

LYRICS THAT PROVIDE A LIFT - the eternal message in Bach's Mass in b minor
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The Latin words jump off the page: "bonae voluntatis," as in "et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis" - or translated, peace on earth to people of good will.

It is a statement from the Gloria of the Roman Catholic Mass. We members of Da Camera Singers are practicing this Gloria on a brisk, partly cloudy April day in the performing arts center at Northfield Mount Hermon School in Gill. Few if any of us are practicing Roman Catholics. I think as a group we take a rather skeptical view towards religion.

Yet we are being urged by our director - for the sake of giving artistic expression of Bach's incredible setting in his Mass in b minor - to truly consider the import of the words.

Peace will come to those, and only to those, who actively will good to their fellow human beings, whoever they may be.

Not just being nice or tolerant, but earnestly willing the good to another is closely related to Jesus' admonition to his disciples to "love your enemy." It is far and away his most radical statement.

It is easy to love those who are like you, who share your beliefs and your culture, he said. The challenge I pose you, he said, is to love the one who is not like you, whose beliefs are not yours, who does not love you.

Bonae voluntatis.

The words come from a "dead" language, but there is an advantage to deadness in a language. The words are no longer subject to spin, to change or adulteration, to manipulation.

They mean what they mean. They ring "eternal" in this respect. Quite miraculously, they are, while not susceptible to alteration in meaning, subject to being brought back to life, re-energized, when fresh breath is blown through them as by simple singers.

The singers, without the slightest spin on the meaning, bring the eternal meaning fully to life.

What a good thing it would be on this planet so scored with hateful and destructive divisions if these two words could be heard, and meditated upon, in their true eternal beauty, especially by those in power, whether it be in city halls, statehouses, Congress, parliaments, dumas, tribal jirgas, the United Nations, or any of the bloody borders of our human world.

And by the way, on Sunday, June 1, at Sweeney Concert Hall at Smith College, you can hear the words breathed to new life in the marvelous music of Bach performed by a collection of simple singers, your neighbors, taking on one of the most deep, most joyous, most marvelous treatments of the Mass ever composed, and that by a Protestant.

Wish us goodwill, please and please be with us.