Were God Not with Us at This Time

Wär Gott nicht mit uns diese Zeit
Martin Luther, 1524
Tr. Christopher J. Neuendorf, 2014

8.7. 8.7. 8.8.7.

Wär Gott nicht mit uns (1524)
Johann Walter, *Geystliche gesangk Buchleyn*, 1524
Setting: Michael Praetorius, 1607, alt.

1 Were God not with us at this time, Let Is-rael now re-
2 So wrath-ful toward us their in-tent, Had God let men o'er-
3 Thanks be to God, who did not let Their gap-ing maw con-

peat___ it, Were God not with us at this time, We'd sure-ly
pow'r___ us, They'd us with gnash-ing teeth have rent, With life and
sume___ us; As when a bird e-scapes the net, Grim death could

be de-feat-ed; For we're a wretch-ed lot, we find, Held in con-
limb de-voured___ us; We would have been as men who drown When rag-ing
not en-tomb___ us; The snare is rent, and we are free, The Lord's strong

tempt by all man-kind, Who cruel-ly do be-set___ us.
wa-ters draw them down And might-y floods o'er-whelm___ them.
name with us shall be, The God of earth and heav-en.

AMONG THE FIRST ORDERS OF BUSINESS in bringing the principles of the Reformation to bear on public worship was the preparation of metrical Psalm settings. Martin Luther, in a 1523 letter to Georg Spalatin, expressed the desire that good poets render the Psalms into "spiritual songs," or Christian hymns in the vernacular appropriate for congregational singing. Luther himself tried his hand at several such psalm settings, including "May God Bestow on Us His Grace" in 1523, with several others to follow in 1524. Among these was "Were God Not with Us at This Time" (*Wär Gott night mit uns diese Zeit*), Luther's metrical setting of Psalm 124.

Luther's text first appeared in print as No. 28 in the first official Wittenberg songbook, Johann Walter's *Geystliche gesangk Buchleyn*, 1524. There it was joined to the present melody in a four-part setting by Walter. It persisted with this melody in the later Wittenberg hymnals and beyond.

"Were God Not with Us at This Time," though missing from the *Lutheran Service Book*, appears in *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 1941, as No. 267, "If God Had Not Been on Our Side," but the composite translation there is copyright 1941 Concordia Publishing House and so could not be used for the Free Lutheran Chorale-Book. We have therefore provided a new translation that is as close as possible in word choice and phrasing to Luther's original. The musical setting is that by Michael Praetorius, 1607, though with the form of the melody taken from Walter.

The text and music here provided may be freely used and reproduced for any purpose whatever, and are offered with the prayer that they may serve for the edification of Christian people everywhere.

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