

“Geist und Seele wird verwirret” BWV 35

Erster Teil

Part 1

1. Concerto

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2. Geist und Seele wird verwirret,
Wenn sie dich, mein Gott, betracht.
Denn die Wunder, so sie kennet,
Und das Volk mit Jauchzen nennet,
Hat sie taub und stumm gemacht.

2. [My] spirit-and-soul becomes confounded
When it¹ meditates² upon you, my God:
Because the wonders that it knows,³
And [that] the people [of God]⁴ praise⁵ by shouting [for
joy],
Rendered it deaf and mute.

3. Ich wundre mich;
Denn alles, was man sieht,
Muss uns Verwundrung geben.
Betracht ich dich,
Du teurer Gottessohn,
So flieht
Vernunft und auch Verstand davon.
Du machst es eben,
Dass sonst ein Wunderwerk vor⁶ dir was Schlechtes ist.
Du bist
Dem Namen, Tun und Amte nach
Erst wunderreich,
Dir ist kein Wunderding auf dieser Erde gleich.

3. I am amazed,
Because all things that one sees
Must bring us wonderment.
If I meditate upon you, [Jesus,]
You precious son of God,
Then reason and also understanding
Flies away.
You even make it
[Such] that [what appears] otherwise a wonderwork is
something meager⁷ next to⁸ you.
You are
In name, action, and ministry [as God's messiah]

¹The source word “sie” is a third-person singular pronoun whose antecedent here is “Geist und Seele” as a unit.

²The source word “betracht,” in this case, is a clipped version of the third-person singular present indicative verb “betrachtet” (“meditates”), employed in this way to accommodate a rhyme with “gemacht.”

³The source word “kennet” is an expanded version of the third-person singular present indicative verb “kennt” (“knows”).

⁴These lines draw for their sense on Psalm 89:6-16, “Und die Himmel werden, HERR, deine Wunder preisen; . . . Wohl dem Volk, das jauchzen kann” (“And the heavens, LORD, will praise your wonders; . . . Well for [Israel] the people [of God] who can shout [for joy]”).

⁵The source word “nennet” is an expanded version of the third-person singular present indicative verb “nennt.” In modern German, “nennen” can variously mean “to name,” “to mention,” “to cite,” “to call notice to,” but in older German it was at times, as here, used as a synonym for “preisen” (“to praise”). With regard to praising God's wonders and to shouting, see also fn. 4, above.

⁶Some modern printings of the libretto here mistakenly read “von” (“from”).

⁷“Schlecht” is used here in its older-German sense of “schlicht” (“meager,” “plain and simple”).

⁸Dative-taking “vor” usually means “before” in the sense “in front of,” but here it is used as a synonym for “gegenüber” in its sense of “next to.”

Den Tauben gibst du das Gehör,
 Den Stummen ihre Sprache wieder;
 Ja, was noch mehr,
 Du öffnest auf ein Wort die blinden Augenlider.
 Dies, dies sind Wunderwerke,
 Und ihre Stärke
 Ist auch der Engel Chor nicht mächtig auszusprechen.

Most⁹ rich in wonders;¹⁰
 No wondrous thing on this earth is like unto you.¹¹
 The deaf you give hearing,
 The mute their speech again;
 Yes, what [is] yet more,
 At a single word you open blind eyelids.¹²
 These, these are wonderworks,
 And their power
 Even the choir of angels is not mighty [enough, in number,]¹³
 to express.

4. *Gott hat alles wohl gemacht.*
 Seine Liebe, seine Treu,
 Wird uns alle Tage neu.
 Wenn uns Angst und Kummer drücket,
 Hat er reichen Trost geschicket,
 Weil er täglich für uns wacht.
Gott hat alles wohl gemacht.

4. *God has done all things well.*¹⁴
 His love, his faithfulness,
 Becomes new for us every day.
 When[ever] anguish and distress oppresses us,
 He has sent rich consolation,
 In that he daily watches out for us.
God has done all things well.

Zweiter Teil

Part 2

5. Sinfonia

5. Sinfonia

6. Ach, starker Gott, lass mich
 Doch dieses stets bedenken,
 So kann ich dich

6. Ah, powerful God, let me
 Indeed ponder this continually,
 So I can contentedly immerse you

⁹The adverb “erst” is used here as a synonym for “höchst” (“most highly”; or simply “most,” when used as an intensifier before an adjective). See also fn. 10, below.

¹⁰“Du bist dem Namen, Tun und Amte nach erst wunderreich” is to be parsed not as “Du bist—dem Namen, Tun und Amte—nach erst wunderreich” (“You are, as to name, action, and ministry, from the start, rich in wonders”), but as “Du bist—dem Namen, Tun und Amte nach—erst wunderreich” (“You are in name, action, and ministry most rich in wonders”). See also fn. 9, above.

¹¹This line draws for its sense on Psalm 40:6, “HERR, mein Gott, gross sind deine Wunder . . . Dir ist nichts gleich” (“Lord, my God, great [in number] are your wonders . . . Nothing is like unto to you”).

¹²Having “blinde Augenlider” (“blind eyelids”) may on the face of it sound illogical. In this line the poet doubtless means simply to express the sentiment, “you open the eyes of the blind,” understood as a fulfilment of the prophecy in Isaiah 35:5, “Alsdann werden der Blinden Augen aufgetan werden” (“Thereupon [i.e., the time, in traditional Christian interpretation, when Jesus, God’s messiah, appears] will the eyes of the blind be opened”). The cantata’s talk of the “‘lids’ of the eyes” (“die Augenlider”) was clearly brought in to accommodate a rhyme with “Sprache wieder.”

¹³“Mächtig” is apparently used here in one of its older-German senses, as a synonym for “zahlreich” (“rich in number”).

¹⁴This is a quotation of Mark 7:37 (part of the gospel portion chanted at the liturgical occasion that this cantata was designed for), “Er hat alles wohl gemacht” (“He [Jesus; i.e., God] has done all things well”).

Vergnügt in meine Seele senken.
 Lass mir dein süßes Hephata
 Das ganz verstockte Herz erweichen;
 Ach! lege nur den Gnadenfinger in die Ohren,
 Sonst bin ich gleich verloren.
 Rühr auch das Zungenband
 Mit deiner starken Hand,
 Damit ich diese Wunderzeichen
 In heilger Andacht preise,
 Und mich als Erb und Kind erweise.

7. Ich wünsche nur bei Gott zu leben,
 Ach! wäre doch die Zeit schon da,
 Ein fröhliches Halleluja,
 Mit allen Engeln anzuheben.
 Mein liebster Jesu, löse doch

Into my soul.¹⁵
 Let your sweet [command] “ephatha”¹⁶ [“be opened”]
 Soften¹⁷ my completely obdurate heart;
 Ah, only put your [healing] finger of grace into my
 [spiritually deaf] ears—¹⁸
 Otherwise I am justly¹⁹ lost [from eternal salvation].
 Touch also the web of my tongue²⁰
 With your powerful hand,²¹
 So that I may praise these wondrous signs
 In holy devotion,
 And may demonstrate myself to be [God’s]²² heir and child.

7. I wish only to live with God;
 Ah, were the time indeed already here
 To lift up a joyful “hallelujah”
 [In heaven]²³ with all the angels.
 My dearest Jesus, do loosen

¹⁵Lines 3–4 are a metaphor for ingesting the body and blood of Jesus in the sacrament of communion. (Note that in Bach’s performances, Part 2 of this cantata was performed during communion.)

¹⁶“Ephata” is Aramaic for “be opened.” The expression is employed in Mark 3:32-35, “Und sie brachten zu ihm einen Tauben . . . und sprach zu ihm: Hephatha, das ist, Tue dich auf; und alsbald taten sich seine Ohren auf” (“And they brought to him [Jesus] a deaf man . . . and [Jesus] declared to him: ‘Ephatha,’ that is, ‘open yourself up’; and immediately his ears opened themselves up [such that he could hear]”).

¹⁷“Mein Herz erweichen” does not mean “weaken my heart.” This line concerns not a “weak” versus a “strong” heart, but a “soft/tender” versus an “obdurate” heart.

¹⁸This line draws on the language of Mark 7:33-34 (see also fn. 16, above), “und legte ihm die Finger in die Ohren . . . und sprach zu ihm: Hephatha” (“and [Jesus] put his fingers into the ears [of the deaf man] . . . and declared to him, ‘ephata’ [‘be opened’]”).

¹⁹The adverb “gleich” is apparently used here not in its senses of “immediately” or “soon” or “equally” but in one of its older-German senses as a synonym for “billigermassen” (“equitably,” “justly”).

²⁰The “Zungenband” (“tongue web”; in medical Latin, “frenulum linguae”) is a small piece of tissue connecting the underside of the tongue to the floor of one’s mouth. If this tissue is short or tight, one is literally “tongue-tied” and thus unable to speak properly or at all.

²¹This line draws on the language of Mark 7:33-35 (see also fn. 16 and fn. 18, above), where Jesus “rührte seine Zunge . . . und sprach zu ihm: Hephatha . . . und das Band seiner Zunge war los, und er redete recht” (“touched his [the deaf-mute man’s] tongue . . . and declared to him, ‘ephata’ [‘be opened’] . . . and the web of his tongue was free, and he [now] spoke properly”).

²²This line draws for its sense on Romans 8:16-17, “Derselbe Geist gibt Zeugnis unserem Geist, dass wir Kinder Gottes sind; sind wir denn Kinder, so sind wir auch Erben, nämlich Gottes Erben” (“The same [Holy] Spirit gives testimony to our spirit, that we are God’s children; for if we are children, then we are also heirs, namely God’s heirs”).

²³As proclaimed in Revelation 19:1.

Das jammerreiche Schmerzensjoch,
Und lass mich bald in deinen Händen
Mein martervolles Leben enden.

Georg Christian Lehms

My yoke of pain, rich in misery,
And let me soon
End my torment-filled life, in your hands.

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



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