

THE ORTHODOX LUTHERANISM OF MATTHESON AND BACH

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In an article on Johann Sebastian Bach's attraction to big city life, George Stauffer contrasts the social and intellectual orientation of Bach and Johann Mattheson:

Mattheson had the urbanity of a big-city sophisticate; Bach had the limitations of a provincial Thuringian church organist. When Mattheson needed intellectual sustenance, he read Voltaire and Lessing; when Bach turned to literature, he opened his Calov Bible.¹

While many contrasts may be drawn between the two men, the implication that Mattheson's religious orientation differed significantly from that of Bach needs to be corrected. Quite apart from the fact that Voltaire and Lessing are poor choices for examples of Mattheson's Enlightenment reading, the amount of direct evidence we have for Mattheson's Bible-reading is incomparably greater than that for Bach. Nor is there any clear theological difference in their approach to the Bible. As Dietrich Bartel concluded in his introduction to the reprint of Mattheson's three *Orchestre* works, Mattheson dedicated himself to the edification of music lovers, "all the while remaining true to his orthodox Lutheran belief that all be done to the greater glory of God."²

As for Bach, there is, I believe, a scholarly consensus that he was an orthodox Lutheran, notwithstanding some positive influences of

¹George Stauffer, "Bach and the Lure of the Big City" in Raymond Erickson, ed., *The Worlds of Johann Sebastian Bach* (New York: Amadeus Press, 2009), 263.

²Johann Mattheson, *Die drei Orchestre-Schriften* (1713; reprint edition: Laaber-Verlag, 2002), I, xlix.