

"Ein ungefärbt Gemüte" BWV 24

1. Ein ungefärbt Gemüte
An¹ deutscher Treu² und Güte
Macht uns vor Gott und Menschen schön.
Der Christen Tun und Handel,
Ihr ganzer Lebenswandel
Soll auf dergleichen Fusse³ stehn.

2. Die Redlichkeit
Ist eine von den Gottesgaben.
Dass sie bei unsrer Zeit
So wenig Menschen haben,
Das macht, sie bitten Gott nicht drum.
Denn von Natur geht unsers Herzens Dichten
Mit lauter Bösem um;
Solls seinen Weg auf etwas Gutes richten,

1. An unfeigned⁴ disposition
Toward⁵ German⁶ faithfulness and goodness
Makes us beautiful before God and humankind.
The doings and dealings of Christians,
Their entire way of life
Should stand on this same footing.

2. Uprightness⁹
Is one of the gifts of God.
That in our time
So few people have it
Is because they do not ask God for it.
For by nature our heart's fashioning
Keeps company with nothing but evil,¹⁰
Should it direct its way toward something good,

¹In Bach's own score, the text reads "an" in measures 12 and 89, but "von" ("of") in measure 29; in his original performing part, prepared by a student copyist, it reads "an" in measure 12, but "von" in measures 29 and 89. A 1717 printed publication of this libretto reads only "an."

²Because there has been some disagreement about how best to understand this expression (see fn. 6, below), it may be worth noting that in the printed libretto of 1717 these words are given as "*Teutscher* Treu" (i.e., with a capital "t" for the adjective), a reading that is even more explicitly quasi-nationalistic than "*deutscher* Treu" (i.e., with lower-case for the adjective). In Bach's own performing part, prepared by a copyist, all three appearances of the phrase are written "teutscher Treu"; and in Bach's composing score, two are "teutscher treu" and one is "teutscher Treu."

³Some modern editions give this as "auf dergleichen Fusse stehn" (literally, "stand on such [a] foot"), but both the poet's printed libretto and Bach's original materials do clearly read "auf dergleichen Fusse stehn." The simplest explanation is that "Fusse" is meant here to be read as plural. Where, for example, in modern German one would say "auf festen Füßen stehen" ("to have solid foundations"; literally, "to stand on firm feet"), older German could sometimes say "auf festen/vesten Fusse/Füsse steh[e]n."

⁴"Ungefärbt" ordinarily meant "uncolored" (i.e., either "white" or "not changed from the natural color"). In the Luther Bible, however, and in this libretto, "ungefärbt" was used as a synonym for "ungeheuchelt" ("unfeigned," "not hypocritical"). 1 Peter 1:22, for example, speaks of "ungefärbte Bruderliebe" ("unfeigned [or, 'genuine'; or, 'unhypocritical'] love for brothers [in Christ]").

⁵See fn. 1, above.

⁶Among the definitions for the adjective "deutsch" or "teutsch" in dictionaries of Bach's day were "plain," "candid," and "open-hearted." Using the word "*deutsch*" to project these sentiments does imply that Germans are at least somewhat more likely than many others to be faithful and good, and this notion is indeed reinforced here in lines 4–6, which proclaim that the *entire way of life* for Christians (i.e., including non-Germans) should stand on this ("German") footing.

⁹"Redlichkeit" usually just means "honesty," but in religious contexts it often refers more broadly to general moral "uprightness."

¹⁰These lines derive their language from Genesis 8:21, "Das Dichten des menschlichen Herzens ist böse von Jugend auf" ("The fashioning of the human heart is evil, from youth onward").

So muss es Gott durch seinen Geist regieren
Und auf der⁷ Bahn der Tugend führen.
Verlangst du Gott zum Freunde,
So mache dir den Nächsten nicht zum Feinde
Durch Falschheit, Trug und List!
Ein Christ
Soll sich der Taubenart bestreben
Und ohne Falsch und Tücke⁸ leben.
Mach aus dir selbst ein solches Bild,
Wie du den Nächsten haben willst!

Then God must be governing it through his spirit
And be leading it on the path of virtue.
If you long for God as your friend,
Then do not make your neighbor your enemy
By deceitfulness, fraud, and cunning.
A Christian
Should strive for the manner of the dove
And live without guile¹¹ and malice.
Make out of yourself such an image
As you wish your neighbor to have.

3. *Alles nun, das ihr wollet, dass euch die Leute tun sollen, das tut ihr ihnen.*¹²

3. *Everything, then, that you may wish people should do to you, do that to them.*

4. Die Heuchelei
Ist eine Brut, die Belial gehecket.
Wer sich in ihre Larve steckt,
Der trägt des Teufels Liberei.
Wie? lassen sich denn Christen
Dergleichen auch gelüsten?
Gott seis geklagt! die Redlichkeit ist teuer.

4. Hypocrisy
Is an offspring that Belial [Satan]¹³ bred.
Whoever puts himself into its [hypocrisy's]¹⁴ mask,
He is wearing the devil's livery.¹⁵
How now? Do Christians then
Covet¹⁶ such things also?
Alas;¹⁷ uprightness¹⁸ is precious.

⁷Some editions have mistranscribed Bach's "auf *der* Bahn" ("on the path") as "auf *die* Bahn" ("to the path").

⁸Some editions have mistranscribed Bach's messily written "ohne Falsch u[nd] Tücke" ("without guile and malice") as "ohne falsche Tücke" ("without false malice"), presumably with the idea that these words ought to be similar to the line "Bhüt mich für falschen Tücken" ("Guard me in the face of false malice") in movement 32 from Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*.

¹¹These lines derive their language from Matthew 10:16, where Jesus says to his disciples, "Seid klug, wie die Schlangen; und ohne Falsch, wie die Tauben" ("Be shrewd, like serpents; and without guile, like doves").

¹²Matthew 7:12.

¹³"Belial" is a name of Satan, employed by the Luther Bibles of Bach's day in 2 Corinthians 6:15. This name is given as "Beliar" in later German (and other) Bibles.

¹⁴"Heuchelei" is the German rendering of the Greek word "hypokrisis" ("hypocrisy"), something that is railed against frequently in the New Testament. The Greek word "hypokrites" ("hypocrite") originally meant "an actor" or "a stage player." "Hypo" means "under," and "krites" means "interpreter"; actors were called "under-interpreters" because they wore large masks to indicate which characters they were playing (i.e., they "interpreted" the narratives from "under" their masks). German Lutheran sermons of Bach's day sometimes spoke of the "Larve" ("mask") of the "Heuchler" ("hypocrite"), and they also sometimes used the verb "verlarven" ("to unmask") in connection with exposing "Heuchelei" ("hypocrisy").

¹⁵"Trägt des Teufels Liberei" ("wears the livery of the devil") is sometimes misunderstood as "bears the works of the devil," or as "bears the children [i.e., from the Latin, "liberi"] of the devil."

¹⁶"Sich gelüsten lassen" is an old-fashioned synonym for "begehren" ("to covet").

¹⁷The idiomatic expression "Gott sei es geklagt!" rendered literally would be "Let it be lamented to God." An approximately similar idiomatic expression in English, now obsolete, is "God's my pity."

¹⁸See fn. 9, above.

Manch teuflisch Ungeheuer
Sieht wie ein Engel aus.
Man kehrt den Wolf hinein,
Den Schafspelz kehrt man raus.
Wie könnt es ärger sein?
Verleumden, Schmähn und Richten,
Verdammen und Vernichten
Ist überall gemein.
So geht es dort, so geht es hier.
Der liebe Gott behüte mich dafür!

5. Treu und Wahrheit sei der Grund
Aller deiner Sinnen,
Wie von aussen Wort und Mund,
Sei das Herz von innen.
Gütig sein und tugendreich
Macht uns Gott und Engeln gleich.

**6. O Gott, du frommer Gott,
Du Brunnquell aller Gaben,
Ohn den²⁰ nichts ist, was ist,
Von dem wir alles haben,
Gesunden Leib gib mir,
Und dass in solchem Leib
Ein unverletzte Seel
Und rein Gewissen bleib.²¹**

Erdmann Neumeister

Many a devilish monster
Looks like an angel.
The wolf is borne inside,
The sheep's clothing¹⁹ is borne outside.
How could it be worse?
Slandering, reviling, and judging,
Condemning and destroying
Is common everywhere.
So goes it there, so goes it here.
May dear God protect me from this.

5. Let faithfulness and truth be the foundation
Of all your thoughts;
Like word and mouth from the outside,
Let your heart be [faithful and true] from the inside.
To be benevolent and rich in virtue
Makes us very like God and angels.

**6. Oh God, you righteous God,
You wellspring of all gifts,
Without whom nothing is that is,
From whom we have everything,
Grant me a healthy body,
And [grant] that in that body
An unvexed²² soul
And clean conscience might abide.**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)

¹⁹“Schafspelz” would ordinarily be “sheepskin.” Here the German equivalent for “a wolf in sheep’s clothing” is invoked: “der Wolf im Schafspelz.”

²⁰Bach’s own materials read “dem” here. In older German the dative “ohn[e] dem” was commonly used, but in later German this would be considered a serious grammatical error. Modern editions have accordingly updated Bach’s “dem” to the accusative, “den.” (This is somewhat analogous to the case of “on account of the weather,” which German speakers commonly express as “wegen dem Wetter,” when according to strict grammarians they ought to use the genitive, “wegen des Wetters.”)

²¹The first stanza of this chorale.

²²The closing lines of this hymn stanza derive their language from Acts 24:16, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “... übe ich mich zu haben ein unverletzt Gewissen allenthalben, beide gegen Gott und den Menschen” (“I [the apostle Paul] exercise myself to have an unvexed conscience everywhere, both before God and people”); note that in older German, “gegen” could take the dative, and so “gegen den Menschen” here is read as dative plural, not accusative singular.



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