

NEW BYZANTIUM PUBLICATIONS

VIDEO LESSON SERIES

Volume 1

A Short History Of Christian Church Music

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The History of Music in Christianity

- Influence of the Music of the Hebrews:
 - Music was primarily vocal, a servant of the words. Texts were rich in theology.
 - Instruments were used, but not to accompany voices. (Trumpets to call to order and lead processions, harps accompany prophecy, etc.)
 - Singing was for studying the Scripture and attaining understanding.
 - Singing was worship, not a “background” for something else.

- The elaborate and sensuous music of the world was shunned.
- Jewish religious meals (Kiddush, Chaborah, Seder) included Psalm singing, thanksgiving (eucharist), blessings, and lamplighting.
- Hours of prayer were observed and the Psalms were the prayer book. Everyone was encouraged to sing the Psalms.
- Psalm Singing:
 - Antiphonal and in unison.
 - Verse (cantor) and refrain (people).
 - Used for personal devotions and throughout Jewish services

“For in truth there ought to be but one voice in the church always even as there is one body. For that reason the reader utters his voice alone and the Bishop himself is content to sit in silence; and the chanter sings alone (verse), and though all answer (response), the voices carry up as if from one mouth.”

--St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on I Corinthians 36:9, PG 61:313

Scriptural and Historical References to Early Christian use of Singing

- Drew heavily from Hebrew practices.
- Last Supper included hymn singing.
- “Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.”
- Psalms and Hymns were syllabic. Spiritual songs were melismatic (asmatika) and sometimes wordless.
- Eucharist was separated from the evening meal, which became the Agape (love-feast); early hymns were “Fos Ilaron” for the lamp-lighting and “Glory...” (small doxology).

- Hymn-writing was not encouraged at first but was particularly natural in Greek culture.
- Hymns are poems of praise and flowered in the early Church.
- Legalization and tolerance of the Church (4th Century) paved the way for the establishment and elaboration of ceremonies.
 - The Eucharist into the Divine Liturgy
 - Remnants of the Agape are found in Vespers
 - Orthros from an all-night vigil
- Important events in the Roman Empire that had great meaning for the Church

Council of Laodicea 363-364 AD

Regulated conduct of clergy and laity. Set Sunday as the sabbath day. Lent restrictions. Biblical canon.

Canon 15:

No others shall sing in the Church, save only the ordained singers, who go up into the ambo and sing from a book.

The Development of Hymns

- Early hymn writers included Emperor Justinian, Ephraim the Syrian, Romanos.
- Early local liturgies gave way to the Constantinopolitan standard: The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. The liturgies of the Presanctified Gifts, St. Basil, and St. James were also used. Language was vernacular.
- Monastic communities contributed greatly to religious practice and hymnody, by using simple chants and observing daily hours.
- Institution of the 8-tone system (Octoechos) by St. John of Damascus (9th Century)

- New types of hymns developed.
 - Troparia: Responses (refrains) between the Psalm verses or Canticles.
 - Apolytikia: Dismissal hymn of Vespers, repeated at Orthros and the Divine Liturgy
 - Kontakia (6th century): Chanted sermons, acrostic poems of which small fragments, mostly their preludes, remain in modern use. (Akathist is an example.)
 - Kanons (8-10th centuries)
 1. Commentaries on Scripture (Each ode corresponded to one of the 9 Biblical canticles).
 2. Each ode has several strophes. 2nd ode is omitted except at Lent.
 3. Heirmos (1st Verse) and Katavasies (reprise)

Nine Biblical Canticles

- Canticale One — The (First) Song of Moses (Exodus 15:1-19)
- Canticale Two — The (Second) Song of Moses (Deut 32:1-43)
- Canticale Three — The Prayer of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10)
- Canticale Four — The Prayer of Habakkuk (Habakkuk 3:1-19)
- Canticale Five — The Prayer of Isaiah (Isaiah 26:9-20)
- Canticale Six — The Prayer of Jonah (Jonah 2:2-9)
- Canticale Seven — The Prayer of the Three Holy Children (Daniel 3:26-56)
- Canticale Eight — The Song of the Three Holy Children (Daniel 3:57-88)
- Canticale Nine — The Song of the Theotokos (the Magnificat or Megalynarion: Luke 1:46-55) and the Song of Zacharias (the Benedictus: Luke 1:68-79)

**Greek Orthodoxy
and
Roman Catholicism**

**4th Century:
Roman Empire Divided
West and East**

**Two Capitals
Rome and Constantinople
(Byzantium)**

(Home of 1st Christian Emperor)

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**Five Original Patriarchates
founded by Apostles**

ALEXANDRIA – St. Mark

ANTIOCH – St. Peter

BYZANTIUM – St. Andrew

JERUSALEM – St. James

ROME – Sts. Peter and Paul

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-----**(Schism in 1054)**-----

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Developments in Western Europe

- Pope Gregory I – re-codified the liturgy (mass) and revised plainchant (late 6th Century).
- Introduction of polyphony (11th Century).
- Refinement of musical notation.
- Renaissance, form of “motets” reflected an increasing secularization of church music.
- Use of instruments and organs.
- Complication of polyphony confused texts, understanding was made more difficult.

- Pope John XXII complained that the complicated music was “distorted by a multitude of notes...intoxicating rather than soothing the ears...devotion is brought into contempt, and wantonness is increased...yet we do not intend to forbid...some concords which enrich the melody.” (Early 14th C.)
- 1450-1600 brought about explosive changes in Western music.
 - Increased secular influence, four-part harmony,
 - Luther’s reformation brought back congregational singing of Psalms and invented chorales (derived from German lieder)

Council of Trent, 1562-63

- Attempt by cardinal representatives of the pope to ban polyphony
- Palestrina composes a simpler 4-part mass that convinces the cardinals not to abandon polyphony, but to compose in Palestrina's new style

- Modern era: Western Christianity and Church Music splits into thousands of pieces.
 - Proliferation of Protestant sects.
 - Counter-reformation in Catholic Church called for simpler music that did not obscure the words.
 - Secular and popular forms of religious music emerge, such as the oratorio and cantata (Bach).
 - “Concert masses” were composed by Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert, and others.
Concert Orthodox pieces written by Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, and Stravinsky, among others.
Romantic composers such as Gounod, Verdi, Rossini, Brahms, and Mendelssohn jumped in.

Reaction to Western-Style Music

- Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate Anthimos issued encyclical against the use of 4-part music in the Greek church in Vienna. (1846)
- Pope Pius X, in reaction to pagan music of Wagner, began a revival of Gregorian chant, male choirs, and Eucharistic piety.
- In 1905 a synod of bishops and priests in Russia convened to determine how to wrest the Liturgy away from the choir directors. A simpler form of chant was recommended.

Meanwhile, Back in the East

Over the course of the Second Millennium, native changes did occur in the music of the Orthodox Christian East:

- In the Slavonic Churches the old Znameny chants, based upon the Byzantine, began to add homophonic harmony primarily from the secular musical cultures in those countries.
- In Greece, Asia Minor, and the Middle East, where Byzantine chant was the official music, there were natural developments such as the beautification of melismatic chanting influenced by St. John Koukouzelis in the 14th Century.
- The Crusades and the Advance of Islam leading to the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 had an effect on the entire Church. Modern scholars are not in agreement as to how much of an influence Turkish music had on Byzantine chant.
- In the early 19th Century, Chrysanthos of Madytos wrote a “new method” for the theory and notation of Byzantine chant that has become a standard in the modern world.
- Later in the 19th Century, John Sakellarides introduced staff notation and harmony to Byzantine music with great implications.

Where do we go from here?

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