

# “If Thou but Suffer God to Guide Thee”: The Journey of a Lutheran Hymn

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*It is well known that German composers, particularly those of Protestant background, frequently employed hymn tunes in their orchestral and choral compositions. This study follows the journey of the text and tune of one Lutheran hymn, “Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten” or “If thou but suffer God to guide thee,” by Georg Neumark.*

## Georg Neumark (1621-1681)

Born at Langensalza in Thuringia in 1621, Georg Neumark was appointed at the age of 31 by the Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar to the posts of Court Poet, Librarian, and Registrar of the Administration at Weimar.<sup>1</sup> Later he served as secretary of the literary union known as “The Fruit-bearing Society” and authored a scholarly treatise on poetic forms.<sup>2</sup> The title hymn was published in 1657 in the key of g-minor. The seven-verse text begins (original spelling preserved) with

Wer nur den lieben GOTT läst walten,  
Und hoffet auf Ihn allezeit,  
Der wird Ihn wunderlich erhalten,  
In aller Noht und Traurigkeit.  
Wer GOTT dem Allerhöchsten traut,  
Der hat auf keinen Sand gebaut.

Wer nur den lie-ben Gott läst walten / und hoffet auf Ihn allezeit  
Der wird Ihn wunderlich erhalten / in aller Noht und Traurigkeit  
Wer Gott dem Allerhöchsten traut / der hat auf keinen Sand gebaut.

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and concluding with

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 verläst Er nicht.<sup>3</sup>

Neumark's preface to the hymn states that it is "Nach dein Spruch" (According to Thy word):

Wirf dein Anliegen auf den Herrn, der wird dich versorgen.

This is the beginning line of Psalm 55:23 in the Luther Bible. In the King James Bible this well-known verse, numbered as Psalm 55:22, reads as follows:

Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee:  
He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.

Neumark's hymn was apparently based not only on Psalm 55:23, but also on the Epistle for the fifth Sunday after Trinity, 1 Peter 3:8-15. This passage, in turn a paraphrase of Psalm 34:12-14, offers advice as to the righteous conduct of life. A portion (1 Peter 3:10-12) reads as follows:

For he that will love life, and see good days,  
let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile:  
Let him eschew evil and do good;  
let him seek peace, and ensue it.  
For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous,  
and his ears are open unto their prayers:  
but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

*Das Franckfurtischer Gesang-Buch* of 1729, containing more than 1,000 hymns, gives all seven verses of Neumark's hymn plus the moving imploration (translation by the author):<sup>4</sup>

Auf dich mein lieber GOTT ich traue,  
Ich bitte dich, verlass mich nicht;  
In gnaden meine noth anschau  
Du weist ja wohl was mir gebricht.  
Machs mit mir wiewohl wunderlich,  
Durch JESum Christ nur seliglich!

On Thee my God I dearly trust,  
I ask of Thee, forsake me not.  
In grace regard my needy soul,  
Thou knowest surely what I lack.  
Make me, though lost and wayward e'en,  
Through Jesus Christ only blessed!

The later *Marburger Gesangbuch* of 1787, containing 615 hymns, presents, however, only Neumark's seven original verses.<sup>5</sup>

Thanks to the mid-nineteenth century translations by the Englishwoman Catherine Winkworth (1827-1878), the hymn has come down to us essentially unchanged (but without the 1729 addition). Winkworth's 1855 translation of the first verse is as follows:

7.  
**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 verläst Er nicht**



<sup>1</sup>For a brief discussion of Neumark's life, see Charles Sanford Terry, *Bach's Chorales, Part II: The Hymns and Hymn Melodies of the Cantatas and Motets* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1917), p. 184.

<sup>2</sup>Georg Neumark, *Poetische Tafeln*, Jena, 1667 (Reprinted Heppenheim: Athenäum Verlag, 1971).

<sup>3</sup>Georg Neumark, *Neumarks von Muhlhausen aus Thuringen Fortgepflanzter Musikalisch-Poetischer Lustwald* (Jehna, 1657). The two illustrated examples are taken from a microfilm copy in the University of Michigan Library.

<sup>4</sup>*Das Franckfurtischer Gesang-Buch*, 1729, #738 (eight verses).

Leave God to order all thy ways,  
 And hope in Him whate'er betide,  
 Thou'll find Him in the evil days  
 Thy all sufficient strength and guide;  
 Who trusts in God's unchanging love,  
 Builds on the rock that nought can move.<sup>6</sup>

More familiar is her 1863 translation, usually sung in the original g-minor key and presented here in full:

If Thou but suffer God to guide thee,  
 And hope in Him through all thy ways,  
 He'll give thee strength, whate'er betide thee,  
 And bear thee through the evil days;  
 Who trusts in God's unchanging love  
 Builds on the Rock that nought can move.

What can these anxious cares avail thee,  
 These never-ceasing moans and sighs?  
 What can it help, if thou bewail thee  
 O'er each dark moment as it flies?  
 Our cross and trials do but press  
 The heavier for our bitterness.

Only be still and wait His leisure  
 In cheerful hope, with heart content  
 To take whate'er thy Father's pleasure  
 And all-discerning love hath sent,  
 Nor doubt our inmost wants are known  
 To him who chose for us His own.

He knows the time for joy, and truly,  
 Will send it when He sees it meet,  
 When He has tried and purged thee  
 thoroughly  
 And finds thee free from all deceit,  
 He comes to thee all unaware,  
 And makes thee own His loving care.

Nor think amid the heat of trial  
 That God hath cast thee off unheard,  
 That he whose hopes meet no denial  
 Must surely be of God preferred;  
 Time passes and much change doth bring,  
 And sets a bound to everything.

All are alike before the Highest;  
 'Tis easy to our God, we know  
 To raise thee up, though low thou liest,  
 To make the rich man poor and low;  
 True wonders still by Him are wrought,  
 Who setteth up and brings to nought.

Sing, pray, and keep His ways unswerving,  
 So do thine own part faithfully,  
 And trust His word, though undeserving,  
 Thou yet shall find it true for thee;  
 God never yet forsook at need  
 The soul that trusted Him indeed.<sup>7</sup>

While turn-of-the-century English-language Lutheran hymn books<sup>8</sup> contained all seven original verses, with only insignificant changes from Winkworth's wording,<sup>9</sup> modern Protestant hymn books typically contain only four verses, namely

1, 2, 3, and 7, or sometimes 1, 2, 6, and 7. In a currently used Lutheran hymnal, the hymn begins

If you but trust in God to guide you  
 And place your confidence in him,  
 You'll find him always there beside you,  
 To give you hope and strength within.

For those who trust God's changeless love  
 Build on a rock that will not move.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout its history this hymn has been associated with comfort and solace; Neumark presented it as a "Trostlied" (hymn of consolation), while subject-arranged English-language Lutheran hymnals have included it under such headings as "Cross and Comfort," "Comfort and Rest," or "Trust and Guidance." Although Neumark's hymn has never been as familiar to English-speaking congregations as have other hymns of German origin, such as "Nun danket alle Gott" (Now thank we all our God), "Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern" (How brightly shines the morning star), "Ein' feste Burg" (A mighty fortress), "O Haupt voll Blut" (O sacred head), or "Vom Himmel hoch" (From heaven above), it has held over the centuries a special place for German congregations. This in turn has led to its numerous adaptations by German composers.

## Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Bach wrote eight cantatas, Kantaten BWV 21, 27, 84, 88, 93, 166, 179, and 197, based principally or in part on the theme of WER NUR DEN LIEBEN GOTT LÄSST WALTEN, including one with the same title, Kantate BWV 93, for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity.<sup>11-13</sup> It has seven sections, corresponding to Neumark's seven verses, which, as described above, derive in part from the Epistle for this Sunday. The first section of the cantata is an SATB chorus in c-minor, textually unmodified from the original. The second is a bass chorale and recitative in g-minor with six intercalated lines, the third a tenor aria in E-flat major with an appreciably modified eight-line, rather than six-line, text, the fourth a soprano and alto aria in c-minor, the fifth a tenor chorale and recitative in g-minor with 20 intercalated lines, the sixth a soprano aria in g-minor, and the seventh an SATB unmodified chorale in c-minor, thus concluding as it began.

For the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, Bach wrote *Wer weiss, wie nahe mir mein Ende?* (Kantate BWV 27). The first of six sections is an SATB chorus sung in c-minor to the tune of WER NUR DEN LIEBEN GOTT LÄSST WALTEN but with its text as the following opening verse of a 12-verse hymn (plus a number of interpolated lines not given here) written by Emilie Julienne, Countess of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt:

<sup>5</sup> *Marburger Gesangbuch*, Marburg and Franckfurt, 1787, #238 (seven verses), specified for the Second Sunday after Epiphany, the Fifth Sunday after Easter (Rogate), and the Seventh Sunday after Trinity.

<sup>6</sup> Catherine Winkworth, *Lyra Germanica: Hymns for the Sundays and Chief Festivals of the Christian Year*, 1855 (Boston: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1862).

<sup>7</sup> Catherine Winkworth, *The Chorale Book for England: A Complete Hymn-Book for Public and Private Worship, in Accordance with the Services and Festivals of the Church of England*, 1863.

<sup>8</sup> For example, see *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book* (Pittsburgh: American Lutheran Publication Board, 1900), #350.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of Winkworth's translations of Neumark's hymn, see John S. Andrews, *A Study of German Hymns in Current English Hymnals*, (Berne and Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1981) pp. 78-79.

<sup>10</sup> *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978).

<sup>11</sup> Charles Sanford Terry, *Bach's Chorales*. See also W. Gilles Whittaker, *The Cantatas of Johann Sebastian Bach, Vols. I and II* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959). The translations given of the opening chorale of Kantate 27 and the final chorale of Kantate 197 may be found on pp. 258-259 of Vol. I and p. 84 of Vol. II, respectively.

<sup>12</sup> Whittaker, *The Cantatas of Johann Sebastian Bach*, offers this translation.

<sup>13</sup> Henry S. Drinker, *The 389 Chorales of Johann Sebastian Bach*, Association of American Choruses, Choral Series No. 1, 1954.

Wer weiss, wie nahe mir mein Ende?  
 Hin geht die Zeit, her kommt der Tod.  
 Ach, wie geschwinde und behende  
 Kann kommen meine Todesnot!  
 Mein Gott, ich bitt' durch Christi Blut,  
 Mach's nur mit meinem Ende gut.

Who knows, how near me [is] my end?  
 Departs the time, arrives the death.  
 Ah, how fast and nimbly  
 Can come my death-peril!  
 My God, I beg through Christ's blood,  
 Make it only with my ending good.<sup>12</sup>

Kantate BWV 21, *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis* (I had great heaviness in my heart), designated "für jede Zeit" (for every time) but sometimes listed as being for the Third Sunday after Trinity, contains brief quotations from the same melody, as for example in its eighth section, a duet for soprano and bass, in which the latter sings in b-flat minor and then in f-minor, "Entweichet, ihr Sorgen" (Away with thy trouble), to the beginning notes of the hymn tune. The tune is more fully developed in the subsequent ninth section, an SATB chorus, "Denk nicht in deiner Drangsals Seele," with a text taken directly from the fifth verse of Neumark's original hymn.

Bach employed Neumark's tune similarly in other cantatas. In BWV 166, *Wo gehest du hin?*, the same text as given above from BWV 27 is sung in g-minor; in BWV 84, *Ich bin vergnügt mit meinem Glücke*, the twelfth verse from Emilie Juliane's hymn is sung in g-minor; in BWV 88, *SIEHE, ICH WILL VIEL FISCHER AUSSENDEN*, the seventh verse of Neumark's hymn is sung in b-minor; and in BWV 179, *Siehe zu, dass deine Gottesfurcht nicht Heuchelei sei*, a verse from Christoph Tietze's hymn, "Ich armer Mensch, ich armer Sünder," is sung in a-minor.

Somewhat surprisingly, Bach set the concluding chorale of the Trauungskantate (wedding cantata) BWV 197, *Gott ist unsre Zuversicht*, to the tune, in b-minor, of Neumark's hymn, with a text taken as a modification of the hymn's seventh verse

So wandelt froh auf Gottes Wegen,  
 Und was ihr thut, das Gott getrau!  
 Verdienet eures Gottes Segen,  
 Denn der ist alle Morgen neu:  
 Denn seine Zuversicht  
 Auf Gott Setzt, denn verlässt er nicht.

So walk joyfully on God's ways,  
 And what you do, that do faithfully!  
 Merit your God's blessing,  
 For it is every morning new.  
 For who places his confidence  
 On God, him He forsakes not.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps there was an attraction to using Neumark's minor-key hymn tune not only with texts of suffering but also with texts expressing the sadness accompanying such joyous events as a wedding.

### Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809-1847)

One of the most expressive of Mendelssohn's adaptations of Neumark's chorale is the single verse in f-minor sung by the chorus immediately after the stoning of the martyr Stephanus (Stephen) in the oratorio *Paulus* (St. Paul). The text reads like this:

Dir, Herr, dir will ich mich ergeben,  
 Dir, dessen Eigentum ich bin.  
 Du nur allein, Du bist mein Leben  
 Und sterben wird mir dann Gewinn.  
 Ich lebe dir, ich sterbe dir:  
 Sei Du nur mein, so g'nügt es mir.

Oh Lord, I yield myself to Thee,  
 To Thee, to whom I do belong.  
 For Thou alone art all my life,  
 And when I die, I count it gain.  
 For Thee I live, for Thee I die.  
 If Thou art mine I am content.<sup>14</sup>

About five years earlier, however, Mendelssohn wrote the cantata *Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten* for soprano and SATB chorus.<sup>15</sup> After a short opening choral with a different text, the words of the first verse of the familiar hymn appear in the second section, those of verse four as a soprano solo in the third, and finally those of the seventh verse as a largely unison chorale in the fourth. Mendelssohn apparently was unaware of Bach's chorale (BWV 93) with the same title until some years later, although he expressed delight at his discovery of the earlier work!<sup>16</sup> Mendelssohn also used the hymn tune in the motet "Mitten wir im Leben sind" (Op. 23, no. 3) for unaccompanied SSAATTBB chorus, clearly indicating his fondness for the melody.<sup>17</sup>

Especially striking but not widely recognized is the very brief quotation in the oratorio *Elias* (Elijah) of the opening notes of the hymn tune.<sup>18</sup> In the last four bars of the recitative for soprano (the angel) and bass (Elijah) immediately preceding the famous alto aria, "Sei stille dem Herrn" (O rest in the Lord), Elijah sings (in e-minor) "O dass meine Seele stürbe! dass meine Seele stürbe!" (O

<sup>14</sup> Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Paulus*, Op. 36, 1836; translation of chorale from notes booklet accompanying EMI compact disk recording 7 47687 8, Düsseldorf Symphoniker, Köln 1977, remastered 1987.

<sup>15</sup> Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, "Mitten wir im Leben sind," Op. 23, no. 3, *Kirchenmusik*.

<sup>16</sup> Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten, Kantate für Sopran, Vierstimmig gemischten Chor, und Streicher* (Orgel ad libitum), ca. 1829, (Kassel, Basel, Tours, and London: Bärenreiter, 1976).

<sup>17</sup> Susanna Grossmann-Vendrey, *Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy und die Musik der Vergangenheit*, (Regensburg: Bosse, 1969), p. 211.8.

<sup>18</sup> Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Elias*, Op. 70, 1846. Illustrated example taken from Kalmus Vocal Score #6300, Belwin Mills Publ. Corp.

that I now might die! O that I now might die!). The phrase begins with the upward fourth (b to e) in the accompaniment and ends with the drop back to b also in the accompaniment.

Example 3

It is interesting to note that Mendelssohn also incorporates in *Elias*, albeit in the form of the E-flat-major chorale "Cast thy burden upon the Lord" (presented in current Lutheran hymnals as "I lay my sins on Jesus"), the verse (Psalm 55:23) on which Neumark's original hymn was based.

### Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Schumann's use of Neumark's hymn tune was simple and direct. As pointed out by Michael Musgrave, Schumann set the eighth of his songs in *Liederkreis* (Op. 24) to a variation of this tune.<sup>19</sup> This text, like the others in this song cycle, was taken from a poem by Heinrich Heine (1797-1856):

Anfangs wollt' ich fast verzagen,	At the onset I nearly wanted to give up,
Und ich glaubt, ich trüg es nie,	And I thought I could never bear it;
Und ich hab' es doch getragen,	And yet I have borne it,
Aber fragt mich nur nicht: wie?	But don't ask me how, don't ask how. <sup>20</sup>
Nicht: wie?	

Example 4

The song, in d-minor, contains only 11 measures with the pick-up (from "a") being the last note of the second measure in the accompaniment and with the text beginning in the third measure. Though different in wording, Heine's text is similar in spirit to that of Neumark's hymn in that it speaks to the enduring of life's burdens. Heine says not to ask how one can manage; Neumark, however, citing Psalm 55:23, says to place one's burdens and trust upon God.

### Johannes Brahms (1822-1897)

Brahms scholar Musgrave has discussed at length the background of Brahms's *Ein Deutsches Requiem*.<sup>21</sup> He makes a strong case supporting the conclusion that the main theme of the second edition, namely the famous funeral march in b-flat minor, is a variation on the hymn tune WER NUR DEN LIEBEN GOTT LÄSST WALTEN. Brahms's text, taken most directly from I Peter 1:24, is:

Denn alles Fleisch es ist wie Gras,  
Und alle Herrlichkeit des Menschen wie  
des Grasses Blumen.  
Das Gras ist verdorret und die blume  
abgefallen.

For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of  
man as the flower of grass.

The grass withereth, and the flower thereof  
falleth away.

However, the text derives originally from Isaiah 40:6-7:

The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall  
I cry?

All flesh is grass, and all the goodness  
thereof is as the flower of the field:  
The grass withereth, the flower fadeth:  
because the spirit of the Lord bloweth  
upon it: surely the people is grass.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Musgrave, "Historical Influences in the Growth of Brahms's Requiem," *Music and Letters* 53, pp. 3-17 (1972), and Michael Musgrave, *The Music of Brahms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

<sup>20</sup> Robert Schumann, *Liederkreis*, Op. 24/8, 1840. Illustrated example and translation taken from Robert Schumann: *Selected Songs for Solo, Voice and Piano* (New York: Dover Publications, 1981).

<sup>21</sup> Johannes Brahms, *Ein deutsches Requiem*, Op. 45, 1868. Illustrated examples taken from Kalmus Choral Score #06110, Belwin Mills Publ. Corp.

<sup>22</sup> Siegfried Ochs, *Geschehenes, Gesehenes*, Leipzig, 1922, as discussed in Ref. 19.

<sup>23</sup> William Albright, *Chorale-Partita in an Old Style on "Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten"* (Bryn-Mawr, Pa.: Elkan-Vogel, Inc., 1974).

<sup>24</sup> Isak Dinesen, "Babette's Feast," *The Ladies Home Journal*, June, 1950. Judith Thurman, *Isak Dinesen: The Life of a Storyteller* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), pp. 329-330.

As shown in Example 5, the tune begins on b-flat and ascends through c to the d-flat minor third. The apparently missing lead-in from the ascending fourth may be found 22 measures earlier, in the orchestral opening of the section (Example 6), as repeated leaps from f to b-flat, thus completing, with some modification, the opening line of the hymn.

Example 5

12 CHOR  
Sopran A  
Alto  
Tenor  
Bass  
Denn al - les Fleisch es ist wie Gras und al - le Herr - lich.  
Denn al - les Fleisch es ist wie Gras und al - le Herr - lich.  
Denn al - les Fleisch es ist wie Gras und al - le Herr - lich.  
22  
pp legato, ma un poco marc.

Example 6

2.  
Langsam, marschmäßig  
Mittl. u. str.  
sempre legato  
pp inessa voce  
Fag. u. Kl.

Brahms himself is reported as having said that the entire *Requiem* rested on a chorale melody, which was perhaps a slight exaggeration.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless there is clearly a very close relationship between both the tune and the text of Neumark's hymn and the tune and the spirit of the text of the march. Musgrave points out similarities between the hymn tune and the orchestral opening of the first section, although the theme appears in the latter in a major key. He also points out Brahms's earlier use of the tune in his two-piano sonata, presumably inspired by Robert Schumann's attempted suicide in 1854.

### William Albright (1945-)

The most recent composition based on Neumark's hymn tune of which I am aware is the chorale-partita for organ by the American composer William Albright, who wrote the following about his composition:

This set of variations, composed at the age of 18, was intended to be as much a homage to the beauties of the chorale tune employed as a tribute to the Baroque composers whose style I attempted to

emulate. It is perhaps appropriate that it should be published at a time when more and more composers are rejecting the necessity of a "linear" progression of musical language. As George Rochberg states, "It no longer matters what 'style' a work is (or was) composed in so long as it is music."<sup>23</sup>

### Gabriel Axel

The Academy Award for the Best Foreign Film in 1987 was awarded for *Babettes Gæstebud* (Babette's Feast), written and directed by Gabriel Axel. The film was based on the 1950 novella by Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen), which was first published in *The Ladies' Home Journal* after being rejected by both *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Good Housekeeping*, and later published in Danish.<sup>24</sup> While the novella was set in a remote Norwegian village, the film was set on Denmark's bleak Jutland peninsula in the 1870s. Two spinster sisters, Martine, named after Martin Luther, and Philippa, named after Luther's friend and associate Philippus Melancthon, devotedly keep alive the memory and teachings of their late father, the



former pastor and founder of an austere religious sect. A French woman who had fled the war-torn Paris of 1871 turns up on their door step and is taken in, becoming their cook and housekeeper for 14 years. One day she learns that she has won 10,000 francs in a French lottery. Her surprising decision is to spend the money on a sumptuous feast for the sisters and the other sect members, thus honoring the 100th anniversary of the birth of the sect's founder. In an excellent article entitled "Babette's Feast: Feasting with Lutherans," Podles has discussed this gift from the woman who had been a Parisian *cordons bleu* cook to the sisters and the sect's brethren in terms of the Lutheran view of the sacramental grace of the Eucharist:

The brethren are in fact not fully able to appreciate Babette's cooking beyond the most rudimentary level, as she (Babette) must know. Still, she gives it to them, regardless of their ability to correspond to it, just as God gives grace. The meal's effect on them is threefold: they are drawn together back into the fellowship that they had lost, they forgive each other their sins and are forgiven, and as they draw near to the end of their lives, they recognize the diminishing of death's significance in the face of eternity.<sup>25</sup>

After the feast, which has momentarily lifted the parishioners from their chronic bitterness and bickering, Philippa moves to the piano and sings two verses in Danish of Neumark's chorale. In the first verse, the sinking sun is bathing itself in the sea, while in the second, the sands of time are running out. In both, there is trust that the encroaching darkness will be displaced by His infinite light.

Upon first hearing, both the words, which anticipate the approaching end of life, and Neumark's tune, sung in the key of g-minor, seem inappropriate; a hymn of thanksgiving seems called for instead, given the sumptuousness of the banquet and its salutary effect on the guests. However, given the history of this chorale and its many adaptations by German Protestant composers, it is indeed a very expressive choice for marking the end of the film *Babette's Feast*. The tune is simple, yet both sad and soothing, and thus is most appropriate for Philippa as she not only finishes Babette's sumptuous feast but also contemplates the coming end of her unfulfilled life. Philippa, her sister Martine, and the other members of the sect have finally, through the gift of the feast, broken the bonds of grief which bound them to the past. As discussed by Thurman, in their mystical high they could no longer distinguish between bodily and spiritual appetites. Axel's choice of hymn is not strange, and is in fact a choice for which Bach's adaptation of the last verse of Neumark's hymn as the final chorale in his wedding cantata BWV 197 may have been the

best precedent. Finally we recall what Christ and his disciples did at the end of the the Last Supper, as narrated in both Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26: "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives."

## Conclusion

The journey of this hymn and its tune has indeed been long and varied, from Jena in Germany to Oscar night in Hollywood. Clearly there has been a long tradition among German composers, particularly those from Protestant backgrounds, including Mendelssohn, who converted as a child to the Lutheran faith, of associating texts of gloom and despair with the haunting minor-key melody of Neumark's *WER NUR DEN LIEBEN GOTT LÄSST WALTEN*. We may go further to note that this simple melody lends itself exceptionally well to texts in which the anticipation of the inevitable end of life leads not to fear but rather to a quiet appreciation for the life which has been led. ■

<sup>25</sup> Mary Elizabeth Podles, "Babette's Feast: Feasting with Lutherans," *Antioch Review* 50, (1992), pp. 551-565.