



Hermeneutik zu Johann Sebastian Bach



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Kontakt: dvvlio@innovation-orgellehre.digital

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Contact: dvvlio@innovation-orgellehre.digital



Hermeneutics before Bach

Research and research results by Christoph Bossert

Das Vatter unser auff 2,
3 und 4 Stimmen
auf Orgeln und allen an
den Musicalischen In-
strumenten ordentlich
in appliciren
London

Johann Ulrich Steigleders 40 Variations on *Our Father in the Kingdom of Heaven*
(1627) **Tabulatur Buch / Darinnen / Daß Vatter Unser auff 2, / 3. und 4
Stimmen componirt, und / vierzig mal varirt würdt**

Durch Johan Steigleder
Organist für Seufftsche in Straßburg
verrieth und verlegt in Straßburg
bey Wärc von ... in ...
1 6 2 7

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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Fig. 2: Johann Ulrich Steigleder, *TB, Variatio 14*, beginning.

Thy kingdom come at this time and thereafter for ever and ever.

For each chorale line there is a precise possibility of assigning text and music; and this is probably a clear indication that *Variatio 14* expresses the third verse, i.e. the second petition.

Variation 17 follows and in *Variatio 17* we encounter very quiet music. There is a new motif based on the third . This very simple music would then correlate with the petition: Thy will be done; or in Luther's words: *Thy will be done, Lord God, both on earth and in the kingdom of heaven.*

And this is precisely the situation in Gethsemane at the beginning of Jesus' Passio. It was preceded by the Last Supper with the disciples. The disciples go with Jesus - but without Judas - to Gethsemane. The disciples are very tired, their eyes are falling shut, Jesus found them asleep. Every now and then, one of them lifts his tired eyelids (see bars 6 and 7). And this seems to be exactly what is meant here musically:



Fig. 3: Johann Ulrich Steigleder, *TB, Variatio 17*, mm. 1-11.

Variations 17 to 19 then show this third passage in quavers as a common element. The last variation, *Variatio 19*, changes into triplets at the end, as mentioned. Music that initially continues in four quavers is followed by music in triplets.

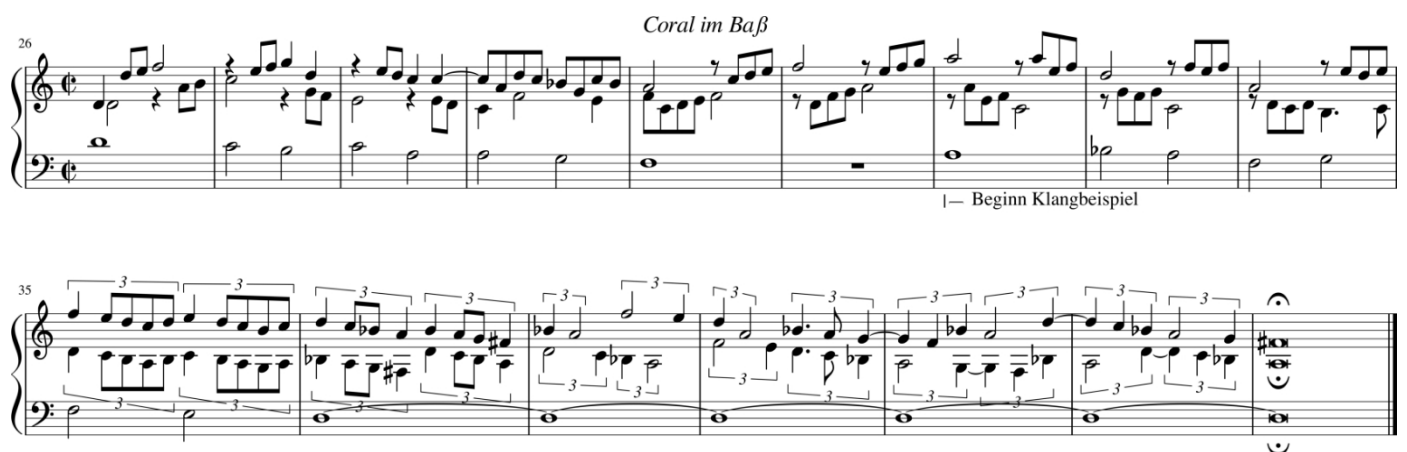


Fig. 4: Johann Ulrich Steigleder, *TB, Variatio 19*, m. 32 to end.

This transition into the triplets would therefore mark a very big ending and then a fundamental new beginning in *Variatio 20*. It would then be the petition associated with variations 20 and 21, the petition for our daily bread. So now come the four petitions that emphasise the word *us*. *Variation 19* with its triplet conclusion would therefore clearly be the end of the first group of petitions with the word *your*, from variation 20 onwards turned into the four following petitions with the word *us*.

Coral im Tenor



Fig. 5: Johann Ulrich Steigleder, *TB, Variatio 20*, KB I.

The fact that this variation 20 is linked to the request for our daily bread can be linked to the fact that the devil - when he tempts Jesus - says: I can give you to turn these stones into bread¹ - and there are stones everywhere, so there is much more bread than you would ever need. That would be the figure of pleonasm. And that's exactly how we find a pleonasm at the end of this variation, namely suddenly thirty-second notes as a trillo figure. I play this ending

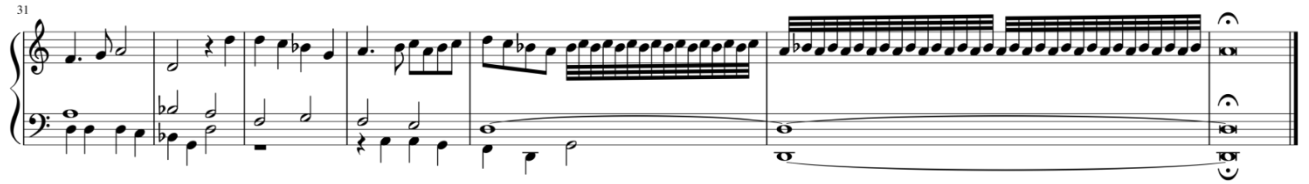


Fig. 6: Johann Ulrich Steigleder, *TB, Variatio 20*, m. 31 to end, KB II.

This trillo figure, which is heard here for the first time in 32nd notes, runs through many variations and is always found at the end, as if the devil, i.e. *Satan's wrath and great violence*, repeatedly makes itself felt here in the form of a temptation.²

We also have to imagine that Steigleder lives during the Thirty Years' War, a time when there is a threat everywhere; he lives in the time of the plague - he himself succumbs to the plague - so that was also an incredible existential threat at the time: half of Stuttgart was swept away by the plague, as Steigleder was the organist at the collegiate church in Stuttgart.

Now, in clear contrast to variation 22, we come again to a very quiet music and to a reduced music, which in my reading would be the plea for forgiveness: *All' uns're Schuld vergib uns, Herr*.

Fugen-Manier



Fig. 7: Johann Ulrich Steigleder, *TB, Variatio 22*, KB I.

And suddenly the Trillo figures are twitching again:



Fig. 8: Johann Ulrich Steigleder, *TB, Variatio 22*, mm. 17-20/1, KB II.

¹ Matth 4, 3 *And the tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, say that these stones will become bread.*

² The trillo figure is heard for the first time at the end of *Variatio 10* in the context of the first petition: *Hallowed be thy name* (stanza 2). The fifth line of the chorale is: *Behüt' uns, Herr, vor falscher Lehr'* (m. 11-13). The words *False doctrine* are partly in octaves. My interpretation: Falsehood = over-snapping of the voice = break = octave transposition.

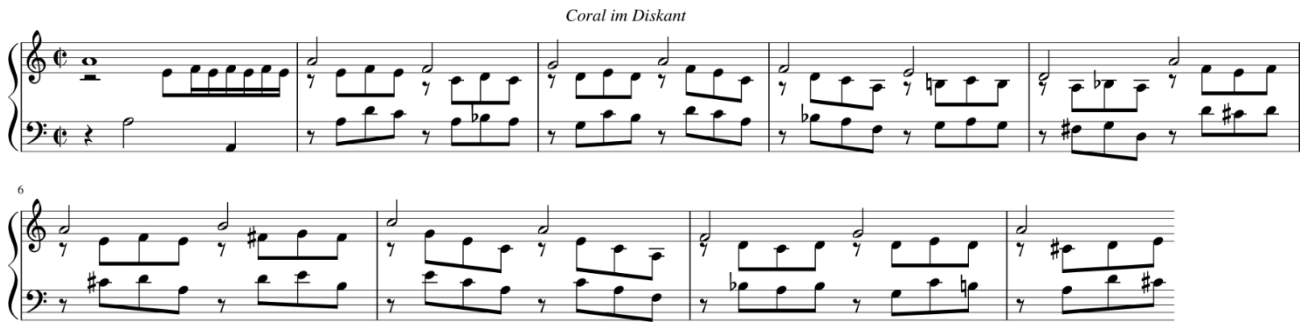


Fig. 11: Johann Ulrich Steigleder, *TB, Variatio 30*.

And it is precisely this [accompanying rhythm indicated vocally] that also pervades *Variatio 31*, for example at the following point:





Fig. 12: Johann Ulrich Steigleder, *TB, Variatio 31*, mm. 5-9/1.

This is then the elaboration of the first chorale line, but the *sospiratio* is also repeatedly noticeable throughout the piece. Variations 30 and 31 are thus linked by the figure of the *sospiratio*.

How is number 32 linked to 33? The beginning of variation 32 is as follows:



Fig. 13: Johann Ulrich Steigleder, *TB, Variatio 32*.

This beginning is characteristic:  Let us compare this with variation 33: 

It is almost the same beginning. In one case the *cantus firmus* is in the soprano [32], now in 33 it is in the bass. This would be called an *evolutio*: The inversion of the whole movement and an identical sound at the beginning would be the correlate of variations 32 and 33.

[Variation] 34 and 35 are connected by the brokenness, by the breaking off of the descant - and that would now be a reference to the topos of the hour of death. When we say: *Deliver us from all evil* - in other words: *Deliver us from evil* - then we have reached the end of all petitions and the Our Father is understood in such a way that it should also accompany us in our last hour. Thus this music plunges into darkness, as it were, in a very peculiar way in both variations. The beginning of variation 34:

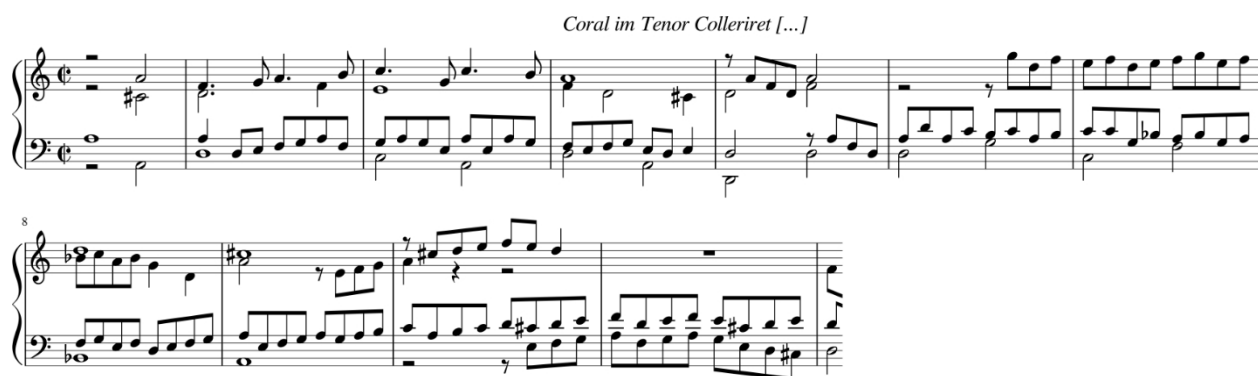


Fig. 14: Johann Ulrich Steigleder, *TB, Variatio 34*, KB I.

That would be a first cancellation. A second cancellation and a reappearance:



Fig. 15: Johann Ulrich Steigleder, *TB, Variatio 34*, mm. 17-19, KB II.

my opinion, this topos is accompanied by the following phrase:



This could

be associated with the following song:



Fig. 16: Melchior Vulpus, *Down is the sun's light* (1609)

Now we come to the corresponding variation 35, where it [the cancellation] is clearly marked by the change of the *cantus firmus* from the soprano to the tenor, as in the next [chorale] line:



So the topos of brokenness dominates these two variations.

Variatio 36 stands in stark contrast to this [what was previously heard in *Variatio 35* as a *cantus firmus* in octaves is now heard in *Variatio 36* as a *cantus firmus* in octaves]. Steigleder places the following descriptive words here:

*This variation is designed so that / if desired / the coral is double
can be sung/ in the following form: The voice that joins in/ makes the chorale double/ should
be sung an octave higher than the actual coral in the bass/ in art and white/ as if sung by a
congregation in a church of different colours
Depending on the age of the people, both low and slightly higher voices
can be heard.*

So this is now a movement in octaves and - yes - a forbidden movement type, so to speak [all six chorale lines sound in octaves]. But the organ stops do exactly that [32'-16'-8'-4']. They treat every stop in octaves. The paradox comes from the fact that we simultaneously have an imitative effect in the other voices, e.g. in the following way:



Fig. 17: Johann Ulrich Steigleder, *TB, Variatio 36*, mm. 8-12/1, KB II.

Again and again imitative approaches, i.e. polyphony, and in contrast a quasi-homophonic movement in octaves.



Fig. 18: Johann Ulrich Steigleder, *TB, Variatio 36*, KB III.

We perceive a tremendously great music! According to my reading, the text would be categorised as follows:

Amen, that is, let it be true, strengthen our faith always, so that we may not doubt what we have hereby asked. At your word and in your name, we say the Amen finely.

The five final variations then begin with *Variatio 36*. Now we must talk about *Variatio 39*. This is heard singularly in this work as a 3/2 metre and has the following form:



Fig. 19: Johann Ulrich Steigleder, *TB, Variatio 39*.

This unique three-part movement is flanked by three variations before and three parts after. This is therefore the group of variations that differentiates itself in the clearest way. It basically expresses 3 + 3 + 3 again, in which the middle section is three-part, [while] the first [section] comprises three variations, the last, third, three parts. This would again be the correlate to verse one from 3 + 3

+ 3 variations. And so the prologue and epilogue would again be structurally mediated as an enclosure of the 3 + 4 groups - symbolising the seven petitions: The three [petitions] intending the word *thine*, the other four [petitions] intending the word *us*.

Now the decisive methodological step (Methodology IV) would be to ask whether this argumentation is plausible enough to arrive at the following *conclusion*: Steigleder's composition is nothing other than the elaboration of a form of the communion chalice from initially 3 + 3 + 3, 2 + 2, 3, 3, 2, 2 variations. From now on, the chalice bowl opens in 3 + 3 variations, then in 2 + 2 + 2 variations, and then the last five variations follow in three variations, a three-part variation in the middle and three parts of the final stoccata at the end. Where the one variation is in the centre, the mouth touches the chalice:

```

x x x x x x x
  x x x  x x x
    x x x x  x  x
      x  x  x x
        x  x
          x  x
            x
              x x x
                x x x
                  x x
                    x x x x x
                      x x x x x x x x x

```

The methodological step here is: Is the previously presented argumentation plausible enough to substantiate this *conclusion*?

Concept

Prof. Dr h. c. Christoph Bossert

Coordination

Thilo Frank

Camera

Dr Jürgen Schöpf

Sound and

editing:

Alexander Hainz

Writing and music examples: Andrea

Dubrauszky

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