

EMBRACING FAITH:
THE DUET AS METAPHOR IN SELECTED
SACRED CANTATAS BY J. S. BACH¹

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I.

It is well known that the dialogues between the Soul and Jesus in Cantatas 21, 32, 49, 57, 140, 145, 152, and 172 are allegories of the believer's quest for greater faith.² In my paper I propose that the allegorical representation of the process of acquiring faith is not limited to settings of dialogue texts, but is also central to approximately thirty cantatas that contain duets.³ Bach grasped the metaphorical potential afforded by the inherent contrast between two-voice settings and solo movements and employed the broader palette of textural combinations offered by two-voice format⁴ as a means of projecting different stages in the believer's search for faith. Cantatas in which duet format appears to play a metaphorical role are listed in Table 1:

¹This paper is a revised version of one delivered at the 2002 American Bach Society meeting in Houston.

²In Cantata 172 the soloists represent the Soul and the Holy Spirit.

³I employ the term "duet" when referring to movements in which the two soloists sing the same text throughout, as opposed to dialogues, in which they do not.

⁴These possibilities include similar or dissimilar melodic lines, alternation, imitation, parallel motion, and arriving simultaneously at cadences, or not. The terms that Joseph Kerman employs to characterize the interrelationship of soloist and tutti in concertos, "polarity," "reciprocity," and "coalesce," are also useful in the context of dialogues and duets (Kerman, *Concerto Conversations* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 1999]).