

“Gott ist unsre Zuversicht” BWV 197.2

1. Teil

Part 1

1. Gott ist unsre Zuversicht,
Wir vertrauen seinen Händen.
Wie er unsre Wege führt,
Wie er unser Herz regiert,
Da ist Segen aller Enden.

1. God is our hope [and refuge];¹
We trust his hands.
The way he guides our paths,
The way he rules our heart,
There [his] blessing is [found], to all ends [of the earth].²

2. Gott ist und bleibt der beste Sorger,
Er hält am besten Haus.
Er führet unser Tun zuweilen wunderlich,
Jedennoch fröhlich aus,
Wohin der Vorsatz nicht gedacht.
Was die Vernunft unmöglich macht,
Das füget sich.
Er hat das Glück der Kinder, die ihn lieben,

2. God is and remains the best caretaker;
He manages [our spiritual and material] household best.
He conducts our doings sometimes strangely,³
But nevertheless⁴ joy-inspiringly,⁵
To [his]⁶ purpose⁷ [that we had] not conceived.
What reason makes [out to be] impossible,
That does come to pass.
From [their] youth on, he has inscribed into his hand⁸

¹This motto appears in Psalm 46:2 and Psalm 62:9. Both the Hebrew source word “machaseh” and Luther’s rendering of it, “Zuversicht,” can mean “hope,” “trust,” “[source of] confidence,” and/or “refuge.”

²“Alle Enden” is a common biblical expression employed to express not “all ends/purposes” or the “end of all time” but “all ends of the [thought-to-be-flat] earth.”

³“Wunderlich” is apparently employed here in its sense as a synonym for “seltsam/sonderbar” (“odd/strange”). This line draws on the language of Psalm 4:4, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Erkennet doch, dass der HERR seine Heiligen wunderlich führt” (“But recognize that the LORD wondrously/strangely leads/conducts [the ways/doings of] his saints”); the Calov commentary Bible, which Bach owned, explains that “wunderlich führt” here means “durch wunderbare und unerforschliche Wege, die von unserer Wissenschaft fern abgesondert sein” (“by means of marvelous and inscrutable ways/paths that are far removed from our knowledge [and understanding]”).

⁴“Jedennoch”—a combination not of “jeden” (“each”) and “noch” (“still/yet”), but of “je” (“ever”) and “dennoch” (“nevertheless”)—is an older-German synonym for “dennoch” and “jedoch.” The word “jedennoch” was generally not useful except in poetry when an extra syllable was needed.

⁵“Fröhlich” is apparently being used here not in its typical sense of “Freude bei etwas empfindend” (“feeling joy in something”)—i.e., such that God is joyful in performing his actions—but in its less commonly encountered sense of “bei einem Betrachter freudige Stimmung hervorrufend” (“evoking a joyful mood in an observer”). Luther used “fröhlich” in this latter sense in his commentaries on the book of Zechariah, where he noted that “die weisse Farbe ist eine fröhliche Farbe, wie das Licht” (“the color white is a joy-inspiring color, like light”).

⁶With regard to this being “God’s” (i.e., not “our”) purpose, see fn. 7, below.

⁷The word “Vorsatz” is employed often in the Luther Bibles for God’s “ends/purposes,” and as such, the “der” in “der Vorsatz” (“the purpose”) should presumably be understood to refer not to “our intent/purpose” but to “God’s intent/purpose.”

⁸The sense of this line is partly derived from Isaiah 49:16, “Siehe, in die Hände habe ich dich gezeichnet” (“Look, into the [palms of my] hands have I [God] engraved [the names of] you [Israel, my people, so that I will always be reminded of you]”). Lutheran commentary of Bach’s day interpreted this as a foreshadowing of Jesus’s metaphorically engraving the names of his people into the palms of his hands by dint of allowing himself to be nailed to the cross (i.e., as opposed to being bound with ropes).

Von Jugend an in seine Hand geschrieben.

The good fortune of his [spiritual] children who love him.

3. Schläfert allen Sorgenkummer
In den Schlummer
Kindlichen Vertrauens ein.

3. Put to sleep all care's concerns, [oh bride and groom,]
Into the slumber
Of childlike trust.

Gottes Augen, welche wachen
Und die unser Leitstern sein,
Werden alles selber machen.

God's eyes themselves, which watch [over us]
And that are our lodestar,⁹
Will do everything [needed].

4. Drum folget Gott und seinem Triebe.
Das ist die rechte Bahn.
Die führet durch Gefahr
Auch endlich in das Kanaan
Und durch von ihm geprüfte Liebe
Auch an sein heiliges Altar¹⁰
Und bindet Herz und Herz zusammen,
Herr! sei du selbst mit diesen Flammen!

4. Therefore, [oh bride and groom,] follow God and his impulse
[of love]—
That is the right course [of life].¹¹
It [this course] guides [you] through danger
Even, finally, into the Canaan [of betrothal],¹²
And, through love tested by him,
Also to his holy [marriage] altar,
And binds heart and heart together;
Lord, may you be present with these [altar] flames [of love].¹³

**5. Du süsse Lieb, schenk uns deine Gunst,
Lass uns empfinden der Liebe Brunst,
Dass wir uns von Herzen einander lieben
Und in Fried auf einem Sinne bleiben.
Kyrie eleis!**¹⁴

**5. You sweet love [of God], bestow on us your favor;
Let us feel love's ardor
So that we love one another from our hearts
And remain of one mind in peace.
Lord, have mercy.**

2. Teil

Part 2

⁹Lines 4–5 draw on Psalm 32:8, which Luther understands as God's declaring, "Ich will dich unterweisen, und dir den Weg zeigen, den du wandeln sollt; ich will dich mit meinen Augen leiten" ("I will instruct/teach you, and show you the way that you shall go; I will guide you with my eyes").

¹⁰Because the noun "Altar" is now grammatically masculine, this phrase in modern German would be not "an sein heiliges Altar" but "an seinen heiligen Altar" (which likewise means "to his holy altar"). In older German, "Altar" can be either neuter (accusative, "das Altar") or masculine (accusative, "den Altar").

¹¹This line probably draws on Proverbs 4:11, "Ich will dich den Weg der Weisheit führen, ich will dich auf rechter Bahn leiten" ("I [God] will guide you along the path of wisdom, I will lead you on the right course [of life]").

¹²In the biblical "promised land" of Canaan, Abram (who was later renamed "Abraham") immediately built several altars to God, as narrated in Genesis 12:7-8; in this cantata the marriage altar (in German, "der Traualtar") mentioned two lines later is apparently being likened to Abraham's altars in Canaan.

¹³The sense of this line is derived from Song of Songs 8:6, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "Liebe ist stark; ... ihre Glut ist feurig und eine Flamme des HERRN" ("Love is strong; its fervor is fiery and a flame of the LORD").

¹⁴A stanza of "Nun bitten wir den Heiligen Geist."

6. O du angenehmes Paar,
Dir wird eitel Heil begegnen,
Gott wird dich aus Zion segnen
Und dich leiten immerdar,
O du angenehmes Paar!

6. Oh, you [God-]pleasing¹⁵ pair,
Nothing but¹⁶ prosperity¹⁷ will befall you;
God will bless you out of Zion¹⁸ [his church]¹⁹
And guide you always,
Oh, you [God-]pleasing pair.

7. So wie es Gott mit dir
Getreu und väterlich von Kindesbeinen an gemeint,
So will er für und für
Dein allerbesten Freund
Bis an das Ende bleiben.
Und also kannst du sicher gläuben,
Er wird dir nie
Bei deiner Hände Schweiß und Mühe
Kein Gutes lassen fehlen.
Wohl dir, dein Glück ist nicht zu zählen.

7. Just as God has been
Faithfully and paternally mindful of you from childhood on,
So will he, ever and ever,
Remain your very best friend
Up to the end [of your life on earth].
And thus you can believe securely
[That] he will never,
In the sweat and labor of your hands,
Let any good thing be lacking to you [in life].
Well for you; your good fortune cannot be tallied.

8. Vergnügen und Lust,
Gedeihen und Heil
Wird wachsen und stärken und laben.
Das Auge, die Brust
Wird ewig sein Teil
An süßer Zufriedenheit haben.

8. Pleasure and delight,
Flourishing and prosperity²⁰
Will grow and [they will] strengthen and refresh [you].
The eye, the breast
Will eternally have [their]²¹ portion
Of sweet contentment.

9. Und dieser frohe Lebenslauf
Wird bis in späte Jahre währen.
Denn Gottes Güte hat kein Ziel,
Die schenkt dir viel,
Ja mehr, als selbst das Herz kann begehren.

9. And this happy life's course
Will continue into [your] late years.
For God's goodness has no end;
It [his goodness] bestows much on you [nuptial pair],
Yes, more than indeed the heart can desire.

¹⁵“Du angenehmes Paar” could simply mean “you pleasing/agreeable/charming pair.” But in religious discourse—e.g., as here, in wedding poetry that was designed for musical performance in a church service—the word “angenehm” was especially associated with God’s finding people or their offerings to be “acceptable/pleasing.”

¹⁶“Eitel” had a variety of meanings in older German, including the senses of “rein” (“pure”) and “lauter” (“nothing but”).

¹⁷The noun “Heil” has a wide variety of meanings in older German; in this libretto it is apparently used in its general sense of “Wohlstand” (“prosperity”).

¹⁸This line is a slightly adapted quotation of Psalm 128:5, one of several biblical passages that was conventionally read at Lutheran wedding services in Bach’s day.

¹⁹In traditional Christian interpretation, “Zion” is the name for the place where God dwells—formerly, in the Jerusalem temple, on Mount Zion. The name “Zion” was adopted (Hebrews 12:22, Revelation 14:1) for the Christian church, the place where God is said to dwell now that he has apparently rejected the (Jewish) temple.

²⁰With regard to “Heil” as “prosperity,” see fn. 17, above.

²¹Grammatically, strictly speaking, the possessive “sein” (“its”) here takes the neuter “das Auge” (“the eye”) as antecedent; but surely it is not only “das Auge” but also “die Brust” (feminine, “the breast”) that is meant to have its portion of contentment.

Verlasse dich gewiss darauf.

**10. Sing, bet und geh auf Gottes Wegen,
Verricht das Deine nur getreu
Und trau des Himmels reichem Segen,
So wird er bei dir werden neu;
Denn welcher seine Zuversicht
Auf Gott setzt, den verlässt er nicht.²²**

Rely, for certain, on that.

**10. Sing, pray, and go on God's paths;
Only carry out faithfully what [duty] is yours
And trust in heaven's rich blessing,
So [that] it [divine blessing] will become new in you [every
morning]²³;
For whoever places his hope
In God, he [God] does not abandon him.**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



Scan or go to <http://www.bachcantatatexts.org/BWV197.2> for an annotated translation

²²A stanza from “Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten,” but not in the wording typically associated with this cantata. Bach’s original performing parts that would have included the text for this movement are lost. In Bach’s composing score, which does survive, the movement is not provided with text. Modern editions give what is apparently a posthumous textual revision of the hymn stanza (it has not been found in any hymnals), a version entered into several related nineteenth-century manuscript copies of BWV 197.2: “So wandelt froh auf Gottes Wegen, / Und was ihr tut, das tut getreu! / Verdienet eures Gottes Segen, / Denn der ist alle Morgen neu; / Denn welcher seine Zuversicht / Auf Gott setzt, den verlässt er nicht” (“So walk happily on God’s paths; / And what you [Christians] do, do that faithfully. / Earn your God’s blessing / For it is new every morning. / For whoever places his hope / In God, / he [God] does not abandon him”). This version’s exhortation “Verdienet eures Gottes Segen” (“Earn God’s blessing”) will—or ought to—set off loud alarm bells to those who are familiar with Lutheran doctrine, as its counsel goes fundamentally against the very core and essence of Luther’s time-honored teachings that one cannot “earn” or “merit” divine blessing but may receive it only as an unmerited gift of God’s mercy and grace. The wording currently employed in editions, concerts, and recordings is extremely unlikely to be the text that Bach envisioned and performed. The version we give here, corresponding to the stanza as found in hymnals of Bach’s time, is far more likely to have been the one sung at the end of this cantata (it is what was sung in movement 7 of “Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten” BWV 93, and in movement 7 of “Siehe, ich will viel Fischer aussenden” BWV 88).

²³This line echoes, a bit distantly, the sentiments of Lamentations 3:22-23, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Die Güte des HERRN ist, dass wir nicht gar aus sind; seine Barmherzigkeit hat noch kein Ende, sondern sie ist alle Morgen neu, und deine Treue ist gross” (“It is [through] the goodness of the LORD that we are not completely done for; his mercifulness, if anything, has no end; but it is new every morning, and great is your [i.e., God’s] faithfulness”).