

"In allen meinen Taten" BWV 97

1. In allen meinen Taten
Lass ich den Höchsten raten,
Der alles kann und hat;
Er muss zu allen Dingen,
Solls anders wohl gelingen,
Selbst geben Rat und Tat.¹

1. In all my actions
I let the Most High² give counsel,
Who can do, and holds, all;
Unto all things³ he must—
If it is otherwise to prosper well⁴—
Himself grant counsel and action.

2. Nichts ist es spat⁵ und frühe
Um alle meine Mühe,
Mein Sorgen ist umsonst.
Er mag mit meinen Sachen
Nach seinem Willen machen,
Ich stells in seine Gunst.

2. There is nothing, night and day,⁶
For all my labor;⁷
My trouble is in vain.
He may deal with my affairs
According to his will—
I lay this to his grace.⁸

3. Es kann mir nichts geschehen,
Als was er hat versehen,⁹
Und was mir selig ist:
Ich nehm es, wie ers gibet;
Was ihm von mir beliebt,
Das hab ich auch erkiest.

3. Nothing can befall me
Except what he has provided
And what is blessed to me:
I take it as he grants it;
What he desires from me,
I have chosen that as well.

4. Ich traue seiner Gnaden,
Die mich vor allem Schaden,
Vor allem Übel schützt.
Leb ich nach seinen Gesetzen,¹⁰

4. I trust his mercy
That protects me from all injury,
From all evil.

¹The text consists of all the stanzas of the 9-stanza version of this hymn. (In Bach's day, this hymn existed also in a version with six more stanzas interspersed.)

²"Most High" is a name used frequently in the Hebrew Bible for the Lord God of Israel. In the New Testament, God the Father (but not Jesus, the Son) is called "Most High."

³The language of this line is apparently derived from 1 Timothy 4:8, which proclaims that "die Gottseligkeit ist zu allen Dingen nützlich" ("godliness is beneficial unto all things").

⁴This expression is derived from Psalm 118:25, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "O HERR, lass wohl gelingen" ("O Lord, let [me/us/it] prosper well").

⁵This is an older spelling of "spät" ("late"; or here, "evening/night"). "Spat" is sometimes thought to be an error, but the spelling without umlaut is found in old dictionaries, and it occasionally shows up in such rhyming pairs as "Rat" and "spat," as, e.g., in the opening stanza of the famous Lutheran hymn "Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein."

⁶"Spat/Spät und früh" (literally, "late and early") was an idiomatic expression that meant "night and day" (i.e., "all day long").

⁷This is presumably an allusion to Ecclesiastes 1:3, "Was hat der Mensch mehr von aller seiner Mühe, die er hat unter der Sonne?" ("What does the person have more from all his labor that he has under the sun?").

⁸In theological use, "Gunst" could mean "favor" or "grace," or both; elsewhere the libretto uses the word "Gnade," which in theological use could mean "grace" or "mercy," or both.

⁹Some modern editions have misread this word as "ersehen" ("to learn [from seeing something]").

¹⁰In the hymnbooks of Bach's day (and today), this line reads "Leb ich nach sein[e]n Sätzen" ("If I live according to his *ordinances*"). "Satz" (plural, "Sätze") is an archaic synonym for "Satzung" ("ordinance"),

**So wird mich nichts verletzen,
Nichts fehlen, was mir nützt.**

**5. Er wolle meiner Sünden
In Gnaden mich entbinden,
Durchstreichen meine Schuld!
Er wird auf mein Verbrechen
Nicht stracks das Urteil sprechen
Und haben noch Geduld.**

**6. Leg ich mich späte nieder,
Erwache frühe wieder,
Lieg oder ziehe fort,
In Schwachheit und in Banden,
Und was mir stösst zuhanden,
So tröstet mich sein Wort.**

**7. Hat er es denn beschlossen,
So will ich unverdrossen**

**If I live according to his laws,¹¹
Then nothing will harm me;
Nothing will be lacking that is of benefit to me.**

**5. May he, in mercy,
Absolve me of my sins,
Strike out my debt/guilt!¹²
Upon my violations¹³ he will
Not pronounce judgment straightaway
And will have patience yet.**

**6. If I lie down at night,
Reawaken¹⁴ in the morning,
Recline, or go forth¹⁵
In my weakness and in fetters¹⁶
And something¹⁷ befalls me,
Then his word comforts me.**

7. If he has determined it so,

employed, e.g., in Leviticus 22:9, “Darum sollen sie meine Sätze halten” (“[The LORD said to Moses:] Therefore they [the priests] shall keep my ordinances”). See also fn. 15, below.

¹¹See fn. 10, above.

¹²Dishonored with “guilt” and in every respect at “fault” for their sins, humans have incurred a crushing “debt” to God. The German word “Schuld” carries all three of these meanings. According to classical Christian doctrine, only God possesses the power to reconcile humans to himself, and it was for this purpose that Jesus—the Messiah, and divine Son of God—died sacrificially, shedding his blood as the “Lamb of God,” on the cross. In this way, the blood of Jesus is said to have paid people’s sin-incurred “debt/guilt,” a payment bestowed as an unmerited gift on sinners through the “Gnade” (“mercy/grace”) of God. The extended metaphor here is graphical and financial: the sinner’s “debt” will be “crossed out” in God’s “accounts book” with the “ink” of the blood of Jesus.

¹³The noun “Verbrechen” here is plural (its possessive “mein” is a poetically clipped version of “meine”). The verb “verbrechen” in older German was sometimes employed as an intensifier of “brechen,” to signify not merely “to break,” but “to [atrociously] violate.” For example, in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, 1 Timothy 4:12 reads “[Die jungen Witwen] haben ihr Urteil, dass sie den ersten Glauben verbrochen haben” (“the young widows have their judgment [of ‘guilty’], because they have [atrociously] violated the first faith [i.e., namely—according to Luther—the faith of their Christian baptism]).”

¹⁴The (separable) verbs contrasted here are “sich niederlegen” (“to lie down”) and “wiedererwachen” (either “to be resurrected from death to life” or “to reawaken from sleep”).

¹⁵Lines 1–3 are an allusion to Deuteronomy 6:6-7, “diese Worte ... sollst du zu Herzen nehmen, und sollst sie deinen Kindern schärfen und davon reden, wenn du in deinem Hause sitzt oder auf dem Wege gehst, wenn du dich niederlegst oder aufstehst” (“[Moses said to the people of Israel:] These words [of God’s instruction/law] you shall take to heart, and shall impress them upon your children, and talk about them when you are seated in your home or go along the path, when you lie down or get up”). See also fn. 10, above.

¹⁶This stanza apparently derives its language about (metaphorical) “fetters” and “[God’s] word” from 2 Timothy 2:9, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “über welchem ich mich leide bis an die Bande, als ein Übeltäter; aber Gottes Wort ist nicht gebunden” (“[the gospel] for whose sake I [would] endure unto fetters, as [if I were] an evildoer; but God’s word is not fettered”).

¹⁷“The German word “was” (“what/whatever”) seems to be used here as a clipped form of “etwas” (“something”) or “irgendwas” (“anything”).

**An mein Verhängnis gehn!
Kein Unfall unter allen
Soll¹⁸ mir zu harte fallen,
Ich will ihn überstehn.**

**Then I will go unwearily¹⁹
About my [God-given] lot.²⁰
Not one mishap among them all
Shall come down too harshly on me;
I will endure it.**

**8. Ihm hab ich mich ergeben
Zu sterben und zu leben,
Sobald er mir gebeut.²¹
Es sei heut oder morgen,
Dafür lass ich ihn sorgen;
Er weiss die rechte Zeit.**

**8. I have given myself up to him
To die and to live,
As soon as he commands me.
Be it today or tomorrow,
I will let him take care of that;
He knows the right time.**

**9. So sein nun, Seele, deine
Und traue dem alleine,
Der dich erschaffen hat;
Es gehe, wie es gehe,
Dein²² Vater in der Höhe,
Der weiss zu allen Sachen Rat.²³**

**9. So be now, soul, yours,²⁴
And trust only in the one
Who has created you.
Let things be, as they may;²⁵
Your father [God] on high,
He knows counsel in all matters.**

¹⁸The contemporary hymnbooks here read “wird mir fallen” (“will come down on me”), which is the reading given in mm. 43, 49, and 51 of Bach’s original materials. In mm. 57, 58, 90, and 91, however, Bach’s materials give “soll mir fallen” (“shall come down on me”).

¹⁹The “I” in this poetry is probably meant to contrast with the biblical character Job, who in chapter 10 of the book of Job says he is weary of life and would go to God and complain of what God has imposed upon him.

²⁰In modern German, “*das* Verhängnis” (neuter noun) means “doom,” “destiny,” “fate.” In older German, however, “*die* Verhängnis” (feminine noun) was often a synonym for “Verordnung” (“decree”). Luther, for example, employed the expression “eine Verhängnis Gottes” (“a decree of God”), and this is the way the word is apparently being used here. (“Mein Verhängnis,” then, would be a poetically clipped version of “meine Verhängnis.”) This “Verhängnis”—a person’s imposed lot, decreed by God—is related to “what he [God] has provided” at line 2 in movement 3.

²¹In older German, “gebeut” is the third-person singular, present-tense form of the verb “gebieten” (“to command”). The Luther Bibles of Bach’s day use this spelling, most famously, in Deuteronomy 26:16.

²²Here some modern editions wrongly give “mein” (“my”).

²³“Der weiss zu allen Sachen Rat” is the version of this line, conforming to hymnals of Bach’s day, found in Bach’s original performing parts for alto, tenor, and bass, with each syllable of text set to one beat of music. This was the copyist’s original reading in the soprano part as well, but Bach crossed out a portion of the text so that it read “Weiss allen Sachen Rat” (“Knows counsel on all matters”), a shorter version of the line conforming to other hymnals of Bach’s day. This means that the text in the soprano clashes with the one in the lower three voices. Modern editions revise Bach’s alto, tenor, and bass lines to fit this shorter (soprano) version of the line, effectively replicating a change that Bach had made (only) in the soprano. But the rhythmically more active lower voices, unrevised in Bach’s own materials, had obviously been designed for the longer text, making it possibly more satisfying to use the longer version in all four voices, undoing Bach’s puzzling inconsistency.

²⁴The meaning of this line is unclear. Eighteenth-century commentary on this hymn explains and paraphrases it as “do not let your even temper be disturbed.” Some printed versions attempted to make sense of it by changing the last word to “seine,” yielding “So be now, soul, his [God’s].”

²⁵Literally, “Let it go, how it may go.” This was one of several renderings in German of the classical phrase “quocunque res cadent.” A more straightforward version was “es geht wie es mag” (“it will go as it may”). There is an apparently related sentiment in Ecclesiastes 3:19, “Denn es geht dem Menschen wie dem Vieh” (“For it goes with the person as with cattle”); i.e., both await the same fate (namely, death).

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