

“Es ist euch gut, dass ich hingehē” BWV 108

1. *Es ist euch gut, dass ich hingehē; denn so ich nicht hingehē, so¹ kömmt der Tröster nicht zu euch. So ich aber gehē, will ich ihn zu euch senden.*²

2. Mich kann kein Zweifel stören,
Auf dein Wort, Herr, zu hören.
Ich glaube, gehst du fort,
So kann ich mich getrösten,
Dass ich zu den Erlösten
Komm an gewünschten⁵ Port.

3. Dein Geist wird mich also regieren,
Dass ich auf rechter Bahne geh;

1. *It is good for you [disciples] that I [Jesus] should go there [to heaven];³ for if I should not go there, then the Comforter [Holy Spirit]⁴ will not come to you. But if I should go, I will send him to you.*

2. No doubt can hinder me
In hearing your word,⁶ Lord [Jesus].
I believe that if you go away [to heaven],⁷
Then I can hope with confidence⁸
That I will come to the wished-for haven,⁹
To the [place of the] redeemed [of God],¹⁰

3. Your [Holy] Spirit¹¹ will thus govern me
That I may go on the right course;¹²

¹This word—“so” (“then”)—appears in m. 25 of Bach’s setting but is lacking in m. 18.

²John 16:7 (verbatim; i.e., including the “so” [“then”] discussed in fn. 1, above).

³On Jesus “going there,” see fn. 13, below. Not only the “come” verb but also the “go” verbs are subjunctive in the underlying Greek text of John 16:7, including where they are not preceded by the word “ean” (“if”), suggesting their translation as “should come” and “should go.” In Luther’s German rendering, the “go” verbs are likewise probably subjunctive (“should go”) but the “come” verb is indicative (“will come”—“kömmt” is simply an archaic spelling of “kommt”).

⁴At the time of the writing of the Gospel of John, the Greek term “ho parakletos” (“the paraclete”), which Luther rendered as “the Comforter,” apparently carried a range of meanings, from “the [legal] advocate/helper” to “the [all-purpose] comforter/helper” (inclining, however, toward the legal connotation). Luther, following traditional interpretation since the time of the early postbiblical church fathers, took John’s term to be a title for the Third Person of the Trinitarian God, “the Holy Spirit” (John 14:26 had identified “the paraclete/Paraclete” with “the holy/Holy spirit/Spirit” that God would send after Jesus had departed).

⁵In Bach’s own score this word is “gewünschten” (“wished-for”/“desired”), but in his separate performing part, copied by an assistant, the text reads “erwünschten” (“welcome”/“desired”).

⁶That is, the “word” of Jesus in John 16:7 that was proclaimed in the first movement.

⁷“Fortgehen” (“to go away”) here acts a synonym for the “hingehen” (“to go [from here to over] there”) in movement 1. See fn. 13, below.

⁸The reflexive “sich getrösten” is an older German verb with several related meanings; in the context of this cantata movement it has the sense of “to place one’s hope and/or confidence in something/someone.”

⁹This is a standard baroque metaphor. The desired “Port” (“haven”/“harbor”) is that of the heavenly city, the “new Jerusalem” (see fn. 10, below).

¹⁰This line’s expression “the redeemed” stems from Isaiah 35:10, “Die Erlösten des HERRN werden wiederkommen” (“the redeemed of the LORD will come back [to Zion/Jerusalem, from captivity in Babylon]”). Traditional Christian interpretation took this passage to be a foreshadowing of Christian believers returning, at the resurrection of the dead, from their miserable captivity in the earthly “old Jerusalem” (caused by “the Fall” of Adam and Eve, and thus of their progeny, into sin) to their joyful freedom in the heavenly “new Jerusalem” (where they will be restored to the sinless state in which Adam and Eve had been created by God).

¹¹“Geist” here would be understood as “the Holy Spirit.” This line alludes to Galatians 5:18, “Regiert euch aber der Geist, so seid ihr nicht unter dem Gesetz” (“But if the [Holy] Spirit governs you [followers of Jesus], then you are not under the Law [of Moses]”). Luther took the word “Geist” in this verse to refer to God, the Holy Spirit (see also fn. 4, above).

¹²An allusion to Psalm 143:10, “du bist mein Gott; dein guter Geist führe mich auf ebener Bahn” (“you are my God; may your benign Spirit lead me on the even course”). Luther took the “Geist” in this verse, too, to refer to God, the Holy Spirit (see also fn. 4 and fn. 11, above).

Durch deinen Hingang kommt er ja zu mir,
Ich frage sorgensvoll: Ach, ist er nicht schon hier?

Through your going there [to heaven]¹³ he [your Spirit]
indeed comes to me;
I ask, full of worrying: Ah, is he not here yet?

4. Wenn aber jener, der Geist der Wahrheit,
kommen wird, der wird euch in alle Wahrheit
leiten. Denn er wird nicht von ihm selber reden,
sondern was er hören wird, das wird er reden;
und was zukünftig ist, wird er verkündigen.¹⁴

4. But when that one [the Comforter], the Spirit of
Truth,¹⁵ will come, he will guide you into¹⁶ all truth.
For he will not speak out of his own [authority];¹⁷
rather, what he will hear,¹⁸ this will he speak; and
what is in the future, [this] will he proclaim.¹⁹

5. Was mein Herz von dir begehrt,
Ach, das wird mir wohl gewährt.
Überschütte mich mit Segen,
Führe mich auf deinen Wegen,
Dass ich in der Ewigkeit
Schaue deine Herrlichkeit!

5. What my heart desires from you [Jesus],
Ah, that will assuredly be granted to me.
Shower me with blessings;²⁰
Lead me on your paths,
So that in eternity
I may look upon your glory.

**6. Dein Geist, den Gott vom Himmel gibt,
Der leitet alles, was ihn liebt,**

**6. Your²² [Holy] Spirit,²³ whom God gives²⁴ from
heaven,**

¹³“Hingang” (“going there/away”), essentially an archaic synonym for “Weggang” (“going away”/“departure”), was the term used in Lutheran discourse for Jesus’s “going away” from the world up “there” to God the father in heaven (hence Bach’s setting the “Hin” in “Hingang” to the highest note in this movement), with the idea that Jesus would eventually come back and that in the meantime the Holy Spirit would comfort his followers. In later German, “Hingang” came to be used as a synonym for “Tod” (“death”; i.e., one’s departure from earthly life), or as a synonym for “Ruhr” (“dysentery”).

¹⁴John 16:13.

¹⁵Because this title is linked in the Gospel of John to the title that Luther had rendered as “the Comforter” (see fn. 4, above), Luther took “the Spirit of Truth” likewise to be a title for the Third Person of the Trinitarian God, “the Holy Spirit.”

¹⁶The sources of the original Greek wording of Gospel of John are divided on whether this preposition should be “eis” (“into”) or “en” (“in”). The Greek source for the text transmitted in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day gives “eis,” and accordingly Luther’s “in alle Wahrheit”—i.e., using the accusative “in alle Wahrheit,” not the dative “in aller Wahrheit”—calls for “into all truth,” not “in all truth.”

¹⁷That is, “the [Holy] Spirit” speaks on the authority of what God the father communicates to him. John 12:49 and 14:10 say that Jesus, the son, likewise speaks not “out of his own” but out of the authority of God the father.

¹⁸That is, this concerns what “the [Holy] Spirit” (the Third Person of the Trinity) would “hear” in communication from God the father (the First Person), or Jesus (the Second Person), or both, or from the father through the son.

¹⁹Luther took this to mean that the Holy Spirit will proclaim to the followers of Jesus not only what they should believe and do but also what the future holds specifically for Christianity.

²⁰“Segen” here is probably plural here but could be singular. The line clearly alludes to Psalm 21:4, but the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day variously give that passage either as “du überschüttest ihn mit *guten Segen*” (“you [God] shower him [King David] with *benign blessings*”), or as “du überschüttest ihn mit *gutem Segen*” (“you shower him with *benign blessing*”). In the Hebrew text of Psalm 21:4 the noun is plural (literally, “blessings of goodness”).

²²The hymn books read not “dein Geist” (“your Spirit”) but “der Geist” (“the Spirit”). The cantata’s reading is presumably meant to echo the “dein Geist” from line 1 in movement 3, where the “your” applies to Jesus.

²³The Spirit/Comforter guides the followers of Jesus, according to John 16:13, the text of movement 4.

²⁴The sense of this line is derived from John 3:34, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Welchen Gott gesandt hat, der redet Gottes Wort; denn Gott gibt den Geist nicht nach dem Mass; der Vater hat den Sohn lieb und hat ihm alles in seine Hand gegeben” (“He [Jesus], whom God has sent [from above, into the world], speaks God’s word; for God gives [Jesus] the Spirit not according to [finite] measure; [God] the father loves the son [Jesus] and, into his hand, has given him everything”).

**Auf wohl gebähntem Wege.
Er setzt und richtet unsren Fuss,
Dass er nicht anders treten muss,
Als wo man findt den Segen.²¹**

Christiane Mariane von Ziegler

**He [the Spirit] guides everything that loves him [God]
On the well-cleared path [of the upright].²⁵
He places and directs our foot
So that it does not have to tread other
Than where one finds blessing.**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



Scan or go to <http://www.bachcantatatexts.org/BWV108> for an annotated translation

²¹A stanza of “Gott Vater, sende deinen Geist.”

²⁵The sense of this line is derived from Proverbs 15:19, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Der Weg des Faulen ist dornigt, aber der Weg der Frommen ist wohl gebähnt” (“The path of the lazy man is hedged with thorns, but the path of upright men is well-cleared [of such impediments]”); some Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, however, give “wohl gebaut” (“well-built”). In older German the verb “bahnen” can carry the same meaning as the English-dialect verb “boon” (“to repair/clear a road/path”). That the Spirit guides people on the right course/path is expressed in Psalm 143:10 (see fn. 12, above).