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PRESENTS

MESSIAEN'S *BOOK OF THE HOLY SACRAMENT*

A TOWERING MASTERPIECE
IN SOUND AND IMAGE

Sat., March 11, 2023
@9:30 am (lecture)

Sun., March 12, 2023
@7:00 pm (concert)

Augustana Lutheran Church
5000 E. Alameda Ave
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Concert
SERIES

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Introductory Commentary by Olivier Messiaen

Translated by David Vogels

The *Livre du Saint Sacrement* for organ was written in 1984. It contains 18 movements: some of these are short, others more developed. The first movements are acts of adoration before the Christ who is invisible but really present in the Holy Sacrament. The first piece, *Adoro te*, expresses precisely this adoration. The second piece, *La source de Vie*, expresses the thirst for the grace bestowed by the Holy Sacrament. The third piece is entitled: *Le Dieu caché*. In addition to the music of adoration on the soft 16' and 8' foundations with the Octavin 2' of the Swell, one hears a plainsong theme: the Alleluia of Corpus Christi (Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ), and the songs of two birds from Israel: the Tristram's grackle (notated in *En Gedi*, between Massada and the Dead Sea) and the olivaceous warbler (notated in *Lod*, near Tel Aviv). The fourth piece is an act of faith in the real presence.

All the graces that Christ earned for us at various times in His earthly life always keep their power, as is applied to us at every celebration of the liturgy. This idea is developed at length in the very beautiful book by Dom Columba Marmion: "*Le Christ dans ses Mystères*." It is especially through the eucharistic Communion that we are given the graces of the mysteries of Christ. Therefore, the following pieces describe every mystery of Christ in chronological order.

The fifth piece, *Puer natus est nobis* (a child is born to us), speaks of the Nativity. It uses a plainchant theme: the Introit for Christmas. It also utilizes a birdsong: the olive-tree warbler. The sixth piece, *La manne et le Pain de Vie*, comes from the discourse on the Bread of Life, delivered by Jesus at Capernaum during his public life. In this discourse, Jesus Himself mentions manna as a symbol of the Eucharist. The piece, then, represents the desert where the manna fell from heaven. High-pitched chords on the Cymbale 3 ranks of the Swell evoke the silence and peace of the desert. Long trilled chords in crescendo and decrescendo on the Clarinet and Nazard of the Positive at 16', 8', and 4' imitate the very strong wind that sometimes blows through the desert. Utilization of two songs of birds from Israel: the mourning wheatear and the desert lark (both notated in the Judean Desert on the Mountain of the Forty Days). The desert lark is a bird of the rocky terrain of Jordan and Palestine, with very bright plumage (yellow-russet-isabella), whose choppy, monotonous song is typical of the Judean Desert. Since the discourse on the Bread of Life promises the Resurrection, the seventh piece is titled *Le ressuscités et la lumière de Vie*. The eighth piece, *Institution de l'Eucharistie*, represents that most solemn moment when Christ first pronounced the sacramental words: "This is my Body. This is my Blood." The basis of the piece is a Greek rhythm (Bacchius): short, long, long, a bit expanded. The miraculous words are entrusted to the Swell Hautbois with Bourdon 16', Octavin 2', and Tierce, in chords of the third mode (second transposition), gray and mauve, over a sustained pianissimo on the Cor de Nuit of the Positive, in A-flat Major, blue-violet, very calm. The song of a nightingale drifts through the open window. The ninth piece is entitled: *Les ténèbres*. Three kinds of darkness. The "power of darkness": horrible "clusters" from the second mode (first and second transpositions), then from the third mode (first, second, fourth transpositions). The Crucifixion with the tearing of distended limbs and the fortissimo of suffering. The physical darkness that spreads over the earth. Tenth piece: *La Résurrection du Christ*. Christ rises suddenly, in all the power of His glory, with the fortissimo of the organ and with luminous chords radiating all the colors of the rainbow. Eleventh piece: *L'apparition du Christ ressuscité à Marie-Madeleine*. This is the most developed piece in the cycle. The day has not yet broken: it is dark, the end of the night. An indistinct, progressively rising chromatic counterpoint portrays the moment. Mary Magdalene, weeping near the tomb, turns and sees Jesus without recognizing Him. Jesus says to her: Mary! Mysterious and

solemn chords symbolize the appearance of the Risen One, and his soft voice seems to come from the beyond. A long crescendo passage follows. Mary looks, but she does not understand. She hesitates, wide-eyed, and suddenly, seized with a wild joy, she recognizes Him! Chords of contracted resonance in transposed inversions. She falls to her knees before Him. The voice resumes. The mysterious chords are joined by the lament heard in the Crucifixion: the glorified body of Jesus Christ has kept the five stigmata. Then comes the mission. Go to my brothers and tell them my words: "I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Themes of the Son and the Father (accompanied by a bird of Iran and northern Palestine: the white-throated robin). It is the revelation of the Resurrection and the Ascension: that is why a musical alphabet is used to sound out the word "Apocalypse" (Revelation) in fortissimo. The night ends, and the chromatic counterpoint of the beginning returns in a descending motion. The mysterious and solemn chords of the Risen One are reprised in pianissimo. In the pale dawn, the apparition vanishes.

Beginning with the twelfth piece, we leave the chronological order of events in the life of Christ, and we are in His Church today, praying to Him in the Holy Sacrament.

Title of the twelfth piece: La Transsubstantiation. This term is employed in theology to designate the change of the substance of bread and wine into that of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist. A mode of durations, pitches, and timbres attempts to communicate this mystery. Two birds of Israel: the common bulbul and the laughing dove (both notated in En Gedi, Judea), are superimposed over the first notes of a plainchant theme: the Communion of Corpus Christi (the Feast of the Holy Sacrament). Continuation of the mode of durations, pitches, and timbres. The two birds and the plainchant theme resume. Development of the first notes of the plainchant theme, with alternating durations of 2, 3, and 4 thirty-second notes, emphasizing the relationship 3 to 4. Conclusion on the Communion for Corpus Christi by a solo of Quintaton 16' and Nazard over a pianissimo background on the Voix Céleste.

Thirteenth piece: Les deux murailles d'eau. The composer has made a comparison between the presence of God in the two standing walls of water at the time of the passage of the Red Sea and the real presence of Jesus Christ under the two fragments of the broken Host. The piece is a fortissimo tutti. A powerful toccata alternates with the song of the melodious warbler. In the middle: torn-off arpeggios in contrary motion represent the standing waves. Reprise of the toccata. Song of the clamorous reed warbler, and the fortissimo conclusion superimposes complementary colors: acid green on brownish red, yellow on violet. Fourteenth piece: Prière avant la communion. It is an act of humility: "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you." Fifteenth piece: La joie de la grâce. Inspired by two texts from "L'Imitation de Jésus Christ," this piece symbolizes the joy of divine love through the songs of birds. These birds are: the common bulbul, the Tristram's grackle (both notated in En Gedi, Judea), and the white-throated robin (a bird of Iran and northern Palestine). One will notice in the registration the lack of 8' stops and the abundance of mixtures and mutations. Sixteenth piece: Prière après la communion. Melodic garlands on the Quintaton 16' and Nazard of the Positive, alternating with the Bourdon 16' and Quinte of the Great, over a background of the Voix Céleste in the Swell. The quotation from Saint Bonaventure speaks of gentleness and sweetness: these are the adjectives that the harmonic colors attempt to match.

Toward the very end, one will note chords of contracted resonance in transposed inversions. Seventeenth piece: La Présence multipliée. Jesus Christ is present in all the consecrated Hosts of the world, in all times and places. The eighteenth and last piece is entitled: Offrande et Alleluia final. Offering to God of all the prayers of all the saints. After the act of offering, chanted by the Cornet of the Positive, the joy of the saints. This joy alternates a brilliant toccata with alleluia-like passages on the foundations and mixtures. Proclamation of the word "joy" and fortissimo conclusion.

Livre du Saint Sacrement

(Book of the Holy Sacrament)

Oliver Messiaen

(1908-1992)

I. Adoro te

“I adore Thee, O hidden Deity!”
(Thomas Aquinas, Adoro te)

II. La source de Vie

(The Source of Life)
“May my heart always thirst for you, O fountain of life, source of eternal light!”
(Prayer attributed to Saint Bonaventure)

III. Le Dieu caché

(The Hidden God)
“My eyes could not bear the splendor of your glory. It is to spare my weakness that you hide yourself beneath the veils of the Sacrament.”
(Thomas à Kempis, De Imitatione Christi)
“On the Cross only divinity was hidden; here, humanity is hidden as well. Nevertheless, professing and believing in both, I make the same prayer as the penitent thief.”
(Thomas Aquinas, Adoro te)

IV. Acte de foi

(Act of Faith)
“My God, I firmly believe. . . .”
(Prayer, Acte de foi)

V. Puer natus est nobis

“A child is born to us, a son is given to us.”
(Isaiah 9:5)

VI. La manne et le Pain de Vie

(The Manna and the Bread of Life)
“You nourished your people with the food of angels. You unflinchingly gave them ready-made bread from heaven, capable of granting every pleasure and satisfying every taste. And the substance that you gave manifested your tender love for your children, since it accommodated the tastes of everyone who ate it and transformed according to the needs of each.”
(Wisdom 16:20-21)
“The life that Christ gives us through Communion is His whole life, with the special graces that He has earned for us by living every one of His mysteries for us.”
(Dom Columba Marmion, Christ in His Mysteries)
“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. And the bread that I give is my flesh, for the life of the world.”
(John 6:51)

VII. Les ressuscités et la lumière de Vie

(The Resurrected and the Light of Life)

“Whoever follows me does not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

(John 8:12)

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

(John 6:54)

VIII. Institution de l’Eucharistie

(The Institution of the Eucharist)

“This is my body. This is my blood.”

(Matthew 26:26,28)

IX. Les ténèbres

(The Darkness)

“Jesus said to them: This is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

(Luke 22:53)

“When they reached the place called Golgotha, there they crucified him!”

(Luke 23:33)

“From the sixth to the ninth hour, darkness spread over the whole land.”

(Matthew 27:45)

X. La Résurrection du Christ

(The Resurrection of Christ)

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”

(Luke 24:5)

XI. L’apparition du Christ ressuscité à Marie-Madeleine

(The Appearance of the Risen Christ to Mary Magdalene)

“Mary Magdalene remained outside near the tomb, weeping. She turned and saw Jesus, but she did not recognize him. Jesus said to her: Mary! She cried: Rabbouni! (which means Master). Jesus said to her: Go and find my brothers, and report to them: I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”

(John 20:11-17)

INTERMISSION

XII. La Transsubstantiation

(The Transsubstantiation)

“Sight, touch, taste in Thee are each deceived: hearing alone assures my belief. I believe all that the Son of God has spoken: nothing is truer than this word of Truth.”

(Thomas Aquinas, Adoro te)

“Under diverse species, which are no longer substances but only signs, sublime realities are hidden.”

(Thomas Aquinas, Lauda Sion)

XIII. Les deux murailles d'eau

(The Two Walls of Water)

"The waters were parted, and the children of Israel entered the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water to their right and to their left."

(Exodus 14:21-22)

"If the Host is broken, do not falter, but remember that there is as much beneath each fragment as beneath the entire Host. The substance is not divided, only the sign undergoes fraction, through which neither the form nor the stature of the One beneath the sign is diminished."

(Thomas Aquinas, Lauda Sion)

XIV. Prière avant la communion

(Prayer before Communion)

"Lord, I am not worthy . . . , but only say the word. . . ."

(Words of the Centurion, Matthew 8:8)

XV. La joie de la grâce

(The Joy of Grace)

"I come to you, Lord, to taste the joy of the sacred feast that you have prepared for the poor."

(Thomas à Kempis, De Imitatione Christi)

"The lover runs and flies! He is full of joy, he is free and nothing holds him back."

(Thomas à Kempis, De Imitatione Christi)

XVI. Prière après la communion

(Prayer after Communion)

"My fragrance and my gentleness, my peace and my sweetness. . . ."

(Prayer attributed to Saint Bonaventure)

XVII. La Présence multipliée

(The Presence Multiplied)

"One receives, a thousand receive; each one receives as much as these: all receive without consuming."

(Thomas Aquinas, Lauda Sion)

XVIII. Offrande et Alleluia final

(Offering and Final Alleluia)

"I offer to you, Lord, all the outbursts of love and joy, the ecstasies, the raptures, the revelations, the heavenly visions of all saintly souls."

(Thomas à Kempis, De Imitatione Christi)

**Want to read more about Livre du
Saint Sacrement?**

Access Lecture Handout [HERE](#):



David Vogels

David Vogels, CAGO, writes the monthly Commentary for The American Organist magazine. His groundbreaking report on “The Birth of Messiaen’s Livre du Saint Sacrement” appeared in the January issue of that publication. He has recently translated Olivier Messiaen’s Livre du Saint Sacrement: Mystery of the Eucharistic Presence by Dorothee Bauer, the most comprehensive book on Messiaen’s organ cycle, from the original German for publication by Brill | Schöningh (available at brill.com/publisher/bdfs or Amazon).



Mr. Vogels served six years each as the American Guild of Organists’ National Councillor for Competitions and New Music and National Councillor for Professional Concerns. He has directed the Guild’s Long-Range Planning Task Force, Committee on National Conventions, Task Force on the Convention Cycle, and Region VI Nominating Committee. He has also served as Coordinator of the 1998 National Convention in Denver, Region VI Professional Concerns Coordinator, and Dean of the Denver Rocky Mountain Chapter, as well as a member of the AGO’s Public Relations Task Force and its Marketing, Budget, Nominating, and New Music committees.

Mr. Vogels has been organist at several Denver-area churches, including St. John’s Episcopal Church in Boulder and Wheat Ridge United Methodist Church, and he currently works on a freelance basis. He has performed recitals in Colorado and Texas, with a particular emphasis on new music, and has commissioned works for organ by William Albright, Naji Hakim, Dan Locklair, Stephen Paulus, and C. Curtis-Smith.

Mr. Vogels is President and Executive Editor of the Journal of Clinical Orthodontics and was the founding Editor of *Sommelier Journal*. He holds a bachelor’s degree in journalism from the University of Missouri and a master’s in music literature from the University of Colorado. His other interests include popular music, wine, golf, and skiing.

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