

Fear and Hope: Contemplating the *Parousia* in J. S. Bach's Sacred Cantatas

Medo e Esperança: Contemplando a *Parousia* nas Cantatas Sacras de J. S. Bach



Eduardo Solá Chagas Lima

Burman University, Lacombe, Alberta, Canada

eduardosola@burmanu.ca

Abstract: Despite extensive musicological writings on J. S. Bach's sacred cantatas, limited space is dedicated to their musical portrayal of the Christian doctrine of *parousia* (παρουσία)—Christ's return, or second coming. This study considers the *parousia* concept within the biblical New Testament and its particular significance for eighteenth-century German Lutheranism, contemplating its dichotomous fearful, and hopeful interpretations. It also explores its implications for the doctrinal notions of death, judgement, and salvation, among other correlated themes as they appear in Bach's cantatas BWV 70, 90, and 140. When analyzed in conjunction, these three cantatas collectively reflect Lutheranism's volatile and intricate sentiment toward Christ's second advent, along with its impact on the Christian's individual experience and spiritual life. This paper analyzes various renditions of these themes in the cantatas along with their rhetorical and musical rendering, thus distilling Bach's perspectives of Christ's second coming. The musical and literary emphases found in the combined product of libretto and musical clothing are revealed in situating the *parousia* in Bach's larger sacred oeuvre.

Keywords: parousia; second advent; second coming; Bach's sacred cantatas; eighteenth-century Lutheranism.

Resumo: A despeito de estudos musicológicos extensos sobre as cantatas sacras de J. S. Bach, pouco espaço é dedicado à sua representação musical da doutrina cristã da *parousia* (παρουσία) – o retorno de Cristo, ou segundo advento. Este estudo considera o conceito de *parousia* no

Novo Testamento bíblico e seu significado dentro do luteranismo alemão do século XVIII, contemplando suas interpretações dicotômicas de medo e esperança. O estudo também explora suas implicações para noções doutrinárias como morte, julgamento e salvação, entre outros temas correlatos, tais quais apresentados nas cantatas BWV 70, 90 e 140 de Bach. Quando analisadas em conjunto, essas três cantatas refletem coletivamente o sentimento volátil e complexo do luteranismo em relação ao segundo advento de Cristo, como também seu impacto sobre a experiência individual e vida espiritual do cristão. O artigo então analisa várias interpretações desses temas junto com sua interpretação retórica e musical nessas cantatas, destilando assim as perspectivas de Bach sobre a segunda vinda de Cristo. As ênfases musicais e literárias encontradas no produto que combina libreto e roupagem musical são reveladoras no que tange o situar da *parousia* em meio à obra compositiva sacra de Bach.

Palavras-chave: parusia; segundo advent; segunda vinda; cantatas sacras de Bach; luteranismo no século XVIII.

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1. Introduction

This article explores the biblical concept and doctrine of the *parousia*, or Christ's second coming¹, in eighteenth-century German Lutheranism. It considers the musical-rhetorical implications of this doctrine, discussing idiosyncratic aspects pertaining to the Lutheran expectation of Christ's second advent and how they inform the vocal work of Baroque composer Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). At the time of Bach's activity as a composer, Lutheran theological literature shows a dichotomy between coexisting yet antagonistic perspectives of the biblical *parousia*. This concomitance is especially visible in the late-Baroque Lutheran amalgamation between negative and positive interpretations of the *parousia* doctrine. These divergent attitudes – generally expressed as fear, hope, or hybrid variations of these emotional and psychological responses – appear in Lutheran literature and music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In recognizing this musical-semantic phenomenon, this article discusses significant instances of negative and positive responses to the *parousia* in Bach's oeuvre. It also analyzes how the composer treats these conflating interpretations with musical-rhetorical devices in the *musica poetica* and Baroque practices. Bach's personal disposition and sentiment toward the *parousia* doctrine, as evidenced in three of his sacred cantatas – BWV 70, 90, and 140 – helps illuminate this tradition in early Lutheranism and its specific conceptual renditions of the second advent in Western musical discourse.

2. The *Parousia* and Lutheran Interpretations

The Greek term *parousia* (παρουσία) means arrival or presence, appearing twenty-four times throughout the New

¹ This Greek term *parousia* is translated interchangeably throughout this paper as “coming” and “advent” – the most prominent translations in extant authoritative sources (BAUER, 2001, p. 780-781; DANKER, 2009, p. 273; THAYER, 2017, p. 490). These translations are compatible with scholarly theological and musicological understandings of the *parousia*. The term “second advent” may be illuminating applicable to Lutheranism, which denomination still celebrated the liturgical Advent season imported from early Christianity and the Roman Catholic tradition. The advent, in Lutheranism, points to the first coming of Christ, whereas the second advent points to his return. The synonym “return” is also employed occasionally.

Testament, seventeen of which relate specifically to Christ. Christian interpretations of the concept point to Christ's second advent (BAUER, 2001, p. 780-781; DANKER, 2009, p. 273; THAYER, 2017, p. 490) on earth as one of the crowning steps in his ministry to humanity. The alternative term *epiphaneia* (ἐπιφάνεια) is also used in reference to Christ's second advent, albeit fewer times. These, among other instances of the concept² in the messianic context, help constitute a pan-Christian doctrine of the second coming that has pervaded Christian thought for millennia. In addressing his disciples, the biblical Christ alludes to his second advent, stating, "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (KING James Bible, Matthew, ch. 24, v. 30). Christ also alludes to his return elsewhere, saying, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also," (KING James Bible, John, ch. 14, vv. 2-3); "surely I come quickly" (KING James Bible, Revelation, ch. 22, v. 20). From lapsarian fall to messianic redemption, the overarching scriptural narrative is, hence, single-focused: it finds in Christ's first advent, sacrifice, resurrection, ascension, and second advent the end of all evil and the promise of everlasting peace. The *parousia* crowns this story of salvation with the saviour's second coming, featuring a victorious Christ, now returning as "King of kings" (KING James Bible, Revelation, ch. 1, v. 5; ch. 17, v. 14; ch. 9, vv. 11-16).

In attempting an eighteenth-century Lutheran interpretation of this doctrine, however, it is fundamental to consider the *parousia* within the context of a multiplicity of last-day events. In Scripture, several interrelated eschatological events occur in succession at the end of times, following specific signs foretold prophetically

² See KING James Bible, Matthew, ch. 24; ch. 25; Luke, ch. 21, vv. 34-36; John, ch. 5, vv. 28-29; ch. 6, vv. 39-40; ch. 14, vv. 1-3; Acts, ch. 1, vv. 10-11; 1 Corinthians, ch. 4, v. 5; ch. 11, v. 26; Ephesians, ch. 4, v. 30; Philippians, ch. 1, v. 6; ch. 3, vv. 20-21; Colossians, ch. 3, v. 4; 1 Thessalonians, ch. 4, vv. 16-17; ch. 5, v. 2; 2 Thessalonians, ch. 2, v. 8; Titus, ch. 2, vv. 11-14; Hebrews, ch. 9, v. 28; ch. 10, vv. 24-25; James, ch. 5, v. 7; 1 Peter, ch. 4, v. 7; 2 Peter, ch. 3, vv. 8-10; 1 John, ch. 2, v. 28; ch. 3, vv. 2-3; Jude, vv. 14-15; Revelation ch. 1, vv. 7-8; ch. 3, v. 11; ch. 20, vv. 11-15; ch. 22, v. 12; ch. 22, v. 20.

(KING James Bible, Matthew, ch. 24). These texts, thus, point to the *parousia* as a period, rather than a single occasion. The interrelated eschatological events include, for example: (1) Christ's return to the world; (2) the resurrection of the dead; (3) the final judgement; (4) the arrival of the redeemed in heaven; and (5) Christ establishment of a heavenly kingdom, thus eradicating sin permanently. Various authors, Bible commentators, and denominations have interpreted these scriptural events differently and with multiple priorities and emphases.

The *parousia* is not a prominent, popular theme in the Lutheran tradition. However, it emerges in the Nicæan Creed (325) and the Apostles' Creed (c. 700), whose earliest version dates from the eighth century (KELLY, 1972, pp. 398–434). Both documents were retained in Lutheranism after the Reformation, playing a vital role in Lutheran liturgy. Martin Luther (1483-1546), in a sermon written for the second Sunday in Advent and first published in 1522 – “Christ's Second Coming: or the Signs of the Day of Judgment; and the Comforts Christians Have From Them” – synthesizes his perspective of the doctrine of the second advent (LUTHER, 1989, p. 61). Luther's use of “day of judgment” as an alternative term for Christ's return emphasizes the final reckoning or trial. He uses the same term several times throughout the sermon, noting, however, that the final judgement relates to a specific class of people. It does not concern Christian believers – those who died in the faith. Luther (*apud* PLASS, 1959, p. 697) writes:

The judgment is abolished; it concerns the believer as little as it does the angels. He will need no mediator on that Day, for the judgment is past. He does not need the saints as intercessors, nor does he fear purgatory. Unless Christ is a preacher of lies, it is certain that just as He does not fear judgment and does not fear that He might be judged, so we who believe shall not be judged. And, what is more, we shall then judge the world and all the

ungodly with Christ. All believers pass from this life into heaven without any judgment.

In equating the second advent to the “day of judgment”, Luther ascribes the *parousia* a tone of fearful expectation, implying that the occasion concerns the sinner rather than the saved. Arguably, nonetheless, a tone of confident expectation meets the saved believer, who is assured of Christ's grace in this passage.

Luther himself believed the second coming would take place within one hundred years into the future, around the time of Easter (PLASS, 1959, p. 696-697), despite the scriptural notion that Christ's return should be “like a thief” (KING James Bible, 2 Peter, ch. 3, v. 10; I Thessalonians, ch. 5, v. 2) and that “of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (KING James Bible, Matthew, ch. 24, v. 36). Christ adds that “as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming [*parousia*] of the Son of man be” (KING James Bible, Matthew, ch. 24, v. 37). Yet the Bible also alludes to warning signs indicative of the second advent's approaching. At the core of his 1522 sermon, Luther dwells extensively on the nature of these eschatological signs and attempts to trace parallels between the biblical narrative and his own time. He predicts the end will occur soon but not immediately (PLASS, 1959, p. 696-697). Hence, Lutheran theology develops a perspective in which the second coming and judgement lie somewhere in an undetermined future.

3. Parallels Between the *Parousia* and Death

In contrast, the concept of death – another prominent theme in Lutheran theology – lies in an imminent future, at an arm's length from the Christian. In Lutheranism, death is often associated with the scriptural *parousia* (KING James Bible, Matthew, ch. 24). From a phenomenological standpoint, the collection of events related to the second coming in Scripture lies, like death, in a

not-yet-experienced future. Despite the ontological distinction between the nature of these events, their anticipation in the early-Lutheran mind affords them shared qualia, likely stemming from the uncertainty regarding their time of occurrence and their dramatic implications for the Christian's life. Their main point of intersection, at least in the context of Lutheran doctrine, is that they convey the termination of one's earthly life and the beginning of a new one. Death and Christ's return signify to the Lutheran Christian a subsequent encounter with her/his saviour. In this respect, Christ's exceptional, triumphant, and unique return to the world is akin to the unexceptional, commonplace, and ordinary event of death – an inevitability of the human condition.

The analogous perspectives of death and the second advent in the eighteenth-century Lutheran mind involve phenomenological projections within a chronological continuum – particularly the phenomenological present and future. In loosely employing Edmund Husserl's (1964) theoretical notion of "living present" – a hybrid model of the phenomenological present – it is possible to differentiate between Lutheran dispositions toward significant events occurring in time and concerning the individual perceiver. Husserl's (1964) priority for the phenomenology of timebound elements also makes for an illuminating model in distinguishing between experiences of immediate and remote events. Husserl (1964) describes the living present as a thick phenomenological moment that incorporates more than the chronological millisecond generally associated with the true, precise, or actual present. It reaches to the recent past, in the form of retained information, and to the immediate future, in the form of projections and expectations³. Percepts beyond the living present are, therefore, experienced remotely rather than immediately, such as events taking place in a remote past or the distant future. Luther views the time for an eschatological judgement as taking place outside

³ In discussing individual experiences of time, Husserl (1964) uses the terms 'retention' and 'protention' for the sustaining of the recent past and the projection of the immediate future, respectively, as perceptual extensions within the living present.

the phenomenological living present, within one hundred years. The imminence of the judgement is, hence, deferred (Fig. 1).

Figure 1 – The projection of the judgement lies in a remote future.

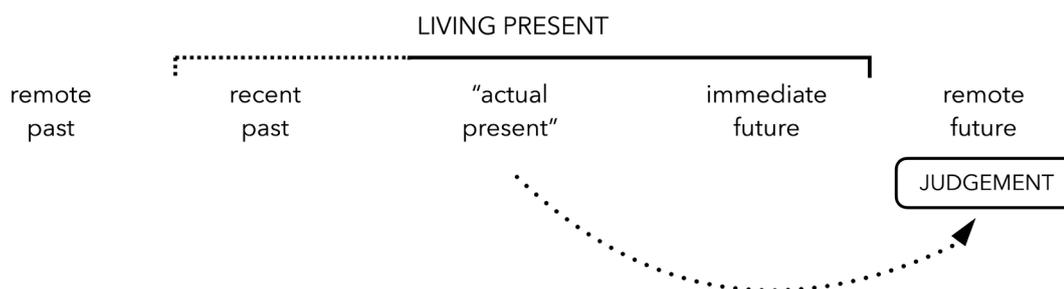


Image description: Phenomenological model.

As for death, Lutheranism constantly reminds the eighteenth-century believer of its imminence. The close association of impending death with the living present may explain the greater anxiety attached to that theme, whereas the *parousia* becomes a secondary reason for religious concern. In Luther's (*apud* PLASS, 1959, p. 364) words, "Sin has so completely drowned us in death that we are not sure of our life for one moment. We may truly say with the heathen that at birth man has nothing certain before him except death". In this sense, it is not surprising that death receives greater prominence in Lutheran literature and liturgy, appearing more often than the second coming in Bach's vocal works. Besides, Luther's prediction of Christ's coming as taking place around a century from the time of his writing had been proven inaccurate when Bach was active as a composer in the early eighteenth century. Pietist⁴ Lutheran pastor Johann Arndt (1555-1621) also draws attention to the fear of "the second and eternal death" (ARNDT, 1712, p. 276), which should follow the eschatological judgement. If the judgement is feared, it is indirectly feared, subsidiarily to death.

⁴ The pietist movement placed greater emphasis on the individual and on a personal relationship with the divine – especially with the entity of Christ. For further reading on Lutheran pietism and its influence on Baroque repertoire, see BROWN, 1978; ERB, 1983; HERL, 1964; IRWIN, 1985; 1993; ROSE, 2009; SCHALK, 2001.

At least at first glance, the Lutheran expectations of the events of death and the second coming are different projections of the future (Fig. 2). Yet, based in Luther's standpoint, the anticipation of the judgement is essentially a perceptual projection of a remote future.

Figure 2 – The projection of death is appropriated by the “living present” and the projection of the judgement is deferred to a remote future.

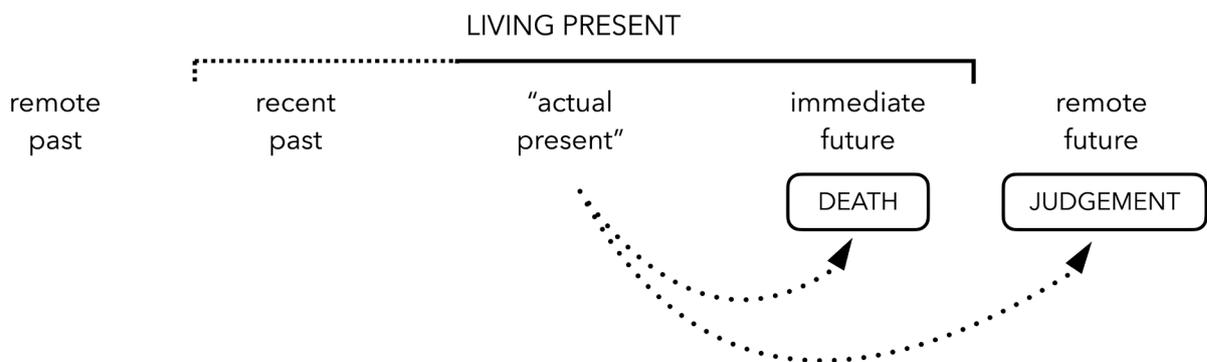


Image description: Phenomenological model.

Yet death is feared as the termination of life, also meaning the termination of one's opportunity to live effectively as a Christian. Death, thus, results in a potentially immediate encounter with the judgement. The fear of death has less to do with death itself than it has to do with death's permanent implications. In other words, although the fear of Christ's second coming seems subsidiary to death in Lutheran doctrine, these events are, in fact, concurrent. The immediacy of the judgement becomes contingent on the occasion of death. The constant expectation of imminent death implies a heightened consciousness of a judgement in a remote future. In this sense, both events are phenomenologically merged within a living present (Fig. 3).

Figure 3 – The projection of the judgement is contingent on the projection of death and, therefore, appropriated by the “living present”.

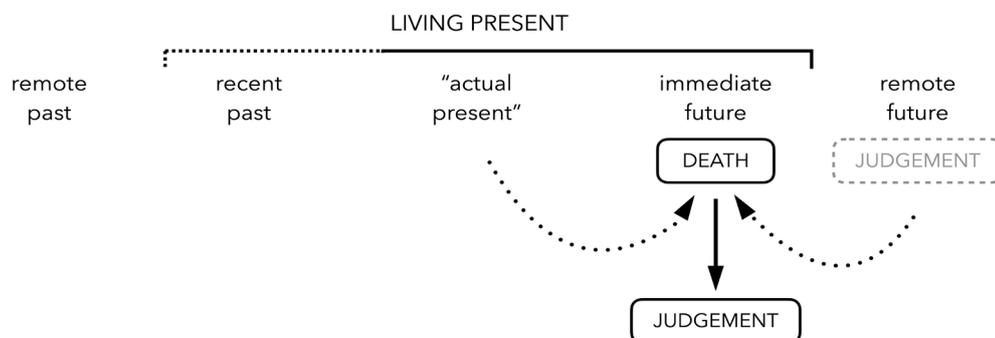


Image description: Phenomenological model.

The judgement becomes as imminent as death and, therefore, part of the Christian's projection of an impending future. Hence, the Lutheran concern and preparation to die 'in Christ' (not 'in sin') is plausible⁵.

4. The *Parousia* in Bach's Cantatas

The Lutheran liturgical calendar does not prominently feature the second coming or eschatological events and Bach reflects this approach in his sacred cantatas written for the church year. The Lutheran denomination inherited its liturgical feasts and celebrations from the Roman Catholic tradition – in which the second coming is also of lesser importance – only featuring slight reformational variations. Despite the rare occasions in which the theme appears, the only three days whose readings concern final events are the last three Sundays after Trinity: the 25th, 26th, and 27th Sundays. The lesser liturgical attention given to the topic attests to the secondary Lutheran concern with the New Testament *parousia* as a developed doctrine within the denomination. Besides,

⁵ The Lutheran understanding of the state of the soul immediately after death is also worth considering. Luther imports his views on this issue from the Roman Catholic tradition, when suggesting that the deceased's soul remains to some extent alive after the event of death. Other protestant denominations have, later in history, either concurred with this tradition, elaborated on it, or adopted alternative interpretations. Some Christians have considered death as a literal sleep in which the soul is not at all aware of its surroundings, but Luther is somewhat unclear about the intermediate state of the soul between the moment of death and the ultimate end of times, admitting that much remains a mystery; he indicates that the after-life state might be *like* a sleep (LUTHER *apud* PLASS, 1959, p. 385), as per Scriptures (KING James Bible, Mark, ch. 5, v. 39). Nonetheless, he also believes the soul *lives* before Christ, albeit in a passive life-like state, wherein “visions and conversations with the angels” (LUTHER *apud* PLASS, 1959, p. 385) take place. For Luther, the soul is neither strictly conscious nor unconscious.

the 27th Sunday after Trinity only appears in the liturgical calendar when Easter is relatively early. This happened only five times during Bach's life: in 1690, 1693, 1704, 1731, and 1742. The three cantatas he composed specifically for these Sundays are BWV 70, 90, and 140 – which this article explores in greater detail.

Das Jüngste Gericht ("The Last Judgement"), by Bach's predecessor Dietrich Buxtehude (c. 1637-1707), is an earlier example of this Germanic Lutheran tradition involving eschatological events. It is the longest German oratorio of the seventeenth century (SMITHER, 1977, p. 96) and its libretto focuses on the conflict between good and evil powers. The title suggests a negative connotation of the *parousia*. The libretti of cantatas BWV 70 and 90 conform with this tradition, conveying a generally negative perspective of end-time events. The very title of cantata BWV 90, for instance, "Es reiet euch ein schrecklich Ende", translates as "a terrible end shall sweep you away". The readings for the 25th and 26th Sundays after Trinity focus both on positive elements – such as doing good unto others (KING James Bible, Matthew, ch. 25, vv. 31-46), the resurrection of the saints, and eternal life (KING James Bible, I Thessalonians, ch. 4, vv. 13-18). Nonetheless, both cantatas highlight the themes of final doom, destruction, anguish, and turmoil. *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, BWV 140, is the only cantata composed specifically for the 27th after Trinity. Despite its subordinate liturgical and doctrinal salience in the liturgical calendar, this cantata stands out as an example of an alternative, positive interpretation to the default negative Lutheran approach to the *parousia*.

Bach further elaborates on these interpretations of the *Parousia* through various rhetorical devices and elements from the *musica poetica* tradition that are common in Baroque repertoire. The following sections explore Bach's musical treatment of the *parousia* in these three cantatas, thus reflecting the interpretive dichotomies embedded in the Lutheran tradition and his personal outlook.

4.1 Cantata BWV 70

Wachet! Betet! Betet! Wachet!, first performed in Leipzig (1723), features an adaptation of a libretto by Salomo Franck (1659-1725), which Bach utilized in an earlier cantata (BWV 70a, Weimar, 1716). The latter score, now lost, was composed for the second Sunday in Advent. The libretto is significantly enlarged in BWV 70 and comprises two extensive parts. Franck was a pupil of German librettist and Lutheran pastor Erdmann Neumeister and conveyed pietist ideals in the “lyrical and ecstatic sentiments of his text” (HERZ, 1946, p. 135). Franck is also known for the devotional nature of his libretti (STILLER, 1984, p. 184). The pietist emphasis of his writings illuminates religious connotations that are not necessarily prominent among the collection of Scripture readings for this liturgical event. The biblical text also states that the “day of the Lord” will be as “a thief” (KING James Bible, 2 Peter, ch. 3, vv. 3-13), elaborating on the dual narrative: the hope of salvation for the righteous and ultimate destruction for the ungodly. Another passage for this event in the liturgical calendar (KING James Bible, Matthew, ch. 25, vv. 31-46), points to the importance of good deeds unto others as if unto Jesus Himself. While giving preference to the fearful approach observed in the passage from the epistle of 2 Peter, the libretto overlooks the more optimistic themes and elements in the gospel of Matthew.

The text in the soprano aria “Laßt der Spötter Zungen schmähen” describes the expected moment of the *parousia*, stating “that we will see Jesus on the clouds, in the heights” (DÜRR, 1992, p. 643). The musical emphasis, however, lies in the contrast between the ephemerality of the physical, earthly world and the ever-standing character of God’s holy word (KING James Bible, Matthew, ch. 24, v. 35). In the Christian understanding, it is against this writ – “the law” – that humans are ultimately judged and the impious transgressor, potentially, damned. Modern literary critic Northrop Frye (1991, p. 14-15) connects this frequent emphasis on the literality of the written law as the “letter that kills”, to which St. Paul refers (KING James Bible, 2 Corinthians, ch. 3, v. 6), essentially suggesting the

frequent concern in Christendom with the negative implications of impiety as a direct consequence of law breakage.

In his employment of rhetorical figures, Bach draws upon a long-standing Baroque tradition – as observed rather consistently in Germany and France – but also makes substantial use of a much older practice, the Renaissance *musica poetica*. In this tradition, the lyrics' musical clothing emphasizes the text's general rather than specific meanings. The *musica poetica* practice also focuses on literal similarities between the text's semantics and the musical figure. In "Laßt der Spötter Zungen schmähen", Bach uses rapid melodic motifs in the upper string parts, predominantly in unison throughout the movement, which implies a rhetorical rendition of an ephemeral, crumbling world, in contrast to the firmness of "Christi Wort" ("Christ's word"). Bach emphasizes the idea of steadfastness in the soprano's sustained notes on "fest bestehen" ("stand firm"), in the aria's middle section (Fig. 4).

Figure 4 – BWV 70, mov. V, mm. 29-33.

The musical score for BWV 70, movement V, measures 29-33, is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 29-31) shows the soprano line with lyrics: "ste-hen, Chri-sti Wort muß fest be - ste - - - - - hen, Chri-sti Wort muß fest be -". The violin line features rapid melodic motifs, and the bass line has sustained notes. The second system (measures 32-33) shows the soprano line with lyrics: "ste - - - - - hen. Laßt der Spöt - ter Zun - gen". The violin line continues with rapid melodic motifs, and the bass line has sustained notes. The score is in G major and 3/4 time.

Source: Bach (1968, p. 107-148).
Image description: Musical example.

In contrast to this emphasis on the disillusionment of an ephemeral reality, the first movement of Part II, "Hebt euer Haupt empor", offers the only distinct and consistent allusions to hope in the entire cantata. The words "Lift up your heads and be of good cheer, you devout ones!" (DÜRR, 1992, p. 643) provide encouragement specifically to those who consider themselves saved but once more exclude the impious from prospective hope. Hence, this aria connects to the doctrinal emphasis of the cantata's Part I, namely, the importance of constant watchfulness, preparation, and prayer in the context of eschatological events. In the text of the opening chorus, the exhaustive repetition of the imperative "wachet" ("watch") and "betet" ("pray") attests to the Lutheran fundamental priority for continual preparation⁶ for death and, consequently, the immediacy of the hereafter. Watchfulness and prayer in the present are, thus, essential in escaping the judgement that awaits the soul in the future – whether at death or the *parousia*.

The instrumental parts in the two *accompagnato* recitatives (movements two and nine) serve a specific purpose within the overarching narrative of the cantata by rhetorically amplifying and dramatically reinforcing the tropes of calamity and destruction. The opening repeated sixteenth notes in the second movement, "Erschrekket, ihr verstockten Sünder" (Fig. 5), help to announce, "Tremble, you obstinate sinners!" (DÜRR, 1992, p. 643). There may be a dual emphasis in the rhetorical rendition of this text. Bartel (1997, p. 212) identifies this motif as the Baroque *bombus*, *bombi*, or *bombilans*, an ornament rather than a rhetorical figure. The translation of this Latin term – "bomb(s)", "bombarding" – aligns with Bach's evocation of calamity and ruin. This figure suggests a potential reference to the idea of destruction rather than a direct tone painting of the verb "erschrekket" ("tremble"). Alternatively, this motif may be identified as a *tremolo* ("shaking", "trembling") or

⁶ It is worth noting that the verbs *wachen* ("to watch") and *aufwachen* ("to wake up"), stemming from the same root, can be employed interchangeably in the context of ongoing preparation. The latter appears in its imperative form "*wachet auf*" in BWV 140, discussed below.

trillo (BARTEL 1997, p. 427-431), suggesting instead the literality of the rhetorical device as an instance of tone painting.

Figure 5 – BWV 70, mov. II, mm. 1-3.

2. *Recitativo*

The musical score shows the first three measures of the recitativo movement. The instruments listed are Tromba, Oboe, Violino I, Violino II, Viola, Basso, and Fagotto Continuo Organo (bez. Org.). The lyrics are: "Erschrek-ket, ihr ver-stock-ten Sün-der! Ein Tag bricht an, vor dem sich". The score includes various musical notations such as clefs, time signatures, and dynamic markings.

Source: Bach (1968, p. 107-148).
Image description: Musical example.

Similarly, the downward rapid scales in the upper string parts in "Ach, soll nicht dieser große Tag" may represent the destruction reserved for the last days (Fig. 6). This Baroque motif, or rhetorical figure, Bartel (1997, p. 215) identifies as *catabasis*. One bar later (m. 4), the trumpet proclaims the melody of "Es ist gewisslich an der Zeit" (ca. 1565) ("it is certainly time"), a *chorale* by German poet, hymn writer, and Lutheran pastor Bartholomäus Ringwaldt (1530-1599) whose text alludes to Christ's second advent to the earth. In this *chorale*, the thematic centrality of "Buch der Seligkeit" – or "book of bliss", as a poetic reference to the book of life – underscores doomsday's woes for those who, with the devil, will go to hell ("mit dem Satan müssen gehn von Christo in die Hölle").

Figure 6 – BWV 70, mov. X, m. 3-4.

The image shows a musical score for BWV 70, movement X, measures 3-4. The score is in G minor and 3/4 time. It features a vocal line with lyrics 'und der Po - sau - nen Schall,' and a basso continuo line with figured bass notation. The vocal line has a fermata over the first measure. The continuo line has a 'fall' marking and a '6 5 b' marking.

Source: Bach (1968, p. 107-148).
Image description: Musical example.

In the Lutheran tradition of corporate worship and active congregational participation, paraphrasing of co-thematic *chorale* (congregational hymns) becomes a powerful rhetorical tool. *Chorale* paraphrases are particularly effective in conveying the intended semantic connotations of libretti to the audience and Bach draws upon these familiar melodies often and extensively in his sacred works.

The bass aria “Seligster Erquikkungstag” holds the dramatic climax for the ambiguity between hope and fear. This recurring binary opposition of concepts demands likewise oppositional affects in the text’s musical rendition. The brief *Adagio* section that opens the movement, a glimpse onto the refreshment of salvation sung to a continuo accompaniment, is abruptly interrupted by a sudden, full-texture *accompagnato* with a *Presto* tempo indication and repeated sixteenth notes in block-like homophonic style (Fig. 6). The new text reads: “Schalle, knalle, letzter Schlag, Welt und Himmel, geht zu Trümmern!” (“sound, crack, last stroke! World and heaven, go to ruins!”) (DÜRR, 1992, p. 645), echoing Luther’s (*apud* PLASS, 1959, p. 700) words, “On the Last Day, there will be a great destruction. Then all elements will be reduced to ashes, and the

whole world will return to its original chaos. Then a new heaven and a new earth will be fashioned; and we shall be changed." The trumpet's interjections add to the trembling, frantic excitation. The *Adagio* section reappears, featuring another abrupt elision with a *Presto* section and reinforcing the ambiguity that pervades the cantata.

4.2 Cantata BWV 90

Es reißet euch ein schrecklich Ende, BWV 90, has a symmetric five-movement structure consisting of two tenor arias and a final *chorale* interpolated by two recitatives. The libretto is of anonymous authorship, except for the concluding *chorale*, which uses the seventh verse of Martin Moller's hymn "Nimm von uns, Herr, du treuer Gott" (1584). The text of the first movement elaborates on the trope of sin and its practitioners, thus conforming to Luther's default view on the last judgement as ultimately concerning the sinner. This diegetic emphasis on sin is noteworthy when in juxtaposition to the readings for the 25th Sunday after Trinity (KING James Bible, 1 Thessalonians, ch. 4, vv. 13-18; Matthew, ch. 24, vv. 15-28). These convey hopeful expectations and recall the need for preparation, respectively. The libretto and Bach's rendition prioritize several elements evoking a fearful affect. Thus, the materials of cantata BWV 90 avoid the optimism of the liturgical calendar readings in favour of the traditional Lutheran outlook.

The fast upward scales in the first violin part (Fig. 7) emphasize and highlight the first line of the text: "Es reifet euch ein schrecklich Ende, Ihr sündlichen Verächter, hin" ("A terrifying end sweeps you away, you sinful despisers!") (DÜRR, 1992, p. 637). The sixteenth-note vocal coloraturas on the word "reißet" ("sweeps") render the movement unsettling and help underscore a general feeling of instability – the anxiety that awaits the lost sinner amidst upending chaos. This upward musical motif is often associated with rising

and is termed interchangeably *anabasis* or *ascensus* in the Baroque tradition (BARTEL, 1997, p. 179-180, 207).

Figure 7 – BWV 90, mov. I, mm. 59-64.

59

- li - chen Ver - äch - ter, hin; es rei - - - - - ßet euch ein schreck - lich

Source: Bach (1968, p. 59-78).
Image description: Musical example.

This rhetorical figure often underscores the idea of divine ascension or resurrection⁷. Bach employs this motif in the form of tone painting and as a mimetic code loosely imitating the extra-musical, swift gesture of “sweeping”. Alternatively, Bartel (1997, p. 207) identifies the rhetorical figures *assimilatio* and *homoiosis* as Baroque motifs that often represent the text’s imagery in a literal manner. The author also uses the term *emphasis* (BARTEL, 1997, p. 253-255) – for rhetorical figures that emphasize the text in various ways – and *hypotyposis* (p. 307-310) – for particularly “vivid musical representations”.

The second bass aria, “So löschet im Eifer der rächende Richter”, depicts Jesus Christ as an avenging judge. This reference is once again noteworthy in juxtaposition to the Scripture reading for 25th Sunday, which does not allude to Christ as a judge⁸. The ascending arpeggio motif, anapestic rhythms, and the addition

7 This rapid upward scalar motion may be identified as a tirata (BARTEL, 1997, p. 409-412), although its broad scope of employment in the Baroque does not necessarily point to the textual idea this figure emphasizes in this aria.

8 This symbol appears later in the book of Matthew, however. Christ’s role as a judge is portrayed in several different contexts in the gospel of Matthew (KING James Bible, Matthew, ch. 24, vv. 36-44; ch. 25, vv. 1-13). Matthew 25:14-30 expounds on the unpredictability of the Lord’s coming and Matthew 25:31-46 encompasses the parable of the separation between sheep and goats, and doing good unto others.

of the trumpet as an *obligato* instrument, imparts a military character – perhaps to underscore the theme in the libretto: an absolute ruling authority comes to judge the world. Alfred Dürr (1992, p. 638) suggests a thematic priority in BWV 90's libretto for the concept of “abomination of desolation”, which will lead the human race into temptation before the Last Day”. Exegetically, the “abomination of desolation” mentioned in Matthew (KING James Bible, Matthew, ch. 24, v. 15), though indirectly alluded to in this aria – “Greuel” (“abomination”) – is generally interpreted by theology scholars as a reference to the profanity of a destructive power (KING James Bible, Daniel, ch. 9, v. 27; ch. 11, v. 31; ch. 12, v. 11) with prophetic implications rather than to temptations facing humans⁹ (DAVIES; ALLISON, 2004, p. 345). Furthermore, the full compound term “Greuel der Verwüstung” (“abomination of desolation”), as it appears in the Luther Bible of 1545 (KING James Bible, Matthew, ch. 24, v. 15; LUTHERBIBEL, Matthaeus, ch. 24, v. 15), and which Dürr (1992) may be referencing in his commentary, is absent from the cantata's text.

The last two lines of the text, as translated in Dürr's (1992, p. 638) commentary – “grant us a blessed hour of death so that we are with You forever” – imply that the ultimate fate of humans is contingent on optimal Christian standing at the moment of death. In the closing chorale, Bach's use of a deceptive cadence on the D-flat major harmony (bVI/III) – instead of the expected relative major harmony of F major (III) – on the last syllable of the word “Stündelein” (“last hour” or, quite literally, “hour of death”) is a significant rhetorical gesture (Fig. 8, m. 10).

⁹ More specifically, the reference to the term in the gospel of Matthew may refer to the worship of pagan deities in the book of Daniel, such as the image of the Olympian Zeus (DAVIES; ALLISON, 2004, p. 345).

Figure 8 – BWV 90, mov. V, mm. 9-12.

leih ein sel - ges Stün - de - lein, auf daß wir e - nig bei dir sein!

leih ein sel - ges Stün - de - lein, auf daß wir e - nig bei dir sein!

leih ein sel - ges Stün - de - lein, auf daß wir e - nig bei dir sein!

leih ein sel - ges Stün - de - lein, auf daß wir e - nig bei dir sein!

Source: Bach (1968, p. 59-78).

Image description: Musical example.

The Picardy third on the words “[bei dir] sein” (Fig. 8, m. 12) provides a relatively bright conclusion to the cantata. The two consecutive cadences – in D-flat major and D major, respectively – are distant by a semitone and only viable in the likewise warmer context of a tonicized F major (Fig. 8, mm. 9-10). The idea of being with Christ (“bei dir sein!”) at the hour of death is sweetened by the closing Picardy, virtually replacing the bleak anticipation of the judgement with a peaceful hope.

4.3 Cantata BWV 140

First performed in 1731, Cantata BWV 140 is a distinct alternative in diegetic emphasis. Its libretto is predominantly based on one of the readings for the 27th Sunday (KING James Bible, Matthew, ch. 25, vv. 1-13) – the parable of the ten virgins¹⁰. This account is one of the most vivid biblical allegories of the *parousia*. It compares the second coming of Christ to the bridegroom’s arrival at the marriage celebration, describing the attitude of ten virgins who are expected to watchfully preside the bridegroom’s coming. In addressing his disciples, Christ concludes the parable by accentuating the

¹⁰ The allegory references the Hebraic ceremonial tradition involving young women watching for the bridegroom at night, waiting for his arrival at the wedding feast. They must hold and maintain burning oil lamps throughout their vigil but fall into slumber when the bridegroom delays. The “wise” virgins, who are prepared and have brought extra oil for their lamps, are able to provide light and ultimately go into the marriage feast with the bridegroom. In turn, the five “foolish” virgins who lack the extra oil to maintain their lamps aglow are not admitted into the celebration.

importance of watchful preparation, saying, "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (KING James Bible, Matthew, ch. 25, v. 13). The disposition of five virgins upon waking from their slumber is then juxtaposed and contrasted to that of the other five. Thus, the parable carries an intrinsic dualism that characterizes the dichotomous outcomes following the *parousia*. In other words, it has the potential for positive and negative emphases on the part of the libretto and musical setting.

The cantata's text generally revolves around the theme of preparation and vigilance. The Christian should watch and prepare for that final day of reckoning just as the virgins should prepare to receive the bridegroom on the wedding night. Considering the multiplicity of eschatological events involved in Christ's *parousia*, the libretto prioritizes the elation and mirth associated with the marital union – in this context, a joyfully anticipated occasion. The "day of judgment" characteristic of Luther's interpretation of the *parousia* does not appear in the narrative's foreground. If it is implicit in the cantata's text, the optimistic approach overshadows its negative connotations. The emotional state of anticipation – rather than apprehension – is the generative source of diegetic tension. In a sense, this cantata is for the *saved* Christian¹¹.

The chiasmic structure of "Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme" consists of seven movements (Fig. 9). The first, middle, and last movements are based on Philipp Nicolai's (1556-1608) hymn of the same title (1599), whereas two arias and recitatives are anonymous poetic settings. The analysis that follows focuses on the dramatic core of the cantata, which comprises the moment of marriage, namely, movements three, four, and six (Fig. 9).

¹¹ The Lutheran pessimism attached to the *parousia* is not absent from interpretations of this text, however. In two Festival sermons specifically on Matthew 25 (published between 1527 and 1533), Luther introduces the recurrently favoured trope of impending death (LUTHER, 1995, p. 16-29, 197-208). He does so upon analyzing the implications in the parable of the ten virgins. Luther begins by discussing watchfulness and preparation in both sermons but soon deviates from that topic. Under the subheading "Summary of the Gospel" preceding the sermon, Luther (1995, p. 198) states, "From this parable we see that death arrives when we least expect it. Then the hypocrite will first see that everything he values counts as nothing and is without oil. Lacking the oil, he will not be able to find it then". Here Luther equates the anticipation of the second coming to the expectation of death, thus reinforcing the connection between these themes. Meeting Christ upon his coming is, again, contingent upon the state of the Christian at the time of death.

These three movements elaborate on the anticipation of the bridegroom's arrival, the moment of arrival, and his union with the bride, respectively.

Figure 9 – Overview of the structure in cantata BWV 140. Dramatic core in bold.

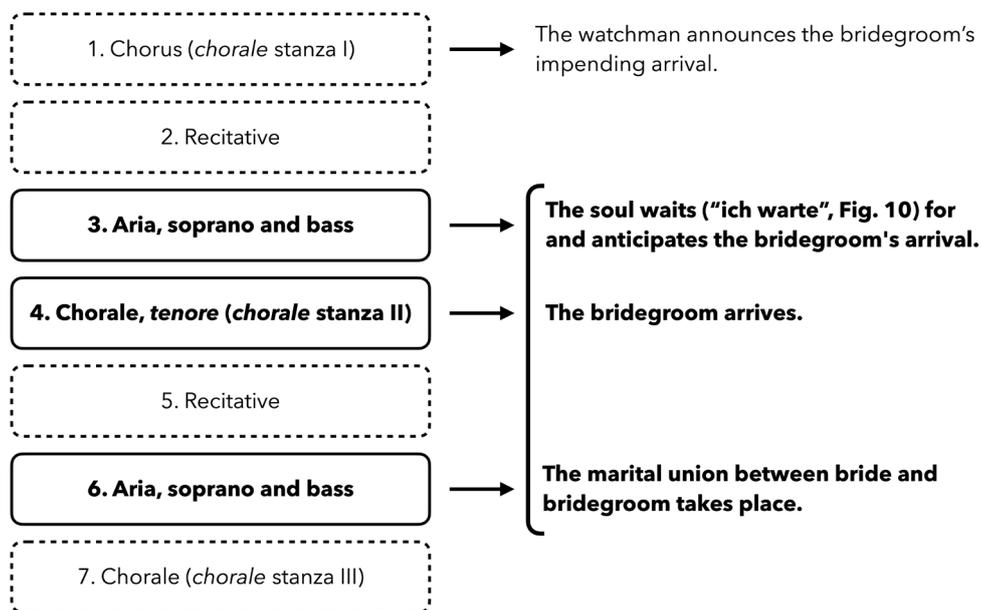


Image description: Structural diagram.

The first aria, "Wann kommst du, mein Heil?", a duet for soprano and bass, depicts the intimacy of matrimony and of the relationship between spouses. It is a dialogue between Christ and the believer. Bach uses sustained notes again in the *musica poetica* tradition, as in BWV 70, on the verb "warte" ("I wait") in the soprano part to convey the idea of expectation and anticipation – thus suggesting that the bridegroom has not yet come. The bass, Christ, responds repeatedly: "ich komme" ("I come" or "I am coming") (Fig. 10). The grammatical tense points to the temporal quality of the union as the phenomenological present at the same time as the idea of waiting implies the future. Here, the *parousia* is both imminent and future.

Figure 10 – BWV 140, mov. III, mm. 24-27.

The musical score for BWV 140, movement III, measures 24-27, is presented in a three-staff format. The top staff is the vocal line, the middle staff is the basso continuo line, and the bottom staff is the basso continuo line. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. The lyrics are: 'war - ich kom - me, ich kom - me, dein Teil, ich kom - me, dein Teil, ich bren - nen - dem Ö - le, mit tr Teil, ich kom - me, dein Teil, ich'. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and ornaments.

Source: Bach (1968, p. 149-191).
Image description: Musical example.

The text in the middle section joyfully invites, “Throw open the hall for the heavenly banquet!” (HERZ, 1972, p. 128), signalling the festivities that celebrate the marital union.

The text in the central *chorale* (stanza II), “Zion hört die Wächter singen”, concerns the bridegroom’s arrival, depicting the moment he encounters his bride. Bach’s direction on the score indicates *tenore* (the Italian singular “tenor”), although the text points to the implicit choral quality of the first line of the text, “Zion hears the watchmen singing”¹² (HERZ, 1972, p. 138). Herz (1972, p. 135, 138) also justifies the choral performance of this movement considering the *cantus firmus* nature of the vocal line. Moreover, the plurality of tenor voices counterbalances the joint forces of violin I, violin 2, and violas in unison, as indicated in the score. Several terms

¹² Herz (1972, p. 138) also advocates for the *cantus-firmus* character of the *chorale* melody, making a case for the use of several tenor voices, instead of one, in the performance of this movement. Various ensembles belonging to the historically informed performance movement have, notwithstanding this score indication, employed a single tenor in the performance of this area.

point to a semantic positivity – “joy”, “springing heart”, “wakes”, “rises”, “resplendent”, “light shines bright”, “Hosanna!” – assigning a jubilant connotation to the second coming.

The second aria “Mein Freund ist mein!” (Fig. 11), a duet for soprano and bass in *bourrée* style¹³, also features a dialogue between the soul and Christ. The dialogue is personal and intimate, perhaps sensualized – the recurring elements of intimacy, love, and eroticism are central to the cantata’s libretto. This stems from various symbols of erotic intimacy in the biblical narrative of the *Canticum Canticorum* (KING James Bible, Song of Solomon, ch. 2, v. 16; ch. 6, v. 3), frequently interpreted in Christianity as an allegory of the binding union between Christ and his Church¹⁴ or between Christ and the individual Christian. Here, the expected future becomes the phenomenological living present: “my friend is mine” (emphasis added).

Figure 11 – BWV 140, mov. VI, mm. 1-4.

6. Aria Duetto

Oboe solo

Soprano

Basso

Fagotto
Continuo
Organo (bez. Org.)

Source: Bach (1968, p. 149-191).

Image description: Musical example.

¹³ The *bourrée*, a fast-paced dance in duple meter, consistently emerges in Bach's instrumental and vocal works (LITTLE; JENNE, 2001). When it is employed in sacred and secular vocal works, it can be interpreted as a rhetorical device highlighting the affect of joy. For a complete appraisal of Bach's movements featuring the *bourrée* style, see the comprehensive lists in LITTLE; JENNE, 2001. The authors provide a catalog of movements in Bach's oeuvre written in Baroque dance styles.

¹⁴ Scripture compares the church to a wife and Christ to her husband, in addressing issues of submission and reverence (KING James Bible, Ephesians, ch. 5, vv. 22-33). This relationship is often interpreted as representing the union between Christ and the totality of humanity, for whom, in the biblical narrative, he sacrificed himself. In this sense, the vicarious atonement of Christ restores an intimate relationship between the human and the divine. This passage in the book of Ephesians also uses the 'head' as a symbol of Christ and the 'body' as a symbol of the church.

The intimacy of this dialogical engagement also suggests traits of pietist influence and its focus on a personalized and individuated relationship with Christ. In his personal library, Bach had pietist works influenced by Johann Arndt (HERZ, 1946, p. 133), a Lutheran theologian and forerunner of pietism who makes recurrent parallels between matrimony and the spiritual union of Christ and the soul. Arndt (1712, p. 137) says in his four-volume *True Christianity* (first published in German between 1605-1610), "I will betroth thee unto me forever; I will even betroth thee to me in faithfulness", stressing the union between the human and the divine (p. 206):

Even as the Person of Christ is indivisible, and as the eternal Deity united the human nature in Christ Jesus with itself in so firm a bond, as is not to be dissolved by death itself... Penitent and believing souls are so closely and intimately united to God, that neither life nor death can separate them from him... God betrothing us unto himself forever.

The conjugal union is beyond chronological time in that it is both phenomenologically present and future – the ongoing consummation of the marital pact transcends the constraints of earthly life. Arndt also states, "The consequence of this espousal, is a communication of all good things, yea, and of the cross itself, so that all that Christ has, belongs to the soul, and all that the soul has, belongs to Christ" (ARNDT, 1712, p. 385). In "Mein Freund ist mein!", the culmination of the cantata's dramatic core, Bach uses an operatic love duet and Baroque dance elements to highlight an ultimate union – the personal and individuated focal point of pietist Lutheranism.

5. Final Thoughts

The *parousia* (παρουσία) – an original Greek term in scriptural narrative denoting a cluster of interrelated eschatological events – is not a prominent theme in early Lutheran interpretations. When it appears, it is ascribed a subsidiary role to the possibility of death

and, consequently, cast in a negative perspective. Unsurprisingly, fearful emotions are the predominant interpretations in denominational writings and pervade liturgical priorities, including scriptural readings for the church calendar. Bach highlights these negative affections in his church cantatas BWV 70 and 90 – two of the three such works he composed for liturgical events related to the *parousia*. He does so through various rhetorical devices, such as Baroque conventions and the long-standing *musica poetica* practice. Cantata BWV 140 presents an alternative to this default emphasis – a potential influence of the rising pietist movement in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Lutheranism. In this cantata, Bach underscores instead the sentiments of hope, elation, and joy, which are evident in the libretto's text as well as his musical setting.

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