

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 23

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Form: Duet-(S/A)-Recit/Chorale (T)-Chorus-Chorale.  
Note: The version originally planned began in C minor, but was not performed until around 1728. Bach apparently composed the work in Cöthen in preparation for his Leipzig audition, then, added the chorale with a choir of trombones in Leipzig (perhaps previously composed) while also transposing the work down a semitone. See Dürr/Jones, "Cantatas," 240 (fn. 41), 242. As explained in the side note, BWV 23 was performed along with BWV 22, likely second (after communion) since it closes with a setting of the German Agnus Dei ('Christe du Lamm Gottes'). It also focuses on the second part of the Gospel reading (the blind man's plea for healing).

## J.S. Bach Cantata No. 23

### Du wahrer Gott und Davids Sohn

•Prayer: Jesus, Son of David (Messiah), have mercy on me! (23/1)—a reference to the plea for healing by the blind man in the Gospel lesson. Since the parallel Gospel account in Matthew 20:30 mentions 2 blind men, the 2 intertwining (more or less canonic) oboes d'amore may represent the two men. On the other hand, they may represent the dual (divine/human) nature of Jesus referenced in the text. (see also BWV 127). When added to the imitating Continuo part, the 3 lines perhaps represent the Trinity. The meandering shape of the oboes' motive may also be intended to suggest the groping of a blind man.

NBA I/8; BC A47a-c  
Estomihi (Quinquagesima) (BWV 23, 22, 127, 159)  
\*1 Cor. 13:1–13 (In praise of love)  
\*Lk. 18:31–43 (Jesus and the twelve go to Jerusalem, healing of a blind man)  
Librettist: Unknown (Last movement added later by Bach)  
FP: 7 February 1723 (St.Thomas)

Instrumentation (23/1):  
Ob d'amore I, II  
Continuo

Later movements add  
Vln I, II  
Vla  
SATB  
Cornetto and 3 trombones  
for the final chorale (doubling the vocal lines)

#### 23/1. Duetto. Adagio molto. (♩ = 80)

1. Ob I  
2 Oboes d'amore  
Ritornello  
C minor

2. Continuo  
E-flat major

4. C minor

5. C7  
F minor

7. C minor  
F# dim.7

8. **Soprano.**

More or less canonic imitation

Du wah - - rer Gott und  
Du wah - rer

B dim.7 G7 C minor C minor

Detailed description: This block shows the vocal and piano accompaniment for measures 8 and 9 of Cantata BWV 23. The Soprano part (top staff) begins with a rest in measure 8 and enters in measure 9 with the lyrics 'Du wah - - rer Gott und'. The Alto part (second staff) also has a rest in measure 8 and enters in measure 9 with the lyrics 'Du wah - rer'. The piano accompaniment (bottom two staves) features a complex texture with many triplets and sixteenth-note patterns. Chord markings 'B dim.7', 'G7', 'C minor', and 'C minor' are placed below the piano part.

10.

Da - - vid's - - Sohn,  
Gott und Da - - vid's - - Sohn,

C minor

Detailed description: This block shows measures 10 and 11. The Soprano part (top staff) has the lyrics 'Da - - vid's - - Sohn,'. The Alto part (second staff) has the lyrics 'Gott und Da - - vid's - - Sohn,'. The piano accompaniment (bottom two staves) continues with intricate rhythmic patterns, including triplets. A 'C minor' chord marking is present at the end of the system.

12.

du wah - rer'

C minor C minor

Detailed description: This block shows measures 12 and 13. The Soprano part (top staff) has the lyrics 'du wah - rer''. The Alto part (second staff) is silent. The piano accompaniment (bottom two staves) features a dense texture of triplets and sixteenth notes. Two 'C minor' chord markings are located at the bottom of the system.

13.

Gott und Da - - vid's Sohn, der du von E - -  
 du wah - - rer Gott und Da - - vid's Sohn, der

C minor

15.

Allusion to Psalm 139. See Petzoldt, "Bach Kommentar," vol. 2, pp. 612-13.

Text painting: Leap for eternity's distance.

- - - wig - - keit, in der Ent - fer - - - - -  
 du von E - - - - - wig - - - - - keit, in der Ent -

F minor B-flat minor E-flat minor

17.

Text painting: Chromatic ascent for "Herzeleid" and chromatic descent for "Leibespein" in both, more or less canonic voices.

- - - nung - schon, mein Her - - - - - ze - - - - -  
 fer - - - - - nung - schon, mein

E-flat minor

18.

leid und meine Leibes-pein um-ständ-lich

Her-ze-leid und meine Lei-bes-pein um-ständ-lich

F minor B-flat minor B dim.7 G7

20.

an-ge-sehn, um-ständ-lich an-ge-

an-ge-sehn, um-ständ-lich an-ge-

C minor

Text painting: Singing motives descend a chromatic tetrachord (traditional symbol of lament) with chromaticism to express lament and misery.

22.

sehn, er-barm' dich mein, er-

sehn, er-barm'

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23.

barm' dich mein, er - - barm' dich  
dich, er - - barm' dich

C minor G minor

Unison cadence (see side note).

25.

mein!  
mein! Ritornello

G minor G minor

26.

G minor B-flat major

28.

G minor

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29.

G7 C minor

31.

G minor C# dim.7 F# dim.7 D7

32. Middle Section

Und lass durch  
Und lass durch dei - ne Wun - der -  
Und lass durch  
Und lass durch

G minor G minor C minor C7

34.

dei - ne Wun - der - hand, die so viel Bö - ses ab - ge -  
hand, die so viel Bö - ses ab - ge - wandt, mir -  
dei - ne Wun - der - hand, die so viel Bö - ses ab - ge -  
hand, die so viel Bö - ses ab - ge - wandt, mir -

F minor C7 B-flat major B-flat 7 E-flat major A-flat major E-flat 7



35.

wandt, mir gleichfalls Hilf' und Trost ge - sche - hen, Hilf' und  
gleichfalls Hilf' und Trost ge - sche - hen,

A-flat major A-flat major C7

37.

Trost, Hilf' und Trost, Hilf' und Trost, Hilf' und Trost, Hilf' und Trost,

F minor B-flat minor E-dim.7 C7

Text painting: Parallel thirds to indicate sweet help and comfort.

39.

Hilf' und Trost, mir gleichfalls Hilf' und Trost, mir gleichfalls Hilf' und  
Hilf' und Trost, mir gleichfalls Hilf' und Trost, mir gleichfalls Hilf' und

F minor B dim.7 E dim.7 C7

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40.

Unison cadence (see side note).

Trost ge-sche-hen!

Trost ge-sche-hen! Ritornello shortened

F minor

Modified A Section returns. Starting in F minor and modulating back to C minor, the section now lies in a lower range allowing the alto to start and the soprano to 42. sing the previous alto part, transposed up a fourth.

Du wah-er

Du wah-er Gott und

F minor

43.

Gott und Da-vid's Sohn, der du von E-

Da-vid's Sohn, der du von E-wig-

L.H.

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



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45.

Two systems of musical notation. The first system has two vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The second system has two vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The piano accompaniment features complex rhythmic patterns with triplets and sixteenth notes.

(E-flat minor)

A-flat minor

D-flat minor

47.

Two systems of musical notation. The first system has two vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The second system has two vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The piano accompaniment features complex rhythmic patterns with triplets and sixteenth notes.

A-flat minor

A-flat minor

F7

B-flat minor

B-flat 7

48.

Two systems of musical notation. The first system has two vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The second system has two vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The piano accompaniment features complex rhythmic patterns with triplets and sixteenth notes. Labels 'L.H.' and 'R.H.' are placed under the piano accompaniment staves.

E-flat minor

E dim.7

C major

F minor

50.

sehn, um - ständ - lich an - - - ge - sehn, er - barm'

sehn, um - ständ - lich an - - - ge - sehn, er -

F minor

52.

barm' dich mein, er - barm' dich

F# dim.7

Text painting: Sighing motives descend a chromatic tetrachord (traditional symbol of lament) with chromaticism to express lament and misery.

53.

Octave unison cadence (see side note).

dich, er - barm' dich mein!

mein, er - - barm' dich mein!

G7 C minor C minor Da! Segno.

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 23

Accompanied recitative in which Vln I plays the first 3 phrases of the German Agnus Dei. The recitative text, as well as the implied

## 23/2. Recitativo a tempo.

German Agnus Dei text alludes to the plea for healing by the blind man in the Gospel lesson. Since Bach incorporates the chorale here, he may have planned to add the final chorale movement from the outset.

Text painting: Tenor begins on the 7th of a dominant 7th chord.

1. Tenore.

Prayer: Pass not by without healing & blessing me: the voice of the blind man in the Gospel lesson (23/2).

Ach, gehe nicht vor - über, ach, ge. he nicht vor - ü.ber, du, aller Menschen  
*Mel. marc. poco. (Choral: „Christe, du Lamm Gottes“)*

Pedal tone may relate to the request (like that of the blind man) for Jesus to pause.

D-flat major  
 A-flat 7

Chorale tuned played by Oboes d'amore and Vln I, accompanied by sustained lower strings—an additional hermeneutical layer introduced by the composer. See also side note.

4.

Allusion to Jesus' saying in Lk. 5:32 and parallel passages in the other gospels.

Heil, bist ja erschienen, die Kranken, und nicht die Ge. sun. den zu be. dienen.

G7 C minor 7.  
 E dim.7 (for "sick") F minor

9.

Eyes of faith despite blindness (paradox).

Drum nehm' ich e. benfalls an dei. ner Allmacht Theil, ich sehe dich auf diesen

B-flat 7 E-flat major F7

Text painting: Entwining melisma for "to grasp." The literary allusion is to Jacob's plea in Genesis 32:26: "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." .

F minor G major

12.

Harmonic ambiguity

fas. . se. . mich und las. . se dich nicht ohne deinen Segen.

G7 C minor E-flat 7 (A-flat major) F7 E-flat major

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 23

Eyes of all wait upon the Lord: grant me light (23/3). Bach sets the movement as a

Text painting: Rising lines for looking up to God. While movement no. 1 alluded to the blind man's request for Jesus to look, now the perspective is reversed: humans up to God.

23/3.

(Coro.)

(Vivace. ♩ = 132)

dance (with hemiolas at cadences) in rondo form, drawing attention to the contrast between corporate and personal faith by having the chorus repeat homophonic statements of the opening line, alternating these with T/B contrapuntal duets presenting the rest of the more individualistic text. Bach's setting may even be self-referential, for vln I and oboes d'amore spell out the B-A-C-H motive at the beginning of the ritornello. Ensemble phrases are set in differentiated ways; solo duets accompanied by continuo alone

Instrumentation: full complement

Ritornello based on opening vocal line. Form is quasi-rondo with the opening choral refrain (Ps. 145:15) separating 4 T/B solo duets. The instruments increasingly double the voices in the tutti sections, as if divine aid comes alongside.

Continuo bass outlines the chorale ("Christe, du Lamm Gottes"), a prayer.

E-flat major Opening text is almost verbatim from Psalm 145:15; The recitative text, as well as the implied German Agnus Dei text, alludes to the plea for healing by the blind man in the Gospel lesson.

Soprano.

Alto.

Tenore.

Basso.

B - A - C - H  
Al - ler Augen war - ten, Herr, du all -

Al - ler Augen war - ten, Herr, du all -

Al - ler Au - gen war - ten, Herr, du all -

hemiola

Al - - - - - ler Au - gen

Continuo alone

E-flat major

Text painting: At first the refrain is accompanied by continuo alone. Then the instruments begin to accompany the voices in different ways, but more and more they abandon independence and double the voices. Bass outlines the chorale ("Christe, du Lamm Gottes").

13.

hemiola

- mächt'ger Gott, Herr, du allmächt' - ger Gott, auf dich!

- mächt'ger Gott, Herr, du allmächt'ger Gott, auf dich!

mächt' - ger Gott, Herr, du allmächt'ger Gott, auf dich!

war - - - - - ten, Herr, du all - mächt'ger Gott, auf dich!

Ritornello + Instruments

E-flat major

+Instruments playing some independent material.

19. **A**

Al - - ler  
Al - - ler  
Al - - ler  
Al - - -

hemiola

E-flat major hemiola

25. **B - A - C - H**

Augen war - ten, Herr, du all - mächt'ger Gott, Herr, du allmächt'.  
Augen war - ten, Herr, du all - mächt'ger Gott, Herr, du all.  
Au - gen war - ten, Herr, du all - mächt' - ger Gott, Herr, du all -  
ler Au - gen war - - - ten, Herr, du all -

Bass outlines the chorale ("Christe, du Lamm Gottes").

31. **B**

- ger Gott, auf - dich! Duet for the more personalized text accompanied by 2 Ob parts & Continuo.  
mächt'ger Gott, auf - dich! Solo  
mächt'ger Gott, auf dich, Solo und die mei - nen son - der -  
mächt'ger Gott, auf dich, und die mei - - nen son - der - lich,  
2 Oboes d'amore  
Strings tacet

E-flat major



36.

lich, und die meinen son - der - lich, und die mei - nen  
und die mei - nen son - - der - - lich, und die

41.

C minor

C +Strings mostly doubling

son - der - lich, und die mei - nen son - - der - lich. Al - ler  
mei - nen son - der - lich, und die meinsen son - der - lich.

hemiola

Tutti

Oboes tacet

Strings

B-flat major

E-flat major

C minor

B-flat major

B-flat major

47.

Au - gen war - - ten, Herr, du all - - mäch - - t' - ger Gott, Herr,  
Au - gen war - - ten, Herr, du all - - mäch - - t' - ger Gott, Herr,  
Tutti Au - - gen war - - ten, Herr, du all - - mäch - - t' - ger Gott, Herr, du all -  
Al - - - ler Au - - gen war - - - - - ten,

Bass outlines the chorale ("Christe, du Lamm Gottes").



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52.

hemiola

du allmächt' - ger Gott, auf dich!

du allmächt' - ger Gott, auf dich!

mächt' - - ger Gott, auf dich!

Herr, du all-mächt'ger Gott, auf dich!

All instruments

Ritornello

B - A - C - H

B-flat major

57.

D - Oboes d'amore until m. 64

Gieb den -

With instruments

Duet for more personalized text.

Solo

D

Solo Gieb den -

E dim.7

A dim.7

B-flat major

62.

Here "light" and "darkness" allude to the blind man in the Gospel lesson but are now treated metaphorically.

sel-ben Kraft und Licht, lass sie nicht

Gieb den - selben Kraft und Licht, lass sie nicht

+Oboes

E-flat 7 A-flat major C7

E-flat major

E-flat 7

A-flat major

C7

67.

im - mer - dar in Fin - ster - nis - sen, in Finster -  
 im - mer - dar in Fin - ster - nis

F minor F minor

Instrument tacet  
Continuo only

73.

nis - sen, im - mer - dar in Fin - ster - nis - sen! Al - ler  
 - sen, im - mer - dar in Fin - ster - nissen! Al - ler

F minor E

+All instruments (doubling voices)

78.

Al - ler Au - gen war - ten, Herr,  
 Au - gen war - ten, Herr, du all - mäch - t' - ger Gott, du all -  
 Au - gen war - ten, Herr, du all - mäch - t' - ger Gott, du all -  
 Au - gen war - ten, Herr, Al - ler Au - gen war - ten

F minor F minor

83.

F

du all - mächt' - ger Gott, auf dich!  
 mächt' - - - ger Gott, auf - dich!  
 mächt' - ger Gott, auf - dich! Künftig soll deinWink al-lein, künf-tig  
 - ten, Herr, du allmächt'ger Gott, auf dich! Künf-tig soll deinWink al-

*Solo* Duet for more personalized text: God's wink.  
*Solo*  
 Continuo only

F minor

88.

C minor

soll deinWink al - lein der ge - lieb -  
 lein, künf-tig soll deinWink al - lein der ge - lieb - - te -

F minor

C minor

93.

G

Al - - - ler  
 Al - - -  
 - te Mit - tel - punkt al - ler ih - - - rer Wer - ke sein. Al - ler  
 Mit - - - tel - punkt al - ler ih - rer - - Wer - ke sein.

Tutti

+Instruments (doubling voices)

C minor

98.

Au-gen war-ten, Herr, du all-mächt-ger.  
 - - - - - ler Au-gen war-ten, Herr, du allmächtger  
 Au-gen war-ten, Herr, du all-mächt-ger.  
 Tutti Al-ler Au-gen war-ten, Herr, du allmächtger.

103.

H

C minor

Gott, all-mächt-ger Gott, auf dich! Duet for more personalized text: God closing believer's eyes in death.  
 Solo  
 Solo  
 Solo bis du sie einst durch den  
 -ten, Herr, du all-mächt-ger Gott, auf dich, bis du sie einst durch den Tod, bis du

Continuo alone

C minor D7 G minor

108.

Tod, bis du sie einst durch den Tod, bis du sie einst durch den  
 sie einst durch den Tod, durch den Tod,

113.

Tod wieder um gedenkst zu schlie - - -  
 -einst durch den Tod wieder - - um gedenkst zu schlie - -

G minor

117.

ssen, durch den Tod, den Tod, bis du  
 ssen, durch den Tod, den Tod, bis du

+Ob I +Ob II +Vlns -Strings

Accompanied by Ob I, II, Continuo

121.

G minor

sie einst durch den Tod  
 bis du sie einst durch den Tod wie der - -

G7

C minor

G minor



125.

Al - - ler  
Tutti Al - - ler  
wie - der - um ge - denkst zu schlie - ssen. Al - -  
Tutti  
um ge - denkst zu schlie - ssen. Al -  
+Instruments (doubling voices)  
G minor G minor

130.

B - A - C - H

Au - gen war - - ten, Herr, du all - - mächt'ger Gott, Herr,  
Au - - gen war - - ten, Herr, du all - - mächt' - ger - Gott, Herr,  
- - - ler Au - - gen war - - ten,  
- - - ler Au - - gen war - - ten, Herr, du all - - mächt' - -  
G7  
Ritornello  
G minor

135.

du all - - mächt' - - ger Gott, auf dich!  
du allmächt' - - ger Gott, auf dich!  
Herr, du all - - mächt'ger Gott, auf dich!  
- - ger Gott, all - - mächt'ger Gott, auf dich!  
Ritornello  
C minor D7 G minor G7 C minor

This may be self-referential: Bach praying about his own eventual death (when God will choose to close his eyes).



140.

C7 F minor F7 B-flat major B-flat 7

145. **K**

B - A - C - H

E-flat major

Bass outlines the chorale ("Christe, du Lamm Gottes").

149.

E-flat major

The autograph has "Il Fine," indicating that the cantata originally ended here. See Petzoldt, "Bach Kommentar, vol. 2, p. 611."

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 23

•Agnus Dei: Lamb of God, have mercy on us! (23/4). The work closes with an elaborate, chromatic setting of the German Agnus Dei. Apparently composed earlier for a now-lost Weimar Passion, the movement sets the three liturgical statements as contrasting, increasingly faster, sections (the middle one presenting the cantus firmus in 3-part canon) and ends with a contrapuntal "Amen" section, based on the same ascending fourth of the Agnus Dei theme. Earlier, this chorus ended the second version of the St. John Passion. (see Petzoldt, "Bach Kommentar," vol. 2, pp. 611, 616).

## 23/4. Choral. Adagio. (♩ = 76.)

1. Motive from chorale

Oboes d'amore I, II  
Vln I, II  
Vla,  
Cornetto and 3 trombones doubling vocal lines (an old-fashioned touch).

Oboes d'amore in parallel 6ths alternate with strings in responsorial fashion.

G minor

The Agnus Dei text alludes to the plea for healing by the blind man in the Gospel lesson (see also movement 2).

3.

C minor D7

5. **Soprano.** First Statement: Slow and homophonic with independent instrumental parts.

Chri - - ste, du Lamm Got - - - tes,

Alto.

Chri - - ste, du Lamm Got.tes, du Lamm Got - - -

Tenore.

Chri - - ste, du Lamm Got - - -

Basso.

Chri - - ste, du Lamm Got.tes, du Lamm Got - - -

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

7.

tes,

tes,

tes,

(G7) C major D7 G minor

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9. Text painting: Chromaticism to depict Christ bearing the "sins of the world."

der du trägst die Sünd' der Welt,  
der du trägst die Sünd' der Welt,  
der du trägst die Sünd' der Welt,  
der du trägst die Sünd' der Welt,

11. G minor

C minor

er - barm' dich  
er - barm' dich  
er - barm' dich  
er - barm'

13. F major

C minor

F7

un - ser!  
un - ser, er - barm' dich un - ser!  
un - ser, er - barm' dich un - ser!  
dich, er - barm' dich un - ser!

B-flat major

C7 F minor

C7 F major F7

Oboes d'amore play lament motive (descending chromatic fourth) in imitation.

15.

B-flat minor (C7) F major F minor

17.

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

Faster tempo indicates increasing confidence and praise, paralleling the healing of the blind man in the Gospel lesson and his subsequent praise. Ultimately, syncopations lead to a triumphant "Amen."

Second Statement: The cantus firmus is presented in canon by Soprano, Ob d'am, Vln I, perhaps a reference to the Trinity. At end, bass line has part of the cantus firmus.

20. **A Andante.** (♩ = 66.)

Chri - ste, du Lamm Got - - - tes,  
 Chri - ste, du Lamm Got - tes, du Lamm Got - tes, Chri - ste,  
 Chri - ste, du Lamm Got - - - tes, Chri - ste, du  
 Chri - ste, du Lamm Got - - - tes, Chri - ste, du Lamm

Bass has part of the cantus firmus.

21. **A Andante.**

Oboes d'amore in unison Vln I

B-flat major Lower strings doubling voices. G minor

22.

du Lamm Got - tes,  
 - Lamm Got - tes,  
 Got - - - tes, der - du

2 independent Ob d'amore parts introduce motive that will dominate.



25.

der du trägst die Sünd' der Welt,  
 der du trägst die Sünd', die Sünd' der Welt, du trägst die Sünd' der  
 der du trägst die Sünd', die Sünd' der Welt, der du trägst die Sünd' der  
 trägst die Sünd' der Welt, der du trägst die Sünd' der

Oboes d'amore in unison

Vln I

G minor G minor

28.

Welt,  
 Welt,  
 Welt,

2 independent oboe d'amore parts

G minor B-flat major

31.

er - - barm' dich un - - ser!  
 erbarm'dich un - ser, erbarm' dich un -  
 er - barm'dich un - ser, er - barm' dich un - - ser, er - barm'  
 er - barm' dich un - ser, er - barm' dich

Ob d'am in unison

Vln I

G minor B-flat major



34.

ser, er-barm' dich un-ser!  
 dich un-ser, er-barm' dich un-ser!  
 un-ser, er-barm' dich un-ser!

2 independent oboe d'amore parts

37.

Chri-ste, du Lamm Got-tes,  
 Chri-ste, du Lamm Got-tes,  
 Chri-ste, du Lamm Got-tes,  
 Chri-ste, Chri-ste, du Lamm Got-tes

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

Third Statement: Cantus firmus in Soprano, independent oboes in unison with syncopations.

In vocal sections, strings double the voices. In interludes, they accompany the oboes d'amore, with descending scales in the continuo bass.

Ob d'am in unison

40.

tes,  
 Christe, du Lamm Got-tes,  
 tes, du Lamm Got-tes,  
 tes, du Lamm Got-tes,

C minor F7 B-flat major B-flat major

D7 G minor G minor Continuo bass has descending scale, probably to depict divine aid.





