

Ecclesiastical Music and Mission

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Abstract. From the beginning, ecclesiastical music has been an integral part of Christian worship, which, for the Orthodox, constitutes the foundation of the faith. As Fr. Georges Florovsky never tired of reminding us: *Lex orandi, lex credendi*. Although, mainly for historical reasons, the Orthodox Churches have largely ignored mission for the past several centuries, it, too—as contemporary theologians such as Yannoulatos, Bria, and Vassiliadis, among others, remind us—constitutes an intrinsic part of the Christian faith, something which lies at the very core of the Church's being. Ecclesiastical music and mission, then, have co-existed in the Church for 2000 years. This paper will reflect on this relationship, noting how missionary endeavors have utilized, developed, and/or adapted the Church's music in order to "incarnate" Christ again and again in each time and place. Finally, the paper will present and analyze several different examples from contemporary missions in North America.

Περίληψη. Εξ' αρχής, η εκκλησιαστική μουσική αποτέλεσε αναπόσπαστο κομμάτι της Χριστιανικής λατρείας, η οποία, για τον Ορθόδοξο συνιστά το θεμέλιο της πίστης. Καθώς ο π. Γεώργιος Φλορόφσκι δεν κουράζεται ποτέ να μας υπενθυμίζει, «νόμος της προσευχής είναι ο νόμος της πίστης». Αν και, κυρίως για λόγους ιστορικούς, οι Ορθόδοξες Εκκλησίες έχουν εκτεταμένα αγνοήσει την ιεραποστολή τους τελευταίους αιώνες, αυτή, επίσης –όπως μας υπενθυμίζουν οι σύγχρονοι θεολόγοι όπως ο Γιαννουλάτος, ο Βρία και ο Βασιλειάδης, μεταξύ άλλων– συνιστά εγγενές μέρος της Χριστιανικής πίστεως, κάτι που βρίσκεται στην καρδιά της ύπαρξης της Εκκλησίας. Η Εκκλησιαστική μουσική και η ιεραποστολή, συνεπώς, έχουν συνυπάρξει στην Εκκλησία για 2000 χρόνια. Αυτή η εισήγηση θα απεικονίσει την σχέση αυτή, αναδεικνύοντας το πώς οι ιεραποστολικές προσπάθειες έχουν αξιοποιήσει, αναπτύξει και/ή προσαρμόσει την μουσική της Εκκλησίας, έτσι ώστε να «ενσαρκώνει» τον Χριστό ξανά και ξανά σε κάθε χώρο και χρόνο. Τέλος η εισήγηση θα παρουσιάσει και θα αναλύσει αρκετά διαφορετικά παραδείγματα από τις σύγχρονες ιεραποστολές στην Βόρειο Αμερική.

1. Orthodox Theology of Mission

I would like to begin by giving you an overview of the current discussion about the Orthodox theology of mission, which has focused on what is called the process of inculturation. Even though the term "inculturation" is a new one, the theology and missionary practice of grafting the Gospel into culture is as old as the Church itself. The theological starting point for this process lies in the doctrine of the Incarnation of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. First, the Incarnation of the Word of God did not take place in a vacuum, but in a specific time and place, among a particular people [1]. Secondly, the Pentecost event made it clear that no one people has exclusive claims to the Gospel, since it was transmitted, via different languages, to all the peoples of that era [2].

Theologically, the inculturation model is based on the fact that the Church is the Body of Christ, or Christ extended through the ages, meaning that Christ is present in history, that He has flesh, that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." [3] In this continuing incarnation of God, the created is assumed into the uncreated's mode of existence, in order to redeem the fallen world and transform it into the Kingdom of God [4]. This necessitates that Christ and His Church be clothed at every moment in the cultural flesh of the world, the essentials of each people. Christ Himself, according to St. Maximos the Confessor, wants "to fully realize the mystery of His incarnation always and everywhere." [5] Christ described his disciples as light, salt, and leaven, and this means that they are

parts of a larger whole. Not only does their presence benefit the larger whole, but *they themselves actually need that wider whole*. As Archbishop Anastasios has noted, leaven on its own will spoil, while in dough it will help it grow. Likewise, the Church is compelled to become part of history [6]. Every moment in every place is a new Pentecost, a new descent of the Holy Spirit, which does not belong exclusively to one culture and one people and their expressions [7].

The fact that the Gospel is clothed in the flesh of the world means that not only does it not reject any culture from the outset, but rather it is grafted into the existing culture with the goal of transforming it, "Christifying" it, and "Churchifying" it. The culture being approached should be viewed with respect, assuming, as Christians have done throughout history, that the new culture contains some elements of good. There is thus what some have described as a dialogue happening between the Gospel and culture, in which the Church assumes and transfigures those elements of the local culture that can bear the light of the Gospel, and disregards those elements that cannot [8].

This dialogue between the Gospel and culture at the local level is safeguarded by another dialectical process that is happening on a universal level between this emerging Christian culture, this new local church, and the other, established, local churches. Archbishop Anastasios of Albania has likened this unity of diversity to a "doxological symphony," in which each local culture and church has its own voice. This means mission must respect the particularities of each people and place, and to incarnate—through a process of dialogue between the Gospel and culture—the word of God in the customs of their particular place, to sanctify the people's characteristics so that they can become truly themselves with their own voice. However, *their voices must always be formed in harmony with the voices of praise of the whole Church* [9]. *We can thus speak about an "inter-culturation," which provides the key to assuring that a new local expression remains recognizable to the worldwide communion*. New churches, like those in the U.S., need to develop their own voice and personality like a child, but be guided by their mother churches and by tradition in a constant dialogue with others [10].

One of the pioneers of Orthodox missiology, Elias Vulgarakis, pointed to Korean Orthodox's use of rice (rather than wheat) in kollyva as an example of successful inculturation [11]. One of the most noted missiologists today, Thanasis Papathanasiou, has gone a step further and stirred some controversy by suggesting, for example, that the local African Orthodox Church consider using something other than bread and wine for its eucharistic offering, since he considers these to be expressions native to the Near East and Europe [12]. This, however, begs the question we discussed above: would a eucharist without bread and wine still be recognizable as a eucharist to the established local churches? Would this "voice" be in harmony with the "doxological symphony" or would it create cacophony? I think this imagery is particularly appropriate to our conference here. But still you may ask, what does all this have to do with Byzantine chant? I'll tell you now.

2. Orthodoxy in the United States

Besides having had the privilege of studying mission in Thessaloniki, I myself am also a product of mission, so I will speak to you today both from an academic and a personal perspective. I converted to Orthodoxy at the age of 21 in my home country of the United States. Now, the traditionally Orthodox countries (such as Greece, Russia, Romania) don't always see the US as a mission field, but in fact it is. For years, the Archdioceses of the various jurisdictions reported much higher numbers, but these figures were not scientific and seem, in fact, to have been quite fanciful. According to this recent survey, which was conducted by an Orthodox researcher and reflects numbers reported by the parish priests themselves, there are 800,000 (Chalcedonian) Orthodox in 12 (yes, 12!) canonical jurisdictions who attend church "even occasionally," i.e. even once or twice a year. Of this number, only 211,000 (or 26%) were defined by their own clergy as "attending church on a regular basis." Out of a U.S. population of over 310 million, that means that 0.0007% of the American population (or 1 person out of every 1428) are normal participants in the life of the Orthodox Church. Of course, this does not

include people who may be "ethnically Orthodox" but never attend a church. There are actually more Orthodox in Kenya, which everyone considers a mission field, with 1 million out of a population of only 40 million, than there are in the whole of North America.

I had never even heard of Orthodoxy until I was 21. I still remember my first experience in a Greek Orthodox church, hearing Byzantine music for the first time. As other western converts have joked, it sounded to us like someone was torturing a goat. Russian emissaries to Constantinople are reported to have told the Holy Prince Vladimir of their liturgical experience in the city of cities, "We didn't know whether we were on earth or in heaven." As a friend of mine jokes about the Byzantine music in the U.S., "We didn't know whether we were on earth or in hell."

The fact of the matter is that there are very few trained Byzantine chanters in the US. And this makes sense historically. The Greek immigrants first priority was to bring over a priest, whom the community, to this day, is called to support financially, unlike the current system here in Greece. Thus paying a chanter was and is something of a luxury that only the very largest parishes can afford.

I mention money only because Byzantine chant requires so much training and dedication that, practically speaking, one must pay a chanter something for his time. In practice, what does all this mean? Well, that Byzantine chant, when it is done in the U.S., is often not done in a way that can be enjoyed by the faithful. Since westerners are not accustomed to the Byzantine musical scale, they often prefer Russian four-part ecclesiastical music. Many times, the choice of music—whether Greek or Russian—is a very serious and divisive issue [13]. In most parishes of the Byzantine tradition in the U.S., the following compromise has been reached. One chanter who has some minimal level of familiarity with Byzantine chant undertakes to chant Vespers and Orthros. Liturgy, which is what the vast majority of the faithful attend, is usually sung by a choir. In the Greek churches, they often use a four-part harmonized "adaptation" of Byzantine music. In the Antiochian parishes, they may use Russian music. Thus, there is a sudden switch at the end of Orthros from Byzantine to Russian.

Although this may seem strange and perhaps even schizophrenic, let us consider the words of Archbishop Demetrios of America. Citing 1Cor 9:19-23 ("I have become all things to all people that I might save some"), the Archbishop calls St. Paul's approach to mission "personal pluralism," arguing that St. Paul took a positive approach to the pluralism of his time by trying to express within his own person all the diversity he found around him. The Archbishop then extends this concept of "personal pluralism" to what he calls "parish pluralism," wherein each local eucharistic community can be a unity in diversity, which would serve as a model for the whole of society [14]. Thus if a parish is to truly be the eucharistic synaxis of all the faithful of a particular geographical locale (and not an ethnic gathering), then perhaps the great diversity that can be found in the United States calls for such a diversity within worship? How else can we accommodate, within the concept of a single church in a single place, the variety of faithful—from Greeks to Romanians to Russians to American converts? Perhaps we could say that this "melting pot" approach best reflects American culture? Then the question becomes whether this "American" voice remains recognizable to the rest of Orthodoxy, whether it creates harmony or cacophony? Since it contains elements of the various Orthodox traditions, I would argue that it does remain recognizable, even if not universally embraced due to its lack of "purity." But it doesn't answer the bigger question of whether this is truly an American expression, or is it simply a compromise among relatively recent immigrants? Or is it in fact a case of the converts themselves seeking escape from their confusing post-modern society by taking refuge in the cultures of a pre-modern age? [15]

3. Papageorgiou's Three Categories of Mission

Niki Papageorgiou has offered us a useful methodology for dissecting these questions by isolating three types of "incarnation" of the evangelical message, which in turn reflect three models by which the Church can approach local culture. The first model, which is usually promulgated by intellectuals, maintains that the Church and its Gospel are best expressed through Greek culture and language. This

trend tends to absolutize Greek Christian culture, disconnecting it from its original historical framework and considering it henceforth a permanent characteristic of the Church, as "inseparable as its very flesh." [16] Mission thus means "Hellenizing" the supposedly "local" Church [17].

In the second model, the Church does not insist on the use of only the Greek language, for example, but in effect simply translates the Greek language and all the other cultural forms of Byzantium, with which the Church identifies itself—iconography, music, etc.—into the local language. This, in fact, represents the prevailing missionary trend within Orthodoxy, which is content with the translation of the Bible and the celebration of the worship in the local language [18].

Finally, in the third model of inculturation, which we discussed above, the Church extracts itself from its cultural expressions [19] and is engrafted into another cultural form, into a local culture.

The question, then, is: into which of these three categories does the Orthodox mission in America fall? While hard to generalize among all 12 (!) jurisdictions in the U.S., I would argue that they most clearly fall into the second category. As pertains specifically to Byzantine music, we have really only two American initiatives at which we can look. The first is the Antiochian Archdiocese's Byzantine Music Project, in which Basil Kazan translated, in the middle of the 20th century, the primary services of the Anastasimatarion into English and Western notation music. The second project, of this century, by Fr. Ephraim of St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery in Arizona [20], is essentially a revision and extension of the first, seeking however to be more faithful to the original Byzantine music. I would say that these are examples of the second missionary approach.

Finally, there is also a third initiative in the U.S. worth discussing, although it is not specifically Byzantine. That is the case of the so-called Evangelical Orthodox Church, or E.O.C. for short. This was a group of approximately 2000 American Protestants who began a search in the 1970s for the historical Church [21]. As they read Church history and the Fathers of the Church, their church structure and worship became more and more "Orthodox," although they themselves had never even heard of the Eastern Orthodox Church! Eventually, in 1987, they were received *en masse* into the Antiochian Archdiocese and maintained a special status for six years as they learned more about Orthodoxy. Meanwhile, they had their own musicians who were learning Orthodox worship. Their first attempts at liturgical music are notable (see PDF). Here in this Trisagion Hymn, they have adopted the Byzantine Liturgy and the words of the Trisagion Hymn, translated them into English, and then—and here's the unique part—set the music to something neither Greek nor Russian, but what is essentially a common, popular Protestant hymn melody. (Sing example.) Could we say that this is an example of the third missionary trend? (I will note on a personal level that I don't care for it at all personally, but I have to acknowledge its possibility theologically.)

It is interesting to note that, over time, their music gradually became more and more Russian, with the typical four-part harmonies. Now, over 20 years later, many of them are trying to transition to Byzantine music. So we have, in a way, the exact *opposite* missionary flow from what we described in theory, a move in reverse back through history and away from their own culture. Is this a case of converts rejecting their own culture as a rejection, for example, of modernity? Or is this a case of them absolutizing certain historical forms? Or could it be that learning *in depth* about the tradition is the first step toward, eventually, developing something local? [22]

As you can see, I do not have all the answers. I am simply asking questions. And I am no expert in Byzantine music, as my long-suffering teacher, Kostas Karagounis, can testify. For the record, I personally love Byzantine music (when done well). But my personal preference is irrelevant to this discussion. So I turn the question to you: What does an indigenous expression of ecclesiastical music look like in the U.S., and in mission fields in general?

References

- [1] As Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and all Albania has noted: "The dogma of the incarnation is therefore essential and fundamental to any inquiry or proper overview regarding the matter presently under discussion," *Facing the World: Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns*, Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003, p. 87.

- [2] See Μητροπολίτης Γεωργίος Χόντρ, "Πολιτισμός και Εκκλησία," *Σύναξη* 88 (2003), σελ. 18-20, and Σοφία Σταύρου-Κλεμάν, "Παγκοσμιότητα και ενσάρκωση: στο σταυροδρόμι των σχέσεων Εκκλησίας και Πολιτισμού," *Σύναξη* 88 (2003), σελ. 21-24.
- [3] Jn 1:14.
- [4] I. Bria, *Go Forth in Peace: Orthodox Perspectives on Mission*. Geneva: WCC, 1986, p. 66.
- [5] Maximus the Confessor, *Περί διαφόρων ἀποριῶν*, PG 91 1084 C-D, quoted in Μητροπολίτου Νιγηρίας Αλεξάνδρου, "Ἱεραποστολή και Πολιτισμός," *Πάντα τα ἔθνη*, ἔτος ΚΗ', (Απρίλιος-Ιούνιος 2009) τεύχος 110, p. 5.
- [6] Of course, Metropolitan John Zizioulas rightly reminds us that, while the Incarnation of the Lord engaged history, it was not completely identified with history. Throughout his earthly life, the Incarnate Lord remained a foreigner and a sojourner, having "nowhere to lay his head" (Lk 9.58). Ultimately, the world rejected him and crucified him. Thus, while he engaged history and lived "in" the world, he was never "of" the world, just as he said to his disciples (Jn 17.16). According to Zizioulas, the influence that the Church is called to exert on history is precisely its message of kenosis and the cross, which serves as a permanent reminder that this world and history is in need of resurrection and transfiguration; see Μητροπολίτη Περγάμου Ἰωάννη (Ζηζιούλα), "Ἐκκλησία και Ἐσχάτα," *Ἐκκλησία και Ἐσχατολογία*, επιμ. Π. Καλαϊτζίδη, Καστανιώτη, Αθήνα, 2003, pp. 37-38. See also Archbishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos), "The Purpose and Motive of Mission," *Mission in Christ's Way: An Orthodox Understanding of Mission*. Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010, pp. 54-55.
- [7] Μητροπολίτου Νιγηρίας Αλεξάνδρου, "Ἱεραποστολή και Πολιτισμός," *op. cit.*, p. 5.
- [8] Th. Papathanasiou, "Mission: A Consequence or, perhaps, a presupposition of Catholicity?," *Future, The Background of History: Essays on Church Mission in an Age of Globalization*. Montréal, Québec: Alexander Press, 2005, p. 26.
- [9] Archbishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos), "The Purpose and Motive of Mission," *op. cit.*, pp. 56, 53.
- [10] I. Bria, *Go Forth in Peace*, *op. cit.*, p. 58. See also Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991, p. 456.
- [11] H. A. Βουλγαράκη, *Ἱεραποστολή. Δρόμοι και δομές*. Αρμός, Αθήνα, 1989, pp. 136-141.
- [12] Θ. Ν. Παπαθανασίου, "Μόνο με ψωμί; Μόνο με κρασί; Η δυνατότητα χρήσης άλλων υλικών στη θεία Ευχαριστία," *Σύναξη* 105 (2008), pp. 55-73.
- [13] Perhaps the most famous American convert to Orthodoxy, Fr. Seraphim Rose, tried to stay above the fray in these endless disputes between "Russian" and "Greek." While Rose himself personally preferred the Russian, because that is to what he had become accustomed, he nevertheless stressed that it was only a matter of what spoke to the heart of man. But here again, the matter is framed as only a pluralistic choice between existing options, not a radical proposal for an entirely new indigenous expression. We would say that the same spirit has held true for the Brotherhood until today; while they often acknowledge the theoretical need for an indigenous expression of Orthodoxy, they themselves constantly take refuge in other Orthodox cultures from other times and places, usually 18th-19th century Tsarist Russia.
- [14] Archbishop Demetrios of America, "The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World," *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World: An Ecumenical Conversation*. Edited by Emmanuel Clapsis. Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004, pp. 3, 9-10.
- [15] Fr. Seraphim Rose, warned about converts rejecting their own culture. While a trenchant critic of Western society and particularly late modernity, Fr. Seraphim did, especially in his later years, insist that converts embrace the best parts of their culture. He recommended, for example, watching films and listening to music from the 1930s and 1940s, as well as reading novels from authors such as Dickens. Although these sources contained some heterodox Christian ideas, Fr. Seraphim considered them still basically Christian and products of a fundamentally Christian culture, which he believed had since been swallowed up in nihilism. Although Fr. Seraphim rejected the results of modernity, i.e. where it had led, he did not reject all of its achievements.¹ Is this a case of assuming those parts of the native culture that can withstand the light of the Gospel and rejecting those that cannot? Or perhaps do we consider Fr. Seraphim too pessimistic about the merits of modern society?
- [16] N. Papageorgiou, "L'Eglise et les traditions locales dans le cadre de la mission," *Istina* 55/1 (Janvier-Mars 2010), pp. 69-80.
- [17] See Π. Βασιλειάδη, *Ενότητα και μαρτυρία. Ορθόδοξη Χριστιανική Μαρτυρία και Διαθρησκευτικός Διάλογος – Εγχειρίδιο Ἱεραποστολής*, εκδ. Επίκεντρο, Θεσσαλονίκη, 2007, p. 60.
- [18] N. Papageorgiou, "L'Eglise et les traditions locales," *op. cit.*, pp. 69-80.
- [19] Θ. Παπαθανασίου, *Η Εκκλησία γίνεται όταν ανοίγεται*, *Εν πλώ*, Αθήνα, 2008, pp. 297-298.

- [20] The project is all the more striking for the fact that the monastery itself does not use it, utilizing only Byzantine notation and the original Greek text. The project is an offering entirely out of service to the rest of the Church in North America.
- [21] Their story is detailed in Fr. Peter Gillquist's *Becoming Orthodox: A Journey to the Ancient Christian Faith*. Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 1992. It has been translated into several languages, including Greek: Πρωτ. Πήτερ Γκίλκουιστ, *Καλώς ήρθατε στο σπίτι σας... Ανακαλύπτοντας την αρχαία χριστιανική πίστη*. Μετάφραση: Ιωσήφ Ροηλίδης. Ακρίτας, 2008.
- [22] Personally, I hope it is the latter, and that the American Orthodox Church will produce grace-filled saints who are able to combine a deep knowledge of the tradition with the grace of the Holy Spirit in order to produce something both "American" and, most importantly, Orthodox.

Fr. Gregory Edwards, Th.D., was born in Virginia, USA, in 1978, and was raised Episcopalian (Anglican). At Brown University, under the tutelage of Prof. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, a renowned Syriac scholar and Orthodox convert, Fr. Gregory discovered Orthodoxy in 2002. After a year of catechism, he was received into the Orthodox Church. In 2006, one of the pre-eminent Orthodox New Testament scholars, Prof. Petros Vassiliadis, accepted Fr. Gregory as a doctoral candidate in the School of Theology of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. In the summer of 2006, Fr. Gregory moved with his wife to Panorama, Thessaloniki and began language school at the university. After passing the university language exam in 2007, Fr. Gregory officially began his doctoral work at the School of Theology. In December 2007, Fr. Gregory was ordained a deacon and accepted into the Holy Metropolis of Dimitriadis and Almyrou. While finishing his studies in Thessaloniki, Fr. Gregory collaborated with the Metropolis' Volos Academy for Theological Studies, for which he has translated many published theological works. Independently, he also edited well-received collections of articles by Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) and Christos Yannaras. In 2009, Fr. Gregory was ordained a priest, and became the father of triplets. On June 5, 2012, Fr. Gregory successfully defended his doctoral dissertation entitled "«Η Διακονία των αγίων» (Α' Κορ. 16,15). Διακονία και Μαρτυρία κατά τον Απ. Παύλο και η Σύγχρονη Ορθόδοξη Χριστιανική Μαρτυρία στην Βόρεια Αμερική" and was awarded άριστα. On July 31, 2012, Fr. Gregory was appointed proistamenos of the Church of the Holy Unmercenaries, Portaria, Volos, where he now lives with his family. He continues to collaborate with the Volos Academy for Theological Studies as a translator. On June 3, 2013, Fr. Gregory and his wife welcomed a new daughter. Finally, in April 2014, he was appointed Sessional Assistant Professor of Missiology at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Crestwood, New York.