

# Key Structure and Tonal Allegory in the Passions of J. S. Bach: An Introduction

By Eric Chafe

"Allegory" is the term used by Bukofzer to describe a relationship of coherence between a musical element and something extra-musical.<sup>1</sup> For example, the triad can be used to represent the trinity because it embodies the concept "three in one"—three notes, one chord. *Tonal* allegory, then, is the use of any tonal element—key, modulation, sharp sign, enharmonic change, cross relation or even the entire key structure of a lengthy work—to express a coherent relationship with something extra-musical.

Key structure is a term not quite so easily agreed upon. In fact, Bukofzer denied its existence in the Bach passions and Handel operas, although his denial was perhaps intended more as a commentary on the musicological literature on the subject of key structure than on the actual tonal plans of the works in question.<sup>2</sup> An allegorical tonal plan he would certainly have accepted, but in the face of blatantly unhistorical presentations of key relationships, Bukofzer tended to stick with the concept of closely related keys that obviously held true in the cantatas, sonatas, concertos, and so on: that is, tonic, dominant, subdominant and their relative minors, the common chords of the key. In his view no satisfactory rationale had been found for the very wide range of keys in the passions. This is a crucial point, for their wide key range is the single aspect of tonality which most conspicuously divides the passions not only from the cantatas, but from the other larger works as well. The *Easter* and *Ascension Oratorios*, the *Trauer-Ode*, *Magnificat*, *B-Minor Mass*, *Christmas Oratorio*, *Missaes Breves*, and others, all stick very closely to what Heinichen called the "ambitus" of six keys that represent the nearest tonal relationships and the normal limit of modulation within a single movement.<sup>3</sup> It is most important not only to recognize the special position of the extravagant key range in the passions within Bach's output, but also to realize that to a great extent the juxtaposition or confrontation between remotely related or unrelated keys belongs in these works as part of the allegory of the irreconcilable conflicts of the passion story.

Analysis of the passions is done a disservice, therefore, by H. J. Moser's equating of the key of A-flat major to G-sharp major in the *St. Matthew Passion*;<sup>4</sup> or the fairly frequent statements by Moser and others that widely separated movements in C-major and c-minor in both passions are to be thought of as being in the same key;<sup>5</sup> or Dieter Weiss's inclusion of the C-major chorus, "Lasset uns den nicht zerteilen" in the *St. John Passion* within a "scene" in E-flat.<sup>6</sup> On the contrary, Bach shows rather an acute awareness of the *distances* between these keys, and exploits them in his structures.

The rationale behind Bach's tonal procedures in the passions is illuminated by a document by Johann Kuhnau, his predecessor and the founder of Leipzig's eighteenth-century passion tradition just two years before Bach's

arrival in that city. It was in Kuhnau's preface to his *Biblical Sonatas* that Bukofzer found an explicit definition of musical allegory and the composer's reference to a striking instance of its tonal application: his representing Laban's deceit with a "deception of the ear," that is, with a sudden modulation from one key to another.<sup>7</sup> Kuhnau published an even more interesting preface to a cycle of church cantatas for the year 1709–10.<sup>8</sup> In it he called for two special qualities from the composer of church music: first, that he be able to stir the affections, and second, that he be no stranger to hermeneutics (the art of scriptural exegesis), and understand both the correct *sensus* and *scopus* of the words. (These terms will be illustrated below.) Kuhnau furthermore outlines his approach to setting the beginning of the first Psalm, which, as it happens, presents the same kind of split that occurs in the passion story, that between the *Gottlosen* ("ungodly") and the *Frommen* ("pious"). He prescribes several different kinds of tonal or harmonic shift. They include repetition of the word "dem" ("Wohl *dem*," "Blessed is *he*") in "unexpected keys, which bring the hearers to attention"; taking the word "wandelt" figuratively to refer to the "twisted circumlocutions" of the ungodly, then setting it with many passages that "wander outside the scale"; setting the word "Gottlosen" ("im Rath der *Gottlosen*," "in the council of the *ungodly*") with a "hard dissonance"; setting the word "Rath," in "remote and unforeseen keys" ("since a council often comes to an unpredictable decision"); moving away from the right key and "erring" into foreign tonalities for the word "Sünder." In addition to these passages, Kuhnau prescribes one further tonal shift that, from his description, appears to be of a more extreme nature and of greater importance to the structure as a whole:

. . . *Sondern hat Lust zum Gesetz des Herrn.* There, in consideration of the adversative conjunction, "sondern," [the music] should proceed in a completely different key, with mi transformed into fa, or fa into mi . . . .<sup>9</sup>

This last modulation corresponds to a major structural division in the text of the Psalm, between the first and second verses, and even more importantly, it expresses the central issue of the text, the split between the way of the ungodly and that of the righteous.

Kuhnau perhaps meant an enharmonic change when he spoke of "mi" being transformed into "fa," or at the very least a sudden turn from sharps to flats or vice-versa. Similar expressions can be found made by other writers of the time. Georg Muffat on the *relatio non-harmonica*, for example:

. . . with "mi" those well versed in the art mean the  $\flat$  mi or hard notes which are signed with a  $\sharp$  or diesis; with "fa," they mean the  $\flat\flat$  "mollia," or otherwise soft signs. In every such false interval there are always found two such signs in opposition, namely, one which is *dur* and the other *moll*, or soft; therefore it is called *mi contra fa*.<sup>10</sup>

In the writings of Werckmeister, Scheibe and others we find references to modulations made by means of cross relations, enharmonic changes, and so

forth, described as the confrontation between sharps and flats or the transformation of the one sphere into the other.<sup>11</sup> Still others, such as Heinichen, will stress the "extreme" nature of keys that are removed from C-major by more than a few sharps or flats.<sup>12</sup> As will be shown below, it is the idea of separation, and even of opposition between sharp and flat keys that Bach makes into his main allegorical structural principle in the two passions.

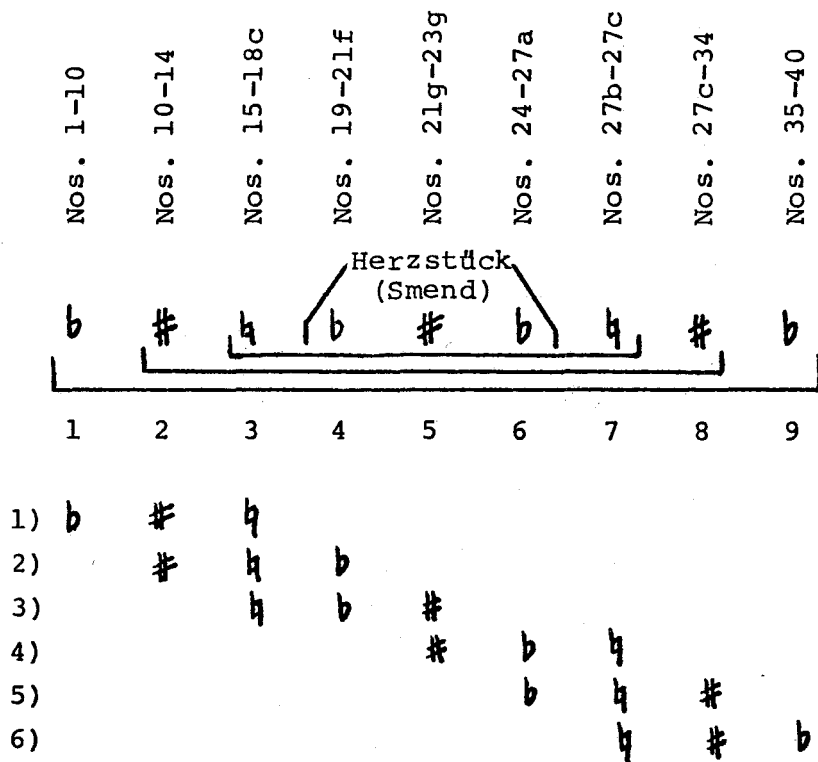
In turning first to the *St. John Passion*, one encounters an astonishing work of scriptural exegesis. It is almost a virtuoso exercise in the presentation and musical allegorizing of theological themes. Perhaps Bach was determined to show, in the first Leipzig passion after Kuhnau, his mastery of the hermeneutics Kuhnau had required of the church composer. The *St. John Passion* presents a thoroughly johannine conception of the passion, overlooking none of the special characteristics of John's account. John's emphasis on the trial and his arranging it in a dramatically-conceived *chiasmus*<sup>13</sup> are amplified by Bach in the central symmetry of the setting, what Smend calls the *Herzstück*.<sup>14</sup> The themes of Jesus' majesty, of His all-powerful nature throughout the passion, of the passion as a glorification rather than an abasement are given full announcement in "Herr, unser Herrscher" and echoed throughout the work, for example, in "O grosser König," "der Held aus Juda siegt mit Macht" (c.f., the final line of the *Easter Oratorio*, "der Löwe von Juda kommt siegend gezogen"), the final chorale, with its pronounced associations of victory.<sup>15</sup> Space does not permit reference to the many other instances of Bach's catching the tone of the johannine narrative perfectly.

An additional point that might have been of special importance to Bach in his planning the structure and character of the *St. John Passion*, is the fact that Luther, in his *Preface to the New Testament*, had named the gospel of John, along with the epistles of Paul (especially Romans), as pre-eminent among the books of the Bible.<sup>16</sup> The Epistle to the Romans he often referred to as the most important book of the Bible. Indeed, Luther's writings are filled with references to Paul: his doctrine of substitutionary atonement; the law of the spirit versus that of the flesh; the fulfillment of the law through faith and God's grace, *not* through works; the cross and faith setting the Christian free from sin, or the law of the flesh; and so on. The reason Luther gave for placing John's gospel above the others was John's emphasis upon the *teachings* of Christ as opposed to the focus upon His *works* that Luther saw in the synoptics. In other words, Luther viewed John through the eyes of Paul.

That Bach was thoroughly conversant with these ideas hardly need be questioned. And that he embodied them in certain works of a pronounced "theological" or "doctrinal" character is known. In the motet "Jesu, meine Freude" he gave full voice to all the aforementioned ideas by means of his interweaving of five crucial verses of Romans 8 with the six of the chorale. The work's structural symmetry is well known, and so is the relation of its central fugue—with ten entries of its subject—to the central fugue choruses of the *St. John Passion*, especially "Wir haben ein Gesetz." The themes of both were apparently modelled on the ten-commandments chorale, "Es sind die heil'gen zehn Gebot."<sup>17</sup> In both passion and motet Bach created a Lutheran

(and johannine) juxtaposition of opposites: flesh versus spirit in the one instance, the law of the Jews versus the freedom of Christians in the other. Bach had allegorized the same idea many years earlier, in the middle movement of the *Actus Tragicus*, Cantata 106, where the juxtaposition was described in terms of the old covenant versus the new. In passion, motet and cantata, and in a number of comparable works, Bach's use of symmetrical ground plans seems to create a structural image of the formality and solidity of the doctrines involved. Symmetry was the first clearly recognizable structural pattern developed by Bach in his church works, the so-called "tropierende Spruchkantaten";<sup>18</sup> a clear line of descent runs from these works to the *St. John Passion*. The antithesis specifically derived from Luther appears in the *St. John Passion* at the very center, where the chorale "Durch dein Gefängnis, Gottes Sohn" echoes all at once the close of the preceding chorus, "we have a law, and according to the law he must die, for he has made himself to be the son of God"; the discussion between Jesus and Pilate concerning freedom; and most interestingly of all, the pauline theology that Luther expounded most eloquently perhaps in his tract, *The Freedom of the Christian*. Bach, of course, had to seek out a chorale that would express just this combination of structural and theological motives. Hence, in "Durch

FIGURE 1: The pattern of key areas in the *St. John Passion*



dein Gefängnis," one finds the only certain chorale contrafactum in his church music.

To clarify how Bach uses tonality to allegorize these great issues, the basis of his procedure is shown in Figure 1. He arranges the entire passion into a huge chiasmus, forming a nine-fold (3 x 3) division of the key areas of the work.<sup>19</sup> We are reminded of Smend's nine-fold division of the Credo of the *B-minor Mass*; in that work the three central movements are preceded and followed by a group of three others; as Smend states, "in the middle stands the word 'crucifixus.'"<sup>20</sup> So it is with the *St. John Passion*: Smend's *Herzstück* comprises a three-fold segment of strong internal coherence; it is flanked by three preceding and three following "scenes." The very center allegorizes the cross by means of its sharp keys (*Kreuztonarten*)<sup>21</sup> and, above all, by the fact that the modulation from the flats of "Wir haben ein Gesetz" to the sharps of "Durch dein Gefängnis" is placed very precisely by Bach on the word "kreuzigen" (Example 1). In a series of movements that constitute the pivot of the *St. John Passion's* structure we perceive four stages in the delineation of the theology of redemption, the soteriology of the cross:

1) The Jews refer to the law in the F-major chorus, "Wir haben ein Gesetz"; the grounds for crucifixion are stated in its final words, "denn er hat sich selbst zu Gottes Sohn gemacht."

2) In a recitative dialogue Pilate claims to have the power to crucify Jesus or to set him free. This claim is denied by Bach's carrying the "kreuzigen" interval (an augmented fourth) sequentially further into sharps, as well as in Christ's answer to Pilate. Pilate has power only to carry out events foreordained by God—in this case crucifixion. The cross (G-sharp) is agent of the modulation.

3) The outcome of the modulation is the key of Christian freedom ("Durch dein Gefängnis," E-major), which, according to Bach's allegory, is attained through the cross and God's plan of salvation.

4) As the music of the F-major "Wir haben ein Gesetz" is heard with a new text, "Lässest du diesen los," in E-major (Kuhnau's "fa [F] transformed into mi [E]." as it were), we perceive Bach's musical allegorizing of an idea that resounds throughout all of Luther's work, and especially in *The Freedom of a Christian*: through faith in Christ crucified the Christian is freed from the law. The law is reinterpreted and fulfilled only through faith in His sacrifice.

Whether or not Bach's juxtaposition of F-major and E-major can be called a *mi contra fa*, and hence a sort of cross relation, is arguable. That the overall structure was designed to allegorize the cross is, however, probably indisputable. A few moments' reflection on the pattern of key areas in the passion shows further that once Bach had decided upon sharps for the central segment (the fifth) and flats for the fourth and sixth (to provide the fa/mi shift as well as the maximum contrast), the choice of key areas for all the others

Pilatus

Re-dest du nicht mit mir? weisst du nicht, dass ich Macht habe, dich zu Kreuzigen und Macht habe,

Basso cont.

Pilatus

dich los-zu-ge-ben?

Basso cont.

Detailed description of the musical score: The score is written in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The Pilatus part is in a recitative style, with lyrics written below the notes. The Basso continuo part provides a harmonic accompaniment with figured bass notation. The first system covers measures 7-10, and the second system covers measures 11-12.

Figured bass notation for the first system:  
 Measure 7: 6  
 Measure 8: 6  
 Measure 9: 5  
 Measure 10: 6, 4, 2, #

Figured bass notation for the second system:  
 Measure 11: #, 5  
 Measure 12: 5

EXAMPLE 1: *St. John Passion*: recitative no. 21g, mm. 7–10; Pilatus and basso continuo

became inevitable. For only with this arrangement (shown in Figure 1), could he provide all six permutations in the ordering of the three signs. There is thus a play with the number three embedded in the structure of the work. Bach's plan is in many respects highly abstract and predetermined, a trait that is very much in accord with the nature of a gospel whose first half is commonly called the Book of Signs and its second, beginning with the passion, the Book of Glory. Moreover, it is a gospel which is characterized throughout by a decidedly deterministic cast. Bach's structure is also composed of *musical* signs and glory, and his extensive pre-planning mirrors the johannine structure and theology of pre-destination.<sup>22</sup>

Incidentally, when Bach sets the word "kreuzigen" with a tritone leap up to a sharp, he is representing what Kuhnau called the *sensus* of the word. However, when he makes this detail into merely a single element in a full allegory of the theological meaning of the passion as a whole, he provides us with one of the most impressive instances of his penetration of the *scopus* of the text. The most conspicuous musical agent of that allegory is tonality.

With the foregoing analysis as a basis, understanding the more complex tonal procedures in the *St. Matthew Passion* becomes much easier, even though that work is not at all as obviously "patterned" as its predecessor. The character of Matthew's gospel and of Bach's setting is quite different from the *St. John Passion*—Matthew placing emphasis upon the church as an institution—and his ecclesiology is mirrored in Bach's dialogues between the church and the faithful, in Bach's series of verses of the same chorale, in his turn to the passion sermons of Heinrich Müller for a considerable number of texts<sup>23</sup> (especially those of the most conspicuous "new" element, the eleven "ariosi"), and in Bach's special arioso treatment of the words of institution of the Lord's Supper. Although Matthew's passion is of the suffering rather than the victorious Christ, and is clearly treated as such by Bach, the basic theological issues, which transcend the question of differences among the gospels and necessarily center around the meaning of Christ's sacrifice, remain the same as those of the *St. John Passion*. Again, in dealing with Matthew's gospel, Bach makes his structure pivot around the issues that were at the center of the *St. John Passion*; and he retains the idea of opposition between sharp and flat keys in his new setting. But otherwise his means of allegorizing the meaning of the whole of Matthew's text leads ultimately to a very different structural realization. The tonal areas of the *St. Matthew Passion* are not arranged in any kind of cross or symmetrical pattern. Instead, Bach chose to interpret the sharp and flat keys as descendants of the old system of hexachords, *cantus durus* and *cantus mollis*, which were still very much alive as a conceptual framework for key relationships, although rapidly becoming more and more outmoded.<sup>24</sup> By Bach's adopting this view of the passion's wide range of keys, instead of the passion story being accommodated to an abstract or partially predetermined tonal plan, the result is that the keys follow the text, allowing it to determine the course of musical events (i.e., the

tonal shifts) to a much greater extent. It might be said that the treatment of sharp and flat tonalities constitutes a plan in the *St. John Passion*, but a procedure in the *St. Matthew Passion*.

This is the first level of tonal allegory in the *St. Matthew Passion*. Bach aligns the full range of tonalities in the work to the text—as interpreted and amplified theologically, of course—so that its *durus* and *mollis* states are given expression according to the traditional *proprietas*.<sup>25</sup> The “hard” realm of affections encompasses all that was described of old as *asperitas*: the crucifixion in all its stages—the trial and shouts of the mob for Jesus’ death, the scourging, and so forth. But it also represents a group of positive emotions which derive from the traditional interpretation of *durus* as masculine and *fortius*: Christ’s prediction of the Kingdom of God, the spread of the gospel, the resurrection, the *parousia*, Peter’s repentance, Jesus’ resolve at the close of Part I, and so on. Contrariwise, the “soft” affections comprise weakness (reflecting ancient associations of *mollis* with the feminine and imperfect): Jesus’ difficulty accepting the cup at first, His depressed states on the Mount of Olives (“Meine Seele ist betrübt”) and on the cross (“Eli, Eli”), and His resignation before Pilate. *Mollis* also represents the comforting, gentle and sympathetic associations of “feminine”: the Christian reactions to Jesus’ sufferings (“Ich bin’s,” “Wer hat dich so geschlagen,” “O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden”), the reaction of Pilate’s wife, the disciples’ sleep in the garden, Jesus’ final sleep in the grave, His arms open to the Christian seeking redemption, His finding rest in the believer’s heart.

In general terms, the polarities involved are principally light/dark, active/passive, tension/resolution, weak/strong, hard/soft. As reflected in this interpretation, the prediction of the resurrection and the agitated events surrounding the capture of Christ call forth the extremes of sharp-key tonality in the passion: E-major, g-sharp minor, and c-sharp minor, while the anticipations of betrayal and denial, Jesus’ crisis on the Mount of Olives, and the darkness and despair of His last moments and words are set in f-minor, A-flat, b-flat minor, and even e-flat minor, the flat “extremes” of the passion and of well-tempered tuning generally. “Ach! Golgotha” hovers around G-flat, D-flat and even a-flat minor; the word “Finsternis” is sung on f-flat.

The organization of tonal shifts within the passion is carefully planned, sometimes even patterned, although its relation to the text is more direct than in the *St. John Passion* (see Figures 2a, 2b). The most satisfactory means of comprehending the many shifts of tonal direction is in terms of *anabasis* (motion upward or “sharpward” through the circle of fifths) and *catabasis* (the reverse). The burial and all anticipations of death, for example, mark conspicuous turns “flatward” (“dass mann mich begraben wird”; “und wenn ich mit dir sterben müsste”; “meine Seele ist betrübt bis an den Tod”; “Er ist des Todes schuldig”; Jeremiah’s prophesy of the buying of the potter’s field, and so on. From this standpoint we find that a very large span of Part I (two-thirds) is occupied with two extended and very regular *anabases*, each moving from four flats to four sharps in very extended and



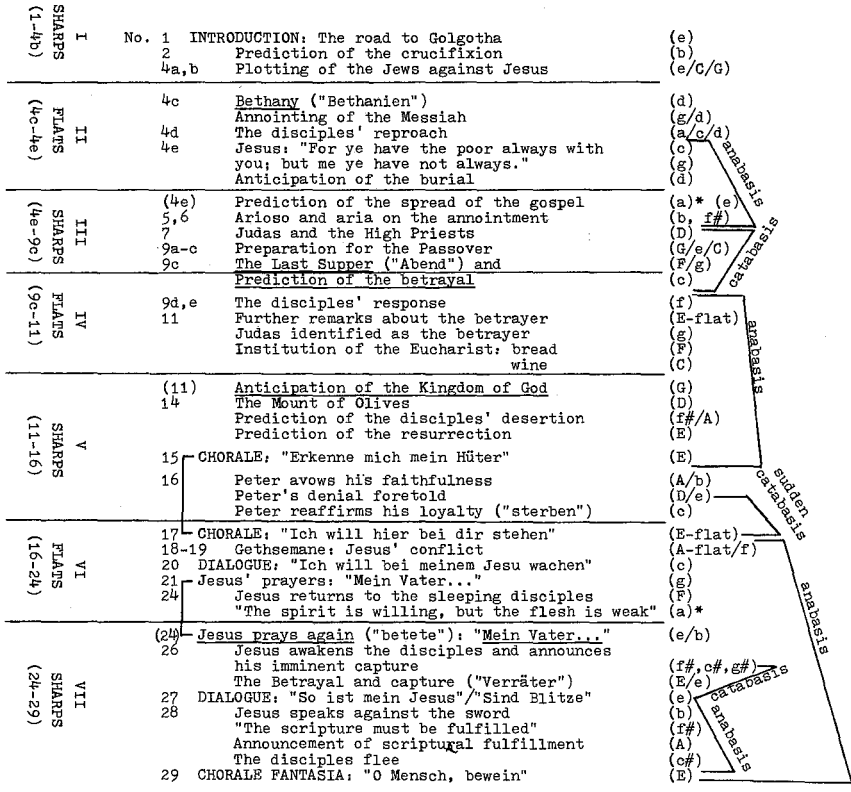


FIGURE 2a: Outline of the major tonal shifts and patterns in Part I of the *St. Matthew Passion*. All sharp/flat modulations are underscored. Dialogues and movements which display parallels to one another have been set apart. The "naturalis" centers of three *anabases*, marking the divisions between tonal groupings II and III (a-minor, the Gospel), IV and V (C-major, the Eucharist) and VI and VII (a-minor, Spirit versus Flesh) are marked with asterisks. Words which are the objects of particular focus in the modulations—"Bethanien," "Evangelium," "Abend," "sterben," "betete," and "Verräter"—are placed in parentheses.

systematic fashion. The first of these starts with the prediction of betrayal and the disciples' reaction ("Herr, bin ich's," f-minor; "Ich bin's, ich sollte büßen," A-flat) and moves through the circle of fifths, one key-signature level at a time, until we reach Jesus' prediction of resurrection and the chorale, "Erkenne mich, mein Hüter," both in E-major. After that point Jesus predicts Peter's denial, Peter makes a musically and textually ironic protestation of loyalty in a sudden *catabasis* (modulation to c-minor) and the chorale is repeated a half tone lower in E-flat—the kind of parallel encountered at the center of the *St. John Passion*—another transformation of "mi" (E) into "fa" (E-flat). Now Jesus' words, "meine Seele ist betrübt" (A-flat) and the arioso, "O Schmerz" (f-minor) mark the start of a second, much longer *anabasis*, more than twice the length of the first, which leads in regular steps to E-major again, and the end of Part I ("O Mensch, bewein").<sup>26</sup> These two *anabases* were, of course, very carefully thought out. Their boundaries—four flats and four sharps—mark the limits of flat and sharp keys for any movements in the passion; only specially selected recitative passages extend farther in either direction. In that sense the two progressions traverse the

SHARPS (30-31)	I	No. 30	INTRODUCTION; Lament over Jesus' arrest	(b)	
		31	Jesus before the High Priest	(e/a/c)	
FLATS (31-38a)	II	33	False witnesses sought ("Hohenpriester")	(F/d/B-flat)	anabasis
		34-35	False witnesses	(d/F)	
		36a	Jesus' silence	(g)	
		36b	Arioso and aria on Jesus' silence	(d/a)	
		36c	Jesus; "Du sagest's"; prediction of the <u>parousia</u>	(e)	
SHARPS (38a-43)	III	36c,d,37	"Er ist des todes schuldig"; start of <u>turba</u> "series"	(g/e-g)	sudden catabasis
		38a	Jesus punished and mocked	(d/F)	
		38a	Peter denies Christ; "Dieser war auch mit dem Jesu von Nazareth," etc.	(d/B-flat/e/b)	
		38c,39	Peter's repentance	(f#/b)	
		41a-c,42	Judas' remorse and suicide	(e/b/g)	
SHARPS (43-50e)	IV	43	Buying of Potter's Field ("Blutakker")	(e/d)	anabasis
		43	Jeremiah's prophecy	(F/g/c)	
		43	Jesus before Pilate; "du sagest's"	(c)	
		43	Pilate: "Hörest du nicht, wie hart sie dich verklagen?" ("hart"="durus")	(d/a/f#/D)	
		45a	Pilate and the people (Pilate's wife)	(A/D/a)	
SHARPS (45-50e)	V	45b	"Lass Ihn Kreuzigen"	(C/F/g)	anabasis
		45b	"Lass Ihn Kreuzigen"	(a-v of e)	
		46	Chorale, "Wie wunderbarlich"	(b)	
		48	Arioso, "Er hat uns allen"	(e/C)	
		49	Aria, "Aus Liebe"	(a)	
FLATS (51-58a)	VI	50a	"Lass Ihn Kreuzigen"	(b-v of f#)	anabasis
		50d	Judgement of death from the people	(b/D)	
		50e	Jesus scourged and delivered over for crucifixion	(e)	
		51	Christian reaction to the trial and scourging; enharmonic change from sharps to flats at end of "Er barm es Gotti"	(f#/g)	sudden catabasis
		52-57	Jesus' punishments and mocking; Christian meditative responses	(g/d/F/d)	
58a	Arrival at Golgotha; the crucifixion ("gekreuziget")	(C/F/d-e/b/D/A)			
SHARPS (58a-58e)	VII	58b	"Der du den Tempel"	(b)	anabasis
		58d	"Andern hat er geholfen"; ending of <u>turba</u> "series" and e-minor passion on "ich bin Gottes Sohn" cadence in octaves	(e)	
		58e	Recitative with cross relation ( <u>parrhesia</u> ) between "Mörder" and "ihm"	(e/c)	
		60	"Sehet, Jesus hat die Hand"	(E-flat)	sudden catabasis
		61a	Darkness; "Eli, Eli..."	(b-flat/e-flat)	
FLATS (58e-68)	VIII	61b,c	Choruses beneath the cross	(c/g-d)	anabasis
		61d, 62	Jesus' death; "Wenn ich einmal..."	(a; e-phrygian)	
		63a	Outbreaks of nature; "Und siehe da,"	(C/d/g)	
		63b	"Truly this was the Son of God"	(A-flat)	
		63c-66c	The burial and related events	(c/g/B-flat/ E-flat/c)	
		67	"Nun ist der Herr zur ruh gebracht"	(E-flat/c)	anabasis
		68	"Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder"	(c)	

FIGURE 2b: The complex pattern of tonal fluctuation in Part II. Less patterned than Part I, Part II gives greater emphasis to *catabases*, especially sudden ones. They are almost all associated with the death and burial of Jesus. *Anabasis* patterns coincide with the prediction of the *parousia*, the increase in intensity between the two "Let him be crucified" choruses, and the change from the darkness and despair of Golgotha to the point of Christ's death. As in Part I, there are seven major tonal divisions in Part II.

entire tonal space of the work. Each *anabasis* also has a carefully arranged "center" (i.e., the "neutral" keys of C-major and a-minor respectively, both of course equidistant from the extremities), although any feeling of symmetry is decidedly secondary. In each case, however, the half-way region of the *anabasis* is reserved for a particularly Lutheran and "Matthean" theological locus. The first is the institution of the Eucharist: F-major for the bread (body), C-major for the wine (blood), G-major for the anticipation of the Kingdom of God. In the second instance the pivot between flats and sharps is given to the words, "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" (a-minor cadence with change of key signature and turn to e-minor). Once again Bach pays special attention to the juxtaposition of flesh and spirit, this time amplified to the level of the entire second *anabasis*, from Jesus' and the disciples' human weakness in Gethsemane through Jesus' resolve to obey the Father's will and his announcement of the fulfillment of scripture. The root word

“Will” appears in Matthew’s text several times and is introduced several more times by Bach and Picander in the non-biblical movements: “Ich *will* hier bei dir stehen” and “Ich *will* bei meinem Jesu wachen” (two *mollis* expressions of the weakness of the flesh since they follow out of Peter’s protestation of loyalty); “Was mein Gott *will*, dass g’scheh’ allzeit” (a *durus* extension of Jesus’ resolve to accept the “Kelch”—that is, to undergo the crucifixion). Along the way from flats to sharps Bach draws a *mollis/durus* parallel between Christ on the Mount of Olives, at first (in No. 21) tormented by the flesh and asking that the cup pass from Him, if possible; the second time (in No. 24) ready to accept it in fulfillment of God’s will. This is illustrated in Example 2. Above and beyond the physical events of the pas-

a)

b)

EXAMPLE 2: Comparison of the endings of recitatives no. 21, mm. 3–7 (a) and 24, mm. 11–15 (b) from the *St. Matthew Passion*.

sion drama, the second great *anabasis* provides us with an allegory of the very Lutheran doctrines of man's inability to attain salvation through his own efforts, of Christ's fulfillment of the law on our behalf, of the difference between the disciples and Jesus, and even an allegory of God and man in Christ. The structure does not give the impression of pre-planning to the extent that the *St. John Passion* does; nevertheless one encounters the same issues and a fascinating new use of tonality to present the *scopus of the passion*.

The rest of the *St. Matthew Passion* is, as one would expect, dominated by prominent *catabases*; and in fact the entire tonal structure of the work has been described by Rolf Dammann as one huge *catabasis* by virtue of its beginning in e-minor and ending in c-minor.<sup>27</sup> This point brings in the second level of tonal allegory in the *St. Matthew Passion*: its dual key structure.<sup>28</sup> From the sharp and flat tonal spheres Bach chose e-minor and c-minor for special emphasis, the first representing the stages of the crucifixion drama itself, the second associated with the regions of contrast. E-minor is the predominant key of the work up to No. 58d, "Andern hat er geholfen," at which point the crucifixion is a *fait accompli*. After that point it is never heard again, and the final one-sixth of the passion is confined to flat keys, ending in c-minor. The choice of e-minor was an easy one; it is the key of many baroque works of lamentation including passions and passion-related works (e.g., Schütz's *Seven Last Words*). Its lines of descent from the Phrygian mode, and perhaps even the association of the Phrygian mode with the hard hexachord led Bach to this traditional key of lachrymose affections.<sup>29</sup> He then arranged that the successive stages of the crucifixion drama should be prominently centered in that key, almost like a representation of the stations of the cross:

- 1) "Kommt, ihr Töchter": Prologue
- 2) Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial
- 3) The betrayal and arrest of Jesus: "So ist mein Jesus nun gefangen"
- 4) The judgement of death from the High Priests: "Er ist des Todes schuldig," the first in the famous set of ten *turbae* choruses in Part II<sup>30</sup>
- 5) The trial and the call for crucifixion
- 6) The delivering over of Jesus for crucifixion and the scourging
- 7) The crucifixion itself and the last of the ten *turbae*
- 8) Jesus' death: chorale "Wenn ich einmal soll scheiden," in e-Phrygian, not e-minor

In addition, six times in the *St. Matthew Passion* Bach confronts e-minor and c-minor at close quarters, c-minor mostly succeeding e-minor in a manner that seems to point to the final outcome of the passion: the prediction of betrayal, Peter's mention of Jesus' death, the buying of the potter's field, and so on. The last, most significant and prominent of these *catabases* is the tonal hiatus that occurs after the great e-minor cadence in octaves on the words "ich bin

Gottes Sohn" (in No. 58e). This point marks the last use of sharp keys in the passion as well as the culmination of the crucifixion and the close of the series of ten *turbæ* which Smend and Jansen interpreted, correctly I think, as representing the Law once again.<sup>31</sup> This is the pivot of the *St. Matthew Passion's* structure, the point of correspondence to the center of the *St. John Passion*. The sequence of ideas is remarkably similar to that of the earlier work:

1) Now Jesus is on the cross; the reason for His death is the same as that given in "Wir haben ein Gesetz": he has called himself the Son of God. The law is represented by the ten *turbæ*; the cadence in octaves perhaps makes an ironic confessional of Jesus' identity out of the words of the mockers, for Werckmeister had called the octave the interval of the Son (the unison represented the Father, the fifth the Holy Spirit)<sup>32</sup>

2) The modulation to flats is made in a precisely placed *cross* relation on the words "Mörder" (the end of sharps) and "ihm" (the point at which "mi" is transformed to "fa" and sharps into flats, a progression Werckmeister called a "grosse Metamorphosis in der Harmonie."<sup>33</sup> (See Example 3.) The rhetorical term for the cross relation was *parrhesia*, "the manner in which one introduces a detested object, then tries to temper it."<sup>34</sup> The "detested object" in this case is, of course, the cross, which is transformed at this point from instrument of death into emblem of salvation. The modulation thus allegorizes the soteriology of the cross just as did the "kreuzigen" *mi contra fa* of the *St. John Passion*.

Evangelist

Desgleichen schuldheten ihn auch die Mörder, die mit ihm gekreuziget wa-ren

Basso continuo

### EXAMPLE 3: *St. Matthew Passion*: recitative no. 58e

3) The theology of redemption is presented in the dialogue "Sehet, Jesus hat die Hand," which serves as introduction to the flat-key close of the passion, a counterpart to and replacement of "Kommt, ihr Töchter."<sup>35</sup> The Law has given way once again to Christian freedom.

Bach uses tonality in the *St. Matthew Passion* to represent the issues of greatest concern to the Lutheran church; in this he was undoubtedly following methods understood by his contemporaries and described by Kuhnau. If the method seems overly intellectual to us today, that is the measure of our distance from the kind of thought which Bukofzer called "the unity of sensual and intellectual understanding."<sup>36</sup> Kuhnau's words on this subject reflect the composer's attitude:

... I can already hear some people say, "these are speculations, of

which only the smallest part can be perceived by the listeners." I agree with this; yet inquiring minds ["curieuse Köpffe"] turn to this sort of thing with respect, and the composer has at the very least this advantage from it [the allegorical method] that in this way the path to invention is opened up for him.<sup>37</sup>

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Manfred Bukofzer, "Allegory in Baroque Music," *Journal of the Warburg Institute* III (1939-40), pp. 1-21.

<sup>2</sup> Manfred Bukofzer, *Music in the Baroque Era* (New York, 1947), p. 367.

<sup>3</sup> Johann David Heinichen, *Neu erfundene und Gründliche Anweisung . . .* (Hamburg, 1711), pp. 262-5.

<sup>4</sup> H. J. Moser, *Die Passion von Schütz bis Frank Martin* (Wolfenbüttel, 1967), n.p.

<sup>5</sup> H. J. Moser, "Zum Bau von Bachs Johannespassion," *Bach-Jahrbuch* (1932), p. 156. Graham George, *Tonality and Musical Structure* (London, 1970), pp. 41-4.

<sup>6</sup> Dieter Weiss, "Zur Tonartengliederung in J. S. Bachs Johannes-Passion," *Musik und Kirche*, Jahrgang 40 (1970), p. 33. Also George, *Tonality and Musical Structure*, p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> Bukofzer, "Allegory in Baroque Music," p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> Kuhnau's *Texte zur Leipziger Kirchen-Music* (Leipzig, 1710) is reprinted in B. F. Richter, "Eine Abhandlung Joh. Kuhnau's," *Monatshefte für Musik-Geschichte*, XXXIV/9 (1902), pp. 148-54. All references are to this edition.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 152. "Sondern hat Lust zum Gesetz des Herrn. Da soll es bey Erwegung der Conjunctionis adversativae k̄ im Sondern, gantz aus einem andern Tono gehen, und das Mi in Fa, oder das Fa in Mi verwandelt werden."

<sup>10</sup> Georg Muffat, *An Essay on Thoroughbass*, edited with an introduction by Hellmut Federhofer, American Institute of Musicology, Musicological Studies and Documents 4 (Tubingen, 1961), pp. 65-6. "... durch das mi verstehen die Kunstgelehrte die  $\square$  mi oder harte Noten, so mit einem  $\natural$  oder Diesi gezeichnet seynd, durch das fa aber die  $\flat$  mollia oder sonst weiche Claves. In jedem falschen Intervallo aber befinden sich allzeit solche zwey wiederige Claves, nemlich eine so dur und die ander so moll oder weich ist, dahero es mi contra fa heist."

<sup>11</sup> Andreas Werckmeister, *Harmonologia Musica* (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1702), No. 67-77. Johann Adolph Scheibe, *Compendium Musices*, an undated manuscript treatise published in Peter Benary, *Die deutsche Kompositionslehre des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig, 1960), pp. 72-3; *Eine Abhandlung von den musicalischen Intervallen und Geschlechtern* (Hamburg, 1739), pp. 47ff., 105ff.

<sup>12</sup> Heinichen, *Neu erfundene und Gründliche Anweisung . . .*, pp. 261ff.

<sup>13</sup> For detailed analysis of the structure of John's gospel see Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, two vols., The Anchor Bible (New York, 1970), especially pp. 785-6, 859.

<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Smend, "Die Johannes-Passion von Bach," *Bach-Jahrbuch* (1926), pp. 105ff; new printing edited by Christoph Wolff in Friedrich Smend, *Bach-Studien* (Kassel, 1969), pp. 11-23.

<sup>15</sup> Compare its use in the cantatas for St. Michael's day, for example, *BWV* 149, "Man singet mit Freuden vom Sieg."

<sup>16</sup> John Dillenberger, *Martin Luther: Selections from his writings edited and with an introduction* (New York, 1961), pp. 18-19.

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Smend, "Bachs Matthäus-Passion," *Bach-Jahrbuch* (1928), pp. 40-1. Martin Jansen, "Bachs Zahlensymbolik, an seinen Passionen untersucht," *Bach-Jahrbuch* (1939), pp. 97-9.

<sup>18</sup> Alfred Dürr, *Stüdien über die frühen Kantaten Johann Sebastian Bachs* (Wiesbaden, 1977), p. 212.

<sup>19</sup> And the revisions made by Bach to the passion for the performance of 1725 clearly amplify this tonal symmetry; the chorale additions involve flat-key chorale fantasias in the outermost segments as well as a four-part chorale and an aria with chorale (the same one) in the second and penultimate "scenes" of the work (in sharps). See Alfred Dürr, "Zu den verschollenen Passionen Bachs," *Bach-Jahrbuch* (1950), pp. 81-99.

<sup>20</sup> Friedrich Smend, "Luther and Bach," *Bach-Jahrbuch* (1947), p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Balthasar Janowka (*Clavis ad Thesaurum Magnae Artis Musicae*, Prague, 1701, p. 14), for example, describes the sharp keys as "durum aut cruciatum" and "in cantu cruculis."

<sup>22</sup> It may also be mentioned that the question of God's foreknowledge and the extent of man's free will in attaining salvation had been the central issue in Luther's polemical book, *The Bondage of the Will*, written in refutation of Erasmus' *The Freedom of the Will*. Luther held that there was no free will apart from the grace and will of God.

<sup>23</sup> See Elke Axmacher, "Ein Quellenfund zum Text der Matthäus-Passion," *Bach-Jahrbuch* (1978), pp. 181-91.

<sup>24</sup> Apart from usages such as those quoted in notes 10 and 21, the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century theorists often applied the terms "dur" and "moll" to sharp and flat keys respectively. Examples of this usage can be found in two articles by Joel Lester, "Major-Minor Concepts and Modal Theory in Germany, 1592-1680," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* (Fall 1979), pp. 208-53; "The Recognition of Major and Minor Keys in German Theory: 1680-1730," *Journal of Music Theory* (Spring 1978), pp. 65-103.

<sup>25</sup> See Carl Dahlhaus, "Die Termini Dur und Moll," *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* XII (1955), pp. 280-96.

<sup>26</sup> It is impossible here to explore these tonal procedures in detail throughout Bach's work (or even only the passions). The reader's attention is drawn to the few cantatas in which conspicuous examples of "tonal allegory" occur (these will be discussed in full in the author's forthcoming book on the passions). The idea of *anabasis* was developed by Bach early in his career in some of the "sermon cantatas" of the Weimar period (see Dürr, *Studien* . . . , p. 213), for the purpose of allegorizing a sequence of increasingly positive emotions; that is, a "successive" rather than "simultaneous" (symmetrical) approach to antithesis. The quintessential instance is *BWV* 21, "Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis," in which Bach matches the textual change from fear and trouble to comfort and joy with a long progression from c-minor (and f-minor) in Part I to C-major in the final chorus of Part II. The change is brought about by a regular motion through the circle of fifths. Although *anabasis* seems to have been created by Bach as an alternative to symmetry—the dynamic of inner change, perhaps, rather than the formality of doctrine—it can be just as "patterned" as any symmetrical structure. A good example of the pattern of *anabasis* occurs in one of the most "doctrinal" of all Bach's cantatas, *BWV* 9, "Es ist das Heil uns kommen hier," which presents Luther's doctrine of justification by faith and not works in a form that Whittaker likened to that of a "theological discussion" (W. Gillies Whittaker, *The Cantatas of Johann Sebastian Bach* two vols. (London, 1959), I, p. 501). After the E-major chorale fantasia the first recitative "sinks" to b-minor, the analogue of our fallen, sinful nature under the law; then the first aria, in e-minor, gives voice to our state at that time, "We had already sunk too deep. The abyss swallowed us up completely." Then a series of four movements relates the coming of Christ, His fulfillment of the law on our behalf, the new doctrine of faith, the replacing of the law by the gospel, and our being able to trust in God. The music all the while moves regularly back to E-major through the circle of fifths. This work sheds light on the structure of the *St. Matthew Passion* in much the way that "Jesu meine Freude" does on the *St. John Passion*. Other instances of tonal allegory in the cantatas are: *BWV* 109, "Ich glaube, lieber Herr, hilf meinem Unglauben" (faith versus unbelief); and *BWV* 213, "Hercules auf dem Scheideweg" (the choice between pleasure and virtue).

<sup>27</sup> Rolf Dammann, *Der Musikbegriff im deutschen Barock* (Köln, 1967), p. 88.

<sup>28</sup> See also George, *Tonality and Musical Structure*, pp. 41-4.

<sup>29</sup> Dahlhaus, "Die Termini . . . pp. 290-1, n. 2. It may also be mentioned in connection with the two tonal centers of the passion that Bach might possibly have found a model in Buxtehude's cycle of seven cantatas, *Membra Jesu Nostri*, a setting based upon the well-known address to the parts of Christ's body on the cross by Bernard of Clairvaux. Buxtehude's plan starts from c-minor ("To His Feet"), then progresses upward through the keys as the eyes move up Christ's body (E-flat, g-minor, d-minor, a-minor, e-minor, c-minor). At the end the cantata addressed to the heart is given a "special" setting with the strings now replaced by viola da gamba consort; its e-minor tonality, used frequently by the composer for cantatas on the name or person of Jesus, is then juxtaposed to the return to c-minor for the final cantata ("To His Face,") the origin of Gerhardt's "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden").

<sup>30</sup> Smend, "Bachs Matthäus-Passion," pp. 16ff. Jansen, "Bachs Zahlensymbolik . . .," pp. 99–100.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Andreas Werckmeister, *Musicalische Paradoxal-Discourse* (Quedlinburg, 1707), pp. 92, 100.

<sup>33</sup> Andreas Werckmeister, *Harmonologia Musica*, No. 72.

<sup>34</sup> The quotation is from J. C. Gottsched, *Vorübung der Beredsamkeit* (Leipzig, 1754), V., paragraph 37, cited along with other references to *parrhesia* in H. H. Unger, *Die Beziehungen zwischen Musik und Rhetorik im 16–18. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg, 1941), reprinted Hildesheim, 1968, p. 87.

<sup>35</sup> Smend, "Bachs Matthäus-Passion," pp. 50–3, points out the parallels between "Kommt, ihr Töchter" and "Sehet, Jesus hat die Hand."

<sup>36</sup> Bukofzer, *Music in the Baroque Era*, p. 369.

<sup>37</sup> "Ich höre schon etliche sagen: Das sind Speculationes, deren der wenigste Theil von denen Auditoribus kan gewahr werden. Ich gestehe dieses auch: Doch geben curieuse Köpffe schon auf dergleichen Dinge mit Achtung, und der Componist hat zum wenigsten diese Avantage davon, dass ihm dadurch die Bahn zur Invention gebrochen worden." Richter, "Eine Abhandlung . . .," p. 153.