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Representation of the Jewish People in Bach's *St. John Passion* and other Johannine Passion
Oratorios: An Alternative Translation

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Musical Arts

by

Troy Michael Robertson

2024

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2024

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Representation of the Jewish People in Bach's *St. John Passion* and other Johannine Passion
Oratorios: An Alternative Translation

by

Troy Michael Robertson

Doctor of Musical Arts

University of California, Los Angeles, 2024

Professor James Bass, Chair

Over the last five decades, numerous renditions of J.S. Bach's *St. John Passion* have been met with fervent opposition, eliciting protests, scathing critiques, boycotts, and even the outright cancellation of concerts. These reactions stem from a pervasive perception of embedded anti-Semitism within the text of the composition. While various performances have attempted to contemporize this work through pre-concert dialogues, innovative staging, or generic textual adjustments, the efficacy of these efforts in completely expunging the anti-Semitic rhetoric or eradicating collective memories of the work's problematic performance history has been limited.

This dissertation undertakes a multifaceted inquiry, drawing upon historical research explaining the genesis of John's gospel, a critical examination of anti-Semitic currents within the Lutheran tradition, and a comprehensive analysis of the *St. John Passion's* seminal role in shaping the evolution of the Passion Oratorio genre. Through this investigation, the imperative of

preserving this musical opus within modern performance contexts is articulated, alongside a delineation of the necessary alterations essential for its continued relevance.

The crux of this scholarly endeavor lies in an alternative translation for the anti-Semitic rhetoric in Bach's *St. John Passion*, including a novel translation of John's Passion narrative tailored for composers seeking to engage with this material. While extant scholarship has delved into the peculiar prevalence of the Greek term "hoi Ioudaioi" ("the Jews") in John's gospel and the inherent problematic nature of employing terms such as "Jüden" and "Juden" within Bach's composition, few scholars have ventured forth with concrete solutions tailored for modern performance. Furthermore, a noticeable gap exists in the availability of Johannine Passion narratives attuned to Jewish sensibilities and intended for musical adaptation. By offering alternative renderings of Bach's *St. John Passion* and an English iteration of the Johannine Passion, this dissertation aspires to furnish performers and audiences alike with a pathway to engage with the essence of the Passion narrative, unfettered by anti-Semitic text and associations.

The dissertation of Troy Michael Robertson is approved.

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Chapter I: Research Background

1.1 Problem Statement

In 2017, the Cleveland Orchestra presented Bach's controversial *St John Passion* in the city's famous Temple Tifereth-Israel. Before the program, the artistic director held a panel discussion with several keynote speakers whose aim was to answer one question: "Is Bach's *St. John Passion* Anti-Semitic?" The orchestra's Austrian conductor, Franz Welser-Möst delivered a gut-wrenching perspective regarding his home country's role in the Holocaust where he said it is "baggage we won't get rid of."¹ Rabbi Roger Klein of Temple Tifereth-Israel made an address where he believed presenting Bach's *St. John Passion* in its original form possessed tremendous value because "we count upon our artists to tell us the way things are, and not to cover over the parts of the truth which seem problematic to us."² The Cleveland Orchestra then presented Bach's *St. John Passion* in its entirety, utilizing solely the original text, and received great praise for their attempt to grapple with this difficult topic.

Other performances of Bach's *St. John Passion* have not received as positive of a response. One of the most well-known examples is Swarthmore College's 1995 performance of Bach's *St. John Passion* where several singers dropped out of the 100-person chorus due to the work's inherently anti-Semitic representation of the Jewish people during one of the "turba" choruses.³ Other performances, such as the Oregon Bach Festival's concert in 2000 or The Boston Cecilia's presentation in 1998, have been met with protests and negative reviews due to

¹ Lewis, Zachary, The Plain Dealer. "Cleveland Orchestra Grapples with Tough Issues in Bach Panel (Analysis)." Cleveland. March 6, 2017. https://www.cleveland.com/musicdance/2017/03/cleveland_orchestra_grapples_w.html.

² Lewis.

³The Associated Press. 1995. "Piece by Bach Stirs Debate in a Chorus." *The New York Times*, February 22, 1995, sec. U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/02/22/us/piece-by-bach-stirs-debate-in-a-chorus.html>.

their inability to effectively grapple with anti-Semitic aspects of this work.⁴ More recently in 2022, Harvard University Choir canceled their performance of Bach's *St. John Passion* over concerns of anti-Semitism in the work.⁵

There are two primary driving factors behind accusations of anti-Semitism in Bach's *St. John Passion*: 1) over 70 references to "der Juden" (the Jews) including being identified as the crowd demanding Jesus' crucifixion in the "turba" chorus and 2) Bach's usage of the term "Jüden" which we know, through modern scholarship, to have been a derogatory term for Jews in 17th and 18th-century Germany.⁶ "Jüden" possessed an inherently negative connotation as its use was limited to derogatory contexts. Additionally, it was used in Nazi Germany as part of their propagandist mission to dehumanize Jews.⁷ Many modern editions of Bach's *St. John Passion* retranslate instances of the word "Jüden" as "Juden." However, many choirs who use older editions and don't understand the history of the term "Jüden" continue to perform it in its original form.

More consistently problematic is the work's identification of the group responsible for Jesus' death as "Juden." Being a more difficult issue to grapple with, three primary methods for adapting performance have emerged within the last 30 years: 1) Perform the work with a pre-concert discussion of the historical context without changing anything in the work itself (i.e. Cleveland Orchestra in 2017);⁸ 2) Stage it to reflect a heavier emphasis on the collective

⁴ Marissen, Michael. 2000. "Music; Perspectives on the 'St. John Passion' and the Jews." *The New York Times*, April 2, 2000, sec. Arts. <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/04/02/arts/music-perspectives-on-the-st-john-passion-and-the-jews.html>.

⁵ "St. John's Passion Off-Key at the Harvard University Choir | Magazine | the Harvard Crimson." n.d. www.thecrimson.com. Accessed May 30, 2024. <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2022/3/10/bach-passion-cancelled/>.

⁶ Karp, Jonathan, and Adam Sutcliffe. 2017. *The Cambridge History of Judaism: Volume 7, the Early Modern World, 1500–1815*. Cambridge University Press.

⁷ Erickson, R. 2011. "The Early Enlightenment, Jews, and Bach." *The Musical Quarterly* 94 (4): 518–47. <https://doi.org/10.1093/musqtl/gdr021>.

⁸ Lewis.

responsibility of Jesus' death while not changing the text itself (i.e. Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment in 2019);⁹ and 3) Change the text from "Jüden" to "Juden" and/or change the "turba" choruses to a more generic translation of "the people" or "they" (i.e. The Thirteen in 2021).¹⁰ While each approach offers merits, they also harbor inherent limitations, necessitating a novel, intrinsically consistent solution to uphold the *St. John Passion's* potential for continued performance.

The first approach commendably attempts to contextualize the *St. John Passion's* history for its audience, displaying Bach's possible intent to assign collective responsibility for Jesus' death rather than blaming "der Juden." However, by not changing any of the text, the narration itself assigns clear blame for Jesus' death to the Jewish people and also includes an antiquated term for Jews. Regardless of the historical context, it is difficult for many audience members and performers to resolve the cognitive dissonance between experiencing the majesty of this dramatic musical work and knowing it contains negative Jewish associations (which is especially dangerous in the age of Supersessionism).¹¹ Even with the work being in German, most performances have translations readily available which may shock audience members who have not previously read John's gospel. While a pre-concert panel is an excellent addition to any performance of Bach's *St. John Passion*, omitting textual modifications in the piece itself may still prove problematic to audiences.

⁹ "Star-Studded, Searing Bach at the Royal Festival Hall." n.d. Bachtrack.com. Accessed May 30, 2024. <https://bachtrack.com/review-bach-st-john-rattle-sellars-padmore-williams-oae-southbank-april-2019>.

¹⁰ "Washington Classical Review." n.d. Washingtonclassicalreview.com. Accessed May 30, 2024. <https://washingtonclassicalreview.com/2021/03/28/the-thirteen-courts-fresh-controversy-in-political-staging-of-bachs-st-john-passion/>.

¹¹Supersessionism: Also known as Replacement Theology, this Christian doctrine purports that Christians have replaced Jews as God's chosen people due to their rejection of Jesus as their messiah.

Since oratorios are not traditionally staged, a less common approach employed in some performances is to leverage theatrical nuance to diminish the impact of Jewish references while emphasizing collective responsibility for Jesus's death. Peter Sellars' reimagining for the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment in 2019 exemplifies this approach, reconfiguring traditional roles to imbue the narrative with fresh perspectives. This progressive depiction featured the soprano and alto soloists as Mary, the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene rather than their originally unnamed roles. Additionally, the aria "Ich folge dir gleichfalls" is sung by Mary, the mother of Jesus instead of Peter, being completely recontextualized to describe Jesus' childhood.¹² The entire production was heavily influenced by theatrical storytelling, which was in many cases antagonistic to the text. While this was possibly one of the most unique productions of Bach's *St John Passion*, a looming problem remains: while a theatrical recontextualization distracts from the potentially offensive text, it does not directly address the long-pressing issue by changing the text. While there is likely some success in completely distracting audience members from the text, those who are already familiar with John's gospel or Bach's *St. John Passion* may still be adversely impacted.

Lastly, and possibly finding the highest degree of success, many productions of Bach's *St. John Passion* change the text from less antiquated references to the Jewish people and/or utilize translations such as "they" or "the people" instead of "Juden". While transitioning from "Jüden" to "Juden" represents a salient step toward linguistic modernization, the employment of generic descriptors such as "they" risk perpetuating associations with the Jewish community.¹³ Given the problematic theology of Bach's *St. John Passion*, many performers and audience

¹² Bachtrack.com

¹³ Marissen, Michael. 2023. *Lutheranism, Anti-Judaism, and Bach's St John Passion*, 47.

members may still think generic terms like “they” are referring to the Jewish people. By substituting "Juden" with specific identifiers such as "Judäer" or "Pharisäer" as outlined in Chapter IV, performers and audiences can disassociate from the generalized depiction of the Jewish people, thereby aligning more closely with historical realities.¹⁴

In Chapter IV of this dissertation, an alternative translation is meticulously crafted to align with contemporary historical insights regarding crowd compositions during Jesus’ era. Drawing from an array of scholarly resources, including the Christian Bible, biblical commentary, and extra-biblical literature, this translation offers nuanced alternatives for the most contentious instances of "der Juden" in Bach’s *St. John Passion*. These revisions are strategically designed to seamlessly integrate into the musical and artistic fabric of the composition without compromising its integrity. Moreover, Chapter V extends this scholarly intervention by presenting an alternative translation of the entire Passion narrative encompassing chapters 18 and 19 of John’s gospel.

Despite the availability of biblical translations that exhibit friendlier language towards the Jewish community, a notable void persists in translations specifically tailored for musical settings. Even contemporary works, such as Johannine¹⁵ Passion Settings by Arvo Pärt and James MacMillan, perpetuate problematic associations by identifying the "turba" choruses as "the Jews." This is problematic for the same reason that Bach’s *St. John Passion* is problematic: the text puts the onus for Jesus’ crucifixion on the whole of the Jewish people. The proposed

¹⁴ Köstenberger, Andreas J. 2013. *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic.

¹⁵ Johannine – Of or relating to a theoretical community of first-century Jesus followers who are likely responsible for writing the gospel of John.

translation provides a viable alternative suitable for Good Friday, liturgical, or non-liturgical contexts, thereby mitigating the perpetuation of harmful associations.

While scholarship on the overuse of the Greek term "hoi Ioudaioi" in John's gospel and the problematic nature of terms like "Jüden" and "Juden" in Bach's *St. John Passion* abounds, few scholars have ventured to offer concrete solutions for modern performance. Additionally, there are currently no translations of the Johannine Passion narrative that are friendly toward the Jewish people and created to be set to music. By offering an alternative for both Bach's *St. John Passion* and an English version of the Johannine Passion, these recontextualizations leave performers and audiences alike empowered to engage with the heart of the Passion narrative free from the specter of harmful associations.

While many performances of Bach's *St. John Passion* have grappled with this difficult issue in a variety of ways, few have made definitive statements on possible solutions for its continued performance in the 21st century. Additionally, few researchers have braved making definitive statements in contributing to this complex conversation. This comprehensive guide navigates the linguistic history of the 18th and 19th chapters of John's gospel, its assimilation into the Luther Bible, Bach's reliance on Lutheran translations and available scholarship, and explores historical precedent for Bach's *St. John Passion*'s influence on modern Passion Oratorios. These establish a definitive case for why this translation's accuracy frees it from problematic language while also maintaining the musical integrity of Bach's composition. This translation aligns with Bach's possible intention to show collective guilt for Jesus' death rather than specifically blaming "the Jews", as purported by Michael Marissen.¹⁶ Additionally, by

¹⁶ Marissen, 48.

offering an alternative Johannine translation based on recent biblical scholarship, recontextualizing John 18 and 19 helps composers avoid this issue in the future.

Considering the extensive work one would go through to recontextualize it for modern performance, one might wonder if the piece is worth the effort. Would we go to such lengths for a lesser-known piece by a different composer? Notwithstanding the Bach *St. John Passion*'s widely-praised musical value, its continued influence on Passion Oratorios today makes it a seminal work in the history of Western Classical music. Due to this significant influence, its preservation through adaptation is crucial to safeguarding, not only this piece, but the entire Passion Oratorio art form. Bach's *St. John Passion* is an especially important musical work to update for modern performance because of its nature as a precedent for other works within the Passion Oratorio genre. The Chapter IV translation attempts to grapple with the complex history of the *St. John Passion*'s text while updating it for modern audiences in an attempt to preserve the Passion Oratorio genre for the future.

Growing up as a Jew in a place where there were very few other Jewish people, I was somewhat of a spectacle. The feelings of isolation and estrangement were regular parts of everyday life. Unfortunately, many Jewish people feel similarly when performing and listening to Bach's *St. John Passion*. By embracing alternative translations that foster inclusivity and unity, future performances of Bach's *St. John Passion* and Johannine settings hold the potential to transcend divisive narratives and foster collective resonance. Ultimately, the imperative to confront and redress the anti-Semitic language of Bach's *St. John Passion* underscores a broader ethical responsibility within the realm of 21st-century musical performance—an examination of how continual performance of anti-Semitic language relives Christianity's fraught history of

oppressing Jews. If we do not change anything about this work, it cannot survive in the modern era.

As 21st-century musicians, we must decide if we care more about established systems and structures or the real impact music has on people and it is up to us to decide what that impact will be. If we prioritize the wishes of composers who have long passed over the impact music will have on the individuals who hear it, not only is Bach's *St. John Passion* in jeopardy, but much of the Western Classical canon. Updating problematic portions of text cannot save musical works from their problematic history, but these changes can mitigate their impact on audience members today. People must know that we, as artists, see and value their lived experiences. When those experiences are negatively reflected in performance, they carry an adverse and lasting impact. In a musical landscape where Western Classical music struggles to stay relevant, we must prioritize real people over idealistic values. In updating the rhetoric used in Bach's *St. John Passion*, this dissertation serves as a small part in bringing people into a contemporary model of the world today that encourages people to engage with this work rather than disassociate from it.

1.2 Definition of Anti-Semitism

As Bach's *St. John Passion* and the history of Lutheranism are fraught with accusations of anti-Semitism, establishing a reliable definition is crucial for this research. Jewish organizations support the use of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of anti-Semitism which states:

“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed

toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”¹⁷

There are many contemporary examples listed within this working definition, but some of the most relevant examples to this dissertation are the following:

“Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.”¹⁸

One of the foremost issues in the Johannine gospel’s description of Jewish people is that it blatantly blames “the Jews” for Jesus’ death. This is an inaccurate representation because, regardless of whether any Jewish individuals were part of the crowd that demanded Jesus’ crucifixion, the whole of the Jewish people are not responsible for Jesus’ death. Factually, it would be impossible for every Jewish person who existed to have been present at Jesus’ crucifixion. Additionally, almost all of the characters in the Passion narrative are Jewish, including Jesus himself. Regardless of whether any Jewish individuals were present at Jesus’ crucifixion (which there likely were), it is anti-Semitic by this definition to accuse the Jewish people of wrongdoing that was done by a single group comprised of Jews and non-Jews.

¹⁷ International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. 2016. “Working Definition of Antisemitism.” IHRA. 2016. <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism>.

¹⁸ IHRA

“Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective — such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.”¹⁹

John’s gospel consistently represents Jewish leadership as holding power over government institutions, which we know through historical information of first-century Roman-Israeli relations not to be true.²⁰ While John’s gospel does represent the Temple leadership as understanding their inability to authorize Jesus’ crucifixion, it includes several instances of anti-Semitic representations. For example, the gospel represents the Temple leadership as sneakily meeting with Roman authorities to discuss how they would put Jesus to death. Today, the idea that Jews secretly control government agencies is an anti-Semitic trope. Though this anti-Semitic trope may not have existed when John was written, this representative account still harms modern Jewish audiences and people’s perception of the Jewish people.

“Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.”²¹

The most straightforward example of the Johannine gospel’s contribution to anti-Semitism is individuals who claim the Jews killed Jesus to characterize Israel or Israelis. People use tropes such as “the Jews killed Jesus” and Replacement Theology (the idea that Christians have replaced Jews as God’s chosen people because the Jews killed Jesus) to justify hatred and

¹⁹ IHRA

²⁰ Wead, David W, R Alan Culpepper, and Paul N Anderson. 2018. *The Literary Devices in John’s Gospel : Revised and Expanded Edition*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 29.

²¹ IHRA

violence against Jewish people today.²² This is classic anti-Semitism and is additionally rooted in John's gospel.

1.3 Existing Literature Review

Michael Marissen, professor emeritus of music from Swarthmore College, has done a substantial amount of research about Bach's attitude toward Jews and how this attitude is manifest in his music. His book, *Lutheranism, Anti-Judaism, and Bach's St. John Passion* is foundational to our current understanding of how Lutheranism and Bach's *St. John Passion* are impacted by anti-Semitism in 18th-century Germany and anti-Judaism²³ in Bach's life. Understanding the historical context of Bach's *St. John Passion* provides crucial insight into how anti-Semitism affects modern performances of this work. Additionally, Marissen was one of the keynote speakers at the Cleveland Orchestra's 2017 panel discussion aimed at answering the question, "Is Bach's *St. John Passion* Anti-Semitic?" He is likely one of the country's foremost experts in this field and provides thorough, well-documented research that adds tremendous value to this ongoing conversation.

Marissen's approach to the continued performance of the *St. John Passion* is that Bach makes a concerted effort to reduce the anti-Semitism of John's gospel and put further onus on humanity's collective responsibility for Jesus' death. Therefore, with a proper understanding of the world Bach lived in and his purpose within his *St. John Passion*, zero to few changes need to be made in the continued performance of this work.²⁴ While his research is invaluable, this

²² "Replacement Theology | Jewish Voice." n.d. <https://www.jewishvoice.org/learn/replacement-theology>.

²³ anti-Judaism: religions, individuals, or groups opposed to Judaism.

²⁴ Marissen, 70.

dissertation maintains that changing the anti-Semitic language of the *St. John Passion* actually enhances audiences' ability to enjoy Bach's Passions for their original purpose without being bogged down in overtly offensive text. While understanding the history of the text is crucial to providing a usable translation, it is not about expressing blame. Rather it is about preserving the continued performance of this work in a time where anti-Semitic and anti-Judaic words and actions continue to increase in severity and volume in our country. If this work was able to ignite anti-Semitic sentiment in 18th-century Germany, it is also able to do so in 21st-century America.

Rebecca Cypress and Nancy Sinkoff's *Sara Levy's World: Gender, Judaism, and the Bach Tradition in Enlightenment Berlin* is a fascinating dive into Bach's impact on Germany's music scene in the late 18th century. Levy's work with two of J.S. Bach's sons preserved many of his musical works and her great-nephew, Felix Mendelsohn made significant contributions to the German "Bach revival" of the early 19th century.²⁵ Providing a detailed look into the life of 18th-century Germanic Jews, this book indicates the value Bach's works held to the Jewish community as well as the "cultural, political, and aesthetic contexts that shaped Levy's world."²⁶ This book provides an intimate and well-researched look into the life of a Jewish woman from Berlin just after Bach's death. Cypress and Sinkoff's insights help to better understand 18th-century Germanic culture and the challenges Jewish musicians faced in Berlin and beyond.

Erickson's journal article in *Music Quarterly*, "The Early Enlightenment, Jews, and Bach", gives specific insight into the life of Jews in various parts of 18th-century Germany. Additionally, it provides insight into the Brockes Passion narrative used as Bach's primary

²⁵ Cypress, Rebecca, Nancy Sinkoff, and Sara Levy. 2018. *Sara Levy's World Gender, Judaism, and the Bach Tradition in Enlightenment Berlin*. Rochester, Ny University Of Rochester Press, 13.

²⁶ Cypress, 1.

biblical source for the libretto in his *St. John Passion*. When translating from Koine Greek²⁷ to German, he makes the case that Brockes made several notable mistakes where he actually intended to represent Pilate's soldiers as the antagonists who murdered Jesus, rather than the Jews.²⁸ His representation of the anti-Semitic portions of the *St. John Passion* reflects it as a response to unintentional mistakes made while translating to German. However, if these re-translations were not mistakes, they represent an especially heinous attack on the Jewish people.²⁹ In 1714, August the Strong requested that the University of Leipzig provide research to study whether or not Jews required Christian blood for their rituals (today referred to as the anti-Semitic trope of "blood libel").³⁰ While this request displays an anti-Semitic and deeply misunderstood conception of the Jewish people, the University that Bach was in league with determined that there was no evidence for this claim. Erickson does well to present a variety of textual and historical accounts that aim to explain the reasoning behind the egregious *St. John Passion* translation.

Ayana Haviv's choralnet.com article, *Performing the Bach Passions as a Jew*, gives crucial insight into one example of what many Jews feel upon performing the Bach Passions today. The pain caused by the hurtful representation of the Jewish people in the *St. John Passion* is only rivaled by much of the music world's continued refusal to address the Jewish community's long-standing issues with this work. Reviewing the ugly history of violence against Jews during Holy Week, Haviv laments that Western Classical music prioritizes Christian liturgy

²⁷ Koine Greek: the common form of the Greek language, spoken and written during the Hellenistic period, the rule of the Roman Empire, and the rule of the early Byzantine Empire.

²⁸ Erickson

²⁹ Erickson

³⁰ Erickson

over the feelings and beliefs of non-Christians.³¹ The article doesn't pose solutions but rather requests that performers of the *St. John Passion* keep Jewish feelings and history in mind when performing this problematic work.

Lastly, Alfred Dürr's *Johann Sebastian Bach, St. John Passion: Genesis, Transmission, and Meaning* provides valuable insight into the history of interpreting this work. While still arguing that this work is rooted in anti-Semitic ideas, Dürr's book also explores concepts of Christian spirituality alongside Bach's version of Lutheranism. Being his first Passion, Bach's *St. John Passion* arose out of necessity, creativity, and personal values. It met the basic standards required of it from church and civic leadership which was an annual, extensive work that was divided into two parts surrounding the sermon.³² It was also required to be a musical setting of the complete text from one gospel's account of Christ's suffering and death as translated by Martin Luther.³³ The necessities required of Bach were equally matched by creativity and genius eventually denoting this Passion as one of the typifying works in the Passion Oratorio genre. Dürr examines the relationship between evidence of Bach's spirituality, the Lutheran tradition, and the translation history of anti-Semitism in the Luther Bible translation. This translation, as the basis of Bach's *St. John Passion*, possesses glaringly anti-Semitic rhetoric that Bach was at best indifferent toward. Its exploration of the dissonance between the *St. John Passion*'s musical genius and its anti-Semitic text makes Dürr's investigation highly valuable in this topic's existing literature.

³¹ Haviv, Ayana "Performing the Bach Passions as a Jew." n.d. Choralnet.org. Accessed June 1, 2024. <https://choralnet.org/archives/656276>.

³² Dürr, Alfred. *Johann Sebastian Bach, St. John Passion: Genesis, Transmission, and Meaning*. 2000. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 11.

³³ Dürr, 37.

1.4 Literary Reasoning for the Overuse of “hoi Ioudaioi” in John’s Gospel

To identify the reality of the people group referred to as “hoi Ioudaioi” (the Jews), one must identify possible explanations for why this term is used so frequently in John’s gospel. John’s gospel possesses 71 instances of “hoi Ioudaioi” compared to 16 instances within the other three gospels combined.³⁴ The instances of “hoi Ioudaioi” in the other gospels are in primarily neutral contexts as they reference the title Pilate bestowed on Jesus, “King of the Jews.” However, in John’s gospel, there are many additional instances of “hoi Ioudaioi” in particularly negative contexts (including the crowd that demanded Jesus’ crucifixion). Additionally, the gospels share many stories and narrative plotlines, but only John uses “hoi Ioudaioi” so regularly. Where John’s gospel uses “the Jews”, the other synoptic gospels³⁵ use words like Sadducees, elders, lawyers, Pharisees,³⁶ and chief priests.³⁷ These factors have left many scholars wondering, “Why are there so many instances of “hoi Ioudaioi” in John’s gospel specifically?”

Biblical scholars follow two primary theories for why John’s gospel possesses so many instances of “hoi Ioudaioi”: 1) the author of John wrote to a primarily non-Jewish audience and thus used vague terms to prevent the story from being bogged down with identifying the composition of various people groups and 2) the Johannine community was expelled from synagogues in the late first century which created separation from their Jewish roots and resulted in a gradual decline in specificity as John’s gospel was re-translated through the centuries.³⁸

³⁴ Wead, 17.

³⁵ Synoptic Gospels: The first three gospels including Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John is not included due to its delayed arrival and primarily religious rather than historical doctrine.

³⁶ Pharisees: a member of an ancient Jewish sect, distinguished by strict observance of the traditional and written law.

³⁷ Chief Priests: the highest ranking among a number of Jewish priests.

³⁸ Köstenberger, Andreas J. 2013. *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 24.

The first explanation is based primarily on historical information about the author of John. While the author was familiar with Jewish customs and traditions based on the level of specificity with which he wrote about Jewish culture, he also frequently clarified to be understood by a non-Jewish audience. Additionally, the frequent references to the Hebrew bible indicate a level of familiarity likely only to be held by a well-educated person within the Jewish community.³⁹ However, John's gospel also frequently refers to non-Jewish culture and literature. For example, the Logos of John's prologue seems to be derived from the idea of Lady Wisdom in Greek mythology. John chapter 6 alludes to Greco-Roman "mysteries" and John chapter 4 references messianic beliefs held by Samaritans.⁴⁰ While the author of John was likely Jewish, his cultural definitions and inclusion of Greek, Roman, and Samaritan cultures indicate that he likely wrote primarily to a non-Jewish audience. Logic would then follow that writing with a lack of specificity about people groups was an attempt to avoid identifying a variety of people groups to an audience who likely didn't know or care about these specifics.

The second explanation relies heavily on the hypothetical expulsion of the Johannine community from synagogues within the last 30 years of the first century. Through biblical and extra-biblical literature (including the writings of Josephus, Claudius, and Suetonius) we know that the early followers of Jesus were sporadically and locally persecuted by Roman authorities.⁴¹ Throughout the gospel of John, he presents a clear rift between his followers and other individuals within the Jewish community. While there is little extra-biblical evidence, some scholars believe these factors indicate a separation between the Johannine community and other Jewish communities. Furthermore, the additional persecution the Johannine community may

³⁹ Köstenberger, 21.

⁴⁰ Köstenberger, 59.

⁴¹ Wead, 39.

have faced from Roman authorities indicates why John might have written that synagogue authorities and Roman officials were antagonistic to his messiah.⁴² His communities' persecution and possible expulsion at the hands of synagogue leaders and Roman officials may have influenced the identification and tools he used within his Passion narrative. The author of John may have negatively represented these two communities as a way of fighting back against systems of oppression (whether real or perceived).

Regardless of which, if either, of these explanations represents a more accurate truth, neither excuses the hate-filled language present in the gospel of John. Among the most heinous examples include blaming Jews for Jesus' crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea claiming to take Jesus' body secretly "for fear of the Jews", and temple leadership pulling secret strings and running a shadow government behind the scenes to work against Jesus. John's anti-Semitic and anti-Judaic language is especially shocking when considering that the author was, most likely, also Jewish. Uncovering possible explanations for the anti-Semitic language in John's gospel helps to understand its translation history, but does not change the inherently problematic text.

1.5 Translation History of "hoi Ioudaioi" in John's Gospel

While John's gospel could have been written anytime between AD 56-70, the finalized form that was widely distributed came about between AD 90-110.⁴³ Like the other gospels, John's gospel does not contain an identified author but is likely written by some kind of "Johannine community." Three other New Testament books within the Christian bible share a

⁴² Burke, David G. "Translating Hoi Ioudaioi in the New Testament." n.d. www.bible-researcher.com. Accessed June 1, 2024. <https://www.bible-researcher.com/burke1.html>.

⁴³ Köstenberger, 81.

similar writing style and content to the gospel of John. While different writers likely authored all of these books, the similarity of these texts and the authorial identification of the other three books as “John” supports experts’ theory that a Johannine community may be responsible for these texts.⁴⁴

Biblical scholars cannot know what was written in John’s original manuscript because the earliest manuscript we possess is the widely distributed edition written between AD 90-110. Therefore, it is possible that the original form of John shared more similarities to the synoptic gospels and did not possess so many instances of “hoi Ioudaioi.” While there is no way for scholars to know for sure, we do know that the widely distributed edition (which eventually became canon) continued to be used and translated for various languages and peoples.

After being written in Greek, John was translated to Coptic, Syriac, and Latin before the beginning of Constantine’s reign in AD 306. By AD 500 the Christian bible had been translated into Gothic, Georgian, Ge’ez, and Armenian amongst hundreds of other languages.⁴⁵ By AD 1000 it had been translated into Sogdian, Old Nubian, Arabic, and many of the Slavonic languages.⁴⁶ Of these editions and translations, Jerome’s Latin Vulgate version from the 4th century became the dominant edition used in Western Christianity during the Middle Ages, though there was not a definitive version of it used by the whole of the Catholic church until the Sixtine Vulgate in AD 1590.⁴⁷ While the Eastern Orthodox editions were translated into various languages during the Middle Ages to make the Christian bible more accessible, the Western biblical editions largely remained in Latin until Martin Luther’s German translation in AD

⁴⁴ Köstenberger, 13.

⁴⁵ Köstenberger, 60.

⁴⁶ Köstenberger, 60.

⁴⁷ Worth, Roland H. 1992. *Bible Translations: A History through Source Documents*. McFarland, 34.

1522.⁴⁸ Shortly thereafter, many biblical translations in peoples' native language came out including the first English New Testament in AD 1526, written by William Tyndale.

Additionally, due to Gutenberg's invention of the Printing Press about 70 years prior, these editions were easily mass-produced, beginning the modern age of standardized biblical translations.⁴⁹

Compared to the synoptic gospels (especially Matthew), John has very few textual variations when being adapted to other languages over time. While limited archeological evidence prevents scholars from being certain that all of the changes are noted, all of the changes in currently recovered Johannine manuscripts in hundreds of different languages indicate an average of about two variations per chapter (whereas Matthew averages about 20).⁵⁰ This means that the book of John, after the original Koine Greek was widely distributed in AD 90-110, saw very few changes when being translated from AD 110 to Martin Luther's German translation in AD 1522. Specifically, there are three recorded translation errors in John 18 and two recorded errors in John 19 (the two chapters that comprise the John Passion narrative).⁵¹ None of these five translation errors are about "hoi Ioudaioi", meaning that given our currently available archaeological evidence, "hoi Ioudaioi" has been consistently translated into hundreds of languages over 1,400 years. It wasn't until the Luther bible translation into German that there was a sudden shift in translation methodology.

Martin Luther translated the New Testament before the Old Testament, using a combination of the Latin Vulgate, the original Koine Greek, and his own editorial influences

⁴⁸ Worth, 39.

⁴⁹ Worth, 17.

⁵⁰ Zeolla, Gary F. 2012. *Differences between Bible Versions: Third Edition*, 109.

⁵¹ Zeolla, 259.

with the assistance of a team of translators.⁵² Luther aimed to distinguish what later became known as Protestants from Catholics, which included a new biblical translation. However, this biblical translation contained some egregious errors, including the continued mistranslation of every instance of “hoi Ioudaioi” as “der Juden.” From AD 1522 up through the past 50 years, biblical translations in hundreds of different languages have been primarily based on the Luther bible. Only recently have scholars determined the inaccuracies present in the Luther bible and its subsequent translations. The reason “hoi Ioudaioi” is solely translated as “the Jews” in most biblical editions today is because of the indiscriminate and politically motivated translation put forth by Martin Luther. While some previous editions also contained this error, Luther claimed to use language scholarship in his edition as a basis for future translations to be modeled after.⁵³ However, we now know this was not entirely the case.

Recent scholarship on the term “hoi Ioudaioi” provides a different perspective on this term’s history. William Davies argues that, given the term’s evolution over centuries, it is likely that the term “hoi Ioudaioi” could refer to four distinct people groups: 1) descendants of the Hebrew patriarch Judah; 2) natives of Judea (aka Judeans); 3) Jews (determined by religious customs rather than ethnic origin); and 4) people from the Judaeo-Samaritan-Idumaeo-Ituraean-Galilean people groups.⁵⁴ These definitions are based on literature from the Hasmonean dynasty which ruled Judea from BCE 140- BCE 37. While it’s possible the meaning of this word changed over the hundred years from the end of the Hasmonean dynasty to the beginning of the Johannine community, it is a good indicator of the various meanings this word may have

⁵² Hentz, John P. 2017. *History of the Lutheran Version of the Bible*. Trieste Publishing, 46.

⁵³ Hentz, 8.

⁵⁴ Davies, William David. 2008. *The Cambridge History of Judaism. 3, the Early Roman Period*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 51.

possessed during John’s time. While the literal meaning of the word has been determined to indicate “the Jews”, it is very likely that it also literally meant “Judeans” and might also have been used to represent various other peoples depending on its literary or conversational context.⁵⁵

The Bauer lexicon, one of the most authoritative dictionaries on biblical Greek also supports translating “hoi Ioudaioi” as “Judeans” for the following reason:

“Incalculable harm has been caused by simply glossing Ioudaios with ‘Jew’, for many readers or auditors of Bible translations do not practice the historical judgment necessary to distinguish between circumstances and events of an ancient time and contemporary ethnic-religious-social realities, with the result that anti-Judaism in the modern sense of the term is needlessly fostered through biblical texts.”⁵⁶

Given the translation history of “hoi Ioudaioi”, it is clear that the term most likely referred to any combination of Jews (religious), Judeans, descendants of Judah (a large portion of ethnic Jews), and people groups from the entire Roman-ruled region.⁵⁷ The initial translation of this term as “the Jews” was likely related to the gospel of John’s audience and/or the Johannine communities’ late-first-century expulsion from synagogues.⁵⁸ As it was translated into hundreds of different languages through to the end of the Middle Ages, this translation stayed consistent. However, the Luther bible translated this term solely as “der Juden” and most biblical editions to this day have followed this precedent. Only within the last fifty years of biblical scholarship have

⁵⁵ Davies, 78.

⁵⁶ Bauer, Walter. 2010. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. University of Chicago Press, 68.

⁵⁷ Davies, 51.

⁵⁸ Köstenberger, 81.

biblical editions considered re-translating “hoi Ioudaioi” to better reflect its original context. However, most biblical editions continue to make this erroneous error. Additionally, since most people are not biblical/historical scholars, translating “hoi Ioudaioi” as “the Jews” needlessly stokes anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism because most readers do not understand its meaning within the original context. Bible readers should not need to be scholars to accurately decipher its meaning, but rather, biblical translations should provide accurate terminology that better reflects the true meaning of John’s text. Similarly, audience members should not need to be biblical scholars to enjoy Bach’s *St. John Passion* or other Johannine Passions in a setting free from anti-Semitic remarks.

1.6 History of Anti-Semitism in Bach’s Life and the Lutheran Tradition

The history of Lutheranism is fraught with anti-Semitic treatises, remarks, and translations. It began with Lutheranism’s founder, Martin Luther, whose infamous 1543 treatise “On the Jews and Their Lies” began the anti-Semitic depictions that are foundational in Lutheran tradition.⁵⁹ In his early years, he aimed to convert Jews to Lutheranism and, later in life, began to persecute them. This vicious treatise calls for synagogues to be set on fire, rabbis to be forbidden from teaching, and Jewish homes and property to be confiscated amongst other hate-filled utterances.⁶⁰ Luther’s anti-Semitic treatise was popular literature amongst Nazis in Germany during the Holocaust. It has often been used by a variety of Christian groups to justify Jewish oppression over the past several centuries.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Marissen, 23.

⁶⁰ Luther, Martin, and Texe W Marris. 2014. *On the Jews and Their Lies*. Austin, Tx: Rivercrest Pub.

⁶¹ Marissen, 30.

J.S. Bach's history with Jews is, likewise, fraught as he wrote nearly exclusively for the Lutheran church. Bach owned a copy of Martin Luther's treatise, "On the Jews and Their Lies", though not necessarily when his *St. John Passion* was written in 1724.⁶² Bach used an 18th-century derogatory term for Jews in Germany in his *St. John Passion* and several cantatas by writing "Jüden" instead of "Juden." While "der Juden" simply translates as "the Jews", "der Jüden" possessed an inherently negative connotation as its use was limited to derogatory contexts.⁶³ One striking example is throughout Martin Luther's anti-Semitic treatise, "Von den Jüden und iren Lügen" ("On the Jews (derogatory) and Their Lies). Additionally, the term "Jüden" was employed in Nazi propaganda to dehumanize the Jewish people to the general German populace.⁶⁴ While Bach had little control over biblical quotes he used from the Luther Bible translation, he specifically chose to use derogatory language toward Jews by writing "der Jüden" instead of "der Juden."

In addition to using "der Jüden" throughout his *St. John Passion*, the stubbornness reflected in Bach's representation of Jews in the *St. John Passion*'s "turba" choruses references an anti-Semitic idea stemming from the Middle Ages. Christians have often attacked Jews for their refusal of the Christian message, leading many Christian congregations to view Jews as obstinate and even to hold Good Friday prayer services for Jewish conversion.⁶⁵ Bach's depiction of Jews as stubborn and unwilling to accept Jesus as their savior reflects anti-Semitic sentiment leading back to the founder of Lutheranism itself.

⁶² Erickson.

⁶³ Erickson.

⁶⁴ The Holocaust Explained. n.d. "Informants – the Holocaust Explained: Designed for Schools." The Holocaust Explained. <https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/resistance-responses-collaboration/german-collaboration-and-complicity/informants/>.

⁶⁵ Dürr, 440.

While there are strong indications Bach may have held anti-Semitic views, there is no surviving record of him saying or writing anything anti-Semitic outside of his music.⁶⁶

Additionally, some claim that Bach's choice of text for Chorales and arias within his *St. John Passion* indicates a collective responsibility for Jesus' death rather than specifically blaming "the Jews."⁶⁷ One of the choruses poses the question, "Who is it that struck you, Jesus?" with the following stanza responding "I and my sins." This reflects the Lutheran theological conception of Atonement where Jesus willingly sacrificed himself to pay a blood atonement to cover the sins of God's Elect.⁶⁸ In doing so, it suggests that Jesus went to the cross to cover Christians' future sins. Moreover, the opening Chorale ends with the line "I lived a worldly life of indulgence and pleasure, and you must suffer for it." Some people believe these lines indicate Bach believed in collective responsibility for Jesus' death rather than blaming "the Jews." In this theory, the anti-Semitic remarks in his *St. John Passion* are biblical quotes Bach was required to include to keep with Lutheran tradition and liturgy.

However, we know Leipzig was a particularly anti-Semitic culture within the already hostile 18th-century Germany. All Jews were forced to register as such with German authorities and Leipzig's government did not permit Jews to live there except on special permissions, meaning there was one Jewish family in all of Leipzig when Bach arrived in 1723.⁶⁹ This number only ever increased to six during Bach's lifetime making it likely that Bach rarely interacted with Jews. While he may have interacted with Jewish merchants and Jews who were well-connected enough to attend his Collegium concerts, these occasions would have been rare.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Erickson.

⁶⁷ Marissen, 43.

⁶⁸ Corbett, George. *Annunciations: Sacred Music for the Twenty-First Century*. 2019. Open Book Publishers, 81.

⁶⁹ Erickson.

⁷⁰ Erickson.

There are a few documented examples of individuals providing safety and security for Jews in Leipzig, but there is no indication that Bach gave much thought to the repressive conditions Leipzig imposed on Jews. Additionally, Bach had to pass a theological examination issued by Leipzig University theologians to undertake positions as Municipal Director of Music and Cantor of St. Thomas, whose doctrine we know to be as hostile toward Jews as the remainder of Leipzig.⁷¹ The anti-Semitism of Lutheranism, Germany, and Leipzig enshrouded Bach during his lifetime and there is little evidence that he strongly differed in beliefs from those within his church and community.

In 17th and 18th-century Germany, it was common for Christians to terrorize Jewish communities on Good Friday (as has been common throughout Europe since the Middle Ages and peaked during the reign of Nazi Germany). Christian communities would leave Good Friday services and attack Jews, burn their homes, steal their property, and even kill them.⁷² This horrifying tradition was established after mobs of Christians became riled up with Jewish hatred after hearing anti-Semitic messages during Good Friday service. The entirety of Holy Week was a time when it was recorded that Jews would hide away in their houses and leave their premises as little as possible for fear of persecution.⁷³ Bach's *St. John Passion* is one such work intended for Good Friday service that may have stirred up anti-Jewish sentiment in its listeners. Again, while we do not know whether Bach intended to present an anti-Semitic message or if it was a result of the required Lutheran liturgy, it is likely that his *St. John Passion* was used as an instigator in calling church-goers to anti-Semitic action on Good Friday.

⁷¹ Erickson.

⁷² Cypess, 12.

⁷³ Cypess, 25.

There is little definitive evidence to determine whether Bach was anti-Semitic during his lifetime, but hostility toward Jews is overtly present in many of his works (especially his *St. John Passion*). Blaming the Jews for Jesus' crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea claiming to be scared of claiming Jesus' body "for fear of the Jews", and saying that Jesus' people (the Jews) rejected their savior are all anti-Semitic tropes that permeate his *St. John Passion*. These few examples display a pattern of hostility in Bach's texts that Jewish audiences may find difficult to experience. Adapting this work for audiences that likely include Jews helps to mitigate its historically problematic impact. There is no single solution to this far-reaching and complex issue, however, changing the text of Bach's *St. John Passion* contributes one possibility to a wide scope of possible adaptations. Additionally, adapting the text to remove its anti-Semitic elements is more possible now than ever due to modern scholarship. For this seminal work to continue to be performed, for Jewish and non-Jewish audiences alike, the anti-Semitic text must be dealt with in some capacity. While changing the problematic portions of the text is not the only solution, it is a viable one that contributes to this work's continued performance in the Western Classical canon.

Considering the strong history of anti-Semitism within Lutheran tradition, Bach's lifetime, and the performance history of his *St. John Passion*, one might wonder if redacting the text is enough to remove the stain of hatred toward Jews present in this work. It is difficult to determine if it is possible to create an absence of anti-Semitism in future performances of the *St. John Passion* or if it is only possible to make it less anti-Semitic. While it may be possible to adapt the anti-Semitic text using modern biblical scholarship, the work itself is steeped in a harmful performance history. The long-standing history of hate-filled performances of this work cannot be eradicated, but changing the text of this work helps create a new precedent for future

performances of the *St. John Passion* which prioritizes people over historical practice. As musicians continue to perform the *St. John Passion* with adapted text, the hate-filled associations can live in our memories rather than in the present. The memory of anti-Semitic performances can serve as a warning rather than a harsh reality that continues to haunt us today. While there are many possible approaches to this complex discussion, in proposing the removal of much of the anti-Semitic text from Bach's *St. John Passion*, it may eventually be appreciated solely for the powerful musical work that it is unmarred by hate-filled words and ideas.

While the history of Lutheranism is fraught with anti-Semitism, Jews' status within this denomination now varies by sect. Within the last 40 years, certain sects of the Lutheran church have repudiated their founder's anti-Semitic beliefs. One of the most well-known examples, which sparked several other Lutheran churches to follow suit, was Grace Lutheran Church's public repudiation of Martin Luther in 1994.⁷⁴ A sect of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America), this Chicagoan church had members silently march to West Suburban Temple Har Zion to show regret for their church's history of defending Martin Luther. They recognized that not only were his comments violently anti-Semitic, they also recognized the influence Luther's writings had on sentiment against Jews in Nazi Germany. At this time, five of the eight million members of the ELCA lived in the Chicago area, making this one of the largest and most public repudiations of Martin Luther the Lutheran church has ever seen.⁷⁵

However, many churches within the Lutheran denomination have done little or nothing to rectify their religion's fraught history and continue to hold Martin Luther in high esteem. For example, the NALC (North American Lutheran Church) continues to hold prayer services in

⁷⁴ Backover, Andrew, and Staff Reports. 1994. "LUTHERANS PUBLICLY REPUDIATE FOUNDER." Chicago Tribune. November 14, 1994. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/1994/11/14/lutherans-publicly-repudiate-founder/>.

⁷⁵ Backover.

hopes of converting Jews to Christianity and has, at best, vaguely shown remorse for centuries of Christian oppression of Jews.⁷⁶ Possibly more problematic, however, is the continued celebration of Martin Luther while not mentioning his troubled history of anti-Semitism.⁷⁷ Remembering the past is an important step in recognizing past mistakes to make positive changes in the future. By recognizing Lutheranism's fraught history, we can remember the past and learn from it as we actively fight against anti-Semitism in both words and actions.

Though its history is steeped in anti-Semitism, the Bach *St. John Passion* possesses an important role within the Christian tradition. Christian communities within and outside of Lutheranism enjoy this work's continued performance on Good Friday services around the world. It holds special religious and spiritual value to many people, making its continued performance imperative. While the history between Jews and Christians is especially fraught, there are also beautiful instances of mutual understanding, coexistence, and altruism between these two groups. In comprising one possible solution to a complex issue, Christian communities may continue to enjoy a work that holds special significance while showing kindness and understanding toward the Jewish people.

⁷⁶ "Good Friday." n.d. North American Lutheran Church. Accessed May 30, 2024. <https://thenalc.org/worship-resources/good-friday/>.

⁷⁷ "Martin Luther, Renewer of the Church, 1546 (February 18)." n.d. North American Lutheran Church. Accessed May 30, 2024. <https://thenalc.org/worship-resources/festivals-commemorations/martin-luther-renewer-of-the-church-1546-february-18/>.

Chapter II: Research Methodology

2.1 Review of Translation Sources

The following translation of John 18 and 19 stems from a meticulous examination of four distinct biblical editions: a faithful rendition of the Luther Bible in English, the New American Standard Bible (NASB), the Complete Jewish Bible (CJB), and The Jewish Annotated New Testament (JANT). The Luther Bible was once celebrated for its endeavor to incorporate the original Greek text into its New Testament translation, alongside the Latin Vulgate. However, due to a lack of scholarship and its politicized motivations, the Luther bible does not constitute a completely accurate translation of the New Testament.⁷⁸ Notably, the consistent translation of the Greek term “hoi Ioudaioi” as “der Juden” (the Jews) carries a historically anti-Semitic connotation, rendering it unsuitable for contemporary biblical audiences. Consequently, in this retranslation of Bach’s *St. John Passion* and chapters 18 and 19 of John, the translation honors Christian tradition while amending problematic anti-Semitic or anti-Judaic narratives. Furthermore, the New American Standard Bible, renowned for its authoritative literal translation and widespread usage among Lutheran denominations, modernizes the text from its somewhat antiquated form.⁷⁹ The Complete Jewish Bible provides accurate alternative translations beyond “the Jews” and The Jewish Annotated New Testament provides scholarly support and further enriches this aim.

⁷⁸ Luther, James, Joseph Blenkinsopp, and Society Of Biblical Literature. 1988. *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary*. New York: Harperone, 408.

⁷⁹ Köstenberger, Andreas J, and David A Croteau. 2012. *Which Bible Translation Should I Use?* B&H Publishing Group, 29.

The selection of the Luther Bible as the foundational text for this translation stems from its pivotal role in narrating the Passion story throughout the annals of Western music. Given the Bach Passions' emblematic status in the Passion Oratorio genre, which predominantly relies on translations sourced from the Luther Bible rather than those derived from the Catholic translation tradition, this choice underscores a commitment to preserving the historical lineage of Western Classical music. Rather than trying to completely remit this history, this translation aims to update inaccurate and problematic portions of the text so that the foundation can remain the same. While acknowledging the Luther Bible's deficiencies compared to modern scholarship, it remains noteworthy for its authoritative word-for-word translation, rectifying numerous inaccuracies inherent in most versions of the Latin Vulgate.⁸⁰ The Luther Bible's entrenched history within the Passion Oratorio genre thus renders it a congruent point of departure for this translation within the realm of Western Classical music.

Many authors of biblical commentaries, such as John R. Kohlenberger III, consider the New American Standard Bible to be the most accurate literal translation of the Christian bible to date, partially due to its use of the "formal equivalence" methodology rather than attempting to match English idioms.⁸¹ Drawing from recent critical editions of the original Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic texts, the NASB complements the Luther Bible translation, particularly in rectifying instances where the literal meaning may have been obscured due to political motivations or scholarly deficiencies. While bearing little similarity now, the NASB stems from the King James Version which shares many similarities to the Luther bible. The NASB's rigorous scholarship

⁸⁰ Luther, 53.

⁸¹ Kohlenberger III, John R. 1995. *The Precise Parallel New Testament : Greek Text, King James Version, Rheims New Testament, Amplified Bible, New International Version, New Revised Standard Version, New American Bible, New American Standard Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 375.

and contemporary language make it an apt supplement for addressing word-for-word inaccuracies within the Luther Bible translation.

Authored by David H. Stern, the Complete Jewish Bible stands as a premier New Testament translation from a Jewish perspective.⁸² Stern created a one-of-a-kind translation of the New Testament (or as he and many Messianic Jews refer to "B'rit Hadashah") transliterating numerous Greek words into Hebrew to foster closer alignment with the original Hebrew language and Jewish culture.⁸³ Stern's adept portrayal of Jewish figures within the gospel narratives is grounded in literary and archaeological evidence, making it particularly unique and praiseworthy by biblical scholars. The Complete Jewish Bible thus serves as a valuable aide in mitigating anti-Semitic and anti-Judaic texts present in the other two translations of John.

The Jewish Annotated New Testament, a product of collaborative scholarship from esteemed Jewish scholars including Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, further enriches the CJB's translation endeavor. Rooted in the New Revised Standard Version but adapted to reflect the insights of Jewish scholarship, this annotated edition illuminates the Jewish cultural context of New Testament figures. Unlike the Complete Jewish Bible, it offers comprehensive annotations that provide nuanced contextual justification for its translational choices. Thus, The Jewish Annotated New Testament provides robust support for the updated translations offered in the Complete Jewish Bible.

In synthesizing these diverse sources, the ensuing retranslation of John 18 and 19 integrates the English rendition of the Luther Bible with the NASB to address outdated scholarship and archaic language. Simultaneously, it replaces instances of anti-Semitic and anti-

⁸² Köstenberger, *Which Bible Translation*, 81.

⁸³ Stern, David H. 1998. *The Complete Jewish Bible: An English Version of the Tanakh and B'rit Hadashah*. Clarksville, Md Jewish New Testament Publications, 3.

Judaic rhetoric with the narrative framework of the Complete Jewish Bible, supported by insights from The Jewish Annotated New Testament. This wide-ranging blend of source materials upholds the Lutheran tradition, ensures biblical fidelity, and employs appropriate terminology, thereby fostering a translation that resonates with both historical precedence and contemporary sensibilities.

One possible area of concern is that, given the oppressive history of Lutheranism against Jews, is it possible to completely remove the anti-Semitism from biblical translations based on Lutheran tradition or only to reduce it? By beginning with a translation from a culture that actively persecuted Jews, is it possible to remove the anti-Semitic history associated with the Luther Bible? While there is no way to separate Lutheranism from its anti-Semitic history (nor should there be an attempt to), adapting the Luther Bible text can completely remove any anti-Semitism from the Passion narration itself. In doing so, the anti-Semitism of the *St. John Passion* can become a memory rather than actively acting antagonistically toward today's Jewish community. Concurrently, it is imperative to remember Lutheranism's associated history with anti-Semitism so that we do not inadvertently repeat it. By adopting a stance of historical remembrance rather than active commemoration, the *St. John Passion* can be salvaged from its anti-Semitic associations in future performances, while remembering its troubled past in separate historical studies.

2.2 Procedure for Determining Translation Accuracy

The primary methodology for determining translational accuracy is a comparative analysis between the original Koine Greek narrative and the proposed English rendition. Preferring the most literal word-for-word translation avoids any previous editorial adjustments

made by other biblical translators. In contrast, dynamic equivalence relies on the interpreter's comprehension of both ancient and contemporary cultures to establish modern phrases that accurately encapsulate biblical meaning. While some well-regarded dynamic equivalent translations exist, they are primarily for use in non-scholarly contexts and would not be appropriate for this translation.⁸⁴

This translation adheres to formal equivalence, supplemented by idiomatic⁸⁵ translations when the former fails to seamlessly transition into modern English. This approach ensures an accurate portrayal of the original text devoid of editorial distortions. Subsequently, any further adaptations are an attempt to align with historical evidence about the culture Jesus lived in, a dimension notably lacking in the gospel of John (one of the reasons it is not considered a synoptic gospel). Moreover, the Protestant tradition's affinity toward word-for-word translations, in opposition to the phrase-by-phrase translations associated with the Catholic tradition, underscores this translation's alignment with the historical trajectory of the Luther Bible and prevailing biblical scholarship.⁸⁶

2.3 Examination of Limitations in Scholarship

As with any single translation, it is impossible to accomplish everything because different objectives are often inherently antagonistic. This translation's primary purpose is to provide an accurate biblical translation based on formal equivalence and informed by historical insight into the Jewish people. However, certain shortcomings accompany this approach. Prioritizing word-

⁸⁴ Köstenberger, *Which Bible Translation*, 6.

⁸⁵ Idiomatic: a paraphrased translation of a text that prioritizes perceived meaning over either word-for-word or phrase-for-phrase translations.johann

⁸⁶ Köstenberger, *Which Bible Translation*, 47.

for-word accuracy may occasionally reduce textual intelligibility in English when phrases fail to align seamlessly. Moreover, adherence to formal equivalence restricts the liberty of poetic license, potentially compromising the artistry of the translation. Criticism may also ensue regarding attempts to deviate from traditional biblical renderings entrenched over centuries. Nevertheless, the imperative to purge anti-Semitic language from the Johannine gospel, detrimental to current Jewish communities, supersedes the imperative of adherence to tradition.

While an abundance of scholarly resources facilitates speculation regarding the demographic composition of Jesus' audiences, the absence of firsthand accounts (beyond the synoptic gospels) poses a recurrent challenge.⁸⁷ Relying on literary evidence, while affording insights into first-person perspectives, introduces the prospect of bias, particularly within religious texts. The gospel of John, possibly prejudiced by a Johannine expulsion from synagogues, underscores the inherently speculative nature of literary-based reconstructions. Therefore, scholars propose reconstructive accounts that will most likely never be definitively confirmed. However, while definitive confirmation remains elusive, scholarly conjectures bolster the contention that "hoi Ioudaioi" should not be invariably equated with "the Jews."

In reconstructing a historical narrative framework based on modern associations, one might accuse this dissertation of utilizing the viewpoint of presentism,⁸⁸ which is a cultural bias and fallacy historians attempt to avoid. While all efforts to circumvent this bias have been made, it is impossible to analyze any artistic work outside of one's own cultural upbringing. Art will always be viewed in reference to previously viewed art and music will always be analyzed in comparison to previously heard music. We do not choose our upbringings which often determine

⁸⁷ Köstenberger, *Encountering John*, 11.

⁸⁸ Presentism: the introduction of current perspectives and ideas into interpretations of the past.

our biases, but do our best to avoid allowing these biases to impact our work. At its heart, this is the same assertion being made in this dissertation. The cultural lens in which the majority of today's concert attendees view is one where anti-Semitism runs rampant. We have all heard anti-Semitic tropes like "the Jews killed Jesus" or "the Jews secretly control the government." It is because of this harmful frame of reference that the work should be updated for an audience viewing Bach's *St. John Passion* through this cultural lens. While it should not influence how we understand the history of Bach's *St. John Passion*, adapting musical works to fit a modern cultural lens is actually the heart of anti-presentism because music can only exist in the present. We are not inflicting modern ideas on previous iterations of this work but rather presenting a musical rendition that lives in the present. Updating the *St. John Passion* to remove harmful anti-Semitic text is at the heart of presenting a fulfilling performance of this work in the modern era. While the harm caused by this piece in previous performances cannot be eradicated, it can be mitigated in present-day performances.

Chapter III: The Bach *St. John Passion*'s Structure and Continued Influence

In determining the merit of biblical translations worthy of rectifying problematic elements in Bach's *St. John Passion*, a fundamental consideration is whether the work is worth updating. Given the troubling history of this work, should it still be considered for modern performance? While this answer remains subjective, the enduring significance of Bach's *St. John Passion* within the lexicon of the Passion Oratorio genre is undeniable and unrivaled (other than by his *St. Matthew Passion*). Numerous acclaimed Passion Oratorios crafted in the last 25 years draw inspiration from this work, underscoring its enduring legacy. Bach's Passions are foundational to the trajectory of the Passion Oratorio genre, rendering an examination of the Passion Oratorio's origins indispensable for a comprehensive understanding of recent developments within this musical domain. In examining the roots of the Passion Oratorio genre and its continued influence, the ensuing discourse articulates a rationale for why this work is worth updating and why it should continue to be performed in the future.

While previous monophonic Passion settings of the 15th and 16th centuries were written for liturgical purposes, J.S. Bach was the first to set the Passion Oratorio liturgy for large musical forces in a polyphonic setting.⁸⁹ In contrast to the Catholic origins of the requiem mass tradition, the Passion Oratorio is firmly planted in the Lutheran tradition with previous Passion settings written by Lutheran composers like Heinrich Schütz and Giacomo Carissimi. While Bach was not the first to create a Passion Oratorio, nor were his Oratorios particularly popular during his lifetime, their dramatic nature and expressive music led them to become very popular in 18th-

⁸⁹ Smallsman, Basil. 1970. *The Background of Passion Music*, 19.

century Germany and expanded to be among the most popular Passion Oratorios in existence today.

Unlike other genres (such as the requiem mass), the Passion Oratorio is not based on a previously formed liturgical structure. While Passion Plays have always been performed during Passiontide services, before Bach, the music was minimal and the readings were exact biblical retellings of the death and resurrection of Jesus.⁹⁰ The oratorio form of the Passion Play didn't exist until Bach typified the genre. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* and *St. John Passion* are the prototypes for the Passion Oratorio structure and, due to their musical excellence and influence, continue to be highly influential on the genre to this day.

There are five distinct features present in both of Bach's surviving Passion Oratorios that typified the genre: 1) a tenor evangelist who narrates the story using exact biblical quotations from the Luther Bible, 2) the interspersing of reflective Chorales between scenes of action, 3) Jesus singing as a bass voice type, 4) intention to fit within the Good Friday liturgical story in two parts, 5) and scoring that does not include brass or percussion as "festive" instruments were not permitted during the Lenten season.⁹¹ In addition to these five elements that are foundational to the Passion Oratorio genre as a whole, Bach's *St. John Passion* possesses the following characteristic distinctions: 1) there is an exception in the format when there is no reflective Chorale during the scene with Jesus, the crowd, and Pilate, 2) the Chorale (#22) "Durch dein Gefängnis, Gottes Sohn, muß uns die Freiheit kommen" is centralized within Act 2 to display a symmetrical form, 3) Bach pulls two stories from the gospel of Matthew (Peter weeping after betraying Jesus and the temple veil ripping during his crucifixion), and 4) the evangelist only

⁹⁰ Smallsman, 12.

⁹¹ Smallsman, 9.

sings exact biblical quotations from chapters 18 and 19 of John in the Lutheran Bible translation.⁹² While some Passion Oratorios still adhere to these guidelines, many of these components have changed in consequent settings to give composers more room to create their own specific vision. However, as Bach's Passion Oratorios are foundational to the genre, his influence can still be seen in nearly every Passion Oratorio to date.⁹³

Considering Matthew Shepard (2016)

Considering Matthew Shepard is a modern, three-part Passion Oratorio by Craig Hella Johnson reliving the life and tragic murder of Matthew Shepard, a man who was tortured and killed by three fellow students because he was homosexual. It is one of many works within the last century to compare the last days of Jesus to those of a modern figure (or group of people) whose untimely death aroused compassion similar to that of the Passion narrative. Other such works within this unique subgenre of the Passion Oratorio include *The Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*, *Easter, 1906*, and *A Time for Life*. *Considering Matthew Shepard* has a wide array of musical influences, including gospel, blues, American musicals, jazz, chant, hymns, country, minimalism, and aleatory.⁹⁴ While utilizing diverse musical influences within and outside of Western Classical music, much of what defines this work as a Passion Oratorio is rooted in the history of the Western Classical genre. What makes *Considering Matthew Shepard* unique, however, is the multi-faceted influences that make it a universally approachable work.

⁹² Fuchs, 27.

⁹³ Niekerk, Van Johann, and Giselle Wyers. *Messiahs and Pariahs: Suffering and Social Conscience in the Passion Genre from J.S. Bach's St. Matthew Passion (1727) to David Lang's The Little Match Girl Passion (2007)*, 2009.

⁹⁴ Brown, Ryan R. 'We Tell Each Other Stories': *Musical Dramaturgy in Craig Hella Johnson's Considering Matthew Shepard*, 2021.

The instrumentation of *Considering Matthew Shepard* includes a clarinet, piano, strings, percussion, and guitar alongside SATB choir with frequent solos. The unique instrumentation allows for a contemporary soundscape that is also attentive to the history of the Passion Oratorio genre. The strings play suspensions and resolutions similar to that of Bach while the guitar and percussion assist jazz and gospel-influenced portions.⁹⁵ Johnson said that he was influenced in his composition of *Considering Matthew Shepard* by composers such as Benjamin Britten, J.S. Bach, and Manuel de Falla.⁹⁶ For example, a melodic quote from Bach's *Prelude in C Major* bookends the oratorio to pay homage to the creator of the Passion Oratorio form.⁹⁷ Johnson intersperses action with reflective poetry that considers what it means to be human and how that should influence how we treat each other. While the text is comprised of a larger range of sources than J.S. Bach's original Passion Oratorio settings, the form and characters share many similarities with the originator of the Passion Oratorio genre.

The traditional roles of an Evangelist/Narrator, Christ figure, and angry mob are all present in *Considering Matthew Shepard*, though they take different forms than in the Bach settings. While the evangelist/narrator is always a tenor in Bach's Passions, the whole choir functions as narrators in Johnson's setting.⁹⁸ Additionally, very little of the narrative text contains any religious components, as opposed to Bach's Passions whose source material for the evangelist is solely from the Christian gospels. In Johnson's setting, Matthew Shepard functions as the Christ figure who is wrongfully murdered and is represented by a variety of singers and narrators. In Bach's settings (as well as in future settings such as Arvo Pärt's *Passio*, Richard

⁹⁵ Ward, Robert, and Richard Sparks. *Passion Settings of the 20th- and 21st-Centuries Focusing on Craig Hella Johnson's Considering Matthew Shepard*, 2018.

⁹⁶ Brown, 37.

⁹⁷ Niekerk, 35.

⁹⁸ Brown, 45.

Danielpour's *The Passion of Yeshua*, and James MacMillan's *St. John Passion*) the bass soloist alone sings the role of Jesus. While the traditional Passion roles are present in *Considering Matthew Shepard*, the vocal settings vary, allowing more participants to contribute in telling the story (a critical component of *Considering Matthew Shepard's* goal).⁹⁹

One of the most notable character influences from Bach's Passions is the nature of the angry mob demanding Jesus' crucifixion. In *Considering Matthew Shepard*, Johnson directly quotes Bach when the Westboro Baptist crowd protesting Matthew Shepard's funeral shouts "kreuzige, kreuzige!" alongside other homophobic slurs.¹⁰⁰ The bloodthirsty and hate-filled nature of the crowd in Bach's Passions is similarly reflected within Johnson's setting. Additionally, the fence on which Matthew Shepard was left to die is representative of Jesus' Cross but also represents the relationship between life and death, beauty and shame, and love and hate. The fence is a central metaphoric component of Johnson's *Considering Matthew Shepard*, representing a transformation point in both Johnson's and Bach's Passion Oratorios.¹⁰¹

Neither Bach nor Johnson's settings possess a resurrection scene. For Bach, the resurrection was not necessary because his Passion Oratorios were written for Good Friday service, two days before Resurrection Sunday. In the case of *Considering Matthew Shepard*, the Passion portion ends with the deaths of both Jesus and Matthew Shepard. Similar to other modern Passion Oratorios (including *The Passion of Yeshua*, *Easter, 1906*, and *The Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*), Johnson's humanistic approach makes the divine nature of Jesus' resurrection a hamper to his goals. The heart of the Passion Oratorio genre is to watch a tragedy

⁹⁹ Brown, 46.

¹⁰⁰ Niekerk, 27.

¹⁰¹ Ward, 10.

unfold, temporarily marred by hope, which is gut-wrenchingly clear in Johnson's *Considering Matthew Shepard*.

While Johnson's format is divided into three parts including a Prologue, Passion, and Epilogue, the Bach Passions are always split into two parts due to the necessity of a break for the Sermon during Good Friday service.¹⁰² However, the "recitative, aria, reflective hymn" format of Bach's Passions is loosely reflected in the format of Johnson's *Considering Matthew Shepard*.¹⁰³ While the form, instrumentation, textual sources, and characters of *Considering Matthew Shepard* vary from the traditional form, the heart of the oratorio remains intact. While Bach utilized specific criteria in his Passion Oratorios, it was likely not his intention to typify the genre with his works as the centerpiece.¹⁰⁴ Utilizing influences from Bach's Passions and creating a new story and dialogue, Johnson creates a beautiful and gut-wrenching story that touches peoples' hearts and minds.

Easter, 1906 (2022)

In league with *Considering Matthew Shepard*, *Easter, 1906* shares many of the same characters as the common Passion Oratorio narrative while utilizing unique text and instrumentation. William Averitt's style is highly influenced by jazz, ragtime, blues, and serialism.¹⁰⁵ The instrumentation of *Easter, 1906* is unique among Passion Oratorios, utilizing four-hand piano, two percussionists, double choir, and narrator(s).¹⁰⁶ Averitt wanted to create a Passion Oratorio that felt like it utilized forces similar to that of previous oratorios while being

¹⁰² Sholl, 50.

¹⁰³ Ward, 14.

¹⁰⁴ Brown, 51.

¹⁰⁵ Ward, 57.

¹⁰⁶ Moore, Stephany Andrea. *Millennial Passions: New Music and the Ends of History, 1989- 2001*, 2018.

accessible to performers with fewer resources available to them. In addition to the peculiar instrumentation of the work, William Averitt's unique ten-tone row compositional system gives his music a unique soundscape compared to other works in the Passion Oratorio genre.¹⁰⁷ The instrumentation and composition style of *Easter, 1906* make it distinctive against the backdrop of previous Passion Oratorios, while still holding to the Passion story.

Robert Bode compiled the libretto for *Easter, 1906* from newspaper articles, eyewitness accounts, biblical narratives from the books of Matthew and Lamentations, and his own poetry.¹⁰⁸ The textual sources and storytelling means are similar to strategies employed by Craig Hella Johnson in *Considering Matthew Shepard*. The narrator in *Easter, 1906* speaks crucial plot points with a similar purpose to the evangelist's recitative sections in Bach's Passions. The narrator keeps the story moving forward, a different character sings a song or aria, and the choir reflects on these events.¹⁰⁹ This sequence is a staple of the Passion Oratorio genre and is also used in *Considering Matthew Shepard*, James MacMillan's *St. John Passion*, and Penderecki's *St. Luke Passion* among others. While the narrator in Bach's Passions was a tenor evangelist whom the Passions were named after, the narrator in *Easter 1906* speaks the narration dramatically to set up future action leading to collective reflection.

The most notable similarity *Easter, 1906* shares with previous Passion Oratorios is the pool of characters from which it draws. In movement "XI. The Trial Continues", one of the double choirs tells the story of Jesus' journey to the Cross while the other tells the story of Will Allen, an innocent Black man who was lynched on Springfield, Missouri's town square over

¹⁰⁷ Sholl, 102.

¹⁰⁸ Fuchs, Michael, and Bradley Jenson. *Bach's St. John Passion for the Twenty-First Century*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2023.

¹⁰⁹ Fuchs, 138.

Easter weekend of 1906. The movement begins with the choir politely taking turns telling their respective stories which share eerie similarities. By the climax of the movement, both choirs transform into bloodthirsty mobs shouting over each other and demanding the deaths of Jesus and Will Allen respectively. Choir I sings “Let him be crucified” while Choir II sings “Hang ‘im”, strongly suggestive of Bach’s “Kreuzige, kreuzige!” chorus in his *St. John Passion* and used in other modern Passion Oratorios including *Considering Matthew Shepard*. Bach’s setting is filled with long suspensions and resolutions stacked over rhythmic, melismatic figures. Averitt also stacks long note values on top of sharp, rhythmic figures, but uses discordant harmonies without resolution until the very end of the movement.¹¹⁰ While the musical means vary, the mob character in the chorus is a clear homage to Bach’s Passions, *Considering Matthew Shepard*, and James MacMillan’s *St. John Passion*.

Will Allen, representative of the Christ figure in *Easter, 1906*, shares many archetypes with the Jesus character in Bach’s Passion settings. Both are represented as bass voices, both were put on false trial for crimes they didn’t commit, both refused to respond when prodded to defend themselves, and both were forced to carry their own means of death to the place where they would be killed. In a further irony, Will Allen’s murder occurred on Holy Saturday night, the day before Easter Sunday. While the largely Christian crowd that lynched Will Allen celebrated Jesus’ death and resurrection, they murdered three innocent Black Americans on the town square.¹¹¹ This irony is a central component of *Easter, 1906*, and is made clear by the Christ-figure parallels between Jesus and Will Allen in movement XI. Other twenty-first-century Passion Oratorios, such as *Considering Matthew Shepard* and *The Seven Last Words of the*

¹¹⁰ Moore, 33.

¹¹¹ Moore, 35.

Unarmed, also parallel Jesus' wrongful trial and execution to a modern Christ figure who was killed. While the Passion story needs no assistance to be relevant to today's audiences, by relating Jesus' story to recent figures, the Passion narrative reflects on humanity's current state and injustices of the modern era.

The characteristic distinctions of Bach's *St. John Passion* carry great influence on works that set these same texts. While the *St. John Passion* is one of the typifying works of the Passion Oratorio genre, it also serves as a template for future compositions based primarily on John's gospel (for example James MacMillan's *St. John Passion* and Arvo Pärt's *Passio*). Some aspects of the *St. John Passion* that are specifically paralleled in *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* and *Easter, 1906* are 1) the symmetry of movement structures, 2) the absence of reflection within the "Trial" scene, 3) musical similarities to the "Kreuzige, kreuzige!" chorus, and 4) exact biblical quotations from chapters 18 and 19 of John's gospel.

Seven Last Words of the Unarmed (2015)

Seven Last Words of the Unarmed is a modern Passion Oratorio by Joel Thompson that utilizes the traditional "Seven Last Words from the Cross" format to incite change regarding police brutality against Black Americans. Traditionally, each of the seven phrases is associated with a phrase Jesus spoke while on the Cross, taken from each of the four Christian gospels. In this instance, Joel Thompson sets the last words spoken by Black American citizens before being killed by police. Some of its influences from Bach's *St. John Passion* include significant

attention to the number seven, symmetrical movements, musical quotes from the “Kreuzige, kreuzige!” chorus, and a repetitive cantus firmus¹¹² melody set as an homage to Bach.¹¹³

The seven movements of *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* each correspond to one of the last phrases spoken by seven different Black Americans killed by police brutality. Additionally, the entire work is centralized around the fourth movement with movements in the second half sharing similar musical themes to their respective counterparts in the first half. Both the influence of the number seven and the centralization of a specific movement are cornerstones of Bach’s format in his *St. John Passion*.¹¹⁴ The middle movement of *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*, entitled “IV. I don’t have a gun! Stop shooting!” displays the most anger of any movement. The agitated rhythms of the violins and high brass coupled with a vocal focus on the word “Stop” are reminiscent of the “Kreuzige, kreuzige!” movement from Bach’s *St. John Passion*. Though less than a minute in duration, the movement shows how quickly incidents of police brutality can elevate.¹¹⁵ Bach’s “Kreuzige, kreuzige!” chorus similarly lasts about a minute and is centralized in the *St. John Passion* structure. Whereas the crowd in Bach’s *Passion* is demanding the crucifixion of Jesus, the sharp “Stop” pleas in Thompson’s setting represent the voice of someone who, had they been at the scene, could have prevented an unnecessary murder. The ostinato patterns in the orchestra are vaguely reminiscent of minimalist composers such as John Adams as the unrelenting eighth note figures set in 7/8 crescendo mercilessly to the final climax, representing the fear and adrenaline Michael Brown experienced as he neared his death.

¹¹² cantus firmus: literally “fixed song”, an existing melody used as the basis for a polyphonic composition.

¹¹³ Corbett, George. *Annunciations: Sacred Music for the Twenty-First Century*. Open Book Publishers, 2019.

¹¹⁴ Oberoi, Krishan. “Singing for Justice: Joel Thompson’s *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*” 3 (1): 6, 2020.

¹¹⁵ Corbett, 35.

Joel Thompson sets the medieval cantus firmus, “L’homme armé doibt on doubter” (literally “the armed man must be feared”) in several movements of *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*.¹¹⁶ In movement “I. Officers, why do you have your guns out?”, Thompson begins with an ostinato pattern in the piano styling a funeral procession. The addition of taps in the snare drum further contributes to the sense of mourning and dread, possibly referencing requiem mass works such as Vaughan Williams’ *Dona nobis pacem* and Britten’s *War Requiem*. The cantus firmus tune is set to Kenneth Chamberlain’s last words as the chorus repeats under whispered breath the most important question, “Why?” The renewal of this medieval tune in a modern context is a staple of a majority of Bach’s works, with the notable exception of his *St. John Passion*. Utilizing some of the same text and music as Bach’s *St. John Passion*, while differentiating his own musical style, Joel Thompson’s *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* has become a cornerstone of modern Passion Oratorios that both recognizes the history of the genre and creates a unique Passion Oratorio crafted for a 21st-century context.

The Passion of Yeshua (2020)

Richard Danielpour, who studied Bach’s Passion Oratorios from a young age, set *The Passion of Yeshua* to adapt this 17th-century form to the story’s original, Jewish, context. With text more closely aligned to Bach’s original liturgical settings, Danielpour draws from the Revised Standard Version and Complete Jewish Bible translations to more closely align the Passion narrative with accurate, Jewish-influenced, Hebrew and English text.¹¹⁷ Additionally, the

¹¹⁶ Oberoi, 3.

¹¹⁷ “Richard Danielpour Finds His Voice in the Passion of Yeshua.” n.d. www.sfcv.org. Accessed March 19, 2024. <https://www.sfcv.org/articles/review/richard-danielpour-finds-his-voice-passion-yeshua>.

text draws from the Tanakh,¹¹⁸ including prophecy from Isaiah, reminiscent of Handel's *Messiah*. Both of these works share an "All We Like Sheep" chorus, though set with different narrative intentions. The whole work is bookmarked with text from Psalm 42 as a way to review the past and look into the future.¹¹⁹ Similar to Bach's *St. John Passion*, *The Passion of Yeshua* does not feature a resurrection as it maintains a humanistic approach to the life and death of Yeshua. The recitation of the funeral Kaddish after Jesus' death further embeds the work in its Jewish roots.

One of the most notable musical features *The Passion of Yeshua* pulls from Bach's *St. John Passion* is the use of fugue with melody and counterpoint.¹²⁰ The "Kreuzige, kreuzige!" movement of the *St. John Passion* is written following the rules of melody and counterpoint almost exactly. Danielpour saves his primary musical homage to Bach until the Epilogue at the end of Part Two where the contrapuntal influence most noticeably takes shape. Additionally, Danielpour's usage of suspension and resolution, while varying harmonically from Bach, bears comparison to the classic structure of tension and release.¹²¹ This is most readily seen in the beginning of movement "XII. Via Dolorosa" of *The Passion of Yeshua* as the soprano soars above a restless orchestra. Danielpour also pulls strongly from his mentorship by Leonard Bernstein, as Psalm 118 is reminiscent of Israeli Hora dances which Bernstein similarly set in *Chichester Psalms*.¹²² The combination of musical influences ranging from the *St. John* and *St. Matthew Passions*, Leonard Bernstein, and Jewish tradition contributes to Danielpour's unique musical expression rooted in both Hebrew and Bachian traditions.

¹¹⁸ Tanakh: The Hebrew bible, referred to by Christians as the Old Testament.

¹¹⁹ Shrock, Dennis. *Choral Repertoire*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.

¹²⁰ "Richard Danielpour", 1.

¹²¹ Hines, 20.

¹²² Shrock, 257.

The number seven is central in both Bach's *St. John Passion* and Danielpour's *The Passion of Yeshua*. For example, the seventh chorale in Bach's *St. John Passion*, "Durch dein Gefängnis, Gottes Sohn, ist uns die Freiheit kommen", is the central movement of the whole Passion Oratorio.¹²³ In *The Passion of Yeshua*, the chorus begins singing in measure seven, there are seven chorus numbers, the two Marys collectively sing seven times, there are seven roles, and seven scenes in each part.¹²⁴ As the number of completion in both Christian and Jewish traditions, seven represents an important aspect of finality in both the *St. John Passion* and *The Passion of Yeshua*.

While adding unique representative accounts by featuring the two Marys' perspectives on the life and death of Yeshua, many of the character settings are similar to Bach's *St. John Passion*. The role of Yeshua is sung by a bass, consistent with both the *St. John Passion* and other Passion Oratorios like *Easter, 1906*. The crowd who demands Yeshua's crucifixion is noticeably less angry than in Bach's representation. Additionally, both Kefa and Pilot are sung by a tenor which is the same voice setting as in *Easter, 1906*. While some of the characters share musical similarities and the same voice types, Danielpour includes perspectives (especially from women) that are not normally told in Passion oratorios.¹²⁵ While the *St. John Passion* influenced Richard Danielpour's *The Passion of Yeshua*, Danielpour renewed the centuries-old Passion Oratorio genre by setting it in a Jewish, humanistic context that features fresh musical and textual perspectives.

The Bach *St. John Passion*'s continued influence on Passion Oratorios today increases the importance of preserving modern performances of this work. It is because of its seminal

¹²³ "Richard Danielpour", 1.

¹²⁴ Shrock, 257.

¹²⁵ Fuchs, 48.

influence on Western music that the Bach *St. John Passion* should be rectified to better reflect its source material and the audiences to which it is performed. If the Bach *St. John Passion* were not as significant, perhaps we would not put so much effort into adapting it for modern performance. However, because of its significant influence on the Passion Oratorio genre and the entire history of Western choral music, its preservation through adaptation is crucial to preserving the entire Passion Oratorio art form. The following translation attempts to grapple with the complex history of this text while updating it for modern audiences in an attempt to preserve the Passion Oratorio genre for the future.

Chapter IV: Alternative Lyrics for Bach's *St. John Passion*

The following 12 textual alternatives for Bach's *St. John Passion* solely include movements with language deemed problematic based on the previously stated research. Problematic instances of "Juden" are changed to "Judäer", "Pharisäer", or "Hohenpriester" and one instance of "Dein" is changed to "Der." This translation is meant to be accurate, musical, and easily accessible for performers. The alternative German options were translated myself changing basic articles and proper nouns that fit within the musical context.

First Part

6. Recit: "Die Schar aber und der Oberhauptmann" m. 3 and 8

Original (m. 3)

Alternative (m. 3)

Musical notation for measure 3. The original lyrics are "Ju - den nah - men Je - sum und". The alternative lyrics are "Pha - ri - sä - er nah - men Je - sum und". The notation shows a vocal line with notes and rests, and a basso continuo line with chords.

Original (m. 8)

Alternative (m. 8)

Musical notation for measure 8. The original lyrics are "Ca - i - phas, der den Ju - den". The alternative lyrics are "Ca - i - phas, der den Ju - dä - er". The notation shows a vocal line with notes and rests, and a basso continuo line with chords.

Second Part

16c. Recit: "Da sprach Pilatus zu ihnen: So nehme" m. 32

Original (m. 32)



Alternative (m. 32)



16e. Recit: "Auf dass erfüllet würde das Wort" m. 61

Original (m. 61)



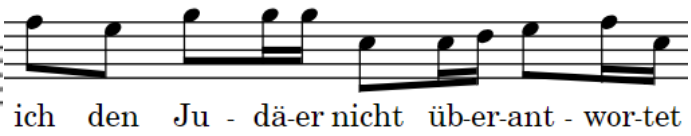
Alternative (m. 61)



Original (m. 68)



Alternative (m. 68)

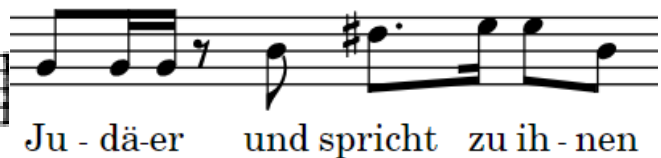


18a. Recit: "Da sprach Pilatus zu ihm: So bist" m. 13

Original (m. 13)



Alternative (m. 13)



21e. Recit: "Pilatus sprach zu ihnen: Nehmet ihr" m. 59

Original (m. 59)

Alternative (m. 59)

Die Ju - den ant - wor - te - ten ihm: Die Ju - dä - er ant - wor - te - ten ihm:

23a. Recit: "Die Juden aber schrieen" m. 1

Original (m. 1)

Alternative (m. 1)

Evangelist

Die Juden a - ber schrieen und die Ju - dä - er a - ber schrie - en und

23c. Recit "Da Pilatus das Wort" m. 9

Original (m.9)

Alternative (m. 9)

und er sprach zu den Ju - den: und er sprach zu den Ju - dä - er

25a. Recit "Allda kreuzigten" m. 13

Original (m. 13)

Alternative (m. 13)

la - sen viel Ju - den, la - sen viel Ju - dä - er,

36. Recit "Die Juden aber" m. 1

Original (m.1)

Alternative (m. 1)

The image shows two musical staves for measure 1. The left staff, labeled 'Original (m.1)', contains a recitative melody with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a common time signature. The notes are: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), Bb4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter). The lyrics below are "Die Ju-den a-ber,". The right staff, labeled 'Alternative (m. 1)', contains an alternative melody with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a common time signature. The notes are: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), Bb4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter). The lyrics below are "Die Ju - dä-er a - ber,".

38. Recit "Darnach bat Pilatum" m. 4

Original (m. 4)

Alternative (m. 4)

The image shows two musical staves for measure 4. The left staff, labeled 'Original (m. 4)', contains a recitative melody with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a common time signature. The notes are: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), Bb4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter). The lyrics below are "heim - lich, aus Furcht vor den Ju - den,)". The right staff, labeled 'Alternative (m. 4)', contains an alternative melody with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a common time signature. The notes are: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), Bb4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter). The lyrics below are "heim-lich, aus Furcht vor den Ho-hen-priest-er,)".

Chapter V: Alternative Translation for Chapters 18 and 19 of the Johannine Gospel

This Passion Narrative is largely based on an English translation of the Luther Bible, the New American Standard Bible, the Complete Jewish Bible, and The Jewish Annotated New Testament. The strict NASB translation is provided underneath the proposed translation to show what changes are made to the closest source material. Additionally, the other translations used are highlighted per their respective contribution. This narrative is compiled for the express use of composers who intend to set the John Passion to music. It is an accurate and artful translation with the intent to reduce anti-Semitic remarks commonly found within the narrative's most commonly used translations.

Chapter 18

Christ's Suffering Before Caiaphas and Pilate

Alternative: 1. When Jesus had spoken these things, he went out with his disciples over the brook of Kidron. And there was a garden, into which Jesus and his disciples went.

NASB: 1. When Jesus had spoken these words, He went away with His disciples across the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden which He entered with His disciples.

2. And Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place: for Jesus was often gathered together there with his disciples.

2. Now Judas, who was betraying Him, also knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with His disciples.

3. Judas therefore, having taken with him a band of Roman soldiers, and some Temple guards of the chief priests and Pharisees, went there with torches and lamps and weapons.¹²⁶

3. So Judas, having obtained the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons.

¹²⁶ “band of Roman soldiers, and some Temple guards of the chief priests and Pharisees” taken from the CJB, but re-translating “cohanim” and “P’rushim” from Hebrew into English.

4. Then Jesus, knowing all the things that would happen to him, went out, and said to them, "Whom do you seek?"
4. Jesus therefore, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, came out into the open and said to them, "Whom are you seeking?"
5. They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he." And Judas also, who betrayed him, stood with them.
5. They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said to them, "I am He." And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them.
6. And when Jesus said to them, "I am he", they drew back and fell to the ground.
6. Now then, when He said to them, "I am He", they drew back and fell to the ground.
7. So he asked them again, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."
7. He then asked them again, "Whom are you seeking?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarene."
8. Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. If then you seek me, let these men go."
8. Jesus answered, "I told you that I am He; so if you are seeking Me, let these men go on their way."
9. This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: "I have lost none that you have given me."
9. This took place so that the word which He spoke would be fulfilled: "Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one."

10. Then Simon Peter had a sword, and drew it, and smote the servant of the high priest cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus).
10. Then Simon Peter, since he had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave's name was Malchus.
11. So Jesus said to Peter, "Put up your sword into its sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which my Father has given me?"
11. So Jesus said to Peter, "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, am I not to drink it?"
12. So the band of soldiers, alongside the chief captain and the Temple guard of the Judeans, took Jesus and bound him.¹²⁷
12. So the Roman cohort, the commander, and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him,
13. And they brought him first to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year.
13. and brought Him to Annas first; for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year.

¹²⁷ "Temple guard of the Judeans" taken directly from the CJB

14. And it was Caiaphas who counseled the Judeans that it is good that a man should be put to death for the people.¹²⁸
14. Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was in their best interest for one man to die in behalf of the people.
15. Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. The same disciple was known to the high priest and went in with Jesus to the palace of the high priest.
15. Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest.
16. But Peter stood outside the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke with the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in.
16. but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in.
17. Then the servant girl at the door said to Peter, “Are you not also one of this man’s disciples?” And he said, “I am not.”
17. Then the slave woman who was the doorkeeper said to Peter, “You are not also one of this Man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.”

¹²⁸ “Judeans” taken directly from the JANT

18. Now the servants stood by, having made a fire of coals (for it was cold), stood there warming themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself.

18. Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.

19. Then the high priest asked Jesus about his disciples and his doctrine.

19. The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching.

20. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly before the world. I have always taught in the synagogue, and in the Temple, where all Jews meet together, and have spoken nothing in secret."¹²⁹

20. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in [g]synagogues and in the temple area, where all the Jews congregate; and I said nothing in secret.

21. Why do you ask me this? Ask those who have heard what I have spoken to them. Behold, they know what I have said."

21. Why are you asking Me? Ask those who have heard what I spoke to them. Look: these people know what I said."

¹²⁹ "where all Jews meet together" taken directly from the CJB

22. And as he spoke these things, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus on the cheek, saying, "Do you answer the high priest this way?"
22. But when He said this, one of the officers, who was standing nearby, struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?"
23. Jesus answered, "If I have spoken evil, let it be proved that it is evil: but if I have spoken right, why do you strike me?"
23. Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?"
24. And Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.
24. So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.
25. Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. So they said to him, "Are you not also one of his disciples?" But he denied it, saying, "I am not."
25. Now Simon Peter was still standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You are not one of His disciples as well, are you?" He denied it, and said, "I am not."
26. One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of him whose ear Peter had cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?"
26. One of the slaves of the high priest, who was related to the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?"

27. Then Peter denied it again, and immediately the cock crowed.
27. Peter then denied it again, and immediately a rooster crowed.
28. And they brought Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium. It was early and they did not enter the Praetorium, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover.
28. Then they brought Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter the Praetorium, so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.
29. So Pilate went out to them, and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?"
29. Therefore Pilate came out to them and said, "What accusation are you bringing against this Man?"
30. And they answered him, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him to you."
30. They answered and said to him, "If this Man were not a criminal, we would not have handed Him over to you."
31. Therefore Pilate said to them, "Take him and judge him according to your own law." Then the Judeans replied, "We do not have the legal power to put anyone to death."¹³⁰
31. So Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law." The Jews said to him, "We are not [k]permitted to put anyone to death."

¹³⁰ "Judeans" taken directly from the CJB

32. This was to fulfill the word of Jesus, which he spoke when he foretold what death he would die.
32. This happened so that the word of Jesus which He said, indicating what kind of death He was going to die, would be fulfilled.
33. Then Pilate went again into the Praetorium, called Jesus, and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"
33. Therefore Pilate entered the Praetorium again, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "You are the King of the Jews?"
34. Jesus answered, "Do you speak this of yourself, or did others say it about me?"
34. Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own, or did others tell you about Me?"
35. Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? The people and the chief priests delivered you to me. What have you done?"
35. Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests handed You over to me; what have You done?"

36. Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight that I should not be delivered to the Judeans. But my kingdom is not from the world.”¹³¹

36. Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.”

37. Pilate therefore said to him, “Are you then a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this cause was I born and for this cause did I come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. All that are of the truth hear my voice.”

37. Therefore Pilate said to Him, “So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say correctly that I am a king. For this purpose I have been born, and for this I have come into the world: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice.”

38. Pilate said to him, “What is truth?” And when he had said this, he went out again to the Judeans, and said to them, “I find no fault in him.”¹³²

38. Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?” And after saying this, he came out again to the Jews and said to them, “I find no grounds at all for charges in His case.”

¹³¹ “Judeans” taken directly from the CJB

¹³² “Judeans” taken directly from the CJB

39. But you have a custom, that I should release one man to you at the Passover. Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?"

39. However, you have a custom that I release one prisoner for you at the Passover; therefore do you wish that I release for you the King of the Jews?"

40. Then they cried out again, saying, "Not this man, but Barabbas! Now Barabbas was a murderer."

40. So they shouted again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas." Now Barabbas was a rebel.

Chapter 19

Jesus Delivered to be Crucified

1. Then Pilate took Jesus, and scourged him.

1. So Pilate then took Jesus and had Him flogged.

2. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns, and put it upon his head, and dressed him in a purple robe.

2. And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and placed it on His head, and put a purple cloak on Him;

3. And they said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and they struck him with their hands.

3. and they repeatedly came up to Him and said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and slapped Him in the face again and again.

4. Then Pilate went out again, and said to them, “Behold, I bring him out to you, so you may know that I find no fault in him.”
4. And then Pilate came out again and said to them, “See, I am bringing Him out to you so that you will know that I find no grounds at all for charges in His case.”
5. So Jesus came out, wearing a crown of thorns and a purple robe. And Pilate said to them, “Behold the man!”
5. Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, “Behold, the Man!”
6. And when the chief priests and the Temple guard saw him, they cried out, saying, “Crucify, crucify!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no fault in him.”¹³³
6. So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they shouted, saying, “Crucify, crucify!” Pilate said to them, “Take Him yourselves and crucify Him; for I find no grounds for charges in His case!”
7. The Judeans answered him, “We have a law, and by that law he shall die, for he has made himself the Son of God.”¹³⁴
7. The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and by that law He ought to die, because He made Himself out to be the Son of God!”

¹³³ “Temple guard” taken directly from the CJB

¹³⁴ “Judeans” taken directly from the JANT

8. And when Pilate heard this word, he grew even more afraid.
8. Therefore when Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid;
9. He went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.
9. and he entered the Praetorium again and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.
10. And Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to crucify you, and power to release you?"
10. So Pilate said to Him, "Are you not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?"
11. Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me, unless it were given to you from above. Therefore he that delivered me to you has the greater sin."
11. Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over Me at all, if it had not been given to you from above; for this reason the one who handed Me over to you has the greater sin."

12. From that time on Pilate sought to release him. But the Judeans cried out, saying, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend, for he that makes himself king is against Caesar.”¹³⁵

12. As a result of this, Pilate made efforts to release Him; but the Jews shouted, saying, “If you release this Man, you are not a friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar!”

13. And when Pilate heard this word, he brought out Jesus and sat in the judgment seat in the place which is called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha.

13. Therefore when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement—but in Hebrew, Gabbatha.

14. Now it was the preparation for Passover and about the sixth hour. Pilate said to the Judeans, “Behold, this is your king!”¹³⁶

14. Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, “Look, your King!”

15. And they cried, “Away, away with him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your king?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.”

15. So they shouted, “Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king except Caesar.”

¹³⁵ “Judeans” taken directly from the CJB

¹³⁶ “Judeans” taken directly from the CJB

16. So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away.
16. So he then handed Him over to them to be crucified.
17. And he bore his own cross, and went out to the place called The Place of the Skull, which is called Golgotha in Aramaic.
17. They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, carrying His own cross, to the place called the Place of a Skull, which in Hebrew is called, Golgotha.
18. And there they crucified him, and with him two others on either side, and Jesus between them.
18. There they crucified Him, and with Him two other men, one on either side, and Jesus in between.
19. Pilate wrote an inscription and set it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."
19. Now Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written: "JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS."
20. This inscription was read by many of the Judeans, for the place was close to the city where Jesus was crucified. And it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.¹³⁷
20. Therefore many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin, and in Greek.

¹³⁷ "Judeans" taken directly from the CJB

21. Then the Judeans' chief priests said to Pilate, "Write not, 'The King of the Jews', but rather, 'This man said he is The King of the Jews.'"¹³⁸

21. So the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews'; rather, write that He said, 'I am King of the Jews.'"

22. Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

22. Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

23. And the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier, and his tunic also. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

23. Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts: a part to each soldier, and the tunic also; but the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece.

24. So they said one to another, "Let us not divide it, but let us cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They have divided my garments among them, and have cast lots for my tunic." This is what the soldiers did.

24. So they said to one another, "Let's not tear it, but cast lots for it, to decide whose it shall be." This happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled: "They divided My garments among themselves, and they cast lots for My clothing." Therefore the soldiers did these things.

¹³⁸ "Judeans' chief priests" taken from the CJB "Judeans' head cohanim" and translated from Hebrew into English

25. And by the cross of Jesus stood his mother, and his mother's sister Mary, the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene as well.
25. Now beside the cross of Jesus stood His mother, His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.
26. And when Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold your son!"
26. So when Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"
27. Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.
27. Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her into his own household.
28. After this, when Jesus knew that all things were finished and in order to fulfill the Scripture, he said, "I thirst."
28. After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, in order that the Scripture would be fulfilled, said, "I am thirsty."

29. And there was a vessel full of vinegar. And they filled a sponge with vinegar, put it on a hyssop branch, and held it to his mouth.

29. A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a branch of hyssop and brought it up to His mouth.

30. When Jesus had taken the vinegar, he said, "It is finished." And bowing his head, he gave up his spirit.

30. Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

31. And the Judeans, because it was the Preparation day, that the dead bodies should not remain on the cross through the Sabbath, (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken down.¹³⁹

31. Now then, since it was the day of preparation, to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews requested of Pilate that their legs be broken, and the bodies be taken away.

32. So the soldiers came, and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who was crucified with him.

32. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man, and of the other who was crucified with Him;

¹³⁹ "Judeans" taken directly from the CJB

33. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.
33. but after they came to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.
34. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water.
34. Yet one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.
35. And he who saw it has borne witness; and his witness is true, and he knows that he speaks the truth, that you also may believe.
35. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe.
36. For these things were done, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, "You shall not break his bones."
36. For these things took place so that the Scripture would be fulfilled: "Not a bone of Him shall be broken."
37. And again another Scripture says, "They shall see him whom they have pierced."
37. And again another Scripture says, "They will look at Him whom they pierced."

38. After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, asked Pilate to take away the body of Jesus, yet secretly for fear of the Judeans. And Pilate permitted it. So he came and took down the body of Jesus.¹⁴⁰

38. Now after these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, requested of Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body.

39. And there came also Nicodemus, who came earlier to Jesus by night, bringing myrrh and aloes of about seventy-five pounds in weight.

39. Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred litras weight.

40. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with spices, as is the Judean burial custom.¹⁴¹

40. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.

41. Now there was in the place where he was crucified a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no man was ever laid.

41. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden was a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.

¹⁴⁰ “Judeans” taken directly from the CJB

¹⁴¹ “Judean” taken directly from the CJB

42. And there they laid Jesus for the day of Preparation, because the tomb was nearby.

42. Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

There is a large breadth of choral music that experiences significantly different performance practice today than at the time it was written. A future area of study would be identifying an evolution in the performance of choral works with problematic language to identify a precedent for updating text. This updated text might be for political reasons, such as Leonard Bernstein's performance of Beethoven's 9th *Symphony* during the fall of the Berlin Wall where he changed the text from "Freude" (joy) to "Freiheit" (freedom). It might be to create more inclusive language, such as the modern performance practice of changing pronouns that refer to traditionally masculine deities to they/them or she/her. Alongside this, many biblical texts that initially read "men" are performed as "all." Much of what we perform as choral musicians is meant to reflect on our time, thus, many works with outdated texts are updated for the 21st century. The Bach *St. John Passion* is one of the most significant and controversial instances of a problematic biblical text in 21st-century performance, but there is a large volume of choral music that contains text incompatible with modern performance. Future studies based on this research may delve into these works and give alternative translations of their text to save them from the risk of becoming obsolete.

Bach's *St. John Passion* stands as a cornerstone within the annals of Western Classical music history, emblematic of the Passion Oratorio genre and exerting a profound influence over Johannine Passion settings spanning from the 18th century to now. However, the anti-Semitic and anti-Judaic rhetoric that permeates the work puts it at risk of becoming obsolete. To uphold the continued performance of this seminal work, and to ensure an inclusive environment for all participants, a re-translation of the term "der Juden" is imperative. Beyond ethical considerations,

a reevaluation of historical evidence suggests a misinterpretation of John's gospel by biblical scholars spanning several decades. Additionally, the notion of a Jewish author imbuing such overtly anti-Semitic sentiments is untenable. Against the backdrop of the Bach Passions' contentious performance history, coupled with an evolving understanding of translational nuance and this work's undeniable mark on the tapestry of Western Classical music, we must safeguard its legacy by updating it for modern performance contexts.

Appendix: Terms and Definitions

Anti-Judaism – religions, individuals, or groups opposed to Judaism.

Anti-Semitism – “a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews.

Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”¹⁴²

cantus firmus – literally “fixed song”, an existing melody used as the basis for a polyphonic composition.

Chief Priests – the highest ranking among a number of Jewish priests.

Dynamic equivalence – attempted semantic translations as opposed to a word-for-word translation (also known as phrase-for-phrase).

Formal equivalence – a word-for-word translation of a text (also known as a literal translation).

Idiomatic – a paraphrased translation of a text that prioritizes perceived meaning over either word-for-word or phrase-for-phrase translations.

Johannine – Of or relating to a theoretical community of first-century Jesus followers who are likely responsible for writing the gospel of John.

Judeans – a native or inhabitant of Judea.

Koine Greek – the common form of the Greek language, spoken and written during the Hellenistic period, the rule of the Roman Empire, and the rule of the early Byzantine Empire.

Pharisees – a member of an ancient Jewish sect, distinguished by strict observance of the traditional and written law.

¹⁴² IHRA.

Presentism – The introduction of current perspectives and ideas into interpretations of the past.

Supersessionism – Also known as Replacement Theology, this Christian doctrine purports that Christians have replaced Jews as God’s chosen people due to their rejection of Jesus as their messiah.

Synoptic Gospels – The first three gospels including Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John is not included due to its delayed arrival and primarily religious rather than historical doctrine.

Tanakh – The Hebrew bible, referred to by Christians as the Old Testament.

Transliterate – Writing the closest corresponding words or letters in a different alphabet.

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