

Abstract of a PhD dissertation:

### **The educational function of Polish Christmas songs of the 15th and 16th centuries**

The principal purpose of this PhD dissertation is to explore the educational aspect of Polish Medieval and Renaissance Christmas songs by means of presenting their universal and timeless message.

The first chapter shows the importance of music in people's life, gives definitions and examples of various types of songs, describes the biblical world of music and discusses the influence of the Bible on the sacred nature of music—songs in particular—of Christian Europe. What this chapter examines separately is Polish vocal compositions—together with their authors and collections—written from the Middle Ages to the 16th century.

The second chapter presents historical and cultural conditions that accompanied the birth of Polish Christmas songs, explains the term 'carol' and gives its typology, discusses the religious origins of Christmas carols, describes their character and form, and also takes a closer look at some European connotations of the first Christmas songs. The second chapter also tells us about the first carols created in the Polish territory, about the collections in which they were recorded and about the translations of the carols and their migrations to other countries and various denominations of Christianity.

The third chapter examines the concept of God and man present in Christmas songs in the anthropological and pedagogical context. What is discussed here is the carols collected by their authors, copyists or editors in particular hymn books (songbooks and prayer books) written in the 15th and 16th centuries.

The fourth chapter of the dissertation analyses the carols in the context of the relationship between God and man. The response of Christ's followers (*anabasis*) to His birth (*katabasis*) is an attitude of joy, humility, propitiation, petition and latria.

In the fifth chapter, the leading content of the analysed Christmas songs is grouped thematically and the world of values presented in them is explored. These mainly include the following: motherhood and fatherhood, the poverty and humility of the Son of God, the world of Christian virtues and a depiction of nature. Aesthetic and culture-forming values of the carols are also discussed here.

The Polish Christmas songs present an educational model based on truth, goodness and beauty. The image of God and man depicted in them emphasises the profound need to search for one's self, for the truth about birth and life, about discovering the meaning of

suffering and death, about existence aimed at a continuous journey towards the future, or eternity (*via hominis – via coelestis*). These songs present a world of the mundane and the unearthly, the immanent and the transcendent at the same time, the ordinary and the extraordinary. The world is shrouded in the aura of the sacred. The carols can teach, educate and move everyone who will allow them to take him or her into the mysterious world connected with foretelling both great things (*magnalia Dei*) and human things (*res humanae*).

Reflecting on the educational function of these ancient Polish Christmas songs was possible due to their rich content and interpretative potential in terms of existential references. As literary works, the Polish Christmas songs create a world of values, taking up the subject of human life in both its spiritual and psychophysical aspects. By depicting the world and the place of man in it, the carols clearly advocate a specific hierarchy of values and a conception of life. Moreover, they present situations in which every human being may be placed, and they pose questions concerning human existence, including those relating to the moral condition of man. The carols also show role models that people may look up to.

The dissertation has an interdisciplinary character for many reasons; it has been written in the context of biblical, apocryphal, patristic, theological, exegetical, literary, iconographic, musical, pedagogical, didactic and, finally, educational traditions. It also adopts phenomenological, axiological and psychological perspectives.