

Merethe ROOS
(MF Norwegian School of Theology, Oslo)

**The Salon as an Arena of Secularization.
Music performed on Intimate Stages in the last decades of the 18 century.
New perspectives on the function of the Salons¹**

This article demonstrates how the salons in Copenhagen in the last decades of the 18 century might be seen as an arena of secularization. These environments are stages for the performance of Johann Christoph Friedrich Bachs Geistliche Lieder. The texts of Geistliche Lieder are religious, and written by the vicar in St. Petri congregation in Copenhagen. Bach breaks with the prevailing norm for such songs, and by doing so, he creates tension between the traditional religiosity of the text and the novel secularization of the setting.

key words: secularization, Copenhagen, salons, Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach, Sturm und Drang

Introduction

This article is based on interdisciplinary research, and demonstrates how the salons in Copenhagen might be seen as a scene of secularization in the last decades of the 18th Century. These environments are stages for the performance of Johann Christoph Friedrich Bachs *Geistliche Lieder* or “Sacred Songs”. They are, however, also environments in which the idea of religious mediation through the arts is closely related to the idea of the aesthetic genius presented in the works of, amongst others, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The texts of *Geistliche Lieder* are religious; written as they were by Balthasar Münter, the Lutheran vicar of the St. Petri Congregation in Copenhagen, who was influenced by the ideas of holy poetry mediated in Friedrich Klopstock’s *Die heilige Poesie*. However, in his settings of these texts, Bach breaks with the prevailing norm of strophic song, and uses through-composed forms with surprising musical progressions. Thus, he creates tension between the traditional religiosity of the text and the novel secularism of the setting, a tension which is highlighted by the Sturm und Drang movement. Being the stage for the performance of these works, the 18th century salon could then be seen as an arena of secularization.

¹ All translations from German to English in this text are mine.

Christian revelation through the arts.

Balthasar Münter's collections of Geistliche Lieder

In 1773 and 1774, the vicar of St. Petri, the German Lutheran congregation in Copenhagen, Balthasar Münter (1735-1793), published two collections of *Geistliche Lieder*, or Sacred Songs.² Münter included extensive introductions with both of his collections, and these are important for the understanding of the works he presented. Münter sets out in his introductions the difference between those works performed within the service, and those works which are thought to be for use at private prayer at home. In doing so, Münter also considers the aesthetical ideal of the public church service, as well as that for the private prayers. These collections represent Münter's contribution to the ongoing hymnological debates which characterize the practical theology of Protestantism in the last decades of the 18th Century.

Already a promising theologian, Münter was appointed to the position in Copenhagen in 1765. Today, he is perhaps most remembered as Johann Friedrich Struensee's (1735-1772) spiritual advisor, and for the book he wrote in which he describes the process of Struensee's conversion into Christianity. Struensee was the Personal Physician to the weak and mentally ill Danish king, Christian VII. Using his influence with the King and his intimate relationship with Queen Caroline Mathilde, Struensee rose to power, and from 1770 to 1772 he was in fact, the de-facto ruler of Denmark. However, his rule was short, and in 1772 Struensee was accused of harming of the king, and of usurping of the royal authority. He was then condemned to death. During the three months between his sentencing and his execution, Struensee had frequent talks with Münter, and in final weeks before he died, he professed the Christian faith.³

As a preacher and spiritual advisor, Münter was influenced by the Neology and the supranaturalistic theology. The relationship between faith and reason is a primary focus of these schools of 18th Century German theology, and this is taken up in the writings of well-known theologians like Johan Semler (1725-1791), Johann Jerusalem (1709-1789) and Johann Spalding (1714-1809). Reason, they argue, is Man's destiny, a destiny thwarted by the fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden. Redemption through Christ is a chance for man to regain his God-given abilities connected to reason; thereby becoming a moral being. Faith, which is connected to an inner and fervent feeling, is in essence a re-activation of reason and morality. Münter's own theological thinking is closely aligned with this line of reasoning.

In his account of Struensee's conversion, Münter describes his use of a strongly deductive – almost Cartesian – technique to convince his spiritual char-

² Balthasar MÜNTER, *Erster und Zwote Sammlung Geistliche Lieder*, Leipzig 1773-1774, without paging.

³ See for instance: Jens GLEBE-MØLLER, *Struensees vej til skafottet*, København 2007.

ge. His aim is obviously to show Struensee that the Bible not only is reasonable, but the only possible explanation of everything visible and invisible. By laying such heavy weight on the rational elements of faith, Münter demonstrates his affinity to the theological movements within his professional surroundings.

On the more practical aspects of religion, such as scripture, sermons, songs and service, Münter's contemporaries espouse the idea that the message of the Bible should be mediated in a way that is understandable to everyone. Anything that might be confusing or distracting to the congregation should be avoided. For example, sermons should exclude all elements which could be connected to the time and space in which the biblical texts originally were written. Simplicity is encouraged.

As a writer of texts for sacred songs, Münter's theological concern seems to deviate somewhat from this argumentation. In his introductions, he argues against his colleagues, amongst them Johann Spalding, who was active in the process which leads to the hymnological reform in Germany in 1780⁴, and their stress on the necessity of simple hymns which are understandable for all the parisheners. For Münter, however, the simplicity of the work seems to be of minor importance. In his introductions, he explains and defends a religious poetry in which the beauty of the written work mediates the religious and transcendent experience. He argues that it is this poetry which should be used in the sacred songs. This poetry is something quite different to the teaching of religion. Münter writes: "*You see, my dearest friend, that I don't reckon the teaching in religion to be a task for the poetry which is to be used in the sacred songs, this is reserved for the prosaic speeches. (...) The teaching in religion declines to use the jewel of poetry. It will be addressed in a simple and accurate way.*"⁵

For Münter, the beauty in the poetry is a result of the religious experience as revealed to the poet. This is a revelation which is connected to a feeling which the writer is expected to communicate to those who read or hear his works, thereby sharing the religious revelation. Thus, the beauty of the sacred songs is given by God, and it is mediated through an exalted poetic language. This language is in accordance with the character of the content.⁶ The truths, which are formulated through the exalted language of the sacred songs activates what Münter calls the

⁴ Paul GRAFF, *Geschichte der Auflösung der alten gottesdienstlichen Formen in der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands*, Zwote Sammlung, Waltrop 1939, pp. 109-160.

⁵ "*Sie sehen, werthester Freund, dass ich den eigentlichen Unterricht in der Religion nicht für das Geschäfte der geistlichen Liederpoesie halte: dieser scheint mir dem prosaischen Vortrage vorbehalten werden (...) Der blosse unterricht weigert sich durchaus den Schmuck der Poesie anzunehmen. Er will einfältig und genau bestimmt vorgetragen werden.*" B. MÜNTER, *Zwote Sammlung*.

⁶ "*Es muss sich edel und würdig ausdrücken, und das um so vielmehr, da sein Inhalt so sehr edel und würdig ist.*" Ibidem.

self love.⁷ This expression might be understood as a condition in which the heart and the soul of Man is in total harmony, and whereby there is a reconstitution of the original godliness which was lost through Man's original sin. The experience which is mediated through the sacred songs leads the listener or the singer to moral engagement. By emphasizing morality as the consequence of the Christian revelation, Münter is in accordance with theologians like Johann Spalding and Johann Jerusalem. Also within Neology, morality is seen as a consequence of the religious experience.⁸ For Münter, however, the morality is connected to the beauty which is immanent in the poetic text, and not to the dogmas presented in the Bible, through the liturgy or in the sermon.

Though Münter states that the poetic ideal is a direct result of the revelation given to the poet, he does not completely dismiss the prevailing arguments for simplicity. He underlines that he who writes the songs to be sung in the church must always have in mind the diversity of the congregation. The texts for the hymns meant to be sung in the church should always be understandable. The poet must write for the majority of people, and not only for the very few able to match his level of creativity. To this end, Münter puts forth some general rules for the poet: the verse should be lightly and pleasingly formulated, the textual rhythm right and clear, and the strophes should be designed in a steady way that can easily be recited.⁹ Münter's arguments for simplicity have, however, less weight than his arguments for the beauty. Although he gives some general advice for the composition of the text, his definition of the beauty in the sacred songs does not seem to be a question of following formal poetic rules, but a question of mediating the beauty of the Christian revelation.

Münter makes a distinction between the texts written for public church service, and those meant for worship in private, at home. The texts which are to be used during the church service should be written so that they can be used in all congregations. Works for private worship should be adapted to the conditions in which they are used: for the special occasions of life, like the mourning over a death or the joy over a birth. These hymns for private use can also be used at the daily prayers, but they cannot be used during the church service. Just as private prayers are informal and not subject to the stringent constraints of liturgy, hymns used in private prayers are able to explore a breadth and depth of religious feelings

⁷ "Sobald also die spekulativischen Wahrheiten die das Lied vorträgt, so vorgestellt werden, dass sie die Selbstliebe des Lesers oder Sängers interessiren, so sind sie der Empfindung genähert (...)." Ibidem.

⁸ Karl ANER, *Die Theologie der Lessingzeit*, Halle 1929, p. 156.

⁹ "Die Versart muss leicht und gefällig, der Rhythmus richtig und deutlich verzeichnet seyn, und die Abschnitte der Strophen durch die Ruhepunkt des Verstandes überall, so sehr es möglich ist, an derselben Stelle angewiesen werden". Auf die Deklamation muss der Dichter besonders Aufmerksamkeit seyn, um sie gleichfalls, so sehr er es in seiner Gewalt hat, in den verschiedenen Strophen übereinstimmig zu machen." B. MÜNTER, *Zwote Sammlung*.

and emotions, without adhering to social and formal rules.¹⁰ Nevertheless, sacred songs for private use seem to embody a stylistic ideal. Münter states that it is desirable for hymns sung in church settings to express the same range of religious feeling and emotions as songs performed in the homes.

Münter is indebted to the poet Friedrich Klopstock (1724-1803), whose ideas of holy poetry he uses as a foundation for his own ideas of sacred songs. In the introduction to the first volume of his texts, Münter humbly thanks Klopstock for having inspired him to write these works. Friedrich Klopstock, who is reckoned to be one of the most important German writers in the mid 18th Century, was among Münter's neighbours during his first years in Copenhagen. Klopstock's presence in the city could be seen as result of the cultural offensive of King Fredrik V, whose ambitions included making Copenhagen being one of the main cultural capitals in Europe. Fredrik V was successful in his efforts, and upon Münter's arrival in 1765, Copenhagen was a lively cultural city with personalities like Klopstock and Klopstock's well-known colleagues Johann Andreas Cramer (1723-1788) and Heinrich von Gerstenberg (1737-1827) among its residents.

The influence of Friedrich Klopstock – and as well as of Klopstock's tradition – is evident in Münter's introductions. Münter's argumentation, in particular, reflects Klopstock's theory of the holy poetry, put forth in *Die heilige Poesie* (1754-1755). Here, Klopstock describes the poet as a genius, having the ability to express a reality which is beyond human imagination, a reality which mirrors the truth of God. Hence, holy or religious poetry never can be said to be an expression of something imagined or untrue. Instead it must be seen as an expression of truth. It is religion formulated in a poetic way. The poetic text is a result of the Christian revelation, formulated and mediated through the talent of the poet. Religious poetry should, however, not be seen as a dogmatic truth, but as a reflection of the subjective revelation given to the poet. The particular revelation is not normative, but the poet should accept its sacred inspiration: the wonderful, the great, the sacred and the sublime. Hence, it is the totality of the religious experience which should be promulgated in this religious or holy poetry.

Furthermore, Klopstock states that it is not possible to explain or analyze the religious power of the poetry. The power is derived from revelation and is concealed in the actual structure of the poetry, and the art which is the most concealed gives the most overwhelming impression. Within the art hides the sacred message. The Christian gospel is revealed to the poet, and mediated through his poetry. It is this theory of holy poetry which makes Klopstock the most important precursor to Balthasar Münter, and which is essential to understanding the theology and texts of Münter's sacred songs.

¹⁰ “Das Lied muss sich immer heben, aber mässig: doch möchte es lieber zu hoch steigen, als im Staubekriechen, vornämlich wenn es zur Beförderung der häuslichen Andacht, nicht zum kirchlichen Gebrauche bestimmt ist.” Ibidem.

The musical setting of Münter's texts.

Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach's compositions

In his introductions, Münter also describes his ideal for the musical setting of the texts. The role of the music is first and foremost to support and underline the text and its meanings. The melody is therefore of great importance. Münter emphasizes that the music should be composed with short strophes, and that the text and the music should combine to create a single unified expression. This is in accordance with the then prevailing ideals of the relation between music and poetry. According to Heinrich W. Schwab, it was a common practice in the late 18th century to focus on a unity between music and text.¹¹ To prevent music from being the focus of the congregation's attention, poets who wrote for the public church service were advised that it was preferable to write text which could be set to melodies already familiar to the parishioners. Münter suggests, however, that there are differences in musical form and setting that derive from the place of time and performance. The choral, meant for the public Church service, differs from the aria, meant for the religious gatherings in the private. The chorals are based on temperate intervals; they are solemn and slow, while the aria is a more demanding work, with rapid movements and a more extreme ambitus.¹²

His own collections consist of newly written music. All the melodies to the texts in the second volume are composed by Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach (1732-1785), who was the second youngest son of Johann Sebastian Bach. For most of his adult life, Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach had the position of composer and musician at the court in Bückeburg, where his closest colleague was Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), the court preacher in the Bückeburg church from 1771-1776. Today, these sacred songs with their texts by Balthasar Münter and their music by Johann Christoph Bach are almost forgotten, they are rarely performed, and even more rarely studied and analyzed.¹³ However, in a broad intellectual context, these works should be considered as interesting material.

¹¹ Heinrich W. SCHWAB, *Sangbarkeit, Popularität und Kunstlied. Studien zu Lied und Liedästhetik der mittleren Goethezeit 1770-1814*, Regensburg 1965, p. 19.

¹² "Die Chormelodie unterscheidet sich sowohl durch ihre innere Einrichtung als durch ihre Bestimmung von der arienmässigen. Jene soll bey dem öffentlichen Gottesdienste gebraucht werden. Deswegen muss sie nur mässige Intervallen haben, sich in einiger Entfernung von der äussersten Höhe und Tiefe der gewöhnlichen Menschenstimme halten, bedächtiger, feyerlicher und langsamer einhergehen. Die arienmässige Melodie dient nur zum häuslichen Gesange. Sie kann zusammengefasst seyn, hurtiger fortschreiten, der Stimme des Sängers mehr zu thun geben (...)" B. MÜNTER, *Zwote Sammlung*.

¹³ They are shortly mentioned in Beverly Jung SING, *Geistliche Vokalkompositionen zwischen Barock und Klassik. Studien zu den Kantatendictionen Johann Gottfried Herder in den Vertonungen Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach*, Baden-Baden 1993, and Hannsdieter WOHLFARTH, *Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach. Ein Komponist im Vorfeld der Klassik*, Bern – München 1971.

Lied im Frühling.*

Heiter.

Singstimme. *mf* *p* *mf*

1. Hoch am Himmel steht die Son-ne, län-ger strahlt uns nun ihr Licht. Al-les
 2. Seht, wie in die wei-ten Fel-der freu-den-voll die Heerden zieh'n, wiedert
 3. Die-se Herrlichkeit der Er-de ist ein Schat-ten von dem Licht, das ich

HARMONIUM. *p* *mp*

ORGEL. *p* *mp*
 Man. II. (s. F.)
 Man. I. (s. F.)
 Pedal. (s. & 16 F.)

mp

Le-ben ath-met Won-ne, Wonn' ist je-des An-ge-sicht. Lachend senkt der Lenz sich
 scherzend durch die Wäl-der schnel-le Scha-ren Wil-des flieh'n! Hört der Vö-gel sanfte
 e-wig trin-ken wer-de dort vor Got-tes An-ge-sicht! Auch das freu-den-voll-ste

nie-der in die Wäl-der, auf die Flur. Die er - stor - be - ne Na - tur le - bet auf
Chö-re: hier der lau - ten Nach-ti - gall, dort der Ler - che süs-sen Schall! Al - les bringt
Le-ben hier auf Er - den ist nur Tod, ge-gen je - nes, das mir Gott dort ver heis -

und wir-ket wieder, Opf-re mei-nem Schöpfer Dank! preis'ihn fröh - lich, mein Ge-sang!
dem Schöpfer Eh-re! Bring auch du ihm Lob und Dank! preis'ihn fröh - lich, mein Ge-sang!
- sen hat zu ge-ben! Opf-re mei-nem Schöpfer Dank! preis'ihn e - wig, mein Ge-sang!

14844

As songs that are meant to be sung within the public church service or in the private prayers, the music which is written is strikingly untraditional. Bach's sacred songs are avant-garde for their time, with surprising musical developments. These developments are related both to harmonic, melodic and rhythmical progressions. The songs are also written in a through-composed form. This form deviates

from the prevailing norm of the 1770s, 1780s and 1790s, in which the rule was to compose in the simple strophic form, based on repetitions (ex. AB AB CD CD).¹⁴ The through-composed form is more complicated, and admits the composer a relatively high degree of artistic freedom. It is also a style which allows a greater expression of feelings and emotions.¹⁵ While the through-composed form was increasingly used from the 1780s onwards, the simple strophic form was still preferred, and as late as in 1802, this form is generally recommended by the most important musical periodical of its time, *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*.¹⁶

The example which precedes, *Lied im Frühling*, typically illustrates the musical style in Bach's works.¹⁷ As can be seen, this work does not follow the principles for strophic songs. It is written in a partly through-composed form, with a new melody presented from the upbeat to bar 10. Thus, the composer creates a tension in the work. This tension is strengthened by a modulation to the dominant, A major, as well as through different cadences and harmonic progressions, such as the progression towards E major in bar 15 and the modulations back to the tonika (D major) in bar 17. The accompaniment is also progressive, with melodic lines and chords that harmonically support the melody. By composing in this way, Bach departs from the tradition of the continuo, most common in contemporary songs. Instead, he establishes a more independent bass line. With this untraditional style, Bach challenges the established form and style of sacred songs.

The salons of the German literati in Copenhagen in the last decades of the 18. century

The question of why these works are worth scholarly attention is related to the intersection between the environment in which they are written and performed, and the compositional style of the music. In his introductions, Balthasar Münter formulates a theology in which the poetry is an expression of a God-given spark of creativity, formulated to glorify and mediate the Sacred. The musical settings of his sacred songs are radical, and calls for attention. The composition of these nontraditional and extravagant works coincides with the concurrent, but independent development of the idea as a god-like, creative genius. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) and Johann Gottfried Herder both develop and advance the idea of the god-like artist, worthy of being honored and worshipped because of his creative genius, in their works. This is significant, if not to say radical, as it is a revelation independent of the Christian tradition. Nevertheless, given the time and place in which Münter's *Geistliche Lieder* are written and performed and the audience who hear these compositions, the German socio-economic elite living in the Danish

¹⁴ H. W. SCHWAB, o. c. in note 11, p. 55.

¹⁵ Ibidem, pp. 58-59.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 58.

¹⁷ Johann Christoph Friedrich BACH, *Lied im Frühling*. From J. Chr. F. Bach: *Geistliche Lieder*. Accessible through Musikhistorisk Museum, København.

capital, this secularized understanding of the artist and his art arts can be an actual frame of interpretation.

In final decades of the 18th century, Germans were an influential and dominant cultural force in Copenhagen. Though Germans had continuously come to Denmark since the 13th century, but starting in 1750, Denmark experienced a significant increase of its German population. In part, this was a result of the efforts of Johann Hartvig Ernst Bernstorff (1712-1772), the minister of foreign affairs in the government of Fredrik V. Bernstorff invited his German relatives and friends to take important political and official positions in Denmark; in part, it was because Denmark had expanded to include the German duchies of Schleswig and Holstein; and in part it was because Copenhagen, with its relatively strong economy, and its vibrant cultural and intellectual life, was an exciting place to be.

As the vicar of St. Petri, Münster was a natural part of the German elite in Copenhagen. Professionally he was their vicar, providing spiritual advises. Privately he was one of them, taking part in their social life.

There should be no reason to doubt that Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach's sacred songs are meant for private settings, and not for the church. They also claim a trained singer, as well as a trained organist (or harmonium player). And with such possibilities for soloist performance, they seem to fit well into a social setting which in particular could be connected to this group of German aristocrats. Their most important place of sociability was the salon. Between 1770 and the end of the century, Copenhagen boasted three salons. Two of three were hosted by German socialites: Charlotte Schimmelmann (1757-1816), the wife of Prime Minister Ernst Schimmelmann (1747-1831), and the cosmopolite Friedrikke Brun (1765-1835), daughter of Balthasar Münster, and wife of the wealthy trader Constantin Brun.¹⁸ The salon of Charlotte Schimmelmann was held during the government of her husband (1784-1797), while the salon hosted by Friederikke Brun had its gatherings in the mid 1790s and onwards. As with salons in Berlin and other European cities, the easy blending of sexes, professions and nationalities made these salons fertile venues for the spread of progressive philosophies. The salons attracted the most prominent people in the city, as well as artists and internationally known guests; politicians, outstanding traders and a panoply of intellectuals. Due to the important political and social position of Denmark, the people visiting the Danish Capital were amongst the most influential in the society. It is easy to surmise that these salons and the ideas expressed and developed there exerted influence on the greater society.

¹⁸ The other was held by the Dane Karen Margrete Rahbek, and was oriented towards the Danish culture in the capital. See: Anne Scott SØRENSEN, *Blomsterpoesi. Om Kamma Rahbek og Bakkehuset*, in: Nordisk Salonkultur. En studie i nordiske skønånder og salonmiljøer, Odense 1998, pp. 327-349.

In general, a salon can be described as an environment at the intersection of the public, the intimate and the private spheres.¹⁹ In private homes, but often in a room physically connected with the entrance of the house, the physical salon space is a hybrid space, existing for and accessible to the public, but invariably set in a private residence. As a social phenomenon, the salon has its roots in the antiquity, and has precedents in the assemblage of the patronized at the courts of nobility and royalty. It is always led by a woman, and by so being; it is known to reverse the traditional order of the relation between the genders: The hostess is the leader, the organizer and the person which is responsible for the logistics. She is also the natural centre of the social gathering in itself. Thus, the salon can be seen as an example of the expanding influence of women in a still male-dominated public sphere.

The German-cultural salons in Copenhagen were modeled on the continental salons of Berlin and Jena, and not at least upon the contemporary salon of Madame de Stäel at Coppet in Switzerland. The salon gathering followed a certain order. There were three main elements: the meal, the speech and the art. The meals, which could be extravagant and pretentious, were often composed for aesthetical enjoyment as much as a culinary pleasure. The speech could be described as a goal in it self, it should focus on an unrestrained form without external goals or themes. As such, it is described in Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Versuch einer Theorie des geselligen Betragens*, which was published as a book in 1799. Art and artistic performance is the third and perhaps the most vital element of the salon; indeed, the salons have been the scene of many premier performances and of famous works, done by internationally known artists.

The life of the intellectual literati of the Copenhagen salons is well documented in letters, notes and diaries written by the prominent guests who visit the salons in the city. More than 50 000 letters are known and have been collected by Louis Bobe (10 volumes) and Aage Friis (5 volumes), both of them Danish historians. The letters give a good account of life at the salon. They also reveal that the guests to the Danish salons were well aware of the latest trends and ideas being formulated by the philosophers and writers in their intellectual surroundings. There is correspondence with close friends of Johann W. Goethe and Immanuel Kant, such as Carl Reinhold (1757-1823), who was the most well known interpreter of Kant at this time, and the philosopher Friedrich Jacobi (1749-1832). Their massive exchange of letters could in it self be seen as a representation of an actual theory. In 1756, Christian F. Gellert (1715-1769) publishes *Versuch einer Theorie des geselligen Betragens*, where he states the ideal of the letters. The ideal letter should reflect the open and free conversation, and it could therefore be seen as the best form of written communication.

¹⁹ Jürgen HABERMAS, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Main 1990, § 6.

Of particular interest is their understanding and practice of the arts. Many of those who attended the salons were amateur singers, amateur musicians, amateur painters and actors who eagerly put on plays and concerts, often with the cooperation of professional players and singers. In the salons some guests also eagerly practice the art of attitudes. In this form of art, described and defended by among Goethe, Herder and Diderot, the artist imitates a sculpture, and in the moment the artist is transformed from herself into a copy of the art, she reflects the transcendent. Through this, the audience is able to experience a certain form of exaltedness. In the surviving correspondence, there are also descriptions of music as the source of a sublime feeling, as could be seen in Charlotte Schimmelmans report from a concert in her own salon, formulated in a letter to her friend Louise Stolberg. Here, Charlotte Schimmelman describes the experience of music as a parallel to the overwhelming feeling of nature: It is a heavenly impression: Scaring, but at the same time holy.²⁰ By so doing, she is in accordance with Kant's understanding of the sublime, as it short time before she wrote the letter was presented in *Kritik der Urteilkraft* (1791).

The understanding of the arts in the Sturm und Drang-movement

This intellectual environment in the German-cultural salons in Copenhagen is also able to interpret the works of Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach in light of the understanding of the arts proposed by the Sturm und Drang movement, as this can be seen unfolded within the literature in late 18th century Germany. The establishment of this movement is in particular seen in connection with a meeting of Herder and Goethe in Strassburg in September 1770. The friendship of these young poets attracted a circle of acquaintances and resulted in the publication of a new periodical: *Programmschrift des Sturm und Drang* (1772). However, the publication of this periodical was suspended after one year, due to pressure from the church. In 1773, the same year as Münster publishes his first volume of the sacred songs, Herder publishes the magazine *Von deutscher Art und Kunst*, in which the understanding of the artist Genius is explored. This magazine also included a small essay by Goethe, *Von deutscher Baukunst*, where in which Goethe gives an example of the artist Genius. In this article, the architect of the Strassbürger Münster

²⁰ "Hier au soir nous étions tous au ciel, quelle musique! das ist himmlische Erhabenheit – non, il faut encore aimer Schulz autrement, quand on le connoit ainsi – tout le monde étoit dans l'extase. Drake m'assura qu'il croyait entendre Händel au Westminster Hall. J'ai souvent souhaité rendre l'ame à la premiere vue des hautes alpes – dans l'agitation d'une terreur sainte – de meme j'aurois ainsi voulu prendre l'essor, et que mon ame quitte la terre dans de tels transports – c'est la premiere fois que la musique m'a fait cet effet." Letter from Louise Stolberg to Charlotte Schimmelman, 7. 2. 1792 in *Efterladte Papirer fra den Reventlowske Familie*, Volume 4, Kjøbenhavn 1900, p. 132. The music which was performed was, according to Lisbeth Ahlgren Jensen, the hymn *Gud Jehova vi prise dig*, with music by Johann Abraham Peter Schulz (1747-1800) and text by Thomas Thaarup (1749-1821). See: Lisbeth Ahlgren JENSEN, *Musiklivet i Charlotte Schimmelmans og Frederikke Bruns saloner*, in: *Nordisk Salonkultur. En studie i nordiske skønårer og salonmiljøer*, Odense 1998, pp. 231-250.

(The Notre Dame of Strassburg), Erwin von Steinbach, is described as a God-like Genius. Goethe uses biblical expressions and religious terminology, and Erwin von Steinbach, as a creative Genius, is worthy of being worshipped by those who understand his works. Through his works, they experience a transcendental revelation. However, those who are in a position to truly understand the art are few. Revelation is for the few, not the very many.

Goethe uses the language of traditional Judeo-Christian Scriptures to express his idea of the artist Genius. Upon considering his artistic creation, Edwin von Steinbach proclaims *Es ist Gut!* (It is good!), like the Creator in the Biblical story of the Genesis. The narrator in Goethe's article, standing in front of the church, experiences the building as monumental and this monumentality gives rise to an exalted feeling. He is not able to explain or identify this feeling. To explain his work, the creator reveals him self in a scene which obviously is a parallel to the biblical Genesis: the massiveness is a matter of necessity, and the parts are composed in an appropriate and harmonious way.²¹

By writing as he does in this small essay, Goethe gives biblical material a new context: The artist is the God of Creation; the artistic production is seen as the creation, and the person who admires the work of art, and to whom the artist has revealed himself, has experienced a religious feeling, a feeling which is a result of the revelation in the work of art. The artist is given an unlimited artistic freedom because of his creative genius and his authority as the creator of the work. In this essay, biblical material is definitely secularized.

The thoughts which can be found in Goethe's writing of Strassburger Münster are further developed in the so-called Frankfurter-Hymnen, which includes the Ganymed, Prometheus and Wanderers Sturmlied.²² These works were widely distributed and read, the result being that the idea of the artistic genius presented in the Sturm und Drang movement was widely disseminated and known in intellectual and creative circles.

Thus, it is a particular understanding of revelation and Godliness that is presented in the works of the Sturm und Drang-period. Art is imbued with a divine spirit, and hence able to reveal it self, but only to the aesthetic elite: *"the felicitous*

²¹ "Mit welcher unerwarteten Empfindung überraschte mich der Anblick, als ich davortrat. Ein ganzer, grosser Eindruck füllte meine Seele, den weil er aus tausend harmonisierenden Einzelheiten bestand, ich wohl schmecken und geniessen, keineswegs aber erkennen und erklären konnte. (...) Da offenbarte sich mir, in leisen Ahnungen, der Genius der grossen Werkmeisters. Was erstaunst du? Lispelt' er mir entgegen. Alle diese Massen waren notwendig, und siehst du sie nicht an allen älteren Kirchen meiner Stadt? Nur ihre willkürliche hab' ich zum stimmenden Verhältnisse erhoben. (...) das all war notwendig! Und ich bildete es schön." Johann Wolfgang von GOETHE, *Von deutscher Baukunst*. <http://www.wissen-im-netz.info/literatur/goethe/aufsatz/02.htm> (accessed May 5, 2008).

²² See for instance Hans-Georg KEMPER, *Deutsche Lyrik der frühen Neuzeit*. Band 6/II. *Sturm und Drang: Genie-Religion*, Tübingen 2002, pp. 287-416.

people to whom the enjoyment of this highest beauty was given".²³ In the poetry of the Sturm und Drang-period, the poem in it self is considered to conceal a deep and religious meaning, and this mediates an independent and divine power. This is where the ideology of the Sturm und Drang period deviates from that fundamental for Christianity. Within Christian tradition, God is seen as absolutely transcendent and ontologically divided from his creation. God created the world from nothingness: *Creatio ex nihilo* is a central dogma of faith. Throughout the history of Christianity, all kinds of pantheistic unifications between God and his creation are considered heretical. It is such an understanding of creation from nothingness that Goethe definitively breaks with. As it can be seen in *Von deutscher Baukunst*, the artist is given a divine freedom, and he is independent from all kinds of dogmatic and normative religion.

The facts that these thoughts admit the understanding of an independent artistic creator might also have a signification for the interpretation of the works by Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach. In composing the sacred songs, Bach breaks with the constraining rules for this kind of works, and this can be seen as an expression of the independent genius. These thoughts are a natural part of the intellectual surroundings for the German aristocrats living in Copenhagen in the last decades of the 18th Century. Herder, with his Sturm und Drang-ideas is moreover a friend of Balthasar Münter, and a great admirer of Münter's writings. Hence, there might be reason to claim that in the environment in which they are performed, Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach's Sacred Songs might be interpreted in light of the secularization which is present in their context. This audience would have identified themselves as the "felicitous people", being part of the exclusive circle of the intellectual elite in the Copenhagen salons.

This should also be seen as a possibility for a new understanding of the salon. The salon can be regarded as an arena where a new understanding of the art is vividly alive, and with this practice, the traditional and conventional definition of religion is challenged. Hence, the salon might be seen as an arena of secularization, and not only a place of sociability, friendship and the exchange of political ideas.

²³ "(...) *treffliche Menschen, die höchste schönheit zu geniessen gegeben ward*". J. W. von GOETHE, o. c. in note 21.