

DEAR UNCLE MAX

Send questions to Dear Uncle Max, AGO National Headquarters, 475 Riverside Dr., Suite 1260, New York, NY 10115.

The AGO emblem contains the motto "*Soli Deo Gloria*" while Bach's expression seems to have been "*Soli Dei Gloria*" (for the glory of God alone). (See enclosed copy of a page from *Patterns of Protestant Church Music* by Robert M. Stevenson, Duke University Press, 1953, p. 54.)

If my dim memories of high school Latin serve me correctly, if we want to say "of God alone" it would be "*Soli Dei*" (genitive case?). "*Deo*" is nominative case, isn't it?

This has confused me ever since I've been a member of the AGO, and I would be very appreciative of some clarification and enlightenment.

M.W., N.C.

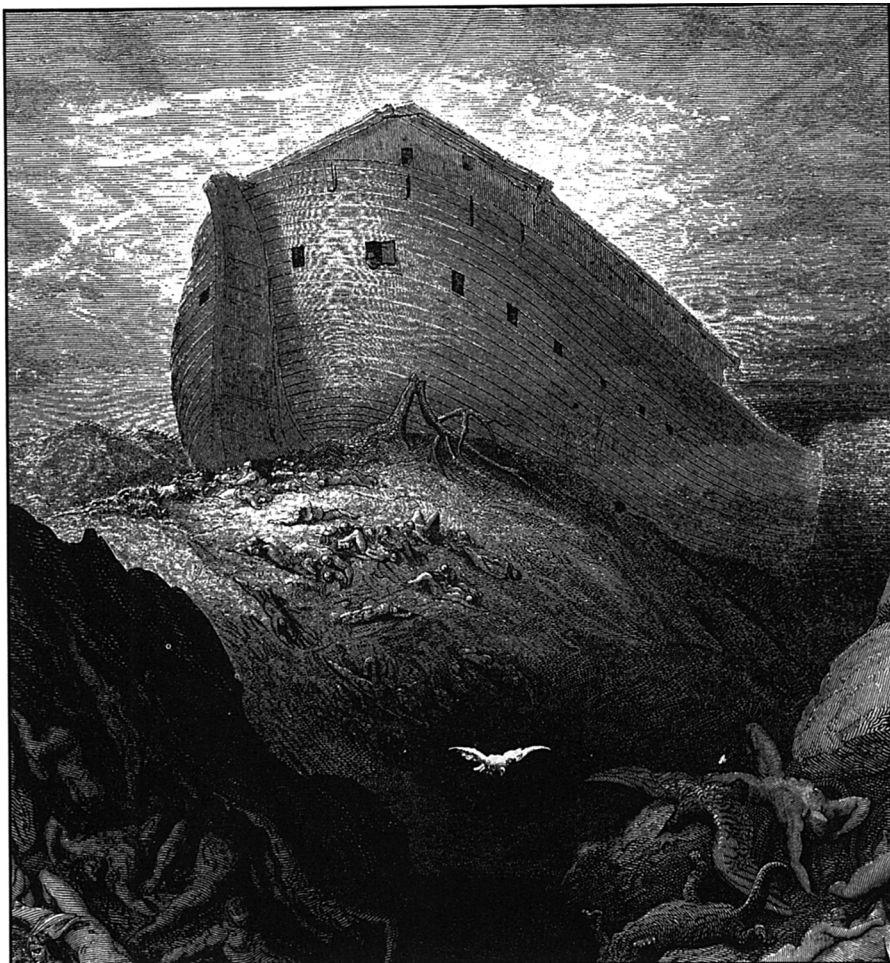
Arnold Schoenberg writing his essay on Gustav Mahler in *Style and Idea* observes, "Nothing about a great man is secondary . . . every one of his acts is somehow productive . . . in this sense, I should even have liked to observe how Mahler knotted his tie. . . ."! Certainly everything about Bach is important and nothing is more indicative of what he was about when he composed than his inscribing his compositions with J.J., Jesu Juva, Jesus Help, at the beginning and S.D.G., Soli Deo Gloria, at the conclusion. Everything was done within the context of giving glory to God. A high calling indeed. Wisely, the Guild adopted the one phrase for its motto and we do well to reflect on it now and again.

Bach, no doubt, after the education of his day, had good but perhaps not flawless skills in Latin. He attended the Lateinschule in Eisenach and later studied more Latin at Lüneburg. When applying for the position of cantor at St. Thomas in Leipzig, Bach indicated he would be willing to undertake the general instruction required of him—giving five Latin lessons weekly to the third and fourth classes. When it came down to it, the Council allowed as how it was all right with them, if the work seemed too much, that he might himself pay for a deputy to teach the Latin. Bach thought it was worth it; he paid a Mr. Pezold to take over.

To put the best face on it, there may be a typographical error in Mr. Stevenson's Latin.

Solus—alone, only—is an irregular adjective of the third declension and goes thus:

Solus, nominative, the case for the subject



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Solius, genitive, *of* or *'s*, the possessive case

Soli, dative, *to* or *for* case

Deus, second declension nominative Dei, genitive

Deo, dative

The noun and its adjective must match in case and number. Either Solius Dei—of God alone—or Soli Deo—to or for God alone.

(One might note that Bach is known to have made an inadvertent Latin mistake, says Walter Blankenburg, in his marking of the duet, "Et unum Dominum" from the B-minor Mass when he wrote "Duo voces articuli secundi," where correct Latin would have required "Duae.")

Moral: After a hundred years, you can trust the Guild to get it right.

MAX B. MILLER, FAGO