“Es wartet alles auf dich” BWV 187

Erster Teil

1. *Es wartet alles auf dich, dass du ihnen Speise gebest zu seiner Zeit. Wenn du ihnen gibest, so sammlen sie, wenn du deine Hand auftust, so werden sie mit Güte*[1] *gesättiget.*[2]

2. Was Kreaturen hält[4] das grosse Rund der Welt!
Schau doch die Berge an, da sie bei tausend gehen;
Was zeuget nicht die Flut? Es wimmeln Ström und Seen.
Der Vögel grosses Heer zieht durch die Luft zu Feld.
Wer nähret solche Zahl,
Und wer vermag ihr wohl die Notdurft abzugeben?
Kann irgendein Monarch nach solcher Ehre streben?
Zahlt aller Erden Gold ihr wohl ein einig Mahl?

Part 1

1. *All [creatures] wait for you [Lord], that you may give them food in its*[3] *[proper] time. When you give to them, then they gather [the gift]; when you open your hand, then they are sated with [your] goodness.*

2. What creatures the world’s great orb contains![5]
Just look at the mountains, where they go about by the thousand;[6]
What do the waters[7] not beget?[8] Streams and seas swarm [with creatures].[9]

[1]In most but not all Bibles of Bach’s day and earlier this verse is given with “mit Gut gesättig[e]t” (“sated with good” [i.e., sated with (God’s) bounty]); other early sources do give “mit Güte gesättig[e]t” (“sated with [God’s] goodness”).

[2]Psalm 104:27-28.

[3]In the underlying Hebrew text, the antecedent for the (masculine possessive) word for “its” is the Psalmist’s (masculine) word for “food.” In Luther’s rendering, the word for “food” (“Speise”) is feminine, however, and thus the antecedent for his (neuter possessive) word for “its” (“seiner”) is presumably the implied “das Geben der Speise” (“the giving of the food”). Late twentieth-century Luther Bibles grammatically and logically simplified this verse to read “Es warten alle auf dich, dass du ihnen Speise gebest zur rechten Zeit” (“All [creatures] wait for you, that you may give them food at the right time”).

[4]A 1728 book of librettos here gives “hägt,” an older spelling of “hegt” (“fosters,” “nourishes,” or “harbors”).

[5]“Hält” is apparently used here in its sense of “enthält” (“contains”).

[6]The language of this line comes from Luther’s idiosyncratic rendering of Psalm 50:10, “Denn alle Tiere im Walde sind mein und Viehe auf den Bergen, da sie bei tausend gehen” (“[Thus says the Lord:] For all animals in the forest are mine and cattle on the hills, where they go about by the thousand”). Nearly all Bible translators here speak not of thousands of animals but of thousands of hills; the Coverdale Bible of 1535, however, characteristically following Luther, gives the verse as “For all the beasts of the field are mine and thousands of cattle upon the hills”; the Lutheran-glossed “Calov Bible,” which Bach owned, comments on Psalm 50:10, “denn das Land Juda war so reich vom Vieh, dass auch so zu sagen einer könnte rühmen von tausenden und hundert tausenden; Ps. CXLIV.13” (“for the land of Judah was so bountiful with cattle that one could even boast, so to speak, of thousands and hundreds of thousands [of cattle]; [compare] Psalm 144:13”).

[7]“Die Flut” here does mean “the flood,” not in its specific senses of “the overflow of a large amount of water beyond its normal limits (especially over what is normally dry land)” or “the [biblical] Flood [of Noah],” however, but in its wider, poetical sense of “water as opposed to land, often contrasted with ‘field’ or ‘fire’.” At Genesis 1:20 in the creation narratives, God says, in Luther’s logically awkward rendering, “Es errege sich das Wasser mit webenden und lebendigen Tieren, und mit Gevögel, das auf Erden unter der Feste des Himmels fliege” (“Let the water stir itself up with moving and living animals, and with fowl that fly atop earth under the firmament of heaven”). In English, what Luther gives biblically as “the water” is usually rendered “the waters” (reflecting the underlying Hebrew word, which is plural).

[8]“Zeuget” here does not mean “witnesses” or “bears testimony of.”

[9]The sense of this line is derived from Psalm 104:25, “Das Meer, das so gross und weit ist, da wimmelts ohne Zahl, beide grosse und kleine Tiere” (“The ocean, which is so great and wide, [is] where it swarms with innumerable animals, both great and small”).

The great host of birds glides[10] through the open air.[11]
Who nourishes such [a] myriad,
And who is indeed able to mete out, to it, its needs?[12]
Can any monarch strive for such [an] honor [of providing sustenance]?
Does all the [mortal] earth's gold indeed buy it [the myriad] a single meal?[13]

3. Du Herr, du krönst allein das Jahr mit deinem Gut.
Es träufet[14] Fett und Segen
Auf deines Fusses Wegen,
Und deine Gnade ists, die allen Gutes tut.

3. You alone, Lord, crown the year with your good [bounty].
Fat [of sacrifices] and [your] blessing drips
Onto your foot's path.[15]
And it is your grace that does good things to all.[16]

Zweiter Teil

Part 2

4. *Darum sollt ihr nicht sorgen noch*[17] *sagen: Was werden wir essen, was werden wir trinken, womit werden wir uns kleiden? Nach solchen allen trachten die Heiden. Denn euer himmlischer Vater weiss, dass ihr dies alles bedürfet.*[18]

4. *Therefore you are neither to have cares nor to say, "What will we eat, what will we drink, with what will we clothe ourselves?" The gentiles seek after all such things. For your heavenly father knows that you need all these.*

5. Gott versorget alles Leben,
Was hienieden Odem hegt.
Sollt er mir allein nicht geben,

5. God takes care for all life

[10]"Ziehen" had a wide variety of meanings in older German. One of the leading eighteenth-century German dictionary's definitions is "sich langsam fortbewegen; die Wolken ziehen gegen Abend; die Vögel ziehen, wenn sie ankommen und fortstreichen" ("To move forward slowly; [for example:] 'The clouds drift toward evening'; 'The birds glide, when they arrive and [when they] move on").

[11]"Die Luft zu Feld" was an older German expression for "free or unenclosed space outdoors, the unconfined atmosphere."

[12]Lines 4–6 are a paraphrase of Matthew 6:26, "Sehet die Vögel unter dem Himmel an: sie säen nicht, sie ernten nicht, sie sammlen nicht in die Scheunen; und euer himmlischer Vater nähret sie doch" ("Look at the birds of the sky/air: they sow not, they reap not, they gather not [harvests] into barns: and yet your heavenly father nourishes them").

[13]The original sources clearly give "Mahl" as the last word of this line. In older German, "Mahl" and "Mal" are both homographs—each of these two could mean either "meal" or "time [in the sense of 'instance']." In modern German, however, "Mahl" means "meal" and "Mal" means "time/instance." Some modern editions and printed librettos here give "Mal," and most of these nonetheless render it as "meal," whereas some render it with the sense of "time/instance" (the latter yielding something along the lines of "Does all the earth's gold compensate it, even a single time?"). The renderings with "meal" make more sense in the context of this movement's (biblical) talk of God's feeding his creatures.

[14]An older-German form of "trieft" ("drips").

[15]This movement draws heavily upon Psalm 65:12, "Du krönest das Jahr mit deinem Gut, und deine Fusstapfen triefen von Fett" ("You [God] crown the [seasons of the] year with your good [bounty], and your footsteps drip with [the] fat [of sacrifices]"). Luther's commentary on Psalm 65 specifically links "fat" and "blessing."

[16]This line adapts Luther's rendering of Psalm 51:3, "Gott, sei mir gnädig nach deiner Güte" ("God, be merciful/gracious to me, according to your goodness").

[17]The biblical and liturgical sources give not "noch" (in this case, "nor") but "und" ("and"). The reading with "noch" appears in the printed sermons of Johannes Tauler, a copy of which Bach owned.

[18]Matthew 6:31-32.

Was er allen zugesagt?[19]
Weicht, ihr Sorgen, seine Treue
Ist auch meiner eingedenk
Und wird ob mir täglich neue
Durch manch Vaterliebs-Geschenk.

That enjoys[20] breath here [on earth] below.
Is he not to give to me alone
What he has promised to all?
Make way, you cares; his faithfulness
Is mindful also of me,
And, for[21] me, becomes new daily[22]
Through many a gift of [his] paternal love.

6. Halt ich nur fest an ihm mit kindlichem Vertrauen
Und nehm mit Dankbarkeit, was er mir zugedacht,
So werd ich mich nie ohne Hülfe schauen,
Und wie er auch vor mich die Rechnung hab gemacht.
Das Grämen nützet nicht, die Mühe ist verloren,
Die das verzagte Herz um seine Notdurft nimmt;
Der ewig reiche Gott hat sich die Sorge auserkoren,
So weiss ich, dass er mir auch meinen Teil bestimmt.

6. If I only hold fast to him with childlike trust
And accept with gratitude what he [has] intended for me,
Then I will never envisage myself bereft of help/salvation,
And [will accept] how he has settled[23] the [salvation] account also for me.
Worrying avails not; wasted is the effort
That the despondent heart makes for its needs.[24]
The eternally bounteous God has himself chosen [to take] care;
Thus I know that he has appointed also to me my portion.

7. **Gott hat die Erde zugericht,**
Lässts an Nahrung mangeln nicht;
Berg und Tal, die macht er nass,
Dass dem Vieh auch wächst sein Gras;
Aus der Erden Wein und Brot
Schaffet Gott und gibts uns satt,
Dass der Mensch sein Leben hat.

7. **God has established the [abiding] earth,**[26]
[And thus] does not allow there to be lack of nourishment;
Hill and valley, them he makes lush,
So that for the cattle, too, its grass grows;
From the earth God creates
Wine and bread, and gives it to us, to the full,[27]

[19]A 1728 book of librettos here gives not "zugesagt" ("promised"), but the better-rhyming "beigelegt" (here, "provided").

[20]"Hegen" is apparently being used here metaphorically in its archaic sense of "behagen" ("to enjoy"). In the libretto of Bach's Cantata 17 this same anonymous poet used the expression "was Odem hegt" ("that enjoys breath") in place of the standard biblical expression "was Odem hat" ("that has breath") to accommodate that poetry's rhyme scheme's use of the word "gelegt" ("placed"). The rhyme of "zugesagt" ("promised") with "hegt" in the present libretto is more approximate, and may not have been the librettist's original wording (see also fn. 19, above).

[21]"Ob" is used here in its archaic sense as a synonym for the (dative) preposition "gegenüber" in its sense of "as regards," or "for" in the sense of "with regard or respect to, as regards, concerning."

[22]These lines echo the sentiments of Lamentations 3:22-23, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "Die Güte des HERRN ists, dass wir nicht gar aus sind; seine Barmherzigkeit hat noch kein Ende, sondern sie ist alle Morgen neu, und deine Treue ist gross" ("It is [through] the goodness of the LORD that we are not completely done for; his mercifulness, if anything, has no end; but it is new every morning, and great is your [i.e., God's] faithfulness").

[23]Strictly speaking, "er auch vor mich die Rechnung hab[e] gemacht" is subjunctive and thus would be rendered literally either as "he might have settled the account also for me" (i.e., if there was uncertainty about the carrying out of the action) or as "he is said to have settled the account also for me" (i.e., if there was simply a desire to report what has allegedly happened). Both understandings are awkward in the present context, and one wonders why the text does not simply read "er auch vor mich die Rechnung hat gemacht" ("he has settled the [salvation] account also for me"). Bach's original materials do clearly read "hab," not "hat."

[24]"Notdurft" does not mean "duty."

[26]Psalm 119:90, "Du hast die Erde zugerichtet, und sie bleibt stehen" ("[God,] you have established the earth, and it remains standing").

[27]In older German, "satt" was sometimes employed as a synonym for the adverbs "völlig" and "vollständig" ("fully" and "to the full"), and it may have been chosen here simply to effect a rhyme with "hat" ("has").

So that the human being has his [abiding earthly] life.[28]

Wir danken sehr und bitten ihn,
Dass er uns geb des Geistes Sinn,
Dass wir solches recht verstehn,
Stets in sein Geboten gehn,
Seinen Namen machen gross
In Christo ohn Unterlass:
So singn wir recht das Gratias.[25]

We thank [God] highly and ask of him
That he may give us the mind of the [Holy] Spirit[29]
That we may understand such things rightly,
May always go about according to his commandments,
[And] may make his name great
In Christ without ceasing;
Thus we rightly sing "The [Giving of] Thanks."[30]

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)

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[25]Two stanzas of "Singen wir aus Herzensgrund."

[28]This stanza quotes and paraphrases extensively from Psalm 104:13-15, "Du feuchtest die Berge von obenher; du machst das Land voll Früchte, die du schaffest; du lässest Gras wachsen für das Vieh; … du Brot aus der Erde bringest; … dass der Wein erfreue des Menschen Herz … und das Brot des Menschen Herz stärke" ("[LORD,] you water the hills from above; the land you make filled with fruits that you create; you let grass grow for the cattle; … from the earth you bring forth bread; … so that the wine may make glad the human being's heart … and the bread may strengthen the human being's heart").

[29]"Des Geistes Sinn" does not mean "the will of the/his Spirit," or "our spirit sense," or "a spiritual mind," or "the capability of mind," or "the presence of mind." The sense of this hymn line is derived from Romans 8:27, "Der aber die Herzen forschet, der weiss, was des Geistes Sinn sei" ("But [God] who searches our hearts, he knows what the mind of the [Holy] Spirit is").

[30]"Das Gratias" here refers to the recitation prescribed within the section from Luther's then extremely well-known *Kleiner Katechismus* (*Small Catechism*) entitled "Wie ein Hausvater sein Gesinde soll lernen, das Benedicite und [das] Gratias sprechen" ("How a Paterfamilias is to Teach his Household to Recite 'The [Table] Blessing' and '[The Giving of] Thanks' [at Meals]"). The text of "The Giving of Thanks," an amalgamation of Psalm 136:1,25 and 147:9-11, reads: "Danket dem HERRN; denn er ist freundlich und seine Güte währet ewiglich; der allem Fleisch Speise gibt, der dem Vieh sein Futter gibt, den jungen Raben, die ihn anrufen; er hat nicht Lust an der Stärke des Rosses, noch Gefallen an jemands Beinen; der HERR hat Gefallen an denen, die ihn fürchten, und die auf seine Güte warten" ("Give thanks to the LORD; for he is friendly [i.e, in its religious sense of 'gracious/merciful'] and his goodness lasts eternally—[the LORD,] who gives food to all flesh, who gives to cattle its fodder, [as well as] to the young ravens who call to him; he has no delight in the strength of the [cavalry] horse, nor pleasure in [the strength/swiftness of] anyone's [warrior] legs; the LORD has pleasure in those who fear him, and who wait for his goodness"). The text of "The Table Blessing" is Psalm 144:15-16, a slight variant of the text in movement 1 of the present cantata (Psalm 104:27-28). Thus movements 2–6 of this work may be heard as a metaphorical "meal" of recitatives and arias that is preceded with a choral "Table Blessing" and followed by a choral "Giving of Thanks"; Part 2 of the cantata would originally have been performed during the distribution of the sacrament, in this case the church's ritual meal in the midst of the cantata's metaphorical meal.