

“Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt” BWV 68

1. Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt,
Dass er uns seinen Sohn gegeben.
Wer sich im Glauben ihm ergibt,
Der soll dort ewig bei ihm leben.¹
Wer glaubt, dass Jesus ihm geboren,
Der bleibet ewig unverloren,
Und ist kein Leid, das den betrübt,
Den Gott und auch sein Jesus liebt.²

1. In such manner has God loved the world
That he has given to us his son.³
Whoever in [Christian] belief gives himself up to him
[Jesus],
He shall live eternally there [in heaven] with him [Jesus].
Whoever believes that Jesus is⁴ born to him [the believer],
He remains eternally unlost;⁵
And there is no suffering that may trouble him
Whom God, and also his Jesus, loves.

2. Mein gläubiges Herze,
Frohlocke, sing, scherze,
Dein Jesus ist da!
Weg Jammer, weg Plagen,⁶
Ich will euch nur sagen:
Mein Jesus ist nah.⁷

2. My believing [in Christ] heart,
Exult, sing, make merry;
Your Jesus is there [in you, my heart]!
Away, lament; away, torments;
To you [torments and lament] I wish to say only:
My Jesus is at hand.⁸

¹Lines 1–4 are a metrical version of Luther’s rendering of John 3:16, “Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt, dass er seinen eingeborenen Sohn gab, auf dass alle, die an ihn glauben, nicht verloren werden, sondern das ewige Leben haben” (“In such manner has God loved the world that he gave his only-begotten son [Jesus], so that all who believe in him [Jesus] will not be lost but have eternal life”). The sense of Luther’s translation differs in several respects from the extremely well-known rendering of the King James Bible, “For God so [greatly] loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

²The first stanza of this hymn.

³In the Lutheranism of Bach’s day, this use of the word “given,” from John 3:16 (see fn. 1, above), was understood as “given—that is, sacrificed—on the cross.” The most widely-known expression of the idea appeared in Luther’s famous hymn “Christ lag in Todes Banden, für unsre Sünd gegeben” (“Christ lay [on the cross] in death’s bonds, given for our sin”).

⁴The language of this line is derived from Isaiah 9:6, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Denn uns ist ein Kind geboren, ein Sohn ist uns gegeben” (“For to us a child is born; a son is given to us”). In traditional Christian interpretation, this child/son was understood to be Jesus. Regarding the biblical phrase “is born to us/you/me,” see also fn. 19, below.

⁵“Remains eternally unlost” is a somewhat awkward formulation. According to the Gospel of John, believers in Jesus partly experience eternal salvation already on earth, a salvation that continues more fully in the afterlife; unbelievers in Jesus, however, partly experience eternal condemnation already on earth—they are said to be “lost.” That is to say, “verloren” is a sort of technical term for being “not saved” (it does not mean “forsaken,” “forlorn,” or “abandoned”).

⁶In Bach’s surviving original performing materials, copied out by an assistant (Bach’s score is now lost), this word reads “Plagen” (“torments”) in mm. 21, 22 and 25, but “Klagen” (“dirges”) in mm. 33 and 34. Presumably Bach’s (now lost) libretto source gave “Plagen” throughout. Modern editions, however, give “Klagen” on the dubious assumption that Bach himself will have decided to improve the text by changing “Plagen” to “Klagen.”

⁷A few years after Bach first performed this cantata, his librettist published the text of this movement as “Getröstetes Herze, / Frohlocke und scherze, / Dein Jesus ist da. / Weg Kummer und Plagen, / Ich will euch nur sagen: / Mein Jesus ist nah” (“My consoled heart, / Exult and make merry, / Your Jesus is there [in you, my heart]. / Away, grief and torments; / To you [torments and grief] I wish to say only: / My Jesus is at hand”).

⁸The language of lines 5–6 is derived from Philippians 4:4-5, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Euch ... sage ich: ... der HERR ist nahe!” (“To you ... I say: ... the LORD [Jesus] is at hand!”).

3. Ich bin mit Petro nicht vermessen.
Was mich getrost und freudig macht,
Dass mich mein Jesus nicht vergessen.
Er komm⁹ nicht nur die Welt zu richten,
Nein, nein, er wolle¹⁰ Sünd und Schuld

3. I, with [the apostle] Peter, am not presumptuous.¹²
What makes me [with Peter] comforted and joyful
[Is]¹³ that my Jesus will not forget me.¹⁴
He will not have come to judge the world;¹⁵

⁹The librettist's printed text and modern editions of this cantata give "kam nicht" ("came not"), but Bach's surviving original materials give "kom nicht ... zu" (i.e., a clipped form of the subjunctive "komme nicht zu"; literally "may come not to," which in this context is presumably to be understood as "could not have come to").

¹⁰The librettist's printed text and modern editions of this cantata gives "wollte" (past tense, "wanted/wished"; or, possibly, the subjunctive, "might/would want/wish"), but Bach's surviving original materials give "wolle" (literally, the subjunctive "may want/wish"; in this context presumably understood, however, as "shall have wanted"); these readings presumably reflect the librettist's original version, which she subsequently revised for publication.

¹²Lexically, grammatically, and contextually, this is an extremely convoluted line, and it would likely have been confusing even for biblically informed audiences of Bach's day. In the Lutheran literature of Bach's day and earlier, the apostle Peter was often called "presumptuous" (German, "vermessen") on account of his having self-confidently declared (in Mark 14:31), just before disavowing Jesus repeatedly, "Ja, wenn ich auch mit dir sterben müsste, wollte ich dich nicht verleugnen" ("Indeed, should I even have to die with you, I would not disavow you"). This issue comes up, e.g., in the 1725 version of Bach's *St. John Passion*, where a singer—petrified, as it were—reflects on Peter's disavowals, exclaiming: "Wie freventlich, wie sündlich, wie vermessen / Hab ich, o Jesu, dein vergessen!" ("How outrageously, how sinfully, how presumptuously / Have I [too, like Peter] forgotten you, o Jesus!"). But in the present cantata libretto, Peter is said to be "*not* presumptuous" (i.e., the sense of "Ich bin mit Petro nicht vermessen" is not "I am not like Peter, who was presumptuous [adjective, 'vermessen']"; neither is its sense "I am not measured/assessed [verb, 'vermessen'] with Peter, namely as a disavower"). Peter is here said to be "*not* presumptuous" probably on account of the way that he is depicted as having acted properly as a spokesperson for God in Acts 10:42-48 (which is the epistle portion at the liturgical occasion for which this cantata was designed). There it is said that the Jewish believers in Jesus who had come "with Peter" (Luther Bibles of Bach's day, "mit Petro") were astonished at his words about openness to associating with gentiles and about allowing for their conversion to becoming followers of Jesus without requiring circumcision of males. In this contextually significant narrative, then, Peter was "not presumptuous," operating in line with Deuteronomy 18:20, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "Doch wenn ein Prophet vermessen ist zu reden in meinem Namen, das ich ihm nicht geboten habe zu reden, ... derselbe Prophet soll sterben" ("[God said to Moses, the leader of the Israelites:] But if a prophet is presumptuous to speak in my name what I have not commanded him to speak, ... that selfsame prophet shall die"). The "I" of the cantata, then, is truly "with Peter," namely in affirming a belief in the God-ordained primacy of faith/belief over "laws" like circumcision. Also, it is worth noting that in Acts 10:26, Peter humbly ("nicht vermessen," as it were) declares to the centurion Cornelius, "Ich bin auch [nur] ein Mensch" ("[Do not fall at my feet;] I, too, am [just] a human being").

¹³See fn. 11, above, regarding the poet's revised wording of this line.

¹⁴"Dass mich mein Jesus nicht vergessen" could be understood as "Dass mich mein Jesus nicht vergessen [hat]" ("That my Jesus has not forgotten me") or as "Dass mich mein Jesus nicht vergessen [wird]" ("That my Jesus will not forget me"). The latter is perhaps more likely, in light of the poet's later version of this line (on which, see fn. 11, above).

¹⁵Lexically, grammatically, contextually, and text-critically, this is an extremely convoluted line. "Nicht" ("not") here modifies not "nur" ("only") but "komm[e]" (in this context, "could have come"—see fn. 9, above). "Only" here seems to mean not "solely" but, rather, "with nevertheless the final result" (as, e.g., in the expression "they won the battles, only to lose the war"). The sense of this line in the cantata is unlikely to be "he came not only to judge the world but also to arbitrate sin and guilt," as this would contradict the extremely well-known biblical dictum of John 3:17 (which, indeed, was chanted as part of the gospel portion at the liturgical occasion for which this libretto was designed), "Denn Gott hat seinen Sohn nicht gesandt in die Welt, dass er die Welt richte" ("For God did not send his son [Jesus] into the world so that he [Jesus] might judge the world").

Als Mittler zwischen Gott und Mensch vor
diesmal schlichten.¹¹

4. Du bist geboren mir zugute,
Das glaub ich, mir ist wohl zumute,
Weil du vor mich genug getan.
Das Rund der Erden mag gleich brechen,
Will mir der Satan widersprechen,

No, no, he will only have wanted to arbitrate¹⁶ sin and guilt
Now¹⁷ [by means of the crucifixion]¹⁸ as mediator between God
and humankind.

4. You [Jesus] are born to me¹⁹ for [salvific] benefit,
This I believe; I am of good spirit,
Because you have made atonement²⁰ for me.
If the orb of the earth may, at the next moment, shatter;²¹
If Satan wishes to speak against me [as against Job];²²

¹¹The librettist later published the text of this movement as “Ich bin mit Petro nicht vermessen. / Was mich getrost und freudig macht, / Ist, dass mein Heiland mich ohnmöglich kann vergessen, / Er kam nicht nur die Welt zu richten, / Nein, nein, er wollte Sünd und Schuld, / Durch die besondere Lieb und Huld, / Als Mittler zwischen Gott und Menschen, völlig schlichten” (“I, with Peter, am not presumptuous. / What makes me comforted and joyful / Is that my savior cannot possibly forget me; / He did not come [out of love] only [nevertheless] to judge the world; / No, no, he wanted to fully arbitrate sin and guilt, / by special love and favor, / As mediator between God and humankind”).

¹⁶This poetry’s use of “richten” (“to judge”) and “schlichten” (“to arbitrate”) reflects and promotes the belief that “Jesus” is the answer to the question posed in Luther’s idiosyncratic rendering of 1 Samuel 2:25, “Wenn jemand wider einen Menschen sündigt, so kanns der Richter schlichten; wenn aber jemand wider den HERRN sündigt, wer kann für ihn bitten?” (“If someone sins against a person, then the judge is able to arbitrate it; but if someone sins against the LORD, who is able to entreat for him?”).

¹⁷“Vor diesmal” is older German for “für dieses Mal” (“this once”), which was often used essentially as a synonym for “jetzt” (“now”) or “gegenwärtig” (“at present”).

¹⁸This idea of the crucified mediator comes from 1 Timothy 2:5-6, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Denn es ist ein GOTT und ein Mittler zwischen GOTT und den Menschen, nämlich der Mensch Christus Jesus, der sich selbst gegeben hat für alle zur Erlösung” (“For there is one God and [there is] one mediator between God and people, namely the person Christ Jesus, who has given himself [on the cross], on behalf of all, for redemption”).

¹⁹The language of the first and last lines of this movement is derived from Luke 2:11, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Euch ist heute der Heiland geboren, welcher ist Christus, der HERR” (“Today the savior, which is Christ the LORD, is born to you”). Regarding the biblical phrase “is born to you/me/us,” see also fn. 4, above.

²⁰The 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”).

²¹“Brechen” here is presumably a clipped form of “zerbrechen” (“to break apart,” “to shatter”). This line refers to God’s end-time judgment, which may come at any moment. In the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, 2 Peter 3:10 reads “Es wird aber des HERRN Tag kommen als ein Dieb in der Nacht, in welchem die Himmel zergehen werden mit grossem Krachen; ... und die Erde und die Werke, die drinnen sind, werden verbrennen” (“But the Day of the LORD will come as a thief in the night, on which [day] the heavens will melt away with [the explosive noise of] great cracking; ... and the earth and the works that are therein will burn up”); in the New Testament, the “Day of the Lord” (or, “Day of Judgment”) is understood to refer to the end time, when God will punish the wicked and redeem the righteous.

²²This presumably represents a Christian parallel to the narrative at the beginning of the Book of Job. “Der Satan” (from the Hebrew “ha-satan,” meaning “the accuser/Accuser,” or “the adversary/Adversary,” or “Satan”) spoke against Job (in 1:11), but in response Job (in 1:20) “fiel auf die Erde, und betete an” (“fell to the ground and worshipped [God]”). Likewise, proclaims the cantata poetry, if Satan wants to gainsay (as he does in Job 1:9-11)—or to accuse (as “der Verkläger” [“the

So bet ich dich, mein Heiland, an.

Then I will worship²³ you, my savior.

*5. Wer an ihn gläubet, der wird nicht gerichtet; wer aber nicht gläubet, der ist schon gerichtet; denn er gläubet nicht an den Namen des eingebornen Sohnes Gottes.*²⁴

5. Whoever believes in him [in Christ], he [that person] will not be judged [unfavorably by God]; but whoever does not believe, he is already judged [unfavorably—he will not see eternal life]; for he does not believe in the name of the only-begotten son of God.

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Accuser,” Satan] does in Revelation 12:10)—the “me” of the libretto, then this “I” will respond by worshipping the savior (Jesus).

²³The words “bet an” in this line are often translated in modern renderings of this libretto as “pray to,” as if there were two words here, namely the verb “bet[en]” (“pray”) and the preposition “an” (“to”); but there is in fact only one word, the separable verb “anbeten” (“worship”). Regarding the use of “anbeten” in the biblical source that this line is apparently quoting, see fn. 22, above.

²⁴John 3:18.