

CHURCHINESS AND MUSICAL THINKING

On Examples of Dobry Christov's Work

The word churchiness lies at the foundation of the present study. Nowadays we do not use this word frequently and that is why when first heard it may be sounds alien, and sometimes sounds as a word denoting a phenomenon that may hinder one's work, and to the ear of those who think in secular terms it may sound even pretentious. When it is yet used, this is done in a way that is too free, within boundaries of meaning that are too variable, and with a meaning that is subjective enough or understood from the context or that has been arrived at by intuition. There are reasons for that. In Bulgarian the word is known first of all through its wide range of meanings – in the way it is met with in the area in which it has become established: the Russian religious-and-philosophical thought of the middle of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. This mentally established “location” immediately makes it clear that here the word is used to express an explicit religious position. This is a position based on a kind of knowledge that differs from scientific knowledge, a position that rests on theological cognitive foundations. That is why it is not a chance phenomenon that in this case the word churchiness cannot have categorical stability: according to the main representatives of the above-mentioned intellectual trend the word should be just what it is, i.e. it should not be a tool used by the mind that investigates, but should instead denote the very world in which the man of the Church exists. “The concept churchiness does not exist”, wrote fr Pavel Florenski, the Russian theologian, religious philosopher, and scholar, “but churchiness itself exists and for every member living in the Church is the most definite and tangible thing that he knows. But the life of the Church becomes part of our lives and is attained only when one lives in it, not in abstract way, not in a rational way.” Just because of that churchiness cannot be “stopped” within the boundaries of a concept and that is so because it is the flow of life itself. Cognition comes to know churchiness by living in it. Churchiness here expresses a profoundly Orthodox understanding of human cognition, an understanding that is apophatic in its essence. That explains to a large extent also the fact that in the West this word is given place chiefly in the word stock of dictionaries (Kirchlichkeit, Church[i]ness).

However, in order for this word to receive its scholarly version and to become fit for use as a tool of research, it should obtain the status of a concept, a status that is refused to it by Florenski and the Russian religious-and-philosophical thought as a whole, which lays the stress on the experience of life itself. So, I would define the main endeavour of the present book as the endeavour to go along a definite path of thinking; the path that begins with the most general verbal designations of the phenomena described by the word churchiness as well as with the use of this word, a use linked with the idea of a specific way of life (i.e., the life of the Church) towards fixing it within the status of a concept. And only after that there comes the attempt to investigate through this concept different levels of the manifestations of church music to the possible limit that can be reached through it.

To that end the path of reasoning in the first part of the book passes into next stage by turning to a concept from a different system of thinking, a concept taken from 20th century philosophy. This is the concept *Weltlichkeit der Welt* (Worldliness of the World) used by M. Heidegger in his work *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time): “Worldliness is an ontological concept and refers to the structure of a constitutive moment of the being-in-the-world”. This concept has been adopted in our study so as to discover whether the linguistic analogy in the word-formation points the way also to similar discoveries of meaning that become possible through this word-formation. The worldliness in Heidegger is “the openness of being”, which provides the possibility to inhabit. In the same way churchiness, when understood in theological terms, refers to the way of living in the Church; it is the thing that determines church life itself. The general perspective in which one can seek the meaning of churchness lies in pointing to the semantic area in which something has been laid and from which it comes from. So in its

status of a concept churchiness will mean the ontological grounds of all factuality (including musical) of the Church. In that status churchiness will assign the conditions that enable a music to be church music.

Speaking in most general terms there are three areas in which the idea of churchiness in music is tested. The first area is outlined by the integral view about what makes one kind of music church music, a view at the foundation of which there lies the very relationship music – Church. Another area covers the matters related to the methodology of investigation as the first stage of the concretization of this view. The purpose here is to substantiate the main approach that can reveal in full the idea of churchiness in music. In the third area problems centre round the possible procedures for working with the musical material. Thus the last goal of the present study is to test the applicability of a new system of research methods now with regard to the very process of creating music, a system of methods that corresponds to the meaning of church music. That brings us to discussing the idea of churchiness in music along the way of analytical actions (with regard to the creating of music) and by the way of reconstructions (of musicological works). Here the subtitle “On Examples of Dobry Christov’s Work” comes into its own.

The choice of Dobry Christov as the principal character in the book is due first of all to his musical creativity in the field of church music. His are the most remarkable specimens of this field in new Bulgarian culture. Among them are the two liturgies of St. John Chrysostom (composed in 1925 and 1934) and “Chants on the All-night Vigil” (1935-1939). Complicated and manysided as his work is, it hides risks for the research workers, who, because of their desire to class it within fixed boundaries, describe it in terms of the bipolar model in which it is either a musical genre, an autonomous work of music, opus musicum, or applied music for the needs of the services of worship. This scheme, which has become established with the passage of time, can be overcome by the attempt to reconstruct Dobry Christov’s idea about churchiness in music, an idea that itself overcomes the paradigm either – or.

The question about churchiness in music is a question concerning the genuine territory of the meaning of music in the Church or, to put it in brief, it concerns the truth about church music. And this is the point that brings us immediately to the question about the approach that can formulate that truth. Speaking in most general terms, the approaches are divided by a boundary that can be considered to be a boundary between “outside of” and “inside” the tradition of the Church, between belonging or not belonging to that tradition. The main thesis of the present work asserts the need for a research that in its endeavor to learn the truth about church music enters the territory of the truth that is revealed by the music itself. In support of this thesis the third chapter of the first part brings in the concept of involvement defining it as an approach that not only traces the theological foundations of church music but also that accepts them as its own. Accepting involvement as a research approach is due to its adequacy to the very idea of churchiness in music. Asserting the cognitive aspect of music itself, the study asserts also the need of a method that can follow it along the way of cognition. Thus the knowledge about music seeks what is revealed by music as cognition.

Such a position in research work, however, cannot remain at the traditional categories of musicology. It strives to enrich its own resources by bringing in new theological and philosophical concepts. This position also requires a sensitive study of the relationships between the concepts in the cases when they take place in different systems of oppositions (sacred – holy, sacred – secular). The pair sacred – holy is of fundamental importance as far as it can effect the methodological change from the position “outside of” (marked by the concept sacred) to the position “inside” (expressed by what is holy), i.e. from the research scholar’s detachment as a side of the scientific opposition object (of study) – subject (of knowledge) towards that scholar’s accepting the totality of what the Church gives us as knowledge.

The second part of the book directs the attention to the church music created by composers (music as a work of art), while understanding it not within the framework of facts of culture, but as a phenomenon of churchiness. To that end it continues to introduce new ideas and relationships in whose context this phenomenon can be situated and understood. Foremost among them is the relationship sacred – secular. Through history this relation has led to different approaches – from the idea about the severing by what is secular of the link with what is sacred to the conviction that what is secular should be based totally on what is sacred. The next step towards the core of the idea of churchiness is taken by adopting the concepts of memory and remembrance. Liturgically fixed, remembrance (with its canonical place in the part of the Eucharist that is called *Ανάμνησις* – remembrance, recollection, reminiscence) does not only organize the service of worship in its progress through time, but also accomplishes in reality the *koinonia* (communion) of the Church across the dimensions of transitory and eternal. The purpose of anamnestic music in the Church is to help the achieving of that communion and to take part in it.

There comes in order also the question as to the theological understanding of what is other in music. The understanding in question sees the relationship between self and other as one that differs from the relationship as seen by those who study the problem from the viewpoint of cultural anthropology and history. Such an understanding shows the link between the human personality and music within the framework of the sacrament of the Eucharist and recalls the essential role of music that in the words of Blessed Augustine is meant “to baptize”.

But that is exactly why the aesthetic interpretation of church music proves to be rather helpless. It deviates from the very essence of that music, transferring retrospectively into liturgical music of an idea that has definite historical validity – the idea of autonomous music. The core of this idea is the postulate that musical materiality received through the senses generates meaning and provides meaning.

During the process of reducing the scope of the discussion, leading it to the problems of Bulgarian cultural experience, the third part of the book directs its attention to a reconstruction of the notions concerning churchiness that dominate in it. This part traces the several turning points in the history of Bulgarian musicology during the first half of the 20th century. First there emerges the coordinate system determined by the categories of artistic and national. The inserting of the notion of religious in that coordinate system is the first breach in the edifice of the idea of churchiness. Here the religious has not as yet been refused the opportunity to make its messages known by way of music; but the messages have been fixed within a framework alien to the content of the religious itself. The barely visible slight opening of the door easily grew into the notion that became popular later, the notion that puts aside thoroughly the messages of churchiness in music. The attitude of reduction common to both cases, an attitude that to one or another ideological degree deprived church music of its independent religious quality, led to the point where the very core of churchiness became the object of attack. If the remembrance, the an-amnesia, is that core, the weapon used against it is the strategy of silence, oblivion, amnesia that has been dominating Bulgarian public life for so long.

Having convinced as to the necessity of discovering the theological foundations of music, the concept of churchiness will be able to implement its work to the end when it brings to light the meaning of the specimens of music studied by means of it. In approaching a specific example – the music by Dobry Christov to the All-night Vigil – the concept of churchiness has prepared its first assignment: to situate that music within the context of the theological idea about the All-night Service that rests on the exhortation by Christ: “So be on the watch. Pray constantly for the strength to escape whatever is in prospect, and to stand secure before the Son of Man” (Lk. 21:36).

The music composed by Dobry Christov for the All-night Vigil turned into a symbol of unceasing watchfulness at every moment, and of unceasing prayer. Turning to it the fourth part of the book completes the giving of definite form to the idea of churchiness. It is the revealing of that idea and of the Christov’s compositional method reflecting it that guide the analysis in that part of the book.

The two types of manuscripts left to us by the composer: “Notes on the Order of the Chants on the Eve of Fests of the Lord and of the Mother of God as well as on the Feasts of the Saints” and “Chants on the All-night Vigil” reflect two different approaches to liturgical music and at the same time are united by Christov’s idea on the meaning of church music. The first type of manuscripts can be described as notes by D. Christov (this time as a conductor in church) written for his own use during the service of the All-night Vigil. Here the usual hierarchy, which gives to music prime place in a manuscript that is in essence a musical one, has given way to the order that should be followed by it.

The “Chants on the All-night Vigil” are works of another mode of cultural existence of music. These are compositions written on the one hand “so as to be sung in church” (D. Christov) and on the other so as to be part of a bigger musical entity and serve a wider plan of musical creativity. This plan, however, does not follow the pattern of a musical cycle; in its ultimate goal it breaks the limits of such a cycle, the independent and unchangeable opus musicum, which has been given “once and for all”, by seeking again its own materialization according to the order of the chants. At the ground of this plan there stands a definite principle – to adopt the idea of infinite prayer and to return it to the liturgical act that has brought it into being. In accordance with such a principle each composition of the “Chants on the All-night Vigil” effects its link with the rest, a link hidden in the liturgical succession. Under this state of connectedness each of the chants is a link in the chain of the living and pulsating with meaning unity of the unceasing prayer through music. Each of these links each time it is sung is brought into being, is clad in sound, and reaches us. Thus the “Notes” and the “Chants” present the two aspects of one and the same attitude to musical creativity. Such an attitude does not set the two sides of this creativity into opposition to one another, but brings them nearer: the one that keeps the unity of living in the Church and the other that creates musical forms while being aware of its own spiritual foundations.

“Now in the end... I am working on Eastern church chant”, Dobry Christov wrote in December 1940 less than a month before his death. “And yet religious music is for me an inexhaustible source of divine humility. One detects in it the peace that is so much sought... The peace among all people!”

In the above passage the struggle between the Old Bulgarian chant and Eastern chant for the name genuine Bulgarian church chant, a struggle to which Dobry Christov dedicated so many pages of his research work, has receded into the background. The aporetic pair opus musicum – service of worship is missing, too. What is present is the road, along which music reveals its genuine churchiness, which brings people to God.

Translated by: Alexander Gospodinov