

## Bach among the Heretics: Inferences from the Cantata Texts

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‘He [Bach] would notify the Superintendent that it had been forbidden him; if an objection were made *on account of the text*, it had already been performed several times’.<sup>1</sup>

Thus Johann Sebastian Bach responded on 17 March 1739 to the deputy town scribe<sup>2</sup> who had stated that upon an order of the Council, Bach had to cancel the forthcoming performance of the Passion (generally considered to be the St John, BWV 245),<sup>3</sup> due in only ten days, ‘until regular permission for the same is received’.

There are two inferences which derive from this incident. Firstly, the Superintendent, Deyling, who had habitually selected from three cantata texts the work to be set each Sunday,<sup>4</sup> had no part in inhibiting the St John Passion, BWV 245; Deyling had yet to be informed. This was a Council, not Consistory decision, one made by the secular authorities. Secondly, at some point, judging from Bach’s reaction, there *had* been an objection to the words of some piece or other of church music set by him. But what possible statement in any libretto set by Bach could have been held to represent a verbal crime – or even a heresy?

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<sup>1</sup> Christoph Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach, the Learned Musician* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 417 (emphasis P. S.).

<sup>2</sup> In fact this was the deputy funeral clerk, ‘aptly named Bienengräber’: Malcolm Boyd, *Bach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 201.

<sup>3</sup> Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach* (n. 1 above), p. 417.

<sup>4</sup> Günther Stiller, *Johann Sebastian Bach and Liturgical Life in Leipzig*, ed. Robin A. Leaver (St Louis: Concordia, c1984), p. 219, quoting Friedrich Rochlitz (1749-1842). ‘Even though Rochlitz is not always considered reliable in his assertions, there can hardly be serious doubt concerning the credibility of his report...’.

### The Passions

In his 1986 work *Bach among the Theologians* Jaroslav Pelikan suggests that the theological crux for each of the two great Passions differs.<sup>5</sup> The St John Passion stresses the image of 'Christus Victor': Christ is triumphant conqueror, breaking the bonds of death. By contrast, the St Matthew Passion is representative of the satisfaction/substitution theory developed by St Anselm: Christ is become the only offering sufficient to atone for the sinfulness of Man, and to pay the price required for divine forgiveness.<sup>6</sup> Now the tension between the two doctrines cannot here be adequately covered, save to point out that other works of Bach accommodate both images – Christ as Victor and Victim – simultaneously.<sup>7</sup> In BWV 78/4, for example, the tenor aria from Bach's chorale cantata *Jesu, der du meine Seele*, moves quickly from the Anselmian idea of 'The blood that cancels out my guilt' to 'Jesus stands at my side, so that I am heartened and victorious'.<sup>8</sup>

The choice of one or other of these emphases was not likely to be the cause of the 1739 decision. The possibility is that the Council were mistakenly thinking of another work.

### Universalism

What has, however, apparently not attracted attention is the theology of the less celebrated Passion by Bach.<sup>9</sup> The St Mark Passion, BWV 247, hangs partly on the dictum of the alto aria, 'Angenehmes mord-geschrey!' (no. 34 in the reconstruction by Simon Heighes), which is Anselmian in stating the substitution doctrine 'Jesus on the Cross must die/only to free me'. However, just at the point of Christ's death there are also the words of the aria 'Welt und Himmel' (no. 42): 'To all sinners he saith /he hath fulfilled his work /that Eden might be restored /which to us once was lost'.

If the stress is on 'Allen Sündern' (To all sinners) then there is a theological inference that *all* sinners are saved; certainly not a Calvinist assumption<sup>10</sup> but also contradicting the Lutheran position on salvation, since the need for justification through faith by grace is not made explicit. This, the Universalist controversy,

<sup>5</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Bach among the Theologians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 102- 115.

<sup>6</sup> See also Elke Axmacher, 'Aus Liebe will mein Heyland sterben': *Untersuchungen zum Wandel des Passionsverständnisses im frühen 18. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Hänssler, c1984).

<sup>7</sup> Pelikan, *Bach* (n. 5 above), pp. 87-88, observes this juxtaposition in the context of the final chorale of the Christmas Oratorio, BWV 248.

<sup>8</sup> That these images were not hermeneutically separated in early Lutheranism is graphically illustrated by Lukas Cranach's altar painting in the Stadtkirche ('Herderkirche') in Weimar, under which masterpiece Bach attended divine service and had six children baptised. Christ is doubly represented in this painting: crucified, but also as the risen Christ; the image of the Lamb is added to emphasise the sacrificial nature of the Atonement.

<sup>9</sup> Translation by David Hicks. The source-cantata BWV 198 by the enlightenment writer Johann Christoph Gottsched is almost totally devoid of Christian reference.

<sup>10</sup> Claude B. Moss, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Dogmatic Theology* (London: S.P.C.K., 1965), p. 191.

attracted the Pietist Johanna Eleanora Petersen (1644-1724) to the view that a God of Love could not be involved in the 'alleged damnation of the unbelieving'. She objected to predestination, but also to the Lutheran position, 'which indeed proceeded from God's universal will for salvation, but nevertheless saw only a small number of people attaining salvation'.<sup>11</sup>

Closer in time and space to Bach is the tendency of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz to adopt a Universalist position in his late writings.<sup>12</sup> In the St Mark Passion the movement placed immediately after the expiry of Christ (no. 40) makes no qualification as to the constituency of the saved and could thus have offended orthodox Lutherans and caused the (mistaken) reaction of the authorities. Universalism had been condemned by the Church at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 533; and Lutherans believing in the atonement would particularly detect that universal salvation independent of faith would undermine a central tenet.

### Quietism

Bach's first work performed at Leipzig after his appointment, BWV 75, *Die Elenden sollen essen*, concludes with the chorale, 'Was Gott thut, das ist wohlgetan' (Whatever God does, is just). Along with the similar sentiments of 'Was mein Gott will, das g'scheh allzeit', the idea of passivity towards the divine will recurs in frequent settings of these chorales and in dozens of arias, including especially the Passions, where resignation to God is advocated. Such emphases, orthodox except when carried to extremes, tend towards the doctrines of Quietism which were circulating in Europe through the activities of two formidable women, Antoinette Bourignon (1616-1680) and Jeanne Guyon (1614-1717).<sup>13</sup>

Both aroused 'enthusiastic admiration' in England and Germany despite persecution and imprisonment. For Bourignon, grace came irresistibly from God; 'we will taste Him by the repose and comfort of our passions [...] You need not be astonished that I find no more pleasure in earthly things; these heavenly things take me up entirely'. While uncongenial to the Lutheran call to cultivate an active faith, elements of this thinking are clearly present in several cantatas; for example, BWV 27 (*Good night, O world-tumult*), BWV 95 (*Now, false world, I have nothing to do with you*) or BWV 8 (*Naught that I desire is of this world*).

This line of thinking was translated into German in the 1680s and later in the so-called Berleburg Bible of 1740, whose glosses are biased towards Pietist and Quietist ideas. While its influence is less direct than Pietism, the tendency not to lure adherents away from established churches made the teaching capable of

<sup>11</sup> Martin H. Jung, 'Johanna Eleonora Petersen (1644-1724)', *The Pietist Theologians*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 147-60, here 154.

<sup>12</sup> The treatment in *Théodicée* of evil as a mere imperfection sits well with Universalism.

<sup>13</sup> On Guyon, see *The Pietist Theologians* (n. 11 above), pp. 161-73; Phyllis Thompson, *Madam Guyon: Martyr of the Holy Spirit* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986); on Bourignon, see Alexander Robertson Macewen, *Antoinette Bourignon: Quietist* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910).

absorption into Lutheranism.<sup>14</sup> Quietist sentiments of emptying and crucifixion of the self permeate the cantata texts without there being any specific connectivity.

Contemporaneously with the suppression of the Jansenists by the bull *Unigenitus* in 1713, the related Quietist movement shrank back and the increase of scientific rationalism put paid to the otherworldly longueurs of the Quietists. Nevertheless, the survival of the cantatas of Bach from the period of reception of Quietism allows the modern listener to hear the echoes in a Lutheran setting of the call for otherworldliness. These calls are striking also in the context of the opulent prosperity of contemporary Leipzig,<sup>15</sup> calls usually uncongenial to the mercantile world.<sup>16</sup>

A dramatic statement of the idea of resignation to the divine will comes in the Picander text for BWV 188, 'Even though the Lord would kill me/ My hope still rests in Him'. Even St Augustine's famous dictum, 'Dilige et quod vis fac', is less explicit. Quietism is thus a contender as the source of the 1739 objection, albeit indirectly.<sup>17</sup>

### Socinianism

The Calov Bible in Bach's library survives to this day, but Bach did not apparently own the same author's *Socinismus Profligatus*, published in 1684. Arrests occurred in Berlin in 1694 and the sect was constantly opposed by Lutherans<sup>18</sup> as anti-Trinitarian, especially since it held that Christ did not exist before His birth. Generally, the followers of the early pacifist Fausto Paolo Sozzini (1539-1604) held unorthodox views of the Trinity, indeed were considered to deny it. Socinians consorted with the Transylvanians in the short but remarkable period (1559-1571) when the Court and the Bishop (Dàvid) was anti-Trinitarian.

Naturally, given the Christocentric emphasis in Lutheranism, the related idea that Christ was a junior form of God ('Deo subalterno') was inimical; so were sentiments attributing to Him a nature purely human, even if worshipped as a God. This view was also attacked by a leading Pietist, Johanna Eleonora Petersen, who believed in the pre-existence of the human nature of Christ, the 'heavenly God-man'. Madame Bourignon held a very unorthodox view of the Incarnation,

<sup>14</sup> It was also considered a threat by Calvinists; the Church of Scotland until 1889 made ordinands swear that they were not Bourignonites! See MacEwen, *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> Wolff (n. 1 above), p. 239. He suggests BWV 75 was written at Cöthen.

<sup>16</sup> Thompson (n. 13 above), p. 132: Mme Guyon is advised by the Abbé Fénelon to 'yield obedience, and to go wherever it may lead us, however dark and mysterious the path may now appear.'

<sup>17</sup> Further on Quietism, and especially on Gottfried Arnold, see Carol K. Baron, 'Tumultuous Philosophers, Pious Rebels, Revolutionary Teachers, Pedantic Clerics, Vengeful Bureaucrats, Threatened Tyrants, Worldly Mystics: The Religious World Bach Inherited', *Bach's Changing World: Voices in the Community*, ed. C. K. Baron, (Rochester University Press, 2006), pp. 35-85, here 69. Miguel de Molinos's Quietist tract *Guida Spirituale* (1675) was translated into Latin in Leipzig in 1687 by August Hermann Francke (1663-1727).

<sup>18</sup> And Anglicans: Bishop Edward Stillingfleet (1635-1699) rounded on John Locke's *Essay* of 1695 supporting Socinian views, including denial of original sin.

namely that Christ was born twice as a Man, once in Adam and secondly as Son of Mary.<sup>19</sup>

It is arguable that the librettist behind BWV 116, *Du Friedefürst, Herr Jesu Christ*, is adopting either the Petersen view, or possibly a position in Lutheranism which places great emphasis on the *homoousios*, the unity of the Father and Son.<sup>20</sup> It is an unusual formula regarding the Incarnation and endows Jesus with human traits even before His birth (BWV116/4):

Es brach ja dein erbarmend Herz,  
Als der Gefallnen Schmerz  
Dich zu uns in die Welt getrieben...

(Did not Thy merciful heart abreak  
When the anguish of fallen man  
Drove Thee to us into the world...)

The conventional doctrine, focused on the action of God the Father, is to be found in the incipit of BWV 68, 'Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt' (So God loved the world, that He gave his only Son).

There are a number of remarkable features to the quoted *Dictum* of BWV 116/4. God the Father has no explicit role in the action; the traditional exegesis of the Incarnation as the supreme exemplar of the obedient love of the Father by the Son is absent. While the passage swipes clearly at Socinian denials, it risks another 'heresy' by depicting the divine Jesus (or even God) as suffering in Heaven (through the broken heart, driven through anguish);<sup>21</sup> in other words, the Theopaschite error; for in classical theology none of the Persons of God in heaven suffers and Jesus had to become man for this to be possible.

That Bach is conscious in this movement that Trinitarian theological significance is implied is perhaps suggested by his setting the section as a *terzetto*, one of only three in the whole of the cantatas.<sup>22</sup> The work is for the 25th

<sup>19</sup> Macewen (n. 13 above), p. 86. She also held that Christ was bi-sexual, 'endowed with the principle of fecundity' (*ibid.*, p. 86).

<sup>20</sup> Klaas Zwanepol, *Een menselijke God. De betekenis van Christus van Luther* (Den Haag: Zoetermeer, 2001), English summary: Klaas Zwanepol, 'A Human God: Some Remarks on Luther's Christology', *Concordia Journal* 30 (2004), 40-53, here 44: 'Luther emphasised this union to the utmost even when it hardly seems bearable for "decent" theology [...] Luther alludes to a preexistent union of God with humanity as He was already present in the womb of Mary, and even to a crucifixion from eternity.'

<sup>21</sup> Melvin P. Unger, *Handbook of Bach's Sacred Cantata Texts* (Lanham/MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996), p. 409, notes that an OT passage, Jeremiah 31:20, has God's heart 'yearn for Ephraim' (RSV), whereas this is translated by Luther as 'bricht mir mein Herz'.

<sup>22</sup> The others are: BWV 150/5, which has no obvious Trinitarian reference (but has 41 bars, numerologically J S BACH); and BWV 122/4, which is a trio SAT against alto, 'If God is appeased and our Friend/How blessed are we who believe in him'. This is Anselmian and Solfideist but not Trinitarian as such.

and final Sunday after Trinity 1724 and finishes the Christian year with a proposition that theologians have been debating hotly even into modern times.

### Theopaschitism/ Patripassionism

This idea of the suffering God, which marches also as Sabellianism in the early Church, is one of the most recurrent of the early 'heresies' and is now well rooted in contemporary liberal Anglicanism and Lutheranism as the result of speculation by leading theologians such as Charles Hartshorne and Jürgen Moltmann.<sup>23</sup> The doctrine has been related back to Luther as an extreme facet of his *theologia crucis*.

Stapert notes a passage in BWV 199, *Mein Herze schwimmt im Blut*, which tends to Patripassionism (BWV 199/3):

Ach ja! Sein Herze bricht!  
(Ah yes! His [God's] heart breaks!)

'These words reveal a suffering God, a God whose mercy runs so deep that his heart breaks!' writes Stapert.<sup>24</sup> However, the contrary view notes that such passages derive from the Old Testament in which God often has human attributes, notably anger ('Zorn').<sup>25</sup> These attributes are understood figuratively since the all-knowing and compassionate God has no need of the sensory apparatus of his creatures.<sup>26</sup>

The sources for Luther's position were not printed or circulated until the late nineteenth century and in any event Luther's 'theopaschitism' did not go as far as the ideas of the 'suffering God' which developed in nineteenth and twentieth-century theology.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the church historian Andrew Drummond in reviewing scholastic Lutheranism notes that 'Pulpiteers of the seventeenth century were not content with demolishing living heresies; they turned their attention to dead ones - Patripassionism, Valentinianism, and the rest.'<sup>28</sup>

It is therefore a safer interpretation of the text of BWV 116/4 to say that it reflects Luther's insistence on the complete humanity of God in Christ, a humanity which is necessary to *communicatio idiomatum*, the uniting of the fully divine and the fully human. BWV 199, whose text is by Lehms, cannot be

<sup>23</sup> Carl E. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), pp. 84-85 and 103; Richard E. Creel, *An Essay in Divine Impassibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

<sup>24</sup> Calvin R. Stapert, *My Only Comfort: Death, Deliverance and Discipleship in the Music of J. S. Bach*, (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000), p.71.

<sup>25</sup> Lucia Häselbock, *Bach-Textlexikon* (Kassel etc., 2004), p.201, lists fourteen incidences of 'Gottes Zorn' in the cantatas.

<sup>26</sup> Creel (n. 13 above), p. 127, discussing the theory of Lactantius (AD 260-330).

<sup>27</sup> Zwanepol (n. 45 above), p.45.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew L. Drummond, *German Protestantism since Luther* (London: Epworth, 1951), p. 33: 'In 1658 the preacher Jacob Andreae published a volume of sermons divided into parts corresponding to the four quarters of the year; each quarter was assigned to smiting in turn Papists, Zwinglians, Schwenckfeldians, and Anabaptists. *Odium theologicum victor!*'

explained away thus since it is one of several cantatas in which there is no mention of Christ at all; it is strictly speaking Patripassionist. In this respect Lehms is anticipating the emphasis of modern Lutheran theology; but since this is also a Weimar work, it is most unlikely to have been a *casus belli* for the Leipzig councillors.

### Pietism

In any discussion of Bach's orthodoxy the question of Pietism arises, namely, the series of writers and groups devoted to pursuing a personal spiritual relationship alongside or even outside the operations of Lutheran orthodoxy.

'Was Bach a Pietist?' is a question answered by Robin Leaver convincingly in the negative, in response to mid-twentieth century suggestions that this is possibly so.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, whatever heresy considerations occasioned the rejection of the Passion in 1739, it is likely that the objectors on the Council included Pietists; so Pietism *ipso facto* would not be the complaint.<sup>30</sup> The evidence of Bach's openness, however, to Pietist sentiments include:

(1) Bach's library, which includes books by Pietists such as Johann Arndt, Philipp Jacob Spener and Heinrich Müller, but also contains works by many more orthodox Lutherans, especially August Pfeiffer and Calov.<sup>31</sup> It is also the case that the one surviving Bach-owned hymnbook, that of the Bohemian Brotherhood,<sup>32</sup> is linked to the (Moravian) Zinzendorff community which represents an early proto-Pietist movement alongside Lutheranism;

(2) the chorales of the St John and St Matthew Passions, which are predominantly Pietist in origin and *affekt*;<sup>33</sup> and

(3) the cantatas which occasionally have language of a Pietist temper, such as 'Washed in Thy death-sweat' (BWV 113), 'Hidden deep in Thy wounds' (BWV 199), or Jesus-litanies such as the heartfelt tenor-bass duet BWV 190/4, where the name of Our Lord is repeatedly invoked.

The central point is nevertheless that the various forms of Pietism (Moravianism excepted) were anti-music and especially anti-liturgy. This is true even where, as in the case of Müller, simple hymns were favoured: he condemned the 'four dumb church idols' of Lutheranism: the 'baptismal font, pulpit, confessional chair, and altar.'<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Robin A. Leaver, 'Bach and Pietism: Similarities Today', *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 55/1, (January 1991), discussing Erik Routley's *Church Music and Theology* (1959).

<sup>30</sup> Tanya Kevorkian, *Baroque Piety: Religion, Society and Music in Leipzig 1650-1750* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 216: 'Clerics lost power relative to councilors'.

<sup>31</sup> Robin A. Leaver, *Bachs Theologische Bibliothek* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1983).

<sup>32</sup> Wolff (n. 1 above), p. 335 and 499, n. 90.

<sup>33</sup> Werner Neumann, *Sämtliche von Johann Sebastian Bach vertonte Texte* (Leipzig, 1974).

<sup>34</sup> K. James Stein, 'Philipp Jakob Spener', *The Pietist Theologians* (n. 11 above), pp. 84-99, here 94.

What seems more likely is that Lutheran writers of the cantata libretti were engaged in a syncretising process whereby the unobjectionable elements of Pietism were submerged in the Lutheran environment. Such a process is apparent in considering the *Schemelli-Gesangbuch* collection BWV 439-507, designed to compete with Pietist hymnody by including simple devotional texts aimed at an interior religiosity similar in feeling to the evangelical aims of the Pietists.<sup>35</sup> In the cantata texts, a balance of personal and corporate worship was achieved, no doubt with the aim of attracting and retaining the congregations.<sup>36</sup>

### Pietism and the Probestück BWV 22

Bach was supplied with two texts for his *Probestück* (audition piece) in February 1723, intended to be played before and after the sermon; it has been suggested that the author was Gottfried Lange, the Burgomaster and long-term Bach ally.<sup>37</sup> Bach extends BWV 23 by the addition of the eucharistic 'Christe, du Lamm Gottes'. What I suggest is that the theological bandwidth of the two works became extended and the result was that together the works accommodated every significant strand of religious opinion active in Leipzig at the time.

Pietism itself had already been suppressed in Leipzig with the banning of Francke under the initiative of his former teacher Johann Benedikt Carpzov II in 1690;<sup>38</sup> thereafter Pietism retreated to Halle so as to progress under the empathy or benign indifference of the Hohenzollern. Nevertheless, as Carol Baron observes, 'the Leipzig City Council approved a mutually satisfactory compromise, accommodating well-to-do citizens with Pietist or other heterodox leanings, while placing them in facilities under the authority of the local consistory'.<sup>39</sup>

One badge of Pietist leanings was to echo the central dictum of August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), which insists on personal conversion in life as a hallmark of justification.<sup>40</sup> This sentiment is occasionally found in the cantatas; but most notably, in the *Probestück*, *Jesu nahm zu sich die Zwölfe* (BWV 22), whose final chorale prays that Jesus may 'weaken the old man / that the new man may live', following the aria BWV 22/4 which calls for renunciation of the flesh, personal transformation and spiritual mortification.

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<sup>35</sup> I am grateful to Thomas Braatz for this observation. It is also interesting that in the late 1730s Bach expands the number of pure settings of chorales as cantatas *per omnes versus* to exactly ten. Each writer, including Luther, has just one to his name. The Pietist, Paul Gerhardt, though 19 of his chorales are set 30 times by Bach, is not represented in this decalogue of orthodox Lutheranism.

<sup>36</sup> Stiller (n. 4 above), p. 261, gives the Communion attendances for the two main Leipzig churches in 1728/9 and 1742/3.

<sup>37</sup> Wolff (n. 1 above), p. 221.

<sup>38</sup> Baron (n. 17 above), p. 52. He was defended at trial by Christian Thomasius.

<sup>39</sup> Baron (n. 17 above), p. 60.

<sup>40</sup> Ben Quash and Michael Ward (eds), *Heresies and How to Avoid Them* (London: S. P. C. K.: 2007), p. 43.



By contrast, the theology of the other audition piece, *Du wahrer Gott und Davids Sohn* (BWV 23), is deeply Anselmian by virtue of the German 'Agnus Dei' with which it closes; it is Catholic in the sense that the text does not feel the need of mentioning faith as the mode of justification, nor calling on the sinner to repent. BWV 22 does both these things; for, in addition to the conversion rhetoric noted above, the aria BWV 22/2 asks for faith by way of a prayer that 'my consolation can be thoroughly understood by me'.

From this time on Bach often uses Pietist language (BWV 199, 'Mein Herze schwimmt im Blut', is a notable example from Weimar) but, perhaps significantly, never actually adopts chorales from the main Pietist source, the Freylinghausen collection.<sup>41</sup> Since Bach had warm relations with Johann Friedrich Fasch we can also surmise – quite apart from the possible Hutton connection (see below) – that there was no animus by the composer against Pietists on a personal level.<sup>42</sup> The intrusion of personal-devotional language of the Pietist sort into the cantatas confirms that the Lutherans were content to assimilate devotional language, provided that the Church and its institutional liturgical forms were enriched, and not replaced, by the imagery and parlance of private religion.

### Moravian Pietism

The Zinzendorff settlement at Herrnhut in Moravia is linked to Bach's Kapellmeister contemporary Johann Friedrich Fasch at Zerbst, with whom correspondence survives. Fasch attended clandestine Pietist meetings and in due course was in conflict with the orthodox Lutheran authorities.<sup>43</sup> However, the Zinzendorff community is technically outside Pietism although influenced by it; it is the core of the surviving Moravian Church originating with the revolt against Rome, initiated by Jan Hus in Bohemia before the Reformation.

This Moravian settlement at Herrnhut was condemned by Augustus III in 1736,<sup>44</sup> thus direct contact with Bach would have posed a risk to relationships with Dresden. It is therefore potentially significant that since 1953 it has been contended (though recently disputed) that Bach indeed met a member of this movement, the pastor James Hutton.<sup>45</sup> Hutton apparently received an autograph version of parts of the *Musical Offering* (BWV 1079) on a visit in 1749, for the item,

<sup>41</sup> See Leaver (n. 29 above). Wittenberg Lutherans had formally condemned this collection.

<sup>42</sup> Bach did not, as far as we know, object to the Council on the grounds of the Pietism of some members. He preserved excellent relations with the Calvinist Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, the Roman Catholics Count Sporck and Count Questenberg: see Wolff (n. 1 above), pp. 192, 210.

<sup>43</sup> The theologian Thilo Daniel reported on these matters to the International Fasch Society Zerbst in 2002 (website source: [www.fasch.net/English/homepage.html](http://www.fasch.net/English/homepage.html)). See also Elena Sawtschenko, 'Das Schaffen von Johann Friedrich Fasch im Lichte der pietistischen Fömmigkeit: Pietismus und Musik', *Johann Friedrich Fasch und sein Wirken für Zerbst*, ed. Barbara Reul and Konstanze Musketa (Zerbst, 1996: Fasch-Studien, 6).

<sup>44</sup> Lindberg (n. 11 above), p. 209. Moravianism was recognised as an 'ancient, Protestant, Episcopal Church' by an English Act of Parliament in 1749.

<sup>45</sup> Michael Kassler (ed.), *The English Bach Awakening: Knowledge of J. S. Bach and His Music in England, 1750-1830* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 6; Constance Richardson, 'James Hutton and Bach', *Music and Letters* 34 (1953), p. 361-2.

now lost, turned up at a musical effects auction, bearing the initials 'JH', in London in 1893.

The fact that we have no record of a Leipzig visit by Hutton in 1749 does not rule out a visit by him; he spoke fluent German and toured Saxony extensively. It is quite conceivable that Hutton, a bookseller in his spare time, who published a book of collected Moravian chorales in 1744, visited Bach at some point and in an exchange gave him the Michael Weisse hymnbook of the Bohemian Brotherhood,<sup>46</sup> which has been treated by the Moravians as the earliest surviving hymnbook of their movement. Although this work is not in the specification of Bach's estate, it is not in doubt that it was given to Dr Burney by C. P. E. Bach and thus made its way to the United Kingdom.

### Rosicrucianism

The mystical image of the rose is first implied in BWV 150, *Nach dir Herr, verlangst mich*, which speaks of 'Christians on their thorny paths' ('Dornenwegen'). The rose image occurs frequently in the texts of subsequent cantatas.<sup>47</sup> However, the roots of the image are medieval; to find a connection to the Rosicrucianist sect, further linkages are needed.

The Rosicrucian obsession with Psalm 18 (and the number 18, sometimes regarded as relevant to Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*) would suggest that a Bach setting of the psalm might be a starting point; but Bach never does quote from this source. The sole angle of connection is very tentative, in that Bach's protector Duke Ernst August of Saxe-Weimar published some 'Theosophical Devotions' in 1742 (*Zu dem höchsten alleinigen Jehovah Berichtete Theosophische Herzens Andachten*) which were once stated to suggest this leaning.<sup>48</sup> Breslau was a centre for this unorthodox sect, as for Pietism and mysticism.

### Pelagianism

Pelagianism, more accurately at this date semi-Pelagianism, named after the early English ecclesiastic, has often been seen as a particular tendency in some form of Anglicanism; the need for self-reform is at the heart of salvation, much in contrast to Lutheran solifideist thinking. Surprisingly, however, the third Leipzig

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<sup>46</sup> See n. 32 above.

<sup>47</sup> Häselbock (n. 25 above), p. 150-51, listing BWV's 72/3, 86/2, 159/5, 182/7, 161/2, 140/6. The image is transmitted also via Henry Suso, Paul Gerhardt and Johann Rist.

<sup>48</sup> Arthur Edward Waite, *The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross: Being Records of the House of the Holy Spirit in its Inward and Outward History* (London: Rider, 1924; repr. Barnes & Noble, 1983), p. 415.

*Jahrgang* of cantatas is rich in a sequence of Pelagian-leaning texts (two incline to Pantheism), where the other doctrines wither away as a consequence.<sup>49</sup>

The group identified through this theological tendency accords with the sequence of cantata texts considered by Walter Blankenburg to be attributable on linguistic grounds to Christoph Helm, whereas Konrad Küster thinks Duke Ernst of Saxe-Meiningen the more likely author.<sup>50</sup> It must be questioned whether at this date superintendent Deyling was exercising any theological control from a strict Lutheran perspective.

### Chiliasm

This is the belief, widespread in the eighteenth century, which derived from Revelation, that Christ will return on earth for a second time and initiate a thousand years' reign, culminating in the Final Judgement. Interest in it is suggested by the possibility that the corrector of St Thomas, Andreas Stübel, had been a chiliast.<sup>51</sup> If he were the author of *Jahrgang* II (the cycle of chorale cantatas from 1724/5), then we might expect that this doctrine would have been slipped into one of the libretti.<sup>52</sup>

There is but one text capable of a chiliast gloss in this cycle. It is, however, by the mystical/Pietist writer Johann Rist, whose (frequently used) chorale text contains the following words at the end of Part I of the first cantata of the cycle, *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort* (BWV 20, for Trinity 1, 1724):

Denn wird sich enden diese Pein,  
Wenn Gott nicht mehr wird ewig sein.

(For this pain will end  
When God is no longer to be eternal.)

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<sup>49</sup> See Appendix. Ironically, when World War II broke out the Lutheran scholar Martin Dibelius published a pamphlet criticising Anglicanism for its tendency to semi-pelagianism, the antithesis of the Lutheran *sola fide*: see Drummond (n. 28 above), p. 166.

<sup>50</sup> Boyd (n. 2 above), p. 159; Helm is included among the librettists listed in Unger (n. 21 above), p. 763. An example is BWV 45/6, 'God will apportion to me/according to my inclination', or 45/7, 'Grant that I do with diligence/That which is fitting for me to do'. One senses the nobleman's intentions for his lackeys!

<sup>51</sup> Wolff (n. 1 above), p. 278, favours the 'hypothesis' of Stübel's authorship; see Thomas Braatz at [www.bach-cantatas.com/Articles/Stubel-Theory.htm#P2](http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Articles/Stubel-Theory.htm#P2). See also Martin Geck, *Bach: Leben und Werk* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2001), p. 400.

<sup>52</sup> According to John Butt (unpublished chapter on Time), 'It is interesting to note that Bach recopied in the margin of his Calov Bible the two possible dates for the Apocalypse given in the Calov Bible commentary on Daniel 12:12, namely 1941 and 2408.' I am grateful to Dr Butt for this observation.

Robertson finds this 'baffling',<sup>53</sup> but the Lutheran/Trinitarian sense that Jesus is God would allow the expression to be cast as a chiliast desire for God to come down from the heavens to the temporal world. As we see in the case of the Silesian poet-mystic Quirinus Kuhlmann, the holding of chiliast views was not conducive to acceptance: Kuhlmann was condemned by the German Lutheran community in Moscow and, unusual even for a bad poet, was burned along with his books in Red Square in 1684, on the orders of the Orthodox Patriarch.

Bach's texts, even though he sets quotations from Revelation six times, incline to a vision of joyous union in heaven after death and not to apocalyptic expectations here on earth. It appears that the author of *Jahrgang II* was not a chiliast, but rather more intent on the frequent repetition of solfideist ideas, the orthodox call to justification by faith.<sup>54</sup>

The tendency especially in the *Ratswahl* cantatas and in late Bach to identify Leipzig as the New Jerusalem has echoes of the Anabaptists, who envisaged the town of Münster as the New Jerusalem – as did Kuhlmann in relation to Breslau.<sup>55</sup> Such a view is not necessarily millenarian or chiliast but does suggest an emphasis on realised eschatology.

### Eschatology

In contrast to the expectations of the chiliasts, Bach looks forward to heaven in harmony with the eschatological impulse in Philip Nicolai, the vision of heavenly Jerusalem which occurs in four of the source cantatas of the B minor Mass.

The culmination of the mystical tendency in the cantata texts is BWV 140, for the 27th Sunday after Trinity, composed in a year when Easter fell exceptionally early and no pre-existing work for the date was available. Possibly the number 27 especially resonated with Bach (the cube of 3, denoting the Trinity). The image of mystical union between Christ and the Church under the form of a celestial wedding with a heavenly meal (i.e. the Eucharist), in a new Jerusalem, is overt. The closing Chorale, unusually written musically in minims, has a text which can be (and historically was) rendered in the form of a chalice:

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<sup>53</sup> Alec Robertson, *The Church Cantatas of J. S. Bach* (London: Cassell, 1972), p. 178. Richard D. P. Jones helpfully suggests the expression may be an apophatic hyperbole: since God certainly is not going to cease to be eternal, then an end to suffering is inconceivable. Terry evades the problem by translating the German as 'When God's good time shall give release'.

<sup>54</sup> The *Ascension Oratorio*, BWV 11/7, says 'Ah yes! So come back soon'. But the thousand-year aspect is missing, and Stübel cannot be the author in 1735.

<sup>55</sup> Civic identity-drift is universal. Both Breslau and Leipzig also considered that they were the 'Paris of the East', as Bucharest has done in the twentieth century; Hamburg is the 'Venice of the North', Weimar the 'German Athens', whereas today's Edinburgh fancied itself as the 'Athens of the North', until one particularly rain-lashed Festival elicited the alternative from the playwright Harold Pinter (d. 2008), viz., the 'Reykjavik of the South'!

Gloria sei dir gesungen  
 Mit menschen- und englischen Zungen,  
 Mit Harfen und mit Zimbeln schon.  
 Von zwölf Perlen sind die Pforten,  
 An deiner Stadt sind wir Konsorten  
 Der Engel hoch um deinen Thron.  
 Kein Aug hat je gespürt,  
 Kein Ohr hat je gehört  
 Solche Freude;  
 Des sind wir froh.  
 Io, io,  
 Ewig in dulci júbilo.

If Bach intends the allusion to the Eucharist, the visual pun of the chalice's appearance, as punctuation to the church year, then it may be considered that it is also *by purpose* that *Jahrgang II* ends with BWV 1, *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern*, and not due to the demise of the librettist or for other cause. This is further plausible because of the 'Alpha et Omega' reference of the text of the final chorale;<sup>56</sup> also by Philipp Nicolai and producing a rather stumper *Kelch*:

Wie bin ich doch so herzlich froh,  
 Dass mein Schatz ist das A und O,  
 Der Anfang und das Ende;  
 Er wird mich doch zu deinen Preis  
 Aufnehmen in das Paradeis,  
 Des klopf ich in die Hände.  
 Amen! Amen!  
 Komm, du schöne Freudenkrone,  
 bleib nicht lange,  
 Deiner wart ich mit Verlangen.

A third 'Kelchchorale' setting, this time the verse 'Zwingt die Saiten in Cythara' also occurs for Advent 1 (in 1731), *Schwingt freudig euch empor* (BWV 36). Thus the Nicolai chorales are strategically placed in the Church year.<sup>57</sup>

### Calvinism

Calvinism tends to be interpreted as stating that justification is predestined by the Almighty and manifested by the production of good works. By contrast, Lutheranism proceeds to posit justification in the words of the incipit to BWV 37,

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<sup>56</sup> Eric Chafe, 'Anfang und Ende. Cyclic Recurrence in Bach's Cantata "Jesu, nun sei gepreiset", BWV 41', *Bach Perspectives* 1 (1995), 103-34.

<sup>57</sup> Stapert (n. 24 above), p. 211.

*Wer da glaubet und getauft wird*, to state that 'Whosoever believes and is baptised shall be saved'.

BWV 7, the chorale cantata *Christ, unser Herr zum Jordan kam*, is one of only two cantatas explicitly referring to the Trinity ('Dreifaltigkeit');<sup>58</sup> and it is distinctly anti-Calvinist, within the context of recalling Christ's baptism.<sup>59</sup> In the alto aria BWV 7/6, the librettist enters enemy territory theologically, 'Menschenwerk und -heiligkeit/Gilt vor Gott zu keiner Zeit'. This swipe at the worthlessness of good works and sanctity in the eyes of God makes it clear what the reaction to Calvinist and, implicitly, Pietist and Quietist attitudes would be amongst orthodox Lutherans.<sup>60</sup> This cantata ends in the Luther chorale, 'Das Aug allein das Wasser sieht': 'Our eyes only see the water/and people pour the water/but Faith alone has the power to comprehend of the Blood of Jesus Christ/and it is for Him/A red torrent/ by Christ's blood coloured /which heals all harm/inherited from Adam /and by ourselves committed'. In this the Lutheran 'Flood-hymn' teaches that connection with holy Christ means that the waters of the world have become consecrated by His Passion to our good. The image fits the Lutheran emphasis on the divinisation of man. BWV 7 thus powerfully asserts Lutheran dogma and attacks Calvinism. It is one of the most doctrinally explicit cantatas by virtue of these emphases.

There are, nevertheless, a number of cantata texts suggesting a tendency to Calvinism. The words 'auserwählt' and 'erwählt' occur quite frequently, identifying the 'elect', which is the keyword for the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination. However, since Luther also held a doctrine of double election,<sup>61</sup> the existence of this expression alone is not conclusive. What is interesting is that a clutch of texts which smack of Calvinism in broad stylistic terms immediately follow BWV 7 in 1724.

Calvin's more emphatic belief (predestination is mentioned rarely) was in the sovereignty of God and his view of Providence:

'Against what he tells us was the general belief in his day, viz., that things happen fortuitously, he maintains that the work of creation finds its

<sup>58</sup> BWV 172 is the other, in the form 'Dreieinigkeit'; BWV 176 uses the descriptive 'dreieinig', (triune).

<sup>59</sup> Infant baptism was condemned by Madame Bourignon who, like most Pietists, needed the consent of adult minds to feel that the Holy Spirit was at work in effecting salvation. This aspect of Quietism and Pietism certainly does not affect the librettist for BWV 7.

<sup>60</sup> Calvin emphatically does not believe in justification by works, but in the *Institutes* accepts, following the Book of James, that works are a sign of regeneration and election. (Luther is famously antipathetic to this part of the Bible.) The key texts are in Book 3, Chaps 16-17; the first of these chapters concludes of the justified, 'they are judged by their fruits'; Chap. 17 states 'It is true that we are justified not without works, yet not by them'. Bach sets a text only once from James, the incipit 'Selig ist der Mann' from BWV 57. The evolution of Calvinism towards emphasis in practice on works is set out in Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905). Roman Catholics also emphasised the efficacy of child baptism *ex opere operato* to the extent that up to the debates of the liberalising second Vatican Council (1963) the unbaptised, even infants at childbirth, could not be capable of salvation, 'attaining the beatific Vision', a position defined at the Council of Florence (1442).

<sup>61</sup> *Book of Concord*, Chapter 11, Paragraphs 1 and 3.

natural continuation in the work of Divine Providence, that 'the Creator is also a Governor and Preserver, and that not by producing a kind of general motion in the machine of the world as well as in each of its parts, but by a special providence sustaining, cherishing, superintending all the things he has made, to the very minutest, even to a sparrow.' Calvin here pleads strongly that Christian people ought not to speak of fortune as doing this and that, but should say 'So God pleased'.<sup>62</sup>

One manifestation of Calvinist leanings is a tendency to refer to weather patterns as distinct acts of God. Thus in BWV 93, *Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten*, the librettist, having spoken of *God, who knows His elect*, then attacks (93/5) the man 'who feeds on constant fortune', concluding:

Nach Regen gibt er Sonnenschein  
Und setzt jeglichem sein Ziel.

(After rain he gives us sun  
And appoints to every man his goal.)

There is also, on the next Sunday but one, BWV 107, which extols the sovereignty of God:

What God has decided  
No man alive  
Can hinder;  
His decree is final.

A few weeks earlier the congregation would have heard in BWV 135/5:

After tears and after weeping  
He makes the sun of joy shine again;  
This gloomy weather changes now.

The sin-burdened Calvinist tone is clear in BWV 135/4:

I am weary with sighing  
My spirit has neither strength nor power,  
For all night long,  
Often without inward peace,  
I lie bathed in sweat and tears.  
I almost die with worry, and sorrow has aged me  
For my fear is manifold.

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<sup>62</sup> Allan Menzies, *A Study of Calvin, and Other Papers* (London: Macmillan, 1918), p. 223.

Such sentiments, lampooned by the modern English poet John Betjeman (1906-1984),<sup>63</sup> sound very like the hymnody of the eccentric Anglican Calvinist Augustus Montague Toplady (1740-1778), who translated the classic text, Zanchius (1562), on predestination. However, after cantatas 135 and 93 were presented (on 25 June and 9 July 1724, respectively), the congregation were told in no uncertain terms what to think in BWV 33: 'Since time began, there has been nothing ordained' (33/1), and 'Simply give me, out of mercy / The true Christian faith' (33/4).

The incursion of Calvinism and anti-Calvinism in the early part of *Jahrgang II* casts further doubt on the identity of the librettist. Harald Streck has identified four groups of texts in *Jahrgang II*, suggesting several contributors.<sup>64</sup> The author has been considered to be a theologian, but the sweep of ideas from the potentially chiliast BWV 20 through the ultra Trinitarian, anti-Calvinist texts of BWV 7 to the proto-Calvinistic images in the three works quoted suggest either a person of highly variable outlook, or that pressures from various parties in Leipzig induced the writer to manipulate the chorale series to satisfy party predilections. Deyling does not appear to be exercising theological control, at least not until BWV 33.

Thus it is conceivable that the first set of published texts for *Jahrgang II* had provoked a reaction from the theologically-alert congregation (which included Council members) of St Thomas; while later on, the specific possibilities are that the 'Meiningen' cantatas as a whole, or the *Ascension Oratorio*; or the St Mark Passion at some point caused trouble for Bach, judging by the 1739 altercation over the St John Passion.

### Bach's Last Chorale

Bach's final compositional reaction to the Council comes in 1748 in a triumphal setting of a doxology in BWV 69, *Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele*. Does it reveal in any sense the last word on Bach's relationship with the Council? BWV 69 is a *Ratswahl* (council election) cantata, but also used in Trinity season - hence the three trumpets and three oboes; its final chorale is Bach's last rendering of a Luther verse in full setting, that is, for voices and orchestra.<sup>65</sup>

'Es danke Gott' (BWV 69/7) is rarely performed or fully recorded since much of the cantata derives from the more familiar (and earlier) BWV 69a. However,

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<sup>63</sup> *An Eighteenth Century Calvinistic Hymn*

Thank God my afflictions are such  
That I cannot lie down on my bed  
And if I but take to my couch  
I incessantly vomit and bleed.

(From John Betjeman, *Collected Poems*, 1958).

<sup>64</sup> As analysed in Artur Hirsch, 'Johann Sebastian Bach's Cantatas in Chronological Order', *BACH: The Journal of the Riemenschneider Institute* 11 (July 1980), 18-35. See also Appendix.

<sup>65</sup> Of course, much attention is paid to BWV 668, 'Vor deinen Thron' tret ich hiermit', the 'Sterbchoral', but that is essentially a keyboard work. Bach also performed BWV 29 in 1749, but this is a repeat without any new movements, unlike BWV 69.



with its crackling trumpet cadences, independent timpani part and insistent high D's, the work bears the interpretation that Bach intended it to be a *tour de force*, a final work of its type.<sup>66</sup> It is perhaps of significance that this verse of Luther's chorale 'Es woll' uns Gott genädig sein', has only once been set before in the cantatas: as the conclusion of BWV 76 which, with BWV 75, is one of the two 14-section works which commence Bach's career in Leipzig. In fact, BWV 76 is likely to have been the *first* work actually written at Leipzig. So, almost as a gesture of Alpha and Omega, this chorale begins and ends the cantata activity for Bach in the city; but also the chorale strophe marks the *last* farewell for the poet-Burgomaster, Gottfried Lange, who according to Christoph Wolff may well have been the author of the text of BWV 76.<sup>67</sup> Lange, who had been poorly for some years, died later in 1748 and the splendid resetting of the chorale may have been an especial tribute to his time as the principal city father, celebrating the recovered prosperity of Leipzig.

### Conclusion

This brief survey of interactions between Bach's works, especially the cantatas, and the religious/doctrinal milieu in his day (and the preceding theologically unstable world of the 1690s), creates very few certainties such as asserting that definite catechistical positions are being worked out in the texts, other than the proclamation of orthodox Lutheranism.

However, the existence of phrases suggestive of irregular doctrinal emphasis in some works naturally leads the reader and listener on to consider whether the theology of the cantatas is entirely unaffected by post-Luther forces. This activity leads to a view that, in general, Bach's librettists are defending a challenged orthodoxy (including the mystical component of Lutheranism and the Trinity) and are aiming at assimilating the acceptable elements in competing religious movements, of which Quietism is one.

These efforts at syncretising theological positions within Orthodoxy very likely caused offence to some councillors, or were used as a pretext for simulating offence, which results in Bach's reaction in the 1739 Passion dialogue. His final chorale, aimed at an increasingly unsympathetic Council,<sup>68</sup> can be read as a sign of his dutiful attitude even to those hostile to his work, but more particularly as a parting token of his personal gratitude to, and admiration for, his friend and ally Gottfried Lange.

Es danke, Gott, und lobe dich

Let the people thank and praise you, O God,

Das Volk in guten Taten.

With good deeds.

Das Land bringt Frucht und bessert sich,

The land bears fruit and improves;

<sup>66</sup> Hans-Joachim Schulze, *Die Bach-Kantate* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2007), p. 596, notes that the arias were being performed twenty-five years after they were first heard.

<sup>67</sup> Wolff (n. 1 above), p. 244.

<sup>68</sup> Baron (n. 17 above), p. 165. In early 1749 the Council begins to recruit Bach's successor.

Dein Wort ist wohl geraten.  
Uns segne Vater und der Sohn,  
Uns segne Gott der Heilige Geist,  
Dem alle Welt die Ehre tut,  
Für ihm sich fürchten allermeist,  
Und sprecht von Herzen: Amen!

Your Word has succeeded well.  
May the Father and the Son bless us,  
May God the Holy Spirit bless us,  
To whom all the world pays honour,  
Fearing Him most of all,  
And say from the heart: Amen!

*Translation by Richard D. P. Jones*

