

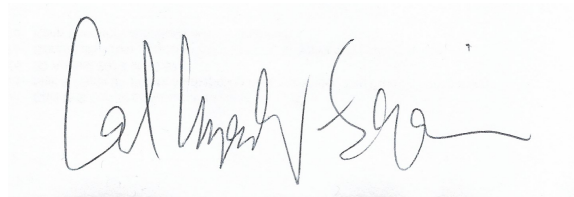
## The Cloud of Unknowing

This work for choir and organ in six movements, is a commission from the Erik Westberg Vocal Ensemble with support from the School of Music in Piteå – at Luleå University of Technology, Sweden. The composition builds on an astonishing text from the English medieval period with the name “The Cloud of Unknowing”. The text was written by an anonymous monk in the 14th century and revolves around the timeless question of how to understand and to know God. The only way to do that, according to “The Cloud” is to “abandon consideration of God's particular activities and attributes, and to surrender one's mind and ego to the realm of "unknowing", at which point one may begin to glimpse the nature of God”.

For the textual compilation for the compositional work, I also included some sentences from “The Book of Privy Counseling” – another formidable work attributed to the same anonymous 14th c. author. The two books form a rich texture of complicated theological considerations, out of which I compiled six themes, which later formed the basis for the six movements in the choral suite.

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Carl Unander-Scharin, Möja & Röder



The Cloud of Unknowing - Libretto

### 1. Cloud & Light

Be thou sure that clear sight shall never man have here in this life: but the feeling may men have through grace when God vouchsafeth. And therefore lift up thy love to that cloud: let God draw thy love up to that cloud and strive thou through help of His grace to forget all other thing.

He will sometimes peradventure send out a beam of ghostly light, piercing this cloud of unknowing that is betwixt thee and Him. Then shalt thou feel thine affection inflamed with the fire of His love, far more than I can tell thee, or may or will at this time.

Beat upon this high cloud of unknowing, and rest afterward. Use it to beat upon the cloud of darkness above you. And to subdue all distractions, consign them to the cloud of beneath you.

It is truly and perfectly comprehended in this little blind love pressed, when it is beating upon this dark cloud of unknowing. Then all other things are put down and forgotten.

Be thou sure that clear sight shall never man have here in this life:

### 2. Unknowing & Forgetting

Reject all thoughts, be they good or be they evil. Go after experience rather than knowledge. It is the Cloud of Unknowing, the secret love planted deep in an undivided heart.

This work shall be cast down and covered with a cloud of forgetting. Step above it stalwartly, mistily, with a devout and a pleasing stirring of love, and try to pierce that darkness above thee. And smite upon that thick cloud of unknowing with a sharp dart of longing love.

Put them and hold them far down under the cloud of forgetting, if you ever shall pierce the cloud of unknowing betwixt you and your God.

Yet do not misunderstand my words. I did not say that you must desire to un-be, for that is madness and blasphemy against God. I said that you must desire to loose the knowledge and experience of self. This is essential if you are to experience God's love as fully as possible here in this life. Reject all thoughts, be they evil or be they good.

### **3. God & Love**

Love may reach to God in this life, but not knowing. He may well be loved, but not thought. By love he may be gotten, by love he may be holden. He exists in all things, as their cause and their being.

For I want your thought of self to be as naked and as simple as your thought of God. So that you may be spiritually united to him without any fragmentation and scattering of your mind.

The mind which sees and experiences God as he is in his naked reality is no more separate from him than he is from his own being. Which as we know, is one in essence and nature.

The everlastingness of God is His length. His love is His breadth. His might is His height. And His wisdom is His deepness.

### **4. Darkness**

When I say darkness, I mean a lacking of knowing: as all that thing that thou knowest not, or else that thou hast forgotten, it is dark to thee; for thou seest it not with thy ghostly eye.

And for this reason it is not called a cloud of the air, but a cloud of unknowing.

Let that quiet darkness be your whole mind and like a mirror to you.

### **5. Soul & Body**

Nowhere bodily, is everywhere ghostly. Look then busily that thy ghostly work be nowhere bodily. And then wheresoever that that thing is, on the which thou wilfully workest in thy mind in substance. Surely there art thou in spirit, as verily as thy body is in that place that thou art bodily.

And therefore be wary that thou conceive not bodily that which is meant ghostly. Although that a thing be never so ghostly in itself, nevertheless yet if it shall be spoken of, since it so is that speech is a bodily work wrought with the tongue, the which is an instrument of the body, it behoveth always be spoken in bodily words. Nowhere bodily, is everywhere ghostly

### **5. Prayer**

That which I am I offer to you, O lord, for you are it entirely.

Go no further, but rest in this naked, stark, elemental awareness that you are as you are.

Have this intent lapped and folden in one word, and fasten this word to thine heart.

It is the shortest work of all work that man may imagine.

And herefore it is written, that short prayer pierceth heaven.

Amen.

Text by the anonymous author, called "The Cloud" – 14th century England.  
Compilation and adaptation by Carl Unander-Scharin, 2019.