

## **Teresa Malecka**

Krzysztof Penderecki Academy of Music in Kraków

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5251-9555>

# **The Phenomenon of Sacrum in Polish Music During the Cold War Era as a Means of Expressing the Aspiration for Independence. The Inspiration of John Paul II<sup>1</sup>**

Keywords: sacrum, polish music, expression, independence, inspiration

“Of all manifestations of the human spirit, music performs a unique, irreplaceable and lofty task. When it is truly beautiful and inspired, it tells us more than any other of the arts about the Good, about the benefits of peace, about the sacred and the divine.”<sup>2</sup>

## **Historical context**

October 1956 was more than a political event in Poland. In fact, it might have even more significance as a moment in the cultural history of the country. It marked the beginning of the dismantling of the official and

- 
- 1 This publication is a result of the research project DAINA 1 No. 2017/27/L/HS2/03240 funded by The National Science Centre (NCN) in Poland.
  - 2 Karol Wojtyła – Jan Paweł II, *Muzyka. Antologia tekstów*, ed. by D. Radziechowski (Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 2015), 17.

mandatory doctrine of socialist realism that had dominated the official outlook in the countries of the Eastern Bloc. Cracks in the Iron Curtain began to appear in music, film and literature. The first ever “Warsaw Autumn” International Festival of Contemporary Music held that same year offered a forum for new trends and tendencies in music; the window to the world of Western culture that had been slammed shut after World War II was opened for good. Later on, ebbs and flows of liberty interspersed with relapses into authoritarianism under the communist regime eventually paved the way for a veritable explosion of freedom in 1989.

This process of change was greatly influenced by Poland’s traditional religiosity and the long-term foresight of the nation’s Catholic Church, which at the time created a major haven and a relative enclave of freedom, an intellectual underground for believers and atheists alike. The election of Polish Cardinal Karol Wojtyła as Pope in 1978 marks perhaps a major turning point in this process both in Poland and in Central and Eastern Europe as a whole.

Seemingly in parallel with this trends, and as the first cracks began to appear in the Iron Curtain, Polish composers became increasingly interested in religious themes, which gave rise to a new wave of compositions that very clearly focused on aspects of Christian spirituality. This movement reached its culmination between 1978 and 1989 and produced some of the greatest masterpieces of sacred music (Górecki, Penderecki, Kilar) since Szymanowski; music “marked by its contact with *sacrum*.”<sup>3</sup>

### ***Sacrum* in the humanities and in music. Some remarks**

The category of *sacrum* and the sacred/profane dichotomy<sup>4</sup> addressed in the writings of Mircea Eliade as well as in the thought of Rudolf Otto and Gerard van der Leeuw emerged as an important aspect of artistic and, obviously, musical scholarship in the European humanities in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century.

Two main tendencies can be observed in discussions of the sacred dimension of music. The first, propounded by, among others, Thrasybulos

---

3 Mieczysław Tomaszewski, “Muzyka wobec *sacrum*. Próba rozeznania”, in *Olivier Messiaen we wspomnieniach i w refleksji badawczej*, ed. by M. Szoka, R.D. Golianek (Łódź: Akademia Muzyczna w Łodzi, 2009), 39–40.

4 Stefan Sawicki, “*Sacrum* w literaturze”, *Pamiętnik literacki* LXXI (1980), 169.

Georgiades, regards music as something that is essentially profane, which “becomes sacred in association with the sanctifying word of God,”<sup>5</sup> a viewpoint that reflects the possible influence of the much earlier thinking of Hans Urs von Balthasar. The latter wrote of musical works which “offer objectively religious themes from a particular creed, e.g. by depicting the birth of Christ as seen in the Gospels.”<sup>6</sup> The second trend, according to Rev. Waloszek, is represented, among others, by Bohdan Pocij, for whom the presence of the sacred can be found “in the very substance of music, in a particular musical language and the structures it creates ...”<sup>7</sup> Again, Hans Urs von Balthasar spoke of the religious nature of musical works expressed by particular means or stylistic elements.<sup>8</sup> This type of religiousness could be described as sacred, as an immanent form of *sacrum*.

Inspired by the ideas of Rudolf Otto<sup>9</sup> and Mircea Eliade,<sup>10</sup> Mieczysław Tomaszewski describes the “presence of *sacrum* in music” from three points of view. First, he addresses “the varieties of *sacrum* itself;” second, “the types of music marked by their contact with *sacrum*” (spiritual, religious, church music in all its forms); finally, he addresses “the character of works that carry in some way their authors’ experience of *sacrum*.”<sup>11</sup>

In his ruminations on the relationship between art and religion, Reverend Father Tadeusz Dzidek focused on works “that express an artist’s subjective religiosity,” and added “there is a particular value in this kind of information that reveals the artist’s religiosity, the artist’s position of faith.”<sup>12</sup> He also says that the crisis of faith, its disappearance or even rejection... may manifest itself in a particular piece of music.”<sup>13</sup>

In Polish music during this time of turmoil, the composer’s point of view and depth of faith was not of paramount importance. In fact, due to the

---

5 Joachim Waloszek, “Kategorie *sacrum* i profanum we współczesnej literaturze muzykologicznej”, *Roczniki teologiczno-kanoniczne* XXXIV (1987), 46.

6 Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Sztuka i religia”, in *Pisma wybrane*, Vol. 2: *Pisma z zakresu sztuki i religii*, trans. M. Urban, D. Jankowska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2007), 93.

7 Joachim Waloszek, “Kategorie *sacrum* i profanum we współczesnej literaturze muzykologicznej”, 46.

8 Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Sztuka i religia”, 93.

9 Rudolf Otto, *Świętość*, trans. B. Kupis (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1968).

10 Mircea Eliade, *Sacrum, mit, historia*, trans. A. Tatariewicz (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1974).

11 Mieczysław Tomaszewski, „Muzyka wobec *sacrum*. Próba rozeznania”, 40.

12 Ks. Tadeusz Dzidek, *Funkcje sztuki w teologii* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2013).

13 Ibid.

fragile nature of this sphere and above all owing to the lack of reliable sources, it is impossible to make any judgements; even if a composer's own testimony is available, it rarely concerns such private matters. What matters most, Reverend Dzidek contends, is that "the beauty of a particular work may (simply) function as the vehicle that facilitates the journey into transcendence."<sup>14</sup>

Indeed: it should be pointed out quite emphatically that despite the great number of works on religious themes penned by Polish composers during this pivotal moment in the nation's history, the criterion adopted when selecting individual works as examples of *sacrum* was their beauty, and their ability to express the most exalted values. After all, it was John Paul II who reiterated the appeal to artists made by the Second Vatican Council: "the world we live in needs beauty in order not to succumb to despair."<sup>15</sup>

## Music and John Paul II

When discussing the theme of *sacrum* in Polish music in general during the thaw of the mid-1950s, one historical event had a particularly powerful impact on Polish composers, namely the election of a Pole as the head of the Catholic Church, and the influence his personality, teaching and writing exerted on Polish history, culture and music.

Music occupied a special place both in Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II's profound religious thinking as well as among his countless interests. It is as evident in his early poetry as it is in his many later statements on philosophy and aesthetics.

The poet/actor was barely 18 when he wrote in 1938:

O Music! Melody! Music!  
You all-powerful! Harmony of Nature!  
You crush me with the weight of a vibrating harp,  
With your strings you carry me away somewhere above the earth...<sup>16</sup>

And, in 1999, the Pope wrote in his *Letter to Artists* that

---

14 Ibid., 59.

15 Jan Paweł II, *List do artystów* (Watykan: 1999), 28.

16 Karol Wojtyła, "Psałterz Dawidów, Symphonie – Scalenia, Mousike", in Karol Wojtyła – Jan Paweł II, *Dzieła literackie i teatralne, Juvenilia (1938–1946)*, ed. by J. Popiel et al. (Kraków: Znak, 2019), 71.



for everyone, believers or not, the works of art inspired by Scripture remain a reflection of the unfathomable mystery which engulfs and inhabits the world.<sup>17</sup>

He went on to say that

like all other arts, music brings man closer to God, who 'hath prepared for them that love him' things that 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither (which) have entered into the heart of man' (1 Cor 2:9).<sup>18</sup>

Still, nothing could foretell the powerful impact that the poetry, teaching and personality of Wojtyła would have on Polish music and Polish composers of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and of the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>.

\* \* \*

At the present time, there exist two fundamental sources of knowledge about music inspired by the thought and personality of St. John Paul II:

1) A catalogue of music materials associated in manifold ways with the person of St. John Paul II, compiled by Krystyna Bielska;<sup>19</sup>

2) A series of publications put together by the Academy of Music in Kraków, entitled *Muzyka wobec poezji i nauczania Karola Wojtyły i Jana Pawła II* [*Music vis-à-vis the Poetry and Teaching of Karol Wojtyła and John Paul II*] and edited by Kinga Kiwała and Teresa Malecka.<sup>20</sup>

The 1993 catalogue lists over 600 works of various types by Polish composers written between 1978 and 1990, and which are connected in some way with the life and work of John Paul II.<sup>21</sup> When it comes to works of high artistic stature, however, this compendium can be narrowed down to several dozen. According to Kinga Kiwała, these include pieces

---

17 Jan Paweł II, *Letter to Artists*, 13.

18 Karol Wojtyła, "Psałterz Dawidów, Symphonie – Scalenia, Mousike", 261–262.

19 Krystyna Bielska, *Jan Paweł II w utworach muzycznych*, 2. ed. (Rzym: Fundacja Jana Pawła II – Ośrodek Dokumentacji Pontyfikatu, 1993).

20 *Muzyka wobec poezji i nauczania Karola Wojtyły i Jana Pawła II*, Vol. 1: *Muzyka. Antologia tekstów*, ed. by D. Radziechowski, 2. ed. (Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 2015); Vol. 2: *Utwory. Inspiracje, interpretacje*, ed. by K. Kiwała, T. Malecka (Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 2011); Vol. 3: *Inspiracje. Interpretacje, prezentacje*, ed. by K. Kiwała, T. Malecka, (Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 2014).

21 Krystyna Bielska, *Jan Paweł II w utworach muzycznych*.

dedicated to the Holy Father; occasional works written to the words of John Paul II; compositions offered as a gift to the Pope; and music inspired by his personality and teaching.<sup>22</sup> The earliest works dedicated to the Pope – Joanna Bruzdowicz’s *Sonated’octobre*, Andrzej Kurylewicz’s *Te Deum*, Roman Palester’s *Te Deum (Hymnus pro gratiarum actione)*, Krzysztof Penderecki’s *Te Deum*, Henryk Mikołaj Górecki’s Psalm *Beatus Vir* and Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil’s cantata *The Slavic Pope* – date from 1978 and 1979, and thus immediately after the election of the first ever Pole to the Chair of Saint Peter. Over the years, interest in papal inspirations has not waned; new music material is constantly appearing, but a complete list remains unknown.<sup>23</sup>

## Artists and works

All manner of paths, stories, and inspiration gave rise to works of sacred music associated with the life and work of John Paul II. At the same time, these pieces served as vehicles of freedom at a time of political change, although they varied in terms of their artistic standard and importance.

The most eminent works were those written by composers whose *oeuvres* feature a significant proportion of sacred themes. These include Górecki’s *Beatus Vir*, *Totus Tuus*, *Kyrie*; Penderecki’s *Te Deum*, *Chaconne*; Palester’s *Te Deum (Hymnus pro gratiarum actione)*; Kilar’s *Victoria*. Zygmunt Mycielski’s *Liturgia sacra* is also special case, because it did not perform a historical function: while it constitutes a one-off departure from the composer’s eschewal of religious ideas, it is meaningful in the context of his activities as a dissident.

## Henryk Mikołaj Górecki: *Beatus Vir*, *Totus Tuus*, *Kyrie*

The Pope’s influence on the *œuvre* of this composer is visible in the Psalm *Beatus Vir*, which was commissioned by Cardinal Karol Wojtyła

22 Kinga Kiwała, “Między *Te Deum* a *Totus Tuus*. Inspiracje osobą i nauczaniem Jana Pawła II w muzyce”, in *Muzyka wobec poezji i nauczania Karola Woktyły i Jana Pawła II*, 13–14.

23 Several such examples are known from a report compiled by Katarzyna Szymańska-Stułka; these include works by young composers from Warsaw written for competitions organized by Warsaw’s Centrum Myśli Jana Pawła II in 2007 and 2018. Paweł Łukaszewski’s *Gloria Patri* was written in 2019.

(1977), but dedicated to John Paul II (1979); Górecki went on to write a number of other major works "for the Pope:" *Totus Tuus and Kyrie*.<sup>24</sup>

Górecki thus described his creative stance: "Music is for me the result of religious concentration and meditation. To see pure water, green grass, healthy forests, to breathe pure air. To see the Creator of it all – and to write for Him."<sup>25</sup>

### ***Beatus Vir* Op. 38 Psalm for baritone solo, mixed choir and great symphony orchestra (1979)**

**Texts: Psalms 142 (143):1, 6–8, 10; 30 (31):15–16; 37 (38):23; 66 (67):7; 33 (34):9. World premiere: Kraków, Franciscan Church, 9 June 1979.**

In 1979, Henryk Mikołaj Górecki composed a work commissioned earlier by Cardinal Wojtyła to commemorate the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of St Stanislaus, the Bishop of Kraków known for his opposition to King Boleslaw the Bold and sentenced to death by the ruler. When the Cardinal became Pope, the composer was in two minds about whether to write music celebrating the Saint or John Paul II. The result of this deliberation is the psalm *Beatus vir*, the title of which arguably carries a double connotation: the psalm does refer to the 11<sup>th</sup>-century saint, but also, and perhaps primarily, to its eventual dedicatee, John Paul II, who was soon to visit his native country in his new guise. The visit of the head of the Catholic Church to a communist country presented the regime with an unprecedented political dilemma; one of its objectives was to preclude all association between the papal pilgrimage and the story of St Stanislaus, which was a symbol of resistance against oppression. The political tension that surrounded the composition of *Beatus vir* demanded incredible spiritual strength from its author. This may indeed be the reason why the product of Górecki's labours bordered so closely on *sacrum*.

The Psalm may be described as a collective (chorus) and individual (baritone solo) prayer: a plea for mercy, a confession of faith and trust, culminating in the revelation: "O taste and see that the Lord is good:

---

24 *Kyrie* Op. 83 for mixed chorus, percussion, piano and strings (2004–2005).

25 Natalia Budzyńska, "Pieśni śpiewają", in *Przewodnik Katolicki*, Vol. 15 (2007), quoted in Barbara Lasek, *Kwartety smyczkowe Henryka Mikołaja Góreckiego*, M.A. Thesis (Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 2007), 215.

blessed is the man that trusteth in him." This prayer is clothed in music that is on the one hand simple, typical of Górecki's work at that time (modal scales, but also tonal affinities, oscillations of the tonal centre between C minor, E-flat major and C major); and on the other, is sublime, full of inner tension, and builds up to powerful climaxes, from which it then retreats. Its folk inspirations are interwoven with allusions to church music; the *quasi*-quote of the psalm tone<sup>26</sup> performed by the chorus *a cappella* in the final movement seems to transcend to another, extra-terrestrial reality.

Bohdan Pocij asked a "bewildered" question of the Psalm *Beatus vir* in 1980: "Where does this unusual manifestation of greatness in music come from? Why is it that a major work of religious inspiration has appeared right now?"<sup>27</sup> Indeed: such was the spirit of the times.

The regime made its displeasure felt after the piece premiered before the Pope, in the Franciscan church in Kraków in June 1979. Due to the atmosphere surrounding the composer in Katowice and its Academy of Music (of which he was the rector) Górecki was forced to resign from both the rectorship and his teaching. It soon became evident that he also appeared to abandon the main direction of his *oeuvre* and enter a new period, that of his later style, dominated by chamber music and – mostly religious-inspired – works for chorus *a cappella*.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Totus Tuus* Op. 60 for mixed chorus *a cappella* (1987)**

**Lyrics: Maria Bogusławska. Dedication: 'To Holy Father John Paul II on his third pilgrimage to his homeland'. World premiere: 8 June 1987 (the Pope's arrival ceremony at Warsaw Airport); 14 June 1987, Victory Square in Warsaw during the pontifical mass.**

The words contained in the title, with the necessary complement of *Totus Tuus sum Maria*, served as the motto for the pontificate of John Paul II; yet they also reflect Górecki's personal Marian devotion, which in fact

26 Kinga Kiwała, *Problematyka sacrum w polskiej muzyce współczesnej na przykładzie utworów związanych z osobą Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II*, M.A. Thesis (Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 2002), 74.

27 Bohdan Pocij, *Forum kompozytorskie H.M. Góreckiego*, Polish Radio 2, 1980.

28 After Poland regained independence in 1989, large-scale pieces appeared as exemplified by the oratorio *Sanctus Adalbertus*, *Kyrie*, *Symphony No. 4 "Tansman Episodes"*.

might have drawn him into an interaction with the work and personality of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II. Theirs was a particular relationship. On the one hand, there was a certain affinity of positions, views and even personal fates, while on the other, particular historical events made these connections even stronger. This relationship was also dominated by the composer's incessant fascination with the personality and the teaching of the Holy Father. In his own words, "I live thanks to the good fortune of having met Him – not for a long time, but it was enough."<sup>29</sup>

The same Marian devotion in its entire theological depth was a well-known if not dominant idea underpinning the pontificate of John Paul II, and it is also present within the aesthetic system the Pope embraced as an artist. It is very evident in his statement that "the Virgin shines as the image of divine beauty."<sup>30</sup>

The lyrics of the piece, a five-line Latin prayer to Mary, is framed by the papal motto. Its peaceful narrative, dominated by an almost constant three-measure rhythmic model, a simple minor-interval melodic, and a diatonic harmony, is at times enhanced by sudden chromatic or enharmonic interventions. Górecki made the call of "Maria" (repeated 40 times in all) and "Mater" (20 times), and only then of "Totus Tuus" (7 times) the semantic centre of his piece. What is more, the opening fourfold "Maria" in *ff*, *crescendo* spelled out in capitals, i.e. MARIA, and the repeated calls to the Mother of God also serve as the material for the finale. The number of voices diminishes, the harmonic field seems to become "purified". At the end, the ever-slower tempo and the ever-dwindling dynamics produce an unreal effect as the Marian prayer seems to be transported into another and possibly transcendent dimension.

The first two performances of this profoundly Marian work were particularly significant in the context of the political system in Poland, which was already beginning to disintegrate in 1987. The first performance took place at the airport in Warsaw, which was still the then the capital of a nominally communist country, the second was on Victory Square, near the "Palace of Culture and Science," a Stalinist symbol of Polish-Soviet "friendship" – both venues resounded with noble and

---

29 *Muzyka jest rozmową*, H.M. Górecki interviewed by students of the Academy of Music in Kraków, Katowice, May 2008.

30 Jan Paweł II, the Encyclical *Redemptoris mater* (Roma: 1987), 33, quoted in Jan Paweł II, *Piękno. Antologia tekstów*, ed. by D. Radziechowski, with an introduction by Jarosław Kupczak OP (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego, 2008), 144.

exquisite music for chorus *a cappella*, at times contemplative, at times dramatic, sung to the Marian text of “All yours, Mary” – as if these words were spoken by the entire Polish nation, and not simply the utterances of its composer or John Paul II.

### **Krzysztof Penderecki, *Te Deum*, *Chaconne***

For Krzysztof Penderecki, the sphere of *sacrum* became a constant point of reference from almost the very outset of his creative journey. Each of his works on religious themes was something of a manifesto in the context of the political situation in Poland in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The inspiration for *St Luke Passion* (1966) was – obviously – derived from the Bible, which in his own judgement was the most important and the greatest work of literature ever written. In addition, Mieczysław Tomaszewski pointed out that Penderecki was “the first composer in this part of the world to transgress the unwritten law against undertaking sacred themes in art. But then he already enjoyed too much of an international reputation for the communist regime to do anything against it.”<sup>31</sup>

It was he who revived the passion genre that had in the past served as a vehicle of both humanist and Christian values in European culture. The composer reminisced in 1993: “I decided upon the passion archetype – on a 2000-year-old theme – not only to express the Passion of Christ but also the cruelty of our century, the martyrdom of Auschwitz. . . Today, I would also add: of Sarajevo.”<sup>32</sup> The subsequent Polish performances in 1966 – the millennial of Poland’s adoption of Christianity – that followed the world premiere in Muenster, were a significant milestone on the road to independence.

Two works by the Maestro places particular emphasis on Poland’s liberation of Poland from the fetters of communism: *Te Deum*, which clearly addresses the impact the Pope had on Polish history and music at the time, and *Polish Requiem*, which seems to have been composed to the rhythm of contemporary historical events. The chapter closes with the death of John Paul II in 2005 and with Penderecki’s reaction to it in *Chaconne*.

---

31 Mieczysław Tomaszewski, *Penderecki. Bunt i wyzwolenie*, Vol. 1: *Rozpętanie żywiołów* (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 2008), 192.

32 Krzysztof Penderecki, honorary doctorate acceptance speech at the University of Warsaw 1993, quoted in Mieczysław Tomaszewski, *Penderecki. Trudna sztuka bycia sobą* (Kraków: Znak, 2004), 19.

### ***Te Deum* for 4 solo voices, mixed chorus and orchestra (1979–1980)**

**Lyrics: entire Medieval Latin hymn; text of hymn “Boże, coś Polskę” [“God Save Poland”]. Dedication: “To Holy Father John Paul II”. World premiere: Assisi, 1980.**

*Te Deum* was written as a response to Cardinal Wojtyła’s election to the Chair of Saint Peter and, at the same time, as a homage to a great Pole. Stylistically, it belongs to the period of Penderecki’s *oeuvre* in which he made a distinct turn towards values abandoned by the avant-garde: beauty as well as humanist and religious messages.

The composer used the original Latin text in its entirety; certain verses were repeated. In view of the recurrence of the initial fragment of text and musical material in the finale, the form of the work may be defined as recapitulative. Avant-garde musical techniques are combined with more traditional devices derived from late Romanticism, with particular emphasis placed on emotional tension and expression. In Krzysztof Penderecki’s composition, *Te Deum* – a hymn by nature festive, joyful and thankful – takes on dramatic, supplicatory or indeed lament-like features. It is a work idiomatic for the time in which it was written: it was a particularly hard period. The artist gave expression to this fact by quoting the hymn “Boże, coś Polskę” [God Save Poland] in the climax; in the 1970s and 1980s, this hymn – Poland’s *de facto* national anthem in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – during its years of bondage during the Partitions it was sung in church masses for the homeland and during anti-communist and anti-government demonstrations. Through this work the composer conveyed his own views on the subject of Poland’s freedom. An additional element reinforcing the composition’s patriotic import was the quotation of this hymn with a text which was banned at the time: “Ojczyznę wolną racz nam wrócić Panie” [A free homeland restore to us, O Lord]. N.B. the printed score, published by Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, a state publishing house then managed by editor-in-chief Mieczysław Tomaszewski, also challenged the ban.

***Chaconne per archi* (2005)** constitutes a part of the *Polish Requiem* – a monumental religious narrative of Polish history, the beginning of which is marked by the famous movement *Lacrimosa*, composed, as is made clear in the dedication, “To Lech Wałęsa and Solidarity on the unveiling of the monument to the fallen shipyard workers.” The composer later commented

on the historical performance of Jadwiga Gadulanka and the combined orchestras of Kraków (conducted by Antoni Wit):

It was emotional on a scale that I had experienced neither before nor since in my entire life. The falling snow, the thousands of people, the hush... What can I say? To this day I relive those moments at home in Lusławice.<sup>33</sup>

History further shaped and inspired the writing of the *Requiem's* subsequent movements. The two most modest pieces in terms of performance requirements – *Agnus Dei* for a *cappella* choir, and *Chaconne* for strings – were written as an artistic reaction to the death of two great Poles: the heroic Primate of the Millennium, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, in 1981, and St. John Paul II, in 2005.

On the one hand, the *Chaconne* clearly alludes to the traditions of the genre, while on the other, it constitutes a moving expression of pain and sorrow. Mieczysław Tomaszewski described the *Chaconne* as “the music of a lament taking place without words”. It can be said that with his music, Krzysztof Penderecki placed the Polish Pope’s pontificate within a certain dramaturgical frame. In response to the Holy Father’s election in 1978, he composed *Te Deum* and dedicated it to him; and in response to his death, he wrote *Chaconne for Strings*.

### **Roman Palester, *Te Deum Hymnus pro gratiarum* for children’s choir, two mixed choirs and instrumental ensemble (1979)**

**Text:** Original Latin hymn *Te Deum*.

**Dedication:** ‘To His Holiness Pope John Paul II, I offer this work with love, devotion and humility. Roman Palester.’

**World premiere:** Kraków, 1983

In 1983, Roman Palester, paying his first visit to Poland after a 34-year absence to witness the preparations for the piece’s world premiere in Kraków, stated:

<sup>33</sup> Mieczysław Tomaszewski, *Penderecki. Bunt i wyzwolenie. Odzyskiwanie raju* (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 2009), 79.



*Te Deum* is music borne of religious inspiration, but intended for concert rather than liturgical purposes. This inspiration is a value of the most personal type, the most intimate matter of an artist.<sup>34</sup>

The composer utilized the text of the Latin hymn almost in its entirety, retaining its original tripartite structure, which determined the work's three-movement form. This work is framed by a quote from the beginning of the original medieval melody of the *Te Deum* hymn. The sonic language combines a diatonic choral melody with dodecaphony and the resulting dissonance that dominates the work. The traditional, indeed cantilena-like vocal statements appear alongside unconventional types of singing, e.g. *parlando*, which evoke a prayerful effect. The superordinate category of Palester's work is an expression achieved through a selection of compositional techniques, but also, importantly, thanks to detailed verbal descriptions inserted into the score, such as *maestoso*, *solennemente*, *deciso*, *calmo espressivo*, *dolcissimo*, and *tranquillissimo*. However, as Kinga Kiwała observes, "the work is characterized by a certain emotional objectivism."<sup>35</sup>

### **Wojciech Kilar, *Victoria* for mixed chorus and orchestra 1983** **World premiere: Katowice 1983**

Wojciech Kilar's rich and important religious *oeuvre* (featuring, among others, *Angelus*, *Missa pro pace*, and *Te Deum*) includes two short pieces dedicated to the Holy Father John Paul II: *Fanfare* for mixed choir and orchestra, also known as *Papal Fanfare* (1979); and *Victoria* for mixed choir and orchestra (1983). The text of the latter work is actually a fragment of a letter sent by King Jan III Sobieski to Pope Innocent XI following the Battle of Vienna of 1683: "Venimus, vidimus, Deus vicit!" [We came, we saw, God conquered!] The work, which bears the dedication "To the Polish Pope: words of the King of Poland set to music, submitted with faith and hope by a Polish composer," was written on the occasion of the second papal pilgrimage to Poland in 1984 and was the inspiration of Herbert Bednorz, Bishop of Katowice. The world premiere took place

---

34 "W ojczyźnie po 34 latach'. Z Romanem Palestrem rozmawia Leszek Polony", *Tygodnik Powszechny* 42 (1983), 6.

35 Kinga Kiwała, *Problematyka sacrum w polskiej muzyce współczesnej na przykładzie utworów związanych z osobą Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II*, 74.

in the Pope's presence in the Cathedral of Christ the King in Katowice on 20 June 1983. A symbolic role is played by the incipit of the original melody of the medieval Polish hymn *Bogurodzica* in the orchestra that opens the work. The construction of its dramaturgy contains two basic qualities: repetition (in both the textual and musical spheres) and the march-like idiom towards the final, joyful cry "Deus vicit!" sung in the harmony of a major chord that seems to span the highest soprano and the lowest bass. Kilar said of the work:

Here, as it were, in view of the greatness of the event, the greatness of the fact that my music will be heard by the Pope, an inner need and appropriate mood arose... in other words, all this came to me quite naturally. I simply felt that I had an idea for such a work, that I had such a need...<sup>36</sup>

## **Zygmunt Mycielski, *Liturgia sacra* for mixed chorus and orchestra (1983-1984)**

**World premiere: Warszawa 1986**

In 1983-1984, the composer, essayist and opposition activist Zygmunt Mycielski<sup>37</sup> – whomostly wrote symphonies and chamber pieces in genres other than religious music –felt a similarly momentary need to compose a work with an explicitly sacred character: *Liturgia sacra*. In the words of Marta Szoka: "This composition occupies a particular place in Mycielski's *oeuvre* not only because it is one of the last things he ever wrote. It is his artistic and spiritual testament."<sup>38</sup> An unconventional combination of texts – not all of them for holy mass – is intricately conjoined with asceticism, simplicity, connotations with the tradition of the plainsong as well as with 20<sup>th</sup>-century composing techniques. The composer's belief in the uniqueness of his piece is evident in his letter to John Paul II:

<sup>36</sup> Wojciech Kilar z rozmowie z Krystyną Kajdan, in *Niedziela* 30 (2002).

<sup>37</sup> Mycielski's political views brought him into conflict with the communist authorities in Poland. His publications led to his ousting as editor-in-chief of *Ruch Muzyczny*; his writings were then subject to strict censorship and he was forbidden to leave the country. Nevertheless, Mycielski continued his political activism. In 1975, he signed an open letter with other Polish intellectuals protesting proposed changes to the Polish constitution by the Communist party. In 1978, he founded the Academic Education Society, a student organisation that was declared illegal and later banned ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zygmunt\\_Mycielski](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zygmunt_Mycielski) (last accessed 17.08.2021)).

<sup>38</sup> Marta Szoka, "Liturgia sacra' Zygmunta Mycielskiego – misterium tremendum et fascinosum", in *Muzyka polska 1945–1995*, ed. by K. Droba, T. Malecka, K. Szwajgier (Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 1996), 114–115.

Towards the end of my life, I wrote AD MAIOREM DEI GLORIAM, music for chorus and orchestra to three Latin psalms and, more recently, LITURGIA SACRA to texts from the Latin mass: *Kyrie*, a shortened *Credo*, *Sanctus* and three versions of *Agnus Dei*, with Gregorian connotations, and *Benedictevus*, full of nothing but humility. [...] Would [...] the Pope remember an old musician, who takes this occasion to beg for His blessing."<sup>39</sup>

In Bohdan Pocij's take, "Mycielski arrived at his final works permeated with metaphysics and religious spirit, i.e. *Three Psalms, Fragments*, via a long road of spiritual evolution which may well be called his path to God."<sup>40</sup>

While the above-mentioned works do not explicitly express a drive towards political independence during a period of change, they do bear witness to the powerful influence that the personality of John Paul II exerted on Poles at a time when the ideas of liberty and sovereignty held particular importance. At the same time, they also reflect the spirit of the time. This is particularly important when seen in combination with the clearly-defined political and ideological stance of their author.

\* \* \*

In his *Integral Interpretation of the Musical Work. A Reconnaissance*, Mieczysław Tomaszewski points out the specific historical situation

experienced for two centuries, with but a short interlude, by Polish music – the music of a nation without its own independent state.... Polish music saw a different relationship between what could be called *musica libera* and that described as *musica adhaerens* than was the case in most European countries. *Adhaerens* depends on other things. It has a function, or perhaps a mission, for nation and society. (...) More frequently than elsewhere, individual pieces of music in Poland are a response to a given situation or event; more frequently than elsewhere, they served to mobilize, to move, to integrate people around a certain task.<sup>41</sup>

---

39 Letter of Zygmunt Mycielski to John Paul II (12.06.1987), quoted in [www.diecezja.rzeszow.pl](http://www.diecezja.rzeszow.pl) (last accessed 10.02.2019).

40 Bohdan Pocij, *Forum kompozytorskie H.M. Góreckiego*, Polish Radio 2 (1980).

41 Mieczysław Tomaszewski, "W stronę interpretacji integralnej dzieł uzycznego", in *Interpretacja integralna dzieła muzycznego. Rekonesans* (Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 2000), 51–52.

**Bibliography**

- von Balthasar, Hans Urs. "Sztuka i religia". In *Pisma wybrane*, Vol. 2, trans. M. Urban, D. Jankowska. Kraków: 2007.
- Bielska, Krystyna. *Jan Paweł II w utworach muzycznych*. Rzym: Fundacja Jana Pawła II – Ośrodek Dokumentacji Pontyfikatu, 1993.
- Dzidek, Tadeusz. *Funkcje sztuki w teologii*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2013.
- Eliade, Mircea. *Sacrum, mit, historia*, trans. A. Tatarkiewicz. Warszawa: PIW 1974.
- Jan Paweł II. *List do artystów*. Watykan: 1999.
- Jan Paweł II. *The Encyclical Redemptoris mater*. Roma: 1987.
- Kiwała, Kinga. "Między Te Deum a Totus Tuus. Inspiracje osobą i nauczaniem Jana Pawła II w muzyce". In *Muzyka wobec poezji i nauczania Karola Wojtyły i Jana Pawła II. Utwory, inspiracje, interpretacje*, ed. by T. Malecka, K. Kiwała. Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 2011.
- Otto, Rudolf. *Świętość*, trans. B. Kupis. Warszawa: Książka i wiedza, 1968.
- Radziechowski, Dariusz, ed. *Muzyka wobec poezji i nauczania Karola Wojtyły i Jana Pawła II*, Vol. 1: Karol Wojtyła – Jan Paweł II. *Muzyka. Antologia tekstów*, ed. by K. Kiwała, T. Malecka. Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 2015; Vol. 2: *Utwory. Inspiracje, interpretacje*. Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 2011; Vol. 3: *Inspiracje. Interpretacje, prezentacje*, ed. by K. Kiwała, T. Malecka. Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 2014.
- Radziechowski, Dariusz, ed. Jan Paweł II. *Piękno. Antologia tekstów*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego, 2008.
- Sawicki, Stefan. "Sacrum w literaturze". *Pamiętnik literacki LXXI*. Warszawa, 1980.
- Szoka, Marta. "Liturgia sacra' Zygmunta Mycielskiego – misterium tremendum et fascinosum". In *Muzyka polska 1945–1995*, ed. by K. Droba, T. Malecka, K. Sz wajgier. Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 1996.
- Tomaszewski, Mieczysław. *Interpretacja integralna dzieła muzycznego. Rekonesans*. Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 2000.
- Tomaszewski, Mieczysław. "Muzyka wobec sacrum. Próba rozeznania". In *Olivier Messiaen we wspomnieniach i w refleksji badawczej*, ed. by M. Szoka, R.D. Golianek. Łódź: Akademia Muzyczna w Łodzi, 2009.
- Tomaszewski, Mieczysław. *Penderecki. Bunt i wyzwolenie*, Vol 1: *Rozpętanie żywiołów*. Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 2008.
- Tomaszewski, Mieczysław. *Penderecki. Bunt i wyzwolenie*, Vol. 2: *Odzyskiwanie raj*. Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 2009.
- Tomaszewski, Mieczysław. *Penderecki. Trudna sztuka bycia sobą*. Kraków: Znak, 2004.
- Waloszek, Joachim. "Kategorie sacrum i profanum we współczesnej literaturze muzykologicznej". In *Roczniki teologiczno-kanoniczne*, XXXIV. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL 1987.

## **The Phenomenon of Sacrum in Polish Music of the Cold War Era as an Expression of Aspiration to Independence. Inspirations of John Paul II**

### Summary

The Polish October of 1956 was more than a political event.. It began the process of dismantling the official and mandatory doctrine of socialist realism that had officially dominated the countries of the Eastern Bloc. Cracks in the Iron Curtain appeared in music, film and literature. The first International Music Festival "Warsaw Autumn" of the same year became a forum of new trends and tendencies in music. Later on, the flow and ebb of liberty interspersed with relapses of the communist regime eventually paved the way for the veritable explosion of freedom in 1989.

This process of change was greatly influenced by Poland's traditional religiousness and the long-term wisdom of its Catholic Church at the time, which created a significant space of relative freedom, an enclave, an intellectual underground for believers and atheists alike. The election of Polish Cardinal Karol Wojtyła as Pope in 1978 might have been a major turning point for this process in the whole of Central and Eastern Europe as well as in Poland. Seemingly parallel to that, ever since that first crack in the Curtain, Polish composers became increasingly interested in religious themes, and this resulted in a wave of new compositions that very clearly focused on the aspect of Christian spirituality. This phenomenon culminated between 1978 and 1989, which saw the appearance of the greatest masterpieces of sacred music (Górecki, Penderecki, Kilar), "marked by its contact with *sacrum*."

**Teresa Malecka**, prof dr hab. – music theorist, head of the Documentation Center of Krakow Composers Output; editorial head of „Teoria muzyki. Studia, Interpretacje, Dokumentacje”; in the years 2002 – 2008 - vice-rector for science and didactic of Academy of Music in Kraków, initiator and organizer of many international and Polish musicological conferences, as well as scientific editor of the books.

She has done research on Russian music (Rimski-Korsakov, Mussorgski) on contemporary Polish music (Penderecki, Górecki, Bujarski), on the word–sound relationship and that between the arts in a semiotic perspective. The author of books: *Słowo, obraz i dźwięk w twórczości Modesta Musorgskiego* (1996) and *Zbigniew Bujarski. Twórczość i osobowość* (2006), and almost 100 scientific articles; she took part in the international congresses and symposia (West and East Europe, USA, Poland). T. Malecka is the member of Polish Composer Union, Societe Internationale d'Histoire Comparee du Theatre, de l'Opera et du Ballet, the head of Artistic Board of Ludwig van Beethoven Easter Festival, in the years 2010- 2018 the member of the Board of National Center of Science.