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SIGNS OF CHRISTIAN ECUMENISM IN IGOR STRAVINSKY'S “SYMPHONY OF PSALMS”

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Abstract

If modern Christian ecumenism, as a movement directed towards unification of various confessions, was officially formed in 20th century, a tendency of their merger with placement of a sample of art in a unified artistic space lasts already centuries. Even when canonicity is preserved, opuses of genial artists with planetary cognition, gather a huge historical memory. Just as there persists an aspiration to synthesize branches of art that developed autonomously beyond the church, also the opuses written on the spiritual theme reveal a demand to overcome disjunction of the united church by merging traditions of various confessions. An interesting event occurs in the art of Igor Stravinsky, an Orthodox composer. The object of research of this article is the issue of coexistence of “Romanic” and “Russian” in Igor Stravinsky’s “Symphony of Psalms.” This opus, created with neoclassicist aesthetics, has a diversity of artistic models. It is still typical for it to merge peculiarities of musical cultures pertaining to epochs and school, different in the stylistic points of view. The form of psalms gives to the composer wide opportunities to merge various genre models of Catholic and Orthodox music as well as certain tendencies and canonicity of the Orthodox and Catholic spiritual genres.

Keywords: Christianity, Ecumenism, Orthodox Church, “Romanic” stylistics

In the present article, the subject of research is represented by parallels revealed at the semantic and artistic-contentual level between Robert Schumann’s piano cycle “Carnaval” and Tennessee Williams’s theatrical play “Camino Real,” saturated with romantic tendencies.

Centuries-old experience shows that religious values are the most solid, eternal values that the composers apply if not permanently, then, at least, in the last period of their creative life necessarily. Igor Stravinsky’s music is one of the most comprehensive examples of the deep rethinking of the essence of Christianity. The “Symphony of Psalms” (1930), written in the neoclassic period, is interesting both in terms to reveal the composer’s general Christian worldview as well as his ecumenical position.

Conceptual essence of Stravinsky’s works having religious/spiritual contents is determined by the deepness of his Christian belief, too. He himself admitted the greatest role of the Christian worldview for the right course of his creative processes [1]. As he was writing the “Symphony of Psalms,” in an interview given for the press, he asserted, “The more one separates oneself from the canons of the Christian Church, the further one distances oneself from the truth.” [2]. The composer, who was baptized as a Christian, in the age of 14 revolted against the Orthodox Church, though during a spiritual crisis he found the way to the Church again; it was not occasional that he prayed before the start of his creation and then during his creative crisis. In 1924, he supported an Orthodox Father named Nicholas Podossenov and became an active informant congregation of the Orthodox Church, starting to read and

work actively upon the Gospel and other types of religious books. Without faith and a special religious education (even under the conditions of a high musical intellect), Stravinsky would not be able to make such a bold combinations of the canonic established in the ecclesiastic music with his own composing innovations.

Yet, what does the horizon of the religious outlook of the composer look like? It can be asserted a priori that fusion of the canonic of various confessions with personal experience is characteristic only for the artists of planetary scales of thinking, and the ecumenical position, too, is symptomatic for the geniuses. Such a synthesis that occurs in Stravinsky's music is obviously connected to the sharing of the esthetic principles of neoclassicism and to the penetration of the stream of "Italianism," too, into the Russian being romance (that formed the Russian-Italian melos). However, originality of the opus cannot be reduced to the universalism of the musical style conditioned by the esthetics of neoclassicism; Behind the fusion of models pertaining to genre and style of various epochs and behind their showing forth in a universal category, we can see the wideness of the spiritual horizons as well as Stravinsky's version of a musical icon of the divine unity seen from the position of an Orthodox.

What was the essence of ecumenism and why is it achievable in the art rather than in a society?

In the first turn, we shall note that schism is not a split of the United Church of Christ, but it is just a split of the Christian humankind. Differences revealed through the visible elements have not touched the deep integrity of Christianity. Accordingly, ecumenism is the movement of the spiritual unification of the Christians. Its starting point and guarantor, too, is the issue of the faith, which has been formulated in the following way in the symbol of catechism: "I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church." [3]. In none of the world religions serves the unity of church believers as an object of faith. Despite this, it is this unity upon which the Holy Spirit descends and the church, too, is in eternal influence of this spirit. In addition, the object of faith is exactly to see this invisible entity. [4]. Despite the wide-scale works performed by the World Council of Churches, this "ideal" is a utopia, as the result cannot be achieved artificially or violently. Just like the choice of good, ecumenism, too, is an act of a good will for a human being. "It is an essential quality of Christianity that it cannot get rid of self-will, the evil in human nature, for it recognizes and respects the freedom of man." [5]. Thus, the art is the only "promised land," where there is revealed the spiritual demand for the initial unity, which finds its concrete expression into the fusion of the elements of distinct traditions and canonic.

Whereas Guillaume de Machaut and Giovanni Palestrina served to just one confession of Christianity and entirely naturally preserved uniform style, already with the Dutch composers, simultaneously with the preservation of the fundamental signs of Catholic canonic, there is also manifested the influence of Calvinism, indeed, they have created the first international style; Heinrich Schütz, a Protestant composer, reveals an already evidently shaped ecumenism: in his madrigals, spiritual canzone, religious symphonies and motets he abides by the Catholic traditions, and in other genres, he promotes the Protestant spirit. J. S. Bach abides by the canonic of the music of two confessions of Christianity, although he does not sharply delimit his creative quests within the boundaries of Catholic or Protestant Canonic, as he uses the achievements of Protestant church music in his Catholic masses. Thus, if ecumenism was revealed in the European music through the coexistence of Protestant and Catholic traditions, in the "Symphony of Psalms" by Stravinsky there is observed the fusion of three traditions. Stravinsky has been able to incorporate all of them into one artistic space, though has rethought all of them from the position of an Orthodox. It is remarkable that, according to the beliefs of the Orthodox, it is exactly their church that preserves the Christian faith without distortion and they enter dialogues with other confessions with this belief in mind. The Orthodox theologians always used to remark that for them, the "United Church" of the catechism is the Orthodox Church. Simultaneously with Stravinsky, an emigrant theologian, working in France, George

Florovsky, one of the initiators of the ecumenical movement, used to write, “For me, unification of all Christians means the universal return into the Orthodoxy.” [6].

Stravinsky’s music gives us all the grounds to conclude that Christianity and isolation into oneself are the notions that mutually rule each other out, as the starting point of Christianity is the love of one’s neighbor, and neighbors include everyone. “The Universal Soul”- so does the musicologist Mikhail Druskin explain the capacity of Stravinsky’s music and implies the connection of various nations and epochs, diversity of artistic models. “Being far away from his native land, he wanted to make a solid connection with the universal world tradition and he used to see in it the point of support.” [7].

Let us talk about the peculiarities of the narration of the sacramental idea of the opus as well as the issue of the historical memory “loaded” in it, which points to the creative assimilation of the traditions of several Christian confessions. In the first turn, we shall note that the opus has a double dedication, namely, that it was composed for the glory of God and dedicated to the Boston Symphony Orchestra on the occasion of its 50th anniversary. [8]. From the religious point of view, this fact does not derogate respect towards the Lord and is justified. St. Gregory of Nyssa used to write about the ability to access two worlds (spiritual and material) given by God as a gift to Adam – “The Lord used the double basis for the life of men, joining together earthly and divine so that the human beings would have the pleasure that is kin and characteristic for each of them, from both of their natures: to feel the bliss of God by his divine nature and to feel the earthly enjoyments by the feelings that are kin to them.” [9]. Stravinsky applied to psalms (38: 13-14; 39: 2-4, #150, The Vulgate) upon which prayers and chants were built ever since the ancient times. [10]. Historical memory of this genre provides wide opportunities to use models or certain separate tendencies pertaining to Catholic and Orthodox genres. “What about the words, I used to seek for them between those texts that were written specially for singing and the first that came to my memory were the psalms.” [11]. In other place, he writes, “The Church knew what the psalmist knew: Music praises God. Music is well or better able to praise him than the building of the church and all its decoration; it is the Church's greatest ornament.” [12].

According to the texts that the composer chooses, it becomes completely evident that he narrates of the main essence of Christian liturgy in general, which is to ask for forgiveness regardless confession, then to transform one’s soul and to praise the Lord. Execution of the liturgy and the use of His vivifying blood and flesh serve as certain “will” left by the savior to immortalize a human soul. This is a bridge stretched between the vanity and the eternal life, upon which the souls saved from the hell pass by means of repentance. During the liturgy, the Lord turns faithless into the ashes in the soul of a sinner and transforms it into the house of God. Introduction of the opus seems to express symbolically torments of soul and that sin that gnaws a human out of the inside. The melody searches its outcome into a supportive tone for a long time, and the sounding of a chorus against this background is perceived as a finding of the spiritual orienteer.

The fusion of the national (for Stravinsky, i.e. Russian) and Catholic music in the “Symphony of Psalms” is referred by M. Druskin as a coexistence of Russian Orthodox and “Romanic” stylistics. The elements of the Protestant tradition must be taken into account, too. It is obvious that, ever since the Russian period, operating with certain models has become a part of Stravinsky’s style, but in this opus, it turned out that it was more important for the composer to attest his own religious position rather than “to play with models.” This is still fairly completely compatible with the composer’s cosmopolitan worldview, with his creative style as well as with the aesthetics of neoclassicism.

Let us analyze, what concretely reveals all of the above-mentioned.

Despite the fact that Stravinsky began writing the psalms on ancient Slavic texts, there still can be felt the strict spirit of European Gothics, too, in this opus. Here, the historical path covered by the Catholic and Protestant music is shown in a retrospective way, starting from the chorales of the Middle

Ages (1st part) via the epoch of the Protestant polyphony of baroque (2nd part) and modern theatricalized French religious music (here we imply allegro of the finale of A. Honegger's symphonic psalm "Le Roi David"), to Rachmaninoff's images of the Orthodox religious music. "Romanic feature" is revealed, in the first turn, through the change of the ancient Russian with the Latin language. "In order to express an elevated spiritual disposition, it is necessary to use a special language, that's why I have thought of the language that is most suited for the opus conceived by me and, finally, I have chosen Latin." [13]. The composer uses this language also to get the focus onto the phonetic quality of text. [14].

The performing composition, too, elucidates what proceeds from the Catholic tradition. The composer indicated that the part of high timber must be performed not by women but by a boys' chorus. [15]. The chorus of men and boys without women was feature, that was characteristic for the Catholic music of European Middle Ages including the late Gothics. One of the principal instrumental images is linked with the organ typical for the music of Renaissance and Baroque epochs, and this has determined the composition of the orchestra. Whereas it is very unacceptable for the Catholic music of these epochs to narrate of the emotional passions and neither the organ sounding is characterized by the vibrato of the strings, the violin part is taken out of the score. With the same cause, violas and clarinets do not occur in the score, as they are associated with feelings, with the romantic century. In the double fugue of the 2nd part that shows forth the soul of the Baroque epoch, the wind instruments imitate organ. We would like to emphasize here that such a composition of the orchestra represents both the influence of neoclassical aesthetics as well as a factor of considering canonic. The balance between the choral and instrumental ensembles is an extra expression of "Romanic feature" and is symptomatic for the opus in which there is merged an Orthodox a cappella with Catholic instrumental thinking. Stravinsky wrote, "In this respect, my opinion of the interrelations of the vocal and instrumental parts coincided with the decision of the masters of old counterpoint music, who applied to them as to even values and did not reduce the role of chorus to the homophonic chanting, and the function of the instruments to a mere accompaniment." [16].

The composer solved the issue of symphonism, too, according to the tradition accepted in European music concerning the ideal and style-intonational interpretation of an opus of spiritual contents. The "Symphony of Psalms" generalizes much larger sense to deliver rather than this is possible for a "secular" symphony of the most global concept. Respectively, Stravinsky has not even tried to repeat mechanically the traditional symphonic model. If the opus were incorporated into the 'ecosystem' of the symphony, in the third part there would be narrated that triumph which symbolizes a fruitful battle for the best society in the socially constructed genre, symphony. "I wanted to created something organically whole, not agreed with various schemes that have widely accepted rules and I wanted it to have a cyclic sequence and order that distinguishes a symphony from a suite." [17]. Thus, the composer was interested only in symphonism, as a method of thinking as well as the orderliness of this genre and that generalized program that was accepted as a cliché – march from the darkness to the light, from personal to public, from torture to joy. The first part ends on a G major chord, which is perceived as a dominant in reference with the C minor fugue, and this is, too, a translucent continuous symphonic thinking. [18]. Thus, we deal not with a symphony as a genre model, but with symphonism, which can be revealed in a church rite, too, from the procedural point of view; this is a march along the path of strengthening one's faith, which is perceived as a "symphony of a man's relation to the God" and it passes certain stages; in the first part there is foretold the prayers and pleading, in the second stage, the conceiving of hope, and in the third, the feeling of the spiritual triumph gifted from the glorification of God.

An evident proximity with J. S. Bach's organ music sounding also points to the "Romanic feature." In reference with the 2nd part, we associatively recall the introduction of his Mass in B minor,

where the melody grown out of the sound h spreads in both directions, and other voices are added to it, that symbolizes the adherence of a lone Christian to a congregation.

What about the Orthodox tradition, in the first turn, we would like to note that the neoclassicist stylistics with its tendency to the universalism does not rule out the national element. "I am classifiable as a Russian," said Stravinsky. [19]. As the impressions of childhood, his memory has reflected the music of the churches of Kiev and Poltava, the patriotic activities of the circle of A. Belyaev and S. Diaghilev, which altogether intensified his interest towards the Russian culture. Stravinsky did not deny that apart from Gregory's choral, the general source of the Russian culture, the Byzantine music has influenced him as well.

The fact that this opus was grown out of the tradition of the Orthodox liturgy, can be also demonstrate by the fact that the impulse of the creation of this work was connected with the Slavic texts, that points to the primary importance of the Orthodox cognition: "I did start to compose the Psalms in Slavonic, though, and only after coming a certain distance did I switch to Latin." [20]. E.g., "Laudate Dominum" ("Glorify the Lord"), was initially written upon the words: "Lord, have mercy" (Господи помилуй), which is manifested through the illogical accents of the final version; [21]. Despite the fact that the art of the composer is marked with vivid searches of the new forms of spiritual music, transition to the Latin language, experiments in the sphere of orchestration, still for him as for an Orthodox, the priority function of text and chant were not to doubt or revise. Due to non-existence of concert forms in Russia before the 19th century, and due to the absence of instrumental accompaniment in their Orthodox tradition, the spiritual music in the Russian mind is connected to the sounding of the bells and recognizes the uniform importance of chanting. The fact that I. Stravinsky was requested to make an opus of the symphonic genre, and he added chorus, tells us of the Orthodox code that has started acting at the level of non-conscious. It is obvious that Stravinsky had no obligation to write an Orthodox opus but there was a demand to use actively the choir element of the Orthodox Church.

One more detail: "Laudate Dominum" was conceived as a prayer in front of a Russian image depicting infant Christ. [22]. It is true that icons practically do not occur in the Protestant world, the corresponding images are depicted onto the vitrages, and there is no habit to pray in front of them. Neither Catholic churches with chairs have that special intimacy of praying directly before the icon by which the Orthodox churches stand out.

One more visual extra-musical impression, which points to the nascence of Stravinsky out of the depths of the Russian universe: allegro of the finale is inspired in the cognition of the composer by the vision of Elijah the prophet, whose wheels, as a Russian folk tale narrates, issues the sounding of a thunder. "I have never composed anything of similar exactitude, as triplets in French horn and grand piano parts, which conceive the representation of horses and chariot." [23].

One more of the Russian passages – the composer emphasized the resemblance of the code of the symphony with the finale of his own opus "The Wedding". [24]. It is not ruled out that his dramaturgy was influenced by the Orthodox structure of John Chrysostom's liturgy; namely, the 1st part starts with a "dry chord", wind passages and the initial chord again, which is perceived as a message that the divine service begins. Accompaniment of the orchestra serves also as an imitation of the tolling of the bells. So does Stravinsky, the Orthodox represent the start of the liturgy, when at first, the attention is captured by the external elements, the sounding of bells, and then it passes onto the icons and praying. The quick first and slow second interval of the finale approximately correspond to the Eucharist canon of liturgy, to the center and the end of the divine service. In the second part of the finale there is sounding as ostinato a step consisting of 2 fourths, that resembles of the decoration of the Eucharist canon with a bell (this canon's title is "It is Truly Meet," which is adorned with bells from the words "It is truly..." to the words "... right to bless thee, O Theotokos"). It is remarkable that the Catholic

music did not suffer any deficiency of instrumental sounding, and in the timber limitedness in the Orthodox liturgy is compensated with the diversity of the sounding of bells of various sizes. Piano, harp and percussion instruments (both in the prelude and in the finale) imitate the sound of the Russian bells, and this is the principal artistic and imagery element of the finale. "Sounding and tonality of the bell for Stravinsky is primarily a musical element and not a being element." [25]. In the first part, there occurs the orchestra ritornelle, and in its sounding, there is found the imitation of the synthesis of organ and bell; only the type of the texture and characters of figurations are associated with the organ, and the sounding is ascribed to bells. Rejection of violins is even more symptomatic from the Orthodox point of view, as this instrument appears in Protestant passions as a concerto part and has a large capacity emotion-wise.

One more arguments that "gives out" the Orthodox worldview of the composer; Stravinsky mentioned that he does not love organ, as this instrument does not breathe, so he changes it with wind instruments. [26]. Alleluia in the form of a short passage in the finale of the opus deserves to be discussed separately. The simplicity and brilliance of this phrase captures our attention and make us return into the atmosphere of the Russian chanting. It does not appear occasionally in the end of the opus; possible in none of the countries has Alleluia become the object of such keen disputes (since the 15th century) and church quarrels (17th century) as in Russia. The dispute concerned the righteousness of double or triple pronunciation of alleluia. According to Starovers (Old Believers or Old Ritualists), if triple alleluia was followed by "Glory to you, o Lord," it quadrupled the trinity. And Reformers believed that alleluia just points to their unity, so it is possible to pronounce it three times. One alleluia less, would make just two hypostases. In the 17th century there was established a triple alleluia, which is kept by Stravinsky, too. Alleluia is appended by the phrase "Laudate Dominum" and these phrases are repeated without change each time, which is typical for the Russian temples. It is also typical of Orthodox Christianity to be concentrated onto the internal state of soul and not onto the external theatricality of the genre. One more sentence is remarkable. Stravinsky considered that "God must not be praised in fast, forte music, no matter how often the text specifies 'loud.'" [27]. This is also a position of an Orthodox, as in Europe, starting from the Baroque epoch, glory to the God is retold in quick tempo and with symbolically apotheotic sounding.

In the opinion of Wilfrid Howard Mellers, the musicologist, if Stravinsky's music has ever reached the lyrical fullness, then this has been revealed in the "Symphony of Psalms." [28]. Passions of the Protestant music are limited by the Orthodox ascetics, a guarantor of the emotional moderacy, which is very natural for the Orthodox church sounding.

The above-cited arguments point to a certain creative ecumenism which a priori rules out limitations with the canonic of any one confession of Christianity and corresponds to the cosmopolitic creative creed of the composer. Stravinsky is one of those genial creators who paved his own way to the truth, which is only one. Georges Florovsky wrote that the church "Splits come from the inability of mankind to respond to the divine call to the unity, and still, unity, once given, does never disappear. This unity unfolding right in front of us. Despite the diversity of ideas, all we need is to penetrate its depths." [29]. The aim of ecumenism is exactly to restore this common spirit and to deepen theological knowledge. Artists of Igor Stravinsky's range are able to achieve this ideal of Christian unity in their creations.

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