



Bach's Chorals Part III: The Hymns and Hymn Melodies of the Organ Works

Charles Sanford Terry

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An excerpt from the Preface:

"Of all Bach's works, the Organ Chorals are probably the least known, even to organists," Mr Newman remarks in Novello's edition of the *Orgelbuchlein*. "Until recently," another English writer, Harvey Grace, confesses, "not more than one organist in a hundred knew what Bach was driving at in the Choral Preludes as a whole. We were confronted with collections of pieces bearing German titles, with no hint as to pace, power, or registration.

Sometimes the thematic basis could be identified and followed, but more often not. In many cases it was even impossible to say whether the music was intended to be joyful or sad. We need not be surprised that the puzzle was laid aside in favour of Preludes and Fugues that carried their message on their face."

In large measure English neglect of the Choral Preludes is due to unfamiliarity with the melodies and hymns on which they are founded, whereas, by reason of the intimate relation between them and Bach's music, a knowledge of both is imperative. No adequate attempt hitherto has been made to remove this serious impediment by placing the text of the hymns before English readers, systematically exploring them for guidance to Bach's treatment of their melodies, and expounding the form and historical antecedents of the tunes. The author believes that the following pages will be found to provide the necessary apparatus for a neglected study."

The author's discovery of Bach's early use of Christian Friedrich Witt's *Psalmodia sacra* (1715) opens a new field of exploration and has produced important results. It has at length forced the secret of its design and purpose from the *Orgelbuchlein*, a problem which German scholarship, persistently and minutely concentrated on Bach's art for more than sixty years, either neglected or found insoluble.

It affords, moreover, with some approximation to accuracy, the means to date the Choral Preludes according as Bach's version of their melodies conforms to or differs from Witt's — i.e. Gotha- Weimar — use. It is only necessary to add that the present volume repeats the method of its predecessors. The source of the hymns and melodies is stated: the tunes are given in their earliest published form: a translation of every hymn used by Bach is provided. Biographical and bibliographical information is furnished concerning such authors, composers, hymns, and tunes as do not occur in the earlier volumes of this work. In Part II an Appendix was provided disclosing the locus of the MS. and Autograph texts of the Oratorios, Passions, Masses, Cantatas, and Motetts. Similar information is provided here regarding the Choral Preludes

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