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Christian music in scripture and tradition

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Abstract. Religious music has always been man's attempt to express the relationship between the Divine and the human. Through it, human nature takes part in the love of the Holy Trinity, participating in power, in prayer and in spirit, in the immanence of God. Divine revelation is easily revealed to man through theology expressed in religious music, and man, regardless of his theological knowledge, begins to feel and live in the love of God.

Keywords. Christian music, New Testament, Patristic theology

Introduction

In human life, music is of paramount importance. Music is a revelation greater than wisdom and philosophy, said the great Beethoven, and Beaumarchais stated that where the word ends, music begins, what cannot be spoken is expressed through music. According to Plato: Music is a moral law. It gives soul to the Universe, wings of thought, impetus of imagination, ascending to all that is good, just and beautiful. It has an invisible but amazing, eternal shape. Aristotle calls it "the language of feeling." Plutarch states that: Music is not given to mankind to tickle the ear, but to bring order to our souls¹.

Music realizes the inexpressible penetration of man into divine transcendence. The concept of transcendence expresses its importance through its ability to attract the intellect in a deep research, out of the desire to express the inexpressible. The god of theology has often been called and defined by the world of philosophy in finite words, which could not comprehend the greatness of the inexpressible².

Distinguished esthetician Vischer Kostlin states: "Vocal music results from the direct and spontaneous expression of a feeling, it does not include or propose anything other than the immediate manifestation of the feeling."³

¹ Nicolae Lungu, Singing in common as a means of clarifying the true faith in B.O.R no. 1-12, November-December. year LXX, 1952 p.890

² Petrov George Daniel (2021). The concept of transcendence in philosophy and theology. Technium Social Sciences Journal, 21(1), p. 846. <https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v21i1.3832>

³ Nicolae Lungu, Singing in common as a means..., p. 891.

Holy Scripture, the Holy Fathers, and the great thinkers of the world show that music elevates man's soul to God. That is why music implicitly participates in the development of the divine cult with well-defined functions⁴.

I. Christian music in the New Testament

„Jesus Christ, the incarnated Son of God, is the essence of the theandry of the Church. This fact can only be made clear in the light of the relationship between the two natures assumed by the Saviour within the hypostatic union, as a continuity in the human realm of the relationship between the divine and human so perfectly fulfilled in Christ”⁵.

"I did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it" (Matthew V, 17). This statement made by the Savior in the Sermon on the Mount, after the nine beatitudes, is also valid for the music that was part of the mosaic cult until then. This music was taken over with a whole repertoire, processed and "fulfilled" laying the foundations of the primary Christian song.

In the Holy Gospel of Luke we see that the Nativity of the Savior in the Virgin Mary is greeted by the voice and song of the angels: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke II, 15), and on earth, as a response and proof of communion with heaven, the shepherds praised and glorified God for all they had seen (Luke II, 20).

In the Holy Gospels we see how the baby Jesus has contact with the music at the temple but also with the communities through which he passes. Later in the "Last Supper" when Christ the Savior instituted the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, we see that together with the apostles they sang praises (Mark XIV, 26). This proves that God sings, and the Savior is the first Christian singer, transferring to His Apostles and then to the early Christians, the tradition of singing psalms, praises, and prophecies, practiced in the synagogues of the Old Testament. as ways of prayer, praise, and praise⁶.

The apostles, in turn, will continue to go to the temple and to the synagogues where they participate in the worship services and practice the Jewish songs, taking from here basic liturgical elements. We see this after the ascension of the Lord when the apostles returned to Jerusalem, being in the temple at all times, praising and blessing God (Luke XXIV, 53). In the Acts of the Apostles we are told that “every day they persevered in the temple and broke bread in the house, taking food together... From this last verse result two liturgical moments: one performed at the temple, which respects the tradition of the Old Testament and the second instituted by Christ the Savior at the Last Supper, namely the Holy Eucharist commanding them: “do this in remembrance of Me” (I.uke XXII, 15). This last practice will be extended and around it will be outlined the Christian cult that will be detached from the mosaic one. The common hymn was present at these early Christian meetings of the apostles. Imprisoned, Paul and Silas "prayed and praised God in song, and those in prison listened to them" (Acts XVI, 25). In the Epistle to the Romans, the Holy Apostle Paul urges the observance of the tradition of praising God: "Therefore I will praise the Gentiles, and will sing praises to your name" (Romans 15: 9).

The Epistles of the Apostles contain countless and important references to music. The most frequent references give us data about the music of the first Christians. It is stated that music must be sung with the spirit but also with the mind (I Corinthians XIV, 15) Thus music is a language of feelings but also of the mind, the song being identified with prayer. Also in

⁴ Sebastian Barbu-Bucur The cult song in the Holy Scripture and the Holy Scripture in the Songs of the Orthodox Church in "Theological Studies" year XL no.5 September-October 1988 p.86

⁵ Petrov, George Daniel (2021). The hypostatic union – the foundation of the theandry of the Church. *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, 22(1), 804–811. <https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v22i1.4364>

⁶ Sebastian Barbu-Bucur The cult song in the Holy Scripture..., p. 87.

Corinthians, the Holy Apostle Paul states that everything related to worship (songs, teachings and revelations, etc.) must be done for the edification of the soul (Corinthians XIV, 26).

Let us not believe, however, that only the Holy Apostle Paul refers to the new music of Christians, but we can also quote from St. James the Apostle who says: , 13).

The New Testament is a foundation of Christian music through its texts and events, which have penetrated deep into the Christian consciousness. An example might be the Lord's entry into Jerusalem (Luke 19:37)⁷.

Mary's Song of the Annunciation "exalts the Lord, my soul (Luke 1: 46-55), the song of Zechariah at the birth of the long-awaited child who will become John the Baptist" blessed is the Lord God of Israel (Luke 1: 68-79) as well as Elizabeth's singing at the meeting with the chosen one to be the Mother of God "blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb" (Luke 1: 42-45), are not only musical and literary models offered by biblical characters, but also landmarks for the song practiced by Christ the Savior during earthly life, which will become part of the ninth ode to the canon, and then adds the prayer of the Righteous Simeon "now set your master's servant free" (Luke 2: 29-29). 32) They will become the first hymns of Christian congregations and sources of inspiration for other unscriptural songs.

The Christian cult is born within the mosaic, so there is a transfer of Jewish music that retains its general framework, within the Christian cult, but which has also acquired specific elements, new forms and genres, new Christian hymns.

The gospel was first preached to the Jews (Acts, 11-19), and through the Jews of the other peoples converted to Christianity the Gospels and Epistles of the Apostles will enter from the beginning into the liturgical cult transmitted to this day without much change. They will enter into the service of the Holy Liturgy and join in the divine worship the Blessings and the Lord's Prayer Our Father, considered by many hymns practiced in early Christianity (Timothy 4.6. Ephesians 5: 4, Romans 13: 11-12).

Many evangelical or epistolary texts will become widely circulated songs, such as the text of the Holy Apostle Paul addressed to his disciple Timothy: "Truly, great is the mystery of Christendom" (1 Timothy 3-16).

The public divine service of the early Christian communities during the holy apostles' night and especially Saturday night to Sunday service, thus trying to imitate the Savior Christ who instituted the Holy Eucharist in the evening at the Last Supper.

They sang hymns of divinity, read and sang passages from the Holy Scriptures. In the Acts of the Apostles (ch. IV, 24-30) we have attested the collective participation of Christians in the liturgical singing by singing grandiose hymns dedicated to the Crucified One⁸.

Like the Savior and His disciples, the early Christians were among the Jews and integrated into the synagogue forms of worship, but as the Christian teaching spread, so did the popular creation of the converted pagans. Thus, since the apostolic period, there are authors of songs such as Joseph and Nicodemus who would have made a first form of the song, "One Born" then became the Second Antiphon of the Liturgy, then appear the two doxologies, the major and minor, inspired by biblical songs⁹.

These songs add to the evangelical and apostolic ones and lead to the separation of the Christian cult from the mosaic one. As evidence of the detachment from the Mosaic cult, there are plots against Christians brought to the fore by the martyrdom of St. Archdeacon Stephen.

⁷ Breazul George, *The music of the first centuries of Christianity in the rays of light*, Bucharest, year VI, no.5, November-December 1934. p.419.

⁸ Vasile Miron, *the Orthodox Public Divine Cult from a Typically Historic Point of View*, Bucharest. 2005. p.25

⁹ Vasile Miron, *the Orthodox Public Divine Cult from a Typically Historic Point of View*, Bucharest. 2005, p. 26

This is recognized as the first doctrinal conflict of the new religion with that from which it descends and which it perfects¹⁰.

Entered the Christian cult since the earthly life of the Savior and the apostles, music remains the main means of expressing religious feelings. Along with the shaping of the features of Christian music, one can observe a deepening of the experience and the gradual elimination of the instrumental music from the cult, keeping an eminently vocal form. This is done on the basis of the principle theorized by many Holy Fathers and church writers "aut sacra sit musica, aut non sit - music will be sacred, or it will not be at all."¹¹

2. The Holy Fathers, Church Writers and Cult Music

There is a close connection between the evolution of Christian life and doctrine and that of worship music, we can list, starting with the apostolic period, different Holy Fathers, who participated in the founding of Christian teaching and the organization of Christian worship with references to worship music in the works there.

St. Ignatius Theophorus, bishop of Antioch, is the author of early Christian hymns and hymns and dies as a martyr and was thrown to the beasts in Rome in 107. He wrote several epistles, but in the Ephesians he makes a resemblance between musical harmony and that between people: "In the harmony of understanding between you, taking together the song of God, sing through Jesus Christ with one voice to the Father, that he may hear and know you by good works."¹²

Saint Clement of Alexandria is the author of the book "The Pedagogue" in which we find the text of a song of praise to Christ: "A Father directs your infants." He invokes the help of the Divinity as a true guide for young people, and the religious song, in his conception, is one of the main means of education that contributes to the formation of true beauty, namely the soul. He states that: "One of the purposes of the incarnation of the Logos was the desire to accord the symphony of the macro cosmos (the Universe) with that of the microcosm (man). The great symphony of the cosmic orchestra sought not only the general harmony of the elements, but also the song of salvation. Through his new song, the Logos made people poets, and those who listen become the living dead."¹³

St. Hippolytus wrote a commentary on the Song of Moses and two commentaries on the Psalms, which show the role of singing in the new cult.

St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, is the author of two works, *De Dominica oratione* (On the Lord's Prayer), in which he argues that prayer must represent moments of concentration and distance from all that is worldly. And in the other work *Ad Donatum* in Chapter VIII, the hierarch urges Donatus, a new member of the Christian religion, to accompany his supper with the singing of the Psalms.

St. Pachomius is the founder of the Christian monastic life, and in his work "Rules for monks and nuns" states that in the liturgical worship, only the elders of the monastery recognized for their musical qualities sing at the liturgy (rule XVII). In the same work there are data on the practice of antiphonal singing (rule XXXVIII).

Saint Athanasius the Great argues for the need for harmony between text, melody and rhythm. In his view, those who sing do good to them and to those who listen to them. In his capacity as bishop of Alexandria, he contributed to the organization of cult songs, an integral

¹⁰ Vasile Miron, *the Orthodox Public Divine Cult from a Typically Historic Point of View*, Bucharest. 2005, p. 27

¹¹ Vasile Miron, *the Orthodox Public Divine Cult from a Typically Historic Point of View*, Bucharest. 2005, p. 27

¹² Vasile Miron, *the Orthodox Public Divine Cult from a Typically Historic Point of View*, Bucharest. 2005, p. 28

¹³ Vasile Miron, *the Orthodox Public Divine Cult from a Typically Historic Point of View*, Bucharest. 2005, p. 28

part of Christian dogmatics. He is excommunicated five times for opposing Arianism. St. Athanasius is recognized as the author of several hymns related to the dogma of the Holy Trinity and the worship of the Virgin Mary and the incarnation of the Logos¹⁴.

Saint Basil the Great is the author of one of the three liturgies preserved to this day in the Orthodox cult to which he also bears his name. He is also credited with some hymns from Evhologhion-8 and Ceaslov which are presented as "works of St. Basil the Great." He also claims: "Church singing gives shine to the holidays, through it the teachings are better imprinted in people's souls."¹⁵

Saint John Chrysostom is the author of the liturgy of the same name and the most frequent in Orthodox worship. He practices and promotes antiphonal or alternative chants to oppose Aryan propaganda. St. John explains in his epistles why instrumental music was allowed among the Jews and should not be continued by Christians: "David used the lyre with lifeless strings. The church, but it uses a pound with live strings"(our vocal cords). Saint Clement of Alexandria also said: we use only one instrument, the word of love and not the old psaltery, flute, timpani and trumpets.

It is important to note that in this period of the first centuries the liturgical services, the three liturgies and their main moments were crystallized, the instrumental music was eliminated, bringing valid arguments to this day, consecrating the purely vocal and monody character of cult music, the foundations of hymnography were laid, and the main forms of singing were outlined. Many of the creations of these Christian songwriters have survived to the present day, some without essential modifications and adaptations. A basis was created for the practice of church music and for the composition of new songs following the model of those already established.

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¹⁴ Sebastian Barbu-Bucur The cult song in the Holy Scripture..., p. 87.

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