

The Beatitudes (2000)

In his new work *The Beatitudes* Van Rosendael follows the text of the Beatitudes word for word. The composition consists of nine parts, whereby the last part just as in Matthew has a different character than the first eight. Each part begins with a short soloistic rendition of the Beatitude in English, where after the same text in Latin is developed polyphonically. With this striking construction the composer resolves two problems with one solution.

The Gregorian-like introduction in English, supported by an open harmony in the choir, offers the listener every opportunity to let the Evangelical message take effect. Moreover the melodic material of the polyphonic development flows forth out of the interval structure of the opening. The unisono melodies which the composer discovered appear to contain again and again useful properties.

The Beatitudes are dear to Van Rosendael's heart. He considers Jesus' first words in public as a convincing plea for the rights of man. When composing *The Beatitudes* he lost no opportunity to bring to expression this engaged dimension of the text. In the opening of part 2 he uses a "forbidden" melodic jump in order to accentuate the word "mourn". Part 4 forms a peak in the outrage. Not one, but two soloists take the opening in hand, because unanimity makes power.

The subsequent polyphonic episode has much in common with a protest march: while half of the choir sings in flowing lines, the other half chants each word like a slogan during a demonstration. This commitment on a smaller scale is also to be found in part 8, with powerful accents on the word "persecutionem".

Despite these text connected explosions, Van Rosendaels' composition in general sounds peaceful and balanced, entirely in agreement with Renaissance polyphony. A few spatial effects betray the preference of the composer for the Venetian music of Monteverdi and Gabrieli. Hereby four and eight voices alternate, as well as tutti and soloists. Still more tried and true compositional techniques appear in *The Beatitudes*. In part 2 the female choir repeats three times the opening melody, while the male choir sings in four voices.

This passacaglia-like setting returns in part 5, but then the roles are reversed. Finally In part 7 there sounds a broad mirror canon.

Jan Rokus van Rosendael associates the timeless beauty of the early polyphony with the eternal value of Jesus' words. He writes first and foremost from out his own belief. In the closing part he substitutes the biblical words "for My sake" for "for Jesus Christ's sake". This textual liberty also arises from belief - the Son must, like the Father, be named explicitly. At this moment the music comes to a stand still in a sort of exclamation mark which reminds one of Motets from the Middle Ages. Van Rosendael has the feeling that he received this new composition from on high. Therefore the score ends with the well-known letters S.D.G.: Soli Deo Gloria. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

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Performers: Nederlands Kamerkoor under the direction of Stephan Layton

Author: Michel Khalifa