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JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

AS THE **Short Title** OF HIS

THE PASSION OF THE LORD ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW
JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH'S ST. MATTHEW PASSION

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

William George Earl Hansen

June 1959

Approved by:

Walter E. Wagner
Professor

Richard B. Jones
Professor

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
AS INTERPRETER OF SCRIPTURE IN
THE PASSION OF OUR LORD ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW

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June 1959

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The status of the work of Johann Sebastian Bach in the world of today is uncertain. To the vast majority he is a name only, buried in the past. His influence today is restricted. It is found on the concert stage, where the per-

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recent catalogue of long-playing records lists only twenty-five per cent of his existing compositions available.

The claim is often made that his work is hardly appreciated in an age when people have been musically conditioned to an entirely different type of culture. It has been pointed out, however, that the problem is not merely cultural

William K. Scheide, Johann Sebastian Bach as a Biblical Interpreter (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 3.

Alexander Ringer, "Bach for Our Time," Saturday Review, August 30, 1953, p. 32.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The status of the work of Johann Sebastian Bach in the world of today is uncertain. To the vast majority he is a name only, buried in the past. His influence today is restricted. It is found on the concert stage, where the perusal of a great many programs will often show a mere token position assigned to one of his "secular" works. In some areas Bach choral societies present sacred concerts of his greater works. Very rarely, a church with an advanced musical program will keep the influence of Bach alive in the one area for which it was intended. He has been called the Fifth Evangelist, so powerful and persuasive has his influence been in the past.¹ Yet by and large this is not true today. A recent catalogue of long-playing records lists only twenty-five per cent of his existing compositions available.

The claim is often made that his work is hardly appreciated in an age when people have been musically conditioned to an entirely different type of culture. It has been pointed out, however, that the problem is not merely cultural

¹William H. Scheide, Johann Sebastian Bach as a Biblical Interpreter (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 1.

²Alexander Ringer, "Bach for Our Time," Saturday Review, August 30, 1958, p. 34.

or musical.³ It is also, and quite possibly more so, a problem of worship and theology. The Lutheran Church, for whose service Bach labored almost exclusively his entire life, knows him not. Those who follow him most avidly in the musical field, do so primarily for aesthetic reasons.⁴

This condition is all the more remarkable when we consider the general opinion of him in the field of music. As a musician, he is generally treated as having few, if any peers. In more recent years, his theological stature is being recognized to a greater degree than ever before as the basis for this greatness. Bach, because of his two-sided genius as musician and theologian, has been misunderstood by a large percentage of those who write about his life and work. This is true partly because those who have studied him were either musicians or theologians, very rarely both.

Musicians generally miss the import of Bach's work completely, often by an obvious oversight of the text itself. The story is told of the great organist, Christian Widor, who one day confessed to his illustrious pupil, Albert Schweitzer, that the harmonizations of some of Bach's chorales were completely unintelligible to him. It remained for Schweitzer, the theologian, to point out the dominant nature of the text

³Walter E. Buszin, "Lutheran Theology as Reflected in the Life and Works of J. S. Bach," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXI (December, 1950), 921.

⁴Ibid.

in all of Bach's choral works.⁵

Schweitzer himself remains one of the few theologians who have written on Bach. Even his treatment is unsatisfactory in that the disparity in theological views causes him to see Bach merely as another mystic.

It is becoming more apparent that any further valuable study of Bach must proceed on the assumption voiced by Gerhard Herz:

None of the attempts to see Bach's religion in another light than the orthodox Lutheran can be supported theologically. From Spitta to Terry, Bach's biographers have shown convincingly that Bach does not transgress the realm of the confessional church.⁶

With regard to the study of the St. Matthew Passion, or of any of Bach's works, the basic assumption must be Bach's familiarity with and loyalty to the teachings of the Lutheran Church.

Such a study has limitations. Any study of musical interpretation falls into the dangers of subjectivism. This is easily seen by the wide variance of opinion on perhaps the same musical form.

The study will proceed by delineating the background material in two areas: (a) The historical development of the Passion form itself; (b) The musical and theological

⁵Albert Schweitzer, J. S. Bach, translated by Ernest Newman (New York: MacMillan, 1950), I, viii.

⁶Gerhard Herz, "Bach's Religion," Journal of Renaissance and Baroque Music, I (March, 1946), 129.

background of the composer. As Bach stood on the threshold of writing his Passions, the entire gamut of musical Passions and oratorios lay before him. The choices he made and the emphases exhibited in his Passions are highly significant. Likewise his own orthodox Lutheran background plays a major part. Bach's treatment of the St. Matthew Passion becomes plausible and inescapable upon understanding these phases of the study. The treatment of the Passion itself is based on the libretto of the score, concentrating primarily on the Biblical words, as well as the significance of the following recitatives and chorales as Bach's own commentary on the Scriptural account.

... of the voice, Christ being at the top of the range, the evangelist in the middle, and the characters at the bottom of the range, technically known as the "high, middle, and low" positions. The custom of staging the singing of the Passion according to each of the Evangelists on the four days of Holy Week also seems to have been established quite early in the Middle Ages.³ The Roman Catholic Church tradition includes a schedule for regular observances:

 Palm Sunday St. Matthew

¹Willi Apel, editor, *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1943), p. 522.

²Paul Smalley, *The Development of Musical Drama* (London: Hutchinson Press Ltd., 1957), p. 22.

³Phillip Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1951), II, 477.

CHAPTER II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MUSICAL PASSION FORM

Plainsong Origins

In its earliest use, we find the Passion performed as a sort of play set to Gregorian chant. This use is as least as early as the twelfth century.¹ In this play presentation, the Passion history was chanted by the priests only, at first entirely by one priest. From the scores of such presentations we have instructions that the priest was to simulate the different characters by the change in pitch and inflection of the voice, Christ being at the lowest point in range, the evangelist in the middle, and the utterances of any group or crowd, technically known as the turba, at the highest.²

The custom of singing the history of the Passion according to each of the Evangelists on the four days of Holy Week also seems to have been established quite early in the Middle Ages.³ The Roman Catholic Church traditions indicate a schedule for regular observances:

Palm Sunday St. Matthew

¹Willi Apel, editor, Harvard Dictionary of Music (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1944), p. 558.

²Basil Smallman, The Background of Passion Music (London: Northumberland Press Ltd., 1957), p. 22.

³Philipp Spitta, Johann Sebastian Bach (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1951), II, 477.

Tuesday	St. Mark or St. Luke
Wednesday	St. Mark or St. Luke (interchangeable)
Good Friday	St. John. ⁴

The Church of the Reformation kept up this peculiar form of Passion service.⁵ It is this connection of the chanting of the Passion history with a liturgical service of the Church that first joins the two elements of the interpretive and the dramatic in this singular type of Lenten observance. The earliest history of Passion music was inseparably connected with the medieval Passion plays, which themselves retained a close connection with the Church. Yet these dramatic presentations became increasingly secular, while the Passion form remained to fill a liturgical need in the centuries preceding Bach.

The form of these earliest Passions consisted of the Biblical text sung in a simple inflected monotone.⁶ The first attempt at variation was the use of different pitches and inflections for the various characters.⁷ Since the demands of such a performance exceeded the average ability of most cantors, three priests were used for the parts.⁸ The next variation that is traceable is the addition of the announcement and the thanksgiving. The announcement generally

⁴Apel, op. cit., p. 558.

⁵Spitta, op. cit., p. 478.

⁶Apel, op. cit., p. 558.

⁷Supra, p. 5.

⁸Smallman, op. cit., p. 22.

took the form, "The (bitter) sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ, (according to) as they are declared to us by the holy Evangelist _____." The usual form for the conclusion, called the Gratiarum actio, was "Thanks be to our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath redeemed us from the torments of Hell."⁹

Once the popularity of these early Passions was assured, the form became quite stereotyped and resistant to change. The most obvious restriction was the exclusive use of plainsong in all the solo sections. With its characteristic paucity of melodic movement and the close inner resemblance of phrases, the plainsong allowed the composer little originality. The tradition of having the Evangelist as a tenor and Jesus as a bass became firmly entrenched very early.¹⁰ This stereotype carried over even into the choice of keys. Almost all of these Passions are in the transposed Ionic mode, F Major.¹¹ The existence of plainsong Passions continued as good liturgical usage until quite late. A Passion text is printed in the Arnstadt Hymn-book of 1745 which states that "In most of the districts and villages belonging here every year on Good Friday, it (the Passion) is customarily chanted in stylo recitative."¹²

⁹Spitta, op. cit., p. 480.

¹⁰Smallman, op. cit., p. 52.

¹¹Spitta, op. cit., p. 479.

¹²Ibid.

Polyphony and the Motet Style

The introduction of part-writing into musical composition fostered the development of the motet style, the most prominent type of polyphony in church music in the period from the thirteenth century to Bach.

Paralleling the preservation of this mode of church music was the style known as the motet Passion, which developed out of the plainsong tradition. There is some disagreement as to the origin of the departures from the pure chant-form. Spitta attributes the closing devotional statement and the opening announcement as providing the first opportunities for expressing "purely lyrical sentiment."¹³ Other sources see the change as originating from the feeling for the dramatic. The procedure was to compose only the turbae which naturally suggested performance by a chorus.¹⁴ Whatever the first variation, it was an outgrowth of the increasing influence of the polyphonic in church music. As part-writing became the established form for musical composers, the Passions of the times reflected this change. At the earliest period of part-writing there arose, side by side with the plainsong Passion, settings treated throughout in the motet style as well as in homophonic part-writing.¹⁵ The earliest evidence

¹³Spitta, op. cit., p. 480.

¹⁴Apel, op. cit., p. 558.

¹⁵Spitta, op. cit., p. 481.

of a thorough-going motet style in German Passion music is from the pen of Johann Machold, whose work was published in 1593,¹⁶ although the significant use of motet style is traced as early as 1505.¹⁷

As a middle state between the chanted and motet forms, there are those compositions in which the plainsong is retained for the traditionally revered parts of the Evangelist and the words of Christ, while the remaining sections of the narrative are in parts.¹⁸

Lutheran Passion Traditions

Simultaneously with the growth of the motet style was that style directly influenced by the Lutheran Reformation. The stress of Luther himself in church music was on the very simple, making the text itself prominent. As a result, the formative Passion music from the Reformation period is attributed to Johann Walther's setting of the St. Matthew text in what is known as the homophonic recitative style.¹⁹ The entire Passion, although written in parts, retains more of the ancient plainsong style than the motet forms. The most significant departure from the norms of the day is the use of

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷H. C. Colles, editor, Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians (Third edition; New York: MacMillan, 1941), p. 73.

¹⁸Spitta, op. cit., p. 483.

¹⁹Colles, op. cit., p. 74.

the vernacular text, using Luther's German New Testament translation. In keeping with this emphasis on congregational participation was the use of the chorale. Chorales, sometimes interspersed with the score, became the most distinguishing characteristic of the Lutheran Passion observances of Holy Week. Generally this was confined to the singing of a chorale before and after the presentation of a Passion.

Influences of the Italian Opera

A significant third influence began to make itself felt on the Passion music of Protestant and Catholic Germany in the latter part of the seventeenth century. The beginnings of the secular opera in Italy had coincided with a rise in prominence of Italian music and composers. Italian operatic music began to appear all over Europe. Their influence was also felt in church music. In the field of Passion music these variations or innovations took definite forms. Basically these forms reflected a feeling for the dramatic over the non-emotional plainsong or homophonic traditions of church music. As a gradual result of this influence Passion music began to incorporate such features as the recitative style, the aria, the orchestral accompaniment, as well as a freer treatment of the Scriptural text.²⁰ The aria soon became the most representative operatic influence on the field of Passion music.²¹

²⁰Apel, op. cit., p. 558.

²¹Spitta, op. cit., p. 487.

Basically Passion composers were influenced by the Italian opera in two ways. The healthier of the two was that characterized best and almost solely by Heinrich Schütz. Schütz is generally credited with introducing the Italian operatic influence into the Passion. Schweitzer attributes to him the introduction of "concert music" into the church by his transformation of the motet into a cantata.²² Perhaps a more accurate view is that Schütz found in the Italian oratorios and operas something which he could infuse into the basic patterns of church music. In his Seven Words of Christ on the Cross, which by its subject matter and treatment follows in the tradition of Passion music, we find a combination of styles. The one-part recitation for the Evangelist and personae is a remnant of the plainsong style. The four-part treatment of some of the narrative portions is reminiscent of the motet. From the earliest church Passions we have the retention of the devotional choruses at the beginning and the end. In a twofold manner he reflects his respect for the operatic concert influence. This is in his treatment of the orchestra both in accompaniment and symphonies, and in his abandonment of plainsong.²³ Regarding the latter, some feel that only in the recitatives is Schütz following in the tradition of Walther and Protestant Passions. There are some

²²Albert Schweitzer, J. S. Bach, translated by Ernest Newman (New York: MacMillan, 1950), I, 68.

²³Spitta, op. cit., p. 483.

who feel that this is Schütz's only concession to the plain-song style.²⁴ Others maintain that Schütz's plainsong recitatives are such in name only and have mere allusions to the old style. They point to such examples as the words of Judas to the high priest as indicative of a strong dramatic tendency not in keeping with the older style.²⁵ The only melodic intervals in chant were at the beginning and the ends of phrases, even those which consisted of frequently recurring formulas.

Heinrich Schütz must be regarded as a pioneer and originator in the history of Passion music. Both in his Seven Last Words and in his Passion According to St. Matthew there is the framework and form of the older plainsong and motet styles. However, together with this there is the peculiar mixture with the newer, the Italian operatic style.

Not all has been said with this observation. There are still in Schütz's work the conservative, liturgical concerns that characterize the best in the musical traditions of the Christian Church. As part of his own directions for the performance of his Passions he showed the concern that these presentations retain a devotional atmosphere and not give the

²⁴Friedrich Blume, "Die Evangelische Kirchenmusik," Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft, edited by Ernest Bücken (New York: Musurgia Publishers, 1931), p. 111.

²⁵Spitta, op. cit., p. 484.

²⁶Blume, op. cit., p. 111.

impression of the secular and dramatic. Regarding the role of the Evangelist in his Passions he writes that he assumes the title "Mittler des Schriftworts," and as such is set apart by the directions, "Diese Histori mit besserer Gratia oder Anmut musizieret werden konnte, wenn naemlich der Evangelist allein gesehen wuerde, mit anderen Personen alle verborgen stuenden."²⁶

While Schütz represents the healthier influence of the Italian opera on the Passion, the history of music records in a far greater majority of cases the profusion of mediocre and inferior examples of such musical expression. This is most easily seen by the gradual elevation of the aria to the gradual exclusion of the chorale. Most historians date this influence in the seventeenth century.²⁷ First the congregational participation in singing the chorales disappeared, and then the straight-forward treatment of the chorale itself began to diminish. This gradual development reached the point where hardly a composer in the seventeenth century took seriously the inclusion of congregational singing of a chorale.²⁸

Emotionalized Texts

Paralleling the decline of the chorale, Passion texts

²⁶Blume, op. cit., p. 111.

²⁷Spitta, op. cit., p. 492.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 490f.

came to light which were characterized by excessive sentimentality. Prime examples of this are Christian Hunold's text, Der blutige und sterbende Jesus and Barthold Brocke's Der Für die Sünden der Welt gemärtete und sterbende Jesus.²⁹ These two Passions are also indicative of the loose treatment of the Biblical text. In both the authentic text is abandoned in favor of rhymed paraphrase. This obviously left the door open for subjective interpretations of the text. This became evident in the sentimental and allegorical turn that these paraphrases assumed.³⁰ The subjugation of the Biblical text also showed itself in the frequent use of the symphonia, as the lengthy orchestral interludes came to be known. It is not to be assumed that there was not a reaction against these extremes. However, the tenor of the times was such that original verse and the entire oratorio style became the prototype for nearly all Passion texts.³¹

J. S. Bach--The Climax

It is against this constantly changing background that Johann Sebastian Bach made his conscious attempt at culminating the entire development of Passion music according to those principles that governed his life. Significantly, he

²⁹Apel, op. cit., p. 559.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Spitta, op. cit., p. 494.

did this at a later, mature period of his life.³² In a century in which there was little regard for the Biblical Passion text, in which much of the affinity with the chorale had disappeared, and in which Passions had become opera-like, the principles that shaped Bach's Passions were at variance with the vogue of the day. Whereas Heinrich Schütz's contribution to the Passion form was an acceptable introduction of the newer influences of the oratorio, Bach's chief contribution was a restoration of the older styles and a culmination of the best features of nearly all the previous forms.

Commentators usually cannot say enough of the influence of Bach on Passion music. Spitta remarks:

Bach's form, using all the constituent elements of previous passions, oratorios and religious operas, nevertheless kept its churchlike character through the elevation of organ music and the chorale.³³

Charles Sanford Terry reiterates the point of the chorale restoration and adds that Bach was not above using all the musical forms of his day, but in his use of such operatic devices as the aria and the recitative injects an all-pervading devotional treatment.³⁴

There are many evidences that Bach was eclectic in his use of past musical forms. Again and again can be noted his

³²Infra, p. 22.

³³Spitta, op. cit., pp. 503f.

³⁴Charles Sanford Terry, The Music of Bach (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 82.

use of such standard methods for achieving dramatic effects as the

use of chromaticism and dissonance for expression, the contrapuntal interlacing of short rhythmic vocal phrases, and the use of independent orchestral accompaniment with its wide range of colourful pictorialism.³⁵

The formal opening announcement of the source of the history that is found in the very earliest of Passions is retained but expanded into the elaborate introductory double chorus, "Kommt, ihr Töchter."

Yet, despite Bach's affinity to tradition, his Passions also show unique musical usage. In the history of the Passion, there exists no careful linking of recitatives and choruses as are found in both extant Passions of Bach.³⁶ In all of musical history there is no exact counterpart to Bach's crowd utterances and short choruses.³⁷ Both of these innovations can be traced to Bach's concern for and reverent treatment of the Biblical text. Despite the obviousness of this conclusion, it remained for the only theologian among Bach's foremost biographers to "discover" this truth. Albert Schweitzer points out that although Bach was a masterful composer of chorales in the polyphonic heritage of Praetorius and Eccard, he far surpassed them in his ability to reproduce

³⁵Smallman, op. cit., p. 72.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

and reflect the text.³⁸ It is this prime consideration of the composer that explains, to a large extent, the eclectic nature of Bach's use of musical forms as well as the innovations attributed to him.

Bach's Passions in the Liturgy

Bach also succeeded in once again elevating the Passion to a worshipful place in the Church's liturgy. It was never his purpose to divorce his presentations from the worship life of the churches he served. Surprisingly, Schweitzer misses this in his observation that Bach succeeded in bringing into the Church the acceptance of the sacred concert.³⁹ Against this view is the historical record that all of the performances of Passion music throughout Bach's cantorship in Leipzig were performed on Good Friday in a Vespers service which began in the early afternoon according to the following order:

Hymn by the congregation--Da Jesus an dem Kreuze stund
 Part I of the Passion
 Hymn by the congregation
 Sermon
 Part II of the Passion
 Motet--Ecce quomodo moritur justus
 Collect for Good Friday
 Hymn by the congregation--Nun Danket alle Gott
 Benediction.⁴⁰

³⁸Schweitzer, op. cit., p. 2.

³⁹Ibid., p. 3.

⁴⁰Terry, op. cit., p. 73.

Other Passions by Bach

According to the Necrolog published at or near Bach's death, five Passions are ascribed to him.⁴¹ It is the general opinion of scholars that only two are extant today, the Passion According to St. John and the Passion According to St. Matthew. The earlier of the two, the Passion According to St. John was first performed in 1723 and seems to show the composer's unfamiliarity with this type of music.⁴² The difficulty usually pointed out is the lack of artistic unity of textual material due to the lack of a suitable literary collaborator.⁴³ In general it may be said that the artistic and poetic character of Bach's was not so important. He saw only the substance.

Other differences in the two Passions stem mainly from the differences in the Biblical accounts. The St. John Passion shows much dramatic realism. This is carried out in the more elaborately set sections in which the chorus represents groups of persons.⁴⁴ The St. Matthew Passion, in distinction, reflects the Gospel writer's predominance of discourses in his greater use of reflective numbers and increased

⁴¹Karl Geiringer, The Bach Family (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 233.

⁴²Smallman, op. cit., p. 14.

⁴³Ibid., p. 13.

⁴⁴J. A. Maitland, editor, Oxford History of Music (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), p. 36.

opportunity for devotional meditation.⁴⁵ In addition, the arias in the St. Matthew Passion show a development toward a more simplified da capo form.⁴⁶

The claim of the finality of Bach's contribution to the Passion form is borne out by the subsequent history of this type of church music. Supposedly, no one ever attempted another Passion in quite the same style in the subsequent centuries. The composers since Bach have generally treated Passions in either a definite cantata style or in a thoroughgoing oratorio form.⁴⁷ Regrettably, many of the immediately following works of comparable nature did not rise above the texts of Hunold and Brocke. Although it is true that the operatic type of Passions vanished from northern Germany in Bach's lifetime, those who followed him aimed solely at stirring an amount of emotion which could be indulged without exceeding reasonable limits.⁴⁸

⁴⁵Smallman, op. cit., p. 42.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 99.

⁴⁷Terry, op. cit., pp. 82f.

⁴⁸Maitland, op. cit., p. 44.

The tradition of staunch adherence to the Lutheran faith in

David Salinger, The Bach Family (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 3.

CHAPTER III

J. S. BACH AS MUSICIAN AND THEOLOGIAN

In speaking of the formative influences that affected Bach in his life, there is much that explains why Johann Sebastian could remain almost alone as a musical composer in his day and contradict most of the popular musical thinking of that day. In addition to laying a plausible basis for his trend-resistant ways, a brief study of Bach's background establishes him as particularly well qualified to interpret the Biblical text portions of his Passions as well as other works.

The Bach Family

It is impossible to appreciate the importance of the two commanding aspects of Bach's life without some knowledge of the strong Bach family traditions with regard to music and theology. In his comprehensive study of the Bach family, Karl Geiringer launches his presentation with the superscription:

The story of the Bach musicians is unique with regard to achievement as well as duration. For seven generations in a row they were active as church or town musicians. To have achieved all this during one of the hardest periods in German history required outstanding vitality and power.¹

The tradition of staunch adherence to the Lutheran faith is

¹Karl Geiringer, The Bach Family (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 3.

even older among the Bachs. Johann Sebastian himself, in his history of the clan,² states that Veit Bach, a white-bread baker in Hungary in the latter part of the sixteenth century, was compelled to escape Hungary because of his Lutheran faith.³ Historically this persecution was the result of the Jesuit Counterreformation in Hungary under the reign of unstable Rudolph II.⁴ The family history also records that Veit delighted in playing a cittern (cythringen), a little lute-like instrument. "This was, as it were, the beginning of music among his descendants."⁵ Veit's action in giving up a settled existence because of his faith is hardly an unusual incident in Bach family history. An overview of the significant figures in the generations to follow would not be able to distinguish which was more important to the Bachs, music or theology.

The period into which Johann Sebastian Bach was born was the highest in the Bach family. This era marks the peak of creative achievement. In the first half of the eighteenth century, the Bachs cultivated and mastered nearly every type

²Johann Sebastian Bach, Ursprung der musicalisch-Bachischen Familie. Complete editions of the "Origin" are available in English translations by Terry, London, 1929; and by David and Mendel, New York, 1945.

³Geiringer, op. cit., p. 7.

⁴Gerhard Herz, "Bach's Religion," Journal of Renaissance and Baroque Music, edited by Armen Carapetyon and Leo Schrade (Cambridge, Mass.: Institute of Renaissance and Baroque Music, March 1946), I, 124.

⁵Ibid., p. 125.

of musical form extant, with the noteworthy exceptions of opera and Catholic church music.⁶

Musical and Theological Background

Johann Sebastian's early years were marked by the death of his parents; his mother when he was nine, his father less than a year later.⁷ In the Bach family, the strong ties insured the nurture and care of orphans, and so it was with young Johann who went to live with a married brother. As a result, his continued education, musically and theologically, was assured. Musically, his father had been responsible for an early introduction to stringed instruments, but it was uncle Johann Christoph who first started him on the organ, the mastery of which was his fame.⁸ History records his rapid achievement in both music and school studies. The former was implemented by his pure soprano voice as well as his musical background;⁹ the latter is evidenced by the fact that at the Ohrdruf Lyceum he was a senior at the age of fourteen, while his classmates' ages averaged 17.7.¹⁰

Significantly, the Ohrdruf Lyceum was renowned for its

⁶Geiringer, op. cit., p. 298.

⁷Ibid., p. 120

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 119.

theological instruction in the Orthodox Lutheran vein.¹¹ At the Lyceum, Bach began a long acquaintance with Leonhard Hutter's Compendium locorum theologicorum of 1610, the prime textbook there.¹² It is Hutter who was nicknamed "Luther re-
donatus," a title bestowed for his defense of Luther's doctrine against the Reformed Church. At his graduation in 1700, Bach left Ohrdruf well grounded in the theological bias of a school known for its orthodoxy and anti-pietistic attitudes.¹³

There are many evidences that the attitudes Bach learned at Ohrdruf were actively adhered to and promoted in his later life. As cantor of the St. Thomas Kirche in Leipzig, each day of instruction was begun with readings from the Bible together with a passage from Hutter's Compendium.¹⁴ Theologically, the emphasis of Hutter can be well traced in Bach's life and work. The entire meaning of the new life in Christ is, according to Hutter, God's glory as well as the attestation of obedience and gratitude.¹⁵ Hans Besch develops this thesis that Hutter's work is the key to this understanding of Bach's faith.¹⁶ This is verified by Bach's common practice

¹¹Herz, op. cit., p. 125.

¹²Ibid., p. 126.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Hans Besch, J. S. Bach, Frömmigkeit und Glaube (Gütersloh, Germany: C. Bertelsmann, 1938), p. 271.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 170ff.

of heading a new composition with the inscription J(esu) J(uva), and ending it with the letters s(oli) D(eo) G(loria).¹⁷ Even in his instruction of musical theory, Bach could not divorce his art from his faith. He considered melody to be a divine gift, the composing of which was divinely inspired.¹⁸ In his Generalbasslehre, he records this commentary on the use of figured bass and music:

Figured bass is the most perfect foundation of music. . . . The result is an agreeable harmony to the Glory of God and justifiable gratification of the senses. For the sole aim and reason of the figured bass, as of all music, should be nothing other than God's Glory and pleasant recreations.¹⁹

The dedication of his Orgelbüchlein is another summation of his philosophy of music:

Dem Höchsten Gott allein zu Ehren
Dem Nächsten, draus sich zu belehren.²⁰

(Alone to the honor of the Lord Most High,
And that my neighbor may be taught thereby.)

Soli Deo Gloria was Bach's life principle in all things.

This would tend to clear up much of the discussion of the sacred versus the secular in Bach. Although most of his biographers finally conclude that there is no fundamental difference for Bach, they disagree in searching for the

¹⁷Geiringer, op. cit., p. 297.

¹⁸Theodore Hoelty-Nickel, editor, The Little Bach Book (Valparaiso, Ind.: Valparaiso University Press, 1950), p. 21.

¹⁹Herz, op. cit., p. 127.

²⁰Ibid.

reason. Geiringer states, "Bach acted as a typically Baroque composer in recognizing no fundamental difference between the sacred and the secular."²¹ Herz comes closer:

Also in this respect he resembled Martin Luther, for whom there existed only one music, and that was a music which became sacred or profane according to the spirit in which it was sung or played.²²

This spirit was the one in which Bach felt his divine calling, knowing that all his talents were in the service of God to be used for His greater Glory. The distinction is sometimes made that Bach deserted the tradition of his direct ancestry in devoting his livelihood exclusively to music, since music was the avocation of his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather.²³ Again, this distinction loses its importance when considered in the light of the theological basis of Bach's life and work.

Bach's Orthodoxy

Against the thesis of Bach's lifelong loyalty to his Lord and Church are those statements that concede his orthodox background in immaturity, but deny that Bach was always as strict in his adherence to the anti-Pietistic, anti-Calvinistic, and anti-Rationalistic formulations of Lutheran

²¹Geiringer, op. cit., p. 202.

²²Herz, op. cit., p. 138.

²³Charles Sanford Terry, Bach: The Historical Approach (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), p. 115.

orthodoxy. Geiringer states that the view that his animosity towards Pietism lasted throughout his life does not allow for the spiritual growth that a man of such genius would certainly exhibit.²⁴ Others contradict this in seeing Bach as one who suffered from the influence of Pietism in an early period of his career.²⁵ Another contradiction resulting from subjective interpretations is seen in the implications drawn from the choice of cantata texts. Whereas one interpretation attempts to show that the choice of texts indicates a spirit friendly to Pietism,²⁶ another thesis is that these texts point out that the "dogmatic writings and old church ordinances had not yet lost their meaning for Bach."²⁷

In reality there was little in common between the Pietists and Bach. The Pietists were very outspoken in their denunciation of anything that resembled the ornate in church music. To them the form of the church cantata was a "sinful abomination."²⁸ It is probably more correct to state that any fervent religious and musical emotions Bach exhibited

²⁴Geiringer, op. cit., p. 141.

²⁵Basil Smallman, The Background of Passion Music (London: Northumberland Press, Ltd., 1957), p. 15.

²⁶Geiringer, op. cit., p. 141.

²⁷Friedrich Hashagen, Johann Sebastian Bach als Sanger und Musiker des Evangeliums und der Lutherischen Reformation (2. Auflage; Schweiz: Ev. Buchhandlung, 1925), pp. 36ff.

²⁸Philipp Spitta, Johann Sebastian Bach (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1951), I, 366f.

are misinterpreted for the fervor of Pietism.²⁹ To judge one's Pietistic tendencies by the display of emotion is an extremely nebulous thing, confused even more by the fact that the florid style of Baroque music, against which the Pietists stood foursquare, could also easily lend itself to legitimate musical emotion. Also, Pietism is often diametrically contrasted with a coldly objective kind of orthodoxy as if no middle ground were possible.

Bach's encounters with Pietism began early. At the age of twenty-two, he secured the position at Mühlhausen. His pastor, J. A. Frohne, had decided Pietistic leanings. The outspoken Johann did not endear himself to Frohne by opposing the latter in his debates with Georg Eilmar on matters of dogma.³⁰ It was this disagreement that finally led to Bach's resignation after only a year at Mühlhausen.³¹ In his new position at the Weimer court, his patron was a fervent Lutheran and Bach himself was given a free reign of expression.³² In Bach's own library, which consisted largely of theological works,³³ the only works that might be labelled

²⁹Herz, op. cit., p. 135.

³⁰Geiringer, op. cit., pp. 139f.

³¹Ibid., p. 141.

³²Ibid.

³³Charles Sanford Terry, Bach, a Biography (Second edition; London: Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 273; Hans Preuss, Bachs Bibliothek (Leipzig: Verlagsbuchhandlung D. Werner Scholl, 1928), pp. 1-12.

Pietistic were one each by August Hermann Francke and Phillip Jakob Spener. Francke's work was a four volume edition of sermons, while Spener's was the anti-Catholic rather than anti-orthodox Gerechter Eifer wider das Antichristliche Pabstthum.³⁴

That these theological concerns occupied his life consistently is also a matter of record. There seems to be little evidence that Bach became more "mature" and less earnest about the vitiating tendencies in the Church. From 1717 to 1723 Bach served at the royal court in Cöthen, where the theological background was Calvinistic. At the court there is no evidence that Bach was under pressure because of his faith. On the contrary, history pictures the young Prince Leopold as a theological "liberal" of his day, imbued with the spirit of tolerance and religious freedom for his subjects. His approval of a new Lutheran school and church in the town invoked much displeasure among those of his own Reformed persuasion.³⁵ Despite this, Bach composed a book for the musical instruction of his wife, Anna Magdalena. Written on the cover of the manuscript copy of 1722 are the words, "Anti Calvinismus und Christen schule item Anti Melancholicus."

A copy of Abraham Calovius' three volume Die Deutsches Bibel d. Martini Lutheri with Bach's signature on the title pages is contained in the library at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri.

³⁴Herz, op. cit., p. 133.

³⁵Geiringer, op. cit., pp. 114ff.

Anti Calvinismus, Evangelische Christen Schule, and Anti Melancholicus are the titles of three works found in Bach's personal library.³⁶ The significance of the second title is borne out by the fact that Bach avoided sending his children to the excellent Reformed school in Cöthen, but chose rather the very recently founded Lutheran school.³⁷

Having stood firm against the Pietistic influences at Mühlhausen as well as the Calvinism at Cöthen and the religious indifference at both Weimer and Cöthen, Bach became more and more absorbed in his Lutheran faith as his life grew to a close. The text of one of his later cantatas, "Wo Gott, der Herr, nicht bei uns hält," which appeared in 1740, contains several outbursts against the growing Rationalistic tendencies of his day. "Schweig', schweig' nur taumelnde Vernunft" is reinforced later by the comment "Vernunft wider den Glauben ficht."³⁸ From this same period came other conscious attempts at expressing his Lutheran studies in music. The third part of the Clavierübung of 1739 is more than a collection of twenty-one organ chorales. These chorales actually symbolize the basic doctrines of the Church of the Reformation in the form of musical representation of the

³⁶Herz, op. cit., p. 131.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸The English text of the two quotations is "Cease, now, tottering Reason, cease!" and "Reason wages war against faith." Herz, op. cit., p. 129.

Common Service.³⁹

Bach's Theological Library

Concerning the importance of Bach's library of theological works, Geiringer states that although the many writings of Lutheran dogmaticians show a strong interest in these problems, it cannot be deduced that Bach shared completely the views of these authors.⁴⁰ This is admittedly true. However, the correctness of the statement is piecemeal. The titles of the three works inscribed by Bach on the musical instruction book of 1722 become highly significant when one considers Bach's position at the time. The only interpretation plausible is that these books were for Bach a source of spiritual encouragement and edification. His feelings throughout all his life, which he often took great pains to make public, are in complete accord with the views expressed by the authors he read and studied. It is also important to note that the very existence of so many theological works in the library of a musician is highly unusual.

Bach the Mystic

Still another prevalent opinion of Bach's personal religion is widespread. Albert Schweitzer, in his monumental

³⁹Ibid., p. 132.

⁴⁰Geiringer, op. cit., p. 141.

biography, seems to be the originator of the idea that Bach was basically a mystic. He gives him this label several times,⁴¹ and in discussing Bach's faith, says, "Bach like every lofty religious mind, belongs not to the church but to religious humanity."⁴² The impression he leaves here is rightly analyzed by Herz. "Schweitzer seems to imply that Bach had worked his way through Lutheranism and Pietism to a completely personal religion."⁴³ A look once again at Bach's library produces very little in the way of books leaning toward mysticism. Yet two mystical works of universal popularity appear; Johann Arndt's Wahres Christentum and the sermons of Johann Tauler.⁴⁴ It is a matter of opinion whether these works indicate Bach as a mystic or not. In his discussion of the claim that Bach was a mystic, Hans Besch's argument is that there was hardly any probability for such religious individualism at Bach's time.

The conclusion seems inescapable. Johann Sebastian Bach, brought up and trained in the Lutheran Church, with seven generations of Lutheranism in him is bound to his Lutheran heritage. A study of his treatment of the texts of the St. Matthew Passion will bear this out further.

⁴¹Albert Schweitzer, J. S. Bach, translated by Ernest Newman (New York: MacMillan, 1950), I, 169f.

⁴²Ibid., p. 264.

⁴³Herz, op. cit., p. 129.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 133.

CHAPTER IV

A SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATION OF THE ST. MATTHEW PASSION

The actual composing of the Passion of Our Lord According to St. Matthew was begun nearly a year before its first performance in the St. Thomas Kirche on Good Friday, 1729.¹ Exact evidence of this is given through the occasion of the death of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, in whose court Bach had served for a number of years. Bach was approached to compose the funeral music for the memorial service some months after the death. For this music he used nine of the pieces of the St. Matthew Passion, securing appropriate vocal texts from C. F. Henrici (Picander), who was working on the libretto of the Passion.² This so-called "Trauermusik" made its appearance in November, 1728.³ From the existing text of this funeral music, also named "Klagt Kinder" from the first chorus, we see that all nine of the pieces make their appearance in the St. Matthew Passion.⁴ Thus it is the music for the Passion which incidentally serves another purpose. This is

¹Karl Geiringer, The Bach Family (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 235.

²Ibid.

³Charles Sanford Terry, Bach: The Passions, in The Musical Pilgrim, edited by Arthur Somervell (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), II, 5.

⁴The nine pieces that were in "Klagt Kinder" are numbers: 10, 47, 58, 66, 29, 26, 75, 19, 78. Geiringer, op. cit., p. 235.

supposed by the unforeseen nature of the occasion for "Klagt Kinder" as well as the priority of the annual schedule of cantatas and Passions that Bach was compiling as cantor of St. Thomas. The monumental character of the St. Matthew Passion, both in the history of the development of the Passion form and in its climactic relationship to the entire body of Bach's music, seems to be consciously reflected in the manner of scoring. The extent of the performers is quite remarkable considering the means at Bach's disposal. Contemporary with the writing of the Passion is a personal, written complaint of the inadequate vocal and orchestral talents at his disposal.⁵ However, he laid out the score in a grand way, calling for two full choruses, each with its orchestra of strings, flutes, oboes, continuo and organ. In his comprehensive historical study, Terry calculates that Bach used in his first performance a minimum of thirty-four singers in the two choruses and fifteen in each of the orchestras.⁶ Accustomed to the mass choruses and gigantic symphony orchestras of today, one can miss the significance of the size of Bach's performing group at this period of time, performing in a church. As scored, the St. Matthew Passion represents one of the composer's most extensive works.⁷

⁵Terry, op. cit., p. 10.

⁶Ibid., p. 11.

⁷Geiringer, op. cit., p. 235.

The construction of the parts of the St. Matthew Passion is a study in the reverent and faithful reproduction of the Biblical account. In addition we note the schematic importance given to the chorales. The division into two parts is based on the liturgical use of the Passion. The publication of Picander's text in 1729 indicates this division with the headings "Vor der Predigt" and "Nach der Predigt."⁸ In any worship in which the Passion was to be performed, it was not only natural but even necessary to divide the presentation because of the span of attention.

The elaborate scoring of the introductory "Kommt, ihr Töchter" and the final farewell "Wir setzen uns mit tränen nieder" stand in contrast to the closing chorus of Part I, "O Mensch, bewein' dein' Sünde gross," and the opening aria and chorus of Part II. The "O Mensch" chorale is generally thought to be a later addition to the score, appearing first in Bach's own copy of the St. Matthew Passion which he wrote considerably later than 1729.⁹ The alto aria with accompanying chorus that begins Part II depends on the opening chorus in its elaboration on the Daughter of Zion motif. In addition, at least one of the foremost Bach commentators sees the lesser, "artificial" side of Picander shown in the picture of the Chorus, representing the Christians, joining the

⁸James Lyons, from the "Recording Notes" of St. Matthew Passion, conducted by Hermann Scherchen (New York: Westminster Recording Co., Inc., 1956).

⁹Terry, op. cit., p. 14.

Daughter of Zion in a vain search for Jesus following His capture in Gethsemane's Garden.¹⁰ Against the idea of a natural, inherent division of the Passion at the halfway point are factors which point to the original inconclusiveness of the musical sections framing such a division. Also, in the Biblical account of the Passion in St. Matthew, there is nothing that indicates an important break in thought at this point. Bach constructs the Passion by alternating the presentation of the Scriptural account with commentaries in either aria or chorale form. Terry, operating on this broad basis for division together with a sense for dramatic scenes, finds sixteen different parts.¹¹ Fourteen represent different scenes of action; two consist of introductory sections to each major part.

Part I

<u>Title</u>	<u>Score Reference</u>
I. Prologue	1-3
II. Conspiracy of Jewish Leaders	4,5
III. Bethany	6-10
IV. Judas	11,12
V. Institution of Lord's Supper	13-19
VI. Mount of Olives	20-23
VII. Gethsemane (Prayer)	24-31
VIII. Gethsemane (Betrayal)	32-35

Part II

IX. Prologue	36
X. Before Caiphas	37-46
XI. Peter's Denial	47-49

¹⁰Ibid., p. 13.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 17ff.

XII.	Judas' End	50,51
XIII.	Before Pilate	52-63
XIV.	Calvary	64-70
XV.	Death of Christ	71,72
XVI.	Burial	73-78.

Such a division shows a schematic pattern: (a) Recitative; (b) Aria; (c) Chorale. The pattern can hardly be said to be slavishly followed. Sections III, V, and XII are examples of arias which conclude a scene. Likewise chorales are often inserted in the middle of a scene as in Sections X and XIII. The most consistent use of this pattern is in the opening recitative. Here Bach adheres to the declarative, straightforward presentation of the Gospel account. Only in the introductory choruses beginning each of the major Parts is a scene opened with anything else than this Scriptural recitative.

According to the inference of the pattern, a tentative order of importance is given: (a) The authoritative Gospel account; (b) The commentary of the chorale (the more objective voice of the Church); (c) The commentary of the arias (the personal response of the individual).

The Gospel account taken from Matthew, the basis of the Passion structure, is considerably longer than that of the St. John Passion. A total of one hundred and forty-one verses are used from the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh chapters of Matthew, as compared to only eighty-two verses

from John in the latter work.¹² Bach's treatment of the text, both in the literal rendition of Luther's translation and in the declarative, straight-forward style, reflects his underlying attitude toward Scripture. The recitatives resemble the reading of the pericopic selections and thus harmonize exactly with the liturgical setting of which the entire Passion is a part.

Although the accompaniment of the Evangelist's recitatives is confined to the basses and organ only, there are instances where Bach uses the recitative to achieve a highly dramatic effect.¹³ The crying of Peter (No. 47) is portrayed by a vocal melisma of great intensity. In the narration of the rending of the Temple veil and the earthquake (No. 73), the bass accompaniment is given a strikingly descriptive line. This was not an innovation with Bach; others had done it before. However, Bach's sparing use of this device in the narrative portions results in an effect more deeply moving and expressive.¹⁴ Bach also retains the custom of setting off the words of Christ in a distinctive way.¹⁵ He gives the accompaniment to the orchestra, in

¹²Charles Sanford Terry, The Music of Bach (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 77.

¹³Geiringer, op. cit., p. 237.

¹⁴Basil Smallman, The Background of Passion Music (London: Northumberland Press, Ltd., 1957), p. 50.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 51.

deliberate contrast with the other soloists, who are supported only by the basses and an occasional organ.¹⁶

Bach's use of the chorale in the St. Matthew Passion constitutes a departure from the usual custom. Although Heinrich Schütz had used the Lutheran chorale in his rendition of The Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross, Bach's stress indicates that it was more than a convenient form to close off particular scenes.¹⁷ Noteworthy in Bach's use of the chorales of the St. Matthew Passion is the repeated use of the Lenten hymn, "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden." It occurs once with the popular text and four other times throughout the Passion, thus contributing to the musical unity of the work.¹⁸ Bach's careful use of all his chorales is graphically seen in the selection of the words and harmonizations for this hymn.

Some advance the opinion that Bach's use of chorales showed an appreciation of the religious connotation that was stirred up by the mere use of the form, an appreciation that surmounted the importance of hearing the words. Smallman states that the power of musical association was so strong

¹⁶J. A. Maitland, editor, Oxford History of Music (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), p. 37.

¹⁷Walter E. Buszin, The Doctrine of the Universal Priesthood and its Influence upon the Liturgies and Music of the Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), p. 31.

¹⁸Geiringer, op. cit., p. 238.

that the audibility of words was often of little account.¹⁹ However, this is hardly in keeping with the meticulous manner in which Bach chose the verse texts from the heritage of Lutheran chorales. Schweitzer points out that one can not find any words more fitting to the occasions than those Bach chose.²⁰ Terry says bluntly that Bach and the Lutheran hymn-book are synonymous.²¹

Only the remaining portions of the Passion are those in which Bach employed the services of the poet, C. F. Henrici, better known by his pen name, Picander. In all of Bach's professional associations with the man, the St. Matthew Passion shows the smallest degree of Picander's usual style and the highest of Bach's own influence. Historically, the record of the publication of Picander's libretto on Easter, 1729 can be contrasted with the entire text of the St. Matthew Passion. Significant omissions are all of the narrative sections as well as the entire body of chorale texts.²² Even in the final form of the remaining sections, particularly the large opening and closing choruses, Bach exerted his control. The pronoun form in the title of the opening chorus, "Kommt

¹⁹Smallman, op. cit., p. 79.

²⁰Albert Schweitzer, J. S. Bach, translated by Ernest Newman (New York: MacMillan, 1950), II, 415.

²¹Charles Sanford Terry, Bach: The Historical Approach (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), p. 115.

²²Terry, The Music of Bach, p. 77.

ihre Töchter" is the remnant of Picander's original scheme of an aria in which these words are addressed to the stereotyped figure of the Daughter of Zion.²³ Bach conceived of a grander setting, composed the music for double chorus with chorale descant, and referred the words to the worshipping congregation. The addition of the chorale, "O Mensch, bewein' dein' Sünde gross" (No. 35), discussed above,²⁴ is another indication of Bach's control.

Evidently, Bach's cooperation and influence was an excellent stimulus to Picander. The arias and aria-like "recitatives" of the Passion are generally conceded to be far superior to Picander's usual work.²⁵ One of Picander's Passion texts dating from 1725 is characterized by rhymed phrases of the Gospel text, and a tendency toward insincerity and poor taste. An example is his treatment of the Via Dolorosa account. In it the women following the Savior are described as proceeding "not on foot, but swimming in the torrents of their tears."²⁶

The musical treatment of the poetic texts has caused some disagreement. Those whose thesis is the essentially Germanic, conservative nature of Bach's music see only token

²³Schweitzer, op. cit., p. 211.

²⁴Supra, p. 34.

²⁵Schweitzer, op. cit., p. 210.

²⁶Smallman, op. cit., p. 13.

reference to the Italian influences in the arias.²⁷ More objective presentations seem to agree that Bach's music was never confined to any particular forms, but that it shows a mastery of all the ancient and contemporary styles. They see a marked tendency toward an "ornamental" style of vocal writing in the arias of the St. Matthew Passion.²⁸

Bach's own directions for the use of the two choirs indicate his concern for an accurate portrayal of even the implied setting of the Passion history. In those sections where the Biblical text is treated by the chorus, it is the first choir, otherwise known as the cantata choir that is selected. The one exception to this is a short selection of Number One hundred thirty-nine in which the two false witnesses are represented by the alto and tenor of the second choir.²⁹ The purpose seems to be to use the better choir for the more important role.

Bach also shows care in combining the choirs on the words of the Jewish leaders or populace. This is a conscious attempt to contrast their outbursts with those of the followers of Christ, in which only one of the choirs usually sings.³⁰ The resulting picture is one of a great majority

²⁷C. H. Parry, Johann Sebastian Bach (New York: G. P. Pietnam's Sons, 1909), pp. 267ff.

²⁸Smallman, op. cit., p. 100.

²⁹Terry, The Music of Bach, p. 78.

³⁰Terry, Bach: The Passions, p. 12.

of voices speaking against Christ throughout the Passion.

Section One (1-3)

The total effect of the opening chorus is one of monumental proportions. The mood is one of excitement rather than quiet meditation. Both the chorale melody and the terse questions with their responses point up the central figure of the Passion as the Lamb of God. This basic picture is presented most clearly by St. John in his Gospel, but is basic to all the Gospel presentations of the Atonement as the sacrifice for sin. The contrast between "His innocence" and "our offense" is introduced here for the first time, and becomes an ever recurring refrain in the following aria and chorale responses. Thus not only the Atonement is presented, but its vicarious nature is emphasized.

Already noted is the fact that Bach toned down the allegorical picture of the Daughter of Zion aria which Picander had envisioned. In its place, Bach seems to have substituted the picture of a milling, excited crowd, possibly thinking of the scene on the road to Calvary.³¹

The initial recitative is followed by the chorale, "Herzliebster Jesu," which illustrates the summarizing function of many of the St. Matthew Passion chorales. Bach may well have taken his cue for choosing this verse from the

³¹Ibid., p. 17.

contrast of divine innocence and human guilt in "Kommt, ihr Töchter." This particular text is placed in a similar position in the St. John Passion. The tune is repeated twice in this work (Nos. 25, 55).

Conspiracy of the Jewish Leaders (4 and 5)

The use of the Double Chorus in Number Five is the first instance of this device to express the majority of the enemies of Christ. This chorus is contrasted with Number Seven, where the words of the disciples are assigned to the First Choir only. It has been said that the aroused nature of this chorus conflicts with the actual intent of the text, with the conclusion that Bach is here sacrificing true meaning for the dramatic. However, the parallel text in Luke (22:2) indicates a real fear of the people among the Scribes and Pharisees. On the contrary, Bach's vigorous chorus reflects the faithfulness to the text.

Bethany (6-10)

Numbers Seven and Eight reflect Bach's attention to contrast. The harsh, crude words of the disciples in condemnation stand out all the more when Jesus' own approval is voiced in compassionate terms. To the confessed sinner the account stresses the completeness of Christ's Atonement; that it was meant to have universal scope and power. This essentially warm and loving picture of God is most easily seen as

a result of the contrast.³²

The violins, which had become silent, resume their role on the words, "Wo dies Evangelium gepredigt wird in der ganzen Welt." The treatment of the entire narrative section here reflects a strong foretaste of the ultimate victory of Christ. These hints become a chain of references of this kind, tempering the tragedy of the Passion text and, in a broad way, pointing to the resurrection.³³

"Du lieber Heiland du" (No. 9) serves as a bridge between the Scripture reading and the full-blown aria form. Here and elsewhere Bach paraphrases the text in these so-called "recitatives," coupling this with a reaction of the believing Christian. Following the "recitative," in all but three cases, the aria is sung by the same soloist.

In this initial aria of the St. Matthew Passion, Bach uses a simple chromatic progression (C#, D, C#, B#) for a fortunate rendering together with the words "Buss and Reu."³⁴ By this use of "Affektenlehre" Bach is describing a God-pleasing repentance as one which is heartfelt and not superficial. Number Ten acts in the place of a summary in this case, calling men to a repentance in pondering the events of the Passion history. Bach's dramatic pictorialism comes

³²Ibid., p. 21.

³³Ibid., p. 22.

³⁴Theodore Hoelty-Nickel, editor, The Little Bach Book (Valparaiso, Ind.: Valparaiso University Press, 1950), p. 44.

forth in his treatment of the words, "Das die Tropfen meiner Zähren" in a musical figure of descending, broken chords known as the "teardrop" figure.³⁵ It seems quite fitting and not without design that the first larger section of the Passion, written to be performed in the Lenten season of the church year, should have as its purpose the preaching of repentance.

Judas' Plot (11 and 12)

This section completes the "background" material, setting the scene for the narrative sections that follow.

Lord's Supper (13-19)

Bach introduces this section with a change of key, shifting from B Minor to the related G Major.³⁶ This conscious attempt at an uplifting of spirit as the account of the feast of joy and thanksgiving is described can be paralleled with the opening preface to the Communion liturgy, "Lift up your hearts." However, the mood quickly returns to the minor with the reference to the betrayer. Number Fifteen includes the realistically written "Lord, is it I?" Again, Bach has scrupulously followed the cue of the Gospel record, which assigns to Judas the same question in a separate place distinct from the others' exclamations. The

³⁵Terry, Bach: The Passions, p. 10.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 26f.

eleven chorus exclamations in Number Fifteen clearly refer to the questions of each of the disciples except Judas.

The chorale that follows is a prime example of the objective manner in which Bach's choice of texts involves the worshipper personally. There is no thought here of the correct answer to the question; the answer is "yes" for all.

The Words of Institution are set to music that departs from the usual style of the narrative. In its lyrical nature it is compared more nearly to the arias themselves.³⁷ In a scene in which there are relatively few interruptions for the "recitative"--aria response, the lyrical setting of these words is a discreet and modest use of the ornamental style. The rising figure that accompanies the words, "This is my blood of the New Testament" recalls a similar treatment in Number Nine and is another example of the underlying motif of final victory.³⁸

More important than the descriptive musical figure to portray the scattering of the sheep³⁹ is the recurring ascending notes accompanying the prophecy, "Wann Ich aber auf-erstehe."⁴⁰ These words of clear reference to the glorious conclusion of Christ's sacrificial Atonement evoke a response

³⁷Smallman, op. cit., p. 58.

³⁸Terry, Bach: The Passions, p. 17.

³⁹Ibid., p. 30.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 30f.

in the Chorale "Erkenne mich, mein Hüter" which has strong eschatological flavor. "Mein Hirte, nimm mich an," is supplemented and expounded by the closing "mit mancher Himmelslust."

The Chorale of Number Twenty-three, following the positive answer of loyalty by Peter, refrains from sharply rebuking him. Rather the worshipping audience is guided to an identification with Peter.

The two chorales for this scene mark the first appearances of the Haupt-Chorale of the St. Matthew Passion.

Gethsemane--Prayer (24-31)

The opening recitative exhibits another pictorial device used by Bach, the "pulsebeat" type of bass, used here for the expression of grief.⁴¹ The throbbing bass is carried over into the aria, "O Schmerz! Hier zittert das gequälte Herz." In this eloquent manner the intensely real sufferings of Jesus are portrayed. Bach could hardly have found a more effective way to proclaim the true humanity of Christ.⁴²

The refrain of Christ's work accomplished for us is stressed again in the text, "Meinen Tod büsset seiner Seelen Not. Sein Trauern machet mich voll Freuden." The closing line would seem to be a key to the manner in which Bach treats

⁴¹Ibid., p. 34.

⁴²Geiringer, op. cit., p. 282.

much of the Passion. "Sein verdienstlich Leiden Recht bitter und doch süsse sein." The Passion is the most effective Law as well as Gospel preaching. As such it is both "bitter" and "sweet."

Aria Number Twenty-eight has a consistent form of short, descending figures which are written to describe the bowing of Jesus' head in submission to the Father's will.⁴³

The powerful thrust that this scene can have on the Christian life of prayer is given as the purpose of this section in the closing chorale. Although "Was mein Gott will, das gescheh' allzeit" does not mention prayer specifically, the obvious reference to Jesus' Gethsemane submission to the Father's will makes the equally obvious application to the Christian attitude in prayer.

Gethsemane--Betrayal (32-35)

Musically the duet and the following chorus for double choir are a study in dramatic effect and musical unity. Theologically they do not seem to contribute much to the progression of thought here.

The culminating effect of the chorales at the end of many of the sections is seen once again in the case of "O Mensch, bewein' dein' Sünde gross." The text is the message of the First Part of the Passion in capsule form,

⁴³Terry, Bach: The Passions, p. 35.

interpreting the facts of Christ's incarnation, life and imminent death in terms of God's plan of forgiveness of sins for all.

Prologue (36)

The Introduction of the Second Part of the Passion is not notable for its theological depth. The Alto Aria with Chorus is designed musically as an echo of the opening "Kommt, ihr Töchter" by its use of both solo and chorus and, particularly, in the repetition of the Daughter of Zion motif. However, the text dwells on the sentimental picture of the Daughter searching for her Lamb, exclaiming, "Was soll ich der Seele sagen, Wenn sie mich wird ängstlich fragen?" The Chorus joins in the search with the words, "So wollen wir mit dir ihn suchen."

Christ Before Caiaphas (37-46)

The chorale that follows immediately on the account of the High Priest's failure to find adequate false witness against Christ has evoked the comment that the timing and the text are not well chosen since they divert the attention from Christ and the trial.⁴⁴ However, the application is well made. The earthly enemies of Christ are often referred to as being "of the world." It was Christ's own prayer that

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 43.

His disciples be not "of this world." The eloquent plea of the chorale for aid is made to the One who Himself has shared the struggle against the world in these last hours of His earthly life and to the One who at the same time has the power to answer the prayer, "B'hüt mich vor falschen Tücken." In placing this chorale at this juncture, Bach is avoiding a later interruption that will do violence to the text.

The account of the two false witnesses, Number Thirty-nine, is strikingly done. The obviously pre-concocted nature of their story is indicated by the use of a strict canon style, implying an exact repetition of words.⁴⁵ Bach is not interested in showing how crafty (trügglich) the world is, as he is in exposing its evil deceptions.

The commentary of Numbers Forty and Forty-one is meant to point up the uniquely Christian virtue of joy in the persecution of falsche Zungen, a joy which Matthew enjoins earlier in the Sermon on the Mount record.⁴⁶

Another example of Bach's careful treatment of the text is seen in the Recitative Number Forty-two. The dramatic accompaniment to Christ's confession that He is the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven,⁴⁷ is more than the exploitation of a possibly dramatic cue of the text. It is

⁴⁵Geiringer, op. cit., pp. 237f.

⁴⁶Matthew 5:11,12.

⁴⁷Terry, Bach: The Passions, p. 44.

first of all in harmony with Bach's efforts to keep in the background the larger perspective of Christ's ultimate victory over the powers of darkness. Secondly, the violently unanimous condemnation of Number Forty-three, "Er ist des Todes schuldig," is most plausibly explained by the fact that the concept of the Son of Man was clearly Messianic to the Jewish mind through the prophecies of Daniel. Here, Bach's ornamentation of a recitative supplies musically what is not readily apparent.

The incident of the shameful spitting and smiting (Nos. 44 and 45) provides the occasion for the choice of the chorale "Wer hat dich so geschlagen." The verse, "Du bist ja nicht ein Sünder," is a summary reaction to the entire trial. Bach once again is using the chorale to sum up the section.

Peter's Denial (47-49)

The three accusations that Matthew records are treated by Bach in a progression of growing certainty, climaxing in the choral setting of the final charge, "Wahrlich, du bist auch einer von denen, denn deine Sprache verrät dich." The multiplicity of voices is justified by the words "die da standen."

The account of Peter's realization of guilt seems to indicate the suddenness with which Peter recalled the words of Christ at the instant of the cock's crowing. Bach chooses a unique way to do this. The words of denial and the crowing

of the cock are framed in musical phrases of indential intervals.⁴⁸

The following aria, "Erbarme dich, mein Gott," reminds one of the words and the settings of Jesus' story of the prayer of the publican in the Temple.⁴⁹

The significance of the selection of the Chorale (No. 49) lies in the last three lines, "Aber deine Gnad' und Huld Ist viel grösser als die Sunde, Die ich stets in mir befinde." Peter's remorse is here contrasted with that of Judas in its reliance upon the grace and forgiving love of Christ. Although presented with an opportunity for a highly emotional treatment of the text, Bach points out the importance of faith in Christ's work, not the degree of sorrow shown in true repentance.

Christ Before Pilate (52-63)

"Befiehl du deine Wege," Number Fifty-three, is conceived as a commentary on the unexplainable silence of Jesus during the trial before Pilate. Bach sees this as a Lordly silence; Christ has no need and no purpose to answer for Himself to any creature. Positively stated, the Lord of heaven and earth here chooses the way of suffering rather than self-acquittal. Only in such a Lord can one place the confidence and trust to guide all actions and decisions.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 47.

⁴⁹Luke 18:9-14.

The growing intensity of the mob is shown by the change of key used in the repetition of "Lass ihn kreuzigen." The entire piece is set a tone higher.⁵⁰

The chorale, "Wie wunderbarlich ist doch diese Strafe," becomes the vehicle for several Scriptural concepts. The wondrous love of Christ is the motivation for His act; the Atonement is basically a sacrifice which the Shepherd makes for His sheep, the Master for His servants.

The "recitative" and aria also express strongly the vicarious nature of Christ's death in the words, "Er nahm die Sünder auf und an" (No. 57) and "Dass das ewige Verderben und die Strafe des Gerichts Nicht auf meiner Seele Blicke" (No. 58). In addition, both the "recitative" and the aria impress the fact of Jesus' sinlessness with the words, "Sonst hat mein Jesus nichts getan" (No. 57), and "Von einer Sünde weiss er nichts" (No. 58).

The concluding pieces of the Trial Before Pilate (Nos. 60-63) dwell heavily on the physical torture endured by the Savior. In particular "Erbarm es Gott" is set on a syncopated figure which evidently was a device to show torture or scourging. Smallman points out that Händel used a similar figure in the Messiah for the accompaniment to the words, "He gave His back to the smiters."⁵¹ In "Können Tränen,"

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 53.

⁵¹Smallman, op. cit., p. 99.

Bach seems to retain the dotted rhythm deliberately. Here a picture of the believing heart as a sacrificial bowl to catch the Savior's blood has even prompted the translator of the text supplied by a modern recording of the St. Matthew Passion to substitute a wording totally different in sense.⁵²

The closing chorale is especially climactic. It is the fifth and final appearance of "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden," employing the original text. The chorale is not superior to the preceding aria in its tendency to avoid a detailed description of the sufferings of Jesus. The dissimilarity lies in the chorale's adherence to the Scriptural account, confining such a description with the words:

O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden,
 Voll Schmerz und voller Hohn!
 O Haupt, zu Spott gebunden
 Mit einer Dornenkron!⁵³

The superiority of the chorale text is seen more clearly in the thrust of the words that follow. The force of the text is in the disparity between the Lordship of Christ and His despised, rejected state. "O Haupt, sonst schön gezieret" and "Du edles Angesichte, vor dem sonst schrickt und scheut Das grosse Weltgerichte" give the chorale the objective purpose of portraying the Savior's state of humiliation while keeping to a minimum the sentimental expression more popular in Bach's time.

⁵²Lyons, op. cit., p. 12.

⁵³Ibid.

Calvary (64-72)

The occasion of Simon bearing the cross of Jesus brings forth the application of the bass "recitative"--aria pertaining to the afflictions or crosses of Christians. The faith expressed knows from whom all crosses come ("Mein Jesu, gib es immer her"), realizes that it ultimately benefits ("je mehr es unsrer Seele gut"), and is confident that no cross will be too difficult to bear ("Wird mein Leiden einst zu schwer, So hilf du mir es selber tragen").

The universal denunciation by those at the foot of the cross (Nos. 67 and 68) is used to set the stage for the intensely personal appeal of "Ach Golgotha" and "Sehet, Jesus hat die Hand" (Nos. 69 and 70). Jesus is called "der Segen und das Heil der Welt," who as the Sinless One is dying for the guilty. The alto solo and chorus combine in a setting once again reminiscent of the opening chorus. Here the terse questions are repeated as if asked by the individual introduced in Number Sixty-nine with the words, "Das gehet meiner Seele nah." The second question illustrates the evangelistic appeal that is made.

Sucht Erlösung, nehmt Erbarmen.

Suchet, Wo?

Suchet, in Jesu Armen.⁵⁴

The inference is that Bach saw in the picture of the crucified Christ the opportunity for the strongest appeal for

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 13.

faith in the entire Passion.

The Recitative (No. 71) is noteworthy for the treatment of the words of Jesus. It is at this point that the string accompaniment to all of Christ's words is dropped. This is more than dramatic effect for words of extreme emotion. As the presence of the "halo" effect for all the other verba Christi signified His divinity, so the absence of it here dramatizes the deepest point of Christ's humiliation.

The concluding Chorale "Wenn ich einmal soll scheiden" gives response to the scene on Calvary. The theme of comfort in the hour of death is a prominent one in Lutheran hymnology. Bach's particular choice here seems to be indicated by the last word of the recitative, "verschied." The use of this verb twice in the opening line of the chorale heightens its relevance. The anguish and pain Christ suffered are presented as having the power ("Kraft") to deliver in the hour of death.

Burial (73-75)

The indication of the text in the Recitative (No. 73) toward a multiple confession gives Bach the occasion for a forcibly clear witness, "Wahrlich, dieser ist Gottes Sohn gewesen."

The eternal significance of the cross together with the thankful attitude of the Christian is seen through the concluding portions of the Passion. The bass "recitative" (No.

74) carries the thought "Der Friedensschluss ist nun mit Gott gemacht, Denn Jesus hat sein Kreuz vollbracht." An even more eloquent expression of the ancient Danksagung which closed the Passion is the soprano line in "Nun ist der Herr zu Ruh gebracht: Habt lebenslang vor euer Leiden tausend Dank Dass ihr mein Seelenheil so wert geacht't."

The closing "Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder" (No. 78) constitutes a departure from the usual expression of thanksgiving. However, the tears and the grief expressed are set in the larger context of the gratitude for Christ's sacrificial death. The importance given to the entire act of burial and the prayer for peaceful rest seems to be grounded in the motivation that this is an act of worship and thanksgiving. Bach can therefore be said to be stressing the deed of love rather than its verbal expression.

Theological Significance of St. Matthew Passion Chorales

In selecting the chorales, an attempt is made to ascertain a body of Christian doctrines represented by those parts of the Passion directly chosen by Bach. The ruling influence of the Biblical text has been shown to be primary. The influence of Bach on his librettist is strong. Yet it is in the selection of the chorales themselves that we see the nature of Bach's own response to the text.

The chorales reveal a theology which above all else, is Christocentric. Whatever truth is presented is always in an

inseparable union with the person or work of Christ.

Man's sin

The classic presentation of man's sinfulness is the Chorale "O Mensch, bewein' dein' Sünde gross" (No. 35). This basic truth is contrasted with Christ's innocence (Nos. 3 and 46). It is also the cause of Christ's suffering (Nos. 16 and 35). The confession of sin is the God-pleasing purpose of any contemplation of sin (Nos. 16 and 49).

The atonement (vicarious satisfaction)

The vicarious nature of Christ's work is found in a great number of the chorales, but most implicitly in Numbers Sixteen, Twenty-six, Thirty-five and Fifty-five. The predominant picture is one of Jesus as the Substitute, taking the place of mankind under the judgment of God. Number Thirty-five stresses the sacrificial nature of Christ's work.

The person of Christ: divinity

The divinity of Christ is consciously presented in several ways. Chorales Number Three and Forty-six see it in His sinless life. Numbers Fifty-three and Sixty-three speak of His Lordship over creation. In addition, Christ's humiliation in Number Thirty-five is pictured as clear in the incarnation of the Godhead in Jesus.

In this connection the humanity of Christ is not stressed consciously. The thrust of the chorales is to assume as obvious His humanity, and to stress His divinity.

Results of the atonement

The benefits from Christ's work are given as the new life (No. 35), forgiveness from sin (No. 49), and deliverance in the hour of death (No. 72).

Faith

The significance of a lack of statements in the chorales on faith is noteworthy. The emphasis is to present Christ's work and words in such a way that they are to be believed. This is done by the personal nature of the chorales. However, they are characterized by a healthy kind of subjectivity which is always centered in the object of faith, Christ.

In the Christological emphasis of the chorales, we see an accurate reflection of the spirit and teachings of the Lutheran Church.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Passion as a musical form is traceable to medieval plainsong origins. It reflected the historical influence of polyphony in music by the introduction of the motet into its basic structure. The tradition of the Reformation was a homophonic style based on the plainsong. In addition, congregational participation through the chorale was made of prime importance. However, the significant changes in the Passion form eventually leaned toward the dramatic through the influence of the Italian opera and its religious counterpart, the oratorio. Through the work of Heinrich Schütz, the dominating influence of plainsong came to an end, and the aria and a more melodic recitative became indispensable. Concurrent with the music of Heinrich Schütz and Johann Sebastian Bach, many Passion texts began to reflect a sentimental, paraphrased treatment of the Passion narrative. Bach appears as the historical as well as musical climax to the development of the Passion. Set into an age in which a Passion could reflect any of the influences of the past, Bach used them all. He showed respect for the simple narrative style reminiscent of the plainsong, an inclination toward the use of arias and "recitatives" in the contemporary mode, and an affinity for a pervasive use of the Lutheran chorale. The product of this artistic culmination was not intended for the concert stage,

but was used exclusively by Bach as a form for worship.

The history of Bach's family, too, finds its culmination in Johann Sebastian Bach. At least seven generations of staunchly Lutheran musicians spawned a man whose training as well as heritage reflected the interests of music and theology. His genius in music is universally recognized. His orthodox adherence to the Lutheran faith, though equally demonstrable, is not always credited as having a major influence in his life and work. Soli Deo Gloria was his philosophy of music. His personal life repeatedly reflected conscious efforts to avoid the Pietistic, Reformed, and Rationalistic tendencies of his day. Evidences of his theological ability, such as his theological library, are in harmony with his ability to interpret Scriptural texts musically. The St. Matthew Passion, coming from a later, mature period of Bach's life, must be reckoned as the product of a musician and theologian.

The climactic nature of the St. Matthew Passion in musical history and in Bach's life is seen in the elaborate scoring of the piece. The construction of the work reveals a pattern according to fourteen different scenes. In their normal order of appearance, the concluding chorale is preceded by narrative accounts and the aria or "recitative" responses.

The narratives are set in a simple, objective manner. The several significant departures are indicated by the

Biblical text. The original libretto, though written by Picander, was thoroughly supervised and approved by Bach, as a study of other Picander texts shows. The chorales also serve as the most important reflection of Bach's theology. A brief study of the chorale texts shows a theology that is Christocentric throughout. The work of Christ is a universal vicarious atonement, made necessary by man's sinfulness and made valid by Christ's Godhead. The entire tenor of this work is geared to the responses of confession and faith.

This study has endeavored to show that Johann Sebastian Bach, in his monumental St. Matthew Passion, accurately reflects the spirit and teachings of the Lutheran Reformation, showing himself to be a skilled theologian and persuasive preacher through his musical treatment of the text.

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