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Becoming Byzantine

Modernization and Tradition in the Liturgical Music of the Greek Orthodox Church

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Prof. Heather White

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“Tradition results from a conscious and deliberate acceptance. A real tradition is not the relic of a past that is irretrievably gone; it is a living force that animates and informs the present.”¹ –Igor Stravinsky

Introduction

When I walk into my Greek Orthodox Church on any given Sunday service, I am greeted by the sound of the past—florid melodies backed only by the single-note drone of another chanter. The exotic sounding notes echo in the cavernous cathedral as incense lightly stings my nose. Suddenly, from out of nowhere booms an organ, plunking out a major chord for the slightly out of tune choir that begins to sing in harmony. These two types of liturgical music seem to be at complete odds with one another, and yet, each holds a significant place in the Greek Orthodox tradition. However, their relationship is not always easy—the rapport between choirs and chanters is often tense, stemming from a conflict over orthopraxy. Church musicians are separated by what they believe to be the ‘correct’ music of the Church, pitting the Byzantine purists against choral enthusiasts. The Byzantine purists believe that as the original music of worship in the Greek Orthodox Church, Byzantine music is obviously more authentic to the experience of the Orthodox Christian. Choral enthusiasts, on the other hand, grew up hearing harmonized music in Greek Orthodox parishes of the United States, and thus reject the notion that Byzantine chant should have dominance.

This petty conflict is part of a larger conversation about the place of Western music in the Greek Orthodox Church of the United States. This conversation has big implications on Orthodox practice, as music is essential to the service of the Orthodox Church. About seventy-five percent of the Orthodox Divine Liturgy is sung, whether by

¹ Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons*, Bilingual ed., Charles Eliot Norton Lectures ; 1939-40 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970).

the clergy, the chanters, choir, or the congregation. As a parishioner, the music can make or break your experience. I have attended services where time flew because I was lost in the music, and I have attended services that were painful to sit through because the music was distracting. Such experiences have peaked my interest in the controversy between Byzantine and Western music. Through my study of both traditions, it has become evident that Western music both modernizes and preserves the tradition of liturgical music in the Greek Orthodox Church of the United States.

This paper will focus on the musical traditions of the Greek Orthodox Church in the United States, one of many ethnic communities that make up the Orthodox Christian tradition. The largest communities of Orthodox Christians in the United States belong to the Greek Orthodox Church, and thus there is more scholarship on this specific population. I am a Greek Orthodox church musician who grew up in this tradition—I have studied, and have a love for, both Byzantine Chant and Western music. Thus, there is an element of personal connection and knowledge that makes this topic more accessible to me, as I am an ‘insider’ to both traditions.

Though Chant is the original music of the Greek Orthodox Church, it is not crystallized in the past. In fact, just as Stravinsky states, the Byzantine tradition is alive and changing, even today. This paper will work through the fallacy that tradition is untouchable through its examinations of modern iterations of Greek Orthodox liturgical music, much of which uses Western staff notation to interpret the sacred melodies or compose new ones. This will show how Western music acts as a religious technology that simultaneously drags Byzantine Chant to the present and attempts to preserve the past.

Religion and Technology

In speaking about Westernized music as a religious technology, it is necessary to define both of these terms. Their definitions are widely debated by scholars, with no universal conclusion in place. Using knowledge from a variety of scholarly sources that attempt to define each term, I have pieced together definitions that are effective in this setting.

Though the Greek Orthodox Church is not questioned in its religiosity, it remains important to examine *what* religion is. In my own words, religion is any set of beliefs or practices that attempts to make sense of human's relationship to the world and the afterlife. This definition is broad enough to encompass movements beyond the Abrahamic traditions that have historically dominated western scholarly thought. I acknowledge that in choosing to write about a denomination of Christianity, I contribute to this Eurocentric conversation. However, my definition of religion aims to honor the multiplicity of religious traditions in existence. Particularly influential to this paper is Mary Douglas's argument in "Purity and Danger" that religion uses "pollution ideas" to define what is acceptable or unacceptable, clean or unclean. "The whole universe is harnessed to [human's] attempts to, force one another into good citizenship."² For the Orthodox Church, whose name literally translates to 'correct belief,' the importance of being unpolluted is evident. In dealing with the problem of authenticity in Byzantine Chant, the idea of purity will be particularly useful—it will aid in understanding the acceptance, audience, and authenticity of Western liturgical music.

² Mary Douglas, "Purity and Danger (Selections)," in *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion*, ed. Carl Olson (Toronto: Wadsworth, 2003), 307.

With regard to technology, my own definition claims that technology is anything created by humans for a specific purpose. This is not limited to physical products, but must be inspired by and fulfill some need. Theorist Jeremy Stolow marks music as a technology of enchantment: “art, music, dance, rhetoric, gifts, and all the other ‘technical’ strategies used by human beings to exert control over the thoughts and actions of other human beings.”³ Thus, through music one can control the experience of the listener—this numinous connection is especially pronounced in religious services, where music is used to bring one closer with the divine. In the context of the Greek Orthodox Church service, the music is utilized for the prayer, meditation, and exaltation of the clergy and the laity. In a video entitled “Music in the Orthodox Church” created by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, Dr. Grammenos Karanos states: “music should be secondary to The Word. If it is conducive to the salvation of the faithful, then the church will accept it.”⁴ In all cases, liturgical music should elevate the text it’s set to, heightening the words so as to bring the listener closer to God. In this way, liturgical music is a technology of the Greek Orthodox Church, a way in which the experience of worship can be controlled. This paper will address the reasons why different types of liturgical music are utilized as technologies in the Greek Orthodox Church.

What is Byzantine Chant?

Byzantine Chant is the oldest liturgical music of the Orthodox Christian Church. Though alive today, Byzantine Chant is an ancient practice; evidence points to the 4th

³ Jeremy Stolow, “Technology,” in *Keyword in Religion, Media and Culture*, ed. David Morgan (New York ; London: Routledge, 2008), 189.

⁴ Nicholas J. Furriss, *Music in the Orthodox Church, Discovering Orthodox Christianity* (Brookline, MA, 2013), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_bmWuC2iuk8.

century as the beginning of the Byzantine tradition.⁵ The earliest chants were likely influenced by the music of Jewish cantors, and were transmitted orally. The first publications of notated Byzantine Chant appear around the 9th century C.E., although the earliest manuscripts that musicologists have been able to decode came from the late 12th century.⁶ A description of Byzantine Chant and its differences from Western music is extraordinarily difficult without audio examples. The “Introduction” of the Divine Music Project, a website of information and resources compiled by St. Anthony’s Monastery in Arizona, agrees: “it is necessary to hear a proper execution of Byzantine chant in the context of a worship service in order to appreciate its ethos and to understand how it differs from Western secular music.”⁷ The music sounds solemn, ancient, and exotic with its chromaticism (notes outside of the traditional scale), melismatic lines (elaborate, florid melodies), and accompaniment by a drone (single sung note)—to a Western ear, it definitely sounds like the music of ‘the East.’ In fact, upon first listen, many equate the sound to a Muslim call to prayer, which is not unjustified considering some of the history of Byzantine Chant.

The center of the Greek Orthodox world has long been the city of Constantinople. Even after the Ottoman Empire took over in 1453 and renamed the city Istanbul, the ecclesiastical Patriarchate, or the head church, remained in this location. When the Ottomans occupied the city in the 15th century, there grew an exchange between Greek Orthodox chanters and Arabic musicians. In fact, many of the chanters of the Patriarchate

⁵ Dimitri E. Conomos, “A Brief Survey of the History of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Chant,” E-Book, *The Divine Music Project*, accessed April 29, 2017, <http://stanthonysmonastery.org/music/History.htm>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ St. Anthony’s Greek Orthodox Monastery, “Introduction,” *The Divine Music Project*, accessed April 29, 2017, <http://stanthonysmonastery.org/music/Intro.htm>.

at this time made successful careers out of performing Arabo-Persian popular music.⁸ As such, this cultural exchange is thought to have bled into the style of Byzantine Chant, rendering it more ‘Eastern’ in sound. However, many scholars believe that the ‘Eastern’ sound of Byzantine Chant can also be traced back to its Greek roots, claiming that Greek folk music had just as much of a hand in the distinct quality of chant as Arabic culture.

The tradition has changed and developed over the centuries of its existence, despite the air of ancient purity given off by the melodies. Much of this change is seen in its system of notation, or the set of symbols used to tell the chanter what to sing. Scholars divide the history of Byzantine Chant into four time periods: Early, Medieval, Late Byzantine, and Post-Byzantine eras. The Early Byzantine period existed pre-notation, while the latest is the form which chanters use today. Scholars tend to focus on the later epochs of notation simply because it is most similar to the system of notation used in Byzantine Chant today. The original notation system “derives ultimately from the accents added to classical Greek texts by Alexandrian grammarians and rhetors, and then adapted for use to aid the musical declamation of scriptural texts.”⁹ As notation developed, the neumes (set of symbols representing the music) became so complex that barely anyone could sing or interpret them. The Post-Byzantine period focused mostly on a simplification of this complex system of notation so that it could be properly understood—this is what informs our study of chant today.

All of that being said, you may be wondering what, exactly, Byzantine Chant notation looks like on paper. It does not at all resemble what those from Western musical traditions are used to seeing when reading a piece of music. The notation, complex in

⁸ David J. Melling, *Reading Psalmodia*, 2000, 4.

⁹ Melling, *Reading Psalmodia*.

nature, more closely resembles Arabic characters than notes on a staff. To give you an idea of the visual difference, here is an example of the same hymn in both Byzantine and Western notations, courtesy of the Divine Music Project:¹⁰

Grave Mode

The image displays two musical notations for the hymn "Lord, have mercy" in Grave Mode. The top notation is Byzantine notation, featuring large, ornate, rounded neumes on a four-line staff. The neumes are decorated with red and blue accents, and the text is written in a stylized font. The bottom notation is Western staff notation, featuring a five-line staff with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a common time signature (C). The notes are small, linear, and connected by stems, with a more standard font for the lyrics. The lyrics for both are: "Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy." The Western notation includes performance markings such as "Un.", "C", "A^b", "E^b", "C", and "rit.".

The visual differences are obvious: the systems look utterly different from one another. The aesthetics of the staff notation appear very linear, while the Byzantine is rounded and ornate looking. But the differences in notation don't stop at their looks; Byzantine notation is considered 'descriptive,' as compared to the 'prescriptive' staff

¹⁰ St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, "Byzantine vs. Western Notation," *The Divine Music Project*, accessed April 29, 2017, <http://stanthonysmonastery.org/music/NotationB.htm>.

notation. The difference between these adjectives lies in their flexibility. While Byzantine notation allows for heavy performer interpretation, Western notation leaves less room for change. This is exemplified by Byzantine music’s flexibility of pitch—the notation does not dictate the exact note to start on. While the space in the middle of a Western staff will always be the same pitch: a C5 (523.251 Hz), Byzantine notation does not assign certain symbols exact notes. Instead, it focuses on the movement between notes: the intervals. This means that a Byzantine hymn could begin at any pitch of the chanter’s choosing—as long as the intervallic movements follow what’s written, it is considered the same piece of music. This allows for flexibility of range in singing these pieces; the chanter can choose a range that will best fit their own voice, or the voice of their priest.

Another of the interpretive aspects of Byzantine notation comes in the expression of the text. In Byzantine notation, the neumes not only show the intervallic movement, but also demonstrate what the vocal characteristic of that movement should feel and sound like. For example, there are three different neumes that signify to move up by a step, and each one implies a certain quality of voice. This example, taken from David Melling’s book, *Reading Psalmodia*, shows the visual difference between these three symbols.¹¹

Oligon	—	Step
Petasti	↪	Flutter
Kentimata	“	Doublestitch

An accomplished chanter will be able to interpret and sing each symbol with its implied quality, so that it appropriately elevates the meaning of the text. After all, as a liturgical

¹¹ Melling, *Reading Psalmodia*, 9.

practice, Byzantine Chant's primary goal is to communicate the holy words being sung in a clear and meaningful manner.

Focusing on the text allows for the music to paint the sacred words—this helps determine the way in which the chanter interprets the music. Unlike Western notation, in which the instructions are all laid out on the page, Byzantine notation allows for some freedom of expression through ornamentation. The same hymn could be sung in a seemingly limitless number of ways—though the main melody stays the same, each chanter or chant school has a specific way of interpreting the information given on the page. This is an area in which Western notation falls short: often, transcriptions (arrangements) of “Byzantine melodies written in Western notation are necessarily either too analytical or too simplified.”¹² As a ‘prescriptive’ tradition, Western notation is forced to either become over complicated to accommodate Byzantine ornamentation or over simplified to be more accessible. The rigidity of staff notation is one of the major challenges in the bridging of the notational gap between traditions. There is, however, a drawback to the flexibility of Byzantine notation, which affects mostly Chant theorists, who find that “[t]he books produced by their predecessors describe an earlier state of Psalmodia [hymns] that can be significantly different from contemporary practice.”¹³ In this way, ‘descriptiveness’ can get in the way of scholarly study and consistency.

Clergy have also shown concern for a difference in spirituality between Byzantine Chant and Western music. The importance of humility and solemnity is embodied by the monophonic (single-line) music of Byzantine Chant, while the complex harmony of some Western iterations of the music could distract from or muddy the meaning of the all-

¹² St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, “Byzantine vs. Western Notation.”

¹³ Melling, *Reading Psalmodia*, 36.

important text.¹⁴ This concern pertains mostly to Western choral music in the Church. The quality of the music or musicians in practice also connects to the spirituality of the parishioner. Clerical opinion is united in the belief that liturgical music should have text as its primary focus—drawing attention to it while not distracting from it. As described earlier, an out of tune choir can pull focus from the solemnity of the service, causing distraction among the parish. This issue, of course, is not limited to choral musicians; however, in harmonized music there is more room for musicians to be out of sync or out of tune with one another, which can distract from the spirituality of the service.

The pedagogical practices of Byzantine and Western notations also differ drastically. If each chanter has a slightly different way of interpreting the neumes on the page, then the way a chanter sings is greatly affected by their teacher. Historically, chant has been passed down as both aural and written tradition, allowing each chanter to take on the *ypchos* (style) of their mentor or the chanters with whom they have sung.¹⁵ This is different from the Western music tradition in which, for the most part, each student will play or sing a piece the same way, no matter who they are taught by. Subtle differences in technique and performance may exist, but notes and rhythms will not be added to the music as in the performance of Byzantine Chant.

A Short History of Western Choral Music in the Greek Orthodox Church of the United States

Important to note is the development of Western-style choral music for use in the Greek Orthodox Divine Liturgy in America, which has historical and assimilative roots.

¹⁴ St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, "Introduction."

¹⁵ Alexander Konrad Khalil, "Echoes of Constantinople : Oral and Written Tradition of the Psaltes of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople," *eScholarship*, January 1, 2009, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/6r2794cz>.

Richard Barrett sums up this development simply by saying “[t]he Greeks who emigrated to the New World did so at a time of heightened ‘Westernization’ of sacred music in Greece, and the émigrés were in a position of having to perform the barest of essential functions with few, if not zero, resources.”¹⁶ This description highlights the inevitability of the change to Western music. Dr. Frank Desby, one of the foremost composers of Greek Orthodox choral music, gives a more detailed account of the way that the choral movement originated—not from the United States but rather from Greeks living in France and Germany (other scholars suggest Vienna and Poland).¹⁷ Scholars often attribute this change to John Sakellarides, a 19th century performer, teacher, and composer of Byzantine Chant, who “combed out many ornaments [from the chant], and produced a kind of classical reform.”¹⁸ Along with this reform, Sakellarides also produced a series of harmonized hymns written for male choir. Sakellarides opened the door for choral composers not only in his original compositions of choral music but also in the simplification of chant melodies. Many of these reformed melodies became the basis for future choral works.

When Greeks began immigrating in large numbers to the United States in the 19th century, many of Sakellarides’ students were among them. To fill the need for liturgical music, his students were quickly elevated to be the chanters of churches that developed.¹⁹ Sakellarides’ followers were quick to implement his harmonized music, and Desby

¹⁶ Richard Barrett, “Building Musical Bridges in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese,” *The Sounding Blog*, March 20, 2015, <http://myocn.net/building-musical-bridges-in-the-greek-orthodox-archdiocese/>.

¹⁷ Frank Desby, “Growth of Liturgical Music in the Iakovian Era,” in *National Forum of Greek Orthodox Church Musicians: Silver Anniversary*, ed. George Rapis, 2002, 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

posits: “Separated from the Mother Church, the Greek Church in the U.S. was not under the watchful eye of anyone objecting to innovations. So in the first quarter of the 20th Century, the Greek Church of the New World introduced choral music on a permanent basis.”²⁰ This implementation of choral music was helped along by the second generation of Greeks in the U.S., many of who were able to participate in higher education. This opened up the opportunity for more Greeks to gain formal training in Western music. In his article “Greek Orthodox Liturgical Music in the United States: The Impact of the ‘California Composers,’” Nick Tarlson refers to Byzantine scholar Alexander Lingas as he:

describes the further development of polyphonic [multi-voiced] choirs as a natural progression “along established lines” due to the emergence of a second generation of American trained musicians, whereas the developments in Greece, and the increased numbers of Greek immigrants to Canada and Australia, led to a simpler format involving the *psaltai* [chanter].²¹

Thus, the Western education of the Greek immigrants and their descendants seeped into the liturgical music of the Greek Orthodox Church, inviting the choral tradition to grow in the United States.

Vital to the growth of Western choral music were a few West Coast composers who greatly influenced the composition of Greek Orthodox liturgical music. Dr. Frank Desby, the first of these composers to publish a choral version of the Divine Liturgy:

“broke the ice” with his use of modal harmony and counterpoint. He refocused Greek Orthodox Church musicians on the Byzantine ethos, adding Western techniques that had not been used widely before his time. He also reintroduced Byzantine performance techniques—such as responsorial singing—that had been

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Nick Tarlson, “Greek Orthodox Liturgical Music in the United States: The Impact of the ‘California Composers,’” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 57 (2012): 3.

neglected or abandoned by his predecessors in the early twentieth-century Greek Orthodox Church music choral literature.²²

Desby's extensive research on Byzantine Chant and notation (his Doctoral thesis at the University of Southern California was presented on this topic) shows a respect for the tradition, even while he moved away from it. Each of the West Coast composers developed the tradition in some way, whether it was moving the style forward or hearkening it to the past. Though not all current composers possess such a strong foundation of knowledge in the Byzantine tradition, it is significant that the first and, arguably, most influential of the modern composers *did* have this knowledge.

There has been a recent revival of Byzantine Chant in the United States, which has come into direct conflict with the choral style that developed since the 1960's. Dr. Vicki Pappas, previous leader of the National Forum of Greek Orthodox Church Musicians, comments: "We also have a lot of American-born trained cantors who have studied and some of them, they're bringing that repertoire up into the church and some of the choirs now are starting to sing some of these ancient melodies as well."²³ However, not all choirs have been as receptive as Dr. Pappas suggests—generations of Greek Americans were raised on choral music in church, and so the revival of the Byzantine Chant style has been difficult for many to stomach. There often exists great tension in the Church between the choir and chanter as they compete for dominance within the church service. Richard Barrett reflects on this conflict in his essay "Building Musical Bridges in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese:"

[O]ne of the speakers for the convention said something that stuck with me – "We have to revitalize the choirs," this person said. "And we can't do it ourselves.

²² Ibid., 17.

²³ Furriss, *Music in the Orthodox Church*.

There are people who think they can do things all by themselves,” the speaker went on, and I braced myself; the setup telegraphed what was coming. “They’re called *chanters*.” The speaker’s words stung, but they underscored for me the reality that there is a wide gulf between the choir loft and the *psalterion* [chant stand] that the current generation must address, and it is especially incumbent on those in positions of musical leadership to find ways of building the necessary bridges.²⁴

Organizations such as the National Forum of Church musicians are attempting to bridge this gap by attending both choral and chant conferences, offering further education to choir directors, and including resources for both types of music on their websites and in their workshops. This tension, and the work being done to combat it, will be immensely important for the analysis of this paper.

Western Music as a Technology of Modernization

The Greek Orthodox Church in the United States holds a unique place in the religious landscape of this country. As a church brought to the here by ethnic immigrants, many of its roots in this country deal as much with ethnicity as they do religion. Central to this history is assimilation, which indeed pervades many conversations about the Greek Orthodox Church in the United States. It is important to note the way that the hierarchy of the Greek Orthodox Church in the United States is dealing with issues of modernization—the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America’s website has a wealth of information on this subject. “The Mission of the Greek Orthodox Parish in America” by George Nicozisin grapples especially with the difference between assimilation and

²⁴ Barrett, “Building Musical Bridges in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese.”

integration—the first including a loss of identity and the latter involving a collaboration of different parts.²⁵

I suspect a good number of us, first-generation up to the present time, have not fully understood the difference between, on the one hand, letting ourselves be assimilated into extinction and, on the other, learning about our own Greek Orthodox Christian faith, living that faith and integrating our faith into our American nation.²⁶

Though the line between integration and assimilation is fine, Nicozisin champions integration, arguing against many ideals that he believes are assimilationist. That being said, how does a member of the Greek Orthodox Church navigate their interactions with American culture, and at what point do they begin to lose their Greek identity?

For many Greek-American parishioners, the task of the Greek Orthodox Church in the United States has historically been centered on a preservation of culture and connection to heritage. As the number of second and third-generation Greeks has risen in the Orthodox community,²⁷ and as the number of mixed marriages between Greeks and non-Greeks grows,²⁸ this cultural impetus makes an increasing amount of sense.

However, along with the growth of the Americanized Greek population, American Orthodox population—that is, those who convert to Orthodoxy in America—has also grown. This change in community dynamic acts as a foil for the preservation of tradition, as the Greek Orthodox Church attempts to cater to a wider audience by developing a

²⁵ George Nicozisin, “The Mission of the Greek Orthodox Parish in America,” *Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America*, accessed April 30, 2017, <https://www.goarch.org/en/-/the-mission-of-the-greek-orthodox-parish-in-america>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “Immigrant Status among Orthodox Christians” (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2014), <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

²⁸ Alexei D Krindatch, “Orthodox (Eastern Christian) Churches in the United States at the Beginning of a New Millennium: Questions of Nature, Identity, and Mission,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41, no. 3 (September 2002): 544.

uniquely ‘American’ identity. But why would the Greek Orthodox Church be interested in appealing to the masses? This can be explained by the concept of the “spiritual marketplace.”

The “spiritual marketplace” deals with the supply and demand of religions in the modern world. Especially in the United States, where religious pluralism is pervasive, consumers of religion have a wide variety of belief systems that they can choose from. In the book *Spiritual Marketplace*, Wade Clark Roof makes the argument that:

In recent times especially, religious messages and practices have come to be frequently restylized, made to fit a targeted social clientele, often on the basis of market analysis, and carefully monitored to determine if programmatic emphases should be adjusted to meet particular needs.²⁹

In an effort to keep the Greek Orthodox Church alive, the Archdiocese must react not only to its current Greek parishioners but also to its potential American parishioners—or rather, its potential consumers. In this way, the Orthodox Church can benefit from a type of modernization that may include the purging of ethnic markers, such as Greek as a liturgical language, or certain old-world practices. As a part of a missionary practice, the Church can formulate a musical identity that is more easily relatable to an American convert. Through the creation of a new musical identity, the Greek Orthodox Church of the United States can reclaim the idea of tradition, and thus develop standards and practices with less concern for historical context.

Plenty of discussion about how this affects the treatment of ethnicity in Orthodox churches has been disseminated, with scholars and clergy holding a variety of opinions. Many have spoken to a missionary task for the church; Mark Bailey states:

²⁹ Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 78.

If the Orthodox Church is further to evolve and even to permeate the American religious landscape as a major Christian presence, thus able to offer a cogent and inviting response to the non-Orthodox as well, then comprehending, explaining, representing, and even promoting the church and its liturgy become essential ongoing activities. This is by definition the new church's missionary presence and by extension its missionary imperative.³⁰

This quotation conveys the attitude of competition and survival that the Greek Orthodox Church has had to adopt in order to retain relevance in the United States. Others advocate for an American Patriarchate, which would have under its jurisdiction all Orthodox churches in the United States, connecting each parish through its American identity, rather than Greek, Serbian, or Ethiopian (etc.) identities. This would push back against those who say that ethnic connection to the homeland, though not the top priority, retains value in connecting parishioners to their faith. Studies done on the link between ethnic ties and spiritual potency show little to no causal relationship between the two.³¹

Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Clapsis contributes to this missionary imperative in “The American Religious Landscape and the Orthodox Churches,”³² where he deals with issues of the marketplace of religion and the individuality of Orthodoxy. This article speaks to the importance of keeping the relevance of God’s word primarily, while accommodating the changing morals of the individual secondarily. Rev. Dr. Clapsis takes on controversial issues such as abortion and homosexuality, acknowledging the fact that current beliefs are often at odds with “formal teachings of the Orthodox church.”³³

³⁰ Mark Bailey, “Toward a Living Tradition of Liturgical Music in Orthodox America,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (2003): 1.

³¹ Dennis G Bell, “Relationship of Russian Ethnic Identity to Orthodox Practice and Belief,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1977): 49–55.

³² Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Clapsis, “The American Religious Landscape and the Orthodox Churches,” accessed May 11, 2017, <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-american-religious-landscape-and-the-orthodox-churches>.

³³ Ibid.

However, the article does not condemn these liberal beliefs, but instead recognizes a shift to a multiplicity of Orthodoxies based on the “the contextual realities in which they [American Orthodox Christians] live, their level of education and their appropriation of God’s love for all people.”³⁴ The willingness to accommodate beliefs that are in direct contrast to canonical teachings of the Church displays an intense desire to keep invested those believers who may feel that they have strayed from Orthodoxy. One could view the Westernization of Greek Orthodox liturgical music in the same manner—many parishioners prefer the sound of harmonized choral hymns to solemn chants. Putting liturgical music in terms that are more appealing to both the singer and the listener can help to keep people on board with Orthodox practice—this willingness to change tradition in order appease the modern audience can be read between the lines on the staff.

The results of modernization of liturgical music come in a few forms. One example is the translation of Greek text into English, which has long been debated in the Greek Orthodox community. Today, about fifty percent of the average Greek Orthodox Liturgy is performed in English.³⁵ However, some composers and transcribers are going further than simply translating text—they are actually translating the music from its ‘original’ Byzantine notation to the widely used Western staff notation. Nancy Takis reflects on the practice of transcription, stating:

I am coming to the realization that Greek-Americans (or American Greeks!) are in the middle of a perhaps unintentional process of developing our own chant style,

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Krindatch, “Orthodox (Eastern Christian) Churches in the United States at the Beginning of a New Millennium,” 544.

based on the melodic lines of Byzantine theory, but using tempered scales, Western notation, and a “Western yphos”, or sound.³⁶

The accessibility to groups with less ethnic or linguistic ties to the Greek Orthodox Church is one of the major benefits of using Western notation to transcribe Byzantine Chant. Rather than shutting out those who weren't raised in the tradition, Western notation gives the opportunity to invite parishioners into the traditional music of the Church. In this way, the transcription of Byzantine Chant is changing to fit the needs of its most curious members, as well as the demands of Church. Modern transcribers must strike a balance in their approach to this issue in order to stay true to the tradition while creating something palatable and useful to the modern choir.

The other way that modernization manifests is in the composition of new liturgical material for the Church. The composers of harmonized liturgical books, some of whom were discussed above, were brought up in both the Greek Orthodox Church and the Western musical tradition. We have noted that many of these composers have a strong historical knowledge of Byzantine Chant, but we have yet to consider the influence of their Western roots on the music itself.

These composers identify as part of a clearly Western tradition of composers, which has followed a highly specific narrative of development. The western tradition began similarly to Byzantine Chant: with primal, ancient religious music. It subsequently underwent changes and additions to render it successively more complex and layered, adding in more voices, more parts, and more instruments. Desby cites this trajectory as an argument for choral music:

³⁶ Nancy Takis, “English Text and Byzantine Chant: Some Problems and Issues” (Axion Estin Conference, New Rochelle, NY, 2006), 2, <http://www.newbyz.org/conferencecomments.pdf>.

One argument against 'westernization' of Byzantine melody was the fact that the west had only one tonality and two scales, rendering the two systems incompatible. However, modal treatment in harmonic and polyphonic music had already been achieved in the west as early as the 15th Century with adaptation of Gregorian Chant to choral music.³⁷

Dr. Desby makes a clear attempt to legitimize his own narrative of composing choral music for the Greek Orthodox Church by comparing it to the narrative of Western choral music. Famous composers such as Mozart and Beethoven have quoted ancient liturgical melodies in their music as references to the past, the same way that Dr. Tikey Zes (another of the 'California Composers' of liturgical music) discusses using Byzantine melodies as the basis or inspiration for his compositions.³⁸ In this way, contemporary Greek Orthodox composers are attempting to place themselves among the great composers of Western music. Desby believes that harmonizing chant "is not to be condemned, for no art form should remain static; there is a certain freshness to these sounds that still manage to capture an essence of Byzantium, much as Bartok had done with much of the ethnic music he collected throughout his travels."³⁹ The direct comparison of his own work to that of a composer of Western classical music shows the desire for validation in his efforts. But in attempting to gain recognition among their peers and within the Church, these composers have created a fictional narrative that assimilates to that of Western music. While rendering themselves relevant, these composers have also greatly influenced the trajectory of Greek Orthodox liturgical music of the United States, placing it within a modern classical tradition. Thus, the music of the

³⁷ Desby, "Growth of Liturgical Music in the Iakovian Era," 7.

³⁸ Ronald E. Grames, "Reflections on the Byzantine: A Conversation with Dr. Tikey Zes," *Fanfare - The Magazine for Serious Record Collectors; Tenafly, N. J.*, April 2014, 4.

³⁹ Desby, "Growth of Liturgical Music in the Iakovian Era," 12.

Church is not only a technology of modernization in its appeal to the religious, but also in its place among the musical. Claiming the creation of a new tradition of Greek Orthodox liturgical music brings us to the next argument, which examines the ways in which Western music can *preserve* a tradition.

Western Music as Technology of Tradition

In his book, *Orthodox Tradition and Modernism*, Constantine Cavarnos states, “The Orthodox Church has been *the only faithful keeper of Tradition*.”⁴⁰ If tradition is central to the Greek Orthodox Church, then central to tradition in the Greek Orthodox Church in the United States is authenticity. The complex nature of authenticity, a problematic theme, has prompted many scholars to tackle this beast. Richard Barrett states that “claims about the authenticity, or lack thereof, of current performance practice of the repertoire are tightly tied to concerns over identity, nationalism, and politics—scholarly, ecclesial, regional, and otherwise.”⁴¹ These intersections with selfhood render singular authentication of a tradition nearly impossible—because the argument is inextricable from the individual, claims of authenticity are flimsy at best. Thus, approaching one “correct” musical tradition in the Greek Orthodox Church is an indomitable task, though various voices of the Church make attempts at it.

In the Greek Orthodox Church, the liturgical side of authentic practice comes mostly from the idea of a sacred tradition. This tradition is a combination of the instructions given by God, as well as the teachings of the Apostolic tradition. According

⁴⁰ Constantine Cavarnos, *Orthodox Tradition and Modernism*, trans. Patrick G. Barker (Etna, California: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1992), 12.

⁴¹ Richard Barrett, “Byzantine Chant, Authenticity, and Identity: Musicological Historiography Through the Eyes of Folklore,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 55, no. 1–4 (2010): 2.

to George Bebis, “the clergy and the laity are both responsible for the preservation of the authentic and genuine Holy Tradition in and through the life of the Church.”⁴² As the keepers of this sacred tradition, members of the Orthodox Church have worked hard to ensure that correct practice is always in use. Councils are one way in which parishioners and clergy determine what is authentic to Orthodoxy, making decisions always with the responsibility of the sacred tradition in mind.

In the history of the Greek Orthodox Church, one sees authenticity playing out in the fundamentalist idea of returning to a past tradition. This is addressed in *New Voices in Greek Orthodox Thought* as purist innovation: “Purist innovation is invoked when members of a faith community begin to question an existing hegemonic tradition which they see as a deviation from what they understand as an authentic and pure tradition.”⁴³ This attitude, which establishes a connection between a person and some original form of practice, can be seen in early scholarship on Byzantine Chant, as well as the Byzantine purists of today. Ironically, purist innovation inspired John Sakellarides’ classical reform of chant, which was described earlier as the precursor to Western liturgical music. This is one example of the problematic nature of a search for authenticity.

Issues of purity and authenticity have long impacted arguments over Byzantine Chant. There exist many scholarly arguments as to whether or not Byzantine Chant is, in and of itself, pure. Early research on Byzantine Chant was performed by Western

⁴² George Bebis, “Tradition in the Orthodox Church - Theology - Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America,” *Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America*, accessed May 2, 2017, <https://www.goarch.org/en/-/tradition-in-the-orthodox-church>.

⁴³ Stauning Willert, Trine, Asst Prof Astley, Revd Jeff Beckford, Professor James A. Brummer, Professor Vincent Fiddes, Professor Paul S. Gorringer, Professor T. J. Grenz, Mr. Stanley J. Hutch, Mr. Richard, *New Voices in Greek Orthodox Thought: Untying the Bond between Nation and Religion*, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies (Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2014), 30.

musicologists, specifically members of the 1931 organization Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae (MMB), and was tinted by a highly Westernized lens. “In short, the Western musicologists of MMB evaluated Byzantine manuscripts of ψαλμωδία [psalmodia] based on the assumed supremacy of Western models, written and aural, largely removed culturally from the source of those manuscripts.”⁴⁴ They argued that the ‘Eastern’ sounds of the chant were anachronistic and added by outside influences. On the other side, Simon Karas claimed that “to the extent that the received tradition of ψαλμωδία [psalmodia] bears characteristics that sound Arabo-Turkish, those characteristics are in fact Greek in origin.”⁴⁵ Both arguments show the influence of nationalism in questions of authenticity. Each scholar is unable to separate themselves from the traditions and identities from which they come.

Furthering this discussion, Barrett aptly states that “The moral element cannot be understated; a quest for original purity leaves the unmistakable impression that what is presently practiced is sullied, defaced.”⁴⁶ In reproducing the most original, or ‘purest’ form of Byzantine Chant, these scholars deny the complex history of the tradition, imposing upon it their own ideals. This debate is echoed in today’s conflict over whether or not Western notation has a place in the Church. Similarly to the scholars discussed, church musicians who come from various musical backgrounds impose their own biases on tradition, making judgments about what does or does not represent the soul of the Church.

⁴⁴ Barrett, “Byzantine Chant, Authenticity, and Identity,” 5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

In this way, it is necessary to problematize the Byzantine purist, who wishes for the complete return to chanting in the church service. In his paper “Medieval Byzantine Chant and the Sound of Orthodoxy,” Dr. Alexander Lingas notes the distaste of these traditionalists for anything Western, stating that “it should not be surprising that some Orthodox view the ways in which their liturgical music differs from that of Western Christianity as theologically significant.”⁴⁷ Though Western voices have historically dominated the conversation, Lingas believes that the condescension of Byzantine purists only complicates matters more. In his opinion, “[o]ne can perhaps better understand the [adoption of western practices] by shedding inherited preconceptions regarding the proper sound of Christian chant, the ideals for which have varied significantly according to place and time.”⁴⁸ In letting go of authenticity, Lingas believes that the purists can see the full history (and, indeed, the future) of Greek Orthodox liturgical music. Although Byzantine purists may paint themselves as heroes who save tradition, these figures are just as problematic as those who champion harmonized choral music. Thus it is necessary to recognize the merits and limitations of both perspectives. Barrett discourages the distinction between types of musicians:

Surely, this distinction between “choir people” and *psaltes* [chanters] is a historical anomaly, one that we may reconsider with a posture of good faith and mutual respect. All of us are *church musicians*, and we are fundamentally doing the same thing: singing in the service of the Church of Christ to glorify God, and doing so in continuity – somehow – with the tradition of the Greek Orthodox Church.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Alexander Lingas, “Medieval Byzantine Chant and the Sound of Orthodoxy,” in *Byzantine Orthodoxies*, ed. Andrew Louth and Augustine Casiday (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 132.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁴⁹ Barrett, “Building Musical Bridges in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese.”

In the same vein of this collaborative spirit, there are several examples of how western music does not necessarily oppose tradition, but instead augments it.

For example, many modern resources for learning chant use comparisons to Western music theory as the main basis for their explanations of Byzantine theory. Chant manuals range in shape, size, and materiality—the growth of the Internet has allowed for the expansion of chant materials from print to include videos, websites, and even an application for mobile devices. In these teaching materials, one can find a variety of methods for teaching chant; one online source even sells a set of card games with which to practice.⁵⁰ Before exploring these, it is necessary to touch upon the history of chant transmission.

In its earliest form, Byzantine Chant was, like all ancient music, orally transmitted. As stated previously, the first transcribed bit of Byzantine notation known to us is dated to the 9th century, although scholars estimate that the tradition began as early as 330 C.E.⁵¹ Throughout much of the history of the Church, parishioners learned the liturgical music simply by faithfully attending services from birth to death. In fact, the beginning of the Orthodox Church included a lot of congregational singing. In the 4th century, the Council of Laodicea officially designated that the *psaltis* (chanter) would be the only one to chant the services.⁵² This hierarchy of singers and the development of the notation combined to cement the student-teacher relationship in the study of Byzantine Chant. The importance of the interpersonal learning was made evident earlier in this

⁵⁰ “Byzantine Beginnings,” *Byzantine Beginnings*, accessed May 2, 2017, <http://www.byzantinebeginnings.com/>.

⁵¹ Conomos, “A Brief Survey of the History of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Chant.”

⁵² Dimitri E. Conomos, “Orthodox Byzantine Music,” *Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America*, August 12, 2005, <https://www.goarch.org/-/orthodox-byzantine-music>.

paper: the teacher would not only tutor their student in the notation, tunings, and liturgical meanings behind each hymn, but would also imbibe them with their own particular style, or *yphos*.⁵³ As a few names became well known in the Byzantine Chant world, distinct schools of interpretation developed based on these teachers. Thus, this transmission of *yphos* extended even larger, as whole groups of people were taught unified methods of interpreting Byzantine notation. Through all of this, the importance of the teacher in transmission of tradition is evident.

If we compare this to the Greek Orthodox community of the United States, where the population is diversifying and becoming increasingly ‘American,’ it becomes obvious that competent teachers could be hard to come by. The call to preserve the tradition of the Church without traditional means of preservation has led to the development of published teaching materials. In an effort to meet the demands of their audience, new methods of teaching Byzantine Chant have surfaced, such as “The Divine Music Project” website and book. Those who contributed to the book state that “since teachers can be difficult to find, the next best way to begin learning is with the audio-visual resources available online.”⁵⁴ This particular website includes both information about chant and many, many pages of music in both Byzantine and Western notation, all with the hope of preserving tradition.

Pedagogical materials have had to use creative means to describe the seemingly indescribable Byzantine Chant theory. For example, the Hellenic College at Holy Cross in Boston created their Byzantine Music Project website (now taken offline), a simple flash site that included sound bytes of several hymns sung in both English and Greek,

⁵³ Khalil, “Echoes of Constantinople.”

⁵⁴ St. Anthony’s Greek Orthodox Monastery, “Byzantine vs. Western Notation.”

along with both the Western staff notation and Byzantine notation.⁵⁵ One can look at the Byzantine, the Western, or both at the same time. It is then possible, although difficult and time-consuming, to decode the meaning of the Byzantine neumes through comparison to their Western counterparts. In its efforts to be accessible, this website serves as a very broad introduction to specific hymns more than to the notation itself. It is certainly not ideal for learning the entire notation system.

Some books, such as David Melling's *Reading Psalmodia*, make the valiant effort of avoiding most visual comparisons of Byzantine Chant and Western theory, not setting the two side by side until discussing rhythm in the Appendix.⁵⁶ However, when it comes to the description, it is difficult to resist using the language of Western notation. Without sound, how else can you describe a leap of a third or a step? Many caveats must be made about the differences in fixed pitch, tuning system, etc. but to a certain degree it would be folly to not use some Western language when interacting with Western musicians. When seeking to teach new material, it makes sense to draw from the existing framework of the student—this is why comparisons to the West generally work well in attempting to describe the complexities of Byzantine Chant theory. Granted, this in no way alleviates the complexity of the theory; Melling's descriptions remain confusing (even to one who has studied chant) despite his use of western musical language. The question remains as to whether or not the use of Western notation as a teaching tool for the beginning student of Byzantine Chant notation is always useful.

It is not only in the study of Byzantine theory that staff notation is utilized, but also in the teaching of the melodies themselves. Parishes in which the choir and chanters

⁵⁵ "Byzantine Music Project," accessed April 15, 2017, <http://chant.hchc.edu/>.

⁵⁶ Melling, *Reading Psalmodia*, 46.

conflict are often overwhelmingly resistant to learning Byzantine notation. In these cases, Western notated transcriptions of Byzantine Chant can be remarkably useful. This allows the melodic tradition to continue even if the desire to study the theory decreases.

Similarly to poor translations of text, there is a large margin of error in the transcribing of chant. There is, however, a motion to make these transcriptions more accurate and reflective of the tradition. In order to make accuracy more accessible, some chanters trained in both Byzantine and Western notation are making efforts to create high quality materials in staff notation, thereby ensuring the preservation of the tradition while also appealing parishioners accustomed to Western music. Barrett names a few of these dedicated workers in his article on building community among church musicians,⁵⁷ which has heavily informed this paper.

Conclusion

In examining the technological use of Western music in the Greek Orthodox Church of the United States, we tackled large questions of assimilation and authenticity in order to get at the crux of the issue: modernization and tradition. This topic is fascinating in its ability to occupy two seemingly opposite ends of the spectrum at once—modernization seems to move forward, while tradition appears to look to the past. And yet, occupy both ends it does. Western music modernizes liturgical music through its use of staff notation and harmonized choral arrangements to appeal to a wider audience. On the other hand, it preserves Byzantine Chant by being utilized as a pedagogical tool and transcribing Byzantine melodies.

⁵⁷ Barrett, “Building Musical Bridges in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese.”

The place of Western music in the Greek Orthodox Church is but one facet of ongoing conversations about change and preservation happening in ethnic churches in the United States. This tension arises from a collective sense to both separate and integrate oneself into American society, for indeed that's what society has demanded of our immigrant populations. Even at the individual level, civilization pressures us to be original and independent while requiring that we stay within the bounds of accepted norms, thus remaining a part of the cohesive whole.

In order to subvert this conformity in the Greek Orthodox Church of the United States, we must embrace our dualism, recognizing that there is no such thing as the cohesive whole. We must continue to strengthen the resources available on both Western liturgical music as well as Byzantine Chant, thus fortifying their ties. The goal in this pursuit is not the fusion of traditions, but rather the nourishment of liturgical music as a whole. This issue is not going to be solved through simplification—in fact, it will likely become more complex. Thus, the Church should respond with specificity. Future work on this subject should involve the surveying of our parishes to figure out what resources they are using and why, and then advise each of them on ways to improve or replace these resources. The National Forum of Church Musicians has attempted to do this through many of its programs and conferences, but what lacks is the involvement of the musicians themselves in this pursuit. Though the building of this relationship starts at the top, it must work its way down to those on the ground.

At the beginning of this paper, we heard from Stravinsky that tradition is not crystallized in the past, but rather is flourishing in the present. Throughout the paper, we have seen the ways in which liturgical music remains alive in today's Greek Orthodox

Church. That being said, the efforts of the Church to use their resources without compromising their dignity should be focused on one principal goal: keep liturgical music a *living* tradition.

Glossary

Byzantine notation: The system of symbols that tell a chanter what to sing and how to sing it.

Chromaticism: Notes outside the traditional scale, often used for 'exotic' effect.

Drone: A single, sustained note.

Interval: The space in between two notes.

Melisma: Elaborate phrase featuring many notes sung on a single syllable.

Monophony: Music with a single melody performed in unison.

Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae: Group of Western musicologists who studied Byzantine chant. Began in 1931.

Neumes: Symbols that depict Byzantine music when it is printed.

Polyphony: Music with multiple different melodies occurring at once.

Psalmodia: Chanted hymns of the Greek Orthodox Church.

Psaltis/Psaltai: Chanter of the Greek Orthodox Church

Staff notation: The foundation of western music. A set of lines and spaces dedicated to certain pitches.

Transcription: Arrangement of a piece of music for a new context. In this case, using Western notation.

Yphos: Style or sound, individual to each chanter or their teacher.

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