

Cantatas for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

Jakobskirche, Köthen

When Bach arrived in Köthen in 1717 to join young Prince Leopold's musical establishment as 'Kapellmeister and director of our chamber music', he would have understood where his main priorities were expected to lie, and that nothing would be expected of him in terms of providing new church music. Prince Leopold, like his father before him, was of a strictly 'Reformed' persuasion and the Calvinist liturgy practised in the *Jakobskirche*, the main church of the town next to the market square, allowed no place for figural music – except on very special occasions. As we entered the splendid late Gothic church to rehearse I tried to envisage how it must have looked in March 1729, 'beautifully illuminated though draped in black throughout', for the late-night state interment of the Prince's body in the royal vault. Did Bach feel uncomfortable, or perhaps even a tiny bit vindicated, performing in this church for a change, with Anna Magdalena and his eldest son Friedemann at his side, paying his final respects to his beloved former patron? During his five and a half years' posting in Köthen, he and his family had been obliged, as was Leopold's dowager mother, to worship in the Lutheran *Agnuskirche*, and just as he had experienced in Mühlhausen in his early twenties there was open hostility between the pastors of the two churches. About six years after his departure for Leipzig Bach was now returning with an extended work parodied from arias and choruses in the *Trauerode* BWV 198 and the *St Matthew Passion*. To the assembled mourners and to the participating musicians recruited from Leipzig, Halle and several neighbouring towns, experiencing this music in a new funerary context must have been intensely moving.

We, on the other hand, had come to Köthen with a rarity – one of the most cheerful programmes of the whole Trinity season. After so many

consecutive weeks of fire and brimstone and dire warnings against devilish temptations, forked tongues, false prophets and the like, it came as a huge relief to encounter three genial, celebratory pieces, one with an organ obbligato and two featuring Bach's talismanic trumpets and drums. Fears that these C or D major trumpets-and-drums opening choruses might become slightly formulaic and repetitious are misplaced: in fact they are subtly differentiated in mood, texture and *Affekt*. The opening chorus of BWV 69a **Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele**, later revived for the Town Council elections, is freely composed and on the grandest scale. Bach is exultant, profiting from the colour contrasts available from the three groupings of his orchestra (brass, woodwind and strings) and the internal subdivisions within each grouping. The hallmark of this fantasia is the way two innocent-sounding bars of rising trill-like figures give way to a jubilant thigh-slapping motif with two short, repeated notes to the second beat of consecutive 3/4 bars – euphoric, bucolic, yet entirely apposite to the text from Psalm 103: 'Bless the Lord, O my soul'. This type of chorus makes one aware of how fine is the membrane (if indeed it exists at all) between Bach's sacred celebratory music and his music for secular festivities: the birthday odes, or even the *quodlibets* sung by his family at their annual get-togethers. The main choral *fugato* begins with a whirligig variant of the trill-like opening, which then irons itself out in a lyrical conclusion. The second clause is more lyrical, in longer note-values with suspensions, hinting at pathos for 'Vergiss nicht' ('Forget not'). But predictably the best is yet to come: Bach combines the two fugues and the music suddenly fires on all cylinders. The principal trumpet blares out the first fugal theme, almost a trial run for that preposterous lick that occurs in the last seven bars of the 'Cum sancto Spiritu' from the *B minor Mass*, superimposed over fanfare interjections for lower brass and a soaring theme for sopranos and tenors and guaranteed, as only Bach can, to press all one's emotional buttons

and by its sheer zest and rhythmical élan to lift one's spirits. No parsing of the component elements of this fugal development, all of them traceable to motifs first heard in the orchestral prelude and their apportionment between the various groupings (chorus and tri-partite orchestra), can begin to define, let alone encapsulate, Bach's invention, his way of constantly springing surprises on the listener and yet weaving all his component elements seamlessly together.

Whoever provided Bach with the text for this cantata based it, with slight changes, on one for this Sunday printed three years earlier in Gotha by Johann Knauer. It takes St Mark's account of Jesus healing a deaf and dumb man as a metaphor for God's caring surveillance and as a pretext for the psalmist's injunction to praise God. There are plentiful references to the miracle: 'Ah, that I had a thousand tongues... to praise God' in the opening soprano recitative, mention of the very word 'Ephphatha' (Aramaic for 'be opened') Jesus used to heal the deaf man in the alto recitative (No.4), and a link between the miracle and the psalm text, 'My mouth shall sing with gladness', in the bass aria (No.5). This, like the earlier tenor aria, is in triple time, the former impressive in its interlacing of three distinctive woodwind instruments (recorder, oboe da caccia and bassoon), the latter remarkable for the naturalness of its word setting. Just try pronouncing the first lines of its text, 'Mein Erlöser und Erhalter, nimm mich stets in Hut und Wacht', and you immediately grasp why Bach chose a lilting 3/4 or 9/8 rhythmical pattern, fitted to a sarabande with its French dotted rhythms: tripletised melismas over a slow chromatic descent in the continuo for the prayer to 'stand by me in affliction and suffering', florid exuberance for the promise 'my mouth shall sing with gladness'. To these contrasts of rhythmical declamation and mood Bach adds, most unusually and in great detail, elaborate dynamic markings assigned to the solo oboe d'amore and accompanying strings from *forte* and *poco forte* to *piano* and *pianissimo*, all

designed to clarify the textures and to pinpoint the expressive gestures of this superb aria. The closing chorale stems from the Weimar cantata BWV 12 *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen*, but curiously shorn of its expressive descant.

Two years later in 1725 Bach came up with another winner, BWV 137 **Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König der Ehren**, this time in C major and still for three trumpets and drums, though unusually for only two oboes. It is a comparative rarity, his first cantata to have been constructed as a series of chorale variations in over twenty years, since BWV 4 *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, in fact. It is based entirely on the five stanzas of Joachim Neander's thanksgiving hymn of 1680 and its associated melody. This means that there are no recitatives, no biblical quotes, no poetic commentary; but on the other hand, this being one of the most glorious of all hymn tunes, familiar to English congregations as 'Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation', there are immense and satisfying musical delights. The opening fantasia is jazzy, shot through with syncopation for the majority of its bars, Italianate in sonority and irrepressible in its rhythmic vitality. The opening fugal theme – vocally awkward – begins with the altos and needs very careful and accomplished negotiation so as not to emerge as though from a disturbed poultry house. It becomes less perilous at the second of its three appearances, where the words call for a more lyrical approach ('Meine geliebete Seele'). Bach is wise to the potential swagger of the tune, so that instead of writing long note values for its first statement in the sopranos he assigns it to them in sturdy crotchets. After repeating the first phrase this has the effect of pulling the other voices into a chordal declamation, 'Kommet zuhauf, Psalter und Harfen, wacht auf!' ('Come in multitudes, psalteries and harps, awake!'). The festive exuberance of the writing makes this movement, indeed the whole cantata, suitable outside the Sunday liturgy, perhaps for the inauguration of the new

Town Council in Leipzig which occurred a few days later, or for some other day of rejoicing. On both occasions Gottfried Reiche, the star trumpeter of his day and *capo* of the Leipzig *Stadtpfeiffer*, would have figured prominently. But whether the fanfare fragment he is holding in the portrait Haussmann painted of him two years later is of his own invention or a quotation of bars 27-28 of this particular cantata of Bach's (as Eric Lewis Altschuler has suggested) is impossible to say.

Whittaker appears to make a good point when he claims that Bach, in this example of a *per omnes versus* cantata, is beginning to learn 'how to outwit the unyielding character of such a hymn'. But didn't he always? Surely *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, written when Bach was twenty-two, is the supreme example, compared, say, to Pachelbel's setting, of how to uncover expressive variety and achieve narrative thrust and drive in all seven verses of Luther's Easter hymn, without ever varying the tonality. Eighteen years on, Bach is alert to the possibility of extrapolating all the motivic features of the new glorious tune and now has the experience to arrange its five verses not only symmetrically in outline: chorus – aria – duet – aria – chorale, but also to give it a satisfying modulatory shape: C – G – e – a – C.

There is exuberance on a more intimate scale in the second strophe (really a trio sonata) where the chorale, now lightly ornamented, is assigned to an alto solo over a sweeping 9/8 continuo line with violin obbligato. The metaphor of being held safely aloft on 'eagle's wings' guides Bach in his choice of lively string crossings for the violin and detailed patterns of slurred and staccato notes, though it is the chorale tune itself which dictates the melodic shape. It does so again in the writing for paired oboes in verse 3, which, like the soprano and bass, enter in canon. But, as in mixed doubles, each person in the couple takes it in turn to 'serve': bass first, then soprano; oboe 1, then oboe 2. Up to this point all has been

conducted in full sunlight, but with the lines ‘How often in your distress has merciful God not spread His wings over you!’ a cloud passes over the music. The believer’s distress (‘Not’) can be read in the grinding chromatic descent, the movement of God’s protective wings by lively chains of dactyls. The last three phrases of the hymn tune are repeated, tilting the overall balance towards its expressive, darker side for the only time in this cantata.

A battle for harmonic supremacy plays itself out in verse 4: not between the tenor and continuo, the latter full of slurred scales, acrobatic leaps and strong rhythmic gestures, but between the two of them complicit in A minor set against the trumpet’s delivery of the unadorned chorale tune as a brass-plated C major orison. The tenor/continuo partnership brushes aside the final notes and cadence of the trumpet; yet the last word belongs to him and to his three colleagues in the uncontested victory of C major: a majestic seven-voiced harmonisation of the chorale (verse 5). Nobody could do a more festive *Danklied* than Bach when so minded. He knew exactly how best to use the resources of the ceremonial trumpet-led orchestra and choir of his day to convey unbridled joy and majesty – more than a match for the most imposing organ voluntary.

If, when resources allowed, he could outgun even the ‘instrument of instruments’ itself, what exactly was Bach’s purpose in turning to the organ as an obbligato solo instrument in his final cantata for this Sunday, BWV 35 **Geist und Seele wird verwirret**, first performed in 1726 as part of his third annual Leipzig cycle? It certainly wasn’t to vie with the trumpet-led ensemble for which the two previous cantatas were written: the use of the solo organ is far too systematic to be a last-minute substitute, as was sometimes the case. The text by Georg Christian Lehms sticks closely to the Sunday Gospel account of the healing of the deaf man and Bach seems deliberately to be setting himself new compositional challenges.

This is not necessarily from disillusionment with the formulae, so richly varied, of the pieces freshly composed for his first and second Leipzig cycles, but conceivably out of a certain weariness, of having to put up with makeshift performances week in, week out. Likely enough there were gaps either in the quantity or quality of the musicians available to him, a situation so deeply exasperating that it came to a head in 1730 with his Draft Memorandum to the Council, and a noticeable tailing off in his subsequent production of new works for the liturgy.

A temporary way to circumvent these inadequacies was to foster individual performers at the expense of the overall ensemble, and that is exactly what Bach seemed to be doing in composing a sequence (BWV 170, 35 and 169) for a conspicuously gifted alto in the summer and autumn of 1726, strategically spaced at two-month intervals to allow for, and adjust to, the development of the particular *Thomaner* talent he was nurturing. This may also have been a contributing factor in his choice of organ as an obbligato instrument in BWV 35, as it was two months earlier with BWV 170 *Vergnügte Ruh*; in both cases it would have made coaching easier, while ensuring that two of the most important components were rehearsed ahead of time (not the case for us, where Robin Tyson stepped forward as a last-minute deputy for Sara Mingardo). And in all probability it was Bach himself and not Friedemann, who at fifteen was away studying violin in Merseburg with Graun, nor Emmanuel, who at eleven was probably too young, who played the organ obbligato. But can this really be the full explanation for why he wrote in this particular style, one which in its sub-Vivaldian manner seems to ape other instruments rather than exploit the true palette and sonic characteristics of this *organum organorum*? The occasional danger of swamping the alto soloist was one reason why we decided that our organist, Ian Watson, should use our portative cabinet

organ rather than a colossal instrument like the Trost organ we used in Altenburg for BWV 146 *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal* (Vol.24/SDG107)

An extreme example of this idiosyncrasy comes in the fourth movement, in which just a single line for the organ is notated in the autograph score. Whereas those for voice and bass are in *Kammerton*, the middle line appears in *Chorton*, clear proof that Bach intended the organ to play just this line and not the continuo. Yet the writing displays features of a typical cello piccolo obbligato in terms both of tessitura and characteristic string-crossing patterns. On the other hand, the sinfonias that introduce each half of the cantata are genuinely solistic and seem to derive from the outer movements of a lost concerto for violin, oboe or harpsichord, for which a nine-bar fragment for harpsichord has survived (BWV 1059). The writing for solo organ is no match for its majestic dominance in *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal*, where Bach converts two movements of what began as a violin concerto but has come down to us as the celebrated D minor harpsichord concerto BWV 1052. Comparing the solo functions of the organ in these two cantatas reinforces Laurence Dreyfus's distinction in Bach's usage between the 'organ as sacred icon' and the 'organ as *galant* conversationalist'. Dreyfus provides an illuminating analysis of Bach's assimilation of the secular solo concerto into his church cantatas and his adjustment of the normal concerto principle, that of soloist-versus-orchestra, through subtle shifts in role playing, the instrument now posing as a soloist, now retreating into the background. As one might expect, there is a theological and metaphorical dimension lurking behind all this, particularly in a cantata which stresses God's transcendence over everything in creation and His ability to affect miraculous cures to damaged or ill-functioning human faculties, not only hearing and speech, but eyesight and reasoning. The organ may have been the technological marvel of its age, that 'wondrous machine' celebrated in verse by John

Dryden and in music by Henry Purcell, but Bach, its greatest living exponent, is intent here on stressing the modesty of its man-made prowess in comparison with God's miracles.

As we left Köthen it struck me that the joyousness of Bach's music for this Sunday was, a little like his sojourn here, something of an exception, a furlough or sunny interlude before a return to the grim doctrinal preoccupations of the Trinity season. A return, in fact, to the Lutheran war zone.

Cantatas for the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity

Dreikönigskirche, Frankfurt

Sure enough, after the breezy pleasures of last week's celebratory pieces – a brief reprieve – came the cold shower of our man's resumption of the earnest process of musical exegesis. Bach saw the exposition of scripture as the main meditative goal of his church music, in particular the need to forge audible links in the listener's mind between the 'historical' ('what [is] written in the book of the law') and spiritual attributes of the texts to be set. Here, on the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, he is faced with a Gospel (Luke 10:23-37) centred on the parable of the Good Samaritan which stresses man's slipperiness in evading his responsibilities to his neighbour, and an Epistle (Galatians 3:15-22) in which Paul probes the distinction between faith and the law. This was adopted by Luther in his twelve-verse hymn paraphrasing the Ten Commandments, 'Dies sind die heil'gen zehn Gebot', insisting that their purpose, and the first step in the believer's understanding of them, was the 'recognition of sin' and 'how one should rightly live before God', a theme that had preoccupied Bach from the outset of his first Leipzig cycle.

Although it was a deliberate choice during this year to group the cantatas by feast day, slicing through the years of their composition so as

to compare Bach's differing responses to the same text, yet with each previous week's offerings still ringing in our ears we were always conscious of the connective tissue that binds cantatas week to week within a given annual cycle. Bach announced himself to his twin congregations in Leipzig with two monumental, fourteen-movement cantatas (BWV 75 and 76) in which he set out his compositional stall. His underlying purpose seems to have been to connect the dualism of love of God and brotherly love with a vision of eternity as man's eschatological goal. All the signs are there that he intended to stretch these thematic links over at least the first four weeks of the Trinity season, first in BWV 75 and 76, and then by reviving two Weimar-composed works, BWV 21 and 185. Now, for the past six weeks, from the Eighth to the Thirteenth Sundays after Trinity, we have been encountering a sequence of works, all newly composed in Leipzig to theologically interrelated texts, based on the principle of reinterpreting an Old Testament *dictum* in terms of the New Testament Gospel of the day, and then applying it to the contemporary worshipper. All this was in a poetic style suggesting that the texts may have been the work of a single librettist.

With BWV 77 **Du sollt Gott, deinen Herren lieben** as the climax of what seems to be a series-within-a-cycle came an opportunity (Bach would perhaps have seen it as an obligation) to give resounding, conclusive expression to the core doctrines of faith already adumbrated in the first four Sundays of the Trinity season. Once again Bach does not disappoint. Here is one of those breathtaking, monumental opening choruses that defy rational explanation: how an over-worked, jobbing church musician, locked into numbing routines, could have come up with anything so prodigious and not, as we have seen, in an isolated work, but as part of a coherent *cycle* of weekly works. Bach aims to demonstrate by means of every musical device available to him the centrality of the two 'great'

commandments of the New Testament and how ‘on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets’. So he constructs a huge chorale fantasia in which the chorus, preceded by the upper three string lines in imitation, spell out the New Testament statement, their utterances encased in a wordless chorale tune that would have been associated in the minds of all his listeners with Luther’s Ten Commandments hymn. This appears in canon, a potent symbol of the law, between the *tromba da tirarsi* at the top of the ensemble and the continuo at its base, a graphic device to demonstrate that the Old Testament serves as the bedrock of the New, or, expressed differently, that the entire Law is understood to frame, and be inseparable from, Jesus’ commandments to love God and one’s neighbour.

But that is only just the start. Bach extrapolates the vocal lines from the chorale theme, so that they emerge audibly as a retrograde inversion of the chorale tune in diminution. Imagine it as a giant Caucasian *kilim*, with the geometric design and decorative patterning all of a piece. Your eye is drawn first to the elegant weave of the choral lines, but you then begin to discern a broader outline: the same basic design, but on a far bigger scale, one twice the size of the other, and bordering the whole. That is the canon in augmentation, the bass line proceeding at the lower fifth at half speed (in minims), symbol of the fundamental law. Bach’s construct allows the trumpet (in crotchets) to deliver nine individual phrases of the chorale and symbolically, in a tenth, to repeat the entire tune for good measure so that at the climax of the movement the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ are unambiguously fused in the listener’s mind. The tune itself, at least thirteenth-century in origin, began as a pilgrimage hymn to the words ‘In Gottes Namen fahren wir’, selected by Luther, or those close to him, as an appeal to God for protection – particularly at the start of a sea voyage in which Christ was the chosen captain or pilot. Other than *Ein feste Burg*

(BWV 80), no other canonic treatment of a *cantus firmus* we've met so far has quite the same air of monumentality or hieratic authority as this.

The strange thing is that whenever the chorale tune stops, and even before it first gets going, the music reveals a searching, almost fragile quality. Soon you notice that Bach has left out the normal 8' continuo from the opening ritornello (instead the violas have a figured *bassettschen* bass line) and a huge chasm in pitch, structure and dynamics opens up between the gentle interweaving of the imitative contrapuntal lines (presumably for strings only, though in the absence of the original parts we cannot be sure of this as none of the instruments is specified in the autograph score other than the *tromba* part) and the full, impressive weight of the double canon. The choral voices thunder out 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God' like so many evangelising sculptors chiselling the words into the musical rock face. One now realises that this emphasis on height and depth is being presented as a spatial metaphor for the divine and human spheres: distant, yet interconnected. Bach builds up colossal tension as a result of this dramatic textural alternation, the voices presumably dropping to *piano* whenever the trumpet/bass dialogue pauses for breath. Rightly or wrongly, I took it that the three oboes, whose presence elsewhere in the cantata makes it unlikely that they would have been excluded from the first movement, should double the voice lines only when the trumpet/bass themes are present.

The whole edifice lends itself to allegorical interpretation beyond the obvious meshing of Old and New Testament commandments, the former strict in its canonic treatment, the latter freer and more human in its choral working out, and the symbolic separation of God's control of the spheres of 'above' and 'below' (five statements of each, making ten in all). As Martin Petzoldt has shown, their moments of intersection point to the 'concord' or 'Übereinstimmung' willed by God for community with humankind and his

promise of mercy to those who keep his commandments. To this, Eric Chafe (who devotes two whole chapters to this work) points to the anomalous flattened pitches in the mixolydian version of the chorale tune which 'inspired Bach to emphasise the sub-dominant minor' at the climax of the movement (bar 58), 'the point at which the trumpet reaches its highest tone and the rhythmic activity of the chorus is at its greatest. Its role in the allegorical design for the movement is to create a sub-dominant/minor region from which the restoration of G emerges at the last possible moment in conjunction with the insight that love of God and love of one's neighbour as *oneself* are inseparable.' If this analysis seems a little dry – and it is certainly accurate – the music at this point is stupendous, the voices first in downward then in upward pursuit under the canopy of the trumpet's final blast of the chorale and cadencing over the solid G pedal of the bass. Chafe makes great play with the alternation of F natural and F sharp in the trumpet part four and five bars before the end (apparently there were different versions of the tune current in his time that Bach may have been quoting). The symbolic uncertainty they represent when associated with the injunction to 'love thy neighbour as thyself' suggests that without God's help we are doomed to failure. The end result is a potent mixture of modal and diatonic harmonies, one which leaves an unforgettable impression in the mind's ear, and in context propels one forward to the world of Brahms' *German Requiem* and beyond, to Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*.

Wisely Bach does not attempt in the remaining movements to replicate the mood or dimensions of this immense hermeneutic edifice which inevitably dwarfs all else. His concern is now to delineate the dependence of the believer in his human, imperfect, condition on the agency of the Holy Spirit to recognise and carry out God's commandment of love. Johann Knauer provided the models for the texts of both last

week's (BWV 69a) and the present cantata, and in both cases these required short but significant revisions. So, for example, in the B section of the aria for soprano (No.3), by changing Knauer's rather neutral 'Lass mich doch *dieses Glück* erkennen' to 'Lass mich doch *dein Gebot* (thy commandment) erkennen' and by avoiding the anticipated *da capo*, Bach shifts the emphasis onto the believer's hope that by grasping Jesus' commandment she will be 'so kindled by love' that she will love God for ever. In a second (accompanied) recitative (No.4), by the simple addition of a single word 'zugleich' ('at the same time') to Knauer's text, Bach welds the two New Testament commandments together so that they are held simultaneously and inseparably in the believer's mind.

The alto aria with trumpet obbligato (No.5), a meditation on the believer's ineffectual will to obey God's commandments and a foretaste of eternal life, is deceptive in its apparent simplicity and intimacy. Couched in the form of a sarabande, its weak phrase-beginnings and feminine cadences hold a mirror to man's proneness to fall short. The decision to recall the principal trumpet, so certain and majestic in the opening chorus but now single and supported by continuo alone, is Bach's most explicit way of conveying human imperfection ('Unvollkommenheit'). If he had set out to write an obbligato melody for the natural (valveless) trumpet he could hardly have devised more awkward intervals and more wildly unstable notes: recurrent C sharps and B flats, and occasional G sharps and E flats, which either do not exist on the instrument or emerge painfully out of tune. Bach is putting on display the frailty and shortcomings of humankind for all to hear and perhaps even to wince at. But how do you explain that to an audience except through a special pleading type of programme note? To be the vehicle for illustrating the distinction between God (perfect) and man (flawed and fallible) is a tough assignment for any musician (and our Swedish trumpeter Niklaus Eklund came through this

ordeal with huge credit and amazing skill), unless you are a sad, white-faced clown, accustomed to playing your trumpet (badly) at the circus. But before we jump to the conclusion that Bach is being sadistic here, we should look beyond the surface of the music. I believe it is going too far to suggest, as Richard Taruskin does, that on occasion Bach 'aimed to torture the ear' or that he 'seems deliberately to engineer a bad-sounding performance by putting the apparent demands of the music beyond the reach of his performers and their equipment'. For that to be true, it would allow no remedial action by the trumpeter to 'bend' or 'lip down' (or 'up') the non-harmonic tones so as to make them acceptable. It is the *effort* Bach is concerned to illustrate, and then in blatant contrast, the *ease* when, in the B section of the aria, he suddenly assigns the trumpet a ten-bar solo of ineffable beauty made up entirely of the diatonic tones of the instrument without a single accidental. Suddenly we are permitted a glorious glimpse of God's realm, an augury of eternal life, in poignant juxtaposition to the believer's sense of difficulty, incapacity, even, in executing God's commandment unaided. Sadistic? No. Pedantic? Perhaps.

According to the seventeenth-century German theorist Andreas Werckmeister, whom Bach read, there was a crucial theological distinction between the pure diatonic scale of the *clarino* octave (composed of harmonic numbers and musical consonances) which he saw as 'a mirror and prefiguration of eternal life', and those chromatic departures from it which reflect, allegorically, man's fallen state. In other words what we loosely refer to as 'Baroque' music, from the moment it set out to affect and stir the emotions ('*Gemütsbewegung*'), had, in Werckmeister's theologically slanted view, imperfection embedded in it in terms of 'tempered' intervals. Yet the need for temperament in practical music does not contradict what he defined as 'the high and divine origin of music' and can still be seen as part of God's master plan.

This acknowledgement of human weakness – mankind’s inability to carry out the second commandment unaided – is given a third illustration in the closing chorale, which Bach ends with a final inconclusive cadence – tenor and bass rising, soprano and alto falling, leaving the listener up in the air. Petzoldt and Chafe have made a convincing case, which we followed, for using the final two strophes of the 12-verse anonymous chorale *Herr, deiner Recht und dein Gebot*, based on the Ten Commandments, since Bach assigns no words to this closing chorale and its remarkable unsettling harmonisation.

Bach seems not to have been daunted by the immensity of his previous year’s offering when in September 1724 he sat down to compose BWV 33 **Allein zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ**. It is a worthy sequel, albeit a shy at a different target, beginning with a chorale fantasia fashioned rather like an antique ring. The fineness of the gemstone, the choral delivery of Konrad Hubert’s nine-lined hymn, is in constant danger of being eclipsed by the ornate beauty of its orchestral setting, energetic in its forward propulsion, motivic invention and proto-symphonic development, through its nine instrumental ritornellos, ranging from five to twenty-four bars. Later there are two penitential recitatives with far-flung harmonic excursions, and a movement for paired oboes and voices (No.5) which contains the only detectable reference to the Gospel text and New Testament Commandment and suggests an affinity of diatonic euphony and scoring to the soprano aria in BWV 77. Also included is arguably one of the most beautiful of all Bach’s alto arias (No.3), scored for muted first violins and accompanying pizzicato strings, bearing a striking kinship in mood, subject-matter (the frightening burden of sin) and even melodic outline to the soprano aria ‘Wie zittern und wanken’ from BWV 105 for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity of the previous year. Bach is unlikely to have known John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678), but this aria is a perfect

portrayal in sound of Christian's faltering steps as he enters the Valley of the Shadow of Death. But perhaps this cantata's most inherently satisfying movement is its last: a fluid, diaphanous harmonisation of Hubert's closing stanza, in which Bach creates an admirable melismatic interweaving of all four vocal lines at cadential points.

The surviving autograph score of BWV 164 **Ihr, die ihr euch von Christo nennet** dates from August 1725 and was performed in Leipzig as part of Bach's third annual cycle. How much of its music, composed to a text by Salomo Franck, can be traced back to one of Bach's lost Weimar cantatas is far from certain, though the scoring for strings and a pair of flutes, to which two oboes are added as unison reinforcement in the last two movements, would accord with the chamber-like proportions Bach adopted for the other Franck cantata texts he set in 1715.

With no opening chorus, some commentators are disturbed by the apparent discrepancy, in the tenor aria with strings (No.1), between words which fulminate against un-Samaritan-like indifference to one's neighbour's plight and the easy pastoral 9/8 flow of the canonic melody. But isn't that precisely Bach's point here: to contrast true mercy – God's mercy – with its human counterfeit, in another expression of the perfect/imperfect dualism featured in his other cantatas for this Sunday? The essence of true compassion is evoked in the alto aria with two transverse flutes (No.3), and followed by the tenor's prayer that those steely hearts that he referred to in the opening number shall now be melted and become 'rich in love, gentle and mild'. One can even discern an emblem of this contrast between human and divine mercy in the way the final duet opens as an inverse canon for the unison melody instruments and continuo, and then with each fresh entry of the voice lines develops fresh canons, now at the octave, now at the fourth or fifth, before burgeoning into free polyphony.

As we made our way out of Frankfurt's rather forbidding and gloomy nineteenth-century *Dreikönigskirche*, it occurred to me that these three cantatas best exemplify Thomas Browne's wonderful definition of music as 'an Hieroglyphicall and shadowed lesson of the whole world, and Creatures of God, such a melody to the eare, as the whole world well understood, would afford the understanding. In briefe, it is a sensible fit with that Harmony, which intellectually sounds in the eares of God.'
(*Religio Medici*, 1642)

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