

“Herr Gott, dich loben wir” BWV 16

**1. Herr Gott, dich loben wir,
Herr Gott, wir danken dir.
Dich, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit,
Ehret die Welt weit und breit.¹**

2. So stimmen wir
Bei dieser frohen Zeit
Mit heisser Andacht an
Und legen dir,
O Gott, auf dieses neue Jahr
Das erste Herzensopfer dar.
Was hast du nicht von Ewigkeit
Vor Heil an uns getan,
Und was muss unsre Brust
Noch jetzt vor Lieb und Treu verspüren?
Dein Zion sieht vollkommne Ruh,
Es fällt ihm Glück und Segen zu;
Der Tempel schallt
Von Psaltern und von Harfen,
Und unsre Seele wallt,
Wenn wir nur Andachtsglut in Herz und Munde führen.
O, sollte darum nicht
Ein neues Lied erklingen
Und wir in heisser Liebe singen?

3. Lasst uns jauchzen, lasst uns freuen,
Gottes Güt und Treu
Bleibet alle Morgen neu.

**1. Lord God, we praise you.
Lord God, we thank you.
You, God the Father in eternity,
The world honors far and wide.**

2. Thus [with this “Te Deum”] we embark on singing
At this happy time
With ardent devotion
And lay before you,
Oh God, our initial heart’s-offering²
In this new year.
What have you not done for us,
From eternity, in support of salvation?
And what must our breast sense
Even now of [your] love and faithfulness?
Your Zion³ knows perfect rest;
Happiness and blessing befall it;
The Temple resounds
With psalteries⁴ and with harps,⁵
And our soul is inwardly stirred
If only we induce the fervor of devotion into heart and
mouth.
Oh, should not
A new song thus sound forth,
And should we not sing in ardent love?
3. Let us shout, let us rejoice;
God’s goodness and faithfulness
Continues to be new every morning.⁶

¹Martin Luther’s translation of the “Te Deum laudamus.”

²This talk of the Te Deum as a “heart’s offering” is developed from the series of ideas in Psalm 51:17-19, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “HERR, tue meine Lippen auf, dass mein Mund deinen Ruhm verkündige. ... Die Opfer, die Gott gefallen, sind ein geängster Geist: ein geängstes und zuschlagen Herz wirst du, Gott, nicht verachten” (“LORD, open my lips, that my mouth may proclaim your glory [e.g., in songs of praise offered to God]. ... The offerings that please God are [not burnt animal sacrifices but] a distressed spirit: a distressed and shattered heart, God, you will not despise”).

³“Zion” was understood in traditional Christianity to mean the followers of Jesus, the church.

⁴The expression “schallt von Psaltern” means “resounds with the playing of finger-plucked instruments called the psaltery,” not “resounds with the singing of poetry from the biblical book of Psalms.” The psaltery is a kind of zither, a flat wooden box with metal strings. In the Luther (and other) Bibles, “psaltery” was used for several different Hebrew musical-instrument terms whose meanings are now uncertain.

⁵By the rules of older German grammar, this construction could admittedly be read as either singular (“psaltery and harp”) or plural (“psalteries and harps”); both German nouns would have had a dative “n”-ending. But in the various places that Luther Bibles of Bach’s day use the expression “mit Psaltern und Harfen,” the underlying Hebrew terms are both plural.

⁶The language of these lines is derived from Lamentations 3:22-23, as rendered in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, “Die Güte des HERRN ist, dass wir nicht gar aus sind; seine Barmherzigkeit hat noch kein Ende, sondern sie ist alle Morgen neu, und deine Treue ist

Krönt und segnet seine Hand,
Ach so glaubt, dass unser Stand
Ewig, ewig glücklich sei.

4. Ach treuer Hort,
Beschütz auch fernerhin dein wertest Wort,
Beschütze Kirch und Schule,
So wird dein Reich vermehrt
Und Satans arge List gestört;
Erhalte nur den Frieden
Und die beliebte Ruh,
So ist uns schon genug beschieden,
Und uns fällt lauter Wohlsein zu.
Ach! Gott, du wirst das Land
Noch ferner wässern,
Du wirst es stets verbessern,
Du wirst es selbst mit deiner Hand
Und deinem Segen bauen.
Wohl uns, wenn wir
Dir für und für,
Mein Jesus und mein Heil, vertrauen.

5. Geliebter Jesu, du allein
Sollst unser¹⁰ Seelen Reichtum sein;
Wir wollen dich vor allen Schätzen
In unser treues Herze setzen,
Ja, wenn das Lebensband zerreisst,

If his hand crowns [with grace] and blesses [the
righteous];⁷

Ah, then believe that our condition
Will be eternally, eternally happy.

4. Ah, [God our] faithful refuge,
Protect also henceforth your worthy word;⁸
Protect church and school;
Thereby your [heavenly]⁹ kingdom is increased
And Satan's evil cunning confounded.
Just uphold peace
And beloved rest;
Thereby, enough is already appointed to us,
And nothing but wellbeing befalls us.
Ah, God, you will
Yet further water the land;
You will always improve it;
With your hand and your blessing
You yourself will cultivate it.
[It is] well with us if we,
Forever and ever,
Trust in you, my Jesus and my salvation.

5. Beloved Jesus, you alone
Shall be our soul's riches;
We would set you ahead of all treasures
In our faithful heart;
Yes, when the bond of [earthly] life severs,

gross." ("It is [through] the goodness of the LORD that we are not completely done for; his mercifulness, if anything, has no end; but it is new every morning, and great is your [i.e., God's] faithfulness").

⁷The talk in this movement of God's "crowning" and of the believer's "condition" does not fully make sense without taking into account its oblique biblical phrasing. The language of line 4 is derived from Psalm 5:13, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "Du, HERR, segnest die Gerechten; du krönest sie mit Gnaden" ("You, LORD, [will] bless the righteous; you [will] crown them with grace"). Line 4 is sometimes mistranslated as "Crown and bless his hand." The line's "segnet" and "krönt" are not second-person imperative ("[You Christians must] crown and bless his [God's] hand") with "Hand" as the object, however, but third-person indicative ("His [God's] hand crowns and blesses [you Christians]) with "Hand" as the subject.

⁸The expression "wertes Wort" comes from 1 Timothy 1:15, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "Das ist je gewisslich wahr und ein teuer wertest Wort, dass Christus Jesus gekommen ist in die Welt, die Sünder selig zu machen" ("It is ever an assuredly true and a precious worthy saying/word [from/of God], that Christ Jesus came into the world to make sinners blessed/saved").

⁹The size of God's realm here is not a geopolitical matter (i.e., a question of how many earthly territories will fall under a Christian ruler); it has to do with how many human souls will end up worshiping God in heaven. The notion that God's growing realm is "das Himmelreich" ("the kingdom of heaven") stems from the parable of the mustard seed in Matthew 13:31-32 (at the parable's parallel tellings in Mark 4:30-32 and Luke 13:18-19, God's realm is called simply "das Reich Gottes" ["the kingdom of God"]).

¹⁰Some modern editions here give only "unser" ("our"), and others give only "meiner" ("my"). The 1711 Lehms print of the libretto reads only "unser." Bach's own score and performing part read "unser" (i.e., not "unserer") in mm. 23, 27, and 32; but in mm. 43, 48, and 53 they read "meiner." This might well be a simple inconsistency on Bach's part, but his readings were kept throughout his multiple performances of this cantata. It is thus possible that his intention was indeed to have the religious vow in the poetry's A section expressed first communally ("our") and then individually ("my").

Stimmt unser Gott-vergnügter Geist
Noch mit den Lippen sehnlich ein:
Geliebter Jesu, du allein
Sollst unser Seelen Reichtum sein.

**6. All solch dein Güt wir preisen,
Vater ins Himmels Thron,
Die du uns tust beweisen
Durch Christum, deinen Sohn,
Und bitten ferner dich,
Gib uns ein friedlich Jahre,
Vor allem Leid bewahre
Und nähr uns mildiglich.¹¹**

Georg Christian Lehms

Our God-gratified spirit
Will yet eagerly join in with our lips:
Beloved Jesus, you alone
Shall be our soul's riches.

**6. All this your goodness we praise,
Father on the throne of heaven,
[The goodness] that you make known to us
Through Christ, your son;
And further we beseech you:
Give us a peaceable year,
Safeguard us from all suffering,
And nourish us generously.¹²**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



Scan or go to www.bachcantatatexts.org/BWV16 for an annotated translation

¹¹A stanza of “Helft mir Gottes Güte preisen,” not present in the 1711 Lehms print.

¹²“Mildiglich,” often now mistranslated as “gently,” was formerly a synonym for “freigebig” (“generously”).