

When Bach took over the St. Thomas Cantorate in the spring of 1723 as the leading musician of the leading Cantorate in Protestant Germany, he achieved at long last the opportunity to realize his artistic aspirations: "the ultimate goal of a regulated church music," which he had described in 1708 to the Mühlhausen Town Council and which he had tried to pursue, on a more restricted level, at the Weimar Court. Bach at once embarked on a program to provide a piece of concerted music - a Cantata - for every Sunday and feast day of the ecclesiastical year, except for the Lenten weeks preceding Christmas and Easter, when concerted music was suspended.

The Cantata supplied the principal music piece in the liturgy of the main service, and as such it highlighted a passage from the biblical lesson then interpreted it as well. Thus all of Bach's Leipzig Cantata texts follow a standard pattern firmly grounded in the two-fold structure of a Lutheran sermon: *explicatio* and *applicatio*, biblical text and theological instruction, followed by practical and moral advice. The libretto ordinarily opens with a biblical dictum, usually a passage from the prescribed Gospel lesson that serves as a point of departure (opening chorus). It is followed by scriptural, doctrinal, and contextual explanations (a recitative-aria pair), leading to considerations of the consequences to be drawn from the lesson and the admonition to conduct a true Christian life (another recitative-aria pair). The text concludes with a congregational prayer in the form of a hymn stanza (chorale).

Bach's own Bible was well used and frequently annotated in the margin. At the end of his Cantata scores he would write "Fine. S.D.G" (*Soli Deo Gloria*). Though formally employed by the City Council and responsible to his Choir and Congregation, the ultimate dedication of Bach's choral writing - indeed possibly all of his music - was to the *Glory of God Alone*. We have used this as our title in these compilations from the two hundred or so known Cantatas.

It is mainly in the opening movements that Bach sets the tone of the Cantatas. The perfect matching of musical mood to the message of the relevant text shows Bach to have a deep comprehension of the Biblical texts and indeed to be a powerful advocate of the weekly message. It is for this reason that the opening movements and chorale elaborations are among the highest pinnacles of Bach's musical output.

1: BWV 29: - Sinfonia from "Wir danken dir Gott, wir danken dir" - This is an organ piece with trumpet accompaniment. We like to visualize the majestic Bach himself at the organ; and we believe that the performance style in this excerpt reflects the *Gravitas* - that mixture of strength and solemnity - which would have prevailed during a Baroque Lutheran service.

2: BWV 78 - Chorus 1: *Jesu, der du meine Seele, hast durch deinen bitteren Tod aus des Teufels finsterner Höhle, und der schweren Seelennot kräftiglich herausgerissen, und mich solches lassen wissen durch dein angenehmes Wort: Sei doch jetzt, o Gott, mein Hort!*

Jesus, Thou hast, through Thy most bitter death, forcefully brought forth my spirit to freedom from the devil's dark cavern and that grief which plagues the soul, and thus Thou hast well reassured me through Thy most enduring word: be even now, O God, my refuge!

3: BWV 124 - Chorus 1: *Meinen Jesum lass ich nicht, weil er sich für mich gegeben, so erfordert meine Pflicht, Klettenweis an ihm zu kleben. Er ist meines Lebens Licht, Meinen Jesum lass ich nicht.*

This my Jesus I'll not leave, since he gave himself for me; thus by duty I am bound limpet-like to him forever. He is the light of my life, this my Jesus will I not abandon.

4: BWV 39 - Chorus 1: *Brich dem Hungrigen dein Brot und die, so im Elend sind, führe ins Haus. So du einen Nacket siehest, so kleide ihm und entzeuch dich nicht von deinem Fleische. Alsdenn wird dein Licht herfürbrechen wie die Morgenröte, und deine Besserung wird schnell wachsen, und deine Gerechtigkeit wird vor dir hergehen, und die Herrlichkeit des Herrn wird dich zu sich nehmen.*

Share with the hungry thy bread, and those in want take into thy house. If thou seest a man naked, then cover him and hide thyself not from thine own flesh. Then shall thy light break forth through all like the rosy morning, and thy growth shall wax quickly, and thine own righteousness shall go forth before thee, and the majesty of the Lord God shall receive thee.

5: BWV 68 - Chorus 1: *Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt, dass er uns seinen Sohn gegeben. Wer sich im Glauben ihm ergibt, der soll dort ewig bei ihm leben. Wer glaubt, dass Jesus ihm geboren, der bleibt ewig unverloren, und ist kein Leid, das den betrübt, den Gott und auch sein Jesus liebt.*

God so loved the world that He gave us his Son. Those who give themselves to Him in faith shall live with Him eternally. He who believes that Jesus was born for him, shall be forever unforsaken, and there will be no grief to disturb him, he who is beloved of God and of Jesus.

BWV 68 - Chorus 2: *Wer an ihn gläubet, der wird nicht gerichtet. Wer aber nicht gläubet, der ist schon gerichtet; denn er gläubet nicht an den Namen des eingebornen Sohnes Gottes.*

Who trusteth in Him will not be judged. But he who doth not trust is already judged; for he trusteth not in the name of the only begotten Son of God the Father.

6: BWV 104 - Chorus 1: *Du Hirte Israel, höre, der du Joseph hütetest wie der Schafe, erscheine, der du sitzt über Cherubim.* Thou

shepherd of Israel, hear me, thou who like the sheep dost shelter Joseph, shine forth thou who dost sit above the Cherubim.

7: BWV 6 - Chorus 1: *Bleib bei uns, denn es will Abend werden, und der Tag hat sich geneiget.* Bide with us, for it will soon be evening, and the day is now declining.

Chorale: *Beweis dein Macht, Herr Jesu Christ, der du Herr aller Herren bist: Beschirm dein arme Christenheit, dass sie dich lob in Ewigkeit.* R
eveal thy might, Lord Jesus Christ, who art the Lord of all Lords; protect thy poor Christian folk, they that praise Thee eternally.

8: BWV 148 - Chorus 1: *Bringet dem Herrn Ehre seines Namens, betet an den Herrn im heiligen Schmuck.* Bring to the Lord honor for His name's sake, worship ye the Lord with holy display.

9: BWV 64 - Chorus 1: *Sehet, welch eine Liebe hat uns der Vater erzeiget, dass wir Gottes Kinder heiss.* See, how great a love the Father hath shown us, that we should be called God's children.

Chorale: *Gute Nacht, o Wesen, das die Welt erlesen! Mir gefällt du nicht. Gute Nacht, ihr Sünden, bleibet weit dahinten, komm nicht mehr ans Licht! Gute Nacht, du Stolz und Pracht! Dir sei ganz, du Lasterleben, Gute Nacht gegeben!*

Good night, Oh way of life, which the world hath chosen! Thou pleaseth me not. Good night to you sins, get ye far behind me, come no more to the Light! Good night, thou pomp and pride! Once for all, thou life of trouble, to thee "good night" be given!

10: BWV 93 - Chorus 1: *Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten und hoffet auf ihn allezeit, den wird er wunderlich erhalten in allem Kreuz und Traurigkeit. Wer Gott, dem Allerhöchsten, traut, der hat auf keinen Sand gebaut.*

He who allows God to direct his life and trusts always in Him, will be most wondrously protected through every burden and sadness. He who trusts in God the Almighty builds not upon sand.

BWV 93 - Chorale: *Sing, bet und geh auf Gottes Wegen, verricht das Deine nur getreu und trau des Himmels reichem Segen, so wird er bei dir werden neu; denn welcher seine Zuversicht auf Gott setz, den verlässt er nicht.* Sing, pray, and walk in God's own way, perform thy work faithfully and trust in Heaven's rich blessing, then shall He stand by thee anew; for who doth place all his trust in God, him shall He not forsake.

11: BWV 111 - Chorus 1: *Was mein Gott will, das g'scheh allzeit, sein Will, der ist der beste; zu helfen den'n er ist bereit, die an ihn gläuben feste. Er hilft aus Not, der fromme Gott, und züchtigt mit Massen: wer Gott vertraut, fest auf ihn baut, den will er nicht verlassen.*

What my God wills, shall always come to pass, His will is best; He is ready to help all those who believe steadfastly in Him is steadfast. He helps those in need, this righteous God, and punisheth with measure: whomsoever trusts God, and upon Him builds, He will not forsake.

12: BWV 67 - Chorus 1: *Halt im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ, der auferstanden ist von den Toten.*

Hold in remembrance Jesus Christ, who is arisen from the dead.

13: BWV 127 - Chorus 1: *Herr Jesu Christ, wahr' Mensch und Gott, der du littst Marter, Angst und Spott, für mich am Kreuz auch endlich starbst und mir deins Vaters Huld erwarbst, ich bitt durchs bittere Leiden dein: Du wollst mir Sünder gnädig sein.*

Lord Jesus Christ, true man and God, Thou, who bore martyrdom, fear and mockery, on the cross at last did die for me and me did win Thy Father's grace, I beg that by Thy most bitter pain Thou wilt show mercy on my sins.

14: BWV 56 - From the Solo Cantata: "Ich will den Kreuzstab gerne tragen" – "I will gladly carry the Cross." **Chorale:** *Komm, o Tod, du Schlafes Bruder, komm und führe mich nur fort; Löse meines Schifflens Ruder, bringe mich an sichern Port! Es mag, wer da will, dich scheuen, du kannst mich vielmehr erfreuen; denn durch dich komm ich herein zu dem schönsten Jesulein.*

Come, O death, thou brother of sleep, come and lead me forth; loosen my boat's rudder, bring me secure to port. Others may desire to shun Thee, whereas thou canst all the more delight me; for through Thee I'll come within to the fairest Jesus-child.

*We have explored virtually all the Choruses and Chorales from the 200 Bach Sacred Cantatas in 10 Volumes of the *Soli Deo Gloria* Series: Vols. 1 & 2 (Karl Richter): BACH 733 - 734; and Vols. 3 - 10: BACH 748 - 755 (Greifswalde Bach Tage Choir & Berlin Bach Orchestra, Conductor: Hans Pflugbeil)*