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The Legacy of Anti-Judaism in Bach's Sacred Cantatas

No personal documents have survived in which Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 -1750) has anything explicit to say about Judaism or Jews, nor do we have any reason to assume that Bach ever had any personal contact with Jews. There are some who would be only too pleased to let the matter rest right there. Yet what we can say quite a lot about is how Judaism, Jewish-Christian relations and, by extension, Jews were represented in Bach's musical output. It is frequently argued, sometimes with surprising vehemence, that any such issues were surely the responsibility of the librettists and not the composer. Yet it should be instantly obvious that this line of argument hardly holds. In this particular case, it is clear that Bach not only chose the librettos he set but in fact "preferred to work directly with an author rather than use already published collections" of libretti for his cantatas. Moreover, while his peers frequently composed entire annual cycles of cantatas based on the texts of just one librettist, Bach never did so and rarely drew on texts by one and the same librettist for more than three consecutive cantatas.² But whatever his level of input into the librettos he chose, he certainly had considerable leeway when it came to the deployment of musical means to de/emphasize certain elements in relation to others; he could go out of his way to highlight or elaborate upon certain ideas and concepts, say, or present them in a relatively dispassionate manner; whether a particular textual element was presented in a chaste or triumphalist manner, for instance, depended in high measure on the musical setting.

Given his education and training, Bach was steeped in the Lutheran orthodoxy of his day and his knowledge of, and commitment to, that orthodoxy was carefully examined before he was appointed to his position as cantor in Leipzig. In that role, he was beholden to provide a constant flow of church music for the city's main churches, especially St Thomas and St Nikolai. The express purpose of this church music was the utilization of musical means to render the congregants more receptive to the Lutheran orthodoxy of the day and thus intensify its articulation in ways that the spoken word alone, it was assumed, could not. In implementing this agenda, Bach presumably thought of himself not so much as

¹ Robin A. Leaver, "Oper in der Kirche: Bach und der Kantatenstreit im frühen 18. Jahrhundert," Bach-Jahrbuch 99 (2013): 171–203, here at 194.

² Ibid., 193.

a great artist but primarily as a consummate artisan.³ Against this backdrop it is ultimately more or less irrelevant what he may have thought or felt in his heart of hearts about certain tenets of the Lutheran orthodoxy of his day. He had a task to perform and we have reason to assume that he was determined to perform that task to the best of his abilities.

Taking into account the interpretations of issues relevant to Jewish-Christian relations prevalent at the time, we can reconstruct with a high measure of plausibility the way in which their reflection in Bach's sacred cantatas is likely to have been understood by most of Bach's congregants, given their own religious education and the extensive religious instruction they received in church each week. In his discussion of Bach's Cantata 46,4 Michael Marissen - the scholar who has made the most sustained effort to date to discuss constructions of Judaism and Jewishness in Bach's works and specific expressions of anti-Judaism within them – has demonstrated how this reconstruction can be undertaken. If we want to understand what Bach's congregants, as a general rule, would have taken away from any given cantata we need to take into account not only the cantata on its own terms but also the liturgical context within which it was performed, the specific themes and readings assigned to that particular day, contemporaneous exegetical and homiletic literature either in wide circulation at the time or known to have been in Bach's library or that of his immediate peers – and, far from least, images in the churches in which the cantatas were performed. These images were, after all, intended to prompt the congregants to think in certain directions and emphatically not in others. It should also be borne in mind that the biblical and theological knowledge of Bach's congregants, as a general rule, would have far outstripped that of current churchgoers. The meaning of a range of allusions, associations and cross-references would have been immediately obvious to them. A wealth of inter-textual references, in other words, to which many of us are oblivious today, helped shape their perceptions of the "message" propagated by a particular cantata. This includes, as Eric Chafe has demonstrated with great sophistication, cross-references, both textual and musical, between cantatas that Bach's congregants would have

³ For an interesting recent discussion of Lydia Goehr's provocative claim that "Bach did not intend to compose musical works," see Gavin Steingo, "The Musical Work Reconsidered, In Hindsight," Current Musicology 97 (2014): 81-112.

⁴ Michael Marissen, "The Character and Sources of the Anti-Judaism in Bach's Cantata 46," Harvard Theological Review 94 (2003): 63-99; now also in Michael Marissen, Bach & God (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 63–121 (chapter 3).

heard within weeks of each other.⁵ Moreover, congregants were able to buy the cantata librettos in advance, allowing for a more sustained engagement of the cantatas' theological meaning than might otherwise have been possible.

In my characterization of Marissen's work on this topic, I referred to "constructions of Judaism and Jewishness in Bach's works and specific expressions of anti-Judaism within them." Marissen and I, I should point out, do not necessarily agree on the issue of where legitimate religious polemic directed at Judaism ends and outright anti-Judaism begins. In this discussion, I will rely on an intentionally inclusive definition of anti-Judaism. To my mind, supersessionist (or, as it is sometimes called, substitution) theology - that is, theology based on the claim that the new covenant on which Christianity is predicated has replaced God's earlier covenant with the Jews, and that there are consequently no legitimate grounds for post-biblical Judaism – is, on principle, anti-Judaic. Consequently, I would likewise insist that the claim that the Christian version of the Tanakh, the Old Testament, primarily or exclusively prefigures the New Testament narrative, not to mention the attempt to exploit the vast corpus of post-biblical rabbinic writings to demonstrate the validity of Christian truth claims, are inherently anti-Judaic. Moreover, a number of core juxtapositions integral to Lutheranism – law vs. grace, true faith vs. mere outward adherence to rules, the letter vs. the spirit of scripture – have historically been saturated with anti-Judaic connotations that would have been instantly obvious to early modern Protestants and are likely still to resonate with many Protestants today.⁶ Growing up (on and off) in a Lutheran family in Germany in the 1970s and early 1980s, I was certainly still taught these juxtapositions with their anti-Jewish connotations and I would be surprised if they had simply evaporated since. To be sure, in their more lucid moments, at least some professional theologians have not been entirely oblivious to the fact that these juxtapositions actually reflect complicated dialectical tensions within Christianity. If, however, one looks, for instance, at the multitude of early modern images that didactically contrasted law and grace, the old and the new covenant, one would have been hard-pressed, even as an educated and well informed congregant, to detect a trace of these dialectical tensions and associate the negative pole in each case not just with Catholicism and Judaism but also with Lutheranism itself.

Eighteenth-century Lutheranism, then, was fundamentally anti-Judaic. To be sure, positions regarding Judaism and the Jews among early modern Protestants

⁵ See especially Eric Chafe, J. S. Bach's Johannine Theology: The St. John Passion and the Cantatas for Spring 1725 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁶ On the history and polemical uses of these juxtapositions in the "longue durée," see David Nirenberg, Anti-Judaism: The History of a Way of Thinking (London: Head of Zeus, 2013).

varied. This concerned two principal questions. First, there was some controversy as to whether "the Iews" had been damned eternally for their failure to acknowledge the divinity of Christ or might yet be redeemed if they converted at the end of days. Second, some felt that individual Jews were more likely to convert if they were treated with some measure of respect and that an unduly polemical approach would only antagonize them. Even when Christian attitudes towards Judaism were at their most benevolent and relations between Christians and Jews at their most amicable, however, the suggestion that the Jews might be appreciated – to borrow the apt phrase Gershom Scholem coined for a later period – for what they had to give rather than what they had to give up, remained inconceivable to early modern Christians of any stripe.

In short: Bach would have been entirely out of step with his education and training, the assumptions taken for granted by everyone around him, and the requirements of his professional position, had he been entirely free of anti-Judaic convictions and sentiments. The punch line, then, is hardly that Bach stood out in this respect. If anything, the notion that he might not have subscribed to the prevalent anti-Judaic attitudes would be perplexing and inexplicable. As so often, the really interesting question therefore lies not in the 'did he/didn't he?' but instead concerns the extent to, and the ways in, which the anti-Judaic consensus of his time found expression in his output. In a context in which anti-Judaism went without saying, we can still draw distinctions between those for whom anti-Judaism quite literally went without saying and those for whom it was a major preoccupation – and the various gradations in between these two positions. The vehemence with which Bach chose to accentuate anti-Judaic notions seems to have varied, and his approach was certainly more nuanced than that of, say, Georg Philipp Telemann (1681–1767). Deploy musical means to lend additional affective force to the propagation of anti-Judaic notions he nevertheless did.

In this context, we also need to bear in mind that, insofar as the existence and legitimacy of Christianity hinges fundamentally on its relationship to, and delineation from, the religion of the biblical Jews, every Christian theological statement is implicitly also a statement about Jewish-Christian relations. When it comes to discerning anti-Judaism in Bach's sacred cantatas, then, we need to focus not only on obvious thematic 'flashpoints' or explicit anti-Judaic/anti-

⁷ See Jeanne Swack, "Antijudaismus in Telemanns Kantate zum Sonntag Judica 'Der Kern verdammter Sünder' TWV 1:303," in Telemann und die Kirchenmusik, eds. Carsten Lange and Brit Reipsch (Hildesheim: Olms, 2011): 256-78; "Anti-Judaism and Lutheran Sacred Music in Hamburg in the Early Eighteenth Century," in Constructions of Judaism and Jewishness in Baroque Music, ed. Lars Fischer (forthcoming).

Jewish statements.8 An inordinate amount of ink has now been spilled over Bach's two Passions. Some work has also been done specifically on Bach's cantatas for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity – known in the Lutheran church as "Israel Sunday" because it is the day on which Lutheran congregations traditionally commemorate(d) the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE – of which the aforementioned Cantata 46 is one; and on a handful of cantatas with librettos that make explicit anti-Jewish references. Yet the bulk of Bach's 200 surviving sacred cantatas have not been scrutinized from this perspective – on the understanding that there can be no anti-Judaism where the actual words "Judaism" or "Jew" do not feature.

This was certainly the position of leading members of the now-defunct *In*ternationale Arbeitsgemeinschaft für theologische Bachforschung [International Working Group for Theological Bach Research], established in 1976, who made (and some of whom continue to make) a sustained effort to discredit any discussion of possible anti-Judaism in Bach's works. As Robin Leaver recently recalled, the working group's "conferences in the early years were generally effective and productive." Yet subsequently "the non-scientific speculations of some of the members" increasingly gained traction in the working group and, following the death of its principal founder, Walter Blankenburg, in 1986, "many in the wider Bach world" became convinced "that the old image of Bach the supreme Lutheran Cantor was being repristinated. Ultimately when it became clear that the wider cultural religious issues such as those pursued by Tanya Kevorkian, or the Anti-Judaism explored by Michael Marissen, were not being encouraged, a few of the established members of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft took action that eventually led to the demise of the working group."10

Michael Marissen has described his own chequered encounters with this group. Having argued that Bach's music "sometimes puts a spin on the text in a way that is readily explainable as orthodox Lutheran in its orientation" and demonstrated that the librettist and composer of Bach's St John Passion could

⁸ It is worth noting that, as cantor in Leipzig, Bach was spared the temptation, should he have been susceptible to it, of capitalizing on some of the particularly obvious 'flash points,' since cantatas were not performed in Leipzig during Advent and Lent - parts of the church year that had the potential to throw the question of what was qualitatively new about Christianity and why the 'old' had supposedly ceased to serve its purpose into particularly sharp relief. I thank Jeanne Swack for pointing this out to me.

⁹ I have discussed this in greater detail in Lars Fischer, "Bach Matters," in Constructions of Judaism and Jewishness in Baroque Music, ed. Lars Fischer (forthcoming).

¹⁰ Robin A. Leaver, "Introduction," in The Routledge Companion to Johann Sebastian, ed. Robin A. Leaver (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017): 1–22, here at 17–8.

have done a whole lot more to emphasize the anti-Judaic implications of the passion narrative (as Bach's peers frequently did), he was initially the Working Group's "golden boy." 11 But then

Many in the Arbeitsgemeinschaft were sorely disappointed, and indeed violently angry [...] when I went on to write a detailed conference paper on theological anti-Judaism in Bach's cantata Schauet doch und sehet (BWV 46) [...] and a subsequent conference paper on Bach's St. Matthew Passion that included a detailed exposé of Luther's heightening in his translation whatever degree of anti-Judaic tendencies there might be in the Greek source text of the Gospel of Matthew [...] What struck my Arbeitsgemeinschaft colleagues as further scandal was the fact that my research for these projects had been supported by an Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung research fellowship at the (large and overwhelmingly Lutheran) Theology Faculty of the University of Leipzig. It happened that senior theologians at the university during my year in Leipzig [2001] had likewise strongly disapproved of the research, repeatedly telling me, several times via purple-faced screaming, that it was absolutely impossible for Luther or for Bach's Lutheran liturgy to have said such and such a thing about Jews. They were utterly unmoved by the historical texts I showed them that obviously did say precisely those very things that they had declared impossible. It was a frustrating year.12

Somewhat counter-intuitively, given my earlier remarks about the need to move beyond the obvious 'flash points,' in this chapter I will focus principally on the one surviving cantata by Bach in which 'the Jews' are mentioned explicitly and of which one might be forgiven for assuming that its problematic nature would be instantly obvious. And yet, especially in the sort of handbooks likely to appeal to 'practitioners' - pastors, cantors, singers and instrumentalists - their audiences, be they congregants or concertgoers, and, not least, the authors of program notes, the problem simply does not seem to exist. If not even this explicit negative reference to 'the Jews' raises any concerns, we can hardly hope for widespread sensitivity regarding the more subtle articulation of anti-Judaic assumptions in Bach's cantatas. Why all this matters rather more than may meet the eye I will address in the final section where I discuss the troubling implications of the neo-traditionalist notion that cantatas are musical sermons that render their message 'real in the present.'

¹¹ Marissen, Bach & God, xii.

¹² Ibid., xiii.

Cantata 42: Am Abend aber desselbigen Sabbats

Cantata 42. Am Abend aber desselbigen Sabbats But in the evening of the same Sabbath] was composed for the Sunday after Easter in 1725. It begins with a sinfonia, followed by a recitative setting of a quotation from John 20:19: "But in the evening of the same Sabbath/When the disciples were assembled and the doors closed for fear of the Jews/Jesus came and stood in their midst." 13 The disciples' "fear of the Jews" is subsequently reiterated in a second recitative (no. 5):

One can see a fine example/In what happened at Jerusalem: For when the disciples had gathered together/In dark shadows/For Fear of the Jews/My Saviour entered in their midst/As a witness that He will be the defence of His Church/Therefore let the enemies rage!

Eric Chafe has recently offered a highly sophisticated discussion of this cantata in the context of the cantatas Bach composed in 1725 for the Sundays between Easter and Trinity against the backdrop of the version of his St John Passion performed that year. Chafe situates the "fear of the Jews" "in the context of the longestablished practice of drawing an analogy between the situation of the disciples in first-century Jerusalem and the place of the Christian church in the world." This trope, he argues, "dictated much of what follows in the remainder of the 1725 cantata sequence, which further alludes to the interaction of Jews and Christians in the first century."14 He draws a line from the final recitative of Bach's St John Passion, via Cantata 42 to the cantata composed for Trinity of that same year, Cantata 176, Es ist ein trotzig und verzagt Ding [There is something contrary and despairing]. The reference to the disciples' "fear of the Jews" in Cantata 42, he explains, echoed the final recitative of the St John Passion, "where we are told that Joseph of Arimathea kept his discipleship secret 'from fear of the Jews'." The first recitative of Cantata 176, in turn, refers to Nicodemus, "described earlier in the Gospel as a 'high official among the Jews' [...] who was also a 'secret' disci-

¹³ This "evening of the same Sabbath" is the evening of the day of the resurrection, that is, it is actually a Sunday evening - which already represents a blatantly supersessionist move on the part of the gospel text. The official translation was changed to "Am Abend aber desselben ersten Tages der Woche" ["But in the evening of the same first day of the week"] in the Luther Bible of 1912 and since 1984 reads "Am Abend aber dieses ersten Tages der Woche" ["But in the evening of this first day of the week"].

¹⁴ Chafe, Johannine Theology, 12.

ple, coming forth only by night."15 Nicodemus was widely seen as "a symbol for early Christianity in his eventual emergence from the 'darkness'" and, as Chafe points out, "in Bach's time the memory of such ancient associations bound up with the very origins of the church, was still very much alive." ¹⁶ Cantata 42 may be Bach's only surviving cantata expressly to mention the Jews. Yet the disciples' "fear of the Jews" clearly reverberated, and was meant to reverberate, throughout that entire liturgical season stretching from Good Friday to Trinity in 1725.

Marissen discusses Cantata 42 under the heading, "Fearing the Jews, Then and Now."17 In the cantata, he argues, "Jews are the persecuting enemies of the disciples of Jesus, and 'the Jews' of the Gospel of John are emblematic of the true church's persecutors ever since." Not least, Bach "would have encountered similar statements about Jews as the archenemies of Christians in Johannes Müllers Judaismus oder Jüdenthumb,"18 a standard work of anti-Jewish polemic.19 Chafe disagrees with this assessment. "The text does not say", he insists, "that the enemies in question would still be the Jews, even in eighteenth-century Leipzig; and it would be a misinterpretation to so understand it." Even so, Chafe does concede that "they [i.e., the Jews] were certainly viewed as among the opponents of Christianity" and "following soon after the St. John Passion [...] it seems likely that the librettist intended as much."20

Cantata 42 is the only one from this series of cantatas "beginning with an instrumental movement rather than with the dictum itself" - suggesting that, to Bach's mind, there was something special about this work. Bach "preceded the opening dictum of Cantata 42 with an extended instrumental sinfonia [...] and followed it by an even more extended aria [...] This decision, which must have been Bach's alone, places a great deal of emphasis on the dramatic situation," Chafe explains. For him, the drama lies in "Jesus's appearing 'in the midst' of the fearful disciples, calming their fear."²¹ Indeed, he suggests that "the motto

¹⁵ Ibid., 414.

¹⁶ Ibid., 12-3.

¹⁷ Marissen, Bach & God, 134.

¹⁸ Ibid., 136 – 7.

¹⁹ The Professor of Church History at Erlangen and zealous Nazi, Hans Preuss, in his pamphlet on Johann Sebastian Bach, der Lutheraner [Johann Sebastian Bach the Lutheran], first published in 1935 and reissued by the Martin Luther Verlag in Erlangen in 1950, rather quaintly described Müller's polemic as "a defence of Christianity against the Jews"; Hans Preuss, Johann Sebastian Bach, der Lutheraner (Erlangen: Martin Luther-Verlag, 1950), 15.

²⁰ Chafe, Johannine Theology, 414-5.

²¹ Ibid., 415.

[i.e., the quotation from John 20:19] is virtually swallowed up by two extended movements," that is, the preceding sinfonia and subsequent aria.²²

I would suggest the exact opposite. There can be little doubt that Bach's setting of the first recitative does a good job of conveying a sense of fear and apprehension. Hans-Joachim Schulze, in his one-volume commentary on Bach's cantatas of 2006, emphasizes that Bach's setting gives a sense of "the sort of trepidation where one's heart is in one's mouth."23 The grand old man of Bach cantata commentary, the late Alfred Dürr, noted the "throbbing continuo semiguavers, which are no doubt designed to depict the disciples' fear of 'the Jews", and stressed the "stark contrast" between the recitative and the aria that follows it. His characterization of that aria as radiating "heavenly calm" has repeatedly been cited in the literature.²⁴ Chafe refers to it as "an oasis of Trost [consolation]." This, I would suggest, is spot-on: the luxuriant nature of the aria that follows the first recitative - which, in recordings, runs to somewhere between ten (Philippe Herreweghe) and more than thirteen minutes (Masaaki Suzuki) - indicates the measure of consolation required following the disciples' traumatic experience of having to lock themselves away "for fear of the Jews." Schulze adds to this the notion that the shift from the D major of the introductory sinfonia – which itself runs to another six (Elliot Gardiner) to seven minutes (Herreweghe) - to the corresponding b minor of the first recitative "effects an abrupt shift from bucolic tranquility straight to an actually or apparently dangerous situation,"25 suggesting that the recitative indeed necessitated consolation of considerable proportions both before and after. In his older two-volume commentary, William Gillies Whittaker – the first incumbent of the Gardiner Professorship in Music at Glasgow currently held by John Butt - characterized the aria following the reiteration of the disciples' "fear of the Jews" in the second recitative as "almost extravagantly joyful," likewise suggesting a heightened need for consolation to deal with the "fear of the Jews" - about which Whittaker has nothing to say, despite quoting both recitatives in full.²⁶

²² Ibid., 417.

²³ Hans-Joachim Schulze, Die Bach-Kantaten. Einführungen zu sämtlichen Kantaten Johann Sebastian Bachs (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006), 202.

²⁴ Alfred Dürr, The Cantatas of J. S. Bach, trans. Richard D. P. Jones (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 297. Jones's translation of "überirdisch" as supraterrestrial rather than heavenly seems quite odd.

²⁵ Schulze, Bach-Kantaten, 202.

²⁶ W. Gillies Whittaker, The Cantatas of Johann Sebastian Bach: Sacred and Secular, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 299.

Schulze, as we saw, was evidently trying to soften the blow. He wrote of "an abrupt shift from bucolic tranquility straight to an actually *or apparently* dangerous situation" (emphasis added).²⁷ He also claimed that the "fear of the Jews" is really only "mentioned in passing" in the gospel text.²⁸ About the reiteration of the "fear of the Jews" in the second recitative, he has nothing to say. Ultimately, this all looks more like an attempt to evade rather than confront the problem, but at least he does not ignore it entirely. The late Martin Petzoldt, in the relevant volume of his big commentary on Bach's cantatas, published in 2007, did just that. He noted that the recitative quotes John 20,19 without Jesus's assurance of peace at the end, hence placing "the thematic emphasis on the assembly of fearful disciples." This, he points out, was certainly at odds with the interpretation presented in the widely read contemporaneous Bible commentary by Johannes Andreas Olearius (1639 – 1684). Olearius paid little attention to the disciples' fear and instead stressed the fact of Jesus's miraculous entry despite the locked doors.²⁹ The fifth movement, in which the introductory narrative is repeated and its meaning spelled out, Petzoldt characterizes as an expression of "profound Biblical thinking."30 At this point, the fear of the disciples is no longer even mentioned, and nowhere does Petzold comment on the ostensible cause of that fear identified so explicitly (and twice) in the cantata.

Petzoldt is in good company. In the two-volume Bach cantata handbook edited by Reinmar Emans and Sven Hiemke and published by Laaber in 2012, Christina Blanken merely points out that Bach, with simple musical means "illustrates the fear of the disciples of persecution by the Jews" and has nothing more to say on the matter. Most recently, Konrad Klek, a Professor of church music at Erlangen, in the third and final volume of his Bach cantata commentary, has shown himself entirely untroubled by the disciples' "fear of the Jews." He notes that "the librettist accentuates the *fear of the Jews* and, by analogy, perceives of the Christian congregation as a 'little band' (movement 4) that is threatened by 'enemies' (movement 5) and 'persecution' (movement 6). But the liturgical presence of Christ serves as a protective shield." Bach, he adds, implemented the libretto's "accentuation of fear" with the appropriate musical means. Klek also emphasizes the stark contrast between the recitative and the "uniquely calming music" of

²⁷ Schulze, Bach-Kantaten, 202.

²⁸ Ibid., 201.

²⁹ Martin Petzoldt, Bach-Kommentar, vol. 2: Die Geistlichen Kantaten vom 1. Advent bis zum Trinitatisfest (Kassel and Stuttgart: Bärenreiter, Internationale Bachakademie, 2007), 779.

³⁰ Ibid., 783.

³¹ Christine Blanken, "Der sogenannte 'Dritte Jahrgang'," in Bachs Kantaten: Das Handbuch, vol. 2, eds. Reinmar Emans and Sven Hiemke (Laaber: Laaber, 2012): 1–88, here at 63.

the subsequent "overly long" aria, music to which one could chill ("Musik zum *'Chillen'''*). All he has to say about the second recitative, in which the disciples' "fear of the Jews" is reiterated and interpreted, is that it assures the congregation of Christ's protection.³²

Ever since Alfred Dürr did so back in the 1950s, 33 far from showing any concern, authors have repeatedly singled out Cantata 42 as a particularly apt case in point for Bach's superlative ability to compose cantatas that really are musical sermons and render their message "real in the present." The erstwhile Professor (in various combinations) of Comparative Religion, Old Testament, and Hebrew at the Protestant theological faculties in Brussels, Bochum, and Marburg, and prominent interfaith activist (though with a greater interest in Islam than Judaism), Johan Bouman, for instance, wrote in a text republished in 2000:

following the reading on Jesus's appearance and encounter with the doubting Thomas, in the Cantata But in the Evening of the Same Sabbath (John 20: 19-29) the applicatio sounds as follows: 'One can see a fine example in this, from what took place in Jerusalem; for when the disciples had gathered in the dark shadow, out of fear of the Jews, at that my Saviour entered amongst them, as testimony that he wants to be his Church's protection. So let the enemies rage!' This convergence of cantata and sermon has the task of actualizing the exegetical message and stimulating one's own faith and piety.³⁴

We will shortly encounter another fan of the cantata's qualities as a musical sermon.

Exceptions to this enduring pattern of oblivion to the disciples' "fear of the Jews" are few and far between. Unsurprisingly, Dagmar Hoffmann-Axthelm, who first pioneered the study of anti-Judaism in Bach's works,³⁵ is one of them. In program notes for Cantata 42 published in 2012, she describes as "depressing from today's viewpoint" the fact that anti-Judaism went without saying

³² Konrad Klek, Dein ist allein die Ehre: Johann Sebastian Bachs geistliche Kantaten erklärt vol. 3 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017), 39-40.

³³ Alfred Dürr, "Johann Sebastian Bachs Kirchenmusik in seiner Zeit und Heute," [originally published in 1957] in Johann Sebastian Bach, ed. Walter Blankenburg (Darmstadt: wbg, 1970): 290 – 303, here at 296 – 7.

³⁴ Johan Bouman, Musik zur Ehre Gottes: Die Musik als Gabe Gottes und Verkündigung des Evangeliums bei Johann Sebastian Bach, 2nd ed. (Gießen: Brunnen Verlag, 2000), 29-30.

³⁵ Dagmar Hoffmann-Axthelm, "Bach und die Perfidia Iudaica: Zur Symmetrie der Juden-Turbae in der Johannes-Passion," Basler Jahrbuch für Historische Musikpraxis 13 (1989): 31-54; eadem, "Bach und die 'perfidia iudaica': Zur Symmetrie der Judenchöre in der Johannespassion," Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2 April 2004: 63; eadem, "Die Judenchöre in Bachs Johannes-Passion: Der Thomaskantor als Gestalter lutherischer Judenpolemik," Freiburger Rundbrief New Series 5 (1998): 103-11, http://www.freiburger-rundbrief.de/de/?item=569 (8 November 2017).

for Bach and his peers and congregants.³⁶ The Emmanuel Music ensemble, which is affiliated with the Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Boston and has "a 46-year tradition of presenting weekly Bach cantatas in a liturgical setting,"37 is another noteworthy exception. They suggest two ways of dealing with the disciples' "fear of the Jews" in the two recitatives. In the first instance, they pick up on a remarkably popular yet nonsensical exegetical claim that the gospel verse, in fact, refers not to the Jews but to the Judaeans, that is, not to "the Jews" per se but merely to those from the Roman province of Judaea (which covered roughly the area of the erstwhile southern kingdom of Judah).³⁸ As a second, more radical solution, they propose that one might omit the reference to 'the Jews' altogether and refer instead to "Verfolgung/persecution." The latter is certainly a suggestion worthy of consideration though it, in turn, raises the question of whether simple erasure is really an appropriate way of dealing with this legacy. There in fact seems to have been some controversy on this matter within the ensemble. Its founding director, Craig Smith, in his program notes for Cantata 42, while being rather reticent in his commentary on the first recitative, when discussing the second recitative, in which the disciples' "fear of the Jews" is reiterated and interpreted, characterized it as presenting "one of the most distasteful examples of a kind of knee-jerk anti-Semitism in all of Bach." The ensemble's longstanding principal guest conductor John Harbison, in 2004, appended remarks specifically on this "uncomfortable" issue. "It has been often the practice at Emmanuel to change this text and similar reference in the final bass recitative," he explains, and continues:

Here are some reasons not to do so: 1) the text of any musical work represents its original sources, the artist's conception, and the historical moment of its creation. Witnesses to the work must be trusted to interpret it according to their own belief and culture. 2) The mention of the Jews is at the least paradoxical, since every person in that room, including Jesus, soon to appear, lived and died as devout, practicing Jews. 3) Throughout the book of John, to magnify the significance of the message, the author downplays what is (merely) factional

³⁶ Dagmar Hoffmann-Axthelm, "'Am Abend aber desselbigen Sabbats' (BWV 42). 'Nun danket alle Gott' (BWV 192)," in Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern: Johann Sebastian Bachs geistliche Kantaten. Werkeinführungen und Dokumente der Basler Gesamtaufführung, eds. Albert Jan Becking, Jörg-Andreas Bötticher, and Anselm Hartinger (Basel: Schwabe, 2012): 200–4, here at 201.

³⁷ http://www.emmanuelmusic.org/who/who_history_mission.htm#pab1_2 (8 November 2017).

³⁸ On the illogical nature of this suggestion, see Marissen, Bach & God, 128 – 9.

³⁹ http://emmanuelmusic.org/notes_translations/translations_cantata/t_bwv042.htm (8 November 2017).

or doctrinal, among Jews, Still it is helpful to remember how many specific enemies are identified as money-changers, chief priests, or Pharisees. 40

What makes these comments somewhat disconcerting is the fact that they are, at least in part, mutually attenuating. Suffice it to say that, were there not a serious problem at stake, one would not need to emphasize one's trust in the ability of the audience/congregation to interpret that problem away. The subsequent attempt to minimize the measure or substance of the problem in the first place seems rather at odds with that emphasis.

The Cantata as a Sermon in its Own Right

That the congregation should, as Harbison suggests, "be trusted to interpret" the disciples' "fear of the Jews" "according to their own belief and culture" is a plausible suggestion within the remit of liberal theology. Yet, among neo-traditionalists, the notion that cantatas are musical sermons that render their theological message "real in the present" is still (or again) in rude good health and, if anything, advancing. From this point of view, one might just as well say that it does not really matter what is preached from the pulpits today because the congregation can also "be trusted to interpret" the sermons they hear "according to their own belief and culture."41

It is by no means just people like the late Renate Steiger, Blankenburg's longstanding and starkly doctrinaire successor at the helm of the International Working Group for Theological Bach Research, who stress this crucial homiletic function of the cantata. She discussed this, for instance, in connection with the complex penultimate movement of Cantata 67, composed a year earlier (1724) for the same Sunday as Cantata 42. Technically speaking a bass aria, the movement combines two distinct elements. On the one hand, there is a deeply calming setting of Jesus's words at the very end of John 20:19 – the aforementioned verse in which the disciples have locked themselves away "for fear of the Jews" - "Peace be unto you." The other element, in stark contrast, is the rather frantic grappling, in the first instance presumably of the disciples but ultimately of all those in need of divine grace, buffeted as they are (or feel) by adversity, with the news of Jesus's resurrection, sung by the sopranos, altos and tenors of the

⁴⁰ http://www.emmanuelmusic.org/notes_translations/notes_cantata/n_bwv042.htm (8 Novem-

⁴¹ http://www.emmanuelmusic.org/notes_translations/notes_cantata/n_bwv042.htm (8 November 2017).

choir. "The resurrected Lord appears to them - today in this cantata," Steiger explained, "in his word and assures them – i.e., us, the listeners – of his peace. The musical depiction of the event represents not a report but a sermon, that is, it renders that of which it speaks real in the present and dispenses it."42

Jochen Arnold, one of the most senior officials responsible for church music in Germany's mainstream Protestant church, the EKD, makes the same argument in his post-doctoral thesis (Habilitation), Von Gott poetisch-musikalisch reden. Gottes verborgenes und offenbares Handeln in Bachs Kantaten [Speaking of God with Poetical and Musical Means. God's Hidden and Revealed Action in Bach's Cantatas], arguably the most important recent work on the theology and contemporary liturgical context of Bach's sacred cantatas. Arnold is clearly not interested in, and feels no need to display sensitivity towards, concerns in the realm of Jewish-Christian relations. Tellingly, neither Dagmar Hoffmann-Axthelm nor Michael Marissen feature in his bibliography (which in any case includes only 6 non-German titles). To be sure, he claims that "the aesthetics of affect characteristic of Bach's music [...] render real in the present Jewish, Reformation and Protestant-Baroque forms of experience of God and the world that can open up for us a personal encounter with God."43 Yet, by 'Jewish,' he principally means the Old Testament, and his understanding of the Christian relationship to the Old Testament constitutes a textbook case not just of supersessionist appropriation but of comprehensive expropriation of the Tanakh. Not only does the Old Testament in general, and the Psalter in particular, "prefigure" the New Testament narrative.44 In the cantatas that begin with a psalm setting, the subsequent movements "realize the lead of the psalm," rendering the "performative quality of the divine word" open to experience with poetic and musical means. 45 Discussing the psalm setting at the beginning of Cantata 110, composed for Christmas Day 1725, for instance, Arnold explains that the librettist "effectively blocked out the promise to Israel of a return from exile in order to transfer it in a generalized form to the Christian church. The 'we' of the early post-exilic Israel becomes the 'we' of the Christian congregation at Christmas."46 As he subsequently reiterates:

⁴² Renate Steiger, Gnadengegenwart: Johann Sebastian Bach im Kontext lutherischer Orthodoxie und Frömmigkeit (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog, 2002), 19.

⁴³ Jochen Arnold, Von Gott poetisch-musikalisch reden: Gottes verborgenes und offenbares Handeln in Bachs Kantaten (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 427.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 424.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 427-8.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 317.

The promise associated with the return from Babylonian exile: "our mouths shall be filled with laughter" (Ps 126,2) is moved to the liturgical presence of salvation at Christmas, that is, it is resolutely rendered real in the present: *May our mouth be full of laughter* means: at Christmas may our mouth be 'full of laughter' *now, here and today*.

And yet, given that there is no explicit Christological reference in this movement, Arnold suggests this psalm setting could be performed separately "at any Christian or even Jewish celebration." Psalm settings in Bach cantatas, Arnold argues, are "nearly always […] *performative milestones*." They ensure "that at the end nothing is as it was at the beginning."

Perhaps Arnold also assumes he is dealing with Jewish tradition when he emphasizes representations of the law in Bach's cantatas. This would amount to a sort of black-face approach to Jewish-Christian relations: an attempt to reintegrate Christianity's Jewish roots by dressing up as one's own cliché of what Jewish religion is supposedly about. On this issue, Arnold seems determined to have his cake and eat it. On the one hand, he insists that the marvel of divine grace cannot be fully appreciated unless contrasted to the burden of the law. Consequently, the prevailing one-sided emphasis on God's love to the detriment of his wrath dilutes the message of the gospel. The law, then, is not extraneous to Christianity but integral to it – and consequently not, as widespread conventional wisdom would have it, a tenet exclusive to Judaism. Yet the crucial point is still the "shift from the accusatory voice of the law to the acquittal of the gospel."

Much as Augustine insisted that God had ordained the abjection of the Jews to show others what lay in store for those who refused to acknowledge the divinity of Christ, Arnold insists that the law – and its representation in Bach's cantatas – is there to throw all the more sharply into relief the marvel of the divine grace that renders the law obsolete. To be sure, Arnold pays lip service to the actual dialectic of law and gospel in Christianity but, as we will see, what prevails in his account is not that dialectic but the "objection to [divine] judgment in Bach's cantatas."

For Arnold, then, Bach's cantatas have a transformative capacity; indeed, they "preach and proclaim the Gospel in their own right." To illustrate this, the example that immediately springs to Arnold's mind is none other than Cantata 42, But in the Evening of the Same Sabbath. It opens, he explains,

⁴⁷ Ibid., 424.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 430.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 235.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

with a Biblical quotation from John 20 (tenor recitative) and then expands through the text of the following aria, which paraphrases the promise of Mt 18,20:

Aria (alto)

Where two or three are gathered together, In Jesus's precious Name, There Jesus appears in their midst, And says to them "Amen".

With the musicalization of the text by Bach the presence of Christ announced in the Biblical quotation [...] transpires in the here and now: "heavenly calm" prevails.⁵¹

The latter ("heavenly calm"), as we saw, is a quotation from Dürr. Note that Arnold has elegantly refrained from quoting the text of the recitative or even paraphrasing its content, apart from its final clause: "Jesus came and stood in their midst."

Now, here is my problem: the likes of Steiger and Arnold credit cantata movements with the ability to make manifest in the here and now, in this case, the consolation those in fear of the Jews draw from Jesus – or, on a more general level, the victory of the gospel over the law, of faith over outward adherence to the law, of the spirit over the letter of scripture. But then it must surely follow that the cantata movements providing the foil for that victory also make the burden of the law or the threat of the Jews "real in the present." Readers may be tempted to think (or hope) that I am making this up. Yet Jochen Arnold is very clear about this. None too surprisingly perhaps, for Arnold, the problem becomes most virulent in the context of one of Bach's cantatas for Israel Sunday, specifically Cantata 102, *Herr, deine Augen sehen nach dem Glauben* [Lord, Your Eyes Look for Faith].

To add a little historical depth: when this cantata was performed at the opening concert of the 13th German Bach Festival in Essen in July 1925, the musicologist Alfred Heuß (1877–1934) noted in his program notes that "the bedrock of the concert and the entire festival is one of the works that shows Bach unrelentingly preaching repentance with harsh old-testamentarian [alttestamentarische] fervor."⁵² In it, Heuß went on, Bach "applies a forge hammer to a rock", the music is of a "downright demonic savagery" and "executed with steely artistry."⁵³ There can be little doubt that these remarks were meant to be complimentary, which is all the more intriguing, given that Heuß was a notorious antisemite. In October of that same year, he characterized Arnold Schoenberg's appointment to the Prussian Academy of the Arts as "a setback for the cause of German music," which pitted "Germanness against [...] the specifically Jewish

⁵¹ Ibid., 92.

⁵² Alfred Heuß, "Zu den Werken des dreizehnten Deutschen Bachfestes," in Dreizehntes Deutsches Bachfest. Vom 11. bis 13. Juli 1925 in Essen: Bach-Fest-Buch, ed. Neue Bachgesellschaft (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1925): 3–10, here at 3.

⁵³ Ibid., 4.

spirit of music. This is clear to anyone who knows about racial distinctions [Rassenunterschiede]." To be sure, there were assimilated Jews who could make a valuable contribution, but Schoenberg's "personal and racial [rassenmäßig]" development had led in a different direction. He was a rootless fanatic who consciously disavowed tradition. The Germanness of German music was already weakened, and Schoenberg's appointment would set the recovery back by decades. Evidently, then, it was entirely possible for one and the same musicologist to admire Bach's "harsh old-testamentarian fervour" and the works of "rooted" Jewish composers and yet engage in antisemitic polemics against Schoenberg – a good indication of some of the complexities that can be involved in understanding non-Jews' attitudes to Judaism, the Old Testament and the Jews.

Arnold, too, seems impressed – albeit negatively – by Bach's "harsh old-testamentarian fervour" in Cantata 102. It "immediately raises the question," he explains: "does its central message lie primarily in the threatening word of the law or the beckoning word of the gospel?" For Arnold, the cantata highlights the need to repent before one's death, that is, before it is too late, but it fails to reflect the promise that awaits those who do repent in time. It thus addresses a genuine empirical affliction of the sinful believer. Though not directly referenced in the libretto, the connection to the destruction of Jerusalem lies in the fact that it serves as an example of that affliction, of what awaits the sinful if they fail to repent in time. How, then, should one deal with this "cantata's sustained propagation of the law"? "Under no circumstances," Arnold stipulates, "should Part II be performed *sub communione* since the propagation of the law could become superimposed on the promise of the Eucharist." The law, in other words, could become real in the here and now at a point where only grace ought to reverberate.

Maybe Arnold has sound empirical evidence to demonstrate definitively that Lutheran congregants who associate, say, the juxtaposition of law and gospel with the juxtaposition of Christianity and Judaism no longer exist. If so, this would reflect a fairly groundbreaking turn of events, and his decision not to publish the relevant research would be astonishing in the extreme. If not, one can only assume that he considers it both useful and desirable for today's Lutherans to be exposed to the horrors inflicted by the (Jewish) God of the Old Testament and 'the Jews' to help them understand fully the superiority of Christianity. Given Arnold's status in the EKD, this, surely, is deeply troubling.

⁵⁴ Arnold, Von Gott poetisch-musikalisch reden, 221.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 227. When Bach composed two-part cantatas, the first part would be performed before, the second after the sermon. It would therefore be highly unusual to consider performing the first part during the Eucharist, rather than before the sermon, hence Arnold's reference to Part II (rather than the whole cantata) in this instance.