

“Allein zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ” BWV 33

1. **Allein zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ,  
Mein Hoffnung steht auf Erden;  
Ich weiss, dass du mein Tröster bist,  
Kein Trost mag mir sonst werden.  
Von Anbeginn ist nichts erkorn,  
Auf Erden war kein Mensch geboren,  
Der mir aus Nöten helfen kann.  
Ich ruf dich an,  
Zu dem ich mein Vertrauen hab.**

2. Mein Gott und Richter, willst du mich  
Aus dem Gesetze fragen,  
So kann ich nicht,  
Weil mein Gewissen widerspricht,  
Auf tausend eines sagen.  
An Seelenkräften arm und an der Liebe bloss,  
**Und meine Sünd ist schwer und übergross;**  
Doch weil sie **mich von Herzen reuen,**  
Wirst du, mein Gott und Hort,  
Durch ein Vergebungswort  
Mich wiederum erfreuen.

1. **In you alone, Lord Jesus Christ,  
Is my hope on earth;  
I know that you are my comforter;  
Not one comfort may otherwise come to be mine.  
From the [world's] beginning, nothing was chosen [to console];  
On earth not one person had been born  
Who is able to save me from [my] distresses.  
I call to you,  
In whom I have my trust.**

2. [Jesus] my God and judge, if you wish  
To interrogate me according to the law [of Moses],  
Then [I should understand that] I cannot  
Make a case against one [charge] in a thousand,<sup>1</sup>  
Because [each thought of] my conscience contradicts [itself].<sup>2</sup>  
[I am] poor in strength of soul and barren in love [of God and neighbor],  
**And my sin is onerous and exceedingly great;**  
Yet because **from my heart I repent of it** [my sin],  
You, my God and refuge,  
Will, through a word of forgiveness,  
Make me glad again.

GENERAL NOTE: The text of this cantata presents the first and last stanzas of a hymn intact as the first and last movements of the cantata; the inner movements paraphrase the inner stanzas.

<sup>1</sup>There is no question that these lines take their language and sentiments from Job 9:3, a passage whose Hebrew text is notoriously difficult to sort out. The King James Bible renders it hyperliterally: “If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand.” The best sense of this is now generally understood to be along the lines of “If one wished to contend with God, one could not answer him once in a thousand times.” In the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day the passage reads “Hat er Lust, mit ihm zu hadern, so kann er ihm auf tausend nicht eins antworten.” The most direct rendering and understanding of this, then, would probably be “If he [a mere mortal human being] has the desire to quarrel/litigate with him [God], then he [(the mortal) should understand that he] cannot answer him [God] one [word/charge] in a thousand.” The librettist of Bach’s cantata, along with Lutheran Bible commentators of Bach’s day, however, read Luther’s text to mean “If he [God] has the desire to litigate with him [a mere mortal human being], then he [(the mortal) should understand that he] cannot answer him [God] one [charge] in a thousand.” In adapting Job’s sentiments, the librettist substituted “sagen” (“to say”) for Luther’s “antworten” (“to answer”), thereby accommodating a rhyme with “fragen” (“question/interrogate”). To understand properly the use of “sagen” in this context, one needs to know that in older German “etwas auf jemanden sagen” meant “gegen jemanden vorbringen” (“to make a case against someone”). The librettist may have also been drawing on the language and understanding of another passage from Job, which in Luther’s rendering bears closer relation to Job 9:3 than the passage does in the renderings of others: Job 39:32/35, in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day (40:2 in modern Bibles, but rendered there very differently), reads “Wer mit dem Allmächtigen hadern will, solls ihm der nicht beibringen?” (“Whoever wishes to litigate with [God] the Almighty, shall he [that person] not provide him [God] with it [the proof/evidence]?”) The librettist’s choices, in all, emphasize a kind of litigation of divine charges against a sinner.

<sup>2</sup>The Christian conscience “contradicts” itself in the sense that its thoughts both accuse and defend themselves, as is suggested in Romans 2:15.

3. Wie furchtsam wankten meine Schritte,  
Doch Jesus hört auf meine Bitte  
**Und zeigt mich seinen<sup>3</sup> Vater an.**  
Mich drückten Sündenlasten nieder,  
Doch hilft mir Jesu Trostwort wieder,  
**Dass er für mich genug getan.**

3. How ominously<sup>4</sup> my steps might waver [toward evil];<sup>5</sup>  
But Jesus listens to my plea  
And **shows me** [God] his **father** [dwelling in him].<sup>6</sup>  
Sin's burdens weighed me down,  
But Jesus's [fatherly] word of comfort saves me again,  
**Because he has made atonement** [with God his father] **for me.**<sup>7</sup>

4. Mein Gott, verwirf mich nicht,  
Wiewohl ich dein Gebot noch täglich übertrete,  
Von deinem Angesicht!

4. My God, do not cast me,<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup>In modern editions this line reads (in the dative) “Und zeigt mich seinem Vater an” (“and shows/points/presents me to his father”); but in Bach’s own score, his original performing part, and the printed libretto booklet distributed to his fellow congregants, the line reads (in the accusative) “Und zeigt mich seinen Vater an” (“and shows me [God] his father”). On the biblically-based meaning of the latter for the cantata, see fn. 6, below. In Bach’s day and earlier, the source line of the hymn is given variously in the hymnbooks as “Und zeig mich deinem Vater an, dass ...” (“And show me to your father, because ...”), “Und zeig mich deinen Vater an, dass ...” (“And show me your father, in that ...”), and “Und zeige deinem Vater, dass ...” (“And show your father, that ...”).

<sup>4</sup>Historical dictionaries comment on the fact that the adverb “furchtsam” was often employed ambiguously (by design, or by lack of attention), as the word could mean either “angst verbreitend” (“fear-spreadingly,” “ominously”) or “voller angst” (“in fear”). For this line of the cantata, “furchtsam” is often translated as “timidly,” which to most readers will probably imply the “in fear” sense. It is the “ominously” sense that most probably is meant here—for the biblical context supporting this understanding, see fn. 5, below.

<sup>5</sup>The cantata apparently speaks of wavering that is frightening on account of its association with evil. Proverbs 4:26-27, in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, reads “Lass deinen Fuss gleich für sich gehen, so gehst du gewiss; wanke weder zur Rechten noch zur Linken; wende deinen Fuss vom Bösen” (“If you let your foot go straight ahead [on the path], then you will go safely; waver neither to the right nor to the left; veer your foot from evil”).

<sup>6</sup>On account of the (mistranscribed or silently emended) dative reading of the Bach sources for modern editions (see fn. 3, above), this line is often rendered as “And shows/points/presents me to [God] his father.” But the line does not mean “And bears witness for me to his father.” The theologically subtler sense of the line, as given in the accusative in the Bach sources, is derived from John 14:9-10, where Jesus says to his disciple Philip, in the rendering of the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, “So lange bin ich bei euch, und du kennst mich nicht, Philippus? Wer mich sieht, der sieht den Vater; wie sprichst du denn: Zeige uns den Vater? Glaubst du nicht, dass ich im Vater und der Vater in mir ist?” (“I have been with you [disciples] for so long, and [still] you do not know me, Philip? Whoever sees me, he sees [God] the father; how then can you declare, ‘Show us the father’? Do you not believe that I [am] in the father and the father is in me?”). Note that there is no difference here in meaning between the verbs “zeigen” and “anzeigen”—the latter, separable verb is employed in the libretto to accommodate a rhyme of “Vater an” with “genug getan.” The idea in the gospel, thus reflected in the cantata, is that to truly “see” Jesus is to understand and know God the father.

<sup>7</sup>The expression “genug getan,” in this context, is a reference to the technical term “Gegugtuung”: “doing (legal) satisfaction,” in its specific theological sense; namely, the atonement effected by Jesus’s dying on the cross for humankind’s sin, in accordance with the belief that Jesus’s suffering was a sacrifice serving as the penalty owed to God for sin. As Luther fundamentally expressed it, in *Crucigers Sommerpostille* of 1544 (a printed collection of Luther’s sermons), “Das Wort Genugtuung [sollte] deuten, dass Christus hat für unsere Sünde genug getan” (“The word ‘Genugtuung’ [should be] interpreted [against ‘the Papists,’ as to capture the sense] that Christ has atoned [or, ‘has made satisfaction’; literally, ‘has done enough’] for our sin”). Lutheranism taught that although Jesus died for all people, not all people will actually obtain salvation with a blessed afterlife in heaven. (Calvinism, by contrast, taught that Jesus died only for the few people that God had, already before Creation, elected to bless with eternal salvation.)

<sup>8</sup>The penitential sense of this movement is heightened by making reference here to the extremely well-known language employed throughout Psalm 51. The libretto quotes from verse 13 in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, “Verwirf mich nicht von deinem Angesicht, und nimm deinen heiligen Geist nicht von mir” (“Do not cast me away from your countenance, and do not take your holy spirit from me”).

Das kleinste ist mir schon zu halten viel zu schwer;  
Doch wenn ich um nichts mehr  
Als Jesu Beistand bete,  
So wird mich kein Gewissensstreit  
Der Zuversicht berauben;  
**Gib mir** nur aus **Barmherzigkeit**  
**Den wahren Christenglauben!**  
So stellt er sich mit guten Früchten ein  
Und wird durch Liebe tätig sein.

Even though I still daily transgress your commandments,<sup>9</sup>  
Away from your countenance.  
To me, even the least [of your commandments] is much too onerous  
to keep;  
But if I pray for nothing more  
Than Jesus's aid,  
Then no struggle of conscience<sup>10</sup>  
Will deprive me of confidence.  
Just **give me**, out of **mercy**,  
**True Christian faith**.<sup>11</sup>  
In this way, it [true Christian faith] arises, with good fruits,  
And will be active through love [of God and neighbor].<sup>12</sup>

5. Gott, der du die Liebe heisst,  
Ach, entzünde meinen Geist,  
Lass zu dir vor allen Dingen  
Meine Liebe kräftig dringen!  
Gib, dass ich aus reinen Triebe<sup>13</sup>  
**Als mich selbst den Nächsten liebe;**  
Stören Feinde meine Ruh,  
Sende du mir Hülfe zu!

5. God, you who are called "Love,"<sup>14</sup>  
Ah, enkindle my spirit [with your love];  
Above all things,  
Let my love powerfully press in upon<sup>15</sup> you.  
Grant, that out of [spiritually] pure impulses<sup>16</sup>  
**I might love my neighbor as myself;**  
If enemies disturb my peace,  
May you send me salvation.

<sup>9</sup>In the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, the collective singular noun "Gebot" is often employed for God's and others' commandments, where later German Bibles give the plural "Gebote."

<sup>10</sup>On the activity of the conscience, see fn. 2, above.

<sup>11</sup>"Der Christenglaube" (hyperliterally, "the faith of Christians") is a synonym for "der christliche Glaube" ("the Christian faith").

<sup>12</sup>This line derives its sense from Galatians 5:6, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "Denn in Christo Jesu gilt weder Beschneidung noch Vorhaut etwas, sondern der Glaube, der durch die Liebe tätig ist" ("For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision [i.e., being a Jew] nor foreskin [i.e., being a gentile] counts for anything; rather [what counts for being justified in God's sight is the unmerited gift of] faith that is active through love [of God and neighbor]").

<sup>13</sup>Modern editions give this in the (dative) singular, "aus reinem Triebe" (literally, "out of pure impulse"), but Bach's own score, his original performing parts, and the printed libretto booklet all read in the (dative) plural, "aus reinen Triebe" (literally, "out of pure impulses"). Normally the plural would be given as "aus reinen Trieben," but in poetry the "n" was sometimes clipped off to accommodate rhymes, especially with "Liebe" (the noun "love") or, as here, with "liebe" (the simple present first-person form of the verb "lieben" ["to love"]). On the semantics of "aus reinen Triebe[n]" versus "aus reinem Triebe," see fn. 16, below.

<sup>14</sup>1 John 4:8, "Gott ist die Liebe" ("God is love").

<sup>15</sup>This particular use of "dringen" is probably derived from Luther's wording in 2 Corinthians 5:14, "die Liebe Christi dringt in uns" ("Christ's love presses in upon us").

<sup>16</sup>Other translations typically give this in the singular, "out of pure impulse" (working from modern source texts that read "aus reinem Triebe"—see fn. 13, above, regarding the historical sources actually giving the plural). To translate the expression as "out of pure impulse" is too easily taken, most probably wrongly, to mean "out of mere impulse" (i.e., an involuntary inclination or tendency to act, by instinct, without premeditation or reflection), when the more likely sense here would be "out of unadulterated impulse." In Bach's day the expression "durch einen natürlichen Trieb" meant "by a natural instinct," but "aus einem heiligen/göttlichen Trieb" meant "through a holy/godly motion." Apparently the cantata is speaking of "spiritually pure impulses."

**6. Ehr sei Gott in dem höchsten Thron,  
Dem Vater aller Güte,  
Und Jesu Christ, sein'm liebsten Sohn,  
Der uns allzeit behüte,  
Und Gott dem Heiligen Geiste,  
Der uns sein Hülff allzeit leiste,  
Damit wir ihm gefällig sein,  
Hier in dieser Zeit  
Und folgends in der Ewigkeit.<sup>17</sup>**

**6. Honor be to God in the highest throne,  
The father of all goodness;  
And to Jesus Christ, his most beloved son,  
Who would protect us at all times;  
And to God the Holy Spirit,  
Who would render us [the gift of] his salvation at all times  
So that we may be pleasing to him,  
Here in this time [on earth]  
And subsequently, in [heaven's] eternity.**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



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<sup>17</sup>In the printed libretto booklet, the last line reads “Und dort hernach in Ewigkeit” (“And there [in heaven] hereafter, in eternity”). Bach’s own score and his original performing parts for alto and bass read “und folgends in der Ewigkeit” (“and subsequently, in [heaven’s] eternity”), whereas the soprano and tenor parts read “und folgends nach in Ewigkeit” (“and subsequently onward, in [heaven’s] eternity”). Each of the three readings can be found in hymnals of Bach’s day.