

# THE THEOLOGY OF DEATH IN CANTATA BWV 106 BY J. S. BACH: A CRITICAL STUDY

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**ABSTRAK:** Secara esensi, teks dari Kantata BWV 106 menunjukkan dua bentuk penyusunan: simetri dan kronologi. Bentuk simetri ditunjukkan oleh kumpulan korespondensi yang serupa dalam susunan musik, yang memperlihatkan antitesis antara: “kematian di bawah hukum Taurat dengan kematian di bawah Injil”. Bentuk kronologi terlihat dalam empat nyanyian solo dan *central fugue/solo/chorale complex* di antara prolog dan doksologi. Pertama, tiga teks bergerak dari zaman Mazmur 90:12 sampai Yesaya 38:1 dan kitab Sirakh 14:17. Kitab Sirakh 14:17 memulai tiga rangkaian yang lain: teks Perjanjian Lama, teks Perjanjian Baru, dan teks koral dengan pola yang mirip dari sumber teks: Mazmur 31:5, Lukas 23:43, dan koral. Kronologi ini melewati tahapan dari sejarah Israel hingga kedatangan Kristus, kematian-Nya di atas salib, dan era Gereja. Urutan ini dapat ditafsirkan sebagai pergerakan batiniah dari ketakutan akan kematian dan penerimaan akan realita kematian yang tidak dapat dihindari hingga kepada iman di dalam Kristus dan di dalam janji Injil, dan akhirnya, tiba kepada kerelaan orang percaya untuk mati di dalam Kristus dan gereja-Nya.

**KATA KUNCI:** *Luther, kematian, hukum Taurat, Injil, iman, tidur.*

**ABSTRACT:** The text of Cantata BWV 106 shows two forms of organization: symmetry and chronology. The former is shown by similar sets of correspondences in the musical texture, which display the antithesis: death under the Law versus death under the Gospel. The latter is visible in the four solos and central fugue/solo/chorale complex between the prologue and doxology. The chronology passes through the stages of the history of Israel to the coming of Christ, his death on the cross, and the era of the Christian church. The sequence can be read as an internal progression from fear of death and acceptance of its inevitability to faith in Christ and in the promise of the Gospel, and finally, to the willingness of the believer to die in Christ and his church.

**KEYWORDS:** *Luther, death, law, gospel, faith, sleep.*

## INTRODUCTION

This introduction will describe and explain the concept of death in the Cantata BWV 106. It will discuss the theological meaning of the chosen texts assembled from a diverse selection of biblical passages, with additional one text of apocrypha and three chorales, presented chronologically as follow: [tripartite motet] “Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit – God’s time is the very best time”/ “In ihm leben, weben und sind wir [so lange er will] – In Him we live, move, and have our being [as long as He wills]” (Acts 17:28)/ “In ihm sterben wir zu rechter Zeit, wenn

er will – In Him we die at the right time, when He wills”; “Ach Herr, lehre uns bedenken, daß wir sterben müssen – Ah, Lord, teach us to remember that we must die” (Psalms 90:12); “Bestelle dein Haus; denn du wirst sterben und nicht lebendig bleiben – Put your house in order, for you shall die and not remain living” (Isaiah 38:1); [central fugue/solo/chorale complex] “Es ist der alte Bund: Mensch, du mußt sterben – It is the old covenant: man, you must die” (Sirach 14:17)/ “Ja, komm, Herr Jesu, komm – Yes, come, Lord Jesus, come” (Revelation 22:20)/ [chorale] “Ich hab’ mein’ Sach’ Gott heimgestellt – I have my affairs in God reposed” [Johann Leon, 1582]; “In deine Hände befehl ich meinen Geist; du hast mich erlöset, Herr, du getreuer Gott – Into Your hands I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, Lord, You faithful God” (Psalm 31:5); “Heute wirst du mit mir im Paradies sein – Today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43)/ [chorale] “Mit Fried’ und Freud’ ich fahr’ dahin – With peace and joy I go to that place” [Martin Luther, 1524] and [verse 7 of the chorale] “In dich hab’ ich gehoffet, Herr – In Thee have I hoped, Lord” [Adam Reusner, 1533] – “Glorie, Lob, Ehr’ und Herrlichkeit – Glory, praise, honor and majesty”.

**Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit/ In ihm leben, weben und sind wir [so lange er will] (Acts 17:28)/ In ihm sterben wir zu rechter Zeit, wenn er will**

The first chorus is combination of these three texts: “Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit/ In ihm leben, weben und sind wir [so lange er will]/ In ihm sterben wir zu rechter Zeit,

wenn er will" ["God's time is the very best time/ In Him we live, move, and have our being, as long as He wills/ In Him we die at the right time, when He wills"].

### **Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit**

The association with "Actus Tragicus" brings out all in the expression of Cantata BWV 106 that is human, subject to death, however, the idea of "Gottes Zeit" deals just the opposite sphere, conveying a unity of time and worlds. God's time provides the only means of overcoming the tragic human condition of the "actus". It thus emphasizes a primary level of antithesis in the work, that between the present life, whose temporality is ideally represented in allegory, and the life of eschatological fulfilment, of time and eternity. In this light the terms "Gottes Zeit" and "Actus Tragicus" can be taken as keys to the broadest and most conspicuous aspects of structure in Cantata BWV 106, the primary connotation of the former being God's control of history, that of the latter man's position in the whole design.<sup>1</sup>

### **In ihm leben, weben und sind wir [so lange er will] (Acts 17:28)**

This is the central phrase in the chorale prologue, "In ihm leben, weben und sind wir [so lange er will]", is taken from

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory: In the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (University of California Press, 1991), 95.

Paul's famous "Areopagus" speech before the Greeks at Athens (Acts 17:28). The speech, inspired by the dedication of the Greek temple to the "unknown God", declares the universal range of God's rule, which surrounds all nations and reaches from the creation to the *parousia*. It suggests the concept of salvation history.<sup>2</sup>

### **In ihm sterben wir zu rechter Zeit, wenn er will**

"In ihm sterben wir zu rechter Zeit, wenn er will", phrase from the third line of the prologue, was perhaps, as Dürr suggests, derived from the line "Meine Zeit und Stund ist, wann Gott will" from the chorale "Ich hab' mein' Sach' Gott heimgestellt".<sup>3</sup> The two phrases modified by the librettist in order to set up the antithesis of life and death, both under God's control. In the prologue, however, the threefold division foreshadows the human perspective, the sense of separate eras in the "Actus Tragicus". Luther explains God's time as a simultaneity, to be understood by the individual only through

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Dibelius, "Paulus auf dem Areopag", in *Aufsätze zur Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen, 1951), 29, quoted in Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory: In the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (University of California Press, 1991), 95.

<sup>3</sup> Dürr, *Die Kantaten*, 616, quoted in Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory: In the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (University of California Press, 1991), 95. Ich hab' mein Sach Gott heimgestellt – My time and hour will be when God wills was composed by Johann Leon, 1530-1597 (Francis, Browne. *Bach Cantatas Website: Ich hab' mein' Sach' Gott heimgestellt*, <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale009-Eng3.htm> (accessed March 11, 2015).

faith.<sup>4</sup>

**Ach Herr, lehre uns bedenken, daß wir sterben müssen  
(Psalm 90:12)**

Our thoughts turned in a dignified way to the common lot of mankind, as the tenor sing in the contemplative words of Psalm 90:12, "Ah, Lord, teach us to remember that we must die, so that we become wise". Chafe asserts that the tropological understanding of history in the "Actus Tragicus" is shown in the relationship between the tenor solo "Ach Herr, lehre uns bedenken, daß wir sterben müssen" and Luther's chorale "Mit Fried' und Freud' ich fahr dahin, In Gottes Willen". In his commentary on Psalm 90, Luther's theology of death is given poetic form in "Mit Fried' und Freud'". The line from Psalm 90 in the tenor solo anticipates in its closing words, "auf daß wir klug werden", the understanding of death presented in "Mit Fried' und Freud'". Death as the proper work of Moses and the Law is counteracted by the Gospel of Christ as the proper work of redemption in "Mit Fried' und Freud'". Several main concepts that fundamental to the plan of the "Actus Tragicus" embodied in this Psalm, Luther saw "all the parts of Moses' proclamation combine – the sermon of the Creator, which makes the beginning of the Psalm a 'copy of Genesis'; temporary life and hope of eternal life; Law (verses 1-12) and

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Fortress Press Philadelphia, 1966), 216-217, quoted in Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory: In the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (University of California Press, 1991), 95.

the promise of Christ (verses 13-17).<sup>5</sup> Luther called this Psalm “Moses at his most Mosaic” [Moses Mosissimus]. The turning point from the severity of death falls between verses 12 and 13, drew from his famous analogy of Law and Gospel as antiphonal voices: “The Law says in the midst of life we are death and the Gospel answers in the midst of death we are in life”.<sup>6</sup> Therefore Psalm 90 makes an ideal text to represent the period of the Law, and for the “Actus Tragicus” Bach selected the pivotal verse 12, “Ach Herr, lehre uns bedenken, daß wir sterben müssen, auf daß wir klug werden”.<sup>7</sup>

Luther underline his commentary on Psalm 90 that Moses’ address to God as a “Dwelling Place” or refuge: “If God is our Dwelling Place, and God is life, and we are residents in that Dwelling Place, it necessarily follows that we are in life and will live eternally”. He added the historical dimension, which we

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<sup>5</sup> Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, 164, quoted in Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory: In the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (University of California Press, 1991), 96.

<sup>6</sup> Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, 145-146, quoted in Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory: In the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (University of California Press, 1991), 96. Luther learned to draw life from the struggle against the devil. For the just shall *live* by faith, and “life” does not begin in Heaven. According to the medieval *memento mori*, in the midst of life we are surrounded by death. Luther’s faith enabled him to vigorously turn this on its head: “In the midst of death we are surrounded by life”. Carter Lindberg, 1999. “Martin Luther: the Christian between God and death.” *Lutheran Quarterly* 13, no. 3: 359-362. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 13, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory: In the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (University of California Press, 1991), 96.

have come to recognize as vital to the “Actus Tragicus”:

This means that from the beginning of the world to the end of the world God has never deserted His own. Adam, Eve, patriarchs, prophets, pious kings are asleep in this Dwelling Place. If, as I believe, they have not as yet risen with Christ, their bodies are indeed at rest in the grave, but their life is hidden with Christ in God and will be revealed in glory on the Last Day.<sup>8</sup>

At the end of the chronological sequence in the “Actus Tragicus”, Luther’s concept of the “sleep of death” voiced in the final line of “Mit Fried’ und Freud”, “der Tod ist mein Schlaf worden” brings out the ultimate meaning of God’s time, that of an “eternal moment”, a unity reaching from the Creation to the end of history and the beginning of eternity for man.<sup>9</sup>

Luther declares that Paul says of us, that “we do not die, but only fall asleep”, that he calls our death “not a death, but a sleep” and of Christ, that His death has such exceeding power that we should consider our death a sleep.<sup>10</sup> Luther expressed in his commentary on Psalm 90, that when the dead are awakened

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<sup>8</sup> Martin Luther, *Lecture on Psalm 90*, (1534-1535), vol. II of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis, 1976), 84-85, quoted in Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory: In the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (University of California Press, 1991), 97.

<sup>9</sup> Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory: In the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (University of California Press, 1991), 96.

<sup>10</sup> Neil R. Leroux, *Martin Luther as Comforter: Writings on Death* (Koninklijke Brill NV, 2007), 144-145.



on the Last Day, they will like a man who wakes up in the morning, know neither where they were nor how long they have rested. He believes that:

For just as a man who falls asleep and sleeps soundly until morning does not know what has happened to him when he wakes up, so we shall suddenly rise on the Last Day; and we shall know neither what death has been like or how we have come through it.<sup>11</sup>

Luther imagined the state of the dead as a sleep, in which a person remains so deeply asleep that this state is dreamless, unconscious, without any feeling, and even "removed from space and time"<sup>12</sup> Luther points out that, according to Paul, Christ is "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20-21), which for Christians means that "this remnant of death is to be regarded as no more than a deep sleep, and that the future resurrection of our body will not differ from suddenly awaking from such a sleep".<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> WA 17 II, 235, quoted in Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Fortress Press Philadelphia, 1966), 414.

<sup>12</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Is There Life after Death?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998), 47, quoted in Anthony C. Thiselton, *Life After Death: A New Approach to the Last Things* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 69.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol.28, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7 and 15 and 1 Timothy*, ed. Hilton Oswald (St. Louis: Concordia, 1973), 110, cf. Weimar Edition, vol.36, 547, quoted in Anthony C. Thiselton, *Life After Death: A New Approach to the Last Things* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 69.

Luther likes to picture the interval between our death and the last judgement as a kind of sleep. Those who died in Christ will sleep in peace and comfort, and this signifies that they must have some kind of self-consciousness. They will lose all sense for a time, and when the Last Day awakens them, they may believe that they have slept only for one hour. But this sleep may be interrupted by dreams or visions sent from God, as the story of the rich man and Lazarus indicates.<sup>14</sup>

Luther, in the lectures on Genesis (1535-1545) also compared our sleep at night with the sleep of the soul at death. On earth our body sleeps and our soul is awake and thus has visions or hears conversation between God and the angels. After death the soul also goes to sleep, but then God wakens and preserves it. He added that we do not know how this can happen.<sup>15</sup> However, Luther says nothing about souls without their bodies enjoying true life and blessedness before the resurrection. He argues: "It would take a foolish soul to desire its body when it was already in heaven"<sup>16</sup> Therefore Luther says that they sleep in 'the peace of Christ'. The Christian is already well taken care of in the sleep of death, since he sleeps 'sweetly' with Christ and in His bosom. The blessedness of life with

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<sup>14</sup> H. H. Kramm, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (James Clarke & Co., 1947), 104.

<sup>15</sup> LW, vol.4, 313; WA 43, 360, 24-33, with reference to the death of Abraham (Gen.25:7-10), quoted in Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Fortress Press, 1999), 326.

<sup>16</sup> WA, TR 5, 5534, quoted in Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Fortress Press Philadelphia, 1966), 417.

Christ is, however, something quite different than a sweet sleep; it is bound to that condition of being awake which comes only with the resurrection on the Last Day. In great many cases Luther uses the description of death as sleep in combination with other words which are clearly metaphorical. Perhaps the most famous illustration of this is his statement: "We are to sleep until he comes and knocks on the grave and says, 'Dr. Martin, get up'. Then I will arise in a moment and will be eternally happy with him".<sup>17</sup>

Luther, at the same time can, as the Apostle Paul does, stress the fact that Christ and eternal life await us immediately beyond death. Speaking of Urbanus Rhegius [the reformer of Lüneburg] in the preface to his *Prophetiae veteris testamenti de Christo* (1542). Luther says,

So we know that our Urbanus, who always lived in faithful appeal to God and faith in Christ, who faithfully served the church, and adorned the gospel with the chastity and piety of his manner of life, is saved, has eternal life, and eternal joy in fellowship with Christ and the church in heaven. There now he is clearly learning, judging, and hearing what he set forth here in the church according to the Word of God.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> WA 37, 151, quoted in Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Fortress Press Philadelphia, 1966), 415.

<sup>18</sup> WA 53, 400, 14-19: "Quare et Urbanum nostrum, qui in vera invocatione Dei et fide Christi assidue vixit et fideliter servivit Ecclesiae et Euangelium castitate et pietate morum ornavit, sciamus beatum esse et

This significant statement about fellowship with Christ immediately after death is in considerable tension with the assertion of soul sleep. It is fundamentally irreconcilable with it. Luther may have been thinking especially of Paul's statement in Philippians 1:23: "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better". The Greek *analyō* means "to depart" or "to be loosed", and is a euphemism for death. Similarly, "We would rather be away from the body, and at home with the Lord" (2 Cor.5:6). On the other hand, the general resurrection appears to denote an event which occurs for the whole people of God "at one moment, after" some have died. Paul writes, "The trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall all be changed" (1 Cor.15:52).<sup>19</sup>

Luther holding these two views beside each other, for he knows that our earthly concepts and measurements of time are no longer valid beyond death. He insists that, "Here you must put time out of your mind and know that in that world there is neither time nor a measurement of time, but everything is one

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habere vitam et laeticiam aeternam in societate Christi et Ecclesiae coelistis, in qua nun ea coram discit, cernit et audit, de quibus hic in Ecclesiae iuxta verbum Dei disseruit". The quotation is preceded by reference to Rev.14:13: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth", quoted in Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Fortress Press, 1999), 327.

<sup>19</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament* (London: Epworth, 1958), 37, quoted in Anthony C. Thiselton, *Life After Death: A New Approach to the Last Things* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 68.

eternal moment".<sup>20</sup> Luther continue saying that,

Since there is no measuring of time in God's sight, a thousand years before him must be as though it were only a day; for this reason the first man Adam is just as close to him as the last man who will be born before the Last Day, for God does not view time in its horizontal but rather in its vertical dimension.<sup>21</sup>

Luther also noted that at death each individual experiences the Last Day, "Adam is as present to God as the last man . . . When Adam and the others rise, they will think they have just died in the very same hour . . . when we have died, each will have his Last Day".<sup>22</sup> Luther pointed out what will

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<sup>20</sup> WA 10 III, 194, quoted in Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Fortress Press Philadelphia, 1966), 416.

<sup>21</sup> WA 14, 70, quoted in Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Fortress Press Philadelphia, 1966), 416.

<sup>22</sup> WA 14, 70, 8-71, 5 (*Die ander Epistel S. Petri und S. Judas ausgelegt*, 1523/24): "Coram deo Adam tam praesens ut ultimus est . . . Adam et ceteri cum resurgent, putabunt se iam primum et in eadem hora mortuos esse . . . quando mortui sumus, quisque suum habebit extremum diem", cf. LW, vol.30, 196. Similarly in WA 12, 596, 26-30 (sermon, 1523): "Und wenn man auffersteen wirt, so wurde es Adam und den alten veteren werden, gleich als weren sie vor einer halben stundt noch im leben gewest. Dört ist kain zeyt, derhalben kan auch kain besunder ort sein und seind weder tag noch nacht". ["When we will rise, then for Adam and the old fathers it will be just as if they had still been alive a half hour earlier. There is no time there, so there can also be no special place, and there are neither day nor night"]. WA 36, 349, 8-12 (sermon, 1532). WA 40 III, 525, 5-6 (*Vorlesung über Psalm 90*, 1534/1535): "quando Adam excitabitur, erit ut 1 hora" ["when Adam will be raised, it will be like one hour"], cf. LW, vol.13, 101, quoted in Bernhard

happen to believers:

Just as Christ also, though he lay in the grave, yet in a moment he was both dead and alive and rose again like a lightning flash from heaven. So he will raise us too in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, out of the grave, the dust, the water, and we shall stand in full view, utterly pure and clean as the bright sun.<sup>23</sup>

Thus the “intermediate state” is compressed together into a very short period of time. For those who have died, the Last Day comes very soon after their death, even “immediately” when they die. “Each of us has his own Last Day when he dies”. Therefore we arrive at the end of the world and the Last Day at the moment of our death.<sup>24</sup> Just as soon as your eyes are closed, you will be awakened. A thousand years will seem as though you have slept a half an hour. As we do not know how long we are sleeping if we do not hear the clock striking during the night, so in death a thousand years will pass away still more rapidly. Before we shall be able to look around, we shall be

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Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Fortress Press, 1999), 328-329.

<sup>23</sup> WA 36: 264.17-21, quoted in Neil R. Leroux, *Martin Luther as Comforter: Writings on Death* (Koninklijke Brill NV, 2007), 168.

<sup>24</sup> WA 12, 496, quoted in Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Fortress Press Philadelphia, 1966), 416.

beautiful angels".<sup>25</sup> This entire time which exists since the beginning of man's creation will seem to Adam, when he arises from the dead, as though he had slept only one hour".<sup>26</sup> Note that Luther thinks of time as being set aside not only subjectively for those who sleep but also objectively in God's eternity. Because our periods of time are no longer valid in God's eternity, the Last Day surrounds our life as an ocean surrounds an island. Wherever we reach the boundaries of this life, whether in dying yesterday or today or at some other time or whether at the end of the world, everywhere the Last Day dawns in the great contemporaneity of eternity. This understanding of the Last Day as something which is always near and even present when we die is the unity in which those two lines of expectation, which we found previously in Paul, flow together without excluding each other.<sup>27</sup>

### **Bestelle dein Haus; denn du wirst sterben und nicht lebendig bleiben (Isaiah 38:1)**

When the bass voice announces, "Bestelle dein Haus, denn du wirst sterben und nicht lebendig bleiben" ["Put your house in order, for you shall die and not remain living"], the choir answers with a paraphrase of "Herr, lehre uns bedenken, daß

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<sup>25</sup> WA 36, 349, quoted in Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Fortress Press Philadelphia, 1966), 416.

<sup>26</sup> WA 40III, 525; LW 13, 101, quoted in Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Fortress Press Philadelphia, 1966), 416.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Fortress Press Philadelphia, 1966), 416.

wir sterben müssen".<sup>28</sup>

In the "Actus Tragicus" the bass response to the tenor solo "Herr, lehre uns bedenken" unmistakably belongs to an Old Testament voice of authority. In the biblical context, King Hezekiah's time has come, and Isaiah delivers God's message in these words. According to Luther, the story illustrates the opposition between faith and works and shows how true faith achieves more through prayer than it expects [God granted Hezekiah another fifteen years of life]. In his prayer Hezekiah boasted of his works and righteousness. Luther explained that God heard his prayer but "not the works of the prayer"; Hezekiah's prayer was answered because his boasting was done in the knowledge that his victory was achieved through the Word alone.<sup>29</sup>

### **Es ist der alte Bund: Mensch, du mußt sterben (Sirach 14:17)**

The choral fugue "Es ist der alte Bund: Mensch, du mußt sterben" ["It is the old covenant: man, you must die"], for alto, tenor and bass iterates the theme of the inevitability of death for the third successive time in the cantata, now with an apocryphal wisdom text. This movement caps the Old Testament sequence of Law, prophets, and wisdom books,

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<sup>28</sup> Friedhelm Krummacher, "Die Tradition in Bachs vokalen Choralbearbeitungen", in *Bach-Interpretationen*, ed. Martin Geck (Göttingen, 1969), 54, quoted in Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory: In the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (University of California Press, 1991), 98.

<sup>29</sup> Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory: In the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (University of California Press, 1991), 97-98.



summing up the meaning of death for the Old Testament, the wisdom that is sought in “Herr, lehre uns bedenken”. Ecclesiasticus places an extraordinarily strong emphasis on tradition and history, as its title [church’s book] indicates.<sup>30</sup> Ecclesiasticus devotes chapters to the wonders of Creation and the whole of Israel’s history, and these are harmonized with the themes of death, time, and personal salvation through faith and prayer. Its maxim, “Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”, was used by Luther in his explanation of the phrase “auf daß wir klug werden” in Psalm 90.<sup>31</sup>

### **Ja, komm, Herr Jesu, komm (Revelation 22:20)**

At the very end of the movement all three elements converge momentarily, and then the soprano’s “Ja, komm, Herr Jesu, komm” [“Yes, come, Lord Jesus, come”] emerges alone to end the movement. This detail arises from the primary textual source of the soprano solo, Revelation 22:20, the final words in the New Testament. The chronological sequence finds its midpoint in the soprano solo, with its call to Jesus, which looks forward to the physical incarnation of Christ. Yet, in its reference to the funeral chorale it also represents the contemporary individual seeking union with Christ, while the

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<sup>30</sup> *The Apocrypha*, in *The New English Bible*, ed. Samuel Sandmel (New York, 1972), 115, quoted in Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory: In the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (University of California Press, 1991), 98.

<sup>31</sup> Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory: In the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (University of California Press, 1991), 98-99.

connection to Revelation anticipates the second coming. The soprano solo, then, contains a literal-historical, a tropological, and an eschatological level of meaning, while the threefold sequence as a whole reminds us of what has been called the “circle of Luther’s theology: Law, Gospel, faith”.<sup>32</sup>

### **“Ich hab’ mein’ Sach’ Gott heimgestellt” [Johann Leon, 1582]**

Against it the fluid solo soprano line adds an expressive personal voice, and the third element, the chorale “Ich hab’ mein’ Sach’ Gott heimgestellt” [“I have my affairs in God reposed”], sounded by the instruments alone, adds a quiet background. In its emphasis on faith this chorale represents the Gospel and the Christian church as a collective body, just as the fugue represents the old covenant and what Luther might have called the church of Israel. The vocal and instrumental ‘choirs’ keep basically separate throughout the movement, suggesting Luther’s famous antithesis of life and death, while the soprano joins each at times, serving to connect the two.<sup>33</sup>

The complex and original three-layered conception in this central movement, the Old Testament apocrypha words (Sirach 14:17) are set as a fugue for alto, tenor, and bass; the New Testament words (Revelation 22:20) as an arioso for soprano. At

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<sup>32</sup> Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, 120, quoted in Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory: In the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (University of California Press, 1991), 99.

<sup>33</sup> Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory: In the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (University of California Press, 1991), 98-99.

the same time, the Christian standpoint on death is reinforced by an instrumental rendition of the chorale "Ich hab' mein' Sach' Gott heimgestellt". If, as seems likely, the text that Bach had in mind can be identified as verse 17 of the chorale,<sup>34</sup> then the underlying train of thought would run: the old covenant, in which death is the wages of sin, is now replaced by the new covenant.<sup>35</sup>

Luther's commentary on Psalm 90 provides us with a clue to Bach's intent the church has always existed; there has been a people of God from the time of the first person Adam to the very latest infant born. But the church has often been "so hidden . . . that it was nowhere except in the eyes of God . . . The true church is the one which prays . . . It is made up of those who move forward in the process of sanctification, who day by day 'put off the old and put on the new man'".<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> As proposed by Martin Petzoldt, "Hat Gott Zeit, hat der Mensch Ewigkeit? Zur Kantate BWV 106 von J. S. Bach", *Musik und Kirche*, 66 (1996), 212-220 (esp. 217-218). The verse runs thus:

|                                      |                                  |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| O Jesu Christe, Gottes Sohn,         | O Jesus Christ, God's Son,       |
| Der du für uns hast gnug getan,      | You who have done enough for us, |
| Ach schleuß mich in die Wunden dein, | Ah, enclose me in your wounds;   |
| Du bist allein                       | You alone are                    |
| Der einge Trost und Helfer mein.     | My only comfort and helper.      |

Quoted in Richard D. P. Jones, *The Creative Development of Johann Sebastian Bach: Volume I: 1695-1717* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 106.

<sup>35</sup> Richard D. P. Jones, *The Creative Development of Johann Sebastian Bach: Volume I: 1695-1717* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 106.

<sup>36</sup> Luther, *Lecture on Psalm 90*, 88-89, cf. Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 154-158; Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 191, quoted in Eric

Possibly the absence of text and the backgrounding of “Ich hab’ mein’ Sach’ Gott heimgestellt” were intended to indicate the hidden character of the church of faith. The solo soprano represents the individual who has moved forward in the process of sanctification.<sup>37</sup>

We have seen, the sequence Old Testament/New Testament/chorale stands for the three periods of salvation history, and the continuity between eras, characteristic of the concept of salvation history which is evident in the various forms of overlap between successive movements and between textual references within single movements.<sup>38</sup>

**In deine Hände befehl ich meinen Geist; du hast mich erlöset, Herr, du getreuer Gott (Psalm 31:5)**

The alto sings a paraphrase of the words spoken by Him on the cross to an indescribably quiet and deeply touching air: “In deine Hände befehl ich meinen Geist; du hast mich erlöset, Herr, du getreuer Gott”<sup>39</sup> [“Into Your hands I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, Lord, You faithful God”]. Chafe noted that this text contains a marked triple layer of chronology in that the first part of its text, whose primary utterance is the

Chafe, *Tonal Allegory: In the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (University of California Press, 1991), 99.

<sup>37</sup> Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory: In the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (University of California Press, 1991), 99.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>39</sup> Phillip Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach: Vol.1* (Dover Publications, Inc., 1979), 462.

contemporary individual's expression of faith, is simultaneously an Old Testament text (Psalm 31) spoken by Jesus from the cross in the New Testament (Luke 23). This movement marks the shift of eras, while at the tropological level the third-person "In ihm" of the prologue shifts to the second-person "In deine". This text emerges as a pivotal movement in several ways: the overlap of eras in its text marks both a chronological turning point and a point of integration of the fugue complex, and in its expression of faith it exactly articulates the meaning of the untexted chorale verse "Ich hab' mein' Sach' Gott heimgestellt", so the solo must also be taken as a turning point toward faith, completing the desire for integration with Christ that is voiced in the soprano solo.<sup>40</sup>

### **Heute wirst du mit mir im Paradies sein (Luke 23:43)**

Then the soul praying thus fervently hears the words of the Redeemer addressed to it, as the bass comes in as if in reply, "Heute wirst du mit mir im Paradies sein" ["Today you shall be with Me in Paradise"]. Luther says in his preaching that this verse is a beautiful heart-stirring story, the likes of which you can find nowhere else. This thief on the right, who is justly condemned to death, temporal and eternal, just like the thief on the left, and possesses no good works, but on account of his sins has reason to be fearful of God, nevertheless courageously and confidently trusts that Christ will receive him into His

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<sup>40</sup> Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory: In the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (University of California Press, 1991), 100.

kingdom. In short, everyone is offended at him, in fact counts him as done for, including the disciples, who, though they stood around the cross for a while, no longer had any hope. It is only the thief on the right who takes no offense because of him, to the point that he even rebukes the thief on the left. Out of this person Christ makes a saint for eternity [for he does not remain a murderer but is converted], and out of the gallows and death, which the thief, as he himself confesses, has deserved, Christ makes a divine altar of worship, so that he no longer suffers as a murderer but as a Christian and a true saint. For he dies confessing and believing in Christ, repents of his sins with all his heart, and intends, should God permit him to live longer on earth, to sin no more. By such faith he receives the happy verdict that he not only is rid of his sins, but is saved and possesses the promise that he will be an heir of Paradise.<sup>41</sup>

### **Mit Fried' und Freud' ich fahr' dahin [Martin Luther, 1524]**

In the midst of this text of promise: "Heute wirst du mit mir im Paradies sein", Luther's chorale, "Mit Fried' und Freud' ich fahr dahin, In Gottes Willen; Getrost ist mir mein Herz und Sinn, Sanft und stille. Wie Gott mir verheißten hat: Der Tod ist mein Schlaf worden" ["With peace and joy I go to that place, According to the Will of God; My heart and mind are established, Meek and quiet. As God has promised me: Death has become my sleep"] enters as a cantus firmus. After

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<sup>41</sup> Martin Luther, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther: vol. 5*. Edited by Eugene F. A. Klug (Baker Books, 2000), 431-434.

combining with the first three lines of the chorale, the bass solo ends and the final three lines of Luther's chorale have only instrumental accompaniment. These details display a striking sense of intent. Beneath the chorale phrase "getrost ist mir mein Herz und Sinn", the bass solo cadences [im Paradies sein], then moves up an octave to cadence a second and last time, overlapping with the continuance of Luther's chorale, while the basso continuo makes what sounds like a melodic reference to the first line of the funeral chorale "Herzlich tut mich verlangen". At this point the chorale text, "sanft und stille", changes to the quiet acceptance of death that marks the end of the sequence on all three levels – chronologically, the era of the church; tropologically, the attainment of understanding of death; and eschatologically, Luther's sleep of death.<sup>42</sup>

In his 1519 baptismal sermon, Luther had this to say:

This significance of baptism – the dying or drowning of sin – is not fulfilled completely in this life. Indeed this does not happen until man passes through bodily death and completely decays to dust. As we can plainly see, the sacrament or sign of baptism is quickly over. But the spiritual baptism, the drowning of sin, which it signifies, lasts as long as we live and is completed only in death. Then it is that a person is completely sunk in baptism,

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<sup>42</sup> Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory: In the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (University of California Press, 1991), 100-101. Luther's theology of death is expressed particularly clearly in his powerful interpretation of Psalm 90. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Fortress Press Philadelphia, 1966), 405. See chapter four for further discussions.

and that which baptism signifies comes to pass. Therefore this whole life is nothing else than a spiritual baptism which does not cease till death.<sup>43</sup>

In this sense the Christian may accept death in the hope of being freed from sin.<sup>44</sup> And also the Christian may actually long for death and with it eternal life.<sup>45</sup> Thus Luther could take up the old motif of the *felix culpa*, the idea of guilt as “fortunate” to the extent it is forgiven through Christ’s redemptive work: “Therefore, we have no greater horror than of sin and death. Yet God can comfort us in it that we may boast, as St. Paul [Romans 5:20-21] says, that sin has even served for this, that we should be justified, and that we also gladly would be dead and long to die”.<sup>46</sup> So it can happen, as Luther interpreted the song of Simeon (Luke 2:29: “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart

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<sup>43</sup> LW, vol. 35, 30. WA 2, 728, 10-17, quoted in Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Fortress Press, 1999), 331.

<sup>44</sup> WA 10 III, 76, 8-10 (sermon, 1522): “that we are free of sin. But this is the best part of dying, that the will surrenders to it. For the body is soon dead when the spirit has surrendered to it”), quoted in Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Fortress Press, 1999), 331.

<sup>45</sup> WA 6, 14, 12-14 (“Help us out of this sinful, perilous life. Help us to desire that life and to be hostile to this one. Help us not to fear death but to desire it”), quoted in Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Fortress Press, 1999), 331.

<sup>46</sup> WA 12, 410, 31-34 (sermon, 1523), quoted in Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Fortress Press, 1999), 331.



in peace, according to thy word") that "death has become my sleep".<sup>47</sup>

In a profusion of various figures Luther expressed the idea that when accepted in faith, death alters its character. In the 1519 Sermon on Preparing to Die, he stated:

Since everyone must depart, we must turn our eyes to God, to whom the path of death leads and direct us. Here we find the beginning of the narrow gate and of the straight path to life (Matt.7:14). All must joyfully venture forth on this path, for though the gate is quite narrow, the path is not long. Just as an infant is born with peril and pain from the small abode of its mother's womb into this immense heaven and earth, that is, into this world, so man departs this life through the narrow gate of death.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Hymn no. 349 in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*: "I leave, as you have promised, Lord, in peace and gladness". WA 35, 439, 2: "Myt frid und freud ich far do hyn": AWA 4, (1985), 78, 229-231, quoted in Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Fortress Press, 1999), 331.

<sup>48</sup> And although the heavens and the earth in which we dwell at present seem large and wide to us, they are nevertheless much narrower and smaller than the mother's womb in comparison with the future heaven. Therefore, the death of the dear saints is called a new birth, and their feast day is known in Latin as *natale*, that is, the day of their birth. However, the narrow passage of death makes us think of this life as expansive and the life beyond as confined. Therefore, we must believe this and learn a lesson from the physical birth of a child, as Christ declares, "When a woman is in travail she has sorrow; but when she has recovered, she no longer remembers the anguish, since a child is born by her into the world" (John 16:21). So it is that

So it is a path comparable to the narrow way to this life at birth. In his lecture on Psalm 90 he summarized his view of dying accepted in faith to the effect that the Law says: “In the midst of life we are ringed ‘round by death’, but the Gospel reverses this, saying: in midst of death we are ringed ‘round by life’, because we have the forgiveness of sins”.<sup>49</sup>

*In dich hab’ ich gehoffet, Herr [Adam Reusner, 1533] – “Glorie, Lob, Ehr’ und Herrlichkeit”*

The last chorus consists of the so called “Fifth Gloria” to the melody by Calvisius “In dich hab’ ich gehoffet, Herr” [“In Thee have I hoped, Lord”].<sup>50</sup>

All glory, praise and majesty  
To Father, Son, and Spirit be,  
The holy, blessed Trinity;

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in dying we must bear this anguish and know that a large mansion and joy will follow (John 14:2). Martin Luther, *A Sermon on Preparing to Die*, 1519, quoted in Timothy F. Lull, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings* (Fortress Press Minneapolis, 2005), 419.

<sup>49</sup> WA 40 III, 496, 4-5: “Das ist vox legis: Mitten: Vox Euangelii: Media etc., quia remissionem peccatorum habemus”. See the materially correct revision by Dietrich, *ibid.*, 496, 16-17, cf. LW, vol. 13, 83, quoted in Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Fortress Press, 1999), 332.

<sup>50</sup> The translation: In You I have placed my hope, Lord! The text was composed by Adam Reusner, 1533 and the melody was by Calvisius, 1581 Francis, Browne. *Bach Cantatas Website: Ich hab mein Sach Gott heimgestellt*, <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale009-Eng3.htm> (accessed March 11, 2015).

Whose power to us,  
Gives victory,  
Through Jesus Christ. Amen.<sup>51</sup>

## CONCLUSION

We must not take a sentimental attitude toward the role of religion in Bach's life. The connection between the composer's beliefs and the complex musicotheological character of this cantata may be supplied by the underlined passages in his Bible. The contents of Bach's theological and, especially, the underlinings and marginalia in his copy of Calov's commented "Luther Bible" show that Bach developed a studied interest in Lutheran theology and that he interpreted many of the events of his life in that light.<sup>52</sup> The underlined

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<sup>51</sup> Phillip Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach: Vol.1* (Dover Publications, Inc., 1979), 463.

<sup>52</sup> Stapert noted that the inventory of Bach's books made after his death included 52 titles [over 8 volumes], all theological works. At the top of the list is "Calovius Writings 3 volumes" and 2 sets of Luther's complete works. Also some orthodox Lutherans; Martin Chemnitz's 4 volumes reply to the Council of Trent, Johannes Müller's *Defense of Luther* and Johannes Olearius's 3 volumes Bible commentary. The corrections, underlinings and marginalia of the Calov Bible commentaries in Bach's hand show that he read and studied them carefully. Some of his comments show his interest in the biblical foundations for church music. Calvin R. Stapert, *My Only Comfort: Death, Deliverance, and Discipleship in the Music of Bach* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 9-11. Boyd commented that the discovery in the USA in 1934 of his copy of the Calov Bible, with annotations and underlinings in Bach's hand, has shown that he studied at least some of these writings very closely. Malcolm Boyd, *Bach* (Schirmer Books, 1997), 212.

Spitta also noted that these works include The Table Talk and a

passages often treat the themes that figure most broadly in the Cantata BWV 106: “committing one’s life to God; God’s control of time and history; life and death”. This indirectly as evidence for the pivotal role in this cantata that we have assigned to “In deine Hände befehl ich meinen Geist; du hast mich erlöst, Herr, du getreuer Gott”. An important focal point for this theme in the Calov Bible is the book of Ecclesiastes, which Bach underlined and marked more often in a substantive manner than any other book of his Bible. In these underlined passages, expressions such as “My life and death are in Your hands”, “as long as You allow”, “I shall dispense with care and thought and give everything over to You”, “The Lord God has given every man his hour and his measure for our lives and our deaths”

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volume of sermons. Phillip Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach*. Vol III (Dover Publications, Inc., 1951), 266. Leaver also added Bach’s collections include Luther’s Psalm commentaries, two editions of the *Hauspostille*, and a copy of the *Tischreden*, in which could be found many of Luther’s statements concerning the connections between theology and music, views that clearly influenced Bach’s approach to composition. Robin A. Leaver, *Luther’s Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 291.

Furthermore, Noll writes that before Bach took up his post as cantor in Leipzig, he went through two theological examinations, which he passed by endorsing the Formula of Concord, a statement of faith from 1577, that encapsulated the high points of Luther’s theology. Mark Noll, “Singing the Word of God”. *Christian History & Biography: Issue 95: Gospel According to J. S. Bach* (Summer 2007).

recall this cantata directly. Bach also marked Calov's commentary on Luke 23:46, where Jesus says, "Vater, ich befehle meinen Geist [meine Seele] in deine Hände". Calov completes the passage with the remainder of Psalm 31:5 and concludes it, "Gott gebe, dass wir alle auch also unser Leben beschliessen in beständigem Glauben an unsern Heyland Christum Jesum", which is in effect the prayer that closes this cantata. In all this we can see that Bach's concerns in composing this cantata went well beyond the requirements of an occasional funeral cantata.

The texts of the Cantata BWV 106 place the encounter with Jesus at the center of movement sequences that favor Old Testament texts before that event and New Testament and chorale texts after it. In this way Jesus occupies the central or pivotal point in chronological time while the "time of Israel" and the "time of the church"<sup>53</sup> that precede and follow it represent seemingly antithetical stages that can be unified only under the conception of "God's time" as the expression of what from the human perspective is perceived as the history of salvation. Thus, the Cantata BWV 106 contains a symbolic dividing point in the empty measure, contains fermata sign, that follows the central movement [central fugue/solo/chorale complex], in which the eras of the Old Testament, New

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<sup>53</sup> Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (Philadelphia, 1961), 150-151, quoted in Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory: In the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (University of California Press, 1991), 93.

Testament, and church come into direct conjunction. In the central movement complex of the "Actus Tragicus" the believer cries out for the coming of Jesus in words from the ending of the book of Revelation ["Ja komm, Herr Jesu, komm"], thus lending the sequence as a whole the character of a progression from suffering [the Old Testament text "Es ist der alte Bund: Mensch du mußt sterben"], through comfort [the untexted instrumental chorale "Ich hab' mein Sach' Gott heimgestellt"], to anticipation of eternity. The New Testament part of the work follows this centralized representation of the faith encounter with Jesus, giving Luther's eschatological chorale "Mit Fried' und Freud' ich fahr' dahin", God's glory place at the end of the movement sequence that precedes the concluding doxology. The sequence of the texts in this cantata can also be read as an internal progression from fear of death and acceptance of its inevitability to faith in Christ and in the promise of the Gospel, and finally, to the willingness of the believer to die in Christ and his church.

Luther's concept of the "sleep of death" voiced in the final line of "Mit Fried' und Freud'", "der Tod ist mein Schlaf worden" brings out the ultimate meaning of God's time. Luther declares that Paul says of us, that "we do not die, but only fall asleep", that he calls our death "not a death, but a sleep" and of Christ, that His death has such exceeding power that we should consider our death a sleep. Luther imagined the state of the dead as a sleep, in which a person remains so deeply asleep that this state is dreamless [though may be interrupted by dreams or visions sent from God], unconscious, without any feeling, and

even “removed from space and time”. Luther, at the same time can, as the Apostle Paul does, stress the fact that Christ and eternal life await us immediately beyond death. This significant statement about fellowship with Christ immediately after death is in considerable tension with the assertion of soul sleep. Luther holding these two views beside each other, for he knows that our earthly concepts and measurements of time are no longer valid beyond death. For this reason, lapses of time such as we experience here are set aside. Luther noted that at death each individual experiences the Last Day. He pointed out what will happen to believers, “Just as Christ also, though he lay in the grave, yet in a moment he was both dead and alive and rose again like a lightning flash from heaven. So he will raise us too in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, out of the grave”. Thus the intermediate state is compressed together into a very short period of time. For those who have died, the Last Day comes very soon after their death, even “immediately” when they die. Therefore we arrive at the end of the world and the Last Day at the moment of our death. Luther expressed in his commentary on Psalm 90, that when the dead are awakened on the Last Day, they will like a man who wakes up in the morning, know neither where they were nor how long they have rested.

There is a relationship between the tenor arioso “Ach Herr, lehre uns bedenken, daß wir sterben müssen” and Luther’s chorale “Mit Fried’ und Freud’ ich fahr’ dahin”, where the line from Psalm 90:12 in the tenor arioso anticipates in its closing words, “auf daß wir klug werden”, the understanding of death presented in “Mit Fried’ und Freud’”. Therefore “sleep of

death” unites our own awaiting of the final awakening with that of all who have preceded us in death. The placement of “Mit Fried’ und Freud” at the very end of the chronological sequence of the “Actus Tragicus” suggests anticipation of the *parousia*, whereas “Herr, lehre uns bedenken” prays for an understanding of death through faith.

The theology of death in this musical *ars moriendi* provide information through the texts which enhanced by music composed by Bach, on the development of our understanding of death and the art to prepare for it. This research find answers to the understanding of most issues in today people’s perception towards fear of death. Luther writings on theology of death gives something of infinite promise because for the dying believer, death provides the best opportunity to redeem the benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection. Therefore for believers, who listen to this cantata, death can be filled with hope and celebration, for death provides the greatest opportunity to proclaim, to others and ourselves, Christ’s death and resurrection.

#### RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS:

**Bach Cantatas.** Ton Koopman, Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra & Choir.

**Bach: Funeral Cantatas.** John Eliot Gardiner, The Monteverdi Choir - The English Baroque Soloists.

**J. S. Bach: “Actus Tragicus”.** Konrad Junghänel & Cantus Cölln.



## GLOSSARY

**Actus Tragicus** Name for Bach's church Cantata BWV106, *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit*. It is the Latin translation of *Trauerspiel*, the main form of German seventeenth century tragic drama that treat human history as "the passion of the world", a "slow funeral pageant", representing stages of decline and destruction. The basic idea is that since the Fall, mankind was under God's wrath and the judgement of death, and the way to salvation through faith presents tribulations at every turn. In the "Actus Tragicus" the subject of meditation is the understanding of death according to the stages of salvation history.

**Arioso** [1] A recitative [speech-like singing] of the more melodious type. [2] A short melodious passage at the beginning or end of an aria. [3] A short air in an opera or oratorio. [4] In instrumental music, a cantabile passage.

**Ars moriendi** The art of dying, is a body of Christian literature that provided practical guidance for the dying and those attending them.

**Cadence** Any melodic or harmonic progression which has come to possess a conventional association with the ending of a composition, a section or a phrase.

**Cantata** (It.). Sung. Comes from the Latin *cantare*, "to sing". In its most generic usage, the term simply designates a vocal piece as opposed to an instrumental piece or sonata. Term with different meanings according to period: [1] In early 17<sup>th</sup> century, often a dramatic madrigal sung by one voice, with lute

accompaniment or basso continuo. [2] During 18<sup>th</sup> century, became more theatrical, comprising a ritornello, aria on two contrasted themes, and concluding ritornello, and accompanied by string. [3] From Bach's model there developed the cantata of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which was usually on a sacred subject and was, in effect, a short oratorio. Bach's cantatas belong to a lineage of Lutheran liturgical and devotional music employing both voices and instruments.

**Cantus firmus** (Lat.). Fixed song. A melody, usually taken from plainsong, used by composers in 14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, as the basis of a polyphonic composition and against which other tunes are set in counterpoint. Also, in 16<sup>th</sup> century, the upper voice-line of a choir.

**Chorale** The congregational hymn of the German Protestant church service. Typically, it possesses certain formal and stylistic traits appropriate to its lay purposes: simple language, rhymed metrical verse, a strophic musical and textual form and an easily singable melody. Martin Luther and his contemporaries most commonly referred to the individual items in the newly revived genre of congregational, vernacular hymns as 'geistliche Lieder'. In the later 16<sup>th</sup> century the term 'Choral', which had traditionally referred to the melodies of the Latin plainchant repertory, began to be applied to the vernacular church hymn. Luther techniques of adapting complete Gregorian or other monophonic melodies reveal the concern for good text declamation prevalent in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century: original melismas were removed to create syllabic

settings, and melodic climaxes were adjusted to correspond with the natural accents of the new texts. A good example of Luther's procedures is his skilful adaptation of the melody of the hymn *Veni Redemptor gentium* to three different chorales, *Verleih uns Frieden gnädiglich*, *Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort* and *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* so that each was not only 'correct' but also had a character of its own. Luther also adopted another common practice of constructing 'original' melodies from melodic formulae and melodic types. For example, *Vom Himmel hoch* and *Ein feste Burg*.

**Ecclesiasticus** More properly known as *The Wisdom of Sirach*, from apocryphal books. Written by Jesus, grandson of Sirach, sometime between 190 and 170 B.C. The original book was written in Hebrew, and a Greek translation was produced by the author's grandson about 132 B.C.

**Felix culpa** (Lat.). Comes from the words "felix" meaning happy, and "culpa" meaning fault, and in the Catholic tradition is most often translated "happy fault". It derives from the writings of Augustine regarding the Fall of man, the source of original sin: "For God judged it better to bring good out of evil than not to permit any evil to exist". [Melius enim iudicavit de malis benefacere, quam mala nulla essemittere]. The phrase appears in lyric form sung annually in the *exultet* of the Easter Vigil: "O happy fault that merited such and so great a Redeemer" [O felix culpa quae talem et tantum meruit habere redemptorem].

**Fugue** Type of contrapuntal composition for particular number of parts or voices. The point of fugue is that the voices enter successively in imitation of each other, the 1<sup>st</sup> voice entering with a short melody or phrase known as the *subject*. When all the voices have entered, the *exposition* is over. Then there comes an *episode* or passage of connective tissue leading to another entry or series of entries of the subject, and so on until the end of the piece, entries and episodes alternating.

**Librettist** A person who writes the text of an opera or oratorio; originally, and more specifically, the small book containing the text, printed for sale to the audience. As a basic minimum, the libretto gives a list of the cast of characters and the words that are to be performed. In addition, it often gives stage directions and a description of scenes.

**Tropological** Involving biblical interpretation stressing on the ethical lesson or moral metaphor.