

“Ich liebe den Höchsten von ganzem Gemüte” BWV 174

1. Sinfonia	1. Sinfonia
2. Ich liebe den Höchsten von ganzem Gemüte, Er hat mich auch am höchsten lieb. Gott allein Soll der Schatz der Seelen sein, Da hab ich die ewige Quelle der Güte.	2. I love [God] the Most High with all my [heart, soul, and] mind; ¹ He also loves me most highly. God alone Is to be my soul's ² treasure Whereby I have the eternal source of goodness.
3. O Liebe, welcher keine gleich! O unschätzbare Lösegeld! Der Vater hat des Kindes Leben Vor Sünder in den Tod gegeben, Und alle, die das Himmelreich Verscherzet und verloren, Zur Seligkeit erkoren. ³ <i>Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt!</i> Mein Herz, das merke dir	3. Oh [God's] love [for us], to which no [love is] equal! ⁴ Oh inestimable ransom! ⁵ [God] the father has given the life of his [holy] child [Jesus] ⁶ Unto death [as a guilt offering] for sinners, ⁷ And has chosen for [salvational] blessing All who [innately, by original sin,] have squandered ⁸ and lost The kingdom of heaven [but, like me, ⁹ do accept God's gift of faith ¹⁰].

¹This line is an adaptation of the various adaptations of Deuteronomy 6:5 that are found in Mark 12:30, Matthew 22:37, and Luke 10:27.

²Here the “n” in “Schatz der Seelen” is an old-fashioned singular genitive ending (thus, “the/my soul’s treasure”; not plural, “the souls’ treasure”).

³The poet’s printing of this libretto includes three more lines after line 7: “Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt, / Die Welt, die böse Welt, / Die ihn erzürnet und betrübt” (“In such manner has God loved the world, / The world, the evil world / That enraged and aggrieved him”).

⁴A grammatical but interpretively trivial note: this line appears to be a clipped version not of “O Liebe, welcher keine gleichkommt” (“Oh love, to which no [love] equals”) but “O Liebe, welcher keine gleich ist” (“Oh love, to which no [love] is equal”).

⁵The general biblical sentiments behind lines 1–2 are found in 1 John 4:10, “Darin steht die Liebe: nicht, dass wir Gott geliebt haben, sondern dass er uns geliebt hat und gesandt seinen Sohn zur Versöhnung für unsere Sünden” (“Herein is the love: not that we have loved God, but that he has loved us and sent his son [to die on the cross] as the propitiation/reconciliation [i.e., a kind of ‘Erlösung/Lösegeld’ (‘redemption/ransom’)] for [the ‘slavery’ of] our sins”).

⁶The sense of this line is derived from Acts 4:27, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Wahrlich ja, sie haben sich versammelt über dein heiliges Kind Jesum, welchen du gesalbet hast, Herodes und Pontius Pilatus, mit den Heiden und dem Volk Israel” (“Yes, in truth, over your holy child Jesus, whom you [God the father] have anointed [as messiah], they—Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the gentiles and the people of Israel—have gathered themselves together [to put Jesus to death on the cross]”). Luther Bibles after Bach’s day give not “über dein heiliges Kind Jesum” (“over your holy child Jesus”) but “gegen deinen heiligen Knecht Jesus” (“against your holy servant Jesus”).

⁷The sense of this line is derived from Isaiah 53:12, “er sein Leben zum Schuldopfer gegeben hat ... er sein Leben in den Tod gegeben hat ... und er vieler Sünde getragen hat” (“he [the LORD, God the father] has given his [the suffering servant’s—in Christian interpretation traditionally understood prophetically to be God the son’s, Jesus’s] life as a guilt offering ... he [the suffering servant] has given his [own] life unto death ... and he has borne the sin of many”).

⁸In this older-German usage, “verscherzen” does not mean “to make fun of”; it is a synonym for “verschwenden” (“to squander”).

⁹As expressed in movement 1.

¹⁰As expressed in movement 4.

Und stärke dich mit diesen Worten;
Vor diesem mächtigen Panier
Erzittern selbst die Höllenforten.

[The gospel proclaims,] “*In such manner has God loved the world*”!¹¹
My heart, bear that in mind
And strengthen yourself with these [gospel-proclaimed] words;¹²
Before this mighty banner [of protection and of love]¹³
Even the gates of hell tremble.

4. Greifet zu,
Fasst das Heil, ihr Glaubenshände!
Jesus gibt sein Himmelreich
Und verlangt nur das von euch:
Gläubt getreu bis an das Ende!

4. Grab hold of [God’s offer];
Seize salvation, you hands of faith.
Jesus gives his kingdom of heaven
And demands¹⁴ only this from you [in return]:
Believe devotedly, up to the end [of this life].¹⁵

**5. Herzlich lieb hab ich dich, o Herr.
Ich bitt, wollst sein von mir nicht fern
Mit deiner Hülff und Gnaden.
Die ganze Welt erfreut mich nicht,
Nach Himml und Erden frag ich nicht,
Wenn ich dich nur kann haben.
Und¹⁶ wenn mir gleich mein Herz zerbricht,
So bist du doch mein Zuversicht,**

**5. I sincerely love you, O Lord.
May [you], I implore, be not far from me¹⁸
With your salvation¹⁹ and grace.
The whole world pleases me not;
I would not ask [anything] of heaven and earth,
If only I can have you.²⁰
And even when my heart breaks [from remorse for sin],
Then you [Jesus] are yet my hope,**

¹¹This line draws on Luther’s rendering of John 3:16, “Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt, dass er seinen eingeborenen Sohn gab, auf dass alle, die an ihn glauben, nicht verloren werden, sondern das ewige Leben haben” (“In such manner has God loved the world that he gave his only-begotten son [Jesus], so that all who believe in him [Jesus] will not be lost but have eternal life”). The sense of Luther’s translation differs in several respects from the extremely well-known rendering of the King James Bible, “For God so [greatly] loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

¹²The words of scripture just quoted in line 8 of this movement (John 3:16) were from the gospel portion (John 3:16-21) chanted on the liturgical occasion that this cantata was designed for.

¹³The word “Panier” ordinarily denotes simply a military flag, but the poet is here apparently also drawing on Song of Songs 2:4, where the female lover proclaims of her beloved, “die Liebe ist sein Panier über mir” (“Love is his banner over me”), a passage the meaning of whose underlying Hebrew text is uncertain, but which was taken prophetically in the Lutheranism of Bach’s day and earlier to mean that Christ the bridegroom’s love, as expressed in his sacrificial death on the cross, is his banner of protection over his bride, the church.

¹⁴In orthodox Lutheranism, possessing the unmerited gift of faith in Christ, by consciously accepting God’s offer of grace, was required for salvation.

¹⁵In the Luther Bibles of Bach day, Revelation 2:10, reads “Sei getreu bis an den Tod, so will ich dir die Krone des Lebens geben” (“Be faithful up to the [point of] death, and I [Jesus] will give you the [victor’s] crown of [eternal] life”), and Mark 13:13 reads “Wer aber beharrt bis an das Ende, der wird selig” (“But whoever persists [in his faith] up to the end [of this life and its troubles], he will be [eternally] blessed”).

¹⁶Some modern editions give “Herr” (“Lord”) here, but Bach himself wrote “Und” (“And”).

¹⁸In the poet’s printed libretto, where only lines 1–2 of the stanza are indicated, this line reads, “Ich bitt, du wollst sein von mir nicht fern” (“May you, I implore, be not far from me”).

¹⁹In the language of the Luther Bible, “Hilfe” (or “Hülfe”) can mean “help” in general or “salvation” in particular.

²⁰An adaptation of Luther’s idiosyncratic rendering of Psalm 73:25, “Wenn ich nur dich habe, so frage ich nichts nach Himmel und Erden” (“If only I have you, then I ask nothing of heaven and earth”).

**Mein Heil und meines Herzens Trost,
Der mich durch sein Blut hat erlöst.
Herr Jesu Christ,
Mein Gott und Herr, mein Gott und Herr,
In Schanden lass mich nimmermehr!**¹⁷

Christian Friedrich Henrici (Picander)

**My salvation, and the consolation of my heart,²¹
Who has redeemed me through his blood.
Lord Jesus Christ,
My God and Lord, my God and Lord,
Into shame let me [fall] nevermore.**²²

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



Scan or go to <http://www.bachcantatatexts.org/BWV174> for an annotated translation

¹⁷The first stanza of this hymn.

²¹An adaptation of Psalm 73:26, “Wenn mir gleich Leib und Seele verschmachtet, so bist du doch, Gott, allezeit meines Herzens Trost und mein Teil” (“When my body and soul alike languishes, then are you, God, yet always [into eternity] the consolation of my heart and my [spiritual] portion”).

²²“Etwas zuschanden machen” or “etwas zu Schanden machen,” in modern German, can mean “to wreck something” or “to bring something to harm.” The language and sense of this line, however, is derived from Psalm 31:1, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “HERR, auf dich traue ich, lass mich nimmermehr zuschanden werden” (“LORD, in you I trust; let me never be put to shame” [i.e., the underlying Hebrew word here connotes “shame,” not “harm”]).