1. Introduction

This paper analyses the theological, spiritual, confessional, artistic and cultural issues posed by Johann Sebastian Bach’s adaptation of Pergolesi’s setting of the *Stabat Mater* as a German Psalm paraphrase suitable for use in the Lutheran Church. These twin compositions actually represent four distinct and yet intertwining works: the Medieval Latin lyrics of the *Stabat Mater*, which obviously predated Pergolesi’s setting by several centuries; the musical features of Pergolesi’s masterpiece; the lyrics of Bach’s *Tilge, Höchster, meine Sünden*, taken from the Biblical Psalm 51 (50) but purposefully adapted to Pergolesi’s music, whose text they replaced; and Bach’s own musical interventions and changes to the score. Thus, this topic is as fascinating as it is difficult to treat in an organic fashion: indeed, so numerous and diverse are the factors at stake, that it is indispensable to treat them somewhat separately as introductory remarks, before delving into the theological analysis proper. One could even say that theological conclusions surface almost inevitably when the complete cultural and artistic frame is set.

A number of pressing questions need to be answered in order for that indispensable background to be established. I will give an account of Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater* first: the history of this eighteenth-century music work needs to be traced back to the Middle Ages, when its lyrics were written within the framework of the devotion to the *Mater Dolorosa*; later, the historical context and musical features of Pergolesi’s work will be discussed. I will then need to move back in history again: in order to understand the nature of the changes made by Johann Sebastian Bach to Pergolesi’s work, the theological understanding of the Virgin Mary within the Lutheran tradition needs to be clarified. At the same time, it is fundamental to discuss, albeit briefly, which kind of “Mariology” can be gathered from the examination of Bach’s compositional output. As we will see, although the basically Lutheran shape of Bach’s vision of the Virgin cannot be questioned, it somehow transcends confessional boundaries and represents a fascinating perspective for modern hearers from an ecumenical viewpoint. Only at that point will the ground be laid for a comparison of the two works,
starting with consideration of the lyrics, continuing with an examination of the musical details, and concluding with a theological interpretation of both works.

2. Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater*

2.1. Text

2.1.1. The *Mater Dolorosa*

“Defend me, o Mother, in the day of judgement.” This line from a medieval Latin poem may well represent one of the issues where theological disagreement between Catholics and Protestants is most tangible. Indeed, turning to the Virgin Mary’s protection rather than appealing to God Himself was a feature of Catholic piety which elicited strong criticism from Luther and his followers.¹ However, as we will see in this paper, a complex net of cultural, spiritual and artistic references connects medieval Umbria, where the *Stabat Mater* was originally written, with eighteenth-century Naples and Germany.

In John’s Gospel (John 19:26-27), the dying Christ entrusts his Mother to the care of his beloved disciple. In Catholic theology, his words (“Woman, here is your son” / “Here is your mother”²) not only refer to the actual needs of a woman with no surviving male relatives, but also involve Mary’s role as the mother of the Church and of all believers, who are symbolised in the person of John.³

Grounded on these words of the Gospel, the topic of Mary’s steadfast presence by her Son’s cross had attracted the attention of spiritual writers, homilists and theologians since the Patristic era. Origen (182-254) commented on Simeon’s prophecy (Luke 2:35)⁴, fascinatingly identifying the sword which would pierce Mary’s heart with the Word (cf. Hebrews 4:12): her suffering comes from the painful and gradual comprehension of how her Son’s humiliation will cause the salvation of the world. Several homilies on the liturgical Feast of the Presentation (known as the *Hypapante* in the Greek-speaking world) follow Origen in the contemplation of Mary’s sorrows: among them, those by Amphilochius of Iconium (c. 339-c.

---

² Here and in the following all Biblical references are taken from the New International Version.
400), Hesychius of Jerusalem (d. c. 433) and Sophronius of Jerusalem (c. 560-638); other important contributions to the theme were due to Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306-373) and to others such as Germanos of Constantinople (d. 733) and Theodore the Stoudite (d. 826). This subject was also treated in several Lives of Mary, among which those attributed to Maximus the Confessor (c. 580-662) and Symeon the Metaphrast (to whom a kanon for the Service of the Virgin’s Lament was also ascribed), as well as in the Wednesday Kanon by Joseph the Hymnographer (c. 816-886).

It is however to Romanos the Melodist (c. 490-c. 556) that we must turn to find one of the earliest and most important antecedents of the Stabat Mater. His kontakion for Good Friday is a seventeen-stanza poem which stages a touching and theologically intense dialogue between the Virgin and her Son who is going up to Golgotha to be crucified. Mary is gradually led by Jesus to the full understanding of his salvific mission and to the wish to share in his redemptive suffering. Romanos’ kontakion was echoed in George of Nicomedia’s Oratio VIII, depicting Mary by Jesus’ cross.

---

10 In Michel-Jean van Esbroeck, ed. and transl., Maxime le Confesseur, Vie de la Vierge, in Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 478 (Scriptores Iberici, 21: Georgian text) and 479 (Scriptores Iberici, 22: French translation), (Louvain: Peeters, 1986).
15 In PG 100, cols. 1457A-1489D; cf. Tsironis, “George of Nicomedia,” and Shoemaker, “A Mother’s Passion.”
Whereas this subject was thus treated relatively frequently in the Eastern tradition, this was not paralleled by a corresponding liturgical focus in the Western Church until the early eleventh century. Among the first important testimonies of this increasing attention are the writings of St. Peter Damiani (1007-1072),16 St. Anselm (1033-1109),17 St. Bernard (1091-1153),18 Adam of St. Victor,19 the Cistercian monk Ogero (1136-1214), and Pseudo-Bonaventure (1221-1274).20

In parallel with the written sources, devotion to the Mater Dolorosa was steadily growing. Interestingly, it was particularly strong in Germany, where the first known altar dedicated to this cult was built in 1221 for the monastery of Schönau, in the Black Forest.21 In the thirteenth century, all three great orders of friars promoted this piety, which was literally exploited by Franciscan poets such as St. Bonaventure (1217?-1274) and Jacopone da Todi (1232?-1296), and was pivotal for the spirituality of the Servite friars (since ca. 1233).

Following the appearance, in the fifteenth century, of the first liturgies on Mary’s “compassion,” the Servite friars in 1668 were officially authorised to celebrate a votive Mass on Mary's “Seven Sorrows.” In 1692 the feast-day of the Virgin’s Seven Sorrows was established for the third Sunday of September (in the twentieth century this was moved to the fixed date of September 15). Another feast-day, originally established by the Provincial Council of Cologne in 1423, was dedicated to Mary’s Sorrows; its celebration on the Friday before Palm Sunday was officially approved in 1714. Alongside ecclesiastical pronouncements, at the level of popular feeling and devotion (as Duffy, Rubin and Budwey point out22), devotion to the Mater Dolorosa was particularly prominent at moments when infant and child mortality was severe, and when plague or famine struck with exceptional violence.

16 “Sermo XLV. In Nativitate Beatissimae Virginis Mariae,” in PL, CXLVI, col. 748.
17 “Dialogus Mariæ et Anselmi de Passione Domini,” in PL, CLIX, col. 271-286
18 “Liber de Passione Christi et dolore et planctu Matris eius,” in PL, CLXXXII, col. 1133-1142
2.1.2. The Stabat Mater

Among poetic creations on the theme of the Mater Dolorosa, the Latin sequence of the Stabat Mater is certainly the most famous and probably the most beautiful. Though its authorship remains debated, there is presently substantial agreement on ascribing it to Jacopone da Todi (1232?-1306), a mystical poet who wrote several other works (mostly in Italian) on the same subject.

The poetic structure is stanzaic, with rhyming tercets whose meter is based on accent patterns (as in Italian) rather than on quantities (as in classical Latin). The first ten stanzas are a third-person description of Mary's doleful figure, whereas in the following ten Mary is directly invoked: she is asked to obtain for the faithful the grace of sharing in her grief (and thus, of course, in Christ's). Indeed, though this work is a clear example of Marian devotion, it is nonetheless strictly Christocentric: no glance at the suffering Mother can ignore her own gaze, fixed on her dying Son.24

Medieval sequences were normally provided with their own music, or had a pre-existing tune associated with the words: in either case, sequences were by definition made of both lyrics and music.25 This did not prevent later composers from writing new musical settings (in polyphony, concertato style, cantata style etc.) for many of the most beloved sequences (as for instance the Dies Irae for the Office of the Dead, or the Pange Lingua).

Jacopone’s beautiful and touching poem enjoyed great success until the Council of Trent, which indirectly curtailed the number of sequences whose use was officially sanctioned by the Catholic Church: since the Stabat Mater was not included among the liturgically approved sequences, it automatically lost its place within the liturgy, though it continued to be used for extraliturgical occasions and where no fixed texts were prescribed. Eventually, in 1727, it was readmitted into the liturgy proper, to be used especially during Holy Week26 and for the feast-day of Our Lady of Sorrows (September 15).

2.2. Music

2.2.1. Pergolesi’s setting of the Stabat Mater

Just a few years after Pope Benedict XIII’s inclusion of the *Stabat Mater* in the Roman Missal, Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710-1736) wrote his own musical setting of the sequence. Within his compositional output, indeed, Marian topics were often found: for instance, he wrote several settings of the *Salve Regina*, and Mary figured as one of the characters in an Oratorio on the Seven Last Words of Jesus on the cross (*Septem verba a Christo in cruce moriente prolata*, ca. 1730-1736). Though this does not directly imply any specific interest in Marian themes, since liturgical requirements may have played a major role in determining the choice of which texts would be set to music, it nevertheless allows us to analyse the stylistic traits which accompany his depictions of Mary.

Both his last *Salve Regina* and the *Stabat Mater* were at least completed, if not entirely written, when Pergolesi was ill in Pozzuoli and shortly before his untimely death at the age of twenty-six. Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater*, composed for the Neapolitan church of Santa Maria dei Sette Dolori, was intended as a replacement for an older work of the same name by Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725): both settings are closer to the intimate style of private devotion and chamber music than to the majestic features of grand oratorios.

Pergolesi’s setting of the *Stabat Mater* is written for two vocal soloists (soprano and alto) with strings and continuo: it is a rather sober and restrained choice, which allows an intimate and compassionate contemplation to take place. The medieval sequence is divided into separate movements, and the two soloists alternate in arias and sing together in duets. Musically, Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater* is clearly divided in two by the two fugato sections, though it can be (and usually is) performed without breaks; moreover, musical quotes in the second half refer to the theologically or spiritually corresponding items in the first. This division was probably functional for performances of the *Stabat Mater* as the hymn for Vespers on the feast day of Mary’s Seven Sorrows.\(^{27}\)

The musical style draws upon Pergolesi’s experience as an operatic composer, with ample recourse to dramatic *topoi*, but without becoming just an exterior showpiece. Pergolesi produces in his music a sincere, deep and intense spiritual effect by fully employing the means

of baroque musical rhetoric. Mary’s feelings and sorrows, as portrayed in the Latin sequence, are given poignant musical renditions in Pergolesi, who often indulges in word-painting to strengthen the emotional impact of the words; such is the case, for example, in the broken notes which depict Jesus’ last breaths. The clear purpose of Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater*, with the physicality of its renditions of Mary’s sentiments, is to elicit compassion in the hearers. Indeed, from a theological viewpoint, this is an important consequence: Mary suffers with her Son (the word compassion derives precisely from “to suffer with,” *cum pati*); anyone who observes her sorrow will in turn feel compassion for her, and therefore with Jesus.

Though it is Jesus who atoned for us on the cross, the topic of “suffering with Jesus” is Scriptural: Paul (Colossians 1:24) wrote that he was completing in his own flesh what was lacking in Christ’s afflictions, and in Galatians 2:19-20 he boldly stated: “I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” Thus, identification with the suffering and crucified Christ was always encouraged within the framework of mystical love. And since it may well be inferred that Christ’s mother felt this compassion in the highest degree, by looking at her immense sorrow most observers were likely to be moved to identify with her and therefore with Christ.

Pergolesi’s Mary was felt to be extremely human, motherly and feminine by his contemporaries: she is portrayed in the complexity of her feelings, but also renouncing the musical traits of the great tragic heroines of *opera seria*. She is no mythological goddess; rather, she is a woman whose very flesh is torn by the martyrdom of her son.

Though Pergolesi has recourse to word-painting to depict Mary’s grief and the visual imagery of the Latin sequence (such as the flames of love, or Jesus’ scourging), the concluding image of the glory of heaven is not evoked in his music. The movement that includes the words “*paradisi gloria*” is serene but not joyful: a prayerful, imploring and rather melancholic mood pervades even this mention of perfect happiness. Moreover, the work actually closes on a handsomely built fugue which has no trace of bliss. Many of Pergolesi’s contemporaries were puzzled and perplexed by this choice, and some of those who later arranged or modified

---

29 Cf. Will, “Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater*,” 575.
30 Cf. Will, “Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater*,” 593.
his *Stabat Mater* intervened in the ending with the purpose of mitigating its sorrowful emotional climate.\(^{31}\)

**2.2.2. Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater* in Lutheran Germany**

Pergolesi’s work enjoyed an immediate and lasting success throughout Europe. In Germany, the Lutheran Church of St. Thomas in Leipzig was one of the radiating points from which knowledge and appreciation of the *Stabat Mater* spread. Indeed, several cantors of the Thomaskirche, the first of whom was Johann Sebastian Bach, demonstrated great interest in the Italian composer’s masterpiece by preparing adaptations and arrangements for use within a Lutheran context.\(^{32}\)

Although a Latin *Stabat Mater* could hardly have found a place within the framework of eighteenth-century Lutheran worship, it should be emphasised that the liturgical destination even of the original Catholic work is not obvious or self-evident. Conversely, many Protestants would have had no objection to listening to and performing a beautiful work on a spiritual text, even though it did not correspond closely to their theological background.

On the other hand, the concept of the authorship of a musical work was less well-developed in the eighteenth century than it is today, and it was a common practice to modify pre-existing works by adapting them to another cultural, religious, social or musical context. Though these adaptations normally affected both text and music, some left the music untouched and were merely translations, paraphrases or adaptations of the original text: even Klopstock (*Golgatha*, ca. 1767) was among the poets providing such new German lyrics. It should be pointed out that the success of Pergolesi’s music was crucial in prompting interest in translations of the *Stabat Mater*: translations of the medieval Latin sequence into German scarcely existed before then.\(^{33}\)

However, great acclaim seldom goes without great criticism. And one of the harshest critics of Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater* was Johann Nikolaus Forkel, to whom the first biography of Bach is due, and who was among the first appreciators of Bach in the nineteenth century. (It should be stressed, however, that Forkel never actually met Bach, and gathered the material for his book from correspondence with Bach’s sons). For Forkel, the *Stabat Mater* was like a

---

31 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 2.
“pious hypocrite,” luring hearers by her seeming piety but with no trace of deep spirituality.\textsuperscript{34} Forkel’s simile echoes a broader stream of criticism: many others observed “weaknesses” in Pergolesi’s work, both from the purely technical and compositional point of view, as well as from an overall stylistic and aesthetic point of view. The sympathy and empathy (as well as the \textit{compassion}) with which Pergolesi portrays the Virgin Mary were deemed weak, effeminate, and better suited to touching hearts than to impressing them with amazement for God’s greatness and sublimity.\textsuperscript{35} Other criticism was elicited by the typically Neapolitan features of movements such as the \textit{Cuius animam}, with their syncopated rhythms and broken words.\textsuperscript{36}

Nevertheless, and rather paradoxically, this comparatively old and extraliturgical Catholic work soon became a touchstone within the Lutheran debate on appropriate new liturgical styles which took place in the early nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{37} This debate was related to new aesthetic concepts (such as that of “absolute music”) which were prompted by Idealism and Romanticism, as well as by the emergence of the so-called “Bach-Renaissance,” which included a new appreciation of older church music (such as that by Palestrina, Bach and Pergolesi) and its adoption as a paradigm of proper liturgy.

3. Bach’s \textit{Tilge, Höchster, meine Sünden}

Having briefly sketched the background of Pergolesi’s setting of the \textit{Stabat Mater} and its reception in eighteenth-century Lutheran Germany, we will now need to describe the confessional and cultural context of Bach’s adaptation of the Italian composer’s work.

3.1. Luther, Bach and Mariology

3.1.1. Luther and the Virgin Mary

As is well known, Luther’s Reform could be summarized by the principles of \textit{sola scriptura} (Bible vs. tradition), \textit{sola fide} (faith vs. works) and \textit{sola gratia} (grace vs. merit).


\textsuperscript{35} Cf. Ruiter, “Wahre Kirchenmusik,” 7; Will, “Pergolesi’s Stabat Mater,” 602. Similar criticism was voiced even by Padre Martini, the illustrious scholar who was the leading figure of Italian musical culture in the eighteenth century. Cf. Giovanni Battista Martini, \textit{Esemplare, o sia saggio fondamentale pratico di contrappunto sopra il canto fermo} (Bologna, 1774-1776), vol. I, viii.


\textsuperscript{37} Cf. \textit{ibid.}, 9.
three raise important questions concerning Mariology: whence did Marian devotions originate, from the Bible or from tradition? Had Mary merited her unique role, or had she simply been chosen by God? Was she able to intercede for sinners, and should they invoke her?\textsuperscript{38} Many of these topics are discussed by Luther in his treatise on the \textit{Magnificat}, Mary’s canticle in Luke’s Gospel (1:46ff).\textsuperscript{39} This work, written by the Reformer during his stay in the Wartburg in 1520-1, cannot be classified either as purely Catholic or as definitely Protestant. However, and notwithstanding the important changes in Luther’s subsequent theology, he never rejected the positions maintained there, and referred to them in much later writings.\textsuperscript{40}

Luther clearly stated that this “sacred hymn of the most blessed Mother of God” is the Scriptural passage which best can “instil a true fear of the Lord.”\textsuperscript{41} Her song celebrates the Lord’s greatness and her own humility: it is precisely her recognition of this ontological gap between His mercy and her “nothingness” (“\textit{Nichtigkeit},” in Luther’s translation) which makes her a model for all believers. Thus, the singing of the Magnificat was retained in the Lutheran liturgy,\textsuperscript{42} and actively encouraged by the Reformers. It is important to point out that the Scriptural origins of the Magnificat gave it a different standing, in a Lutheran perspective, from the free poetry of the \textit{Stabat Mater}, which is a contemplation of events narrated in the Gospel but interpreted by the poet independently from a Biblical model.

The subject of the \textit{Mater Dolorosa} underwent a similar appropriation: since it was fundamental for piety, it was retained, but the focus was increasingly moved from the Mother to her Son. As Heller states, “during the Reformation Mary was not so much suppressed as transformed.”\textsuperscript{43} The suffering Mother was often presented as a symbol of the Church by

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{39} Cf. Christopher Burger, \textit{Marias Lied in Luthers Deutung: der Kommentar zum Magnifikat (Lk 1,46b-55) aus den Jahren 1520/21} (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).
\item \textsuperscript{40} Cf. Joel R. Baseley (trans.), \textit{Festival Sermons of Martin Luther. The Church Postils; Sermons for the Main Festivals and Saints; Days of the Church Year; Winter and Summer Selections}, (Dearborn: Mark V Publications, 2005), 117. Cf. Wendy Heller, “'Aus eigener Erfahrung redet': Bach, Luther, and Mary's Voice in the \textit{Magnificat}, BWV 243,” \textit{Understanding Bach}, 10 (2015), 31-69, here 42.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Cf. LW 21:298.
\item \textsuperscript{42} For example at Vespers, where it was frequently sung in Latin up to the eighteenth/nineteenth century: cf. Martin Luther, \textit{Deutsche Messe und ordnung Gotts diensts} (Wittenberg, 1526), B ii; Heller, “Aus eigener Erfahrung,” 35.
\end{itemize}
Lutheran preachers; however, in so doing they stressed that as Mary needed help from John in her dismay, so did the Church from her pastors. Nevertheless, many early Lutheran preachers pointed to Mary as a model of perseverance and “manly” courage, sometimes even contrasting her strength with Peter’s fear. Such praise, however, constantly had to avoid the risk of making Mary a demi-goddess: she could and should be a model for believers precisely inasmuch she was one of them, a simple recipient of God’s grace. (Incidentally, Pergolesi’s Stabat Mater is remarkably close to this perspective: the similarity of Mary’s motherly feelings to those of any other mother for her suffering child depicts the Virgin as “one of us,” as Luther liked her to be felt by the faithful).

Lutherans rejected the idea that Mary could be considered co-redeemer or co-mediator with Christ; however, for Melanchthon (in the Augsburg Confession), contemplation of the deeds of Mary and the saints was acceptable as it reinforced faith. Mary’s attribute of Theotokos (“Mother of God”) was retained, as was belief in her perpetual virginity and immaculate conception. Indeed, Luther even admitted the title of Queen of Heaven, though this did not imply she had any special power or merit. While in some areas of Germany it was possible to see images of Mary even after the Thirty Years’ War, in others Marian devotion was virtually non-existent among Protestants. One can even say that Protestant bans on Marian devotion were strongest in the territories where the Catholic Counter-Reformation was promoting it most enthusiastically; and, indeed, one of the marks of post-Tridentine Catholic spirituality was its strong focus on Marian themes.

As concerns musical works on Marian topics, no consistent policy can be observed in Lutheran lands, and the fate of Catholic songs in Lutheran Germany depended largely on their lyrics, on their liturgical use and on the time and place in question. Some of the most cherished Catholic tunes could be given new lyrics by transforming their words radically, by merely changing a few terms which did not correspond to the Protestant viewpoint on Mary,

---

45 Ibid., 121 and 130.
46 LW 21:323 (cf. ibid., 329).
48 Cf. LW 21:327-328.
50 Cf. Heal, The Cult of the Virgin Mary, 2ff etc.
51 Cf. ibid., 3.
or by referring them to Christ instead of to his mother. This practice, called *contrafactum*, was already centuries old when Luther and his followers adopted it, but was exploited with noteworthy zeal both for liturgical and for propagandistic purposes by the early Reformers. However, although – for example – several *Salve Regina* settings became *Salve Rex Christe* in Protestant lands, even there a “significant number of chants and motets addressed solely to Mary” could be found, as Frandsen points out.\(^{52}\)

### 3.1.2. Bach and the Virgin Mary

As mentioned above, Leipzig pioneered the performance of Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater* in Germany, particularly Johann Sebastian Bach in the *Thomaskirche*. In his capacity as Cantor, Bach had to provide for and organise all music for the Lutheran services of the city’s main churches. Although occasions for religious works in homage to the Virgin Mary were infrequent within the context of Lutheran liturgy, several of Bach’s sacred works refer directly or indirectly to her. A brief survey of such compositions may help us identify how Bach portrayed the Virgin Mary in his works.

The most important is undoubtedly the *Magnificat BWV 243* (1723-1733), a Latin-text composition conceived for Lutheran services, preceded by an earlier version in German (*E-flat major, BWV 243a*).\(^{53}\) This amazing work for chorus, solos and orchestra is a liturgical setting of Mary’s canticle as reported in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:46-55), in the Vulgate translation. Though the entire work makes implicit reference to the Virgin who speaks these words in the Gospel, there are in particular two consecutive movements where both text and music allude most directly to her. In *Et exsultavit* and *Quia respexit*, Mary speaks of herself in relation to God, and uses the first person singular to highlight how her personal history intertwines with the history of God’s mercy. Bach entrusts both arias to solo sopranos (and it should be stressed that having two soprano arias in a row is a rather uncommon choice\(^{54}\)). Though treble vocal parts (soprano and alto) were sung by male children in Lutheran services in Bach’s time, the aural reference to female voices is intentional made and is found in a variety

---


of vocal works by Bach as a symbol of femininity (for example in reference to Mary Magdalene in the Easter Oratorio, or to the Church as Christ’s Bride in Cantata BWV 140).

The aria Et exsultavit is in D major, a key alluding to kingship in Baroque rhetoric (one may recall here that Luther did not forbid referring to Mary as the Queen of Heaven). It is in triple-time, which is often associated with dance. Moreover, the theme is characterised by an ascending melody, proceeding by leaps up the notes of the major triad. Both compositional choices convey feelings of joy, confidence, assurance, and boldness.

The following aria, Quia respexit, features an obbligato oboe d’amore, an instrument commonly used by Bach to portray mystical love. The key is B minor, which is the minor relative of D: thus it pertains to the same tonal sphere, but it represents the melancholic side of the triumphant D major. Here the melody is descending by chromatic semitones: the result is tormented and sorrowful, and highlights the word humilitatem (humility) which is etymologically related with humus, earth. It should be pointed out that here Bach makes a compositional choice which is at odds with Luther’s insight; whereas the Reformer had stated that “the emphasis lies not on the word ‘humilitatem’, but on the word ‘respexit’, because her lowliness is not to be praised, but rather God’s regard for her,” Bach gives a much more prominent role to the word humilitatem than he does to respexit. No evidence has been found as to whether Bach had read Luther’s treatise on the Magnificat; however, at least an indirect knowledge of its main themes can be inferred, as it is likely that sermons preached in the Lutheran churches when this Gospel was read made references to the Reformer’s writings.

Beside the Magnificat, several other works by Bach relate to Mary’s canticle. This is the case with his Church Cantata BWV 147, composed for the liturgical feast of Mary’s visitation of St. Elisabeth – during which Mary is said to have uttered the canticle’s words. Here, a laudatory reference to Mary is found in a recitative (“Blessed mouth! Mary makes the

58 Heller is more positive than I am on this point: cf. Heller, “Aus eigener Ehrfahrung,” 50 (“we can assume that Bach would have known Luther’s Commentary”). Cf. also Michael Linton, “Bach, Luther, and the Magnificat,” Bach, 17/2 (April 1986), 3-15, here 5.
innermost part of her soul known through thanks and praise; with herself she begins to tell of the wonders of the Saviour, all that he has done for her as his handmaid"\(^{60}\), followed by an aria for alto (a “female” voice again) which is again in triple time and with obbligato oboe d’amore. The aria’s lyrics and these musical features all seem to suggest that here Mary herself, as a model for believers, is inviting them to be unconstrained by undue shame or shyness and to praise God openly.\(^{61}\)

The oboe d’amore is paired again with a solo soprano in the Christmas Oratorio BWV 248/6, whereas in the St. John’s Passion Jesus’s entrusting of his mother to his disciple makes no musical references to Mary. On the other hand, the Scriptural theme of the sword piercing Mary’s soul is found in Cantata BWV 154, in the episode of twelve-year-old Jesus among the teachers in the Temple (Luke 2:46ff). The libretto is set as a first-person expression of deep feelings provoked by the statement that “My Jesus is lost” (Mein Jesus ist verloren). The “loss” of the child Jesus by his parents is evidently conceived as a type for the loss of his life on the cross, and the grief and anguish felt by his mother on the former occasion as an anticipation of that experienced on the latter. However, the speaker expressing a variety of emotions in this libretto cannot be straightforwardly identified with Mary, though the quotation of Simeon’s prophecy in the very first lines\(^{62}\) seems to lead to this interpretation. I would suggest that the librettist purposefully capitalised on the ambiguity surrounding the identity of the speaker (Mary? Joseph? The believer?), and implicitly proposed Mary as a model for the believer’s emotional relationship with Jesus. It is thus particularly touching to observe how the elation and consolation felt by Mary and Joseph when they eventually find their son in Jerusalem is represented by a highly ornamented duet for a female-pitched and a male voice.

Though musical elements such as triple-time, use of oboe d’amore and female-pitched voices are by no means exclusively indicative of feminine portraits in Bach’s music, their combination is normally suggestive of a very positive view of femininity. Moreover, Bach uses the oboe d’amore also to signify God’s love for humankind (or the soul, or the Church): the

---


\(^{62}\) “Mein liebster Jesus ist verloren: / O Wort, das mir Verzweiflung bringt, / O Schwert, das durch die Seele dringt, / O Donnerwort in meinen Ohren,” translated as: “My precious Jesus no now hath vanished: / O word which me despair doth bring, / O sword which through my soul doth drive, / O thund’rous word, when mine for hearing” (in [http://www.uvm.edu/~classics/faculty/bach/BWV154.html](http://www.uvm.edu/~classics/faculty/bach/BWV154.html)), last accessed April 30th, 2015.
frequent association of this timbre with lyrics referring to the Virgin Mary is highly significant of how favourably Bach viewed her and her unique and loving relationship with God.

4. Bach and Pergolesi

Having summarised the background of Bach’s view of Mary, both in the Lutheran theology to which he adhered and in his own artistic and spiritual perspective, we shall now move on to consideration of how Bach interpreted Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater*, why he was so interested in this work as to adapt it for use in the Lutheran Church, which kind of compositional challenges he had to face, and how he solved them.

4.1. Occasion and context for Bach’s paraphrase

4.1.1. Occasion

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned provisos against a simplistic concept of Mary in the Lutheran Church, there was hardly room for a *Stabat Mater* within seventeenth-century Lutheran liturgical practice; although Bach was free to use (within limits) works by other composers for the Lutheran worship he had to provide music for, Pergolesi’s music could not be employed as it was.

Indeed, Bach’s interest in Italian music is a red thread found throughout his compositional career. In his youth, he had transcribed twenty-two Concertos by Italian masters for keyboard instruments; towards the end of his life, he carefully studied the so-called *stile antico*, i.e. an archaic-sounding polyphonic style, transcribing Palestrina’s *Missa sine nomine*, along with other works. Transcription and adaptation of other composers’ music was a common practice at Bach’s time, when no issues of copyright and plagiarism were at stake. However, in Bach’s case, the use of other composers’ works is connected most often with reasons of study and personal development; transcription was for him a form of appropriation, which allowed him to master compositional techniques typical of other historical and/or geographical contexts. For this and for other reasons that we will see shortly, Bach’s decision to arrange Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater* as a German version of Psalm 51

---

(Tilge, Höchster, meine Sünden, BWV 1083) is to be seen as a deliberate homage to the Italian composer and his masterpiece.

It has been impossible to establish the occasion on which Bach’s arrangement was first performed. This penitential Psalm was indeed suitable for a variety of occasions: from the Scriptural viewpoint, hypotheses have been advanced suggesting its use as a Church cantata on the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity (Gospel reading: Luke 18:9-14), the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity (Matthew 9:1-8) or Quinquagesima (Luke 18:31-43). Church cantatas, which were the most important of Bach’s duties as a church musician, often included Psalm quotes, but normally were not constituted entirely by psalm paraphrases, as is the case with Bach’s Tilge, Höchster, meine Sünden. (If, however, it actually was performed as a Cantata, the possibility of dividing the work into two halves in correspondence with the two fugato movements would have perfectly suited the Lutheran practice of having a sermon preached between the two sections of Church cantatas). On the other hand, Lutheran worship did include Psalm-singing, and Psalm 51 was typical for penitential seasons such as Lent. However, no instrumental accompaniment to singing was allowed in Lutheran worship during Lent, and thus its performance would not have been possible then. This does not rule out, however, the possibility of using Bach’s adaptation during concerts spirituels which may possibly have taken place during the Lenten period as a pious activity outside of liturgy proper.

Another possible occasion for its performance would have been during Good Friday worship, when a Passion was sung at Vespers. In this service, a Psalm was sung before the sermon, which was preached between the two halves of the Passion; after the Passion, a Latin-text motet was sung. Though Bach’s Tilge has a German text, it may have been performed in this context, especially since the title-page bears the indication of “Motet” after that of “Psalm.” As Daniel Melamed correctly points out, however, a work such as Bach’s Tilge was normally not described as a motet in Germany in Bach’s time; thus the question remains open as to where and when (and if) Bach’s adaptation was performed in the Thomaskirche. The most likely hypothesis, however, remains that Bach’s Tilge was conceived

---

as an *omni tempore* work, perhaps intended for performance *sub communione*, i.e. during Communion.  

### 4.1.2. Context

Although it may puzzle Bach scholars, the lack of an immediately observable reason for transcribing Pergolesi’s *Stabat* demonstrates rather clearly that Bach was not prompted to do so by compelling liturgical need or by lack of suitable works of his own. It seems safe to say, therefore, that he arranged that work because he felt an affinity with it, appreciated it and wanted it performed within his own Lutheran context. Bach’s *Tilge* is commonly dated to 1746-47, when he was over sixty years old and had already composed most of his own masterpieces. It may strike us as odd, therefore, that he still used transcription as a means of learning and progressing in his own compositional skills. However, at that same time Bach was actually studying very carefully the *stile antico*, especially so as to complete his *B Minor Mass BWV 232*, whose texts correspond to those of the Catholic *Ordinarium Missæ*.

It is probably to his connection with the Catholic court of Dresden that Bach owed his acquaintance with Catholic sacred music such as Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater*. It cannot be established, however, whether Bach’s interest in Catholic church music was due to purely musical aspects only, or whether he felt some closeness to Catholic spirituality toward the end of his life. Certainly, however, his composition of a Catholic liturgical work brought him nearer than he had ever been to the world of Catholic sacred music.

Another interesting point to take into consideration is that no original works by Bach on Psalm 51 have survived or are known, within an output of more than seven hundred sacred works. Pergolesi, whose life was forty years shorter than Bach’s, had written several settings of this Psalm, in one of which – incidentally – a musical gesture is found which is strikingly similar to the corresponding passage in Bach’s adaptation.

---

Figure 1 - Pergolesi, *Cor mundum*, from the B-flat Miserere

Figure 2 - Bach, *Schaue nicht*, from *Tilge Höchster* (b. 37ff)
4.2. Comparisons of lyrics and music

4.2.1. Textual comparisons

Bach’s adaptation of Pergolesi’s *Stabat* to Psalm 51 involved a close cooperation with a librettist (whose name is unknown, though scholars suggest it might have been “Picander,” i.e. Christian Friedrich Henrici [1700-1764], with whom Bach worked on a number of occasions). Although it is likely that Bach did not limit himself to obediently setting to music whatever lyrics were given to him, and that he actively sought cooperation with his librettists, in this case the operation they undertook must perforce have been a joint enterprise. In fact, here a pre-existent musical work had to be fitted to a newly composed text, which moreover had to follow – albeit not strictly – the pattern of a Biblical Psalm (and was to have a well-defined and complex metrical and rhyming structure). Of course, Bach was familiar with the practice of adapting existing music to new texts, since he had practised “parody” on several occasions, even changing the destination of a work from the secular to the sacred sphere. From the textual viewpoint, the resulting lyrics follow the Bible text rather loosely: the order of the Psalm verses is respected, but some lines are greatly inflated (up to three tercets: Psalm 51:3) whereas others are summarised in a single tercet (Psalm 51:9-10).

As to the overall structure of Bach’s *Tilge*, two main observations should be made. The first is that the movements are differently numbered in Pergolesi and in Bach, since the tempo change on Pergolesi’s “Pro peccatis suæ gentis” (movement five) is counted as a new movement in Bach’s version (*Sieh, ich bin in Sünd empfangen*, movement six). This may seem a minor detail, though it may have a fascinating overtone, as Hellmann suggested. By this minor change, which is not justified by either musical or textual needs, the overall number of the movements becomes fourteen: this number is often found in Bach’s works (together with its palindrome forty-one) because both corresponded to his name according to gematria (fourteen being the sum of B+A+C+H, and forty-one of “Johann Sebastian Bach”). Bach used this symbol (and others, such as the motif B-A-C-H) to signify himself, often within contexts of “confession” (both of sins and of faith). Thus, for example, the number fourteen is found – among others – in the *Art of Fugue*, in Bach’s portrait, in his monogram etc. It may be inferred, thus, that Bach’s *Tilge*, divided into fourteen movements, might have represented the composer’s own request for mercy to God.

---

68 See table in Appendix.
69 Hellmann 1989), ii.
The second observation concerns the ending, which is differently structured in Pergolesi and in Bach. The movements corresponding to Pergolesi’s third-to-last movement (*Inflammatus et accensus*) and penultimate movement (*Quando corpus morietur*) are inverted in Bach’s setting, whereas the last movement (the *Amen* fugue) is sung twice in Bach’s setting, the second time in the key of F major (instead of F minor, as in Pergolesi and in Bach’s first time).

Another important difference concerns Bach’s eleventh movement, which sets to music a single tercet, whereas the corresponding movement in Pergolesi’s work makes use of two tercets. The same applies to Bach’s thirteenth movement, corresponding to Pergolesi’s eleventh.

As concerns the lyrics, we should first stress that, within the Lutheran context, Psalm-paraphrases were common, and they tended to point out for listeners the typological reading of Messianic Psalms. (Incidentally, this had been an issue of disagreement between early Lutheranism and Calvinism, since the latter favoured literal translations of the Biblical text.) Thus, in the lyrics of Bach’s *Tilge*, there is an explicit mention of the “cross” (“Kreuz”), which was obviously missing in the Biblical original.

Comparing the lyrics of Bach’s *Tilge* with those of Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater*, some observations can be made. Both the Psalm paraphrase and the Biblical original are shaped as a dialogue between a penitent soul and God, who is continuously appealed to as a silent interlocutor through use of the second person. In the *Stabat Mater*, as mentioned before, half the text is a third-person description, whereas the second half is a second-person invocation (to Mary). In both works, obviously, the imperative verbal form is abundantly used.

The careful cooperation of librettist and musician in adapting the Latin sequence and its music to a German psalm can be observed throughout: not only did the resulting text have to conform to the meter and the word-length of the original, but the musical “effects” by which Pergolesi had interpreted the Latin text had to be respected also. This produces some instances where the same or similar words (though in different languages) are found at the same or at a similar place. For example, in the third movement the Latin “Mater” and the German “Vater” (mother and father respectively) are found in the same position and on the

---

same notes. In the fifth movement, two consecutive tercets begin, respectively, with “Quis” and “Wer” (interrogative “who”). In Pergolesi’s ninth movement (which is the tenth of Bach’s adaptation) the words “condolere” (“to suffer with”) and “Schmerze” (sorrows) parallel each other, and obviously both settings end with a fugato “Amen.”

In Bach’s sixth movement (which corresponds to Pergolesi’s fifth) there are looser references to the original: “Vidit” and “Sieh” (“saw” and “see”), as well as “peccatis” and “Sünd” (sins/sin) are found in the same tercet (though not on the same notes); so are “Eia” and “doch” (“lo”) in Pergolesi’s seventh and Bach’s eighth movement, as well as “cordi” and “Herze” (heart) in Pergolesi’s ninth and Bach’s tenth. A still looser allusion is found in Bach’s eighth movement, when “Wasche” (wash) is found, corresponding to the Latin invocation of Mary as “Fons [amoris]” (source of love).

Notwithstanding these similarities, however, a typical Lutheran point is made by the paraphrase of Psalm 51:16, where the Biblical mention of the offering God appreciates is expanded to highlight its correspondence with the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith and grace rather than by works.

Though this does not strictly concern the music, it is touching – in my opinion – to observe that both Pergolesi and Bach consecrated their creative efforts by inserting religious mottos at the end of their scores: Pergolesi wrote “Finis Laus Deo” (“The End, in praise of God”), whereas Bach as usual wrote “SDGL” (“Soli Deo Gloria”).

4.2.2. Musical interventions

Generally speaking, Bach’s interventions in Pergolesi’s writing may be summarised as follows:

- Bach suppresses many ornaments and trills which are found in Pergolesi;
- Pergolesi’s frequent use of long (repeated) notes is sometimes replaced by new melodies in Bach;
- Bach often modifies Pergolesi’s dynamic indications (in particular, Bach sometimes favours echo effects where Pergolesi repeats a short series of abrupt dynamic changes, and frequently changes Pergolesi’s dolce into forte).

Though some of these modifications are probably due to the differences in taste between Pergolesi’s Naples and Bach’s Leipzig, in other instances – as we will discuss shortly – Bach’s
interventions convey a particular theological or spiritual insight. Indeed, not only was Pergolesi using many gestures typical of the Neapolitan operatic tradition, which could sound slightly exotic in Germany (especially within religious services); the stress laid by Pergolesi on empathy with the Virgin's sufferings led him to over-emphasize particular words, and to point them out for the listeners through precise word-painting references. Thus Bach was faced with the problem of choosing which among Pergolesi's musical renditions of single words or atmospheres could be retained when transferring the work from a contemplation of Christ's Mother at the cross to a penitential Psalm.

As we have seen earlier, Pergolesi’s second movement (Cuius animam gementem) elicited criticism for its syncopated rhythm, which often collided with the text’s rhythm and broke up polysyllabic words (“animam,” “gementem”). In Bach's Tilge, most words are monosyllabic (“Ist mein Herz in...”), whereas the word “Misset[h]aten” (“misdeeds”) can be perceived as made up of two plus two syllables (and thus breaking it up is less shocking than with the corresponding Latin “ge-mentem”). Moreover, Bach systematically adds appoggiaturas to Pergolesi’s semiminims, thus mitigating the abruptness given to his melody by frequent rhythmical stops.

![Musical notation](image)

Figure 3 - Pergolesi, Cuius animam gementem, b. 27
On the words “pertransivit gladium” (b. 91), Pergolesi’s writing is almost expressionistic, with the soprano singing a high G on four consecutive measures, always with trills. It is indeed a piercing cry, where Pergolesi aims at neither beauty nor elegance, but rather at portraying almost sculpturally a sword piercing a mother’s heart. In this passage, the corresponding words in Bach’s psalm are much softer, being a plea for mercy (“wasch es selber, mach es rein,” i.e. “wash [my heart] yourself, make it pure”). Here, therefore, Bach thoroughly rewrites the soprano’s line, making it much softer and sinuous.
A similar example is found in Pergolesi’s sixth movement (corresponding to Bach’s seventh, b. 34ff). Here, as previously mentioned, Pergolesi portrays Christ’s rasping breath and death rattles by breaking up the words through long rests. Here again, no hint in the corresponding German text could have justified this striking representation of death ("[die Weisheitsgaben] hast du selbst mir offenbart": “you opened for me [the treasures of knowledge] yourself”). Once more, then, it was necessary for Bach to dramatically change Pergolesi’s music: he did so by rewriting the soprano part and by adding to this entire movement a caressing viola accompaniment, suggesting – with its captivating sextuplets – the fascination of the “gifts of knowledge.”
Analogously, in Pergolesi’s ninth movement (corresponding to Bach’s tenth, b. 77ff.) a clash in the meaning of the words is found: where Pergolesi has “plangere” (“to weep”), Bach has “Loblied” (“song of praise”). The difference in their musical renditions is striking: a quiet descending melody with melancholic overtones in Pergolesi, and a florid virtuoso vocalise in Bach.
Figure 9 - Pergolesi, *Sancta Mater, istud agas*, "Fac me tecum plangere"

Figure 10 - Bach, *Schaue nicht*, "Daß mein Loblied"

In other instances, instead, the correspondence between single quasi-identical words seems deliberately chosen: this happens, for example, in the third movement (b. 7ff) where the sinner’s plea to the Father ("Vater") mirrors the compassionate gaze at the Mother ("Mater"). In this case, Pergolesi’s indication of “dolce” is faithfully echoed in Bach’s score, where it is poignantly contrasted with the sinner’s confession ("Ich bin nicht gerecht," “I am not just”), boldly sung in forte.

By rearranging several movements at the end of the work, Bach also gives a new tonal shape to its concluding sections. After Pergolesi’s eleventh movement (*Inflammatus*), in B-flat major, we find the twelfth movement in F minor (*Quando corpus*) and the final F minor Fugue (*Amen*). Bach makes use of Pergolesi’s twelfth movement before the original eleventh, thus shaping the ending as a succession of F minor, B-flat major, F minor and F major (final fugue doubled with mode change). Though Pergolesi’s *Quando corpus* is moving, tender and serene, it is by no means a cheerful piece: thus the two last movements in the original conclude the
work on a sorrowful note. By contrast, Bach chooses to break up the sequence of minor-key movements and to add an F major fugato at the end, thus giving a much more positive conclusion to his arrangement. This is undoubtedly justified by the text of the Psalm, which gradually rises from its doleful initial mood to become a joyful song of gratitude for God’s deliverance of the penitent from his sins. Indeed, as mentioned before, Pergolesi might also have chosen to point out the lyrics’ hint at the “glory of Paradise” in a clearer way. However, while a despondent ending for a Stabat Mater is perfectly acceptable, it would have sounded very odd had Bach similarly disregarded the Psalm’s rejoicing.

Though here and there Bach needed to adjust Pergolesi’s original to his German Psalm, it is undeniable that the Stabat Mater influenced his later works. Christoph Wolff pointed out how closely an accompaniment found in Bach’s Credo from the B-minor Mass is modelled on a fragment from the Stabat Mater.

![Figure 11 - Pergolesi, Quis est homo](image)

---

est, incarnatus est de Spiritu

est, incarnatus est de Spiritu

est, incarnatus est de Spiritu

na-tus est, incarnatus est de Spiritu

Et incarnatus est de Spiritu
Interestingly, this quote is found at the only point where the Catholic Ordinary Mass mentions Christ’s Mother, the Virgin Mary – i.e., when the Son’s incarnation is confessed. Since the Kyrie and Gloria of the B minor Mass had been conceived for the Catholic court of Dresden (from which it is likely that Bach had obtained Pergolesi’s score), it is possible that the reference was intended, and that it could be appreciated and understood by at least some of the recipients.

4.2.3. Theological interpretations and conclusions

Bach’s choice to transform Pergolesi’s Stabat Mater into a German Miserere (i.e., Psalm 51) hardly seems casual: as previously discussed, there seems to have been no immediate necessity for this transcription, which thus – it can be inferred – represents a spontaneous creative undertaking of the German composer. A first link between the two texts is presented by their liturgical use during Holy Week: the Stabat Mater was obviously typical for Catholic
liturgies, but both confessions made ample use of Psalm 51 during Passiontide. There is therefore a connection in their liturgical context, which provides the spiritual framework for the Church’s prayer.

Secondly, there is a strong Scriptural connection between the two works, which has hitherto been overlooked, as far as I know. Though the Miserere is found in the Book of Psalms, it bears an introductory superscript that clearly contextualises it: “A Psalm of David, when the Prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.” The episode is narrated in 2 Samuel 12: after King David’s sin with Bathsheba (and his indirect but nonetheless despicable murder of her husband Uriah), Nathan is sent by God to the King with the purpose of making him repent. Nathan announces to David a dreadful punishment (v. 11), upon which “David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord’.” It is not too far-fetched to see in this short confession the narrative equivalent of the great penitential Psalm known as the Miserere. After David’s confession, Nathan announces for him a milder fate, though the child of David and Bathsheba will still have to die. David is portrayed here as a tender father, very far from the virile stereotypes of an unemotional king. While his child was ill, “David . . . pleaded with God for the child,” “fasted, and went in and lay all night on the ground”; he would not rise, “nor did he eat food.”

This episode is perhaps the most touching description found in the Bible of a parent’s grief while his or her child is suffering. King David sees the illness of his son as a consequence of his own sin, and though the Virgin Mary is believed to be sinless by Catholics, the Stabat Mater clearly connects her sorrow with our sins: “Pro peccatis sue gentis / vidit Jesum in tormentis” (“She saw Jesus suffering / for the sins of her nation”). In both cases, therefore, an innocent is suffering before his parent’s eyes to atone for someone else’s sins.

Likewise, within a Christian framework, the contemplation of the crucified Christ is neither a neutral observation nor a distant objectification. On the contrary, from the contemplation of the Cross, believers should be moved to amazement at a God who “so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (John 3:16). Through contemplating this love, repentance, confession of sins and plea for mercy should spontaneously arise in the believer’s soul. It can be said, therefore, that the goal of all devotion to the Mater Dolorosa, including the pious exercise of the Stabat Mater, should be the spiritual movement which prompted King David to invoke God’s mercy with the Miserere.
Moreover, if Bach’s choice to modify the numbering of Pergolesi’s original so as to make a fourteen-movement German Miserere is a deliberate and meaningful artistic undertaking whose aim is to point out the composer’s own identification with the Psalmist asking God for mercy for his sin, then the Tilge comes to represent not “only” a liturgical work, but also one which speaks directly of his composer’s relationship with God, particularly within the framework of penitential action and prayer. Though musicologists should always be very cautious in ascribing “hidden” intentionalities to the composers whose work they are studying, and to connect biographical aspects with compositional features, it is at least suggestive that, as they were nearing the end of their earthly lives, both the young Pergolesi and the much older Bach decided to express their piety and devotion through the musical settings of penitential texts.

These two musical works, with their intertwining stories and their different (though complementary) background can thus be said to have a common aim: to lead listeners to feelings of contrition, of grief for their sins, of prayer and of trusting invocation of God’s mercy. In both cases, saving grace is observed as it is poured out from its primary source, the cross of Christ. Both the praying soul who sings the Stabat Mater and the sinner who prays the Miserere are led to recognise in Christ’s cross the saving power which gives meaning to all of their own sufferings. Indeed, in Bach’s Tilge, the sinner prays thus: “Let me feel the joy and pleasure, let me gladly sound the triumph, when the cross me hard doth press.” In other words, God is asked to lead the sinner to rejoice in his sufferings, which are recognised as being of a piece with Christ’s cross. The same feeling is expressed in the Stabat Mater: “Holy Mother, grant that the wounds of the Crucified drive deep into my heart; that of your wounded Son, who so deigned to suffer for me, I may share the pain . . . . Grant that I may bear the death of Christ, the fate of his Passion, and commemorate His wounds.” It is therefore only by God’s grace, for both Catholic and Protestants, that the sinner’s prayer is heard and benignly received by God. In Bach’s Tilge, the last verse can be translated as: “And then shall thy glory echo, / And then will to thee bring pleasure / Offerings of pure righteousness”; in Pergolesi’s Stabat Mater, it is clearly Christ’s cross which alone merits the reconciliation of sinners: “Let me be guarded by the cross, armed by Christ’s death, and His grace cherish me.”

In spite of different confessional backgrounds, therefore, and divergent accounts of how sinners are saved, these two musical works seem to anticipate in art and prayer the theological results reached by the Catholic-Lutheran commission which created in 1999 the
Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: “In Christ’s death and resurrection all dimensions of his saving work have their roots;”[72] “Justification is the forgiveness of sins . . . [and] it unites with Christ and with his death and resurrection. . . . All this is from God alone, for Christ’s sake, by grace, through faith ‘in the gospel of God’s Son’ (Romans 1:1-3);”[73] “In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ.”[74] For both Pergolesi and Bach, these crucial theological achievements of the ecumenical dialogue in the twentieth century were already, one is tempted to say, a living reality in the world of art, of prayer and of music. Their spiritual insight and their creative artistry had already made present, some two hundred and fifty years before the Joint Declaration, a “ecumenism of prayer” which resounded, and still resounds, in the prayerful creations of their talent and spirituality.

### Textual Appendix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Luther’s Bible</th>
<th>Bach</th>
<th>Pergolesi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satz</strong></td>
<td><strong>Versus</strong></td>
<td><strong>Text</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gott, sei mir gnädig nach deiner Güte und tilge meine Sünden nach deiner großen Barmherzigkeit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Wasche mich wohl von meiner Missätet und reinige mich von meiner Sünde.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Denn ich erkenne meine Missätet, und meine Sünde ist immer vor mir.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dich erzürnt mein Tun und Lassen, Tun und lassen mußt du hassen, weil die Sünde mich geschwächt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Wer wird seine Schuld verneinen oder gar gerecht erscheinen? Ich bin doch ein Sündenknecht.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>An dir allein habe ich gesündigt und übel vor dir getan, auf daß du recht behaltest in deinen Worten und rein bleibest, wenn du gerichtet wirst.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Siehe, ich bin in sündlichem Wesen geboren, und meine Mutter hat mich in Sünden empfangen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luther’s Bible</td>
<td>Bach</td>
<td>Pergolesi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6Siehe, du hast Lust zur Wahrheit, die im Verborgenen liegt; du lässet mich wissen die heimliche Weisheit.</td>
<td>7 8  6</td>
<td>Vidi suum dulcem natum moriendo desolatum, dum emisit spiritum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7Entsündige mich mit Isop, daß ich rein werde; wasche mich, daß ich schneeweiss werde.</td>
<td>8 9</td>
<td>Eia Mater, fons amoris, me sentire vim doloris fac, ut tecum lugeam!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8Laß mich hören Freude und Wonne, daß die Gebeine fröhlich werden, die du zerschlagen hast.</td>
<td>9 10 8</td>
<td>Fac, ut ardeat cor meum in amando Christum Deum, ut sibi complaceam!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9Verbirg dein Antlitz von meinen Sünden und tilge alle meine Misssetaten.</td>
<td>10 11 9</td>
<td>Sancta Mater, istud agas, crucifixi fige plagas, cordi meo valide!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10Schaffe in mir, Gott, ein reines Herz und gib mir einen neuen, gewissen Geist.</td>
<td>12 10 9</td>
<td>Tui nati vulnerati tam dignati pro me pati poenas mecum divide!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11Verwirf mich nicht von deinem Angesicht und nimm deinen heiligen Geist nicht von mir.</td>
<td>13 12 9</td>
<td>Fac me vere tecum flere, crucifixi condolere, donec ego vixero!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12Tröste mich wieder mit deiner Hilfe, und mit einem freudigen Geist rüste mich aus.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luther's Bible</td>
<td>Bach</td>
<td>Pergolesi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satz</strong></td>
<td><strong>Versus</strong></td>
<td><strong>Text</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Ich will die Übertreter deine Wege lehren, daß sich die Sünder zu dir bekehren.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Denn ich will die Sünder lehren, daß sie sich zu dir bekehren und nicht tun, was Sünde heißt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Errette mich von den Blutschulden, Gott, der du mein Gott und Heiland bist, daß meine Zunge deine Gerechtigkeit rühme.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Laß, o Tilger meiner Sünden, alle Blutschuld gar verschwinden. daß mein Loblied, Herr, dich ehrt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Herr, tue meine Lippen auf, daß mein Mund deinen Ruhm verkündige.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Öffne Lippen, Mund und Seele, daß ich deinen Ruhm erzähle, der alleine dir gehört.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Denn du hast nicht Lust zum Opfer, ich wollte dir's sonst wohl geben, und Brandopfer gefallen dir nicht.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Denn du willst kein Opfer haben, sonsten brächt ich meine Gaben; Rauch und Grand gefällt dir nicht.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luther's Bible</td>
<td>Bach</td>
<td>Pergolesi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satz</strong></td>
<td><strong>Versus</strong></td>
<td><strong>Text</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Tue wohl an Zion nach deiner Gnade; baue die Mauern zu Jerusalem.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Dann werden dir gefallen die Opfer der Gerechtigkeit, die Brandopfer und ganzen Opfer; dann wird man Farren auf deinem Altar opfern.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Amen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>