

1929

# A symphonic life of Christ

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICE

A SYMPHONIC LIFE OF CHRIST

The Outline of a Thesis

Presented before the Faculty and Student Body

At the Easter Demonstration

Of the Department of Fine Arts

in

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by

Stephen James Callender

(A.B., College of Liberal Arts, Syracuse University, 1917

B.O.E., School of Speech, Syracuse University, 1917

S.T.B., School of Theology, Boston University, 1922)

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1929



## PURPOSE OF PRODUCTION

This world's supreme fact is the life of Jesus Christ. So the Gospel account of what He was and did is time's most wonderful story. Nothing can compare with it. It is unique in its simplicity, strength, and splendor.

The inspiration of His life has produced not only the most noble men and women of the centuries - lifting skyward the ideals and practices of the race - but it has prompted the creation of our choicest music and most beautiful pictures.

Words alone are inadequate to portray completely, accurately, and vividly the dramatic impact made by His incomparable life. The same is true of the music and pictures which have been prompted by what He said and achieved. When used separately, each tells only a partial story.

There is evidence through out America that our people are hungry for a richer portrayal of the values of the Christian faith. During the last five years probably more beautiful and worship inspiring churches have been built than in any previous like period.

On the whole modern church architecture is not crudely utilitarian and materialistic. In it we catch a silent yearning for the best and highest.

The aim of this thesis is to meet this almost universal yearning by presenting the Super Christ who is to be had welding dramatic diction, descriptive music, and choicest pictures into one symphony of line, color, sound, and thought.

The result is a mosaic. The creative work involved consists of the selecting and fitting together of the choicest obtainable fragments, so that the richest and most convincing portrait may result.

The principles followed in the selection of the units of scripture, music, and pictures have been very simple. The attempt has been made in each case to choose the most fitting, the most dramatic, the most beautiful element for each little niche, so that the total mosaic will most effectively inspire the highest form of worship.

It is expected that there will be disagreements with the selections made and with the resultant combinations. We do not pose as an authority, with which the entire world must agree. When we choose that which seems best to us, we do not disallow others the same privilege.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE SCRIPTURE TEXT

Those episodes have been selected which show the most dramatic moments of the last week of the life of Jesus. Many of the less important events, if not necessary to the continuity of the narrative, have been omitted to give the action as much momentum as possible.

The four gospels have been carefully studied to find the best statement of each incident and thought. These have been so woven together that a synthetic story of graphic directness results. Every unnecessary word is elided.

One example is all that is needed to make the method clear: "Now on the first day of unleavened bread," (Matt. 26:17a) "He sent Peter and John saying, Go and make ready for us the passover that we may eat." (Luke 22:8) "And when it was evening, He cometh with the twelve." (Mark 14:17)

The American Standard Version has been used almost exclusively. However whenever one of the earlier or later versions gives a more happy rendering of the thought, it is used.

Thus the text to be read by the reader is so constructed that it will give in most direct and dramatic way the outstanding events in Christ's life between Palm Sunday and His Ascension.

## NORMS USED IN THE SELECTION OF PICTURES

The shift of pictures on the screen is very rapid. The average is one every half minute. Since our ultimate purpose is to stimulate worship - adoration, almost all of the symbolic and dogmatic pictures of the "old masters", which have great value if there is time to interpret and study them, must be avoided.

For this attitude we have an authority as great as Von Ogdon Vogt, who declares that, "We have no right to offer the worshiper of today forms of Christian art which neither his sober reason nor his clear Christian conscience can approve." 1.

Pictures like Fra Angelico's "Crucifixion", which might provoke an argument or which because of the symbolism can not win its way at the first glance, such pictures cannot be used as swift shuttles for the weaving of the fabric of worship.

Since our chief objective is to inspire an attitude of sincere worship we must give precedence to pictures which "Free from dogma and theology, innocent of school, nationality or age, make an immediate appeal to the heart." 2.

So we have chosen with utmost deliberateness the simple, direct, emotional pictures which get their message over instantly and with greatest intensity.

1. Vogt: "Art and Religion," p 233

2. Smith: "Worship in the Church School,..." p 133

For each incident that picture has been chosen:-

1. Which fits with greatest accuracy, historically and otherwise, the event and thought. The facts must be given correctly, without distortion.
2. Which speaks with most intense dramatic and spiritual insight. Mere photographs are not enough. "If an artist is something more than a painter, if he is a true seer, he sees into the meaning of experience. He .. interprets .. life for us."<sup>1</sup> "The artist's insight" should be "primarily not of a special event, but of a living ever-present truth."<sup>2</sup> So that picture is selected which gives the richest total message.
3. Which portrays Christ most idealistically, i.e., most attractive, strongest. "Jesus lived so continuously and so fully in .. this world of fact and in the infinite spiritual world that penetrates it and gives it meaning .. that no artist can depict an incident in his life without reminding us to some extent of both."<sup>3</sup> Yet we feel that Christ should not be presented as ghostly, crude or effeminate. We believe that in him we should see life at its very best.

- .1. Bailey: "Use of Art in Religious Education" p 28
- .2. Bailey: "Art Studies in the Life of Christ" p 17
- .3. Bailey: "Art Studies in the Life of Christ" p 4

4. Which in all other respects is the most beautiful.

When we use the word "beautiful" we do not mean mere comely pulchritude but that mysterious something which woos us by its irresistible attractiveness and divine wholesomeness from life's sordidness up to God's own perfect self.

Now for an example or two: The "Triumphal Entry" by Plockhorst and that by Dore are chosen in preference to those by Giotto, Angelico, Deger, Hofmann, etc., because they best satisfy these norms which we have just outlined.

Thus the picture for each event or thought is chosen: It must be able to tell its story instantly. It must be a perfect fit. It must have profound dramatic and spiritual insight. It must show Christ strong - attractive. It must be beautiful. The picture which excels in meeting these requirements in the order in which they are mentioned - that picture is selected.

Whenever it is impossible to find a picture which really fits an important event, which must be told for the sequence of the story, or if no picture conforms with the standards above stated, one of the better portraits of Christ is used. Examples of this are found in the incidents where Christ sends His disciples to find the colt, p 17 where He tells Peter and John to go and make ready the Passover, p 19, etc.

## STANDARDS USED IN THE SELECTION OF THE MUSIC

The third component part in the creation of "The Symphonic Life of Christ" is music. Words and pictures, be they ever so graphic, need still further reenforcement to get the all compelling result, which is our objective.

Since "An eloquent thing is made more eloquent by being beautiful" (1) and since "Music ... is intended for the service of the spiritual part of our nature", (2), we add the spiritual beauty that the right kind of music can give.

Music has a tremendous power all its own to lift and to intensify the attitude of worship which we desire to produce. "Music has a power unmatched among the other fine arts to act as an illuminator of thought and of life, because it is an art of progressive action. .. It is not static, but dynamic; not rigid, but elastic; not inorganic, but vital. These qualities make it a twin-sister of speech especially of poetic speech." (3)

So we have endeavored to find that music which builds the most consistent tone background. As we have previously inferred, the purpose of this background is to interpret and augment the moods of the scenes and meanings of the speeches.

(1) Mason: "Ears to Hear" p 24

(2) Dickinson: "The Spirit of Music" p 39

(3) Pratt: "Musical Ministries in the Church" p 37

Where other values are the same, well known hymns have been used in preference to less familiar compositions. To be sure this entails the risk of causing some auditors to think of unfortunate associations connected with the occasional hymn.

But usually the message carried by the better hymns suggests a greater degree of intellectual content and more intense feeling than music which is not known. For example, what can make a better background for the scene in Gethsemene than "'Tis midnight, and on Olive's brow,..."?

Since the Gospel narrative is central, usually no more than short excerpts of various musical productions can be used. Dramatic acceleration cannot be checked to complete a favorite air. As long as the fragment of the hymn tune or of the oratorio tells the same story as is being told by the reader and by the picture, as long as it is making the thought more gripping and colorful, it has a place. But as soon as the thought can better be sustained by something else, that something else must be used.

Of course there are times when the music has complete right of way. For example, at the outset of the production, part of the stately introduction of Maunder's "Olivet to Calvary" prophesies and sets the mood for all that is to follow.

Another example is found at the completion of the crucifixion. At the death of Christ there is total silence except for the prayerful playing of "When I Survey the Wonderful Cross on Which the Prince of Glory Died!" , while the audience gazes at the picture of the Christ who has given His life for them.

Whenever the chorus, quartette or soloist can tell the story with greater effectiveness than the reader, they are given full right of way to do so, e.g.,

1. The greeting of the Palm Sunday multitude is far more exultant when the choir bursts out into the "Hosanna" chorus of Parker's "Jerusalem".
2. The cry of the mob, "Crucify Him! ... His blood be on us and on our children!", is far more cruel and gruesome when sung as Dubois has cast it in "The Seven Last Words".
3. When Mary Magdalene comes back to tell the disciples that she has seen the Risen Lord, instead of the unimpassioned words of the spoken narrative, the soprano soloist gives Mary's speech in Handel's thrilling setting of, "I Know that My Redeemer Liveth ... and Because He Lives I too Shall Live!"

## PERSONNEL NEEDED FOR PRESENTATION OF PRODUCTION

1. Reader. The abridged Gospel account is the core of the symphonic message. It must be read by one sufficiently trained to be able to breath the breath of life into words and make them vibrant with their original meaning.

In addition to being well trained in the technique of dramatic reading, the reader must be one whose spiritual experience makes possible the limit of sympathetic interpretation. There is no more difficult literary interpretation than that which sincerely attempts to portray Jesus Christ, particularly during the tragic events of the Last Week.

### 2. Musicians:

a. Pianist or organist - one who has the rare gift of being able to put a soul into what she plays.

b. Violinist, cellist, harpist.

c. Soloists, quartette, and small chorus. The presentation of this production is not a stunt. It is a supreme act of reverent worship. So all musicians must have in addition to technical expertness sufficient depth of religious development to enable them to make what they do not a performance but the sublimation of their talents into the most sincere worship possible.

3. Stereoptican operator. One who is trained to get the best technical results. He must be dependable and resourceful.

4. Cue man to direct the operator's change of slides. Because of the extremely difficult interpretive work to be done by the reader, he should be free from all mechanical responsibilities to give his entire energy to the recreation of the events and thoughts which he should be reliving. This seemed to be the outstanding weakness at the official presentations of the thesis. The reader attempted to be cue man also and could not give his mind with utter abandon to the task of transforming words into the form of actual life.

#### PREPARATION FOR PRESENTATION OF THIS PRODUCTION

Not a single technical flaw is permissible. The purpose is to build a symphony of worship out of the most sublime and awful experience of the race. The structure of worship is always fragile and can be shattered by the obtusion of any disharmony. The more lofty the worship the more nearly perfect needs to be the concentration of the worshipers. So this presentation must be perfect.

There must be sufficient previous rehearsing to guaranteed absolute cooperation between each person who has any part. Deays and fumbles are unpardonable.

A short service of prayer and consecration should be hld by the participants immediately before the presentation to insure a worshipful atmosphere in all that is done from the very outset.

## EXPERIENCE AT OFFICIAL PRESENTATIONS

This thesis was given twice before the faculty and student body of the School of Religious Education. The first presentation was part of the Easter demonstration of the Fine Arts Department in the Crypt of Saint Paul's Cathedral, March nine, 1925. The second time was at the Chapel Service of the School, March twelve.

On each occasion there was the utmost of reverent and sympathetic attention. The expressions of approval at the close seemed very genuine.

Although previously requested, so as to perfect the production in every way possible, there was an absence of constructive or other criticism. The expressions of opinion which came to the producer were only ones of commendation.

The most appreciated statement came from Professor H. Augustive Smith: "I have done a deal of work like this myself. I have witnessed much done by others. But this is the best I have ever seen."

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Since this is not a conventional expository thesis, I shall take the liberty of saying "Thank you" to those without whose help this work would have been impossible:-

1. Miss Edith Lovell Thomas, who as collaborator made possible the total musical setting. In order to fit the music to the text I prevailed on many of my friends to play while I read. However she did the major part of this work, slaving whole days at the piano, drawing on her rich personal repêtoire of religious music till we found what seemed best. She also took complete responsibility for the music at the official presentation.

2. Professor H. Augustine Smith, to whom I owe the idea of correlating the Fine Arts for religious use, in whose classes I learned much, and who gave me a host of valuable suggestions in the development of the thesis.

3. Professor Albert E. Bailey, who unlocked for me time's priceless gallery of Christian Art.

4. Dean Walter S. Athearn, who permitted me to choose this subject and who repeatedly gave me wise counsel relative to its development.

5. My instructors in the School of Speech of Syracuse University. As a result of their training I gave for several years "The Life of Christ" as a dramatic reading. Thus was born the idea of augmenting the effectiveness of this story by the addition of the best obtainable music and pictures.

## OUTLINE OF SYNCHRONIZATION OF SCRIPTURE, PICTURES, AND MUSIC.

The first column gives the Scripture reference, the second the picture used, the third the music. Usually the title of the picture gives the clue to the action.

### INTRODUCTION

Silence	Amber light growing from darkness.	Maunder: "Olivet to Calvary. "On the way to Jerusalem" From the beginning of selection to 8th measure, 1st beat; p 8, 14th measure to p 9, 1st meas., 2d beat; p 1, 4th meas., last beat to 8th meas., 1st beat.
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### TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

Mark 11:1,2,	Hofmann: Christus	Parker: "Jerusalem", found in Smith, "Immortality of Love and Service" - beginning to bottom of p 7.
7-9a	Ploekhorst: Triumphal Entry	

<u>Chorus:</u> three	Deger: Triumphal	Chorus: p 8, 1st line
"Hosannas"	Entry	
Mk. 11:	Dore: Triumphal	Remainder of selection
9b-11	Entry	subdued in volume to
		suggest echo of the
		day

## CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

Mk. 11:12a,	Hofmann: Cleansing	St. Andrew of Crete.
15-17a	of Temple	Methodist Hymnal (Here-
		after designated as
		M.H.) 616,
		1st 8 meas.
17b-18a	Shields: I and	Gaul: Sanctus,
	My Father are	H.L.A. (Hymns for
	One.	the Living Age)
		513.
18b	Tissot: Pharisees	
	and Herodians	
	take Counsel	
	against Jesus.	

## CONFLICT WITH AUTHORITIES

Mk. 12:	Copping: Question	Gallico: Apocalypse, Schir-
13-15a	of the Saducees	mer, 1 1, 4 meas. Play
		three times

Mk. 12: 15b-17a      Titian: Tribute to Caesar      Gounod: Sanctus, Messe Solennelle, Novello, Octavo. p 54, measures 3-6; p60, last note of 2d meas. to end

Lk. 22:3-6      Prell: Corruption of Judas      Gallico, Apocalypse, Schirmer, p 56, 1st 9 meas.

Mt. 26:17a      Hofmann: Portrait of Christ      Measures 9-12, played out of rythm.

#### THE LAST SUPPER

Mt. 26:21-23      DaVinci: Last Supper      Vox Dilecti, Dykes, H.A.Y. (Hymnal for American Youth) 136

24      Schmitz: Master Is It I?

25      "      Gallico, Apocalypse, Schirmer, p 56, 3d meas., 3d line, play 3 measures

Jn. 14:30      Von Gebhafdt: And He Went Out and It Was Night      Improvised "dark" chords

Mt. 26:26-28	Hofmann: The	Miller, Rockingham,
Jn. 13:34-35	First Eucharist	H.L.A., 131
Mt. 26:31-35	Hofmann: Christus	West, Entreaty, measures 5-8, 13-16, 29-end, in The Village Organist, Stainer and Woods.
Jn. 14:1-3	Hofmann: Come Unto Me	Sullivan: Homeland, H.L.A. 483

## GETHSEMENE

Mk. 14:26	Hole: Christ	Redhead: Gethsemene,
	Leaving the City	H.L.A. 145
32-34	Tissot: Christ	
	Bids His Disci- ples to Rest	
35-36	Taylor: Christ	Bradburry: Olive's
	in the Wilderness	Brow
37-38	Bacon: Could Ye Not Watch?	
Mt. 26:42	Hofmann: Christ	Dykes: St. Cross,
	in Gethsemene	H.L.A., 153 <u>or</u> repeat
43	Bacon: Could Ye Not Watch?	"Olive's Brow"



Mt. 26:69

Silence

70-71 Mastroni; Peter's  
Denial

Oliver: Federal Street,  
M.H. 443; play four  
measures and stop

72-73 Hole: Peter's  
Denial

Play four more measures  
and stop

74

Play remainder

75 Harrach: Peter's  
Denial

" "

Mt. 27:3-5

Armitage: Remorse  
of Judas

Deet: "In the Bottoms",  
prelude p 4, 1st section,  
10 measures, change to  
D flat

Mk. 15:1-5

Munkacsy: Christ  
Before Pilate

Maunder: Oliver to Cal-  
vary, Novello, p 48 - 49,  
3d meas. Repeat.

Lk. 23:13a

13b-16 Ciseri: Ecce  
Homo

Mk. 15:6-13a

Hofmann: Christ  
Before Pilate

p 49, 4th meas., to p 50,  
1st line, end of 2d meas.

Chorus:

"Crucify

Hofmann: Ecce

p 50 " " " "

Him! ...

Homo

to bottom of page

Mt. 27:24-25a	Hole: Pilate's Protestation of Guiltlessness	Silence
<u>Chorus</u> : "His blood be on us and on ...	" "	Dubois: Seven Last Words, p 12, last line, next to last measure to p 13, last line, 2d measure
SCOURGING AND MARCH TO CALVARY		
Mt. 27:27-30	Hole: Mockery of the Soldiers	Hassler: Passion Corale, M.H. 151. Better harmon- ization, Bach: Passion Music, p 191
<u>Quartette</u> Unaccompanied	Shields: After the Scourging	1st stanza of O sacred head, now wounded
Mt. 27:31	Hofmann: Bearing the Cross	Maunder: Olivet to Calvary, Novello, p 54, March to Calvary, measures 1 to 5, next to last beat
<u>Solo</u> , contralto	Taylor: Christ Falls Under the Cross	Must Jesus Bear the Cross alone ..? M.H. 438, first line
Mt. 27:33	Thiersch: Bear- ing the Cross	" " second line

Mk. 15:22-23	Hofmann: Simon Bearing the Cross	DUbois: Seven Last Words, First Word, Introduction, measures 1 to 8, 1st beat
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THE CRUCIFIXION

Mk. 15:24a 25a	Hole: The Cruci- fixion	" " "
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Lk. 23:34a	Rubens: The Elevation of the Cross	" "v "
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Solo, (barit  
one)

"Father, for- give them ..	Vandyke: Christ on the Cross	" " measures 9 to 16
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Mk. 15:29a	Munkacsy: Cruci- fixion	Silence
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<u>Chorus</u> : "Thou wouldst fain destroy the temple ....	" "	Seven Last Words, p 54, "Vah <sup>h</sup> Corus"
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Jn. 19:35	Munkacsy: Cruci- fixion, detail of group about the foot of the cross	Seven Words, Schirmer, p 36, 3d measure, 1st line to end
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Jn. 19:26	Hole: Our Lord Commits His Mother to St. John	Music, described on bottom of page 23
27	Ploekhorst: St. John and the Mother of Jesus	" "
Mk. 15:33	Dore: The Darkness	Seven Last Words, Schir- mer, p 42, Fourth Word, 1st six measures of solo
34	Van Dyck: The Crucifixion	" "
Lk 23:45b- 46a	Shields: The Crucifixion	Seven Last Words, Schir- mer, p 72, first 8 meas.
Mk. 15:39	Hofmann: The Crucifixion	<u>Silence</u>
<u>Solo:</u> When I Survey the Wondrous Cross . . . .	" "	Woodbury: Hamburg, M.H. 141, 1st stanza
Mt. 27:59	Copping: Descent from the Cross	Seven Last Words, Chorale, "Christ we do



Jn. 20:11-14	Copping: He is Not Here	Stainer: "They have taken away my Lord", 5 lines, Edith L. Thomas, "Easter and the Forty Days", p 7
15-16a	Copping: Mary Magdelene	
16b-18a	Flockhorst: Easter Morn	" "

<u>Solo</u> : "I know that my Rede- emer liveth and because He lives I too shall live"	Hofmann: Come Unto Me	Knapp: "Open the Gates", first and last of the selection
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#### THE WALK TO EMMAUS

Lk. 24:13-17	Girardet: The Walk to Emmaus	O Filii et Filis, Edith L. Thomas, Easter and the Forty Days, entire
18-19	Copping: The Walk to Emmaus	
20-21	" "	Hassler: Passion Chorale M.H. 151, 1st half, G minor
22-24	" "	Statham: With Sorrowing H.A.Y. 110, G minor

Lk. 24:25-28a	Flockhorst: Walk to Emmaus (In many respects Hole is better)	Messiah, p 197, The King- dom of this world . . . . , begin with "C" and go 9 measures, key D flat
28b-29a	Hofmann: Abide with Us	" "
29b-30a	" "	Monk: Evariantide, M.H. p 50, entire
30b	Hofmann: Supper at Emmaus	" "
31	Eichstaedt: Sup- per at Emmaus	" "

#### THE LAST COMMAND AND ASCENSION

Mt. 28:16	Hofmann: Come Unto Me	<u>Silence</u>
17-20	Aubert: Go Disci- ple All Nations	Gounod: Redemption, The Promise of Redemption, from the beginning to
Mk. 16:19a	" "	"K"
19b-20	Biermann: Ascen- sion	" "

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Music, Pageantry, and Pictures,

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Sources of pictures:

A careful study was made in 1924 of all paintings, prints and books containing pictures of the Life of Christ in:

1. The Boston Art Museum.
2. The Metropolitan Art Museum - New York.
3. Library, Boston University School Religious Education.
4. Boston Public Library.
5. New York Public Library. (I found the Lennox Collection of pictures the most significant of any collection that deals with the Life of Christ.)
6. The Frick Library - New York.
7. Newark Public Library.
8. Scranton Public Library.
9. All the stereoptican slides dealing with the Life of Christ in the five following houses:-  
Handy and Thurston of Boston;  
MacAllister, Keystone, and the New York Sunday School Association of New York.