

## BWV 94 Was frag ich nach der Welt Cantata for the ninth Sunday after Trinity

*(Italics indicate text from original chorale)*

### 1. Coro SATB Flauto traverso, Oboe I/II, Violino I/II, Viola, Continuo

<p><i>Was frag ich nach der Welt Und allen ihren Schätzen Wenn ich mich nur an dir, Mein Jesu, kann ergötzen! Dich hab ich einzig mir Zur Wollust fůrgestellt, Du, du bist meine Ruh: Was frag ich nach der Welt!</i></p>	<p><i>What care I for the world and all its treasures when it is only in you, my Jesus, that I can delight! In you alone I look to find pleasure You, you are my peace. What care I for the world!</i></p>
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Chorale v1

### 2 Aria Bass Continuo

<p><i>Die Welt ist wie ein Rauch und Schatten Der bald verschwindet und vergeht, Weil sie nur kurze Zeit besteht. Wenn aber alles fällt und bricht, Bleibt Jesus meine Zuversicht, An dem sich meine Seele hält. Darum: was frag ich nach der Welt!</i></p>	<p><i>The world is like smoke or shadows that soon vanish and are gone since for only a short time do they last. But when everything falls and breaks, Jesus remains my confidence To whom my soul holds fast. Therefore: what care I for the world!</i></p>
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Chorale v2  
paraphrase

### 3 Chorale e Recitativo Tenor Oboe 1-2, Continuo

<p><i>Die Welt sucht Ehr und Ruhm Bei hocherhabnen Leuten. Ein Stolzer baut die prächtigsten Paläste, Er sucht das höchste Ehrenamt, Er kleidet sich aufs beste In Purpur, Gold, in Silber, Seid und Samt. Sein Name soll für allen In jedem Teil der Welt erschallen. Sein Hochmuts-Turm Soll durch die Luft bis an die Wolken dringen, Er trachtet nur nach hohen Dingen <i>Und denkt nicht einmal dran, Wie bald doch diese gleiten.</i> Oft bläset eine schale Luft Den stolzen Leib auf einmal in die Gruft, Und da verschwindet alle Pracht, Wormit der arme Erdenwurm Hier in der Welt so grossen Staat gemacht. Acht! solcher eitler Tand Wird weit von mir aus meiner Brust verbannt. Dies aber, was mein Herz Vor anderm rühmlich hält, Was Christen wahren Ruhm und rechte Ehre gibet,</i></p> <p>Und was mein Geist, Der sich der Eitelkeit entreißt, Anstatt der Pracht und Hoffart liebet, Ist Jesus nur allein, Und dieser solls auch ewig sein. Gesetzt, dass mich die Welt Darum vor töricht hält: <i>Was frag ich nach der Welt!</i></p>	<p><i>The world seeks honor and glory among people of high rank. A proud man builds a splendid palace, he seeks the highest post of honor, he dresses himself in his best, In purple, gold, in silver, silk and velvet. His name must resound to everyone in every part of the world. His tower of arrogance must press up through the air into the clouds. He concerns himself only with high matters <i>and not once does he consider how quickly these things slip away.</i> Often, in a single moment, a stale air blows the proud body into the tomb, and then all the splendor vanishes which this poor earthworm here in the world held in such great estate. Ah ! Such vain trifles are far away, banished from my heart. Instead, that which my heart holds glorious before all else, that which gives Christians true fame and righteous honor, and which my spirit— tearing itself away from such vanity— instead of splendor and arrogance loves Jesus alone, And this shall be forever. However foolish the world may consider me— <i>What care I for the world!</i></i></p>
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Chorale v3  
with tropes

Luke 16:19–  
25 Rich man  
Lazarus

Gen 11:4–9:  
Tower of  
Babel

**4 Aria Alto Flauto traverso, Continuo**

Betörte Welt, betörte Welt!  
 Auch dein Reichtum, Gut und Geld  
 Ist Betrug und falscher Schein.  
 Du magst den eitlen Mammon zählen,  
 Ich will davor mir Jesum wählen;  
 Jesus, Jesus soll allein  
 Meiner Seele Reichtum sein.  
 Betörte Welt, betörte Welt!

Deluded world, deluded world!  
 Your riches, wealth and gold  
 are all deceit and false appearance.  
 You may count on vain Mammon,  
 But I choose my Jesus.  
 Jesus, Jesus alone, shall be  
 the wealth of my soul.  
 Deluded world, deluded world!

Chorale v4  
 paraphrase

**5 Chorale e Recitativo Bass Continuo**

*Die Welt bekümmert sich.*  
 Was muss doch wohl der Kummer sein?  
 O Torheit! dieses macht ihr Pein:  
*Im Fall sie wird verachtet.*  
 Welt, schäme dich!  
 Gott hat dich ja so sehr geliebet,  
 Dass er sein eingebornes Kind  
 Vor deine Sünd zur größten Schmach  
 um dein Ehre gibet,  
 Und du willst nicht um Jesu willen leiden?  
 Die Traurigkeit der Welt ist niemals größer,  
*Als wenn man ihr mit List*  
*Nach ihren Ehren trachtet.*  
 Es ist ja besser,  
*Ich trage Christi Schmach,*  
*Solang es ihm gefällt.*  
 Es ist ja nur ein Leiden dieser Zeit,  
 Ich weiß gewiss, dass mich die Ewigkeit  
 Dafür mit Preis und Ehren krönet;  
 Ob mich die Welt Verspottet und verhöhnet,  
 Ob sie mich gleich verächtlich hält,  
*Wenn mich mein Jesus ehrt:*  
*Was frag ich nach der Welt!*

*The world is troubled.*  
 But what must this trouble be?  
 O Folly! Here is what causes its pain:  
*The possibility of being scorned.*  
 World, shame on you!  
 God has so loved you  
 that he his only begotten son—  
 for your sin—and in great humiliation—  
 given for your honor.  
 And you would not suffer for Jesus?  
 The sorrow of the world is never greater  
*than when one with cunning*  
*strives for its honors.*  
 It is much better that  
*I carry Christ's humiliation*  
*so long as it pleases him.*  
 It is only a suffering for this time.  
 I know for certain that eternity  
 will crown me with glory and honor.  
 Though the world mocks and despises me,  
 though it treats me with contempt,  
*when my Jesus honors me—*  
*What care I for the world!*

Chorale v5  
 with tropes

**6 Aria Tenor Violino I/II, Viola, Continuo**

*Die Welt kann ihre Lust und Freud,*  
 Das Blendwerk schnöder Eitelkeit,  
*Nicht hoch genug erhöhen.*  
 Sie wühlt, nur gelben Kot zu finden,  
 Gleich einem Maulwurf in den Gründen  
 Und lässt dafür den Himmel stehen.

*The world's pleasure and joy,*  
 its delusion, its base conceit  
*can never be raised high enough.*  
 It burrows only to find yellow filth,  
 like a mole in the ground,  
 and lets heaven stand (unheeded).

Chorale v6  
 paraphrase

**7 Aria Soprano Oboe d'amore solo, Continuo**

Es halt es mit der blinden Welt,  
 Wer nichts auf seine Seele hält,  
 Mir ekelt vor der Erden.  
 Ich will nur meinen Jesum lieben  
 Und mich in Buß und Glauben üben,  
 So kann ich reich und selig werden.

He who holds fast to the blind world  
 Is someone who cares nothing for his soul.  
 Myself, I feel disgust for this earth.  
 I will love only my Jesus  
 and exercise penance and faith,  
 so I can become truly abundance and blessed.

Chorale v6  
 paraphrase

**8 Chorale**

*Was frag ich nach der Welt!*  
*Im Hui muss sie verschwinden,*  
*Ihr Ansehn kann durchaus*  
*Den blassen Tod nicht binden.*  
*Die Güter müssen fort,*  
*Und alle Lust verfällt;*

*What care I for the world!*  
*In a flash it must vanish.*  
*Its appearance can in no way*  
*Tie down pale death.*  
*Its wealth must pass away*  
*and all its pleasures decay.*

Chorale v 7

*Bleibt Jesus nur bei mir:  
Was frag ich nach der Welt!*

*Only Jesus stays with me,  
What care I for the world!*

*Was frag ich nach der Welt!  
Mein Jesus ist mein Leben,  
Mein Schatz, mein Eigentum,  
Dem ich mich ganz ergeben,  
Mein ganzes Himmelreich,  
Und was mir sonst gefällt.  
Drum sag ich noch einmal:  
Was frag ich nach der Welt!*

*What care I for the world!  
My Jesus is my life,  
my treasure, my possession,  
to whom I completely surrender  
my entire heavenly kingdom  
and whatever else pleases me.  
Therefore I say yet again:  
What care I for the world!*

Chorale v8

### Conductor's notes © 2013 Ellen Frye

BWV 94 *Was frag ich nach der Welt*, a chorale cantata for the ninth Sunday after Trinity, was first performed on August 6, 1724, during Bach's second annual cycle of Leipzig cantatas. The chorale tune is *O Gott du Frommer Gott* (1679). The anonymous libretto is based on the Balthasar Kindemann's eight-verse hymn with verses 1, 3, 4, 7 and 8 intact and the other verses paraphrased. The message of the cantata is that the Faithful must reject the world and instead choose Christ.

In the period between July 23 and November 19, 1724, Bach composed 17 cantatas with extensive and exquisite flute parts. It seems likely that a visiting virtuoso inspired Bach's outpouring. Robert Marshall suggests that the E Minor Sonata for flute and harpsichord, for which no date of composition has been determined, may also have been composed for this flutist.

BWV 94 is second in the series of cantatas with challenging flute parts. The unaccompanied flute leads off the opening chorale fantasy with a dazzling ascending theme. When the strings and doubling oboes join in, it sounds as if a flute concerto might be beginning. The instruments continue their thematic interplay independently throughout the chorale—as if the Faithful were calling out their challenge to the world while surrounded by its wondrous distractions. The early flute theme



appears only 5 times: twice each in the opening and closing ritornellos and once between lines 2 and 3 of the chorale—where the Faithful sing “*it is only in you, my Jesus, that I can delight!*” If one wanted to assign a metaphor to this rising theme, one could say, as Whittaker does, that it represents “the transitory nature of the world.” One might equally hear it as Christ soaring above, pointing the way to heaven.

The flute reappears in the fourth movement, the *adagio* aria for alto and continuo with flute obbligato. Alfred Dürr hears a “bitter beauty” in this aria and remarks that the frequent diminished and augmented intervals characterize the “false appearances” of the world. Although the alto sings variants of the flute themes, the two move independently of each other until the middle section where music moves into an *allegro* as the Faithful choose Jesus over mammon. Here flute, voice, and continuo proceed first in canon, then in sixths (the flute's 32<sup>nd</sup> notes in parallel with the alto's 16<sup>th</sup> notes). At the end of the B section (which has returned to the *adagio* tempo), all three instruments finally come together at octaves. The aria ends with a condensed *da capo*: the world with its bitter beauty is no longer a distraction.

On either side of this aria are movements that contain an intact verse of the chorale sung to a much decorated chorale melody that is interrupted by textual tropes scored as recitatives. In #3, Bach fits the chorale lines into a delightful oboe duet and sets the long and preachy tropes as angular recitatives punctuated with harsh chords. A wonderful piece of word painting occurs when he takes the gently flowing opening theme of the oboes, transforms it into a harsh wind that blows the proud body into the tomb, and then into a gentler breeze blowing away the trifles of the world.

m 1	m 43	m 49
		
Oboe theme derived from chorale	Lowering flats: The wind blows the proud body into the tomb	Raising sharps: the wind blows away the trifles of the world

In #5, on the other side of the aria, descending and ascending chromatic figures in the continuo accompany the decorated chorale lines. Here Bach evokes the Passion, and the recitative text quotes John 3:16 (“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son...”). Bach’s ominous chromaticism vividly reminds the Faithful that in order to follow Christ, they must embrace their suffering—in the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “drink the earthly cup to the lees.” The text emphasizes that the reward for suffering is the crowning glory of eternity, but Bach’s chromatic struggle takes the Faithful through modulation after modulation before finally cadencing in D major, the home key. So the Faithful return to life as it is on earth, but they are renewed with a deeper understanding of redemption.

There are three other arias in this cantata. In the bass aria (#2), the continuo’s *ostinato*-like line with falling motifs and ascending scales is a wonderful metaphor for the world being like smoke that vanishes. The tenor aria (#6) is a gigue-like dance for string orchestra in which the strings alternate buoyancy with growling, while the text scorns the blind world for seeking pleasure while burrowing in filth. In the final aria (#7), a haunting oboe d’amour accompanies the promise to practice faith and repentance.

The closing chorale is set plainly; the Faithful reprise the vanities of the world and pledge their lives to Jesus.

### Tonality

Eric Chafe\* places this cantata into a descent-ascent-descent framework. This table summarizes his analysis of the tonal allegories in BWV 94.

	Descent by 3 <sup>rd</sup> s away from tonic			Ascent to tonic	Descent by 3 <sup>rd</sup> s to tonic			
Key/ #s	1. D+	2. B-	3. G+	4. E-	5. D+	6. A+	7. F#-	8. D+
###						Aria T, strings	Aria S, oboe d’amour	
##	Chorus SATB, full orchestra	Aria B, continuo			Chorale/recit B, continuo			Chorale SATB, full orchestra
#			Chorale/ recit T, 2 oboes, continuo	Aria A, flute, continuo				
Tonal allegory	Full splendor of the earth	Descending arpeggios in continuo correlate with fallen character of earth	Recits move through modulations, chorale remains in tonic	A section, (minor with dissonances) is theological antithesis of B section (major and diatonic)	Return to D+ through modulations represents deeper understanding of world redeemed by Jesus’ sacrifice	World’s image: splendor and tribulations	Final warning against the dangers of the world	Eternity promised for those who follow Christ

\* *Tonal Allegory*, 179–181

Chafe believes that, in setting the cantata in all 6 keys of the *ambitus* of D major, Bach intended to present a comprehensive view of all facets of the world. He points to one conundrum: In most cantatas, Bach assigns the highest tonal point to a movement associated with faith and salvation. In #6 the text focuses on the most negative aspects of earth: “like a mole, the world burrows in the ground finding only yellow filth while leaving heaven unheeded.” Chafe suggests that in setting the dire text to dance music in A major, Bach may be representing a parallel dialectical relationship between the two sides of the world: its splendor and its tribulations. I think that this interpretation fits well with the message of redemption in #5 (chorale/recitative), that the Faithful must embrace the world—all of it—in order to bring a crucified and risen Christ into the center of this life on earth.

### Lessons for the day

The relationship of this cantata with the lessons for the day is not clear to me. The passage from I Corinthians fits well enough with the libretto, but the parable of the unjust steward puzzles me (as it has puzzled theologians). Is it possible that this strange parable stands in for the complexities of the earthly struggle?

### Luke 16:1-9 KJV

#### *The Parable of the Unjust Steward*

16 He also said to His disciples: “There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. 2 So he called him and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.’

3 “Then the steward said within himself, ‘What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. 4 I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.’

5 “So he called every one of his master’s debtors to him, and said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ 6 And he said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ So he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ 7 Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ So he said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ And he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’ 8 So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

9 “And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.

### 1 Corinthians 10:6-13 (KJV)

6 Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

7 Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

8 Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.

9 Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.

10 Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.

11 Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

12 Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.