

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 87. Form: Aria (B) - Recit (A) - Aria (A) - Recit (T) - Aria (B) - Aria (T) - Chorale.

Introduction & updates at melvinunger.com.

NBA I/12; BC A74

Rogate: 5. S. after Easter (BWV 86, 87)

*James 1:22-27 (Be doers of the word and not hearers only)

*John 16:231-30 (Christ's farewell: Ask anything of the Father in my name)

Librettist: Christiane Mariane von Ziegler (Libretto greatly modified)

See notes for details.

FP: 6 May 1725 (Leipzig: St. Thomas)

Austere cantata of contrition; determination to the Shepherd of Souls for comfort.

As noted by Alfred Dürr, the librettist begins with Jesus' exhortation to pray in his name. Because it takes the biblical verse out of context, it sounds like a reproach, which is reinforced in nos. 2 and 3: "despite their obvious guilt, mortals have not prayed to God for forgiveness." See *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, p. 323. The text is repeated 6 times, emphasizing different words from one statement to another. The figura corta is combined with repeated ascending diatonic fourths.

J.S. Bach

Cantata No. 87

Bisher habt ihr nichts gebeten in meinem Namen

Instrumentation:

Ob I, II; also Ob d'amore I, II

Ob da caccia

Vln I, II

Vla

SATB

Continuo, Organo

Fugue-like arioso, which contemplates Christ's statement from varying perspectives (see below).

For Eric Chafe's interpretation of the cantata's tonal plan, see note.

87/1.

1. Aria

• Vox Christi: You have not asked in my name: John 16:24 (87/1).

Ob. II, Viol. II Instrumental exposition of rising subject (one 8va).

D minor
(For possible significance, see note.)

B-flat major

F major

(G7)

C major

G major

D7

(A7)

3

Ob da caccia
Vla

Ascending diatonic
fourth (see note).

D minor

D minor

5

Ob da caccia
Vla

D7

E major

A minor

A minor

D minor

7

Ascending diatonic 4ths in
parallel 3rds.

C7

F major

D minor

D minor

9

F7

B-flat major

C major

F major

The cantatas with Von Ziegler librettos show considerable variety in compositional approach. Some make almost no use of the chorus (BWV 87, 183, 175). Some begin with an aria or recitative (BWV 108, 87, 183/1, 175/1).

The ascending diatonic fourth is pervasive, associated with Jesus' exhortation to make requests to God in his name. As the statement is repeated, different words are emphasized by means of rhythmic duration and/or metric placement (underlined here)—as if Jesus' statement has become the subject of a self-examination.

11 Basso Vox Christi

A

Chromatically ascending line.

Bis - her habt ihr nichts ge - be -

p Cont. R.H.

A7 D minor D minor (C major) F major (G7) C major

Ascending diatonic 4th ending in a double cadence ("cadenza doppia")

1311

- ten in meinem Na - - - - men, in meinem Na - - -

Ob. da caccia, Va.

(A7) D minor A7 D minor

16

- men, habt ihr nichts, habt ihr nichts ge - be - - - - ten, bis - her

Ob. I, Viol. I

Ob. II Viol. II

C# dim.7 D major E7 F major A minor A minor

A major

15

- habt ihr nichts ge - be - - - - ten in mei-nem Na - - -

D7 G minor C7 F major

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20

men, bis - her habt ihr nichts ge - be - ten in

F major G7 A minor D7 G(7) A7 G7 A major B half dim.7

A writhing harmonic progression suggests "praying in Jesus" name is hard...

22

mei - nem Na - men, in mei - nem Na - men, bis - her habt ihr nichts ge -

G minor A7 D minor G minor E7

24

be - ten, bis - her habt ihr nichts ge -

A minor A minor G7

B Ascending fourths now in duets of parallel 3rds...

26

be - ten in mei - nem Na - - men, bis - her habt ihr nichts ge -

C major A minor A minor F major

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Word painting: Rhetorical emphasis on "gebeten" ("ask/pray") with long coloratura.

be - - - - - ten in meinem Na - - - - - men.

F major D minor D minor B-flat major B-flat major C major F major A7 D minor D major

87/2. 2. Recitativo • Failure to pray despite deliberate transgressions (87/2).

Chromatic saturation in the vocal part in 4 mm.

To see what revisions were made to the libretto, see Von Ziegler's original (as published in 1728) in note.

1. Alto E D B G# A C# B-flat

Exclamation (leap) Tritone

O Wort, das Geist und Seel er - schreckt! Ihr Menschen, merkt den

O Word, that spirit and soul alarms! You people take-note of-the

The alto, often the voice of faith, interprets Jesus' statement as a reproach. Von Ziegler's original libretto is made more urgent by the new words "Zuruf," "Evangelium," and "ungesäumt" (see note for more).

E7 A7 D major

Text painting: Descending line to depict the meaning underneath the words.

Adding the word "Gospel" to the reproach suggests general spiritual failure.

3 C F# G E-flat F

Zu - ruf, was da - hin - ter steckt! Ihr habt Ge - setz und E - van - ge - li - um vor -

call, what behind-it lies! You have Law and Gospel deliberately

Text painting: Move from minor to major (Law to Gospel).

D7 G minor B-flat major

5

sätzlich übertreten, und diesfalls möcht' ihrungesaumt in Buß und Andacht beten.
transgressed, and therefore (should) you immediately in penitence and devotion pray.

Chromatic progression for "übertreten."

B dim.7 G7 C minor N6 F# dim.7 G minor

87/3. 3. Aria

•Prayer of confession; request for advocacy (87/3). This is one of Bach's longest arias.

1. Ob da caccia I
Sighing figure in parallel 6ths.

Ritornello derived from vocal line.

Ob da caccia II

G minor G minor

Ostinato (beseeching) figure (compare m. 34, where singer has it)...

3II

Sustained note...

F major C minor

6

Ob da caccia II

G minor F minor (subdominant of subdominant) C minor G minor C minor G7

9

Sighing figures

C minor F# dim.7 D7

11II Alto A

Quotation from the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:12): "Forgive us our debts."

Ver-gib, o Va-ter, ver-gib uns re
Forgive, O Father, forgive our re

G minor G minor

Ostinato (beseeching) figure 5

Alusion to Jesus parable of the servant who fell at the feet of his master to beg for leniency. See Matthew 18:26: "The servant fell on his knees, imploring [his master], "Lord, have patience (Luther 1545: Geduld) with me..."

Insistently repeated "beseeching" figures exchanged between oboe da caccia I and singer (rising hopefully in the instrumental part but falling back down in the vocal part).

14

Schuld und ha - be noch mit uns Ge -

Ob da caccia I

Text painting: Sustained note depicts "habe Geduld" ("have patience").

G minor

To pray with "Andacht" is reminiscent of the servant in Jesus' parable falling at the feet of his master. The sequential figure in the vocal line and the melisma on "beten" intensify the statement.

16

duld, wenn wir in An - dacht be - ten.

when we in devotion pray.

F major G minor C minor B-flat major B-flat major

19

Ver - gib, o Va - ter, ver - gib uns - re

B-flat major D7

22

Schuld, ver - gib, o Va - ter, ver - gib uns - re

G minor B-flat 7 B dim.7 G7

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24

Schuld und ha - - be noch mit uns Ge - duld, wenn

C minor (D7) G minor

26II.

wir in An - dacht be - - - - ten, wenn

G minor

29

wir in An - dacht, wenn wir in Andacht be - ten; ver - gib, o Va - ter,

G7 C minor C minor

31II

uns - re Schuld und ha - be noch mit uns Ge - duld, wenn wir in An - dacht

D7 G minor G7 C minor

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31 **C**

be - ten, in An-dacht be - ten

Ob. da caccia I
Ritornello
Ob. da caccia II

D7 Beseeching figure in parallel 6ths between continuo and singer. G minor G minor

37

G minor F7 F major C minor

40

G minor F minor C minor D major G minor

42II

G7 C minor C minor F# dim.7

45 **D** B Section.

Bach delays the continuation of the prayer until the second part of the aria, thereby excluding it from the da capo, with the result that the aria ends with the initial idea alone (the prayer for mercy). Note: Von Ziegler's printed libretto does not indicate da capo at end.

und sa - gen: Herr, auf

G minor G minor B-flat major

The text alludes to Jesus' words in the Gospel reading, promising to speak plainly instead of figuratively and to Paul's statements that the Holy Spirit and Christ intercede for them (see note).



47

dein Ge-heiß, ach, re - - de nicht mehr

C7 F major D7 G minor

49

sprich - - worts_weis, hilf uns viel - mehr ver - tre - -

Cont. Ob. da caccia I, II

G# dim.7 A(7) D major C# dim.7

51

- - ten, hilf uns - - viel - mehr - - ver - tre - -

Word painting: Sustained notes (associated with "Geduld" in the A section) now used for "vertreten" ("intercede").

A7 D minor

53

- - ten, hilf uns - - viel - mehr ver - tre - -

Cont.

D minor D minor D minor

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56 **E**

ten;

Ob. da caccia I

Ritornello Ob. da caccia II

D major G minor D minor C minor (F# dim.7) G minor A major

58II

Word painting: "Vertreten" emphasized with sustained notes and animated triplets.

hif uns vielmehr,vielmehr ver - tre -

p Cont. Ob. da caccia I,II

D minor D minor F(7) B-flat 7 C minor

61

- ten, hif uns viel - mehr ver - tre - ten, uns ver -

F7 B-flat major

63

tre - - - - - ten!

B-flat major

Von Ziegler libretto does not indicate da capo. **Da Capo**

B-flat major

The recitative is not in Von Ziegler's original poem. Bach many have added it for structural reasons (to avoid 3 consecutive arias). From a textual perspective,

introduces the idea of Jesus' promised comfort, mentioned in the following 4 movements. The text about to Ezra 9:6: O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to thee, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt (Luther 1545: Schuld) has mounted up to the heavens. (See also Revelation 18:5.)

4. Recitativo •Pardon for sin sought since God sees contrite heart (87/4).

Chromatic saturation in the vocal part in 7 mm.

87/4. 1. Tenore

Wen uns-re Schuld bis an den Himmel steigt, du siehst und

When our guilt up-to - heaven climbs, you see and

Chords: A7, C# dim.7, D minor, F# dim.7

Animated viola line may suggest God seeing the hidden things of the heart (see Petzoldt, Bach Kommentar 2:881).

Word painting: Wandering melisma for "suche" ("seek") with chromatic harmonic progression.

3II

kennest ja mein Herz, das nichts vor dir ver.schweigt; drum su - che mich, su -

know indeed my heart, which nothing before you conceals, therefore seek me, seek

Chords: D7, G minor, B-flat 7, E-flat major, C minor

Text painting: The chromatically descending Vln I line reinforces the intensity of the harmonic progression.

6

che mich zu trö - sten!

me in-order-to comfort (me)! - sten!

Chords: N6, B dim.7, G7, F# dim.7, C minor, A-flat major, C minor

Continuo aria (R.H. is editorial realization).
87/5. 5. Aria •Vox Christi: World of fear overcome: John 16:33 (87/5). Alfred Dürr describes this movement as "of unexpected severity" (see note).

The continuo bass is an 8va higher (see full score), so that it sometimes crosses above the singer's line.

Cont

In der Welt habt ihr Angst,

Chords: C minor, D7, B dim.7, C7, F minor

7 Basso

In der Welt habt ihr Angst,

Chords: B dim.7, C minor, C minor, C minor, D7, B dim.7

The serpentine bass line is reminiscent of descriptions elsewhere of the devil as serpent.

Singer takes over the line...

13

in der Welt, in der Welt habt ihr Angst,

C7 F minor B dim.7 C minor C minor E dim.7

19

in der Welt habt ihr Angst,

F(7) B-flat 7 E-flat major E-flat 7

24

in der Welt, in der Welt habt ihr Angst, in der Welt habt ihr

A-flat major B-flat 7 E-flat major E-flat major C minor D7

30

Angst, in der Welt habt ihr Angst, habt ihr Angst; aber seid ge-

G7 C(7) F minor B dim.7 C minor C minor C minor

Text painting: Move to the major mode for Jesus' exhortation to be of good cheer.

36

trost, seid ge-trost, seid ge-trost, seid ge-trost, seid ge-

B-flat major E-flat major E-flat 7 A-flat major B-flat 7

Theme in major...

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Word painting: Rising line followed by extended melismas for "I have overcome the world."

42 **B**

trost, ——— ich ha-be die Welt ü-ber-wun- — — — —

E-flat major E-flat major C minor D7 G minor

48 — — — — — den, die Welt ü-

C# dim.7 D7 G major B dim.7 C minor D7

hemiola

53 **C**

-ber-wun-den, seid ge-trost, seid ge-trost, ich ha-be die Welt, die

G minor G7 C minor C minor

Sequential bass figure over G pedal for "seid getrost" ("be of good cheer")...

58

Welt ü-ber-wun- — — — — —

C minor F# dim.7 D7 G(7) C7

Word painting: Athletic melisma for "überwunden" ("overcome").

Word painting: Large leap down for "Welt" ("world" followed by "large leap up for "überwunden" ("overcome").

64

den, die Welt ü - ber - wun - den.

hemiola

F minor G7 (C minor) C minor D7

70

B dim.7 C7 F minor B dim.7 C minor C minor

87/6. 6. Aria

1.

Viol. I

•Suffering accepted; Christ will help & comfort (87/6). For Alfred Dürr's characterization of this movement, see note.

Strings
Viol. I, II
Va.
Continuo

Ritornello derived from vocal line.

The siciliano metrical rhythm suggests a pastoral character, yet the athleticism of the melody suggests pathos—a determination to return to Jesus as shepherd.

B-flat major B-flat 7 E-flat major F7 B-flat major G7

4 (41)

C minor B-flat 7 E-flat major F7 F major F pedal...

6II (43II)

F major B-flat major F# dim.7 G minor F major

9 (46)

A Tenore

The text quotes Psalm 39:10: I am dumb, I do not open my mouth (Luther 1545: Ich will schweigen)...

Ich will lei - den,

ich will schwei - gen,

Rests illustrate the text: I would suffer, I would keep silent.

Dynamic indications are original.

B-flat major B-flat pedal... B-flat 7 E-flat major F7

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11

ich will lei - den, ich will schwei -

B-flat major G7 C minor B-flat (7)

13

- gen, Je - sus wird mir Hilf er - zei - gen; ich will

E-flat major F7

15

lei - den, ich will schwei - gen, Je - sus wird mir Hilf er -

B-flat F pedal.. C7 F major D7

17

zei - gen, Je - sus wird mir Hilf er - zei - gen, denn er tröst' mich nach dem

G minor F7 B-flat major C7

19

Schmerz, denn er tröst' mich nach dem Schmerz,

Chromatic inflection for "Schmerz" ("pain/suffering").

C pedal... 15

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21

denn er tröst' mich nach dem Schmerz.

Upwardly sweeping, chromatic line anticipates the call for sorrows to depart.

Ritornello

F minor F major (see NBA) F minor

23

Weicht, ihr

Word painting: Quick, upwardly sweeping melisma for "weicht" ("depart").

C# dim.7 D minor C major F major F# dim.7 D7

25

Von Ziegler 1728: Weicht ihr Sorgen! Flieht ihr Klagen! Seele, du darst nicht verzagen (Away you sorrows! Flee you lamentations! Soul, you must not despair).

Sor - gen, Trau - - - er, Kla - gen, denn wa - rum sollt' ich ver -

Bach added this word (mourning)—see above note about Bach's personal losses.

piano

G minor B dim.7 C minor D7

27

Chromatic inflection for "verzagen" (to "despair").

za - gen, wa - rum sollt' ich ver - za -

D major D pedal... G major D(7)

The last line is reminiscent of Psalm 42:5-6. Why are you cast down (Luther 1545: betrübst du dich), O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?...Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God...

29

- gen? Fasse dich, be-trübtes Herz!

Compose thyself, troubled heart!

Strings

G minor G minor G minor



32 **C**

To compare the text with Von Ziegler's original, see note.

Weicht, ihr Sor-gen, Trau-er,

Word painting: The upwardly sweeping melisma for "weicht" is now accompanied by staccato string interjections.

G minor G7 C minor (B-flat 7)

34

Kla-gen, denn wa-rum sollt' ich ver-za-gen, wa-rum sollt' ich ver-

E-flat major F7 F pedal...

36 **D**

za-gen? Fas-se dich, be-trübtes Herz!

Chromatic inflection for "verzagen" (to "despair").

B-flat major B-flat major B-flat major B-flat 7

Dal Segno

87/7. **7. Choral** (Mel. „Jesu, meine Freude“) •Suffering turned into joy if Jesus loves me (87/7).

Soprano
+Ob I
Vln I

Alto
+Ob da caccia I
Vln II

Tenore
+Ob da caccia II
Vla

Basso

Muß ich sein be - trü - bet? So mich Je - sus lie - bet, ist mir al - ler Schmerz
i ü - ber Ho - nig sü - ße, tau - send Zü - cker - küs - se drü - cket er ans Herz.

See NBA
for text to
second line.

7

D minor D minor D minor A major D minor D minor

Wenn die Pein sich stel - let ein, sei - ne Lie - be
Wenn die Pein sich stel - let ein, sei - ne Lie - be

10

D minor C7 F major F major A7

macht zur Freu - den auch das bitt - re Lei - den.
macht zur Freu - den auch das bitt - re Lei - den.

D major A minor E7 A major D minor D major