

"Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt" BWV 18

1. Sinfonia

2. *Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt und nicht wieder dahin kommet, sondern feuchtet¹ die Erde und macht sie fruchtbar und wachsend, dass sie gibt Samen zu säen und Brot zu essen: Also soll das Wort, so aus meinem Munde gehet, auch sein; es soll nicht wieder zu mir leer kommen, sondern tun, das mir gefällt, und soll ihm gelingen, dazu ichs sende.²*

3. Mein Gott, hier wird mein Herze sein:
Ich öffne dirs in meines Jesu Namen;
So streue deinen Samen
Als in ein gutes Land hinein.
Mein Gott, hier wird mein Herze sein:
Lass solches Frucht, und hundertfältig, bringen.
O Herr, Herr, hilf! o Herr, lass wohlgelingen!
**Du wollest deinen Geist und Kraft zum Worte geben.
Erhör uns, lieber Herre Gott!**
Nur wehre, treuer Vater, wehre,
Dass mich und keinen Christen nicht
Des Teufels Trug verkehre.
Sein Sinn ist ganz dahin gericht,
Uns deines Wortes zu berauben
Mit aller Seligkeit.
**Den Satan unter unsre Füße treten.
Erhör uns, lieber Herre Gott!**
Ach! viel verleugnen Wort und Glauben
Und fallen ab wie faules Obst,
Wenn sie Verfolgung sollen leiden.
So stürzen sie in ewig Herzeleid,
Da sie ein zeitlich Weh vermeiden.
**Und uns für des Türken und des Papsts
grausamen Mord und Lästerungen,
Wüten und Toben väterlich behüten.
Erhör uns, lieber Herre Gott!**
Ein anderer sorgt nur für den Bauch;
Inzwischen wird der Seele ganz vergessen;
Der Mammon auch
Hat vieler Herz besessen.
So kann das Wort zu keiner Kraft gelangen.
Und wieviel Seelen hält
Die Wollust nicht gefangen?
So sehr verführet sie die Welt,
Die Welt, die ihnen muss anstatt des Himmels stehen,
Darüber sie vom Himmel irgehen.
Alle Irrige und Verführte wiederbringen.

1. Sinfonia

2. *Just as the rain and snow falls from heaven, and does not return there, but waters the earth and makes it fruitful and growing, so that it gives seed to sow and bread to eat: thus also shall be the word that proceeds from my [the Lord's] mouth; it shall not return to me empty but do what pleases me, and shall prosper in the thing³ for which I send it.*

3. My God, here will my heart be:
I open it to you in my Jesus's name;
So scatter your seed [into my heart]
As into good soil.
My God, here will my heart be:
Let such [a heart] bring forth fruit, and a hundredfold.⁵
O Lord, Lord, help/save!⁶ O Lord, let [me/us] prosper well!⁷
**May you⁸ grant your [Holy] Spirit and power together
with your word.⁹**
Hear us, dear Lord God!
Only forbid,¹⁰ faithful father, forbid
That the devil's deceit
Might pervert¹¹ me or any [other] Christian.
His disposition¹² is entirely directed
To robbing us of your word
Along with all blessedness/salvation.¹³
**Trample¹⁴ Satan under our feet.
Hear us, dear Lord God!**
Ah! Many deny [God's] word and [the Christian] faith
And fall away like rotten fruit,
If they are to suffer persecution.
So they plummet into eternal heartache [in hell],
Because they avoid a temporal¹⁵ woe [on earth].
**And in the face of the Turk's and of the Pope's¹⁶
gruesome murderousness¹⁷ and blasphemies,
raging and ranting, protect us like a father.
Hear us, dear Lord God!**
Another looks after only his stomach;
Meanwhile, his soul is entirely forgotten about;
Mammon, too,
Has taken possession of many a heart.
Then the word [of God] cannot touch any faculty [of the
soul].¹⁸
And how many souls does
Pleasure¹⁹ not hold captive?
So greatly does the world mislead them,

¹Some modern editions of the cantata have mistranscribed "feuchtet" ("waters," "moistens") as "fruchtet" ("fructifies").

²Isaiah 55:10-11.

³Here "ihm" appears to be the dative form of "es" ("it," a thing), not of "er" (which, depending on context, in English could be "him," a person; or "it," a thing). This passage says that what prospers is the word of the Lord, although it would follow that the receivers of the word will prosper as well.

Erhör uns, lieber Herre Gott!⁴

The world, which for them must stand in place of heaven,
On account of which they go astray from heaven.

**Bring back all who err and all who are misled.
Hear us, dear Lord God!**

4. Mein Seelenschatz ist Gottes Wort;
Ausser dem sind alle Schätze
Solche Netze,
Welche Welt und Satan stricken,
Schnöde Seelen zu berücken.

4. God's word is my soul's treasure;
Aside from it, all treasures are
Such nets
As the world and Satan weave
To ensnare contemptible souls.²⁰

⁵The expressions "heart," "sowing seed," "good soil," and "bringing forth fruit, a hundredfold" are metaphors having to do with spreading "God's word." All of this language comes from the parable of the sower in Luke 8:4-8 and its appended interpretation in Luke 8:11-15, all part of the gospel reading assigned to the liturgical date for which this cantata was composed.

⁶In Lutheran usage, "helfen" can carry the sense of "to help" or "to save" (i.e., to bring spiritual salvation), or both.

⁷This is a nearly verbatim quotation of the Luther Bible's rendering of Psalm 118:25.

⁸The expression "du wollest" with complementary infinitive was often employed in prayers and requests, and accordingly "Du wollest" is not a statement but a plea; here it means "May you," not "You may want to" or "You would."

⁹The sense of this line is derived from 1 Thessalonians 1:5, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "unser Evangelium ist bei euch gewesen, nicht allein im Wort, sondern beide in der Kraft und in dem Heiligen Geist" ("our gospel has been with you not in the word [of God] only, but [also] both in the power [of God] and in the Holy Spirit").

¹⁰The verb "wehren" is apparently being used here in its older German sense of "to prohibit/disallow" (as, e.g., in Numbers 30:5).

¹¹"Verkehren" is being used here in its older sense of "to pervert," "to turn the wrong way."

¹²The word "Sinn" is apparently being used here in the sense of the common expression "Sinn und Zweck" ("sense and purpose").

¹³The sense of this line is dependent on Luke 8:12, "darnach kommt der Teufel und nimmt das Wort von ihrem Herzen, auf dass sie nicht glauben und selig werden" ("after this [heeding, by some, of God's word] the devil comes and takes the word from their heart, so that they do not believe and do not become blessed/saved").

¹⁴"Treten" here is a clipped form of "zertreten" ("to trample"), a verb used in connection with Satan in Genesis 3:15 and Romans 16:20.

¹⁵"Zeitlich" here means "temporal" and this-worldly (as opposed to "eternal" and next-worldly), not "temporary" or "passing" (as opposed to "lasting").

¹⁶These lines project religious and political polemic against "the Pope" (i.e., Roman Catholicism, but also the political regimes associated with this religion) and "the Turk" (i.e., the Turkish people and their regime, but also the Muslim religion associated with this ethnic group). What Lutherans adamantly could not tolerate were the Catholic and Muslim beliefs that good works do play a role in justifying eternal salvation.

¹⁷"Mord" might be understood here not only as physical murder but also as soul-damning, as in the expression "einen Seelenmord begehen" ("to occasion the eternal damnation of a soul," e.g., through the successful teaching of false doctrine).

¹⁸The German text of this line, on the face of it, would appear to be saying something like "the word [of God] can achieve no power." For Lutheranism, however, any notion that God's word lacks power would have been considered heretical. "Gelingen," then, is most likely being used here in one of its older senses, as a synonym for "anlangen" ("to arrive at," "to touch"). And "Kraft" is most likely being used in the time-honored philosophical sense of the "Kräfte der Seele" ("the faculties/powers of the soul"). The "faculties of the soul" include the will and the intellect.

¹⁹The Lutheranism of Bach's day made a distinction between a "vernünftige Wollust" ("reasonable pleasure") that is of God and a "verderbte Wollust" ("corrupted pleasure") that is of the world.

⁴The boldface lines in this movement are reordered excerpts from the Litany, Luther's German translation and substantial revision of the early medieval Litany of All Saints. A litany is a series of sung invocations and supplications, each responded to by a phrase such as "Lord have mercy," or "Hear us, dear Lord God."

Fort mit allen, fort, nur fort!
Mein Seelenschatz ist Gottes Wort.

Away with all [those treasures], away, just away!
God's word is my soul's treasure.

**5. Ich bitt, o Herr, aus Herzens Grund,
Du wollst nicht von mir nehmen
Dein heiliges Wort aus meinem Mund;
So wird mich nicht beschämen
Mein Sünd und Schuld,
Denn in dein Huld
Setz ich all mein Vertrauen:
Wer sich nur fest,
Darauf verlässt,
Der wird den Tod nicht schauen.²¹**

**5. I plead, o Lord, from the bottom of my heart,
May you²² not take from me,
Out of my mouth, your holy word;²³
So my sin and guilt
Will not put me to shame,
For on your favor
I place all my trust:
Whosoever just firmly
Relies on that,
He will not [eternally] look upon death.²⁴**

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Scan or go to <http://www.bachcantatatexts.org/BWV18> for an annotated translation

²⁰“Berücken” is apparently being used in its older sense of “to ensnare” (as, e.g., in Ecclesiastes 9:12), such that “Netze ... stricken ... zu berücken” would be speaking of “nets that are woven to catch/ensnare,” not of “webs that are spun to captivate/bewitch.” To be caught by the world and Satan is much more dire than to be captivated.

²¹A stanza of “Durch Adams Fall ist ganz verderbt.”

²²Regarding the expression “du wollest/wollst,” see fn. 8, above.

²³The language of this line is derived from Psalm 119:43, “nimm ja nicht von meinem Munde das Wort der Wahrheit” (“[Lord], yes, take not from my mouth the word of truth”) and John 17:17, where Jesus prays to God the father, “Heilige sie in deiner Wahrheit; dein Wort ist die Wahrheit” (“Make them [my followers] holy in your truth; your word is truth”).

²⁴The fuller meaning of this line is dependent on John 8:51, where Jesus says “So jemand mein Wort wird halten, der wird den Tod nicht sehen ewiglich” (“If anyone will keep my word [i.e., the ‘word of the gospel,’ Acts 15:7], he will not see death eternally”).