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ALFRED MANN

BACH STUDIES

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Approaches to the B Minor Mass

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Preface

In devoting the first *American Choral Review* issue of the anniversary year 1985 to the choral music of Bach, I have taken occasion to pay homage also to the organization that provided the principal impetus to Bach performances in America. These essays were written over a period of fourteen years, 1970–1983, as program notes for Festivals of the Bach Choir of Bethlehem. It was a period that stood under the influence of major new discoveries in Bach scholarship, discoveries that had changed the challenge of American Bach Festivals. In the early part of this century, the foremost task of yearly Bach programs was to present first American performances for many of Bach's works. After the middle of the century began the task of re-evaluating our interpretation of the Bach repertoire.

On a more modest scale, this process is also reflected in the transformation of isolated program notes into a continuity of a more comprehensive nature. During the first few years of its activity, the Bach Choir of Bethlehem had established its own tradition: its initial project had been the American premiere of the B Minor Mass, and it had immediately become apparent that this work would occupy the Choir year after year. Thus a program format emerged that placed the Mass invariably at the end of Bethlehem Festivals. It was preceded from Festival to Festival by varying choices of Bach's choral works.

Two considerations gained importance as this program pattern developed over the years. One was to seek unity in choosing segments of Bach's work that could claim a measure of completeness in themselves. The other was to link these chapters to the final chapter of Bach's work, the Mass; for the larger and the more intense the probing into this work grew, the more apparent it became how deeply rooted the Mass is in all of Bach's writing.

Thus each part of this collection ends in new reference to the B Minor Mass. It was an intriguing though intricate assignment to avoid duplication, because not only the Mass itself but many other works appeared repeatedly in changing context: their significance is bound to point the observer in a variety of directions. With the aid of the index, the reader may wish to round out the study of a given work, and the cross-references may suggest continuing exploration.

The span of time in which the essays were first written covers the years of my own tenure as conductor of the Bach Choir of Bethlehem and those during

which my immediate successor, William Reese, led the Choir — the total of fourteen, a magic number in Bach numerology, for it represents the sum of the ordinal numbers of B A C H in the alphabet (a fact to which the composer himself apparently made reference on occasion). The programs of the latter period not only form units in themselves but stand for a larger aspect: Bach and the Liturgy. The earlier sections in the collection follow, in a general way, a chronological order; they lead from the works of the young Bach and from the cantatas written primarily in the first few Leipzig years to the larger works, the Passion settings, oratorios, and Masses. But the genres of cantata and Mass recur throughout as an integral part of the presentation, as they remain integral to the entire design of Bach's choral oeuvre.

A. M.

The Motets

STYLE AND PERFORMANCE

Bach and his works have met a strange fate at the hands of posterity. They were fairly well recognized in their day; practically forgotten by the generations following his; rediscovered and revived; and finally accorded an eminence far beyond the recognition they had originally achieved. It is a tale of posthumous success unique in the history of music.

This introduction to an account of the story of Bach's fame, which the Bach scholars Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel have given in *The Bach Reader*, is followed by the ever fascinating observation that it was Mozart who apparently was "the first to be struck by the realization of Bach's qualities as by a kind of revelation or even shock".[1]

The work that caused this extraordinary moment was Bach's motet *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied.* On a journey undertaken two years before his death, Mozart passed through Leipzig where J. F. Doles, second successor to Bach at St. Thomas's, invited him to hear the motet performed at the church. The occasion was recorded by one of the singers: "Hardly had the choir sung a few measures when Mozart sat up, startled; a few measures more and he called out: 'What is this?' And now his whole soul seemed to be in his ears."[2] The eyewitness report is detailed and touching. Mozart asked to see the music after the performance, but there was no score at the church, only the original part books from which Mozart had to construct for himself a picture of the complete score ". . . and then it was for the silent observer a joy to see how eagerly Mozart sat himself down, with the parts all around him — in both hands, on his knees, and on the chairs next to him — and, forgetting everything else, did not get up again until he had looked through everything."

Mozart had known other works by Bach. He was well acquainted with the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, from which he had transcribed, a number of years prior to the event, five fugues, rescoring them for string quartet. What caused the overwhelming impression of the older master's music was that aspect which again and again has epitomized Bach's genius: the sound of his choral polyphony.

The choral medium was the musical heritage to which Bach returned

[1] *The Bach Reader*, New York 1945 and 1966, pp. 358f.

[2] Friedrich Rochlitz, "Anekdoten aus Mozarts Leben," cf. *The Bach Reader* p. 146.

when he assumed the cantorship at St. Thomas's, and it became the central force in the period of his highest productivity. To Bach, it was originally associated with the term *motet*. When he issued his first published work, a cantata for chorus, solo voices, and orchestra, written to celebrate the appointment of a new town council, he entitled it "Motetto." The designation *cantata* was still generally restricted to works for solo voice.

The term motet had come into use in medieval days. It referred to the free treatment of a text in the rising art of polyphony. The word motet itself is a diminutive of the French *mot*—the word, the verbal text. The increasingly liberal setting of text characterized the emergence of one of the greatest forms of Western art music, the form of choral composition in which each vocal part develops full individuality—a wealth of expression devoted to one common thought. Century after century imparted stylistic changes to the motet. In Bach's time the meaning of the term gradually merged with that of the more modern term cantata, but it still signified the essence of choral polyphony, and its application had acquired a flexibility not always readily appreciated by the modern listener.

What has been known under the title motet in Bach's writing is in the main a group of works seemingly for chorus alone and written for special occasions. From the choice of texts, and from Bach's own notation in Motet No. 2, we can gather that these works were intended as odes of mourning to be performed at funeral servcies where customarily the modern means of orchestral color and florid solo singing were relegated to the background (even the jubilant Motet No. 1 deals in its chorale with the evanescence of earthly life). But these modern means had become such integral components of musical practice that in reconstructing the circumstances of Bach's own performances we cannot in fact banish them from the scene. Bach had on occasion arranged some of Palestrina's music for performance with instruments supporting the voices. Invariably the choral sound was accompanied by the organ, and groups of choir boys from St. Thomas's seem to have carried with them a small portable organ even when caroling in the streets.

Thus the unadorned *a cappella* appearance of Bach's motet scores is, as we realize, deceiving. They contain all the music to be heard, but this music was not necessarily perfomed by voices only. Two of the motet scores have come down to us with instrumental parts doubling the voices; another one contains an organ accompaniment. The difference between modern cantata style and conservative motet style in Bach's scores is not determined by the presence or absence of instruments but rather by the manner in which the instruments accompany the voices. In the cantatas they perform independent, highly individual parts — often amounting to veritable concertos of their own — whereas in the motets they merely reinforce the melodies of the vocal parts and are therefore not necessarily written down.

These two styles are freely mixed in Bach's choral music; richly orchestrated sections alternate with sections in which the orchestral setting duplicates the choral score throughout. It is for this reason that sections of the latter kind taken from Bach's cantatas became widely known as independent works under the title motet, for instance *Sei Lob und Preis mit Ehren* (the first chorus of Cantata No. 28) and *Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir* (the first chorus of Cantata No. 38). Even the setting of Psalm 117, *Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden*, listed in the *Bach-Gesellschaft* edition as Motet No. 6, seems to be a fragment from a cantata the rest of which is lost. Conversely, the funeral anthem *O Jesu Christ, mein's Lebens Licht*, entitled in Bach's autograph as *Motetto,* is listed as a cantata (Cantata No. 118) — doubtless because the supporting instrumental accompaniment rises in this work to a certain independence. Bach's original superscriptions vary, containing often merely the text beginning.

There is another element which characterizes the merging of old and new styles in Bach's choral writing and which reflects the development leading from motet to cantata — parallel to the emergence of the orchestra was the emergence of solo voices from the choral sound. In his famous "Draft for a well-appointed Church Music," submitted to the Leipzig town council in 1730, Bach wrote "A well-appointed Church Music, requires vocalists and instrumentalists . . . in order that the choruses of church pieces may be performed as is fitting, the vocalists must in turn be divided into two sorts, namely, concertists and ripienists." This arrangement, calling for a distinction between a solo group and full chorus, suggests not only the obvious difference between aria and chorus situation but also a differentiation within the choral texture itself. Such differentiation may have varied from occasion to occasion according to the available forces, and the modern performer is reminded of the fact that the age of Bach's own performances was still largely dominated by the element of improvisation. But in some cases — for instance in preparing a manuscript for print — Bach was specific about entering "solo" and "tutti" in his choral scores.

From these entries we can gather that the occasional reduction of the choral group went hand in hand with changes from strong to light orchestral accompaniment or changes in the total make-up of the score. The full chorus becomes in these cases a small solo ensemble comparable to the solo group in the concerto grosso. For the concerto effect — the lively contrast of small and large, individual and blended tone — is so strongly rooted in Baroque music that it is inseparable from Bach's choral sound. The possibility of its application cannot be ruled out in the performance of Bach's motets.

In a series of significant discoveries, the chronology of Bach's works has been completely revised in recent times. New studies of the changes in Bach's handwriting over the years, of the watermarks in the paper used for his

manuscripts, and of individual traits in the handwriting of copyists who assisted him have led to the conclusion that Bach must have written the majority of his choral works for use at St. Thomas's within his first few years in Leipzig.

This new chronology also assigns a number of years larger than had been hitherto assumed to the time gap between the composition of the First Part and that of the Second Part of Bach's B Minor Mass. As has been known, the Kyrie and Gloria were presented by Bach in 1733 as a *missa brevis* (the customary Lutheran form, omitting the Creed) to the court in Dresden when, at the height of his powers and dissatisfied with conditions in Leipzig, Bach sought the appointment of royal court composer. But the Second Part of the work was evidently completed near the end of Bach's life. Bach's remarkable use of the entire Catholic Mass text linked his work to that of the great composers of the past; the B Minor Mass may be considered a conscious contribution that Bach made to that genre of composition which had been the noblest musical form since the days of Dufay, Josquin, and Palestrina. And its concentration upon the choral element in vast and highly varied structures links the Mass to Bach's motets.

The special affinity of these two traditional forms of choral music comes to the fore in his writing. Both are retrospective, but both are marked by the modern, instrumental style of the Baroque that is merged with a purely vocal style to a degree that only Bach could achieve. The focus upon choral texture produces certain formal similarities of Mass and motets. In both Bach tends to apply the pattern of prelude and fugue to choral writing, and the symmetry of structural design that characterizes the *Credo* of the Mass is reminiscent of the unusual form that Bach gave the motet *Jesu meine Freude*. The texts, finally, of Mass and motets deal alike with the thought basic to Bach's choral oeuvre — life and death and the mercy of redemption. The glorification of the words *der Geist* and *geistlich* in the motets corresponds both in its lyricism and drama to that of the words *Et in spiritum sanctum* and *Cum sancto spiritu* in the Mass. Bach's choral writing is invariably devoted to the transcendental.

The Christmas Service of 1723

The language of Bach's music is universal; its qualities are so overwhelming that it is difficult to associate them with the ideas of change, evolution, beginning and end. Yet the two Bach works on Latin text most generally known, the Magnificat and the Mass in B Minor, represent in fact beginning and end, two entirely different aspects of his art.

The Christmas music of 1723 shows Bach as the newly appointed Leipzig cantor at the height of professional success and ambition. The challenge of his new office led to an artistic productivity unequaled in Bach's career at any other time. The vast cantata oeuvre, formerly believed to have been spaced rather evenly through three decades of Bach's Leipzig tenure, was essentially the creation of the first few Leipzig years. Adapting in some cases material from earlier works, the young St. Thomas cantor prepared a cantata for every Sunday and holiday. But in anticipation of his first Christmas season in Leipzig, he prepared a cantata for every day. Christmas was celebrated for three consecutive days in Leipzig. On these days the morning service, which lasted about four hours even on regular Sundays, was especially elaborate. Bach must have left the direction of large portions of the liturgy to senior students appointed as his assistants, as he did on other occasions. His own work was concentrated upon the *Hauptmusik*, the new cantata for each feast day. The Vesper Service on December 25, however, required a further musical program, and for this occasion Bach added to his Christmas cantatas a choral Sanctus and the Magnificat.

The plan of the three cantatas (Nos. 63, 40, 64) was conceived as an entity. Bach may have compiled the cantata texts himself; in any event he arranged their order so that the three works form a cycle dealing with the nativity scene, Christ's mission on earth, and mankind's redemption, and leading from jubilation to contemplation and thanksgiving.

The means that Bach employed were festive indeed. Never before had he assembled an orchestra quite as large and richly varied as on Christmas Day, 1723, and yet he changed the orchestral scoring for the second day and again for the third day of Christmas. The beginning of the first cantata with its bright colors of woodwinds and trumpets shows the affinity of the music to Bach's activity as a court conductor, and the opening page of the Magnificat might have been written for one of the Brandenburg Concertos, Bach's masterpieces of the Cöthen period. Only with the more introspective character of the second

cantata does the congregational chorale appear, but from here on it assumes a dominant role, and in the score of the third cantata the choral sound absorbs that of the instruments, the orchestra merely doubling the vocal parts in ancient motet fashion.

There is a common theme to all three cantatas: the dramatic conflict between the forces of good and evil, between Saviour and Satan. Thus the choral coloratura and accentuated high tones portraying the star of Bethlehem in the opening of the first cantata lead to an alto recitative whose adagio section dwells upon the allusion to Israel's slavery. The thirty-second runs heralding the lion of David's lineage in battle (tenor recitative of the same cantata) lead to his glorification in a graceful round dance (alto-tenor duet). And in the final chorus of this cantata the contrasting themes of choral fugues interpret earth and heaven, subjection and salvation.

The second cantata describes the majesty of the Son of God — characterized as in the B Minor Mass, by the sound of the horn — in triumph over the work of the devil. What infinite melodic variety guides the listener from the hammered choral declamation hailing the destruction of evil to the chromatic and arpeggiated violin passages symbolizing the snake. Nevertheless, the total plan of the work, with its more modestly scored wind parts, its solo arias for tenor and bass that take the place of the duets in the first cantata underlines its reflective character — assigns it the place of a "second movement" in the cycle of Christmas cantatas.

The third cantata serves both as epilogue and finale. Its somber orchestation— the brass scoring changes from horns to trombones — is coupled with the growing intensity of the vocal sound. As if in expression of the incarnation, the human voice rules supreme, reaching its utmost serenity in the arias, now scored for soprano and alto, which extol the glory of eternal life.

Yet what constant fine detail is contained in the conception of Bach's work. Each repetition of the word *nichts* — naught — in the last alto aria is illustrated by a little pause. Mundane tenacity is drawn by insistence upon the same tone in the continuo part and its likening to vanishing smoke expressed in the rising violin scale of the preceding soprano aria. The opening word "redoubled" in the bass recitative of the first cantata prompts a setting in eight rather than the usual four parts. This seems to have been an afterthought; the wind instrument parts, through which the accompanying group reaches twice its normal size, were here originally marked *tacet* and later filled in. A fascinating image arises from the glimpse at the sources: the composer who, with just pride in his craft, is adding one of the skillful touches that everywhere enrich his wondrous art.

We must now turn to the methodical review to which Bach subjected his Christmas cantatas of 1723. The composer's supreme mastery of form was applied to structural schemes of ever-growing proportions, and Bach arranged

in fact all of his cantatas into *Jahrgänge* — cycles representing the entire church year — in which he wished them to be preserved.

This plan called for an additional work, to be placed between the three Christmas services and New Year's Day service, a cantata for the Sunday after Christmas. The original schedule of 1723 performances did not include such an additional work since December 25 fell on Sunday, the week between Christmas Day and New Year's Day coinciding with the calendar week. In order to complete the yearly cycle, Bach dipped into his earlier cantata work of Weimar days, as he had done on various occasions for his Leipzig cantatas, and chose the cantata *Tritt auf die Glaubensbahn,* eventually numbered by the editors of the *Bach-Gesellschaft* edition as No. 152.

This choice intensifies the balance of a larger sequence of works. For New Year's Day 1724 Bach had written another new piece — Cantata No. 190 — on which he may have been at work even while he was involved in the Christmas performances. Like his first motet, this cantata was based on the Psalm text "Sing unto the Lord a new song," and it was as festive in character and orchestration as the first of the Christmas cantatas prepared one week earlier. In fitting one more link into this chain of works, Bach decided on a cantata forming the greatest possible contrast to the imposing Christmas Day and New Year's Day cantatas — a lyrical interlude whose concluding text is a pietistic love duet in which the Soul is pictured as the bride of Christ. The score of Cantata No.152 includes neither chorus nor orchestra. Two solo voices are accompanied by an ensemble of instruments representing one of the most intimate combinations of sound found in Bach's work. It is the sound of waning instruments — the recorder, the viols — that reaches in Bach's writing its utmost expression.

The most demanding musical performance was reserved for Christmas Day Vespers. Nowhere is the exuberance of Bach's creative work at Leipzig more convincingly documented than in his setting of the Magnificat. In composing the Canticle of the Blessed Virgin, Bach entered upon great traditions of church music. The grandeur and tenderness of the text had inspired masters of every generation, and Bach's treatment of key words of the poem recalls passages from many Magnificat compositions of the past: the dance-like joy of *Et exultavit,* the gentleness of *Quia respexit humilitatem*, the choral force of *Omnes generationes*, the compassion of *Et misericordia*, the eloquent rest that ends the verse *Esurientes,* the gloriously sustained continuity of *In saecula saeculorum*. Yet such intensity of interpretation, such wealth of musical means had not been reached heretofore. The sudden turn to an archaic choral setting, supported only by the orchestral bass, in the verse *Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros* (Thus He spoke to our fathers) manifests Bach's intricate merging of diverse styles, and when the opening tutti returns in literal

expression of the words *Sicut erat in principio* (As it was in the beginning), a da capo structure of entirely new dimensions is rounded.

There was also a purely local tradition of which Bach was aware in composing the Magnificat.The Leipzig Christmas Vespers had for many years included a sequence of chorales and songs whose texts outlined the Nativity story — the appearance of the angel, the message of glad tidings, the rejoicing of the heavenly host, the scene at the manger. Bach's predecessor Johann Kuhnau had combined these texts into a cantata, and Bach set them afresh to be performed as interpolations in the Magnificat by a small ensemble of voices and instruments probably placed across the church nave, in a separate choir loft.

When Bach revived the work in later years, the performance did not take place during the Christmas season. Thus he omitted the interpolations, and in this form his Magnificat has become generally known. But the original plan of composition, its finely balanced architecture (in which, for instance, the two soprano arias after the first chorus are separated by a choral setting) becomes clear only in the full context of the 1723 Vespers. Bach's blending of the texts culminates in one of the most exquisite moments of the work — the juxtaposition of the lullaby setting of *Puer delectabilis* and the trio of high voices for the verse *Suscepit Israel puerum suum* to which the oboe melody adds the chorale tune of the German Magnificat: *Mein Seel erhebt den Herren.*

The scoring for one of the interpolations requires special mention. The Gloria following the chorus *Fecit potentiam* shows in Bach's manuscript only a single violin part in addition to the block of choral parts — the other instruments were intended to double the voices. This unusual combination of supporting and independent orchestral writing reappears in the Sanctus in D Major which through new studies of Bach's handwriting and that of his copyists has recently been assigned to the cycle of works written for the Christmas services of 1723. Most likely it preceded the Magnificat in the Christmas Day Vespers, and in general character and style of choral writing the two works are closely linked. The joyous melody of *Pleni sunt coeli et terra,* which is sung finally by all voices in unison, suggests a classical dance — in fact it recurs almost unchanged in a Schubert scherzo.

A span of ten years separates the Christmas music of 1723 from the composition of the *Missa* dedicated to Frederick Augustus, Elector of Saxony. In this decade all the expectations with which Bach had entered upon the Leipzig cantorship had turned to disappointment. His work had not met with true understanding, and his daily duties were embittered with ever-continuing adversity. His plans and standards having been frustrated, Bach turned to the Elector of Saxony and later King of Poland in search of another position.

What Bach presented to the Elector, who had then just assumed his reign, was a *missa brevis,* the Lutheran form of the Mass, consisting of the Kyrie and

Gloria sections only. It was a work to which Bach had been able to give an unusual amount of time and care, since during the period of mourning following the death of King Augustus the Strong, whom Frederick Augustus succeeded, no performances of church music were scheduled for several months.

It is not too much to state that during these months a completely new phase of Bach's work began. Hardly ever before had he been able to work with such leisure and complete concentration on a single composition — and on a composition that was to serve beyond the confining circumstances of his everyday professional existence.

As we know, his hopes were not realized. It took a second petition before the Elector responded and conferred, three years later, the title of court composer upon the Leipzig cantor. Even then, what Bach had obtained was merely the granting of a title but no evident change of his working conditions. Nevertheless, the new era in Bach's work had begun to take effect. No longer primarily concerned with the observance of week-by-week assignments, in which his interest had faded, the master was directed more and more by purely artistic goals and, setting his own pace and in growing creative isolation, he turned to the miraculous works that occupied his declining years. Much of his former work was used again and given new form. Yet Bach was not merely concerned with revision but rather with a widening and completing of his plans, with the fulfillment of his mission.

Thus Bach decided to return to the earlier *Missa* and, adding a larger series of compositions, to compile gradually a full setting of the Ordinary of the Mass. In writing what became the Second Part of the B Minor Mass, Bach brought his lofty work of sacred choral music to conclusion. In fact, the chorus *Et incarnatus est,* inserted on a separate sheet into the volume may represent the very last example of Bach's choral writing. This portion of the text was at first included in the preceding duet which Bach rewrote when he added the chorus.

There is one chorus in the Second Part of the Mass, however, that connects the work of Bach's old age to the beginning of his career at St. Thomas's. The Sanctus, the earliest piece in the entire work, has been assigned by recent findings of Bach scholarship to the year 1724. Originally, like the Sanctus in D Major, an independent composition, it was apparently written for the opening of Bach's second Christmas celebration in Leipzig.

Psalm Cantatas

We do not know how many cantatas Bach wrote — the efforts of more than two centuries have not been equal to the task of fully surveying the infinite wealth of his work. After Bach's death in 1750, the composer's son Carl Philipp Emanuel stated in the obituary that among Bach's unpublished works were five cycles of church cantatas, each spanning an entire church year. The edition of the *Bach-Gesellschaft,* the Society founded in 1850 for the purpose of publishing Bach's complete works, lists numbers 1 to 191 — these numbers having been assigned by the editors — though it contains some additional cantatas which, for various reasons, were not included in the numbered series, but allotted to supplementary volumes, at the time of publication. The *Gesellschaft* edition was completed in 1900. When in 1950 a first thematic index of Bach's works was issued, the entries 1-224 were set aside for cantatas. But we gather from a set of numbers, beginning with 30a, that meanwhile the supplements to the original series of published cantatas had grown considerably. Entry 1045 of the index reports a telling story. It lists a fragmentary manuscript of an orchestral introduction for solo violin, 2 oboes, 3 trumpets, timpani and string orchestra. Bound in covers that show a hand other than Bach's, its first page, however, bears Bach's autograph inscription of the title of a cantata for four-part chorus and the orchestral scoring of the fragment — will the remaining pages of the manuscript ever by found?

It was not until shortly after the appearance of the index published at the Bach bicentennial of 1950 that Bach scholars were able to establish a definitive chronological order for the extant cantatas by Johann Sebastian Bach. Their findings showed the surprising result that what has come down to us was essentially the creation of only the first few years in Leipzig during which Bach prepared a cantata for each Sunday, at times even quickening the pace — as we gather from the succession of the cantatas written for December 25, 26 and 27 of the year 1723. The achievement of these years adds up to three of the full-year cycles to which C. P. E. Bach referred. Whether the two additional year cycles of which he gave account are lost, or whether he was in error in listing five cycles, we do not know. What we do know is that in the 1730's, Bach turned primarily to secular works. Apparently he composed ceremonial cantatas for more than fifty academic occasions — most of these works have not yet come to light.

Alfred Dürr, editor for many volumes of Bach's works, gives a vivid

account of the haste with which Bach must have prepared his cantatas in order to be ready with the composition — and performance — of a new work each Sunday. The vocal and instrumental parts for Cantata 174, for instance, were not completed until Sunday, June 5, 1729 (the performance took place the next morning, the second day of the Feast of Pentecost, in a service that began at 7 a.m.). The composer and several copyists seem at times to have been forced by the pressure of time to share one and the same score page in copying out a minimum set of performance parts required.

It is hard to believe the attention Bach devoted to detail in the face of such demands. It was by no means an unusual occurrence that Bach touched up the texts for his works, guided the hand of the librettist (a particularly good working relationship existed between Bach and Friedrich Henrici, who under the pseudonym of Picander served as author for many of Bach's texts) — or that, indeed, the composer compiled the text himself. In this connection it is particularly interesting to list the entries given in the thematic index for the choice of cantatas to be discussed in this section:

Cantata 19
Text rewritten (by Bach?), based on a poem by Henrici published in 1725 in Leipzig.
Cantata 23
Author of the text unidentified (Bach?).
Cantata 34
Author of the text unidentified (Bach?).

For the other three cantatas (Nos. 52, 79, 105) the index entry merely reads: *Author of the text unidentified.*

The cantata texts of Bach's time had to conform to certain esthetic requirements. The congregation wished more than the purely biblical language — Bach's audience felt a need to penetrate the scriptural word with its own thoughts and emotions. Thus contemporaneous poetry, interpolated in the Biblical text, served as a constant interpretation. It is characteristic of Bach's attitude toward this mixture of eighteenth-century verse and scripture that he chose red ink for the words of the evangelist and certain other portions in his fair copy of the St. Matthew Passion: the sacred text was the true guide of his work, and in this sense, too, we will have to understand Bach's Psalm settings. No less than sixty of Bach's extant cantatas contain Psalm verses, and in almost all these cases, the investigation of the origin of texts shows the same result as in the works listed above; in fact, for only half-a-dozen of the Psalm cantatas has it been possible to ascertain a librettist other than Bach — although even in these instances there are reasons to believe that Bach himself may have been involved in arranging or rearranging the text.

"The Book of Psalms has been, no doubt, the most influential single source of text in all musical history," writes the compiler of the Harvard Dictionary of Music. Going back to David, the royal poet, the Psalms must have assumed a

primary role in the ancient musical service for worship — which Israel's king considered an organizational mandate of importance to both church and state — and we know of Bach's searching interest in these origins of liturgic tradition. A remarkable document was recently discovered — Bach's personal copy of the Bible, containing manuscript annotations by the composer that give ample testimony of his concern with the sacred text (due to a fascinating sequence of ownership, this priceless volume is today readily accessible; it is preserved in the library of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri).

Tracing the use of the Psalm text in Bach's cantatas, we obtain a highly diversified picture. The structure of Cantata 19, is marked by the quality of intense drama. Following the epistle reading for St. Michael's Day, it depicts the battle in heaven, raging serpents, furious vengeance, and the triumph of the heavenly host. The opening of the cantata is formed by one of Bach's most powerful choral compositions. Yet the momentum of this chorus, the victorious end of the battle, does not lead to celebration and loud rejoicing, but to quiet contemplation. It is here that the Psalm paraphrase appears (from Psalm 34, verse 7, and Psalm 8, verse 4), establishing the greatest dramatic contrast of the work and turning the vision of the celestial war into gentle human prayer. In a sublime change of scene, the trumpet sound of the opening chorus reappears in the aria "Bide, O angels, bide with me," which seems to reflect Psalm 91, verses 11, 12 — but it is now the hymn tune known to us from Bach's St. John Passion ("O Lord, Thy angel send, whene'er my life shall end") that is played by the trumpet. The full orchestral splendor of the opening chorus returns only in the last chorale whose words reflect man's ultimate delivery and thus take the thoughts of the listener back to heaven.

In contrast to Cantata 19, Cantata 105 is entirely lyrical in character. Here words of the Psalter (taken from Psalm 143, verse 2, and Psalm 51, verse 11) serve for the beginning of the work. One of Bach's most extraordinary arias, "How tremble and waver the thoughts of all sinners," follows as comment on the Biblical text, and the development of the thoughts presented in the first three sections of the cantata lead to the quiet reassurance of the remaining three. In the instrumental accompaniment of the final chorale, the trembling gradually subsides, and the end of the work returns to the adagio pace of its beginning.

The text for Cantata 34, a cantata for the Feast of Pentecost which Bach rearranged from an earlier secular work, is summarized in the lines from Psalm 118, verse 23 — "This is the Lord's doing" — and from Psalm 128, verse 6 — "Peace upon Israel," whereas in other works, Bach follows portions from the Psalter throughout. Cantata 52 ends with a chorale paraphrase of recurring verses from Psalm 31. In Cantata 79, the opening words of Psalm 84, verse 11 — "For the Lord God is sun and shield" — set the tone for the entire work, but in Cantata 23 it is the central chorus, based on Psalm 145, verse 15 — "The

eyes of all wait upon Thee" — that permeates and determines the nature of text and music.

The concluding chorale of Cantata 23 is written on the words "O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us, grant us peace" — a translation of the *Agnus Dei.* The original score of the cantata contained only a suggestion of the chorale melody (it occurs in the tenor recitative) but not the chorale in its entirety. When Bach added it he must have done so after careful thought. The chorale, recalling the text of the opening duet, served a particular purpose in rounding the total structure. One marvels again and again at the artistic sensitivity with which Bach penetrated meaning and form in the continuous process of reviewing and perfecting his work. It is another Psalm text, the opening of Psalm 51, "Have mercy upon me," that links beginning and end of this Psalm cantata, as it links beginning and end of the text of the Mass.

Annunciation Cantatas

> Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.

This beginning of the gospel of St. Luke sets his account apart as a personal letter; by the evangelist's own words it is distinguished from the other gospels through the nature of plain narrative. Yet this narrative rises at times to the level of exalted verse, the foremost instances being the Song of Mary and the Song of Simeon. Known by their opening words as *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis,* they form two most lyrical poems of the New Testament and they deal with a singular aspect of the Scriptures: the Annunciation of Our Lord. Among the biblical passages that have inspired great music, these two Songs have always held a place of special importance. Traditionally they are the principal canticles of Vespers, the evensong service in which their Annunciation texts symbolically herald the light of the new day.

In the cycle of the church year, which guided Bach's cantata composition, the Annunciation texts were assigned to different Sundays grouped under the heading of *Marienfeste* — Feasts of St. Mary. They celebrated the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the Purification of Mary, and they gave rise to some of the most intimate and some of the most jubilant church music Bach has written. "It is a pity," says Alfred Dürr in his monograph on Bach's cantatas "that in our time, which no longer formally observes the Feasts of St. Mary, this magnificent music, showing the St. Thomas Cantor at the height of his art, is not more frequently performed."[1]

Bach dealt with the Annunciation theme throughout the many years encompassed by his cantatas. Some of them date back to the early period during which he served as court organist and court conductor in Weimar; and a fragment belonging to this group of works and discovered only in recent times, was probably written during the last decade of Bach's life. The intensity with which Bach treated this biblical subject is shown by the fact that he composed music on the Annunciation texts at different times to form a great variety of

[1] *Die Kantaten von Johann Sebastian Bach,* Kassel, Basel, Tours, London 1971, vol II, p. 540.

works, and a number of the Annunciation cantatas were rewritten for performances in different years. The most outstanding example of this diversity appears in his settings of the Magnificat text. He composed works on the complete Magnificat canticle apparently in three successive years: 1723, 1724, and 1725.[2] The last of these has come down to us only in a printed word book. The most obvious difference between the other two is that of language: one of them is in German, the other in Latin.

Bach's Latin Magnificat is one of his best known works. Though terse in comparison with his settings of the Mass or the Passion Story, it exceeds the normal dimensions of the cantata and remains one of his most festive and imposing choral compositions. It exists in two different versions from the composer's hand. The occasion for which Bach originally composed his Latin Magnifcat was, as we know, his first Christmas season in Leipzig. The celebration of December 25th called for a morning service as well as an evening service more particularly devoted to musical performance: it was enhanced by Bach's Magnificat. This explains how the Magnificat text entered the Christmas liturgy; it was an accepted part of Vespers. Bach's German Magnificat, a work of somewhat smaller proportions, has been listed by the editors of the *Bach-Gesellschaft* edition as Cantata 10. The text follows Luther's Magnificat translation closely in verses 1–2, 8, and 10–11; the other verses appear in free poetic paraphrase.

One would imagine that the German cantata served as a preliminary study for Bach's larger setting of the Latin Magnificat, but it is the other way round: the cantata was written half a year later. A direct connection between the two works remains obvious. The melody of the traditional Magnificat chant that appears in the gentle trio movement of the Latin Magnificat (*Suscepit Israel*) forms the chorale melody of the opening and close of the cantata; the tender alto-tenor duet (*Et misericordia*) returns in almost the same form as a setting of the corresponding German text; and great bass arias portray in both works the figure of the Almighty.

Yet what subtle differences are expressed in Bach's concern with every detail! The Latin word "Magnificat" is rendered in German as "erhebt" (exalts, literally: "raises"), and in the German cantata this literal meaning of the word produced the rising bass line that dominates the entire first movement. The solo soprano introduces, as in the Latin Magnificat, the figure of Mary, though the place of the two brief lyrical soprano episodes is now taken by an extended da capo aria in which the rising bass motif of the opening chorus is fully developed. Only in the aria's middle section does the musical expression return to a characterization of the Lord's humble handmaiden; the German

[2]An additional work, available in a modern edition under the title *Piccolo Magnificat*, is spurious.

word "elend" (wretched), however, called for a more expressive touch than did the Latin "humilitas." The tenor solo that follows in Cantata 10 is somewhat reminiscent of the forceful *Deposuit.* Here the comparison of the final coloratura ("zerstreu'n") with the incisive choral setting of its Latin counterpart "dispersit" is particularly interesting. The German version seems to reflect the experience of the soaring Evangelist passages in the St. John Passion, which was composed between the two Magnificat settings. The concluding doxology presents the old Latin Magnificat chant as a German Protestant chorale.

The Magnificat text received a more liberal treatment in Cantata 147. References to the scriptural wording are limited to the recitatives, the first of which introduces the Magnificat scene against the solemn sound of string chords that we know from other uses in Bach's work at the mention of the Saviour. The second recitative deals with verses 6 and 7 of the canticle, assigned here — as in the two other Magnificat works — to the bass voice. The last recitative moves to the Annunciation text of the Visitation of Mary, and in the accompaniment of this recitative the reflection of the dialogue between the two women rises to such unbelievable beauty as only Bach's music can express. Like a number of the larger cantatas Bach wrote, Cantata 147 is divided into two parts, and the trumpet solos of the first chorus and last aria give the work a brilliantly ornate outline. But the chorale that concludes both parts of the cantata confirms its inherent lyricism with a tone of pervading confidence and serenity that has made it more famous than any other Bach chorale.

The third of the Annunciation texts, the *Nunc dimittis,* forms the subject of Cantata 125. Included as a Lesson in the feast of the Purification of Mary, the text represents the prophecy of Simeon:

> Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace,
> according to Thy word:
> For mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation,
> Which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
> A light to lighten the Gentiles,
> and the glory of Thy people Israel.

It closes the cycle of Annunciation scenes in somber prayer, as it symbolically rounds the cycle of life. The musical basis of the cantata is Luther's chorale adaptation of the *Nunc dimittis,* the first stanza sung by the sopranos in the opening chorus, the second by the solo bass — now representing the figure of Simeon — and the last by all voices uniting in the concluding hymn verse. Thus the work is a chorale cantata. It belongs to the group of church compositions that Bach wrote after the year that includes his Magnificat, and, like Cantata 10, it shows his cantata style in its most mature form.

Even later is the fragmentary *Nunc dimittis* paraphrase published under the cantata number 200. The single aria that has remained of this work interprets the text not so much as the vision of the departing but as his proclamation of the Light to lighten the Gentiles — the Salvation that the Lord

has prepared before the face of all people. It suggests the affinity of the *Nunc dimittis* text to Psalm 117, as the Magnificat text suggests an affinity to Psalm 103.

There is a sonority in its full choral entrances that immediately distinguishes the Magnificat from other choral works by Bach: five voice sections are singing rather than the usual four. This may seem to be a small difference, but in reality it signifies a different orientation of style; the five-part texture was prevalent in the century before Bach, not in his own. Bach's choral writing rises to six and eight parts at times, but in these great choruses the dense web of voices usually opens into a more transparent antiphonal play of a pair of three-part or four-part choruses, as in the writing of the Renaissance masters. The five-part texture stands as an entity that characterizes the *chorus plenus,* the traditional full choral sound. We find it, for instance, in Bach's motet *Jesu meine Freude,* as we find the five-part texture here and there in Bach's instrumental writing, but in the Magnificat the retrospective attitude is underlined by the choice of Latin text. In completing his first major choral composition, Bach very consciously aligned his own work with the illustrious past. This tendency is strengthened with Bach's later return to Latin texts. The Mass in B Minor combines the five-part choral texture again with the setting of Latin language. Thus Magnificat and Mass form a mighty frame for his choral oeuvre.

Ceremonial Cantatas

When the young Mendelssohn, at the occasion of a visit to Goethe, played portions from the score of one of Bach's orchestral overtures, Goethe remarked that the listener could not help but see a ceremonial procession in festive attire and stately motion before his eyes. The poet's description, preserved in one of Mendelssohn's letters, bore a historical justification that those present at the time may not have fully realized. The style and form of Bach's overtures, having originated at the court of Louis XIV, portrayed true courtly ceremony. Though based upon the traditional pattern of prelude and fugue, the French overture — an instrumental introduction for opera or other formal aristocratic entertainment — reflected regal pomp and circumstance. One might indeed imagine the entering and greeting of nobles to the marchlike strains of an overture's beginning and the start of the real concert, the fugue, once the company was settled. Bach's compelling sense of form tended towards a rounding out of the musical structure with a return to the ceremonial opening after the completion of the fugue; even the character of the fashionable dances to which the orchestral suite turned after the overture was ceremonial.

The model that the French court set for European social life influenced all German principalities, one of the smallest of which was Cöthen. This court had attracted Bach's services because of the admiration — indeed, the close personal friendship — shown him by Leopold, the young ruling prince, an accomplished musician and a person of unusual refinement and charm. Traditionally, the court of Cöthen adhered to the reformed faith, and the austere character of its music, founded in Calvinist chapel service, must have been veritably revolutionized by Bach's compositions. The overtures, sonatas, and concertos which Bach wrote in Cöthen established court ceremony of the most exquisite kind — they altered, in fact, the course of European instrumental music.

It was a hard decision for Bach "to change the position of Court Conductor for that of Cantor," as we know from Bach's famous letter to Georg Erdmann, a friend from school days. His move to Leipzig was prompted by various factors — Prince Leopold had become espoused to a strong-willed, totally unmusical cousin under whose influence the court music had lost its former support, and the needs of Bach's growing family seemed inadequately served in the provincial schools of the secluded town. Bach had expressly stated the concern for the opportunity of his sons' university study in his letter to Erdmann.

Leipzig was not only the seat of the oldest German university, but also one of the foremost strongholds of the Protestant faith; the cantor of St. Thomas's was at the same time music director for the main churches of the town, and Bach's professed ideal of "a well-regulated church music" may in the end have been the motive that guided the composer most strongly.

The disappointment in the Leipzig cantorship was due to many reasons, yet the most obvious among them proved to be the change from princely authority, with its characteristic largesse, to civic authority — complex, bureaucratic and quarrelsome. It is not easy to visualize the specific place and function of ceremonial music in the creative assignment of a public servant who at the outset of his duties had to sign a pledge saying that he would "so arrange the music that it shall not last too long, and shall be of such nature as not to make an operatic impression."[1]

Probably the most important civic event for the Leipzig population was the annual election of the town council. For a number of works which Bach wrote to celebrate these occasions only the texts remain. Among the election cantatas that have been fully preserved are numbers 29 and 119, both of them works characterized by festive means and tone. Bach was acquainted with council election festivities from the early years of his career in which he served as organist in the city of Mühlhausen. He had composed Cantata 71 in honor of the Mühlhausen town council taking office in February, 1708, and it is indicative of the circumstances that the council did the composer the honor to have the work printed. Cantata 71, like Cantata 119, resplendent in its orchestral colors ranging from trumpets and drums to recorders, remains the only Bach cantata published during the composer's lifetime.

Doubtless one of the most fascinating aspects of Bach's oeuvre is the composer's power of synthesis. With each new phase he regathered experience and achievement. He was untiring in selecting the finest of earlier works for recasting and elaboration, and the style of the young conductor and virtuoso, in fact, his ceremonial court music, reappears again and again in the church compositions of Bach's later years. Thus the French overture did not disappear; it was absorbed into the cantata scoring for chorus and orchestra in varying formal designs, all of them retaining the lustrous spirit of the model. The beginning of Cantata 119 is a French overture in the most splendid manner, the orchestra of woodwinds, brasses, and strings presenting the stately opening and conclusion, and the chorus joining in the lively middle section. There is one cantata (No. 194) in which Bach so consistently retraces the pattern of the orchestral suite that not only the overture but even the different court dances — gavotte, minuet, pastorale, and gigue — are represented in vocal garb. This

[1]Records of the school of St. Thomas's, May 5, 1723; Quoted from *The Bach Reader,* p. 92.

work marked a Leipzig ceremony quite similar to the services for council elections: the service held in celebration of the reconstruction of a church and initiation of a new church organ.

The instrumental introduction for Cantata 29 shows how Bach, the brilliant organist, comes again to the fore in church cantata performance. Albert Schweitzer conjectured in his Bach biography that Bach had a separate keyboard installed in the choir loft at St. Thomas's in order to make it possible for him to play obbligato parts while conducting choir and orchestra. The installation and dedication of the great Baroque organs must in themselves have been subject to considerable ceremony. When the young Bach was called from Weimar to examine the new organ at the Church of Our Lady at Halle, he and his co-examiners (Johann Friedrich Rolle, later one of his competitors for the post in Leipzig, and Johann Kuhnau, whom he eventually succeeded at St. Thomas's) were treated by their hosts to a formal banquet which happens to have furnished the only extant documentary evidence from a menu in Bach's life, a seventeen-dish meal, equally varied and substantial, which in itself gives amusing proof of ceremonial character.

The duties of Bach's cantorship embraced musical ceremony ranging from the most joyful to the most solemn occasions — musical church ceremony spanned the course of human life. The reason that so many ceremonial works of Bach are lost is that, having been intended for one particular occasion, the performance material was not as carefully filed away as that of cantatas which might be used again on the same Sunday in another church year. But the music written for commemorative services of several distinguished Leipzig citizens — the series of Bach's motets — was kept in the choir library of St. Thomas's, and these form an incomparable body of works, which we have discussed in the first section of this volume.

Bach's music for marriage ceremonies must be considered in two categories: sacred cantatas written for the church service in which the actual wedding ceremony took place, and secular cantatas written for performance in the home and calling for much more modest means, although for equally great vocal and instrumental virtuosity. The cantatas for church weddings which Bach composed during his Leipzig years are all divided into two parts, one to be performed before and the other after the ceremony. In the case of Cantata 195, the latest and most impressive of these, only the first part has come down to us. Yet the text of the second part has survived, suggesting proportions corresponding to those of the first part. The chorale with which the cantata is concluded still bears the inscription "after the ceremony," but it apparently was used only for a repeat performance in which Bach did not have time available to perform the entire work.

Cantata 202, a secular wedding cantata, is particularly famous among Bach's solo cantatas. Its sublime opening leads, through arias and recitatives,

gradually back to the court dance; the last aria suggests the character of the minuet, and the finale is entitled gavotte.

Friedrich Smend, editor of the B Minor Mass in the new Complete Edition of Bach's works, has suggested that even the *Missa* in B Minor served in its first performance for a ceremonial occasion. Written in 1733, after the death of Augustus, King of Poland and Elector of Saxony, the work was dedicated to his successor, Frederick Augustus II. Smend conjectured that it was originally intended for the service that ended the period of mourning in Leipzig — the Kyrie performed before the sermon as a memorial tribute to the late king, and the Gloria after the sermon in festive homage to the new monarch. Though Smend's theories have been widely disputed, his argument for the ceremonial character of the work that eventually formed the First Part of Bach's setting of the complete Mass text retains validity in the widest sense. In the Mass, as in so many other works, Bach recalls phases from his own creative career, and the music of the court conductor and composer of ceremonial cantatas returns, as does the music for the *Gratias* in the *Dona nobis pacem*. Both go back to the stately chorus of Thanksgiving that forms the opening of Cantata 29.

Chorale Cantatas

The chorale stands at the center of Bach's work. Ranging from the small organ preludes in the early *Orgelbüchlein* and the stark four-part settings that conclude many of the cantatas to the immense chorale fantasy that opens the St. Matthew Passion, the use of the chorale is the key to Bach's oeuvre. The chorale determines the work of the Leipzig cantor as does no other musical form.

There are several reasons for this predominant role. Despite modern doubts, Bach was a devout Lutheran; it was evidently not only tradition but conviction that accounts for the fact that the Lutheran chorales he sang as a choir boy guided him throughout his artistic career. As a young organist in Mühlhausen, Bach had proclaimed, in one of the highly revealing statements he issued to his church superiors, the ideal of a "well regulated church music." And it was through matters of civic organization rather than those pertaining to the church proper that he became discontented with his assignment in Leipzig and anxious to leave. The startling recent discovery of Bach's copy of the Bible has supplied us with incontestable evidence of Bach's personal attitude towards the church service. Bach's marginal annotations entered in this copy refer to an edition of the Scriptures that was one of the eminent Lutheran documents of the time. Luther, himself a musician of acknowledged ability, had taken an active hand in reforming the choral song of the church, and the history of the German Protestant chorale is founded in works largely his own creation.

But aside from the religious reasons, there is a purely artistic reason that gave rise to the unique role of the chorale in Bach's work. One of the most remarkable characteristics of Bach is the consistency with which he pursues a particular musical subject. Once committed to it, he exalts it; it becomes essence and epitome of his writing, it is glorified by the characteristic expression of musical imagination Bach could bestow on a chosen theme. Thus a prototype of Bach's procedure of composition is the fugue in which all voices concentrate on the elaboration of a single subject. In works like the Musical Offering and the Art of Fugue such a subject serves not only for one piece but for complete cycles.

Neither these principles of fugal composition nor the manifold forms of chorale settings are new as they appear in Bach's work. On the contrary, his towering position must be attributed to the fulfillment of time-honored stylistic ideals and the quality of individual creative genius with which he led them to

culmination. Used as a musical term, the word *subject* suggests the typical act of composition by which the entire wealth of Western polyphony had unfolded. Composers invariably began with a *sogetto,* a subject that was often a melody generally known and used and that formed the basis of a composition in which new and original parts were gradually added. Usually the subject came from the church repertoire, from chant. It is this traditional process to which Bach lent supreme dimensions. Again and again, the chorale serves as technical basis of his compositions. But it serves as spiritual basis as well. It becomes framework and summary, and the artistic and religious motives merge.

When the chorale becomes the subject on which the design of an entire cantata is based, we are dealing therefore with an outstanding example of Bach's relentlessly exploring work process — the chorale cantata. The best known, but in its form also unusual, example of a chorale cantata is probably Bach's Cantata 4, *Christ lag in Todesbanden.* Each section of the work is formed by a new verse. The hymn tune appears in ever changing guises in choral and solo song; but drawn from it in some form or other are also the themes of the instrumental introduction and all the accompaniments of strings, brasses, and organ. Equally famous are Cantata 140, *Wachet auf,* and Cantata 80, *Ein feste Burg;* but these works represent different variants of a genre which upon closer consideration shows well-nigh endless multiformity.

We must bear in mind that in adopting a chorale as theme for a whole cantata Bach made use not only of the melody but also of the text. Thus the special poetic form of the chorale *Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan* meant that each movement of Cantata 100 had to begin with the same words. Bach met the musical challenge arising from this reiteration by using the chorale melody in full choral harmony only for the beginning and end of the work. The settings of verses 2, 3, 4, and 5 call for rather different musical and expressive means. Soprano and bass soli, duet and aria, lyricism and joyous affirmation are the contrasting features of a picture rounded out in the first and last verses by the exultant concerto of flute, horns, strings, and drums that portrays man's faith in God's ways. In similar manner, the form of Cantata 192 is determined by the chorale text. The work is little known because it has been handed down in fragmentary form: the original score and the tenor part are lost. From the extant parts, however, the editors of the *Bach-Gesellschaft* edition were able to reconstruct this cantata for modern performance, and it would be wrong to apply the word "fragmentary" to the overall structure of the work. The formal scheme follows that of the chorale, and the unusual brevity of the work is accounted for by the fact that this chorale contains only three verses.

The two great classics from Bach's cantata oeuvre, Cantata 80 and Cantata 140, exhibit at first glance an identical pattern. Like Cantata 100, they open with a brilliantly designed chorale verse and end with a verse in plain four-part texture, in addition to which they contain a central chorale verse sung

in unison with orchestral elaboration. Yet the momentum of the opening chorus in Cantata 80 carries over into the second movement. The florid solo lines of soprano and bass are also dominated by the chorale. The third and fourth, as well as the sixth and seventh movements form pairs in which the dramatic thrust of the chorale gives way to quiet contemplation. As in Bach's Passion settings, free poetic texts are here inserted in form of recitatives and arias which serve for reflection and interpretation of the principal text. There is perhaps no more monumental a chorale setting in all of Bach's work than the opening movement of this cantata. All voices and stringed instruments deal with the embellished chorale melody at all times. And, as so often in Bach's writing, the musical interpretation of the theme grows into an interpretation of its meaning. The unadorned chorale tune, which appears in wind instruments and organ above and below the chorus, becomes in itself the Mighty Fortress that stands unfailingly. In the text and music of the fifth verse this interpretation is even more explicit. The hymn tune, reintroduced in the opening bass melody, is transformed in the mounting string tutti to a veritably raging battle into which the firm chorale melody enters once again.

The tenor chorale that forms the middle section of Cantata 140 marks this work's striking symmetry. The central chorale verse is preceded and followed by recitative-duet sequences which, in turn preceded and followed by chorale verses, represent in this case integral parts of a dramatic succession that links the triumphant entry into Jerusalem to the theme of the spiritual union of the Soul with Christ. Bach was inspired by the beauty of this text, and the structural balance of its section is matched by a balance of forcefulness and gentleness that has made this cantata one of the most celebrated of all Bach's works.

The duets in Cantata 140 hark back to one of the oldest dramatic forms in the liturgy, the musical dialogue. The principles of responsorial and antiphonal singing had found a new soloistic expression in Bach's time. The discourse of the Soul and Christ contrasts earthly suffering and heavenly bliss, and Cantata 58, which Bach called *Concerto in Dialogo,* deals with the same theme. The chorale appears here as frame which, however, maintains the texture of dialogue. The bass part, representing the voice of Christ, answers the phrases of the soprano chorale, reassuring the Soul in its fear, summarizing at the end the guiding thought, the antithesis of "grief is here — but glory there."

What makes the use of the chorale so specially interesting in Cantata 58 is that the two verses appearing at the beginning and end are taken from two different hymn texts. Nevertheless they represent the same chorale. Both are set to the melody known through a third text, related in mood — *O Jesu Christ, mein's Lebens Licht.* With this original text, the melody formed the basis for the sublime chorale motet BWV 118, a work from Bach's last years.

In Cantata 60, the dialogue form is widened. The two protagonists are designated by Bach as Fear and Hope, and these solo parts are clearly

distinguished from the usual dialogue parts as alto and tenor. Yet the bass voice — the *vox Christi* — is added in the last recitative, entering with the words from Revelation 14, verse 13, which leads the dramatic dialogue to the catharsis.

The subtlety with which the chorale links the fabric of the entire work, is probably unique in Bach's writing. We are dealing here not only with different hymn texts for the beginning and end of the cantata, but also with different hymn melodies. Yet these hymns are so close in verbal and melodic thought that Bach in fact merged them, drawing dramatic continuity as well as principal thematic material from what obviously had become one basic chorale. The word "Eternity" is portrayed by the traversing of the entire scale that forms the opening chorale phrase. But whereas in the alto melody the scale theme expresses Hope, its smaller compass and trembling rhythm in the string accompaniment express Fear. Again and again the stark melody appears in various motivic variants. Only in the divine intercession is the anxious upward surge of the melody turned to tranquil descent. The critical reinterpretation of the opening theme is first suggested in the recitative words, "How hard the road." It reappears in the closing chorale verse: the struggle is resolved in a return of the rising theme which — boldest musical expression of Bach's time — reflects the transcendence beyond earthly life by transcending the harmony of the scale. Bach's entire language seems to change now, and the concluding chorale verse has arrested the attention of musicians through the generations; in the twentieth century it was incorporated in the work of one of the foremost exponents of the dodecaphonic style.[1]

In the course of its long history, the term chorale embraced two distinct meanings, one associated with the Catholic and the other with the Protestant church service. It is the latter that is more familiar today — the use of the term in the sense of the Protestant congregational hymn. The older meaning of the term, connected with the Catholic liturgy, did not involve the congregation, but referred to the choral singing of a small, specially trained group of celebrants. Its best known synonym is *chant.* The overlap of the terms is easily understood when one realizes that *chant* stands for *chant choral* — choral song; the Protestant hymn, like Catholic chant, was originally rendered by the unaccompanied choir.

Yet aside from their original manner of performance, Catholic chant and Protestant chorale have another particular musical characteristic in common, and this became of special interest to Bach. Chant, as we have mentioned, had served through the ages as thematic material upon which composers based their

[1]Alban Berg's Violin Concerto. A recording combining this work and Bach's cantata was issued by Crossroads, New York, Stereo 22160172.

compositions in more and more complex structures. Bach had used chant melodies on various occasions, but they became of primary importance to him when he turned his full attention to the composition of the Mass text. Christoph Wolff mentions in his significant study of the aging Bach's compositional style that even the very opening of the B Minor Mass is based on a chant formula.[2]

In setting the Mass text to music, there was no apparent opportunity for Bach to avail himself of the repertoire of the Protestant chorale which he had used to such a large extent in his cantatas. It is typical of Bach that with compelling creative force he nevertheless brought about a blending of seemingly contradictory elements. In his Mass in F Major, Bach used the complete melody of the Protestant chorale *Christe, du Lamm Gottes* — a melody derived from the chant formula that had served him for the opening of the B Minor Mass. It is played above the four-part chorus by oboes and horns. But at the same time the choral bass sings the traditional chant for the *Kyrie eleison*. This work shows Bach at the crossroads; when he composed the Second Part of the B Minor Mass in later years, he began with a theme that represents the "chorale" strictly in the ancient sense. Dipping deeper and deeper into the traditions of the past, Bach chose chant melodies as themes dominating the Credo and Confiteor sections, and even the final section of the Mass is based on a chant formula Bach had used before; what Bach had begun in his earlier Mass compositions is here carried to ultimate heights.

[2]*Der Stile Antico in der Musik Johann Sebastian Bachs,* Wiesbaden, 1968, p. 180.

St. John Passion

> "You know the course of my life from my youth up until the change in my fortunes that took me to Cöthen as Capellmeister. There I had a gracious Prince who both loved and knew music, and in his service I intended to spend the rest of my life. It must happen, however, that the said *Serenissimus* should marry a Princess of Berenburg and that then the impression should arise that the musical interests of the said Prince had become somewhat lukewarm, especially as the new princess seemed to be unmusical; and it pleased God that I should be called hither. . ."

The inauspicious circumstances under which Bach assumed his Leipzig post in the summer of 1723 are related in this well-known account which the composer later sent to Georg Erdmann, Imperial Russian Resident Agent in Danzig, a friend from early days. Bach had realized at the outset that with his new choice of superiors he was exchanging the company of sympathetic, highly educated aristocrats for a set of wrangling town officials, and the mistrust was mutual.

He was the third choice, and only when his famous colleagues Georg Philipp Telemann and Christoph Graupner had proved unavailable did the town council come to grips with the issue that its minutes have so historically recorded: "Since the best man could not be obtained, mediocre ones would have to be considered . . ." Bach's wish to concentrate on his musical duties and to be relieved of academic teaching assignments was all the more readily deemed "somewhat questionable."[1]

As always in the story of this extraordinary professional career, Bach's character proved immeasurably stronger than the obstacles placed in his way. A period of intense creativity followed; as we know, Bach began to produce a cantata for every week. The greatest musical challenge of the church year, however, did not arise until the Lenten season: the gospel text relating the Passion of Our Lord called for a musical setting different from all others in that the postulates of church music clearly met with the preeminent musical genre of Bach's time: music drama.

In the Passion according to St. John, performed on Good Friday, 1724, Bach's work reached totally new dimensions. Bach had never before written a chorus of such magnitude as the opening movement in the St. John Passion. It may, in fact, have proved too taxing for the choir boys at St. Thomas's, and this

[1]The documents are quoted from *The Bach Reader*, New York, 1945 and 1966.

may have been the reason why for a second performance of the work, on Good Friday of the following year, Bach substituted a new introductory chorus for the original one. The new opening movement — *O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde gross,* one of the most beautiful Passion choruses Bach has written — measured up to the large new dimensions; but it assigned to the boy sopranos merely a plain chorale tune, while the other parts, sung by the older choir members, provided an elaborate vocal accompaniment which was based on the different phrases of the soprano tune in the manner of the chorale fantasy. When Bach later resumed the original opening chorus, the alternate movement became the concluding chorus for Part One of the St. Matthew Passion. Was it for reasons of balance that Bach introduced a similar chorale fantasy as final chorus for the St. John Passion in 1725? This chorus, based on the Lutheran hymn *Christe, du Lamm Gottes,* had been newly composed as the concluding movement for Cantata 23, and eventually Bach restored it to its place in Cantata 23 — possibly because he felt that two extended choral movements might be too weighty a conclusion for the St. John Passion. These changes show Bach's ever vigilant working attitude, his constant concern for the perfection of form and style.

The dramatic style of Passion setting was not unknown in Leipzig. The operatic forms of aria, recitative, and ensemble had long invaded the Protestant church cantata, and Bach's predecessor had presented, with some hesitation, a "theatrical" Passion setting at St. Thomas's in 1721. The origin of this style was indeed the theater. Following the model of Venetian opera, the city of Hamburg, the "Northern Venice," where Bach had unsuccessfully applied for an organist's post before he went to Leipzig, had opened a first German public opera house in 1687. Its early repertoire contained both sacred and secular subjects, and after the turn of the century several of the composers who wrote for the Hamburg stage presented settings of the Passion according to St. John. The most eminent among these was George Frideric Handel, who composed a St. John Passion in 1704 and another work based on the same text, poetically paraphrased, in 1716.

Throughout his life, Bach was an ardent student of different musical styles. He absorbed all that past and present had to offer and turned it into his own incomparable musical style. Handel's St. John Passion of 1716 has come down to us in a copy made by Bach and his wife, Anna Magdalena. The work may have guided Bach in his composition of the same gospel text, and he used portions of the same poetic paraphrase. While the authenticity of Handel's earlier St. John Passion has been doubted, its concluding chorus shows an unmistakable influence upon the last chorus from Bach's St. John Passion. But with Bach's work began an entirely new chapter of the genre. It leads from the St. John Passion to the St. Matthew Passion and reaches a final point, interestingly enough, with the Passion section in Handel's *Messiah*.

Whether considered in stylistic context or as an isolated work, Bach's Passion according to St. John stands as a unique creation. The fervor of its language is unmatched in his later works. The perfection of polyphonic texture in its choruses is blended with a lyric quality that shows the composer still as the youthful master. His work seems to have arrived at a sharp dividing line: the early world of musical colors, the sound of the "love viol" (viola d'amore), of the lute and the viola da gamba still surrounds us; the low range of the alto role still strongly suggests the timbre of the counter-tenor. The passionate quality of the quaint pietistic poetry influences the climactic points of the Evangelist's role. But the contours are stark — the part of Jesus is supported by simple continuo accompaniment, and plain chorale settings conclude the First Part, open the Second Part, and form the end of the work.

The structure is drawn with overwhelming clarity. The drama of the First Part is the personal drama, it is Peter's denial; with the Second Part it becomes impersonal. Jesus, forsaken, faces the crowd. In the breathtaking unfolding of choral movements, the hymn verse of chorale No. 40, interpreting Christ's imprisonment as mankind's liberation, emerges as the central point of a design from which the same musical settings of different choruses radiate, encircling the divine captive until the crucifixion is completed. The placement of identical hymn tunes parallels this symmetry. The opening chorale of Part Two recurs after the crucifixion scene. The closing chorale of Part One recurs in the two chorales of the death scene.

The huge structural arch which thus dominates the form of the St. John Passion corresponds to the grandeur of the opening chorus. It sets a standard that henceforth remained characteristic of Bach's work. The opening of the St. Matthew Passion, originally intended for a solo voice and chorus, grew into the double chorus which turns, with the entrance of a third group of voices, into a monumental chorale fantasy. The concluding chorus of the St. Matthew Passion reflects on a larger scale the form, character, and even melodic outlines of the last chorus of the St. John Passion. And it was the creative achievement of his Passion settings that determined the proportions of Bach's B Minor Mass. Not only in the vastness of its form is the Mass indebted to the Passions, but — as we realize when the Kyrie and Gloria choruses are followed by the *Qui tollis* — in the profound musical imagery. "This is real Passion music that words cannot describe."[2]

Bach's life work forms ever new cycles. When after an interval of almost two decades he resumed the *Missa* in B Minor (the work to which we now refer as Part One of the B Minor Mass) and composed a setting of the entire Catholic Mass text, his creative interest was aroused by a number of factors. Not the

[2]Quoted from Paul Henry Lang, "B Minor Mass," in *Bach and Handel,* New York, 1975, p. 16.

least among them was the composer's artistic commitment to the central portion of the Credo text — Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection. The mighty trilogy of choruses that present the drama of the Christian creed was the last section that Bach completed, shortly before his death. It forms the conclusion of the immense chapter in Bach's work begun with the composition of the St. John Passion of 1724.

St. Matthew Passion

The rebirth of drama was the supreme expression of the rebirth of ancient culture — the Renaissance — and it embraced all aspects of art. When Shakespeare wrote his plays, Monteverdi created works representing a new form of music, opera. But like Bach, having been immersed in the novel challenges of secular music, Monteverdi became the foremost church musician of his time, and the hallmarks of opera — recitative, aria, dramatic chorus, and orchestral accompaniment — became absorbed into the music of worship.

It has often been observed that among all major musical forms of his time, opera is conspicuously absent from Bach's work. But this fact must be regarded with some reservation. There could, in fact, be no more perfect miniature opera than the *Coffee Cantata,* and that Bach was not averse to the operatic music of his contemporaries is known through a report that Bach's eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann, gave to the Bach biographer Johann Nicolaus Forkel:

> At the time that Hasse was Capellmeister at Dresden, the orchestra and the opera there were very brilliant and excellent. Bach had had there already in his earlier years many acquaintances. . . . He was therefore always received in an exceedingly honorable manner at Dresden, and often went thither to hear the opera. He generally took his eldest son with him. He used to say in joke, some days before his departure: "Friedemann, shan't we go again to hear the lovely Dresden ditties?"

That Bach wrote no operas must be understood in the context of traditions and circumstances of his artistic career which was dissociated from the operatic centers of his time. But his fundamental commitment to the dramatic means of music is nowhere more strongly expressed than in his greatest church music.

The presentation of the Passion Story, traditionally chanted in the liturgy of Holy Week, had become interspersed with certain dramatic elements ever since medieval days. Priest, deacon, and subdeacon had assumed the principal roles in gospel narration, the *vox Christi* being assigned to a bass and the voice of the *evangelista* to a tenor. The third voice, usually in alto register, represented the other personages, and in time the number of voices was increased and combined to suggest both the crowd scenes and the comment of a Choir of Believers.

When Bach undertook the composition of the Passion according to St. John in his first year of office in Leipzig, he merged these traditions with modern operatic practice on a scale never attempted before. Yet the St.

Matthew Passion, composed several years later, shows such infinitely enlarged dimensions, such perfection of style and depth of compassion, that the work stands apart from all other human creation.

It is apparent — though the language of opera is transfigured — that the conventions of music drama guided Bach throughout the composition of the St. Matthew Passion. There was a tradition in Venetian opera by which at the crisis of the tragedy, when the protagonist's fate had begun to separate him from the living, his role was singled out through the orchestral accompaniment of his vocal part. Instead of a merely supporting orchestral bass, enriched at times by the obbligato of isolated instruments, the sound of the full string orchestra now surrounded his voice. In early English opera we know this practice from the moving final lament in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas.* Italian opera had even created a name for the changed role: it had passed from *persona* to *ombra,* entered into the domain of shades. This practice was applied by Bach to the part of Jesus — except that the dramatic means were expanded, for the detachment of His role is marked through a halo of string sound from the very beginning.

With the stringed instruments assigned to this singular task, Bach chose woodwind accompaniment for the majority of recitatives and arias, thus generally enriching the individual vocal solos. But the musical characterization of roles is carried into every detail. It may, in fact, have been the wish to distinguish the chorus of disciples from the chorus of the hostile crowd that gave Bach the first suggestion for the grand scale of the work calling for two choruses and two orchestras. Thus chorus I — the chorus of disciples — sings alone in the beginning of the narration. Yet how finely differentiated are even these brief choral scenes. The true, serene nature of the followers of Christ appears only in the second, in which they ask the Master where to prepare the Passover feast. In the first they appear shortsighted and distraught; in the last, the brief fugal setting of "Lord, is it I?", they are dissolved in disbelief and shock — and Bach wrote exactly eleven entrances of the theme; the twelfth disciple, Judas, is silent.

The antiphonal design lends spaciousness to the work everywhere. Solo voices emerge from the first and from the second chorus, and at times — as in the first two arias — the two orchestras alternate in their accompanying tasks. The perspective created by the two main bodies of sound is intensified in such settings as the opening chorus of Part Two. There a solo voice from the first chorus — the daughter of Zion, left desolate in the Garden of Gethsemane after the capture of the Saviour — is contrasted against the full second chorus answering and comforting her in the words of the Song of Songs. The opening chorus of Part One was originally planned in the same manner, as is still suggested by the first line of the text "Come, ye daughters, help me lament." But in the musical execution of this prologue, Bach envisioned a scene of

incomparably mightier proportions, and it resulted in the largest score he ever created. A third choir of soprano voices was added to the two choirs and orchestras, turning the entire chorus into a chorale fantasy upon the German *Agnus Dei.* Yet the power of Bach's language is evident in its economy as much as in its magnitude. The single outcry "Barrabam" — one chord — marks the height of the tragedy, and the strongest dramatic contrasts are achieved by short lyric moments of utmost tenderness.

Bach himself doubtless regarded this work as a consummate expression of his art. The span of time between the composition of the St. John Passion and the St. Matthew Passion represents the most productive period in his entire life work. Its feverish creative pace must have been influenced again and again by Bach's wish to raise his public to the level of his own artistic standards. This effort failed. It was the dramatic presentation of the Passion text to which the Leipzig congregation was least receptive.

From a book on the Divine Service in Saxony written by the church historian Christian Gerber (1732) comes the famous quotation:

> When in a large town this Passion music was done for the first time, with twelve violins [strings], many oboes, bassoons, and other instruments, many people were astonished and did not know what to make of it. In the pew of a noble family in church, many Ministers and Noble Ladies were present, who sang the first Passion chorale out of their books with great devotion. But when this theatrical music began, all these people were thrown into the greatest bewilderment, looked at each other, and said, "What will come of this?" An old widow of the nobility said, "God save us, my children! It's just as if one were at an Opera Comedy."

Though often mentioned in connection with the first performance of the St. Matthew Passion, this passage cannot refer directly to the work — there are points of obvious incongruity. But it remains a striking document in its description of the attitude with which the St. Matthew Passion must have been met. The autograph score of the work, written in two different inks, is one of the most beautiful manuscripts that has come down to us from Bach's pen. The pride and matchless care of the craftsman guided the hand of genius in every detail. Having given his best, Bach must have realized irrevocable severance from his audience.

Thus the St. Matthew Passion marks a turning point in Bach's career. Three years after its first performance followed one of the most eloquent testimonies of Bach's life, the letter written to a friend from school days asking for assistance in Bach's search for another position, and, as we know, Bach later applied unsuccessfully to the royal court in Dresden for the office of Court Capellmeister, submitting the manuscript of his *Missa* in B Minor.

It remains one of the most remarkable facts in cultural history that Bach sustained the level of his achievement and rose to new heights in the face of disillusionment and isolation. Abandoning the cantata as the principal form of

his work and abandoning, in fact, the steady pace by which his writing was geared to the challenge of each new Sunday, Bach turned his interest to the forms of Mass and Oratorio. The last two decades of Bach's life form a history of their own which leads to culminating points in almost all aspects of his music. Unmistakably, the beckoning of drama continued to be a strong influence in Bach's work, even in its last and most remote phases. When eventually Bach singled out the *Missa* written for Dresden and widened it to a complete setting of the Mass text, he was apparently guided by the thought of creating a final monumental work of his choral art. Adding the text of the Catholic *Credo,* Bach encountered in its central section once more the drama of the Crucifixion.

It is this section of the Mass that seems to have occupied Bach most extensively at the very end of the process of composition. The *Crucifixus* is modeled upon a chorus from an early cantata which deals with the theme of the Crucifixion lament (Cantata 12, *Weeping, Mourning*); but as Friedrich Smend, editor of the B Minor Mass in the new edition of Bach's Complete Works, writes "compared to this model the *Crucifixus* stands as a totally new creation." Revising the rewritten version again, Bach made it the core of the three choruses representing the scenes of Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection — the *vox Christi* reappears in the bass solo of *Et resurrexit* announcing the second coming of Christ. Thus Bach was concerned with the concept of a larger dramatic continuity, the drama of Redemption. No one who has heard the sequence of *Crucifixus* and *Et resurrexit* can escape the power of this dramatic continuity. But what determined its balance was Bach's rewriting of the *Et incarnatus* text. Originally contained in the duet *Et in unum Dominum,* Bach separated this text portion and turned it into a choral prologue, inserting, in fact, the manuscript leaf on which it was written into the finished score of the Mass.

Thus he achieved a choral structure that corresponds to the succession of the choruses *Confiteor, Sanctus,* and *Osanna,* reflecting once again the dramatic sequence of Death and Resurrection. In both cases the concluding scene, the return to Heaven, is enhanced by an orchestral postlude, and these extended epilogues — concerts of the angels — are perhaps the most touching gesture of the aged dramatist, written as if in defiance, to stress the meaning of *non erit finis.*

Passion Cantatas

When Bach's second son Carl Philipp Emanuel was born, the composer asked his celebrated colleague and friend, Georg Philipp Telemann, to become the child's godfather. As it happened, Carl Philipp Emanuel was to fall heir not only to Telemann's second name but eventually also to his eminent position as music director at the five main churches of Hamburg and as cantor at Hamburg's famed *Johanneum,* the city's old Latin School founded by a friend of Luther.

As had been the case with his father, Carl Philipp Emanuel approached such dual assignment not without hesitation. A letter has been preserved in which C. P. E. Bach asked

> which Sundays and festivals required special music for the churches and whether a new setting of the Passion was expected each year. . . .[1]

This inquiry shows that the Passion music, traditionally performed on Good Friday, was the most imposing aspect of a church music director's creative task. As is listed in his obituary, Johann Sebastian Bach wrote five settings of the Passion story (of which only two have survived). Telemann, known in his era and to posterity by the legendary fertility of his invention, left almost ten times that many.

What so immediately distinguishes the tone of Bach's Passion settings from that of the works by his contemporaries is a quality of emotion that is unique to his genius. We are transported to the innermost expression of Bach's art. It is of interest in this connection to quote the comment given by Paul Henry Lang on Bach's orchestral concertos. He says that their opening and final movements conform to the animated character of commissioned works favored in his time, although their workmanship and ingenuity make them the highest point in the history of the old concerto. But the nature of social music

> vanishes in the middle movements before a bottomless profundity of feeling. The Bach of these middle movements is no longer the consummate instrumental virtuoso; these adagios are Passion music and belong to the greatest poetic achievements of the German spirit.[2]

The comment is doubly striking because we must consider the fact that the

[1]Richard Petzold, *Georg Philipp Telemann,* translated by Horace Fitzpatrick, New York 1974, p. 51.

[2]*Music in Western Civilization,* New York 1941 pp. 510f.

concertos were written prior to Bach's Passion settings. A perspective of fresh understanding arises before us: The young court conductor arriving on the scene in Leipzig and resolved to devote his life to church music gives new voice to the revered texts, adorns them with a language of his own that interprets their meaning with an intensity never known before.

This language assumes its dominant role immediately. It becomes clear from Bach's very first Leipzig cantata that the Passion theme, in fact, pervaded the church year. This cantata (No. 22, *Then He took unto Him the twelve)* was written for a service on February 7, 1723; it deals with the prediction of death and resurrection, the first aria stressing the word *Leiden* (suffering) in its unusual harmonies. The text was apparently assigned to Bach by the Leipzig Town Council. In a scribe's hand the notation "test piece for Leipzig" appears on the copy of the score. It seems that Bach had originally intended to present another cantata (No. 23, *Thou true God and Son of David*) for the occasion. This latter work is even more closely linked to the thought of the Passion, for, as we know, its final chorale was subsequently used by Bach as a conclusion for the Passion according to St. John.

A third cantata, written for the same Sunday of the church year is Cantata 127; it is based on the chorale *Lord Jesus Christ, true Man and God,* but with Bach's unequaled contrapuntal art, this chorale is joined, from the first measure of the orchestral introduction, to the Passion chorale from Cantata 23. And in the ensuing movements the immense variety of interpretation to which the Passion theme is subjected in Bach's writing fully unfolds. In the first aria, the solo soprano is accompanied by the plaintive voice of the oboe and gentle chords played by the flutes. With the key word *Sterbeglocken* (funeral-bells), the plucked sound of the stringed instruments completes the portrayal of otherworldly yearning. A dramatic contrast is formed by the following recitative and aria for bass. The victory over death is announced by the sound of the trumpet, and a vision of the Last Judgment gives promise of eternal life to the believer. The thought of eternal life is joined to that of eternal slumber in the conclusion of the final chorale, as the thought of the divine sacrifice is joined to the name of Jesus in the work's opening measure.

One might say there is a common bond between the source of these cantata texts and the spiritual legacy of the Moravian settlement in which American Bach Festivals originated: Pietism. A special religious attitude had evolved during the seventeenth century in reaction to the horrors of the Thirty-Years-War. Its foremost document was a publication by Philipp Jakob Spener, founder of the Pietist movement, which was entitled *Pia desideria* (Pious desires). Pietistic thought leaned towards the interpretation of death as the spiritual union of the Soul and Christ, often expressed in the most ardent, veritably amorous (the modern observer is tempted to say: Tristanesque) terms. But the boundlessness of Pietistic expression is also reflected in an infinite

tenderness, in the noble naivete that marked the spirit of the Pietist settlers. In the writings of the Pietists there arose a religious poetry in which the believer relives the Passion of our Lord, and in which his worship unendingly returns to the suffering of the Redeemer, drawing his consolation from agony overcome.

A typical example is the text of Cantata 159. The gospel verse (St. Luke 18:31) is surrounded in the opening recitative by comment portraying the dialogue between Christ and the Soul, and in the following aria the duet texture continues as the sopranos interpolate a verse of the Passion chorale in the vocal line of the alto solo part. The musical expression follows this text line by line; the opening "Behold, we go up" is rendered in ever ascending melody, and the aria's "I follow Thee" is set in canonic imitation that shadows the voice in the instrumental accompaniment. The next aria is one of Bach's most famous Passion pieces. The dying words of Jesus, "It is fulfilled" (St. Matthew 19:30) are represented in a musical phrase that, departing from its initial harmony and returning to it by the inversion of the melody, suggests completion in the most conclusive and exalted manner; it is resumed in the last words of the aria, "World, farewell." The final chorale embodies the spirit of Pietism: "Jesus, from Thy Passion came all my heart's elation."

The Passion cantatas favor the solo bass voice because this is the traditional representation of Christ, as we know it from the St. John and St. Matthew Passions. Thus the monumental "Kreuzstab" cantata, *I would my cross-staff gladly carry,* is written for bass alone, and in the work the solo part rises to the greatest bel canto art of Bach's time. Here we also encounter in stronger measure than before the musical symbolism associated with the Passion theme in Bach's works. In the very opening measures the melodic lines form a cross around the key-tone, ascending and descending to dissonant intervals, while the theme is marked by a harmonic "cross-relation." It is followed by the typical "sigh-motifs," slurring anticipations of successive tone steps in the principal contour of the melody, as we know them from the final chorale of the First Part of Bach's St. Matthew Passion.

A similar symbolism appears in the beginning of Cantata 78. Now it is the instrumental bass that determines the nature of the work. Falling chromatically from tone to tone, it forms one of those inexorably returning ostinato melodies that announce the Passion scene; the foremost example of such a bass theme is that of the *Crucifixus* in the B Minor Mass.

Best known among the duets Bach wrote is probably the next movement of Cantata 78, a gentle, almost serene plea for the Saviour's help. With incredible musical imagery Bach describes the "faltering steps" in melody and bass, the haste but yet the wavering of the believers. In the second section of the duet the theme serves to depict the raising of their voices (*erheben*), and it receives its full musical elaboration, turning to wholly joyful expression, on the words "Thy merciful countenance."

A new aspect of the manifold interpretations of the Passion theme appears in the tenor aria of Cantata 78. It is now the heroic fight against Satan that is portrayed by voice and instruments, and the word *Streit* (fight) returns in the triumphant lines of the final chorale.

The character of Cantata 3, finally, reverts to the thoughts of suffering and sorrow. With its opening movement we are afforded a most unusual glance into the composer's workshop. Since melody and text of this movement are based on the chorale verse describing the narrow road to heaven, Bach anticipated a truly heavenly ascent of the soprano voices in the final phrase. For this reason he must have decided on the singular procedure of placing the hymn tune in the bass rather than the soprano part and, reinforced by a trombone, it forms a reassuring support for the lyrical lament expressed in the melodies of the upper voices. A reflection of this design of composition appears in the following movement. Both an ostinato theme of the instrumental bass and a straightforward four-part setting for the chorus represent the second hymn verse, while the solo voices, moving upward from tenor to soprano, echo the earlier ascent of the chorus sopranos. The solo bass voice, the *vox Christi,* is saved for the conclusion of the movement which leads into the following aria: the Soul meets her Redeemer in heaven. The last appearance of the solo voices is in a duet not unlike the great duet in Cantata 78, though here both text and melody guide the listener back to the symbol of the cross.

When Bach took up the Passion theme again in the B Minor Mass, he dealt with its symbolism on the grandest level of musical design. The *Crucifixus* movement itself, with its recurrent ground bass, its cross-relations and sigh-motifs, is filled with the expressive inferences of Passion music. But the most important aspect of this section of the Mass is in its placement within the total work.

Traditionally, the Credo section occupies the central place among the five main sections of the Mass text. In the musical settings of the Mass, this symmetry was at times somewhat altered, as was the symmetry of the parts into which the Credo text is subdivided. Bach had observed a careful balance in planning the musical form of the *Symbolum Nicenum* (Nicene Creed), as he entitled the Credo section. He did this by placing two choruses each in the beginning, middle, and end. But eventually he improved upon this structure; he changed the middle section from two to three choruses by removing the *Et incarnatus* text from its original setting and by recasting it as a separate chorus. Through this change he supplanted the former parallelism of structure, each divided choral section growing from solemn to quickened pace, with a large cross design that places the *Crucifixus,* as a central chorus of three, in the very center of the entire *Symbolum Nicenum,* just as the Credo stands in the center of the entire Mass:

SymbolumNicenum

		Et incarnatus		
Credo				Confiteor
	Et in unum	Crucifixus	Et in spiritum	
Patrem				Et expecto
		Et resurrexit		

In the center of the *Crucifixus* — and thus in the center of the symbolic cross design — appear the words *passus et sepultus est.* It was Bach's final setting of the Passion text.

The Oratorios

Bach's Christmas Oratorio was written one year after the *Missa* in B Minor. It was the first of Bach's works bearing the title "oratorio"; but within the same church year, 1734–35, Bach applied the term oratorio also to works for Easter and the Feast of Ascension, so that we can recognize in the Christmas Oratorio the beginning of a larger cycle of works, a complete series of church compositions which established a new form in Bach's writing.

Relatively little attention has been given to the fact that Bach and Handel turned to the form of oratorio at almost the same time and at parallel points in their careers. They did so for similar reasons. Both composers had become disillusioned in serving disinterested audiences with works into which had gone their supreme creative effort. In the end, Handel's audience rejected opera and Bach's showed no true understanding for his cantatas. In moving to English and German oratorio, respectively, and arriving at totally different oratorio styles, the two masters probed new roads of artistic expression. But in reality, the mainstream of their work continued, deepened, and carried opera and cantata to final regions of baroque art.

The oratorio, rising from modest beginnings in Palestrina's time, had undergone complex musical influences before this decisive phase of its history. It represented the style of musical performance that took place in the public prayer hall — the oratory — and that stood midway between the musical styles of church and theater. In the course of time, it absorbed characteristics of both; its literature became both sacred and secular, ranging from disguised scenic play to devout meditation.

A trait that remained common to all works of the genre was a typically oratorical manner — the role of the speaker or narrator that we know from the Evangelist's part in Bach's Passion settings originated with oratorio. This role was designated as *Historicus* — the role that relates the story — during the century before Bach's time, and *Historia* became a general title for biblical scenes set to music in the oratorio manner. It was the *Historia* and its Protestant tradition that Bach began to explore in devoting his interest to the oratorio.

There is a further fact that conspicuously links Bach's and Handel's oratorio oeuvre: the adaptation of earlier works began to play a major role in the work of both composers with their oratorios. This fact is not easily understood by the modern listener because the very concepts of artistic activity

have changed. The quest for originality of invention was raised to primary importance by a later age; the ideal of Bach's and Handel's age was rather originality of execution. The vast number of works based on the same chorale tunes alone places musical borrowing, the so-called parody technique, in a different light: it was an integral part of a process of composition interpreted strictly according to the original meaning of the word — joining components to an entity. At the same time we must recognize that the work of the two masters — born in the same year — entered upon a new phase in the 1730's, a phase in which the creative career is no longer shaped so much by impulse as by synthesis. The adaptation of older compositions meant continuity and intensification, and among the works containing such adaptations, *Messiah* and the B Minor Mass stand as foremost examples.

The dimensions of Bach's three oratorios are totally different. The difference is based in part upon liturgical requirements and traditions, but its fundamental reason is the inherent dramatic quality of the text. This explains, too, why the *Historia* of the Passion and Crucifixion held a place more firmly established than that of any other liturgical drama in the Protestant Service, so that by Bach's time the Passion setting had virtually become a genre of its own.

It took Bach's sense of formal conception to impart proportions comparable to those of a Passion setting to the Christmas Story. He did so by an ingenious plan, the origins of which go back to Bach's first Christmas service at Leipzig in 1723. Since the Christmastide celebration, however, extended actually beyond the three Christmas Days to New Year's Day and the feast of Epiphany (Twelfth-day), including an intervening Sunday, Bach envisaged a design for a work embracing all six morning services of the holiday period. To the three Christmas Day services he apportioned the scenes describing the birth of the Saviour, the appearance of the angel, and the adoration of the shepherds. The part written for New Year's Day, the feast of the Circumcision, deals with the naming of Jesus, and those for Epiphany and its preceding Sunday, with the story of the three Kings.

While Bach follows in the six parts of the oratorio the conventions of the cantata — as he did in his Masses — the larger scope and the individual character of the work is present throughout. The gospel narration, assigned according to tradition to the tenor role, serves again and again as a connecting thread; but the entire fabric is also connected through the choice of chorales — the first and last chorale tune is the same, with others recurring in the grouping of various scenes — and through their unusual, festive treatment: the richly varied orchestra of woodwinds, brasses, and strings often interrupts the chorale melodies as if to picture the rejoicing of the heavenly host.

The texture of the whole work — seemingly simple because of the clear contrasts formed by bright choruses, contemplative arias, flowing recitatives

and summarizing chorales — is in reality complex. Recitative, aria, and chorale begin to merge, and the vocal solo, rising to the most lyrical expression in the slumber song of the second part, becomes reflective dialogue: the duet in the third part is followed by the echo aria in the fourth part, and in the fifth and sixth parts three and finally four solo voices are blended. Everywhere the singing is enhanced by the sound of instruments, its most profound concentration marking the beginning of the pastoral scene. The orchestration of this *sinfonia* (flutes and strings against a choir of reed instruments) was first recognized by Albert Schweitzer as the portrayal of a concert between angels and shepherds, thus as a confirmation of the thought that guides the entire work, the joining of Heaven and Earth.

The Easter Oratorio, with its much more sparse dramatic outline, comes in reality much closer to a traditional oratorio form. Here we are dealing with four solo roles representing the *dramatis personae* throughout the work: Mary, the daughter of Jacob (soprano), Mary Magdalen (alto), Peter (tenor), and John (bass). The roles were so indicated in Bach's original parts; but the action derived from the biblical story is limited to a single scene. The disciples, hastening to the grave, find the women who have come to anoint the body of the Lord. From them they learn of the appearance of the angel bearing the message that He is risen from the dead.

In adapting the composition from a secular cantata, Bach used not only the arias and final chorus (the opening chorus was transformed from an original duet confusingly retained in the *Bach-Gesellschaft* edition), but he also took over the essential structure of the earlier work. The secular origin accounts for the elaborate introduction — a piece of court music — and indeed for the total character of the oratorio. As the Bach scholar Alfred Dürr has pointed out, it is an Easter Play rather than a liturgical work. Its gospel narration is presented in free poetry throughout. But while it thus differs from all other church compositions by Bach, it leads the composer's work back to the roots of oratorio and its representation of sacred drama.

The Ascension Oratorio, while similar to the Easter Oratorio in size, marks a return to the Christmas Oratorio in style. The account of its two scenes — the disciples witnessing Christ's ascension and the angels promising His return — is again given in the words of the Evangelist. Thus the recitative presenting the gospel narration is distinguished anew from the poetic recitative which approaches the melodically expressive aria enriched by instrumental accompaniment. Scripture reading and lyric reflection lead here, as in the Christmas Oratorio, to congregational prayer in the chorale, and the plain chorale harmonization is contrasted once more against the concerted chorale setting in which brilliant orchestral phrases interrupt the hymn melody.

Bach's review and revision of previous compositions is particularly apparent to the listener in this work through the inclusion of the music used

later for the *Agnus Dei* of the B Minor Mass. The *Agnus Dei,* however, is not in fact a transcription of the oratorio aria; both were independently derived from a model that guides us back into Bach's earliest Leipzig years.

Bach's involvement in the traditions of the oratorio did not end with these three works. The sacred *Historia* continued to occupy his interest and influenced his search for new expression. In Bach's A Major Mass, as will be discussed in the following section of this volume, there is a highly individual interpretation of the text by which the scenes of the Christmas Story — the Nativity, the vision of the shepherds, the adoration of the Magi — are unmistakably woven into the musical setting of Kyrie and Gloria. Two creative phenomena emerge as major factors in this period of Bach's work: the concern with enlarged formal design and the intensified return to a familiar text. Thus the origin of the Gloria text — the message of the angels in the Christmas gospel — points in this instance to the interpretation of its surrounding texts in the Mass, and a widened structural plan arises in which the music of the opening Kyrie returns with the *Gratias,* the chorus of thanksgiving that concludes the Christmas allegory. A chorus of thanksgiving was the traditional conclusion for the sacred *Historia* (we still find it in the Easter Oratorio), and the rounding of musical form achieved with the *Gratias* chorus in the A Major Mass may have suggested to Bach the idea of concluding also the B Minor Mass with the music of a *Gratias* chorus. The entire range of the sacred *Historia* reappears with the B Minor Mass, and in its monumental choruses the Christmas message of the heavenly host and the scenes of Easter and Ascension found their most glorious manifestation.

The Masses

The founding of the Bach Choir of Bethlehem was prompted by the plan for a specific performance: the first American performance of the B Minor Mass. This event, which took place on March 27, 1900, coincided with a worldwide observance of the Bach Sesquicentennial and it was heralded by a long and extraordinary process of preparation. J. Fred. Wolle, founder of the Bethlehem Bach Choir, had begun to organize programs of choral music in Bethlehem with some of the major works by Handel, Haydn, and Mendelssohn in the 1880's. As his efforts met with remarkable success, Wolle realized more and more that Bethlehem's choral activity must be concentrated upon the work of Johann Sebastian Bach. In 1888 he presented the first American performance of the St. John Passion; it was followed in 1892 by a performance of the St. Matthew Passion (which had received its American premiere performance ten years earlier in Cincinnati). When Wolle finally proposed a presentation of the B Minor Mass, he met with crisis. The singers of his "Bethlehem Choral Union" were deterred by the vastness of the work, their enthusiasm faltered, and the organization dissolved. Yet the spirit of the supreme goal had taken hold. During the late 1890's the community rallied under the challenge of establishing a chorus totally devoted to Bach's work. With the eventual adoption of the Mass as performance project, the Bach Choir was founded on December 5, 1898, and formally organized a week after its premiere performance of the B Minor Mass in April, 1900.

The sequence of these early American performances of Bach's major choral compositions presents a striking, though unintentional, parallel to Bach's career as choral composer: the works were written in the same order. A direct line of development led from the St. John Passion to the St. Matthew Passion, once Bach had concentrated his creative energy upon choral composition. But the B Minor Mass, whose completion was separated from these works by a critical interval of time, stands apart from them as a final accomplishment of a totally different nature.

The isolation of the B Minor Mass is a phenomenon at once readily accepted and ever puzzling. We appreciate its exceptional position in the writing of the Lutheran master and its unique quality, but we are uncertain when it comes to grasping the work's inception, its *raison d'etre* in Bach's life work. It was apparently the only one of Bach's choral works never performed in its entirety during his life. Did Bach have a performance in mind, or did he

write this work as a purely ideal example of church music independent of actual use in the service of worship?

Nothing could illustrate the perplexing question of the work's origin better than the most recent edition of the Mass. The Bach Bicentennial in 1950 had provided the incentive for a new critical edition of the Complete Works of Bach, the first volume of which was devoted to the B Minor Mass. The editor of this volume, the distinguished Bach scholar Friedrich Smend, startled the world of music with an entirely novel thesis. Smend asserted that the volume embodying Bach's original manuscript contains a collection of various compositions based on different portions of the Mass text but not a work intended as an entity. Although immediately questioned, this theory is too well founded to be totally dismissed. The title B Minor Mass was not Bach's own but an invention of the nineteenth century. Bach gave no suggestion of a collective title. In fact, to group such a large work under the heading of a single key is a concept foreign to Bach's time. The Mass cannot claim the key of B minor to a much larger extent than, for instance, Handel's *Messiah* can claim the key of E minor. These keys mark the beginning and certain other portions of the two compositions, but for the rest their choice of keys is quite free — and both works end in D major.

In order to gain a measure of understanding as to what concept of unity may have governed the original composition, it is necessary to remember that Bach himself applied the title *Missa* only to the First Part of the work. This composition, spanning the eleven sections from the opening *Kyrie* to *Cum sancto spiritu* and constituting a *missa brevis* — a Short Mass or "Lutheran" Mass — was apparently written between the months of February and July, 1733. It was a period in which Bach — probably for the first time in his career — was free of day-by-day duties and able to give his undivided attention to a single task, for during the months of mourning that followed the death of the Elector of Saxony no performance of church music took place. Thus there arose — in Smend's words — a musical score of a quality unusual even by the standards of Bach's own work. Later that year, Bach presented the parts of the work to the new ruler with his famous dedication in search of the title of court composer. Bach retained the score; and after many years he assembled it in one volume with the remaining sections of the B Minor Mass, then newly composed, which in Bach's original manuscript are curiously divided by three title pages. The first of these designates the sections from the *Credo* to the *Confiteor* as *Symbolum Nicenum*, the second is for the *Sanctus* (an adaptation of the work written in 1724), and on the third are listed the headings for the last four movements.

Smend's assumption that these title pages separated three different compositions, written independently of the *Missa* for services at Leipzig, was largely based on a dating of the manuscripts since revised by new findings. While his argument has therefore been largely refuted, it has raised basic

questions previously ignored in the study of the Mass, and it has moved into focus the fact that portions of the Catholic Mass were indeed regularly included in the Protestant church service at St. Thomas's. Bach prepared settings of the Sanctus text as well as settings of the Credo text on various occasions.

In a brilliant study, Christoph Wolff, a student of Smend's, has recently shown that Bach's four Short Masses must be seen in a larger context — a hitherto unsuspected extensive occupation with compositions of the Mass text in Bach's later Leipzig years which dispels the isolation in which posterity has placed the B Minor Mass.[1] Bach's Short Masses — works analogous in form to the original *Missa* in B Minor — have been largely unknown. The Masses had been slighted by Bach biographers because they were believed to be hastily compiled on commission for performances outside of Leipzig in which Bach had no genuine interest. This was assumed to a large extent because they contain various portions rewritten from earlier Bach works, and it was not understood that such a process of rewriting represents a typical working process applying in almost equal measure to the B Minor Mass.

This working process gained increasing importance towards the end of Bach's life. Denied recognition and immediate rapport with his audience, Bach concerned himself more and more with reviewing, revising, and finishing his artistic work. In his absorbing account, Wolff discusses how deliberately Bach reached back, not only to his own compositions, but to the compositions — especially the Masses — of earlier composers, drawing fresh strength from this intensive study and creating in his old age a mode of expression that was new within his own style. And it is to this working process that we apparently owe one of the grandest plans in Bach's work: the plan to combine the most elaborate of his *missae breves* and the largest of his earlier Sanctus compositions within a complete setting of the Catholic Mass text.

By tradition, the text of the Mass was merely chanted in unison for the regular Sunday services at Leipzig. Bach's four *missae breves*, calling for soloists, chorus, and orchestra, were probably written for special occasions, like the original *Missa* in B Minor. They have many characteristics in common with Bach's greatest Mass setting, and it is fascinating to see how the Mass text caused Bach to deal with the same concepts in ever new ways.

Most prominent in giving the different Mass settings their character is Bach's orchestration. In the lyrical A Major Mass he uses flutes, in the ceremonial F Major Mass he blends oboes and horns; he employs the pure oboe sound in the austere G Minor Mass, but in the festive B Minor Mass we find all these wind instruments combined with trumpets and drums. The trombone sound is not used at all in these works; in Bach's Mass writing it is reserved for the orchestral accompaniment he added to a Mass by Palestrina. Absent also is

[1] Cf. above, p. 48.

the recitative: there is no narration. Nor do we encounter the chorale in the typical form known from Bach's cantatas; rather it appears in the original sense of the term, Gregorian chant. But all these unusual characteristics of style are melded into Bach's individual language, they become part of a style unmistakably Bach's own.

The same juxtaposition of old and new is also applied in a wider sense. In the Masses in G Major and F Major the ancient Greek text of the Kyrie is set in a Renaissance style in which instruments essentially double the voices, whereas the Latin Gloria shows all the bright and independent orchestral coloring of the High Baroque. In the second Kyrie of the B Minor Mass the treatment of voices and instruments is similar to that used in the Kyrie portions of the F Major and G Major Masses; but in the *Confiteor,* the most intimate section of the Creed, the orchestra disappears completely in the B Minor Mass. Only the basses support the choir until in the great Resurrection vision of *Et expecto* the full instrumental sound joins the voices again. The solo writing is more intense than in Bach's cantatas. The dramatic da capo aria has disappeared, and the imagery inspired by the old prayers of the Mass text is present everywhere. The words *Tu solus altissimus* are often set solo for the *vox altissima* — the highest vocal range for the choristers of the traditional chapel choir, the alto — and the duality of God the Father and God the Son is reflected in a duet scoring of solo voices. In the B Minor Mass, in fact, the symbolic duet of solo voices appears with every mention of the Son of God, until in the final aria the *vox altissima* appears again as single voice though paired with the orchestral violins whose sound has also been reduced to a single part.

Fascinating, above all, is Bach's varying treatment of form. The choral frame he gives the Short Masses includes three sections — the Kyrie, the beginning of the Gloria, and *Cum sancto spiritu* completing as a choral finale the image of Trinity. The two opening choruses, as we have mentioned, tend to appear in stark contrast — the Kyrie as solemn invocation and the Gloria as jubilant song of praise. Yet in the G Minor Mass the Kyrie assumes a more agitated tone, reminiscent of the opening of the St. John Passion, which is written in the same key, and here the quality of the Kyrie is carried into the Gloria in a veritably unending choral prayer. In the B Minor Mass, with its larger formal dimensions, the alternation between solo and chorus is more regular, although in the Passion and Resurrection scenes the use of the chorus mounts. As the choral texture grows from five to six and eight parts in the direct succession of the *Confiteor, Sanctus,* and *Osanna* choruses, Bach's planning seems to defy all concepts of form. As if by a gigantic afterthought, formal unity is re-established through the recapitulation of the music for the *Gratias* chorus in the final chorus, *Dona nobis pacem,* but a detailed interpretation of the immense structure of the work will remain a challenge to every generation.

Perhaps the most arresting example of form is the opening of the A Major Mass. Here for once Bach merges Kyrie and Gloria into a single composition in

whose formal plan there unfolds a new, exquisite penetration of the text. The *Christe eleison,* intoned over sustained chords of the string orchestra, suggests in this work the mystery of Nativity, and the Gloria, the rejoicing of the heavenly host. As a solo group of three men's voices enter, the Adoration assumes its proper place in this scene, and the *Gratias* chorus completes it like the traditional *Danksagung* in the early Christmas *Historia* of Protestant church music. But this conclusion lends at the same time a deeper meaning to Bach's interpretation of the text. The return to the music of the opening Kyrie suggests that the initial supplication "Lord, have mercy upon us" is here understood as mankind's prayer for redemption to which corresponds the thanksgiving of the same chorus when, through the appearance of the Redeemer, the prayer has been accepted and mankind's hope fulfilled.

The setting of the Mass text found one more interpretation — again completely different — in Bach's music. Toward the end of his life, Bach prepared for publication a number of organ works based on the great repertory of Protestant chorale tunes. The organ chorale had occupied Bach throughout his career. The first major collection, the so-called *Orgelbüchlein,* dates from the Weimar period and contains chorale preludes arranged according to the church year. The first published collection of chorale preludes, issued in 1739 as Part III of Bach's Keyboard Practice *(Clavierübung),* contains chorale preludes arranged according to the Lutheran Catechism. Introduced and concluded with the Prelude and Fugue in E flat Major, one of Bach's mightiest organ works, this set of chorale preludes deals with all the articles of the Protestant dogma as they are reflected in the poetry of Lutheran chorales, beginning with the German chorale versions for the Kyrie and Gloria of the Lutheran Mass. The plan of this work proclaims two major themes in Bach's life work which, during his last years, merge into one. It is Bach the revisor and collector concerned with the synthesis of his art who speaks from the pages of this collection of organ chorales, and Bach the student of the musical elaboration of the Mass. Just as Bach reviewed his keyboard oeuvre and his mastery of fugal writing in groups of final works, so he turned to a final work in choral composition. The Second Part of the B Minor Mass, which was probably written during the last two years of Bach's artistic activity, shows the magnificent enrichment of his craft produced through the remarkable process by which the master, at the close of his career, turned student again searching for new levels of expression which transcended contemporary understanding. The Mass that Bach thus created contains a wealth and variety of choral styles unattained in any of his earlier works; it became his crowning achievement of sacred music.

The Church Year

FROM ADVENT TO PENTECOST

As the Bach Tercentenary 1985 approaches, we become newly aware of the outlines marking the amazing development of the recognition of Bach's work — indeed "a tale of posthumous success unique in the history of music."[1] Bach anniversaries gave the impetus. It was in 1800, the fiftieth anniversary of Bach's death, that the firm Hoffmeister & Kühnel, later renamed C.F. Peters, first conceived of the idea of issuing the Complete Works of Bach. The plan was supported by the first Bach biography, published by Johann Nicolaus Forkel two years later; but a Complete Edition of Bach's works did not materialize at the time. It was not until the next Bach anniversary, 1850, that the *Bach-Gesellschaft* was founded with the help of some of the most illustrious musicians of the era, among them Schumann and Liszt, for the purpose of issuing a critical edition of all of the composer's works then known. This task was completed half a century later, at the Bach Sesquicentennial of 1900. The bicentennial celebrations of Bach's birth, in 1885, were attended by a young American, J. Fred. Wolle, who, under the overwhelming impression of a performance of the St. John Passion, resolved to devote his life work to the propagation of Bach's music in the New World. His American premiere of the B Minor Mass, leading to the establishment of American Bach Festivals, coincided with the founding of the *Neue Bach-Gesellschaft* which took up the legacy of its parent organization on an international basis.

The observance of the two-hundredth anniversary of Bach's death in 1950 led to the beginning of an entirely new chapter in the history of Bach scholarship. In the end, the preparations for the 1950 celebration proved even larger than the celebration itself. A result of the anniversary year that had not been anticipated was that a sizable surplus of funds collected for its events remained.

It was the ingenious idea of a publisher to suggest that these funds be applied to the undertaking of a new critical edition of the Complete Works of Bach. Since the existing edition had been concluded only a half-century before, the idea seemed revolutionary at the time. But recent history has accorded justice to this idea: the New Bach Edition that resulted was soon to be followed

[1] Cf. p. 5.

by a New Mozart Edition, a New Handel Edition, and a New Schubert Edition; modern research created a characteristic twentieth-century profile for posterity's appreciation of the work of the great masters.

An obvious gain of the New Bach Edition was the proper perspective it offered of Bach's gigantic cantata oeuvre. Some of the vocal scores that were published earlier in the century, but have remained in use, still carry an advertisement for "all of Bach's 199 church cantatas." The *Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis* by Wolfgang Schmieder (BWV), published as the first systematic index of Bach's works, also in the anniversary year 1950, contains a listing of 224 cantatas; but we have meanwhile learned that even these constitute only a remnant of a much larger number possibly not forever lost. While the new Work List could show such a remarkable increase in the known extent of Bach cantatas, its numbering of these works followed a system that did not go beyond that established by the old *Bach-Gesellschaft* edition: BWV 1 is Cantata 1; BWV 2, Cantata 2, etc.

This was obviously a wise decision because in the consciousness of the public such famous works as Cantata 4 *(Christ lag)*, Cantata 80 *(Ein feste Burg)*, and Cantata 140 *(Wachet auf)* can probably never be separated from their original numbers. The problem is that these numbers are not original but arbitrary; they signify the sequence in which the *Bach-Gesellschaft* was able to publish these works, much like the sequence of accession numbers in a library collection. Bach did not number his cantatas; he merely designated them by the beginning of individual texts or by the day of the year for which their performance was intended. And since the matter of chronology proved to be the largest challenge of modern Bach research, the only logical order that could be established for the New Bach Edition was their proper sequence within the church year.

In adopting this principle, the New Edition presented a new view in a series of volumes arranged by the Sundays of the church calendar; it was a view of the true situation of Bach's work.

The church year begins traditionally with the first Sunday of Advent, and it was doubtless no empty gesture that Bach used the formal scheme of the orchestral overture for the opening chorus of his first setting of the Advent text *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* (Cantata 61). It was written almost ten years before Bach came to Leipzig, and he probably used it again in his first Leipzig Advent service. In the following year, he returned to the same text and interpreted it anew in Cantata 62.

Cantata 62 is characteristic of a novel cantata form, the chorale cantata, that arose from the second year of Bach's work in Leipzig. Apparently Bach had overestimated the ability of the choirboys with the works he wrote at the beginning of his Leipzig tenure: the earliest Leipzig cantatas are very long and difficult, and they are followed by a work in which Bach goes, in fact, to the

other extreme by reducing the cantata form to arias and recitatives with merely a concluding hymn verse as a choral portion. In his second year as St. Thomas Cantor, Bach settled on an ideal solution. He returned to elaborate opening choruses but, in basing his works on chorales — using both the texts and melodies of Protestant hymns — he entrusted to the boy sopranos a task as familiar and uncomplicated as it was all-important: the chorale tune itself, crowning in slow rhythm the entire edifice of the complex choral score.

Cantata 62 is one of the finest examples of Bach's chorale cantata form. Whereas the earlier cantata written on the same text uses only the first stanza of the hymn, Cantata 62 deals with the text in its entirety. The chorale is one of Martin Luther's adaptations of traditional chant. The hymn tune — which had been known for centuries in conjunction with the original Latin text *Veni redemptor gentium* — dominates the opening chorus; it appears in the instrumental parts long before its entrance in the choral soprano, and it returns to conclude the postlude of this opening chorus, as it returns at the end of the cantata to conclude the whole work. The second and third stanzas of the hymn form the basis for the text of the first aria, and the fourth and fifth stanzas are paraphrased in the following recitative.

In these solo numbers the advent message is presented as an announcement of the highest ruler (the solo tenor sings on a long-held *g* in rendering these words). Similarly, the bass aria, interpreting the sixth hymn stanza, deals with the image of the victorious hero. Only with the seventh stanza, woven into the last recitative, do the solo voices of soprano and alto come to the fore, and now the scene at the manger is portrayed, with a beautiful expression of darkness into which shall come the Light. Thus, in spite of its triumphant arias, the cantata is marked by a hushed tone. Bach saved the sound of trumpets, horns, and drums for the celebration of Christmas.

Cantata 65, though written for a Sunday in the new calendar year, was the last of the six cantatas Bach had planned for his first Leipzig Christmas season, because the season extended to Epiphany, the Feast of the Three Kings. The opulence of the festive orchestra is once more reviewed in colors that are both majestic and gentle. The solemn procession of the Kings — indeed, of the multitude of nations that gather for adoration — is accompanied by recorders, alto oboes, and horns, the symbolic instruments of royalty. This being one of the cantatas of Bach's first church cycle, the chorale tune is absent from the opening chorus; all choral voices move in seemingly endless fugal continuation to represent the entry and motion of the personages until all are united in jubilant unison. The opening chorus is then followed by a verse of the hymn *Puer natus in Bethlehem.*

The design of the cantata is based on a pietistic reinterpretation of the appearance of the Three Kings (and "appearance" is the literal meaning of the word Epiphany). The work is laid out in three sections; after the opening pair of choral movements follow two pairs of solo numbers for the men's voices. The

three sections deal in turn with the prophecy and fulfillment of the Lesson of Epiphany; the Christian's resolve to make his heart the everlasting present; and his actual offering and thanksgiving to the Redeemer. A chorale verse expressing spiritual surrender concludes the work.

The Sunday after Epiphany is the first Sunday in "Ordinary time," and while many of Bach's cantatas can be assigned to specific weeks between the major church feasts, some of them are marked *per ogni tempo* — suitable for services without any specific designation. The major outline of the church year is resumed with the season of Lent, and Bach's Cantata 22 was written for the last Sunday before Lent. The gospel reading of the day is devoted to the prediction that Jesus will go to Jerusalem where the Passion story shall be fulfilled. The anonymous poet began his text with words chosen from the Gospel of St. Luke 18:31, 34, dealing with the announcement of the Passion and the apathy of the disciples. The work shows unmistakable traces of the style of the young Bach; it is filled with an ardent chromaticism and with strong rhythmic and melodic gestures that may well have gone beyond the understanding of the Leipzig congregation. The mournful tone of the oboe accompanies an opening arioso in which we can recognize the familiar tenor role of the Evangelist and the bass part symbolizing the figure of Christ; the chorus that follows is the typical "crowd chorus" of the Passions representing, in this case, the group of twelve disciples. As in Cantata 65, the personages are reinterpreted, so that the action involves the role of the Believer who pleads that he might follow the Saviour on his road to Golgotha. The New Testament spirit of the hymn words *Trahe me post te* ("Draw me after Thee") permeates the various sections of this cantata; in fact, the illustration of the word "draw" (*ziehe*) forms the dominant element of the work's rich musical imagery, and the Saviour's gift of everlasting life is expressed in the flowing instrumental accompaniment of the concluding chorale.

The approach of Lent and Easter had represented the greatest task for the young St. Thomas Cantor. In a revealing account, the American Bach scholar Gerhard Herz writes:

> Looking at the cantatas before Lent, we find that Bach freed himself for more than fifty days by revising earlier works for Sunday services. Exhausted from the labors of creating, rehearsing and performing the St. John Passion, he dealt similarly with the four cantatas he had to provide for the different Easter services. Not until the Sunday after Easter do we find a new cantata.[2]

This work, Cantata 67, is one of the most extraordinary in Bach's entire creative career. It takes its point of departure from the scripture words of II Timothy 2:8, "Hold in remembrance Jesus Christ," and the word "Hold" is wonderfully illustrated in the repeated entries of the choral voices. It is accompanied by rising melodic lines that suggest not only Christ's resurrection

[2]*Bach in Bethlehem Today: A Conference Report,* Bethlehem, 1979, p. 64.

but, as the work progresses, more and more the rise of doubt and fear in the heart of the Believer. And while the Christian congregation is joined in the hymn of Christ's victory, the story of Thomas as told in St. John, chapter 20, emerges as the work's central thought. The Christian congregation, left amidst the threats of a hostile world, is likened to the assembly of the disciples behind shut doors; and the scene from St. John, relating Christ's reappearance to the disciples, is re-enacted in a veritable dramatic episode. It forms the cantata's final aria with its incredibly moving blend of solo voice and chorus. A brilliant string introduction portrays the onslaught of the world; and four times, as in the verses of the gospel, the *vox Christi* appears, as Christ speaks the evangelic message "Peace be unto you." (The aria was later ingeniously transformed into the Gloria of Bach's A Major Mass.)

The sound of trumpets and timpani that adorned the music of Christmas returns with the season of Ascension and Pentecost. Cantata 11, the Ascension Oratorio, was composed in the same church year for which Bach wrote the Christmas Oratorio, and the term "oratorio" appears at this time also first in connection with the cantata Bach had revised for performance at Easter.

For all three oratorios Bach drew on earlier works, and the first aria of the Ascension Oratorio — later to reappear in Bach's work as the *Agnus Dei* of the B Minor Mass — reminds us immediately that this process of reviewing and reshaping continued. The principal source for the Ascension Oratorio was a secular cantata, and the straightforward, ceremonial tone of the opening chorus suggests the character of the state and civic occasions for which Bach's secular cantatas were intended. More subtle is the reinterpretation of the secular work in the second aria in which the absence of bass instruments underlines the thought of Ascension. The final chorale, with its bright prelude, interludes, and postlude, gives the impression of an orchestral concerto rather than a hymn verse; it represents a new type of chorale setting totally characteristic of Bach's choral-orchestral style which began to gain significance in the composer's work with the Christmas Oratorio.

The Pentecost Cantata 34 also goes back to a secular work — framed by resplendent opening and concluding choruses — which Bach rewrote in later years for the church service. The new text is based on verses from Acts, St. John, and the book of Psalms; a late work, it is one of Bach's most serene cantatas. The work's only aria, for alto, flutes and muted strings, is one of the classics of Bach's lyrical art.

The Sunday after Pentecost is the Feast of Trinity, and with the long sequence of the Sundays after Trinity the church calendar resumes its Sundays in Ordinary Time — the last of which leads back to the season of Advent.

The cycle of the church year had lost its importance in the work of the aging Bach. Withdrawn from the world around him, concentrated upon his

own creative challenges in completing his life work, the master served his weekly duties at St. Thomas's with cantatas from earlier years — at times in considerably changed versions that point again to the process of refining which permeates Bach's old age. Yet the decisive shaping force which the cycle of the church year had once been in Bach's life retained its impact on his work.

The Mass, removed not only from this concept but also from the Protestant liturgy as such, furnished the text for the last series of Bach's major choral works. As Bach interpreted this text again and again, we find telling reminiscences of Bach, the composer as servant of the church year. As we have seen, the episode of the Three Kings, the vision of the Heavenly Host, arise again in Bach's treatment of the Gloria text in the A Major Mass. And the entire church year was summarized in a final revision which Bach applied to the B Minor Mass. With its sublime unfolding of choruses, its exquisitely lyrical passages written on the words *ex Maria Virgine*, the listener is guided back once more to the wonder of the Nativity. And in the three choruses of Incarnation, Passion, and Ascension that form the center of the Credo, Bach's climactic choral composition, he outlined for the last time the cycle of the church year.

Music of the Sacraments

When we speak about the immortality of Bach, we speak in reality of both Bach and ourselves. The great live on in their work because the involvement of posterity rekindles and revives it through the ages. Thus it becomes necessarily subject to changes and fashion. This in itself may endanger its perpetuity; interest in the music of bygone days rises and falls, but Bach's work has proved to be enduring.

While the approach of each era and generation is new, its indebtedness to the original work is unchanging. In recent times this commitment has led to a thorough investigation of the conditions under which Bach's music was sung and played. A distinguished New York performance organization announced in the 1940's and 1950's that it was the only one in the city that presented Bach's cantatas in a stone church, thus recreating the true acoustical situation of Bach's performances. The quest has continued, and especially the recording industry — less tied to chance and circumstance than the setting of live performance — has embarked upon long-range projects attempting to match the precise specifications of instruments, performing forces, timbre and texture of sound, and in some cases even of the seating arrangement used in eighteenth-century performance practice.

It cannot be denied that this approach reflects, to some extent, an age of technology and material values. In fact, it has gone hand in hand with a certain secularization of Bach's work and the music of his time. This conscious attitude can best be recognized in the changing styles of *Messiah* recordings. The nineteenth century had established a place for this work in the service of worship. The mid-twentieth century saw a violent reaction; claiming that *Messiah*, like other oratorios by Handel, reflected the theatrical traditions of Handel's writing, conductors and editors began to stress the dramatic aspects of the work, favored radical tempo contrasts and bravura embellishments of da capo arias and thus all but erased the distinction between opera and oratorio.

A parallel development took place in the interpretation of Bach's work. The discoveries of the 1950's, establishing the true chronology of Bach's choral music on the basis of scientific exploration of paper and copyists' handwriting, caused what the Bach scholar Friedrich Blume called a veritable "landslide" — all values seemed to change in the revised view of Bach's work and life, and a new image arose showing Bach as the artist whose genuine interest was in

secular music and whose quarrels with church authorities suggested an inner struggle against the very spirit of the church and church music.[1]

A reversal set in with the awareness of Bach's most personal avowal of faith expressed in the autograph commentary for his newly discovered copy of the Bible. But it set in also on a wider scale with new Bach research dealing with the spirit of the composer's work rather than its circumstances — research that traced changes in the style of Bach's old age, linking them to Bach's characteristic tendencies for reviewing and completing major aspects of his work. Thus it was discovered that, in a manner similar to that applied to his own compositions, Bach re-examined the sacred music of the past, immersing himself in styles of setting the sacred text that resulted in a new style of his own, this style coming to the fore especially in the composition of the Credo text (B Minor Mass) and that of the organ chorales he published at the turn of the last decade of his life (*Clavier-Übung*, Part III).

Bach's penchant for reflection and for creating an encompassing scope emerges again and again in works spanning the entire church year. Long before he had embarked upon the Leipzig cycles of church cantatas he had gathered the cycle of organ chorales outlining the course of the liturgical year (*Orgel-büchlein*), and Albert Schweitzer has pointed out in his Bach biography that the chorales for Christmas, Passiontide, and Easter form individual cycles within this collection. With the same care with which the master surveyed all major and minor keys in the order of the scale (*Well-Tempered Clavier*), he created ever new collections of works devoted to religious events.

The cycle of the church year represents the cycle of life traditionally marked by the Christian church in the seven sacraments. The sacraments are the major ceremonies of the Christian dogma extending from baptism to the last rites; and even the more austere interpretation of the Protestant church, reducing the number of sacraments to two — baptism and the Last Supper — honors this concept: it symbolizes the beginning and end of the Saviour's mission. Thus the sacraments link the stations of life to the spirit of worship, and Bach glorified this spirit in groups of works spanning the course of human existence.

While Cantata 137, for instance, seems to embody the spirit of worship as such, even the verses of its hymn of praise allude to the cycle of life; verse 3 speaks of the creation of man, verse 4 suggests the blessing of procreation, and verse 5 refers to the promise of eternity expressed in the Lord's covenant with Abraham. A typical chorale cantata, its hymn text is focused on the word *musica* as the essential expression of worship, and this lends the work a special quality. For the key words of the first verse, "Gather! Psaltery and harp,

[1] *"Outlines of a New Picture of Bach,"* in *Twentieth-Century Views of Music History*, edited by William Hays, New York, 1972.

awaken!," all voices "gather" in straightforward hymn style, and as the lively fugue of instruments and voices resumes its course, the opening chorus portrays the awakening of sheer music in praise of the Almighty. "Music" is expressed, above all, by the ornate quality of the instrumental sound, as we shall see again in the discussion of the next cantata. But in Cantata 137 this same quality returns with the elaborate violin accompaniment of verse 2 and with the instrumental fugue of oboes and bassoon that joins the vocal duet of verse 3. In verse 4 the chorale tune itself finally becomes instrumental; the trumpet joins the independent chorale variation of the tenor voice. And here the roles seem magnificently reversed: the instrument plays the melody of the sacred song, and the complex figurations of the solo voice add accompaniment. In the final hymn verse the concert of voices and instruments is reconciled — all present the chorale, with the trumpet chorus adding a supreme dimension to the ensemble.

The sacrament of baptism forms the subject of both Cantata 68 and Cantata 7. But whereas the latter refers directly to the scene of Christ at the river Jordan as recounted in the words of Luther's chorale, Cantata 68 gives us only veiled references to the act of baptism. Its text sources are St. John, chapter 3, and Acts, chapter 10, both of which deal not with the baptism of Christ but with the baptism of the multitude. The words from the gospel of St. John form the basis for the opening chorale movement which speaks of baptism in terms of the promise of redemption and everlasting life: "Whosoever taketh on His faith shall live with Him forever; whosoever believeth that Jesus was born for mankind shall be forever redeemed." Thus this chorale text, too, spans in reality the entire cycle of Christian life. The soprano aria that follows the introductory chorus suggests the believer's vision of joining Christ in the beyond; the bass aria that precedes the final chorus speaks of Christ's birth for our salvation. The recitative placed between the two arias draws on the words from Acts that relate the scene of Peter baptizing the Gentiles.

Like so many of Bach's church compositions, Cantata 68 is based in part on an earlier work, Cantata 208, the "Hunting Cantata," and the two arias originally represented Pan and Pales, deities of flocks and pastures. The choice of two oboes and oboe da caccia for the bass aria may still suggest the instruments of the original pastoral scene. But who can fully interpret Bach's thoughts in adapting a model for a new text setting! — to us the accompaniment of "Thou wast born for my salvation" recalls the instruments of the famous pastoral *sinfonia*. Even more interesting is the equally well known concert of instruments that concludes the soprano aria of Cantata 68. A first draft of this movement was already appended to the score of Cantata 208, but we do not know what function it served in that composition. Here, in Cantata 68, it is assigned a definite place. In a few instances Bach added extended instrumental postludes to vocal forms. We know this practice in a somewhat similar form from *Et resurrexit* and *Osanna* in the B Minor Mass — was it intended, in

connection with all these texts, to depict the concert of angels as the soul ascends to Heaven?

Luther's text in Cantata 7 renders the mystery of baptism with much more immediacy. The baptismal water is likened to the blood of the Redeemer. In an archaic setting, with the tenor voices assuming the cantus firmus, the chorale is introduced. The imagery of Bach in suggesting the pouring out of the water and the descent of the celestial dove vies with the imagery of Luther's words. As in the chorale cantatas *Aus tiefer Not* (No. 38) and *Ein feste Burg* (No. 80), Bach's and Luther's works are joined in an overwhelming document of Protestant art.

It is with the sacrament of communion, to which Cantata 180 is devoted, that Bach's music reaches its most solemn tone. The sound of the opening chorus, with its string and woodwind choirs, unlocks a delicate wealth of interweaving melodies supported and capped by contours that anticipate those of the chorale. The text is based on a hymn by Johann Franck, the author of *Jesu meine Freude* and one of the finest among early Protestant poets; and the work of the anonymous poet who adapted the hymn verses for the cantata measures up to the reverent quality of the original text. The scene of the Holy Supper is drawn like that of a veritable banquet. But in the treatment of its details — the opening of the door, the blessing of the meal, the prayer of thanksgiving — Bach's music rises to an otherworldly serenity that merges the spirit of devotion with that of the festive dance; he created a ceremony that expresses an unparalleled tenderness of worship.

Cantata 195, devoted to the sacrament of marriage, departs from the usual pattern of the church cantata text, as do those works devoted to the sacrament of the last rites. It must have taken more than an hour to perform the original score of Cantata 195, but a considerable portion of it has not survived. The work was based on one of those extended texts compiled for special ceremonious occasions. Its first part was intended to be performed before the actual wedding ceremony, the second part (now lost) to follow after the ceremony. Bach used the cantata for wedding services on several occasions probably several years apart. It is the last of these which is represented by the score that has come down to us. In this manuscript, the text portions for which we no longer have the music — an aria, a recitative, and a concluding chorus — are still included. But it contains also a chorale, newly-inserted by the composer, which was to take the place of the original second part.

The musical means of Cantata 195 are Bach's most festive — double chorus (four parts of which were sung by the soloists), three trumpets and timpani, flutes, oboes, and strings. The extant solo numbers are for soprano and bass; a first recitative and subsequent aria mark the character of the celebration, a second recitative leads to the ceremony proper. The framework for the solo movements is provided by choruses of particularly bright and joyous nature.

In the case of Cantata 198 we are concerned with proportions similar to those of the original version of Cantata 195. While the entire work is somewhat shorter, its two separate parts are fully preserved. But the character of Cantata 198 represents an opposite extreme — the palette of orchestral colors is determined not by trumpets and drums but by lutes and violas da gamba. The unusually somber tone of Cantata 198 may betray a very personal commitment of the composer in the execution of this work. Queen Christiane Eberhardine, in whose memory it was written as an Ode of Mourning, had gained deep affection and respect among her subjects when she refused the political conversion to the Catholic faith that had secured the Polish royal throne for her husband. We are reminded of Handel's genuine devotion expressed in his Funeral Anthem for Queen Caroline, and as in the case of Handel's Anthem, the text of the Ode, being directly addressed to the departed ruler, was changed by later generations in an attempt to modify the occasional nature of the work. Bach himself may have used the music of this majestic tribute to the Queen eventually with a new text, for it has been conjectured that parts of the Ode were transformed to fit the text of a Passion according to St. Mark, the score for which is now lost.

By tradition, the sacrament of the last rites was observed in the Protestant service through musical compositions written in the form of the motet, calling for a vocal texture that was essentially *a cappella*, and it is likely that Motet BWV 226, written in memory of Johann Heinrich Ernesti, director of the St. Thomas School, was so performed in a memorial service at St. Thomas's. An original set of instrumental parts, however, supporting the various voice sections, exists for the work. The instrumental accompaniment was doubtless used for a second memorial service, held at the University of Leipzig on whose faculty Ernesti had served as well. In the chorale motet BWV 118, Bach's modern scoring for a concerted ensemble of voices and instruments is more clearly shown. Yet here, too, we have a musical documentation of two performances: the work has been preserved in two versions, the first of which — apparently designed for rites held out-of-doors — calls for the accompaniment of brass instruments only; the second, which must have been intended for a later occasion, blends the sound of brass instruments with that of woodwinds and strings.

As we know, Bach singled out the central sacrament, the sacrament of communion, for a unique set of works to which he turned in later years: his Masses. Unlike the cantatas, the Ode, and the motets, Bach's Masses were no longer directly connected with the ceremony of the sacrament within the service of worship, but like all his other works devoted to the celebration of the sacraments, they were written to glorify the spirit of worship through music.

Bach and Luther

The story of the Bach family forms an extraordinary case of hereditary history. "The Bachs" was a name generally applied to Thuringian town musicians for more than a century before Johann Sebastian Bach was born. It was he, the master in whose life and work the evolution of this family culminated, who in 1735 recorded its details in a genealogy of the Bach Family of which two copies have survived. The document begins with these words:

> Veit Bach, a white-bread baker in Hungary, in the sixteenth century was compelled to escape from Hungary because of his Lutheran faith. After converting his property into money, as far as this could be done, he went to Germany, and finding security for his religion in Thuringia, settled at Wechmar near Gotha, and continued his trade there. What he most delighted in was his little cittern which he used to take with him to work to play while the mill was grinding. A pretty noise the pair of them must have made! However, it taught him to keep time, and that apparently is how music first came into our family.

Thus the chronicle opens with the two aspects of the Bach legacy that became inseparable: music and the adherence to Lutheran faith.

Martin Luther hails from the same region in which the Bach family settled, a region incredibly rich in musical endowment. As the five hundredth return of the great reformer's birth was observed throughout the world, many Thuringian sites were viewed with new awareness. Extensive restoration work was done during the anniversary year at Luther's birthplace in Eisleben — a town in the district of Halle where Handel was born — and at the Wartburg, the castle towering above Bach's home town of Eisenach where Luther translated the Bible.

Bach's fundamental commitment to Luther's mission can be appraised not only in spiritual terms but also in terms of the music itself. Music played a predominant role in the Reformation. As a cleric, Luther himself was a trained musician, and from the records we gather that he was a musician of considerable gift. As a singer and instrumentalist, he took an active part in shaping the music of the Protestant Church, but his decisive contribution to the Lutheran liturgy was that of a composer.

The Lutheran reform must be seen not as a protest so much — as its name implies — but as a genuine act of the Renaissance, the pervading reinterpretation of the classical Christian heritage in view of a new age and a new population. Luther's role as a church musician and organizer of church music,

therefore, runs parallel to his role as a translator of the Scriptures. It is a well recognized fact that Luther's German Bible represents a document not only of theological but of general linguistic significance. With very little in the way of printed German available at this time, his text stands as the foundation of modern German literary prose; in many details he created a reading language that had not existed prior to his writing. In the same manner he placed music in the service of worship on the basis of a new national understanding. A great admirer of the wealth of existing church music and of the great Catholic composers of his day, he adapted the vast heritage to new needs. German music was a fully developed indigenous art at the time of the Reformation, but this art had its roots in the song — it was an art of truly popular origin.

The great achievement of Luther, the church musician, was that he admitted no paltry tone of folk art in the new church — as later ages have done — but that he sought out the finest this art had to offer. As he transformed ancient texts, he transformed chant to song melodies, placing in the center of Protestant liturgy the congregational hymn — the Lutheran chorale. While many of the chorale texts and tunes are his own, he turned for advice to some of the best musicians of his time. One of them, Johann Walter, collaborated with Luther on the publication of the earliest collection of Protestant church music; another, George Rhaw had assumed the cantorship at St. Thomas's in Leipzig and composed a festive Mass in twelve parts on the occasion of Luther's first appearance in that town.

> The Reformation became a fact on Whitsunday, May 24, 1539, when Luther preached in the *Thomaskirche* before the new Duke of Saxony, Moritz, who, unlike the brother whom he succeeded, was a supporter of the Evangelical faith. Three years later the cloistral buildings of St. Thomas were sold and the moneys made available were transferred to the education accounts of the city, particularly benefiting the *Thomasschule*.[1]

Thus Bach was the heir of a well-established Protestant tradition when he assumed his duties at the church and school of St. Thomas. As we know, from the conflicts between the duties at the church and at the school arose the problematic nature of his assignment. The "well-regulated church music to the Glory of God," of which Bach spoke, had to be performed with boys whose poor preparation and conduct presented him with unwelcome tasks day by day. It is, curiously, through this dilemma that the Lutheran chorale rose to its most illustrious function in the hands of Bach. Within a short time Bach had realized that his musical demands, involving the study and performance of a major new choral work for every Sunday service, could not be met with the forces available. There followed the period of experimentation that we have mentioned and during which Bach repeatedly took to the device of writing solo cantatas for alto, tenor, and bass voices — i.e., for the older and more

[1]Percy Young, *The Musical Tradition of the School and Church of St. Thomas*, New York, 1981, p. 13.

experienced choir singers — until he eventually arrived at the solution of building his cantatas upon the Lutheran chorale, giving the simple chorale melody itself to the youngest choir members, the sopranos. This, the form of the chorale cantata, had been approached by earlier Protestant composers, but the musical elaboration of Luther's congregational hymns reached its perfection in Bach's works.

In some instances we can identify models of music or poetry that go back to a time before Luther, but the very comparison shows the fresh inventive strength with which the Reformator created works marked by a totally new individuality. The majority of these chorales come from the first collection that he published in collaboration with Johann Walter in 1524, and the chorale *Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin* (With peace and joy I now depart) is one of them; it inspired a work that represents Bach's writing at the height of serene and profound expressiveness.

This, Cantata 125, is a typical example of Bach's chorale cantatas; the hymn text and melody are presented by the soprano part of the first chorus and they reappear in the closing chorale. But the melodic motif with which the chorale begins furnished also, in more elaborate form, the idea of the theme for the introductory chorus, so that all voices, the string orchestra, and the solo flute share the chorale from the very beginning. Line by line, the hymn is interpreted, the words *sanft und stille* (gentle and calm) and *der Tod ist mein Schlaf worden* (death has become but sleep) giving rise to the most wonderful lyrical moments. The solo numbers omit an assignment for soprano — it is again the group of older, more versed singers that Bach favors. The final duet, sung by tenor and bass, introduces a new tone of confidence with the words *ein unbegreiflich Licht* (an unfathomable glow) and their allusion to eternal light and hope.

Of an entirely different nature is Cantata 91, the work Bach wrote for the beginning of the Christmas season in his second year at Leipzig. He had chosen the Luther chorale that was his congregation's traditional hymn for Christmas Day and whose first stanza goes back to a poem that antedates the Reformation by almost two centuries — the closing formula *Kyrieleis* betrays the early origin. Luther had written the other verses and the melody, and in Bach's setting the chorale seems doubly enriched with the Protestant spirit; his stress of the words *das ist wahr* (this is true) in the first stanza seems in itself like a Reformation announcement. It is interesting to compare the jubilant *des freuet sich der Engel Schar* (in this rejoices the heavenly host) of the opening chorus to the single occurrence of the word *Freud* — joy — in the closing chorale of Cantata 125: Bach's means are now festive, horns and drums join the orchestra, and his treatment of the text is dramatic. The soprano solo of the first recitative represents, as in Bach's later Christmas Oratorio, the appearance of the Angel. And the halo of string chords accompanying the second recitative places the

figure of Christ, as in the St. Matthew Passion, against the shadow of eternity.

Like Cantata 125, this work contains a final duet, in this case given to the upper voices; and as in the Mass, the duet setting suggests the duality of God, though the allusion here is not to God the Father and the Son but to the divine and human image of Christ. That the latter is immediately linked to the Passion of Our Lord is characteristic of the Pietistic interpretation Protestantism had assumed in Bach's time. The central thought of the Christmas celebration was the thought of Redemption. Christ's human appearance and suffering raises mankind to "the glory of the angels." And the joyous spirit returns in the closing verse in which the horn parts, written independently of the four-part hymn setting, seem to carry the total sound straight into heaven.

The Luther chorale which has the longest and most fascinating history is *Christ lag in Todesbanden* (Christ lay in bonds of death). It goes back to the famous Easter dialogue *Victimae Paschali Laudes* (Sing praises to the Sacrifice of Easter) written in the eleventh century by the Bavarian monk Wipo — a work that may have been a paraphrase of a liturgical play centuries older. Adapted, in turn, in numerous later guises, it lived on in the hymn *Christ ist erstanden* (Christ has risen) that was sung during the children's crusades and, for a century (1424 to 1524), became part of Imperial court ceremonies. It was intoned, as the chronicles report, by the victorious armies at Tannenberg (1410) when the Poles turned in flight before the Knights of the Cross. In the earliest Protestant hymnal, *Christ ist erstanden* appears side by side with Luther's chorale *Christ lag in Todesbanden,* which stands as the final revision of the old song. Luther restored the epic quality of the poem, especially in his vivid description of life's miraculous duel with death, and he retraced the melodic contours of Wipo's work, creating a dramatic hymn that became one of the cornerstones of Protestanism.

Bach's setting of Luther's chorale in Cantata 4 is the earliest chorale cantata we have from his hand, and in its complete adherence to the chorale tune throughout all verses it is closer in form to the chorale variations of the young organ master than to the later chorale cantatas. Its early date, confirmed by the findings of modern Bach scholarship, had often been disputed owing to the perfection of the work's form and the grandeur of its style. But its stark, archaic character is manifested by the accompanying five-part string group suggesting the old seventeenth-century orchestral practice (brass instruments were added for Bach's later performances at St. Thomas's to aid the voices of the boys).

Absent, like the radiant sound of flutes and oboes, are the forms of recitative and aria. *Christ lag in Todesbanden* represents the Lutheran chorale with a strictness and intensity as does no other Bach cantata. Strict, like its style, is its structure. The seven chorale verses, moving from the full ensemble to duet, solo, quartet of voices and back, outline in their symmetry the model of a cross

design. But what infinite wealth of detail adorns each section of the work — the chorale melody is developed with ever fresh differentiation; yet the pervading quality of the work remains the absolute strength of this melody.

Great contrasts are represented by the hymns that form the basis for Bach's chorale cantatas. *Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir* (Out of the depths I cry unto Thee) is Luther's poetic paraphrase of Psalm 130, and the penitential mood of the text is expressed in the solemn motet setting of Bach's introductory chorus for Cantata 38 and its opening suggestion of modal harmony implied by Luther's tune. The entire work is utterly lyrical; yet its emotions are contained, and to balance the cantata's only aria Bach chose the more impersonal vocal trio to portray the repentant's sorrow "from night to morning and night" as described in the fourth stanza of the hymn. The text is freely interpreted by Bach's anonymous librettist, but the final chorale, like the opening chorus, presents Luther's own wording.

The genuine spirit of the Reformation emerges with the chorale *Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort* (Lord, sustain us in Thy word). The opening trumpet fanfare of Bach's Cantata 126 introduces a series of highly dramatic gestures; "sustained" are the key words of the first stanza — *Wort* (word), *Mord* (murder), and *Thron* (throne) — and the last text phrase anticipates the bold treatment of the word *stürzen* (depose) that forms the violent expression of the final bass aria. But the chorale dominates the cantata; it returns in the duet phrases of alto and tenor that punctuate the first recitative, and it reappears in the words of the tenor aria *Herr, der Herren starker Gott* (Lord of Lords, mighty God) even when the hymn melody is absent.

Through the ages, the chorale *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott* (A mighty fortress is our God) has stood as the archetypal Lutheran hymn, and it inspired in Bach's elaboration what is probably the most imposing chorale setting ever written by the St. Thomas Cantor. This, Cantata 80, opens with a chorus which, in 228 measures that never depart from Luther's text and melody, is in itself unequaled among Bach's works. The idea of Luther's text has its origin in verses of Psalm 18, but the dramatic quality of the Psalm text is reinterpreted in a manner that is totally Protestant in spirit. It is this quality that permeates Bach's cantata. It gives rise to the unusual canon treatment of the chorale in the highest and lowest instrumental parts of the opening chorus (symbolizing God's rule in heaven and on earth), to the militant accompaniment of the second chorale verse, and to the jubilant affirmation of the chorale in the unison verse with full orchestra.

In a recent essay, Christoph Wolff has convincingly argued that the true nature of this work is still widely misunderstood.[2] The reason is that the trumpet and drum parts were not written by Bach but by his oldest son

[2]Bach's Cantata *Ein feste Burg*; in *From Schütz to Schubert: Essays on Choral Music*, New York 1982, pp. 27ff.

Wilhelm Friedemann, and that they were added to Bach's score not in an attempt to edit the work but for the purpose of creating a new piece, on a Latin text, which the son based on the father's cantata. The inclusion of all voices in the unison verse was also apparently Friedemann's work. In later editions the versions written by father and son were merged. It shows how much there will always remain to be learned about Bach's music — and how much adjusting future generations will have to do in the process.

Luther's epochal achievement as translator of the sacred text did not end with his creation of the German Bible and German chorales. A year after he had issued the first Protestant song book in collaboration with Johann Walter, he proposed to Walter a new publication. The occasion was Luther's first celebration of a German Mass on the twentieth Sunday after Trinity, October 29, 1525, in Wittenberg, the city where the Reformation movement had taken its beginning. A year later he published there his *Deutsche Messe und Ordnung Gottesdienst* (German Mass and Order of Service). The work shows that he was concerned with the idea of retaining the outline of the old liturgy for the Protestant Church. Nor did he abandon the principal Latin portions of the liturgy entirely. This explains the reappearance of the Latin Magnificat in Bach's work as well as his retention of the Latin Mass text, albeit in the shortened version of the "Lutheran Mass."

Nothing could represent the Lutheran spirit in Bach's work more strongly than the merging of traditional and novel means in the opening of his Missa Brevis in F. The Kyrie of this Mass was originally an independent composition which may date back to Bach's years in Weimar. Blended into Bach's own thematic material is the chant melody of the old Kyrie litany as it appears in Luther's edition. But the synthesis of old and new goes beyond this. Bach's wish to penetrate the text prompted him to stress the unity of the Mass: Kyrie and *Agnus Dei* present, in Greek and Latin, virtually the same words. This symmetry of the Mass text guided Bach in the bold plan to weave into the Kyrie setting the Protestant *Agnus Dei.* Bach's work had become truly timeless. In his later years, Bach himself seems to have gained an increasing awareness of this quality. It may have been the deeper reason why he turned repeatedly to the composition of the Mass text, completing finally a setting of the entire Latin Mass.

"Thus Bach is the end. Nothing comes from him, everything merely leads up to him." These words from Albert Schweitzer's Bach biography might also be applied to his great Mass; in its enigmatic grandeur, it marks the end. With this, his last choral work, Bach transcended Protestant church music, but he imbued it with all the strength that Protestant traditions had bestowed on his art.

Index of Works

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