

L'Arbre de la Vie (The Tree of Life)

for organ

Peter Bannister

1998

- I. The Garden of Grace
- II. The Fall – Sword of Fire
- III. The Tree of Jerusalem

The work *L'Arbre de la Vie* (The Tree of Life) takes its inspiration from passages in both the Old and New Testaments referring to the mysterious and symbolic “Tree of Life” first found in the centre of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2). The composition opens with a calm, predominantly diatonic trio in response to the Biblical imagery of the harmony of the “Garden in the East” (Gen. 2:8) prior to the Fall. This is succeeded by a darker, more dissonant second section as forces of death and destruction are unleashed by mankind’s subsequent rebellion against God, resulting in expulsion from Eden and the appearance of a “flaming sword flashing back and forth” (Gen. 3:24) barring the way back to the Tree of Life.

In St Luke’s Gospel, we find the following enigmatic words of Jesus on his way to Golgotha: “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children [...] For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?” (Luke 23:28, 31). It is logical, in the light of this reference to the “tree” at the moment of the Crucifixion, that Christian tradition should have interpreted the Tree of Life as a metaphor for the Cross of Christ. In the Revelation of St John, Jerusalem reappears, no longer as the scene of Christ’s Passion, but rather as the Holy City, with the Tree of Life at its centre, standing on each side of the “river of the water of life” (Revelation 22:2), source of healing and redemption. The third section of the piece attempts to mirror the Biblical transformation of this “Tree of Jerusalem”, beginning with a crucifixion lament and ending with the eternal city “decorated with every kind of precious stone” (Rev. 21:19).