Communion Meditation on Psalm 139

John G. Barr

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Communion Meditation
on Psalm 139

“You Are Before Me Lord”

By John Barr

Organ

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Commissioned by Dr. Rudolf Zuiderveld for the inauguration of the Brombaugh organ (Op. 35) at First Presbyterian Church, Springfield, IL and dedicated to Rudolf Zuiderveld and David Shane

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"You Are Before Me Lord"

Text included for illustration:

SURSUM CORDA; Alfred Morton Smith, 1941
Setting by John G. Barr (b. 1938)

* See page 10 for registration suggestions.

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You are before me, Lord, you are behind,

And over me you have spread out your hand;
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
Too high to grasp, too great to understand.

Then from your spirit where, Lord, shall I go;
(Gt.)
And from your presence where, Lord, shall I fly?

If I ascend to heaven you are there,
And still are with me if in hell I lie.
Your mighty hand will rest upon me still,

If I should take my flight into the dawn,

If I should dwell on ocean's farthest shore,

Your mighty hand will rest upon me still,

rall.

And your right hand will guard me evermore.
If I should say "Let darkness cover me,

And I shall hide within the veil of night," Surely the darkness is not dark to you;

The night is as the day the darkness light.
Search me, O God, search me and know my heart;

Try me, O God, my mind and spirit try;

Keep me from any path that gives you pain,
Suggested Registration and Piston Configuration

Piston changes are indicated in circles: ☐

Gen. 1  Great: Principal 8'
Swell: Viole de Gambe 8', Viole Celeste
Pedal: Gedacktbass 16', Bass Flute 8'

Gen. 2  Great: Principal 8', Super Octave 2'
Swell: Bourdon 8', Flute a bec 2'
Pedal: Gen. 1 + Flute 4'

Gen. 3  Great: Gen. 2 + Octave 4'
Swell: Gen. 2 + Prestant 4'
Pedal: same as Gen. 2

Gen. 4  Great: Rohrflote 8', Gt->Gt 4'
Swell: Bourdon 8', Flute Harmonique 4'
Pedal: Same as Gen. 3

Gen. 5  Swell: Bourdon 8', Prestant 4',
        Basson-Hautbois 16'
Pedal: Subbass 16', Octave 8', Choralbass 4',
        Basson 16'

Gen. 6  Great: Principal 8', Octave 4'
Swell: Viole de Gambe 8', Voile Celeste 8',
        Bourdon 8', Flute Harmonique 4'
Pedal: Subbass 16', Gedacktbass 16',
        Bass Flute 8'

If a given organ has separate Swell, Great, and Pedal pistons, the registration given for generals 4 and 5 could be registered on divisional pistons, allowing the use of four generals rather than six.
JOHN BARR was born in Myrtle Point, Oregon in 1938. After taking piano lessons since the age of six, he began organ and composition study in college. He graduated in 1960 from Manchester College in northern Indiana, receiving a B.S. in Music Education. He received master's and doctor's degrees in sacred music from the School of Sacred Music at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, where his teachers included Donald Coats and Robert S. Baker for organ and Joseph Goodman for composition.

Dr. Barr was music teacher at Hillcrest School for Missionary Children in Jos, Nigeria, 1962-65; Organist/Choir Director at University Presbyterian Church, Madison, WI, 1965-68; and Professor of Organ and Piano at Bridgewater College, Bridgewater, VA, 1968-2003 retiring as Professor Emeritus. Most of this time he has also been organist at Bridgewater Church of the Brethren, a position in which he continues to serve.

He has given a number of organ recitals, mainly in Virginia, and has numerous organ preludes published by publishers including Warner Bros., H.W. Gray, and Wayne Leupold Editions. He and his wife, Ann Lootsma, have two grown children, one son-in-law, and one grandson.