

## STRAVINSKY AND MARITAIN: PHILOSOPHIES OF WORK\*

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СТРАВИНСКИ И МАРИТЕН: ФИЛОЗОФИЈЕ ДЕЛА

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### ABSTRACT

Igor Stravinsky's philosophical and religious trajectory included transformative encounters with Catholic theologians and philosophers in the Paris of the 1920s and 1930s. The most important amongst these was Jacques Maritain, whose neoThomist philosophy applied to art was of significance to Stravinsky, and in particular through its application in the life and work of fellow Russian émigré composer Arthur Lourié. This article examines the relationship between Stravinsky and Maritain in terms of the larger philosophical and creative context of the period, also touching on the work of Lourié and Manuel de Falla, and discussing its ramifications in the work of Stravinsky himself.

KEYWORDS: Igor Stravinsky, Jacques Maritain, Arthur Lourié, scholasticism, sacred music.

### АПСТРАКТ

Филозофска и религиозна трајекторија Игора Стравинског обухватала је трансформативне сусрете с католичким теолозима и филозофима у Паризу

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двадесетих и тридесетих година прошлог века. Међу њима је најважнији био Жак Маритен, чија је неотомистичка филозофија, примењена на уметност, била врло значајна за Стравинског, нарочито њена примена у животу и раду колеге, руског композитора емигранта, Артура Луреа. Овај чланак осветљава однос између Стравинског и Маритена ширим филозофским и стваралачким контекстом тог периода, дотичући се и дела Луријеа и Мануела де Фаље, те расправља о његовим последицама у делу самог Стравинског.

Кључне речи: Игор Стравински, Жак Маритен, Артур Лурије, схоластика, духовна музика.

## INTRODUCTION

Igor Stravinsky's interest in matters philosophical is well known. He was a voracious reader and spent, over the course of his life, much time with creative intellectuals, ranging from Jean Cocteau (1889–1963) to Aldous Huxley (1894–1963). His ambiguous relationship with religion was certainly part of this trajectory of intellectual curiosity, and it came to the fore particularly while he lived in France (1920–1939), Paris at that time being a centre of philosophical debate that by no means excluded discussion of religious topics (further on this, see Moody 2021b). In this context, Stravinsky's relationship with the French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882–1973) has a very particular significance, and it is this that the present article explores.

## MARITAIN AND STRAVINSKY IN DIALOGUE

On 28 July 1935, Maritain wrote to Stravinsky:

From my point of view it would be necessary to confirm the existence of something entirely different from the expression of feelings. I refer to “creative emotion” or “creative intuition”; by means of this, the artist, without being aware of it, speaks to himself in his work as God does in the act of creation. I have written several pages on this subject in my *Funèbres de la Poésie* (pages 192–99), and I would be happy to know what you think ... (Stravinsky and Craft 1978, 222)

Robert Craft observes that Stravinsky would have been shocked by Maritain's analogy, noting that “Few contemporaries have known with the first-hand certainty of Igor Stravinsky that a ‘creative emotion’ exists. As for God, while listening to the *Symphony of Psalms*, one can feel that Stravinsky may also have had some knowledge of him” (Stravinsky and Craft 1978, 222). Such a reaction hardly does justice to the complexity of this subject, however. Firstly, Maritain is far from claiming that Stra-

vinsky had no knowledge of God – this is an entirely specious argument. Secondly, in view of Stravinsky's notorious pronouncements on the inability of music to express anything but itself,<sup>2</sup> one might imagine that the composer would in fact have had considerable sympathy with such a point of view. We cannot know, however, as Craft himself notes, for there exists no record of Stravinsky's reactions to the letter.

Maritain's position with regard to the spiritual dimension of a potential philosophy of work had been formed by his decision to become a Roman Catholic after a Protestant upbringing, a period of agnosticism and a deep spiritual crisis. Under the influence of St Thomas Aquinas especially, but also Aristotle, Henri Bergson and others, he came to a philosophy which centred on divine reason as informing the earthly order, publishing his treatise *Art et scolastique* in 1920. In this work, he claimed that modern art had become too enslaved by personal expression, and that was what required was the dissociating of this from the individual; a return, in other words, to the concept of artistic humility of the Middle Ages and an acceptance of the idea of divine order.

Criticism of this position includes the idea that, as Carl R. Hausman put it,

Maritain is committed to a denial that the artist is an active and literal creator [...]. Maritain believes that the Illuminating Intellect, which conditions the artist's realization of his intuition as it springs from the preconscious intellect, is given by the grace of God. And, although Maritain rejects Plato's Muse in order to explain creativity in terms of the human mind, ultimately, he replaces the Muse with God (1960, 219).

But it is hard to see, from the point of view of a Christian artist, what could be wrong with this idea. The Muse really has no place in the Christian scheme of things, but a universe ordered according to divine principles would necessarily involve the grace of God as the *fons et origo* of artistic inspiration and achievement. The "creative emotion," or "creative intuition," is not, in Christian terms, an invention of the human mind alone. The late theologian Fr Alexander Men (1935–1990), for example, saw creativity as essential to the human condition:

To deprive man of creativity means to take away that attribute which makes him like God. For it is written in the Scriptures: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." These are the Creator's words. Which image and likeness, we might ask, does not create? Which one tells us that creativity is delirium, of the devil? So, we come to the following. Christ said that each person brings what he has to offer from his treasure. And you, painters and masters of other genres, express the treasures of your heart, your perceptions of the world (Men, n.d.).

2 "I consider that music is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to express anything at all, whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, or psychological mood, a phenomenon of nature, etc.... Expression has never been an inherent property of music. That is by no means the purpose of its existence" (Stravinsky 1975, 53).

One may thus see creativity as a kind of reactive dialogue: man creates in response to having been created by God, and it is impossible in this context to see what merit Hausman's claim that Maritain consciously "replaces the Muse with God" might have.

How one might actually work with such concepts as those put forward in *Art et scolastique* is, of course, another matter. It is one thing to claim to desire to be part of what the controversial artist Eric Gill called a "holy tradition of working", but quite another to make that desire a reality, as Gill's own life showed, and as demonstrated in the depressingly revealing biography by Fiona MacCarthy (1989).

Stravinsky himself said that "Maritain may have exercised an influence on me at this time, though not directly, and, certainly, he had no part in my 'conversion'" (Stravinsky and Craft 1972, 76). Such dissociation from figures of possible discernible influence is hardly unusual on Stravinsky's part, however, and it is certainly the case that some of Maritain's ideas, notably concerning "man the maker" (*homo faber*) still found resonance in the lectures Stravinsky later gave at Harvard on the poetics of music (Stravinsky 1956).

Neither was Stravinsky the only composer to have been struck by Maritain's ideas. Manuel de Falla was similarly impressed and sought ways to reconcile aesthetic modernism with his deep-rooted Catholicism. As Michael Christoforidis has pointed out,

Falla had annotated a passage from E.T.A. Hoffmann that reflects Maritain's sentiments on the artist and the worker in the pre-industrial age, exalting "that time when the artist and the worker strove hand in hand, marching to the same rhythm." Falla would go on to integrate such ideas within his proclamations on artistic endeavour at the end of the decade [the 1920s]: "I believe in the beautiful necessity of music from a social point of view. It should not be egoistic but created for other people. Yes, to work for the public without compromising: this is the problem, this is my constant concern" (Christoforidis 2018, 197).

Stravinsky was impressed by Falla's music, and made laudatory reference to it in print during the 1930s, in particular the Harpsichord Concerto and the marionette opera *El Retablo de Maese Pedro* (Ibid., 258). The Russian composer's reputation in Spain during this period was high, and not only had his *Symphony of Psalms* been extremely well received when it was given several performances during the course of 1933, but in 1935 his *Chroniques de ma vie* was translated into Spanish by Leopoldo Hurtado and published by Sur in Argentina.

#### ARTHUR LOURIÉ

There is another aspect to Stravinsky's attitude to these questions: he maintained – in spite of his connections with such figures as Maritain, Cocteau and the Russian émigré composer Arthur Lourié (1892–1966), who had converted from Judaism to Catholicism – a distance from the Roman Church, which was certainly affected by his nostalgia for Russia, and also certainly by the vibrant Orthodox presence in

Paris. Stravinsky himself said, on once again becoming a communicant after years of remaining outside, that, “perhaps the strongest factor in my decision to re-enter the Russian Church rather than convert to the Roman was linguistic. The Slavonic language of the Russian liturgy has always been the language of prayer for me” (Stravinsky and Craft 1962, 75–76), an observation that clearly reinforces the idea that nostalgia for his Russian past – even the memory of his childhood – was central to the whole process.

There was certainly pressure on the part of Lourié for Stravinsky to move towards Catholicism, and Orthodox theologians and philosophers resident in Paris at that time were strongly involved in ecumenical initiatives, so such contacts were inevitable. Figures such as Nikolay Berdyaev (1874–1948), Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944), Georges Florovsky (1893–1979) and Vladimir Lossky (1903–1958) were at the heart of a vital spiritual and intellectual renaissance in Orthodoxy, and Catholic theologians engaged with them. Lourié’s own fascinatingly complicated trajectory, and the interrelationship of his Maritainian orientation with his interest in Eurasianism and Russian symbolism, have been discussed in detail in Caryl Emerson. She writes:

Catholicism was, after all, the longest uninterrupted affiliation of his career. Symbolism faded to a shade after the Revolution. The celebrated Lourié-Stravinsky collaboration (and tucked inside it, the Eurasianist diversion) was at best robust for half a decade. But the Catholic connection lasted for more than half a century, from 1913 to 1966 (Emerson 2014, 202).

She further notes that “Lourié was the model twentieth-century composer whom Maritain cited in all his mature treatises on art” (Emerson 2014, 202), but also points out the ambiguity in his trajectory, noting in particular Lourié’s stance in 1934 (the break with Stravinsky having come five years earlier) and his reiteration of Maritain’s neoThomist position: “Earlier, salvation had been sought in the right shape for an Orthodox Russia; now it was sought in the right sort of Catholicism. This confluence could be a sign of Lourié’s universalism. Or it could be simply an alternative enabling mask” (Ibid., 205).

Stravinsky, however, while also a wearer of enabling masks, returned to the religion of his youth, with fascinating musical consequences (see Walsh 1999, especially 431–443 and 498–501).

## STRAVINSKY’S MUSICAL RESPONSES

If we turn to the first music Stravinsky composed with a specifically spiritual aim, namely the Slavonic setting of the Lord’s Prayer written in 1926, we might very well argue that this is the work of an *homo faber*. The composer himself described it as “a simple harmonic intonation of the words” (Moody 2021a, 312), and its unadorned severity has little to do with the often elaborate, and frequently sentimental, 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian repertoire that he would have been used to hearing in services. It is tempting to construct a relationship between this setting and the various ex-

traordinary repertoires of Russian mediaeval polyphony now familiar to us, but it is highly unlikely that Stravinsky would have known about these. They were certainly familiar to the limited circle of chant scholars active in Russia at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whose pioneering work would result not only in a renewed interest in early chant but in new ways of treating it compositionally, as so much music by Chesnokov, Kastalsky, Rachmaninov and Tchaikovsky demonstrates. But it is not music that would have been heard, least of all liturgically, and the first modern publication of such repertoire was that by Nikolai Uspensky in the Leningrad of the 1960s (Uspensky 1965 [1971]; 1968).

On the other hand, it would be rash to forget Stravinsky's memories of Russian and Ukrainian folk music, especially as filtered through *Les noces* (1923) (See, *inter alia*, Mazo 1990). This, I would argue, is much more likely to have been an influence, whether conscious or unconscious. The *Bogoroditse Devo* which he wrote eight years later is somewhat more calculated, being a harmonization of a four-note melody (varied metrically) in the Phrygian mode on D, with some elements of the Aeolian mode. It seems if anything to fit even more neatly into the category of "craft" fit for holy purpose. In between these two works came the Creed (*Veruyu*), in 1932. It is reminiscent of a modal fauxbourdon, and would have a successor in the Creed of the Mass (1944–1948): it may be described as a Stravinskian refraction of the traditional recitative-style setting of the Creed in use in Russian churches.

The Mass provides, in fact, an opportunity to speculate on what Stravinsky might have come up with had he chosen to convert to Catholicism, though, being Stravinsky, he hardly needed encouragement to follow his own creative instincts, however contradictory they may have seemed (and did seem) to his audiences.

According to Roman Vlad (1978, 157), it was during the writing of the Credo that Stravinsky first had the idea of setting the whole of the Mass. This did not, in fact, come to fruition until 1948, though in the meantime he completed the *Symphony of Psalms* and *Babel*. His oft-quoted explanation in *Explanations and Developments* for the composition of the work was that he had been playing through some second-hand scores of Mozart Masses; "rococo-operatic sweets of sin", as he described them (White 1985, 407). He also recorded that it was because he wanted to write a genuinely liturgical piece, but using instruments that he would use to set the Catholic Mass; in the Orthodox Church the use of instruments is expressly forbidden. One must also remember, of course, Stravinsky's predilection for the Latin language itself.

The instrumentation consists of wind instruments only – two oboes, cor anglais, two bassoons, two trumpets, and three trombones – and the extraordinary sonority this ensemble produces in combination with the choir of men's and boys' voices is one of the most noteworthy features of the Mass. The music itself is austere and humble, but possessed of the kind of inner radiance proper to true liturgical music. The strange oscillating solos of the Gloria and Sanctus, for example, sound like refractions of Byzantine chant; the incantatory declamation of the Credo is simply a Russian Creed transplanted (as, indeed, was his earlier setting of the text in Slavonic, as we have seen); and all the movements have memories of the Catholic polyphonic repertoire all the way from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, us-

ing techniques such as fauxbourdon and descant, and exploring a modal polyphonic vocabulary that subsumes dissonance into something appropriately hieratic and deliberately “inexpressive”. Given this, though the composer explicitly denied ever having heard the Mass by Guillaume de Machaut, it is difficult to take this affirmation seriously. Stravinsky’s musical omnivorousness and the way in which he was able to filter this to create works of astonishing originality are, of course, well-known, and this applies just as much to his sacred as to his secular music. What is interesting in the context of the composer’s attraction to the idea of the *homo faber*, ornamented though this particular work, and in spite of its having been first performed in a theatre (the Teatro alla Scala in Milan, no less), is that it has become over the decades increasingly frequently performed within the context of the liturgy, which has much to do with choirs having become more familiar with the idiom over the years. This in itself prompts reflection on what is “useful” in liturgy, and how the parameters of such a definition might change; Maritain’s practical vision would not, I would argue, have been such as to encompass the idea of what one might call modernisms becoming part of a “tradition of holy working” in quite the way that might be said to have occurred in the Mass and the *Symphony of Psalms*, even though the latter is, of course, in any case not liturgical.

It is, indeed, a matter of historical fact that the Church has not agreed in all places and at all times about what kind of music genuinely has a “theological character” (Moody 2009; 2015) and, consequently, a liturgical character. The Fathers of the Church are clear, in general, about what music should *not* be, and about what music is capable of, but it remains the case that discerning with any precision what kind of music might meet with Patristic approval is not always easy. This in turn has clear ramifications for Maritain’s “tradition of holy working”.

In the light of this, it is interesting to note what Alexander Kastal’sky (1856–1926) himself had to say about the composition of church music, in an article published in English translation in 1925, entitled “My Musical Career and My Thoughts on Church Music”:

And style?... Our original church tunes when laid out chorally lose all their individuality; what distinction they have when sung in unison as they were by the old-believers, and how insipid they are in the conventional four-part arrangements of our classics, on which we have prided ourselves for nearly a hundred years: it is essential but... spurious (Kastal’sky 1925, 237–238).

The future of our creative work for the Church can also be merely surmised, but I feel what its real task should be. I am convinced that it lies in the idealisation of authentic church melodies, the transformation of them into something musically elevated, mighty in its expressiveness and near to the Russian heart in its typically national quality. (...) I should like to have music which could be heard nowhere except in a church, and which would be as distinct from secular music as church vestments are from the dress of the laity (Ibid., 245).

It is quite clear in such writing that, though the intention is to return to “indigenous church melodies,” the motivation is emotional and nationalistic, rather than grounded in liturgical theology. And one might say the same of Stravinsky’s motivation, as we have seen, though this certainly does not cast doubt on the reality of his faith. Rather, the constant war of attrition fought between the requisites of genuinely liturgical music able to engage in theology and the vast imagination possessed by Stravinsky, one able to transmute all manner of objects that came his way into something uniquely his, is precisely the conflict that so many artists of faith have had to resolve, every time anew, for themselves.

This is a convenient point at which to return to the *Symphony of Psalms*, written in 1930 and revised in 1948. The sung texts are Psalms 38:13–14; 39: 2–4; 150; the origin of the work was a commission from Serge Koussevitzky at the end of 1929 for a symphony to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in the following year, but the project had been initiated by Stravinsky himself earlier that year. Initially, the plan was for a purely orchestral work, but by January the following year it had become not only choral but sacred: the composer made a note of verses 13–15 of Psalm 39 after reworking a set of earlier songs (*Souvenirs de mon enfance*), and the words of the dedication begin with the observation that it was composed “à la gloire de DIEU”: here is the real starting point of the work. Stravinsky had had the idea for a symphony based on psalm texts for some time, as he noted in *Dialogues and a Diary*, and made this commission his opportunity. In spite of having decided on the texts, the title of the work took some time to be formulated exactly, and had considerable bearing on the way the composer wished the piece to be understood. Stravinsky’s original idea was *Symphonie psalmodique*, which was queried by the ethnomusicologist André Schaeffner. The composer then wondered in a letter to Schaeffner whether *Symphonie psalmique* would be better, but noted that

To me the word ‘psalmique’ indicates only that the symphony contains some psalms sung by soloists or choirs; that is all. I was looking for a brief title which would seize the special character of my Symphony. In short, this is not a symphony into which I have put some psalms which are sung, but on the contrary, it is the singing of the psalms which I symphonize, and that is difficult to say in two words (Stravinsky 1982, 215, n. 273).

Significant, too, is the fact that Stravinsky began composing the work in Slavonic, and only later changed to Latin. Though he specifically pointed out that he was not consciously aware of “Phrygian modes, Gregorian chants, Byzantinisms” while composing, he said too that such influences may well have been unconsciously present (Stravinsky and Craft 1982 [1968] 45). These words, together with his observation that the “Laudate Dominum” section is “a prayer to the Russian image of the infant Christ with orb and sceptre” (Ibid., 46) serve to reinforce the strong Russo-Byzantine splendour of the music, otherwise almost inexplicable since the text is in Latin and the musical processes undeniably largely western and pseudo-Baroque in origin; Stephen Walsh has described the work as a “gesture of solidarity with

the divine order: antique songs of praise cast into the grandest of modern classical forms” (Walsh 1999, 500). Might one not view this as corresponding with Maritain’s assertion that “Art... is the straight intellectual determination of works to be made” (Maritain 1953, 35)? That is, if art is defined as being *techne* (τέχνη), which brings creation into an essential relationship with the intellect, in that rules are skillfully applied, it thus covers arts considered both “traditional” and “useful,” the fine arts having no other function than to body forth beauty, “beyond use other than for themselves”, as Richard Haynes has phrased it (2015, 531–532), and thus universal.

### EPILOGUE À LA RUSSE

The names of Stravinsky and Maritain have, as we have seen, frequently been linked in the past. What has, perhaps, not been considered in more detail, in part because of his own deliberately obfuscatory comments, is Stravinsky’s independent application of ideas that, as he said, “may have influenced” him. In fact, his singular approach to Maritain’s ideas in his work is scarcely comprehensible without taking into account his status as a Russian abroad. For a Catholic artist in Europe or the United States, Maritain’s ideas would have been an obvious resource. The fact that Stravinsky, of Russian training and Orthodox religious persuasion, became interested in these matters is, as I have suggested above, a result of the “Paris effect” evident in the philosophical ferment in the France of the 1920s and 1930s.

Stravinsky was as well able to play the magpie philosophically as he was musically, but his kleptomaniac disposition in this regard always results in something that, while it may well be “for the glory of God”, is also unmistakably signed by the hand of its – Russian – author.

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ИВАН МУДИ

СТРАВИНСКИ И МАРИТЕН: ФИЛОЗОФИЈЕ ДЕЛА

(РЕЗИМЕ)

Филозофска и, нарочито, религиозна трајекторија Стравинског одликује се бројним утицајима. Један од њих је дело француског католичког филозофа Жака Маритена, с којим је композитор ступио у контакт током својих година проведених у Паризу, двадесетих и тридесетих година прошлог века.

Овај чланак осветљава учинак Стравинског с фокусом на његова религиозна дела кроз перспективу познанства с филозофијом Жака Маритена (нарочито с његовом интерпретацијом идеје *homo faber*-а, „човека-творца”), у контексту филозофског врења у међуратној Француској.

Сам Стравински вратио се наслеђеној руској православној вери и од двадесетих година прошлог века надаље произвео је серију остварења која изражавају овај маритенски став на један или други начин, укључујући мања словенска остварења *Оче наш*, *Бојородице дјево* и *Credo*, и затим, *Симфонију њсалама* и *Мису*, иако ни у једном од ових дела није показао посебан лични технички вокабулар. Тај вокабулар се налази у сагласју ових двају елемента који чине музику Стравинског посебном, спрези која се темељи на његовом руском пореклу преображеном искуствима на Западу: старо изнова представљено као ново.