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The Called. Church Musicians in the Face of Cultural Changes¹

We are living in a time of crisis. There are “many facts indicating that the united Europe is losing its political unity and cracking economically at the same time, and demographically, it is even annihilating, [...] it is weakening religiously and socially, and losing its cultural influence”². We are witnessing a widespread process of redefinition of concepts and values, establishment of laws that contradict the Decalogue, abandonment (or even rejection) of the Christian tradition, and disappearance (or even negation) of cultural references to Christianity.

Increasingly often a dramatic question: what next? is asked in the public space. In family and social conversations, we can sense painful rifts reflecting current social protests, decisions of politicians, reactions (or perhaps lack of reaction) from church authorities, comments from mainstream and social media that fuel mutual resentment. People who were previously close often distance themselves from each other because they cannot or are unable to overcome differences of opinion and to avoid bringing up difficult subjects in their conversations. Thus, issues that until recently were indisputable now become inconvenient: the value of a child's life, the concern of schools for the moral condition of young people, the right of parents to bring up children in accordance with their system of values, the right to make professional choices according to the dictates of one's conscience, the right to make choices regarding one's own health, etc.

¹ The text was delivered on 22.11.2021 at the International Scientific Conference *Liturgical Music Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow – Fidelity to Tradition, Need for Renewal* as part of the 16th Days of Church Music in Krakow.

² M. Zięba, *Kłopot za kłopotem. Katolik w dryfującej Europie*, Poznań 2015, p. 9.

This article is an attempt to diagnose selected cultural and social threats and to relate them to the everyday life of Roman Catholic church musicians and their profession in Poland. In this regard, the reflection is based on the analysis presented in the book *Kłopot za kłopotem. Katolik w dryfującej Europie* [*Trouble follows trouble. A Catholic in a drifting Europe*] by Fr Maciej Zięba OP³. In the second part, the article refers to the tripartite model of sacred music, consisting of feeling, aesthetics and mystery, proposed by an eminent theologian, member of the Pontifical Academy of Theology, Professor Inos Biffi. This model might help to find answers to questions of interest to us: Can a Christian musician face the growing problems, and if so, then how?

A properly educated musician is aware of his heritage (tradition), has mastered relevant technique and shows artistic sensitivity to beauty. He has the knowledge, skills and awareness of contemporary professional conditions, including legal, venue-related, musical or repertoire factors. Finally, if he is a Christian, the musician should respect the spiritual element in both the individual and the community dimensions.

It can be said that the main task of the church musician is to draw from the past what is most valuable, to enliven it with his or her faith, enthusiasm and passion, and then transfer it to the next generation. The church musician balances on the borderline between secular and ecclesiastical realities and is a kind of link between them. He connects the two worlds, and at the same time – because of the close relation to each of them – he often sees and experiences greater difficulties than an average churchgoer.

1. “European troubles” and the work ethos of church musicians. Diagnosis from a hundred years ago

From the writings of Maria Renata of Christ CSIC⁴, a nun from the Congregation of Sisters of the Immaculate Conception who lived a century ago, we learn that for the Church (and liturgical art) the most important and dangerous legacy of the 19th century were – in her opinion – modernism and devotionism.

The religion of modernists was based on individual feelings, it rejected dogmas and the element of intellectual reflection, negated the value of public worship (and thus of liturgy) in favour of religious individualism and being alone with God. In classical music, so-called “religious secular works” began to appear, which did not meet the liturgical requirements in terms of content and style.

³ M. Zięba, *Kłopot za kłopotem*, p. 9.

⁴ Maria Renata od Chrystusa CSIC, *Liturgia a sztuka*, Warszawa 2002.

In the name of individual freedom, people began to claim the right to define their own norms and to use art as a means of expressing ideas – such expression being devoid of not only aesthetic but also moral boundaries, thus elevating the human being to the sole and highest criterion of value, but at the same time disregarding the right of believers to a different view of reality. At the present time, we often witness various iconoclastic productions, theatrical plays or so-called performances which are inspired by this attitude.

On the other hand, as Sister Maria Renata of Christ claims – perhaps as a short-sighted response to the attitude of the modernists – an aesthetically and intellectually undemanding mass trend of piety developed in the form of devotionism, which “cluttered the altars like a shelf of trinkets”⁵ with painted plaster figures of saints and dilettante musical compositions. As a result, we have inherited uncritically reproduced forms of piety (such as gestures, texts, songs, paintings, cheap sculptures and devotional items), with little intellectual or aesthetic value, which from year to year are becoming increasingly worthless. To this day, in many Polish parishes, figures and images of saints crowd the side altars, arranged in a random fashion devoid of any order (let alone any aesthetic consideration), while the musical repertoire, unchanged for years, is supposed to enliven the singing community of the faithful with its erstwhile momentum.

2. Aftermath of the moral revolution of 1968

The remaining portion of this part of the article is based on the diagnosis made by Fr Maciej Zięba OP, who discusses the major cultural changes taking place in Europe today. The text, published in 2015, does not account for the rapid development of certain phenomena to which the pandemic contributed.

The author of the diagnosis puts forward the thesis that the problems Europe is experiencing are a simple consequence of the ideas of the moral revolution that swept through the minds of students in 1968, affecting also the activity of a whole host of influential scientists, postmodern artists, so-called social authorities and most of the media – at first mainly in France, the United States and West Germany, but then also in countries all over the world, from Australia to Mexico. The exceptions were the countries of the so-called Eastern Bloc, where these ideas started to be “implemented” several decades later, and we are experiencing their effects now. What is happening in Poland today is, according to Dr Ralph Martin, an example of such an “ideological hurricane”⁶.

⁵ Maria Renata od Chrystusa CSIC, *Liturgia a sztuka*, p. 183.

⁶ R. Martin, *Kościół w kryzysie*, Kraków 2021.

The key ideas of the moral revolution of 1968 postulating that “people are not only equal, but they are the same”, “autonomy is the right to define one’s own norms”, and “the source of value lies within each individual” still resonate in the public sphere today, and they are a glaring contradiction to the Christian view. They are the consequences of the Enlightenment view of man and of religion, according to which the latter “fosters violence” and thus becomes not only harmful but even dangerous to social life⁷. In this context, the meaning of such concepts as: “religion”, “family”, “father”, “fatherland” becomes clearly pejorative and associated with the perpetuation and transmission of tradition and faith, as well as with the restriction of “freedom”, “liberty”, “equality”, or “sexuality”⁸.

Bearing the above-mentioned context in mind, it is worth devoting special pastoral attention (also through music) to the endangered values. “Defend the family!” is what Pope John Paul II urged the nations to do seeing the approaching consequences of the systemic weakening of the family identity:

To tell the truth, today the very identity of the family is being subjected to dehumanizing threats. Loss of the “human” dimension in family life is leading people to dispute the anthropological roots of the family as a communion of persons. Thus, more or less everywhere in the world, deceptive alternatives are emerging which do not recognize the family as precious and essential for the social fabric. In this way, through irresponsibility and lack of commitment to the family, we run the risk, unfortunately, of having to pay a high social price, and it is the future generations in particular who will have to pay it, as victims of a harmful and bewildered mindset and lifestyles unworthy of man⁹.

The heirs of the revolutionary thought have implemented their ideas in an ideologically-inspired “march through institutions” in order to finally break with Christianity – which is identified with intolerance and violence – and (in the West) for several generations, they have been educating young people, who – in consequence – do not understand the concepts of “salvation”, “sin”, “faith” or “love”, do not recognise Christian iconography or symbolism, the texts of the musical works being performed, their complexity, depth and symbolism, who do not know

⁷ M. Zięba, *Kłopot za kłopotem*, p. 177.

⁸ M. Zięba, *Kłopot za kłopotem*, p. 6ff.

⁹ John Paul II, Address to those attending the convention of the Presidents of the Episcopal Commissions for the Family and Life of Europe, 13.06.2003, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2003/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20030613_pc-family.html (10.11.2021).

the Gospel either in its kerygmatic meaning or in its descriptive sense¹⁰. People are being raised without moral authority, lonely, unstable and, as a result, unable to cope with life's difficulties.

3. Enlightenment cliché

These actions are deliberate. Zięba quotes Voltaire's disconcerting words in which he calls for the "crushing of the abomination" [the Catholic Church] by all available means:

Let us not hesitate to defame the authors who have opposing views, let us insidiously ooze the venom of suspicion. Let the people learn of the wickedness of the enemy, let us present it in the worst possible light... If the facts deny it, let us fabricate the evidence – wrote Voltaire, adding – Attack stealthily, careful not be caught red-handed¹¹.

As a result, generations of people unaware of Christian references in culture and art are growing up, detached from the Christian cultural tradition, or even hostile to it. I omit here the very real financial and organisational difficulties one may encounter at cultural institutions and universities when discussing issues related to the culture of the Church, however I would like to point out that the academic discourse in art history, musicology or theatre studies is often reduced to a purely aesthetic aspect, not allowing for the possibility of discussing the true context, content or meaning of sacred works. A small though bothersome evidence of this tendency are the contemporary cover designs for CDs with sacred music, combining the works of strictly religious content with illustrations of storks, a circus artist on a rope or of ethnic curiosities. This shows both the spiritual ignorance of their authors and a lack of respect for Christian listeners.

4. European collapse "Threat to the cultural message"

It's difficult to disagree with the view, that

Western culture has lost its Christian orientation. Today, therefore, if we wish to continue to be true Christians, we must live counter-culturally, and

¹⁰ M. Zięba, *Kłopot za kłopotem*, p. 13.

¹¹ P. Gaxotte, *Revolucja francuska*, tłum. J. Furuhielm, Gdańsk 2001, p. 70, quoted after: M. Zięba, *Kłopot za kłopotem*, p. 163.

the Church must stop pretending to be an advocate of the surrounding culture. Instead, it needs to bear witness to its faith, often going against the tide. [...] A sober perspective is needed in order to discern the fundamental problem of today's disciples of the Risen Lord. This problem lies in the fact that the world seems to bring many poisons and impurities into the Church [...] [and the Church] is no longer [...] an organisation which has an influence on temporal matters. It should acknowledge this loss of influence, recognise its significance and stop clinging to it, instead concentrating on preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ without expecting flattering reviews from the world's leading opinion formers¹².

I would like to emphasise that the author points to the Church as an institution – a community of clergy and laity who by undertaking specific roles (including musical ones) not only contribute to the preaching of the Gospel during the liturgy (developing their own competencies, preparing music suitable for the liturgy, selecting appropriate texts, caring for the beauty and accuracy of performance), but also fulfil various roles outside the church, in the public sphere (through concert initiatives, workshops, publications, conferences, broadcasts, presence in the media, etc.) – all these can become areas for the preaching of the Gospel. Public space, school education, the family, but also academic debate, are new mission areas, though this mission is a particularly difficult one since it is largely appropriated by the media and censored.

In the face of the above-mentioned difficulties, it is patient and systemic education and speaking out in the public debate that may help to slow down the changes. It is necessary to create a coherent counterbalance to the intellectual and spiritual ignorance found in the public sphere by caring for the cultural sphere, artistic education in our parishes being part of it. For it is there (and sometimes only there) that an average believer has fairly regular contact with art – the culture of the word, sound and image. What is more, they often contribute financially themselves, becoming anonymous patrons of culture, refunding renovations of paintings and altars or Stations of the Cross; it is thanks to their generosity that organs can be renovated and concerts organised. The one by whom art is received becomes its patron at the same time.

Therefore, it is extremely important that those whose task is to care for beauty of culture and for works of art (including musical art) in local centres should be professionals. When listing the causes of the crisis in church music, Fr Andrzej Filaber

¹² R. Skrzypczak, *Wstęp*, in: R. Martin, *Kościół w kryzysie*, p. 14–15.

mentions ignorance¹³ in the first place. He also points to the problem of employing undereducated musicians, as well as to the secularisation of liturgy due to the ignorance of the Church's teachings among both the laity and the clergy. From this point of view, religious and artistic education should go hand in hand, and the key to that seems to be a wisely conveyed evangelical message, supported by the testimony of the speaker and followed by "the touch on the heart" through art.

In order to be effective, educational activities should involve three interrelated areas: the general education of society, musical formation of the clergy and the training of specialists. The relationship between these three elements is obvious: if any of them is neglected, it will affect the others.

To translate the previous reflections into practice, it can be postulated that we should make use of various opportunities in order to reach out with valuable music and evangelising catechesis to different groups within the Church, as well as those who can be brought to the Church through music. The development of new, alternative forms of participation in culture should be combined with the recognition and use of traditional forms (such as scout movements, meetings with children and parents preparing for sacraments, Catholic youth movements, pilgrimages, renewal movements, prayer meetings, Taizé meetings, scholas, altar boy groups, choirs, choral societies, concerts with music-related talks, presentations of art works and instruments, etc.). Engaging children artistically by involving their parents seems an effective, though difficult option.

Proper musical formation of the clergy guarantees that there will be an adequate space for music in individual parishes. In this regard, it is not necessary to make any special changes in the seminary schedules (although there is increasingly less time allocated to music), but to develop in the young seminar students an attitude of love for the liturgy, to shift the focus from purely devotional practices towards a thorough celebration of the Mass and the Office¹⁴, and to help them understand that music has a liturgical as well as an evangelising value. What may prove to be particularly fruitful in this respect is the cooperation of the clergy and the laity during such activities as organising music workshops, preparing the Triduum celebrations, improving the musical skills of young clergy, joint singing in ensembles, undertaking and supporting local artistic initiatives – concert series, properly prepared musical services, and many others.

¹³ A. Filaber, *Drogi i bezdroża muzyki liturgicznej w Polsce w świetle nowej instrukcji Episkopatu Polski*, „Musica Ecclesiastica” (2019) nr 14, p. 70ff.

¹⁴ Por. *Błogosławione marnowanie, o Mszy świętej z Ojcem Tomaszem Kwietniem rozmawiają Jacek Borkowicz i Ireneusz Cieślak*, Kraków 2003, p. 249ff.

From the perspective of many years of academic experience, I can say that church music faculties and departments in Polish musical universities educate church musicians who are high-class professionals. This is achieved thanks to well-developed academic activities (annual national symposia, numerous publications, workshops, concert series, courses with the participation of distinguished guests, organological trips), as well as numerous artistic and educational activities in which students and teachers participate. Competent teaching staff, active and committed students, good curricula, including a large number of individual classes, are the factors thanks to which a church musician may develop in various areas: liturgical playing, instrumental performance, Gregorian chant and conducting. As a result, church music graduates are in great demand in the churches of the region and nationwide.

The education of musicians (organists, cantors, animators), but also of priests, is what halts the general trend towards the primitivisation of liturgical genres, which are increasingly often reduced to simple song forms, and this in turn threatens to destroy the cultural heritage of the previous centuries. In terms of genres and repertoire, today's liturgical music has become terribly impoverished – song forms, alternate chants and the so-called Taizé canons are often the only manifestations of genre diversity, which cannot even be compared with the genre richness of the Gregorian chant itself, with the different varieties of motet and mass works, annual cycles of offertories or communions created over the centuries. They have been replaced by simple stanzaic songs or several-bar ostinatos, which do not meet the requirements of the liturgy. Out of the desire to vary the repertoire, some organists try to embellish the liturgy with the so-called youth songs (a notion unknown to the contemporary non-singing youth), making attempts – which are doomed to failure – to adapt the organ accompaniment to suit the pieces which are intended for a pilgrimage bonfire or an evangelising meeting at best.

At this point, one should point out that it would be advisable to follow the centuries-old tradition of the Gregorian chant, especially with regard to its unparalleled connection to the liturgy. A return to the Word and appropriate meditation on it would enable a careful and proper choice of the repertoire.

What should be mentioned here is the fact that composers have rather little interest in creating high-quality liturgical music. The need to explore “what is new and avant-garde” – the flagship idea of most composers – is inherently at odds with the requirements (limitations?) imposed by the logic of the liturgy, which stresses such values as time, order, silence and appropriate musical language. The question is to what extent the young generations of composers are truly exploratory. According to Tomasz Kulikowski, a composer from Wrocław,

despite the enormous stylistic diversity, contemporary times have not produced many original compositional techniques [...]. It seems that all methods employed to shape the sound substance – with regard to traditional instrumentation – had their prototypes in history¹⁵.

Finding historical equivalents for serialism, aleatorism, sonorism, ostinato, canon, etc., Kulikowski goes on to say that:

The essence of contemporary compositional techniques is a combination of modern sound material and the historical way of processing it [...] in other words: it consists in dressing up old techniques in the garment of new timbre¹⁶.

The question to what extent this new type of sound is adequate for the style of contemporary liturgical music is left open; it is true, though, that sacred compositions often use traditional ways of selecting sound material and techniques characteristic of past eras. A further elaboration of the problem can be found in the text of Kulikowski's article that has been quoted here.

What could motivate composers to contribute more to the functional liturgical repertoire might be the realisation that there is some kind of mission to be accomplished. In the situation when professional composers do not undertake to create the kind of music in question, the resulting repertoire gap is filled with mediocre, amateurish "works" of poor artistic and aesthetic value.

Another issue is the fact that the technical means used by composers today often require high professional qualifications of performers. The lack of proper ensembles in Polish churches is sometimes used by composers as an excuse for not creating church music, although historically speaking, both composing and performing what we consider today the classics of sacred music (up until the 19th century) always required professionals and at least modest financial outlay. The question is why in Poland, where the level of all types of choral music has significantly increased in recent decades, this development does not translate (or translates only to a small extent) into the involvement of professional ensembles in important

¹⁵ T. Kulikowski, *Wybrane współczesne techniki kompozytorskie – możliwość zastosowania w akompaniamencie liturgicznym*, in: *Psalate synetos*, 2: *Twórca wobec wymogów współczesnej liturgii*, red. M. Kierska-Witczak, Wrocław 2019, p. 116.

¹⁶ T. Kulikowski, *Wybrane współczesne techniki kompozytorskie – możliwość zastosowania w akompaniamencie liturgicznym*, p. 116.

church centres. Does the cause lie in the reluctance to finance them, in the lack of interest and the hermetic attitude of the church circles?

“[The Church] – to reiterate – should acknowledge this loss of influence, recognise its significance and stop clinging to it, instead concentrating on preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ”. For the church musician, it is the respect for the Word, for the liturgy and the place where it is celebrated, and for the faithful that is of importance here. It is necessary to ask oneself about the motivation behind practising one’s profession: Am I primarily driven by my own artistic and professional ambition or by concern for the spiritual growth of the congregation? To use biblical imagery – it is the choice between building the Tower of Babel or the Cenacle. Let us note that it was into the Cenacle (probably not even fully cleaned and painted) that the Spirit descended when the apostles, despite their fear, persisted in prayer.

It is of great importance that no one should remain alone in their endeavours – it is necessary to build cooperation between the laity and the clergy, to create a community of people with similar values, who can share and discuss current problems, but also support each other with prayer. It is necessary to build up – patiently but effectively, sometimes even against human hope – a community to which the cultural circles could be won over again.

5. Emergence of ethics in the capitalist economy?

Among the many issues addressed in his book, Father Maciej Zięba also presents a broad philosophical and historical perspective on the changes that have occurred in the way people think about money, arguing that the capitalist economy is based on the foundations of Christian anthropology and Christian ethics, which are deeply embedded in Western culture. He puts forward the following thesis:

As long as Western societies drew upon the resources [of Christian anthropology and ethics], the long-term unprecedented increase in prosperity obscured the structural problems. The break with Christian roots generated a paradigm of economics as a science devoid of ethical references and treating man like an object¹⁷.

At the same time, Zięba notices some positive symptoms – that is attempts to move from the aforementioned economics devoid of moral norms to some kind of economic reflection. For Zięba, the increasingly frequent use of such terms as “business ethics”, “brand reputation”, “human capital”, “relational capital”

¹⁷ M. Zięba, *Kłopot za kłopotem. Katolik w dryfującej Europie*, p. 99. According to Enlightenment scientism, the laws of economics excluded any moral and spiritual factors and were subject to the same strict laws as Newtonian mechanics in physics. “Knowledge free from doubt, morality, metaphysics, personal views”. Cf. M. Zięba, *Kłopot za kłopotem*, p. 89.

proves that we are beginning to notice the relationship between a proper appreciation of the value of man and the effectiveness and speed of work, the involvement of employees and even the reduction of business costs. One may be tempted to translate this tendency into Church practice and to suggest some simple postulates in this respect. Such postulates originate, on the one hand, from the principles of the management process and, on the other hand, from the most elementary Christian moral norms, which are often not observed with regard to the employment of church musicians. And so the following issues should be mentioned and examined in detail:

- respect for the potential of the employee (recognising and respecting the competencies and autonomy of the church musician),
- motivation to improve one's own qualifications (due rights and responsibilities in this respect),
- a model of cooperation and teamwork (time for the parish priest to talk with the musicians, the ability to engage in dialogue, mutual respect for one another's concerns and opinions, smooth and substantial cooperation in the preparation of important events, support and facilitation of cooperation between parish ensembles and groups and the parish council),
- a model of relations that may help the musician to identify with the institution (employer's interest in the musician's activities), and last but not least,
- adequate and decent financial compensation as well as a clear, fair form of employment securing the employee's rights and entitlements.

6. Between gender and genderism

Maciej Zięba OP puts the problems related to the contemporary Church's attitude to the issue of sex at the top of his list of troubles¹⁸. He is precise in his use of concepts and terms, treating sex as a psychophysical fact of being a woman or a man, a fact confirmed by genetics, neurobiology and medicine. However, he acknowledges the cultural and social aspect of experiencing and perceiving sexuality, which has changed, determined by historical circumstances, and here he uses the term *gender*. In his opinion, it is undeniable that in different epochs women and men have had different social positions, different influence on cultural events, and sometimes different opportunities.

The rejection of this way of thinking leaves one with a third concept, often related to some prejudicial fears – that of *genderism*, which is culturally very dangerous. It is as different from gender as science is from scientism, because based

¹⁸ M. Zięba, *Kłopot za kłopotem*, p. 35ff.

in ideology, which does not take into account the findings of science, it assumes that the obvious differences should be reduced to a cultural element, and that a culture must be introduced in which the roles of man and woman can be exchanged freely, at the discretion of an individual, even an under-age one (such cases being increasingly often reported in the foreign media). And this is the reality that impacts everyday life.

The problem I want to raise here is the recognition of the fact that culture in general, and the culture of the Church in particular, is, for obvious reasons, masculinised. According to Zięba, this cannot be changed through administrative decisions (and restrictions against those who think differently), neither by introducing artificial parity principles, which do not go hand in hand with the necessary competencies, nor by women adopting male attributes, but only by bringing out and emphasising the great significance of the female element in culture, the fact that it is as important as the male element and absolutely equal to it. To confirm his point of view, Zięba quotes a fragment of John Paul II's apostolic letter *Mulieris dignitatem* from 1988¹⁹.

Also with regard to this issue, one should postulate a change of view that would allow for noticing the role of women in the Church and for unlocking their great potential – this refers in particular to lay women who are professional church musicians: organists, conductors, specialists, and partners in conversation and discourse. It is necessary to recognise a woman's practical view of reality, her natural ability to build relationships, to efficiently manage and coordinate tasks, and to assume responsibilities. Unfortunately, women often meet with a certain disregard, or even condescension, which discourages them from full involvement in church activities. On the other hand, there is also an important question of exploiting the potential of lay men in our churches. It is an urgent problem, because – contrary to women, who are actually involved in many parish matters and activities, it is not that easy to find suitable and challenging tasks for men. An apt summary of this situation is an overheard statement claiming that today's Polish Church consists of priests and of women.

For this reason, it seems that men, and especially fathers, are an important group that might be the target of pastoral mission and that might be encouraged to become involved in liturgical and musical ministry. This can take various forms and functions, as men may become lectors, acolytes, psalmists, singers of the Prayer of the Faithful, members of small ensembles singing Gregorian chant, traditional songs or the so-called Dominican chants, or of scholas involved in the preparation of the Paschal Triduum, Tenebrae, the Rorate Masses, and various other

¹⁹ M. Zięba, *Kłopot za kłopotem*, p. 38–39.

services. Involving the parents of children that are preparing for sacraments might turn out to be particularly effective, and for children, their fathers' engagement in prayer and singing during the celebratory First Communion liturgy will be an unforgettable testimony.

7. Biffi's model

Let us repeat: we are living in a time of crisis. Tackling the above-mentioned challenges requires consistency and the effort to go "against the tide", the courage to return to the origin in order to realise the essence and purpose of the Christian artist's work. The model outlined below, in which Professor Inos Biffi distinguishes three closely interconnected components of sacred music, might be of help here. It offers a certain way out of the crisis of sacred culture²⁰. The three components are:

- the "feeling" in which the music originates,
- aesthetics, which gives the music the form and shape of a work of art,
- mystery – the last element which, according to Biffi, ultimately defines sacred music, orientating sacred art towards its ultimate goal, which is the glory of God and sanctification of the Church.

Each of these elements will now be described in terms of its key aspects: the notions that make up the element, the images associated with it, and its theological dimension, as well as in terms of the dangers that neglecting the given element might result in, followed by a discussion of the practical aspect (*praxis*).

7.1. "Feeling"

The key notion for the first component is not so much emotionality, but "experience" – man's personal experience of his relationship with his Creator, the experience from which music is born. Saint Ambrose will call it *ima cordis*, the deepest secrets of the heart, where individual inner praise and contemplation take place. It is a time dedicated to celebrating the Word and listening to it (according to the fundamental commandment: "Hear, O Israel" (Deut 6, 4)²¹), an intimate spiritual place where we "experience amazement" in the face of the Creator and His work. "O Lord, our Lord, how worthy of admiration is your name on the entire earth" (Ps 8, 2)²², exclaims the psalmist in sincere exultation. Three thousand years later

²⁰ I. Biffi, *Teologiczne refleksje nad muzyką sakralną*, "Communio. Międzynarodowy Przegląd Teologiczny" 21 (2001) nr 2, p. 29ff.

²¹ *Biblia pierwszego Kościoła*, tłum. R. Popowski SDB, Warszawa 2021, p. 216.

²² *Biblia pierwszego Kościoła*, p. 725.

John Paul II will write: “In the face of the holiness of man’s life, in the face of the wonders of the universe, admiration is the only satisfactory attitude”²³.

An image illustrating this attitude could be the figure of an orant standing with her hands raised high, deep in prayer, while in terms of the theological dimension, it is a striving for *metanoia*, an inner transformation of man who participates in the act of worship. He is called to holistic prayer that involves the soul, mind and all human senses. According to Inos Biffi,

the entire concrete anthropology [...] should be involved in the liturgical action: sight, hearing, word, voice and taste must perceive and reflect the Christian mystery, they must enjoy it, contemplate it, admire it, [...] experience it emotionally and turn it into worship. [...] in this way the anthropology, the soul and the body will be profoundly transformed²⁴.

The transformation of man, then, takes place in silence, during personal prayer and contemplation of the Word, and it is dynamically directed towards love. It is accomplished with a sense of complete freedom and with humility before God, who is the Truth. In the artistic sphere, this attitude is achieved through individually chosen means of expression.

Neglecting the “feeling” (individual experience of faith) leads to routine, performance of certain rituals (including music) out of habit, without due attention and “sensitivity”, and this in turn results in a growing sense of the meaninglessness of faith and a slow drift away from the Church.

As for *praxis*, an effective and, as it seems, the only solution is to return to the Logos. In the individual dimension, it means focusing on prayer and working towards “rediscovering the time and silence” necessary to hear the Word. In the social dimension, it entails evangelisation and powerful testimony, resulting from the experience of God’s intervention in one’s own life. These translate into a passion for the beauty of the liturgy, a desire to celebrate and “waste” time for God.

²³ List Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II do artystów, “Zeszyty Niedzieli” (1999) No. 11, p. 33–34.

²⁴ I. Biffi, *Teologiczne refleksje nad muzyką sakralną*, “Communio. Międzynarodowy Przegląd Teologiczny” 21 (2001) nr 2, p. 35.

7.2. Aesthetics

The key concept for the second component under discussion is that of Ambrosian *gratia*, which St Augustine speaks of as: “gracefully adorned sound”²⁵, referring to the beauty of singing and image, the grace and perfection of form.

...singing is more than sound, it is harmonious sound. [...] for one does not harmonise singing to produce sound, but harmonises sound to accomplish singing²⁶.

An exemplary image here might be the complicated design of a gothic stained glass rosette or, in music, the concept of an elaborate polyphonic Frankish-Flemish mass. The aesthetic category applies to every type of art regardless of its complexity and the forms used, and its premise is that the melody, instinctively born in the depths of the heart, should be shaped with the right “proportion and measure”, the right harmony, form, style and properly selected technical means. This component entails training of instrumental and vocal technique, the composing and performing skills, as well as those necessary to properly care for the instruments. It calls for excellence of technique and form – the neglect of the aesthetic component leads to ugliness and kitsch, to the slow trivialisation of sacred works, which balance between mediocrity, exaggeration and disorderly noise. “Pastoral pragmatism” and pandering to the popular tastes of the audience (and performers), from whom little intellectual effort is expected, are a doubtful justification for such a situation.

As for *praxis*, musical education of the entire congregation by systematically showing them good artistic models should be considered an effective course of action. High aesthetic awareness and high competence of church musicians, their constant work on developing their technique²⁷ will allow for an appropriate selection of repertoire and a moderate choice of musical means, suited to a given community.

²⁵ Św. Augustyn, *O porządku*, II, 11, 13, tłum. W. Seńko, in: św. Augustyn, *Dialogi filozoficzne*, Kraków 1999, p. 215–216, quoted after: I. Biffi, *Teologiczne refleksje nad muzyką sakralną*, “Communio. Międzynarodowy Przegląd Teologiczny” 21 (2001) nr 2, p. 30–31.

²⁶ Św. Augustyn, *Wyznania*, XII, 29, tłum. Z. Kubiak, Kraków 2002, p. 377.

²⁷ I. Biffi, *Teologiczne refleksje nad muzyką sakralną*, “Communio. Międzynarodowy Przegląd Teologiczny” 21 (2001) nr 2, p. 29–38.

7.3. Mystery

Discussed by Biffi as the last component of the triad, as its culmination, mystery becomes a fundamental element of Christian artistic work. The key notions for this component are: liturgy, theology, participation, divine *gloria*, time of celebration, and the best image illustrating the concept is the heavenly Jerusalem, the heavenly liturgy.

In the theological dimension, the “mystery” is the source of and the basic motivation for every sacred action (including sacred art), and its conclusion at the same time.

To return to the model in question, if art fulfils the first two conditions (it grows out of “feeling” and meets the aesthetic requirements), during the liturgy it becomes a kind of confession of faith, it contributes to the glory of God and builds up the community²⁸.

The neglect of the “mystery” element results in aiming for other goals than the glory of God. What Fr Andrzej Filaber calls the instrumentalisation of liturgy²⁹, e.g. promoting oneself, a particular ensemble or one’s own musical works, stands in opposition to the liturgy oriented towards its original and only Addressee.

The signs of neglect also include haste, sloppiness, lack of adequate preparation of the celebration, carelessness, subjectivity in the choice of repertoire, inadequate treatment of the place of celebration, and individualization at the expense of community participation.

As for *praxis*, the solution again consists in deepening the spiritual life by turning to the Word and individual prayer, broadening knowledge about the liturgy, devoting time to its preparation, as well as building a community of people who jointly experience faith, who love the liturgy and its beauty, including coposers and performers.

The called

To reach the necessary conclusions, one should address the issue raised by Joseph Ratzinger: “It is necessary to return to the Logos as the only point of reference in order to save the human being”³⁰, which he sees as the only possibility of avoiding

²⁸ Cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium*, No. 112.

²⁹ A. Filaber, *Drogi i bezdroża muzyki liturgicznej w Polsce w świetle nowej instrukcji Episkopatu Polski*, “Musica Ecclesiastica” 14 (2019), p. 73.

³⁰ J. Ratzinger, *Muzyka a liturgia*, “Communio. Międzynarodowy Przegląd Teologiczny” 21 (2001) nr 2, p. 47.

an anthropological catastrophe. In both practical and spiritual terms, it means living the life of the Word and of personal prayer. For the participant of liturgy who is also a musician, the transformation of their heart, conscious inner participation in celebration, and finally a personal experience of faith will translate into an inner commitment to singing and prayer, and also to “the prayer of silence”, which respects the time of celebration and tones in with it, enhancing the inner experience. The celebration then becomes full of peace and joy.

It is extremely difficult to face the problems mentioned in the introduction alone – the cultural changes that are taking place right before our eyes “overwhelm”, in a way, the individual and are, according to Maciej Zięba, irreversible. All the more so, then, let us repeat after Ratzinger: “in order to save the human being”, it is necessary to return to the Word – the source that gives meaning to the work of every Christian artist and defends him against the temptation to redefine the existing values. The “feeling – aesthetics – mystery” model I have discussed urges us to reflect on the essence of the musician’s work in the Roman Catholic Church, on his own involvement in an increasingly conscious and full participation in the life of the Church, which he serves through his artistic competence. If the art he practises stems from a personal experience of faith, it will lead others to faith. Thanks to its closeness to the Word and its high aesthetic level, liturgical music will acquire a kerygmatic dimension – it will become a tool of evangelisation that will strengthen the Church community, also in the face of the aforementioned travails and “troubles” that we experience every day.

“If a pagan comes to you saying, show me your faith [...], bring him to a church and let him stand before the sacred paintings”³¹. May our musical icons be authentically spiritual, faithful to tradition, artistically alive and invigorating. This is what we – as church musicians – are called to.

transl. Ewa Skotnicka

³¹ Words of John Damascene, quoted after: W. Tatarkiewicz, *Historia estetyki*, Vol. 2, Warszawa 2014, e-book.

Abstract

The Called. Church Musicians in the Face of Cultural Changes

The article is an attempt to diagnose selected cultural and social threats and to relate them to the everyday life of church musicians and their profession. In this regard, the reflection is based on the analysis presented in the book *Kłopot za kłopotem. Katolik w dryfującej Europie* [Trouble follows trouble. A Catholic in a drifting Europe] by Fr Maciej Zięba OP. In the second part, the article refers to the tripartite model of sacred music, consisting of feeling, aesthetics and mystery, proposed by an eminent theologian, member of the Pontifical Academy of Theology, Professor Inos Biffi. This model should provide answers to questions of interest to us: How can a Christian musician plan and shape his professional future? Can he face the growing problems, and if so, then how?

Keywords: the work ethos, church musicians, Biffi's model, feeling, aesthetics, mystery

Abstrakt

Wezwani. Muzycy kościelni w obliczu zmian kulturowych

Artykuł jest próbą zdiagnozowania wybranych kulturowych i społecznych zagrożeń oraz odniesienia ich do zawodowej codzienności muzyków kościelnych w oparciu o analizę zawartą w książce Macieja Zięby OP *Kłopot za kłopotem. Katolik w dryfującej Europie*. Kolejno, tekst wykorzystuje model trzech głównych komponentów muzyki sakralnej: uczucia, estetyki i misterium, sformułowanego przez teologa, członka Papieskiej Akademii Teologicznej, prof. Inosa Biffiego, aby w tym modelu poszukać odpowiedzi na interesujące nas pytanie – w jaki sposób chrześcijański muzyk może planować i realizować swoją zawodową przyszłość, czy i w jaki sposób może mierzyć się z narastającymi problemami.

Słowa kluczowe: etos pracy, muzyk kościelny, model Biffiego, uczucie, estetyka, misterium

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