

## **Coplas al Santísimo Cristo de la Conversión del Buen Ladrón** **(Coplas to the Most Holy Christ of the Conversion of the Good Thief)**

### **Editor's Notes**

These *Coplas*, a certain short song style commonly used in Spain, were composed by Hilarión Eslava in 1852, based on a poem attributed to Spanish poet Francisco Rodríguez Zapata (1813-1889) on the Gospel story of the Good Thief (Luke 23: 39-44) and the Passion of Christ. The score, in the form of an undated modern, anonymous manuscript copy, came to us courtesy of the Hermandad de Montserrat by way of D. Antonio María Caballero and D. José Manuel Delgado, editor of the companion *Himno* of the Hermandad, which we have also published. This work was commissioned to Eslava by the Pontificia, Real, Ilustre, Antigua y Primitiva Hermandad de Nuestra Señora del Rosario y Cofradía de Nazarenos del Santísimo Cristo de la Conversión del Buen Ladrón y Nuestra Señora de Montserrat in Sevilla (<http://hermandaddemontserrat.org/> [site in Spanish]). This Hermandad was originally established in 1601 but was significantly reconstituted in 1849 under the auspices of the Duke and Duchess of Montpensier.

According to Antonio Caballero, this piece has traditionally been performed at all principal religious functions of the Hermandad, for many decades past. José Manuel Delgado notes that the attribution of the lyrics to Francisco Rodríguez Zapata is based on an exchange of letters between the Hermandad and Eslava in 1854 when the *Himno* was commissioned that alludes to the success of the *Coplas* two years earlier. It seems logical that the Hermandad would have chosen for the latter piece to maintain the same authors. We do know with certainty that the words to the *Himno* were written by Rodríguez Zapata. What we do not know is whether the original music to these *Coplas* would have been scored for voices and orchestra (as the *Himno* was) or just voices and keyboard/organ, or whether what we have is in effect a later reduction of an original (and as yet undiscovered) orchestral score.

Another certainty we have is that this beautiful piece provides an example of a shortcut that is fairly common among composers from Eslava's time and now – repurposing older compositions with different lyrics. The melody, harmonies, and accompaniment for this piece are almost identical to another piece I received from a separate source (Eresbil – Basque Music Archives), and transcribed:

<https://musescore.com/user/29381772/scores/6602828>

The “Letrilla a la Pasión de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo” found at the above link has a more elaborate keyboard accompaniment, which could probably be used in lieu of the relatively simple accompaniment provided here.

This transcription is by permission of the Hermandad de Montserrat. In this re-edition of the piece, the keyboard part is labeled ‘piano’, and played as such in the synthesized (mp3) sound file. The voice arrangement is T-T-B.

For more about Eslava and his music, visit <https://hilarioneslava.org/home/home-en/>

SPANISH LYRICS	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
<p>Tú, Señor, que al morir enclavado sobre el leño de la redención, Perdonaste al ladrón su pecado, de los nuestros, Señor, compasión.</p>	<p>You, Lord, who as you were dying nailed on the log of redemption, forgave the thief for his sin; be merciful for ours.</p>
<p>Dios clemente, Dios justo, Dios grande, que tomaste carne mortal, Para al hombre librar del infierno, dó arrojóle la culpa de Adán. Esos hombres por quienes vinistes cuyo orgullo venció tu humildad, despreciaron tus sabias lecciones, desoyeron al nuncio de paz.</p>	<p>Clement God, just God, great God, who became mortal flesh to free man from hell, where He cast Adam's guilt. Those men for whom you came whose pride was overcome by your humility despised your wise lessons ignored the messenger of peace.</p>
<p>Cuán acerba tu pena sería cuando viste ¡oh dulce Jesús! a tu Madre afligida y llorosa contemplándote al pie de la cruz, inclinada su cándida frente dó brilló la pura virtud, destrozado su pecho divino del dolor por la fiera segur.</p>	<p>How deep your sorrow would have been when you saw, oh sweet Jesus! your Mother grieving and weeping contemplating you at the foot of the cross, His innocent forehead on which the purest of virtue shined, His divine chest pierced in pain by the fierce spear.</p>