

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 155

Form: Recit (S) - Duet (alto/tenor) - Recit (B) - Aria (S) - Chorale.

The text alludes to the day's Gospel account of Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana after the wine runs out. The poet turns this story into a metaphor of despair transformed into trust and hope with allusions to such biblical passages as Psalm 6:2-7: "Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing... But thou, O Lord—how long?... I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears," then later, passages such as 1 Peter 5:7: "Cast all your anxieties on [God], for he cares about you" and Matthew 11:28-30 [Christ]: Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you... for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

J.S. Bach Cantata No. 155

Mein Gott, wie lang, ach lange

J. S. Bach," translated by Richard Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 193.

• Lament: My cup is filled with woe, joy's wine fails (155/1).

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NBA I/5; BC A32

2. S. after Epiphany (BWV 155, 3, 13)

*Romans 12:6-161 (Diversity of gifts, exemplary conduct)

*John 2:1-11 (Jesus attends wedding at Cana)

Ends at "men of low estate."

Librettist: Salomon Franck (see side note).

FP: 19 January 1716 (Weimar court chapel);

performed again 16 January 1724 (Leipzig: St. Thomas

Church)

Note: On this Sunday as well as on the second Sunday after Trinity, it was mandatory to read the 1632 Marriage Ordinance by Johann Georg I.

The autograph score is entitled "Concerto." The cantata begins with a highly dramatic recitative.

Soprano.

Instrumentation:

Fagotto

Vln I, II, Vla

SATB

Continuo

All 4 voices are given solos in the cantata. The soprano represents the despondent soul, whom the other three voices address with words of comfort.

155/1.

Recitativo

($\text{♩} = \text{F}$ 3.)

Chromatic saturation in 8 mm. of the vocal part.

Mein Gott, wie lang, ach

My God, how long, ah,

lan-ge?

long?

Des Jammers ist zu

Of misery (there) is too

D minor (For the significance of D minor, see side note. Here a throbbing D pedal reflects the anxiety and fear referenced in the text.)

3.

viel,
much!

ich se-he gar kein Ziel

I see absolutely no end

der Schmerzen und der Sor-gen! Dein süßes Gnaden-

of sufferings and of sorrows! Thy sweet glance

D minor

D7

G minor

6.

blick
glance

hat un-ter Nacht und Wol-

hath beneath night and clouds

ken sich ver-bor-gen, die

itself hidden, (Thy)

A7

D minor

8.

Lie-beshand zieht sich, ach,

hand-of-love draws itself, ah,

ganz zu-rück!

completely back!

Um Trost ist mir sehr

For consolation am (I) very

D7

F# dim.7

B dim.

E7

Biblical Allusion: Isaiah 38:17: Lo, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness (Luther 1545: um Trost war mir sehr bange)...

10.

ban - ge! Ich fin - de, was mich Ar - men täg - lich krän - ket, der
anxious! I find- which me wretched-one daily vexes, (my)

C# dim.7 D minor

12.

Thrä - nen Mass wird stets voll ein - geschen - ket, der
tears' measure is ever full poured,

NBA: das Tränenmaß

The bass finally changes at "the measure of my tears is full."

D7 G minor C# dim.7 D minor

14.

Freu - den Wein gebricht: mir
joy's wine fails; for-me

NBA: der Freuden-wein

B-flat major F7 G# dim.7 E7

16.

sinkt fast al - le Zuversicht!
sinks nigh all confidence!

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

Da capo **Duetto.** •Faith in adversity: Hope in God and wait for him! (155/2).

155/2. (Lento $\text{♩} = 56$.)

1. **Ritornello** *mf*

A minor G7

Virtuosic obbligato bassoon outlines a lament-like chord progression. Its mechanical rhythm suggests the passage of time, perhaps intended to point to the text of the B section: Jesus knows the right time to intervene...

3.

C major A minor

5. **Alto.**

The alto and tenor comfort the despondent soul with sweet parallel 3rds and 6ths.

Tenore.

Du musst glauben, du musst hoffen, du musst glauben, du musst

Du musst glauben, du musst hoffen, du musst hof-fen, du musst

You must believe, you must hope, You must

A minor A minor

Unger: amazingly agile, jaunty obbligato bassoon. Repetitive, sequential ritornello. Expresses duality of glauben and hoffen. Except for long melismas on a few words, it's syllabic. This is quite a remarkable movement.

8.

Gott gelas-sen sein; du musst hof-fen,

Gott gelas-sen sein; du musst glauben,

(in) God composed/resigned be

G7 C major B major E minor

10.

du musst glau-ben. du musst hof-fen. du musst glau-ben. du musst hof-fen, du musst glau-ben,

B7 E minor

12.

hof-fen. du musst Gott gelas-sen sein: du musst glauben. du musst hoffen, du musst du musst Gott gelas-sen sein; du musst glauben, du musst hoffen,

B7 E minor B7 E major A minor A minor

15.

Gott ge-las -

Word painting: Long melisma for "gelassen" (composed/resigned) suggests patient waiting.

du musst Gott ge-las -

C7 F major E7

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17.

sen sein; du musst glau-ben, du musst

sen sein, ge-las-sen sein; du musst glau-ben, du musst

E7 A minor

19.

hoffen, du musst glauben. du musst Gott gelas-sen sein.

hoffen, du musst hoffen, du musst Gott gelas-sen sein.

E7 A minor A minor

22.

E7 A minor G7 C major A minor

24.

The B section alludes to Jesus' words in the Gospel reading of the day: When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come" (John 2:3-5). The text also alludes to the Epistle of the day: Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation (Luther 1545: Trübsal), be constant in prayer (Romans 12:12).

B Section.

Je-sus weiss die rech-ten

Jesus knows the right

A minor C major

26.

Je - sus weiss die rech - ten Stun - den. dich mit Hül - fe zu er -
 Stun - den, dich mit Hül - fe zu er - freu'n, dich mit Hül - fe...
 hours, thee with help to gladden,

D7 G major

Text painting: Long melismas (often in sweet parallel 3rds & 6ths) and a bassoon part that is even more virtuosic, for "to gladden you with his help."

28.

freu'n.
 zu er - freu'n,

G major

30.

dich mit Hül - fe zu er - freu'n.
 dich mit Hül - fe zu er - freu'n.

mf G major A7

32.

Wenn die trü-be Zeit ver-
When the troubled time has-vanished

D major D(7) G major F#7

34.

schwun-den, steht sein gan-zes Herz dir of-fen, steht sein gan-zes
stands his whole heart to-you open,

Wenn die trü-be Zeit ver-schwun-den, steht sein gan-zes Herz dir

B minor D# dim.7 E minor G major G7

36. Text painting: Long melisma with alternating figures and parallel motion for "his heart stands open to you."

Herz dir of-
of-

C major

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38.

fen, sein gan-zes
fen, sein

C major

41.

Her-ze steht dir of-fen. Du musst glau-ben, du musst
gan-zes Her-ze steht dir of-fen. Du musst glau-ben, du musst

B7 E minor E minor E(7)

The da capo without intervening ritornello gives immediacy to the encouragement to believe and hope of the A section.

Dal Segno.

155/3. **Recitativo.**

• Affliction sent as test; wormwood will turn to wine (155/3).

So sei, o See-le, sei zu-frieden! Wann es vor dei-nen Augen
So be, O soul, be at-peace! When it to thine eyes

Biblical allusion to Psalm 116:7 (see side note).

For the significance of C, see side note.

3.

scheint, als ob dein liebster Freund sich ganz von dir geschieden, wann er dich kurze Zeit ver-
appears, as if thy dearest friend himself completely from thee hath-parted, when he thee for-a-short time forsakes

Allusion to Song of Songs, where the "friend" is the bridegroom (see side note).

Flourishes in the continuo are like shudders.

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6. D# C# B-flat NBA: den

lässt, Herz! glau-be fest, es wird ein Kleines sein, da er für bitt-re Zähren dir

Heart, believe steadfastly, it will a short-while be, until he for bitter tears the

Text painting: Pause for "when he leaves you for a short time."

B7 C major E minor C7 A7

9.

Trost und Freu - denwein und Honigseim für Wer-muth will ge - wäh - ren.

consolation- and joy-wine and virgin-honey for wormwood shall bestow.

Chromatic coloring for "wormwood."

Shuddering flourish in continuo.

D minor C major F# dim.7 C major C7

12.

Ach! denke nicht, dass er von Herzen dich be-trü-be; er prüfet nur durch Leiden deine

Ah, think not, that he from (his) heart thee would-grieve; he tests merely through suffering thy

Allusion to Lamentations 3:31-33 (see side note).

C# dim.7 B7

15.

Lie-be, er machet, dass dein Herz bei trü - ben Stunden wei-ne, damit sein Gna-den.

love, he makes that thy heart in dreary hours weeps, so-that his grace's

Word painting: Long note with chromatic inflection for "trüben" (dreary/troubled).

E minor G major B dim.7 F minor Ger+6 C7

18. (Arioso ♩ = 50.) Text painting: Arioso and harmonic "transformation" to C major for the appearance of the light of grace. Recit.

licht dir desto lieb - li - cher er-schei-ne; er hat, was dich er-

light-to-thee so-much lovelier appear; he hath, what thee delights

F major G7 C major C major C7

(Arioso $\text{♩} = 56$.)

21.

götzt, zuletzt zu deinem Trost dir vor behalten; drum lass ihn nur, o Herz, in Al-

in-the-end

for thy consolation for-thee reserved,

so let him just, O heart, in all-things

"Zuletzt": Allusion to the Gospel reading (see side note).

F major

F7

B-flat major

C7

F major

Text painting: Arioso for the encouragement to trust God's sovereignty in all things.

For more on F major, see note.

24.

lem wal-ten!

rule!

Possible allusion to Mary's instruction to the servants in the Gospel reading, "'Do whatever he tells you.'" The language echoes that of the chorale "Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan...drum laß ich ihn nur walten."

F major

Aria.

•Cast all your cares, your sorrows' yoke, on God (155/4).

155/4. (~~Risolute~~ $\text{♩} = 100$.)

The dotted rhythm and harmonic progression sound much like Handel.

For the significance of F major, see note.

Strings

Ritornello derived from vocal line.

F major

G(7)

C major F major

Note: If the dotted rhythms are kept intact, the piece suggests a processional walk with Jesus after "casting one's yoke onto his shoulders," as referenced in the text. On the other hand, if they are adjusted to the later triplet rhythm, the piece evokes an image of carefree skipping by the soul—entirely appropriate to the text. See side note for more.

5.

C7 F major

F major

The strings come to rest in F major, while the continuo adopts the dotted figure, creating dissonances until the resolution in m. 8.

9. Soprano.

Editorial additions are greyed out for clarity.

Wirf, mein Her-ze, wirf dich noch in des Höchsten Liebes - ar-me, wirf, mein Herze, wirf dich

Cast (O) my heart, cast thyself yet into the Most-High's arms-of love,

F major

G(7)

C major

Text painting: The opening figure (dotted rhythms with leaps) most immediately relates to the opening word "wirf" (to cast).

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12. noch in des Höchsten Liebes-ar-me, dass er deiner sich er-bar-me! Wirf, mein Herze,
that he on-thee (have) mercy!

C major E major A minor G7 C major

Triplets suggest a light-hearted, gamboling/skipping, perhaps pointing to the sheep carried by the shepherd as alluded to in the last line. Yet the minor mode suggest sadness or resignation.

15. wirf dich noch in des Höchsten Liebes-ar-me, dass er deiner sich er-bar - -

C minor C7 F minor G(7)

18. me!

mf Ritornello

C major C major D(7) G major C major G major A minor E minor C7

Biblical allusions: 1 Peter 5:7: Cast all your anxieties on [God], for he cares about you. Psalm 55:22: Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved. Philippians 4:6: Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. Matthew 11:28-30: [Christ]: Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

22. The strings come to rest in C major before the continuo does.

F major G7 C major C major

26. Le-ge dei-ner Sor-gen Joch und was dich bis-her be-laden, auf die Ach -
Lay thy worries' yoke and what thee until-now hath-burdened on the shoulders

p C major C(7) F major (A7) A7 D minor G7 C7

Biblical allusion: Matthew 11:28-30: [Christ]: Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

29. *sehn sei - ner Gna - den, auf die Ach - sen seiner Gna -*

of-his grace.

F major A7 D minor C7 D minor A major D minor

32. *Text painting: Long note for ["shoulders of his] grace."*

A7 D7 G minor F7

35. *den, At the cadence, the mode becomes major. See side note for more. le - ge dei - ner Sor-gen Joch und was*

mf p

B-flat major B-flat major B-flat major C7 F major

38. *dich bisher be - la - den, auf die Achseln seiner*

G7 C(7) A7 D minor C7 F major

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41. Gnaden, le - ge deiner Sorgen Joch und was dich bisher be -

mf *p*

F major G(7) C major C7 F major A major

44. la - den, le - ge deiner Sorgen Joch und was dich bis - her be - la - den, auf die

D minor C7 F major F major F minor

47. Achseln sei - ner Gna - den!

D-flat/E clash

mf

F7 B-flat minor F minor F major F major G(7)

50.

C major F major

53.

F major F major Strings sustain the chord against dotted rhythm in continuo. F major

155/5. **Choral. (Mel.: „Es ist das Heil“.)**

(See also 9/7, 186/6.)

•Believe his Word rather than appearances (155/5).

Soprano. 1/5.

Martin Petzoldt notes that the chorale functions as a catechismal response, as became standard in the Leipzig cantatas. See *Bach Kommentar* 2:443.

Regarding the fermatas, see note.

Ob sichs an-liess, als wollt' er nicht, lass dich es nicht er - schrek - ken,
denn wo er ist am be - sten mit, da will er's nicht ent - dek - ken;

Ob sichs an-liess, als wollt' er nicht, lass dich es nicht er - schrek - ken,
denn wo er ist am be - sten mit, da will er's nicht ent - dek - ken;

Ob sichs an-liess, als wollt' er nicht, lass dich es nicht er - schrek - ken,
denn wo er ist am be - sten mit, da will er's nicht ent - dek - ken;

Ob sichs an-liess, als wollt' er nicht, lass dich es nicht er - schrek - ken,
denn wo er ist am be - sten mit, da will er's nicht ent - dek - ken;

F major 9. (F7) B-flat major F7 G minor C7 F major G7 C major C major

sein Wort lass dir ge - wis - ser sein, und ob dein Herz sprach'
sein Wort lass dir ge - wis - ser sein, und ob dein Herz sprach'
sein Wort lass dir ge - wis - ser sein, und ob dein Herz sprach'
sein Wort lass dir ge - wis - ser sein, und ob dein Herz sprach'

F major (G7) C major C major F major

lau - ter Nein, so lass doch dir nicht grau - en.
lau - ter Nein, so lass doch dir nicht grau - en.
lau - ter Nein, so lass doch dir nicht grau - en.
lau - ter Nein, so lass doch dir nicht grau - en.

D major F major F major

Translation: Though it appear as if he were not willing, let it not alarm you. For where he is most present, there would he not disclose it. Let his Word become more certain to you. And though your heart say only "No," yet let yourself nevertheless not be terrified.