

# Men of faith: Stravinsky, Maritain and the ideal Christian artifex

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What constitutes the rigor of the true classical, is such a subordination of the matter to the light of the form thus manifested, that no material element issuing from things or from the subject is admitted into the work which is not strictly required as support for or vehicle of this light, and which would dull or 'debauch' the eye, ear or spirit. Compare, from this point of view, Gregorian melody or the music of Bach with the music of Wagner or Stravinsky.<sup>1</sup>

In 1920, French philosopher Jacques Maritain wrote *Art et Scholastique*, a philosophical treatise on art and aesthetics. It included a savage attack on Igor Stravinsky, claiming that Stravinsky's music contained elements that dulled and debauched the eye, ear or spirit.<sup>2</sup> Yet in startling turnaround, the 1927 edition of the same work contained a verbose apology from Maritain to the composer:

I am sorry to have spoken in this way of Stravinsky. I knew as yet only the *Sacre du Printemps*, but I should have already seen that Stravinsky was turning his back on all that shocks us in Wagner. Since then he has shown that genius preserves and increases its strength by renewing it in the light. Exuberant with truth, his admirably disciplined work affords the best lesson of any today in grandeur and creative force, and best comes up to the strict classical rigor of which we are speaking. His purity, his authenticity, his glorious spiritual vigor, are to the gigantism of *Parsifal* and the Tetralogy as a miracle of Moses is to the enchantments of the Egyptians.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism and the Frontiers of Poetry*, translated by Joseph W Evans, Notre Dame, 1962, 57.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Although relegated to a footnote in *Art et Scholastique*, the above quotations are two of the most direct pieces of evidence remaining of the influential relationship between Stravinsky and Maritain. This relationship gave them both a framework within which to articulate their beliefs. From the way each man spoke about the other, it is clear that Maritain came to use Stravinsky as the prime living example of his ideal Christian artifex, where conversely Stravinsky used Maritain's ideas to help him describe how his own beliefs influenced his music.

Maritain's radical change of opinion indicates that events significant to his understanding of Stravinsky had occurred by *Art et Scholastique*'s second imprint in 1927. First, in 1926 Maritain and Stravinsky met. While the composer was already familiar with Maritain's work, Maritain knew only Stravinsky's pagan ballet, *The Rite of Spring*. As 'knew' was exactly the word the philosopher used, we cannot be sure that Maritain had actually heard the music by 1920. It is, however, entirely likely that he read the copious numbers of reviews which exploded into the Parisian press after the ballet's notorious premiere, reviews describing Stravinsky's music as 'disconcerting and disagreeable...destroying every impression of tonality,' 'amusical' and 'savage.'<sup>4</sup> As Maritain's rather vague descriptions of music<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Truman Campbell Bullard, *The First Performance of Igor Stravinsky's Sacre du Printemps*, Vol 2, Ann Arbor, 1971, 14-15. Even before the premiere, an article appeared in the journal *Montjoie* under Stravinsky's name, dedicating the performance to Maritain's other undesirable, Richard Wagner; *ibid*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Note the phrase from the opening quotation 'no material element issuing from things or from the subject is admitted into the work which is not strictly required.' One wonders what the 'material elements' issuing from the 'things' could possibly be. I am at something of a loss to make any suggestions, although in musical terms Maritain's 'material elements' could refer to any of the structural elements of composition which are required to support or perhaps enhance the 'subject' (for this I read 'tune'): ornamentation, extravagant instrumentation and elaborate harmonies might all be regarded as elements which extinguish the light of the subject, in opposition to Maritain's desire that they merely support it. As to the 'things,' I find myself unable to elaborate. Such uses of language and a lack of evidence to the contrary suggest Maritain had no musical education.

suggest little musical education, might not all this bad press have influenced his original opinion of Stravinsky? Subsequently, might not Maritain's opinion have changed when he had the opportunity to hear the composer's own voluble views on his music?

Second, in 1926, the very year that the two men met, Stravinsky formally rededicated himself to the Russian Orthodox Church. The reason Stravinsky's regained and profound religiosity changed the philosopher's opinion of him becomes clear in a closer reading of *Art et Scholastique*: Maritain's work is not merely a treatise on art and aesthetics, but ultimately a treatise on how to produce good Christian art.

This paper explores the relationship and mutual influence between Stravinsky and Maritain, a relationship which scholars have neglected to examine in depth. The abundance of recent scholarship on Stravinsky concentrates on the composer during his Russian period, music from before his rededication, or on the workings of his later serial music divorced from its religious subject matter.<sup>6</sup> While working on this subject, I encountered a number of musicians (students and academics alike) who expressed great surprise that Stravinsky was religious. It is such common practice for music theorists to study Stravinsky's music in isolation from the man and the climate which produced him that musicians have for the most part been able to overlook this significant aspect of his life. Yet understanding Stravinsky's religious beliefs leads to a greater understanding of his music.

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<sup>6</sup> For an example of prolific scholarship on Stravinsky's Russian period, see Richard Taruskin's weighty tomes *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works Through Mavra*, Vols 1 and 2, Oxford, 1996; while Joseph Straus has written on Stravinsky's serial music in detail. See Joseph N Straus, 'Stravinsky's Serial "Mistakes",' *Journal of Musicology*, Vol 17 No 2, Spring 1999, 231-271; Joseph N Straus, *Stravinsky's Late Music*, Cambridge, 2001.

If musicians have neglected to examine Stravinsky's religious beliefs, so too have scholars of religion. It appears that we believe analysis of the beliefs of musicians should be left to those who are trained in understanding their music, despite the fact that music theorists are generally uninterested in doing so. Yet I have discovered that studying the relationship between Stravinsky and Maritain not only throws greater light on Stravinsky's music, but on Maritain's religious philosophy as well. Maritain, initially so critical of Stravinsky, came to promote the composer as the prime living example of his philosophy. Stravinsky not only provided a concrete example of Maritain's ideal Christian artifex, but his presence boosted the popularity of Maritain's philosophy as well.

To understand this philosophy we must first set the scene which spawned it: the disillusionment and nationalism of intellectual and artistic Paris in the 1920s. World War I had just ended and the French, keen to prove themselves superior to the Germans in art as well as warfare, launched a campaign against that Nineteenth Century bastion of the western Canon, Romanticism. An interest in order, proportion and balance grew steadily, forming an aesthetic firmly opposed to the organicism, excessiveness and emotiveness of the Romantic ideal. This shift was epitomised by French author Andre Gide's declaration that the classical art work was a 'triumph of order and measure over self-centered romanticism.'<sup>7</sup> The emerging style became known as *la nouvelle classicisme*: neo-classicism. Although there were almost as many interpretations of classicism as there were artists, the binding factor between them was a resounding desire for discipline. As Maritain discovered from the success of *Art et Scholastique* in 1920, neo-Thomism provided the perfect aesthetic philosophy to justify such a return to the classical and to champion a desire for order and discipline.

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<sup>7</sup> Louis Andriesson and Elmer Schönberger, *The Apollonian Clockwork*, translated by Jeff Hamburg, Oxford, 1989, 86.

Maritain's philosophy was not, however, new: like neo-classicism, it was revised, in this case from a philosophy some eight hundred years old. Between 1100 and 1500 C.E. a school of medieval European academics, known to their contemporaries as 'the Schoolmen,' laboured to reconcile the thoughts of classical philosophers with medieval Christian theology. They produced a technique that emphasised dialectical reasoning, and which would become known as 'scholasticism.'<sup>8</sup> Maritain both extended and revived scholasticism in his philosophy.

One Schoolman of great renown was Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Aquinas's development of scholasticism so pleased the Catholic Church that it renamed scholasticism 'Thomism,' and adopted the saint's ideas for decades as its primary philosophical approach. Thomism enjoyed its most recent resurgence in Europe after World War I, where it was taken up by intellectuals who, in seeking a return to religion, also sought a way to reconcile their belief structures with their intellectualism.

At this point Jacques Maritain composed *Art et Scholastique*, bringing Aquinas and his Schoolmen forward several hundred years into the limelight. Maritain used their techniques and philosophies to instruct his audience in the right way to create. *Art et Scholastique* contained the philosophy s appealing to many Parisian intellectuals,<sup>9</sup> and which was to help Stravinsky articulate exactly how he expressed his own beliefs through his music.

First and foremost, *Art et Scholastique* is a treatise on aesthetics: it attempts to reconcile beauty and art. Maritain did not consider art to refer to the fine arts alone, but to all areas in which an

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<sup>8</sup> See John Haldane, 'Editorial Introduction: Scholasticism – Old and New,' *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol 43, No 173, October 1993.

<sup>9</sup> Maritain's followers included French artist Georges Rouault, Irish poet Brian Coffey, who arrived in Paris in the early 1930s, and French artist Jean Cocteau, whose support of Maritain's philosophy increased the philosopher's visibility and popularity among the artistic elite of Paris at the time.

object is created. To create art, he argued, is to imprint ideas on matter, and therefore the capacity for art resides in the intelligence of its creator. This argument appealed to numerous French intellectuals: according to Maritain, art is not about emoting (a Romantic trait) but about intellectualising (a trait that is firmly neo-classical). Stravinsky himself clearly despised emoting through music, as he demonstrated in interviews, essays, and even his use of instrumentation. For example, Stravinsky chose not to use string instruments in his *Octet* because:

[t]he suppleness of the string instruments can lend itself to more subtle nuances and can serve better the individual sensibility of the executant in works built on an 'emotive' basis. My *Octuor* is not an 'emotive' work but a musical composition based on objective elements which are sufficient in themselves.<sup>10</sup>

Maritain accorded the fine arts a unique place in his philosophy; they are those arts that create a beautiful work rather than a functional one, and a beautiful work is a work that pleases the intellect. Again, Maritain made no place for the emotions in art; only the intellect. Beautiful things must contain three elements: integrity, proportion and radiance or clarity. Here Maritain's emphasis on form matches the neo-classical aesthetic of order. Maritain illustrated the three elements of beauty with Thomas's description of God's ultimate artwork, Jesus Christ:

In the Trinity, Saint Thomas adds, the name Beauty is attributed most fittingly to the Son. As for integrity or perfection, He has

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<sup>10</sup> Eric Walter White, *Stravinsky: the Composer and his Works*, London, 1966, 529. Also note the following anecdote: 'Stravinsky to a journalist: "Suppose you went out and narrowly escaped being run over by a trolley car. Would you have an emotion?" Journalist: "I should hope so, Mr Stravinsky." Stravinsky: "So should I. But if I went out and narrowly escaped being run over by a trolley car, I would not immediately rush out for some music paper and try to make something out of the emotion I had just felt."' Andriesson and Schönberger, op cit, 83.

truly and perfectly in Himself, without the least diminution, the nature of the Father. As for due proportion or consonance, He is the express and perfect image of the Father: and it is proportion which befits the image as such. As for radiance, finally, He is the Word, the light and the splendor of the intellect, 'perfect Word to Whom nothing is lacking, and, so to speak, art of Almighty God.'<sup>11</sup>

Finally, Maritain saw beauty as metaphysical and transcendental, for beautiful things draw the soul beyond them to glimpse 'splendors situated beyond the grave.'<sup>12</sup> A relationship with God also permits us to glimpse these splendors; He also is metaphysical and transcendental, and therefore beautiful objects represented God in Maritain's philosophy:

God is beautiful...He is beauty itself, because He gives beauty to all created beings, according to the particular nature of each, and because He is the cause of all consonance and all brightness...And every consonance or every harmony, every concord, every friendship and every union whatsoever among beings proceeds from the divine beauty, the primordial and super-eminent type of all consonance, which gathers all things together and which calls them all to itself...Thus the beauty of anything created is nothing else than a similitude of divine beauty participated in by things...<sup>13</sup>

In what way did Maritain postulate such beauty can be created? First, Maritain's artist (to whom he invariably refers in the masculine) must follow rules or a method but not be a slave to them; he must know when to transcend the rules. Second, the artist must have something in his heart which motivates him beyond the completion of his work; if the artwork he produces is the sole focus of his creative process, he is, in effect, an idolater.

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<sup>11</sup> Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, translated by Joseph W Evans, 3rd edition, Indiana [cited 14/6/05]. Available from <http://www.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/etext/art.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

For Maritain, that motivation was, of course, God. God is morality, truth and beauty, and true art must aspire to all these things, so clearly in Maritain's eyes God was an excellent choice for the motivation beyond the artwork itself.

Maritain saved the crux of his argument for the final chapters of his book, where we discover that, since God is the epitome of all things to which good art should aspire, one must really be a Christian in order to be a good artist. The Christian has no need to try deliberately to make a Christian work; if he holds his Christianity in his heart while he is creating, then his work will be Christian. Again, Maritain emphasised simply making rather than active attempts at expression.

As Stravinsky said, 'Religious music without religion is almost always vulgar.'<sup>14</sup> And so we come to a point at which we can begin to see how he integrates with Maritain's philosophy. From *Art et Scholastique* we learn that Maritain's ideal artist is not the slave of rules, but both uses and breaks them at will, that he must aspire towards, or incorporate, the classical, and that he must be Christian. To develop his artistry, he should not have studied at an institution, but as an apprentice with a master of his art. A study of Stravinsky as a composer of neo-classical and serial works reveals that he met all these requirements, and he was also quite vocal about the manner in which he conformed to them.

Stravinsky never studied composition at a university and warned other composers against doing so, saying that 'there is no pattern for the real composer anyway.'<sup>15</sup> Instead, he studied composition under private teachers. Most notable in this instance was his intimate relationship with Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, an

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<sup>14</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky*, Berkeley, 1958, 124.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 132.

apprenticeship which Stravinsky valued so highly he mourned Rimsky's death more intensely than that of his own father.<sup>16</sup>

By the time he completed his composition tuition and long before *The Rite of Spring* ('the Rite'), Stravinsky had a good grasp of rules. Despite this, Maritain's lack of musical knowledge enabled him to decide on his own terms which music followed rules too closely, and which music diverged too far from them. Imagine the philosopher's position on encountering *The Rite Of Spring*: its synopsis describes the sacrifice of a young virgin to the pagan god of the earth, and in the final scene she dances herself to death. The music and choreography of *The Rite* was so unusual in 1920s Paris that it caused a riot in the theatre of a magnitude that no musically-inspired riot has equalled since.

The events of the premiere are well known and have been carefully documented. Even before the curtain rose, the musical prologue drew catcalls and whistles from the audience, which intensified as the dancers stamped their way through the first half. Loud arguments broke out between supporters and detractors of the ballet; fist fights erupted in the aisles. Although the police arrived at half time, the remainder of the performance was chaotic.<sup>17</sup>

A cursory glance at some of its reviews suggests why the Bach-loving Maritain despised the ballet as he did. Critic Jean Chantavoine wrote that 'to suggest the disharmony of a world...still plunged in barbarity and almost in animality, M Stravinsky has written a score which...is deliberately discordant and ostensibly cacophonous.'<sup>18</sup> Reviewer Gaston Carraud chose to illustrate the 'cacophony' with a metaphor: 'the music of *Le Sacre* gives the impression of a battle of cats – in the springtime,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 39-45.

<sup>17</sup> See Bullard, op cit; Thomas Forrest Kelly, *First Nights: Five Musical Premieres*, New Haven, 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Jean Chantavoine, 'Au Theatre des Champs-Elysees: Le Sacre du Printemps,' *Excelsior*, IV/927, May 30, 1913, 6, in Bullard, Vol 3, op cit, 20.

of course – who have been locked up in the cupboard of pots and pans.<sup>19</sup> Others found the music ‘disturbing,’<sup>20</sup> and ‘heavily, flatly and uniformly ugly,’<sup>21</sup> considering it ‘the torture of Art.’<sup>22</sup> Finally, leading music critic Adolphe Jullien referred to Stravinsky’s music as ‘a debauchery.’<sup>23</sup> Is it any wonder that Maritain initially referred to Stravinsky as he did?

These reviews, and many more in a similar vein, were all published in respected journals or newspapers, readily accessible to the public. Even if Maritain did not see one of the four Parisian performances of *The Rite of Spring*, he would have been hard pressed to avoid the publicity that surrounded it. Maritain’s limited musical knowledge, coupled with published denunciations of Stravinsky’s score, probably entrenched disgust for the pagan ballet in the philosopher’s mind.

There is no evidence to suggest that Maritain received any formal musical education. In her memoirs, Maritain's wife Raïssa did not mention any musical training on her husband's part, although she played piano in her youth. Nor does the fact that Maritain spoke freely about music in *Art et Scholastique* suggest musical competence; he spoke just as freely on art, about which he confessed to knowing little. The philosopher formed his ideas about art when he and his wife attended the studio of artist Georges Rouault, which they did specifically to watch him work and learn his motives. As Raïssa said, 'we were neither art critics nor old school-mates.'<sup>24</sup> Rouault himself once said ‘I do not feel as if I belong to this modern life on the streets where we are

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<sup>19</sup> Gaston Carraud, ‘Au Theatre des Champs-Elysees: Le Sacre du Printemps,’ *La Liberte*, XLVIII, 17, 255, May 31, 1913, 3; *ibid*, 58.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Ce qu’il faut faire a Paris,’ *L’Illustration*, June, 1913, 546; *ibid*, 69.

<sup>21</sup> Pierre Lalo, ‘Au Theatre des Champs-Elysees,’ *Le Tempe*, June 3, 1913, 3; *ibid*, 86.

<sup>22</sup> Alfred Capus, ‘Courrier de Paris,’ *Le Figaro*, LIX/153, June 2, 1913, 1; *ibid*, 81.

<sup>23</sup> Adolphe Jullien, ‘Revue Musicale,’ *Le Journal des Debats*, CXXV/158, June 8, 1913, 1; *ibid*, 133.

<sup>24</sup> Raïssa Maritain, *We Have Been Friends Together*, New York, 1945, 159.

walking at this moment; my real life is back in the age of the cathedrals.<sup>25</sup> Maritain would find a similar ally in Stravinsky, but in 1920 all his lack of musical training could enable him to see was that Stravinsky's music was pagan and disordered.

It is highly likely that a man who had little musical education and who preferred the music of Bach to Wagner would have heard a shapeless cacophony in *The Rite*.<sup>26</sup> Yet by the time Maritain published his apology to the composer in 1927, the pair had met, giving the very vocal Stravinsky the opportunity to explain in person the highly ordered nature of all his music. Stravinsky was also already in his neo-classical phase, borrowing the rigid compositional structures of Baroque and classical music, and it was also around this time that Stravinsky began using words like 'architectonic' in interviews to describe his music, showing his love for structure and for rules.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> James Thrall Soby, *Georges Rouault*, New York, 1947, 6.

<sup>26</sup> Maritain can especially be forgiven for not noticing the rules governing *The Rite of Spring* considering the squabbles many educated musicians have indulged in over it. The Forte, Taruskin and Van den Toorn debate is the most notorious example. In this case, three noted musicologists engaged in a public and heated debate as to how Stravinsky structured the harmony of *The Rite*. See, for example, Allen Forte's book *The Harmonic Organisation of the Rite of Spring*, New Haven, 1978; Richard Taruskin, 'Review of *The Harmonic Organisation of the Rite of Spring*,' *Current Musicology*, No 28, 1979, 114-34; Van den Toorn, Pieter C. Van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky*, New Haven, 1983 and Allen Forte, 'Letter to the Editor in Reply to Richard Taruskin from Allen Forte,' *Music Analysis*, Vol 5, No 2/3, July, 1986, 321-337.

<sup>27</sup> Regardless of Maritain's opinion, Stravinsky's compositions, especially his serial works of later years, demonstrate his own awareness of both holding the rules and acting beyond them. See Joseph N. Straus, op cit. Even Straus, keen as he is to correct Stravinsky's serial errors, acknowledges that the composer apparently intended to include some apparently row-incorrect notes. Arguing that Stravinsky demonstrated flexibility of rules during his neo-classical style is a little more difficult, as it is the opinion of musicologist Scott Messing that there were very few hard-and-fast rules for neo-classical works (see Scott Messing, 'Polemics as History: the Case of Neo-classicism,' *Journal of Musicology*, Vol 9, No 4, 1991, 481-497).

In his neo-classical music Stravinsky also demonstrated the ideal artist's aspiration towards, or incorporation of, the classical. 'These days,' said Maritain, 'all *the best people* want the classical.'<sup>28</sup> Although Maritain refused to define what he understood as classical,<sup>29</sup> his celebration of Satie's music suggests that to be 'sincerely classical' was to be free from 'suspicious caresses, fevers' and 'miasmas,' and to have an excellent working knowledge of technique with which to express simple ideas.<sup>30</sup> In other words, part of being classical is being strongly anti-romantic. Music critic Boris de Schloezer first described Stravinsky's music as neo-classical in 1923,<sup>31</sup> too late for Maritain to mention in his first edition of *Art et Scholastique* in 1920, but in plenty of time to encourage his apology in 1927. The timing of de Schloezer's comment supports the theory that Maritain's missing musical knowledge left him reliant on the opinions of others.

Most importantly, there is Maritain's assertion that to create Christian art one must simply be a good Christian, and that the artist need not actively try to express anything through his art for this to be successfully transmitted. Compare Maritain's words in 'Christian Art,' the penultimate chapter of *Art et Scholastique*, with Stravinsky's conversation on music and the church with Robert Craft. Maritain exhorted the Christian artist to remember that 'If you want to make a Christian work, then *be* Christian, and simply try to make a beautiful work, into which your heart will pass; do not try to "make Christian."<sup>32</sup> When Craft asked

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<sup>28</sup> Jacques Maritain, op cit, 53.

<sup>29</sup> 'Too many theories have rendered the word "classical" irritating to our ears and terribly hackneyed. The fact remains that the definition of words are free. The important thing is to distinguish the authentic from the sham – they sometimes bear the same label – and to realize all the liberty the first requires.' Ibid,187. Unfortunately, Maritain does not explain how we are to make this distinction between the authentic and the sham.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>31</sup> Scott Messing, op cit, 490.

<sup>32</sup> Jacques Maritain, op cit, 66.

Stravinsky 'Must one be a believer to compose in these forms?'<sup>33</sup> the composer replied, 'Certainly, and not merely a believer in "symbolic figures," but in the Person of the Lord, the Person of the Devil, and the Miracles of the Church.'<sup>34</sup> These quotes illustrate the central position Christianity held for both Maritain and Stravinsky regarding the creative process.

Maritain's focus on how to create a Christian work is the climax of his argument, leading us to explore carefully the manner in which Stravinsky identifies himself with this point. To determine this, I analysed one of his religious works to determine how Stravinsky's Christianity informed his compositional process. The work I chose is *Canticum Sacrum* (1955). Although it was written almost thirty years after Stravinsky's first meeting with Maritain, it was composed during the period of Stravinsky's life when he produced his largest corpus of religious works and when his belief was strongest. By the time Stravinsky reached America in 1939, his first wife Catherine, eldest daughter Ludmila, and his mother, had all died within a short space of time, leaving the composer alone in a strange new land. Stravinsky consoled himself by writing a flood of religious works which poured forth unabated until shortly before his own death in 1971.<sup>35</sup>

Stravinsky wrote *Canticum Sacrum* in 1955, as a commission for the Venice Biennale International Festival of Contemporary Music. Venice itself is a city to which Stravinsky had special

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<sup>33</sup> Craft is referring to the sacred musical services Stravinsky spoke of earlier in the conversation, 'the Masses, the Passions, the round-the-calendar cantatas of the Protestants, the motets and Sacred Concerts, and Vespers and so many others' without which we are 'much poorer;' Stravinsky and Craft, op cit, 121-122.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 123. I am unsure on whose instigation the capitalisation in this sentence occurred.

<sup>35</sup> Maritain himself preceded Stravinsky in moving to America in the 1930s, where he continued to teach and preach his philosophy. Both Maritain and his philosophy remained with Stravinsky until Maritain's return to France in 1961; Maritain attended Stravinsky's delivery of the William Vaughan Moody lecture at the University of Chicago in 1944. White, op cit, 94.

religious connections: the composer spoke of a Venetian miracle where fervent prayer caused a troublesome abscess on his finger to disappear as he sat down to play his *Sonata*. Shortly after this miracle, in the Easter of 1926, Stravinsky formally returned to the Orthodox communion to which his parents nominally belonged.<sup>36</sup> With such religious resonances, it is small wonder that Stravinsky seemed determined from the first to create a work of religious significance. He toured the cathedrals of Venice in search of the finest acoustic, and finally settled on Saint Mark's, the basilica of Venice's own patron saint, to whom he dedicated the work: *Canticum Sacrum* is subtitled 'Ad Honorem Sancti Marci Nominis.'

From the title to the text and scoring, *Canticum Sacrum* is a religious work. Within it, Stravinsky demonstrates his Christianity through a range of techniques. Firstly, he uses religious texts, and secondly, he references religious musical techniques such as plainsong and antiphony. Finally, Stravinsky's careful use of structure highlights the ancient argument that order is divine, an argument with which he was well acquainted thanks to Jacques Maritain.<sup>37</sup> Therefore to highlight the ways in which Stravinsky

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<sup>36</sup> Stephen Walsh, 'Igor Stravinsky,' *The New Grove Dictionary of Music Online*, L Macy, editor, 2003, 6 [cited 5/9/05]. Available from <http://www.grovemusic.com>.

<sup>37</sup> Andriesson and Schonberger draw an interesting parallel in their *Apollonian Clockwork*, op cit: the entire book is based around their association of Stravinsky with the Greek god Apollo. Apollo controlled the nine muses but was also god of reason and the intellect. In literary criticism, the figure of Apollo is connected with order, harmony and reason. Apollo's justice is lawful and transparent, as opposed to the chthonic powers which are his direct opposite in the classical world. The Apollonian ideal in comparison to the Dionysian is best illustrated by Aeschylus' tragic trilogy *The Oresteia*, in the first part of which Orestes murders his mother Clytemnestra. In the following plays he is pursued by the Furies, women from the chthonic realm who since time immemorial have had the task of killing matricides. Yet in the final play of the trilogy, *The Eumenides*, Orestes pleads with Apollo for his life, and despite the prior claim of the Furies, Apollo grants Orestes' wish. In this way Apollo embodies a new order of lawfulness, a logical justice which ultimately overpowers the dark mysteries of blood guilt and women's vengeance. Andriesson and

conforms to Maritain's ideal artifex I will look at his use of texts, references to religious music and the form and proportions of his work.

Stravinsky used texts from the Latin Vulgate, Jerome's fifth century translation of the Bible at the command of Pope Damasus I. This is an example of Stravinsky's inclination to compose music for Catholic rites. Although he belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church, Stravinsky turned to Catholicism for inspiration because it was more permissive in terms of music. For example, musical instruments are not permitted in the services of the Orthodox Church, a factor which gave the composer little flexibility in terms of orchestrating his music. Stravinsky's personal faith in the Orthodox Church inspired him to produce religious music; Catholicism was simply the inspiration for the musical styles in which he composed.

This point is advanced by Stravinsky's use of compositional techniques appropriate to various forms of church music, furthering *Canticum Sacrum's* connection with God. Maritain argued the virtues of connecting music to God in this fashion:

The art which germinates and grows in Christian man can admit an infinity of [techniques, styles]. But these forms of art will all have a family likeness, and all of them will differ substantially from non-Christian forms of art. . . . Consider the liturgy: it is the transcendent and supereminent type of the forms of Christian art; the Spirit of God in Person fashioned it, so as to able to delight in it.<sup>38</sup>

As an example of Stravinsky's references to liturgical music, we need look no further than the opening of *Canticum Sacrum* - the

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Schonberger's alignment of Stravinsky with Apollo acknowledges the composer's desire for order and reason in the creative arts, and typifies the shunning of the romantic, chaotic forces popular among artists between the world wars.

<sup>38</sup> Jacques Maritain, op cit, 8.

... Through a Glass Darkly

*Dedicatio*. Ignore the opening trombones and listen instead to the flowing vocal lines, scalic and melismatic, of the tenor and baritone soloists: Stravinsky is referencing plainsong, the liturgical style of the early church as shown in Figure 1.

The image shows a musical score for the 'Dedicatio' section of Stravinsky's *Canticum Sacrum*. It features five staves. The top two staves are for vocal soloists: Tenore (Tenor) and Baritono (Baritone). The Tenore part is in treble clef, and the Baritono part is in bass clef. Both parts have lyrics: 'Ur - bi Ve - - ne - ti - ae, ..... in lau - -'. The Tenore part has a tempo marking of  $\text{♩} = 68(-69)$  and dynamic markings of *mf* and *f*. The Baritono part also has a *mf* marking. The bottom three staves are for instruments: Tromboni (I) in bass clef, Tromboni basso in bass clef, and Tromboni contrabbasso in bass clef. The Tromboni basso and contrabbasso parts have a marking of *marc. ma non f*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Figure 1<sup>39</sup>

Stravinsky also uses the verse and response form found in liturgical music where the congregation responds to a solo singer, the leader of the service. *Canticum Sacrum*'s most notable example of verse and response is in the fourth movement, *Brevis Motus Cantilenae*, where the baritone solo is answered by the chorus echoing both his words and his melody in condensed form as shown in Figure 2.

*Canticum Sacrum* is a highly ordered work, and this can be seen on many levels of its compositional structure. Both Maritain and Stravinsky believed music was akin to architecture and most especially the architecture of churches and cathedrals. *Art et*

<sup>39</sup> All musical examples come from Igor Stravinsky, *Canticum Sacrum*, New York, 1956.

*Scholastique* includes the following quote from Maritain about medieval cathedral builders:

The cathedral builders did not harbour any sort of thesis. They were, in Dulac's fine phrase, 'men unaware of themselves.' They neither wished to demonstrate the propriety of Christian dogma nor to suggest by some artifice a *Christian emotion*. They even thought a great deal less of making a beautiful work than of doing good work. They were men of Faith, and as they were, so they worked.<sup>40</sup>

The image shows a musical score for a Baritone Solo and a Chorus. The Baritone Solo part is written in bass clef, 4/4 time, with a tempo marking of quarter note = 88 and a dynamic marking of mezzo-forte (mf). The lyrics for the Baritone Solo are "Je - - -". The Chorus part includes parts for Baritone (Bar.), Soprano (D.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.), all with lyrics in Latin. The lyrics for the Chorus are "quasi un eco" followed by "Je - - - sus....." and "au - tem a - rit il - li:.....".

Figure 2 – note the baritone leading the chorus

<sup>40</sup> Jacques Maritain, op cit, 35.

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Stravinsky used his knowledge of the architectural design of Saint Mark's Basilica to structure *Canticum Sacrum* entirely. The five main movements refer to the five domes of the basilica (see Figure 3). Stravinsky ordered the movements cyclically and symmetrically, as one would encounter them on walking clockwise around the building.

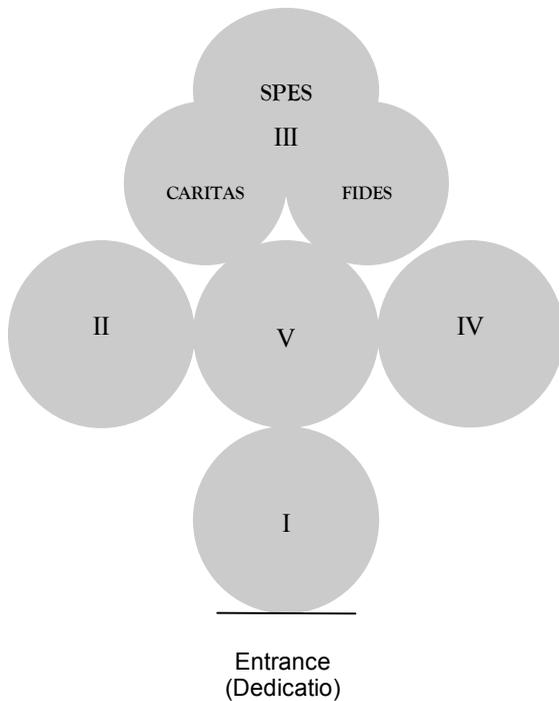


Figure 3

Adjoining one another in the scheme of the basilica, the first and final domes both share the entrance; visitors must enter through the first dome and return to it on their exit, passing through the fifth dome on their way. Stravinsky emulated the action of entering the basilica and then exiting it at the same point by composing the first and last movement to share the same textual and musical material. The text for both movements comes from the same biblical chapter and addresses the same theme, Chapter 21 of the Book of Mark, in which Jesus commands his disciples to 'preach the gospel to every creature' - and the musical material is also connected. The music of the final movement, *Illi Autem Profecti*, is the same as the music of the first movement, *Euntes in Mundum*, – backwards. Through use of retrograde, Stravinsky imitated the physical return pilgrims make through the first cupola to exit the cathedral.

This returns us to Maritain not only through the highly ordered nature of the music, but through the philosopher's insistence on both following and transcending rules. Stravinsky used a specific rule to create his retrograded final movement, but broke that same rule at the very end of the piece: he stretched the first bar of the first movement to make the final three bars of the last movement. It took Stravinsky three times as long to say in closing what he grandly stated with one chord to begin. In this case, however, Stravinsky transcended the rules with good reason: he extended these bars in the name of closure. They are, after all, the final bars of the entire work.

Apart from these three rogue bars, almost all the musical material of the first and final movements is identical, even down to the instrumentation and the changes in speed. Such strict adherences to the rule only serve to highlight Stravinsky's ultimate destruction of it.

All other movements of *Canticum Sacrum* reference the basilica's structure. Opposite one another in the circular scheme of the basilica, the second and fourth movements balance and

reference each other, although not so closely as their surrounding movements. Both are vocal solos, unlike the chorus numbers which surround them. The lyrical tenor solo of *Surge, Aquilo*, the second movement, is complemented by the baritone solo featured in the fourth movement, *Brevis Motus Cantilena*.

The reference to the cathedral's structure is completed most closely by the central movement, also the longest, *Exhortations to the Three Virtues*. Stravinsky divided it into three lesser movements, *Caritas*, *Spes* and *Fides*, in imitation of the manner in which two smaller chapels flank the central dome of the basilica.<sup>41</sup> The two flanking movements *Caritas* and *Fides* are canonic, a technique which serial composers borrowed with praise from the canon's chief protagonist, Johann Sebastian Bach. In *Spes*, the central and longest part of the trio, Stravinsky took another leaf from the Catholic liturgy; it contains antiphonal singing between soloists and the chorus.

These three movements are connected by organ *ritornelli* which outline their progression and provide a private cycle for them within the context of the work as a whole. Using the rules of transposition and retrograde, Stravinsky ended the *ritornello* of the final movement on the same note with which he began the *ritornello* for the first (Figures 4.1 to 4.4). These three smaller pieces, well balanced and cyclical in themselves, 'form a central arch or dome for the whole structure,'<sup>42</sup> a kind of microcosm to the macrocosm of the overall work. The following figures show the organ *ritornelli* in their various incarnations:

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<sup>41</sup> The usual order of Faith, Hope and Charity are reversed. In musicologist Eric Walter White's view this gave special prominence to Faith; White, op cit, 483-484. I disagree with White on this: what the special prominence accorded to Faith is, he does not say. Instead, it is Hope, as the central movement and the longest, that is most prominent, indeed central in more ways than one, to the entire work, and both Faith and Charity with their use of canon act modestly as flanking movements to the central virtue.

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Walsh, 'Igor Stravinsky,' *The New Grove Dictionary of Music Online*, op cit, 2003, 9 [cited 5/9/05]. Available from <http://www.grovemusic.com>.

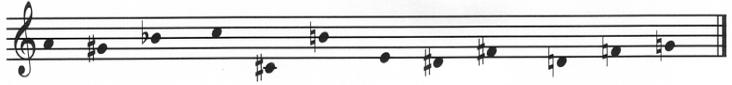


Figure 4.1 provides the 'row,' the specific pattern of all twelve tones from which Stravinsky derived the *ritornelli*.



Figure 4.2 shows a reduction of the first organ *ritornello*, the introduction to *Caritas*, bars 94-99. Here we see the original, or 'Prime,' row.



Figure 4.3 shows a reduction of the second organ *ritornello*, the introduction to *Spes*, bars 130-135. Now the Prime row is transposed up three semitones (hence  $P_3$ ).



Figure 4.4 – a reduction of the third and final organ *ritornello*, the introduction to *Fides*, bars 184-189. Stravinsky has transposed the Prime row up two semitones so it can end on an 'A,' the same note on which the Prime row began. The strings repeat this *ritornello* at the close of the movement, bars 244-249.

Thus we can see that the order defined by the cathedral builders in worship of God structured Stravinsky's music, also written in worship. The order is divine; the choice of structure is in itself an act of worship. More directly, the choice of a basilica as the unifying principal of a piece of music connects it to God with real immediacy. *Canticum Sacrum's* construction '... observes closely

the fundamental architectural principles of symmetry, proportion and balance.<sup>43</sup>

Through a combination of referencing church music, using ecclesiastical texts, borrowing a sacred architectural structure and promoting careful order in his music, Stravinsky connected *Canticum Sacrum* inextricably with the divine. The listener may not notice all these aspects immediately, but many, like the clear plainsong style of the *Dedicatio*, we can recognise instantly as references to religious music. Unlike other of his works, Stravinsky hinted at neither parody nor irony: he intended the use of sacred styles very seriously. Stravinsky allowed his faith to fashion his music in a manner of which Maritain would have been proud. After all, he is the composer who, in his own words, 'hopes to worship God with a little art if one has any'<sup>44</sup> and who discussed his own music in Maritain's terms of construction and order.

Having analysed one of Stravinsky's works in the context of Maritain's philosophy, it is difficult to see how anyone could doubt his beliefs, or deem them irrelevant to his compositional process. The two are inextricably linked; to study one without the other can only ever give us a fragmentary picture. Likewise, through a study of Stravinsky we can also gain a greater understanding of Maritain's philosophy. We can see how his aesthetics worked in practice, and how his philosophy influenced one of the most important artists of the 20th century.

While this paper has explored Stravinsky's music in some analytical detail, I gained much of my understanding of the relationship between Stravinsky and Maritain from reading each of their writings. It is by no means impossible for a scholar in religion to investigate the role that religion plays in the creative processes of a composer when the life and ideas of that

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<sup>43</sup> White, op cit, 489.

<sup>44</sup> Stravinsky and Craft, op cit, 46.

composer have been richly documented. Much of the material for this paper has been drawn from Stravinsky's autobiography and other writings; only the musical analysis required a musicologist's touch. Assessment of Stravinsky's perceptions of himself as a composer who writes ordered, architectonic, religiously-inspired music, requires his words more than his music.

It is even more possible for scholars in the fields of religion and music to join together in collaborative projects on the religious influences of musicians to the benefit of both fields: the musicologist will gain a greater understanding of his or her subject's inspiration, the scholar of religion will uncover concrete examples of the influence of religion on artists of all kinds.

And what of Stravinsky and Maritain? What, at last, was the result of their previously invisible relationship?

Despite Maritain's proven influence on him, it is unlikely that Stravinsky ever consciously changed his compositional approach to conform to Maritain's thesis. Stravinsky was a highly ordered composer before Maritain discovered him, and remained so until his death. What Maritain's philosophy did provide was a way for Stravinsky to articulate how he was able to worship God through his art without compromising his belief that 'music is...powerless to express anything at all.'<sup>45</sup> Stravinsky did not actively use his music to try to express his faith; creating his music was not an expressive act, but an act of worship. Like the cathedral builders who did not actively seek to create Christian emotion with their work but let their own belief shape their art, Stravinsky let his faith shape his music. In this way he was able to worship God with the art he had irrespective of the fact that for Stravinsky music could not express: it was, itself, an expression.

And what did Maritain gain from their relationship? Just as his association with Cocteau gave Maritain greater force in the

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<sup>45</sup> Igor Stravinsky, *Igor Stravinsky: An Autobiography*, New York, 1958, 53.

artistic world, so did his relationship with Stravinsky. Stravinsky's was a name with which the whole Western world – the whole artistic and intellectual Western world at least – was familiar by the end of the 1920s, and Maritain's association with him lent his philosophy international prestige and power. More than that, in Stravinsky Maritain found a living example of the ideal Christian artifex he had previously exalted in Bach and the anonymous composers of Gregorian chant. Maritain's philosophy was no longer hundreds of years old – with Stravinsky alongside it, it was modern, it was forceful, and it had the power to be as popular as the *enfant terrible* of Russian music himself.