

“Nur jedem das Seine!” BWV 163

1. Nur jedem das Seine!  
Muss Obrigkeit haben  
Zoll, Steuern und Gaben,  
Man weigre<sup>1</sup> sich nicht  
Der schuldigen Pflicht!  
Doch bleibet<sup>2</sup> das Herze dem Höchsten alleine.  
Nur jedem<sup>3</sup> das Seine!

1. Just to each what is his.<sup>4</sup>  
If sovereignty must have  
Toll, taxes, and gifts [of free-will tribute],<sup>5</sup>  
One may not refuse to discharge oneself  
Of the obligation owed!  
But the heart remains [rendered] to [God] the Most High alone.  
Just to each what is his.

2. Du bist, mein Gott, der Geber aller Gaben;  
Wir haben, was wir haben,  
Allein von deiner Hand.  
Du, du hast uns gegeben  
Geist, Seele, Leib und Leben  
Und Hab und Gut und Ehr und Stand!  
Was sollen wir  
Denn dir  
Zur Dankbarkeit dafür erlegen,  
Da unser ganz Vermögen  
Nur dein und gar nicht unser ist?

2. You are, my God, the giver of all gifts;  
What we have, we have  
From your hand alone.  
You, you have given us  
Spirit, soul, body, and life,  
And goods and chattel,<sup>6</sup> and rank and honor!<sup>7</sup>  
What shall we,  
Then,  
In gratitude, repay<sup>8</sup> you for them,  
When our entire wherewithal<sup>9</sup>  
Is only yours and not at all ours?

<sup>1</sup>This word is given as “wegre” in Bach’s own score and as “weg’re” in the poet’s printed libretto. Both were old-fashioned spellings of “weigere,” a third-person subjunctive form of the reflexive verb “weigern” (“to refuse”).

<sup>2</sup>The poet’s printed text reads “Doch bleibe das Herze dem Höchsten alleine” (“But may the heart remain [rendered] to [God] the Most High alone”), whereas Bach’s score reads “Doch bleibet das Herze dem Höchsten alleine” (“But the heart remains [rendered] to [God] the Most High alone”).

<sup>3</sup>The poet’s printed text here (unlike in line 1) reads “jeden,” presumably either simply in error or as part of a clipped version of the expression “Nur einem jeden das Seine” (“Only to each one his own”).

<sup>4</sup>Some present-day listeners are concerned that the title of this cantata, “Nur jedem das Seine,” resonates with anti-Jewish and other contempt, as its language might be taken to pre-echo the motto moulded on to the gate at the Buchenwald concentration camp, JEDEM DAS SEINE—literally, “to each his own,” but which the Nazis understood as “one gets what he deserves.” Cantata 163’s “Nur jedem das Seine,” however, is employed in the context of the biblical obligation to pay taxes to secular authorities. The first movement’s poetry is based on language on that subject from Romans 13 and Matthew 22 (on the latter, see fn. 10, below). In the cantata’s biblical-liturgical context, the more specific sense of “Nur jedem das Seine” would be “Only to each his due,” and so we have rendered the phrase not as “Only to each his own,” which suggests another unintended sense (“To each his own [taste],” as in the French “Chacun à son goût”), but rather as “Just to each what is his.”

<sup>5</sup>In its definition for “Gabe,” a key early-eighteenth-century German–English dictionary gives as a usage example, “eine freiwillige Gabe so die Untertanen der Obrigkeit geben,” which it renders in English as “a free gift of the subjects to the sovereign.”

<sup>6</sup>“Goods and chattel” is the standard English phrase that corresponds to “Hab und Gut.”

<sup>7</sup>“Rank and honor” is by far the most common English phrase that corresponds to “Ehr und Stand,” but it is also frequently expressed the other way around, as “honor and rank.”

<sup>8</sup>“Erlegen” here is used in its old-fashioned sense of “erstatten” (“to repay/compensate/reimburse”).

<sup>9</sup>The the word “Vermögen” here could have to do with human abilities or with material possessions, or both. It is rendered here as “wherewithal,” because this solution can cover both senses.

Doch ist noch eins, dass dir, Gott, wohlgefällt:  
Das Herze soll allein,  
Herr, deine Zinsemünze sein.  
Ach! aber ach! ist das nicht schlechtes Geld?  
Der Satan hat dein Bild daran verletzt,  
Die falsche Münz ist abgesetzt.

But there is yet one thing that well pleases you, God:  
The heart alone,  
Lord, shall be your coin for tribute.<sup>10</sup>  
Ah, but ah! Is that not bad money?<sup>11</sup>  
Satan has marred<sup>12</sup> your image on it,  
[And] the [now] faulty coin<sup>13</sup> is decried.<sup>14</sup>

3. Lass mein Herz die Münze sein,  
Die ich dir, mein Jesu, steure!  
Ist sie gleich nicht allzu rein,  
Ach! so komm doch und erneure,  
Herr, den schönen Glanz bei<sup>15</sup> ihr!  
Komm! arbeite, schmelz und präge,  
Dass dein Ebenbild bei<sup>16</sup> mir  
Ganz erneuert glänzen möge!

3. Let my heart be the coin  
That I render unto you, my Jesus.<sup>17</sup>  
If it [the coin] is not altogether pristine,  
Ah, do come then and renew,  
Lord, the beautiful radiance to<sup>18</sup> it.  
Come; work, melt, and emboss [it],  
So that your very image  
May radiate in me [who is] entirely renewed.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>10</sup>“Zinsemünze” is Luther’s rendering of the technical phrase “nomisma tou kensou” (“[current] coin for the [census] tribute/tax [levied on individuals, to be paid yearly to the Romans]”) in Matthew 22:19-21 (a passage that is part of the gospel portion for the liturgical occasion that this cantata was originally designed for), where Jesus says to the Pharisees, “Weiset mir die Zinsemünze! ... Wes ist das Bild? ... Sie sprachen zu ihm: Des Kaisers. Da sprach er zu ihnen: So gebet dem Keiser, was des Kaisers ist, und Gott, was Gottes ist?” (“Show me the [current] coin [used] for tribute. ... Whose [face] is the image [on the coin]?” ... They [the Pharisees] said to him: ‘The emperor’s.’ Then he said to them: ‘Give/Render therefore unto the emperor what is the emperor’s, and unto God what is God’s’”).

<sup>11</sup>“Schlechtes Geld” is “bad money” (or, “debased coinage”), where “bad” means “low in value” (i.e., not “evil” or “ill-gotten”).

<sup>12</sup>The verb “verletzen” is used here in the sense of “beschädigen” (“to damage,” “to mar”).

<sup>13</sup>A “falsche Münze” (“false/faulty coin”) might be “false” by counterfeiting, or “faulty” by “clipping” (i.e., by shaving metal from the coin’s circumference) or defacing. The metaphors surrounding coinage doubtless reflect not only the gospel reading for this cantata’s occasion (see fn. 10, above), but also the interests of the poet, Salomo Franck, who was the consistorial secretary, librarian, and head of the numismatic collection at the ducal court in Weimar, where Bach composed and first performed this cantata.

<sup>14</sup>“Abgesetztes Geld” (a technical term) refers to “coinage that is ‘cried down’ [or, ‘decried’]”). In the eighteenth century, it was said of the British monarch, for example, that “The king may decry, or cry down, any coin of the kingdom, and make it no longer current.” The idea in this cantata poetry is that the image of God had been embossed on the heart-“coin,” but in corrupting the human heart, Satan has defaced this “coinage,” making the original suitability of all such “coins” as proper “legal tender” no longer “visible” and thus causing the king/God to proclaim it as unlawful and devalued; the heart-“coin” can, however, be restored (i.e., God can “renew” the heart).

<sup>15</sup>In the poet’s print, not “bei ihr” (here, “to it”) but “in ihr” (“in it”).

<sup>16</sup>In the poet’s print, not “bei” (here, “in”) but “in” (also, “in”).

<sup>17</sup>“Steuern” had a wide variety of meanings in Bach’s day; here it means “to render” (in the sense of “to pay as a tax, rent, or tribute”). This line is specifically a reflection of the command to “render unto God what is God’s” (see the citation of Matthew 22:19-21 in fn. 10, above).

<sup>18</sup>See fn. 15, above.

<sup>19</sup>This line speaks of a renewed person, not of God’s image being made new. The wording reflects Luther’s subtle but theologically significant understanding of Colossians 3:9-11, which he rendered as “ziehet den alten Menschen mit seinen Werken aus und ziehet den neuen an, der da erneuert wird zu der Erkenntnis, nach dem Ebenbilde des, der ihn geschaffen hat” (“put off the old

4. Ich wollte dir,  
 O Gott, das Herze gerne geben!  
 Der Will ist zwar bei mir;  
 Doch Fleisch und Blut will immer widerstreben,<sup>20</sup>  
 Dieweil die Welt  
 Das Herz gefangen hält;<sup>21</sup>  
 So will sie sich den Raub nicht nehmen lassen;  
 Jedoch ich muss sie hassen,  
 Wenn ich dich lieben soll!

4. I would<sup>22</sup> gladly give you,  
 O God, my heart!  
 The will is indeed in me;  
 But flesh and blood<sup>23</sup> will always strive against [the law of  
 conscience],<sup>24</sup>  
 Because<sup>25</sup> the world  
 Holds the heart captive [in the law of sin];<sup>26</sup>  
 It [the world], therefore, will not let its robbery [of your honor,<sup>27</sup>  
 God,] be taken [in turn];

man [i.e., the fallen Adam] and his works and put on the new [i.e., the sinless Christ, who is the ‘new man’], which is being renewed in knowledge according to the very image of him who has created him”). In Luther’s reading of Paul, a person who has “put on [like clothing]” the “new man” (Christ, the “new Adam”) is renewed according to the image of God. A person’s whole being as the “image of God” is restored by union with Christ, and Christ is the “very image of the invisible God” (according to Colossians 1:15). So it is not God’s image itself that is renovated; more exactly, fallen human beings are made new into God’s image.

<sup>20</sup>In key modern editions, the comma that is found in the poet’s print and in Bach’s own score has been unwarrantedly emended to a period, affecting the sense of lines 3–7 (see fn. 25, below).

<sup>21</sup>In key modern editions, the semicolon that is found in the poet’s print and in Bach’s own score has been unwarrantedly emended to a comma, affecting the sense of lines 3–7 (see fn. 25, below).

<sup>22</sup>“The “wollte” here is apparently imperfect subjunctive.

<sup>23</sup>The expression “flesh and blood” is a quasi-technical term for (fallen, intrinsically sinful) human nature. The classic use of the expression is found in 1 Corinthians 15:50, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Davon sage ich aber, lieben Brüder, dass Fleisch und Blut nicht können das Reich Gottes ererben” (“Hence I [the apostle Paul] say, however, to you dear brothers [in Christ], that [one’s essentially corrupted] flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”). It is the “spirit” that inherits the kingdom of God.

<sup>24</sup>On the law of conscience vs. the law of sin, see fn. 26, below.

<sup>25</sup>The formal sense of the four phrases in lines 3–7 is often given as “[a] Indeed I have the will, [b] but flesh and blood always resist. [c] While (or, “Because”; or, “So long as”) the world holds my heart captive, [d] it will not let the spoils be taken away.” With the punctuation of the original sources restored (see fn. 20 and fn. 21, above), however, the first word of phrase c, “dieweil,” is more likely to be understood as “because” than “while,” and it apparently links not phrases c and d but c and b.

<sup>26</sup>For their sense, lines 4–6 assume familiarity with Romans 7:23, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Ich sehe aber ein ander Gesetz in meinen Gliedern, das da widerstrebet dem Gesetz in meinem Gemüte und nimmt mich gefangen in der Sünde Gesetz, welches ist in meinen Gliedern” (“But I see another law in my bodily parts [i.e., in the “flesh-and-blood” of intrinsically-sinful me—see fn. 23, above], which strives there [carnally] against the law in my mind [i.e., against my conscience] and takes me captive in the law of sin, which [law] is [innate] in my bodily parts”). Some Luther Bibles of Bach’s day read “widerstreitet” (“battles against”) in place of “widerstrebet” (“strives against”).

<sup>27</sup>“The robbery” here refers to the way that the fall of humanity into sin (Genesis 3:1-24) is believed to be echoed specifically in Philippians 2:6-7, a passage understood as contrasting the sinful man Adam with the sinless man Jesus. In Genesis 3:5, Adam and Eve are tempted to become like God, by eating the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; Philippians 2:6-7, in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, reads “ob er wohl in göttlicher Gestalt war, hielt ers nicht für einen Raub, Gott gleich sein; sondern äusserte sich selbst und nahm Knechtsgestalt an, ward gleich wie ein ander Mensch” (“[Christ Jesus], although he was in the form of God, deemed it not a robbery to be like [or, ‘equal with’] God; rather, [he] relinquished his own advantage [or, ‘he emptied himself’] and took on the form of a servant, becoming like any other human being”). This same contrast is also explored in movement 19 of Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*, which reads “Er leidet alle Höllenqualen, er soll vor fremden Raub bezahlen” (“He [Jesus] suffers all the

So mache doch mein Herz mit deiner Gnade voll;  
Leer es ganz aus von Welt und allen Lüsten  
Und mache mich zu einem rechten Christen.

I must yet hate it [the world]  
If I am to love you!  
Do, therefore, make my heart filled with your [soul-saving]  
grace;  
Empty it entirely of the world and all [worldly] desires<sup>28</sup>  
And make me into a proper Christian.

5. Nimm mich mir,  
Und gib mich dir;  
Nimm mich mir und meinen<sup>29</sup> Willen,  
Deinen Willen zu erfüllen!  
Gib dich mir mit deiner Güte,  
Dass mein Herz und mein Gemüte  
In dir bleibe für und für,  
Nimm mich mir,  
Und gib mich dir!

5. Take me from myself  
And give me to you [Jesus].<sup>30</sup>  
Take me from myself and take my will,<sup>31</sup>  
To fulfill your will.  
Give yourself to me together with your goodness,  
So that my heart and my mind  
May remain in you<sup>32</sup> forever;  
Take me from myself  
And give me to you.

**6. Führ auch mein Herz und Sinn  
Durch deinen Geist dahin,  
Dass ich mög alles meiden,  
Was mich und dich kann scheiden,  
Und ich an deinem Leibe  
Ein Gliedmass ewig bleibe.**<sup>33</sup>

**6. Also lead my heart and mind,  
By your spirit, there [to your kingdom],<sup>34</sup>  
So that I may shun everything  
That can separate me and you,  
And that I may remain a limb**

sorrows of hell; he is to pay for others' robbery"); this poetry proclaims that Jesus is to pay for fallen humanity's cardinal robbery; i.e., in its original sin of desiring to become like God, humanity "robbed" God's honor.

<sup>28</sup>Alluding to Titus 2:12, "wir sollen verleugnen ... die weltlichen Lüste" ("we [followers of Jesus] shall deny worldly desires").

<sup>29</sup>The poet's printed text reads "Nimm mich mir und meinem Willen" ("Take me from myself, and from my will"), but Bach score reads "Nimm mich mir und meinen Willen" ("Take me from myself, and take my will").

<sup>30</sup>The sense of the cantata's poetry is that its "me" is the Christian sinner and its "you" is Jesus (see also fn. 32, below), something that is reinforced by Bach's inserting an instrumental quotation of the hymn tune "Meinen Jesum lass ich nicht" into this vocal duet's texture; just as Jesus submits to God the father, the Christian sinner submits to Jesus. Jesus (as the "me"), in his speaking to God (as the "you") in Mark 14:36, uses similar language to lines 3-4 of this cantata movement.

<sup>31</sup>See fn. 29, above.

<sup>32</sup>The explanation of what the expression to "remain in you [i.e., in Christ]" is given in John 15:1-4, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "Ich bin ein rechter Weinstock ... Bleibet in mir, und ich in euch; gleich wie der Rebe kann keine Frucht bringen von ihm selber, er bleibe denn am Weinstock, also auch ihr nicht, ihr bleibet denn in mir" ("I [Jesus] am a proper vine ... [I say to you believers:] Remain in me, and I in you; just as the twig cannot bear fruit by itself unless it [the twig] remain on the vine, so neither can you [bear the spiritual fruit of salvation] unless you remain in me [via faith]").

<sup>33</sup>The last stanza of "Wo soll ich fliehen hin." Bach's performing parts are now lost, and his score gives only an untexted bass line here. The poet's printed libretto gives as the text for this movement only: "Führ auch mein Herz und Sinn / Durch deinen Geist dahin etc"; it seems rather unlikely that in his performances Bach used a different text from the one implied by the poet's printed incipit.

<sup>34</sup>The antecedent for "dahin" ("there") is "dein Reich" ("your kingdom") from the previous stanza of this hymn. "Dein Reich" refers to "dem ewigen Reich unsers Herrn und Heilandes Jesu Christi" ("the eternal kingdom of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ") in 2 Peter 1:11.

**On your body [the church]<sup>35</sup> eternally.**

Salomo Franck

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



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<sup>35</sup>“The body of Christ” is a biblical term for “the church” (e.g., in Ephesians 4:16 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-26). In the Lutheranism of Bach’s day, a Christian was said, e.g., to be “ein Glied des geistlichen Leibes Christi, nemlich seiner Kirche; ein Gläubiger” (“a member of the spiritual body of Christ, namely of his church; a [Christian] believer”). Sometimes the genitive formulation “Glied des Leibes Christi” (“member of the body of Christ”) is used, and sometimes the dative “Glied an dem Leibe Christi” (“limb on the body of Christ”).