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“The Bible: Its Influence on the Music and Composers of the Baroque Period”

R. Neil Tuttle

Introduction and Statement of Thesis

It shall be the purpose of this paper to examine the Bible and its influence on the music and composers of the Baroque period, giving special attention to those composers who have likewise had a strong influence on the Christian and secular world of music. It is my belief that in order to understand the music of this period, one must first take a look at the religious and theological thought of the day. Moreover the philosophical ideas that existed influenced the music and art of that period. However, it is regretful so many people in today's world have little or no understanding of the true meaning or intention of the music or words as it was first composed. This is due to a lack of knowledge about the Christian religious thought of the Baroque era.

Therefore I hope that this paper will not only bring to light once again the influence of the Bible on the original composers but will also help the musicians and music lovers of today recognize the importance of understanding the theology of what they are singing or playing or hearing. So often the case is that we understand the theory of the music but not the words or the meaning of the music. It is vitally important to understand baroque music not only from a musical standpoint but also from a theological one. Though baroque music, like all music, appeals to the auditory senses, it has qualities that go much further, touching not only the auditory but the aesthetic faculty of man which we call the “soul”. Beethoven wrote in his *Mass in D*, “from the heart it has come, and to the heart it shall penetrate.” Baroque music has a special ability to touch the heart. It is my assumption that this is so because much of it was inspired by the religious and theological thought of an era that was vital to Christendom and its survival. It is my hope that at least I can help musicians begin to see the theological background of the music which has as its theme words or stories from the Bible. The words of the Bible have not only influenced but changed the lives of great

composers as well as simple and common lovers of music. To overlook the background and meaning of the text from which one sings or plays or hears is become a mimicry of empty and meaningless sound. Music must not only be played but felt. It must not only be performed but understood. To feel and to understand any piece of music, one must know the background of its composer and of its text or words. For that reason, we must turn to the Bible and the religious thought of the day in order to understand the music of the Baroque period. I would like to study the particular aspect of the relationship between the Bible and music; in short, the theology of baroque music.

The Baroque Period (1600-1750) General Overview

In order to better understand the influence of the Bible and religion on the music of the Baroque era we must first get an overall idea of what was going on in government, politics, and religion during this period. The Baroque period, as we call it in the music world, was not only one of the most eventful in music history, but also in the history of the movement and development of Christianity. It coincided with the movement that is more commonly called the Protestant Reformation. Though we consider the dates of the Baroque period slightly later and shorter (1600-1750) than those of the Protestant Reformation itself (1330-1789), it actually took place during the most strategic and foundational period of the four-hundred-year long reformation. It was during this Baroque period that small groups of three or four musicians often replaced the organist in the church and provided music for the worship service. It was also during this period that more and more small groups of people became dissatisfied with the status quo of the Roman Catholic Church and began making more and more protests against the church itself. While sacred choral works, using a version of the polyphonic style, were presented in new forms called the "oratorio" and the "sacred cantata," men and women in the church, building on foundations laid by earlier reformers like John Wycliffe of England (1330-84), John Huss of Bohemia (1372-1415), and Martin Luther, "father of the Protestant Reformation" (1483-1546), were continuing to break away from the traditional beliefs and dogmas of the Catholic Church and start new and freer religious societies.

The politics and religion were practically one in the same at the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. The nineteenth century historian Lord Acton said, "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Perhaps that explains why popes did not reform the church along lines that limited their power. It is true that the battles between church and state in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were mostly fought over political power. The old ideas and thoughts of the medieval papacy were at odds with the

spiritual and intellectual uneasiness of an awakening world. The agent of that awakening was a loosely defined movement known as “humanism.” Humanists responded to the religious and political chaos around them by reverting back to ancient conceptions of humanity, culture, ideals, and destiny. Their goal was to rediscover the sources of and to delight in the type of life portrayed in classical Greek and Roman documents. Their efforts led to a rebirth of classical learning, the Renaissance.

The religious consequences of the Renaissance were astounding. Popes began to realize that they should not confine themselves to religion and politics, but that they should make the church the great patron of the arts. Rome should be the spiritual and cultural capital of the universe, the popes thought, so they were determined to build museums and patronize artists.

It should be remembered here that the popes themselves felt they had a special God-given, God-ordained right to carry out the spiritual functions of the church and that the church should be the direct agent of influence in the society and civilization itself. With that idea instilled in the people of that day and time, and with the popes themselves claiming the God-given authority and power, it is no wonder that when the people began to protest, the popes began to change their way of thinking in order to somewhat please the people and retain their own power. So even in the music world the popes had great influence on the composers of the day in the name of the church. But reversely, patronizing the artists, while at the same time demanding that the artists or composers remain true to the foundational beliefs and dogmas of the church, caused not only dissatisfaction among the believers but also laid the groundwork for the Reformation itself.

Musicians and composers seeking popularity and success, tried to follow the humanistic philosophy of the secular world by composing great works based on the stories and mythologies of the Greek and Roman worlds on one hand and on the other hand they composed religious and sacred works in order to please the popes and the Christian world. Often the popes themselves would commission some composer to write a mass or sacred song for the church simply because that composer was popular with the people. Most of these humanistic composers have long since been forgotten. However, there were many composers of the day who were committed to God and determined to write for the glory of the Church and God. One particular style of music which had been popular during the Renaissance and carried over into the Baroque period was that of chamber music. It was among the oldest of instrumental media used during the Baroque period. One chamber music form that served both the church and the aristocracy and was probably the most important of all chamber music, was the “trio sonata.” Works by Corelli, Handel, Bach,

Telemann and lesser-known baroque composers used this style.

Getting back now to the Reformation ideas themselves, we should look briefly at the man who was most significant in establishing the Reformation, Martin Luther. Luther himself was a musician, philosopher, and monk of the Roman Catholic church. Having been somewhat influenced by the ideas of the humanists, Luther rediscovered the Greek New Testament; learned Greek and began to see what it meant to understand a biblical text in its historical setting. His scripture studies and humanist scholarship helped him to articulate a strong position.

“Somewhere between 1512 and 1515, Luther had what is referred to as the Tower Experience, which convinced him that the essence of the gospel lay in faith alone. The context of his experience was significant. At the time it occurred Luther was working to understand Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. Romans 1:17 says this: ‘For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written. ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’ Luther’s experience led him to believe that good works were absolutely useless for one’s salvation. ‘A person is saved,’ Luther said, ‘by faith alone.’ The freedom and sense of release he felt in the wake of this insight was phenomenal. Luther believed that Roman Catholic doctrine and practice put up walls around religion, that the church operated as a power structure that so controlled the means of religious experience that it was virtually impossible for people to have an assurance of God’s love and their own salvation. The church, as he saw it, controlled Scripture by insisting that it only be read in Latin and not translated into the vernacular, and that the church was the sole authorized interpreter. Luther set out to free the gospel from the control exercised over it by the Roman Catholic Church.” (*Introduction to Christian*, Mary Jo Weaver)

Luther said of music: Music is one of the most glorious gifts of God. It removes from the heart the weight of sorrows and the fascination of evil thoughts. He himself composed a number of hymns and sacred songs for the Protestant church. One in particular, “Einfeste Burg ist unser Gott” (A Mighty Fortress is Our God) became the theme song of the Protestant Reformation movement and was later adapted by Johann S. Bach in his “Cantata Number 80.” From the time that Martin Luther began his protest against the Roman Catholic Church until the time that we actually find the beginning of the Baroque period in music, only a short time had lapsed. But within that short period a new

denomination of Christianity called "Lutheranism" had been born and a number of other "Protestant" movements had taken place. Luther had begun it in Germany. It spread to England where John Wycliffe's ideas were preached and later culminated in what was known as the "Tudor Reformation" spurred on by a dispute between the Pope and King Henry VIII in the early sixteenth century. It spilled over into Switzerland, where a follower of Luther's, Ulrich Zwingli, led the "Reformed Tradition" and inspired the French Protestant theologian, John Calvin to carry out the realization of establishing the "Reformed Church." So for almost a hundred years before the Baroque period began, the influence of the Protestant Reformation had been decisively strong on the governments and people of Europe.

Another religious thought that sprang out of the Protestant Reformation was called "Pietism." The original impetus for pietism arose during the seventeenth century just about the same time that baroque music was making its debut. It started as a new reformation within German Lutheranism. It was associated with the teachings of Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705) and August Herman Francke (1663-1727). This movement was a reaction to moral laxity, formalism, secularism, and religious indifference. Spener longed for a new birth of religious seriousness within the Lutheran church. He organized Bible study groups in his home, which were known as "collegia pietatis," thus the name "Pietists." Spener was more interested in the right feeling in the heart rather than pure doctrine or liturgy. Francke was a professor in a Lutheran seminary where more than 200 young ministers graduated every year. His teaching of Pietistic doctrine included: a Bible-centered faith, a strong sense of guilt and forgiveness felt in the heart, personal conversion, practical holiness in simple Christian living, and a concern for the needs of other people. These beliefs or doctrines greatly influenced not only the young ministers, but in turn the common people of the church and thereby the community and state. It goes without saying that these principles of pietism had a great influence as well on the composers, especially the German ones, of baroque music. It also influenced members of many different churches and inspired the formation of even more religious groups.

Music in the Baroque period: General overview

In 1768 Jean-Jacques Rousseau gave this entry in his music dictionary:

"A baroque music is that in which the harmony is confused, charged with modulations and dissonances, the melody is harsh and little natural, the intonation difficult, and the movement constrained. It seems that this term comes from 'baroco' of the logicians." (Jean-Jacques Rousseau,

Dictionnaire de musique, Paris: la Veuve Duchesne, 1768, p.41)

Music at the turn of the sixteenth century discloses a bewildering diversity of conflicting techniques, styles, forms, and terms which always characterizes a period of transition in music history. Like the Protestant Reformation which coincided it, the Baroque Period, was one of reformation. It was almost as if God himself had ordained that the music style should change to exemplify the change that was taking place in the religious history of Europe. The diversity of baroque music was gathered into a more unified style in the works of three preeminent composers who decided the future course of music. Giovanni Gabrielli, the master of church music; Monteverdi, the most universal composer of the early baroque; and Frescobaldi, the genius of the keyboard.

Behind the traits that mark music as baroque are their reason for being. According to Claude V. Palisca in his book *Baroque Music* the reasons for being are: the passions, or as they were more often called then, the “affections.” Affections are not the same as emotions. A sixteenth century poetic critic, Lorenzo Giacomini, defined an affection as “a spiritual or operation of the mind in which it is attracted or repelled by an object it has come to know.”

However, the most common thread that unites the great variety of music we call baroque, according to Palisca, is an underlying faith in music’s power, indeed its obligation to move the affections. Whether it is a madrigal of Marenzio in the late sixteenth century or an aria of Bach or Handel in the 1730s, this belief strongly determines the musical style. If we want to determine whether a piece is baroque or not, there is no better way to test than to ask whether the expression of the affections is the dominant goal in fashioning a piece of music.

Of the greatest masters of baroque music, many wrote for the church and composed music of the highest artistic excellence. To confuse sacred music with secular music is the sure mark of an inferior musician. Sacred music, especially baroque sacred music, has as its dominant goal moving the affections. Some have said that music is the expression of human emotion. It naturally follows then that sacred music should be the expression of purely religious emotion. Many of the composers of baroque music believed this, too. “If you wish to touch my heart,” wrote the Roman philosopher Horace, “you must begin by showing me that you have touched your own.”

F. Landrum Humphreys wrote in his book *The Evolution of Church Music* in 1896, “I am conscious of a power in music in which I want for words to describe. It touches chords, reaches depths in the soul which lie beyond all other influences. It extends my consciousness, and nothing in my experience is more mysterious. An instinct has always led me to

transfer it to heaven: and I suspect the Christian under its power has often attained to a singular consciousness of his immortality.” (p.20)

A great impetus in the development of sacred music was the Protestant Reformation itself. The very style of church musical composition was affected by it. Next to theology, Martin Luther gave “highest place to music, for thereby anger is forgotten, melancholy and many tribulations, and evil thoughts are driven out.” The Chorale of Protestant Germany furnish us with the best illustrations of perfection in metrical tunes. Those chorale are so elevated and at the same time so simple and devotional that they are beyond question the most perfect model of hymn tunes. The well-known choral introduced by Bach in his St. Matthews “Passions Musik” “O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden,” was a folk song in its original source, but became one of the best loved hymns of all times after set in choral style by Bach.

“Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott” (1716-1730) is, to be sure, based on Martin Luther’s famous setting of the 46th Psalm. Bach used the same melody for one of his organ preludes. With Luther’s hymn as his point of departure, Bach went on to create what Schweitzer described as ‘a dramatic art work of the most perfect kind imaginable’ for performance during the Reformation Festival. There are eight sections, beginning with the chorale, ‘Das Wort sie sollen lassen stahn.’ The third verse of Luther’s hymn is used in the fifth part of the cantata—‘Und wenn die Welt voll Teufelwaer,’ for chorus—in order ‘to paint the picture of the fiends of Hell struggling against the bands of true believers, with the imagery of a true mystic.’ Individual vocal passages of special significance include the aria for solo bass and soprano choir, ‘Mit unser Macht ist nicht getan,’ and the wondrous duet for alto tenor, ‘Wie selig sind doch die, die Gott im Munde tragen.’ (*The Complete Book of Classical Music*. Ewen, Prentice-Hall, 1965, p.96)

An enormous quantity of sacred vocal music was written in Germany between 1630 and 1750, some of it by some of the most prolific composers in the history of music. According to Paul Steinitz, German Church Music researcher for “*Opera and Church Music 1630-1750*”, there are three main reasons for so vast a production. Firstly, the Lutheran faith held music to be an absolutely essential part of worship. Secondly, people turned more and more solace to religion and its music, a fact that offset a temporary reduction in the elaboration of music through economies demanded by wars. Finally, towards the end of the

seventeenth century, court establishments tend to increase in size and number in emulation of Louis XIV's courts at Versailles.

Bach, Cantata No. 80, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*

Allegro (SOPRANO WITH OBOE)

(BASS)

(VIOLIN AND VIOLA)

(CONTINUO)

Stan - ding a - lone

Ev' - ry, ev' - ry, ev' - ry, ev' - ry

Though this discussion is not aimed at examining the music style of the Baroque period itself, so much as the theology of the Baroque, it might be to our advantage to take a quick look at the differences that exist between the music styles of the former Renaissance period and that of the Baroque. It will be seen that some of the old terms were retained. It might seem that the two styles can be contrasted as two disconnected and static units that have no internal development of their own, but this implication is not correct. "Baroque" in itself implies "abstract." So abstractly comparing these two periods is only natural. On the other hand, the theology that lies behind the construction of the music and words is more concrete. But for now we will simply keep ourselves to the abstract comparison of the old and new styles which were a part of these two eras in music history. A quick look at the following chart from the book, *Music in the Baroque Era* will give a good picture of what we need to understand.

RENAISSANCE	BAROQUE
One practice, one style	Two practices, three styles
Restrained representation of the words, <i>musica reservata</i> and madrigalism	Affective representation of the words, textual absolutism
All voices equally balanced	Polarity of the outermost voices
Diatonic melody in small range	Diatonic and chromatic melody in wide range.
Modal counterpoint	Tonal counterpoint
Intervallic harmony, and intervallic dissonance treatment	Chordal harmony and chordal dissonance treatment

Chords are by-products of the partwriting	Chords are self-contained entities
Chord progressions are governed by modality	Chord progressions are governed by tonality
Evenly flowing rhythm regulated by the <i>tactus</i>	Extremes of rhythm, free declamation and mechanical pulsations
No pronounced idioms, voice and instrument are interchangeable	Vocal and instrumental idioms, the idioms are interchangeable

With this background, it would now be in our best interest to look at a short characterization of the three periods of baroque music with respect to the important differences in their style. According to Manfred Bukofzer, in his book *Music in the Baroque Era*, in early baroque style, two ideas prevailed: (1) the opposition to counterpoint and (2) the most violent interpretation of the words, realized in the affective recitative in free rhythm. With it appeared an extraordinary desire for dissonance. The harmony was experimental and pre-tonal, that is, its chords were not yet tonally directed. Vocal music was more important than instrumental at this time.

The middle Baroque period brought above all the bel-canto style in the cantata and opera, and with it the distinction between aria and recitative. The single sections of musical forms began to grow and contrapuntal texture was reinstated. Free dissonance was restrained. Vocal and instrumental music were of equal importance.

The late baroque style is distinguished by a fully established tonality which regulated chord progressions, dissonance treatment, and the formal structure. The contrapuntal technique culminated in the full absorption of tonal harmony.

For our study here, we need to look more specifically at the sacred music that was developed during these periods of the Baroque era. In 1610, Monteverdi presented to Pope Paul V a large collection of sacred works which reflected the new trends in secular music, but which he purposely kept conservative, in order to please the pope. Those works were published under the title *Sanctissimae Virgini Missa senis vocibus ad ecclesiarum choros ac Vesp erae pluribus decantandae cum nonnullis sacris concentibus ad sacella sive principium cubicula accommodata* (Mass to the Most Holy Virgin for Six Voices for Church Choirs, and Vespers for Many Voices, together with Some Sacred Harmonies Suitable for Chapels or Princes' Chambers.)

"Missa da cappella" for six voices was the first of the collection. It was based on an earlier Flemish composer's, Nicolas Gombert, motet and it was mid-sixteenth century style. Some have called it archaic because of its fugal texture. The "Vespers" music is called "da concerto." This means that the voices and instruments are combined so that the instruments are not just doubling the voices but also having "solo" parts at times.

However, as in the general characteristics of the early baroque, the voices took the more important role. Throughout the collection there is a parallel richness of compositional techniques. The clearest link between the secular and sacred can be found in the devotional pieces: “Nigra sum”, “Pulchra es”, and “Audi coelum.” Here we find both the dramatic recitative and aria styles.

Look at the example below:

C. Monteverdi, *Pulchra es amica mea*

Sop. I

25

A - ver - te o - cu - los tu - os a me - a me -
 (Turn away thine eyes from me, a me -

30

a me - qui - a ip - si me a - vo - la - re a - vo - la - re fe -
 for they have over come me;)

35

ce - runt me a - vo - la - re a - vo - la - re fe - ce - runt me - a - vo -
 la - re ip - si me a - vo - la - re a - vo - la - re fe - ce - runt

In the early seventeenth century some composers wanted to see the style of Palestrina canonized by the church as the only acceptable choral idiom. One of the strongest opponents to this idea was a man named Marco Scacchi. In 1648, Scacchi presented a classification of the available styles that will help us to further understand church music of the Baroque era in general. He divided church music into four types. 1) masses, motets, and similar compositions for four to eight voices without organ; 2) masses, motets, and similar compositions for four to eight voices with organ, or for several choirs with organ;

3) similar compositions in concerto, that is, in which one or more choirs are mixed with instruments; 4) motets and concertos in modern style, or, in other words, in the second practice.

Baroque composers: Their lives and their music: The theological implications

Let us look from this point forward at the composers and musicians who followed and used these particular styles of sacred music. Indeed there were many, but for our purpose here we will look specifically at those men who were somewhat theologians as well as musician-composers. We will look at not only their music, but also at their personal lives and the effect that religion had on them and their music as well. Furthermore, we will try to examine the words of the texts which they composed and see how it was directly related to the Bible texts themselves.

Heinrich Schutz

It was the works of Heinrich Schutz (1585-1672), the undisputed master of the “dramatic concerto”, that German music reached its greatest heights. Schutz belonged to the few German composers who combined a wide European perspective with the aristocratic attitude of an highly individual artist.

Heinrich Schutz lived a long life in a period of great change. It was a time when foolishness gave way to scholarly discussions; a time when neoclassical poets and versifiers were held in high esteem; and a time of widespread conflict in the religious, social, and political worlds. Born on October 8, 1585 in Reuss-Kostritz near Saxony, Schutz is now considered the greatest German composer of the middle seventeenth century. In Venice he studied under Giovanni Gabrieli from 1609 to 1612, but he was somewhat of a “late bloomer” as far as his entrance into the music world was concerned. Though his first work was a collection of five-part Italian madrigals, it was not until he was nearly twenty-seven that he published his Op. 1. From 1617 to the end of his life he was the master of the chapel of the elector of Saxony at Dresden. He is said to have written the first German opera but there is no copy of it available. Most of what Schutz wrote was church or sacred music. Religiously speaking, he chose to follow Lutheranism. However, the great blow that had been dealt by Luther brought with it an unresolved stalemate of basic religious principles. Within this context, Schutz found himself somewhat confused at times. His best friend, a Roman Catholic senior chaplain to the court in Dresden was taking bribes from the Jesuits. He saw the people turning to the mysticism of the ‘pansophic’ (the Greek mystics) ideas. He therefore felt a strong urge or might I say inspiration to write music that was very

pleasing to God rather than pleasing to mankind, and music that would furthermore bring mankind back to a true understanding of God's purpose for their lives. Perhaps some would call it only speculation but I am convinced that the life of David, the king of Israel and a man after God's own heart, was the inspiration for the songs of Schutz. David himself, like the people around Shutz, was a man who turned to God and then turned away, then back again when his troubles were so great. Schutz saw the "humanists" and their ideas as a threat to Christian principles. It was with devoted Christian faith that he set out to compose from the very Psalms of David himself, some of the most beautiful Christian music of all ages. Psalms were the hymns and songs and poems of the Jewish people. The majority of them were written by David.

At this point I think that we have to look at the background of the Psalms themselves and of the story of David in order to understand what exactly Schutz found as his inspiration.

There were many psalms which were special songs written mainly by the young shepherd boy, David, who became king of Israel. These songs were of several varieties. Some were songs of praise. Others were songs of repentance. Still others were songs of sorrow and sadness.

David's story is a dramatic one. Brought up as a shepherd boy, he was chosen by God to become the king of Israel. As a young shepherd he wrote simplistic, yet beautiful psalms which were about the beauty of God's world and the powerful, omnipotent protection of God for His people. Even as a young boy David was special. A famous story about him is that of the slaying of a giant whom the soldiers of the army of Israel could not themselves slay. With a sling and five smooth stones, he defeated the attack of the oncoming Philistine army. He won great praise among the Israelites and they knew by this that God had a special work for the young lad. Samuel, the chief priest of the Jews, then anointed David as the future king of Israel.

David's childlike faith in God and his determination to please God, led him to write such psalms as "The Twenty-third." Perhaps it is the most famous of all David's psalms. The words are as follows:

"Psalm 23"

The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;

He leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul.

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
I will fear no evil.
For thou art with me;
Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.
Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

After becoming king, David was involved in a series of wrong-doings. His sins brought him great trouble and separated him from God. One of the sins he committed which greatly displease God and for which he suffered much was the crime of murder for the sake of adultery. The famous story of David and Bath-sheba is still an example of how man turns against God for his own selfish human desires. However, David asked God for forgiveness, again in the writing of a psalm. During his time of stress, he wrote psalms of great mourning and repentance. David was forgiven by God and considered by the people of Israel a great king, gifted poet, and musician. Though none of his tunes have been saved, Heinrich Schutz, inspired by David's life, determined to again set the psalms of David to music.

The Psalms of David of 1619.

The Psalms of David (SWV22-47) represented a milestone in the history of German music and especially in the development of protestant church music. They consist of twenty-six massive Konzerte (anthemns), of which twenty-one are settings of complete psalms and the remainder are setting of excerpts from psalms or texts from other sources. A broadly Gabrielian technique is made to serve Luther's translation, thereby providing far-reaching inspiration to other composers in the setting of psalms to music. With them, Schutz established himself as one of the leading composers of his time.

A look at Psalm 130 (SWV 25) will show the accomplished musician the delicate musical effects with which Schutz composed. Using orchestral accompaniment with the church anthemn, Schutz laid the groundwork from which the oratorio and cantata forms were to grow. Using words as cleverly as an artist uses paintings, Schutz gave the listener a visual picture of what the psalmist had written thousands of years before. Solo voices, full choir, and instumental ensembles were effectively introduced by Schutz.

A deeper understanding of the words themselves will show us clearly how even Schutz

felt about his faith in God. Here in this beautiful psalm, the psalmist, even though in great distress, professes his hope in prayer, his patience in hope and then exhorts Israel to hope in God. From the King James Version of the Bible we find this poetic rendition of Psalm One Hundred Thirty.

- 1 "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord.
- 2 Lord, hear my voice: let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.
- 3 If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?
- 4 But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.
- 5 I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope.
- 6 My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.
- 7 Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption.
- 8 And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

Schutz himself being a devoted follower of Jesus Christ and associating himself with the Lutheran church, felt strongly the need for the people of the world, and yes, of Germany, to return to the one true God. He found in this psalm a message which would challenge the weakest believer to turn to God for comfort in times of distress. He found in it, too the prayer of his own heart. That being that God would hear his requests for forgiveness and hope for the nation. In this case, "Israel" not only refers to the Israel of history, but the Israel of the present day. For Schutz Israel was the Christian believers who had grown weak in their faith or in some cases, left their true purpose in life for more "humanistic" ones. Indeed, Schutz, like other pietistic composers, felt that many of the humanistic styles in music were leading the common people away from God and that church leaders as well were giving in to the "ways of the ungodly world" which surrounded them. Through using God's word, the Bible, and setting it to music, he was determined to turn the eyes and ears of man to God. His "Psalmen Davids" did just that. Some of them were composed as early as 1617. Writers of his life story have suggested that a number of his compositions were done after the death of his young wife in 1625; at which time Schutz was in great distress and felt God was his only hope. It has been said, too, that due to other themes with which he had been busy, he had taken little time to work on his *Psalmen Davids*. He himself wrote:

"It pleased God the almighty...that the sudden death of my late dear wife...bring to

a halt such other work that I was engaged in and put this psalter in my hands, as it were, so that I could draw greater comfort from it in my sorrow.”

The “psalter” of which he spoke was the so-called *Becker Psalter* (SWV 97a-256a), a collection of simple partsongs based on the popular psalm paraphrases of the Leipzig theologian, Cornelius Becker. This became his inspiration for the composing of the *Psalmen Davids*.

It seems that throughout his life Schutz depended on and read the Psalms as a source of inspiration for his life and works. Having served in the position of “Kapellmeister”, head of Protestant Germany’s largest and most important musical establishment, Schutz began to make preparations for his end by 1670. He passed much of his time “reading Holy Scripture and other books of learned theologians...and maintained himself in abstemious and temperate fashion.” (Geier)

It is also said that Schutz wrote to Christoph Bernhard in Hamburg asking for a five-voice setting, “in the Palestrina style of counterpoint” of Psalm 54, the words chosen as the motto for his funeral sermon. Psalm 54, the source of his funeral text, served as the basis for his last composition, (SWV 482-92), a monumental “*eight-voice work in 11 partes.*” Let us look at the significant words that Schutz himself selected as his own funeral sermon; these are the words that he chose to summarize his long life on this earth.

Psalm 54

- 1 Save me, O God, by Thy name, and judge me by Thy strength.
- 2 Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth.
- 3 For strangers are risen up against me, and oppressors seek after my soul: they have not set God before them.
- 4 Behold, God is mine helper: the Lord is with them that uphold my soul.
- 5 He shall reward evil unto mine enemies: cut them off in Thy truth.
- 6 I will freely sacrifice unto Thee: I will praise Thy name, O Lord; for it is good.
- 7 For He hath delivered me out of all trouble: and mine eye hath seen His desire upon mine enemies.

It was to God, the Lord of heaven, that Schutz found his lips singing praise. Even unto his last days he felt the great need to glorify God in the works and compositions that he wrote. Though his life had been one of hardships and bitterness from time to time, he found only words of praise for the “Meister” of his life. Surely Schutz is a true example of the

composer dedicated to his God. His influence on the lives of other great composers was felt for years to come after his death.

Baroque music, complex as it is in its musical scores, shows in its texts, texts like the ones written by Schutz, the simplicity of the word of God and the influence that simple lives like Schutz's can have and have had on the world of music as a whole.

Arcangelo Corelli

Even though our basic discussion in this paper is related to the Bible and its texts as used by the baroque composers especially for vocal music, it is necessary I think to take a brief look at the life of one instrumental composer who himself greatly effected the new style of music during the baroque era. That man is none other than Arcangelo Corelli.

Corelli's trio sonatas were the crowning achievement of Italian chamber music in the late seventeenth century; his solo sonatas and concertos initiated procedures that were followed for the next fifty years and more. He was exceptional among composers of his time in that he wrote no vocal music at all. Corelli clearly separated church and chamber sonatas, grouping them in twelves or sixes.

He usually began his church sonatas with a severe, majestic, solemn, or proud mood, passed on to a resolute and contented one, then to a tenderly melancholic affection, and finally to a light and carefree one. The music types which best fit these moods were the slow "allemande" or the French "grave" for the first; a bright fast fugue for the second; an operatic "arioso", in sarabande rhythm, for the third; and usually a fast allemande or "gigue", a "gavotte or balletto", for the last. The order of movements in a chamber sonata was less predictable.

Perhaps the reason that Corelli chose to use these four "moods", as it were, was to show the character of man and God. In the first mood we can usually feel the "spiritual temperature" of believer approaching the throne of God. Sin that had been committed might have led Corelli to show the severity with which God deals with sin through some slow allemande. But with each succeeding mood we see or feel the forgiveness of God and finally feel the joy of a restored relationship to God the father and with mankind.

In the late Baroque period the decisive step in the development of the concerto was taken by Corelli. In addition to his sonatas, Corelli also composed a number of concertos for the church. Concertos, like sonatas and sinfonias, were played in church as "overtures" before Mass or at certain moments in the ceremony. Corelli divided the orchestra into 2 groups, the tutti or concerto grosso, and the solo or concertino, both of which were supplied with a conitnuo of their own. Church and chamber concertos were distinguished as

“concerto da chiesa” and “concerto da camera”. For the Christmas Mass composers often added an optional movement in pastoral style. Corelli’s “Christmas Concerto” (Opus 6, No. 8) contains the best known as well as one of the most beautiful of these pastorales.

The following sonata da chiesa, op.3, No.11 is also a good example.

A. Corelli, *Sonata da chiesa, Op. 3, No. 11, Grave*

Antonio Vivaldi

Antonio Vivaldi (1675-1741) was associated primarily with Venice, although he composed and conducted in many other European cities during his career. For almost forty years he was the director of the conservatory of the Ospitale della Pieta, where he was in charge of hundreds of orphans and foundlings. Many oratorios, a large amount of church music, and hundreds of instrumental compositions were composed for the students (mainly girls) of the conservatory, who performed in regular series of public concerts.

Between 1693 and 1703 Vivaldi was trained for the priesthood by the Fathers of S Geminiano and those of S Giovanni in Oleo. However, soon after his ordination as a Catholic priest, he ceased to say Mass. Though he was censured for conduct “unbecoming to a priest”, he remained pious and followed his faith throughout his life. The religious motto “Laus Deo” frequently occur at the head of his score. This meaning was “praise to God.” He felt evidently that his ability as a musician and his gift as a composer were surely gifts from God and he intended to use them for the glory of God. The psalmist wrote “praise Him with string instruments” (Psalm 81:2). Vivaldi was praised more readily by his contemporaries as a violinist than as a composer.

Outside of Italy, Vivaldi’s sacred music was not so well known. But in his church

music, Vivaldi succeeded conveying the general sense of his text. Some have said that his artistic finesse was not good. Whatever the case, Vivaldi's *Gloria* (RV 589) and the *Magnificat* (RV610 and 611) are beautiful examples of how religion influenced his life.

I Gloria in excelsis Deo

Allegro

Oboe

Tromba
(in Do)

S.
Glo-ri-a, glo-ri-a, glo-ri-a, glo-ri-a

C.
Glo-ri-a, glo-ri-a, glo-ri-a, glo-ri-a

T.
Glo-ri-a, glo-ri-a, glo-ri-a, glo-ri-a

B.
Glo-ri-a, glo-ri-a, glo-ri-a, glo-ri-a

in ex-cel-sis De-o,

in ex-cel-sis De-o,

in ex-cel-sis De-o,

in ex-cel-sis De-o,

Georg Philipp Telemann

In many ways it seems strange that the man who was probably the most noted musician and composer of the Baroque period, and even to whom Bach himself played

second, has been overlooked as only a “contemporary of Bach or Handel.” Georg Philipp Telemann was the first choice of the town council of Leipzig when the position of Cantor of St. Thomas became vacant.

In his own time, Telemann was one of the most highly esteemed musicians of Germany. Bach and Handel venerated him. Many others praised him. In fact he has been called “one of the most prolific composers of all time.” He composed some forty operas, seven hundred church cantatas, forty-four Passions, six hundred French Overtures, and uncountable other orchestral, chamber and harpsichord compositions.

Telemann grew up in a Lutheran home, the son of a Lutheran pastor. With a strong religious background and a genius for music, it only seemed natural that he should become a church musician. His success in composing church music as a young man convinced him to leave his studies in law and follow his destiny in the church. In 1704 he became organist at the Neue Kirche in Leipzig. In 1721, he was appointed musical director of the city of Hamburg, where he was put in charge of five churches. He also became the Cantor of Johanneum. When offered the position as Cantor of St. Thomas, he decided not to accept it. (Bach got the position.)

Telemann not only lived through the great changes in Germany and all of Europe, he helped to bring it about. Even though as a cantor he was not supposed to write or compose music for secular purposes, he felt that music was something that all the people needed to hear. So he made it a point to give music lovers the opportunity to hear all kinds of music. It was the first time that the Passion oratorios were sung before paying audiences at public concerts.

As for sacred music, church cantatas were rarely published in the 18th century, but Telemann saw the need to make scores available not only to the large churches, but for the smaller ones as well, and even for domestic worship (home churches), and so he developed simple scores.

In Hamburg he was obligated to write a new Passion each year. Even though he was true to the biblical story, he often altered words to make them more dramatic. Telemann’s *St. Luke Passion* of 1728 has a special historical significance. In this Passion he tried to show the difference between the liturgical (church) Passion and the Passion oratorio. Before each of the five sections of the Passion story a parallel passage from the Old Testament is inserted, to act as a preparation for the Passion. Da capo arias are found only in this section.

Let’s take a look at the actual scripture from which Telemann took his Passion. The Passion itself is based on the twenty third chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. The

writer of the Gospel himself, Luke, was a Jewish physician, who was a follower of the early disciples. He was not one of Jesus' twelve disciples. His description of the agony of Jesus is rather meticulous, but very clear about the point that Jesus was the Messiah for all people, not just the Jews. He (Luke) points to the two men who were crucified with Jesus and gives us the picture that no other biblical writer does: that is that even a common thief can be saved by God's love and mercy.

Luke 23 : 39-43

- 39 And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.
- 40 But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Doest not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?
- 41 And we indeed justly: for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.
- 42 And he said unto Jesus, Lord remember me when thou comest into they kingdom.
- 43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.

It is perhaps for this reason that Telemann chose Luke's Passion to be the Passion which would change the style and biblical textual form of preceding Passions. Furthermore, Telemann's unique desire to let all the people hear the music which was as much sacred as secular, gives one the impression that he definitely had in mind reaching people of every class and level with a "gospel that could touch the heart of every person through music."

Again the Gospel of Luke spoke to every man when the Roman centurion who stood by the cross of Jesus said, "Certainly this man was a righteous man." (Luke 23:47). Telemann must have felt so strong about this Passion that he actually adopted rhetorical accents harmonically thereby achieving the maximum effect with the simplest means.

Johann Sebastian Bach

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) has been described as "a great river into which all things flowed: and all that his own age and the ages before him had done and dreamed were his tributaries." Bach indeed was a "bridge" from all that we know as Gothic, Medieval, and Baroque to the Classical Period of music. The brilliant development of instrumental

and sacred music in the late baroque culminated in the works of Bach, the greatest genius of the baroque music. “The observance of liturgy, whether Catholic or Protestant, obviously mattered more to him than the difference in denominations. Bach imitated many Italian Catholic masters including Vivaldi and Corelli.” (*Music in the Baroque Era*, page 271) “His message to humanity,” says W.G. Whitaker, “is the purest, the noblest, the most fruitful that any musician has ever delivered.” Charles Sanford Terry said, “directed by a faith child like in its simplicity, he used it to interpret the infinite, saw the heaven opened, and was prophetically oracular.”

As for Bach himself, he was a devout Lutheran. Bach was drawn into the quarrels between Orthodoxy and Pietism. The clash between Pietism and Lutheran orthodoxy lasted through the closing third of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth centuries, but there was much interpenetration and amalgamation of the two, the effect of Pietism being felt in circles that strongly opposed it, and both streams of thought often used the same religious language. In Halle, only a few miles from Leipzig, another side of the Pietist movement was strong. Led by the aggressive August Herman Franke, the movement had a great impact on the thinking of Bach and that of his librettists. This impact led to what was virtually a conflict between orthodox Lutheranism, with its long tradition of music as an essential part of worship, and the simple devotional life of Pietism. This dichotomy is evident in the texts which Bach set. Bach himself, though influenced strongly by the Pietists, true to his own personal conviction and his family tradition, sided with the Orthodox faction even against the pastor of his own church. Perhaps the statement Bach made early in his life when he resigned from his position at the church at Muhlhausen, where he served less than a year, can help us to see what he really held as important about his religious and musical beliefs. He stated, “My final goal is a regulated church music in the honor of God.” Bach held fast to the traditional Lutheran conviction that God should be praised in a ceaseless effort by means of the most artful music. The “motteto” *Gott ist mein König*, composed for the inauguration of a new city council at Muhlhausen, opens with the invocation “God, God, God,” repeated emphatically with a full chorus and orchestra. The central idea is that of old age and youth presented as a contrast between the Old and New Testaments. With a strong reminder that all people of all ages should join heart in praising God.

Much has been written about Bach and his influence on the world of music, but let us continue to turn our attention to how Bach was influenced by religion and especially the Bible. His cantatas and Passions give us a clear picture of how the Bible touched and inspired him. Let’s look first at his cantatas.

Bach's earliest concerted sacred works were the type Erdmann Neumeister (1671-1756), whose devotional poetry established a new trend in sacred music, called "oratorio". They were made up of scriptural extracts and chorales. One good example is the 1707 work entitled *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit* (God's time is the very best time, BWV 106). The texts come from the Psalms, the Acts, Isaiah, St. Luke, and other biblical sources. Look at this quotation from the Acts of the Apostles, King James Version of the Bible:

"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons,
which the Father has put in His own power." (Acts 1:7)

This verse along with others greatly inspired Bach to compose BWV 106 and gives us a better understanding of the man himself. He didn't question God about the timing of things, he simply accepted that God would work out all things according to His schedule. "God's time is the best time," has become a common saying in the households of Christian people around the world.

One thing that we should first realize is that Bach's cantatas are truly a musical "biblia pauperum." That is to say that his beautiful and vivid music was not only inspiring but at the very base was the essence of his Christian faith, the mystery of his salvation, and his need for redemption. In the cantatas he shows us very clearly his understanding and his ideas about God the Father, Christ the Lord, Redeemer and Victor, and of the Devil as the tempter, serpent. The themes of his choral fugues and motets are very eloquent and mysterious. His recitative is very decisive and strong. His arias are passionate yet flexible.

The chorale was always central and of most importance. He felt that the chorale had to have the most prominent place in his cantata. According to music scholars, almost all of the two hundred cantatas he wrote had a central chorale.

Whatever Bach wrote, it seemed his music surrounded the text in such an extraordinary way that the listener could actually visualize the content of the text by listening to the music itself. For example, in Cantata BWV 61, *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland*, the bass recitative "Lo, I come now. I stand before the door and knock thereat," surrounds the words of Christ as found in the Revelation of John 3:20, with a halo of five-part strings. Four pizzicato chords in each measure are meant undoubtedly to suggest the knock at the door.

The following soprano aria translates the incident told in the recitative into the experience of the individual worshiper, who opens her heart to the knocking Christ.

J. S. Bach, Cantata BWV 61, *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland*,
No. 4, Recitative

Sie-he, sie-he, ich ste-he vor der Tür und klop - fe an, und klop-fe
(Lo! I come now I stand before the door and knock thereat.)

Strings pizz.

an. So je - mand mei-ne Stim-me hö - ren wird
(If any man hear my voice.)

J. S. Bach, BWV 61, *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland*, No. 5, Aria

5. Aria

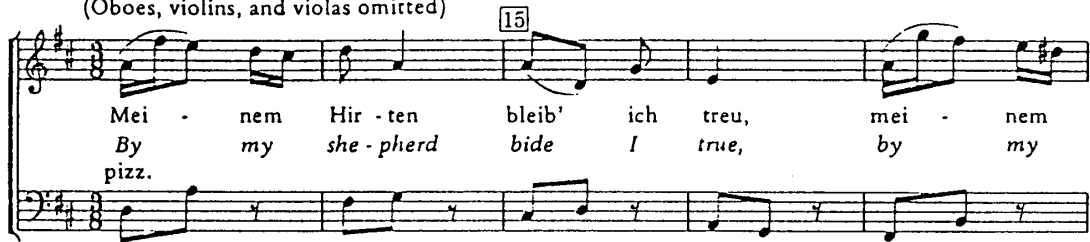
Off-ne dich, mein gan - zes Her - ze,
(Open I my whole heart)

Like Schutz, Bach was often inspired by the psalmist. One of his cantatas like one of Schutz's *Psalmen Davids* was based on the famous twenty-third psalm. BWV 92, *Ich hab' in Gottes Herz und Sinn*, No. 8 Aria expresses the simple-minded peasant's faith in the words "To my shepherd I remain true. Will he my chalice fill?" Again the individual has his turn to "speak" feel and meditate as he listens to the singer. Remembering again the words of the psalmist, "The Lord is my shepherd...my cup runneth over."

J. S. Bach, BWV 92, *Ich hab' in Gottes Herz und Sinn*, No. 8, Aria

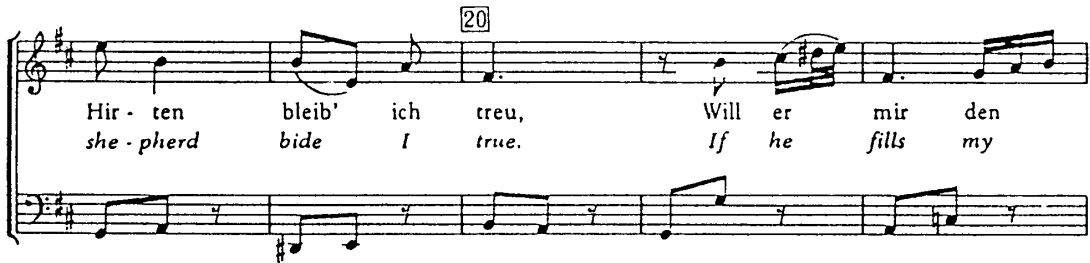
(Oboes, violins, and violas omitted)

15



Mei - nem Hir - ten bleib' ich treu, mei - nem
By my she - pherd bide I true, by my
pizz.

20



Hir - ten bleib' ich treu, Will er mir den
she - pherd bide I true. If he fills my

25



Kreuz - kelch fül - len, ruh' ich ganz in sei - nem
cha - lice full, I'll rest whol - ly in his

30



Wil - len, er steht mir im Lei - den bei.
will, He sus - tains me in my grief.

The almost two hundred church cantatas by Bach are without equal in liturgical music. Bach wrote these works as functional music for the Sunday and Saints Day service at the St. Thomas Church in Leipzig. The text was prepared for the performance for which it was intended, at times suggested by the scriptural lesson for the day, at times by hymn verses, and at times direct or paraphrased texts from the Bible.

Let us now take a brief look at the Passions. The texts of Bach's Passions may be divided into three categories: 1) Bible narrative (meaning stories and words taken directly from the Bible), 2) interpolated chorales (meaning insertions of new material or words in a text), 3) interpolated free-text choruses, arias, ariosos and recitatives. (free-text meaning that he drew on poets, writers, etc. and intermingled the words of the Bible or original story with these helps)

For our study we will look at part of the text of the most famous of the Passions, the *St. Matthew Passion*. The text consists of Bible narrative from Luther's translation of the New Testament and prepared for Bach by Christian Friedrich Hinrici from the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh chapters of the gospel of Matthew. It is very devout and more spiritual than the former *St. John Passion*. The words of Christ are accompanied by strings, as a halo around the head of Christ. Furthermore, the Bible text was kept in its original purity. Bach even underlined the words of scripture in red in the original score in order to underscore the importance of these words.

According to Arthur Loesser's words, "The speeches of the various personages, such as the Evangelist, Christ, Peter, Judas, and so forth, are directly represented by the various singers, although the same singer at different times has to take several different parts. The emotional values of the story are vividly brought out in the music. The mob's terrifying cry of 'Barabbas', the cruel intervals of the passage, 'Let Him Be Crucified', the manner in which the false witnesses parrot each other in exact imitation—in all these and many other passages the composer aims to portray the inner, psychological truth of the words."

Though Luther's translation of the New Testament would not benefit us here, again we can rely on the King James Version of 1609 to show us in particular from where Bach took his text. In Matthew chapter twenty-seven, verses 17-22 we find the words that Loesser described above.

- 17 Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them,
Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas or Jesus which is
called Christ?...
- 20 ...But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they
should ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.
- 21 The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the
twain will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas or Jesus?
They said, "Barabbas!"
- 22 Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus
which is called Christ? They all said unto him, "Let Him
be crucified!"

Dramatic as the very scene of Christ's trial itself, Bach used the text and his wonderful music to point out the great agony of the one true God, Jesus Christ, when he died for the sins of all mankind. Leonard Bernstein has remarked in *The Joy of*

Music that the *St. Matthew Passion* is a “mystic fusion of words and notes.” Felix Mendelssohn after having revived the work in 1829 said in a letter to his sister concerning the musical presentation in Berlin, “Everyone was filled with the most solemn devotion. One heard only an occasional involuntary ejaculation that sprang from deep emotions.”

The chorale, which has become most well-known from this cantata, is repeated five times, each time in a slightly different or new way. It was based on an early folk melody attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux (12th cent) and later adapted by Hans Hassler, but now it has become synonymous with the name of Bach and the *St. Matthew Passion*. It has likewise been set in hymn style and is often sung and played in the many of the churches around the world today. A brief look at the adapted hymn may be of interest at this point.

O Sacred Head, Now Wounded
When they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head . . . Matt. 27:29

Attr. to Bernard of Clairvaux, 12th century
 Trans. (German) by Paul Gerhardt, 1656
 Trans. (English) by James W. Alexander, 1830

PASSION CHORALE 7 6 7 6 D.
 Hans Leo Hassler, 1601
 Arr. by J. S. Bach, 1729

1. O sa - cred Head, now wound - ed, With grief and shame weighed down,
 Now scorn - ful - ly sur - round - ed With thorns, Thine on - ly crown:

The *St. Matthew Passion* is truly one of the most moving expressions of religious faith in western culture. To understand it and its composer is a great step to understanding western thinking and music. At least this one piece of music should be read and studied in both its musical and religious perspectives. It was intended by Bach to touch the heart of every person in Germany and Europe who cared to listen to it, and might I add, by God Himself, to touch the hearts of every person in every nation on earth. It was not by chance that a friend of young Felix Mendelssohn’s

working in a butcher's shop happened to find a score of music in its entirety among the wrapping paper that had been purchased from some "recycle" agent. And it was not by accident that the young man took the score to his friend Felix and ask him to look at it, having no knowledge of music itself. And it was not by happenstance that Mendelssohn spent the next ten years of his life trying to get permission to perform this great piece of baroque music. All of this was by the providence and direction of God. After almost one hundred years the work was revived and it lives today. That in itself should give us the determination to read and understand the text of this great Passion. It should also challenge every musician to keep in mind what he or she is playing had a purpose when it was written. Discovery of that purpose will make better musicians, not just players.

MATTHÄUS-PASSION BWV 244

CHORAL

Erkenne mich, mein Hüter,
Mein Hirte, nimm mich an!
Von dir, Quell aller Güter,
Ist mir viel Gut's getan.
Dein Mund hat mich gelabelt
Mit Milch und suber Kost,
Dein Geist hat mich begabet
Mit mancher Himmelslust.

CHORAL

Ich will hier bei dir stehen,
Verachte mich doch nicht,
Von dir will ich nicht gehen,
Wenn dir dein Herz bricht.
Wann dein Herz wird erblassen
Im letzten Todesstob,
Alsdenn will ich dich fassen
In meinen Arm und Schob.

REZITATIV

Evangelist. Petrus aber antwortete und sprach us ihm:

Pilrus. Wenn sie auch alle sich an dir srgerten, so will ich doch mich nimmermehr srgern.

Evangelist. Jesus, sprach zu ihm:

Jesus. Wahrlich, Ich sage dir: In dieser Nacht, ehe der Hahn kiahet, wirst mich dreimal verleugnen.

Evangelist. Petrus sprach zu ihm:

Pilrus. Und wenn Ich mit dir sterben mübte, so will ich dich nicht verleugnen.

Evangelist. Desgleichen sagten auch alle Jonger.

CHORAL

Was mein Gott will, das g'scheh' allzeit
Sein Will, der Ist der beste,
Zu helfen den'n er Ist bereit,
Die an Ihn glauben feste.
Er hilft aus Not,
Der fromme Gott,
Und zuchtiget mit Maben.
Wer Gott vertraut, Fest auf Ihn baut,
Fest auf Ihn baut,
Den will er nicht verlassen.

George Frideric Handel

George Frideric Handel, (1685-1759) unlike Bach, was a man who sought both as a musician and as a man, to broaden his perspective of music and life by studying not only in Germany, but in Italy and England as well. He was a man who liked freedom of expression. It was said that he was one of the greatest organists and harpsichord players of his day and that he was a man with a simple, uncomplicated faith and simple view

toward life. Whereas Bach thought of God as a supreme power to be feared, Handel thought of God as his friend. Having studied Italian opera but feeling that the Italian opera seemed “dead”, Handel turned to the oratorio in English. Some people believe that after having a stroke that he became very religious. Others think he turned to religious oratorio because they were popular in London and would bring him success. Whichever is true is left to speculation. But the important thing is that the oratorios that Handel composed were among the most beautiful religious music ever composed, especially *Messiah* which is probably the most popular piece of choral music in history.

Oratorio had a long and interesting history even before Handel used it. It had originally been used by the Roman Catholic Church to combat secular art and was often used in the period of “Lent” (a Christian practice of fasting and repentance 40 days before Easter) in place of the Italian opera. Defined simply, the oratorio is a choral work of religious nature consisting of recitatives, arias, and choruses without drama or action. For our study we will examine the contents and ideas of parts of the words of *Messiah*: those words being directly from the Bible, but we should also mention here some of the other famous oratorios that he wrote. They include among others:

- 1) *Saul*-based on the story of King Saul in the Old Testament book of Samuel.
- 2) *Israel in Egypt*-based on the story of the Jewish people when they were slaves in Egypt from the book of Exodus.
- 3) *Samson*-based on the story of the strong Jewish leader in the book of Judges.
- 4) *Jephthah*- based on the story of a judge who was a deliverer of Israel in the book of Judges.

Messiah is one of the most highly emotional and God-inspired pieces of music in history. We are told that Handel wrote it in 24 days, while locked in his London apartment. During the time he was composing it he refused food and hardly slept. The result was a masterpiece.

The great popularity of the *Messiah* in London began in 1749 when Handel led a benefit performance. The audience reaction was most enthusiastic. During the next nine years, Handel conducted *Messiah* in London every year for the benefit of the Foundling Hospital: by the end of that decade, *Messiah* was established as a favorite piece with the English audience. Since that time it has been played regularly throughout the world.

C.E. Abdy Williams wrote, “*Messiah* towers above all the other oratorios of Handel’s in the estimation of the English people. The highest ideals of the Christian religion are here

set forth and enhanced by music which in its strength, its sincerity, and its entire fitness to the subject appeals to learned and unlearned with equal force.”

Messiah is basically divided into three parts. The first part deals with the prophecies of the coming Messiah. The second part tells about the suffering and death of Christ and the third part tells of the resurrected, living Christ. Since the purpose of our study is to encourage further research by the reader we will not look in detail at all three parts. Time and space will not allow us that privilege in this paper. However, let's look at part one in some detail.

In the first part we can easily discern six different sections, comprising Nos.1-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10-12, 14-17, and 18-21. The accompanied recitative begins with “Comfort Ye,” the aria with, “Ev'ry Valley Shall Be Exalted”, and the the radiant chorus with, “And the Glory of the Lord.” The main theme here is “God's promise.” Based on the prophecy from Isaiah 40: 1-5 we feel this as a prologue to the whole work.

The counterpart to this prologue of Promise is the next group (4-6) again, a recitative, aria, and chorus. Here Handel views the coming of the Lord from a new aspect: the distance between God and man is pointed out. Here the music makes the worshiper or listener to examine himself and his relationship to God. It is an early charge to be prepared for the coming of the Messiah. In some respects it is if Handel uses the message to ask the question to each individual listener: “Are you ready?” The Bible message is clear:

“And who may abide the day of His coming? And who shall stand when He appeareth? For He is like a refiner's fire.”

(Malachi 3:2)

After this solemn and strong warning comes again the joy with the announcement of the prophecy of the birth of the Messiah. Again turning to the prophet Isaiah, Handel proclaims in song the ancient words of the prophet “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call His name Emmanuel. God with us.” (Isaiah 7:14) This verse of scripture has been the main theme of many Christmas sermons since the birth of Christendom. It is fitting that Handel was led of God to set it to music. One writer has said that the difference between Bach's Passion and Handel's Oratorio was that Bach's Passion was a worship service, but Handel's Oratorio was a sermon in itself. Indeed this was so.

In the fourth section (Nos. 10-12) Handel continues by showing us the people in dark who see a great light. Of course, the light is the Messiah. The message here is similar to the message symbolized in the traditional candlelight services that are often held in Protestant churches at Christmas that is: Christ, the Messiah, is the Light of the world which is in darkness because of sin. The candlelight services having originated in the

German Protestant churches, Handel himself, German by birth, must have remembered such experiences from his early life in Germany when he set this beautiful passage to music.

“The people that walk in darkness have seen a great light;
and they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the
light shined.” (Isaiah 9:2)

The fifth group deals with an account of the Christmas Message of the Gospel. For the first time Handel goes to the New Testament for his source of inspiration. Here the announcement of the birth of Christ to the shepherds in Luke 2:8-14 becomes the fulfillment of the prophecies that have been spoken of. Handel wanted his audience to understand that the Messiah that was prophesied by the great Jewish prophets became a reality in the man Jesus Christ. His music is glorious at this point as he uses the message of the angels to the shepherds, “Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth: good will towards men!” (Luke 2:14)

The sixth and final section of the First part symbolizes Christ’s sojourn on earth. It includes two uniquely different arias: “Rejoice” and “He Shall Feed His Flock.” The tone of the angels in section five resounds again in these arias. The first aria is a song of gladness about the King of Zion who comes and talks peace to all people. The second is about the Shepherd. Christ, who leads His flock and brings comfort to those afflicted. It is a common pattern in the Bible to associate the Messiah as a Shepherd and his followers as sheep. As you probably know, the sheep is considered one of the least intelligent of animals and often finds itself in danger because of its constant wandering. Without a Shepherd, so people are like sheep who go astray. Handel wanted his audience to comprehend the importance of following the Good Shepherd and so he encouraged in the duetto: “Take His yoke upon you and learn of Him, for He is meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” (Matthew 11:28-29) The chorus then concludes with the verse: “His yoke is easy and His burden is light.” (Matthew 11:30) Here again through the aria and duetto, the challenge is made to the listener and through the chorus the challenge is met.

Biblically speaking we have seen how Handel based this great oratorio on the prophecy of the great prophet Isaiah, but also on the minor prophecies of Haggai and Malachi. Hand in hand with the prophecies of the Old Testament, Handel interweaves the words of the New Testament Gospel writers, with the basic intention to prove the validity of Jesus Christ of Nazareth as the true Messiah. As the first part ends with the birth of the Christ child and a short review of the life and purpose of the Messiah, so the second part begins

with the main purpose of the Messiah: that being the Redeemer of mankind.

Sinfony : Grave : Allegro moderato

1. Accompagto : tenor

comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God (Isaiah 40:1-3)

2. Aria : tenor

Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low ; the crooked straight, and the rough places plain (Isaiah 40 : 4)

3. Chorus

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together : for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it (Isaiah 40 : 5)

4. Accompagnato : bass

Thus saith the Lord of Hosts : Yet once a little while and I will shake the heavens, and the earth the sea, and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come. The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in. Behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts (Haggai 2 : 6-7 ; Malachi 3 : 1)

5. Aria : alto

But who may abide the day of His coming? And who shall stand when He appeareth? For He is like a refiner's fire (Malachi 3 : 2)

6. Chorus

And He shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness (Malachi 3 : 3)

7. Recitativo : alto

Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and

shall call His name Immanuel : God with us (Isaiah 7 : 14)

8.9. Aria and chorus: alto

O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain. O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength. Lift it up, be not afraid ; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee (Isaiah 40 : 9 : 60 : 1)

10. Accompagnato: bass

For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people. But the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee, And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of the rising (Isaiah 60 : 2-3)

11. Aria : bass

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light : and they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death ; upon them hath the light shined (Isaiah 9 : 2)

12. Chorus

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given. And the government shall be upon His shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful. Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9 : 6)

18a. Duetto : soprano and alto

He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; and He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. Come unto Him all ye that labour, come unto Him that are heavy laden and He will give you rest. Take His yoke upon you, and learn of Him, for He is meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. (Isalsh 40 : 11 St. Matthew 11 : 28-29)

19. Chorus

His yoke is easy and His burtden is light (Matthew 11 : 30)

The second part of *Messiah* deals with His suffering and death, His resurrection, His ascension, and His message to all mankind. It ends with the powerful message from the book of Revelation, the last book in the Bible. The Hallelujah Chorus is without a doubt the most revered and well know part. It's brilliance and message can lift the heart of any person who hears it. It is a message of hope and salvation and eternal life through Christ.

The third not only maintains the exalted level of the Hallelujah Chorus but carries us to new heights. This part opens with the wonderful soprano aria, "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth" and ends with the three-part chorus, "Worthy is the Lamb."

Anyone who listens to Handel's *Messiah* can surely understand the basic principles of the Christian faith. *Messiah* is concerned with the concept of redemption as expressed in Christian philosophy. It is not derived from any particular denomination of Christianity

and so is above church doctrines and liturgy. It is universal in its appeal to all Christians of all ages of all denominations of churches. *Messiah* unites all Christian faiths in a unique but simple way. Perhaps Handel himself was truly God inspired to show mankind that there is no need for disputes among fellow Christians or fellow human beings. Perhaps Handel's *Messiah* is universal in appeal because the subject of its message is Jesus Christ, the universal Redeemer of all mankind.

20. Chorus

Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world
[John 1 : 29]

21. Aria: alto

He was despised and rejected of men: a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. He gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. He hid not His face from shame and spitting [Isaiah 53 : 3; 50 : 6]

22. Chorus

Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him [Isaiah 53 : 4-5]

23. Chorus

And with His stripes we are healed [Isaiah 53 : 5]

24. Chorus

All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way: and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all [Isaiah 53 : 6]

25. Accompagnato: tenor

All they that see Him laugh Him to scorn. They shoot out their lips, and shake their heads, saying [Psalm 22 : 7]

26. Chorus

He trusted in God that He would deliver Him. Let Him deliver Him, if He delight in Him [Psalm 22 : 8]

27. Accompagnato: tenor

Thy rebuke hath broken His heart; He is full of heaviness. He looked for some to have pity on Him, but there was no man; neither found He any to comfort Him [Psalm 69 : 20]

28. Arioso: tenor

Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow [Lamentations 1 : 12]

29. Accompagnato: tenor

He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgressions of Thy people was He stricken [Isaiah 53 : 8]

30. Aria: tenor

But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell; nor didst Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption [Psalm 16 : 10]

31. Chorus

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.

(Semi-chorus)

Who is this King of glory?

(Semi-chorus)

The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.

(Semi-chorus)

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.

(Semi-chorus)

Who is the King of glory?

(Semi-chorus)

The Lord of Hosts.

(Chorus)

The Lord of Hosts. He is the King of glory [Psalm 24 : 7-10]

32. Recitativo: tenor

Unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten Thee? [Hebrews 1 : 5]

33. Chorus

Let all the angels of God worship Him [Hebrews 1 : 6]

35. Chorus

The Lord gave the word; great was the company of the preachers [Psalm 68 : 11]

36. Aria: soprano

How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things. [Romans 10 : 15]

37. Chorus

Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the world [Romans 10 : 18]

38. Aria: bass

Why do the nations so furiously rage together? And why do the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed [Psalm 2 : 1-2]

39. Chorus

Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yokes from us [Psalm 2 : 3]

40. Recitativo: tenor

He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn; the Lord shall have them in derision [Psalm 2 : 4]

41. Aria: tenor

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel [Psalm 2 : 9]

42. Chorus

Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. The Kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever. King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, Hallelujah! [Revelation 19 : 6; 11 : 15; 19 : 16]

43. Aria: soprano

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though worms destroy this

body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. For now is Christ risen from the dead, the first-fruits of them from that sleep [Job 19 : 25-26; I Corinthians 15 : 20]

44. Chorus

Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive [I Corinthians 15 : 21-22]

45. Accompagnato: bass

Behold I tell you a mystery: we shall not all sleep; but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet [I Corinthians 15 : 51-52]

46. Aria: bass

The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed [I Corinthians 15 : 52-53]

47. Recitativo: alto

Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: Death

is swallowed up in victory [I Corinthians 15 : 54-55]

48. Duetto: alto and tenor

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law [I Corinthians 15 : 55-56]

49. Chorus

But thanks be to God, Who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ [I Corinthians 15 : 57]

51.52. Chorus

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by His blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing
Blessing and honour, glory and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever Amen.
[Revelation 9, 12-14]

From other choruses by Handel let us look at a few hymns that have been adapted. They have been arranged and are still sung regularly in the church. One of the most beautiful and well-known Christmas hymns "Joy to the World" was arranged from Handel. Another is, "Awake, My Soul, Stretch Every Nerve.

Awake, My Soul, Stretch Every Nerve

Let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Heb. 12:1

CHRISTMAS C.M. Repeats

Weyman's *Melodia Sacra*, 1815
Arr. from George F. Handel, 1728

Philip Doddridge, 1755

1. A - wake, my soul, stretch ev - ery nerve, And press with vig - or
2. A cloud of wit - ness - es a - round Hold thee in full sur -
3. 'Tis God's all - an - i - mat - ing voice, That calls thee from on
4. Blest Sav - lor, in - tro - duced by Thee Have I my race be -

on; A heav'n - ly race de - mands thy zeal, And
vigor; For - get the steps al - read - y trod, And
high; 'Tis His own hand pre - sents the prize To
begin; And crowned with vic - t'ry, at Thy feet I'll

an im - mor - tal crown, And an im - mor - tal crown.
on - ward urge thy way, And on - ward urge thy way.
thine as - pir - ing eye, To thine as - pir - ing eye.
lay my hon - ors down, I'll lay my hon - ors down. A - men.

All in all we can say that the oratorios of Handel invigorated the whole of musical public life, both in his lifetime and even now. His music was addressed to the world at large, not a small circle of professional musicians or elite religious people. Handel, like the psalmist, was a man after God's own heart. A man who likewise touched the hearts of people of every race and nation, and will continue to do so.

Conclusions

The Baroque period of music was certainly an exciting and refreshing time in which to live. Refreshed by the very Word of God itself, the composers of that era wrote music which even now refreshes the souls of weary listeners. In this paper we have seen how great composers were influenced by the power of God's Word. We have further come to understand a little about the different religious convictions that existed during that time including; Pietism, Humanism, Orthodox Lutheranism, among others. Had not these great religious movements taken place during this period it is doubtful that such composers as Schutz, Corelli, Vivaldi, Telemann, Bach, or Handel would have ever composed or been remembered.

As for this writer, I believe it was in the providence of God that these men were all born in the same great period of reform in both music and religion. I think that the words we quoted from Bach's early work BWV 106, "God's time is the best time," sums up the true theme of the Baroque period. Surely God Himself seemed to walk again up the face of the earth as these and other great musicians composed beautiful and glorious melodies from the pages of God's Holy Word. These men were men of spiritual discernment. A person devoid of spiritual discernment and spiritual life, unstirred and uninfluenced by the Spirit of God, could not have expressed musically or otherwise an emotion or understanding of religious feeling which they themselves were a stranger, too.

In the same way, I hold it true that being a "stranger" to the background of the nature of the sacred baroque music and the emotion with which it was written, leaves any professional musician or amateur performer with a lack of emotional feeling for the message of the text and thereby leaves the audience, as well, with an emptiness that chills the intent of the performer. This is *not* to say that sacred baroque music should be performed only by Christians or only in the church, but it is to simply challenge the performers to a deeper understanding of the original purpose of the work and to better inform themselves of the essence of all that is involved, not just the content of the musical score. It is with the spirit and knowledge of the contents of such compositions that they should be presently played and sung.

(本学助教授 = 英語・宗教学担当)

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