

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 18

Form: Sinfonia - Recit (B) - Recit/Chorale (SATB) - Aria (S) - Chorale

The sinfonia is based on a repeated 4-measure bass (like a free chaconne) in da capo (A - A' - A) form, which is demarcated 4 unison statements of the theme (mm. 1-4, 17-20, 52-55, 68-72). In between these unison statements (reminiscent of Vivaldi's music, which Bach had been studying in Weimar), are passages in which Vla I & Vla II lead in concertante manner. At 72 mm., the movement is longer than previous equivalents. See Petzoldt, "Bach Kommentar," vol. 2, 575.

Introduction & updates at melvinunger.com.

NBA I/7; BC A44 a/b

Sexagesima (BWV 18 [earliest extant cantata for a cycle?], 181, 126)

*2 Cor. 11:19-12:9 (God's power is made perfect in weakness)

*Lk. 8:4-15 (Parable of the sower)

Librettist: Erdmann Neumeister (from Neumeister's 1711 cycle for the Eisenach court). One of Bach's few recits to use Neumeister. See side note.

FP: 1713/1714 (Weimar)

Kobayashi suggests

19 February 1713 (see Dürr/Jones, 233). Performed again in Leipzig (notated higher because of Leipzig's lower chamber pitch) perhaps paired with BWV 181 on 13 February 1724. (Petzoldt states the joint performance with BWV 181 as a fact. See "Bach Kommentar," vol. 2, p. 575. For other double cantatas, see side note.)

Instrumentation:

Vla I, II, III, IV

(Vla I & II doubled by added recorders in later Leipzig version, but silent in ritornello of Sinfonia so that Vla I & II act as soloists.)

SATB

Fagotto (somewhat independent)

Violoncello

Violone o Organo (see side note)

5-part string writing (usually 2 vns, 2 vlas, and continuo) was typical of Bach's Weimar works. Christoph Wolff compares the low sonority of 4 violas in BWV 18 to Brandenburg 6. See "Bach the Universal Musician," 100.

J.S. Bach Cantata No. 18 Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt

18/1. **Sinfonia.**

1. (Andante $\text{♩} = 108$)

Ground bass principle is combined with ritornello/concerto principle, in which Vla I & II act as soloists.

G minor

(B-flat major)

F# dim.7

D7

Rising series of suspensions (like Corelli) may depict the seed's germination & growth mentioned in the next movement. For Chafe's interpretation, see below.

D major

G minor

F major

Eric Chafe argues that the cantata is based on the dualism of rising and falling. See "Analyzing Bach Cantatas, 104. Rising fourth: See later note about the significance of the rising diatonic fourth.

(B-flat major)

D major

G minor

G minor

F# dim.7

D7

G minor

G minor

F# dim.7

D7

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16. Unison Statement #2

Vla IV has descending line (see full score)

Unison

Tritone

D7 G minor G minor (B-flat major)

19. [A] Vla II Vla I

Bassoon sometimes enters with Vla III & IV

D major G minor G minor A major

22. Text painting: Vlas I & II have descending lines to depict the rain & snow coming down from heaven (a metaphor for God's word) mentioned in the next movement.

D minor D minor C major

25. F major A7 D minor

28. Vla I

A7 D minor D minor (C7) F major

mf

31. Vla II

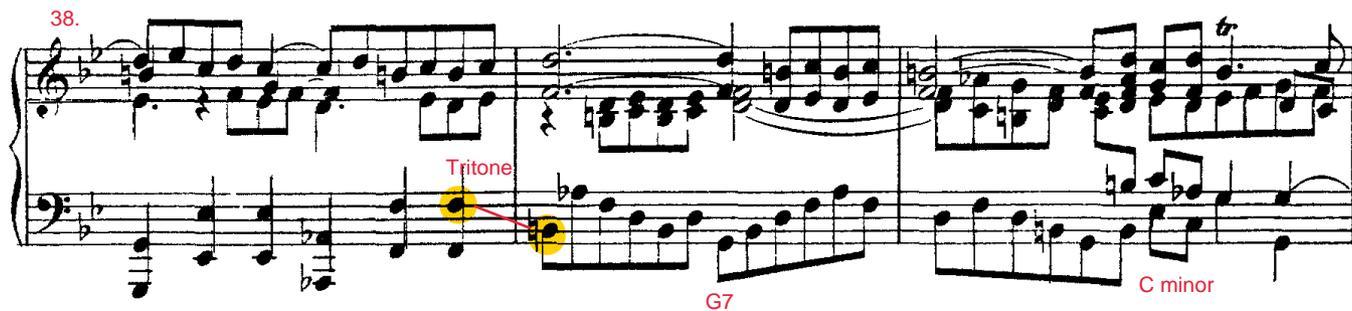
Bass tacet.

D7 G minor (F7) B-flat 7 E-flat major G major C minor

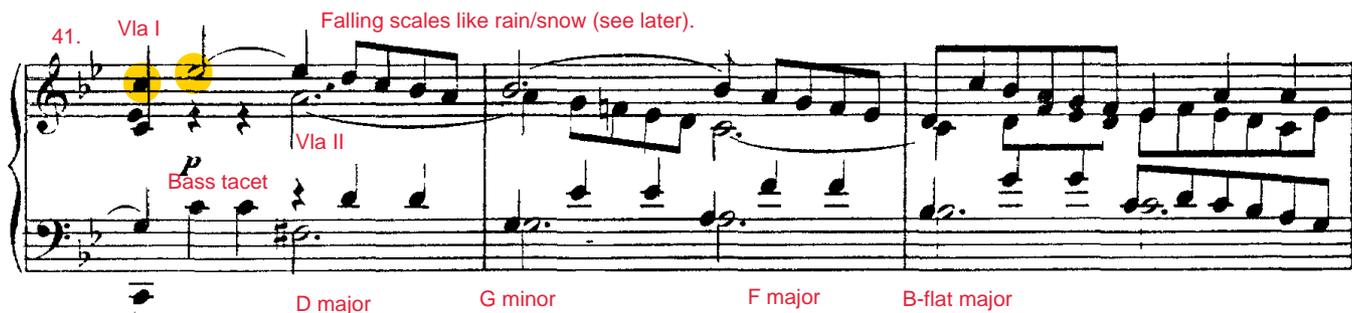
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35. 

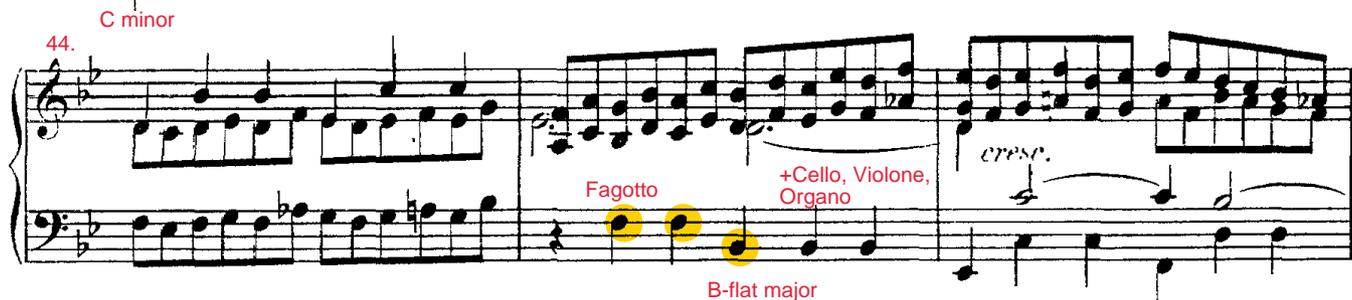
C minor C minor

38. 

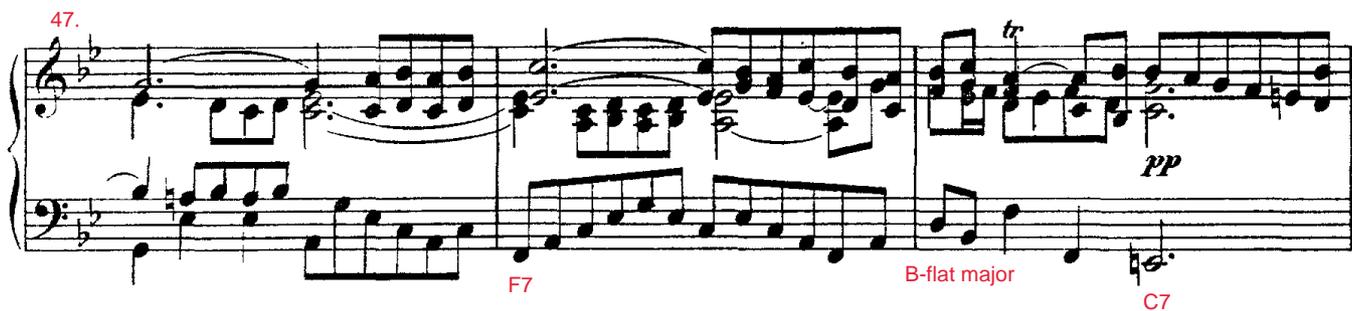
Tritone G7 C minor

41. 

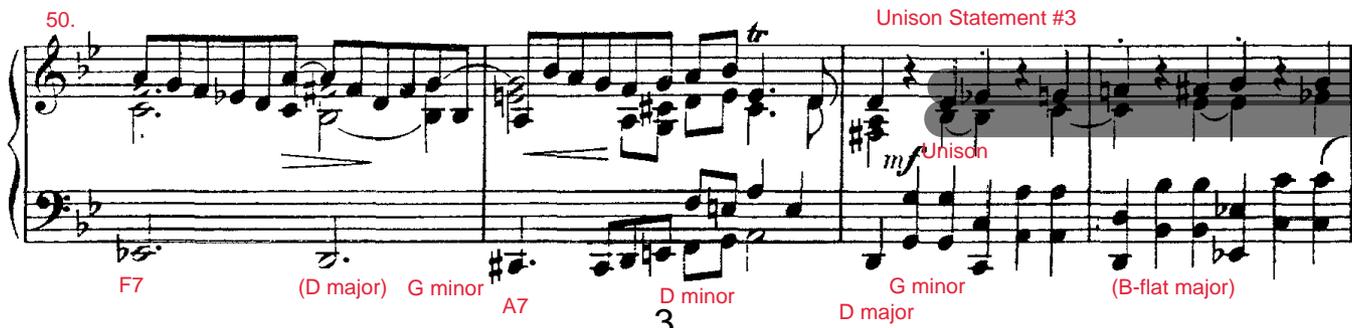
Vla I Falling scales like rain/snow (see later.)
Vla II Bass tacet
D major G minor F major B-flat major

44. 

C minor Fagotto +Cello, Violone, Organo
B-flat major cresc.

47. 

F7 B-flat major C7

50. 

Unison Statement #3
Unison
F7 (D major) G minor A7 D minor G minor D major (B-flat major)

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54. A (da capo) Vla I

Vla II
Vla III & IV tacet

F# dim.7 G minor D major G minor

57.

G minor F major (B-flat major) D major G minor

60. Vla III & IV unison with bass p Note: Later the tritone is used for the devil (Diabolus in Musica). Tritone

G minor F# dim.7 D7

63. Vla I tr Falling scales like rain/snow (see later).

Vla II Vla III

G minor G minor

66. Vla IV has descending line (see full score). f

F# dim.7 D7 G minor G minor

69. Unison Statement #4 Unison tr

(B-flat major) F# dim.7 D7 G minor G (minor)

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Eric Chafe that Neumister has created a sequence representing the viewpoints of the Old Testament (no. 2), New Testament (no. 3, recitatives), Church (no. 3 litany passages), and individual (no. 4). See "Analyzing Bach Cantatas, 103.

The metaphor of God's Word as seed is common in the bible. Here it particularly reflects the Gospel reading of the Sunday: Jesus' parable of the sower and the seed.

Bach structures this recitative in two similar halves to depict the simile in the text: God's Word is like rain and snow. Each half ends in arioso.

Secco (right hand is editorial)

18/2. **Recitativo.**

•Vox Dei (despite its Old Testament origins, probably understood as Vox Christe): My Word will produce fruit: Is. 55:10-11 (18/2). Text painting: Descending melodic lines to depict rain & snow falling from heaven.

1. **Basso.**

Gleich wie der Re-gen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt und nicht

Oulines dim.7 chord

Somewhat independent bassoon (often punctuates beat 3).

G minor

3.

wie - der da - hin kom - met, sondern fruch - tet die Er - de und

NBA: feuchtet

G minor

Recitatives that conclude with arioso are typical of Bach's earlier works.

5. **Andante.** (♩ = 66.)

macht sie fruchtbar und wachsend, - dass sie giebt Sa - men zu sä - en und Brot zu

figura corta

F major

Canon

Continuo imitates bass.

Ascending 4ths depict fruitful growth (see later note).

B-flat major

Eric Chafe understands the rising figures as returning the word through God in prayer. (See "Analyzing Bach Cantatas," 102).

Continuo imitates singer, probably to depict the connection between the watered seed and subsequent growth.

7.

es - sen: al - so soll das Wort, so aus mei - nem Mun - de

Motivically like the opening, showing the parallel (simile: Seed is like God's Word).

Motivically like "und nicht wieder dahin kommet," showing the parallel (simile: Seed is like God's Word).

B-flat major (relative major)

C7

9.

ge - het, auch sein; es soll nicht wie - der zu mir leer kom -

F major

F# dim.7 (colors "empty")

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See the repeated use of "gelingen" (succeed) in the next movement, m. 11.

11. *Arioso*
Andante. (♩ = 66.)

men. sondern thun, das mir ge - fäl - let, und soll ihm ge - lin - gen,

Figura corta

Canon

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

13. Continuo again imitates Singer to depict the connection between the spiritual seed (the Word) and subsequent spiritual growth.

da - zu ichs sen - de.

~~Choral.~~ All except the continuo here are editorial (see NBA).

Figura corta

G minor G minor

18/3. **Coro.**
Recit.

Luther revised the Latin Litany and published it, along with the German Litany, in 1529. See Benjamin Mayes, "Restoring the Great Litany in the Lutheran Church," in "Concordia Theological Quarterly" 81/2 (2017): 321-330. See also side notes.

•Prayer: Let my heart be like fertile soil (18/3). In this recitative, 4 statements (T-B-T-B) alternate with 2 stanzas of Luther's Litany in allegro tempo (each chant statement begun by soprano followed by a repeated response by SATB: "Erhör uns, lieber Gott"). The 4 statements correspond to the 4 types of soil referenced in the Gospel reading. Alternating tempos is reminiscent of motet structure.

1. Tenore
Statement 1: Mein Gott, hier wird mein Her-ze sein, ich öff-ne dir's in mei-nes Je-su
Prayer that the heart will be open to receive the Word like seed falling on the good soil (mentioned last in Jesus' parable: Luke 8:8 & 15).

Mein Gott, hier wird mein Her-ze sein, ich öff-ne dir's in mei-nes Je-su

"Halo" of violas.

Vla I, II, III, IV

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

Tonal descent in a flatward direction (G minor to E-flat major)

Reminiscence of previous movement: Compare 18/2, m. 5 (Continuo) & 18/2, m. 7 (Bass).

Na - men; so streu - e dei - nen Sa - men als in ein gu - tes Land hin -

ein! Mein Gott. hier wird mein Her-ze sein, lass sol-ches Frucht und

Imitative ascending 4ths

Vla I

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

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Summation: Direct quotation of Psalm 118:25 (Petzoldt notes that this is typical of Neumeister: see "Bach Kommentar," vol. 2, 576.) This phrase relates directly to the promise of the Vox Dei in m. 12 of movement 2, that God's Word will succeed ("gelingen").

9. Allusion to the Gospel reading.

hun-dert-fäl-tig-bringen! O Herr, Herr, hilf! o Herr, lass wohl-ge-lingen!

Intensification; movement to C minor. See side note for more.

Via II figure is like a request or question.

Via II

G major

C minor

B-flat 7

E-flat major

See the use of the word "gelingen" (succeed) in the previous movement, m. 12. Thus, Old Testament and New Testament are joined.

12. **A Allegro.** (♩ = 144.)
Soprano.

Du wol-lest dei-nen Geist und Kraft zum Wor-te ge-

Continuo alone, the remainder is editorial.

Rhythmic bass line in faster tempo may symbolize the animating influence of the Spirit on the Word as mentioned in the text.

C minor

G minor

Litany (a responsorial prayer of the faithful). In the original, this versicle comes third of those included here. (Chafe calls this "the process by which the 'word' returns to God." See "Analyzing Bach Cantatas," 103.) The soprano's prayer for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Note that the bass changes for each subsequent statement of the Litany.

Regarding this phrase of the Litany (i.e., the power of the Spirit to make the heart ready to receive the Word), see Martin Petzoldt's summary of Johann Olearius's commentary on the parallel Gospel account of the Gospel reading in Mark 4 (Petzoldt, "Bach Kommentar," vol. 2, p. 577).

16. SATB response represents congregation.

ben, er-hör' uns, lie-ber Her-re Gott!

Alto.

Tenore.

Basso.

Er-hör' uns, lie-ber Her-re Gott!

Er-hör' uns, lie-ber Her-re Gott!

Er-hör' uns, lie-ber Her-re Gott!

Instruments doubling voices.

Rhythmic bass line continues during during the response.

B-flat major

B-flat 7

E-flat major

C minor

Recit. Statement 2: Prayer to keep the devil from deceitfully perverting and stealing the Word, analogous to seed falling (exposed) on the hard roadway and being trampled underfoot: Luke 8:5 & 12.

NBA: Nur Nun-neh-re, treu-er Va-ter, neh-re, dass mich und kei-nen Chri-sten

D A B-flat C B F

G minor

B dim.7

D7

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B-flat and E-flat major chords suggest the devil is sweet & harmless.

22. *nicht des Teu - fels Trug, des Teu - fels Trug, des Teu - fels Trug ver - keh -*

F# Tritones for devil. G E-flat C#

See NBA

Deceptive chord progressions for "deceit."

C minor F# dim.7 D7 G minor E major B-flat major D minor N6 E7

Text painting: Chromatic harmonies to depict Satan's deceitfulness.

25. *- re! Sein Sinn ist ganz da - hin ge - richt, uns dei - nes Ra - thes zu be -*

Tritone E NBA: Wortes

D minor D major F# dim.7 D7 G minor G7

Chromatic saturation in the vocal part in 7 mm., perhaps to indicate the devil's "complete" intention to rob ("ganz dahin gericht").

Very operatic

Text painting: Allegro tempo, fast rhythmic motion, and vocal melismas with dramatic leaps (including the "Diabolus in Musica" i.e., tritone) to describe the devil robbing the human heart of the Word (see Luke 8:12).

28. *rau -*

Allegro. (♩ = 80.)

Voice outlines tritone via F# dim.7

Tritone leaps

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

30. *- ben mit al - - ler - Se - lig - keit, mit al - - ler - Se - lig -*

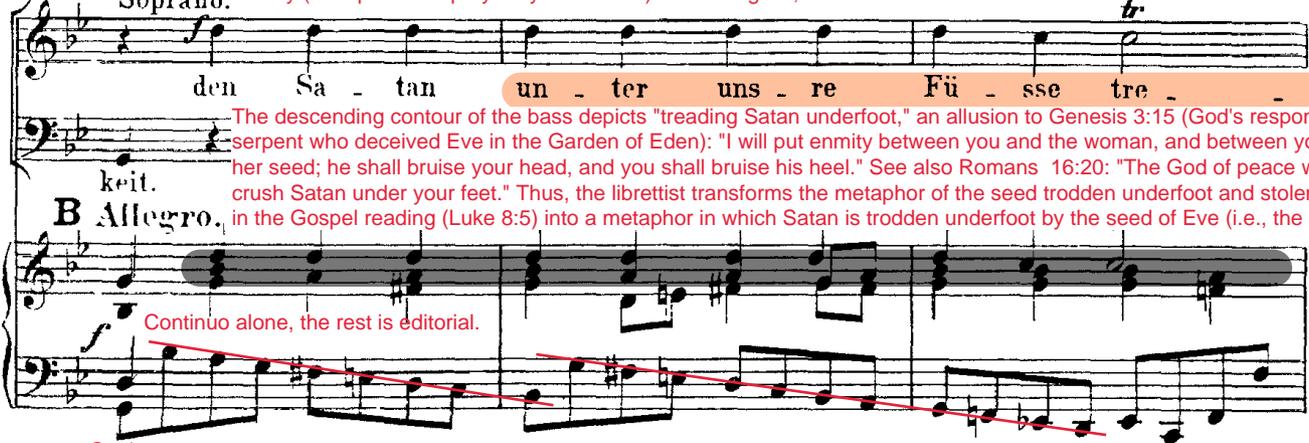
Adagio. (♩ = 72.)

G minor

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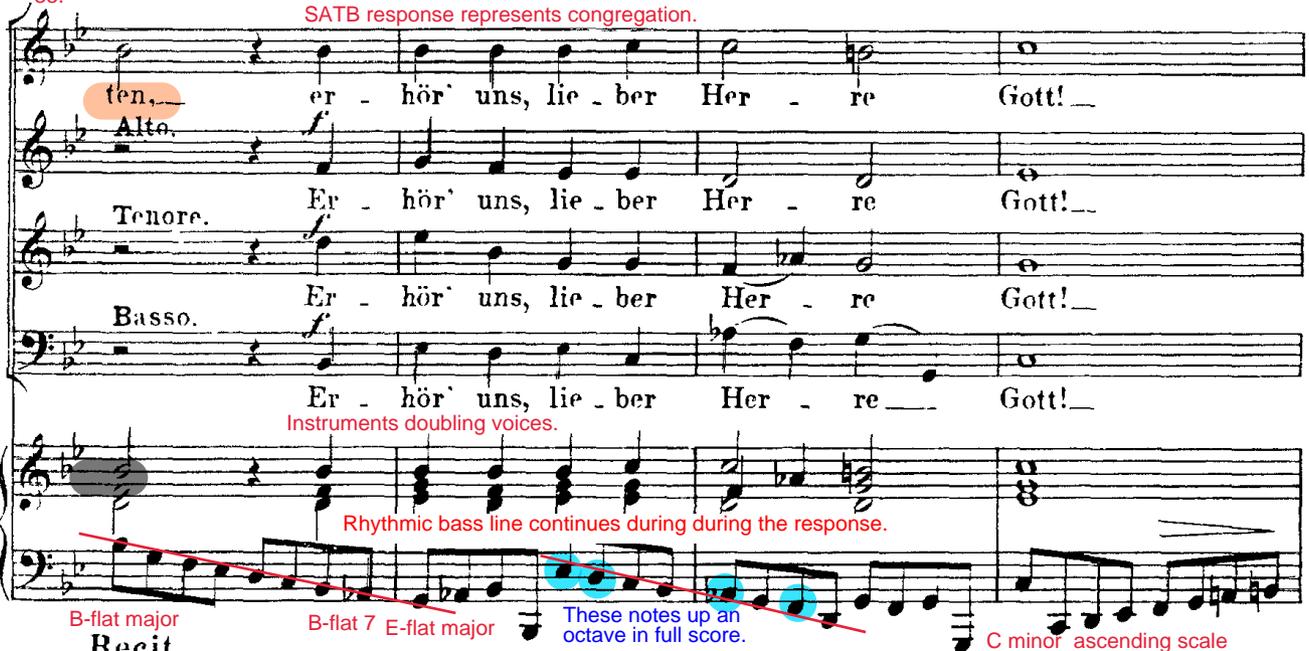
32 **B Allegro.** ($\text{♩} = 124.$)
Soprano.

Litany (a responsorial prayer by the faithful). In the original, this versicle comes second of those included here.



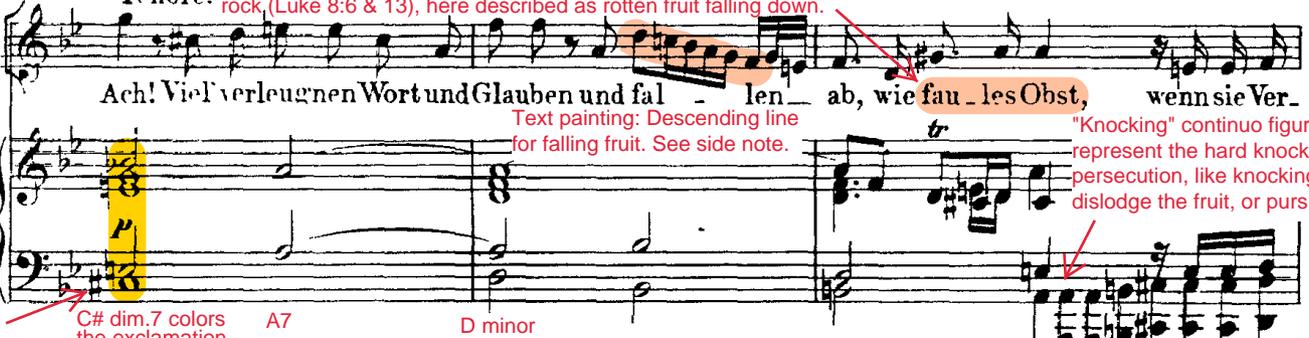
35. G minor

SATB response represents congregation.

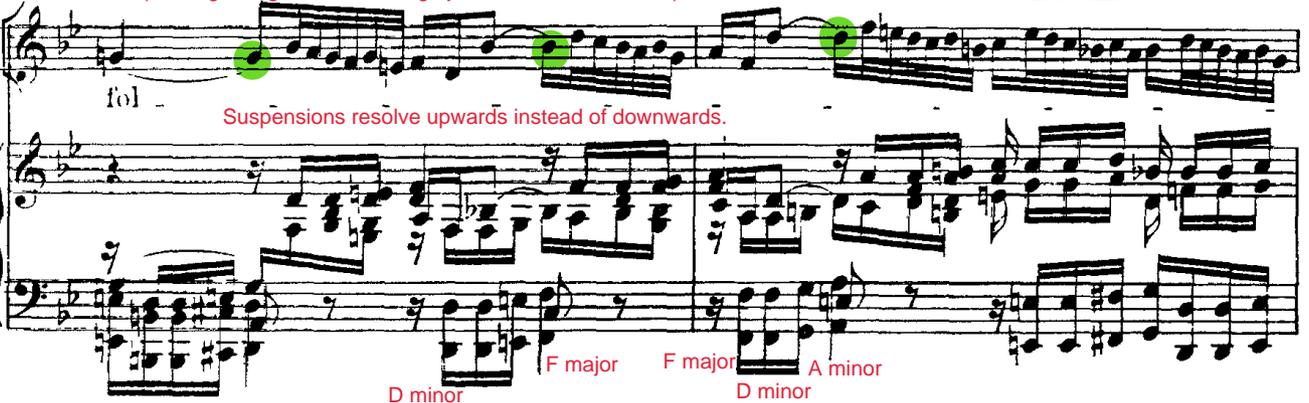


39. **Recit.**
Tenore.

Statement 3: People who deny the Word and fall from faith when they encounter persecution are analogous to seed falling on a rock (Luke 8:6 & 13), here described as rotten fruit falling down.



42. Text painting: Long, convoluted/highly virtuosic melisma for "persecution."



44. *Chromatic clashes for "persecution."*

- gung sollen lei - den.

mf

F major A7 D minor

46. *Text painting: Dramatic dropping interval for "plunge." Eternal grief contrasted with temporal woe.*

So, so, so stür-zen sie in e-wig Her-ze-leid, da sie ein zeit-lich Weh ver-

D major D7 C# dim.7 colors word (grief of heart) A7 G# dim.7 colors word (woe).

Litany (a responsorial prayer by the faithful).

49. **C** **Soprano. Allegro.** (♩ = 144.)

und uns für des Türken und des Papsts grausamen Mord und Lä - ste -

In the original, this versicle comes fourth of those included here. Note: In the Weimar edition of Luther's collected works, the text (given in a footnote) reads: "Den gruwamen viendt der Christenheit / den Türcken stören und weren." (Disturb and protect [us] from the cruel enemy of Christendom, the Turk.) See "Weimar Ausgabe," vol. 3.3, p. 32.

meiden. **C** **Allegro.** Continuo alone, the rest is editorial.

Rhythmic bass line in faster tempo: rising 8ths followed by a 16ths in a form of "stile concitato" in a falling direction, representing the "raging & storming" of the attacking enemies, also fear. See side note.

D major G minor G minor

53.

run - gen, Wü - then und To - ben vä - ter - lich be - hü -

G minor F major

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Chromaticism for "seduce."

66.

langen. Und wie viel Seelen hält die Wol_lust nicht gefan_gen! So schr verfüh - ret sie die

F minor F minor G7

69.

Welt, die Welt, die ih_nen muss an - statt des Himmels ste_hen, dar_ü_ber

B-flat 7 E-flat major

Bach presents the statement, "On account of which they go astray from heaven" three times.

72.

sie vom Him - mel ir -

C minor C minor A-flat major "Waffling" figure.

Large leap to depict "from heaven." Continuo alone, the rest here is editorial.

75.

- re ge - hen, da - rü - ber sie vom Himmel ir - re ge -

D7 G minor 2. Text phrase repeated

D minor Text painting: Convoluted, angular melisma leaps for "going astray."

D minor B-flat major

78.

hen vom Himmel ir - re ge

3. Last part of text phrase repeated.

Text painting: Convoluted melisma for "going astray."

G minor

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81. **D Allegro.** (♩ = 124.)

Soprano.

f Litany (a responsorial prayer by the faithful). In the original, this versicle comes first of those included here.

hen.

D Allegro.

Continuo alone, the rest here is editorial.

f Rhythmic bass line in faster tempo.

G minor

G minor

F7

85.

SATB response represents congregation.

Instruments doubling voices.

Rhythmic bass line continues during during the response.

B-flat major

B-flat 7

E-flat major

G7

C minor

Modern, galant style aria in binary form with unifying ritornello, characterized by cantabile melodies (interspersed with sections in operatic patter diction), periodic phrase structure, and relatively slow harmonic rhythm.

•God's Word is my true treasure, all else is trickery! (18/4). This is the only aria in the cantata. The lower notes of the biplanar viola melody's opening delineate a descending diatonic fourth, the inversion of the singer's opening figure. Bach appears to have used the ascending diatonic fourth as an antonym of the descending chromatic fourth (the traditional lamento figure). See side note for more.

1. **(Andante)** (♩ = 54.)

Obbligato of Vla I, II, III, IV in unison.

Unifying ritornello

The unison violas of the ritornello suggest the influence of Vivaldi, whose music Bach was studying at this time (see also unison violas in the opening movement).

(E-flat major)

F7

B-flat major

E-flat major

Descending diatonic fourth

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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.

5.

E-flat major E-flat major

Soprano. 8.

Ascending diatonic fourth

Mein See - lenschatz ist Gottes

E-flat major E-flat major

10.

Wort, mein See - len - schatz ist Got - tes

E-flat major E-flat major

E-flat major (E pedal maybe symbolizes determined steadfastness)

Text painting: A melodic squiggle depicts "such nets"—the nets devised by the world and Satan. As a metaphor, "net" amalgamates the 3 metaphors previously listed: the roadway, the rock, and the thorns, which prevent successful reception of the seed (i.e., Word).

12.

Wort; au - sser - dem sind al - le Schätze - sol - che Net - ze,

F major B-flat major F major B-flat major

Text painting: Angular figure with C-F# tritone for "snares of world and devil."

14.

wel - che Welt und Sa - tan - strik - ken, schnö - de Seelen zu be - rük -

F major F# dim.7 G minor E-flat major

B-flat major

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16.

ken. Mein See - lenschatz ist Gottes Wort; ausser.

mf *p*

B-flat major B-flat major B-flat major

19.

dem sind al - le Schätze - sol - che Net - ze, wel - che Welt und Sa - tan

p

C minor C minor C minor

21.

strik - ken, schön - de Seelen zu be - rük - ken.

mf

D7 G minor

23.

Fort mit allen, fort, nur fort, fort mit allen, fort, nur

mf

Vlas

G minor B-flat major

Patter diction (operatic style) with scalar lines for the command to depart, in canonic imitation among singer, vias (I-IV), and continuo, presumably to depict the interwoven strings of a net.

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25.

fort. mein See - lenschatz ist Got - tes Wort; fort mit allen, fort, nur fort. fort mit allen, fort, nur

C minor

Detailed description: This system shows measure 25. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower two staves. The key signature has two flats (B-flat major/C minor). The tempo is marked 'fort.' (forte). The piano part features a complex texture with many sixteenth notes. Several notes in the vocal line and piano accompaniment are highlighted with blue and yellow circles.

27.

fort. mein See - len - schatz ist Got - tes Wort;

C minor F7 B-flat major

Detailed description: This system shows measure 27. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower two staves. The key signature has two flats. The tempo is marked 'fort.'. The piano part features a complex texture with many sixteenth notes. The measure ends with a fermata. The piano part has a dynamic marking of 'mf' (mezzo-forte).

29.

fort mit allen, fort, nur fort, fort mit al - len, fort, nur

E-flat major F7 B-flat major

Vlas

Detailed description: This system shows measure 29. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower two staves. The key signature has two flats. The tempo is marked 'fort.'. The piano part features a complex texture with many sixteenth notes. Several notes in the vocal line and piano accompaniment are highlighted with blue and yellow circles. The piano part has a dynamic marking of 'tr' (tristesse) and a 'Vlas' annotation.

31.

fort, mein See - lenschatz ist Got - tes Wort; fort, nur fort, fort mit al - len, fort, nur

E-flat major B-flat 7

16 B-flat pedal...

Detailed description: This system shows measure 31. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower two staves. The key signature has two flats. The tempo is marked 'fort.'. The piano part features a complex texture with many sixteenth notes. Several notes in the vocal line and piano accompaniment are highlighted with blue and yellow circles. The piano part has a dynamic marking of 'B-flat 7' and a '16 B-flat pedal...' annotation.

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33. fort, mein Seelenschatz ist Gottes Wort.

Descending diatonic fourth

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

36.

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

39.

E-flat major 1/5. E-flat major

18/5. Choral. (Mcl: „Durch Adams Fall ist ganz verderbt“.)
Soprano. •Prayer: Do not take Word away, it is our confidence (18/5).

Chafe notes that 5 of this hymn's 9 stanzas mention God's word. Here the 8th stanza is a prayer, demonstrating that God's Word has not returned

Martin Petzoldt notes that this closing chorale returns to the G minor key of the Sinfonia and the first vocal movement. Both vocal movements speak of a desire for God's Word to be effective, a theme (reinforced by the verses of the Litany), that largely characterizes the cantata. See "Bach Kommentar," vol. 2, p. 579. The closing chorale represents a prayer by the congregation.

+Vla I, II Ich bitt', o Herr, aus Herzensgrund, du wollst nicht von mir neh - men }
dein heiliges Wort aus mei-nem Mund; so wird mich nicht be - schä - men }

Alto. +Vla III Ich bitt', o Herr, aus Herzensgrund, du wollst nicht von mir neh - men }
dein heiliges Wort aus mei-nem Mund; so wird mich nicht be - schä - men }

Tenore. +Vla IV Ich bitt', o Herr, aus Herzensgrund, du wollst nicht von mir neh - men }
dein heiliges Wort aus mei-nem Mund; so wird mich nicht be - schä - men }

Basso. +Continuo Ich bitt', o Herr, aus Herzensgrund, du wollst nicht von mir neh - men }
dein heiliges Wort aus mei-nem Mund; so wird mich nicht be - schä - men }

Descending bass line perhaps represents the "taking away" of God's Word.

C minor G minor G major

"empty." This accords with the interpretation of God's Word as spiritual manna from heaven. See "Analyzing Cantatas," 103.

Eric Chafe sees the "weakening" of G minor in the first, third, fifth, and sixth phrases as allegorical of an acknowledgment of sin and guilt, while the resoration of G minor signifies the "initial dictum, that through prayer (acknowledgment of sin) the word does not return 'empty' to God" but rather the fruit of eternal life. See *Analyzing Bach Cantatas*, 108.

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Abgesang of bar form: For librettist and composer, "Sünd und Schuld" here apparently represent all the worldly values (see 18/3, m. 69) that hinder regarding God's Word as a "treasure." See Petzoldt, "Bach Kommentar," vol. 2, p. 579.

mein' Sünd' und Schuld, denn in dein' Huld setz' ich all mein Ver - trau - en. Wer
mein' Sünd' und Schuld, denn in dein' Huld setz' ich all mein Ver - trau - en. Wer
mein' Sünd' und Schuld, denn in dein' Huld setz' ich all mein Ver - trau - en. Wer
mein' Sünd' und Schuld, denn in dein' Huld setz' ich all mein Ver - trau - en. Wer

G minor B-flat major E-flat major C minor

13.

sich nur fest dar - auf ver - lässt, der wird den Tod nicht schau - - - en.
sich nur fest dar - auf ver - lässt, der wird den Tod nicht schau - - - en.
sich nur fest dar - auf ver - lässt, der wird den Tod nicht schau - - - en.
sich nur fest dar - auf ver - lässt, der wird den Tod nicht schau - - - en.

C minor E-flat major B-flat major G minor G major