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Choral Total:  
Analytical Perspectives on the Bach Cantatas

## Authorised Transcript

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# Choral Total: Analytical Perspectives on the Bach Cantatas

Authorised transcript\* of a live video discussion with Daniel R. Melamed (DM), Ruth Tatlow (RT), and John Butt (JB), moderated by Noelle M. Heber (NH).

Questions from the audience were asked by Michael Marissen (MM).

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\*The following transcript has been edited and expanded for clarity and will at times differ from the spoken live discussion.<sup>1</sup>

NH Welcome to this discussion on 'Analytical Perspectives on the Bach Cantatas'. Our three contributors today will speak on three different analytical aspects: Daniel Melamed will focus on the music of the cantatas; Ruth Tatlow on the theology; and John Butt on their performance practices. The curious subtitle, 'How We Got into this Kind of Analysis and How to Get out', is a parody of two classic texts from music criticism and analysis, the first by Joseph Kerman, published in 1980, and the second by Kofi Agawu in 2004.<sup>2</sup> So today, we will consider some of the same issues in relation to our treatment of the Bach cantatas. Without further ado, let's hear from Dan on 'Analysing the Music'.

DM I want to suggest, to get us started, that the analysis and interpretation of Bach cantatas is badly broken, especially for its reliance on an approach to analysing and interpreting the cantatas that seems to be pretty much taken for granted, but turns out to be based on a very particular, and, I would say, historically dubious aesthetic. I want to show you, as briefly as I can, something about where this approach came from, demonstrate to you that it really does persist, and then, if there is time, begin to suggest a way out of this broken system.

I want to suggest that the model for pretty much all cantata analysis in the 20th and 21st centuries has been Albert Schweitzer, particularly drawing on his study of Bach's music published successively in French, German, and English in 1905, 1908, and 1911, with revisions and modifications by the author in each of the languages.<sup>3</sup> You cannot put these three down next to each other and expect to find exactly the same content. It's slightly dizzying. He spends several chapters extensively establishing the aesthetic foundation for his approach to interpreting and analysing Bach's music. There is no time to go into that here. You'll have to come hear a longer version of this talk.<sup>4</sup> Suffice to say that he is positioning Bach, and Bach's way of working musically, very clearly against Wagner. And you might note that the preface to the first edition is by Charles Widor, and that should tell you something about the aesthetic orientation of this.

Analysis of Bach, Schweitzer laments, has missed the expressive element. He says that Philipp Spitta, really the only person to deal extensively with the cantatas, is—in his words—embarrassed by this expressive element, and he writes that analyses fail just at the point where the analyst should look for the inmost connection between the poetic thought and Bach's musical expression. They've missed, as do all analysts, that Bach's music represents not so much a generalised emotional state as one woven out of concrete musical ideas. Bach is, in a number of ways, a direct opposite of Wagner. In this respect, Wagner is the poetic musician, Schweitzer's title notwithstanding; Bach is representative of what he calls pictorial music.

Now, Schweitzer sees this realised musically in particular musical motifs. They are mostly rhythmic, and they appear and reappear in all the vocal music and, in fact, in the instrumental music as well, where, from piece to piece, and from vocal to instrumental genres, they retain the same meanings across pieces. 'Bach's musical

language', he writes, 'is simply based on the fact that for the representation of certain feelings he prefers certain definite rhythms, and that this association is so natural that it at once tells its own story to anyone with a musical mind'. Schweitzer goes on to identify 20 or 25 such ideas; some of them, the ones you see at the top, are pictorial, representing serpents, angels, and water. But they're also conceptual—rising, falling, walking, hurrying—and abstract, representing faith, strength, tumult, weariness, solemnity, terror. He's got 20 or 25 of these. They, to him, represent a vocabulary, and, he says, a key to decoding Bach's vocal and instrumental music.

Let me show you an example: the first movement of the cantata *Brech dem Hungrigen dein Brot* ('Break Your Bread with the Hungry'), BWV 39. Schweitzer offers this as an example of Bach's representation of movement. Now, in this opening idea, of the opening ritornello, Spitta very clearly hears the breaking of bread, 'Brech dem Hungrigen dein Brot'.<sup>5</sup> And let me just play you a little bit of this. So here's the ritornello.

[Music]

So, Spitta hears the breaking of bread, and so on. In Spitta's view, the fact that Bach continues these eighth note motifs into the next section and text, demonstrates how far Bach is, Spitta says, from triviality; here he means 'und die, so in Elend sind...' ('and those who are in exile...').

[Music]

And then that motif will continue in the instruments, even as the text moves on, and offers succour to those who are in exile. Now, Schweitzer calls this explanation—that Bach deviates from the trivial by continuing this motif—an excuse, and he says both the explanation of this as breaking of bread and this excuse are wrong. 'There is no worse reproach', he writes, 'than saying Bach retained a picture in music beyond its necessity.' And he also says no one who listens to the music can take it to be a picture of the breaking of bread. It is, instead, a march, Schweitzer says, the march depicting wretched ones who were being supported and led into the house.<sup>6</sup> He writes that Bach's real thought is not always the most direct and obvious. The idea is strongly pictorial in essence, but it is a picture of a situation.<sup>7</sup>

These are the terms in which analysts and interpreters have since worked. Let me show you some examples: that is, they take motifs that they associate with particular images, and they consider them to be consistent from piece to piece. And they look for a governing idea that Bach brings to the text that reveals his subtle pictorial approach. The method is almost never questioned, just the correctness or incorrectness of a particular interpretation along these lines.

The clear heir is William Gillies Whittaker. On this movement, he turns immediately to a pictorial question: 'Spitta and Schering see in this the breaking of bread, Schweitzer the tottering of the weak.' The first form of this motif, Whittaker says, 'is associated with the word 'hungry', the despairing appeal of starving refugees. ... Sopranos and altos sing an infinitely tender theme, pathetically broken by rests after the first and third words, imitated by tenors and basses; emotion chokes the voices of the merciful'.<sup>8</sup> Again, still pictorial, and Whittaker picks up another interpretive tendency: that is, regarding Bach cantatas as personal expressions of the composer.

Spitta took Cantata BWV 39 to be a composition marking the arrival, in 1732, in Leipzig of Protestant exiles from Salzburg, and he called it 'an affecting picture of Christian love, softening, with tender hand and pitying sympathy, the sorrow of the brethren, and attaining the highest reward'. Whittaker says, 'Bach's heart was touched to the core by the sight of the forlorn and suffering people'. This is the other strand of Bach cantata interpretation: that is, Bach as personal, expressive artist through this music.

A more recent practitioner, John Eliot Gardiner, offers the following perspective: 'We have seen how rarely the musical setting of a cantata movement is driven exclusively by the semantic sense of the words', he writes. 'Instead, Bach often surrounds them with his own private code of emphasis of matching affects.' And then, talking about the various sections of this piece, Gardiner notes, 'Just where you might expect the Oxfam appeal, you get the begging bowl itself. Bach writes his chorus, not from the position of the appeal's director, but from that of the famine victim. In other words, he is engineering a movable role for his choir from members of a cast to biblical instructors, laying down rules for appropriate charitable behaviour'.<sup>9</sup>

And this is found all over the internet. Here's one, Julian Mincham, from [jsbachcantatas.com](http://jsbachcantatas.com), and he goes immediately to Schweitzer, citing one of Bach's motifs of exhaustion in a comparative piece, Cantata BWV 125, *Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin* ('With Peace and Joy I Depart'): 'Schweitzer is probably somewhat nearer to the truth, although he does not seem to entertain the thought that Bach may have intended to represent both images'; that is, movement and the breaking of bread.<sup>10</sup> So you see that this is all about deciding which is the particular pictorial image, not questioning whether that's really what's going on here in the first place.

Now, Schweitzer is on to something, of course, in saying that looking at a larger universe of pieces is important, and you will recognise some of these, in some of his interpretations here. 'Tumult', for example, is clearly Monteverdi's *genere concitato* that stands for warlike sentiments, and anger, rage, and so on. And it's not hard to recognise things like pastoral topics, and so on. But both considerations of the *genere concitato* and topical analysis understand these conventions as being exactly that: they are musical conventions of the time, a

shared musical language, as opposed to being some personal, expressive code of Bach's. So he's not wrong to be looking at other pieces, but this pictorial bent runs all the way through analysis.

The interpretation of this piece, just as an example, goes in circles trying to decide which pictorial image is most likely. We're stuck in the same interpretive method. The way out, I suggest, and probably don't have time to elaborate on, is musical analysis that's compatible with 18th-century types and with an understanding of 18th-century conventions; and, importantly, a willingness to try and align those with theological issues that would have been understood as salient at the time.

Although I don't have time to go into it, this is Alfred Dürr's analysis.<sup>11</sup> What's really interesting about it is, if you write a Venn diagram of essentially all of Dürr's analyses, he will tell you something about the text and the theology, and he will tell you something about the music, but they have no overlap whatsoever; they have none whatsoever. And so Dürr's analyses certainly are good, and he mostly escapes this pictorial approach, but it doesn't amount to interpretation of the piece. Oh, there's lots more I could say about this, but there's a few thoughts to get us started on this topic. Thank you.

[Applause]

NH Thank you, Dan. Do either Ruth or John have a question for Dan?

JB I noticed at several points Dan said, you know, 'they heard this', or 'they saw this'. And I think that's where this issue lies: that it's the person looking or the person listening that makes a decision. So it's therefore, to my mind, not necessarily wrong that people come to conclusions like this, because you need two halves to any artistic experience, the producer and the listener. So it's perfectly possible to hear what you want in Bach cantatas. Indeed, I would argue that a lot of the design of Bach's music is to try and make you think of something, even though one couldn't necessarily say precisely what. And what you bring to it from your background, theological or otherwise, is going to concretise what you think you're hearing. So it's Bach providing a mechanism by which pictorial, affective, or semantic issues can be constructed in the very moment of consumption.

NH Thank you, John. Let's move on, then, to Ruth, on 'Analysing the Theology'.

RT Thank you. 'The Theology of Bach's church cantatas' or 'How We Got into this Kind of Analysis and How to Get out'. The past 200 years of Bach scholarship have seen a wide variety of theological views projected onto Bach's church cantatas: for example, those by Marpurg and Forkel in the 18th century; by Bitter and Spitta in the 19th century; by Blume and Dürr in the 20th century; and by many scholars since, including the late Martin Petzoldt, who recently analysed the theological in Bach research from the 1950s, and named the clashing ideological camps between the theologies of scholars in West and East Germany.<sup>12</sup>

These theological views have been projected onto the image of Johann Sebastian Bach. We've seen Bach, the heroic representative of the German nation; Bach, the Great Devout Lutheran; Bach, the rigidly Orthodox Lutheran; Bach, the Pietist Lutheran; Bach, the Begrudging Impious church musician.<sup>13</sup> And with these images come many suggestions of a Bach who is implicitly anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, anti-'Other', and so on. Many of these views are mutually exclusive, but they do have one common attribute: theologically, Bach was a card-carrying Lutheran, whatever that meant in practice.

Students and Bach scholars are expected to be familiar with the mainstream writings on Bach's theological beliefs. A critical look at these writings, though, shows that there are as many shades of theological interpretation as there are authors. At times, emotions have run high as scholars have forcefully defended their views of Bach's theology, causing factions and divisions within the Bach community. Is it worth it? And is it even possible to discover Bach's theological stance? If historical objects such as Bach's cantatas are to speak to every age, then surely it is inevitable that we will interpret their theology from the perspectives of our own philosophy, theology, and prejudices, and thereby paint Bach, the man, in our own image. These are age-old questions fundamental to the analytical aspiration, and they are part of 'How We Got into this Kind of Theological Analysis'. So how do we get out?

The method I have chosen to try to get closer to Bach's way of thinking, and his theology, is a historically informed approach, focusing on sources that Bach could have known, owned, or read. It's a well-tried method, and it's particularly beneficial today because of the unlimited access we now have to historical sources that were not available to earlier scholars. This method is resulting in new insights that are both challenging and confirming the canonical views of Bach's theology. Here is an example from my work on Cantata BWV 61, *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* ('Now come, you Saviour of the heathen').<sup>14</sup> As I was thinking about this cantata, I wondered: who were the heathen to Bach? What kind of salvation did Bach think the Saviour was offering the heathen? How far did God's love, God's grace, and salvation, extend to the non-Lutheran 'Other'? I turned to the volumes listed in Bach's estate by theologian and orientalist August Pfeiffer (1640–1698), who appears to have been one of Bach's favourite authors.<sup>15</sup>

The tolerance I found in Pfeiffer's theology made my heart skip a beat, given some of the hardline views repeated in Bach literature. Here are a few examples from Pfeiffer's volume of systematic theology, which is particularly helpful as it has a great index.<sup>16</sup> So here we go. This is in translation, of course; the original is in German. Pfeiffer writes:

The entire content of the Gospel is found in the golden power-saying of Christ, John 3:16: 'For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life', because it is these words, in their right and complete

understanding, that put before our eyes the entire evangelical sermon of grace.<sup>17</sup>

He continues:

When Christ says, 'God loved the world', do not understand this to mean the enormous expanse of heavens and of earth, but rather to refer to Adam and all the children of men in the world, who descended from him in the common course of nature. Not a single one is excluded; in a word: God loves the human world.<sup>18</sup>

Pfeiffer believed that God's love and his salvation were open to everyone, to all, and what he meant is clarified when you read his views on the natural recognition of God:

No folk or people has ever been so barbaric, wild, and crude that they lacked a sense of God, religion, or worship, or at least a shadow of these. This clearly shows that even though they did not really know what or who God was, they nonetheless recognised and were convinced in their hearts that there was a God.<sup>19</sup>

Later, Pfeiffer grapples with the logic of how God's love for the whole world can be squared with the salvation story. This causes him to criticise Calvinist missionary endeavours to convert Indigenous people, people who already worshipped their own deity and believed in an afterlife. It's worth reading Pfeiffer's comments; they're very funny, actually, but I haven't got time. [Laughter]

Pfeiffer sees such beliefs as evidence of the merciful calling of God, writing:

For man has a soul, which foretells of a divine judgement and another life after it... Besides, if such an American or other barbarian uses his natural light correctly [laughter], and desires to know the right way of honouring God, he will have every opportunity to do so.

And this is interesting:

God's hand is not shortened to bring such a man to the knowledge of the truth, and we would rather trust divine goodness too much than too little, even though this is not the usual method of salvation.<sup>20</sup>

He pursues the logic of this position, writing:

Why then do many thousands of heathen children die before they even know left from right? The answer is: if you assume that such heathens, including Muslims and Jews, would be damned, then God would not be doing unjustly, but God in his word says that he does not want any to be damned,



and in these situations we have to trust God's righteous mercy, because God can do more in these cases than we know or understand.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout Pfeiffer's writings, one finds the belief that God's dispensation of grace covered all people from every corner of the world. Could this tolerant, inclusive, and kindly theology have been common currency in Bach's community? Was Pfeiffer an outlier, or an exception? It seems not. The authority on post-Reformation Lutheranism, Robert D. Preus, explains that Pfeiffer's kind of liberalism was in fact trending in the mid- to late 17th century, writing: 'The approach to the theological problems of their day was not nearly as monolithic as is commonly thought'.<sup>22</sup> For the first time since Luther, theologians were adopting a freer attitude to work towards the inerrancy of Scripture, while at the same time professing fidelity to the authority of Scripture.<sup>23</sup>

Does this case study promise a way out, or a way forward, for the theological in Bach research? I think so. If Pfeiffer's brand of tolerance and his loving views of the non-Lutheran 'Other' find a place within the canon of Bach theology, they will help us hear and understand Bach's musical choices in the cantatas afresh. And that, after all, is the whole point of analysis. Thank you.

[Applause]

- NH Thank you, Ruth. So now, are there any questions from Dan or John for Ruth?
- DM Could you say a little something about the word 'inevitable' that you used early on, when you said, if I heard the word correctly, that it's inevitable we'll see this from our perspective? I suppose maybe it is, in some fatalistic way. But couldn't you also ask whether one of the goals of the scholarly investigation of theology is to resist the inevitable?
- RT Yeah. What I said was—and I agree with your point—'if historical objects such as Bach cantatas are to speak to every age, then surely it is inevitable that we will interpret their theology from the perspective of our own philosophy...and prejudices'. Yes, it's a bit fatalistic. And yes, of course we will fight against that, because the analytical aspiration is to get beyond our own prejudices and our own views. The question is: is it possible? Maybe 'inevitable' is too strong. I take your point.
- JB Yes, I mean, the whole concept of viewpoint is an interesting one because it was developed partly within Leipzig, I'd say. Martin Chladenius, of the 1740s, was the first hermeneut to suggest that different viewpoints bring different forms of understanding and interpretation, which is relatively radical for that time in history. So it's around this time that the notion of multiple viewpoints, as far as I understand it, at least, becomes possible. But yes, on that point of each age colouring everything it does, you could, of course, argue that the very urge to interpret something historically correctly, from a theological point of view, is itself

a habit of our age, and therefore we can't ever escape our shadow as such. It's just, I suppose, a question to the degree to which we can actually split our scholarly selves into a present-day self and a past-day self, and whether there really is an authentic bridge between them. And I think what you're saying there brings up this very issue, which I don't think we're going to solve this afternoon! [Laughter]

NH Thank you. And with that, we'll move right into your contribution.

JB Thank you. Well, I was asked to talk about performance practice, and what occurred to me is that nobody would have used the term 'performance practice' until they actually thought about it as something they ought to be doing or thinking about.<sup>24</sup> In other words, performance practice, as a term, suggests a consciousness of the way one performs, as opposed to performing in the way one performs, without thinking about it. And to the degree that performance practice is defined in that way, then, it's become central to Bach cantata performance since the first historically informed recordings of the entire cantatas by Harmoncourt and Leonhardt, starting in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>25</sup> Essentially, this became a sounding workshop for issues of Baroque historical performance, and what was called at the time the 'authenticity movement', which of course implies that everything else is the 'falsity movement' or the 'fallacious movement'.

What's quite interesting, in contrast to what we've heard so far today, is that these early pioneers, and so many of the later ones, too, were surprisingly uninterested in theology, or indeed much else about the cultural background, apart from getting the right hardware and some of the software. It's almost as if the attitude within historical performance, at least initially, was an extension of thinking of musical works as autonomous in themselves. There was almost a sort of piety of correctness in terms of performance, but not a piety in terms of the original religious or cultural needs or suggestions that these pieces of music brought. So there is an echo, then, of an absolute music aesthetic, I think, within the early historical performance movement, which is sort of expanded to include performance and include the style of performance. The famous phrase is that 'If you haven't heard Mozart's piano concertos played on an original piano, you've not heard Mozart's piano concertos'. Even if they're badly played, it's still better!

Much of the energy for the movement in general came from these two key figures, Harmoncourt and Leonhardt. Neither was actually a musicologist as such, although you could sometimes be fooled into thinking they were. But I think what was so powerful about them is that they made even half-understood historical findings sound really convincing; it was the conviction that went with it. So, again, there is a sort of religious sensibility, in terms of thinking of what they were doing as being right.

Now, the players from those days were clearly less skilled than their equivalents today, but again, the roughness itself seemed to bring a level of authenticity. We

might really imagine what Bach's all-male setup must have sounded like when we hear those recordings from the 60s and 70s. The imperfection was almost a virtue, or, perhaps, more loftily, as some people have put it, something which demonstrates human frailty counterpoised with Bach's seeming perfection; in other words, the model of God's world as opposed to the human world of frailty, sort of shown in real time on those recordings.

The biggest shock to this state of affairs, of course, came in the early 80s, with the 'You Know What' dispute; I will not mention it!<sup>26</sup> This somehow rocked the cantata world, and indeed the choral world, in a way that it hadn't been rocked before. If there was a suspicion that any of these new views (which are about the fact that a lot of Bach might have been performed with single singers, just in case you didn't know what must not be named), it was the fact that they might actually be partially correct, at the very least.

And with that suspicion came a further fear: what if we don't like the performances that Bach made? What if they are anathema to what we consider to be great performance today? What if, in some sense, they are inadequate in the light of our changing conceptions of good performance today? Or perhaps, from my point of view, more importantly, what if they destroy the very culture, the choral culture, on which Bach reception, and indeed much reception of choral music, has been based? If we have to have it all down to single singers, that sort of excludes everybody, rather than, as Ruth would suggest, includes everybody. So there is a real fear from several different levels when this possibility was first discussed.

Perhaps there are two factors that can get us out of the model by which historical accuracy is the only thing that counts in Bach performance. I think that the problem with performance practice studies generally is that 'Yes, you can only do it this way'. I think the first thing that's got us out of that way of thinking, or has started to get us out of that way of thinking, is that we now realise it's absurd to think that we can ever get 'there' as such, particularly as we consider more of the context in which Bach's music and other music sounded, the presuppositions of both the players and the listeners, the smells and light levels of Bach's Weimar and Leipzig. They looked nothing like this. The sun was on gas in those days, gas-lit, not electric as it is today! [Laughter] So as we consider ourselves to progress through time, what we consider as historical facts often change in importance. They change in quality; they change in emphasis. In other words, someone looking at all of the sources afresh today might come up with quite different priorities, for performance and for other things besides, than somebody performing the same task 20 years ago. I know this is true because I've experienced it myself: when I look at the same things again, 10, 20, 30 years later, I have a different perspective. So, in other words, as we change, the sources change, even though they are essentially the same, give or take a molecule or two. In other words, there's a way that both historical knowledge, but, more importantly, our own practices, are in flux.

We should perhaps drop the idea, then, that there is always progress towards some hallowed, authentic performance which will suddenly bring the Word of God down to all of us, and Bach will reappear, resurrected, somewhere in Leipzig. So, in other words, if we do not aim for the notion of a single historically perfect performance, the study and interest in history can in fact carry on, as an inspiring and, indeed, infinite driver in our quest towards regenerating our performances. We rediscover things that we didn't realise we'd forgotten, in other words. The various disputes we've had include: the number of singers; how much 16-foot tone do you have; what type of cello do you use; how do you position the voices (important point); the role of the organ; vibrato; articulation; rhetoric (I can't remember what rhetoric was now, we've discussed it for so long); hermeneutic understanding...all these questions go on and on, and I believe that perhaps they should be refreshed on a daily, if not weekly, basis. And sometimes by taking all these things into account, they can really result in a necessary commitment to the performance; sometimes, they don't. There's nothing inevitable that performance will be better as a result of taking these things into account, but at least there's something going on which keeps us moving. So that's one thing I think that gets us out of it—the moving target idea.

The second thing that gets us out of a single, correct, and monolithic authentic performance is a tremendous rise in the interest in audience expectations and listening practices, both then and now. This is another moving target. It's all very well to start with the thought that theological connections were made by Orthodox Lutherans all the time. But what did these people think of time itself, of self, of substance? Of the smell of coffee? What metaphors got them through normal life? How did an early Enlightenment rationalist hear Bach's music compared to a Pietist or a Calvinist? What if you'd been to the opera? Did that change your view on things?

Some excellent recent work has been done on embodiment and physicality in both performing and listening, and I think this really opens up the conceptions of both performance and listenings.<sup>27</sup> We have an idea of the types of mindset of Bach's time, but perhaps we should also have an idea of what the body-set was. How did it feel to be a person in Bach's congregation? How do we feel physically, and how do we model movements in music?

So these new directions can lead towards all sorts of things, and I think they're quite important, because a lot of these suggestions might lead to new ways of what I might call redigesting the cantata repertory. There is liturgical listening: what does it sound like in a liturgy, either a historical one or a more modern one? What about listening that involves some degree of audience involvement? Some of us will have experienced that this week in the Nikolaikirche cantata performances.<sup>28</sup> What about hearing cantatas as part of a larger whole within a different sort of event, musical or otherwise? Hearing cantatas in different venues? I've tried cafés, I've tried nightclubs in my time. What about private listening, what you do through your earphones? And what about the cyclic ordering of communal or individual

life that the cantatas bring with them? Can that rhythm, as we recreate the weeks 300 years ago, as we're almost doing now, give us some sort of grounding in our own experiences?

So, in the same way that historical performance is and was a moving target, potentially ever renewable, listening can be far more varied than the so-called authentic religious context or the anachronistic concert etiquette. The cantatas' very awkwardness in the standard classical music concert canon might provide a spur towards other things that they might do for us, might have done for us in the past, and might continue to do for us in the future.

NH Thank you, John.

[Applause]

NH So, we have time for a quick question or comment from Ruth or Dan, if you have something.

RT I love the image of the moving target. And I think that's really what I was saying when I said it's inevitable: it was coming back to the same issue, that 'we' in the now are going to be different than 'we' even last week, and 'we' in the future. And the tradition of acquiring something monolithic, something canonic that is correct, I think we're all challenging that, including what has been established as monolithic. All the sources, you know, 'These are correct'. But we all know now that the interpretation has to be personal; it's become personal. I think we can accept that. So yes, in the theology, in the music, and in the performance practice, in all these areas, there is now the embodied, the real, the us, the human, a little bit more than maybe was the image put forward in the 19th century.

JB Yeah. And now, I know an obvious question to come out of all this is, you know, well, surely some things are actually established fact. You know, we know that there's this piece of paper and it has this on it, and that's absolutely true. And that's sort of scientific knowledge in a certain sense. But scientific knowledge is always, of course, correctable, repeatable and correctable. And I think that's the crucial thing to think about when we're thinking of binary yes or no answers to, well, is it a quarter note or a half note? Whatever. Or is it a particular theological point of view or another? But I think one thing that I've learned certainly through my career is that, yes, I still accept established facts. I'm not saying that we should not say that the order of the *St John Passion's* four or five performances is wrong. I think it's getting better all the time. And people like Dan Melamed have really contributed very strongly, and Michael Marissen. So, it's very important to be aware of that. But I think what has changed is the weight one puts on a particular idea, so one might have a different priority as to what you think is important today. And that's where the art of both scholarship and performance and reception, I think, come into their own. So I think, yes, don't throw away the

science. I'm not, never suggesting that. But be aware that science is iterative and ever perfectible.

NH Thank you, John. So, is there a burning question in the audience?

MM The texts of the chorales in Bach's day were not fixed. And there are several instances in which there's a nasty polemical version of the chorale text, and there's an updated Pfeiffer-like text, and Bach opts to go with the polemical one. That's the one that's set in the Bach cantatas. That's a fact. I mean, that's problematic, and it's hard to reconcile with this idea that I've heard sometimes in Leipzig here, too, that Bach loves everybody, and that the Enlightenment is catching on. So let me give a very quick example of that too, that I use quite frequently. It's often said that the Enlightenment and tolerance really did finally catch on in Leipzig over the 1730s and 40s. But the harsh technical reality, again, is that in 1734, in the Passion performance, when they reflect on the meaning of Pilate saying, 'Was ist Wahrheit?' ('What is truth?'), the commentary says, 'Hör, verdammter Jude, was hier ein Heide spricht' ('Listen, damn Jew, to what a heathen, or Gentile, says to you here'). And then it goes on to say, 'If you, you Jew, will not have Jesus as your King, then you can go just straight on to hell'. That was what was performed as the Passion music in 1734.<sup>29</sup> I heard a performance of it here at the Bachfest a few years ago. I just about turned white when this happened. It's shocking. So I just want to throw that out. It's a balancing thing to think about as well. But nonetheless, I very much appreciate all the comments that have been made.

RT Well, I think the response to Michael requires a book! [Laughter] We can discuss it later, but I'm not trying to say that everything Bach wrote was ecumenical. I was really trying to discover the possible different views about the heathen. Who was the heathen? My anticipation was that the heathen...that it would be hardline, that it would be anti-Semitic, and so I was very surprised.

MM But the 'it' is what's important here. What's the 'it'? Is the book by Pfeiffer the 'it', or are the vocal works the 'it'?

RT Well, exactly. And of course, we can't know that.

MM But we do know what the cantatas say.

RT Well, I haven't gone through all the cantatas yet to find Pfeiffer's tolerance. [Laughter]

MM I can recommend that.

RT [Laughter] Yeah. But then we also have to remember that we're coming from our own viewpoint. And you would be very right to say, as I implied, that we're coming to it from our own theologies and philosophies and prejudices. And you would also be quite right to say, 'But Ruth, this is just appealing to you. That's why

you picked this up'. And, of course, it's why my heart skipped a beat, because I like it. [Laughter] And, you know, I mean...

MM But you're going to check it against the repertory?

RT Of course. I was checking it so that I could discuss the repertory. It is in my chapter about BWV 61.<sup>30</sup>

NH Well, it is time to bring this session to a close. I want to thank our three panellists again for their very lively and thought-provoking contributions, and we can look forward to continued conversations on this topic in the future. Thank you.

[Applause]

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The spelling has been standardised following British English norms. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are by the editors.
- <sup>2</sup> Joseph Kerman, 'How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out', *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980), 311–31, also published as 'The State of Academic Music Criticism' in Kingsley Price (ed.), *On Criticizing Music: Five Philosophical Perspectives* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 38–54, and reprinted in Kerman, *Write All These Down: Essays on Music* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 12–32; Kofi Agawu, 'How We Got out of Analysis, and How to Get Back in Again', *Music Analysis* 23 (2004), 267–86.
- <sup>3</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *J. S. Bach, le Musicien-Poète* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1905); *J. S. Bach* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1908); *J. S. Bach*, trans. Ernest Newman (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1911).
- <sup>4</sup> A longer version of this presentation was given as 'How Not to Analyze a Bach Cantata' on 27 September 2024 at the Biennial Meeting of the American Bach Society, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia (see [https://americanbachsociety.org/meetings/atlanta2024\\_schedule.html](https://americanbachsociety.org/meetings/atlanta2024_schedule.html), accessed 16 December 2024).
- <sup>5</sup> Philipp Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, trans. Clara Bell and John Alexander Fuller-Maitland, Vol. 3 (London: Novello & Co., 1884–5, repr. 1899), 81.
- <sup>6</sup> Schweitzer, *J. S. Bach*, English language edition, Vol. 2, 46–7.
- <sup>7</sup> Schweitzer, *J. S. Bach*, English language edition, Vol. 2, 47–8.
- <sup>8</sup> William Gillies Whittaker, *The Cantatas of Johann Sebastian Bach*, Vol. I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 688–97.
- <sup>9</sup> John Eliot Gardiner, *Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 446–8.
- <sup>10</sup> Julian Mincham, 'The Cantatas of Johann Sebastian Bach: A Listener and Student Guide' (2010), <https://www.jsbachcantatas.com/documents/chapter-17-bwv-39/> (accessed 7 December 2024).
- <sup>11</sup> Alfred Dürr, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach: With Their Librettos in German-English Parallel Text*, rev. and trans. Richard D. P. Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 392–7.
- <sup>12</sup> Martin Petzoldt, 'The Theological in Bach Research' (2007), in Mark A. Peters and Reginald L. Sanders (eds.), *Compositional Choices in the Vocal Music of J.S. Bach*, Contextual Bach Studies 8 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018), 103–120, at 110: 'Texts—especially sacred texts—were truly employed by Bach in their function as bearers of meaning, as they had developed in contemporary Lutheran theology, and he always sought to set them in their theologically defined sense. That his musical themes and their development owed their creation in extremely high measure to textual invention consequently finds its expression in the handling of the text through a proper manner of musical representation'.
- <sup>13</sup> Daniel R. Melamed and Michael Marissen, *An Introduction to Bach Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 34–7.

- <sup>14</sup> Ruth Tatlow, *Bach's Church Cantatas* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2025), Chapter 3, 'Advent Music for Weimar and Leipzig: 'Nun komm der Heyden Heyland'', and Chapter 7, 'Glory from New Galleries: Reimagining Bach's Church Cantatas', especially the sections 'Viewing the 'Other'', and 'Bach and Tolerance'.
- <sup>15</sup> August Pfeiffer, *Apostolische Christen-Schule* (Lübeck, 1695); *Evangelische Schatz-Kammer* (Nürnberg, 1686); *Nuptialia Oder Hauß- und Ehe-Schule* (Frankfurt, Leipzig, 1705); *Evangelische[r] Aug-Apfel* (Leipzig, 1685); *Kern und Safft der Bibel* (Lübeck, 1718), posthumous; *Evangelische Christen-Schule* (Leipzig, 1688); *Anti-Calvinismus...Bericht und Unterricht von der Reformirte[n] Religion* (Lübeck 1699); *Das wahre Christenthum... Nach denen Fünff Haupt-Stücken des Catechismi In Acht Predichten* (Lübeck, 1718) posthumous; *Anti-Melancholicus, Oder Melancholey-Vertreiber* (Leipzig, 1684). Of the 52 volumes listed in the inventory of Bach's estate, nine are by Pfeiffer, six by Heinrich Müller, five by Martin Luther, and two by Erdmann Neumeister. See Robin A. Leaver, *Bach's Theological Library* (Neuhausen: Hänssler-Verlag, 1983).
- <sup>16</sup> August Pfeiffer, *Evangelische Christen-Schule, Darinnen das gantze SYSTEMA THEOLOGIAE, Oder die Articul der Christlichen Religion in ihrer richtigen Ordnung, aus denen Evangelischen Sonn- und Fest-Tags-Texten deutlich gewiesen* (Leipzig, 1688, 1710, 1724). All page numbers refer to the original 1688 edition, which can be read and downloaded at <https://digital.slub-dresden.de/werkansicht/dlf/186451/9> (accessed 9 January 2025).
- <sup>17</sup> 'Der gantze Inhalt des Evangelii ist befindlich in dem güldnen Macht-Spruch Christi[,] Joh. III, [1]6. Also hat Gott die Welt geliebet, daß er seinen eingebornen Sohn gab, auff daß alle, die an ihn gläuben, nicht verlohren werden, sondern das ewige Leben haben. [...] sintemahl diese Wort in ihrem rechten und völligen Verstande uns die gantze Evangelische Gnaden-Predigt vor Augen stellen: [...] Pfeiffer, *Evangelische Christen-Schule*, Chapter 35, 'Von dem Evangelio' ('The Gospel'), 'Die 4. Frage. Welches die Summa und der Inhalt des Evangelii sey?' ('The Fourth Question: What is the entire content of the Gospel?'), §7, 823. All translations by Ruth Tatlow.
- <sup>18</sup> '[...] wenn Christus spricht: Gott habe die Welt geliebet. Verstehet nicht das grosse Gebäude Himmels und der Erden, sondern Adam und alle Menschen-Kinder in der Welt, die nach dem gemeinen Natur-Lauff von ihm herkommen, keinen ausgenommen, mit einem Worte: Die Menschen-Welt.' Pfeiffer, *Evangelische Christen-Schule*, Chapter 35, §9, 'Paradoxon. I. Gott liebet die Welt' ('The Paradox: I. God so loved the World'), 824.
- <sup>19</sup> 'Kein Volck ist jemahls so gar barbarisch, wild, und roh gewesen, das nicht [...] eine gewisse opinion von Gott, eine Religion und Gottesdienst, oder doch einen Schatten davon gehabt haben sollte: Daraus dann offenbarlich zu sehen, daß ob sie gleich nicht eigentlich gewust [...] was Gott sey, dennoch im Herten überzeugt gewesen, und erkannt haben [...] daß ein Gott sey.' Pfeiffer, *Evangelische Christen-Schule*, Chapter 2, 'Von der natürl. Erkänntniß Gottes' ('On the Natural Recognition of God'), §8, 39–40.
- <sup>20</sup> 'Im übrigen wenn man einen solchen Fall setzen sollte, daß ein solcher Americaner oder ein anderer Barbar sein natürlich Licht recht brauchte, und Verlangen trüge, die rechte Art zu wissen, wie er Gott recht ehren sollte [...] so wolten wir der göttlichen Güte lieber zu viel als zu wenig zutrauen, als welcher an die ordentlichen Mittel für sich ungebunden, auch seine Hand unverkürtzt ist, auff ihm bewusste Art einen solchen Menschen zur Erkänntniß der Warheit zu bringen.' Pfeiffer, *Evangelische Christen-Schule*, Chapter 31, 'Vom Gnaden-Beruffe Gottes' ('On the Merciful Calling of God'), §11, 725.
- <sup>21</sup> 'Allein wie wird es mit so viel 1000. frühzeitig-verstorbenen Heyden-Kindern werden, die nicht wissen, was recht[s] oder linck[s] ist? [...] Antwort: Wann man gleich sagte, daß solcher Heyden, wie auch Türcken und Jüden-Kinder verdammet werden, so thäte ihnen Gott nicht unrecht. [...] Dennoch aber weil uns Gott in seinem Worte so viel Nachricht gegeben, daß er keinen verdammen wolle, [...] so wollen wir dieselbigen der Göttl[ichen] Barmhertzigkeit überlassen, und den Richterstab über sie nicht brechen. Gott kan in solchen Fällen mehr thun, als wir wissen und verstehen.' Pfeiffer, *Evangelische Christen-Schule*, Chapter 31, §15, 732–3.
- <sup>22</sup> Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, Vol. 1, *A Study of Theological Prolegomena* (St Louis: Concordia, 1970), 30.
- <sup>23</sup> Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, Vol. 1, 347.
- <sup>24</sup> Regarding Historically Informed Performance and Bach performance practice, see also *Discussing Bach 7* (2024), 'Bach for the Future: The Future of Bach Performance'.



- <sup>25</sup> See Johann Sebastian Bach, *Das Kantatenwerk*, cond. Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Gustav Leonhardt (Teldec/Das Alte Werk, 1971–1989).
- <sup>26</sup> Regarding this dispute, see (for example) Joshua Rifkin, 'Bach's Chorus: A Preliminary Report', *Musical Times* 123 (1982), 747–54; Robert Marshall, 'Bach's Chorus: A reply', *Musical Times* 124 (1983), 19–22; Rifkin, 'Bach's Chorus: A Response to Robert Marshall', *Musical Times* 124 (1983), 161–2; Andrew Parrott, *The Essential Bach Choir* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000); Rifkin, *Bach's Choral Ideal* (Dortmund: Klangfarben Musikverlag, 2002); Andreas Glöckner, 'On the Performing Forces of Johann Sebastian Bach's Leipzig Church Music', *Early Music* 38/2 (2010), 215–22; Parrott, 'Bach's Chorus: the Leipzig Line. A Response to Andreas Glöckner', *Early Music* 38/2 (2010), 223–36; Rifkin, 'Bach's chorus: against the wall', *Early Music* 38/3 (2010), 437–9; Glöckner, "'The ripienists must also be at least eight, namely two for each part': the Leipzig line of 1730—some observations", *Early Music* 39/4 (2011), 575–85; and Rifkin, 'Bach's Chorus: More of the Same', *Early Music* 40/1 (2012), 165–6.
- <sup>27</sup> For many examples, see the discussions and further reading lists given in *Discussing Bach* 1 (2020), 'Bach and Emotion: *'Zur Recreation des Gemüths'*'; *Discussing Bach* 4 (2021), 'Bach and the Corporeality of Emotions'; *Discussing Bach* 6 (2023), 'The Future of Bach Sources'; and *Discussing Bach* 7 (2024), 'The Future of Bach Performance'. All are available at <https://bachnetwork.org/discussing-bach/> (accessed 16 December 2024).
- <sup>28</sup> A central feature of the Bachfest Leipzig 2024 was the performance of the complete cycle of chorale cantatas that Bach wrote mostly during his second season in Leipzig (1724–25). The entire cycle, including later additions, was presented in 16 concerts in various churches across Leipzig by choirs and orchestras from around the world (Bachfest Leipzig 2024 Nos. 3, 11, 13, 34, 48, 49, 52, 66, 67, 69, 81, 83, 88, 97, 99, and 119). Each cantata was preceded by an organ prelude on the featured chorale melody, and the first two stanzas of the chorale, sung by the audience; at the conclusion of each cantata, the closing chorale was repeated and the audience again invited to join in. See the Bachfest 2024 Programmbuch (Leipzig: Bach-Archiv Leipzig, 2024), and Johann Sebastian Bach, *Choräle des Choralkantatenjahrgangs: Mitsingheft zum Bachfest Leipzig 2024*, ed. Carus-Verlag (Stuttgart: Carus-Verlag, 2024), which was produced as a special edition for this event.
- <sup>29</sup> This work is Gottfried Heinrich Stötzels's *Ein Lämmlein geht und trägt die Schuld* (premiered in Gotha, 1720), which J.S. Bach performed under the title *Der Gläubigen Seele geistliche Betrachtungen ihres leidenden Jesu* (BWV Suppl 2, S. 660) on Good Friday 1734. The relevant passage comes from the accompanied recitative, No. 28, 'Verdammter Jude, hör was hier ein Heide spricht' ('Damn Jew, listen to what a heathen says here').
- <sup>30</sup> Tatlow, *Bach's Church Cantatas*, Chapter 3 and Chapter 7.

