Last changed: 25 November 2025.

Introduction & Updates at melvinunger.com.

Form: Chorus - Aria (A) - Chorale (S) - Recit (B) - Aria (T) - Chorale (Bach reverts to earlier pattern).

This is the first cantata from Bach's second Leipzig cycle (the chorale cantata cycle) that is not a chorale cantata (in the sense that one chorale unifies the entire work).Thus, instead of beginning with a chorale fantasia, the work begins with a through-composed setting of a scriptural verse. As explained in the side note, the reason for the change may have been that Bach had lost his librettist. The central literary theme is that of light and darkness, dervied from the Gospel reading.

NBA I/10; BC A57
Easter Monday (BWV 66, 6)
*Acts 10:34–43. (Peter preaches to Cornelius's household.)
*Luke 24:13–35. (Jesus meets the disciples on the way to Emmaus.)
Librettist: Unknown; perhaps Christian Weiß the elder
FP: 2 April 1725 (St. Thomas in morning, St. Nicholas at Vespers)

J.S. Bach

Cantata No. 6

Bleib bei uns, denn es will Abend werden

The opening chorus is in ABA form, with sarabande-like sections framing a central fugue in 4/4 meter. For Bach, the sarabande appears to have carried special meaning, able to portray the deepest expression of intro spective melancholy (e.g., the famous chaconne for violin (in BWV 1004), or the sarabandes in the cello suites). See note for more.

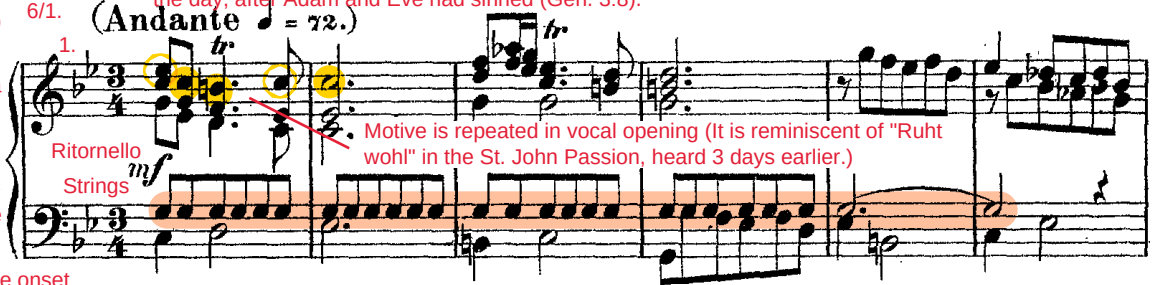
Instrumentation:
Ob I, II
Ob da caccia
Vln I, II
Vla
Violoncello piccolo (see side note)
SATB
Continuo with Harpsichord, Organ
(Along with BWV 109, this cantata proves dual continuo accompaniment was sometimes used.)

First Cantata after the Chorale Cantatas in Cycle 2 with the Theme of Light & Darkness.

The gloomy mood of the 2 disciples walking to Emmaus after Jesus' crucifixion is depicted here with the color of 3 oboes, minor key, pulsing strings, and drooping motives. The text's reference to the onset of evening becomes a metaphor in the libretto for spiritual darkness.

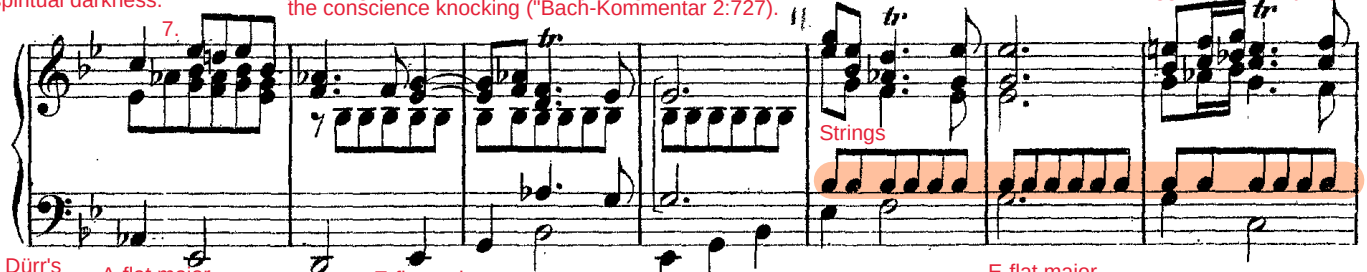
●Prayer: Remain with us for night approaches: Luke 24:29 (6/1). This is the request of the 2 disciples in the Gospel reading. Here "evening" also recalls the account of God walking in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day, after Adam and Eve had sinned (Gen. 3:8).

6/1.



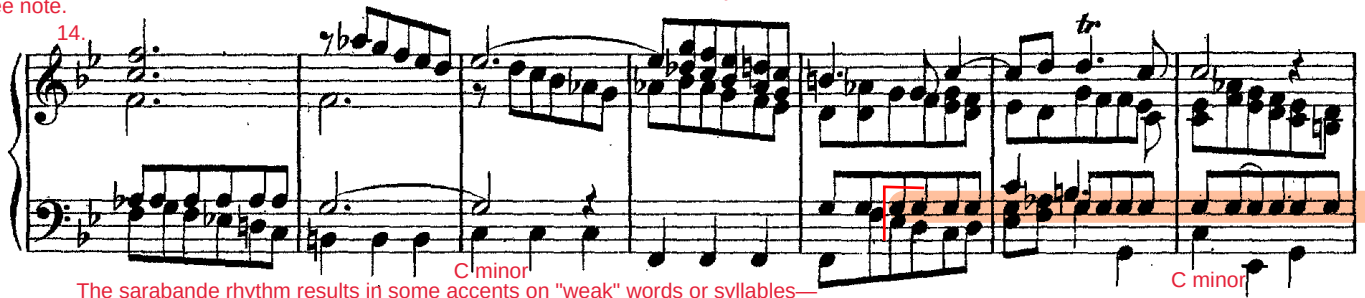
Motive is repeated in vocal opening (It is reminiscent of "Ruht wohl" in the St. John Passion, heard 3 days earlier.)

C minor. Triple meter with accent on beat 2 suggests a sarabande. Throbbing unison notes suggest melancholic yearning, associated with the opening words of the text: "remain with us." Martin Petzoldt suggests that they represent the conscience knocking ("Bach-Kommentar 2:727).



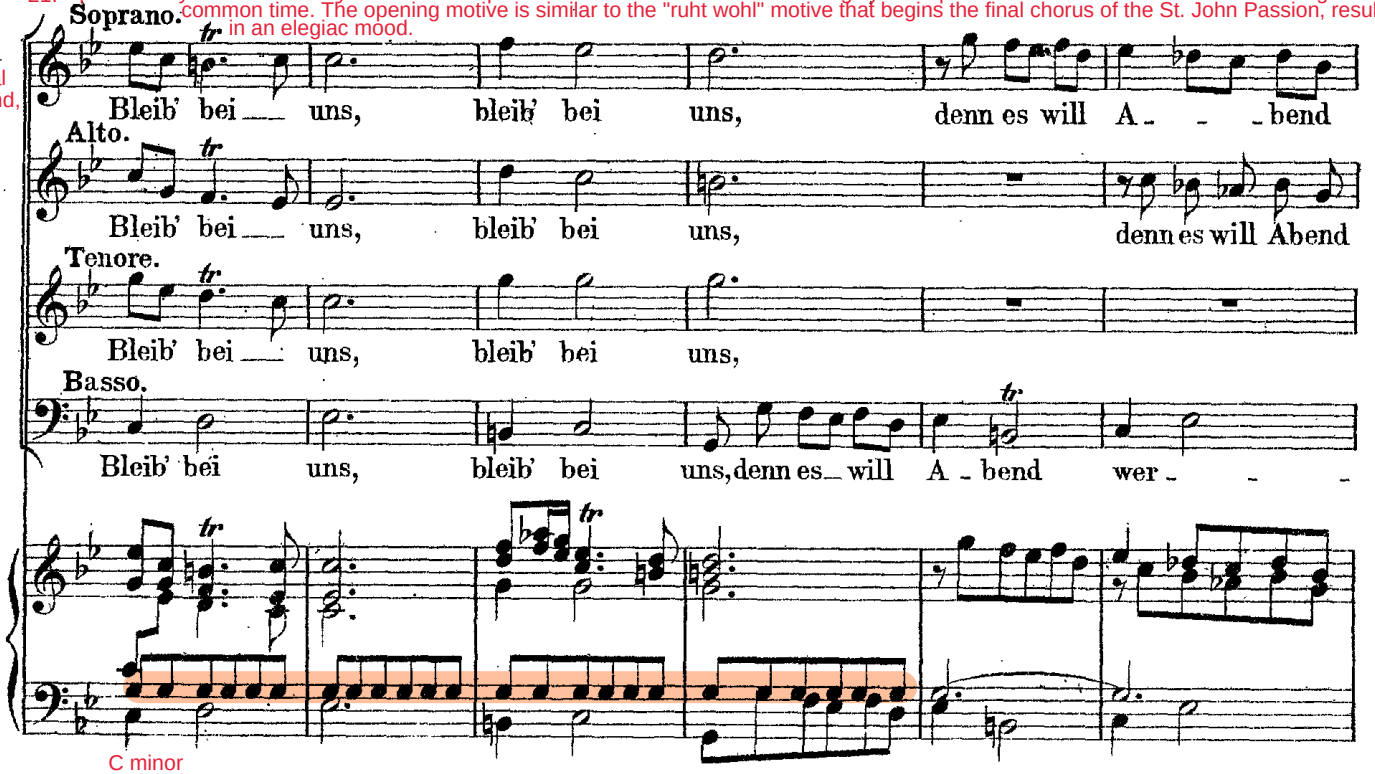
A-flat major E-flat major E-flat major E-flat major

For Alfred Dürr's comments on the libretto, see note.



C minor C minor

The sarabande rhythm results in some accents on "weak" words or syllables—presumably because the rhythm is more important than the text declamation. Largely homophonic sections in 3/4 frame a double fugue in common time. The opening motive is similar to the "ruht wohl" motive that begins the final chorus of the St. John Passion, resulting in an elegiac mood.

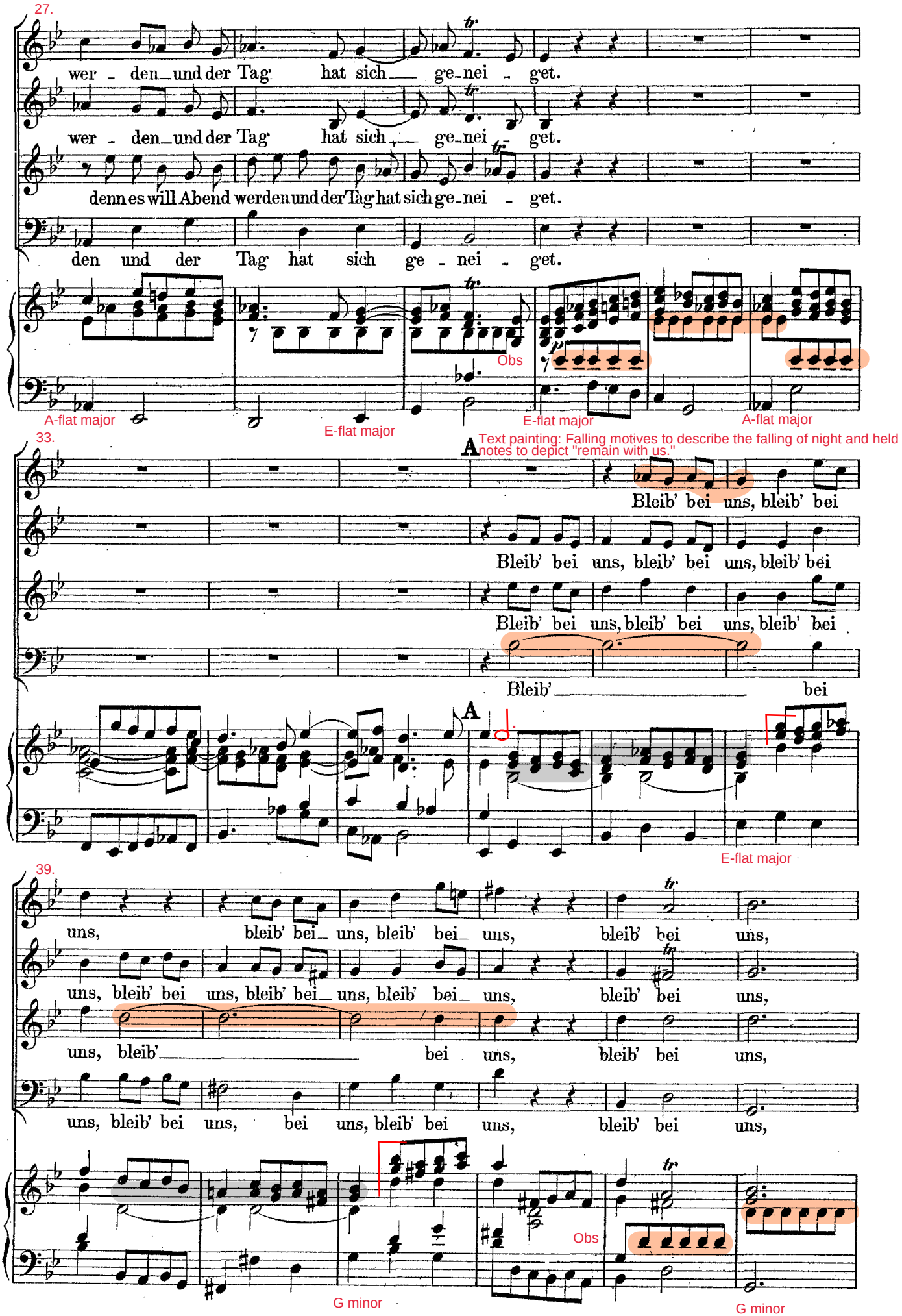


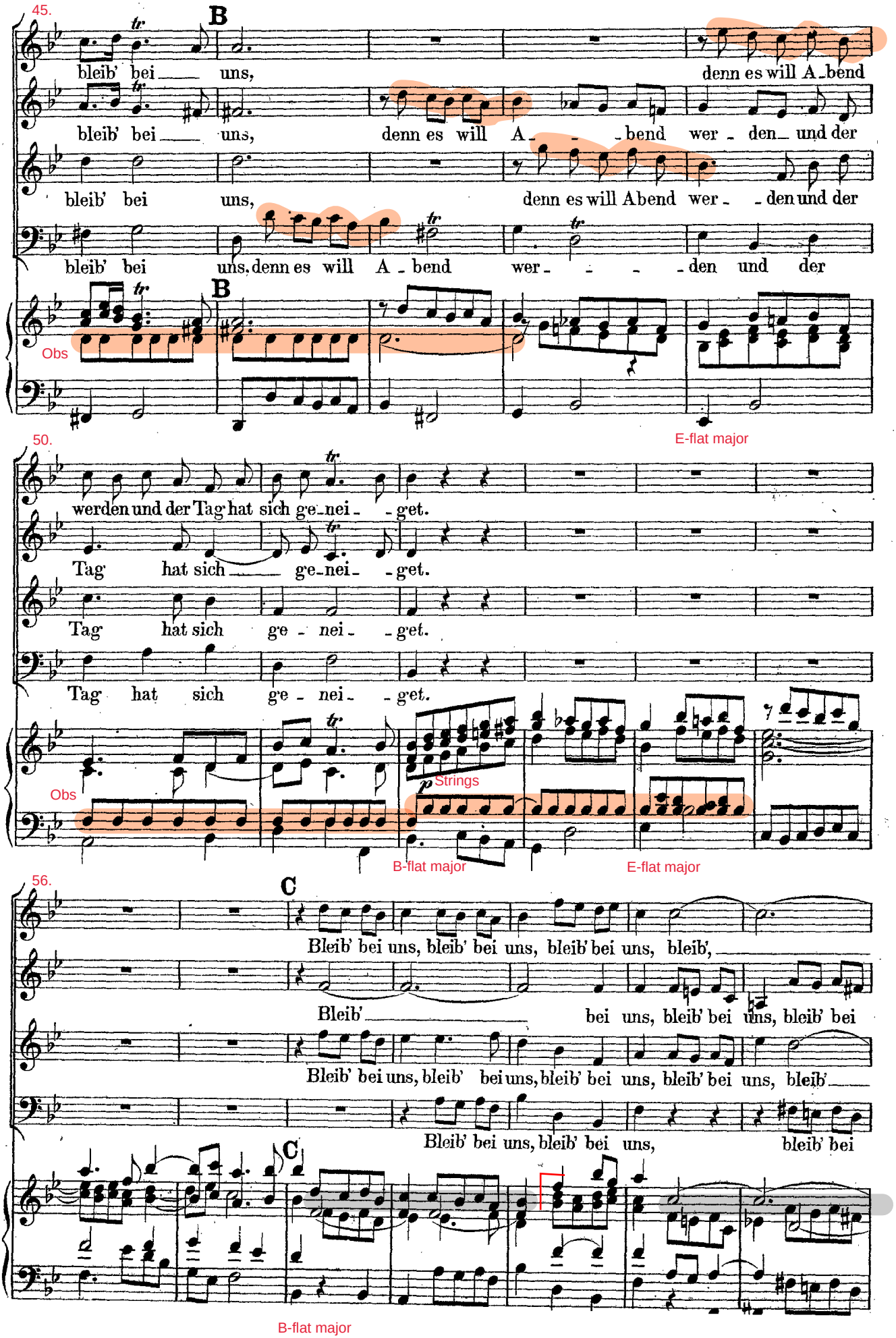
For biblical background, see note.

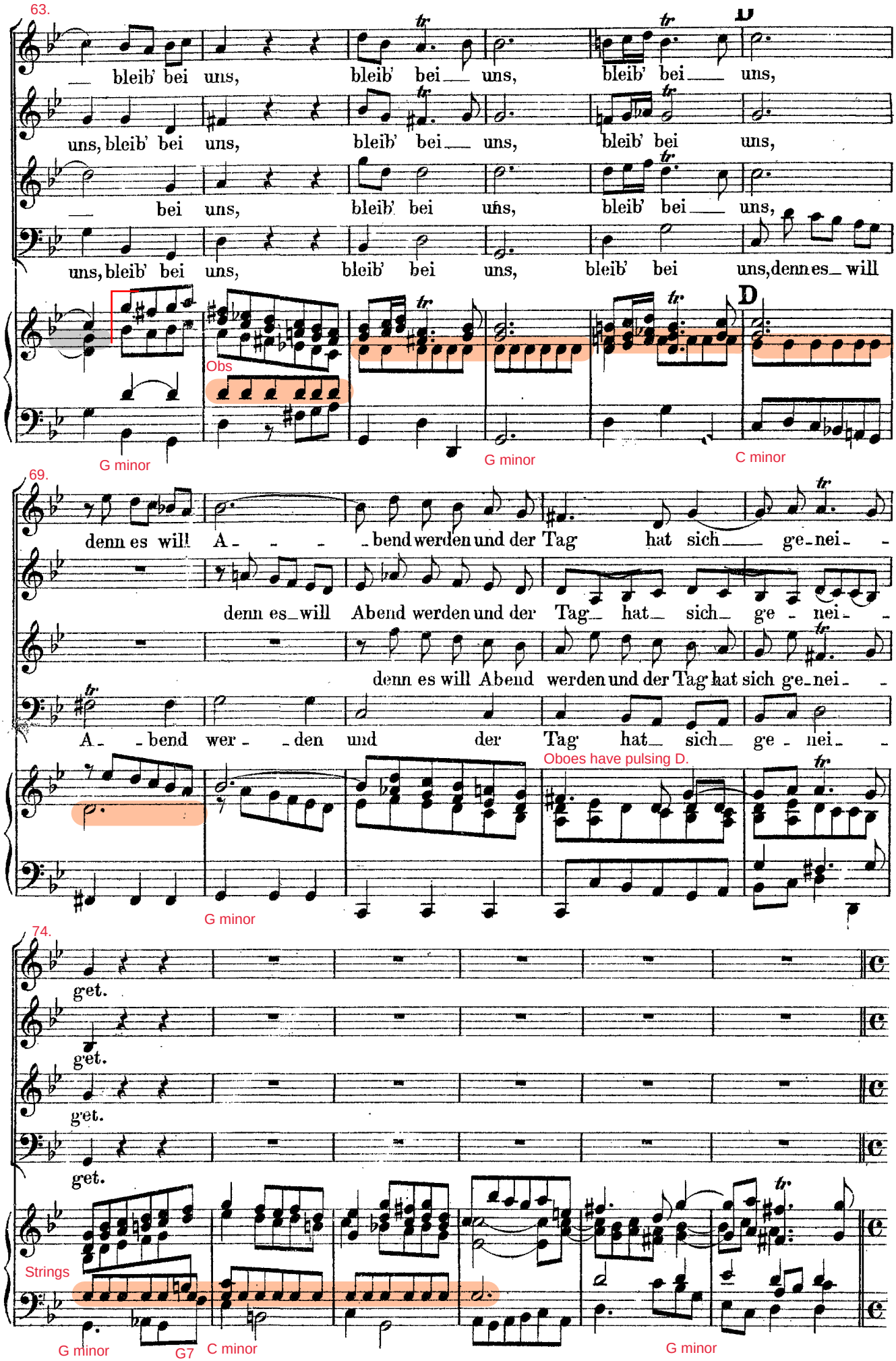
C minor

For observations on the first movement by Karin Wollschläger, see note.

For word-for-word translations, see Unger, *Handbook to Bach's Sacred Cantata Texts*,


27.
wer - den und der Tag hat sich ge-nei - get.
wer - den und der Tag hat sich ge-nei - get.
denn es will Abend werden und der Tag hat sich ge-nei - get.
den und der Tag hat sich ge - nei - get.
Obs
A-flat major
E-flat major
E-flat major
A-flat major
33.
A
Text painting: Falling motives to describe the falling of night and held notes to depict "remain with us."
Bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei
Bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei
Bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei
Bleib' bei
A
E-flat major
39.
uns, bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns,
uns, bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns,
uns, bleib' bei uns,
uns, bleib' bei uns, bei uns, bleib' bei uns,
bleib' bei uns,
Obs
G minor
G minor


45.
B
bleib' bei uns,
denn es will A-bend
bleib' bei uns,
denn es will A - bend wer - den und der
bleib' bei
uns, denn es will Abend wer - den und der
bleib' bei uns, denn es will A - bend wer - den und der
B
Obs
50.
E-flat major
werden und der Tag hat sich ge-nei - get.
Tag hat sich ge-nei - get.
Tag hat sich ge - nei - get.
Tag hat sich ge - nei - get.
Obs
p Strings
B-flat major
E-flat major
56.
C
Bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns, bleib',
Bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei
Bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns, bleib'
Bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei
C
B-flat major


63.
bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns,
uns, bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns,
bei uns, bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns,
uns, bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns, denn es will
D
Obs
G minor
G minor
C minor
69.
denn es will A - - bend werden und der Tag hat sich ge-nei-
denn es will Abend werden und der Tag hat sich ge-nei-
denn es will Abend werden und der Tag hat sich ge-nei-
A - bend wer - den und der Tag hat sich ge - nei-
Oboes have pulsing D.
G minor
74.
get.
get.
get.
get.
Strings
G minor
G7
C minor
G minor

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 6

Central Fugal Section. The beginning is accompanied by continuo alone. Faster tempo suggests agitation and fear, which culminates in a unison statement of "remain with us." Drone figure (like a psalm tone) & both fugue subjects are introduced immediately; subject entries overlap somewhat.

80.

Andante. (♩ = 80.)

Double Fugue

Fugue Subject 2

Both fugue subjects sink downward to depict "geneiget" (the "declining" of the day).

Und der Tag hat sich ge - nei - - - get, denn es will

Denn es will A - - - - bend wer - - -

Fugue Subject 1

Denn es will A - - - - bend wer - - den, denn es will A - bend

Bleib' bei uns,

Text painting: long notes (drone/psalm tone figure) for "remain with us."

Andante.

Continuo only.

G major

C minor

83.

A - - - bend wer - - den. Bleib' bei

den und der Tag hat sich ge - nei - - - get, denn es will A - - -

wer - - den und der Tag hat sich ge - nei - - - - - get, und der

denn es will A - - - bend wer - - - den,

C minor

G minor

86.

uns,

Text painting: Descending lines for approaching evening.

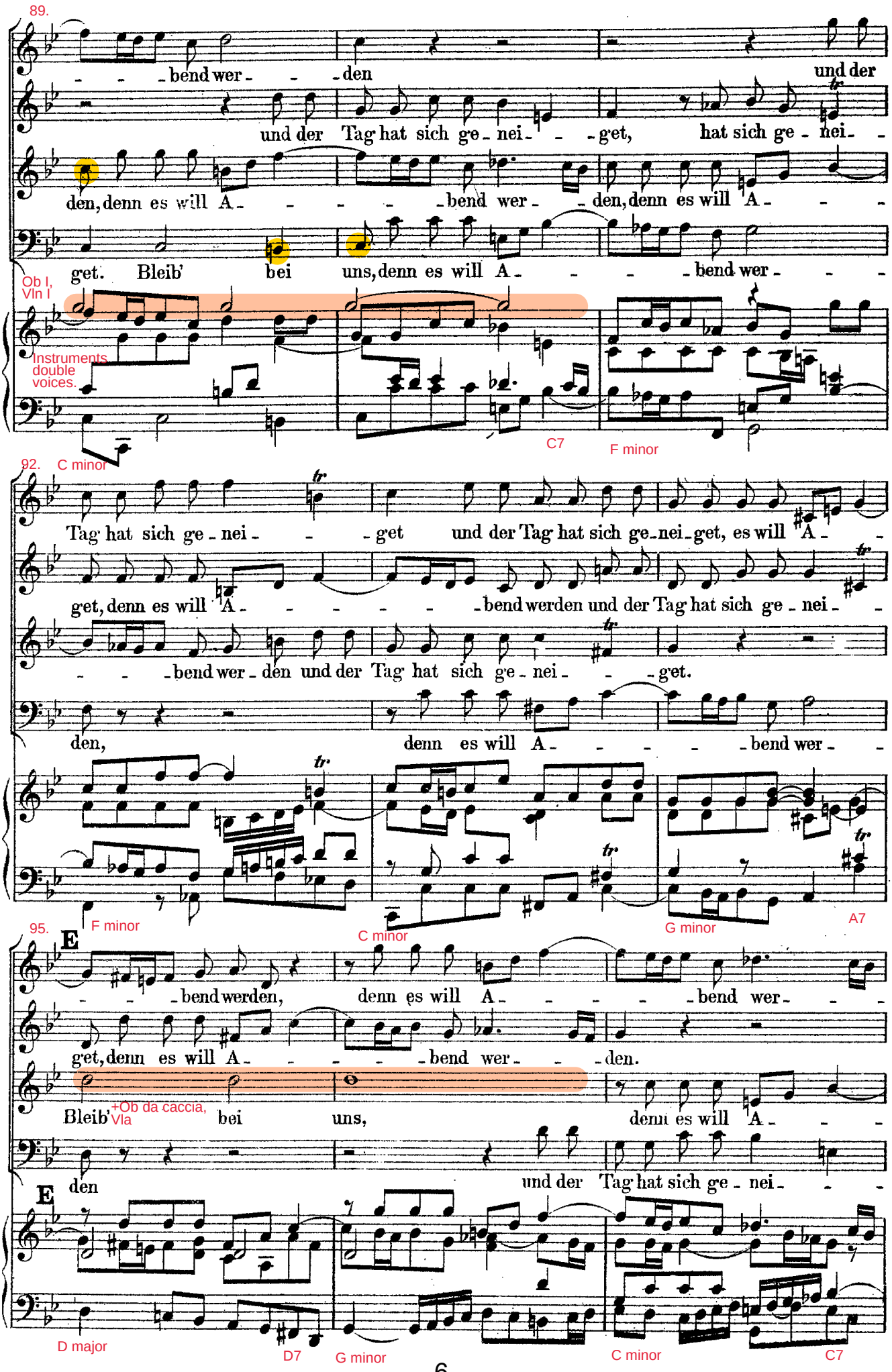
denn es will A - -

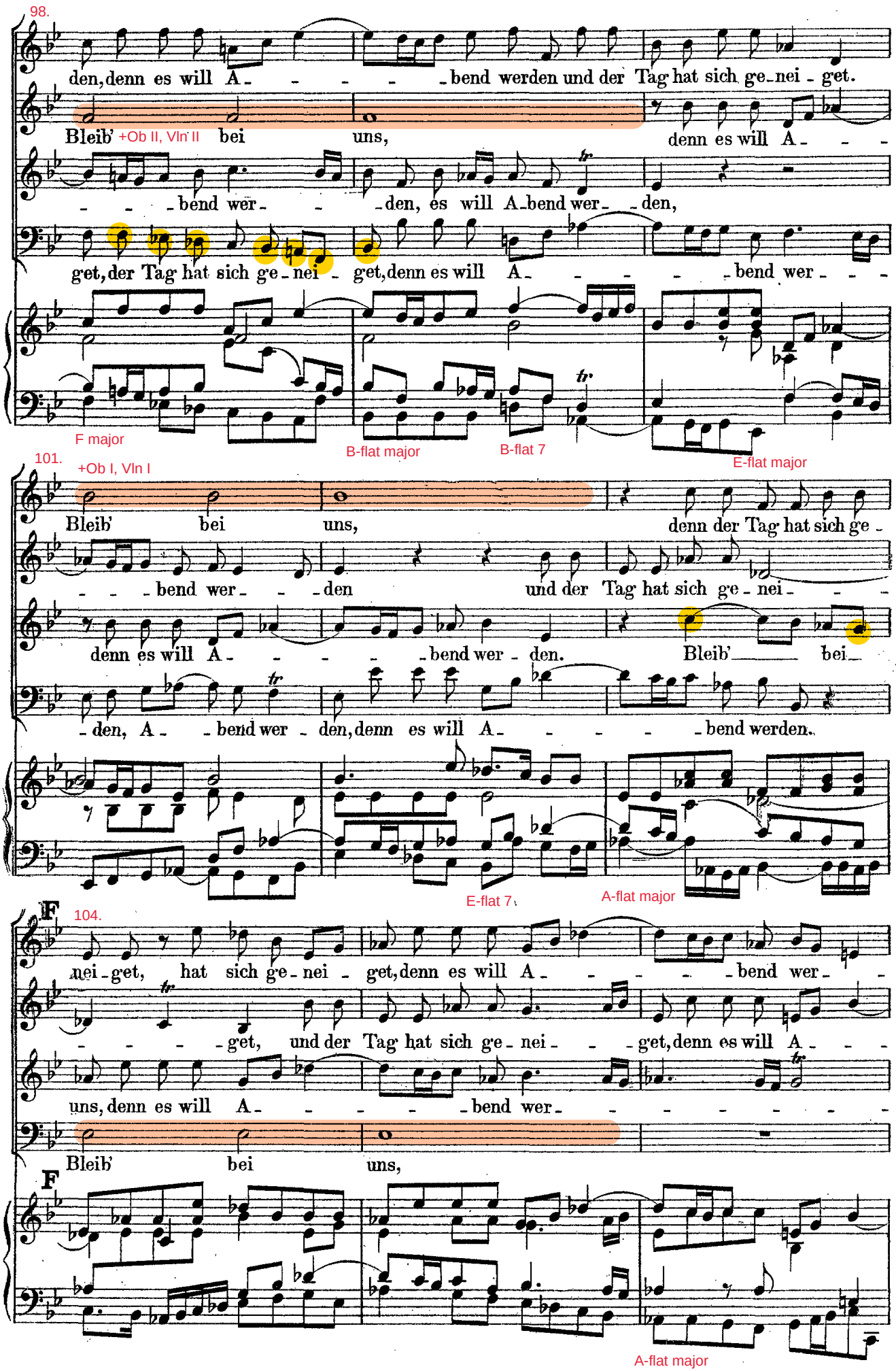
- - - bend wer - - den, denn es will A - bend wer - - den

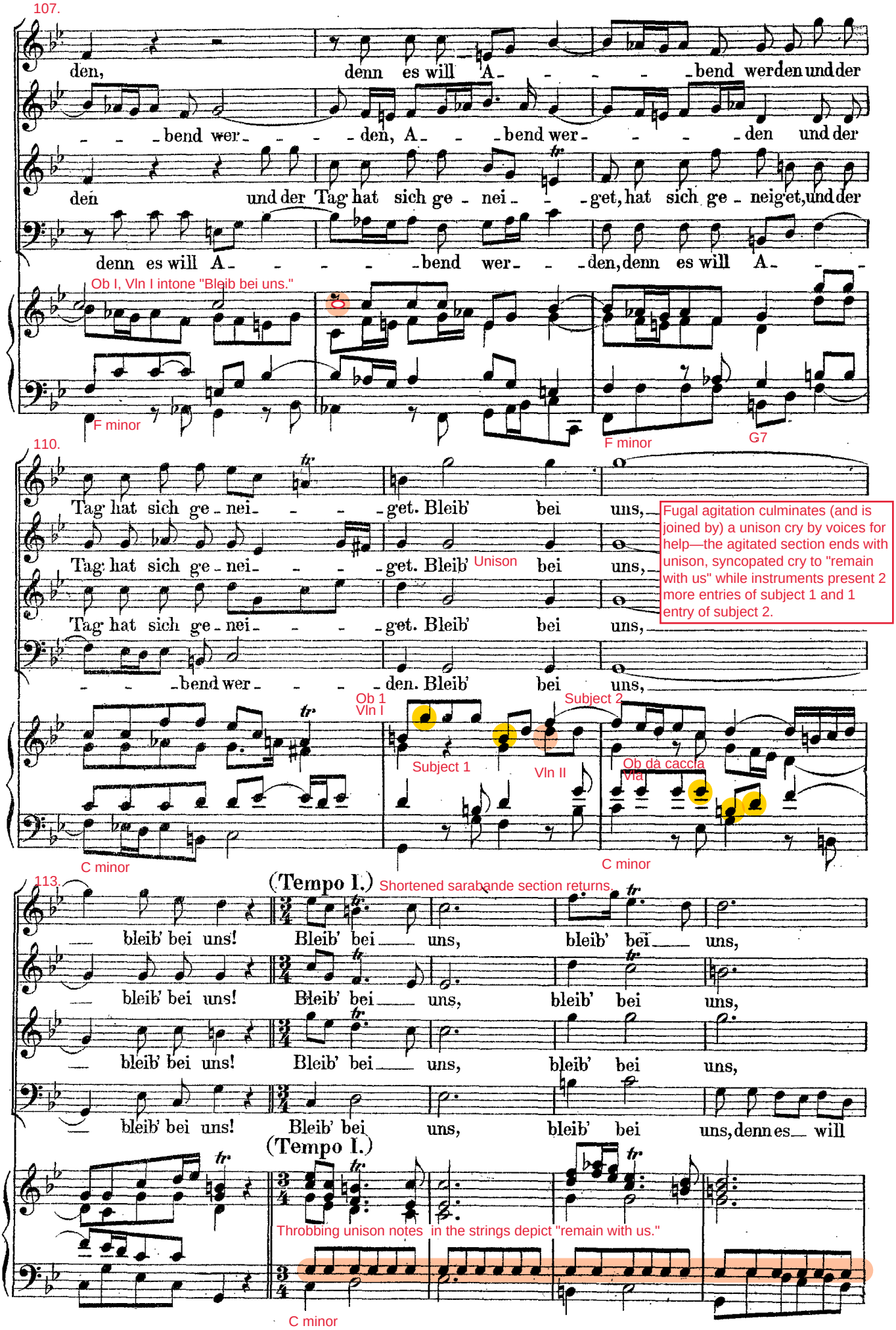
Tag hat sich ge - nei - - get, denn es will A - - - - bend wer - -

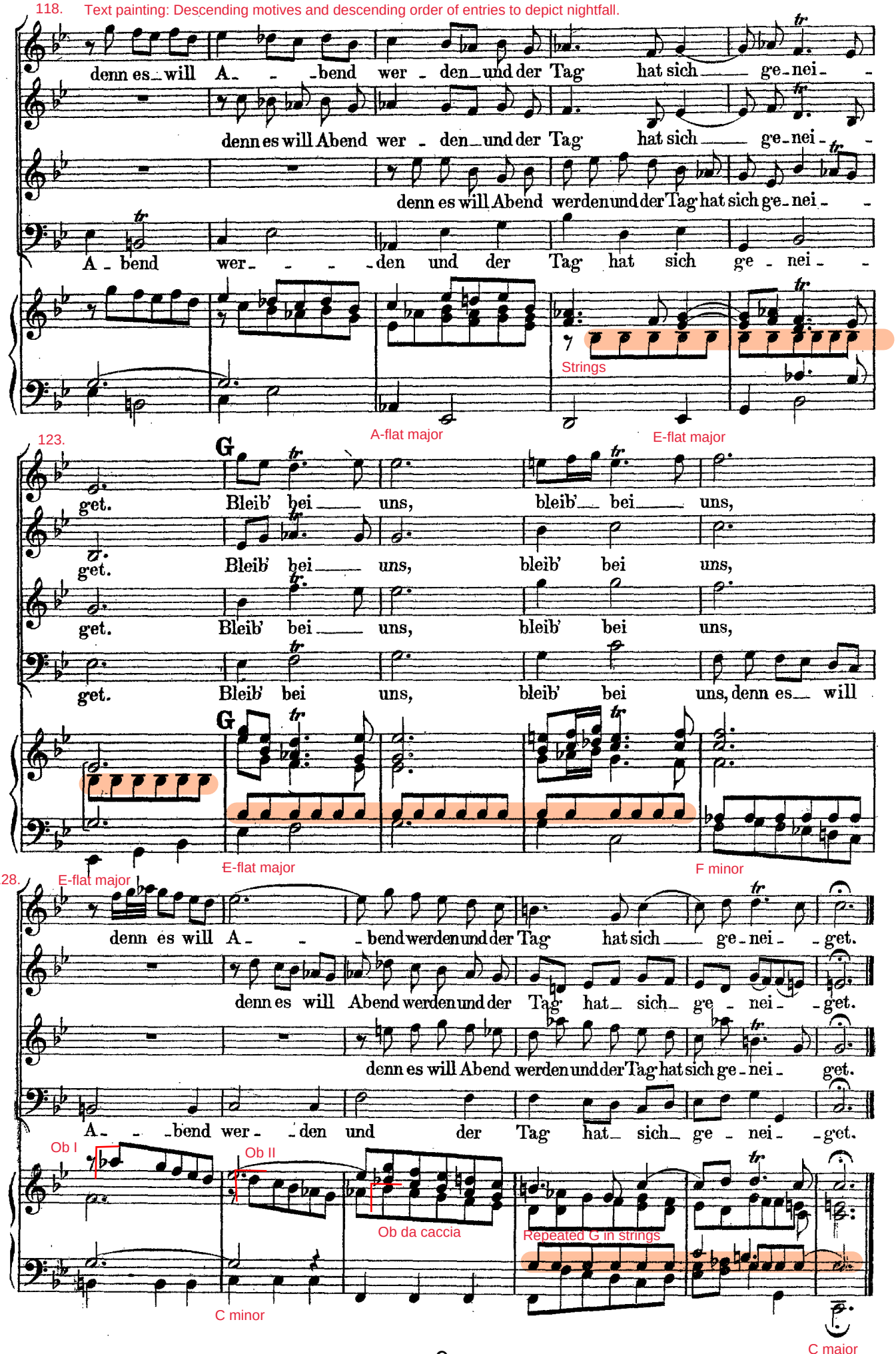
denn es will A - - - - bend werden und der Tag hat sich ge - nei - -

F minor


89.
bend wer - - den
und der
und der Tag hat sich ge - nei - - - get,
hat sich ge - nei -
den, denn es will A - - - - - bend wer - - den, denn es will A - - -
get. Bleib' bei uns, denn es will A - - - - bend wer - - -
Ob I, Vln I
Instruments double voices.
C7
F minor
92.
C minor
Tag hat sich ge - nei - - - get und der Tag hat sich ge - nei - get, es will A -
get, denn es will A - - - - - bend werden und der Tag hat sich ge - nei -
- - bend wer - den und der Tag hat sich ge - nei - - - get.
den, denn es will A - - - - - bend wer -
95.
F minor
C minor
G minor
A7
E
- - bend werden, denn es will A - - - - bend wer - - -
get, denn es will A - - - - bend wer - - - den.
Bleib' bei uns, denn es will A - - -
+Ob da caccia, Vla
E
den und der Tag hat sich ge - nei - - -
D major
D7
G minor
C minor
C7


98.
den, denn es will A - - - - bend werden und der Tag hat sich ge - nei - get.
Bleib' +Ob II, Vln II bei uns, denn es will A - - -
- - - bend wer - - den, es will A - bend wer - den,
get, der Tag hat sich ge - nei - get, denn es will A - - - - bend wer - - -
F major
B-flat major
B-flat 7
E-flat major
101.
+Ob I, Vln I
Bleib' bei uns, denn der Tag hat sich ge -
- - - bend wer - - den und der Tag hat sich ge - nei - - -
denn es will A - - - - bend wer - den. Bleib' bei
- den, A - - bend wer - den, denn es will A - - - - bend werden.
E-flat 7
A-flat major
F
104.
nei - get, hat sich ge - nei - get, denn es will A - - - - bend wer - -
- - - - get, und der Tag hat sich ge - nei - - - get, denn es will A - - -
uns, denn es will A - - - - bend wer - - - - - - -
Bleib' bei uns,
F
A-flat major


107.
den, denn es will A - - - - bend werden und der
- - - bend wer - - - den, A - - bend wer - - - - den und der
den und der Tag hat sich ge - nei - - - get, hat sich ge - neiget, und der
denn es will A - - - - bend wer - - den, denn es will A - - -
Ob I, Vln I intone "Bleib bei uns."
F minor
F minor
G7
110.
Tag hat sich ge - nei - - - get. Bleib' bei uns,
Tag hat sich ge - nei - - - get. Bleib' Unison bei uns,
Tag hat sich ge - nei - - - get. Bleib' bei uns,
- - - bend wer - - - den. Bleib' bei uns,
Fugal agitation culminates (and is joined by) a unison cry by voices for help—the agitated section ends with unison, syncopated cry to "remain with us" while instruments present 2 more entries of subject 1 and 1 entry of subject 2.
Ob 1
Vln I
Subject 1
Subject 2
Vln II
Ob da caccia
Vla
C minor
C minor
113.
(Tempo I.)
Shortened sarabande section returns.
bleib' bei uns! Bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns,
bleib' bei uns! Bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns,
bleib' bei uns! Bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns,
bleib' bei uns! Bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns, denn es will
(Tempo I.)
Throbbing unison notes in the strings depict "remain with us."
C minor


118.
Text painting: Descending motives and descending order of entries to depict nightfall.
denn es will A - bend wer - den und der Tag hat sich ge - nei -
denn es will Abend wer - den und der Tag hat sich ge - nei -
denn es will Abend werden und der Tag hat sich ge - nei -
A - bend wer - den und der Tag hat sich ge - nei -
Strings
A-flat major
E-flat major
123.
G
get. Bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns,
get. Bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns,
get. Bleib' bei uns, bleib' bei uns, denn es will
G
E-flat major
F minor
128.
E-flat major
denn es will A - bend werden und der Tag hat sich ge - nei - get.
denn es will Abend werden und der Tag hat sich ge - nei - get.
denn es will Abend werden und der Tag hat sich ge - nei - get.
A - bend wer - den und der Tag hat sich ge - nei - get.
Ob I
Ob II
Ob da caccia
Repeated G in strings
C minor
C major

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 6

Obbligato oboe da caccia or viola (used in a later performance).

Ritornello is based on opening vocal material. The upbeat mood (with major key, minuet rhythm, and pizzicato bass) is established by the singer's motto or "devise," which identifies Jesus' royal station. Nevertheless, the low timbre of the voice and obbligato shows Bach's sensitivity to varying degrees of

•Prayer: O Christ, remain our light (6/2). Physical light becomes metaphor for spiritual light. Alto is often the voice of the believing soul. See Petzoldt, "Bach-Kommentar," vol. 1, p. 541.

6/2 **Aria.** (Andante ♩ = 104.)

1.

Ob da caccia *mf*

E-flat major pizzicato

Minuet-like

B-flat 7

A-flat major

7.

E-flat major

F7

B-flat (7)

E-flat major

E-flat 7

13. **Alto.**

Alto is often the voice of intimate, heartfelt faith.

The text of the motto apparently alludes to Mark 14:61, where Pilate asks Jesus, "Are you Christ, the son of the highly exalted one?" Since the disciples in the Gospel reading did not at first recognize Jesus, it is appropriate that this aria focuses on the identity of Jesus before moving on to supplication.

Text painting: upward leap to depict "highly praised."

Hoch - ge - lob - - ter

Motto phrase

Fine

p

A-flat major

B-flat 7

E-flat major

E-flat major

For biblical background, see note.

19.

Got - - tes-sohn,

This type of aria is called a "Devisenarie" or "motto aria." After the ritornello, the singer presents the first phrase of the aria as a kind of motto.This is followed by a short instrumental bridge before the aria proper begins. The motto sets the tone (and the literary perspective) for the movement.

mf

A-flat major

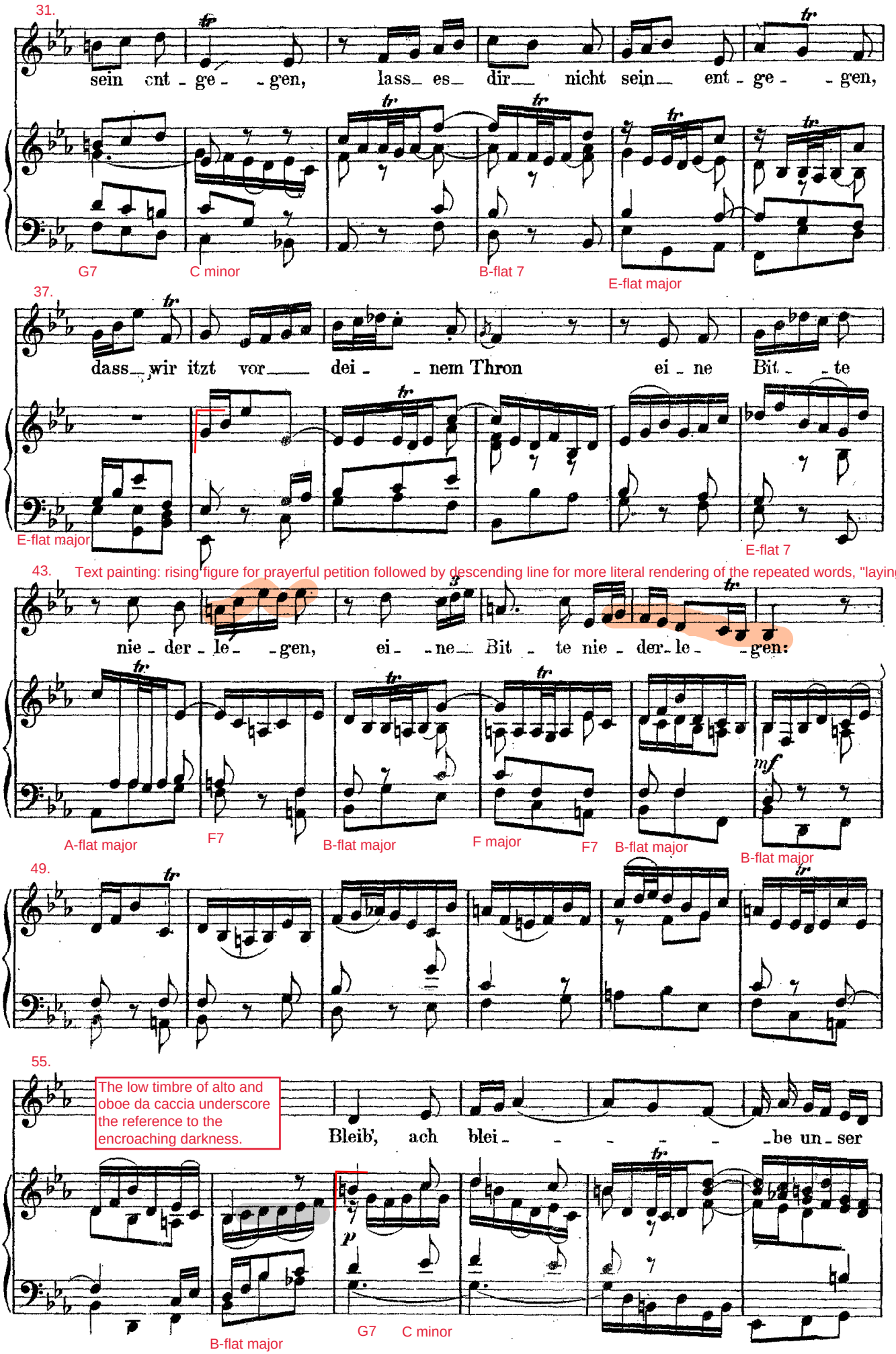
B-flat 7

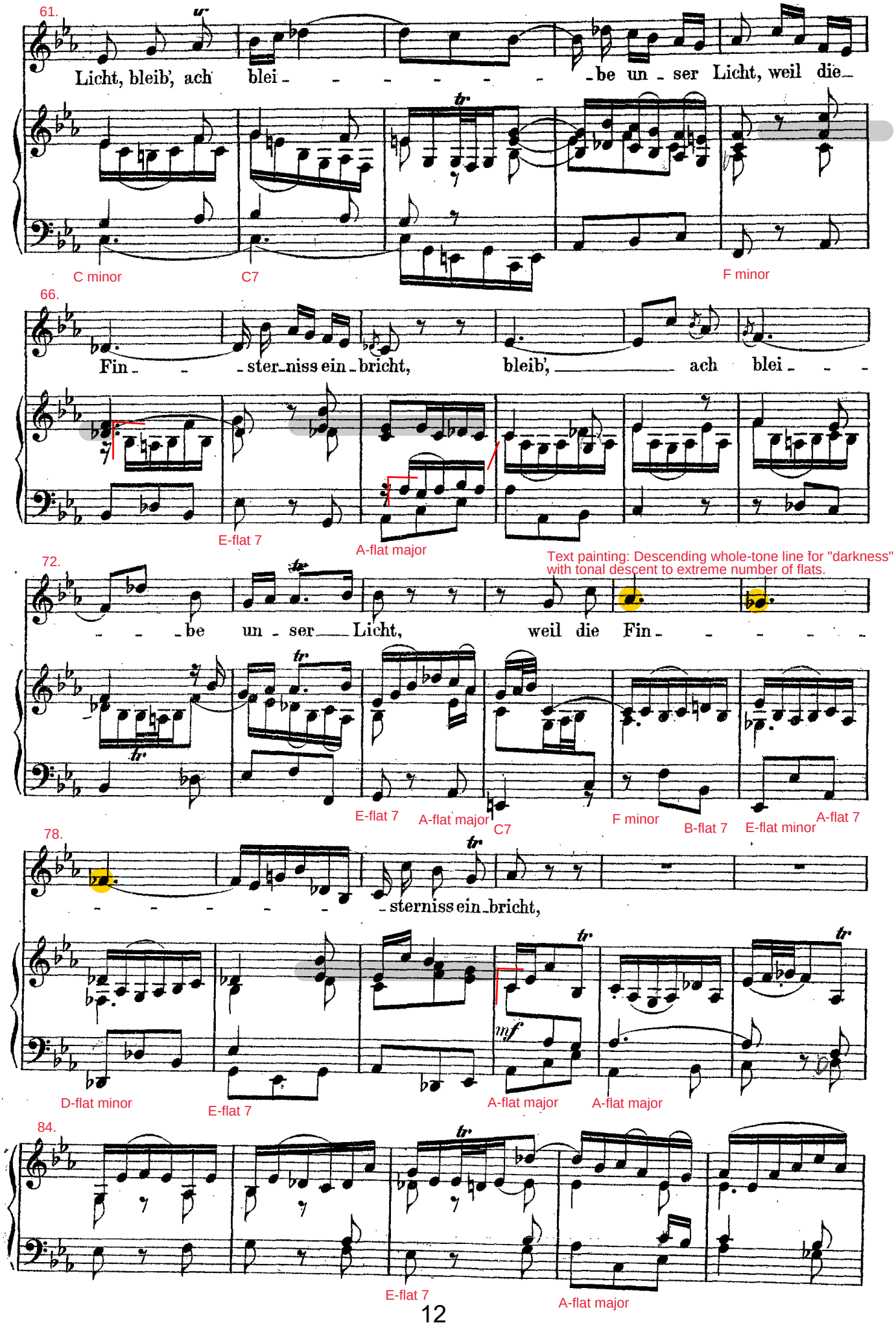
E-flat major

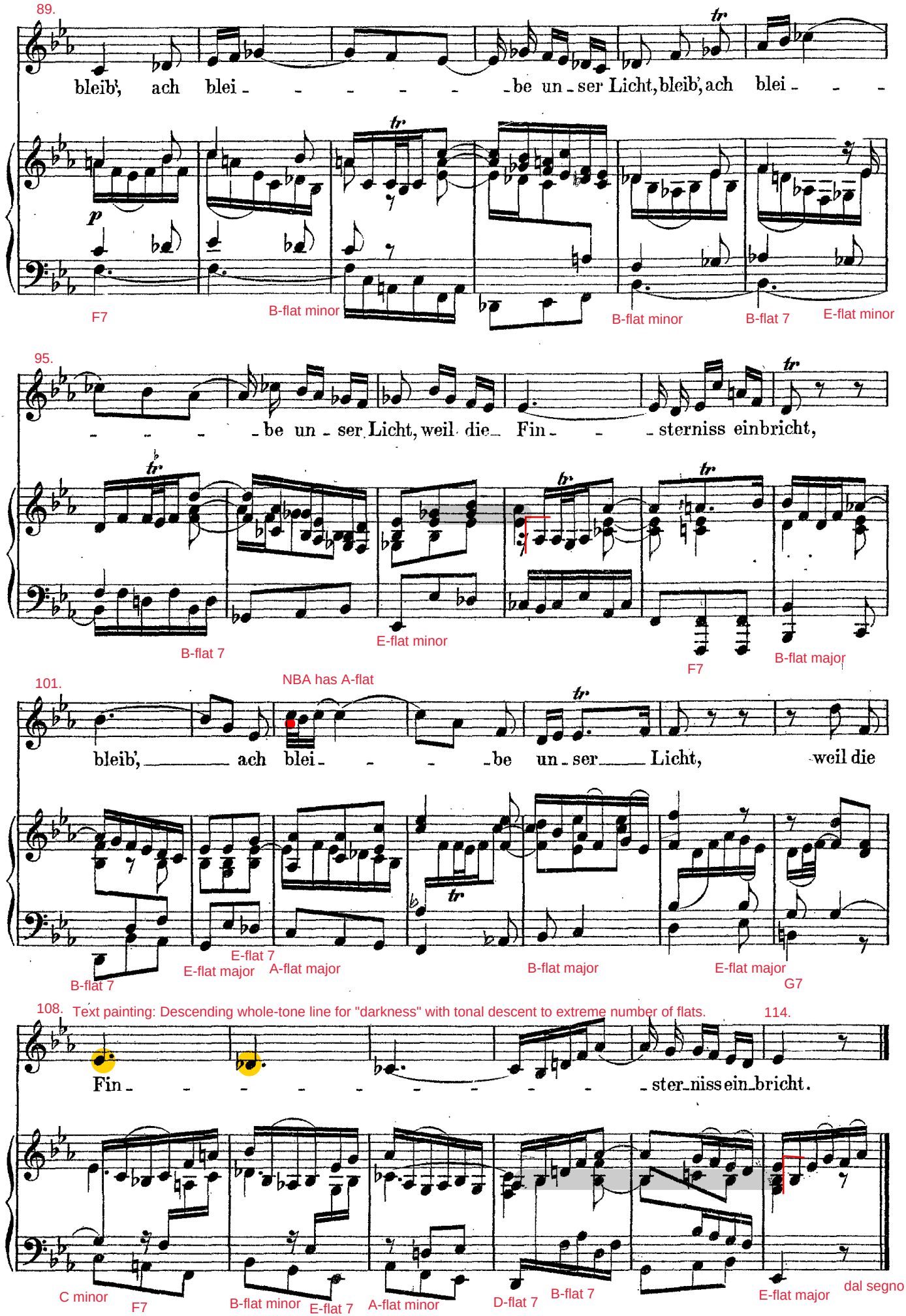
25.

hoch - ge - lob - - ter Got - - tes - sohn, lass es - dir - nicht

p


31.
sein ent - ge - - gen, lass es dir nicht sein ent - ge - - gen,
G7
C minor
B-flat 7
E-flat major
37.
dass wir itzt vor dei - - nem Thron ei - ne Bit - - te
E-flat major
E-flat 7
43.
Text painting: rising figure for prayerful petition followed by descending line for more literal rendering of the repeated words, "laying down."
nie - der - le - - gen, ei - - ne Bit - te nie - der - le - - gen:
A-flat major
F7
B-flat major
F major
F7
B-flat major
B-flat major
49.
55.
The low timbre of alto and oboe da caccia underscore the reference to the encroaching darkness.
Bleib, ach blei - - - - - be un - ser
B-flat major
G7
C minor


61.
Licht, bleib', ach blei - - - - - - be un - ser Licht, weil die -
C minor
C7
F minor
66.
Fin - - - ster - niss ein - bricht, bleib', ach blei - - -
E-flat 7
A-flat major
72.
Text painting: Descending whole-tone line for "darkness" with tonal descent to extreme number of flats.
- - - be un - ser Licht, weil die Fin - - - - - -
E-flat 7
A-flat major
C7
F minor
B-flat 7
E-flat minor
A-flat 7
78.
- - - - - - sterniss ein - bricht,
D-flat minor
E-flat 7
A-flat major
A-flat major
84.
E-flat 7
A-flat major



These are the first 2 stanzas of 10 in the 1579 version of a German hymn based on the 1551 Latin couplet “Vespera iam venit, nobiscum” by Philipp

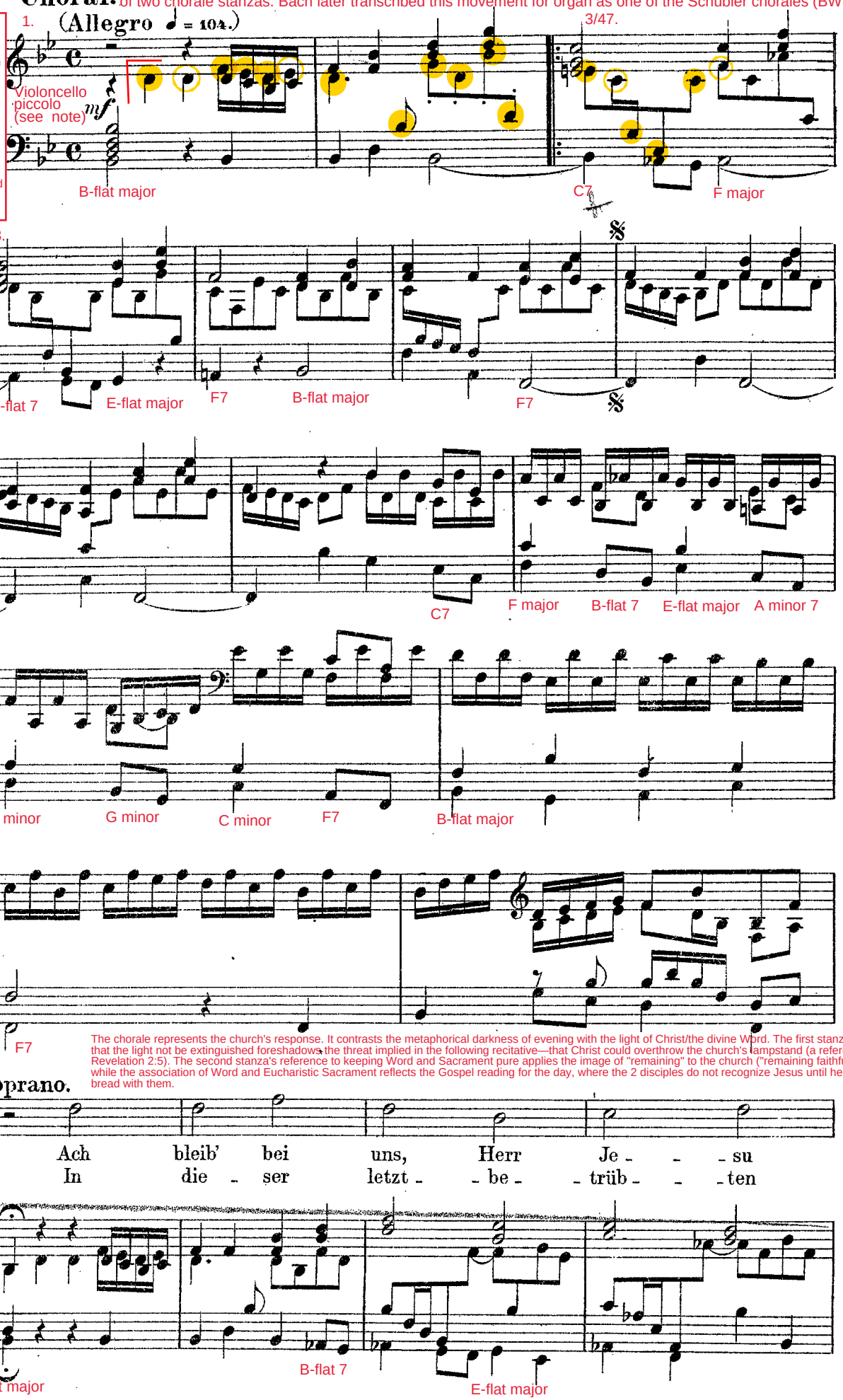
Melanchthon (1497–1561), continued with 8 more stanzas in 1572 by Nikolaus Selnecker (1532–1592). See Martin Petzoldt, *Bach-Kommentar* 2:728.

Chorale Aria

14 (156) 6/3. **Choral.**

●Prayer: Thy Word is our light, help us keep it to end (6/3). This chorale is different from the one that ends the cantata, a phenomenon found in Bach's first cantata cycle (before the chorale cantata cycle). Music is repeated for the second of two chorale stanzas. Bach later transcribed this movement for organ as one of the Schübler chorales (BWV 649).

Instrumentation: Obbligato by violoncello piccolo (see side note) plus continuo. The virtuosic obbligato, with its biplanar, leaping, wide-ranging melody, is an effective foil to the chorale tune with its slower, conjunct movement. It appears to symbolize the flickering "Light of God's Word" in the church's lamp stand, referenced at the end of the first stanza and in the following movement.



The individualized prayer of the preceding movement gives way to a corporate prayer by the Church. Bach chooses one of the tunes associated with this chorale.

The chorale represents the church's response. It contrasts the metaphorical darkness of evening with the light of Christ/the divine Word. The first stanza's prayer that the light not be extinguished foreshadows the threat implied in the following recitative—that Christ could overthrow the church's lampstand (a reference to Revelation 2:5). The second stanza's reference to keeping Word and Sacrament pure applies the image of "remaining" to the church ("remaining faithful"), while the association of Word and Eucharistic Sacrament reflects the Gospel reading for the day, where the 2 disciples do not recognize Jesus until he breaks bread with them.

For biblical background, see note.

19/63.

Christ, weil
Zeit ver - -

E-flat major F7 B-flat major

Evening understood metaphorically as spirtual darkness.

23/67.

es nun A - - - bend wor - - den
leih' uns, Herr, Be - - stän - - dig - - -

D7 G minor B-flat 7 E-flat major F7 B-flat major

26/70.

ist,
keit,

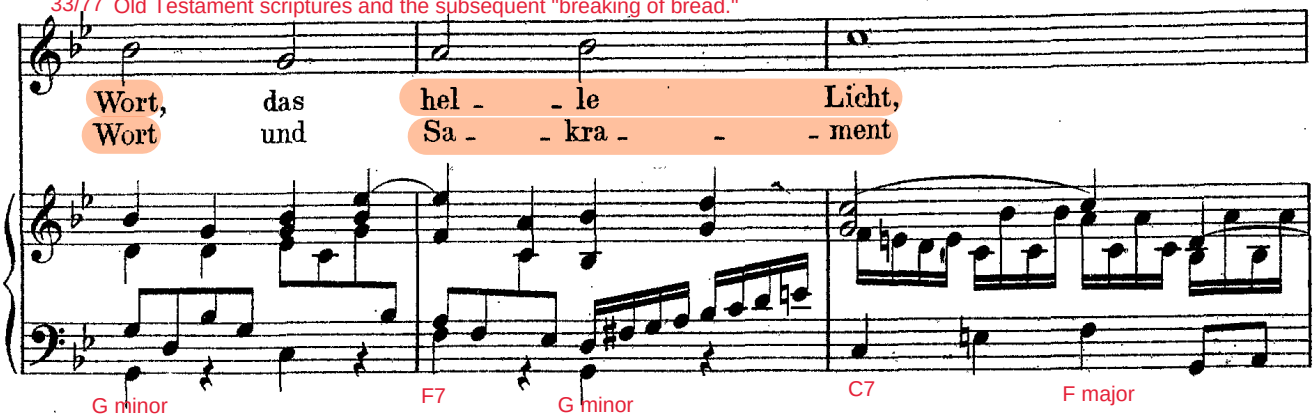
B-flat major B-flat 7 E-flat major F7 B-flat major

29/73.

dein gött - lich
dass wir dein

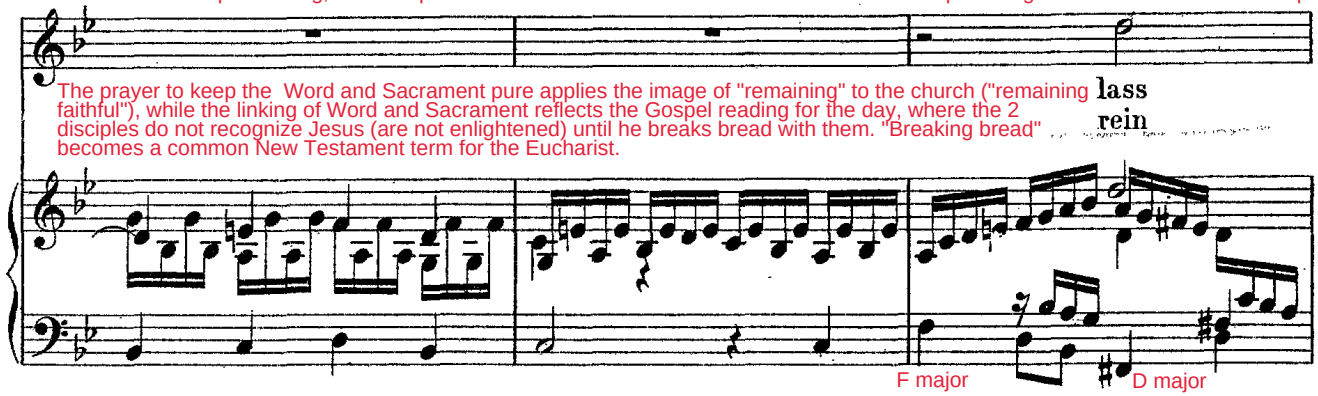
B-flat major B-flat major D7

33/77 Christ's divine Word enlightens, just as the confused disciples in the Gospel reading are led to understanding by Jesus' exposition of Old Testament scriptures and the subsequent "breaking of bread."

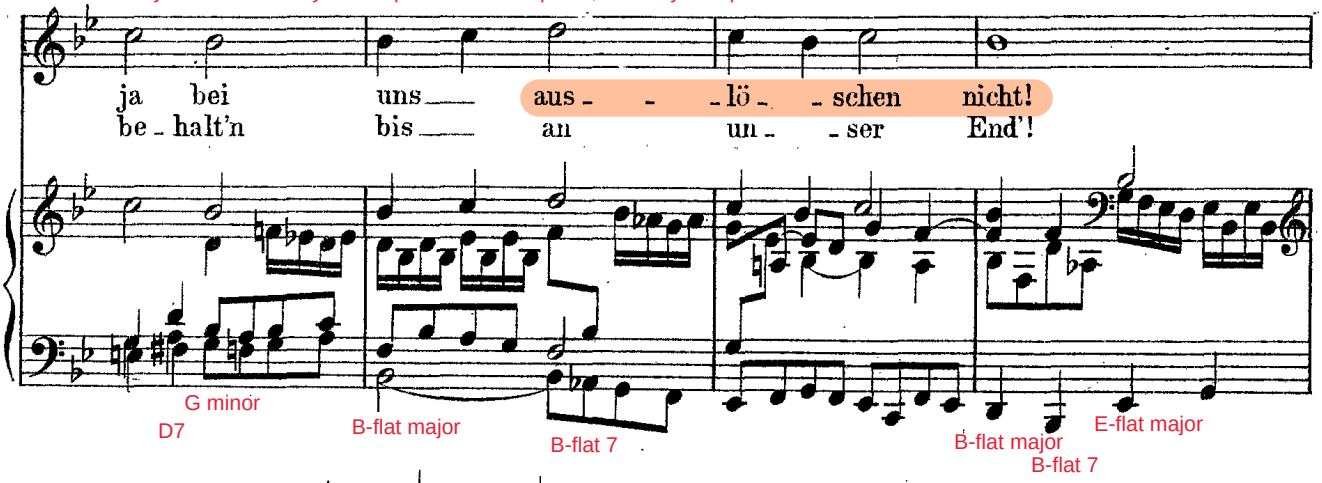


36/80. In the Gospel reading, Christ explains his death and resurrection to the 2 confused disciples in light of the Old Testament scriptures (Word).

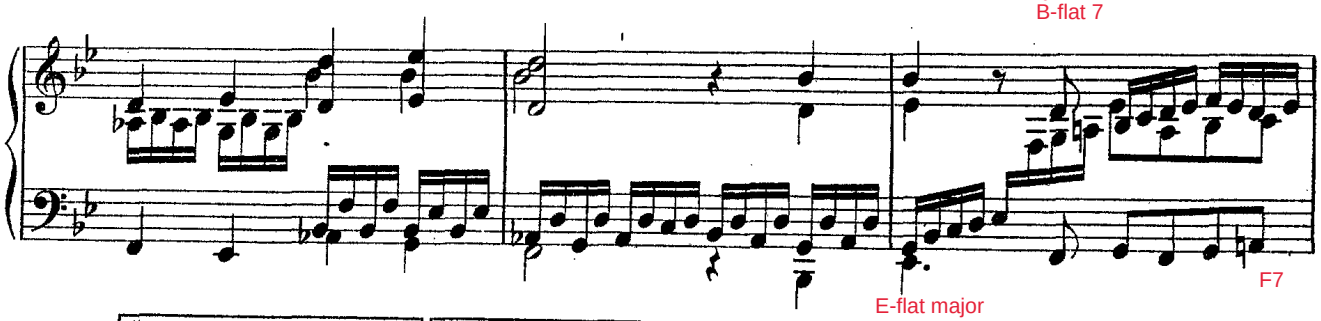
The prayer to keep the Word and Sacrament pure applies the image of "remaining" to the church ("remaining faithful"), while the linking of Word and Sacrament reflects the Gospel reading for the day, where the 2 disciples do not recognize Jesus (are not enlightened) until he breaks bread with them. "Breaking bread" becomes a common New Testament term for the Eucharist.



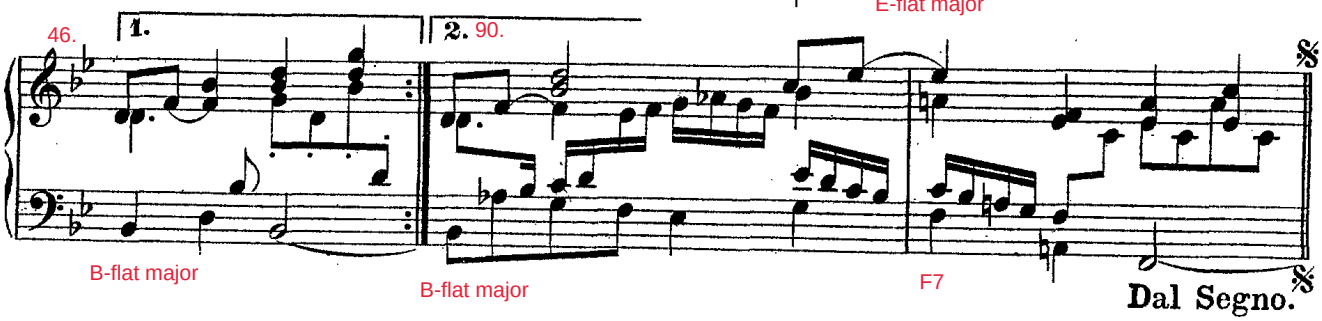
39/83. The prayer that the church's light not be extinguished points to the implied threat in the next recitative, which alludes to Christ's words in Revelation 2:5: "Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."



43/87.



46.



Secco

6/4. **Recitativo.** •Darkness has triumphed in many places (6/4). Pervasive spiritual darkness is depicted with chromatic saturation and unexpected chord progressions.

Chromatic Saturation in the vocal part in 9 mm.

For biblical background, see note.

1. **Basso.** E G A F C# B-flat D

Es hat die Dunkelheit an vielen Or-ten ü-berhandgenommen. Wo-her ist

Text painting: Large leap downward for "darkness."

Secco

A7 C# dim.7 D minor

3. C B

aber dieses kommen? Bloss da-her, weil sowohl die Kleinen, als die Grossen nicht in Ge-

Text painting: Chromatic descending bass line and tonal descent "flatward" in the circle of fifths for descent into spiritual darkness, leading to judgment. Martin Petzoldt suggests the reference to "small and "great" alludes to Paul's statements about Jews and Greeks (all are sinners). See "Bach-Kommentar," vol. 1, p. 729.

F major F7 D major G7 C7 F7

E-flat 6. A-flat

rech-tig-keit vor dir, o Gott, ge-wandelt und wi-der ih-re Christenpflicht ge-

B-flat major B-flat 7 G major C7 B dim.7

8. F#

handelt. Drum hast du auch den Leuch-ter um-ge-stossen.

With a vocal line that descends almost 2 octaves, Bach sets this allusion to Christ's warning in Revelation 2:5: "Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."

G7 C minor A dim. F# dim.7 E-flat major G minor

●Prayer: Jesus, keep us with the light of thy Word (6/5). Martin Petzoldt suggests that this aria is to be understood as a prayer by the individual, which moves in the next movement to a prayer by the Church. See "Bach-Kommentar," vol. 1, p. 729. In this regard, he argues that the last three movements parallel the first three.

6/5. **Aria.** (Moderato ♩ = 72.)

1. Vln I

Strings

Ritornello

mf

Ritornello derived from vocal line.

G minor

A7

4.

D minor

Alfred Dürr argues that the main motive is to be understood as a reference to the cross; similarly, Martin Petzoldt notes that the name of Jesus is synonymous with the cross and the power to save from sin. See Dürr/Jones, "Die Kantaten," 280, Petzoldt, "Bach-Kommentar," vol. 2, p. 729. However, the monotonous, trudging rhythm of the motive may also depict walking (as represented by the 2 disciples in the Gospel account walking with Jesus, and by the text's reference to avoiding the path of sin.

Tenore.

7.

The triplet passsages may be intended to represent the shimmering light (see the tenor's melisma in m. 34).

Je - su, lass uns auf dich se - hen,

Cross figure

Vln I

p

Vln II & Vla tacet

D major

G minor

G minor

9.

This type of aria is called a "Devisenarie" or "motto aria" (see above at movement no. 2). Here the motto may allude to Hebrews 12:1–2 (",,, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross...").

For biblical background, see note.

Je - su, lass uns

+Vln II & Vla

mf

p

G7 C minor

F# dim.7

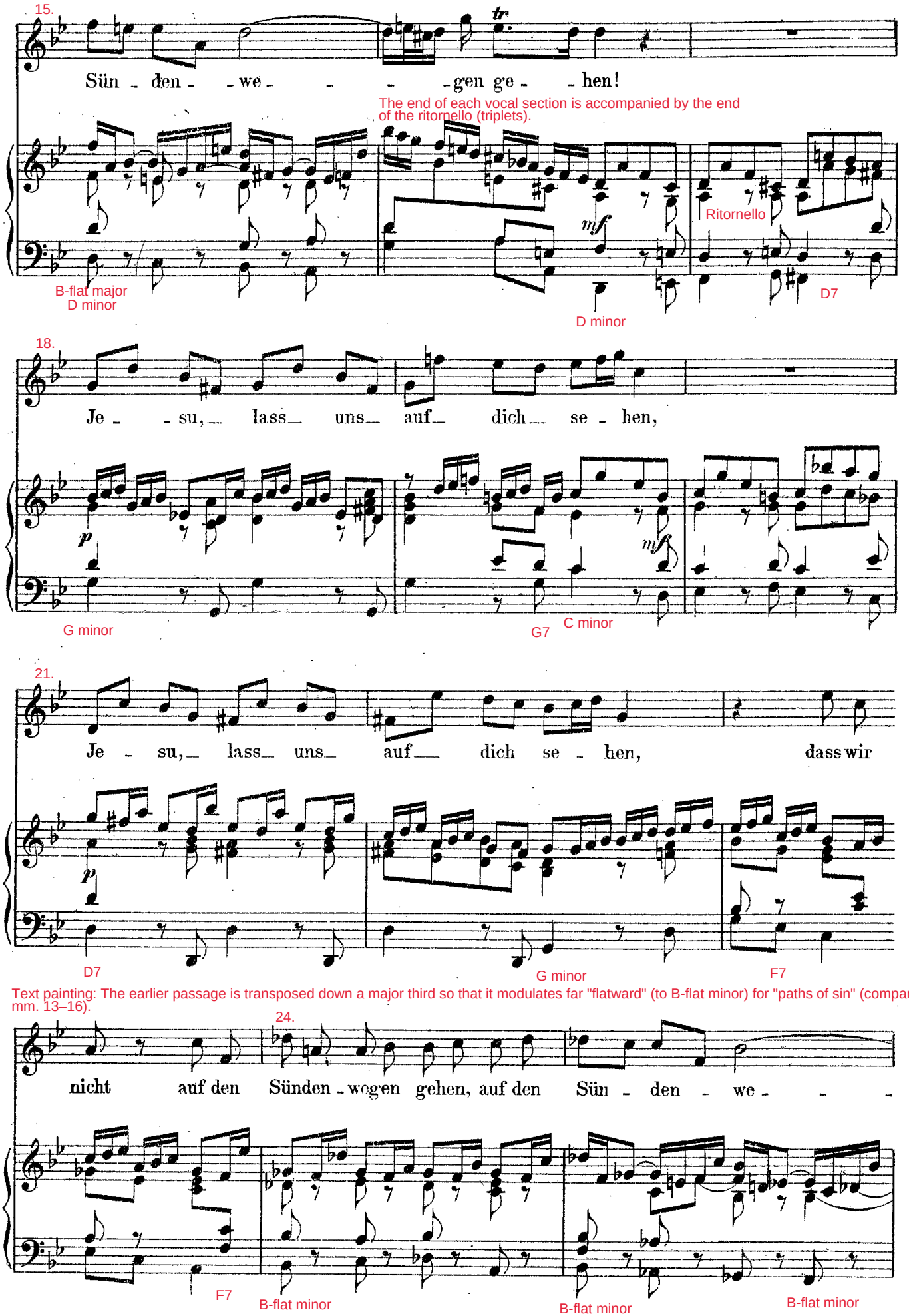
G minor

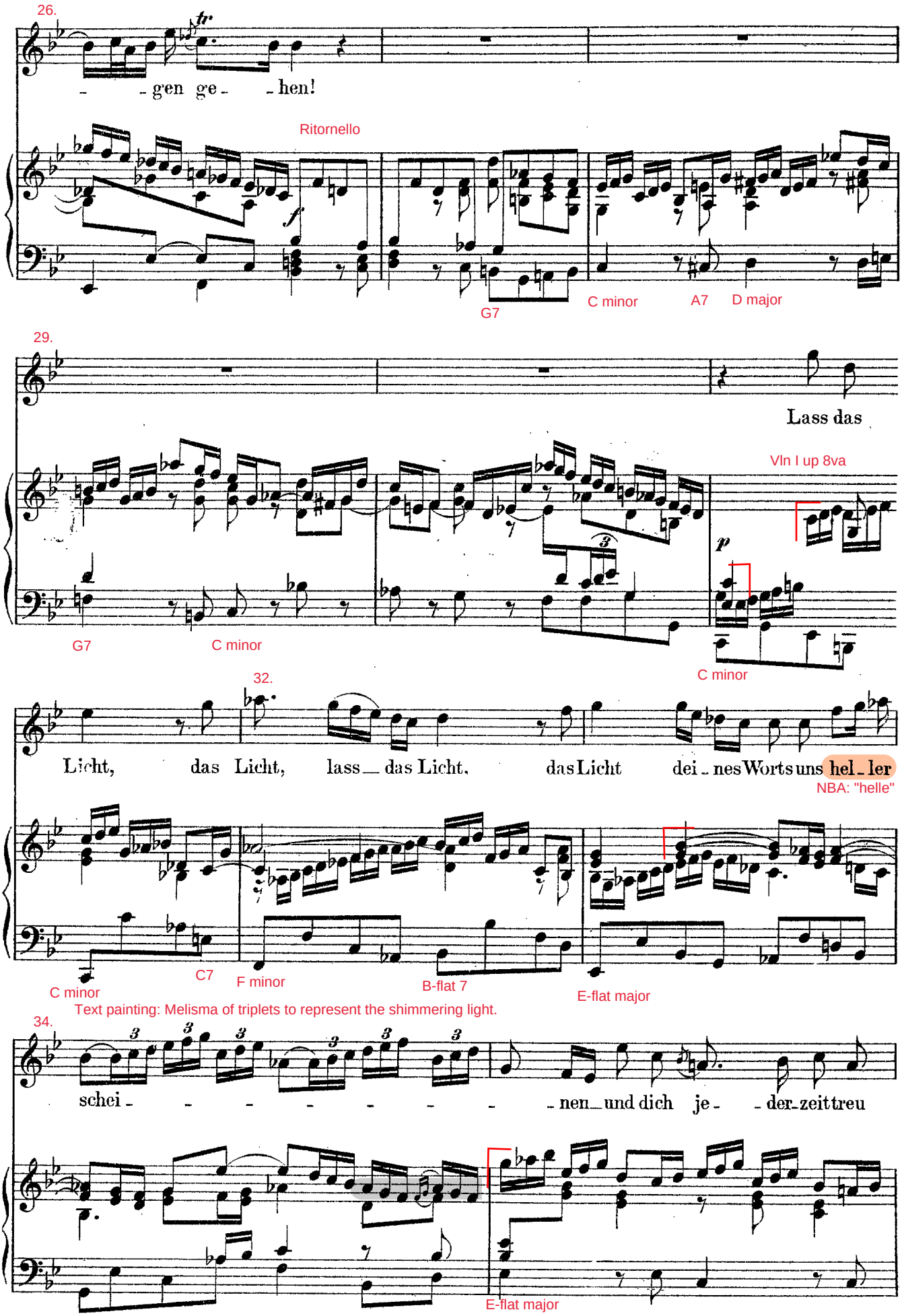
12.

auf dich se - hen, dass wir nicht auf den Sünden-weg'en geh'en, auf den

C# dim.7

D minor


15.
Sün - den - we - gen ge - hen!
The end of each vocal section is accompanied by the end of the ritornello (triplets).
Ritornello
B-flat major
D minor
D minor
D7
18.
Je - su, lass uns auf dich se - hen,
G minor
G7
C minor
21.
Je - su, lass uns auf dich se - hen, dass wir
D7
G minor
F7
Text painting: The earlier passage is transposed down a major third so that it modulates far "flatward" (to B-flat minor) for "paths of sin" (compare mm. 13–16).
24.
nicht auf den Sünden - wegen gehen, auf den Sün - den - we -
F7
B-flat minor
B-flat minor
B-flat minor



The poet asks Jesus to let his word shine brightly (reflecting the Gospel story of Jesus enlightening the disciples on the way to Emmaus after his resurrection) and "dich jederzeit treu meinen"—to always incline him faithfully to Jesus.

Martin Petzoldt suggests that the melisma on "meinen" (i.e., to mean, or to be inclined toward), especially in mm. 42–43, is to stimulate the believer's agency. See "Bach-Kommentar," vol. 2, p. 730. Furthermore, giving "meinen" a melisma serves to match the rhyming couplet (the word "scheinen").

36.

mei - - - - nen, je - der - zeit treu mei - nen! Lass das Licht

G minor D major E-flat major G7 C minor

39.

dei - nes - Worts uns hel - ler schei - - - - nen

NBA: "helle"

F7 B-flat major F# dim.7 D7

41.

Text painting: Melisma for "meinen" (here: to be inclined toward). See above note.

und dich jederzeit treu mei - - - - - - - - - - -

G minor

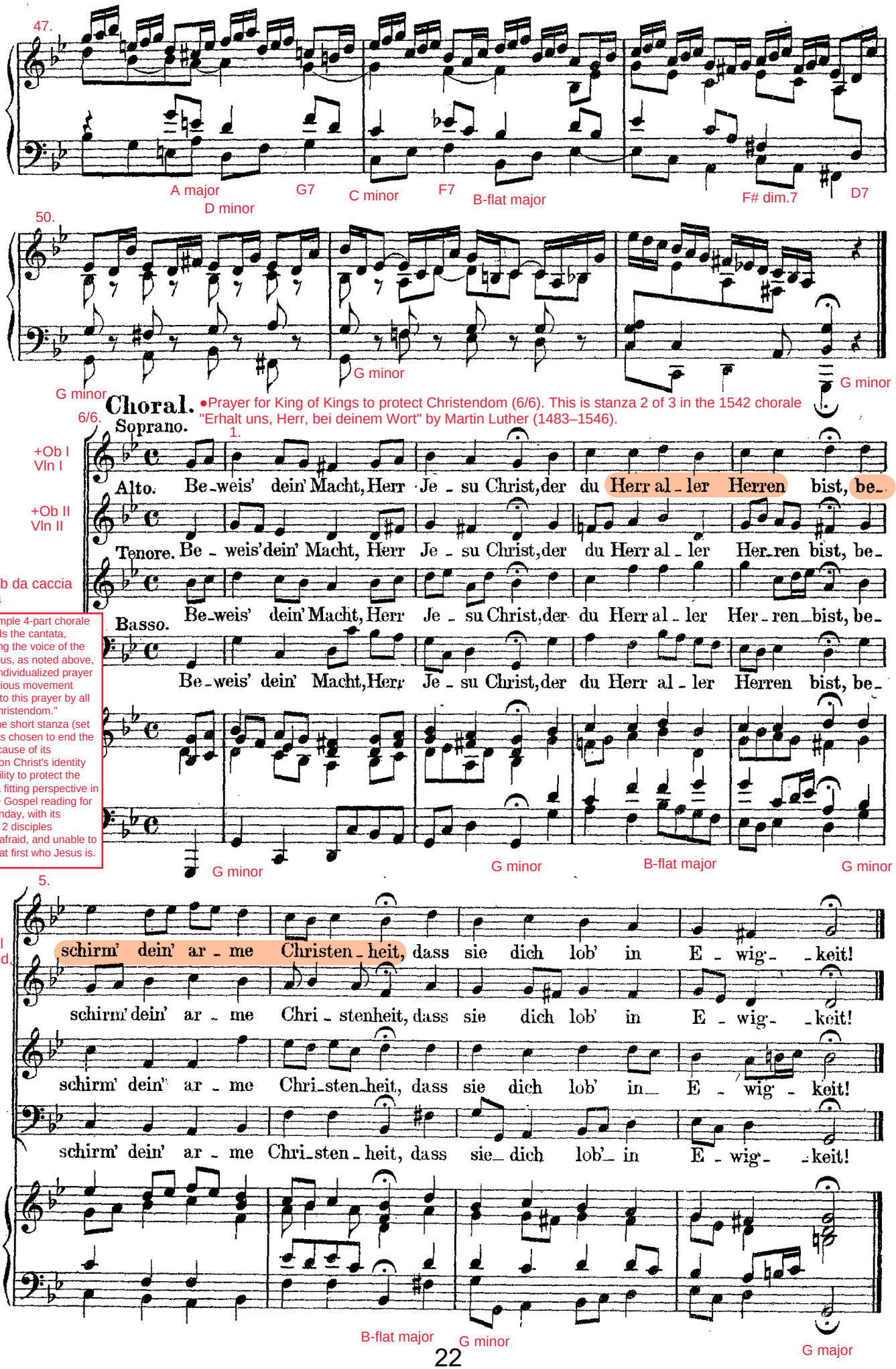
44.

- - nen, dich je - der - zeit treu - mei - nen!

The end of each vocal section is accompanied by the end of the ritornello (triplets).

Ritornello

G minor


47.
A major
D minor
G7
C minor
F7
B-flat major
F# dim.7
D7
50.
G minor
G minor
G minor
Choral.
6/6.
•Prayer for King of Kings to protect Christendom (6/6). This is stanza 2 of 3 in the 1542 chorale "Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort" by Martin Luther (1483–1546).
Soprano.
1.
+Ob I
Vln I
Alto. Be-weis' dein' Macht, Herr Je-su Christ, der du Herr al-ler Herren bist, be-
+Ob II
Vln II
Tenore. Be-weis' dein' Macht, Herr Je-su Christ, der du Herr al-ler Her-ren bist, be-
+Ob da caccia
Vla
Basso. Be-weis' dein' Macht, Herr Je-su Christ, der du Herr al-ler Her-ren bist, be-
Be-weis' dein' Macht, Herr Je-su Christ, der du Herr al-ler Herren bist, be-
G minor
G minor
B-flat major
G minor
A short, simple 4-part chorale setting ends the cantata, representing the voice of the church. Thus, as noted above, the more individualized prayer of the previous movement gives way to this prayer by all of "poor Christendom." Perhaps the short stanza (set simply) was chosen to end the libretto because of its emphasis on Christ's identity and his ability to protect the Church—a fitting perspective in view of the Gospel reading for Easter Monday, with its account of 2 disciples confused, afraid, and unable to recognize at first who Jesus is.
5.
For biblical background, see note.
schirm' dein' ar-me Christen-heit, dass sie dich lob' in E-wig-keit!
schirm' dein' ar-me Chri-stenheit, dass sie dich lob' in E-wig-keit!
schirm' dein' ar-me Chri-sten-heit, dass sie dich lob' in E-wig-keit!
schirm' dein' ar-me Chri-sten-heit, dass sie dich lob' in E-wig-keit!
B-flat major
G minor
G major