

“Komm, Jesu, komm” BWV 229

Komm, Jesu, komm, mein Leib ist müde,  
Die Kraft verschwindt je mehr und mehr;  
Ich sehne mich nach deinem Friede;  
Der saure Weg wird mir zu schwer.  
Komm, komm, ich will mich dir ergeben;  
Du bist der rechte Weg, die Wahrheit und das Leben.

Come, Jesus, come, my body is weary;  
My strength is dwindling, ever more and more.  
I long for your peace;  
The arduous<sup>3</sup> path [of earthly life] is becoming too difficult for me.  
Come; come, I wish to give myself over to you;  
You are the right path,<sup>4</sup> the truth, and the life.

Drum schliess ich mich in deine Hände,  
Und sage, Welt, zu guter Nacht!  
Eilt gleich mein Lebenslauf<sup>1</sup> zum<sup>2</sup> Ende,  
Ist doch der Geist wohl angebracht.  
Er soll bei seinem Schöpfer schweben,  
Weil Jesus ist und bleibt  
Der wahre Weg zum Leben.

Therefore I let myself be enfolded in your hands,<sup>5</sup>  
And say, “World, good night.”<sup>6</sup>  
Should my life’s course<sup>7</sup> soon hasten to its end,  
My spirit is, even so, well-fitted [for heaven];  
It shall hover [in heaven above] with its creator,<sup>8</sup>  
Because Jesus is and remains  
The true path to [eternal] life.<sup>9</sup>

GENERAL NOTE: The two sections of this motet represent the first and last strophes of an 11-stanza poetic text by Paul Thymich. It appeared in several hymnals in Bach’s environment, but evidently had no fixed melody associated with it. Bach set the first stanza in BWV 229 in the manner of a scriptural text, phrase by phrase; he set the last stanza as a four-voice movement labeled “Aria” in a principal source.

<sup>1</sup>“Läuft gleich mein Lebensbach zum Ende” (“Should my life’s stream/brook soon flow to its end”) is the wording in earlier sources of this poem, but “Eilt gleich mein Lebenslauf zum Ende” (“Should my life’s course soon hasten to its end”) in the Wagner Gesangbuch of 1697, which Bach owned.

<sup>2</sup>Modern editions read “zu Ende” (“to [a/the/its] end/finish”). The secondary copies of this motet (Bach’s own materials are now lost), give either “zum Ende” (“to the end/finish”) or “zu Ende.” The former is the wording in the printed seventeenth century sources. There is no real difference in meaning, but “zum Ende” is a bit clearer.

<sup>3</sup>“Saur” in older German was used variously, including as a synonym for “beschwerlich” (“arduous”).

<sup>4</sup>The wording of this line is derived from John 14:6, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Jesus spricht zu ihm: Ich bin der Weg, und die Wahrheit, und das Leben; niemand kommt zum Vater, denn durch mich” (“Jesus says to him [Thomas, the disciple]: I am the path/way, and the truth, and the life [eternal]; no one comes to [God] the father but by me [the right path]”).

<sup>5</sup>An adaptation of what Jesus, quoting Psalm 31:6, says to God the father in Luke 23:46, “In deine Hände befehl ich meinen Geist” (“Into your hands I commend my spirit”).

<sup>6</sup>The phrases “Zu guter Nacht” and “Gute Nacht” both translate as “good night” in English. “Gute Nacht” would be employed for “[I wish you a] good night,” and “zu guter Nacht,” e.g., for such expressions as “to [give a] kiss goodnight” (“zu guter Nacht küssen”).

<sup>7</sup>See fn. 1, above.

<sup>8</sup>This line apparently derives its sense from Sirach 24:4-6, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Ich bin Gottes Wort, und schwebe über der ganzen Erde, wie die Wolken; mein Gezelt ist in der Höhe, und mein Stuhl in den Wolken” (“I [the personification of wisdom] am God’s word, and [I] hover above the entire earth, like the clouds; my tent is in the heights [of heaven], and my throne in the clouds”), along with from John 1:1, which reads “Im Anfang war das Wort, und das Wort war bei Gott” (“In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God”). In Lutheran teaching, whereas the “dust” of the person’s body returns to the earth in a “sleep of death,” the spirit of that person hovers with God above, waiting for the end-time resurrection of the body.

<sup>9</sup>These lines are sometimes given in English incorrectly as “Jesus is and remains the true way to live.” That would require the German to be something like “Jesus ist und bleibt die wahre Art zu leben” or “Jesus ist und bleibt der wahre Weg zu

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leben.” The expression “der Weg zum Leben” (hyperliterally, “the way to the life”) is biblical, meaning “the path to/toward/of life.”