

Article

Flourishing through Prayer by Singing in a Liturgical Choir

Agnieszka Marek ^{1,*}  and Tomasz Lisiecki ²

¹ Department of Organisational Employee Management, Faculty of Social Sciences, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, 20-950 Lublin, Poland

² Department of Liturgical Theology, Faculty of Theology, University of Lublin, 20-950 Lublin, Poland; tomasz.lisiecki@kul.pl

* Correspondence: agnieszka.marek@kul.pl

Abstract: Prayer in human life enables directing attention to God and a transcendent goal beyond Earthly life. Singing has been present in the life of Israel since the oldest times, which is proved on the pages of the Holy Scriptures, in the Books of Exodus and Psalms. In the New Testament, there is a lot of encouragement to sing the glory of God in psalms and songs, as well as praising God Most High in Revelation. The Catholic Church is concerned with the quality of liturgical music through a number of recommendations and requirements defining the pieces that may become a part of the liturgy. Liturgical choir singing is a special form of common prayer. The aim of the present paper is to examine the effect of prayer by choral singing on human flourishing. The aim was achieved by analyzing recommendations of the Church on liturgical music, presenting the assumptions of the theoretical model investigating the effect of art on human flourishing, and then conducting empirical studies. Sixteen in-depth interviews were carried out with members of fourteen choirs. There were four groups of respondents according to their gender and family status. All obtained codes were organized into five main themes with four subcategories. They confirmed the assumptions of the model presented in the theoretical part and made it possible to identify the effect of choral singing on the performers' health and the improvement of their skills. In addition, they showed a direct relation between prayer and spiritual well-being when singing in a choir, a coherence of activities with values as well as the striving for happiness.



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1. Introduction

Believers' goals go far beyond the Earthly life. They have a need to refer to the highest Absolute, to God, who directs their life and enables them to think about the transcendent goal, which is eternal life. This usually takes place during a prayer, which can take various forms, from short ejaculatory prayers, through devoting one's thoughts and acts to the Creator, to contemplative prayer. The present article attempts to draw attention to singing prayer, which—as the Bible says—has been present in the history of Salvation since the earliest centuries. The choir performing sacred pieces during the liturgy is one of the communities which through prayer directs one's thoughts as well as creative activity towards God. Although a choir is a community of liturgical character, it also performs various roles in the lives of its members as well as the recipients of its songs. A properly run choir is the place of the religious formation of choir members, conductors, music animators and organists. On the other hand, it is a tool to evangelize culture and its recipients (Potacik 2022). The aim of the present paper is to study the effect of prayer by choral singing on human flourishing. To realize this aim, we present the importance of prayer by singing during the liturgy and the concept of human flourishing. After theoretical reflections, the analysis of the results of the qualitative studies conducted among the people involved in singing in liturgical choirs will follow. In-depth interviews constructed according to human flourishing dimensions allow us to examine the particular effects of choral singing

on different aspects of human flourishing. Being aware that attitudes to prayer and singing in different religious rites differ, we decided to examine the Catholic Church practice. That is why the article shows the indications of liturgical prayer and the practice of choral singing within the Catholic Church. Choosing members of liturgical choirs performing in the Catholic Church let us obtain better coherence of the theory with the empirical research.

2. Singing as Prayer to the Glory of God in the Holy Scriptures

The first time we read about singing on the pages of the Holy Scriptures is in the Book of Exodus. The reaction to the miraculous rescue of Israel by Yahweh on the Sea of Reeds is described by the inspired author in the following way: “And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant. Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea”. (Exodus 14.1–15.1). The essence of that event is a sequence of successive events: rescue of the Israelites by Yahweh, their act of faith in the Lord, singing the song to the glory of the Redeemer-Savior. Singing is then the response full of faith in the saving Yahweh. It is not hard to imagine that it was a song full of happiness and the overwhelming joy of people who had already believed, and who celebrated their rescue through singing.

Benedict XVI remarks that the very same song of rescue on the Red Sea appears at another important moment in the history of salvation. As we read in the Book of Revelation, “And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of God’s servant Moses and of the Lamb. . . (Rev 15.2–3). Benedict XVI emphasizes that “it is not the large and predatory Beasts equipped with powerful media that win but the sacrificed Lamb”. And then the song of Moses, the servant of God, which now becomes “the song of the Lamb sounds again, this time definitely” (Ratzinger 2012c).

This Lamb is Christ, who saved the world in the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection. It is for this reason that the Catholic Church makes this mystery present in each Eucharist while every year during the Paschal Vigil the song of Moses and the Lamb is sung as a response of faith to the final redemption in Christ. However, it should be realistically observed that after crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites still encountered new threats to life. That is why each new danger to their existence and each successive saving intervention of Yahweh called for a new song and this song was a new variant, or even variation, of the song that they had sung together with Moses.

A testimony of the multi-aspect subject of the prayer is the Book of Psalms. Joy, suffering, abandonment, human’s fall, and above all (and finally) God’s miraculous presence constitute the main subject catalog of psalms. We know from biblical sources that the prayer was performed in a vocal and instrumental manner. Reading the psalms we learn what instruments and ways of singing those were; we also know that there were various liturgical and folk melodies (Ravasi 2017).

Christians took over this way of praying from the Synagogue, although already in the new context of the history of salvation since Christ is for the Church this David who “teaches the new song and indicates the tone and manner of the proper adoration of God and union with the Heavenly liturgy” (Ratzinger 2012b). St. Paul understood this perfectly and this is why he wrote in the Letter to Ephesians, “. . . be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another [in] psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts” (Eph 5.18–19). And, therefore, the Church—being conscious that she has already been redeemed in Christ—sings a new song to the Lord.

In each liturgy, the Church celebrates her final salvation in Christ and glorifies Him by singing from the very depths of her soul, thus joining the heavenly choruses which forever and ever sing around the Throne of the Lamb (Rev 4.8–11). Therefore, the reason why Christians sing in the liturgy becomes obvious, and St. Paul expresses it in the following

words: “No one can say, “Jesus is Lord”, but by the Holy Spirit” (Cor 1.12,3). In the perfect relation of love between the Persons of the Holy Trinity, this “charity of God (is) poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost who is given to us” (Rom 5.5) makes it possible to sing and glorify God for His “wondrous work of our creation and the still greater work of our redemption” (*Missale Romanum* 1975, p. 312*). So, in the deepest understanding of the essence of glorifying God by singing, the major efficient cause is the Holy Spirit.

The latter breath (*pneuma*) is after all (symbolically) close to the manner of our singing, which takes place through breath, whereas no breath is considered as a lack of life signs. That is why the Church should call *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, especially while celebrating the liturgy in order to give praise to God, and not to herself. Unfortunately, a number of symptoms in the contemporary Church (also on the musical level) point to pastoral projects whose actions do not come from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but which are poor pastoral attitudes. In certain local churches, the liturgy may rather resemble mediocre musical shows, often of a secular character, than the proper liturgical music having the character of *musica celestis*. This mainly results from a lack of correct theoretical and musical formation of the clergy, church musicians as well as the faithful (Lisiecki 2018).

Sensitive to this problem, the Apostle to the Nations reminds the Church with all his power: . . . “I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12.2). What does St. Paul mean by using the phrase *logiké latreia*? While analyzing the consequence of the effect of music in various cultures and religions, Benedict XVI points out that for sacred music *logiké latreia* means that it is not dissolving oneself in uncontrolled intoxication, in sensuality, but a person’s integration with the higher heavenly sphere, and this is the kind of music which refers to Logos—Word—which became human in Christ. “That is why the Word—writes Ratzinger (2012c, p. 123)—gets us out of the isolation of individualism and includes us into the community of saints beyond time and space. All of our singing is always singing and praying together with this great liturgy encompassing all creation”. For Benedict XVI then, the word predominates consistently in liturgical music, and combined with music this word is a higher way of prophesying (Ratzinger 2012c).

Joachim Waloszek, a Polish theologian and musicologist, claims that the word combined with music reevaluates the word and transfers it from the level of pure rationality to the level of emotionality, will and intuition on the pre-rational and supra-rational level (Waloszek 2006). Wherever singing accompanies the word, something more than the correct understanding of words is important. J. Ratzinger explains this issue even more emphatically, “Faith is born out of listening to the word of God. However, where the word of God is translated into human language, a surplus remains of something unspoken and unspeakable which calls for our silence—the silence which finally changes it into song and also calls the powers of cosmos for help so that what was not said can be also heard” (Ratzinger 2012a, p. 524).

3. Liturgical Singing in the Present Teaching of the Catholic Church

The Catholic Church has treated music, and especially singing, with great respect. In her teaching, we can find innumerable documents by popes, councils, synods and bishops referring to so-called church music. Great theological interpretation (teaching) as well as many centuries of alive tradition remain a permanent testimony that treats music, especially in liturgy, with solemnity. Nevertheless, the common secularization touching upon various spheres of the Church also found its way into the music performed in churches. That is why it seems justified to ask a question about the essence and the further fate of sacral music, whose great part is music combined with words—that is singing.

Realizing her mission, the most important goal and the supreme law of which is the salvation of souls (*Codex Iuris Canonici* 1983, can. 1752), the Church is guided by two fundamental sources, namely the Word of God and Tradition. The liturgy celebrated by the

Church, together with liturgical singing, which is its part, “includes us into the community of saints, as well as trespassing times and places” (Ratzinger 2012c, p. 123). The constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* of the Second Vatican Council emphasizes that our union with the heavenly Church takes place when in liturgy “with one song of praise (we) magnify the one and triune God” (Second Vatican Council 1963, p. 112). The Catechism of the Catholic Church points to the fact that the Earthly liturgy transgresses the visible dimensions and teaches: “In the earthly liturgy we share in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem. . . With all the warriors of the heavenly army we sing a hymn of glory to the Lord” (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1993, art. 1090).

Therefore, a question arises about how the Church perceives the participation of the faithful in liturgy and what role music plays, especially singing. Answers to these questions can be found first of all in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. There are a number of documents of the universal Church as well as particular churches that extend their commentaries to the concise entries of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. However, for greater clarity and greater attention attached to the most important pillars of the teaching of the Church, the analysis of a number of additional commentaries and instructions is deliberately omitted.

At the beginning of the sixth chapter, the authors of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* emphasize that the musical tradition of the Church is distinguished from other forms of artistic expression in that the church singing combined with words is a necessary and integral part of the liturgy (Second Vatican Council 1963, p. 112). This special character is that the singing of the celebrant, the faithful, the choir and the cantor is not a mere addition or decoration, but it is literally a part of the liturgy. If, as claimed by the authors of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, singing is a necessary part of the liturgy, then the liturgy requires singing, which is a prayer and adoration of the Lord in the company of all angels and heavenly choirs. With them, we make a community during the celebration. D. Sabino specifies this thread: “. . . liturgy without singing certainly is “canonically” valid. . . . It is, however, deprived of one of its main anthropological components and hence it is simply deprived of a part of itself and, as a consequence, a part of its meaning” (Sabaino 2013, p. 93).

Church music—including liturgical singing—will be even more elated if it blends with the liturgical action. It needs to be emphasized that the solemnity of the song does not depend on the “greatness” of the composer of a given liturgical song or on the greatness of the esteemed vocal group singing during the Holy Mass, but on whether a given music piece is related to a given liturgical action, thus highlighting its proper sense. A lot of theologians and musicologists question the correctness of the expression *musica sacra* by the Vatican Council. That is why the adjective “sacred” should be understood as referring to music (singing) to the relation with the liturgical action, and above all to the esthetic or musical quality (Piqué i Collado 2017).

The Council also establishes two direct aims of music, which in the context of our biblical analyses seems obvious. These are the praise of God and sanctification of the faithful. These two factors are the essence of the proper liturgy (cult) as well as liturgical music. This is why Piqué remarks that “the ideal of liturgical music should be combined with the proclaimed and prayed Word. In this way thanks to this identification the faithful are led to piety, and—above all—they are prepared for the grace of the sacraments. We can, therefore, speak of sacramentality of music in the liturgy” (Piqué i Collado 2017, p. 100).

Next, the authors of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* point to the fact that the liturgical action takes a more dignified form when divine worship takes place solemnly, accompanied by singing. . . with the active participation of the faithful (Second Vatican Council 1963, p. 113). The essence of each celebration of the Eucharist is celebrating the salvific mystery, which is highlighted by the singing of the community participating in the liturgy. “Active participation” of the faithful does not mean excessive activity or realization of a number of tasks, but rather what we said earlier about *logiké latreia*—active involvement understood as a more conscious service to God, which is prayer.

Further on, the authors of the *Sacrosanctum Concilium* suggest caring about the development of singing groups, especially in cathedral churches (Second Vatican Council 1963, p. 113), while bishops and pastors are given the task of devoted care so that in each celebration of the liturgy where songs are performed all the faithful are able to actively participate in the proper manner (Second Vatican Council 1963, p. 114). Singing groups, choirs and liturgical scholas have existed in the Church for ages. Today it is hard to imagine a world without many valuable compositions written for vocal groups by ordinary and brilliant composers. Now the Church needs smaller groups of the faithful associated with vocal groups considering their personal musical and liturgical formation (education). Vocal groups (choirs, scholas) are also necessary for valuable liturgical works to sound in churches. Hence, the document consistently reminds us of the necessity of music formation in priests' seminaries, novices, Catholic schools, etc. as well as of the permanent liturgical formation of church musicians and members of church choirs (Second Vatican Council 1963, p. 115). Authors of the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy remind that the Gregorian chant is regarded by the Church as its own singing of the Roman liturgy and that is why it should take the first place among other ways of singing. Hence the next postulation is to finalize a model edition of books with this mode of singing.

At the end of this part, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* reminds us of the necessity for new church songs to appear whose texts will be congruent with the Catholic teaching and whose invaluable sources are the Holy Bible and the liturgical sources. This means composers who will serve the Church through their creative work. At this point, we cannot overlook the *Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Artists*: "The Church also needs musicians. How many sacred works have been composed through the centuries by people deeply imbued with the sense of the mystery! . . . In song, faith is experienced as vibrant joy, love, and confident expectation of the saving intervention of God" (John Paul II 2007, p. 498).

Summing up, it needs to be emphasized that *Sacrosanctum Concilium* contains only ten points; these are, however, the most important indications showing the weight of church singing, its essence and a need for it. In the context of the present studies, a few of the most important indications should be emphasized. Liturgical song is a necessary element of each liturgy celebrated in the Church. Since the salvific mystery of Jesus Christ, His Passion, Death and Resurrection are celebrated, singing is a prayer of adoration of the whole Church, both the Pilgrim Church and the Church already glorified in heaven. The purpose of this prayer is, on the one hand, giving praise to God and, on the other, sanctifying a person, which means entering into communion with God in the hope of reunion in eternity. It also follows from the Council's teaching that the prayer sung during the liturgy cannot be accidental. First of all, it must be related to a given liturgical action and it should possess high aesthetic features. Singing prayer should also be characterized by a reasonably perfect text (the Holy Bible, liturgical texts). A special role is played by vocal groups like scholas and polyphonic choirs. Their members are not treated by the Church as artistic guests during the celebration of the Eucharist but as small believing communities that are continuously improving their liturgical and musical workshop, in this way artistically representing the whole praying community.

4. Human Flourishing and Art

The concept that makes it possible to view the development of the human person holistically is human flourishing. It derives from Aristotle's eudaimonia and is connected with the quest for happiness. Since each person has their own definition of happiness (though the ways to achieve it have some common elements), each person also needs different conditions in which they can use their potential and achieve the desired happiness. In the Parable of the Sower, the grain gives 30-fold or 60-fold yields and only in ideal conditions does it give a 100-fold yield. Likewise, a person can use their potential in thirty, sixty or a hundred percent, depending on the conditions in which they live, work and develop. An element of human flourishing is human well-being, where the hedonistic and eudaimonic aspects can be distinguished (Ruggeri et al. 2020). Hedonistic well-being, according to

the assumptions of hedonism, focuses on achieving satisfaction from life, seeking positive sensations and avoiding negative feelings conducive to a lack of happiness (Ryff et al. 2021). Eudaimonic well-being, on the other hand, is connected with the realization of the human potential (Zheng et al. 2015) and it is directed at higher needs such as autonomy, aspiration for perfection, personal development, positive relations with others, acceptance of oneself and purposefulness in life (Ryff et al. 2021). Another dimension might be added here, namely spiritual well-being understood as “one’s satisfaction with the spiritual domain of life; specifically, satisfaction with one’s relationship with the sacred or divine” (Watkins et al. 2022). The last-mentioned dimension will be the most important determinant of well-being in the context of the paper’s goal.

People combine a number of roles and fields of activity. It is only a coherent development in such areas as family, work and social life as well as combining activity with its proper motifs that lead to flourishing (Mercado 2018). Mutual relations between activities in the family, at work, in religious communities and in education facilitate flourishing. Apart from the aforementioned factors, other spheres of life affect human flourishing (VanderWeele 2017). These are not necessarily so commonly experienced, for example, involvement in art. This thesis is confirmed by numerous studies showing the relation between art, well-being (Daykin et al. 2018; Hallam and Creech 2016; Hendry et al. 2022) and human development in various aspects like building a community (Helitzer et al. 2022), spirituality (Moss 2019), as well as the relation between singing and life (Thompson et al. 2022). In particular, this relation is more thoroughly studied by James O. Pawelski (2022), who defines positive humanities “as the branch of learning concerned with culture in its relation to human flourishing” (Pawelski 2022). American researchers Louis Tay, James O. Pawelski and Melissa G. Keith proposed a conceptual model of the effect of involvement in arts and humanities on human well-being and development (Figure 1). They investigated the influence of involvement through creating, presenting, studying, consuming or criticizing particular works of art, and claimed that various forms of involvement result in other effects in the area of human flourishing. The effects also vary depending on the activities undertaken, for instance, reading, listening or analyzing (passive activities) as well as active activities such as singing, playing musical instruments, painting or dancing (Tay et al. 2018).

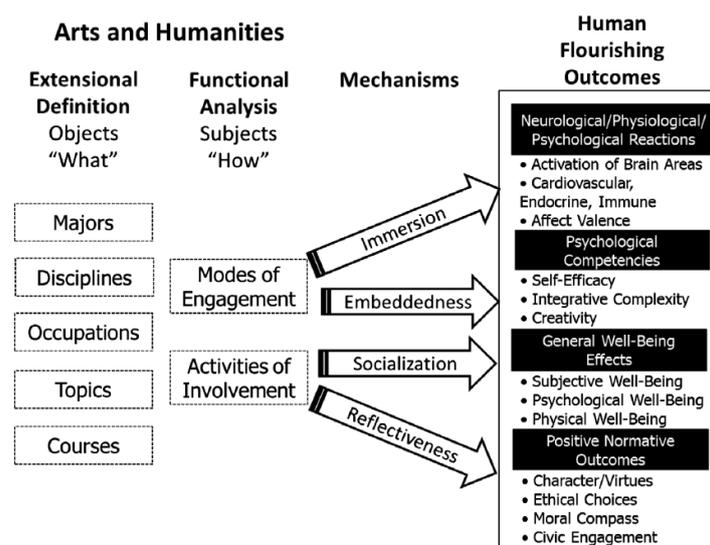


Figure 1. Relations of Arts and Humanities on Human Flourishing—conceptual model. Reproduced with permission from Tay, Louis, James O. Pawelski, and Melissa G. Keith. The role of the arts and humanities in human flourishing: A conceptual model. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*; published by *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 2018.

The authors distinguished four mechanisms, namely immersion, embeddedness, socialization, and reflectiveness, which enable the achievement of positive effects for the development of a person who gets involved in activities connected with art. They emphasize, however, that these mechanisms can also be applied in other areas of life, and they should not be identified only with involvement in art (Tay et al. 2018). In this model, immersion is understood by the authors as complete attention devoted to a given activity to such an extent that a person seems to be absent. This leads to the state of flow, which results in the appearance of pleasant feelings of aesthetic sensations (Tay et al. 2018). This state is possible to achieve in a choir thanks to collective activity where an individual uses their skills and abilities to get totally involved in prayer by singing. As a result, this activity releases joy and excitement in a choir member, thus leading to happiness (Tonnejck et al. 2008).

Embeddedness is connected with socio-cognitive processes enabling the creation of definite behaviors and habits as well as acquiring definite abilities. This can be an experience of mastery, direct encouragement or a positive psychological response. Embeddedness in art can bring fruit in the form of permanent benefits in other spheres of life, e.g., greater persistence in achieving goals or a stronger willingness for improvement (Tay et al. 2018).

Socialization is connected with the variety of roles adopted by an individual in society and in the culture where they function. This variety results in the enrichment of an individual's life through involvement in different activities and through the establishment of a network of new friends and people from whom they may receive support (Tay et al. 2018; Juan-Morera et al. 2023). Moreover, socialization is connected with building a community and sharing experiences through group activities such as playing in the theatre or singing in a choir (Tay and Pawelski 2022).

Reflectiveness is understood here as conscious cognitive and emotional processes leading to the development, strengthening or rejection of certain habits, to work on one's character, values or worldviews. The authors of the model relate reflectiveness to the establishment of a moral compass, involvement in civic behaviors and questioning the current practices leading to social change. This can be a change in the local community as well as on a global scale (Tay et al. 2018).

5. Methods of the Studies

The aim of the present studies is to indicate the way in which singing prayer, which is realized in choirs performing liturgical music, affects the integral development of a human person. To realize the research aim, individual in-depth interviews were conducted with choir members. The plan of the interview was constructed in a way that referred to the areas of human flourishing distinguished in the theoretical part of the model (Tay et al. 2018).

The research sample was chosen deliberately. The criteria of inclusion were: (1) active membership in the choir performing liturgical music and (2) the age above 18 so that the respondents themselves were able to express their willingness to participate in the research. Due to the subject of research—prayer with choral singing—it was important to conduct interviews with people performing liturgical music, which is directed to God. Additional criteria were gender and family status. This follows from different ways of perceiving both prayer (Tatala and Wojtasiński 2023) and leisure activity (Lee 2023) by men and women, as well as different obligations of single people in comparison to those who combine singing in the choir with family duties. As a result, four respondent groups were established, namely single men (group A), men with a family (group B), single women (group C), and women living in a family (group D). To keep the anonymous character, the respondents' answers were assigned codes according to the scheme where F means a woman, M means a man, S means a single person, and F means a person functioning in a family. In this way the following abbreviations were used: 1SM-4SM for group A, 1FM-4FM for group B, 1SF-4SF for group C and 1FF-4FF for group D. All respondents were informed of the aim and the scientific character of the research. All of them consciously agreed to take part in the research and to use their answers in a scientific paper.

Research on the functioning of human communities uses the method of participants' observation since according to the precursors of everyday life sociology, "If somebody is interested in what people think, feel and do, the best, reliable and complete method to acquire this information is sharing their experiences" (Wallerstein 2007, pp. 6–7). This is why the auxiliary method in the present study was participant's observation of the authors who were actively involved in the community of St. John Paul II Choir as the conductor (choirmaster) and a member of the choir.

The analysis of primary data was based on the study of transcriptions of the interviews. In the first step, we were looking for specific expressions that would allow us to confirm mechanisms of engagement and involvement described in analyzed model of relationships between art and human flourishing. Then the respondents' answers were coded line-by-line with the aim of finding the main subjects, important events and situations as well as recurring opinions. A similar method was used in studies on the effect of choir on its members' well-being by (Batt-Rawden and Andersen 2020). Next, the collected and coded research material was arranged in tables and submitted for analysis and interpretation. The interviews were conducted in the period from October to November 2023. Sixteen persons from fourteen different choirs gave the answers.

6. Research Results

In the description of the research results, we decided to organize it in accordance with the analyzed model of relations between art and human flourishing (Tay et al. 2018). For that reason, there is no additional paragraph about the noticed differences between particular groups of respondents, but they are described within particular themes. We distinguished five main themes with four subcategories, which are shown in Table 1. The subject of our research is prayer through singing in a liturgical choir, so we wanted to examine the meaning of prayer in general, and then the specificity of prayer within a choir and motifs that led our respondents to engagement in a liturgical choir.

Table 1. Table of code families.

Prayer	Mechanisms
Mystical experience	<i>Engagement</i>
Devoting all things in life to God	Immersion
Saying words	Embeddedness
Prayer within a choir	<i>Involvement</i>
Words are not enough to praise God	Reflectiveness
Additional window to God	Socialization
Deeper contact with God's word	
Devoting more time to God	Human flourishing outcomes
Deeper experience of a liturgy	<i>Connected to singing in a choir</i>
Helping others in liturgy	Physical well-being
Formation of choir members	Skills
Hardships	Character features
	Creating sth with others
Motifs	Musical taste development
Belonging to the Church	
Enliven the parish	
Interest in liturgical music	<i>Connected to prayer within a choir</i>
Musical traditions in family	Integrative complexity
Religious family	Spiritual well-being

Table 1. Cont.

Prayer	Mechanisms
Conductor's invitation	Subjective well-being
Friend's invitation	
Realization of own vocation	
Willingness to praise God	
Own passion's realization	

Source: own elaboration on the basis of research results.

6.1. Choral Singing as a Prayer

We decided to start with an analysis of a broader category, which is prayer and after that examine the narrower one, which is prayer within a choir. The analysis revealed a different understanding of prayer itself. A mystical experience connected to a deep reflection, intensive emotions or total immersion in the relation with God is rare and hard to achieve (2SM, 3FM). The answer to that hardship is to pray by giving all activities to God and to pray with words, music, or even with body posture (3FM, 1SM, 2SM). In that sense, all actions, from focusing on God, through being open to other people, to deep meditation, can be perceived as a prayer (1SM).

When asked about the reasons for the choice of a liturgical choir, the respondents indicated their previous experience. Some respondents mentioned being brought up in a religious family (1SF, 2SM) or having parents who sing or used to sing in different choirs (3FM, 4SF). They also encountered many years of involvement in the life of the Church, both in scholas and music groups in childhood (3SF, 4SF, 2FF), in academic ministry (2FF, 4FF), in formation communities such as Light-Life Movement (3FM, 1FF, 1SF) or in Father Pio prayer group (2SF). That long-term engagement led two respondents to the willingness to enliven the parish community (1FF, 2SF) and for others was deeper involvement in building the Church community (3FF, 3FM). The motifs for involvement in a choir included personal passion realization (3SF, 4SF) and interest in liturgical music (2SM, 1SF) and the liturgy itself (1SM). An important reason for singing in a liturgical choir was the desire to praise God (3FM, 4SF) or realize one's vocation by using a given talent (1SF, 2SF, 1FM, 3SM) or even paying a debt for the talent (3SF, 2FM). People engaged in more than one project needed a personal invitation from the conductor (1SM, 2SM), for others, a friend's invitation was a trigger to join a choir (2SF, 3SF, 2FF, 3FF). While the mentioned motifs emerged in all four groups of respondents, the interest in liturgical music and in the liturgy itself was present only in groups A and C which involved single people.

Describing prayer through singing in a choir respondents highlighted that for them it is a better form of praying than just saying words (4FF). They often mentioned the quotation attributed to St. Augustine: "who sings, prays twice" (3FF, 2SF, 1SM, 3SM). They also noticed that the spoken word is not enough to express the glory of God or that music is a better way to praise the Lord (1SF, 3SF, 2SM). One of the choristers said: "the music itself also expresses my faith and my love to God, sometimes it's difficult for me to express it in words and then I express it with music. For sure, this spiritual aspect is obviously connected with words, but at times it is sort of easier to sing these words than simply say a prayer" (1SF). Respondents also feel that their involvement in the choir is a way to get closer to God (3SM), it is an additional window to heaven that is available for the choristers (2SM).

Respondents indicated that their prayer is a part of the liturgy. That is why, the choice of particular pieces is vital. It is really important that the songs performed by them have their sources in the Holy Bible (1SF, 2FF) and they are liturgical pieces closely connected with particular parts of the liturgy (1SF, 2SM). According to respondents, conductors of a number of choirs place emphasis on formation during study days, retreats and music workshops (1SF, 3FF, 4SM). One of the female members says, "our choir is very absorbed in prayer, we don't sing just for singing itself since retreats and study days are organized for us and this is also very important for me" (3FF). During rehearsals, choristers also talk

about the lyrics of chosen pieces and try to understand the meaning of God's words to be able to share them through their singing. Finally, they enter a specific role based on scenes from the Gospel. "It is sometimes not easy to get into such a role and the text which one is singing. For example, the Passion is not only singing for singing itself but transferring the proper emotions. I sing in a choir sentencing Jesus to death and this is horrible from my perspective as a Catholic. Still, I have to get into this role" (4SF), says one of the female members. Another person, also referring to the singing of the Passion, pointed out that he experiences this scene as if Jesus was dying at this very moment, and through this prayer, he empathizes with the Savior's feelings as if they were happening live (4SM).

By singing in a choir one can also affect the life of others and try to get them closer to God. Personal testimony is important, especially with the speeding secularization and with people turning their backs on God. The respondents emphasized that when they invite their friends to the liturgy prepared by the choir, they create a possibility for those who are not religiously involved to experience the beauty of singing prayer (4SF) and "help them experience something mystical, help them weep" (3FM).

The last but not least theme that emerged during interviews was hardships during the prayer. One of them is the necessity to focus on too many technical matters (4SM, 4SF), unexpected distractions caused by external factors (2SF) or distractions caused by improper behavior of the choir members (3FM, 1FF). Respondents in groups B and D mentioned that it is hard for them to find time for the rehearsals because they sometimes feel as if they escape from their family (3FF) or have to resign from spending time with their family (1FF), for people from groups A and C it was harder to find any difficulties that distract them from singing in a choir. Some of them had to choose between the choir and meeting friends or taking other hobbies (1SF) or had no idea how to use leisure time otherwise (4SM). One of the respondents from group C said that she organizes everything else in a way that allows her to participate in rehearsals and liturgies with her choir (3SF).

To sum up, analyses of the interviews confirmed that many postulates from *Sacrosanctum Consilium* regarding liturgical music are applied in the practice of the functioning of liturgical choirs. Although respondents perceive prayer differently, their motifs for praying by singing in a liturgical choir are strongly connected with their faith, praising God and serving the community. Even if they have to go through different difficulties, they decide to participate in choir activities for the greater good.

6.2. Mechanisms of Engagement and Involvement

The next step of the analysis was checking if the choirs' members experienced all four mechanisms included in the model which are immersion, embeddedness, socialization and reflectiveness. Getting engaged in singing choristers immerses in singing by devoting all their attention to it. That activates the brain areas and muscles involved in singing and allows articulating proper sound and concentrating entirely on singing. It also enables one to escape from everyday life and its problems when a given song is performed (1SF, 4FF). The choir members emphasized that they have to take care of the body posture and the proper way of breathing to oxygenate the whole brain (1SM, 1SF, 3SF). It is worth noticing that the concentration on technical issues emerged only in groups A and C which may suggest that single people are even more immersed in singing than those having families.

Analyzing the content of the interviews we can also find such opinions pointing to embeddedness manifested in the establishment of specific habits and skills. The respondents emphasized that they could improve their workshop by learning from the masters whom they consider their conductors to be (1SM, 2SF, 2FF). They also indicated that singing requires the proper training of the muscles, which—when unused—lose their properties (1SM, 1SF, 4SF). Moreover, participation in rehearsals teaches concentration on what is here and now, on the music score, the text and the harmony, and thus also inner discipline (1SF, 4SF). Again, people from groups A and C are more focused on technical issues than people from groups B and D.

Systematic participation in rehearsals and various kinds of celebrations creates responsibility for one's own acts and co-responsibility for the whole choir. In return, they become a part of the community, which satisfies their sense of belonging and enables interactions with the group members. Then the process of socialization occurs, and the appearing bonds facilitate the functioning in everyday life, which is emphasized by the respondents. They remark, however, that although the choir members socialize elsewhere during the rehearsals on various occasions (3FF), they are interested in what is happening in the lives of the other members (1SM, 2FM), and the strength of these bonds varies. When one has sung for many years, one can establish friendly relations (3SF, 4SF, 4FM, 2SM), count on help in prayer (1FM, 2SF, 1SF), as well as help in everyday hardships and problems (4FM), which is a specific sign of love (1SM) and an expression of the functioning as a community (1SF, 4FF).

From the perspective of the research aim, the most important process out of the four mentioned in the analyzed model is reflectiveness. It can be experienced by the choir members while directing their thoughts to God through liturgical songs. For many of them, singing in the choir is closely connected with the sense of life, which is faith in God (1SF, 2SF, 3SF, 4SF, 1FF), eternal happiness (3FM), and love (1SM, 2SM, 4FM) as well as being a good person (3FF), being with others and helping others (1FM, 3FF). People from groups B and D declared that the family is the sense of their lives (3FM, 4FF) while people from groups A and C mentioned living here and now and discovering the goal of the present experiences (4SM) or singing (4SM).

6.3. Human Flourishing Outcomes

6.3.1. Outcomes Connected to Singing in a Choir

By referring the obtained responses to the presented theoretical model, one can identify specific outcomes in the area of human flourishing brought about simply by singing in a choir. Some of them seem to be independent of the character of the choir, for example, the proper technique of singing or health benefits are simply related to group singing, which—according to studies—decreases the secretion of stress hormones, and through the decreased stress level indirectly releases immunological mechanisms responsible for recovery processes in cancer diseases (Szyszkowska 2019). Those findings are confirmed in our research. The first group of benefits is connected to physical well-being. A respondent who works as an organist underlined improvement in voice hygiene and voice physiology as well as muscle tension and stretching (1SF). Others mentioned better brain oxygenation which led to better mood and functioning (1SM) or ability to relax (4SM). Only respondents from groups A and C mentioned benefits influencing physical well-being.

Singing in a choir itself affects one's skills as well as features of character. A person learns to be systematic (4SF) and improves musical techniques (1SM, 1SF, 3FF) as well as develops musical taste (4SM, 4SF). Conductors teach the choristers how to sing properly in a classical mode and how to improve the voice emission to obtain better harmony within the whole choir (1SM, 3FM).

The necessity to adjust the dates of rehearsals and performances makes it possible to acquire the ability to manage time, establish priorities, and organize work and life in such a way that all duties can be fulfilled (3FF, 4FM). Moreover, it contributes to the ability to cooperate, and subordinate to the manager of the group, that is the conductor. Another advantage is overcoming one's shyness or egoism (2SF). A choir member does not focus on their individual happiness, though singing may contribute to the experience of it, but with singing they contribute to the common good.

Responsibility was the feature that respondents mentioned in different contexts. They articulated their responsibility on different levels starting from being on time for rehearsal (1SM), attending all rehearsals (4SM), and being prepared to sing by knowing the score (4SF, 2SM, 4SM) through helping others in learning the melody (4FF) to responsibility for the particular voice group (alto, tenor) or a whole choir and its harmony (3FM, 4FF). Respondents also mentioned that singing in a choir is better than singing solo because they

could create beauty together and the final harmony and beauty of the music sometimes transcend their expectations and give them enormous satisfaction (3SF, 4SF, 2SM, 4SM). Men from groups A and B underlined that they had to come and prepare well because the number of men in their voice was small and all the choir depended on them. Women from groups C and D more often perceived their responsibility for a choir and singing as a whole, as a group.

Some respondents mentioned that their family members' support is one of the benefits of singing in a choir. Their families often take part in liturgies, concerts and events organized by the choir (1FM, 3FM, 4SF). A theme that emerged only in groups B and D is that parents who sing in a choir encourage their children to sing in the same choir (3FF, 3FM), and they treat this time as spending free time and sharing passion with their children.

6.3.2. Outcomes Connected to Prayer within a Choir

Integrative Complexity

It is possible to distinguish the benefits that are strictly connected to the act of common prayer through choral singing, directing one's activities and using one's talents for God. The decision to belong to a choir is an expression of integrative complexity since while being conscious of their values and motifs, a person makes an autonomous choice based on their interests and abilities. It should, however, be emphasized that the decision to join a choir performing songs during liturgical celebrations is also influenced by the willingness to praise God and serve the community, whether it is the parish community, or a broader one, e.g., during the World Youth Days or Taizé Meetings. Making the decision to join a choir a person makes a long-term pledge requiring responsibility for their behavior and, at the same time, for the community which they join. Reflectiveness is expressed in the proper arrangement of priorities, which makes it possible to see the value of involvement in a liturgical choir. "In principle, the superiority of this form (liturgical, and not secular choir) is that I do not realize my own ambitions, and the music performed acquires value due to its purpose. I treat singing as service to the parish community. Naturally, I derive joy from it and I am happy with successes and praises, but they are of secondary importance to me" (3SF).

Integral complexity requires an agreement between values and everyday behavior. Singing during the liturgy demands choristers to behave in a dignified manner during the celebration and concentrate on particular songs. At the same time, it gives one the awareness that they should present a certain model for others (2SF). This is underlined by the choir members pointing to an irreproachable moral attitude. "When you are in a choir, you are a certain model for the environment. Not any choir, but a Catholic one. I brought a few people to the choir but I knew that they were morally all right; I had to know them very well to suggest that they sing in the choir" (2FM). This agreement between the values and behavior led one of the respondents to claim "this is so true and I thought that it also has the dimension of testimony. The fact that maybe my daughter needed to see that involvement in the choir is important for me. She is interested in it and she supports me. It might be the way to win her for Church" (1FF). She understood that her authenticity in praising God during the liturgy and her engagement in the parish choir might be the way of evangelization for her adolescent children. This theme emerged only in group D.

Human flourishing is closely connected with striving for happiness. When asked about the degree to which singing in the choir contributes to their happiness, the respondents noticed a number of aspects. One of them stated that singing in the choir is one of the small parts of happiness since he can cherish a lot of things in the world and all of them build his happiness (4FM). The respondents also emphasized the aspect of belonging to the choir community, acceptance by the other members and common values (2FM, 4SM). Through reference to God and the transcendent goal—eternal happiness—an individual is able to get more involved in singing in spite of any problems they encounter. Despite being tired from professional jobs and duties at home (1FF) and despite the necessity to give up rest

(3FF), meetings with friends (1SF) or any other interesting projects (2SM), members of the choir are able to find time for rehearsals and participation in liturgy together with the choir.

Spiritual Well-Being

Improvement of spiritual well-being seems to be the outcome with the strongest connection to prayer by singing in a liturgical choir. First of all, as stated earlier, being a liturgical choir member leads to a deeper engagement in the Church and devoting more time to God. It influences spiritual development through meditation on the Bible, immersion in sacred text and deeper experience of the liturgy. Some conductors even organize study days and spiritual retreats to integrate their choir members and to have a separate time for training in singing and to deepen their spiritual life. In a community based on Christian values, they can freely manifest their faith and praise the Lord without fear that somebody would criticize their beliefs. All of that leads to a deepening relationship with God and in some cases even to change in life. One of the respondents pledged that she could not accept the conflict of values in her life and she resigned from non-sacramental union with her partner to leave in agreement with the Church's teaching (2SF). The other one indicated that he experienced God's grace in a difficult life situation and now he is paying the debt by helping others with all kinds of problems including those with faith (1FM). Moreover, the common prayer is an integral part of the liturgy, a window to heaven thanks to which the choir members have a sort of a special connection with saints and with God Almighty (2SM).

Taking all code families into consideration, we built a model similar to the model described in the theoretical part but adjusted to our research. Our model is presented in Figure 2.

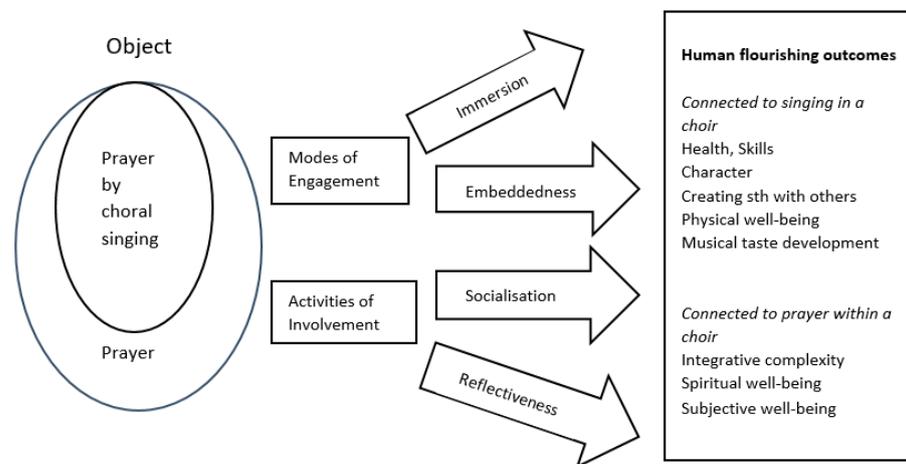


Figure 2. Relations between prayer by singing in a liturgical choir and human flourishing. Source: Own elaboration on the basis of research results and Tay, Louis, James O. Pawelski, and Melissa G. Keith. “The role of the arts and humanities in human flourishing: A conceptual model”. *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 13, no. 3 (2018): 215–225.

7. Conclusions and Limitations

The size of the present paper and the definite research aim does not make it possible to present the whole research material. On the basis of the cited opinions expressed by people involved in singing in liturgical choirs, one can definitely state that it has a positive effect on human flourishing. The results of the present studies allow us to state that faith in God is a fundamental motif of involvement in a liturgical choir for the respondents. Performing songs based on the Holy Bible and other liturgical texts enables a deeper relation with the Creator, praising Him and showing gratitude for exceptional musical talent. Thanks to prayer in the community of the choir, the singers realize their Christian vocation, beginning with their spiritual development, through work on their

limitations, to the evangelization of their environment. Involvement in choral singing is an expression of their service for the benefit of the Catholic Church (*logiké latreia*) and a form of building a parish community. According to the results of studies, involvement in liturgical choir singing expresses spiritual maturity resulting from many years of formation, which has often continued since childhood and is still present during study days, retreats and workshops.

Opinions expressed by the studied choir members indicate a high level of realization of recommendations included in the teaching of the Catholic Church on liturgical singing. Summing up the above reflections, it should be emphasized that through choir singing prayer the ways of engagement (immersion and embeddedness), as well as the activities connected with involvement (socialization and reflectiveness), are realized. Choir singing as a group activity requiring specific skills affects health aspects and develops the necessary habits and mastery of the singers. Prayer by singing in a liturgical choir contributes to the increased coherence of motifs with behavior and to spiritual well-being.

The basic limitation of the present studies is the fact that they were conducted on a small sample (16 persons), which does not make it possible to generalize the results to the whole population. Another drawback, which, however, allowed us to maintain the coherence of the research, is the embeddedness of the research in one religious rite, which is the Catholic religion. It would be interesting to see which human flourishing is present in different religious rites and traditions.

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