

Sing: "Precious shouts of murderous crowds".
Bach and mission's third act.

By Wiel Eggen

In Girardian circles, the murderous mob in the Gospel's passion story is a much-researched theme. One of Girard's main concerns is how gaily Western democracies combine their rationalist ideals with a cavalier acceptance of huge hecatombs and violence. In *Mission is a must* (Amsterdam 2002), a *Festschrift* for the retiring missiologist Rogier van Rossum, I had this enigma in mind when I reflected on a curious meditation by J.S. Bach on the lynch mob, wondering if he had an alternative vision of the Christian mission. What did he tell his audience by hailing and yet discarding the mob's murderous cries? With some light touches I want to reproduce that article, to place it in its (hidden) context of Girardian reflection. [The book was edited by Frans Wijzen and Peter Nissen, its subtitle reading: *Interculturaltheology and the mission of the Church*]

Onwards soldiers

When a religious *fatwa* allowed King Farid to welcome Western troops on Arabian soil for the 1991 operations against Iraq, his opponents jeered that, henceforth, their national anthem would be "Onward Christian Soldiers". Whatever the qualms about Saddam's and Iraq's domineering designs, these dissipated in view of the Christian expansive drive. Not without reason! For, the soul-searching about the West's motives in 200-years of colonial and missionary dominance continues to challenge disciplines as wide apart as history, anthropology and theology. The search for the subcutaneous drive or 'secret hymn sheet of mission' is the main interest Rogier van Rossum has passed on to his pupils also and it is to follow up on my joint publication with him in that scope, rather than to jump on the Bach-2000 bandwagon, that I wish to reflect on a curious aria in Bach's *Markus Passion* (BWV 247, probably from 1731).ⁱ Early in the 1700's, Bach had a manifestly missionary understanding of his art, and the Passions are among his clearest mission statements. But what do they convey? Was it just the pietism that pervaded both Protestant and Catholic circles at the time? Or did Bach see other vistas, amidst Enlightenment's nascent rationalism, on the eve of our modern mission era? An aria in the recently re-edited *Markus Passion* incited me to this closer inquiry.

The sober *Markus Passion* contains few of the ornate arias we associate with Bach's passions and cantatas. All the more striking and shocking, then, at the heart of the work, is aria n.34 in which a treble is made to sing, with great melodic and rhythmic exuberance, what to cultured ears cannot but sound as utter blasphemy and cynicism: *Angenehmes Mortgeschrei*.ⁱⁱ Following the rhythm of this affront to our religious ear, I translate: *Precious shouts of murderous crowds*. What is this to mean? Why does Bach give so much prominence to this shocking text? If he did understand his art to be kerygmatic, we must

ask: "In which sense so?" Could his exaltation of the mob's murderous call for Jesus' death be the index of a missionary undertow, which we come to sense only a quarter of a millennium later? This issue touches a raw nerve in our time, soaked with the blood of genocides and holocausts.

Is Bach's aria more than the old *felix culpa* theme, with its pietistic stress on the redemptive worth of Jesus' crucifixion? Actually, this aesthetic adulation of the lynch mob's murder cries is a provocative feature of his own genius, reminiscent of his earlier *Johannes Passion*. Before studying the missiological undercurrent in this aria, let us first listen to the text and appreciate the extraordinary twist his music has given to what might seem straightforward pietistic lines:

<i>Angenehmes Mort Geschrey</i>	Welcome cry for murder;
<i>Jesu soll am Kreutze sterben</i>	Jesus must die on the Cross;
<i>Nur damit ich vom Verderben</i>	Solely that I of the perdition
<i>Der verdammten Seelen frey</i>	of the damned souls be free;
<i>damit mir Kreutz und Leiden</i>	and that cross and suffering
<i>Sanffte zu tragen sey.ⁱⁱⁱ</i>	be light to bear for me.

Are the cords struck, here, just a bourgeois "Blood and Wounds"-theology (Ritschl), so much abhorred by people like Nietzsche? They are on a different emotional scale than Peter's sorrowful "I am burdened by sin" in the preceding aria. Could this be what Nietzsche sensed, when he wrote to his friend how, in one week's time, he had attended three performances of the "divine Bach's *Mattheus Passion*" and had understood what true evangelising should be about?^{iv} What did Nietzsche - a musician himself, and great admirer of Bach - perceive in those early 1700's message? What did he feel was lost in later mainstream Christianity? What did he mean by restoring the Gospel beyond its Christian deformations? Had he furtively influenced me, as I listened to this aria? Or was it René Girard's theory that the lynch mob is religion's true birthplace? Reflecting on the extraordinary complex of imageries and emotions in Bach's artistic and kerygmatic jewel, written on the eve of the modern mission drive, we are urged to ponder its evangelic message for our present setting.

Mission amidst beloved miscreants

Seeing the remarkable upsurge of many a religious congregation - for whom R. van Rossum predicts a new missionary task - we wonder if their role might be formulated on the basis of what Bach intuited, but which was later forgotten amidst the heroic banners hoisted on the ships sailing to the divine harvest. What are we to make of Paul's "Woe unto me unless I preach the Gospel" in view of the world's misgivings? Can the new task be inferred from a subcutaneous ideal in Bach's aria about the murderous crowd? What does it have to say about religious leanings to war hymns and battle cries? Clearly, despite the upsurge in bellicose mission fervour, we cannot gain much by focussing the depressing triumphalism of Ps 46:6 battle hymn: "God goes up among shouts of joy". The social-psychological studies of '*Allahu akbar*'-cries that echo over rivers of blood, as well as the history of the military's links with religious ideas on superiority and missionary election, need

supplementing with a thoroughly new, cultural scrutiny. In fact, underneath religious and imperialist expansionism, we surmise another mission call. While the crusaders' cries lavishly praise their religious Master, our treble aria strangely adulates the enemy's action; while religious battle hymns deafen the ear with aesthetics of trumpet blasts, our aria sings in a 'wholly other' tonality, sensitising us to a hidden stream of Christian involvement that needs analysing again and again.

Beyond the militant proselytism and a covert euro-critical outreach to 'the other', which used to mark many a missionary's daily practice, we are led back to a third dimension. If the 200 years of modern mission appear just a drive for conversion to boost church membership, or bring 'savages' to the civilian rule of law - later called social development aid - to which most missionary energy was devoted, we are now to look again. Beyond the 'double stewardship' of conversion and social action (Neckebrouck, 1994), a third, more fundamental dimension may be fathomed, which at present emerges amidst the most appalling convulsions of the global system. Bach's early 18th century Gospel-reading may seem shocking, as it adulates the crowd's call for crucifixion; not only in itself, but because it reminds us of the total evil of the Shoah, to which it inadvertently relates, by glorifying the very act on which anti-semitics found their incrimination. But, while we discard any idea of Bach intending to stoke up such anti-semitic feelings, we must ponder which missionary vision could have inspired this shocking aria, at the heart of Mark's Passion.

Numerous recent Bach-studies help us sound out the background of this giant of Western musical spirituality, whose emotional piety and love of mathematical order is so endearing. What interests us in the BWV 247 treble aria, which seems clearly of his own hand, is its role as a meditation on events that were of key importance to him. This dancing jewel of artistry marks his views on the Gospel, and urges us to scrutinise its message to the piety of his days, in the aftermath of the religious wars, and at the height of an economic boom that thrived on the international slave trade.^v Our task is not to analyze the link between art and societal impulses in general. Suffice it to recall the extent to which Bach was in tune with the theological debate as well as the cultural trends of his age. Three rather short notes must suffice. After a few words on Bach's position amidst the ecclesiastical disputes, we consider some of his personal views and especially the wider cultural setting of his work.

"*Bach among the theologians*" has been a favourite theme for quite some time. His huge output is dominated by religious motives, which receive a fascinating dimension in the light of Nietzsche's eulogy of the "divine Bach's *Mattheus Passion*" as the true way to understand the Gospel. But Nietzsche's criticism of the Christian distortion of the Gospel warns us not to take Bach's presumed missionary vista in the common sense. Pelikan observes three sides of Bach's interest in theological issues. As a church musician of Leipzig's Lutheran community, he was steeped in the core doctrine of salvation by faith in Jesus' redemptive death and the crucial role of the Bible. But this orthodox line was profoundly affected by a pietistic strand, that had spread from Halle, and to which Bach

had been exposed in his previous appointment at Mühlhause. Although he deplored the pietistic aversion of complex compositions, he supported the pastoral view that faith should be more than an intellectual belief in Christ's redemption: the faithful are to identify emotionally with the drama of Christ dying for our sins and make it their own. "Jesus not for us, but in us", was a slogan he endorsed.^{vi} Although he altered the extreme pietism of Brockes' texts several times, his Passion music abounds with meditations on the sinner's calling to identify with Jesus. Beyond the orthodox and pietistic views, though, we also note his pivotal and unreserved adherence to the rational humanist role of music, which led him to the mathematical artistry of works like the *Wohltemperirtes Clavier*, *Kunst der Fuge* and *Musikalisches Opfer*. But it should also alert us to two interrelated and often ignored aspects. The Lutheran orthodoxy that pervades his Passions and Cantatas, was quite open to some impending innovations, such as Reimarus' exegetical questioning if the man Jesus adhered to what theologians defined as the redemptive purpose of his life. Moreover, humanist studies were about to 'discover' the human *psyche*, due to the growing materialist perception of the human anatomy. As the old idea that our body (and society) is controlled by the mind's virtuous rationality dithered, the pietistic emotionalism itself brought an onslaught of irrationalism.^{vii}

But before analysing how this affected society, unknown to the proselytising orthodoxy and the more rationalist versions of mission, we should first verify that Bach did perceive his art as kerygmatic. From his private library, a copy of the famous Calov bible commentary survives, with underscorings and glosses in his own hand. R. Leaver has reproduced a facsimile of the major glosses, offering a detailed analysis of them.^{viii} At first glance, they seem merely to do with his own conflicts, for which he sought scriptural backing. But even his comments on the religious role of musicians transcend the nasty polemics with stingy employers. He not only stresses the musicians' ecclesial ministry, but opines that proclamation is to be done both by text and music, the latter having its integral part to play.^{ix} In fact, he even corrects Calov's quotes from Luther's own text in respect of 2 Sm 22:44, which Calov had interpreted in a strongly anti-Jewish line, but which his gloss restores as a prophecy of the universal value of God's message. And a gloss on Gn 13:4 emphasizes Abraham's proclamation (*predigt*) of God's name.^x Even if these instances do not deal with foreign missions, their frame of reference is undoubtedly the missionary fervour pervading Europe in the aftermath of the religious wars. Before we ask how our *Markus Passion* aria suits this context, we may follow Leaver in his special interest in the passions.

Bach directed the Holy Week music alternatively in the two churches under his care, at Leipzig. But only the Thomas Kirche matched the demanding conditions for performing his two great passion compositions. Whatever the precise order of performance of his various settings, it would seem that the *Markus Passion* (performed only in 1731?) was close to the earlier *Johannes Passion* (BWV 245). In both of them, Jesus' rejection by the crowd plays a pivotal role, whereas Peter's denial features more prominently in the *Mattheus Passion* (BWV 244).^{xi} The BWV

245 scene at Pilate's court discloses his particular fascination with the dramatic struggle between Christ and the confused human soul. We find this expressed in an amazing artistry of arias and chorales, rife with paradoxes, impetuous rhythms and compositorial complexity. After the emotional aria and chorale on Peter's denial has closed the first part, the second part's opening chorale spells out the impending tragedy: the innocent victim is about to be denounced and killed by bandits, enacting an eternal design. The build-up to the lynch mob's denunciation is marked by two hauntingly chromatic sequences, running up and down through the crowd's replies to Pilate: "If he were not a criminal..." The scene is set. Here is not the place to analyze the remarkable composition of this scene at Pilate's court, with the central role for the crowd's irrational craze. Let us just look at the stunning paradoxes, and his stress on the murderous cries. After the bass arioso and aria n.19 has sung about the "*ängstlichem Vergnügen*" (fearsome bliss) and "*bitterer Lust*" (bitter pleasure) of Jesus' woes - having likened Christ's blood-tainted back to the rainbow being God's sign of grace in the sky - an intricate sequence follows, in which chorale n.22 serves as the eye of a hurricane in the middle of a murderous storm. It spells out the logic of the tragedy: "Your capture brings us freedom; without your subordination ours would last eternally". Rotating around this illogical logic, we find a rustic repetition of dance rhythms: "We have a law saying that he should die" (n.21f) and "If you free him, you are not Caesar's friend" (n.23a). After which, most remarkably, two sections crying out "*Kreuzige*" (Crucify, in n.21d and n.23d). Without giving too much weight to numbers, we notice that, between them, they repeat the cry 148 times in choral starts.^{xii} Bach thus created a perfectly balanced piece of drama, of shocking beauty, where the music expresses the inevitability of the tragedy, and where the lynch mob has its own artistry and aesthetics. This we find stunningly repeated in the *Markus Passion* aria n.34: "*Angenihmes Mortgeschrei*".

Aesthetics to end all moral absolutes

Is this music meant for aesthetic delight? When Nietzsche spoke of Bach's true presentation of the Gospel, he surely did not mean it in the common moralising sense of liberal Protestantism. Here was the antipode of the life-paralysing, priestly *Umwertung* (trans-valuing), proper to the Judeo-Christian tradition and of which moralising pietism was the acme.^{xiii} Could this *Passion* drama prove how music is the mother of tragedy?^{xiv} The musical voices indeed follow a fatal logic and, like the fugues' counterpoint, pass by the rational of Socratic-Platonic ilk. Their dramaturgy even surpasses Wagner's aesthetics, which in Nietzsche's view, slips back into the Platonic and Christian belief in eternal values. Any discourse that pretends to mirror the Platonic eternal truth or, in the Judeo-Christian sense, aims at bridging the chasm between God and man, just deludes the human calling to bravely face the ugly fatality of existence. Rather than a placid submission to an eternal order, in a priestly manner of meditative self-effacement, one is to seek one's self-determination by facing the everyday grotesque and cynical truths.^{xv} Bach's musical

perfection is not a message of slavish submission to orthodox dogma or some rational meta-story. His Passions' Gospel transcends the theological scheme. The kerygma of God's name - underscored in the glosses in his Calov Commentary - implies another missionary program, far exceeding the schemes that dominated the 19th and 20th century mission. So, what to say of the missionary drive at the height of the Enlightenment? Should we see it only as a return to old structures, in protest against chaotic industrialisation.^{xvi} Or was there another view?

Our aria makes us wonder if, in Cragg's words, Bach did "carry realism to its utmost limits, but never overstepped the bounds of liturgical propriety".^{xvii} Does he not push orthodoxy and pietism over the edge, while integrating them with what people like Hofstadter have termed some extreme rationalisation?^{xviii} A child singing *Angenehmes Morgeschrei* seems a farewell to any intellectual and moral absolute, and an outright acceptance of the Dionysian vital force with its 'pre-logical' rites. Yet, before investigating how Bach differs from the post-Kantian, romantic way of splitting aesthetics into the two realms of beauty and the sublime - where only the latter is deemed a vitalising force - we should first study how he seems to forebode these developments. Within a religious setting, he displays a type of aesthetics which, in a more erratic manner, was about to flourish in 'revolutionary' Europe, after the religious wars had been duplicated by their secular Jacobin and Napoleonic equivalents. His aria foreshadows the curious aesthetics of post-revolutionary romanticism, taking crime and bloodshed as the sublime which, unlike the Platonic beauty, is able to lead humanity to truly innovative creations. The scaffold imageries of the Jacobins were about to galvanise what Chr. Merandier-Collard has called the aesthetics of "blood crimes and capital scenes".^{xix} Her opening line cannot fail to refer us both to Nietzsche and to Bach's aria: "For romanticism, crime is a revolt of the Cain race against its long misery" (tr. W.E.). Murder is now restored to its ritual greatness; or, in Baudelaire's words, a "bloody wedding of beauty and violence" (in: *Fleurs du mal*). Whereas Platonic beauty answered to an eternal canon, post-Kantian aesthetics and post-revolutionary romanticism believes in a sublime that makes life rise up from amidst heart-breaking tears, calamity and despair. True art, and myth-inspired literature in particular, are henceforward to comprise 'delightful horror' and an erotic frolicking with repulsive evil. While death had always featured in art as a cultural challenge to the creative mind, it now features as a 'sublime' source of creative life. So, the question arises if we might connect Bach's aria, via Kant and the romantics, to Nietzsche and today's violence in art, cinema, journalism and cyberspace. Only partly so, I feel. On both sides of the Great Revolution, we find giants of Western creativity daring to glorify murder. But there is a difference of perspective. Bach hails human evil that allows God's grace to show its superiority, whereas romantics portray the bloody scaffold as the sublime that brings about the real human self-assertion and creativity. Between these two, we find contra-revolutionary figures like Maistre and Burke, using a mixture of post-critical irrationalism and political reactionism to analyze the murderous flow of blood, and notably

the French regicide, as a renovating and purifying crisis, but only so in the sense of an expiatory sacrifice in God's providential plan. And coming to the missiological field, the argument goes that the concurrent mission drive is to be read in this conservative sense of churches trying to sail clear from any further onslaught and seeking a new purity. But might there not have been more than this conservative escapism?

De(con)structed mission

Does this brilliant musical adulation of the lynch mob prefigure the romantic wedding of beauty and violence (Baudelaire, Hugo) or rather Maistre's churchy alternative? Or could it, already in that early age of reason, have been a pointer to expressionism's de(con)structing patterns, which G. Simmel examined during World War I? Without equating destruction with deconstruction, we must ponder the missionary implication of this emerging drive which, in a radical revolt against form, takes life itself as object beyond pre-established rules. Within this crisis - which Simmel defines as our increasing incapacity to internalise the objective forms of one's own making - there is the growing conflict of life attacking its own forms, in search, not so much of eternal absolutes, but of eternal renewal. The industrial innovations and the myth of humanity's unlimited desires makes humanity surpass the need to acknowledge death. Virtual and physical reality become interchangeable leading to the 'risk society' (U. Beck), where the de(con)struction of certitudes becomes the very engine of existence.

So, the question arises if the pietistic upsurge and the mission of the newly founded congregations were just reactionary attempts to stem this tide. Or did Bach's kerygmatic option already forebode a third dimension, beyond the urge to preach conversion to God's grace and development of material conditions? Was the 'dual stewardship' supplemented by a third factor, which missionaries failed to name, despite living it out courageously? Did they unknowingly aim beyond agnostic free-thinking and the techno-scientific progress, amidst the horrendous evil and misery they perceived? Or was their preaching just about old certainties? If they furtively believed that dogmatic proselytism and redressing social evils did not exhaust their calling, what could have been the overarching model to surpass these two? The theories that missionaries left Europe exclusively to spread the divine law and its rational substitute - or alternatively to seek an antidote against the agnostic evil and social upheaval at home - may be ignoring an aspect which was undoubtedly at work but needs formulating. Was the world to them, both at home and abroad, just a scene of unbelief and failing rationality, or rather the setting of autonomous forces, beyond morality or reason, among which they were to be the (observant) witnesses of how evil and sin was removed, by being surmounted in Jesus' name (Lk 24:47)?**

In a society, set in its rationalist cult of the logocentric (Derrida) 'self', it seems rash to claim that mission's profound drive was about the search for 'the other'. Yet, the

idea must be examined seriously, while we remain open to counterarguments. Just what was breaking through the climate of complacent essentialism of Bach's age, giving birth to anthropology and the modern missionary movement?^{xxi} What did the nascent one-dimensional society (Marcuse) envisage, when it referred to 'the savage other', either as the uncontrollable psyche, or as the unknown alien? While the French Revolution consolidated the 'Enlightened Reason' into an 'absolutist State' of bourgeois entrepreneurs, tension between a self-protective ego and the non-self reached its first peak. P. Sloterdijk, in line with M. Foucault (both of them inspired by Nietzsche's rude awakening) locates the rise of the autonomous psyche in that latter part of the 18th century, when society's conduct so radically contradicted its own belief in the rational order.^{xxii} That was the setting from which missionaries were soon to sail out, allegedly to bring the rule of Christ's (westernized) order to the new subjects of the various col-empire. In reality, however, they became links within a global awakening of human unity beyond all law and doctrine; first scouts, as it were, of Europe's home-coming to facts which Platonic-Christian views had stubbornly ignored. By a practice that factually ruptured moral and supernatural absolutes, their evangelisation entered into a complex encounter with a 'wholly other'. Yet, it shared the ambiguities of the medicalising of the subconscious *psyche*, the anthropologising of the *homo naturalis* and, what seems the most striking guise of philosophy's transcendental *ego*, the artistic celebration of life rising from horror. These three no doubt signal, amidst the increasingly powerful State structures, a break with the constructs of orthodox' dogmas, rational ethics and the canons of beauty. But, if we see 'mission' thus getting off to a de(con)structed start, preaching a kingdom divided against itself, we need to examine which religious contents it could possibly carry.

Dancing amidst evil

Before attempting to spell out mission's third act, we recall some puzzling features of this triadic configuration and its dubious tendency to absorb 'the other' into 'the self'. Sloterdijk's doctor-hero van Leyden, who discovered the subconscious, on his way from Vienna to revolutionary Paris, got arrested for having surgical equipment in his outfit. Condemned to the scaffold as a spy, without more ado, he saw nothing wrong with that. "For, is the revolution not to defend its children?"^{xxiii} As the monopoly of violence is seized from the supernatural to be given to the State's industrial machinery, there emerges the acceptance of an uncontrollable subconscious, alongside the celebratory de(con)struction of fixed forms. Acceptance of a sublime, absolutised mobility of forms turns into an idealised, dauntless frolicking with evil, amidst the tragically gay science of crisis management. A risk society emerges, in which the mobility of unconscious drives matches the de(con)struction of any static form, under the cybernetic control of a bureaucratic power, blindly pushed on by a democratic principle of constant electioneering.^{xxiv} In this State, with its all-controlling technology, citizens are no longer to opt for self-control in submission to a divine order,

but for the all-mobilising risky breach of any limit. For, industry thrives on maximising the artificially heightened demands: "Anything possible is worthy of desire". Although this maxim of liberal society seems in stark contrast to old ascetic ideals, we need to understand, from a missionary point of view, how it derives directly from the totalitarian God - Church alliance, which the old dogma of redemption by the dying God-man had nurtured. Just as the Protestant *sola fide* indeed strengthened the old Catholic doctrines, we now see both the socialist and the liberal models bolster the total State, as an avatar of the mighty God - Church - King alliance, engendering an individual who, beyond orthodoxy in beliefs and rationality in obedience to the law, must veer to an aesthetics of energized 'being unto death'. Heidegger's motto of 'being unto death' is formulated in a hyper-mobile society, thriving on Nietzsche's 'will to power'. Equanimity to the 'eternal return' now replaces the medieval ideal of internal mastership, to meet the Eternal Judge. For the technocratic realm and its new citizen, this means de(con)structing any form, and letting the subconscious drive face the ultimate risks by exploring the limits of both the physical and the juridical order. The heroes of the new society are not only athletes or dot.com shareholders, but tax-evaders and political daredevils. Boastful autobiographies, with abominably confessions of boxer-rapists, or of murderers telling how-they-did-it, are assured lucrative media outlets. Evil becomes the 'cool' challenge of a *dance macabre*; death - life's apogee opening up to some reincarnation - turns violence into a cipher of sensible existence, the psychedelically virtual world into true being, and risky contests with the law into a respectable sport. While the medical machinery increasingly dispossesses people of their personal death (Illich), society adulates sporty risk-taking as a sign of vitality. Daring one's luck, in whatever setting, has become a moral must, after eternal values have faded.

Returning to Bach, we must first remark that he remained a faithful churchman, all his life. Yet, his pietism seems gaily to veer toward a nihilist mobility, when he has the murderous crowd portray the 'self' as standing up against any limiting force, flouting any eternal canons and going beyond any moral value. Although he would undoubtedly subscribe to the double mission ideal of kerygma and rational development, his treble aria's gay adulation of the lynch mob announces how the logic of the 'double stewardship' is to explode. How was he able to write this media-like scene foreshadowing a third millennium society? Was it because he knew of a third value in the Christian tradition, beyond the transcendence of an immutable Other and the immanence of a progressing 'self'? Only now, after two millennia of stressing first God's Transcendence, and then the incarnated Immanence, our age seems about to grasp the overarching third dimension, which Bach may have anticipated. In 1755, five years after Bach's death, the foundation of Europe's theodicy cruelly collapsed in the Lisbon earthquake, destroying the city which by papal decree figured as the capital of the Old World's hemisphere. Modern mission, then, was to start from a heap of rubble, where ancient forms had definitively lost their supernatural moorings. Now, the revolutionary mind could set out, thanks to incarnated power,

on its cheerful destruction of any obstacle to the enlightened self, while rationalising its irksome death toll from risk-taking, war, murder, euthanasia, etc. Amidst the prospects of this carnage, a new mission was to be circumscribed. But, just how?

Mission's third act

Bach's adulation of murder cries recalls a history of Christian harshness. The image of mission as bringer of love and civilising order is tainted, not only by the failure to deliver or by Enlightenment's ideological doubts. Beside the record of crusades, inquisition of heretics and religious wars, there is the Christian harshness of absolute clerical dominance and ruthless asceticism, as seen in a late-medieval realism in art and mysticism. Hardly softened by the Protestant *Solas*, this portrayed the Transcendent ordering the subduing, if not destroying of the non-self. A triple radicalism arose from the insolent yet inspiring image of a God, who willed his Son's death to expiate human sin. Bach bluntly exposes this violent root of Christianity and its modern effects: "Oh blessed crowd, conniving with the divine plan of an unjustifiable murder, to override old mount Moria's logic." Indeed, although Abraham's compliance with the idea of paternal murder was halted, all scruples are dropped when God is said to have cheerfully accepted Jesus' death at the hands of a lynch mob, who thus incite their own holocaust to come, due to proselytizing actions of those who profess these absurdities in rationalised forms.

So, where is the cipher of Bach's third missionary way? It is hardly visible, and yet most powerfully expressed. His aria does not chant the usual doctrine of Jesus earning the soul's future delivery, after its earthly travails. The case is rather inverted. By Jesus' death, the soul is liberated from shackles that prevent it from enduring its own cross and pains. This is not about the 'self' *en route* to a glorious future, overcoming the nasty bumps on its way to paradise through this vale of tears; not the tale of delivery, or ever renewed upward mobility. On the contrary, the soul is said to receive the power to join Jesus, amidst the bloody and pain, in total solidarity with the world's ugly turmoil. Whereas many (Sloterdijk, Hermann Broch a.o.) claim that the only way to withstand the generalised panic, in the chaos of slaughtered forms, is the heroic assertion that "I am the world", our aria points away from the 'self' and stresses that the surrounding suffering is "the world". Can one stand the pain of chaotic evil, without giving in to the temptation of dissolving it into some theory on the redemptive Transcendence, or the constructible Kingdom?

Mission's third act comprises a triple task. Beside sincerely sharing people's pains and humbly accepting that Christianity is, at least in part, responsible for many of today's evils, one is honestly to admit the real anomaly of evil, as integral part of the world, without trying to vaporize it metaphysically, or pretend knowing how to eliminate it. In missiological terms this means, not just a commitment to the three innovations in current mission practice, known by the captions of Liberation - Dialogue - Inculturation, but a keen

awareness of the danger, in the new practice too, of reducing 'the other' to 'the self'. On this basis alone can the 'double stewardship' be raised to its crowning level as a witness to hope (1 P 3:15) in the form of a chant, even dance (Mt 11:17) or psalmody (Mk 15:34), in the face of evil. Is this a *dance macabre*? Yes. But within a community of the Spirit, who alone can give it the sense of a solidarity of chant. *Extra Ecclesiam nulla Saltatio*.^{xxv}

This solidarity, without proselytising or developing targets, may appear to contradict the very essence of mission. However, if there is any sense in the notion of Christianity as religion of the end of religion (M.Weber, M.Gauchet, a.o.), it must be a religion that overcomes the judgemental 'knowledge of good and evil' (Gn 3:5) and enables one to hold out amidst the most appalling evil, without turning one's finger into an device of judgment, rather than healing. That is how Bach's aria seems to join Nietzsche's Zarathustra in a kerygmatic duet of what P. Sloterdijk called "*Immoralismusgewordene Melodie*".^{xxvi} Jesus tells his followers to go and witness how removal of sin is effectuated in his name (Lk 24:47), which must be read in a new realist mode. Rather than framing it into an ontology of God's hereafter or a realisable Kingdom, one must learn to witness the Spirit's (musical) healing force at work.^{xxvii} Mission, then, may be defined as "Keep a singing and dancing faith amidst the globe's chaos". Bach knew that the murderous crowd could be mastered only by Jesus' faith in the Spirit, enabling him and his followers to keep up a life-giving song and dance amidst the abominations. And better than most, he knew that we need a community (Ecclesia) to do so. *Extra Ecclesiam nulla Saltatio!* Those who see this as a nihilistic view of mission - or the proverbial mouse born from a theoretical elephant - may ponder how it speaks of a superman's *kenosis*, who valiantly holds out in a void, crowded with God's loved miscreants.

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- i. See W. Eggen en R. van Rossum, 1992
- ii. The comparative simplicity of Mark's Passion may be due to the conditions of performance. The artistry of our aria underlines the central place of this episode in the work.
- iii. After the Picander version n.34 p.62 quoted in F.Schmend, "Bachs Markus Passion" in: *Bach Jahrbuch 1940-1948* p.18, reproduced in a facsimile copy by A. Dürr in: *Johann Sebastian Bach; Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke, Serie II Band 5, Kassel, Bärenreiter Verlag* p.263.
- iv. See J. Pelikan, 1986. We obviously heed W. Desmond warning: "Nietzsche should be honoured as an antagonist, not as a secret fellow traveller for forms of religious reverence he himself vehemently repudiated". (See "Caesar with the soul of Christ" in: *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 1999, 1, p. 27-61). The choice of R. Strauss' Nietzsche-inspired "*Also sprach Zarathustra*" as opening music for the millennium celebration at Bethlehem, was therefore rather *risqué*, even if one rejects P. Sloterdijk's view that this work is *Musikgewordene Nihilismus* and an *Einübung in die Semantik der Gotteserlassenheit*. (See 1985 p.86-87)
- v. Although Germany was hardly involved in slave trade, it no

doubt shared the views on how Christian salvation was to overcome sin, in an age when a slave's paganism was deemed a graver evil than the slavers' trade!

- vi. See J. Pelikan, 1986 p. 64-65
- vii. Carl Jung's famous 1937 speech in New York improvisingly applied his 1935 Eranos-lecture, to show that science had created a tension to which the churches were ill-equipped to respond. By locating the principle of universality in matter rather than spirit, it collapsed the old constructs. P. Sloterdijk (1986 p.188), analysing Nietzsche's vitriolic attack on the churches' useless moralising rationalism, also placed this breach in the second half of the 18th century, heightening our curiosity about what Nietzsche perceived as the true Gospel in Bach's work.
- viii See R. Leaver 1985. Calov was a leading Lutheran bible authority at the time.
- ix. See Leaver, R. 1985 p. 93-94. Apart from several sites in the Book of Psalms, Bach underlined and glossed such texts as Ex 15:20; Ex 28:20 and 2 Ch 5:13. He called 1 Ch 25 the "true foundation of all God-pleasing church music", and he saw 1 Ch 28:21 as prove that the musicians had an ordained ministry.
- x. See R. Leaver 1985, p. 61. Leaver translates *predigt* as 'worship', because of the reference to the altar. On 2 Sm 22:44, applying to Jesus' and Bach's own position, see R. Leaver, 1985 p. 91.
- xi. K. van Houten, specialist in the mathematical analysis of Bach's works (see 1992), has recently argued that Peter's denial and repentance form the centre of Matthew's Passion. Without repeating his counts, we easily perceive how the mob's cries play a similar role in our two passions, which is not without a bearing on the overall message. Bach, in line with pietist thinking, used Peter, Judas and the crowd as emotional challenges to the faithful. A fine example is aria n.45 in Lukas' Passion (BWV 246), comparing Peter's tears to the healing waters flowing from the rock struck by Moses. The logic is clear: Jesus (the new Moses) turns our sins to healing, if we repent like the rock Peter. In Mark and John it is rather sin's enormity that gets stressed.
- xii. R. Leaver (1985, p.129-132) analyses the most intricate, chiastic construct around chorale n.22, at the core of BWV 245. The 148 starts would carry a clearer numerical meaning if there had been one fewer (147 = 7x7x3 or 3x5x7 + 2x3x7). Yet, their sheer number is quite remarkable.
- xiii. D. Franck ("De priesterlijke Umwerthung", in *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 1999[1] p. 63-96) reminds us that Nietzsche

emphasizes *agon* (struggle) as the essence of human life, in contrast to the Judeo-Christian love and (priest-induced) submission to an eternal truth and law. He saw 'redemption from sinful rebellion against the eternal' as the priestly invention that plunged creativity into a slavish moralism. We cannot discuss here how Nietzsche's option actually meets Kierkegaard's anti-aesthetic criteria.

- xiv. See P. Sloterdijk (1986) explaining how Nietzsche's early study *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (1869) holds the key to his entire philosophy.
- xv. See P. Sloterdijk 1985 p. 119 and 125. The exceeding of the eternal law concerns, not just orthodox dogmas or cartesian rationalism, but empiricism as well, to the extent that it relies on an absolutism engraved in the empirical.
- xvi. This is not to gainsay van Rossum's emphasis on the counter-revolutionary side of mission in '"Religious Substitution, Dialogue and Inverted Inculturation: A Case-Study of Latin American Developments', in: Valkenberg W. & Wijzen F. (eds) 1997 p. 117-118
- xvii. See Cragg, G.R. 1966, p.277
- xviii. See Hofstadter, D. 1979.
- xix. See Chr. Merandier-Collard, Paris, PUF 1998
- xx. On missionary witness in Lk 24:47, see my "Witness God's finger lifting evil" in: *Exchange*, 28 (1999) 2 p. 155-169.
- xxi. I do not wish to idealise this by suggesting that these had consciously broken with essentialism, any more than Kant's pietistic forebears. Yet here, as in J.J. Rousseau's idea of 'noble savages', there was a radically new view that was to work its way into human awareness.
- xxii. P. Sloterdijk's 1985 study is an 'epic' attempt to explain philosophically the rise of psychoanalysis in 1785 France, where van Leyden sees a disciple of Mesmer using hypnosis as a therapeutic means: a recognition of human dimensions that are inaccessible to reason.
- xxiii. P. Sloterdijk (1985, p.308) thus describes the emergence, around 1800, of an extreme form of the cynical.
- xxiv. The notion of metaphysical automobility has been analyzed by P. Sloterdijk and in many works of P. Virilio, calling for the political economy of speed and its aesthetics.
- xxv. "Without a spirited solidarity no dancing"; the title I gave to an article written in honour of the retiring Prof. Byaruhanga Akiiki. The Uppsala University publication

seems to be delayed or lost in some Nordic mist.

xxvi. A melody that refrains from moralising. See 1985, p.186.

xxvii. See Ch. Davies 1986 on this form of Christian realism,