II. Le pastiche' [1931?], Bibliothèque municipale de Dijon, MS 3071/2.

56 The best overview is Winfried Kirsch (ed.), *Palestrina und die Kirchenmusik im 19. Jahrhundert*, vol. 2 *Das Palestrina-Bild und die Idee der "Wahren Kirchenmusik" im Schrifttum von ca. 1750 bis um 1900: eine kommentierte Dokumentation*, Regensburg: Bosse, 1999.

57 See esp. Maurice Emmanuel and René Moissenet, *La polyphonie sacrée*, Lyon: Janin, 1922, pp. 2–3.

58 See Gommier-Decourt, 'Albert Alain', p. 133.

59 See Saint-Martin, *Art chrétien/art sacré*; Jean-Pierre Greff, 'Art sacré en Europe, 1919-1939. Les tentatives d'un "renouveau"', in: *Un art sans frontières. L'internationalisation des arts en Europe (1900-1950)*, ed. by Gérard Monnier and José Vovelle, Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 1995, pp. 157–174; Dario Gamboni, 'De "Saint-Sulpice" à l'"art sacré". Qualification et disqualification dans le procès [*sic*] de modernisation de l'art d'église en France (1890-1960)', in: *Crises de l'image religieuse, de Nicée II à Vatican II*, ed. by Olivier Christin and Dario Gamboni, Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1999, pp. 239–262.

60 'son esthétique s'oppose à celle de la Schola et de d'Indy' (lettr from Maurice Gay evidently to Albert Trotrot-Dériot, 23 July 1932, Bibliothèque municipale de Dijon, MS 3069/2).

61 See Isabelle Saint-Martin, 'Art et liturgie : des années trente au concile Vatican II', in: *Liturgie et société. Gouverner et réformer l'Église, XIX^e^-XX^e^ siècle*, ed. by Bruno Dumons, Vincent Petit and Christian Sorel, Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2016, p. 140.

62 See Lespinard, *Les passions du chœur*, p. 274.

63 See respectively Saint-Martin, 'Art et liturgie', p. 140 and Rainer Mohrs, *Hermann Schroeder (1904-1984): Leben und Werk unter besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner Klavier- und Kammermusik*, Berlin: Merseburger, 1987, pp. 21, 34, 37.

64 See Levitz, *Modernist Mysteries*, p. 607 and Carl B. Schmitt, *Entrancing Muse: A Documented Biography of Francis Poulenc*, Hillsdale: Pendragon, [2001], p. 137. See also Klára Móricz, *In Stravinsky's Orbit: Responses to Modernism in Russian Paris*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2020, pp. 139–140.

65 His manuscript entitled 'Notes diverses ~~très~~ importantes. ~~Sur le style~~' (Bibliothèque municipale de Dijon, MS 3085/12 bears the note: 'J'écrivais ici en réserve des notes importantes avant l'envoi à M. Brillant[.]'

66 Samson mentions having studied this article in his undated letter to Kœchlin numbered '4' in Bibliothèque musicale Lagrange-Fleuret, B 444.

67 See Robert Jardillier, [review of Samson, *À l'ombre de la cathédrale enchantée*], *La Revue musicale*, X/10, Nov. 1929, p. 78: 'Sans doute aime-t-il à souligner ce qui rapproche un Moissenet de nos jeunes, ces ennemis de tout "chantage sentimental", et à retrouver dans ce sens de la valeur stricte les tendances d'un contemporain'.

68 Samson, 'Les données liturgiques et la composition musicale', p. 159. Cf. Samson, *Palestrina*, p. 16.

69 'de Rome à Montmartre ^Montparnasse^ toute notre époque est d'accord sur ce point : à bas les effets de torse !' (letter fro Samson to Lioncourt, 29 Feb. 1940).

70 'ce souci de détachement, de dépouillement, d'objectivité qui me harcelait' (letter from Samson to Lioncourt, 26 March 1940).

71 *Ibid.*

72 'le type d'un art contemporain qui pourrait servir de modèle à nos compositeurs de musique sacrée' (Joseph Samson, 'II^bis^. La musique moderne à l'église', Bibliothèque municipale de Dijon, MS 3071/3, p. 24).

73 See e.g. Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, pp. 1198–199 and Levitz, *Modernist Mysteries*, pp. 135–159.

74 See Jardillier, [review of Samson, *À l'ombre de la cathédrale enchantée*], 79: 'Il souligne à quel point la musique d'alors a été composée sans souci des paroles'.

75 See Dufour, *Stravinski et ses exégètes*, p. 97.

76 See Samson, *Palestrina*, p. 73.

77 See Igor Stravinsky [and Walter Nouvel], *Chroniques de ma vie*, vol. 1, Paris: Denoël, 1935, pp. 73–74.

78 See Viviana Cadari, 'Il tempo musicale in Stravinsky. Tratti della teoria di Maritain come sistema organizzativo dell'attitudine estetica del grande musicista', *Nuova Rivista musicale italiana*, XXV/2, 1991, pp. 247–261; Dufour, *Stravinski et ses exégètes*, pp. 103 and 220; Klára Móricz, 'The Burden of Chronos: The Genealogy of Stravinsky's Concept of Musical Time', *Kronoscope*, 22, 2022, pp. 87–112; Helen Sills, *Stravinsky, God, and Time*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022.

79 Samson, *Palestrina*, p. 204 (see also p. 140).

80 'La musique pour moi est une qualification du temps. Définition à mon sens plus large et plus vraie que la vieille définition : la musique est l'expression des sentiments. [...] la musique qualifie le temps réel. Je veux dire que ce temps qui serait "vide" est alors "rempli" de quelque chose, meublé d'une certaine manière. Et c'est alors, mais seulement secondairement, que l'auditeur est mis dans une certaine disposition. La musique n'attouche notre état sensible qu'en qualifiant le temps' (letter from Samson to Lioncourt, 29 Feb. 1940) .

81 First seen in Joseph Samson, 'À l'ombre de la cathédrale enchantée. Monseigneur R. Moissenet. I. L'homme', *La Tribune de Saint-Gervais*, XXV/2, May 1928, p. 44.

82 Samson, *Palestrina*, p. 209.

83 Samson, *Palestrina*, p. 121.

84 See e.g. Douglas Shadle, 'Messiaen's Relationship to Jacques Maritain's Musical Circle and Neo-Thomism', in: *Messiaen the Theologian*, ed. by Andrew Shenton, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2010, p. 89.