

DIALOGUE STRUCTURES IN
J. S. BACH'S CANTATAS:
THE BASIC FORM OF WORSHIP
AS A MODEL FOR ARTISTIC SHAPING¹

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INTRODUCTION

The Dialogue as a Basic Form of Christian Worship

In his famous sermon for the dedication of the *Schloßkirche* in Torgau on 5 October 1544, Martin Luther states that in a house of worship “nothing else takes place . . . than that our dear Lord Himself speaks to us through His Holy Word and that we, in turn, speak to Him in prayer and songs of praise.”² The basic form of Christian worship is described here by Luther as a dialogical occurrence. In this article I will develop thoughts on what this implies theologically and what it evokes musically in J. S. Bach’s church cantatas.

Why is dialogue (Greek: *διαλεγεσθαι*), necessary? The answer: Because God as our judge wants us to contend with him: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be

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²Martin Luther, *Predigt am 17. Sonntag nach Trinitatis bei der Einweihung der Schloßkirche zu Torgau gehalten*, *WA* 49, p. 588, 15–18.