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**PHENOMENON AND CONCEPT OF CANON AS A BASIS OF THE
ORTHODOX LITURGICAL SINGING TRADITION: FROM CANONIC FORM TO
THE “SPIRIT OF CREATIVE WORK”**

The paper is dedicated to the consideration of phenomenon and concept of canon as a basis of the orthodox liturgical singing tradition. It is found out, that canonical form shall be understood as a form, created inside the tradition, inside the canon life and under its immediate influence, that allows considering the canon as a necessary basis for liturgical singing tradition.

Keywords: canon, canonical form, liturgical singing tradition, cult, churchism.

The theory of liturgical singing proceeds from the prescriptions, theoretical explanations of singing behaviour in the house of God, therefore, it is closely associated with the pragmatics of ceremony and its canonical sides, gradually getting involved into the formation of the actual music singing canons. According to the teachings of Holy Fathers and Teachers of the Church, liturgical chant shall incite the Christians' diligence and attention to sacred songs, as well as readiness to understand their useful content. The confirmation of this fact we find in Saint Basil, bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia: “The Holy Spirit knew, that it was hard to lead the human race to goodness, and that according to the tendency to satisfaction we feel no excitement over the right way. Then: what does it do? The teachings are mixed with pleasant singing that in order together with delectable and harmonious for hearing to make us accepting in an unnoticeable way what is useful in the word” [2, p. 94]. St. Basil the Great pointed to the unusually conciliative and didactic effect of psalmody, so that singers “apparently only sang them, but in fact taught their souls”, since “a psalm is a silence of souls, the world's dispenser; it becalms rebellious and disturbing thoughts; it smooths the irritability of soul and immoderation ... Psalm is a work of Angels, heaven cohabitation, spiritual frankincense. This is a wisdom invention of the Master, arranged everything in such a way in order to make us sing and learn together useful things. Due to this fact the lessons are better imprinted in the souls. Since what is learned under pressure will not remain in us for long; but what we accept with delight and pleasance will take good roots in the souls” [2, p. 95-96].

Together with explanatory and educational impact of liturgical singing, there is a lot of references to its placative, spiritualizing effect in the patristic heritage. As an example we can give a statement of Saint Athanasius the Great, the archbishop of Alexandria, who in his

work named “About Psalms against Markellian” developed an idea of the strength of impact and of a place and significance of psalmody in divine worship.

Therefore, if we refer to the experience of people, achieved according to the Orthodox church, the highest levels of the intellectual development - to the experience of saints, so we will be able to see, that they were on the path of *churchism*, life in *cult*. In other words, their path represented, first of all, a life inside the benefit of clergy.

Following the Byzantine Orthodoxy, the Orthodoxy, established in the territory of Kievan Russia, combines tendency to the philosophical consideration of religion with the high estimate of the ceremony importance. As noted by the Father Pavel Florensky, "together with the developed Theosophy, where the relations between the Persons of the Blessed Trinity are found out in philosophical terms, between the substances in the God-man, the notion of Church, salvation, immortality, etc., in the eastern religiosity the profound respect for the ceremony is of no less important, so that its performance is placed side by side and even higher than the fulfilment of moral covenants" [5, p. 468]. In other words, compliance with all details of the ceremony is one of the most important tasks of church. This careful attention is spread to the singing part of the ceremony, in particular, to the performance of all ceremonies related to birth, marriage and death of human. Therefore, the distinctive feature of the orthodox attitude to Church is an overbalance of participation in *cult* and *ceremony* over any exhortatory actions: immediate participation in church life is much more important than strict divine worship study by means of books. In its turn, cult and orthodox ceremony is very attentive to the most significant events of human life, namely, “birth, death, marriage take place before the God and are blessed by mysteries and divine worships” [5, p. 478].

The systems of ceremonies form a closed entity, wherein the replacement of one ceremony with another is impossible, since such a replacement will definitely break the fundamentals of the entire system. “It is impossible to replace voluntarily one organ in body with the same one, with another type, since with the change of organ all the rest shall be changes correspondingly” [7, p. 158]. In the cult, on the way of ascension from the worldly to the heavenly, ceremony is understood by Florensky to mean gradual dying of the worldly, and on the way of descent from the heavenly to the worldly, this is an embodiment in the worldly. In the ceremony there is no statics, it is full of motion, interpenetration and interaction. But in the cult there is one more type of constant motion, where constant ascension to the otherworldly and descent to worldly takes place.

The concept of holiness has a low pole and an upper pole, and in our consciousness it moves between these poles, as ascending up and descending down. The concept of holiness is like stairs: nonexistence - world - exclusion - election - purification - atonement - Light - God. Witnesses play a special role in this moving “upstairs”. Florensky indicates, that in the Christian conception testimony and martyrdom are the words and phenomena of one root, that explains the significant importance of witness in the New Testament. In this connection, there is a motive of holiness: martyrs - saints and vice versa. An act of heroism of life is always martyrdom; a sacral deed needs witnesses. It needs leaders, transfer, witness: the presence of evidence makes the sacral deed “witnessed” [3, p. 162-167].

Moreover, semantic meaning of the translation of the Greek word μαρτυς, which in Greek means a “witness”, in liturgical Slavonic sounds as a “martyr”, can be divided into two groups. In some texts, it is emphasized in μαρτυς the meaning “*expression, affirmation of truth*”, in other texts it means “*sufferings and death*”. This ambiguity of the translations discovers a peculiarity of this Greek word, based on (or which can be based on) three roots, namely: μαρ – *to shine*, μαρ – *to fight*, μερ – *to have a thought, remember*. All these shades of meaning find their reflection in the word μαρτυς - witness, martyr. Florensky talks about two strengths of demonstration of bearing witness, that is ad extra and intra. “Bearing witness of the *truth* is shine. But in order to *witness the truth*, one *shall fight*, overcoming the darkness of nescience and falsehood: a witness is a *fighter* and, spiritually, is *winner*. When fighting, one shall not only deliver an attack, but also *have it*, and hence - *suffer, be in torment, be exhausted* and even *die*” [7, p. 363]. This is called by the Father Pavel displaying strength of bearing witness ad extra. To witness on the part of intra a witness-martyr “has to *have inside* the truth being witnessed”, to be “owned by the truth, a bearer of the truth”, in other words, “objective truth *makes to remember* thereof and masterfully *leads* a person, who learned it, to the witness thereof” (*italics is ours - O.S.*) [7, p. 363]. Martyrdom is a special symbol of living mutual penetration of two “events”, namely, worldly and heavenly.

Symbolic fundamentals of liturgical activity are due to the fact that the service is carried out as platonic “remembering”, there is “something deeply close, something very familiar” [7, p. 131]. It is more ancient than us and our parents, more ancient than the humankind, more ancient than the world; that is why it supposes “smart doing” - the essence of smart praying. It seems, that the service is not composed, but discovered, found. “The Orthodox absorbed the very colour of the world’s achievement and removed the shells and

coats; we have pure, threshed and breezed, seed of religions, the very essence of humankind” [7, p. 131]. It is particularly remarkable that Semitic three-letter root, meaning in the translation into Russian *bring back to memory, remember*, in its principal meaning is translated as “to call in the cult”. Therefore, the concept of *mindfulness* is found to be “not more than reflex of cultic prayer for the dead, and *memory* in general is the application to human, what in fact relates to God, since it is peculiar only to Him *to remember* words in the intrinsic meaning” [6, p. 172].

“What did the prudent robber ask about?” - “*Pray for me, God, when You will come to Thy Kingdom*”, he asks to *pray for*, and only” (Luke: 23, 42) [6, p. 173]. The robber asks to be prayed for not here on the earth, he shortly asks to be prayed for in the Kingdom of God. In other words, he does not ask for the body survival, because he relies on the salvation of soul. To his request God answers: ““Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43). Therefore, “to be prayed for” by God - this is the same that “to be in paradise”. “To be in paradise” means to be existence in the eternal memory, and as a consequence of this, to have eternal being and eternal memory about God: without the remembrance of the God we die, but precisely this remembrance of the God is possible through God’s remembrance of us” [6, p. 173]. Consequently, on the basis of the mentioned above we can make a conclusion, that the God’s eternal memory about us and ours about God are met and implemented in the Church’s eternal memory, where the God is and a human can be.

Relying on the provisions of the Father Pavel Florensky, we can emphasize a number of notions, which have immediate relation to the liturgical singing tradition and discover the concept of “liturgical music”, that allows defining the Orthodox singing tradition as “self-rising logos”. The goal of *art*, being understood as a complex of all demonstrations of arts, Florensky sees the overcoming of “naturalistic bark of accidental” and formation of “generally valuable and valid in fact”. In other words, the goal of any art (artistry) is an intention to transform (improve) the reality. For the purposes of the church arts, such kind of activity can be completely embodied only in *cult*. The very *notion of cult* according to Florensky can be defined as one of the most important for correct understanding, what is “music of divine worship”. Florensky defines cult as an isolated part of the reality, where immanent and transcendental, temporary and eternal, corruptible and incorruptible. Probably, this “meeting” is clearly expressed in the music culture in general, but it gets the greatest

expressiveness in the "music of worship," which he calls "concentrated experience". Concentration of all messages of divine worship, which were always "cult-centric", is peculiar for "music of divine worship". "True reality - in respect of which we can talk about self-determination - is the only one: this is realized meaning or comprehended reality, this is the embodied Logos, this is cult" [7, p. 104].

One more necessary condition for existence of temple event as one body is the presence of canon. Florensky believes, that one of the most important life problems is to apprehend essence and meaning of canon, however a necessary condition therefor is involvement therein. "The closest task is to apprehend the canon essence, to gain an insight into it as into *concentrated humankind mind*" (*italics is ours - O.S.*) [4, p. 557]. True artist, according to Florensky, wants neither *own*, nor creation of anything egocentric individual anyhow, true artist aims for the creation of really beautiful, "objectively beautiful", in other words, "the *truth of things* embodied in an artistic manner" [4, p. 556]. Provided that this is really *truth*, value of piece of work, according to Florensky, will be established naturally. *True* piece of work can be only in general stream of the history common to all mankind; what is studiedly invented cannot be true, in other words, it is not canonical. The notion of canon is feeling of indissoluble connection with humankind, and realization of inheritance of all those treasures, which were created by previous generations of creators. "Checked and purified by the council of populations and generations" [4, p. 557], the most valuable and true things were fixed in *canon*. Consequently, canon in fact can be called "concentrated humankind mind".

The more ontological the artist's vision, the more common to all mankind, more canonical the form is, his vision will be expressed in. "Canonical form is a form of the most naturalness, that is as easy as ABC, while deviation from canonical forms is embarrassing and artificial. In contrast, the atmosphere is more congenial in canon forms: they dishabituate from accidental motion, hindering in matter. The more stable canon is, the deeper and cleaner it expresses spiritual requirement common to all mankind: canonical is liturgical, liturgical is joint, joint is common to humanity" [4, p. 562]. Canonical form is understood as a form created inside the tradition, inside the life of canon and under its immediate influence; it has been building during the centuries, filtering out accidental and fixing *the true*. Thus, canons in the area of church songs, as well as in the area of the ancient icon painting, have been created and crystallized out during centuries, at the same time creating a special side of

canon, where relations between word and melody are reflected. The form of canticle is inseparable from ecclesiastic content, being therein, translated into the words by great hymn creators and the Church Fathers.

The considerable part of the historians and “positivistic theologians”, as Florensky emphasizes, in the norms of ecclesiastical consciousness is inclined to see “the usual conservatism peculiar for the Church, the old-aged withholding of habitual forms and methods” [4, p. 556], however, this, according to Florensky, is a manifestation of misunderstanding of both ecclesiastic conservatism and a lack of understanding of the essence of artistic creativity. For artistic creativity canon was never a trouble, and “complicated canonical forms in all branches of art were always only a slipstone, where noughts were broken and real talents became acute” [4, p. 556]. As the Father Pavel Florensky emphasizes, canonical form releases creative individuality and creative energy of artist - “requirements of canonical form or, more specifically, a gift from mankind to an artist of canonical form is a release, not constraint” [4, p. 556]. Therefore, through the acceptance of canon the relationship between mankind and attainment of truth, verified and purified by the council of populations and generations, is carried out. That is why, “music of divine worship” does not seek to create its own, individually personal, it’s objective is to create “the *truth of things* embodied in an artistic manner”, which can live soundly only as a part of a single body of templar action. Canonical form of “music of divine worship” has been formed and crystallized out by the century-old tradition, inside the life of canon and under its immediate influence. Moreover, an ecclesial singing canon represents a special area of the relationship between word and melody: the form of canticle cannot be separated from its ecclesiastic content.

The Father Pavel Florensky’s world view is relied on the understanding of things in existence, where all manifestations of human culture are indissolubly connected - as different facets, different aspects of the disclosure of the single Truth. When thinking about art, in particular, about music art Florensky proposes a number of provisions, based on the fundamental opinion, that what is beautiful, this is *true*. True “realistic” art creates symbols of things, while imaginary art is their illusive similarities.

We can also find thoughts about ways of development of the Christian culture, about the correlation between canonical rules and life of cult in the works of I. Ilin, in particular, in the work called “Fundamentals of the Christian Culture” [1]. Ilin considers the whole history

of the Christianity as "*a single and great search for the Christian culture*" [1, p. 22], emphasizing that this is a "great search," in which, of course, there are extreme views on what the Christian culture is. "Some of them are ready to reject in the name of Christ worldly culture and the very world within which it is created; and the others are ready to receive too much earthly and worldly, even up to the loss of Christ's Spirit" [1, p. 22]. The only right way, according to Ilin, is "vital wisdom way, which will accurately lead from Christ to the world, establishing in Christ and artistically saturating with His beams the fabric of human life" [1, p. 22]. Ilin emphasizes that understanding the Gospels as a "book of laws", which contains a system of "certain rules for all life's events and everyday difficulties" [1, p. 23], is completely contrary to the spirit of the Christianity. "The Gospel is a book of faith, freedom and conscience, but not a book of laws and rules. The Gospels shall be read and understood *in no time*, by the depth of his own faith, of his freedom and his conscience, but not by the formal mind" [1, p. 23]. The Holy Writ of the New Testament contains therein some "blessed and free spirit", which is not complete code of conduct, but carries "*living stream of love and vision, pouring into the soul and visions flowing into the soul and awakening therein the deepest sources of personal spirituality*; this stream penetrates into us and frees us to *independent vision, decision-making and creativity*" [1, p. 23-24]. Therefore, the spirit of the Christianity is a spirit of living creative content, where precisely the content, not the form is primary. However, this shall be understood neither as an opposition, nor as contradistinction, but in the sense, that there is no predominance at all of "empty, abstract, self-sufficing form, deprived of the content, which saturates and sanctifies it" [1, p. 33]. Consequently, in the Christianity the law "is not cast aside, but it is *filled with vivid and deep content of the spirit*, so that "the form ceases to be "a form", but it becomes a real way of comprehensive life, goodness, art, knowledge - completeness and wealth of cultural being" [1, p. 33].

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