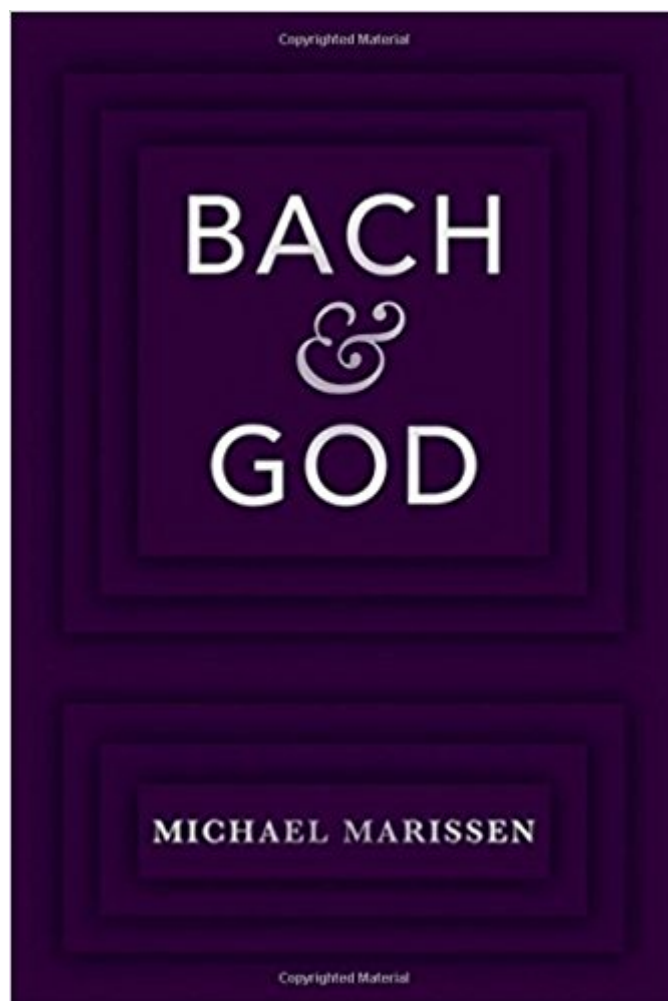


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# Bach & God



## Synopsis

*Bach & God* explores the religious character of Bach's vocal and instrumental music in seven interrelated essays. Noted musicologist Michael Marissen offers wide-ranging interpretive insights from careful biblical and theological scrutiny of the librettos. Yet he also shows how Bach's pitches, rhythms, and tone colors can make contributions to a work's plausible meanings that go beyond setting texts in an aesthetically satisfying manner. In some of Bach's vocal repertory, the music puts a "spin" on the words in a way that turns out to be explainable as orthodox Lutheran in its orientation. In a few of Bach's vocal works, his otherwise puzzlingly fierce musical settings serve to underscore now unrecognized or unacknowledged verbal polemics, most unsettlingly so in the case of his church cantatas that express contempt for Jews and Judaism. Finally, even Bach's secular instrumental music, particularly the late collections of "abstract" learned counterpoint, can powerfully project certain elements of traditional Lutheran theology. Bach's music is inexhaustible, and *Bach & God* suggests that through close contextual study there is always more to discover and learn.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Michael Marissen's courageous and challenging investigations into the religious meaning of Bach's music have been hidden away in theological journals long enough. This book makes them available to all musicians and music lovers who want their Bach at full, at times unnerving, strength. Anyone willing to brave this book will be fascinated and vastly enriched."--Richard Taruskin, author of the *Oxford History of Western Music* "A persuasive, much-needed historical study of an important,

overlooked topic, based on a careful analysis of the primary sources and presented with clarity and attention to relevant detail."--George W. E. Nickelsburg, Professor Emeritus of New Testament Studies, The University of Iowa"Michael Marissen is one of the most widely discussed scholars currently addressing the theological dimensions of Bach's music...this work cannot be ignored, and, like his other works, deserves a wide readership."--Professor Jeremy Begbie, Duke University"Essentially, Marissen...is a philologist of the first order: examining original sources with accessible translations and providing clear and detailed understanding of the word."--The Bach Cantata Website"In *Bach & God*, a new collection of essays by musicologist Michael Marissen, Johann Sebastian Bach's relationship to Lutheranism gets the careful, historical attention it deserves...Michael Marissen's *Bach & God* is an absolute necessity for scholars in the fields of musicology, church history, comparative religion, and theology."--Reading Religion"Highly recommended."--Choice"'Bach & God' (Oxford) is the splendid title of a new book by Michael Marissen, a professor emeritus at Swarthmore College. It brings to mind two approximately equal figures engaged in a complicated dialogue, like Jefferson and Adams, or Siskel and Ebert. The book is one of a number of recent attempts to grapple with Bach's religiosity." --The New Yorker"[Marissen's] most interesting chapters offer several examples of how Bach's musical settings put 'a religious spin on its religious text.' Later he shows how Bach music and text need to be understood in light of the specific phraseology and ideas of the Luther Bible and the commentaries of his day. Like many Christians, Bach underlined his annotated Bible, and we still hear his marginalia in his music."--First Things"The book is very well documented and the analysis therein (both from a musicology standpoint and a religious studies perspective) is coherent overall ... [I]t is an excellent addition to the critical studies into the religious meaning of Bach's music."--Ronald Charles, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Saint Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada and violinist, admirer of Bach.

Michael Marissen is Daniel Underhill Professor Emeritus of Music at Swarthmore College, where he taught from 1989 to 2014. He has also been a visiting professor on the graduate faculties at Princeton University and the University of Pennsylvania. His publications include *The Social and Religious Designs of J. S. Bach's Brandenburg Concertos* (Princeton, 1995), *Lutheranism, anti-Judaism, and Bach's St. John Passion* (Oxford, 1998), *An Introduction to Bach Studies* (co-author Daniel Melamed; Oxford, 1998), *Bach's Oratorios* (Oxford, 2008), *Tainted Glory in Handel's Messiah* (Yale, 2014), and essays in *Lutheran Quarterly*, *Harvard Theological Review*, *The Huffington Post*, and *The New York Times*.

Marissen makes the excellent argument that you cannot separate the music of Bach from Bach's spirituality and fully understand its aesthetic. At the same time, one cannot determine the true personal nature of Bach's spiritual thought, try as we have with the clues we have been left. Many in the past have taught that to be properly understood, Bach's music should be approached from a purely musical standpoint apart from any spirituality, or as absolute music: music for music's sake. While Bach's music is a marvel on any level, its full realization is incomplete when the door is shut on the "foolishness" of the Holy.

Super book on a vexing subject. Anyone into theology or music "or both!" will find this a compelling read.

I care about Bach's musical ideas, including ideas applied to religious thought. This book for the most part skipped the music.

The writing is poor and excentric. The format is confusing. The information which might be of interest is buried beneath the author's ego.

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