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A Nietzschean Moment in a Bach's Passion? - Revisiting "Zerfließe mein Herze", BWV 245 (35)

God died centuries before Nietzsche's madman exclaimed that "you and I have killed him": This colossal event was dramatized when artists started to focus on the moment of the death of the Lord and his dead body after the crucifixion and before his burial. The crying over his passing away never stopped. Depicted through silence or expressed in lamentation, could we view these moments as subversive manifestations against institutional religion or even faith? In my paper I will concentrate on one such moment, the last arioso + aria of St. John Passion, when the soprano soul repeatedly exclaim: your Jesus is dead.

Demonstrating Bach's poetic and emotional independence in embodying this horrific moment, and his realization of its traumatic reverberations, I will shortly compare it to similar moments in painting and poetry, across four centuries and three confessional frameworks (Catholicism, Lutheranism and Judaism). The question, whether as post-secular audience we read more into such moments than Bach's contemporaries would have dared, will be assessed against its alternative: that such moments, in the time of their inception, prepared the ground for the second, and more brutal, killing of God in modern times.