

The Advent Collects

Four Meditations on the Season of Advent

For unaccompanied SATB Choir

Words from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer

Music by Nigel Morgan

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The Collect

The collect, if not the oldest, is at least a very ancient form of prayer. It seems that out of the generalised and largely extempore prayers of the early church there developed three clearly recognisable types. There was the Litany, which was a form of prayer in dialogue between minister and congregation. There was the Sursum Corda ('Lift up your hearts'), which was a liturgical thanksgiving, specially appropriate in the Eucharist. And there was the Collect. This last was a good deal shorter than the other two and was intended to 'collect', that is, gather together into one and sum up the petitions, silent or expressed, that had gone before.

The chief characteristics of the collect have been described as variety and terseness. The latter quality we shall have frequent occasions to admire. The former does not imply that any one collect dealt with a number of different themes. In fact, there is normally only one specific point to each collect. It means that owing to its peculiar form the collect could be adapted to almost any occasion.

In its essential structure the collect is threefold. Any prayer built properly on these lines must contain an address, a petition, an ascription. This can be clearly seen for instance, in the collect for Trinity XVII:

Lord, we pray thee - that thy grace may always prevent and follow us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; - through Jesus Christ our Lord.

... most of the collects in our Book of Common Prayer descend from them through the Sarum Missal, which was the most popular liturgical book in mediaeval England. They were beautifully translated by Cranmer and his helpers for the first English book of common prayer in 1549, and were often considerably adapted in translating. Where the ancient collects were not considered suitable, new ones were composed, as for instance those of Advent I and II.

... in the composition of the daily offices, the collect found a place in the Mattins and Evensong because it gave a fixed tone of prayer for the day or the week.

It seems advisable to say at least this much about the historical and literary setting of the collects, for then we are more likely to appreciate what they set out to do and shall not expect from them something that they do not attempt. If recognition of proper limitations is true of all genuine art, then we shall be prepared to find in the collects one of the finest of literary forms.

From Wand, J. W. C. (1964) *Reflections on the Collects*. Mowbray, London

The Advent Collects

This work for unaccompanied SATB choir uses a simple but dramatic device to achieve a number of different ends. Each collect is prefaced by a diad which expands from a major second in Advent I to a major ninth in Advent IV. These diads may be realised in a number of different ways:

- as a continuous *piano* drone played on an organ, synthesiser, sung *bouche fermée* by a semi-chorus, or even pre-recorded;
- as an chord played by organ or synthesiser that is performed prior to and throughout the address, fading during the petition, to reappear for the ascription;
- as a chord struck on hand-chimes (ideally by members of the choir) at strategic pauses (suggestions are marked in the score) to enable singers to retune, not only musically, but spiritually to the content and progress of the prayer as it unfolds;
- similar to the above only played by organ, synthesiser or 'like' instruments (violas, tenor recorders, clarinets, muted trumpets);
- a more severe alternative is to leave out the drone diads altogether. But it is suggested that in rehearsal these diads are employed to 'centre' the choir on the material from which each collect is made. In this way the choir knows inwardly the diads but the listener remains unaware of this hidden reference.

Singers and conductor are encouraged to regard this work as a sequence of prayers and be alive to any possibility in their performance presentation that might enhance that quality. The use of silence is important, not just to retune to the drone but to allow the sound of phrases to react to the acoustics of the performance space. Performers should remember a prayer is, in this context, as much a meditation as an exhortation: they should strive to encompass both qualities within the performance . . . but only if appropriate. To this end the disposition and length of pauses, the use of the drone, tempo, dynamic and articulation markings, and suggestions for *solo*, *a2* and *a4* groupings must be seen as guide, no more.

The physical disposition of the choir in performance may improve the performers' understanding and the listeners' reception of the work. Basses and Tenors should be to the left, separated from Altos and Sopranos on the right with the drone instrument(s) occupying the centre space.

In some respects this work might be seen a companion piece to Avro Pärt's Seven Advent Antiphons, whose separate movements are often performed at Advent carol services as punctations between carols and readings. Only in such circumstances should The Advents Collects be broken up into separate movements.

Advent I

Almighty God,

give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever.

Advent II

Blessed Lord,
who hast caused all Holy Scriptures
to be written for our learning:
Grant that we may in such wise hear them,
read, mark, learn,
and inwardly digest them,
that by patience,
and comfort of thy holy Word,
we may embrace,
and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life,
which thou has given us
in our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Advent III

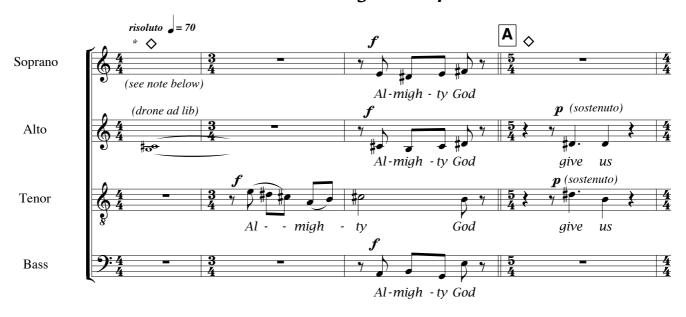
O Lord Jesu Christ,
who at thy first coming didst send
thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee:
Grant that the ministers and stewards
of thy mysteries may likewise
so prepare and make ready thy way,
by turning the hearts of the disobedient
to the wisdom of the just,
that at thy second coming to judge the world
we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight,
who livest and reignest
with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
ever one God,
world without end.

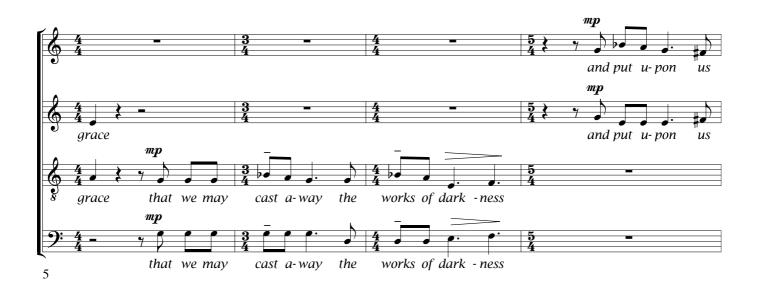
Advent IV

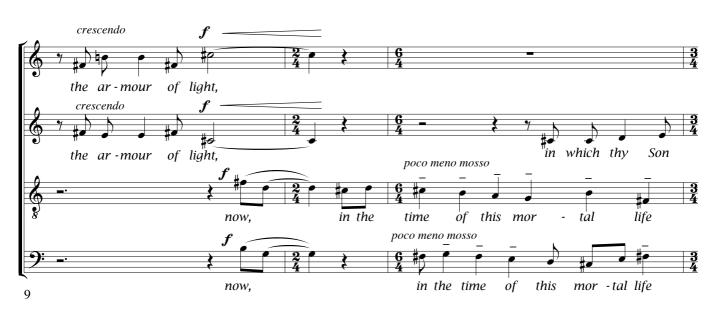
O Lord,

raise up (we pray thee) thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honour and glory, world without end.

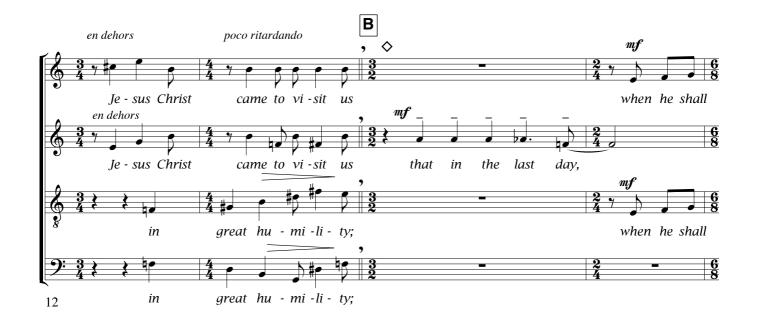
Advent I - Challenge & Response

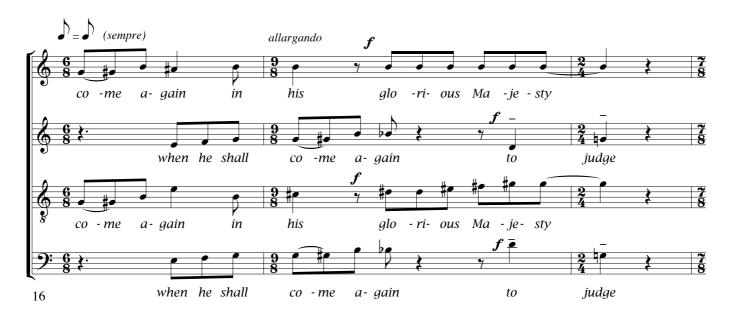


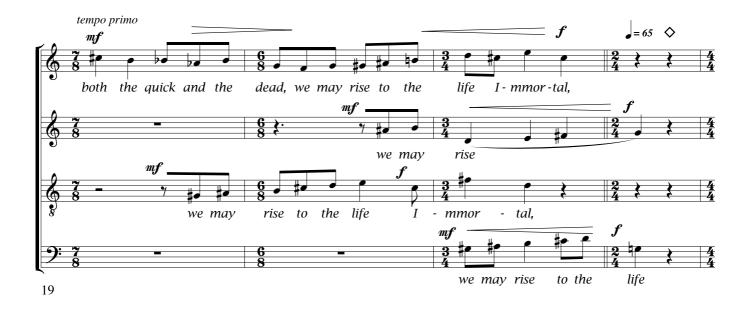


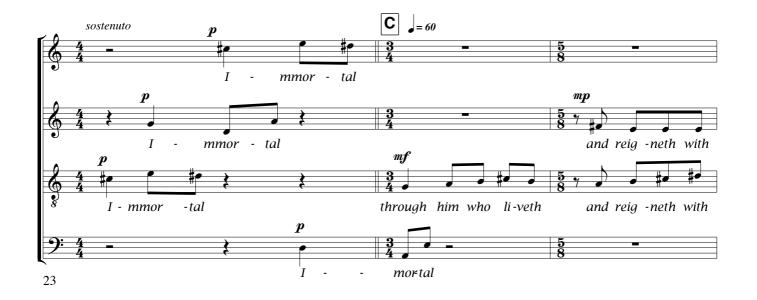


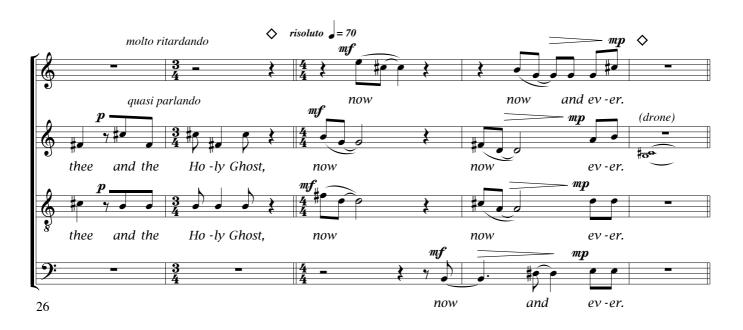
^{* �} indicates a 'possible' ensemble pause and iteration of the drone



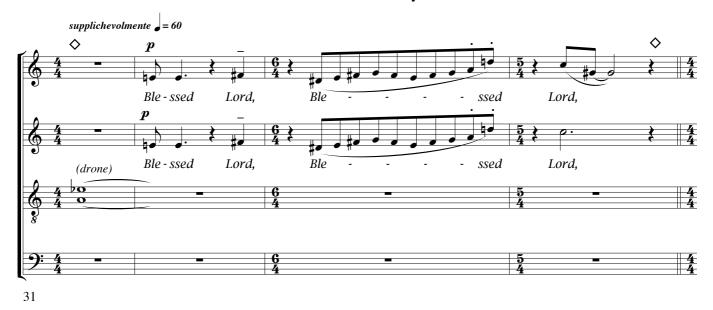


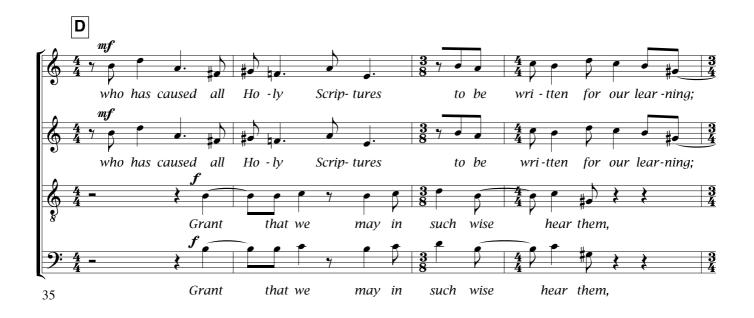


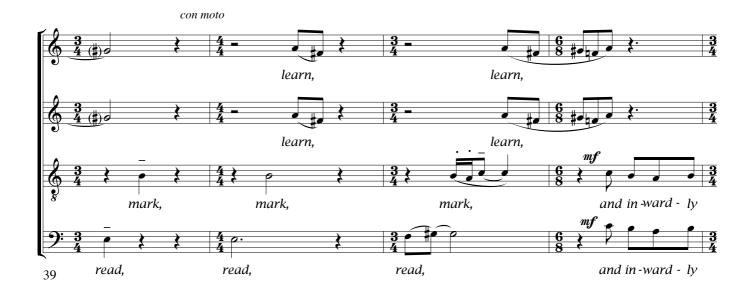


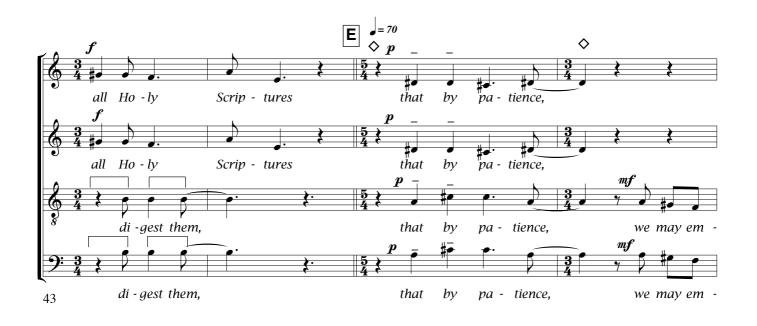


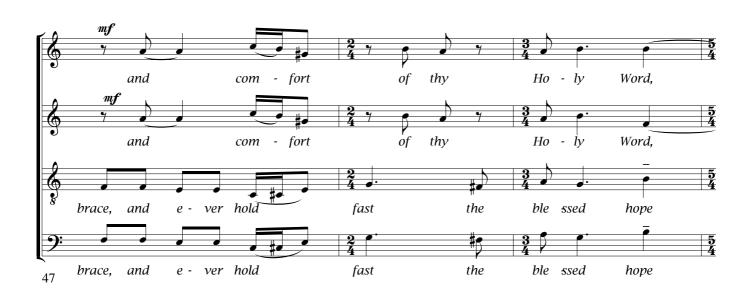
Advent II - The Scriptures

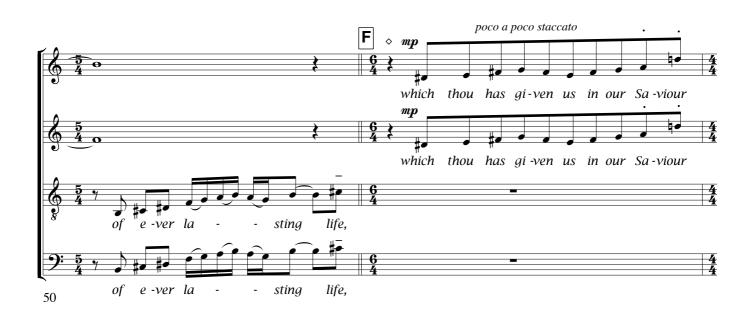


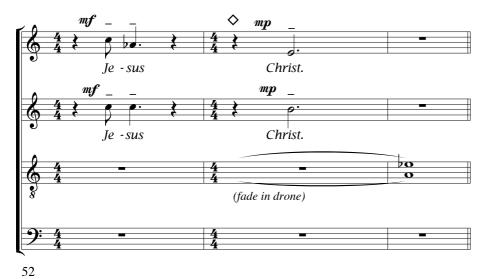




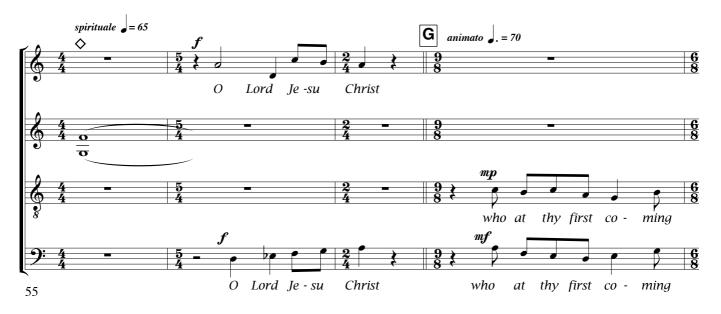


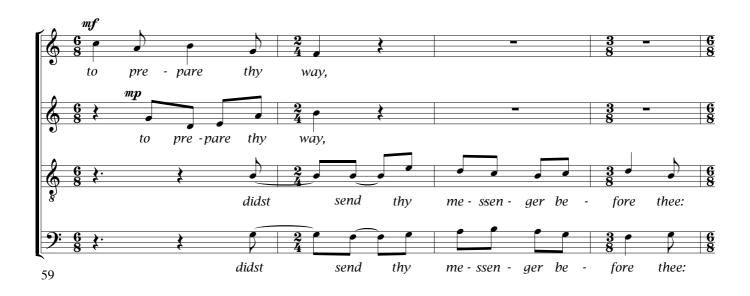


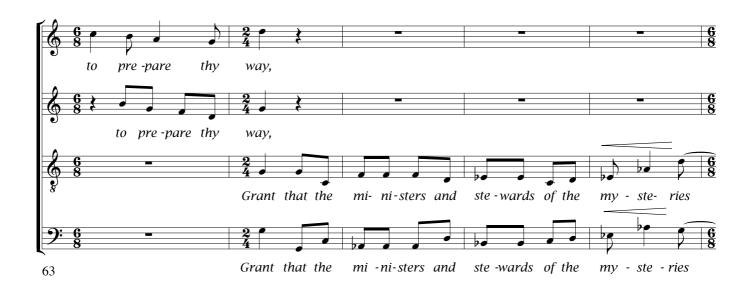


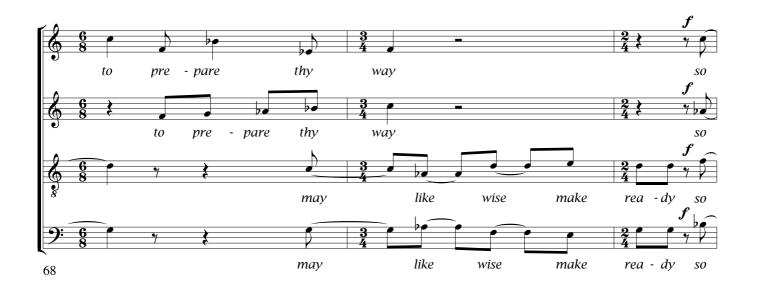


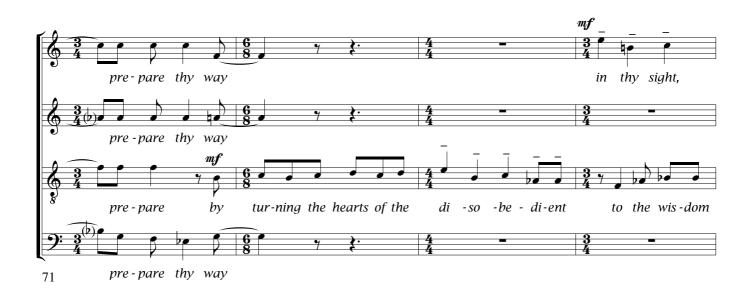
Advent III - The Ministry

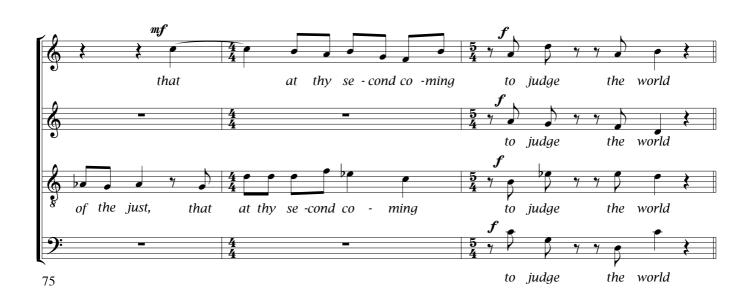


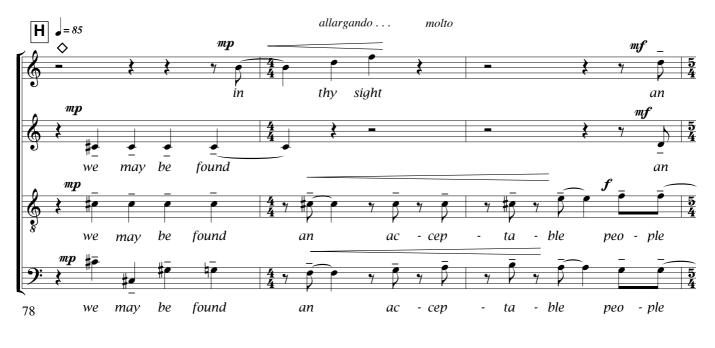


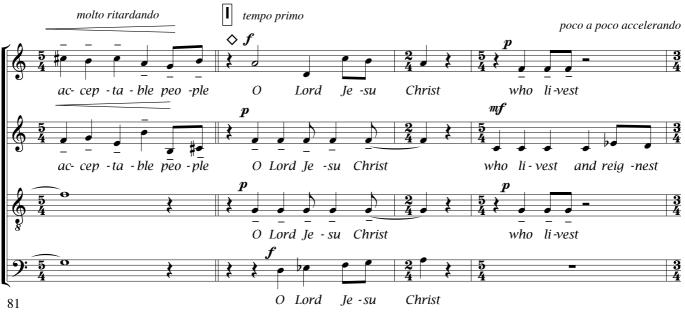


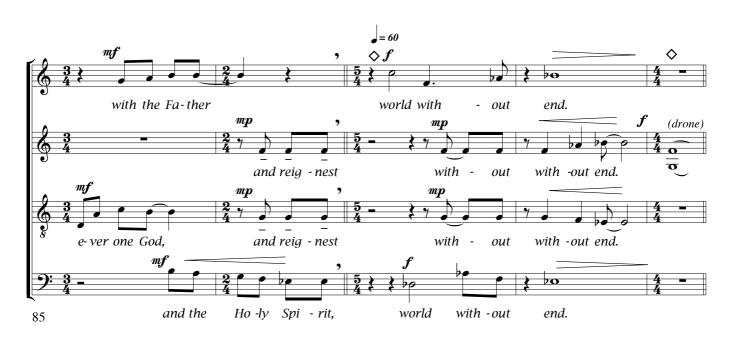












Advent IV - Succour

