

BUFFALO JEWISH COMMUNITY RELATIONS

A STATEMENT FROM THE BUFFALO JEWISH COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL

Richard Danielpour's ecumenical intentions in writing "The Passion of Yeshua" are admirable, and yet inevitably the work raises numerous problems that are inherent in the Passion story. He states that he wants "to bring the story of Jesus of Nazareth back to its Jewish origins," which sounds perfectly fine until we think about how differently history can be understood. Just ask someone from New York and someone from Alabama about the Civil War. Jews and Christians differ about history, just as they often use the same words—"salvation," for example, or "messiah"—to mean different things.

Thus, the messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53 is entirely consonant with Christian interpretations of the Hebrew Testament, which often see it as predicting the events of the Greek Testament. It is, however, entirely at odds with Jewish readings of the prophetic passage, which understand that Isaiah is describing the abuse of Israel at the hands of the Babylonians. Many contemporary Bible scholars argue that the passion story in the Greek Testament was intentionally patterned after Isaiah's chapter in order to make it appear prophetic. We have here three interpretations that cannot be reconciled, nor should we try to reconcile them. We need only understand where the different traditions stand.

Yet another troublesome issue arises when the crowd cries, "Crucify him." Whether such a scene actually took place, the presumption that Jews were somehow responsible for the crucifixion has led to the accusation of deicide, the result of which was almost 2,000 years of anti-Semitic violence. In his program notes, Mr. Danielpour states, idealistically, that "with music no one is excluded and all are invited," but the reference to deicide can hardly be seen as an invitation.

This is not to say that Mr. Danielpour wrote "The Passion of Yeshua" in bad faith or that he intended to be in any way offensive. It is simply to point out the ongoing necessity of dialogue, not so that we can persuade each other but only so that we can understand each other. If we achieve that, then we can begin to approach the ideal that motivates all the Abrahamic faiths, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."