

Chapter Six

MINING FOR GOLD

What is Truth? "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," wrote Keats, "that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know", thus ensuring that if his poetry failed to sell, at least he was assured a posthumous entry in a preacher's dictionary of quotations. As an impressionistic cry from the heart, it communicates. But as a proposition, it invites the retort: how do you know that is all you need to know? One person's beauty is another person's ugliness! - so is one person's truth another person's lie? History is curiously unfair in its judgements on these matters. Socrates has had a favourable write-up for going round unsettling the young people of his day by asking them, "What is truth?", and submitting their answers to so many supplementaries that they became confused. Socrates is even more highly commended for the fact that in order to make the streets of Athens safe from confusion, he was dispatched to another dimension: where, presumably, he began at once to spread further confusion by asking, "What makes you think this is Heaven? How can we know what is heavenly?" Yet Pontius Pilate gets a bad press because he asked the same question. "What is Truth?", asked Pilate, and did not wait for an answer' - that is how Bacon begins a famous essay. Pilate could have waited all day and not got an answer. This prisoner wasn't in the business of giving that kind of answer. What was Pilate supposed to have said? "Ah, Sir, I see from your silence that Truth is E equals MC^2 , or alternatively, that truth is contained in the 'Sanctus' of the 'Mass in B Minor' which J.S. Bach will compose in about seventeen centuries from now?" Pilate's problem was, of course, that he asked a very good question at a very bad moment.

Pilate's unpopularity derives not from a dubious contribution to the footnotes of philosophy, but from his behaviour in

a real life situation. In front of millions of angry putative readers of the New Testament, the poor guy washed his hands and let Barabbas get away, (that way, however, at least ensuring a posthumous entry in Bach's 'St. Matthew Passion'). But this leads us to a pivotal question. Can real truth be disentangled from real life? Is there such a thing as objective truth? My answer to that is put in one sense very simply: no. But that is my subjective answer. There is simply no way out of this ambiguity. It is a no-win situation. However, the person who, like Socrates, Pilate, or Alice in Wonderland, concedes that a definitive answer to the subjective/objective riddle may be difficult to come by, may be one half step ahead, through not obscuring the reality by formulae, however magisterial. Such a person (whether Socrates, Pilate, or Alice) recognises a fundamental ambiguity in all human language. Music, as one form of human language, is susceptible to that ambiguity.

In the second chapter, I described a recent visit to Prague. On one evening journey to a suburb we passed an Orwellian landscape of mass urban housing which I would describe in terms of tower blocks, except that that would be to put too kindly a construction on the architecture, as if these massive grey slabs were sufficiently individualistic and sky-orientated to deserve the word 'tower'. Michael Dean, the director of the film we were making, remarked that he had been considering the link between the Puritan ethic of self-denial and the Marxist totalitarian philosophy of denying self. In both cases, certain standards on a narrow front are preserved, but at the expense of freedom. It is now a truism of reportage by journalists and tourists alike that Eastern Europe has found freedom to deliver pornography, sleaze, and crime in sad proportion to deliverance from the knock on the door in the early hours. The challenge of choice which the cosmos delivers to us is not to be denied, a freedom where joy, colour, and wholeness are experimentally available, even if also available are the dark fruits of freedom. If you deny self, you deny that cosmos inside yourself which includes a range of opportunities in a lifetime to be wrong as well as right, to explore the dark as well as the light, evil as well as good, to go digging for real gold. If you deny that,

you deny that for which we were born, which is creativity. And that includes the freedom to discover through play, like children, the possibilities of any medium. A bridge, or for that matter a tower block, must have flexibility built into it to take account of wind and variations in temperature: the structure must not be rigid. So any system constructed by the human brain, whether of theology, politics, morality, science, or art, if it is conceived rigidly or maintained and defended rigidly, will fail to keep up with real life as it is experienced by the human psyche, and will sooner or later break up under the strain.

A so-called objective approach to music will eventually fail. And so will a so-called objective approach to God. If you compound these failures by combining them in an objective approach to church music, you will not connect with reality as it is experienced by the mass of people for whom church music is meant to mean something. Which will enable them to face Monday morning.

But if I am trying to face reality, then I have to face one theological mountain that stands in the way. Or perhaps it is more a tower block, one that might be conceived by the science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke, a tower stretching skywards so high you can't see the top, because it stretches beyond the earth's atmosphere, beyond the solar system, beyond the galaxy, beyond the Big Bang, to God Himself. Such a gargantuan structure might serve as a metaphor for the kind of theology which postulates an objective truth about God revealed from infinitely far away. It is what one could call a Jack in the Beanstalk theology, except that, whether it is tower block or beanstalk, it is built from the other end. As in Alice in Wonderland, where everything is upside down, so it is the top of this structure that hits the earth. This is of academic interest, since, whichever way the structure is built, its size is likely at some point to block out the light of experience. The rigidity of its structure, while it may provide adequate protection from some of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, is liable to fare less well when assailed by the massive earthquakes of emotional experience. According to some reports, if you visualise the structure as a tower block, the lift is working. Jacob

confirms that angels were seen going up and down; but according to other stories, the giant gets restive from time to time and gives the whole thing a biff - there was an unfortunate incident at Babel - a misunderstanding over a language block. But the latest from the New Testament is that the giant in the beanstalk has been friendly for two thousand years, and the son of Jack is on remarkably good terms with him.

In Scotland, revelation theology is represented at its most distinguished by Professor Tom Torrance. Also, at its most robust. He is not slow to reproach those who fail to see that this is how things are. In an article quoting the *Life and Work* of September 1990, *The Glasgow Herald*, under the banner headline, "Kirk beliefs attacked by Former Moderator", began its report by referring to a "scathing attack on attitudes in the Church of Scotland". One Torrance passage reads, "Obsession for relevance has led to a detachment of Christianity from Christ, and its attachment to society, so that the Christian way of life is re-interpreted to make it endorse the cheap humanistic philosophies of life placarded before our eyes by film and television. Christianity is reduced to being not much more than the sentimental religious froth of a popular socialism - the 'cheese and cookies notion of Christianity'. What Americans call 'car bumper theologies' replace the distinctive doctrines of the Christian faith, and trendy substitute religions replace strong evangelical witness to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour."

This is the gauntlet of 'objective' theology thrown down with gusto. Let us pick it up, for the phrase 'sentimental religious froth' will do very well as a pejorative label for a subjective approach to church music; while the dismissive wave of the hand towards film and television illustrates the failure of an 'objective' vision to see something in front of your eyes, in this case a common contemporary culture. I am not personalising this kind of theology in Tom Torrance to diminish him. One might as well seek to diminish the Sphinx by writing graffiti on it. But human thoughts and artefacts come down to stories, and stories are about people. The journey and struggle of faith is not on a separate plane. That is why so much of this series of lectures is stories about people.

In the '50s, I sat under Professor Torrance for three years. I was enchanted, as most of my fellow students were, by his personal warmth, his evangelical passion, and his lyrical use of language. Even, however, as I submitted emotionally to the appeal of the Torrance rhetoric, I gradually realised that what I was enjoying submitting to was not a series of objective statements, but a torrentially adjectival vision, with a cosmic Christ at the centre. The Torrance Dogmatics Lecture Sequence amounted to an epic love-poem, with Christ as the Beloved. This was, without reservation, a wonderful trip. The trouble arose when the poet launched into what he conceived as dialogue. He would lean over the lectern and elicit questions. He would answer them patiently and lovingly - so long as they were couched in what he regarded as appropriate language. If anyone, occasionally a bold Scot, but more frequently a sceptical American or German Ph.D. student, developed a challenge into a head-on assault on the divinity of Christ, the sun slid behind the cloud, and thunder rumbled. On one occasion, I recall a theological thunderbolt bouncing up the desks and striking a German who persisted in quoting with high voltage enthusiasm the arch-apostate (as Torrance saw him) German theologian, Rudolph Bultmann. For Bultmann, the question of whether Jesus actually rose from the dead or not is a secondary matter which distracts from the primary questions about whether in Jesus God came to us in the first place. Torrance, with a quiet conviction that chilled the blood, said, "You speak as the anti-Christ." At the coffee break, a once again sunny Torrance enquired of me, "I was right, wasn't I?" I wish I could recall my response.

He exhibited another trait which I have found to be not infrequent among evangelicals. They do not welcome arguments *ad hominem* applied to them, but they are capable of being *ad hominem* about you. At one lecture, just after College morning worship at which I had played the organ, Torrance singled me out of a class of thirty and addressed me on the subject of my organ voluntary. I was there and then the subject of an *al fresco* music review, delivered with crisp rhetorical elegance. At one level this was intellectually serious, education-

ally clever, pastorally sensitive, and personally flattering. Yet, I recognised even as I listened that as a music review this was flawed. I had played Bach. Was the piece I had played aesthetically defective? He didn't say. He was not at that point overtly concerned about music in worship nor about music itself. His concern was to use me and to use Bach, to make a point. The point was about Platonic idealism. As against the world-affirming Word made Fleshness of the Incarnate God in Christ (itself a concept I felt to be highly abstract) Bach, according to Torrance, had spiritualised religion into an ideal realm of abstract ideas.

At first I was impressed, but as the linguistic web was woven around me, I began to resile: on three counts. First, it seemed to me that what Professor Torrance attributed to Bach was a fair description of his own method; was the Torrance *corpus* of ideas not a gigantic abstract system clothed in the verbal equivalent of Bach melody and counterpoint? If so, Torrance was on his own terms, in action, a Platonist of a high order. Second, he was not really introducing a dialogue about Bach as a Platonist, he was painting a picture, valid in its own terms, which did not reflect my experience of Bach. Third, he was not submitting Bach's actual music to the rigorous analysis he would confer on a Biblical or Patristic text. I do not, of course, mean that Torrance was consciously doublethinking - any more than any of us do - but that at the centre of what was actually going on was a disjunction between claim and actuality. His image of his craft was that his language was objective and scientific. The actuality as I received it and responded to it was that it was a labyrinthinely poetic language, and indeed, now and then an almost Byronically romantic one. His own image of his teaching method was that he was humbly emptying his mind and heart before the revealed reality of God, receiving into the resultant space the Word of God, and sharing this treasure with us in a situation of dialogue. The actuality seemed to be that he was unveiling an *ex cathedra* revelation as to how we should think, see, hear, and feel.

I have gone into some detail about Professor Torrance and Bach for a number of reasons, of which one very practical one

is this. At a less exalted level, many clergy still treat the musical element in worship and the organist in the vestry in an analogous way. A not untypical clergyman, (who knows little about music), assumes that he has more locus in the matter of music than the musician, (who knows little about theology), has in the matter of theology. When this is done with Torrance's brilliance and passion, it may be revelatory or obfuscating, but it is not patronising. Done casually in the vestry without even realising that anything is at stake, it can be patronising to the extent of being insulting.

The aesthetic ambiguities in the Torrance position struck home in my existential situation. More significantly, in the second half of the dogmatic odyssey which has been his life, he has in recent decades launched a daring assault on what he has rightly perceived as in our age the citadel of objectivity: science. He has over many years advanced with Christological trumpets blaring, to demolish the walls of scientific Jericho. He has written about science and religion as if, virtually single-handed, he could synthesise the new worlds of quantum physics with the images of Christ contained in the New Testament, the Patristic theologians, and the covenant theology of the reformers. Unhappily for synthesis, and for the stimulus this solo effort supplies to anyone concerned for the stripping away of triviality from late 20th Century theology, once the smoke of battle clears, the campaign to synthesise sometimes appears more like a mission to colonise: I suppose the same is true of the attitude of many theologians to music. They identify the enemy - 'sentimental froth'. Then they feel entitled to place it under pro-consular theological protection backed up by the tanks of objective criteria. All this brilliant activity is bristling with inherent ambiguity. But whereas less dogmatic theologians do not deny ambiguity, but affirm it, neo-calvinists and evangelicals tend to deny ambiguity, while inevitably practising it. Evangelicals will agree, in effect, with Torrance's view that theology is not only able to beat art and science in revealing the truth. They will agree with him that theology actually leads us to the truth, because it deals with what is objectively given - God revealed in Christ.

To amplify the point, I have to pull another autobiographical curtain. Torrance sweeping an audience into his world-view in the realm of ideas could be a thrilling and, at the emotional level, a liberating experience. Where it becomes exposed is when the psychic energy is transferred into the making of judgements in areas where the author has no particular expertise. As I am repeatedly saying in one way or another, music is too big a matter for expert musicians to be the sole arbiters of what in it is authentic, but I urge this democracy of interest to enable doors to be opened, not shut. The moment I decided enough was enough was when I heard Torrance deliver definitive *dicta* on the status of Mozart, Bach, and Beethoven, in which Beethoven, spiritually speaking, came bottom. Torrance was following Karl Barth in putting Mozart top of the league because he accepts his creaturely existence; he is the pagan who accepts the created order, the world as it is in objective truth. Mozart accepts, in Barth's phrase, "The State of Affairs" - a phrase which, if you follow the story line of Mozart operas, has more than one possible connotation.

Bach, however, in this view, was guilty of spiritualising faith, indeed of that most heinous of 20th Century sins, religionising it, making it a matter of subjective human religiosity, the soul's egocentric quest in the proud realm of human ideals, when it should lie in the humble acceptance of a given reality. Bach, then, does not distinguish himself in the view of this kind of objective theology. But Ludwig van Beethoven flunks it altogether, not even a Beta minus for him. Beethoven, said Torrance, reaches arrogantly up to Heaven and tries to grasp God: his Ninth Symphony is simply not on the menu for Christians. Tempted though one is to say to all this, simply, "Tosh!", that will not quite do. For buried in these judgements are half truths. Again, the colourful Torrentian daub of paint conveys an impressionistic picture which is recognisable. What does not work is the ideological judgement, the placing of the impression in a rigid logical system.

Yes, of course Beethoven sometimes storms Heaven. But that is a figure of speech, not an ideological programme. Beethoven also engages in ferocious struggles on earth, and

plumbs depths in the subconscious - though not perhaps as manipulatively as, say, Wagner. But we also are now falling into the trap of generalising slogans! Who is this Beethoven? A man of whom, as in the case of Jesus, Pilate, and Paul, we actually know little as regards his interior life. What we do know are his compositions. Take, for example, the serenity of the Pastoral Symphony, or the Triple Concerto; and compare it with the darkness in Mozart's 'Don Giovanni' or 'Requiem'. Which composer in these works is accepting the created order and which is struggling beyond the grave? The stereotypes just don't fit.

As for the sketch of Bach as being so committed to a spiritual quest that he becomes unearthed, it is so remote from my experience that I have to give a personal thumbs down from the fairly earthed environment of an Intensive Care ward. A short number of years ago, I visited the Vale of Leven Hospital for a break from routine work under cover of a cardiac diversion of moderate magnitude. Under the pressure of getting my corporeal act together, I submitted to a number of mechanical aids which were in no sense natural to me. Some were more obviously necessary than others. I was in no position to contest wiring me up to information and action systems. What the heck, I thought, in for a penny, in for a pound. So I gave up the habit of a lifetime. I let my son buy me a Sony Walkman. With it he brought the Six Brandenburg Concerti of Bach. Someday a bright lad or lassie should get a Ph.D. of more value than most for doing detailed research into the therapeutic effects of different forms of music on various mental and physical states. Even within the limited category of classical orchestral music, the variation in the clinical effects produced by different composers was startling. I have to tell you that one composer, and one composer only, was of any value to me for the first crucial week. Guess who? That spiritually questioning *religioso*, 'unearthed' Johann Sebastian. Although the usual sedatives were applied and played their part, what gave me not only sleep, but contented sleep, accepting the very earthed order I was in, was Bach. What gave me a reasonably calm approach to the ups and downs of a threatened mind and body and the ins and outs

of the hospital circus was Bach. What gave me a substantial hope of re-entering a normal world - I stress substantial hope - was Bach. I can vouch for the good effect. But was it achieved by bad means?

Again, I will resist the temptation to say, "Tosh!". What Bach contributed to my condition was the opposite of a vague religiosity. The Brandenburgs worked because of their composer's exactitude of craftsmanship. In his time Bach was known not as a spiritual quester but as an organ-builder and organist. He was a practical man. He was also of course, a genius, but the genius worked through mathematically poised patterns of an almost micro-chip order of precision. Yet it never sounds predetermined: thus the genius. To be as precise as I can, the miracle which I felt to re-order the cells, molecules, and atoms of my entire biological ecosystem emanated from an achievement by an ordinary sort of church musician and organ builder dead over two centuries ago: namely that, like Ezekiel over a couple of thousand years before in his vision of wheels, he saw that the divine is not only as complex as the latest computer, but infinitely more so, so it can comprehend the complexity of our predicaments, and has spare intelligence to deal with us in a sufficiently relaxed way as to laugh, cry, sing, dance and generally go whoopee.

After ten days in hospital, I felt strong enough, out of interest, to bring some variety into my musical diet: I tried some 19th Century Romantic music. My organism reacted emetically as if invaded by a toxic substance. Even Brahms was too heavily emotional. Mozart almost made it. But I only felt at ease again when I went back to Bach's union of the lyrical and mathematical, the subjective and objective, the brilliantly coordinated symmetries of counterpoint and fugue together with the almost jazz-like jauntiness of syncopated dance: in a phrase, his ordered freedom or - better, perhaps - freedom in order. Mozart did come next. Once out of hospital, the order in freedom of his enchanted world brought me into increasingly relaxed dialogue with the emotional complexities of the post-hospital environment - family life, road traffic, social encounters, and eventually work. This mental rehabilitation was like a speeded up run

through history, catching up with the accelerating pace at which emotional life is lived. By the time that process was complete, I was ready to engage again with more romantic composers of whom it might be said they were egocentric spiritual questers, as charged. My heart, metaphorically, and my psychosomatic system, practically, was now able to take their brazenly emotional assaults on my subconscious.

I hope I have shown in this simple way that Bach was good, not bad, and that he was good not because he was religious, but because he was wired into an earthbound reality, to the exact and exacting circumstances of an organism in peril which, under pressure, needed clear and absorbable information - that is, truth - about the potential of order out of chaos. In other words, Bach strikes a balance between the objective and the subjective which, because it is true, heals and liberates. One simple word for such a blessing is indeed beauty - so perhaps old Keats is right. But I have no wish to swing into the opposite error of saying that romantics are untruthful, because in that life-dance of the organism between the subjective and the objective, they tilt the rhythm one way rather than another. In circumstances quite different from the one I was in, the romantic drive of a Richard Strauss or a Berlioz may ring true for a person facing a daunting but exhilarating challenge in love, life or work. While another, in profound gloom, may find Tchaikovsky, wearing his sobbing heart on his sleeve, is able to assist by sharing his or her solitary desolation. In passing, I wish now I had carried my experiment into the 20th Century. Would Stravinsky's glittering neo-classical patterns have been as calming as Bach, and Shostakovich's equally contrapuntal passion have been as destabilising as Tchaikovsky's? Or is Torrance right (in this respect), to identify in Bach an extra spiritual ingredient which brought comfort?

I may now regret the limits of the experiment, but my motivation was actually to survive, not to fill gaps in lectures of whose future existence I was not aware! Lest a cardiac crisis should seem an unsafely narrow experience upon which to base a view of Bach, I switch now to another kind of critical experience. In the fifties, while I still had the stamina for it, I

played my part in supporting the early harbingers of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Even in those halcyon days, the ordeal was no less than now; the stacking chairs no softer, the foetid halls no larger, the performances no more reticent. I attended one play in a dank space with a roof and walls, off a Royal Mile close. The absence of a stage defined the experience as theatre in the round; we sat in a circle. My two companions were Douglas Templeton and Roland Walls, Presbyterian and Anglican theologians respectively. Suddenly we were concussed by warlike music from amplifiers powered for Nuremberg. Smoke canisters were exploded. Out of the smoke appeared the cast. I think they were the cast. For an hour in between machine gun fire they ran about and shouted. At the interval, Roland sighed deeply and said, "I have dispeace. May we go?" It was but a five minute walk to St. Giles, where I was still assistant organist. I set them down in its enfolding shadows, while I went up to the loft and played Bach. Healed, we took coffee nearby and parted for the night. J.S.B. had won again.

That story, though historically true and fitting neatly in this context, carries an inbuilt snag. It fits too neatly. It confirms the stereotyped view of Bach as sucky blanket material for distressed persons of religious inclination; and once again it appears to suggest that, from the religious perspective, truth is to be found in the classical rather than the romantic muse. To balance any such impressions, I move to Sheffield for an anecdote which, by one of these serendipities which makes submitting to autobiographical compulsion occasionally worthwhile, involved exactly the same trio of participators: so some of the elements are present for a controlled experiment in musical psychotherapy. The scene is a wet night in Sheffield's city centre. We are standing in a queue at the bus-stop, and as in early technicolor movies, yellowing streetlights reflect moodily in pavement puddles. I forget whether Walls, Templeton or I said it, but the sentiment was that it was as well to have a preview of hell before one actually gets there. This was a comment, not on Sheffield, but on the Hallé Orchestra concert we had just left. Barbirolli had conducted performances which, sumptuous with string tone in the classical first half, had

alchemised in the romantic second half into structures of crystal clarity. Berlioz is a one-off composer. His orchestration, like his harmony, is like no-one else's. He breaks the rules of orchestration, exposing instruments at heights and depths away off their usual pitch and timbre. The results in the last two movements of the 'Symphonie Fantastique' have a crystalline cruelty. 'The March to the Scaffold', for example, ends with an icily bright chord on the brass which alchemises the major key into something more horrible than a minor chord. However, it was of 'The Witches Sabbath' which, in every sense, winds up the work, that we were thinking. It is a wicked brew, with increasingly bucolic squeakings, cacklings, chatterings, and brayings whirling through black holes into what is assumed to be red-hot devilry; yet, actually under Barbirolli it had been white-hot, or red-cold, like being burned by ice. This was no easy-going descent into chaos. Barbirolli treated the Berlioz score with exact respect. Every note was given its hellish space. The whole ghastly farrago was set out with austere despatch. The conductor, usually warmly expansive, was as clinically serious as one of the scientists unveiling the first nuclear bomb. The consequence was a scary performance. It was as if Sir John had peered into the Berlioz abyss, seen it as real, and was passing it on to us with a health warning.

I never tire of quoting Karl Barth as saying Christians should start with the state of affairs. If you become aware of another dimension, you are closer to apprehending reality, and whether the medium is a classical or a romantic composer, or whether the subject matter falls into overtly objective or subjective categories, is irrelevant. What matters is to be truthful. And the truth mattered to each of us that night. Douglas Templeton and I were visiting Roland Walls, who was conducting in Sheffield an experiment in preparing Anglican candidates for the priesthood. He was preparing them for the truth. For some months they worked in industry, and stayed in industrial workers' homes. Then they spent time in a small community with Roland. He has been a remarkable priest, monk, scholar, and teacher, who, later in small communities in Roslin and Cumbrae, and in retreats and colleges everywhere, has, some-

times with humour, always with meditative discipline, for generations lifted the events and parables of the New Testament existentially off the page. But in Sheffield, then, his job was to test the young men in his care, almost to destruction. He selected those churches in the Sheffield area which were most run-down and out of touch with society, the numinous - anything - and sent the ordinands to worship there. After their months in industry and in the homes of people who found the church irrelevant, this was a devastating experience, and some simply gave up the idea of becoming clergy. The negative aspect of this work worried Roland. And he was not entirely easy (though he joked about it) at putting the mark of Cain on the churches to be visited. Douglas Templeton, now a most subtle and underestimated New Testament scholar, was also going through a vocationally uncertain period, as I was. So we were a group ripe for truth, a structured truth, something we could live on, whether it was pleasant or otherwise. For us, therefore, facing differing degrees of disorder in our lives and beliefs, Berlioz was extremely orderly - his delineation of hell was, to us, relatively objective. Romantic? Classical? Do these terms mean anything?

The Barthian objective theologian is joined by the post-war neo-Barthian theologian who follows Bonhoeffer in saying that Man has come of age and need no longer manoeuvre God into the gaps of human need. This theological school respected music which was strong, objective, clear; it had little time for weak music which pandered to human neurosis. Therefore, by extension, subjective neurotic music is anathema in Christian worship where we meet to get caught up in the truth of God's strength and Christ's liberating grace, not to wallow round indulgently in the murky shallows of our human needs. I think most of this analysis is misconceived, but it has been a fashionable misconception among the opinion-formers in church music for a couple of generations, as part of that anti-*kitsch* reaction against Victorian sentimentality to which I referred in Chapter Two. I concede that Victoriana at its most romantically unbridled led to some music and words whose emotional lifestyle was liable to finish up in an intensive care ward. But,

despite that concession, the thesis that it is wrong to express and respond subjectively to human need, even sick need, rests on the assumption that we are designed to be free from need, and that we are most truly ourselves when we are most free from our needs. I know that in non-Western spirituality - Buddhism, for example - the unshackling of one's soul from human needs and desires is a cardinal spiritual aim. But I am not yet a paid-up Buddhist. Do not, however, Western monks and nuns strive for this? I am not yet a paid-up monk or nun! Do not those who practise secular meditation, do not even those taking adult evening classes in *yoga*, seek the liberating tranquillity of unstressed plateaux of acceptance? My friends will not be surprised to hear that sitting cross-legged is not an activity that greatly occupies my evenings. Are not executives now told to practise stress-freeing finger exercises while their fellow drivers paw the ground at traffic lights? Well, I am no longer an executive, and when I was, I found it simpler to play Mozart and Tchaikovsky on the car radio. But what, finally, about wonderful old ladies whose beautiful lives, all passion spent, are devoted to pruning the roses, feeding the hungry - grandchildren or cats - and fulfil their psyches by singing sweetly in the church on Sundays? I do not expect to be an old woman, beguiling apotheosis though that would be. But in any case most of the wonderful old women I have met have been wonderful precisely because of the blazing egocentricity of their vitriolic passions, firm opinions, and energetic wickedness. Indeed, isn't that the point? If the thesis is that Man and Woman have come of age, then we don't need to evacuate them of all that makes them maddeningly, dangerously, gloriously individual. They can stand on their own deformed feet, their own feet of clay. They can be as they are. That is how they can receive God.

Human beings need to need. They are built in such a way that they need to need God, or whatever it is that the word God is taken to represent. But also, they need to need the whole range of emotions music can offer. Church music is no exception. This is by no means an academic question. It was because the editors of CH3 - the last Church of Scotland hymn book - had swallowed whole the implication that to have come of age

is to boast hygienic good taste that they were programmed to be suspicious of hymns that were too subjective, and that is why favourite tunes and hymns were left out. As a result the church had a hymn book which was in some respects deeply untrue to the reality of people's emotional situation. People's emotional situation is sometimes this: AAARGH!

To sum up what I have been saying: if you're going to try to be genuinely objective about reality, then you must be objective about the human condition, and that means you have to be objective about the subjective, and accept it in a big way. In which case you may as well be generous in your acceptance and wallow, from time to time, in the Big Tune; for the truth may be that the Divine has a Big Heart which enjoys a good wallow as well as the next woman - or man. To say other is to suggest that come-of-age love, human or divine, is so sophisticated that a good cry is not allowed. And my reply to that is not, "Tosh!" I will just say, ever so quietly: I beg to disagree.

That, I hope, is to conclude the difficult and negative part of this chapter: the case for the defence of the subjective, its right to exist. I am content to rest that and to proceed now to a more interesting enquiry: exploration of the worlds of objective magic that lie ready to be discovered in the depths of the subjective. At which cross-over point, we will junk these terms altogether. Over the bridge they go, into the ravine of discarded jargon. We are now able to travel lighter. We are free to enter the territory of... Ambiguity. What a let-down! Ambiguity? Yes, for nothing is more exciting than this. It is the alchemy of both life and art that reality can be experienced both in one way and in another way. Real freedom is to choose not between right or wrong, but between real and unreal; and no system of rules exists, certainly not in the worlds of art and music, that can guarantee to sort that out.

In late 1990, I was returning from Israel. At 37,000 feet over the Island of Rhodes, the entertainer and composer Donald Swann was sitting beside me in the El Al jumbo, and he was writing out for me the words of a number of his songs. What made me ask him for these was the fact that the night before,

Donald was sitting at the piano 200 yards from the border across which was the Palestinian part of Jerusalem which had been having trouble. It was the night of the Jewish Sabbath. We were in Jerusalem, the holiest city in the world. That day I had stood in the Bethlehem cave where Jesus is reckoned to have been born. We were at the crossroads of geopolitical time and space, secular history and salvation history. And what, to his audience of Jews, Arabs, and other races did Donald sing? 'Mud, mud, glorious mud.' Ah, but that must have been a one-off, what else did he sing? Well, 'The Gnu Song', 'The Transport of Delight' (the London Omnibus Song), and the song about the disappearing slow lines of Britain's trains.

He also gave us a song he had just written, a pearl of a song called, 'The Sign of the Reed', with a strong Eastern influence. He finished with the famous mournful Russian folk-song about the camels - that quintessential non-story about a desert where absolutely nothing happens - but sung by Donald with such ferocity that one camel appearing over the horizon, then a second, then a third, then a fourth, and so on... then one camel moving off, then a second one, then a third... then one camel having a sore foot etc... becomes a drama to beat into a cocked hat the Gulf crisis and the Arab-Israeli volcano threatening round the corner.

I would not tell this merely to squeeze anecdotal pips out of a trip. The whole situation struck me as a bizarre and therefore telling example of the kind of emotional and cultural cocktail that defies the attempt by any system of theology or aesthetics to put liturgy in a cage. Here in the religious and political cockpit of the world, people of mixed races and beliefs laughed and cried as Donald sang. The lament for the passing of the rural railway, sad as any English elegy, made us laugh. The Russian camel drama, taking the mickey out of the desert myth, made us crease ourselves till we cried. His new setting of 'The Sign of the Reed', a key poem by the 12th Century poet, Rumi, brought an intense meditative stillness into the cabaret scene. It was a healing occasion, I would say a sacramental one, but I would challenge anyone to disentangle it in terms of objective or subjective reality.

I have been majoring in conductors as exemplars of different approaches to music-making, rather than on pianists, singers, or organists, because conductors have high and memorable profiles, because they are likely to be widely known to a cross-section of music lovers, and because they carry a subliminal metaphorical message about God's relationship to the orchestra of creation. I don't want to overdo that metaphor, because it is limited in scope: one needs many metaphors for God, of which composer is perhaps the most obvious. But there is another reason for using orchestral conductors as exemplars. They are oblique to the topic of church music. One can therefore make points of style or substance without immediately treading on the corns of church music practitioners, specially ones who, being alive, could sue me or at least cut me in the street.

However, I would like now, at whatever litigious risk, to move nearer home. Having, I hope, established that I am not enamoured of a right or wrong way of doing music nor of any overall philosophy which has *ex cathedra* authority in aesthetics or theology, it should be possible to describe differences without imputing value judgements. Which is just as well, for my goodness, are there differences? I have experienced them in the organ playing field, and I have experienced them there with maximum existentiality. I said organ playing field, and field is a good word, for what one experienced was two force fields coming from opposite directions and proceeding, it seemed, in immutably contradictory paths. I had two organ teachers and musical gurus. One was W.O. Minay, then organist in St. Cuthbert's in Edinburgh and teacher at Fettes, where I first encountered him. When I left Fettes I spent a further period assisting him at St. Cuthberts and continuing with organ tuition. The second was Herrick Bunney, whom I assisted at St. Giles for many fascinating years and who took over my organ tuition. Before I explain the differences in the approach of these two mentors to matters musical, it might be useful to apply, not a preparatory anaesthetic, because that would deaden awareness, nor an unguent, as if negative scarring was anticipated, nor

even a tourniquet, as if escalating blood pressure might boil over, but an emollient, in the shape of stating what I found them to have profoundly in common. Their common characteristics included integrity, sensitivity, warmth, adoration of the organ, and deep caring for the essence of what it is that is going on when human souls gather for worship. That is to say that in most things that matter they were as brothers. If they had not been I would not have given allegiance to both. But in most things musical their styles were so different that chalk and cheese acquire by comparison the identity of twin substances.

The polarisation of their musicianship was prefigured by their bodies and personalities. Bill Minay was small, with a sharp face belying a deep Lancashire drawl. When he spoke one became aware of a dangerous wit overlaid with the courtesy of a brilliant lad who has learned to suffer fools with resignation. As a result of his failure, like Professor Sidney Newman, to genuflect to the Edinburgh music establishment, he went down there with the élan of a lead balloon; the fact that he just happened to be a genius being something which, if it did not entirely escape the attention of those musical panjandra, was assessed as a containable inconvenience. Those of us who turned up Sunday by Sunday at St. Cuthberts were treated to unforgettable musical experiences. That huge yet strangely muted church (now vandalised by partition), became for me a liturgical Bayreuth, where one did not only hear and see, but experience, its enveloping world of cloud-capped mystery. In passing, why have those who worshipped at St. Cuthberts been so pampered down the years? Did they make some Faustian pact with the Devil? If so, the nemesis will be formidable, to pay for such magic as the preaching of George MacLeod at his Titanic prime and the majesty of Adam Burnet, a Prospero of preachers who ransacked the treasures of scripture, prayer book, and English literature to weave a magisterial spell. On top of all that, a quarter of a century of Minay's organ playing was more than a West End congregation could possibly have earned by good works. Their faith, of course, may have been prodigious. Or, *au contraire*, their sinning so fearful as to require the outpouring of all this truly amazing grace.

My wife and I visited the real Bayreuth years later, to experience, in its multi-dimensional majesty, the Ring Cycle, so I do not make the comparison lightly. Just as in that custom built Wagner auditorium one waits for the orchestral sound to be born in another world before stealing out of the cave-like pit, so as an emotionally hungry teenager I sat hugging myself in St. Cuthbert's, waiting for that first throb of the pedal, tinkle of the flutes, splash of the strings, carillon of the mixtures, or pirouetting of the trumpets, to announce the beginning of an hour and a half of astonishment. Even better, it might be the sudden patterning of a Bach Prelude and Fugue, or a noble work by Rheinberger, Reubke, Reger, Karg-Elert or Franck that burst out of the chancel and flooded up the nave, its shapes dancing up and down like the shadows of a thousand candles flickering against the walls of an Aladdin's Cave. Minay was generous. No vertiginous descent from a hasty last minute chat in the vestry to a five minute voluntary covering entry of choir and clergy. This was an organ recital for the gods, a preparation for mysteries, a sustained incantation at the gate of high seriousness. By the time the minister arrived, one was ready for great things to happen. How lucky I was (I now realise) that in Adam Burnet one was not disappointed. But even when lesser men occupied the prayer desk and pulpit, the way Minay accompanied the hymns kept the dramatic pulse alive.

This was romantic organ playing of a prodigious order. The little man with the caustic wit was subsumed in a giant. The beanstalk was transfigured into a ladder of gold, hymns were excursions for angels, Jack became Jesus indeed, and Paradise was here. Nothing could more decisively appear to break the Torrance taboo, for was it not obvious that Minay had knocked at Heaven's gate and midwived God into this Edinburgh mausoleum of a 2,000 year old cult?

And, if so, how?

I have called this chapter 'Mining for Gold'. This was a gloss on 'Minaying for Gold'. Minay linked earth and heaven, not by some arrogant gesture skywards, but by humble digging downwards. He was a deep seam miner hacking away at the coal face of other men's inspirations. I do not mean he was unaware of

his own worth. He had been a brilliant young student, a pupil of Vaughan Williams, a youthful organist in Exeter Cathedral who later built a great choir at Wigan Parish Church, and helped Norman Cocker to build a new organ at Manchester Cathedral. He was frequently asked to give organ recitals on the Third Programme and at least once gave a recital on the Festival Hall organ on London's South Bank. But the reason all this counted for little in the world of Edinburgh reputations was that he himself counted it for little. He saw his as a humble art, a craft, a service, to work away at the practical business of revealing the detail of others' compositions and of the words and music of hymns and psalms. He worked away at truth in the inner parts. Every phrase had to be dug out, assessed, evaluated, given its true worth in relation to its neighbour, given room to breathe, shaped, cleaned up, brightened, clarified, sprung into action, ennobled, redeemed, transfigured.

I'm talking hard work. I'm talking the kind of genius which is 90% perspiration. In terms of Bach, he was a follower of Albert Schweitzer, who gave the first part of his life to studies in philosophy and music, and had dug deep into the phrasing of Bach's organ works. As a result of unremitting delving into the intricacies of phrasing, Minay often took a Bach prelude, and specially a fugue, significantly slower than other organists. It seemed sometimes dangerously slow, as if the surgeon was taking the vital organ out of the body for close inspection, and breathing might stop. But always the body was put together again with such scrupulous attention not only to detail but to the overall original vision, that when it grew to its full height, took up its bed and strode around the church, it was a resurrected body, a miniature cosmos glittering with transfigured life. The principal technical means employed in this resurrecting surgery was the percussive touch. By the use of staccato, alternating with legato, Minay shaped phrases as if bowing a stringed instrument. This was striking enough in letting air into treble and bass parts. When it was applied through all the inner parts of a complex fugue, the effect was staggering, like seeing an ancient mosaic in bold relief after the grime of centuries has been cleaned off.

Those of us who simply do not have such talent or scholarship may feel we have little to learn here, because we are just not up to it, but there are lessons even for us. First, worship deserves the absolute best we can offer. The symbolic bleak Sunday morning in February of which I often speak is, in its import, as much an assignation with destiny as the opening concert of a Festival in front of Royalty and the world's *cognoscenti*. And here, I reconcile the Byronic Tom Torrance with the Beethovenian musician, for I once heard Professor Norman Porteous describe attending an evening service at Alyth when Torrance was the young minister in that small farming town. There were in the church a handful of country folk with no outward sign of enthusiasm or even interest. Torrance delivered a sermon of blazing evangelical sincerity and exegetical magnitude, a towering inferno of the kerugma, as if by that one act of dedicated service to the Word, he could save the world. And then the handful of country folk woke up and went home to their supper. So Minay played. And so all of us can do our absolute best with whatever talent we have.

Second, as I'm sure Tom Torrance did for every sermon, Bill Minay did his homework for each service as if it were a final examination. Skimping fresh preparation for a Bach fugue he had played all his life would have been as foreign to his musical conscience as Chicken Chow Mein to his Lancashire palate. This is to say that for Minay every act of worship was an eschatological reality. At every moment, last things, ultimate assessments, were involved.

Third, he gave us as many treats before and after as if we had emptied our wallet for Jessye Norman or the Berlin Philharmonic. I'm not suggesting we can all supply such treats, but some of us can; and at least clergy should enable musicians who have talents to use them.

Fourth, he did not patronise hymns and psalms. Upon each item of praise he lavished the same rigorous attention to detailed phrasing as he did on a great organ work. He studied the words, the syntax, the dramatic profile of the story line, the inner harmonic potential of the tune. And he did this as seriously in the case of a weak-ish Victorian hymn as with a

powerful classic of praise - indeed, reflecting St. Paul, the weak tune was given extra attention, and transfigured into an apotheosis of itself. The hymn, in its whole performance, became a tone poem, coloured in with bold use of registration, harmonic variations, and, when appropriate, zig-zag cross rhythms.

Again, we may not all have such talents, but we can all take the praise list a great deal more seriously than most of us do. We can at the very least not treat it as a routine matter. There are more detailed lessons one could learn from the Minay technique, but as this is not a workshop, these must be left on one side, to leave intact the principle that this kind of craftsmanship embodied: namely, that truth is released when personal commitment - the subjective reality - is placed at the service of detail in the context of the infinite... in the context of so-called objective reality.

This is where the romantic musician is digging at the identical golden seam, deep underground, to which the classical musician is attending. God, the gods, the numinous, whatever name you use, is not stuck up there (wherever one thinks 'up there' is). He, they, it, is incarnate here in the travail of good work, honestly done; but that good work has to be really good, the best we can do, plus a little more, plus, if the truth be told, a costly amount more.

What then, is left to say about Herrick Bunney that is not a wounding anti-climax? Ah, that is the amazing grace that I experienced that has left me at least in music, a permanently humbled spirit. Having moved up the road to assist in the organ loft of the High Kirk of St. Giles, I came under the tutelage of an organist who in detail performed almost entirely differently, but, in result, was equally inspirational. His personality was different, to start with. Where Minay was small and appeared diffident, Bunney, though not tall, appeared so; if not actually swashbuckling, his confident bearing suggested a hint of buckle here, and a dash of swash there - hints which materialised with electric effect when in his early days he magnetised big choirs like the Edinburgh Royal Choral Union. The Bunney scale of arm-waving made Malcolm Sargent look like a sedated sandbag.

Over the years, Herrick scaled down his conducting to match his increasing commitment to small choirs like the University Singers, and this was an outward paradigm of the inner pathway of his musical evolution. Whereas Minay built up from micro to macro, Bunney explored down from macro to micro. As I said, there is more than one way to skin a cat; Bunney's instinct was to go for the big cat, the jaguar, but because he was also a dedicated craftsman, his life in music became an odyssey towards the miniature. Musically, he journeyed from gold Cadillac to the diamond on the tie pin. To be specific, in matters choral, he began with heroic attempts to spark fire from huge choirs like the Choral Union. (It sometimes needed heroism: during the interval of the New Year 'Messiah', the choir decanted into the rearward corridors to eat pies out of paper bags; and I recall with delicious horror the way the eyes of the same choir stood out on stalks when Beecham, conducting a lacklustre afternoon rehearsal for 'L'Enfance du Christ', silkily enquired, "What did you have for lunch, Ladies, haggis?"). To be historically fair, the Bunney windmill did breathe life, sometimes even passion, into that amply bosomed choral organism. But in his odyssey towards inner truths unavailable on that scale, Bunney evolved a quite different style with chamber choirs. Fleet of foot and elegantly toned contrapuntal singing of motets, cantatas, and notably an annual Easter performance of the 'St. Matthew Passion', produced exquisitely paced performances, intimate, yet of deep religious urgency. When Bunney burst on to the Edinburgh scene in 1946, his heroic capacity to throw the organ around brought an unfamiliar excitement to Presbyterian worship. It wasn't a brutal heroism. He had a Barbirolli-like panache, which could, like Barbirolli, also suffuse with delight the English numinosity of Elgar and Howells. His sense of occasion energised his playing of Handel and the modern French school alike. St. Giles has many services which are dubbed special, spawning processions and recessions as to the manner born. This involves the congregation in much sitting around waiting for the next parade to appear at the West Door. The Bunney sparkle transformed these choreographic wastelands into *coups de théâtre*.

A tedious crocodile of municipal pomposity would become a *corps de ballet* sweeping up the aisle to a fusillade of Vierne or Vidor. The geriatric meandering of a *cortège* of enthistled knights would become a noble sward of surging green on which Bunney improvised a Messiaen-like paeon. Like Minay, he was a brilliant improviser; but whereas Minay began with a detailed idea and built outwards, Bunney started from an impressionistic canvas and worked the detail in.

But it would be misleading to convey an impression that the Bunney organistic brilliance lay in surface impressions. His commitment was to the secret heart of music as of worship. He just believed, as a matter of musical judgement, that it is the whole picture that counts, and you start with the impetus that requires, in tempo and colour. He has more than once given recitals of the whole corpus of Bach's organ works, and as keen a critic as Erik Routley thought it was as majestic an unveiling of the vast Himalayan landscape of Bach as could be experienced this side of Elysium. So the ambiguity is resolved, or is it? Bunney's Bach was not Minay's Bach, but both were Bach. The answer is that there is room for both, for what is a composition bequeathed to us by a master? It is not like a mass produced car off a factory line, every performance a clone of every other. It is a door opened into other worlds, and each person may step through it, in different directions. The basis of the Bunney technique was a flowing legato which sought the architecture of the whole. The basis of the Minay technique was the rhythmic staccato which liberated the inner intricacies and let the accumulating counterpoint build the edifice afresh.

So: legato or staccato, what is truth? Where is truth? When is truth? How do we get there, we who are neither expert diggers at the underground coal face, nor climbers of musical mountains? I will let you into a secret. Having been hundreds of times in the organ loft with both gurus, I can tell you what they were doing when they were not playing. They were listening. For both were explicit in their appreciation of craftsmanship in the pulpit, when it occurred. And both were critical of its absence if it was absent. No sermon, no prayer, escaped their concentrated attention. They knew, how I don't know, I

suppose it was in their bones, that for Beauty to be whole, Truth must be indivisible. If the work in the pulpit was shoddy, superficial, meretricious, or pretentious, they felt their craft demeaned.

In Chapter Three, I described an Easter morning service in Durham Cathedral when, after a remarkable sermon by the Bishop, the cathedral organist sent the last two hymns into orbit. When I recounted this experience to Bishop David Jenkins, he said that, while he could not be sure what was in the organist's mind at that moment, it was undoubtedly the case that "James listens to sermons".

Who says preaching doesn't matter any more?

Bill Minay is in his eighties now, and Herrick Bunney in his seventies. Both are still musicians of the utmost distinction, but the prime of their careers is in the past. Is it another case of there were giants in those days? No, I'm glad to say, great organists and choir trainers follow. To mention but a handful, Andrew Armstrong and George McPhee, once Herrick's assistants, shower fireworks over lofty naves and chancels. Richard Galloway, son of my late Peterhead organist, the magnificent Tom Galloway, sparkles at Stirling. John Langdon, a romantic organist with the precision of Minay and the panache of Bunney, is a rising star who takes as defiant a risk in the humblest hymn as in a Berlioz bonanza; and in my own Helensburgh church, Walter Blair has for the nineteen years I have worshipped there made me leave every service with my heart singing, as the *bravura* of his playing fresh minted every Sunday sweeps through the service. Church music's magic is not dead. We have everything still to play for. And for digging and climbing to proceed, we need not only experts of their calibre. We of lesser talents have our specific opportunities.

The one essential thing is to believe that it matters. Like Tom Torrance in that half empty church in Alyth long ago, it is because God is there that we do it. What He sees as truth is not these fragments that we see. He sees us whole and He hears the inner parts. It is He who resolves all the ambiguity, reconciles bone and marrow, alchemises my dross to his gold, makes Omega Alpha, and recreates the world.