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Church Music from the West of the Country from the Declarations and Confessions of Some Outstanding Musical Personalities

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Abstract

The Orthodox Church carries out its mission and testifies to the revealed Truth through the various means. Singing is one of them. In Orthodoxy the communion character of singing predominates. Music is undoubtedly a gift from God. Singing began by being the companion of the word. Both through monodic, pew, and choral singing, the Orthodox believer, the Christian performer highlights the confession of faith, which has a special role and importance in Theology and in the life of the Church, with deep meanings and ecclesiological and soteriological implications.

Keywords:

confession, revealed truth, modal music, choral music, communion

I. Introduction

Through everything that the Orthodox Church does, through all the means it has at its disposal, it is obvious that it carries out a mission and at the same time confesses the saving Gospel. Singing, both monodic and choral,

is an instrument of the Church, through which it goes out into the world and testifies the Crucified and Resurrected Truth. But, before seeing what is the role of church singing in the confession of the Orthodox faith, we must first see what the terms of mission and confession mean by which the Church is present in the world.

As an eminently technical term of expression, the word “mission” comes from the Latin *missio-missionis*, which in turn comes from the verb *mitto-mittere* and means “to send”. The sent one becomes the missionary, the herald, the preacher, the one who carries on a news, a message. When we refer to the Christian mission from an Orthodox perspective, we do not bring to light, first of all, personal thoughts and initiatives, our own confessions, what we believe, but we refer to the preaching of the Gospel of Christ to all nations, to the apostolic vocation of the Church.

II. Confession of faith through music

Far from being a secondary and purely theoretical matter, the confession of faith has a purpose and an essential importance in Theology and the life of the Church, with profound soteriological and ecclesiological meanings and implications, because faith and its confession determine the essence of Christian life.

Such a confession of the Church’s faith is also done through singing, both pew and choral.

The first appearance of music in Scripture is an instrumental song related to the expression of joy. She refers to Laban, who, after reproaching Jacob for stealing the girls and the gods (idols), adds: “That if you had told me, we would have parted with joy and singing with drums and harps” (Genesis 31, 27).

The last biblical reference about music, we find in the Apocalypse, when an angel announces how the end of Babylon will mean, among other things, the fact that from then on “the voice of those who sing with the guitar or the mouth or the flute or trumpets will no longer be heard in it” (18, 22)¹.

¹ Costion NICOLESCU, in: *Orthodox Christian*, <http://www.crestinortodox.ro/editoriale/cantarea-biserica-in-preajma-70415.html>

This time the instrumental singing seems to be accompanied by the vocal one. Good understanding between people meant a foretaste of heaven, such joy accompanied by music. On the other hand, the apocalyptic times are also characterized by a cease of music, a blocking of people's symphonic articulation capacities, of their power to form a glorious choir. On the other hand, the end of the world is announced by the sound of angelic trumpets.

Music is undoubtedly a gift from God, and it would be a shame not to receive it properly. True music lifts you up and brings you down, envelops you, envelops you protectively. As such, true music (but of God) is able to lead you to God, a possible way to Him, provided it respects its constitution. Good music takes you to the most imponderable areas of spirituality. Any good, well-made music has in it, by definition, a mystical component. There is a purity to good, true music. In its territory you are much less exposed in doing bad things. It produces a purification of being. In a concert hall you are worked on calming and settling the being. Normally, you leave there more available to others, more capable of generous decisions, in a word, better. Of course, this is not a rule.

Man does not normally live only within the walls of the church. As such, the only good and acceptable music is not only that which is sung in church. Just as there is a secular architecture, a secular literature, in general a secular life in all its cultural or artistic components, there is also a respectable and edifying music outside the church. Sometimes music, through its correct structural articulation, given by God through Creation, compels composers to correct productions, despite their less accomplished religious training. Simple school knowledge or only musical skills are not enough to access the essence of music.

In the Orthodox Church, the communion character of singing predominates. Through singing, the pulse of beings is more easily harmonized, brought to life together, synchronic and common. It would be ideal for those gathered in the church to form a common choir, in which those with vocal qualities would bring with them those without them, so that the joy would be totally shared. It is said that there were thousands of those who sang the responses to the Liturgy in the Saint Sophia church,

during the glorious days of Byzantium. In any case, those who sing are more guarded in the church from the wandering of their thoughts, than those who only listen to the chants. The soliloquy in church singing is the opposite of its purpose. It would lead to an affirmation of individuality in separation, not in communion. The soloist provided by the “liturgical score” is the priest. But this soloist role of the priest has not so much a musical basis as a predominantly spiritual one. Moreover, in Orthodox services, the role of the priest gives way, in terms of extent, to the pew. The choir is the expression of a real community. The choir leads the spiritual dancing, but not a playful, secular one, but a spiritual, mystical one. In the hearts of the medieval cathedrals was, like a heart, the choir, space of the essential accompaniments of a community, those in Christ.

In the Church, the faithful unite, glorifying with one heart and one voice, but still keeping their stamp, the distinctive mark of the person. Like a railing, the icon watches over the way not to go away. Instrumental music does not lead to the same companionship in spirit, those who listen to it can and end up traveling on different, perhaps even divergent, paths. The one who perfectly unites is the Word, and pure speech, sung or unsung, is His icon.

In the Orthodox Church, instrumental singing was not allowed in worship, if we do not take into account the announcing, summoning and commenting sound of the bells or the beat of the drumstick or the joyful sound of the censer’s jingle. The music of Orthodox services is exclusively vocal, accompanying the word of prayer. Why, one might ask? Especially since we still sing the verses of Psalm 150 at Praises (“Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; praise Him with the psaltery and harp. Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; praise Him with the strings and pipe. Praise Him with the tuneful cymbals; praise Him with the joyful cymbals”)². Because David the Psalmist accompanied his words with the sounds of the psalter, an instrument that also gave him the nickname. Psalitic music (only the name remains from the old instrument of the Jews, not the actual instrument) gathers you: in itself, together with the closest to you and around God.

² Costion NICOLESCU, in: *Orthodox Christian*, <http://www.crestinortodox.ro/editoriale/cantarea-biserica-in-preajma-70415.html>

Instrumental music is also allowed in the Catholic Church, but even there it appeared relatively late. The original Gregorian chant was still vocal. The first instrument admitted was the organ, which suggested the passage of the breath of the Spirit through it. Later, others were allowed, until we reached smaller or larger orchestras. In the great cathedrals this was possible without difficulty. So that, quite quickly, the Catholic religious music mostly moved from the church to the concert halls. Now it sometimes returns to churches, considered secularly like concert halls, with a privileged composition and acoustics superior to modern halls. But even in the Catholic Church, the human voice remains sovereign over instruments.

Singing began by being the companion of the word. Music was initially vocal, it accompanied the word on its way. Even if music is not reducible to words, it is ontologically attached to it. Speech is the normal state, and singing is the exceptional state. Singing interrupts speech for relatively short periods, not the other way around. In the last resort, singing remains a saying, a form of expression of more or less verbalized thoughts. Otherwise it would perhaps not be so capable of characterizing an era or an area or a community so meaningfully. In the Church for a long time the arts collaborated, competed, ran together towards the same crown of victory in Christ.

Singing accompanies life's moments of exaltatio³. The psalmist emphasizes the connection between singing and joy (Psalm 67, 4). Isaiah also talks about the singing that is done "with joy in hearts" (Isaiah 30, 29). The father, in the immense joy produced by the return of the Prodigal Son, welcomes him with "songs and games" (Luke 15, 25). As maximum joy, music leads to celebration, music also becomes an essential element of the celebration. (Isaiah 30, 29)

The exhortation of St. James "Is any of you in pain? Let him pray! Is someone with a good heart? Let him sing psalms!" (James 5, 13) seems to show that the difficult moments should rather lead to prayer, while joy has the most appropriate expression in singing. Besides, everyone can try this in their own life.

³ Radu ALEXANDRU, in: *Orthodox Christian*, <http://www.crestinortodox.ro/liturgica/cantarea/cum-tamaduieste-muzica-bisericeasca-142690.html>

The effect of music on the spiritual life of man is characteristically debated by Saint Basil the Great in his homily addressed to young people, in which he says:

“To speak generally and going as far as it is necessary, the purity of the soul includes three things: contempt for carnal pleasures, refusing to delight our eyes with the senseless jokes of buffoons, or with bodies that cause passions and not paying attention to songs that confuse the mind, since passions, the result of villainy and humiliation, are caused by this kind of music”.

On the other hand, we must make use of that music which is good in itself and which leads in its turn to good things, namely that David is said to have used to appease the madness of the king.

Saint Basil the Great recalls the episode contained in the I Kings, from which we learn that Saul was often troubled by an evil spirit. Then the king’s servants brought David, the son of Jesse, who took the harp and sang to Saul so beautifully that the evil spirit departed from him. This music, performed by David, calms man and brings him to the initial state which cannot be other than his relationship with God. We can affirm that in the fragment quoted above, Saint Basil the Great shows the importance of church music, presenting it as a means by which the human soul can be cleansed and through which it can receive healing. The spectrum of church music is quite wide, starting with the “music of the bells and bells” to those “wordless” chants, specific to psaltic music.

III. Statements and Confessions

Church music in the west of the country was a complex subject from several points of view. First, the characteristics of the geographical area must be emphasized, that is, those specific territorial coordinates without which certain conclusions about this music cannot be revealed. Any advanced ideas regarding the state and evolution of the church music of the

Romanians in these parts, must take into account that all this complexity is largely due to the geographical position of confluence in which it functioned. We have in mind here both the fact that this part of the country is the “ultimate extremity”⁴ of Orthodoxy in contact with Western Catholic culture, and the fact that this territory, in recent centuries, has known more and different administrative-political leaderships, compared to the others Romanian spaces.

The coexistence of Romanians with Hungarians, Germans and Serbs, was a reality that had to be taken into account in the assessments made of the religious music here.

Secondly, I want to highlight the rather large number of those who have qualified to write about church music from the west of the country⁵. Probably, precisely because they noticed the existing complexity and the multitude of situations created, they tried to express their opinions and opinions found out of a need to clarify and clarify this area as much as possible. In an attempt to list them further, it is impossible not to mention the most important of them at the beginning, which both by the duration and by the assessments made, proves to be the most documented and the most reference source. It is about the researcher, ethnomusicologist and Byzantinologist Gheorghe Ciobanu, who, through the affirmations of his studies, managed to remove the reservations and “opacity”⁶ that existed and hovered over church singing in these parts of the Romanians. Next, I mention here, in an order that does not take into account any criteria of value, Dr. Vasile Petrașcu, the teacher and composer Timotei Popovici, the teachers and practitioners and those who wrote down this church melody: Trifon Lugojan and Terentius Bugariu, Sabin Drăgoi, then more recently the professors: Vasile Vărădean and Nicolae Belean, and many others who in a tangential or less tangential way touched on this issue in their writings.

⁴ Mircea BUTA, *The Chants of Church Voices at Vespers and Their Intonational Essence in the Notations of Trifon Lugojan*, Cluj Napoca, 2004, p. 39.

⁵ When I say “west of the country”, I don’t mean only a strict Banat area, but also a part of Bihor and also another part up to Alba-Iulia and beyond Hunedoara. It is true that the largest part and representative region for the southwest of the country is Banat, but the characteristics of church music practiced here definitely extend far beyond its “borders”.

⁶ Mircea BUTA, *Songs of Church Voices...*, p. 40.

Therefore, one of the questions circulated about Banat church music refers to its origin, and the answer would have two main variants: the first would be that at its origin there would be “Serbian worship music, and the other that at its origins we would have the Byzantine music that came directly to us through the Serbs, Bulgarians, Russians and even Romanians from the other provinces”⁷. In arguing the first possibility, Gheorghe Ciobanu cites the statements of Timotei Popovici who writes that: “In Banat and Hungary, following the Serbian hierarchy, Serbian church singing is still in use today”⁸, and that of Terențius Bugariu who says that: “Serbs have the same songs with us because our priests were preparing in Karlovits while we were under their hierarchy”⁹ and he also writes “Church songs are common (...) for the entire Serbian Metropolitan and for the dioceses of Arad and Caransebeș of the Greco-Eastern metropolitan in Hungary”¹⁰, and also Trifon Lugojan supports the same opinion when he writes:

“We Romanians from the parts of Arad, Banat and Bihor, having been under the Serbian hierarchy for a long time, we also have the same chants as theirs, different from those of Transylvania and those from the old kingdom who have adopted the Greek ones”¹¹.

Vasile Petrașcu has the same position when he says: “Today, the Orthodox Romanians from these parts of Transylvania, Bihor and Banat, who were previously under the Serbian hierarchy, have many chants

⁷ Gheorghe CIOBANU, *Etnomusicology and Byzantinology Studies*, vol. III, Musical Publishing House, Bucharest, 1992, p. 105.

⁸ Timotei POPOVICI, *Dictionary of Music*, Sibiu, 1905, p. 101, quoted from Gheorghe CIOBANU, *Etnomusicology and Byzantinology Studies*, vol. III, p. 105.

⁹ Terențius BUGARIU, *Sentinel of Romanian Church Chants*, Timișoara, 1908, p.6, quoted from Gheorghe CIOBANU, *Studies of Ethnomusicology and Byzantinology*, vol. III, p. 105.

¹⁰ Terențius BUGARIU, *Sentinel of Romanian Church Chants*, Timișoara, 1908, p. 8, quoted from Gheorghe CIOBANU, *Studies of Ethnomusicology and Byzantinology*, vol. III, p. 105.

¹¹ Trifon LUGOJAN, *Church Songs, The 8 Voices at Vespers*, 3rd edition, vol. I, part I, Arad, 1929, p. 4, quoted from Gheorghe CIOBANU, *Studies of Ethnomusicology and Byzantinology*, p. 105.

similar to those of the Serbs...”¹² thus completing one of the variants about the origin of the Banat church music, which has lasted quite a long time, being based in particular on the argument of the historical-geographical conditions and to some extent on the “manner of singing”¹³.

The second variant regarding the ancient Byzantine origin has its supporters: Tiberiu Brediceanu, who says that “Banat music is from old times (...), it is of ancient provenance”¹⁴, and elsewhere he clearly states “the Byzantine origin of the music of all peoples of the Orthodox rit”¹⁵. Also in this sense, almost a century before, Bishop Melchizedek stated: “This old Slavonic melody, in a form closer to Greek singing and with nuances of the national song, is maintained to this day among the Serbs and Romanians from Banat and Transylvania where the Greek practice is not in use, not even known...”¹⁶.

Of course, both variants can intersect at a given moment, when the origin of Serbian church music is discussed.

In addition to these two variants regarding church music from the west of the country, due to the fact that “Banat has not preserved any musical manuscripts from the medieval period, by treating things superficially, almost any statement can be made regarding the origin of pew music (...) just as it was done”¹⁷. For example, Timotei Popovici stated that “worship music from Banat and Transylvania differs from diocese to diocese, and even from commune to commune”¹⁸, or Romeo Ghircoiașiu who

¹² Prof. Dr. Vasile PETRAȘCU, *45 Pricesne (Chinonic) for Sunday Liturgies*, Petrașcu and Ardelean Publishing House, Cluj, 1938, p. 6, quoted from Gheorghe CIOBANU, *Studies of Ethnomusicology and Byzantinology*, p.105.

¹³ Mircea BUTA, *Songs of Church Voices...*, p. 42.

¹⁴ Tiberiu BREDICEANU, *Writings*, Musical Publishing House, Bucharest, 1976, p. 177, quoted from Gheorghe CIOBANU, *Ethnomusicology and Byzantinology Studies*, vol. III, p.106.

¹⁵ Tiberiu BREDICEANU, “Histoire de la musique roumaine en Transilvanie”, in: *La Transylvanie*, Bucharest, 1938, p. 566, quoted from Gheorghe CIOBANU, *Studies in Ethnomusicology and Byzantinology*, vol. III, p.106.

¹⁶ Bishop MELCHISEDEC, “Memoir for Church Songs in Romania”, in: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, VI (1881) 1, p. 22, quoted from Gheorghe CIOBANU, *Studies in Ethnomusicology and Byzantinology*, vol. III, p.106.

¹⁷ Gheorghe CIOBANU, *Studies in Ethnomusicology and Byzantinology*, vol. III, p. 111.

¹⁸ Timotei POPOVICI, *Dictionary of Music*, p. 100, quoted from Mircea BUTA, *Cântările glasurilor bisericesti...*, p. 44

speaks of “the existence of some dialects in folk music from Banat and Transylvania”¹⁹.

Terentius Bugariu is also in the category of positions that are somewhat “extreme”²⁰, with his statement that says: “The old singing of the Eastern Church was supported in Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary, especially through monasteries, where for us Romanians, the true school was Arad (...) and Caransebes”²¹.

But these similarities and correspondences with church music from the east and south of Romania have very old and very solid arguments at the same time. Treating them in an orderly manner I found it in Fr. Dr. Nicolae Belean, who in a study entitled “The Approach of Religious Music from Banat to Byzantine Singing, through the Priests and Monks who Came to Banat from Wallachia, Moldova and Transylvania”²², convincingly exposes the reasons that led to this relationship and together development, with all the external impediments that existed. Although the author shows that “in the Banat area the first books of religious songs appeared at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century”²³, however, we cannot overlook the testimonies written and mentioned by Sebastian Barbu-Bucur in “Cultural Music of the Byzantine Tradition on the Territory of Romania in the 18th and early 19th Centuries and the Original Contribution of Local Culture” where the fragment of the Octoih from Caransebeș is emphasized, which includes the chants of voices V-VIII and is attributed to the age of the XIII-XIV centuries.

A very important first point in the relationship between church music in the west of the country and the other areas was the monastic settlements. Father Nicolae Belean talks about these, highlighting a school

¹⁹ Romeo GHIRCOIAȘIU, *Transylvanian Folk Music and Its Popular Influences*, Cluj, 1958, p.18; Gheorghe CIOBANU, *Studies in Ethnomusicology and Byzantinology*, vol. III, p.108.

²⁰ Mircea BUTA, *Songs of Church Voices...*, p. 45.

²¹ Terențius BUGARIU, *Sentinel of Romanian Church Chants*, p. 10, quoted from Gheorghe CIOBANU, *Studies in Ethnomusicology and Byzantinology*, vol. III, p.107.

²² Nicolae BELEAN, “The Approach of Religious Music from Banat to Byzantine Singing, through the Priests and Monks who Came to Banat from Wallachia, Moldova and Transylvania”, in: *Altarul Banatului*, XI (2000) 1-3, pp. 191-195.

²³ Nicolae BELEAN, “The Approach...”, p.191

of catechumens existing in the monastery of Morisena (Cenad) in 1030 “in which, among other things, young people also learned religious singing according to the models brought from Mount Athos or Constantinople”²⁴, and elsewhere he also adds the names of other monasteries such as: Bodrog, Partoș, Morava, Vărădia, Ciclova, where

“since ancient times there were schools of the time, in which, in addition to learning to write and read, manuscript calligraphers, border designers, bookbinders and painters were trained of icons and churches, but also the priests of the altars who were obliged to learn worship singing”²⁵.

The second important point regarding Banat music in its relationship with other areas is the exchange of priests. In this sense, the original documents on the basis of which concrete statements can be made are “a conscription of the parishes of Timisoara and Lipova dating from June 11, 1767”²⁶.

In addition to these concrete examples, we also find some very important findings of a general order that can give a much more suggestive global picture of the situation of priests in maintaining ties with other Romanian areas.

On the third place of the motivation for the inter-relationship of music from the west of the country with that of other areas, especially with that of Wallachia, is the circulation of cult books. We have here two examples in this sense, namely: bishop Nestorovici of Timisoara, who receives from Râmnic in 1734, nine boxes of books for the needs of the Romanian parishes and bishop Sinesie Jivanovici of Arad who corresponded with Bishop Grigorie of Râmnic and in 1752 receives from him 500 books for his diocese²⁷. In this sense, the fourth argument appears regarding

²⁴ Nicolae BELEAN, “The Approach...”, pp.191-195.

²⁵ I. SOIA-UDREA, *Marginale la istoria Banățeană*, Timișoara, 1940, p. 85, quoted from Nicolae BELEAN, “The Approach...”, pp. 148-149.

²⁶ Gheorghe COTOȘMAN, “Priests from Oltenia and Wallachia in the Parishes of Banat”, in: *Mitropolia Olteniei*, XXV (1973) 5-6, pp. 467-476, quoted from Nicolae BELEAN, “The Approach...”, p. 191.

²⁷ Mircea BUTA, *Songs of Church Voices...*, p. 49

the connection of the singing from the west of the country with the other areas, namely the activity of Naum Râmnicéanu, a great teacher, singer and with a rich activity of spreading church music. He was active not only in Wallachia, but also in Transylvania and Banat and “stayed at the Hodoş-Bodrog monastery for 7 years, then in Lipova and in the town of Căniţa in Caraş-Severin”²⁸.

A final argument of this inter-relation brought by Fr. Dr. Nicolae Belean refers to “apehemata, neanes” which appears at the beginning of a liturgical response: “Holy, Holy, Holy...” from the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great in 1946, being noted by Atanasie Lipovan²⁹. It is known that “these melodic formulas”, called by Filotei sin Agăi Jipei, “voicings after each voice” are meant to create the atmosphere of the voice, they represent intonation formulas, reminiscences of the old melodies, according to the scheme of which the new songs were created³⁰. It is interesting that these are missing from psaltic music today, although they remained in the theoretical commentaries of the 18th century and are found notated in 17th century manuscripts. As a concluding idea to these findings regarding the church singing in the west of the country, father Nicolae Belean reaches the following opinion that: “Banat religious music has more points in common with the old Byzantine music before the 18th century than with the current psalter”³¹.

Therefore, the notation of the Banat church music being the linear one, raised enough difficulties in this process of fixing it on paper and felt that it was not its own, including those who wrote it. Trifon Lugojan (because he was the first in the west) struggled with this and many times he oscillated making very big differences regarding the choice of the “armor” of the voices³². His contemporary and colleague from the guild, Atanasie Lipovan, in his turn tried to reproduce in the most accurate way possible

²⁸ Mircea BUTA, *Songs of Church Voices...*, p. 51

²⁹ Atanasie LIPOVAN, *Church Songs for All Holidays over the Year*, Tipografia Diocezană Publishing House, Arad, 1946, p.122.

³⁰ Grigore PANȚĂRU, *Notation and Echoes of Byzantine Music*, Bucharest, 1971, p. 83, quoted from Mircea BUTA, *Songs of Church Voices...*, p. 52

³¹ Nicolae BELEAN, “The Approach...”, p.195

³² Mircea BUTA, *Songs of Church Voices...*, p. 54.

the reality of church singing, partially removing the metric framework that “corseted” the Lugojan notation.

In addition to these difficulties that the two Arad people who notated the church chants struggled with, I would like to mention two more aspects that appeared much later for those who tried to capture the same songs in writing. The first refers to the book “Cântări bisericești”³³, where the collective of the three authors wanted to somehow “remove the insufficiently precise character”³⁴ from the rhythmic point of view of the previous notations using alternative measures, notated both immediately after the armor and during the chants.

IV. Conclusion

I conclude by emphasizing once again the role of the Arad collections (Trifon Lugojan and Atanasie Lipovan) which, through their perseverance and insistence, provided a solid base of reference for church melodies, being at the same time perhaps the surest direction and the best guide in penetrating the melodic essence of church songs from the west of the country.

³³ Prof. Dimitrie CUSMA, Rev. Ioan TEODOROVICI, Prof. Gheorghe DOBREANU, *Church Songs*, Mitropolia Banatului Publishing House, Timisoara, 1980.

³⁴ Mircea BUTA, *Songs of Church Voices...*, p. 55.