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The Music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach
Supplement 12.4. The Two Litanies

The table below compares the two works, each of which falls into seven sections of varying length. The sections in both the Old and New Litanies are identified with respect to where they begin (in what measure) and which lines or verses they contain.

<u>section</u>	<u>Old Litany</u>		<u>New Litany</u>		<u>comment</u>
	<i>m.</i>	<i>verses</i>	<i>mm.</i>	<i>verses</i>	
introduction (Kyrie)	1	1–9	1	1–9	
responses: <i>behüt</i> (protect)	52	10–20	54	10–13	
responses: <i>hilf</i> (help)	140	21–26	117	14–22	
responses: <i>erhör</i> (grant)	190	27–50	193	23–34	main portion of work; new melody (b'-b'-b'-) for versicles, which are longer here
Christe (Agnus Dei)	477	51–54	504	35–38	<i>Lamm Gottes</i> begins in v. 52 with new melody (b'-d''-c'')
close (Kyrie)	515	55–58	542	39–42	resembles opening
Amen	537		566		

As in any litany, the repetitious nature of each work is an essential element of its experience, opening a window onto Bach's and his contemporaries' musical thought, and perhaps also their spirituality, during his last years. In keeping with the nature of a litany, rhythmic variety and clarity of form were not paramount objectives. As each verse except the last cadences on the note a', with a medial cadence on b' (g' in the second and fourth sections), even Bach could devise only so many distinct tonal trajectories for every verse and every larger section of the two settings. But although the response that concludes each verse ends on A, it is the longer versicles (or petitions) that define the tonality; this is essentially G major, the key of the final Amen. Still, the ambiguous tonality inherent in a melody that uses just three or four pitches (with chromatic inflections) means that, as in Bach's fantasias and other late works, modulation is constant.

Despite the unchanging basic character of both settings, significant contrast emerges as verses grow longer or shorter and as the dynamic level, as well as the level of dissonance and harmonic audacity, rises and falls in response to the text. There are few decisive musical articulations, and these do not always coincide with divisions of the text according to either its literary form or its biblical sources.¹ The New Litany, which Bach regarded as the more challenging to set, shows signs of having been the second composed. Only here does Bach reduce the texture in some passages—for instance, by omitting the continuo at the mention of “spiritual death” within verse 13 (*Seele Tod*, m. 106) and for the petitions in the first half of the verses 15–17. The contrast

¹ Marx-Weber, “Carl Philipp Emanuel Bachs Litaneien,” 203–5, divides Klopstock's text for the New Litany into nine sections, but these do not always correspond with the seven divisions articulated musically by Bach's setting as shown in the present table.

between each of the latter, sung *pianissimo*, and the following responses, sung *fortissimo* with accompaniment, might create a stunning effect.

The great length of some of Klopstock's petitions turns their settings almost into miniature self-contained motets. For example, in verse 28 (mm. 306–26), the petition consists largely of short declamatory phrases but concludes with an almost lively setting of *Leben* (life, online example 12.20). Verse 31 (mm. 393–430) is perhaps the most intense of all, recalling some of Bach's late passion songs in its enharmonic modulations: after the mention of Jesus's “death on the cross” (*Tod am Kreuze*), an apparent 6/4-chord of A-flat minor is transformed into a suspended dominant ninth of C major (online example 12.21).

[Example 12.20. New Litany, W. 204/2, mm. 306–30 \(verse 28, complete\)](#)

Choir 1

306 *p* *f*
 S Laß es uns mit ge-wis-ser Zu-ver-sicht wis-sen, es mit freu-di-gem Glau-ben emp-
 A
 T
 B
 b.c. NB.
p 6 5 4 3 6 7 6 *f* 6 6 5 6 7 7[♯]

314 *p* *f*
 S fin - den, daß wir auf dei - nem schma - len We - ge durch die en - ge Pfor - te zum
 A
 T
 B
 b.c. NB.
 5 6 7 6 6 7[♯] *p* 7[♭] 7[♯] 6[♯] 6 - 5 5 2+ 6 4+ 5

Choir 2

323 *f* *f* *p* *f*
 S e - wi-gen Le - ben wan - deln! Er - hör uns, Herr! Herr! un - ser Gott!
 B
 b.c. *f* 6 2 *p* 5[♯] 4 *f* 6 7 6 7 6

Example 12.21. New Litany, W. 204/2, mm. 408–15

408 *pp*

S
A

T
B

b.c.

biz zum Tod am Kreuze, O, daß wir aus ganzer Seele,

ff

NB.

pp 6 6 7^b 5 5 8 7^h 5^h 4^b 6 5^h 7^h 8 7^h 4+ 6