THE SERVICES OF THE HOURS - THE GREAT BOOK OF THE HOURS - GREAT HOROLOGION

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APPENDIX :

BELL-RINGING : RUBRICS ON BELLS[1]

– an excursus –

– from Rostislav Gan's explanations of the Divine Services
Translated and edited from the Russian by Presbyter Victor Sokolov, and Kirill Sokolov (from the Holy Trinity Cathedral San Francisco web-site, and slightly edited).

The ringing of bells serves two functions in the Orthodox Church. The first is to announce the beginning of various parts of the services to those Faithful that are absent from the church.

THE VARIOUS MANNERS OR WAYS OF BELL-RINGING

1) **Blagovest'** – Literally "Good News". This is the measured striking of one bell for the beginning of a service.[2]
2) **Zvon** – Literally "Peal". This is the ringing of all bells.
3) **Dvuzvon** – Literally "Double Peal". This is the ringing of all bells, then an interval of silence, followed by a second ringing of all bells. Simply put, this is the ringing of all bells, twice.
4) **Trezvon** – Literally "Treble Peal". This is the ringing of all bells, three times.
5) **Perezvon** – "Chain -Peal". This is the striking of each bell several times, beginning with the largest bell, and proceeding to the smallest bell. This chain is repeated as long as necessary. This is used before any blessing of water.
6) **Perebor** – "Chain -Toll". This is the slow striking of each bell once, beginning from the largest bell, and proceeding to the smallest bell. After the chain, all the bells are rung, together. This is repeated several times. This is also called burial or funeral ringing.

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[1] From the web-site of Holy Trinity Cathedral in San Francisco, California : http://www.holy-trinity.org/liturgics/on.bells.html

[2] Note : *The duration is usually given as the length of time taken to recite, at a slow pace, Psalm 50.*

Bell Ringing at All-night Vigil

The **Blagovest'** is rung before the service, and is immediately followed by the **trezvon**. At the beginning of the **six psalms,** or before it, the **dvuzvon** takes place. Immediately before the reading of the **Gospel,** the **zvon** takes place. During the **Magnificat,** the bell is struck nine times. At the conclusion of the Vigil, the **trezvon** is rung.[3]

Bell Ringing at the Divine Liturgy

The **Blagovest'** is rung at the **appointed time,** and ceases at the beginning of the Hours. At the end of the **sixth hour,** the **trezvon** is rung. At the **Creed,** which consists of 12 parts, the bell is struck **twelve times** in an unhurried fashion, to inform those Christians that are absent that the time of the Consecration of the Holy Gifts approaches.[4] **After the Divine Liturgy,** the **trezvon** is rung.

At the Lenten and Royal Hours

Before the Hours during Great Lent, and at Royal Hours, the number of times the bell is struck corresponds to which hour is being read. At the **Third Hour,** the bell is struck **three times** ; at the **Sixth Hour, six times** ; and at the **Ninth Hour, nine times.**

Vespers of Holy Friday

At the bringing-out of the **Plashchanitsa,** and before the **procession** around the Church, the **perebor** is rung, and immediately thereafter, the **trezvon.**

Bell-Ringing at Funerals

The **perebor** is used at the **carrying-out** of the deceased from the temple for burial. There is **no** trezvon after this bell.

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[3] *Likely beginning during the Great Doxology.*

[4] *However, other authorities indicate that the bell be rung instead during the Anaphora.*

Bell-Ringing at Molebens with the Blessing of Water

When the Cross is immersed into the **water**, then a **short trezvon** takes place.

Bell-Ringing at the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy

The **Blagovest'** is sounded at the **appointed time.** When the **Hierarch approaches** the Temple, then **all the bells** are rung. When the Hierarch **enters** the Temple, then the **ringing stops**, and the **Blagovest'** is resumed until the beginning of the **vesting** of the Hierarch. At the beginning of the **Sixth Hour**, the **trezvon** is sounded unless there is an ordination to the rank of reader or subdeacon, in which case the **trezvon** is sounded **after** the bishop's prayers before the Divine Liturgy.

On Bells and their Ringing

The striking of the "Dormition" bell signalled the beginning of the solemn peal of church bells from all the Temples in Moscow on the great and bright Paschal night. The Russian Orthodox populace so loved the ringing of church bells, that they enriched it with ingenuity and art.

The distinctive trait of Russian bells is their sonority and sweet sound, achieved by various means :

- an exact proportion of bronze and pewter, often with silver added (i.e. correct casting) ;
- the proper height and width of the bell)i.e. correct instrument proportions) ;
- the exact thickness of the bell walls ;
- the proper hanging of the bell ; and,
- the correct casting of the clapper, the manner of fixing it to the bell, and many other means.

The clapper is the actual striking component of the bell, and situated within it. A Russian bell is distinguished from its western European counterpart first of all in that the bell itself is permanently fixed, and the clapper inside of it moves freely, striking the side of the bell, and producing its ring. It is moved by a rope, wire, or cord.

In Russian, the clapper is characteristically called the "tongue" of the bell, making the bell's sound comparable to a living voice. For the Russian Faithful, bells became tongue, voice, and trumpet. Indeed, what could the pealing of bells be called, other than a speaking mouth ?

On great Feast-days they remind us of heavenly blessedness. On saints'

days they tell us of the unending rest of the holy dwellers-in-Heaven. During the Passion Week, they remind us of reconciliation with God through Christ the Saviour. During Bright Week, they announce the victory of life over death, and the eternal unending joy of the life to come in the Kingdom of Christ.

Is this not a real mouth speaking, when a bell informs us of every hour, of its passage, along with a reminder of eternity, when "there should be time no longer (*Apocalypse 10:6*)".

Announcing the glory of the name of Christ, ringing out both day and night (mostly from above God's Temples), the pealing of bells by itself reminds us of the words of Almighty God, spoken through the Old Testament Prophet Isaiah, "I have set watchmen upon your walls, O Jerusalem, who shall never hold their peace day or night, (*making*) mention of the Lord (*Isaiah 62:6*)". It is not by coincidence that the pagans, who used to hear the peal of bells, often said, "It is the voice of the Christian God speaking".

The sound of a single church bell is solemn and sublime, while the pealing of several bells more or less in concert is even more majestic-sounding. The mighty peal of bells has an effect on our interior sensibilities, and awakens our souls from spiritual sleep.

And what sorrowful, oppressive, and most often irritating feelings are called up by the pealing of bells in the heart of the evil and impious apostate.

The ringing of bells summons up a feeling of uneasiness, and spiritual anguish in the heart of the unrepentant sinner ; while on the other hand, in the heart of the believer seeking peace with the Lord God, the ringing of church bells gives rise to a peaceful, joyful, and bright mood. One may thus determine the status of his soul by the sound of ringing church bells.

We can single out many examples in life, when a person, wearied of life's struggles with sorrow, has fallen into a state of depression and hopelessness, and decided to attempt the taking of his own life, then suddenly hears the sound of church bells. The willing suicide shudders, trembling at his own self, and involuntarily protecting himself with the Sign of the Cross, remembers his Heavenly Father, and awakens new noble sensibilities in his heart – and he that might have perished is reborn to life forever. So there is a wonderful hidden power in the striking of a church bell that penetrates deeply into the human heart.

Having come to love the ringing of church bells, the Russian Orthodox people have united to it all their festive and sorrowful events. For this reason Orthodox church bell-ringing not only signals the start of church services, but it also serves as an expression of joy, sorrow ,and solemnity. And from this have arisen the various ways of ringing bells with their names and meanings.

THE TYPES OF BELL-RINGING

Church bell-ringing falls into two basic categories – calling to worship (Blagovest'), and bell-ringing proper (zvon).

Call-to-worship

The call-to-worship (Blagovest') is achieved by the measured striking of one large bell. By this type of ring, the Faithful are called to gather for services in God's Remple. This ring is called blagovest' because it announces the "good news" of the beginning of divine services.

The call-to-worship is rung in the following manner. First, the bell is struck three times slowly (until the ring all but dies away) after which it is struck at a measured pace. If the bell be very large or even amazingly huge, then the clapper is swung to strike first one side of the bell, and then the other. However, if the bell is comparatively not so large, the clapper is tied so that it is near one edge of the bell, and a system is worked out so that it may be rung by depressing a board with the foot, thus moving the clapper.

There are two types of call-to-worship :

- the normal or frequent striking of the largest bell ; and
- the Lenten, or slow striking of the second largest bell – on the weekdays of Great Lent.

If the Temple has several large bells, as may be the case in some cathedrals and large monasteries, then these large bells are named according to their designation – festal bell, Sunday bell, polyelei bell, weekday bell, and fifth or small bell. Usually in parish churches, there are no more than two or three large bells.

Bell-ringing Proper

Bell-ringing proper is the ringing of all or several bells at once. Ringing all the bells is divided into the following categories :

Treble Peal (Trezvon)

- All the bells are rung, then after a short interval all the bells are rung a second time, then again a short interval after which all the bells are rung a third time, i.e. all the bells are rung three times or in three sessions.
- The treble peal expresses Christian gladness and solemnity. (In our time the treble peal has come to mean not only a ringing of all the bells three times, but also a general or patterned ringing of all the bells.)

Double Peal (Dvuzvon)

– All the bells are rung twice, i.e. in two sessions.

Change-Ringing (Perezvon)

– Each bell is rung in turn (one or several times for each bell), starting with the largest bell to the smallest, and repeated many times.

Reverse Change-Ringing (Perepbor)

– A slow striking of each bell only once, starting with the smallest bell to the largest, after which all the bells are rung together once. This is repeated many times.

THE APPLICATION OF BELL-RINGING AND ITS MEANING

Bell-ringing at All-night Vigil

1. Before the beginning of Vigil – call-to-worship, followed by treble peal.
2. At the beginning of the Six Psalms – double peal. This double peal announces the beginning of the second part of the Vigil service, Matins (*and expresses the joy of the Nativity of Christ, the incarnate second Person of the Holy Trinity, our Lord Jesus Christ. Matins begins, as we are all aware, with the doxology of the angels to the shepherds in Bethlehem, "Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to Men," a direct reference to the Nativity*). The Russian people often call this the "second peal" (second after the beginning of Vigil).
3. During the singing of the polyelei, before the Gospel reading – treble peal, signifying the joyfulness of the celebration. At Sunday Vigil, the treble peal signifies the joy and solemnity of the Resurrection of Christ. (*In some areas this treble peal occurs during the singing of "Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ".*) Usually this is referred to as "the Gospel ring". The Russian people often call this the "third peal".
4. At the beginning of the Magnificat –a short call-to-worship, consisting of nine strokes on the largest bell (as is the custom in Kiev and all Ukraine).
5. On great holidays, Vigil ends with a treble peal.
6. If the bishop serves Vigil, then there is a treble peal at its conclusion to accompany his procession out of the Temple.

Bell-ringing at Divine Liturgy

Before the third and sixth hours are read, the call-to-worship for Divine Liturgy is rung, and at the end of the sixth hour, right before the Liturgy itself begins, the treble peal (trezvon) is rung.

If there are two Divine Liturgies, (earlier and later), then the call to the earlier Liturgy is slower and more restrained than before the later Liturgy, and it is usually rung on a lesser bell.

If a bishop is celebrating the Divine Liturgy, the call-to-worship is rung at a predetermined time. A treble peal is rung during the approach of the bishop to the Temple. When the bishop enters the Temple, then the treble peal ceases, and the call-to-worship is again taken up unto the start of the vesting of the bishop. At the end of the sixth hour, the treble peal (trezvon) is rung.

During the Divine Liturgy itself, a call-to-worship is prescribed at the beginning of the Eucharistic Canon, the most important part of the Liturgy, to announce the time of the sanctification and change of the Holy Gifts. The Archpriest K. Nikolski, in his book "Rubrics of Divine Worship," states that the call-to-worship begins at the singing of the words "It is meet and right to worship the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit," and continues up until the singing of "It is truly meet to bless you, O Theotokos …". The same prescription is given in "The New Tables of the Law" by Archbishop Benjamin (Saint Petersburg, 1908, p. 213). In practice, however, this call-to-worship is shorter and consists of twelve strokes. In the south of Russia, the call before "It is meet and right" takes place before the Eucharistic Canon, during the singing of the Symbol of Faith (Creed) and consists of twelve strokes, one for each article. This call before "It is meet and right" was introduced into the Russian Church during the tenure of Patriarch Joachim (1690) after the custom of the Western Church, where bells are rung at the words "Take, eat".

At the end of Divine Liturgy, on all the great holy days, a treble peal is prescribed (all the bells are rung). A treble peal is also prescribed after every Divine Liturgy celebrated by a bishop, in order to accompany his procession from the Temple. On Christmas Day, it is prescribed that all the bells be rung from the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy until Vespers.

On Pascha, the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ, the call-to-worship begins before Nocturnes, and it continues up until the commencement of the procession, when the joyful and festive treble peal (trezvon) is taken up, lasting to the end of the procession, and even longer. Before the beginning of the Paschal Divine Liturgy, there is a call-to-worship and treble peal (trezvon). And during the reading of the Gospel at Paschal Liturgy, a multiple change-ringing is prescribed (seven strokes on each bell, signifying the fulness of God's glory). This solemn change ringing symbolises the preaching of the Gospel of Christ in all languages, and at the conclusion of the Gospel, a joyful treble peal

of victory is rung.

On every day of Bright Week, all the bells are rung from the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy until Vespers.[5]

From Pascha until Ascension there is a treble peal (trezvon) following Sunday Liturgy.

On Patronal (Altar) Feast-days, at the conclusion of Divine Liturgy and before the moleben, a short call-to-worship and treble peal are prescribed. After the moleben, there is a treble peal (trezvon).

A treble peal is prescribed for all Cross-processions.

Before Royal Hours, a call-to-worship (Blagovest') is rung on the largest bell. Before Lenten hours, the call-to-worship is rung on a lesser bell. At both Royal Hours and Lenten hours, the bell is rung in the following manner – before the third hour – three strokes ; before the sixth hour – six strokes ; before the ninth hour – nine strokes ; before Typical Psalms, and before Compline – twelve strokes. But if a great feast occur during Lent, the bells are not rung at the beginning of each hour.

At Great Friday Matins, celebrated on Great Thursday evening and including the reading of the Twelve Gospels of the Lord's Passion, in addition to the usual call-to-worship and treble peal at the beginning of Matins, there is a call-to-worship at each Gospel ; before the first Gospel – one stroke an the large bell ; before the second Gospel – two strokes ; before the third Gospel – three strokes ; and so on.

At the conclusion of Matins, while the Faithful are carrying their "Thursday Fire" home, a treble peal (trezvon) is prescribed.

THE APPLICATION OF CHANGE-RINGING AND ITS MEANING

At Vespers of Great Friday, before the Epitaphion is carried out, during the singing of "O You that clothe Yourself with light as with a garment …," a slow change-ringing (one stroke on each bell from the largest to the smallest) is prescribed. And once the Epitaphion has been placed in the centre of the Temple, a treble peal trezvon) is immediately rung.

At Matins of Great Saturday, beginning with the singing of the Great Doxology and throughout the procession with the Epitaphion about the Temple, the same type of change-ringing as at the carrying-out of the Epitaphion is prescribed. When the Epitaphion is brought back into the Temple and brought before the Royal Doors, then a treble peal (trezvon) is immediately rung.

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[5] *It will no doubt be from this that the custom arises in some places that on these days any one wishing to ring the bells may do so at any time.*

A slow change-ringing of one stroke on each bell beginning with the largest bell that has a powerful ring, to the smallest whose ring is thin and high-pitched symbolises the "emptying" of our Lord Jesus Christ for the sake of our salvation, as we sing, for example, during the fourth Irmos of the Resurrectional Canon in Tone 5, "Habakkuk, having understood as a prophet Your divine emptying for the salvation of Your people …".

According to the ageless tradition and practice of the Russian Orthodox Church (in the central part of Russia) this type of change-ringing should be used only twice a year – on Great Friday and on Great Saturday – on the day of Christ's death upon the Cross, and on the day of His burial. Experienced bell-ringers are very careful to preserve this tradition, and never allow the sorrowful ringing of the bells on this commemoration of the death and burial of our Lord and Saviour to be confused with the funeral-ring of simple sinful mortals.

At Matins on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, on Cross-Veneration Sunday, and on 1 August (the Feast of the Procession of the Holy Cross), before the Holy Cross is carried out from the Altar during the singing of the Great Doxology, there is a change-ring, whereby each bell, from the largest to the smallest, is struck three times (in some places only once). When the Holy Cross has been brought into the centre of the Temple and placed on the analoy, then a treble peal (trezvon) is prescribed.

A similar change-ringing, but faster and more frequent, seven times on each bell (in some places three times) takes place before the Lesser Blessing of Water. When the hand-Cross is lowered into the water, then a treble peal (trezvon) is prescribed.

Exactly the same change-ringing takes place before an episcopal consecration.

In general, a multiple change-ringing of several strokes on each bell is a solemn bell-ringing. In some places, this type of change-ringing takes place before the beginning of Divine Liturgy on patronal Feast-days, and other solemn festive occasions, as indicated above, for example, during the reading of the Paschal Gospel.

THE APPLICATION OF REVERSE-CHANGE-RINGING AND ITS MEANING

Reverse-change-ringing, or the funeral or burial ring, expresses sorrow and grief over the loss of the deceased. It is rung in an opposite order, as already mentioned above, from change-ringing – i.e., one stroke on each bell from the smallest to the largest, after which all the bells are rung once together. This sorrowful change-ringing is always followed by a short treble peal (trezvon), which expresses the joyous Christian belief in the Resurrection of the dead. Since some bell-ringing handbooks forbid treble peals at funerals, which is not in keeping with Church practice, we shall explain further.

A slow reverse-change-ringing of the bells, from the smallest to the largest, symbolises the various stages of a person's life on earth, from infancy and youth to maturity and adulthood ; and striking the bells once signifies the severing of mortal life by death, when all that has been acquired for a person's use during life is abandoned. As is expressed int he funeral hymn, "All mortal things are vanity ; they do not endure after death. Riches do not last, and glory is left behind. For when death comes, all these things are destroyed". (Or, as another hymn says, "In but a single moment death overtakes them".) "Wherefore let us cry to Christ the Immortal, 'Give rest in the abode of those who rejoice to *him* who has been taken from us'".

The second part of the hymn refers directly to the joy of the future life with Christ. This joy is also referred to by the short treble peal (trezvon), which concludes the sorrowful change-ringing.

In the question-and-answer section of the magazine "Orthodox Russia", Archbishop Averky (Taushev) gave a well-founded explanation of panikhidas and funerals, which to all intents and purpose may also be applied to bell-ringing, "According to our Orthodox custom panikhidas and funerals should be served in bright vestments. The custom of conducting these services in black vestments has come to us from the west, and is completely not in keeping with the spirit of Holy Orthodoxy. Yet in spite of this, the custom is fairly widespread, so much so that it would be difficult to change it. For the true Christian death is crossing over to a better life. It is joy and not grief, as is so beautifully expressed in that most touching third kneeling prayer, read at Pentecost Vespers, 'For when we leave our body, O Lord, and go to meet You, there is no death, but a passing form this most sorrowful existence to sufficiency and delight, to rest and joy'".

This treble peal, which reminds us of the Resurrection, has a comforting effect on the believing Christian soul that mourns over the loss of the deceased, and imparts to it an inner joy. There is no cause to deprive the Christian of such joy, all the more since this treble peal has become a fixture in the life of the Russian Orthodox people, and is an expression of their faith.

In this wise, when the **funeral procession** approaches the Temple, then there is a mournful reverse-change-ringing, and when the deceased is brought into the Temple, then a treble peal is rung. After the funeral, as the deceased is being carried from the Temple, there is again a reverse-change-ringing, followed once more by a treble peal.

At the **funeral and burial of priests, hieromonks, archimandrites and bishops**, the reverse-change is rung somewhat differently. First the large bell is rung twelve time ; then follows the reverse-change-ringing ; then the large bell is once more rung twelve times, followed again by reverse-change-ringing, and so on. As the body is carried into the Temple, a treble peal is rung. A treble peal is also rung after the reading of the Prayer of Forgiveness. As the

body is carried from the Temple, the aforementioned reverse-change is rung, and a treble peal is rung after the body is lowered into the grave. In some places the reverse-change is rung as usual. In the "Book of Rites", it is noted that as Patriarch Joachim was being carried from the Temple, there was rung a call-to-worship (Blagovest'), changing from bell to bell at long intervals.

Recently we learned that there exists yet another type of reverse-change-ringing – one stroke on each bell, but beginning with the largest and continuing to the smallest, after which all the bells are rung together. This has been confirmed by the phonograph record "The Bells of Rostov", recorded in Rostov in 1963. In our experience, we have never heard such a ring, and there is no indication of it in any bell-ringing handbook. Therefore, its origins are uncertain.

There exists also a so-called "**Beautiful Ring**" on all the bells. This "Beautiful ring" is used in cathedrals and monasteries where there is a great quantity of bells, amongst which are many large bells. The "Beautiful Ring" is executed by several ringers, five and more in number. "Beautiful" ringing occurs on great Feast-days, on joyous and festive occasions in the Church, and also to honour the diocesan bishop.

Apart from this, we should also make mention of the **tocsin, or alarm bell.** The tocsin or alarm bell is a constant, uninterrupted ringing of the large bell. The alarm bell was used during times of trouble such as fire, flood, civil unrest, enemy attack or other type of public calamity.

"**Common Council**" bells used to call the citizens of Pskov and Novgorod to the people's assembly.

Military victories and troop-returns from the battlefield were announced by a joyful, festive treble peal (trezvon) on all the bells.

In conclusion, let us call to mind that our Russian bell ringers achieved great mastery in their art, and were well known throughout the world. Many tourists used to journey from Europe, England and America to Moscow on Pascha to her the ringing of the bells. On that "Feast of Feasts" in Moscow, from all the various Temples more that 5,000 bells rang. The Paschal ringing of bells in Moscow could never be forgotten by those who heard it. It was "the only symphony in the world", as wrote the author I. Shmelyov.

[THE END OF EXCURSUS ON BELL-RINGING]
[THE END OF THE APPENDIX TO THE GREAT HOROLOGION]
[THE END OF THE GREAT HOROLOGION (BOOK OF THE HOURS)]