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# *Jesu Meine Freude:* A Cultural Reception Analysis of Romans 8

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## **An honest look before we begin**

My context as the author of this study is that of a person who is interested in the musical, academic and faith sides of the interpretation of Romans 8 as it appears in J. S. Bach's choral motet, *Jesu Meine Freude*. I am a professional classical singer, a biblical student, and an ordained Christian minister, an Elder in the Community of Christ church.<sup>1</sup> My interest in this study arose from my experience of performing *Jesu Meine Freude* and from my interest in the area of cultural reception of scripture. How does scripture affect culture, and how does culture (through classical music in this instance) influence scriptural interpretation?

One of the areas of study for this paper involves the Reformation, specifically the theological worldviews of Martin Luther and J. S. Bach as they relate to St. Paul. I approach the Reformation with some ambivalence, because although my denomination would never have come into being without the passion and innovation of a reformer like Martin Luther, the political and ecclesial situation of early 19<sup>th</sup> century America created an ethos of persecution – ironically by the descendents of the very reformers who left Europe to escape religious persecution.

Growing up in my denomination instilled in me a sense of our uniqueness as a movement and a lingering sense of suspicion toward outsiders. This may be because the sense of persecution and exclusion experienced by the early LDS church lingers in various ways to the current day in the Community of Christ, fostering both a sense of isolation and a strong sense of internal community in the denomination.<sup>2</sup> That notwithstanding, my theological education enables me to realize that my denomination has greater ties to Protestant and Catholic theologies and ecclesiologies than was apparent in my formative church experience. This study is thus an opportunity for me to engage seriously

in Protestant studies through the lens of my tradition's focus on community, and to use emerging critical tools to search for meaning in the historical and ongoing interpretation of biblical texts.

*Text*

Jesu, meine Freude  
 meines Herzens Weide,  
 Jesu, meine Zier.  
 Ach, wie lang, ach lange  
 ist dem Herzen bange,  
 und verlangt nach dir!  
 Gottes Lamm, mein Bräutigam  
 außer dir soll mir auf Erden  
 nichts sonst Liebers werden

*Es ist nun nichts Verdammliches<sup>3</sup>  
 an denen, die in Christo Jesu sind  
 die nicht nach dem Fleische wandeln,  
 sondern nach dem Geist.*

Unter deinem Schirmen  
 bin ich vor den Stürmen  
 aller Feinde frei.  
 Laß den Satan wittern  
 laß den Feind erbittern,  
 mir steht Jesus bei.  
 Ob es itzt gleich kracht und blitzt,  
 ob gleich Sünd und Hölle schrecken:  
 Jesus will mir decken.

*Denn das Gesetz des Geistes,  
 der da lebendig machete in Christo Jesu,  
 hat mich frei gemacht  
 von dem Gesetz der Sünde und des Todes.*

Trotz dem alten Drachen,  
 trotz des Todes Rachen,  
 trotz der Furcht darzu!  
 Tobe, welt, und springe  
 ich steh hier und singe  
 in gar sichre Ruh.  
 Gottes Macht halt mich in acht;  
 Erd und Abgrund muß verstummen,  
 ob sie nicht noch so brummen.

*Translation*

Jesus, my joy  
My heart's solace,<sup>4</sup>  
Jesus, my treasure.  
Oh how long, how long,  
The heart craves  
And pines for you!  
Lamb of God, my bridegroom,  
None on earth shall I love  
More dearly than you.

*There is now no condemnation of those  
who are in Christ Jesus,  
who walk not in the flesh,  
but in the Spirit.*

Under your protection  
I will be free from the assaults  
Of all my enemies.  
Let Satan sense it;  
Let the foe plead;  
Jesus will stand by me!  
Even if thunder and lightning crash,  
Even if sin and hell frighten:  
Jesus will protect me

*For the law of the Spirit  
of life in Christ Jesus  
has made me free  
from the law of sin and death*

Defy the ancient dragon,  
Defy death's revenge,  
Defy all fear of it!  
Rage, world, and leap  
I stand here and sing  
In the surest peace.  
God's power will watch over me;  
Earth and abyss must grow silent,  
However much they roar.

*Text*

*Ihr aber seid nicht fleischlich,  
sondern geistlich  
so anders Gottes Geist in euch wohnt.  
Wer aber Christi Geist nicht hat,  
der ist nicht sein.*

Weg mit allen Schätzen!  
Du bist mein Ergötzen,  
Jesu, meine Lust!  
Weg, ihr eitlen Ehren,  
ich mag euch nicht hören,  
bleibt mir unbewußt.  
Elend, Not, Kreutz, Schmach und Tod  
soll mich, ob viel muß leiden,  
nicht von Jesus scheiden.

*So aber Christus in euch ist,  
so ist der Leib zwar tot um der Sünde willen;  
der Geist aber ist das Leben  
um der Gerechtigkeit willen.*

Gute Nacht, o Wesen,  
das die Welt erlesen,  
mir gefälltst du nicht.  
Gute Nacht, ihr Sünden  
bleibet wir dahinten,  
kommt nicht mehrs ans Licht!  
Gute Nacht, du Stolz und Pracht!  
Dir sei ganz, du Lasterleben,  
Gute Nacht gegeben.  
*So nun, der Geist des,  
der Jesum von der Toten auferwecket hat,  
in euch wohnt, so wird auch derselbige  
der Christum von den Toten auferwecket hat,  
eure sterbliche Leiber lebendig machen  
um des willen, daß sein Geist in euch wohnt.*

Weicht, ihr Trauergeister,  
denn mein Freudenmeister,  
Jesus, tritt herein.  
Denen, die Gott lieben,  
muß auch ihr Betrüben  
lauter Zucker sein.  
Duld ich schon hier Spott und Hohn,  
dennoch bleibst du auch im Leide,  
Jesus, meine Freude.

*Translation*

*For you are not of the flesh,  
but of the Spirit;  
so differently does God dwell in you.  
Yet whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ,  
is not his.*

Away with all treasures!  
You are my delight,  
Jesus, my desire!  
Away with all vain honours!  
I will hear none of you,  
Remain unknown to me!  
Suffering, distress, the cross, shame and death,  
However much I suffer,  
Will never part me from Jesus.

*But in this way Christ is in you:  
the body is dead by the will of Sin,  
but the Spirit is life,  
by the will of righteousness.  
Good night, earthly existence –  
What the world offers –  
You please me no longer.  
Good night, sins,  
Stay away from me,  
Do not come to light!  
Good night, pride and splendour!  
To you all, you life of burden,  
I bid good night.*

*But now the Spirit  
who raised Jesus from the dead  
lives in you: so also will the same one  
who raised Jesus from the dead  
instill life into your mortal bodies  
so that his spirit shall live in you.*

Away, lamenting spirits,  
For the master of my joys,  
Jesus, enters in.  
For those who love God,  
Your grief must become  
As sweet as sugar.  
I will suffer all mockery and scorn;  
Yet for all my suffering, you remain,  
Jesus, my joy.<sup>5</sup>

## Introduction

Our interpretation of theology and scripture often has as much to do with our spatial and sociological location as it does with our reason or ecclesial formation.<sup>6</sup> Each time biblical texts are interpreted outside of their canonical context, meaning is added and changed. In the past, this work was exclusively the domain of clergy and scholars, but the availability of biblical texts in living languages fuels an increasing democratization of scriptural interpretation. Today the most widely-read theologians are arguably filmmakers and pop singers.

Johann Sebastian Bach was an important reader of Paul. As a cantor and confessing member of the Lutheran church, his theology was hermeneutically grounded in Martin Luther's sermons and hymns and influenced by the Pietistic movement.<sup>7</sup> The hymns of Martin Luther were especially important in Bach's composition.<sup>8</sup> Bach's contemporaries also used chorales in their work, but what is unique to the music of Bach is that so much of it has endured in popularity over the past 250 years, meaning that his music *and* theology have been shared with a wide audience.<sup>9</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to study the theology and signification in one of Bach's choral motets, *Jesu Meine Freude*.<sup>10</sup> This motet contains verses from Romans 8 alongside a Lutheran chorale written in 1653 that uses text by Johann Franck and music by Johann Crüger.<sup>11</sup> I intend to show that Bach's interpretation of Romans 8 both reflected and popularized the theological ethos of his day, and significantly reshaped the Pauline view of the believer's relationship with Christ. In part, Bach achieved this by his use of Luther's translation of the Romans text, his deletion of several verses of Romans text, and his use of Johann Franck's chorale text. By examining the theological themes in Paul's Greek text and the way in which they were interpreted by Augustine, Martin Luther and Bach, I intend to study the experience of the cultural reception of Romans 9 in (a) 60 CE Rome, (b) 1723 Leipzig, and (c) 2007 Vancouver (the latter two will appear in the second installment of this essay, which will appear in a subsequent edition of *Consensus*). The result will demonstrate the role of community in the transposition of textual meaning and show the effect of the continuing readings of a biblical text.

The study of the cultural reception of a biblical text involves examining the world behind the text (the context that inspired its creation), and the world of the text (literary criticism), along with

translation and syntactical analysis.<sup>12</sup> Cultural reception addresses the questions: “What were the impulses behind the writing of this text?”, “How does it reflect its context?” and “What was the range of the probable inflected meanings we can discern based on this study?” I will perform the afore-mentioned analysis and then write narratives that attempt to describe possible experiences of the reception of Romans 8.<sup>13</sup>

## The Text

Bach selected verses from Romans 8:1-11 for his composition, which is the text that I will analyze in this study.<sup>14</sup> In order to study this passage, I must first determine its wording, through deciding how to translate various possibilities.

The second verse of the pericope has one of the most interesting textual anomalies in the passage. The pronoun is the debated word: does Paul say, “For the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has set **you** (singular) free,” or “For the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has set **me** free”? Bruce Metzger’s analysis attributes  $\sigma\epsilon$  to possible dittography and  $\mu\epsilon$  to theological harmonization with Romans 7, but decides on the former reading.<sup>15</sup> Even if the reading were the first-person singular  $\mu\epsilon$ , I would interpret it with a similar inflection of inclusion of the reader because I would associate it with the  $\epsilon\gamma\omega$  context of Romans 7 in the sense that Paul is describing the condition of human nature although he uses the pronoun “I.”<sup>16</sup>

Later in the pericope, a translation issue arises as to how to understand 8:9. The issue concerns the mood of the verb  $\epsilon\sigma\tau\epsilon$  (“you are”) and the function of the particle,  $\epsilon\dot{\iota}\pi\epsilon\omicron$ . Because it appears in direct discourse, the verb could be translated either in the indicative mood or in the imperative mood. This decision is affected by the situational function of  $\epsilon\dot{\iota}\pi\epsilon\omicron$ . The three main definitions for  $\epsilon\dot{\iota}\pi\epsilon\omicron$  provided by The Greek English Lexicon (edited by Frederick Danker, and hereafter “BDAG”) are “if indeed, if after all, and since,” two of which are conditional, and the last which is conclusive.<sup>17</sup> If the particle has the latter meaning, then it would strengthen the use of the verb as an imperative: “But you, **do** not live according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit, **since** the Spirit of God dwells in you.” In his Greek grammar, Daniel Wallace asserts that this word takes on the inflection of  $\epsilon\iota$  and is used as a first-class condition, meaning that it is “assumed true for the sake of argument”.<sup>18</sup> Thus the reading appears: “But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, **if indeed** the



Spirit of God dwells in you,” to which the response would be, “Of course it does!” This reading is also confirmed by Paul’s overall message in Romans: people are unable to choose to live up to righteousness, but require the grace of God’s righteousness.

## **Cultural Reception of Romans 8 in 60 CE Rome**

### *Introduction and Social Context*

Romans would have been received by an urban group of diverse Christians in the *lingua franca* of Greek through the technology of a hand-written letter in the proto-ecclesial setting of a house church.<sup>19</sup> In contrast to his other letters, Paul was writing to a church that he had neither founded nor visited, yet he seems to have had strong reasons for writing them; Romans was not a social letter.<sup>20</sup> John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan Reed assert that Paul’s two aims in writing to the saints in Rome were to convince them to contribute to the collection he was gathering for the poor in Jerusalem, and to help in Paul’s mission to take the gospel to Spain.<sup>21</sup> Both goals were missions loaded with eschatological significance which could be seen to herald in a new age: the collection hearkened back to Hebrew Bible prophecies about the wealth of the nations streaming back to Jerusalem, and the mission to Spain would have spread the gospel through East and West, fulfilling the Great Commission of global unity.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, Paul wrote to the saints in Rome to introduce himself and his gospel, and to address the tension in the Roman church caused by conflicting understandings of what Christianity meant in the first century, namely between the requirements of Paul’s gospel and the tradition of the Jews.

The main thesis in Romans is commonly understood to be contained in 1:16-17: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith.’”<sup>23</sup> The problem as it is stated here is salvation – who gets it and how, and the solution is seen to be found through righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) and faith (πίστις). Both are seen as spiritual gifts available “to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

Paul was an orator likely trained in the classical Roman rhetorical style. If the mutual regard and cooperation between Jews and Gentiles stressed in Romans 1:16-17 can be seen as one of Paul’s main objectives,

then Romans 8:1-11 can be seen as a *peroration*, or an emotional appeal meant to favourably influence the audience to comply.<sup>24</sup> The incentive of life in the Spirit would encourage Roman believers to reconcile with one another and consider Paul's further requests. Neil Elliot, in his rhetorical study of Romans, notes that the first pericope of Romans 8 is a continuation of Paul's defense of the Christian's moral obligation to obey Christ that he introduced in Romans 6, and expounded in chapters 7 and 8.<sup>25</sup> Romans 8 concludes the argument begun in 6:1 by stating that there is no condemnation because the Christian now fulfills the "righteous requirement of the Law."<sup>26</sup>

In Romans 8, Paul offers hope to the Christian believer through the triumph of God over the weakness of flesh and law. Paul constructs a series of dualisms in this passage to promote his argument:

Flesh.....	Spirit
Life .....	Death
You .....	Them
Law of the Spirit.....	Law of sin and death
Being in Christ .....	Not being in Christ

These themes are abstract and theologically loaded, with implications as to both soteriology and the nature of God. The following analysis of these themes will focus on law, human nature (through the lens of flesh and body), the activity of Christ, the indwelling of the Spirit, and the eschatological impact of Paul's conclusions in this passage.

### Law

In the opening chapters of Romans, Paul mentions law many times, and he is careful not to condemn it as evil. In fact, he praises the law in 7:12: "So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good," and in 8:3 he justifies it, "For God has done what the law, *weakened by the flesh*, could not do." Yet Paul maintains that it is impossible to meet the law's demands through human strength, and insists on the necessity of divine help through Christ's actions to overcome the violations to justice that humans routinely commit. The activity of the Spirit changes the will of the believer to enable him or her to *want* to fulfill God's righteousness.<sup>27</sup>

In Romans 8:1-11, Paul mentions "law" four times, in contrasting ways. He contrasts "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" and "the law of sin and of death" in 8:2, and then simply states "the law"

twice in 8:3 without describing it directly. Elliott suggests that these usages of νόμος both refer to God's law, but as differentiated by how that law is experienced in the opposing realms of sin and of righteousness, described as κατὰ σάρκα ("according to the flesh") and κατὰ πνεῦμα ("according to the Spirit").<sup>28</sup> I prefer this reading of "law," because it focuses on the realms of flesh and Spirit and the insufficiencies of law to function within the fleshly realm and thus allows Paul to both praise and critique the praxis of God's law.

### *Human Nature*

In conjunction with the law, Paul discusses human nature through the vocabulary of flesh and body. In 8:3, he claims that the law was weak through the flesh: διὰ τῆς σαρκός. The weakness of people caused weakness in the law. Leander Keck argues that Paul's view of the body reflected the Hebrew Bible's understanding of "flesh" as being a way of "characterizing the whole self vis-à-vis the divine," and yet that his use of σὰρξ ("flesh") had a more negative and temporary value than his use of σῶμα ("body").<sup>29</sup> BDAG contrasts the Hebrew Bible view of flesh with Paul's view. In the Hebrew Bible, there was not necessarily a connection between corporality and sin, but for Paul, flesh (especially expressed as σὰρξ) represents all parts of the body, which is completely dominated by sin.<sup>30</sup> This view appears forcefully in 8:8, where Paul describes a dualism between flesh and spirit: "For the mindset of the flesh is death, but the mindset of the Spirit is life and peace" (8:7).

### *Indwelling of the Spirit*

Romans 8 is also notable for its pneumatology because spirit is mentioned more frequently in this chapter than in any other passage in Romans. This spirit is named in various ways: Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (8:2); Spirit (8:5); Spirit of God (8:9); and Spirit of Christ (8:9). According to Crossan and Reed, Paul defines his pneumatology in this passage; Paul equates the "Spirit of God" and the "Spirit of Christ" through his statement: "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus."<sup>31</sup> This understanding of Spirit prompts many translators, including myself, to capitalize these instances of "Spirit," although Paul's was certainly a pre-Trinitarian understanding.<sup>32</sup> In the *Anchor Bible Commentary*, Joseph Fitzmyer observes that Paul's use of Spirit reflects the Hebrew Bible understanding of Spirit as a

mode of God's outgoing activity in a creative, prophetic, quickening or renovating way: the Holy Spirit is seen as personal, but not yet a person.<sup>33</sup> It is clear through Paul's language, especially in 8:9, that there is a connection between his uses of Spirit as a subject and his uses of God and Jesus as subjects. If Paul did not clearly define the relationship between God, Jesus and Spirit, he certainly did associate them, and in this passage gave them each prominence.

### *Activity and Nature of Christ*

Another element of this passage is the nature of Christ. Paul uses a salvation formula in 8:3-4: God sent "his own Son in the appearance of sinful flesh, καὶ πρὸς ἡμαρτίας, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us." The middle phrase resonates with atonement theology from the Hebrew Bible, but is not the main subject of the passage. Rather it is contextual information indicating that the Spirit is able to do its transformative work due to God's activity in Christ.<sup>34</sup>

The most interesting aspect of Paul's christology in Romans 8 is that although he mentions Christ frequently, Christ is characterized as passive – not a subject, but as someone acted upon. Christ is the location in which believers dwell, Christ is sent by God, Christ is raised from the dead, Christ exists within believers. Paul also seems to de-personalize Jesus by focusing on his title of Χριστός – the only time Paul uses the name "Jesus" in this pericope it appears after the title "Christ." Paul mentions Christ in order to focus on God: the future salvation that God has provided. For Paul, Jesus is always a tool of God's salvation.

### *Eschatology*

The social environment of Rome provided another theme of importance to Paul in this passage: eschatology. A later passage, 8:17-30, actually contains a full description of Paul's view of eschatology, with the renewal of the earth along with the renewal of humanity. However, 8:1-11 contains elements of eschatology as well. The gift of the Spirit into the believers' lives, described in 8:9-11, is the down-payment of the future existence that will be experienced in the last days, and this passage describes how God is judging, and will judge an evil world through the law.<sup>35</sup> Romans 8 describes a proleptic existence in which the believer begins to experience the future

promise of intimacy with God within the sphere of God's dominion, not Rome. Paul's writing shifts from small to cosmic, alternating between personal weakness (σάϑξ) and divine power (πνεῦμα).<sup>36</sup> In Romans 8, Paul emphasizes the nature of God's eschatological achievement through Jesus and the Spirit, and thereby furthers his appeals for help in eschatological terms (collection for Jerusalem, and mission to Spain).<sup>37</sup>

### Paul's Audience

Paul often swings between speaking abstractly and addressing the reader directly. He is writing in direct discourse, through the form of a personal letter, yet he discusses abstract concepts through third-person plural pronouns ("them") and then radically addresses readers directly through singular and plural second-person pronouns ("you"). He even includes himself in the discourse in 8:4 through the first-person plural "we." A significant aspect of this rhetoric is that even when it is abstract, it is still plural: not "someone" but "some people," and that Paul keeps that plural focus in his direct address as well (excepting 8:2) with his use of ἡμῖν and ὑμῖν.

Not only does Paul address the believers in the plural voice throughout this passage, but he also addressed the letter to the church, not to the leaders only. In the introductory formula in 1:7, Paul wrote, "To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints." This attention to Paul's audience makes it difficult to interpret the passage in a manner that assumes the primary importance of the individual believer.

### Encounter with the Text

We have the text before us, along with considerations of syntax, textual variants, theological themes and the broader world of the Christian believer in first century Rome. The following narrative is my suggestion of a possible experience of reception by a believer in this cultural setting:

The Gospels and Hebrew Scriptures have helped our Christian community of believers to determine our hope for salvation and our ethical and moral standards. We believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and we share table fellowship and worship God together as best we can. However, as we hear these words of Paul read to us in our worship, we recognize that our interpretation of scripture does not fully meet the challenges of our life together. We still evaluate each other based

on ethnicity and ethnic religious practices as well as on the decisions we make in our interaction with our political and social environment. This Paul is skilled in discerning our divisions. His interpretation of the law is comforting for those of us who love the Mosaic Law very much, and his promise of current life in the Spirit is great incentive to respond to his arguments. He wants us to trust in God's goodness and for us to stop being in the flesh and thus unable to please God on our own, but rather to walk "according to the Spirit."

Paul has persuaded us to do these things through his depiction of salvation for us as individuals, for our community (8:16), and for creation (8:22). These are powerful messages because we know the Mosaic Law and the promises God made to redeem Israel and creation, both in Jewish apocalyptic literature and in Second Temple theology.<sup>38</sup> This gives us hope that God is still working to redeem the covenant with Israel, for both Jews and Gentiles, and is not starting over from scratch. Paul's vision also confirms our belief that all is not well in our Roman society and that God is both aware of this and is working out salvation.

This passage of Paul's letter is very interesting to us because it talks about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, as well as the Law. Paul helps us to understand Jesus' activity, but does not focus on him. God has promised various times in the Scriptures to send deliverance through the Spirit. The prophet Ezekiel prophesied that the dry bones would be revived through the Spirit (37:6), the prophet Joel promised that God's Spirit would be poured out on all people (2:28), and Jesus himself prophesied the gift of the Spirit in the gospel of John (15:26). We hear stories of events with this Spirit at Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2:4) and we hope to experience the gifts of the Spirit in our assembly as the saints in Corinth do (I Cor. 13). We are interested in living this new life in the Spirit.

Paul's message exhorts us to release our reliance on Mosaic Law and to look to God first through the witness of Jesus and the indwelling of the Spirit. We will work to overcome our differences and to support Paul in his message as much as we can.

Paul wrote in order to express his insights into the nature of God's interaction with humanity, and to exhort his audience to respond with increased holiness in their lives, cooperation with other believers, and expanded mission, namely supporting his mission to Spain. The argument in Romans 8 was precisely crafted to sway the listener's thoughts and emotions within the context of the larger letter, and I believe that it was successful in gaining support for his mission even though it may not have come to fruition in the way he imagined.

This hypothetical construction of Paul's ideal reader shows how an abstract theological discourse could indeed function as the climax of an argument for a group of believers. Paul's frame of discourse (Jewish covenantal law/Roman imperial setting) and his use of rhetoric (analytical arguments/dialogic discourse) show that Paul had a specific context and reader in mind. He wrote to a group of people to explain salvation history and to convince them of God's goodness and humanity's need for reconciliation to God. Although Paul's text was "closed" in that he unapologetically argued for a distinctive theological understanding, it was also "open" in that its theological content was mystical – life in union with the Spirit – which allows many opportunities for interaction and interpretation.<sup>39</sup>

### **Theological development of the text**

Romans 8 did not pass into Bach's hands untouched and unmediated. At the most basic level, the text we considered thus far is in Greek, and Bach used a German translation for his study, reflection, and contemplation. Bach owned two sets of Luther's complete works and likely used Luther's 1545 translation of the Greek text in his composition.<sup>40</sup> In particular, Bach owned a copy of Calov's Annotated Bible, which contained Luther's translation and a great deal of his commentary, and it is obvious from the marginal notes he added to it and the special care he gave the book that it was meaningful to him.<sup>41</sup> From his marginal notes in Calov's Bible, Bach asserted agreement with Luther's analysis of the connection between music and prophecy, thus describing the act of musical composition in a confessional or proclamatory light.<sup>42</sup>

The significance of these evidences of Bach's faith plays out in the theology behind his setting of *Jesu Meine Freude*. Bach was certainly a very "Lutheran" Lutheran; following the influence of Martin Luther, who happened to be a very "Augustinian" Augustinian monk. In order to identify Bach's theological influences, this study must acknowledge the influence that Augustine and Luther exerted on the translation and interpretation of Romans 8 before it reached Bach's hands.

In the fourth century CE, Augustine was a young lawyer and orator in Rome. The Epistle to the Romans was one of the main elements in Augustine's conversion away from paganism and neo-Platonism (along with the sermons of Ambrose), and the letter affected his theology and faith throughout his life.<sup>43</sup> Augustine was deeply moved by the letters of

Paul and consulted Paul as the final court of appeal throughout his

ministry: “Marvelously these truths graved themselves in my heart when I read that latest of Your apostles and looked upon Your works and trembled.”<sup>44</sup>

Augustine eventually became the Bishop of Hippo, and much of his writing was polemic, intending to counter his former associates the Manichees, as well as the Pelagians, Donatists, Arians, Gnostics, and pagan philosophers of the day.<sup>45</sup> In this way, he shared a context with Paul and Luther, because his writing aimed to persuade his readers *against* certain views and at the same time persuade them *toward* his own. His discourse is colored by his conflicts, in that his theological views were challenged and refined by his battles with the heterodox over Christological, Trinitarian and ecclesiological heresies.<sup>46</sup>

Martin Luther had his share of conflict and controversy as well. He was an Augustinian monk and professor of theology in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century at the University of Wittenberg before he publicly broke from the Catholic Church and began the movement that would become Lutheranism.<sup>47</sup> Like Augustine, Luther’s public ministry was filled with battles; he fought the Scholastics over what he saw to be Pelagianism, the Catholic Church as a whole over its system of indulgences, and Müntzer for his support of the violence of the Peasant War.<sup>48</sup>

Martin Luther understood Paul along similar lines as Augustine. Romans was also a central text in Luther’s faith experience: it was the issue of justification in Romans 1:16-17 that precipitated the spiritual crisis that led to his theological assertiveness through his 95 theses.<sup>49</sup> Luther said, “Romans is really the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest gospel, and is worthy not only that every Christian should know it by heart, but occupy himself with it every day.”<sup>50</sup>

Luther’s approach to translation relied on previous methods used in translation, but he also developed new interpretative techniques while molding the German language to his understanding of Scripture. Luther used the philology developed by the Humanists in his work of translation and interpretation, and adapted the Scholastic four-fold exegetical method, which involved literal, allegorical, moral and anagogic interpretations.<sup>51</sup> Luther adopted a literal-prophetic approach to translation of scripture as much as possible, while acknowledging the moral (tropological) sense of the scripture’s application to the believer.<sup>52</sup> He relied on his linguistic exploration of Greek and Hebrew, his study of biblical contexts, and his sermons on the moral ramifications of the gospel.<sup>53</sup>



## **Commentary by Augustine and Luther on Romans 8:1-11**

How do the interpretative comments of Augustine and Luther on Romans 8 compare to the previous analysis of the Greek text and Roman context? And how may those comments have influenced Bach's use of the scripture text?

### *Law*

Regarding the law, Augustine distinguished between the ceremonial and moral demands of the Mosaic Law. He believed that Jesus had fulfilled the ceremonial demands of the law, but believed that Christians are still required to keep the moral commandments (Decalogue).<sup>54</sup> Augustine asserted that the law brings knowledge of sin but not its destruction, and that believers who have been justified have no need of the law because love now motivates their obedience.<sup>55</sup>

Luther described three uses of the law, which all work to prepare people for the gospel. There is a natural or instinctive law, the Mosaic code found in the beginning of the Hebrew Bible, and the law that is any Scripture that places requirements on people.<sup>56</sup> The main function of law in all of its forms is both to restrain the wicked and to convict the self-righteous of their shortcomings before God.<sup>57</sup> In his commentary on Romans 8, Luther used the law as a vehicle for criticizing human nature, especially in his comments on 8:3, "Nature idolizes and absolutizes itself and is discontent in adversity – grace is always neutral and observes in everything only God's will."<sup>58</sup>

Augustine's reading appears to limit Paul's concept of law to the Mosaic Law, while Luther's three-fold interpretation acknowledges that function of "law," but also broadens its definition to include the New Testament. Thus, the reading that Bach inherits sees law in a positive and negative light – as a partly 'superseded' Mosaic Law and as God's universal law drawing people to Christ.

### *Human Nature*

Augustine preached that the one nature of the soul has "both the wisdom of the flesh when it follows lower things, and the wisdom of the Spirit when it chooses higher things."<sup>59</sup> He continued by stating that Paul showed that both life and death exist in people who are living in their bodies – they experience death in the body and life in the spirit.<sup>60</sup> Augustine acknowledged that all humans are justly

condemned, but agreed with the epistle of James that faith without works is dead, and that through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, good works that Christians do can be seen to merit salvation.<sup>61</sup> For Augustine, the story of human redemption was the healing of the wounded will.<sup>62</sup>

By way of contrast, Luther stated that people are all rooted in ignorance, hatred and contempt of God, through Adam's sin.<sup>63</sup> Luther believed that believers are justified only by faith, and not at all by works, which was his largest departure from Augustine.<sup>64</sup> He also asserted that believers are sinners throughout their whole life, even though they are also righteous, which he communicated through his famous formula *simul iustus et peccator* ("at the same time just and sinner").<sup>65</sup> Perhaps this influenced his interpretative principle for Romans: "the apostle does not speak against those who obviously are sinners, but against those who in their own eyes are righteous."<sup>66</sup>

Both of these interpretations portray human nature more in light of σάρξ ("flesh") than σῶμα ("body"). Paul's Jewish interpretation of σῶμα put value on corporality and gave theological value to the joined existence of body and spirit, despite his negative interpretation of the flesh side of the duality. By this later emphasis on the negativity of flesh, Augustine and Luther led later interpreters into more negative views of human nature overall.

### *Activity of the Spirit*

Augustine claimed that the Spirit is a gift given into believers' hearts to help them resist sin in the flesh. He also asserted that Christians have the Spirit's help, which enables them to will to do what is right, against their nature.<sup>67</sup>

In the Short Catechism, Luther defined the Holy Spirit as the one who calls, gathers, and enlightens the church on earth.<sup>68</sup> Luther was concerned that the Holy Spirit had been overlooked in the Christian church. He wrote three Pentecost hymns in order to "accord to the Holy Spirit the proper place of honor in Christian theology, preaching, and worship."<sup>69</sup> To Luther, the Spirit of God enables the believer to freely, promptly and gladly "renounce all that is not God, even ourselves."<sup>70</sup>

Despite his emphasis on the importance of the Holy Spirit, Luther did not mention it in his commentary on Romans 8, which is surprising considering the sheer repetition of Πνεῦμα in the passage. Luther seems more concerned with the problem of human nature than

with the promise of the Spirit. Perhaps Augustine and Luther's silence about the nature and functioning of the Spirit in Romans 8 is influenced by the conflicts of their day, which involved Christology and human nature more than the nature of the Holy Spirit. In the result, Bach inherited a commentary that did not emphasize the activity and indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

### *Activity and Nature of Christ*

Augustine asserted that Father and Son were one in condemning human sin and in providing redemption. As such, Christ was not placating an angry God, and Christ's death was voluntary.<sup>71</sup> Augustine commented on the controversy over Jesus nature, claiming with respect to 8:3, that sinful flesh has death and sin, whereas the likeness of sinful flesh has death without sin.<sup>72</sup> Augustine saw Jesus as a powerful Savior.

Luther believed that Jesus was the object and origin of the faith that provides salvation that the Holy Spirit enables believers to receive.<sup>73</sup> Luther saw Jesus as the redeemer of humanity, who, through his "innocent passion and death" was able to "win and deliver me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil".<sup>74</sup>

Both of these Christologies operate under an interpretative principle that is not exhibited in Romans 8:1-11. In that pericope, Jesus is not seen as powerful or as an agent of any kind. Instead, he is the means of salvation, and his activity serves only to point to God and to allow God to act in the world. This difference may seem only semantic to those who fully equate the activity of Christ and God, but the difference in the characterization of the second person of the Trinity is indeed striking. Luther's language about Christ describes an active and personal figure that hearkens forward to the later, highly personalized Lutheran chorale that Bach juxtaposed with Romans 8.

### *Eschatology*

Augustine believed that 8:9-11 described glorified existence, which is the highest of the four states that believers can hope to achieve. He believed that all humans could experience the progressive states of being that move from natural to legal existence, then to evangelical and finally to glorified existence. He asserted that the final state of glorified existence could be achieved in the next life with the resurrection of the body promised in 8:11.<sup>75</sup> One of Augustine's key

theological achievements was to convince his contemporaries not to follow any present apocalyptic timetables but instead to push speculation about the end times off into the distant future.<sup>76</sup>

Luther did not choose to comment on 8:9-11 in his lectures on Romans. His focus in the commentary was consistently on law, sin and human nature. In his commentary on 8:19, Luther encourages the believer to focus on the essence of creation and existence while also engaging fully in created existence.<sup>77</sup> While Luther did discuss more cosmic theological issues such as predestination, he expressed his theology in terms of present existence.

Both of these theologians focus on the present rather than on the future, which both mirrors and distorts Romans 8. As stated in the first section, Paul had a specific activity in mind when he wrote Romans, namely the collection for the poor in Jerusalem and the need for him to spread the gospel to Spain. In the later contexts of Augustine and Luther, it was more important both theologically and pastorally to advise concern for the present rather than a mad rush to the end of time. By both of their times, eschatology was divorced from social justice concerns and was almost entirely other-worldly. To focus on eschatology was to focus on *u-topia*: “no place”. Thus, Augustine and Luther called their flocks to action in the present, and away from eschatological musings. This spiritualization and depoliticization of ideal conditions perhaps contributed to the conditions of Bach’s 18<sup>th</sup> century context, which focused on the states of life and death as substitute eschatology for Paul’s missions.

### *The Influence of Translation: Romans 8:1-2; 9-11 in*

#### **Jesu Meine Freude**

Bach only chose to use five verses from the pericope 8:1-11 in *Jesu Meine Freude*.<sup>78</sup> The text was Luther’s translation, and it has textual and theological variants when compared with our earlier study of the Greek, which may have been the result of the source materials in front of him, but were likely also ideologically motivated.

In 8:1, Bach’s Romans text contains the two relative clauses at the end of the verse that UBS determined was a later addition: *die nicht nach dem Fleische wandeln, sondern nach dem Geist*.<sup>79</sup> In Luther’s *Lectures on Romans* (1515), he included the first of these clauses but not the second, so it appears to be an intentional choice on Bach’s part to include both.<sup>80</sup>

Another textual difference between the Greek and German texts occurs in 8:2. Both Bach's text and Luther's lecture use the first-person pronoun *mich* rather than the second-person pronoun *dich* that is recommended by Metzger, *et al.* The basis for Luther's translation of the New Testament was Erasmus' 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, published in Basel in 1519, but he also followed the Latin Vulgate, although he disliked its strong Catholic ideology.<sup>81</sup> Jerome's Vulgate translates 8:2 with the second person singular pronoun, *lex enim Spiritus vitae in Christo Iesu liberavit me* ("the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has liberated **me**").<sup>82</sup> However, in Augustine's thirteen uses of this verse, he more frequently than not used the second-person *se*.<sup>83</sup> Luther was likely aware of both variants, because of his personal attachment to Augustine's work. In my opinion, Luther's use of *mich* was a theological decision intended to emphasize the believer's personal relationship with Jesus.<sup>84</sup>

A third difference regards the confidence of the statements in 8:9-11. The conclusion of the discussion of 8:9 in Greek above was that this verse was likely a first-class conditional statement that leaned toward affirmation due to the function of the particle εἴπερ. Luther's translation replaces the conditional particles εἴπερ and εἰ with the conclusive German particle *so*. This removes the conditional sense of the verses and leaves only the affirmative inflection.

The most important difference between Bach's Romans text and the text as it appears in the Bible is the "gap" that it contains between 8:2 and 8:9. The result of this gap is that Bach's text contains the conversation about freedom from condemnation (8:1-2) and the conversation about experiencing life through living in the Spirit (8:9-11), but it eliminates the discussion of law and salvation (8:3-4) and the argument about the weakness of human nature (8:5-8). By omitting the two middle sections, Bach's Romans text becomes an optimistic text that focuses on the Spirit, but omits the explanation of *how* one experiences life in the Spirit, and understates the negative description of life according to the flesh. Bach's inclusion of the extra two clauses in 8:1 can now be seen to generally connote 8:3-8, which discusses the issue of "those who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" at length. However, the more abstract, theological explanation of salvation, law, and the weakness of the flesh are missing, all of which were rhetorically and theologically important to Paul.

## Conclusion

In the result, the effect of Bach's Romans text, through its translation and excised verses, denotes much more confidence in salvation than the original did. Luther's use of *mich* in 8:2 prepared the way for a personalized interpretation of the message of Romans 8. Also, by omitting the middle verses in the passage that comment on current behavior and mindset, Bach shifts the focus of the passage to the future eschatology in 8:11. Together with the chorale text, Bach shapes a much different picture of Romans 8 in *Jesu Meine Freude* than the message transmitted to Paul's Roman community.

The next installment of this paper will comment on the theological signification added by the chorale text of *Jesu Meine Freude* and the signification added by Bach's musical composition to the combined text. It will also study the social location of Bach's audience as it compares to the experience of Paul's audience. The final stage of the study is a cultural examination of the experience of Romans 8 through *Jesu Meine Freude* for a contemporary Canadian audience in the setting of the concert hall, including societal, philosophical and linguistic considerations in dialogue with the two previous experiences of reception.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> My denomination is the Community of Christ, formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, a Christian tradition with roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Latter Day Saint (Mormon) movement.
- <sup>2</sup> The RLDS/Community of Christ church experiences isolation not only from the mainline Christian denominations, but also from its larger LDS cousin, because it has developed in very different ways since the death of Joseph Smith, Jr. in 1835.
- <sup>3</sup> Italics show the verses from Romans 8.
- <sup>4</sup> Literally: pasture.
- <sup>5</sup> Adapted from a translation by Ray Nurse, January 2004.
- <sup>6</sup> Brian K. Blount, *Cultural Interpretation: Reorienting New Testament Criticism* 17 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995): quoting Enrique Dussel.
- <sup>7</sup> Bach formally assented to the theological position of the Book of Concord twice, both to affirm its conclusions and to deny non-Lutheran beliefs. Robin A. Leaver, "Music and Lutheranism," in *Cambridge*

- Companion to Bach*, ed. John Butt (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1997), p. 37. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Bach Among the Theologians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 62.
- 8 Pelikan observed that it would be possible to recreate Luther's hymnody through Bach's compositions because he used them all in his cantatas, Passions, and organ preludes. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
  - 9 Calvin Stapert, *My Only Comfort: Death, Deliverance and Discipleship in the Music of Bach* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 21.
  - 10 A motet is simply a piece of choral music, typically with a sacred text, that is sung without instrumental accompaniment (*a cappella*). I highly recommend listening to a recording of *Jesu Meine Freude* in conjunction with reading this study.
  - 11 Klaus Hofmann, *Johann Sebastian Bach: Die Motetten* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2003), p. 116.
  - 12 Harry O. Maier, "Advanced New Testament Exegetical Paper Guide," NT 200, Vancouver School of Theology, Fall 2005.
  - 13 I adapt my semiotic framework of analysis from the following works: Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Eco, *On Literature*, translated by Martin McLaughlin. (New York: Harvest, 2002); Marshall Blonsky, ed. *On Signs*. (Maryland: Johns Hopkins U. P., 1985); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); and Daniel Patte, "Critical Biblical Studies from a Semiotics Perspective." *Semeia* 81 (1998): 3-26. An excellent introduction to the field of semiotics is: Paul Copley and Litza Jansz, *Introducing Semiotics* (Thriplow, Royston: Icon Books, 2004).
  - 14 Other commentators argue that the length of the pericope should be greater than this (8:1-13), but I will follow Bach's selection, as I see this passage serving as a whole to establish the theological context for the themes of inheritance with Christ and the further development of Paul's pneumatology.
  - 15 Bruce Metzger promoted this view both in his 1971 analysis and in the United Bible Societies' committee's 2001 analysis (the decision was upgraded from {D} to {B}). Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: a Companion Volume to the United Bible Society's Greek New Testament*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 515. Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini and Bruce Metzger, eds., *The Greek New Testament* 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Nördlingen: United Bible Societies, 2001), p. 538. There are also manuscripts with  $\eta\mu\alpha\varsigma$ , but the committee rejected that reading on the grounds of later theologizing. Metzger, p. 516.

- 16 Following Kümmel and Stendahl. Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 144.
- 17 Frederick Willhelm Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 279.
- 18 Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp. 692, 694.
- 19 Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*. (New Haven: Yale, 2003), p. 9.
- 20 Calvin Roetzel, *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), p. 106.
- 21 John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus's Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), p. 355.
- 22 Ibid., p. 355.
- 23 N. T. Wright, *New Interpreters Bible Volume X: Romans* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), p. 397. Biblical quotations are author's translation or from NRSV: Michael Coogan, ed. *New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York: Oxford, 2001), NT, p. 244.
- 24 Don H. Compier, *What is Rhetorical Theology? Textual Practice and Public Discourse* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), p. 7.
- 25 Neil Elliott, *The Rhetoric of Romans: Argumentative Constraint and Strategy and Paul's Dialogue with Judaism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), p. 23.
- 26 Ibid., p. 248.
- 27 Westerholm, p. 418.
- 28 Neil Elliott, "Romans," in *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Michael Coogan, ed. (New York: Oxford, 2001), p. 253 NT.
- 29 Leander Keck, *Paul and His Letters*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), pp. 100f.
- 30 Danker, p. 915.
- 31 Crossan, p. 281.
- 32 John B. Cobb and David J. Lull, *Romans* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2005), p. 117.
- 33 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), p. 480.
- 34 Keck, 2005, p. 199; Wright, p. 575.



- 35 Meeks, p. 188.
- 36 Ibid., p. 189.
- 37 Wright, p. 575.
- 38 Daniel Patte, *Global Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), p. 437. Wright sees Second Temple theology in Paul's use of the themes of *shekinah*, Wisdom, Torah, Word and Spirit as means of salvation. Wright, p. 580.
- 39 Wright, p. 161.
- 40 Bach had copies of Luther's 1522 and 1545 translations of the New Testament, but the text of *Jesu Meine Freude* more closely resembles the 1545 edition. Leaver, "Music and Lutheranism," pp. 39-40.
- 41 Ibid., p. 40.
- 42 Robin A. Leaver, *J. S. Bach and Scripture: Glosses from the Calov Bible Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1985), p. 30.
- 43 Pamela Bright, ed. *Augustine and the Bible* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), pp. 230, 16.
- 44 Ibid., p. 19.
- 45 W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 667; Bright, pp. 185-188.
- 46 Bright, p. 184.
- 47 Wilhelm Pauck, "Introduction" in Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*. Translated by Wilhelm Pauck, ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. lxi.
- 48 Ibid., pp. lvi-lvii. Martin Luther, *Martin Luther*, E. G. Rupp and Benjamin Drewery, eds. (London: Edward Arnold, 1970), pp. 120-126.
- 49 Ibid., p. 6.
- 50 Ibid., p. 95.
- 51 Pauck in Luther *Lectures*, xxiv, xxxii; Eric Chafe, *Analyzing Bach Cantatas* (New York: Oxford, 2000), p. 3.
- 52 Pauck, in Luther *Lectures*, p. xxxiii.
- 53 Barry Harvey, "Anti-postmodernism" in A. K. Adam, *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000), p. 3.
- 54 Bright, pp. 13-14.
- 55 Ibid., pp. 14-15.
- 56 Westerholm, pp. 28-29.
- 57 Ibid., p. 29.
- 58 Pauck, in Luther *Lectures*, pp. 220.

- 59 Thomas C. Oden, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998), pp. 209.
- 60 Ibid., p. 212.
- 61 Bright, pp. 9, 12.
- 62 Westerholm, p. 5.
- 63 Ibid., p. 27.
- 64 Bright, p. 34.
- 65 Ibid., p. 36.
- 66 Pauck in *Luther Lectures*, pp. xxxiv.
- 67 Bright, pp. 10, 12.
- 68 Luther, *Martin Luther*, p. 141.
- 69 Pelikan, p. 7.
- 70 Luther, *Lectures*, p. 230.
- 71 Bright, p. 9; Oden, p. 203.
- 72 Ibid., p. 204.
- 73 Westerholm, pp. 30-31, 41.
- 74 Luther, *Martin Luther*, p. 141.
- 75 Oden, 213.
- 76 Harry O. Maier, *Apocalypse Recalled: The Book of Revelation After Christendom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), pp. 125-126.
- 77 Luther, *Lectures*, p. 236.
- 78 Please consult the Romans text in the translation of *Jesu Meine Freude* at the beginning of the paper.
- 79 Metzger strongly discounts including these two clauses because they do not appear in early manuscripts and because this material is duplicated in 8:4. Metzger, p. 515.
- 80 Luther, *Lectures*, p. 217.
- 81 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), as it appears at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/luther02.html>: 9-10.
- 82 Latin Vulgate quotation from *BibleWorks 7* software, copyright *BibleWorks LLC*, 2005.
- 83 Augustine used *se* ten times and *me* three times. Aland, p. 538.
- 84 It is interesting to note that although the *Luther Bibel* of 1912 uses "mich," the updated *Revidierte Lutherbibel* of 1984 uses "dich." Source: *BibleWorks 7*.