

HISTORY OF THE B MINOR MASS

Lecture delivered at First United Methodist Church, San Diego

April 11, 2007

Linder Social Hall

Tonight's lecture on the history of the B Minor Mass is the first of two that Bob Plimpton and I hope will provide a context in which we can all better understand and appreciate the masterpiece which we will present on May 20 and 21. The two lectures have been designed separately: mine being an historical overview and Bob's delving into the musical and spiritual language of the work. Some of you will be in the audience and others of you will be performing, but I know both, as listener and performer, you have a keen interest in understanding one of the greatest works of Western art. Over 200 singers have been rehearsing the Mass since the second week in January on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings. By the time of the performances they will have invested 20 weeks of their lives to the study of this work and hopefully will have become better musicians and people of faith as a result.

For tonight's lecture we will cover the following topics:

- 1) definition, purpose and history of the Roman Mass
- 2) worship practices in 18th century Northern Germany
- 3) composition of the B Minor Mass and a brief overview of each movement, including a DVD presentation of excerpts
- 4) the B Minor Mass after the death of Johann Sebastian Bach

Why would Johann Sebastian Bach, an orthodox Lutheran church musician living in Leipzig, the center of Lutheran orthodoxy, write a large-scale musical setting of the Ordinary of the Roman Mass? From the sheer size of the work (approximately two hours in length), it is obviously not something intended to be performed in worship. Hopefully we will find hints of a reason or reasons by the end of this lecture.

The Mass, or *Missa* in Latin, literally translated as "dismissal," is a service of worship in which the Eucharist, or re-enactment of the Last Supper, is observed. In the late 4th century St. Ambrose referred to the Eucharistic portion of the service as *missa catechumenorum* or after the dismissal of the non-confirmed members of the church. At the end of the Eucharist the "faithful" were "dismissed," or *missa fidelium*.

Initially there were two separate portions of the Mass: the *synaxis*, meaning “to come together,” was a service, originally observed in homes, consisting of readings, a homily which interpreted the readings and petitioning prayers based on the readings and homily. After the Edict of Milan in 313 C.E., which removed all obstacles to the public practice of Christianity, the *synaxis* was joined with the *Eucharist*, from the Greek *Eucharistia*, meaning “giving thanks” (we call it “The Great Thanksgiving” today in our United Methodist Communion liturgy) and held in a public place of worship. By the Middle Ages the *missa catechumenorum* is forgotten and there remains one connected service, which kept the name *missa*.

The purpose of the Mass was to both instruct the faithful and observe an “un-bloodied” version of Christ’s sacrifice. Greek was the initial language of the Mass, but was eventually translated into Latin and finally codified by Pope Gregory in the late 6th and early 7th centuries. It remains pretty much the same today with a few localized variants in Western Europe. If you look at the first page of your handout, you can see the form of the Roman Mass, including the division between the *Synaxis* and *Eucharist*.

There are six portions of the Mass that are “fixed” or unchanging, called the Ordinary: the *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Credo*, *Sanctus*, *Agnus Dei* and the *Ite missa est*. The remainder of the Mass changed day to day in accordance to the specific needs of the occasion, called the Propers. Initially the entire Mass was chanted, a means to transfer the words in the “live” acoustic of cavernous worship spaces over a distance from the priest to the congregation. From the 12th century polyphonic (or multiple-voice) settings came into existence as a means to embellish the Mass on festive occasions. From the 13th century composers focused solely on the Ordinary portions of the Mass for the obvious reason that they could be used over and over again. From the 14th century, collected cycles of the Ordinary began to appear and by the time of the Renaissance the *Ite missa est* had been dropped from inclusion in subsequent collections, leaving just five portions of the Ordinary.

Let’s jump ahead to 18th century Northern Germany, to observe the worship practices in Leipzig and Dresden, the context in which Bach’s *B Minor Mass* is conceived. The principal Sunday service for Lutherans, known as the *Hauptgottesdienst*, was developed by Martin Luther in 1523, just six years after his infamous “posting of the 95 theses” on door of the castle church in Wittenburg. As you can see by referring back to the first page of the handout, it retained the basic outline of the Latin Mass, but added German-language hymns, known as chorales, and a cantata and required the sermon and portions of the Communion liturgy (except for festival Sundays) to be read in German instead of Latin. The

development of the *Hauptgottesdienst* illustrates Luther's concern to "rectify" not "reject" the practices of the Roman Church. It retained the five portions of the Ordinary, which were to be chanted in Latin by the choir. In 1526, Luther developed the *Deutsche Messe*, a vernacular service for the "unlearned lay folk." This service provided alternative tunes and texts for the Ordinary and moved the Credo to the location between the Gospel and Sermon. Luther cautioned celebrating Mass solely in German as noted in his preface to the *Deutsche Messe*:

For in no wise would I want to discontinue the service in the Latin language, because the young are my chief concern. And if I could bring it to pass, and Greek and Hebrew were as familiar to us as the Latin and had as many fine melodies and songs, we would hold Mass, sing, and read on successive Sundays in all four languages, German, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. I do not at all agree with those who cling to one language and despise all others....It is also reasonable that the young should be trained in many languages; for who knows how God may use them in times to come?

In spite of Luther's admonition, the vernacular service was fully embraced by the majority of Lutheran congregations. However, in Leipzig Luther's polyglot service remained strong: a rich blend of Greek, Latin and German (see handout). Vopelius' *New Leipzig Hymnal*, 1682 confirms that the Latin Ordinary continued to play a strong role in Leipzig worship in Bach's day: all five portions were chanted in Latin at one time or another over the course of the Church Year. On high feasts the *Kyrie*, *Gloria* and *Sanctus* (a truncated version without the *Benedictus* and *Osanna* texts) were sung in polyphonic arrangements. This practice for festival services gives us a foreshadowing of how and why the *B Minor Mass* came into existence the way it did late in Bach's life.

While Northern Germany was firmly Lutheran an interesting development occurred in Dresden (located approximately 60 miles southeast of Leipzig), which further impacted Bach's writing of the *B Minor Mass*. In 1697, Elector Frederick August I, who reigned over Saxony from 1694-1733, converted to Roman Catholicism in order to extend his domain to Poland. His wife, a staunch Lutheran, refused to convert, creating an awkward situation in the court. August I's son, Crown Prince Frederick August II, converted in 1712, but it was kept secret for five years for fear of unrest. The religious situation at the court stabilized in 1719 with the marriage of the Crown Prince to a Roman Catholic, Maria Josepha, daughter of Emperor Joseph I of Austria. Their children and grandchildren were all baptized into the Roman Catholic faith. The Dresden Court's needs for worship

music called for the importation of Latin-texted polyphonic settings of the Mass from Vienna and Rome. By the time of Frederick August II's ascent to the throne in 1733, Dresden had become in the words of Christoph Wolff "a Catholic diaspora" in the middle of the Lutheran heartland.

We now turn to details leading up to the composition and compilation of the *B Minor Mass*. Up until 1729 and six years into his tenure as Thomaskantor in Leipzig, Bach's church music writing, particularly his sacred cantatas (over 300 composed) and organ chorale preludes (over 200 composed), flourished. Referring to the first page of the handout you can see the location of the Cantata in the context of the Lutheran Mass, which is in essence, a musical and theological rendering of the Gospel Lesson, lasting approximately 20-25 minutes out of a total worship time of 3 hours, which included a one-hour sermon. Remember, there was nothing else to do in Leipzig on Sunday, a day when work and recreation ceased. For those of us who are old enough to remember the "blue laws" here in the US, as well as the Methodist campgrounds in such places as Chautauqua and Ocean Grove, it is easy to understand the cultural context of the Lord's Day observance in 18th century Leipzig.

After 1729, considered by scholars to represent the beginning of Bach's late compositional practice, his steady production of Lutheran church music, comes to an abrupt halt. Probably the main reason for this change in compositional focus relates to his confrontations with the Town Council, the hiring and supervisory body over all civic and church employees (remember the Church and State were one in 18th century Lutheran Germany). His issues with the Town Council came to a climax when Bach sent to them a stinging letter entitled, "Short but Most Necessary Draft for a Well-Regulated Church Music." In this letter he complains about a shortage of qualified choirboys and student instrumentalists at his disposal. By August of 1730 Bach was reprimanded by the Town Council, including a restriction placed on his incidental income, due to his "incorrigible" indifference toward his job.

Another reason for the change in Bach's compositional focus came when he assumed the post of Director of the *Collegium Musicum*, an ensemble of students at the University of Leipzig. He held that post from 1729-1737 and again from 1739-1741. His work with the *Collegium Musicum* produced rearrangements of secular cantatas and instrumental works from his days in Anhalt-Cöthen (see second page of handouts) as well as newly-composed pieces for chamber orchestra and solo instruments, such as the gamba and lute. These works were featured weekly in Zimmermann's Coffee House in the winter months and Zimmermann's Coffee Garden in the summer.

After 1741 Bach withdrew his compositional focus from both the church and university and devoted his attention to private projects: publication of keyboard works, study of Latin church music, sorting of earlier compositions, compilation of encyclopedic compendia, and more frequent travel to Berlin and Dresden. It is during this time he produced such works as the Goldberg Variations (1741), The Art of Fugue (1742), the Musical Offering (1747) and finally the B Minor Mass (1748-1749).

Two other items warrant our attention that relate directly to the B Minor Mass. In the late Baroque Period there was a growing reliance on “parody technique,” the art of underlaying a new text to old music. This technique was not considered a cheap substitute for newly composed music, but rather was admired when carried out with finesse. During Bach’s initial years in Leipzig he relied on “parody” to keep up with the weekly demands for newly composed sacred cantatas, borrowing material from his secular cantatas that were written during his Weimar and Anhalt-Cöthen years. On the last page of your handouts I have indicated particular movements of the B Minor Mass which were “parodied” from Bach’s earlier works. Keep in mind, in this instance Bach had the added challenge of underlaying a Latin text in music that was originally composed for texts in German.

The last item I want to share that relates directly to the B Minor Mass writing was Bach’s expanded interest in Latin church music. He adds to his library several Mass settings by Italian composers, keeping abreast of Roman Catholic church music. He also composes the E-flat version of the Magnificat for Christmas 1723 and the Sanctus in D of 1724, later to become part of the B Minor Mass. This heightened interest in Latin church music also reflects his preoccupation with the Catholic Court in Dresden. In 1733 he submitted his own five-voice Missa in hopes of securing an appointment at the court, which was finally granted in 1736. If you turn to the third page of your handouts you will see Bach’s letter of introduction to Frederick August II which accompanied the Missa. This work will become the Kyrie and the Gloria of the B Minor Mass. During the late 1730s he wrote four additional Mass settings. In the 1740s he copied out and conducted a performance of Palestrina’s *Missa sine nomine* (Kyrie and Gloria only), Kerll’s Sanctus from *Missa superba* and Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater* in Leipzig. The copying and performing of these works in particular gave Bach exposure to three different styles of composition, all evidenced in the B Minor Mass: Renaissance a cappella style (called by the Baroque contemporaries *stile antico* or “ancient style” where the vocal lines were either unaccompanied or doubled by instruments, but without any instrumental writing apart from the vocal lines), Baroque concerted style (where two musical forces, either solo or ensemble, vocal or instrumental, contrast

with each other, and the galant style (a less complex style, less ornamentation, less polyphony, more emphasis on melody and regular-length musical phrases).

Technically speaking, the preparatory steps to the composition and compilation of the B Minor Mass cover a period of over 35 years. Bach did not have a vision of the B Minor Mass lurking in the recesses of his mind at the beginning of those 35 years. However, some of the musical materials he drew upon during the actual writing of the movements come from the cantata writing back in his Weimar period. The earliest of these preparatory steps is seen in the Crucifixus movement of the Credo, which is a parody of the chorus *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen* from Cantata #12, written in 1714. I have already mentioned the Sanctus in D, written for Christmas Day in 1724 and the Dresden *Missa* written in 1733. You can refer to the last page of your handouts to see a complete listing of the movements, with parody annotations listed in parentheses. The Credo and Osanna/Benedictus/Agnus Dei/Dona nobis pacem portions of the Mass were the last to be composed or parodied.

It is generally agreed by scholars that Bach assembled the B Minor Mass in the last two years of his life. There is no mention of the Mass in any of Bach's letters or contemporary documents. The only source of information about its origin is the autograph score itself, labeled *P 180* and housed in the Berlin State Library. This score is a 188-page single-bounded document compiled in four divisions: *Missa* (the Kyrie and Gloria from 1733), *Symbolum Nicenum* (or the Credo), *Sanctus* and *Osanna/Benedictus/Agnus Dei* and *Dona nobis pacem*. It is believed that each of the four divisions of the Mass were originally kept in folios, with the title pages of each division being the front-page remnants of the four folios, whose back pages were destroyed when the autograph was bound into a single volume in the 19th century.

The autograph has been scrutinized by Bach scholars since Philip Spitta in 1880 wrote that the *P 180* autograph contained two different types of paper, proving that it was not conceived as a homogenous work, but rather a compilation of more than one original work done late in Bach's life.

There is no title page for the complete work, a further indication that it wasn't composed as a homogenous work. The first mention of a name for it, *Die grosse catholische Messe* or *The Great Catholic Mass* was coined by Bach's son, Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach in 1790. It wasn't until the 1820s that the title "B Minor Mass" appeared as the work emerged in reviews and letters. From then on that title stuck.

Now let us have a walk through the *B Minor Mass* and watch portions of a live performance. Please turn to the fourth page of your handouts. My comments about the music itself will be brief, since Bob Plimpton will get into the intimate details of the music next week. As I mentioned earlier, the Mass is separated by four divisions, reflecting the way it was composed and compiled over a period of time.

The first division, containing the Kyrie and Gloria makes up two-fifths of the entire work. The Kyrie, or more fully, Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison (Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy) is not a Latin text as some would suppose, but Greek. Recent scholarship is fairly certain that the Kyrie is not a vestige from the early church, whose language was Greek for the first two centuries, but rather was introduced into the Roman liturgy from the Eastern Church in the 6th century, with the first reference to its use in the West by the Second Council of Vaison in 529.

Bach's setting of the Kyrie (as you can see from the fourth page of the handout) is divided into three distinct movements, with the Kyrie petitions assigned to the chorus and the middle Christe petition assigned as a duet for two sopranos. The "first" Kyrie, scored for 5-part chorus, begins with a short 4-bar adagio in a declamatory style, followed by a slow Baroque-style fugue, being the longest movement (just over 9 minutes in length) of the entire Mass. The Christe movement, a duet for 2 sopranos and both 1st and 2nd violin sections in unison, is written in ritornello form, an alternation between orchestral and vocal forces in which the orchestra plays a type of recurring refrain between sections of vocal material. The "second" Kyrie, scored for 4-part chorus, is written in the style of a Renaissance fugue, not unlike the writing of Palestrina, a style commonly used by the Baroque composers in Dresden for the second Kyrie. The easy tell-tale sign of this style of writing can be seen by looking at the beginning of the work (see p. 24) where Bach indicates "alla breve," and the notes are "whiter" overall due to the fact that the hollow-headed half note is the primary beat rather than the black-headed quarter note.

We are going to watch the opening four bars of the "first" Kyrie, then jump ahead to the "second Kyrie." If you are following along in the music score for the "second" Kyrie you can see the fine fugal writing with the all four voices taking turns announcing the 3-measure theme, first in the bass, then followed by the tenor, alto and finally the soprano section. I would like to add that this DVD recording is a "live" performance from the rear gallery of the St. Thomas Church in Leipzig as part of the 2005 Bach Festival. Bach served as Cantor at St. Thomas from 1723 until his death in 1750. Herbert Blomstedt conducts the GewandhausKammerchor

(or Chamber Choir) and Gewandhausorchester, both based at the Gewandhaus concert hall in Leipzig. Listen to the gravity of the opening 4 bars, setting the tone for the monumental mass that is to follow. In the “second” Kyrie, listen for the entrance of the theme each time, made obvious by the first three notes, with the second and third notes “surrounding” the first note by the interval of a half step above and below. [sing the first three notes with text]

[play the Kyrie excerpts track #1, first 4 measures, and #3]

The Gloria (p. 29 in the music score), a hymn of praise to the triune God, is divided into nine movements, typical of the Baroque Period, as composers of the day sought to use a variety of musical devices to illustrate the nuance of text (you’ll hear more about this from Bob next week, I’m sure). The movements include 4 or 5-part choruses, 3 solos and a duet. The opening chorus of the Gloria is in sharp contrast to the “second” Kyrie in terms of writing style (Baroque concerted style vs. Renaissance fugal style), tonality (major vs. minor), tempo (dance-like vs. solemn) and instrumentation (trumpets and timpani are added to the rest of the orchestra for the Gloria to accentuate the festiveness of the text).

The second chorus, “et in terra pax” immediately follows the opening “Gloria,” beginning on p. 35, which is also scored for 5-part chorus.

The “Laudamus te,” beginning on p. 46, is scored for second soprano with violin obligato in an extreme virtuosic style, continuing the festive nature of the Gloria.

A 4-part chorus returns on p. 51 of the score to sing the “Gratias agimus tibi in Renaissance vocal style. This movement is the first one so far in the score where there is proof of parody technique being used. Bach borrowed the music from Cantata 29, *Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir*, written to celebrate the change of Town Council in Leipzig on August 27, 1731. The German text of the cantata movement, taken from Psalm 75:1 is so close in meaning to the Latin-texted “Gratias agimus tibi” (we give thanks for thy great glory) that it could almost be considered a translation. It is no wonder that Bach found it an appropriate source to parody in the B Minor Mass.

The fifth movement of the Gloria, “Domine Deus,” found on p. 56 of the score, is written for soprano and tenor duet with flute obligato in the emerging galant style of the Baroque Period. Though it cannot be proven, there is speculation that this movement was a parody of a duet from a lost secular cantata *Ich will rühmen* due to the similarities that the texts share in terms of structure and character. The duet

elides into the “Qui tollis” movement found on p. 63, scored for 4-part chorus, with an added second flute to the instrumental texture, which play in duet or dialogue together throughout. Bach parodied this movement from the chorus *Schauet doch* from Cantata 46, composed for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity, 1723. The German text is taken the Lamentations of Jeremiah 1:12, “Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow” and makes an obvious thematic and musical parallel to the Latin “who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us, receive our prayer.”

The “Qui sedes” movement (p. 68) is scored for alto solo and oboe d’amore obligato in the rhythm of a gigue, a baroque dance in compound meter, such as this movement, in 6/8 time, with orchestral ritornellos.

“Quoniam tu solus sanctus” (p. 72) is an extraordinary aria scored for bass solo, with a unique combination of corno da caccia, or hunting horn, 2 bassoons in duet with each other and with ritornellos throughout.

The Gloria portion of the Mass concludes on p. 78 with “Cum sancto Spiritu” (Come, Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen) is scored for 5-part chorus, with the trumpets and timpani heard in the opening movement returning. It is divided into 5 sections with the 2nd and 4th sections containing a fugue using the same subject, sandwiched between three free declamatory sections written in the style of a fanfare.

Turn to p. 29 of the score and watch with me the opening chorus of the Gloria. Listen for the fugal entrances in the second and fourth sections as well as the brilliant character of this movement, accentuated by the three trumpets and timpani.

[play track #5]

Turn to p. 72 of the score and watch the bass solo, “Quoniam tu solus sanctus,” listening to the unique combination of bass voice, horn and the two bassoons.

[play track #12]

The Credo, or more specifically *Symbolum Nicenum* (translated as the Nicene Creed) as opposed to the shorter, and later-written Apostles’ Creed, is a fourth century statement of faith designed to counter the heretical sect of Arianism, which denied the divinity of Jesus. As the second portion of the B Minor Mass, it is the

second longest, some 35 minutes and contains nine distinct movements in a highly organized structure that Bob Plimpton will explain in some detail next week. This was a portion of the Ordinary of the Mass that Lutherans chanted in Latin, so Bach had no need to write a polyphonic setting for use in the *Hauptgottesdienst* services in Leipzig. Looking to Roman Catholic models, nothing comes close to the proportions needed to match the size of the Dresden *Missa* of 1733, forming the first portion of the B Minor Mass. Much of the music for the Credo was parodied from Bach's cantatas as you can see from the fourth page of the handouts. The opening movement, "Credo in unum Deum" (found on p. 94 of the score), resembles, in all but a few of the details, a Credo that he wrote sometime between 1747 and 1748, transposed up a whole step from G to A. Here Bach combines the Renaissance a cappella style with a Baroque-style walking-bass continuo line supporting the harmonic content of the vocal lines. The movement opens with the tenors singing a metrical and long-note version of the plainchant that was probably sung by the choirs in the Leipzig churches in the *Hauptgottesdienst* service. This metrical version of the chant enters in all voices, sometimes doubled in note value as a well-written vocal fugue with a Baroque-style "accompaniment."

The second movement of the Credo, "Patrem omnipotentem" (found on p. 100), which also reiterates the text of the opening movement "Credo in unum Deum" is a parody from the chorus "Gott, wie dein Name, so ist auch dein Ruhm" that opens Cantata 171, composed for New Year's Day and probably first performed on January 1, 1729. The German text, quoting from Psalm 48 includes "For this is our God for ever and ever." It is easy to understand why this music works with the second phrase of the Credo, "the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." The music is written in the style of a 17th century Baroque fugue, giving the first two movements of the Credo a stylistic contrast between Renaissance and Baroque fugal styles of writing.

The third movement of the Credo, "Et in unum Dominum" (found on p. 106), begins the part of the Creed centered on the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. It is scored for soprano and alto duet in Baroque style with ritornello passages supplied by the orchestra. It is a parody from a lost love duet from one of his secular cantatas.

The fourth movement, "Et incarnatus est" (and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man), is written in Baroque style, using a pedalpoint in the continuo and contrasting imitative counterpoint and homophonic writing between the two phrases of text: "et incarnatus est de Spiritu sancto" and

“ex Maria Virgine, et homo factus est.” Bob may point out the theological implications of this highly expressive writing next week.

The fifth movement, “Crucifixus” (and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, suffered, and was buried), found on p. 118 was mentioned earlier in this lecture as a parody from the earliest source of Bach’s music, Cantata 12 from 1714, “Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen.” Its signature characteristic is the chromatic descending bass line. I’ll leave the theological implications of this for Bob to address next week.

The sixth movement, “Et resurrexit” (and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, etc) found on p. 122 contrasts the previous movement about Jesus’ crucifixion by breaking into the silence with an enormous outburst by a 5-voice chorus and orchestra in the form of a dance-like Baroque fanfare in triple meter, complete with trumpets and drums, followed by alternating imitative and homophonic writing, including instrumental ritornellos. This movement’s source is possibly a parody from the chorus “Entfernet euch, ihr heitern Sterne!” (Disperse, you fair stars!) of a lost cantata written for the birthday of Elector Friedrich August I and performed outdoors in front of the Leipzig Town Hall on May 12, 1727.

The seventh movement, “Et in Spiritum Sanctum” (and I believe in the Holy Spirit, etc.) found on p. 135 centers on the third person of the Holy Trinity. It is scored for bass solo with two oboes playing often in duets with recurring ritornello passages, in a Baroque pastoral style.

Bach concludes his Credo with two large-scale back-to-back choruses, beginning on p. 141. The 5-part chorus “Confiteor unum baptisma” (I acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins) is a Renaissance style double fugue (dividing the text into two phrases, each assigned its own theme) with the insertion of plainsong chanted separately by the alto, tenor and bass voices. A unique feature of this movement found on p. 151 is the ritardando (or gradual slowing) into a concluding twenty-four measure Adagio section full of harmonic surprises that pose challenges for the singers. This slowing feature is rarely found in the Baroque Period.

On p. 153 the final 5-part chorus “Et expecto” (I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come) bursts forth from the previous movement’s Adagio in a Vivace, or brisk, tempo with the introduction of the trumpets and drums again in fanfare-style writing.

Please turn back to p. 94. We will now watch the opening two movements of the Credo. Listen to the opening plainchant sung by the tenors, followed by entrances of the same in all voice parts. Underneath you'll hear the walking bass line. Note the contrast in writing styles when the second movement begins.

[play tracks #14 and #15]

Now jump ahead to p. 163 of the score as we turn to the Sanctus portion of the Ordinary, which is sung during the Preface or Great Thanksgiving as a hymn of praise God, offered by the faithful by joining with the angels and archangels in song. Prior to Bach's assembling of his "B Minor Mass" in the late 1740s, he had written a total of six Sanctus settings in the truncated form that could be used in the Leipzig Lutheran churches. By truncated I mean only the first two phrases: "Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria ejus." Of the six truncated settings that Bach wrote while in Leipzig, he chose the Sanctus in D of 1724 for inclusion in the "B Minor Mass." It was originally scored for 6-part chorus, with the soprano part tripled. Bach rearranged the voicing by scoring the third soprano part for first alto. This is the only movement that requires a third oboe part which, along with the bassoon, creates a four-part oboe choir. With the strings, brass/drums, and the quasi-double-choir writing of the vocal parts, Bach has created five contrasting groups, all supported by a basso continuo. The second half of the truncated Sanctus "pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria ejus" (see p. 170) is set as a brisk six-part fugue, accompanied only by continuo (the organ and bass strings) until the last entrance of the fugue theme occurs in the bass part, at which time the full orchestra enters.

Let's watch the entire Sanctus (just under 6 minutes in length).

[play track #23]

The rest of the Sanctus needed for the "B Minor Mass": "Osanna in excelsis. Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini" (Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord") had to be either newly composed or parodied. For the "Osanna" found on p. 179 of the score, Bach reached into his library to parody the polychoral setting of "Preise dein Glücke" from Cantata 215, written for the election-anniversary celebration of Friedrich August II in Leipzig, on October 5, 1734. It is written for two 4-part choruses and full orchestra, including the trumpets and drums with a combination of homophonic and imitative counterpoint.

The “Benedictus” found on p. 189 is scored for tenor solo and flute, although there is no indication of which instrument is to play the obligato part, but the range and style of writing would point to the flute as the likely choice. It is written in a progressive Baroque style with instrumental ritornellos, rapidly changing note values and beautiful, but short-phrased melodic lines.

Following liturgical practice, the “Osanna” is repeated at the end of the “Benedictus.” Instead of writing a second musical setting, as was the custom with some of the Baroque composers, Bach merely indicates “Osanna repetat” or Hosanna is repeated.

The final portion of the Ordinary, the “Agnus Dei” falls near the end of the Great Thanksgiving as an invocation to Christ, as the sacrificial Lamb of God to grant the mercy and peace to the faithful, is divided into two movements. The first, entitled “Agnus Dei” or Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world, and found on p. 193, is scored for alto solo and violin obligato with both violin sections of the orchestra playing in unison. It includes the usual instrumental ritornellos. Bach parodies the music from “Entfernet euch,” an aria from a lost wedding serenade of 1725.

The final movement of the “B Minor Mass” “Dona nobis pacem” or “Grant us peace” found on p. 196 is the final phrase from the Agnus Dei portion of the Ordinary. Bach repeats the music written for the “Gratias agimus tibi” movement from his Gloria, not an unusual practice by composers of major works. It is scored for 4-part chorus and the full orchestra, including trumpets and drums eventually entering as the work builds to its final climax.

Let’s watch the performance of the Dona nobis pacem. Note how the audience responds to the final strains of the “B Minor Mass.”

[play track #28]

For the final portion of this lecture I want to quickly take you through the history of what happened to the “B Minor Mass” after Bach’s death, both to the manuscripts and the eventual performances. The work was not published during Bach’s lifetime, since he compiled it within the last year or two before his death with no intention of a particular performance.

The instrumental parts and full score of the Dresden “Missa,” forming the “Kyrie and Gloria” of the “B Minor Mass” went separate ways, with the parts staying in

Dresden after being presented to Frederick August II in 1733. They became part of the Royal Music Collection and went unnoticed until the 1830s. This Royal Music Collection was transferred to the Saxon State Library in 1896. It was evacuated from Dresden during WWII and survived the bombing raids. After the war the collection returned to the Saxon State Library, where it remains today.

The autograph score of the “B Minor Mass” passed on to Bach’s son, Carl Philip Emmanuel, who made every effort to preserve his father’s manuscripts, unlike his brother, Wilhelm Friedmann, who was forced to sell most of his inheritance including the now lost score and parts of Bach’s “St. Mark Passion.” C. P. E. kept the “B Minor Mass” until his death. Two copies were made during C. P. E.’s lifetime which ended up in the Berlin State Library. After C. P. E.’s death in 1788, the autograph score was offered for sale. This was when the title “The Great Catholic Mass” was first given to the “B Minor Mass.” No buyer came forth. In 1805, after the death of C. P. E.’s last heir, Anna Carolina Philippina, it was offered for sale again and was purchased by Georg Nägeli. In 1833, one hundred years after its composition, Nägeli published the “Kyrie and Gloria” portions. In 1845 Georg’s son, Hermann published the remainder of the “B Minor Mass.” In 1856 the Bach-Gesellschaft published the “B Minor Mass” as part of a publication of the complete works of Bach, but had to use the Dresden parts and secondary manuscripts that C. P. E. had copied and housed in Berlin because Hermann Nägeli wouldn’t sell them the autograph. In 1857 Hermann fell onto hard times financially and sold the “B Minor Mass” autograph to Arnold Wehner, Kappellmeister at the Royal Court in Hanover under the mistaken impression that Wehner was acting on behalf of King George V. The true backer to the purchase was Handel scholar Friedrich Chrysander, who immediately turned the manuscript over to the Bach-Gesellschaft for use in editing the work for re-publication in 1857. After publication, the Bach-Gesellschaft sold the manuscript to the Royal Library in Berlin, predecessor to the Berlin State Library. In the 1930s it was thoroughly restored. During WWII the manuscript was evacuated to the Beuron Monastery on the Danube and after a stay in the Music Library of Tübingen University, was returned to the Berlin State Library in 1967. Another restoration on the badly deteriorated manuscript is forthcoming.

The “B Minor Mass” was never performed in its entirety during Bach’s lifetime. C. P. E. Bach performed the Credo in 1786 on a program that featured Handel’s “Messiah” excerpts (“I know that my Redeemer Liveth” and “Hallelujah”) and three works by C. P. E. The concert took place in Hamburg as a benefit for the Medical Institute for the Poor.

A revival of J. S. Bach's music officially began in 1802 with the publication of Johann Nikolaus Forkel's biography: "Johann Sebastian Bach's Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke" (on Johann Sebastian Bach's Life, Art and Artworks). In 1811 the Berlin "Singakademie" began to read through the "B Minor Mass." This is the same middle class choral society that performed Bach's "St. Matthew Passion" in 1829 under the direction of Felix Mendelssohn, who had joined the Singakademie at age 11 with his 15 year old sister, Fanny. 1828 was the year of the first public performance of music from the "B Minor Mass" in the 19th century. Two concerts took place: on March 10th in Frankfurt and April 30th in Berlin. The Credo was performed in Frankfurt by the St. Cecilia Society of about 200 amateur singers. The singers complained and were biased against Bach's work because of its extreme difficulty, but the director persevered and by the first orchestra rehearsal they ALL confessed that they had never encountered anything "richer or more elevated" In 1831 the same choir performed the Kyrie, Gloria and Credo. The 1828 Berlin performance of the Credo was billed along with works of Beethoven: "Fifth Symphony," Kyrie and Gloria from the "Missa Solemnis," and "Coriolanus Overture," and C. P. E. Bach's "Heilig." That must have been a VERY long concert! In 1841 and 1843 Felix Mendelssohn performed portions of the "B Minor Mass" in Leipzig's Gewandhaus, home to the performers we heard on the DVD. 1859 was the year of the first complete performance of the "B Minor Mass," albeit in German, with Franz Liszt in attendance at the Gewandhaus. A second complete performance took place in 1861 by the St. Cecilia Choir in Frankfurt. The first performance outside of Germany occurred in 1876, performed by the Bach Choir of London, with Jenny Lind singing the soprano solos. In 1885 a performance was held in Rome. It wasn't until March 27, 1900 that the "B Minor Mass" made its debut in the US under the direction of Frederick Wolle with the Bethlehem Bach Choir at Central Moravian Church, honoring the 150th anniversary of Bach's death. This organization, founded in 1898, continues to thrive today under the direction of Greg Funfgeld, under whose baton I had the privilege of singing the "B Minor Mass" in 1984 and with David Wilcocks, guest director, in 1985, as part of Bach's 300th birthday celebration. Their annual Bach Festival, which is celebrating their 100th anniversary this year, attracts thousands of Bach enthusiasts every year on the first and second weekends in May. The "B Minor Mass" is always performed on the two Saturdays.

Performances of the "B Minor Mass" are rare. Our choir members can probably tell you the reason why: it is a very difficult vocal score to learn. The last performance of the "B Minor Mass" here at First Church occurred in May of 1987 under the direction of my predecessor, Robert Cooper. Some of the choir members participating in this year's production sang in that performance. I felt that this year,

marking the 20th anniversary of that performance, was a long enough wait to “resurrect” this incredible work of art.

Why did Johann Sebastian Bach, an orthodox Lutheran church musician decide near the end of his life to write a monumental work based on the Roman Mass? We will probably never know for sure, but maybe it had something to do with his desire to express the universality of the Christian faith as found in this sacred text, a text that rises above the parochialism of Bach’s German-texted works, a text that is timeless in its message of a power so great as to transform the world we live in.

I would like to thank the Cultural Events Committee of First Church, our generous patrons, the Chancel Choir, Masterwork Chorale and the Pacific Academy of Ecclesiastical Music for making this “B Minor Mass” production possible. Please tell all of your friends and family members to come to one of the two performances on May 20th and 21st here at First Church and St. Paul’s Cathedral. I hope that all of you will come back next week to hear Bob Plimpton’s lecture on the theological and spiritual implications of the “B Minor Mass.”

Source cited:

Stauffer, George B. “Bach: the Mass in B Minor, The Great Catholic Mass.
New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003