

“Herr, deine Augen sehen nach dem Glauben” BWV 102

Erster Teil

1. *Herr, deine Augen sehen nach dem Glauben. Du schlägest sie, aber sie fühlen nicht; du plagest sie, aber sie bessern sich nicht. Sie haben ein härter Angesicht denn ein Fels und wollen sich nicht bekehren.*¹

2. Wo ist das Ebenbild, das Gott uns eingepreget,
Wenn der verkehrte Will sich ihm zuwiderleget?
Wo ist die Kraft von seinem Wort,
Wenn alle Besserung weicht aus dem Herzen fort?
Der Höchste sucht uns durch Sanftmut zwar zu zähmen,
Ob der verirrte Geist sich wollte noch bequemen;
Doch, fährt er fort in dem verstockten Sinn,
So gibt er ihn ins Herzens Dünkel hin.

3. Weh der Seele, die den Schaden
Nicht mehr kennt
Und, die Straf auf sich zu laden,
Störrig rennt,
Ja von ihres Gottes Gnaden
Selbst sich trennt.

4. *Verachtetest du den Reichtum seiner Gnade,⁹ Geduld und Langmütigkeit? Weissest du nicht, dass dich Gottes Güte*

Part 1

1. *Lord, your eyes look for faith.² You strike them [the entire people of Israel],³ but they do not feel it; you torment them, but they do not mend their ways. They have a face harder than a rock, and do not want to convert [to faith in you].*

Where is the image [of God]⁴ that God stamps in us,
If the perverse will sets itself against it?⁵
Where is the power of his word,
If all mending of ways retreats from the heart?
By gentleness the Most High⁶ seeks indeed to bridle us,
Whether [or not] our misguided spirit would yet go along;
But if it [the spirit] carries on in its obdurate disposition,
He [God] gives it over to the heart's conceit.⁷

3. Woe to the soul that
No longer recognizes its [sin-inflicted]⁸ damage,
And, bringing punishment on itself,
Stubbornly runs,
Yes, breaks itself away
Even from its God's grace.

4. *Do you despise the richness of his grace, patience, and forbearance? Do you not know that God's goodness entices*

¹Jeremiah 5:3.

²The original Hebrew of Jeremiah reads not “faith/belief” but “steadfastness/integrity.” Luther's rendering chimes with the sentiment of Hebrews 11:6, “ohne Glauben ist unmöglich, Gott zu gefallen” (“without faith it is impossible to please God”).

³According to Jeremiah 5, verses 4-5, 11-12, and 21-23. This cantata was written for the 10th Sunday after Trinity, an occasion on which Bach's fellow Lutheran congregants, thought of as members of God's “new Israel,” were sternly warned about the sins of “old Israel” (the non-Christian Jews of the 1st century who did not accept Jesus as God's Messiah, and later Jews), and about how “old Israel” was punished through God's banishing its people after destroying the Jerusalem Temple. The general message of the sermons and cantatas was that sinful Lutherans could expect similar punishment if they remained unrepentant.

⁴Genesis 1:27 and Colossians 3:10 say that God had created humans “in his image [“Bild,” or “Ebenbild”].”

⁵The idea here is that all humans have inherited from Adam and Eve “a corrupted essence” (in German, “ein verderbtes Wesen”), and thus their “perverse will” sets itself against the “image [of God]” (see fn. 4, above), which is the antecedent for the word “ihm” in this line (thus translated “against it,” not “against him”).

⁶“Most High”—*elyon* in Hebrew, *hypsistos* in Greek—is used in the Bible as a name for Israel's God, who dwells on high. In nonbiblical Greek, *hypsistos* was used for Zeus as the most high god.

⁷The language of this line is derived from Romans 1:24, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads “Darum hat sie auch Gott dahin gegeben in ihrer Herzen Gelüste, in Unreinigkeit” (“Therefore God also gave them over to impurity, in the lusts of their hearts”). “Dünkel” means not “darkness” but “conceit/thought/notion.”

⁸The language of this line is presumably derived from Mark 8:36, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads “Was hilfs dem Menschen, wenn er die ganze Welt gewinne, und nehme an seiner Seelen Schaden?” (“What does it help the person if he should gain the entire [sinful] world, and inflict damage on his soul?”).

⁹In the Luther Bibles of Bach's day this word is “Güte” (“goodness”), not “Gnade” (“grace”). “Grace” was apparently substituted by the cantata's librettist (Bach's own manuscript shows no sign of revision here), presumably to link up with the talk of God's grace

zur Busse locket?¹⁰ Du aber nach deinem verstockten und unbussfertigen Herzen häufest dir selbst den Zorn auf den Tag des Zorns und der Offenbarung des gerechten Gerichts Gottes.¹¹

Zweiter Teil

5. Erschrecke doch,
Du allzu sichre Seele!
Denk, was dich würdig zähle
Der Sünden Joch.
Die Gotteslangmut geht auf einem Fuss von Blei,
Damit der Zorn hernach dir desto schwerer sei.

6. Bei Warten ist Gefahr;
Willst du die Zeit verlieren?
Der Gott, der ehemals gnädig war,
Kann leichtlich dich vor seinen Richtstuhl führen.
Wo bleibt sodann die Buss? Es ist ein Augenblick,

you to repentance? But, in accordance with your obdurate and unrepentant heart, you are heaping up wrath against yourself on the day of wrath¹² and of the revelation of God's righteous judgment.

Part 2

5. Be terrified indeed,
You all too cocksure soul.
Consider what would make you count
As worthy of sin's yoke.¹³
God's forbearance moves with a leaden foot,
With the result that his wrath will be all the heavier¹⁴ against you afterward [on the day of judgment].

6. There is danger while waiting [for the end time];¹⁵
Do you want to forfeit the time [of God's visitation]?¹⁶
The god who formerly was merciful
Can easily lead you before his judgment seat.
Then where is repentance? It is an instant¹⁷

in the previous movement. The expression "richness of [God's] grace" (in the Luther Bibles, "Reichtum seiner Gnade") is probably borrowed from Ephesians 1:7 and 2:7.

¹⁰In the Luther Bibles of Bach's day this word is "leitet" ("leads"), not "locket" ("entices"). The word "entices" was probably borrowed from the section on the "Lord's Prayer" (Matthew 6:9-13) in Luther's "Small Catechism" (which was still taught, and memorized, in the Lutheran schools of Bach's day), where Luther comments regarding the first line ("Vater unser, der du bist im Himmel" ["Our father, you who are in heaven"]), "Gott will damit uns locken, dass wir glauben sollen, er sei unser rechter Vater und wir seine rechte[n] Kinder" ("God wants with this [the first line of the Lord's Prayer] to entice us, that we should believe he may be our proper father and we his proper children").

¹¹Romans 2:4-5.

¹²The "day of wrath" language is related to the "day of the Lord," when God will judge the nations on a cosmic scale (e.g., Isaiah 13:9), and to the "day of judgment" at the end time, when God/Jesus will judge the world and call people to account for their sins (e.g., Matthew 25:31-46).

¹³The meaning of the German in lines 3-4 is uncertain, and the present translation thus probably yields a false clarity. In a 1728 book that includes a fair number of texts earlier set by Bach, there is a libretto featuring some of the poetry found in Cantata 102. But there lines 3-4 are given as "Denk, *wer* dich würdig zähle / Der Sünden Joch" ("Consider *who* would count you worthy of sin's yoke"); the "*wer*" refers to God, whose "forbearance moves with a leaden foot." Bach's surviving cantata materials do clearly read "*was*," not "*wer*," most likely in simple error (on the part of Bach or his source).

¹⁴This line's notion of God's "heavy" wrath is probably derived from Isaiah 30:27, "Siehe, des HERRN Name kommt von ferne! Sein Zorn brennt, und ist sehr schwer" ("Look, the name of the Lord comes from afar. His wrath burns and is very heavy [with smoke]").

¹⁵Some modern editions read "Beim Warten ist Gefahr" ("There is danger *in* waiting"), but Bach's surviving original materials read "Bei Warten ist Gefahr" ("There is danger *while* waiting [for the end time]"). The 1728 book of poetry mentioned in fn. 13, above, also lacks the "m" in "Beim."

¹⁶This line apparently draws on Luke 19:44, "du nicht erkennet hast die Zeit, darinnen du heimgesucht bist" ("you have not recognized the time in which you have been visited [by God]"), a verse that was part of the gospel reading at the liturgical occasion for which this cantata was designed. In the language of the Luther Bibles, "heimsuchen," like its underlying biblical-Greek word "episkopé," could be a visitation of mercy or of chastisement, or both simultaneously. The gospel reading seems to refer to mercy, whereas the cantata libretto, in the very next line of this movement, speaks of mercy that can be succeeded by chastisement.

¹⁷The "Augenblick" that separates time (this world) from eternity (the next world) is described in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "wir werden aber alle verwandelt werden; und dasselbige plötzlich in einem Augenblick, zur

Der Zeit und Ewigkeit, der Leib und Seele scheidet;
Verblendter Sinn, ach kehre doch zurück,
Dass dich dieselbe Stund nicht finde unbereitet!

**7. Heut lebst du, heut bekehre dich!
Eh morgen kömmt, kanns ändern sich;
Wer heut ist frisch, gesund und rot,
Ist morgen krank, ja wohl gar tot.
So du nun stirbest ohne Buss,
Dein Leib und Seel dort brennen muss.**

**Hilf, o Herr Jesu, hilf du mir,
Dass ich noch heute komm zu dir
Und Busse tu den Augenblick,
Eh mich der schnelle Tod hinrück,
Auf dass ich heut und jederzeit
Zu meiner Heimfahrt sei bereit.¹⁹**

That separates time and eternity, body and soul.
Blinded disposition, ah, turn back,
Lest¹⁸ this same hour [of judgment] find you unprepared.

**7. Today you live; convert [to Godliness] today;
Before tomorrow comes, things can change;
One who today is vigorous, healthy, and ruddy,
Tomorrow is sick—indeed, even dead.
If you die now without repentance,
Your body and soul must burn there [in hell].**

**Save, O Lord Jesus, save me,²⁰
That even today I may come to you
And may do penitence²¹ this instant,
Before sudden death may pull me away [from earth];
So that today and at all times
I may be prepared for my journey home [to heaven].**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



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Zeit der letzten Posaune” (“but we shall all be transformed [at the end time], and the selfsame suddenly, in an instant, at the time of the last trumpet [literally, ‘trombone]’).

¹⁸In older German, the “dass ... nicht” construction is sometimes used where modern German would use “damit ... nicht” (in English, “lest”).

¹⁹Two stanzas of “So wahr ich lebe, spricht dein Gott.”

²⁰The verb “helfen” (literally, “to help”) is used here in the sense of “to save [from an afterlife in hell].” Jeremiah 17:14 reads, in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, “Heile du mich, HERR, so werde ich heil; hilf du mir, so ist mir geholfen” (“Heal/save me, Lord, and I will be safe/whole/healed; help/save me, and I am saved/helped”).

²¹“Tu Buss” refers to more than making private confession to a priest. Penitence was a central subject of Luther’s “95 Theses,” Number 1 of which reads “Da unser Herr und Meister Jesus Christus spricht ‘Tut Busse’ ... hat er gewollt, dass das ganze Leben der Gläubigen Busse sein soll” (“When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ says ‘Do penitence ... [Matthew 4:17],’ he wanted that the entire life of believers shall be [one of] penitence”).