

What was sung at the church, the Vigil by Rachmaninov or Znamenny raspev – that was of minor importance.

Now it is possible to talk openly about the spiritual revival, presidents cross themselves in public and visit the divine services, great numbers of cassettes and records of church singing are sold everywhere. If a young person today goes to church, it is nothing extraordinary to others, nor a reason for pride. He goes to church to find what he cannot find in the world. Intuitively he is looking for the path to God's Kingdom. Will he find this path? Is the contemporary art of liturgical singing the compass pointing out the direction? Is it necessary to change something in the contemporary Liturgy? Is it possible...?

In order to answer these questions, I would like to start with a short description of the general situation of church singing in the Russian cities, as I see it.

#### WHO SINGS ON THE KLIROS AND WHAT?

Choirs in cathedrals and also in the majority of city parishes are usually made up of students of musical institutions and of elderly opera singers with their worn-out voices, more seldom of players of instruments. Whether the singer has been baptized, whether he leads a Christian life – it is often of no interest to the priest. The sermon seldom reaches the singers' ears, as they enjoy the pause in singing by exchanging the latest news among themselves.

The repertoire of singing follows the priest's tastes to some extent, but it is mostly based on the taste of the conductor of the choir. The *menu* for the Liturgy is made up depending on the mood in which he woke up in the morning. (Antiphons by Kastal'sky, Cherubic Hymn by Bahmet'ev, Eucharistic Canon by Izvekov, "It is Meet" by Yaichkov, etc.) The repertoire must be wide, for all occasions. A couple of dozens of Cherubic Hymns, also of Eucharistic Canons, a few "It is Meets", as many so-called "concerts during the communion" as possible, and so on. The main demand from the priest to the choir is to avoid delays and pauses. The singers without good voices (usually the very religious) are sent to the left *kliros*. Equally talented *klirosy* are usually

found only in big monasteries, seldom in parishes. The priest often desires singing "with the people". In this he sees the ideal of unity being reached: "with one heart and one mouth". However, this singing, on account of its disharmony and the dissonances it produces, is often jokingly said to be the reason why *strochnoe penie* originally developed.

In the past few years the main tone and character for the Russian church singing has been given, naturally, by monastery choirs, which include monks, seminary students and, in part, invited singers. In the urban monasteries, however, they are all lay singers. The generally accepted style of the monastic singing follows the energetic and sensible spirit of the Lavra monasticism which serves as an example for many, even female monasteries. This singing is characterized by a heightened musical pitch producing agitation that evokes in the listeners involuntary compassion for the singers, which they interpret as a prayerful feeling. However, the main impact on the soul is caused by the musical material that is sung in the church. The composers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries who composed for the divine services used means of harmonization that were seldom used even by opera composers, and if used, mainly in love scenes and arias.

How can the spiritually immature person be expected to distinguish true spiritual movement in his soul from normal emotionality? The soul's cry from everyday sentimentality? Of course, if you tell the clergy that this or that singing is too emotional for the Liturgy, he may agree, but nothing comes of it. He appeals to human infirmities, to God's understanding towards our weaknesses, and to the need to allow people occasionally to relax...

However, the "human weaknesses" used in the liturgical arts very quickly become a power that aggressively defends its place in the liturgy and seeks to overthrow canonical art. After all, how sinful would it be to paint a light blue sky with a purple sunrise on the background of an icon instead of gold paint?... Beautiful? - Very. But soon on that sky appears a cloud, and from this cloud a grey-haired old man, pointing a finger as if threatening us. Instead of fiery

cherubim and seraphim, depicted with fear as explosions of light, the icons present sweet children, resembling small Cupids, and small “Mozarts” in their wigs fly around the domes. Instead of the Mother of God, the Madonnas appear, inspired by the artists' wives or friends.

Intuitively understanding that iconography has deteriorated, the monasteries promoted the production of icons of the so-called Athonite type. The ascetism in these icons is reflected in their languidness and inexpressiveness. There could have been no other result, since the monks of the Solovetsk monastery rehearsed their iconographic skills among the Italian sculptures and paintings of no higher quality, developing a corresponding artistic taste. The teaching of singing was also conducted following the examples of European opera singing.

To please this taste, the ancient frescoes of the Vladimir cathedral in Kiev were painted over in the 19th century, and finally completely hacked off. Similarly destroyed were the wings of the angels in the nave of the church of the Birth of the Mother of God in the Ferapont monastery, painted by the great Dionisy, and the icon of Christ on the western wall was hacked off in order to increase the light in the church. As a result, the icons of the Mother of God and John the Baptist seemed to be bowing prayerfully towards an empty spot on the wall. And this was done not by Bolsheviks but by pious Christians. In the 19th century they, with the Synod's permission, destroyed ancient frescoes, removed old church bells, including the miraculous church bells of the Dimitry cathedral in Vladimir from the 14th century... Similar examples can be found in great numbers... What was this? Blasphemy or lack of understanding? Neither one nor the other. It was a matter of taste!

If a priest or a *starets* in all his piety finds the sentimental verses about Christ or popular illustrations of the Gospel scenes appealing, there is nothing to do. All discussions over the dangers of such art end up in the famous phrase of St Ambrose of Optina which he used not at all in reference to singing: “Where there is simplicity, there are angels by the hundreds”. One begins to think that perhaps