

Introduction

A new version of the Passion narrative has long been a project close to my heart, and I was delighted when my friend Ray Adams asked me to take it on. It's long troubled me that the traditional gospel account (almost always taken from Matthew or John), tends to lose the forest for the trees. Heavily focused on the blow-by-blow details of Jesus's final twelve hours, it has little to say about the deeper meaning of this sacrifice, particularly its relationship to redemptive love.

My own setting of "The Passion" (probably the polar opposite of Mel Gibson's graphic spectacle) is grounded in Jesus's own understanding that the events of the crucifixion were necessary for the full activation of redemptive love. When Love can be shown to hold its own against the worst that the human condition can throw at it--betrayal, cowardice, violence, and collective insanity--only then can the human heart be freed from the dominion of evil. This is the task that Jesus takes upon himself in his Passion, and only in the light of task does the sacramental meaning of his action become clear. In creating the libretto, my goal has been to keep this deeper meaning front and center.

With one exception (the chorale "In Stillness Nailed" at the end of the Fourth Movement), the text is entirely biblical. But I have interwoven all four gospel accounts rather than following one exclusively, and I have introduced some material from the Gospel of Luke that is rarely set: the exchange between Jesus and the two thieves crucified alongside him and the haunting "Daughters of Jerusalem, Do not weep for me, but for yourselves." I have also interspersed teachings from the beatitudes, the psalms, and the Song of Songs, to create an ongoing dialogue between the narrative itself and its symbolic meaning.

The libretto begins and ends in the chapters of John's gospel known as the Farewell Discourses, where Jesus shares his final instructions with his disciples: "Behold, I give you a new commandment: Love one another as I have loved you." With love as the touchstone, suffering transcends itself to reveal the luminous path that we, too, are called to walk if courage and compassion do not fail us. Jesus dies not for our sins, but for our highest and universal human possibility.

The libretto virtually wrote itself in a searing five days, and while I wouldn't exactly say that it was "channeled," I was often pointedly aware that a higher hand was at work--most dramatically when I found myself startled awake at two o'clock one morning by a woman's voice clearly saying, "Go to the Song of Songs." There, in Chapter 7 of this Old Testament book, I found the powerful "Love is as strong as death" which becomes Mary Magdalene's lament at the beginning of the Fifth Movement. Certainly this is a bit innovative in terms of traditional Passion theology, but I had a sense that Mary Magdalene really wanted to be in there, free at last to give voice to the words of human love that form a seamless bridge to our most intimate human experience of the divine. Whoever the players are who have brought this Passion together--Ray Adams, Fr. Theophane, the communion of saints, and the hearts and souls of the people in this Valley who have once again made a miracle happen--I am honored and grateful to have had a part in it.

-Cynthia Bourgeault

The Libretto

Passion I: The Farewell Discourses

Jesus Speaks:

John 13: 33 My children, I will be with you only a little longer.

Where I am going you cannot follow now.

John 14:1 Do not let your hearts be troubled;

Trust in God; trust also in me.

In my Father's house are many mansions.

I go to prepare a place for you.

John 14:18 I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

John 16:20b You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.

Orchestral bridge....

Choir:

John 13: 34 Behold, I give you a new commandment:

Love one another as I have loved you.

John 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches.

15:9 As the Father has loved me, I have loved you.

Abide in my love.

Jesus:

John 16:19 A little while and you will see me no longer.

14:30 The prince of this world is coming.

16:20 You will weep and mourn while the world rejoices.

16:23 But take heart: I have overcome the world.

Narrator:

John 13:1 Having loved those who were in the world,

He now prepared to show them the full extent of his love.

Passion II: Gethsemani

Instrumental introduction....

Jesus:

Matt 26:38 Come, now, let us depart,

And go into the olive grove to pray.

My soul is troubled, even unto death.

Stay here and keep watch with me.

Musical bridge

Jesus

Matt 26:39 Abba, if it be your will, let this cup pass from me.

Yet not my will but yours be done.

Psalm 31:5 Into your hands I commend my spirit.

Chorus:

John 12:26 Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies,
It remains a single grain,
But if it dies, it shall yield a rich harvest.

Psalms 126:5-6 Those who sow with tears will reap with joy.
Those who go out weeping, sowing the seed
Will return with songs of joy, carrying the sheaves.

Musical Bridge

Jesus:

Luke 22:46; What, are you sleeping? All of you asleep!
Exhausted from sorrow,
Matt 26:40 Could you not watch for a single hour?

(Instrumental bridge, maybe introducing "My God, why have you abandoned me ?" theme
(cello?))

Passion III: The Prince of this World

Narrator:

Luke 22:47 While Jesus was still speaking,
A crowd of Pharisees and palace guard arrived,
And the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was
Leading them.

Jesus (or men's choir) Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?
Twisted, fugal chant builds. Then phrases are added: Draw your swords!
Stand your ground! Turn them back!

Narrator: And one of them struck the servant of the high priest,
Cutting off his ear.

Jesus:

Luke 22:51 NO MORE OF THIS! Am I a rebel,
That you come for me with swords and clubs?
Every day I was with you in the temple,
and you did not lay a hand on me.
But this is your hour, when darkness reigns.

Chorus:

Matthew 5:11 Blessed are you when they shall revile you,
Persecute you, and falsely say all manner of evil against you
For my sake. Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in
Heaven. In the same way they persecuted the prophets
Who were before you.

Narrator: Then seizing him, they led him away to the house of the high priest.

(MUSIC BEGINS, CROWD CHANT. FIRST TWO LINES ARE ESSENTIAL...
SHOULD BE A KIND OF OSTINATO ON WHICH THIS ENTIRE SECTION
IS BASED. OTHER LINES CAN BE ADDED, COMBINED, OVERLAID, AS
INTENSITY BUILDS)

Men's Chorus:
(collated from

all gospels) This man calls himself the Son of God,
the Christ, Messiah, the Anointed One.
He sets himself above the Law, the prophets.
He heals on the Sabbath,
Befriends the poor, the outcasts
Dines with prostitutes! Tax collectors!
Dances to a music all his own
That melts our hearts of stone...
Calls himself the Son of God...

Caiphas:

Luke 22:70 Are you the Son of God?

Jesus: I AM.....I AM....

Men's Chorus

(Luke 22:71)

To Pilate! To Pilate!

(MORE INTENSE REPRISE OF CHANT....)

Pilate:

Luke 23:3 Are you King of the Jews?

Jesus:

John 18:36-7 My Kingdom is not of this world.

If it were, my servants would fight for me.

My Kingdom is from above.

For this I was born

And for this I came into the world:

To Testify to truth.

Pilate:

John 18: 38 What is Truth?

Choir

John 14:6 I am the Way, the Truth, The Life

No one comes to the Father except through me;

You shall know the truth and it shall set you free.

Men's chorus theme re-enters; turmoil builds.

Pilate: I find no charge against him. What would you have me do?

Crowd: Crucify! Crucify!

Pilate: Shall I crucify your king?

Crowd: We have no King but Caesar!

CRUCIFY! CRUCIFY

Passion IV: On the Cross

Narrator or recitative

Luke 23:26-7 And they led him away to be crucified,
To the place called Golgatha, the Skull.

Wailing and mourning, the women who loved him
Followed behind him, those few who still cared.

Jesus:

Luke 23:28-9 Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me;
Weep for yourselves and for your children.
The time will come when you will say,
'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs
that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.'
(woman's choir might repeat this)

Narrator or recitative

Luke 23:32-3 Two criminals, were also crucified there beside him,
One on his right, the other on his left.
Upon his head, a crown of thorns,
Above him t hung a sign:

Men's chorus begins the chant, at a whisper (or hiss) at first:
JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS

(This merges into the following, a reprise of the earlier "crucify" chant, but darkerJ
Men's Chorus:

Matthew 27:40 You, you who claimed you were the living temple,
SAVE YOURSELF!
Come down from the cross if you are the Son of God, the
Chosen One, the Christ!
(As music builds, in a brief eye of the storm, Jesus cries:

Jesus:

Luke 23:34 Father, forgive them. They know not what they do.

Men's Chorus

(matt 27:42) Save, save yourself if you are the Son of God.
1st Criminal: He saved others; himself he cannot save.

2nd Criminal:

Luke 23:40-1 Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence?
We are punished justly for our deeds, but this man has done
No wrong.
(Instrumental bridge, then:))

Luke 23:42 Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.

Jesus:

Luke 23:43 Truly I tell you: today you will be with me in Paradise.

(Musical interlude to move paradise glimmer back to hell-Ray Adams special)

Narrator (could be woman's part)s

Luke 23:44 It was now the Sixth hour, and darkness came over the
Whole land. The sun ceased to shine, and the veil in the
Temple that hid the Holy of Holies tore in two.
At about the Ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice:

Jesus

Matt 27:46 Eli, Eli, lama sabachtani?

My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?

Narrator

Matt 27:50 And he gave up his spirit.

Women's Choir: Into your hands I commend my spirit

For you have redeemed me , O Lord, O God of Truth.

Luke 23:43 (Today you shall be with me in Paradise)

Matt 27:54 (truly this man was the Son of God) (these are echos for solo voices)

SILENCE. Then this chorale (contemporary prayer from Convent of the Incarnation, Fairacres, Oxford, England)

Choir:

In stillness nailed,

To hold all time

All change

All circumstances

To Love's embrace.

Choir:

Passion V: Remembrance

Orchestral beginning, then

Magdalene (soprano solo)

Song of Songs 3:1 All night I lay on my bed

I looked for the one my heart loves.

I looked for him but did not find him.

I will get up now and go about the city

Through its streets and squares;

I will search for the one my heart loves.

Song of Songs 8:6-7 For love is as strong as death,

Its ardor as unyielding as the grave.

It burns like a blazing fire,

Like a mighty flame.

Many waters cannot quench Love.

Rivers cannot wash it away.

Chorus (gradually begin

Reprise of theme from I) Behold, I give you a new commandment:

Love one another as I have loved you.

I am the vine, you are the branches:

Abide in me, as I in you.

Men's chorus: I am the way, the truth, the life

No one comes to the Father except through me.

You DO know the truth and it HAS set you free.

Choirs together

1 John 4:7-9 Dear friends, let us love one another
for love comes from God.

Everyone who loves has been born of God
And knows God, for God is Love.

1 John 4: 16 Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.

Mary Magdalene:

Song of Songs 8:6 Place me like a seal upon your heart.

1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.

Jesus:

John 11: 25-6 I am the resurrection and the life.

HE who believes in me will live,

Even though he dies.

And he who lives and believes in me

Will never die.

The Artists

Ray Vincent Adams

Mr. Adams moved to the Roaring Forks Valley in 1976 as a conducting fellow with the Aspen Music Festival and School under Murray Sidlin. He participated in master classes with Jorge Mester, Leonard Slatkin, Pinchus Zuckerman, and Sergiu Commisiona. One year after his arrival in Aspen he began conducting choral concerts, and his annual "Messiah" concerts have enjoyed continued success since 1977.

Mr. Adams began composing large choral works in 1998. The 2000-01 concert season saw the world premieres of two Adams compositions. "Angels," a choral suite for treble voices and string orchestra, was premiered on December 8-9, 2000, in Harris Concert Hall. "Songs of Divine Love," a song cycle based on the poetry of the Sufi mystic Rumi, was premiered on February 14, 2001. November 30-December 1, 2001, saw the world premiere of Adams' "Revelation," a seven-movement work for women's chorus and string orchestra, based on the Book of Revelation, the apocalyptic final book of the Bible. Harris Hall was again the site for the April 2003 world premiere of "Requiem."

Future compositions planned by Mr. Adams include "The Passion," a collaboration with the Reverend Cynthia Bourgeault, an acclaimed teacher and writer on the Christian mystical life. The libretto is based on a new revisioning of the traditional gospel narrative, drawing on all four gospels and interweaving the passion drama itself with passages from the teachings of Jesus which highlight its significance and set it within a context of universal love and forgiveness.

The world premiere of "The Passion" is tentatively scheduled for Palm Sunday weekend, April 2-3, 2004. Much of "The Passion" will be composed at the Dorland Mountain Arts Colony in Southern California, where Mr. Adams was recently accepted for a two-month composition residency. Following "The Passion," Mr. Adams plans to compose his first opera, "Brothers."

The Reverend Cynthia Bourgeault, Ph.D.

Hermit priest, writer, and internationally known retreat leader, Cynthia Bourgeault divides her time between solitude on Eagle Island, Maine, and a much more extraverted schedule in Vancouver, British Columbia, where she serves as Resident Teacher for the Contemplative Society and an adjunct faculty member at the Vancouver School of Theology. She is the author of three books: *Love Is Stronger than Death* (1999), *Mystical Hope* (2001), and *The Wisdom Way of Knowing* (2003), as well as many articles and audiotapes on the Christian Spiritual Life. In 2001 she was invited to become a charter participant in the "Deepening the American Dream Project," sponsored by the Fetzer Institute, Kalamzoo, MI, joining a select group of other American spiritual writers including Kathleen Norris, Jacob Needleman, Elaine Pagels, Huston Smith, and Parker Palmer; Her third book is a revision and expansion of that original essay. She is a past Fellow of the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural research at St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, MN, and an oblate of New Camaldoli Monastery in Big Sur, Callifornia.

Mr. Adams' and Dr. Bourgeault's collaborations on sacred texts began informally in the mid-1990s, when Dr. Bourgeault served as Assisting Clergy at Christ Episcopal Church, Aspen.

She is now a regular guest teacher in the Aspen area, where her annual seminars on the Christian mystical life draw an increasingly large and enthusiastic audience. A trained musician and musicologist in her own right, she has studied with Nadia Boulanger at the Conservatoire Americain in France, and holds a music minor from Ohio State University and a Ph.D in Medieval Literature and Musicology from the University of Pennsylvania. Co-founder and dramatic director of the University of Pennsylvania's Collegium Musicum, she has sung in a number of choirs and chamber choruses, including most recently the Aspen Choral Society.