

Bach and the *Schulordnung*

Separating Myth from Reality

By assuming that the *Schulordnung* is a *prescription* and not a 100% reliable *description* of the reality that surrounded Bach during his tenure as cantor in Leipzig, a reader will avoid the trap that some Bach biographers have fallen into, for instance, declaring that Bach regularly taught Latin classes at the *Thomasschule*.

According to a literal interpretation of the *Schulordnung*, Bach would have been required to

1. show respect and honor to the principal (p. 3)
2. resolve difficulties and disagreements with other colleagues on his own, but otherwise bring the matter to the principal for resolution (p. 3)
3. be present at the monthly teachers' meeting to discuss matters which the principal has selected from experiences related to him by faculty members (p. 4)
4. be present each time, after examinations or whenever deemed necessary by the principal, when the new rules and regulations (*Schuldordnung, 1723*) are read aloud to all teachers and students and discussed (p. 6)
5. take his turn as a weekly inspector once every month (p. 27) during which weekly commitment he would supervise all the activities of circa 150 students and need to a) visit and attend to ill students in the infirmary (p. 8 p. 31); b) personally be present for prayers at Matins and Vespers from beginning to end (p. 27); c) carefully note whether the students are earnestly praying along and otherwise conducting themselves quietly (p. 28); d) have the custodian ring the wake-up bell promptly; e) see to it that none of the students are absent without sufficient cause; f) ensure that prayers take place at precisely at 8 pm and with the help of the custodian make certain that all lights are extinguished and that all the boys should go to bed at that time (p. 29); g) see to it quite carefully that the usual prayers and other devotional passages are spoken and read before and after each meal; h) check carefully that all students who have been outside the school for weddings, funerals, etc. have returned to the school building and

note which ones have misbehaved (drank too much alcohol); i) frequently go in the boys' rooms to see that they are doing what they are supposed to do (p. 30); j) always be with the students in church or at funerals and mete out punishment to those who do not listen or participate in the appropriate manner; k) when the student body is split on Sundays, be with the primary choir; l) remain with the boys until the very end of the services; m) pay fines for any absence which keeps him from fulfilling the weekly supervisor's duties (p. 32); n) allow the boys from time to time to have an hour to refresh themselves physically or go for a walk outside (p. 68) and supervise any such activity; o) observe that strict discipline, law and order is adhered to during meals (p. 70)

6. make an effort to be in the students' presence at all church services on Sundays and Feast Days, but also occupy them on these days with reading from the Bible and other inspirational books, also with singing and praying (p. 13)
7. assume the function of *in loco parentis* for students entrusted to him (p. 14)
8. decline any outside business or occupation which would distract or hinder him from fulfilling this obligation as cantor and any school duties (p. 14)
9. begin his tasks punctually and directly and not leave them or the school building until they have been completed even if he has been called away (p. 16)
10. promptly end his lessons or classes so that other teachers who follow him do not have to wait in vain to begin their classes (p. 16)
11. report beforehand any unavoidable absence from the city or from the school building to the mayor of Leipzig and the school supervisor (p. 17)
12. use the same teaching methods, apply them with equal emphasis and teach only what is useful and necessary (p. 18)
13. present material in a well-ordered manner with the greatest clarity possible, determine if the students have understood it properly, and by means of constant repetition ensure that its contents will remain in the students' memory (p. 19)
14. try to make use of the Catechism and the Theology Compendium in such a manner that the results will bear fruit (p. 20)
15. explain the Holy Bible to their students in a concise, clear and emphatic manner (p. 20)
16. make a special effort to ensure that choir students or others that have to be present during church services make a habit of bringing along to church their bibles (p. 20)

17. use the last quarter hour to review and repeat through questioning the material that had been presented earlier in order to determine proper comprehension (p. 22)
18. carry with him his attendance book to determine if all students in his charge are properly enrolled and attending classes (p. 23)
19. often take students aside to a) challenge them to the limit b) encourage and warn them to be pious and industrious c) give them an opportunity to declare their guilt if they have done something wrong or have overlooked something
20. treat their assistants like all other students without any special favoritism (p. 24)
21. keep keys on him at all times and never entrust them to any of the boys (p. 25)
22. spare no pains in preparing his students for the biannual examinations (p. 26)
23. attend the biannual examinations, participate in them by asking questions and finally discuss the students' proficiencies with the principal and his other colleagues (p. 27)
24. spare no effort in teaching all the boys at the school music and presenting to others their accomplishments in performing music (p. 32)
25. listen in one hour (the singing instruction hour) each school day to each and every boy and teach him music (p. 32)
26. provide private singing/music lessons for free to those for whom there was no time during the regular instruction period and for those who are naturally talented and desire to sing (p. 33)
27. examine and select from the beginners those that might be moved to a higher level group (p. 33)
28. remain with the Primary Choir when the Secondary Choir is practicing elsewhere (p. 33)
29. begin musical performances in both main churches on time (p. 33)
30. arrange these performances so that the sermon can still begin before 8 o'clock in the morning services and before 1:45 pm in the afternoon (or before 2 pm on Feast Days) (p. 34)
31. choose music which is suitable for the service and which will elevate the devotion of the entire congregation (p. 34)
32. alternate performances of the Primary Choir on Sundays and Feast Days in both the *Nikolai-* and *Thomaskirche* (p. 34)
33. send 8 musically skilled boys to St. Peters Church along with a choir prefect

34. inform the *Præcentor* which music should be selected and performed in the other church(es) (p. 34)
35. divide the entire group of all boy performers in such a way that they can improve their abilities in church (p. 34)
36. distribute the good singers who could possibly be accepted into the Primary Choir among all the other choirs so that not all the good ones perform in the best choir available leaving all the others who lack practice in singing in the other choirs (p. 34)
37. personally begin the singing of the German hymns in the church where the Primary choir is singing (the cantor as *Præcentor*) (p. 34)
38. choose from among the boy singers *Præcentors* for the other churches (p. 35)
39. pay close attention to which verses of a chorale the congregation is singing and whether the correct melody is being sung (p. 35)
40. be with the choir members during the entire church service and watch that none of the choir boys leave early (p. 35)
41. ensure that the entire choir sings the chorales appropriate for communion so that the congregation will obtain a better understanding of this sacrament through music (p. 35)
42. not increase his fee if there are specific requests to have additional hymns sung at funerals and other ceremonies (p. 36)
43. grant special requests only to those who have led an honorable life, served in the churches and schools, have bequeathed money to them, or have demonstrated their support of these institutions (p. 36)
44. satisfied with the payment of € 72,00 for weddings and not ask for any more money than this amount (p. 36)
45. maintain an inventory of all musical manuscripts and part books that belong to the school and keep them in a safe place (p. 36)
46. maintain an inventory of musical instruments and note their availability and usability for music in the churches (p. 36)
47. be responsible for the inspection of organists and other musicians who perform at both main churches (p. 37)
48. limit the time spent preparing the boys for their caroling activities as much as possible so that this preparation does not interfere with their studies (p. 37)
49. point out to the school supervisor any *Externi* that should be accepted as *Alumni/Interni* based upon their musical abilities and accomplishments (p. 38)

50. test and report on the musical abilities (proficiency) of prospective students (p. 39)
51. accept boys without the necessary music proficiency if they agree and promise to practice and perfect themselves (p. 39)
52. be present at general funerals involving the entire school, this includes the conducting and singing of a motet in front of the house before the procession begins (p. 47)
53. be present at funerals where the 'larger half school' participates and where the Primary Choir sings (p. 48)
54. be present at funerals where the 'little half school' participates (p. 48)
55. be present at funerals where the 'quarter school' participates (p. 49)
56. allow only *Alumni* who are musically qualified to perform in the Primary Choir (p. 74)
57. punish students who do not appear for music lessons or who absent themselves from performances (p. 74)
58. allow no *Externi* to sing at weddings or other feasts (p. 74)
59. select 4 Choir Prefects each year around Christmas (p. 78)
60. delegate his Choir Prefects to substitute for him when he is absent (p. 79)