

Conclusion

The fundamental issue of my dissertation is represented by the question of whether one can express content of theological character by means of musical language. From the abundant music literature, I have selected J. S. Bach's *Passion According to St. John*, on the example of which I have analyzed the relationships between word and music. In order to better situate the research conducted in a period context, I have utilized mainly historical materials – surviving manuscripts of the work, as well as 17th- and 18th-century editions of the Holy Scriptures.

An important role in the creative process of composers from the Baroque era was played by the theory of affects, as well as by rhetorical musical devices, among which the most important place was occupied by *topoi* and figures derived directly from classical rhetoric. They fulfilled an essential function in the transmission of the meaning contained in the words – they brought out from them a broad semantic spectrum and served to illustrate them, as well as to trigger emotions in the audience. This convention of rhetorical musical figures found its fullest expression in German music. The theorists and composers active there created the academic concept of *Figurenlehre*. In their treatises, they left us detailed information concerning the proper utilization of rhetorical operations. On the basis of this knowledge, as well as surviving manuscript materials, we are convinced that the peculiar character of the musical language of that time assumed the involvement of a rhetorical factor in almost every phrase of a composition. Therefore, ignorance of the principles of musical rhetoric makes it impossible to listen to works from the Baroque era in a conscious manner, and thereby significantly limits interpretation of the composer's intentions. In one of his treatises, Hamburg theorist J. Mattheson writes that

we must make the effort to in a certain manner take in hand the dear Grammar, as well as the precious Rhetoric, and also the worthy Poetry: for without having the proper knowledge of these beautiful sciences above all, regardless of any other efforts, one only lays hold of a work with unwashed hands and all but in vain¹.

¹ J. Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, Hamburg 1739, reprint of facsimile edition, Kassel 1969, p. 181. [wir müssen] uns die Mühe geben, die liebe Grammatic sowol, als die schätzbare Rheroric und werthe Poesie auf gewisse Weise zut Hand zu nehmen: denn ohne von diesen schönen Wissenschaftten vor allen die gehörige Kundschaft zu haben, greiffet man Werck, ungeachtet des übrigen Bestrebens, doch nur mit ungewaschenen Händen und fast vergeblich an.

The transformations taking place in Baroque art were the result of general processes taking place also in theological thought. Protestant culture, especially on German ground, remained in an integral relationship with music: 'For Lutherans, love of music became almost an article of faith'². Aside from the dominant Lutheran orthodoxy, also finding expression in 17th-century German Protestantism was Pietism as a reaction to ossified and radical dogmatism. The main representatives of this movement – among others, J. Arndt, A. H. Francke, J. P. Spener – portrayed subjective or individual religious experiences in their works, deepened by ardent feeling and living faith aiming towards personal conversion. For this reason, the Pietists addressed God directly, aiming toward a mystical union with Christ (*unio mystica*). Bach remained under the influence of these views, at the same time being an ardent follower of Protestant orthodoxy. This is attested by his abundant book collection containing works both by Pietist authors and by such figures as Luther or A. Calovius. In his *œuvre*, we see a merging of these religious movements, expressing itself in the special treatment – or, properly speaking, primacy – of the words of Holy Scripture, with simultaneous utilization of Pietist poetry authored, for example, by B. H. Brockes or C. H. Postel. An example of such text compilation are his Passions. Representing the oratorio-cantata passion form, they constitute a peak phase in the development of this genre.

In the *Passion According to St. John*, which was the object of my research, one can distinguish three layers: narrative, dramatic and lyrical. The most important gospel events play out in the narrative and dramatic layers – that is, in recitatives and *turba* choruses possessing a text taken straight from the Holy Scriptures. These two genres alternate, creating a peculiar spine for the entire structure of the *Passion*. The remaining forms of musical expression, such as the aria, chorale, aria with chorus, arioso – though not infrequently very expansive – supplement that structure of the Passion account, based on a poetic text. They belong to the lyrical layer, which is characterized by a suspension of the action for the purpose of reflective experience of the events presented.

For each layer, I have selected a characteristic fragment; the narrative is represented by 'Und von Stund an nahm sie der Jünger' (no. 57); the dramatic, by the *turba* chorus 'Lasset uns den nicht zerteilen' (no. 54); and the lyrical, by the aria 'Es ist vollbracht' (no. 58). I have

² J. L. Irwin, *Neither Voice nor Heart Alone. German Lutheran Theology of Music in the Age of the Baroque*, New York 1993, p. 22; cited according to: M. Walter-Mazur, *Motet madrygałowy w protestanckich Niemczech I połowy XVII wieku [The Madrigal Motet in Protestant Germany in the First Half of the 17th Century]*, Poznań 2004, p. 219.

subjected these movements, which occupy a central place in the work's narrative process, to thorough musical and theological analysis.

The research carried out has proven the existence of mutual relationships between the words of the Bible and their musical expression in the *Passion According to St. John*. Here, the music fulfills the role of a textual hermeneutic, while the word in its depth inspires the sound. The analyses have also confirmed the assumption that the musical language utilized by Bach is able to bring out the most subtle aspects of the work's theological content. In making the proper choice of means of musical expression, the composer proved that music can not only illustrate a text, but also represent a theological interpretation of the words of Holy Scripture, emphasizing their emotional content and, in this manner, facilitating their reception.

The sound material in the recitative, thanks to the declamatory treatment of the text, emphasizes the content of the Gospel with particular articulation of the theologically essential words. In this manner, the composer has additionally enriched the narrative with his own interpretation. The *turba* chorus illustrates the noisy crowd scene exceptionally suggestively. Here, the accent falls upon the reinforcement of the work's dramaturgy; we can feel a rapid piling up of emotions resulting from the fast pace of the action. The extraordinary dynamism conveys the crowd's chaotic action. In the aria, on the other hand, what finds expression are the individual feelings of a lyric subject contemplating the events presented in the recitative. 'Es ist vollbracht' is a dialogue of the alto and viola da gamba, resembling a funeral hymn of Pietist provenance. The radical change of mood in the middle section possesses a theological justification as an expression of the triumph of the Savior, introducing a new eschatological perspective.

Elocutio, that is, the linking of a word with a specific rhetorical figure, finds abundant application in all of the layers of the work analyzed: narrative, dramatic and lyrical. Bach combined compositional technique of the highest order with mastery in providing the text with appropriate figures, as well as in the use of such other rhetorical and musical means as *topoi*, number and interval symbolism or tonal semantics.

The perfect utilization of different elements of the art of musical expression bore fruit in a deepened transmission of theological content from both the revealed text and religious poetry, which led to a conviction that the composer is not just an artist, but also a theologian who interprets theological content in sound. In other words, the title of the dissertation could be presented differently: *Bach's Passion as Biblical Exegesis*.

In musicological reflections, Bach's *œuvre* is normally presented from the perspective of the great development of various musical genres accomplished by the composer. However, it is also worthwhile to view his works from the position of the theology in which he was engaged. In this light, the cantor of Leipzig appears to us as a superb synthesist, for he links Lutheran orthodoxy – subject to the chief directive of *sola scriptura* – with the influences of Pietism, which revived Protestant theology, as well as representing an inspiration for those fragments of the composer's works in which he was most concerned with introducing the faithful into the sphere of experiencing God. At that time, such requirements could not be met – and certainly not in such measure – by the somewhat ossified Protestant theology focused on, among other things, academic interpretations of dogmas, unfortunately normally incomprehensible to those not 'initiated' into the discourse of the university theology of that time.

Looking at the condition of today's Catholicism, it is difficult not to perceive certain links with the tendencies that motivated the theological ideas of Bach. Above all, the teaching of the Second Vatican Council points to the main theological source – that is, the Holy Scriptures – described in the *Dei verbum* dogmatic Constitution as the soul of sacred theology³. In a somewhat more general perspective, we also read there that 'the Christian religion must feed upon the Holy Scriptures and be guided by them'⁴. On the other hand, an emphasis on the need to engage in theology 'addressed to the human being, and not developed theoretically'⁵ can be found in many theologians, including J. Daniélou. In his opinion, it is necessary to aim towards conquering the so-called 'dogmatic' theology, which explains the truths of the faith mainly on the basis of the Holy Scriptures⁶ – what is interesting is that this need is becoming noticeable in both Catholic and Protestant circles. Such a challenge can be met by 'hermeneutic' theology⁷ – that is, an interpretive theology that does not focus exclusively on the transmission of unchanging dogmas, but shows the current significance of God's word in a manner accessible to all the faithful.

³ Cf. Konstytucja dogmatyczna o Objawieniu Bożym *Dei verbum* [*Dei verbum* Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation], ch. VI, pt. 24, [in:] Sobór Watykański II. Konstytucje, dekryty, deklaracje [*Vatican II Council. Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*], Poznań 2004, p. 361.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pt. 21, p. 360.

⁵ T. Dzidek, P. Sikora, 'Historyczne koncepcje teologii' ['Historic Concepts of Theology'], [in:] *Teologia fundamentalna* [*Fundamental Theology*], vol. V, *Poznanie teologiczne* [*Theological Understanding*], ed. T. Dzidek, Ł. Kamykowski, A. Napiórkowski, Kraków 2006, p. 46.

⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁷ The tasks of hermeneutics theology are explanation, interpretation of texts as well as religious symbols with the aim of better understanding of them on the part of the faithful. Cf. T. Dzidek, P. Sikora, 'Natura teologii' ['The Nature of Theology'], [in:] *Teologia fundamentalna* [*Fundamental Theology*], vol. V [...], *op. cit.*, p. 81.

Looking at the composer's legacy, one can state that his works are above religious divisions, which is clearly visible in the liturgical life of both of the denominations which draw on the rich musical *œuvre* of J. S. Bach. In this sense, it would be difficult to find a greater artist whose *œuvre* would possess such clear marks of ecumenism. For this reason, going yet further, we can see in him a composer-theologian active in the space of broadly-understood Christian thought.

The length of this dissertation has not permitted a holistic analysis of the *Passion According to St. John*; thus, it should be treated as an orientation for research into other parts of the work. I trust that, thanks to the utilization of source materials and multi-aspectual analysis, my inquiries will lead to yet better understanding of Bach's *œuvre* and display the exceptional quality of Baroque music, which existed in a peculiar symbiosis with the word. I hope that via its interdisciplinary perspective on the subject, this dissertation will convince theologians that music is an important *locus theologicus*, while making musicians aware of how much the knowledge of a musical work's theological content influences its perception. This doctoral thesis also represents a proposition of how one can analyze other works by J. S. Bach, especially the vocal-instrumental ones, as well as a significant portion of the musical legacy of the Baroque era, in which observance of the principles of 'rhetorical composition' bore fruit in the creation of a finely-crafted and convincing musical oration.

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