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The Invisible Church: C. P. E. Bach, *Die Israeliten in der Wüste* – A Freemasonic Oratorio?

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ABSTRACT

The miracle narrative of the first oratorio by C. P. E. Bach – the escape of the people of Israel from the thirst death by Moses – comes from the *Book of Exodus*. In the course of the second part of the work, however, the figure of Moses is unexpectedly taken over by the Redeemer. The place turns out to be a paraphrase of Genesis 3:15. In the context of the German Enlightenment the biblical story can be interpreted as a reference to the assimilation process of the Jewish community. The composed libretto includes an interpolation, which speaks about the real advent of the Messiah, thus placing the work among the representatives of the messianic-cult of the Enlightenment. The interpolated text section focuses on the religion above religions as imagined by the latitudinarianism of the leading philosophers of the Enlightenment and testifies to the Masonic spirit in it. The text of the final chorus re-interprets the church dedication (the original function of Bach's oratorio) as the dedication of the invisible Church: the soul.

KEYWORDS

Enlightenment, Jewish emancipation, Freemasonry, German oratorio, recitativo accompagnato

For János Bali

The institution of the modern concert owes a great deal to the oratorio. In pre-modern times, the salient points of musical life were not the musical works themselves, but the occasions for music-making; in other words, it was based on the continuous reproduction of music.

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Thus, a genre that created its own occasion for performance so that it could merely hand itself down to posterity was regarded as an astonishing novelty. Regular annual performances of Handel and Carl Heinrich Graun oratorios in concert halls created a virtual sphere of classic and timeless art, which celebrated itself rather than God. This virtual sphere embodied the phenomena viewed as the rediscovery of early music by the romantics, and it was represented by the physical sphere of the concert hall. Mendelssohn's performance of his adaptation of J. S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* in 1829 fitted naturally into the cult of the Handel oratorio; at the same time, it demonstrated that the crucial point was not so much performing these early works, but rather transferring them into the neutral and defunctionalized sphere of the public concert. The festivals of the nineteenth century that worshiped individual composers or musical works in an almost religious fashion (thereby forming a transition between the liturgy and the concert) were largely built around the ritual of annual oratorio performances.

The unbroken cult of the Handel oratorio was upheld at the expense of an excessive adaptation practice, yet it was unable to revive the German form of the genre even into the twentieth century. The oratorios and passions of Telemann, Carl Heinrich Graun, or Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, which in their time were regarded as lasting works establishing their composers' artistic rank, are accommodated only with difficulty by today's concert organizers. If at all, these works are included in concert programs only as curiosities that may be uplifting aesthetically, but historically they appear to be inferior. The reason behind this may partly be that the German oratorio is closely linked to (protestant) liturgy, whereas Handel's oratorios – despite their biblical texts – are secular in their conception. Another, more general reason is a socio-musical transformation that formed part of the phenomenon labeled as the rediscovery of early music. Throughout the nineteenth century, to attribute supremacy to vocal church music was unquestionable; twentieth-century trends, however, preferred the secular instrumental music of the Baroque and Viennese Classicism, which in turn in its own time (despite the prolific output), was considered secondary, as music for private or domestic use.

1. THE WOMAN'S SEED AND THE SERPENT

Hamburg was one of the most important birthplaces of the German passion; and when C. P. E. Bach moved to the city in 1767 to succeed his late godfather, Telemann, as music director, he was faced everywhere with the latter's legacy in the field of religious musical drama. Telemann's late oratorios are manifold; they include through-composed works, such as the Jesus-trilogy by Ramler, cantata-garlands like *Der Tag des Gerichts* depicting allegorical characters, the *Donnerode* composed to Psalm texts, the setting of Klopstock's *Der Messias*, and *Das befreite Israel* to a poetic setting of a biblical theme treated earlier by Handel. It is no coincidence that Bach also found the incentive for composing oratorios in Hamburg. Among the three independent works (not including the pastiches), *Die Israeliten in der Wüste* is the earliest, as it was premiered only a year after Bach had moved to the city. The *Passionskantate* and the *Auferstehung und Himmelfahrt Jesu* followed. The textual source for *Die Israeliten* and *Auferstehung* are Ramler's, as is Telemann's work; but while the latter's text is identical with it, the former only uses its theme. Rather indicative of the power of local tradition is that less than ten years after the premiere of *Das befreite Israel*, as he was deliberating compositional material for the consecration of the

Lazarethkirche, Bach could already turn to this topic.[1] By virtue of emphasizing the power of faith, the account of the miraculous flight of the Jews, in the *Book of Exodus*, was probably a fitting parable for the inauguration of a hospital church. However, whereas Telemann's consecration pieces were occasional and indefinable in terms of their genre, Bach apparently intended to create a lasting and paradigmatic work for this commission; his decision to turn to the dramatic oratorio (employing character personification), as well as his wish to supplement Daniel Schiebeler's libretto, seem to support this claim.

For *Die Israeliten in der Wüste* does not end where the original libretto does. The anonymous author of the extension (which did not appear in any of the independently printed versions of Schiebeler's libretto) adds a chorale, a recitative, and a closing chorus to the original text.[2] Michael Märker emphasizes the unique presence and out-of-genre nature of the inserted chorale without attending to the fundamental meaning of the whole text in the extension.[3] Whereas the original ending expressed a longing for the return of the Messiah, the extension, in its conception going beyond the intentions of the original text, proclaims his genuine arrival. The new concept, regardless of the identity of the author, can certainly be attributed to the composer, and it is, above all, this addition that provides clues to the work's special place in intellectual history. To develop a better understanding of the matter, we have to go back to Moses's great recitativo accompagnato in the original libretto (no. 21).

The relationship between the two parts of the oratorio, as a matter of fact, models that of the Bible reading and the sermon within the framework of a worship service; the epic biblical narrative of the first part corresponds to the Bible-reading material, while the laudation of the second part forms a parallel with the act of exegesis. A certain tension may be felt, however, between the narrative and the musical proportions of the piece after the prayers of gratitude were sung first by the ensemble and then by the first Israelite woman (nos. 18–20); the second part of the oratorio, at this point, still does not counterbalance the dramatic-musical weight of the first. The only solution to this is a temporal shift in which the laudation progresses; it is Moses's recitativo accompagnato mentioned above that sets forth this transformation, turning from the past to the future, and elevating the commentary to the heights of the oracle. Moses brings the events of the past into an eschatological perspective, and thereby redefines the miracle and himself as prefigurations of redemption and the Savior's universal redemptive act. Whereas in the opening recitativo secco of the second part of the oratorio Moses sets God's grace against the unbelief of the people of Israel, here in the recitativo accompagnato there is no mention of "people." Instead, he addresses them as "friends" and "children" ("O Freunde, Kinder"). With

[1]For a comparison between Telemann's and Bach's 'Israelite' oratorios see Ludwig FINSCHER, "Bemerkungen zu den Oratorien Carl Philipp Emanuel Bachs," in *Philipp Emanuel Bach und die europäische Musikkultur des mittleren 18. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Hans Joachim MARX (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 317 and 319.

[2]For the additional text together with the original text of the whole libretto see Reginald L. SANDERS (ed.), *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. The Complete Works* (CW), IV/1: *Die Israeliten in der Wüste*. Wq. 238 (Los Altos: The Packard Humanities Institute, 2008), xxvi. About the possible identity of the author of the added text see FINSCHER, "Bemerkungen zu den Oratorien Carl Philipp Emanuel Bachs," 316. The musical setting of the omitted lines did not survive.

[3]See Michael MÄRKER, "Zum Einfluß von Textgattungen und Textstrukturen auf die musikalische Gattung deutschsprachiger Oratorien des 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert," in *Musik als Text. Bericht über den Internationalen Kongreß der Gesellschaft für Musikforschung 1993*, 2. vols., ed. by Hermann DANUSER and Tobias PLEHBUCH (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1998), 202. Regarding the text of the stanzas of the chorale which have an obvious connection with the oratorio, see notes 10 and 11 below.

this new form of address, Moses invokes the Schillerian-Beethovenian ideal of human community, a community which has now become a united nation through a newly emerging faith awaked by the miracle of "Yahveh":

O Freunde, Kinder,
mein Gebet hat jenes Labsal euch erfleht,
das eure Kraft verjüngt, das Leben euch erhält.
Doch einst, vor meinen Blicken
seh ich die Zukunft aufgehellt,
einst wird für Adams sünd'ge Welt
ein Anderer zum Richter flehen.
Gott wird gnädig Ohr auf seine Bitten lenken,
und die, für die er fleht, mit ew'ger Wonne tränken:
die sich voll Zuversicht ihm nahn.
In ein vollkommenes Kanaan,
o Freunde, werden sie auf seine Spuren gehen.
Ich bin bei euch sein schwaches Bild!
Er wird, wenn nun der Zeiten Lauf erfüllt,
in sterbliche Gestalt verhüllt,
die menschliche Natur erhöhen.
Dies ist der Held, des Weibes Saame,
der mit der Schlange kämpft, und ihr den Kopf zertritt.
Er kommt, und bringt den Frieden mit,
und Heil und Segen ist sein Name.

(O friends, children, my prayer
Has beseeched that refreshment for you,
That renews your strength, and preserves your lives.
Yet one day, as if before my eyes
I see the future illuminated,
one day hence, for Adam's sinful world
another one will plead before the judge.
God will bend a merciful ear to his pleas
and shower with eternal bliss those for whom he beseeches,
those who accept him in all confidence.
In a more perfect Canaan,
O friends, they will follow in his footsteps.
I am for you but his pale image!
He will, when the fullness of time arrives,
appear in mortal shape,
risen in human form.
This is the hero, the seed of woman,
who shall battle the serpent and crush its head underfoot.
He comes and brings peace,
and salvation and blessing is his name.)

The dominance of original poetic texts in the German oratorio does not point to the end of the tradition of topical reading; the biblical text more or less imbues all poetic texts of the period. It is, therefore, not surprising that the hero-and-serpent topic, found in the end of the quoted text, paraphrases a passage in the book of Genesis ("And I will put enmity between you and the

woman and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.")[4] This is a crucial point in the text: it is the first light of hope for redemption from Adam's sin and, as such, foreshadows all later messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. The recitativo accompagnato is preceded and followed by two arias sung by the First resp. the Second Israelite Woman of a different character, which sets aside and elevates the words of Moses to a prophecy of historical significance. The following recitative and aria by the Second Israelite Woman transform the earlier mood of praise for Yahveh's miracle, and expresses the longing for the Savior.

2. THE SAVIOR AS HERO

Moses was a favored figure for the Enlightenment, perhaps also because it was able to correlate the magic of the miracles with the rationality of jurisdiction. Above all, however, his popularity sprang mainly from his assuming of the role of a plebeian tribune and the ethos of the "builder of the nation" he exemplified. The keyword was uttered in the recitativo accompagnato, when Moses called the Savior a hero; by doing so, he rendered a narrower religious interpretation of his figure irrelevant. In Telemann's oratorio of a related theme *(Das befreite Israel)*, Jahveh himself is the subject of worship. This piece could be considered a concatenation of psalm-type worship texts that is short of any plot. The composer, nevertheless, counteracts the lack of action utilizing the musical form by developing the transitions between recitative and aria, aria and chorus with extraordinary variety, while employing different alternatives to forgo the da capo form, which was mostly considered obsolete by the mid-eighteenth century. It is also assignable to the lack of plot, that – opposite to Schiebeler – Telemann's librettist, Zachariä, does not follow the opera-like Handelian operatic tradition of impersonated dramatic roles; his aria texts are reflections that cannot be linked to a particular character.

However, Handel's, Telemann's, and C. P. E. Bach's oratorios are undoubtedly connected through their hero-worship. The line of Handel's oratorical compositions, from *Messiah* through *Samson* to *Hercules,* clearly shows the process in which the longing for a united English nation etches biblical or mythological characters into folk heroes who represent the optimism of a modern national awareness.[5] It is in this spirit that the representation of the crucifixion is almost completely absent from *Messiah*: only one of the three big chapters, divided into fourteen smaller parts, deals with the subject ("The redemptive sacrifice, the scourging, and the agony on the cross" at the beginning of Part II). At the same time, the entire third part is devoted to portraying the resurrection and to the praise of the Savior. "The prophecy of redemption" and "The prophecy of the coming of the Savior"– the essential message of Moses's recitativo accompagnato in Bach's work – correspond to the titles of the first two scenes in Handel's

[4]Gen. 3:15, *New American Standard Bible* (NAS). There are numerous allusions to this passage in the Bible, and here is just one example: "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years." Rev. 20:1–2, NAS. For the Moses-Jesus analogy, see, among others, Acts 3:22; Heb. 3:16–18.

[5]See Johanna RUDOLPH, "Die historischen Bezüge des 'Messias'," *Händel-Jahrbuch* 13/14 (1967–1968), 43–59. Traces of this hero cult can also be observed in the libretto of Bach's next oratorio *Die Auferstehung und Himmelfahrt Jesu* by Ramler.

Messiah ("Isaiah's prophecy of salvation" and "The prophecy of the coming of the Messiah…"). Furthermore, "The abolishment of Adam's sin" and "The victory over death and sin," which can be regarded as a "content-list" for the text extension in Bach's *Israelites*, are titles of scenes from the final part of Handel's work (scenes nos. 1 and 3, "The promise of bodily resurrection and redemption from Adam's fall," and "The victory over death and sin").[6]

A similar epic grandiosity characterizes Handel's earlier oratorical work, *Israel in Egypt*, in which the story of Israel, from the death of Joseph right up to the taming of the Red Sea by Moses, is told with one single breath that would have been inconceivable within a liturgical setting. In contrast to the heterogenic text and unified music of *Messiah, Israel in Egypt* sets to music a single contiguous passage from the book of Exodus. In terms of musical genre, however, it is panoramic: the first of the three big chapters constitutes a wreath of choral movements (recitatives and arias are absent), best described as a lamento mourning the death of Joseph. The second recounts the epic tale of the exodus itself – also comprising the exalted plot of Bach's oratorio; and the third part is a word-by-word and complete musical setting of Moses's hymn (Exod. 15:1–21) consisting of arias, recitatives, and choruses. Typically, Schiebeler and Bach took up the story where Handel had left off (Exod. 15:22–25). Nevertheless, this genre-panorama is just as alien to the tradition of the German oratorio as the naturalistic representation of the ten plagues of Egypt is to the expressive means of Bach's *Empfindsamer Stil*. Another peculiar contrast between the two oratorio composers is the fact that C. P. E. Bach (who similarly to his father avoided the opera genre) relies much more on operatic intonations and character types in his *Israeliten* than the opera composer Handel in his oratorios.[7] The operatic tone is emphasized by the dramatization of da capo arias through changes of tempo and meter, which may have been inspired by Carl Heinrich Graun's Berlin operas. In spite of its closeness to the operatic genre, however, important characteristics – such as the appearance of the hero topic, the

[6]The titles of the different parts of the text stem from the wordbook published for a 1743 performance, which divided the text into 16 scenes and which can be associated with the librettist Charles Jennens. – The German Handel cult seems to originate in Hamburg. Bach's friend Klopstock was one of the driving forces behind the Handel cult in Hamburg through his translation of the messianic text. Moreover, contemporary musical life in Hamburg gives the impression that it was precisely the premiere of *Die Israeliten* in 1769 that hastened the German premiere of *Messiah* in Hamburg (1772). Although Bach did not conduct the work at the premiere, he did so on later occasions (1775 and 1777). The conductor of the first Hamburg (and German) performance of *Messiah* was Michael Arne. See Howard E. SMITHERS, *A History of the Oratorio*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 353. About Bach's performances of *Messiah* see also H. G. OTTENBERG, *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach*, transl. by Philip J. WHITMORE (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 159, 313 and 337. On the ebullient account by Johann Heinrich Voß of the 1775 performance, see Walther SIEGMUND-SCHULTZE, "Die musikalische Gedankenwelt des 'Messias'," *Händel-Jahrbuch* 13/14 (1967–1968), 25–42. On the beginnings of the cult of Handel in Germany see Walther SIEGMUND-SCHULTZE, "Über die ersten 'Messias'-Aufführungen"; further see his introduction to Walther SIEGMUND-SCHULTZE (ed.), *Georg Friedrich Händel. Beiträge zu seiner Biographie aus dem 18. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig: Verlag Philipp Reclam, 1984), 5–24. See also footnotes 7 and 21 in the present essay.

[7]The grand processional march of Moses is a French overture that is based on the musical topic of the reigning monarch. The two Israelite women assume the traditional roles of the *prima* and *seconda donna*, while the character of Moses is represented by a hieratic bass. In addition, the opening chorus, as well as the big recitativo accompagnato with chorus in the first part, is a parallel to a Gluck opera scene (in Bach's work, the choruses seem to be musically salient and – with the exception of the closing chorus – represent a kind of distilled classicism, which indicates its affinity to the operatic tradition represented, at the same time, by Gluck and Handel alike). About the connection of Bach's and Handel's *Israelites* see Reginald L. SANDERS, "The Israelites in Hamburg and London: C. P. E. Bach's *Die Israeliten in der Wüste* and Handels Israelite Oratorios," *Göttinger Händel-Beiträge* 11 (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

dramatic process from darkness to light (an important element in the first part of the non-dramatic *Messiah*), the transition from a liturgy-dictated two-part form to a three-part structure, as well as the expansion of the Old Testament story into a redemption concept – unequivocally link Bach's work to the secular doxologies of the *Messiah* or *Israel in Egypt*. The apparent contradiction that the two Handel oratorios, composed with a secular function in mind, use verbatim biblical texts whereas in Bach's liturgical work the text is entirely original, speaks more precisely than anything else about the Enlightenment's approach to religion.

Here, a small detour must be made. Had Milton's different works had not served as sources for more Handel oratorio texts, the profound kinship between their Baroque epic poetry would still be easily detectable. Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the first of the two epic poems also composed in the light of the new redemption – a poem that had been exercising enormous influence on English culture for a hundred years – paraphrases the very same moment of utterance by Moses that proved to be so crucial in the Bach oratorio. The presence of this topic is so powerful here that the question emerges whether Milton's poem had played a role in the decision for this text as the intellectual focus of Bach's work.[8] (*Paradise Lost* had already been available since 1740 in a German translation by the passion librettist Heinrich Brockes of Hamburg.)

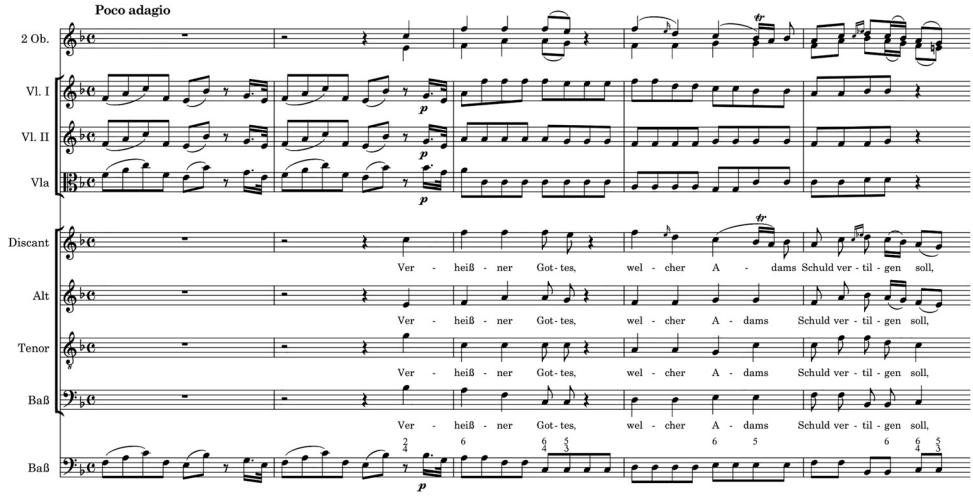
3. THE INNER TEMPLE

According to the closing chorus of the original Schiebeler libretto, Bach's *Die Israeliten in der Wüste* would have ended with the awaiting of the Savior, and with the anticipation of peace that he brought with him; the impelling tone of the music in Bach's pre-classical musical language evokes a genuine chorus of freedom. It is worth contemplating whether musically the work would remain meaningful as a whole, were it to end where the librettist had intended. The answer is doubtful, despite the fact that the extension of the libretto was presumably executed not on dramatical but conceptual grounds: the chorus of freedom, in accordance with the text, remains too open, too incomplete musically to serve as a convincing ending to the oratorio.[9] Hence, it is above all for the performers to define the relationship between the two choral movements. The conductor needs to express the hierarchy between the nature-like F major of the original closing movement (see Example 1) and the sacred E♭ major of the final chorus. Furthermore, he needs to elevate the gallant melodic world of the latter in comparison to the refined Gluckian beauty of the former, and to create a balance between their tempos, a balance that will endow the real closing movement with the dignity of the final word. Finally, yet importantly, the question is whether the music will be able to transform the dramatically dubious text and create a convincing closure for the musical work through a bridging of the disruption by means of the performance.

The first musical number of the extension (no. 26) is an advent chorale, and its main function is to bridge the mystical distance between the original and additional part of the libretto by providing a connection between the prophecy and the arrival of the Savior, and aiding the

[8]See excerpts from the last book of Milton's *Paradise Lost:* "…God from the mount of Sinai, whose gray top / Shall tremble, he descending, will himself / In thunder, lightning, and loud trumpets' sound, / Ordain them laws; part, such as appertain / To civil justice; part, religious rites / Of sacrifice; informing them, by types / And shadows, of that destined Seed to bruise / The Serpent, by what means he shall achieve Mankind's deliverance."

[9]The inconclusive ending of the music of the chorus suggests that the textual extension preceded the composition.



Example 1. C. P. E. Bach, *Die Israeliten in der Wüste*, „Verheißner Gottes," beginning (After the first edition.)

shift from the historical to the utopian sphere in the conceptual development of the oratorio. The stanza that Bach borrowed from a seventeenth-century poem by Heinrich Held suits this mediatory role perfectly, as it emphasizes the consummation of Old Testament prophecies in the New Testament.[10] It is obvious that Bach selected the chorale consciously based on theological considerations, as the eighth stanza – although not included in the oratorio, but clearly well known by the congregation – evokes the topic of the serpent with the crushed head (familiar from Moses).[11]

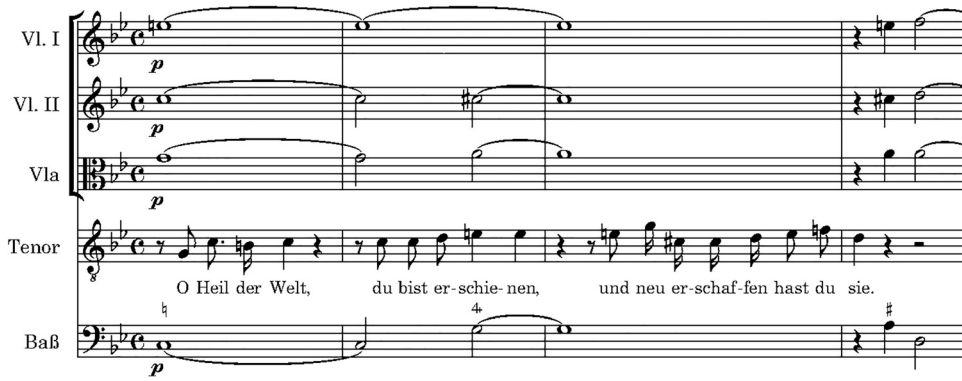
No specific character is assigned to the soloist of the recitative connecting the chorale and the final chorus; however, it evidently falls upon the singer performing the part of Aaron (With some exaggeration, it is possible to say that Aaron's dramatically essentially redundant role in the first part of the oratorio acquires meaning here, at this point of the second part, when his character is no longer indicated.) Why does the character of the younger high priest recede into anonymity? It was presumably a conscious and perhaps symbolic decision, as a result of which the work steps out of its own narrative as well as its liturgical setting, and even through its vocabulary transforms itself into a hymn to the Enlightenment.

[10]"Was der alten Väter Schaar / höchster Wunsch und Sehnen war, / und was sie geprophezeit, / ist erfüllt nach Herrlichkeit." (The greatest wish and yearning of our band of forefathers, and what they prophesied, is fulfilled according to your glory.) This is the second stanza of Held's poem; the first begins with the lines "Gott sei Dank durch alle Welt" (Thank God all over the world).

[11]"Tritt der Schlange Kopf entzwei, Dass ich, aller Ängste frei, Dir im Glauben um und an Selig bleibe zugetan." (The serpent's head split in two, / I am now free of all fear / In my Belief and with all my Soul / I remain with you in joy.) From the extant description of the liturgy of the first performance it turns out that in accordance with the Lutheran cantata performance tradition there was a sermon between the two parts of the work. See FINSCHER, "Bemerkungen zu den Oratorien Carl Philipp Emanuel Bachs," 315.

In the published score (1775), however, Bach omitted the last eighteen lines of the original version of this recitative, performed at the premiere (see Example 2). When he mentions the discarded line in his correspondence with his publisher, he conspicuously avoids revealing the true reasons for his decision.[12] At first, it might seem surprising that he omitted the very lines that would have befittingly introduced the deeper significance of the consecration, as expressed in the final chorus. Moreover, a possible explanation might be the literary awkwardness of the insertion; it is too direct and employs literally means already used earlier in the work to draw a parallel between the story of the rescue of Israel and the Enlightenment. In fact, however, there is a deeper reason:

Hier tönt in Tempeln voller Pracht,
Allgütiger, dein Ruhm.
Auch heute wird ein neues Heiligthum
Dir, Herr, von uns geweiht.
Ein Werk der Menschenliebe,
Die dein Befehl gebeut
Vor allen andern Pflichten.[13]



Example 2. C. P. E. Bach, *Die Israeliten in der Wüste*, Recitativo accompagnato abridged by the composer before publication, beginning (After the first edition.)

[12]"Hinten im letzten Recitative habe ich aus Ursachen etwas weggelassen und ausgestrichen." Letter to Breitkopf publishing house, 1775. Cited after Ernst SUCHALLA (ed.), *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: Briefe und Dokumente. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 489; for the English translation see Stephen L. CLARK (ed. and transl.), *The Letters of C. P. E. Bach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 77. For philological details of the first print of the score see Rachel W. WADE, "Filiation and the Editing of Revised and Alternate Versions: Implications for the C. P. E. Bach Edition," in *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach Studies*, ed. by Stephen L. CLARK (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 286.

[13]For the omitted lines of the libretto see Reginald L. SANDERS (ed.), *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. The Complete Works*, Introduction, xvi, and plate 8.

(Here magnificent churches sing
Thy might, God Almighty.
Today, once again, we are dedicating
a new shrine to Thee,
A work of the love of Humanity,
built by Thy command
ahead of all other duties.)

According to the editor of the oratorio in the *Complete Works*, "Bach omitted the rest of the recitative which alludes to the event for which the work was originally composed, so as not to limit the marketability of the print or have it seen principally as a document preserving a particular occasion."[14] I think, however, that Bach may also have had a less practical and more weighty reason for this omission. Looking carefully at these lines, we can see that the call for the praise of a "neues Heiligthum" – especially with the phrase "Vor allen andern Pflichten," which furthermore calls for the defiance of the priority of religious laws in their very own church – probably worried protestant dignitaries and church authorities (for a good reason) and led them to Christianity, and reveals too openly the enlightened and freemasonic background of the text. Metaphors such as "des Irrthums Nacht" and "des Irrthums Finsternissen," or a formel such as "und liessest uns dein Recht und deine Wahrheit wissen" ("the night of straying," "the darkness of straying," "you made your law and your wisdom" known to us) may remind the listener of the libretto of *Die Zauberflöte*. This relationship is further reinforced by a congruity in the tonal design of the two works. The overture and the second finale of Mozart's opera, as last numbers of the two sections of Bach's oratorio, are in E♭ major, and both the opera itself and the oratorio begin in C minor. The extension, therefore, may be attributed to the demand for tonal unity in the work: the key of the originally intended closing chorus is, as already mentioned, F major.

From the point of a freemasonic interpretation of the work, Aaron's anonymity seems to strip him from his clerical position so that at the announcement of the joyous news he will be able to represent Man equal to all: "Er ist Prinz! – Noch mehr, er ist ein Mensch!," as the young catechumen is portrayed in the Temple of the Wisdom in *Die Zauberflöte*. Furthermore, the building of the church and the consecration, as motifs, fit unaltered into the freemasonic system of symbols: tools of temple building are widely known to be the most important parts of this system, which serves the Work of the Creator referred to by the name of The Great Architect of the Universe, and in which the services offered for the lodges are designated as "temple work" (Tempelarbeit). In addition, the connection between Bach's oratorio and freemasonry can also be documented, as the 1777 performance conducted by Bach was organized by a freemason lodge.[15] Regarding this fact, and the evidence found in the supplement of the libretto, the supposition made by Richard Kramer about the sympathy of Bach to freemasonry seems to be almost an understatement.[16] Taken all this into

[14]Ibid.

[15]See H. G. OTTENBERG, *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach*, 313. Bach's lieder series, the *12 Freymauern-Lieder*, openly testifies his close relationship to freemasonry.

[16]"…although there is apparently no evidence that Bach himself was a Freemason, many of his friends were active members, and he cannot have been unsympathetic to Masonic ideals." See Richard KRAMER, *Unfinished Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 85.

account, the question is legitimate: was not the textual extension inspired by freemasonic circles, and is not this the explanation to the anonymity of the author of the supplement of the libretto?

4. JEWISH EMANCIPATION AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The text of the final chorus takes the simplest approach to the motif of consecration through religious pietism (a movement that also formed the basis of the *Empfindsamer Stil*): it compares the temple with our own inner space. In other words, the place which is to be consecrated is, in fact, "the temple of our breast."[17] (The following two places from St Paul's Letters to the Corinthians serve as possible sources of this metaphor: 1 Cor 3:16 and 2 Cor 6:16.) Thus, the temple is within us, and a further esoteric significance of this external-official act of consecration is the dedication of our soul to God. The internalization of religious sentiment, therefore, does not oppose the universalization of religion; rather, it forms one aspect of it. This pietistic concept corresponds with what enlightened thinkers generally thought about religious tolerance. Enlightened thought considered the question of religious supremacy undeterminable based on external criteria. Lessing couched the answer in the famous ring parable in his play, *Nathan der Weise*. Its message is that different religions possess complete but incommensurable truth within themselves, and therefore can only be justified internally, not by dogma – this marks the work as the symbolic literary achievement of the period.

It becomes evident that the Enlightenment, at its best, as an intellectual movement, by no means proposed the abolishment of religious belief but rather its liberation from the dogmas of theology. In the social context of the German Enlightenment, however, in which Bach's work was indeed rooted, the question of religious tolerance became synonymous with the question of Jewish emancipation. The obvious approach to the oratorio's concept of religious universality (unbounded by liturgy), therefore, is from the emancipation movement of the German Jewry. The Jewish diaspora abandoned its cultural heritage consciously in order to integrate into German culture, and the relevance of Bach's oratorio ultimately lies in the comparison between Jewish emancipation and the emancipation of mankind. The authors invoke the biblical metaphor of the wandering Jews to express the great historical vision of Mankind wandering in the darkness of history and waiting for redemption. The comparison was not difficult for the Jewry, as the theses of the universality of Enlightenment – as expressed by a Lessing or a Moses Mendelssohn – were easily encodable in their language of Messianic faith, as Nathan himself, in *Nathan der Weise*, also represented religious universalism, faith above religion. It is no surprise that Schiller's name has also emerged in relation to the oratorio text; the humanistic religion advocated by him became a strong link between the progressive German intelligentsia and Germany's assimilated Jewry. (Is it possible that Beethoven's setting of *An die Freude* can be regarded indirectly as in its day, a final, already utopian expression of joy over the secular Messiah?) In the development of Jewish messianism, the utopian element had become dominant

[17]"Lass es gute Früchte bringen, die dein Vaterherz erfreun. Lass uns dir, allmächt'ge Güte, unsre Brust zum Tempel weihn!" (Let it bear good fruit, that will gladden your fatherly heart. Let us, almighty Goodness, dedicate our breast to be your temple!).

by the time of the Enlightenment – hence the straightforward connection between Jewish messianism and the enlightened idea of eternal human progress.[18]

5. THE PROFANE TEMPLE

The extension of the libretto, although rudimentary, breaks away from the liturgical framework while strengthening earlier endeavors in the text. In order to attract the attention of prospective subscribers for his printed score, Bach arranged his work in a way that "it can be performed not only on a solemn occasion, but anytime, inside and outside the Church, simply to praise God, and indeed without objection by any Christian denomination."[19] Bach speaks about those intentions in the oratorio genre that actually materialized during the history of Handel's *Messiah*. Despite his intentions, however, *Die Israeliten in der Wüste* remained exclusively in the performance practice of the concert halls.[20] Bach's words, furthermore, correspond to the views of Lessing mentioned above, and they are open expressions of a desire for a nature religion which stands above institutionalized religions. In Ernst Cassirer's words, "The Jews, Christians, Muslim and Pagans are all simply the heretics and dissidents of this nature religion."[21] The text of the final chorus, in fact, broadens the physical space of the consecrated church and transforms it to symbolize the inner temple of this invisible church. "Man has banished God from among them; they have relegated Him to a sanctuary; the walls of a temple hide Him from sight; He doesn't exist outside of it. O Madman that you are, break down these walls that hold your ideas in, and magnify God: you will see Him everywhere where He is, or say that He is nowhere."[22] These lines were written by Diderot, whose two letters written to Bach from 1774 have survived. However, it is important to note that significant thinkers of the Enlightenment never followed Diderot's first command in the last quoted sentence. The composer of *Die Israeliten in der*

[18]Gershom SHOLEM, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971).

[19]"Es ist dieses Oratorium in der Anwendung so eingerichtet worden, daß es nicht just bey einer Art von Feyerlichkeit, sondern zu allen Zeiten, in und außer der Kirche, bloß zum Lobe Gottes, und zwar ohne Anstoß von allen christlichen Religionsverwandten aufgeführt werden kann." *Hamburger Correspondent* no. 147 (September 14, 1774). Cited in Reginald L. SANDERS (ed.), *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. The Complete Works* IV/1, Introduction, xi; also in Howard E. SMITHERS, *A History of the Oratorio*, 348. The subtle liberal shift in his choice of words ("Religionsverwandte" instead of the otherwise customary "Gläubige" in Protestant religious vocabulary) also points to Bach's enlightened-extended interpretation of the concept of religion.

[20]In fact, the reception history of *Messiah* in England in Handel's lifetime unfolded in two separate spheres. Besides concert performances in theaters, the work was performed on ceremonial, but not liturgical occasions, as for example at the coronation of George II or at his wife's funeral in Westminster Abbey; these representative occasions, performed in church settings, were transformed from 1784 into regular concert-like performances in the same venues. See SMITHERS, *Oratorio,* vol. 3, 354. Further see Jens Peter LARSEN, "Zur Geschichte der 'Messias'-Aufführungen," *Händel-Jahrbuch* 13/14 (1967–1968), 13. Existing documents on the eighteenth-century performances of Bach's *Die Israeliten in the Wüste*, with the exception of the premiere, are very tellingly all concert performances; for a list, see Reginald L. SANDERS (ed.), *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. The Complete Works*, IV/1, Introduction, xiv.

[21]Translated by Julia VAJDA; for a full English translation, see Ernst CASSIRER, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, transl. by Fritz C. A. KOELLN and James P. PETTERGROVE (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951).

[22]Denis DIDEROT, "On the Adequacy of Natural Religion," in *Philosophical Thoughts and Other Texts*, transl. by Kirk WATSON (Kindle Edition, 2013).

Wüste and the author of its additional text, however, did so with the second command. By choosing the idea of redemption as the focal point of the work, announcing the arrival of the Savior, and stepping beyond religious boundaries, they extended the notion of God, and thereby opened that profane temple, which hereafter gave home to the institution of the modern concert.

English translation by Julia VAJDA