

Baptist Churches and Performative Arts: Building a Theological Case for an Unlikely Friendship in Mission

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This article presents a case for looking at the relationship of art and mission from a Baptist perspective, especially focusing on performative or performing arts. I explore the possibility that the relationship of arts and mission is not an addition to the normal way of doing mission that can be considered or not, but rather reveals something fundamental and necessary. This attempt begins by juxtaposing two twentieth-century theologians, one a French Catholic, Yves Congar, and one an American Baptist, James Wm McClendon Jr. By focusing on Congar's thoughts about how to engage modern unbelief and McClendon's ideas of mission and university, I will bring forth a correlation. Following this I will turn to my own missionary context, post-Soviet Lithuania and the arts scene of our post-totalitarian society as a third conversation partner. Would a developed relation between performative arts and the theology of the Holy Spirit bring some necessary insights for mission in a post-Soviet context?

Keywords

Arts; mission; Pneumatology; post-Soviet; Lithuania; Yves Congar; James Wm McClendon Jr.

Yves Congar: Theological Patterns of Engagement

The French Catholic theologian Yves Congar (1904–1984) is important for my article in several ways. First, I am from a country where most of the citizens identify themselves as Catholics; the Roman Catholic Church remained an institutional force to reckon with even throughout Soviet times. But it is not only the theological logic behind engagement with the surrounding culture that is interesting, but also the theology of engagement more generally. Congar, in this case, would be the first on any list as a theologian who wrote on ecumenism, reform and the theology of lay people in the church. Sometimes when in academic circles I would — as a Lithuanian Baptist home missionary — mention that I was studying Yves Congar. Several questions would be immediately asked. To say that my interest was because Lithuania is a predominately Catholic country would

not be an adequate answer. At a deeper level, I have sought to engage with Yves Congar's *Dialogue Between Christians*.¹

While overviewing his life journey and his collaborations in ecumenical work, Congar points out an interesting shift which occurred in his theological pilgrimage. He points to life-shaping circumstances in this journey and especially marks out the significance of this early *Dialogue*, an article from 1935. This was 'a theological tailpiece to an enquiry into the causes of unbelief', which followed a three-year-long research project of his colleagues in a French Catholic journal *La Vie Intellectuelle*.² This article raised a question about the responsibility of Christians and the church for the prevalence of modern unbelief. When reflecting on that article some thirty years on, Congar explains that he initially sought to address the failure of the church to present to humanity a face which would conform to the Gospel and tradition. Thus, this early response to unbelief would — as he saw it — be through a renewal of the view of the church, which would transcend the juridical idea of it.³ However, in *Dialogue Between Christians*, he suggests a further 'transcendence'. He looks at something more radical than the idea of the church; this was the very notion of faith and the correlative idea of revelation. He writes as follows:

It is the idea of God as the living God which is the indissoluble link in Judaeo-Christian revelation between theology, anthropology and cosmology, the living God, man and the world! The greatest obstacle which men encounter today on the road to faith is in fact the lack of any credible demonstrable connection between faith in God and the prospect of his reign on one hand, and man and terrestrial creation on the other. There is a pressing need for a clear vision and demonstration of the intimate connection which these realities have with one another as the most effective answer to the reasons for modern unbelief.⁴

This long section in Congar had several points of appeal for me. First, the quotation was set in a work on ecumenical collaboration. Consequently, its 'transcending' character allows a Baptist to read it as a *rapprochement*. Then, second, it is not merely ecumenical in a churchly sense, but also a move deeper into 'the very notion of faith', or 'the correlative idea of revelation'. This leaves to one side not merely a juridical idea of the church, which would focus the discussion on accepting the claims of the institution of the Catholic Church, but the discussion of the church altogether. The Catholic claims are not thus dismissed, but there is a move towards the central tenets of Christian belief. This might help reassess the claims

¹ Yves Congar, *Dialogue Between Christians: Catholic Contributions to Ecumenism* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966).

² Congar, *Dialogue Between Christians*, p. 22. The original article is Yves Congar, 'Une conclusion théologique à la enquête sur les raisons actuelles de l'incroyance', *La Vie Intellectuelle*, 37, no. 2 (1935): 214–249.

³ Congar, *Dialogue Between Christians*, p. 23.

⁴ *Ibid.*

concerning the institution at a later juncture, if still necessary, but in a different light. Third, it is made clear that what persists in his life journey is the desire to address the causes of the modern prevalence of unbelief.⁵ This invites and creates the possibility of looking at the underlying logic of this appeal.

For Congar, the problem of understanding the causes of unbelief, or a loss of a relationship with God (one might say, a vertical dimension) is addressed by identifying and demonstrating links between God, creation and humanity (including the horizontal dimension). Furthermore, these connections are to be shown as ‘intimate’ for the answer to be ‘most effective’. These two notions evoke further questions for a Baptist missionary. What would ‘effective’ mean in the light of a discussion about coercive claims made by the institution of the church in engaging the culture? Or how would an issue of intimacy be articulated in the light of an understanding of divine action in and through the church, and with regard to the issue of mediation of that action? Immediacy and directness of experience of encounter with God in the Spirit, important aspects for a Baptist believer, link with Congar’s emphasis on the living God. Yet, there is more to Congar’s proposal than immediately meets the eye. Some nuances point to its underlying logic. First, he actually insists on addressing the causes of unbelief and not merely unbelief as such, or as he has it in his early, ecclesiological work, collective causes. This is the crux of his relation between ‘intimate’ and ‘effective’. These collective causes included a failure on the part of the church. Congar pointed to the lack of incarnation of faith through the lack of involvement by the church in all of human experience and activity.⁶ It is thus a Christological argument. The intimate interweaving of realities, the power to convince, on the other hand, anticipate the development of the theology of the Holy Spirit (Pneumatology).⁷ This posits an appeal but also a claim for a Baptist theologian–missionary as to the implications of belief in the Trinity for one’s missionary engagement.

While Congar moved from ecclesiology, the engagement of the church is still central to his approach. In the earlier work he referred to it as the ‘politics of presence’, that is, the (public) presence in the culture of signs of faith, which point to Christ,⁸ and manifest God’s desire for the all-

⁵ For more on this see also Gabriel Flynn, ‘The Role of Unbelief in the Theology of Yves Congar’, *New Blackfriars*, 85.998 (2004): 426–443.

⁶ See Yves Congar, ‘Une conclusion théologique’, and Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie – New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2010), pp. 43–45.

⁷ I argue for this kind of ‘logic’ to Congar’s work as a whole in my thesis, Henrikas Žukauskas, ‘The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Relation God–World in the Theology of Yves Congar’ (doctoral thesis, Vrije Universiteit, 2018), available online <https://research.vu.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/61554392/complete+dissertation.pdf>.

⁸ Congar, ‘Une conclusion’, p. 248.

embracing fullness of human existence.⁹ In his early work, Congar called for the re-creation of a milieu that is favourable to faith and ultimately to human existence. This preoccupation with milieu persisted in his later work. So, in *Tradition and Traditions* he says, ‘Tradition as coextensive and fundamentally identified with the Christian life as handed on in the Church since the time of the apostles — is the proper milieu of faith.’¹⁰ This ‘Tradition’ is a milieu in which ideas and attitudes are communicated in a living synthesis that has a logic of its own, not the logic of words, but the logic of action.¹¹ To articulate the role of action in this understanding of living tradition would require more space than this article affords, but it is significant to add that the Holy Spirit is the ‘Transcendent Subject’ of Tradition.¹² For our purposes here, however, it is interesting to note that in terms of public engagement, visible in the early article, the notion of milieu is less prominent. On the other hand, the identification of the logic of action reasserts the ‘politics of presence’, with the Holy Spirit as its subject. However, to what kind of society would this politics lead? Also, would a disruption of such a milieu mean that faith is not formed and then the action of the Holy Spirit is limited?

There is a challenge to Baptists who claim that they live without traditions, even if they would probably agree with Congar on the importance of lived, that is performed, faith.¹³ A need to respond to this challenge, in my view, arises from the appeal concerning how to address unbelief. A truly effective response, to return to the initial quotation from Congar, lies in a proposed vision of the unveiling of God, which interweaves three books: the

⁹ While primarily incarnational and thus Christological, the fullness also refers to the catholicity or universality of faith. The loss of visibility, for Congar, referring to Thomas Aquinas, was the loss of a sign which allowed one to see what to believe (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q 178, A 1, 2nd rev. edn, trans. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920), online edition copyright by Kevin Knight <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3178.htm> [accessed 10 April 2015]). In signs God presented humans with a human face. In this way, everything truly human was transfigured and assumed into Christ by the Spirit. Thus, it anticipated the development of Pneumatology.

¹⁰ In Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and Theological Essay* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 369.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 361–375. See especially his discussion about the notion of tradition and action as proposed by Maurice Blondel, pp. 363–368.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 338. Congar, *Meaning of Tradition* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004) pp. 30–31 quotes Blondel: ‘Tradition is the progressive understanding of the riches possessed objectively from the beginning of Christianity, held and enjoyed in a truly Christian spirit, and transformed by reflection from “something lived implicitly into something known explicitly”.’ He refers to Maurice Blondel, ‘Histoire et Dogme: les lacunes de l’exégèse modern’, *La Quinzaine*, 56 (January and February 1904): 145–67, 349–73, 433–58. English translation, Alexander Dru, and Illtyd Trethowan, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994).

¹³ Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, p. 493. Congar’s general challenge to theology (and most of all to Protestants) is as follows — it has to gain ground on two points: ‘First, there is the relation of the Church to Christ and what he did during his life on earth. Secondly, the union between the Church and the Holy Spirit, and the action of the Spirit in the Church’s history [...] the elaboration of a more satisfactory doctrine of the Spirit’s activity in the *Church* as such will be a necessary condition for a more adequate theology of Tradition.’

Scriptures, the human person, and the book of creation.¹⁴ Such an approach tends to resist the reduction of the manifestation of God to Scriptures and looks for ‘the intermediary for every communication of God’, and affirms that God manifests and communicates not only in words and ideas, but also in realities.¹⁵ This latter point emphasises the reality wherein the activity of God and humanity interweave. However, the question of what kind of practice is presumed by this approach is not clarified. Is it a retreat to an ecclesial practice or real engagement with the society? Furthermore, does such a presentation of the vision also apply to the contexts where ecclesial life and cultural life have suffered the attempts of dismantling, as in former Soviet republics? And then, in this case, is the vision sufficient and effective enough to address the situation, and is it relevant in a situation of forced secularisation?

James Wm McClendon Jr: Patterns of Intimacy and Delight

Before directly addressing the Lithuanian context, I turn to the insights of the North American baptist (he spoke of small ‘b’ Baptist, to indicate a stream of church life rather than a denomination) theologian James William McClendon Jr (1924–2000). During my studies in the International Baptist Theological Seminary when it was based in Prague, McClendon’s works helped myself and others to make sense of and articulate some of our baptist convictions, and so here I briefly turn to his work to explore the resonance of baptist¹⁶ experiences with Congar’s vision. It is not my intention to provide a thorough juxtaposition but to discern some possibilities of encounter that can appeal to a baptist missionary.

The second volume of McClendon’s Systematic Theology, *Doctrine*, has three parts and the third is called ‘The Fellowship of the Spirit’. He concludes it with a section ‘The End of Mission’.¹⁷ Towards its conclusion he turns to an unusual piece of evidence to convince those who are alien to or disillusioned with the missionary and transformative character of the baptist movement. McClendon (pointing to the practice of worship as an evidence) finishes the section with an account of singing a song commonly used in baptist assemblies: ‘What a fellowship, what a joy divine, Leaning on the everlasting arms [...]’.¹⁸ The performance of the song reminds me of the logic of action I have already encountered in Congar. But there is an even

¹⁴ This is explicitly articulated in Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, p. 65.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁶ In this section, I follow McClendon in using the small ‘b’ Baptist to refer to a stance in church life rather than to the particular denomination.

¹⁷ James Wm McClendon Jr, *Doctrine: Systematic Theology, Volume 2* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), pp. 439–454.

¹⁸ McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 452.

deeper connection. For McClendon, ‘joy divine’ and ‘fellowship’ are ‘the two very ends of the Spirit mission’.¹⁹ Experienced in worship, would they (joy and fellowship) resonate with Congar’s idea of ‘intimate connections’ between the realities, and present a reality to be experienced (in practice) beyond mere vision?

This might not only explain the appeal a baptist may feel for a vision like Congar’s, but also articulate a baptist perspective and possible contribution. For McClendon, this joy or ecstasy and fellowship together constitute the intimacy of the final eschatological state. But it already begins in the practice of the church. This oneness to which the activity of the Spirit is directed means the church is to be the church of the Spirit, aimed ‘not at sectarian narrowness or dogmatic rigidity or organizational evolvment but at syzygy or wholeness’.²⁰ This already invokes ‘joy’, mentioned earlier, but also points to a place for baptists. Thus, Christianity cannot be complete without this ‘vast, amorphous ecclesial type, the baptist’.²¹ But the fulfilment is wider than ecclesial. McClendon uses the imagery of ‘syzygic’ or sexual unity from Russian philosopher Vladimir Sergeyevech Solovyov.²² The point is that love (in this case conjugal) can achieve its fullness only with the transformation of its whole environment. While this happens through sacrifice, it is not at the expense of the individuality of all its members. The organism (embracing, but not reduced to political, religious organisms) is thus completed as it completes individuals, through the transformative mission of the Spirit.²³

This approach seems to connect with what Congar was aiming at and could explain the appeal to baptists, but what could be a baptist contribution? This ‘ecstasy and fellowship’ for McClendon are ‘the distinguishing marks of the Spirit of God’, to be classed under what he calls providential signs, as distinguished from historic and remembering signs.²⁴ For one thing, they comply with what Congar was referring to when writing about God communicating in realities. But, furthermore, he brings these about in discussing the Pentecostal experience of the Spirit.²⁵ It is significant that the argument is made through ‘the practice of worship in these communities [...] accessible to any who will train their ear to its inner music’.²⁶ But as I read

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 450.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Alexander Schmemmann, ed., *Ultimate Questions; An Anthology of Modern Russian Religious Thought*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), pp. 73–134.

²³ McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 449.

²⁴ Ibid., 438. If historic signs refer to events such as the Exodus, Easter and Pentecost, and remembering signs refer to baptism and preaching, providential signs are the manifestations of God in one’s personal or communal journey, revealing the relevance of the Gospel to a particular circumstance.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 437.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 451.

this from the Lithuanian context it highlights a sovereign action of the Spirit — as happened with the collapse of the Soviet Union when people also came to faith without or outside the ecclesial milieu, which were intentionally dismantled. And this posits the question of the relation of the Spirit and action, or milieu, differently.

Before considering Lithuania, I will briefly turn here to the last chapter of McClendon's third volume of systematic theology, *Witness*, entitled 'Theology and the University'.²⁷ It will not only strengthen the affinity with Congar's vision of addressing the causes of unbelief, but also will help to introduce the role of the arts. McClendon's aim in this section is to argue for the crucial role of theology in the university and for university as a meeting place of 'the two cultures, that of the gospel and that of the world'.²⁸ It allows us to return to the issue of milieu raised earlier and elaborate on it, this time with a spatial imagery. McClendon speaks about the two-sided conversation wherein the church engages the world, and for McClendon one aspect of this is through theology in the context of university. Building on an image of the gallery in old American towns, where family members would engage in friendly conversations with passers-by, it culminates in the 'loggia or public arcade of Italian Renaissance cities'.²⁹ While the image is doubtlessly alluring, it is not easily applicable to the post-Soviet context. Perhaps an action or performance itself could be a milieu where milieus are destroyed?

One would have to read the whole section to capture the openness and engagement among the disciplines and theology which McClendon proposes. Its scope definitely measures up to Congar's. But there is one specific contribution which helps elaborate on the issue of milieu and action. McClendon argues for the inclusion and the necessary role of theology alongside the arts and sciences, with a section pointedly called 'arts and sciences theologically awake'.³⁰ First, this allows us to see that a theological look at action, like the performance of song, to which I referred earlier, is not limited to a church practice. There is a kind of engagement through a practice of art. McClendon uses the practice, or art, to reveal a theological rationale within it and make a case for theology among the 'liberal arts'. This is because, according to McClendon, the arts refer to the world as it is but also to the imagination of what the world might be. Here he moves from general arts to art. So art 'employs existing conventions (symbols?) in creative *action*

²⁷ James Wm McClendon Jr, *Witness: Systematic Theology, Volume 3* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), pp. 387–420.

²⁸ McClendon, *Witness*, pp. 388, 387. A big part of McClendon's argument is historic and concerns the origins of universities, contending that 'the church gave a precious gift to the culture: the university itself was that gift' (p. 391).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 413.

whose dual *reference* is *affectively* conveyed to its audience'.³¹ While here the use of art is an illustration, the fact that this chapter sums up the book, does allow the practice of art to be seen as a milieu of conversation and engagement.³²

Artistic Action as the Milieu of the Spirit in a Post-Soviet Setting?

The juxtaposition of tradition as action and the milieu of the Spirit, and arts as loggia within the university, along with concern for engagement rather than retreat, all allow me to turn, lastly, to the Lithuanian context. Reading Congar from the present Lithuanian setting brings significant change to the issue of the public milieu of faith. One is looking at a majority Catholic country in the wake of the Communist regime that was aggressively set against faith. Sociologists point out how the regime used social control, differentiation of social spheres, depersonalisation and mechanisms of socialisation: all of which characterised the Soviet period and affects post-Soviet life.³³ On the other hand, the disillusionment with Soviet-type urbanisation highlighted the potential of the relatively autonomous organisation of Catholicism and the genuine companionship associated with it.³⁴ The role of the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania in resisting Russification stands out, which explains its persisting ties to Lithuanian cultural identity and a continual role in consolidating civil society.³⁵

However, new challenges come with democratic pluralism and adjusting to developing and westernising institutions.³⁶ Thus, Congar's emphasis on a 'politics of presence' as a kind of continuing incarnation, should be read vis-à-vis concerted efforts to destroy the structures that sustained these memories. While a kind of continuing touch on the part of

³¹ Ibid. p. 414. McClendon also sees in American art two poles, towards empirical or the spiritual, to be juxtaposed with the central point of the Gospel of Jesus Christ 'the Word become flesh' (McClendon, *Witness*, p. 137).

³² McClendon, *Witness*, p. 418. McClendon writes about the energy flowing in both directions, which undergirds a broader image of the relation of church and culture. This relation for him is best expressed through the twofold rhythm of 'diastole' and 'systole' taken from Edwin Ewart Aubrey, and 'going-out and return' taken from Julian Hartt (Edwin E. Aubrey, *Secularism a Myth: An Examination of the Current Attack on Secularism* (New York: Harper, 1954), p. 30; and Julian Hartt, *A Christian Critique of American Culture: An Essay in Practical Theology* (New York: Harper, 1967), pp. 300–302).

³³ Milda Ališauskienė and Ina Samuilova, 'Modernizacija ir religija sovietinėje ir posovietinėje Lietuvoje', *Kultūra ir visuomenė: socialinių tyrimų žurnalas*, 2, no. 3 (2011): 67–81 (p. 73). One should add to this the massive displacement of population, the dismantling of rural religiosity, lay organisations, religious education, the elimination of religious consciousness, even secular churches, rites of passage and state funeral houses. See Arūnas Streikus, 'Shifts in religiosity in the face of Soviet type urbanization: the case of Lithuania', *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 48, no. 2 (2017): 8–10.

³⁴ Streikus, 'Shifts in Religiosity', pp. 8–10.

³⁵ Valdas Pruskus, 'Katalikų bažnyčios kaita Lietuvoje transformacijų laikotarpiu', *Problemos*, 63 (2003): 45–61.

³⁶ Ibid.

the Roman Catholic Church should not be altogether dismissed, it is not sufficient anymore.³⁷ While 79 percent of people in Lithuania identify as Roman Catholics, the sociologists of religion note that the attitude to Catholicism is ‘rather superficial and consumerist’ and ‘Catholicism does not provide [...] a matrix for perceiving the world or a guideline for action in everyday life’.³⁸ The role of Catholicism as a social milieu, which provides ‘a dominant belief system and moral guidelines’, according to Schröder, is marginal.³⁹ Does this mean that what I have previously marked out about the ‘politics of presence’, the milieu of engagement, has to be dismissed as irrelevant?

I want to suggest the contrary, and this time to refer to my personal testimony. I grew up in Lithuania under the Soviet regime in a home which was not religious. Growing up in Kaunas, a city which was the capital of Lithuania before Soviet occupation, I remember a second layer to the lives and stories in which people lived. On old bookshelves or somewhere in the attic you would find journals and books from the former times. They were forbidden. Catholic religious art, some of it folk and from rural places, was on display in these old homes of the intelligentsia and had an aura about it. These works of art carried this aura even if they were taken out of their religious milieu, which was aggressively targeted as indicated earlier. This did not mean that existential and spiritual questions were eradicated, but rather that they were explored in different milieus, spaces or communities. In my case it was the practice of performative art, namely theatre, which is quite understandable in a Lithuanian context.⁴⁰ Theatre was the space to explore how the new historic reality reflected on what it was to be a human being, frequently invoking religious imagery.⁴¹ Theatre was also a space to engage in political discourse, albeit by means of grotesque and apocalyptic

³⁷ This can be illustrated by the image of Rūpintojėlis, which Lithuanian Catholic theologian Ligita Rylėškė uses as a way to interpret post-Gulag experience. This Lithuanian image of Christ is a part of popular culture: it is a wooden sculpture, and its name could be translated ‘One who cares’ or ‘Dear One, who provides’. See Ligita Rylėškė, ‘Post-Gulag Christology: Contextual Considerations from a Lithuanian Perspective,’ *Theological Studies*, 76, no. 3 (2015): 468–484.

³⁸ Ingo W. Schröder, ‘The Elusive Religious Field in Lithuania’, in *Religious Diversity in Post-Soviet Society: Ethnographies of Catholic Hegemony and the New Pluralism in Lithuania*, ed. by Milda Ališauskienė and Ingo W. Schröder (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 79–98 (pp. 80, 84).

³⁹ Schröder, ‘The Elusive Religious Field’, p. 85.

⁴⁰ On theatre as a ritual of social life and Lithuania as ‘the theatre republic’ within the Soviet Union, see Gintaras Aleknonis, ‘Visuomeninio gyvenimo ritualas’, *Menotyra*, 4 (45) (2006): 49–53. Aleknonis looks at the high ritual potential of theatre in the light of the neglect by Soviet ideology of religious and other rituals. Other forms of art would be relevant as well, for example abstract painting. See Kristina Budrytė, ‘Lietuvos abstrakčioji tapyba sovietmečiu’ (doctoral dissertation, Vytautas Magnus University, 2009).

⁴¹ Edgaras Klivis, ‘Ecce Homo: žmogaus reprezentacijų dinamika Lietuvos sovietmečio teatre’, *Logos*, 43 (2005): 196–209. Klivis explores how the image of the human being developed in Lithuanian theatre of Soviet times in the face of specific historic reality. It is apparent from his account, that while religious imagery is frequently in the background, it is a backdrop for exploring the conflicts of the human being in the face of totalitarian aggression and prevalent conformism. See especially pp. 199–201.

imagery.⁴² The eschatological feeling surrounding the times was also visible in theology.⁴³

Then, the changes began. The stories of Chernobyl, then the Baltic Way, and the change of regime brought diverse religious and spiritual novelties. It was in a context like this that my theatre studies began. I saw them as a search for meaningful action. Keeping in mind the role theatre played, the existential, political and spiritual dimensions of such action were also important. In the process of studies, I developed an interest in Christian eschatology through my friend who studied in a fundamentalist Baptist institute. He gave me study materials and I began writing a play for an examination performance. I applied to this process all the critical scrutiny and artistic imagination necessary to justify a public performance and to embody or perform it. This was my entrance into the alien world of the Bible and an attempt to appropriate it to make it my own. My friend from the Baptist institute had an immediacy and directness of experience when talking about God. This contrasted with the hierarchic structures of mediation, a lack of immediacy and directness in approach to Scriptures which I saw in Lithuanian Catholicism. My friend's radical experience gave an existential urgency for such eschatological pursuit.

As I was writing, a strange thing happened. I mentioned that I was trying to appropriate this biblical text and to make it my own. But it suddenly became apparent that I was being incorporated into its drama, and consequently there was a rift of dramas. Instead of writing a drama and creating its world, I began seeing that this drama was encapsulating my life and enabling me to recreate it afresh. One of the central images in this discovery was the image of living waters streaming from the inside of the believers in Jesus Christ, from John 7. These living waters, the image of the Spirit, were connecting us (me), our embodied selves, the world, and Jesus Christ, and interweaving these realities. The feelings of intimacy, ecstasy, and fellowship were connected with this event of visitation by the Spirit in the process of artistic engagement with biblical text. Furthermore, as this article makes clear, this experience consequently played an important role in searching for and engaging theological themes in later ministry. Such a view of personal experience thus insists on a performative aspect; its complexity embraces issues of culture, experience, faith and beliefs. Firstly, this experience illuminated the lingering but not sufficient 'presence' of the signs

⁴² Researchers point to the 'polysemic grotesque way', allowing more to be said than is permitted in public in a Lithuanian version of political theatre which influenced further developments continuing into the present. See Ginta Čingaitė, 'Kosto Ostrausko ir Kazio Sajos politinio teatro ypatumai', *Teksto slėpiniai*, 15 (2012): 47–72 (p. 47). On 'political theatre' engendering a critical and analytical dialogue between stage, audience and reflecting on the environment, see Indrė Daunytė, 'Politinio teatro apraiškos Europoje ir Lietuvoje XX amžiuje', *Menotyra*, 4 (29) (2002): 33–42.

⁴³ Ryliškytė, 'Post-Gulag Christology', p. 480.

of faith in Lithuanian culture, the ‘politics of presence’ in Congar’s sense. Secondly, the experience also expanded as I became involved in the artistic process and performative practice of working with biblical text, so that what was an artistic experience was transformed into an explicitly religious experience. Thirdly, it was the religious experience that was searching for structure and action. It was formed and illuminated by, but also negotiated with the theological themes I have outlined. More significantly for the theology and practice of mission, this experience points to the overlap between the belief in the Holy Spirit and its performative aspect. The fact that this is done with reference to performative arts and the theology of the Spirit is significant in that the Soviet regime sought to disrupt religious continuities.

Conclusion

I have looked at the resonance between the theological vision of Yves Congar and the Pneumatological emphases of James Wm McClendon Jr from a post-Soviet perspective. What interested me in particular was how useful their imagined conversation might be for the context in which the presence of religion was intentionally attacked. While I affirmed the missionary potential of Pneumatological emphases, I have also highlighted that such violence presents a unique challenge. I then introduced the Lithuanian arts scene, especially that of performative arts, which carried in itself an implicit religious and prophetic dimension. This has allowed for the ‘transposing’ to it of some of Congar’s thinking regarding the ‘politics of presence’, namely, the milieu of forming faith or engagement with it, and for the underlining of a performative aspect of this milieu. But the significance of such a juxtaposition of performative art and theology of the Spirit, and of the view of art as the milieu of the Spirit might go beyond just a transposition to the Lithuanian situation. If it is significant in the context of aggressive secularisation, why not in a context of secularisation more generally? If this is the case, how does such an approach invite creative cooperation with other activities and movements more generally? Taken seriously, such an invitation would require theologically embracing social movements, human action and performativity in reassessing classical theological themes. Such creative and aesthetic engagement would be crucial in re-creating destroyed environments, including our creation.

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