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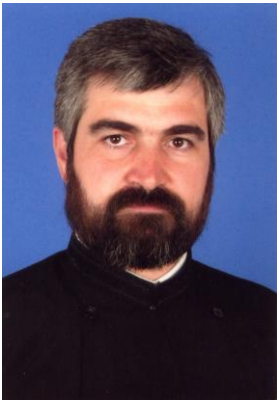
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The Religious Experience Issues of the Members of Church Choirs. A Gender Analysis

Abstract

The central part of all Liturgies is the transfiguration of the bread and wine in the Body and the Flesh of the Lord and, from a liturgical point of view, this is considered the priest and the worshippers' joint work. Thus, the liturgical conversation between the priest and the worshippers is both a time during which the entire Church takes part in the Eucharist and an authentic lesson on Christian communion and perfection. This study presents the survey data gathered after the analysis of the answers to a questionnaire applied to 264 participants, all members of church choirs from nine Romanian towns. The differences between the two genders are mostly connected to the effectiveness of the religious



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experience and the women recorded the highest percentage in the following categories: religious motivation in belonging to the various congregations; frequency of attending the religious services, other the Liturgies during which they sing; and knowledge of the various moments of the Holy Liturgy.

Keywords

religious experience, choir music, Eucharist, gender analysis

1 Introduction

In an interview with one of the greatest Romanian conductors, Marin Constantin[1], he explains why it is not necessary to use musical instruments in Orthodox worship: the man received from God the gift to articulate sounds and the opportunity to use his vocal chords to build songs that emphasize the energy of spoken word. Moreover, it can be identified a relation between the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacrifice of one who actively attend the religious services, by singing. Through the presence in the text of the Holy Liturgy of some prayers to God for those who sing, the need to support them in the effort that you submit transpires particularly, given the great importance of the message you send through the liturgical chant.

From the explanation which St. Chrysostom gives the role of the song Psalms, we deduce the existence of some spiritual experience steps which are identified in relation to the availability or the need of church singing: "*For this, harmonious melodies were composed for psalms, because those who are*

[1] Marin Constantin (1925-2011), promoter and conductor of the National Chamber Choir „Madrigal", laureate with many great national and international prizes

children or those who are very young to wear to look like they are singing, but actually they train their soul."[2] At the beginning of spiritual ascent, the man needs songs in a greater scale, in relation to the next stages, in which the communion with God takes new forms, with a more pronounced introspection. The quoted text recalls also the educational importance of psalms, which equally support the need of faith`s doctrine knowledge and spiritual formation.

The complementary role between the main functions of sing, text and song joined in prayer, emerges from the confession of St. John Cassian: *"Sometimes, singing psalms, one verse is my fervent prayer`s spring. Sometimes, the peers` song urges in prayer tense the burning souls by its modulations"*.[3] Independently by the perspective that the listener has on the song, we detach the importance of the quality of its interpretation, the energy which is transmitted, able to move both the listener's soul and those who plays it to climb to a higher level of inner experience.

In Romania, the existence of mixed church choir owes its beginnings to Professor Gabriel Musicescu`s activity (1847-1903), conductor for more than a quarter of century of Iasi Metropolitan Cathedral choir, who introduced *"for the first time the female voices in a chorus "*[4]. This mixed choir practice was widespread in time so that the presence of male choirs

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2 Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilii la Psalmi*, [St. Basil the Great, *Homilies on Psalms*] în „Scrieri", partea I, trad. Dumitru Fecioru, colecţia P.S.B., vol. 17, Bucureşti, Editura Institutului Biblic şi de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1986, p.183.

3 Sfântul Ioan Casian, *Convorbiri duhovniceşti*, [St. John Cassian, *Spiritual Conference*] în „Scrieri alese", trad. Vasile Cojocaru şi David Popescu, colecţia P.S.B., vol. 57, Bucureşti, Editura Institutului Biblic şi de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1990, p.468.

4 Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, [*The History of Romanian Orthodox Church*] vol. 3, Bucureşti, Editura Institutului Biblic şi de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1994, p.341.

remained almost exclusively in theological schools account. If for the first time the presence of women in church choirs was a discreet one, after a century their composition by gender shows a ratio of almost 2: 1 in favor of women.

The research that we realized aims to test the assumption that, on issues related to the effectiveness of the religious experience, the gender differences recorded in case of church choir members are in the favor of women.

To test the assumption, the questionnaire was administered to 264 choristers from nine cities in Romania (Alba Iulia, Sebes, Sibiu, Cluj-Napoca, Baia Mare, Bucharest, Timisoara, Săcele, Moineşti) from different geographic regions, but various ranks: Metropolitan cathedral choirs / archbishop, choirs of churches from small towns and districts of large cities. After our data, it is the first research in Romania aimed at finding out the opinion of church choirs members on issues linking by their spiritual life given by the status of belonging to the various congregations.

2 Membership of a Church Choir: Decisions and Motivations

The decision to be member of a church choir can be a strictly personal one or it is taken as a result of some influences from different people with religious or musical concerns. The first item of the questionnaire asked the singers to show the person who was at the back of their decision to be member of the choir whose they belong. In the list proposed by us, I mentioned the priest, the choir`s conductor, another choir`s member, a friend, a family member. Semi-open form of this item offered the opportunity to the respondents to indicate a different answer. The data were summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Comparative table with persons who influenced the decision to be member of a choir, depending on the gender of its members

The person	**Women**		**Men**		**The difference w-m (%)**
	Nr.	**%**	**Nr.**	**%**	
No one, I have taken the decision alone	67	**38,72**	36	**40,44**	- 1,72
the priest	27	**15,6**	15	**16,85**	- 1,25
A member of the choir	23	**13,29**	11	**12,35**	0,94
The choir's conductor	22	**12,71**	12	**13,48**	- 0,77
A family member	20	**11,56**	8	**8,98**	2,58
A friend	10	**5,78**	6	**6,74**	- 0,96
Number	4	**2,31**	1	**1,12**	1,19
Total	173	**100**	89	**99,96**	0

As shown in Table 1, for about 40% of respondents (the difference is less than 2%), the decision was a personal one, and 60% of them (here, the differences by gender are less than 3%) work in a choir at the suggestion of another person. Given the very small differences between the data obtained for answers "another member of the choir" and "choir`s conductor", both the percentage values (below 1%) and the gender differences, it found the same order of percentages for the following persons: the priest, a member of the choir, choir`s conductor, a family member, a friend.

If the analysis takes into account the reporting of the results to the percentage average obtained by persons who have

influenced the decision to be member of the choir, we see that the average for the two groups of respondents is approximately equal (a_w= 11.78%, a_m = 11.68%). In both cases, the answers "family member" and "a friend" can be found below this value. It follows that the role of family members and friends in the decision to join a church choir is limited, both for women and men. Therefore, it is shown that the decision of belonging to a choir is often taken for other reason than those related to family relations or friendship.

Through the second item, we wanted to know the main reasons that had led our respondents to be member of a church choir. For this, I asked them to choose from a list of seven variants only three reasons, ranking them in order of importance, from 1 to 3 (1 being the first place, in importance, and 3, the last one). In the Tables 2 and 3 we present the results by gender, the ranking being made according to the choices first placed, and in Table 4, we calculated the differences between the percentages obtained for each motivation by gender, the ranking being made based on the total percentage values. The respondents were able to state their own reasons if they were not included on the list proposed by us.

Table 2 The ranking of women`s reason to be member of a choir, depending on the reasons from the first place

Reasons	**The place**			**Total**	
	I	**II**	**III**	**Nr.**	**%**
□ The desire to value the gift received from God	120	1	1	122	**70,52**
□ The desire to belong to a congregation	21	36	1	58	**33,52**
□ The hobby for religious music	10	61	18	89	**51,44**
□ The awareness to take part at the Holy Liturgy every Sunday	8	30	66	104	**60,11**
□ The desire to improve myself in musical field	6	10	10	26	**15,02**

□ The desire to get away the loneliness	1	2	11	14	**8,09**
□ The fame of the choir whose member I am	0	2	10	12	**6,93**
□ Another answer	5	1	3	9	**5,20**
Number	2	30	53	85	**49,13**
Total	**173**	**173**	**173**	**519**	**299,96**

Table 3 The ranking of men`s reason to be member of a choir, depending on the reasons from the first place

Reasons	**The place**			**Total**	
	I	**II**	**III**	**Nr.**	**%**
□ The desire to value the gift received from God	59	1	1	61	**68,53**
□ The desire to belong to a congregation	13	18	1	32	**35,95**
□ The hobby for religious music	7	38	11	56	**62,92**
□ The awareness to take part at the Holy Liturgy every Sunday	6	6	30	42	**47,19**
□ The desire to improve myself in musical field	1	6	14	21	**23,59**
□ The desire to get away the loneliness	0	0	6	6	**6,74**
□ The fame of the choir whose member I am	1	1	3	5	**5,61**
□ Another answer	1	1	0	2	**2,24**
Number	1	18	23	42	**47,19**
Total	**89**	**89**	**89**	**267**	**299,96**

As shown in Tables 2 and 3, the reasons of attending a church choir can be grouped as follows: related to the effectiveness of the religious experience (the desire to value the gift received from God; the awareness to take part at the Holy Liturgy every Sunday), linked by the hobby for music (a hobby for religious music, the desire to improve myself in musical field) related to group membership (the desire to belong to a congregation, the desire to get away the loneliness).
The results from Tables 2 and 3 places 'the desire to value the gift received from God on the first place" for more than two thirds of the choristers, regardless of gender. And for the other six reasons, we can observe the same ranking of responses, both for women and men. A number of 11 choristers said other reasons than those from our list: I take a cultural activity, we serve the Lord, I actively participate to the Holy Liturgy, I can make friends, and I do all these for the joy of singing.
The total answers show that just over half of the choristers have made all three choices specified in the item.

Table 4 The differences according to gender, for reasons to be part of a religious choir, depending on the percentage values for the total choices

Reasons	**Women**	**Men**	**The difference w-m (%)**
□ the awareness to take part at the Holy Liturgy every Sunday	**60,11**	**47,19**	**12,92**
□ the hobby for religious music	**51,44**	**62,92**	**- 11,48**
□ The desire to improve myself in musical field	**15,02**	**23,59**	**- 8,57**
□ the desire to belong to congregation	**33,52**	**35,95**	**- 2,43**
□ The desire to value the gift	**70,52**	**68,53**	**1,99**

received from God			
□ The desire to get away the loneliness	**8,09**	**6,74**	**1,35**
□ The fame of the choir whose member I am	**6,93**	**5,61**	**1,32**
□ another answer	**5,20**	**2,24**	**2,96**
Total	**299,96**	**299,96**	**0**

According to Table 4, we can conclude that for four of the seven reasons, the gender differences (positive or negative) are less than 3 percentage points. If you look at the type of motivation, we see equilibrium only in terms of reasons related to group membership, the desire of communion with others.

The comparative analysis of the results reflects differences in the percentage values of choristers' responses – men and women - more than 5% for three reasons: one related to the effectiveness of religiosity (positive difference) and two on the hobby for music (negative differences).

For women, the reason of weekly attendance at Holy Liturgy prevails (60.11%, compared to 47, 19% for men). It reflects the religious importance that women attach to the choir activity: it exceeds a greater musical act, moving towards the spiritual value of singing. Regarding the hobby for music, if we sum the percentages for the two motivations, we get a difference of 20 percentage points for men: the importance of harmony singing predominates for them.

3 Choristers and worship services. Frequency, knowledge, internalization

The third item of the questionnaire asked choristers to indicate the frequency of their participation at other worship services than the Holy Liturgy in which they are singing. In Table 5 we have summarized the answers both by gender and differences between the percentages calculated, for three answers: weekly

frequency, fortnightly frequency, and their presence just at the Holy Liturgy during which they sing.[5]

Table 5 Table of the frequency of attending the different worship services, another time than on Sunday, at the Holy Liturgy

the frequency of attending	**Women**		**Men**		**The difference w-m (%)**
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	
once, more times a week	55	**31,79**	23	**25,84**	**5,95**
twice, three times a month	86	**49,71**	54	**60,67**	**- 10,96**
I go only at the Holy Liturgy during which I sing	30	**17,34**	12	**13,48**	**3,86**
Number	2	**1,15**	0	**0**	**1,15**
Total	**173**	**99,99**	**89**	**99,99**	**0**

The analysis of the data from Table 5, for each category of subjects, shows that 81.5% of women and 86.51% of men go to church at least twice a month, at other religious services than the Holy Liturgy during which they sing (I totaled percentages for these two answers). A higher frequency, weekly, it is recorded in women case (31.79%) compared to males

[5] For the effectiveness of the religious experience of Romanian children and adults, see also: M. Cuciureanu, S. Velea (coord.), *Educaţia moral-religioasă în sistemul de educaţie din România*, [*Moral-religious education in educational systems from Romania*], Bucureşti, Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică, 2012.

(25.84%), a difference of almost 6 percentage points being in favor of the women. From this item it results an increase of the effectiveness of the religion in women case, compared to their peers. For the next step of frequency, the difference is greater; it is 10 percentage points, for men. For the answer "I only go at the Holy Liturgy during which I sing" the difference between the answers is below 5%, so that we cannot decide on the existence of a clear trend by gender.

Understanding the meaning of the Holy Liturgy is, in our view, the main premise of introspection, of a conscious participation in the most important service in the church. By item 4, I asked them to state the grade of knowledge of the significance of the Holy Liturgy moments, on four steps: *very well, well, little, very little*. Indicating the four steps allows the value positioning of respondents towards a positive or negative response. Table 6 shows the results after the algorithm presented in the previous items.

Table 6 Table of the grade of knowledge of the various moments of the Holy Liturgy

The grade of knowledge	**Women**		**Men**		**The difference w-m (%)**
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	
□ very well	27	**15,60**	22	**24,71**	**- 9,11**
□well	128	**73,98**	53	**59,55**	**14,43**
□ little	15	**8,67**	14	**15,73**	**- 7,06**
□ very little	2	**1,15**	0	**0**	**1,15**
Number	1	**0,78**	0	**0**	**0,78**
Total	**173**	**100**	**89**	**99,99**	**0**

The data from the Table 6 reveals the positioning of the positive value of a percentage of 89.58% of women, of which nearly three quarters have chosen "well" for the knowledge of the Holy Liturgy moments. And men, the proportion of positive positioned in relation to this aspect of religion effectiveness is high (84.26%), but the difference is d = 5.32 for women.
For the answer "very well", the results are in favor of men, an explanation being given that in universities cities, some choristers are graduates of theology. For example, in our sample, 13 men (14.60%) had theological studies, which explain the difference of 9 percentage points for those who know very well the Liturgy moments.
The total percentage of 11.74% respondents that have chosen the options "little" or "very little" for the knowledge of the Holy Liturgy moments shows the failure liturgical initiation of the chorists, in relation to aspects of the musical side. Here, the results lead towards a better understanding of the religious field of the women as compared to men. This could be explained by their greater frequency of services, including the access to information provided by the sermon.
Regarding to maintaining of attention during the Holy Liturgy, the data were presented in Table 7, where we have proposed four possible answers.

Table 7 Table presenting the maintaining of attention during the Holy Liturgy

The person	**Women**		**Men**		**The difference w-m (%)**
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	
□ almost, during it	52	**30,05**	34	**38,20**	**- 8,15**
□ during the most important	93	**53,75**	39	**43,82**	**9,93**

parts					
□ I am attend on singing	6	**3,46**	9	**10,11**	**- 6,65**
□ when our conductor notices us	3	**1,73**	4	**4,49**	**- 2,76**
□ another answer	5	**2,89**	3	**3,37**	**- 0,48**
Number	14	**8,09**	0	**0**	**8,09**
Total	**173**	**99,97**	**89**	**99,99**	**0**

Based on the data in Table 7, we propose a series of observations. 83.80% of women and 82.02% of men keep their attention at least in the most important moments of the Holy Liturgy. A greater power of concentration is declared by the chorists, the difference of percentage values being by 8.15%. A close difference as value (9.93%) we find in women chorists case for the answer to keep the focus on only the most important parts. It results a balance of positive responses between the two groups of respondents. For a rate of about 10% of men and 3.5% of women, the presence during the Holy Liturgy is reduced just about singing.

Conclusions

For our sample, the structure of choirs by gender is 2: 1 ratio in favor of women. The research results lead to the existence of some positive differences by gender for women chorists, recorded on effectiveness issues of the religious experience. If for the decision to be part of a church choir percent we have very tight limits between the two categories of subjects, for reasons which led to this decision, some differences appear. The awareness to attend to the Holy Liturgy every Sunday is stronger in women case. The frequency of participation in other

religious services than to the Holy Liturgy during which they sing, the difference is positive for women. Near these items related by the effectiveness of religious experience, the knowledge of the significance of the main moments of the Holy Liturgy is added, in a greater measure for women than for men.

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