

Solo Trio : **Philip Colls** (Alto),
Mark Davies (Tenor),
William Armiger (Baritone)

Solo Treble : **Edward Brech**

Solo Bass : **Christopher Monk**

The Three Cathedral Choirs of

Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester

The Philharmonia Brass and Percussion

Ian Ball : Organist

Adrian Lucas : Conductor

- I The Birth of Order from Chaos**
- II The Primal Vision -
The Hymn of the First Hierarchy**
- III The Fall of Satan and of Man**
- IV The Consequences**
- V The Divine Image -
Dimmed but not Destroyed**
 - (a) **The Song of Western Atheism**
 - (b) **The Song of Eastern Religion**
- VI The Finest Crack -
The Jewish People**
- VII The Prophecy**
- VIII The Medicine**
- IX The Resurrection**
- X Urbs Beata - The Vision**

Urbs Beata

Music by John Sanders (b.1933)
(First performance)

A Cantata for Alto Soloist, SATB Choir,
Solo Cello, Brass Ensemble, Percussion
and Organ.

*(Based on an idea of William Armiger and
commissioned by the Gloucester Three Choirs
Festival Committee.)*

Libretto by the Reverend Jonathan
Hadfield (compiled from original,
biblical and patristic sources.)

James Bowman : Alto Soloist
Rachel Howego : Solo Cello

the right libretto took well over a year
but when Jonathan Hadfield gave me his
text I immediately felt that it had the
right mixture of mysticism and realism
to spark off the alchemy of inspiration.

I always kept in mind the fact that the
work would be performed in the incom-
parable acoustics of Gloucester
Cathedral with its unique organ and pos-
sibilities for spatial effects. God, for
example, is placed in a gallery. As the
Trinity he speaks in three voices, - (a solo
trio of alto, tenor and baritone). They
sing above, and apart from, the main
choir, accompanied by sustained atmos-
pheric organ chords.

The Alto soloist covers several roles
acting as the Narrator and also repre-
senting the Serpent, Dragon, etc. He is
often paired with the solo cello playing in
the same register producing a peculiarly
plangent effect. In No. III they are joined
by the solo Trumpet in several trio pas-
sages all performing at roughly the same
pitch: a somewhat unearthly combina-
tion!

In Nos. III and IV the character of Eve
may sometimes be sung by a solo Treble
and at other times by all the upper voices
of the choir representing "Everywoman".
Adam, likewise, may be sung by a solo
Bass or by all the lower voices portraying
"Everyman".

Use is occasionally made of traditional
Plainsong: the Lent and Advent Prose
sequences in No. VI and the hymn *Urbs
Beata* in No. X. I have also taken the
liberty of quoting from other composers,
including myself! Discerning listeners
may recognise a purple passage from
Wagner and the note sequence BACH!

and man had sinned. This prophecy points not only to the unique status of the Theotokos in orthodox Christianity but also shows that in redemption as well as in creation, all the actions of all the persons of the Godhead are intricately linked.

The Incarnation of the Word is a "marvellous wonder", but the price of redemption can never be sentimentalised or underestimated. It is exceedingly costly. There is a huge contrast between the apparently easy creation of the Universe in Genesis I and the harrowing process of our salvation. The beads of sweat falling from Christ's brow in Gethsemane are the drops before the storm of the Passion. The "medicine" refers back to the *Primal Vision*: there we heard a hushed hymn of praise; here there is a dumbfounded and horrified reaction to the humiliation of the Second Person of the Trinity. The descent into hell is the entry of the Son of God into the unfathomable darkness of eternal death. There has only been one true atheist: Christ cut off momentarily and absolutely from the love of the Father. God now truly understands the utter desolation of Job.

The Resurrection (section IX) using some of the words of a paschal homily of St. John Chrysostom, by turning our attention to Christ coming in His glory, banishes the terrors of the Last Judgement and the Abyss of Hell: "Death hath no more dominion"!

We end our journey with our gaze lifted up to the vision of the Blessed City, the heavenly Jerusalem. Here we see the saints, living icons fashioned uniquely and individually by the Holy Trinity, perfectly restored through Christ to the divine likeness. And to that city we too may aspire and join our countless voices to those sonorous harmonies of unending praise to Him, whose glory and dominion are from all ages to all ages.

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I The Birth of Order from Chaos

II The Primal Vision - The Hymn of the First Hierarchy

Chorus Holy and unknowable, holy and ineffable, holy and incomprehensible. *Agios O Theos, Agios Ischyros, Agios Athanatos.*
Enough for us thy Cherubim to contemplate, and ponder, and gaze on the darkness, the thick darkness where Thou art.

Narrator O threefold lightning, O single blaze,
With what rapture our soaring minds shudder
before thine infinity and die!

Chorus Holy and beautiful
Holy and sublime
Holy and dazzling
Full of thy fire, we thy Seraphim adore and burn and gasp for thee,
the living God.
How vast the heart!
How strong the pulse!
How deep the sigh
Of boundless love!

Holy God
Holy and strong
Holy and immortal
Full of thy strength, we thy Thrones,
high and lifted up
Bear thine unbearable radiance and the weight of thy glory.

O uncreated Trinity
O undivided Unity
O Father, Son and Holy Ghost
We serve thee and we reign!
Accept our hymn from tongues of dust
As if from mouths of flame:
Gloria in excelsis Deo!



III The Fall of Satan and of Man

Narrator And there was war in heaven:

Chorus Evil born not of God, nor of the will of matter,
nor of the will of the flesh but of spirit!

Narrator And Satan, Great Dragon, that old Serpent, was cast
out of heaven on to the earth: and all his angels with
him.

Chorus Woe to all creeping things!
Woe to the fowls that fly!
Woe to the whales of the deep!
For the father of evil descends.

God Let us make man in our own image,
Male and female after our likeness.

Chorus And he made us in his own image, male and female
after his likeness.

God Be fruitful and multiply,
Fill the earth and be strong.
Behold I have given you herbs bearing seed, trees
bearing fruit, beasts, fish and fowl for your meat.
But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you
shall not eat: for on the day you eat thereof you
shall surely die!

Narrator And the Dragon scorched the earth with the fire of
his breath and there arose a great drought in the
land. And Adam and his wife were in want. Then
came the Serpent to the woman tempting her.

Chorus Evil born not of God, nor of the will of matter, nor of
the will of the flesh but of spirit!

Eve Adam, Adam! Here's a tree with some fruit.

Adam But isn't this the forbidden tree? If we eat this fruit
won't we die?

Satan Why do you not eat? Can dying be worse than the
gnawing pains in your belly? And the tongue that

sticks to your gums? God has never been hungry.
God has never been thirsty. God has never known
death. Think! You have been made in the image of
God, free to do as you will.

Adam Free to disobey?...

Satan Free to choose what is right for you.

Eve Free to try everything...

Satan Free to think and do and eat what you wish:
refashion everything in your own image.

Adam / Eve Our will, not his, be done on earth...

Satan As it was in heaven.

Adam / Eve Free to eat... good fruit... good food...

Satan And maybe good for the brain. Take and eat.

Eve This fruit is delicious!

Adam Yes, - it's delicious. The answer to prayer.

Satan You could plant the seeds and grow your own.
Pen the animals.
Eat your own meat. Paradise regained!

Eve We could have children. Fruit of your loins...

Adam Fruit of your womb.

Satan Fruits of your toil. A rich inheritance for your sons
when you grow old - when you die.

Adam / Eve When we die... die! ... cut off from God... cut off
for ever. What have we done? What have we done?

Satan You have grown up. Learned to rely on yourselves;
learned to be strong. Thought is power. Power to
create... farms, cities, empires, science, art, music...
wars, pollution, genocide, wealth, inequality... and
religion!

IV The Consequences

God O Adam, O Eve,
O my son, my daughter, shamed and sunk in misery.

Chorus Thorns and thistles...
The pains of birth...
Sweat and labour... a short time to live... full
of misery and born to trouble as surely as the
sparks fly upward.

God O man, O woman, how can we abandon you?
How can we forsake you?
O Trinity made in our image but now divided into
mind, body and soul. Flawed but glorious still. And
yet... and yet you have not begun to comprehend the
weight of sin. Like as a vessel that is marred by the
hands of the potter, then broken in pieces and fash-
ioned anew: so shall I set a limit to the evil and
return you to the dust from which you came. But I
will restore you again to my likeness and refashion
your ancient beauty.

Chorus Born to trouble as surely as the sparks fly upward...
but still that sweet voice calls us...
And the distant music
The mountains and the solitary places... the green
pastures and the wooded valleys...
Strange islands... and that sweet voice

V The Divine Image - Dimmed but not destroyed.

(a) The Song of Western Atheism.

Narrator Made in the image of none, alone among animals
Man, the quintessence of atoms, has received the
summons
To be god, a holy temple empowered to admit
Unearthly fire.

The Great Hall of the Mysteries is his brain:
Sojourn of stars and of great distances -
A glimpse of measureless ages gone and to come
Caught in a skull.

God may measure the heavens with the stretch of his
fingers -

Enclose the earth and seas in the palm of his hand
But man alone is free to pass unobstructed
Beyond the stars.

Man is a being infinitely greater than man:
An unsearchable depth, baffling all definition
Mind of sapphire, creator and breaker of idols
That are less than the truth.

(b) The Song of Eastern Religion

Chorus God sleeps in the rocks
God dreams in the plants
God stirs in the animals
But God is awake in me!

VI The Finest Crack - The Jewish People

Chorus All things God can do except compel love.
Enveloping Grace may seep through the finest crack
But only faith, faith that is sovereign and free,
Opens the crack.

Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember
iniquity for ever: thy holy cities are a wilderness,
Sion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation: our holy
and our beautiful house, where our fathers
praised thee.

Drop down ye heavens from above, and let the skies
pour down righteousness.

God, we implore thee, in thy glory seated: bow down
and hearken to thy weeping children: pity and
pardon all our grievous trespasses.

Hear us, O Lord, have mercy upon us: for we have
sinned against thee.

VII The Prophecy

Narrator Who is she that comes forth as the dawn, fair as the
moon and bright as the sun, terrible as an army in
full array?



God This is she whom I have chosen from the beginning to be a fit and holy dwelling place for my Son: The Holy Ghost shall come upon her and my Spirit shall overshadow her. And that holy thing that shall be born of her shall be called Jesus.

Narrator He shall descend into the depths of the earth to seek and save that which was lost: and ascend again to offer to the Father a more perfect likeness.

VIII The Medicine

Chorus A marvellous wonder has this day come to pass:
Nature is made new and God becomes man.
He who is without flesh becomes incarnate:
He who is clothed with light is wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Narrator He had no beauty that we should desire him:

& Chorus Yet he shines more brightly than the sun.
He was hungry: but is the living and heavenly bread.
He was thirsty: but promises us a well of water
springing up to eternal life.
He was weary: but is the repose of them that travail
and are heavy laden.
He wept: but wipes away all tears from our eyes.
He was sold for thirty pieces of silver: but redeems
the world with his most precious blood.
The Creator of all things was struck by the hands of
his creatures.
The Judge of both living and dead was sentenced to
die.

Chorus O wonder of wonders! O mystery sublime!
He whose glory the Thrones bear aloft: is raised up
on a cross of shame.
He who makes the Seraphim to gasp: is gasping for
breath.
He before whom the Cherubim stand trembling: is
hanged between two robbers.

Narrator God is forsaken by God: and has entered the abyss of
eternal death.
The Immortal has been murdered: God has died!

Short Pause.

IX The Resurrection

Narrator Christ who was nailed to the tree of death, is become
the fruit of the tree of life.
Love is stronger than death: many waters cannot
quench love nor can the floods drown it.
Let none now fear death, for the death of Christ has
set us free

Chorus Hell was embittered when it tasted his flesh.
Hell was embittered for it was despoiled.
Hell was embittered for it was mocked.
Hell was embittered when it was slain.
Christ is risen and the demons are fallen!
Christ is risen and the angels rejoice!
Christ is risen and the dead go forth to meet him!
Death hath no more dominion.

X Urbs Beata - The Vision

Chorus New Jerusalem, city of light, home of the righteous
and mansion of the highest King.
In thee all is holy and pure. In thee the joyful
Alleluia is ever sung.
Thy gentle air, undimmed by clouds, is gilded by the
Sun of suns.
O how glorious thou art, ancient and yet always new.
Heavenly City, full of joy, founded by the Trinity, to
whom may countless voices sing in glorious and
unending praise. Alleluia, alleluia. Amen.

Hosanna in excelsis Deo.

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