

## Cantatas for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity

### St Gumbertus, Ansbach

It was inevitably an awkward and jarring transition going straight to Ansbach in Franconia from the magical Scottish island of Iona, where a few of us had commemorated the 250th anniversary of Bach's death. For our daytime celebration in the old Abbey on Iona we had devised a programme composed of some of his most intimate and heart-stopping pieces, which we performed on a day of balmy sunshine against a background of the cries of seagulls and lambs. Our programme for the Ansbach Bach week, in addition to a repeat of *Aus der Tiefen*, which we had given the previous weekend in Mühlhausen, and two motets, featured Bach's two surviving cantatas for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity: BWV 170 *Vergnügte Ruh, beliebte Seelenlust*, a cantata for alto and obbligato organ, oboe d'amore and strings, and BWV 9 *Es ist das Heil uns kommen her*, a chorale cantata from around 1732.

**Vergnügte Ruh, beliebte Seelenlust** is the first of two solo cantatas for alto that Bach wrote in the summer of 1726 to texts published fifteen years earlier by the Darmstadt court librarian Georg Christian Lehms. In that year Bach seems to have had an outstanding singer available, perhaps Carl Gotthelf Gerlach, then a university student who had been a *Thomaner* under Johann Kuhnau, and was keen to make the most of his talents. On the face of it Bach was setting a pithy but decidedly old-fashioned text rich in baroque imagery at a time when the *galant* style was coming into fashion and was even beginning to take a purchase on his own church music. It is fascinating to see how he manages to achieve a convincing synthesis of these diametrically opposed modes of expression. The opening aria is pure enchantment, a warm, luxuriant dance in 6/8 in D. You can almost feel Bach's benign smile hovering over this music, an evocation of 'Himmelseintracht', 'the harmony of heaven'. One of those ineffable

Bach melodies that lodge itself in one's aural memory, it takes a whole bar to get going but once launched, seems as though it will never stop (actually it is only eight bars long, but the effect is never-ending). Yet this expansive melody given to oboe d'amore and first violin acquires its beauty and its mood of pastoral serenity only as a consequence of its harmonic underpinning. The gently lapping quavers in the lower strings are slurred in threes, suggestive of 'bow vibrato', or what the French referred to as *balancement*, while the downward-tending bass line sounds as if it might be the first statement of a 'ground' – in other words, the beginning of a pattern that will repeat itself as though in a loop. Well, it does recur, but not strictly or altogether predictably. With Lehms' text in front of him, Bach is searching for ways to insist on spiritual peace as the goal of life, and for patterns that will allow him to make passing references to sin and physical frailty.

A vigorous and impassioned wordsmith, Lehms really gets into his stride from No.2 (a recitative) onwards, paraphrasing and synthesising the day's Gospel (taken from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:20-26) and its Epistle (Paul to the Romans 6:3-11). Thus the world, he tells us, is a 'house of sin', its mouth filled with 'viper's bane', spewing out insults like 'Raca! Raca!' ('Fool! Fool!') towards neighbour and brother alike. Bach, as you would expect, is alert to the possibility of matching every declamatory gesture and expressive nuance, and in the process shifts the tonality to the remote sharp key of F sharp minor. Now in this upside-down world comes an unusual, lengthy aria in A major. It is assigned to a two-manual obligato organ, though we followed what seems to have been Bach's practice at the cantata's first performance in using two instruments, one for each manual, one notated in *Chorton*, the other in *Kammerton*. To this he adds just a middle register line for violins and violas in unison. This special texture, known as *bassettchen*, is one that we have encountered on a number of occasions this year when Bach decides that a special mood needs to be

created and removes the traditional support of basso continuo. He uses it symbolically in reference to Jesus (someone not requiring 'support'), protecting the faithful from the consequences of sin (as in 'Aus Liebe', the soprano aria from the *St Matthew Passion*), and at the other extreme to serial offenders, as in that other marvellous soprano aria, 'Wir zittern und wanken' from BWV 105, or (as here) to those 'perverted hearts' who have (literally) lost the ground under their feet in their rejection of God. The aria is written from the standpoint of a passive witness to the 'Satanic scheming' of the backsliders as they 'rejoice in revenge and hate', so that one can sense the observing singer's anxiety in the fragmented rhythm of the *bassettchen* line. Bach departs from the chromatic, fugal intertwining of the two organ lines on two occasions in favour of faster, diatonic exchanges clearly calibrated to coincide with Lehms' mention of 'Rach und Hass' ('revenge and hate') in the A section, and with the words 'frech verlacht' ('boldly flout') in the B section. As a non-organist, it all seems to me a little strange and impersonal. With more flexible, plangent instruments, like the unison violins used in the 'Et incarnatus' of the *B minor Mass*, say, I could imagine this aria exerting a stronger tug on one's heartstrings.

Evidently Bach was short of time, having decided to couple this cantata on 28 July 1726 with one by his Meiningen cousin Johann Ludwig (*Ich will meinen Geist in euch geben*); this was given before the sermon, and *Vergnügte Ruh* during the distribution of the Eucharist. For me the prancing D major *da capo* aria (No.5) which rounds off the cantata makes more sense of the solo organ, though that too may have been a last-minute, time-enforced change, obliging Bach himself to play the organ solo. His first intention for this movement may have been a melodic wind instrument – perhaps an oboe d'amore – and certainly when he revived *Vergnügte Ruh* in his last years, around 1746-7, he opted for a flute obbligato in this movement and thereby skirted the need for the second organ used at the first performance. One sees why

his eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann, would have been keen to revive the first aria, but not the rest of the cantata, in Halle in 1750.

The composing score and original performing parts of **Es ist das Heil uns kommen her** date from 1732-5, but formally and stylistically this cantata belongs to Bach's second *Jahrgang*, the chorale cantatas of 1724-5. In that year Bach composed no cantata for this Sunday (on 16 July 1724 he and his wife were actually out of town performing for his old employer, Prince Leopold of Cöthen). Yet mindful of the gap he had left in that cycle, Bach not only composed this cantata some eight or ten years later but did so in the earlier style, surely out of a strong urge – one not always fulfilled – for completeness. Bach and his librettist choose to ignore the Gospel for the day, which deals with reconciliation between brothers and adversaries, and to refer instead to the Epistle, with its theme of victory over sin and death (containing the famous line 'Death no more hath dominion over him'), belief in the Resurrection being an underlying theme of one of the main hymns for this Sunday, one by Paul Speratus dating from the earliest years of the Reformation (1523). Whoever Bach co-opted as his literary collaborator on this occasion had the tricky task of condensing fourteen verses by Speratus into half that number of cantata movements. His solution was to retain verses 1 and 12 intact for the opening and closing movements, to paraphrase verse 8 in the fifth movement (a duet for soprano and alto) and to condense three other verses for each of the three linking recitatives. This last assignment was very skilfully done, providing a narrative thread between reflections on the Law, man's puny attempts to give up the 'bad habit' of sin ('der Sünden Unart zu verlassen') (No.2), his need for salvation and justification by faith (No.4), and the power of the Gospel to strengthen that faith, and finally his reliance on God to determine the hour of his death (No.6). Bach augments this sense of narrative commentary by assigning all three recitatives to the same (bass) soloist. Whereas this could just be part of his usual strategy of

associating the bass voice with the *Vox Domini*, God's Law and its fulfilment being indeed the keynotes of all three recitative paraphrases, it also creates the impression, as Dürr points out, of a continuous sermon interrupted at two points by a meditative aria (No.3) and a duet (No.5).

If ever there was an instance of how Bach can be clever and fun-loving at the same time, it is located in the fifth movement of this cantata. At his disposal are a pair of instruments (flute and oboe d'amore) and a pair of voices (soprano and alto). Over a simple basso continuo he sets the first two in canon, initially at the lower fifth led by the flute, then at the upper fourth led by the oboe. The voices then enter, also in canon – a simplified version of the opening instrumental canon – and after eight bars are joined by the oboe and flute now playing the second half of their canonic *ritornello*, and so forming a double canon. Next he reverses the order of canonic entries (oboe, flute, alto, soprano), still in double canon, and then repeats his opening *ritornello* as a link to the B section, also in canon, the instrumental pair this time merely shadowing or lightly decorating the vocal lines. From the engaging way the melodies unfold and intertwine one might not guess that anything specially clever or 'learned' were afoot here – yet it is. CPE Bach tells us that his father was no fan of 'dry, mathematical stuff'; but that doesn't mean he was incapable of providing us, when his blood was up, with the most skilled, innovative counterpoint of any composer then alive, while at the same time disguising it, as this number proves, with melodic charm and an appealing playfulness. Peer a little further below the surface and one can perhaps discern Bach's reason for covering up his learnedness in this way: to alleviate the listener's need to swallow the bitter pill of abstract dogma – justification by faith alone, in other words. The message reaches the believer via the comfort and warmth of Bach's music, its air of simplicity masking its underlying complexity.

The opening chorale fantasia is in E major, the sharpest key of all Bach's vocal music, and is difficult to tune. It features a *concertante* flute and oboe d'amore with the strings confined to an almost *ripieno* accompanying role, though from time to time the first violin takes on a *concertino* role as well. The elaborate alto, tenor and bass parts entering in imitation are based on material that has nothing whatsoever to do with the chorale tune (in fact they take their initial thematic lead from the arpeggiated figure in the flute's third bar) and at one point Bach splits their syllables up into stuttered fragments for the words 'der hat g'nug... g'nug... für uns all getan'. But most striking of all is the central aria for tenor in E minor. The tenor James Gilchrist, who had not sung it before, had a fast, urgent delivery in mind, as though to emphasise the believer's struggles to resist the downwards suction towards the abyss. With its unusual 12/16 time signature, I saw it more as a slow, contemplative dance, despondent and heartsick in its unremitting gloom and its emphasis on the death knell (the violin double-stopping over a dominant seventh harmony) and the Job-like helplessness of the unredeemed sinner. With what other composer, I wonder, could one have such potential extremes in interpretation legitimised and validated? Both positions held their attractions. In the end the tortured melodic lines, the inexorable syncopated descent and the complexity of the harmonic movement won the argument in favour of the slower tempo. In rehearsal we experimented with unison violins (their music appears in both the original first and second violin part-books) and with organ continuo (used by Bach in a later revival). But we finally opted for the precariously intimate and austere texture of Bach's first performance, as indicated in the autograph: voice, violin and cello. As played by Maya Homburger's violin and David Watkin's cello, and sung in this performance by James Gilchrist, it struck me as utterly convincing in its bleakness – as emotionally harrowing, in fact, as anything we have been faced with in the cantatas since before Lent, the 'solche Not'

(‘such distress’) reminding me of the ‘betrübt Einsamkeit’ (‘distressed solitude’) we encountered in *Liebster Immanuel*, BWV 123. This impression was enhanced by the absence of any keyboard support to spell out the passing harmonies or to paper over the cracks in such denuded textures. Bach’s later style is perhaps more manifest in this great aria, which certainly occupies a dominating position in the work, than in any of the other movements. The cantata ends with a final chorale, harmonised in a masterly and intriguing way.

We ended our programme with the funeral motet *Der Gerechte kommt um*, attributed to Bach, a vernacular reworking of a five-voiced Latin motet by Johann Kuhnau. Several features of the new arrangement lend credence to the theory that Bach is its author: the throbbing accompaniment provided by a pair of oboes, strikingly similar to the *litui* in *O Jesu Christ, mein’s Lebens Licht*, BWV 118, the subtle harmonic recolouring, and the heightened expressivity of the text underlay. In its new version the motet’s orchestral introduction opens in astonishing anticipation of Mozart’s *Requiem*, while the most poignant moment comes very close to the end – a bar of measured silence before the 17-bar coda.

The last time we were here in Ansbach was in 1981, when we were invited to give five separate programmes of Bach’s music. The choir excelled themselves at a time when, as the English Baroque Soloists, we were still finding our feet as a period-instrument ensemble. Nineteen years on our opening number, the motet ‘Lobet den Herrn’, which ends with a rousing ‘Hallelujah!’, was greeted in total silence. Suddenly I remembered being startled by the way a ripple of tentative applause was loudly ‘shushed’, both in 1981 and at the end of our first appearance here in 1979. Somehow it had the effect of taking the gilt off the gingerbread – the honour we, as foreigners, felt in being singled out and invited to take part in this leading Bach festival, almost the Mecca (or Bayreuth) of Bach celebrations. Several of us found it hard not to be

riled, not by the absence of audible approbation but by the attitude that lies behind this capricious withholding of applause. It has very little to do with the quality of the performance and everything to do with a pseudo-religious respect accorded to the music by an audience who view themselves as the true guardians of the sacred Bach flame. The historical flaw in this excessive Bach hagiolatry is that the music is treated as a static object or some holy relic, whereas Bach clearly set store in having his music *performed*, as we have had confirmed to us time and again during the course of this year. In a sense its composition is only 'completed' in performance, which is why as musicians we are always alert to every trace of Bach's own performance embedded in the notation of his cantatas. We also look to establish a fruitful and vibrant triangular relationship between Bach as composer-performer, us as recreative performers, and the audience as complicit participants. That has been the way in all the East German towns where we have played this year. But if the listeners have already occupied the defensive ground as Bach aficionados that vital chemical reaction between them and us falls flat, thus closing off the potential 'lift' that a responsive audience can give to a performing ensemble.

Such reflections were put into perspective when an elderly lady came forward and offered me a posy of flowers from her garden at the end of the morning concert. Any last trace of grievance vanished when she returned in the evening with an even bigger bunch, this time of wild meadow flowers.

## For the Seventh Sunday after Trinity

### St Mary's, Haddington

Returning from Ansbach, and in Scotland again a week after the commemorative concert on Iona, we headed this time for Haddington, a modest market town in East Lothian, twenty or so miles to the east of Edinburgh. The collegiate church of St Mary is the longest and, according to Pevsner, 'the most impressive of the late medieval Pictish kirks' (sometimes mistaken for parish churches) in Scotland. In the early 1970s a project to reintegrate the ruined roofless chancel of the fourteenth-century Franciscan church was begun, one that entailed knocking down the false wall at the end of the nave under the crossing. The pinkish stonework of the choir and chancel, weathered by more than three centuries of buffeting by rain and hail, had acquired a striking patina. Now it is encased by a modern fibreglass roof replacing the original stone vaulting. The Lamp of Lothian organisers had designated the central crossing as our performing area atop a thickly carpeted circular dais. Even when covered with wooden flooring I felt it would never be satisfactory for the audience, so I led a splinter group to the east end to try out the acoustics there. Magical! We decamped – choir, orchestra, organ and harpsichord – while the engineers uncomplainingly re-rigged their microphones.

All three of Bach's cantatas for this day (BWV 186, 187 and 107) have masterly opening movements. None of them is particularly flamboyant or festive, yet each in its way is individually expressive. This time Bach is using pastel shades rather than primary colours. The kernel of BWV 186 **Ärgre dich, o Seele, nicht** is the injunction to the soul 'not to fret' when it sees heavenly light represented on earth in humble guise. Here was the nub of eighteenth-century rationalist criticism of Christianity: the concept of Christ as creator and Christ in majestic splendour they could tolerate, but Christ humbled and

diminished by poverty and suffering – this to them was patently unsatisfactory and indeed risible. It may seem strange to us now, but in Bach's day it was a live issue. Bach of course took the Lutheran line, and in the opening choral statement he sets out to evoke the fretting Christian soul communing with itself by means of a chain of cumulative dissonances. But as so often in the cantatas we have performed to date, you sense that the intelligence and added bonus that Bach's music brings to his texts goes well beyond verbal discourse and follows its own trajectory. Take, for example, the way he follows this opening choral motto, how each voice leads off in turn with a fugal theme to the same words via a simple device of three rising notes in speech rhythm with the third suspended over a dominant ninth. It gives exactly the right yearning, forward momentum to the music, the harmonic tension of its three-note *incipit* ebbing and flowing within a longer eight-bar paragraph. It is hard to say which adds more eloquence to the consoling mood, the instrumental lines (strings doubled by reeds) or the choral voices. Structurally, this movement is unconventional – in the way, for example, that the interleaving of fugal passages for the choir acts like a counter-theme to the partial reappearance of the main theme that is always played by the orchestra. In an overall ABABA pattern, Bach gives the second clause (B) to his choir alone ('God's true gleaming image is concealed in a vassal's form'), the sopranos leading off and answered by the other three voices homophonically with just continuo for support – the first clear hint that this music originated as an earlier work from Bach's Weimar years.

Perhaps it's not too fanciful here to detect the famished pleading of the 4,000 in the wilderness, the subject of the set Gospel (Mark 8:1-9), their hunger being both physical and spiritual. These imploring gestures are given renewed expression at the *arioso* conclusion to the opening bass recitative 'Ach Herr, wie lange willst du mein vergessen?' ('Ah Lord, how long wilt Thou forget me?'). It could almost be a sketch

for one of the great Passion setting utterances. The bass amplifies this cry for help in his aria with continuo (No.3), urging the doubting soul not to let reason 'ensnare you: you can see your Helper, Jacob's light, in the Scriptures'. Again in recitative giving way to *arioso*, the tenor expatiates on the value of Holy manna: 'So, though sorrow gnaws and eats the heart, taste and see, how friendly Jesus is'. It expands into an aria referring to His 'works of mercy' that 'nourish weary bodies' and 'satisfy body and soul'. We have proof that this cantata did indeed start life as a Weimar work in six movements (BWV 186a) for the Third Sunday in Advent in 1716, to a text by Salomo Franck. Unable to use it in Leipzig because of the *tempus clausum*, the ban on singing on the Second to the Fourth Sundays in Advent, Bach decided to recycle it early on in his first *Jahrgang* in Leipzig for the Seventh Sunday after Trinity as a two-part cantata in eleven movements. This entailed major structural revisions on account of its changed liturgical position: alterations to the aria texts, and three new recitatives (the four arias initially followed without a break). In addition, Bach decided to compose new chorale conclusions to each of the two parts, using verses 12 and 11 respectively of Paul Speratus' 1523 hymn 'Es ist das Heil uns kommen her', which had formed the basis of one of last week's cantatas (BWV 9).

If Part I of this cantata emphasises the true source of faith in the scriptures, Part II, as Eric Chafe says, 'completes the idea of the *Glaubensbahn* [path of faith] with the nature of the life of faith – life under the cross, so to speak'. So as in BWV 170 No.3 last week, we start out in a topsy-turvy world, this time with a powerful bass *accompagnato* emphasising the world as a wilderness ('heaven turns to metal, earth to iron'). This is contrasted sharply with the 'Saviour's word, that greatest treasure' (Salomo Franck was the court numismatist at Weimar, which helps explain his fondness for coin and metal similes). Bach, following Franck, maintains this antithesis throughout the second

part, between the 'Jammertal' ('vale of tears') of the present life and the joy and fulfilment of the afterlife. This he articulates in a series of vivid musical gestures – such as the descending tetrachord arpeggios of the continuo in the soprano aria (No.8), to represent the poor ('die Armen') whom God will 'embrace' ('umarmen' – a play on words), matched by an extended chromatic ascent of the violins. Contrary movement is also a feature of the instrumental lines in the identical chorales which conclude each part (Nos.6 and 11), the oboes rising and strings falling in alternation and playful banter, a musical equivalent to the antithesis between tribulation and hope expressed in the text. As so often, there is a lot more going on beneath the surface of the music than at first seems apparent – a (deliberate?) tension between musical figures and underlying *Affekt* and, no doubt also, a numerological aspect, witness the curious thirteen-bar structure of the duet for soprano and alto (No.10), a C minor gigue with full oboe and string band, in which the crucial injunction 'Sei, Seele, getreu!' ('O soul, be true!') is reserved until the last two bars.

In the absence of the new Leipzig parts for this revised cantata (lost since 1906) several problems emerge, for example the bottom B flats in the continuo part of No.9: was this originally a *basse de violon* part with its lower string tuned to B flat? Then there is the pitch and instrumentation of the tenor aria (No.5) – oboe da caccia in the Weimar version, yet annotated as 'oboe and violins I & II' on the autograph score used for the Leipzig revival. Dürr and Kubik both recommend an upward octave transposition, which seems unlikely and unsatisfactory: it pushes the oboe off its upper edge (E flat) and separates the voice (tenor) and obbligato by a far wider series of intervals than we have so far encountered. So we kept it at the original pitch, doubling the oboe da caccia with violins and violas, and it worked rather beautifully.

The following year (23 July 1724) Bach came up with yet another winner. (How often have I had cause to write these words in my diary in

the course of this year!) BWV 107 **Was willst du dich betrüben** is a chorale cantata which this time reverts to a seventeenth-century design 'per omnes versus'. Any other composer, when pressed for time as Bach undoubtedly was, would have been tempted to take a few short cuts, such as paraphrasing several of the hymn verses in the cantata's middle movements. Here is a prime example of how Bach differs from the Stölzels, Telemanns and Graupners of his day. They also fulfilled self-imposed assignments to provide cycles of new music for every feast day in the liturgical year (though usually not in consecutive years). But only Bach is prepared to make life consistently difficult for himself, as here, for example, by choosing to incorporate verbatim all seven stanzas of a rather obscure chorale by Johann Heermann from 1630. The last time he had done this was back in Mühlhausen in 1707 with BWV 4 *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, though here he confines the melody to the first and last verses. Maybe his success on this occasion inspired him to fire several other shots at the same target in his later chorale cantatas. Bach rises to the challenge: to overcome the limitations of being confined to a rigidly structured hymn without monotony or repetitiveness. He converts only a single verse into a recitative (verse 2), managing to mask the inexorable symmetry of the metre (v-v-v- - / v-v-v-) by adding a pair of oboes d'amore to punctuate it with their own counter-rhythm and by breaking into extended melismas on the words 'Freuden' and 'retten'. All this means that four arias, none of them da capo, are placed back-to-back to form the spine of the cantata. Here again Bach manages to avoid monotony, not simply by the usual devices of changing voice type (bass, tenor, soprano, tenor), key, metre and *Affekt*, but by blurring the obvious tri-partite structure of Heermann's verse and its predictable division into *Bar* form (AAB, or *Stollen*, *Stollen* and *Abgesang*).

In the first of these arias Bach seems momentarily to forget that he is depicting the unruffled security of those who undertake God-

protected ventures, and instead paints a lively hunting scene for bass and strings (verse 3). He teases the singer (and the listener) by breaking up the vocal line with jagged leaps on the word 'unerschrocknem [Mut]' ('unaffrighted [heart]') – offering, in other words, a direct negative – jitters in place of the guarantee of calm. A little later he seizes on the word 'erjagen', meaning 'to achieve by great exertion' but with literal resonances of 'to hunt down', and even assigns an outrageous hunting call trill to the bass in evocation of the divine huntsman calling to his hounds. More striking still is the tenor aria with basso continuo (verse 4), a vivid pen-portrait of Satan and his wiles, delivered with typically Lutheran relish. Bach seems to be making whoopee with the rhythm by alternating one bar in 6/8 with another in 3/4, until you discover that the pattern he is establishing is less schematic and more ambiguous than that. The bass line (marked *organo e continuo*) is extravagantly animated and angular – Albert Schweitzer likens it to the contortions of a huge dragon – and persists even when the tenor enters with a free inversion of it, seemingly in direct contradiction: Satan flagrantly confronting the Will of God. This is an operatic 'rage' aria with a difference.

The mood now begins to soften, first in a soprano aria with two oboes d'amore (verse 5) and a vocal line that begins by hinting at a decorated version of the chorale tune and later confirms this reference by quoting its last line to the words 'was Gott will, das geschicht' ('God's will shall be done'). Doubts are banished in the fourth of the arias, scored for unison flutes and muted violin and providing the tenor with a vocal line that (at last!) is mellifluous and grateful to sing. Bach places the last verse of Heermann's chorale in a sumptuous orchestral setting scored for two flutes and two oboes d'amore in addition to the regular string ensemble, and a *corno da caccia* or *Zugtrompete* to double the soprano melody. The orchestra's persistent, lilting *siciliano* maintains its independence even when combined with the choral passages. It is the

same autonomous instrumentation that he uses in the opening movement, where it served to soften the admonitions of the chorale text. There you can feel the heartbeat of the music, as it were, as the scoring reduces to the paired flutes over a pulsating violin/viola unison accompaniment in units of four beats at a time. A mere fifty-two bars long, its mood of soul-searching prayer culminates in the consoling words ‘er wird gut alles machen und fördern deine Sachen, wie dir’s wird selig sein’ (‘He shall set all in order, and promote all your affairs, so that you may prosper’), and is immensely affecting.

BWV 187 **Es wartet alles auf dich** is one of the seven ‘Meinungen’-type cantatas Bach wrote between February and September 1726, so called because they are based on texts thought to have been written by Duke Ernst Ludwig of Saxe-Meiningen not later than 1704 and set to music at the time by his progressive-minded Kapellmeister, Georg Caspar Schürmann. By including so-called ‘madrigalian’ verse for recitatives and arias, preceded in each cantata by quotations from the Old Testament at the start of Part I, and from the New Testament to introduce Part II, Duke Ernst was anticipating the so-called ‘reform’ cantatas of Erdmann Neumeister by at least seven years. This particular cantata opens with a biblical quotation from Psalm 104, stressing the Lord’s providence in gratifying the hunger of His creatures and providing a link to the Gospel text, the feeding of the 4,000. It is a spacious, big-boned piece in G minor divided into three main sections. After a 27-bar *sinfonia* comes a ‘launch’ by the four choral voices in imitation – this in Bach’s favoured technique of choral insertion (‘Choreinbau’), where the motivic lead given by the instruments now extends to the chorus – and a 17-bar instrumental interlude that prepares for the fugal re-entry of the choir, 46 bars long. Finally there is a summary of the whole psalm verse for choir and orchestra combined. But that simplified schematic précis does not do justice to Bach’s skill in reconciling two opposed modes of composition, one associated with

concerto form and supplying the motivic reservoir that acts as a unifying device to the whole movement, the other text-related, ensuring that each of the individual choral passages is shaped in clearly audible speech rhythms ('dass du ihnen Speise gebest zu seiner Zeit' and later, as the fugue subject, 'wenn du ihnen gibest, so sammeln sie, wenn du deine Hand aufstust'). By varying the contributions of his orchestra, first in the foreground as prelude, now as a largely independent accompaniment to the choral insertions, now reduced to continuo alone for the important fugal proclamation of the second clause, now playing *colla parte*, Bach creates a riveting tableau in which the focus constantly shifts from orchestra to choir and back again. Finally he gives a condensed restatement of the whole text, reviewing and dovetailing all the thematic strands of the movement within a mere twelve bars.

Masterly.

All the subsequent movements are of a matching quality. An opening bass recitative celebrating God's bounty in nature (No.2) that could conceivably pass as a prototype for one from Haydn's *Creation* is followed by a harvest-time aria for alto and strings in 3/8 with a slightly Handelian melody and musical symbols of plenitude, fertility and ripeness (No.3). At the start of Part II a witty bass aria with violins (No.4) sets St Matthew's description of the disciples anxiously asking 'What shall we eat or what shall we drink'. This is met with the severe put-down, 'Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things', set by Bach in the same dactylic rhythm but implying a totally different delivery. Finally there is an intriguing soprano aria with obbligato oboe (No.5), opening with the grand gestures of a French overture with threes-against-fours, a ceremonial build-up leading you to expect not just a single soprano but a chorus at the very least, and with a quicker middle section where worries are banished in celebrating the 'many gifts of fatherly love'. From this pattern of ever-reducing instrumental forces for each successive aria – oboe with strings (No.3),

unison violins with continuo (No.4), oboe solo with continuo (No.5) – one might surmise that Bach is mirroring not just the succession of ideas prompted by the text, but a more subtle shift from the general to the particular. From this one can conclude with Alfred Dürr that the string accompaniment of the penultimate recitative (No.6) is there to serve as ‘a symbol of the security of the individual in God’s love and within the Christian community’. A stirring harmonisation in triple time of two verses of a hymn by Hans Vogel, ‘Singen mit Herzensgrund’ (1563), culminates with the ‘Gratias’, a harvest hymn of collective thanks for the fruits of agriculture. We can sympathise with Bach if all the care he had lavished on the music of this cantata were to disappear after only a couple of performances on 4 August 1726. Sure enough it reappears a decade later in his G minor *Missa* (BWV 235), where almost the entire Gloria is made up of the opening chorus and three of the cantata’s arias (Nos 3, 4 and 5) in parody form.

Having gone to the trouble of shifting our forces and paraphernalia to the east end of the church, it was not just the acoustics in Haddington that turned out to be so special, the sound bouncing off the back wall truly and without distortion. Shafts of early evening light slanting in through the northern windows, the huge copper beech shimmering in the wind just outside the big east window, and the intimacy of the enclosed space framed by these once-external walls – all contributed to the atmosphere and to the sense of occasion.

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From a journal written in the course of the  
Bach Cantata Pilgrimage