

the quiet affirmation of a minim followed by two crotchets, the second ornamented; and flows into stepwise undulations. We recognise the cantus firmus as the sacred word because of its augmented time values and because it is differentiated from the other parts in being played on a solo stop, with delicately blooming ornamentation. In bar 11 the suspended ninth between alto and bass resolves chromatically, anticipating (though we cannot yet know this) the piece's final cadence.

The first seven bar interlude, which is again fully thematic, opens with an undulation up and down from the third of the scale. The three voices (tenor, alto, pedal bass) are in sequence *rectus*, *inversus*, *rectus*; and the drooping chromatics that the first clause had faded into now rise, resolving in ornamental suspensions euphoniously spaced, (bars 11-15). This effects a real modulation to E minor, (relative of G major, and Bach's key of crucifixion); but although the suspensions are dissonant they are also, given the disposition of the parts, tenderly radiant. When the second clause of the cantus firmus enters as the top (solo) part in bar 19, it is *unornamented*, making it more readily recognisable as a pop song but also more easily assimilable into the counterpoint as a many-in-oneness of canonic imitation (bars 19-21). The two inner parts start off *rectus*, in the quaver pulse and in warm parallel thirds, answered by the pedal *inversus*. Since each slowly arching phrase is mirrored by its inversion, the music preserves its tranquil equilibrium; and equipoise extends to the tonality, for the touch of subdominant at the beginning of the clause is countered by the gentle dominant modulation at its end. Even visually, in score, we may observe a balance between stepwise movement and the calmly declining fifths and fourths that support the cadential suspensions (bars 21-22).

Now the unheard words of the first two clauses of the hymn are:

Vor deinem Thron tri' ich hiermit,  
O Gott mit inniglicher Bitt;  
Beschere mir ein selig End;  
nimm meine Seele in deine Hand

The music, moving imperceptibly, emulates a slowly pulsating heart. In musical terms there is a dissolution of the body, a return to nature, and a union of finite man with the infinite, which we sometimes call God. As Hermann Scherchen pointed out in 1950, the tempo is around quaver equals 72, the pulse-beat or *integer valor* of the Middle Ages, which gives 72 pulses and 18 full respirations to the minute. So each 4 4 crotchet bar or each 8 8 quaver bar corresponds to one deep

inhalation and exhalation at about the rate produced in deep sleep. The breath of life, with which God made 'a living soul', faintly expires; yet in so doing it again becomes the breath of God, as creature returns to Creator.

So the chorale prelude's structure is not, after all, a dissolution. Tonally, the second clause, ending in the dominant, slightly increases energy as the canonic entries follow one another in closer strettis; and the slightly heightened pace and warmer temperature are extended into the next period, the unheard words of which are *Ach, keh' dein Riebreich Angesicht von mir blutarmen Sünder nicht* (bars 19-21). And in the next seven-bar interlude consciousness of sin provokes harmonic tension within textural tranquillity, as the theme is imitated, appropriately enough, by *inversions* at God's intervals of fourth or fifth; the tenor's falling phrase, answered by the alto in ascent, creates both false relations between descending C natural and ascending C sharp, and also modulates (which means *moves*) up a cycle of fifths from G to D major and, with the pedal entry, to (tenser) A minor and E minor (bars 23-28). Yet even through these guilt-laden realms passion is still recollected in tranquillity, since the level movement is undisturbed, the canons by inversion are still mirrored in stillness, and the harmony and tonal movement sound as natural as breathing. If there is anything as crude as a 'climax' it occurs when, at the entry of the third clause of the cantus firmus, the spacing between the parts is widest, covering three octaves between the cantus firmus and the pedal's Ds (bar 29). This re-establishes the tonic, in which emerges the last seven-bar interlude, still totally thematic.

For the first time the tenor entry is, in this seven-bar interlude, slowed down to the crotchet pulse of the cantus firmus itself; and is answered *inversus* by the alto in the original quavers (bars 33-36). Although the theme undulates softly by step, it involves a chain of ornamentally resolved suspensions in 'suffering' E minor and B minor; yet once again 'negative' impulses are inextricably tangled with 'positive' impulses in the form of movement towards D and A majors. Chromaticism makes the music hover between tonalities, implying either declension or aspiration, yet never quite relinquishing the blessedness of G major. The interdependence, perhaps even the identity, of Dark and Light, was the mysterious heart of Bach's (as of Blake's) version of the Christian message: as becomes *incarnate* as the music *flows, moves, steps* – each verb contains its precise contribution to the effect – into an extended version of the plagal cadence that had concluded the first clause. Acquiescence and resignation are one when the pedal has the *augmented* theme in inversion,