

“Sie werden euch in den Bann tun” BWV 44

1.–2. *Sie werden euch in den Bann tun. Es kömmt aber die Zeit, dass, wer euch tötet, wird meinen, er tue Gott einen Dienst daran.*¹

3. Christen müssen auf der Erden
Christi wahre Jünger sein.
Auf sie warten alle Stunden,
Bis sie selig überwunden,
Marter, Bann und schwere Pein.

**4. Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid
Begegnet mir zu dieser Zeit.
Der schmale Weg ist Trübsal voll,
Den ich zum Himmel wandern soll.**⁵

5. Es sucht der Antichrist,
Das grosse Ungeheuer,
Mit Schwert und Feuer
Die Glieder Christi zu verfolgen,
Weil ihre Lehre ihm zuwider ist.
Er bildet sich dabei wohl ein,
Es müsse sein Tun Gott gefällig sein.

1.–2. *They [the Jews] will place you [followers of Jesus] under the ban.² But the time is coming that whoever [of the Jews] kills you will suppose he thereby does God a service.*

3. Christians must on earth
Be Christ’s true disciples.
For them await at every hour—
Until, in the blessed hereafter,³ they have overcome [this world]⁴—
Torment, ban, and great pain.

**4. Ah God, how much heartache
Meets me in this time [on earth].
Full of tribulation is the narrow⁶ path
That I am to journey to heaven.**

5. The Antichrist,⁷
That great monster,
Seeks with sword and fire
To persecute the members of Christ,⁸
Because their teaching is abhorrent to him.
He doubtless imagines thereby
That his actions must be pleasing to God.⁹

¹John 16:2.

²According to John 9:22, “the Jews” excommunicated believers in Jesus as God’s messiah from the synagogue. The underlying word in John’s Greek that Luther rendered as “place under the ban,” *apostynagogos*, would more literally be “put out of the synagogue”; Luther translated the term in a more general way to allow its ready application also to the pope, who was called a metaphorical “Jew” for banning proper (Lutheran) Christians from the church; see also fn. 7, below, regarding the “Antichrist.”

³There is no one word in English for the specific way that “selig” is being used here, and so it has been translated not with the adverb “blessedly” but the adverbial phrase, “in the blessed hereafter.” The “true disciples” of line 2 have overcome “blessedly” here, in that they will have gone to heaven. “Seligkeit” is one of the words for God’s salvation that becomes, at a person’s death, the blessedness specifically of being in heaven, where one is eternally free of torment and pain.

⁴This line derives its language from 1 John 5:4, “Alles, was von Gott geboren ist, überwindet die Welt; und unser Glaube ist der Sieg, der die Welt überwunden hat” (“All that is born of God overcomes the world; and our [Christian] faith is the victory that has overcome the world”).

⁵The first stanza of this hymn.

⁶In Luther’s New Testament, technically, the gate to heaven is said to be “narrow” and the path “strait” (i.e., extremely narrow). Matthew 7:14 reads “die Pforte ist eng, und der Weg ist schmal, der zum Leben führt” (“the gate is narrow and the path is strait [or, ‘constricted’] that leads to [eternal] life”). The modern expression “the straight and narrow [path],” insofar as it takes “straight” to mean “not crooked,” stems historically from a misunderstanding of the renderings “strait gate” and “narrow way” found in Matthew 7 in older English Bibles.

⁷The *antichristos* is a mysterious, violent apocalyptic figure mentioned several times in the Epistles of John. In Lutheran teaching, “the Antichrist” was the pope, whom it regularly accused of acting, in essence, like the Jews of the Gospel of John; see also fn. 2, above.

⁸The New Testament continually refers to the Christian community, or the church, as the “members” of “the body of Christ” (e.g., 1 Corinthians 12:27). The Lutherans of Bach’s day and earlier considered themselves to be the proper Christian community, subject to continual persecution by the pope.

⁹It may seem odd that “the Antichrist” (the final enemy of God’s messiah and thus of God) imagines his action could be pleasing to God. It made sense in the Lutheran communities of Bach’s day, however, as they held that the head of the Roman Catholic church,

Allein, es gleichen Christen denen Palmenzweigen,
Die durch die Last nur desto höher steigen.

But Christians are like those palm branches
That only rise all the higher by being weighted down.¹⁰

6. Es ist und bleibt der Christen Trost,
Dass Gott vor seine Kirche wacht.
Denn wenn sich gleich die Wetter türmen,
So hat doch nach den Trübsalsstürmen
Die Freuden Sonne bald gelacht.

6. It is and remains the consolation of Christians
That God watches over¹¹ his church.
For even though¹² tempests may tower,
Soon after storms of tribulation
The sun of joy has indeed smiled.

**7. So sei nun, Seele, deine
Und traue dem alleine,
Der dich erschaffen hat.
Es gehe, wie es gehe,
Dein Vater in der Höhe,
Der weiss zu allen Sachen Rat.**¹³

**7. So be now, soul, yours,¹⁴
And trust only in the one
Who has created you.
Let things be, as they may;¹⁵
Your father on high,
He knows counsel in all matters.**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



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the pope, was the *antichristos* prophesied in the New Testament (see also fn. 7, above); Lutherans believed that Roman Catholics and actual or metaphorical Jews delusionally sought to please God.

¹⁰The underlying notion of the Christian as a growing palm tree draws on Psalm 92:13, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "der Gerechte wird grünen wie ein Palmbaum, er wird wachsen wie ein Ceder auf Libanon" ("the righteous one will thrive like a palm tree; he will rise like a cedar on [the mountain range called] Lebanon"); Luther assumed that the unspecified tree in Psalm 1 was also a palm tree and noted, significantly, that the palm is the only tree that grows upward against every weight and pressure put upon it.

¹¹"Vor/für etwas wachen" ("to take watchful care for something") is apparently an alternative expression for "über etwas wachen" ("to watch over something"). There is no real difference in meaning, and presumably "vor" was chosen here to accommodate the scansion.

¹²"Wengleich" ("even though"), ordinarily given in modern German as one word, was expressed in Bach's day as two words, "wenn gleich."

¹³A stanza of "In allen meinen Taten."

¹⁴The meaning of this line is unclear. Eighteenth-century commentary on this hymn explains and paraphrases it as "do not let your even temper be disturbed." Some printed versions attempted to make sense of it by changing the last word to "seine," yielding "So be now, soul, his [God's]."

¹⁵Literally, "Let it go, how it may go." This was one of several renderings in German of the classical phrase "quocunque res cadent." A more straightforward version was "es geht wie es mag" ("it will go as it may"). There is an apparently related sentiment in Ecclesiastes 3:19, "Denn es geht dem Menschen wie dem Vieh" ("For it goes with the person as with cattle"); i.e., both await the same fate (namely, death).