

## Interpretation of the Word in Liturgical Books and the Problems of Postmodern Philosophy

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### Abstract

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The author attempts to argue that the patrimony of Byzantine liturgical chant, grounded in the *Octoich* as well as various *irmologia*, is built on a system of eight modes (cyclic time) that intersects with the linear time of the calendar, creating a “dual time standard” between cyclic and linear, between moveable and immovable feasts and commemorations. The connections between such cycles and patterns, on the one hand, and human consciousness of time, on the other, are briefly discussed.



In the beginning was the Word (John 1:1). Since the most ancient of times, representations of the Word in the image of a letter, words, or the actual texts of a culture were distinct elements in sacred art. The Word in its verbal or graphical form was not only a symbol but was also a sign, the foundation and source of all that is. It was a manifestation and realization of being-in-the-world. The development of a word into a text and a book is an ontological act. Since the “fontal” nature of the Word is determined, then *a priori* the dynamic aspect pertains to it as well.

One of its aspects has been imaged in the structure of collections of liturgical chant. Thus, for instance, we have an eight-mode system of organization of chant which defined the reformatory structure of the *Octoich* of Saint John of Damascus (eighth century).<sup>1</sup> Shortening the texts of the canon during Lent and Pentecost by as much as three chants led to the formation of appropriate collections – the Lenten *Triodion* and the *Pentecostarion*. Finally, the Ukrainian five note-linear collection referred to as the *Irmologion*<sup>2</sup> (sixteenth century) reflected the main stylistic features of the full Orthodox liturgy, which combined two basic parts: the eight-mode system and the system of calendar-*menaion*, whose repertoire provided for the needs of liturgical practice for a complete annual cycle. It should be said that these two genres of chant organization are closely related to categories of time, the definition of which is important in the development of the holistic medieval philosophy of time. Its content has special meaning for the solution of contemporary problems.

Eight-mode time is cyclic time. Calendar-*menaion* time is linear and is represented by the location of the feast-day chants within the calendar year, starting from September 1<sup>st</sup>. These two forms of time were concurrent in celebrating and therefore the people who were continually present in church subconsciously entered into a dual liturgical time circuit. “Dual time standard” refers also to marking the movable and non-movable feasts. The peculiarities of this practice were described by Mykhaylo Muryanov:

Both cycles together form a system whereby any moment of physical time can be measured according to either one or the other cycle. Being movable or non-movable depends on which of the system components

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<sup>1</sup> See E. Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 70.

<sup>2</sup> Establishment of five-line notation in Ukraine in the late sixteenth century made it possible to fix an ancient layer of monody (single-voice) chants, which existed in oral ministering practice for centuries. See O. Цалай-Якименко *Київська школа музики XVII ст. (Київ-Львів-Полтава 2002)*, с. 14.

an observer is employing. As is known, Christian philosophy accords the highest position to the principle of immovability, which can be seen, for example, in the idea of the altar where even the physical shift would annul the holiness of a Temple. It would be more reasonable to proceed from immovability of the cycle that is considered movable.<sup>3</sup>

One should realize the importance of the connection between human consciousness and time coordinates, which in ministering is represented by the integration of the eight-mode and calendar-*menaion* systems. Firstly, their relation is symbolically presented on the day of the beginning of the ecclesiastical year, September 1<sup>st</sup>, when Saint Simeon Stylites (*Stolpnyck*) is commemorated. Slavs call the complete eight-modes cycle a “*stolp*.” Secondly, a wide range of events within a complete year is reduced to the most important ones, which are repeated as themes in the eight-mode chants during a cycle of eight weeks. Thus the *dogmatikon* of the Theotokos at vespers marks the nativity of Christ and the virginity of Mary, as well as the dual nature of the Savior as Godman; the *sidalni* (*kathisma*) marks the resurrection of Christ; and the *stepenni* (*anabathmoi*) marks Pentecost.

Thirdly, the strict, arithmetical eight-mode sequence is “scattered” through the numerous feast-day chants, each of which has its own mode, and which collectively establish the mosaic of eight-mode combinations in the festal chant repertoire. And fourthly, the amplified dynamic composition of recurrent annual feast-days is characterized not by repetition, but by a gradual “tagging” of recurrent annual events. The leave-taking of the feast-day happens on the eighth day, symbolically crisscrossing with the elements of eight-mode chants.

Hence, the Ukrainian *Heirmologion* is an example of a dual-reference system, although the particular combination of repertoire has not always been equivalent. In the majority of cases, the division of feasts was shortened. For example, verses only for Christmas and Easter were written. And the main

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<sup>3</sup> М. Мурьянов, Гимнография Киевской Руси. Москва, “Наука,” с. 330.