

Bach's Prelude, Fugue and Allegro for Lute (BWV 998): a Trinitarian Statement of Faith?

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The Prelude, Fugue and Allegro (BWV 998) is a composition dating from Bach's maturity. According to the relevant critical commentary of the *Neue Bach-Ausgabe*, published in 1982, BWV 998 was composed in the final decade of Bach's life.¹ More recently, Yoshitaki Kobayashi has pinpointed the date of composition more specifically to 'um 1735'.² Although it has always been classified among the secular compositions of Bach, it is a work rich in symbolic potential.³ To date all theological Bach studies have mainly focused on either vocal compositions or instrumental works related to the Lutheran chorale. There may be many reasons to believe that Bach intended to portray a theological message in this piece, which will be outlined below.

Firstly, however, it is necessary briefly to consider the autograph score and the instrumentation. Bach's manuscript bears the title 'Prelude pour la Luth à Cembal'.⁴ Historically, the piece seems to have been regarded as a lute piece, although the composer's inscription has led to some ambiguity. The date of composition, believed to fall around 1735 (as suggested by Kobayashi) or at least between 1734 and 1747,⁵ may point to a lute work, as it was around this time that Bach was in contact with the

¹ Hartwig Eichberg and Thomas Kohlhase (eds), *Kritischer Bericht* (1982) for volume V/10, *Einzelne überlieferte Klavierwerke II und Kompositionen für Lauteninstrumente*, of the *Neue Bach-Ausgabe*, 153.

² Yoshitake Kobayashi, *Die Notenschrift Johann Sebastian Bachs. Dokumentation ihrer Entwicklung*, volume IX/2 (1989) of the *Neue Bach-Ausgabe*, 209.

³ The significance of this piece was brought to my attention by my student, Redmond O'Toole, who suggested to me that there might be a theological aspect to the work.

⁴ The autograph score is held at Ueno-Gakuen Music Academy, Tokyo (Eichberg and Kohlhase, 149).

⁵ Eichberg and Kohlhase, 152.

lutenist Silvius Leopold Weiss.⁶ However, there are problems with range when this piece is played on the lute and so it remains rather enigmatic. Only the Prelude is playable without much alteration. Nevertheless, the necessary changes to the Fugue and Allegro are no more radical than those found in the tablature version of the Suite in G minor (BWV 995) which is an arrangement of the Cello Suite in C (BWV 1011).⁷ The last few bars of BWV 998 are in organ tablature, thereby raising further performance issues. The most likely instrument would seem to be the *Lautenwerck* or *Lautenclavier*, a small harpsichord with a similarly shaped body to that of a lute. It had gut strings plucked by a quill mechanism.⁸ According to the inventory of instruments in Bach's possession made at his death, Bach owned two lute-harpsichords—an instrument we know little about, as no example has survived and there are few documentary sources regarding its structure.⁹ Johann Friedrich Agricola recalled: 'around the year 1740, in Leipzig, having seen and heard a lute-harpsichord designed by Mr Johann Sebastian Bach and executed by Mr Zacharias Hildebrandt, which was of smaller size than the ordinary harpsichord'.¹⁰ It seems that around 1740 Bach was in contact with Weiss and also owned a lute-harpsichord—factors that do not make the issue of the instrumentation of BWV 998 any clearer. In an article dealing with the instrumental possibilities of BWV 998, Eugen M. Dombois concludes:

I have considered the question separately for all three movements, and in all three cases I have come to the conclusion that the whole work is probably more a lute-harpsichord piece than a lute piece. The degree of probability differs, however: it is highest in the case of the Allegro and lowest in that of the Prelude.¹¹

⁶ Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel (eds), *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*, revised and enlarged by Christoph Wolff (New York: Norton, 1998), 204.

⁷ Malcolm Boyd (ed.), *J. S. Bach: Oxford Composer Companions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 276.

⁸ Boyd, 274. See also Ulrich Prinz, *Johann Sebastian Bachs Instrumentarium: Originalquellen, Besetzung, Verwendung* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2005), 645.

⁹ Boyd, 274; Werner Neumann and Hans-Joachim Schulze (eds), *Fremdschriftliche und gedruckte Dokumente zur Lebensgeschichte Johann Sebastian Bachs, 1685–1750*, *Bach Dokumente*, 2 (Leipzig and Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1969), no. 627.

¹⁰ David and Mendel, 366; Christoph Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach: the Learned Musician* (New York: Norton, 2000), 413.

¹¹ Eugen M. Dombois, 'The Fugue and Prelude from Bach's Prelude, Fugue and Allegro in E-flat Major (BWV 998)', *The Lute* (Journal of the Lute Society) 15 (1973), 37–47: 47.

Bach's Prelude, Fugue and Allegro for Lute (BWV 998)

The problems of instrumentation are perhaps the subject of another study and, for the moment, this article will turn to the possible theological aspects of BWV 998.

Why should one suggest that there is a theological aspect to the Prelude, Fugue and Allegro, a work for lute or lute-harpsichord and ostensibly not a sacred piece? Whatever the instrument for which Bach may have been writing, there are nonetheless many reasons to believe that Bach was conveying a theological message in this composition and it is interesting to note that in the very few articles written about the work there is little mention of this possibility.¹² Theological symbolism in the non-text-based music of Bach was not completely unprecedented. Many authors have commented on the Trinitarian aspects of both the Prelude (BWV 552.i) and the Fugue (BWV 552.ii) in E flat which frame *Clavierübung* III.¹³ If Bach showed an interest in theological symbolism in these pieces, then it is highly probable that he might also have done so in other works. This will be explored below.

Before looking at the symbolic potential of BWV 998, it is necessary to outline the basic structure and highlight the main musical elements. This is a work in three movements, all in the key of E-flat major. The opening movement is in the pastoral metre of 12/8. The central movement is a *da capo* fugue, one of the rare instances of this form in the works of Bach (he also used this form in the lute partita BWV 997, dating from around the same time as BWV 998, and in the so-called 'Wedge' fugue in E minor, BWV 548, which dates from the period 1727–32).¹⁴ The fugue subject is an eight-note chorale-like theme in crotchets. The final movement is a dancing binary-form movement in 3/8.

Firstly, it is interesting to examine the tonality. Writers in the eighteenth century such as Johann Mattheson clearly acknowledged that the choice of key could be significant¹⁵ and more recently Eric Chafe has shown that there is much tonal allegory

¹² See Eduardo Fernandez, *Essays on J.S. Bach's Works for Lute* (Montevideo: Ediciones ART, 2003), 29–38 and 45–51, where he explores the rhetorical possibilities of the Allegro and the fugue. Fernandez does not however use any other examples from Bach's *oeuvre* to substantiate his views.

¹³ These include Robin A. Leaver, 'Bach's "Clavierübung III": Some Historical and Theological Considerations', *The Organ Yearbook* 6 (1975), 17–32; Albert Clement, *Der dritte Teil der Clavierübung von Johann Sebastian Bach: Musik—Text—Theologie* (Middelburg: Almares, 1999), 21–34.

¹⁴ See Peter Williams, *The Organ Music of J. S. Bach*, second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 123, where he cites other possibilities while acknowledging that the examples he cites are not pure fugal forms.

¹⁵ See Johann Mattheson, *Das Neu-Eröffnete Orchestre* (Hamburg, 1713), 231–253, where he describes key characteristics.

in the sacred vocal works of Bach.¹⁶ In his PhD dissertation of 1976, Ulrich Meyer suggested that an investigation into tonal allegory in the organ works was timely.¹⁷ However, to date there has not been a comprehensive investigation into tonal allegory in the instrumental works. The key of E flat has been noted to be of great significance in the works of Bach, most notably in the Prelude and Fugue in E flat (BWV 552), the opening and closing movements of *Clavierübung* III, where it can be strongly associated with the Trinity.¹⁸ It is likely, in the light of other possible Trinitarian associations, that the E-flat tonality of BWV 998 may have similar meaning. Further investigation into the other musical aspects of the piece will help to clarify the issue.

Another striking feature of the opening movement is the 12/8 metre. Renate Steiger has related this metre to Christ as the Good Shepherd in the cantatas of Bach.¹⁹ Traditionally this time signature has had pastoral connotations, used in the context of Christ as the Good Shepherd. Steiger refers to John 10:11: 'I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep'. Here Steiger suggests

¹⁶ Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory in the Vocal Works of J. S. Bach* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1991). Chafe and Wolfgang Auhagen (*Studien zur Tonartencharakteristik in theoretischen Schriften und Kompositionen vom späten 17. bis zum Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main, Bern and New York: Lang, 1983)), have both investigated tonal allegory in the vocal works of Bach, but not in his organ works.

¹⁷ See Ulrich Meyer, *J. S. Bachs Musik als theonome Kunst* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1979, originally a dissertation, University of Mainz, 1976), 76–7, where he writes about the notion of keys and their symbolism in the organ works as follows: 'Die Forschung steht hier vermutlich noch vor vielen Aufgaben' [the research must probably be directed towards more investigations here]. See also Anne Leahy, *Text-Music Relationships in the 'Leipzig' Chorales of Johann Sebastian Bach* (PhD diss., Utrecht, 2002), 99–100, forthcoming as Anne Leahy, *Text-Music Relationships in the 'Leipzig' Chorales of J. S. Bach*, ed. Robin A. Leaver (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2006).

¹⁸ See Clement, *Der dritte Teil der Clavierübung*, 11–24 and especially 14–16 and 23–4, where he discusses the significance of the number three in Bach's *Clavierübung* III and in particular in the Prelude and Fugue in E flat (BWV 552). BWV 552 is probably one of the strongest examples of Bach's using the symbolic number three in connection with the Trinity but there are many more examples to be found in the cantatas. See for example, movement 6 of the cantata for Trinity Sunday, *Es ist ein trotzig und verzagt Ding* (BWV 176). This is an alto aria in E-flat major and triple metre, accompanied by three unison oboes and continuo. The final line of text praises the Trinity and although in a later, undated, performance Bach subsequently changed the scoring to only one oboe (see Hans-Joachim Schulze and Christoph Wolff, *Bach Compendium: Analytisch-bibliographisches Repertorium der Werke Johann Sebastian Bachs* (Leipzig: Peters, 1985–), i, 368), the Trinitarian significance of the three-part texture and the E-flat tonality remains strong.

¹⁹ Renate Steiger, "'Die Welt ist euch ein Himmelreich". Zu J. S. Bachs Deutung des Pastoralen', *Musik und Kirche* 41 (1971), 1–9 and 69–79.

Bach's Prelude, Fugue and Allegro for Lute (BWV 998)

that the Good Shepherd and therefore the 12/8 metre can be interpreted as a symbol of deliverance. According to her, 12/8 is employed by Bach in an eschatological context, where there is a reference to eternal salvation and paradise.²⁰ A very convincing example of this is the monumental opening movement of the St Matthew Passion. Here the daughters of Zion weep for sinful humanity while the ripieno soprano intones Nicolaus Decius's 'O Lamm Gottes unschuldig' [Oh innocent Lamb of God]. The message is clear—Christ the innocent Lamb of God will save guilty humanity. This deliverance is related to Bach's use of 12/8 metre in the opening movement of the St Matthew Passion. Many other examples of Bach's use of 12/8 metre in this context may be found in his text-based works.²¹ It is possible that if BWV 998 is of theological significance, then the 12/8 metre may have been deliberately chosen by Bach for its symbolic potential.

Initially, the two other movements of the composition must be examined in tandem. The fugue subject of the central movement is a straightforward eight-crotchet theme, moving mainly in step. Some writers have suggested that the theme of the fugue may have been derived from Martin Luther's Christmas hymn 'Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her'.²² This may appear to be a subjective assumption. The opening phrase of the chorale certainly has a similar shape to that of the fugue subject. Both consist of eight crotchets, beginning on the second beat of the bar with a similar melodic outline:

Example 1(a): BWV 998.ii (fugue subject)



Example 1(b): 'Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her' (Martin Luther)



²⁰ Steiger, 1–2. Albert Clement also refers to BWV 768.7 in this context: Clement, 'O Jesu, du edle Gabe'. *Studien zum Verhältnis von Text und Musik in den Choralpartiten und den Kanonischen Veränderungen von Johann Sebastian Bach* (PhD diss., Utrecht, 1989), 129–32.

²¹ See the discussion of Bach's use of this metre in *Jesus Christus, unser Heiland* (BWV 666) and *Komm Gott Schöpffer, Heiliger Geist* (BWV 667) in Leahy, 185 and 200.

²² Fernandez, 45.

These similarities are not enough, however, to make an argument for theological significance. It is the opening motif of the third movement that provides a link to the 'Von Himmel hoch' hymn. This opening motif is exactly the same as that of the Canonic Variations on 'Vom Himmel Hoch, da komm ich her' (BWV 769/769a), which Bach was to compose on the occasion of his joining the Mizler Society some years later in 1747. In the case of the Canonic Variations, Bach employed 12/8 metre in C major, whereas the third movement of BWV 998 is in 3/8 and E flat, but apart from this the music is in essence the same:

Example 2(a): BWV 998.3



Example 2(b): BWV 767 (Variation 1)

Canone all'ottava

This connection does not seem to have been made to date. This motif is of considerable significance in the music of Bach. It manifests itself in various guises in his music from an early stage in his compositional output as will be shown below.²³

²³ Friedrich Smend was the first to mention the motivic connection between BWV 738, 618 and 769: see Smend, *Bach-Studien: Gesammelte Reden und Aufsätze*, ed. Christoph Wolff (Kassel etc.: Bärenreiter, 1969), 101–102; this is a reprint of the original article that appeared in *Bach-Jahrbuch* 30 (1933), 1–29. Since then, many have discussed these connections, although none has thus far connected these pieces with BWV 998. Albert Clement discusses all the literature on this subject in detail (Clement, 'O Jesu, du edle Gabe', 180–2). There (p. 182) he draws attention to what he suggests is the same motif in

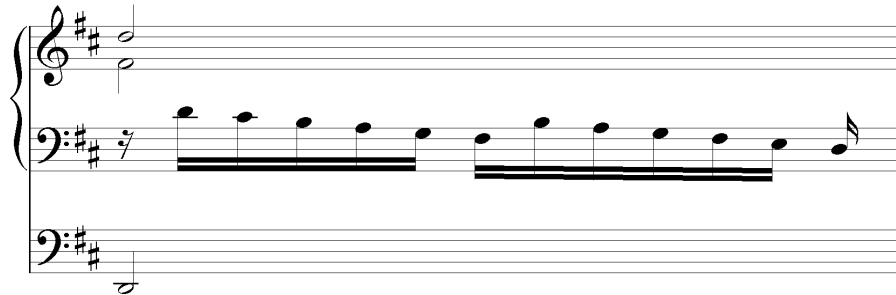
Bach's Prelude, Fugue and Allegro for Lute (BWV 998)

First, however, it is useful if the work is regarded as a whole. The fugue subject seems clearly related to Luther's 'Vom Himmel hoch'. The text of this hymn is related to the birth of Christ and the message of the angel who brings the good news down to earth, so conceivably the middle movement, the fugue, could be related to the second person of the Trinity.²⁴ Michael Marissen has pointed out the similarity between the fugue subject and the chorale 'Herr Jesu Christ, wahr'r Mensch und Gott'.²⁵

Example 3: 'Herr Jesu Christ, wahr'r Mensch und Gott' (Paul Eber)



Example 4: BWV 738 (bar 3)



These are important examples since they link this falling scalar motif with Luther's Christmas chorale. In this case it is almost certainly related to the message of the angel who brings the joyous news of the birth of Christ from heaven to earth. Albert Clement has related this motif to *descendit de coelis* in the context of the opening variation of the Canonic Variations (BWV 769a/769).²⁶ He also relates it to Jesus as 'edle Gabe' [precious gift] in relation to BWV 619 and 666.²⁷ It will be shown below how this motif may have a similar meaning in other works employing the same melodic patterns.

Bach also used this motif in the *Orgelbüchlein* chorale *Christe du Lamm Gottes* (BWV 619), as seen in the following example:

Example 5: BWV 619 (bars 1–3)

²⁶ Clement, 'O Jesu, du edle Gabe', 182.

²⁷ As note 26.

Bach's Prelude, Fugue and Allegro for Lute (BWV 998)

Here it appears not in the joyous running semiquaver form of BWV 738a and 738, but in solemn crotchets in the context of 3/2 metre. The hymn text is an anonymous paraphrase of the *Agnus Dei* and John 1:29. As well as being a hymn for the Ordinary, it was also widely used as a Lenten hymn.²⁸ Bach relates this hymn in a forceful way to the passion of Christ in the instrumental citation of the melody in the opening movement of the *Estomihi* cantata *Herr Jesu Christ, wahr'r Mensch und Gott* (BWV 127). Just as this motif was related in the 'Vom Himmel hoch' setting to the birth of Christ, now Bach relates it in BWV 619 and 127 to the death of Christ. This is no surprise, as in Lutheran theology of Bach's time the birth and death of Christ were very much linked. This is why the first chorale setting that we hear in the Christmas Oratorio is Paul Gerhardt's 'Wie soll ich dich empfangen' sung to the familiar tune of 'O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden'. In the Christmas Oratorio Bach is subtly reminding his listeners in Leipzig that Christ was born to die by employing this melody so inextricably related to the passion in the ears of the congregation.²⁹ So, in the organ works he also links the birth and death of Christ by employing the same motif.

This motif appears in the opening chorus of the Pentecost cantata *Erschallet ihr Lieder! Erklinget ihr Saiten!* (BWV 172), composed in 1714 in Weimar.³⁰

²⁸ Bighley, 55.

²⁹ See Robin A. Leaver, 'The Mature Vocal Works and their Theological and Liturgical Context', in *The Cambridge Companion to Bach*, ed. John Butt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 86–122: 98.

³⁰ Schulze and Wolff, *Bach Compendium*, i, 330.

Example 6: BWV 172.1 (bars 13–15)

Er - schal - let ihr Lie - der,
 Er - schal - let ihr Lie - der,
 Er - schal - let ihr Lie - der,
 Er - schal - let ihr Lie - der,

6 6

In this case the context is clearly the descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples at Pentecost. As shown above with reference to Example 4, the descending motif is related to the descending angel with the message of the gift of the birth of Christ (BWV 738). In addition, it can be associated with the gift of Christ's sacrifice as seen in BWV 619. The link between Incarnation and Atonement is an important aspect of Lutheran theology of the composer's time. It seems that this motif is often present in works by Bach relating to salvation.

How can this fit in with a Pentecost cantata? The Spirit is the final link to salvation. This is clear from the words of Christ in the gospel of John 14:16 and 26 as follows:³¹

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever...but the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

The Father sends the Spirit and subsequently Jesus also sends him, as is spoken of in Luke 24:49 as follows:

³¹ Quotations from the Bible are taken from the King James Version.

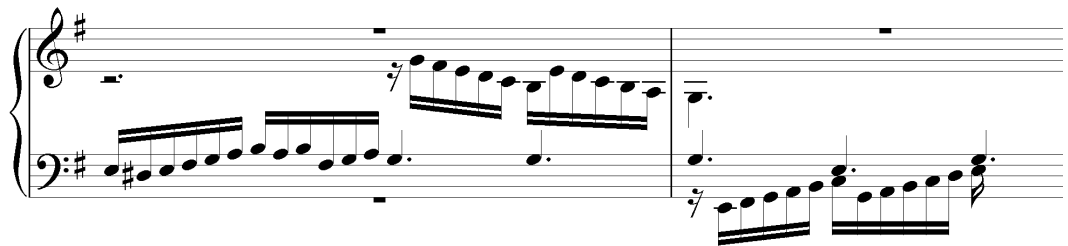
Bach's Prelude, Fugue and Allegro for Lute (BWV 998)

And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

Here Jesus has his role to play in the sending of the Holy Spirit and it is clear that each person of the Trinity has a role to play in salvation. God the Father sends the Son who then sends the Holy Spirit. Jesus refers to him as the Spirit of truth with whom there is certainty of salvation. Therefore, it is not surprising that Bach employs a motif already related to the birth and death of Christ in one of his earliest Pentecost cantatas. This may have some bearing on an interpretation of BWV 998, but first it is necessary to examine the remaining works employing this motif.

The motif is to be found in the 'Leipzig' chorale *Jesus Christus unser Heiland* (BWV 666):

Example 7: BWV 666 (bars 18–19)



The early version of this chorale (BWV 666a) dates at least from Bach's period at Weimar, but is more likely to be from an earlier period, given its compositional style.³² 'Jesus Christus unser Heiland' is Luther's extensive 1524 revision of the Latin *cantio*, *Jesus Christus nostra salus*. It was designated as a communion hymn in all Lutheran hymn-books. As such, the text was also clearly related to the passion of Christ with its many references to Christ's pain and suffering. Therefore, if, as in BWV 619, Bach is relating the falling motif to Christ's passion, then the same context may apply here.

A version of the same motif is heard in *Komm Gott Schöpffer Heiliger Geist* (BWV 667):³³

³² See Russell Stinson, *J. S. Bach's Great Eighteen Organ Chorales* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 5.

³³ Albert Clement has drawn attention to this connection (Clement, 'O Jesu, du edle Gabe', 182).

Example 8: BWV 667 (bars 15–17)



On its own, it is not a convincing connection, but taken in the light of the other instances of this motif, it is certainly worth considering. 'Komm Gott Schöpffer Heiliger Geist' is Luther's translation and revision of the Latin Pentecost hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*. In BWV 667 the chorale melody is heard twice, once in the soprano and then in the pedal part, where Bach appears to be setting verses 1 and 2 respectively.³⁴ The motif in question occurs at bars 16 and 19, where the text is referring to the Holy Spirit as 'des Allerhöchsten Gabe theuer' [precious gift of the most high]. The idea of the gift of the Holy Spirit is discussed liberally in Luther's Pentecost sermons. It cannot be a mere coincidence that Bach chose to employ this exact motif both in his Pentecost cantata (BWV 172) and in this Pentecost chorale prelude (BWV 667). In both works the gift of the descending Holy Spirit, which in turn results in the gift of salvation for humanity, is represented in the descending melodic line.

To complete the circle, Bach's final use of this motif is in the opening movement of the *Canonic Variations*, where he once more sets it in 12/8. In the light of all the other examples, the meaning is clear — the 12/8 metre and the descending scalar motif are related to the gift of the birth of Christ and the salvation which this birth brings. All these instances of this motif will help to establish the purpose of Bach's use of it in BWV 998.

With the exception of BWV 619 which is in 3/2 and BWV 172.1 which is in 3/8, all of the above examples are in 12/8, a metre that seems to be firmly associated with salvation in the sacred music of Bach. The 3/2 metre generally represents a more conservative approach by Bach, having much in common with settings of his predecessors in the seventeenth century. When Bach used 3/2 in his later years he

³⁴ Leahy, 198–200.

Bach's Prelude, Fugue and Allegro for Lute (BWV 998)

appears to have used it in a symbolic way and in most cases to emphasize a text relating to salvation: e.g. *O Lamm Gottes unschuldig* (BWV 656) and *Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr* (BWV 663).³⁵ Although these works were written in Weimar, Bach revised and placed the 'Leipzig' chorales together in one manuscript while he was in Leipzig and so these compositions must be considered within a later compositional development. The dancing 3/8 metre of the opening movement of BWV 172 represents a most modern approach by Bach. This is very much a depiction of the 'Spirit of Truth' of the New Testament, who appears in dancing tongues of fire and provides a link to the third movement of the Prelude, Fugue and Allegro, a movement rich in symbolic potential. The E-flat tonality links it to the Trinity. This surely strengthens the Trinitarian connection. As the third movement of a work which as a whole is so abundant in references to the number three, it may be expected that it could be somehow related to the Holy Spirit. This is confirmed by the triple quaver-beat metre, also found in the Pentecost cantata BWV 172. The presence of a motif clearly related to salvation shows the role that the Holy Spirit plays in salvation, while also linking it to the Son by means of its association with the chorale 'Vom Himmel hoch', so much a part of the second movement. The constant presence of semiquavers in this movement also points to the Holy Spirit whose tongues of fire are so dramatically portrayed in the cantatas for Pentecost: for example, the first movement of *O ewiges Feuer, o Ursprung der Liebe* (BWV 34). In the context of so many aspects of the third movement of BWV 998 pointing to the Holy Spirit, the use of semiquavers could have a similar meaning to that of the opening movement of BWV 34. The opening motif is heard three times only in this third movement (at bars 1 and 6 in E flat and at bar 19 in B flat). In this regard, it is interesting to note that the total number of bars in BWV 998 is 243 which is three to the power of five!³⁶ This serves further to strengthen the Trinitarian connection.

So, continuing to work in reverse order, it is worth taking a closer look at the central movement of the Prelude, Fugue and Allegro. The use of a tripartite form at the centre of a three-part structure is very significant in my view. Many elements point to

³⁵ Leahy, 79–80 and 159.

³⁶ See Wendelin Göbel, 'Notwendigkeit und Freiheit einer Komposition, dargestellt an Johann Sebastian Bachs Präludium, Fuge und Allegro Es-Dur, BWV 998', in *Zur Geschichtlichkeit der Beziehungen von Glaube, Kunst und Umweltgestaltung*, ed. Claus Bussmann and Friedrich A. Uehlein, Pommersfelder Beiträge, 6 (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1992), 132–170, where he engages in a discussion on the significance of numbers in BWV 998. He does not link any of his numerical hypotheses to the Trinity, nor does he explore the theological potential of the piece in any significant manner.

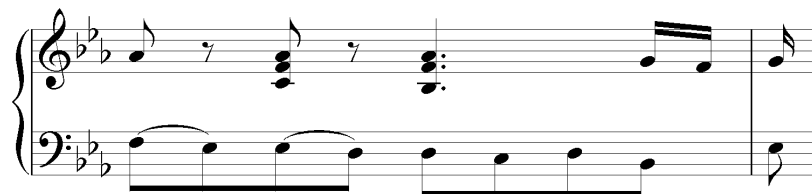
the second person of the Trinity. Clearly the close link with both 'Vom Himmel hoch' and the striking similarity to 'Herr Jesu Christ wahr'r Mensch und Gott' tie this movement to the second person of the Trinity. There are other musical aspects which also point to similar connections. The use of accented dissonance in the form of the so-called 'sigh motif' also clearly points to Christ, this motif being linked with him and his passion in many of the cantatas and passions and indeed the chorale-based organ works relating to the passion:

Example 9: BWV 998.2 (bars 17–18)



Similar pairing of quavers can be found towards the end of the B section of the fugue at bar 74.³⁷

Example 10: BWV 998.2 (bars 74–5)



A fine example of this is the Advent chorale prelude *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland* (BWV 659) where the introduction of slurred semiquavers, the 'sigh motif', is related to the passion of Christ which is a natural outcome in Lutheran theology of his Incarnation on earth.³⁸

³⁷ The same motif is used in a similar way in the three-part ricercar of the Musical Offering, bars 109–10. I am grateful to Yo Tomita for pointing this out to me.

³⁸ Leahy, 115.

Bach's Prelude, Fugue and Allegro for Lute (BWV 998)

Example 11: BWV 659 (bars 21–22)

Example 12: BWV 659 (bars 23–26)

The inversion of the opening four notes of the fugue subject in movement 2 of BWV 998 used in combination with the 'sighing' motif may also be significant. While one must acknowledge that inversion is a common contrapuntal technique, Bach often seems to employ this technique in order to make an extra-musical point. This may be the case in BWV 998. Some examples may help to prove this point. Inversion has been used by Bach in a symbolic way in many of his works; in the *Missa* in F (BWV 233), the subject of the *Christe eleison* is almost exactly a mirror image of the *Kyrie eleison*. In the second *Kyrie* the two themes are combined to make a double fugue. The text is a plea

for mercy to the Father and the Son. It seems reasonable to suggest that Christ is portrayed as a mirror image of the Father in the inverted *Christe* theme. In the second *Kyrie* the two themes are combined perhaps to symbolize the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son.³⁹ Added to this, Bach superimposes the three verses of the chorale 'Christe du Lamm Gottes' successively over the three sections of the *Kyrie – Christe – Kyrie* on horns and oboes. Clearly in this case the use of inversion refers to Christ.⁴⁰ Similarly, in the middle movement of BWV 998, the use of inversion in combination with the 'sigh' motif may be linked to the second person of the Trinity (for example, in bars 17–19). So there seem to be valid reasons for associating this middle movement with the second person of the Trinity.

It is tempting to assume that the opening movement of the Prelude, Fugue and Allegro could be related to God the Father. This Prelude has much in common with similar preludes from the Well-tempered Clavier. Important features already noted are the 12/8 metre and the E-flat tonality. These in themselves are not enough to assume symbolic potential but when viewed in the context of all the possibilities regarding the other two movements it is logical to associate these aspects with God the Father and his role in the chain of events leading to salvation for humanity. A characteristic of this movement is the repetition of the tonic in the bass of the first four bars and subsequently throughout the piece as seen in the following example:

Example 13: BWV 998.1 (bars 1–5)

Prelude

³⁹ Robin A. Leaver, lecture given at the Conservatory of Music and Drama, Dublin Institute of Technology, November 2001.

⁴⁰ There is a striking use of inversion in the opening fugal *Kyrie* of the *Missa* in G (BWV 236).

Bach's Prelude, Fugue and Allegro for Lute (BWV 998)

This happens four more times in the movement—on B flat (bar 6), on C (bar 14), on A flat (bar 25) and finally once more on E flat at the close of the piece (bar 42). This is very striking. On its own it may not be regarded as significant, but within the context of other extra-musical discoveries in relation to BWV 998 it must be regarded as being of note. The strong repetition of bass notes in this manner has been frequently used by Bach in the context of God the Father: in, for example, the opening chorus of the St John Passion where the Trinitarian God is so expressly portrayed by Bach. Here God the Father is portrayed in the repeated bass and this could be its meaning in BWV 998 also.

One final element to be considered is the dating of this piece. The final years of Bach's life may be regarded as a period of consolidation with works such as the Goldberg Variations, the Art of Fugue, Musical Offering, Canonic Variations, the assembling of the B Minor Mass and the 'Leipzig' chorales dating from this period. It seems significant that Bach would compose a piece such as BWV 998 in this period, incorporating many elements found in other contemporary compositions.

Before concluding, it is worth taking a brief look at one other piece by Bach: the *Kleines harmonisches Labyrinth* (BWV 591). This is a three-movement work for keyboard/organ whose dating, as well as its authenticity, has not been fully established. No autograph score exists and in the recently published *Kritischer Bericht*, which accompanies the *Neue Bach Ausgabe* edition of this piece, the editors find it difficult to date the work.⁴¹ Given the upbeat ties which they regard as a mark of the galant style, the piece is unlikely to belong to Bach's Weimar period.⁴² In his book *The Maze and the Warrior*, Craig Wright suggests that the piece may stem from 1720 and Bach's time at Cöthen.⁴³ The editors of the *Kritischer Bericht* disagree, maintaining that the rhythmic style was very unusual for this time in Bach's career, as were the many instances of the 'Haltetton'.⁴⁴ The *Kleines harmonisches Labyrinth* is, however, a most interesting piece and can help strengthen the argument that Bach did indeed attach theological significance to at least some of his non-text-based instrumental works.

⁴¹ Ulrich Bartels and Peter Wollny, *Kritischer Bericht* (2004) for volume IV/11, *Freie Orgelwerke und Choralpartiten aus unterschiedlicher Überlieferung*, of the *Neue Bach-Ausgabe*, 79–80.

⁴² As note 41.

⁴³ Craig Wright, *The Maze and the Warrior: Symbols in Architecture, Theology and Music* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 264.

⁴⁴ Bartels and Wollny, 80.

Although not Trinitarian in the same way as the Prelude, Fugue and Allegro, there are some significant references to the number three and other possible theological interpretations. Bach divides his work into three movements: *Introitus*, *Centrum* and *Exitus*. The imagery is clear here—a prelude and postlude framing a central movement.⁴⁵ There is yet more symbolism: the piece could be described as palindromic. The *Introitus* has eighty beats, the *Centrum* forty-eight and the *Exitus* also eighty.⁴⁶ In addition to this, Bach commences a retrograde of the fugue exactly halfway through the *Centrum*. The title of the work is also significant. There was indeed a precedent for musical labyrinths, the most notable before Bach being Johann Caspar Ferdinand Fischer's *Ariadne Musica* (1702), Marin Marais' *Le Labyrinthe* (1717) and Friedrich Suppig's *Labyrinthus Musicus* (1722).⁴⁷ The maze had a traditional theological meaning, of which Bach would have been well aware. Musical labyrinths represented a difficult tonal journey and could be seen as a metaphor for the 'errant soul wandering in the maze of life'.⁴⁸ It seems clear that there is some sort of theological symbolism at work in Bach's labyrinth. If he would use such a method in one seemingly non-text-based work, then is it not highly likely that he might try again with others? This seems to strengthen the argument that Bach was applying theological aspects to the Prelude, Fugue and Allegro. It may also help in the dating of both BWV 591 and 998. The other clearly Trinitarian work stemming from the same period as the Prelude, Fugue and Allegro is the Prelude and Fugue in E-flat (BWV 552). It may be that Bach was deliberately applying to the instrumental works methods now firmly established in his sacred music. This could mean that BWV 591 also dates from the final years of Bach's life. Another instrumental work rich in symbolism from this period is, of course, the Musical Offering.⁴⁹ In this last decade of his life, Bach seems to have been expanding the boundaries of his compositional methods as demonstrated by these works.

The Prelude, Fugue and Allegro, while belonging firmly in the realm of Bach's secular instrumental music, may thus also have some theological connotations. There are too many elements here to disregard the symbolic potential of this work—the E-flat tonality, the 12/8 metre of the Prelude, the very close similarity of the fugue subject

⁴⁵ Wright, 262.

⁴⁶ As note 45.

⁴⁷ Wright, 254–8.

⁴⁸ Wright, 264.

⁴⁹ Michael Marissen, 'The theological character of J. S. Bach's Musical Offering', in *Bach Studies* 2, ed. Daniel R. Melamed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 85–106.

Bach's Prelude, Fugue and Allegro for Lute (BWV 998)

to two Lutheran chorales, a *da capo* fugue at the centre of a tripartite work and, most importantly, the use of a motif so clearly associated in the music of Bach with the 'Vom Himmel hoch' chorale and its relevance to salvation. Bach did not compose any one composition in isolation from any other and his compositional style crosses the boundaries from sacred to secular and back. Although some have used this fact as an argument that Bach did not apply any theological meaning in any of his music, it seems reasonable to suggest the opposite: not only did he write *J.J.* (*Jesu juva*) at the beginning of many of his pieces and *S.D.G.* (*Soli Dei Gloria*) at the end, but he was praising his God in a more tenable manner by using the same significant compositional devices in both sacred and secular compositions. The Prelude, Fugue and Allegro is possibly a Trinitarian statement of faith on the part of Bach.