

“Gott, wie dein Name, so ist auch dein Ruhm” BWV 171

1. *Gott, wie dein Name, so ist auch dein Ruhm bis an der Welt Ende.*¹

1. *God, like your name, so is also your acclamation² unto the world's [outermost] end.*³

2. Herr, so weit die Wolken gehen,
Gehet deines Namens Ruhm.
Alles, was die Lippen rührt,
Alles, was noch⁴ Odem führt,
Wird dich in der Macht erhöhen.

2. Lord, as far as the clouds go,
[So also] goes the acclamation⁵ of your name.
Everything that moves⁶ its lips,
Everything [on earth] that yet draws breath,
Will exalt you in your power.⁷

3. Du süßer Jesus-Name du,
In dir ist meine Ruh,
Du bist mein Trost auf Erden,
Wie kann denn mir

3. You sweet name of Jesus, you,
In you is my rest;
You [name of Jesus]⁸ are my [saving] consolation⁹ on earth;
How, then, can I become anxious¹⁰

¹Psalm 48:11. Many Luther Bibles of Bach's day render the passage with an extra word: “Gott, wie dein Name *ist*, so ist auch dein Ruhm bis an der Welt Ende” (“God, like your name *is* [unto the world's (outermost) end], so is also your acclamation unto the world's [outermost] end”).

²In old-fashioned biblical German, as apparently here, “Ruhm” was employed not as a synonym for “Pracht” (“glory”) or “Ansehen” (“renown”) but, conforming to sense of the underlying Hebrew wording of this psalm verse, as a synonym for “Freudengeschrei” (“cry of joy”), “Jauchzen” (“shouting [for joy]”).

³The Luther Bibles, idiosyncratically, give this noun in the singular (“Ende”). Later German Bibles here give the plural (“Enden”), reflecting the plural that was employed in the original Hebrew of the psalm. Either way, this language speaks not of the temporal “end of the world” but of the geographical “ends/end of the earth.” The biblical authors believed that the earth is an extended flatland with ends, corners, or limits; the standard old-fashioned English expression “four corners of the earth” corresponds to the standard old-fashioned German expressions “vier Enden der Welt” (“four [outermost] ends of the world”; i.e., north, south, east, and west), “vier Orte der Welt” (“four parts/places of the world”), “vier Gegenden der Welt” (“four regions of the world”), and “vier Ecken der Welt” (“four corners of the world”).

⁴In some modern editions this line is given erroneously as “Alles was nur Odem führt” (“Everything that but draws breath”).

⁵On the meaning of “Ruhm,” see fn. 2, above.

⁶Ordinarily, “was die Lippen rührt” would mean “what touches the lips,” but here—where the contextually awkward verb “rührt” is employed to accommodate a rhyme with the likewise contextually awkward verb “führt” in “was Odem führt” (the equivalent of “was Odem holt” [“that draws breath”], or in place of “was Odem hat” [“that has breath”])—it is clear that “rührt” is being used as a synonym for “regt,” such that the line would otherwise have read “Alles, was seine Lippen regt” (“Everything that moves its lips”).

⁷An adaptation of the sentiments of Psalm 21:14, “HERR, erhebe dich in deiner Kraft, so wollen wir singen und loben deine Macht” (“LORD, arise in your strength; [and] so will we want to sing and praise your power”).

⁸The name “Jesus” means “the Lord saves,” or “God is salvation”; hence “an angel of the Lord” (Luther Bibles, “ein Engel des HERRN”) says in Matthew 1:21, “Und sie wird einen Sohn gebären, des Namen sollst du Jesus heissen; denn er wird sein Volk selig machen von ihren Sünden” (“And she [Mary] will bear a son, whose name you [Joseph] shall call ‘Jesus,’ because [as befits the name] he will make his people [eternally] blessed [with salvation] from their sins [by dying a sacrificial death, on the cross]”).

⁹With regard to “Trost” as “consolation,” see fn. 10, below.

¹⁰The use of the words “bange” (“anxious”) and “Trost” (“consolation”) in this and the previous line come from Luther's idiosyncratic rendering of Isaiah 38:17, “Um Trost war mir sehr bange” (“I was very anxious for consolation”), from “The

Im Kreuze bange werden?
Du bist mein festes Schloss und mein Panier,
Da lauf ich hin,
Wenn ich verfolgt bin.
Du bist mein Leben und mein Licht,
Mein Ehre, meine Zuversicht,
Mein Beistand in Gefahr
Und mein Geschenk zum Neuen Jahr.

In bearing the cross?¹¹
You are my secure castle and my [military] banner;¹²
Toward there [the castle] I run
When I am persecuted.¹³
You are my life and my light,
My honor, my refuge,¹⁴
My aid in danger
And my gift for New Year's.¹⁵

4. Jesus soll mein erstes Wort
In dem Neuen Jahre heissen.
Fort und fort
Lacht sein Nam in meinem Munde,
Und in meiner letzten Stunde
Ist Jesus auch mein letztes Wort.

4. "Jesus" shall be [uttered as] my first word
In the New Year.
On and on
I will freely speak his name,¹⁶
And in my final hour
"Jesus" will also be my final word.

5. Und da du, Herr, gesagt:
Bittet nur in meinem Namen,

5. And because you, Lord [Jesus], have said:
"Simply ask in my name,"¹⁷

Writing of Hezekiah, King of Judah" (Isaiah 38:10-20), a poem about Hezekiah's being healed of a life-threatening illness and finding salvation in God.

¹¹"Kreuz" here means the suffering of metaphorically bearing and enduring the cross, as Jesus did literally. In the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, Jesus says in Luke 14:27, "Wer nicht sein Kreuz trägt und mir nachfolget, der kann nicht mein Jünger sein" ("Whoever does not bear his cross and follow me, he cannot be my disciple").

¹²For their sense, lines 6–8 draw on the language of Proverbs 18:10, "Der Name des HERRN ist ein festes Schloss; der Gerechte läuft dahin und wird beschirmt" ("The name of the LORD is a secure castle; the righteous person runs thereto and is shielded"), and Psalm 20:6, "Wir rühmen, dass du uns hilfst; im Namen unsres Gottes werfen wir Panier auf" ("We give ringing cries of acclamation that you help/save us; in the name of our God we set up a banner [in preparation for war]"); on the old-fashioned biblical German use of the word "Ruhm" as "acclamation," and thus also on "rühmen" as "to give ringing cries of acclamation," see fn. 2, above.

¹³The verb "verfolgen" can mean either "to persecute" or simply "to pursue." Either sense is possible in this line, but since the word is used so frequently in the former sense in the Luther Bibles, that sense is more likely intended here.

¹⁴"Zuversicht" often means "hope" or "reliance," but here it is apparently being used in one of its older German senses, as a synonym for "Zuflucht" ("refuge"), the way the word is used in Psalm 61:4, "Du bist meine Zuversicht, ein starker Turm vor meinen Feinden" ("You [God] are my refuge, a strong tower against my enemies").

¹⁵That is, the "name of 'Jesus'" (on whose meaning, see fn. 8, above) is a "gift" that the believer receives as a "New Year's gift" (distinguished, e.g., from a "Christmas gift"). New Year's day, the liturgical occasion for which this cantata was written, was also called "Das Fest der Beschneidung Christi" ("The Festival of the Circumcision of Christ"). Luke 2:21, the gospel portion for that occasion, specifies that after eight days from his birth had gone by, which is the time when a Jewish male child would be circumcised, the son of Mary of Nazareth was formally given the name "Jesus." Luther held that this first shedding of blood in Jesus's circumcision foreshadowed the full salvific shedding of blood in Jesus's eventual sacrificial death on the cross.

¹⁶"Mit lachendem Munde" (literally, "with laughing mouth") was a standard legal phrase in older German, referring to actions that were carried out willingly, freely, and unforced.

¹⁷This is a conflation of two passages in Luther's rendering of the New Testament. In John 14:13, Jesus says "Was ihr bitten werdet in meinem Namen, das will ich tun" ("Whatever you [disciples] might ask in my name, that I will do"); no sense of the word "nur" ("only/just") was included in what Jesus was depicted as saying in the Gospel of John (neither in the original Greek nor in Luther's translation of it); in Luther's rendering of Mark 11:24, Jesus says "Alles, was ihr bittet in eurem Gebet, glaubet nur, dass ihrs empfangen werdet, so wirds euch werden" ("Everything, whatever you [disciples] ask in

So ist alles Ja! und Amen!
 So flehen wir,
 Du Heiland aller Welt, zu dir:
 Verstoss uns ferner nicht,
 Behüt uns dieses Jahr
 Für Feuer, Pest und Kriegsgefahr!
 Lass uns dein Wort, das helle Licht,
 Noch rein und lauter brennen;
 Gib unsrer Obrigkeit
 Und dem gesamten Lande
 Dein Heil des Segens zu erkennen;
 Gib allezeit
 Glück und Heil zu allem Stande.
 Wir bitten, Herr, in deinem Namen,
 Sprich: ja! darzu; sprich Amen, Amen.
 Amen.

Then everything [in you, Jesus,] is “Yes!” and “Amen!”¹⁸
 Thus we make supplication to you,
 You savior of all the world:
 Do not cast us away henceforth;
 Protect us [throughout] this year
 From fire, plague, and danger of war.¹⁹
 Let your word, the bright light [of the gospel],²⁰
 Blaze yet pure and clear among us;²¹
 Give our government
 And the entire land
 To know your prosperity of blessing;²²
 Give at all times
 Good fortune and prosperity to [those of] every social rank.
 We ask, Lord, in your name,
 [May you] declare “Yes!” to this [plea]; declare: “Amen, Amen!”
 Amen.²³

**6. Lass uns das Jahr vollbringen
 Zu Lob dem Namen dein,**

**6. Let us end the year
 In [sung] praise to your [Jesus’s] name,**

your prayer, just believe that you will receive it, [and] so it will be [given] to you”); though included in Luther, no sense of the word “nur” was present in what Jesus was depicted as saying in the Greek text of Mark.

¹⁸2 Corinthians 1:20, “Alle Gottes Verheissungen sind Ja in ihm, und sind Amen in ihm” (“All God’s promises are ‘Yes’ in him [Jesus], and are ‘Amen’ in him [Jesus]”).

¹⁹“Kriegsgefahr” can mean either “threat/danger of a war breaking out” or “danger due to a war that is happening”; the latter sense seems more likely intended here.

²⁰2 Corinthians 4:4 speaks of “das helle Licht des Evangeliums” (“the bright light of the gospel”), i.e., the good news of Christian salvation. 2 Corinthians 4:6 goes on to say that “Gott, der da hiess das Licht aus der Finsternis hervorleuchten, der hat einen hellen Schein in unsere Herzen gegeben” (“God, who there [at Creation, in Genesis 1:3-4] bid the light shine forth out of the darkness, [it is he] who has imparted a bright luminosity [of the word/gospel] inside our hearts”).

²¹The “uns” here more likely connotes the dative “among us” than the accusative “for us.” The sense of lines 10–11 apparently draws upon the first stanza of the famous Lutheran hymn “Ach bleib bei uns,” whose closing lines read “Dein göttlich Wort, das helle Licht, / Lass ja bei uns auslöschen nicht” (“Do not let your divine word, the bright light [of the gospel] (see fn. 20, above)), be indeed extinguished among us”).

²²“Heil des Segens” is a very uncommon expression. It is often rendered in translations of this cantata as “blessing of salvation,” but if “Heil” were to be understood here as “salvation,” then grammatically this should be “salvation of blessing” or “blessing’s salvation,” both of which are clumsy and dubious. The librettist of this cantata employed the phrase again in a wedding poem printed in 1737, which contains the lines “Er wünschet euch, Geehrtes Paar, / Das Heil des Segens immerdar / Zu euren neuen Ehe-Bunde!” (“It [‘my spirit’] wishes you, Honored Pair, / The prosperity of blessing forever / In your new bond of matrimony!”). This suggests a reading of “Heil” here as “prosperity,” pointing to earthly blessing.

²³Punctuation decisions can subtly affect the sense of these closing lines. A 1732 printing of the libretto reads “Wir bitten, HERR, in deinem Namen, / Sprich: ja! darzu, sprich Amen! Amen!” (“We ask, LORD, in your name, / Declare: Yes! to this [plea]; [Lord,] declare Amen! Amen!”). The standard 19th-century edition of Bach’s cantata reads “Wir bitten, Herr, in deinem Namen, sprich: ‘ja!’ darzu sprich: ‘Amen, Amen.’ Amen.” (“We ask, Lord, in your name, declare ‘yes!’ [to this plea]; [Lord,] in addition declare: ‘Amen, Amen.’ [To that, I declare] ‘Amen’.”). The standard 20th-century edition reads “Wir bitten, Herr, in deinem Namen, sprich: ja! darzu, sprich: Amen, amen, amen!” (“We ask, Lord, in your name, declare: yes! to this [plea]; [Lord,] declare: Amen, amen, amen!”). In Bach’s yet differently punctuated composing score, the script switches from Kurrentschrift to Latin script for the third “Amen” (and this third Amen was musically set off in a highly striking manner): “Wir bitten Herr in deinem Namen sprich: ja! darzu, sprich Amen, Amen. *Amen.*” (“We ask [you] Lord in your name [that you] declare: yes! to this; [Lord,] declare Amen, Amen. Amen.”).

**Dass wir demselben singen
In der Christen Gemein.
Wollst uns das Leben fristen
Durch dein allmächtig Hand,
Erhalt dein liebe Christen
Und unser Vaterland!
Dein Segen zu uns wende,
Gib Fried an allem Ende,
Gib unverfälscht im Lande
Dein seligmachend Wort,
Die Teufel mach zuschanden
Hier und an allem Ort!²⁴**

Christian Friedrich Henrici (Picander)

**So that we may sing [praise] to this same [name]
In the congregation of [all] Christians [living and dead].²⁵
May you preserve our life
Through your all-powerful hand;
Uphold your dear Christians
And our fatherland.
Turn your blessing [of salvation]²⁶ toward us;²⁷
Give peace in every [outermost] end [of the earth];
Give, uncorrupted²⁸ in the land,
Your saving²⁹ word;
Put the demons³⁰ [headed by Satan] to shame,
Here and in every place.**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



Scan or go to <http://www.bachcantatatexts.org/BWV171> for an annotated translation

²⁴A stanza of “Jesu, nun sei gepreiset.”

²⁵This line refers in characteristic Lutheran language to what is elsewhere often termed “the congregation of saints,” “the communion of saints,” or “the Christian church,” each understood to be made up of all Christians, living and dead.

²⁶“Segen” here apparently refers not to the blessings of good health, of the harvest, and so on, but to the blessing of eternal salvation (see also line 12 of this movement). This line is probably drawing on Psalm 3:9 (which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day does not have a verb in the second phrase), “Bei dem HERRN findet man Hilfe, und deinen Segen über dein Volk” (“In [you] the LORD, one finds salvation, and [one finds] your blessing upon your people”).

²⁷The phrase “zu uns wende” (“turn toward us”) is the obverse of “von uns wende” (“turn away from us”) in 2 Chronicles 29:10, “Nun habe ich im Sinn einen Bund zu machen mit dem HERRN, dem Gott Israel, dass sein Zorn und Grimm sich von uns wende” (“Now I [Hezekiah, king of Judah] have in mind to make a covenant with the LORD, the God of Israel, so that his wrath [concerning our backsliding in proper worship] and fierceness will turn away from us”).

²⁸The word “unverfälscht” here apparently means “unfalsified” in its sense of “unadulterated” or “uncorrupted.” As in the hymn line, “unverfälscht” is linked with God’s “Wort” (“word”) in 1 Peter 1:25–2:2, which in some Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Des HERRN Wort bleibt in Ewigkeit. ... Seid gierig nach der vernünftigen, unverfälschten Milch als die jetzt geborenen Kindlein, auf dass ihr durch dieselbe zunehmet” (“The word of the LORD abides into eternity. ... [You followers of Jesus:] Be, like just-now born infants, eager for the reasonable, unadulterated/uncorrupted milk [of God’s word], so that through this same [‘milk’] you may grow [in faith/salvation]”). In other Luther Bibles of Bach’s day the word “lauten” (“pure”) appears here in place of “unverfälschten.”

²⁹“Seligmachend” (literally, “blessed-making”) refers to eternal salvation. This sense is derived, e.g., from James 1:21, “Darum so leget ab alle Unsauberkeit und alle Bosheit und nehmet das Wort an mit Sanftmut, das in euch gepflanzt ist, welches kann eure Seelen selig machen” (“Therefore lay aside all filthiness and all evil, and accept with meekness the word [of God] that is planted in you, which is able to make your souls blessed [i.e., which is able to save your souls from eternal damnation]”).

³⁰“Die Teufel” (i.e., plural) are usually “the evil spirits/demons/devils [that are in the service of Satan].” Extremely evil human beings could also be called “Teufel.” But “der Teufel” (i.e., singular) would be “the devil [himself],” Satan. Were it only Satan that the hymn was meant to refer to, the line would have read “den Teufel mach zuschanden.”