
Quartet For The End Of Time

**An article for *The Cathedral Times*
by the Very Rev. Sam Candler, *Dean of the Cathedral***

I lament that last week was a difficult time for me. Things with my family are excellent! Things at church are fantastic! I have good friends, in various stages of life; and those friends—and family—give me joy. It was world events that were bothering me. As you know, I do not usually lead my sermons or articles with political reflection on world events. There are many others who analyze current events better than I can. But I do pay attention. And I lament. I lament the thuggish violence in the world. I lament the random and erratic dismissal of decency and morality in the world today. It is not good.

So it was, on January 15, 2026, last week, that I listened to a little known piece of beautiful music that was premiered on January 15, 1941, over eighty years ago. Estimates vary as to how many people were present at the premier. Apparently, some say 150 people; some say 400 people. Some say 5000. This is primarily because it premiered in Stalag VIII-A, a German prisoner of war camp.

There were brutish and brutal people around in those days, and they had power. A French musician, Olivier Messiaen, had been taken prisoner in 1940, at 31 years old. He was about 70 miles east of Dresden. He wanted to play music, and compose music, even as a prisoner. A clarinetist, a violinist, and a cellist, were among his fellow captives

But not everyone was brutish. One of the German guards had some sympathy, a man named Karl-Erich Brüll; and he provided Messiaen with crude pencil and paper. In prison with little hope and deep dread, Messiaen began writing an eerie, even ecstatic, masterpiece. Though the music began as a trio, he would add piano and title the piece, the “Quartet For The End of Time.”

I listened last week to the fifth movement, one of the slowest pieces of music ever written, titled, “Louange à l'éternité de Jesus,” or “Praise to the Eternity of Jesus.” That section exalts the eternity of the Word, that which was in the beginning and which ever shall be. It is hauntingly beautiful, and it sings down deep, below the violences of the world.

The entire quartet takes its inspiration from a passage in the Revelation to John (“Revelations!” the last book of the Bible!). At chapter 10, verse 6, a seventh angel, with a seventh seal, is described, the last angel. When that angel blows a trumpet, scripture says that, “there will be no more time.” Some translators say, “there will be no more delay,” but the word is “chronos,” time. Scripture says, at that point, that there will be no more time. The world will have entered eternity, where there is no more time.

Thus, this fifth movement, for cello and piano, has some of the slowest time descriptions one can encounter: *Infiniment lent, extatique (Infinitely Slow, Ecstatic) (Sixteenth Notes = 44)*, say the directions. Others know more than I do of the beautiful mysticism of Olivier Messiaen; he was a devout Roman Catholic. But anyone can sense the power of eternity in this “Quartet For The End Of Time.”

These are times that need the good gifts of good people. We need good religious and political leaders, as we always do. We need good teachers and good business people. We need good people of commerce and spirit. And we need the good gifts of poets and artists. We need good people with good gifts, everywhere.

I define “good,” as I often have, as what encourages the common good, the good of all. I appreciate and salute good faith for the common good, especially when it comes from people in prison who would seem to have little hope. I look forward to moments of eternity, when we are in ecstasy, standing outside time. I look forward to the eternity of Jesus, when there will be no more time. But there will be good. I enjoy the good, at whatever time it

is.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

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