

## Introduction &amp; updates at melvinunger.com.

NBA I/11; BC A66

Misericordias Domini: 2. S. after Easter (BWV 104, 85, 112)

\*1 Peter 2:21–25 (Christ as example; you have returned to the shepherd of your souls)

\*John 10:11–16 (Jesus declares himself to be the Good Shepherd—(see note))

Librettist: Unknown; perhaps Christian Weiß the elder

FP: 15 April 1725 (Leipzig: St. Nicholas) This cantata belongs

to Bach's second cantata cycle in Leipzig, composed after a long series of chorale cantatas.

A lyrical cantata expounding the pastoral theme of Jesus as Good Shepherd.

Cantata No. 85  
Ich bin ein guter Hirt

Of the first movement, Alfred Dürr writes, "The opening movement is one of those settings of Jesus's words for bass voice whose form lies somewhere between aria and arioso. Framed and articulated by a six-bar instrumental ritornello, this dictum is heard in two corresponding vocal sections, A and A'. The vocal head-motive has already been quoted four times by the continuo during the ritornello before it is taken up by the bass as a 'motto.' As a counterpoint to this motive we hear descending semiquaver runs, which, however, do not consolidate thematically to the same extent. The oboe repeatedly comes to the fore in concertante style, so that at times the movement resembles the middle movement of an oboe concerto. See Alfred Dürr, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, rev. and trans. by Richard Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 302.

## 1. Arioso

•Vox Christi: I am the good shepherd: John 10:12 (85/1).

Jesus speaks (biblical dictum)

## Instrumentation:

Ob I, II

Vln I, II

Vla

Violoncello piccolo (see notes)

SATB

Continuo

85/1. **Largo** (♩ = 92)

Th 2

The vocal style lies between aria and arioso; the form is A-A'.

Ob I & II

Strings

Motto (Th 1)

Double Counterpoint in ritornello  
Th 1: I am a good shepherd (m. 7)  
Th 2: Lays down his life (m. 12)

Strings

Some 2 weeks before (30 March), Bach had performed the second version of the St. John Passion (the first version was performed the year prior).

C minor (for significance, see note). The first 3 notes may be derived from the closing chorale.

The theme of God as the shepherd of his people echoes throughout the bible and so it permeates Bach's structure creating a thematic and formal density, appropriate to the gravitas of the text.

Str

Obs

cresc. poco a poco

(tr)

C7

F minor

(E-flat 7)

(A-flat major)

F minor

C7

F minor

cresc.

5II

## Baß

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.

A

mp

Ich bin ein

I am a

For biblical background, see note.

+Str

C minor

G7

(tr)

C minor

7II

Bach reveals which aspect of Jesus' statement is to receive the greatest rhetorical weight by lengthening and ornamenting the final 3 syllables of the head motive: "Ich bin ein gu - ter Hirt" ("I am a GOOD SHEPHERD"). He further emphasizes the statement through repetition and contrapuntal artifice.

gu - ter Hirt,

good shepherd,

Obs

Str

Compare oboe opening...

p

Str respond to oboes with descending scales...

mf

C minor

(D7)

G7

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

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 85

10 *mf* *tr* *mp* *tr*

ich bin ein gu - ter Hirt. Ein gu - ter Hirt läßt sein

*mp* *p* *Str* *Obs*

C minor C minor

12II *poco cresc.* *mf* *tr*

Le-ben, sein Le-ben für die Scha-fe. Ich bin ein gu - ter

*Str* *Obs* *+Str* *Str*

B-flat 7 E-flat major B-flat 7 ??

15 *Rhetorical pause* *tr* *cresc.*

Hirt. Ein gu - ter Hirt läßt sein Leben, sein Le-ben für die

*Obs* *Str* *espr. Str* *cresc.*

B-flat major E-flat major F# dim.7

17II *poco a poco* *rit.* *B*

Schafe, ein gu - ter Hirt läßt sein Leben für die Scha-fe.

*+Str* *mf* *Continuo alone for reflection.* *rit.* *Obs* *a tempo* *Str*

G minor G minor

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 85

20 Obs

22 II Vln I

25 C *mf*

Ich bin ein gu - ter Hirt, ich bin ein

27 II *mp*

gu - ter Hirt, ich bin ein gu - ter Hirt. Ein gu - ter

30

Hirt läßt sein Le - ben, sein Le - ben für die Schafe, ein

*poco cresc.*

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 85

*cresc. poco a poco*

32 gu - ter Hirt läßt sein Le - ben für die Scha - fe,

*f*

Obs

Str

*mf*

C minor C minor C minor C major F minor

34II *mf*

ein gu - ter Hirt läßt sein Le - ben, sein Le - ben für die Schafe, ein

Obs

*p*

*poco cresc.*

Str

*cresc.*

F minor G7 C minor *mf*

37 ~~Breiter~~ *rit.* **D** a tempo

gu - ter Hirt läßt sein Le - ben für die Scha - fe.

Obs

*cresc.*

*f*

*p*

C minor C minor C minor *tr*

39II *tr*

Str

Str

Str *mf*

*cresc. poco a poco*

C7

42 *cresc. molto*

*rit. tr*

*f*

*ff*

F minor *tr* A-flat major F minor G7 *tr* C minor C major

(E-flat 7)



The individual voice of faith speaks, interpreting Jesus' words.

The form is modified *da capo* but with the entire text stated in both A and B sections. The animation of the violoncello piccolo could suggest the shepherd's combative care for the sheep, leading to his death, as referenced in the text or (alternatively) the playfulness of the sheep.

## 2. Arie

85/2. Moderato (♩ = 80)

• Jesus identified as the good shepherd: he gave his life for sheep (85/2).

Regarding the violoncello piccolo see notes above at instrumentation.

Form:  
Ritornello (mm. 1-9) Gm  
A. Lines 1-4 (9-22) Gm-Dm  
Rit (22-27) Dm  
B. Lines 1-4 (27-40) Dm-Cm  
A'. Lines 1-4 (41-53) Gm  
Rit (53-61) Gm

Violoncello piccolo

Ritornello

G minor

For the obligato's correct octave, see the NBA, where the part is notated an octave above sounding pitch.

G minor

3 II

*poco a poco*

For biblical background, see note.

G7

C minor

C minor

6

B-flat (7)

E-flat M7

D7

G minor

9

**A** Alt  
*mp*

Alto is often the voice of faith. The text (given in full three times), alludes to Jesus' own words in the Gospel reading (see note).

A Section (entire text). Je - sus ist - ein gu - ter Hirt,

Je - sus ist - ein

G minor

G minor

12

gu - ter Hirt,

denn

er hat -

be -

reits sein

Le -

ben

G minor

B-flat 7

E-flat major

B-flat major

F7

B-flat major

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 85

15

für die Scha - fe hin - ge - ge - ben, die ihm

which from-him

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

*mf*

17II

Nie - mand rau - ben wird, die ihm Niemand, Niemand rau

no one rob will

The vocal line becomes increasingly virtuose for the last line ("no one will steal them from him").

G minor C# dim.7 A7 D minor

*p*

20

ben, rau - ben

Word painting: Long melisma for "rob/steal."

*p* *cresc. molto* *rit.*

D minor D minor

*mf* *rit.*

22II

a tempo

wird.

Ritornello

D minor C7 F major

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 85

25 B Section (same text).

*mp* Je - sus ist - ein

*f* *p*

A7 D minor D minor B dim.7

28

*p* gu - ter Hirt, Je - sus ist - ein gu - ter Hirt,

*p*

C minor C minor C minor F7 *pp* B-flat major

31 *mp*

denn er hat - be - reits sein Le - ben - für - die -

*cresc. poco a poco*

F# dim.7 G minor C7 D7

33 II *D mf*

Scha - fe hin - ge - ge - ben, die - ihm Nie - mand

*mf* *mf*

B-flat major C7 F major B dim.7 G7

7

36

rau - ben, Niemand rau -

*mf* Word painting: Long melismas for "rob/steal."

*dim.*

C minor C minor

39

- ben, rau-ben wird. Je - sus ist ein

*rit.* *f* **E** a tempo *p*

a tempo

*p* *mf* *rit.* *f* *pp*

C minor C minor C minor G minor

42

gu - ter Hirt, Je - sus ist ein gu - ter Hirt, denn

*mp*

*p*

G minor

45

er hat be-reits sein Leben für die Schafe hinge - geben, die ihm Nie - mand

*p* *poco cresc.* *mf*

*pp* *cresc. poco a poco*

G minor G7 C minor C minor F7



# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 85

48

*rau*  
Word painting: Even longer melisma for "rob/steal."

*cresc. poco a poco*

B-flat major

D7

mf

51

*f* *breiter* *rit.* **F** *a tempo*

ben wird, Je sus, Je sus ist ein gu-ter Hirt.

*rit.* *a tempo*

*breiter*

Ritornello

G minor

G minor

54

*mf* *cresc. poco a poco*

G minor

G7

C minor

56 II

*f*

C minor

F7

B-flat major

59

D7

G minor

G minor



# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 85

21/55

Hirt,  
führt,

*mf*

B-flat major D7 G minor G7 C minor F7 B-flat major D7

25/59

dem ich mich  
auf schö - ner,

*cresc.* *f* *B* *p*

D7 G minor G minor

29/63

*cresc.*

ganz grü - ver - trau -  
ner Au

Ob I Ob II Ob I Ob II

*p*

C minor F7 B-flat major F# dim.7 G minor B-flat major F7

Text painting: The phrase is stretched to emphasize the words (especially appropriate for Stollen 1: "completely entrust myself"). In contrast to the performing part, the autograph score shows that Bach originally wrote a shorter version of the phrase.

33/67

e:  
e.

Ob I

*f* *cresc.* *mf* *mf*

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

1. 2.

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 85

37/70

Ob I

Ob II

*p* *mf*

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

41/74

*p* *mf* *cresc. poco*

G minor F7 B-flat major (C7) F minor B-flat major

45/78

*a poco* *mf*

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

49/82

*cresc.* *f* *p* *mf*

Zum fri - schen

E-flat major E-flat major E-flat major F7 G minor

53/86

Was - ser leit't er - mich,

Ob I

Ob II

*mf*

C minor C minor C7 F minor F minor F7

57/90

*cresc.*

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



# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 85

61/94

mein Seele zu la-ben

Ob I Ob II

F minor F7 B-flat major B-flat major

*f* *mf* *f* *mf*

65/98

kräft-tig lich

Ob I Ob II Ob I & II

B-flat major D7 G minor C7

*f* *mf* *cresc. poco*

69/102

*a poco*

D minor D minor D minor

73/106

durch's sel' - ge Wort der

NBA: selig

Ob II

D7 G minor B-flat 7 C minor G7 C minor F7 (G minor)

*mf* *p dolce*

78/111

Gna den.

Ob I Ob II Ob I Ob I

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

*mf* *p* Dal Segno

The text alludes to Jesus' words in the Gospel reading (see note). However, the Gospel says the hirelings flee rather than sleep.

# 85/4. 4. Recitativ • Shepherd watches sheep when hirelings sleep (85/4).

For biblical background, see note.



**Tenor**

1. *mp*

Wenn die Miet - lin - ge schla - fen, da wa - chet die - ser  
When the hirelings sleep, then keeps-watch this

**Strings** *fp dolce*

Text painting: Sustained strings in low register for the sleeping hirelings.

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

3 *sf* *p*

Hirt bei sei - nen Scha - fen, so, daß ein Je - des  
shepherd by his sheep, so, so that each-one

Text painting: Fast triplets presumably depict agitation.

*stacc.* *fp*

E-flat major B dim.

5 *mf*

in gewünschter Ruh die Trift und Wei - de kann ge - nie - ßen, in wel - cher  
in welcome rest the meadow and pasture can enjoy, in which

B dim.7 C minor

7 *mp* *poco accel. e cresc.*

Lebensströme fließen. Denn, sucht der Höl - len - wolf gleich ein - zu - dringen, die  
streams-of-life do-flow. For, seeks the wolf-of-hell (indeed) to-break-through, the

Flowing figure *mf* *p*

D7 G minor G minor E-flat dim.7 F minor

10 *Wieder ruhig*

Schafe zu verschlingen, so hält ihm die - ser Hirt doch sei - nen Ra - chen zu.  
sheep to devour, then holds - this shepherd indeed his jaws shut.

*cresc.* *mf* *p*

Sweet modulation to A-flat major to depict God's intervening protection from the menacing jaws of the devil.

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

The reference to the devil as a "wolf of hell" suggests several biblical passages referring to adversarial lions. 1 Peter 5:8: Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Daniel 6:22: My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not hurt me. 2 Timothy 4:17: The Lord stood by me and gave me strength... So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. (See also Psalm 22:21, 1 Samuel 17:34-35, Hebrews 11:33.)

# 85/5. 5. Arie • Jesus as shepherd shows his love by dying for sheep (85/5).

## 1. Larghetto (♩ = 66)

Form (Rhyme: AABBA)  
Ritornello (mm. 1-9) E M  
A. Lines 1-3 (9-27) E M-B M  
Rit (27-33) B M  
B. Lines 4-5 (33-49) B M-Gm  
Line 1 (50-57) E M  
Rit (57-65) E M

Strings  
unison

Ritornello unrelated to vocal beginning.

E-flat major

*cresc. sempre*

B-flat 7

A Lines 1-3.

Exclamatio (3x)

*poco rit.*

*a tempo*

Seht!

*poco rit.*

*a tempo*

For biblical  
background,  
see note.

The 9/8 meter underscores the pastoral context (even though the aria is the only movement with no mention of the shepherd), while parallel 3rds and 6ths between strings and continuo suggest sweetness. Peter Wollny suggests that triplets in 9/8 meter were a new phenomenon when Bach began to employ them in his Leipzig period. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4yw7VdgR6q0>, accessed 26 July 2024.

E-flat major

E-flat major

The tenor's part is often above the instruments...

*mf*

Seht!

Seht, was die Liebe tut!

Seht, was die Liebe

*poco cresc.*

*mp*

E-flat major

E-flat major

tut, was die Liebe tut, seht, was die Liebe tut!

Rhetorical  
pause

Mein Je - sus hält

Text painting: Repeated notes for "My Jesus holds."

*cresc.*

*mf*

*mf*

*p*

B-flat major

B-flat major

NBA: guter (each time)

in zar - ter Hut die Sei - nen fe

ste einge - schlos - sen, mein Je - sus

*p espr.*

B-flat major

B-flat 7 E-flat major

Text painting: Sustained notes for "hält in guter Hut" ("holds in good keeping"). The statement represents a positive version of Jesus' words in the Gospel reading, "No one shall snatch them out of my hand."

23 *guter* *ritard. mf*  
hält in zar-ter Hut die Sei-nenfe ste ein-geschlos-

27 *F7 B-flat major* **C** *a tempo*  
sen. *a tempo* *cresc. poco a poco*  
*mf* *p* *Ritornello*

32 *D mf* Lines 4–5 (Mm. 33–49 are an extended variation of mm. 17–27.)  
In the second vocal block, the two themes are presented in reverse order.  
NBA: ~~Er~~ und hat am Kreu - - - - zesstamm ver -

36 *p cresc. mf*  
gos - rise, then drop for "vergossen" ("poured out"). sen für sie sein teu-res Blut, -

40 *cresc. poco a poco*  
er hat am Kreuzes-stamm vergos - - - - sen für

*C minor* *D7* *G minor* *G minor*



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44  
*f* *mf*  
 sie seinteu-res Blut, sein teu-res Blut, am Kreuzesstamm für

48  
*rit.* *mp* **E** *a tempo*  
 sie seinteu-res Blut. Seht! Seht! Seht, was die Liebe  
*a tempo*  
*cresc.* *rit.* *f* *p* *pp* *p*  
 G minor G minor E-flat major

53  
*mf* *p* **Breit**  
 tut! Seht, was die Liebe tut, was die Liebe tut, seht, was die Liebe  
 Breit  
*mf* *p* *pp* *cresc.*  
 E-flat major

57 **F**  
 tut!  
*a tempo*  
*mf* *p* *cresc. sempre*  
 Ritornello  
 E-flat major

61 *molto rit.*  
 E-flat major E-flat major

85/6. **6. Choral** • God as shepherd: I need not fear anything (85/6).

**Sopran**  
+Ob I, II  
Vln I

**Alt**  
+Vln II

**Tenor**  
+Vla

**Baß**

Ist Gott mein Schutz und treu - er Hirt, kein Unglück mich be - rüh - ren wird; weicht,

Ist Gott mein Schutz und treuer Hirt, kein Unglück mich be - rüh - ren wird; weicht,

Ist Gott mein Schutz und treuer Hirt, kein Unglück mich be - rüh - ren wird; weicht,

Ist Gott mein Schutz und treuer Hirt, kein Unglück mich be - rüh - ren wird; weicht,

*mf*

For biblical background, see note.

5

al - le mei - ne Fein - de, die ihr mir stif - tet Angst und Pein, es wird zu eu - rem

al - le mei - ne Fein - de, die ihr mir stif - tet Angst und Pein, es wird zu eu - rem

al - le mei - ne Fein - de, die ihr mir stif - tet Angst und Pein, es wird zu eu - rem

al - le mei - ne Fein - de, die ihr mir stif - tet Angst und Pein, es wird zu eu - rem

C minor B-flat (7) E-flat major G major C minor

10

Scha - den sein; ich ha - be Gott zum Freun - de, ich ha - be Gott zum Freun - de.

Scha - den sein; ich ha - be Gott zum Freun - de, ich ha - be Gott zum Freun - de.

Scha - den sein; ich ha - be Gott zum Freun - de, ich ha - be Gott zum Freun - de.

Scha - den sein; ich ha - be Gott zum Freun - de, ich ha - be Gott zum Freun - de.

*mf* *p* *cresc. molto* *rit. f.*

B-flat 7 E-flat major E-flat major E-flat major B-flat 7 G7 C minor

The final line alludes to Jesus' words, "No longer do I call you servants...but I have called you friends." (John 15:15).

*mf* *rit.*

G major C minor A-flat major C minor C major