

“VOR DEINEN THRON TRET ICH”:  
THE ESCHATOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE  
CHORALE SETTINGS OF THE P271 MANUSCRIPT  
OF THE BERLIN STAATSBIBLIOTHEK

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This article concerns the chorale-based works of the P271 manuscript of the Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, which contains the largest body of organ music by Bach in one collection: the six trio sonatas (BWV 525–30), the so-called “Leipzig” chorales (BWV 651–68), and the Canonic Variations (BWV 769a)—which are inserted before *Vor deinen Thron tret ich* (BWV 668), the final chorale prelude of the “Leipzig” chorales. Also contained in the manuscript is an earlier version of the trio *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland* (BWV 660a). Bach did not give a title to the chorale preludes of this collection and many have subsequently endeavored to do so.

The earliest title/description comes from page 73 of the catalogue of C. P. E. Bach’s estate:

“Sechs Trios mit 2 Clavieren und Pedal und ohngefähr 20 Vorspielen und ausgeführten Chorälen für die Orgel. Von der eigenen Hand des Verfassers.” [Six trios for two manuals and pedals and approximately 20 preludes and harmonized chorales for the organ. In the original hand of the composer.]<sup>1</sup>

For the first edition of the complete works of Bach (*Bachgesellschaft*), the editor, Wilhelm Rust, borrowed from the title of the Schübler Chorales, calling the preludes from P271 “Achtzehn Choräle

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<sup>1</sup>BD 3, no. 957 (p. 496); [Johann Sebastian Bach] *Die Achtzehn Grossen Orgelchoräle BWV 651–668 und Canonische Veränderungen über “Von Himmel Hoch” BWV 769*, facsimile ed. Peter Wollny (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1999), vii [xv].