

## “Gott der Herr ist Sonn und Schild” BWV 79

1. *Gott der Herr ist Sonn und Schild. Der Herr gibt Gnade und Ehre, er wird kein Gutes mangeln lassen den Frommen.*<sup>1</sup>

2. Gott ist unsre Sonn und Schild.  
Darum rühmet dessen Güte  
Unser dankbares Gemüte,  
Die er für sein Häuflein hegt.  
Denn er will uns ferner schützen,  
Ob die Feinde Pfeile schnitzen  
Und ein Lästehund gleich billt.

**3. Nun danket alle Gott  
Mit Herzen, Mund und Händen,  
Der grosse Dinge tut  
An uns und allen Enden,  
Der uns von Mutterleib  
Und Kindesbeinen an  
Unzählig viel zugut**

1. *God the Lord is [a] sun and shield. The Lord grants grace and honor; to the upright he will leave no good thing wanting.*

2. God is our sun and shield.  
Therefore our thankful human spirit  
Boasts of his goodness  
That he fosters for his little band [of Reformation Christians].  
For he will continue to protect us  
If the enemies carve arrows [to shoot at us],<sup>2</sup>  
And a slander-hound<sup>3</sup> likewise bellows [against us].<sup>4</sup>

**3. Now let all thank God<sup>6</sup>  
With heart, mouth,<sup>7</sup> and hands;  
Who does great things  
For us and to all ends [of the earth];<sup>8</sup>  
Who, from [the] womb  
And childhood<sup>9</sup> on,  
Has done much for our benefit, too great for words,<sup>10</sup>  
And still [does] now.**

<sup>1</sup>Psalm 84:12.

<sup>2</sup>“Pfeile schnitzen” can refer to the shaping and sharpening of wood, flint, bone, horn, and metal arrowheads or to the whittling of wooden arrow shafts. The older-German figurative expression “aus jedem Holze Pfeile schnitzen” (“to carve arrowheads/arrows out of every kind of wood”) was defined as “alle mögliche Mittel anwenden” (“to apply all possible means”).

<sup>3</sup>“Lästehund,” as employed here, was a synonym for “Verleumder” in its sense of “slanderer.” The word does not mean “vicious [literal/metaphorical] dog” (which would have been “ein bissiger/böshaftiger Hund,” or perhaps—in a stretch—“ein lasterhafter Hund”), nor does it mean “blasphemous dog.” The cantata line is speaking of God’s protecting Lutheran Christians from despicable people (“hounds”) who would slander them. In this context, both “the enemies” of line 6 and the “slander-hound” of line 7 were probably meant to refer to Roman Catholics (see the various annotations for movement 4, below).

<sup>4</sup>In older German, the verb “bellen” (“to bark/bay/bellow”) was sometimes conjugated not “ich belle, du bellst, er/sie/es bellt” but “ich belle, du billst, er/sie/es billt.” The latter allows for a rhyme with “Schild.”

<sup>6</sup>This hymn stanza is a metrical adaptation of Luther’s idiosyncratic rendering of Sirach 50:24(22), “Nun danket alle Gott, der grosse Dinge tut an allen Enden, der uns von Mutterleib an ... tut alles Guts” (“Now let all of you thank God, who does great things, to all ends [of the earth], who for us, from [the time we were borne in] the womb on, does all good [things]”).

<sup>7</sup>For its sense this line draws on Sirach 39:41(35), “Darum soll man den Namen des HERRN loben und danken, mit Herzen und Munde” (“Therefore shall the name of the LORD be praised, with heart and mouth”).

<sup>8</sup>“Alle Enden” is a common biblical expression employed to express not “all ends/purposes” or the “end of all time” but “all ends of the [thought-to-be-flat] earth.”

<sup>9</sup>“Kindesbeinen” (literally, “child’s legs”) is a synonym for “Kindheit” (“childhood”).

<sup>10</sup>“Unzählig” is apparently employed here in the sense not only of “zahllos” (“innumerable”) but also of “nicht zu sagen” (“not [able] to be said”). To capture both senses we have opted for the phrase “too great for words.”

**Und noch itzund getan.<sup>5</sup>**

4. Gottlob, wir wissen  
Den rechten Weg zur Seligkeit;  
Denn, Jesu, du hast ihn uns durch dein Wort gewiesen,  
Drum bleibt dein Name jederzeit gepriesen.  
Weil aber viele noch  
Zu dieser Zeit  
An fremdem Joch  
Aus Blindheit ziehen müssen,  
Ach! so erbarme dich  
Auch ihrer gnädiglich,  
Dass sie den rechten Weg erkennen  
Und dich bloss ihren Mittler nennen.

5. Gott, ach Gott, verlass die Deinen  
Nimmermehr!  
Lass dein Wort uns helle scheinen;  
Obgleich sehr  
Wider uns die Feinde toben,  
So soll unser Mund dich loben.

**6. Erhalt uns in der Wahrheit,  
Gib ewigliche Freiheit,  
Zu preisen deinen Namen  
Durch Jesum Christum. Amen.<sup>15</sup>**

4. Praise God, we know  
The right way<sup>11</sup> to [salvation's] blessedness;  
For you, Jesus, have shown it [the way] to us by your word;  
Therefore your name will continue to be exalted at all times.  
But because many<sup>12</sup> still,  
At this time,  
Must out of blindness  
Put on [an] alien yoke,<sup>13</sup>  
Ah, then graciously have mercy  
Also on them,  
That they might know the right way  
And call only you their mediator [interceding with God].<sup>14</sup>

5. Those who are yours, God, ah, God,  
Abandon nevermore.  
Let your word shine brightly on us;  
Even though  
Enemies rage greatly against us,  
Our mouths shall praise you.

**6. Uphold us in the truth;  
Grant [us] eternal freedom  
To exalt your name  
Through Jesus Christ. Amen.**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)

<sup>5</sup>The first stanza of this hymn.

<sup>11</sup>That is, the way taught in Lutheranism.

<sup>12</sup>That is, many Christians who are potential proper Lutherans.

<sup>13</sup>The sense of this line is based on Luther's rendering of 2 Corinthians 6:14, "Ziehet nicht am fremden Joch mit den Ungläubigen. ... Was hat das Licht für Gemeinschaft mit der Finsternis?" ("Do not put on with unbelievers the [thereby] alien yoke. What does light have for fellowship with darkness?"). This notion of an alien or unnatural "yoke" comes from Deuteronomy 22:10, "Du sollst nicht ackern zugleich mit einem Ochsen und Esel" ("You shall not plow with an ox and donkey [that are harnessed] together"); Lutheranism taught that such yoking is ineffective because it mixes a much stronger animal with a weaker one; and, moreover, is unlawful because it mixes the "clean" with the "unclean." In the cantata these differences are evidently meant to be applied to Lutheranism (held to be "clean" and theologically strong) versus Roman Catholicism (held to be "unclean" and theologically weak). See also fn. 14, below.

<sup>14</sup>The sense of this line is not "Allow that what they might simply do is call upon you as their mediator" but "Allow that what they might do is call upon simply you their mediator." The cantata—designed for Reformation Day—proclaims explicit disagreement with the Roman Catholic practice of praying to the saints, angels, and Mary the mother of Jesus to act as intercessors with God the father. According to Protestant teaching, there is only one mediator between humankind and God the father: God the son, Jesus.

<sup>15</sup>A stanza of "Nun lasst uns Gott dem Herren."



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