

"Herr Gott, dich loben alle wir" BWV 130

1. Herr Gott, dich loben alle wir
Und sollen billig danken dir
Für dein Geschöpf der Engel schon,
Die um dich schwebn um deinen Thron.

2. Ihr heller Glanz und hohe Weisheit zeigt,
Wie Gott sich zu uns Menschen neigt,
Der solche Helden, solche Waffen
Vor uns geschaffen.
Sie ruhen ihm zu Ehren nicht;
Ihr ganzer Fleiss ist nur dahin gerichtet,⁴
Dass sie, Herr Christe, um dich sein
Und um dein armes Häuflein:
Wie nötig ist doch diese Wacht
Bei Satans Grimm und Macht.

3. Der alte Drache brennt vor Neid
Und dichtet stets auf neues Leid,

1. Lord God, we all praise you
And should fittingly¹ thank you
For your creation of the resplendent² angels
That hover around you, around³ your throne.

2. Their [the angels'] bright radiance and lofty wisdom⁵ shows
How God inclines [his ear]⁶ to us people—
[He] who has created
Such warriors,⁷ such weaponry for us.
They do not rest from honoring him;
Their whole diligence is directed only there,
So that they, Lord Christ, may be [hovering] around you
And around your wretched little band [of Christians].⁸
How needful is this keeping watch indeed
Amid Satan's fury and might.⁹

3. The ancient dragon [Satan]¹⁰ burns with envy

GENERAL NOTE: Movements 1 and 6 take their texts verbatim from the outer stanzas of the hymn "Herr Gott, dich loben alle wir." The internal movements paraphrase other stanzas.

¹"Billig" here is an archaic synonym for "angemessen" ("fittingly/meetly"). The language of this line is derived from 2 Thessalonians 1:3, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "Wir sollen Gott danken allezeit um euch, lieben Brüder, wie es billig ist" ("We should thank God always for you, dear brothers [in Christ], just as it is meet/fitting").

²In older German, "schon" is a possible alternate spelling of "schön," presumably employed here for its better rhyme with "Thron" ("throne"). The word "schön" basically means "beautiful," but it also can carry a sense of "brightness" (the English words "shine" and "sheen" share historical roots with "schön"), hence the rendering with the adjective "resplendent." The language of this line is apparently derived from Psalm 147:1, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "Lobet den HERRN, denn unsern Gott loben, das ist ein köstlich Ding; solch Lob ist lieblich und schön" ("Praise the LORD; for to praise our God, that is an excellent thing; such praise is lovely and beautiful/resplendent"). In line 1 of the next movement of the cantata, the angels are said to be brightly radiant.

³The Bach sources give "um" ("around"), but the text booklets for this cantata that were made available to his congregants reads "in," as do contemporary hymnals; i.e., the standard wording for this hymn line was "Die um dich schwebn in deinen Thron" ("[the angels] that hover around you [as you are sitting] in your throne"). The cantata's double "um" may have been meant to correspond to the appearance of a double "um" in lines 7–8 of the next movement.

⁴This line is a near quotation of the underlying chorale stanza as well.

⁵In 2 Samuel 14:20, angels are said to be wise.

⁶This line derives its sense from Psalm 40:2, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "Ich harre des HERRN, und er neigt sich zu mir und hört mein Schreien" ("I await the LORD, and he inclines [his ear] to me and hears my crying").

⁷The angels of the Lord are hailed as "ihr starken Helden" ("you mighty warriors") in Psalm 103:20.

⁸This is a biblical expression, "ihr armer Haufe Israel" ("you wretched/poor band, Israel"), taken from Isaiah 41:14. The name of the people of God, "Israel," was understood here to mean "Christians."

⁹Bach's own score and the text booklets made available to his congregants feature a question mark here, whereas the original performing part, in the handwriting of an assistant, has a period. Some modern editors have instead used an exclamation mark. The presumably rhetorical question is answered by the text of the following aria.

¹⁰A conflation. Satan is called "die alte Schlange" ("the ancient serpent"—with echoes of Genesis 3:1-7) and "der grosse Drache" ("the great dragon") in Revelation 12:9.

Dass er das kleine Häuflein trennet.
Er tilgte gern, was Gottes ist,
Bald braucht er List,
Weil er nicht Rast noch Ruhe kennet.

And constantly dreams up¹¹ new suffering [for Christians],
So that he might¹² put asunder the tiny little band.¹³
He would gladly wipe away what is God's;
He would readily use¹⁴ cunning,
Because he knows neither rest nor peace.

4. Wohl aber uns, dass Tag und Nacht
Die Schar der Engel wacht,
Des Satans Anschlag zu zerstören.
Ein Daniel, so unter Löwen sitzt,
Erfährt, wie ihn die Hand des Engels schützt.
Wenn dort die Glut
In Babels Ofen keinen Schaden tut,
So lassen Gläubige ein Danklied hören,
So stellt sich in Gefahr
Noch itzt der Engel Hülfe dar.

4. But well it is for us that day and night
The host of angels keeps watch,
[Ready] to destroy Satan's plot.¹⁵
A Daniel who sits among lions
Finds out how the hand of the angel¹⁶ protects him.
When the blaze there
In Babylon's furnace does no harm,¹⁷
Then [the] believers [within the furnace] let a song of thanks be
heard,¹⁸
Likewise,¹⁹ in [times of] peril,
Still now²⁰ the angels' aid presents itself.

¹¹The archaic verb “aufdichten” means, more literally, “to fashion/devise unto/up.”

¹²Strictly speaking, this (apparently indicative) “trennet” simply means “sever.” But the use of this form here seems to make sense only if it is read as if it were subjunctive, “might sever.” Giving the verb not as “trennet” (indicative) but “trennte”/“trennete” (subjunctive) would have expressed this more properly. “Trennte,” however, does not rhyme with the “kennet” of line 6.

¹³Regarding the “little band,” see fn. 8, above.

¹⁴The apparently indicative “braucht” (“uses”) here is probably a poetically clipped form of the subjunctive “brauchte” (“would/might use”).

¹⁵The word “Anschlag” has a wide variety of meanings. Line 5 of movement 3 had spoken of Satan's “List” (“cunning”), and in turn line 3 of movement 4 derives its language about cunning from Job 5:12, “Er macht zu nichte die Anschläge der Listigen, dass es ihre Hand nicht ausführen kann” (“he [God] frustrates the plots of the cunning, so that their hand cannot carry it out”).

¹⁶The story of Daniel in the lions' den is narrated in Daniel 6:10-24. The angel who protects Daniel from the lions is referred to in Daniel 6:22 as “his [God's] angel,” which is the same expression used, at Daniel 3:28, for the angel in the story of the three men thrown into a fiery furnace (see fn. 17, below). Luther took this angel—referred to in Daniel 3:25 as a figure “gleich wie ein Sohn der Götter” (“just like a son of the gods”)—to be an early manifestation of Christ, who is the “Engel des Gnadenbundes” (“angel/messenger of the covenant of grace”).

¹⁷The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego being thrown, unharmed, into King Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace is narrated in Daniel 3:8-30.

¹⁸The song of thanks—performed by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, right there in the furnace—that this line speaks of is not mentioned in the oldest surviving (now canonical) version of the book of Daniel, which was transmitted in Hebrew and Aramaic. Later versions of Daniel inserted what are now called “Additions to Daniel,” written in Greek, into the middle of what is now chapter 3 of their Greek translation of the book of Daniel. Luther, however, printed his translation of this inserted material—calling the first part “Das Gebet Asarjas” (“The Prayer of Azariah [i.e., the Hebrew name of Abednego]”) and the second “Der Gesang der dreien Männer” (“The Song of the Three Men [in the Fiery Furnace]”)—within the “Apocrypha” (i.e., for him, non-canonical) section of his Bible. The cantata libretto is often taken to refer generally to later (Christian) hymn singing, but it actually refers specifically to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's singing “The Song of the Three Men” as narrated in the Additions to Daniel.

¹⁹These two lines begin with the same German word “so,” but the first instance is part of a “wenn-so” (“when-then”) construction, whereas the second is apparently used as a clipped version of “ebenso” (“likewise”).

²⁰That is, angelic protection presents itself now, just as it did in the past (as when the angel protected Daniel in the lions' den, and when this same angel [see fn. 16, above] kept Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from being consumed by the furnace's fire).

5. Lass, o Fürst der Cherubinen,
Dieser Helden hohe Schar
Immerdar
Deine Gläubigen bedienen;
Dass sie auf Elias Wagen
Sie zu dir gen Himmel tragen.

6. Darum wir billig loben dich,
Und danken dir, Gott, ewiglich,
Wie auch der lieben Engel Schar,
Dich preisen²⁴ heut und immerdar.

Und bitten dich, wollst allezeit,
Dieselben heissen sein bereit,
Zu schützen deine kleine Herd,
So hält dein göttlich Wort in Wert.

5. Oh [Jesus,] prince of the cherubim,²¹
Let the lofty host of these warriors²²
Forever
Serve your believers;
So that they [the angels] may carry
Them [the believers] on Elijah's chariot²³ into heaven, to you.

6. Thus we fittingly²⁵ praise you,
And thank you, God, eternally,
Just like [we thank] also the host of dear angels;
[We] laud you today and forever.

And [we] ask you, may you at all times,
Bid these selfsame [angels] be ready
To protect your little flock,²⁶
Who holds your divine word in reverence.²⁷

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



Scan or go to <http://www.bachcantatatexts.org/BWV130> for an annotated translation

²¹“Prince of the cherubim” is a title for Jesus. In the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Exodus 25:17-20; 2 Kings 19:15), the invisible God of Israel sits on a covering—usually rendered in English as “the mercy seat”—above two winged composite creatures called “cherubim,” who serve as guardians. The Luther Bibles rendered this divine seat “der Gnadenstuhl” (“the throne of grace”). It is the use of “Gnadenstuhl” in Luther’s idiosyncratic translation of Romans 3:25—“welchen Gott hat vorgestellt zu einem Gnadenstuhl durch den Glauben in seinem Blut” (“[Christ Jesus,] whom God has set forth as a throne of grace through faith in his [sacrificial] blood [on the cross]”)—that provides the basis in the theological discourse of Bach’s day for calling Jesus “der Fürst der Cherubinen” (“the prince of the cherubim”); also significant is the fact that the cherubim were theologically prized in Lutheranism for prefiguring what they (the Lutherans) professed as the harmony between the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. The normal plural for “der Cherub” was “die Cherubim,” but sometimes “[der] Cherubim” was employed for the singular and “Cherubinen” for the plural. In poetry, “Cherubinen” was especially welcome, as it has an extra syllable and it handily rhymes with “dienen/bedienen” (“to serve”).

²²See fn. 7, above.

²³This is a reference to the “feuriger Wagen” (“fiery chariot”; or, “chariot of fire”) that in 2 Kings 2:11 is said to have conveyed the prophet Elijah into heaven.

²⁴Many hymnbooks of Bach’s day give “preiset” (an older form of “preist”) here, suggesting the meaning “Thus we [congregated Christians] fittingly praise you, / And [we] thank you, God, eternally, / Just like also [any one angel] of the host of dear angels lauds you today and forever”; but others give “preisen,” implying “Thus we [congregated Christians] fittingly praise you, / And [we] thank you, God, eternally, / Just like [we thank] also the host of dear angels [for protecting us]; / [We] laud you [God] today and forever.” The text booklets made available to Bach’s congregants read “preisen,” and the only surviving original texted musical materials of Bach’s also read “preisen.” Some modern editors, however, have suggested emending the text to “preiset.” Adding to the challenges is the punctuation in the Bachian and non-Bachian historical sources, which is inconsistent and often apparently logic-defying. The modern punctuation of these texts is thus necessarily editorial.

²⁵See fn. 1, above.

²⁶Synonymous with the “Häuflein” (“little band”) in movements 2 and 3, here with pastoral implications.

²⁷“In Wert halten” is apparently being used here as a variant of “in Würde halten” (“to hold in [high] respect/worthiness”).