A Brook Runs through It:
Fresh Water from the Bach for Today's Thirsty Church

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"Not *Bach* [brook], but *Meer* [sea] should be his name," Beethoven once said of Johann Sebastian Bach.[1] In this anniversary year marking the two-hundred and fiftieth year of his death on July 28, Bach is receiving extraordinary attention, which includes a significant biography by Christoph Wolff,[2] yet another series of recordings of all the cantatas (that makes five[3]), and soul-searching among various scholars in an attempt to grasp the essence of this person's life and work.

Christoph Wolff opines that more than seventy percent of Bach's instrumental output has been lost, tentatively or permanently. Yet, even if he is right, it is music from that truncated repertoire of concertos and suites which is played and heard most widely. Bach has gained a name for himself also among keyboard students, beginners and advanced, who continue to be challenged and rewarded by the two- and three-part inventions, the English and French suites, and the Goldberg variations. Organists take on the repertoire for that instrument as a sign of maturity and, when they are Lutheran, proudly feel they have entered the circle of the all-time premier Lutheran organist. The output of Bach in these areas is staggering.

Of his known extant works, however, the largest repertoire by far consists of the vast output of vocal works. Choirs of all kinds have mounted performances of the six (or eight—depending on how they are categorized) motets, the Mass in B-minor, the two Passions, and possibly

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[1]Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, eds.; rev. and enl. Christoph Wolff, *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 490.

[2]Christoph Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000).

[3]The Teldec project with Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Gustav Leonhardt and Concentus musicus Wien (arranged according to the BWV numbering), the Hänssler edition with Helmut Rilling and the Bach-Ensemble of Stuttgart (also arranged according to the BWV numbering), the Erato series with Ton Koopman and the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra (arranged according to the church year), the Bis issue with Masaaki Suzuki and the Bach Collegium Japan (arranged according to the date of composition), and a new project under the Archive label with John Elliot Gardner.

the four short masses (Kyrie and Gloria). As extensive as that gathering is, nevertheless, the cantata repertoire is still larger. Over the years approximately 210 cantatas have survived, and of those about two hundred are what we might label "sacred." At an average of twenty minutes per work, that amounts to four thousand minutes of music, back to back, or almost three days of solid music. If it is true that another hundred such works were lost, add at least another day to such calculations.

Of course, the point is not to generate a cult of a demigod. That project already needs no help. The size of the cantata repertoire suggests that we attend to those places where Bach himself invested time and energy and perhaps wonder why such attention has not be given sooner. For it is part of the reception history of Bach that apart from about a dozen specimens, the cantatas received little notice until about 1940. Even then, voices arose concerning their contemporary usefulness. Fifty-two years ago, approaching another anniversary year, Günter Ramin, one of Bach's successors at St. Thomas, asked whether the cantatas still had a living purpose in evangelical worship.[4] The question wouldn't go away, and Hermann Keller and Rene Wallau were adding their own doubts. In 1957 Alfred Dürr, patriarch of contemporary Bach studies, concluded that "Every attempt to create a home for the Cantatas in evangelical worship is on the whole doomed."[5]

Perhaps that is true, and it is not the purpose of this paper to argue the matter. Rather, contemporary study of the cantatas and their function in Bach's parishes offers some insights which may assist our understanding of these *Stücke* (pieces), as Bach was wont to call most of them, and which provide a few new perspectives on the current task of proclamation in the liturgy.

So that we can think together about these matters, let us review some basic information. Bach's major places of employment were as follows: 1703–1707, organist at the *Neukirche* in Arnstadt; 1707–1708, organist at *Blasiuskirche* in Mühlhausen, during which time he wrote about six cantatas—one of which is BWV 4; 1708–1717, organist and then *Konzertmeister* to Duke Wilhelm Ernst in Weimar, during which time he wrote twenty more cantatas; 1717–1723, Kapellmeister to Prince Leopold

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[4]"Ist die Bachsche Kantate überhaupt innerhalb der heutigen kirchlichen, gottesdienstlichen Erneungsbestrebungen einzubeziehen?" in Günther Ramin, "Joh. Seb. Bachs Kantaten," *Musik und Kirche* 18/5–6 (1948): 135.

[5]Alfred Dürr, "Johann Sebastian Bachs Kirchenmusik in seiner Zeit und Heute," in *Johann Sebastian Bach*, comp. Walter Blankenburg, vol. 170, *Wege der Forschung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1970), 302.

in *Köthen*, where he wrote most of his instrumental works and a handful of "secular" cantatas; 1723–1750, Cantor at St. Thomas Church in Leipzig and Director of Music for the city, where the remaining cantatas were written, most before 1730.

Even though Bach rarely used the term, we will follow convention and speak of these works as cantatas. Earlier examples follow the north German type, with biblical or chorale texts structured in movements of short, contrasting sections all textually related. Some sections are for soloists, others for choir, and all are liberally sprinkled with instrumental interludes. While in Weimar, Bach began to incorporate recitatives (free-verse texts) and arias (poetic texts of a more lyrical nature), following the kind of libretti penned by Hamburg's Lutheran preacher/theologian, Erdmann Neumeister. In the introduction to his 1704 collection of such texts Neumeister tellingly writes: "In short, a cantata should be seen as nothing else than a piece of opera, composed in the style of recitative and arias."[6]

Bach was not the first to use recitatives and arias, nor was he alone; his good friend Georg Philip Telemann also used these dramatic means for his own five hundred plus cantatas. But, having garnered these opera-based forms, Bach had all he needed to fulfill his duties as cantor during those first seven years in Leipzig. Moreover, he employed these same tools for the Passions.

The significance of recitative and aria in his vocal work during those years ought not be dismissed even though we are so accustomed to hearing the pattern of chorus, recitative, and aria not only in Bach's works but also in the vocal works of Handel and Mendelssohn. For here is the point: these elements evolved from musical drama. They succesfully served the purposes of narrative. Librettists and composers happily seized upon recitative and aria as the way to unfold a plot, for these forms provided actors opportunities to reflect and meditate upon the drama.

Erdmann Neumeister supplied a few of the librettos that Bach used, but only, surprisingly, a few. Scholars have identified about sixteen other authors for these cantata texts, including Christian Friedrich Henrici (with a pen name of Picander), and Christiane Mariane von Ziegler. More than half of the librettos are by unknown authors. Bach may have assembled a few by himself. After he had chosen several texts for a given Sunday, Bach sent them to the ministerial superintendent, who in turn chose one for

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[6]"Soll ichs kürzlich aussprechen, so siehet eine Cantata nicht anders aus als ein Stück aus einer Opera, von Stylo Recitativo und Arien zusammengesetzt," in Dürr, "Johann Sebastian Bachs Kirchenmusik in seiner Zeit und Heute," 295.

Bach to set.[7] That, of course, speaks volumes about the relationship of musician and pastor.

One of those volumes could be about the pastoral care and concern that presumably prompted supervisors even to bother about the propriety and usefulness of texts and music that cantors proposed to be unloaded on parishioners. In part that care and concern proceeded from a mostly unspoken understanding that the cantata for the day was a musical sermon. Not just anyone was to be allowed into the pulpit—so the thinking went. It should come as no surprise that nearly all of the librettists were preachers or theologians.

If the cantatas were understood to be sermons, then one might expect the librettists to submit texts which in form and content looked like sermons. So they did. Most of the cantatas (and the passions, too) follow the five-part homiletical grid of the time: introduction, key statement (biblical text), exposition of the key statement, application, and final summary statement.[8]

Within that structure preachers sought to unleash the vibrant Word of God by laying out for individuals the unfulfilled expectations of the law, by articulating the mercy of God in Christ, and by suggesting new ways people's lives might be directed. Behind those goals parishioners and preachers alike held to the Reformation insight that as the mercy of God is announced, such mercy in fact is set in motion.[9]

Motion is the operative word here. From the time of the Reformation, composers within the Lutheran church believed that music's motion could serve as analogue for the motions of faith within a baptized Christian. Bach likely absorbed such beliefs from his surroundings. To be sure, contemporary trends in music theory supplied a toolbox full of compositional means to achieve these possibilities. For instance, stock rhetorical devices such as ascending melodic patterns indicated quite universally a lift of spirit, thus providing composers a way of tracing

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[7]Günther Stiller, *Johann Sebastian Bach and Liturgical Life in Leipzig*, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman, Daniel F. Poellot and Hilton C. Oswald; ed. Robin Leaver (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 219.

[8]Robin Leaver, *J. S. Bach as Preacher: His Passions and Music in Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 27.

[9]"Sondern in dem es gesprochen wird, geschiet das, was es meint," wrote Alfred Niebergall, "Die Geschichte der christlichen Predigt," in *Gestalt und Formen des evangelischen Gottesdienstes*, vol. 2, *Leiturgia: Handbuch des evangelischen Gottesdienstes*, ed. Karl Ferdinand Müller and Walter Blankenburg (Kassel: J. Stauda-Verlag, 1955), 259.

uplifting turns of faith or the cheer mercy initiates.[10] Again, the widely-held belief that music could alter one's emotional balance made it possible to accompany sad text, for example, with appropriate musical effect.[11] Tonal changes seemed to have been used to announce and escort stages of faith.[12] Then, too, consistency of usage indicates that vocal and instrumental personalities were understood to signal various presences in the drama of faith;[13] so, for instance, a soprano soloist often represents the ideal Christian whereas the use of the oboe d'amore personifies the fleshy side of life.

Bach's cantatas then come to us as musical microcosms of the processes of the faith experience. In one sense, their plots are always the same, although the day's texts provide them with peculiar twists; for like other contemporary sermons, the cantatas were, with a very few exceptions, anchored in the appointed texts for the day. Very simply put, the common plot is the experience of baptism. Baptism's many stages, however, suggest that not everyone will enter the cantata at the same place. But there is usually enough for everybody. While the spoken sermon could boast similar achievements, the church composers probably had a better chance at enabling proclamation because their tools made it possible to address both mind and heart, to put into motion a field of energy which comprised a perfect home for the Holy Spirit.

We now explore three disparate areas of current cantata scholarship that prompt some observations about contemporary proclamation and worship, and, where appropriate, about the cantata we are to hear tomorrow morning.

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[10]David Schullenberg, "Affektenlehre," and Stephen A. Crist, "Word Painting," in *J. S. Bach*, ed. Malcolm Boyd, Oxford Composer Companions (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); see also Eric T. Chafe, *Analyzing Bach Cantatas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4.

[11]Chafe, *Analyzing Bach Cantatas*, 4.

[12]Eric T. Chafe, *Tonal Allegory in the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 142–43.

[13]Renate Steiger, "SUAVISSIMA MUSICA CHRISTO. Zur Symbolik der Stimmlagen bei J. S. Bach," *Musik und Kirche* 61/6 (1991): 318; Ludwig Prautzsch, "Die Bedeutung der Instrumente in der Johannespassion von Johann Sebastian Bach," *Musik und Kirche* 50/2 (1980): 75.

When serious Bach lovers hear sweeping charges that he was a pietist, they feel by affinity an accusation piercing their own musical/spiritual souls and hope that the charges cannot be true. Evidence to the contrary abounds: his thorough orthodox Lutheran training in Leonhard Hutter's *Compendium,* his successful demonstration of orthodoxy before the Leipzig magistrates, his well-read library of orthodox theologians, and his obvious dedication to concerted music—anathema to hard-core pietists. But then, we do have to reckon with texts like this from Cantata BWV 21, "Ich hatte viel Bekümerniß."

8. Soprano and Bass duet (Believer and Christ)

Believer: Come, my Jesus, and revive
Christ: Yes, I come and revive
Believer: And gladden with your glance!
Christ: You with my glance of grace!
Believer: This soul
Christ: Your soul
Believer: It shall die
Christ: It shall live
Believer: And not live
Christ: And not die
Believer: And in its cavern of misfortune
Christ: Here out of this wound's hollow
Believer: Completely be ruined
Christ: Shall you inherit
Believer: I must continually hover in care
Christ: Salvation through this juice of the vine.
Believer: Yes, ah yes, I am lost!
Christ: No, ah no, thou art chosen!
Believer: No, ah no, you hate me!
Christ: Yes, ah yes, I love thee!
Believer: Ah, Jesus, thoroughly sweeten my soul and heart!
Christ: Vanish, you cares, disappear, all sorrow![14]

[14]Translation from Melvin P.Unger, *Handbook to Bach's Sacred Cantata Texts* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 76ff.

In Cantata BWV 172, "Erschallet, ihr Lieder," similar words are sung:

5. Soprano and Alto duet (Christian and the Holy Spirit)

> Believer: I perish, if I am without you.
> Holy Spirit: Accept from me the kiss of grace
> Believer: By faith I bid you welcome. Highest Love, come in! You have captured my heart.
> Holy Spirit: I am thine, and you are mine![15]

A similar example exists in the always popular Cantata 140, *"Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme."*[16] All three come from a genre of devotional writing called "Divine Love Poetry," which Madeleine Forell Marshall has documented and described in detail.[17] Pietists were not the first to employ this bridegroom-bride imagery as a way to foster and express the deep inner relationship between the believer and God, but they found it congenial to their need for a more intense personal experience of the Spirit's inner movement. Preoccupation with God's indwelling eventually led pietists to that unsocial stance which, because of its focus on personal experience as the central feature of the baptismal plot, could dispense with the church.[18]

Bach was not unfamiliar with devotional material of this kind; his own library contained works by August Hermann Francke, Philipp Jakob Spener, and Heinrich Müller, who in his fervor for this kind of individualism advocated a kind of private hymn singing which he called "*Seelenmusik*" (soul music).[19]

But Bach's attraction to divine love poetry and his readiness to deal with texts that invite personal meditation on the intimacies of faith, recent scholarship has shown, derive not so much from pietism but from a

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[15]Ibid.

[16]Arias no. 3 and 6 in Unger, *Handbook to Bach's Sacred Cantata Texts*, 487 and 489.

[17]Madeleine Forell Marshall, *Common Hymnsense* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 1995), 70ff.

[18]See Friedrich Kalb, *Theology of Worship in 17th-Century Lutheranism*, trans. Henry P. A. Hamann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 173.

[19]See Robin A. Leaver, *Bach's Theological Library* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hanssler-Verlag, 1983), 152–153. For background see Robin Leaver, "Pietism," in *J. S. Bach*, 369.

spirituality already present in Lutheran orthodoxy.[20] By way of the doctrine of *unio mystica* (the mystical union) orthodox theologians proposed a way to imagine the personal encounter with the Holy Spirit through faith, and at the same time tapped into a long tradition of Christian mysticism which included Johannes Tauler, one of Luther's favorite devotional mentors, and Luther himself. Here is a way to appreciate Bach's seeming lack of discomfort with divine love poetry and with other texts that elicit the sensual processes of baptism.

It appears that Bach and his librettists were not hesitant about dealing with matters of the heart. The musical envelope he uses for these erotically charged texts is precisely the love duet form from Italian opera. In Bach's hands the love duet invited believers into a moment of meditation over the unfolding drama—dare we say, narrative—of the Spirit making herself at home in these soft and undefiled places we call hearts.

While the cantata BWV 51, "*Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen*" contains no divine love poetry, the concluding chorale stanza advances that delightful and attractive "orthodoxy with heart" so typical of the repertoire. After extolling God's goodness in life, pledging sacrifices of praise and a godly life, the soloist exuberates:

Gänzlich uns lass'n auf ihn,	Completely rely on God,
Von Herzen auf ihn bauen,	With all our heart upon him build,
Daß uns'r Herz, Mut und Sinn	So that our heart, mood, and mind
Ihm festiglich anhangen;	On God firmly would adhere;
Drauf singen wir zur Stund	Thereupon we sing at this hour:
Amen! wir werdn's erlangen,	Amen, we will attain it
Glaub'n wir von Herzensgrund.	If we believe with all our heart.[21]

The heart, moods, and mind then break into a kind of reckless alleluia.

Orthodoxy with heart is, in my way of thinking, what's needed in contemporary preaching and church music. On the one hand, I—and there are others like me in this respect—in my eagerness for enticing people into the profundities of the liturgy and classic hymnody, have turned a deaf ear to the cries of people who want more warmth in their worship. On the other hand, I fear for emotional outbursts that display so little of the deep riches of God's grace and that ignore the total baptismal plot. New attempts at musical microcosms may be a way to go, but I don't think we have yet found the textual or musical rhetoric for it. While divine love

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[20]Ulrich Siegele, "Bachs Ort in Orthodoxie und Aufklärung," *Musik und Kirche* 51/1 (1981), 11ff.

[21]Unger, *Handbook to Bach's Sacred Cantata Texts*, 179.

imagery (not in its skittish Victorian translations) may find some fans even today, contemporary taboos about such matters make one hesitant to advocate updated versions. Nonetheless, I am stunned by Tom Beaudoin's suggestion that for Gen-Xers "sexual desire is an analogue for desire for God."[22] One way or another, orthodoxy with heart is the key to new musical microcosms of the processes of the faith experience.

Narrative with Challenge

Precisely because sixteenth-century Lutheran theologians held that the spoken word is Christ himself present, they were led further to assert that the proclaimed word creates faith and has as its purpose to lead people to repentance, trust, and love of the neighbor.[23] The baptismal plot challenges one to renounce the old and to embrace the new. Can we inquire, then, whether the cantata, just as the sermon, is also meant to move people to be the body of Christ in the world, to respond with acts of charity and repentance? In the case of Bach we discover rather obvious if not disturbing clarity on these matters both from the larger dimensions of the cantata in context and from the smaller dimensions of the cantatas themselves.

During Bach's tenure at St.Thomas in Leipzig the pre-eucharistic section of the Sunday chief liturgy followed this pattern:

Motet (often in Latin)
Kyrie (in Latin by the choir)
Gloria (in Latin by the choir)
Reading or singing of the epistle from the lectern (often in Latin)
Hymn
Reading or singing of the Gospel from the altar (often in Latin)
Prelude to the concerted music (cantata)
Concerted music
Creed (in German or Latin)
Predigtauftritt (Sermon appearance)
Hymn[24]

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[22]Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 94.

[23]Niebergall, "Die Geschichte der christlichen Predigt," 269.

[24]"Leipziger Kirchenstaat 1710," in *Quellen zur Geschichte des evangelischen Gottesdienstes von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Wolfgang Herbst (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1968), 138–142.

The *Predigtauftritt* is worth a second look. Essentially a liturgy within a liturgy, set apart also by location since it all took place in the pulpit, the *Predigtauftritt* is a transplant of the medieval preaching office of Prone into the evangelical pattern of eucharistic liturgy. Prone served vernacular needs in worship long before the occurrence of sixteenth-century campaigns for the language of the people. Elements of this little liturgy within a liturgy varied from place to place, but from the form used at Bach's Leipzig, this is what one might expect from *Predigtaufftritt*:

> Votum or greeting
> Hymn
> Lord's Prayer silently
> Reading of the Sunday Gospel in German
> Sermon
> Announcements of wedding banns
> Common confession
> Common absolution
> Intercessions
> Parish announcements and invitation to almsgiving
> Blessing.[25]

This shape prompts two observations: 1) The spoken sermon flows out of the reading of the Gospel in German in the pulpit (which, it might be recalled about St. Thomas, has always been midway down the nave on a side wall), while the typical cantata follows the presentation of the Gospel sung in Latin from the remote altar. This positioning places the cantata in a kind of transitional space—from the Latinized elements of a service sung chiefly by the choir to an order entirely vernacularized in form and content. 2) The spoken sermon leads immediately to confession, absolution, intercessions, and almsgiving, liturgically then providing an *ordo* that facilitates the movement from proclamatory narrative to action.

It is not surprising to learn that many people came to services like this about the time the *Predigtauftritt* was to begin, or that parishioners at St. Thomas were provided with cantata librettos so that they might fully grasp the latest musical baptismal plot, or that available to members and visitors alike was a book of prayers to be spoken silently for every part of the service (including the cantata) except for *Predigtauftritt,* presumably because proclamation from the pulpit was obvious in its intents and accomplishments in leading people to repentance and action.

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[25]Ibid, 140.

At every turn, it seems, efforts arose to ensure the linkage of mind, heart, and life. Even the cantata texts, linked closely to *Predigtauftritt* by their vernacular presentation and up-to-date theology, usually contained overt invitations to changed behavior. In Cantata 51 the soloist, as the ideal Christian, models this prayer:

Durch ein frommes Leben weisen,	Through a godly life show
Daß wir deine Kinder heißen.	That we are called your children.[26]

These things call forth some new thinking about the cantatas in particular as they are again revived for contemporary presentation. Historically informed performances probably should also take into consideration that these works want to be proclamation, they intend to be musical microcosms of the processes of faith, they are meant to lead listeners and performers to godly action. Might this not mean, at least, an offering for the poor, and/or prayer?

Corporately and personally, the world of the cantatas won't let us off the hook. Rather, the cantatas invite consistency of faith and life, preaching and life, church music and life. Their lack of popularity as fare for classical FM stations is a sign of how well the cantatas actually broker these proclamatory purposes. Rather, this repertoire summons unity of faith, life, and performance—a unity long sought by those bold enough to critique the Levitical castes of liturgical worship. Augustine said it well:

> If one adds a drum or lute to song, then the hands work together with the voice. Think about this ensemble in this way: when you sing the Alleluia, then refresh the hungry with bread, clothe the naked, and take in the stranger.[27]

Gen-Xers, claims Tom Beaudoin, suspect all churchly institutions. "The fascination with Jesus in music video," he explains, "is as much an ironic stance toward Jesus as a reclamation of him, showing the emptiness of what many churches offer."[28] In a surprising way, Xers acknowledge that recurring struggle to demonstrate integrity in and through prophetic and musical vocations.

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[26]Unger, *Handbook to Bach's Sacred Cantata Texts*, 179.

[27]Winfried Kurzschenkel, *Die theologische Bestimmung der Musik* (Trier: Paulinus-Verlag, 1971), 137.

[28]Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X*, 69.

In Cantata BWV 51 the majestic opening movement in C-major gives way to a recitative and aria in A-minor, only to return to C-major for the doxology and Alleluia of the last movement. The musical techie knows, of course, that A-minor is the relative minor of C-major and that visiting the relative minor is a way to head-off boredom in an extended piece. But there is more to these tonal changes than boredom avoidance, as Eric Chafe has recently noted. Eighteenth-century Lutheran musical theorists, particularly Andreas Werckmeister, understood the relationship of major and minor triads as an allegory of the relationship between the divine and the human. According to this scheme, major triads show divine characteristics, while minor triads show human traits. Descending progressions to relative minors are microcosms of slipping into an honest realization of fallen humanity's place before God.[29]

The recitative from Cantata BWV 51 begins with string accompaniment and reminds believers that a fitting response to God's goodness is praise, doxology, and worship. With a change of tempo and elimination of the strings the movement then suddenly acknowledges how paltry and weak such praise really is. The soloist sings mostly monotone at first, then breaks into halting musical phrases on the word *lallen* (stammering), finally giving up at the end and permitting the instruments to complete the piece.

In the following aria from the same cantata a prayer for assistance in leading the godly life is raised, but its A-minor cast acknowledges the real outcome of even these good intentions. A return to C-major for the doxology in the last movement underlines what Praetorius, Nicolai, and Schütz also knew: musical doxology itself on this side of the eschatological mystery is nothing less and nothing more than an echo of what is already occurring; therefore major keys are the order of the day.

Werckmeister mused further on music and theology in his treatise *Musicalische Paradoxal-Discourse.* Because he was a practical musician as well, he knew that were one to try to construct a twelve-tone chromatic scale by successively building on perfect fifths (C-G-D-A, etc.), the octave at the end would be imperfect. In fact, this conundrum led him, among others, to develop the tempered scale that is used on keyboards even today. Werckmeister theorized that this disturbing oddity of nature must have

[29]Chafe, *Analyzing Bach Cantatas*, 30–32.

theological significance. For Werckmeister, as Chafe says it, "the impossibility of a pure and perfect temperament became an allegory of the unavoidable imperfection of human life."[30] On this earth humans can only make music within the imperfect tempered scale. But people of faith affirm that somewhere, sometime, the secrets to the pure and perfect temperament will be manifested.

The baptismal plot appears again, but in even more astonishing ways. In his new biography of Bach, Christoph Wolff considers that when final measures are made, Bach will emerge as the paragon of the learned musician, one who was engaged in a lifelong project to master musical science, to determine the laws of this sonic universe, and to find "for himself an argument for the existence of God."[31] He always pushed the musical envelope, one might say. Within every form and structure handed down to him he tried to break through seeming limitations by solving compositional challenges in a new way. One of his last students, Johann Kirnberger, remarked that with Bach "everything must be possible."[32] The latest find of new music from Kiev contains an exercise sheet from 1738 on which Bach with his son Wilhelm Friedemann posited for each other seemingly insoluble problems in counterpoint. The great Mass, the Art of the Fugue, the Third Part of the *Clavierübungen*, the *Orgelbüchlein*, the two passions, each in their own way represent attempts to come closer to all the secrets of the pure and perfect temperament.

It would be foolish to think that such striving occurred for musical reasons alone—a phrase, actually, Bach would probably not understand. Luther's theology of vocation would have led him to hear these words from 2 Timothy, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed." His craft, therefore, was his faith, and even though he knew that on the other side of imperfect tempered scales, his own efforts were no more than *lallen*, here at least he would do his best, exploring every creative energy at his disposal. The mercy of God called for a life of striving after the good, the noble, and the pure. His vocation as musical creator not merely imitated such striving, it *was* the striving. For him faith processes sounded in their musical microcosms. Listen up, all you churchly crafters of word and music.

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[30]Ibid, 24.

[31]Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 339.

[32]George B. Stauffer, "Beyond Bach the Monument, Who was Bach the Man?" *New York Times*, 2 April 2000, Arts & Leisure, 41.