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The Role of Religious Songs in the Public Speeches of John Paul II during his 1st Pilgrimage to Poland

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to examine the functions and circumstances of religious hymns and songs that accompanied the papal speeches during John Paul II's 1st pilgrimage to Poland. The paper is not about the musical setting of the liturgy, or the songs sung, for example, while waiting for the start of a meeting with the Pope, but about those songs that were performed during his speeches, sometimes interrupting, and sometimes complementing them. The research question is: what role did religious songs play in John Paul II's public speeches during his first pilgrimage to Poland in June 1979? In order to answer this question I analyzed available video (<https://jp2.tvp.pl>) and audio materials from that pilgrimage. Three homilies were used as research material: the homily delivered in Warsaw at Plac Zwycięstwa on 2 June 1979 and the homily given in Częstochowa on 6 June 1979, during the Mass for pilgrims from Upper Silesia and the Dąbrowa Basin, in addition to the homily delivered in Auschwitz-Birkenau on 7 June 1979. This is followed by the speech delivered at Lech Hill in Gniezno on 3 June 1979, the speech addressed to young people gathered at the Krakow Skalka on 8 June 1979, and, finally, conversations with young people gathered under the window at Franciszkańska 3 in Krakow.

KEYWORDS: religious song, homily, John Paul II, 1st Pilgrimage to Poland

STRESZCZENIE

Rola pieśni i piosenki religijnej w publicznych wystąpieniach Jana Pawła II podczas I pielgrzymki do Polski

Celem artykułu jest zbadanie funkcji oraz okoliczności śpiewania pieśni i piosenek religijnych towarzyszących papieskim wystąpieniom podczas I pielgrzymki do Polski. Nie chodzi przy tym o muzyczną oprawę liturgii czy pieśni śpiewane np. podczas oczekiwania na rozpoczęcie spotkania z papieżem, ale

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o te, które były wykonywane w czasie tych wystąpień, czasami je przerywając, czasami uzupełniając. Pytanie badawcze brzmi: jaką rolę odgrywały pieśni i piosenki religijne w publicznych wystąpieniach Jana Pawła II podczas I pielgrzymki do Polski w czerwcu 1979 r.? Aby na nie odpowiedzieć, przeanalizowane zostały dostępne materiały wideo (<https://jp2.tvp.pl>) z tej pielgrzymki. Jako materiał badawczy posłużyły trzy homilie: homilia wygłoszona w Warszawie na pl. Zwycięstwa 2 czerwca 1979 r., homilia wygłoszona w Częstochowie 6 czerwca 1979 r. podczas mszy św. dla pielgrzymów z Górnego Śląska i Zagłębia Dąbrowskiego oraz homilia wygłoszona w Oświęcimiu 7 czerwca 1979 r., a także przemówienie na Wzgórzu Lecha w Gnieźnie z 3 czerwca 1979 r., przemówienie skierowane do młodzieży zebranej na krakowskiej Skalce z 8 czerwca 1979 r. i wreszcie rozmowy z młodymi zgromadzonymi pod oknem na ul. Franciszkańskiej 3.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: pieśń religijna, piosenka religijna, homilia, Jan Paweł II, I pielgrzymka do Polski

1. Religious songs in homilies

A religious (or sacred) song,¹ according to the definition provided by a Catholic encyclopedia, is a “devotional Catholic song in a national language, performed by the faithful during the liturgy and extra-liturgical activities, of metrical and strophic structure, with a melody for group singing and repeated use” (cited in: Woźniak, 2015, p. 176). Although it accompanies the liturgy, it rarely appears during the homily and is generally not a part of it. A homily is a genre of utterance delivered within the liturgy, that is, during the Holy Mass, the celebration of the sacraments, provision of the sacramentals, the Liturgy of the Hours, and the Liturgy of the Word.² The name is derived from the Greek verb *homilein* (to talk) and signifies a conversation between persons who know each other, on various subjects, held in an atmosphere of freedom and trust (Przyczyna, 2013, p. 14; Przyczyna, 2020, p. 12). In the past, it often took the form of a rhetorical speech, but later it was recommended that the paradigm of the homily become a conversation (Zerfass, 1995, pp. 34–37). The same thought is conveyed by Father Gerard Siwek, who encourages priests not to behave differently at the pulpit than in normal conversation (cited in Sieradzka-Mruk, 2009, p. 363).

1 Throughout the text, when I use the term “religious song,” I refer to the Catholic faith, although hymns and songs are also performed by followers of other religions as well.

2 The sermon, on the other hand, as opposed to the homily, is preached during services such as May or June devotions, the Rosary or Bitter Lamentations (Przyczyna & Skowronek, 2020, p. 7).

Therefore, if the paradigm of the homily is to be a conversation, its form should also be dialogical rather than monological. Although most homilies are monologues spoken by priests, numerous elements of dialog are often present as well. This dialog in the homily can be actual or virtual. Real dialog, or actual dialog, occurs when the preacher has a conversation with the faithful, asks them specific questions and receives answers where feedback occurs between him and the audience.³ Virtual dialog, on the other hand, involves the preacher formulating various problems on behalf of the listeners, and proposing questions about issues of common concern. Recipients identify with these, expecting answers and solutions (Cygański, 2018, pp. 243–260). In a homily using virtual dialog, called a dialogical homily, various linguistic means are used to help achieve a dialogical effect. These include forms of address, i.e. direct addresses to listeners, rhetorical questions and meditative questions, verb contact operators, e.g. “you know,” “see,” “you understand,” question particles at the end of sentences, and many others.⁴ They have mainly conative and phatic functions (Jankosz & Przychyna, 2020).

John Paul II used these means, formulating issues in such a way that his recipients felt that they really participated in the homily and co-created it; although they did not utter the words, they inwardly dialoged with the Pope. But not only internally. Religious songs sung by the faithful during these homilies were an element of real, direct dialog, a concrete, verbalized, artistic response of the crowd to the papal words.

An example of this can be the homily delivered at the start of the papal pilgrimage in Warsaw. It has been recognized as one of the highlights of John Paul II’s visit. The tension at Plac Zwycięstwa was so great, and words spoken by the Pope so important, that the crowd apparently felt a need to exit from the role of a listener and directly respond to the content of the homily. It begins, “Together with you I wish to sing a hymn of thanksgiving to Divine Providence, which has enabled me to stand here as a pilgrim.” The entire text can be interpreted precisely as a hymn, a song with a very solemn character. Already at the outset, John Paul II asks the audience to participate in the singing of this song of thanksgiving, thus endowing his homily with the nature of a dialog. The feedback from the audience can be recognized, for example, in the very long applause they used to show which words were the most important to them. Applause, however, as it turned out, was not sufficient to express all their emotions.

3 This happens most often in homilies directed to children.

4 It should be added that various tropes and stylistic figures for establishing contact have been used by homilists for centuries, however often, they were not intended to build dialog, but had a primarily persuasive function.

Therefore, another type of dialogical behavior emerged: the singing of religious songs happened no longer in a symbolic way, as the Pope called for in the introduction, but literally. About halfway through the homily, John Paul II said words that are still very often quoted today:

For man cannot be fully understood without Christ. Or rather, man is incapable of understanding himself fully without Christ. He cannot understand who he is, nor what his true dignity is, nor what his vocation is, nor what his final destiny is. He cannot understand any of this without Christ (John Paul II, 1979).⁵

The audience started clapping at this point, which lasted for a long while. Later, the Pope added: "That is why Christ cannot be excluded from the history of man in any part of the globe, at any longitude or latitude of geography." It turned out that these were the words that everyone was waiting for. The applause lasted for several minutes. The Pope stood quietly, his hands lifted up, not trying to calm the crowd, but not provoking it to any reaction. He waited. His part of the dialog had been spoken. The crowd, therefore, answered with a song. Someone started singing: "Christ the leader, Christ the king, Christ the savior of us." A more voices joined in, the organ started playing. People living in Warsaw, in Poland, a place where the political system was trying to exclude Christ from their history, said with the words of the song that they did not agree, and that their leader and king was Christ, and no one else. Then they expressed something more, with another song, specifying exactly what their desires and expectations were. They sang: "We want God ..." The Pope did not join in the singing. It was not his role in this dialog. He spoke, and the faithful responded with song. Listening to recordings of the homily, it can be observed that the religious songs that appeared in this context also served an integrative function. More voices were joining those leading at the beginning, and the crowd became a community. It lasted about six minutes. It seems that these were important minutes of the homily and the entire pilgrimage.

Another homily accompanied by religious songs was delivered during the Mass celebrated at Jasna Góra for pilgrims from Upper Silesia and Dąbrowa Basin. The words that provoked the crowd to answer with singing were:

Dear brothers and sisters, hardworking people of Silesia, Zagłębie, and the whole of Poland, do not let yourselves be seduced by the temptation to

5 Retrieved from <http://polishfreedom.pl/en/document/homily-of-his-holiness-john-paul-ii>.

think that man can fully find himself by denying God, erasing prayer from his life and remaining only a worker, deluding himself that what he produces can on its own fill the needs of the human heart. “Man shall not live by bread alone” (Mt 4:4) (John Paul II, 1979).⁶

John Paul II knew that such a temptation existed, and that was an attitude the workers were simply encouraged for. They answered him, again, with singing “We want God,” that is to say – we do not succumb to this temptation. It is noteworthy that at first the crowd had problems with synchronized singing, some sang the refrain, while some were singing the stanza, and only after a while all the voices united in singing, which again testifies not only to the dialogical but also integrative role of religious song during John Paul II’s 1st pilgrimage to Poland. The singing of the song was also a form of prayer, a recitation of a request to God.

Another homily during which listeners held a dialog with John Paul II using a religious song was delivered in Auschwitz-Birkenau on June 7. The very place where this homily was delivered, irrespective of the liturgical context, called for particular solemnity and reflection. This was also the tone of the Pope’s words. Among the audience were many former death camp prisoners. It was 1979, and many of them were still alive – and they remembered. The Pope uttered many important words, but the crowd especially responded to something he repeated after Paul VI:

It is enough to remember that the blood of millions of men, numberless and unprecedented sufferings, useless slaughter and frightful ruin, are the sanction of the covenant which unites you in a solemn pledge which must change the future history of the world: No more war, war never again. It is peace, peace which must guide the destinies of peoples and of all mankind (AAS 57, 1965, p. 881).

First, applause rose and lasted for a very long time – a couple of minutes. The Pope tried to continue, but he noted that the listeners did not yet finish their response and that they needed more than just applause. A chorus of voices raised: “Before Thy altars we beseech Thee, Lord, bless the free homeland.” This song had been, for a time, the Polish national anthem, and therefore it brought out feelings of faith and patriotism. It was a response to the Pope’s words – a request for blessing for a free people, not one destroyed by war and hatred. It was also a loud collective prayer of the faithful gathered at the Auschwitz camp. Just as during the homily at Plac Zwycięstwa, also here can the integrative role of the singing

6 Retrieved from: http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790606_polonia-jasna-gora-operai.html

be seen. At first one could hear individual voices, but after a while the crowd became one. The song sounded more and more solemn and powerful. The Pope listened, did not sing, and waited. He was very focused. It seems that he also prayed with the song.

For the Pope, the reaction of the audience, expressed in singing together, was a direct indication which words were the most important to them, as well as what their needs, expectations and problems were. It is also worth noting that the religious songs sung by the faithful during the homilies delivered by the Pope were solemn and celebratory; often, they were hymns.

Religious songs during meetings with the young

Religious singing, although it emerged as John Paul II was delivering his homilies during his 1st pilgrimage to Poland, was more characteristic and elaborate during meetings of a less formal character. This applied primarily to his meetings with young people. In addition to sacred songs or hymns, also lighter religious songs were sung.⁷ The religious songs generally refer to biblical themes, however, they translate them into a more emotional language, appealing to the younger generation, who are the main performers of them.

The religious songs gave the papal speeches the quality of a dialog. In fact, they turned them into an actual one (e.g. the Pope would ask a question and the youth would respond with singing). During such meetings, John Paul II himself was often the initiator of the singing. Sometimes his voice was dominant, especially when he tried to show its possibilities, e.g. by singing in a different key. This can be seen very well in the recording of the meeting between the Pope and young people on Lech's Hill in Gdansk. The first part was official, with the Pope reading a speech he had prepared in advance, but in the second part he simply started talking to the young people. He laughed, joked, bantered with them, told anecdotes and sang. In addition to the many scouting and feasting songs which he sang with the faithful that evening, he also reached to religious songs. For example, he asked the audience to sing the song *Idzie noc, Bóg tu jest* [Night is coming, God is here] together. He also joined in when the faithful sang

7 The Polish language distinguishes between a solemn musical piece with words, *pieśń*, and a popular genre of song, *piosenka*. The latter are characterized by a "clear message content and uncomplicated melody with a dance meter. The characteristics of *piosenka* include rhythmic contrasts, syncopation, changes of meter or key, and basing the composition on the harmonic triad: tonic, subdominant, and dominant" (Wozniak, 2015, p. 182).

a religious pilgrimage song for him: *W krąg przez cały świat Duch mocą swą wieje* [Throughout the world the Spirit blows its power]. He remembered the forgotten words, and he added “Hallelujah” to the chorus. He continued singing even when the crowd had finished, encouraging them to sing more stanzas or repeat refrains. He held a dialog with the young people through songs and as one can see, he enjoyed it. He also spoke about the youth needing to teach him the songs as he had forgotten a lot. Subsequent songs emerged on the principle of exchanging the parts of the dialog. The songs built a platform for mutual understanding among the congregation and constituted a community. They emphasized the shared experiences. They broke the distance. One of them, probably prepared especially for the occasion, was sung by children to the tune of a Christmas carol *Oj Maluski, Maluski...* [O Thou Little One] telling about the Pope himself, and expressing a need to pray for him. The Pope commented on its individual verses, for example, he said, “Nice!” or “There you go!”

In a way, the religious song became a theme of another meeting with young people, at Skalka in Krakow. The Pope did not read a pre-prepared speech there. He spoke spontaneously and very emotionally. He referred, among other things, to the Sacrosong festival. He had initiated the event himself during his time as a bishop of Krakow.⁸ Now, as the Pope, he spoke in the same city:

Because Sacrosong is a workshop, a very interesting workshop, where Christian content and values meet with contemporary artistic means of musical expression. I wish Sacrosong continue to grow and not give up a single year. Every year, a festival. And if you are not careful, the orchestra of [the village] Zielonki will defeat you (John Paul II, in 2010, video recording).

The meeting at one point turned into a musical dialog with the Pope. His words, “You have to show the simple truth of the Gospel. You have to show who Christ is. You have to get close to Christ, and this is the way. That’s what I took from here. This is what you have taught me”, were immediately responded to with applause and singing: at first with pathos, with the words of the *Rota*, which the crowd, however, did not take up, and after a while, all together began to sing *My jesteŝmy na ziemi ŝwiatłem twym* [We are your light on earth]. The Pope joined in the singing, which was a marked difference from the sacred songs accompanying the homilies, where the Pope listened, but never sang himself. His role was different in

8 The first Sacrosong Festival of Religious Song was organized by Fr. Jan Palusiński, S.D.B., with the support of Karol Cardinal Wojtyła, at the church of St. Theresa in Lodz, in May 1969.

that case. Here the communication situation allowed him to participate and often to take the initiative. The nature of the songs was also different: they were generally so-called religious camp songs.

And finally, there was the papal window. It was during the First Pilgrimage that the tradition of evening meetings there was born. Each of them ended up with singing the *Appeal of Jasna Góra*. The song served as a prayer. Other hymns and songs were also heard during these meetings. Perhaps the most important one was *Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore* [*Barka*], dearly beloved by the Pope. During one of the evenings at Franciszkańska street, this song became the pretext for a friendly dialog with the young people.

“You know how to sing. Now everything is silent. When I praised them for singing, they are silent”, Pope John Paul II said.

“Sing with us”, the youth chanted.

“I don’t know how”, the Pope said. “But what?”

“*Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore.*”

“Well, sing.”

The Pope, with a microphone at his disposal, dominated the singing. After the song ended, he prompted the young audience again:

“And you only know one nice stanza?”

“Very nice, very nice”, the youth called out.

“But you can’t do the other one?”, the Pope asked provocatively.

The crowd responded with singing, which the Pope immediately joined. The same happened with the third and fourth stanzas. John Paul II encouraged the young people to perform (saying things such as “Well, you know the second one, but [I bet] you don’t know the third one”; “Alright, you do know three stanzas. Yet there is the fourth one”). Dialog, fun, integration, and community are concepts that come to mind as a conclusion of this meeting. The singing of *Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore* built bonds which proved to be very strong, and which shaped “JPII Generation.”

In front of the papal window at Franciszkańska 3, the young people willingly intoned a short chant with the following words: “*Niech żyje Ojciec Święty / przez wiele długich lat / a cała młodzież prosi / o uśmiech albo dwa*” [Long live the Holy Father / for many a long year / and all the young we are asking for / is just one smile, or more]. At the end, the Pope added: “That will be two smiles, then.” The chant was sung many times, with only the words “the young” being replaced by “Krakow” over time.

Conclusion

Religious songs accompanying the speeches of John Paul II during his first pilgrimage to Poland had many functions: dialogical, communal, humorous, unifying, and prayerful. They appeared in a liturgical context, and therefore, in sacred ritual situations, on top of informal and spontaneous situations,⁹ especially during the Pope's meetings with young people. The songs sung during the homilies were generally initiated by the faithful. The Pope did not sing with them, just listened.¹⁰ They helped the listeners to express their emotions and, above all, to respond to specific words of the Pope, to establish a dialog. Therefore, they greatly influenced the dialogical character of these homilies. They also turned into communal prayer of all those gathered, a public profession of faith and a form of community building.

The religious songs accompanying the extra-liturgical papal speeches were of a different nature. Many times they were initiated by the Pope, who then actively participated in the performance. They had a less solemn and festive character. They also became part of the dialog, sometimes very elaborate. They made the atmosphere of the meetings with the Pope similar to that of bonfires at religious youth summer camps and other cheerful evenings. They built strong bonds between the participants and brought them closer to John Paul II, who sang with his audience and, therefore, became one of them.

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- 9 John Paul II made public appearances in three different communicative situations during his 1st pilgrimage to Poland: ritual (sacred and secular), informal, and informal-spontaneous. The communication situation exerted a strong influence on the nature of the Pope's speeches, including the type of religious hymns and songs accompanying his speeches and homilies. For more on the communication situations, cf. Jankosz, 2018.
- 10 An exception may be the homily given at a Mass celebrated for alumni of a religious seminary, the liturgical altar service and young people. In a way, the Pope himself provoked the singing by referring to the words of the song: "I chodź ze mną zbawiać świat, dwudziesty już wiek" [And come with me to save the world, the twentieth century is here]. The crowd responded with applause and singing, which he also joined in. During the same homily, the *Wiele jest serc* [Many hearts] song and *Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore* were sung. The Pope responded to the singing of *100 lat* [Live a hundred years] with the words: "This is not a liturgical song."

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