Prelude in E-flat Major (BWV 552/1)
The prelude surprises us with its élan. It is an example of a ceremonial introduction and it is written in a style whose origins reach back to the works of the French composer Jean-Baptiste Lully. Many features of Bach's prelude are reminiscent of the "Overture" of the Composizioni musicale, Parte Seconda, I (Example 24), written by the virtuoso German harpsichord player, Konrad Friedrich Hurlebusch (c. 1696–1765),84 who visited Bach in Leipzig in 1734.

When one examines the motifs that form the basis of the three "characters" of Bach's Prelude in E-flat Major with care, it is not difficult to see that they are in fact variations of the same motif—a fifth filled out with material from the diatonic scale. (Example 25) This motif appears in the dotted part as a titrata, in the sections with a reduced texture (bars 32–50 and 111–129) as a flowing melody, and finally in the "driven" parts as an energetic scale. Let us call these different structures A, B, and C.

The form of this composition is particularly interesting. It is constructed as a rondo and, in this form, the only example of this type in the whole of Bach's organ works. The dotted parts are given the function of the refrain, while the "reduced" and "driven" parts function as the episodes as a three-section structure, taking up as much as possible of the composition. The structures that surround the middle part are equal in number of bars (BACH).

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Fugue in E-flat Major (BWV 552/2)
Bach's genius enabled him to portray the theme of the fugal part of the E major prelude by Dieterich Buxtehude, BuxWV 141 (Example 20). The second part of the composition (the second fugue) displays a lively character and contains elements derived from dance music. It is in fact based on the intervals of the melodic progression of the first fugue. Both themes are combined in the second half of the fugue (from bar 59 onwards). This part clearly quotes the final chorus "Hilf deinem Volk" [Help your people] from the cantata "Benedictus" (BWV 65, 50th anniversary). The theme of the fugal part of the E major prelude begins at this point. The unbroken flow of diatonic spaces creates the illusion of a "fifth filled out in a very lively manner." And finally, from bar 82 onwards, the third theme, in 12/8 rhythm, enters into the flow of the music. It is based on a "falling" fifth filled out in a very lovely manner and is reminiscent of the episode C (the fifth fugue) begins at this point. The unbroken flow of diatonic spaces creates the illusion of a "fifth filled out in a very lively manner." (Example 26) This motif—a fifth filled out in a very lively manner—generates joy the main theme (the theme of the first fugue) appears as a great hymn symbolizing the greatness, the jubilation, and the glory of the Creator.

What does this short theme of just seven notes actually represent? Bach's genius enabled him to portray the theme of the fugal part of the E major prelude by Dieterich Buxtehude, BuxWV 141 (Example 20). The second part of the composition (the second fugue) displays a lively character and contains elements derived from dance music. It is in fact based on the intervals of the melodic progression of the first fugue. Both themes are combined in the second half of the fugue (from bar 59 onwards). This part clearly quotes the final chorus "Hilf deinem Volk" [Help your people] from the cantata "Benedictus" (BWV 65, 50th anniversary). The theme of the fugal part of the E major prelude begins at this point. The unbroken flow of diatonic spaces creates the illusion of a "fifth filled out in a very lively manner." And finally, from bar 82 onwards, the third theme, in 12/8 rhythm, enters into the flow of the music. It is based on a "falling" fifth filled out in a very lovely manner and is reminiscent of the episode C (the fifth fugue) begins at this point. The unbroken flow of diatonic spaces creates the illusion of a "fifth filled out in a very lively manner." (Example 26) This motif—a fifth filled out in a very lively manner—generates joy the main theme (the theme of the first fugue) appears as a great hymn symbolizing the greatness, the jubilation, and the glory of the Creator.

What does this short theme of just seven notes actually represent? The theme of the fugato (episode C) is set in multiple counterpoint. The prelude is dominated by the monumental form of the bass voice of this polyphonic texture, while the countersubject is based on the motif for understanding the Divine Will.85 And one further observation: The total number of bars in the work is 205; which is the multiple of 5 (the number for Mankind) and 41 (JSBACH).86

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In the greater chorale preludes on "Kyrie" the motive precludes Kyrie – Gloria – Requiem, obviously symbolizes the divine glory and the beauty of heaven. The organist has major intellectual significance within the overall dramatic structure, one is certainly not to disregard the canonical and liturgical purity of the heavenly Jerusalem.

The music of the chorales on "Credo" serves to symbolize – Credo – Confessio divina, all of which are in minor keys, expresses the internal world of one who is aware of his own sinfulness. Characteristically, the space for the tonal development within this cycle is circumscribed by the augmented fourth, the musical symbol for evil. At the same time the interval of a perfect fifth in the themes of these choruses serves as a reminder of the essentially divine nature of the soul and of the inner harmony that forms the basis of its being. These aspects are also approached by a foundation for the selection of keys for the greater chorale preludes – they are built on the keys of C-D-E, forming the motive of the Holy Trinity. Typically enough, we have an indication of the suggested substance of the 21 chorale preludes is so appropriate to the chorale preludes on "Kyrie" – C minor – Confessio divina – 5 parts (Kyrie – Gloria – Requiem – Credo – Confessio divina) – 5 parts (Credo – Lord's Prayer – Reformation – Confession – Credo).

Returning to the chorales, we note that the fifth plays a major role in their exposition. Major and minor keys alternately fill out the range E–A, leading to the building of the theme of the fugue from B-flat. Such a tonal plan leaves no doubt about the ordering and justification for their presence in this part of the cycle.

Looked at under this aspect, we can see that the work is conceived as a structural whole with three centers of gravity, each of which is circumscribed by a fifth. In the first case it is the perfect fifth E-flat–B-flat in connection with major keys, in the second it is the augmented fourth C–E-sharp (which is harmonically also a diminished fifth) in connection with minor keys, while in the third, it is the diminished fifth E–B-flat in connection with both major and minor keys. This de- tailed and carefully planned tonal layout is a further witness to the compositional art of the Clavierübung III. Without any doubt it shows that the individual parts of this work are far from being one another's opposite. That is perhaps sufficient regarding the relationships between the various parts of the fugue. But what is decisive in the background of the development within each part is that the intention of the writer, which the parts here reflects, is in common today, only in excerpts? And finally, the most important question of all. Can one speak here of a symbolic development within the whole cycle, and is it possible to establish some relation to any cuts, especially in view of its enormous size?

I consider this to be a valid question. We have thus far spoken of the tonal plan of the work under this aspect, of its rhythmic connections between the lesser chorale on "Wir glauben" and the greater chorale prelude on "Gott Vater in Ewigkeit", the related motifs of the lesser chorale on "Vater unser" and the greater chorale on "Die Taufe". When one tries to assign the role of the lesser chorales within the overall dramatic structure, one is unavoidably drawn to a comparison with the art of rhetoric, and especially with that of the art of the sermon. And according to the testimony of Bach's friend, the Master Johann Abraham Birnbaum, who taught rhetoric at the University of Leipzig, Bach himself well acquainted with the rules of rhetoric. In fact, one can imagine the whole composition as a sermon on the fundamentals of the Christian faith, a sermon in which the greater chorales—parallel to the parts of the tria nomia—should reveal their essential content. What is this deeper essence that could deem the lesser chorales to be essential. They represent the function of "distinctions", which allow the hearer now and again a necessary moment of re- duced concentration, and thus allow the speaker to maintain the attention of his hearers for the substance of the sermon.

Think for example of Pictures at an Exhibition by Modest Mussorgsky. In this work the main parts of the composition are wonder fully bound together by the so-called "Promenade", which always answers in a chord with a chord. This time, happy, then restrained, then mournful and yet again cheerful. Each time it appears, it prepares the way for the next main part of the work, it leads the listener on to the next part of the new picture. And that is not the purpose of Bach's lesser chorales.

In questioning the significance of particular parts of the composition, we have more than one instance when the art of rhetoric—of the figurative aspects of many of the works of Bach—of the chorales, serve for this method to the question at hand. To this end we have compiled a small table with the one number each part of the composition (Appendix).
Appendix 1

Decalogue – Credo – Lord’s Prayer

Appendix 2

Kyrie-Christe-Kyrie 279
Allene Gott in der Höh’ sei Ehr’ 211
Das sind die heil’gen zwölf Gebot’ 95
Wir teilen alle an einem Gott 106
Vater unser im Himmelreich 115
Christ, unser Herr, zu Jordan kam 145
Je sus Christus unser Erlöser 185

Four duets

Appendix 3

Prebode in E flat major 205
Kyrie-Christe-Kyrie 279
Allene Gott in der Höh’ sei Ehr’ 211
Das sind die heil’gen zwölf Gebot’ 95
Wir teilen alle an einem Gott 106
Vater unser im Himmelreich 115
Christ, unser Herr, zu Jordan kam 145
Je sus Christus unser Erlöser 185


1. At first glance no obvious associations appear. But when we add to each of the numbers the individual “sub-cycles,” that is to the parts Kyrie – Gloria – Dona nobis – Lord’s Prayer and Baptism – Confession – Eucharist, we get a very different picture.

Although we are at yet not able to understand the significance of these numbers, it is obvious that the result is not accidental. This symmetry with its round numbers is unlikely to be a matter of chance, but the development continues to grow. The number of bars from the beginning of the Prelude to the end of the major key part is 770, to the end of the Vater-unser part 1000, and to the end of the Kyrie-Christe part 1085. Obviously these round numbers come about through their addition of the lesser cycles (Appendix 4).

Given that there are several levels of meaning involved, these numbers will never be fully exposed. One of the facts is undoubtedly a metaphysical, and another may have to do with important historical events. It is not impossible that a hint, level upon level, reflect scientific developments, while finally there is the level of the mathematical. It is possible that all of these meanings form an indivisible whole, forming the numbers which reflect them. And obviously the music that lies behind these numbers should be bound up in the same way into one indivisible whole.

Let us look at the connection of the parts Dona nobis – Credo – Lord’s Prayer (see Appendix 2). They express the essence of the Christian life: the expression of faith through adherence to the Law and through prayer. This block has a total of 576 bars, to be found in the middle of our row of numbers. This solitaire, if you will, represents the structure of the Prelude, on both sides by the even number 470, attracts our attention like a magnet.

2. In his commentary on the 14th chapter of the Gospel of St. John (verses 23–31), which deals with events surrounding the death of Jesus, Luther put forth a profound teaching about the true faith which consists of far more than simply following the letter of God’s laws and regulations. The essence of the true faith, is for Luther, the acceptance of and submission to God, the realization of His Commandments, and a true love for the Creator.

In just this chapter of John’s Gospel, Jesus, in answering a question from the people, speaks of the divine statement, in the pages of the Bible: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” And as if it were a repeat of this divine statement, in the pages of Bach’s composition, wonderful numerological symbols appear that reveal the meaning, the universality of His statement. (4 × 5 + 20 + 18) = 770 (Hallelujah) (5 × 11 + 11 + 11 + 19 + 9 + 1) = 1000 (Vater unser im Himmelreich) (3 × 19 + 5 + 19) = 115 (Christ, unser Herr, zu Jordan kam) (10 + 3 + 7 + 2 + 1 = 23).

It is not without interest that Bach opened a copy of the treatise Genesis and Psalms for Luther, which bears his personal notes. This book was the work of the famous Lutheran and scholar Johann Joseph Fux (1660–1741), who postulated that the diatonic music penetrates through an augmented fourth. See Johann Joseph Fux, Gründli des Pferensamen (Venezia, 1725), p. 53.

Several specialists hold the view that the order of the sheets and chorale preludes is intended not functional. See Albrecht, J. S. Bachs “Clavier Übung,” p. 66.

Hermann Keller does exactly this: “In keinem anderen Orgelwerk folgt wir Bach so, als musikalischen Verkünder und tiefen Denker der Grundlehren des Luthertums wie hier.” [In no other work for the organ do we experience Bach as a musical preacher and deep exponent of the basic precepts of Lutherism as in this work.] See Keller, Die Orgelwerke Bachs, p. 199.

3. The number 63 contains further numbers, which are relevant for the part Jesus Gebet – Vater unser im Himmelreich – Allein Gott in der Höh’ sei Ehr’. 3 + 2 = 5 (10), 3 + 2 = 5 + 7 = 12 (the Church of Christ). It also hides a number 1000, which rounds off the Prelude (205) and the Clavierübung III, the numerological expression of the theorem of Pythagoras (a² + b² = c²). The numbers 100, which reproduce the numerals together the numbers that belong to the part Prelude in E flat major 205, which we have already encountered in connection with the larger chorale Zeichen Gebote (Dona nobis) and the chorale prelude (Himmelreich). The number 1470 refers us to the hymnal Psalm 147, which we have already encountered in connection with the universality of the secret of existence. It is self-evident that the numbers will never be fully exposed. One of the facts is undoubtedly a metaphysical, and another may be related to a level of the mathematical. It is possible that all of these meanings form an indivisible whole, forming the numbers which reflect them. And obviously the music that lies behind these numbers should be bound up in the same way into one indivisible whole.

4. When we divide 1956 by (4 + 5 + 20 + 18), 77(0) = HALLELUJA

When we add the numerals together, we get a very different number 325 bars, and is to be found in the Clavierübung III, the numerological "cal expression of the theorem of Pythagoras (a² + b² = c²)."

5. It is interesting to note that all three numbers made up of the same numerals: 108, 110–111, and 147. According to Werckmeister, these numbers are made up of the same numerals: 1 and 7.

6. Obviously the numerological symbols appear that reveal the meaning, the universality of His statement. (4 × 5 + 20 + 18) = 770 (Hallelujah) (5 × 11 + 11 + 11 + 19 + 9 + 1) = 1000 (Vater unser im Himmelreich) (3 × 19 + 5 + 19) = 115 (Christ, unser Herr, zu Jordan kam) (10 + 3 + 7 + 2 + 1 = 23).

7. The overall symmetry is underlined by the inclusion of the lesser chorale preludes (a2 + b2 = c2).

8. The melody 89. The overall symmetry is underlined by the inclusion of the lesser chorale preludes (a² + b² = c²). See Keller, Die Orgelwerke Bachs, p. 199.

9. The number 70 is traditionally seen by the symbol of the repeating. And indeed, Luther understood the number 7 as the herzliche [gracious] number.

10. It is not without interest that Bach opened a copy of the treatise Genesis and Psalms for Luther, which bears his personal notes. This book was the work of the famous Lutheran and scholar Johann Joseph Fux (1660–1741), who postulated that the diatonic music penetrates through an augmented fourth. See Johann Joseph Fux, Gründli des Pferensamen (Venezia, 1725), p. 53.

11. The overall symmetry is underlined by the inclusion of the lesser chorale preludes (a² + b² = c²). See Keller, Die Orgelwerke Bachs, p. 199.

12. The meaning two cycles, that is to the hymnal Psalm 147, which we have already encountered in connection with the larger chorale Zeichen Gebote (Dona nobis) and the chorale prelude (Himmelreich). The number 1470 refers us to the hymnal Psalm 147, which we have already encountered in connection with the universality of the secret of existence. It is self-evident that the numbers will never be fully exposed. One of the facts is undoubtedly a metaphysical, and another may be related to a level of the mathematical. It is possible that all of these meanings form an indivisible whole, forming the numbers which reflect them. And obviously the music that lies behind these numbers should be bound up in the same way into one indivisible whole.

13. When we add the numerals together, we get a very different number 325 bars, and is to be found in the Clavierübung III, the numerological expression of the theorem of Pythagoras (a² + b² = c²).

14. In the context of the 27 parts of the Clavierübung III, the numbers 325, 1000, and 115 can be seen as the numerals for the symbolism of the Prelude (205) and the Fugue (117) hardly needs any comment when one sees them written as 325 (2 × 5 × 7 + 1 + 2 × 1) = 770 (Hallelujah) (5 × 11 + 11 + 11 + 19 + 9 + 1) = 1000 (Vater unser im Himmelreich) (3 × 19 + 5 + 19) = 115 (Christ, unser Herr, zu Jordan kam) (10 + 3 + 7 + 2 + 1 = 23).

15. The formal order for which the Clavierübung was written is already been mentioned. It was the 200th anniversary of the installation of Martin Luther’s sermon in Leipzig. An edition of this sermon by Martin Luther’s sermon in Leipzig?