Liturgy as Mediation in James MacMillan's *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados*

by

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Abstract

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Scottish composer James MacMillan wrote a series of pieces using the poetic texts of persecuted peoples in Latin America and liturgical and other sacred texts of the Christian faith. Though *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados* were composed in two distinct genres, MacMillan built a framework of response to political repression in both by using liturgy and sacred texts as the scaffolding. These early compositions mark the commencement of an important period for MacMillan. During this time, he establishes himself as a modernist drawing on the traditional roots of his Catholic faith and cultural roots of his Scottish heritage. MacMillan amplifies the plight of persecuted peoples using sacred themes juxtaposed against secular events and texts. His symbiotic approach would eventually lead to his recognition as an internationally established composer with *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie, Veni, veni Immanuel,* and *Seven Last Words.* The manner in which MacMillan blends media (means of communication), particularly poetry (secular) and liturgy (sacred), using a stratified approach that often places two diametrically opposed themes in close proximity, allows for an enrichment of meaning and a mediated space in which an attempt is undertaken to reconcile complex issues of pain, loss, hope, and forgiveness. This essay examines the method by which MacMillan establishes such a framework in *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados* and argues that in the merging of diverse forms of media, meaning is deepened and enriched to the greater success of the mediation.

Scio enim quod Redemptor meus vivat, et in novissimo de terra surrecturus sim. Et rursum circumdabor pelle mea, et in carne mea videbo Deum quem visurus sum ego ipse, et oculi mei conspecturi sunt et non alius.

Reposita est haec spes mea in sinu meo.

Job 19.25-27

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My heartfelt thanks and appreciation to my wife Krista, my editor and friend, who does me the great courtesy of always asking me: ‘why?’.

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Introduction

The use of liturgy outside of its normal environs and in the creative artistic process has the potential to reveal significations worthy of closer attention. In the early stages of his career, Scottish composer Sir James MacMillan began to practice a mediation through the arts and the liturgy of the Catholic church that provides a fascinating study into the implications of amalgamating diverse methods of communication such as poetry, music, theatre, and prose. MacMillan was looking to '[mix] the sacred and secular in the same musical space.'[1] In the late 1980s and early 90s, he wrote three distinct works (two of which are the subject of this paper) in which he intermingled the media of music, liturgical text, and sacred and secular poetry. The result of this approach was to create an enrichment of meaning by drawing out similarities between the media. MacMillan's goal was to highlight what he terms as 'the mutual interrelationships of the personal, the political, the social and the religious; and the illumination of situations faced by 'ordinary people' through those situations being juxtaposed with liturgical texts.'[2] These interrelationships and the 'illumination of situations' in the music-theatre work, *Búsqueda* (1988), and the composition for choir and organ, *Cantos Sagrados* (1989), are the subject of this paper. These works are the vehicles by which these processes are examined. *Búsqueda* is a staged performance work for narrator, actors, soprano trio, chamber ensemble including percussion, categorized as an operatic work (though it might not be conventionally recognized as such). *Cantos Sagrados* is a choral piece written for the concert stage in the more traditional medium using mixed chorus and organ.

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[1] Email correspondence with composer, June 5, 2020.

[2] Michael Fuller, 'Liturgy, Scripture and Resonance in the Operas of James MacMillan,' *New Blackfriars*, 96 (2015), 383.

MacMillan's employment of the mediatory nature of liturgy and his sacramental view of the arts are two essential components for an understanding of how he functions as a composer, allowing his private faith to challenge the public sphere. To gain some understanding of both, MacMillan's musical education and development as a composer will be briefly visited, insofar as they aid in offering insight into his cultural, religious and political influences. This paper will then touch on a concise historical context for the subject matter of *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados.* I will examine the methods of mediation that MacMillan employs to create points of resonance between the liturgical, specifically portions of the Catholic Mass Ordinary and Requiem Mass, and non-liturgical, which includes the poetry of Latin Americans Ariel Dorfman, Ana Maria Mendoza, and the *Mothers of the Disappeared*: sources of poetry offering differing perspectives on political repression. Dorfman is an Argentinian-Chilean poet and professor whilst Mendoza is a Latin poet of unknown origin. The *Mothers*, whose poetry features in *Búsqueda,* are part of an organization originating in Argentina made up of women who have lost relatives to political repression.

I will then address MacMillan's use of the sacred and liturgical texts to erect a supporting scaffolding for the secular poetry, reviewing how new and enriched meanings emerge when the media of poetry, liturgy and music are brought together in close proximity.[3] This is particularly important when it comes to his polysemic use of that media, that is, his practice of drawing out several different meanings by bringing multiple forms of communication together, whether text, music, or ritual.

[3] The function of the Latin liturgy and implications for its use in MacMillan's work are addressed on p. 31.

It may be helpful to clarify the usage of a few terms having to do with this process of what might be termed a cross-fertilization of communication though it is in fact much more actively reciprocal than that term connotes. 'Scaffolding' implies a supporting structure from which one can work, unlike a 'framework', which would imply a structure to work within rather than upon. Both terms are used in reference to the liturgy (and extra-liturgical sacred texts), developing a support upon which poetic themes are constructed, as well as the framework within which they are examined. Throughout this paper, the term 'mediation' is read as the method of providing agency by which opposing elements of music, text, theme, imagery, etc. intermingle, thereby enriching existing meanings or even enabling new meanings. It is not used primarily in a reconciliatory sense though it certainly may include elements of that process as the liturgical elements provide space for mediation.[4]

The influence of Liberation Theology tends to loom large in any discussion of MacMillan's work in the 1990s, not least because it resonates with two self-admittedly important areas of his life: a concern for social issues and a deeply held Catholic faith. Liberation Theology refers to a practical strand of theological discourse that began to flourish in Latin America in the 1960s and 70s within parts of the Catholic church. It is primarily defined by a common experience of poverty and an interpretation of the Christian Scriptures that is inseparable from that experience. Many of its themes are borne out in calls for justice, mercy, and peace for the oppressed and vulnerable. I will explore further elements of its theological ramifications as I investigate liturgy and symbols as tools of mediation.

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[4] Because much of the thematic material remains critically unreconciled, the mediatory process is rather inter-mediatory, an 'interposition of processes between stimulus and result,' to borrow from the OED.

MacMillan suggests the Great Wars of the 20th-century lent credence to the idea that culture had failed especially as it pertained to the arts. One response from what he terms 'high modernism' was to seek a 'hard reset': a fresh beginning for art, a ground zero, a blank slate.[5] MacMillan believes that this resulted in swaths of cultural and religious heritage being muted or ignored, Christian or otherwise. While speaking of the challenges that faced composers of the late 20th/early 21st century, he maintains that since the 60s and 70s, 'the strictures of high modernism have been taken away and anything is possible…the potential for chaos and bewilderment is huge.'[6] As a way of addressing this, MacMillan has often referenced the image of a river of history or tradition at which composers stand, either choosing to dam it up and desiccate their work, or allowing it to irrigate their creative process though the fruit may differ from the seeds. MacMillan leans very heavily on Christian religious and cultural tradition, drawing on the musical and theological work of composers like Palestrina and Bach, whose principles of polyphonic layering are transformed to a stratification of an expanded type in MacMillan's work, one of themes, rhythm, timbre, and text.

In his review of the only studio recording of *Búsqueda*, Raymond Monelle pointedly remarks that, 'no one can turn religious truths into contemporary realities as vividly as James MacMillan.'[7] It is this ability to transpose forms and strictures of the past in such a way as to

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[5] 'James MacMillan in Conversation,' Incorporated Society of Musicians, https://www.ism.org/videos/interview-sir-james-macmillan-in-conversation-at-ism-members-day-2018. MacMillan contemplates what it would have been like for 'young artists, young composers, and young thinkers' in 1945 when it seemed as though the 'world had come to an end', how preferable it would have seemed to start with a *tabula rasa* after culture had failed them. He specifically references the claim attributed to Adorno that, the horror of the Holocaust and 'Auschwitz was the culmination of a failed culture.'

[6] 'James MacMillan in Conversation.'

[7] Raymond Monelle, 'Búsqueda and Visitatio Sepulchri,' in accompanying booklet, James MacMillan, *Busqueda/ Visitatio Sepulchri*, recorded 1993, compact disc.

address the rhetoric of contemporary secular society, sometimes critically, that has helped to establish MacMillan as one of the preeminent British composers in the world today. It has also earned him criticism. Following his early success in the orchestral medium through to his rise to international prominence as a composer of choral music, MacMillan's study and employment of sacred themes, specifically of the Christian tradition, remain a hallmark of his work, whether explicitly or implicitly. While self-admittedly informed by the styles of avant-garde figures of the 60s and 70s such as Berio and Boulez, MacMillan developed a form of writing in which, thematically or programmatically at least, one is led through an arc of extended experiential conflict towards some kind of resolution. This seems to be a long way off from a postmodern dismissal of grand narratives, having more in common with the modern mindset. MacMillan believes that tradition, be it religious or cultural, irrigates our societal experience and should continue to be acknowledged as fertile ground for artistic endeavours. By his own admission he often draws upon a reservoir of religious and cultural heritage, influenced by the folk music of Scotland and the work of those he considers his theologian-musician forebears: from Bach to Messiaen.[8]

From his early career onwards, MacMillan was, and still is, praised for an ability to break down perceived barriers between contemporary classical music and the general concert goer or music-listening public. He does so, in part, by appealing to a certain emotional forthrightness that is displayed in *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados*.[9] *Búsqueda* certainly opened the door to

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[8] MacMillan singles out Bach and Messiaen in their theological approach to composition, however this is not to the exclusion of composers outside of any bookend that this might suggest. He also references, as influential in incorporating an exploration of spirituality into their music, Stravinsky, Cage, and Britten, amongst others.

[9] Fuller, 383. 'There's something about being an artist which needs to make sense out of the chaos. It's like moulding clay. Taking something like the issue of the Argentinian 'Mothers of the Disappeared' is like taking the clay, taking the chaos and wanting to make it right. Perhaps it's futile, but it comes from a humanitarian urge.'

public recognition for MacMillan while *Cantos Sagrados* has proved to have the greater longevity when it comes to performance.[10] In the early 90s, as MacMillan's music was increasingly performed at major UK festivals, such as the Edinburgh International Festival and the BBC *Proms,* he developed a reputation with the British public as a composer who would not shy away from political, cultural, and religious commentary either in his music or in the public forum. During this period of fecundity, generally marked by a return to Scotland from Durham where he had completed academic studies, his compositional output opened up and a distinguishable development ensued with major works, such as *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie* (1990)*, Veni, Veni, Immanuel* (1992) and *Seven Last Words from the Cross* (1993), repertoire that is considered foundational to an understanding of his oeuvre today. Though *Confession, Veni* and *Seven Last Words* stand out as critical artistic statements, both *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados,* though smaller in scope and different in genre, should be considered forerunners of his distinct compositional voice, a combination of polytonal, aleatoric, tonal lyricism and a juxtaposition of opposing forces.

MacMillan writes music that consistently draws upon programmatic themes. One can trace a progressively broadened discourse with politics and Liberation Theology in these early works then moving towards, not unnaturally, a generalized reflection upon Christian themes, including Catholic liturgy and a recurring and intense focus on the Triduum (the three days marking the journey reflected in the Church calendar from the evening of Maundy Thursday to Easter Sunday).[11] Through the late 80s to early 2000s much of MacMillan's thematic subject

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[10] *Cantos Sagrados* calls for choir and organ, while *Búsqueda* requires a chamber orchestra, percussion, multiple actors and a trio of sopranos. Thus the longevity and popularity of the former could be based upon the ease of gathering performance forces, whereas the latter's orchestration calls for a more diverse set of capable performers.

[11] Philip A. Cooke. *The Music of James MacMillan* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019), 115.

matter was informed by a triumvirate of faith, folk tradition, and roots in a modernism and experimentalism influenced by composers such as Lutosławski and Penderecki.[12] Dominic Wells maintains that MacMillan's 'view of tradition - musical, religious, or political - is to understand the present better by revisiting and accepting the past.'[13] He describes MacMillan as a 'retrospective modernist', employing much of the compositional language of modernism while drawing on the aforementioned elements.[14] MacMillan would most likely dismiss the term 'retrospection' as a stagnant term and instead affirm a practice of informing the present by encouraging a combined blossoming of religious and cultural experiences that resonate with and through one another. This compositional approach allows for what critics have both negatively and positively described as a striking personalism; an earthly and everyman agenda that draws from a deep well of folk, religious, and musical history. Viewing it from another perspective, one finds parallels in Beethoven's use of chant and polyphony in the later years of his life; methods lying seemingly ill at ease with one another but producing, in close proximity, a more nuanced context in which to view the greater whole.[15] In recent years MacMillan has turned increasingly towards absolute music and abstract theological concepts as the inspiration for his compositions.

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[12] Stephen Johnson, 'MacMillan, James,' *Grove Music Online*, 2001, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000048182. See also dissertations by Kingsbury, Wells, Alvey, et al.

[13] Dominic Peter Wells, 'James MacMillan: Retrospective Modernist' (PhD thesis, Durham University, 2012), 7.

[14] Wells, 16.

[15] William Drabkin, *Beethoven, Missa Solemnis,* (Cambridge, [U.K.]: Cambridge University Press), 1991. See *Credo* in Beethoven's Missa Solemnis: specifically 'Et incarnatus est'. Drabkin speaks about Beethoven's use of the Dorian church mode here as a negation of 'major/minor harmony', reinforcing the dominant key's transition back to D major. The introduction of a chant-like theme, then transferred to all voices, along with polyphonic entrances leading to 'ex Maria Virgine', eventually culminate in a unified and homophonic 'homo factus est'.

As his compositional style matured in the early 1990s, MacMillan's combination of polytonality, atonality, and aleatoric techniques, all the while layering lyric melodies and clashing texts became defining features. It is during this period that he began to concertedly mine the depths of associations inherent in the Christian Scriptures and Catholic liturgy. In the spiritual world they inhabit, these iconic images stand on their own merit and function, but in MacMillan's music they are viewed in a new light, as they are suddenly juxtaposed with secular texts and political events, as in *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados*. MacMillan's emerging voice exhibited its richness, stretching towards a fuller potential through the layering of each style, each method, each text, the meanings they each hold respectively and the way in which they clash and converge when held up against each other. While contemporaries such as Pärt and Tavener pursued contemplation through minimalism (both also committed to a spiritual approach), MacMillan's approach was to actively pursue the heart of conflict, progressing towards programmatic culmination: a tension and release based in thematic journeys. Richard McGregor recounts MacMillan describing his musical identity:

> 'If I have a mission I think it must involve acts of remembrance, of recollection, of rediscovery of the past or a re-animation of our heritage, of a reawakening of our culture'. This is not 're-formation', which [MacMillan] rejects. It is 're-membrance' - going back to things that are buried in the collective memory; 're-collection' - retrieving ideas and bringing them into the present; 're-discovery' - finding art/music that was written/made in the past and celebrating its value now; 're-animation' - giving new life to old ideas; and 're-awakening' - bringing musical ideas 'back to life' after a long sleep. [16]

[16] Richard McGregor, ''A Metaphor for the Deeper Wintriness': Exploring James MacMillan's Musical Identity,' *Tempo* 65, no. 257 (2011): 22-39.

The exercising of opposing forces became an integral part of MacMillan's compositional technique: a clashing, blending and merging of styles in equal measure. His use of sacred liturgical references in and amongst the secular poetry of works like *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados* conjures or splashes across the blank page image after image, dredged up to be placed on trial before the listener with its associations and implications as witnesses to it. Sacred text acts as a backdrop to a particular oppressive scene, poetic reflection, or political statement. Alternatively, it may emerge as a sympathetic strand of thematic material that causes its countersubject (i.e. intermingling text, musical idea, or societal function) to be understood in a richer manner.

This is not religious imagery in a vacuum, rather it is the result of MacMillan's use of a practiced form of Christian worship that has and continues to shape individuals the world over. The art becomes the icon wherein active meditation, that 'interposition of processes between stimulus and result,' allows for mediation of remembrance and commemoration.[17] Out of the history of liturgical practice emerges countless resonances with the potential to enhance the motifs of joy, pain, agony and peace, such as are starkly presented in both *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados.* Most prominently, these works aid in contextualizing the suffering of a particular place and people (Latin America, the *Mothers of the Disappeared*, political dissidents). It places all questions, expressions of anger and anguish within the framework of the Catholic Mass and Latin hymnody, each section holding a specific time and place in the lives of the sufferers portrayed in both works. Many would regularly hear, practice and experience the words of the liturgy themselves. A reading of this work in such a manner that gives so much focus to the role

[17] OED Online, 'mediation,' accessed August 23, 2020. https://www-oed-com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/view/Entry/115665?redirectedFrom=mediation

of liturgy as a defining structure may seem to diminish the voice of the individual poet(s) but the mediated area is one in which those voices are actively heard. Rather than suppressing dissidence, or dissonance, by an overarching uniformity, the liturgy is seen to provide the space within which much of the grief and questioning of the poets are highlighted. It is a place where MacMillan finds common ground with the poets through a shared liturgy or, at the least, a shared imagery. Grief is not ameliorated, far from it, but in many cases it is magnified to carry a greater weight and prominence.

> [*Búsqueda]* therefore has both political and religious overtones, expressing my interest in both the secular and the sacred, the timeless and the contemporary...The Ordinary sections of the Mass *(Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei*), are used as structural scaffolding for the development of the piece.[18]

> In [Cantos Sagrados] I wanted to compose something which was both timeless and contemporary, both sacred and secular.[19]

MacMillan's use of liturgical scaffolding is one method by which he attempts to contextualize moments and create points of resonance which are produced when liturgy moves into close proximity to the poetry and events. As the practice of liturgy seeks to establish a meeting place between its participants and the spiritual or what is sometimes referred to as the 'numinous', MacMillan accomplishes a similar mediation by the association of political events with liturgical text and secular poetry, *all brought together in music.* What lies behind his *modus operandi* is the belief that religious practice, its traditions and imagery, can serve as a strong

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[18] James MacMillan, 'Búsqueda,' Boosey & Hawkes, https://www.boosey.com/cr/music/James-MacMillan-Busqueda/3524.

[19] James MacMillan, 'Cantos Sagrados,' Boosey & Hawkes, https://www.boosey.com/cr/music/James-MacMillan-Cantos-Sagrados/6138.

framework for the creative process, stimulating the imagination. His rootedness in an ancient faith tradition compels him to explore these associations, with little or no separation between religious and public life. In doing so, MacMillan contributes towards what he terms, a 're-sacralization of our world', something he believes will help to 'penetrate the mists of contemporary banality to restore the idea of the sacred in which our true and fullest freedom resides.'[20] In *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados*, this freedom allowed or perhaps compelled him to explore the intersection of politics, liturgy and music: a clashing or interweaving of the sacred and secular in an attempt to contextualize horrific political events and contribute towards an act of healing, remembrance and restoration. It has proved powerful and poignant, drawing critical acclaim, due to its relational and unflinching nature. Regarding this personalism, Stephen Johnson wrote:

> 'When Ernst Bloch remarked that 'We hear only ourselves', he was indicating music's strength, not its weakness - its capacity to draw images from our minds and cause us to reflect upon them. That MacMillan's music does call forth charged images - however banal - is part of its strength.[21]

Richard McGregor refers to this as 'textural mixing' but in this paper the term 'cross-fertilization' towards a mediatory nature will be used.[22] *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados* may not have achieved the same prominence as later works, however they do reveal a compelling process

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[20] James MacMillan, 'Sawatsky Visiting Scholar 2016: Sir James MacMillan - The Spiritual in Music,' Conrad Grebel Lecture Series, March 3, 2016, YouTube Video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9P0MZrleVE.

[21] Stephen Johnson, 'James MacMillan,' *Tempo*, no. 185 (1993): 2-5, https://www.jstor.org/stable/945707.

[22] McGregor, 27. 'The musical equivalent to this textural mixing is the juxtaposition of potentially opposing musical elements at the same time: such is the effect delivered in the opening and closing sections of The Confession of Isobel Gowdie which contain 'a multitude of chants, songs, and litanies coming together in a reflective outpouring - a prayer for the murdered woman.'

of mediation between faith, politics, anger and healing that would have an influence on successive works and, indeed, MacMillan's development throughout the final decade of the millennium. This paper will address questions of why and how he achieves this intermediary transaction and what it means in the context of the intersection of political-secular poems and religious-sacred practices .

Early Influences

James MacMillan was born in the town of Kilwinning, Ayrshire, Scotland in 1959 and grew up in a Catholic working class family. The Catholic tradition, the economic status of his community, and the practice of music-making at the social, educational, and religious levels all played an important role in shaping his character and outlook on life. He began his musical training at the age of 9, learning to play the piano and trumpet, and had begun composing by the age of 10.[23] Like many young school children, he was given a recorder to play in music classes at the local Catholic school. Noting the irony of being inspired by the playing of this ubiquitous instrument at a young age, MacMillan later reflected that, 'everything changed immediately,' and that somehow at this time, a 'deep desire to make music, play music, write music,' took hold and never left him.[24] His grandfather, a coal miner who 'spent his days [working] underground', played in community brass bands, an important tradition in the Ayrshire area, and procured for MacMillan his first cornet.[25] His grandfather, who was also a singer, would bring home hymn books from which MacMillan learned to play. MacMillan's father and mother were musical and folk music was a regular feature in the home but it was his maternal grandfather who inspired that initial spark of passion for music making.[26] Singing and performing in the local school followed anon naturally, as did involvement in the parish church choir. As MacMillan's gifts

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[23] 'James MacMillan in Conversation.' MacMillan recounts, 'I was prematurely interested in Wagner and I'm still recovering.'

[24] Donald Macleod, 'James MacMillan', *BBC Radio: Composer of the Week*, podcast audio, 19 July, 2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07h7jbp.

[25] 'James MacMillan in Conversation.'

[26] MacMillan frequently references the moment when his primary teacher, a nun in the local Catholic school, produced recorders for the class as a moment when he believes he knew that he wanted to commit his life to making music.

were recognized, opportunities to direct and accompany the choir on the organ followed. Early musical life and training, as well as involvement in a community receptive to music-making, left a music promoter and organizer's mindset in him. He formed a street band and composed for whatever instrumentation was available, including *ad hoc* percussion equipment taken from items close to hand.[27] This practice of combining an eclectic array of percussive and brass instruments would become a regular feature in his instrumental music.

MacMillan describes his childhood home as a happy one, presided over by parents who were devout Catholics but who weren't afraid to go against the grain in pursuit of the best opportunities for their children. This took shape in a controversial transferring of MacMillan from the local Catholic school to a 'non-denominational' one where his educational provision might be better served. In this school MacMillan would encounter a music teacher who introduced his students to the music of Palestrina, Lassus and Monteverdi. This exposure was to have a lifelong effect on MacMillan and it is here that he says his 'interest in and love of Catholicism actually took off.'[28] Kingsbury describes this introduction to the polyphony of Renaissance masters as, '[providing] MacMillan with a fundamental compositional concept - the juxtaposition of multiple layers of musical activity [in different voices] progressing at different rates.'[29] MacMillan would employ this 'compositional layering' or 'stratified polyphony' at the micro and macro level, not only in regards to musical structure but especially in the emergence

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[27] 'James MacMillan in Conversation.'

[28] James MacMillan, *A Scot's Song: A Life in Music*, (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2019), 24.

[29] Stephen A. Kingsbury, 'The Early Choral Music of James MacMillan:1983-1993' (DMA diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2003), 11.

of his juxtapositional style that would thrust together opposing themes in religion, culture, and politics.

The working class mining community in which MacMillan was raised kept up strong connections and was actively involved in the Labour Party. His grandfather and uncle were involved in workers' unions and socialist movements but eschewed and actively opposed the hard left Marxists reaching for prominence within these movements. In a break with his family, the teenage MacMillan joined the Young Communist League to the great dismay and heartbreak of his grandfather, a decision which he later described as, 'one of the worst things I've ever done.'[30] In a reflection on his 60th year, a booklet entitled *A Scot's Song*, MacMillan recounts that he had 'developed an interest in politics too as a teenager and followed my family members into the Labour Party...one might say that my premature interest in politics took a particularly militant turn with romantic gesturalism of my teenage years.'[31] His involvement with the Young Communists continued through his teens, yet MacMillan soon found that his Catholicism, deep and embedded as it was, was fundamentally at odds with what he perceived to be a militant atheism and deconstructionism that permeated the Young Communists movement. Looking back later in life, Macmillan recounted:

> ...the politics of the ultra-left infected and corroded me for years, before I gradually woke up and shed the virus. Politically, I feel that I haven't necessarily gone in the opposite direction; I'm mundanely non-descript in my positions, tediously middle-of-the-road, with an abiding tinge of the social restraint I had even when I was in the Communist Party, during which time I never abandoned my Catholic faith. Some think that is strange. Maybe it is.[32]

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[30] MacMillan, *A Scot's Song,* 32.

[31] MacMillan, 32.

[32] MacMillan, 33

Throughout his life critics have attempted to pin down MacMillan to different points on the political spectrum. Whilst he may have moved away from a certain political forthrightness that was present in his compositional output and publicly stated views during the late 80s to early 2000s, it seems clear that MacMillan views this as a loss of 'youthful certainties' rather than a political move from the so-called left to the right. Perhaps now more than ever he believes that the spiritual and the exploration of and grasping after the numinous attracts people to music from all faiths and political views, and none.[33] By the time he wrote *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados*, MacMillan had retreated from his incursion into communist ideology, though a lifelong concern for social issues has ever been in evidence in his public life. In a recent publication, *The Music of James MacMillan* (the only serious attempt thus far at a survey of MacMillan's oeuvre), Philip Cooke suggests that it is MacMillan's cumulative success as a composer/conductor that has gradually shifted him from the left to the right.[34] He suggests that MacMillan, once an outspoken composer and critic of the status quo, is now a part of an establishment that he once challenged, and that something akin to self-preservation has tempered his output thematically as a composer and commentator. Whatever the case, MacMillan's youthful, familial and political experience with socialism, solidarity with the working class, minority Catholicism in what was a Protestant majority, set the stage for a composer who, in the early-mid stage of his career made a practice of

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[33] James MacMillan, 'Symphony No. 5: Le grand Inconnu,' Boosey and Hawkes, https://www.boosey.com/cr/music/James-MacMillan-Symphony-No-5-Le-grand-Inconnu/102048. 'There is a real burgeoning interest in spirituality in our contemporary post-religious and now post-secular society, especially in relation to the arts. Music is described as the most spiritual of the arts, even by non-religious music lovers, and there is today a genuinely universal understanding that music can reach deep into the human soul.'

[34] Cooke, 137. MacMillan tends to describe himself as 'middle-of-the-road' when it comes to politics and seems to be comfortable with a retreat from the limelight of the media. However, his critique on the state of music education in Scotland would seem to suggest that it isn't lacking in rear-guard action. See James MacMillan's *Music Makes Us Socially Mobile* in Standpoint Magazine.

identifying with the politically oppressed and used his music as a critical commentary inextricably linked to his Catholic faith and political views.

He attended the University of Edinburgh as an undergraduate, graduating with a BMus in 1981, and completing a PhD in composition from the University of Durham in 1987. His compositional interest in Kenneth Leighton, who became a professor of his in Edinburgh, stemmed in part from an interest in Leighton's combination of traditionalism with the experimental.[35] Leighton, who had studied with Italian modernist Goffredo Petrassi, was MacMillan's connection to the avant-garde. His music had a deep and lasting effect on MacMillan, not least due to his willingness to engage with sacred themes in his own music. In Durham, MacMillan studied with John Casken, a professor and composer only a decade older than him, who had studied with Polish modernists and developed a style of 'cautious aleatoricism' along with a focus on textural development.[36] Stephen Johnson writes that up until his completion at Durham, MacMillan had 'pursued a modernist course, though he had been influenced early on by Polish experimentalism, as typified by such figures as Lutosławski and Penderecki, 'the avant-garde with the human face.''[37]

As he began to gain recognition as a composer, following his departure from Durham and return back to Scotland, MacMillan might have been referred to as 'a re-formed modernist with a human face'. Indeed, MacMillan came to deride what he saw as an oppressive program of

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[35] James MacMillan in Conversation.'

[36] David Revill, 'Casken, John,' *Grove Music Online,* 2001, https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000005093.

[37] Johnson, 'MacMillan, James.'

censorship in certain schools of modernism. In a 2009 essay entitled, *Music and Modernism*, MacMillan stated:

> A European modernism, with its roots in the Second Viennese School and developed by a small group of post-war composers in certain European towns and cities, has been given a special place in official understandings of the development of modern music. A message has gone out that composers, and indeed the musical public, should regard this sanctioned path as, not just the way forward, but the way things are and ought to be.[38]

Early in his career it seems that MacMillan made the decision, consciously or not, that his Catholic faith would be a primary lens through which he viewed his creative process. Along with his work as a composer and performances as a conductor, MacMillan has become a sought-after voice regarding the interplay between Christian theology and music.[39] In a lecture entitled 'The Spiritual in Music' given at the University of Waterloo in 2016, he reflected on the reason that he has so often drawn upon a reservoir of the Christian faith tradition:

> [It is a] river that runs through history irrigating human experience at any given point in history...we stand at the bank of that river, feeling its flow. If you put a dam into that river it causes desiccation, and it causes dryness and death. Drying up of human potential, the drying up of culture perhaps…[T]here were moments in the 20th-century, politically, philosophically, perhaps artistically as well, where people wanted to put a dam up to tradition and stop it, thinking that it could be again untainted by that tradition. But it has consequences that were unforeseen and has implications for human flourishing. Take the dam away and it can begin to flow again. And it's not a conservative position to say that...Tradition is like a gift from history...to be afraid of tradition seems bizarre.[40]

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[38] James MacMillan, 'Music and Modernity: James MacMillan,' *Standpoint*, October 26, 2009, https://standpointmag.co.uk/text-november-09-music-and-modernity-james-macmillan/.

[39] He currently holds the post of 'Professor of Theology, Imagination, and the Arts' at the University of St Andrew's Divinity School.

[40] 'James MacMillan in Conversation'

Much of MacMillan's extensive output is inspired by and imbued with sacred themes, metaphor, and language that spring up out of the deep well of his Christian faith. This is evidenced in his expansive list of choral repertoire for which MacMillan is perhaps best known. It is permeated with Christian metaphor and allegory yet it was his orchestral work that first propelled him to international fame. *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie* (1990), an orchestral tribute to a 17th-century woman accused of witchcraft, and then *Veni, veni Emmanuel* (1992), a concerto for percussion and orchestra, broke MacMillan's music out into the wider world as they were featured at the BBC *Proms*, a London-based summer festival of classical music showcasing orchestras and musicians from around the world. Inspired largely by spiritual, religious, and political themes, these two works are a part of a period of fruitful work that saw MacMillan then venture into liturgical drama (*Visitatio Sepulchri,* 1993), a major religious choral work (*Seven Last Words from the Cross,* 1993), and an opera (*Inés de Castro*, 1991-95).[41] Cooke calls *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie*, *Veni, veni Emmanuel*, and *Seven Last Words*, 'a triumvirate of works from the early 1990s on which MacMillan's compositional reputation hangs, three pieces that define him as a composer and have coloured all his subsequent work'.[42] These three works, and indeed the substantial body of repertoire that emerged over the course of the 1990s, can be viewed as a part of a period in which MacMillan's style begins to solidify. They are post-*Búsqueda*, post-*Cantos Sagrados*. MacMillan leaves behind experimentation with the form of

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[41] Visitatio Sepulchri (1993) is in many ways a direct successor and progression from Búsqueda. In it MacMillan uses texts from a 14th-century Easter Day liturgical drama, incorporating the *Te Deum* hymn of praise as a finale. In three sections, the opening is 'a lengthy orchestral prelude which captures the violence of the crucifixion, the anguish and the agony at Golgotha.' The second section enacts the drama between the three women at the tomb of Jesus and the angels they encounter there. A cantor interjects with shouts, spoken word and Sprechtsimme chanting as an external observer. The group together sing the *Victimae Pascheli laudes,* an Easter sequence, which leads into the final section and the *Te Deum.*

[42] Cooke, 62.

'music and liturgical theatre' works he engaged in with *Búsqueda* and *Visitatio Sepulchri*, though he continues to use spoken word and dramatic 'scene-setting' in later compositions. While sacred themes remain a dominant feature, in time MacMillan's use of Liberation Theology as a primary theme begins to fade and becomes more of a strand of general social justice in his compositional consciousness.

It has been suggested that as MacMillan experienced more success as a composer, the usage of the 'protest piece genre' became an expression of his past and that MacMillan's view on protest through music gradually began to shift away from direct confrontation towards reflection and meditation.[43] MacMillan himself has said that his political views have changed or softened over time. This is evident as few of his works since *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados* have directly engaged with such overt political-religious themes.[44] Cooke proposes that *Veni, veni Emmanuel* is MacMillan's final work connected to his interest in Liberation Theology,[45] however this assertion is based on a tenuous connection between Luke, chapter 21 (Christ foretelling the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 AD and the consequent dispersal of the Jewish people throughout the Roman Empire) and the text of 'O Come, O Come, Emmanuel', which calls for the ransoming of Israel, projected forward in time to apply to all Christians everywhere who live 'in exile'. This is a critical theme of the Christian faith and, while it is 'liberation theology' in the truest sense of the term, it has broader connotations for spiritual redemption rather than solely economic and political relief. It seems erroneous then to suggest that MacMillan turns away from

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[43] Cooke, 54. 'MacMillan regularly cites *Búsqueda* as being the 'piece that allowed me, for the first time, to be myself'. The work paved the way for many of the musical developments that were to follow…'

[44] MacMillan's *A Scotch Bestiary* (2004) is an interesting study in political satire.

[45] Cooke, 64.

Liberation Theology as a guiding theme at this point but rather, that the principles of this particular strand of Catholic discourse are diffused into a focus on broader Christian spirituality.

Literature that analyzes the breadth of MacMillan's output is at this stage sparse, however, is ever-growing.[46] In the literature that does exist, there is a consensus that *Búsqueda* (and to a lesser extent *Cantos Sagrados*) are among a collection of works in which MacMillan begins to settle into his mature compositional voice. We see this voice affirmed in *Visitatio Sepulchri*, *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie*, and *Veni, veni Immanuel.* Though differing in performance forces, MacMillan's marriage of modernism and traditionalism begins to blossom into full flower. Cooke remarks on MacMillan's ability to weave together sacred and secular themes, albeit from an incomplete perspective:

> (Búsqueda) was the beginning of MacMillan's interest in Liberation theology, a heavily politicised form of religious theory in which religion is redefined in a secular context. This practice, which began in Latin America in the late 1960s, suggests a certain level of humanism, as it aims to transform society by overcoming the conditions of poverty, oppression and violence…[47]

It is important however, to note a crucial component of MacMillan's compositional process which Cooke has bypassed. For MacMillan, religion is not redefined in a secular context but rather redefines the context into which it is brought or practiced. Just as he composes through the lens of his Christian faith, MacMillan believes religion brings into focus secular concepts and events. Cooke's point regarding the transformative aspirations of Liberation Theology rings true,

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[46] In August 2020, Cambridge University Press released a book on James MacMillan studies in the *Cambridge Composer Series.* It features a collection of scholarly essays on a range of musicological, theological and analytical topics concerning a selection of MacMillan's works.

[47] Cooke, 28.

but MacMillan brings the religious (e.g. Catholic faith with its liturgy, its praxis) to bear on secular life, not the other way around. That is what lies at the heart of the intersecting media in *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados*: the deepening and enrichment of meaning, the broadening of context, and the emergence and clarification of new ideas by associations.

When speaking of the continuing tradition of writing through a sacred worldview, MacMillan frequently mentions 20th-century composers such as Britten, Stravinsky, Poulenc, Messaien, and Cage.[48] Messaien in particular is held up as a model: one whose Catholicism was 'the major—indeed the singular—factor behind his genius, his modernism and his individuality.'[49] MacMillan claims that 'every note of his unique contribution to music was shaped by a deep religious conviction and liturgical practice.'[50] MacMillan views Messaien as a theologian, placing him alongside Bach in his breathtaking incorporation and saturation of Christian themes, and immersion of theological structure into his music. This is a crucial point in terms of gaining an understanding of the position from which MacMillan writes, how he views his vocation, not only as a modern composer but as one who stands in the tradition of Bach and Messaien.

For MacMillan, the sacred and secular don't stand on opposite sides of a divide but rather they meet and intermingle on earth, as the sacred is a vehicle of truth and hope that bursts in to shine light upon the seemingly darkest of places. This, is where he leans away from Messaien. Much of MacMillan's sacred content, throughout his career but particularly through the period

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[48] Peter Whittle, 'Sir James MacMillan: Scotland's Great Composer on his Influences: Faith, heritage & Tradition,' *So What You're Saying Is…,* podcast audio, November 16, 2019, https://podcast.app/sir-james-macmillan-scotlands-great-composer-on-his-influences-faith-heritage-tradition-e77672933/. MacMillan calls Stravinsky, 'as revolutionary in his music making as he was conservative in his theology.'

[49] MacMillan, 64.

[50] MacMillan, 64.

marked by his overt interest in Liberation Theology, is focussed on the very tangible human spiritual experience. These works are generally connected with a very specific experience of earthly suffering. Whereas Messaien's was a 'theology of glory', transcendent in its focus on Christ's divinity, MacMillan's theology, as displayed in these early works, heavily focuses on the identification of Christ with the suffering victim.[51] It is telling that these works centre largely on suffering until the writing of *Veni, Veni, Immanuel*, as if MacMillan is working out a response or theology of suffering through his music finally arriving at a conclusion with *Veni*. This conclusion is the political and spiritual redemption of the oppressed through the death and resurrection of Christ, one who has come and is coming. The deliverer promised during Advent is made manifest during Triduum (the period covering the betrayal and crucifixion of Christ) and recognized on Easter morning (the resurrection of Christ), three days to which MacMillan self-admittedly continues to circle back. It would seem that this then marks an internalization of the very tenets of Liberation Theology, as it becomes an understated pillar in the framework of MacMillan's compositional style.

In an interview with Richard McGregor, MacMillan speaks of how his approach to mysticism differs from that of Messaien:

> 'I think it comes from being a political animal as well, certainly someone who was aware of the important political dimension of human existence, not necessarily always in the active sense, but, whether I like it or not and, to be honest, I don't like it now because I've lost all the political certainties that I had when I was younger. But, I certainly was shaped by a desire to make good that

[51] Paul Griffiths, 'Messiaen, Olivier,' *Grove Music Online,* 2001, https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000018497. 'Of Christ's Passion and Crucifixion, treated in so much Christian music, [Messiaen] had little to say…[h]e was attracted by those moments in the Gospel stories when Christ's divinity stood apparent'.

> which was bad, in the most simple and simplistic terms, that is, trying to grapple with the disorder and hurt in the world in order to make it better…'[52]

The focus on Liberation Theology in his works may have faded, but the influence and inspiration from Christian themes has not. While in the 90s MacMillan's style matures and takes on a broader inclusion of his traditional influences, at the end of the 80s he was still developing a method alongside a modernist technique that would brashly thrust religious imagery and liturgy into the political realm.[53] It is at this significant juncture that Kingsbury suggests that MacMillan 'had begun to feel a new energy and fertility, along with the realization that he had at last found the roots of a truly personal musical language - one which still owed something to the leading post-war avant-garde.'[54]

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[52] James MacMillan and Richard McGregor, 'James MacMillan: A Conversation and Commentary,' *The Musical Times* 151, no. 1912 (2010), 84.

[53] Email correspondence with the composer. MacMillan mentions that his idea was to 'open up the political dimension of the other texts in unusual and untried ways' by 'looking to mix sacred and secular in the same musical space'.

[54] Kingsbury, 13.

Historical Background — *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados*

> Lifting voices in an environment of oppression is an act of unified opposition to injustice. In the defiance that prompts the singing, there is the understanding that one is not alone. Others acknowledge the injustice and raise their voices in dissent. More importantly, singing in defiance of injustice is a sign of hope that evil power used to provoke pain will not ultimately prevail. *Hoping for justice is a point of intersection between political protest in the streets and eschatological expectation that sustains Christian liturgy.*[55] (italics mine)
>
> C. Michael Hawn in *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology*

As MacMillan emerged onto the national stage as a multi-faceted composer, he produced choral, operatic and orchestral works with a strong political streak, a practice that would continue into the nineties. These included the following works: *Búsqueda* (Search) (1988), *The Exorcism of Rio Sumpúl* (1989), *Cantos Sagrados* (Sacred Songs) (1989), *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie* (1990), *Catherine's Lullabies* (1990), and *Veni, veni, Emmanuel* (1992).[56] Though later in life he would distance himself from some of his 'youthful certainties' and would refer to *Búsqueda* as 'a young man's work', MacMillan has never shied away from incisive political commentary, whether in his compositional work or in the public sphere, regarding music, religion, or politics, as often intertwined in the fabric of modern culture.[57]

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[55] C. Michael Hawn, 'The truth shall set you free : song, struggle, and solidarity in South Africa,' Begbie, Jeremy, and Guthrie, Steven R. ed, *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology,* Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies Series, (Grand Rapids, Michigan ; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans, 2011), 410. In an essay that 'explores the intersection between song and political protest in South Africa', Hawn acknowledges that in singing and in the outward practice of liturgy one finds that one is not alone. He suggests that, 'corporate song [read liturgy] can thus engender a deeper sense of belonging to one diverse and globally extended family of God. Not least, we are likely to become far more socially and politically attentive, not only with respect to other nations but also to our own.'

[56] Cooke views *Veni, veni, Emmanuel* as a part of this group due to the emancipatory nature of the antiphon text as can be seen in the Advent carol's English translation: O come, o come, Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel. Though the theme is certainly liberation theology, if MacMillan viewed the work as culminating at Eastertide, it takes on a greater, universal meaning.

[57] See articles *Scotland's Shame*, *Unthinking Dogmatism*, and *Music and Modernity.*

These works emerged in conjunction with an exploration of political themes through the lens of Liberation Theology: a worldview that has its roots in Roman Catholicism and regards social, political and economic justice as anticipating eternal salvation. This interest found manifestation in works composed after a fallow year in which MacMillan had returned home to Scotland from Durham, settling in Glasgow. Rather than enduring an extended 'writer's block', MacMillan emerged from a year of relative silence with a renewed approach that would incorporate cultural (Scottish), religious (Catholic) and political engagement. Kingsbury suggests that at this time, 'MacMillan's new and deeper understanding of and commitment to his Scottish heritage [led] to nationalism that is new for MacMillan's music. His Catholicism asserts itself in the choice of religious subjects and texts. His socialist political concerns take the form of actively promoting social justice for the poor and oppressed.'[58] MacMillan recounted:

> I don't know what happened; it wasn't a conscious thing, it wasn't a deliberate thing, but the barriers separating these various compartments dissolved and I began to realize that there was a possibility of allowing the political, or the vernacular, or indeed, the spiritual dimension again in the music and that was a liberating thing for me...I also feel it is perverse to maintain that contemporary music should have no connection with the world around us, that the concern to achieve integrity in the abstract is somehow an activity which exists in blissful amoral isolation.[59]

MacMillan's interest in Liberation Theology, which blossomed as a religio-political movement within socialist circles in Christianity and particularly in the Latin American Roman Catholic Church, has been documented more expansively in Dominic Wells' dissertation, *A*

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[58] Kingsbury, 13.

[59] Kingsbury, 14.

Retrospective Modernist, and in Philip Cooke's recent book, *The Music of James MacMillan*. Yet this movement and its connection to the Christian faith and Catholic tradition in which it found a prominent voice deserves a closer look. Liberation Theology draws on themes of justice, equality and care for the poor in Christian scripture and specifically in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Concerning application of these themes in the political sphere, it is a unification of religious thought and political theory, one based on the very practical outworking of Christian teaching.[60] Of the aspects that distinguish this vein of thought and practice, particularly in Latin America, the following are noted here by Christopher Rowland:

> First of all, it is rooted in ordinary people's everyday experience of poverty. Second, it involves a use of Scripture the interpretation of which is closely related to that experience. Third, it is a theology which in many parts of the world has deep roots within the life of the Church...Fourth, it has flourished in the meetings of groups within urban or rural settings, worshipping and reflecting on Scripture and joining in common projects for human welfare in health and education. Fifth, there is a theology which is explored not just in the tutorial or seminar but engages the whole person in the midst of a life of struggle and deprivation...Finally, books of the Bible (like the book of Revelation) and parts of the theological tradition, often ignored or despised, become a vehicle of hope and insight in these situations of oppression and deprivation as new hope in God's purposes are discovered.[61]

It is important to note that Liberation Theology is rooted in the very real and present suffering of the poor in the face of economic and political oppression. Unlike other theological traditions, it would seem impossible to separate the experience from the theorization. For many

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[60] Fuller, 383. 'I think what I wanted to do in this piece was to bring together the timeless and the contemporary, the secular and the sacred, the religious and the political'; and he has described Búsqueda as being 'inspired by the basic principles of Liberation Theology'.

[61] Christopher Rowland, 'Introduction: The Theology of Liberation,' In *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, edited by Christopher Rowland, 1-16. Cambridge Companions to Religion. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2.

theologians, clergy and lay workers of the Catholic church who worked in Latin America during the 60s, 70s and 80s, 'it is their experience and that of those with whom they work that is the motor which drives their theology.'[62] Whereas MacMillan now admits his political views have softened over time, the influence of Liberation Theology on *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados* (and then reaching a high water mark with *Confession of Isobel Gowdie*) represents a major period in this composer's development. It continues to leave traces through his work and public commentary to this day. MacMillan's holistic approach to writing, whether for congregational purposes, amateurs or professional ensembles, has always retained as a core principle that the experiential always informs the theoretical. In this the residual effect of Liberation Theology finds common ground with MacMillan's ongoing social and educational concerns, as well as a long tradition in the British Isles of composing not only for the professional or elite but for the layperson.

Búsqueda and *Cantos Sagrados* contain carefully selected poetic texts structured upon portions of the Latin Mass liturgy and cover 'similar religio-political ground'.[63] The former is set as music-theatre and the latter written to be performed as a conventional concert performance work. They are closely connected, their premieres followed one year after the other. Both address political themes by way of the interplay and cross-fertilization between sacred and secular texts. There is another work in which MacMillan employs this multi-textual approach using liturgical and protest poetry. It is entitled *Catherine's Lullabies* and was written to celebrate the birth of his daughter. Its running time is twenty minutes and it is scored for SATB chorus, 3 trumpets, 2

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[62] Rowland, 3.

[63] Cooke, 31.

trombones, bass trombone, and percussion. MacMillan also draws from sacred Christian and Jewish texts, highlighting the centrality of social justice to both faiths' traditions. The piece is bookended by a poem of the *Mothers of the Disappeared*. In utilizing sacred texts and secular poetry, MacMillan writes to 'express a sense of perpetual hope and mercy even in the light of [the *Mothers*'] children being taken away and destroyed by the military regime. This is the starting point of the work and was chosen to express the everlasting, healing love that humankind is capable of in the face of tragedy and oppression.'[64] Despite links in a multilayered approach to text setting and thematic development, MacMillan does not engage with the same comparisons between Christ and supplicant in *Catherine's Lullabies*, which is a major focus of the mediatory action in the other two works. The themes are explicitly political and MacMillan leans heavily on social justice motifs. An extended study examining these themes in all three (*Búsqueda, Cantos Sagrados* and *Catherine's Lullabies*) would be worthwhile as an informative view into MacMillan's politically driven compositional period.

The poetry used in *Búsqueda* can be found in a collection of selected poems written by the Argentinian *Mothers of the Disappeared*.[65] The *Mothers* were and continue to be an advocacy group, dedicated to ongoing work on behalf of repressed and 'disappeared' political prisoners, originally in Argentina and presently around the world. Under the Argentine military regime in the 1970s and 80s, thousands of dissidents—those who were perceived to be anti-government—were forcibly seized, tortured, killed and thrown away without a record with which to trace them.

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[64] James MacMillan, 'Catherine's Lullabies,' Boosey & Hawkes, https://www.boosey.com/cr/music/James-MacMillan-Catherine-s-Lullabies/5648.

[65] Gilbert Markus (ed. and tr.), *The Selected Poems of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo,* (Oxford: Busqueda), 1983.

They were often young and left behind grieving families who lived for years not knowing whether their loved ones were alive or dead.

The *Mothers* formed originally as a group of fourteen women who gathered to march silently in front of the presidential palace in Buenos Aires. Their aim was 'to demand that their children be returned to them alive and given a proper trial if it turned out that they had committed any crimes.'[66] They are also commonly referred to as the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo,* after the square in which they gathered to march, and are associated with the *Abuelas* (Grandmothers) *de Plaza de Mayo*, an organization whose stated goal is, 'that the children who were kidnapped as a method of political repression be restored to their legitimate families.'[67] The latter group has dedicated decades to the restoration of missing children with their remaining family members, actively pursuing identification and reconciliation through DNA testing. In a political climate that ruthlessly suppressed opposition, often with public shaming and deadly force, these women held faithful vigil for years for their missing and murdered children or relatives in the form of weekly marches around the Plaza de Mayo.

The poetry written by these women was collected and translated into English by an Oxford-based organization entitled Búsqueda (or Search), led by Fr. Gilbert Markus.[68] This heartrending material highlights a sickening tension between the expectation of a bereaved mother (that one's child is gone forever) and that mother's hope against all hope (that somehow

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[66] Federico Rivas Molina, 'Grandmothers of the Plaza De Mayo Find Child Who Went Missing during Argentina's Dictatorship in Spain,' EL PAÍS, January 15, 2020, https://elpais.com/elpais/2019/04/10/inenglish/1554886165_700829.html.

[67] 'History of Abuelas De Plaza De Mayo,' History | Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, https://abuelas.org.ar/idiomas/english/history.htm.

[68] Email correspondence with the composer. Markus was a friend of MacMillan's and 'very involved in Central American affairs and pastoral outreach, and was able to open up [MacMillan's] own interests in these matters.'

their child might have survived). Vivid comparisons are drawn between the facelessness of the sea and the inability to search out and find loved ones. These are made increasingly poignant with the knowledge that prisoners were thrown unconscious into the ocean to be found washed upon the shore. Yet incredibly there are records of families being reunited through the efforts of the *Madres* and *Abuelas*. Though many were lost forever, a number of children and grandchildren of political prisoners have been found and introduced to their blood relatives in an attempt to reestablish familial connections.

The poetic text featured in *Cantos Sagrados* was written by Ariel Dorfman (*Identity* and *Sun Stone*), a Chilean-American novelist, professor, and human rights activist, and Ana Maria Mendoza, a poet of unknown origin (*The Virgin of Guadalupe)*. Dorfman, a former cultural advisor to the Chilean president Salvador Allende, who fled Chile after a coup led by General Augusto Pinochet in the 1970s, eventually emigrated to live in exile in Washington, D.C. After the settling of the political climate in Chile, he divided his time teaching between Chile and America. He is a Distinguished Emeritus Professor of Literature at Duke University and his writings deal with social justice and political commentary.[69]

Not much is known about the poet behind *The Virgin of Guadalupe*. MacMillan recounts how he had come across this paradoxical poem by Ana Maria Mendoza: 'I think she was basically a peasant woman who was a friend of a priest, maybe, a missionary from Scotland whom I sort of believe brought the text back, a friend of a friend, and I got a hold of it. There is probably a woman out there who doesn't know that her words are being sung.'[70]

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[69] Chris Clark, 'The Sacred/Secular Dichotomy: In James MacMillan's Cantos Sagrados,' *The Choral Journal* 59, no. 2 (2018): 50-58.

[70] Clark, 53.

Búsqueda was premiered as a staged work for soloists, actors (speakers) and chamber ensemble, whilst *Cantos Sagrados* was written strictly as a concert work for choir and organ. While differing in genre, both are attempts to convey and challenge a repressive political climate as represented by the former Argentinean and Chilean regimes in Latin America. MacMillan states of *Cantos Sagrados* that, 'the three poems are concerned with political repression in Latin America and are deliberately coupled with traditional religious texts to emphasise a deeper solidarity with the poor of that sub-continent.'[71] This could equally apply to *Búsqueda* however its tone is markedly divergent as an extended and unflinching reflection on political repression within the sphere of religion. While in its second and third movements, *Cantos Sagrados* takes a more nuanced approach to the text as it operates at arm's length from the anger simmering in much of this poetry, in *Búsqueda* MacMillan bares all of the passion of the text in an unvarnished exposition of grief, fear and hope, leaving the topic of forgiveness for the later work.

[71] MacMillan, 'Cantos Sagrados.'

Tools of Mediation

The late Aidan Kavanagh, former Professor of Liturgics at Yale Divinity School and a Benedictine monk, described sacramental discourse as thickening meaning through incrementation:[72]

> One cannot imagine Walt Whitman stopping by cold woods or Robert Frost frolicking amid laughing flesh. Each has in his own way *thickened the meaning he found in the reality* of stopping at day's end and then incremented that meaning with such exquisite style that everyone else is stunned by the *reality being revealed with sharp precision*, seduced into transacting more deeply with the real.[73] (italics mine)

Kavanagh stated that this is an extremely difficult process to accomplish but that it 'thickens' the subject's meaning, thereby 'increment(ing) it with style, throwing it open for those to whom it is addressed.'[74] When considering Monelle's statement that MacMillan brings the listener and performer into 'transacting more deeply with the real', one considers the differing aspects of the work. Is it the music and the instrumentation? Or is it in the poetry of the *Mothers*, Dorfmann, and Mendoza? Is meaning deepened through the portion of liturgy and bits of prayers or perhaps the ideas behind the works are the driving force: the political oppression, the suffering of innocents and the world wide connection of a Catholic faith. David Brown refers to liturgy as

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[72] MacMillan often speaks of the music with 'sacramental' language, that is, referring to something becoming, by its specific associations, a true image of that which it represents.

[73] Aidan Kavanagh, and Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, *On Liturgical Theology : The Hale Memorial Lectures of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, 1981* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1992), 48.

[74] Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology.*

having, 'deep roots in dramatic performance.'[75] If one thinks of the Medieval liturgical drama or the development of Passion plays, one can easily envision these deep roots, yet even in vernacular contemporary church liturgy, regardless of faith tradition, dramatic progression of ritual and meaning is inextricably linked. This profound connection is where MacMillan draws much of his inspiration and it is here that the transaction begins to take place.

As MacMillan engages in musical layering, he also employs textural layering. These methods are brought together and, in jostling about for common space, thicken the meaning and role of each individual part. There are diverse forces at work in *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados*; the liturgical setting provides a functional scaffolding from which to build up poetic meaning, and subsequently, the suffering and politics therein. But the question remains: on what basis is liturgy allowed to accomplish this incrementation or 'thickening of meaning'?

Liturgy

Liturgy, as a form of public worship, is a structured enactment whereby those carrying it out continually ascribe and re-ascribe meaning to words, drama (actions) and symbols, thus constantly forming and re-forming strong bonds between themselves and the divine.[76] McGregor emphasizes the centrality of this function to MacMillan's compositional practice:

> In particular the juxtaposition of liturgy with secular texts, as in Búsqueda and Cantos Sagrados, suggest that *liturgy is the mediator*, the means of 'making good, of ameliorating the suffering...A similar process of mediation in more abstract terms is the basis of The Confession of Isobel Gowdie, where 'a multitude of chants, songs and litanies (real and imagined) [come] together in a reflective

[75] David Brown, *God & Mystery in Words : Experience through Metaphor and Drama*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 149.

[76] Brown, 150. 'the Greek literally means 'a work done on behalf of the people.''

> outpouring – a prayer for the murdered woman'. *The juxtaposition of diverse thematic materials reflects, in musical terms, the intermingling of texts from different sources. It is a compositional technique central to MacMillan's thinking*.[77] (italics mine)

In *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados,* this communal enactment is most prominently reflected in sections of the Catholic Christian liturgy. Selected portions of the Latin Mass (*Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus and Agnus Dei*) become resonant way-markers and foundational structures upon which external experiences, ideas and philosophies meet, are interwoven and thickened, developing an enhanced meaning. The Latin Mass, from which much but not all of MacMillan's underlying sacred text is taken, includes the celebration of the Eucharist (taken from the Greek word, *eukharistia*, which means 'thanksgiving'). The Eucharist is also known as Holy Communion, a term that communicates a sense of holding something in common together with others. This form of public worship contains in itself the following core components, referred to as the Mass Ordinary: the *Kyrie* (from the Greek 'Lord'), *Gloria* (Latin 'Glory to God'*)*, *Credo* (Latin 'I believe'), *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* ('Holy, holy, holy' and 'We bless you'), and *Agnus Dei* (Latin 'Lamb of God').

The liturgy of the Eucharist service, which in itself is a re-enactment of the submission to and celebration of Christ as deliverer, sacrifice/atonement and king, is practiced weekly and often daily in the life of the Church. It culminates in the distribution of bread and wine; viewed together as either the literal body and blood of Jesus Christ (by way of a Catholic doctrine known as transubstantiation) or symbolically and profoundly representing the body and blood of Christ (a view taken in many Protestant traditions). This act, among other religious symbols

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[77] MacMillan and McGregor, 84.

surrounding the Eucharist, represents a response to Christ's command to remember his suffering and death until he returns. It is in a powerful sense a show of unity amongst Christians worldwide.[78]

In *Búsqueda*, though not in *Cantos Sagrados*, MacMillan orders the appearance of the Mass Ordinary (the sections of the Mass common to every Eucharistic service, regardless of their place in the Church calendar) as it would normally occur in a service. He does not include the text of each section in its entirety, for reasons we shall explore below, but rather extracts key statements. In *Cantos Sagrados* MacMillan also uses portions of the Requiem (Mass for the Dead) liturgy and sacred Marian poetry which have corresponding links to the poetic subject matter but do not appear in sequential order as they most often do in *Búsqueda*.

It is important to note that, for Catholics and Protestants, the liturgy of the Eucharist is viewed as a sacrament. This means that the practice of drinking wine (the blood of Christ) and eating bread (the body of Christ) together as a worshipping community as a memorial to Christ's death is viewed as opening up an avenue for divine grace in a way that other acts of the Church do not. Here we approach the sacramental discourse that Kavanagh employs and of which MacMillan took advantage when he constructed a scaffold structure of liturgy and sacred poetry. Thus the text of the Eucharist or Mass takes on a very personal nature and yet it is undeniably communal. It relates to the very saving physical, ultimately spiritual, act of Christ's death on the cross for the individual Christian, but occurs in the context of a meal, invoking the Last Supper between Jesus and his disciples. It is a communal act whereby the suffering of Christ, an innocent victim and divine sacrifice, is repeatedly and publicly acknowledged, commemorated

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[78] 1 Corinthians 11:26 (ESV).
'For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.'

and honoured. Speaking of the death of his granddaughter, MacMillan reflects upon the affect this ritual can have in moments of terrible tragedy:

> A tragic loss like that, does it dent faith? People kind of half-expect you to lose your faith when that happens. But actually, it's the exact opposite. First of all, your Catholicism kicks in. But it's not just the whole community gets to work with you, but it's that liturgy that you mentioned, that gives shape to suffering. It gives a kind of almost aesthetic and artistic shape through music and movement and text and poetry, etc. The suffering is transformed into something beautiful. And that's what the Catholic faith does.[79]

This communal act of meal-sharing, through the text that acts as its framework (*Kyrie*, *Gloria*, etc.), solidifies a unity amongst its professing practitioners. As we will see, MacMillan assumes a communal reflection in the midst of the suffering of individuals, not only drawing a connection between those experiencing suffering and those viewing it externally, but between both groups and the iconic sufferer of political and religious violence himself, Jesus Christ: 'The body of Christ becomes the primary place of liturgical encounter.'[80]

Each aforementioned section of the Mass Ordinary can be understood to contain unique characteristics as to their function and where they occur in the service. The *Kyrie* is a prayer invoking mercy from God. It is comprised of the words, 'Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.' This tripartite prayer alternates from the formal 'Lord', to the more personal 'Christ', before returning to the more formal appellation, 'Lord'. It occurs near the opening of the service, setting a tone of contrition and repentance. The *Gloria* opens with the same joyous announcement proclaimed to the shepherds found in the gospel of Luke, chapter 2: 'Glory to

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[79] Madeleine Kearns, 'Scotland, Suffering, and Silence: An interview with James MacMillan,' *National Review,* August 30, 2019, https://www.nationalreview.com/2019/08/interview-james-macmillan-scottish-composer/.

[80] Robert MacSwain and Taylor Worley, *Theology, Aesthetics, and Culture Responses to the Work of David Brown,* 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 256.

God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.'[81] It is a statement of royal acknowledgement and consent made by the congregation that they will worship God. It orients the participant, through verbal acknowledgement and posture (in some Christian traditions the celebrant or priest and congregation would stand at these words) toward a hierarchy that exists involving humankind and God. This communal prayer also affirms the uniquely triune nature of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In *Búsqueda*, MacMillan chooses to highlight a brief portion of the *Gloria* text, rather than the entire prayer, drawing attention to who 'men of good will' might be. It is interesting to note that the King James Version translates that well-known phrase as, 'Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth, good will toward men,' while the English Standard Version translates it as, 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those with whom he is pleased.' In the former translation it is implied that God's good will is granted to all men, while in the latter it seems to be suggested that the blessing of peace is to be bestowed on those with whom He is pleased (i.e. those of good will, who 'do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God.').[82]

The *Credo* is a public statement outlining core Christian tenets. It is not comprehensive but addresses doctrine that much of Christianity, both Protestants and Catholics, would hold central to their faith.[83] MacMillan was very specific in the way he chose certain portions of the

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[81] Luke 2:14 (ESV).

[82] Micah 6:8 (ESV). 'He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?'

[83] Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology : An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). The council of Nicaea was held in part to address what were considered to be various heresies that were cropping up in the early Church. The Creed (Nicene and Apostles), or *Credo* (I believe) responds to these heresies through positive affirmations that, while never meant to be a comprehensive statement of the Christian faith, provide a framework for an overview of the essentials of the Christian faith.

Creedal text to undergird and highlight selections of the poetry of the *Mothers of the Disappeared*. Central to the Creed is an affirmation of Christ's incarnate humanity, now existing eternally in unity with his divinity. This idea of 'God with us' (Emmanuel, i.e. Jesus the Messiah), as a fellow sufferer forms a continual theme alongside the suffering of the politically repressed in *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados*. Particularly incisive are the comparisons drawn between the innocent victim appearing before the power and authority of the State. As Christ in his humanity faces Pontius Pilate, a representative of abusive governing power, so victims of political injustice confront, in a variety of ways, the regimes that threaten to suffocate them and their families. In the final movement of *Cantos Sagrados,* the identification with Christ, the suffering God incarnate, becomes much more intimate and personal as MacMillan narrows the focus, through Dorfmann's poetry, to the experience of the individual political prisoner and undergirds it with the words of the Creed, '…for our sake he was crucified.'

The *Sanctus* is placed at the core of the Latin Mass where, in the Catholic liturgy, the host (the bread or wafer, representing the physical body of Christ) would be held up by the presiding priest, the clergy kneeling before it. It is a moment filled with reverence, awe and respect, with the gathered church proclaiming the words, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.' In *Búsqueda*, MacMillan does include the full text of the *Sanctus* but also tacks on to its end a portion of the *Creed* concerning the resurrection and the ascension of Christ to sit at the right hand of God the Father. This draws particular attention to the political nature of Christ's defeat of death and the comparisons drawn to the rebellion against corrupt powers.

The *Agnus Dei* concludes the Eucharistic portion of the Mass and is used to draw *Búsqueda* to a close: 'Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us.' As the word 'holy' is repeated thrice during the *Sanctus,* and as the plea for mercy occurs three times in the *Kyrie*, so the *Agnus Dei* contains a thrice uttered prayer, twice for mercy and once for peace. It is the closing bookend to the Mass sung liturgy (at least in the sense of fixed portions of the Mass), as the Lord who is entreated to 'have mercy upon us,' is now recognized as the innocent victim, the sacrificial 'Lamb of God.'

Symbols

> The setting of the Latin Mass and the interspersing of solo song was a brilliant *binding of public and private personas* which hits the listener with extraordinary intensity.[84] (*italics mine*)

> Yet there can be little doubt that sometimes it is precisely the interaction between biblically inspired words and non-biblical that generates the most profound reaction in challenge and reflection...So, for example, the Latin Vulgate's words of promise to Abraham and his seed are immediately followed by what is perhaps Owen's best-known poem 'The Parable of the Old Man and the Young' that speaks of the slaughter of his son and 'half the seed of Europe.[85]

The two quotes above reflect the common ground that exists between Benjamin Britten and MacMillan, two composers who viewed liturgical media differently and yet chose to combine them to striking effect.[86] Brown speaks of 'the capacity of metaphor to relate apparently

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[84] Paul Spicer's notes on Benjamin Britten's 'War Requiem,' Boosey & Hawkes, https://www.boosey.com/cr/music/Benjamin-Britten-War-Requiem/15495.

[85] Brown, *God & Mystery in Words*, 220.

[86] The common ground may not extend very far given Britten's apparent nominal approach to the Christian faith and Church of England, though respecting its traditions and teaching.

disparate realities within the world…'[87] and that '[Language] can in and of itself function as such a medium, most obviously in appropriate metaphors helping to bridge that gap...the metaphors help generate the image of an interconnected world and thus of a God from whom that intelligibility ultimately derives.'[88] The capacity of metaphor can be seen in the visual display of liturgy and its practiced rites. Liturgy is comprised of the physical act of saying the words and taking the postures of prayer (outward manifestation) but it is also a deeply spiritual act of worship (inward mystery). It takes on a sacramental role (something central to MacMillan's view of music as the 'most spiritual of the arts') and works as, 'a visible sign of an invisible reality — and more than a sign: *it partakes of the reality it renders intelligible*.'[89] (italics mine) In MacMillan's works, liturgy acts as a metaphor towards relating the 'disparate realities' of suffering, oppression and loss with the hope, forgiveness, love and victory over darkness represented in Christ and the Christian faith.

Musicologist Nicholas Cook suggests the following:

> …metaphor can be seen as a viable model of cross-media interaction in general...The pre-condition of metaphor-and, if I am right, cross-media interaction-is what I call an enabling similarity…rather than simply representing or reproducing an existing meaning, it participates in the creation of a new one. (It does not simply make sense but makes sense, so to speak.)...Understood in this way, emergence is a defining attribute of multimedia. [90]

It is tempting to refer to the usage of different media types in artistic works as 'multimedia' but perhaps what Cook terms to be 'cross-media' is the more accurate designation.

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[87] Brown, *God and Mystery in Words*, 45.

[88] Brown, 47.

[89] Brown, 218.

[90] Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 70.

The idea of a cross-fertilization of media, or interpenetration of meaning, is at the heart of the creation of new meanings, or incrementing meaning through sacramental discourse, or emergence of new meanings out of existing media, as Cook suggests. In MacMillan's works, in which poetry, liturgy, and music interplay simultaneously, the method used and the result produced becomes a unique strength in MacMillan's compositional style. It is in this concept of 'enabling similarity' in creating new and shared meanings that the liturgical, and thus sacred, foundation of MacMillan's *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados* enables the secular poetic themes to flourish in such fertile ground. What are these new meanings being created by the juxtaposition of 'diverse thematic materials'?

The communal nature of liturgy at work in *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados* allows others to enter into the suffering of the poets, the *Mothers of the Disappeared* and their subjects, as they identify and sorrow with them. The liturgy itself works against paralysis in the face of great suffering by providing a structured response whereby practitioners are assured that those who have gone before have met these experiences for centuries. Silence leads to further paralysis and ossification; singing/music/liturgy leads to response or, perhaps more accurately, *are* the response.[91] When paired together with the raw words of poetic protest, liturgy becomes a poignant force within which the experience of suffering is mediated and processed by rituals formed over time. MacMillan uses excerpts from the Mass Ordinary, Requiem Mass and Catholic hymnody to place suffering in a particular context which can be more widely understood. It is the rhythm and reality of a faith in which the primary sufferer, Jesus Christ, identifies with the pain of the subjects of the secular texts. The poetry of the *Mothers of the*

[91] Hawn, 409.

Disappeared, Dorfmann and Mendoza is a response to their own loss. MacMillan echoes that loss with foundational statements found within the Christian, specifically Catholic, faith with which the subjects of this work have a personal and cultural connection. Linking liturgical cries such as 'Lamb of God, grant us thy peace' with a *Mother's* prayer that a rescued child 'may shelter from the explosion of that place you will have left far behind' ushers in a shared advocation for the oppressed and an empathetic response from the listener.

MacMillan's juxtapositional technique provides a unique way of 'conceiving space' for interaction.[92] What emerges is a deeper enrichment of each text, or medium, by their proximity to one another and the music. As he employs the Roman Catholic liturgy, Dorfmann's, Mendoza's and the *Mothers'* poetry, MacMillan encourages, what Jeremy Begbie terms, an 'interpenetration' of meaning. This idea goes beyond cross-fertilization to a sense of cohabiting in a space, allowing both to occupy that same space simultaneously. The concept relates to Cook's idea of multimedia and its role in producing and enabling similarities that create new meanings. Begbie references a musical triad as an example of a trinity of sounds that occupy the same space, remaining distinct from one another but forming a new whole. In a similar way, the liturgy, poetry and music of *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados*, while not always occurring simultaneously, occupy the same performance space, operating often simultaneously in contextual layers. Yet it may not be enough to use terms such as 'layers' or 'cohabitation', as it implies a separation of two different media. Though the meaning that they hold may not be immediately processed simultaneously by the listener, their meaning and context bleed into one

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[92] Jeremy Begbie, *Music, Modernity, and God: Essays in Listening*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 2013, 143. 'The spatiality here is one of juxtaposition and mutual exclusion: different entities can be next to each other but cannot be in the same place at the same time.'

another, venturing into one another's territory, leaving indelible marks upon traditional understandings of their meaning. In a sense, multiple themes begin to come to fruition simultaneously and new meanings may emerge. The links between liturgy, poetry, music and politics are burnished to an even greater resonance through their continual interaction. As in harmonics and the tuning of strings, the concept of 'sympathetic resonances' applies in which one sound is included in another, encouraging and acoustically completing the other. These ideas and themes together become something new. The cross-fertilization of meanings and associations lead to a greater illumination of context than previously realized.[93] Much like the emergence of light through a stained glass window, so the 'cross-media interactions' illuminate the experience and deeper understanding of a work.

[93] Brown, 70. Brown states that the, '[authorial] intention may in the end not be resoluble. The point rather is that for religious believers even the apparent negation of their perspective can draw them into its renewal, new potentials and new aspects are explored.'

Búsqueda

> If there is one work that acts as a symbol of MacMillan's new aesthetic...it is *Búsqueda* from 1988, for in this work, more than others, for the first time the composer brought art and folk music, politics and religion together in an individual and integral way. It should be considered one of his most important creations.[94]

Búsqueda ('Search') was premiered at the Queen's Hall, Edinburgh on December 6, 1988, by the Edinburgh Contemporary Arts Trust ensemble, with the composer conducting.[95] It is scored for speaker, eight actors, three sopranos and chamber orchestra.[96] As mentioned, MacMillan selected the text for this music-theatre work from two very different sources, the Latin Mass and the collected writings of Latin American women. The Latin Mass encompasses the five foundational pillars of the Eucharistic liturgy, as represented in the Roman Missal.[97] The narratives that run through Roman Catholicism feature prominently in both the sacred and secular texts. Often the sacred text operates as the scaffolding upon which the response, the working out of trauma, of the secular text is built. The *Mothers of the Disappeared* are also known as 'Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo' of Argentina, named for the square around which the original fourteen women of the group marched in silent protest. The poems used are

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[94] Cooke, 28.

[95] In the initial recording liner notes, Raymond Monelle writes, '"Búsqueda' (meaning 'search') is the name of a group in Oxford who help in the tracing of the politically annihilated, those who have been secretly imprisoned by autocratic regimes in various parts of the world. The text of MacMillan's piece comes from poems written by the 'Mothers of the Disappeared,' Argentinian women whose sons and daughters have been snatched from them by the secret police...There are also very deliberately placed fragments of the Latin Mass. The simple, almost rustic poems *are echoed in liturgical words*…' (italics mine)

[96] *Búsqueda* is scored for flute, 3 clarinets, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones (3rd - tenor/bass), 2 percussionists, 2 harps, 2 cellos, double-bass, and 3 sopranos, 8 actors, and the Speaker.

[97] Willi Apel, *Gregorian Chant*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958), 23-28. Regarding the solidification of the order of the Mass Ordinary.

excerpted from a larger compilation entitled, *The Selection of Poems of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* and feature brief but powerful reflections on loss, waiting and death. Some of the women are known only by their first names, some remain anonymous. The poems were published through an Oxford-based organization entitled, *Búsqueda*, a documentation and research centre focussing on disappeared prisoners in Latin America. As its subject, every *Mother'*s poem discloses the experience of significant loss of a brother, sister, spouse, parent and/or child. This loss emanates from that experience and pervades every word, thought and image evoked by the *Mothers,* as they convey the trauma resulting from a relative's death or disappearance. The way in which both the liturgy and poetry intermingle, the mixing of sacred and secular in the same musical space, becomes the agency by which new and enriched meanings emerge, stimulated towards a kind of resolution or, at the least, greater expression of the poet's subject.

Taken together as a whole and combined with the undergirding portions of the Latin liturgy, the poems present us with an image of local parishioners filing into a church, gathered to share their stories of horror and loss in the midst of a celebratory Mass.[98] The commonality of their narratives bind the Argentineans together, while the cross-cultural reach of the Mass invites outsiders (audience and performers) to enter into the experience. One can perceives the suffering of the group of *Mothers,* and those for whom they mourn through the remembrance and celebration of a 'service within the work' that leads the faithful through the death, resurrection and ultimate triumph of Christ. The powers of the world, the State and its followers (police, judges, government officials) are contrasted with the kingdom of heaven, Jesus Christ and his

[98] Interestingly, the liturgy of the Latin Mass, much of which would usually spoken by the priest (one person), in this work is uttered by one narrator and a group of speakers representing the communities.

followers (victims, Mothers and Grandmothers, the oppressed in general). Through the sacred and secular discourse, perceived strength is turned on its head, attitudes are transformed, power is lost in abject terror and despair is reclaimed as the most vulnerable bring their private stories into the public sphere. MacMillan draws attention to the plight of the oppressed, combining secular texts with sacred structure, finding common ground with the translators of the *Mothers*' words, 'in order to echo their cry of sorrow in our own language.'[99] Far from obscuring or dominating the voice of each individual *Mother*, the liturgical structure allows for their complaint to be highlighted and their words to be amplified.

> MacMillan is today ambivalent about this piece, referring to it as a 'young man's piece'...Certainly, the work has not aged quite as well as some of his other pieces from this period, but this is mainly due to the waning of music-theatre as an important vehicle of musical expression for composers.[100]

It is not certain what Cooke means here by the work not aging well. Though this type of performance art may not be seen as readily on the concert stage as it once was, there does indeed seem to have been a proliferation of staged performances of any number of concert works, something not unlike this piece. It may not be as accessible to the amateur performer as *Cantos Sagrados* and the instrumentation calls for a specialization that is not easily gathered with limited resources but a reward awaits the discerning conductor or producer who would mount production of it. It is not a 'musical theatre' work but a theatrical expression of a work of music. The staging of the musicians and actors, the use of microphones and sound system, all of these play a part in the performance of *Bùsqueda* that is, regrettably, not covered in this essay. There is however an

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[99] Markus, *Selected Poems*.

[100] Cooke, 30.

intense, passionate and sometimes brutish quality to the work that even thirty years later vividly evokes a youthful anger at injustice. While it may be a 'young man's work', one of its strengths is that it remains a picture of a young man's political passion and perspective.

In *Búsqueda,* MacMillan uses only the Latin Mass as the sacred material and throughout the composition taps into the religious dramatic effect inherent in this liturgical ritual. It follows, generally speaking, the order of the Mass Ordinary progressing from the *Kyrie* through to the *Agnus Dei*. Even though it is meant to act as a scaffolding upon which the poetic text hangs, not all of the liturgical text is employed. Specific lines, generally dealing with God's relation to humanity, are curated. The *Credo* text appears before and amongst the *Sanctus*, while the *Benedictus* is omitted. It is not always concurrent with the poetic text, thus creating a push and pull between the media. One media comes to the fore while the other is omitted, however the liturgy does provide key reference points often signalling musical, thematic, and structural changes.

There are four distinct personas that feature in *Búsqueda*: the Speaker, who advances the role of the individual mother often communicating through spoken word, and leaving large portions of poetic text unbroken. The actors, who inhabit the role of the community or parish congregation, disjointedly interjecting bits of the *Mothers'* poetry or reciprocating with a unified liturgical response. The soprano trio gives a benedictory response, occupying a possibly prophetic role. They generally sing portions of the liturgy except in one important case when the trio leads an extended expression of lament (emulating a significant passage from the book of Lamentations) that culminates in the poetic apex of the work, *When you come back*. The trio acts as a small choral unit rather than distinct soloists per se and establishes an aurally ethereal

texture — in some moments distant and remote from the action and immediateness of the speaker, actors and orchestra. In other moments, the trio carries the weight of action in a focussed, unified and musically homophonic manner. MacMillan apportions to them what might be considered the most peaceful or reflective portions of the Latin Mass, the *Kyrie* and the *Agnus Dei*, which bookend the work. Each of the vocal forces MacMillan employs in *Búsqueda* have a unique role in advancing the work through multiple levels of conflict towards a resolution of sorts, or at least towards a reflection on a resolution. Finally, the chamber orchestra, through shifts between polyrhythms, polytonality and aleatoric sections, displays the emergence of MacMillan's juxtapositional musical style and gives hints as to what is to come in later works such as *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie* and *Veni, veni Immanuel*.

Though the focus of this paper lies mainly on MacMillan's blending of the liturgical and poetic text, it is difficult to consider *Búsqueda* without briefly referencing its musical development. If the Speaker reflects the *Mothers*, the actors reflect the community and the soprano trio a divine voice of comfort or reflection, then the chamber orchestra's character shifts quickly from militant band to protest march and then onto the accompaniment of a mother's lullaby. Sparsely, yet effectively orchestrated, the chamber orchestra's roles are often delineated by timbre. The woodwinds and harps often provide the meditative and mystical underpinning, while the brass features aggressively as provocateurs and in turn, activists. The cellos and bass undergird the piece as the harmonic and rhythmic foundation, with the two cellos providing much of the opening dialogue in the intervening instrumental section. The percussion is an equal voice in the instrumentation and helps to carry the narrative along as it reinforces the dramatic shifts from oppression to protest to reflection.

Breath is a common feature or theme in MacMillan's music.[101] Breath acts as a metaphor for life. It takes breath to live, breath to speak, and breath to be heard. Breath anticipates the beginning of a word or an act. Breath is a concept traditionally closely associated with the spirit of a person. When life begins, a first breath is taken. When life comes to a close the last breath is drawn. In Hebrew, while the word '*ruach*' can refer to a person's breath, it also relates to the wind. *Ruach* can also connote the idea of 'spirit'. In the Old Testament, the word is used in reference to the creative Spirit of God, an immanent and ultimate presence in the universe. Considering all of these meanings, one can form a greater picture of a force that gives life, enables and enlivens humankind. As it says in Genesis, 'And the Spirit (*Ruach*) of God was hovering over the face of the waters,' as a force of creative power and of life.[102] This is where *Búsqueda* begins and ends: with life, the slow inhalation and exhalation by the actors entering in one by one 'until all eight actors are breathing in and out in a single, slow, common pulse. After a minute or so the conductor may begin the piece…'[103]

The stage is set by the successive individual entrances of audibly breathing human beings. They form a community at rest, perhaps an uneasy rest, that will eventually emerge into a gathering whereby communal, ritual acts of commemoration, mourning, protest and celebration will be performed. Like parishioners gradually filing into a church, the individual breaths of the actors follow each other until they are all present, breathing as one. Like men and women asleep

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[101] MacMillan's most recent composition, a choral symphony entitled *Le grand Inconnu* (2019), is an extended reflection on the Spirit and begins with the sound of the inhalation and exhalation of breath. His work for large unaccompanied choir, *Sun Dogs* (2006), also incorporates audible breathing to close out the fourth movement.

[102] Genesis 1:2 (ESV) 'The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.'

[103] James MacMillan, *Búsqueda,* (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1988), 1.

in the dead of night, their breathing rises and falls, each one unaware that violent change is approaching.[104]

Kyrie (mm. 1-44)

After the steady inhalations and exhalations, the introduction of the *Kyrie* text is established by the soprano trio.[105] Within the liturgical scaffolding that MacMillan is setting in place, the *Kyrie* forms the fundamental level or germane concept just as it would towards the beginning of the celebration of the Mass. In the English translation, the words 'Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy,' are said or sung by the priest and congregation.[106] No one soprano completes a full intonation of the prayer. Instead, fragments of the entreaty are passed back and forth between the three singers so that only as a trio is a complete plea for mercy formed.[107] The eight actors enter (m. 6) and echo the disparate strands of the liturgical appeal introduced by the trio and, one after another, consecutively recite the beginning of the poem, *A Scream in the Night:*[108] 'That man, that woman, have no faces, They have no names. They are nothing but the wave tips of a sea of new misery.'[109] The fragmented exchange of the musical lines and text in the opening of *Búsqueda* exhibits a penchant for hocket that MacMillan similarly employs to great frenetic effect in the opening movement of *Cantos Sagrados*

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[104] Even the tempo marked reflects a resting heart rate at 56-58 to the quarter note.

[105] The *Kyrie* is the only portion of the Ordinary of the Mass that is set in Greek, the rest being set in Latin: *Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison. Kyrie eleison.*

[106] In a service setting, each of the three invocations of '*Kyrie eleison*' may be repeatedly said or sung.

[107] The number three, within one ensemble, holds special significance in the Christian faith, primarily as a reflection of the triune nature of God. See, for example, the 14th century text affirming the ability to reflect on the Trinity through the virgin birth: 'By that rose [Mary] we may well see there be one God in persons Three'.

[108] Markus, *Selected* Poems, 14. Anonymously written.

[109] MacMillan, *Búsqueda*, 3.

(Identity). It becomes a regular feature in his compositional technique going forward.[110] (Figure 1)

Traditionally composers have often treated the tripartite nature of the *Kyrie* in what might resemble an ABA form, thematically if not strictly musically. The designation of 'Lord' can be taken to refer to the kingship and indeed the deity of Jesus. Thus, a composer might attribute a grander treatment to the opening and closing sections of this movement in liturgical or concert works. The middle section, in which Jesus is acknowledged as 'Christ', or the earthly Messiah and liberator, is often the subject of his common humanity.[111] The term 'Christ' or 'Christos' (Chosen One) comes from the Hebrew designation 'Messiah', a term with an incredibly nuanced history among the Jewish people alone. Suffice it to say, it is helpful to understand 'Christ' as referring to the divine liberator, one who would restore not only political and cultural freedom, but would re-establish a link between God and humankind.[112]

From this position the touch point between God and humankind is the willingness of God to become human in the person of Christ, or Emmanuel (God with us). This establishes and reinforces a connection between the suffering Christ and the suffering people. These sectional distinctions are present in MacMillan's opening setting of this prayer. They are a part of the structure upon which he hangs the poetry. The singers intone the words, '*Kyrie eleison*', as the actors speak the words, 'That man, that woman, they have no faces'. In effect, together they are

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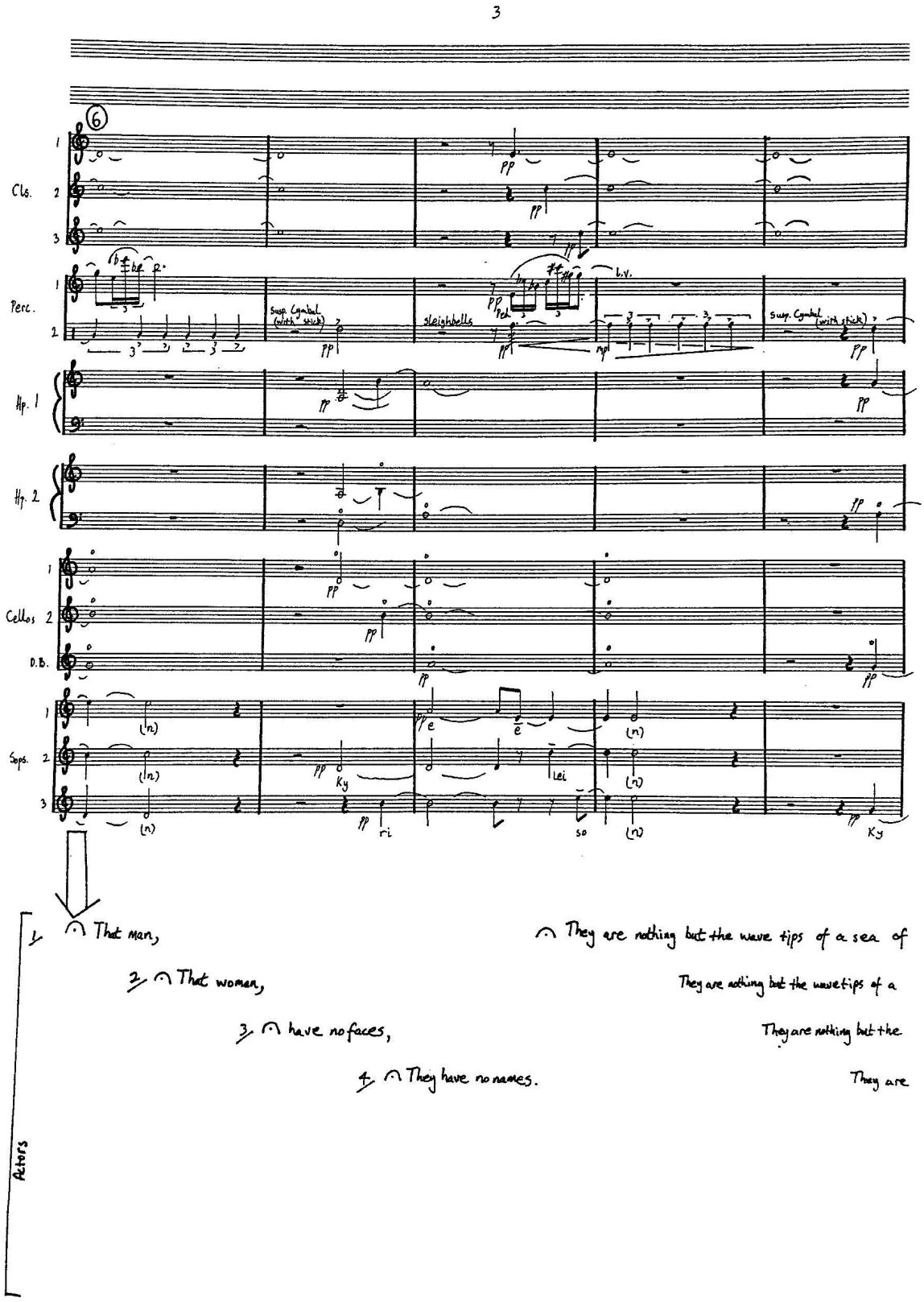
[110] Cooke, 165.

[111] A prime example is Schubert's *Mass in G,* where the chorus and orchestra lead both '*Kyrie*' sections, while the soprano soloist sings the intervening 'Christe' section). The bookend sections are expansive and flow gently through ascending and descending stepwise musical phrases, while the melody of the middle section is angular and the orchestration drives the pace along.

[112] N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God,* Christian Origins and the Question of God (London, England; v. 2. 2015), 482.

Figure 1


3
6
Cls.
Perc.
susp. Cymbal (with stick)
sleighbells
susp. Cymbal (with stick)
Hp. 1
Hp. 2
Cellos
D.B.
Sops.
Ky
Lei
ri
so
Ky
Actors
1. That man,
2. That woman,
3. have no faces,
4. They have no names.
They are nothing but the wave tips of a sea of
They are nothing but the wave tips of a
They are nothing but the
They are

establishing the plea, the struggle for recognition and discovery that lies at the heart of much of poetry of the *Mothers*. Continuing on, the singers pass back and forth portions of the words, '*Christe eleison*', which now provide the backdrop for very specific details of a nocturnal abduction in, *A Scream in the Night*. The poem is written in the form of a memory. The writer recounts the chaos left behind by a loved one, stolen away by force: "I have torn long days, weeks and months from the calendar. Oh I have felt close to the Virgin on her bloody Calvary road!"[113] Here, through the loss of a child, the mother identifies with Mary, the mother of Jesus, who ultimately lost her child at the crucifixion of Christ (the chosen one). MacMillan evokes a sense of hope crushed beneath the heavy boot of persecution and deeds done in the darkness.

The aftermath of the loss of a child is a major theme that runs throughout the poetry of the *Mothers of the Disappeared*: in it Mary, the mother of Jesus, becomes a universal symbol of maternal mourning and an inspirational example for those who remain to bear the loss of loved ones. This opening poem places the primary emphasis on those left behind and those who follow after the victim, rather than on the one who received the violence firsthand. Just as Mary has watched her son suffer at the hands of the Jewish authorities and Romans and stood at the foot of the cross, so too the *Mothers* continue to journey along their own *Via Dolorosa* in the wake of their missing children. However, unlike Mary, no confirmation of death awaits them but instead an uncertain, unspoken 'terrible darkness'.[114] This type of identification will also be evident in the way in which MacMillan pairs the secular and sacred texts in *Cantos Sagrados,* most markedly in the suffering of the prisoner in the final movement, *Sun Stone*.

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[113] MacMillan, *Búsqueda,* 6.

[114] Markus, *Selected Poems*, 15.

In works where liturgical or other sacred texts form the foundation upon which the ideas and experiences reflected in secular texts are examined, MacMillan will often use topical moments to create touch-points between two media (poetry and liturgy) to bring about that interpenetration of themes and ideas that heighten the meaning of the texts. When the '*Christe eleison*' section descends upon the shared suffering of political prisoners and of Christ, himself, the storyline become blurred: Jesus's arrest in the garden of Gethsemane by night, a betrayal by a friend and the secret police kidnapping a perceived threat to the political system. A sympathetic resonance can be perceived: 'a scream pierces through the 'denseness of silence...which beats down resistance without a miracle.'[115] The reiteration of '*Kyrie eleison*', as it passes back and forth between sopranos, re-introduces the actors passing back and forth the image of a faceless persecuted and imprisoned humanity: "That man, that woman, bound, sweat heavily, breathe painfully. Fear. They stifle, they shiver."[116] After interjecting the invocations for mercy in bits and pieces throughout the opening of the work, the only word that is sung completely is the Greek word, '*eleison*' or 'mercy'. As if to hold a moment within the idea of extending or receiving mercy, at this point the Speaker states, pausing alone in the void of communal speaking or instrumentation, "And I won't ask what happened, now it doesn't matter, and this nameless pain that grows in me will blossom in forgiveness. You'll see."[117]

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[115] MacMillan, *Búsqueda*, 5.

[116] MacMillan, *Búsqueda,* 8.

[117] MacMillan, *Búsqueda,* 9.

Et in terra pax (Gloria) - Rehearsal B (mm. 58-76)

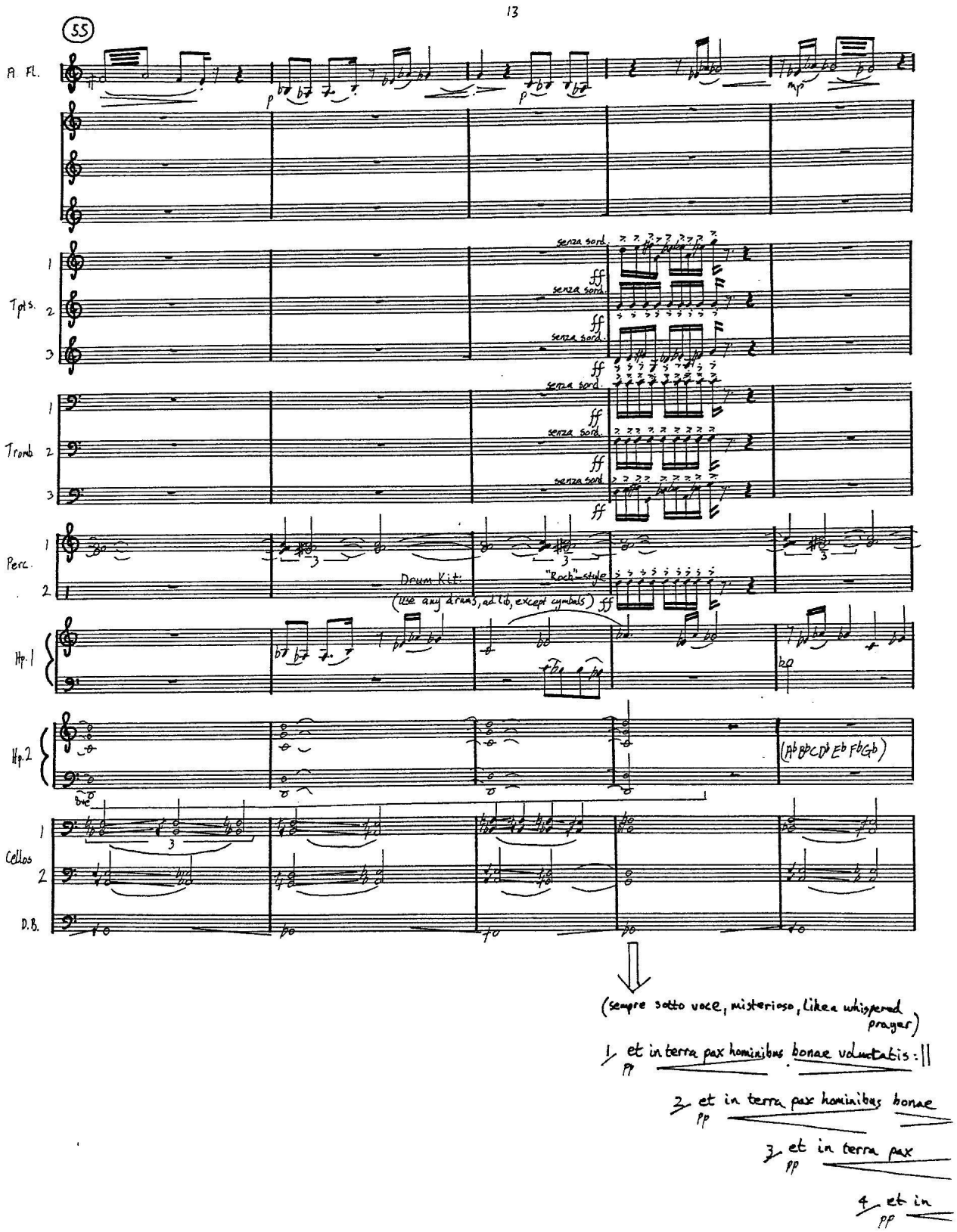
The declamatory nature of the brass section (often acting as an ensemble within an ensemble) features prominently in MacMillan's instrumentation both in this work and beyond. In *Búsqueda,* the brass band plays an important role in establishing a militant or at times celebratory presence that boldly and often crassly penetrates the sanctuary of the community and the innocent victim. (Figure 2)

The band of trumpets, trombones and drum kit (m. 58) signals a unified, piercing and rhythmically irregular (unpredictable) intrusion into the reflection that has taken place. At that signal, the actors whisper, in separate entrances, a portion of the opening text of the *Gloria* (*et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis*) in rapid succession. MacMillan does not include here the opening lines of this section of the Latin Mass: 'Gloria in excelsis Deo', but rather opts for its earthly response, 'and on earth, peace to men of good will'.[118] The 'brass band' sporadically but incisively interrupts the whispering of the individual actors with rapid, successive sixteenth notes spit-fired over the long sustained notes of the rest of the chamber orchestra. It is unsettling, it is chaotic, and after the third iteration of the brass, the actors at last gather themselves in a unified declaration of peace towards people of good will ('et in terra'). This time however adding the following response: '*Laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te!*'.[119] This latter declaration of praise to God is written in unison — in a Sprechstimme-style that marks the end of

[118] Different translations of the scriptural passage from which this doxology is taken offer up small but telling differences in interpretation. 'Peace towards men of good will' or 'Peace, good will towards men (or all)' differ in terms of where peace is being offered. MacMillan uses the former, in line with the translation found in the Roman Missal.

[119] MacMillan, *Búsqueda,* 16. 'We laud you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you.'

Figure 2


13
55
A. Fl.
Tpts.
Tromb.
Perc.
Hp. 1
Hp. 2
Cellos
D.B.
senza sord.
Drum-Kit:
(use any drums, ad lib, except cymbals)
"Rock"-style
(sempre sotto voce, misterioso, like a whispered prayer)
1. et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis :||
2. et in terra pax hominibus bonae
3. et in terra pax
4. et in

the chaotic opening and signals the transition to the next poem, *I would like*.[120]

Whereas the whispers of the 'human' or 'earthly' portion of the *Gloria* reflect the scattered voices of the victims, punctuated and disrupted by the aggressive entries of the brass band, the chanting of the voices marks an ever growing, ever stronger and unified statement that peace is granted to the righteous or those of good will. This in turn produces its own aggressive response of praise towards God: 'we praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you.' In *Búsqueda*, as in the celebration of the Latin Mass, the *Gloria,* or a portion of it, follows quickly on the heels of the *Kyrie* and its plea for mercy. MacMillan establishes a pushback against the implacable political oppression within those who celebrate the liturgy (the community on behalf of the victims themselves). They are unified against the encroaching militancy inherent in the brass band's eruptions, a unification that is made manifest in the recitation of the liturgy. The struggle between the two opposing forces will return in a heightened state in the section where the *Sanctus* provides the scaffolding (m. 252). The dynamic conflict between victim and perpetrator established in the *Gloria* section continues on as a bubbling tonal sequence emerges led by the harp and vibraphone. The sopranos, through the text of the poem, *I would like*, pass the words and melody back and forth once more, as they did at the outset of the work: 'I would like to try, any day, to remove the pain from the world.'[121] The 'brass band' reemerges here to penetrate the calm once more with brief passages of accented, sharply punctuated sixteenth notes.

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[120] Markus, *Selected Poems*, 7. Poem written by Susana Teresa.

[121] Markus, *Selected* Poems, 7.

> You will come back. I wait for you. Often I held you as a child on my lap. If not, what shall I tell your nephews when they ask me as they asked yesterday: what is justice? Does mercy exist? Is it a sin to defend the truth? I told them what justice was, but...I was crying...[122]

The poem that marks the transition into this instrumental section where authoritarian themes are explored reflects the heart of much Liberation Theology: 'What is justice? Does mercy exist? Is it a sin to defend the truth?[123] This questioning of justice, the push for justice for the oppressed opens the door for a full appearance of the governmental machine that grinds down opposition with a methodical vigour.

The apocalyptic emergence of the trombones and trumpets outlining polytonal major and minor chords inaugurates the intervening instrumental section. MacMillan refers to this as, 'an instrumental and more subjective declaration of faith, highlighting the two cellists as soloists.'[124] What is contained therein is a dialogue, a duet between the two cellists that is repeatedly assaulted by the constant return of the brass and percussion. The opening chords are followed by a pulsating common tone, as the entire brass section alternates sounding a unison D in differing rhythms. This return to unison conveys a finality or a decisiveness.[125] It highlights a shift from textual reflection to an instrumental one as the ensemble assumes the sole conveyance of the turmoil between peace and oppression, faith and anguish. The dialogue between the two cellos is stalked by the 'wah-wah' of the trumpets and the burgeoning swell of the trombones. The brass shadow this interchange until they burst forth, overpowering it multiple times before subsiding to

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[122] Markus, *Selected Poems,* 26.

[123] Markus, S*elected Poems,* 26.

[124] MacMillan, 'Búsqueda,' composers note.

[125] See *Confession of Isobel Gowdie* final measures.

the reflection of strings and woodwinds once again. Each outburst becomes more and more fierce and jingoistic until the limping figure of the trombones and the evocative pounding of the drum signal the lead up to a wild fanfare.

Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto (mm. 235-236)

The powerful brass fanfare provides the transition out of the instrumental section, calling to mind a harmonized, chorale-like version of the trombone melody that opens the *Tuba mirum* section of the *Dies irae* sequence in Mozart's *Requiem*. The trumpet sounds to signal the entry of what might be viewed here as a military parade; the Speaker and Actors then set up against it. Alternatively, it may be that the way in which the orchestration moves from chaotic polytonality to a unified, homophonic and polytonal descent of parallel fourths and thirds speaks to a unification of purpose on the part of the protesting voices. MacMillan sets up two opposing ideas or images. The government presents as orderly but descends into chaos while the Speaker/Actors (community/protesters) come across as disorderly but emerge unified in their response. In this unmetered section (beginning at rehearsal M), MacMillan introduces indeterminacy so as to feature several layers of text. The actors are reintroduced, unified in their rising and falling recitation (Sprechstimme) of the portion of the *Credo* (I believe): Et incarnatus est de Spirito Sancto ex Maria Virgine et homo factus est (and [Christ] was incarnate by the Holy Spirit, of the Virgin Mary, and was made man), but swiftly transition to the *Mother'*s poem, *No-one Can take You from Me* [126], turning on the textual hinge, 'ex Maria Virgine,' and, 'you are always with me, my son' (Figure 3).

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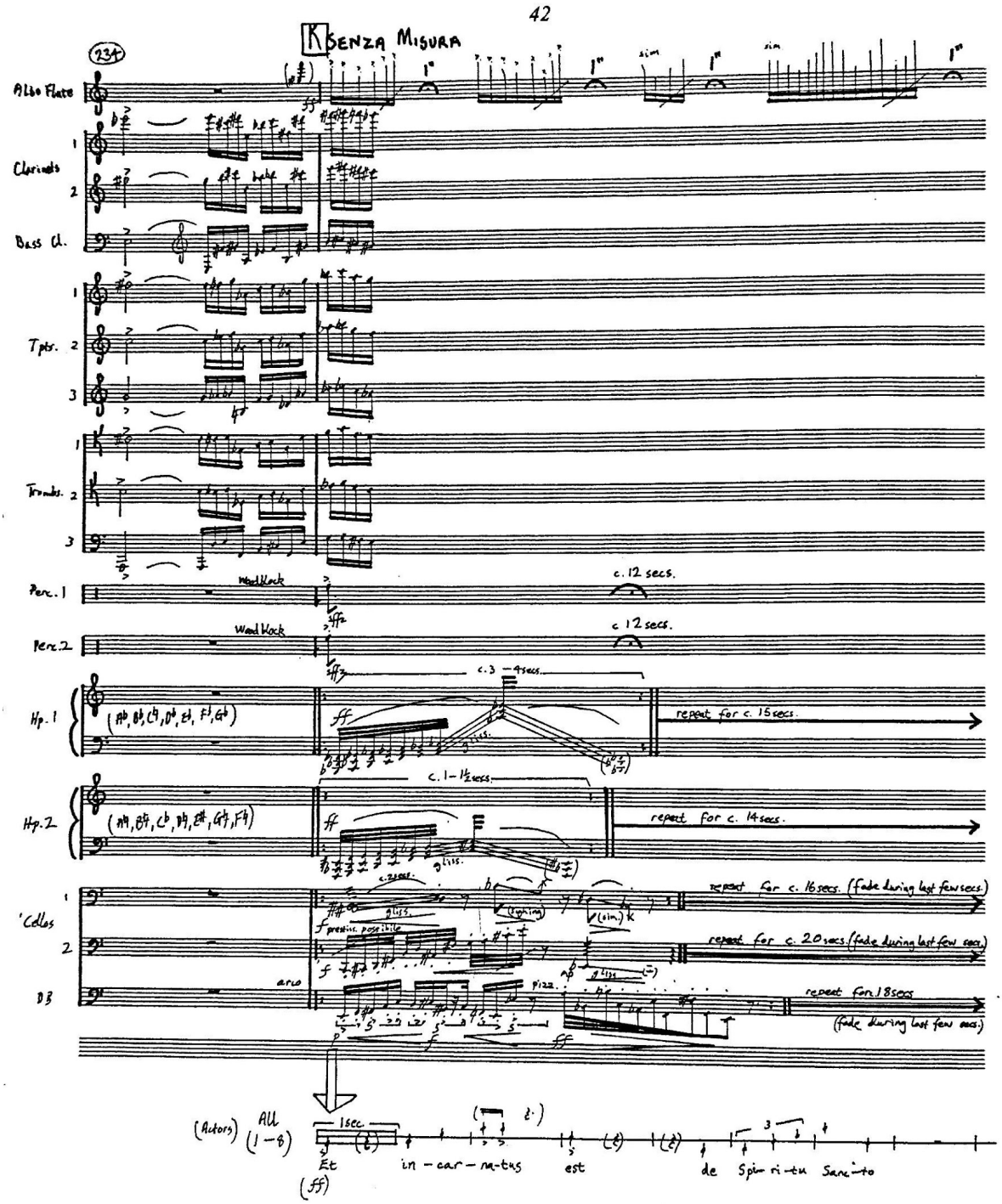
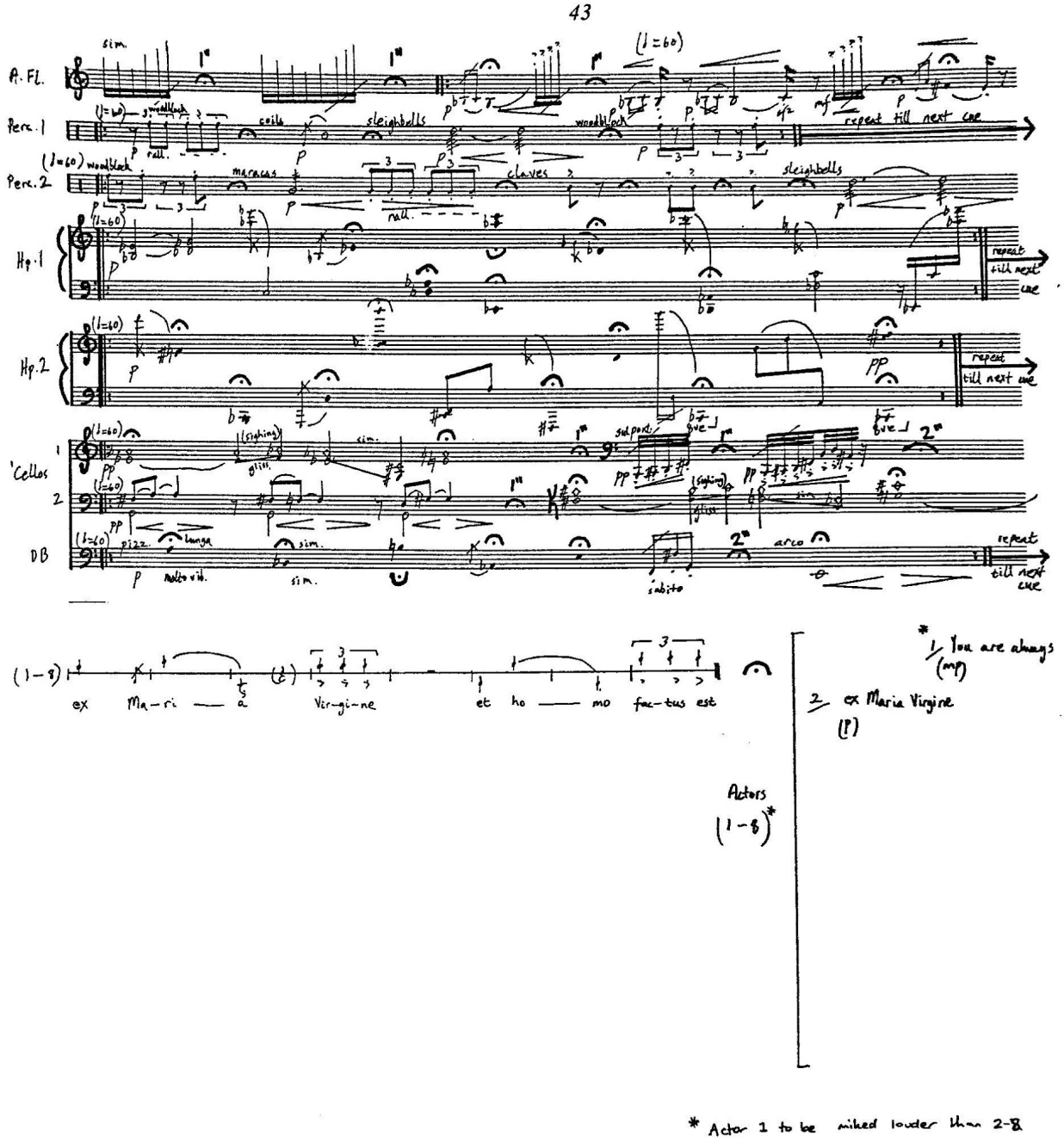
[126] Markus, *Selected Poems,* 19. Poem written by Celina Z. de Kofman.

The Creed (from the Latin *credo* or 'I believe') is a series of affirmations of doctrinal statements that are generally recited the world over by Christians of many different traditions. While not necessarily a summation of everything any one Christian would believe, it is often

Figure 3





used as a profession of one's faith through core doctrines of the Christian Church. There are multiple creeds (Nicene, Apostles' and Athanasius) and each was written in a collaborative manner to establish commonly held sound doctrines of the Christian faith at the time of the early

Church.[127] Over the centuries, the Nicene Creed came to be used in the Catholic Mass as one of the foundation stones of the liturgy. MacMillan chooses statements from the Creed that directly deal with God's incarnating of himself as a man by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the form of God the Son, Jesus Christ. There occurs a particularly poignant moment when the 'congregation' recites this portion of the Creed ending with the phrase, 'and was made man [born of the Virgin Mary]', and Actor 1 takes up the next phrase, a *Mother*'s poem, beginning with the line, 'You are always with me, my son.'[128] This explosive statement from the Creed, showing the divine entrance of God into the world by the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary in the form of a very human child, is held up against the continued presence of a mother's kidnapped son, in the midst of great loss.

MacMillan brings together a most poignant connecting point between God and humankind in a free-flowing, unmetered section, whereby the liturgical statement is unified and the response, in the form of a *Mother*'s poem, is fragmented. Whereas the statement regarding 'peace on earth' commences in a fragmented fashion before unifying in the face of an encroaching menace (in the returning form of the militant brass band), this statement of identification and of divine-human solidarity is unified from the beginning before breaking apart in the face of a mother's reflection. The statement from the Creed, '*de spiritu sancto ex Maria Virgine et homo factus est*,' is repeated and exchanged between actors as selected texts from the poems, *Springtime of a Son*[129] and *No-One Can Take You from Me*, increasingly encroach on the liturgical text; interrupting, punctuating, and separating these affirmations of Christ's incarnation

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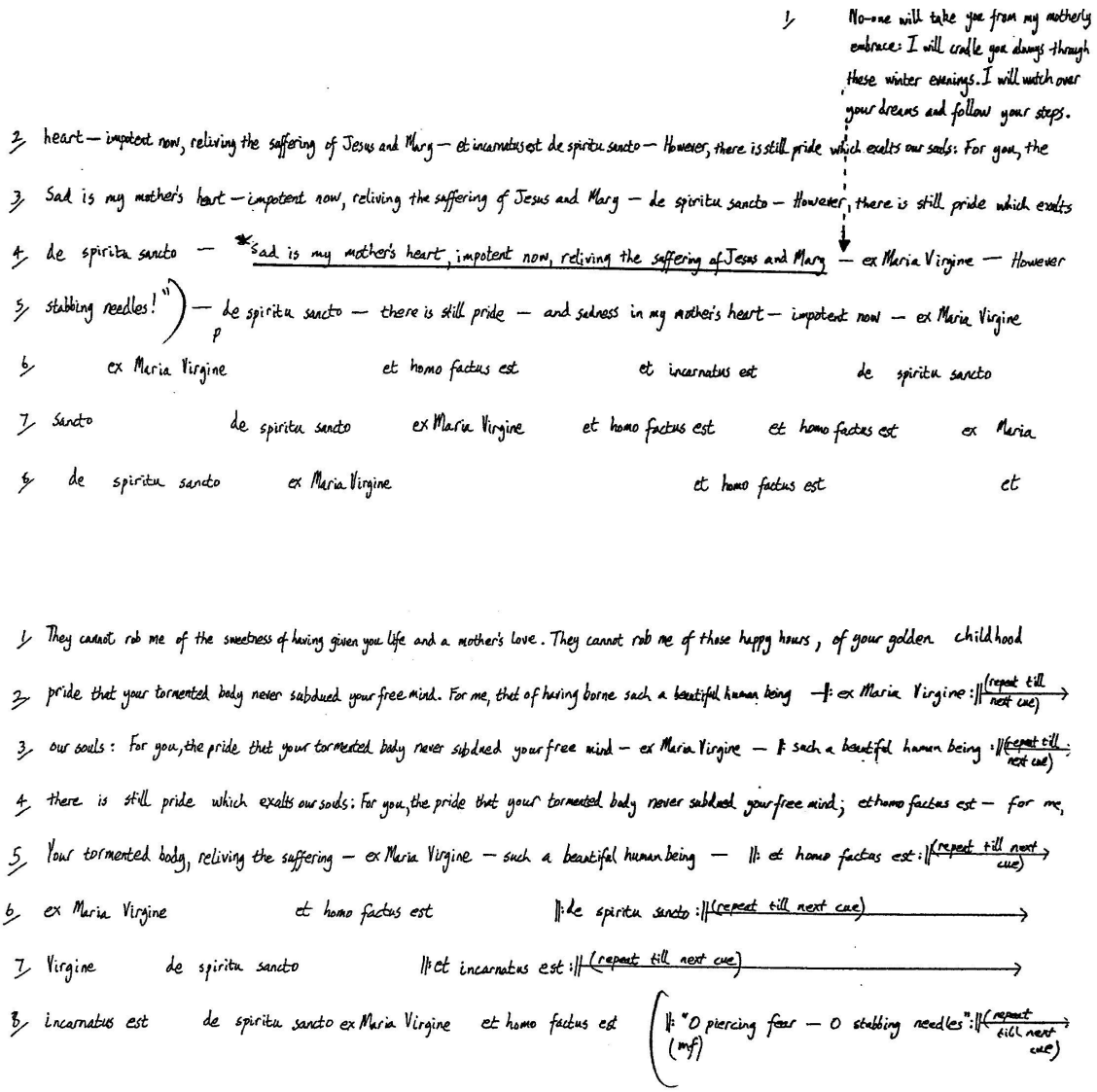
[127] McGrath, 30-32.

[128] MacMillan, *Búsqueda*, 44.

[129] Markus, *Selected* Poems, 29. Poem written by Maria del Rosario.

(Figure 4). Different actors recite portions of the poem, echoing the poignant reflections coming from different mothers. A line from the former poem, '...having borne such a beautiful human being,' and one from the latter poem, 'full of hope,' bring this section to a close. It is telling that this section follows an intense instrumental section where the aggressive and chaotic nature of that militant brass band is developed and established, culminating in the homophonic, polytonal, parallel chords that will return later in the *Sanctus* section.

Figure 4



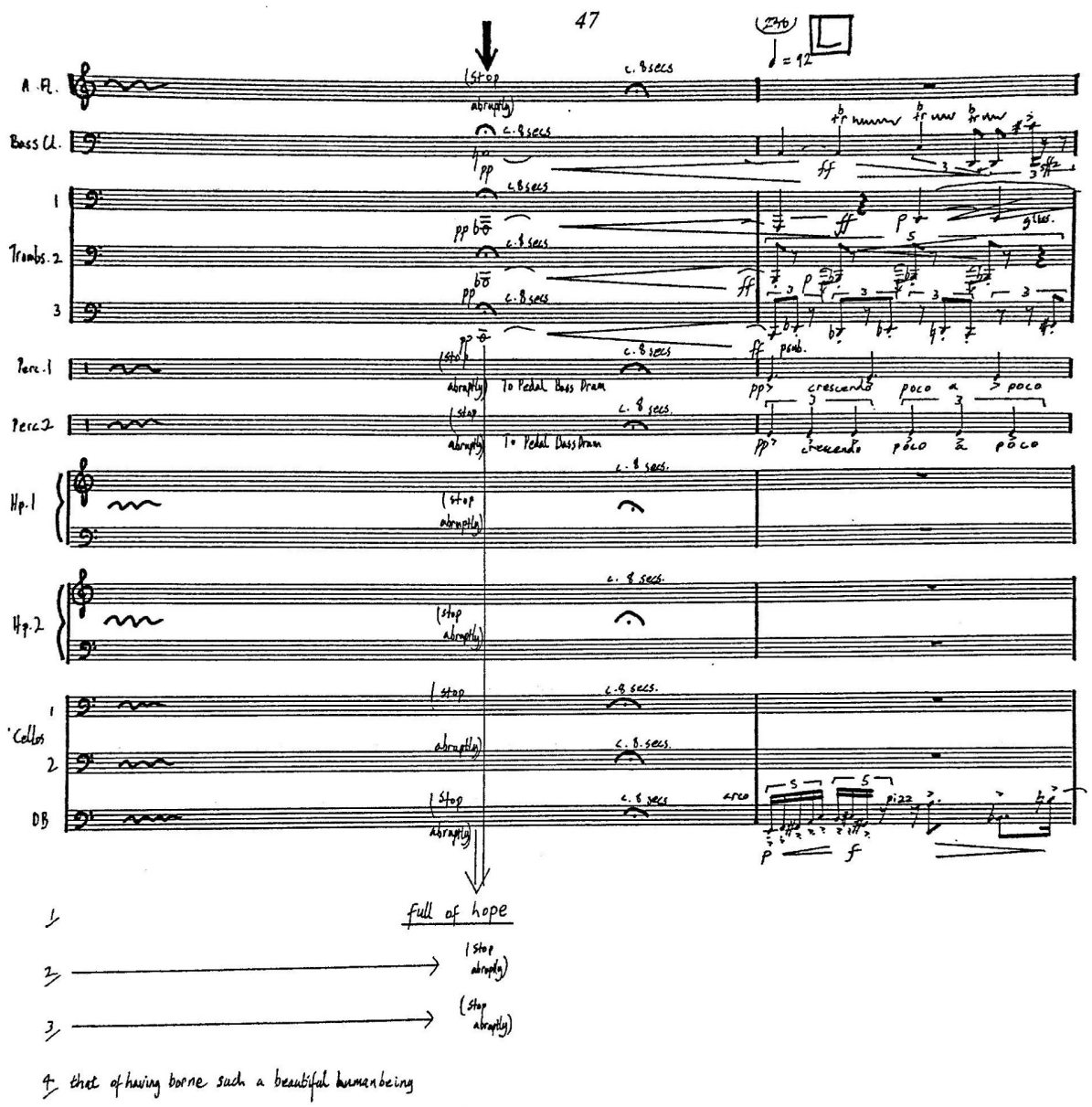
Moving forward, the threatening presence of the military band does return, signalled by the heaving pounding of the bass drum. The trombones and bass clarinet, with a grotesque weight, lean into rehearsal L and the recurring motif of the pounding bass drum. It cuts through the mood established by the previous liturgical statements and maternal reflections, signalling a return to the fear of discovery and abduction.

Crucifixus etiam pro nobis (mm. 251)

In the space between the utterance of the incarnation of Christ (rehearsal L) and the following declaration of his crucifixion (rehearsal M), MacMillan establishes a military image juxtaposing order and lawlessness. MacMillan sets the trumpets and woodwinds to sound aggressively. The trombones provide a recurring ascending glissando that evokes a crude swagger accompanied by the return of the pounding bass drum (Figure 5). The evocation of an abduction in the night is followed by the community's response to the earlier text in the poem, *A Scream in the Night*, 'the car [that] drives off unchallenged along the street. Nobody stops it, though everybody knows….'[130] The community's unified response is a shout (marked *ff* and exclaimed by all actors) of '*Crucifixus etiam pro nobis*'. At this moment the crass swinging of the trombones subsides, giving way to a free-form section played by the lower strings, harps, and upper woodwinds. As this section marked 'senza misura' progresses, MacMillan exchanges this particular creedal statement between different actors, 'He was crucified for us'. At the same time, they also carry the *Mothers'* fragmented poem, *A Song of Lamentation*: 'I am pierced by a

[130] MacMillan, *Búsqueda*, 7.

Figure 5



thorn...who will take it from me...Darling son of my heart, where are you?'[131] Two allusions here are worth noting and may carry resonant meaning beyond the immediately obvious. First of all, the individual mother's mention of being 'pierced by a thorn' perhaps connects primarily with Christ's temptation in the Garden of Gethsemane ('Father, if you are willing, remove this cup

[131] Markus, *Selected* Poems, 44.

from me'),[132] and then the crown of thorns he was made to wear.[133] Secondly, the Apostle Paul speaks of a 'thorn in the flesh', some burden or trial that he suffered such that he repeatedly prayed that it would be taken from him.[134]

This poem is recited by Actors 2 through 8, accompanied by the interjections of 'c*rucifixus*', and dissolves into the background as Actor 1 commences a portion of the poem, *Statement*. As *Statement* ('I have lost what is most beautiful, what is most precious') takes primary place over *A Song of Lamentation,* the liturgical focus moves to acknowledge the crucifixion under Pontius Pilate ('*sub Pontio Pilato*') and Christ's death and burial ('*passus et sepultus est*'). Pontius Pilate remains a symbol of Roman authority often viewed as a greater representation of state authority without mercy.

Separating this free-form section from the next major shift in liturgical function is a poem entitled, *Disappeared Prisoner*.[135] While MacMillan only gleans bits and pieces from the poem, it reads and sounds like a rapidly fired news bulletin, somewhat akin to the first movement of *Cantos Sagrados, '*Identity'. It falls between the creedal statement of Christ's crucifixion, death, and burial, and the *Sanctus*, the portion of the Mass in which that sacrifice is commemorated. Read by the Speaker, it reflects the Mother's reception of, 'all the official answers:...whereabouts unknown...no arrest recorded...excesses unavoidable in war...the Pope is a heretical, subversive

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[132] Luke 22:42 (ESV)

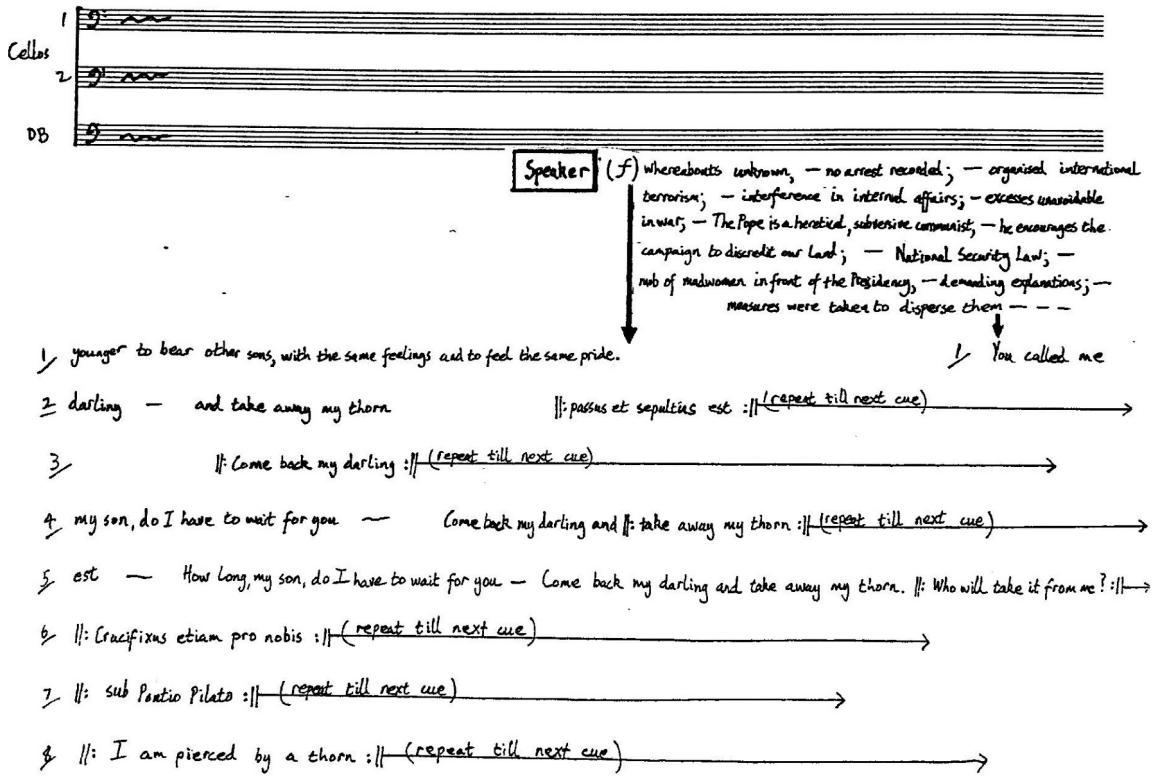
[133] Matthew 27:29 (ESV). 'And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling down before him, they mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!'

[134] 2 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV) '…a thorn was given me in the flesh. Three times I pleaded to the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'

[135] Markus, *Selected* Poems, 33. Poem written by C.J.

Communist.'[136] The private pain of the mothers who have lost their children is turned into a public shaming as the government ('*sub Pontio Pilato'*) discredits the 'mob of madwomen in front of the Presidency' (Figure 6). Yet the image of the mourning woman turns from the protesting 'madwomen' in *Disappeared Prisoner* to the 'pretty little mother' in *You said to me*. Here, MacMillan brings the section to a close with the image of a little figure, '[standing] at the gates of your hell.' The victim, murdered by the state, dead and buried, is sought out by the mother who peers hopefully into a vast void of bureaucracy, uncertainty, fear and despair.

Figure 6



[136] Markus, *Selected Poems*, 33.

Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus (mm. 252-267)

From the tender poem of the 'pretty little mother', the music transitions from an ethereal and free metered section, to a strict march-like tempo. It is as if the contemplations of the mother ('I call you from my pain: 'Son, my son, come back!' Though I know they won't let you; though I know that you may be dead.'[137]) are halted by the eventual encroachment of death and its perpetrators. All instruments and actors with the exception of the bass clarinet and trombones stop abruptly on the words, 'Son, my son, come back!'. The trombones echo the final words of the poem with a blast before crescendoing to a grotesque limping pattern in the lower brass marked by the reappearance of the stricken bass drum. The bass drum heralds the return of the 'knocking' motif, conjuring up images of secret police pounding on the doors in the dead of night. Again, the contrast between the immediate, physical world of the common people and their spiritual response in the liturgical or the world of the sacred, is highlighted. The liturgical response of the community is brought to bear on the fear that tyranny induces. In *Búsqueda*, the spectre of the secret police finds much in common with the mob that came by night for Christ in the garden of Gethsemane.[138]

There is a bitter, inevitable admission in the *Mothers*' poetry that unspeakable deeds are done in the darkness, that there is a papering over of intentions and responsibilities as the state shifts blame to the helpless. In many ways this is the emotional climax of the work, where those who steal lives are inevitably confronted with an approaching display of spiritual light and immense power. MacMillan employs multiple textual and musical layers to define this meeting

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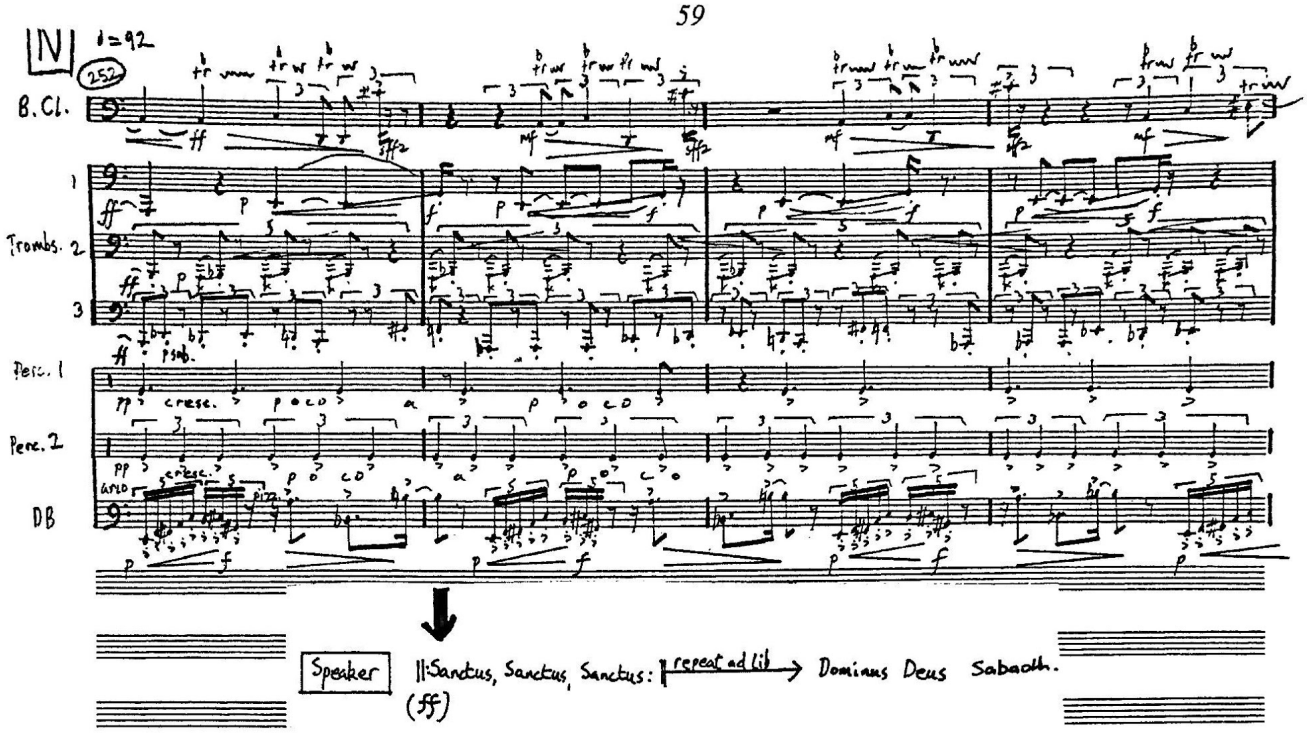
[137] Markus, *Selected Poems*, 33.

[138] John 3:19 (ESV) 'And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.'

point between people and church, government, God, victim and death squad. The debased march of the trombones and pounding knock of the bass drum meet on the line of protest with the confident, passionate cries of the Speaker, '*Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth*,' and its coterie.[139]

The *Sanctus* ('Holy' cried out three times) is set in opposition to the striking of the drum, which evokes the sound of the pounding of government forces on the door of a victim's home in the middle of the night (Figure 7). The liturgical cry attempts to rise above the incessant pounding on the door, as the Speaker reiterates: 'Holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts (or the heavenly armies)' and 'heaven and earth are full of your glory.' These words are shouted and yet, the glory of God (and the freedom and justice it brings) seems to struggle to break through the

Figure 7



[139] MacMillan, *Búsqueda*, 59.

cacophony until the repeated waves of brass-dominated, inverted major chords are brought into unity. It is worth reflecting upon the fact that in the Latin Mass, the *Sanctus* falls at the centre of the Eucharist. Other Eucharistic liturgy that would normally be recited at this point in a Mass but not included in the *Búsqueda* text, allude to the body of Jesus being broken (or sacrificed) for the sins of the world. Is it a coincidence that immediately after the *Sanctus* MacMillan leaps back to the a portion of text from the *Credo* that proclaims the resurrection of Jesus, three days after his death? Indeed, 'he ascended into heaven,' spoken in unison by the actors, acts as a hopeful signpost in remembering the ultimate fate of those disappeared who are still missing.

The words of the *Sanctus* (Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts) form a declaration at the highest point of the Mass. Not only do they proclaim the uniqueness and supremacy of God over all the earth, but they also offer a foretaste of the concept of 'Sabbath rest' which will be brought about by the coming of Christ. The Sabbath finds its roots not only in a day of rest, but in a concept of liberation from debt and oppression, a generous outworking of unmerited forgiveness in a socially restorative manner.[140] It was an unmerited forgiveness of societal debt crucial to the keeping of the physical, economic, and spiritual health of the ancient Jewish society. The Sabbath is more than just a day, it is a period of physical and spiritual rest and as a concept, can often mean a period of freedom during which chains are loosed and prisoners set free.[141] It is closely tied to the fulfillment of a promise of peace to a people group. In the liturgy of the Catholic Mass and in *Búsqueda*, it is followed by the words '*Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria*

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[140] Isaiah 61:1 and 2 (ESV). 'The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has [t]anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and [u]the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn….'

[141] Parallels are drawn throughout Scripture between the Sabbath and the Day of the Lord, as in the coming of the Lord heralds a new Sabbath (forgiveness of debts, rest for the weary, freedom for captives, etc.).

tua' (the heavens and earth are full of your glory). This is not a passive declaration but a verbal affirmation of the promise that when God's rule is established the earth 'will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as waters cover the sea'.[142] (Figure 8)

The idea that the promises of freedom and rescue from persecution read about in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures apply in the present day is a crucial theme at the heart of Liberation Theology. It asserts that the kingdom of which Christ spoke can and should find realization on earth, especially among the poor, weak and persecuted. Here at the heart of *Búsqueda*, MacMillan sets up this highest point of the liturgy against the darkest and most invasive penetration into the community and family life.

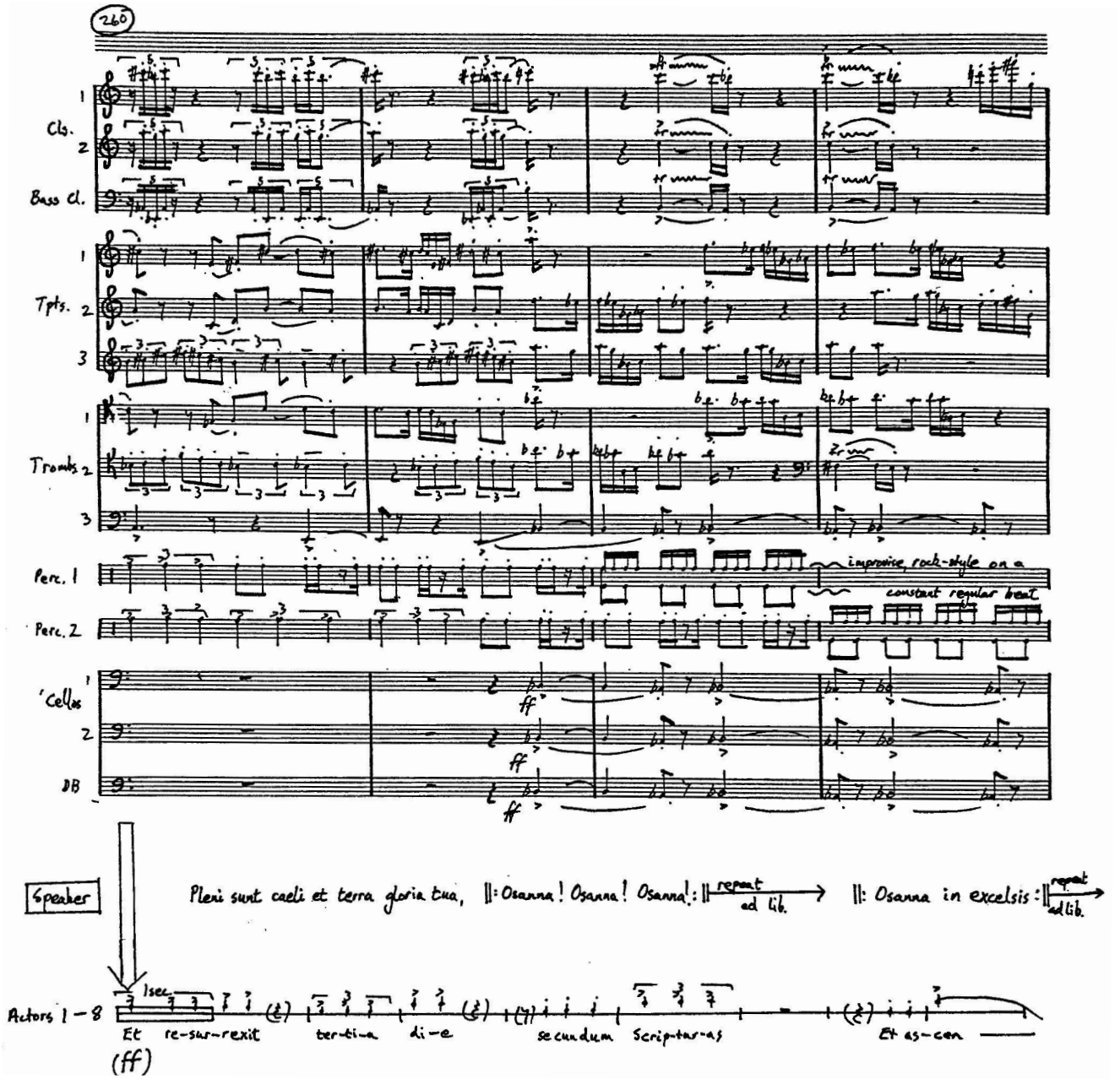
Creed returns (mm. 252-267)

The brass band has reached its peak: a whipped up frenzy complete with unified horns and woodwinds and the crashing percussion as it represents a display of state power and a protest movement's agitated response, all at once or in turn. The community of Speaker and Actors take their place against the state. MacMillan suggests that the brass band at this point contributes to the evocation of a political protest or street march. It seems also likely that it is an extension of the sharp and percussive brass outbursts that broke through the statement, '*et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis*,' earlier in the piece. It resembles a military parade (or perhaps a police crackdown) that is then confronted by the Speaker and Actors as a political street protest. As mentioned above (with the descending triads of inverted parallel major chords), the orchestration's gradual mergence speaks to a unification of purpose on the part of the protesting

[142] Isaiah 11:9 (ESV). 'They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.'

voices. Regardless, the move from clamour and chaos to unification and uniformity occurs over the course of 17 measures (mm. 252-267). It acts as a linchpin or an axle upon which the course of *Búsqueda* turns.

Figure 8



During the course of this shift from fear to resolute action, the Speaker leads the way with the declaration, '*Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus*' (m. 253) as a flag bearer at the head of the protest, while the Actors, forming the rest of the community, march steadily behind chanting from the final portion of the Creed: '*Et resurrexit tertia die secundum Scripturas. Et ascendit in coelum sedet ad dexteram Patris*' (and Christ rose from the dead according to the Scriptures. And ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father).[143] MacMillan is unambiguously setting up Christian doctrine as a framework for political response in the face of government oppression.[144] The idea that the suffering servant (a term that is often applied to Christ) has been persecuted and killed, whose memory has been suppressed, has then risen and sits in a position of power and authority, is one that completely subverts the faceless and cruel state-led terror. The weak have been or will be made strong. The humble will be lifted high as they have been in the past, particularly in the consciousness of a practicing, religious community.

Parallels are found in the *Magnificat*, or Song of Mary, a canticle filled with political implications concerning the world's order turned upside down at the announcement of the coming of God in the form of Jesus, the Son. The 'rich are sent empty away' and God has 'put down the mighty from their seat and exalted them of lowly degree.'[145] This care for the poor and weak lies at the very heart of Liberation Theology. This subversive worldview, the humble as triumphant victors, is proclaimed amidst the framework of the liturgy: *Credo* (I believe). At the height of the ebullient sounds of the protest march, as the instrumental and vocal forces begin to

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[143] MacMillan, *Búsqueda*, 61.

[144] Email correspondence with the composer. 'The sacred (or liturgical) texts might have been able to open up the political dimension of the other texts in unusual and untried ways, which pointed to a deeper archetypal universality perhaps, which grounded the 'merely' political and contemporary ideas in something more ancient and profound than the usual banal sloganeering one sometimes finds in modern political art.'

[145] Luke 1:52 (King James)

coalesce (m. 268), the soprano trio enters once more with a text of the poem, *You, man.* It resonates with early passages of the book of Lamentations, a prophetic lament concerning the destruction of ancient Jerusalem:

> You, man, who passes by indifferent,
> do not say it doesn't matter,
> that you don't know.
> Listen: They were thousands and thousands.
> They were young and they were snatched away
> in the darkness of night.
> Since then they have not returned.
> Even though time passes by
> the mothers go on waiting.
>
> If you know where they are, tell them
> - the mothers are weeping,
> - the mothers are praying,
> - the mothers are fighting,
> - the mothers are waiting![146]

This poem's introduction echoes an analogous despair revealed in the prophet Jeremiah's opening pronouncements in Lamentations:

> Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?
> Look and see
> if there is any sorrow like my sorrow,
> which was brought upon me,
> which the LORD inflicted
> on the day of his fierce anger.[147]

It is a response aimed at, but removed from, the immediate action; the detached trio's reflections are brought to bear on what is occurring. A critique placed outside of the circle of

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[146] Markus, *Selected Poems*, 11.

[147] Lamentations 1:12 (ESV)

action, staged to offer a different perspective. Due to the invasion and destruction of Judah and her capital city, Jerusalem, the inhabitants of that city, and particularly Jeremiah the prophet, wept for its desolation, crying out to those who witnessed the aftermath, that they would take note and mark their suffering. In Latin, '*o vos omnes*', this text has been set by composers through the centuries, most notably by Tomas Luis de Victoria and, in the last century, by Pablo Casals. The text itself forms part of a core of readings during Holy Week as the Church calendar moves from Passion Sunday (the heralded entrance of Christ into Jerusalem) to Triduum (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday), in which the betrayal and crucifixion are played out before Christ's resurrection on Easter Sunday.[148] It is a text associated with darkness and mourning, having been appropriated from the book of Lamentations (Old Testament) to serve as a cry of despair for the death of Christ (New Testament). MacMillan uses this *Mother*'s text of lament to transition from the violence and chaos of protest to reflections on the possible return of missing children, in the final section of *Búsqueda*.

Singing parallel major chords, the sopranos enter with the text from this poem (Figure 9). Throughout this transition, from the plea of, 'You, man, who passes by indifferent,'[149] a drawn-out lament for the persecuted, to the poem, 'When you come back',[150] the singers move in parallel motion, a trinitarian approach to the resolute, mournful statement laid out in the text above. In the following poem, in a passage marked *senza misura*, the Speaker takes on the voice of the individual *Mother* once more. There are no Actors, no brass and no crashing percussion.

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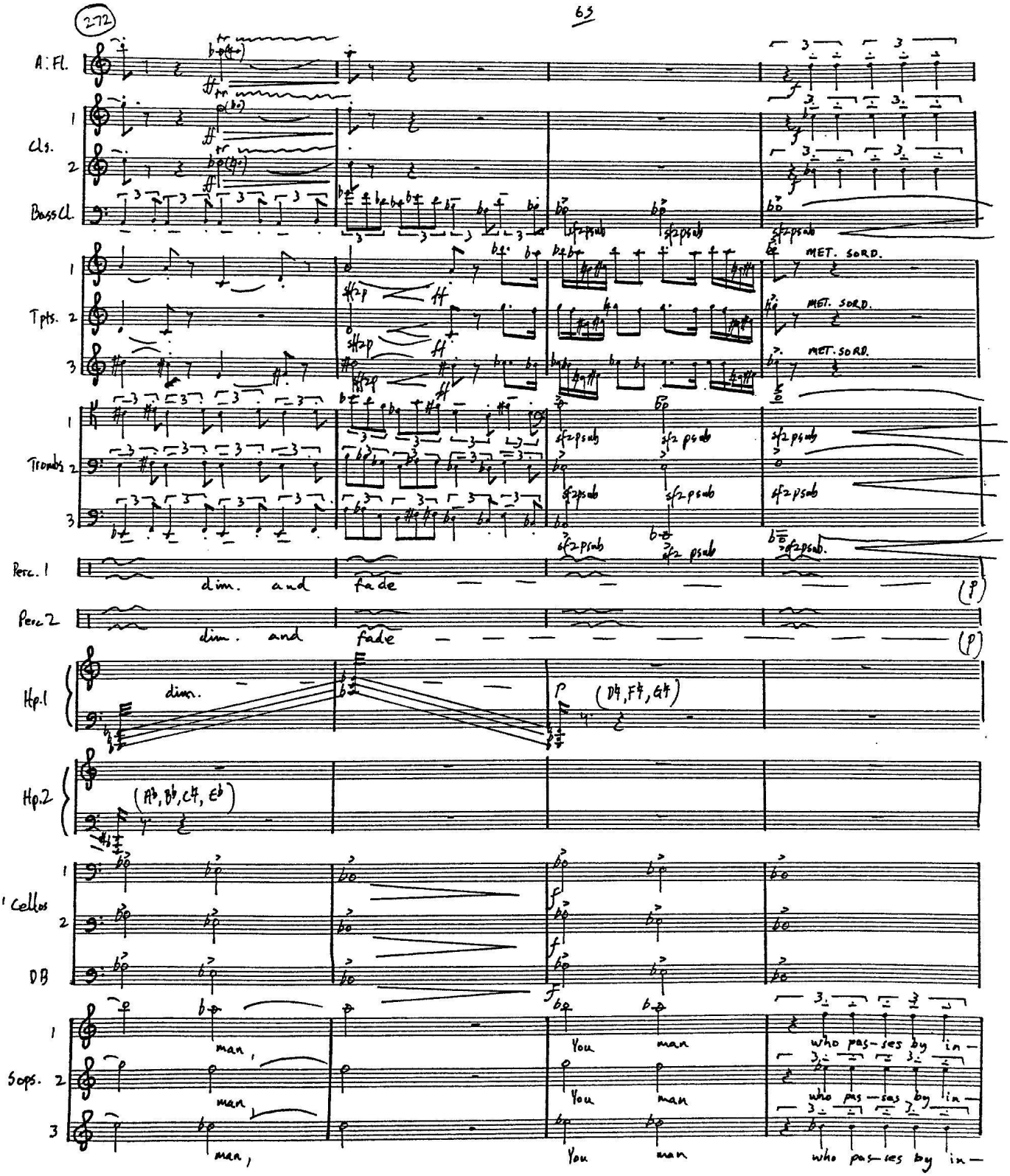
[148] Email correspondence with the composer. 'It sometimes feels I have been circling these few days in human history again and again, and music seems to flow out of the experience. It's odd, but these violent events in the life of Christ have moved me to clothe them in music, but very differently each time I go there.' See *Visitatio Sepulchri, Seven Last Words from the Cross, St. John Passion, Motet I-V, St. Luke Passion*, etc.

[149] Markus, *Selected Poems*, 11. Poem written by Lina.

[150] Markus, *Selected Poems*, 28. Poem written by Ely.

Figure 9


272
63
A. Fl.
Cls.
Bass Cl.
Tpts.
MET. SORD.
Trombs
Perc. 1
dim. and fade
Perc. 2
Hp. 1
dim.
(D♭, F♯, G♯)
Hp. 2
(A♭, B♭, C♯, E♭)
'Cellos
DB
Sops.
man,
You
who pas-ses by in-

Only the sound of one voice, two harps and a flute. The voice of the *Mother* in the poem speaks confidently about the time when she will hold her kidnapped daughter again ('When you come back my darling girl') and 'weave spells until the shadows are driven away.'[151] Towards the end of the first section of the poem in which all of the 'tremblings' and 'terrors' of the returned (or imagined-to-be-returned) child are addressed, the sopranos re-enter singing the benediction of the *Agnus Dei* — a lullaby to soothe away crippling fear.

Agnus Dei, qui tollis (rehearsal R to the end)

The *Agnus Dei* text mirrors the opening portion of the Ordinary of the Mass, the *Kyrie*, in its tripartite structure. Yet rather than two of the same plea bookending the overall prayer, the supplication takes the following form:

> Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world, have mercy on us.
> Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world, have mercy on us.
> Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world, *grant us thy peace.* (italics mine)

The cue directly preceding rehearsal S marks an introduction to the end of the work. The soprano trio's entry at this point is marked, 'Improvise chant-like incantations, sotto-voce, on these notes on the words 'Agnus Dei'. Change notes and words as indicated for the rest of the piece.'[152] The spell the mother wishes to weave around her daughter to drive away the shadows is the plea to the Lamb of God, to have mercy and to grant peace to the faithful. After everything that has come before, this final unmetered section is perceived to be out of time and separated from the harsh realities of *Búsqueda's* subject matter. It is a simultaneous prayer for peace and a

[151] Markus, *Selected Poems*, 28.

[152] MacMillan, *Búsqueda*, 73.

lullaby for the victim. The term 'Lamb of God' is pregnant with implication but perhaps none stronger than the image of a lamb as a defenceless animal with sacrificial connotations. It is the great irony of the Christian faith that the 'last shall be first' and that the 'meek shall inherit the earth.'[153] Surrounded by this prayer to the Lamb of God, beginning at rehearsal R, MacMillan layers three texts. *Agnus Dei* forms the structure around and in which two final poems are couched. The first, spoken by the Speaker clearly over sparse instrumentation (harps and woodwinds), is entitled *When you come back* and deals with the reflections of a mother to her 'darling girl' upon her imagined restoration back to her family. It is outlined in two sections: the first a realization and affirmation of the effects of political persecution and violence, the second, a mother's will to seek to heal and drive away the 'shadows' of persecution and violence that have enveloped her daughter. The eight actors whisper portions of the second poem *If you come back,* [154] one that MacMillan had employed towards the beginning of the work. It becomes increasingly marked by doubt, highlighting the motif of the 'sin of Cain' (Figure 10).

'The sin of Cain will be his, and God…he damned the deed': this reference to the opening chapters of the book of Genesis conjures up associations of the fratricide by Cain on his brother, Abel. [155] Though warned by God that sin was 'crouching at his door' and that 'its desire (was) contrary' to Cain, he murdered his brother out of envy and sought to dismiss it by claiming ignorance. God's reply to Cain speaks to the cry of Liberation Theology: 'And the LORD said,

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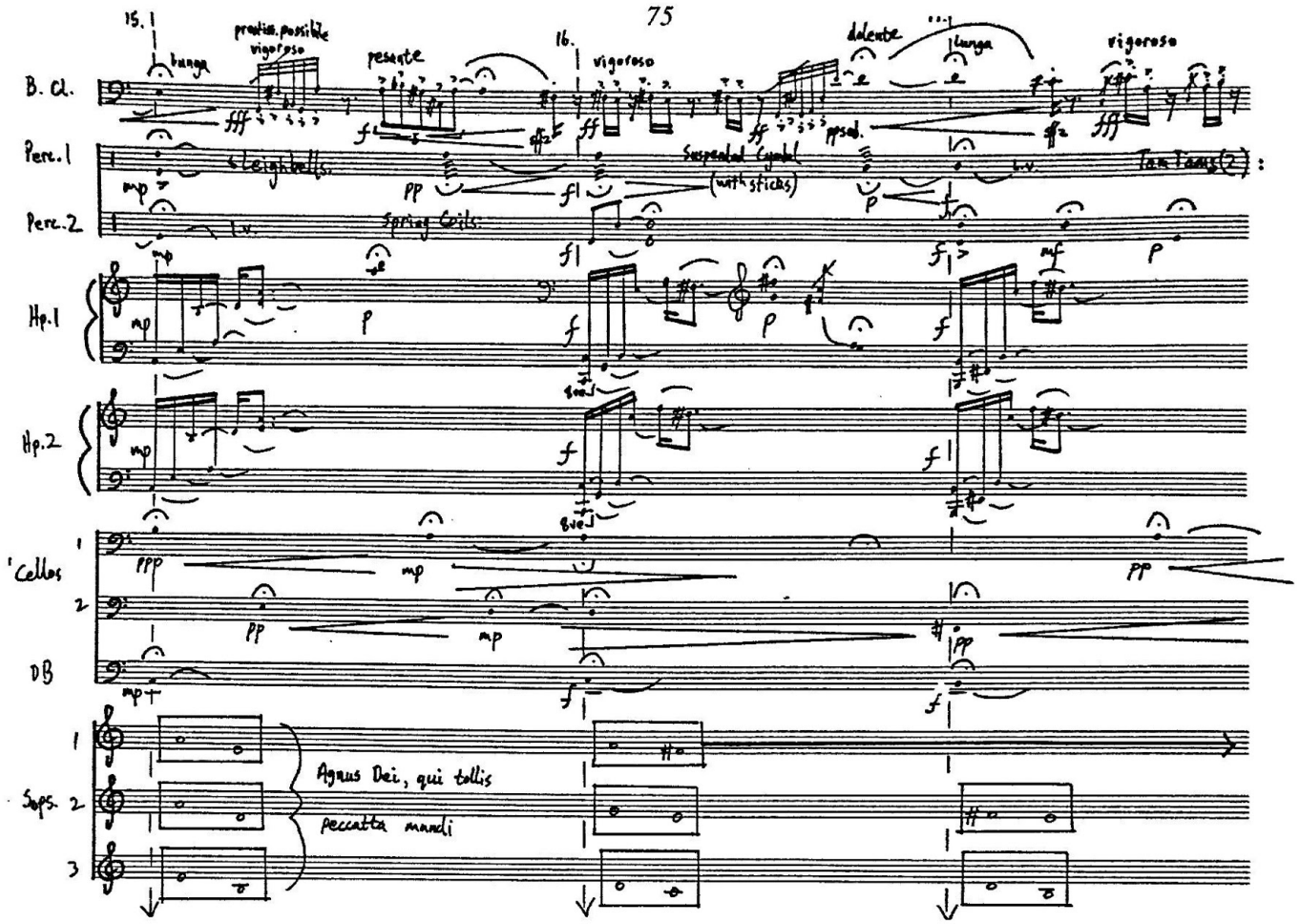
[153] Matthew 19:30 and 5:5 (ESV). 'But many who are last shall be first, and the first last.' and, 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.'

[154] Markus, *Selected Poems*, 26. Poem written by Miriam.

[155] Genesis 4:7 (ESV). God's acceptance of the offering of Abel was set up against the rejected offering of his brother, Cain, who was given the exhortation to "do well" and his offering would be "accepted": 'If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.'

Figure 10



1 deed.... ||: If you don't come, then if you don't come .... I cannot think of it. :|| (repeat till Speaker starts again)

2 he damned the deed .... ||: If you don't come, then if you don't come.... I cannot think of it. :||

3 Cain will be his, and God .... he damned the deed.... ||: If you don't come, then if you don't come.... I cannot

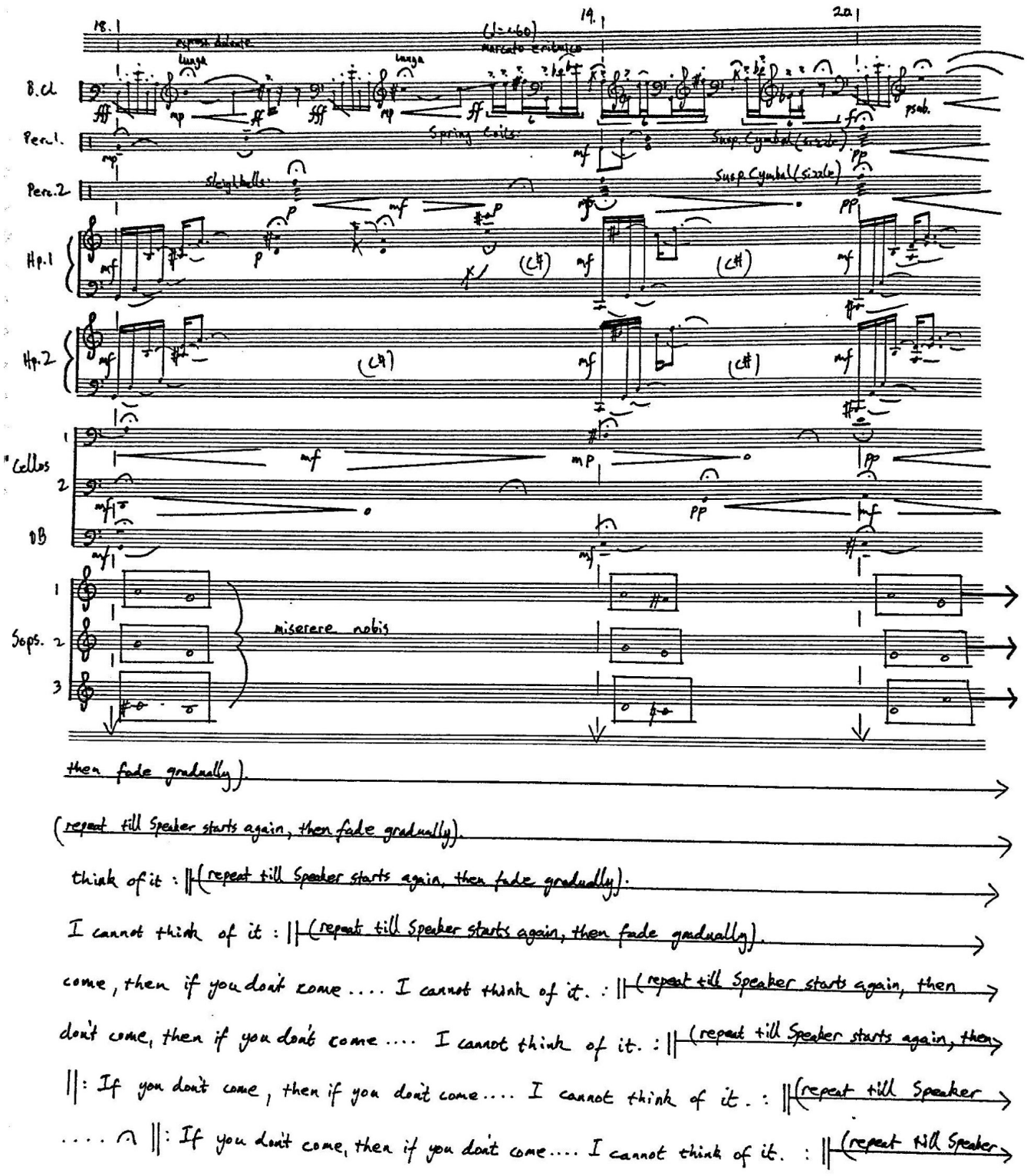
4 sin of Cain will be his, and God ..... he damned the deed .... ||: If you don't come, then if you don't come.

5 think of it. The sin of Cain will be his, and God .... he damned the deed.... ||: If you don't

6 cannot think of it. The sin of Cain will be his, and God.... he damned the deed.... ||: If you

7 don't come .... I cannot think of it. The sin of Cain will be his, and God .... he damned the deed ....

8 you don't come .... I cannot think of it. The sin of Cain will be his, and God ....he damned the deed


18.
19.
20.
B.Cl.
Perc.1.
Perc.2
Hp.1
Hp.2
'Cellos
DB
Sops.
Spring Coils
Susp. Cymbal (sizzle)
sleighbells
miserere nobis
then fade gradually).
(repeat till Speaker starts again, then fade gradually).
think of it : ||(repeat till Speaker starts again, then fade gradually).
I cannot think of it : ||(repeat till Speaker starts again, then fade gradually).
come, then if you don't come .... I cannot think of it. : ||(repeat till Speaker starts again, then
don't come, then if you don't come .... I cannot think of it. : ||(repeat till Speaker starts again, then
||: If you don't come, then if you don't come .... I cannot think of it. : ||(repeat till Speaker
.... ∩ ||: If you don't come, then if you don't come .... I cannot think of it. : ||(repeat till Speaker

"What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.'"[156] Not only has Cain claimed ignorance but he has dismissed the fraternal relationship they were to have had, claiming, 'am I my brother's keeper?', when questioned as to Abel's whereabouts.

With an insidious penetration of doubt into the hopeful dream of a son's or daughter's return, the whispers of the actors dredge up the betrayal of a government towards a generation of its people, whose keeper, in a sense, they were to have been. As yet another realization of the conflict building through *Búsqueda*, the poem *When you come back* is set against a contrasting poem *If you come back,* and suspended on the structure of the liturgical prayer for peace, the *Agnus Dei*. The murdered Abel becomes an image of the disappeared victim. Abel is the innocent son, the one with whom God is pleased, while also resonating in a sacrificial manner with the image of the Lamb of God. The sopranos sing in murmuring continuance, '*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi*', as the actors recite, 'If you don't come...I cannot think of it.'[157] The government who takes away the lives, the hopes and the joy away from people (especially the *Mothers*, in this case) is contrasted against the claim of the foundational words of the Latin Mass, 'God who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.' There will be no mercy, but a rush to deny, invalidate, and suppress. The supplication of the *Agnus Dei* is repeated again, the second part of the tripartite prayer, as the actors recite the final portion of the poem, *If you come back*, in

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[156] Genesis 4:10 and 11 (ESV).
And the LORD said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.
And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your han
d.'

[157] MacMillan, *Búsqueda,* 75.

one voice before breaking off into soft successive, individual, indeterminate iterations of the same. Amidst the fierce, virtuosic and bubbling swell of the chamber orchestra, led by the bass clarinet and at the dying away of the recitations of the actors, the cathartic climax of this final section, if not the whole work, is reached as the Speaker utters the words (Figure 11):

> And then, I, on my knees,
> Bursting into a thousand flames
> With the miracle of having you back,
> Will gather up endearments,
> As a nest where your spirit may shelter
> From the explosion of that place
> You will have left far behind.[158]

The painful tension of *When you come back* against the poem *If you come back* is released.

The final words of the *Agnus Die* come to cradle the tension which has been held for the entirety of the work. The themes of government oppression against young protesters, state sponsored abductions through the lens of Liberation theology and ultimately, the secular against the sacred are brought into perspective as MacMillan turns to the words, 'Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, grant us thy peace.' The Speaker, with the communal voice of the *Mother*, prays, 'I, on my knees [prayer, supplication, submission, vulnerability]…at the miracle [against all odds] of having you back…'[159]

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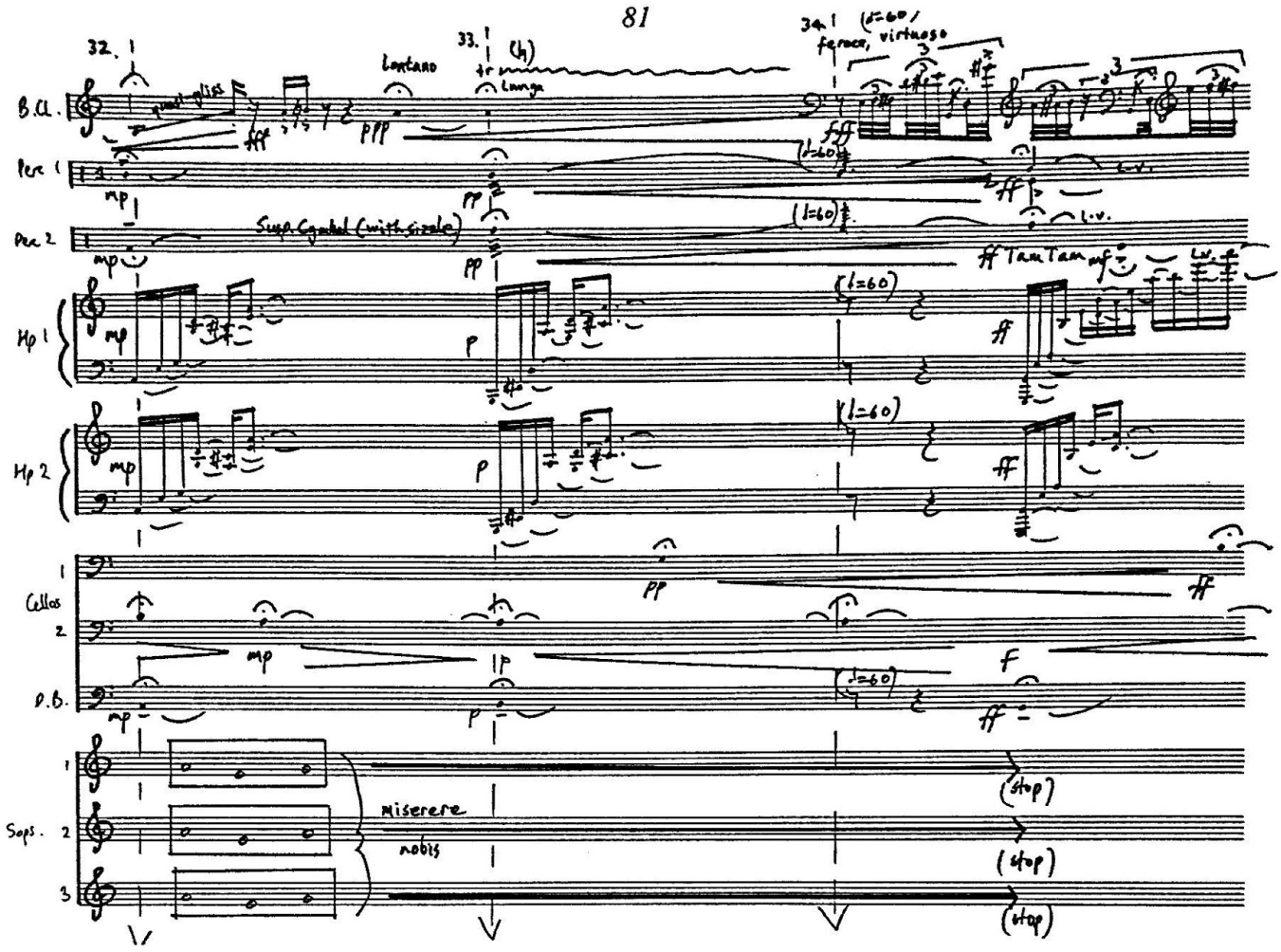
[158] MacMillan, *Búsqueda*, 82. MacMillan substitutes the word 'place' for the word 'Hell' as seen in the original collection of the Mother's poetry, *Selection of Poems of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*, p. 28

[159] MacMillan, *Búsqueda*, 81 and 82.

Figure 11



Speaker

3-4secs.

And then I, on my knees

your face.... traces of tiredness.... :||

.... your face.... traces of tiredness.... :||

we laugh again? .... your face .... traces of tiredness.... :||

will we laugh again? .... your face .... traces of tiredness .... :||

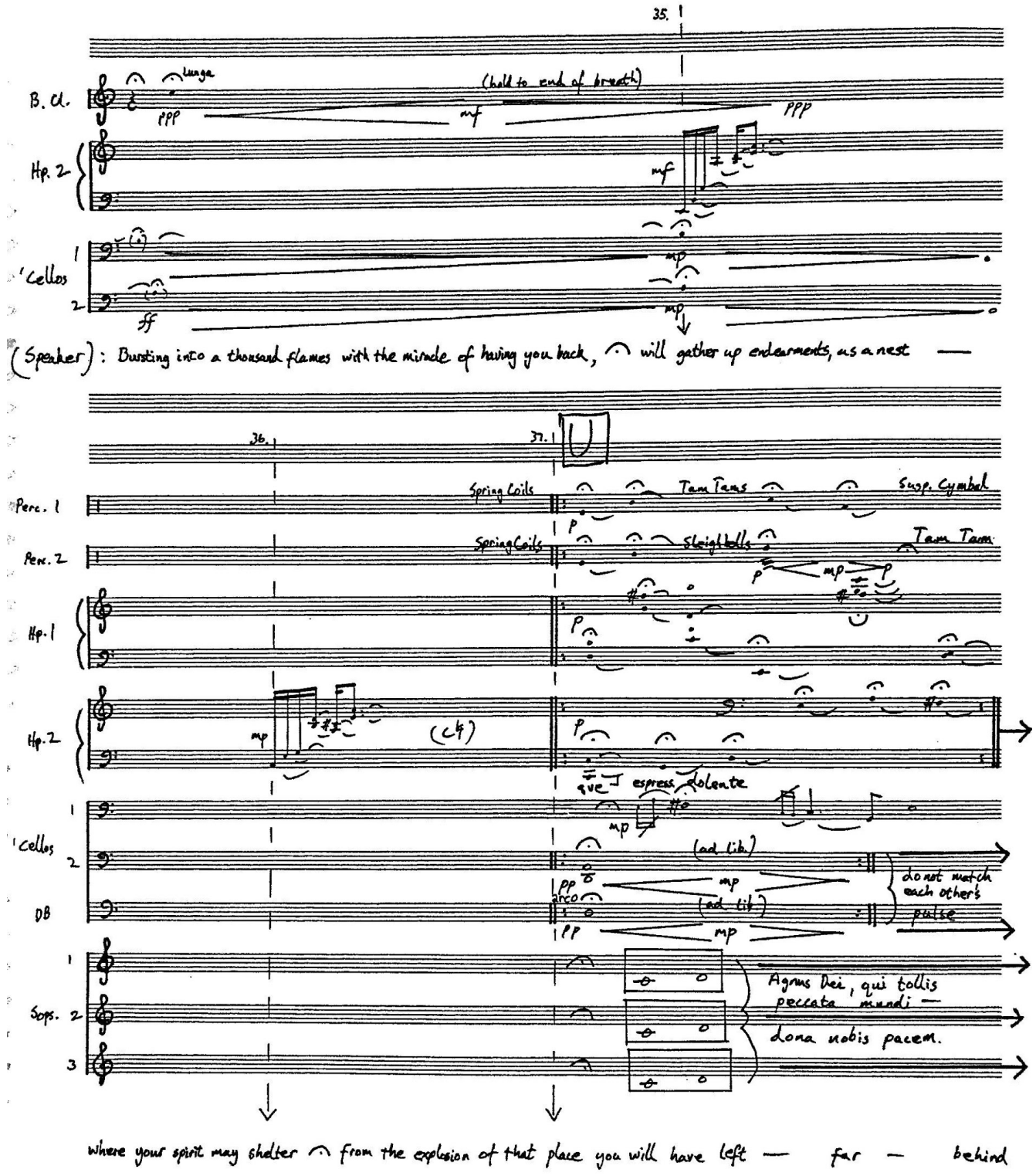
tiredness.... will we laugh again? .... your face.... traces of tiredness .... :||

warmth.... tiredness .... will we laugh again? .... your face.... traces of tiredness.... :||

one day.... warmth .... tiredness .... will we laugh again? .... your face.... traces of tiredness.... :||

Perhaps one day.... warmth .... tiredness .... will we laugh again? .... your face .... traces of tiredness :||

repeat and fade gradually after the 'fff' in 34.


35.
B. Cl.
lunga
(hold to end of breath)
ppp
mf
ppp
Hp. 2
mf
'Cellos
1
2
mp
ff
mp
(Speaker): Bursting into a thousand flames with the miracle of having you back, will gather up endearments, as a nest —
36.
37.
Perc. 1
Spring Coils
Tam Tams
Susp. Cymbal
Perc. 2
Spring Coils
Sleighbells
Tam Tam
Hp. 1
Hp. 2
mp
(cl.)
espress.
molente
'Cellos
1
2
DB
(ad lib.)
do not match each other's pulse
pp
arco
mp
Sops.
1
2
3
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi —
dona nobis pacem.
where your spirit may shelter from the explosion of that place you will have left — far — behind

During this statement the liturgical prayer (*Agnus Dei*) falls curiously silent directly from the point at which the Speaker declares that they are on their knees. Thus when the Speaker's individual prayer begins at the moment of experiencing the fulfillment of a returned child, the community prayer ceases — the movement through the liturgical prayers has been paused. The dreamt of hope and joy at the return of a stolen daughter is supported by the sparse instrumentation of harp and cello alone. However, the liturgical prayer for peace is brought back into motion at rehearsal U, the moment in which the intolerable 'place' of isolation and persecution, which this prisoner would have left far behind, is mentioned. The singers return with the corporate prayer, rocking back and forth upon a major 2nd, 'Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, grant us thy peace.'[160]

The final words from *If you come back*, 'I will not have waited in vain,' are whispered by the actors separately as the strings crescendo and decrescendo, the 1st cello soloist penetrating the soft instrumentation of harp and percussion until it too rocks to and fro. The work is brought to an end in the same manner as it began, giving way to the steady breathing of the actors. Where the strings are instructed to 'not match the pulse' of their crescendo/decrescendo, the singers are to 'start breathing, as at the beginning, in a common pulse one after the other...then gradually fade to nothing.'[161] As the instruments recede, the soprano trio continues to invoke the peace of God upon the common supplicants, and the steady sound of breathing begins to conjure images of a sleeping host before fading away to nothing.

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[160] MacMillan, *Búsqueda*, 81 and 82.

[161] MacMillan, *Búsqueda*, 85.

When you come back is the very last poem that MacMillan presents in *Búsqueda* and it conjures up the image of Michelangelo's *Pieta*, the mother finally able to hold her child again, returned to her after much violence. That image frozen in time of Mary holding the body of the grown man, Jesus, as she cradled him as a child, now dead, is reflected in this final poem. Set upon the structure of the final section of the Ordinary of the Mass, the *Agnus Dei*, the narrator imagines what she will do to 'weave spells until the shadows are driven away':[162] 'I will wash your flesh until the wounds are concealed; I will search for oblivion to calm your memory; I will bring you sweet remembrances until your mind is soothed.'[163]

[162] MacMillan, *Búsqueda*, 78.

[163] MacMillan, *Búsqueda*, 78.

Cantos Sagrados

> In writing this work I wanted to compose something which was both timeless and contemporary, both sacred and secular. The title ('sacred songs') is therefore slightly misleading as the three poems are concerned with political repression in Latin America and are deliberately coupled with traditional religious texts to emphasize a deeper solidarity with the poor of that subcontinent.[164]

In *Cantos Sagrados,* MacMillan draws from liturgical and extra-liturgical sacred material, incorporating portions of the Latin Requiem Mass (*Dies irae* and *Credo*) and a Latin Marian text, *Salve Mater coeli porta* (Hail Mother, portal of heaven)*,* to undergird the dissenting verse of the Latin American poets, Dorfman and Mendoza. Over the course of three movements, a spectrum of response to political oppression is presented: from the immediate and tangible (*Identity*), to the introspective (*Virgin of Guadalupe*) and finally, to the cruelly inevitable (*Sun Stones*). These sacred songs have been described as 'restrained, angry, touchingly humane in their own right.'[165] There is much that sets this work apart from its earlier thematic counterpart, *Búsqueda,* not least the instrumentation and genre*,* however it may be in MacMillan's restraint that the chief differences lie.

It is written for choir and organ. It is a concert work and meant to be experienced from the stage in a differing way than *Búsqueda*. The latter is theatrical, with staged placement of actors and musicians, though without known marked movement. *Búsqueda* walks a *via media* between a concert work and theatrical production, particularly in the blend of its media; singing, speaking and Sprechstimme, and is rhapsodic in its instrumentation, combining strict metre and

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[164] James MacMillan, *Cantos Sagrados*, (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1990), composers note.

[165] Patrick Russill, 'Cantos Sagrados,' *The Musical Times* 137, no. 1837 (1996): 35-37.

aleatoric passages.[166] *Cantos Sagrados* is methodically sculpted and invites its hearers to experience it at arms length, to observe and ponder. It exists as a triptych on suffering, each movement an illumination of repression inviting reflection but not immersion, with the sacred text providing the frame. Finally, wherein *Búsqueda* MacMillan veers between the brash and the intimate, holding little back in a relentless exposition of human loss and political protest, *Cantos Sagrados* presents a response more refined, reflective and contained in its revelation. Both are emotionally forthright but *Cantos Sagrados* presents as a work that has followed on from the initial foundation laid with *Búsqueda*.[167]

With the inclusion of the Requiem liturgy in the first movement, a connection is established between the expectation of the oppressed community and the liturgy of the church, this time with a ritual that is sung or said on behalf of the dead. Whereas in *Bùsqueda* the communal response to suffering is couched in a liturgy that propels (through congregational acts of protest) the participants to a tangible point of victory (or a culmination of activism, as in the *Sanctus*), in *Cantos Sagrados'* first movement, *Identity*, MacMillan uses the Mass for the Dead to initiate responsive action. Following the initial outburst of frenetic questioning that yields to the inevitable outcome of the oppression, the words '*Libera animas omnium fidelium defunctorum de poenis inferni*,'[168] act in a benedictory fashion in reaction to the discovery and retrieval of the corpse.

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[166] Could *Búsqueda* be considered modelled on a Lutheran Passion, but focussed on the suffering of humankind accompanied by selected portions of liturgy and the example of the sympathetic Christ? In miniature, an unconscious pre-cursor to Passions MacMillan would go on to write.

[167] MacMillan's succeeding works, *Visitatio Sepulchri, The Confession of Isobel Gowdie, Veni, veni Immanuel* follow closely after and feature, as mentioned above, strong emphasis on themes of justice and liberation.

[168] 'Deliver the souls of all the faithful departed from the pains of hell…'

The second movement, *Virgin of Guadalupe,* provides a profound reflection upon the diverging outcomes or *raisons d'être* from commonly held religious beliefs and practices between opposing people groups. Though both indigenous and invader revere the same religious figure, in this case the Virgin of Guadalupe, the invader oppresses the indigenous population who hold the Virgin to be their spiritual mother. While they should be in a sense joined in a common Catholic Christian family, the oppressed people are instead forced to ask an existential question that strikes near the heart of their faith: how can two different people, the oppressed and oppressor, venerate the same religious figure? A Marian sequence, rather than a segment of the liturgical text of the Mass, undergirds Mendoza's poetry with intimations of a motet-like *cantus firmus*.

In the third and final movement, *Sun Stone,* MacMillan returns to the liturgy of the Latin Mass by setting a portion of the Nicene Creed in tandem with Dorfman's piercing poetic account of the execution of a prisoner. Not only do the two texts yield contrasting subject matter, they are polar opposites in their musical quality. The slow, solemn and implacable movement of the creedal text (dealing with the suffering and death of Christ) progresses inevitably forward under the clipped, excited and rapidly moving retelling of a death, by firing squad, of a political prisoner.

Along with religious and political themes, sacred and secular texts are brought together in diverse ways in each of these movements. In *Identity*, the account of the event takes place entirely separately from the liturgical text, which in turn becomes a reactive, congregational ritual response. The punctuative return of the organ reinforces a subtext of continued tension. In the *Virgin of Guadalupe* the sacred text flows beneath the philosophical inquiry. It is an

affirmation of a role that the Virgin Mary plays, or an aspect of who she was, the portal of heaven through which Christ, *salvator mundi*, entered the world.[169] In tandem with this affirmation, the secular poem questions the sacred text's veracity and by extension the Virgin's favour. MacMillan employs a similar technique in *Sun Stone*, progressing the two texts, sacred and secular, alongside each other. Here, however, the sacred text (from the Nicene Creed) concerning the crucifixion of Christ affirms in solidarity the connection between Jesus, the persecuted innocent victim, and the execution of the political prisoner.

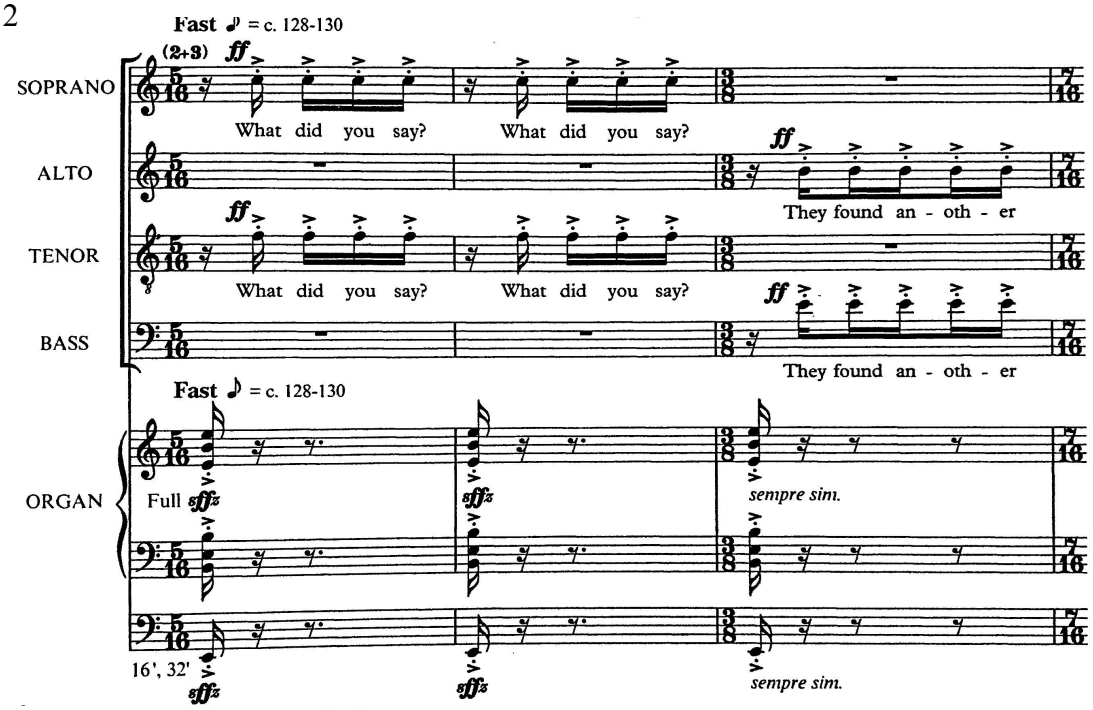
Identity

MacMillan launches the first movement, *Identity*, with a terse block chord erupting from the organ. The rapid fire text exchanged antiphonally between the sopranos/tenors and altos/basses (ST: 'What did you say?' AB: 'They found another one.') immediately evokes the chaos of a rumour spreading its tentacles throughout a community. In doing so it conjures an aural impression of a phone conversation punctuated by interruptions, exclamations of new information, and emphatic statements that immerse the listener immediately into the breathless spasms of the horrific discovery of a dead body washed up on the banks of a river (Figure 12). The restless and uncertain turbulence caused by anonymity, and hence a projected universality, of the victim is a theme that permeates both Dorfman poems, and much of the works of the *Mothers of the Disappeared* in *Búsqueda*. It could be anyone's child, spouse, or parent: 'He doesn't belong to anybody, you say he doesn't belong to anybody?'[170]. Readily apparent, and much of

[169] It is, at first glance, tempting to think of Mary as the portal leading into heaven but it would be more accurate to view her as the tangible, physical way by which Christ literally entered the world.

[170] MacMillan, *Cantos Sagrados,* 15.

Figure 12



the time elegantly expressed, in the poems of the Mothers and indeed here with both Dorfman and Mendoza, is the continual revelation of the close and intimate relationship between mother and child. In *Búsqueda,* this generally plays out within the perspective of a mother's rumination on tragedies that have transpired, sometimes separated by the passing of years. These events, having taken deep root, continue to spread their invasive tendrils into the victim's (here, the *Mother'*s) consciousness through intervening time. In *Identity,* the tragedy is present and it is raw, as if the hearer/performer/audience is stumbling across it in real time. The communicant conveys, almost as a casual statement, the message that police don't even believe that the victim's mother could identify him, that other women had tried and failed:

> no one could identify him?
> the police said not even his mother
> not even the mother who bore him
> not even she could
> they said that?
> the other women already tried [171]

[171] MacMillan, *Cantos Sagrados,* 6-7, 13-14.

Phrases like, ‘mother who bore him’, and, ‘naked as the day he was born,’ imbue the scene with a visceral sense of childhood and innocence, regardless of whether the dead one is ‘son, husband, or father’. Indeed, he may be all simultaneously. This possessive nature of the individuals and community is contrasted with the image of being cast off, like an orphan of the state, through such phrases as, ‘they found another one’, ‘no one can identify him’, ‘doesn’t belong to anybody.’ [172] The image is extended by the response of the bereaved stating that, ‘I’ll sign the papers…’.[173] The victim is ‘adopted’, or taken back into custody of a loving family, though this time it is with mourning instead of celebration. This discovery of a dead body floating in the river leads to a frantic outcry among a community of people that have become used to the morbid rhythms of tragedy. They are people who dread and anticipate such a moment, even if only to achieve some sort of closure. Though the disappeared are faceless victims, claimed by no one, every body found becomes everyone's son or daughter. The final words of the poem emphasize this: ‘Tell them not to worry: I can bury my own dead.’[174] The claim is now complete, the faceless, unrecognizable body has now been adopted back by a parent, grimly eager to lay them to rest.

Whereas in *Búsqueda*, and in the other two movements of *Cantos Sagrados*, MacMillan often simultaneously undergirds the poetry with the a portion Latin Eucharistic liturgy, Requiem mass, or a Latin hymn, in *Identity* he situates it as a benediction, a response made in full and following hard after the declaration that the bereaved will ‘bury their own dead’. The liturgy here

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[172] MacMillan, *Cantos Sagrados*, 15. Faceless victims, claimed by no one but then every one found becomes everyone's son or daughter.

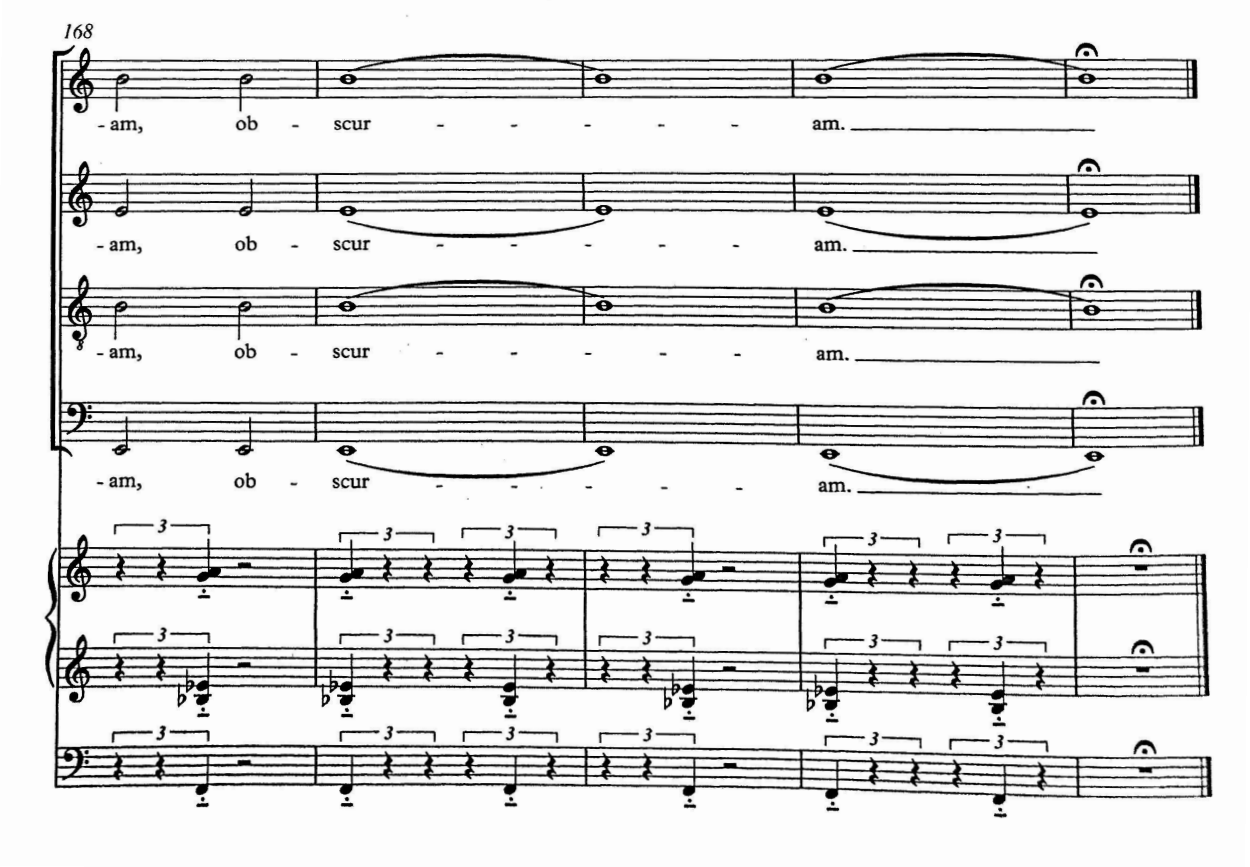
[173] MacMillan, *Cantos Sagrados,* 18-19.

[174] MacMillan, *Cantos Sagrados*, 21.

is borrowed from the text of the Requiem mass, specifically the *Dies irae*, where the supplicant plea to God is that he would save the dead from the fires of hell and ultimate destruction. After the majority of the movement passes in frantic motion (rapid, punctuated text, with cluster chords and a flurry of virtuosic organ activity) the last quarter comes as a soft, homophonic plea, a blessing accompanied by pulsating cluster chords on the organ (Figure 13).

Libera animas omnium fidelium defunctorum de poenis inferni, et de profundo lacu: Libera eas de ore leonis ne absorbeat eas tartarus, ne cadant in obscurum.	Deliver the souls of all the faithful departed from the pains of hell and from the depths of the pit: deliver them from the lion's mouth, that hell devour them not, that they fall not into darkness.[175]

Figure 13



[175] MacMillan, *Cantos Sagrados*, 21-24.

The frantic pace of punctuated sung text, spoken word, and music ultimately gives way to a communal prayer for the collective souls of the 'faithful departed'. This is reflected in how MacMillan has set the text syllabically, to progress in a chant-like manner, floating seamlessly over the movement of the organ. After a three-measure instrumental passage, following a bridge from the furious, 'I can bury my own dead', the opening text of this prayer, '*Libera*' or 'free', is sung over two measures and then repeated once. The furiousness of that transition from 'tell them not to worry', through the triple forte of 'I can bury my own dead', begins to melt away from personal anger and despair to the calm, communal language of the Mass for the Dead. The organ, which has undergirded the choir with virtuosic runs and chord cluster punctuations, now gives way to an open fifth with an added second in the LH and a trill on C6 in the RH. This trill continues into the beginning of the *Libera* prayer, eventually becoming the only remaining musical underpinning to the text in this transitional passage. The trill evokes the image of the fluttering of the dove, a symbol of the descending Holy Spirit upon Christ at his baptism.[176] In pairing the image of the descending Holy Spirit, known as the Helper, or Comforter,[177] with the word '*libera*', MacMillan enlarges the context of the grieving community's experience. The cry for freedom, for liberation, though initially a personal one, is reflected in a mutual way amongst the local community (the singing 'like a chorale'[178]). It also resonates with Christians worldwide through the common funereal liturgy.

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[176] Beethoven incorporates a similar trill (also on C6) in the *Credo* section of his *Missa Solemnis* as the soloists sing, in turns, "Et incarnatus est de spiritu sancto" (and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit).

[177] John 14:26 (ESV).
'But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to yo ur remembrance all that I have said to you.' MacMillan's most recent work, Symphony No. 5 Le grand 'Inconnu' (2019), combines texts from the Bible, St. John of the Cross, and the Latin hymn, Veni Creator Spiritus.

[178] MacMillan, *Cantos Sagrados*, 22.

The Holy Spirit is identified as the one who enables this freedom or could bring it about, the one who enlivens each individual Christian and inspires the worldwide Church. According to doctrinal statements found in the Creed (which will be used later in *Cantos Sagrados*), Christ was made incarnate by the Spirit of the Virgin Mary and 'was made man'. This identification forms many of the connecting points between sacred texts and secular poems. In m.164, the obscurity ('*in obscurum*') gradually clears as the choir finally achieves the open fifth. However, the organ, after featuring very sparsely in this final section, continues to provide an underpinning of instability through the irregular punctuation of cluster chords, recalling the uneasiness of the opening section of the movement.

Virgin of Guadalupe

In this second movement of the 'Sacred Songs', MacMillan departs from his usage of the Office of the Latin Mass, instead employing a Marian hymn as the foundation of sacred text upon which he sets Mendoza's poem.

Salve Mater coeli porta	Hail Mother, portal of heaven
Virga florens at exorta	Flowering Virgin, sprung
David ex prosapia	from the line of David.[179]

Mendoza's poem deals with the nature of political repression and erasure in a broad sense, inquiring of the Virgin Mary what MacMillan calls, 'a more fundamental cultural and historical question.'[180]

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[179] MacMillan, *Cantos Sagrados,* 25-41.

[180] MacMillan, 'Cantos Sagrados,' Boosey & Hawkes, composer's note.

Why is it that in Spain
on the far side of our hills and valleys,
across the sea,
why is there
another Virgin of Guadalupe,
Patron Saint of the Conquerors?
men with great beards,
men on horses,
men with swords and fire,
who crush and burn our homes,
and the Indians,
your children,
still inside?[181]

This vexatious question reveals a bitter dilemma postulated by the poet: that a beloved saint might act as a patron for the oppressor as well as the oppressed. The conquerors are portrayed as fierce and implacable, the 'Indians' as the oppressed are shown to be the lowliest of the low and therefore extremely vulnerable. They are 'poor little ones' and 'your children', highlighting the maternal and caring nature of the Virgin and revealing, in ever-increasing harsh light, the confusion of the supplicant poet. The comparison is even more stark and jarring in light of the enduring popularity of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexican society, particularly among the poor.[182]

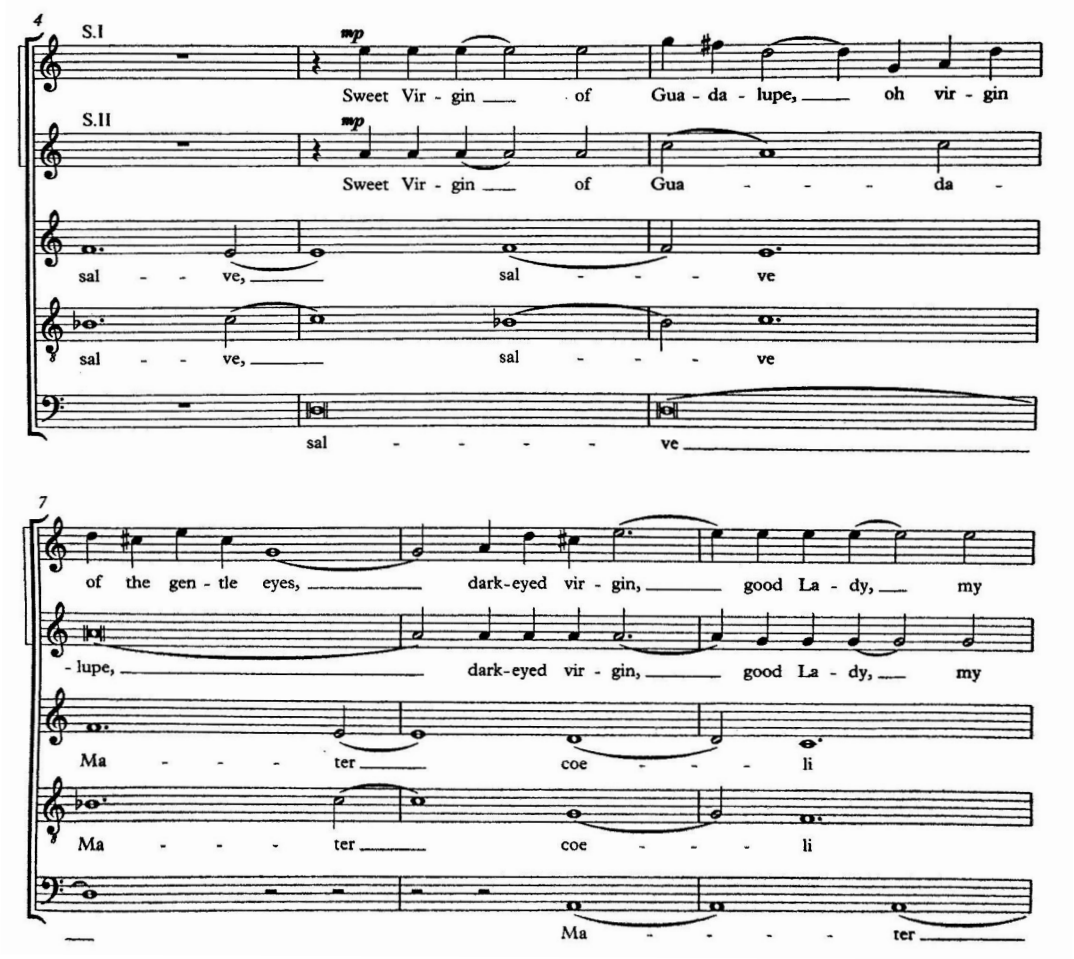
MacMillan's construction of the movement hearkens back and pays homage to an early form of the motet. Indeed, his use of a Marian text as an underlay for Mendoza's poem recalls the practice of appropriation of Marian antiphons as *cantus firmi* in Medieval polyphonic works

[181] MacMillan, *Cantos Sagrados*, 25-41.

[182] Mendoza's poem makes reference to Juan Diego, the Indigenous Mexican saint who is said to have encountered multiple visions of the Virgin Mary. As a sign of the veracity of her appearances, the Virgin miraculously imprints Diego's cloak with her image.

(Figure 14).[183] In ABA_1 form (the return of the opening section being truncated and accompanied by the organ), MacMillan presents the two outer sections as a model exercise in this ancient form, while the B section reflects a more modern adaptation, rigidly homophonic, but with a turbulent organ underlay. In the A section, the bass voice moves the most slowly, in tied whole note or long values, singing the Latin text through once in its entirety, and then again to '*Virgo florens*'. The alto and tenor voices form a type of *cantus firmus*, repeating a series of similar rhythmic patterns and pitches, all narrowly constrained, as they move in consort through

Figure 14



[183] Barbara H. Haggh, 'Votive ritual,' *Grove Music Online,* 2001, https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000049328.

the Latin hymn.[184] MacMillan uses the sopranos, split into two parts, to introduce the 'secular' text, Mendoza's poetry.

The organ, the unseen but very much present 'actor' in these movements, re-enters the scene towards the middle of the second movement (it is helpful to consider the movements as a series of vignettes) with very nearly the same notes (read: presence) with which it had exited in *Identity*, now formed as a cluster chord.[185] This intermittent pulsating of the organ conjures up an increasingly desperate prayer to the Virgin, leading into the second section (m. 62) where, voices progressing homophonically (a motet from another era), the 'cultural and historical question' is asked with building frustration, amid the increasingly turbulent organ accompaniment (Figure 15). Though the question is posed by the sopranos in the A sections, it is in the B section where it is probed, explored and expounded upon. The oppressive acts of the Conquerors are described, enacted upon those who are also the 'children' of the Virgin. How can this be? Whereas in the outer movements the liturgy allows for a supplication for help or identification with the suffering Christ, in *Virgin of Guadalupe* the Marian text casts its subject as 'Mother, portal of heaven', with any request for aid or succour left to be inferred rather than explicitly stated. In doing so, MacMillan sustains the ambiguity of response in relation to the question, and indeed, the overall theme of justice deferred or denied.

Though it deals with sacred themes, Mendoza's poem does not spring directly from liturgical use. It is in the same vein of much of the poetry of the *Mothers*, as reflected in

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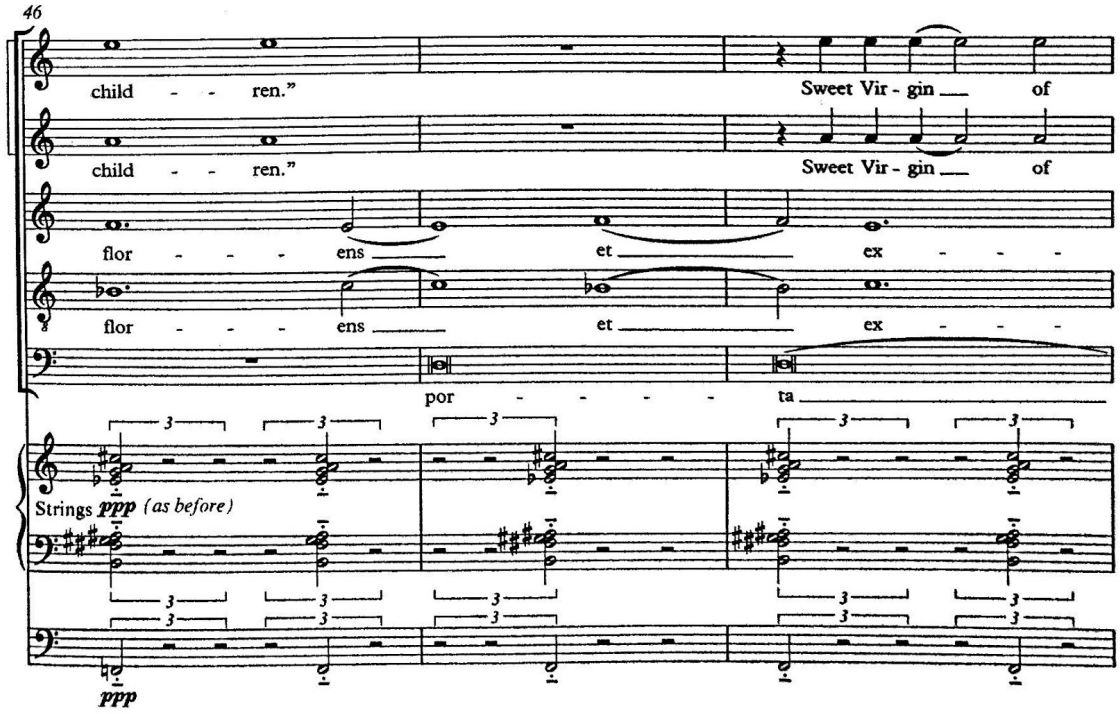
[184] Chester L. Alwes, 'The British Isles,' in *A History of Western Choral Music*, Volume 2, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016) Oxford Scholarship Online, 2016, doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199376995.003.0012. Alwes' analysis of Medieval elements in, what he terms, MacMillan's 'cantata', reveals another compelling layer to this work. Confusingly, however, he refers to Búsqueda as being 'purely instrumental'.

[185] MacMillan, *Cantos Sagrados*, 29. MacMillan specifies this entry, 'as before'.

Figure 15



Búsqueda, a philosophical observation with existential implications that MacMillan situates above the foundation of the Marian poem. As in his clash of musical forms, styles, instrumentation and voicing, MacMillan juxtaposes the two texts, deconstructing their form and submitting them to each other. It is an uncomfortable union, perhaps undermined by the connotations of the motet as a sacred work dealing with broader spiritual reflections, whilst the votive antiphon is an intensely personal, devotional prayer. This discord is augmented by the intrusion of the organ into what would have traditionally been primarily an acapella work, adding an unsettled element to the movement.

The Latin hymn hails the Virgin Mary as the 'portal of heaven'. To take a narrow interpretation of Catholic doctrine, this indicates that Mary acted as the 'gate' through which Christ entered the world. The mother of Christ, the one who for many personifies innocent suffering, is now questioned as to why those in the very same tradition of Christ's oppressors

would also call on her as their patron. The primary question ('why?') is highlighted by uneasy tension felt at the end of the final section; whereas they had brought the first section to a close in unison, the sopranos (who advance Mendoza's question) now linger on an extended, clashing major 2nd.

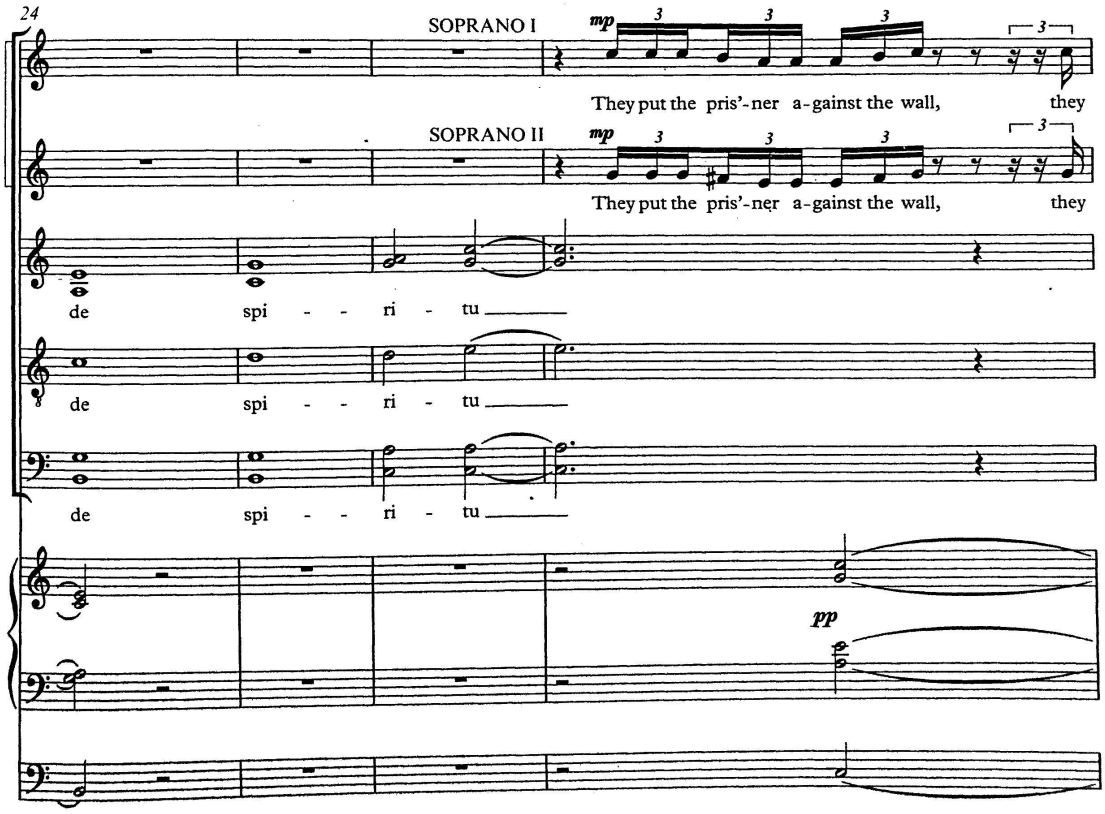
Sun Stone

In this final movement, MacMillan sets Dorfman's poetic text upon the following portion of the *Credo* taken from the Latin Mass:

Et incarnatus est de spiritu sancto	He became incarnate by the Holy Spirit
Ex Maria Virgine, et homo factus est	of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.
Crucifixus etiam pro nobis	For our sake he was crucified.

Rather than separating the two texts, MacMillan generally sets them simultaneously, the Latin liturgy opening the movement, following the slow and methodical organ introduction. Again the liturgy is set syllabically to the music, the larger note values at a slow tempo (very nearly imitating the opening chordal material played on the organ) drawing out a broad choral texture. The alto, tenor, and bass parts voice the statement, 'and was incarnate by the Spirit,' before they are met suddenly and unexpectedly by the quick opening statement of the poetic text, 'They put the prisoner against the wall.' This rapid interjection, sung by the sopranos, again split into two parts, is reminiscent of the machine-gun-fire bursts of text that incisively open the first movement, *Identity* (Figure 16). Perhaps in *Sun Stone,* questions and themes arising from *Identity* and *Virgin of Guadalupe* are brought together and addressed.

Figure 16



The relatively brief but vitally important portion of the *Credo* presented here underpins the movement but is drawn out to such lengths as to be relatively indiscernible to the listener without the text in front of them. It is a capstone upon which much of Catholic and Protestant doctrine rests; the divine God becoming human in the person of Jesus Christ, and with that incarnation exemplifing a divine experience and understanding of human weakness and suffering. With this brief but powerful doctrinal statement, MacMillan provides, as in *Virgin of Guadalupe*, a foundation from which Dorfmann's text springs to find fuller resonance. MacMillan applies a compositional device used in writing sacred music in centuries past,

reclothing it and bending to a divergent effect; the sacred alongside the secular. In this juxtaposition of texts, MacMillan employs this concise statement from the Latin Mass as a textual and melodic *cantus firmus*, allowing it to illuminate the secular poetry. The statement made in the Creed, the events borne out therein, become the backdrop on which the experience of the prisoner and his executioners plays out. The recitation of the Creed is presented here in the same way it has been for centuries, unchanged, as a part of the daily rituals of worshippers throughout the world and a bedrock upon which the Church has stabilized its doctrine. The quiet iteration of Christ's incarnation throughout *Sun Stone* moves in steady progression and is passed from voice to voice, supporting and enclosing Dorfmann's poetic description of a political prisoner's final moments.

MacMillan does not return to any portion of Dorfmann's text after setting it once, in a movement where the quarter note is marked at 52 BPM, as the liturgy is sung syllabically to the half note. Otherwise, the choir spits out the text, creating a heightened tension and a sense of one gasping for breath. '*Sancto*' is sung twice against the words, 'they put the prisoner against the wall', what might be regarded as a connecting moment in the Eucharist when the physical host (the bread/the sacrifice) is lifted up ('they put the prisoner against the wall, A soldier ties his hands'). Only once is this rapid singing lulled, when a soldier ties the prisoner's hands at the firing wall, 'his fingers touch him - strong, gentle, saying goodbye.'[186] The other identified figure commiserates with the prisoner, offering his apology and asking for his forgiveness as he binds him for execution. This show of gentleness, affirmation and acknowledgement that something is not quite right calls to mind the centurion at the foot of the cross remarking, 'Truly this was the

[186] MacMillan, *Cantos Sagrados*, 45.

son of God.'[187] The guard's physical touch and his words 'fills [the prisoner's] body with light', so much so that 'he almost does not hear the sound of the shots.' (Figure 17) [188] These words signal the movement's apex, as the tenors and basses cry out these last words at *fff*, while the sopranos in divisi successively enter with '*crucifixus*' above the fray.[189]

As these words of the poem rush the listener to the inevitable conclusion, the parallel promise of the Creed, '*Crucifixus etiam pro nobis*' mingles with them, the sacred promise attending the secular injustice. The forcible and inevitable end of Dorfman's text gives way to this creedal statement, sung at *p.* MacMillan ends the movement, and the entire set of 'sacred songs', by revisiting Dorfmann's words of the guard: 'forgive me, compañero.'[190]

The marriage of Dorfman's poem to the foundational nature of the incarnation of Christ to the Church and his sacrificial death, allows for a sense of solidarity between Catholic Christians in South America and those worldwide for those willing to explore the texts. This anonymity and universality of the victim allows for a point of connection that MacMillan uses to tie together with the liturgy. It is not solely the universality of the suffering of innocents, though that is surely an important reflection. It is more specifically the connection between the grieving parent and those grieving the death of Christ.

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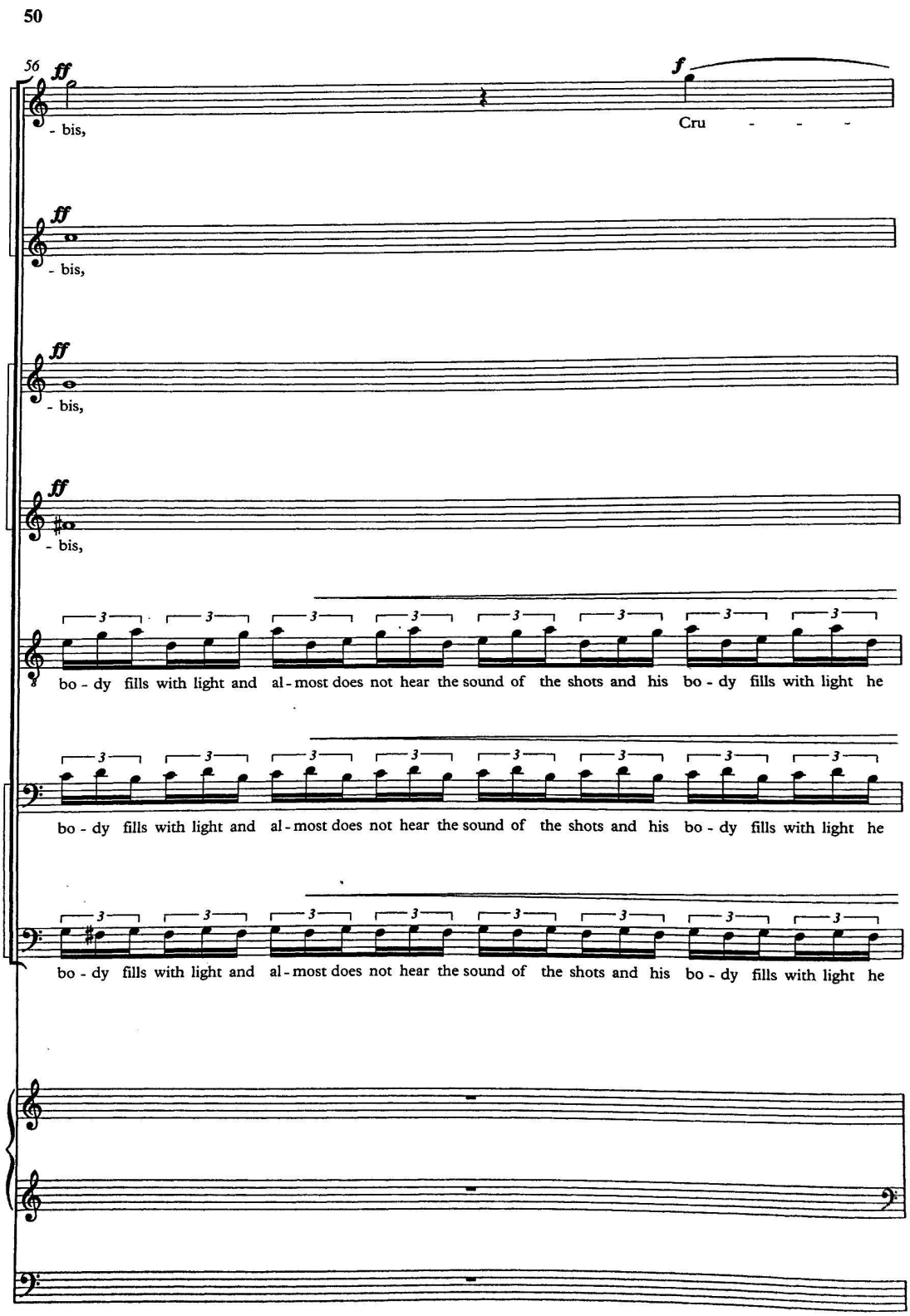
[187] Matthew 27:54 (ESV)

[188] MacMillan, *Cantos Sagrados,* 51.

[189] The culmination of the third movement evokes shades of another meeting of opposing forces; two soldiers in death in the final movement of Britten's Requiem. Juxtaposed with the frantic opening section, *Identity*, *Sun Stone* offers an unsettling peace when they 'turn(ed) him over' and said he 'doesn't belong to anybody,' just like the faceless war dead, though he is recognized by his 'enemy' in the end.

[190] MacMillan, *Cantos Sagrados*, 51.

Figure 17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- bis,
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bo - dy fills with light and al - most does not hear the sound of the shots and his bo - dy fills with light he
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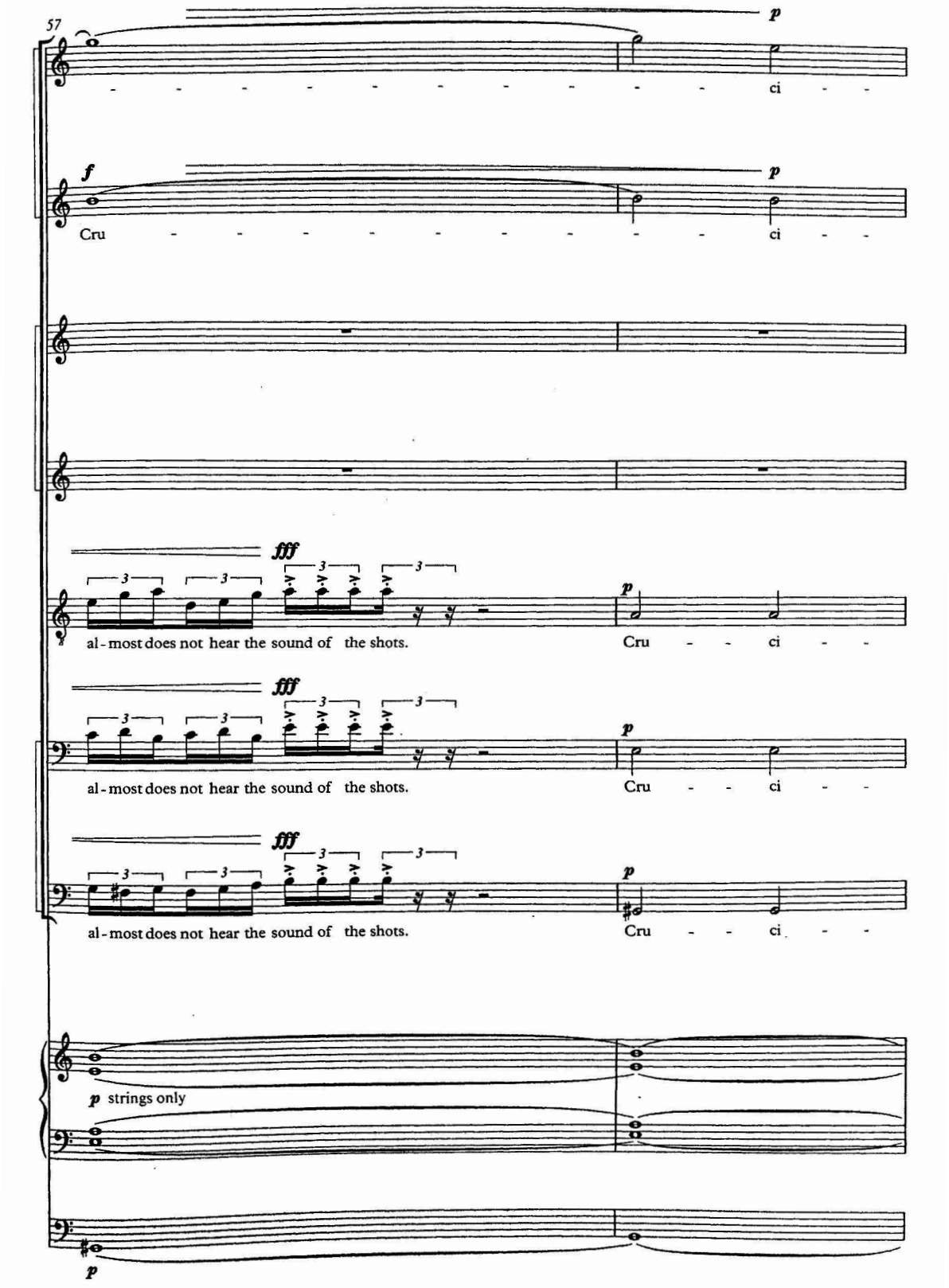
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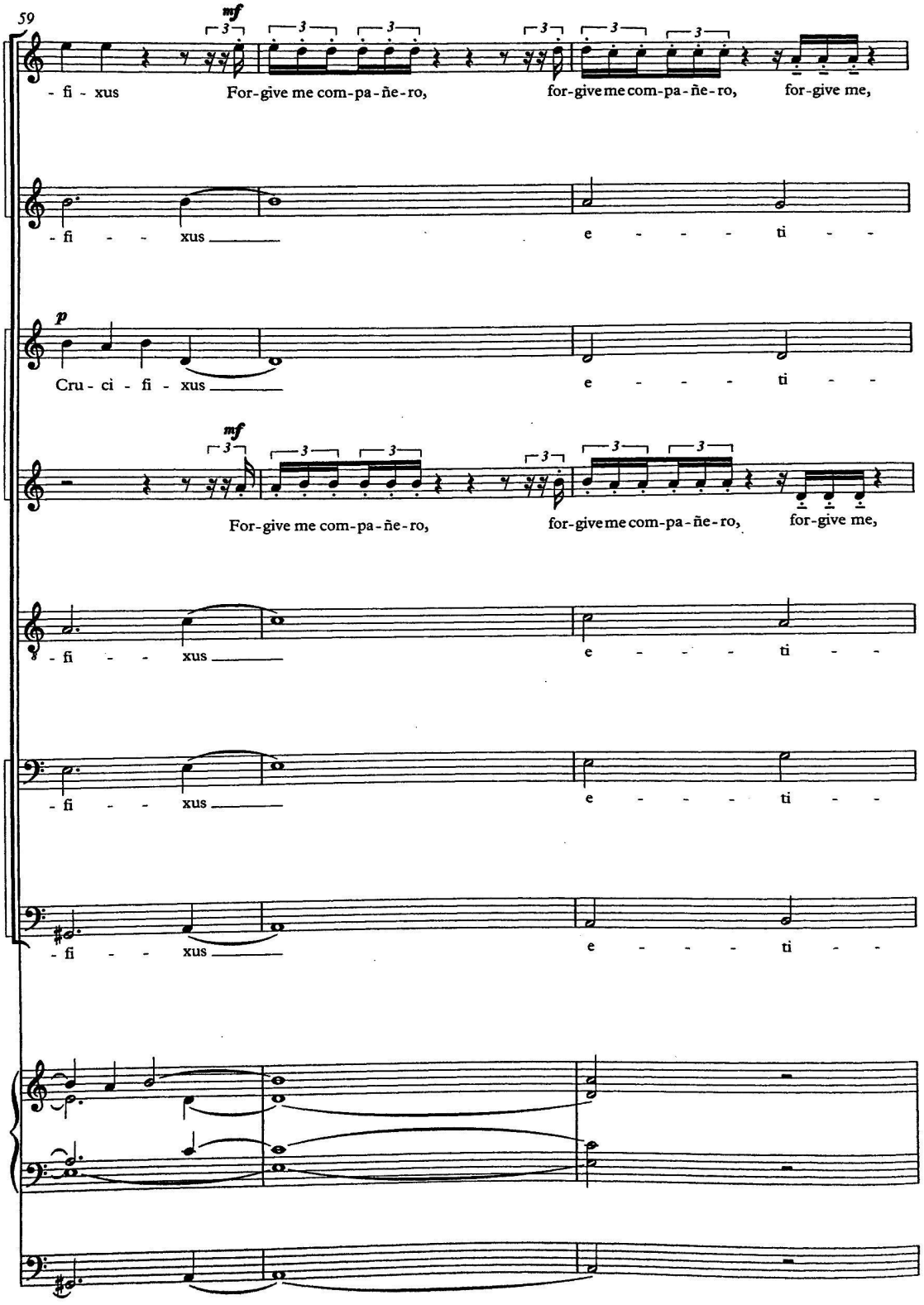
59
mf
- fi - xus
For-give me com-pa-ñe-ro,
for-give me com-pa-ñe-ro,
for-give me,
- fi - - - xus
e - - - - ti - -
p
Cru - ci - fi - xus
e - - - - ti - -
mf
For-give me com-pa-ñe-ro,
for-give me com-pa-ñe-ro,
for-give me,
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Conclusion

> MacMillan's inherited self is rigorously modernist, while his intrinsic self is, if not "populist," at least open to communicating deeply held religious and political views. While these two positions initially appear to be diametrically opposed, MacMillan manages to hold them in tension, creating a diverse body of works that is both well-crafted and deeply moving.[191]

In the development of James MacMillan's work from the late 1980s and into the early 90s, one can trace an arc through his repertoire of concerted engagement with religio-political themes. In several of these works subjects of repression and remembrance, protestation and commemoration, violence and forgiveness are presented within a space mediated by sacred texts. MacMillan's tools of mediation extended beyond the immediate text of the Catholic liturgy and Liberation Theology to encompass broader Christian themes while still paralleling human experience.[192] This is evident in his trio of works based upon the texts of Latin American protesters (*Búsqueda*, *Cantos Sagrados*, *Catherine's Lullabies*), in the condemnation of military violence on impoverished El Salvadorians (*The Exorcism of Rio Sumpul*) and later, in the historic witch hunts in Scotland (*The Confession of Isobel Gowdie*) and meditation on the release of prisoners from captivity (*Veni, Veni, Immanuel*),

Though today he might challenge any attempts to situate him on a political spectrum, admitting at present that he is 'wonderfully mundane' or 'middle of the road', he was and still remains active in public discourse as evidenced in his national publications regarding faith in society, music education, and other cultural matters. In his 2009 speech, entitled *Scotland's*

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[191] Kingsbury, 16.

[192] Email correspondence with the composer. 'I suppose there were not many 'politically aware' practising Catholics in the world of contemporary classical music at the time, so my two works might have appeared strangely noteworthy in the late 1980s.'

Shame, delivered at the Edinburgh International Festival, MacMillan decried the persistence of anti-Catholicism in his home country and earned himself no small societal and cultural backlash. In a recent interview, MacMillan admitted that his forays into the public discourse, especially as regards the recent Scottish referendum on independence, had left him regretting the potential for toxicity one might experience when committing to public debate.[193] Though he now looks back with a somewhat softened view over the *Scotland's Shame* speech and some of the 'youthful certainties' he once held, he holds firmly a belief in the ability of composers, of the potency of music to engage with the problems of the world. This led him to produce works in *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados* that would open the door to a further synthesis of elements in later works. The intermingling of sacred and secular themes and the juxtaposition of musical elements would become a key element in his compositional voice.

MacMillan describes the amalgamation of sacred liturgy and secular poetry as a 'synthesis of ideas.'[194] If we take this, for example, to mean the commixture of media (liturgy and poetry), it not only enhances the meaning of the causes themselves but also creates a new sense of meaning or revelation. At this mediation point in *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados* a meeting of ideas (read: media) is taking place. One could describe it as a multi-, or cross-media interaction (Cook); the media of liturgy, poetry and music. Placed in close proximity to one another, the cross-media interaction takes place with the 'pre-condition' being an 'enabling similarity'.[195] The similarities can be met at the edge of each medium or within its core. When

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[193] Kearns, *National Review.*

[194] Email correspondence with the composer. '[*Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados*] came quite early in my career and I was looking at ways of mixing the secular and the sacred in the same musical space.'

[195] Cook, 70.

they resonate with one another they provide greater nuance and, one can hope, a deeper understanding of the subject(s) of the work. That is a unique function of how music and media resonate around and within one another when amalgamated. The manner in which both *Cantos Sagrados* and *Búsqueda* transcend the situation for which they were written lies in the blending of different media that enable the similarities between them. This enriches meaning and allows for a resonance between people and places where such suffering is common. Amid the darkness, confusion, sacrifice and love that form the complex subjects of both these works, the sung *Kyrie* or the shouted *Hosanna* have the potential to instantly connect with those who recognize their call.[196]

Though the particular form of musical theatre in which MacMillan wrote *Búsqueda* may not be a commonplace medium at present, it is interesting to note as a parallel the rise of staged performances of standard choral works, particularly JS Bach's Passion settings over the past twenty years. It would seem that a desire to transcend the existing structures of the concert hall results in an attempt to bring fresh perspectives to the mainstays of the canon, originally moored to liturgical obligations, by heightening their overt drama with stage direction and a greater focus on production outside of the music alone.[197] Humble comparisons may be drawn between what MacMillan was doing with *Búsqueda* and *Cantos* Sagrados, in regards to the blending of media,

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[196] Consider pianist Jean Batiste's arrangement of the American national anthem performed for the kick-off to the 2020 NBA post-season. The melody of *The Star Spangled Banner* was played simply, almost whimsically, with his right hand in a high register, while simultaneously a cellist's soft strains of *Lift Every Voice and Sing* could be heard underneath. Midway through the anthem, he incorporates an electric guitar solo with distorted effects to take the melody. The layering of the American national anthem with what Batiste referred to as, the Black national anthem, while paying tribute to Jimi Hendrix's iconic *Star Spangled Banner* riff, at a time of societal and cultural unrest was a conscious act of mediation. See Jon Batiste, 'Jon Batiste - National Anthem,' in *Bibliography*.

[197] Originally moored but long since cast off its tethers beginning with Mendelssohn's revival in 1829 and culminating in the grand symphonic performances of the 20th-century. The early music movement of the mid-20th-century leads us back to a fidelity to original performance forces but perhaps not to the drama in the liturgy itself. These staged settings may be closer to the heart of the drama while not remaining faithful to the liturgical setting.

and Bach's pairing of Pietistic religious poetry and the Passion story, as recounted in Scripture (not to mention musical form and structure, instrumentation, Lutheran hymns, etc.). Bach's Passions display on a grand scale one outcome of cross-media interactions, that is the interpenetration of diverse communications to the broadening and enhancement of individual meaning in light of the whole. Many conductors and artistic directors have been keen to take advantage of their theatrical nature in staging productions to varying degrees of success.

MacMillan writes that Bach's Passions, 'provide a firm challenge to the contemporary conceit that the modern world is always improving. The growing popularity of hearing the Bach Passions leading up to the Easter season in our 'post-religious' culture is an intriguing one.'[198] Much of MacMillan's work might be similarly described as a challenge to a contemporary Western society with a penchant for loudly and forcefully celebrating its success without always recognizing its shortcomings. Often MacMillan's work centres around the very subject matter of the Bach Passions, the final persecution and death of Jesus Christ. The enduring fascination with the Passion may indicate the longevity of the narrative of the suffering, perfect, and divine innocent victim. With their themes of innocent suffering, persecution and forgiveness, *Búsqueda*, *Cantos Sagrados* and *Catherine's Lullabies* should be accepted as precursors of a landmark composition in MacMillan's oeuvre, *Seven Last Words from the Cross*, a work which he describes as springing out of 'theological and liturgical reflections.'[199]

Búsqueda and *Cantos Sagrados* are distinct in their activistic nature and purpose and yet the similarities begin to resonate as liturgy, poetry, and music interact (some inherent, some

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[198] Email correspondence with the composer.

[199] Email correspondence with the composer.

manufactured by the composer, some arising out of juxtapositional context), becoming touch-points where new or deeper meanings are made possible. A thickening of meaning occurs as sacred and secular words, religious action and political protest, speech and music are 'incremented with style'.[200] What is being accomplished here is similar to the interactions of music in film: '...there is the striking image of the music 'seeking out' these thoughts, searching through the visual image in order to uncover its potential for signification, penetrating through the visible to the meaning that is embedded within.'[201] It is what Begbie terms an 'interpenetration' of meaning, this 'signification' is revealed as media resonate with and within one another.[202] In his paper on MacMillan's *Sun-dogs* (2006), a choral work blending poetry, Dominican imagery, liturgy, and Medieval text, Shantz's proposal of the stratification inherent on many levels (specifically that the 'combining [of] disparate stylistic and rhythmic elements, providing multiple planes of narrative and interpretation')[203] shows that MacMillan's approach to cross-media (text and music) is a discipline which he continued to cultivate into the new millennium. The multiple planes of narrative and interpretation colliding, colluding with, and inhabiting one another leads to a richer understanding whereby meaning is enhanced and context is enlarged. This is no accident. MacMillan believes that art has a sacramental purpose, that is to say that art has the ability not only to represent something but to 're-present' it, not as an image of the thing, but as that thing in the art form. In doing so the '*thing* is turned into an *action'*; art

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[200] Kavanagh, 48.

[201] Cook, 66.

[202] Cook, 82. 'What seems to be required for the emergence of signification in multimedia is exactly what they have shown there: a limited intersection of attributes, as opposed to either complete overlap or total divergence.'

[203] Timothy Shantz, 'James MacMillan's Sun-dogs: A Conductor's Analysis,' (DMA diss., Indiana University, 2009), 116.

doesn't represent something else, it is unto itself but embodies that thing in its presentation. In an essay entitled, *Word in Action*, Anthony Domestico reflects on David Jones, a modernist poet whose writings have influenced MacMillan's thought on an artist's sacramental vocation: 'In [Jones's] view, both aesthetic modernism and Catholicism are invested in what he calls 're-presentation'—the ability of a symbol not just to point toward something else (the artwork's meaning or God's grace) but actually to embody this something else, to make it present once again.'[204]

One of the primary touch-points that MacMillan sets between the liturgy and sacred text in these two works is the suffering of the innocent victim. The soprano trio's prayer of invocation, '*Kyrie eleison*', is a pointed cry for recognition against the Speaker's words, 'that man, that woman, they have no faces'.[205] In particular, the image of the trial and crucifixion of Christ is set alongside the despairing cry of the *Mothers* for their stolen children or Dorfmann's 'prisoner against the wall'. Connections are made between them, not only as images, but between the texts as responses. Against the militant brass band or the pulsating, intermittent cluster chords of the organ, the cry against the horror of unjust and cruel repression becomes a unified statement of Christ's crucifixion 'for us' and an appeal to God's 'holiness' (see *Sanctus*) and by extension his justice or a benedictory prayer for deliverance from death (see *Libera eas, Domine*).

The relationship between a parent (specifically mother) and child is another prominent similarity that finds deeper meaning in the close proximity of these media. Many of the poems of

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[204] Anthony Domestico, 'Words in Action — The Sacramental Poetry of David Jones,' *Commonweal Magazine* (December 20, 2012), https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/words-action.

[205] MacMillan. *Búsqueda,* 3.

the *Mothers* are in essence love songs or lullabies to their missing children. This finds sympathetic resonance in the image of Mary, the mother of Jesus, following her son through his trial, unjust condemnation and death ('Oh, I have felt close to the Virgin on her bloody Calvary road!').[206] The commitment to following Mary down that road of suffering in search of their children binds these *Mothers* to the one who watched her own son unjustly persecuted and sentenced to death. With the second movement in *Cantos Sagrados,* MacMillan introduces a complex and complicated view of suffering and persecution. Throughout the Latin hymn and Mendoza's poem, the Virgin of Guadalupe's role as patroness and protector of her people is questioned as the one recognized as the 'portal of heaven' through which salvation came, but who also then acts as patroness to those who oppress them.

It is important to remember that these are communal and public experiences just as much as they are individual or private. Though MacMillan has used the liturgy or sacred texts as scaffolding on which to build or hang the poetic texts and music, the prominence of their roles fluctuates depending on context. In *Búsqueda*, the progression of the portions of the Latin Mass form the supporting structure or, often times, muscle their way to the foreground in incisive commentary upon a poetic reflection or thematic projection of repression. The *Kyrie* and the *Agnus Dei* introduce reflective sections of thought, while the *Credo* and *Sanctus* act as rebuttals or active protests against a tyranny of silence, abduction, torture, and murder. Religious imagery abounds between the two forms of media:

> I have strung together everything that happened,
> added up like beads on a rosary
> And I have been keeping it on my chest.

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[206] Markus, 26.

I count on it to see when you will come home.[207]

Memories gathered and reviewed by the mother by rote, an action that aids in reflection and expression of grief, serves to function even as a form of the liturgy. Through repetition one reflects on the content of each liturgical structure while the experience one pours into it is processed and contextualized. In this way, MacMillan differs from Britten particularly in his employment of the liturgy: 'Britten's emotional commitment to Owen's poems is clear, his attitude to the liturgical texts and their ancient associations is equivocal at best (except perhaps at the very end). MacMillan, however, uses the device to the entirely opposite effect.'[208] MacMillan's attitude towards the liturgy leans towards a largely communal function but with a personal commitment to their purpose and function.

A composer has the ability to produce multiple layers of associations that can be instantly recognizable for the discerning listener or perceived over time with attentive practice. We have networks of correlations, interrelated recollections inherited from whatever society or tradition to which we happen to belong. When one repeatedly practices liturgical forms, habits are established on which thoughts will then alight when confronted with those forms or echoes of their purpose. This is the power inherent in a sacramental approach to music, its ability to produce, make, engage and foster fertile ground for associations and perhaps more than that, to embody these associations. When a petitioner hears the tripartite prayer, '*Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison. Kyrie eleison*,' a personal connection is made. When the listener hears the same prayer opening a work concerning the missing and murdered men and women of Argentina, the prayer

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[207] Miriam, in *The Selected Poems of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo.*

[208] Russill, 62.

made on behalf of those victims may become accessible through the common ground of the liturgy. It is internalized. The representation becomes 're-presented', 'the ability of a symbol…to embody this something else, to make it present once again' is made manifest once more.[209]

This is a part of the 'sacralising' task into which MacMillan puts his creative strength, perhaps in some sense assuming a kind of priestly role with a work done on behalf of the people.[210] In *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados*, the liturgy is a meeting place, it allows for a mediating space where conflicting acts are set side by side, an encounter with each other, embodying the original acts of grace in the face of great suffering.[211] In Cook's *Analyzing Multimedia*, he recounts Alfred Hitchcock's collaborator, Bernard Herman, describing music in film as, 'the communicating link between the screen and the audience, reaching out and enveloping all into one single experience.'[212] Music has the ability to pour into empty spaces and irrigate the ground for signification. What follows is Cook's theory that 'what seems to be required for the emergence of signification in multimedia is...a *limited* intersection of attributes, as opposed to either complete overlap or total divergence.'[213] One medium must not be lost in the other but a continuous exchange occurs when that 'limited intersection of attributes' is engaged.

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[209] Domestico, 'Words in Action.'

[210] This may inspire visions of the composer on high, dispensing grace and virtue, however, there is a reference in 1 Peter 2:9 to the priesthood of all believers, indicating that the role of reflecting the divine falls to every member of the faith. As Christ demonstrates a servant leadership, so those who would be 'the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, must be the servant of all.' I believe that this is from where much of MacMillan's thought on 're-sacralisation' emanates.

211 Email correspondence with the composer. 'Bach's music proves that the Passion of Christ has deep beginnings and profound resonance, even for modern man: he opened up a window on the divine love affair with humanity. The greatest calling for an artist, especially today, is to do the same - that is, that the artist can and should open up a window on the divine love affair with humanity.'

[212] Cook, 66.

[213] Cook, 82

In *Búsqueda* and *Cantos Sagrados* mediatory exchanges transpire as liturgical and extra-liturgical sacred texts provide the intervening structure for the poetic and musical acts of sorrow, despair, anger and hope. The meaning inherent in each and the contextual meaning each holds enables a resonance of similarities with the potential to produce deeper and richer outcomes. Through these two works, MacMillan could be equally engaged in the 'brilliant binding of public and private persona' in the liturgy and poems as was Britten in the *War Requiem*.[214] The difference between MacMillan and Britten's dual setting of sacred and secular text is that whereas Britten's liturgy seems distant (even in its judgement) from the poetry, MacMillan encourages an interaction of liturgy and verse by which there is an intermingling of the public and private persona. The individual pain becomes the communal struggle, the private prayer becomes the congregational protest. Solidarity is established through commonly practiced religious ritual and interpreted through a socially conscious reading of liturgy and Christian scripture (through the lens of Liberation Theology). MacMillan juxtaposes the public function, meaning, and connotations of liturgical practice against the personal reflections and political statements of the *Mothers of the Disappeared*, Dorfmann, and Mendoza. What emerges is an impassioned negotiation of these complex and resonating encounters through a mediation of suffering and faith.

[214] Paul Spicer's notes on Britten's *War Requiem*. 'The setting of the Latin Mass and the interspersing of solo song was a brilliant binding of public and private personas which hits the listener with extraordinary intensity'.

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