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BACH'S RELIGION

GERHARD HERZ

If Bach's Protestantism could be defined as easily as Palestrina's Catholicism it would be relatively simple to understand Bach's place in society and the purpose of his art work. As it is, Bach's piety, personality and music were not even adequately understood by his own time. Bach's contemporaries had already departed so far from the composer's philosophy of life and the style and content of his music that they felt increasingly less able to understand his compositions and to derive immediate pleasure from them. Because Bach carried on traditions which his generation was about to abandon, an unbridgeable gap separated his music from the main current of his time. Although marvelling at his almost unlimited craftsmanship, Bach's contemporaries rejected the composer because his art work seemed out of step with his period. Bach was no musician for future generations. His mission was rather to safeguard the heritage of the past and to preserve traditions which his contemporaries attempted to undermine. That Bach was a devout Christian has never been doubted. Yet he was not, as many writers have pointed out, a Christian who lived apart from his time, but one who in every respect lived and remained within the social and religious boundaries of his century. Bach's personality and creations, which today move us chiefly aesthetically and emotionally, are deeply rooted in the ethos of the old Lutheran church.

During his whole life Bach faithfully adhered to the way of life and belief of the old Thuringian family of the Bachs. It never occurred to him to be different from his ancestors who, for five generations, had been musicians in the service of the Protestant church or of Protestant towns.

In fact, one of Johann Sebastian Bach's most moving and most characteristic traits can be traced back to the 16th century, to Veit Bach, the primogenitor of the musical Bach family. Veit Bach lived from about 1550 to 1619. Having left his native village, Wechmar in Thuringia, he settled down as a baker and miller in Hungary which had just accepted the Lutheran faith under the emperors Ferdinand I and Maximilian II. When under the regime of the mentally unstable Rudolph II the Jesuits were recalled, the Hungarian Counter Reformation set in. Veit Bach did not wait until the persecution of the Protestant German settlers reached its cruel

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climax in 1597 but "converted his property into money," left Hungary and returned to Germany. Back in Wechmar, he lived a life free from fear, enjoying as "his greatest pleasure" the playing of the 'Cythringen', a little lute-like instrument, to the sound of which his mill ground out its eternal *ostinato* rhythm. "This was, as it were, the beginning of music among his descendants." [1]

To these genuine Bachian traits of the musical miller, Veit, whose firm Lutheran belief defied persecution, can be added the traits of a possible brother, Hans Bach. Of this Hans Bach (1555–1615),[2] famous for his beard, his jesting and viol playing, Philipp Emanuel Bach inherited, probably from his father, two pictures for his splendid collection of portraits of musicians. Does not the inscription: "homo laborius, simplex et pius" on one of them sound like the trade-mark of the industrious, simple and pious Bach family?

Like Veit and Hans Bach, the one a lutenist the other a fiddler, Bach's devout Protestant forefathers were instrumentalists. They were musical artisans, town and court musicians in the Middle German provinces of Thuringia and Saxony, home of the German mystics and the Reformation. Thus Johann Sebastian Bach's profession and religion were traditional in his family long before he was born. Bach's religion was so deeply embedded in the old Lutheran faith that no new trends, such as the Pietistic movement which in his time aroused the Protestants, could become a serious problem for him.

This loyalty to the belief of his forefathers is also reflected in Bach's life and artistic work.

II

Johann Sebastian Bach grew up in an orthodox environment and, as a typical member of the Bach family, passed this orthodox education on to his own children. From his tenth to his fifteenth year, Bach attended the Ohrdruf *Lyceum*, one of Thuringia's outstanding old Latin schools, renowned principally for its theological teaching. Although the youngest in his class, Bach was a superior student and in his first year of school was allowed to skip a half year.

[1] As the greatest of them, Johann Sebastian, tells us in the Genealogy of the Bach family.

[2] Not Hans Bach, 'der Spielmann', Bach's great-grandfather who died in Wechmar in 1626. See also Charles Sanford Terry: *Bach, a biography*. London, Oxford University Press, 2nd and revised edition, 1933, 7.

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In 1697 the twelve year old boy was promoted to *Secunda*, two years ahead of the average student. There he was introduced to Leonhard Hutter's (1563–1616) *Compendium locorum theologicorum* of 1610. This was the principal work of the great German theologian, called "Luther redonatus" who so ably defended Luther's doctrine against the assaults of the 'reformed' Protestants.

In 1700 Bach left Ohrdruf "well grounded in the humanities, his character absorbed the theological bias of the school, whose atmosphere was sternly orthodox and anti-pietistic. At Ohrdruf, we can feel sure, the simple faith which possessed him all his life took root." [3] This faith was strengthened during the ensuing three years which Bach spent at St. Michael's School in Lüneburg. There, Hutter's theology of Lutheran orthodoxy was again taken up as the main subject for upper-classmen and more deeply expounded. In fact, Hutter's dogmatic interpretation of Luther accompanied Bach throughout his life. When later Bach himself taught music and Latin in Leipzig the daily work at the Thomas School began each morning with readings from the Bible and a passage from Hutter's *Compendium*.

Hans Besch, in his admirable and comprehensive study of Bach's faith,[4] finds in Hutter's work actually the key to a theological understanding of Bach's religion.

One principal doctrine of Hutter which Besch dwells on may serve as an illustration. It concerns the apostles and prophets whose mouths, tongues, hands and styluses have all been but tools of divine inspiration. "It must have given an ultimate meaning and direction of his calling to an orthodox organist to know that the hands too stand in the service of God." [5] As Bach, in true Lutheran spirit, did all his work *In nomine Jesu*,[6] the unbroken continuity of his indefatigable life work, created in deep humility, is further proof of his genuine piety. The search for Bach's philosophy of life leads to the figure of Christ as understood by the orthodox Lutherans. Bach's art and his religion are but one and the same. Nobody in music perceived and interpreted the sacred and the miraculous more powerfully and more purely than Bach. Bach, who has been called the fifth evangelist,

[3] Terry, *op. cit.*, 30.

[4] Hans Besch, *J. S. Bach, Frömmigkeit und Glaube*, Verlag C. Bertelsmann, Gütersloh, 1938, 239.

[5] Translated from Besch, *op. cit.*, 239.

[6] Bach's famous inscription on the Little Clavier Book for the nine year old Wilhelm Friedemann.

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uses music as a medium to present the Lutheran doctrines of Christianity. His music thus leads to the Gospel.

"There is not one link in the chain of Hutter's thoughts which is not of decisive significance for the understanding of Bach. . . . Meaning of the new life is, according to Hutter, God's Glory as well as the attestation of obedience and gratitude." [7] Several instances out of Bach's life and work suggest themselves at this point. There is the charming dedication which adorns Bach's Little Organ Book:

> "Dem Höchsten Gott allein zu Ehren
> Dem Nächsten, draus sich zu belehren"
> ("Inscribed in honor of the Lord Most High,
> And that my neighbor may be taught thereby").

Another instance can be found in Bach's letter to the Mühlhausen Consistory in which the twenty-three year old organist declares "a well-regulated church music to exalt God's Glory" [8] the ultimate purpose of his strivings.

The most important document in this connection is Bach's *Generalbasslehre* [9] in which the composer drew from Niedt's book on thorough bass for a formulation of his own ideas. Rewording Niedt, Bach passed this doctrine on to his pupils: "Figured bass is the most perfect foundation of music. It is executed with both hands in such a manner that the left hand plays the notes written down while the right hand adds consonances and dissonances. The result is an agreeable harmony to the Glory of God and the justifiable gratification of the senses. For the sole aim and reason of the figured bass, as of all music, should be nothing other than God's Glory and pleasant recreations. Where this is not kept in mind there can be no true music, but only an infernal scraping and bawling." It is revealing that Bach speaks here about the meaning of *all* music; that is, vocal and instrumental, sacred and secular.

In Bach's time, religious and secular art are not yet intellectually separated. While limiting the listener's enjoyment to "justifiable gratification

[7] Translated from Besch, *op. cit.*, 271.

[8] Terry, *op. cit.*, 83, reprints the whole letter of 1708.

[9] *Rules and Instruction for Playing Thorough Bass or Accompaniment in Four Parts*, made for his Scholars in music by Herr Johann Sebastian Bach of Leipzig, 1738. See also Philipp Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, translated by Clara Bell and J. A. Fuller Maitland, London, Novello and Co., 1899, vol. III, 318, as well as Albert Schweitzer, *J. S. Bach*, English translation by Ernest Newman, Breitkopf and Härtel, London, 1911, vol. I, 167.

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of the senses" Bach does not forget twice to remind his readers of the "aim and reason" of all music: God's Glory. The *J. J. (Jesu Juva)* with which Bach begins each composition is to him, the orthodox Lutheran, a humble prayer for God's assistance and inspiration; the *S D G (Soli Deo Gloria)* with which he closes his work is the thanksgiving for the prayer heard. In Christ Bach seeks and finds inspiration, means and end for his life, for his belief and for his work.

To what extent this outlook shares in the thought of Bach's time may also be learned from the fine definition by Andreas Werckmeister, the promoter of well tempered tuning, who in 1691 had this to say about art:

"Even if art is an external thing in itself, it nevertheless gives rise to beautiful reminiscence of things spiritual and divine . . . particularly music is a mirror of divine order and a foretaste of heavenly harmony." [10]

Just as the *Soli Deo Gloria* idea goes back to Johannes Tinctoris and beyond him, so Werckmeister only voices the medieval concept of the harmony of the spheres or of *musica mundana*. At this point we may think also of the many beautiful definitions by Luther of the purpose of music, the symbolic meaning of polyphonic singing and of the function of the musician in Protestant schools and churches.

Yet Bach did not, like Dürer with whom he has frequently been compared,[11] live at the time of Martin Luther. He lived two hundred years later, at a time when serious dissensions rent the Protestant church. Unlike the Catholic, the Protestant church was in a state of emotional turmoil in the early 18th century. Its fundamental doctrines were heatedly discussed by such different religious schools as the orthodox Lutherans, the 'reformed' Calvinists, the German Mystics, Spener's Pietists, as well as by those Protestants who believed in a church that would reconcile the different denominations.

The difficulty of placing Bach correctly is further augmented by the *social* upheavals of the 18th century. The Age of Enlightenment with its new liberal thoughts and its conquests of science clashed with religion. Thus orthodox Lutheranism had to defend itself also against a secular enemy: Rationalism. Bach frequently attacked Rationalism. For instance,

[10] Translated from W. Gurlitt: *Joh. Seb. Bach, der Meister und sein Werk.* Im Furche-Verlag, Berlin, 1936, 20.

[11] See Hans Preuss: *Dürer und Bach*, 55 pp., Verlag C. Bertelsmann, Gütersloh, 1935.

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in his cantata No. 178 [12] he exclaims: "Cease, now, tottering Reason, cease!" pointing somewhat later to the core of the problem: "Reason wages war against faith."

These diverse religious, cultural and economic trends which existed at Bach's time made it subsequently possible for representatives of each of these schools of thought to interpret Bach in terms of their own. The same is true of the six generations that have followed Bach's death, inheriting the problems of Bach's time and adding their own.

While Bach has been claimed by any one of these groups, it is characteristic that the efforts to substantiate these claims are as contradictory as they are dubious and vague. More frequently, as in Schweitzer's case of "Bach, the mystic," [13] one deals with opinions rather than facts; and few of them have the dignity and insight that distinguish Schweitzer even in a debatable interpretation. A beautiful idealism caused Schweitzer, the only theologian among the Bach biographers, to read a general religious quality into Bach's church music. Schweitzer seems to imply that Bach had worked his way through Lutheranism and Pietism to a completely personal religion.[14] However, Besch's study of religious conditions in the early 18th century reveals [15] that there was little room for such religious individualism in Bach's time.

As Bach's individuality means more to most people than the religious community to which he belonged, such a personal interpretation of Bach's faith is just as natural as it is debatable. None of the attempts to see Bach's religion in another light than the orthodox Lutheran can be supported theologically. From Spitta to Terry, Bach biographers have shown convincingly that Bach does not transgress the realm of the confessional church.

In fact, Bach is the one composer whose music forms a perfect mirror of Lutheran theology. Culminating and summarizing two hundred years of orthodox Lutheranism, Bach was able to explore, deepen and illuminate its full theological and musical meaning without producing a conflict with its basic concepts. Even the polemic vein in Bach's character corresponds to

[12] "Wo Gott, der Herr, nicht bei uns hält," cantata No. 178 of the year 1740. The German text of the two quotations is: "Schweig', schweig' nur taumelnde Vernunft" and "Vernunft wider den Glauben ficht."

[13] Schweitzer, *op. cit.*, I, 169–170.

[14] Schweitzer, *op. cit.*, I, 264: "Bach, like every lofty religious mind, belongs not to the church but to religious humanity."

[15] See Besch, *op. cit.*, 183.

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the nature of Luther and the *church militant*. Bach liked to fight. Particularly, any encroachment upon church music and the cantor's old prerogatives aroused his pugnacious spirit. But the obstacles which orthodox consistories placed in his way were petty rather than matters of basic religious disagreement. Bach usually came out of these fights victorious. The musical heir of the Reformation showed by his actions and his music that he was a worthy representative of the *church militant* and the *church triumphant*.[16]

III

Even more decisive is the question: how did Bach himself feel about the different trends of his time? Did he express himself about them? Did he ever take action in behalf of or against one or more of them? Do we have any additional facts beyond the evidence of Bach's orthodox education and his deep understanding of Hutter's Lutheran theology?

While there is not one word in the whole source material about Bach which could be interpreted as even implying a faint criticism of the Lutheran dogma, there is ample evidence to the contrary — about Bach's attitude towards Pietism and, of course, towards the 'reformed' church.

In Ohrdruf, Lüneburg and Arnstadt, Bach had lived in strictly orthodox environments. When he accepted the position of organist at St. Blaise church in Mühlhausen in 1707, the picture changed. Bach found himself suddenly in the very midst of religious dissensions. The orthodox minister of the church of the Blessed Virgin, Georg Christian Eilmar, had become involved in a serious controversy with the pastor of Bach's own church, the Pietist J. A. Frohne, a disciple of Spener. While the dispute dragged on Bach took sides. Although Frohne seems to have had the far pleasanter personality, Bach snubbed the man who was his own pastor. He asked the minister of the other church, the fanatic zealot Eilmar, to be godfather at the cradle of his first child. A careful investigation of the godfathers and godmothers whom Bach chose for his children would support the assumption that Bach preferred orthodox friends. As will be shown later, the same is true of his cantata poets.

The religious squabbles in Mühlhausen eventually caused Bach to hand in his resignation. In his letter of June 25, 1708, to his Mühlhausen employers Bach states: "I have not been allowed to do my work without opposition, and there does not seem the least *apparence* that it will abate.

[16] See Besch, *op. cit.*, 174.

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. . . The opportunity to pursue the object which concerns me most, the betterment of church music, free from opposition and vexations encountered here," [17] came for Bach when the Duke of Sachsen-Weimar offered him a position as chamber musician in his orchestra.

When, ten years later, Bach became Capellmeister at the 'reformed' court of Cöthen (1717–1723), he had to take issue with Calvinism. In view of the fact that the Calvinistic doctrine was about as irreconcilable to a Lutheran as was Catholicism, it will not seem astonishing to see Bach send his children to the newly founded Lutheran rather than to the town's outstanding 'reformed' school. Like St. Agnes church of Cöthen, this Lutheran school was built at the initiative of the mother of prince Leopold who, unlike her son, was a Lutheran.

The Anna Magdalena Bach Note-Book of 1722, written while Bach made his living as Capellmeister of a Calvinistic court, contains on its cover an open warning against Calvinism:

"Anti Calvinismus und
Christen Schule item
Anti Melancholicus."

Now, "Anti Calvinismus," "Evangelische Christen Schule" and "Anti Melancholicus" are the titles of three dogmatic Lutheran books by Dr. August Pfeiffer, all three in Bach's possession. The first of these books culminates in this dogmatic, final utterance: "We have shown that the 'reformed' doctrine overthrows the foundation of belief and therefore deserves to be condemned."

There is also a musical meaning hidden in this curious flyleaf warning. By "Anti Melancholicus" Bach may well have intended to stress the healthy, gay and unproblematical nature of simple house music of the kind that filled Anna Magdalena's Note-Book. Its straightforward music may have served as an antidote to Calvinistic sobriety, Pietistic world flight or subjective ecstasy. Adding a "Beware of Calvinism" Bach seems to turn, above all, against the extremely art-hostile spirit of the 'reformed' church. The reformists who regarded art a product of worldliness, if not of the devil — in direct contrast to Luther to whom music was a God given gift — admitted only the unadorned chorale to their puritan service. They banished everything else: the polyphonic arrangement of the chorale, its rich

[17] Quoted by Terry, *op. cit.*, 83.

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orchestration, the cantata form and any Latin text. In Cöthen Bach had come to know the artistic barrenness of the Calvinist service.

Does it seem surprising that Bach finally quitted his post as court Capellmeister at Cöthen to settle down as cantor of St. Thomas in Leipzig, thus voluntarily immuring himself in the cloistered world of venerable churchly tradition? Not the least important reason for this change was the further education of his sons. The university of this largest Saxon city, to which Bach sent young Friedemann in the year of his arrival (1723), represented one of the oldest strongholds of orthodox Lutheranism. While the 'reformed' court of Cöthen made no demands upon its Capellmeister to provide 'concerted' church music, in Leipzig Bach's artistic work was almost exclusively devoted to the church. There is ample proof that also during this last and longest part of his life Bach remained uncompromisingly loyal to Luther's church.

In fact, the more his contemporaries moved away from Lutheran orthodoxy the more Bach withdrew from them, until, towards the end of his life, he buried himself quite stoically and completely in Lutheran studies and their revelation in terms of music. His *Schübler Chorales*, his late chorale variations upon the Christmas hymn *Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her* and particularly the third part of his *Clavierübung* of 1739 represent fervent musical affirmations of the Lutheran creed. The latter work, so often taken to be just a collection of twenty-one organ chorales, actually symbolizes the doctrines of Lutheran Christianity in the form of a complete musical representation of the service.

Equally, if not even more, revealing is the library which Bach left at his death.[18] Its inventory lists eighty-three titles — all theological. Among them are Martin Luther's collected works in two editions: the seven-volume Wittenberg edition of 1539 and the eight-volume Jena edition of 1556 which Bach's eight year old daughter Regine Susanna inherited.

In addition to Luther, Bach's library consisted mainly of the works of Luther's disciples and champions in the next centuries. Well represented are the writings by the Wittenberg professor Abraham Calovius who fought Catholicism, Calvinism and Socinianism, and the 17th century Archdeacon of St. Thomas and Leipzig professor August Pfeiffer (see above). Among the many orthodox theological works were also six books by the Rostock professor Heinrich Müller. One of them, entitled

[18] The complete inventory is printed in Terry, *op. cit.*, 273–275. See also: H. Preuss: *Bachs Bibliothek*, Zahn Festausgabe, Werner Scholl, Leipzig, 1928.

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Schluss-Kette, contains a sentence which must have had a special personal meaning for Bach. It is, in fact, as if Luther, Hutter or Bach himself were speaking when Müller says: "When the heart is full of spirit it overflows in singing. It is not I who am singing, but the Holy Ghost who sings through my mouth." [19]

Religious poetry was represented in Bach's library by the comprehensive hymn book in eight volumes that Paul Wagner collected and edited in 1697. Heinrich Bünting's *Itinerarium Sacrae Scripturae*, a colorful rather than scholarly book, with its vivid description of all persons, countries and towns mentioned in the Bible, must have added a lovable, picturesque familiarity to Bach's profound knowledge of the Bible.

The only Pietists found in Bach's library were August Hermann Francke and Philipp Jakob Spener. But Bach owned only one work by each of them: Francke's *Predigten und Traktätlein* (four vols., 1723) and Spener's anti-Catholic rather than anti-orthodox *Gerechter Eifer wider das Antichristliche Pabstthum* (1714).

Leanings towards mysticism, frequently found among orthodox Lutherans, characterize Johann Arndt's *Wahres Christentum* (1606–09), a book inspired by St. Bernard, Johann Tauler and Thomas à Kempis. Bach also owned the five-volume *Schola pietatis*, a treatise on the duties of the Christian, by Arndt's disciple Johann Gerhard.

Unless we consider Arndt's *Wahres Christentum* the work of a true mystic, the German mystics appear in Bach's library with just one outstanding book. It is the famous volume containing the sermons of Johann Tauler, the 14th century Strasbourg Dominican monk who was the immediate disciple of Meister Eckhart, the founder of German mysticism and philosophy. Does the possession of Tauler's beautiful and moving sermons make Bach a mystic? Or does it rather show a relationship between mysticism and orthodoxy? That such a spiritual bond existed is well known from Luther's life. The great reformer was not only well acquainted with Tauler's writings but his own *Epistle to the Romans* (1515/6) shows beyond all doubt the profound influence of the medieval mystic. Luther felt that in their essentially personal interpretation of Christianity the German mystics helped pave the way for the Reformation. For good reason did Luther publish (in 1516) the famous handbook of mystic devotion, *Eine Deutsche Theologie*, by one of the members of Tauler's pious fellowship,

[19] Translated from H. Besch, *op. cit.*, 149. Besch suggests also to see in the *Credo in unum spiritum sanctum vivificantem* a clue to the understanding of Bach.

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the "Friends of God." One thing is sure, mysticism was nothing strange to Luther or to Bach.

A suggestion of mysticism in Bach has been seen not only in his possession of these books by Arndt and Tauler but also in the composer's 'mystic' longing for death which he expresses so ecstatically in many of his cantatas and passions. Yet, Bach's mysticism does not live apart from, but remains within, the orthodox Lutheran church. True mysticism is individualistic. It is either speculative, as Meister Eckhart's, or strives for sensuous communication with God. But Bach's was not a speculative mind, nor did he have ecstatic visions of the Divine. Moreover, mysticism did not create what, we know, was a *sine qua non* for Bach: a church with a well organized service that a church musician could call the home for his art. A study of mysticism within the orthodox church of Bach's time should reveal that the latter encompassed enough mysticism to account for Bach's own mystical traits,[20] and, for that matter, also enough warm sentiment and serenity to account for Bach's understanding of some phases of Pietism.

No doubt, the inventory of Bach's estate fails to give a complete account of the books which the composer owned or read during his life. In addition to claims by the heirs it seems also likely that Bach gave many books away. How could it otherwise be explained that his cantata poets, except for Erdmann Neumeister, and the great hymn collectors, except for Paul Wagner, are missing among the authors' names recorded in the inventory?

Yet we may assume that Bach kept most of the books which were dearest to his heart; particularly the books which again and again absorbed him in the last and musically less fertile years of his life. A chronological study of Bach's cantatas, and particularly of their texts, corroborates this increasingly profounder insight of the master into the content of his library. What the inventory has handed down to us is therefore doubly noteworthy. It proves again that its owner was a Lutheran scholar and, for the 18th century, a uniquely religious personality whose library at his death contained nothing but theological books.

IV

What was it in addition to family tradition and orthodox upbringing that caused Bach openly to oppose the most vigorous and progressive Protestant movement of his time: Pietism? Objectively seen, Pietism was a

[20] See H. Preuss, *op. cit.*, 126; and Besch, *op. cit.*, 192.

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movement the candor and genuine warmth of which might well have captured the imagination of a sensitive musician. Also the economic and social reforms which Pietism followed should have appealed to a liberal minded artist. For it was during Bach's life time that the long established social order of guilds and classes was shaken by a new spirit that eventually was to lead to revolution and to a victorious middle class.

Already in Bach's youth the old society began to disintegrate. In the religious sphere, the new Pietistic movement took an active part in promoting the new and destroying the old ritual forms.[21] Since Bach could not ignore Pietism he had to take sides. As a matter of fact, the fervor of the Pietists frequently inspired Bach to equally fervent religious and musical emotions which have sometimes, though wrongly, been interpreted as Pietistic. That such misinterpretations have occurred is the more astonishing as we note that none of Bach's text writers was, nor could have been, a Pietist because the Pietists looked upon the form of the church cantata as a "sinful abomination." [22] In fact, Erdmann Neumeister (1671–1756) who created this new cantata type by recasting his Sunday sermons into poetic verse form, was one of the most ardent champions of the orthodoxy and one of the most violent opponents of Pietism. Not even in the case of Neumeister's pupil, Salomo Franck, who has frequently been considered a Pietist because of the lyrical and ecstatic sentiments of his texts, can we rightly speak of Pietism. Not only was Franck a close friend of Olearius, the orthodox superintendent at Arnstadt, but he also enjoyed the confidence of the orthodox court of Duke Wilhelm Ernst of Sachsen-Weimar. But above all, his cantata texts, sentimental as many may be, were written in the poetic manner of Erdmann Neumeister and opposed by the Pietists.[23]

In spite of this, Orthodoxy and Pietism are not as mutually exclusive and contrasted as superficial comparisons lead one to believe. Frohne, the Pietist pastor of Mühlhausen, thought himself in perfect agreement with Lutheranism as he interpreted it. On the other hand there existed more genuine sentiment and life in the orthodox camp than the Pietists were ready to admit.

Yet, Pietism was never capable of shaking Bach's fundamentally orthodox attitude. There were too many characteristics in the new Pietistic movement which Bach could not have overlooked and must have consid-

[21] Spener's *Pia desideria*, the fundamental work of Pietism, appeared in 1675.
[22] Spitta, *op. cit.*, I, 366.
[23] Cf. Spitta, *op. cit.*, I, 528.

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ered as dangerous to Luther's church. Pietism tended towards religious expansion and tried to enlarge the congregation. It did not insist upon the preservation of the congregation as a collective unit in the strict Lutheran sense of the term. To Luther, the *Gemeinde des Glaubens* represented the beginning on earth of Christ's Kingdom. This concept of the 'Gemeinde' was weakened by the Pietists' pastoral work which assumed an altogether new missionary character. Their sermon changed from a revelation of the Biblical word to a fervent oration striving to win over dissenters. The individual member of the congregation also indulged in a new, personal and more intimate relationship with God.

All this contradicted the meaning of the word 'Gemeinde' and led, in the opinion of the orthodoxy, to a dangerous isolation and individualization of its members. Bach must have noticed these seeds of congregational disintegration and foreseen an inevitable schism in the parish. To him, who felt at home in the old world of guilds, the "destruction of the classes and good orders" [24] must have been a matter of serious worry and irritation. Bach saw with his own eyes to what extent the new ritual function of edification and conversion was spreading. His fear that it might in time replace the deeply rooted 'de tempore,' the special Biblical significance of each Sunday and Holiday, was only too well founded. Bach who in five yearly cycles of cantatas had given the world a last and definitive musical interpretation of the ecclesiastical year with its recurring fasts and festivals, had to be an involuntary witness to the Pietists' gradual removal of the symbolic meaning of the church days. Bach certainly could not have locked calmly at the downfall of a world which he still felt called upon to represent. He had inherited a keen conservative sense of responsibility and was always aware of his old family tradition. In him, Luther's church lived on with its original undiminished power and freshness.

One need only think of Bach's cantata texts in order to comprehend that the dogmatic writings and old church ordinances had not yet lost their meaning for him.[25] Bach was still capable of re-living and experiencing the symbolism of the Biblical events. With him orthodox Lutheranism was still very much alive, its forms not yet sunk to the level of scholastic rigidity and habitual formulas as with so many orthodox Lutherans whom the

[24] *Die Zerrüttung der Stände und guten Ordnungen* was an outstanding orthodox book by Valentin Ernst Löscher (1637–1749), published in 1711.

[25] See D. Fr. Hashagen, *J. S. Bach als Sänger und Musiker des Evangeliums und der lutherischen Reformation.* Wismar, 1901.

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Pietists rightfully reproached. Bach clung to the old because it was not yet old to him. He is the last incarnation of true Lutheranism at the time of the dissolution of the orthodoxy.

Still less reconcilable to Bach was the general attitude of the Pietists towards church music. It explains more convincingly than anything else we have shown why Bach must have felt bound to defend Luther's church and its music. Luther himself had been a singer and musician. Ever since Luther re-arranged and rejuvenated the music of his church, his followers joyfully sang his chorales and accepted also the artful polyphonic forms of the chorale variation, the chorale prelude, the fugue and, above all, the cantata.

The Pietists, on the other hand, were fundamentally opposed to any kind of art in worship, especially to the 'concerted' style of cantatas and Passions which Bach created out of his innermost religious and artistic conviction. Pietism "wished the service to be adorned only with simple congregational hymns. So every cantor necessarily hated the pietists, and Bach took it particularly ill of them that they dragged his religious and artistic ideals in the dust." [26] By introducing thousands of spiritual songs into the service, the Pietists virtually succeeded in undermining the polyphonic style. These sacred songs, with their simple *Lied* form, their intimate piety, their sentimental texts and weak and artless melodies, supplanted the sung Gospel symbolized by the old chorale. For the Pietists art stood in the service of subjective edification, lyrical meditation and religious 'revival.'

While the Pietists were principally responsible for this dilution of the old chorale it must be admitted that the orthodox Baroque hymn poets too helped pave the way for this new subjective and sentimentalized chorale style. On the other hand, it can again be shown to what little extent Bach participated in this trend of his time. No composer alive employed as many of the old Lutheran chorales as did Bach. "Of the five generations of German history between 1520 and 1680, represented in Bach's cantatas by their chorales, the first generation contributed most, with Luther himself leading the rest of the writers." [27] When Bach availed himself of a text by a writer like Brockes, as in the well known instance of the St. John's Passion, he extensively changed the tasteless language and sentimentally meditative character of Brockes' text to suit a more dogmatic churchly purpose. While much can be said against the excessively sentimental style of some

[26] Schweitzer, *op. cit.*, I, 169.

[27] R. Wustmann, quoted by Besch in *op. cit.*, 258 f.

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orthodox Baroque poets of Bach's time, it can not be said that they ever questioned or curtailed the dominant role of church music in the service; and this is precisely what the Pietists did. Their musical narrow-mindedness, above everything else, must have offended the sensibilities of a musician who — for God's Glory — wanted to utilize all the musical forms and vocal and instrumental means that a long line of Protestant composers had passed on to him. "Praise the Lord with trumpets and kettle-drums" ("Lobet den Herrn mit Trompeten und Pauken") is the, at first bewildering, and yet so strikingly orthodox, message of a Bachian *Gloria*. The composer of such festive church music had to be a natural opponent of the Pietists who — not unlike the Calvinists — tried to exclude all forms of music from their service with the sole exception of the spiritual song.

Thus Bach came to know in Pietism one of the arch-enemies of polyphonic church music. And it was of just this style that history had chosen him as the last and at the same time greatest representative. It never occurred to Bach to doubt or wonder whether his complex polyphonic church music was sacred or not. Also in this respect he resembled Martin Luther, for whom there existed only one music, and that was a music which became sacred or profane according to the spirit in which it was sung or played.

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