

Cantatas for Septuagesima Grote Kerk, Naarden

With Lent only a few weeks away – a time of fasting, sackcloth and ashes – it is appropriate that the Gospel for the day should turn to the parable of the labourers in the vineyard as recounted in St Matthew. The moral drawn by Bach's librettist is unequivocal: accept and be satisfied with your lot, however unfair it may seem at the time. It permeates all six movements of Bach's offering from his first Leipzig cycle, BWV 144 **Nimm, was dein ist, und gehe hin**. It is hard to imagine a balder, more uncompromising opening to a cantata than this. From a standing start – there is absolutely no instrumental preamble – the tenors launch into the *Spruch*, the start of a fugal motet, with two oboes and strings doubling the voice lines over a partly independent basso continuo. Ten years after his death, at a time when not many people outside the charmed circle of his ex-pupils knew or could remember anything of his astonishing Sunday menu of church cantatas, it comes as a surprise to find an educated voice extolling the virtues of Bach's fugal writing for voices. In 1760 the Berlin music theoretician Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg singled out the opening of this cantata, admiring the 'splendid declamation which the composer has applied to the main section and to a special little play on the words, "gehe hin!"' And it *is* admirable the way Bach sets up a simple-seeming contrast between the syllabic statement of his first theme (in minims and crotchets) and this urgent, rhythmically propelled counter-subject. It is also proof, as Robert Marshall showed in his study of the sketches and manuscripts, that Bach, typically, didn't compose fugal expositions 'answering to a mechanical, predictable routine', but in order to give a special character to the text he was setting. In fact, it is a brilliant example of Bach's economical, circuitory procedure with his material that he manages to introduce the 'gehe hin' figure no less than sixty

times in sixty-eight bars. The effect is not so much that of a curt dismissal – ‘go thy way!’ – as a playful exhortation to take whatever life has to offer on the chin. It is also the perfect riposte to Charles Burney who, preferring Handel, wrote, ‘I never have seen a fugue by the learned and powerful author [Bach] upon a *motivo* that is natural and *chantant*’. There is of course a subtle difference between Bach the famed writer of fiendishly difficult keyboard fugues and the composer of these choral fugues. True, some of the latter are fiendish, too, (just think of the ‘fecit potentiam’ subject that the tenors are required to lead off with in his *Magnificat*); but more often than not they are manageable and singable, as well as conforming to what Marpurg calls ‘truth, essence, and [with] an exactly suited “rightness” to the text’.

The first aria is set as a minuet for alto over a pulsating string accompaniment to represent the mutterings of dissatisfied Christians. According to Kirnberger’s copy of the score, it should also feature two oboes doubling the violins; but since these plunge well below the lowest range of the standard baroque oboe, we felt the most plausible option was to have a single oboe da caccia to double the first violin line. It certainly gives it an extra plangency. Bach’s response to the injunction not to complain is in some ways ear-catching (the gentle lullaby with its ‘murmuring’ lower-string accompaniment), in other ways quite irritating (its four-square repetitiveness). All in all there is something a little facile in the neat way he inverts the sound of the opening two 8-bar segments so as to ensure that the ‘murmuring’ is always heard at the lower pitch, while the ‘lieber Christ’ (a figure clearly reminiscent of the ‘gehe hin’ motif in No.1) appears at the higher pitch. Look a little deeper and you sense that Bach has deliberately searched for an annoying way of fixing in the minds of his listeners what Germans describe as ‘meckern und motzen’ – the grumblings of dissatisfied labour. For behind the mutterings of the aggrieved vineyard workers stands St Paul’s injunction to the Corinthians, ‘Neither murmur ye, as some of them also

murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer' (1 Corinthians 10:10), and, further back, the God of the Old Testament, exasperated beyond endurance by the moaning of the ungrateful Israelites whom he had safely shepherded out of captivity in Egypt, 'How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me?' (Numbers 14:27). Bach reminds us in a passage he underlined in his Calov Bible commentary that he himself was no stranger to the injustices of contractual employment: 'Lord, I attend to my duties and do what you have commanded me, and I will gladly work and do what you will have me do, only help me also to manage my household and help me to regulate my affairs' – something he evidently found difficult to achieve. In fact the highest number of annotations and underscorings in his Calov copy come from *Ecclesiastes*, a book that frequently refers to acceptance of one's lot being more important than worldly acclaim, and to the idea that intelligent people are in for a life of suffering, but nowhere that talent is praiseworthy beyond the demands of meeting one's official duties.

Sandwiched between two fine harmonisations of sturdy hymns by Samuel Rodigast (No.3) and Albrecht von Brandenburg (No.6) is a tenor recitative which ends by repeating the words 'Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan' of the previous chorale, and an aria for soprano with oboe *d'amore* obbligato. Here Bach makes the most of the attractive irregularity of phrasing. In place of the expected *da capo* he contrives that the third and longest portion of the aria should encompass a restatement of the whole text but without a literal reprise of the associated music. By this means he is able to vary the convention so successfully that, what with the contrapuntal interweaving of oboe and voice and the way the final oboe *ritornello* is ushered in while the voice still has four more bars to go, one gains the impression of the aria having been made up of a free sequence of variations.

The engaging five-movement work for solo soprano, oboe and

strings, BWV 84 **Ich bin vergnügt mit meinem Glücke**, is actually labelled 'Cantata' (most unusual in Bach's sacred *oeuvre*). Most probably it was performed for the first time on 9 February 1727, set to an anonymous libretto but with links to an earlier one that Erdmann Neumeister provided for Telemann's Eisenach cycle, and, still more closely, to one that Picander would go on to publish in 1728. The actual text that lay on Bach's desk waiting to be set was once again anchored in the vineyard parable, though this time there is no mention of the disgruntled work-force, only of being 'content with my good fortune that dear God bestows on me'. Matthew's Gospel for the day concludes 'So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen' (20:16), implying that the contract of employment holds good regardless of whether other parallel contracts are more favourable to the recipient. Since Bach was alert throughout his career to the danger of dropping behind the going rate for the job before he agreed to a new contract, he might have found the homily of this cantata's text quite hard to swallow. To be 'content with my good fortune' is one thing – just one notch above obediently 'accepting my calling' (as in the Calov quote he underlined). But both Neumeister and Picander go a step further, speaking of being satisfied or happy with 'the *station*' bestowed. Was Bach content with the 'station' he found himself in Leipzig? Everything we can glean from his troubled cantorship suggests a permanent inner struggle between the desire to do his job to the utmost of his abilities on the one hand (to the glory of God and the betterment of his neighbour, as he would have put it) and, on the other hand, the need to put up with 'almost continual vexation, envy and persecution' (as he described it in a letter to a friend). Was it Bach, then, who engineered this change to the text? Hard to say. But even with this shift of emphasis, to look for an unequivocal portrayal of equanimity in the long opening E minor aria would not just clash with everything we might glean from his situation in Leipzig, but would underestimate the ambivalence and complexity of

music – especially *his* music – and its ability to give nuanced depictions of mood. Contentment is perhaps a rather static state of mind, whereas Bach’s music here suggests something dynamic and fluctuating. The florid intertwining of voice and oboe, the prevalent lilting dotted rhythms and expressive syncopations, the way the opening *ritornello* returns again and again in various guises while the soprano initiates fresh motifs: all these contribute to the enchantment of the music and to its elusive moods – wistful, resigned, elegiac even?

Due to its sheer high spirits, the second aria (‘Ich esse mit Freuden mein weniges Brot’), for solo oboe, violin and continuo, is attractive in a far less sophisticated way. With its upward leap of a sixth it suggests an unconscious kinship to Galatea’s ‘As when the dove’ from Handel’s masque *Acis and Galatea*. The following string-accompanied recitative (No.4) moves the cantata back towards minor keys, mirroring the text’s calm presentiments of death, and provides a perfect bridge to the concluding chorale: the twelfth strophe of a hymn by Ämilie Juliane von Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt, set to Georg Neumark’s haunting melody. It bears the rubric *a soprano solo e a 3 ripieni*, implying that none of the four vocal parts was intended to be doubled by instruments. Accordingly we sang it *a cappella* and rather quietly. ‘Ich leb indes in dir vergnüget / und sterb ohn alle Kummernis’ (‘I live meanwhile content in Thee / and die, all sorrow laid aside’). I found it very affecting.

The third of Bach’s surviving cantatas for this Sunday is BWV 92 **Ich hab in Gottes Herz und Sinn** of 1725, a nine-movement chorale cantata based on a hymn by Paul Gerhardt. Unlike the previous two cantatas, the text, dating from 1647, does not relate specifically to either of the appointed Bible readings, but exhorts the congregation to surrender to God’s heart and mind and to trust in Him through good and ill. This might account for the similarity of the initial melodic outline and mood of the opening oboe theme to the tender soprano aria ‘Komm in mein Herzenshaus’ from BWV 80. The opening chorale fantasia is

elaborately constructed with a lot of imitative cut-and-thrust in the lower three voices. You hunt in vain for traces of the chorale melody until you realise that their material is derived from the instrumental *ritornellos* that punctuate the lines of the chorale. The second movement is an audacious experiment by Bach in which the bass interrupts his own measured singing of the second hymn strophe no less than nine times with his own glosses in free recitative, illustrated by vivid word painting in the continuo. In fact, it is all a bit like a scripture lesson: the Sunday School teacher patiently explains that when the going gets tough 'it is only because [God] wishes to test me', hence the passing allusions to Jonah and the whale, which we are helped to identify from the submarine rumblings in the continuo, and to St Peter's 'rock-hard faith', expressed in the singer's angular, crampon-assisted scramble to the summit (top E). Meanwhile Bach signals to his listeners each time the main hymn strophe is about to resume by announcing (or simultaneously presenting) its outline in diminution in the continuo. There is a danger of the listener being overwhelmed by too much information, like those confusing signposts that motorists are expected instantly to decipher at road intersections, and the whole number is difficult to bring off.

No such problems with the tenor aria that follows, 'Seht! wie reisst, wie bricht, wie fällt'. It finds Bach in apocalyptic mood. Here the word-painting shifts onto a much larger canvas: huge vigour is generated by the boldly sweeping Rubens-like brush strokes, the *tirades* in the first violins (with wide leaps and jagged rhythms) alternating with four-note motifs for the two inner voices and the contrary-moving continuo. All contribute to conveying the fragility of life and how all things 'snap, break and fall' when 'not held by God's own mighty arm'. It is virtuosic in the extreme for the singer; impressive but deliberately unlovely. The chorale tune now returns scantily decorated in the fourth movement, which extols God's 'wisdom and reason' as the supreme

time-keeper ('He knows the time, the place, the hour / in which to act or not to act'). It is more objectively presented here than in equivalent models, and suggested to me unison rather than solo treatment for the altos placed behind the instrumental ensemble. As a result the backdrop – two oboes d'amore locked in fugal exchange (with no official place to breathe in fifty-five bars) and creating a type of three-part invention with the continuo – now becomes the foreground.

Gale force winds return in the sixth movement, evoked in vigorous exchanges between cello and bass singer. Bach is here pillaging an idea from his very first cantata (BWV 150, No.5) where the same motif served to describe cedar trees buffeted by the storm. Here the simile is used to reinforce the message of the B section – how the cross's 'turmoil' bears fruit for Christians. (One of the meanings of 'Ungestüm' is 'violence', referring, I suppose, to the brutality of death by crucifixion.) To me the image of 'roaring, cruel winds' leading to 'full ears [of corn]' is a puzzling one. Wind usually has the opposite effect for farmers: one of the things we most dread at harvest-time is a freakish gale flattening the standing corn and wrecking the potential yield. For a second time Bach now breaks up the hymn stanza (No.7) with commentary in recitative passing from the lowest to the highest voice. Just at the point where the hymn text becomes intensely personal ('Ah, my God, I come to Thee, comforted') and would lead one to expect solo treatment (as in No.2), Bach arranges it as a four-part chorale over a partially independent continuo line.

Balm returns in the pastoral soprano aria with oboe and pizzicato strings, 'Meinem Hirten bleib ich treu' (No.8). There is a delicious ambiguity of rhythmic emphasis: Bach sets you up to expect a sequence of two-bar units, then he suddenly braces four bars together. At its enchanting conclusion – 'Amen: Vater, nimm mich an!' – innocence, trust and fragility are all rolled into one.

The late fifteenth-century church of St Vitus in Naarden in

northern Holland is a celebrated magnet for concerts and it is slightly puzzling to find coffee and alcohol being served during the interval and post-concert reception in the Sanctuary. Yet the high-vaulted wooden roof with its Dürer-inspired painted panels of scenes from the Old and New Testaments facing one another, together with the characteristic Dutch church furnishings, help to retain the devotional atmosphere, one that is conducive to music-making of this sort. The Dutch audience listened to our programme of cantatas with rapt concentration.

Cantatas for Sexagesima

Southwell Minster

This week we had the challenge of tackling three of Bach's most original and startlingly different pre-Lenten cantatas. Despite their varied provenance, this trilogy might even have been performed in Leipzig within a twelve-month of one another: BWV 18 revived on 13 February 1724, perhaps before the sermon in the Nikolaikirche, and the newly-minted BWV 181 immediately after it, with BWV 126 following on 4 February less than a year later. The focal point of all three cantatas is the overwhelming power of the Word (*qua* spiritual manna from heaven) in the process of faith, the Gospel theme of the day (Luke 8:4-15), expressed, in the first two, through the parable of the sower. Even by his standards, Bach faces up to this challenge with exceptional intensity and ingenuity. Each of these cantatas is characterised by his vivid pictorial imagination, an arresting sense of drama, and by music of freshness and power that lodges in the memory.

A superb example of this is BWV 18 **Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt**, composed in Weimar most likely in 1713, just before Bach was promoted from Court Organist to the newly-created post of Concertmaster. So much of this cantata is wildly original and unusual, starting with its scoring for four violas and basso continuo

including bassoon. Bach's decision to transpose the regular five-part Weimar string ensemble down to an alto/tenor register was based not on the chance appearance of two additional viola players pitching up one day in Weimar and touting for work (he would no doubt have asked his regular violinists simply to join the viola section for this cantata), but on the magically dark-hued sonority the four violas are able to bring. I don't think it too fanciful to see them as representing, particularly in the two middle movements, the warm topsoil, fertile and well irrigated, forming an ideal seed-bed in which God's Word may germinate and prosper. When he came to revive this cantata in Leipzig in 1724 Bach supplemented this string ensemble with a pair of recorders to double the upper two viola parts, to which they add a nimbus, a little like the four-foot stop on a pipe organ. This was the version we adopted, transposing it into A minor from the Weimar *Chorton* in G minor (the violas tuning up to A=465, but reading off the original G minor parts).

The opening Sinfonia, a true overture in the way it anticipates the subject-matter and the action, is an intriguing hybrid of styles – shaped as an old-style chaconne bass line first played in unison, which then acts as a *ritornello* in up-to-the-minute Italianate concerto form. Above the *ostinato* bass the upper two voices (doubled at the octave by the recorders) weave elegant tracery and swirl about like gusts of rain or flurries of snow. As an interpreter you are faced with the choice of either punctuating the structural repetitions of the ground bass or of discerning dynamics to match the graphic pictorial imagery within the opening four-bar unison *ritornello* (two bars of falling rain and two of snow, say, and behind that, the more symbolic 'falling away' of humankind).

Confronted with the title words of the prophet Isaiah, Bach composes his first 'modern' recitative in a church cantata. It is immediately clear that the familiar patter of contemporary operatic recitative holds no attraction for him. What he is striving for, above all, is a lucid presentation of the text in a dignified, highly personal style, one

that burgeons into and out of *arioso*. Thus the bass soloist faithfully replicates the rising and falling imagery of the text and the way Isaiah compares the seed, and the impact of the weather on its germination and growth, to the Holy Word.

On the face of it the following movement looks like a harmless fusion of litany and commentary, but Bach turns it into the centrepiece of his cantata. Conceived as one fascinating tapestry, unique in his cantatas, it is made up of four stretches of accompanied recitative (still with this exceptional and actively participating instrumentation), two for tenor, two for bass, interwoven with four short prayers. These are announced in an archaic three-note phrase and answered by the full choir quoting supplicatory refrains from Luther's litany known as the German Prefatory. Typical of litanies, these passages are unvaried musically (might they contain a whiff of satirical fun-poking at the monotonous intoning of the clergy?), except for the continuo part which goes ballistic at mention of the Turks and Papists 'blaspheming and raging'. Meanwhile the linking sections are through-composed, and where appropriate switch from *adagio* to *allegro* (presumably twice as fast) to reflect the changing sentiments of the text. There is reference to those who renounce the word 'like rotting fruit' and how 'another man may only tend his belly'. It all adds up to a vivid, Breughel-like portrayal of rural society at work – the sower, the glutton, the lurking devil, as well as those pantomime villains, the Turks and the Papists.

All in all it forms a fascinating comparison with Telemann's setting of the same text, written especially for him by Erdmann Neumeister for his Eisenach cantata cycle of 1710/11. While there is every likelihood that Bach and Telemann, living only fifty miles apart, were in regular contact during Bach's Weimar years (Telemann standing godfather to CPE Bach), the case for Telemann having a strong stylistic impact on Bach's development as a cantata composer is harder to substantiate. There is no doubt that Telemann's Eisenach cycle made quite a splash

in Thuringia – a paradigm of how to graft the techniques of contemporary operatic music onto the old cantata root-stock of choral movements and chorales – and indeed it might even have been performed in Weimar in 1712/3, where Telemann was popular with Ernst August, the reigning Duke, and so within Bach's hearing. But if Telemann was the instigator of the new style, Bach comprehensively outdoes his colleague at every juncture, on a much larger scale and with a vast increase in musical substance and interest. This particular movement is a case in point. On the one hand we have Telemann, short-breathed and avoiding extremes, doing his best to blur the distinction between psalmody and speech-like recitative. On the other hand here is Bach, seeming to relish the contrast between archaic litany and his new 'modern' recitative style in which he empowers his two male soloists to voice personal pleas for faith and resolution in the face of multiple provocation and devilish guile, with increasingly virtuosic displays of coloratura, ever-wider modulations and extravagant word-painting on 'berauben' (to rob), 'Verfolgung' (persecution) and 'irregehen' (to wander off course).

Some of the same mood spills over into the sole, brief, aria (No.4). The four violas in unison (again doubled by recorders at the octave) provide a sensual and slightly bucolic accompaniment to the soprano as she addresses the Word of God as she would her lover. There is an insistent rising motif, 'Fort mit allen, fort, nur fort!' ('Away with them!'), in which she wards off the temptations and nets of the world and Satan. To cap it all Bach gives us what is in effect the first in a series of four-voiced chorale harmonisations – what we would consider a 'typical' conclusion to a cantata – this time the eighth verse of Lazarus Spengler's 'Durch Adams Fall'.

Equally brilliant and vivid is BWV 181 **Leichtgesinnte Flattergeister**, composed a decade later in Leipzig; but where before there was naïve pictorialism, here there is manifest craft and

sophistication. Richard Stokes translates *Leichtgesinnte Flattergeister* as 'frivolous flibbertigibbets', those superficial, fickle people who, like the fowls of the air referred to in the parable of the sower, devour the seed that 'fell by the wayside', prey to the devil who 'taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved'. You can but marvel at the way Bach evokes the graphic details of the parable: a fragmented melodic line peppered with trills, the light, staccato articulation in *vivace* tempo, and an upper instrumentation of flute, oboe and violin, redolent of Rameau on the one hand and on the other of the *galant* style that became fashionable with Bach's sons' generation. All of this suggests the nervous, jerky movements of the avian seed-stealers, vying in their greed for the fallen grain.

This is one of the relatively few cantatas of which the original (and anonymous) libretto has survived, and it is obvious from this, as Malcolm Boyd points out, that it was Bach and not his poet who was responsible for the aria's unusual, possibly unique, structure: in technical terms what sets out to be an adapted *da capo* of the first section loses its way after only four bars and is transformed into a modified repeat of the B section. Back comes 'Belial mit seinen Kindern' in place of the expected opening words and associated theme. Perhaps Bach couldn't resist another chance to depict this Miltonic Prince of Darkness, demon of lies and guilt, and to ram home the point that it is Belial, a fallen angel, who effectively torpedoes God's initiative of making the Word be 'of service'. It is also his way of underlining that the devouring fowls are now identified with Satan and his cronies. This is a witty, Hitchcockian evocation, irresistible in its imagery and skill in word setting. It could almost serve as a soundtrack to a cartoon film: a gaggle of flighty, giggly teenage girls being bounced out of a nightclub by Belial and his henchmen. Surely even Bach's easily distracted Sunday congregation, impatient for the sermon to begin, must have sat up when they heard this.

The alto recitative (No.2) points the moral: the seed that falls on stony ground is likened to the hard-hearted unbelievers who die and are dispatched below to await Christ's last word, the time when the doors will be burst apart and the graves opened. This *arioso* section bears more than a passing resemblance to the famous trio in *Acis and Galatea*, 'The flocks shall leave the mountains'. It ends with a deliciously playful descent by the continuo to describe the ease ('Look, no hands!') with which the angel rolled back Christ's tombstone, and the rhetorical question 'Would you, O heart, be harder still?' The obligato part is missing for the ensuing tenor aria (No.3), and in answer to my request Robert Levin characteristically provided not one but three convincing reconstructions of the solo fiddle part. He found brilliant ways for the violin to complement and contrast with the voice, comparing the thorns that choke a growing plant to the cares and worldly desires that threaten the Christian life. As Bach noted in his copy of Calov's Bible commentary, 'For what is this world but a large thicket of thorns that we must tear ourselves through!'

An unremarkable soprano recitative (No.4) turns from the wasted seeds to those that fell on fertile ground, and God's Word that prepares fruitful soil in the heart of the believer is celebrated in the final movement for all the forces: choir, including a soprano/alto duet in the B section, flute, oboe, strings and, for the first time in the cantata, a trumpet. Despite this festive instrumentation the vocal writing has a madrigalian lightness and delicacy perfectly appropriate to the joyous message of the parable and of the cantata as a whole.

There is no discernible trace of the parable in BWV 126 **Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort**, but the common thread is the emphasis on God's Word. This is a stunning, combative work, a chorale cantata written in 1725 and based on a compilation of four strophes by Luther (Nos 1, 2, 3 and the first half of No.6), two by Justus Jonas (Nos 4 and 5) and one by Johann Walter (the second half of No.6), calling on God

to destroy His enemies and bring peace and salvation to His people. Luther wrote his hymn for children to sing ‘against the two arch-enemies of Christ and His Holy Church’ – the Pope and the Turks. However politically incorrect, when viewed from the standpoint of Wittenberg in 1542 and with the Eastern war genuinely threatening the stability of Europe, this rousing battle hymn had some topical force: both the Turks and the Papacy were considered enemies of state and a threat to international law. It was this residual fear of Ottoman aggression that led Luther to believe initially that the Turks were God’s agents, poised to strike at the heart of the Christian world on account of its sins. In fact the Ottoman invasions were, paradoxically, the distraction that prevented the Protestant revolt from being crushed early on, stoking the fears of imminent catastrophic change which led many to listen to Luther’s challenge to the church. The fact that Heinrich Schütz sets the final double-decker chorale strophe ‘Verleih uns Frieden’ (Luther) and ‘Gib unsern Fürst’n’ (Walter) in 1648 at the end of the Thirty Years War is also understandable given that the Turks were never very far away from the Austrian border – and actually succeeded in besieging Vienna in 1683, around the time that Buxtehude set his ‘Erhalt uns/Verleih uns/Gib unsern Fürst’n’ triptych.

Why Bach should have felt the need, or why he was compelled, to write such a bellicose cantata in 1725, when hostilities with the Turks had abated, and indeed at this point in the church year and not, say, on St Michael’s Day or the Reformation Day, is not entirely clear. Yet what a scintillating piece it is! The opening chorus is full of martial defiance and vigorous anapaestic rhythms. It is scored for trumpet, two oboes and strings. Bach tugs on his choir in the same way that he would pull out organ stops: on this occasion to convey a cumulative plea to sustain or uphold God’s Word against those murderous Papists and Turks. The frequent return of the opening four-note trumpet signal, itself a pre-echo of the chorale melody, and the long-held notes for the trumpet and

voices, ensures that the words 'Erhalt uns, Herr' ('Uphold us, Lord') are always kept in the foreground, a technique he also uses for the final word 'Thron', prolonged over three whole bars to testify that God's throne cannot be budged.

There follows one of Bach's more technically testing tenor arias, initially genial and easy-going, then erupting in staccato semiquavers and demisemiquaver roulades to suggest first 'gladness' and then the scattering of the enemies' 'bitter mockery'. A *secco* recitative for alto and tenor (No.3) is punctuated by four slow restatements of the chorale tune, a prayer to 'God, Holy Ghost, dear comforter', now delivered as a soft and touching duet.

Drama returns with the bass aria ('Stürze zu Boden') with a virtuosic cello accompaniment. According to W. G. Whittaker, Bach's 'righteous indignation at the enemies of his faith was never expressed more fiercely than in this aria'. Visible on the drip mouldings of the windows above the entrance porch to Southwell Minster are 'grotesques', one of them depicting Judas being swallowed by Satan – an apposite parallel. In the *secco* recitative (No.5) the tenor changes the mood in preparation for the chorale setting of Luther's prayer for peace (1531), a German vernacular translation of 'Da pacem, Domine', and its unmetrical sequel by Johann Walter. There is nothing perfunctory about Bach's setting, with its stirring pleas for 'Fried und gut Regiment' ('peace and good government') and tender hopes for 'a quiet and peaceful life'. In fact the most memorable phrase is reserved for the final three-bar 'Amen', a miraculous fusion of Tudor polyphony and Bachian counterpoint, which under the wooden barrel-vaulted roof of Southwell Minster acquired a transcendental beauty.

Southwell was established as the Mother church of Nottinghamshire during the twelfth century and is surely one of the most perfect examples of Romanesque architecture in Britain. The plain cylindrical piers of the nave arcade are in warm, lion-coloured Permian

sandstone. They might seem a bit squat in proportion to the high crossing arches, but are saved by the wide openings of the triforium and higher still by the clerestory, akin to Romsey Abbey 150 miles to the south where we performed a month ago. There is something almost ancient Egyptian in feel to this Norman architecture. Is it the colour of the sandstone or the subtle carving and the bold ridge end roll, cable and zigzag mouldings?

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