

The Contemplative Dimension of Sacred Music

Kontemplacyjny wymiar muzyki sakralnej

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Abstract: The article presents philosophical and theological aspects of the contemplative dimension of sacred music. The presented research aims to define contemplation's role in sacred music and Christian spirituality. This synthesis allows for a better understanding of contemplation's philosophical and biblical foundations in the reception of music and the creative process. Contemplation, as an essential element of the realization of the ethos of a musician, becomes an integral part of music, conceived as a way to encounter God.

Keywords: contemplation; sacred music; Mary of Bethany; Transfiguration

Abstrakt: W artykule ukazano filozoficzne i teologiczne aspekty kontemplacyjnego wymiaru muzyki sakralnej. Celem przedstawionych badań jest próba określenia roli kontemplacji w muzyce sakralnej oraz w szeroko pojętej duchowości chrześcijańskiej. Dokonana synteza pozwala na lepsze rozumienie filozoficznych, a także biblijnych podstaw rozumienia kontemplacji obecnej nie tylko w odbiorze muzyki, ale także w procesie twórczym. Kontemplacja jako niezbędny element realizowania etosu muzyka, staje się integralną częścią muzyki pojmowanej jako droga do spotkania z Bogiem.

Słowa kluczowe: kontemplacja; muzyka sakralna; Maria z Betanii; Przemienienie

I. Philosophical foundations of contemplation in music

The term “contemplation” is derived from the Latin *contemplatio*. Etymologically, it is possible to distinguish *cum* – “with”, at the same time, “together” and *templum* – “the place from which the field of vision extends” (temple).

The Greek equivalent of the word is *theorein* – “to see, to reflect, to meditate”. Originally, the concept of contemplation was not limited to the sacral dimension, but expressed a specific intellectual effort made by man to gain a broader and deeper knowledge of different aspects of reality and to experience beauty.

According to Aristotle, all beauty is good, but not all good is beauty; all beauty is pleasure, but not all pleasure is beauty, for beauty is only that which is both good and gives pleasure. Beauty is combined with pleasure, but it is different from utility, because the value of beauty is contained in itself, and the value of utility is contained in its effects. The good that is fair and beautiful is manifested in such virtues as justice and moderation. By acting virtuously, a man is happy and beautiful. Beauty through virtue constitutes perfection and gives fullness of happiness. The phrase *kalokagathia* (καλοκαγαθία) is adjectival, composed of two adjectives, *καλός* (“beautiful”) and *ἀγαθός* (“good” or “virtuous”). Werner Jaeger defines it as “the chivalrous ideal of the complete human personality, harmonious in mind and body, foursquare in battle and speech, song and action” (Jaeger 1945, 13). *Kalokagathia* refers to the most important human goal which is contemplation towards the divine being.

Aristotle is relying on the claim that only human beings are capable of contemplation. His theory of human happiness in the *Nicomachean Ethics* explicitly depends on the claim that contemplation is peculiar to human beings. Contemplation of the events depicted in artwork leads to an understanding of the human condition and compassion. Aristotle argues that human happiness is “a type of contemplation” for the reason that life characterized by contemplative activity is most proper to a human being (Reece 2020, 131-132).

For Aristotle, contemplation (*theōria*) is the ultimate end for human beings. The power to contemplate has a special position in the human soul. Contemplation is the dominant function for the sake of which the human soul’s subordinate functions exist. For Aristotle, contemplation is the main organizing principle in our kind-specific good as human beings. On his account, contemplation’s objects are eternal and divine. Contemplation is not directly concerned with practical affairs (Walker 2018, 1-12). Referring to Aristotle’s thought, later thinkers such as Strabo presents an account of the music performed in initiation rites, according to which such music is used to facilitate knowledge of divinity. He stresses the significance of the emotional effect generated by religious music, which in turn is useful towards gaining knowledge of the gods (Segev 2023).

Mimetic *catharsis* embraces the whole man, both his emotional and spiritual-moral spheres. In Aristotelian terms, the rest provided by music is not only recreational, but has a deeper ethical and spiritual meaning, leading man to selfless contemplation of beauty. Aristotle is concerned with the natural powers of music (tunes, *harmoniai*, rhythms) and how they affect ordinary

people. According to this argument music is a leisure activity providing relaxation from labour and freedom from care, not a means of communicating deeper truths and values. *Catharsis* should be understood as a harmless release of emotions rather than as an intellectual refinement which educated audiences discover in the proper use of emotions. The pleasure attending musical *catharsis*, according to Aristotle, is a pleasure the audience feels when the tension that has been developing throughout the action of the play is released. The pleasure attending contemplation of the beauty of music is shown to be an aesthetic satisfaction, corresponding in this respect to musical *catharsis* (cf. Ford 2004, 309-336; Ferrari 2019, 117-171). In a religious dimension contemplation enables one to admire the magnificence of God, man and the world; and from delight comes love. Therefore, noble pleasure does not have only a subjective dimension. We derive it not only from what suits us, but above all from what is in itself worthy of recognition and love, because the best man considers as the best pleasure that which flows from the most beautiful springs. In this way, contemplation associated with the experience of pleasure is an important factor in artistic activity, as it becomes the basis of inner peace and satisfaction with what we create (Belfiore 1992, 345-347).

In Aristotle's conception, and throughout classical philosophy, beauty was regarded as the criterion and norm of contemplative cognition as a pleasing vision of existence. Jacques Maritain draws attention to the contemplative nature of human perception of beauty. Referring to St. Thomas's definition of beauty as that which "arouses pleasure in vision" (*pulchrum est quod visum placet*), he emphasizes that it is not only about emotional satisfaction (subjective "pleasure") or sensual "watching", but above all about intellectual cognition. The above-mentioned term *pulchrum* indicates what is "liked" (*placet*) as an object of contemplation (*visa*). Contemplation understood in this way, in which elements of truth and goodness are combined, and at the same time subjective and objective moments are intertwined, is the most characteristic feature of aesthetics as a separate philosophical discipline (Trapani 2011, 139-153; Castro 2021). This is why Maritain understands contemplation as the key to participation in the liturgy (Maritain 2015).

Mieczysław Albert Krąpiec¹ describes the whole wealth of meaning of the word *visum* as "an object of intellectual contemplative view". Explaining the meaning of this "contemplative gaze", Krąpiec does not limit it only to "visual vision", but reaches to the musical experience: "When I am at a concert and I focus on myself, even closing my eyes to sharpen my auditory perception of the concert taking place, then I can speak of my «vision» – in the sense of the

¹ Mieczysław Albert Krąpiec (1921-2008) – eminent Polish philosopher, theologian and renowned humanist, the main figure behind the founding of the Lublin School of Philosophy.

actual perception – of the played symphony” (Krapiec 1991, 169). Man, experiencing awe over beauty, experiences it not only in the emotional sphere, but also in the intellectual and spiritual dimension, which he tries to express in the form of an artistic work.

This applies to the process of creation in musical art, of which contemplative “seeing” is an indispensable element. Both the creator and the recipient of the work, in the spontaneous experience of beauty, are enriched not only cognitively and intellectually, but also grow in loving delight as a constant orientation towards being. Music is not only an “aesthetic entertainment” and a “moment of respite” from everyday problems, but an ethical force that harmonizes the human person “from within”, uniting his intellectual and emotional life. Thanks to the power of musical expression there is, as Krapiec notes, “a deeper view of the real being, which indeed [man] does not understand in all its details, but nevertheless persists in contemplation and affirms this state of contemplative “gazing” itself with his act of love” (Krapiec 1991, 177).

Contemplation presupposes a special synthesis of knowing and experiencing reality. It means a state of mind in which astonishment, delight, admiration and dazzle merge with the attitude of love as a selfless gift of self. Contemplation is not about inquiring or analyzing, but about seeing and loving living. In itself it is not yet a creation, but as a “loving sight” he precedes it, prepares it, and then crowns it. It always refers to universal values, such as beauty, goodness, truth, holiness. They are present both in nature, as well as in man. However, there are also such values (e. g. artistic values) that man “calls into existence” in the creative process. Then art becomes a kind of school of contemplation. For it introduces sacredness and unusualness into human life, teaching the taste of noble and sublime rest.

Contemplative art means, expressed in the language of beauty, an answer to all deep and pure feelings to that which is great, perfect, sublime, pure... exceedingly magnificent. It has a dual purpose: it tries to show great values and at the same time evoke in the recipient (listener) feelings worthy of them. True art takes its origin from the contemplation of the creator and leads to the contemplation of the recipient of the artwork. Art, which has its source in contemplation, has not only the aesthetic dimension, but also the axiological dimension, because it is based on knowing and experiencing values. It thus acquires an ethical character, sensitizing man to what is great, extraordinary, perfect.

2. Theological sources of contemplation in music

Jacques Maritain emphasized the connection between various aspects of contemplation – its aesthetic dimension and classical metaphysics and theologi-

cal reflection (Trapani 2011, 154-168). Beautiful, sublime music gives us the desire to be better, and by this – consciously or unconsciously – we want to be closer to the sacred. Music directs our thoughts, feelings and imagination to God. In addition, it leads to catharsis, that is, to purification and ennobling our personality, becoming a school of unselfish love for truth and goodness. At the same time, it invites you to “go deep”, to look at the world, history and man not only from the outside (“superficial”) side, but to penetrate into the inner, spiritual sphere, from the perspective of fundamental and ultimate truths.

Thus contemplation rises from the philosophical plane to the theological plane. Its supreme form is the “gaze of faith” (Catechism, 2715) anchored in God, who, as the source and end of all existence, implements to the highest degree the sense of perfect beauty. It contains the final fulfillment of the *visum placet* and of all that “a vision arouses love” (*cuius ipsa apprehensio placet*) (STh I-II, q. 27, a. 1). In theological contemplation, God himself becomes “the direct object of knowledge that awakens love in a blissful vision” (Krapiec 1991, 177) that will constitute the essence of “eternal rest” (*requiem aeternam*) as a constant and supreme experience of beauty.

Benedict XVI described the spiritual experience of the beauty of Mozart’s music. During a solemn concert held on 17 January 2009 in the Sistine Chapel, Benedict XVI recalled an event from his childhood, when he and George, his brother, went to the Basilica of St Peter’s Abbey in Salzburg to listen to Mozart’s *C minor Mass*: “Even if I was only a simple youth at the time, I realized, with you, that we had experienced something other than a mere concert: it was music in prayer, a divine office in which we had felt the magnificence and beauty of God himself and were moved by it” (Benedict XVI 2009; Ratzinger-Benedetto XVI 2010, 225-228).

2.1. Contemplation as a “gesture” of Mary of Bethany

The importance of contemplation in christian life is shown by the Gospel scene of Jesus’ encounter with two sisters: Martha and Mary of Bethany (cf. Lk 10:38-42). St. Luke relates that Christ came to their village and Martha received Him into her home. This detail allows us to understand that of the two sisters Martha was the older and she was the one who managed the house. When Jesus accepted their hospitality, Mary sat at his feet and listened to him, while Martha “burdened with much serving” (Lk 10:40), which was undoubtedly necessary to receive such a special guest.

Significantly, the Gospel account emphasizes the fact that Mary did not so much “look” at Jesus, but above all she “listened” to Him. “Listening” to the word of God indicates the proximity of musical perception. Contempla-

tion is not just “seeing”, but perhaps even more “listening”. Contemplative listening means bringing a full-bodied, loving presence to the person before you, as well as to what is said and what as yet remains unsaid. Such listening rests in warm, loving, engaged, and prayerful silence, which often needs few or no words. Contemplative listening is more than simply not speaking. It involves putting oneself aside to attend fully to the other. The beauty of listening is a form of spiritual hospitality. Listening is paying full attention to others and welcoming them into our very beings. Listening is paying full attention to the Guest and welcoming Him to yourself. Not only was Martha hospitable by preparing the meal, but Mary was even more hospitable by contemplative listening to the Guest. Mary of Bethany as a model of contemplative listening exemplifies the listening stance of a disciple who first hears the word and then enacts it (Reid 2017, 6).

Martha was absorbed in her work, while Mary in contemplative delight “absorbed” the presence and words of the Teacher. After some time Martha objected in distinct indignation, rebuking Jesus: “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me” (Lk 10:40). Christ calmly answered: “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her” (Lk 10:41-42). Jesus’ words do not at all indicate a disregard for the active life, let alone work and generous hospitality. However, they clearly realize that the only thing really important is to listen to the Word of the Lord, who is present in the Person of Jesus. Everything else will pass away and be taken away from man, but the Word of God is eternal and gives meaning to everyday human activity. The Gospel scene from the home of Martha and Mary reminds us that, yes, man must take care of his daily duties, but above all he needs God, who is the interior light of Love and Truth. Even the most important activities performed without love lose value and give no joy. Without the deep meaning that can be found through contemplation, all human activity boils down to sterile and chaotic activism (Knabb 2023, 113-130).

The contemplative attitude represented by Mary shows the need to be open to what is most important, that is, to the presence of God who, in his Word, gives us himself. This can be related to the situation of the contemporary Church, especially in the aspect of pragmatism towards sacred music. In carrying out the daily “ministry of Martha”, in preparing everything for the success of pastoral action, it often forgets the “dimension of Mary”. But true availability to God and His Kingdom requires much more than just our outward actions. The “best part” is the contemplative presence at the Lord’s feet, listening to his word and humbly admiring the beauty of the liturgy and sacred music through which he himself gives us a share in his life.

Joseph Ratzinger-Benedict XVI pointed to the great value of the “best part” – contemplative dimension of theology and pastoral practice. He has repeatedly stressed the importance of music in the experience of transcendental beauty (Rowland 2020, 235-247). Cardinal Ratzinger remarked that “a theologian who does not love art, poetry, music and nature can be dangerous since blindness and deafness towards the beautiful are not incidental: they are necessarily reflected in his theology” (Ratzinger 1985, 130). He has also said that: “The only really effective apologia for Christianity comes down to two arguments: namely, the saints the Church has produced and the art which has grown in her womb” (Ratzinger 1985, 129). Ratzinger has written that the greatness of Western music from Gregorian chant to polyphony to the Baroque age, to Anton Bruckner and beyond is, for him, the most immediate and the most evident verification that history has to offer of the Christian image of mankind and of the Christian dogma of redemption” (Ratzinger 1986, 10).

In one of the letters of St. Theresa of Lisieux to her sister Celina of 19 August 1894 can be found a very timely observation on the situation of the Church interpreted in the light of the evangelical figures Martha and Mary. St. Teresa, as a contemplative person, writes: “Remember the scene in the house of Lazurus: Martha was serving, while Mary had no thought of food but only of how she could please her Beloved. And «she broke her alabaster box, and poured out upon her Saviour’s Head the precious spikenard, and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment» (John 12, 3). The Apostles murmured against Magdalen. This still happens, for so do men murmur against us. Even some fervent Catholics who think our ways are exaggerated, and that – with Martha – we ought to wait upon Jesus, instead of pouring out on Him the odorous ointment of our lives. Yet what does it matter if these ointment-jars – our lives – be broken, since Our Lord is consoled; and the world in spite of itself is forced to inhale the perfumes they give forth? It has much need of these perfumes to purify the unwholesome air it breathes” (Therese of Lisieux 2007, 244-245). The symbol of the “broken alabaster box” of our lives, from which the precious oil is poured, purifying the poisoned air of the world with its fragrance, shows the true and profound theology of liturgy, also in the aspect of church music. Certainly in the liturgy we must also fulfill the ministry of Martha, we must offer our consecrated place to the Lord, we must offer our preparation, we must prepare ceremonies, we must sing, we must offer the gifts of this world, bread and wine – all this is very necessary. But if the liturgy does not have the dimension of Mary, the dimension of contemplation, simply being at the Lord’s feet, there is no essence. Only from the liturgy, which is truly a “Mary” liturgy, in the gesture of Mary may come purification of the really poisoned air of today’s world.

Sacred music, which draws inspiration from the “gesture of Mary of Bethany”, from the contemplative dimension, is a form of transcending the empirical world towards spiritual values. Referring to the symbolism contained in the evangelical figures of Mary and Martha, it should be emphasized that contemplation does not exclude action, but, on the contrary, is the source from which human activity derives its dynamism and meaning. Hans Urs von Balthasar points out that the christian sense of contemplation and action does not consist in opposing them, but in both merging together into a mysterious unity (Urs von Balthasar 1995, 299-307; Berry 2012, 145-170). Marta’s “attitude” realized in music art is fulfilled both through the creative effort of the artist and through the focus of the listener. Passive contemplation of his own creative inventions could plunge the artist into a state of inefficiency. On the other hand, a listener who reluctantly refers to music and does not take the trouble to “listen” to it with understanding, would show a lack of aesthetic sensitivity or simple ignorance. Marta’s active “attitude” is particularly noticeable in the artist, who, as the creator of a musical work, gives it its final shape and meaning through his work. However, for the full, creative realization of music, a contemplative “Mary’s attitude” is necessary.

It allows us to experience the phenomenon of illumination, that is, the mysterious flash of delight in the experience of truth, goodness and beauty. This contemplative delight enables contact with the Absolute and is an opportunity for an intuitive glimpse of the hidden order of the universe. In this way, musical art does not stop only at the surface of phenomena, but reaches the depths of being. A contemplative attitude to music is not merely an aesthetic enjoyment of its beauty, but can be compared to prayer. For many artists, the state of creative inspiration was close to the experience of religious ecstasy. Art, as a particular form of human existence and activity, should therefore be the fruit of contemplation, reflection of a higher order, and not the product of a consumer “supermarket of culture”. The contemplative attitude allows us to discover lasting values in music, even if the work itself is fleeting in the sense of time. In fact, what has been deeply experienced by man remains in him, shaping his spiritual and moral sensitivity. The contemplative “gesture” of Mary present in sacred music is born from an attitude of silence and respect for silence. Music consists of sound and silence. The more beautiful the sound, the more beautiful the silence. A musician has to cultivate the ability to fall into admiration, it helps to create beautiful things.

2.2. *Transfiguration as an icon of contemplation*

Another biblical icon of contemplative reality is the Transfiguration event on Mount Tabor. Analyzing this Gospel scene, St. John Paul II observed: “It is possible, then, to climb the mountain in order to pause, to contemplate and to be immersed in the mystery of God’s light. Tabor represents all the mountains that lead us to God, according to an image dear to mystics” (John Paul II 2000). The mountain is an ancient symbol of contemplation. The mountain as liberation from the burden of everyday life, as a drawing of the pure air of nature. The mountain as an opportunity to see the unfathomable dimensions of creation and its beauty. The mountain that lifts the spirit and suggests the thought of the Creator (Benedict XVI-Ratzinger 2007, 314-318). The revelation of Christ in all the splendour and beauty of God’s light causes the Apostles present with him, Peter, James and John, to “fall prostrate and be very much afraid” (cf. Mt 17:6). The experience of the Transfiguration was for them not only true and good, but also beautiful: seeing the charm of Truth and Good, they see that it is the beauty of God who appears to them.

The English word “transformation” does not fully reflect the deep meaning we find in the Greek *metemorphothe* and Latin *transfiguratio*. The term “transformation” suggests more an external phenomenon, while the Greek and Latin terms have a deeper, ontological and moral meaning of the event. On Mount Tabor, Christ as the Son of God revealed who He is in His nature and essence. Therefore, the word “transfiguration” is more appropriate, which emphasizes the internal dimension. The Transfiguration is an unexpected revelation of the truth about Jesus. It is as if the veil of his humanity had vanished under the influence of the light until the appearance of his hidden face, which Paul calls “light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of (Jesus) Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). The Father’s voice joined the light, as if explaining the meaning of what had been revealed: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him” (Mt 17:5).

On that day the disciples came to know the true face of Jesus, whom they had not yet known, and who dazzled them with his radiance. The mystery of the Transfiguration thus marks the beginning of the fulfillment of the eternal longing of man who desires to see the face of God (Hebrew *panim*, Greek *prosopon*). This vision takes place in an encounter with Jesus, who assures us: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). The theological meaning of this experience is revealed by the Mass preface of the Feast of The Transfiguration of the Lord: “For he revealed his glory in the presence of chosen witnesses and filled with the greatest splendour that bodily form which he shares with all humanity, that the scandal of the Cross might be removed from the hearts of his disciples and that he might show how in the body of the whole

Church is to be fulfilled what so wonderfully shone forth first in its Head” (The Roman Missal 2011, 918-119). The Apostles, participating in the mystery of Mount Tabor, were amazed by the beauty of God and desired to remain in his circle. Moreover, the beauty of the Transfiguration gave them the power to survive the humiliating experience of Christ’s Passion.

The fearful apostles “fell on their faces,” recognizing the dignity of Jesus as the Son of God. They became witnesses of theophany, or the revelation of God (Greek: *Theos* – God, *phaino* – I appear). This is evidenced by the “bright white” robe of Jesus: light and white symbolize eternity and transcendence (cf. Mk 9:3). The light revealed on Mount Tabor was the manifestation of God’s beauty present in Christ, who is “the light of the world” (Jn 8:12). For this reason, the Transfiguration occupies a central place in the contemplative theology of the Fathers of the Church, especially St. Gregory of Nazianzus and St. John Damascene. The contact with the *sacrum* triggers a feeling of holy fear, because *mysterium fascinosum* (mystery of delight) is combined with *mysterium tremendum* (mystery of fear). That is why Benedict XVI emphasizes: “Contemplating the Lord is at the same time both fascinating and awe-inspiring: fascinating because he draws us to him and enraptures our hearts by uplifting them, carrying them to his heights where we experience the peace and beauty of his love; awe-inspiring because he lays bare our human weakness, our inadequacy” (Benedict XVI 2012). Through the Transfiguration of Christ, the apostles realized how inexpressible God is and how incomplete and imperfect human ideas about Him are. Divine beauty infinitely exceeds all that man can call beautiful in the temporal and material dimensions. In today’s world, where only trust in human effectiveness and the power of technical means is preferred, the Christian artist is called to rediscover and to bear witness to the power of God expressed in beauty.

The disciples’ response to the revelation of this divine beauty was the desire to keep it to themselves, to secure and to perpetuate that lofty moment when the “veil” of Infinity was opened before them: “Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three tents” (Luke 9:33). Beauty, however, is not an object of possession, but a gift that cannot be kept for oneself alone. Jesus went up to his apostles and, placing his hand on their shoulders, exclaimed, “Rise, and do not be afraid” (Mt 17:7). The Master’s touch was aimed at overcoming the fears of the students, as well as consecrating them to undertake the awaiting tasks of the future. Christ encouraged the Apostles to set out on their journey and to come down from the Mount of Transfiguration into the valleys of everyday life to bear witness to the splendour of God’s beauty. Interpreting this scene, St. Augustine observes: “Earth thou art, and unto earth shalt thou return” (PL 38, 492-493). Despite the fact that the moment of ecstasy passes away, there remains an inner conviction that an encounter with the Unspeak-

able has taken place and an awareness of the duty to testify about it. This is expressed by a medieval Dominican maxim indicating the need to share with others the fruits of contemplation (*contemplata allis tradere*) (STh III, q. 40, a. 1; Mikiciuk 2021, 3-6). The need to proclaim the truth, which results from the experience of the Transfiguration, is indicated by the presence on Mount Tabor of the Apostles Peter, James and John. Christ took them with Him because He wanted them to be witnesses of His Transfiguration. That is why St. Peter could confess years later: “We had been eyewitnesses of his majesty (...) We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven while we were with him on the holy mountain” (2 Pt 1:16,18).

This “voice coming from heaven” becomes our share as we contemplate beauty. Contemplation allows you to experience an inner peace in which time and eternity merge. It accompanies us when we contemplate the beauty of nature, flowers, meadows, mountains, but also works of art. We experience peace by immersing ourselves in the contemplation of the beauty of music, listening to Gregorian singing, Bach’s cello suites or Mozart’s quartets. All of us are then turned into hearing, nothing bothers us, and time seems to stand still. When we live in time, we touch eternity, when we listen to music, time seems to disappear.

The result of contemplation is a new perspective in seeing reality and its ultimate goal. That is why St. Paul says: “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body by the power that enables him also to bring all things into subjection to himself” (Phil 3:20-21). This transforming power Christ revealed for a short time on Mount Tabor, and irrevocably and forever confirmed in his Resurrection. In the face of the power of His love, the words of the Apostle John are fulfilled: “Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn 3:2).

The experience of the Transfiguration has a profound theological and moral dimension, because the Resurrection of the Lord gave rise to the rebirth of the spiritual beauty lost by man through sin. Those who are united to Christ by baptism become in him a new man, freed from the bondage and ugliness of sin (cf. Rom 5:12-21 – 6:1-23). The whole of creation also desires to share in God’s beauty, awaiting “the revelation of the sons of God” (cf. Rom 8:19). The longing for the beauty God has bestowed on man lasts for centuries and is expressed in countless masterpieces created by artists open to divine inspiration. In a special way, musical creation, which is associated with hardship and suffering, is an expression of the expectation of the whole cosmos, for “all creation is groaning in labour pains even until now” (Rom 8:22), desiring to sing before the throne of the Lamb “a new song” (Rev 14:3).

The Transfiguration of the Lord shows the way to the transformation of man. Christ, being the sacrament of God present in the world, transforms the world into a sacrament for God. This is expressed by the Prayer after Communion from the Eucharistic Liturgy of the Transfiguration: "May the heavenly nourishment we have received, o Lord, we pray, transform us into the likeness of your son, whose radiant splendour you willed to make manifest in his glorious Transfiguration" (The Roman Missal 2011, 920). The readiness to transform our existence is contained in the call of St. Paul: "Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect" (Rom 12:2). For man cannot close the horizon of his life only in the temporal dimension, but he discovers within himself the duty to strive for the world of spiritual and eternal values. As we contemplate the beauty and holiness of God, we become more and more like him. Because we transform into what we look at – when we look at beauty, we ourselves become more beautiful. In the reflection St. Paul VI had planned to give at the Angelus on that day, 6 August 1978, he said: "The Transfiguration of the Lord, recalled by the liturgy of today's solemnity throws a dazzling light on our daily life, and makes us turn our mind to the immortal destiny which that fact foreshadows" (John Paul II 1999). Contemplating the mystery of the Transfiguration teaches us that "we are made for eternity and eternity begins at this very moment, since the Lord is among us and lives with and in his Church" (John Paul II 1999).

This "light on our daily life" is contained in the contemplative dynamism exemplified by the event on Mount Tabor. It leads to the discovery of the moral dimension of human work and, in particular, of artistic activity. Through art, man seeks the shape of God's beauty, which is reflected in the various forms of his creativity. The longing for beauty is at the same time a longing for communion with others, in which a selfless gift is manifested. Beauty is for man a source of spiritual power, an inspiration to work, a light that guides him through the darkness of existence. It helps to overcome all evil with good, because the hope of the Resurrection cannot fail. The encounter with beauty makes man not only do good, but also make himself good. The Second Vatican Council points out: "Human activity, to be sure, takes its significance from its relationship to man. Just as it proceeds from man, so it is ordered toward man. For when a man works he not only alters things and society, he develops himself as well" (Vatican Council II 1965, 35).

2.3. *Music as a contemplation of God according to St. Augustine*

Of all the early church fathers, St. Augustine (354-430) is perhaps the most renowned. St. Augustine was endowed with great sensitivity to beauty and poetic genius. Seeing the beauty of nature and man, Bishop of Hippo paid particular attention to singing and the harmony of sounds as an expression of spiritual and moral order (Begbie 2000, 75-85). For Augustine sees creation as the work of the divine composer who has „chosen to *measure*, count, and *weigh*... [*has*] *arranged all things by measure and number and weight*” (Wisdom 11:20). The rhythm and harmony we find in our earthly music, together with its fleeting, elusive character, ought to impel us to seek after the perfect divine harmony of which it is an image. St. Augustine explains, the harmony of creation offers us a model for ordering our own souls: „So terrestrial things are subject to celestial, and their time circuits join together in harmonious succession for a poem of the universe” (Augustine 1947, 355). Much like a psalm, the cosmic composition’s unity, regularity, and self containment show forth the order and stability of which even temporal things are capable, and for which we ought to strive in our own spiritual lives. Music serves not only as a model for the well-ordered human soul but also as an image of the divine, eternal mind. In the harmony of the cosmos we see the work of the divine artisan whose beauty inspires us to compose our own lives after its pattern; and we can attempt to imagine the knowledge and life of this artisan as even more perfect, beautiful, and self-sufficient than our comprehension of a musical piece. In each of these cases, the peculiar status of music as successive and ever-fleeting, yet articulating order and beauty, makes it an apt example by which we come to better understand our place in relation to the universe and to God, and in particular the finitude of our temporal existence in relation to God’s eternity (Warchał 2023, 47-50).

St. Augustine’s treatise *De musica* can be viewed both as an extended philosophical justification for the use of music in the church and as a medium in which he explores his personal attraction to the subject. the use of music that encourages “sensual pleasure” rather than, as he says, “music that encourages devotion kindled with piety. Augustine could only accept music that was “used with restraint” as opposed to church music that would “inflame the passions”. In fact, at one point, Bishop of Hippo considered banning music completely from the church to protect against the improper enjoyment of it. In the end, however, Augustine could not deny the power of music to “inspire worship” (cf. Macinnis 2015, 211-220; Jirtle 2010, 263–281; Blackwell 1999, 83-86).

A human can grasp the whole of a psalm in abstract expectation, but must fragment that whole in order to carry out the concrete act of recitation; on the other hand, the harmony by which the divine intellect creates and compre-

hends creation is present to God all at once, simply and actually. We can imagine that God knows events all at once as we know an entire psalm while singing each part, but the Creator's knowledge must be "far more wonderful" than that (*Conf.* 11. 31)². Thus from our grasp of a musical piece we can extrapolate to God's eternal knowledge of the poem of the universe as a limiting case, or perhaps a negation, of the kind of knowledge we are capable of attaining.

In his autobiographical writings, St. Augustine deploys the example of music to illustrate key aspects of christian life. Bishop of Hippo try to clarify his understanding of "contemplation" as the interior presence of God to the soul. That long meditation brought his classic account in the *Confessions*. This study explores Augustine's developing understanding of contemplation, beginning with his earliest accounts written before his baptism and ending with the *Confessions*. For St. Augustine, christian contemplation was the practice of transcendence, the interior access of the soul to God. Contemplation is an "immediate knowledge of a transcendent God discovered within the soul" (Kenney 2013, 15). J.P. Kenney notes: "Contemplation is the mirror in which we glimpse the shining of our souls in the light of eternity. So Augustine came to believe. Through its practice were resolved the uncertainties of his earlier life and a spiritual God more real than the material cosmos revealed. His soul was arrested by the certainty of contemplation and, on his account, made newly aware of the poverty of its fallen state. Contemplation thus cleared the way for the action of grace within his soul" (Kenney 2013, 163).

The famous masterwork *Confessions* allows us to understand the personal character of the reference to St. Augustine to music. It is abundantly clear that Augustine was both familiar with the music of his day and enjoyed it. Music frames two key events in Augustine's life, the first being his conversion at a country house near Milan. While alone in the garden, he hears the mysterious voice of a young child singing the refrain: "Take up and read; Take up and read" which prompts Augustine to pick up a copy of the Scripture and come to a final decision about Christianity (*Conf.* 8.12). The second occasion is the death of Augustine's mother, Monica, at Ostia when he is on his way back to Africa. Instead of weeping over her death, the entire household sings a psalm 100: "I will sing of mercy and judgments to Thee, O Lord. While this comforts Augustine at the time, it is not until later that his emotions come to the forefront, and he is moved to tears by the remembrance of another hymn (*Conf.* 9.12).

Augustine's account in the *Confessions* of his ecstasy at Ostia remains unsurpassed in its poetic force, yet unusual, as a description of religious experi-

² English translation is quoted from *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. 1999. Translated by Edward Bouverie Pusey. Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

ence. What he describes is not a *vision* of God, but an experience of *listening*. And though Augustine searches for words through which to articulate this shared experience with his mother (“We were saying”), he admits that in this moment of ecstasy, “Every tongue and every sign, and whatsoever exists only in transition, since if any could hear” (*Conf.* 9.10). If they were to strain to listen to the remaining sounds above this silence, they would catch neither concepts nor images but music: the music of a Psalm 79: “We made not ourselves, but He made us that abideth for ever”. If we allow this music to sound in silence, then we can enter into the contemplation of God, whose eternal Wisdom we touch, even for a brief moment, with our thought, our heart’s rapture and our longing (Wiskus 2020, 274-287).

Confessions contains Augustine’s contemplation on desire mediated through the five senses. Turning to the pleasures of sound he writes: “The delights of the ear had more firmly entangled and subdued me; but Thou didst loosen and free me” (*Conf.* 10.33). For Augustine, sound has the power to enslave us through desire. Because of sound’s ability to arrest our conscious thought, he became wary of its power. Deepening his concern, Augustine found that sound’s potency only increases when it’s molded into the medium of music. As he notes, music is “mysteriously” related to our emotions and thus uniquely affects us: “The several affections of our spirit, by a sweet variety, have their own proper measures in the voice and singing, by some hidden correspondence wherewith they are stirred up” (*Conf.* 10.33). Like other thinkers of the ancient world, Augustine believed that types of music corresponded with particular emotions and attitudes. Accordingly for Augustine music is a medium that strongly affects the communication of words: “Feeling our minds to be more wholly and fervently raised unto a flame of devotion, by the holy words themselves when thus sung, than when not” (*Conf.* 10.33). For St. Augustine, worship music is the “setting for the words” accentuating the meaning and appealing to emotion through “appropriate tunes” (*Conf.* 10.33). Because he believed that different types of music affect our emotions and attitudes differently, musical accompaniment must be appropriate to the words and setting of worship. Augustine refers to personal experience, mentioning the role of sacred music in his conversion: “I remember the tears I shed at the Psalmody of Thy Church, in the beginning of my recovered faith; and how at this time I am moved, not with the singing, but with the things sung, when they are sung with a clear voice and modulation most suitable, I acknowledge the great use of this institution” (*Conf.* 10.33). Augustine reservedly concludes “to approve of the usage of singing in the church” (*Conf.* 10.33). Bishop of Hippo justifies this as follows: “That so by the delight of the ears the weaker minds may rise to the feeling of devotion” (*Conf.* 10.33). However, his approval of music is limited: “Yet when it befalls me to be more moved with

the voice than the words sung, I confess to have sinned penally, and then had rather not hear music” (*Conf.* 10.33).

A further testimony to music’s power occurs earlier in the narrative when he mentions his profound response to the hymns sung in Ambrose’s church, going so far as to equate his musical experience with a revelation of truth (Phillips 2006). The contemplative power of music that moves the soul experienced by St. Augustine in Milan, where he was shaken by the experience of the singing Church. A beautiful description of his spiritual experience, Augustine concluded in the *Confessions*: “How did I weep, in Thy Hymns and Canticles, touched to the quick by the voices of Thy sweet-attuned Church! The voices flowed into mine ears, and the Truth distilled into my heart, whence the affections of my devotion overflowed, and tears ran down, and happy was I therein” (*Conf.* 9.6). The contemplative power of music not only inspired Augustine’s conversion, but allowed him to strengthen his faith. In this way he himself can strengthen the faith of others with his theology down to our time.

Conclusions

The musician, persisting in contemplative listening, besides being fascinated by the timeless beauty he discovers, also retains the attitude of humility resulting from the feeling that in the temporal dimension he will never be given absolute fulfillment. The spiritual situation of the artist facing the mystery of Transcendence is well expressed by the words of Benedict XVI: “We must therefore have the humility not to trust merely in ourselves, but to work, with the Lord’s help, in the Lord’s vineyard, entrusting ourselves to him as fragile «earthen vessels»” (Benedict XVI 2012). Bending over the mystery of the Absolute, which emerges from outside the harmony of sounds, the musician can repeat the biblical confession of Job: “Behold, I am of little account; what can I answer you? I put my hand over my mouth” (Job 40:4). It remains for us to remain silent before the mystery of God, because not everything can be uttered to the end – even in the language of art. God as the greatest artist did not finish certain things. Thanks to this, there is an incredible charm of life: there is a place for the unknown, for the invisible. Any attempt to remove these inadequacies is an impoverishment of life. An artist cannot answer like God, who has not answered many things to the end. Great art always puts man before something unfinished. A real artist never finishes anything because he would stop being an artist. It must be done by the participants in his work. A musician must describe what he cannot see. I think what’s hidden in the secret is the source of music. The musician sees the world hidden, invisible, different. The artist transfers something from that reality into this one. Great works are born

from the artist's contemplation. By this the artist becomes a kind of apostle of spiritual reality. Pope Francis emphasized this in his speech to representatives of the world of art: "Artists remind us that the dimension in which we move, even unconsciously, is always that of the Spirit. Your art is like a sail swelling with the wind of the Spirit and propelling us forward" (Francis 2023).

These words also apply to the musician who, although approaching Infinity, is not able to fully know, understand and express its beauty and perfection. Art cannot fully translate the Invisible into the Visible. Hence, he must be content with allusion and selection. All she manages to do is pinch the Un-speakable. At the end of contemplation, the speech of contemplative art turns first into stuttering, and finally into deafness. At the end there is the inability to speak called silence and the mute delight of the Inexpressible. This dimension of contemplation can be found in the statement of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "Contemplative prayer is silence, the «symbol of the world to come» or «silent love». Words in this kind of prayer are not speeches; they are like kindling that feeds the fire of love. In this silence, unbearable to the «outer» man, the Father speaks to us his incarnate Word" (Catechism, 2717). From the contemplative silence comes great music that leads us to Infinity. Sacred music as *via pulchritudinis* is therefore above all a way of contemplation.

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