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**Predrag Miodrag:
OGLEDI O SRPSKOJ
CRKVENOJ MUZICI
[ESSAYS ON SERBIAN
CHURCH MUSIC]**

Belgrade, Visoka škola –
Akademija Srpske pravoslavne
crkve za umetnosti i
konservaciju, 2012, 276 pages

*Ogledi o srpskoj crkvenoj muzici*¹ is the title of the first as yet published book by theologian, chanter and church choir conductor Predrag Miodrag, one of few contemporary theologians and practical experts in the field of Serbian church chant, whose interests are directed towards the history of traditional Serbian sacral singing and issues of its liturgical use, but also towards the questions of Orthodox church music in the wider geographic area. Written on various occasions over a time span of two and a half decades, and thus meth-

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¹ Predrag Miodrag, *Ogledi o srpskoj crkvenoj muzici*, Belgrade, Visoka škola – Akademija Srpske pravoslavne crkve za umetnosti i konservaciju, 2012, X + 276 pages.

odologically diverse,² the texts included in this book are the result of the author's years-long systematic, practical theological and research activity in the area of monophonic chant and choral church music. Thus, the items are marked by the consistent interlocking of a viewpoint based upon deliberation about the issues related to the art of church singing from the theological aspect, and the viewpoint of a musically educated practitioner and competent connoisseur of the particular musical substance at hand.

In its 276 pages, the book *Ogledi o srpskoj crkvenoj muzici* contains an introduction (pp. 11–14), chapters with primary content (pp. 15–180), summaries in the English and Russian languages (pp. 181–184), a table of names (pp. 181–184), a note about the author (pp. 191–194), and a chapter with sheet music examples (pp. 195–276). The volume also includes two compact discs with acoustic records of the extensive sheet music material, presented in the chapter with the examples. For the most part, the acoustic records exhibit the excellent chanting skills of the author himself.³

Advocating the standpoint that a church song, either monophonic or polyphonic, is a sung prayer, Predrag Miodrag

² Skeleton of the book are the papers written for scientific meetings and round tables, as well as contributions for paper collections and journals. The book also includes modified transcripts of public lectures, interviews and a tour report.

³ Besides Predrag Miodrag, the examples from the book are chanted by Jovan and Vasilije Stojanović, students of the Orthodox Theological Academy in Saint Petersburg, as well as Petar Mrakić, deacon of the Saint Lazarus Church (Lazarica) in Sydney, Australia.

equates the notions of church music and the liturgical act in the narrow sense, comprehending monophonic chant and choral church music as two forms of liturgy. However, the author takes into account their specific liturgical function and defines them as musical systems of sorts, whose application within a church service is aimed at “na svečan način donesu do vernika tekstovi crkvenih pesama... i pobude kod njih najpobožnija osećanja” [“rendering the verses of church songs to the believers in a solemn manner... and inspiring in them the most pious sentiments”].⁴ Thus, the book chapters are organized into two parts: the first one deals with the issues of monophonic chant (“Srpsko narodno crkveno pojanje” [“Serbian Popular Church Chant”]), and the second with the numerous questions related to choral church creation (“Horska crkvena muzika” [“Choral Church Music”]). Each part deals with six subjects.

The first part of the book *Ogledi o srpskoj crkvenoj muzici* contains writings about the history of liturgical chant in the Serbian Orthodox Church, about the introduction of chant in seminaries and the cultivation of the chanting skills in them, as well as a contribution about general and always topical issues of relations between the Orthodox liturgy and religious art, with a special review of the role of the art of religious singing in the liturgical act itself. The author also deals with the particulars of articulation of the verses from the Epistles, the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospels in the liturgical practice of the past and the present, and reiterates the necessity of devising a notational system for church

melodies, which would, unlike the current one, allow for the more efficient reduction of the liturgical text to a musical expression, thus functioning as “zajednički, uzajamni jezik, kako sveštenoslužitelja, tako i svih vernika” [“a common, mutual language, both of ordained clergy and all the believers”].⁵ One contribution deals with affinity between church melodies and the folk singing heritage of Serbia.

The second part of the book includes a text about the beginnings and development of church singing in Russia and Serbia, as well as an essay about the, so far, only known (and unsuccessful!) attempt to introduce the organ in the Orthodox liturgy, which took place in the Russian Orthodox Church in the second decade of the 20th century. Putting forward a host of observations about the performance aspect of church music, based upon personal theological and artistic experience, Predrag Miodrag also deals with the appropriateness of the concert performance of church music, often debated about in theological and musical circles, as well as the issue of formulating relevant criteria for choosing the numbers and deciding on their order in programmes of sacral music concerts. This group of texts is concluded by a report from a concert tour that the book’s author made as choirmaster with the Choir of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in the USA during the 1980s.

Examining the historical aspects of Serbian chant, Predrag Miodrag focuses on the issues of its origin and periodization, but also delves into the characteristics of old Serbian chant, referring on multiple occasions to the opinions of distinguished

⁴ Cf. Predrag Miodrag, op. cit., 20.

⁵ Cf. Predrag Miodrag, op. cit., 81.

scholars – musicologists, theologians and literary historians – related to these issues. He concentrates on the particulars of Serbian chant in the first stage of its development, in the period which “započinje na zajedničkoj sveslovenskoj osnovi, pa se utemeljuje i razvija na srpskoj redakciji bogoslužbenih tekstova, nastaloj u književno-reformatorskoj delatnosti svetosavske škole, a traje sve do pojave prvih zapisa srpskog pojanja s kraja XIV veka” [“stemmed from a common pan-Slavonic foundation, and relied on and progressed from the Serbian redaction of liturgical texts, arising from the literary and reformatory activities of St. Sava and his followers, ending with the appearance of the earliest written records of Serbian chant in the late 14th century”],⁶ as well as its importance for the liturgical practice of the period in question, drawing conclusions based upon the data taken from Serbian hagiographic literature, also quoted in the text.

In a report on the ethos of the art of religious singing, Predrag Miodrag deliberates on the basic role of liturgical chant, not only as a form of divine service but generally as a religious art. Thus, here he introduces the category of the beautiful, in the sense of the aesthetically sublime, and points out that beauty is one of the fundamental determinants of both the Orthodox liturgy and religious art. Reminding us of the basic postulates of the Christian interpretation of Neo-Platonism, which perceives reality as the materialization of spiritual prototypes, the author advocates the viewpoint that the beauty of the divine service is a reflection of divine beauty, as well as the result of the aspiration to attain

the beauty of heavenly archetypes, as the most perfect aesthetic degree, through the visible and cognitive existence of the beautiful in church painting and music. Hence, the term “angeloglasno pjenije” [“angel-voiced singing”] is used for liturgical singing, treated both as a chanted liturgy and a form of religious artistic expression. In Miodrag’s opinion, beauty is the means to express the truth of Christian religion, which, applied through the entity of the liturgical melody, has the purpose of making it easier for the believers to understand and adopt the content of a church song. Ipso facto, the author stresses the precedence of the utilitarian function of liturgical chant, compared to the importance of its purely aesthetic effect; he stresses, therefore, supremacy of the role that is also demonstrated in the act of the musical articulation of the texts from the Epistles, the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospels during the divine service.

In a review of the place and role of choral music in the Orthodox Church, whose foundation and development in our midst he rightfully ascribes to the vigorous contacts with Russia and Ukraine, consolidated in the 18th century (by that time sacral polyphony had already become widespread in Russia), Predrag Miodrag is of the opinion that, among all the forms of the art of religious singing, it is monophonic chant that essentially corresponds to the authentic liturgical purpose, since “potpuna moć izražajnosti osećanja pripada melodiji” [“only melody has the full power to express feelings”].⁷ However, he also states that choral musical expression can partially satisfy basic liturgical demands – be it old

⁶ Cf. Predrag Miodrag, op. cit., 24.

⁷ Cf. Predrag Miodrag, op. cit., 178.

Russian polyphony, Serbian choral church music of the 19th century, or contemporary choral religious creativity – provided that the conception of the musical work should not disturb the organic connection between melody and word, that the beauty of the external form should not replace “odsutnu neposrednost i lepotu, koja sebi stvara način i oblik osećanja” [“the absence of immediacy and beauty, which of itself creates the manner and form of emotions”]⁸ and that the very act of articulating the work should not transgress the boundary between the liturgical and the concert approach to its performance. As one of the more recent forms of religious art, choral church music has long since completed its initial developmental stage and found its place in the practical activities of certain local churches in Serbia, says Miodrag. Thus, for him, the liturgical foundation of choral singing is the Church’s response to the new influences on the existing church musical canon: the practice of liturgical singing took a step outside of the canon, which ulteriorly has encompassed a new musical expression.

As stated above, the second part of the book includes a large chapter with musical appendices, where each sheet music example is accompanied with the explanation as to what kind of church song it is, what its liturgical purpose is and whose melographic notation it is, if a more recent melody of Serbian religious chant is in question. However, it remains unclear what criteria have been used for the selection of the published sheet music material because the book does not offer an explanation in that respect, which would certainly be use-

ful for its general readership.

In the book *Ogledi o srpskoj crkvenoj muzici*, Predrag Miodrag has presented a wealth of relatively new, less known facts about Orthodox Church music. He has skilfully used the literature in the best sense, but has also embarked further, leaving his personal imprint on the subjects he selected. However, in spite of the abundance of quoted editions and number of bibliographical citations relevant to the subject of each chapter in turn, the book, unfortunately, does not contain a separate list of referential literature.

Given the scale of the starting point and the complexity of the approach to the issues of the art of religious singing in our country, the book *Ogledi o srpskoj crkvenoj muzici* will certainly find a broad readership, not only among musicians, theologians, church chanters or historians of religious art, but also among all the educated readers interested in deepening their knowledge about Serbian musical heritage.

Translated by Goran Kapetanović

⁸ Ibid.