



Hermeneutik zu Johann Sebastian Bach



Diese Übersetzung wurde mittels DeepL-Translator erstellt.

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Hermeneutics of Bach

Research and research results by Christoph Bossert

Feature 3

Indications for a symmetrical construction of the *36 chorales* - Indication 1

Hermeneutics
instructional video in 12
features
with
Prof. Dr h. c. Christoph Bossert
on the Klais organ (2016) in the Great Hall of the
Würzburg University of Music

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Table of contents

Feature 1

Introductory thoughts
Pièce d'Orgue BWV 572

Feature 2

The question of authorship: Are the 36 chorales attributed to Bach in the Neumeister collection actually by Bach?

Response: *The Well-Tempered Clavier* I, Praeludium in B flat major BWV 866 and the chorale prelude No. 32 *Alle Menschen müssen sterben* BWV 1117 of the 36 chorales

Feature 3

Indications of a symmetrical construction of the 36 chorales - Indication

1 No. 1 *Der Tag, der ist so freudenreich* BWV 719
No. 26 *Nun lasst uns den Leib begraben* BWV 1111
No. 11 *Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir* BWV 1099
No. 36 *Christ, der du bist der helle Tag* 1120

Feature 4

The symmetrical construction of the 36 chorales - indication 2

Feature 5

Transition from end to new beginning -- Beginning and end of a piece - Indications 3-4

Indication 3 (a): Chorales Nos. 1, 2 and 34
Indication 3 (b): The chorales no. 3, 35 and 36
Indication 4: The chorales no. 4 and no. 33

Conclusio and definitions of terms

Feature 6

My concept of 'work unit' using the example of *Das Wohltemperirte Clavier* I, Fuga in A minor and its 118th bar half in the course of the 22nd theme performance as a *major challenge*

Feature 7

The path of hermeneutics as a path of enlightenment - 10 examples of the "step beyond"

Feature 8

Musical perception: What numbers can *tell us*

Feature 9

The biblical foundation: Psalm 119 as an acrostic of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet

Feature 10

Personal figures

Feature 11

Further discussion on numbers -- the biblical number 153 compared to $351 = \sum_{n=1}^{26} 1+2+n+26$;
26 as the numerical value of the tetragrammaton YHWH

Feature 12

Identical numerical findings in a comparison of WK I and *Kunst der Fuge*

Feature 3

Indications for a symmetrical construction of the 36 chorales - Indication 1

I come to feature 3, followed by features 4 and 5. I want to establish some indications as to whether the 36 chorales actually even contain symmetry. Only then can I actually justifiably speak of 36 chorales. It would be my suggestion to the organ world to use the term "36 chorales" in future, instead of the very unwieldy term that has been introduced in the scholarly literature up to now: *chorales by Johann Sebastian Bach from the Neumeister collection*.

I can present evidence that supports my thesis that the 36 chorales I have named do indeed exhibit symmetry. In this feature I would like to make an initial suggestion (my argument): The relationship of piece 1 to 26, of piece 26 to no. 11 and of piece no. 11 to no. 36. Then the connection of pieces 1-11-26-36 becomes a symmetrical construction. I would like to briefly explain my argument:

No. 1 *Der Tag der ist so freudenreich* BWV 719

The song speaks of the joy of Christmas. The piece is divided into a fugal first section and a fugal second section.

KB 1a: The first section:




Musical notation for the first section of 'Der Tag der ist so freudenreich' BWV 719, measures 1-11. The notation is in G major and 3/4 time. It shows the beginning of the piece with a treble and bass clef. The melody starts with a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note A, and then a quarter note B. The bass line starts with a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note F, and then a quarter note E. The piece is in a fugal style, with the melody and bass line often moving in parallel motion.

A second section begins with a fugato, following a *passagio* that runs through the entire keyboard:


KB 1b:



Musical notation for the second section of 'Der Tag der ist so freudenreich' BWV 719, measures 23-28. The notation is in G major and 3/4 time. It shows a fugato section starting at measure 23. The melody starts with a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note A, and then a quarter note B. The bass line starts with a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note F, and then a quarter note E. The piece is in a fugal style, with the melody and bass line often moving in parallel motion.

My statement regarding this second fugato is as follows: On the one hand, it is about the second chorale line of the hymn *Der Tag der ist so freudenreich*, which reads: *aller Kreature* 

but at the same time it is about an anticipation - metalepsis - of what will happen in piece 26


is expressed by means of the chorale line *und unverweslich herfürgeh'n*: 

No. 26 *Now let us bury the body* BWV 1111

As the funeral hymn *Nun lasst uns den Leib begraben*, No. 26 is in a sense the opposite of the first piece. It was the classic funeral hymn in Bach's time. The first verse reads:

*Now let us bury the body. Of this we
have no doubt.*

*He will rise on the last day [the body]
and go forth imperishable*

How does one hear this *imperishable coming forth* in No. 26? This is another story. It is the fourth chorale line with this progression: 

We become aware of this in no. 1:

KB 1c, no. 1:



But now we have to include the colouring in No. 26.

KB 2a, no. 26, mm. 35 f.:



Up to about here the melody notes had reached the word *herfür geh'n*. This *going for it* is now depicted in a grandiose stretch over a total of seven bars:

KB 2b, no. 26, mm. 37 f.:




The musical relationship between No. 1 and No. 26 is - I think - evident. The theological relationship is that of the antithesis, the stark antithesis of the birth of the Lord and our death.

Now comes the next step, the **relationship of No. 26 back to No. 11**, or also the relationship of the 11th to the 11th piece before the end, if I am right with my argument. Now comes an argument that might seem strange at first. It is the argument of counting, the argument of the numerical finding.

My findings revolve around the number 153, a biblical number. When the Risen One shows himself to the disciples, he stands on the shore and says to the disciples who have caught nothing in their fishing: '*Cast the net on the right side of the boat and you will find.* Peter catches! A net full of fish: *Simon Peter went up and pulled the net ashore, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three* (John 21:6 and John 21:11).

Now - and this will be the subject of further features - the number 153 should be opened up semantically. Very briefly: The mirror number for 153 is 351. 351 is the sum of the numbers from 1 to 26, i.e. $1 + 2 + 3 + \dots + 26$. But what is 26? In the Hebrew alphabet, it is the addition of the letters of the name of God YHWH.¹

We were just at No. 26, the funeral song. And right there we find in the 153rd sounding

quarter the following situation: . What are the findings?


Firstly: nowhere else do we find a chord like this that makes the music stop, as it were. Only here!

Listen to the context:

KB 2c, no. 26, mm. 41/42: 


Secondly: Chords bring the root, the fifth and the third into the sound, here as a sixth chord. Each chord brings 1, 5 and 3 into a compelling relationship in terms of number semantics through the root, fifth and third and thus possibly establishes a relationship to what we find here in the 153rd sounding crotchet.

¹ For the derivation of YHWH in Hebrew reading from left to right and counting as $5+6+5+10$, see: Hermeneutics before Bach, Feature 5, with the following additional thought: In Steigleder's *Variatio 1* of the 40 variations, the second half of bar 124 and the first half of bar 125 are not in 2 half-notes but in 3 half-notes shortly before the end. From this: $2+3=5$ // $3+3=6$ // $3+2=5$ // $2+3+3+2=10$ // $5+6+5+10=26$ = representation of the name YHWH.

The third reference is that the upper voice tells us the following: ; these are the notes *a'-e'* and *c''*. Their respective numerical values are 1, 5 and 3.

There is therefore a threefold determination of the number 153:

- (1) the localisation as the 153rd sounding quarter;
- (2) the fact of the triadic foundation, which is nowhere else so clearly visible in this piece, where triad means: root-quint-tetre;

- (3) the upper voice strings together the notes *a'-e'* and *c'* (). The numbers 1, 5 and 3 result from the notes a, e and c.

No. 11 *From deep distress I cry to you* BWV 1099

Now I come to the question of the symmetrical relationship of No. 11 to the 26th piece, the 11th piece before the end. Methodologically, the question is now what might possibly be in No. 11 in the place of the

153. sounding crotchet. It is what is heard shortly before the end:

KB 4, no. 11, bar 39:




In fact, here again we have a singularity of semiquaver triplets that do not occur anywhere else in the piece. This is exactly what happens in the 153rd sounding crotchet of this piece. Now we can gather further clues. For example, the beginnings of nos. 11 and 26 are visually very similar. Now this finding of the 153rd sounding crotchet at the end is in line *with* the beginning, which is visually and musically comparable in both pieces. Thus the beginning and end of both pieces interlock symmetrically.

The question now arises as to the connection between No. 11 and No. 36 as a *counterpart* to No. 1 in relation to No. 26, **so what could No. 11 have to do with No. 36?**

Listen to the beginning of piece no. 11 *Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir* with the chorale melody



It is the alternative to the frequently used melody: .

Listen to Bach's harmonisation, which is based on a reflection of the treble in the bass. Due to

These mirrored outer voices produce a harmony that leads to an extremely unusual type of chorale harmonisation.

KB 5, No.11, beginning

At the end is the key of E major and it is precisely this E major that would now be the bridge to the last, 36th piece. It also ends in this E major - but with a much more restrained sound.

KB 6a, no. 36, conclusion:

The last three bars of this restrained E major echo No. 11 in the full sound of the organ.


No. 36 *Christ, who art the bright day* BWV 1120

Now, of course, the question arises as to the **relationship of no. 36 to no. 1**. Does this last piece also have something to do with the first piece? This would give us further evidence in favour of the thesis of symmetry.

We actually find this turn of phrase in m. 11 of no. 36:

KB 6b, No. 36, T. 11:

compared to the *Cantus firmus* in No. 1:

We find precisely this turn of phrase in no. 36 in the tenor ; in the combination of voices:

KB 7a, no. 36, mm. 9-12

It would again be a small hint for the connection of the last to the first and the first to the last piece. Others could be mentioned at any time.

This now stands as an argument, or as the first indication in favour of the thesis that these 36 chorales were conceived in symmetrical order. Consequently, this would rule out the possibility that any chorales could have been lost to us in Neumeister's transmission. Or have they?

Within the symmetrical construct, for example, lost pieces would have to be stored either completely on the outside or in some symmetrical position in relation to each other, or a centre piece would have to be completely missing.

My indication 1 was, as explained, the relationship of No. 1 to No. 26 and No. 11 to No. 36 and the corresponding cross-connections between these pieces.

Sheet music examples, edited

Last retrieval of all sheet music examples used: 05/08/2023.

Tobi's music archive:

Johann Sebastian BACH, organ chorales from the Neumeister Collection, No. 11 *Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir* BWV 1099, No. 26 *Nun lass uns den Leib begraben* BWV 1111, No. 36 *Christe, der du bist der helle Tag* BWV 1120. URL: < <https://tobis-notenarchiv.de/wp/bach-archiv/> > and < <https://tobis-notenarchiv.de/wp/bach-archiv/ergaenzungen/orgelchorale-der-neumeister-sammlung/> >

IMSLP:

Johann Sebastian BACH, Organ Chorales from the Neumeister Collection, No. 1 *Der Tag, der ist so freudereich* BWV 719, edited by Gayk Aboyan via [Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial Share Alike 3.0](#), part of the [Werner Icking Music Collection](#).

URL: < https://vmirror.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/2/27/IMSLP200344-WIMA.538a-Der_Tag_ist_so_freundreich_BWV719.pdf >

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