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## **Popular Music in Contemporary Church Chants**

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### **Abstract**

A feature of contemporary Christian music is its stylistic pluralism. Today, the most controversy is about the possibility of using in church chants various styles of popular music, which, at first glance, are less suitable for religious communication, which requires contemplation, spiritual recollection, and concentration from a person. The transformation of church music in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century associated with globalization processes that led to an increase in interest in non-European cultures. The renewal of Christian music took the path of actualizing its ecstatic component, characteristic of Eastern culture and lost by Christianity many centuries ago. It was became the connecting link that made it possible to combine the forms and techniques tested in mass music with church tradition and contemporary church practice. A new type of liturgical music has become most sought after by Protestants, in the church services of which the central place is occupied by preaching with the proclamation of the Word of God. The rejection by the conservative part of parishioners of innovations in liturgical music gave rise to such a phenomenon as youth Christian music, which very soon went beyond the framework of the Protestant denomination and became a hallmark of the contemporary church practice of most Christian denominations. In the Catholic churches of the Western and Eastern rites, new church music is very popular, and it is rarely heard in the Roman Catholic liturgy and is never used in the Greek Catholic. Such restrictions are explained by the connection of church rites with the sacrament of the Eucharist, which requires prayer concentration, and not a dispersal of attention and spiritual relaxation. Youth Christian music is heard mainly in prayer meetings, in pilgrimages, during religious processions. The least characteristic is the style of contemporary popular music for church songs of the Orthodox Church, which is the most conservative and, when updating the repertoire, focuses on the style layer not of world pop music, but national cultural traditions.

**Keywords:** Contemporary liturgical music, Christian denominations, Religious communication, Musical style, Popular music.

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## **Introduction**

The current stage of development of Christian music is characterized by extreme stylistic diversity. In Catholic churches today you can hear the Gregorian chant, Renaissance polyphony, the music of Viennese classics and songs in pop style; in Protestant – music by J. S. Bach, Negro spirituals, chants in rock style. Orthodox church music looks less modern, in which the 20<sup>th</sup> century is represented by a song-romance. Of course, such stylistic diversity is not represented within the framework of one worship, but such a wide range of styles became possible only in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when, in the context of globalization processes, the ecumenical movement and the desire to find something in common in the Christian tradition set a trend that led to the leveling of Christian differences denominations. Therefore, despite the difference in theology and rites, in the services of various Christian denominations, the musical component today has become less confessionally expressed (with the exception, perhaps, of the Orthodox tradition) and at the same time more and more colorful in style. Of particular importance in this style conglomerate is pop music, which, through its pronounced entertainment focus, until recently, was of little use to accompany the service. Nevertheless, today, pop music, if not a leader among musical styles, is very significant among the possible stylistic options for the musical filling of Christian worship. The style of pop music gained particular importance in the Protestant denomination, however, other branches of Christianity today use it more and more often, trying to speak a musical language that is understandable to our contemporaries.

## **Literature Review**

Sacred (liturgical) music remains one of the most studied in musicology. At the same time, however, we are witnessing a paradoxical phenomenon: the most frequent subject of research is the ancient layer of church hymns, enough attention is paid today to music of the 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. As for liturgical music of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the eyes of researchers are primarily focused on quasi-sacred music, that is, one that focuses on the liturgical forms that have developed over the centuries, but is intended for concert rather than liturgical practice. We understand that, from an artistic point of view, it is concert music that is more interesting, but in the context of contemporary intonational practice, chants that sound at Christian services and perform the function of religious communication between man and God are no less significant for culture and for science. Today, few scholars turn to the theme of contemporary liturgical chants. The work of the English researcher A. Wilson-Dickson (2001), where the entire history of Christian music from its origins to the present is considered, can already be called classic. Among the problematic areas of modern worship, this book raises the question of the appropriateness of using hymns based on the style of modern pop music in worship. The problems of contemporary musical style in church practice in theological and practical perspectives are also considered in the work of the American researcher L. Dukan (2014). Among Ukrainian scholars, we will name the works of O. Klokun (2004) and O. Zosim (2007), among Russian scholars, Yu. Fidenko (2015), where contemporary church liturgical practice of various Christian denominations is considered in the context of genre-style processes. However, in these publications, the problem of using compositions based on the style of contemporary pop music as liturgical music was either not in the center of attention or was not raised at all. On the other hand, today there are works where the subject of analysis is Christian subjects in pop culture, such as, for example, the famous rock opera E. Lloyd Webber «Jesus Christ Superstar», or the use of church chants as spiritual symbols in mass works is considered culture (works by E. Germanova de Diaz (2016) and I. Lyashchenko (2010)). As for such publications, they are devoted primarily to compositions based on Christian ideas and using Christian themes and plots, but not intended for performance in worship. The use of rock

and pop music style in them does not raise questions, since these works as artifacts do not imply religious communication. In this regard, we single out the importance of the question of admissibility and expediency of using popular music styles in church chants, requiring recollection and concentration of attention.

### **Discussion**

Consider the importance of pop music style for various Christian denominations, starting the review with the Protestant denomination, since it was the Protestants who were the first to use it in worship. Recall that the reason for the transformation of sacred music in Modern Period was the collapse of the unity of its ritual, verbal, and aesthetic components (Zosim, 2019, p. 142). The most radical changes were among the Protestants, who refused to interpret the Eucharist as a sacrament, and began to interpret it as a remembrance of the Last Supper of Jesus Christ. As a result, a sermon came to the fore in the worship of Protestants, and the rite itself lost the understanding of the sacred that was in traditional Christian denominations (Zosim, 2019, p. 139).

In the Protestant worship service, the verbal component is central, and the proclamation and interpretation of the Word of God comes to the forefront, which the parishioners listen to and answer with requests, praise, and thanksgiving. Music is present in all elements of worship: it is part of preaching, reading the Bible, prayer requests, and glorifications. The task of liturgical music is to help convey to people the meaning of God's Word and church teaching through the *emotional sphere*. If in the 18<sup>th</sup> – the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the main Christian religious emotions were awe, contemplation and quiet joy, then from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a new one appears in Protestant worship, which can be described as *ecstatic*. Recall that religious ecstasy is characteristic of ancient pagan cults (for example, the ancient Greek cult of Dionysus), where a person with the help of music, usually loud and rhythmically organized, fell into a state of fury, thereby connecting with the Divine. Ecstatic elements were also present in the liturgical music of the first Christians, but contemplation began to prevail in the liturgy in the Middle Ages.

The ecstasy of music has long been unclaimed in the Christian liturgical tradition. Elements of secular music, which actively entered into liturgical music in the 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, were designed to emotionally influence parishioners with the help of rhetoric, streamlining and harmonizing the sensual sphere. The emotional sphere of liturgical music was under strict control, which corresponded to the worldview of European man. However, Christianity as a world religion gradually spread to other continents, interacting with other cultural traditions. The return of the ecstatic function of music to Christian worship took place on the American continent, namely in the religious music of African Americans (spirituals, gospels), who represented the Protestant tradition. The interaction of the Christian religion with the culture of Afro-descendants gave rise to a new type of church singing, which not only differed strikingly from European in style, but also revived the tradition of glorifying God, forgotten many centuries ago, in forms close to ecstatic. Liturgical music of black Americans, as V. Konen testifies, heard by the white population half a century before the birth of jazz (Konen, 1990, p. 40), subsequently significantly influenced not only the formation of the latter, but also other directions of popular music, for example, soul style. However, Negro spirituals neither in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, nor in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century did not affect the global liturgical musical tradition, and remained a local version of the sacred music of America.

The situation changed after the Second World War, when Christian churches became more open for interaction with the world, and new communication channels contributed to the rapid spread of new musical styles represented by rock and pop music. In an effort to preserve youth in the bosom

of church life, Protestant clergymen did not prevent the inclusion in the service of works based on the style of contemporary popular music.

Recall that the interaction of church and secular elements is characteristic of the entire history of Christian liturgical music, however, the situation in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century fundamentally different from what it was before. First, the sound content of worship has changed. If earlier the style of secular music, which was present in the church, appealed to the feelings and emotions of believers, then a new sound with a pronounced rhythmic pulsation, an ostinate repetition of melodic and rhythmic figures and the loud sound of power tools affected not only emotions and feelings, but also the whole essence of man, on its *spiritual-bodily nature*, thereby reviving the *ecstatic aspect* of musical art in sacred music. Note that the ecstasy of rock and pop music is more universal than the song dance of church music of black Americans, and therefore this type of music has become extremely widespread in the Christian world, and not only in the Protestant denomination.

Secondly, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there is such a thing as youth liturgical music. The reason for its appearance was the need to attract youth to Christian services. However, chants oriented toward the style of popular music did not suit a sufficiently large group of conservative-minded Protestants, people, as a rule, of the older generation. For a compromise between different age groups of parishioners with excellent musical tastes, on Sunday and holidays two or more services are held in Protestant churches, where traditional choral music is played on some, and contemporary on others, with the participation of an ensemble with electric instruments and drum kit. This practice is widespread today, especially in the temples of large cities. In the context of dividing the parishioners into different categories, in this case age-related, we recall that the main idea of Christian worship is the communal prayer of all believers, regardless of gender, age, social status, health status, etc. The appearance of special youth services is contrary to the main Christian idea of liturgy as a communal prayer of the whole people of God. Nevertheless, this practice exists until today and is now represented in various Christian denominations.

Let us dwell in more detail on the aspect of religious communication of the Protestant worship, which uses rock and pop music style. Recall that the secular component has always been present in religious music. Moreover, this phenomenon has been explained: over time, all secular associations of one or another church hymn will be forgotten, and therefore such borrowings are quite acceptable (Wilson-Dickson, 2001, p. 383). The style of opera music was fundamental in the church services of the 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and it was in the spirit of the times. Today, the current musical style is rock and pop music, so their use in worship is very logical. However, in this case we are not talking about the style of music itself, but about its intentional orientation. Sacred music of the Middle Ages suggested recollection and inner concentration, in the 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries it aroused appropriate religious emotions among the parishioners and stimulated spiritual experiences. The ecstatic orientation of contemporary liturgical music presupposes, first of all, an emotional-bodily reaction, which contributes not to concentration, but to emancipation. Recall that emancipation is one of the features of mass art, and in this it differs significantly from both secular elitist art and the traditional church art. Therefore, mass music has never been used in worship before, since it was believed that it was not suitable for religious communication: listening to the Word of God at the liturgy required a person to concentrate and deepen his inner, rather than scatter attention. Nevertheless, today Protestant music widely uses various styles of popular music in its liturgical chants. In this context, it is necessary to answer the question of how much music, directions for emancipation, is suitable for religious communication. In world practice, rock music and religion have been actively interacting for decades. A. McDowell notes a particular type of religiosity of contemporary American youth who has become disillusioned with the

church as a social institution and is looking for God outside of it, including at Christian Hardcore punk rock concerts (McDowell, 2017). Christian Hardcore and Muslim “Taqwacore” (from the Arabic word Taqwa, meaning “God consciousness”) in America have become a form of youth protest against the conservatism of their own religion, as well as a way of statement their religious views in a punk environment (McDowell, 2014). Young people, as the most active part of society, are characterized by radical views on social institutions, including religious ones. The appeal to rock music as a protest against traditional forms of religious worship inspired the emergence of a new type of religious communication, where temple service is no longer mandatory. However, since religious rock is a youth subculture, although quite significant, it could not significantly affect the traditional forms of worship, in the same, time the musical preferences of the youth contributed to the stylistic renewal of sacred music.

From the point of view of Protestant theological thought, using in worship music that does not concentrate, but liberates, is quite acceptable. For Protestants who renounced the sacrament of the Eucharist, sermon as a proclamation of the Word of God became the central point of worship. This proclamation in its musical expression could have different forms: once it was simple songs that were first sung by Protestants at the dawn of the Reformation, later it could have been more complex music compositions intended for performance by professionals. Long and complex theological constructions saturated with symbolism and allegory, as was the case with J. S. Bach, are no longer relevant for the texts of Protestant liturgical chants. The texts of contemporary Protestant chants are short phrases and sentences of moral and edifying content that are «imprinted» in memory and stored there for a long time. In this context, music that performs a mnemonic function, acting not only on the feelings, but on the whole nature of a person, can be considered as such that serves religious communication. It should be noted that the forms of communication in contemporary worship and during mass performances by popular artists primarily rock performers today are largely similar: in both cases it is a matter of collective actions of a ritual nature, although the content and purpose of the rituals are very different: sacred music, unlike popular, aimed at transcendental reality. Recall that the main component in Protestant liturgical chants is the word, and music serves only as a means of its proclamation, therefore contemporary Protestant liturgical music, using the style and specific techniques of rock, serves as a form of reporting the Word of God. In this context, we note that the concerts of Christian rock groups, which include the popular Ukrainian bands «Holy Blood», «Mission 3.16», «Evroklidion», are, in principle, very close to the Protestant service both in form and in essence, since the chants in them perform the same function – the glorification of God through the preaching of his Word. Thus, religious communication is present at rock concerts of Christian bands, which in many aspects are not much different from modern youth Protestant services.

In addition to rock music, Protestants no less often turn to the style of pop music. Recall that rock and pop music are largely close: rock grew out of popular music; both directions appeal to a mass audience and are dependent on the laws of commerce; common are musical forms, instruments and means of expression. However, at the same time, rock is a rebellious art, real, serious, while pop music is distinguished by conformism, artificiality, and entertaining character (Syrov, 2008, pp. 36–40). Unlike ideological rock, which carries messages to listeners that are somewhat comparable to religious ones, pop music is almost always aimed at entertainment and helps to relax, and, therefore, is less suitable for religious communication. However, there are components in it that help fulfill this communication role. If we talk about chants in the soul style and pop ballads, then they are a contemporary version of meditative music and contribute to religious contemplation; dance compositions is a somewhat simplified version of ecstatic music, in which physicality is involved. As in rock music, in these compositions the main function is played by the text, which contains the main message of the chant.

In the historical aspect, it is interesting that dance in religious music became relevant only in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and therefore there are no Protestant chants in the rhythms of tango, foxtrot, cha-cha-cha, but there is a lot of church music in the style of disco, reggae etc. There are known attempts to use electronic music, hip-hop, rave, and techno styles at divine services (Wilson-Dickson, 2001, p. 382), but these areas of popular music were not fixed in church services. Rock and pop have become contemporary universal styles of Protestant music for young people.

Let's note one more interesting moment. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were no cases when sacred music became secular, while many popular secular compositions, having received a new text, became part of the church musical tradition, as mentioned earlier. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century we see the opposite picture: church chants, especially spirituals and gospels, leave the temple and sound at concerts. First of all, we note the famous performance of the spiritual «Go down, Moses» by Louis Armstrong, which became the visiting card of this famous jazz musician. Thus, the chants that were previously performed in the temple, in the works of jazz performers, acquired a new, completely secular sound, and became part of popular music, which had never been before.

As a result, we note that contemporary Protestant music, referring to popular musical styles, significantly updated and rethought the concept of religious communication, returning to it the ecstatic aspect lost in Christianity. In the liturgical chants of modern Protestants, in the center is the verbal component, which today is more simplified and adapted for understanding by the masses, and music based on rock and pop style performs a mnemonic function, helping to capture the meaning of words in the memory of believers.

It would be wrong to talk about contemporary liturgical music, relying only on Protestant church practice. Roman Catholic music today also largely focuses on the contemporary style of chants, relevant for Protestants. At the same time, the differences between the Catholic and Protestant traditions are quite significant: the first is regulated by the documents of the Councils, where there is a sufficiently clear one indicated regarding the types of music acceptable in the liturgy. Thus, the ideal of Roman Catholic liturgical music is Gregorian chant, but not one type of church music is forbidden if it does not contradict the spirit of the liturgy and promotes the active participation of parishioners in it (Kunzler, 2001, p. 181). Consequently, formally there are no prohibitions on this or that musical style, as well as on musical instruments that can sound at the liturgy, however, in Roman Catholic churches, music in pop style is practically not used in worship, although outside the framework of the liturgy it is quite valid.

The reason for the cautious attitude to contemporary pop styles in Catholic liturgical music lies in the understanding of the liturgy, where the rite is not just the proclamation of the Word of God, but the celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist. Despite the fact that in Modern Period the unity of the ritual, verbal and aesthetic components of sacred music disintegrated, it was the preservation of the sacrament of the Eucharist that did not completely level out the specificity of the Catholic rite, as well as making pop music one of its priorities. At the same time, styles of mass music are quite widely represented in Catholic church practice. Note the fact that many Catholics of this kind borrowed from Protestants, having got acquainted with contemporary liturgical music at ecumenical meetings. However, these chants were not included in the liturgical, and primarily because of the musical style, and not the dogmatic difference in the texts. How did these chants manage to gain a foothold in the Catholic repertoire and what status do they have? Recall that in traditional Christian Churches (Orthodox, Catholic), in addition to liturgical, there are paraliturgical and extraliturgical rites and chants (such a division is possible only if the ritual involves the sacrament of the Eucharist). At the liturgy in the Catholic church, chants using styles of contemporary popular music are not welcome, as they do

not contribute to the concentration necessary for experiencing the sacrament of the Eucharist. However, in the music of paraliturgical and extraliturgical rites (prayers, pilgrimages, etc.), pop style is quite acceptable, especially at youth meetings, which, following Protestant meetings, have become an integral part of contemporary Catholic church life. Young people eagerly sing contemporary religious songs in prayer meetings, in pilgrimages, i.e., in pious practices that are not related to the sacrament of the Eucharist. However, in youth church services (as a rule, outside the church) today one can hear chants in the pop style performed with an acoustic guitar, although this contradicts the status of the liturgy as a service where the sacrament of the Eucharist is celebrated.

The difference between Catholic and Protestant youth services is also that in Catholic churches in the liturgy no rock or pop band are used, as in Protestant ones, and we can only talk about the *contemporary musical style* of liturgical chants, and not about the complete reconstruction in the church of sound similar to a rock or pop concert. However, in presentation recordings, such as, for example, in the author's album of the Ukrainian church composer and Catholic priest Oleg Sartakov «Exodus» (2000), created on the basis of Holy Scriptures describing the Gospel events according to the secrets of the rosary – a popular Catholic prayer, the sound is fully oriented towards sound pop or rock band. In terms of structure, the «Exodus» album can be compared to the conceptual albums of rock musicians such as «Pet Sounds» («The Beach Boys»), «Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band» («The Beatles»), «The Dark Side of the Moon» and «The Wall» («Pink Floyd»). However, in terms of style, «Exodus» is a musical eclecticism, where you can hear the rhythms of disco, riffs of rock music and allusions to Baroque music.

Recording discs with music of religious content is a vital necessity in the contemporary world, since most parishioners do not have a musical education and do not know the notes, and therefore new chants are adopted by ear. It is for this that such albums are created that are primarily of an exploratory nature. As a rule, the level of arrangements, vocals, recordings, and sometimes even the music of religious songs in pop style is rather mediocre, however, given the applied nature of such albums, they generally fulfill their function. For those parishioners who know notes, collections of contemporary chants are published, which contain text and a melody indicating harmony chords. We also note the fact that in countries where Catholicism is the main Christian denomination, there is a tradition of structuring songbooks, where the entire body of songs is divided into two parts: the first contains traditional chants used in the liturgy, the second contains modern youth songs in pop style. Ukrainian Greek Catholics adhere to this practice, however, in Ukrainian Roman Catholic publications, unfortunately, the nature of music, and, therefore, the status of chants, is not taken into account when structuring.

Greek Catholics in their liturgical practice maintain the Byzantine rite, as for paraliturgical chants, they are guided by the Catholic tradition. That is why today in the Greek Catholic Church, youth songs, based on the style of pop music, have spread. Unlike Roman Catholics, they never sound at the service: indeed, it is hard enough to imagine that the texts of medieval church hymnography were voiced in the style of pop music. However, in pilgrimages and other pious practices for youth, songs in a contemporary style are used quite widely.

The distinction between liturgical, paraliturgical and extraliturgical music among Greek Catholics caused the collection of songs to clearly separate classical church songs from modern ones, as, for example, in the publication «The Lord is My Song» (Ferenc, Melnyk, & Kostecka, 2003). The first section of the publication contains church songs that have already become classic, which have long been sung at worship, while the second section contains songs in a contemporary style intended for youth church meetings and other religious practices. Contemporary church chants are characterized

by dance rhythms, frequent syncopation in melodies, harmonies, widely used in popular music. However, we note a trend that has not yet been clearly identified, but can be seen in a number of church communities. Songs in pop style today are no longer as attractive as 20 years ago, because, according to the faithful of the younger generation, they do not contribute to prayer concentration. This trend can be described as a kind of reaction to the simplification of the traditional musical style of church music, but it does not generally indicate a rejection of this kind of music, which is relevant for modern youth.

The Orthodox Church is the most conservative among all Christian denominations, therefore, the style of contemporary pop music is the least relevant for her. Extraliturgical chants today use the style of song-romance of the 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, for example, the contemporary church composer Oleksandr Kalishchuk writes in this style. His author's musical style combines elements of Ukrainian folk song and urban romance. Of course, Orthodox youth are receptive to contemporary musical rhythms, including temple music, and sometimes turn to more relevant musical styles. However, such examples are single and do not fall into the field of view of researchers. The conservatism of Orthodoxy with respect to contemporary musical styles is explained by the lack of a developed paraliturgical tradition, which, within the framework of church services, made it possible to experiment in the musical sphere, which subsequently made it possible to use chants based on the style of modern pop music in church practice.

### **Results**

Contemporary church chants of various Christian denominations are distinguished by style diversity, where the style of popular music occupies a special place. It is most representative for Protestant chants, since the sacrament of the Eucharist is absent in the church services of Protestants, and the service itself is a sermon where the Word of God is proclaimed. The use of popular music styles in liturgical chants has formed a new type of religious communication, for which it is not spiritual concentration that is important, but emancipation, which returned Christian church music to the ecstatic aspect that was lost many centuries ago. The latter is close to influences tested in popular music, due to which the verbal component of Protestant chants is firmly imprinted in the minds of believers. In this context, concerts of Christian rock groups, whose theme is spiritual worship and glorification, and the Protestant church service in a contemporary style, where church chants use the vocabulary of rock music, become almost identical. Appeal to mass musical styles in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century gave rise to such a phenomenon as youth Christian music, which is heard at special services for youth, thereby transforming the main idea of Christian worship as a communal prayer of the whole people of God.

Roman Catholic church practice allows the use of chants based on popular music styles, but does not include them as liturgical, since the use of this kind of music contradicts the essence of the liturgy as a rite associated with the sacrament of the Eucharist. Youth Roman Catholic music is played mainly in prayer meetings, in pilgrimages, processions, and as an exception in youth liturgies that are served outside churches. Similarly, contemporary Christian music is used by Greek Catholics, the only difference is that the liturgical chants themselves never use the styles of popular music. Orthodox Christians, with rare exceptions, do not turn to contemporary styles in church music and prefer more traditional style orientations.

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