

*Pelikan der Wüste* ('Pelican of the wilderness') was commissioned by the Sacred Music Association of the church of St. Helena, Mönchengladbach-Rheindalen, where organist Reinhold Richter gave its first performance on September 20, 2009, also giving the French première in Notre-Dame Cathedral, Paris, on May 1, 2011. Its title is taken from a haunting image found in Psalm 102:

1 Hear my prayer, O LORD!  
And let my cry for help come to You.  
2 Do not hide Your face from me in the day of my distress;  
Incline Your ear to me;  
In the day when I call answer me quickly.  
3 For my days have been consumed in smoke,  
And my bones have been scorched like a hearth.  
4 My heart has been smitten like grass and has withered away,  
Indeed, I forget to eat my bread.  
5 Because of the loudness of my groaning  
My bones cling to my flesh.  
6 I resemble a pelican of the wilderness;  
I have become like an owl of the waste places.  
7 I lie awake,  
I have become like a lonely bird on a housetop. (North American Standard Bible)

Although v.6's reference to the pelican (*pellicano solitudinis* in the Vulgate) is widely considered by scholars as a mistranslation, it is the source of a long Christian tradition of allegorical interpretation associating the bird with Christ on account of the legend of the bird's drawing blood from its own breast to feed its young. An example is the hymn *Adoro te devoto* by Thomas Aquinas:

*Pie Pellicane, Jesu Domine,  
Me immundum munda Tuo sanguine.  
(O Loving Pelican, O Jesu Lord,  
Unclean am I but cleanse me in Thy blood.)*

Making use of the organ's supreme ability to evoke both darkness and light, *Pelikan der Wüste* is a diptych which attempts to mirror Psalm 102's progression from despair and inner turmoil to consolation, which can both be read Christologically and as an expression of universal human experience:

8 My enemies have reproached me all day long;  
Those who deride me have used my name as a curse.  
9 For I have eaten ashes like bread  
And mingled my drink with weeping  
10 Because of Your indignation and Your wrath,  
For You have lifted me up and cast me away.  
11 My days are like a lengthened shadow,  
And I wither away like grass.  
12 But You, O LORD, abide forever,  
And Your name to all generations.  
13 You will arise and have compassion on Zion;  
For it is time to be gracious to her,  
For the appointed time has come.  
14 Surely Your servants find pleasure in her stones  
And feel pity for her dust.  
15 So the nations will fear the name of the LORD  
And all the kings of the earth Your glory.  
16 For the LORD has built up Zion;  
He has appeared in His glory.  
17 He has regarded the prayer of the destitute  
And has not despised their prayer.

Cover : Pelicans, Basilique Sainte-Marie-Madeleine, Vézelay