

“Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben” BWV 147a

1. Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben
Muss von Christo Zeugnis geben
Ohne Furcht und Heuchelei,
Dass er Gott und Heiland sei.

1. Heart and mouth and deed and life
Must bear witness of Christ,
Without fear and hypocrisy,
That he is God and savior.

2. Schäme dich, o Seele, nicht,
Deinen Heiland zu bekennen,
Soll er seine Braut dich nennen
Vor des Vaters Angesicht!
Denn wer ihn auf dieser Erden
Zu verleugnen sich nicht scheut,
Soll von ihm verleugnet werden,
Wenn er kommt zur Herrlichkeit.

2. Do not be ashamed, o soul,
To profess your savior [now],
If he is to call you his bride¹
Before [God] the father’s countenance [at the end time].
But whoever is unafraid
To deny him on this earth
Will be denied by him
When he [the savior] comes in glory [at the end time].

3. Hilf, Jesu, hilf, dass ich auch dich bekenne
In Wohl und Weh, in Freud und Leid,
Dass ich dich meinen Heiland nenne
In Glauben mit Gelassenheit,
Dass stets mein Herz von deiner Liebe brenne.

3. Help, Jesus, help that I too may profess² you
In weal and woe, in joy and sorrow;
That I may call you my savior
In faith with resignation [to your will],³
That my heart may ever burn with your love.

4. Bereite dir, Jesu, noch heute die Bahn,
Beziehe die Höhle
Des Herzens, der Seele,
Und blicke mit Augen der Gnade mich an!

4. Prepare the highway for you [into my heart],⁴ Jesus, even today;
Move into [your dwelling place,] the grotto
Of my heart, of my soul,
And glance upon me with eyes of grace.

5. Lass mich der Rufer Stimmen hören

5. Let me hear the voices⁵ of those who call out,

GENERAL NOTE: It has been suggested that Bach may never have set all of this version of this libretto to music. Only the opening chorus survives in a Weimar-era source, and Bach placed its manuscript into his Leipzig setting of an expanded libretto that featured the other movements from this Weimar libretto, some of them textually revised. Bach’s Leipzig score of the music after the first movement is not a (messy) “composing score,” which means that Bach was copying from a now lost earlier manuscript (whose dating is not known).

¹According to Revelation 19:7-9, the “Lamb [of God],” namely God’s son and messiah, Jesus, will marry his bride, the church (understood as each Christian “soul” and as the whole group of believers), at the end time.

²Lutheran doctrine taught that one must not only believe in Jesus but also profess him openly. Human beings were said to be inherently tainted with sin, however, and thus unable to believe or profess without Jesus’s help. “Bekennen” (“to profess”) is akin to the “Christo Zeugnis geben” (“to bear witness of Christ”) in movement 1 of the cantata.

³“Gelassenheit” is used here in its older sense of resignation and calmness associated with leaving things to God’s will, as opposed to its modern sense of general placidity or imperturbability.

⁴This is an adaptation of Isaiah 40:3, “Bereitet dem Herrn den Weg, machet auf dem Gefilde eine ebene Bahn unserm Gott” (“Prepare the way for the Lord; make in the desert plains a smooth highway for our God”). In Christian interpretation of this verse, Jesus is the God for whom the highway is made. Jesus is apparently being asked, in the cantata poetry, to prepare the “highway” himself, such that he can then travel into the believer’s heart.

⁵Some modern editions give the German as “Stimme” (singular, “voice”), but the surviving original source reads “Stimmen” (“voices”), which is properly associated here with the plural verb “lehren” (thus “voices teach,” not “voice teaches”).

Die mit Johanne treulich lehren,
Ich soll in dieser Gnadenzeit
Von Finsternis und Dunkelheit
Zum wahren Lichte mich bekehren.

**6. Dein Wort lass mich bekennen
[Für dieser argen Welt,
Auch mich dein'n Diener nennen,
Nicht fürchten Gwalt noch Geld,
Das mich bald möcht ableiten
Von deiner Wahrheit klar;
Wollst mich auch nicht abscheiden
Von der christlichen Schar.]⁹**

Salomo Franck

[Voices] which, with John,⁶ teach faithfully⁷
That in this time of grace
I shall convert from benightedness and darkness
To the true light.⁸

**6. [God,] let me profess your word¹⁰
Before this evil world;
[Let me] also call myself your servant,
Fearing neither power nor wealth
That would want before long to mislead me
From your clear¹¹ truth;
[And] may [you]¹² also not separate me¹³
From the Christian flock.**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



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⁶John the Baptist is the voice of one who calls out to “bear witness of Christ” (see line 2 of movement 1, above) in John 1:23, part of the gospel reading for the Fourth Sunday in Advent for which this cantata is designed, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Ich bin eine Stimme eines Rufers in der Wüsten: Richtet den Weg des Herrn” (“I am a voice of one who calls out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord [Jesus]”).

⁷Another “John,” as it happens, namely John the Apostle (traditionally believed to be the author of the Gospel of John, the Epistles of John, and the book of Revelation) spoke a good deal about darkness and light, which is the subject of the next lines in this movement of the cantata (see fn. 8, below).

⁸The language of this line is derived from 1 John 2:8b, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “die Finsternis ist vergangen, und das wahre Licht scheint jetzt” (“the benightedness [of sin/unbelief] has passed, and the true light [of God in Jesus] now shines”).

⁹A stanza of “Ich dank dir, lieber Herre.” Only the first line is indicated in the surviving libretto source.

¹⁰That is, Jesus. According to John 1:14, “the logos/word of God” comes (from heaven) to become the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth.

¹¹That is, “clear” in the sense of manifest to the mind or judgement; evident, plain. The word is used in this sense in “die klare Wahrheit” (“the clear truth”), an expression employed often in the theological books of Bach’s day.

¹²The expression “du wollest” with complementary infinitive was often employed in prayers and requests, and accordingly “[du] wollst mich auch nicht abscheiden” is not a statement but a plea; it means “May you also not separate me,” not “You also would not separate me.”

¹³That is, “Let me go to heaven, not hell.” The language here is apparently derived from Matthew 25:32, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “er wird sie von einander scheiden, gleich als ein Hirt die Schafe von den Böcken scheidet” (“he [the Son of Man] will separate them [the people gathered in future before the Son of Man] from one another, just the way a shepherd separates the sheep [the people who will go into eternal life] from the goats [the people who will go into eternal pain]”).