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## The theological dimension of selected Polish Easter songs<sup>1</sup>

Easter songs rooted in the tradition of the Roman Church, and particularly present in Poland, date back to the Middle Ages. With their content and the theology they contain, they reveal the greatest mysteries of the Christian faith, relating to the mystery of Christ's passion, death and resurrection. The New Testament truth was made present in the Church's liturgy, especially in the sacraments and other rites, which date back to the beginnings of Christianity. The joy of the mystery of Christ's resurrection and the redemption of man is experienced by the Church especially throughout the Easter season—from Resurrection Sunday to Pentecost Sunday. This time correlates directly with the season of Lent and the Holy Paschal Triduum which immediately precedes it. The theological dimension of the liturgy of the Easter season oscillates around the mystery of the victory of life over death, forgiveness over sin, love over evil and hatred, fidelity over betrayal, humility over human pride. This dimension also characterises the richness of Easter hymns and songs, which this article will attempt to interpret.

### 1. From the history of Easter chants

Father Prof. Cassian Folsom OSB emphasises: 'As far as the sensory soul is concerned, the objects of cognition in the liturgy are concrete sacramental signs, gestures, symbols. The sacraments, obviously, are rooted in the five senses. Music, art and architecture are also objects of the soul's sense power (even if reason later

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can and should understand their meaning).”<sup>2</sup> This unique importance of music, alongside art and architecture, as an object of sensory power makes it an essential and indispensable part of the celebrated liturgy. In turn, Fr Odo Casel, an eminent liturgist and researcher of the documents of the early centuries of the Church, explaining the essence of the understanding of the Paschal feasts among the ancient Christians, stated:

The Paschal feast of the ancients is a whole, it is a celebration of the redemption accomplished by the death and exaltation of the Lord, it is a celebration of the economy of salvation which God willed to be accomplished by the work of men. It is, therefore, a ‘festival’ of the highest order, and as such it is a cultic expression of the essence of the Christian religion.<sup>3</sup>

Undoubtedly, songs that have their own genesis and history of origin have contributed to enriching the theological dimension of the Paschal feasts. Pope Benedict XVI expressed this truth in the words: ‘The early development of theology, its ever-deepening knowledge of the deity of Christ, was probably accomplished to a significant extent precisely in the songs of the Church, in the intertwining of theology, poetry and music’<sup>4</sup>.

The formation of liturgical hymns can be traced back to the earliest forms sung in the Latin Church, such as tropes and sequences, which appeared in Gaul at the end of the eighth century<sup>5</sup>. Their simple and syllabic form, with references to folk music, made them very popular and allowed the faithful to gradually join in liturgical singing<sup>6</sup>. At the same time, the liturgy itself gave birth to ‘devotional chants’ in national languages, which developed on the basis of Latin Gregorian chants, especially the aforementioned tropes and sequences, but also hymns and antiphons<sup>7</sup>.

The earliest records of religious chants or devotional songs in Poland are related to processions accompanying church celebrations, so the oldest songs are those related to the celebration of the mystery of Christ’s resurrection—Easter songs, and strictly Resurrection songs. The rich tradition of the Church in Poland brings out of its treasury Easter songs, initially alluding to the choral tradition both in terms of melody and literary value. The first testimonies date from the mid-14th

<sup>2</sup> C. Folsom, *Człowiek współczesny a liturgia*, ed. by K. Porosło, Krakow 2018, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> O. Casel, *La Fête de Pâques dans l’Église des Pères*, Paris 1963, p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Nowa pieśń dla Pana*, transl. J. Zychowicz, Krakow 1999, p. 166.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. T. Sinka, *Polska pieśń w liturgii*, ‘Nasza Przeszłość’ 60 (1983), p. 245.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. T. Sinka, *Polska pieśń w liturgii*, p. 245.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. T. Sinka, *Polska pieśń w liturgii*, p. 246.

century. They are based on a centuries-old work dated 1360–1370, the Plock Pontifical *Stella chori Plocensis* called *Ordinale plocense*, as well as the *Plock Gradual*, which was unfortunately lost during the Second World War<sup>8</sup>. Thanks to the references to this work made by Fr Jozef Michalak in 1939, it is possible to reconstruct a brief description of the Resurrection procession from 14th-century Plock:

‘After singing the laudes during Lauds in solemn procession, all proceed to the tomb, singing ‘Cum rex gloriae...’ The two priests unveil the cross, intone the continuation of the song they began with the words ‘Advenisti...’ After this song the whole people sang: ‘Wstał smartwich crol nas Synboży’. The procession moved off and the song was sung alternately: the people a stanza in Polish, the clergy in Latin a prose stanza ‘Victimae paschali’ (clerus literaliter, populus vulgariter). The boys then sang the Latin hymn ‘Salve festa dies...’ while the people sang ‘Prestwe swete weschrzene’ after each strophe<sup>9</sup>.

It is worth mentioning that during the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord one sang *Przez Twe święte w niebo wstąpienie* [Through Thy Holy Ascension into Heaven], while on the Solemnity of Pentecost one sang *Przez Twe święte Ducha zesłanie* [Through Thy Holy Spirit’s sending forth]<sup>10</sup>. Thus, it can be assumed that the people also joined in with the singing of devotional songs during other processions, such as Palm Sunday or Corpus Christi<sup>11</sup>.

It should also be noted that the oldest medieval Easter processional songs, subjected to literary modification, are still performed today during the liturgy, e.g. *Chrystus zmartwychwstan jest* [Christ is Risen] and *Przez Twoje święte zmartwychpowstanie* [Through Thy Holy Resurrection], while the song *Wstał z martwych krol nasz, Syn Boży* [Risen from the Dead, Our King, the Son of God] became, over time, the so-called Easter part of the *Bogurodzica*<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. T. Sinka, *Polska pieśń w liturgii*, p. 246.

<sup>9</sup> J. Michalak, *Zarys liturgiki*, Plock 1939, pp. 217–218. During the procession the song was performed alternately: the clergy in Latin *Victimae paschali*, the faithful in Polish the same song. On the other hand, when the clergy sang *Venantius Fortunatus’* Latin hymn *Salve festa dies* (Witaj, dniu święty [Hail, holy day]), the people repeated after each stanza: *Przez Twe święte zmartwychwstanie* [Through Thy holy resurrection]. Cf. B. Nadolski, *Leksykon liturgii*, Poznań 2006, p. 1295.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. <https://www.muzeum-radom.pl/muzeum-o-kolberga/tradycja-piesni-wielkanocnych/2947> (15.06.2024).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. T. Sinka, *Polska pieśń w liturgii*, p. 249.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. <https://www.muzeum-radom.pl/muzeum-o-kolberga/tradycja-piesni-wielkanocnych/2947> (15.06.2024).

From the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries come the following songs: *Wszęgo świata wszystkim lud* [The whole world's people] and *Jezus Chrystus Bóg-człowiek* [Jesus Christ God-man] and *Wesoły nam dzień nastął* [A joyful day has come upon us]<sup>13</sup>.

The following centuries, especially the 16th to 18th centuries, brought a significant flowering of Easter songs. In the 16th century, the following songs were written: *Chrystus Pan zmartwychwstał* [Christ the Lord is Risen] and *Dnia tego świętego wielkanocnego* [This Holy Easter Day]<sup>14</sup>.

In the seventeenth century, the following songs were written: *Wesoły nam dzień dziś nastął* [Today is the joyful day], *Dziś Chrystus Król wiecznej chwały* [Today Christ, the King of eternal glory] and a translation of *Collaudemus—Wystawiajmy Chrysta Pana* [Let us praise Christ the Lord]<sup>15</sup>.

The next century—the eighteenth—added abundantly to the repertoire of Easter songs: *Alleluja, chwalcie Pana* [Alleluia, praise the Lord]; *Alleluja, Jezus żyje* [Alleluia, Jesus is alive]; *Chrystus zmartwychwstał* [Christ is risen]; *Dni wesołe nam nastaly* [Joyous days are upon us]; *Dziś nam nastął dzień ozdobny* [Today an ornamental day has come to us]; *Jezus przeszedł smutne drogi* [Jesus has gone through sad ways]; *Książę życia tryumfuje nad śmiercią* [The Prince of life triumphs over death]; *Nie zna śmierci Pan żywota* [The Lord of life knows no death], all written by the eminent poet Franciszek Karpiński (+1825)<sup>16</sup> and with music by Teofil Klonowski (+1876), composer of the song *Wesel się, Królowo miła* [Rejoice, my dear Queen]<sup>17</sup>.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw the majority of composed Easter songs, which can be found in songbooks, beginning with the first edition of Fr Jan Siedlecki's *Śpiewnik kościelny* [The church songbook] of 1878<sup>18</sup>. Songs from the late 19th century highlight the special religious, cultural and patriotic consciousness of Poles then living under the regime of the partitioners.

Moreover, the 19th-century collections of Oskar Kolberg (+1890), which are an extremely valuable source of information on the Polish folk culture of the time and document the living tradition of Polish religious songs, deserve special

<sup>13</sup> Cf. J. Surzyński, *Polskie pieśni Kościoła katolickiego od najdawniejszych czasów do końca XVI stulecia*, Poznań 1891, pp. 95, 101.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. <https://www.muzeum-radom.pl/muzeum-o-kolberga/tradycja-piesni-wielkanocnych/2947> (15.06.2024).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. <https://www.muzeum-radom.pl/muzeum-o-kolberga/tradycja-piesni-wielkanocnych/2947> (15.06.2024).

<sup>16</sup> See F. Karpiński, *Pieśni nabożne*, Supraśl 1792.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. <https://www.muzeum-radom.pl/muzeum-o-kolberga/tradycja-piesni-wielkanocnych/2947> (15.06.2024).

<sup>18</sup> J. Siedlecki, *Śpiewnik kościelny*, Kraków 1876. Current edition recognised as a national liturgical songbook: edition 41, Kraków 2021.

mention<sup>19</sup>. He lists six Easter songs known in the Polish lands in the second half of the 19th century: *Chrystus zmartwychwstan jest* [Christ is risen]; *Dziś Chrystus, Król wiecznej chwaly* [Today Christ, the King of eternal glory]; *Nie zna śmierci Pan żywota* [The Lord of life knows no death]; *Wesoły nam dziś dzień nastał* [Today is the joyful day]; *Wstał Pan Chrystus* [The Lord Christ has risen]; *Wystawiajmy Chrysta Pana* [Praise Christ the Lord]<sup>20</sup>.

Cultural, regional and, above all, patriotic influences, especially at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, were extremely important for the formation of the Polish Easter song. During the Partitions of Poland, Poles perceived Easter, especially the Resurrection procession, as a harbinger of the ‘resurrection’ of their enslaved homeland, and in this context the song *Wesoły nam dzień dziś nastał* [Today is the joyful day] became, in a way, the ‘Easter Polish church hymn’<sup>21</sup>.

## 2. Theology of selected Easter songs

Analysing the content of Easter hymns, we should emphasise their significant value for the heritage of Polish culture. They were and are an invaluable treasure vividly present in the liturgy of the Church, especially when they resound during the Easter season. Their richness is also concluded in their literary and musical form, reflecting the cultural and historical epoch as well as the stages of development of the Polish language.

The theological dimension of the chants of the Easter period focuses essentially on the Gospel event of the night of Christ’s resurrection and the joy of Easter morning. During this period, the Church solemnly celebrates the joy of the work of redemption for fifty days between Resurrection Sunday and Pentecost Sunday<sup>22</sup>. Easter songs help the faithful to personally experience Christ’s victory over death, while opening up the prospect of resurrection and eternal life<sup>23</sup>.

The selected examples of Easter songs presented below are arranged alphabetically by title, consistent with their arrangement proposed in the project *Traditional Church melodies from the perspective of organ accompaniment*<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Oskar Kolberg lists 336 religious songs, out of 12,500 songs. See *Tradycja pieśni wielkanocnych*, <https://www.muzeum-radom.pl/muzeum-o-kolberga/tradycja-piesni-wielkanocnych/2947> (15.06.2024).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Tradycja pieśni wielkanocnych*.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Tradycja pieśni wielkanocnych*.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. J. Siedlecki, *Śpiewnik kościelny*, Kraków 2021, p. 261.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. J. Siedlecki, *Śpiewnik kościelny*, p. 261.

<sup>24</sup> *Tradycyjne pieśni kościelne z perspektywy akompaniamentu organowego*, <https://akompaniament.upjp2.edu.pl/wielkanoc> (15.03.2024).

The song *Alleluja! Jezus żyje, On co za nas życie dał* [Alleluia! Jesus lives, He who gave his life for us]<sup>25</sup> by an unknown author composed of three strophes, joined by a refrain after each, refers to Christ's Gospel announcement of his resurrection: 'as he said, he is risen'. The victor of death brings sinners out of the abyss, as expressed in the Old Polish phrase: *'Wraca z otchłani z jeńcami, / śmiercią skruszył śmierci grot'* ['He returns from the abyss with captives, / by death he has crushed death's grotto'] and, as the Lord of heaven possessing 'the key to heaven's gate', 'hell is strewn underfoot', confirming his power over Satan. The final strophe, together with the refrain, is a joyful turn to the Mother of God, called 'Queen of Heaven', to whom the fact of the Resurrection is announced: 'Your Son lives, the Lord lives'. After the suffering and wounds comes the joy to be shared with the risen Son: 'Joy you must share with Him, / sunshine each of His wounds'.

This old Polish song contains lexical archaisms, such as: *'Nućmy Jemu pienia chwały'* ['Let's hum a song of praise to Him'], making it all the more valuable as a linguistic monument.

A joyful Easter song with a similar title: *Alleluja! Jezus żyje, już Go dłużej grób nie kryje* [Alleluia! Jesus is alive, the tomb hides Him no more]<sup>26</sup>, expresses great joy at the fact of the empty tomb in which Jesus rested for three days: 'the tomb hides Him no more, / in which He rested three days'. Each of the five strophes begins with the Hebrew word Alleluia, expressing joy and praise given to God, and literally from the Hebrew means 'praise, glorify Yahweh'<sup>27</sup>. Simple in literary phrases

<sup>25</sup> '1. Alleluia! Jesus lives, / He who gave His life for us. / No longer does the night hide Him from the grave, / as He said, He is risen. / Ref. Let us hum songs of praise to Him: / Hail, Risen Jesus! / Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia! / 2. He returns from the abyss with captives, / By death He has crushed death's grotto. / Hell is strewn underfoot, / He holds the key to heaven's gate. / Ref. / 3. Rejoice, Queen of heaven, / thy Son liveth, thy Lord liveth. / The joy you share with Him, / the sunshine each of His wounds. / Ref. R.: Hymn songs of praise to Him: / Hail, risen Jesus! / Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!' (J. Siedlecki, *Śpiewnik kościelny*, no. 175, p. 264).

<sup>26</sup> '1. Alleluia! Jesus lives, / no longer hides Him, the grave in which He rested three days, / in which He rested three days. / 2. Alleluia! He has overcome / Jesus the witchcraft that imprisoned us / in this shameful bondage, / in this shameful bondage. / 3. Alleluia! Triumphs / truth, and falsehood recedes / from a land liberated, / from a land liberated. / 4. Hallelujah! Malice rebuked, / and innocence exalted / has regained its rights, / has regained its rights. / 5. Alleluia! The Risen One / is the pledge of eternal glory, / which He has bloody won, / which He has bloody won' (J. Siedlecki, *Śpiewnik kościelny*, no. 174 a, pp. 262–263).

<sup>27</sup> 'Alleluia'—essentially this Old Testament expression has not been translated in various editions of the Bible. In the Greek Bible it was used in psalms 106 (105), 111 (110), 113 (112), 136 (135), 146–150, as an invocation to which the gathered people responded during the synagogue liturgy. The *Hallel* (psalms 113 [112]—118 [117]) was prayed during the feasts. The Church adopted the acclamation 'alleluia' and began to use it for the glory of Christ gaining

and rhyming, the text of the song (AA-BB) shows the people's faith in God's victory over Evil: *Przewyciężył / Jezus czarta, co nas więził / w tej haniebnej niewoli* ['He has overcome / Jesus the devil who imprisoned us / in this shameful bondage']. This victory refers to both the eschatological dimension and the earthly struggle of man and the triumph of truth over falsehood. Christ's resurrection also showed the victory over evil and injustice expressed in human passion, suffering and death: *'Alleluja! Złość zgromiona / a niewinność wyniesiona / odzyskała swoje prawa'* ['Alleluia! Malice rebuked, / and innocence exalted / has regained its rights'].

Another example of a 16th-century Easter song, *Chrystus Pan zmartwychwstał* [Christ the Lord is Risen]<sup>28</sup>, expresses the truth of Christ's victory over death. The author juxtaposes the two dimensions of death: human and Christ's. The former, 'harsh death', is overcome by His death on the cross, described as precious—'dear death'. Each of the three strophes ends with the solemn invocation 'Alleluia!'. After the victory over death referred to in the first strophe, in the second strophe the author addresses the Risen One, beginning with the invocation: *O Chryste, nasz Panie!* ['O Christ, our Lord!'], for inward conversion through the cause of the Resurrection (*'Przez Twe zmartwychwstanie / daj nam z grzechów powstać* ['Through Thy Resurrection / let us rise from our sins']) and for all graces, especially, one might suppose—the grace of the Resurrection (*'Łaski Twojej dostać. Alleluja'* ['Get Thy grace. Alleluia!']). The final strophe is, as it were, the apogee of the entire text of the song and expresses an eschatological nostalgia for eternal life and the encounter with God after life on earth is over: *'A gdy żywot minie / daj w wiecznej krainie / widzieć Ojca swego, / Boga Wszchemocnego. Alleluja!* ['And when life is past, / let us see Thy Father / in the eternal realm / God Almighty. Alleluia!']

One of the most well-known, widespread and at the same time oldest Easter songs is the aforementioned song *Chrystus zmartwychwstan jest* [Christ is Risen]<sup>29</sup>.

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victory. Therefore, 'alleluia' became the characteristic chant of the Easter season and is also performed at many other moments of the celebrated liturgy in the Latin Church. Cf. P. Caban, *Jakie odpowiedzi na wezwania liturgiczne dawali chrześcijanie w starożytności?*, 'Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny' 59 (2006) no. 2, p. 122.

<sup>28</sup> '1. Christ the Lord is risen, / the victory has been won, / for he has shattered death harshly / by his death by the way. Alleluia! / 2. O Christ, our Lord! / By Thy resurrection / grant us from sins to rise, / thy grace to receive. Alleluia! / 3. And when life is past, / grant in the eternal realm / to see Thy Father, / God Almighty. Alleluia!' (J. Siedlecki, *Śpiewnik kościelny*, no. 178, p. 267).

<sup>29</sup> '1. Christ is risen, / to us by example is given, / That we are to rise again, / With the Lord God to reign. Alleluia! / 2. He lay three days in the tomb, / he gave his side to be pierced, / his side, his hands, his feet both, / for salvation to you. Alleluia! / 3. Three Mary's went, / expensive ointments they carried, / they wanted to anoint Christ, / to Him honor and glory

It is considered to be the oldest Polish song of the Easter season and is written in Old Polish ‘Krystus zmartwych wstał je’, a translation of which was probably made by Świętośław of Wilków in 1365<sup>30</sup>. The song originated as a trope to the solemn Easter sequence *Victimae paschali laudes*<sup>31</sup> (*Niech w święto radosne* [Let there be joyful feast]), and its notation—both text and melody—can be found for the first time in the Plock Gradual, although archaic linguistic forms point to an even earlier dating<sup>32</sup>:

Krystus z martwych wstał je,  
Ludu przykład dał je,  
Eż nam z martwych wstaci,  
Z bogiem krolewaci,  
Kyrie [eleison]<sup>33</sup>.

The single stanza form of the song, which appears in many accounts, has enjoyed widespread familiarity since the medieval period, and its melodic shape and equal number of syllables made it easy to remember and perform<sup>34</sup>. Originally, the piece consisted of four verses written in six lines with even rhymes (AABB), completed by the invocation *Kyrie eleison*<sup>35</sup>, but from the mid-15th century further strophes began to be added, including theophanic invocations to the Mother of God, or Polish saints (e.g. St. Stanislaus), expressing requests for spiritual protection and prosperity, and strophes strictly related to the mystery of the Resurrection, especially the motif of the three Marias arriving at the empty tomb of Christ (cf. Mk 16:1–16:6) and the Christophany, i.e. the appearance of Jesus after death<sup>36</sup>. The theology of the song focuses attention on the Gospel message of the kerygma of faith in the

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to give. Alleluia! / When they were on the road, / they said to each other: / There is a stone not small, / and who will roll it away for us? Hallelujah! / Tell us, Mary, / Where did you see the Lord? / I saw Him after the Passion, / holding the banner / in His hand. Alleluia! / 6. As they stood over the tomb, / the white angel said to them, / Fear not, Mary, / the Lord is risen and lives! Alleluia! (J. Siedlecki, *Śpiewnik kościelny*, no. 179, pp. 268–269).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Tradycja pieśni wielkanocnych*.

<sup>31</sup> The sequence *Victimae paschali laudes*, attributed to the presbyter and poet and chaplain to the German emperors (Conrad II and Henry III) Wipon of Burgundy (c. 995–1084), is performed on the Solemnity of the Resurrection and in its octave. Cf. B. Nadolski, *Leksykon liturgii*, pp. 1031–1033.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. B. Nadolski, *Leksykon liturgii*, pp. 1031–1033.

<sup>33</sup> T. Michałowska, *Literatura polskiego średniowiecza*, Warsaw 2011, p. 464.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. M. Korolko, *Średniowieczna pieśń religijna polska*, Wrocław 1980, p. 54.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. T. Michałowska, *Literatura polskiego średniowiecza*, p. 463.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. T. Michałowska, *Średniowiecze*, Warsaw 1995, p. 276.



resurrection of Christ and the mystery of the empty tomb. It is filled with hope in the resurrection of man and reign with God in heaven: *‘Iż mamy zmartwych-powstać, / Z Panem Bogiem królować. Alleluja!* [‘That we are to rise again, / With the Lord God to reign. Alleluia!’]

The Easter song *Dziś Chrystus, Król wiecznej chwały* [Today Christ, King of eternal glory]<sup>37</sup> once again shows the reigning Christ and His victory over death and Satan, announced in the gospels. He triumphs grandly and receives worship ‘on Zion’ as the true Messiah, King and Saviour of the world. His victory is eternal and immortal. Each of the four stanzas ends with a melodious double *Alleluia*, while the final stanza, like the ending of the psalms, is a doxology in praise of the Holy Trinity: ‘Glory to the King, God the Father and God the Son [...] to the Holy Spirit’.

The song *Nie zna śmierci Pan żywota* [The Lord of life knows no death]<sup>38</sup> was composed by Franciszek Karpiński, with music by Teofil Klonowski. The theology of the song refers to the mystery of Christ’s resurrection as repaying Adam’s debt: *‘Twój, Adamie, dług splacony, / okup ludzki dokończony’* [‘Thy, Adam, debt paid, / human ransom completed’]. The text refers to the First Letter of the Holy Apostle Paul to the Corinthians, in which the Apostle of the Nations states:

In the meantime, however, Christ has risen first among those who have died. For since through man [came] death, through man also [will be accomplished] the resurrection. And as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive, but each according to their own order. Christ first, then those who belong to Christ, at His coming (1 Cor 15:20–23).

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<sup>37</sup> ‘1. Today Christ, King of eternal glory, / Leads a triumph resplendent. / Adorned in a lovely crown, / receives worship on Zion. Alleluia, alleluia! / Death, where is thy power now? / Where is thy armour, Satan? / He hath beset the stronger armed / The mighty and taken his spoil. Alleluia, alleluia! / 3. My Jesus, for ever and ever, / Thou art the adornment of this world, / By grace bring us to thy / immortal victory. Alleluia, alleluia! / 4. Glory to the everlasting King, / God the Father and the Son, / glory to the Holy Spirit, / our one God. Alleluia, alleluia!’ (J. Siedlecki, *Śpiewnik kościelny*, no. 180, pp. 269–270).

<sup>38</sup> ‘1. The Lord of life does not know death, / though he has passed through its gates; / he has torn the grave’s bonds / by a holy hand. Alleluia! / [2] ‘Thy debt, Adam, is paid, / man’s ransom completed; / thou shalt enter heaven with thy happy / children. Alleluia! / 3. In vain, ye guards, ye guard the tomb! / You will no longer find Him here; / He has risen, penetrated the rocky walls / God of nature. Alleluia! / 4. Now He upon the human tribe / and upon the pleasant land, / that dearly garnished today / at the Lord’s expense. Alleluia!’ (J. Siedlecki, *Śpiewnik kościelny*, no. 184, p. 274).

Christ paid Adam's debt and at the same time opened the gates of heaven for believers. The song conveys the truth of man's eternal destiny. However, in order to rise with Christ, one must first die with Him, leaving the human body (cf. 2 Cor. 5:8) in the expectation that the soul will be reunited with Him on the day of the resurrection of the dead<sup>39</sup>. 'Dying with Christ' is fulfilled at the death of the human body, which dies in Christ's grace, at the same time that the implantation in Him in His redemptive act is completed<sup>40</sup>. In the third strophe, the author alludes to the Gospel scene of the setting of the guard at Christ's tomb (cf. Mt 27:65–66; 28:4), which remained vigilant in vain as the risen Lord penetrated the 'rocky walls'. We are referring here to the glorified body of Jesus. On the one hand, the resurrected body in which Jesus appears bears the marks of the Passion; on the other hand, this authentic body possesses the new properties of a glorified body, that is, it is no longer situated in time and space, but 'can make itself present in its own way, wherever and whenever it wishes, since His humanity can no longer be bound to the earth and belongs exclusively to the divine dominion of the Father'<sup>41</sup>. The joy of the mystery of the Resurrection should touch every human being and the whole earth, which is expressed in the song by the 'Alleluia' repeated at every strophe, as well as by the final words that speak of the 'today's preciously adorned' earth on which the Resurrected One looks.

Another Old Polish Easter song, *Przez Twoje święte Zmartwychpowstanie* [By Thy Holy Resurrection]<sup>42</sup>, reveals the truth of believers' hope of eternal life. Alongside 14th-century Polish Easter songs, the incipits of which are recorded in the aforementioned lost Plock Gradual: *Chrystus z martwych wstał je, Preswte swete weschrznenie, Wstał smartwich crol nas Syn Boży*, the song *Przez Twoje święte z martwy wstanie* most reflects the theological content of the mystery of Christ's rising from the dead: 'By Thy holy rising from the dead, O Son of God, forgive us our sin Thou hast made this world alone Thou hast made our life right Thou hast

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego*, Poznań 1994, no. 1005, p. 246 [hereinafter: KKK].

<sup>40</sup> Cf. KKK, no. 1010.

<sup>41</sup> KKK, no. 645.

<sup>42</sup> '1. By Thy holy Resurrection, / Divine Son, forgive us our sinning; / we believe that Thou hast risen from the dead, / Thou hast made our life right, / eternal death hath saved us, / Thy holy power hath appeared. / 2. By thy holy Ascension, / God's Son, forgive us our sin; / we believe that thou hast ascended into heaven, / hast made our life good, / hast saved us from eternal death, / hast made thy holy power manifest. / [1] [1] [2] [3] By Thy holy Spirit sent, / God's Son, forgive us our sin; / we believe that Thou didst send the Spirit, / Thou didst fix our life, / Thou didst save us from eternal death, / Thy holy power hath appeared' (J. Siedlecki, *Śpiewnik kościelny*, no. 190, p. 283).

made our death eternal Thou hast saved us Thy power hast appeared”<sup>43</sup>. The song is divided into three thematically coherent stanzas. The first depicts the mystery of Christ’s resurrection, the second the ascension, the third the sending of the Holy Spirit, respectively beginning with the words: *‘Przez Twoje święte Zmartwychpowstanie, / Boży Synu, odpuść nam nasze zgrzeszenie; Przez Twoje święte Wniebowstąpienie, / Boży Synu, odpuść nam nasze zgrzeszenie; Przez Twoje święte Ducha zesłanie, / Boży Synu, odpuść nam nasze zgrzeszenie’* [‘By Thy holy Resurrection, / God’s Son, forgive us our sinning; By Thy holy Ascension, / God’s Son, forgive us our sinning; By Thy holy Pentecost, / God’s Son, forgive us our sinning’]. All of these 14th-century songs, as ethnographic and cultural studies show, were sung during the Resurrection procession and were intended to portray the Resurrection as a salvific event and to create an emotional connection between Christ and the liturgical participants<sup>44</sup>.

The first part of the *Regina caeli* antiphon is the Polish version of the song *Weseli się, Królowa miła* [Rejoice, my dear Queen]<sup>45</sup>, written in the first half of the 19th century by Fr Józef Wrzeciono, with music by Teofil Klonowski<sup>46</sup>. The antiphon *Regina caeli*, as one of the four Marian antiphons, is contained in the manuscript of the Antiphonary of St Peter’s Church in Rome (1171), but was popularised by the Franciscan general, Fr Haimon of Faversham (+ 1244), who incorporated it into the Franciscan liturgy of the Hours at the Paschal season<sup>47</sup>. Under the pontificate of Clement VI (+ 1352), it was adopted and spread, becoming the privileged antiphon of the Easter season<sup>48</sup>. Its legendary origin is linked to Pope Gregory the Great (+ 604)<sup>49</sup>. The theology of the hymn text refers to the Mother

<sup>43</sup> G. Ryś, *Pobożność ludowa na ziemiach polskich w średniowieczu. Próba typologii*, Szczecin 1995, p. 164.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. M. Kowalczyk, *Geneza i obchód Wielkanocy w Polsce. Zarys problematyki*, ‘Studia Elbląskie’ 21 (2020), p. 281.

<sup>45</sup> ‘1. Rejoice, O Queen dear, / for He whom thou hast borne, / is risen Lord over lords; / pray to Him for us! / Alleluia, alleluia! / 2. Rejoice and be merry in heaven, / ask Him for us in our time of need, / that we may get there too / and for ever sing: / Alleluia, alleluia!’ (J. Siedlecki, *Śpiewnik kościelny*, no. 191, p. 284).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. B. Nadolski, *Leksykon liturgii*, pp. 1282–1283; J. Siedlecki, *Śpiewnik kościelny*, no. 191, p. 284).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. B. Nadolski, *Leksykon liturgii*, p. 1282.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. B. Nadolski, *Leksykon liturgii*, p. 1282.

<sup>49</sup> A legend described in the *Legenda aurea* (1265) mentions a plague that struck Rome in 596 during the Easter season. Pope Gregory the Great then ordered a penitential and supplication procession. The procession set off at dawn from the church of Ara Coeli to the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, where the grace-famous image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Salus populi Romani*, was located. The Pope carried the icon of Our Lady in the procession in person. As they passed

of God who, after the prophetic words about the sufferings (Lk 2:35) associated with the passion and death of her Son, experiences joy (Jn 19:26–27). The People of God turn to their Mother, Mary, as it were, consoling her, encouraging her to rejoice. At the same time, they turn to her—the Queen of heaven and earth—for intercession with Christ, asking for the necessary graces and blessing (‘ask Him for us in our time of need’), and ultimately for eternal life in heaven, in imitation of the Divine Parent (‘so that we may also get there and sing: Alleluia, alleluia!’).

One of the oldest Polish Easter songs is *Wstał Pan Chrystus* [The Lord Christ has risen]<sup>50</sup>. The song was most likely written in the late 14th or early 15th century, as its title is mentioned in *Przeworszczyk’s Canon*<sup>51</sup> of 1435. It is a Latin translation of the trope *Surrexit Christus hodie* and consists of two verse strophes written in irregular eight-verse with even rhymes<sup>52</sup>. A joyful and vigorous melodic acclamation begins the song: *Wstał Pan Chrystus z martwych ninie, / alleluja, alleluja!* [‘The Lord Christ has risen from the dead, / alleluia, alleluia!’] and will become the beginning of the sung joy in praise of the risen Lord. It is crowned by the praise of the Holy Trinity constituting a confession of faith in God present in Three Persons: *Świętą Trójcę wyznawajmy, / alleluja, alleluja! / Bogu cześć i chwałę dajmy, / alleluja, alleluja!* [‘Let us confess the Holy Trinity, / alleluia, alleluia! / Let us give honour and glory to God, / alleluia, alleluia!’]. The Divine Persons are inseparable; the sending of the Holy Spirit by the Father on behalf of the Son (‘from the Father’—Jn 15:26) reveals that He is with the Father and the Son the same one God and receives with the Father and the Son praise and glory<sup>53</sup>. This confession confirms the statement present in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: ‘With the Father and the Son He jointly receives adoration and glory’, since the Father is the same as the Son,

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Hadrian’s mausoleum, the participants heard angelic voices singing ‘Regina coeli laetare, alleluia, quia quem meruisti portare, alleluia, resurrexit sicut dixit alleluia’. As the voices fell silent, the Pope added ‘ora pro nobis Deum. Alleluia.’ At that moment, an angel appeared, holding the sword of pestilence, which he tucked into its scabbard, and from then on the pandemic ceased. To commemorate this miraculous event, the name of the mausoleum-castle was changed to the Castle of the Holy Angel, and the words of the angelic hymn were placed on the roof of the church of Ara Coeli. Cf. B. Nadolski, *Leksykon liturgii*, p. 1283.

<sup>50</sup> ‘1. The Lord Christ rose from the dead nin, / alleluia, alleluia! / He has exulted his people miles away, / alleluia, alleluia! / 2. He did not repent of his life, / alleluia, alleluia! / For a miserable man, / alleluia, alleluia! / 3. On this Easter day, / alleluia, alleluia! / Praise every Son of God, / alleluia, alleluia! / 4. Let us confess the Holy Trinity, / alleluia, alleluia! / Let us give honour and glory to God, / alleluia, alleluia!’ (J. Siedlecki, *Śpiewnik kościelny*, no. 194, pp. 289–290).

<sup>51</sup> A lost medieval hymnal from 1435 by Jan of Przeworsk contained religious songs in Polish. Cf. T. Michałowska, *Średniowiecze*, pp. 347–348.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. T. Michałowska, *Średniowiecze*, pp. 347–348.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *KKK*, no. 263.

the Son the same as the Father, the Holy Spirit the same as the Father and the Son, that is, one God as to nature, and they constitute a co-eternal Trinity<sup>54</sup>.

The Easter song *Zwycięzca śmierci* [Victor of Death]<sup>55</sup> was probably written in 1837, and its authorship of both text and music is attributed to Father Michał Marcin Mioduszeński (+ 1868). It was included in his songbook<sup>56</sup>. It expresses the truth of Christ's victory over death, hell and Satan. The figure of Jonah, who in typological exegesis<sup>57</sup> becomes a type of Jesus, is evoked in the song. The prophet Jonah and his story is thus a figurehead for the work of Christ already announced in the Old Testament (Jon 2:1). The Evangelist Matthew records Christ's words referring directly to the Old Testament prophet: 'The perverse and faithless tribe demands a sign, but no sign will be given to them except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the bowels of a great fish, so the Son of Man will

<sup>54</sup> *KKK*, no. 245; no. 253.

<sup>55</sup> 'The conqueror of death, hell and Satan, / comes out of the tomb on the third day of the morning. / The unbelieving nation is triumphant, frightened, / at the miracle of Jonah. Alleluia! / 2. The earth shakes, the guard of the tomb stirs, / an angel descends, the women are comforted, / 'See, thus he says, this tomb is left empty, / the Lord is risen.' Alleluia! / 3. Abandon from us sorrows and cares in waves, / when the Lord Saviour triumphs in glory; / to his Father he has already made satisfaction, / to us he brings joy. Alleluia! 4. He rejoices with His disciples who have been faithful, / He confirms them in the faith so that they do not doubt; / He communes with them, gives many teachings / about His Church. Alleluia! / 5. He no longer ceases with an unbelieving people, / alone shows himself to the faithful; / immortality presents the mark / among the disciples of the cluster. Alleluia! / 6. Sorrows, wounds, scorns inflicted / and shameful deaths are already rewarded; / for humiliations He has been exalted / above all thrones. Alleluia!' (J. Siedlecki, *Śpiewnik kościelny*, no. 198, pp. 295–296).

<sup>56</sup> See M. M. Mioduszeński, *Śpiewnik Kościelny, czyli pieśni nabożne z melodyjami*, Kraków 1838, p. 458.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. P. Podeszwa, *Prorok Jonasz zapowiedzią Chrystusa w świetle Komentarza do Księgi Jonasza św. Hieronima*, 'Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia' 2 (2009), p. 158. The prophet Jonah and his story is thus a figure showing the work of Christ already announced in the Old Testament (Jon 2:1). The Evangelist Matthew records Christ's words referring directly to the Old Testament prophet: 'The perverse and faithless tribe demands a sign, but no sign will be given to them except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the bowels of a great fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the womb of the earth' (Mt 12:39). The monumental image of the Lord's resurrection, highlighted in the third verse: 'the unbelieving people will be troubled, frightened' emphasises the attribute of God—His power—and reveals the truth of the fear of a people immersed in sin, while by the term "unbelieving people" are meant those Jews who did not believe in the Deity of Christ and His resurrection. In the second strophe, the author refers to the experience of the empty tomb by the women and the dialogue with the angel announcing the Lord's resurrection (Mt 28:1–8). The death of Christ liberates the disciples from the bondage of sin and eternal damnation, while the death of the believer's body becomes an important event, a gateway, as it were, which opens eternal life.

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## Conclusion

The theology of Easter hymns, especially those analysed and deeply rooted in the Polish Church's liturgical and folk tradition, focuses mainly on the mystery of man's redemption through the mystery of Jesus Christ's resurrection. Fundamental truths related to the believer's existence in the perspective of eternal life appear in them. These include the theological virtues, especially faith and hope, the truth about human sin rooted in the biblical sin of Adam. There are many indirect or direct references to quotations taken from Scripture, especially those describing the event of Christ's resurrection. The soteriological significance of the truths concluded in the Easter songs directs the faithful to open their hearts and minds to the truth of the Triune God, the ultimate things, especially death, resurrection and eternal life.

In the Instruction on Music in the Sacred Liturgy *Musica Sacram* we read:

Through singing, too, a more solemn character should be given to those rites which the liturgy in the course of the Church year specially emphasises. Particularly solemn should be the celebration of the rites of Holy Week, which, through the celebration of the paschal mystery, lead the faithful as if into the very centre of the liturgical year and the liturgy itself<sup>59</sup>.

Easter songs expressing the joy of experiencing Christ's victory over death and the hope of the universal resurrection are therefore a form of prayer and should lead

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. S. Ropiak, *Treść teologiczna wielkanocnych pieśni zastępujących hymny w Liturgii Godzin*, „Studia Warmińskie” 44/45 (2007/2008), s. 141.

<sup>59</sup> Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction on Music in the Liturgy *Musica Sacram*, 5.03.1967, no. 44.

the faithful to a profound experience of the liturgy and consequently to an encounter with the risen Lord.

## Abstract

### The theological dimension of selected Polish Easter songs

The theology of Polish Easter hymns focuses on the mystery of Christ's resurrection and is directed towards the eschatological dimension of human existence. Through the victory of the Son of God over sin, death and Satan, man has an open gate to eternal life. Easter songs are rooted in the biblical account of the Lord's resurrection and are a form of prayer expressed both during and outside the liturgy, and should therefore bring the faithful closer to God. The oldest hymns, dating back to the 14th century, were composed throughout the centuries of the existence of the Polish nation and state, and often referred to the historical and social situation of Poles, especially during the partitions. However, their content and melody have always expressed the essence of man's faith in the resurrection of Christ and the hope of eternal life.

**Keywords:** Pascha, Easter, Easter chants, Paschal liturgy, theology of hymns

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