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The Historical Typology of Sacred Music of the Christian Tradition

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Abstract

Three stages can be distinguished in the history of Christian music – the early Christian, medieval and modern, each of which, with a plurality of styles, genres and forms, has internal integrity and unity. The integrity of each historical type of sacred music is based on a common understanding of the sacred as a key category of religious art. The sacred in the early Christian liturgy appears as a unity of text, music and rite in the sacrament of the Eucharist as the pinnacle of religious communication, while music aimed at conveying religious emotions was not considered an autonomous, and therefore an aesthetic object. In the medieval liturgy, the sacrament of the Eucharist as the pinnacle of religious communication is inextricably linked with aesthetic categories: solemnity, prayerfulness, concentration of liturgical music, the exaltation of liturgical texts using exclusively archaic languages, become the main markers of the sacred. In Modern Period, Protestant theology rethinks the doctrine of church sacraments, which is reflected in the liturgical practice of other Christian denominations. As a result, the syncretic unity of text, music and ritual is lost in the sacred art of the Modern Period, which leads to a transformation of the relationship between its aesthetic and sacred components. This contributed to the formation of a multiplicity of forms of liturgical music in various Christian denominations, where the verbal (Protestant tradition) or the musical-aesthetic (Catholic and Orthodox traditions) component could be priorities. The autonomization of music in worship led to the emergence of non-liturgical, quasi-sacred music, which at a new historical stage actualizes medieval genres and forms, as well as meditation as the basis of musical dramaturgy, while refusing the key category of religious art – religious communication. The characterization of the historical stages of development of Christian music will allow the reader to understand both the internal mechanisms of its external transformation in the process of evolution, and to understand the reason for the diversity of its modern forms, including the appearance of those that have lost their direct connection with worship.

Keywords: Sacred music, worship, church sacraments, Eucharist, Christian denominations, religious communication.

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Introduction

Contemporary Christian music differs significantly from baroque and especially medieval. Today in worship, primarily Protestant, in chants one can often hear the intonations of popular music, and the singing itself is accompanied by the sound of electric musical instruments. High and concentrated music, written in liturgical texts, today sounds more often in the concert hall than in the church. The discussion of which particular music is better suited for worship is contemplative or fluid, corresponding to the rhythm of modern life (adherents of one view or another express quite reasoned, though completely opposite opinions), does not bring us closer to understanding the essence of liturgical music as sacred, i. e. serving for religious communication between man and God, and also can not explain the reasons for historical evolution and the transformation of its forms. To find a commonality of typological features with a plurality of genres, forms and styles of Christian music is quite difficult. To solve this problem, we distinguish three main stages in the development of music of the Christian tradition – the early Christian, medieval and modern, and consider each of them, focusing on the sacred as the basic category of religious art.

Literature Review

In contemporary Ukrainian science, the term “sacred music” has been used quite recently, and today music for Christian worship is most often referred to as church, divine service, liturgical. Liturgical music is identified with sacred music primarily in works devoted to church monody (Yu. Yasynovs’ky (1998), N. Syrotyns’ka (2004), N. Gerasimova-Persidskaya (1994)), however today this term is often used to characterize liturgical or concert music of the 20th century, which refers to genres and forms prevailing in the Christian worship (A. Yefimenko (2005), O. Manulyak (2009), L. Parkhomenko (2009)). The legitimacy of using the term “sacred” for music, which only imitates classical forms, but does not fulfill the function of religious communication, is now a subject of discussion based on an expanded understanding of the sacred (the work of E. Durkheim (1915) and his followers). Russian researcher N. Rostova states that the sacred today is not a transcendent area, but a philosophical concept, which implies a corresponding ontology, anthropology and sociology, and for its research the anthropological, philosophical and religious studies are most fruitful, thereby shifting emphasis and translating the sacred from transcendent to the immanent plane (Rostova, 2016, p. 113–116). Today, works where the sacred is regarded as a cultural rather than transcendent phenomenon, such as, for example, the monograph of the Russian researcher S. Zenkin “The non-Divine Sacred” (Zenkin, 2012), are already not uncommon. The sacred is often considered today in the context of everyday life, as a component of the cultural life of contemporary man. It is significant that the understanding of the sacred and religious as part of everyday life of a person is characteristic not only of the Christian cultural tradition, but also of the Muslim (Yılmaz, 2014). At the same time, most art historians adhere to the traditional point of view on the sacred as an integral part of church art.

Discussion

There is negligible evidence of early Christian music, so it is extremely difficult to talk about its genres, forms and performing style. In the epistles of the Apostle Paul (Colossian 3:16, Ephesians 5: 19), genres of religious music – psalms (ψαλμοί), hymns (ὕμνοι) and spiritual songs (ὠδαί πνευματικαί) – are mentioned twice. Researchers interpret these passages differently. Russian scientist Ye. Gerzman says that there are no genre or style differences between the three definitions in the early Christian era, and this text should be understood as the apostle Paul's instruction that "psalms should be used as hymns and spiritual songs" (Gerzman, 2006, p. 426). The author argues his position by the fact that in the patristic literature only psalms are indicated as chants (Gerzman, 2006, p. 422-426). The American church music historian A. Wilson-Dickson talks about the difference between psalms and hymns, primarily linguistic ones, and also points to the songs of the first Christians contained in the texts of the New Testament (Wilson-Dickson, 2001, pp. 29-30). However, both scientists agree that early Christian music was significantly influenced by Jewish tradition: the first Christians simply adapted the genres, forms and methods of the synagogue they knew (Gerzman, 2006, p. 430, Wilson-Dickson, 2001, pp. 27-28). At the same time, it is impossible to talk about developed forms of church art, since during the period of persecution of Christians (1st – 3th centuries), its representatives were least interested in the aesthetic side of worship. At the same time, both the apologists of Christians and their enemies note the extraordinary zeal of the first followers of Christ, including at prayer meetings. Ye. Gerzman emphasizes the extraordinary piety and prayer impulse, characteristic of the Eucharistic congregations: the Christian meal became an elevated ritual in which people drew spiritual force to strengthen in the faith (Gerzman, 2006, p. 408).

The musical component of the Eucharistic ministry of the first Christians, including readings of the Holy Scriptures, prayers, sermons, chants and meals, later transformed into a Christian liturgy with ramified ritualism, is historically the first form of sacred music, where the latter, due to its syncretic nature, has become one of the components of religious communication. The sacred in the early Christian liturgy appears as a unity of *text, music and rite* in *the sacrament of the Eucharist* as the pinnacle of religious communication. The *verbal component* in the rite is not only a part of the Eucharistic sacrament, it also serves as a form of prayer for believers to God and edification of them in the Christian faith, music at the divine service, due to its specificity, is aimed at transmitting religious emotions. Note that the latter, like all church art of that time, did not focus on the aesthetic component – the songs of the first Christians were as simple as possible in form and often came down to recitation (psalmodization). The aesthetic component will become significant already in the Middle Ages, after the final formation of the canonical foundations of Christian art.

In the Middle Ages (4th – 15th centuries), church art reached its peak. At this time, its main features are being formed, among which we will single out primarily symbolism, canonicity of forms, retrospectiveness, anonymity and edification. The pinnacles of medieval art were the cathedrals and

temples where church service was performed, and church sculpture, icon painting and liturgical music became its organic part. Perfect works of art were supposed to emphasize the significance of the sacrament of the Eucharist as the pinnacle of religious communication.

The significance of the central Christian sacrament influenced the development of medieval church art, including musical art. However, let us dwell first on the verbal component, since its significance in sacred music is no less important. Medieval art is logocentric, because it is based on the Word imprinted in the Bible. God's Word is sacred by its nature, and sacredness presupposes a special tone of utterance – sublime and solemn. This point was also emphasized by the Church Fathers, among whom Basil the Great, who said that grace can only be transmitted through the use of the sacred language (Popovych, 1998, p. 106). Consequently, the sacredness of the liturgical text was emphasized with the help of aesthetic categories, as indicated by Ukrainian scientist V. Sheluto in his work, who notes the unity of the sacred and aesthetic in the Middle Ages (Sheluto, 2010, p. 24). Belarusian researcher N. Mechkovskaya interprets the phenomenon of the unity of the sacred and aesthetic as an unconventional interpretation of the word in religious texts, where the aesthetic component of the language is enhanced due to its greater sensitivity to the external, formal side of signs (Mechkovskaya, 1998, p. 45).

The solemn character of the word proclaimed at the liturgy (the sacrament of the Eucharist) brought verbal and aesthetic as close as possible, and this synthesis became one of the markers of the sacred art of the Middle Ages. Until the end of the Middle Ages, deviation from the sacred language was not thought of in liturgical practice, although such attempts were made in the late Middle Ages (liturgical hymns of the Hussites, Catholic church songs of paraliturgic mission), but at that time they still did not become a trend. Conducting services in an understandable language was a reaction to the loss of the word of its main purpose – to be understood and convey religious truth, which caused the transformation of sacred art in the Modern Period.

The sacred monody has also become a synthesis of the musical and the aesthetic. Music in the Middle Ages was conceived not only as a way of expressing religious emotions, but as a kind of theology. Ukrainian musicologist N. Gerasimova-Persydsckaya notes that church singing in the Middle Ages turned from a person to the Transcendent, like a “reverse perspective” in painting, space is organized around the saints, thereby emphasizing the priority of the Transcendent over the earthly. The music in the temple, thanks to the slow deployment, the repetition of melodic turns, the lack of focus and an emphasized reference measure, contributed to immersion in a state of contemplation by simulating time dilation, which was the main task of sacred music as part of the divine service (Gerasimova-Persydsckaya, 1994, pp. 23–27). Thus, medieval church art, including musical art, acquired forms that became classical for the expression of the sacred. Spiritual concentration, the sublime feelings of liturgical music, its introversion focus, most appropriate to prayer concentration during the fulfillment of the central church sacrament of the Eucharist, became the basis for the aestheticization of church singing.

Thus, the second stage of the development of Christian music is characterized by the correlation of the sacraments of the Eucharist as the pinnacle of religious communication with aesthetic concepts and categories: solemnity, prayerfulness, concentration of liturgical music, the sublimity of liturgical texts due to the use of archaic languages became sacred markers in medieval church art. Thus, in the *sacrament of the Eucharist* as a central Christian rite, the *verbal* and *musical* components were inextricably linked with the *aesthetic* ones, which is the specificity of medieval sacred art and distinguishes it from the early Christian and modern ones.

In the Modern and Contemporary Period (16th – 21st centuries), significant changes took place in the worldview, inspired by the anthropocentric vector of the development of the culture of the Modern Period, which caused the transformation of the sacred music of the Christian tradition. Anthropocentrism was one of the reasons for the emergence of many Protestant movements that changed the church landscape of Europe. The emergence of Protestants of various denominations (Lutherans, Anglicans, Calvinists, anti-Trinitarians, etc.) became possible due to the individual interpretation of church doctrine, which led to separation from the Roman Catholic Church. The most radical of these changes was the interpretation of the Eucharist not as a sacrament, but as a simple recollection of the Last Supper of Jesus Christ, and worship began to approach the sermon, gradually losing the spirit of sacredness as religious communication. The Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Uniate Churches preserved the Eucharist as a sacrament, but in the new historical conditions, *the unity of the word, rite and music in the sacrament of the Eucharist* is lost in the services of these churches, and each Christian denomination has focused on one or another component of the former whole, sometimes to the detriment to others.

The Roman Catholic Church has preserved the traditional doctrine of the sacraments, while the relationship between word, ritual and music has become different. In the liturgy, the Latin language, which had the status of a sacred language, continued to be used, but its function slightly changed: the preservation of Latin was not associated with the need for sublime and solemn oration, during the so-called. “Iron liturgy” (Kunzler, 2001, p. 262) the Latin language has become a way of unifying worship and a form of preserving confessional identity. As the sounding word gradually diminished its significance as a sacred marker in its aesthetic aspect, this role was taken over by music, which, from the late Middle Ages to the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) was understood not as an integral part of prayer intentions, but as “decoration of services” (Kunzler, 2001, p. 176). The “decoration” function became especially popular in the Baroque era, when religious music was required not to maintain spiritual concentration, but to maximize the impact on the feelings and emotions of the parishioner. Due to changes in the functions of music in a sacred act, its actual autonomy, it began to focus on relevant secular forms, genres and styles. At the same time, the new church style cannot be regarded as the secularization of sacred music, it is more correct to speak of a new understanding of the sacred, where the emphasis is transferred from the Transcendent to man, which appears in his prayer impulse to God. Music also became part of the confessional struggle – the beauty of worship was to promote proselytism among representatives of other faiths. Thus, the gap in the integrity of the sacred as a sacrament, where ritual, word and music once formed a unity,

led to the fact that the aesthetic component, and not the word and essence of the ritual, became a form of religious communication in the temple. In the 18th – 19th centuries in the Roman Catholic Church, attempts were made to restore contemplation to church music, but this did not solve the problem of restoring the former integrity.

Similar processes took place in the Orthodox and Uniate churches, although more slowly. They also preserved the traditional doctrine of the sacrament of the Eucharist as the pinnacle of religious communication, as well as the use of the sacred language in worship. The difference was that the sacred language did not serve as a means of unification and only partially performed the function of preserving confessional identity. The use of the sacred language in many respects continued the traditions laid down in the Middle Ages, where sublimity and solemnity were markers of the sacred, thereby transferring the medieval paradigm of the sacred to the Modern Period. One cannot but point out the fact that the Uniate Church was guided by both Catholic and Orthodox liturgical traditions. If we talk about the verbal component, then the Uniates, like the Orthodox, have preserved the sacred Church Slavonic language in their worship. As for the musical component, the situation here was somewhat different. Influenced by the theological and liturgical thought of Catholics at the Uniate service since the 17th century sounds organ and instrumental music, which was unthinkable in the Orthodox liturgy, thereby strengthening its musical and aesthetic component.

After revising the doctrine of church ordinances in the center of worship, the Protestants did not have the mystical reunion of man and God in the sacrament of the Eucharist, but the proclamation of the Word of God, so the verbal component in their worship has now become central. Since it was important for Protestants that all parishioners understand the texts of the Bible, they abandoned the sacred language as archaic. The interpretation of the role of music in the worship of Protestants depended on faith. Calvinists simplified worship as much as possible, while Lutherans and Anglicans did not refuse from its developed and aesthetically attractive forms, including musical ones. Modern Protestants (Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists) are less interested in aesthetically perfect music in worship because they focus on proclaiming and interpreting the Word of God. However, all Protestants are united in one thing: music in their services has lost the function of spiritual concentration and contemplation and has become a kind of sermon-prayer.

Note the influence of the Protestant approach in modern Catholic music, where today the liturgy is much less interested in the aesthetic component. After the Catholic worship at the Second Vatican Council is translated into national languages, it enhances the verbal component, while there is a significant decrease in the aesthetic ones. This process has less affected Orthodox and Uniate music, primarily due to its greater conservatism and the preservation of the medieval sacred paradigm in liturgical practice.

We also note the fact that the aesthetic component, important in the development of sacred music of the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, contributed to the formation of a special kind of music that retained liturgical forms, but was not intended to be performed at worship. Such

compositions were found in the 18th and 19th centuries. Among the most famous examples we will mention the “High Mass” by I. S. Bach, the “Solemn Mass” by L. Beethoven. In the 20th century extremely many such works have been written, they are distinguished by the complexity of the musical language and at the same time a prayer character, in this aspect approaching the medieval understanding of the sacred. This music incorporated the aesthetic and ethical aspect of religion, but at the same time did not serve as the subject of religious communication. Therefore, it is most correctly called quasi-sacred, even if the individual religious experience of its creator, his prayer and spiritual intention are concentrated in these works. The essence of the sacred is in religious communication, which is absent in concert music, since it is aimed at aesthetic rather than transcendent.

Thus, we note that in modern times the *unity in the sacrament of ritual, verbal and aesthetic components is disintegrating*, and from now on one of them prevails in each Christian denomination: the verbal aspect has become most significant in Protestant music, the aesthetic one has become extremely strong in Roman Catholic, later Uniate and Orthodox music, and later became the main one in non-liturgical, concert music, based on the genre system of liturgical chants prevailing in the Middle Ages. Appearance in the 20th century numerous concert masses, liturgies, requiems, all-night services, not only vocal, but also instrumental, became possible due to the strengthening of the anthropocentric vector in sacred music in Modern Period, which led to the autonomy of ritual and aesthetic. It is very significant that composers rarely turned to genres cultivated by Protestants, since the latter were formed already in Modern Period and implicitly did not contain the features of medieval sacredness in its unity of ritual, verbal and musical-aesthetic.

Results

In its development, the sacred music of the Christian tradition went through three stages. The first stage (early Christian liturgy) is characterized by the unity of text, music and rite in Christian worship, where the sacrament of the Eucharist, which is the pinnacle of religious communication, takes place. At the same time, the aesthetic side of the rite in its verbal and musical expression did not play any role in marking the sacred, since during the period of the persecution of Christians, the emphasis in worship was placed on the prayerful zeal of adherents of the new religion and their desire to know and proclaim the Word of God. The first Christians did not need the beauty of the spoken word or the aesthetically perfect music to express their faith and union with God in a sacred act of liturgy.

The second stage in the development of Christian liturgical music, dating to the Middle Ages, rethought the role of the aesthetic component in marking the sacred. The significance of the sacrament of the Eucharist as the highest manifestation of religious communication in this period presupposed the maximum solemnity and sublimity represented by external forms. Markers of the sacred in medieval church art were archaic languages, which, due to their antiquity and connection with biblical and gospel events, acquired special significance in Christian society, and a special type

of music – aesthetically perfect and at the same time most conducive to a prayer state and spiritual concentration. The verbal and musical component in the sacrament of the Eucharist turned out to be inextricably linked with the aesthetic ones, creating perfect forms of medieval sacred art, distinguished by the unity of prayer intentions and artistic forms.

The third stage in the history of Christian liturgical music dating back to the Modern and Contemporary Period is marked by the collapse of this unity and the emergence of various ways of the relationship of verbal, musical and aesthetic in the sacred space of worship and even outside it. The reason for the collapse was the rethinking of the sacrament of the Eucharist by the Protestants, which led to the transformation of external forms of worship. Protestant music, with its focus solely on the proclamation of the Word of God, strengthened the verbal component of worship at the expense of the aesthetic. The Roman Catholic tradition, preserving the medieval understanding of the sacrament, reduced the importance of verbal through the musical and aesthetic component, which, thanks to the reorientation from prayer contemplation to sensual expression from an auxiliary one, became one of the important channels of religious communication. However, from the second half of the 20th century and until today, in connection with the orientation of modern Roman Catholic worship to liturgical forms worked out by Protestants, in which the central element was the word, the aesthetic component in the Roman Catholic liturgy is gradually losing its significance. Orthodox and partly Uniate liturgical music, due to its conservatism, for a long time preserved and partially retains today the trinity of rite, text and music in its medieval sense. The aesthetic component today is most pronounced in non-liturgical, and therefore quasi-sacred music, which, focusing on the medieval type of sacred art, reproduces the forms that have developed in the Middle Ages in a new historical round, and differs from them not only in an updated musical language, but primarily in the absence of a priority component Christian worship – communication with the Transcendent.

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