

J. S. Bach's WTC Book I Prelude and Fugue in B-flat Minor BWV 867:

An Analysis and Study of Related Works

by

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## ABSTRACT

The core element of this research paper is an analysis of the B-flat minor prelude and fugue BWV 867. The author's analysis is then compared with the main contributors to Bach's analytical studies. An understanding of the work's structure, together with its motivic and harmonic details, help the performer develop an interpretive approach to the work.

Significant Bach scholars, including David Ledbetter and Peter Williams, are used as the source for the additional works to be studied. These scholars also mention close associates of Bach who offer additional insight into his music: Kirnberger and Weiss. The paper includes a brief discussion of the opening chorus fugue BWV 64, instrumental prelude to the cantata BWV 106, chorale prelude BWV 721, and *Tombeau sur la Mort de Mr Comte de Logy* by Weiss, as they relate to the B-flat minor prelude and fugue. In addition, the analysis provides materials on how the elements of the work relate to the Doctrine of Affections. From the B-flat minor prelude and fugue, the harmonic progressions and figuration are examined from the point of view of the Doctrine. The research also examines the fugue subject, with its unusual leap of a minor 9th, to its structural connection to the opening chorus fugue of BWV 64, and its ties to the Doctrine.

Through the analysis of the B-flat minor prelude and fugue and a comparison to works by Bach that are stylistically connected to this work, the author offers insights into the music and its relationship to works that have a sacred text association.

## DEDICATION

To my parents for their immense love, support and prayers. This work is also dedicated to God the Father, Lord Jesus Christ, my personal Savior, and the Holy Spirit.

*Soli Deo Gloria.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My gratitude goes to all the members on my committee. Thank you, Dr. Meir, for your guidance on this process. Many thanks to Professor Ryan for your kind words along with your continual support. Thank you, Dr. Little, for gladly supporting me in the process toward completing the work. Most of all, thank you so very much, Professor Hamilton, for all your teachings on the piano and for sharing with me the subject regarding the symbolisms of Bach. Thank you for inspiring me in finding the topic of my research and for supporting me up until the editing of my work. It is such a blessing to have met you and I will treasure all the piano lessons we had including your words of wisdom to heart.

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## PREFACE

*The Well-Tempered Clavier* by Johann Sebastian Bach is one of his most popularly performed keyboard works.<sup>1</sup> The importance and challenge of Bach's preludes and fugues reside in their application in multiple musical contexts.<sup>2</sup> There is a wide array of Bach interpretations being presented today, yet the knowledge regarding the compositional meaning of the works is limited. This suggests the need for ongoing musical exploration and research. It is crucial for the musician to seriously examine the significance of Bach's works in order to fully appreciate his music.

Throughout the many years of research in the field of Bach's music, ongoing discoveries in symbolism (the cross motive in particular) have been made by leading scholars of his works. Prior to exploring the realm of Bach's symbolism, it is crucial to mention Bach's strict teaching process. From the readings on Bach, one can realize how much of a master he was as teacher as well as composer. His specific teaching program was a well-structured and coherent one.<sup>3</sup> Even though Bach taught a select group of only the highly gifted, he did not allow them to skip the process of learning his keyboard works.<sup>4</sup> Bach would instruct even one of his most advanced pupils to return to the basics

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<sup>1</sup> David Schulenberg, *The Keyboard Music of J. S. Bach* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1992), 160.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> David Ledbetter, *Bach's Well-tempered Clavier: The 48 Preludes and Fugues* (New Haven: Yale University, 2002), 129-130.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 130.

to strengthen the course.<sup>5</sup> Though it is intriguing to analyze the symbolic aspects of Bach's work, one should not overlook study of the more traditional analytical methods utilized by Bach.

The B-flat minor prelude BWV 867 is composed of a homophonic texture, which is rare to Bach's contrapuntal writing in *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. There are two common challenges in performing this prelude on the modern piano. The first is to create a stylistic character appropriate to the Baroque era (for example, employing a limited use of pedal), and the second is to find a tempo which conveys forward motion without excessive speed. The search for the profound implications of this prelude continues to this day.

This research will follow the basic class structure that Bach established for his students. The first chapter will display the work's structure through an analysis of its harmonic and motivic details, including discussions of rhythm and pitch motives along with sequence materials. The analysis should be of significant aid to the performer in determining a valid interpretation. In the second chapter, a comparison of related vocal and keyboard works will be offered with a view towards finding mutual motivic associations. The final chapter will evolve into a deeper level of symbolic analysis, as the author examines the evidence for Bach's use of symbolism with implications for interpretation and performance.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 1

### ANALYSIS

Many renowned Bach scholars, such as Erwin Bodky, David Schulenberg, Siglind Bruhn, David Ledbetter, Marjorie Engels, and Hermann Keller have analyzed and written on the 48 preludes and fugues.<sup>6</sup> These books are beneficial in acquiring the compositional traits of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. The authors provide vast knowledge to gain access into Bach's keyboard works, demonstrating a collection of analytical methods to help the reader comprehend the intriguing works of the 48 sets of pieces. Keller points to the principal in learning the works:

And as in Bach's time practice and theory were not yet separated as they are today, the player derived from the book not only an introduction to all the twenty-four keys, but also to the texture and form of the preludes and fugues. This unity has been lost to us, but one can find it again in *The Well-Tempered Clavier*.<sup>7</sup>

It is essential for the performer to go back in time to absorb the teaching tradition Bach implemented for his pupils. It is known that Bach taught through the demonstration of his own works—Bach's pupils were to copy and rewrite the master's keyboard compositions.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Erwin Bodky, *The Interpretation of BACH's Keyboard Works* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1976); Schulenberg, *The Keyboard Music of J. S. Bach*; Siglind Bruhn, *J. S. Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier: In-depth Analysis and Interpretation*, 2nd, completely revised ed. (Waldkirch: Edition Gorz, 2014); Ledbetter, *Bach's Well-tempered Clavier*; Marjorie Wornell Engels, *Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier: An Exploration of the 48 Preludes and Fugues* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2006); and Hermann Keller, *The Well-Tempered Clavier by Johann Sebastian Bach*, trans. Leigh Gardine (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> Keller, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Ledbetter, 128.

The title-page of *The Well-Tempered Clavier I* explains Bach's methodical intentions in his teaching. The translation of the title-page describes *The Well-Tempered Clavier* as intended for educational means and for the "eager to learn."<sup>9</sup> It further specifies the 48 pieces are "for those who are already proficient in this study."<sup>10</sup>

The 48 is the apex of Bach's clavier teaching programme. In his formulation of the title-page he puts the educational intention first, before the 'rare entertainment of those already skilled in this discipline'. Here again Bach's wording has significant resonances in his tradition, which clarify and give focus to his intentions.<sup>11</sup>

Even though the compositions of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* are among the most challenging works created for keyboard players, the performer may to a certain degree develop an awareness of the motivic ideas by simply learning the preludes and fugues. However, a failure to seriously study the pieces in detail will likely lead to misguided interpretations of the works. A theoretical approach opens the player to knowledge on a deeper level. Discovering the interwoven motivic details helps the performer to see the internal framework of the works and develop a broader interpretive perspective. Analytical practices greatly strengthen understanding and performance.

It is through intense motivic analysis that one realizes the wondrous design of Bach's immaculate work. The master frequently revisited *The Well-Tempered Clavier*

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<sup>9</sup> As cited by Keller, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ledbetter, 126.

throughout the years for revisions of his work of art.<sup>12</sup> To properly grasp the 48 preludes and fugues based on Bach's compositional intents, the analytical approach is vital.

The B-flat minor prelude and fugue contains an atmosphere and intensity that rivals the expressed feelings of works from the Romantic era. The music is widely enjoyed by performers for its sublime qualities. The prelude's chordal style is an unusual texture among the many contrapuntal preludes of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Nonetheless, a thorough analysis shows the work contains various intertwined layers of motivic ideas beneath its broad emotional surface. The discovery of this motivic diversity in turn reveals a structural coherence.

## **Prelude**

### Rhythm Motives

The B-flat minor prelude consists of basic motivic categories. In general, motives can be categorized in two groups: rhythm motives, and pitch motives. The rhythmic motives are of two types, the first of which establishes the main theme, dominating the entire prelude and recurring in various forms. The second is a single *ostinato* bass note motive that recurs in important measures of the prelude. Additionally, this repeated eighth-note rhythmic motive is key to the character of the piece.<sup>13</sup>

The prelude involves three different types of rhythmic motives. The primary rhythmic motive (Rh1) is built on two sixteenth-notes followed by three consecutive eighth-notes.

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<sup>12</sup> Engels, 3.

<sup>13</sup> The significance of this *ostinato* bass will be discussed in the third chapter when referencing its symbolic meaning to the piece.





Example 1.1 Rh1 motive, m. 1.

The second rhythmic type (Rh2), which is almost identical to the first rhythmic pattern Rh1, begins with the same idea of two sixteenth-notes followed by an eighth-note. It then substitutes a pair of sixteenth-notes for the second eighth.



Example 1.2 Rh2 motive, mm. 3-4.

The third type of rhythmic motive (Rh3) is an elaborated version of the first two rhythm motives (Rh1 and Rh2). This third rhythmic pattern appears only twice in the prelude, in mm. 19-20 and mm. 23-24. Regardless of its rare appearance, its recurrence validates the continuation of its rhythmic form. Rh3 serves a cadential function namely at the closing the prelude. This specific rhythmic Rh3 idea will later play a unique role in the piece.<sup>14</sup> The third rhythmic pattern Rh3 consists of six sixteenth-notes, followed by an eighth-note.

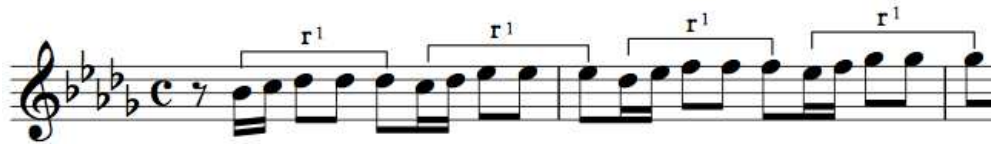


Example 1.3 Rh3 motive, mm. 19-20.

The primary rhythmic motive Rh1 is immediately established in the theme, occurring consecutively throughout in an ascending motion.

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<sup>14</sup> The reason for this will be explained in the third chapter when discussing the symbolic elements.



Example 1.4 Rh1 motive in the theme, mm. 1-3.

This ascending motion in the soprano line briefly ceases on the high G-flat as the bass notes begin to imitate the soprano an octave lower with the theme in m. 3.



Example 1.5 Rh1 motive in the bass, mm. 3-4.

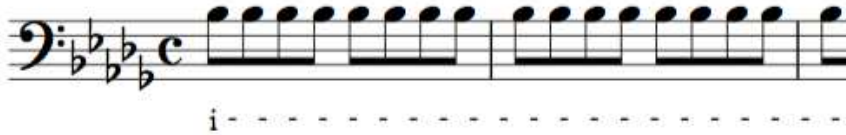
The other rhythmic type, and perhaps the most unique in the prelude, is a pulsating eighth-note motive. This repeating motive is an essential rhythmic device in the piece.



Example 1.6 Eighth-note pulse in the bass, mm. 1-3.

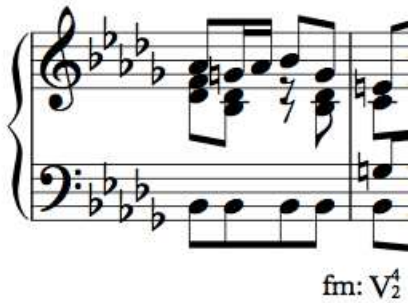
This eighth-note pulse motive appears on many occasions throughout the prelude, varying in length. The pulses are harmonically related, either detaining the piece at the tonic or dominant level acting as a pedal or modulating into other key areas. The lists of these references are shown in the examples below.

The prelude's beginning pulse rhythm is on the tonic B-flat. This maintains tonic up to m. 3, reinforcing the B-flat minor tonality.



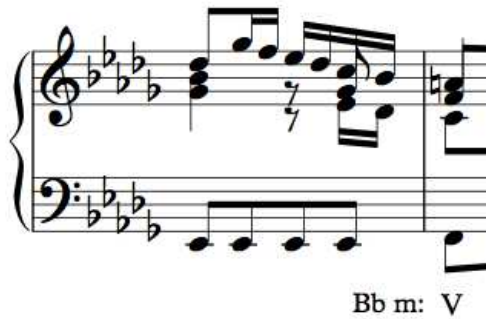
Example 1.7 Eighth-note pulse in the tonic key, mm. 1-3.

The next pulse rhythm motive appears in mm. 9-10. In these measures, the rhythmic motive is shorter in length, consisting of only five notes. In this instance, the motive serves as a preparation for a third inversion secondary dominant chord to the dominant key area of F minor.



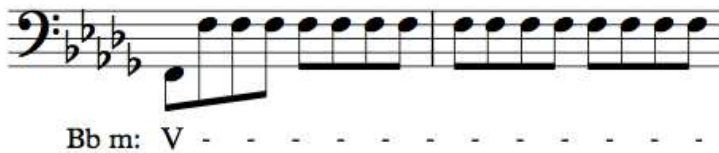
Example 1.8 Eighth-note motive, mm. 9-10.

In mm. 19-20, this pulse rhythm incorporated in mm. 9-10 returns in combination with the Rh3, the succeeding sixteenth-note motive. Similar to the dominant preparation chord shown in the example above, this set of pulsing eighth-notes functions as a connection into pedal on the dominant of the prelude.



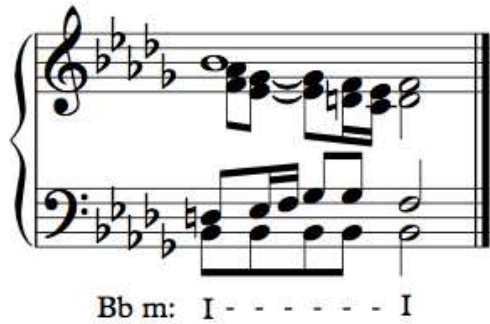
Example 1.9 Eight-note pulse leading to V, mm. 19-20.

The return of the extended pedal point in m. 20 resembles the *ostinato* bass line in the exposition. However, it now reiterates the dominant to prepare the listener for the final cadence. Regardless of the difference in pitch level, the pulsating motive is still as persistent as the motive in mm. 1-3.



Example 1.10 Eighth-note pulse as dominant pedal, mm. 20-21.

The last phase of the repeated rhythm motive occurs at the final cadence of the prelude in m. 24. It extends this final cadence by emphasizing the tonic key of B-flat minor, which had proceeded in the previous m. 23. Consequently, it initiates the closing of the prelude as well as fulfilling a final perfect authentic cadence anticipated from the dominant pedal point figure shown in mm. 20-21.



Example 1.11 Final eighth-note pulse at cadence, m. 24.

As demonstrated, the repeating eighth-note rhythmic figure is an essential motivic tool that supports the harmonic outline of the prelude. However, this is not the only rhythm motive that pertains to harmonic structures in the piece. The Rh1 and Rh2 patterns are found in various sections more than the eighth-note pulses and function as a harmonically related feature throughout the prelude.

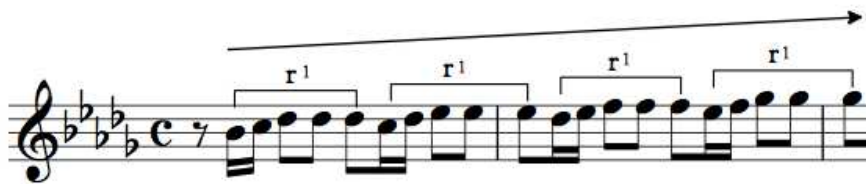
#### Pitch Motives

The rhythmic motives that drive the main theme of the prelude are carefully interconnected. The Rh2 motive emerges from Rh1, and the subtle transition makes its appearance unnoticeable. Yet the two rhythms are distinguished by their reference to either pitch level or harmonic relationship. Rh1 is attached to certain pitch patterns, while Rh2 is closely related to harmonic cadence procedures. Differentiating the two rhythmic forms comes from dividing the rhythms into their smallest units. For instance, the smallest rhythmic unit (Un1) is a three-note idea which is also a one-beat motive. This rhythmic pattern shares an association with a certain set of pitches in various forms.



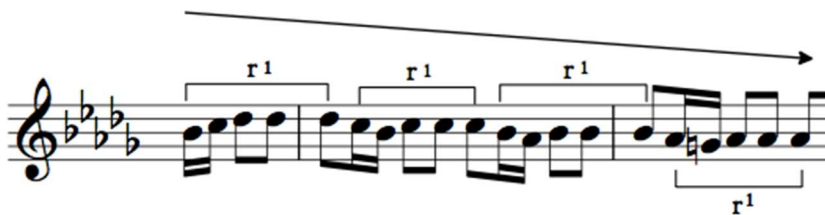
Example 1.12 Un1, m. 1.

Once the Un1 is identified, it is then grouped into a larger motive as discussed earlier. This becomes the standard Rh1 motive to the prelude.<sup>15</sup> It is necessary to observe the Rh1 motive carefully amidst the natural flow of thematic movement. The motivic pitch pattern of Rh1 is directed in either an ascending or descending motion. These motivic patterns are found in five sections of the prelude. The first example is displayed in the theme and demonstrates how the Un1 allows a melodic line to ascend.



Example 1.13 Ascending Rh1 motive in the theme, mm. 1-3.

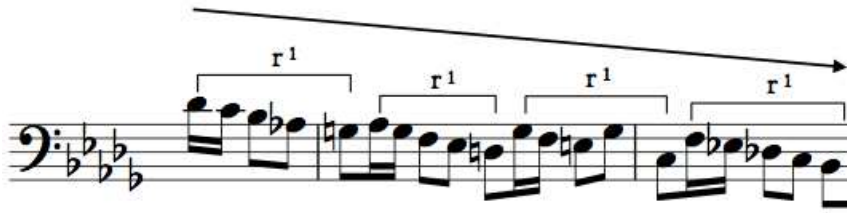
The Rh1 pitch motive reappears in mm. 7-9, this time mirroring the rising line of the opening in a descending motion.



Example 1.14 Descending Rh1 motive, mm. 7-9.

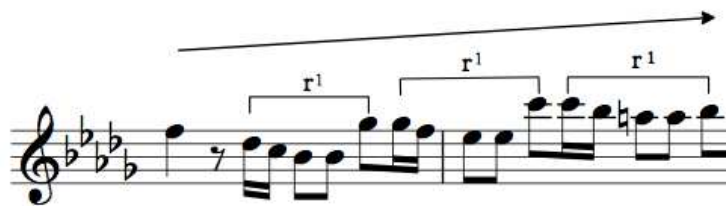
<sup>15</sup> See Example 1.1.

The following bass line from mm. 7-9 imitates the descending motion shown in the previous example from the soprano line.



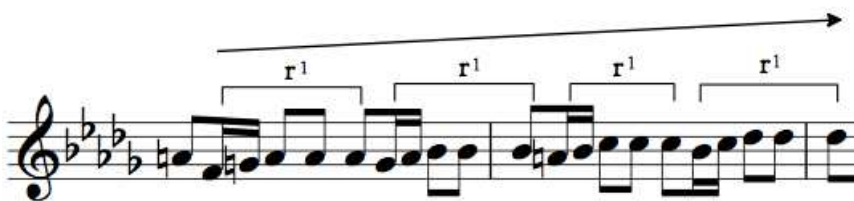
Example 1.15 Descending Rh1 motive in bass line, mm. 7-9.

A melodic line that contains an alternate version of the thematic idea appears in mm. 15-16. This melody combines the descending scale Un1, but then leaps up on beats four and two to create a different type of ascending line. The Rh1 is applied in the ascending motion.



Example 1.16 Rh1 motive in ascending motion, mm. 15-16.

In m. 20, the Rh1 pattern reappears in the return of the theme in the dominant key. The upward melodic and rhythmic content replicates the main theme.



Example 1.17 Ascending Rh1 motive in the return of theme, mm. 20-22.

Rh2 takes on a different role melodically than Rh1. Contrary to the primary Rh1, Rh2 most often moves downward to disengage from the previous ascending motion. Notice how Un1 shifts the pitch to a higher or a lower note. The inconsistent pitch arrangement maintains a specific harmonic domain. It preserves a certain key area or prepares for a harmonic change that ultimately leads the phrase to cadence.

This rhythmic module Rh2 is particularly important for its harmonic achievements in the prelude. Harmonic shifts occur whenever this specific rhythm is applied. The following examples show the various usages of pitch motives and how the rhythmic structure accomplishes certain harmonic goals. The first occurrence of this rhythmic pattern marks the earliest dominant chord in the prelude.

The image shows a musical score for two staves, treble and bass clef, in G-flat major (three flats). A bracket labeled 'r2' spans the first two measures. The first measure is labeled 'Bb m:' and the second measure is labeled 'V2'. The bass line shows a descending line from F4 to B-flat4, and the treble line shows a descending line from G4 to E4.

Example 1.18 Rh2 motive, mm. 3-4.

The first collaboration of Rh2 between the two outer voices appears in m. 6. The Rh2 in the upper register lingers around the dominant key as the bass descends by step, changing inversions of the dominant chord to arrange the cadence. The leap of pitch in the bass (F to B-flat) as shown in the example below can occur because of the descending line preceding it (created by Rh2) to fulfill its harmonic resolution. The arriving note of B-flat in the bass initiates its earliest dominant to tonic cadence in the prelude, and the B-flat resolution is further emphasized in m. 7.



Bb m:  $V_2^4$        $\frac{4}{3}$        $\frac{6}{5}$   $r^2$       7      i

Example 1.19 Rh2 motive, mm. 6-7.

As shown in the example above, the merging of the two Rh2 motives prolongs the dominant key in m. 6. This dominant chord, initiated in m. 4, ultimately leads the phrase to its first imperfect authentic cadence on the downbeat of m. 7; however, the Rh2 motive then extends the tonic to the middle of m. 7.

Bb m:      i

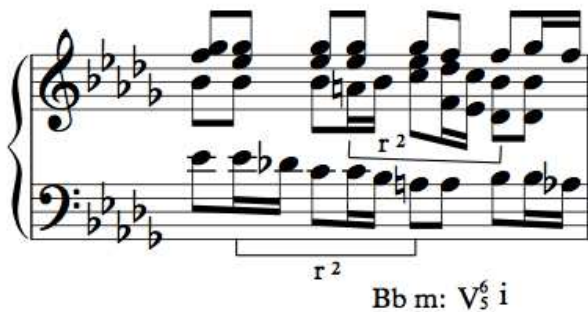
Example 1.20 Initial imperfect authentic cadence V to i, m. 7.

Rh2 reappears in the bass to retain the Neapolitan chord in F minor, in m. 11. The rhythm is implied yet again during the modulatory section in preparation for the upcoming cadence in mm. 12-13.



Example 1.21 Rh2 motive, m. 11.

The next Rh2 set exemplifies the turn of direction from the previously ascending motives.<sup>16</sup> The Rh2 creates a quick transition into a dominant key to reach its arrival point back to the tonic in B-flat minor.



Example 1.22 Descending Rh2 motives, m. 17.

In m. 18, the Rh2 motive is most actively engaged in the upper and lower outer lines. The motives emerge from the previous section to pave the way for the next cadence. This harmonic progression is fulfilled in m. 19, but only momentarily.

<sup>16</sup> See Example 1.16.

Bb m:  $V_5^6$  i

Example 1.23 Rh2 motives, mm. 18-19.

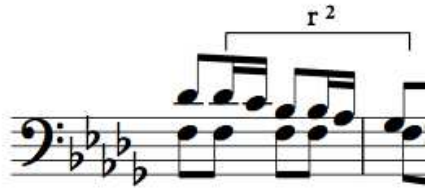
The imperfect authentic cadence is soon interrupted by the bass motive, which creates a pathway to the arrival of the dominant pedal in m. 20.

Bb m: i  $r^2$  V

Example 1.24 Descending Rh2 motive, m. 19.

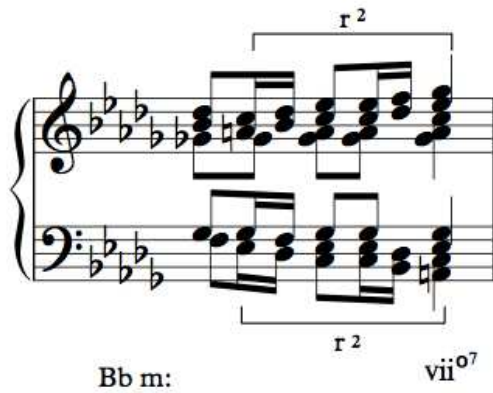
As seen in the earlier examples, Bach often uses the Rh2 to postpone and reinforce an upcoming harmonic closure. This method tends to prolong or delay the cadences and produce slower resolution after the cadence. So far, the rhythm motives have functioned to elude certain cadences.

At the end of the return of the theme, Rh2 makes its swift appearance in m. 21, where the tenor line rapidly changes to a downward motion to close the thematic material and accomplish a quick cadence.



Example 1.25 Descending Rh2 motive, mm. 21-22.

This pattern abruptly creates a fully diminished seventh chord. Unlike the usual appliances of this motivic nature, this cadence figure is accomplished in less than a measure. In m. 22, Bach uses a similar device, the harmonic tension created by this fast descent in the bass and the rhythmic unison builds an unexpected focus before the final cadence of the prelude.



Example 1.26 Rh2 motivic unison, m. 22.

The following segment is in the coda section to the prelude. This concluding segment presents its final statement of the Rh2 motive that leads into a perfect authentic cadence. This measure also corresponds to the preceding dominant to tonic harmonic progression first initiated in the dominant pedal in the return of the theme at m. 20.

Bb m:      V    I

Example 1.27 Final Rh2 motive, m. 23.

As seen from the previous examples, Rh2 motives are linked with harmonic progressions throughout the piece. The Rh2 achieves harmonic procedures, together with the use of the Un1 motives within. The rhythmic units are uniquely coordinated for harmonic purposes.

#### Harmonic Sections

The purpose of discovering the motivic roles is to aid the performer in attaining a clearer understanding of the harmonic structure of the prelude. It leads to recognizing the structural unity to the piece. With the complexity of the composition, recognizing the overall structure is important as to recognize recurring sections and how the harmonic portions dictate form. Harmonic sections form the internal design of the prelude, and this allows the performer to review the piece from a higher perspective.

The primary harmonic unit is mostly evident in the theme of the prelude. The opening section to the prelude displays an unceasing homophonic movement on the tonic pedal. The chordal texture is fulfilled by the inner-voice accompaniment, which supports the harmonic structure to the eminent theme.



Example 1.28 Inner-voice accompaniment in the theme, mm. 1-3.

The inner-voice accompaniment supports the theme from the middle voices. The description is meant to give the performer more information about how these voices help construct the sections of this prelude from a middle ground level. These motivic elements build connections to sectional measures and clarify the overall design of the composition.

Sections are often divided by harmonic statements and cadences. For example, the first authentic cadence that appears in mm. 6-7 concludes the first tonic area of the piece to transition into more modulatory ideas. Therefore, the thematic statement is extended and closes in m. 7.<sup>17</sup> This prolongation of the tonic in the exposition initiates the first thematic area and establishes a status quo for the return of certain sections.

Sectional division in the prelude highlights viewing the work at a foreground level. This is the ultimate reason why one would attempt to find major sections within a composition. In terms of sectional divisions, the prelude is divided into three parts. The first part of the piece (mm. 1-13) may be defined as the exposition. The second main part, or modulatory section, occurs in m. 13 and continues to the return of the theme in m. 20. Although the dominant pedal signals the dominant to tonic harmonic progression,<sup>18</sup> the

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<sup>17</sup> See Example 1.20.

<sup>18</sup> See Example 1.10.

return of the theme in the dominant key overrides the harmonic statement and validates it as the last section to the piece.<sup>19</sup>

Regarding sectional terminology, formal labels are used differently by Bach analyzers. For example, Bruhn refers to major subdivisions as “sections.”<sup>20</sup> However, the harmonic structures are of more importance than section labeling. Specifically, the episode of the prelude, which contains an incomplete statement of the theme, begins at the closing area of the tonic in m. 7. The descending motion in the soprano line explains the incomplete statement of the theme.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the episode results in a motivic development, such as the rhythmic sequences demonstrated in the bass line.<sup>22</sup> The episodes are more apparent in the fugue where the absence of the subject becomes more evident.

The harmonic purposes are fulfilled even in the episodes of the prelude. It functions as an important transitory phase resulting in the main modulatory section of the piece and leading back into the tonic key of B-flat minor. Identifying the harmonic portions first is significant for this reason as it helps locate the episodic passages as well as other sections within the piece.

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<sup>19</sup> The significance of the theme will be explored further in the third chapter when referencing the symbolic interpretation.

<sup>20</sup> Bruhn, 291.

<sup>21</sup> See Example 1.14.

<sup>22</sup> See Example 1.15.

## Fugue

### Motive of 9th

Generally, Bach analyzers have focused on the rhythmic values and homophonic texture in the prelude.<sup>23</sup> For this fugue, the unusual leap of a minor 9th presents a unique quality and is the subject to intense analysis. Discussion revolves around the treatment of this rare dissonant leap. With respect to the opening of the fugue, Bruhn provides two options in viewing the subject: considering the quarter-note rest as a “structural interruption” that divides the subject in two sub-phrases, or perceiving the rest as a “tension-sustaining” expression to enhance the melodic motive.<sup>24</sup> Following the previously examined motivic and sectional analysis of the prelude, one will realize the answer to this debate has been made available in the work in itself. As the prelude and the fugue are connected as a set, the motivic figures also show relational ties between them. Analysis observes that the intervallic value of the minor 9th is foreshadowed in the theme of the prelude. In fact, the first three notes of the fugue subject are foreseen in the prelude. These traces of motivic clues can be identified in the prelude once viewed from the largest foreground level by observing the overall opening of the prelude.

The interval of the 9th is, in fact, inserted in each thematic segment of the prelude. For example, the first note of B-flat reaches to the high C. This is the earliest 9th leap illustrated in the theme. This C is the highest note to the prelude; the rising melodic line immediately descends when reaching this pitch.

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<sup>23</sup> See Ledbetter, 222-223; Bruhn, 289-290; and Engels, 176-178.

<sup>24</sup> Bruhn, 293.





Example 1.29 Primary 9th motive in the theme, mm. 1-5.

The same 9th leap is recaptured in mm. 15-16, even though the thematic material recurs in its alternated idea.



Example 1.30 Minor 9th motive in altered thematic idea, mm. 15-16.

The final appearance of the 9th motive is found in the return of the theme, now registered on different pitches.



Example 1.31 Minor 9th motive in the return of theme, mm. 20-22.

When viewing the prelude from the grandest scale possible, the 9th interval shapes a motivic idea that is identical to the fugue subject. This motivic alignment is selected from three different corners of the prelude—the B-flat as the opening note to the theme, the F and the G-flat as the final 9th interval leap in the return of the theme. These three figures confirm the opening notes to the fugue subject.



Example 1.32 Three-note idea (Bb-F-Gb) in the prelude BWV 867, m. 1; mm. 20-22.



Example 1.33 Three-note idea (Bb-F-Gb) in the fugue subject BWV 867, mm. 1-3.

As shown in the example above, the opening of the fugue comprises the three-note idea. This unique structure shows to be inseparable in both the prelude and the fugue. Therefore, it is most ideal to treat the fugue subject as one complete phrase rather than divided in two.

The works of Bach are composed of many deep layers of such motivic design. His compositional approach is more multilayered than seen by casual observation. As viewed earlier, each of the motivic groupings steadily expand the outline of the works. The subdivisions of thematic components become valuable regarding this study. The compositional ground to *The Well-Tempered Clavier* is beautifully intricate in motivic nature. Yet it is perfectly constructed to form an ingenious musical unity. This compositional pattern is trustworthy, and its relevance to the thematic concept continues onwards even unto the next set of the minor prelude and fugue.<sup>25</sup>

Apart from the theoretical approach, there is more to this study which engages much of the sacred text associations with this motivic concept. In order to approach this

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<sup>25</sup> This motivic association will be discussed in the third chapter when examining the intervallic development.

specific field of research, it is crucial to first evaluate a piece in its motivic diversity. By doing so, a solid analytical ground is established to balance the dealings with sacred meaning. This two-way analysis eventually enables the composition to be seen with a new viewpoint. Sacred works relating to the B-flat minor prelude and fugue will be discussed in the next chapter.

# PRAELUDIUM XXII.

The musical score is divided into several systems, each with specific annotations:

- System 1:** Labeled "Theme" and "Part I (m. 1 - m. 13)". It includes a "Smallest unit and one beat motive" (Unit) and an "inner-voices rhythmic figure". A "Tonic pedal (m. 1 - m. 3) pulsing 8th note" is indicated in the bass line.
- System 2:** Features a "Canon at 6th between alto and sop." and a "Bridge".
- System 3:** Contains a "Canon (inv) alto and bass" and an "Episode".
- System 4:** Shows a "Canon at 4th between alto and sop." and a "pulsing 8th note" in the bass line.
- System 5:** Continues the musical development with various melodic and harmonic lines.

B.W. XIV.

**Part II** Modulatory Section

end of episode

Rhythmic motive from theme (m. 1 - m. 4)

Episode

15 end of modulatory section

Bridge

r3

end of episode

**Part III** Recapitulation

r1

Theme

r2

Dominant pedal pulsing 8th note

Coda

r3

B.W.XIV.

Example 1.34 Motivic analysis of B-flat minor prelude BWV 867.

# PRAELUDIUM XXII.

Sequence: 1/2 bar + 1/2 + 1/2 + 1/2 up 2nd

Musical notation for the first system, showing a sequence of chords in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Green arrows indicate the sequence pattern.

Rhythmic sequence: sop. + bass, alto + bass, sop. + bass, alto + tenor, sop. + bass, alto + tenor, sop. + bass, alto + tenor  
1/2 bar + 1/2 + 1/2 + 1/2

Musical notation for the second system, featuring a melodic sequence in the right hand and a rhythmic sequence in the left hand. Dashed lines and green arrows highlight the patterns.

Sequence: 1/2 bar + 1/2 + 1/2 up 2nd

Melodic sequence: 1/2 bar + 1/2 + 1/2 + 1/2 down 2nd

Musical notation for the third system, showing a melodic sequence in the right hand and a rhythmic sequence in the left hand. Dashed lines and green arrows highlight the patterns.

Rhythmic sequence

Melodic sequence: 1/2 bar + 1/2 + 1/2 down 2nd

Musical notation for the fourth system, featuring a melodic sequence in the right hand and a rhythmic sequence in the left hand. Dashed lines and green arrows highlight the patterns.

Melodic sequence: 1/2 bar + 1/2 down 2nd

10

Sequence: 1/2 bar + 1/2 down 2nd

Musical notation for the fifth system, showing a sequence in the right hand and a sequence in the left hand. Green arrows indicate the sequence pattern.

Sequence: 1/2 bar + 1/2 up 2nd

B.W. XIV.

Rhythmic sequence: sop. + bass, alto + tenor 1/2 bar + 1/2 + 1/2 + 1/2 (similar to mm. 4-8 db)

Harmonic sequence: rising 4th falling 5th (circle of 5ths)

Rhythmic sequence

Sequence: 1/2 bar + 1/2 + 1/2 + 1/2 up 2nd

Sequence: 1/4 bar + 1/4 + 1/4 + 1/4 down 3rd

The image displays a musical score for the B-flat minor prelude BWV 867, annotated with sequence analysis. The score is presented in two systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The first system includes annotations for a rhythmic sequence (soprano and bass, alto and tenor) and a harmonic sequence (rising 4th, falling 5th). The second system includes a rhythmic sequence annotation and two specific sequence annotations: 'Sequence: 1/2 bar + 1/2 + 1/2 + 1/2 up 2nd' and 'Sequence: 1/4 bar + 1/4 + 1/4 + 1/4 down 3rd'. The score is marked with measure numbers 15 and 20. Dashed lines and arrows highlight the sequence patterns across the staves.

B.W. XIV.

Example 1.35 Sequence analysis of B-flat minor prelude BWV 867.

# Fugue XXII

in 5 voices

EXPOSITION

BWV 867

Bb minor: i

end of exposition

No rights reserved.



21

end of episode 1

V I PAC Eb m | vii° / ii | vii° i

28

Bridge

Ab | i | v

35

Statement Section

V I PAC Db | ii6 | V

42. **Bridge** | **Modulatory Section**

I PAC

Bb m | vi | i

48. **Stretto 1**

A (Tonal) Eb m | VI | III | V

55. **Double Fugue** | **Episode 2**

i PAC

end of modulatory section Bb m | vii°6 / v | vii°6

4

62

Stretto 2

S

ai

x

b1

end of episode 2

vi Deceptive Cadence

69

Coda

ai

a2

c inv

x

s

end of stretto 2

final statement of subject

V

I PAC

Example 1.36 Motivic analysis of B-flat minor fugue BWV 867.

## CHAPTER 2

### SIMILAR ASSOCIATED WORKS

#### **Prelude**

Several Bach scholars, such as Ledbetter, Williams, and Keller have examined works of similar character to the prelude and fugue BWV 867. Particularly, the chorale prelude BWV 721 and the opening to the *Actus tragicus* BWV 106 have been cited for their text association. The titles of the chorale *Erbarm dich mein, o Herre Gott* (Be merciful to me, O Lord God) BWV 721 and the instrumental prelude to the cantata *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit* (God's Time is the very best Time) BWV 106 contain sacred meanings and share similarities to the B-flat minor prelude BWV 867.<sup>26</sup> Apart from the sacred text association, the correlation stems from the repetitive bass motives, as well as the prelude's chordal style texture. Although Williams invalidated comparisons drawn between the opening of the cantata BWV 106 with the accompaniment to the prelude BWV 721, the pieces are similar.<sup>27</sup>

The two preludes of BWV 721 and BWV 106 mutually reiterate an eighth-note accompaniment. In the chorale prelude BWV 721, this eighth-note rhythmic setting is not only fitted in the bass line, but is also coordinated to repeat the chordal movement as an accompaniment to the soprano's *cantus firmus*.

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<sup>26</sup> This sacred title association will be further explained in the third chapter.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Williams, *The Organ Music of J. S. Bach*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003), 464.



Example 2.1 Eighth-note bass motive in *Actus tragicus* BWV 106, mm. 1-3.



Example 2.2 Eighth-note bass motive in chorale prelude BWV 721, mm. 1-4.

Regarding the prelude BWV 721, Williams further claims that “No other example is known by J. S. Bach or contemporaries, even for texts as austere as this.”<sup>28</sup> However, the chorale prelude BWV 721 and the opening to the cantata BWV 106 incorporate harmonic texture and pulsating motivic elements that are of the same compositional style as the prelude BWV 867.

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<sup>28</sup> Williams, *The Organ Music of J. S. Bach* (2003), 463.

### Erbarm dich mein, o Herre Gott

Erfurt 1524

Er - barm dich mein, o Her - re Gott, nach dei - ner großn Barm - her - zig - keit, Al - lein ich dir ge - sün - digt hab,  
wasch ab, mach rein mein Mis - se - tat; ich kenn mein Sünd, wad ist mir leid.  
das ist wi - der mich ste - tig - lich; das Bös vor dir nicht mag be - stahn, du bleibst gerecht, ob du ur - teilst mich.

Erhart Hegenwalt 1524

### Erbarm dich mein, o Herre Gott

*manualiter*

BWV 721

6 (17)

11 (22)

Example 2.3 *Erbarm dich mein, o Herre Gott* BWV 721.

Actus tragicus.  
„Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit.“

SONATINA.  
Molto Adagio.

Flauto I.

Flauto II.

Viola da gamba I.

Viola da gamba II.

Continuo.

B.W. XXIII.



The first system of musical notation consists of five staves. The top two staves are treble clefs, and the bottom three are bass clefs. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The music features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some slurs and accents. The first measure has a treble clef change to a C-clef (soprano) for the first staff.

The second system of musical notation consists of five staves. The top two staves are treble clefs, and the bottom three are bass clefs. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The music continues with the same rhythmic pattern, featuring slurs and accents. The first measure has a treble clef change to a C-clef (soprano) for the first staff.

The third system of musical notation consists of five staves. The top two staves are treble clefs, and the bottom three are bass clefs. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The music concludes with a final cadence, indicated by a double bar line and a fermata. The first measure has a treble clef change to a C-clef (soprano) for the first staff.

B.W. XXIII.

Example 2.4 "Sonatina" from *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit* BWV 106.

Furthermore, the sixteenth-note rhythmic characters in the violas da gamba section of the prelude to the *Actus tragicus* BWV 106 verify strong similarities with the melodic motives to the prelude BWV 867. As Keller states, “Again we are reminded of the introduction to the *Actus tragicus*, with its two recorders, two gambas and basso continuo (an instrumentation one could also imagine for this prelude in *The Well-Tempered Clavier*):”<sup>29</sup>



Example 2.5 Opening of B-flat minor prelude BWV 867, mm. 1-3.



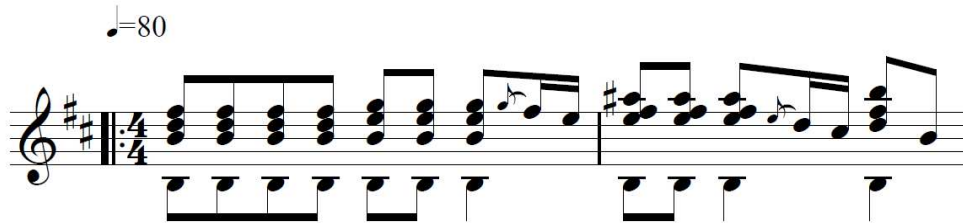
Example 2.6 Basso continuo with two violas da gamba in BWV 106, mm. 1-3.

Another piece that assimilates the mood and character of the prelude BWV 867 is the lute composition *Tombeau sur la Mort de Mr Comte de Logy* (1721) by Weiss.<sup>30</sup> This

<sup>29</sup> Keller, *The Well-Tempered Clavier by Johann Sebastian Bach*, 118.

<sup>30</sup> Ledbetter, *Bach's Well-tempered Clavier*, 223.

composition also displays a chordal style accompaniment moving in slow eighth-note patterns. Combining the title of the piece, the lute composition creates a general state of sorrowfulness that also reflects the gray atmosphere of the prelude.



Example 2.7 *Tombeau sur la Mort de Mr Comte de Logy*, mm. 1-2.

Nonetheless, the arpeggiated figures exemplified in the lute composition are not to be applied to the B-flat minor prelude. This type of performance tradition would not be suitable on the keyboard, for the breaking of the inner-voice accompaniment would be unfitting to the choral style of the prelude BWV 867.<sup>31</sup> Ledbetter also suggests that the repeated patterns in the opening of the prelude BWV 867 are to be played as chords, as if designed for the organ, rather than as ornamented arpeggios.<sup>32</sup>

The chorale prelude BWV 721, the *Actus tragicus* BWV 106, and the *Tombeau sur la Mort de...* concentrate on a chordal style. The character of the pieces adheres to dense harmonic successions, producing an emotional sound palette equivalent to the prelude BWV 867.

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<sup>31</sup> The reason for this will be explained in the third chapter.

<sup>32</sup> Ledbetter, 222-223.

## Fugue

The fugue subject contains similarities to the opening chorus fugue BWV 64. Although it is not exactly in the minor dissonance, the opening of the chorus BWV 64 resembles the rare leap of a minor 9th in the fugue subject.<sup>33</sup> Based on these similarities, the pieces are also related to the Doctrine of Affections in similar ways.



Example 2.8 B-flat minor fugue subject BWV 867, mm. 1-3.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 225.

Feria 3 Nativitatis Christi.

„Sehet, welch' eine Liebe hat uns der Vater erzeiget.“

**Soprano.**  
Violino I. Cornetto  
col Soprano.  
Se - het, welch' ei - ne Lie - be hat uns der Va - ter er - zei -

**Alto.**  
Violino II. Trombone I.  
coll' Alto.  
Se - het!

**Tenore.**  
Viola e Trombone II.  
col Tenore.  
Se - het!

**Basso.**  
Trombone III. col Basso.  
Se - het!

**Organo e Continuo.**

get, dass wir Got - tes Kin - der hei -

se - het, welch' ei - ne Lie - be hat uns der Va - ter er - zei -

ssen, welch' ei - ne Lie - be hat uns der Va - ter er - zei - get, se - het,

- get, dass wir Got - tes Kin - der hei -

se - het, welch' ei - ne Lie - be hat uns der Va - ter er - zei -

B.W. XVI.

Example 2.9 Opening of *Sehet, welch' eine Liebe hat uns der Vater erzeiget* BWV 64.

The vocal works in the cantatas have been constantly linked to figures of musical speech. According to the Doctrine of Affections, vocal works draw strong ties to human expression. Williams provides an objective overview of the Doctrine: “Fashionable today, like the programmaticism of yesterday or the didacticism of the day before, is the analysis of *Affekte*, figures of musical speech, rhetoric and so-called symbolism.”<sup>34</sup> He further states, “It is clear that the composer worked very much from *figurae* which, in the cantatas, were often associated with particular words or moods.”<sup>35</sup>

Prolific Bach scholars have expressed much interest in the view of this particular minor 9th leap. Pirro mentions vocal works of Bach that incorporate the minor 9th similar to the fugue subject of BWV 867.<sup>36</sup> In Pirro’s perspective, the references of the *Affekte* in Bach’s chorus works are indeed inevitable.<sup>37</sup>

The melodic lines in the cantatas are fitted to quote biblical texts as the wordings of the hymns. Pirro labels this Bach’s inventive vocal arrangements, as they are intended to collaborate with the sacred texts in the cantata.<sup>38</sup> The cantata BWV 13 exemplifies Bach’s use of intonation and musical creativity. “The soprano recitative from the cantata *Meine Seufzer, meine Tränen* demonstrates very clearly the procedure Bach uses for

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<sup>34</sup> Peter Williams, *The Organ Music of J. S. Bach*, Vol. 3: A Background (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1989), 65.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>36</sup> Andre Pirro, *The Aesthetic of Johann Sebastian Bach*, trans. Joe Armstrong (Somerville, MA: Duende Editions, 2018).

<sup>37</sup> For the reference, see Pirro, 58-60; 285-323.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

creating an interpretation of the text with music that is as comprehensible and colorful as the text itself.”<sup>39</sup>

The opening of the recitative from the cantata *Mein Gott, wie lang, ach lange* BWV 155/3 is also a good example of tone painting.<sup>40</sup> Bach prolongs the dissonance throughout the vocal passages in the cantata.<sup>41</sup> Pirro explains, “By leaning on the dissonant note... [Bach] creates an image of the soul’s anxiety.”<sup>42</sup>

A further study of the cantatas verifies Bach’s emphasis on musical speech. It also demonstrates the increasing correlations with his vocal and keyboard works. Whether it is vocal or instrumental, Bach often uses the dissonant interval to symbolize the expression of an anguished soul.

The soprano’s upward minor leap in the opening recitative of *Mein Gott, wie lang, ach lange* BWV 155 similarly exemplifies the musical portrayal of a soul in distress. The ascending interval aligns with the lamenting recitative text, *Mein Gott, wie lang, ach lange* (My God, how long, ah, how long?).



Example 2.10 Interval leap in recitative *Mein Gott, wie lang, ach lange* BWV 155.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 291-293.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Further usage of a large interval leap is located in the accompaniment to *Herr, wie du willst* BWV 73/4.<sup>43</sup> The sacred text to the bass aria is as follows:

Lord if thou wilt, then press, ye pangs of death, these groans out of my heart, if only my prayer be acceptable to thee... Lord, if thou wilt, then lay down my members in dust and ashes—this most corrupted image of sin... Lord, if thou wilt, then strike, ye bells of death, I follow unfrightenend; my misery is henceforth stifled.<sup>44</sup>

Here, Bach combines specific melodic and rhythmic notes to engage with the Christian doctrine of living in the Will of God.<sup>45</sup> Pirro defines this melodic motive as “the motif of will—a straight-forward and vigorous one with an energetic rhythm made up of a large, consonant interval and followed by repeated notes.”<sup>46</sup>

This example shows that Bach customs the large interval leap to evoke the signs of misery. In this aria, the interval motive heightens the feelings of distraught—the motive of will is characterized to equalize the distress in dying to oneself. As Pirro explains, “These two motifs are mingled together in the accompaniment to the first vocal phrase, and this phrase itself is based on one of the themes of sorrow and death.”<sup>47</sup> Later, the string accompaniment presents sighing motives similar to the 9th leap.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 305.

<sup>44</sup> As cited in Pirro, 304.

<sup>45</sup> Pirro, 304.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 305.





Example 2.11 Motivic leaps in *Herr, wie du willst* BWV 73/4, mm. 12-16.<sup>48</sup>

The use of symbolic analogies in the vocal and keyboard works are numerous. These expressive symbols in the vocal and instrumental works seem inseparable. In fact, the symbol of the large dissonant leap in the fugue subject is nothing rare. An examination of the cantatas shows that the concept of dissonance has close relations with sacred meanings, as in the expression of a distressed soul.

The cantatas and the B-flat minor prelude and fugue also show constant connections in rhythmic form. For example, the vocal text that relates ‘eternal salvation’<sup>49</sup> shares the same rhythm motive as discussed in the prelude.<sup>50</sup>



Example 2.12 Rh2 motive in *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ* BWV 91/5, mm. 10-11.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>50</sup> See Example 1.2.

<sup>51</sup> Pirro, 316.

Bach's motivic patterns are traceable in many of his compositions. Pirro further points out that Bach personifies "the feelings of fear and hope" through his selected vocal melodies and their respective intonations.<sup>52</sup> The instrumental lines convey textual meaning even through the melodies alone.

Sometimes this uniting of feelings that Bach wants to give the recitative is accomplished by means of a partly poetic and partly musical source. While the singer expresses the verbal contents of the libretto according to Bach's usual procedures, the accompaniment juxtaposes a chorale melody to it, and—even without words—the hymn comes through in a recognizable way.<sup>53</sup>

This type of tone painting is also associated with Bach's keyboard compositions as a tool to project specified emotions. It further indicates that his keyboard compositions are no plain instrumental settings. As Pirro explains, "For Bach, even the fugue is an ingenious way of speaking to our imagination."<sup>54</sup>

At times, even in the cantatas, Bach includes the vocal line in a four-part fugue to avoid the sacred phrases of the text being presented in a theatrical way.<sup>55</sup> As much as is the case with the choral fugues, the non-text based instrumental fugues combine various symbols to deliver a sacred message.

Bach's fugues are, in fact, rich with thoughts and feelings, and we only have to reflect on their themes to be convinced that he never composes fugues in the cantatas just to demonstrate his ability to lay out decorative arabesques in large strokes that are subtly knit together. But he first strives to render, in the subject, the profound meaning of the words that he is given.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 317.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 322.

The analysis finds the general *Affekte* to be common among the works of Bach. The 9th leap vocal lines portray a similar pattern to the opening of the B-flat minor fugue subject. These mutual motivic symbols imply the vocal works and *The Well-Tempered Clavier* could be related. Furthermore, Bach's capacity of writing sacred texts in the fugues enables many possibilities in the instrumental style of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* for containing a wide range of symbolic meanings. This leads to more examination of non-textual compositions, such as discovering sacred text-based symbolic connotations in *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. A final review of the prelude and fugue BWV 867 based on symbolism will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3  
INTERPRETATION

**Theory of Figures**

The previous study on the Doctrine of Affections shows Bach intended to visualize sound through his musical symbols. This prompts an extended symbolic-based research regarding the 9th motive in the prelude and fugue BWV 867.

A thorough investigation of Bach's motives provides further proof of his use of musical language as figurative speech. *Figurenlehre*, the theory of figures, was the central strand of music theory in the Baroque era.<sup>57</sup>

Figures were devices that were thought to give music a greater rhetorical force, analogous to the embellishments orators use to make their speeches more persuasive and drive their points home. For some time composers had enjoyed illustrating textual ideas and words with musical figures. Now the practice assumes a new prominence. If you wanted to “say” something musically, you needed to know your figures.<sup>58</sup>

Before analyzing the details of motivic allusions in the piece, there are a few types of Bach symbolisms that must be covered. One is the number symbolism. Williams describes this numerology as “number-counting with a view to discovering number symbolisms.”<sup>59</sup> He explains the number symbolism from a symbolic point of view:

the number of movements, bars, entries, parts, notes in a theme, notes in an interval, repetitions of a word, or notes in the continuo allude to something outside the music, such as some particular word. Such numbers can be allegorical:

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<sup>57</sup> Calvin R. Stapert, *My Only Comfort: Death, Deliverance, and Discipleship in the Music of Bach* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 12.

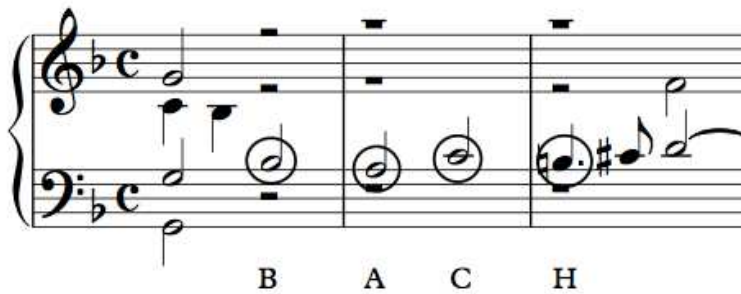
<sup>58</sup> Jeremy S. Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 131.

<sup>59</sup> Williams, *The Organ Music of J. S. Bach* (1989), 76.

eleven entries in a chorus concerned with faithful disciples, three themes in a movement 'dedicated' to the Trinity.<sup>60</sup>

The other type of popular numerology in Bach's music includes numeric symbols concerning his name. "Numbers can also be cabalistic: A = 1, B = 2 etc., so that B + A + C + H = 14 and J + S + B + A + C + H = 41."<sup>61</sup>

Moreover, letter symbolism is represented when Bach's signature name motive (B-A-C-H) is notated by an alphabetical equation inscribed on the score.



Example 3.1 B-A-C-H motive in *The Art of Fugue* BWV 1080.

Fascinating correlations ensuing Bach's use of symbols lead to the most heated musical figure of the genre: the cross motive. "The 'cross motif' is a celebrated example of a symbol supposedly operating even when the music has no text, 'wider significances' serving as a reason for it."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 73-74.

Stapert describes the cross symbol in reference to the term called *chiasm*. His accurate description of the cross shape is based on the symbolic relationship with the cross.

Even forms could sometimes have meaning. Particularly important in Bach are forms that are symmetrical around a central axis, for example, ABCACBA. Such forms are called “chiastic.” The name comes from the Greek letter *chi*, which is X-shaped, itself a chiastic shape. Since *chi* is the first letter of Christ (hence our abbreviation Xmas) and its shape is suggestive of the cross, chiastic forms could symbolize Christ and the cross.<sup>63</sup>

Stapert further observes that the chiastic structure of the cross had direct connotations with the melodic symbol of the Baroque, which in this case verbalizes the German term *Kreuz* or cross as “sharp” (#).<sup>64</sup> The cross symbol is formulated in the connection of a group of four notes in a zigzag pattern.<sup>65</sup> This cross design is best illustrated in one of Bach’s most well-known signature cross motives, in the C-sharp minor fugue BWV 849.



Example 3.2 Cross motive in C-sharp minor fugue BWV 849, mm. 1-3.

Other music examples suggestive of the cross can be found in works by different composers of Bach’s time. For example, Handel’s *Messiah* is recognized for its famed

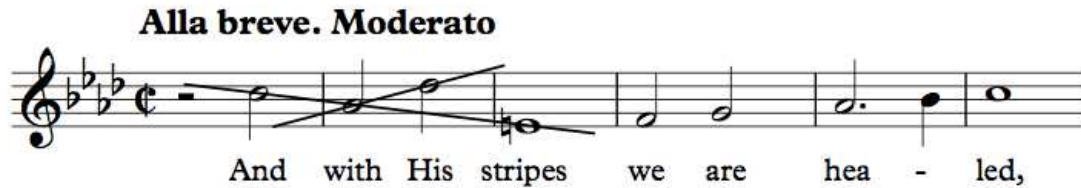
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<sup>63</sup> Stapert, 16.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 16.

portrayal of the chiasitic shape alongside its direct word associations to the biblical text quoted from Isaiah chapter 53 verse 5. The cross motive is stated in the theme.



Example 3.3 Cross symbol in Handel’s *Messiah*, HWV 56.

Bach’s inventiveness of the cross symbol is not limited to his fugue writing.

Figures of musical speech can be found in other works, such as the prelude BWV 867.

The emotive aspect of the prelude is also viewed from the Doctrine of Affections.

Additionally, the organ works offer ample representation of his musical speech. Williams states the following:

it cannot be doubted that in his organ music, at least from the *Orgelbüchlein* onwards, the composer engaged in various kinds of textual allusion. Settings of melodies allude in some way to the words of the original chorale – evoking the same area of mood or part of the emotional spectrum (sad or happy), offering a musical parallel to the meaning of the text (timorous or vigorous, liturgical or personal), symbolizing it in some way (e.g. inversion = immersion in BWV 685), relating a key word which in itself is literal (*ten* in ‘Dies sind die heil’gen zehn Gebot’) or symbolic (the *fall* in ‘Durch Adams Fall’).<sup>66</sup>

As much as with the chorales and organ preludes, the prelude and fugue BWV 867 also contain symbolic allusions that are based on the *Affekte*. This motivic effect becomes incredibly expressive once the underlying symbolic references are revealed beyond the surface of the score. Williams states, “Similar points can be made about a line

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<sup>66</sup> Williams, *The Organ Music of J. S. Bach* (1989), 66.

of enquiry fashionable today, musical rhetoric. The principle here lies in both the strategy and the tactics of composition: the overall shape and the details of the material.”<sup>67</sup>

### **Symbolic Interpretation**

Prominent Bach scholars often restate the common attributes of Bach’s musical figures. Many of these informative descriptions assist in translating the symbolic language of Bach’s writing. Schweitzer specifically depicts Bach as a musical painter.<sup>68</sup> According to Bach authors, the keyboard music drama of Bach relies much on understanding the essence of his musical dialogue. Schweitzer further states that Bach “appeals to the conceptual imagination...”<sup>69</sup> and “[his] imagination also conceives motion.”<sup>70</sup> The virtue of Bach’s tone painting is found in the sophistication of his composition. His musical depiction is unobtrusive,<sup>71</sup> and it is presented clearly.<sup>72</sup> In fact, the musical language of Bach is remarkably transparent that it can only be deemed as intentional.<sup>73</sup> As for Bach, what defines a quality musical poet is how he skillfully decorates his music with extreme imagery and translates it into sound.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>68</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *J. S. Bach* Vol. 2, trans. Ernest Newmann (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1966), 41.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 51.

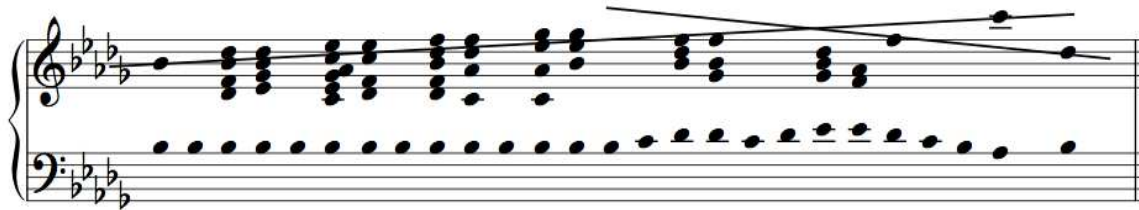
<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 42.



Schweitzer claims the poetic idea of Bach is rooted in the theme.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, Keller, Engels, and Schweitzer correspondingly state that the repetitious rhythmic bass accompaniment has the mannerism of a march.<sup>76</sup> Keller additionally suggests that the eighth note *ostinato* bass in the B-flat minor prelude gives the effect of pacing in a funeral procession.<sup>77</sup> Mellers comments that the use of pairs in drooping eighth-notes are one of Bach's musical allusions to tears, and is relative to an expression of a sigh.<sup>78</sup>

On the basis of Bach's figurative elements, the hidden image embroidered in the opening theme of the B-flat minor prelude displays the following:



Example 3.4 Cross symbol in B-flat minor prelude BWV 867, mm. 1-7.

The key symbol to Bach's music, the cross, is the central theme of the piece. The cross motive is indeed engraved in the main theme. This specific cross symbol happens to be somewhat enlarged in shape. Though Stapert particularly mentions the cross sign could appear in more than four notes.

It consists of four notes (although it could be made more elaborate with additional notes) that go in a zigzag pattern – up, down, up, down (or the reverse). If one

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Keller, *The Well-Tempered Clavier by Johann Sebastian Bach*, 118; Engels, *Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier*, 176; and Schweitzer, 46.

<sup>77</sup> Keller, 118.

<sup>78</sup> Wilfrid Mellers, *Bach and The Dance of God* (London: Travis & Emery, 2007), 47.

imagines a line drawn between the first and fourth notes and another between the second and third notes, a cross appears.<sup>79</sup>

In this case of the prelude, the cross shape is formed by connecting four notes in the upper register; the beginning note of B-flat (m. 1), the highest note of the piece on C (m. 5), the emphatically long-held note F (m. 4 and mm. 6-7), and the final D-flat (m. 7). The elaborated version of the cross in the theme appears during the initial section of the piece.<sup>80</sup>

Comparing the prelude BWV 867 with the chorale prelude BWV 721, the cross symbol is portrayed in the same manner as the *cantus firmus* to the prelude BWV 721. The notes that create the cross motive are as though the figures of the *cantus firmus* float above the accompanying notes, shown below.



Example 3.5 *Cantus firmus* above eighth-note bass in prelude BWV 721, mm. 1-4.

The prelude BWV 867 further correlates with the sacred texts in the cantatas. Schweitzer relates the arioso accompaniment from “Ja! freilich will in uns das Fleisch und Blut zum Kreuz gezwungen sein” (Aye, surely now can flesh and blood atone, if the Cross hold them bound) in the *St. Matthew Passion* as Bach seeing, “Jesus laboring under

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<sup>79</sup> Stapert, 16.

<sup>80</sup> See Example 1.20.

the cross, stumbling along, sinking on His knees, and breaking down; he paints this picture of Him in the accompaniment.”<sup>81</sup>

Even the flute section provides a familiar rhythm and pitch motive as in the theme of the prelude.



Example 3.6 Flute accompaniment in arioso, “Ja! freilich will in uns das Fleisch...”<sup>82</sup>

Schweitzer describes the arioso as capable of conjuring “the picture of Christ staggering under the burden of the cross.”<sup>83</sup> He further explains Bach’s music as “strongly pictorial in essence...” and “very often a picture of a situation.”<sup>84</sup> Bach captures the essence of the whole, painting the scene into his music through the perspective of a significant moment.<sup>85</sup> The pictorial nature of his imagination emerges over time, becoming indisputably clear in his work.<sup>86</sup>

The idea that prompted Bach to paint a musical picture is not always equally clear to us. It often takes us some time to discover how he has realised his text in music. But when once we have grasped the sense of the music, it seems unthinkable that the poem could be depicted from any other standpoint. Daring as

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<sup>81</sup> Schweitzer, 45.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 47-48.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 55.

his painting often is, the final and enduring impression is one of absolute satisfaction; and this is the fundamental proof of the veracity of his art.<sup>87</sup>

Miles also states,

There can be a no more rewarding musical experience than to approach *The Well-Tempered Clavier* with a fresh viewpoint... The “Doctrine of the Affections” is at work in each prelude, and a knowledge and acceptance of this baroque ideal is basic to its appreciation.<sup>88</sup>

Noticeably, the musical painting in the prelude BWV 867 depicts a dramatic biblical narrative; it portrays the scene of Jesus Christ carrying the cross. While the repetitive bass notes symbolize the stumbling steps of Jesus Christ, the pairs of chords in the middle register represent the weeping crowd, as the enclosing of Christ. In this musical drama, the weeping chorus is represented through the inner-voice accompaniments.<sup>89</sup> It is for this reason the inner chords are not to be broken in arpeggios, for they signify the chorus. As in the flute accompaniment in the arioso of the *St. Matthew Passion*, the inner-voice chorus ought to support the grave musical expression of the piece. Schweitzer states, “The conductor who has grasped the meaning of this recitative will not let his flutists group their three notes in the usual sentimental *diminuendo*, but will make them give a heavy emphasis each time to the third note.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 44-45.

<sup>88</sup> Russell H. Miles, *Johann Sebastian Bach: An Introduction to His Life and Works* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 79.

<sup>89</sup> See Example 1.28.

<sup>90</sup> Schweitzer, 45.

Whether in textual or pictorial concept, the sacred music of Bach undeniably unveils a definitive impression of Jesus Christ. With respect to the cross symbolism, the analogy between Christ and the cross shape embraces a much deeper relationship.

### **Word Study of the Cross**

A brief word study shows the Hebrew language to be profoundly symbolic in nature. The pictographic translation of the Hebrew letter *tav* ( ט ) is t, which literally forms the shape of the cross.<sup>91</sup> According to Scripture, God’s prophecy of Christ’s crucifixion is not only revealed in Isaiah chapter 53 verse 5, but is also foretold in Genesis chapter 3 verse 15. A literal meaning of this biblical verse in the Hebrew Bible translates that God prophesied Jesus’ upcoming sacrifice on the cross for the atonement of sins, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”<sup>92</sup> In Hebrew, the letter *zayin* ( ז ),<sup>93</sup> symbolizing the weapon of an axe, is used in the verse to indicate the bruising of Christ on the cross: “he will crush your head, and strike his heel.”<sup>94</sup> The Hebrew Bible accurately describes Jesus Christ nailed to the cross.

A pictorial interpretation of the crucifixion is characterized in *The Well-Tempered Clavier* based on the Hebraic biblical transcription of the cross. This cross reference is

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<sup>91</sup> Jeff A. Benner (2019), *Tav* in “The Ancient Hebrew Alphabet,” <https://www.ancient-hebrew.org/ancient-alphabet/tav.htm>

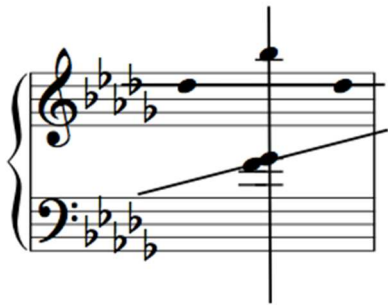
<sup>92</sup> Gen. 3:15 (New International Version; all subsequent citations are from this version).

<sup>93</sup> Benner, *Zayin* in “The Ancient Hebrew Alphabet,” <https://www.ancient-hebrew.org/ancient-alphabet/zayin.htm>

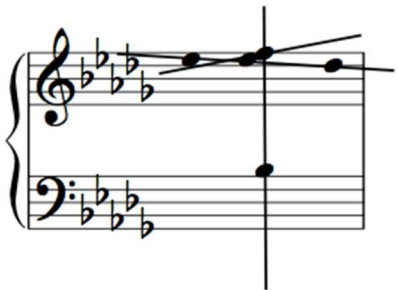
<sup>94</sup> Gen. 3:15. See also James Strong, *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Updated and Expanded Edition* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2018), H7779.

discovered all around in the prelude BWV 867. In careful observation, the suspension chords in the prelude configure a cross symbol as inscribed in the Bible.

The clash of sharp dissonance appears in the upper, middle, and lower register of the chord, suggesting Christ's suffering on the cross in graphic detail—the crushing of the head, and striking of the hands and the heels.<sup>95</sup> The inclusion of the breadth, length, and weight of the cross figure is shaped in connecting the group of four notes of the suspension chord. In the law of gravity, the cross symbol now gravitates downwards, symbolizing the hanging of Jesus Christ on the cross. The total number of appearances of the specific suspension chord is seven in the prelude and seven in the fugue.



Example 3.7 Cross symbol in B-flat minor prelude BWV 867, m. 4.



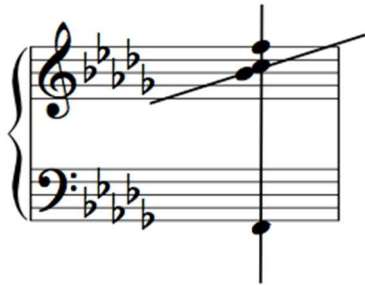
Example 3.8 Cross symbol in B-flat minor prelude BWV 867, mm. 6-7.

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<sup>95</sup> See Gen. 3:15; Ps. 22:16; Matt. 27:29; and John 19:18.



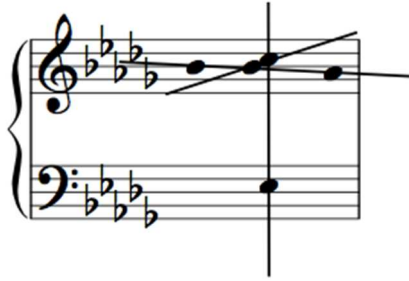
Example 3.9 Cross symbol in B-flat minor prelude BWV 867, m. 11.



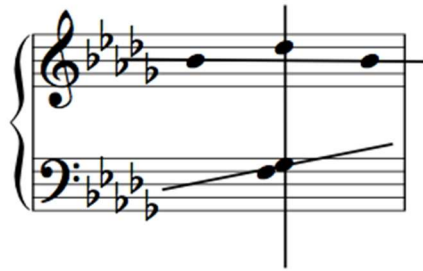
Example 3.10 Cross symbol in B-flat minor prelude BWV 867, m. 13.



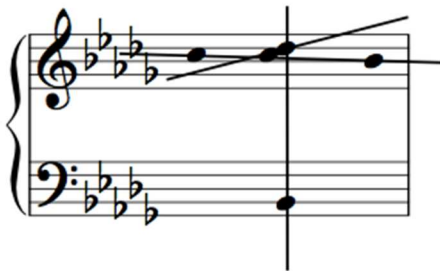
Example 3.11 Cross symbol in B-flat minor prelude BWV 867, m. 17.



Example 3.12 Cross symbol in B-flat minor prelude BWV 867, m. 18.

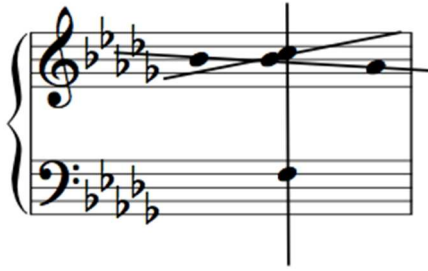


Example 3.13 Cross symbol in B-flat minor prelude BWV 867, m. 22.

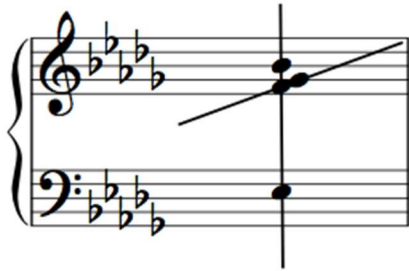


Example 3.14 Cross symbol in B-flat minor fugue BWV 867, mm. 14-15.





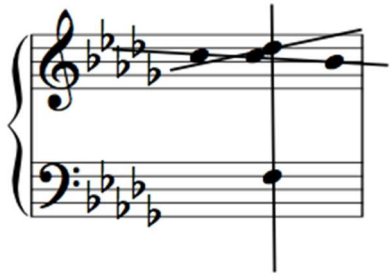
Example 3.15 Cross symbol in B-flat minor fugue BWV 867, mm. 15-16.



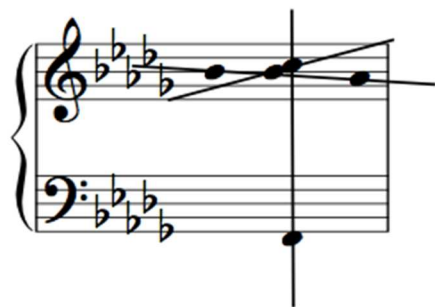
Example 3.16 Cross symbol in B-flat minor fugue BWV 867, mm. 17-18.



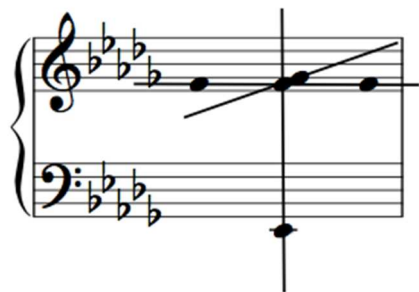
Example 3.17 Cross symbol in B-flat minor fugue BWV 867, mm. 31-32.



Example 3.18 Cross symbol in B-flat minor fugue BWV 867, mm. 62-63.



Example 3.19 Cross symbol in B-flat minor fugue BWV 867, m. 63.



Example 3.20 Cross symbol in B-flat minor fugue BWV 867, m. 66.

The sound of the harsh dissonance is commonly perceived to the listeners as a reflection of pain and sorrow. However, the biblical meaning of the crucifixion signifies that all pain and suffering was pegged to the cross with Christ. These dissonant chords soon resolve downwards to fulfill their harmonic resolution. This is in accordance to

Scripture, as the Bible states that the purpose of Christ's death was for the resolution of all sins.

This particular cross symbol brings Bach's creativeness in *Figurenlehre* onto the figurative plateau. His outstanding figurative speech cleverly refers to the one crucial figure: the persecuted Christ.

### **Bach and the Bible**

The intentional purpose of Bach's music to reveal sacred subjects, along with his faith in God, are sometimes disregarded. Nonetheless, Bach's devout faith is shown widely through his sacred musical dramas, as well as in the small traces of his personal life. Bach publicly professed his musicianship as a God-given talent.<sup>96</sup> Surpassing the requirements of his musical profession, fervent faith led him to learn theology.<sup>97</sup> Further evidence supports Bach's credibility in knowing Scripture:

The Bible commentary once owned by the composer Johann Sebastian Bach is now in the Ludwig Fuerbringer Library of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. It is *Die deutsche Bibel*, edited largely from Luther's writings by the theologian Abraham Calov, in three large folio volumes, published in Wittenberg in 1681-82. It is of immense importance to Bach studies since it contains the composer's marginal comments alongside particular Biblical passages, as well as underlinings and other markings. They reveal something of the innermost thinking of the great composer and illuminate his theological and devotional approach to his art. It also provides evidence for Bach's own commitment to the Christian faith.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Miles, 104.

<sup>97</sup> Stapert, 7.

<sup>98</sup> Robin A. Leaver, Ed., *J. S. Bach and Scripture: Glosses from the Calov Bible Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1985), 11.

As a composer for the eighteenth century Lutheran Church, it was expected that Bach maintain more than a basic knowledge of theological principles.<sup>99</sup> Having been raised in the Lutheran church, Bach chose to trust the biblical lessons above the more literal Latin liturgical writing.<sup>100</sup> The Calov commentary not only validates Bach's biblical understanding. Demonstration of a genuine faith through his own highlighting of the sacred texts shows his sincerity in remaining true to the Gospel.

Bach's basic reverence and respect for the Bible is reflected in the librettos he chose for his cantatas...It is also demonstrated in the two great passions...Bach rejects the poet's versification of the Biblical narrative and uses instead the direct words of Scripture. In his own carefully written manuscript of the *St. Matthew Passion* the Biblical text is written out in red ink.<sup>101</sup>

Theological discussions on Genesis chapter 3 displayed in the Calov commentary reveal signs of Bach's handwritten remarks.<sup>102</sup> The detail is under the subject of original sin.<sup>103</sup>

The Calov commentary contains an interesting marginal entry in Bach's hand that may well indicate that he compared the ninth volume of the Altenburg edition with the Calov quotation of Luther on Genesis 3. This chapter deals with mankind's fall into sin, and Calov gives a generous quotation from Luther on Genesis 3:7, which is a key verse with regard to the doctrine of original sin. However, in quoting Luther, Calov omits an important phrase, and Bach has written the missing words.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Stapert, 7.

<sup>100</sup> W. Murray Young, *The Sacred Dramas of J. S. Bach: A Reference and Textual Interpretation* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 1994), 86.

<sup>101</sup> Leaver, 27.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

Amassing proof of Bach's credible insight of the Bible reduces much speculation regarding his personal faith. It would be difficult to discredit Bach's knowledge and his dedication of the cross symbol taken from Genesis chapter 3 verse 15. Documents show that he knew well enough to comment on the Christian doctrine of the fall of man.

### **Prelude and the Passions**

The Passions and cantatas narrate the Bible in a musical setting. Stapert agrees with Richard Jeske's view that Bach's church cantatas have an "invitational character" and his reference to the Gospel feels natural and authentic.<sup>105</sup> According to Bach's use of figurative speech, the biblical tone reflected in the Passions shows signs of being interrelated to parts of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. As viewed earlier, the *St. Matthew Passion* is most often referenced in translating the sacred meaning of the crucifixion in Bach's works.

Schulenberg writes that Fuller Maitland once compared the opening section of the prelude BWV 867 with the Passions, and that the opening gestures of the chorus were plausibly recollecting the *St. Matthew Passion*.<sup>106</sup> Although the *St. Matthew Passion* has been mentioned in this context, a further cross-examination with the Passions shows that the prelude and *St. John Passion* actually reflect a better sounding match. The ascending features of the chords, together with the pedal-point pulsations of the bass in quadruple meter, reveal these two pieces as more alike.

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<sup>105</sup> Stapert, 18-19.

<sup>106</sup> Schulenberg, *The Keyboard Music of J. S. Bach*, 193.

Quantz remarks: “the number of notes in chords is the principal way of controlling dynamics [on the harpsichord].”<sup>107</sup> The strongest resemblance between the two pieces lies mostly in the richness of the harmonic background, along with the outbursts of the chorus—this parallels well with the inner-voice accompaniment in the prelude as a means of representing the mournful choir. Most importantly, the harmonic expression in the *St. John Passion* mirrors the dark lamenting atmosphere of the biblical scene as portrayed in the prelude. The resemblance of the two pieces resonates in perfect imitation, as if the prelude is a replica of the opening chorus of the *St. John Passion*. Consequently, pairing the prelude with the *St. John Passion* is musically more relatable. This similarity is most clearly exemplified once the two pieces are audibly compared.



Example 3.21 Opening of B-flat minor prelude BWV 867, mm. 1-3.

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<sup>107</sup> Ledbetter, *Bach's Well-tempered Clavier*, 223.

**CORO.**

Flauto traverso I.  
Oboe I.

Flauto traverso II.  
Oboe II.

Violino I.

Violino II.

Viola.

Soprano.

Alto.

Tenore.

Basso.

Organo e Continuo.

Violoncelli e Bassoni.

Organo e Violone.

B. W. V. 245 (C)

Example 3.22 Opening chorus of *St. John Passion* BWV 245, mm. 1-7.

The keyboard works of Bach are similarly programmatic as the cantatas.<sup>108</sup> Although the preludes and fugues may seem fairly secular in nature, Bach actually implemented many biblical references in his *Well-Tempered Clavier*. As Rachel Lowrance explains, “Bach also intended the *WTC* to be used for religious purposes.”<sup>109</sup>

### Development of Intervallic Motives

The sacred context to the cantatas and the Passions also coexist elsewhere in *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. One example is found in the E minor fugue, BWV 855. The opening to the fugue reflects a similar pattern to the opening chorus of *Jesu, der du meine Seele* BWV 78. The chromatic descent in the E minor fugue is similar to what Mellers refers to as the “‘Crucifixus’ bass,” in the bass line of the cantata BWV 78.<sup>110</sup>



Example 3.23 Chromatic descent in E minor fugue BWV 855, mm. 1-3.



Example 3.24 Chromatic descent in cantata *Jesu, der du meine Seele* BWV 78/1.

The vocal text in the cantata BWV 78 is based on the crucifixion of Christ. Stapert states, “E minor, the central key of the *St. Matthew Passion*, was often associated

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<sup>108</sup> Pirro, *The Aesthetic of Johann Sebastian Bach*, 360.

<sup>109</sup> Rachel A. Lowrance, “Instruction, Devotion, and Affection: Three Roles of Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*,” *Musical Offerings* 4, No. 1, Article 2 (2013): 18. DOI:10.15385/jmo.2013.4.1.2.

<sup>110</sup> Mellers, 248.

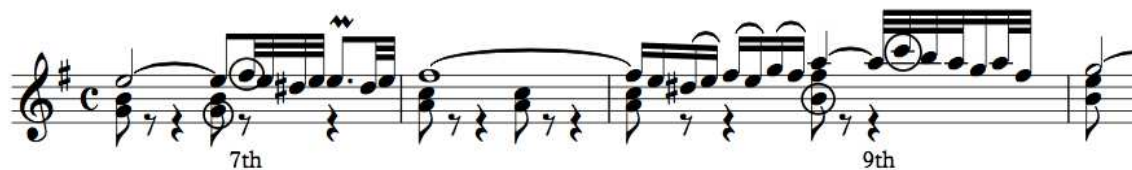


with suffering.”<sup>111</sup> In addition to the sacred key relation to the E minor prelude, the zigzag motion drawn between each note in the chromatic descent also motions a chiastic shape, as if to imply the crucifixion.<sup>112</sup> Another motivic idea is detected in the E-flat major prelude BWV 852. This intervallic movement leads to the B-flat minor prelude BWV 867. In the E-flat major prelude BWV 852, the theme contains visual signs of a dissonant 7th in the theme, which is the first case to present an interval of the minor 7th in *The Well-Tempered Clavier*.



Example 3.25 Intervals of minor 7th in E-flat major prelude BWV 852, mm. 1-3.

Bodky notes, “[The E-flat major] key, with its three flats, is frequently used by Bach to symbolize the Trinity.”<sup>113</sup> The dissonant leap is also discretely applied in the following E minor prelude BWV 855, with the leap of a 7th to a 9th interval increase.



Example 3.26 Dissonant 7th and 9th intervals in E minor prelude BWV 855, mm. 1-4.

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<sup>111</sup> Stapert, 15.

<sup>112</sup> See Example 3.23.

<sup>113</sup> Bodky, *The Interpretation of BACH's Keyboard Works*, 232.

Engels explains the importance of the B-flat minor key to Bach as follows:

Although there are no other instrumental compositions in B-flat minor, it is worth noting that Bach chose this key for the Chorale *O hilf, Christe, Gottes Sohn* (Help, O Jesus, God's own Son) which appears just before the recitative that leads into the final chorus of the *St. John Passion*. Even more significantly, it is the key of the deeply moving *Eli, Eli, lama, lama asabthani?* (My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?), Jesus' last words from the Cross, in the *St. Matthew Passion*.<sup>114</sup>

It is as though Bach reserved the B-flat minor key to express a sentiment of deep lamentation and grief with "exceptional beauty and power."<sup>115</sup> In viewing the entire *Well-Tempered Clavier I* from a broader perspective, one can realize that the dissonant leaps are inserted in Bach's chosen keys, subtly introducing the significance of the cross in the E-flat major prelude BWV 852, the E minor prelude BWV 855, and the B-flat minor prelude and fugue BWV 867. In the use of the minor 9th leap in the B-flat minor subject, Kirnberger "cites it in this fugue as signifying despair."<sup>116</sup> A similar expression of the minor 9th is seen being used in the vocal works of Bach.<sup>117</sup> The dissonant leap, which Ledbetter characterizes as "expressive tension," shows signs of its motivic enlargements throughout the entire *Well-Tempered Clavier I* as a means to foreshadow the suffering of the cross that occurs towards the end of the book.<sup>118</sup> This dissonant leap steadily progresses from the E-flat major prelude BWV 852 to the B-flat minor fugue BWV 867.

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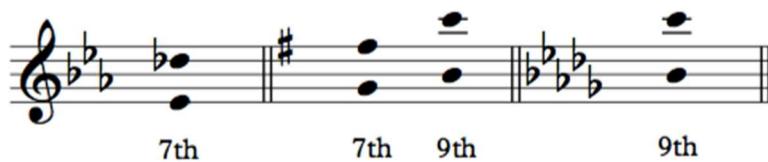
<sup>114</sup> Engels, 176.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ledbetter, 224.

<sup>117</sup> See Pirro, 58-60.

<sup>118</sup> Ledbetter, 224.



Example 3.27 Dissonant 7th to 9th in preludes BWV 852, BWV 855, BWV 867.

Key signatures held significant meaning.<sup>119</sup> In terms of keys, B minor specifically has relations to the cross. This also relates to the *Mass in B minor* in which “Bach explicitly expressed a Christ-centered, cross-centered faith.”<sup>120</sup>

Interestingly, Bodky writes that the significance of the cross in Bach’s keyboard music is found in the final preludes and fugues in his *Well-Tempered Clavier*.<sup>121</sup> In regard to symbolisms in the last sets of minor preludes and fugues, Engels and Ledbetter note that the fugue of BWV 867 creates a cross motive in the subject.<sup>122</sup> Engels states that “The despair embodied in this theme is made even more real to us when we see that the first four notes form the cross motif.”<sup>123</sup> The cross sign in the fugue subject as described by Engels would appear as follows:

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<sup>119</sup> Stapert, 15.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>121</sup> Bodky, 245.

<sup>122</sup> Engels, 179; Ledbetter, 225.

<sup>123</sup> Engels, 179.



Example 3.28 Cross symbol in fugue subject BWV 867, mm. 1-3.

This cross reference provides the key to Bach’s implication of the minor 9th in the prelude and fugue BWV 867. The cross symbols, integral to viewing the entire *Well-Tempered Clavier I*, reveal the collection of specific preludes and fugues containing a motivic enlargement in the progression of a cross shape. Williams mentions that the nature of Bach’s *figurae* has tendencies to “develop a certain pattern in each movement.”<sup>124</sup> This motivic pattern is also exemplified in the B-flat minor fugue BWV 867. In the opening of the fugue, the subject and the tonal answer show expansion of the 9th to 10th intervallic motive.



Example 3.29 Intervals of 9th to 10th in B-flat minor fugue BWV 867, mm. 1-4.

This 9th to 10th intervallic development is important to note because it defines the substructure of the work. It is as though the expanding intervals were coordinated in such a way as to prepare for the finality of the minor 10th interval in the upcoming B minor fugue BWV 869. Similar to the prelude BWV 867, the cross motive also appears in the B

<sup>124</sup> Williams, *The Organ Music of J. S. Bach* (1989), 84.

minor fugue subject BWV 869. The cross shape is formed by connecting the first and last notes (F-sharp to F-sharp) and the lowest and highest notes (B to D) to the subject.

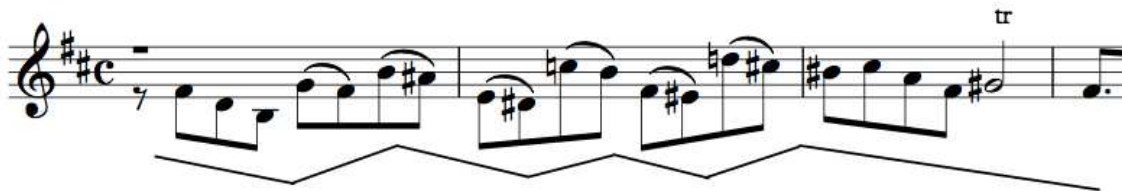


Example 3.30 Cross-forming notes in B minor fugue subject BWV 869, mm. 1-4.



Example 3.31 Cross symbol in B minor fugue subject BWV 869, mm. 1-4.

The B minor fugue is widely acknowledged for its cross shape in signifying the outstretched arms of Christ on the cross. Mellers and Bodky identify the cross symbol in the B minor fugue subject as, “a line drawn through the heads of the notes ascends and then descends, representing the arms of the cross.”<sup>125</sup>



Example 3.32 Arms of the cross symbol in B minor fugue BWV 869, mm. 1-4.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>125</sup> Bodky, 245. See also Mellers, 244.

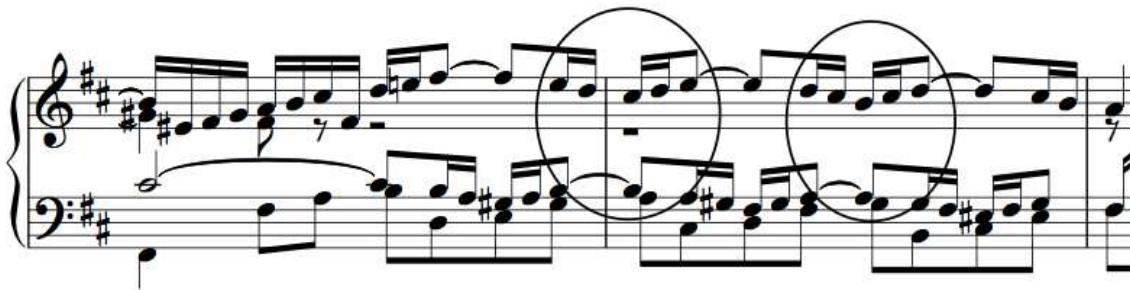
<sup>126</sup> Bodky, 245.

This type of cross symbol of an arm shape is also noticeable in the ascending and descending bass notes to the theme of the B minor prelude BWV 869.



Example 3.33 Opening bass line in B minor prelude BWV 869, mm. 1-3.

The B minor prelude and fugue display an array of cross symbols that now portray the crucified Christ from a different view within the biblical standpoint. This depiction of the arm shape of the cross suggests the Bible verse: “The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.”<sup>127</sup> The suspension chords in the B minor fugue now display the cross symbol embodying the form of Christ with arms placed bare on the cross. Mellers writes that these dissonant suspensions are in fact “sensuously satisfying, even ceremonial.”<sup>128</sup>



Example 3.34 Suspension chords in B minor fugue BWV 869, mm. 17-19.

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<sup>127</sup> Isa. 52:10.

<sup>128</sup> Mellers, 245.

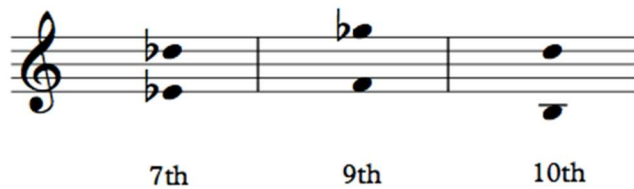


Example 3.35 Cross symbol in B minor fugue BWV 869, mm. 17-18.



Example 3.36 Cross symbol in B minor fugue BWV 869, m. 18.

Consequently, the progressive augmentation of the dissonant intervals in *The Well-Tempered Clavier I* proves to gradually expand and navigate towards the final set of the B minor fugue BWV 869. It is perhaps as though the purpose of the dissonances was to reach the B minor prelude and fugue in *The Well-Tempered Clavier I* to express the intensification of the suffering of the cross.



Example 3.37 Intervallic 7th – 9th – 10th motives in *The Well-Tempered Clavier I*.

The minor 9th motive in the prelude and fugue BWV 867 leads the way to the message hidden in the final minor prelude and fugue of *The Well-Tempered Clavier I*. Furthermore, the connected styles of the opening chorus fugue BWV 64, the *Actus tragicus* BWV 106, the chorale prelude BWV 721, and the prelude BWV 867 seem to contain symbolic connotations with the motive of will.<sup>129</sup> In the prelude BWV 867, this motive of will may be seen to overlap the characterization of Christ's persistent will in carrying the cross.<sup>130</sup> This motive also explains representing Jesus Christ in the bass to express his willingness to fulfill the Will of God unto the cross. As Pirro further describes, Bach uses the repeated note motives "to express energy and persistent will."<sup>131</sup>

Regarding the case of the cross in the B minor fugue BWV 869, there may well be a biblical meaning to the 10th interval implicit in the fugue subject that is connected to the opening of the former prelude BWV 867. Pirro explains the interval of an octave as Bach's interpretation of "the idea of fullness."<sup>132</sup> Additionally, Stapert suggests that the number 10 signifies the Law, as in the Ten Commandments.<sup>133</sup> Perhaps to adhere to biblical principle, Bach applies numerology to his works. In translating the motivic synopses to the final sets of the minor preludes and fugues in *The Well-Tempered Clavier I*, the symbolic meaning of the cross motives would signify the following: the 9th motive

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<sup>129</sup> See Example 2.11.

<sup>130</sup> See Example 3.4.

<sup>131</sup> Pirro, 303.

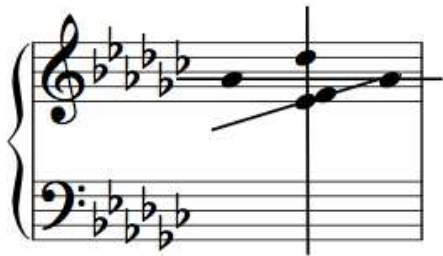
<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

<sup>133</sup> Stapert, 17.



of will in the prelude BWV 867 might symbolize Jesus' total submission to the Will of God, whilst later the 10th interval in the B minor fugue BWV 869,<sup>134</sup> which also exceeds an octave leap, could represent the fulfillment of God's divine Law on the cross.<sup>135</sup>

Another piece of evidence demonstrating Bach's frequent use of cross symbols is found in the E-flat minor prelude BWV 853. This prelude, which like the prelude BWV 867 has homophonic texture and an emotional spectrum characterizing deepest sorrow, contains visual inclusions of the cross symbols in the suspension chords of m. 3 and m. 15. Bach's intention could have been to articulate the most devastating expression of grief within the biblical context, in connection with the crucifixion revealed in Genesis chapter 3 verse 15.

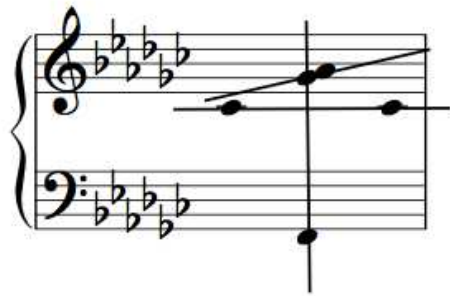


Example 3.38 Cross symbol in E-flat minor prelude BWV 853, m. 3.

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<sup>134</sup> See Example 3.31.

<sup>135</sup> See Gen. 3:15; Isa. 53:5; and John 19:17-18.



Example 3.39 Cross symbol in E-flat minor prelude BWV 853, m. 15.

Furthermore, similar traces of the cross motive, as found in the B minor fugue subject BWV 869, are indicated in Bach's selected fugues in *The Well-Tempered Clavier I*. Number symbolism also exists and is of significant importance in the Bible. The numbers 3 and 5 symbolize the Trinity and the five wounds of Christ.<sup>136</sup> Bach seems to have utilized the biblical numerology in his use of the following key signatures: C-sharp minor fugue BWV 849, F-sharp minor fugue BWV 859, A minor fugue BWV 865, and the B minor fugue BWV 869.

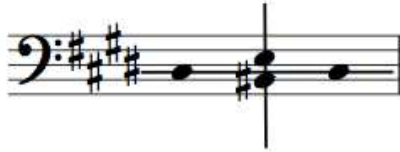
Engels recognizes Bach's use of inversions as part of his variety of musical speech.<sup>137</sup> As such, the cross motives in the specified minor fugues could be seen as representing the Christian number symbols when viewing *The Well-Tempered Clavier I* in retrograde (i.e. moving backwards from C#-F#-B). In this respect, the cross motives of the three minor fugues now appear to be placed under the succession of descending circles of fifths. Moreover, the A minor fugue, in this case, would serve as the folding of

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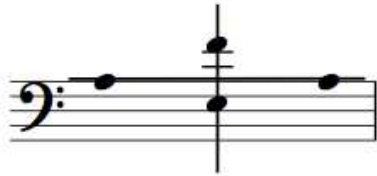
<sup>136</sup> Engels, 31-32; Stapert, 17. This number symbolism is biblical. Christ is also revealed in the Bible under the numbers 3 and 5 concerning the symbol of the cross. See Gen. 3:15; Isa. 53:5; and John 3:3, 3:5.

<sup>137</sup> Engels, 179.

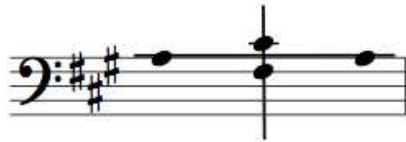
the fifth interval descent (C-sharp to F-sharp) to emphasize the third interval as the central point, the symbol of 3 for the Trinity.



Example 3.40 Cross symbol in C-sharp minor fugue subject BWV 849, mm. 1-4.



Example 3.41 Cross symbol in A minor fugue subject BWV 865, mm. 1-4.



Example 3.42 Cross symbol in F-sharp minor fugue subject BWV 859, mm. 1-4.



Example 3.43 Cross symbol in B minor fugue subject BWV 869, mm. 1-4.

The Christ-representing number symbols of 3 and 5 are present in the E-flat minor prelude and the four minor fugues discussed above. This pattern of Bach's musical numerology could be intended to accentuate the completeness of the perfect gift of Christ.

Williams states that it is critical to research one specific symbol in Bach's music.

Dealing at length with one particular hypothesis is necessary first because the major works of J. S. Bach do appear so isolated and the mystery of their power so unfathomable that any way of looking at them deserves attention, and secondly because the seeking of significances in what are called symbolisms...has become fashionable and is likely to remain so for some time.<sup>138</sup>

The cross-centered subject in the B minor prelude and fugue subsequently presents "Bach's favourite 'dark' key of suffering."<sup>139</sup> The surreal beauty and sorrowfulness in the B minor prelude and fugue may reflect the state of Christ's suffering on the cross.

### **Sacred Title Interpretation**

The lute composition by Weiss, titled "Tombeau" (or Tomb), also has stylistic connections with the B-flat minor prelude regarding its subject of mourning and death. Moreover, the sacred association in the Sonatina of BWV 106 shows further similarity with the prelude BWV 867. Miles describes BWV 106 in this manner:

The text being largely a compilation from the Bible and the Lutheran Hymnal, it is assumed that Bach prepared it himself. Its subtitle, *Actus Tragicus*, underlines the probability that it commemorated the death of someone within Bach's immediate circle, and in it he sounded emotional depths heretofore unplumbed.

An instrumental introduction (*Sonatina*) breathes an atmosphere of resignation. A constant throb of even eighth notes in the bass ticks off the seconds of life, reminding man of his morality. Over this quiet pulse the dark tones of low strings provide a somber background for the quietly reassuring tones of two recorders (flutes), whose interlacing melodies symbolize the union of the soul with God. These twenty bars are a priceless expression of Bach's faith in eternal life.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Williams, *The Organ Music of J. S. Bach* (1989), 81.

<sup>139</sup> Mellers, 242.

<sup>140</sup> Miles, 41-42.

Pirro writes that the two violas da gamba of the *Actus tragicus* “sing so tenderly of the charm of ‘God’s time.’”<sup>141</sup> A remaining question is to what the title “God’s Time is the very best Time” of BWV 106 is referring. The Bible records that the crucifixion of Christ had an accurate occurrence with the Passover Feast, which originated in the time of Moses.<sup>142</sup> The title could suitably correspond the prelude BWV 867 to God’s *kairos* timing of the event of the cross.

The vast structure of the Passions may be condensed into a summarized musical project, developing the biblical narrative scene by scene.<sup>143</sup>

To understand Bach’s Passions it is important to grasp their liturgical function. Despite all their additional text and music, their core remains the Gospel narrative. The additional text and music – the recitatives, arias, and chorales – are there to highlight the Gospel story, to make it vivid and meaningful to the worshiper.

So in the *St. Matthew Passion* and in the *St. John Passion* the story of Jesus’ suffering and death is sung in its entirety directly from chapters 26 and 27 of Matthew and chapters 18 and 19 of John, respectively.<sup>144</sup>

In like manner, the final works of the *Well-Tempered Clavier I* also retell the Gospel story.

It seems possible that the B-flat minor prelude conforms with the *St. John Passion* by harboring a biblical message originated from the Gospel of John in the Bible. From the *Affekte* perspective, the 9th motive in the fugue BWV 867 leans toward the larger 10th interval in the fugue BWV 869, perhaps in fulfillment of John chapter 19 verse 17 to

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<sup>141</sup> Pirro, 363.

<sup>142</sup> See Exod. 12:6; Lev. 23:5; and John 19:14.

<sup>143</sup> Miles, 106.

<sup>144</sup> Stapert, 36.

18 (in an orderly manner). Could the two final sets of minor preludes and fugues accurately partner to recount the biblical verses in chronological order: “Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). There they crucified him, and with him two others — one on each side and Jesus in the middle.”<sup>145</sup>

In further observing the 9th motive in the *Affekte*, the dissonant interval and expression of a distressed human soul reveal ties with biblical aspects. The gesture of an upward motion, which in the Bible is an illustration to “look up” to God Most High, shows to be an instinctual expression of the human spirit.<sup>146</sup> (This use of the 9th motive was also used in the vocal music background for the crucifixion scene in the modern movie *The Passion of the Christ*.)<sup>147</sup> Pirro also captures the musical analogy of Jesus Christ as God in the flesh from the cantata *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ*, BWV 91/5, “the idea of lowering God to the human state, and the idea of man’s transfiguration through grace.”<sup>148</sup>

The prelude BWV 867 is also linked to the biblical texts sung in the motet *Fürchte dich nicht* BWV 228 through the Rh1 motive.<sup>149</sup> In the prelude, Bach employs the eighth to sixteenth-note rhythm motives, which is also known as his “motives of

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<sup>145</sup> John 19:17-18.

<sup>146</sup> See John 17:1, 19:37.

<sup>147</sup> This music example is found during the crucifixion scene, which occurs twice at 1:41:00-1:41:49, in the movie.

<sup>148</sup> Pirro, 316.

<sup>149</sup> See Stapert, 51-61.

joy.”<sup>150</sup> Bach engages the motives of joy “to express the joyful feeling of confidence in God’s goodness.”<sup>151</sup> Stapert mentions that the motives of joy in the motet BWV 228 overlaps Isaiah chapter 41 verse 10, “I also help you.”<sup>152</sup> Likewise, the rhythmic pattern in the theme of the prelude BWV 867 could reflect God’s promises, “I will carry you.”<sup>153</sup> Perhaps by adding the motives of joy to the figurative cross symbol Bach interrelates Jesus’ resounding words, “I removed the burden from their shoulders.”<sup>154</sup> Along with illustrating the footsteps of Jesus in the bass, Bach seems to use the jubilant rhythm motive in the prelude to outline the signature sign of God-given peace and joy, the foretaste of heaven, found in Christ.

Such Scriptural promises imbedded in the theme of the prelude are implied despite its minor key. As Schweitzer states, “Bach is very fond of this motive of joy, because the multiplicity of which the rhythm of it is capable allows him to depict joy in all possible nuances — the quiet and mystical as well as the most unrestrained.”<sup>155</sup> The significance of the uprising motives of joy in the prelude BWV 867 also reflects that Bach knew of the figurative symbolism of the cross, as seen by the inscription *Christus*

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<sup>150</sup> Schweitzer, 65-66.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>152</sup> Stapert, 60.

<sup>153</sup> Isa. 46:4.

<sup>154</sup> Ps. 81:6.

<sup>155</sup> Schweitzer, 66.

*Coronabit Crucigeros* (Christ will Crown the Crossbearers) in which he imprinted into his work.<sup>156</sup>

### Symbols in Keys

In Bach's allegory, the crucifixion is signified as a vicarious death of Jesus as Son of God. Mellers states, "As in the mass, crucifixion *is* redemption."<sup>157</sup> As the purpose of the crucifixion was to bring a good end through salvation, Bach exalted Jesus' sacrifice through musical parables with a cause. Bach achieves this concept through adapting the cadence figure at the end of his compositions. Despite the key signatures in his music, the *Tierce de Picardie* opposes the given key to the piece. This cadence signifies the entryway to the everlasting felicity, the great reward of heaven with Christ. Ledbetter also explains, "the whole of Book I might be seen as a circle from birth to death, with death on the leading note to C again; the Cross leading to the Resurrection."<sup>158</sup>

Bach has also been called the "lawgiver of music."<sup>159</sup> The beauty of Bach's harmony is widely appreciated as the perfection of his musical law:

In summary, we can be fairly confident that Bach believed the rules of music are not wholly dependent on culture, fashion, custom, individual taste, or even entirely on our human makeup but to some degree are also established by God in the created world at large, and it is part of the composer's vocation to respect and elicit them. If we are along the right lines, the upshot is that insofar as it shares in

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<sup>156</sup> Christoph Wolff, *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*, eds. Hans T. David & Arthur Mendel (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 20. This inscription is derived from Scripture. See also Matt. 7:21, 10:38.

<sup>157</sup> Mellers, 244.

<sup>158</sup> Ledbetter, 366.

<sup>159</sup> Nicolas Slonimsky, *The Concise Edition of Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, 8th ed. (New York: Schirmer Books, 1994), 40.



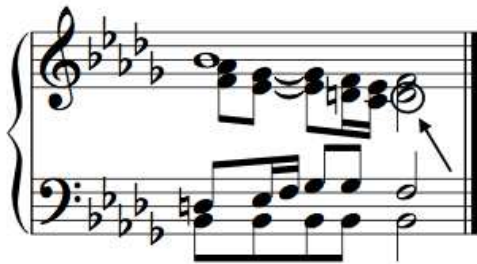
the world's harmony—a harmony that testifies to its Maker—music, for Bach, can glorify God in its own way, *even without texts*.<sup>160</sup>

Bach seems to have selected certain keys to symbolize elements of spirituality.<sup>161</sup>

Mellers writes:

...if, in the Baroque period, E major was traditionally a key of heaven because it was the sharpest, most 'upward' key in common use, Bach's pedagogic investigation of temperament might well reserve the sharpest key possible within the chromatic system for an experience that miraculously marries the physical with the metaphysical.<sup>162</sup>

The common use of Bach's *Tierce de Picardie* at final cadences in his music holds an intonation of a higher realm of eternity. Bach inserts the *Tierce de Picardie* as a symbol of heaven.



Example 3.44 *Tierce de Picardie* in prelude BWV 867, m. 24.

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<sup>160</sup> Begbie, 134.

<sup>161</sup> Mellers, 45.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.



Example 3.45 *Tierce de Picardie* in fugue BWV 867, mm. 74-75.

Notice in the prelude BWV 867, the cross motive engraved closely prior to the final cadence. It suggests that Bach may have intently linked the cross symbol as a figurative pathway to the resurrection, commemorating Jesus' words, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."<sup>163</sup> This final cross motive is found in the Rh3 motive in the prelude.<sup>164</sup>



Example 3.46 Cross symbol in Rh3 motive in prelude BWV 867, m. 23.



Example 3.47 Cross symbol in fugue BWV 867, m. 72.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> John 14:6.

<sup>164</sup> See Example 1.3.

<sup>165</sup> See Example 1.36. This cross motive is found at the end of motive c inversion in the fugue analysis.



Example 3.48 Cross symbol in fugue BWV 867, m. 74.

In just 24 measures of this non-textual prelude in *The Well-Tempered Clavier I*, Bach presented a concentrated musical expression of the Gospel. His famous faith signature “S. D. G.” (To God alone be the Glory), inscribed at the end of the B minor fugue BWV 869, reveals again his faithfulness to God and the Gospel.<sup>166</sup> As Stapert states, “[Bach] usually proclaimed at the end of his scores with the initials SDG – ‘Soli Deo Gloria.’”<sup>167</sup>

As the organ prelude *Vater unser im Himmelreich* (Our Father in Heaven) BWV 636 was from a hymn based on the Lord’s Prayer, the inclusion of Bach’s final cross motives leading to the *Tierce de Picardie* suggests his intention to end *The Well-Tempered Clavier I* with the “Amen” effect—a concluding musical prayer.<sup>168</sup> As Williams notes, “The TEXT is Luther’s versification of the Lord’s Prayer... Verses 2–8 develop the first line of each section of the Paternoster, v. 9 the Amen.”<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> These initials are in the Urtext edition, G. Henle Verlag.

<sup>167</sup> Stapert, 27.

<sup>168</sup> Williams, *The Organ Music of J. S. Bach* (2003), 302.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

## CONCLUSION

The challenge in approaching the B-flat minor prelude BWV 867 lies in understanding the original context of the piece. Applying an in-depth examination of Bach's motivic elements proves to be crucial. A thorough analysis of Bach's composition provides important benefits and understanding for both performers and listeners.

Because many examples of motivic and thematic materials in Bach's instrumental works seem to show an indirect correlation to sacred texts, this research suggests that the B-flat minor prelude and fugue may be a musical parable based on the Gospel of John chapter 19 verse 17. This finding offers further implications for performance. The representation of Jesus that seems evident in the beginning eighth-note bass motives, for example, would signal the required tempo as respectively slow. The monotonous bass tones appear to indicate a portrayal of the faltering steps of Christ as he carried the enlarged cross up Golgotha Hill, thus requiring the performer to match that character in the bass. The minor 9th leap served as a significant factor in discovering the cross motive in the theme of the prelude.

Bach draws on Jesus Christ as the centerpiece of his musical framework by impressing the widespread cross to the brim of the theme. The B-flat minor prelude is one of many places where Bach seems to have left his imprint on the legacy of Jesus Christ through encoding symbols like the cross in his musical masterpieces.<sup>170</sup> As often stated by Bach scholars, the cross motive is a key item in Bach's music. The cross symbol in the prelude BWV 867 gives a new element for interpretation: a hidden level of meaning that is not explicit in the work's notation. The study suggests *The Well-Tempered Clavier*

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<sup>170</sup> See Col. 2:2.

could broadly have been composed on the foundation of the Bible, leveling justly on both the Old and New Testament. With this in mind, the performer might consider consulting biblical sources to comprehend the full origins for the profundity of Bach's musical context.

The present research shows how elements of Bach's compositional features were utilized to understand the symbolism underlining the biblical text, delivering the composer's message to his audience by way of figurative language. Through the combination of analysis and an absorption of scriptural texts, the performer may discover both the genius of Bach as a composer and the richness of his underlying spirituality. In Bach's own words: "the aim and final reason, as of all music...should be none else but the Glory of God and the recreation of the mind."<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Wolff, *The New Bach Reader*, 17. See also Rom. 12:2.

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