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## Church Music – Doxological Structure with Eucharistic Purpose

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### Abstract

The cultural provocations of our society are so immense that one may concede defeat in giving an answer to them. The reality of the culture, in our days, seems to have such a large diversity that some even talk of “the gospel of diversity” which does not need any truth. For those I have thought of making the most beautiful and illustrated presentation about Church music, this presentation not only to resume at having the respect for its beautiful listening, but also the attachment that resulted from the deep understanding of its purpose and logic. The orthodox sound structure faces the extremely serious problems of the beginning of the new millenium and the Orthodoxy needs to value its tremendous potential. The orthodox musical thesaurus represents a “musical construction” close to perfection which we have the duty to pass on and reverse to the hundreds of nations that are still waiting.

### Keywords

Musical structure, melodic body, repetitiveness, non-evolutive music, algorithm, trans-temporality, non-spectacular vocation

The need to write about this study appeared after a reaction to commentaries made by many orthodox theologians regarding missionary and pastoral work achieved in our Church. The subject concerns many young people

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who have to be prepared for a good activity in social circles. Even at the recent Congress of the Theology Faculties held in Arad two months ago, some of the distinguished speakers made references to certain aspects of this situation from Russian orthodoxy, of the protestant and neoprotestant world. The educational training of the orthodox youth in a missionary spirit is a priority for our times and especially the necessity to promote the profound values of orthodoxy even in the multitude of contemporary culture “faces”. The portrayal of these values, of the knowledge about them and particularly the used methods to promote them become very important in transmitting the orthodox ethos – affirms Fr. Prof. Dr. Vasile Stanciu. The reality of the culture in our days seems to have a diversity so immense that some talk of a “Gospel of diversity” which doesn’t need anymore any truth. This situation can confirm the existence of a deeper respect for the Church but without it being understood, (the idea is not new, it belongs to Nae Ionescu), and this truth reveals a great danger. This danger is the loss of connection between theology and culture in some way and its appearance between theology and counter-culture. In the context of such affirmations, I cannot accept just one particular respect for religious music, but I wish that it is understood by the orthodox youth who will be involved in the social activities. For those I have thought about a presentation to be as beautiful and illustrated about religious music, a presentation which doesn’t just resume on an imposed respect by its beauty of listening it, but also on feeling attached to its deep logical and purposeful understanding. In order to achieve this, I have come to the afore mentioned title: *Religious music, doxological structure with Eucharistic purpose*.

Therefore, religious music represents now, during the half of the second decade of the third millennium, a reality that can prove once more for those who wish, a meaningful value and a living testimony of the orthodox faith existent during the first two millenniums. Religious music can be looked at from many angles and can be judged in many ways. Until we can talk of the sound structure’s perspective, I would like to resume a general statement regarding religious music:

“it is a sweet relief for some – and it is hated by others,... the most hidden treasure for some – a scare and demise for others, a sure guide for some and ignored and disregarded by others, a proof of wisdom for some – repulsive by others, joy and comfort

for the firsts, left behind and accused by the latter, necessary support and pleasing hearing fragrance to God for the firsts and fundamentalist sign for latter, the miracle of thrift for the firsts and forced listening for the latter.”<sup>1</sup>

We must accept those general statements regarding religious music, it is proper to underline now some of the most beautiful characteristics acquired by it throughout time and the interrelation of these with the manifestations from the orthodox cult. Particularly, to make this in the context in which the overpowering majority of world Christianity is trying even now, after 2000 years to explain exactly what it is that exists in the chalice.

Eucharist, in its essence, represents the way and at in the same time the purpose and aim of humanity. It represents the perfection among us and the constant challenge that the human race is asked to answer to. From this perspective, the music as an accompaniment to this presents an aspect of a sound structure well contoured, which has a very solid foundation, with “stairs”, “doors” and “specific windows” and in the end, a “roof” with many domes and heights which aim towards an ascension where the descent of Him who we relate to.

The similarities between physical construction characteristics of one orthodox church and the sound structure of church tones present similarities of extrem interest and this is the reason to develop them.

Firstly one should make a reference to the time of first attempts to create the sound structure and... when, where and how,... this construction was completed. For the majority of the connoisseurs, the answer is clear, meaning that it is unanimously accepted that the process of creating orthodox songs started in the first centuries, at the same time as sound structure.

The most expressive formulae of writing about what happened during the first centuries I consider to find it with Fr. Petre Vintilescu in: “... what is called in normal circumstances bizantine church music or bizantine psalter, is not in its origina a strict product, pure and absolutely originated of Byzantium or Constantinople. Under that name we must understand a musical art that emerged from the byzantine format, in which so many

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<sup>1</sup> Mircea Buta, *Quo vadis, ecclesiastica musica în terțio millenio?*, in “Teologia”, Nr. 3-4, Arad, 1999.

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variants melted, so many repertoires of regions outside of the Constantinople's influence like: Syria, Egypt and Asia Minor.

It is enough to remember the antiphonal song brought to Constantinople by Saint John Chrysostom, which has but syrian origin; the troparion music also claims Egyptian Alexandria as home; putting aside Roman Melodul, born in Damascus and being a deacon in Syrian churches, which sung the kontakions in the church of 6th century in Constantinople, it's enough to bring to attention the hagiopolita opera, etc, to understand that at the core of byzantine song the entire oriental orthodoxy participated."<sup>2</sup>

Being the centre and the essence of the worship, the Eucharist modeled permanently and subordinated in a way, the whole "sound structure", as well as the architectural structure and the painted reality from the Church. So, – having such a solid musical base, with many "ornaments" reunited in the thesaurus area of the entire oriental orthodox and "casted" in "the foundation" of orthodox music of that time it emerged to the projection of first steps of the songs, which have taken us from level zero of the foundation to the gate of the Church's narthex.

Those steps are represented in the first songs accepted generally by the whole Christian world of the time, like: "*Smooth light* or *The Birth of our Lord Kontakion* or different *Praises* – of course some reverberated already from the Old Testament.

Having this melos in a vast geooographic area, the effective construction of the later melodic body started after five centuries, meaning the crafting and coagulation of the eight tones became accepted realities and practised in many dioceses.



<sup>2</sup> Petre Vintilescu, *Church Hymns*, București, 1936, pp. 183-184.

The tones would then be presented towards the end of the first millennium as an existent reality of the time by Saint John Damascene. It's important to mention that this "body of melodies" based the organization on the eight tones and it would form the melodic "nave" of the Church. It would suffer during the centuries different presentations, improvements or processing. Also like the diverse shapes of the physical constructions of the church, like the stylistic differences of the icons,... the religious music followed the same development in the freedom of style, with the clear flexibility imposed by its purpose, of serving the eucharistic purpose.

What is the roof of this sound structure? The answer would use the comparison between different domes and towers of the churches, in parallel with the multitude of ornaments existent or even,... why not, with the variety of choral church music of the last three centuries.



In this case, of the the great heights obtained in the beauty of choral processing, we can say categorically that those have at their foundation clear elements from the intonational essences of the eight tones. Again, it can be strongly confirmed that the sound "kneading" which exists in the orthodox church has intrinsically in it, from its base to its roof, intonational consecrated elements, which in different forms accompany and serve the Eucharisty.

A particular aspect of this sound structure is *repetition*. Evidently, this repetition has its origin in the practice of the worship. This had an important aim of updating the Body of Christ to all generations during the centuries. Naturally, the reality of the sound which accompanies this update has to contain something very special in its practice. And this *special* in church music is formed of immortal dimension which contains this repetition in the reality of the update, every time that it accompanies The Eternal One Who flows in the Holy Communion. This repetitions are in fact practises of the Eternity whilst also being "a denial of time".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Irinel Anghel, "*Esthetic contemporary orientations. Non-evolutionary music*", in "Muzica", Serie Nouă – Anul VI, Nr. 2/1995, Ed. Uniunea Compozitorilor și Muzicologilor, p. 76.

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Inside of musicology there are new models of composition called: *algorithm*, “*loop*” and *non-evolutionary* music.

As processes of composition, those are newly arrived in the musical language, but their definitions are expanded in the singers’ practises, it offers the mental understanding and “composer’s imagination” specific to them and different valence: “For example, it is understood through algorithm, to compose using clear and simple processes on musical material which is also clear and simple; the result is also clear, but not simple.”<sup>4</sup>

“The definition surprises in a marvellous way what is going on in choir after the beginners have learnt the phrasing content of the tones and what follows is to apply it on the texts of the worship books. Everything regarding the musical material seems clear, as well everything is simple and clear regarding phrasing order, but... the result is not at all simple.

As mentioned before, *repetition* is a particular aspect of the church music, a connection can be made also with a new technique used in composition, as written above, called “loop”. “The loop” can be considered an infinite line, it combines the idea of finite with infinity, a plating of the finite over the infinity; the segment is finite, but it gets repeated infinitely. From a combining point of view, there is a “permanent circular permutation”.

“When later by using the methods of finite differences... we will be able to generate periodic infinite lines with periods of long variations,... resulting that a system of modal lines is, musically and conceptually, an at least interesting phenomenon. “...a simple or complex structure – both of those, because there is complexity with simple ways,... meaning a weaving of some periodicity; some musical events succeed and overlap, each one with its own period of repetition.”<sup>5</sup> “But this repetition, repetition... and yet again repetition, can send our thoughts towards an automation idea. This automation can create different doubts if we look at it as a monotonous practice, rigid and dry.”<sup>6</sup> It’s portrayed positively in the following words: “We have no reason to fear today this idea... (automation o.n.), the modern automation has not

<sup>4</sup> Anatol Vieru, *Words About Sounds*, Cartea Românească, București, 1994, p. 68.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>6</sup> M. Buta, *Verspers Church Hymns and their intonational essence, notated by Trifon Lugojan*, Editura Universității “Aurel Vlaicu”, Arad, 2006, p. 273.

only entered in many domains of life, but we became conscious that different automatic aspects have infiltrated human activity from the oldest times. To be a “Creator” in one domain, the man automates his activity in others, freeing himself from those. Moreover, in the creating domain we cannot proceed forward without algorithm or without automating many operations; if the researcher would need to multiply constantly numbers, by doing successive countings, he would be completely immobilized.”<sup>7</sup>

“All these opinions appear to be very exciting and partially they suit the creative activity submitted by the singers during the exposure of the melos of a tone. Some of them succeed better than others to obtain a small number of melodic phrases repeated, that wanted “*variation in unity*”, and to realize that balance between “the corset” of the imposed number of melodic lines and the large reality of worship texts, that have a varied number of syllables. In this perspective, I thought it was exciting to re-find some realities and concepts in the so called non-evolutionary music.

Putting aside many of the existent differences between the origin and ideology of non evolutionary music and the way it sustained its motivations, however, I considered it right to point out some situations in which some meanings with the semantic richness do intersect with the church music values”<sup>8</sup>:

1. First case is the aspiration towards eternity and the use of “*trans-temporality*” concept.<sup>9</sup>
2. The second one refers to its journey towards “*stability, permanency and essence*”, with linear aspect and foreseeable musical speech...”<sup>10</sup>
3. The third case is about “movement inside sound”, made by “transpositions of sound in many octaves, rhythmical variations on basic sound, timbre variations, intensity variations.”<sup>11</sup> The association between this type of movement with “the movement inside melodic essences” is very fine, as long as the singer benefits from “the freedom of movement” in a

<sup>7</sup> Anatol Vieru, *Words about Sounds*, Cartea Românească, București, 1994, p. 66.

<sup>8</sup> M. Buta, *Verspers Church Hymns...*, p. 274.

<sup>9</sup> Irinel Anghel, “*Orientări estetice contemporane. Muzica non-evolutivă*”, in “*Muzica*”, Serie Nouă – Anul VI, Nr. 2/1995, Ed. Uniunea Compozitorilor și Muzicologilor, p. 59.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59 și p. 74.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62 și p. 64.

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limited content by intonational structures from within the tone, but at the same time, by freedom of additives or subtractions applied to these. (Here it talks about the possibility of movement inside a chord or a structure, – exactly what is mentioned above!)

4. It is not suitable for the concert hall, its *vocation is non-spectacular*.<sup>12</sup>

“I think that all those features can complete the characteristics of the church music and it is barely accepted by “non-religious” people. This case is even more viable when those people benefit by a secular musical education, but who are familiar with listening or frequenting church services and who also didn’t have any affiliation with literature that clearly defines and deepens the purpose and role of the church singing in all its glory and beauty.”<sup>13</sup>

Conclusive ideas:

All church musical structure is a construction without human as author. Of course that some songs belong to certain professional composers, but the structure of the church’s melos, its essence and development during centuries has a categorical godly guidance. If all the musical achievements of the world have men behind them, like the famous different creation styles, different musical currents (i.e. Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Impressionistic, National Schools, Musical Serialism... etc), then we can affirm strongly that this church musical construction doesn’t have its origins in any composers or saints, not even in groups of people. The conception of “tailoring” belongs undoubtedly to a Divine intervention, which seems to have “accompanied” and “cared” during the centuries this gift given to people, who can also bring through its use the gift of their heart next to the Holy Table where The Holy One descends in the Holy Communion.

Being of godly creation, it contains some of the perfection of the God that lives. In this case, our difficulty and fantastic purpose that belongs to us, consists in proclaiming the “perfection” in a world that has as slogan

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>13</sup> M. Buta, *Verspers Church Hymns...*, p. 275.



“the relativity of the absolute” as well as promoting “the absolute of the relative”.<sup>14</sup>

From the perspective of the perfection of the orthodox musical structure, it is compulsory to have a specific strategy towards the imposed globalization and ecumenism. Despite that, during the last decades, the orthodox worshippers have participated in many ecumenical actions, from a musical point of view – it looks like we are so faraway from understanding the orthodox “scaffolding”, that we can say that we are very close to a discouraged parallelism.

Some juxtapositions of the Japanese orthodox music or British orthodox with the Indian orthodox or Finnish – highlights violently that in the “selective club of the five orthodox nations” (said by a newly convert British orthodox) it is very clear that what is found is something extremely special.

Behold, here are some of the orthodox music sound structures coming face to face with serious problems ahead of us, these are the musical provocations that we are called to answer to, these are the few options that the Orthodoxy has at this beginning of this millenium. We protect our musical and orthodox treasure, this “musical construction” close to perfection, but risking to become isolated or musical gulags of the world,... or we will know how to break the existent dikes and to transmit it and reverse it to the hundres of nations who are still waiting.

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<sup>14</sup> Christos Yannaras, *Ortodoxie și Occident*, Editura Bizantină, București, 1995, p. 73.