

“Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan” BWV 100

1. Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan,
Es bleibt gerecht sein Wille;
Wie er fängt meine Sachen an,
Will ich ihm halten stille.
Er ist mein Gott,
Der in der Not
Mich wohl weiss zu erhalten;
Drum lass ich ihn nur walten.¹

1. What God does is done well;
His will remains righteous.
However he dispatches² my affairs,
I will keep still before him.
He is my God,
Who in [times of] distress
Knows well how to preserve me;
That is why I just let him rule.

2. Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan,
Er wird mich nicht betrügen,
Er führet mich auf rechter Bahn,
So lass ich mich begnügen
An seiner Huld
Und hab Geduld,
Er wird mein Unglück wenden,
Es steht in seinen Händen.

2. What God does is done well;
He will not deceive me;
He guides me on the right course [of life];³
Thus I will be content
With his favor
And have patience;
He will turn my misfortune around;
It is in his hands.

3. Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan,
Er wird mich wohl bedenken;
Er, als mein Arzt und Wundermann,
Wird mir nicht Gift einschenken
Vor Arznei.
Gott ist getreu,
Drum will ich auf ihn bauen
Und seiner Gnade trauen.⁴

3. What God does is done well;
He will well take me into consideration;
He, as my physician and man of miracles,
Will not pour me poison
As medicine.
God is faithful;
That is why I will rely on him
And trust his mercy.

4. Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan,
Er ist mein Licht, mein Leben,⁵
Der mir nichts Böses gönnen kann,
Ich will mich ihm ergeben
In Freud und Leid.
Es kommt die Zeit,
Da öffentlich erscheint,
Wie treulich er es meint.

4. What God does is done well;
He is my light, my life,
Who can wish me nothing evil;
I will give myself over to him
In joy and sorrow.
The time is coming
When [at the last] it will be openly manifest
How he faithfully means it [to uphold his lack of ill will].

¹ The text of this cantata consists of all the stanzas of this hymn.

² The verb “anfängen” here does not mean “to begin” or “to commence”; in older German, the phrase “meine Sachen anfängen” can be used in the place of “meine Sachen verrichten” (“to dispatch my affairs”)

³ A combination of language from Psalm 143:10, “du bist mein Gott; dein guter Geist führe mich auf ebener Bahn” (“you are my God; may your benign Spirit guide me on the even course [of life]”); and Proverbs 4:11, “Ich will dich den Weg der Weisheit führen; ich will dich auf rechter Bahn leiten” (“I will guide you along the path of wisdom; I will lead you on the right course [of life]”).

⁴ Many contemporary hymnbooks here read “Und seiner Güte trauen” (“And trust his goodness”). Bach is sometimes surmised or implied as having changed this line himself, for biblical-theological reasons, but the cantata reading is also in fact found in a fair number of hymnbooks of Bach’s day.

⁵ Many contemporary hymnbooks here read “Er ist mein Licht und Leben” (“He is my light and life”). Bach is sometimes surmised or implied as having changed this line himself, for musical-setting reasons, but the cantata reading is also in fact found in a fair number of hymnbooks of Bach’s day.

5. Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan,
Muss ich den Kelch gleich schmecken,
Der bitter ist nach meinem Wahn,
Lass ich mich doch nicht schrecken,
Weil doch zuletzt
Ich werd ergötzt
Mit süßem Trost im Herzen;
Da weichen alle Schmerzen.

6. Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan,
Darbei⁸ will ich verbleiben.
Es mag mich auf die rauhe Bahn
Not, Tod und Elend treiben,
So wird Gott mich
Ganz väterlich
In seinen Armen halten;
Drum lass ich ihn nur walten.

Samuel Rodigast

5. What God does is done well;
If right now I must taste the cup [of suffering]⁶
That is bitter according to my way of thinking,⁷
I do not let myself yet be afraid,
Because yet at the last
I will be cheered
With sweet comfort in my heart;
There [at the last] all sorrows give way.

6. What God does is done well—
I will abide by this.
If distress, death, and affliction may
Drive me on the rough course [of life],
Then God will,
Most paternally,
Hold me in his arms;
That is why I just let him rule.

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



Scan or go to <http://www.bachcantatatexts.org/BWV100> for an annotated translation

⁶ In biblical language, “the cup” is a metaphor for what God has to offer a person, whether positive (e.g., “the cup of consolation”) or negative (e.g., “the cup of wrath,” and “the cup of suffering”).

⁷ Here, “Wahn” is not exactly “delusion” (the meaning in modern German). In older German, “Wahn” was used as a synonym for “Meinung” (“opinion,” “what one thinks”), more specifically sometimes in the sense of an “unsichere Annahme” (“arguable assumption”). The idea is not that it is deluded or even wrong to judge the cup of suffering to be bitter, but that such a judgment is incomplete. In Lutheran thought, bitterness of suffering was not a bad thing—it was in the nature of things, and was good for you.

⁸ “Darbei” (or “darbey”) is an older-German alternative spelling of “dabei.” Curiously, some modern printings of this libretto give “derbei.” Bach quilled “darbey” (his mark over the “y” was conventionally used in old German cursive not as an umlaut but as a marker that more clearly distinguishes the “y” from the “e”) in his own score and in his original performing parts (except for the tenor part, where he wrote “dabeÿ”).