Bach: Luther's Musical Prophet?

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Introduction

It is impossible to read much theological analysis of Bach without encounter-
ing Martin Luther. The reformer's name is ubiquitous: he is given both
as source and as ultimate authority for the theological ideas supposedly
expressed in Bach's music.

To cite just a few examples: according to two theologically minded
interpreters of Bach, Lothar Steiger and Renate Steiger, Bach's church music
"was theologically grounded solely on Luther's teaching about the Word of
God and of the essence of music" (1992:15). Bach scholars even cite Luther's
love of music and his assertions of its divine origin as the fundamental
impulse behind Bach's work: Robin Leaver writes that the key to "opening
the door on the whole world of Bach's innermost conceptions and ideas"
will be found in "the writings of the reformer Martin Luther" (1978:30).
Rather less approvingly, Richard Taruskin argues that Bach's church music
"was a medium of truth, not beauty, and the truth it served—Luther's
truth—was often bitter" (2005, 2:363). I imagine that few scholars today
would go as far as Hans Preuß, who declared in 1922 that "Bach is Luther"
(1922:15). However, most would agree that Luther provides a vital context
for interpreting Bach's sacred music.

Perhaps it is unsurprising that musicologists have turned to Luther
when interpreting Bach. Despite many critiques of the hermeneutic
method—such as that of Carolyn Abbate (2004)—musicologists still search
out meaning in music by investigating a suitable "horizon of expectations"
within which to situate music's meaning and affect historically. My own
view is that hermeneutics is inescapable to most of us brought up within the
musicological tradition; I tend to agree with Karol Berger's assertion, *contra*
Abbate, that "we cannot help it: we are hermeneutic creatures through and
through" (2005:497). Abbate argues for the privileging of the experience of
performed music over its hermeneutic interpretation; Berger counters that,
while aesthetic experience is indeed an important and under-appreciated
part of academic study, the hermeneutic and the experiential cannot be
so neatly separated. I side with Berger on this point: whether because of
training, conditioning, or instinctive response, many—perhaps most—lis-
teners to Bach's music seem to want to contextualize and understand their

responses by studying what Bach himself might have thought about his music's purpose and origin.

Bach, of course, was a Lutheran, and he wrote most of his music for that church. On the face of it, therefore, Luther seems not only useful but necessary if we are to interpret Bach's music historically. Further, Luther's writings would seem to provide a rich source for interpreters. He has long been seen as a key figure of European history, and some of the myths told about him—posting the Ninety-five Theses in Wittenberg, his proud announcement that "I can take no other course"—have been widely understood as defining moments in the evolution of modern Western culture and thought. So it is perhaps easy to assume that he is a clearly defined historical figure about whose life and work there is substantial agreement. Yet his very eminence creates its own difficulties. Faced with the sheer volume, complexity, and frequent inaccessibility of Luther's own writings, Bach scholars have tended—entirely understandably—to rely on secondary literature when divining his message. Consequently, their view of Luther is filtered through the writings of later (mainly twentieth-century) theologians.

Luther studies as a discipline is particularly rich in competing political and religious ideologies, and portraits of Luther have characteristically been shaped by scholars' own confessional views. Within musicology, the problem appears to be that researchers frequently fail to distinguish between two different types of Luther scholarship. Theologians can, very roughly, be divided into two camps: the systematic and the historical. Historical theologians study the history and development of doctrine, while systematic theologians focus on forming and explaining doctrine for their own time. Of course there is a wide overlap, as many historical theologians study history to illuminate belief in the present and many systematic theologians study history. But problems occur when these two methods are conflated, notably when systematic theologians impute their own ideas about doctrine to a historical figure. This can occur for a wide variety of reasons: from the simple wish for a historical icon to add weight to one's own views, to the unreflective decision that one's own beliefs must be correct, and that, as it is axiomatic that your heroes are correct, they must have agreed with you. Some theologians, for instance Karl Holl and Paul Althaus, imputed their own systems to Luther, making them guilty of anachronisms both deliberate and accidental (Stayer 2000:28). American theologian and Bach writer Joyce Irwin encapsulates the issue when she writes that "the problem of discussing Luther is similar to the problem of discussing Jesus Christ" (1993:1). Like Christ, Luther informs the religious traditions, experiences, and identity politics of many believers, including a large majority of those who write on him. Yet Luther himself was a passionate, inconsistent thinker who cared little for overall coherence and whose psychological and spiritual

development throughout his life frequently led him to discard or repudiate his own earlier writings. Just as with the Bible, one can search Luther's work and find support for just about any theological idea. Consequently, in the twentieth century alone, scholars have painted Luther as Catholic, Protestant, Reformed, medieval, modern, ecclesiastical, existentialist, authoritarian, revolutionary, and everything in between.

The concern I wish to articulate in this paper is that most theologically influenced Bach scholars have claimed historical readings of Luther, when in fact they rely on a view of him filtered through mid-twentieth-century German dogmatic theology. Interpreters of Bach from the German theological tradition have tended to employ a particular hermeneutic which conflates past history with present Christianity, emphasizing those aspects of historical Lutheranism which might provide points of contact with the modern liturgy and augment the piety of today's Christians at the expense of recognizing the historical distance of Bach's time. Rooted firmly in twentieth-century Protestantism, scholars such as Steiger and Steiger exaggerate those aspects of Bach and Luther which were, or could be made, familiar, while ignoring the more distant features of both. Some modern Anglo-American Bach scholars, many of whom might not consider themselves orthodox Christians, have been influenced by this tradition and similarly take theological ideas stemming from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to represent Bach's religious background. While it is, of course, possible to interpret Bach by way of a hermeneutics uninfluenced or only partly influenced by historical considerations, such a method seems incompatible with the claims to historicity made by these scholars. Indeed, I propose that the authority accrued by theological interpreters of Bach flows directly from their often entirely anachronistic appeals to history. I wish to highlight some of the more anachronistic portraits of Luther which have found their way into Bach studies and to question their ideological origin before suggesting some alternative ways of employing the ideas of Luther and Lutheran theologians in understanding Bach's music.

The Luther Renaissance and Bible Criticism

Bach's music has long been considered uniquely rich in religious symbolism. Theological approaches to interpreting his music are almost as old as Bach scholarship itself; the first monograph analyzing the composer's music by reference to his religious background was written by Johann Theodor Mosewius in the mid-nineteenth century ([1845] 2001). Subsequent writers, notably Philipp Spitta, also took Lutheranism into account in interpreting Bach (1873–80). But theological investigation into Bach's music began in earnest in the 1920s and 30s with the inception of the periodical *Musik und*

Kirche and the publication of the first writings setting out the links between theological and musicological methods (such as Besch 1938). Almost all these writers were German Lutherans. Confessionalists—writers whose view of Luther was decisively influenced by their own religious beliefs—set the agenda for such theological Bach scholarship, and their influence remains strong.

Such confessional bias replicates the situation in Reformation studies, where Reformation history was for many years a battleground of competing confessional interests. Recent historians have frequently drawn attention to the anachronisms these earlier writers produced: historian R. W. Scribner, for instance, criticized the "excessive concentration on Luther and his theology, without regard for historical context" (1986:1; also MacCulloch 2004:xxii). Theologian Heiko Oberman pointed out that "Luther never called himself a reformer, and . . . he never called the movement that started with him a 'Reformation'" (2004:57). The term "Reformation," used in this context, actually dates from the seventeenth century (Oberman [1989] 2006:79; Scribner 1986:2). The later assumption, that the "Reformation" was begun consciously by Luther and that all its elements stem directly from him, is historically dubious and clearly ideological in origin. Scholars thus risked creating an ahistorical Luther to whom they imputed a whole range of later ideas—some dating from as late as the twentieth century.

Church historian Diarmaid MacCulloch writes in a forthcoming article about the problem of "ancestor-worship" in Reformation studies, whereby confessional historians investigate only their own traditions and ignore others, failing to make connections between different strands of belief or to take account of gaps, silences, and dissent (forthcoming). The problem is certainly not new; Luther has been revered as a German icon for centuries. His thinking was always more Germanocentric than that of other reformers, notably Calvin and Zwingli, and since the nineteenth century he has received more than his fair share of nationalistic rereading. But in the view of Luther presented by many recent Bach scholars, among them Lothar Steiger, Renate Steiger, Eric Chafe, and Robin Leaver, some specifically twentieth-century confessional aspects can be identified. Many of the key features of this "Luther" can be traced to the "Luther Renaissance" movement inaugurated by theologian Karl Holl (1866–1926). Indeed, Lothar Steiger and Renate Steiger write of their theological teachers coming "from the school of Karl Holl" (1992:7). The most striking reflection of this heritage in Bach scholarship is the perpetuation of Holl's insistence on Biblical exegesis as Luther's mission.

From the 1920s onwards, Holl and his school promoted a "historicist" return to Luther through detailed study of his writings. They invented a strongly internally coherent and text-bound Luther as German hero in op-

position to what they saw as the decadent Weimar Republic and to secular liberalism more generally. Creating a coherent Luther whose Reformation credentials were strong from the earliest possible point in his life and who did not change his mind later necessarily entailed selective reading. Stung by Germany's defeat in the First World War, Holl promoted a muscular German Christianity that appealed to Luther for its authority. Holl's "historical" reading of Luther was decisively influenced by his increasingly conservative politics and his reactionary dogmatics, and he sought authority by reference back to the reformer:

> The Reformation, in fact, enriched all areas of culture. But has it not exhausted its strength with what it has accomplished to date? Many would have feared this before the [First] World War, under the impression that, together with religion in general, the Reformation, too, had lost its power to win a following. Today a turn in the road seems to be appearing. The feeling for religion is growing among us. But the danger threatens that the new movement will lose its way in superstition and utopia. If ever, we need Luther today to make us healthy . . . Consciences everywhere, especially since the war, are confused; in Germany as in other nations. Only when sober reflection returns: at this point may one hope for a renewal of our nation. But then it will also demonstrate—I believe this confidently—that the Reformation is not at the end, but only at the beginning of its worldwide effect. (1927:1, 542–43, translation slightly modified from Holl 1959:151–52)[1]

Directly in the spirit of Holl, theologically influenced Bach writers have held Luther to be the supreme authority for modern Protestantism and consider him primarily or even solely an exegete of the Bible. Steiger and Steiger, for instance, write of "the cantata, which, in the form encountered in Bach, can only be understood as proceeding from Luther's understanding of Scripture and of music" (1992:15).[2] Scripture, identified with Luther, looms large in Bach theology. Ruth Tatlow begins her liner notes for one of John Eliot Gardiner's *Cantata Pilgrimage* recordings with the assertion that, "Cantata composition always began with the text. But as the text-writers began with sermons, and the preachers began with Luther, and Luther began with the Bible, the true beginning was the Word" (2000:7). Theologians like to analyze Bach's music as "exegesis" (*Auslegung*) of its texts. However, "exegesis" is, in itself, an anachronistic term when applied to Luther, as are other trusted formulae of modern Bible criticism such as "hermeneutic," "method," and "system" (Hagen 1993:15). While Luther certainly employed scholarly techniques, including thorough study of the Biblical languages and the writings of Church fathers such as St. Augustine, he did not consider the Bible a subject for detached, systematic enquiry. Rather, he read it directly and personally in a manner alien to modern scholars, anxiously searching

it for what he had already conceptualized as its central evangelical message while dismissing those passages or even whole books which he thought contradicted that message. As MacCulloch puts it:

> [Luther's] translation of the Bible in the Wartburg was an expression of a relationship of love with the word of God, which meant that he could be as familiar with or even as rude to the Bible as with the most intimate of old friends. He could treat the text in a startlingly proprietorial way. Wherever, for instance, Luther found the word equivalent to "life" in Greek or Hebrew, he would extend it in German to the phrase "eternal life." "Mercy" became "grace" and "the deliverer of Israel" "the saviour." When he translated a crucial proof-text in Romans 3 "we hold that man is justified without works of the law, by faith," he made no bones about adding "only" to "faith."
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> Luther also had no scruples about ranking different parts of the Bible as more or less valuable depending on whether they proclaimed the message which he had discovered. St. John's Gospel, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and I Peter were central; so were the Psalms, because they were prophecies of Christ. The Epistle to the Hebrews talks about faith in terms which did not suit him ... Worse still was the Epistle of James ... and he also loathed the Book of Esther. (MacCulloch 2004:133–34; see also Oberman [1989] 2006:161–74, 220–25)

Luther, therefore, did not limit God's Word and revelation to the words of the Bible. Oberman even writes of Luther's understanding of Scripture as a "necessary evil"—necessary because humankind was too perverse to understand God's will naturally. Oberman quotes Luther's comment, "God and the Scriptures are two different things, as different as creator and creature" ([1989] 2006:221). Scripture must be interpreted by means of grace and faith; God is not bound by the words. Contrary to later Biblicism, whose adherents thought that the Word of God was limited to the words of the Bible, Lutherans viewed the Bible as merely part of God's revelation. It was only the theologians of the twentieth-century Luther Renaissance movement who imputed to Luther modern exegetical methods and the modern idea that Protestantism's authority is rooted solely in text (Stayer 2000:28–29). Bach scholars, too, raise the importance of the words of the Bible to a level Luther would have found verging on the blasphemous. Lothar Steiger, for instance, cites Bach's music in support of his argument that German Christians should not update Luther's Bible into modern German. In his view, Luther's words should not be changed, for they represent a unique Godly union of sense and beauty, *logos* and *melos*:

> [Bach] stands on the shoulders of all those before him whose musical invention and composition were forged by the Biblical Word: but with all these together he stands on the shoulders of him who brought the voice

of a friend to our hearing in Bible German. It is still speaking where there
is adherence to the accurate words. It speaks not in general, it speaks [di-
rectly] to me. (1999:72)[3]

Yet such "Biblicism," such fetishizing of the German text, would have been
alien to Luther.

It is therefore odd that the tools of nineteenth- and twentieth-century
Bible criticism still find their way into Bach scholarship today, ascribed to
Bach or to Luther. Perhaps the clearest example of this is to be found in the
work of Eric Chafe, who has written two books finding "tonal allegory" in
Bach. Chafe believes that Bach performs a sort of historical exegesis on his
texts, supposedly in the spirit of Luther. Many Bach cantatas begin with texts
about condemnation under the Law followed by salvation under the Gospel
followed by the joy of Christian belief. Chafe theorizes that this progression
gives a narrative of God's historical engagement with humanity. He broadly
identifies the Law with the period of the Old Testament, the Gospel with
the period of the New Testament, and joy with the subsequent period of
the Christian Church:

> The ancient concept of Scripture as "salvation history"—that is, the notion
> that God had a plan for the salvation of humanity that was revealed pro-
> gressively throughout the successive eras of biblical history—was essential
> to Lutheran hermeneutics, as it had been to the interpretative principles
> employed in the Middle Ages. (2000:4)

However, Luther did not describe the process of salvation by a historical
narrative in this way. Moreover, the evolutionary view of history implied by
such a method could not have been conceived before the nineteenth century.
The term Chafe uses, "salvation history," is in fact a translation of the techni-
cal term *Heilsgeschichte*, which was coined in the 1840s by the theologian
Johann Christian Konrad von Hofmann as a way of describing the process
of the events of Biblical history from the sayings of the Israelite prophets to
the life of Jesus to the end of time (1841–44:43, 47). Hofmann wanted to find
a method of Biblical interpretation that took account of Kant's philosophy
of truth made manifest in history; he was also influenced by Hegelianism.
True, the term is used in certain types of Bible scholarship up to the present
day, but it owes nothing to the eighteenth century, much less the sixteenth.
Most historical theologians today avoid a literal interpretation of it because,
as Friedrich Mildenberger writes, "it implies a less-than-reflective modern
understanding of history."[4]

Chafe, in fact, cites two sources for his concept of "Lutheran" salva-
tion history: the mid-twentieth-century German theologians Heinrich
Bornkamm—who was a student of Karl Holl's and a leading light of the

Luther Renaissance movement—and Hans Conzelmann (Bornkamm 1948; Conzelmann 1954). Both were confessional Lutherans and both sought ways of interpreting the Bible for the church of their own time. Bornkamm was largely motivated by a desire to find authority in Luther to support contemporary Biblical scholarship. Since the late nineteenth century, Bible criticism had taken a historical turn, and it was no longer possible for serious theologians to argue, for instance, that the Old Testament contained direct prophecies of Christ. Moreover, it had to be recognized that these Hebrew Scriptures were written for an audience of Israelites or Jews. Such a realization caused problems for anti-Semitic Christians. Bornkamm—whose book was written in the early 1940s—was concerned to "rescue" the Old Testament from any association with Judaism, both because of his own anti-Judaic biases, and because he was a conservative Christian who did not want to see the Old Testament denigrated, as the Nazis were wont to do. To this end he tried, in his words, to "Christianize" the Old Testament by explaining it as narrating an early era of "salvation history" (Bornkamm 1969:221; see also Nowak 1992):

> Luther's quarrel with the Judaism of his day must not be treated as a repudiation of the Old Testament . . . no one who has even superficially looked into his writings can doubt his passionate op- position to the Jews as blasphemers of Christ on the one hand, and his deep love for the Old Testament on the other. (1969:1)

> It will be shown how many historical and literary treasures [Luther] mined out of the Old Testament. Yet, his writings on the Jews illustrate clearly enough the fury with which he denounced the Jews' usurious practices . . . Beauty and wisdom in the Old Testament are adornments of the Holy Spirit; but the spirit of profiteering and the murderous plans of the Jews were the expressions of their mad messianic arrogance. (1969:2)

> It is an urgent matter for Christians to interpret the Old Testament cor- rectly. Today it is even more urgent than before because of the crisis that overshadows our relationship to it. Yet, our use of Luther's work has made this proper interpretation more important now than ever: his work has Christianized the Old Testament thoroughly, as we have seen. (1969:226)

Given the views he expresses, it is perhaps not surprising that Bornkamm's personal history during the 1930s and 40s is murky: he was briefly a member of the *Sturmabteiling* (the Brown Shirts) and also joined the *Christlich-Deutsche Bewegung*, a forerunner of the Nazi *Deutsche Christen* movement, though later he preferred to support the mainstream evangelical church (Nowak 1992:55; Meier 1992:26).[5] Conzelmann, who supported a group comparable to the anti-Nazi Confessing Church during

the war, nevertheless put forward similar theories about the Gospel of Luke. In his view, the Gospel was written to narrate the origins of Christianity in superseding a moribund Judaism (Tyson 1999:76).

Interestingly, while Bornkamm explicitly, if anachronistically, seeks to link his interpretation of the Old Testament to Luther's writings, Conzelmann never mentions Luther, who does not even appear in the index to his book. Conzelmann was clearly writing systematic theology, a Lutheranism for his own time. Chafe, however, reads him as though he were a historian, imputing Conzelmann's very specifically twentieth-century views to sixteenth-century Luther. While Luther's own attitude to Jews and Judaism is notorious, he could not have conceived of an evolutionary view of historical truth such as that which underlies the anti-Judaic model of "salvation history" used by Bornkamm and Conzelmann and cited by Chafe. At a time when the issue of anti-Judaism in Bach is receiving much scholarly attention, it is worth separating out the history—Bach's and Luther's—from the historiography. While it is often worthwhile to consider a range of interpretative sources from different periods, I cannot see that it is desirable to bring into Bach interpretation anachronistic descriptions of Christian history written at a time when proving the superiority of Christianity over Judaism was a scholarly imperative.

Allegory as Meaning?

Even leaving aside the historiography of his sources, however, Chafe's concept of "tonal allegory" is historically dubious. The term "allegory" has long been associated with Baroque music: Walter Benjamin first posited philosophical allegory as a defining feature of "Baroque" representation, and in 1948 Manfred Bukofzer became the first writer of modern times to apply the concept to music (Benjamin 1998; Bukofzer 1948). Chafe appeals to Luther's "allegorical" hermeneutics to support his contention that Bach used musical signs, particularly tonality, to make clear external referents and ensure that text and music were meaningful to his audience.

But Chafe faces several problems in claiming that allegory provides meaning. Traditionally, allegory is a form of rhetoric rather than of hermeneutics: in making allegory into interpretation Chafe misreads the interpretative systems of early Lutheranism. According to Luther himself, allegory was an ornamental device for the delight of the discerning listener, not an argument, interpretation, or technique of persuasion: "Allegories do not provide solid proofs in theology; but, like pictures, they adorn and illustrate a subject" (1538:262; translation from Luther 1963:435).[6]

To discover a hermeneutic use of allegory, Chafe has to return to the Scholastic theologians of the late medieval period. They famously divided

Biblical interpretation into four parts, often explained by the metaphor of four horses pulling a single cart. Each Bible text had literal, allegorical, tropological (moral), and anagogical (eschatological) interpretations. An example frequently given was that of Jerusalem, which could be understood literally as the earthly city, allegorically as the church on earth, tropologically as a pure conscience, and anagogically as the church in heaven. Scholastic theologians believed that allegorical interpretation created new meanings or "senses" which were as valuable as the literal interpretation of the text. In fact, the so-called "spiritual" senses were generally considered more important than the literal sense, as captured in the Biblical text that "the letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life" (2 Cor 3:6, Authorized Version).

According to Chafe, the quadripartite division is to be found throughout Luther's work and survived into Bach's day:

> As is well known, Luther generally opposed the traditional four-fold interpretative scheme of medieval hermeneutics . . . preferring a simpler "literal-prophetic" sense that was Christologically oriented. Luther's objections centered on the fact that "allegorical" interpretations of Scripture had traditionally been directed toward Law and works and the institutions of the church rather than faith . . .
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> Within Luther's hermeneutics . . . the medieval four senses were not so much rejected as they were reoriented according to the dialectical relationship of Law and Gospel and the analogy of faith. As a result many residues of the medieval scheme persisted through the era of Lutheran Orthodoxy, but generally in freely flexible form. (2000:5–6)

But if one reads Luther, one discovers that he was in fact utterly hostile to the four levels of interpretation, as an example from the *Lectures on Galatians* of 1535 demonstrates:

> Therefore the Jerusalem that is above, that is, the heavenly Jerusalem, is the church here in time. It is not, by anagoge, our fatherland in the life to come or the church triumphant, as the idle and unlettered monks and scholastic doctors imagined. They taught that there are four senses of Scripture—the literal, the tropological, the allegorical, and the anagogical—and by means of these they misinterpreted almost every word of Scripture. Thus, according to them, Jerusalem literally signified the city of that name; tropologically, a pure conscience; allegorically, the church militant; and anagogically, our heavenly fatherland or the church triumphant. With these awkward and foolish fables they tore Scripture apart into many meanings and robbed themselves of the ability to give sure instruction to human consciences. (1538; translation from Luther 1963:440)[7]

Chafe's rationale for disagreeing with Luther about allegory is that Lutheran hermeneutics "reoriented" allegory, employing it as a means for the believer

to relate the historical events in the Bible to his or her own life. His solution, as we have seen, is to read the four senses as temporal rather than conceptual. He often assigns them to the times of the Old Testament, the New Testament, the church on earth, and the church eternal, a usage which would have puzzled Luther and the Scholastics alike: they would not have understood the Bible as divided into such discrete historical periods. It was only with the nineteenth century that the term "hermeneutics" began to imply a specifically historical method of interpretation.[8] Chafe, however, writes:

> Central to the articulation of such a large-scale unity of the content of Scripture, therefore, was the belief that Scripture possessed both literal and spiritual meanings, the latter expressed in the three so-called "spiritual" senses of hermeneutics. When subjected to allegorical, tropological, and anagogical (eschatological) interpretation, the events of biblical history moved outside their own historical time frames and became imbued with new levels of meaning for later generations. (2000:4)

Chafe believes that Bach followed in Luther's footsteps by writing music to underline the "spiritual" senses (the latter three in the above list) of his texts (2000:3–22). Yet Luther despised the attempts of the Scholastic theologians to find "spiritual" senses in the Bible. For him such senses could not exist; there was only the literal. Luther continued to view allegory with deepest suspicion, especially in his late works. Two short passages from his *Table Talk* [*Tischreden*] demonstrate this well:

> When I was a monk, I was a master in the use of spiritual meanings. I allegorized everything. But afterward through the Epistle to the Romans I came to some knowledge of Christ. I recognized then that spiritual meanings and allegories are nothing, that it's not what Christ signifies but who and what he is [that counts]. (1566:509; translation slightly modified from Luther 1957:406)[9]

> On another occasion, Doctor Martin Luther said, "I can't work any more, nor can I speak any longer. When I was young I was learned, especially before I came to the study of theology. At that time I dealt with allegories, tropologies, and analogies and did nothing but clever tricks with them. If somebody had them today they'd be looked upon as rare relics. I know they're nothing but rubbish. Now I've let them go, and this is my first and best art, to translate the Scriptures in their plain sense. The literal sense does it—in it there's life, comfort, power, instruction, and skill. The other is tomfoolery, however brilliant the impression it makes." (1566:510; translation slightly modified from Luther 1957:46)[10]

Only when Scripture proclaimed itself to be allegorical did Luther and seventeenth-century Lutheran writers such as Abraham Calov and Salomon Glass allow truly allegorical interpretation—and even then in only a few, strictly

limited, circumstances. One example was Christ connecting his "lifting up" on the cross with Moses lifting up a snake in the desert so that all who looked towards it would be healed (John 3:14; Numbers 21:4–9). Another important example was Paul's allegory in Galatians (4:22ff.) of Abraham's slave Hagar and wife Sarah as representing the two covenants.[11] Luther was quite clear that any allegorical interpretation could not be considered a "spiritual" reading, but instead was just as dependent on the text as a literal one. Furthermore, the linking of the Old and New Testaments in sources such as the Calov Bible implies nothing about time: it merely asserts the unity of the whole of Scripture, making no assumptions about historical progress. (It is, after all, just as possible to interpret the New Testament in the light of the Old as it is to interpret the Old in light of the New, or the Gospels in light of one another, or the Gospels in the light of the Epistles, or the Epistles in light of the Gospels.[12]) All in all, Luther was concerned to blur or even remove the boundaries between "literal" and "spiritual" meanings, declaring that the literal sense (or permitted allegory) could have both a dogmatic and an inner, experiential effect—which was a mystical proof of its truth. As Bernhard Lohse puts it, the mature Luther "no longer tried to find the spiritual meaning of a text alongside the literal meaning but rather within it" (1986:149).

For Chafe, however, Lutheran theology allowed "spiritual" interpretations of texts, firstly because of its view of history as the progress of salvation and secondly because of Luther's "allegorical" concept of the analogy of faith. This concept—central to Luther's thought—was the means by which the believer could understand the unity of Scripture and find meaning in Scripture for his or her own life. But Chafe confuses Scholastic allegory with the Lutheran analogy of faith: they are not the same thing, nor are they designed for the same purpose. Luther's analogy of faith dealt only in literal senses, and was concerned solely with the hermeneutic understanding of the author when the meaning was unclear, focusing on the power of the literal sense to bring "life, comfort, power, instruction, and skill." Older allegorical interpretation concerned itself with creating new or multiple "spiritual" meanings validated by tradition: these new meanings would then have the same—or, often, greater—validity than the literal sense. For Luther, only the literal sense would do. This is not a sophistic distinction: for Bach to create allegories in the way Chafe suggests would, for Luther, have verged on the blasphemous. To Luther, the literal sense is full [*sufficiens*] and perfect. Luther's fundamental principle of *claritas Scriptura* means that the Bible interprets itself and does not need exegesis, least of all by music. The concept of music as allegory of the Bible does not fit into Luther's hermeneutics; even if Bach is understood as working entirely in Luther's

shadow, the notion that Bach saw music as allegorizing theological truth remains historically implausible.

Why, then, does Chafe assert that Luther employed the *quadriga*, the medieval fourfold means of Scriptural interpretation? One has to conclude again that he is content to echo the work of theologians of the conservative Luther Renaissance movement, notably Karl Holl. Perhaps Holl's most idiosyncratic hermeneutic device was to ignore or contradict many of Luther's own autobiographical statements. For instance, Holl refused to accept the claim in the 1545 autobiographical fragment that Luther had made his "Reformation breakthrough"—his understanding of justification by faith alone—in 1519, asserting instead that Luther's breakthrough was a moral insight against Catholicism which predated his *Dictata* and lectures on the Psalms of 1513–15. Holl saw that the *Dictata* still contained many medieval Catholic influences, notably the use of the *quadriga*. Yet he explained this away as Luther using old formulae which had ceased to hold deeper meaning for him. By noting the tight concentration on the Christological and moral senses in Luther's interpretation of the Psalms in the writings of this period, Holl forced medieval interpretation to fit his notion that Luther's breakthrough was a moral insight: in Holl's view, Luther had abandoned Catholic casuistry, mortal and venial sins, and had put all the emphasis on moral regeneration as work of God (Stayer 2000:35). Chafe, like Holl, ignores much of what the mature Luther said about his own theological development. Just as Holl refused to accept that Luther's justification by faith alone came out of his readings of Paul and Augustine in 1519, and counts early writings in which Luther employs the *quadriga* as vitally important to his Reformation, Chafe refuses to allow that Luther disavowed the *quadriga* at about this time. It is striking that in this instance Chafe has followed a principle dear to some theologians of the Luther Renaissance: that Luther's *earliest* writings and thoughts already represent his whole systematic thought. Chafe cannot allow that Luther turned his back on allegorical interpretation, specifically on the *quadriga*, and that it is therefore implausible to suggest that later figures such as Bach would have been influenced by this explicitly rejected part of his theology.

Music Theory as Lutheran Allegory?

Chafe also appeals to the writings of certain seventeenth-century Lutheran music theorists to support his concept of "tonal allegory," even though these sources make no claims as to music's ability to interpret a text. He cites Andreas Werckmeister, notably the speculative appendix "Anhang / Von der Allegorischen und Moralischen Music," in Werckmeister's treatise

Musicae Mathematicae. Werckmeister states that God, who is ineffable (*unbegreifflich*) and hidden (*verborgen*), lives in darkness, but has revealed himself not only through Scripture but also through nature and art ([1687] 1972:141). The "allegories" which follow—relating the musical scale to the creation of the world, for example (Day 1 is represented by the fundamental note, from which everything springs, and so on)—are not, however, allegorical interpretations of the text (Genesis 1, in this case) after the manner of the Scholastics and other medieval theologians. They are allegorical mirrorings of God himself and of the event of the creation, understood in Werckmeister's time as an independent event, not as dependent on the text ([1687] 1972:141). Werckmeister's allegories do not reveal a hidden message in the text of Scripture; in fact, Scripture has nothing to do with them (and many of them, such as the one connecting the four main octaves to the four elements, do not even relate to Biblical narratives). Instead, like Scripture, these allegories reveal the nature of God.

To Werckmeister, the fact that music has the same ratios as Solomon's Temple, the creation of the world, or the Trinity merely reflects its divine, revelatory nature ("mirror" or *Spiegel* is a favorite word of his). George Buelow describes him as "remain[ing] a mystic and decidedly medieval," stating that Werckmeister's view of music as a reflection of cosmic harmony comes from Johannes Kepler.[13] Werckmeister never suggests that music may be used to interpret Scripture—this idea lies far outside his "medieval" understanding.

It is, furthermore, far from clear that Werckmeister intended music to be understood as allegorizing God or Scripture; he was merely writing rhetorical allegories of music itself. Does music allegorize creation, or creation allegorize music? Werckmeister's rather endearingly clumsy German and repeated humble apologies for any inconsistencies or errors are clear signs that he was well aware both of the speculative nature and the limitations of his work. Werckmeister is perhaps best understood as one of the last in the great tradition of Pythagorean music theorists, working in opposition to the subjectivization of musical aesthetics which would be articulated most clearly by the next generation of theorists, notably Johann Mattheson. If music to Werckmeister represents a Lutheran-Biblical unity rather than the generalized cosmic harmony of the medieval theorists, this contrast is merely due to his different concept of theological and philosophical truth. Werckmeister's philosophical and theological imaginings, in the end, only tell us about his way of understanding music, or perhaps about his personal devotions. It is unlikely that they represent a general way of thinking about music among educated people (although Bach may have heard about his writings third-hand, from his cousin Johann Walther who was in contact with Werckmeister). There is no evidence that Werckmeister—or Bach—expected

music to interpret a text. Rather, they expected music to simply reflect the glories of creation.

David Schulenberg (1995) has pinpointed Chafe's over-interpretation of the concept of "allegory." According to Schulenberg, the idea of "Baroque allegory" appears not only in Chafe's work but also in the writings of the "new musicologists" such as Susan McClary, who famously discovered social and gendered hierarchies in Bach's music (McClary 1987). Schulenberg asks several questions about the "allegorical" method of finding meaning in Baroque music:

> Are the new types of reading legitimate? Do they tell us more about Baroque music or about the interpreter? Despite the postmodern critical terminology adopted in some writings, do they ultimately amount to anything more than programmizing of the sort associated with nineteenth-century music criticism? Does the theological or sociological allegoresis of Bach's music really constitute an exercise in modern hermeneutics, or is it an updated version of the romantic view of music as autobiography, its implicit purpose being to rehabilitate the old view of Bach as a preacher or now, perhaps, to make him a politician, in tones? (1995:208–209)

In an attempt to answer these loaded questions, Schulenberg takes a historical overview of the whole system of "allegory" applied to Baroque music. He notes that Chafe's influence has led to "musical allegory" being applied to complex theological and philosophical ideas rather than—with more historical justification—to simple objects or actions. And he also questions the locus of the allegory: to hear Baroque music as "allegorizing" an idea is to write an allegory. The allegory is in the musicological writing rather than in the music or in the composer's intention (1995:210).

Schulenberg makes an interesting point in bringing together the apparently disparate writings of Chafe and McClary under the concept of "allegory." There certainly are many points of contact between Bach theology and the perhaps now dated "new musicological" attempt to find the social relevance of music by giving musical forms and devices verbal meaning. It seems that one of the reasons for the level of interest in theological methods of understanding Bach may indeed be because of these points of contact. Methods which attempt to discover "extra-musical" meaning in music have enjoyed a certain prestige, and methods which find unpalatable or difficult meanings —such as certain types of theological dogma—might be especially congenial to scholars who prefer to designate the past as distant and unknowable. Chafe believes that the theological outlook of Bach's music is "more challenging than ever in our predominantly secular age" (2000:xvii). This belief might be particularly appealing to those musicologists who have an interest in relativizing musical experience as historically and socially

contingent. Unfortunately, what both Chafe and McClary are discovering is often not the challenge of eighteenth-century theology expressed in music, but the challenge of early twentieth-century conservative Lutheranism.

Historically, allegories of music form creative rhetorical ways of conceptualizing music. They do not necessarily uncover a unified verbal "meaning" for that music or tell us anything at all about the way the composer imagined it. It is Chafe and other theological writers who are the allegorists, not Bach. Theologians' allegories explaining that this is how they hear the melody might make interesting reading, but their statements that this is what the melody means, that this was Bach's intention based on Luther's theology, claim an impossible authority for their speculations.

Theology by Numbers

Most theological interpreters of Bach, like the allegorists, work by framing a direct correlation between his music and his theological ideas. For them, Bach distanced himself from the texts he was setting to music, considered the exact theological meanings he found, then interpreted the texts with his music, just like a modern exegetical theologian would do with words. Michael Marissen, for instance, finds social allegories in Bach's music and relates these to Luther's writings about the theological structure of society (1995). Other scholars, notably Renate Steiger, find "rhetorical" tropes in Bach's musical figures (2000). Steiger usually begins her analyses of Bach's music in simple fashion with an examination of Bach's "exegesis" of single words or phrases. For instance, in an analysis of his cantatas on the theme of dying and death, she finds *sterben/Tod* (to die/death) represented by tempo fluctuation (slowing down) and dissonant harmonies (2000:3–10). Similarly, *Furcht* (fear) is represented by tremolos (2000:13). Steiger then moves on from this straightforward semantic method to much more complex theological ideas. She concludes, to give one example, that the absence of continuo in certain works represents the certainty and acknowledgement of death (2000:22). She stresses that the rhetorical signs she finds do not merely provide surface decoration, but form the very structure of Bach's exegesis, and therefore of his music (2000:36).

Some theological writers who believe that most or all of Bach's musical decisions were consciously theological in impulse end up mired in the conspiracy theory of cabbalistic number symbolism. German violin professor Helga Thoene, for instance, believes that almost every decision Bach took, from the number of notes he wrote on a certain page in a certain manuscript to the number of dotted notes in a certain section, has direct theological significance to be decoded (1991). Thoene also finds "hidden" chorales

underlying the music in quasi-Schenkerian manner (1994). Thoene's work was the inspiration behind the CD *Morimur*, released in 2001, in which the Hilliard Ensemble joins violinist Christoph Poppen to illustrate her theories. As Poppen performs the Chaconne from the D Minor Partita, the Hilliards mistily sing chorales in the background, resulting in some alarming—and definitely un-Bachian—harmonic progressions. The CD liner notes claim that "in the latter half of the twentieth century, Bach scholars both during and after [Friedrich] Smend's lifetime collected so much evidence in this field that the only question remaining is the extent, or perhaps we should say the limits, of the encoded numeric messages in Bach's music" (Glossner 2001:41).

However, any reasonably mathematically aware scholar will know that, given enough data, it is possible to find almost any desired "significant" pattern. (I once whiled away a long afternoon finding numerical patterns from sections of the Koran in Bach's scores.) Truly believing that one has found religious meaning in chance numerical patterns requires a large measure of blind faith, or perhaps credulity—as Luther himself pointed out. His late anti-Judaic essay "Vom Schem Hamphoras" contains a sustained polemic against the Rabbinic interpretation of the Old Testament by numeric symbolism (a method sometimes known as arithmetic Cabbala), probably motivated by his attempt to advance his own German translation and his literalist ideas on interpretation ([1543] 1920). Luther scorned the cabbalistic interpretation of Exodus 14:19–21, in which Rabbinic scholars had found seventy-two names of angels or aspects of the hidden name of Yahweh by rearranging the Hebrew letters and understanding them as numbers (all letters are also numbers in Hebrew). To illustrate this, Luther constructed a schema in Latin (in which language only some letters are also numbers) and created twelve new angel names. One came out as "Gott gibt Heil" (God gives salvation). But Luther showed that it was also possible to read "Hans gibt Heil" or worse, "Satan gibt Heil" ([1543] 1920:596–98). He concluded that one could come up with any hidden message in Scripture by this cabbalistic method, and his essay contains a recurring polemic against understanding a text after the "poor, bare, empty letters" (ledige, blosse, arme Buchstaben, [1543] 1920:592–93). And Luther generally mistrusted any attempt to find coded meaning in external signs.

Lutheran or Reformed?

As the above examples show, most of the scholars who seek Lutheran mean-ing in Bach's music seem to think it self-evident that such an undertaking must involve relating musical features in some way to Lutheran doctrines.

Yet even this project is questionable, and not merely because of the more extreme forms it can take. It is in fact a Calvinist, rather than a Lutheran, idea that church music must relate clearly to doctrine. As Rowan Williams puts it, in the Reformed (Calvinist) tradition: "There is an appropriate 'beauty' for Christian art and utterance, but it is to be judged by how far it draws attention away from the 'real' agent, the divine agent" (1995:583). Luther himself would certainly have failed to recognize such an idea—and not simply because he lived before the *seconda prattica* had developed with its theories about music's power to express ideas. Williams believes that for Luther: "The experiences of ordinary life [are] *all* pervaded by grace. If God does not belong with a particular set of positive 'religious' experiences, the kind of experience you may have if you perform religious duties or undergo religious ecstasy, then God is not restricted in his presence in the world" (1995:578). As I have argued above, when he read the Bible, Luther refused to believe that the external signs—the words—contained the whole meaning. Similarly, he would have refuted the idea that all aspects of a worship service, including music, must point clearly to verbally expressed doctrine. This idea comes from Calvinism—a tradition which Bach himself would almost certainly have understood to be the enemy of church music. Scholars' attempts to tie Bach's music down to the words of his texts are unhistorical and betray a later perspective, when the lines between the Lutheran and Calvinist traditions had blurred.

Luther was famous for his love of music; similarly, he was not opposed to elaborate church decoration and architecture. Calvin, on the other hand, started a movement whose followers abhorred elaborate worship and ritual—and figural music—which led them to desecrate churches and destroy church organs. Calvinists did this because, just as they thought that the words of the Bible contained the Word of revelation, so they were concerned to find the exact spiritual meaning, sacred or diabolical, of every secular sign and practice. It is a Reformed approach to subject all religious ritual and symbolism to rigorous scrutiny in order to verify its orthodoxy. In Calvin's austere world, nothing is innocent; all symbols must belong either to God or to the devil, and music, like other arts, creates ambiguous symbolism that distracts the senses. It is therefore suspect, so it belongs to the devil and must be destroyed.[14]

Luther, by contrast, happily accepted that there was a secular world of innocent pleasure, or, to put it another way, that good things were sanctioned by God. In his view, divine revelation was separate from and primary to the Bible, though it should crystallize out of the Bible (MacCulloch 2004:241; Oberman [1989] 2006:174). For Luther, therefore, flashes of divine inspiration could be expected from secular things such as music, as well in the joys of marriage, the company of friends, a good meal, and so on, but such divine

inspiration was not necessarily expressed in words. When Luther wrote that "except for theology there is no art that could be put on the same level with music, since except for theology [music] alone produces what otherwise only theology can do, namely a calm and gentle disposition" (Luther 1958, 49:427–29), he did not intend that music could give semantic meaning or provide exact analogues to theological ideas. Rather, he thought that music could refresh and comfort the soul as the Word does, because it is also a gift from God.[15] Thus, when Bach scholars seek the direct, Scriptural meaning of the composer's musical decisions, they are invoking Calvinist rather than Lutheran theology.

This confusion between Lutheran and Calvinist piety can again be traced back to Karl Holl and his followers, whose view of Luther was so decisively influenced by their twentieth-century German nationalism. Holl was a staunch Lutheran, but was also troubled by what he saw as Lutheranism's political weakness in comparison to Calvinism. In line with the then voguish attempt to describe social movements by way of religious culture—Max Weber's work on the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism being the most enduring example—Holl posited that Germany had lost the First World War because Lutherans were not used to fighting for individual freedom as Calvinists were, and because the inhabitants of Calvinist states tended to hold self-righteously to the belief that they had the religious duty to wage war on injustice (Holl 1959:76). While deploring this self-righteousness and individualism, Holl also argued for a "small transfusion of Calvinist blood" to strengthen the resolve of his countrymen (Stayer 2000:34). In terms of doctrine too, Holl frequently preferred Calvinist dogmatism to what he saw as Lutheran vacillation; he chose, for instance, to describe justification primarily as a process of ethical transformation, which is a Calvinist idea (Stayer 2000:23–24). Theologians and writers follow Holl's school, whether they know it or not, in asserting that an ethical, Calvinist view of music is a Lutheran doctrine. In fact, Lutherans from Luther to Bach and beyond were always well aware of the impossibility of constraining music with words. They valued music for the beauty it added to the liturgy rather than interrogating it for its fidelity to doctrine or for its ability to effect ethical transformation of the individual.

Bach Cantatas as Sermons

Bach scholars generally adopt the ethical view of music's power to express doctrine and thus identify his sacred music, particularly the cantatas, as musical sermons. To give one example, Alfred Dürr begins his famous study of the cantatas with the words:

> At the heart of the Protestant service lies the sermon . . . The history of
> church music from Schütz to Bach is thus an account of the influx into
> liturgical singing of sermon-like interpretative and exegetical elements . . .
> Church musicians were naturally most interested in those parts of the ser-
> vice best suited to assuming a sermon-like character. (Dürr 2005:3–4)

Yet if we reject the Calvinist idea that music's religious power is primarily
semantic, this notion also becomes more problematic, or at least it invites
us to question what a sermon really is. Taruskin argues that Bach's music
exhorts, indeed, hectors the listener: "Bach's most striking works were
written to persuade us—no, reveal to us—that the world is filth and hor-
ror, that humans are helpless, that life is pain, and that reason is a snare . . .
When his music was pleasing, it was usually in order to indoctrinate or
cajole" (Taruskin 2005, 2:363–64). And yet, Luther himself would not have
recognized this description of music's power; I venture to suggest that neither
would Bach. As a pious Lutheran, Bach probably hoped that his listeners
would gain spiritual refreshment and understanding as God chose to send
it via music—or not. But he would not presume to know the specific form
such refreshment and understanding might take.

Yet again, the idea that Bach preaches in music, if this means that he
intended to inspire his listeners to repentance and to change their mental
state in set ways, can be traced back to Holl. For Holl and his followers,
Luther's theological ideas were based on a deep psychological understanding
of humankind's existential state.[16] Holl understood both Luther's famous
Anfechtungen (times of temptation or mental anguish) and St. Paul's "thorn
in the flesh" as moments of psychological despair in which the sinner is
closest to God, and on which salvation through grace is dependent. He
identified such despair with Luther's understanding of condemnation under
the Law, and as such understood it as a vital step on the path to the joy of
justification by faith. This psychological view of Luther was one of Holl's
most persistent legacies, yet it is of questionable use when transposed onto
Luther's time (or Bach's). It grew more from Holl's interest in Kierkegaard
and a post-Enlightenment subjectivist understanding of religion than from
a reading of Luther's actual words or from Luther's medieval understand-
ing of his world as populated with supernatural beings. Holl wanted to
understand Luther and the Reformation as the beginning of modernity in
thought, which for him meant the beginning of the modern consciousness
and the modern subjective conscience-based religion as opposed to the older
objectivist view. He therefore saw in Luther's early writings a justification
of his own existentialist religious views in which God's love paradoxically
perpetuates his anger, this anger being the paramount way of convincing
sinners of their sinfulness. Law and Gospel are thus experienced internally
and psychologically by the believer as bad or good conscience, understanding

of God's wrath or of his love. Holl's religion of conscience (*Gewissensreligion*) was in fact one of the most controversial features of his theology, and was clearly informed by his nationalistic desire to see Luther as founder of modern German philosophy. Holl imputed his existentialist view to the early Luther only after developing it independently as a piece of systematic theology (Assel 1994:142–63; Korsch 1989:145–213).

But if Holl was anachronistic in identifying the process of salvation as a psychological procedure, this renders the idea that Bach "preaches" in tones—that he attempts to instruct his listeners' consciences to repentance and renewal—a good deal more questionable. In fact, it is safer to assume that Bach saw his texts as reflecting an objective truth. Seen in that light, the idea that he was emphasizing the experiential in order to convince a congregation of those truths becomes less compelling. Rather than exhorting his listeners, or writing music which underlined the emotional or "dynamic" religious experience in order to move the listeners to feel that experience for themselves, it is more likely that Bach was merely composing music to illustrate the dramatic effect of various aspects of the Christian message. If justification depends not on a subjective, moral response, but on the work of an almighty God no matter what the conscience of the believer, then a need to change the feelings or affective state of the believer is less obvious. The affect of music is not necessarily related to the religious meaning of the text, for such meaning would not have needed musical demonstration or proof. Performing or writing church music was an act of devotion, part of religious practice, not an act of persuasion associated with religious dogma. The affect of music is not necessarily consequent on the religious meaning of the text, for such meaning would not have needed musical demonstration or proof. It is in religious practice, ritual, and drama that we should seek to contextualize his music, not by looking for its elusive doctrinal content. Or, at the very least, if a cantata is a sermon, it should be heard as an imaginative response to an idea or emotion, rather than, following Taruskin, as an exhortation. Luther commented that "God has preached the gospel through music too, as may be seen in Josquin, all of whose compositions flow freely, gently, and cheerfully, are not forced or cramped by rules, and are like the song of the finch" (Luther 1958, 54:129–30). Preaching through music does not involve the underlining of doctrinal messages, but rather the meditation on the Word that is not constrained by words.

Conclusion

Many Bach scholars today continue to rely on an outdated view of Luther, one which portrays him as a German hero, a Bible exegete who consciously initiated the "Reformation" and who inaugurated the best of German cul-

ture, including music, to spread his doctrinal message and win souls. While there has very recently been a move away from the more extreme aspects of this interpretation, particularly in the English-speaking world, writings which take a twentieth-century ethical and nationalist view of Luther—and consequently of Bach and of his music—remain highly influential in Bach studies. I propose that Luther scholarship should be taken more critically, not merely mined for supposedly historical, but actually confessional, contexts in which Bach can be situated.

Yet I do not want to advocate an end to hermeneutics in Bach studies; nor do I want to marginalize the importance of religion and religious experience in Bach interpretation. It would be impossible, and perhaps undesirable, to remove Luther and his interpreters altogether from Bach studies. But it is surely possible for writers to become more aware of their scholarly ancestry, to heighten their critical faculties by understanding more about the agendas driving the various Luther images down the centuries, and to be more careful about historically situating both themselves and the authorities they cite, in an attempt to understand which images they want to retain and which to reject.

There are other, less confessional, interpreters whose images of Luther might help to illuminate Bach's music; note, for instance, theologian Heiko Oberman's notoriously dramatic view of Luther as "man between God and the devil" ([1989] 2006). Oberman portrays a Luther who grappled passionately with belief, joyful and despairing by turns, and who valued music and other pleasures as gifts of God without needing to be Puritanical about their doctrinal meaning. This Luther can provide an antidote to the dry images of Luther as the righteous exegete that plague Bach scholarship.

In a similar fashion, the different types of Lutheran piety which had also taken hold by Bach's time deserve investigation on their own terms, not merely evaluation according to how far they remain faithful to Luther's supposed legacy. For instance, Carol Baron has recently edited a book of essays with the aim of setting Bach in the cultural context of his times. In her own two essays within the volume, she demonstrates the cultural, political, and religious "tumult" of Leipzig at Bach's time, when Pietism, Lutheran Orthodoxy, and Enlightenment philosophy and science formed "a vortex of flux and fusions" (2006:74). In startling contrast with the traditional view of Bach's world as essentially unchanged since Luther's time—the introduction to one mid-twentieth-century standard work on Bach is entitled "A World Without Change: Luther to Bach" (Chiapusso 1968)—Baron argues that "The religious complexity of the Leipzig community during the period of the early *Aufklärung* can be bewildering if one is looking for clear definitions of what people believed and how they worshipped. This was an intellectually dynamic period for the wealthy and educated populations of Germany's

courts and commercial cities" (2006:73). Joyce Irwin also portrays Bach as an individual engaged in the musical and religious politics of his time, on the progressive side: "For understanding the context in which Bach lived, it is important to observe that he was very conscious of living in a culture that differed greatly from that of his forebears. The people he needed to please were not the opponents of foreign culture . . . but the bourgeois citizens of a contemporary society" (Irwin 2006:121). Enlightenment optimism about the world, according to Baron, even overturned Luther's "pessimistic" theology of the cross; Bach's music "offers the 'taste' of joy through arrival and accomplishment, in the here and now . . . The palpable quality of this affect in Bach's music would necessarily have had its source in an emotion known and embraced in the reality of that epoch, and of that composer" (2006:73).

By placing Bach in the context of the religion of the eighteenth rather than the sixteenth (or twentieth) century, and by attempting to understand his possible reactions to the religious issues of his time, Luther's grip on Bach scholarship is weakened. Yet even this will not detach Luther entirely, simply because in Bach's day, Lutheranism as religious, cultural, and political identity was extremely strong, and fascination with Luther prevailed even then. My own contingent solution to the problem of Luther in Bach studies indeed returns inescapably to Luther himself. Not, however, to the stern Scriptural exegete anachronistically painted by later theologians, but to the ex-monk to whom the quotation about "wine, women, and song" found such an easy, if probably erroneous, attribution.[17] This Luther was not Calvin. He was not suspicious of the pleasures of life; unlike Calvin and his followers, he did not interrogate all worldly symbols and pleasures for the sacred or diabolical meaning to which they pointed. Rather, he expected to hear flashes of the ineffable and the divine in music, as in all good things: "[Music] has often revived me and relieved me from heavy burdens" (quoted in Oberman [1989] 2006:310). He knew how to harness music's mnemonic power for the illiterate, but he no more intended music to mediate theological doctrine than he found in the enjoyment of a good meal a sermon on the Eucharist. Ironically, we can expect to become more "Lutheran" in listening to Bach precisely by dropping the heavy weight of confessional Lutheran scholarship. By looking again at Luther we can challenge the historically dubious assumption that in order to be theologically orthodox, music has to express ideas. Perhaps Bach, like us, knew the limitations of music's semantic ability; perhaps he too knew that words and music have always signified in different ways. And perhaps this worried him not at all. Indeed it may be that he took special pleasure in this form of *Gemütsergötzung*, this "spiritual refreshment."

Notes

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1. "Alle Gebiete der Kultur hat die Reformation im Lauf der Jahrhunderte befruchtet. Aber hat sie mit dem, was sie bisher geleistet hat, nicht ihre Kraft erschöpft? Manche mochten das vor dem Krieg befürchten, unter dem Eindruck, daß zusammen mit der Religion überhaupt auch die Reformation an Werbekraft verlor. Heute scheint sich ein Umschwung anzubahnen. Der Sinn für Religion ist unter uns im Wachen. Aber es droht auch die Gefahr, daß der neue Drang sich in Aberglauben und Träumerei verwirrt. Wenn je, so tut heute Luther uns not, um hier eine Gesundung herbeizuführen ... Die Gewissen sind überall, zumal seit dem Krieg verwirrt; auch bei uns in Deutschland. Erst wenn an dieser Stelle eine Besinnung eingetreten ist, darf man auf eine Erneuerung unseres Volkes hoffen. Aber dann wird, so vertraue ich zuversichtlich, es sich auch erweisen, daß die Reformation nicht am Ende, sondern erst am Anfang ihrer Weltwirkung steht" (Holl 1927:1, 542–43).

2. "Eben dies tut auch die Kantate, die in der Form, wie sie bei Bach begegnet, nur von Luthers Schrift- und Musikverständnis her zu verstehen ist" (Steiger and Steiger 1992:15).

3. "Das regte einen Johann Sebastian an zu seiner bis dahin noch nicht da gewesenen Kunst, doch steht er auf den Schultern aller derer vor ihm, deren musikalische Invention und Komposition vom biblischen Wort erfunden waren: mit diesen allen zusammen aber auf den Schultern dessen stehend, der die Stimme des Freundes uns zu Gehör brachte im Bibeldeutsch. Die redet noch immer, wo wortgetreues Festhalten ist. Nicht im allgemeinen redet sie, sie redet zu mir" (L. Steiger 1999:72).

4. *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, s.v. "Heilsgeschichte" (by Friedrich Mildenberger).

5. It is also worth noting that the English translators of Bornkamm's most influential work are disingenuous in their biographical note about him. E. Theodore Bachmann states that, "During the Nazi era and its ideological struggles [Bornkamm] sided with the Confessing Church, maintaining his scholarly pursuits during World War II to the extent that conditions permitted" (Bornkamm 1983: Preface). The Evangelical Church in Germany split into three broad factions in response to Nazism: the *Deutsche Christen* supported Nazism and tried to expunge Jewish influences from Christianity, the mainstream Evangelical Church cooperated with the regime to a varying extent, and the Confessing Church (*Bekennende Kirche*) opposed Nazism. Bornkamm was involved with the first two factions; his editors' comments exemplify the way in which the reputations of theologians were "cleaned up" after the war, something which may partly explain Chafe's failure to appreciate Bornkamm's ideological position.

6. "Allegoriae non pariunt firmas probationes in Theologia, sed velut pictuae ornant & illustrant rem" (Luther 1538:262).

7. "Quare Hierusalem quae sursum est, id est, coelestis, est Ecclesia in hoc tempore, non ἀναγωγικῶς futurae vitae patria, vel Ecclesia triumphans, ut ocioli & ineruditi Monachi & Scholastici doctores nugati sunt, qui tradiderunt quuatuor esse sensus scripturae, Literalem,

tropologicum, allegoricum & anagogicum, & secundum hos singula fere verba scripturae inepte interpretati sunt. Ut Hierusalem literaliter significabat illis urbem eius nominis. Tropologice, conscientiam puram. Allegorice, Ecclesiam militantam. Anagogice, coelestem patriam seu Ecclesiam triumphantem. His insulsis & nugacibus fabulis, quibus discerpserunt scripturas in tot sententias, secerunt, ut de nullis rebus conscientae certo erudiri potuerint" (Luther 1538).

8. See Gadamer (1989:176–77). On what Paul Ricoeur calls "this pact between hermeneutics and history," see his essay "The Task of Hermeneutics" in Ricoeur (1981), especially pages 48–49.

9. "Da ich ein Mönch war / war ich ein Meister auff Geistliche Deutung / allegorisirt es alles / Darnach aber / da ich durch die Epistel zum Römern / ein wenig zum Erkenntnis Christi kam / sahe ich / das mit Allegorien und Geistlichen Deutungen nichts nicht war / Nicht was Christus bedeutet / sondern wer und was er ist" (Luther 1566:509).

10. "Doct. M. L. sagte auff ein ander mal / Ich kan nicht mehr arbeiten / auch nicht mehr reden / Als ich jung war / da war ich gelert / und sonderlich / ehe ich in die Theologia kam / da gieng ich mit Allegorijs / Tropologijs / und Anagogijs umb / und machte eitel kunst / Wenns jtzt einer hette / er trüge es umbher fur eitel Beilthumb / Aber ich weis / das es ein lauter Dreck ist. Nu hab ichs faren lassen / und ist meine beste und erste Kunst / tradere Scripturam simplici sensu, denn literalis sensu der thuts / da ist leben / da ist krafft / lere und kunst innen / In dem andern / da ist nur Narrenwerk / wiewol es hoch gleisset" (Luther 1566:510).

11. "Abraham est figura Dei, qui habet duos filios, id est, duos populos, per Ismael ac Isaac representatos. Hi nati sunt ei ex Agar & Sara, quae significant duo testamenta, vetus & novum" (Luther 1538:261–62).

12. For one of many instances, see Cox (1985:facsimile 231) on the commission to make disciples from all lands in Matthew 28:19, linked to Jacob's blessing of Joseph in Genesis 48:16.

13. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Werckmeister, Andreas" (by George Buelow).

14. In my discussion of the differences between Calvinist and Lutheran piety, I follow the broad outlines set out in Williams (1995).

15. Heiko Oberman writes entertainingly about Luther's joy in life and his distance from later Puritan moralizing. See, for instance, Oberman ([1989] 2006:282–83, 309–310).

16. Holl took this notion in part from Max Weber. Scribner designates the idea that Luther represented the beginning of modernity in German thought as part of the "myth-making"' which surrounds the reformer (Scribner 1986:2).

17. On the attribution of this saying to Luther, see Oberman ([1989] 2006:310).

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