Cantatas for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity
Tewkesbury Abbey

It seems to me that the daily media brew of sour milk, froth and spin that is dished up every breakfast-time pretty well guarantees that the really absorbing issues of the day will be dealt with superficially. The treatment quickly degenerates into posturing, savage personal attacks and knee-jerk dismissive jibes. Luckily we've come through this half of the pilgrimage remarkably unscathed – so far. Perhaps ours is just too marginal or wacky a way of marking the new millennium to engender high-profile media interest – for which we should probably be grateful. Yet there are signs of a change in the way people look to 'classical' music to fill some perceived loss in the spiritual make-up of their lives. 'This quiet, organic revolution in listening habits' was how David Sinclair described it in *The Times* (21 July this year), a nostalgia for 'a time before the delights of digital sampling, synthesised sounds and machine-generated rhythm tracks'.

Sinclair is not referring to Bach's cantatas, of course – more's the pity! But if anything has put a spotlight on the problems of performing sacred yet intimate music in the vast secular roominess of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw or, still more, the Royal Albert Hall, it has been this year's pilgrimage. Of course there will always be overriding arguments in favour of reaching out to a far larger public, the bedrock audience for classical music that would otherwise have difficulty in reaching us in the small or remote churches where we have often been performing this year. Yet much as we looked forward to taking part in the Proms, several of us felt turned inside out, disorientated by the experience of performing this fragile music in the huge, torrid spaces of the Albert Hall, and of juxtaposing more 'public' works like the fourth Orchestral Suite and first Brandenburg Concerto with two such intimate church cantatas as BWV 24 and BWV 185.

So it was a relief to find ourselves the very next day back on course with the pilgrimage, this time in Tewkesbury Abbey as part of the Cheltenham Festival. Reverting to a diet of cantatas one can't help feeling that the sustained popularity of Bach's orchestral suites and concerti gives a somewhat lopsided view of him, and that as a result many people miss out on the rich displays of invention and insights that are to be found in the cantatas. One senses that Bach in his cantatas was not intent on 'pure composition', devoid of performance ramifications and opportunities, for these are scrupulously crafted musical elaborations tailored to the Gospel readings and the liturgy and to the unfolding of the seasons, as well as to the individual performers available to him on any given day. To display the whole range of artistic possibilities was a practical, not an abstract, goal: his pursuit of musical science was a means of gaining 'insight into the depths of the wisdom of the world', according to the statement given on his behalf by J A Birnbaum, and proof that 'music has been mandated by God's spirit', as he himself noted in his copy of Calov's Bible commentary. Whatever one's own beliefs, how can one doubt that a sense of God's grace was manifest to Bach in all the music he was composing, rehearsing and performing – always assuming that it was done in the spirit of devotion? Christoph Wolff refers to Bach's 'never-ending musical empiricism, which deliberately tied theoretical knowledge to practical experience', and suggests that his compositions 'as the exceedingly careful elaborations that they are, may epitomise nothing less than the difficult task of finding for himself an argument for the existence of God – perhaps the ultimate goal of his musical science' (*J S Bach, The Learned Musician*). Scientists like Newton and Johann Heinrich Winckler not only believed that theological principles were capable of empirical demonstration, but saw no conflict between science and Christianity. Bach too 'would see the directing hand of the world's creator in the branch of science he knew best and probably better than

anyone else in his day’.

But he does not always make it easy for us. How, for example, is one supposed to take the opening lines of BWV 24 **Ein ungefärbt Gemüte** – ‘Ein ungefärbt Gemüte / von deutscher Treu und Güte’ (‘an unstained mind / of German truth and goodness’)? Perhaps the words are no more selectively chauvinistic than the seventeenth-century English habit of identifying with Israel as the chosen people. The Gospel for the day, after all, is ‘judge not, and ye shall not be judged’ (Luke 6:36-42), advising the hypocrite to ‘cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother’s eye’. Bach’s music in BWV 24 has no surface gloss: you have to work your way under its skin and not to get irritated (as Gillies Whittaker evidently did) by the ‘dry, didactic statements and crude denunciations of the failings of mankind’ of Neumeister’s text.

Bach opens with an aria for alto, a stately minuet-style piece with unison violins and violas that produces its own unusual chemistry in evoking an ‘unstained mind’. The tenor recitative which follows is an exemplary mini-sermon in its own right, taking as its theme ‘honesty [as] one of God’s gifts’, since ‘by nature our hearts are wont to consort with naught but evil’. As the motto for his concluding arioso he exhorts us to ‘emulate the dove and live without deceit and malice’. ‘Do as you would be done by’, in effect. This is certainly the burden of the central movement and the moment when Bach brings out his big guns to ram the point home: for the first time in the cantata we hear the chorus, with a clarino atop the full string band, in a perplexing double exposition of the axiom ‘Alles nun, das ihr wollet, dass euch die Leute tun sollen, das tut ihr ihnen’ (‘Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them’). It is given first as a swinging triple time ‘prelude’, then as a double fugue (still in triple time) marked *vivace allegro*, presented first by the four *concertisten* and then by the full choir. Its theme is smooth, its counter-theme broken, jumpy, nervy

even. As a way of announcing his choir (it even starts after a silent quaver beat) it is neither what one would expect nor easy to pull off. It took many goes in rehearsal before we arrived at an even passably satisfying reading, basing it on an *alla breve* proportion for the fugue.

A fire-and-brimstone attack on hypocrisy follows as a bass accompagnato (No.4) with savage chordal stabs by the strings. After eighteen bars these give way to a more emollient plea, ‘may dear God spare me from it’, given in an arioso. A gentle piece (No.5) for twin oboes d’amore and tenor exhorting us to constancy and truth precedes an extended chorale, Johann Heermann’s ‘O Gott, du frommer Gott’, its eight lines split by watery or pastoral interludes for the oboes and strings (and a pulsated clarino line in low tessitura). It ends with a plea for ‘ein unverletzte Seel’ (an unsullied soul) ‘und rein Gewissen’ (and a clear conscience). How different from the tortuous penitential exclamations of last Sunday’s cantatas!

A far earlier piece, BWV 185 **Barmherziges Herze der ewigen Liebe** was composed in Weimar in 1715 to a text by Salomo Franck and revived by Bach in Leipzig in 1723 and again in 1746/7. We took the last revisions as the basis of our performance. Whittaker’s analysis gets choked by ‘the briars of obstruction’ he sees in Franck’s words, strewn ‘so abundantly in the path of the young composer’, while Schweitzer feels that Franck’s ‘bland, lesson-like libretto’ diminishes the beauty of this work. I’m not so sure. Bach finds convincing ways to mirror Franck’s harmless paraphrase of the Gospel injunction to ‘be merciful, as your Father also is merciful’. Cast as a siciliano for soprano and tenor with cello continuo, there is a warm glow to this opening duet, with trills on each of the main beats to signify the flickering flame of love, and a plea to ‘come melt my heart’. Agricola’s chorale-tune ‘Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ’ is meanwhile intoned by a clarino hovering above the two amorous vocal lines. The gentlest imaginable accompagnato for alto and strings (No.2), extolling the virtues of charity

and the need for forgiveness, almost comes to grief with the words ‘Store up a capital which then one day God shall repay with interest’. The idea behind this clumsy metaphor is further elaborated in the opulent instrumental textures of the central aria for alto, oboe and strings, ‘Sei bemüht in dieser Zeit’ (‘Be at pains in this life... to scatter ample seed’ (No.3), the cantata’s only movement in a major key, for which Bach etches in melodic outline the gestures of the sower while hinting at the rich harvest in prospect. Nathalie Stutzmann’s sumptuous yet transparent contralto seemed just right for this aria, especially in the glowing afternoon light of Tewkesbury Abbey.

The final aria is for bass and a continuo provided by all the strings at the octave. Its start, drawing on the stock-in-trade of contemporary Scarlattian opera, makes one fear for the worst. But any text containing the word ‘Kunst’ was likely to prod Bach into inventive action, and he does not disappoint, neither in the ingenuity of his solutions to setting unpromising material (including a canon at a beat’s distance between voice and continuo), nor in the gentle, parodistic way he portrays the rhetorical displays of a pompous preacher. Duke Wilhelm Ernst was given to preaching to his entire staff and entourage at the Weimar court and to holding spot-check catechisms. Was he the intended target here? Surely not, though the relationship between him and his *Konzertmeister* was soon to deteriorate rapidly.

Strikingly different in mood is BWV 177 **Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ**, composed in 1732, a chorale cantata *per omnes versus* based on Agricola’s hymn set unaltered and with no recitatives. For the opening chorus Bach singles out a concertino violin with two oboes answered by the full strings to weave an elaborate, instrumental fantasia before the three lower voices enter, followed by the oboe-doubled *cantus firmus* in the sopranos. Even by his standards the interweaving of the three lower voices is emotionally charged and poignant: penitential writing at its lyrical best. The three arias are all

long, but beautifully contrasted: for alto with continuo (No.2), a minuet-like soprano aria with oboe da caccia (No.3), and a jaunty, ritornello-formed piece for tenor with the unusual obbligato combination of violin and bassoon (No.4). It is a plea for steadfastness and mercy, its irrepressible cheeriness twice giving way to something much darker at the words 'errett' vom Sterben', marked pianissimo and then 'dying' away to a fermata. The cantata ends with a strong, plain, four-part harmonisation of Agricola's hymn.

Tewkesbury Abbey stands at the confluence of the Severn and the Avon, roughly equidistant from the Cotswolds and the Malvern Hills. It looks as if it were built to last, and to survive turbulent times – the Wars of the Roses and the dissolution of the monasteries [and now, in 2007, devastating floods]. The nave is dominated by colossal cylindrical columns, each more than nine metres high and two metres in diameter and surmounted by a Romanesque arch. I got the impression that everyone in the choir and orchestra felt relieved that we were back on course with this concert: an inspiring setting, a happy congruence of music and architecture, a true pilgrimage station and a still, attentive festival audience.

Cantatas for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity
Blasiuskirche, Mühlhausen

Bach was twenty-two when he took up his second professional post – at Mühlhausen. It lasted for just one year, from June 1707 to 1708. The old canard proposes that he found himself caught in the crossfire between the Pietist priest Johann Adolf Frohne, officiatory at the *Blasiuskirche* where he was employed, and the Orthodox priest Georg Christian Eilmar at the *Marienkirche*, the other main church. A more plausible explanation for his early departure is that the opportunity to

inaugurate the new organ at the Weimar court brought with it an offer he could hardly have refused and the chance to work alongside a more stimulating and professional group of musicians than the ragbag of part-timers, amateurs and town musicians he had been allotted in Mühlhausen. Yet Mühlhausen was a 'free imperial city' like Lübeck, where he had recently experienced Buxtehude's thriving regime. Councillors in such cities were answerable directly to the emperor in Vienna and not to some local princeling, so it must have held attractions for him. And it was here that he set himself his life's goal, the task of creating 'a regulated or orderly church music to the glory of God', a colossally ambitious venture, as his subsequent Leipzig output attests. By moving to Weimar, he explained to the Mühlhausen city fathers, he hoped to be able to pursue 'the object which concerns me most, the betterment of church music, free from the opposition and vexation I encountered here'. Nonetheless he maintained good relations with the city long after his move to Weimar, returning to perform new *Ratswahl* cantatas and to keep an eye on the repair work for the organ.

I felt very much inclined to include two specifically Mühlhausen pieces, the magnificent *Aus der Tiefen rufe ich, Herr, zu dir* (BWV 131) and *Gott ist mein König* (BWV 71), besides the two surviving Leipzig cantatas for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity, BWV 88 and 93. Bach's surviving cantatas of this Mühlhausen period are not written to a single stylistic formula. Each one comes up with a fresh and compelling musical solution to Biblical exegesis. In the case of the penitential cantata BWV 131 **Aus der Tiefen**, Bach confines himself to verses from Psalm 130 together with two stanzas of a chorale by Bartholomäus Ringwaldt (1588). He composed it at Pastor Eilmar's behest, possibly for a commemorative service following the devastating fire of 30 May 1707 that destroyed 360 houses in the lower part of the town very close to St Blasius, or for its anniversary the following year. (On one of the old houses I noticed a carved inscription which seemed to translate as

‘Although the flames have taken everything from me, my faith is still secure; who trusts in God and believes after this shall have eternal joy.’) Whether it was the poignancy of the occasion that inspired him or the pathos of Luther’s translation of the *De profundis*, Bach’s striving for an optimal characterisation of the text led to music of powerful, if slightly unequal, eloquence.

His achievement is all the greater in that here he could not fall back on a simple compositional device such as the omnipresent chorale melody that unifies all seven of the stanzas of BWV 4 *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, his probationary piece for Mühlhausen, and so provide a scaffold for his musical realisation. The psalm text demanded contrasts of style, form and expression. One senses Bach surveying the immediate backdrop of stylistic antecedents. Standing four-square behind his *Aus der Tiefen* is the family’s own corpus of musical responses to penitential texts, seven of them by his elder cousin Johann Christoph (though how many of these he was familiar with at this point in his life is hard to gauge). A common thread of what has been called Luther’s ‘penitential exaltation’ runs through the German psalm settings of Heinrich Schütz and the elder Bach, and is now picked up by JS Bach for the first time. In all three composers one comes across instances where the emotional utterance is so raw once it has been channelled into their music that it leaves one choked. Was Bach reminded of his cousin’s frequent outpourings of anguish when he sat down to compose the slow fugal chorus (No.3) to the words ‘I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait’? This is the central and most telling portion of the work, announced by three full-blooded affirmations in block harmony – ‘Ich harre des Herrn’ – which are separated by little cadenza flourishes for two individual voices. From here the chorus expands into a long-arched, essentially vocal, fugue. The emotional tug of the music is lodged in the succession of diminished sevenths, major and minor ninths strategically placed by Bach on strong beats to emphasise the

‘waiting’ or ‘yearning’. As a result, each successive fugal entry gains in poignancy and heightened delivery. It is the instrumental fabric, that extra layer of invention, which gives this movement its extraordinary distinction, his novel and masterly way of interlacing oboe and violin (and later violas and even bassoon) in decorative counterpoint to the impassioned voice-leading of the chorus. Expressive gestures such as these, and a strain of mysticism in this cantata, suggest an affinity with another noble setting of the *De profundis*, that of the French composer Michel-Richard de Lalande, composed in 1689. What both versions share is an overall dignity and sobriety of expression and, in particular, parallel ways of layering voices and instruments in dense contrapuntal webs of exceptional intensity.

An original feature of *Aus der Tiefen* is the way Bach shapes his themes to reflect the texts so aptly. For the impressive chorus which concludes the work, he constructs a sequence made up of four interlocking clauses: ‘Let Israel’ (three assertive blocks of open harmony), ‘hope in the Lord:’ (imitative counterpoint with instrumental interjection), ‘for with the Lord there is mercy,’ (hymn-like with decorative oboe cantilena), ‘and with him is plenteous redemption’ (a vigorous imitative treatment with antiphonal figures in *suspiratio*). This leads without a break into an independent fugal sequence, its theme and counter-theme skilfully adjusted to reflect the dual character of the final sentence: ‘And He shall redeem Israel’, a brief head-motif with an extended melismatic ‘tail’ for the word ‘erlösen’ (‘redeem’), ‘from all her iniquities’, by means of a chromatically rising counter-subject. In this final section Bach distances himself from the earlier motet-like structures of his forebears’ music and reveals that he is *au fait* with devices such as this extended fugue subject and its chromatic answer, taken over from contemporary Italian practice and developed by north German composers such as Johann Theile and Georg Österreich.

Conclusive evidence of Bach’s establishment as *de facto* musical

capellmeister in Mühlhausen comes with the 'congratulatory church motet' he was commissioned to compose for the town council elections in February 1708. There is nothing else quite like BWV 71 **Gott ist mein König** in Bach's oeuvre. No other work of his is laid out on such a grand scale in terms of its deployment of four separate instrumental 'choirs', set against a vocal consort of four singers, an optional *Capelle* of ripienists and an organ. The closest model for Bach's work both in style and in time lies in the last two oratorios of Buxtehude, in which the city of Lübeck mourned the death of its emperor Leopold I and paid homage to his successor Joseph I in December 1705 with theatrical splendour. Bach was undoubtedly present and *Gott ist mein König*, composed two years later, is one of his many tributes to Buxtehude, a distillation of the potent experience of those Lübeck *Abend-Musiken*, of which only the texts survive.

Bach was writing for a lavish political celebration in which civic Mühlhausen, proud of its independence, put its best foot forward. On the morning of 4 February 1708 the big church bell of the Marienkirche tolled from 7am to 8am. Two brass bands heralded the official process of forty-two councilmen and six burgomasters from the town hall to the church, the outgoing officials leading the way followed by their newly-elected successors, with civil servants bringing up the rear. Within the church, after the initial hymns, came first the sermon and then the centrepiece, Bach's motet, intended to greet the new council. Its text contained a topical reference to the age of at least one of the burgomasters (an octogenarian), a prayer for the good governance of the town, passing allusions to the War of the Spanish Succession and a tribute to the Emperor Joseph I, all intermingled with Biblical citations. After the blessing and final hymn the newly-elected councillors aligned themselves in front of the church porch 'under the open skies'; here they took their oaths, which were read to them by the *Syndicus* standing in the doorway. Thereafter the procession regrouped with a new council

now at its head and wended its way back to a splendid feast in the Town Hall.

Two of the newly elected burgomasters were sufficiently impressed and gratified by Bach's contribution to pay for the printing of the score and parts. That this, of all Bach's cantatas, was to be the only one to appear in print during his lifetime may strike us as ironic. For all its charm and ingenuity of instrumentation, its delight in bold contrasts of sound, its fresh and imaginative handling of this complicated array of voices and instruments, *Gott ist mein König*, perhaps on account of its strangely assembled text, is somewhat disjointed and short-winded. It is the only one of the Mühlhausen cantatas which *feels* like an early work, part of his novitiate. But there is one exception, the penultimate chorus (No.6), the plum of the cantata. Setting a verse from Psalm 74, 'O deliver not the soul of thy turtledove unto the multitude of the wicked', Bach portrays, in what can only be a very personal tone of voice, the situation of the beleaguered Christian or, indeed, the hard-pressed musician. It is a movement of extraordinary reticence, delicacy and the utmost tonal subtlety. Where in 'Christ lag' he used the interval of the falling second to express grief, here he uses its obverse, a rising semitone, to convey yearning – another example of *pathopoeia*, and straightforwardly evocative of the cooing of the turtledove. An impression of Frenchness faintly redolent of Couperin is enhanced by the delicately applied tone-colour, 'choirs' of recorders and cello contrasted with those of the reeds – two oboes and bassoon – and the string ensemble. A gentle, undulating figure beginning in the cello gradually permeates the whole instrumental ensemble – awakening a whole flock of turtledoves as it were – while the voices fade away softly and in unison, intoning five bars of Gregorian-like chant. They suggest a melancholic longing for something out of reach. This movement is one long enchantment, one of the few instances in Bach's vocal music where he allows himself to mix nostalgic unreality, mystery and sensual

delight. As with his cantatas for the Fourth Sunday after Easter (SDG Vol 23) the closest parallel is with some of Rameau's pastoral dances, and in this style perhaps both were ahead of their time – by more than a hundred years.

What puzzles me is what made Bach abruptly turn his back on the incredibly fertile formulae he had hit upon in these early cantatas, and around 1714 opt for 'closed form'? Both these early works (as with BWV 4 and 198) are so full of wit and fantasy and you can bet that sooner or later you're going to be wrong-footed by his sudden – almost capricious – changes of mood, speed or texture, geared to the expression of each clause of the text. Was it the influence of Erdmann Neumeister, the young Lutheran theologian and poet who revolutionised cantata texts by bringing them in line with Italian opera scenes, that made Bach jettison all that fluidity and caprice for closed form? Did he come to feel that if he was to produce sermons in music, then, as a musician-preacher, he simply had to have *secco* recitative in his arsenal to deliver the rhetorical punchlines and exhortations? Or was it the fresh challenges he saw in closed form movements like chorale fantasias and the varied twists he saw he could give to standard *da capo* arias? Perhaps we'll have found out by the end of this year...

In the first of his two Leipzig cantatas for this Sunday Bach's recipe in BWV 93 is to structure the entire work on a hymn assigned to Trinity 5, one of his clear favourites (and evidently a favourite of Brahms, too, when he composed his *German Requiem*) **'Wer nun den lieben Gott lässt walten'**, with both words and melody by Georg Neumark (1641). Although it belongs to his second cycle and its opening chorale fantasia is appropriately sophisticated, Bach seems to be delving back to his childhood roots, not just on account of this cherished hymn but in the way he structures it in two of the movements (Nos 2 and 5), based on the catechismal question-and-answer formula by which he learnt all his lessons. So he takes a stanza of Neumark's

hymn and announces it line by line: ‘What can heavy cares avail us? What good is our woe and lament?’, always lightly embellished by the soloist, and then interrupts it in free recitative by means of an answering text: ‘They only oppress the heart with untold agony and endless fear and pain’, and so on, as in a medieval trope. It means that one needs to be constantly alert to Bach’s free treatment of Neumark’s chorale (or else utterly familiar with it, as was his congregation) in order to follow the astonishing ways he varies, decorates, abridges or repeats it – all for rhetorically expressive ends. In the opening fantasia the four vocal *concertisten* lead off in pairs singing an embellished version of all six lines of the hymn *before* it is given ‘neat’ in block harmony by the (full) choir, the lower voices then fanning out in decorative counterpoint. In the central movement (No.4) of this symmetrically conceived work, the hymn stands out in its pure form, like gold capitals in a medieval missal. Its wordless delivery is given by unison violins and violas, while the soprano and alto ornament a lyrical contraction of the tune. In the two arias the disguise is even subtler. It re-emerges paraphrased in the string-accompanied tenor aria (No.3). If we wonder why the steps of this elegant *passepied* are halted every two bars, the tenor soon makes it clear: ‘Remain silent for a while’ (‘Man halte nur ein wenig stille’) – and listen to what God has to say. There is a further tease in the final aria, ‘Ich will auf den Herren schaun’ (No.6). In their carefree exchanges, the soprano and oboe seem to assure us that for the first time in the cantata, we are in a chorale-free zone. Then at the mention ‘He is the true miracle-worker’ (‘Er ist der rechte Wundermann’) in comes the hymn tune, unaltered for its *Abgesang*. One wonders whether this profligacy of invention and wit was relished or wasted on Bach’s first listeners.

Other than by presenting Neumark’s hymn in magisterial harmony as the conclusion to his offering on this same Sunday two years later, Bach’s approach in BWV 88 **Siehe, ich will viel Fischer aussenden**

could hardly be more different. This is a double-decker cantata in which he dispenses with a choral opening, appears to ignore the Gospel of the day and turns instead to an Old Testament text reporting on the search parties (fishermen and hunters) sent by the Lord to gather in his scattered people (Jeremiah 16:16). The extended bass aria opens as a lilting 6/8 *barcarolle* with two oboes d'amore and strings. Suddenly the scene changes to a hunt, 'allegro quasi presto', with a rampaging pair of high horns added to the orchestra as though negotiating a steeplechase course. The slow beat and sinuousness of the one, with its constantly varied placement of 'Siehe!', and the multiple syncopations of the other, make this a hard nut to crack in terms of ensemble. Bach steals the rhetorical gambit of a preacher in the following recitative, ending with the question 'and does He abandon us to the foe's deceit and spite?' 'No!' answers the tenor to his own question with force at the start of the ensuing aria with oboe da caccia obbligato. Bach holds back the entry of the full strings until the singer has finished, and to compensate for the absent opening ritornello. Declamatory recitative used as a heightened form of speech is then hoisted onto a higher level for the clinching theological statement in a minuet-like aria. Music's powers are convincingly on display.

Part II opens with a direct quotation from the Gospel for the tenor acting as evangelist ('Jesus sprach zu Simon'), whereupon the *Vox Domini* (bass) launches into a triple-rhythm arioso over an energetic cello ostinato beginning in speech rhythm but expanding into melismatic dialogue with the continuo. A duet for soprano and alto, with unison violins and oboe d'amore, is cast as a two-part invention, with a memorable sighing motif (voices in thirds) reserved for the last line. At last the relevance of those fishermen and hunters in Part I becomes clear, the opening intended to remind us of that lakeside scene when Peter, the fisherman, was first identified as a disciple. If so it is perhaps an early example of that 'dialectic of modernity' to which scholars are so

partial: Bach's way of cultivating memory on the part of his listeners.

Another thought that kept recurring this week was prompted by the return of Georg Neumark's haunting chorale tune in the two cantatas for this Sunday. What is it about this tune that convinces me that it is *old* – just the fact that it is modal? Its distinctive elegiac air and intimacy of expression, particularly in Bach's treatment of it, inclines one to 'tacet' the doubling instruments and to perform it very quietly.

The response of the audiences at both the 'open' rehearsals on the Saturday evening – mostly locals, we were told – and the Sunday itself was attentive and rapturous even by the standards of this pilgrimage, as though in acknowledgment that a genuine thirst had to some extent been slaked.

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From a journal written in the course of the Bach Cantata Pilgrimage