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TOWARD A LIVING TRADITION OF LITURGICAL MUSIC IN ORTHODOX AMERICA

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Introduction

The Orthodox Church, tracing its roots through two thousand years of Christian existence, is a relatively new presence in America. Many Orthodox are still adjusting to the fact that oceans and continents now separate church communities in America from their ancestral churches, even if certain ethnic and jurisdictional alliances remain active between them. For Orthodoxy to take hold in a new land where other forms of Christianity predominate, each new church community must establish and articulate its presence with an acute awareness of what makes the Faith uniquely and truly Orthodox. This implies an evaluation and renewed understanding, among other things, of the fundamental liturgical elements, including music, that long established Orthodox churches in other lands tend to take for granted. If the Orthodox Church is further to evolve and even to permeate the American religious landscape as a major Christian presence, thus able to offer a cogent and inviting response to the non-Orthodox as well, then comprehending, explaining, representing, and even promoting the church and its liturgy become essential ongoing activities. This is by definition the new church's missionary presence and by extension its missionary imperative.

A missionary mindset does not come automatically, however. The initial and understandable tendency is simply to lock into place and to adhere as closely as possible to the practices, customs,

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habits, and manners of liturgical expression that previous generations experienced in the mother church abroad (even if, by the way, the mother church's liturgy has evolved in the meantime). This condition helps to settle the initial unease a new Orthodox community may feel being in a new and strange land, and it creates with the mother church a psychological bond through liturgical familiarity, in which there is comfort and reassurance in the perception of continuity. And, to justify particular stylized patterns of worship transplanted to the new land, they are called traditions, against which no one wishes to argue, as some of them represent essential ritualistic elements of the faith.

Introducing English for Orthodox liturgical use, however, signals that a new church has begun to actualize its missionary imperative. For instance, in the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), English eventually began to replace Slavonic in many musical settings carried forth from the motherland. Predictably, not all in the OCA embraced the liturgical switch to English, which led to quite a bit of controversy, some of which still exists today. As well, early musical attempts at the switch often yielded dubious results. David Drillock summarizes this situation and then refers to Alexander Schmemann in the following passage:

> [Concerning the adaptation of "prior-existing music written to Greek or Slavonic texts"] The results...vary widely, depending upon methodology. Where the main concern is the preservation of the original melody, evident especially in the earliest settings of English translations made in the 1930s and 1940s, one generally finds constant repetition of words, poor phrasing, and improper or simply incorrect accentuation. ... [w]hile the original melody might be preserved, the [textual] meaning is completely obliterated. Liturgical services with settings such as this have been described by Father Alexander Schmemann as "Greek or Russian services in English, but not English services."[2]

2 David Drillock, "Liturgical Song in the Worship of the Church," *SVTQ* 41:2–3 (1997), 213. A published Schmemann quotation that echoes Drillock's reference is

Using familiar music rather than new compositions to carry the new English texts softened the blow, however, so that at least the music itself could remind the listeners of the religious-cultural experience of a foreign land to which they were emotionally linked and perhaps still primarily dedicated in their hearts. This is not to call into question the art of liturgical music transcription, for which there is undeniable historical precedent, but instead to point out one of its side effects under these conditions. Here the text and music came to represent two different things: the English text was associated with the missionary concerns of a new church realizing its permanence in a new land, and the music to which the English text was set was associated with the former church and the preservation of a religious-cultural heritage of the past. When liturgical music and text no longer coordinate and function as one unified process of expression serving liturgy in the same manner and by the same set of associative powers, it sends mixed signals into the worshipping community that can grow into a kind of liturgical schizophrenia. The juxtaposition of old and new, of course, can be theologically valid in some cases. But the tension between the missionary imperative and adherence to the liturgical practices and styles of the ethnic mother church is obviously not an argument that liturgical music should represent. Therefore, if left unaddressed by the new church, the musical sound of liturgy becomes a singular element to be associated with secondary and often polemical concerns, increasingly detached from the text it means to express and the liturgical component it means to realize. And this is a problem.

A church nevertheless that commits to the liturgical language of its host nation or region is on the missionary path, and other aspects of missionary actualization will follow. Eventually in the

as follows: "I have explained why, for as long as American Orthodoxy is only translated it is neither fully American nor fully Orthodox. It is not fully American because the literal translations of Byzantine or Russian texts ... remain odd and alien to the genius of English language, result[ing] in ... Greek or Russian services in English, but not English services." See Alexander Schmemann, "Problems of Orthodoxy in America," *SVTQ* 8:4 (1964), 181.

OCA, choirs began to sing other styles of liturgical music outside the Slavic nineteenth century sacred choral repertoire, often representing the broadening make-up of OCA worshipping communities. This brought about new compositions as well. Within the last quarter of the twentieth century, one also saw the development of a movement, or perhaps a sub-movement, to combat the predominance of Slavic nineteenth century choral music with ancient Slavic canonical chant, either in its original monophonic form or set contrapuntally in the manner of the Moscow Synodol School. One cannot help but also notice a vehement anti-western polemic running through the church at this time. That is to say, many considered the standard Slavic repertoire a symbol of western contamination (recalling the sticky issue of music's associative powers) and that something more indigenous and culturally authentic in Slavic terms needed to purify liturgy. And, to justify the strict use of canonical chant as the alternative material of liturgical music expression, it was labeled even more traditional than what was in place.

To be fair, some have proposed that canonical chant better serves the transmission and therefore the comprehension of the text it carries. This contention, however desirable, remains unproven by any in depth analytical musical undertaking. It also implies that choral music by nature automatically muddies text, which one may certainly dispute. As well, some contend that canonical chant is a more flexible form of musical expression, better suited to address a wide range of textual and liturgical structures. This is an even more appealing notion that still requires further unpacking and investigation. At the same time, one is slightly suspicious of how the promotional interest in canonical chant, and the allowance for it to be set in contrapuntal and harmonic motion, perfectly favors the Moscow Synodol School—l'école du jour among many liturgical musicians—against the inherited St Petersburg repertoire, thus perpetuating that particular rivalry, which is arguably better suited for debate in Russia than within America's evolving missionary church.

For the OCA simply to replace or to subordinate its inherited and admittedly problem-laden repertoire with yet another inherited repertoire poses a specific theoretical problem. It suggests that choral music written in the St Petersburg style is indeed inadequate by virtue of being contaminated through western influences, thus conceding to the polemic that anything perceived as western musical style should be disqualified for Orthodox worship, in spite of the way it may shape and address the liturgical component to which it is attached, thus resonating meaningfully and legitimately within the worshipping community. Such a contention argues a perception that serves aesthetic bias more than it serves objective liturgical reality, where the precepts of form and function in worship await some sort of voice in the dialectic. If, on the other hand, the ancient chant repertoire embraced in Moscow unearths valid liturgical music structures suppressed by the St Petersburg repertoire, focusing on function rather than taste, then there can be much value in it. Therefore, perhaps it is the application of the chant, rather than the musical product per se, that should be our primary consideration.

The OCA, like other Orthodox churches in the United States, has accepted numerous converts into the faith as it has continued to actualize its missionary presence. These new Orthodox Christians confronted with foreign and unfamiliar styles of liturgical music are beginning to ask, "But what about our tradition?" At the very least, what about the church's ancient western chant tradition that took shape before the eleventh century, if not beyond that to more recent styles of singing that reflect their own indigenous cultural and religious experiences? Whereas one can certainly understand and sympathize with the complaint of the new Orthodox, the argument sadly perpetuates an image of liturgical music as something primarily representing culture and the aesthetics of the religious side of that culture, as opposed to representing liturgy itself as the primary concern. Tradition simply loses its meaning on such occasions.

Tradition reconsidered

Clearly, "tradition" is a problematic word for today's Orthodox Church, as, in many cases, it has been diluted and polemicized to mean a certain ongoing cultural religious experience, often with the undertone of the polemicist's preferred tastes of that experience. Even those untempted by this argument often search for and contend that a particular superior style of musical sound, in the name of tradition, can evoke the quintessential aesthetic of worship —and we are on highly subjective ground here—rather than contemplating that any multitude of sounds may legitimately express liturgy. Therefore, a more focused and refined use of the word "tradition," especially in liturgical and musical terms, is in order. Toward this end, consider the following four theoretical points:

Tradition does not start out as tradition. Rather, it begins as a specific response to a direct liturgical need or impulse revealed in worship. The musical response may then repeat to the extent that it becomes recognized as liturgical practice.

As a liturgical practice solidifies through further repetition and custom, it can then take on the authority of an unwritten liturgical law or tradition.[3] In other words, practice may become tradition when one may explain it as a principled element of liturgy, justified and illuminated by liturgical form and function, as well as by the inherent nature of liturgical impulse and need.

Igor Stravinsky, one of the more philosophical composers of the twentieth century who also wrote a handful of Orthodox liturgical settings, stressed the enduring value of the term by saying, "[T]radition results from a conscious and deliberate acceptance. A real tradition is not the relic of a past that is irretrievably gone; it is a living force that animates and informs the present."[4] Therefore, when faced with a liturgical need or impulse that evolves uniquely from an Orthodox Church with missionary presence in America, one

3 This simply reflects the standard dictionary definition of the word. See Webster's *New World Dictionary*, 2nd ed., "tradition."

4 Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics in Music* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1979), 57.

should embrace tradition as the first step toward shaping the response, as this understanding of tradition is always legitimate and necessary.

At the same time, a tradition, by virtue of having historical resonance, is not automatically justifiable in exact form in worship today, unless it is specifically activated in direct response to current liturgical conditions and structures in use. And this is what distinguishes a tradition from a living tradition. A living tradition, in other words, is always directly linked to the liturgy it serves in the present—it never loses the quality of active response.

Granted, this view of tradition as formulated for this discussion is narrower than one may encounter elsewhere, yet there are still degrees of flexibility in the application that allow for broad musical consideration. As well, a tradition may evolve as the liturgical component to which it is assigned also evolves. For instance, the once barely noticed entrance of the holy gifts in Byzantium over time became highly ceremonialized. The initial musical reaction was to sing a responsorial psalm, which became the musical tradition of the Great Entrance. Later, as the entrance evolved, the musical tradition became antiphonalized with the inclusion of the Cherubikon refrain, while the principle of verse/refrain structure remained in tact.[5] The fact that verse/refrain or dialogic structures were typically sung when liturgical processions occurred is part of the principle as well (in other words, one may explain it theoretically, as opposed to a habit, which exists subconsciously[6] or without justification). When the dialogic structure in this case disappeared and was replaced by the through-composed elongated chanting of the Cherubic hymn, the exact musical tradition of

5 This is summarized in Robert Taft, *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding* (Washington: Pastoral Press, 1984), 181. The exact development of the Great Entrance rite, of course, is a matter of much speculation and hypothesis, although Taft's extensive research on this topic, leading to the same conclusion, is foundational and compelling. See Robert Taft, *The Great Entrance: A History of the Transfer of the Gifts and other Pre-anaphoral Rites*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1978), 98.

6 Stravinsky, *Poetics in Music*, 56.

singing dialogic structures to liturgical processions (or at least at the Great Entrance) indicated structural reduction. Therefore, this application of the word "tradition" focuses not on musical style and quality of sound, inviting the headaches of aesthetics and personal taste that go along with it, but on musical structure as a direct reflection of liturgy's architectural demands.

In this sense, the purpose becomes to discover the role of tradition and living tradition in structural and principled terms within the music of today's Orthodox Church. Although the OCA has been used so far in the discussion to generate this kind of consideration, there are of course many forms of Orthodox presence in America. The fact that they are all relatively new forms, however, faced with the possibility of realizing their missionary imperative, literally creates a common ground for further consideration.[7] This is not to make rivals out of contrasting liturgical music styles, but to investigate the liturgical structures any of these styles may potentially enliven and represent within the missionary imperative.

The benefits and limitations of musicology

Musicology, the combination of music theory and music history in simplified terms, enables serious musicians to acquire a deeper and more meaningful understanding of Orthodox liturgical music. A number of tireless musicians in fact have made great strides in the past several decades toward allowing Orthodox music to earn and gain acceptance as a serious field of study. In the process, discoveries of important musical manuscripts and instructional or theoretical writings have been made to shed light on the vastness and complexity of the Orthodox musical legacy. Needless to say, these materials are essential toward understanding how various liturgical music traditions have taken form and evolved. Such pursuit and discovery is also critical for a missionary church aiming to sort through, evaluate, and apply various forms of music within the context of worship today.

7 This important idea, which creates a fundamental common factor for all Orthodox Churches in a new land—especially America—belongs to David Drillock.

Musicology, however, is not enough. Moreover, a problem arises in that musicology as a method understandably makes the music itself the primary cause and element of examination. Other relevant liturgical issues that give the music context are certainly taken into account, but often they remain too far in the background during the process of study. Therefore, in the label "liturgical music," musicology tends to focus on the musical, not the liturgical, part of the term. At the same time, liturgy as the precise reason the music exists in the first place, and as the source that gives the music its shape and meaning, can be dangerously de-emphasized.

Johann von Gardner, an important twentieth-century scholar of Russian sacred music, noticed and addressed this problem to a certain extent. To begin, Gardner was very much aware that in liturgical music, the "liturgical" side of things required elevated consideration, evident in such quotes as, "[T]he singing of the church must never stray from its central essence: the liturgy. It must avoid at all costs the tendency to pursue exclusively aesthetic or personal, subjective goals."[8] And while any serious liturgical musician is likely to agree, musicology by itself fails to provide the means by which to actualize the contention, and thus musicians are still free to roam into the very subjective ground against which Gardner warns.

In the following quote, Gardner actually critiques musicology in similar fashion. He says:

> [Many] believe that liturgical singing belongs entirely to the field of music. In their view church singing is choral music distinguished from secular music only by the fact that the former is performed in church during worship services and contains a sacred liturgical text. ... Such an understanding of liturgical singing...is extremely superficial.[9]

Gardner then explains the impact a lack of liturgical understanding in Russia, for instance, can have when music is under consideration:

8 Johann von Gardner, *Orthodox Worship and Hymnography*, vol. 1 of *Russian Church Singing*, tr. Vladimir Morosan (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1980), 13.

9 Gardner, *Orthodox Worship*, 14.

> [I]t is not surprising that church singing has remained a purely practical subject. Each generation of church singers could only uncritically accept everything that was passed along by older generations, perhaps adding or deleting something according to personal tastes or opinions, and then pass the knowledge along to equally uncritical successive generations.[10]

In response to this condition, Gardner articulates a field of study entitled liturgical musicology, which he describes as a borderline discipline. Other important non-musical factors, such as liturgy itself, are listed as essential areas of consideration, without which any valid and meaningful examination of the music can take place.[11] Gardner's approach is certainly helpful, but it fails to go the distance, yielding an inverted liturgical reality. By principle, liturgy is not an element of music, however important and even essential musicological study may deem that element to be, but music is an element of liturgy. In other words, worship is the raison d'Ltre of the church, and worship therefore serves as the point of departure and the point of arrival that should necessarily frame the entire process of musical examination. Otherwise, musicians who ignore this precept often perpetuate an uncritical and overly liberal attitude, allowing the music itself to become self-justified by obtuse notions of its endurance and spiritual value. This results in is several problems.

Among them, personal spiritual edification begins to subordinate liturgical consideration. This is especially evident when musicology degenerates into the sort of pseudo-musicological writings and verbal commentaries that appear in diocesan publications, on web sites, in CD liner notes, or that one encounters in person at some liturgical music workshops. How disappointing, for instance, that a new Orthodox web site dedicated to liturgical music concludes it introductory section by saying, "Russian hymnody fully express[es] the whole range of feelings and states of

10 Ibid., 17.
11 Ibid., 16.

the human soul."[12] Or that a two part on-line video series sponsored by a major Orthodox jurisdiction in America is entitled, Music for Our Souls: Orthodox Hymnology.[13] Or even that a well-known hierarch recently addressed a conference of church musicians by saying, "[T]he purpose of sacred music is to make the individual ... experience spiritual transformation through beauty and mystery."[14] These well-intentioned notions simply confuse the secondary results of liturgical music with its intended primary purpose. Additionally, not much in these terms actually distinguishes liturgical music from secular music. Any musically-inclined person who listens, say, to the Trio from Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, or the final tweny minutes of Mozart's *Nozze di Figaro*, or the Air from Bach's third orchestral suite, or the Balcony Scene from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* will likely experience profound edification and even transformation by virtue of the transcendent powers of the music. The Christian may even argue that such transformation is spiritual, as it brings the listener closer to the Creator who allows such beauty to be created. In that secular and liturgical music may achieve the same thing, therefore, what actually distinguishes the latter from the former? Conceivably, only liturgy as the music's source can answer the question.

The role of the liturgical musician in the liturgical music process

Therefore, it is with some urgency that Alexander Schmemann wrote:

> [T]he obvious crisis in Church singing can be traced with special accuracy. Once a most important element of the litur-

12 See the end of the introduction to *Russian Orthodox Hymnody*, www.novgorod.ru/eng/cult/cd2/hist_e1.htm

13 See the "Online Chapel" of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North America web site, www.goarch.org/en/chapel/video.asp

14 Metropolitan Philip (Saliba), "Metropolitan Philip's Keynote Address to the Sacred Music Institute," *The Word* (October 2002), 4. The Metroploitan's address raises several insightful points of benefit to liturgical musicians. This particular contention, however, neglects the impact a liturgically-oriented approach has on exactly defining the purpose and role of liturgical music from outside of music itself, and therefore it overstates the case.

> gical structure, it is being torn away more and more from the overall scheme of worship, from its structure, and in ceasing to be the expression of this structure it very often becomes the expression only of "what is human ... all too human."[15]

A church with missionary presence, however, is well positioned to grapple with this crisis and even to set a precedent toward reuniting music with the liturgical system it is meant to serve. To do so, however, requires a re-examination of the role of the liturgical musician. This discussion suggests three things toward that end.

First, the church must acknowledge the presence and importance of the musician within the liturgical music creative process. Anonymity tends to create a false sense of authority over music for which we know the composer, as if to suggest that the known human presence in composition somehow degrades its spiritual validity. We tend to overlook, in other words, that an unknown individual was just as much responsible for a certain chant setting of the past as a known composer is responsible for his or her settings today. Take, for example, a canon composed using Znamenny chant. It should become obvious when one conducts manuscript analysis that a creative individual had to ponder and make a series of conscious compositional decisions to craft the melodic kernels, or popevki, in such a way as to address the complexities of the text and to provide musical cohesion throughout the entire set of verses. It matters not that the composer is unknown, for such a level of detailed consideration and craftsmanship should apply to composition today as well. This links the chant composer of the past, along with the process that the composer carried-out, to the liturgical music composer of today and the parallel process he or she must carry-out.

At the same time (and this is the second point), it is clear that composers must strive to empty themselves of the compelling primary desire for self-expression, which plagues the numerous musical settings that consistently overtake liturgy. The self-expressive mindset, which can never go away completely, dangerously

15 Alexander Schmemann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1986), 38.

encourages the composer to depart from the current ethos of worship—whatever that ethos may be in any given locale—and to impose something new and uniquely creative for its own sake. To compose for structural expression, however, requires submitting to the rules of the structure itself—rules that are geared not toward the elevation of the composer's music but toward the elevation of the liturgical component under consideration. As well, the music should be set in a palatable style, so that musical sound itself does not cause the faithful to reject the very structure they should feel moved through music to embrace. Therefore, the effects of a new liturgical composition, ideally, should not focus on how it uniquely sounds when one compares it to other settings, but on how it liturgically addresses the assembly.

Third, and most important, the liturgical musician, especially the composer and arranger, should become an interpreter of liturgy and its music. The interpreter, among other things, is a key figure in the aforementioned formulation of a creative musical response to liturgical need and impulse, thus linking that response to a principled musical practice that may indeed evolve into a living tradition. The interpreter also frames all musical consideration within a liturgical context, allowing liturgy itself to have an authoritative say in musical expression.

Lucien Deiss, acting as a musical interpreter for the Roman rite, makes the following observation regarding the restoration of responsorial psalmody in liturgical singing:

> [P]resent liturgy is in no way a criticism of the beauty of the past. ... [and the] reform of the responsorial psalm does not imply the devaluation of the splendors of Gregorian chant. We admire and appreciate the past. The reform says only that what was done in the past is not necessarily what should be done in [sic] today. This is simply the law of all life—things evolve. It is also the law of liturgy.[16]

Note that Deiss does not avoid the use of the word "reform," a word

16 Lucien Deiss, *Visions of Liturgy and Music for a New Century* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 98–99.

that is likely to set off fireworks in many Orthodox circles. But also note that the reform of which he speaks is actually a restoration of an ancient musical practice and tradition. In other words, his interpreted response to an evolving liturgical need was to return to an ancient practice that is already established as tradition. This sets an example for the Orthodox as well.

The impact of history and tradition on missionary liturgy today

What then, in the context of a missionary church in America, is the liturgical musician/interpreter actually to interpret? To start, the church's liturgy or patterns of worship are the primary subjects for examination. In other words, liturgical musicians should seek broadly and in detail to understand the liturgical structures, systems, and points of emphasis that specifically formulate and guide worship in the missionary church, and to respond to this understanding with the appropriate musical expression of those elements. Musicians must also take into account the more general inclinations and manifestations of the gathered faithful in response to their communal unity in such a church. For instance, one notices that the faithful place increasing value on liturgical comprehension and participation. Many insist on understanding what is sung and, when appropriate, on singing along. This particularly resonates with the early Christians of the New Covenant who sang communal songs of praise as a manifestation of their unity and commitment of faith. Early Christians also audibly responded to preaching, proclamation, teaching, and prayer with short, emphatic refrains or acclamations such as Amen, Alleluia, Hosanna, and various praise formulae.[17] It is not surprising, therefore, that Orthodox Christian churches embracing the missionary imperative in America today find themselves directly linked to Christianity's very first communities.

And this begs the consideration of history. By definition, Orthodoxy's American missionary presence represents a new beginning, or a

17 Edward Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music: The Music of Pre-Constantinian Christianity* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 77.

point of inception. It is only natural and logical, therefore, to examine other points of inception, and the liturgical and musical traditions associated with them, to discover how tradition by principle may inform, guide, shape, and help animate current practice. Such points of inception include the church of the New Covenant; Byzantium after the Peace of Constantine; initiatives related to the missionary work of SS Cyril and Methodios; the Christianization of Kievan-Rus; and so forth. Where we find coherence and cohesion with the past, the historical tradition may guide our response toward living tradition under somewhat similar, if not altogether parallel, circumstances. Put another way, we have the possibility of recovering tradition within worship today without having to contrive it into something that feels abstract and foreign to the faithful gathered.

A critique of common practices

Several examples allow musicians to exercise and apply a tradition-oriented approach to liturgical music. For instance, the worshipping community may realize its impulse toward comprehension and participation within liturgy's traditional dialogic structures, if they are performed as such. To begin, the Great Litany that now resides at the start of the Liturgy of the Word is not an uninterrupted paragraph of petitionary prayer read by the deacon on the community's behalf, but a series of short, focused, petitions, after which each instance the people sing "Lord have mercy" as punctuation. Simply put, the traditional essence of this structure is that the community listens attentively and then affirms prayerfully what they hear.

Nevertheless, many choir directors rehearse and execute the responses as if they were miniature one or two measure choral anthems (and, admittedly, many are composed with that very characteristic in mind). Directors strive for nuance, shading, and other expressive elements associated with refined choral performances that include, in subjective terms, prayerful undertones. Not only does this approach erode the dialogic structure, but also it silences the very community that should feel compelled to sing the

responses. Imagine, for instance, sitting in an opera house and listening to a beautifully shaded and expressive performance of a well-known aria. The audience is absolutely not to sing along—and we would be incredibly annoyed if they did—it would ruin the aria. And this is precisely the signal sent to the worshipping community when they encounter refined choral performances of dialogic responses. On the other hand, if the choir delivers a response with a clear, well-tuned singable monophonic or harmonized melody, rhythmically structured so that a firm pulse may glue together the singing, the congregation will likely find themselves participating before they even realize it. This is not to say, of course, that every congregant must always sing every response. One need not regulate to that extreme. The point, however, is that the music for the response and the manner of its singing should engage the participant so that he or she is singing within the soul even if not always through the actual human voice.

Responsorial antiphons are also conceived as dialogic structures. The Liturgical antiphons, for instance, that once existed outdoors in stational services now start the Liturgy of the Word from the inside. Concerning the first two antiphons of the set, many churches residing in America suppress the psalm verses but maintain the refrain repetitions, which then are sung in the form of a redundant or inwardly repetitious hymn.[18] This practice undeniably erodes the dialogic structure into a one-sided conversation, since there no longer exists anything to respond to. Another practice concerning these antiphons, prevalent in Slavic-influenced churches, heads-off in the opposite direction. Here abridged Typikon psalm texts are sung in hymn-like fashion with no congregational acknowledgement of the psalmic refrain buried within. This is the other side of the one sided conversation.

Both practices are referred to as such, not as traditions, as we are hard-pressed to locate any solid liturgical principle at work. If

18 "Through the prayers of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us" is the refrain of the first antiphon, for example, which is now often sung three times in a row without the insertion of psalm verses.

either the refrain-anthems or the psalm-hymns are expressed with elaborate choral or soloistic nuance, the faithful then gather for liturgy not to unify immediately through sung audible praise but to stand silently, motionless, listening to a musical performance. If the musical settings in either case happen to encourage participation, the congregation is still deprived of the liturgical invitation to engage in the vitality and energy of the dialogue, which should move the faithful through an entire series of psalmic exchanges—the opening antiphons, the entrance chant, the prokeimenon, the Alleluia—to a face to face encounter with the proclamation and preaching of the Word.[19] And should this essential and traditional dynamic escape the attention of Christians in the mother churches, it certainly does not escape those Orthodox Christians who embrace the missionary imperative.

One may then ask but what about beauty in music. The question presumes, however, that beauty realized through choral or solo singing is the only form or the most effective form of beauty that should evolve out of the liturgical gathering. Yet, when the faithful as the unified body of Christ raise their voices collectively in supplication and in joyful praise of God, beauty exists as well. This is not to diminish the role and importance of liturgy's appointed singers, nor is it by any means to suggest that all liturgical moments be congregationally sung, which simply invites hyper-participation and overtakes the liturgical structure from the other direction. Rather, quite possibly the liturgical structure in use within the context of worship can determine when the congregation may listen and pray on the words that the singers expressively shape; when the worshippers themselves should feel compelled toward participating in the

19 St John Chrysostom firmly believed in the importance of a congregation learning and singing refrains, as made clear in the following: "I exhort you not to leave here with empty hands but to gather up the refrains as though gathering pearls, to keep them always with you, to meditate on them, to sing them to all your friends and your wives. And if anxiety invades your soul, sing them assiduously. Thus we shall rejoice in the great peace of this life, and we shall obtain eternal rewards in the next, through the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ." *Expositio in Psalmum*, 41.5 and 7. PL 55.163.166–67, as cited in Deiss, *Visions of Liturgy*, 108.

singing; and when both the singers and congregation should engage in sung dialogue, all of which can and should yield beauty in many forms.

A more complex example under consideration involves Holy Communion. The liturgical movement of the twentieth century as interpreted by Alexander Schmemann for the Orthodox yielded a renewed understanding of the Eucharist. It also yielded frequent Eucharistic participation in many churches, especially in the OCA. As a result, the shape of the event itself changed. As a practical matter, it began to take longer. Also, worshippers became more aware of the event as sacrament and its essential role in the life of the church, an understanding that led them to focus on the event and its meaning.

This shape change in the celebration of Eucharistic distribution necessarily requires a matching musical response. Unfortunately, the long-standing musical practices that, for example, the OCA inherited from the Slavic church presumed infrequent communion, a much different perception and expression of the event. As a result, the way in which Communion generally takes place in current OCA practice and the musical patterns and settings used to accompany the event are badly matched. Therefore, it is critical to look toward history and tradition to help guide a response toward musical and liturgical reunification.

Liturgists propose that Eucharistic distribution as a single act is cohesive—the clergy begin as a practical matter and the people follow. This implies that the music assigned to accompany and enliven the event should be cohesive as well. In the distant past, to intone the event, the clergy proclaimed, "The Holy Things for the Holy," to which the people responded, almost in a corrective tone,[20] "One is Holy, One is Lord: Jesus Christ ..." The communion antiphon or koinonikon conceivably then took place for the duration, psalmody with refrain, ending with the concluding troparia, "We have seen the true light," and "Let our mouths be

20 The idea of the people's corrective tone was expressed in conversation by Archimandrite Ephrem (Lash).

filled," further punctuated by a final iteration of a three-fold Alleluia.[21] This points out the systematic congruity in liturgy at certain historical points of inception and initial development. More specifically, responsorial antiphons were liturgically conceived and assigned to accompany and indicate physical, directed movement. They accompanied processions on the way to church, at the entrance into the church, at the subsequent procession of the celebrant to the high place, at the entrance of the holy gifts, and now, here, at the procession to the chalice, perhaps the quintessential act of liturgical movement. The system is consistent to say the least, but the heavily eroded musical practices inherited from more recent generations indicate no recognizable sign of movement, as the music has become disjointed into uneven bits and pieces.

To begin to describe the problem, the psalmody of the koinonikon is reduced to a single phrase, sometimes sung in elongated fashion to help cover the clergy's partaking of the Eucharist, but more often today it is sung in short musical form. What then follows is perhaps the most degenerative practice to invade liturgy: the singing of freely chosen hymns not appointed by the Typikon—often in a concertized or soloistic manner—inserted at the discretion (and often the delight) of the music director. In Russia this was actually referred to as a concert. Clearly, this blatantly erodes the primary traditional structure and its systematic relevance to the point where one may argue liturgical abuse. First, music by tradition that takes place at an event within liturgy is meant to accompany and direct toward that event, which this music rarely does. Moreover, as part of the sacramental event of the gathered community, the communion of the clergy is just as much the concern of the faithful as is their own journey to the chalice.[22] Therefore, the music sung at this time should take into account and relate directly

21 Taft, *East and West*, 184–86.

22 St John Chrysostom emphasized the idea that the clergy and the people commune on equal terms in the eyes of the church, as Hugh Wybrew points out in *The Orthodox Liturgy: The Development of the Eucharistic Liturgy in the Byzantine Rite* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1990), 59.

to the fact that the clergy are partaking of the same Body and Blood that is to be offered to the faithful. Second, one must remember that processional responsorial antiphons not only compel movement, but also engage the faithful in comprehension and participation, as the faithful take in the psalm verses and, in dialogic form, answer on the refrains. In this sense, all congregants in both body and mind may immerse themselves in the event. Yet, inherited practice allows anthems and elaborate musical settings to impede that immersion. Aidan Kavanagh describes the condition as follows:

> Liturgical music then functions as a set-piece for appreciation by intently listening audiences, and textual meaning becomes overshadowed by compositional and performative virtuosity; it is no longer music to move by – "parade" music, simple and rhythmic – but music to listen to.[23]

Next the priests intones "[W]ith faith and love, draw near," to which the gathered faithful logically respond with the Palm Sunday communion verse,[24] thus signaling the continuation of the Eucharistic event through distribution to the community. As that takes place, the ecclesiastical communion verse of Pascha is sung repeatedly in a slow and solemn manner ("Of Thy Mystical Supper" generally is not sung in Slavic inherited practice). In some American church communities with a large number of communicants, however, even more unprescribed musical settings are inserted here, or in non-OCA churches, one hears organ preludes with greater frequency. In other words, this music frequently detaches from the event it serves.

No clear solution exists to the problem of liturgical and musical incongruity during Communion because the problem is so complex and entrenched, and because liturgical musicians still fail to admit that the problem is even worse than they think. Still, in some

23 Aidan Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite: A Handbook of Liturgical Style* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 38.

24 "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord. God is the Lord and has revealed Himself to us."

communities, there are signs of progress toward an appropriate response to this current shape and understanding of the event, thus allowing the event itself to serve as the direct source of the music. These positive signs are summarized here with further possibilities for consideration.

First, to sing the psalmody of the appointed koinonikon in full responsorial style, using psalm verses that resonate with the Eucharist, allows the faithful to engage actively in the event and to acknowledge rather than ignore the communion of the clergy. If the koinonikon finishes before the clergy are ready to come out with the chalice, whatever is chosen to fill the gap ideally should keep the faithful engaged and Eucharistically focused as well. Other congregational psalms and hymn-refrains—perhaps a conservative selection of troparia that characterize the commemorations of the day or feast—are worth considering. In many OCA churches, pre-communion prayers set to music are inserted. Certainly, this relates to the theme of the gathering, but it nevertheless introduces the incongruity of singing texts appointed as preparation for a sacred act that is actually already taking place as the clergy have begun to partake. One could argue that some of the prayers are worded such that, indeed, the faithful could say them when greeting the chalice. But, if the koinonikon as a full structure is to maintain a solid presence while accompanying the act, one must scrutinize the insertion of all structurally unrelated elements. And admittedly this does not make things any easier.

Another possibility would be to sing select verses of the Palm Sunday koinonikon. And then, when the clergy are ready, the deacon may intone the ecclesiastical verse—which coincidentally also summarizes that particular set of psalmody—to which the people would respond one more time on the refrain now as appointed, "Blessed is He that comes in the Name of the Lord ..." Obviously, this approach cannot work on every occasion, but it nevertheless represents an attempt to address the musical issue within the specific liturgical context.

Next, the looped singing of "Receive the Body of Christ" as the

faithful commune is a stickier issue on the surface, because we tend to shy away from hyper-repetition.[25] At the same time, as an ecclesiastical verse probably dating back no later than the tenth century according to Robert Taft,[26] it has no psalmody (although some practices attach psalmody willy-nilly). To sing an elongated soloistic chant version of the verse risks disengaging the faithful as audible participants and suspends the feeling of movement toward the chalice that has already been started. Even if one can argue a meditative and spiritual ethos of the chant, liturgy argues that Eucharistic participation at the chalice, at least in urban tradition, is not primarily a private meditative matter but a communal act of unification and great sacramental joy—at least this is the ethos of the event when the faithful commune frequently. Using organ preludes at this time is even more out of the question. In the repeated use of the ecclesiastical verse, however, if the musical setting allows, the people may still sing and thus remain cognitively engaged and focused as they make their final steps of the Eucharistic journey. And as a practical matter, perhaps there could be a two-fold musical version of the verse, sung in alternation, to soften the repetition. Changing the setting midway through, however, is probably too much of a distraction, even for the sake of variety.

Meditative liturgical music

And what then of liturgical music sung in a meditative, elongated manner without congregational participation? Is there no role for this practice in today's missionary oriented liturgy? Aidan Kavanagh proposes the following:

> Not all sounds are verbal sounds. Melismatic chant concentrates not on words but on sheer splendor of melody, and the same applies to good instrumental music and to the pealing of the bells. Non-verbal sounds are important components of liturgical worship ... They help reduce the verbosity of lit-

25 In the days of infrequent communion, this verse was repeated a handful of times at most, but with a large body of communicants, it may go on for quite a while.

26 Taft, *East and West*, 187.

> urgy done by ministers and assemblies who assume that liturgy is a text and that celebration requires continual talk.[27]

It is interesting to note, first of all, that Kavanagh allows for the consideration of melismatic chant and instrumental music in the same theoretical category, although Orthodox tradition exposes no principle that can justify the active or singular liturgical role of organs and other musical instruments. His point about verbosity, however, is well-taken. Some Orthodox services—not the Divine Liturgy—are so laden with ecclesiastical poetry—the result of the proliferation of stichera, sedalen hymns, kathisma hymns and so forth – that one wonders how the assembly can fend-off saturation, and whether this justifies some form of occasional meditative release through singing.

The problem, however, especially in a church that values comprehension as a top priority, is in deciding what liturgical texts may diminish their comprehensibility for the sake of meditative musical elaboration. One could argue that, for instance, the repetitive singing of an Alleluia is a possibility, where comprehension already exists due to familiarity. Yet, the Alleluia in a missionary church now functions as the people's refrain, and what liturgical musician should wish to silence the faithful who desire to participate? And, if the musicians allow the congregants to sing some refrains and not others, it weakens the systematic clarity and logic of the principle of assembly participation. Musicians then replace principle and its systematic application with arbitrary decisions.

One may note that melismatic singing was especially prevalent in major Byzantine and Slavic churches of the first half of the second Christian millennium. It is also true, from our understanding of things, that the restoration of responsorial psalmody and dialogic antiphonal structures was not the direction in which they were headed. Therefore, their ongoing response to expanding liturgical components was simply and logically to elongate the sung component through musical extension, even, in some cases, at the

27 Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite*, 52–53.

expense of cognitive understanding, perhaps assuming that a long-standing familiarity with the text no longer made direct comprehension at the moment an issue. And, to some people's tastes, the most beautiful chant settings associated with Orthodoxy evolved out of this tradition.

One may argue that the principles of this tradition, however, fail to resonate fully with churches in Orthodox America that prioritize the missionary imperative and value complete comprehension of every text liturgically appointed. True, liturgical musicians sometimes form scholarly cliques and decide for themselves from the academy, rather than the worship space, that the value the faithful place on cognitive understanding as a strict rule is naVve and spiritually unrefined. Such a dismissive attitude, however, can actually distance musicians from the church body they are committed to serve, as they fail to think, interpret, and lead as members within that very body.

This should not imply, however, the absence of meditation and reflection in a liturgical context. For example, the Cherubikon, filled with images of the angelic hosts and the invocation of the Holy Trinity, culminates by asking the faithful to abandon their worldly cares so as to receive the King of all in communion.[28] Indeed, this stirs the soul and compels reflection – not as individuals detached into their own personal thoughts, but as the faithful who abandon those thoughts to pray deeply the meditative moment within the common mindset and presence of the faithful gathered. The angelic metaphor, after all, stresses that the bodiless hosts sing as a united entity, not as a series of spiritually self-concerned formations. And music can help to invite communal reflection, using melisma or other similar techniques associated with meditative profundity, within the context of the setting, to elaborate on and enhance the meaning of these images and sacred instructions. The text, therefore, becomes expressively elevated,

28 The idea that the final verse of the Cherubikon refers to receiving the King in communion is discussed in Taft, *Great Entrance*, 64–65 and mentioned in *East and West*, 181.

not dismantled, by the music. And, if the faithful are to sing along in some instances, not all congregational music needs to be syllabic, fast, and loud; indeed, musical craftsmanship allows for the possibility of participation on slower more elongated settings as well.

The canonicity of chant

So-called "composed" liturgical music in the pejorative sense refers to choral anthems, antiphons, solemn hymns, and complex litanies that are based on new musical material. Admittedly, many of these settings command more attention to themselves than they direct toward the text and liturgical moment they mean to express. Some argue, however, that the use of canonical chant—that which is ecclesiastically authorized—either by itself or as the basis for all harmonic and contrapuntal arrangements monitors against self-expressive excess and musically overblown compositions. This has an appealing tone, but it presumes that the canonical chant itself is free from the same self-expressive trappings, and that it automatically responds in the appropriate form to fulfill its assigned liturgical function as manifested in today's liturgy. And such is not always the case, by any means.

Take, for example, the Kievan chant assigned to the Anaphora of St Basil's Liturgy, especially as it was harmonized for later liturgical use. The music is elongated through extended melodic figures and word repetitions only when the recited prayers of the clergy are equally elongated; the opening responses, however, are structured just as they would be for St John Chrysostom's liturgy, since the text is the same. Clearly, the primary reason for this musical elaboration is to cover the longer prayers. And the implied musical solemnization achieved here is the secondary result or often the justification used to mask the primary intention. The problem is, of course, that in a cognitively oriented church, the faithful often elect to hear the anaphoral prayers of St Basil, which necessarily silences the chant from any sort of elongation to cover text. The Kievan chant, even if transcribed into English but left basically as is, does not therefore function canonically in today's liturgy, as, for the sake of musical

performance, it would unnecessarily delay or threaten to cover the audible reading of the prayers. And if one were to trim, slice, chop, and otherwise abridge the chant— a dubious endeavor—then why not simply compose a new chant instead, perhaps in similar melodic style, well-catered for current circumstances?

Perhaps canonicity, at least theoretically speaking, is more a process than a product. In other words, that canonical authority exists in the way the chant expresses the liturgical component to which it is assigned, and not solely on whether it has been ecclesiastically approved and published. What becomes primarily important then is not the reuse of the material, now arranged into English for better or for worse, but to comprehend the musical and systematic principles of canonical chant construction in various practices and traditions, and to animate those principles in music composed today. This allows the composer to craft pitch and rhythm carefully to text as a full process, steeped in tradition, completely free to address liturgical form and function in worship, unhindered by the limitations of pre-existing chant conceivably designed the very same way for another language and liturgy.

Conclusion

Transcendent liturgical experiences, as a final point, can occur when liturgy and its music converge with extraordinary coherence. These are amazing grace-filled moments that the gathered faithful experience as a whole. The problem, however, is that liturgical musicians often try to prescribe transcendence through particular styles or forms of music, as if it is the music itself exclusively commanding such power.

Framing the point, we are now a series of multi-cultural Orthodox churches in America that together face the missionary imperative. Realizing Orthodox unity, however, at least in musical terms, does not stipulate achieving Orthodox uniformity. In other words, to become liturgically coherent in a new land happens not by embracing the same musical styles and repertoires as a rule, but by embracing a common set of principles that result from the merging

of history with liturgy in the present. These principles may then guide and direct the music of a living tradition expressed by whatever legitimate musical means—monody, polyphony, homophony, modality, diatonic melody, and so forth.

When, however, liturgical musicians are trapped into particular favored styles, periods, and genres of music; when they think and work in musical vacuums, one unaware of the processes of the other; when liturgy inadvertently becomes a tool for musicological rediscovery and experimentation in worship; when the music itself distracts from liturgy by the power of its own self-expression; when the concern for preserving cultural heritage dominates the choice of repertoire; when musicians ignore the pulse and nature of worship so as not to lose treasured musical practices and settings; and when the overall consideration of liturgy fails to frame the entire musical enterprise, then movement toward unity ceases.

Liturgical musicians, in essence, help to interpret the expression of the liturgical experience, and therefore become servants of that experience. In the end, to empty oneself to liturgical need and to interpret a musical response to that need on behalf of the faithful gathered begins, in America, by embracing the missionary presence and role of Orthodoxy by common principles, considerations, and priorities. And this indeed is the path toward a living musical tradition that serves and thrives within a living faith.

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