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Richard A. Muller

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The Calov Bible of Bach

Edited by Howard H. Cox

Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1985

x + 460 pp.

J.S. Bach frequently inscribed the letters "D S G"—*Deo Soli Gloria*—at the end of the manuscripts of his compositions. So ends the score of the great B minor Mass. The greater part of Bach's life was spent in musical service to the church and the greater part of his music was either written specifically for performance in the church or draws on the music of the church for its themes. But what, precisely, was Bach's religion like—and what were his theological views? We know, of course, that Bach was Lutheran, and Lutheran enough to be dissatisfied with the ecclesial style in Calvinist Köthen, where he was employed as Kapellmeister from 1717 to 1723. And we also have, in the rare book collection of the Concordia Seminary Library, St. Louis, Bach's own copy of the so-called "Calov Bible". The Calov Bible is an important possible indicator of Bach's own theological views or devotional inclinations for two reasons. In the first place, the Calov Bible is not simply text: it is also a commentary consisting of a verse by verse analysis of the text, sometimes brief, sometimes at considerable length, by the eminent orthodox Lutheran theologian of the late seventeenth century, Abraham Calov or Calovius, professor of theology at Wittenberg. In the second place, Bach's copy of the Calov Bible has been worked over very carefully by at least one of its owners—with underlining, marginalia and words of comment written into the text. The question that has plagued scholars since the rediscovery of the Bible in 1934 is whether or not the various signs of careful study come from J.S. Bach.

The Bible was printed in 1691 and only came into Bach's possession in 1733. Bach kept the Bible until his death in 1750, after which at least one owner, Ludwig Reichle, wrote in the book: his signature appears in volume two. Do the markings in the Bible come from Bach or from Reichle—or from some other (unknown) owner of the Bible? The question becomes particularly difficult to answer in the case of underlinings and minor corrections where handwriting analysis can be of no assistance. As the editor of the present volume notes, the earlier attempt to examine markings in the Bible, undertaken by Trautmann in 1969, was inconclusive precisely because of this problem. Cox and his team of scholars, however, have taken advantage of recent work in nuclear physics to provide what appears to be conclusive analysis of all the markings in the text: together with handwriting analysis, historical study of inks, and a strong component of Bach scholarship, the atomic analysis of the inks and markings themselves can identify those markings which certainly, probably or possibly come from Bach himself.

At the Crocker Nuclear Laboratory of the University of California at Davis, the team of scholars enlisted by Cox used a cyclotron-generated beam

of protons projected on to one square millimeter of paper and ink. The proton beam, in turn, causes an emission of x-rays from the ink and paper. These emissions can then be compared: the ink of known Bach marginalia compared to the ink of questionable markings and of the underlining. The beauty of the method is that it causes no damage to the book. The Bach Bible is, in fact, the first book to be analyzed in this way (cf. the discussion, pp. 5-6), and the results of the testing are quite remarkable. Granting the correctness of the expert analysis of handwriting samples, specifically, of the attribution of various lengthier comments and corrigenda to Bach, the cyclotron analysis of markings and underlinings as identical in chemical composition and of approximately the same date permits the attribution of these markings and underlinings, with a high degree of probability, to Bach himself. In other words, virtually all of the markings in the Bible probably were made by Bach.

The Calov Bible of Bach is both a significant historical exercise and an important resource for further study of the life and work of J.S. Bach. In the first place, the volume manifests generally the value of cooperative investigations by historians and scientists in a potentially fruitful area of research. *The Calov Bible* points the way toward other, similar, efforts. In the second place, it provides an enormous amount of otherwise unavailable or difficult to access material to a wide audience: in addition to the chapters of background discussion, literary analysis of handwriting, and concluding argumentation, the volume includes extensive diagrams and tables detailing the methods and results of the proton milliprobe analysis, a nearly three hundred page set of reproductions of the pages from the Bible on which markings had been made, and a full set of translations of the marked passages and the markings. The volume makes no attempt to draw theological conclusions about Bach or Bach's work—it simply provides a resource.

In addition, therefore, to giving the editor and his colleagues praise for a job well done and for the creation of a volume that is attractive as well as informative, some attention must also be given here to the kind of questions about Bach and his work that *The Calov Bible* may enable us to answer. Bach owned the Bible during the last seventeen years of his life—all of which were spent in Leipzig. The markings ought to be collated carefully with the church music written by Bach during those years, particularly with the texts of cantatas, in order to see if there is any correlation between Bach's music output and his biblical study. Since Bach seems to have been interested as much in Calov's commentary as in the text of Scripture, the question can be raised as to the impact of orthodox Lutheranism on Bach. After all, whether by chance or choice, Bach was reading a commentary written by one of the scholastic orthodox Lutherans and not by a Pietist. Pelikan has commented generally on this issue but now, perhaps, some documentation can be placed behind the generalization. In *The Calov Bible of Bach* we have, in short, a marvellous new resource for Bach scholarship and a model

for cooperative efforts between practitioners of the more traditional forms of historical analysis and proponents of new scientific approaches.

Richard A. Muller
Fuller Theological Seminary

Triumph of the Lamb

Ted Grimsrud

Foreward by Willard M. Swartley

Scottsdale, Pennsylvania and Kitchener, Ont.: Harold Press
189 pp., \$13.95

Attracted by the Mennonite concern for discipleship and peacemaking, the author joined the Mennonite Church in 1981. Currently he is a candidate in Religion and Society at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley.

According to the subtitle, the book intends to be a Self-Study Guide in the Book of Revelation. Each section contains study questions and a brief interpretation of the passage. In the eyes of the author, Revelation expresses "a timeless philosophy of history" in which God's people struggle with evil until eventually God will destroy evil and establish the Kingdom. Giving up Hal Lindsay's approach to the Bible (19), the author flatly states that "Revelation was not originally written for twentieth century Americans" (20). A prophet does not foretell the future but rather "forthtells" God's truth in the present (22).

The place and date, he maintains, are those when the church was persecuted by the Roman Empire and some of its Jewish opponents (22), i.e. during the last decades of the first century.

Unfortunately, the interpretation of the text is less satisfactory; it is too brief and too vague at many passages. In a brief remark he says the birth of the Messiah (Rev. 12:22) means the cross of Christ (90). The number 666 (Rev. 13:18) supposedly means "false religion" (104).

Concerning "Armageddon" (Rev. 16:16) and the "eighth king" (Rev. 17:11) the author remains indecisive (123, 133). The same is true of the 1000 year reign of Christ (Rev. 20:1 ff; cf. 151).

These criticisms notwithstanding, the volume is a useful guide to a method of instruction in Revelation. However, a teacher should consult other recent commentaries, for instance, those of Schuessler-Fiorenza and the like.

Otto W. Heick
Waterloo Lutheran Seminary