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The Values of *Sacrum* and *Sanctum* in the Lyrics of Polish Religious Songs after 1945

The aim of the present article is to show how the religious values of *sacrum* and *sanctum* are realized through the medium of linguistic and musical means of expression in Polish religious songs created after 1945¹. The author considers religious songs as multi-faceted acts of auto- and social communication.

The methods employed by the author are analysis of song lyrics, as well as analysis of selected aspects of the musical component of the songs. The main results are as follows: the analyses reveal that the lyrics of the religious songs are imbued with the values of *sacrum* and *sanctum*, expressed through the choice of topics, the words and phrases used, and a type of poetic specific for *sacrum*. As a consequence, the songs provide vessels for religious values. Moreover, the structures of the songs are such that they include, as their inherent components, the author and the addressee of the values of *sacrum* and *sanctum*.

In this study, Polish religious songs from the period after 1945 are treated as a source of knowledge about man, God, and the world of values, including religious values of *sacrum* and *sanctum*. The collected research material (a repertoire of songs) has been organized according to name, character and subject matter (the main thematic thread). To summarise, the themes of songs refer to the deepest existential issues, and the main subjects are: God and a human being in relation to the Absolute as well as to another human being.

Manifestations of *sacrum* in the themes and vocabulary used in the songs

A representative list of thematic threads in the researched songs includes: God, man, life, dignity, freedom, vocation, happiness, love, community, solitude, suffer-

¹ The present paper is based on the author's research for her PhD thesis, written in Polish, which analyzed the Polish song material (her doctoral dissertation *vide*: Agnieszka Sojka, *Wychowawcze funkcje polskiej pieśni religijnej po 1945 roku* [Educational functions of Polish religious songs after 1945], the Institute of Education of the Faculty of Philosophy of the Jagiellonian University, Cracow 2002). It does not include English translations of the songs, focusing rather on the conclusions drawn from that research.

ing, death. The focus is not just on these motives, and the thematic circle expands to incorporate the conceptual dimension, a specific vision of the relationship between God and man, or more generally, God and the world. The characteristic themes found in the lyrics of religious songs include: human life in its earthly and eternal dimensions, individual's vocation, the everyday intertwined with the transcendental, or the motif of consecration. Based on text analysis, the outlined vision can be described as religious philosophy/ religious view of life. The themes of songs were sourced from beliefs and tradition. The lyrical world of the studied songs is a religious world created through juxtaposition of images of material reality and the supernatural. Embedded in the lyrics is a religious theory of reality, which assumes the world's natural governing principles. Thus one of the levels of the discussed values is revealed, where they can be exposed and at the same time experienced by the recipient in the process of aesthetic experience. This is mediated through language, and specific vocabulary can be identified using pre-defined categories. The expressions and phrases used in Polish religious songs can be classed as referring to people, qualities, symbols, and the reality of the religious world:

- Divine Persons: God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, appearing under numerous names (The Holy Trinity, Jesus, The Saviour, The Lord, The Victor, The Creator, The Source, The Beginning, The Giver, The Eternal Thought, The Comforter);
- Qualities: 'Blessed', 'Gracious', 'Benevolent', 'Omnipotent', 'Holy';
- Reality of the religious world: God's presence, the Face of God, The Kingdom of Truth and Justice, spirit, consecration, mercy, renewal, reconciliation;
- Symbols: the holy altar, the gates of the Kingdom, traveller, fire, heat, light, brightness, secret, a new man, children of light, Lord's bread, the living bread, God's bread, the breath of Spirit, the grain of life, the full Truth, the fire of life, Life and Awaiting,

The religious symbols send the recipients to an extra-empirical reality and open them to the invisible, the spiritual world, thus revealing the value to the recipient.

The poetics of *sacrum*

The content of the studied material pertains to religious feelings, convictions and preferences. These experiences demand co-participation and communion of feelings – the pre-conditions for understanding. It is a form of a very honest prayer which introduces an intimate atmosphere filled with trust. And so a certain type of devout religiousness emerges in the form of humble submission. The

religious dimension of the poems is expressed in „songified” religious lyrics, where expression equals emotional piety: it denotes calm and trust. The character of a religious song as a genre determines its specific view of the world.

The question about the poetics of *sacrum* emerges at this point. Literature on the subject defines it as a set of means of expressions in the service of the idea of *sacrum*, i.e. its exponents on the textual level. How does *sacrum* manifest itself in the structure of the texts? It comprises elements such as: an autonomous function of words (which bring truth about the world and man) and words – symbols².

The study uncovered an area of religious values which allows to unveil a vision of the world and man, and the place of God within it, of supernatural and religious beings, and finally, a system of values transmitted in the religious songs through words, the religious sense of the songs, symbols and images. Discussing a religious experience that triggers an active response in an individual in the process of realising the values, Rev. M.M.A. Krąpiec OP says: “Religious feelings are among the deepest in human beings, (...) religion permeates all conscious areas of human life and psyche – and these feelings are expressed in a conscious religious stance, expressed also through song. A song is as if a synthesis of human feelings, for both the cognitive and the emotional elements, the language and the melody make up a religious song as an expression of human feeling both in private and as part of a community”³. Therefore religious songs can be treated as a spontaneous answer and at the same time an expression of personal response to the calling of God. The author refers to songs as one of the means of expression of religious values. A song is a synthesis of a man’s religious experience as well as his experience of religious values, and thus also of the two qualities in question: *sacrum* and *sanctum*.

The sacred character of religious songs as transmitters of religious values

Stefan Sawicki⁴, an expert on the subject of axiology in literary studies, discussed it in three areas. The first area deals with description and interpretation of values manifesting themselves in literature in various ways. The other two areas cover the oldest issues of the value of the literary work itself and the study of literature as a value “for”. This article focuses on the first area of study. According to S. Sawicki, “values revealed by literature are an immanent world of values of the

² *Folklor, sacrum, religia. Praca zbiorowa*, ed. Jerzy Bartmiński, Maria Jasińska-Wojtkowska, Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, Lublin 1995, pp. 294, [2].

³ *Polskie śpiewy religijne społeczności katolickich. Studia i materiały*, vol. 1, ed. Bolesław Bartkowski, cooperation Karol Mrowiec, Jan Stęszewski, TNKUL, Lublin 1990, p. 7.

⁴ Stefan Sawicki, *Problematyka aksjologiczna w badaniach literackich*, [in:] *Problematyka aksjologiczna w nauce o literaturze. Studia*, ed. Stefan Sawicki, Andrzej Tyszczyk, Redakcja Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, Lublin 1992, p. 95-110.

work: the axiological qualities of the structural element and the values evoked by the literary work”⁵.

As literary works of art, the Polish religious songs build a world of values, taking as their subject the human life in its spiritual and psychophysical dimensions. Portraying the world and the place a human being occupies in it, they opt to subscribe to a specific hierarchy of values and an idea of life which can be described as religious. The reality is always presented in the songs in terms of values, and thus it is a reality of values.

The view of culture as deriving from religion and opinions about religious context of poetry have been quoted in works of numerous scholars, including Christian Dawson, Ernst Cassirer, Mircea Eliade. In their opinion religions are the creative force in culture. M. Eliade suggests a strong relationship between man and religion, which is naturally embedded in the essence of humanity. “Regardless of how desacralized the world becomes, a man who has chosen a secular life is never able to free himself entirely from the religious attitude. (...) Even the most desacralized existence retains traces of religious valorization of the world⁶”. This quotation shows a human being in a dimension deeper than simply living here and now, *hic et nunc*, but internally focused on transcending his worldly life and the pursuit of God. That inner desire, manifested as a constant drive to develop oneself, can focus on the shaping of the spiritual life of an individual. The whole world of culture, understood as an externalized world of values, helps to develop a human being as a whole.

Maria Jasińska-Wojtkowska lists the following criteria that help classify poetry as religious⁷:

- the ability to identify with a certain religion,
- a scale of experience,
- a degree of contact with a deity,
- the attitude of a lyrical subject,
- the object of the experience,
- stylistic outlook,
- and indicators of the religious character of the text⁸:

⁵ Ibidem, p. 96.

⁶ Mircea Eliade, *Sacrum, mit, historia. Wybór esejów*, selection and introduction by Marcin Czerwiński, translated by Anna Tatarkiewicz, 2. edition, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1974, p. 51. The English quotation is a translation from the Polish version, not from the original text.

⁷ Maria Jasińska-Wojtkowska, *Problematyka badań nad liryką religijną*, [head-line:] *Komisja do Badań nad Literaturą Katolicką. Posiedzenie z dnia 14 maja 1957 r.*, [in:] *Sprawozdania z czynności wydawniczej i posiedzeń naukowych oraz kronika Towarzystwa Naukowego Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego nr 8 za okres od 1 stycznia 1957 r. do 31 grudnia 1957 r.*, Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, Lublin 1958, s. 57-59.

- perceiving the world through the prism of the highest values,
- affirmation of the highest values in the world created in the text,
- a positive attitude of the lyrical subject to these values.

Religious song is a genre of religious poetry singled out mainly on the basis of the lyrics, but also meeting the requirements of the classification above; it is the poetry that deals with man in the space of God⁹. This description embodies the essence of religious song as a product of culture, but also as a medium for the values of *sacrum* and *sanctum*.

Religious song as a message directed at a recipient has to achieve the goal intended by the sender. The direction of the communication, called “a function” due to its clear aim, is “written into” the text. Its primary function is to contact the Absolute. In every religion, contact with God is made through certain religious practices, e.g. prayer. As a cultural phenomenon, religious song is an expression of belief in God and at the same time of willingness to enter into dialogue and make contact with the Absolute. The songs evoke religious values, and their experience makes the contact possible. The song engages the entire being and all human faculties, and introduces man into the reality of the supernatural world. It especially happens through auto-communication, where the sender is simultaneously the recipient. *Sacrum* is the primary value, coming across very strongly in the analysed texts. The term was introduced into European philosophy of art and culture by the aforementioned M. Eliade. Referring to Rudolf Otto and Gerard van der Leeuw, he proposed a study of the reality through the categories of *sacrum-profanum*. The study of the songs has demonstrated that *sacrum* as the value exists objectively and also as an internal object of literary and musical experience (the songs are considered in their entirety, with attention paid to both verbal and musical dimensions). *Sacrum* evoked by religious songs encompasses the entirety of their themes and plots. From a theological point of view, the manifestation of the value can be compared to the salvation history, where everything has been included within God’s plan of salvation, and as such is consecrated, touched with holiness. The human being and the surrounding world are seen through the prism of God-given holiness. However, in his freedom, man can choose to accept or to reject this proposition. When considering the value of *sacrum*, I took into account various sacred elements related to the religious attitude, to all things supernatural, to qualities which repre-

⁸ Maria Jasińska-Wojtkowska, *Sacrum w poezji Leopolda Staffa*, [in:] *Polska liryka religijna*, ed. Stefan Sawicki, Piotr Nowaczyński, Wydawnictwo Towarzystwa Naukowego Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, Lublin 1983, p. 371-422, serie: Religijne tradycje literatury polskiej, ed. Stefan Sawicki, vol. 1.

⁹ See: Zofia Zarębianka, *Co to jest poezja religijna?*, „Horyzonty Wiary. Zeszyty Instytutu Kultury Religijnej przy Wydziale Filozoficznym Towarzystwa Jezusowego w Krakowie”, vol. 2: 1991, No. 8, p. 71-82, especially p. 81.

sent sacred values for man. Roman Ingarden¹⁰ speaks about the so called metaphysical qualities revealed by the literary work to the recipient. Drawing on this idea one can point to metaphysical qualities evoked by the studied songs: holiness, sinfulness, sublimity. The latter quality refers to a deeper theological meaning of religious songs, namely to the motif of the saving sacrifice of Jesus, and also evokes moral values such as generosity and devotion. As stressed by R. Ingarden, the essence of these qualities consists in the inability to define them in rational terms, but the recipient may grasp them in the moment of their realization - in the situations presented in the songs where the qualities are made real.

Analysis of chosen religious songs which exemplify the values of *sacrum* and *sanctum*

Analysis of the songs has demonstrated that the metaphysical qualities that are being considered here are evoked in particular by pieces which take the lyrics from the Bible, e.g.:

“Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps” /song “Christ suffered for us”, text taken from 1 Peter, 2:21-24/.

Beyond all questions, the mystery of godliness is great/ He appeared in a body/ was taken up in glory /song “How great, oh God”, text from 1 Timothy, 3:16 and Romans 8/.

Living in the world and experiencing different values, man responds to his calling. Deep down, human beings in their essence want to pursue a life of holiness. This becomes clear in moments of realisation of the fragility of life, of insufficiency in the face of new areas of existence. The key is to develop sensitivity that enables the human soul to find the value of *sacrum* in itself.

The religious subject matter of the analysed material has been already established in the initial stages of the study and this compels us, in a way, to deal with the problem of transcendence. How does transcendence work and how does it manifest itself in this kind of poetry? The phenomenological approach allowed us to uncover the essence of religious song, and thus to define what this phenomenon consists in. Religious values in the song can be intuitively detected on first hearing. However, to understand their deeper meaning, the subject of the analysis (religious song) must be treated as a phenomenon. According to the methodological principles of phenomenology, to “transcend” in this context simply means to go beyond the current knowledge about the song. It also means an attempt to enter a world of the supernatural and to extract what at first glance appear to be religious qualities of

¹⁰ Roman Ingarden, *O dziele literackim. Badania z pogranicza ontologii, teorii języka i filozofii literatury*, [translation by Maria Turowicz], Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1960, pp. 489, [2].

the songs. These qualities are visible already at the linguistic level of the songs. Specific vocabulary is used by the authors. This is the first indicator of a religious character of the songs. The verbal and musical layers make the scholar feel the sacred dimension of the text already on first encounter. Naturally, the scholars will base their judgement on the previous experience of such feelings or atmosphere of a song, but they will also rely on their intuitive feeling about the character of the work. This is exemplified by texts by Marek Skwarnicki with music by Marian Machura, e.g. the song "Cross, my Cross". On hearing the lyrics and the melody, a calm, contemplative atmosphere of the song becomes apparent. The religious character is underlined by simplicity of the melodic line and of the text. Its religious dimension can be best expressed as a prayer – reflection on one's own life, or on the condition of man in general. Reception of the song depends on a number of factors, most prominently on the sensitivity of the recipient; however, already the first exposure to the work allows us to establish its genre. The certainty about the quality of the song comes with a deeper experience of the song and with recognition of its value. Performing or perceiving a song can bring an experience of religious values through the axiological experience of the work. What I mean is a total immersion into the content of the song and focusing on a single element that has most affected our consciousness. It has to be done without reaching out for our knowledge and experience, but only trying to grasp what is characteristic of the text, the thing that gives it its sacred dimension. At this point a special kind of attitude to such religious texts has to be highlighted.

The notion of *sacrum* refers to the sphere of man's attitude to the world, to the way of experiencing and interpreting the reality and to transcendence. The phenomenological description of holiness by R. Otto¹¹ seems useful here. He understands divinity – *numinosum* – as an a priori value that is unknowable and inexpressible, secret, attainable in contemplation, inspiring simultaneous fear and fascination – *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* – a value beyond moral value judgement. On the other hand, M. Eliade¹² defines *sacrum* as a source of strength, constancy and permanence, which reveals itself in acts of hierophany, which are historically changeable and involve not only god figures and holy people, but also objects, animals, plants. Accordingly, the sphere of *sacrum* can expand or contract: with certain rites what is secular can become sacred, and what is sacred can become profane. M. Eliade wrote: "Space is not homogenous for a religious man. [...] And so there is a sacred space, strong and important and there are other areas, not sacred and thus without structure and consistency, in another words, amorphic. [...]"

¹¹ Rudolf Otto, *Świętość. Elementy irracjonalne w pojęciu bóstwa i ich stosunek do elementów racjonalnych*, translated by Bogdan Kupis, [the introduction by Józef Keller], Thesaurus Press, Wrocław 1993, pp. 218, [1].

¹² M. Eliade, *Sacrum...*, op cit., p. 61-62.

Appearing, *sacrum* ontologically defines the world. In homogenous and infinite space, boundless, where there is no point of reference, where there can be no direction, hierophany reveals an absolute constant point, the middle”¹³.

The world of values represented in Polish religious songs evokes holiness and encourages holiness. Everything that takes place in life can become sacred; every sphere of life can take on a holy character. The act of experiencing *sacrum* therefore entails self-determination of an individual as an integral part of the world, connected to it with a secret mystical tie.

The value of *sanctum* is manifested in the texts of the songs of worship. In the majority of cases the lyrics are based on the words of the Bible and accompanied by melody.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (...) /song “Praise be to the God”, text Ephesians, 1:3-14/.

“God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal (...) To him be honour and might for ever.” /song “The blessed and only Ruler”, text from 1 Timothy, 6:15-16/.

The value of *sanctum* features in the texts of the songs as praise of God that is above everyone and everything. R.Otto writes of fearful praise which desires to acknowledge and celebrate what is truly worthy of glory¹⁴.

The values created in religious songs indicate a sacred character of analysed works. Both *sacrum* and *sanctum* are available to the recipient as part of an aesthetic experience.

Man and God – sender and recipient of the values of *sacrum* and *sanctum* in the structure of the lyrics

In a song seen as an act of communication, there is a sender who communicates a message to the recipient, which means there are two people using the same code. The relationship between them is based on an exchange of words, thoughts and feelings. The message is transmitted to the recipient through the communication channel – in this case air, but also paper (depending on the type of contact between the sender and the recipients). A medium for transmitting the message - sound wave, print or tape – is a necessary condition for the message to be effectively delivered.

The sender and the recipient feature in songs as necessary participants of the act of communication. The author of the lyrics and the music is the original sender, but the performer of the song should also be considered, and can be defined as a secondary sender. The Divine Person is the addressee (the intended recipient) in

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ See: R. Otto, *ibidem*, p. 79.

religious songs. To the same degree, a listener or a performer is also a recipient. The recipients of the message are both an individual and a community which comes into any contact with the song.

The knowledge of the specific religious language employed in the lyrics is crucial for decoding the studied songs. The language refers to the sphere of *sacrum* and is used to transmit religious values. Studies of religious language stress its importance in religious life¹⁵. In the religious songs the language used in the analysed songs evokes a sacred reality through the use of religious symbols.

The sender of the song (the author of the lyrics, the composer) is the obvious force behind it. But so is the recipient, since communication with them is the goal of the message. The other indispensable elements are the message itself (lyrics, melody) and a code, and finally, the relationship between the sender and the recipient.

The contact between the sender and the recipient is made at the moment when the song reaches the recipient. In songs this is the start of an extra-verbal relationship, based on a common code – in this case the reality of faith. The faith enables understanding of the song-message addressed to the recipient. Religious song has an inherent point of view in relation to the knowledge of the existence of God: it is a world of faith, shared by the sender and the recipient. The character of the genre of religious song predetermines its viewpoint. The song reflects the consciousness of both the lyrical subject and the addressee.

A model *homo religiosus* seeks to experience the value of *sacrum*, even if the search is chaotic, without a clear goal, experiencing different values but without a notion of any hierarchy. The deeper dimension of *homo religiosus* touches the very essence of the religious experience, which is experiencing the value of *sacrum* as a religious value. In Christianity this state is referred to as conversion through the experience of the Living God – (Person) and starting a personal relationship with him. A religious experience which encompasses the whole person and deeply touches his existence leaves an indelible mark on the human being. At this level the person consciously responds to an inner desire to experience *sacrum* and feels religious values as transcending the human nature, weak and insufficient. In this sense the person, described as *homo viator*¹⁶, has identified the ultimate aim, has given his life a direction and is now trying not to delay achieving the goal. He is

¹⁵ See: Irena Bajerowa, *Rola języka we współczesnym polskim życiu religijnym. Wprowadzenie do dyskusji*, [in:] *O języku religijnym. Zagadnienia wybrane*, eds. Maria Karpluk, Jadwiga Sambor, Redakcja Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, Lublin 1988, p. 9-20, serie: (Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski. Zakład Badań nad Literaturą Religijną, vol. 13). It was also published in another version. See: Irena Bajerowa, *O języku współczesnego życia religijnego*, „W Drodze”, 9: 1981, No. 9, p. 43-50.

¹⁶ See: Gabriel Marcel, *Homo viator. Wstęp do metafizyki nadziei*, translated by Piotr Lubicz, Afterword by Antoni Podsiad, „Pax”, Warszawa 1984, pp. 315, [4].

aware of his path and internally convinced that achieving the goal will lead him to good. The “good” may be understood in different ways and often depends on the hierarchy of values adopted by an individual, which is the supreme value that dictates his choices and governs other values. To the religious man that emerges from the lyrics of religious songs, God is the supreme value and good. In the texts we deal with a deepening of sensitivity in order to enable the human soul to find *sacrum* in itself. Everything that takes place in life can become sacred; every sphere of life can take on a holy character. The act of experiencing *sacrum* therefore entails self-determination of an individual as an integral part of the world, connected to it with a secret, mystical tie. The experience of the Absolute, despite its mystery, will leave a deep lasting impression on the subject’s consciousness.

The very name of the form of religious songs provides the clue to their thematic focus. It presents a specific way of seeing the world, life and man which takes into account the existence of the Divine Person. A song may also provide role models that reach into the very essence of the human nature. Everyone is familiar with the sphere of religion or faith, whether they declare themselves as believers or negate the supernatural. This declaration itself reveals an individual attitude of man to higher values. The answer is the choice of each individual. Person. Spatial distance appears as a fear of God, not terror and anxiety, but experiencing *sacrum* as wonder, admiration, (*misterium fascinans*)¹⁷. It is at this point when the category of *sanctum*, semantically related to that of *sacrum*, is revealed¹⁸

Abstract (Summary) in English:

The article presents an overview and analysis of a research study of the repertoire of Polish religious songs after 1945. The article aims to present how the religious values of *sacrum* and *sanctum* are realized in them through the medium of linguistic and musical means of expression. The author also examines the categories of religious poetry as proposed by Maria Jasińska-Wojtkowska, and considers religious songs as multi-faceted acts of auto- and social communication. A phenomenological perspective adopted by the songs encourages holiness and acts of goodness through the pursuit of God – the supreme value.

The article is an original text. Its goal is to demonstrate how the religious values of *sacrum* and *sanctum* are realized through the medium of linguistic and musical means of expression in Polish religious songs created after 1945. The author considers religious songs as multi-faceted acts of auto- and social communication.

¹⁷ See: R. Otto, *ibidem*, p. 59-67.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 78.

The methods employed by the author are analysis of song lyrics, as well as analysis of selected aspects of the musical component of the songs. The main results are as follows: the analyses reveal that the lyrics of the religious songs are imbued with the values of *sacrum* and *sanctum*, expressed through the choice of topics, the words and phrases used, and a type of poetics specific for *sacrum*. As a consequence, the songs provide vessels for religious values. Moreover, the structures of the songs are such that they include, as their inherent components, the author and the addressee of the values of *sacrum* and *sanctum*.

The results of the analyses may be employed further as a basis for continued research, in particular in the following areas: reception of religious songs; practical applications of the reception of religious songs, both in pedagogical work and in the context of child education and socialization, especially in terms of religious upbringing and education. The songs encourage holiness and acts of goodness through the pursuit of God, the supreme value. The article also explores the social impact religious songs have on an individual's attitude to the world and interaction with the religious community.

The article's original contribution consists mainly in the research perspective it applies to the analyses of the research material, i.e. the author's hermeneutic and phenomenological approach. Moreover, the article's strong point lies in its comprehensive treatment of songs as both literary and musical works.

Key words:

religious song, sacred, *sacrum*, *sanctum*, God, religion, values, religious themes, song, religious poetry, culture

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