The Commandments

During World War II, I was a soldier in the 140th Infantry Regiment of Patton’s Army in the European Theater. As a soldier, almost overnight your thinking becomes far more directed toward philosophy, religion, and survival. You are no longer that lighthearted individual that didn’t seem to have a care in the world. Some estimate that the number of people killed in World War II reached sixty million. My reasoning and understanding of religion led me to question how such inhumanity could exist among people who were basically grounded in one form or another in the Commandments of the Old Testament. I supposedly prayed to the same God. The more serious the condition of the fighting, the more seriously I examined my own conscience. Were the Commandments to be taken literally, or not?

Although I was only a PFC, the Army had assigned me as bandleader, and I was in charge of a group of musicians, many of whom had been wounded and sent back from the front. If their records showed that they had once been musicians, they were sent to my band rather than redeployed to the front lines. It was our job to entertain the troops whether they may be.

One day in early December, the Colonel in charge of the 17th Replacement Depot issued orders that the band “on a Cook’s tour.” After driving a few miles we found a clearing in the woods where there were many G.I.s lining up in a row line, so I had the driver stop the truck and we began to set up our instruments to play for these soldiers. Suddenly, a plane flew low over us. Hardly anyone paid attention because at this time the German air force had almost stopped reconnaissance. Then, one of the G.I.s shouted, “Hey! That’s a German plane, and he’ll be coming back!” Everyone scrambled away from the clearing to find a protected position. We hastily climbed back into our truck and drove out of there. As there were no maps of this sector with us, we chose the road that seemed most traveled. Unfortunately, it was now growing dark. Our truck was not allowed to turn on the lights. We came to a soldier directing traffic, who, using a dimmer electric light, waved us through. As we passed him, I realized that he was wearing a German helmet. I told our driver to go over the hill and when he reached a point where we could not see, to turn around and pass by the soldier again at half speed.

Within a few miles we were stopped at a checkpoint. Now we faced American soldiers who did not believe my story that we were a G.I. band. While they were deciding among themselves what to do with us, the questioner held hand grenades with the pins pulled. Finally, they asked me for the password and that got us through the line. They explained that many of their fellow soldiers had been killed right at this point by German soldiers who spoke perfect English, were in an American truck and wearing G.I. uniforms. This was the beginning of what became known as the Battle of the Bulge. We drove back to almost empty headquarters, and while listening to a German radio broadcast realized that we were surrounded, and according to Axis Sally, we had lost the war. I vowed that if I survived, someday I would write a composition examining the Commandments. I was not able to form any thoughts into a composition until that moment in time. It took me over sixty years to finally put into a composition what I felt all those years ago when it was clear that all sides of the war were breaking one or all of the Commandments.

When I was interviewed in the former Soviet Union in 1987 I asked about how the governments that were in conflict should start examining the basic tenets of their culture and that our government should spend a lot of effort in the study and application of the Commandments. When Paul Schwendener, president from the Million Foundation, listened to the recording of my Gates of Justice,” I heard that I was composing a piece about the Commandments, he thought that it should be performed at Lincoln Center when the Jewish Heritage Foundation produced a concert of “The Gates of Justice.” I told him that he should like to know if the Commandments were part of the Islamic tradition, as well as the Jewish and Christian. Intrigued by the question, he read several books on the Koran but found no mention of the Commandments. One day he reported that he had finally found what I was looking for. In one of the books he studied, believers were told they must follow the laws of Moses. Realizing the three great monotheistic religions of the world held these basic tenets in common motivated me to complete “The Commandments,” a composition that I had wanted to write so long ago.

Dave Brubeck
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Dave Brubeck (1920–2012)

A jazz pianist who is noted for his improvisational skills, Dave Brubeck is also the composer of many fully-scored works, including choral, instrumental, chamber music, ballet suites, string quartet, solo pieces for piano, violin & voice, and large-scale works for chorus and orchestra. He has been designated a “Living Legend” by the Library of Congress and a “Jazz Master” by the National Endowment for the Arts.

For more information, please visit alfred.com.
The Commandments

Based on Exodus 20:1-22

Soprano
Alto
Tenor
Bass

And God spoke all these words: I am the Lord thy God who brought you out of Egypt of the land of Egypt of Egypt.

And God spoke all these words: I am the Lord thy God who brought you out of Egypt of the land of Egypt of Egypt.

And God spoke all these words: I am the Lord thy God who brought you out of Egypt of the land of Egypt of Egypt.

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And God spoke all these words: I am the Lord thy God who brought you out of Egypt of the land of Egypt of Egypt.
Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt have no other gods, have no gods.
And then God spoke all these words to Moses:

Thou shalt not murder!

Thou shalt not give false witness.
Thou shalt not murder!

Keep my commandments: Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother. Thou shalt
not take the name of the Lord in vain. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou
not take the name of the Lord in vain. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou
not take the name of the Lord in vain. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou
And then God spoke all these words to Moses:

shalt not steal, thou shalt not lie, thou shalt not give false witness.
lightning, and heard the long blast of the horn

people saw the thunder When the people saw the thunder When the people saw the thunder When the people saw the thunder When the

heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in

people saw the thunder When the people saw the thunder When the people saw the thunder When the people saw the thunder When the
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down to i-dols. Then the Lord said: Tell the Israelites this: You have

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down to i-dols. Then the Lord said: Tell the Israelites this: You have
seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
When the people saw the smoke they trembled, people saw the smoke they trembled.
people saw the smoke they trembled. They saw the mountain in smoke they trembled in fear. They
stayed at a distance and said unto Moses: Speak to us your self and we will listen, speak to us but do not let God speak to...
us, or we will die!


us, or we will die!


Do not be a fraid.

God has come to

Do not be a fraid.

God has come to

Do not be a fraid.

God has come to
test you. So that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from falling you. 

The fear of God. 

The people remained at a distance while sinning. The people remained at a distance while
Moses approached the thick darkness where God was. Then the Lord said to Moses:

(Alto 1 sing Tenor text)
Tell the Israelites this: You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven. And God spoke all these words:

Tell the Israelites this: You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven. And God spoke all these words:

Tell the Israelites this: You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven. And God spoke all these words:
I am the Lord thy God who brought you out of Egypt, of the land of slavery.

Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

I am the Lord thy God who brought you out of Egypt, of the land of slavery.
Keep my commandments, Keep my commandments, Keep my commandments.

Keep my commandments, Keep my commandments, Keep my commandments.

I am the Lord your God showing love to a thousand generations of
cresc. poco a poco
cresc. poco a poco
cresc. poco a poco
those who love me and keep my commandments.

Deliberate

Keep my commandments. Keep my commandments.

Deliberate