

“Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir” BWV 29

1. Sinfonia	1. Sinfonia
2. <i>Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir und verkündigen deine Wunder.</i> ¹	2. <i>We thank you, God, we thank you and proclaim your wonders.</i>
3. Halleluja, Stärk und Macht Sei des Allerhöchsten Namen! Zion ist noch seine Stadt, Da er seine Wohnung hat, Da er Lust zu wohnen hat, ² Da er noch bei unserm Samen An der Väter Bund gedacht.	3. Hallelujah; strength and might Be to the name of the Most High. ³ Zion is still his city ⁴ Where he has his dwelling, Where he has the desire to dwell, ⁵ Where, among our seed, he still Remembers the covenant of the fathers [of Israel]. ⁶
4. Gottlob! es geht uns wohl! Gott ist noch unsre Zuversicht,	4. Praise God; it is well with us. God is still our refuge; ⁸

¹Psalm 75:2.

²In Bach’s own score and performing part, mm. 100–102 give “Da er seine Wohnung hat,” but mm. 118–120 give “Da er Lust zu wohnen hat.” The printed libretto booklets made available to Bach’s congregants gives just the former, and some modern editions of the cantata follow suit. It is unclear whether the latter (Bach’s formulation?) was intended as a supplement or possibly as a replacement. Perhaps curiously, the second hews much more closely to scripture; Psalm 132:13 reads “Denn der HERR hat Zion erwählt, und hat Lust daselbst zu wohnen” (“For the LORD has chosen Zion, and has the desire to dwell there”).

³“Most High”—*elyon* in Hebrew, *hupsistos* in Greek—is used in the Bible as a name for Israel’s God, who dwells on high. In nonbiblical Greek, *hupsistos* was used for Zeus as the most high god.

⁴“Zion” is used here as a synonym for biblical “Jerusalem” and, in turn, for “[the Lutheran community of eighteenth-century] Leipzig.” The former are explicitly connected, e.g., in Hebrews 12:22, “ihr seid kommen zu dem Berge Zion und zu der Stadt des lebendigen Gottes, zu dem himmlischen Jerusalem” (“you [followers of Jesus] have come to the mount Zion and to the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem”); and all three places are explicitly connected, e.g., in Bach’s Cantata 193, “Ihr Pforte zu Zion” (“You Gates of Zion”), where movement 4 declares “O Leipziger Jerusalem ...” (“O Jerusalem of Leipzig ...”).

⁵See fn. 2, above.

⁶These lines draw significantly upon Deuteronomy 4:31, “Gott ... wird ... nicht vergessen des Bundes, den er deinen Vätern geschworen hat” (“God will not forget the covenant that he has sworn to your [i.e., the nation of Israel’s] fathers”); likewise upon Genesis 17:7, “Und ich will aufrichten meinen Bund zwischen mir und dir und deinem Samen nach dir, bei ihren Nachkommen, dass es ein ewiger Bund sei, also dass ich dein Gott sei und deines Samens nach dir” (“And I [God] will set up my covenant between me and you [Abraham, the father of Jacob, the father of the nation of Israel] and your seed after you, among their descendants, that it will be an eternal covenant, so that I will be your God, and of your seed after you”). Abraham’s “seed” (i.e., descendants), then, would include Bach’s fellow Lutherans, even though they were gentiles, as according to Galatians 3:7, Christians are (spiritually) the children of Abraham: “die des Glaubens sind, das sind Abrahams Kinder” (“whoever are of the faith [in Jesus], these are Abraham’s children”).

⁸“Zuversicht” means “hope and confidence” but can also mean “refuge,” as, e.g., in Psalm 62:8-9, “meine Zuversicht ist auf Gott; hoffet auf ihn allezeit, ... Gott ist unsre Zuversicht” (“my refuge is in God; hope in him always, ... God is my refuge”).

Sein Schutz, sein Trost und⁷ Licht
Beschirmt die Stadt und die Paläste,
Sein Flügel hält die Mauern feste.
Er lässt uns aller Orten segnen,
Der Treue, die den Frieden küsst,
Muss für und für
Gerechtigkeit begegnen.
Wo ist ein solches Volk wie wir,
Dem Gott so nah und gnädig ist!

His protection, his comfort and light,
Shields the city and the palaces;
His [army] wing⁹ holds fast the [city] walls.¹⁰
Everywhere he makes us to be blessed;
Righteousness
Must ever and ever
Meet faithfulness,¹¹ which kisses peace.¹²
Where is there such a people as us,
To whom God is so close and merciful?

5. Gedenk an uns mit deiner Liebe,
Schleuss¹³ uns in dein Erbarmen ein!
Segne die, so uns regieren,
Die uns leiten, schützen, führen,
Segne, die gehorsam sein!

5. Remember us with your love;
Enclose us in your mercy.
Bless those who rule us,
Who lead, protect, guide us;
Bless those who are obedient.

6. Vergiss es ferner nicht, mit deiner Hand
Uns Gutes zu erweisen;
So soll dich unsre Stadt und unser Land,
Das deiner Ehre voll,
Mit Opfern und mit Danken preisen,

6. And further, do not forget to bestow
Good things on us with your hand;
Thus shall our city, and our land
That [is] full of your honor,¹⁴
Praise you with offerings and with thanks,

⁷Some modern editions incorrectly read “sein Trost, sein Licht” (“his comfort, his light”).

⁹Lines 4–5 apparently draw on two biblical uses of the word “Flügel,” namely as bird wings and as army wings. Psalm 17:8 asked of God, likened to a bird, “Beschirme mich unter dem Schatten deiner Flügel” (“shield me under the shadow of your wings”). Isaiah 8:8, however, in Lutheran interpretation, spoke of the “wings” of a battle formation assembled by God when it warned that the “den König von Assyrien und alle seine Herrlichkeit werden ihre Flügel ausbreiten, daß sie dein Land ... füllen” (“the king of Assyria and all his glory [i.e., his army] will spread/disperse their wings, such that they will fill your land”).

¹⁰This line is not saying that God’s bird wing holds up various walls from falling; rather, it is saying that God’s army wing protects and keeps city walls from being breached by enemies. Psalm 122:7, in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, says of Jerusalem (which in this cantata is associated with Leipzig—see fn. 4 above), “Es müsse Friede sein inwendig in deinen Mauern, und Glück in deinen Palästen” (“May there be obliged to be peace inside of your [city] walls, and felicity [inside] of your palaces”).

¹¹“Der Treue, die den Frieden küsst” does not mean “the faithful [male] person, who kisses peace” (for this, the line would need to read “Der Treue, *der* den Frieden küsst”). It also does not mean “The faith that kisses peace” (for this, it would need to read “*Das* Glauben, *das* den Frieden küsst”). The “der” in “der Treue” is feminine dative, not masculine nominative. The gist of lines 7–9 is “die Gerechtigkeit begegnet der Treue” (“righteousness meets faithfulness”).

¹²Lines 7–9 rearrange several ideas from Psalm 85:11, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “... dass Güte und Treue einander begegnen, Gerechtigkeit und Friede sich küssen” (“... that goodness and faithfulness meet one another, righteousness and peace kiss each other”).

¹³“Schleuss ein” is an older German spelling of “schliess ein,” the second-person singular imperative form of “einschliessen.” The verb “einschleussen” is not to be confused with “einschleusen” (“to channel”) or “[jemanden] einschleusen” (“to smuggle [someone] in”).

¹⁴That is, the land of Saxony, too, is full of God’s honor, in line with Isaiah 6:3, “Alle Land sind seiner Ehren voll” (“All the lands are full of his [i.e., God’s] honor”).

Und alles Volk soll sagen: Amen!

And all the people shall say: Amen.¹⁵

7. Halleluja, Stärk und Macht
Sei des Allerhöchsten Namen!

7. Hallelujah; strength and might
Be to the name of the Most High.¹⁶

**8. Sei Lob und Preis mit Ehren
Gott Vater, Sohn, Heiligem Geist!
Der woll in uns vermehren,
Was er uns aus Gnaden verheisst,
Dass wir ihm fest vertrauen,
Gänzlich verlassn auf ihn,
Von Herzen auf ihn bauen,
Dass unsr Herz, Mut und Sinn
Ihm tröstlich solln¹⁷ anhangen;¹⁸
Drauf singen wir zur Stund:
Amen, wir werdens erlangen,
Glaubn wir aus Herzens Grund.¹⁹**

**8. Acclamation and praise with honor²⁰ be
To God Father, Son, Holy Spirit,
Who would increase in us
What he, out of mercy, promises us;
That we may trust him steadfastly,
Wholly depend on him,
Rely on him from the heart,
That our heart, courage, and mind
Shall adhere comfortingly to him;
Thus we sing at this hour:
Amen, we will obtain it,
If we believe from the bottom of our heart.**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



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¹⁵The line “And all [Israel as] the people [of God] shall say: Amen” is a liturgical formula taken over from its multiple repetitions in Deuteronomy 27:14-26 (and verse 9 says that all Israel have become the people of God). The use of the formula in the cantata, then, equates the Lutheran community in Leipzig with “all the people [of God],” a new Israel who praises “God Father, Son, Holy Spirit” (see lines 1–2 in movement 8). Regarding Bach’s fellow Lutherans as being among the successors of ancient Israel, see also fn. 6, above.

¹⁶See fn. 3, above.

¹⁷The text booklets made available to Bach’s congregants for a reperformance of this cantata in the 1740s here read “Ihm *festiglich* anhangen” (“[that our heart, courage, and mind] *may* adhere *steadfastly* to him”), not “Ihm *tröstlich solln* anhangen” (“... *shall* adhere *comfortingly* to him”). The music and text for this movement is in Bach’s handwriting in the main set of his own vocal performing parts, and here, curiously, the alto part alone gives the variant “Ihm tröstlich *tun* anhangen” (“... *do* adhere *comfortingly* to him”), while the rest read “Ihm tröstlich *solln/soll* anhangen.”

¹⁸“Anhangen” is an older spelling for “anhängen.”

¹⁹The final stanza of “Nun lob, mein Seel, den Herren.”

²⁰The “n” in “mit Ehren” here, in older German, is a singular (not plural) dative ending.