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Physicality and Devotion in Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber's *Rosary Sonatas*

Roseen Giles

Signa proprie dantur hominibus, quorum est per nota ad ignota pervenire.

[Sacramental] signs are given to human persons, who come to know by moving from what is familiar to what is unknown and unfamiliar.¹

—Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 60, a. 2

The music of Bohemian violinist and composer Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber (1644–1704) reshaped the concept of virtuosity in the latter decades of the seventeenth century. Although the composer's large-scale choral works comprise a substantial portion of his output, Biber is primarily known for his contributions to the solo violin repertoire.² The virtuosic splendor of Biber's violin music attracted the attention of the eighteenth-century music historian Charles Burney, who described it as “the most difficult and most fanciful of any music I have seen of the same

period.”³ At some point after departing from the court of Prince-Bishop Carl Liechtenstein-Kastelcorn at Kroměříž and eventually arriving in Salzburg in about 1670, Biber compiled a collection of music for violin and continuo that would later become his most famous: fifteen pieces representing the Mysteries of the Rosary, known today as the *Rosary Sonatas*. These sonatas are exceptional in the violin repertoire since they each employ a different *scordatura* tuning—that is, the tuning of the violin strings in a configuration other than that of the conventional one in fifths (see Table 1).⁴

Despite the fact that Biber's sonatas have attracted much attention from both violinists and scholars, several aspects of their composition and performance history have not been fully understood.⁵ The exact date of composition is uncertain, the circumstances of the dedication are unclear, and the collection was never published in the composer's lifetime: it is preserved in a single manuscript.

¹ Translated by Nathan Mitchell in *Meeting Mystery* (New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 67. “Signa proprie dantur hominibus, quorum est per nota ad ignota pervenire. Et ideo proprie dicitur sacramentum quod est signum alicuius rei sacrae ad homines pertinentis.” This passage from *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 60 (quid sit sacramentum, “what a sacrament is”) has also been translated: “Signs are given to men. Now it is characteristic of men that they achieve awareness of things which they do not know through things they do know. Hence the term ‘sacrament’ is properly applied to that which is a sign of some sacred reality pertaining to men.” In St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 56 (3a. 60–65), trans. David Bourke (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1975), 8–9.

² Including, for instance, his famous *Sonata violino solo representativa* (1669) and the *Sonatae à violino solo* (1681).

³ Charles Burney, *A General History of Music* (London, 1789), 3: 580.

⁴ The *scordatura* tunings in the collection are sufficiently distinct from one another that playing the whole set of pieces at once on a single instrument is quite impractical.

⁵ There are several noteworthy recordings of Biber's *Rosary Sonatas*, including Andrew Manze and Richard Egarr (Harmonia Mundi, 2004; rereleased 2016), Rüdiger Lotter and Lyriarte (Oehms Classics, 2005), Elizabeth Wallfisch and Linda Kent (ABC Classics, 2008), Julia Wedman and Charlotte Nediger (Sono Luminus, 2011), Rachel Podger and Marcin Świątkiewicz (Channel Classics, 2015), and Julia Schröder and Lautten Compagny (Deutsche Harmonia Mundi, 2018).

Table 1: Biber's Fifteen *Rosary Sonatas*

	Sonata	Mystery	Movements	Key	<i>Scordatura</i>
The Joyful Mysteries	I.	<i>The Annunciation</i>	Praeludium, Variatio (7 variations), Finale	d minor	$g - d' - a' - e''$ (standard)
	II.	<i>The Visitation</i>	Sonata, Allemande, Presto	A major	$a - e' - a' - e''$
	III.	<i>The Nativity</i>	Sonata, Courante/Double, Adagio	b minor	$b - f\sharp' - b' - d''$
	IV.	<i>Presentation of Jesus in the Temple</i>	Ciacona (12 variations)	d minor	$a - d' - a' - d''$
	V.	<i>The Finding of Jesus in the Temple</i>	Praeludium, Allemande, Gigue, Sarabande/Double	A major	$a - e' - a' - c\sharp''$
The Sorrowful Mysteries	VI.	<i>The Agony in the Garden</i>	Lamento	c minor	$a\flat - e\flat - b' - g' - d''$
	VII.	<i>The Scourging at the Pillar</i>	Allemande/Variatio, Sarabande/Variatio (3 variations)	F major	$c' - f' - a' - c''$
	VIII.	<i>The Crowning with Thorns</i>	Sonata, Gigue/Double/Double	B $\flat$ major	$d' - f' - b\flat' - d''$
	IX.	<i>The Carrying of the Cross</i>	Sonata, Courante/Double/Double 2, Finale	a minor	$c' - e' - a' - e''$
	X.	<i>The Crucifixion</i>	Praeludium, Aria/Variatio (5 variations)	g minor	$g - d' - a' - d''$
The Glorious Mysteries	XI.	<i>The Resurrection</i>	Sonata, Surrexit Christus hodie, Adagio	G major	$g - [g' - d'] - d''$
	XII.	<i>The Ascension</i>	Intrada, Aria Tubicinum, Allemande, Courante/Double	C major	$c' - e' - g' - c''$
	XIII.	<i>The Descent of the Holy Spirit</i>	Sonata, Gavotte, Gigue, Sarabande	d minor	$a - e' - c\sharp'' - e''$
	XIV.	<i>The Assumption of Mary</i>	[Sonata], Aria (29 variations)	D major	$a - e' - a' - d''$
	XV.	<i>The Coronation of Mary</i>	Sonata, Aria (3 variations), Canzone, Sarabande	C major	$g - c' - g' - d''$

Although the pieces have generally been labeled “sonatas,” the collection comprises a variety of abstract movements, including prelude-type improvisatory sections labeled “sonata” or “preludium,” dances in binary form, and sets of variations.⁶ The pieces thus resemble both suites—in that they are comprised of a series of dances—and partitas—since they favor variation movements such as the passacaglia and chaconne. Charles Brewer has suggested that the pieces should be seen in the tradition of the central European *Partita* or *Partia*, which in the seventeenth century referred to a multisectional instrumental work often including sets of variations.⁷ Nevertheless, there are still many unanswered questions about the cultural context and performance history of Biber’s *Rosary Sonatas*, a situation that is exacerbated by a lack of documentation particularly regarding dissemination and reception. Some of these questions may never be answered. But there is one important facet of the collection that can give some perspective on the pieces in the context of their patronage—namely, the correlation between the sonatas and seventeenth-century devotional practices.⁸

⁶ There are two exceptions to this: the first movement of Sonata VI (*Agony in the Garden*) is called “Lamento,” and the first movement of Sonata XII (*The Ascension*) is labeled “Intrada.”

⁷ Charles E. Brewer, *The Instrumental Music of Schmelzer, Biber, Muffat and Their Contemporaries* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 301. Baroque composers tended not to use precise labels or designations, especially in this repertory. For this reason, I have chosen simply to call these pieces “sonata” both because it is the most general term for a sectional instrumental work, and because it appears in the manuscript itself, as a title for the opening movement of several of the pieces.

⁸ See Manfred Hermann Schmid, “Die ‘Rosenkranz-Sonaten’ von Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber,” in *Rosenkranz-Sonaten: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München: Mus. Mss. 4123*, ed. Manfred Hermann Schmid (Munich: Strube, 2008), 90–107.

This article examines Biber’s *Rosary Sonatas* as ritual expressions, suggesting that the performance of these pieces, from the perspectives of both the performer and the listener, can be considered an act of Marian devotion. Although the connection between the Rosary prayer and Biber’s sonatas is undoubted, the way in which the performance of the pieces might actually function as devotion is less clear. How is it possible for a composer to create a musical analogue for the recitation of the Rosary? The answer to this question is linked both to the performative aspects of seventeenth-century devotional practices, and to the fact that the *Rosary Sonatas* create a complex ritualistic space, one that vivifies private internal contemplation and at the same time demands public external utterance. In employing virtuoso *scordatura* tunings, Biber struck an intricate balance between style, convention, and ritual that demanded an elusive rather than overt virtuosity. The notation, as an unusual assortment of familiar patterns and strange figures, could arguably be seen as a visual manifestation of Divine Mystery that was, in conjunction with the *scordatura*, internally destabilizing for the violinist in performance. As I will contend, it is this “destabilization,” this reconsideration of familiar habits, that the *Rosary Sonatas* share with seventeenth-century devotional practices. A multisensory view of religious “participation” further points to connections between seventeenth-century and modern theological perspectives; the devotional act embodied by the music is not exclusive to the performer alone: the listener is likewise an active participant.⁹ Through the

⁹ See Andrew Dell’Antonio, *Listening as a Spiritual Practice in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011).

extraordinary relationship between *scordatura*, musical notation, and rhetorical figures in this collection, Biber creates a sensory distance between the aural and visual in order to symbolize the dialogue between the physical and spiritual. The *Rosary Sonatas* must be seen, felt, and heard in order to be effective, a characteristic that they share with Catholic devotional practices following the Counter-Reformation, and indeed with divine presence itself.

The complexity of the *scordatura* in the *Rosary Sonatas* is unparalleled in the violin repertory.¹⁰ In her extensive study of the history of *scordatura*, Dagmar Glüxam writes that Biber's conception of *scordatura* in the *Rosary Sonatas* is so extraordinary and, indeed, so extreme that the collection is "unique in the entire history of violin playing."¹¹ Brewer concurs that the pieces comprise "the most extensive collection of works using the *scordatura* technique."¹² With some exceptions

by Johann Theile (1646–1724) and Wolfgang Carl Briegel (1626–1712),¹³ most *scordatura* violin music that bears any resemblance to Biber's virtuoso pieces is preserved in manuscript, particularly in the Liechtenstein-Kastelkorn collection at Kroměříž.¹⁴ As mentioned, the *Rosary Sonatas* are preserved complete in a single manuscript currently housed at the Bavarian State Library that resurfaced only in the late nineteenth century.¹⁵ With the exception of Sonata X,

rhetorica in the Violin Music of Heinrich Biber (1644–1704)" (Ph.D. diss., Royal Holloway College, University of London, 2002), 116.

¹³ Printed collections of *scordatura* violin music from the mid- to late seventeenth century include: Johann Erasmus Kinderman, *Canzoni, Sonatae . . .* (Nürnberg, 1653); Johann Theile, *Weltlichen Arien und Canzonetten* (Leipzig, 1667); and Wolfgang Carl Briegel, *Geistliche Oden Andreae Gryphii* (Gotha, 1670). The *scordatura* c'-f'-a'-c" from Biber's Sonata VII (*The Scourging at the Pillar*) was also used by Briegel and an anonymous Kroměříž composer (ca. 1670). See Glüxam, *Violinskordatur*, 429 and Glüxam, *Biber: Rosenkranz-Sonaten*, x, n33. Many of Biber's *scordatura* configurations, however, are unique to his collections of violin music.

¹⁴ See Charles Brewer, ed., *Solo Compositions for Violin and Viola da Gamba from the Collection of Prince-Bishop Carl Liechtenstein-Castelcorn in Kroměříž*, Recent Researches in the Music of the Baroque Era 82 (Madison, WI: A-R Editions, 1997). As Robert Rawson has shown, the musical culture of the Liechtenstein court at Olomouc and Kroměříž represents an exceptional tradition that was in many ways atypical when compared to those from the Bohemian provincial courts following the Thirty Years' War. See Rawson, *Bohemian Baroque: Czech Musical Culture and Style, 1600–1750* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2013), 3. A further witness of *scordatura* violin music is found in the Martinelli Collection (Centrale Bibliotheek Leuven), which includes compositions by Schmeltzer, Johann Woita, Carl Ambrogio Lonati, and the Flemish composer known only as "Goor." As Glüxam has shown, there was also a tradition of notating *scordatura* violin pieces in manuscript in musical circles around Gotha and other cities in Thuringia and Saxony by such composers as David Pohle, Andreas Oswald, and Wolfgang Carl Briegel. See Glüxam, *Biber: Rosenkranz-Sonaten*, ix.

¹⁵ The Munich manuscript (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München: Mus. Mss. 4123) is the only

¹⁰ Dagmar Glüxam, foreword to *Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber: Rosenkranz-Sonaten*, Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich 153 (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 2003), ix–x: "Anders als in Biber's Rosenkranz-Sonaten bilden die Stücke seiner unmittelbaren Vorgänger mit Skordatur nur einen Bruchteil des Gesamtumfanges der jeweiligen Sammlung und zeigen auch nur wenig Affinität zu jeglicher spieltechnischer Raffinesse."

¹¹ "Zu den bemerkenswertesten Spezifika der Rosenkranz-Sonaten gehört die vielschichtige sowie komplexe Auffassung der Skordatur, die dieser Sammlung eine einmalige Stellung in der gesamten Geschichte des Violinspiels verleiht. Diese außerordentliche Stellung Biber's in bezug auf die Violinskordatur basiert darauf, daß der Komponist in mehrfacher Weise den üblichen Rahmen seiner Zeit sprengte": Glüxam, *Biber: Rosenkranz-Sonaten*, ix. See also Dagmar Glüxam, *Die Violinskordatur und ihre Rolle in der Geschichte des Violinspiels* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1999), 123–30.

¹² Brewer, *Instrumental Music*, 306. James Clements adds that in no other collection was the use of *scordatura* so extreme, nor had any other composer "used the device to construct a single collection of instrumental music." See James Clements, "Aspects of the *Arx*

the *Türken-Sonate*, for which a concordance survives, there is almost no documentary evidence for a reception history.¹⁶ This is perhaps not surprising considering that alternate tunings in the violin repertory generally fell out of favor soon after Biber's death, and later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century accounts generally regard *scordatura* as a superfluous nuisance. Even in Biber's own time there were some who argued that the technique distorted the true sound of the violin; Biber was involved in an artistic rivalry with Johann Jacob Walther (1650–1717), who criticized Biber's *scordatura* in the preface to *Hortulus Chelicus* from 1688, referring to a violinist who “squeak[s] now on two or more strings falsely tuned *ad nauseam*.”¹⁷ The implication that *scordatura*—which comes from the Italian verb *scordare*, meaning “to put out of accord”—suggests “mistuning” as opposed to an alternate tuning, was encouraged later in the eighteenth century by the usual German translation of the term as *Verstimmung*.¹⁸

source that preserves the complete cycle of sonatas, and there is little information concerning its provenance; it apparently was in a private collection until it came to the library around 1890.

¹⁶ The only piece in the collection with a concordance is Sonata X (also known as the *Türken-Sonate*), which is also preserved in a manuscript in Vienna and bears an ascription to Schmeltzer; see Schmid, “Die ‘Rosenkranz-Sonaten’ von Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber,” 98; and Brewer, *Instrumental Music*, 314–15.

¹⁷ While Walther's criticism is almost certainly aimed at Biber, it is not clear whether he is referring specifically to the *Rosary Sonatas*. If so, this is one of the few surviving pieces of evidence to suggest that the collection was known to a wider audience. Translation in Brewer, *Instrumental Music*, 313.

¹⁸ More sympathetic, Johann Mattheson suggested the term *Umstimmung*: “Der gemine Mann nennet solches eine Verstimmung der Geige, aber nicht mit fug. Es sollte vielmehr eine Umstimmung heissen.” Johann Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehrenpforte* (Hamburg, 1740); reprint edited by Max Schneider

Even when we consider the aforementioned lack of documentation, there is little to suggest that these sonatas were circulated at all, even in the seventeenth century, since they were never published, nor are there any specific accounts of the pieces ever being performed.¹⁹ Such strict controls on the dissemination and performance of highly virtuosic music are, as we will see, particularly significant in the context of Jesuit artistic patronage and seem to indicate that the music in question was considered a powerful tool in conversion, or even an embodiment of religious teaching.

The *Rosary Sonatas* are notated in *Griffnotation* (hand-grip notation), in which the written notes do not indicate sounding pitches but rather the finger placements as they would have been on a normally tuned violin. In performance, the resulting tones can be quite unexpected, as the violinist employs familiar finger patterns that correspond to the conventional notational patterns. Each of Biber's *scordatura* tunings requires the performer to relearn the tendencies and general feel of the instrument. In the substantial repertory of solo violin music from the seventeenth century that employs *scordatura*—including the music of Biber's contemporaries Johann Heinrich

(Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1969), 64. Quantz not only makes reference to the idea of “mistuning” but also comments on the “hazardous” nature of early German instrumental notation: “In former times most of the instrumental music of the Germans looked very confusing and hazardous on paper, since they wrote many notes with three, four, or more crooks. . . . They thought more highly of difficult pieces than of easy ones, and sought to excite admiration rather than to please. . . . The Germans played the violin harmonically rather than melodically.” J. J. Quantz, *On Playing the Flute*, trans. Edward R. Reilly, 2nd ed. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), 337.

¹⁹ Eric Chafe, *The Church Music of Heinrich Biber* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1987), 186.

Schmeltzer (ca. 1620–1680) and Georg Muffat (1653–1704)—it was used primarily to explore key areas and chords that would otherwise be unavailable on the instrument; it was a technique traditionally used to achieve a practical end. Schmeltzer, who was acquainted with Biber in Kroměříž, was possibly the only composer to approach Biber’s rich multiple-stop violin style, and then only in a few of his pieces.²⁰ Even in the viol repertoire, where variant tunings were commonplace, hand-grip notation of *scordatura* was relatively rare, as viol players most often preferred the use of tablature; the Moravian viol player Gottfried Finger (1655/56–1730) was one of the few to employ it in his pieces for the viola da gamba.²¹ The expectations of performers and the familiarity they may have had with certain types of notation are thus important considerations here. Though hand-grip notation of *scordatura* achieves the desired sonorities by rather “cruder means” than the tablature of the lyra-viol repertoire,²² it stands

to reason that composers of violin music would employ it for their *scordatura* pieces since it would be easier to read for a performer accustomed to a standard system of tuning. But the way Biber employs both *scordatura* and hand-grip notation in the *Rosary Sonatas* is truly extraordinary, and, as will be seen, it reveals that the composer may have intended their use to be much more than a practical way to extend the technique of the violin.

Biber composed two other notable collections employing the *scordatura* violin: the *Mensa Sonora* (1680) and the *Harmonia Artificiosa-ariosa* for two *scordatura* violins and continuo (1696). It has been suggested that the latter may have been Biber’s response to Johann Pachelbel’s collection *Musicalische Ergötzung* (ca. 1691–95), also scored for two *scordatura* violins and continuo.²³ Though there is some question about whether Biber could have seen Pachelbel’s collection before composing the *Harmonia Artificiosa-ariosa*, the intended audience and the role of the *scordatura* in Biber’s and Pachelbel’s collections seem to differ significantly. In the respective dedications to these collections, Biber stresses the skill required of the performer to execute his *scordatura* pieces, while Pachelbel writes that this music is meant above all for “musical delight” and “recreation.” Indeed, and as Brewer suggests,

²⁰ Glüxam, *Biber: Rosenkranz-Sonaten*, x.

²¹ According to Peter Holman, Gottfried Finger “was just about the only gamba composer to use *scordatura*, presumably inspired by Biber.” There are five *scordatura* pieces by Finger that employ hand-grip notation; two are found in GB-Ob Mus. Sch. D.228. See Peter Holman, *Life after Death: The Viola da Gamba in Britain from Purcell to Dolmetsch* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2010), 23. Two other manuscripts preserve anonymous *scordatura* viol pieces in hand-grip notation: two viola da gamba sonatas in F-Pn Rés IIII (I am grateful to Jöelle Morton for this information), and ten pieces in F-Pn Vm7 137.323 (fols. 5v–6v, 9–11, 21, 30, 78v–79) that Peter Holman attributes to Anthony Poole. For Finger and the musical circle patronized by the bishop of Olomouc, Karl Liechtenstein-Kastelkorn, see Robert Rawson, “From Olomouc to London: The Early Music of Gottfried Finger (ca. 1655–1730)” (Ph.D. diss., Royal Holloway College, University of London, 2002); and Brewer, *Solo Compositions for Violin and Viola da Gamba*.

²² Holman, *Life after Death*, 23. See also John Cunningham, *The Consort Music of William Lawes, 1602–*

1645 (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2010), especially chap. 3.

²³ A facsimile of Pachelbel’s collection is edited by Frohmüt Dangel-Hofmann (Courlay: Éditions J. M. Fuzeau, 1992). Despite Brewer’s suggestion that Biber may have been responding to Pachelbel, James Clements contends that Pachelbel’s collection could not have appeared in print before the composer’s return to Nürnberg in the summer of 1695, and that “it is not possible to trace specific connections between the two composers’ music.” See Clements, “Aspects of the *Ars rhetorica*,” 224.

the style of Pachelbel's collection is "much more consistent, and on the whole, less complex" than Biber's *Harmonia Artificiosa-ariosa*.²⁴ This could well imply that Biber understood *scordatura* to have a greater expressive potential than the majority of his contemporaries, a conviction that led him to employ it in a more rigorous and fundamental way. Although we cannot be certain exactly how *scordatura* was heard and perceived in Biber's time, the devotional context in which the *Rosary Sonatas* were composed can offer some important clues in this regard.

Considering aspects of performance—and in this case devotional practices—in the analysis and interpretation of early music may at first glance appear to be conjectural and, for some, a veritable surrender to the "quicksand of acoustical phenomena."²⁵ The notation of early music seldom provides "firm ground" upon which the intentions of the composer are made clear. That the performance of music from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is indispensable to the development of tools in analysis and historical interpretation is an idea that has recently been encouraged by the field of "carnal musicology": an approach that gives consideration to the physicality of performance and the body as a locus for

meaning.²⁶ This musicological perspective has strong resonances in the work of twentieth- and twenty-first-century theologians, particularly through the Neo-Thomist framework employed in the field of theological anthropology. As Nathan Mitchell has beautifully articulated: "the most basic language liturgy speaks is the body itself."²⁷ In the case of Biber's *Rosary Sonatas*, the score is an encoding that can only be solved with the key of the *scordatura* and the acoustical properties of the violin itself. The *scordatura* in turn, along with its audible "solution," is intimately bound to the act of performance, in the experience and physical memory of the performer. Because the music as notated does not correspond to its expected realization in sound, it seems deliberately crafted to address an *absence*, and for its realization demands a human *presence*. Biber's *Rosary Sonatas* cannot be read on paper alone, and this is confirmed by the notation: the music is only "real" insofar as it is realized.²⁸ As simultaneous embodiments of the familiar and the strange, the absent and the present, the real and the imagined, these works share qualities with, and may be understood as musical expressions of, Divine or Sacred Mystery.

²⁴ Brewer, *Instrumental Music*, 331–34.

²⁵ In his study of Biber and seventeenth-century violin technique, Elias Dann writes: "Any investigation of early music, the moment it departs from the confines of rigorously developed theoretical analysis to entertain problems of actual performance, leaves behind the reasonably firm ground of notation and harmonic contrapuntal analysis for the quicksand of acoustical phenomena." Elias Dann, "Heinrich Biber and the Seventeenth-Century Violin" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1968), 87.

²⁶ See, especially chap. 1 of Elisabeth Le Guin, *Boccherini's Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 14–37.

²⁷ Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery*, 149. For the field of "theological anthropology," see Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Theological Dictionary*, trans. Cornelius Ernst (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965), 60. For a recent contribution to this area of early modern studies, see Kimberly Johnson, *Made Flesh: Sacrament and Poetics in Post-Reformation England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

²⁸ On the subject of musical ontologies, see Philip Bohlman's seminal "Ontologies of Music," in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 17–34.

Rosary Devotion and the Catholic Confraternities

The basic structure of the Rosary prayer—tenfold repetitions of the Ave Maria separated by the Our Father—has changed remarkably little since its Dominican origins in the Middle Ages. The strung beads that correspond physically to each of the prayers have likewise remained essentially the same for centuries. The versatility of the Rosary prayer, the fact that it may be said alone, in public, and as part of any number of extraliturgical devotions, resulted in a tremendous variety of Rosary practices, particularly after the Reformation.²⁹ Following the publication of St. Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* in the mid-sixteenth century, the prayer was reinterpreted as a multisensory devotion in which the focus was less on the Virgin herself than on the contemplation of Christ's suffering, with Mary as a conduit. By the seventeenth century, the Rosary was commonly prayed as a meditation upon the fifteen Mysteries, each of which

corresponded to significant events in the lives of Christ and of His mother. The Mysteries were, in turn, divided into three groups—joyful, sorrowful, and glorious—which, if prayed complete, would result in three cycles of the Rosary beads, each comprising five “decades,” or sets of ten Ave Marias for each Mystery.³⁰ In the *Rosary Sonatas* manuscript the Mysteries themselves are not named but are instead depicted by copperplate engravings that preface each of the pieces and have been pasted into the manuscript (see Fig. 1).

²⁹ Jesuit historian Herbert Thurston's research suggests that a typical public recitation of the Rosary in the early seventeenth century was related to practices of psalmody and the Divine Office. His description of Rosary recitation may serve as a starting point: following the opening versicle (“Deus in adiutorium meum intende”) and a hymn, “a point of meditation on one of the Mysteries was read aloud and an antiphon was intoned. Then followed the Pater [Our Father] and ten Aves [Hail Marys], which were either said or sung, the one side of the church answering the other side exactly as the psalms are sung in choir. Then to maintain the analogy of the psalms there was added the Gloria Patri, followed by the antiphon in full, with versicle and prayer. This process was repeated for each of the five Mysteries, and the whole service concluded with another versicle and prayer, and with the anthem of our Lady varying according to the season.” Herbert Thurston, “Our Popular Devotions. II. The Rosary. V. The Fifteen Mysteries,” *The Month* 96 (1900): 637; quoted in Mitchell, *Mystery of the Rosary*, 20.

³⁰ The organization of the Mysteries into the three categories of joyful, sorrowful, and glorious was standardized by the sixteenth century. In his *Roma Sancta* (1581–82), the English priest Gregory Martin described this classification in the practices he observed in Rome: “fifteen Meditations . . . five Joyful points, five Dolorous or sorrowful, and five Glorious, . . . to be meditated by one and one, either in saying the Rosarie, or before, or after, as every man feeleth it most commodious.” Gregory Martin, *Roma Sancta*, ed. George Bruner Parks (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1969), 216–17; quoted in Mitchell, *Mystery of the Rosary*, 33. Similarly, the title of John Bucke's *Instructions for the Use of the Beades* (1589) purports to contain “many matters of meditation or mentall prayer with diuerse good aduises of ghostly counsayle.”

58

Sonata.

piano.

forte.

Figure 1: Heinrich Biber, Sonata XIII, *The Descent of the Holy Spirit* (Pentecost) (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München), Mus. Mss. 4123, pp. 58, 59³¹

³¹ The whole manuscript can be viewed in the Digitale Sammlungen of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek: http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/bsb00020682/image_62.

According to the surviving manuscript, the *Rosary Sonatas* were dedicated to Biber's patron in Salzburg, Archbishop Maximilian Gandolph von Kuenburg.³² The earliest possible date for the compilation of the manuscript is therefore 1670, the year Biber left Kroměříž and, without permission, his employer, the bishop of Liechtenstein-Kastelkorn. Sixteen eighty-seven, the year of the dedicatee's death, is the *terminus ante quem*. The source for the Rosary engravings—a confraternity charter from 1678—suggests that a date in the early 1680s is most likely.³³ Eric Chafe has pointed out that Biber's patron in Kroměříž had a particular taste for extravagant violin music, whereas the pious Archbishop Maximilian Gandolph was less enthusiastic about Biber's virtuosic violin style. This raises the possibility that the composer may have conceived of the pieces before arriving in Salzburg and subsequently compiled them to present to the archbishop, a fervent promoter of Rosary devotions and of confraternities in honor of the Blessed Virgin. While the *Rosary Sonatas* are undoubtedly challenging to play because of their unusual tunings, their style is in some ways less outwardly virtuosic than the solo sonatas of 1681, and their theological underpinnings, as we will see, may very well have suited the more sober taste of the Salzburg archbishop.

Archbishop Maximilian Gandolph had received Jesuit training at the Collegium

Germanicum in Rome and thus shared a similar religious upbringing with Biber, who had associations with the Jesuit College in Opava, Moravia.³⁴ Not only did the archbishop build the pilgrimage church of Maria Plain in the 1670s, he founded a fraternity in honor of the Virgin and was himself a member of the brotherhood.³⁵ Indeed, the influence of Jesuit philosophies of art cannot be underestimated in the conception of the *Rosary Sonatas*; Biber uses *scordatura* emblematically to bridge the physical and spiritual in the same way that Jesuit rhetoric achieved a "reciprocal qualification between word and image."³⁶ On this point Bruna Filippi writes, "the association between the image—the body—and the textual parts (*inscriptio* and *subscriptio*)—the soul—was supposed to achieve a unity of meaning, which rendered the two elements of the emblem mutually penetrating and comple-mentary."³⁷ In the dedication of the *Rosary Sonatas*, Biber likens his patron's name to that of the Virgin Mary, and also explains his use of *scordatura* with reference to the archbishop's diligent promotion of the Rosary:

Taking that first letter from her most blessed name, you set it as the first in Your Most Noble Name; thus Mary honored Maximilian. You will discover that my lyre with four strings is discordantly prepared in fifteen alterations and elaborated with persistent diligence and with great artifice according to their potentiality with various sonatas, preludes, allemandes, courants,

³² Unfortunately, the manuscript does not have a title page, which certainly would have provided useful information regarding dating and genre designation.

³³ Schmid, "Die 'Rosenkranz-Sonaten' von Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber" includes a complete facsimile and commentary of this charter, which was discovered only in 2008 in the Archiv der Erzdiözese Salzburg; see p. 91. Brewer makes a similar argument for the date of composition on stylistic grounds. By comparing the *Rosary Sonatas* with those of 1681 and other works, he concludes that the *Rosary* collection may have an even later date, sometime between 1683 and 1687. Brewer, *Instrumental Music*, 310–13.

³⁴ This is based on correspondence by 1663 between Biber and a number of students at the college. Marian devotion was a deeply personal concern for the Salzburg archbishop, and his enthusiasm for the Rosary likely originated in his Jesuit education.

³⁵ Chafe, *Church Music*, 186.

³⁶ Bruna Filippi, "The Orator's Performance: Gesture, Work, and Image in Theatre at the Collegio Romano," in J. W. O'Malley, ed., *The Jesuits II: Cultures, Sciences and the Arts, 1540–1773* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 522.

³⁷ Ibid.

sarabands, arias, a ciaccona, variations, etc., together with basso continuo. If you wish to know my motive, I will explain the reason: all these I consecrated to the honor of the Fifteen Sacred Mysteries, since you promote them with great diligence. To you I dedicate with bended knee, a humble servant of Your Highness, Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber.³⁸

Although there are no specific accounts that describe performances of the *Rosary Sonatas*, it has often been suggested that the pieces either served as postludes to Rosary devotions that took place at the Salzburg Cathedral during the month of October,³⁹ or had a function in the devotions of the Rosary confraternities. Early seventeenth-century Salzburg witnessed an important revival of Catholic lay brotherhoods. This was initiated in part by the efforts of Archbishop Markus Sittikus, who in 1613–14 began a campaign to promote their establishment. Thereafter, dozens of Catholic confraternities were chartered. The largest of these was the Confraternity of the Scapulary, introduced in 1630, which boasted a recruitment of 10,000 new members in the 1680s alone.⁴⁰ The

confraternities were vital to both the religious and artistic landscape of alpine Salzburg through their patronage of art and culture. But they were also indicative of an intense campaign toward confessional uniformity following the Thirty Years' War, especially via Marian tools of conversion. This campaign would culminate in a decree, known as the *Emigrationpatent*, by Archbishop Leopold Anton Freiherr von Firmian that expelled more than 20,000 Protestants between 1731 and 1734.⁴¹ Some five decades earlier, in 1684–86, Archbishop Maximilian Gandolph himself had been responsible for the expulsion of several hundred Protestant peasants and their families from the Deferegger valley.⁴² The Catholic confraternities became the locus for some of the most important socio-religious networks of the seventeenth century.⁴³ They were societies in which lay people forged their own civic and confessional allegiances via the most recognizable and versatile symbol of Catholicism: the rejuvenated *Pactum Marianum* (Marian Pact).⁴⁴ The confraternities were therefore some of the strongest proponents of what Nathan Mitchell has called “vernacular religion,” a movement that “reframed Catholic

³⁸ “Quae primam de suo beatissimo Nomine sumens Litteram, primam Tuo Celsissimo Nomini imposuit. Sic Maria Maximilianum condecoravit. Quatuor Chordis Chelym meam instructam quindecim vicibus discordatam diversisque Sonatis, Preludijs, Allemandis, Courent, Saraband: Arijs, Ciaconâ, Variationibus, etc. una cum Basso continuo sedulâ cum diligentia, et secundum possibilitatem magno artificio elaboratam reperiens. Causam si numeri scire velis enucleabo: Haec omnia Honori XV. Sacrorum Mysteriorum consecravi, quem cum [vim?] Tu ferventissimè promoveas. CELSITUD.^{is} TUAE TIBI flexo poplite dedico. Humilimus Servus, Henr[ic]us Ignat[us] Franciscus Biber.” Translation in Brewer, *Instrumental Music*, 298–99.

³⁹ Eugen Schmitz, “Bibers Rosenkranzsonaten,” *Musica* 5 (1951): 235–36.

⁴⁰ Rupert Klieber, *Bruderschaften und Liebesbünde nach Trient* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1999), 572–74; cited in James Van Horn Melton, “Confessional Power and the Power of Confession: Concealing and Revealing the Faith in Alpine Salzburg, 1730–1734,” in *Cultures of*

Power in Europe during the Long Eighteenth Century, ed. Hamish Scott and Brendan Simms (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 148.

⁴¹ Van Horn Melton, “Confessional Power and the Power of Confession,” 133.

⁴² Ibid., 143; see also Franz Ortner, *Reformation, Katholische Reform und Gegenreformation im Erzstift Salzburg* (Salzburg: Pustet, 1981), 179.

⁴³ The connection between the post–Thirty Years' War Catholic confraternities and the pre–Thirty Years' War humanistic brotherhoods of Bohemia and Moravia is one that merits further exploration, especially in the context of a Bohemian composer like Biber who moved from one circle to the other. See Rawson, *Bohemian Baroque*, 67.

⁴⁴ According to Mitchell, the *Pactum Marianum* (Marian Pact) “seems to have originated in Lucerne about the middle of the seventeenth century.” Mitchell, *Mystery of the Rosary*, 127.

identity primarily through practices rather than through theological argument or homiletic persuasion.”⁴⁵

One of the Salzburg confraternities—the Confraternity of the Assumption of the Virgin—was chartered by Archbishop Paris Lodron in 1634 and later came under the protection of Maximilian Gandolph.⁴⁶ All the students at the University of Salzburg belonged to this confraternity, and their main religious obligation was the prayer of the Rosary. Their devotions took place in the Große Aula (Great Hall), called the Aula Academica, which had been erected in 1619. The hall, then as it is now, was something of a multipurpose room used for convocations, religious devotions, and even the staging of operas.⁴⁷ Hanging in the room are fifteen paintings depicting the Mysteries of the Rosary, eight of which were painted by the Dutch artist Adrien Bloemaert in 1637 (see Fig. 2).⁴⁸ The Virgin Mary is

shown even in the paintings that depict scenes in which she was not actually present (see Fig. 3). The focus on Mary’s emotions as she shares and experiences the physical pain of her son points to a central fascination—one typical for the religious art of Austria and Bohemia at this time—with the meeting points of the visual and tactile senses, and the significance of this juncture in religious contemplation. An indirect interaction with the Mysteries of faith (that is, refracted through Mary’s perspective) leads, perhaps unexpectedly, to the believers’ direct and immediate participation in the Mysteries they are meditating upon; they are invited to envision themselves in the very situations they are contemplating by Mary’s vicarious example.⁴⁹ It is in such a nuanced understanding of devotional participation, one in which the act of looking, or as we will see the act of listening, is a type of devotional performance, that we can identify a pivotal transformation in the imaginative techniques of Ignatian meditation.⁵⁰ In the context of early modern spirituality, contemplation is no longer just a mental activity, it is a performative one.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 128. Despite the eventual expulsion of a significant portion of Salzburg’s Protestant communities in the early eighteenth century, their survival in the area during the previous century can be attributed to the activities of a “clandestine Protestant subculture.” Thanks to the versatility and civic engagement of the confraternities, these Protestants were able to conform outwardly with Catholic practices while still maintaining their confessional allegiance. See Van Horn Melton, “Confessional Power and the Power of Confession,” 134.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 151.

⁴⁷ The Große Aula was converted into a theater for the performance of some of Mozart’s earliest dramatic works. The University of Salzburg embraced the tradition of performing Latin plays at the end of the academic year, a practice shared with other Benedictine institutions in southern Germany and central Europe. Mozart composed music for *Apollo and Hyacinth*, a lighter work meant to accompany the main Latin play based on Herodotus, which was performed in the Große Aula on May 13, 1767. See chap. 6 of Stanley Sadie, *Mozart: The Early Years, 1756–1781* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁴⁸ Marcel G. Roethlisberger, *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons: Paintings and Prints* (Doornspijk: Davaco Publishers, 1993), 533. The other paintings are by local

Salzburg painters Zacharias Miller and Burkhard Schrammann. I would like to thank Prof. Thomas Hochradner (Universität Mozarteum) for arranging my visit to the Große Aula at the University of Salzburg to see these paintings.

⁴⁹ In Robert Orsi’s words, Mary is portrayed “through the prism of the needs and fears of the people who approach her and so she is a protean and unstable figure.” Robert A. Orsi, “The Many Names of the Mother of God,” in *Divine Mirrors: The Virgin Mary in the Visual Arts*, ed. Melissa R. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4.

⁵⁰ “This was perhaps the most significant way Catholics’ approach to the Rosary began to change in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.” Mitchell, *Mystery of the Rosary*, 72.

Figure 2: Adrien Bloemaert (ca. 1609–1666), *The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1637 (Große Aula, University of Salzburg)

Figure 3: Adrien Bloemaert, *The Scourging*, 1637 (Große Aula, University of Salzburg)

In his 2009 book *The Mystery of the Rosary: Marian Devotion and the Reinvention of Catholicism*, Nathan Mitchell sheds light on the way in which the patronage of the Rosary confraternities, especially in the visual arts, transformed the way the Rosary was understood. He takes as his examples several altarpieces commissioned by confraternities, most notably Albrecht Dürer's *Feast of the Rose Garlands* (1500), Giuseppe Cesari's *La Madonna del Rosario* (1589), and, perhaps closest to the paintings of the Aula Academica, Caravaggio's *Madonna del Rosario* (1607; see Fig. 4).⁵¹ As Mitchell argues, Caravaggio's visual representation did more than promote the kind of creative flexibility that made the Rosary so appealing to early modern Catholics. It embodied the performative and physical aspects of Rosary meditation that were central to the Ignatian reimagination of the prayer as a spiritual exercise. By inviting the viewer into the visual, tactile, and even aural space of the image, Caravaggio's "rewritten" Marian icon "subverted the distance between viewer and image, thereby altering the experience of looking itself."⁵² Like Caravaggio, Biber did not compose his *Rosary Sonatas* "in order to instruct, catechize, or edify viewers, but to provoke a (perhaps unnerving) experience of direct involvement."⁵³ Biber's *Rosary Sonatas* fundamentally "alter" the experience of listening as they do the act of performing

precisely because they physically alter the body, or "the most basic language liturgy speaks." Both Caravaggio and Biber focus attention on the physical aspects of the Mysteries, helping to weave images in the minds of their audiences. The efficacy of Counter-Reformation Rosary art is therefore not in narrating a story, but in transforming a religious Mystery into a physical and cathartic experience.

The use of images in Rosary devotion dates back to the medieval Rosary psalters—picture books that contained images of the Mysteries as circular medallions, similar to the engravings in the *Rosary Sonatas* manuscript.⁵⁴ The earliest example of such *Rosenkranzbücher* is from 1483; it was printed in Ulm and based on the writings of Alanus de Rupe, also called Alain de la Roche (1428–1475), the founder of the first Rosary confraternity in 1470 (see Fig. 5).⁵⁵ The woodcut images are surrounded by garlands of roses and have been colored in by hand. The tradition of illustrating the Rosary with circular medallions and contemplative texts in the vernacular continued through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially in German prints. Such pictorial depictions also became associated specifically with the *Rosenkranzbrüderschaften*, the Rosary confraternities, as seen in the inscription of a woodcut by Wolf Traut from 1510 (Fig. 6).

⁵¹ Giuseppe Cesari, also known as Cavalier d'Arpino, was mentor to Caravaggio in Rome. His *Madonna del Rosario* was commissioned by the Rosary confraternity in Cesana in 1589; see Christopher F. Black, *Italian Confraternities in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 103. Dürer's altarpiece also appears to have been commissioned by a Rosary confraternity, "one connected with the German community in Venice." See Mitchell, *Mystery of the Rosary*, 25.

⁵² Mitchell, *Mystery of the Rosary*, 215.

⁵³ Ibid., 72.

⁵⁴ Anne Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose: The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 32.

⁵⁵ Alain de la Roche founded the first confraternity of the Rosary in Douai in 1470. Not long after this, a similar Dominican confraternity, that of the Psalter of Jesus and Mary, was founded in Cologne by Jakob Sprenger on Sept. 8, 1475 at the behest of Emperor Frederick III; see Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose*, 24–25; and Franz Michel Willam, *The Rosary: Its History and Meaning*, trans. Rev. Edwin Kaiser (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1953), 45.

Figure 4: Michelangelo Merisi, detto Caravaggio (1571–1610), *Madonna del Rosario*, 1607 (Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Gemäldegalerie)⁵⁶

⁵⁶ This image is available through the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien's digital collection: www.khm.at/de/object/25b2822c2f.

Figure 5: *Psalterium Mariae (Vnser Lieben Frauen Psalter)* (Ulm: Dickmut, 1483) (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München), 4 Inc.c.a. 316⁵⁷

⁵⁷ This book can be consulted through the Digitale Sammlungen of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek: <https://tinyurl.com/yco83d3c>.

By the seventeenth century these same Rosary roundels were used in confraternity charters—formal proclamations of the responsibilities of confraternity members—including the one from which the images in Biber’s manuscript were directly taken.⁵⁸ The images published in the Rosary psalters of the *Rosenkranzbücher* are related to the visual tradition discussed above in the paintings of Bloemaert and Caravaggio. Through these images, the viewer experiences the Mysteries of the Rosary through the pain and suffering of Mary. The image in Figure 7 is from a late seventeenth-century Rosary book from Augsburg in which Mary, with a dagger through her heart, watches her son struggle to carry the cross. As in the *Aula Academica* paintings, she appears at a remove from the other figures, and occupies a very different space from the rest of the scene.

In addition to emphasizing the visual component of Rosary devotions, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Rosary books insist on the necessity of the beads, and of saying the prayer aloud.⁵⁹ James Van Horn Melton has shown that, unlike the practices of Catholics in Tudor England, for whom silent prayer was necessary to avoid detection,⁶⁰ there is evidence that ecclesiastics in Salzburg insisted the Rosary prayer be said *mit lauter Stim*, “spoken aloud.” The prayer was, in this context, both a public declaration of faith and a multisensory

experience.⁶¹ The beads themselves in the seventeenth century were precious objects often made of rare and costly materials such as lapis lazuli and other gemstones. A surviving seventeenth-century Rosary from Cologne offers a further tactile enhancement: it is made of blue Murano glass beads wherein the decades are each split in half by five additional wooden beads in shapes of Christ’s body parts bearing the Holy Wounds.⁶² Rosaries could also incorporate the sense of smell with hollow beads of lattice silver gilt, which could be filled with fragrant herbs and flowers. The tactility of the beads and the vocal nature of the prayer were understood to assist the unsteady human spirit and to complement its composite nature of both spirit and matter.⁶³ Without the outward vocalization of prayer, such pure inner contemplation is impossible for a being who is bound to earthly physicality.

⁵⁸ Schmid, “Die ‘Rosenkranz-Sonaten’ von Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber,” 92–93. The layout of the manuscript suggests that the roundels were originally intended to be placed at the head of each sonata, and that the creation of the manuscript was likely around 1678, even if the pieces themselves may have been composed some time earlier.

⁵⁹ Willam, *The Rosary*, 63.

⁶⁰ See Anne Dillon, “Prayer by Number: The Confraternity of the Rosary and the English Catholic Community, c. 1580–1700,” *History* 88 (2003): 451–71.

⁶¹ Van Horn Melton points to two documents in the Salzburger Landesarchiv that suggest this to be the case: a record of a catechistic mission in Liechtenberg in which parishioners were “admonished . . . to recite their Saturday evening Rosary prayers ‘in a loud voice’ (mit lauter Stim),” and “a questionnaire used by Jesuit interrogators in the Gastein Valley [which] sought to determine whether or not the subject prayed the Rosary ‘laut.’” Van Horn Melton, “Confessional Power and the Power of Confession,” 152, n61.

⁶² This Rosary is housed at the Erzbischöfliches Diözesan-Museum, Cologne, R 133, Abb. 50 and is pictured in an exhibit catalogue published by the museum: *500 Jahre Rosenkranz: 1475 Köln 1975* (Cologne: Erzbischöfliches Diözesan-Museum, 1975). Compare the rather macabre seventeenth-century example to the balanced beauty of a sixteenth-century Rosary in the Kunstkammer Wien made of gilded glass: <http://www.khm.at/de/object/62293b5570>.

⁶³ Maisie Ward, *The Splendour of the Rosary* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1946), 17.

Figure 6: *Rosary Meditations*, woodcut, Wolf Traut, 1510 (Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe)⁶⁴

⁶⁴ This forms part of the Badische Landesbibliothek's digital collection: <https://digital.blb-karlsruhe.de/id/2933501>.

Figure 7: Wohlriechendes Myrrhen-Büschlein oder Unterricht Von der Gnadenreichen Bruderschaft Der sibem Schmertzten Mariä under dem Schwartzten Scapulier (Augsburg: Utzschneider, 1696), 32b⁶⁵

⁶⁵ This book can be consulted through the Digitale Sammlungen of the Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Münster: <https://sammlungen.ulb.uni-muenster.de/urn/urn:nbn:de:hbz:6:1-188909>.

Just as it is essentially impossible to “silently” read the score of Biber’s sonatas—it is a visual code that requires audible realization—the Rosary prayer must be vocalized in order to fulfill its potential; its importance lies not in the semantic meaning of the words but in the physical act of repeating them.

In 1496 a Danish priest from Odense known as Master Michael wrote a lengthy meditation on the Mysteries of the Rosary. Michael’s poem, one of the earliest printed books in the Danish language, was based largely on the teachings of his mentor, the aforementioned Dominican theologian Alanus de Rupe.⁶⁶ In the passage quoted below, the author describes the tactile and auditory nature of the Rosary prayer as an effective means of focusing the worshipper’s attention and avoiding distraction.

Could one pray it at an hour
When no distraction could occur
How pious that would be.
But the heart is unsteady ever
Too freely to earthly things run wild.
Much distraction will ever enter.
Hence to pious be, pray with lips,
And prayers will rise from within.
So does Alanus teach.
Recite with beads the prayer dear,
With heart to Virgin bent.
In heaven then you shall see her.⁶⁷

According to Master Michael, if one occupies their otherwise distracted field of perception with something that physically embodies the focus of devotion, the potency of their thoughts will be intensified. A later example, from the works of the French Jesuit Louis

Richeome (1544–1625), illustrates that the senses were, in the tradition of Ignatius Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*, an aid to devotion, and not an impediment to it. Richeome roots his distinction between meditation and contemplation in temporal bodily metaphors. For him, meditation is akin to eating—each morsel must be dealt with sequentially, one at a time, as if one were reading a text line by line. Contemplation, on the other hand, is a momentary saturation that allows the worshipper to take in the subject all at once, like drinking a fine wine, or ingesting all the elements of a picture in a single glance:

Heereof we learne the difference betwixt these two actions; for meditation is lesse cleere, lesse sweet, and more painefull than contemplation: it is as the reading of a booke, which must be done sentence after sentence; but contemplation is like casting the eyes vpon a picture, discerning all at once. Meditation is like eating: Contemplation is like drinking, a worke more sweet, cooling, and more delicate, lesse labour, and more pleasure than eating is. For he that meditateth, taketh an antecedent, doth behould, weigh, and consider it, as it were shewing the meate with some paine, and afterward doth gather conclusions one after another, as it were swallowing downe of morsels, and taketh his pleasure by peeces; but he that contemplateth, receaueth his obiect without paine swiftly, and as it were altogether, as if he tooke a draught of some delicate wine: such is Meditation, and such is Contemplation.⁶⁸

A Mystery, then, is not an impediment to thought, but rather an invitation to it.⁶⁹ The

⁶⁶ Herr Michael, *Praetesen i Odense Herr Michaels tre danske rijmvaerker fra. A. 1496*, ed. Christian Molbech from the 1516 edition (Copenhagen, 1836).

⁶⁷ This passage is based on the *materia Alani* of Alain de la Roche; quoted and translated in Willam, *The Rosary*, 48.

⁶⁸ The quotation above is from an English translation of Louis Richeome’s *Pilgrime of Loreto* published in 1629: Lewis Richeome, *The Pilgrime of Loreto: Performing His Vow Made to the Glorious Virgin Mary Mother of God*, trans. “E.W.” (Paris, 1629); repr. in *English Recusant Literature*, 1558–1640, vol. 285 (London: Scolar Press, 1976), 50; quoted in Mitchell, *Mystery of the Rosary*, 100.

⁶⁹ Ward, *Splendour of the Rosary*, 22.

idea that human interaction with the great Divine Mysteries has to do with a *partial* understanding, bound up in knowing and seeing as well as feeling and remembering, suggests not only that there is a deliberate distance between worshipper and subject, but also that a portion of that divine subject is created by the imagination of the worshipper through the physical act of devotion.⁷⁰ If we continue Richeome's line of "bodily" reasoning, music has the power to embody both meditation and contemplation simultaneously. It is experienced sequentially and engages the intellect by memory in the manner of a meditation, and it is at the same time a physical, tactile, and sensory experience akin to contemplation. Both the Rosary and Biber's sonatas are dependent on, and partially created by, the act of performance via a bodily metaphor; as the English theologian Catherine Pickstock writes, "this liturgical problematizing of the 'real' does not thereby deprioritize the physical, but rather intensifies its force and potential, and ability to signify its own invisible magnitude."⁷¹

It must be stressed at this point that any kind of generalization regarding the collective "spirituality" of Counter-Reformation Europe should be approached with caution. Although there was an increasingly greater emphasis on private and extraliturgical devotions in this period, the vast majority of these, including the Rosary, were powerful reimaginings of centuries-old practices of worship. Beyond this, the tremendous variety in the ways that such practices were executed—even within the charters of confraternities of late seventeenth-century Salzburg alone—makes it nearly

impossible to say exactly how a collection like the *Rosary Sonatas* could have functioned within a devotion from a practical standpoint. What we can conjecture, however, is that the idiosyncrasies of Rosary art in this period point to an aspect of the prayer that, on the one hand, dates back to its beginnings, and on the other, was reemphasized in the most literal and visceral way in the seventeenth century: the practice of Rosary devotion is one that blends the vocal and meditative aspects of prayer, the internal with the external, and the social with the private. The act of devotion can thus be "performed" by anyone who experiences artistic representations of the Mysteries of the Rosary through any of the senses: by seeing, speaking, listening, and even tasting. Furthermore, this double-sided religious persuasion, with an emphasis on both solitary prayer and overt public Marian piety, would become, as Anna Coreth has shown, a central characteristic of the *pietas Austriaca*.⁷²

Physicality in Performance

Devotional practices like the Rosary, and indeed the Catholic liturgy itself, are characterized by ritual, repetition, and a sense of perpetual striving. As Richard Kearney writes, the experience of the divine begins with a creative moment of "not knowing," a sense of "dispossessive bewilderment" in which ingrained habits of thought are brought to crisis, opening up novel possibilities for meaning and enlightenment.⁷³ The doubt, disillusionment, and acuteness so central in the

⁷⁰ Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 214.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁷² See Anna Coreth, *Pietas Austriaca*, trans. William D. Bowman and Anna Maria Leitgeb (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2004), especially chap. 3, "Pietas Mariana," 45–80.

⁷³ Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 7–8.

experience of Biber's sonatas force a moment of utter confusion, of "not knowing," which then catalyzes a search for new understanding, a recognition or *re-cognizing*, as the divine experience perpetually oscillates between strangeness and familiarity. This deliberate sense of distance is most acutely felt by the violinist in the act of performance. The uncomfortable discord between the pitches read and the melodies heard results in an unmistakable physical awareness of the familiar finger patterns that have become, through years of practice, the immediate response to the visual patterns of notation.⁷⁴ The performer is forced into self-awareness as they reconcile familiar physical impulses with inconsistent and unfamiliar results. In his comments on the *Spiritual Exercises*, Gerard Manley Hopkins refers to the blending of the senses in this physical self-consciousness when he writes of "my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself . . . more distinct than the taste of ale or alum."⁷⁵ Similar bodily or "carnal" understandings of spiritual exercise have also

been echoed more recently in the work of Jean-Luc Marion, who, in his study of "saturated phenomena," wrote that in such rituals the distinction between appearance (*l'apparaître*) and what appears (*l'apparaissant*) is dissolved, and that in the case of "the flesh," "the perceived is one with the perceiver."⁷⁶

The violin itself undergoes transformations as well. Some are pleasing, as in Sonatas II (*The Visitation*) and XV (*Coronation*),⁷⁷ whereas others are painful, as in the Sorrowful Sonatas: Sonata IX (*Carrying of the Cross*) has the G string tuned up a fourth, and Sonata VIII (*Crowning of Thorns*) brings it up a fifth to D creating a tension that pushes the instrument "to the absolute limits of what is possible."⁷⁸ Daniel Edgar has gone so far as to say that Biber deliberately deploys the *scordatura* in Sonatas VII and VIII "so as to prevent his fine Stainer violin from functioning properly."⁷⁹ This tension in the instrument not only creates conflicting vibrations within the body of the violin, it is also sympathetically felt by the performer, who, through direct contact, feels the discomfort of the instrument and the disruption of sympathetic resonance. In Sonata XI (*The Resurrection*), considered below, the two middle strings are crossed just behind the bridge, undoing every tactile instinct the performer has developed through years of training. The process is similar to what the French theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet calls "the slow work of apprenticeship in the art of

⁷⁴ It is worth noting that the ingrained habits of a seventeenth-century violinist must be very different from those of a modern one. Because Biber's sonatas do not have an extensive history of performance and reception, it is difficult to say how violinists' perceptions of them have changed alongside violin technique. It may be said, however, that, then as now, the extent to which the collection employs *scordatura*—beyond what a modern violinist might reasonably expect from the core repertoire—means that its performance remains an exceptional undertaking.

⁷⁵ Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Comments on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola," in *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Christopher Devlin, S.J. (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 105–209; quoted in Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 170. The connection to Loyola's exercises has been discussed by Lindsey Strand-Polyak, "The Virtuoso's Idiom: Spectacularity and the Seventeenth-Century Violin Sonata" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2013).

⁷⁶ Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press), 99.

⁷⁷ The *Visitation* Sonata (I) is in A major, with the tuning a – e' – a' – e", and the *Coronation* Sonata (XV) is in C major, with the strings tuned g – c' – g' – d".

⁷⁸ Daniel Edgar, "The Encoding of Faith: Scordatura in Heinrich Biber's Mystery Sonatas" (Ph.D. diss., University of York, 2008), 67.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

‘un-mastery.’”⁸⁰ Just as the act of reading the semi-tablature notation forces the performer to consider their own physical conditioning, the *scordatura* also makes them keenly aware of the internal vibrations and tactility of the instrument. The *scordatura* and the act of realizing its notation are therefore not superfluous but necessary in the creation of this distance—somewhere between the familiar and strange—which is ever-present in liturgical acts. The music, quite literally, does not exist on paper; it is embodied experience: “a mix of biological facts and cultural consciousness,”⁸¹ and the locus of its meaning is the physical body.

Biber used *scordatura* not only to allow the violinist to perform passages otherwise unplayable on the instrument, but also to exploit artistically the unusual tone colors, sympathetic resonance, and acoustical idiosyncrasies of the violin. Unlike many *scordatura* pieces for violin that use the alternative tunings to complement a particular key—thus making polyphonic playing more manageable—some of the *Rosary Sonatas* configure the strings in a way that does not entirely complement the sounding key. For example, Sonata VI (*Agony in the Garden*) uses one of the most extreme tunings in the whole collection ($a\flat - e\flat' - g' - d''$). Despite the fact that this piece is heard in C minor, this *scordatura* actually splits the violin into two perfect fifths separated by a semitone ($a\flat$ and g). The effect of the *scordatura* is that the top two strings cancel any sympathetic resonance

with the lower two and vice versa.⁸² In this way, Biber creates “a uniquely empty tone quality” that seems to force the violin to fight against itself, and the performer against the violin, in order to achieve the correct key.⁸³ Similarly, Sonata XIII (*Pentecost*) uses a *scordatura* suggesting A-major ($a - e' - c\sharp'' - e''$), while the piece itself sounds in D minor (see Fig. 1 above).⁸⁴ The double-stops and measured trill passages in the first movement of Sonata XIII are repeated to excess, with increasing dynamics and quickening note values; they seem driven in a frenzied manner toward climaxes that are intensified by the “distinctly strained . . . narrower, more closed timbre” created by the *scordatura*.⁸⁵ It has been suggested that these figures are meant to depict musically the “swirling winds of Pentecost.”⁸⁶ There are any number of instances in the *Rosary Sonatas* where images and stories may be evoked in the minds of the listeners, but the relationship between music and prayer is not limited to the programmatic. The relentless repetition in the opening of Sonata XIII is reminiscent of the cathartic repetitions of the Rosary prayer, a connection made all the more intense by the double-stops and the timbral tension of the conflicted tuning. It is clear that Biber’s primary intention was not to make his sonatas

⁸² See Edgar, “Encoding of Faith,” 67.

⁸³ Ibid., 65–66: “Biber succeeds in creating a uniquely empty tone quality, as much of the harmonic support from the open strings above and/or below each note, which would usually contribute to its colour, is absent. This, then, is the first example in the *Sorrowful Mysteries* of Biber going beyond the instrument’s comfort zone, and he achieves it without moving any of the strings more than a tone away from their normal pitch.”

⁸⁴ This “A-major” tuning bears some resemblance to the *scordatura* chosen by Gottfried Finger in three of his viol pieces that use hand-grip notation (see note 21 above).

⁸⁵ Edgar, “Encoding of Faith,” 83.

⁸⁶ Clements, “Aspects of the *Ars rhetorica*,” 170.

⁸⁰ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 1995), 74.

⁸¹ Ariel Glucklich, *Sacred Pain: Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 15.

easier to play by employing *scordatura*; in many of the *Rosary Sonatas* quite the opposite is true. In this case as in many others, what seems excessive is actually essential.

Sonata XI (*The Resurrection*) is a particularly poignant example of Biber's creative use of *scordatura*. The strings are tuned $g - d' - g' - d''$, but the two middle strings are crossed just behind the bridge, resulting in a configuration of $g - g' - d' - d''$. The strings are not just tuned in octaves; the higher of the two middle strings is now closest to the lowest G string, and the lower of the two middle strings is now closest to the highest string (the E string tuned to d''). In the opening passage of this sonata shown in Example 1—which includes both the pitches as written on the highest staff and as sounded on the second highest—Biber plays with the expectations of both the performer and the listener with what sounds like a series of G-major scales and arpeggios over a tonic pedal in the bass. The notation is deliberately inconsistent in its relationship to the sounded music, and the physical gestures required of the performer are visually incongruent with the sound. In the second beat of bar 6, the notated musical line leaps up to a descending scalar passage that looks like an uncanny version of its audible analogue; the written and sounded music share a similar shape but are separated by a whole tone. In the measures that follow, Biber transforms this discrepancy between notation and sound into a dynamic interplay that is both unsettling (for the performer) and, in this case, awe-inspiring (for the listener). In the subsequent passage of sixteenth-note “scales,” written disjunct motion is consistently paired with sounding conjunct motion, and the two alternate from beat to beat. In bars 10–12, thirty-second-note arpeggios are notated with a visual discrepancy of either a perfect fourth or a major second; here, the audible shape of the

musical line does not match at all with the visual shape of the notation.⁸⁷ The listener is only partly aware of this process as they attempt to reconcile the musical figures heard with the physical gestures of the violinist's bow. Determined to “show” this G-major harmony in every possible guise, Biber then brings this opening virtuosic passage to a close in bar 13, where the sounded and written music are nearly identical—with the exception of the written a at the top of the arpeggiated passage. The echoes in this passage—notated piano and forte in the manuscript—are made all the more effective by the stopped resonance of the two middle strings caused both by their tuning and by the fact that they are crossed.

⁸⁷ James Clements has identified this passage to employ the ornamented musical-rhetorical figure *circulatio*. Clements argues that the circular musical figuration has Christian connotations: “the circle, traditionally associated with the sun and as a source of life, was also associated with God and Christ as the Light of the World.” Clements, “Aspects of the *Ars rhetorica*,” 166. For a more detailed history of the *circulatio* tradition in music, see Warren Kirkendale, “*Circulatio*-Tradition, *Maria Lactans*, and Josquin as Musical Orator,” *Acta Musicologica* 56 (1984): 69–92.

Example 1: Sonata XI, *The Resurrection*, I, bars 6–13

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with three staves. The top staff is labeled 'vn (written)' and the middle staff is labeled 'vn (sounded)'. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. Bar 6 begins with a half note G#4 in the written violin part, followed by a half note F#4 in the sounded violin part. Bar 7 continues with eighth notes. Bar 8 starts with a half note G#4 in the written part and a half note F#4 in the sounded part, marked with a forte 'f' dynamic. Bar 9 continues with eighth notes. Bar 10 starts with a half note G#4 in the written part and a half note F#4 in the sounded part, marked with a piano 'p' dynamic. Bar 11 continues with eighth notes. Bar 12 starts with a half note G#4 in the written part and a half note F#4 in the sounded part, marked with a forte 'f' dynamic. Bar 13 continues with eighth notes. The piano accompaniment consists of half notes in the right hand and whole notes in the left hand, with a key signature change to two sharps (F#, C#) at the end of bar 13.

The performer's disorientation is emphasized further in the second movement of the Resurrection sonata, which presents variations on the Easter song *Surrexit Christus hodie* (see Ex. 2a).⁸⁸ As in the first movement, Biber

strikes a precarious balance between the aural and visual dimensions to complement the already symbolic quotation of a well-known hymn tune.⁸⁹ As seen in Example 2b, some of

⁸⁸ Example from the bass line of the second movement of the Resurrection Sonata (XI). On the hymn tune, see also Wilhelm Bäumker, *Das katholische deutsche Kirchenlied in seinen Singweisen, von den*

frühesten Zeiten bis gegen Ende des 17. Jahrhunderts (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1886–1911; repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1962), 1: 510–14.

⁸⁹ The interpretation of Biber's use of this hymn tune has garnered a considerable amount of scholarly debate. In his study, Dieter Haberl provides a

the notes appear as they sound—for example, at the beginning of the variation at bar 49—or, as in the subsequent few bars from 50 to 54, at least appear to have a congruent melody. Other passages, however, are not so straightforward. The hymn tune, heard quite clearly from bar 42 to bar 46, sounds as a beautiful stepwise melody but is written as a disjointed tune, visually separated from its audible realization now by a fifth (bar 42), now by a second (bar 45), sometimes with intervals in the same direction, and sometimes in the opposite direction (both seen in bar 47). Additionally, this movement is laden with double-stop passages, exemplified in bars 49–64 (see Ex. 3), where essentially none of the notated double-stop intervals are the same as their sounding realizations. In such cases, the violinist must negotiate seeing incorrect intervals both horizontally and vertically while maintaining a sense of tuning. Further, the added complication of the crossed strings results in utter disorientation as the violinist tries to adjust pressure on the two strings of the double-stops while hearing the sounds being produced; the automatic response to

change bow angle and pressure when the violinist hears more of the lower- or higher-pitched string must be forcibly reversed to achieve the desired result.

That the relationship between the visual and the oral can shift from entirely congruent and expected to completely incongruent and unexpected within the space of one phrase, or even one bar, demonstrates that the experience of performance is not one of utter incomprehension but rather one of partial comprehension. The disorientation is heightened and made more potent because the performer is not barred entirely from understanding; they can grasp just enough—through the aural and tactile senses—to allow this sense of awe to be communicated through a disruption of physical memory. The compositional devices employed by Biber, such as the *scordatura*, crossed strings, and the quotation of a well-known hymn tune, strike a balance between a necessary distance and intimate closeness required to make the performance of these pieces an act of religious devotion. Biber does not describe or narrate the story of the Resurrection, he creates the circumstances in which both the violinist and the listeners may become aware of the greatest Mystery of Christianity, of earthly death and heavenly life: “And this space between knowing and not knowing is that of the resurrected life which is characterized by the act of worship.”⁹⁰

The prayer of the Rosary consists of unceasing evocations of the Virgin Mary: it is an apostrophic address.⁹¹ In the context of liturgical enactment or devotional practice, the

numerological reading of Biber’s quotation and treatment of *Surrexit Christus hodie*, pointing out, for instance, that the cantus firmus of the Easter hymn tune comprises 33 notes: Christ’s age when he died. See Dieter Haberl, “*Ordo arithmeticus*: Barocker Zahlbezug und seine Wurzeln dargestellt am Beispiel der Rosenkranzsonaten von Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber” (Ph.D. diss., University of Salzburg, 1995), 179. The symbolism of Biber’s quotation (which is heard three times in the violin and six times in total) is taken even further with the dissonance between visual, oral, and physical caused by the *scordatura*. Brewer writes that “the programmatic aspects of Partita XI (*The Resurrection*) are also explicit in the variations on the Easter Song, ‘Surrexit Christus hodie,’ first stated in the continuo in what was probably a Salzburg variant of the well-known tune” (Brewer, *Instrumental Music*, 309). How exactly this is “programmatic” is not fully explained, however; there is very little in the text or tune beyond the image of “rising” that could suggest an explicit musical program.

⁹⁰ Pickstock, *After Writing*, 265.

⁹¹ Katie Wales, *Dictionary of Stylistics* (London: Longman, 1989), 32; see also James Paxson, *The Poetics of Personification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

address, or apostrophe, is at once the individual's calling to that which is absent and a communal event; "it is both heard and overheard."⁹² The ever-incomplete divine subject—the Mysteries seen and felt through Mary—can only exist through this dual vocative address, one that is both individual and collective. Furthermore, the enactment of this "presence of absence"⁹³ complements Aquinas's human understanding of sacrament quoted at the beginning of this essay: ritual or symbolic acts are the inventive and, above all, human processes by which the familiar is joined to the unfamiliar in a cyclical, repetitive symbiosis. Likewise, Biber's sonatas musically express Sacred Mystery through the inner strife of the performer and the partial vocal expression of that conflict.

⁹² Pickstock, *After Writing*, 193.

⁹³ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 62–63.

Example 2a: *Surrexit Christus hodie*, hymn tune; Sonata XI, *The Resurrection*, II (bass line), bars 1–16

Example 2b: Sonata XI, *The Resurrection*, II, bars 33–48

33

vn (written)

vn (sounded)

36

4 #

39

6

42

6 6 6

45

Example 3: Sonata XI, *The Resurrection*, II, bars 49–64

49

vn (written)

vn (sounded)

52

#6

55

6 6 7 6

58

6 7 6 6

61

6

63

6 7 6

While the performer strives to communicate without fully comprehending the sounds they are producing, the listeners feel only a part of the discomfort of the performer as they assemble their own mental images based on what they see and hear. In this context, it is not surprising that many of the movements in Biber's sonatas are based on large and small patterns of repetition: chaconnes, variations, improvisatory movements, and the magnificent Passacaglia for solo violin with which the collection ends. Because audible exteriorization is necessary for interior awareness, the "excess" of the Rosary prayer or the "nuisance" of the *scordatura* is in fact essential for indicating the juncture of physical and

spiritual. The performer and listener are invited to contemplate the unfixed nature both of the pieces themselves as catalysts to devotion and of the divinities they address. Such devotional acts preserve the intangible distance and, paradoxically, allow for a metonymic relationship—one of real contact—between their enactment and the divine. Essentially, the *Rosary Sonatas* do not explain the Mysteries, they embody them by eliciting creative acts that blur the boundaries between the visual and aural senses.

Although Biber never left Salzburg for any significant length of time after his arrival around 1670, the publication of his violin

sonatas of 1681, along with other works, ensured the circulation of his music during his lifetime and sustained his posthumous reputation. But the *Rosary Sonatas* seem to have remained relatively obscure in their time, even though they are today among Biber's most recognized pieces. As we have seen, the *Rosary Sonatas* have a particularly complex relationship with their written representation, since, given the notational expectations of the performer, the signs do not function as they would normally. In *Orality and Literacy* (1982), Jesuit philosopher Walter Ong observes that "print is curiously intolerant of physical incompleteness. It can convey the impression, unintentionally and subtly, but very really, that the material the text deals with is similarly complete or self-consistent."⁹⁴ The fact that these sonatas were preserved in manuscript suggests not only that they require human presence both in their writing and performance, but also that they are deliberately crafted to thwart fixation. Printed distribution would not have neutralized the extraordinary nature of the pieces since, as we have seen, such extensive *scordatura* tunings were uncommon in the violin repertory, but the authority of stabilized print could certainly have minimized the importance of the visual, tactile, and physical presence so central to understanding the music as ritual devotion.

That virtuosic music of the seventeenth century was often not intended for publication may suggest that this repertory was so highly valued that patrons were reluctant to allow its circulation and, in some cases, prohibited it outright. This is particularly true in the context of Jesuit patronage. The Jesuits of the seventeenth century were very protective of the emotive, sensual, and highly rhetorical music

that they commissioned. A comparison can be made with the case of Giacomo Carissimi (1605–1674), whose music and the performances of it were tightly controlled by his employers at the Jesuit Collegium Germanicum in Rome, the same institution at which Biber's patron in Salzburg, Archbishop Maximilian Gandolph, was educated. Since the college seldom allowed Carissimi to publish, the vast majority of his music was written in manuscript and kept within the walls of the institution.⁹⁵ Within a year of the composer's death in 1674, the college obtained a brief from Pope Clement X confirming their exclusive rights to Carissimi's music and forbidding its removal in any form, under pain of excommunication.⁹⁶ Although Carissimi's fame ensured that his music was in high demand, the college never benefited financially from its ownership of the music.

The Jesuits understood music to be both a potent embodiment of their teachings and an extremely powerful tool in conversion. If widely distributed and divorced from its devotional context, perhaps without due reverence to the solemnity of the music, both Carissimi's and Biber's highly emotive music could somehow be misused or be considered purely ornamental. Although fate was kinder to Biber upon the rediscovery of the *Rosary Sonatas* manuscript, Carissimi's autographs, tragically, all disappeared after the suppression of the Jesuits in 1773.⁹⁷ Our perception of

⁹⁴ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982; rpt. New York: Routledge, 2002), 130.

⁹⁵ The exceptions here are 53 motets published between 1642 and 1675; Andrew V. Jones, *The Motets of Carissimi* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 1: 27.

⁹⁶ The most extensive study of these documents is Thomas Culley, *Jesuits and Music* (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 1970). For the papal brief, see doc. 196.

⁹⁷ Carissimi's oratorios survive today only in copies by French and English scribes, most notably Marc-Antoine Charpentier. See Howard Smither, *A History of*

these repertoires is for this reason decidedly incomplete, and without extant manuscripts it is impossible to say how incomplete; *scordatura* may have been employed in a substantial corpus of instrumental music that is now lost or, at best, has yet to be studied in detail.⁹⁸ In Biber's case, the context of patronage and religious practice can help to enrich our understanding of this repertoire, even in the absence of musical sources. As much as Archbishop Maximilian Gandolph's connection to Rosary confraternities was a strong one, the interpretation of the *Rosary Sonatas* as potent acts of devotion raises the possibility that they may never have been part of any public performances, even in a religious context. We may therefore entertain the possibility that Biber's collection was most likely meant as a private offering to Archbishop Maximilian Gandolph, and that Biber himself may have been the only violinist to perform it.⁹⁹

the Oratorio (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 1: 221.

⁹⁸ Important here is the music of Giuseppe Colombi (1635–1694), which includes several examples of unpublished virtuoso *scordatura* pieces written for the Este court at Modena and preserved only in manuscript. Twenty-five manuscript volumes of instrumental music including sonatas and dances by Colombi are preserved in the Biblioteca Estense in Modena. See Gregory Barnett, *Bolognese Instrumental Music 1660–1770* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 123–25. Compared especially to the German repertory of *scordatura* violin music, there are relatively few examples of published Italian *scordatura* music (Biagio Marini's famous Op. 8 of 1629 and Marco Uccellini's *Sonata Tromba sordina per sonare con violino solo* of 1649 are notable exceptions). As I have suggested above, this does not mean that virtuoso *scordatura* music was not common in Italian circles, since most of it appears to have been unpublished and preserved only in manuscript. See especially Peter Allsop, "Violinistic Virtuosity in the Seventeenth Century: Italian Supremacy or Austro-German Hegemony?" *Saggiatore musicale* 3/2 (1996): 233–58.

⁹⁹ Both Chafe and Brewer have already hinted at this possibility. Brewer has also pointed to the similar

The potency of the devotional act initiated by the *Rosary Sonatas*—as real symbols for the human experience of Mystery—might then explain why the pieces were not published and their distribution was tightly controlled. The aversion to the printing or "fixing" of some genres of seventeenth-century music has been discussed by Tim Carter with reference to composer-performers who were ambivalent about committing their virtuosic art to print.¹⁰⁰ Carter suggests that in many cases, "these musical texts were designed to be somehow brought to life in performance, and thus . . . they are by definition incomplete in and of themselves."¹⁰¹ By composing and notating music, the composer's task "is not so much to create meaning as to determine a space in which meaning might be created."¹⁰² But perhaps we should approach the idea of "producing meanings" with a degree of caution, especially in the context of music and devotional practices. Although I have argued that the performance of Biber's pieces creates a ritualistic space akin to the Rosary prayer—both internal and external—it must be stressed that this music is powerful not because it allows one to "make meaning" from abstract instrumental music, but because it forces one to relinquish control, to surrender oneself, to question ingrained practices and habits. As Nathan Mitchell astutely summarizes: "Liturgy's goal isn't meaning but meeting. And meetings are always risky. Christian worship is not doctrine disguised in ritual shorthand, but action that draws us into the dynamic,

situation of Johann Kuhnau's *Biblische Historien* (Leipzig, 1700); Brewer, *Instrumental Music*, 314.

¹⁰⁰ Tim Carter, "The Search for Musical Meaning," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Music*, ed. John Butt and Tim Carter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 187.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 189.

hospitable, yet perilous space of God's own life."¹⁰³

The deliberate distance and seeming remoteness of Biber's sonatas compels the performer to internally contemplate physicality in the act of exteriorizing sound. The performance of Biber's *Rosary Sonatas* is an act of devotion in and of itself, an embodiment of theological expression that gives musical presence to holiness. The performer of these sonatas concedes intent and control on all fronts: in the act, they are perpetually oscillating between confusion and understanding, volatility and stability, doubt and enlightenment. In truth, the performer's second nature is acting without them. Such internal struggle, externalized through an artistic medium, draws attention to physically ingrained habits and compels the worshipper, here equated with the performer, to doubt their preconceptions and simultaneously propels them into a new understanding. Throughout the lifetime of an individual or across generations this process repeats itself, confirming that religious art teaches us that an understanding of the divine can never be taken for granted, can never be regarded as a foregone conclusion; it must be interpreted and reinterpreted *in perpetuum*. Biber's use of *scordatura* in the *Rosary Sonatas* was shaped by Jesuit understandings of the spiritual power of rhetoric; the physical and spiritual are not conflated, but joined in a dialogue,¹⁰⁴ and a musical technique is transformed into an emblematic representation of Mystery. In his sublime and cryptic *Rosary Sonatas*, Biber

created an artistic space in which we may come to be familiar with God the stranger.

¹⁰³ Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery*, 59.

¹⁰⁴ "It was precisely this operation of putting the two parts into relation that constituted the foundation of emblematic language." Filippi, "The Orator's Performance," 522.