

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 185

Form: Chorus/Fantasia - Aria (A) - Aria (S) - Aria (T) - Chorale.

All newly composed texts (nos. 1–5) allude to the Gospel reading. With its emphasis on love for God and one's neighbor (expressed in ethical behavior), the cantata has been called pietistic. Noteworthy is the prominence of major keys. On Johann Mattheson's comments of major versus minor, see note.

Introduction & updates at [melvinunger.com](http://melvinunger.com).

NBA I/17; BC A101

4. S. after Trinity (BWV 185, 24, 177)

\*Romans 8:18–23 (All creation eagerly longs for the revealing of the sons of God)

\*Luke 6:36–42 (Sermon on the mount: Be merciful, do not judge)

Librettist: Salomon Franck (see notes)

FP: 14 July 1715 (Weimar Palace Chapel)

Revised for 20 June 1723 (Leipzig: St. Thomas). See note.

## J.S. Bach Cantata No. 185

### Barmherziges Herze der ewigen Liebe

#### Thematic Material of no. 1

- 1a. Descending line in loure rhythm
  - 1b. Inversion
  2. Wave-like motion of 8ths (bass).
  3. Chorale tune (oboe/trumpet)
  4. "Errege" ("stir up") figure.
- Throughout the movement, the mirror principle is foundational.

185/1. **Duetto** • Prayer: O God of love, kindle a heart of love in me! (185/1).  
(Lento 1.  $\text{♩} = 104$ )

**Soprano**  
**Tenore**

Instrumentation:  
Clarino (Leipzig version)  
Oboe  
Vln I, II The entire Instrumental ensemble is not heard until no. 3.  
Vla  
SATB  
Continuo

Continuo alone plus later chorale. Th.1a

Theme 1a begins with the opening interval of the chorale tune.

The text alludes to Luke 6:36 (Gospel reading): Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. The duet structure and the forestatement by the continuo reflects the text's emphasis that God's love should inspire a similar reaction in his followers.

(Lento) Editorial realization

F# minor in Chorton (For significance, see side note.) F# minor F# minor

The voice imitates the continuo's opening, probably to suggest the text's emphasis that God's love should inspire a similar reaction in his followers. For Johann Walter's definition of a loure, see note.

4

e - wigen Lie - be, er - re - ge, be - we - gemein Her - ze durch dich, er -

Barm - her - ziges Her - ze der e - wigen Lie - be, er -

Th.1b

Th.1a

Th.2

F# minor F# minor F# minor

Contrary motion captures the heavenward and earthward trajectories of the 2 corresponding texts; their mirror relationship suggesting the command to reflect God's love by loving one's neighbor.

The continuo switches to a wave-like stream of 8th-notes (perhaps modelled after the circular figures in Bach's setting of the same chorale in the *Orgelbüchlein* (BWV 639)—apparently a depiction of the eternal flames of divine love referenced in the text.

7

re - ge, be - we - ge mein Her - ze durch dich, mein Her - ze durch dich,

re - ge, be - we - gemein Her - ze durch dich, mein Her - ze durch dich, barm -

(Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Je - su Christ,

Th.3 Oboe/Clarino

F# minor

Instrumentally rendered chorale (adapted to 6/4 meter) was given to clarino in the Leipzig version.

By including a citation of the closing chorale in the opening movement, Bach sowed the seeds for his later chorale cantata cycle in Leipzig (1723–1724).

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10

barmherziges Herze der  
herziges Herze der ewigen Liebe, errege, bewege mein

F# minor G#7 C# minor C# minor B7 E major

13

ewigen Liebe, errege, bewege mein Herze durch dich, er.  
Herze durch dich, errege, bewege mein Herze durch dich, er. (Choral)

E(7) A major

16

errege, bewege mein Herze durch dich, errege, bewege mein  
rege, bewege mein Herze durch dich, errege mein

bitt, erhör mein Klagen,

A major C# major F# minor G#7 C# minor

19

Herze durch dich;  
Herze durch dich; da

C# major F# minor F# minor

Rhythmic motion for "errege" ("stir up"), "bewege" ("move").

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22

da - mit ich Er - bar - men und  
mit ich Er - bar - men und Gü - tigkeit u - be, o - Flam - meder Lie - be, zer -

F# minor F# minor

25

Gü - tigkeit ü - be, o - Flam - meder Lie - be, zer - schmel - ze du mich, zer -  
schmel - ze du mich, o Flamme der Liebe, zerschmelze du mich, zer -  
ver - leih mir Gnad zu

F# minor F# minor

28

schmelze - du mich, da - mit ich Er - bar - men und Gü - tigkeit ü - be, o -  
schmel - ze du mich, da - die - ser Frist,

C#7 F# minor G#7 C# minor C# minor

31

Flam - meder Lie - be, zer - schmel - ze du mich, o Flamme der Liebe, zer -  
mit ich Er - bar - men und Gü - tigkeit ü - be, o Flam - meder Lie - be, zer -

B7 E major E(7) A major A major

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34

schmelze du mich, o Flamme der Lie-be, zer - schmelze du mich,  
 schmel-ze du mich, o Flamme der Lie-be, zer-schmelze du mich, o  
 laß mich doch nicht ver-za-gen;

A major C#7

37

o Flamme, zer-schmel-ze du mich! Barm-her-zi-gesHer-ze-  
 Flamme der Lie-be, zer-schmel-ze du mich! Barm-

F# minor G#7 C# minor C# minor F#7 B minor

40

der e-wi-gen Lie-be, er-re-ge, be-we-ge mein  
 her-zi-ges Her-ze-der e-wi-gen Lie-be, er-re-ge, be-we-ge mein  
 den rech-ten Weg, o

Parallel 3rds suggest the sweetness of God's eternal love, as referenced in the text.

E7 A major

43

Her-ze durch dich; da-mit ich Er-bar-men und  
 Her-ze durch dich; da-mit ich Er-bar-men und Gü-tig-keit ü-be, da-  
 Herr, ich mein;

A major B7 E major F#7 B minor B7

46

Gü-tig-keit ü-be, und Gü-tig-keit ü-be, o Flam-meder Lie-be, zer-schmel-ze du mich, o Flam-me der Lie-be, o Flamme der Lie-be, zer-schmel-ge-ben, o Flamme der Lie-be, o Flamme der Lie-be, zer-schmel-ze, zer-schmelze du mich, o Flam-me, zer-ze, zer-schmel-ze du mich, o Flam-me der Lie-be, zer-schmel-ze du mich! Barm-her-ziges Her-ze der e-wigen Lie-be, er-le-ben,

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

Chromaticism for "O flame of love, melt me."

49

schmel-ze du mich, o Flam-me der Lie-be, o Flamme der Lie-be, zer-schmel-ze, zer-schmelze du mich, o Flam-me, zer-ze, zer-schmel-ze du mich, o Flam-me der Lie-be, zer-schmel-ze du mich! Barm-her-ziges Her-ze der e-wigen Lie-be, er-le-ben,

C# major E major

Loure-like rhythm. See Meredith Little and Natalie Jenne, *Dance and the Music of J. S. Bach*, expanded ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 258, 303.

52

schmel-ze du mich! Barm-her-ziges Her-ze der e-wigen Lie-be, er-le-ben,

A major F#7 (B minor) (E7) C#7 F# minor B7 C major

55

schmel-ze du mich! Barm-her-ziges Her-ze der e-wigen Lie-be, er-le-ben,

E major B7 E major E7 A major

Here the theme is inverted (i.e., it is the mirror image).

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58

her - ziges Her - zeder e - wi - gen Lie - be, barm - her - ziges Her - zeder  
 re - ge, be - we - ge mein Her - ze durch dich, er - re - ge, be - we - ge mein  
 mein'm Näch - sten nütz zu

A major

61

e - wigen Lie - be, er - re - ge, be - we - ge mein Her - ze durch dich, er -  
 Her - ze durch dich, barm - her - ziges Her - zeder e - wi - gen Lie - be,  
 sein,

A major F#7

64

re - ge mein Her - ze durch dich, barm - her - ziges Her - ze,  
 ...be - we - ge... durch dich, barm -

B minor E minor A7 D major A# dim.7 B minor

67

barm - her - ziges Her - ze der e - wigen Lie - be, er -  
 her - ziges Her - ze, barm - her - ziges Her - ze der  
 dein Wort zu hal - ten

The tenor begins with the mirror image before the soprano is finished.  
 The imitation comes at ever closer intervals.

E# dim.7 F# minor E7 A major C#(7) F# minor

70

re - ge, be - we - ge mein Her - ze, er - re - ge, be - we - ge mein Her - ze durch dich!  
e - wigen Lie - be, er - re - ge, be - we - ge mein Her - ze durch dich!

F#7 B(7) E7 E# dim.7 F# minor F# minor

The ritornello reverses the order of the 2 lines (Th.1b, Th.1a).

73

F# minor F# minor F# minor

Warning: Show mercy so that you receive mercy (185/2).

Text painting: Jagged melody for "hearts turned hard as stone and rock," downwardly flowing melisma for "hearts that melt."

Martin Petzoldt notes that in Bach's later works, the alto voice represents the voice of faith (personified as Mary in the Christmas Oratorio); at Pentecost, it can also represent the Holy Spirit. See *Bach Kommentar* 1:97.

185/2. **Recitativo**  
Alto

Ihr Herzen, die ihr euch in Stein und Fels verkehret, zer - fließt

pp "Halo" of Strings

A major A# dim.7 F7 B minor E# dim.7

The reference of hearts as hard as stone, appears to allude to Ezechiel 36:26 (see note).



4

und werdet weich; er - wägt, was euch der Heiland leh - ret, übt, übt Barmher - zig - keit, und sucht noch auf der Er - den dem Va - ter gleich zu wer - den. Ach greifet

C#7 F# minor G#7

Recitatives from Bach's Weimar period often flow into arioso sections.

7 a tempo (♩ = 60) (Recit)

keit, und sucht noch auf der Er - den dem Va - ter gleich zu wer - den. Ach greifet

Chorale citation: Herr Je - su Christ

Quasi-imitation by inversion in the strings reflect the text's reference to earthly emulation of God the Father, who is equal to the Son (represented by a chorale snippet).

C# minor F# minor iv6 (Phrygian) G#7 V C# minor C# minor A# dim.7

The text alludes to the Gospel reading. Luke 6:35-38 [Christ]: Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back.

10

nicht, durch das verbotne Richten, dem Allerhöchsten ins Ge. richt, sonst wird sein Eifer euch zer.

B7 E minor F#7 E# dim.7 C#7

13

Text painting: The line softens and moves to the major mode for the admonition to forgive.

nichten. Ver - gebt, so wird euch auch ver - geben; gebt, gebt in die sem

F major B minor B7 E major E7

16

The text alludes also to Matthew 6:19-20 [Christ]: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal."

Leben; macht euch ein Ca - pi - tal, das dort ein - mal Gott wiederzahlt mit reichen In - te -

B7

19

(Arioso ♩ = 66)

Text painting: The reference to Jesus' words in the Gospel reading (Luke 6:38, "For the measure you give will be the measure you get back") is depicted with imitation between singer and continuo, which is repeated in inversion.

ressen. Denn wie ihr messt, wird man euch wieder mes -

E major B7 E major

22

Repetition by inversion.

- sen, denn wie ihr messt, wird man euch wieder mes -

E major E major

Word painting: "Broadly encompassing melisma for "messen" ("to measure")."



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25

- sen, wird man euch wie-der mes-sen.

E major

27

E major

E major

A walking tempo and the sound of the oboe suggest a pastoral scene: the sower walks his field, shaking out the seed as he goes. The figura corta appears to represent the sower's shaking motions, and later his joy in the eternal harvest referenced in the text. See note for more.

**Aria** • Sow plentifully in this age to gather a rich harvest (185/3).  
 185/3. **Adagio** (♩ = 58)

Ob/Vln I

Ritornello derived from vocal line.

Figura corta

The entire instrumental ensemble is heard for the first time.

A major Walking bass descends the full octave, depicting . A major

3(34)

B7

E major

5(36)

E major F#7

B minor E7

A major

7(38)

A major

The text alludes to the Gospel reading Luke 6:38: Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back. (Also Matthew 7:2.)

9(40) **Alto**

Sei — bemüht in — die — ser Zeit,

*p* *mf*

A major A major

This type of aria is called a "Devisenarie" (a term coined by Hugo Riemann) 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.

11

sei — bemüht in — die — ser Zeit, See — le, — reichlich aus — zu —

*p*

A major A major B7

13

streu —

*p*

Ob

E major E major

Text painting: A long "shaking" melisma depicts the scattering of seed, as referenced in the text.

15

— en, reichlich aus — zu — streu — en,

*mf*

Ob/Vln I

E major

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17

soll die Ernte dich er-

E major E7 A major

Text painting: Energetic melisma for "to gladden."

19

freuen in der reichen Ewig-

Ob/Vln I

A major A major E# dim.7 F# minor

Word painting: Sustained tone merging into a sequential coloratura for "eternity."

21

keit, in der reichen E-

Ob/Vln I

F# minor

23

-wigkeit,

Ob/Vln I

F# minor F# minor

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25

wo, wer Gu - tes... aus - ge - sä - et, fröh - lich

*p*

B# dim.7 C# minor B7 E7 A major

27

nach den Gar - benge - het, wo, wer Gu - tes... aus - ge - sä - et, fröh -

Ob

A major

29

- lich nach den Garben ge - - - - - het, fröh - lich

Ob/Vln I

A major

31

nach den Gar - ben. nach - - - den Gar - ben ge - het.

*mf*

A major

Dal Segno

Secco **Recitativo**

185/4, 1. Basso •Blindness to own faults; splinter in neighbor's eye (185/4).

The bass is often the voice of authority. Here the bass singer rebukes his listeners with various biblical allusions.

Die Ei-gen-lie-be schmei-chelt sich. Be-stre-be dich, erst

Word painting: Embellishment on "schmeichelt" ("flatter/caress")

A major A7 D major E7

3 dei-nen Bal-ken aus-zu-zie-hen, dann magst du dich um Splitter auch be-

A# dim.7 F#7

5 mühen, die in des Nächsten Augen sein. Ist gleich dein Nächster nicht vollkommen

E# dim.7 F# major B minor C#7

8 rein, so wis-se, dass du auch kein En-gel. Ver-bess're dei-ne Mängel!

F# minor B7 E major G# major

11 Wie kann ein Blinder mit dem andern doch recht und richtig wandern? Wie, fal-len

C# minor F#7 B minor E# dim.7 C# major F# major

Phrygian cadence (often used for questions)

The text alludes to the Gospel reading. Luke 6:39: [Jesus] also told them a parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?" (Also Matthew 15:14.)

14

sie zu ihrem Leide nicht in die Gruben alle beide?

A# dim.7 B minor E minor iv6 F# major V  
(Phrygian cadence often used for questions)

Text painting: Descending continuo line depicts "falling into a ditch," as referenced in the text.

**Aria** • Mark of Christian is non-judging generosity (185/5).

185/5. 1. **Vivace** (♩ = 86)

Ritornello derived from vocal line, treated as a quasi-ostinato.

Bass line only; rest is editorial.

Herr Je - su (Christ)

B7 Em A7 Bm

Form (Rhyme: AbccddaA)  
Ritornello (mm. 1-5) B minor  
Lines 1+2-3+1 (5-12) B minor  
Lines 1+ 4-5+1) (13-17) DM  
Rit (18-21) DM-F#m  
Lines 1+6-7+1 (22-26) DM-Em  
Lines 1+2-7+1 (27-35) Em-F#m  
Lines 8+1 (2x with repetitions: 36-43) Bm  
Rit (43-47) Bm

This type of aria is called a "Devisenarie" (a term coined by Hugo Riemann) 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.

4 **Basso**

Das ist der Christen Kunst,

F#7 B minor B minor GM A7 DM Bm F#7 B minor

The bass is often the voice of authority. Here he instructs in emphatic rhythms.

Lines 1+2-3+1.

There are 2 musical ideas:  
A) 5-note motto: "Mark of a Christian"  
B) 4-mm. striding line: Elucidations

Imitation between singer and continuo depicts the relationship between Jesus (and his followers) (imitatio Christi).

Note: In the Leipzig version, the bass line is doubled by the strings one octave above.

Patter diction suggests the operatic style.

The continuo begins with the motto but continues with the second line.

7

das ist der Christen Kunst: nur Gott und sich er...

B minor B7

Unity is achieved with the motto appearing at the beginning and end of each couplet (the "mark of the Christian").

Canon between continuo and singer depicts the imitatio Christi.

9ii

kennen, von wahrer Liebe brennen: das ist, das ist der Christen

E minor F#7 B minor A7 D major

Motto inverted

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12

Lines 1+4-5+1.

Kunst. Das ist der Chri - sten Kunst: nicht un - zu - lās - sig

*mf* *p*

D major E7 A(7) D major D7

15

Motto inverted

richten, noch fremdes Thun ver - nichten: das ist das ist der Christen Kunst.

*mf*

G major C#7 F# minor F# minor

18

Ritornello

F#7 B minor C#7 F# minor

21

Lines 1+6-7+1.

Das ist der Chri - sten Kunst: des Nächsten nicht ver -

*p*

F# minor A major D major

23II

Motto inverted

ges - sen, - mit rei - chem Ma - sse mes - sen: - das ist, das ist der Christen

*tr*

B7 E minor

26 Lines 1+2-7+1 (previous lines are recapitulated).

Kunst. Das ist der Chri - . sten

*mf* *p*

E minor E minor D7

28

Kunst: nur Gott und sich er - ken - nen, — von wah - rer Lie - be

G major E minor

30

bren - nen, — nicht un - zu - läss - sig rich - ten, — noch frem - des Thun ver -

E minor F# major B minor

32

nich - ten, — des Näch - sten nicht ver - ges - sen, — mit rei - chem Ma - sse

B minor E minor



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Lines 8+1 (2x with repetitions).

34

mes. sen:— das ist der Christen Kunst, der Christen Kunst, das

B minor B minor

36II

macht bei Gott und Menschen Gunst, das macht bei Gott und Menschen Gunst, das ist, das ist der

B minor A7 D major

39

Christen Kunst, das ist der Christen Kunst, das macht bei Gott und Menschen Gunst, das

F#(7) B minor B7 E minor F#(7)

41II

macht bei Gott und Menschen Gunst, das ist der Christen Kunst.

Ritornello

B minor B minor

44

B7 Em F#7 B minor B minor

The chorale serves as catechismal response. Martin Petzoldt notes that it does not refer specifically to the Gospel reading yet summarizes the literary thread. See *Bach Kommentar* 1:98.

185/6. Choral (Mel.: „Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ“)

(5) Soprano 1.

+Ob  
+Vln II  
+Vla  
+Bsn  
Cello  
Violone  
Continuo

Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Je - su - Christ, ich bitt: er - hör' mein Kla - gen, }  
ver - leih' mir Gnad' zu - die - ser - Frist, lass mich doch nicht ver - za - gen; }

Alto  
Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Je - su Christ, ich bitt: er - hör' mein Kla - gen, }  
ver - leih' mir Gnad' zu - die - ser - Frist, lass mich doch nicht ver - za - gen; }

Tenore  
Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Je - su Christ, ich bitt: er - hör' mein Kla - gen, }  
ver - leih' mir Gnad' zu - die - ser - Frist, lass mich doch nicht ver - za - gen; }

Basso  
Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Je - su Christ, ich bitt: er - hör' mein Kla - gen, }  
ver - leih' mir Gnad' zu - die - ser - Frist, lass mich doch nicht ver - za - gen; }

Descant: Vln I

F# minor C# major F# minor E7 A major F#7 B minor F# minor

9.

den rech - ten Weg, o - Herr, ich mein', den wol - lest du mir ge - ben, dir zu  
den rech - ten Weg, o - Herr, ich mein', den wol - lest du mir ge - ben, dir zu  
den rech - ten Weg, o - Herr, ich mein', den wol - lest du mir ge - ben, dir zu  
den rech - ten Weg, o - Herr, ich mein', den wol - lest du mir ge - ben, dir zu

A major A major F# minor F#m B7 EM

13

le - - ben, mein'm Nächsten nütz zu sein, dein Wort zu hal - ten e - - ben.  
le - - ben, mein'm Nächsten nütz zu sein, dein Wort zu hal - ten e - - ben.  
le - - ben, mein'm Nächsten nütz zu sein, dein Wort zu hal - ten e - - ben.  
le - - ben, mein'm Nächsten nütz zu sein, dein Wort zu hal - ten e - - ben.

E major E7 A major A# dim.7 B minor A major C#7 F# minor F# major

A surprising cadential diminished 7th chord suggests that serving one's neighbor is not assured.