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Sacred music - the meeting between the divine and the human according to the Holy Scriptures

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Abstract. Man is by definition the creature created by God to be in communion with Him, to share in the eternity of the Creator, and sacred music has the ability to reduce the distance between God and man, raising the latter to an experience special prayer, the experience through which man speaks directly to his Creator.

Keywords. Sacred music, God, man, prayer

I. Introduction
The intimate relationship that is made between man and God through church music is often demonstrated by the word of Scripture. Although many verses from the New Testament can be analyzed, we will develop only four examples that highlight the relationship between the Uncreated and the created, when the man in various trials seeks God, then the relationship between religious music and spiritual gifts and finally, church music as a form of pure joy.

These verses highlight the very important role of sacred music in living life in Christ.

II. Sacred music and its biblical foundations
The text in Acts 16:25 highlights the relationship between the divine and the human, when the man in various sufferings seeks God through prayer and implicitly religious music. "And at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing praises to God, and those in prison were listening to him". The event of the imprisonment took place in Philippi, where Paul and Silas were preaching the gospel of Christ. Once imprisoned and beaten with rods, their sung prayer acquires another experience, they praise God, Who gives them the power of such a struggle, and on the other hand, the spontaneous character of prayer is highlighted through sacred music.

From this verse it appears that the prayer often manifested in church music draws man closer to God, being at the same time a means of preaching, for "those who were in prison listened to him" (Acts 16:25). Often the afflicted man turns his heart to God through sacred music, which has the capacity to sensitize even more, to express the state in which man is in a...
special way, and the effect can only be the glory of God, Who is asked to provide the means necessary for man's upliftment. „The personal relationship between man and the trinitarian God is developed in the ecclesiastical framework through the work of the Holy Spirit. Through this work, each believer experiences the communion based on love and obedience to God, through a lively relationship and by any means not through a mediation over an impersonal principle or idea”

At the time of prayer expressed through church music, time and place become relative. Even though they were in prison and in great distress because of the blows received, Paul and Silas, through their prayer to God, demonstrate that in the relationship between the Divine and the human, time and space are relativized, counting only living in God's love. The fulfillment of the spiritual life can be achieved only in the love of God, and this love can be reached only through deep prayer, which, manifested in sacred music, denotes the true form of living in Christ. The approach of man to God through sacred music has the effect of sharing the creature with the greatest gifts offered by God through the sacramental priesthood. „Through the sacramental priesthood instituted by the Son of God, the supreme High Priest, the people of the universal priesthood receive the Holy Sacraments, receive the grace of the living and working Holy Spirit, and thus grow as fruitful branches in the vineyard of Christ”

The example of the prayer of Paul and Silas in the dungeon of Philippi, a prayer that was not part of the order of divine worship, because a particular liturgical service was not to be performed at that time, shows that in times of hardship, the man in God's grace finds relief. only by His praise. This music expresses in the purest form the depth of the prayer of the hearts of those who are suffering, this expression being the key to approaching God and remaining human in the uncreated divine grace.

The text in James 5:13 highlights the treatment of suffering on the one hand, and the need for religious music for all who have a pure heart on the other. Thus, the Holy Apostle James says: “Is any among you afflicted? To pray. Is anyone with a good heart? Let them sing psalms” (Jacob 5:13).

One thing that needs to be mentioned is that in the Greek text the verb psallo is used, a verb that in the New Testament is synonymous with hymns and has the meaning of bringing glory to God, by singing praises. Therefore, it should not be understood that the use of psallo refers to the order of the Jewish cult. Moreover, this verb, even though it refers to the psalms, does not refer to the religious music of their singing with instruments as was the custom of the Jews.

In the New Testament the word psallo translates as "to sing," without a strict reference to the texts of the psalms. This whole verb, by equating it with hymns, eliminates the Jewish practice of playing the instruments.

The analysis of the text in James shows that prayer and singing are inextricably linked, and the worship of the Church of Christ fully expresses this idea. Thus, in public divine worship, prayers are hymns, and church music is by definition a prayer. Of course, the verse defines the individual song, but it does not limit the song to only one hypostasis, to the detriment of the

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collective song, which we see in the exhortation to pray for one another: “Confess your sins to
one another, ye are healed, for the prayer of righteousness can be great”\(^6\) (Jacob 5:16).

The third verse under analysis is the one addressed by St. Paul to the Corinthians in his
first epistle, where he says, “I will pray with the spirit, but I will also pray with the mind, I will
sing with the spirit, but I will also sing with the mind”\(^7\) (I Cor. 14, 15). And here the verb psallo
is translated by singing. The relationship between prayer and singing is inseparable, for the
mind that prays the heart sings.

In this verse the Apostle emphasizes that prayer must be intelligible to both the heart
and the sense of reason. Neither element can be ruled out. Therefore, those who claim to have
the gift of glossolalia\(^8\) and say that they offer prayers to God, but are unaware of what they say,
are in direct contradiction with this word of Scripture.

According to Pauline theology, there can be no true prayer, a prayer that highlights the
experience of life in Christ, without the joint work of reason and heart. What reason
understands, the heart must feel. "Worship in its absolute form cannot exist in the absence of
human rationality"\(^9\).

To elucidate the mystery of prayer, the Holy Apostle Paul explains, "If I pray in a
foreign language, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful"\(^10\) (I Cor. 14:14). It follows that
prayer and, implicitly, its manifestation through church music must be realized starting from
the rational part of man. The message must be understood by both the one who prays and the
one who listens, so that the state of prayer that includes all those present in the Church of God
may be exalted to the communion of grace with the Persons of the Holy Trinity.

The fact that there must be a co-operation between reason and heart for prayer to be
complete also results from the word of St. Paul which comes with clarification saying: "I will
sing with the spirit, but I will also sing with the mind." These are the most important values of
prayer. Reason provides the means of fulfilling prayer, and the heart is the way for man to
ascend to God. “A pseudo-physical change takes place in the believer; he must be aware of the
consequences of this change. When the believer is in Christ, he belongs to a new unity, within
which the merits of one member can be reflected on another, and the mind (spirit) of Christians
is (the Spirit) of Christ\(^11\).

The true worship "in spirit and in truth" of which Christ Himself speaks must be based
on man's faith in God, without which prayer remains without a recipient. St. Matthew the
Evangelist is clear in this matter by presenting in chapter 15 the word of the Son of God which
he says to the people\(^12\) (15, 7-8).

The effect of such reverence is also emphasized by the word of the Son of God, who
says, "In vain do they honor me, teaching of the commandments of men" (Matthew 15: 9).

The practice often used in the pagan world was to sing without words intelligible to
reason. This was practiced in the early days during the idol sacrifices, which is why St. Paul
\(^7\) τί οὖν ἐστι; προσεύξομαι τῷ πνεύματι, προσεύξομαι δὲ καὶ τῷ νοΐ· ψαλῶ τῷ πνεύματι, ψαλῶ δὲ καὶ τῷ νοί. (I Cor. 15, 14), cf. Αγία Γραφή, (1997). Ελληνική Βιβλική Εταιρία, Αθήνα.
\(^12\) ὑποκριταί! καλὸς προσωφήθησεν περὶ ὑμῶν Ἡσαίας λέγον· ἐγγίζει μοι λαὸς οὗτος τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν καὶ τοῖς χείλεσίν με τιμᾷ, ἢ δὲ καρδία αὐτῶν πόρρω ἀπέχει ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ· (Matei 15, 7-8), cf. Αγία Γραφή,(1997). Ελληνική Βιβλική Εταιρία, Αθήνα.
exhorts the Corinthians to say, "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry"\(^\text{13}\) (I Cor. 10:14). All pagan sacrifices were accompanied by bloody rituals aimed only at serving the devil, for the Apostle says, "Those who sacrifice to the Gentiles sacrifice to demons and not to God" (I Cor. 10:19).

From the above it follows that it is imperative that reason understand what the heart feels through prayer manifested through sacred music. For man cannot pray to something abstract, but only to a Personal God, who responds to human love with the highest love of words. When does reason not understand how it could know whether it brings praise to the One God?

If the pagan ritual was based strictly on the emotions produced using either hallucinogenic substances or all sorts of bloody manifestations whose main purpose was to sensitize man, the pagans had the impression that they were in absolute communion with the gods they worshiped. Of course, in the darkness of their minds, they could believe whatever was offered to them, but the differences between these rituals and the form of church music in the Church of Christ are immeasurable.

The antithesis between Christianity and any other kind of worship is obvious. Religious music practiced in the Church of God has no purpose to produce emotions, but to bring glory to God, and the emotions felt are not a result of the interpretation of religious music, but a result of the meeting in grace and prayer between God and man. That is why it is necessary that sacred music be intelligible to reason, like all the members of the Church, understanding it to rise through prayer "in spirit and in truth" to God.

Prayer, who does not produce any movement of reason, proves useless, because man cannot relate his person to the Persons of the Holy Trinity, a report that requires a fully conscious prayer.

Concluding the few ideas presented, we can say that the cooperation between reason and heart brings with it the deepest prayer, a prayer often manifested through sacred music in the Church of Christ. Without this cooperation the human person cannot rise to an authentic form of living, of experiencing life in Christ, for the mind must understand the words of prayer, and the heart must feel them. Only in this way is true worship of God possible, and religious music is the quintessential means of manifesting this experience in the love of the Holy Trinity.

The last text in question is also addressed to the Corinthians, where the Holy Apostle says, "When you are gathered together, each one of you has a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, a language, an interpretation: all things to the building up"\(^\text{14}\) (I Cor. 14, 26). And this text refers directly to the sacred music of the Church of Christ, which differs from the religious music of the Jewish people. By the expression "each one of you has a psalm," the apostle is not referring to the texts of the psalms of David, but to the verb psalm, which is translated in the New Testament by singing. By using this verb, St. Paul defines any type of sacred music, so without instruments, including psalms, but there is no limitation only in their singing.

This verse highlights the two forms of church music: the solo form and the collective form. Regardless of the form used in the Church of Christ, the effect is to involve the entire Christian community in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. So, even if the solo form is practiced, it is performed for the good of the whole community which, understanding the message, is absorbed in the beauty of the song and rises in the prayer of glory brought to God.

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\(^{13}\) Διόπερ, ἀγαπητοί μου, φεύγετε ἀπὸ τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας. (I Cor. 10, 14), cf. Αγία Γραφή, (1997). Ελληνική Βιβλική Εταιρία, Αθήνα.

\(^{14}\) Τί οὖν ἐστιν, ἀδελφοί; ὅταν συνέρχησθε, ἕκαστος ὑμῶν ψαλμὸν ἔχει, διδαχὴν ἔχει, γλῶσσαν ἔχει, ἀποκάλυψιν ἔχει, ἑρμηνείαν ἔχει· πάντα πρὸς οἰκοδομὴν γινέσθω. (I Cor. 14, 26), cf. Αγία Γραφή, (1997). Ελληνική Βιβλική Εταιρία, Αθήνα.
III. Sacred music according to the theology of Saint Paul

In New Testament theology, sacred music is presented in its conceptual form in two verses addressed to the Ephesians and the Colossians. These verses highlight the concept of religious music in the true Christian sense. The first of these verses is addressed to the Ephesians, to whom the Apostle says, "Speak among yourselves in psalms and hymns and in songs, praising and singing to the Lord in your hearts." (Eph. 5:19).

It follows from the theology of this verse that the concept of church music defines the Christian way of life. It is one of the means of distinguishing between Christians and the heathen world, as evidenced by the words, "Therefore I testify unto the Lord that ye walk not in the heap of the Gentiles, in the vanity of their minds." (Eph. 4:17).

If the Gentiles were to walk in the flesh, Christians must always be aware that they are living for the benefit of their neighbor in the love of God. That is why the apostle's exhortation is very clear when he says: "Walk in love, just as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, being sacrificed to God." (Eph. 5:2).

By adhering to these principles, the Christian life acquires a new meaning full of wisdom: "Take heed to yourselves, that ye walk not in the wise, but as in the wise." (Eph. 5:15). And in these verses, we see the intertwining between the rational understanding of prayer manifested through sacred music, and its implementation in everyday life. Moreover, the true experience of living in Christ and in his Church naturally presupposes the presence of religious music in the life of Christians, music through which he manifests his love for God on the one hand and the application of this love, horizontally in relations between community members.

This form of living "in the spirit" presupposes co-operation with uncreated divine grace, and the effect is to elevate man to a new way of living in the Church of Christ. Manifest selfishness often disappears, each having as its main purpose the glory of God manifested in caring for others. This concern for fellow human beings produces ontological changes in man, who through reason and feeling knows the theology of God's love and implicitly together with his fellow men in a thought bring songs of glory to the triune God in Persons.

The second verse under analysis is addressed by St. Paul to the Colossians when he says, "Learn and be wise among yourselves. Sing to God in your hearts, giving thanks to him in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Col. 3:16). And this verse highlights sacred music as a sine qua non of living the Christian life in Christ. All the old habits of pagan life are of no use in the experience of living in God's love. That is why Christians are urged by these words to teach one another with all wisdom, so that their way of life may be characterized by religious music, permanently thanking God in spiritual songs.

In other words, thanksgiving to God for all the gifts received, springs from the heart full of gratitude, and from here also spring the words of prayer and singing. Only through religious music performed in the community of believers in the Church of Christ is full
communion in prayer achieved among all members of the Church, for all-in-one thought bring glory to God. It follows that Christianity can be defined in some way by the joy of thanking God through music.

The comparative analysis of the two mentioned verses shows the following:
- Both use the imperative expressed in the words: speak and learn.
- Both define the valences of sacred music, for the speech and teaching mentioned above are performed "in psalms and praises and in spiritual songs."
- The main purpose of those presented is the praise of God through spiritual singing
- The means of its realization is through the heart.

From all this it follows that man's will and thought are active components of the sung prayer. In fact, any prayer in foreign words for a clear understanding of the one who utters them can in no way achieve its purpose. This idea is also expressed by the great Isaiah, who says, "Therefore this people drawnet nigh unto me with their mouth, and honored me with their lips; "Worship before Me is but a human ordinance learned from men"21 (Isaiah 29:13).

In other words, it is imperative that the prayer manifested through religious music be intelligible to reason, for only in this way can it reach the heart that feels to ascend by spiritual songs to the One God.

Another very important aspect that sacred music covers are that through it the true faith learns both the one who sings and the one who listens22. That is why St. Paul says, "Let all things be done" (I Cor. 14:26). Therefore, singing with the spirit and reason, as the Apostle of the Gentiles says, is perhaps the best means of learning and, implicitly, of preaching the true faith23.

Singing has been practiced in unison since the early Church. In this way all the members of the Church understood and learned the truth of the faith24. The fact that this way of singing was best suited to the preaching of the early Church results from the words of the Apostle who says, "Speak among yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs".

All this form of church music represented the unity of all in Christ, for only through unity could each active and living member of the Church be able to intervene to help others, thus caring for one another. Therefore, in the primary period of the Church the solo was not developed, the singing together, in a single spirit of the whole community being the form of manifestation of prayer.

The Apostle's command is for all to bring glory to God "in psalms, in praises, and in spiritual songs." It should be noted that the psalms of which St. Paul speaks have a double meaning. The expression sometimes refers directly to the Psalms of David, sometimes used as a general term defining sacred music. According to I Cor. 14, 26 Pauline theology highlights the term as referring to the spiritual singing in unison within the Church.

An important aspect that the two verses presented at the outset emphasize is that the praise of God is brought from the heart, for the Apostle says, "in your hearts." Religious music is not defined as a simple form of mechanical singing, but is much deeper, because it is

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inextricably linked with the feeling of the heart, and the feelings developed in the heart are based on the beliefs of the faith.

Both the Ephesians and the Colossians are urged to sing with their hearts, that is, to overcome the barrier imposed by the culture of Gnosticism and to bring praise to God by lowering reason into the heart. The main purpose of this exhortation is to preserve in holiness the praise brought to God, to keep this sensitive act in an intimate framework of communion and dialogue between man and God, thus avoiding the danger of turning sacred music into a spectacle.

**Conclusions**

Religious music does not seek the delight of those who listen to the need for a theatrical performance, nor the psychological emotions that bring a certain satisfaction to those who listen. Sacred music is the concept of pure worship of God through the human heart. This form of the "sacrifice of praise" (Hebrews 13:15) is the exact opposite of the bloody sacrifices of the Old Testament Law which proved incapable of bringing divine forgiveness. Therefore, religious music made in the heart is the purest form of sacrifice that man can make to God.

**References**