

Hereford Variations

Op. 22



Peter Stoltzfus Berton

Hereford Variations is a set of fifteen organ pieces inspired by the life and works of the priest and writer Thomas Traherne (1636-1674), as commemorated in the stained glass windows by Tom Denny (2007) placed in the Audley Chapel at Hereford Cathedral. Each of the first three lights, of intimate size and spellbinding creativity, is represented by a set of four variations; the next two variations represent small tracery windows above; a double-length finale sums up the fourth light and the whole. In a complete performance, the last of each set may involve vocal forces—which could range from one singer to a large choir and audience—but these also may be realized by organ alone. Individual variations or groupings may be useful as concert pieces, voluntaries or meditations, for which brief separate titles are given. Descriptions and quotes from Traherne’s writings, compiled by the creator of the windows, are referenced in the score, as are later texts supporting the overall pilgrimage of the stained glass. A common theme is “the beauty of creation and the essential happiness or ‘felicity’ of humankind within it.”†

While the musical program in microcosm is informed by the content of the windows, the structure of the Variations overall is arranged in homage to *Variations on an Original Theme for Orchestra* (“*Enigma*”), Op. 36 (1898-1899), by Sir Edward Elgar (1857-1934). Thus, fifteen musical movements are entitled Theme and fourteen Variations. “Elgar was a resident of Hereford between 1904 and 1911, and composed some of his finest works while in the area. A bronze statue (2004) by Jemma Pearson depicts the composer facing the cathedral from the north, with his bicycle—on which he made many journeys along the lanes of Herefordshire.”† Elgar doubtless experienced inspiration from the same natural surroundings as did Traherne, much of which is yet available to a modern pilgrim traveling to this particularly green part of the far west of England, bordering Wales.

The idiosyncratic dedications of Elgar’s Variations, “to my friends pictured within” using initials (sometimes by nickname), is a plan followed for amusement and also sincere appreciation to family and friends for “acts of faith and love;” each of these people has contributed to the possibility of the whole (as have others who would be mentioned if the list were longer; these must be represented by the Finale). In Elgar’s prototype, the musical references are not always clear, and the variations work perfectly well on the level of absolute music. For instance, in the variation dedicated to Hereford’s organist G. R. Sinclair, Elgar depicts Sinclair’s pet dog; in another, the music recalls running for cover in a rainstorm. Similarly, the dedications here are connected to personal incidents and/or sources of musical inspiration. However there is not, as in the case of Elgar’s “*Enigma*” about which a great deal has been speculated and written, a possible disagreement about the “theme!”



† Text by *The Very Reverend Michael Tavinor* from *Hereford Cathedral Guide Book* (2012). Text and all *Hereford* photography reproduced by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of Hereford Cathedral, August 2013.

Much in the manner of Bach’s cantatas and profound moments from the Passions, a well-known hymn tune—*Hereford*—provides not only the main musical subject but also a wealth of additional meaning in the form of that hymn’s original text. Whether by design or destiny, the windows themselves seem to echo the hymn’s four stanzas. A second hymn, *Rockingham*, makes appearances in several Variations as related to Traherne’s theology and sense of wonder revealed in the windows. Other hymn tunes appear elsewhere and, in Variation XIII, five tunes overlap in nature’s cycle of a night and day of praise. In cameo roles, musical “friends pictured within”—composers and/or their pieces—add to the whole.

The forty-minute journey is also very specifically inspired by the cathedral’s 1892 “Father” Willis organ. The variations were generally improvised and written down at a home studio equipped with the Hauptwerk virtual organ platform, reproducing with astonishing fidelity the sublime nuances of the instrument and its acoustic environment; essentially, in all matters of tone color, scaling and divisional balance, this music was written “at” the complete Hereford instrument, as sampled and prepared by Lavender Audio (2012). Willis’s noble creations were of particular inspiration to the American organbuilder Ernest M. Skinner, who returned from study tours in 1898 and 1924 full of details to incorporate into his already highly esteemed organs. In a few cases, signature stops invented by Skinner are recommended options in the score. Some of the variations segue easily from one to the next; in some, the tune is well disguised, drawing instead on a second tune, rhythmic elements, melodic fragments or the circumstances of the dedication for primary musical interest.



Lavender Audio

Light 1

<i>M.U.M.</i>	Theme: Largamente	The visible body of God	
<i>G.F.A.</i>	Variation I: Allegro	The runner	
<i>J.D.Y.</i>	Variation II: Andante	To love	
<i>U.G.H.</i>	Variation III: Adagio	O thou who camest from above	(soloist, or organ)

Light 2

<i>M.H.O.</i>	Variation IV: Allegro con fuoco	Tocatta: The wondrous Cross	
<i>D.B.B.</i>	Variation V: Moderato	The phoenix	
<i>M.G.G.</i>	Variation VI: Allegretto	Surrounding the Cross	
<i>C.H.E.</i>	Variation VII: Andante	There let it for thy glory burn	(men’s voices, unison)

Light 3

<i>J.E.A.</i>	Variation VIII: Adagissimo/Allegro	God vast and miniature	
<i>T.M.M.</i>	Variation IX: Adagio	In wonder	
<i>J.F.D.</i>	Variation X: Andante	Pastorale	
<i>H.R.N.</i>	Variation XI: Andante	Jesus, confirm my heart’s desire	(all voices, harmony)

Traceries & Light 4

<i>B.B.B.</i>	Variation XII: Allegro	Weather, eight ways	
<i>C.A.P.</i>	Variation XIII: Lento	A cycle	
<i>S.P.L.</i>	Variation XIV: Finale	Ready for all thy perfect will	(all voices, unison + descant)
	Allegro di molto; Allegro presto; Largamente		

Theme

Landscape is seen as the body of God.
*"How do we know, but the world is that
body, which the Deity hath assumed to
manifest His beauty! Beauty being a thing
consisting of variety, that body...must
be sweetly tempered of a manifold and
delightful mixture of figures and colours."*

Centuries II 20

I

A figure runs through a cornfield.

*"The corn was orient and immortal wheat
which never should be reaped, nor was
ever sown..."*

The field is framed by trees, a large oak
appears in the middle distance and
beyond, wooded knolls.

*"The green trees when I saw them first...
transported and ravished me, their
sweetness and unusual beauty made
my heart to leap."* Centuries III 3

II

In the distance we see the city of
Hereford and we are *"entertained with
prospects"* and *"surrounded with the
beauty of hills and valleys."* Centuries II 8

A pool fed by a spring occupies the
foreground. *"Love in the foundation
and love in the stream."* Centuries II 41

"That pool must first be filled."

Centuries IV 55

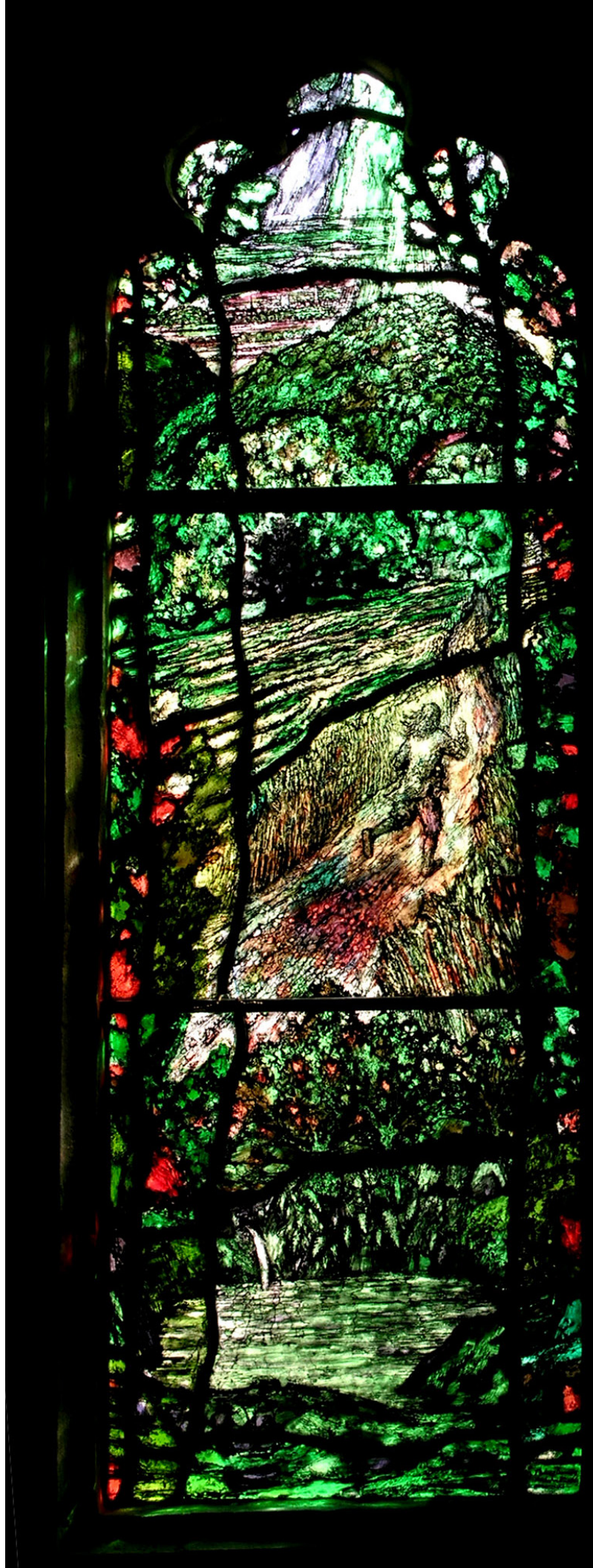
*To love: the angels' wise surprise;
the centerpiece of God's design.*

M. David Samples (born 1924)

III

*O thou who camest from above,
The pure celestial fire to impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love
On the mean altar of my heart.*

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)



M.U.M. **Theme: Largamente**

The visible body of God

For my mother, who experiences God through music, and through nature above all. The stark opening suggests the uncreated universe, neither major nor minor; a slow theme in a minor key enters (which is Elgar's *Enigma* theme verbatim, with only the note values changed to disguise it); when the tune *Hereford* enters, the fully formed world becomes visible and the key brightens to major. Five voices with double pedal impart a lush texture suggesting this deep green window.

G.F.A. **Variation I: Allegro**

The runner

John H. Rives is known within our family as "Goffa," as our daughter called him before she could pronounce "Godfather." A pillar of the community of All Saints Church, Worcester, Massachusetts, he was born on All Saints Day, hence a few notes from Vaughan Williams's tune *Sine Nomine* ("For all the saints"). He has been a long distance runner since high school, has coached running professionally, and has completed several marathons both literal and medical, sometimes requiring a rest before continuing with his life, without losing his ability to coach others. He also is a clock repairman; the trill is a precise countdown to begin a race, which recurs after a pause for breath. Leaping and then running is depicted by pedal figuration. A moment from *Chariots of Fire* precedes the *Sine Nomine* reference, as encouragement never to give up the road ahead.

J.D.Y. **Variation II: Andante**

To love

For my wife, for her bottomless pool of patience and love. The melody is largely from an anthem written for our wedding, a setting of a poem for the day by our dear friend David Samples.

U.G.H. **Variation III: Adagio**

O thou who camest from above

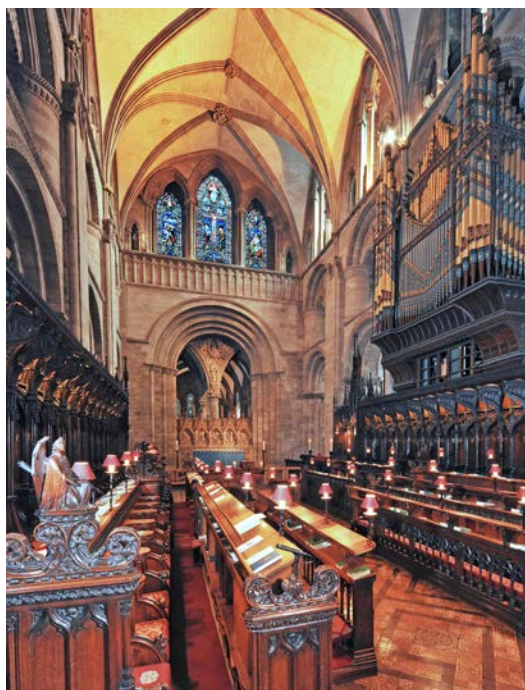
(may be sung by a solo treble, soprano or tenor)

"Uncle" Gerre Hancock (1934-2012) inspired countless listeners and musicians through his organ improvisations and heartfelt direction of creative, dramatically peerless concerts and liturgies. He delighted in slipping disguised tunes into service extemporizations, such as "Easter Parade" during communion on an Easter Day. The beginning and end of the variation veil an organ interlude that precedes a celebrated treble section "Love one another" from Samuel Sebastian Wesley's anthem "Blessed be the God and Father." (Wesley was organist of Hereford Cathedral 1832-1835, composer of the tune *Hereford*, and grandson of the hymn's author.)

Considered a musical father figure by many, Dr. Hancock is certainly due the credit for the motivic and contrapuntal foundation in these variations, with free rhythmic and harmonic creativity, which he warmly and memorably encouraged in his students' work as they found their own unique voices.

The portrait of Dr. Hancock on the back cover was painted in 2003 by Paul Newton and hangs at Saint Thomas Choir School. Reproduced by kind permission of Saint Thomas Church.

Hereford Cathedral, the Quire and organ.



IV

“That cross is a tree set on fire with invisible flame, that illuminateth all the world. The flame is Love: the Love in His bosom who died on it. In the light of which we see how to possess all the things in Heaven and Earth after His similitude.”

Centuries I 60

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were an offering far too small;
love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.*

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

V

Rising above the Cross is a bird.

*“Love is a Phoenix that will revive
in its own ashes.”* Centuries IV 61

“Felicity is a bird of paradise.”

Select Meditations III 65

*Thy blessed unction from above
is comfort, life, and fire of love.*

Rabanus Maurus (776-856),
translated by John Cosin (1594-1672)

VI

Surrounding the Cross are various creatures – a bull, a leopard, a roebuck, men battling, birds. The “border” of this light contains knots and flowers.

“God had before this made an Epistle of his love. He had written it upon the Earth in knots and flowers...in bloody characters in the living creatures which was in more bloody ones afterwards copied in the Death of his son.” Kingdom of God XLI 193-197

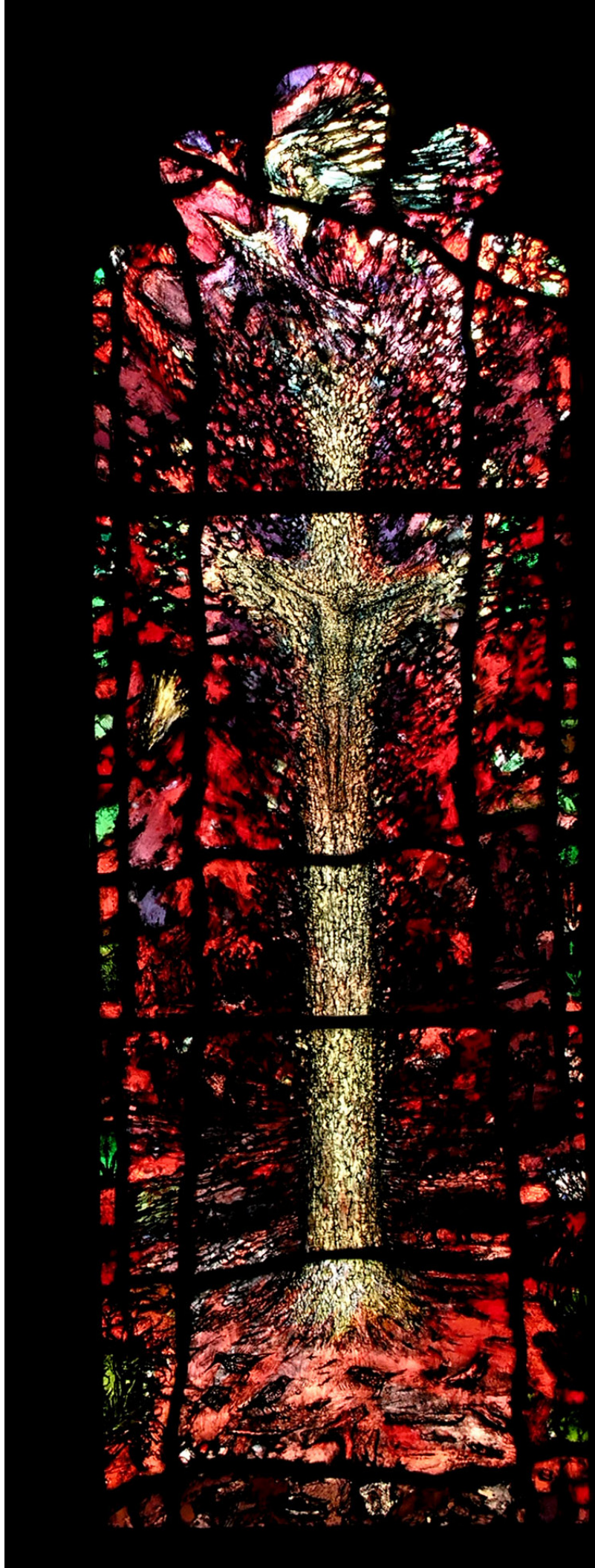
*For us he rose from death again;
for us he went on high to reign;
for us he sent his Spirit here
to guide, to strengthen, and to cheer.*

15th c., translated by Benjamin Webb (1819-1885)

VII

*Green trees a-bending, poor sinner stands
a-trembling. The trumpet sounds within-a
my soul. I ain't got long to stay here.*

Traditional African-American



M.H.O.

Variation IV: Allegro con fuoco

Toccata: The wondrous Cross

Richard Houghten (known as “Mr. Ho” by his Chinese laundry), an organ builder and occasional impish pyromaniac, provided keyboards for the home organ studio on which these variations were written, thus, a toccata (*to touch*) for these keys. The music begins with an optional “cipher” (a single “stuck” note, bane of organ technicians) held over from the previous movement, a segue made between two of Elgar’s movements. The hymn tune *Rockingham* (“When I survey the wondrous cross”) is combined with *Hereford* in a way to make them almost into one tune.

D.B.B.

Variation V: Moderato

The Phoenix

Donald Meineke and Billy Elliott, devoted uncles our daughter calls “D and BB,” are a model of a sacred marriage (never without fire), revival and triumph. After burning flames and a tortured continuation of *Rockingham*, Don’s love of the music of Johann Sebastian Bach is represented in the motive from the alto aria *Erbarme dich* from the *Saint Matthew Passion*, the bitter weeping over the betrayal of Jesus by Peter three times. Next the phoenix rises, to a quotation from Edward C. Bairstow’s anthem “Let my prayer come up into thy presence as incense.” (Bairstow was devoted to music of Bach especially the *Saint Matthew Passion*; Billy is in charge of incense at their church.) Finally the phoenix soars in flight, to the plainsong hymn for Pentecost *Veni Creator Spiritus* accompanied by *Hereford*. (“Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire, and lighten with celestial fire.”)

M.G.G.

Variation VI: Allegretto

Surrounding the Cross

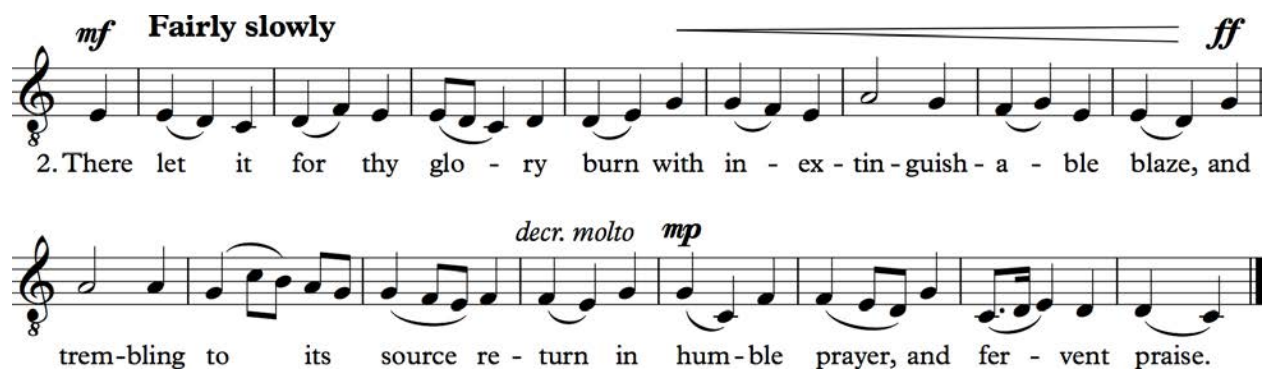
Carrie (Mrs. George) Glick is a nearly lifelong friend, and early inspiration as organist on the Skinner instrument at my childhood church. There is a bit of figuration from Bach’s “Sheep may safely graze,” and the hymn tune *Deo gratias* (“O Love, how deep”), two of her favorites, combined in Traherne’s evocation of animals. The battle here extends to one between major and minor tonality.

C.H.E.

Variation VII: Lento (*men’s voices, unison*)

There let it for thy glory burn

Bruce “Bruce” or just “Ché” McInnes is a master trainer of men’s choirs who conducts annual tours of his scattered alumni collected as “Mastersingers USA.” The introduction and close of the variation quote Bruce’s arrangement of the spiritual “Steal Away.” Like John Rives, Bruce is seemingly inextinguishable, despite health issues which would overcome a lesser spirit. His fervor when explaining interpretations of sacred works never fails to command inspired performances. The stanza is a minor third lower than usual, for a richly full-voiced fortissimo “trembling to its source return” competing with a robust and colorful accompaniment, conceived perhaps in the manner of an improvisation by Dr. Norman Coke-Jephcott (1893-1962, Ché’s choirmaster while a boy chorister at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York), presiding over the thunderous Skinner organ in one of the most reverberant spaces imaginable. The melody of the introduction ends on your starting pitch.



mf Fairly slowly *ff*

2. There let it for thy glo - ry burn with in - ex - tin - guish - a - ble blaze, and

decr. molto mp

trem-bling to its source re - turn in hum-ble prayer, and fer - vent praise.

VIII

Traherne's sense of the revelatory
in everything he encountered—seeing
the vast and the miniature.

*"You never enjoy the world aright, till you see
how a sand exhibiteth this wisdom and power
of God."* Centuries I 27

*"Suppose a river, or a drop of water, an apple
or a sand, an ear of corn or an herb: God
knoweth infinite excellencies in it more than
we: He seeth how it relateth to angels and
men; how it proceedeth from the most perfect
Lover to the most Perfectly Beloved."*

Centuries II 67

*"An ant is a great miracle in a little room
and no less a monument of eternal love than
almighty power."* Commentaries

IX

A figure stands in wonder
and in one-ness with Creation.

*"You never enjoy the world aright till the sea
itself floweth in your veins, clothed with the
heavens, and crowned with the stars."*

Centuries I 29

*Earth, and stars, and sky, and ocean,
by that flood from stain are freed.*

Venantius Honorius Fortunatus (ca. 540-600),
translated by John Mason Neale (1818-1866)

X

Beyond this is a river valley sheltered by
hills and full of orchards, the sun above.

"You are as prone to love as the sun to shine."

Centuries II 65

"All its light shineth for you." Centuries II 7

In the border are small creatures, apples,
minerals, drops of water and *"a little church
environed with trees."* Select Meditations III 83

*E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me...
There let the way appear, steps unto heaven;
All that thou send'st to me in mercy given:
Angels to beckon me nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee!* Sarah F. Adams (1805-1848)

XI

*Send heralds forth to bear the message glorious;
Give of thy wealth to speed them on their way.*

Mary Ann Thomson (1834-1923)



J.E.A. Variation VIII: Adagissimo/Allegro God vast and miniature

Jonathan Ambrosino is a witty author who takes delight in minutiae as well as the big picture (be it in describing architecture, organs, or personalities), and has helped many to see both with clarity. As best man, he organized a rather overlong expedition to different stores to find the right ties for my wedding. The music starts and stops several times, each time disappointed, until the solution is reached. The notation employs a few more ties than required. Undergirding the busyness of the “miniature” is the tune *Dennis* in vast note values (“Blest be the tie that binds”).

T.M.M. Variation IX: Adagio In wonder

Yale University Organist Thomas Murray orchestrates wondrous effects at one with the landmark Hutchings-Steere-Skinner at Woolsey Hall; his sublime recording there of “Nimrod” from Elgar’s *Enigma Variations* has made a pivotal impression on many a listener and hopeful student. This is the impassioned “Nimrod” of this set, placed where Elgar placed his often-excerpted jewel. The melody adapts the ancient Maundy Thursday hymn *Pange Lingua*, expressing wonder at the Passion of Christ. Besides “Nimrod” itself, two Gerre Hancock creations inspired the music: *Maundy Thursday* from *Holy Week* (2007) for two organs, and a 1994 improvisation on *Ubi Caritas*.

J.F.D. Variation X: Andante grazioso Pastorale

Joseph Dzeda is a specialist restorer of Skinner organs, generous employer, and several-term warden of a church surrounded by trees. He is fond of roller coasters (heard in the scales describing the rolling hills of the Hereford countryside so loved by Traherne), as well as the human pathos and lessons of both the Cross and the 1912 *Titanic* disaster, contained in the hymn “Nearer, my God, to thee” (*Horbury*). The pedal part represents, in the outer sections, a man of steady habits, and in the *Horbury* section, his steps toward heaven: tentative at first, then firm, guiding others.

H.R.N. Variation XI: Andante (all voices, harmony) Jesus, confirm my heart’s desire

R. Walden Moore (“Waldhorn” or “Horn”) is the longtime organist and choirmaster of Trinity Church on the Green, New Haven, who has sent forth many assistant organists for service during a thirty-year tenure celebrated in 2014. A Trinity tradition of an *orison*, an unaccompanied stanza of a hymn as a final choral prayer before the concluding voluntary, requires a brief improvisation to give the pitch. In Walden’s inventive hands, the introduction is often an elegant transition out of the final hymn. In the case of this *orison*, the “sending” hymn just sung was “O Zion, haste, thy mission high fulfilling” (*Tidings*). The introduction ends on your starting chord.

Andante

3. Je - sus, con - firm my heart's de - sire to work, and speak, and think for thee; Still

let me guard the ho - ly fire, and still stir up thy gift in me.

XII

Eight small tracery shapes across the two windows contain eight weather images.

“What shall I think therefore when the winds blow, the seas roar, the waters flow, the vapours ascend, the clouds fly, the drops of rain fall, the stars march forth in armies, the sun runneth swiftly round about the world?” Centuries I 22



XIII

Two large shapes in the upper tracery (one in each window) represent Traherne's sense of the perfection of night and day.

“The sweetness of repose, the delightful vicissitudes of night and day, the early sweetness and spring of the morning, the perfume and beauty in the cool of the evening.” Centuries I 9



XIV A gate opens to reveal a city crowded with its inhabitants: “*The city seemed to stand in Eden, or to be built in Heaven. The streets are mine, the temple was mine, the people were mine. The dust and the stones of the street were as precious as gold: the gates were at first the end of the world: The men! O what venerable and reverend creatures did the aged seem! Immortal Cherubims! And young men glittering and sparkling Angels, and maids strange seraphic pieces of life and beauty! Boys and girls tumbling in the street, and playing, were moving jewels.*” Centuries III 3

B.B.B.

Variation XII: Allegro

Weather, eight ways

For my daughters, who love marvelous tiny things such as these miniature windows, who love to be outdoors, and are fascinated by severe weather, especially tornadoes. The music proceeds in the order described by Traherne; evocative atmospheres from a short stack of favorite pieces are swirled together by the wind.

C.A.P.

Variation XIII: Lento

A cycle

The Rev. Canon Andrew Piper, Precentor of Hereford Cathedral, first introduced me to the windows in the Audley Chapel in 2007. In 2008 I composed an anthem, “The Wonders” (briefly quoted at the very end), based on a poem by Thomas Traherne and dedicated to Canon Piper. His extraordinary facility with circular breathing during the singing of Collects is represented by a pedal point, the note E-flat, present in the middle of the texture throughout the entire variation. In addition to *Hereford* (stretched into plainsong form), four hymn tunes describe a recurring cycle of praise: *Conditor alme siderum* (“Creator of the stars of night”) played on the charming Glockenspiel first heard in Variation XII (the Skinner equivalent is Harp and Celesta), with a soft flute depicting shooting stars; *Laudes Domini* (“When morning gilds the skies”); *Ora Labora* (“Come, labor on”); and lastly, *Saint Clement* (“The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended”) by way of a decrescendo from a beloved evening anthem. The music ends as it begins, such that on an “endless loop” it could be repeated eternally, the held note also being God’s constancy.

S.P.L.

Variation XIV: Finale: Allegro di molto; Allegro presto; Largamente (all voices)

As in the case of Elgar’s Finale, the dedication refers to the composer; the initials represent a nickname related to a capsized 1991 choir camp canoe. Near the beginning, the Tuba stop introduces the gesture of a dotted ascending octave, a motive from my anthem *The Resurrection* (2000, text by M. David Samples) as well as from Elgar’s anthem *Give unto the Lord* (Op. 74). Following two complete statements of the tune *Hereford*, a *fugato* section references Easter and the Blessed City of heaven, in the buildup to the final sung stanza. *Rockingham* returns as a descant, before the Amens summarizing Traherne’s offering of “my soul, my life, my all” to “make my sacrifice complete.” Please stand at the trumpet fanfare and join heartily.

(Allegro presto) Largamente

(Trumpets) *ff*

4. Rea - dy for all thy per - fect will, my acts of
 faith and love re - peat, - till death thy end - less mer - cies seal, and make my
 sac - ri - fice com - plete. A - men, A - men.

rall. al Fine



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|--------|---------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| M.G.G. | 3.9.14 | Otterbein United Methodist Church, Lancaster PA, 4 pm |
| D.B.B. | 3.13.14 | Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, New York NY, 1:15 pm |
| G.F.A. | 4.9.14 | Mechanics Hall, Worcester MA, 12 pm (excerpts) |
| B.B.B. | 4.13.14 | Saint John's Episcopal Church, West Hartford CT, 5 pm |
| T.M.M. | 10.7.14 | Seminar Presentation, Yale Institute of Sacred Music |
| M.H.O. | 2.22.15 | Saint Paul's Episcopal Church, Flint MI, 3:30 pm |
| H.R.N. | 3.8.15 | Saint Paul's Episcopal Church, Fairfield CT, 5 pm |
| M.U.M. | 3.11.15 | Saint Stephen's Pro-Cathedral, Wilkes-Barre PA, 11:20 am |
| U.G.H. | 3.15.15 | Saint Thomas Church, New York NY, 5:15 pm |
| J.E.A. | 3.27.15 | Trinity Church, Boston MA, 12:15 pm |
| J.F.D. | 3.31.15 | Trinity Church on the Green, New Haven CT, 7:30 pm |
| J.D.Y. | 4.17.15 | Christ Episcopal Church, Los Altos CA, 7 pm |
| C.H.E. | 5.3.15 | Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, Portland OR, 5 pm |
| S.P.L. | 5.20.15 | Methuen Memorial Music Hall, Methuen MA, 8 pm |
| C.A.P. | 5.24.15 | Church of Saint John the Evangelist, Newport RI, 4 pm |

Hereford Cathedral 14 August 2018 1.15 pm
 Saint Thomas Church, New York 5.5.19 5:15 pm

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