

Similar observations might be made concerning much Venetian icon painting of the 17th century¹³ or the tradition of Ukrainian folk icons of the late 19th century.¹⁴ If one is willing to apply this logic to the music of the period, one can, so to speak, “re-church” an entire corpus of music, accept it as part of the rich history of the liturgical arts of the Orthodox Church, and avoiding the perils of anathematizing this or that aspect of the fullness of our heritage.

It should also be noted that the often very active reforming movements currently at work in the liturgical arts in many countries are themselves the result, in part, of the same historical process that produced this corpus of what is, in effect, frequently characterized as “bad liturgical art”. Without the development of Italianate humanistic icon painting there would have no subsequent Byzantine revival, no Petros Sasaki, no Grigory Kroug. Similarly, without the overlaying of various polyphonic styles on the monophonic corpuses of Russian church music, there would have been no codified polyphonic court chant, no elaboration of the kind to be found in Tchaikovsky or Rakhmaninov, and certainly no movement for a return to the liturgical aesthetics of an earlier period. What this means on a local level is that it can be dangerous, pastorally, spiritually, to impose radical solutions – as I have seen done – in situations in which there is an established *modus operandi*, or rather, a *modus celebrandi*. Since even small changes are noticed, it is clearly a great pastoral risk to change the entire sung repertoire of a parish in one fell swoop. Reformers need to be aware of this spiritual danger, to take into account their own responsibility in making any changes, and to consider the need for stability at a parish or community level.

Does this mean, then, that we should allow people to continue unenlightened, enduring “bad liturgical art”? The short answer is yes, for the risks of spiritual alienation are great. The longer answer is that education, undertaken gently and with spiritual wisdom, can play a very important role here.

There is another aspect to this question. The removal of these “substandard” repertoires from liturgical use means that, though they have served Orthodox liturgical worship in the past, they are now to be relegated to some kind of museum, sung, perhaps only in concerts, examined by scholars of those dark and corrupt periods. To this I would say that the reformer must be very careful what and how he chooses to reform. Censure of this kind is,

13 See, *inter alia*, Kazanaki-Lampa, Maria: Ὀδὸς τοῦ Μουσείου, Ἑλληνικὸ Ἰνστιτοῦτο Βυζαντινῶν καὶ Μεταβυζαντινῶν Σποθδῶν Βενετίας, Venice 2005 and *Guida al Museo di Icone e alla Chiesa di San Giorgio dei Greci*, Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Post-Bizantini di Venezia, Venice, 1992.

14 One of the few to take these icons seriously was the ethnologist and collector Ivan Makarovych Honchar (1911-1993); his collection is to be found in the Ivan Honchar Museum in Kiev (see <http://www.honchar.org.ua/>). For a brief account of further recent interest in these icons, see Sedova, Yana, “Ukrainian American collector brings folk icons into the spotlight”, in *The Ukrainian Weekly*, December 24, 2000, No. 52, Vol. LXVIII. Available online at <http://www.ukrweekly.com/Archive/2000/520024.shtml>

fundamentally a matter of taste, and if we make a universal imposition of our own taste, we are as uncanonical, or at least paracanonial, as those authors and painters whose work in the service of the Church we are endeavouring to extirpate.

In closing, I return to the earlier *reduction ad absurdum* and suggest another aspect of it. If we were to apply structuralist hermeneutics to the case for restoring monophony where the tradition has for the last few centuries been that of polyphony, we would be forced to concede that our signifiers have changed: just as we cannot look at a Byzantine icon in the way that those who first saw it did, following our collective experience of the renaissance and its consequences, so we cannot reproduce Znamenny chant after the experience of polyphony as though we had lived the tradition. In “decoding” the repertoire, we are inevitably “encoding” it once more. It was, naturally, to guard against this transmission of meaning from signifier to signifier, as happens in language, that the Ecumenical Councils met and defined dogma. The difficulties encountered in so doing, occurred, of course, often precisely on account of the mutability of meaning in language. Thus, when we read in the 75th Canon of the Council in Trullo (Quinisext) of 692 that

“We wish those who attend church for the purpose of chanting neither to employ disorderly cries and to force nature to cry aloud, not to foist in anything that is not becoming and proper to a church”¹⁵,

we are obliged to wonder exactly what, for the authors of that canon, would have constituted disorderly crying in liturgical worship. In that the definitions, for example, of consonance and dissonance have shifted, and ideas of simplicity and complexity even in monophonic chant have altered during the course of history, we cannot take our own experience, our own set of signifiers, and apply it to the words of such a Canon as though they had been written yesterday. The 12th century canonist and historian John Zonaras defined what was unsuitable in liturgical worship as being “womanish members and warblings”, which phrase has in its turn been interpreted as meaning “trills, and, an excessive variation or modulation in melodies which inclines towards the songs sung by harlots”.¹⁶

If we forget that the Holy Spirit works through the Church, and that repertoires of music, just like customs, may be absorbed and churchified, then our idea of canonicity is very often just that, *our* idea.

15 The Greek text of the full Canon reads as follows: **Κανὼν ΟΕ' (75) τῆς ζ' Οἰκουμενικῆς Συνόδου.** Τοὺς ἐπὶ τῷ ψάλλειν ἐν ταῖς Ἐκκλησίαις παραγινομένους, βουλόμεθα, μήτε βοαῖς ἀτάκτοις κεχρησθαι, καὶ τὴν φύσιν πρὸς κρουγὴν ἐκβιάζεσθαι, μήτε τι ἐπιλέγειν τῶν μὴ ἐκκλησια ἀρμοδίων τε καὶ οικείων· ἀλλὰ μετὰ πολλῆς προσοχῆς, καὶ κατανύξεως τὼς τοιαύτας ψαλμωδίας προσάγειν τῷ τῶν κρουπτῶν ἐφόρῳ Θεῷ. «Εὐλαβεῖς γὰρ ἔσεσθαι τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραὴλ» (Λευϊτ. ιε', 30), τὸ ἱερὸν ἐδίδαξε λόγιον.

16 See <http://users.forthnet.gr/ath/frc/75th.html>.