

2-2002

The Cresset (Vol. LXV, No. 4, Lent)

Valparaiso University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.valpo.edu/cresset_archive



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#)

This Full Issue is brought to you for free and open access by ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Cresset (archived issues) by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at scholar@valpo.edu.

65:4

THE CRESSET

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE, ARTS, AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS



Lent | 2002

THE CRESSET

Alan F. Harre, *Publisher*
Gail McGrew Eifrig, *Editor*
February 2002, Lent
Vol. LXV, No.4 ISSN 0011-1198
Valparaiso University
Valparaiso, Indiana 46383

Contents

- 3 The Editor / *in luce tua*: calculating and the incalculable
7 Mel Piehl / intimations: the critical task
9 Peter Mercer-Taylor / facing Bach: the *St. Matthew Passion* on the 21st century campus
16 Jeanne Murray Walker / sacrifice (verse)
17 Duesenberg/ Cock/ Klapis/ Messner / voices from Valpo's Passion
23 William Eifrig / the Heidelberg Bach: review essay
26 David G. Truemper / *from the chapel*: how good, Lord, to be here!
29 D.S. Martin / *music*: wrestling Bach's angel
33 James Combs / *popular culture*: brows
37 Anne Shaw / crossing to Chebeague: December in Casco Bay (verse)
38 booklines / Stapert on Bach sources
39 book reviews / Noll on Reeves (*St. Matthew Passion*); Lauber on Lewis (Holy Saturday)
42 Mark A. Noll / performing Bach, 1985 (verse)
43 notes on covers, reviewers, poets

Departmental Editors

Joshua Messner
Student Assistant Editor
Melissa Peronto
Student Aide
Jessica Pleuss
Web Page Manager
Julie Davidson
Office Manager
Thomas D. Kennedy
Book Review Editor
David Morgan
Art Editor
Gregg Hertzlieb
Art consultant
John Ruff
Poetry Editor
Ralph Klapis
Copy

Advisory Board

James Albers
Richard Baepler
James Caristi
Christine H. Lehmann
Alfred Meyer
Arlin G. Meyer
Frederick A. Niedner, Jr.
Mel Piehl
Mark Schwehn

Front and Back covers:

Aimee Tomasek and Jessica
Lindbloom, *Bach on
Campus*, photography and
digitally-appropriated
artifacts, 2002.



THE CRESSET is published seven times during the academic year by the Valparaiso University Press as a forum for ideas and informed opinion. The views expressed are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the preponderance of opinion at Valparaiso University. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Editor and accompanied by return postage. Letters to the Editor for publication are subject to editing for brevity. *The Book Review Index* and the *American Humanities Index* list Cresset reviews. Periodicals postage is paid at Valparaiso, Indiana. Regular Subscription rates: one year--\$10.00, two years--\$18.00; Student/Senior subscription rates: one year--\$5; two years--\$9.00; single copy--\$2.00. International subscriptions add &6.00. Entire contents copyrighted 2002 by the Valparaiso University Press, Valparaiso, Indiana 46383, without whose written permission reproduction in whole or in part for any purpose whatsoever is expressly forbidden. *Postmaster* send address changes to The Cresset, #29 Huegli Hall, Valparaiso University, 651 S. College Ave., Valparaiso, IN 46383

Readers are encouraged to address the Editor and staff at cresset@valpo.edu or <http://www.valpo.edu/cresset/>

In Luce Tua

calculating and the incalculable

Every now and again, you read a sentence so outrageous that you don't know which part of it is the worst. Here's my current favorite: "Relax with Bach for just 99 cents, plus shipping and handling." One could, for instance, respond with a groan of despair about a culture so shallow that the word "relax" would strike someone as a good thing in combination with the word "Bach." Or indeed with anything great or meaningful or important. Relax with Sophocles? with the Grand Canyon? with astrophysics? Is there anyone who believes that relaxing is such a high good that we can count it as achievement, a *desideratum* of human endeavor? Can we expect an Olympic event in relaxing?

Or could it possibly be true that the most winning argument that can be made as an inducement for uncertain new listeners to Bach is that for just 99 cents you can "discover a Bach you never knew"? Is there a person ready to believe that you can discover anything worth knowing for an investment of 99 cents? Even including the shipping and handling? Most chilling of all, I suppose, was the fine print, wherein it was allowed that this 76 minutes of Bach had been "hand-picked" by none other than Grammy™ winning conductor Helmuth Rilling himself. The whole affair under the name of the Musical Heritage Society. Irony on irony.

This issue of *The Cresset* centers on J.S. Bach, and more particularly on a performance of *The St. Matthew Passion* on the campus of Valparaiso University last spring, under the direction of Maestro Rilling. Preparing these contents, I received a communique from Music Department chair Linda Ferguson, answering in her usual scrupulous way some questions I had about campus resources and this performance. Her answers gave me estimates of figures so that I could calculate the hours spent in preparation by the Chorale. At six hours per week for 21 weeks, plus two intensive intra-semester weeks, we might estimate that the 51 members of this ensemble put in around 6000 hours of rehearsal for the Bach. Professor Dennis Friesen-Carper rehearsed two orchestras of 26 and 28 members each, and probably this ensemble devoted about half its regular rehearsal time to this work over the same period, so add another 3000 hours.

We haven't yet mentioned the 30-member Bach Chamber Choir, the Immanuel Church Jubilate Children's Choir, the 6 soloists, 2 keyboard accompanists or the hours logged by the directors of the ensembles. (Personnel head count was about 203 on the stage for the performance itself.) Combinations of people from this final number were involved in intensive rehearsal schedules in the final week, which went on for eight days at eight hours each day, at a minimum. Say that during half that time, only 40 people were involved, and during one-quarter of it the entire chorale forces, so conservatively, 2500 hours. Of course this number does not include the hundreds of hours of individual practice done by many participants, just to learn the notes of this work for this performance. Say 12,000 hours of campus time, more or less.

Student manager for the performance was Kimiko Bacon, whose notebooks [see the back cover of this issue] make fascinating reading, if you can discern the schedule through the palimpsest of emendations, overrides, corrections, revisions:

*Bach is not easy,
just miraculous.*

*But, in the immortal
words of our friend*

John Steven Paul,

"the trouble with

art is that it

takes such heavy

lifting."

How and why does

the art of music

come to us?

Thursday, March 22:

12:00P—2:00P —solo recits (Evangelist, Christus, et al)

4:00—5:20P —Accompagnato and elided secco recits (Evan., Christus, Petrus, Pontifex I)

5:50P—7P —Solo movements without upper strings (SAB soli, Tenor mvmts on Fri, Gamba mvmts on Fri.(includes Prin cello, bass and bassoon) Chorus-TBA

[Then, added:] 7:30-10P —Tutti orch and Chorus I + Chorus II

Interspersed with these notes are the phone numbers of the students who were lined up to transport Maestro Rilling, reminders about the preferred blend of coffee to be ready at each break (his modest requirement for sustenance through the hours of rehearsal) and numerous notations of queries, problems, hang-ups, changes, complaints and fixes to be attended to before the next day's schedule could commence.

I have no doubt that Jeff Hazewinkel and Kari-Anne Innes, the Director of Operations and Projects Manager for the VU Center for the Arts could add hours and lists of costs for physical set-up, logistical support, sound and light equipment, instrument moving, printing programs and arranging publicity. (Let's just take one detail: rental and set-up for the stage was about five thousand dollars.) Or we could try to estimate the hours spent in public relations when it was discovered that publicity had been too successful and every seat in the Chapel was spoken for more than two weeks before the performance. Contracting, housing and transporting soloists? Housing and providing dinners for the students involved in the performance during the week of final rehearsal (which was the second week of their Spring Break)? The total costs added up to large amounts of money, and generous people contributed. Those of us who only listened were, I hope, grateful in proportion.

questions and considerations

Such an expenditure of effort, hours and money demands that one ask why. To some extent, this issue of *The Cresset* explores some answers to that question. Why should any university today engage in an activity like this one? Performances of Bach's work will never get the attention of the national media, no matter what their excellence. Though many students were directly involved and many others attended, the majority of the students were probably only dimly aware as they relaxed on the warm beaches of their break that back on campus their colleagues were hammering out stretches of counterpoint that have challenged professional musicians for 200 years. What does it mean to do this in the context of a culture where a 99 cent relaxation encounter with Bach might be considered a good thing? I do not intend to make such a rationale in this space; in a variety of ways, the pieces in this issue will both explore and explain some of the reasons. Here, I would like simply to present a few points for consideration.

First, some attention might be given to the less audible results of the decision to support a performance like this one. The audience heard a magnificent performance, but one remarkable performance had no audience at all, yet provides a glimpse of the interactions of study and performance in the processes of learning in music. Professor Ferguson, this time in her role as teacher of music history, offered during the spring semester of 2001 Music 421/521, a seminar on the music of J.S. Bach with special emphasis on the *St. Matthew Passion*. The students' experience and goals varied: violin performance, graduate in church music, music education, piano performance, liberal arts music majors. All had some connection with the performance at hand; most were members of the Chorale, one had a small solo role, another served as rehearsal assistant to the conductor. One student set up a web site for discussion, another addressed a local Bible class with the relevant topics. Their most tangible result was a set of short papers ranging from "The Liturgy of Conflict," to "Dance in J.S. Bach's Solo Cello Suites and *St. Matthew Passion*." From Jason Bornhop's "Why the educated listener has an advantage in Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*:"

First, let us look at this recently mentioned idea of personal guilt in the crucifixion of Christ. Chorale No. 10 (Bärenreiter edition) "Ich bins, ich sollte büßen" affords us a prime example. Looking at the turba in No. 9e, we see the disciples asking, "Lord, is it I?" upon hearing that one of them will betray Christ. Counting the number of times we read "Herr," we see that there are eleven

instances of the word. There were twelve disciples, so the question is, where is the twelfth disciple asking, "Herr, bin ichs?" The audience expects to hear Christ say that one who dips his hand in the dish [with him] that evening will betray him. Instead, they hear the Chorus, most likely at a forte, sing [Chorale No. 10] the words, "*Ich bins.*" [emphasis added] Bach has interrupted the narrative with this Chorale; and in doing so he suggests that it was not Judas as much as the modern Christian who betrayed Christ.

Other essays more specifically engaged with musical analysis are harder to excerpt out of context, but all display admirable qualities of attention, seriousness, exploration and the application of one's newly learned skills of analysis and historical appreciation to a nearly overwhelmingly complex subject. In short, they form an almost perfect demonstration of the exercise of undergraduate learning in a university setting. One wishes that there were some way that a larger public could be aware of the skills and successes of the student as learner, and provide for that exercise too a sustained and appreciative ovation.

Second, it would be well to remember that our campus has a long tradition of Bach performance and study. While not equivalent to the scale of this most recent experience, Bach's works have been performed by nearly every ensemble, choral and instrumental, in at least my forty-four years of experience at Valparaiso University. Hoelty-Nickel not only talked the talk but for a number of years walked the walk, with the formation of the Church Music Seminar and its support for scholarship, performance and publication of Lutheran musical heritage, centered on, if not restricted to, the works of J.S. Bach. M. Alfred Bichsel's choirs made a speciality of the Walter Buszin chorale arrangements. In last summer's upheaval of the Eifrig burrow, we uncovered a program from a *St. Matthew Passion* directed by Bill Kroeger in the mid-sixties. With far fewer resources than are presently available, Gehring, Telschow, Fleming, Balko and others all taught Bach to student ensembles and presented the major works before appreciative and grateful audiences over many years. Need one mention that no organ student has ever graduated from the university without quantities of Bach in their repertoire and fingers? It has often struck me as odd that while other Lutheran colleges celebrate their musical traditions with hyper-enthusiastic patriotism, Valpo's heritage seems to vanish into collective amnesia. Perhaps Professor Baepler's recently published history will help to remind us locals that our past, while it need not dominate our future, does form its foundation, and thus can make some claims on our attention and memory. Last year's performance was not an anomalous and unprecedented phenomenon, but rather a culmination of the work and hopes of several generations of fine music teaching at our institution.

reflections

Lastly, a few personal remarks on the *St. Matthew*. I never heard it before I came to the first rehearsal of it for a performance in my hometown. At age 15 I was recruited by its director to be part of a semi-pro civic chorus, and as long as my grades were sufficient, my parents allowed me to participate. I loved it from the first measures. Maybe that fact is responsible for my having a sense that the music is not out there but inside, like a skeletal structure, shaped to my very being. When I hear any part of it—and I've always listened to it during the three hours of Good Friday—there is a deep satisfaction, like when two pieces of a joint fit together, or a drawer closes just right. I can't sing it any more, but I was relieved to know, last March, that the sense of complete, internal rightness still characterizes my listening to the piece. I sat for hour after hour in the Chapel, listening ultimately to about 30 hours of rehearsal in that final week. And every measure matched some internal certainty about what life is, and why.

Sitting out in the dim light of the Chapel, I cannot hear what the Maestro is saying to the performers. I can see that he talks, but his voice is soft, and I am not sitting close. He is working with the instrumentalists: they play, he stops, he bends down to converse with the first violinist in Orchestra I, or the oboist, or the group of cellos. They nod, looking at their scores, marking, then they follow as he starts again. They play it again and this time it is better. Sometimes I can tell why; the passage is slower at one point, or the emphasized notes are different, or there are separations, or

small silences, more sound or less sound. But it is always better than it was. Bit by bit, measure by measure, hour by hour, he is improving what he was given. I assume that the four or five people with full scores who arrived on campus when he did, and who follow his every move with their scores and their pencils, know what it was he said. To me it remains a form of magic.

Over a thousand people heard the performance at the Chapel of the Resurrection last March. It was breath-takingly beautiful. The performers played and sang beyond themselves, and the audience became one worshipping heart, receiving a gift whose value was finally incalculable.

The performance of the *St. Matthew Passion* in Palm Springs in 1955 took place in a roller rink that had gone bankrupt, so its owner rented out the space for the odd occasion. (Ordinarily we performed at the local temple, but they, understandably, drew the line here. Brahms' *Requiem*, yes. *St. Matthew Passion*, no. Which taught me a lot about the wisdom of the elders of the temple, and their discernment. They knew a lot about art music, and they knew this wasn't it.) On the day of our last rehearsal, the wind tore at the sky with a determined frenzy. Sand drove into everything that stood in its way. Inside the building we heard roars of what sounded like thunder; it was the tin roof rumpling and buckling, flopping and crashing and moaning and beating overhead in irregular spasms of imminent disaster. An uncertain atmosphere of tension and anxiety hovered around the rehearsal—not untypical of any final rehearsal, I later learned—heightened by an almost giddy anticipation of release: the roof might simply blow up into the sky—or we could complete the performance. Something of the same quality about either eventuality.

On the day, the weather was calm. But at the end of the performance I still had the sense that the roof might indeed blow off and heaven show up right there, much closer than we had thought.

Peace,

GME

Of Walls and Doors: A Procession Through my Life

—a new book by Karl Lutze, a collection of more than twenty vignettes, in tribute to people who helped shape his life and ministry over his 81 years, including such persons as Victor Hoffman, Otto Paul Kretzmann, Andrew Schulze, a few Valparaiso alumni, some prominent church leaders, as well as former parishioners in his days as pastor in Oklahoma's African American communities during pre-civil-rights days.

Published under auspices of the Association of Lutheran Older Adults, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso IN 46383. Cost: \$20 plus \$5 shipping/handling (\$1.50 for each additional book). To order by phone call the ALOA office at 219-464-6743 or 800-930-ALOA.

Intimations

the critical task

Mel Piehl

This is the fourth piece in a series commissioned for this year's Cresset concerning the question, "what and how should the church-related university publish in the 21st century?" Participants have all been editors of Valparaiso University publications. Mel Piehl was Editor of the student newspaper, The Torch, in 1967.

—The Editor

What a Christian university should "publish"—i.e., "make public," in the original meaning of the term—must derive from reflection on its fundamental identity and mission. A Christian university stands at the intellectual intersection of the world of faith and the world of public knowledge and society at large. Its connection to the world of faith—specifically, some portion of the Christian church as a confessing community of believers, and to the whole "communion of saints" living and dead—confers an identity that requires the capacity to understand and speak the language of faith wisely and fluently, to those within and without the church. Its connection to the world of public knowledge confers an identity that requires it to seek the truth wherever it may be found.

Thus the university must always be discussing and publishing its critical examinations of wide-ranging features of human knowledge and culture, understanding and interpreting their meaning, both for the practice of religious faith and for our necessary, common human immersion in the secular world (secular here meaning simply "of the present age"). And it must constantly consider which features of culture and society, science and art, are worthy of belief, practice, and celebration, and which are not.

The Christian university's most essential "publishing" task, then, is the critical one. This critical task requires great knowledge and judgment. Worthy and unworthy phenomena, valuable and meretricious beliefs and ways of life claim attention. The university ought to be one place that rigorously tries to discover, and publicize, which is which. While a community of faith like the church may be better at the cultivation of the elemental Christian virtues, a community of intellectual competence like the university ought to be better at critical tasks like thoughtful publication.

Much of this critical "publishing," of course, goes on through the ordinary practices of teaching and learning, scholarship and service. In such activities, a Christian university ought to make judgments of value about what ideas, disciplines, arts, and courses should be valued and which not. The task of critical "publication" occurs even more visibly in decisions about what kinds of people and events to honor and commend, through such things as honorary degrees or speakers or holidays, and which to ignore. Journals of information and opinion, like *The Cresset*, have a specific mission to provide informed criticism and create forums where thoughtful debate and disagreement about important matters can occur within the context of the Christian intellectual mission of the university.

In my judgment, a primary task in all these forms of critical publication ought to be finding positive points of engagement between Christian traditions and the manifold forms of human culture. One of the most unfortunate things about the weakness of Christian universities in the past few centuries was the way that much of Christian intellectual life became divorced from the larger debates of the culture. Lacking the resources, financial and intellectual, of their secular counterparts, Christian colleges too often fell into postures of defensiveness or reflexive opposition. Even as they have become more sophisticated in recent decades, however, some Christian publications are still inclined to perpetuate cultural perspectives from earlier eras that, however valuable at the time, are unlikely to speak to our contemporary situation and world. If trendiness and chasing after cultural fashion are the communicable diseases of many contemporary intellectuals and academics, stuffiness and resistance to cultural imagination and innovation remain temptations for Christian thinkers.

Of course a Christian university, existing as what Robert Bellah calls a "community of memory and hope," does have a responsibility to publish ideas and materials that specifically engage and

*The role of loyal
opposition has never
been popular.
Professor Piehl
reflects on the
necessity of the critical
task for the
universities of the
church, over against
both church and
society at large.*

Mel Piehl is currently
on a one-year
assignment as the
Distinguished
Visiting Professor
of Catholic studies
at the University
of Dayton.

reflect on the Christian intellectual tradition. But tradition itself must be a living thing. As the famous statement of former *Cresset* editor Jaroslav Pelikan has it, "Tradition is the living faith of the dead, while traditionalism is the dead faith of the living." Or as Catholic theologian Terrence Tilley has recently stated, "If a tradition is not to die, it must be reinvented as the context in which it lives changes. A living tradition is a set of practices received, renewed, and reinvented for another generation to receive, renew, and reinvent."

One way to make sure that tradition remains a "living faith" is to engage it critically with previously unfamiliar features of human thought and culture. Any Christian university should therefore cultivate, and publish, material about institutions, ideas, and arts from many kinds of people, places, and communities. In other words, its publications should in this respect be as cosmopolitan as they can afford to be. It seems obvious, for example, that some of the liveliest religious, social, and cultural developments of this newborn twenty-first century are going to come from East and South Asia, Africa, Latin America, Russia, and the Middle East, as well as from immigrant communities within the United States that derive from those places. No serious Christian publication can afford to ignore these developments—including the rise of the churches in these non-Western lands.

At the same time, genuine openness to universality should not preclude particularity. There is value in any Christian university's rooting its publications in the immediate perspectives and experiences of the particular, face-to-face academic community of which it is a part. If parochialism and narrowness are perpetual temptations for any publication, so is rootless cosmopolitanism and false sophistication. As the global marketplace makes London, Bombay, San Francisco, and Hong Kong look more and more alike, the more original differences in ideas and imaginative visions may come from writers, scientists, and artists who know how to root their work in particular places, nations, communities, families, and churches. Those outside conventional media and academic spotlights may also be more alert to deeper religious and moral currents of their cultures. A Christian university might well make it part of its task to publish the work of such often lesser-knowns.

Finally, I believe a Christian university's critical publishing task involves the fine matter of discerning warranted and unwarranted social and moral beliefs, upholding the former and challenging the latter. If too many academics today know mainly how to practice a hermeneutics of suspicion but not how to embrace and practice positive commitments, much of American society, including many in universities and churches, embraces an uncritical faith in consumerism, nationalism, and technological manipulation. Christian university publications ought to bring a hermeneutics of conviction to the places where skepticism and cynicism are the prevalent mode, but also ought to question the pieties of the surrounding culture, including those of its own tribe.

In an address on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of Valparaiso's Christ College, former CC Professor and *Cresset* editor Richard Lee pointed to the striking juxtaposition in the Gospels of Jesus' two injunctions: "He who is not for me is against me." (Matthew 12:30); and "He who is not against us is for us." (Mark 9:40) Lee took these seemingly contradictory passages as a kind of charter for the Christian educational task, properly pursued, and insisted that both outlooks must form part of the vision of Christian scholarship and teaching. That is, there must be a critical study, welcoming, and upholding of all ideas, perspectives, and beliefs, from whatever unexpected sources, that may offer something to deepen and enrich human life as well as the life of faith. At the same time there must be a sharp awareness of the tendency of all human creations and institutions to turn themselves into idols, becoming threats to the core of faith.

Some similar dual vision, I think, might inform the publication efforts of Christian universities. We need sophisticated, thoughtful, and critical Christian publications of many kinds to address the complex and challenging practices of the arts, history, politics, economics, biology, theology, psychology, sexuality, war—and every other area of human thought and endeavor. At the same time a publication rooted in Christian faith cannot forget its fundamental *raison d'être*. No one Christian institution, or publication, can even begin to do all of this well. Every Christian institution, and publication, must concentrate on those areas where its editors, scholars, writers, and artists are most knowledgeable and capable of sound critical judgment. But even a small, well-done effort in this regard can constitute a valuable and permanent contribution to the mission of any Christian university. †

Facing Bach:

the *St. Matthew Passion* on the 21st century campus

Peter Mercer-Taylor

On Sunday, March 25, J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* will be performed in our Chapel of the Resurrection, under the direction of world-renowned conductor, Helmuth Rilling. Though my purpose here is to place the composer, J.S. Bach, at center stage—and in doing so to pose a few questions about how you might bring your own thought process more fully in line with his—I want to make clear at the outset that we are also here to celebrate the hard work, dedication and talents of the students and music faculty who are bringing this work to life in our midst.

failure and remorse

So let me start with a confession. It may surprise you to hear that I am standing before you tonight as an act of penance, discharging a debt I incurred sixteen years ago. In my freshman year at college, I was fortunate enough to land a position in the bass section of the school's touring concert choir. Through the fall of that year this was a delight, as we worked up an eclectic, upbeat program that even a classical music novice like myself could sink his teeth into with no trouble. Spring semester was a different matter. The entire semester, we soon learned, was to be dedicated to a single, towering, masterpiece of Lutheran choral music: Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*.

This piece does, indeed, hold a very special place in the history of choral music. It was completed in 1727 and performed at the Leipzig Thomaskirche that Bach served. Manuscript evidence suggests that Bach considered this passion to be a *magnum opus*, as he undertook the meticulous preparation of a polished, fair copy of the score. Simply put, this was, at the time, one of the biggest, most ambitious pieces of music ever composed, calling on two orchestras, two choirs, a rich array of soloists, and around three hours' worth of rapt attention from its audience.

This proved too much for me. Too much German, too much counterpoint, too much religious *angst*. I survived for two rehearsals, then I quit the choir. There are mitigating circumstances, of course. I was a bewildered freshman from Oklahoma, half a generation off the farm, trying to make sense of life in the heady, cosmopolitan environment of a New England school and still laboring under the belief that I wanted to be a philosophy major, which was sheer folly. But still I might have persevered.

Why should I tell you such a shameful story? Because my very remorse may qualify me in a particularly rich way to approach the *St. Matthew Passion*, for a spirit of genuine personal guilt, of genuine shame, is precisely what Bach demands that we bring to the passion story. This piece is a call to the listener to take up his or her own unenviable role in the story, the role of the guilty party for whose guilt the passion itself—Christ's passion—unfolded. There is perhaps no better way to introduce ourselves to this theological, aesthetic, and emotional landscape than to inhabit it ourselves, and no better way for us to take up residence than through the hymn "Ah, Holy Jesus." This hymn was nearly a century old when Bach put it to use, the text composed by Johann Heermann around 1630, set to this music by Johann Crüger about a decade later. It appears three times in the *St. Matthew Passion*.

*Ah, holy Jesus, how hast thou offended
That man to judge thee hath in hate pretended?*

*This lecture was
presented on Valpo's
campus in the late
winter of 2001.
The attentive listener
may wish to add to
the experience of
reading it
by listening to the
suggested excerpts.*

*By foes derided, by thine own rejected,
O most afflicted.*

*Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee?
Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee.
'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee;
I crucified thee.*

There is little way for the believer to escape a sense of personal investment in this hymn. Indeed, these two verses, by focusing on two different principal characters, form a single argument, an antecedent and consequent, a question and an answer. The first verse speaks in the second person to Jesus, asking for some explanation as to why he, whose innocence was manifest, should have been made to suffer. The second verse answers the question of the first, swinging at the same time into the first person. "I," the singer, turns out to be the one responsible for Jesus' torture and death. This is not some generic proclamation that I, along with all of humanity, am sinful and in need of salvation. This verse places the argument at a much more personal level, as the singer is invited to project herself into a series of roles in the actual passion narrative. As Judas: "my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee." As Peter: "'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee." I may even have been the one driving the nails.

Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* unfolds through a rhythm that feels very much like the rhythm of this pair of verses. Our attention moves back and forth between the actual words of the passion narrative in Matthew and private poetic meditations, reflections on what our own role in that narrative might be or what significance the narrative still holds for the contemporary believer.

In approaching the libretto of this work (that is, the words) the first thing we notice is that "St. Matthew Passion" is a distinctly inadequate title, at least inadequate as a description. It is true that the libretto contains the entire story of the passion of Jesus as it appears in the Gospel according to St. Matthew, chapters 26 and 27. But this scriptural narrative constitutes less than half of the entire work. Interlaced with this narrative are nearly a dozen hymns, six massive choral numbers, and an array of meditative arias, all of which serve the function of establishing the present-day believer's relationship to the narrative. These are not presumed to be part of the narrative itself and are not delivered by characters within the narrative but are uttered by what might best be conceived of as a crowd of onlookers. The masterfully-crafted text of this work was authored by Christian Friedrich Henrici, who went by the name "Picander," though Bach and Picander appear to have worked in close consultation at every step along the way.

Bach and Picander were hardly the first to hit on the idea of integrating hymns, arias, and choruses into a musical setting of the passion narrative. All of these had been fixtures of the genre for at least half a century in northern Germany. But the sheer scale of this work, together with the relatively high proportion of interpolated material to the biblical narrative of the passion itself, set it well apart from its forebears.

the way it works

To get a sense for the basic mechanics of this piece, I want to offer a guided tour of a single extended excerpt, one which introduces us to the array of stylistic modes Bach will call on in the course of the whole piece. Here we will hear Bach's handling of Matthew 26, verses 3-13, in which a woman anoints Jesus with oil while he is dining at the house of Simon the Leper. **[Begin in Part I, at the recitative "Da nun Jesus war zu Bethanien" through the contralto aria "Buß und Reu."]** At the beginning of this section, we hear Matthew's third-person account of events as they are unfolding. This sort of third-person narration, which obviously makes up the bulk of the scriptural account, is taken by a figure known as the "Evangelist." This role is sung by a tenor, who obviously ends up doing more singing than anyone else in the whole performance. The style of music the Evangelist is singing may be new to those of us who don't have a lot of opera experience in our backgrounds. This musical discourse—called recitative—actually stands closer to speech than to song. Where

songs have steady beats, memorable melodies, and usually some sort of predictable pattern of structural repetition, recitative has none of this. It simply unfolds to the ambling, unpredictable rhythms of speech. Simply put, recitative is to song as prose is to poetry. At the same time, though there are plenty of orchestra musicians waiting around to play, they do not play along with the Evangelist. Like most of the recitative in the work, the Evangelist's is what we call simple recitative, accompanied only by the organ.

The words of the disciples, chastising the woman for wasting valuable resources, take the form of a brief number for the choir (this happens to be taken by Choir No. 1). Though they are still speaking in prose, the orchestra begins to play and the piece takes on a sort of propulsive formal logic. This sort of number, in which the chorus actually takes part in the scriptural drama, is called a "turba," the Latin word for crowd. Though it isn't exactly recitative, it is much too short to be considered a full-fledged number in itself.

The role of Jesus, who comes at once to the woman's defense, is sung by a bass. Although Jesus, like all the individuals in the biblical narrative, is singing in recitative, we notice at once that his recitatives sound like no other recitatives in the *Passion*. Rather than being accompanied by organ alone, as the Evangelist and others are, Jesus' words are accompanied, as well, by what is often described as a musical halo. Whenever he opens his mouth, a string orchestra plays along in unobtrusive chordal accompaniment. You'll know it when you hear it.

After Jesus makes his pronouncement, an alto steps in for a recitative and aria of her own. This is a classic example of the sort of interpolations we find throughout this piece. She is obviously *not* the woman who did the pouring of oil (she talks about "this devout woman" in the third person). Nevertheless, we find the singer imagining her way into a comparable role in the narrative, anointing Jesus with her own tears. A couple of musical points here: though the first thing the alto sings is "recitative," this is what we call "accompanied recitative." Though it does not have the melodic shapeliness or rhythmic drive of an actual song, the orchestra is playing along, and even strikes its own catchy groove. You will be able to tell at once when the alto breaks into a genuine aria.

If this example shows Bach at a moment of finely honed dramatic insight, there are moments at which we sense that drama isn't all of which Bach's music is capable, for Bach's musical decisions, at least on a few occasions, have a direct impact on the actual theological spin of this narrative. The most important of these concerns the handling of Jesus' final words. Jesus' musical halo, the wash of strings that sets his sung words apart from their surroundings, is the musical equivalent of printing Jesus' words in red. The strings accompany Jesus every single time he opens his mouth, except once. At his final words, the strings are gone: "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*" "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Here, the last time we hear Jesus' voice, he cries out alone against the bare accompaniment of an organ. [beginning in Part II with the Evangelist's recitative "Und von der sechsten stunde an."]

In one sense, the stripping down of the musical texture can be seen as Bach's way of reflecting, in his musical language, on what has occurred in the spoken language of this passage. As Jesus is stripped down to the most essential human experience—facing his own death—so, too, does Matthew as a narrator strip his speech to that which is most essential. Something in these words is so fundamental to Jesus' personal being that it could not even survive translation into Greek but had to be left in the Aramaic that Jesus' mouth actually formed. Parenthetically, Matthew's way of handling this irreducible moment of anguish resonates with the moment, recounted in John 20, when Mary recognizes the resurrected Jesus. Her exclamation, "Rabboni!" is packed with more personal, human joy than any word had ever been asked to bear, and this, too, had to remain untouched by translation. In this sense, the loss of strings at Jesus' final cry echoes the linguistic stripping to essentials. We might say that we find ourselves, with these words, standing on sacred ground: take off your shoes, stop speaking in Greek, and lose the strings.

Now this is all very touching, but it's hardly the whole story. Indeed, the basic quandary posed here actually cuts to the core of the question of what music can or cannot be said to signify. For the first question we have to ask at this moment is what, exactly, did those strings stand for? For many

Bach scholars, the most expedient description—one I used a moment ago—is that these strings are a musical “halo.” But if we are going to argue that Christ is not haloed at the moment of his death, that his personal divinity is compromised at the moment he performs the great salvific act, we have a little explaining to do. Much more satisfying is the possibility that the strings stood not for Christ’s own divinity but for the presence of God the Father with Jesus. And if the strings stand for the presence of God the Father, it becomes clear that J.S. Bach—not Matthew, not Bach’s librettist, but Bach himself—is making a fundamental theological claim about the order of the universe at the moment of Jesus’ exclamation. If we look at Jesus’ words as they appear in the written scripture alone, there are several interpretive possibilities available to us. In claiming that he has been forsaken by his father, Jesus might simply be asking why God has abandoned him, as it were, to this fate, refusing to intervene to save his mortal skin. We might suppose, too, that Jesus is simply mistaken in his sense of abandonment, revealing something about the fallibility of his own human perspective. That is, he experiences God’s absence not because God is really absent but because the mortal organism is simply incapable of experiencing its own death as anything but an absolute totality, death obscuring his view of the divine as completely as the moon eclipses the sun. Uncomfortably for us, Bach doesn’t really leave either of these options available. The strings were really there, and now they are really gone. Where there was a divine presence, there is now an absence. God vanishes; Jesus dies alone.

following Judas?

As challenging as we may find Bach’s portrayal of Christ—or at least my portrayal of Bach’s portrayal of Christ—more thought-provoking still is Bach’s portrayal of this narrative’s arch-antagonist, the disciple Judas. Let us turn again to the hymn “Ah, Holy Jesus.”

*Ah, holy Jesus, how hast thou offended
That man to judge thee hath in hate pre-
tended?
By foes derided, by thine own rejected,
O most afflicted.*

*Who was the guilty? Who brought this
upon thee?
Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone
thee.
'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee;
I crucified thee.*

trans. Robert Bridges, 1899

*Herzliebster Jesu, was hast du verbrochen
Dass man ein solch scharf Urteil hat
gesprochen?
Was ist die Schuld, in was für Missetaten
Bist du geraten?*

*Was ist die Ursach aller solcher Plagen?
Ach! Meine Sünde haben dich
geschlagen:
Ich, ach Herr Jesu, habe dies verschuldet,
Was du erduldet.*

Johann Heermann, 1630

*Most beloved Jesus, what have you
broken
That so harsh a judgement is pro-
nounced?
What is the guilt, the offense, what kind
of sin
Have you fallen into?
What is the reason for all these torments?
O! my sins have struck you down;
I, O Lord Jesus, have encumbered you
With the guilt you bear.*

literal translation, the author

The text in the left column is the text that I read earlier, the translation as it appears in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. As you recall, I made much of the fact that the second verse invites the listener to try on a succession of subject positions within the narrative. We take responsibility first for Peter’s crime of denial. Next, we assume guilt for Judas’ crime of treason. But as the present example shows, I wasn’t being totally honest about all of this.

In the middle column is the German original of these two verses as it appears in the *St. Matthew Passion* itself. In the right column is a more or less literal, non-metrical translation of these verses. As you can see, the whole business about identifying with Peter, then with Judas, doesn’t actually play a part in the chorale as Bach knew it at all. The original German text makes pretty vague claims about guilt and so forth. But the notion that we might actually identify with Judas, say, is purely the invention of the translator.

We are obviously looking here at an instance of a translator exercising a certain kind of poetic or imaginative license. Few would claim that he is betraying the sense of the original verses. Rather,

the translator is bringing this sense more fully into focus, amplifying the broad sense of guilt and shame by bringing to a fine point the possibility of personal identification. I submit that Bach, as a musician setting the text of the *St. Matthew Passion* as a whole, is engaged in a translation of the same kind, and, as a translator, is striving for a pretty similar effect, on the large scale, when it comes to the figure of Judas. For we find in Bach's handling of Judas an invitation to identification that is no more than implicit in the words themselves.

I want to take us on one more side-road before striking down the main path. In this case, we pause for a look at one of the closest answers the 20th century provided to the musical Passion narrative as it was practiced in Bach's day. I am referring, of course, to Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Mentioning the *St. Matthew Passion* and *Jesus Christ, Superstar* in the same breath raises a number of complications. For starters, one is Christian, and one is not. Though Rice and Webber took the essential outlines of the Passion story as their subject matter, the dialogue has been revised almost beyond recognition. The goal is about as uncharitable a reading of Jesus' last week on earth as could possibly be conceived. Jesus comes off much of the time as a wimpy, whining coward. He grumps his way through the Last Supper, for instance, muttering: "For all you care, this wine could be my blood."

The driving inspiration behind the Rice/Lloyd-Webber version of the story is the contention that Judas is the real hero. As Judas explains in his opening monologue, Jesus' increasing influence as a political leader can only spell trouble for the Jews. Indeed, if Jesus is given the chance to consolidate his power into a full-blown earthly coronation, the Romans will obviously respond by crushing the Jewish nation into oblivion. With a heavy heart, Judas does the only thing he can to keep this from happening, turning Jesus over to the authorities. He is fully aware that in doing so he is probably buying himself a one-way ticket to eternal damnation, but he does it anyway. This, according to *Jesus Christ, Superstar*, is the greatest possible human sacrifice, next to which Jesus' own martyrdom pales.

But the story doesn't end here, for by the end of the show, we are left with the odd sense that it is Judas, not Jesus, who is destined to return from the dead. After Jesus' sentence is passed, we break into a surreal set-piece which seems to stand apart from the time and place of the story as it has unfolded thus far. Judas appears, robed in white, to perform for Jesus an extravagant production of the show's title song, "Jesus Christ, Superstar." Judas speaks now as a citizen of the 20th century, having been transplanted from Jesus' world into our own. In this number, Judas turns a critical eye toward Jesus' brief career and, in a sort of George Stefanopolis mode, continues to offer smug, I-told-you-so advice to an admired leader he knows he can no longer help: "If you'd come today, you could have reached a whole nation. Israel in 4 BC had no mass communication." As the song ends, Jesus is whisked back to his own time, drags his cross across the desert, and is crucified. It is not clear whether we are supposed to interpret this number as an indication that Judas has been bodily resurrected. But this is a serious possibility. Just as importantly, it is Judas who is offered up to the modern audience as the character with whom they can really identify, the one who is revealed, at last, as one of our own.

I want to suggest that Bach does the same thing with the figure of Judas or something much like it. Is Judas the good guy in Bach's work? Of course not. Is he raised from the dead? In fact, he just might be. And in this ambiguous, quasi-resurrection, he might also be the one character in the story who succeeds in making the leap from Jesus' time into our own.

Read the excerpt from Judas' last scene in the story, when he has just returned to the Chief Priest to give back the thirty pieces of silver. Judas, in the *St. Matthew Passion* sung by a bass, pronounces his final line: "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood." [Beginning in Part II, the Evangelist's recitative, "Des Morgens aber hielten alle Hohenpriester" through the bass aria, "Gebt mir meinen Jesum wieder."] The chorus takes the part of the elders, retorting "That's your problem, mister." The Evangelist narrates Judas' suicide, and the story moves along into the conversation, among the elders, of what is to be done with that money. There follows a bass aria, with the words,

Give me my Jesus back!
See the silver, the blood money,
Thrown to your feet
by the wayward son.

The big question here is, who is singing this aria? By now, we have a pretty clear understanding of where the arias come from. They are meditative pieces, sung from a modern perspective by people who may identify with characters in the narrative, but are not those characters. But a couple of issues come into convergence here that come into convergence nowhere else in the drama. To begin with, the words of this aria might actually be sung by Judas himself. Yes, the “wayward son” is referred to in the third person, but there’s plenty of room for this kind of self-chastising distance in a first-person confession. The moment it identifies—at which the silver is literally lying there on the floor in front of the priests—situates this singer with uncharacteristic specificity in the action that has recently passed. Importantly, there is not a single other aria—not one—in the *Passion* that could, in terms of sense or syntax, actually have come from the mouth of one of the characters in the show. The other arias establish sympathy, but distance. “I’m like the woman who anointed you, but I’m not her.” “I feel a guilt like Peter’s, but I’m not him.” But these words might well, in purely dramatic terms, be the words of Judas himself. This time, any distance is obliterated.

But it is the musical realm, as much as the textual one, that actually brings this implicit possibility to life. For at the same time that we have an aria whose words might have come from an actual member of the narrative’s cast, Bach sets the aria for bass, the same voice part as Judas himself. This is serving no over-arching structural principle. The earlier aria commenting on Peter’s denial, for instance, was taken by an alto, a female voice we couldn’t possibly mistake for Peter’s. But this is a voice we could mistake for Judas’s own.

With this in mind, we must attend to the curious placement of the aria dramatically. This aria obviously refers to what happens three sentences before: “And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed.” But the narrative is allowed to unfold into new territory. Judas hangs himself, and the elders begin to chat about the money question. For no particular reason, it is only here, after Judas has died and the story has begun to move on, that the aria pops up commenting on Judas’ confrontation with the elders. Indeed, when the Evangelist picks up the narrative once more after the aria, he’s really completing the train of thought set in motion just before the aria began, as though the aria had never occurred. If this does, indeed, strike us as the voice of Judas, it is a resurrected Judas, and one who succeeds, as does no other character in the drama, in moving from his own musical and historical sphere into ours.

Is Bach claiming that Judas was literally resurrected? No, this would be too strong. But we’re not talking about truth claims here, we’re talking about a dramatic work and its capacity for suggestion, for exploring horizons of possibilities. The architects of German Pietism, including early contemporaries of Bach’s, were among the progenitors of the notion of being “born again” into Christianity. To press the point just a bit farther—and I’m probing for the breaking point here—the sense that this may, indeed, be intended to depict a rebirth of Judas is augmented in the very naivete of this aria’s signature complaint: “I want my Jesus back.” These words are, indeed, child-like; even the musical style of this aria feels shallow, not so much insincere as emotionally underdeveloped. I am not trying to coax exaggerated, heretical claims from Bach. But I do think he sets before us materials around which we might craft for ourselves the comforting, hopefully rhetorical, question: Is it possible that even so great a sinner as Judas might be born again into discipleship? And if him, why not me?

rebirth and restitution

In the centuries following its composition, the *St. Matthew Passion* would learn a thing or two about improbable rebirth. Posterity did not at once seem to share Bach’s own enthusiasm for this piece. After the composer’s death in 1750, it fell into total neglect for the better part of a century.

Though Bach's keyboard music continued to enjoy a limited circulation, at least in northern Germany, through the second half of the 18th century, it was only in the 1820s that his large choral works began to receive serious attention again. In 1829, then thought to be the hundredth anniversary of the *Passion's* first performance, the 20-year-old Felix Mendelssohn conducted a path-breaking revival of the *St. Matthew Passion*. The piece thereafter soon established its position in the canon of German masterworks that was developing at just that time, a canon that had, at its heart, the symphonies of Beethoven and the operas of Mozart.

But as sometimes happens, rebirth brought with it transfiguration. I don't mean that the piece itself was edited or embellished, though it occasionally was. The work itself, the notes as Bach wrote them, became something different. For the *St. Matthew Passion* was revived not as a piece of church music, but as a concert work. And for concert-goers, both of the 19th century and the 21st, Bach's piety is much less interesting than Bach's genius. This piece was intended, I think, as a window onto the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. To proclaim it a masterpiece, though, is to focus all of our attention on the window itself, to lose sight of what's on the other side of it.

The situation that we 21st-century listeners face in a performance of the *St. Matthew Passion* calls to mind a story I heard once about the playwright Arthur Miller. This anecdote, as I've heard it, is so many removes from the event itself that I can't vouch for its authenticity; indeed, I'm quite sure the details are wrong. But the story has stuck with me for many years not because of its verity, but because of the lesson it offers. According to the tale, Arthur Miller's play, *Death of a Salesman*, was being given a glamorous 25th anniversary staging in New York. Miller arrived at opening night to considerable pomp and circumstance in front of the hall. On his way in, he spots a face in the crowd that he recognizes, an old friend from his school days whom he hasn't seen since school. He makes his way through the crowd to greet this fellow. Miller's old chum—let's call him Berny—recognizes Miller as a school friend and greets him by name—"Arthur Miller, how's it going?"—but Berny seems utterly unaware that he is talking with a celebrity. Miller asks how Berny's life has been going, and Berny reports that he's established himself as a modestly successful businessman in insurance. Berny asks how things are going for Miller. "Well," says Miller, "you may remember that I'd always wanted to be a writer, so I stuck with that, and that's what I've done all these years." "Great, Arthur," says Berny. "Have you had any luck with it?" Miller responds, "Yeah, I've gotten a few plays on the stage. They're reviving *Death of a Salesman* here tonight, so someone must like it." At this point Berny steps back in shock and exclaims, "You're Arthur Miller!"

From Berny's perspective there are two Arthur Millers. They inhabit the same clothes, they speak with the same voice, they say the same things, they go by the same name. But one is the Arthur Berny knows as a friend, the spontaneous, human, mortal Arthur. The other is the Arthur Berny confronts at the end of this little tale, an Arthur Miller around whom has exploded a penumbra of celebrity, a halo of greatness so bright that it makes it impossible to gaze directly on the first Arthur Miller any more. How might this conversation continue? It probably couldn't; I imagine Berny stammering a few incomprehensible words, shaking Miller's hand enthusiastically for the second time, and watching the Great Playwright be whisked away into the theatre. Nor does the story itself need to continue. As a gag, its proper end has already arrived in the recognition of greatness. The joke comes at the expense of poor anonymous Berny, someone foolish enough to think that Arthur Miller might actually be known, greeted, and befriended naively, without reference to his greatness.

Perhaps the best advice I can give on how to approach a performance of J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* is this: "Try to be Berny." Allow the gifted man of faith who crafted it to speak to you directly and try to focus less on his greatness than on his capacity for honesty. If you share Bach's religious outlook, or something like it, don't be afraid of personal involvement. It may be true that Bach is seated in glory at the right hand of Beethoven, but don't believe for a moment that he isn't talking directly to you. ❀

Peter Mercer-Taylor,
formerly of Valpo's
Christ College,
is now an Associate
Professor of
Musicology at the
University of
Minnesota.
He is the author of
The Life of
Mendelssohn
(Cambridge University
Press, 2000).

SACRIFICE

Sometimes I think of Bach,
working a stick with his mouth
to get notes he couldn't reach
with his hands and feet

so the sweet catastrophe of counterpoint
could break the hearts of his parishioners.
And while we're on the subject of music
think of the monk who dove

and dove again into dark archives
to rescue from oblivion
the Gregorian chants of Leonin and Perotin,
whose names have lasted

while his remained unknown,
though his name, Anonymous IV
sets him apart from other anonymous writers.
Still, in the sacrifice business

there's no guarantee of fame.
Remember Annabel Lee Stein, whose brain
rubbed words backward (drawkcab)
from the way it was meant to?

I bet no one can recall the teacher
who, for years sat patiently coaxing
Annabel Lee to read. No. Although
for her it must have been a sacrifice.

Sacrifice is slow as a funeral procession
in rush hour traffic, the sort of word
other words pass, honking.
And still, God (*doG*) is not the only one

who did it, as Annabel Lee could
tell you, Annabel, the grandmother
standing by the stove, moving her lips
as she reads a cake mix box.

Jeanne Murray Walker

Valpo's *St. Matthew Passion*

Benefactors

Why Bach at Valpo? It was October, 1940. Most of Europe was at war, and soon the United States would be, too. Valparaiso University had been owned by a group of Lutheran laymen for a short period of fifteen years. In his inaugural address as the small university's third president under Lutheran auspices, O.P. Kretzmann spoke these memorable words expressing his vision of Valpo's destiny: "Others may try to make men scientific; we must do that—and make them wise. Others may give men knowledge; we must give them that—and understanding. Others may try to make men useful; we must do that—and make them noble."

How this vision was and is to be accomplished is something that the University has, in the sixty years that have passed since presented with its challenge, actively debated. Doubtless, the discourse will go on; hopefully, it will proceed enlightened and edified by the tradition of which the University is an heir.

We speak of the University as being an institution of learning in the Lutheran tradition. Not an empty cliché, this description. The Lutheran Reformation was, after all, first and foremost an intellectual movement. Martin Luther was intimately familiar with the classic Greek thinkers and with those who followed right down through most of the his own century. Being in the Lutheran tradition means exploring the great issues of knowledge, conduct and governance. It is a tradition at ease in addressing such overarching and timeless questions: Who am I? What am I? What is beauty? What is my destiny? My purpose? My God?

Now, how does all this lead us to Johann Sebastian Bach? And, why Bach for Valpo?

Bach is, of course, one of the giants of Western civilization. Not as a philosopher or a scientist, but as an artist. Life's landscape would indeed be dreary without the beauty of great art. The timeless works involving canvas, stage and instruments are the vessels by which generations pass their best to succeeding generations. Being at least minimally acquainted with their content is essential to merit the accolade of being "cultured." In itself, that is compelling reason for Bach at Valparaiso.

But so far, no premise here for a distinctive connection to Valpo.

It is in his grand and extraordinary fusing of art and religion that the Bach connection to Valpo is found. To be sure, Bach composed a great deal of secular music, and his years at Coethen (1717-1723) were almost exclusively in that genre. It was during those years that he composed the Brandenburg Concerti, which alone would have earned him a timeless reputation. But to advance music in divine service was his self-declared goal, and this he did with an ability and productivity unmatched before or since.

Being a university in the Lutheran tradition, Valparaiso University takes a stand with regard to the central doctrines of the Christian Church. So did Bach. His cantatas, *Passions*, the *B Minor Mass*, chorale preludes, cantatas and motets were the means by which he preached and taught the centrality of the Gospel message found in these compositions. He was steeped in the Lutheran tradition. The Bible, hymns and sermons of Martin Luther, and the Lutheran chorales—some of the greatest artistic expressions of the Western world—were all part of Bach's person. To them he brought a craftsmanship unmatched in all of music. The tonal allegory found in his works give the words of Holy Scripture, especially the Passion, and the Creed and Lutheran chorales an uncommon freshness each time they are heard. Even the best Lutheran homily is no match.

Bach's music, particularly his church music, is therefore something through which Valparaiso University can make its educational experience unique. Scholarly research and colloquia on Bach's music at the University would be appropriate, for exploring Bach's relationship to the Reformation heritage would be an enrichment that this University is by its tradition suited to pursue.

*The voices of some
of those who
made it
possible.*

But equally—maybe more—important is offering its students and others of the University family frequent performances and presentations of this music and musicology. Powerful messages are dramatized in his music that touch profoundly the condition of humankind, its being and its destiny. *The St. Matthew Passion* as presented by the University choir and orchestra under the direction of Helmuth Rilling in March of 2001 was, for those who crowded into the large University chapel, a deeply personal experience not likely ever to be forgotten. “Being in the Lutheran tradition” has a theological dimension, and a cultural dimension. Making the music of Johann Sebastian Bach generously available at Valparaiso University would be in fulfillment of the vision of its Lutheran founders by serving both dimensions.

Phyllis and Richard W. Duesenberg

The Duesenbergs are generous benefactors of many programs at Valparaiso University, particularly in German studies, the arts, and legal education.

Choir Director

The Chapel of the Resurrection was filled to capacity. Evening approached and snow began to fall, quickening the sense of darkness. Anticipation was palpable, both among the musicians and in the audience. “Oh Blessed Jesu, how hast thou offended, that now on thee such judgement has descended. Of what misdeed hast Thou to make confession? Of what transgression?” (Chorale, #3, “Herzliebster Jesu.”)

We have all lost ourselves in the timelessness of unique elements—composer and work—conductor and ensemble—worshiper and place. We stood still in those words and in that place of worship. With each collective breath, the sense of community between performers and audience grew. So complete was the attention of the audience and the desire of the performers that at some points one was unsure who inhabited which role. On that afternoon, all of us met Bach and the Gospel of Matthew in a new and startling way. Composer, work, conductor, ensemble and location combined to lift the music and its message to a new place of understanding and worship. In a stirring dialogue between conductor and ensemble, the performers met Bach at a new level and lived the Gospel account with new clarity in a place where God’s word continues to be lifted up.

first rehearsal with the maestro

Valparaiso’s historic tradition is Lutheran and Germanic. Its mission as a “university under the cross” is strongly insinuated into its very fiber. The Chapel is a place where music has been proclaimed long and loud. And the music of Bach is well known to this vast space. They have been intimately connected for some forty years. Of course, in the months of learning one of the great masterworks of western literature, we are given fresh chance to tell the story with new spirit. Through hours of rehearsal, seminar courses, theological discussions about the Gospel and the church coming into Lent, we grappled with the musical complexity and marveled at the completeness and perfection of Bach’s vision of Matthew.

As we studied we increasingly felt Bach’s ultimate goal in writing this work: the opportunity to deepen the religious education of his congregation in the most vivid, visceral way imaginable. Our primary choral forces met together on Monday evenings to tackle the process of not just singing correct notes and rhythms, but of becoming congregants, disciples, high priests, and blood-thirsty crowds. This level of characterization would be crucial to the final performance and to meeting the demands of the conductor who would lead us.

conductor and ensemble

After months of anticipation and preparation, the time itself had arrived. The chorus numbering 87 members sat waiting for the first rehearsal with one of the world’s great maestros—Helmuth Rilling. As he approached, dressed in his trademark leather jacket, one could feel the singers’

excitement and nervousness. Rilling began with a simple word of acknowledgement of the privilege of performing this work. Looking around the Chapel, he noted how its beauty was an ideal match for the grandeur and solemnity of the work. Wasting no further time, he said simply, "sing number three: 'Herzliebster Jesu, was hast du versprochen. . .'"

Under Rilling's intense and watchful gaze, the chorus sang its first words. He proceeded straight through the chorale, made two brief suggestions and immediately went through the chorale a second time. "Your German is understandable to any native," he commented. Since he is not known for excessive verbal comment, this immediate and simple acknowledgement to the chorus created their first moment of accomplishment—and relief. Immediately, he continued into #4, the first small chorus utilizing the double chorus texture ("Ja nicht auf das Fest," 'not upon the feast'). Rilling listened to the choruses separately and again gave simple verbal instructions, this time relating to matters of style and articulation. The chorus eagerly responded with clarity and precision. Apparently convinced with the basic level of preparation demonstrated thus far, Mr. Rilling removed his jacket and said, "Now we will sing the opening movement." The chorus navigated its way through the monumental and difficult opening chorus. As the rehearsal became more detailed, one sensed the relationship building between conductor and ensemble as confidence grew on both sides.

In the days that followed, soloists, continuo players and orchestra all began the process of learning and following the keen insight and lifelong understanding one of the world's great Bach conductors. Not merely a conductor, Rilling is a master teacher, intent on transmitting the depth of Bach's setting to a new generation. He shows the performers numerous instances of Bach's numerology symbolism. He discusses the theologic impact of examining the manuscript and Bach's methods of creating deeper levels of understanding for the believer. He cajoles the chorus to become deeply involved in creating the character of specific movements—most memorably in the tenors laughing sardonically as they sing "Gegrüßet seist du, Jüdenkönig!" ("Hail, Hall, King of the Jews!")

All the performers sensed in Mr. Rilling a profound level of respect and commitment to the musical score that comes from a lifetime of experience. As he cited further examples of the music's expressive qualities, technical challenges were conquered. With each passing hour he taught with greater depth and gave life to the most powerful images and ideas of the music. The journey toward a memorable performance had begun.

worship and place

At 3:00 PM on March 25, Mr. Rilling and the soloists came onto the already full stage. Working according to convention, the stage manager had placed a stand for a conductor's score, which Mr. Rilling moved out of the way as he launched into the work, conducting completely from memory. Once again, as in the initial rehearsals, the performers felt the intensity of this gaze and his ability to focus entirely on telling the story of the Gospel—the circle of trust and community coming to a resolution. Rilling became increasingly animated as the performance unfolded, bringing the performers to a new place of musical accomplishment. Yet in the approaching darkness of that late afternoon, a performance that began with technical assurance and much drama and pathos developed into something much deeper. Holy Week was several days away and the personal sense of living the Gospel was strongly apparent.

The first half ended with Bach's massive chorale fantasia: "O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde Groß" ("O man, thy heavy sin lament"). The final D natural, sustained only in the bass instruments, created a feeling of anticipation for the second part, a sense that the fulfillment of the word was beckoning to all present. As snow began to fall outside and the hue of the Chapel windows deepened with each moment, Part II enveloped the audience with its desperate initial questions, and its rapid plunge into Christ's trial, scourging and crucifixion.

Darkness had completely enveloped the chapel as the Evangelist sang the words: "Und von der sechsten stunde an war eine Finsternis. . ." ("And from the sixth hour there was darkness"). Almost two thousand people were impossibly still, enveloped in the gloom of that moment, waiting to hear Jesus whisper in agony: "Eli, eli lama sabachthani?" These words in Aramaic collapse the time since

Jesus' suffering, and Bach simply offers the words in German from the mouth of the Evangelist: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" In recreating these words the Evangelist experiences a moment of eternal empathy.

Not even the slightest glimmer of day remained. Night had come with snow, cold and profound. Who could not feel a part of the words from Chorale #62: "Be near me, Lord, when dying, O part not Thou from me."

Bach and St. Matthew—Rilling and the combined forces of Valparaiso University—The Chapel of the Resurrection filled with God's people. In these elements the word became flesh, newly broken and ever whole.

Christopher M. Cock

Professor Cock holds the Phyllis and Richard Duesenberg Chair in Lutheran Music, and is a renowned singer of the Evangelist, a role which he took in this performance. He conducts the Valparaiso University Chorale and the Bach Chamber Choir.

Soloist

GME: Had you sung the role of the Christus before?

Ralph Klapis: No. I had done the arias in the St. John, and the Bass part in the B-minor Mass, but had never even heard a performance of the St. Matthew.

GME: What are the biggest challenges of this role?

RK: When Christopher first approached me with the possibility, he told me he thought I should do the Christus. He thought with my background in opera, I would have a good feel for the drama inherent in the recitatives.

GME: What were your biggest concerns?

RK: My biggest concerns had to do with my neophyte status as a Bach singer. I have done a lot of opera—classic, romantic, and contemporary—and many recitals, mostly of romantic-period music. My experience with Bach is much more limited. I have a voice with a warm, vibrant sound, and I am used to using that vibrato in everything I do. I felt that this sound might not be what was wanted. And of course, an overriding concern was that I would be playing the role of Jesus in a work that is at the pinnacle of Lutheran church music, in the Chapel of the Resurrection, before an audience for whom the work has tremendous spiritual significance. It was quite a responsibility.

GME: How did you go about your preparation?

RK: After Christopher and I had our conversation, I began working on the music. At this point, I just wanted to learn the notes. I also studied the Bible texts, and did my own word-by-word translation of the German text in the recitatives. I prepared the music just as I would an operatic role. Shortly thereafter, I went to Champaign-Urbana to hear a performance of the work. It was really good to hear the work live before doing very much listening to recordings. There is nothing like a live performance to bring out what one will need to do to make a work come through. Ultimately, I listened to three different recordings, as well as to performances of other Bach works, just to steep myself in the style. I had a lot of help from Christopher Cock and Joseph Bognar. I particularly remember one rehearsal where we were to do the recitatives but Joe could not be there, so it was just Christopher, me, and Daniel Morganstern, the continuo cellist. Danny is the principal cellist for the Lyric Opera of Chicago, so he has heard a lot of singers. I was a little hesitant to sing with just a bass note accompaniment, but it was really easy, because we all understood the music and how it needed to go.

As I became familiar with the context, I began trying to put the meaning of the various "scenes" across. Each recitative has its own part to play in the narrative. One thing I have learned in thirty years of performing is that the expression of emotion is seldom general. Particular situations evoke particular responses. One of the interesting challenges with the Christus is that Jesus did not react in the way that a normal human being would react in a given situation. He was always teaching, always thinking of what effect his example would have on others. At the same time, he was human, and his human side comes out several times in the course of the work. Trying to find exactly the right shade for each of these moments is a great challenge, and I suppose one that one might spend a lifetime doing.

GME: *What did you learn from Rilling?*

RK: Well, he is the one who has already spent a lifetime doing just that—finding the best way to portray Bach's understanding of St. Matthew's texts, so that in the mind of the listener, there is no separation. Every note in the piece is locked in Mr. Rilling's memory, and he has very strong, very specific ideas about the exact timbre and articulation that will serve the expressive purpose of the whole work. That was one thing I saw right away. Mr. Rilling always knew where each piece fit in the totality of the work. At first, I fell very short of that ideal. We worked on some passages over and over, until he got the sound he knew was right. I was reminded of a coaching I once had with Jeffrey Tate, the British conductor. We worked for a half hour on the first page of the recitative to "O du mein holder Abendstern." It took that long for me to get the style up to his standards. I had a similar experience with Mr. Rilling. My voice had too much vibrato and I did too many portamentos, sang too legato. After a while, either I got better, or he got used to me. By the dress rehearsal, things were better, but I still had a long way to go. Luckily, hearing the whole thing put together all at once gave me an idea of what I needed to do, and with a few suggestions from the Maestro, I think I did pretty well in the performance.

GME: *What is so distinctive about singing Bach?*

RK: I can't even describe the feeling we all had on the platform during the final chorus. There was such a sense of having re-created something that was so much larger than anything any one of us could imagine. Somehow in that place, for those three hours and ten minutes, we and the audience shared a closeness to the divine that could not be expressed or manifested in any other way. Bach's understanding and portrayal of all of the layers of meaning in these great events was brought out in every way possible through and from all of us. I kept thinking how wonderful this experience was for all of the students in the orchestra and in the choirs. Once you have an experience like this, you know what it is to become one with a great work of art. I know that none of us will ever forget it.

That very sense of shared accomplishment gives a clue to what makes Bach problematic for some performers. You don't really hear of Bach divas. If you insist on putting a lot of your personality into your sound when you perform Bach, you probably are going to have trouble. The music gives you quite enough to do, and if you are tuned in to the work, you begin to realize that no little "extras" are needed. For those of us used to doing romantic operas and art songs, it can be a humbling experience. A lot of times, the melodies are instrumentally conceived, and don't go where one might expect. All parts work together to form the totality, and in the case of the *St. Matthew*, there is a monumental quality that really comes home to you as the work reaches its end. You realize that each one of us, no matter what our part, is only a small element of a grand design. But each part is essential, and that leads to a wonderful feeling of accomplishment for all who participate. That alone is a wonderful reason for doing these works. No matter how difficult they are, the rewards are worth the effort.

Ralph Klapis

Mr. Klapis, a distinguished singer and teacher of vocal music, performs in numerous venues and teaches in the Department of Music at Valparaiso University.

Chorister

The University Book Center sold us *St. Matthew Passion* scores for \$30.95. Between the pretty blue covers were 68 movements spread over 304 pages. Those once-white pages were made black by thousands of tiny notes and the German texts beneath.

Jeff Hazewinkel, director of operations at the Valparaiso University Center for the Arts, sold us 3-CD sets of Mr. Rilling's rendition of the *Passion* for \$23.00. The running time on the discs is 2 hours, 54 minutes and 51 seconds. The liner notes had to be perfect bound because staples could not penetrate that much paper.

Emily Curran and Marcus De Pasquale, social chairs of the VU Chorale, sold us navy blue T-shirts with silver lettering for \$10. The shirts mirrored almost exactly the posters for the *Passion* performance that were now to be seen all over campus.

\$63.95 (a lot of money student terms!), 304 pages, 68 movements, 3-CDs, two months of rehearsals and an entire week of our spring break, all for three hours of singing on a Sunday afternoon. The weight of this undertaking was perceived quickly, and almost as quickly, in good choral fashion, playful but revealing humor developed, reflected in the original T-shirt design proposal. The idea was to spell B*A*C*H across the front of an olive green shirt in Mash-style and make reference on the back to the upcoming bootcamp with Mr. Rilling as drill instructor. For obvious reasons we discarded the idea, but we secretly held on to the belief that we should be with our less-musical friends on a beach in Florida.

We had received other warnings about the weight of our project. As we returned early from Christmas break for all-day Bach rehearsals, Dr. Cock had explained to us that Mr. Rilling would sense and respond to our level of preparation. If we were ready, he would take everyone—audience and performers—for an unforgettable journey through the Passion. If we were less than prepared, he would pull back and do the Passion-for-Dummies version, to the disappointment of all.

The mildly-threatening comments continued as March approached so that, by the time Mr. Rilling actually arrived, we expected him to be seven feet tall, carry a javelin for a baton and breathe fire from his nostrils every time he said Bach's name. Even those of us who felt completely ready for "Bach-week" still had some apprehensions about our ability to keep up. As campus emptied for spring break, the gray winter sky of Northwest Indiana made the weight that much heavier.

Our final warning came as we entered the Chapel for our first full rehearsal. Eighteen rows of pews had been removed from the front of the room to make space for an enormous stage of black plastic and silver metal. The construction was forty feet deep, fifty feet wide, three feet high and would soon hold well over a hundred performers. Massive physical weight had been added to the temporal, financial and psychological heaviness we were already experiencing.

In reality, Maestro Rilling is well under six feet in height and he tends to be rather soft-spoken. From the moment he stepped carefully onto that great stage, we were at ease with him and with ourselves. Rather than having to be driven toward attentive precision, we gave our attention freely—joyfully—out of respect and collegiality. Through historical anecdotes and musical details, he shared with us his knowledge and his own passion. We were brought into and carried through a place where the weight of the project—notes, schedules, money—was made light by grace and wisdom. Though our own efforts were indeed weighty, they remained imperfect and at some point during the performance, even Mr. Rilling stepped aside. But his humility did not create a vacuum. The movement of the Spirit through that packed crowd was tangible and the symbolism of beginning the piece at three o'clock on a Sunday afternoon was not lost. All the weight of this highly-anticipated "performance" had been lifted and the Passion, which begins with the heaviness of a call to mourning, ended with the lightness of a lullaby to Jesus resting in the tomb. Looking through the great windows of the Chapel, we saw that snowflakes had begun to fall against a deep purple sky that grew darker and darker. But the grace we were experiencing told us of a far greater dawn.

Josh Messner

Josh Messner has been a member of the Valparaiso University Chorale for five years, and a Student Assistant to the Editor of The Cresset for that long also. Next year, he hopes to be in seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

The Heidelberg Bach

a review essay

William Eifrig

Calvin R. Stapert. *My Only Comfort: Death, Deliverance, and Discipleship in the Music of Bach*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

On Wednesday afternoons in the late 1940's Chicago public schools provided release time from classes for students who traveled from school to their churches for religious instruction preparatory to confirmation. It was especially the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans who went to their St. Johnses or St. Corneliuses, eyeing each other suspiciously as they kept to opposite sides of the street until their ways definitively parted.

On these journeys I often wondered what was the difference between Lutherans and Catholics? After all we both had altars with candles, services with communion, images of saints (though with protestant efficiency we had fewer images and those mostly in windows). But there were some differences that explained the opposite sides of the street stances. Their clergy were celibate; ours were monogamous. At communion, they received bread only; we received in both kinds. They had seven sacraments; we had only two (protestant efficiency again). We practiced congregational governance; they—the real horror—suffered under the tyranny of the Vatican. But it was in the realms of music that I found what seemed to be the decisive difference. Our congregations sang louder than theirs and *we had Bach!*

Now Bach, there was a name to command respect. (Who knew even the name Palestrina?) Bach was recognized as a great—some even said the greatest—musician. Serious musicians learned Bach the way serious athletes worked out at the gym. The Chicago Symphony played Bach. Bach was a cultural treasure of the western world. And he belonged to us! Having Bach as our own may have marked a difference, but it did not solve the identity problem, for Lutherans seemed to talk more about Bach than they listened to his music. Bach, it appeared, was for professional performances in the serious concert world. Oh, yes, we sang some of his chorales in church, and our more ambitious organists had an occasional shy at some of the simpler chorale preludes or preludes and fugues. But we didn't include Bach cantatas in our church life and Bach's *Passions* would have seemed to us too popish somehow. Sermons might mention the Leipzig cantor as a model of Christian (read "Lutheran") faithfulness, but Lutheran church musicians in those days who attempted more than an occasional chorale, something like *Wir folgen dir gleichfalls mit eiligen Schritten*, were usually put on short reins by pastor and congregation.

So what was this schizophrenia: Bach was indeed the great Lutheran musician but his music was not for the likes of us? It has to be admitted that Lutheran churches were not musically capable of most of Bach's choral music, but even Lutheran college choirs did little more than nod to Bach at the beginnings of their concert tour programs. If they had a go at the more difficult music it was always the motets, never the cantatas. The passions? Forget it. And the great *Mass in B minor* was for the choirs of state universities or expensive private schools who could afford such luxuries as high art music. In my musical education at Valpo I learned that Bach was a staunch fighter for orthodoxy over eighteenth century pietism. But again, it was the music to which Bach set biblical texts on which we focused our attention. The heavily pious texts of the cantata arias and those of the passions were something of an embarrassment. Rarely did a student voice major include a Bach aria in a recital program.

To this riddle—If Bach is so Lutheran, why don't Lutherans feel close to him?—Calvin Stapert provides something of an answer. In his introduction to *My Only Hope and Comfort*, he distinguishes between the "canonic Bach" and the "essential Bach." The Bach of the musical canon taught and performed by our secular institutions is Bach for instruments, not voices. But in Bach's biog-

raphy the vocal music is most central to his output, the cantatas and the passions are the “essential Bach,” no matter how infrequently performed, even by Lutherans. Stapert acknowledges that he has adopted the term “essential Bach” from Richard Taruskin, who only recently has challenged the musical world to take Bach as he is rather than confine him to an aesthetic more conformable to modern tastes. Those aria texts—unabashedly awash in intimate emotions and nearly violent in their intensity—are the genuine expressions of Bach’s religious experience. Why do we try to avoid them? Stapert doesn’t go as far as I am about to go, but I do not think he will disagree with me. Bach lived his life in European culture before it was changed radically by the movement of thought and invention called, even then, The Enlightenment. *Die Aufklärung* rationalized and secularized everything, even religious vocabulary. Previous expressions of religious experience became merely cultural artifacts to be cherished for their general uplift of the human spirit and historical significance. The result was that Lutherans of northern Europe came to recognize themselves as citizens of a political unit, the established church, not as individual souls shaken by their experience of God. Enlightenment secularization, thus, removed the musical expressions of Bach from worship and placed them in concert halls instead. The cantatas, not as “great” as the *Passions* and the *Mass* and therefore of less interest to those concert halls, were all but forgotten. Later, Lutheran theology of the post-Enlightenment emphasized first, the ethical advantages of religion and later, biblical scholarship. Eighteenth century theology was an embarrassment. Our failure to embrace the essential Bach is due in no small measure to the Enlightenment and its after-effects.

In more recent times a theologian with unassailable credentials has been brave enough to take up the essential Bach and the matter of his theological foundations. Stapert frequently cites Jaroslav Pelikan’s *Bach Among the Theologians* (1986). If Pelikan’s book is unusual in the world of theological scholarship, performances of the cantatas within a worship context have seemed equally odd. Richard Westenburg in New York and Paul Boumann in River Forest were exceptional in bringing this music regularly to worshipping congregations. But even these exceptional endeavors presented Bach more as a cultural than a devotional experience. With *My Only Hope and Comfort*, Calvin Stapert, like Pelikan, turns to Bach the believer and dares to confess the role Bach’s music has played in the development of his own religious life and in the living out of his Calvinist faith. He dares this, confident that others share an experience like his of finding Bach a helpful guide in the religious life. I for one am convinced by his book and am grateful to him for establishing grounds upon which Bach’s contribution to faith-filled lives can be examined and understood more profoundly than previous scholarship has been able to account for.

This book draws on published scholarship old and new; Stapert, a professor of music and chair of the music department at Calvin College, makes no claims in this book to original musicological work. He is, nonetheless, an impeccable scholar as well as a sensitive musician. These are the skills he brings to this study with remarkable results. It is unfortunate, therefore, that the publication date of Stapert’s book preceded the most recent summary of current Bach scholarship, Christoph Wolff’s *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician* (Norton 2000). Should Eerdmans publish a second edition—an outcome devoutly to be hoped for—Stapert can be expected to incorporate Wolff’s information. (I wish also that Tom Rossin’s dissertation work with the Calov Bible, Bach’s personally annotated copy now at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, were as widely known as the Robin Leaver studies.)

What Stapert’s book does that others have not attempted is to show how Bach’s vocal music explicates and embodies personal beliefs with which today’s Christian can resonate. Stapert is not here concerned as much with orthodoxy as with personal piety. He avoids the merely testimonial by anchoring close study of musical details and textual meanings in the structure of the Heidelberg Catechism of the Reformed Church. At first encounter with Stapert’s book I was taken aback mightily by this conjunction of Bach and Calvinist thought, but I have become convinced by Stapert’s reasoning:

I wanted to write a small book that would serve as an introductory guide to Bach’s text-related works, especially for listeners who would like to use them devotionally. I wanted to discuss specific works rather than make generalizations about the works as a whole, and I wanted to select and orga-

nize those works according to some theological basis. The Heidelberg Catechism is the theological compendium I know best. It was the basis for my theological instruction as a boy, and I have heard it preached all my life. But over the years I have also spent a good amount of time listening to Bach's musical "sermons." . . . The preaching I heard in the Calvinist churches I attended and the music of Bach I listened to at home still seem to me to be very much in harmony.

Upon the Catechism's structure Stapert places selected works or parts of larger works that "preach" Bach's beliefs about death, deliverance, and discipleship. He provides for each selection not only a quotation from the Catechism but also the original German texts with English translations that overcome the conflicts between German and English word order by a clever use of underlining. For cantata texts Stapert also provides the biblical readings appointed for the Sunday worship at which the cantata was to be sung. Before he begins studying specific pieces, Stapert gives the reader, whether experienced listener or novice, an extended glossary or vocabulary of musical forms, techniques, and conventions. This fifty-page introduction is also a quick review of background ideas about Bach, his music and thought, in general. Stapert's selections from among the text-related works are apt and adroit. He wisely gives us entry into groups of pieces that form an entire musical work or at least a reasonably large part of an even bigger work: the whole of Cantatas 4 and 140, for example, and the "Gloria" and the "Sanctus" of the *Mass*. Three chorale-based organ works are included to show the seamless continuity between music in which the texts are voiced and those in which the reference presupposes the listener's recognition of the text sounding non-verbally.

Most text/music relations that Stapert calls to our attention are indisputable, but he also suggests relationships that he has found in his personal experience of the music. Still other text/music relations discovered by some scholar/listeners are noted, even when Stapert remains somewhat skeptical. In short, Stapert is never doctrinaire but is always respectful of his reader/fellow-listener's apprehension of Bach's musical communication. Years of experience with the skills of undergraduate teaching stand behind every word in this book.

What might I expect of my Lutheran musical scholar colleagues? Would a sort of Stapert spin-off be possible: Bach according to Luther's *Catechism*? The compendium of organ music which Bach entitled *Klavierübung III* and subtitled *Various Preludes on the Catechism and Other Hymns* arranges those "Catechism hymns" exactly after the Six Chief Parts of the Lutheran catechism: Ten Commandments, Creed, Lord's Prayer, Office of the Keys, Baptism, and Lord's Supper. For each of the parts there are two organ preludes based on appropriate chorale tunes, one using the pedal keyboard, the other for hands alone—the "Large" and "Small" Catechisms! How else might the Lutheran catechism shine its light on Bach's music?

Probably, however, Lutheran devotional use of Bach's text related music will most often locate itself in the liturgical worship context for which the music was created. (Notice that Stapert testifies that he heard Bach at home, not in the Reformed church service.) But how to avoid mere historical reproductions of a cultural artifact ending up, again, with a secularized meaning? The cantata vespers form is one way of avoiding the dilemma. And there always remains hearing and studying Bach's text-related music on recordings in the privacy of one's home, committing oneself to a disciplined reading of the texts heard in Bach's day with the music, the Epistle and Gospel and the Ordinary, thus in some sense recapitulating the worship context of the original performances of the music. (I myself will draw the line at recreating a sermon lasting one and a half hours as a part of this experience!) Such private devotion happily may draw upon Stapert's book for the textual contexts. And perhaps this returning to his book from a Lutheran perspective is evidence that the Heidelberg Catechism has given Stapert a foundation for his reflections on Bach's music that is solid enough to support visitors from other religious traditions. I would call attention to Stapert's words about the Heidelberg Catechism: "[it is] the theological compendium I know best," and encourage my reader to seek out his own best known theological compendium. Do the compendium and Bach's musical explication of texts fit each other with new and personally meaningful insights? In this way one may experience Bach's music not merely as cultural artifact nor Bach only as traditional hero, but as the composer of music for private and public devotion. Lutherans—and Roman Catholics too—can rejoice that a Calvin has shown us the way! ❖

*William Eifrig taught
in and chaired the
Department of Music
at Valpo for many
years. His present
chair in retirement
is in Sonoita,
Arizona.*

From the Chapel

how good, Lord, to be here!

David G. Truemper

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

We're booth-makers, you know. Babbling like Peter, you know. Talking out of our heads, you know. Not knowing what we're saying. No matter the Christmas lesson of the incarnation, that God comes deep into our flesh to work out the mystery of our salvation. No matter the Good Friday lesson of the crucifixion, that God works out the mystery of salvation in the agony of deepest love there on Golgotha. No matter the vivid smudge-marks of Ash Wednesday, dark reminders of the words, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you will return." No matter. We know better. We know that if God were really to come among us, there'd be all kinds of razzle-dazzle. Why, God would be so full of God-ness that it couldn't be kept inside; it would ooze out here, burst out there—in healings and miracles and revived corpses and—and you'd just know it was God in our midst, and you'd just know we were somehow transcending our grubby and fleshly and finite humanness. Peter speaks for all of us, drunk with the glimpse of miracle: "Let's build a shrine. Let's hold the miraculous!"

They streamed, by the thousands, to the Yugoslav town of Medjugorje, to catch a glimpse of the claim of the vision, for a report from the young persons who had these repeated visions of the Blessed Virgin and auditions of her advice, her revelations, to them and to their hearers. U.S. media were fascinated, mostly because folks seek to have their lives transformed by contact with what they hold to be the holy, the transcendent, the divine.

There was that weeping icon in the suburban Chicago parish. And the apparition of Mary on a water tank on the Texas plains. And thunderclaps and lightning bolts and swoons for being healed! Always, there is the attraction, the thronging, the yearning, the hoping for something more than is usually there, for something that might be so grandly much more than is usually there that it will transform what is usually there—maybe even for the rest of one's life.

And then there's the whole phenomenon that has come to be called the "new age"—wonderfully promoted by celebrities and pervasively marketed in shops across the land, selling aids for meditation, seminars on channeling, and crystals for. . . well, for whatever it is that crystals are for. The devotees have turned the new age phenomenon into a multi-million dollar industry. For there is in us this longing, this yearning, this hankering after something to transcend the limits of the ordinary.

We are fascinated with the "more," the "beyond," the transfigured. And we show our fascination by considerable personal investment of time and money and energy and risk. And when we find something that promises to give us that "more," that "beyond," we seem ready to move mountains to get a piece of it. We hanker, one theologian wrote, to be saved out of our humanity, not in it; to be saved by a really divine savior, not one locked in our humanity with us. That's why so many people had such problems dealing rationally with the Scorsese film of Nikos Kazantzakis' novel, *The Last Temptation of Christ*. For that novel and film presented an utterly human Jesus—nay, in the best sense of the word, a merely human Jesus.

In that process we not only show that we are incorrigibly religious, but that we look for religious experience to transfer us to some realm or dimension beyond the ordinary, beyond the hum-

*This sermon was
preached in the
Chapel of the
Resurrection
for the
Transfiguration
of our Lord
February 25, 2001.*

It is based on Luke 9.

drum, beyond the life and the body and the community that are a part of our everyday existence. And so we miss the Savior we actually have, the one from God, deep in our humanity. And Peter speaks and acts for us in this story of an Easter appearance: "It is good to be here; let's stay, so we can remain in the presence of this "more," this "beyond." What a way to be transported, to be delivered from the ordinary!

And, each in his own way, Jesus' two conversation partners in the vision had the same longing. Moses: I led this people for forty years, God, and all they've done is grumble and moan because there was more meat in the soup back in Egypt. And now you say I'm impatient? that all I get is a look across the river at the promised land? that you're going to let Joshua take over? And for this I've climbed the mountain? Elijah: I've confessed your name, Lord, every time I said my own, Elijah/My God is Yahweh. Do you know what it's like to have a name like that, Lord? Here I am introducing myself to another person at the party; 'How do you do?' he says. 'My name's Ahab.' 'Hello,' I say. 'my God is Yahweh.' I've worked hard, God, to keep Israel faithful, and nobody listens. And you say you're going to let Elisha take over? For this I've come to the mountain?

Well, each handed on the prophetic leadership work to a successor whose name was a confession that God was indeed in the rescuing business: Joshua/the LORD will save, Elisha/God is savior; yet the work went on; it wasn't finished. God's work of salvation needed more than crossing the Jordan River into the promised land. It needed more than identifying those seven thousand faithful left in Israel.

As Luke tells it, it takes another mountain—and then some! "*The mountain*" he calls it, as if no other mountain could matter. And there God has Moses and Elijah do their pass-it-on routines again. Halos and all, they talk with Jesus (the LORD will save!) about the departure, the exodus that he is about to accomplish (fulfill, really) in Jerusalem. So Jesus plays Joshua to Moses, plays Elisha to Elijah. For God's work of salvation would go all the way, would be fulfilled by this one, by this one of whom the voice from the cloud says, "My son, my chosen one." Salvation will be fulfilled, all the way—all the way to the cross and death and hell. And that will take us to another mountain, Skull Hill, and a Friday that only a Redeeming God could call Good.

In Luke's version of the good news, it is just two paragraphs earlier that he has Jesus saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected, and be killed." That saying is what Moses and Elijah come to ratify. The exodus that will really accomplish salvation is the truth of a divine plan that has the chosen one die, go all the way to to death—just like every other one of God's daughters and sons.

So the vision isn't the big deal; it's the *clue* about what the big deal is. The vision doesn't last. The voice evaporates with the cloud from which it came. The ancient worthies disappear. The tents do not get pitched. And Jesus and the three now wiser men come down from the mountain. Back to the valley. Back to the shadow. Back to the death. Back to what in the next paragraph is another son, another only child—who is possessed by an evil spirit that the disciples cannot exorcise. Jesus frees the boy, and when all are amazed at the majesty of God's salvation, Jesus reminds them: "Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of man is to be delivered into the hands of folks who will kill him." Not by power. Not by might. But by surrender and submission and dying. So is the ultimate exodus accomplished—not by escape from humanity, but by utter humanness, by merely human dying. In Luke's unique way of telling the story, Jesus and the followers head on a journey to Jerusalem, a journey on which all the healings, all the teachings, all the forgivings, are a part of the completion of the exodus.

That is the great good news that can accompany us in the valley of the shadow of death that is our Lent. God will accomplish the divine work of salvation, in and by and for our merest of humanity. God will be patient even with our impatience; God will bear, in Jesus, the ordinariness that we keep wanting escape from. When like the three we are heavy with sleep, heavy with our own notions of what a worthy salvation would be, God aims to get through to us, to unhook us from our phony fascinations and to hook us back into the cross of the Son, the Chosen One. For on that cross he died a fully human death; and the gospel is that in that dying he did in death, died death to death,

*Professor Truempfer
chairs the Department
of Theology at
Valparaiso University.
He is Director of the
Institute for Liturgical
Studies and author of
numerous presenta-
tions on Lutheran
confessional theology
and the meaning of
the Christ.*

and so offers us both a place in God's family and hope in our own valley of the shadow. The Gospel is that for us who by baptism have a share in Jesus' death and resurrection, the last word has already been spoken from the cloud: you, too, are my beloved, my chosen, my own dear one.

So we bid farewell today to Alleluia. Wednesday we begin Lent, begin it with the baptismal cross marked on our forehead, for a few hours more visible than when we see it only by faith. An ashen cross, so we can remember that it is our frail and mortal humanity that is the object of God's intense desire to save. "You are dust, and to dust you shall return." And only there, as dust-in-dust, shall you be saved. Forty days to meditate on our share in that exodus that Jesus accomplished at Jerusalem, forty days to get ready for the celebration of the center of our faith, forty days of repentance and discipline and reflection on the basic elements of the faith, forty days of being in the place once again of the catechumens to learn afresh the mystery of the faith: that God saves us in our ordinary humanness, in our mere everydayness, here where we live and work and worry and toil, here where we wrestle daily with our mortality, where we face up to our dying—and seek to do so as Christ's faithful ones.

As you receive the Lord's body and blood today, receive it as your share in that exodus/departure he accomplished in Jerusalem. And rejoice that God is so overwhelmingly rich in grace that God does not put us off for our blindness nor abandon us for our impatience with the human ordinariness that is his good creation, but welcomes us, *even us*, at the Table of the Lord, and deigns to offer us along with Christ, as sharers in his sacrifice.

Armed with that promise and that faith, we come down from the mountains where we would escape from the ordinariness of our life. We come down from the mountains our self-importance builds. We come down from the mountains from which we seek some transfiguring glimpse into a realm beyond the one into which God has placed us. For a time, we bury our "Alleluia!" For a time, we abandon our "Glory to God in the highest!" For a time, we concentrate on the valley. We concentrate on the shadow. We concentrate on the dying. We study repentance, and submission, and lowliness, and service. We study that wondrous exodus that Jesus accomplished—so that we may learn again our share in it, our share in his dying, and know that it is our death he died, that we might have our life in all its fullness in him.

What gets transformed, transfigured, then, is not that we escape from our humanity. It is that our humanity is now made really *mere* again, is made utterly human again. Thank God, for that is the place of God's salvation. There, thanks to the Son, the Chosen One, we can really live!

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠

wrestling Bach's angel

D.S. Martin

Today's musicians and artists of faith go through struggles similar to those once faced by Bach: trying to come to terms with the calling God had placed on his life. For every artist who is a Christian—whether a writer, a painter, or a musician—there is a tightrope to walk, a demon or angel to wrestle, a burden to bear. The question each must ask is: How am I to best serve God through the talents given to me? The issue is as diverse as the people who face it; some of the various nuances can be suggested through wording the question in various ways: Do I see myself more as an artistic Christian, or as a Christian artist? Am I more an artist whose work is informed by faith, or a man or woman of faith who expresses that through art? Is my audience primarily the church, or the world? Should my art be limited to overtly Christian material, or is my artistic calling within the Kingdom open to broader themes? Is it primarily through the content of my work that I am seeking to glorify God, or mainly through engaging in the creative process? In what way should my work differ from that of a nonbeliever? These personal questions do not always have simple answers, and they often will not remain content for long with whatever answers we give them.

Three hundred years ago J.S. Bach came up with his personal answer to this dilemma: he would give his life to God through church music. Because he was living during the Enlightenment, when the cultural elite had little respect for religion, his decision amounted to career suicide. He also received little encouragement from within the church. For one, the variations he incorporated into his organ playing confused the congregation as they tried to sing hymns. Another group, the Pietists, with whom he felt

closely aligned theologically, believed in simplicity in their style of worship. When he was able to attain suitable employment as a musician, it often limited the composing he could do. As a serious artist, who wanted to submit to God, he certainly struggled with a need for creative autonomy.

Music has usually been seen by the church as the least suspect of art forms because of its obvious usefulness for worship. In contrast, poetry, since it refuses to be didactic and even welcomes multiple interpretations, becomes too dangerous. Painting, once you move beyond the obvious depictions of biblical scenes, leaves too much to the eye of the beholder and similarly presents ambiguous messages unless accompanied by an explanatory text crossing the sky. Dance might possibly be valuable in worship, although it is so very physical, in danger of being sexual, and is, again, open to misinterpretation. Music's very usefulness, however, also presents the tension between utilitarian and artistic sensibilities. Were Bach's flourishes detrimental to the worship experience? Is an entertaining worship team a distraction or benefit to worship? Today's church tensions between praise choruses and the hymn book are mild compared with those of the past.

The theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer would certainly shudder at the thought of today's professional-sounding worship teams. He wrote in *Life Together*:

Because it is bound wholly to the Word, the singing of the congregation. . . is essentially singing in unison. . . The purity of unison singing, unaffected by alien motives of musical techniques, the clarity, unspoiled by the attempt to give musical art an autonomy of its own apart from the words. . . is the essence of all congrega-

D.S. Martin has written about music for Christianity & The Arts, Mars Hill Review, and The Cresset. He digs the roots and branches of contemporary music, particularly from a Christian perspective. He can be reached at ds-martin@yahoo.com

tional singing. . . It becomes a question of a congregation's power of spiritual discernment whether it adopts proper unison singing.

Of course, I doubt there are many who would want to embrace this approach to church singing from the "Bohemian Brethren," but the statement does demonstrate how easily we can convince ourselves that our favourite way of worshipping through music is God's preference too; how easily, also, we might spiritualize the criticism we direct toward the musicians. I've been in services where instrumentation, but not harmony, was excluded. Unless there were a few talented voices to protect the melody and blend the dissonance, the din could at best be generously referred to as "a joyful noise." Bonhoeffer was not opposed to the arts, was even a musician and poet himself, but had definite views on music in worship. Parallel opinions in Bach's time were roadblocks to his following the course he felt God had chosen for him. It would be no stretch to say that the limiting attitude toward the arts within today's church also impedes Kingdom artists.

Within Christian communities the perceived worth of an artist's work has traditionally been measured by its effectiveness for evangelism, teaching, or worship. This view was effectively challenged by H.R. Rookmaaker in *Art Needs No Justification*, which he was working on at the time of his death in 1977. Rookmaaker said, ". . .to ask the artist to be an evangelist points to a total misunderstanding of the meaning of art, and, for that matter, of other human activities." He saw the aim of life as—not evangelism, but—seeking the Kingdom of God. Therefore, he concludes, the Brandenburg Concertos are as Christian as the *St. Matthew Passion*.

The church accepts this conclusion as long as music is without words and painting without figurative reality. When a singer sings comprehensible words, or a painter paints a perceivable image, there is clearly a subject. When that subject is merely human, with no particularly Christian message, is the art still Christian? For the believing novelist, songwriter, or playwright, what is appropriate content for a story? Must the writer include many references to God? Must he or she avoid depictions of sexual impurity or violence? Is writing a fictional story even appro-

priate for a Christian who should always speak the truth? These questions propose unacceptable standards, for they would force us to strike many stories from the canon of scripture: God is not mentioned in the book of Esther, the Old Testament would be significantly trimmed by our censors for sex and violence, and Jesus' parables would have to be cut for being fictional. Whether real or fictitious, the life most interesting to read about is rarely the life anyone would choose to lead. Stories need conflict, and conflict isn't what most of us want in our lives—conflict often being a result of sin. When we read, for example, of Jacob conning his brother into selling his birthright, stealing Esau's blessing, or manipulating Laban's flocks for his own benefit, we might expect a note of condemnation or judgment. Instead God proclaims blessing. Our own fallenness may be the subject of our artwork at one time, God's redemptive work at another.

A more appropriate standard for Christian artists—although much more difficult to measure—would be whether the story (painting, song, film, dance. . .) encourages, or at the very least does not contradict, a Christian world view. This should be true even if the work is merely designed to entertain. I do not mean our art should teach a Christian world view, but the artistic output of a Christian who truly is seeking to glorify God, when viewed as a whole, will show a Christian world view to be a reasonable—perhaps even as the only reasonable—option. The decision is for every individual artist to make (perhaps through a specific calling of God) whether they will write, paint, or perform for an audience of fellow-believers (including for outreach), or for the world in general.

All this is not to say that true artists should avoid overtly Christian themes. Because artists seek to write (paint, sing. . .) about significant subjects, and since faith is of most significance to believers, faith inevitably will be a central theme in the work of Christians. Overtly Christian music (film, poetry. . .), however, must also stand up to the same tough scrutiny that secular music must, in order to be considered of artistic merit and integrity. I believe that Christians who are artists demonstrate the integrity of our God, through the integrity of our art—and unfortunately we undermine the image of His Kingdom through compromise. Two common errors Christian song

writers in particular fall into are preaching and sentimentality. Love songs that could just as easily be sung to a girl friend addressed instead to Jesus fall far short of the depth and range of emotion expressed in the Psalms, for instance. David and his fellow psalmists cry out to God when the world doesn't make sense; they cry for justice, for protection, for blessing; they cry out in thankfulness and praise.

Mahalia Jackson knew the difference between true songs of faith and sentimentality. Like Bach, she dedicated herself to the music of the church. She even refused to sing at night clubs or other non-church functions that offered her work as a singer. She had to support her singing, through the years, by working as a maid, a laundress, a packer, a hairdresser, and a florist. Restricting herself to gospel music, however, did not restrict the eventual size of her audience. She sang at JFK's inauguration and for 200,000 people assembled for the 1963 Freedom March on Washington.

A very different success story is that of Al Perkins, a studio musician (guitar, dobro and pedal steel) who in the early '70s was a member of The Flying Burrito Brothers and Manassas (with Stephen Stills) and has played with Gram Parsons, James Taylor, The Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, Garth Brooks, and Emmylou Harris. By the mid-'70s he had produced many gospel albums for artists such as Terry Talbot, Daniel Amos, and The Pat Terry Group, sometimes calling on top secular players to fill the ranks. In 1978 he was the driving force behind the British-invasion style band Ark, and in 1985 recorded with Ever Call Ready, a bluegrass gospel outfit he led which included former-Eagle Bernie Leadon and former-Byrd Chris Hillman. In the last few years he's recorded with artists such as Buddy Miller and Sixpence None The Richer.

Musicians make contrastable decisions that can still be honoring God. On the one hand, consider Al Green who pushed his R&B stardom onto the backburner to perform gospel music and become the pastor of a Memphis church. On the other hand, consider Leslie Phillips, who outgrew the artistic limitations of contemporary Christian music to remake herself (with the help of her husband, T-Bone Burnett) as Sam Phillips, an enigmatic, poetic rocker with spiritual depth and hip irony. Or consider (turning in a completely different direction) the time I heard The Canadian

Brass performing Bach's beautiful fugues (not his "sacred" music) for the crowd at Toronto's Sky Dome as part of a Billy Graham Mission. There seems to be more than one right answer. Sometimes we best honor God by doing what we do with artistic integrity; other times we're called to make a uniquely Christian statement.

Where is the place for the musician who isn't called exclusively to gospel music, but who still wants to sing about spiritual things? Before the musical boom of the '60s, performers could lead an "ambidextrous" existence, recording gospel songs for one release and totally secular ones for another. The talented prewar bluesman Blind Willie McTell, when not singing gospel, chronicled the gritty side of Atlanta's streets, often reflecting on the tragedy of wasted life. It is still common on the bluegrass circuit—following the tradition of Bill Monroe, The Stanley Brothers, and other founding fathers—to include a gospel number on an album or at the close of an evening's performance. Even Elvis recorded several gospel albums.

When the major record companies increased their marketing of the performer's image to the point where it exceeded the importance of the music—especially as the financial stakes grew—this flexibility slipped away. There's something thrilling about the safely-packaged danger of rock'n'roll, and the industry has learned how to exploit this to the max.

This is the environment which led to the birth of contemporary Christian music in the late '60s and early '70s. While labels such as Maranatha Music focussed primarily on worship music, other labels emerged, at various times, which gave a place for clearly Christian, but not exclusively gospel, expressions. In the late '70s, Solid Rock Records was home to some of the best (beginning with Larry Norman and Randy Stonehill). In the '80s Exit Records from Sacramento (Charlie Peacock, The 77s, Steve Scott) earned secular distribution with Island Records for some of their fine artists, and A&M's What Records, like a flower in the arctic summer, had a brief but brilliant blossoming (Dave Perkins, Ideola, Tonio K.). In today's pluralistic society, and with the wide range of viable independent labels with decent distribution, some Christian artists find a small secular label an appropriate place. Pierce Pettis has settled at the excellent

Nashville label Compass Records (also home to Colin Linden and Vigilantes of Love); Buddy and Julie Miller both release their music through High Tone Records. There are also exciting labels dedicated specifically to bringing the expressions of believers to a wider world, such as Silent Planet Records and Squint Entertainment. Creative distribution arrangements also abound between gospel labels and the entertainment conglomerates, but only occasionally does it mean that the unchurched are listening. Perhaps if we become less concerned with drawing lines between the secular and the sacred in our art, those outside our own community will have a chance to experience our music or literature.

It is difficult, at best, to know an artist's intentions. Even the purest expressions of gospel music can be done for marketing purposes. When a performer who's made professions of faith sings a song of human love, she may be merely viewing what she's doing as her job, in the same way that an architect may work on an office building rather than a church. Sometimes unbelieving architects even build churches. As people of faith, we may appreciate the work of both, and both may result in God being glorified. The closer we look at the issue, the more complex it grows. It is part of the task and the role of the

individual artist to work out his or her own calling, perhaps with fear and trembling. We, as receivers, are only responsible for our responses.

Perhaps if Bach had been unhindered in his pursuit of creating church music, he would never have turned to writing the great instrumental masterpieces that kept his music alive during times when his church music was unknown. If it hadn't been for his instrumental work, we might not know Bach today. I think of some of my favourite Bach recordings—Glenn Gould playing the *Goldberg Variations*, Yo-Yo Ma's rendering of the cello suites—and, although they don't speak specifically about spiritual things, they carry a spiritual weight because Bach's work was written for the glory of God; on the last page of each manuscript he indicated this with the letters S.D.G.—*Soli Deo Gloria*. Recording artists today have a similar way of giving credit where credit is due. Pops Staples, for example, on his CD *Father Father*, concludes his list of thanks with "Above all, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ of whom without, I am nothing." Perhaps J.S. Bach's original sense of calling was only the catalyst to lead him toward his greater calling—one much wider than he first envisioned. †

Popular Culture

brows

James Combs

I am listening to Bach as I write this. It is a time, wintry and gloomy, for musing. But I am finally convinced I am weird. While everyone else is thinking about terror and security and revenge and unity and war, I have been thinking about brows. This may seem a shocking dereliction of duty lacking the pietistic zeal and patriotic resolve expected of us by the authorities, and it no doubt should be reported to the vigilant forces of the Attorney General's expanding army of domestic guardians alert to un-American backsliders. If hauled before a secret military tribunal, I could only say in my defense that I thought brows the very thing to think about, since it was a failure of brows that has brought us to the sorry pass of an endless and bottomless war against something called "terrorism" and a diminution of civil liberties by those who claim to be defending "freedom." Given my subversive skepticism about the efficacy of the former and the wisdom of the latter, I found myself unable to maintain a high state of self-righteousness and instead kept thinking of the furrowed brow of a president in earnest (if not deep) thought, the smooth brows of retired generals in full chart-and-pointer mode on television, and the arched brows of news celebrities anxious to please the powers that be and to monger the latest rumor.

It was not particularly much-needed irreverence that prompted my thoughts on brows, but rather reading a book by Joan Shelley Rubin entitled *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*. It is a well-done tale of the selling of respectable and uplifting culture in the century past: of book clubs, reading groups, book review sections in newspapers, bestseller lists, of "great books" series and programs, of multi-volume "stories" of mankind, science, philosophy, and civilization,

and of literary radio programs (Oldtimers: remember "Information, Please!") The metaphor of "brow" for the level of intellect or interest is an old one: "highbrow" referred to people who cultivated or affected an association with refined forms of expression—"longhair" classical music, "lit-rah-tur" and "the ahts," the "theatuh," and so on, much parodied in the movies as forms of snobbery and affectation (recall the Marx Brothers in *Night at the Opera*). Attacks on high culture are a populist tradition, useful in deflating pretense and the use of culture as an elite property, but baneful as a project of promoting know-nothingism, as with the Gingrich Congress. Parochial politicians or ministers and local influentials display their ignorance in far too many ways to add shameful attacks on books they never read or plays they never attend.

Such conflicts between the high reaches of expression and the ignorant reaches of the fearful are apparently perpetual and predictable. But since highbrow culture has establishment allies and institutional power, it usually wins, even down to books in local libraries. I was once on a local library board and learned you had some powerful help—state library associations, civil liberties groups, and so on—to fend off occasional objections to book X, but less help against local ignoramuses who just plain disliked the idea of libraries and learning. What was more interesting was how much community support there was for what is called "middlebrow" culture. This appeared to be the local social stratum who valued culture, or at least the presence of culture, as a civic improvement. Many people were proud of the county library, and older folks could no doubt recall when there was no library and the widespread illiteracy among their ances-

*Whatever the culture
he's observing, Jim
Combs has written
about it for The
Cresset for more than
twenty years.
He is the author of a
dozen books on
politics and
popular culture.*

tors. I recall one woman, a maid all her life, who to my astonishment not only knew how to read but read voraciously, mostly popular novels by the bagful. The middlebrow culture of libraries with bestsellers and reference materials and Internet and lectures on hydrangeas now seem an integral part of local life, no matter how lowbrow the surrounding community may be.

But the lowbrow attacks on the widespread and seemingly innocuous middlebrow culture are as naught compared to the highbrow opprobrium it has endured. Intellectuals from Virginia Woolf to Dwight Macdonald condemned middlebrow culture as, variously, insidious, sentimental, corrupting, pernicious, vulgarizing, and, well, middling. Highbrows tend to think that middlebrow culture was motivated by desire for status rather than pure aesthetics, and that many of its practices were phony. In this evaluation they were, as Rubin shows, partially correct. The Book-of-the-Month Club, for instance, settled into “safe” selections by their highbrow committee. Given an imprimatur by cultural authorities, one could read an agreeable but not particularly challenging novel each month and feel cultured, or at least display culture. Similarly, the various “Great Books” sets one could buy allowed you to have cultural power on your living room bookshelf, leatherbound and often unread, to let it be known you could access learning at a moment’s notice. (There is an oft-printed picture of Mortimer J. Adler and his graduate students at the University of Chicago standing over the files of cards that linked the knowledge of their Great Books together, after great toil, into a guiding “Syntopicon;” but critics have wondered not only how a book makes a canonical list like this—the choices again are fairly safe ones—but also ideas: why, for example, is war a great idea, but not peace?) I have known several people who would take it upon themselves to wade through Will and Ariel Durant’s multi-volume *Story of Civilization*, as if such an enterprise were a kind of vaccine of cultural knowledge. You could imagine yourself at gatherings confidently speaking of Michelangelo.

More recently, the popular phantasm of instant culture has taken new but familiar forms. Radio programs such as “Information, Please!” have been superseded by Oprah’s book shows, with familiar touches: celebrity writers sharing

their “vision” or whatever, accessible books, an afternoon glimpse at art in action. Various educational programs have descended down the evolutionary chain, most notably “cultural literacy” programs, which purport not only the necessity of lists of books but also lists of ideas, a Syntopicon which includes Elvis. Such venues and gestures to lowbrow culture suggest even further distance from the improving purposes of middlebrow projects of old, but retain the closeness to the muted goal of selling culture at a profit. The highbrows of old objected not so much to the spread of culture as they did to the manufacture of cut-rate culture. The great fear was that art would reside on coffeetables, literature in handsome and untouched sets, and music in public radio stations with “real toe-tapper” formats. Culture would become just another object of consumption, like franchise foods devoid of taste or nutrients. I recently received in the mail a “special introductory offer” from a “teaching company” offering me “a front-row seat in the world’s best classrooms!” They’re not kidding: one can buy the tapes of no less than John Searle on “Philosophy of Mind” for drive-time-car cassette erudition, answering our burning questions about mind (“It is a joy to have them explained and explored with so capable a guide”). The “great courses” are plugged by satisfied customers, and by reviewers (*Harvard Magazine*: “Pure intellectual stimulation that can be popped into the VCR or cassette deck anytime”). Strong doses of what Rubin calls “self-culture”—the urge for self-improvement and sinless enjoyment of higher pleasures—can still be satisfied in new venues of cultural acquisition. And with teaching companies offering a “lifetime guarantee of your satisfaction,” you can acquire learning on the cheap without the bother and expense you would encounter at America’s best universities. One can elevate one’s brow whilst caught in traffic or doing the dishes.

Middlebrow styles and pretensions may be found in the warp and woof of American life, but much of what is done is likely less harmful than highbrows, with their own pretensions, allege. The problem with middlebrowistics is not so much pathetic attempts at grasping philosophy of mind through wham-bam tape courses or seeking “what to read” through the good

offices of radio or TV cultural authorities. Rather it becomes suspect when it involves matters of power, when expressions of opinion or preference mask the interests of the mighty rather than honest appraisal and critical evaluation independent of self-aggrandizement. Surely no one in the realm of political commentary is more adept at this art than George F. Will. Will's columns are masterpieces of middlebrow rhetoric that sounds learned, reasoned, and independent, replete with pithy aphorisms and references to sound academic opinion. The aphorisms are a middlebrow ploy to impress the reader with Will Durant-ian learning, and the academic references invariably are drawn from the officious opinions of rightwing think tank mags. The thrust of the argument is in the slightly overblown style that smacks of academia but displays enough good sense to give us the impression the argument stands regardless of who benefits. But a hard look at Will's opinions reveals his not-so-hidden agenda: the State is only safe in the hands of the rightwing of the Republican Party, Clinton was a disaster while Bush is the colossus which bestrides the world, policy that benefits the rich is wise and prudent, and the world should welcome the United States bombing and exploiting it. Middlebrow rhetorical style is at its worst when suited to curry favor or further oneself—we might call it Affirmative Thought—so we may expect Will and those after him to tailor their wisdom in order to suck up to who is Boss.

It is no secret, nor accident, that middlebrow culture pervades social fields such as politics, education, and the popular arts. Highbrows think it pretentious and unauthentic; lowbrows think it phony but usually defer to it. A lowbrow parent usually acquiesces in the middlebrow strictures on education; he and she may not understand "standards of learning" testing that effectively stigmatizes poor children and perpetuates the class system, but when it is explained to them in scholastic mumbo-jumbo, they conclude it is fair and wise since they can't possibly comprehend it. Similarly, when politicians explain that during a recession, the major problem is not unemployment, loss of health insurance, or limits on public assistance, but rather the disgraceful fact that the rich just don't have enough money, this must be couched in the

murkiest of Greenspanian econorhetoric. Middlebrow cultures depend much for their perpetuation on styles of expression which justify inequities or imbecilities in terms of "policy" or similar bureaucratic languages resplendent with euphemistic arabesques.

Those who became suspicious of middlebrow culture scorned it for its lack of purity, which was likely misguided; but they were not wrong to think it opportunistic and even synchophantic. The book reviewers who fawned over a book with blurby effusion in order to hype its sales were essentially propagandists. Nowadays it is easy to see the same loss of critical function in television, and much print, news. Post-traumatic cheerleading syndrome has set in, and newspeople schooled in the ethos of objectivity and analysis have become mere mouthpieces for the Pentagon and shills for the White House. If, as we suspect, civil liberties will now be permanently curtailed and reviled, we only have to point to the stirring leadership of the news media, which have become mere ancillary functionaries of the Ministry of Propaganda. Enduring freedom will likely not be able to withstand many more operations called Enduring Freedoms.

Historians of the future will debate what was happening in the early twenty-first century, but one hypothesis worth considering is simply that middlebrow culture is being superseded by lowbrow culture. Paul Fussell pointed to this in his book *Class*, wherein he envisioned the expanse of "prole drift," an oddly popular process in a system becoming less and less democratic. This process may be more extensive than he thought. For if stability and the status quo are maintained through the provision of cheap goods and undemanding entertainment—the bread and circuses of our age—then this means prole drift towards lowbrow satisfactions will expand into other areas. The redivision of the world into black and white, innocence and guilt, good and evil will guide State policy and limit responses to Third World uprisings to revenge and repression. This should not surprise us, since in many ways the United States is becoming a Third World country, with vast wealth and privilege held by those in the sequestered McMansions, the drift of money upward and out of the country, the collapse of corrupt wildcat corporations such as Enron, rule by a clubby or related elite, and the disappear-

ance of public services and benefits; in response, we may expect the rise of political peronistas, who will take lowbrow politics to its logical consequence. Yes, we might well look to Argentina for a model of the American future.

For the moment, however, we may well be seeing the meltdown of the middlebrow. But what happens when the Law of Excluded Middle takes effect? In such a new world, for instance, middlebrow churches—the “mainstream”—would be replaced not only by lowbrow Pentecostals, but even more so, by the curious “nondenominational” churches that seem to attract so many people, with their Walmart™ size, feelgood atmosphere, and therapeutic message of sunny hopes. Lowbrow news could even censor the weather report, since the authorities will be anxious to avoid mass anxiety over the obvious and rapid deterioration of the Earth’s environment. Lowbrow politics will complement bomb-’em spectacles with shirts from Sri Lanka, expanding the choice of cereals but diminishing the choice of futures. For in the lowbrow perspective, there is no future, only the present, in which (to use a past image) Oceania is at war with Eurasia, forever, and our lives are constantly improving even if we can’t tell it.

If this sounds dangerously highbrow, it no doubt is. But if middlebrow culture has failed us, it may be too much to ask of lowbrows to revivify critical thought, dangerous inquisitiveness, and aesthetic expressions unapproved of by State functionaries. This would require journalists who relished once again debunking the mighty (Mencken, wouldst that thou were living at this hour!), writers who were not tamed by tenure, daring artists who gave us new images, and philosophers who gave us fresh ideas. It is now said that we are past “the end of history;” perhaps we can at least hope we are at some point soon past the present paralysis and self-absorption, and can find hope in expression, highbrow at its best, that signals and ushers in a new age in which the powers of mind and spirit are ascendant over the powers that count on the dullness of mind and contribute to the defeating of spirit. It is well at such a moment to remember Bach, a fellow of decidedly lowbrow livelihood and middlebrow aspirations who created highbrow music of awesome and immortal power. With the world at war, it is just barely possible to believe that humans, like sheep, could yet spend their time gently grazing. †

CROSSING TO CHEBEAGUE:
DECEMBER IN CASCO BAY

For Anne Porter

Driven for once below deck, I watch
as the snow spins down, squint
at the pines in the distance: the thaw
is a long way off. A little smoke leaks
from the houses. The water fills with snow.
The cabin smells of diesel fuel
and wool. These, then, are the islands
from which you launch your life:
Actual fishermen glancing, thinking *stranger*.
I think of you crossing this water
before school every year,
of your father bringing back groceries
dressed in his big grey coat.
From Japan you send me paper
pale as a luna-moth's wing,
stamps with warblers, a card
with a tiny deer. *All I can read*
are the numbers, you write
from Kashiwa. *I get very tired of using*
only the smallest words: 'Japan
is a good country; Japanese people
are nice.' *There are goats across the street*
that I stop to talk to each morning.
They eat their fill from gardens devoted
to radishes and green tea. The engine heaves
through the water. Which of these islands
is yours? We scrape past houses built
at the edge of a cliff. One road rings
the island. Your whole house smells of books.
The stairs to the attic pull down by a string.
We cut the tree in the evening, talk on your narrow bed.
I sleep near the woodstove, wake when the fire
goes cold. In the morning, sun comes slanting
into an old red chair. I dream you are curled
and reading, there where the windows
face south. *This is our ration*, I tell you, your dark
hair made more dark. *Ration of sunlight, spent*
in a sun-starved place.

Anne Shaw

Books

booklines

Albert Einstein said: "This is what I have to say about Bach's life work: listen, play, love, revere—and keep your mouth shut." He might have added, "...and hold your pen." I understand Einstein's sentiment but I can't always honor it. I have a job that requires that I speak and write about Bach. But there is a deeper reason for breaking silence. The greatest things in life—a sunset over Big Fumee Lake, love, the Gospel—demand both silence and speech. We want to contemplate them silently in thankful wonder and tell others about them. The worst things in life also elicit silence and speech—the silence of dread and the speech of warning. I recall reading that Jesus, Bach and Hitler have had the most words written about them. That makes sense. The best and the worst elicit the most comment.

So where does one begin when faced with the flood of words about Bach? I suggest that any short shelf of books on Bach should include *The New Bach Reader* (Norton, 1998). It begins with a "Portrait in Outline" written by Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, the editors of the original edition (1945). Despite the mountain of research that has accumulated since the first edition, their "portrait" is still the best short introduction to Bach and his music that I know. In twenty-five pages David and Mendel masterfully sketched Bach's background, career, and personality, his heritage and achievement, and his attitude toward the art of music.

The bulk of the book contains documents relating to Bach's life and works and to their reception through the nineteenth century.

Many have said that Bach's life was uninteresting. To be sure there were no scandals or torrid love affairs, but his life was hardly uneventful or devoid of daily struggles and joys—some petty, some profound. *The New Bach Reader* is an ideal place to get a feel for the texture of the life of this "solid citizen" (as David and Mendel characterize him). Dip into it at random. You might find an account of Bach's fight with a bassoon player, a rebuke from his consistory, a touching letter about his wayward son, his evaluation of a new organ, or his quarrel with the rector. If your dipping is toward the end of the book you might find Mozart's exclamation on first hearing a Bach motet ("Now, there is something one can learn from!") or Berlioz's remark about a performance of a Bach concerto by Chopin, Liszt, and Hiller ("It was heart-rending. . .to see three such admirable talents. . .united to reproduce this ridiculous and stupid psalmody"). Next to *The New Bach Reader*, I'd like to find *Oxford Composer Companions: J.S. Bach* (Oxford, 1999), an excellent encyclopedia of names and terms. Do you want to know who Ernst-August was or what is the difference between a passacaglia and a passepied? You can find out here. There are longer articles on topics like "The Art of Fugue," chorale, and number symbolism. But the main value is that it contains short articles on all of the cantatas. Bach's approximately 200 church cantatas make up by far the largest part of his output. They, more than anything else, put us in touch with what Richard Taruskin called the "essential Bach." Before you listen to an unfamiliar cantata, read the *Com-*

panion's short article on that cantata. It will serve as a longer and better program note than you'll find in the CD liner notes. Then, since we're improving upon what CD liners usually offer, turn to Melvin P. Ungers's *Handbook to Bach's Sacred Cantata Texts* (Lanham, MD., 1996) for the Epistle and Gospel lessons for the day, an accurate line-by-line translation, and identification of biblical quotations and allusions.

Of course our short shelf needs a biography. There are plenty to chose from beginning with Philip Spitta's *J.S. Bach*, a work that has been the touchstone of Bach scholarship since the 1870s. It still retains its magisterial status. Of the shorter, older biographies, C.H.H. Parry's is a joy to read. Another short, well-written account is Malcolm Boyd's recent biography which reliably updates the scholarship of the older ones. And now we also have the long-awaited biography by the dean of Bach scholars, Christoph Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician* (New York, 2000). Without denying Wolff's superb achievement or the immense value of this "new Spitta," there is something askew. Bach is portrayed as "the learned musician," something of a musical scientist. No doubt he was, and there is a certain aptness to the parallel that Wolff draws between Bach and Newton, especially when he says that in both there was "a pre-Enlightenment outlook" in their firm belief that their discoveries "ultimately pointed to the operations of God." But that is about as far as Wolff goes in dealing with Bach's faith. Of Bach's belief in the special operations of God through Jesus Christ, or of his dedication to using his art to proclaim them, little is said.

In *The New York Review* (June 15, 2000), Robert Marshall noted the same thing. "Examining Bach's religiosity very closely seems to make Wolff . . . uncomfortable. . . . So he does not "deeply explore Bach's religious views [and] largely ignores [a theological] line of inquiry. . . ." But even when modern scholars like Marshall acknowledge the importance of theology for Bach, they don't seem to "get it" when it comes to the deep reality of that theology in his life. For example, Bach saw death frequently and close up. His father and mother died within a year of each other when he was ten. He outlived his six siblings, his first wife, and eleven of his twenty children. Marshall confidently analyzes the psychological impact of the death of his parents using modern assumptions about human nature (he "no doubt experienced . . . abandonment and betrayal") and on the belief that religious faith can be reduced to psychology ("Under such circumstances, it is readily apparent. . . why Bach would have been drawn to religion"). It doesn't seem to enter Marshall's mind that Bach's faith would have shaped his psychological reactions rather than vice versa.

In Bach's music about death, the incomparable expressions of peace and joy, of exuberant hope and anticipated glory bear witness to the reality of the theology of Romans 6 in Bach's life: with Christ we are baptized into death so that, with him, we may rise to new life. Fortunately there are books that don't explain away Bach's faith as mere therapy or historical accident. *Bach Among the Theologians* (Philadelphia, 1986) by Jaroslav Pelikan is a wonderful primer, and *Johann Sebastian Bach and Liturgical Life in Leipzig* (St. Louis, 1984) by Gunther Stiller is rich in detail about its subject. And no shelf of books on Bach, however short, should be without Robin Leaver's *J.S. Bach and Scripture* (St. Louis, 1985). It consists mainly of facsim-

iles with commentary of pages from Bach's copy of the so-called "Calov Bible and Commentary." Bach's underlinings, corrections, and marginalia bear witness to careful reading. After leaving Bach's shelf for peregrinations we cannot trace, it reappeared in 1934 in a farm house near Frankenmuth, Michigan during meetings of the Michigan District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. How fitting!

Calvin Stapert

John Reeves. *The St. Matthew Passion: A Text for Voices*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

Already during his own lifetime, J.S. Bach was being addressed in verse. *The Bach Reader*, edited by Hans David and Arthur Mendel, records four such poems, one of which was a birthday greeting from Bach's friend, kinsman, and fellow-composer Johann Gottfried Walther:

O day, come often! Joyous day return
When God gave thee to us, and Bach
was born!
We thank Him, praying that He long
thy life may spare,
For seldom doth the world receive a
gift so rare.

The sentiments of Walther's poem have echoed and re-echoed from many pens in the two-and-one-half centuries since Bach's death in 1750. To that chorus, I must admit to have attempted my own contribution (p.42). But now from John Reeves, a veteran author and composer long associated with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, comes one of the most ambitious poetic tributes ever attempted—twenty-one separate poems inspired by the text and performances of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*.

According to the up-to-date account of Robin Leaver in Oxford University Press's *Companion to*

Bach (1999), the first version of the Passion was compiled in 1727 for a Good Friday Vespers in Leipzig. Bach then repeated the performance, with significant changes for each use, in 1729, 1736, and 1742. After Bach's death the work languished until the famous public performance mounted by Felix Mendelssohn at the Berlin Singakademie in 1829 (which at the time was considered the centennial year). Mendelssohn repeated the performance several times in other German cities, all to tumultuous approval. These events, in turn, played a large role in preparing the way for the Bach-Gesellschaft of 1850 and so in fueling the modern, ever-expanding cascade of interest in Bach.

John Reeves engages Bach's supernal composition with brief prose comments introducing poems that meditate on the developing narrative of the work and on the locales in which Reeves has heard it performed (Budapest, Ouro Preto [Brazil], Prague, Leipzig, Rome, Warsaw, London, Toronto). The book closes with an English translation of the Passion text, itself an intricate interweaving of Matthew 26-27, recitatives and arias composed by Bach's frequent collaborator Picander, and Lutheran chorales chosen by Bach himself.

Reeves's poetry most often reads like prose, and it does not (indeed, cannot) rise to the ineffable majesty-cum-pathos of the original. Yet his own compositions offer much to contemplate as a tribute to Bach, and even more to the cross-centered version of reality that Bach evoked. As an example, in *Agnus Dei*, Reeves concludes:

his mercy healing
our evil: whose hour is at hand;
who furled
under his wings the gross sin of the world.

In "The Tree" Reeves imagines Bach composing at a window that opens onto a Leipzig Baum:

But mind's eye, this noon
of nailing, looks beyond those
limbs, to a far hill, another
tree, another year: knows
there the death of wood, bitter
in the deep grain; and heeds the hurt
within the desolate rending at the heart.

The most effective poems are Reeves's meditations on the places and circumstances in which he has heard the Passion. One of these was a performance during the Second World War in London where "I stash the shovel I work with clearing / debris from bomb sites in Bethnal Green, / homes once, and journey across intervening / time and distance, by tube, to Bach and Calvary." Another was in late-Communist Budapest where Reeves heard the Passion on a Palm Sunday:

death comes, and the sung scripture
announces it; baldly, simply—"he
yielded up
the ghost." Silence. A whole
congregation goes
to its knees. Silence: music comes to a stop.
This is not some reflex pose
of pietism: this is the intersection of
history and belief;
and every one of these adamant believers
knows, somewhere in the recesses
of his own life,
the taste of judicial murder, and how
the murderers
are always among us. Always.

A sharp contrast to the performance in Budapest was Reeves's experience at the Roy Thomson Hall in Toronto, where "from plush seats to chic lighting" it is difficult "in such a setting to imagine / his last cry, his yielding up the ghost." Further incongruity came at the end of the performance when "several hundred Torontonians, reprieved / from Calvary and Leipzig, revert to open display / of their own culture and applaud, with great gusto," while "the conductor, who failed to print a request that there be / no applause, smirks with self-evident pleasure / and bows like a hinge." Yet even when Passion has become performance, Reeves remains under Bach's liberating spell:

Who, lost in all that
tumult, that vile noise, can hope
to hear the still small voice, yet
insisting, this year as every year,
"Prepare, prepare: Easter begins here"?

Despite the built-in limitations of what Reeves has attempted, the book is still an effective offering. Yet for me its most important effect was a prompting to find the CD and experience again the gentle introductory measures and the riveting queries that carry listeners into the mysterious heart of the one essential human drama:

*Kommt, ihr Töchter, helft mir klagen,
Sehet!—Wen?—Den Brautigam,
Seht ihn!—Wie?—Als wie ein Lamm!*

Come, daughters, aid my mourning.
See! Whom? The bridegroom.
Look at him! How? As a lamb!

Mark A. Noll

Alan E. Lewis. *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

Published seven years after his death in 1994, *Between Cross and Resurrection* represents the life's work and achievement of Alan Lewis. Lewis, former Professor of Theology at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, devoted the bulk of his scholarly life to the subject of a "theology of the cross," focusing upon the heart of the Passion in the burial of Jesus Christ. In the midst of producing the most comprehensive study of Holy Saturday available today, Lewis was diagnosed with cancer and spent the last seven years of his life struggling both with an immense topic and a devastating disease. Although this aspect of Lewis's biography reminds us that theology is written by particular persons in unique circumstances and lends an air of urgency to the text, Lewis admirably resists self-indulgence.

The fundamental importance of this volume lies in its contribution

to our understanding of Holy Week and Easter. This book compels the reader to view the events of the Pascal Triduum with fresh eyes and to listen to the Passion narrative as if for the first time. Holy Saturday will no longer be considered a welcome break from the intensity and morbidity of Holy Week. As Lewis demonstrates, this Saturday is Holy indeed and ought to be observed with care. Rather than use this day merely as a time to run errands in preparation for the festivities of Easter, this day should be set aside as a time for prayer and contemplation, as the corpse of Jesus lies cold in the tomb.

Lewis's study is ambitious in scope and touches on the various components of theological study—biblical interpretation, doctrinal articulation, and ethical life. The book is nicely organized in three sections and ten chapters. In Part I Lewis offers guidance for how we ought to read and hear the Passion narrative, including the silence of the time between the cross and the resurrection. Part II includes constructive suggestions for the relationship between Holy Saturday and the doctrine of God—how the death and burial of God affects our understanding of the identity of God. Part III is devoted to the question of the how the church and individuals, being shaped by Holy Saturday, ought to live in the world today.

Lewis asserts that in order to read the story of Jesus' death correctly we must avoid the tendency to domesticate and soften the harsh reality of the cross. Because of the familiarity of this story, especially its finale, we are prone to distort the text and to force our interpretation to fit prior conceptions and judgments regarding God, Jesus, life, and death. By way of contrast, one can allow the story to speak in all its power if and only if one is able to tell, hear, believe and interpret the story in "two different

ways at once—as a story whose ending is *known*, and as one whose ending is discovered only *as it happens*” (p. 33). In the first hearing, the cross and burial of Jesus must be read as the calamitous end of Jesus’ life, as we stand with the first disciples. Yet, this hearing must be joined by a second voice (read and heard retrospectively), with the announcement ringing in one’s ears that “He is not here, but has risen.” As such, the cross and burial do not mark the disastrous end of Jesus’ life but are properly seen as essential aspects of God’s saving and redemptive activity in Christ, the triumph of God over evil, sin, and death. This dual reading retains the necessary interpretive tension of Holy Saturday and Christ’s descent into hell.

What does this dual reading and hearing of the Passion narrative tell us about the character and identity of God? Lewis begins by explicating Karl Barth’s contribution to thinking about God in light of the Passion of Jesus Christ. Lewis applauds Barth for beginning with the Gospel narrative rather than with general metaphysical presuppositions. This enables Barth to preserve the cross as scandal and stumbling block. For Barth the cross of Christ indicates that God lives, suffers, and dies humanly, while never ceasing to be God. Lewis praises Barth for this achievement, for his movement from the particularity of the cross to the identity and being of God. This praise, however, is short lived. It is Jürgen Moltmann who, for Lewis, represents the needed improvement and extension of Barth. Where Barth is reticent and stops short, Moltmann is bold and presses forward. While Barth refuses to speak of contradiction and rupture in God—God remains God even in the death of Jesus—Moltmann, Lewis concludes,

rightly sees the drastic implications of the death and burial of Christ for the life and being of God—rupture, contradiction, and the rendering asunder of the trinitarian community. It is precisely at this point that further and more careful theological reflection needs to be done, for it is far from obvious that Moltmann is a necessary improvement on Barth. How, for example, is Moltmann’s talk of rupture within the very life of the Trinity superior to Barth’s reticence on this matter? Lewis, it must be noted, acknowledges severe limitations in Moltmann’s proposals, especially his endorsement of panentheism, which risks making God a prisoner to the process of history, as well as Moltmann’s inadequate treatment of the cross as atonement. Yet, it is exactly these problems with Moltmann that make Barth’s views more theologically adequate and satisfying. Nonetheless, at the end of the day, Lewis points to Moltmann as the most able guide through the mystery of Holy Saturday. Should we seek to supplement the work of Barth with the work of another, perhaps the innovative work of Hans Urs von Balthasar, which Lewis mentions merely in passing, it would prove to be more salutary than that of Moltmann.

The third and final section is devoted to how Christians, individually and corporately, might live this story of death and burial in the contemporary world. Lewis masterfully demonstrates how the resurrection of the one who was crucified and buried offers genuine hope in a world marked by the horrors of Auschwitz, Hiroshima, and Chernobyl (to which we could add a whole host of contemporary instances of terror, suffering, and death). The triumph of God over evil, suffering, and death in the person of Jesus Christ, especially in

being taken from the cross to the grave, enables the church to proclaim a word of hope that is grounded in the being and activity of God.

Lewis draws the third section to a close by reflecting on the significance of Holy Saturday for authentic individual existence and a theology of death. A life shaped by Holy Saturday is a life lived in reckless availability for others; it is a selfless life, lived for others and for the one who died and was buried for us. Finally, by meditating on the reality that Christ lies dead and alone in the grave on Holy Saturday, we can face death knowing that even though we must die alone, we are truly not alone, because God in Christ accompanies us in the solitude of our suffering and in the loneliness of our dying. In fact, in his dying on the cross and being placed in the tomb, Christ tastes the fullness of death for us, so that we may be spared. God in Christ not only suffers and dies alongside us, with us, God in Christ suffers and dies for us and in our place. This is the Gospel, and the richness of this Good News can be grasped only by way of the burial of Christ and the silence of Holy Saturday.

This is a beautiful, sublime, and provocative meditation on the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. We are in debt not only to Lewis himself, but also to his colleagues, friends, and family who brought this manuscript to publication. Lewis’s book is a powerful invitation to a theology of Holy Saturday, which ought to have lasting importance and should be consulted again and again for intellectual, spiritual, and ethical insight and nourishment.

David Lauber

PERFORMING BACH 1985

Tonight we hear you, old Johann
Sebastian, pure, sublime—as near as man,
and this time woman singing too,
could come to what your genius conceived,
your artful hand inscribed, but you

had never heard yourself. Not this time boys
with middling skill and wandering eye
or sleepy burghers bored by “irksome noise.”

Our leads, with seconds standing by,
were world class, our instruments as *echt*
as yours, our hall acoustically
precise, our stage well lit, our seats designed

for ease. We had no choirs resigned
to rushed rehearsals, strained artistically
as amateurs and drawn piecemeal
from every class among the *Volk*.

And in our programs was a well-
phrased treatise on the pleasures of Baroque
for study at the interval

instead of gospel readings, ancient rites,
and sermons—plain continuo
of words to ground the unalloyed delights
that poured forth with an artless art
from deep within your craftsman’s praising heart.

Mark A. Noll

from *Seasons of Grace*, Baker Books, 1997

on covers—

Aimee Tomasek is a member of the Department of Art at Valparaiso University. She has worked extensively with photography as a medium for teaching and learning, as well as teaching the medium itself. Last fall she organized an exhibition of student work featuring veterans of WW II.

Jessica Lindbloom is a Senior Art Major at Valparaiso University. Her concentration is in graphic design but she actively makes art in other mediums.

The two collaborated on this project, *Bach on Campus*.

on reviewers—

David Lauber,
a recent PhD from Princeton Theological Seminary, teaches systematic theology at Wheaton College.

Mark A. Noll
teaches History at Wheaton College and, when not writing poetry, writes books on American religion, most recently *The Old Religion in a New World: The History of North American Christianity* (Eerdmans, 2002).

Calvin Stapert,
author of *My Only Comfort: Death, Deliverance, and Discipleship in the Music of Bach* (reviewed on p. 23), teaches and chairs the Department of Music at Calvin College.

on poets—

Jeanne Murray Walker
writes from Delaware where she writes poetry and plays and gives readings and workshops around the country.

Anne Shaw
teaches English and sociology at Carthage College. Her work has recently appeared in *Phoebe, Mobius and Crania*.

St. Matthew Passion
Final Week Schedule (proposed)

Sun. March 18
7P - 10P - Tutti Forces (incl Evan and Christus, no aria soli)

Mon., March 19
Orch (TBA)
7P - 10P - Chorus (DFC or HR, cond)

Tues., March 20
6:30P - 6:30P - Chorus (HR)
7:30P - 10:00P - Chorus (HR) (call Children's chorus @ 7:30P)
(orch. TBA)

Wed., March 21
4:00P - 6:30P - Accompagnato and arias w/ st, winds
SAB soli (no Christus, Evan or aria T)
Orch I: str., fl., ob. bsn, org
Orch II: str., fl., org
7:30P - 10:00P
Tutti Forces (no soli)

Thurs., March 22
12:00P - 2:00P - Secco Recits (Evan, Christus, et al)
4:00P - 5:20P - Accompanato and elided secco recits
(Evan, Christus, Petrus Pontifex)
orch I: Str., organ
5:20P - 7:00PM Solo movements without upper strings
(SAB soli, Tenor mvmts on T, Gamba mvmts fri
and/or sat.)
(includes Principal cello, bass and
(chorus TBA)

Fri., March 23
3:30P - 6:00P
Part I Turbae, chorales and choruses (as conductor w/ st)
Part II (5P): #30, 27a, 60, 67, 19, 20 (Tenor should arrive at 7:30P)
7:30P - 10:30P - Tutti Forces (Children's Chorus @ 7:00)

Sat. March 24
11:00A - 12:30P
Tenor arias as necessary (incl. #35 & 35 w/ Gamba, #56-57 w/ Gamba)
1:00P - 4:00P
Final Dress

Sun., March 25 - Performance - 3:00P

Handwritten notes and markings:
- "contact list" with arrows pointing to names
- "urban principals" and "at school"
- "out of town" with arrows
- "C. Gault and entt" with arrows
- "b5m" with arrows
- "for killing coffee, sandwich" with arrows
- "office avail?" with arrows
- "food @ late" with arrows
- "w/ car to do other respon." with arrows
- "ambist" on the left margin
- "for organ" and "room" near Thursday's entry
- "for, Basing" and "talitz sm" near Thursday's entry
- "for, Basing" and "talitz sm" near Friday's entry
- "for, Basing" and "talitz sm" near Friday's entry
- "for, Basing" and "talitz sm" near Friday's entry