



Dear friends,

Please enjoy the following video link: <https://vimeo.com/419760272> (Control + Click opens this link.)

This is the second installment in the J.S. Bach *German Organ Mass*. We begin with three settings based on the chorale *Allein Gott in der Höh'* ("All Glory be to God on High") which is a textual paraphrase of the *Gloria* of the Mass. All three settings are written in a 3-voice texture: a probable reference to the Trinity. The first setting of *Allein Gott* is a trio with the *cantus firmus* (i.e., the chorale melody) in the alto. The second setting is a charming trio sonata with the *cantus firmus* appearing at different points in each voice in a musical paraphrase. The third setting of *Allein Gott* is a short fughetta with a fugue subject based on the opening pitches of the *cantus firmus*.

Next, we have two settings based on the chorale *Dies sind die heil'gen zehn Gebot* ("These are the holy Ten Commandments"). In the prelude for 2 manuals and pedal, Bach presents the *cantus firmus* in two voices in canon. The term "canon" literally means "rule" or "law," so the use of a musical canon is an intentional reference to the subject matter. The long note values of the *cantus firmus* canon gives the chorale melody a sense of stability and permanence, as if the melody were written on stone tablets. Bach follows this setting with a lively four-voice fughetta, where once again the fugue subject is based on the chorale melody. Interestingly enough, the fugue subject is ten beats long and is presented a total of ten times, which is an indisputable reference to the Ten Commandments.

Finally, Bach presents two settings of the chorale *Wir glauben all' an einen Gott* ("We all believe in one true God"). The *pedaliter* setting of this chorale is unique in that it does not utilize a *cantus firmus*, but instead uses the opening pitches of the chorale as the subject of a four-voice fugue. (Nevertheless, I have included the poetic English translation of the chorale text in the video for consistency). The *manualiter* setting is a short three-voice fughetta written in a quasi-French Overture style. This movement lies at the precise mid-point of the *German Organ Mass*. It is not lost on scholars that Bach also placed a French Overture movement at the mid-point of the *Goldberg Variations*, as well as at the mid-point of several other large-scale works.

The next video will feature settings of chorales associated with the Lord's Prayer and the sacraments of Baptism, Penitence, and Eucharist.

Peace,
Richard Townley