Regarding the problematic source material, see note.

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 156

Form: Sinfonia - Aria/Chorale (S/T) - Recit (B) - Aria (A) - Recit (B) - Chorale.

No. 4 (A aria). Accepting God's will in all things
No. 3 (B recit.). Accepting God's will in death
No. 5 (B recit). Accepting God's will in health (physical & spiritual)
No. 2 (S aria/B chorale). Accepting God's will at the end of life
No. 6 (chorale). Accepting God's will throughout life
No. 1 (Sinfonia)

Introduction & updates at melvinunger.com.

Regarding Picander, see note.

NBA I/6; BC A38
3. S. after Epiphany (BWV 73, 111, 72, 156)
*Romans 12:161–21 (Overcoming evil with good)
*Matthew 8:1–13 (Jesus heals a leper; the centurion from Capernaum comes to Jesus). Begins: "Never be conceited."
Librettist: Picander (Christian Friedrich Henrici)
FP: probably 23 January 1729 (St. Nicholas), from Bach's fourth Leipzig cantata cycle (the "Picander cycle").

Cantata No. 156
Ich steh mit einem Fuß im Grabe

Bach often used chiastic (x-shaped/symmetrical) forms, in which center movements (where the mirror image begins) provide the crux of the matter. There antithetical elements meet or are paradoxically inverted (formal inversion reflects an aspect of reversal or turning in the text). In this cantata, the central movement represents a turning point from accepting God's will in death to desiring his will in health (both physical and spiritual). Here the text echoes the leper's request to Jesus in the day's Gospel reading: "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."

For Alfred Dürr's comments, see note.

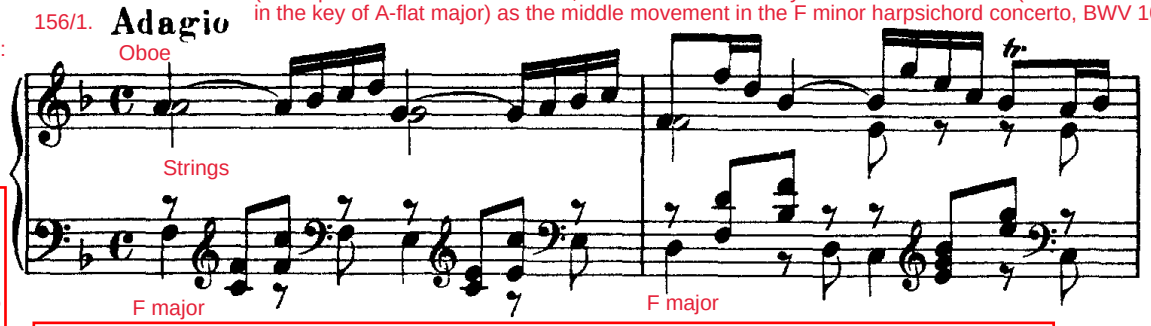
1. Sinfonia

156/1. **Adagio**

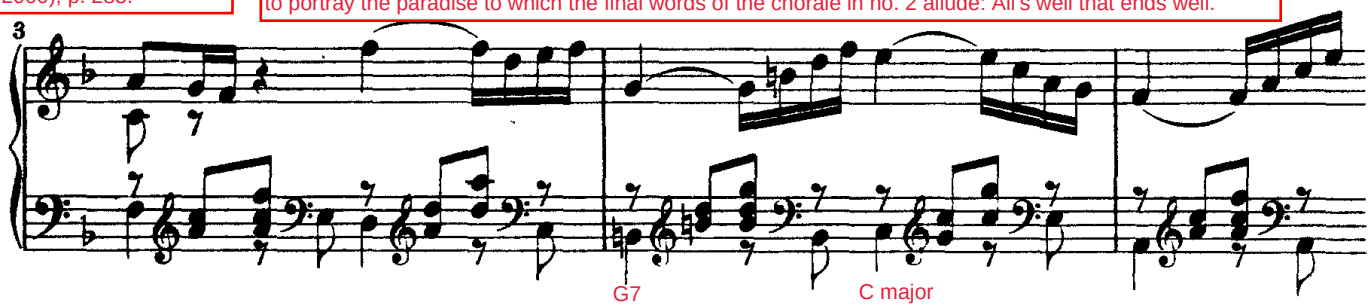
(Perhaps from an earlier concerto; added to the libretto by Bach. He later used it (more ornamented and in the key of A-flat major) as the middle movement in the F minor harpsichord concerto, BWV 1056.)

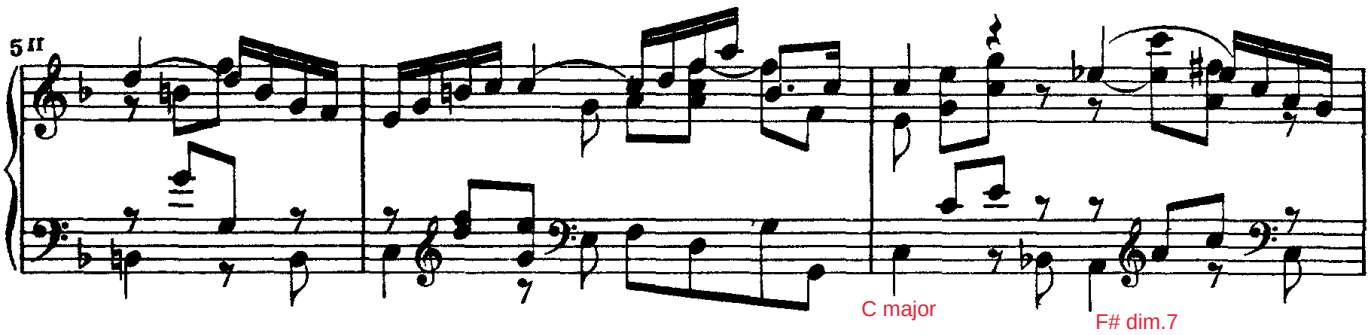
Instrumentation:
Oboe
Vln I, II
Vla
SATB
Continuo

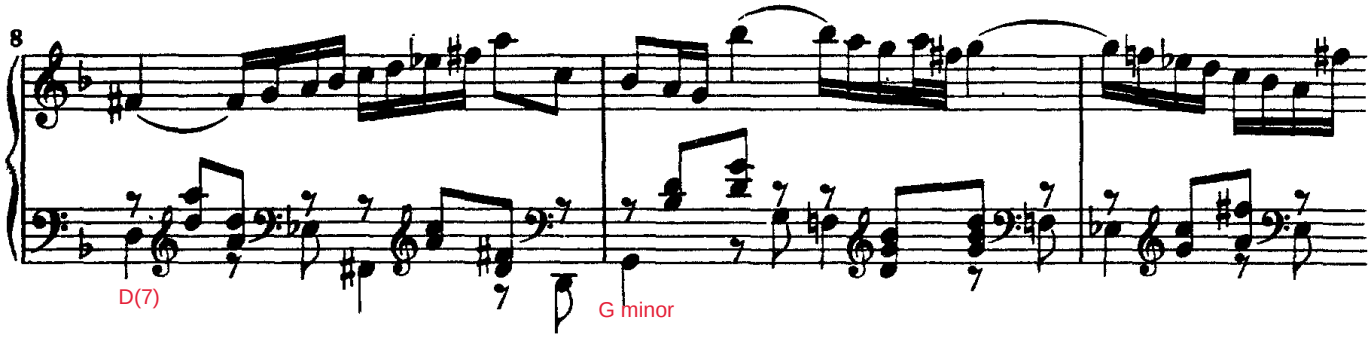
Bach's use of pre-existing concerto movements as opening sinfonias occurs in his 3rd and 4th Leipzig cantata cycles. See Christoph Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach. The Learned Musician* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), p. 283.

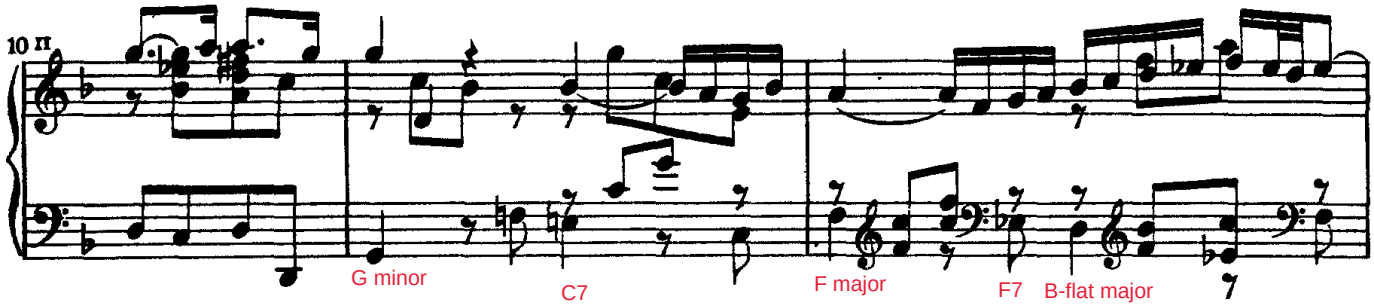


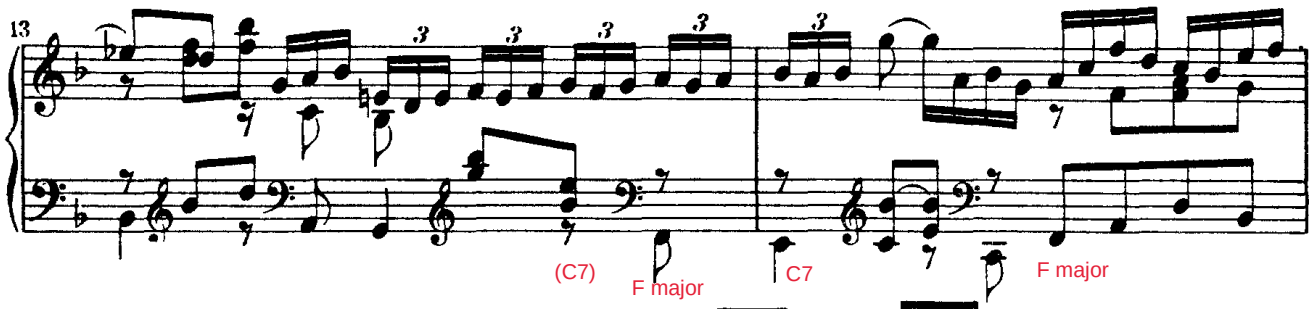
The serenity of the sinfonia contrasts greatly with the opening text of the cantata. Bach apparently intended to portray the paradise to which the final words of the chorale in no. 2 allude: All's well that ends well."

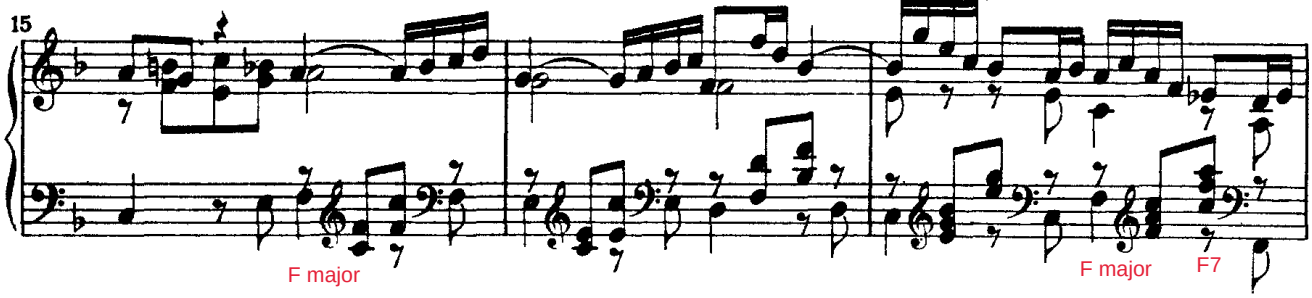


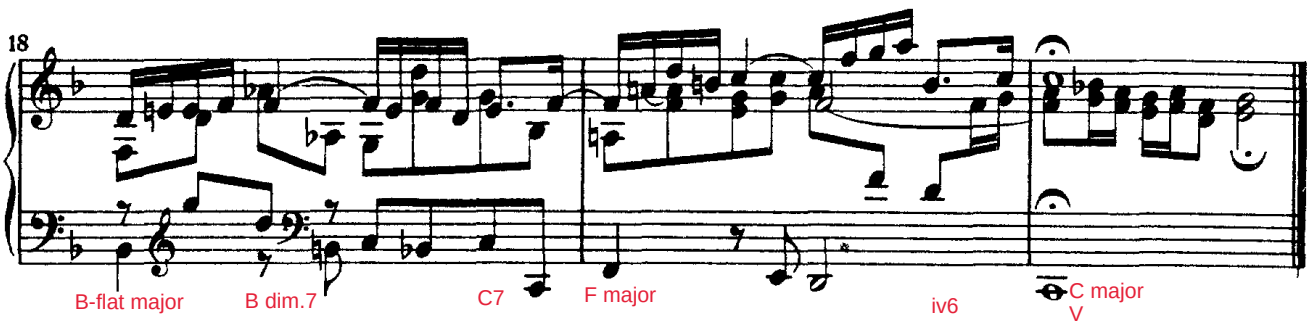










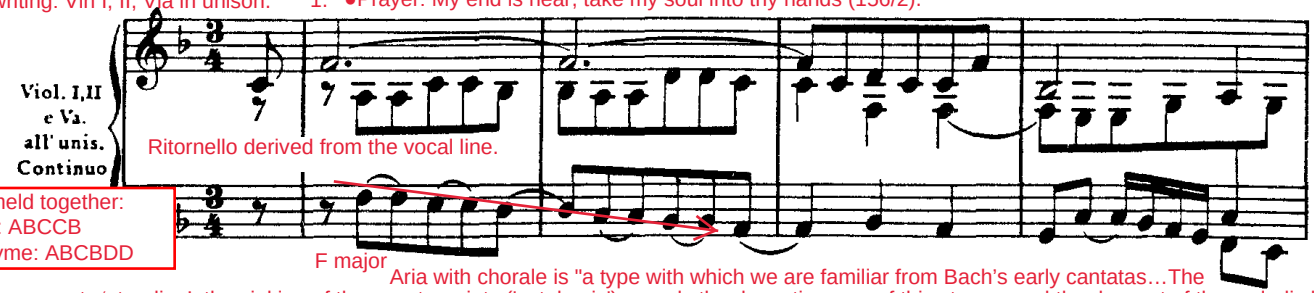


Phrygian cadence, often used for questions.
In the A-flat major version for harpsichord, the ending modulates to F minor, the key of the outer movements.

156/2. **2. Aria mit Choral** (The aria poetry tropes the chorale text.)

Low string writing: Vln I, II, Vla in unison.

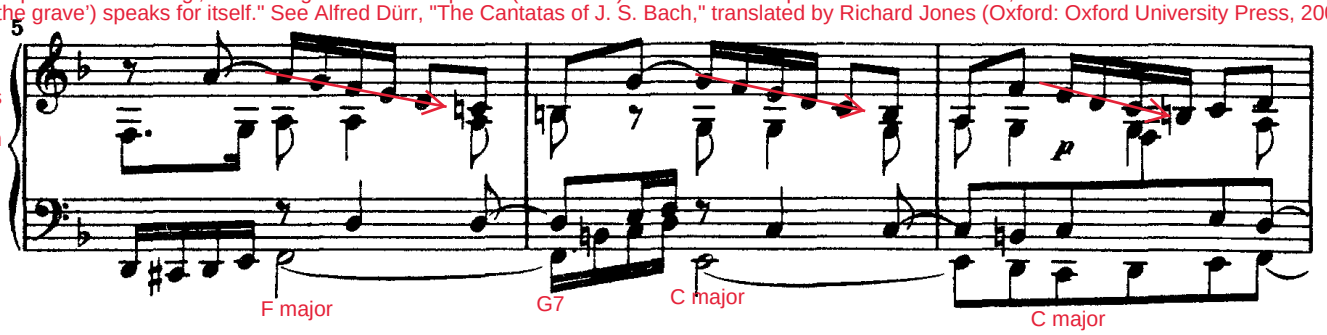
1. •Prayer: My end is near, take my soul into thy hands (156/2).

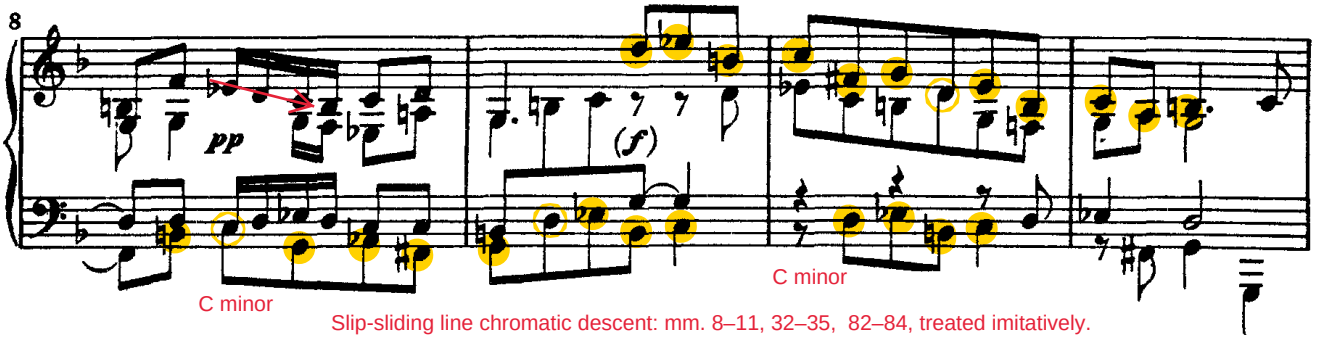


2 prayers meld together:
Aria rhyme: ABCCB
Chorale rhyme: ABCBDD

Aria with chorale is "a type with which we are familiar from Bach's early cantatas…The long-held f' represents 'standing', the sinking of the counterpoints ('catabasis') reveals the deceptiveness of this stance, and the descent of the melodic line on 'im Grabe' ('in the grave') speaks for itself." See Alfred Dürr, "The Cantatas of J. S. Bach," translated by Richard Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 213.

Regarding hybrid movements in the cantatas on Picander librettos, see note.





Slip-sliding line chromatic descent: mm. 8–11, 32–35, 82–84, treated imitatively.

A dichotomy between major and minor modes characterizes the movement. See side note for more.

Text painting: Sustained note for "[I] stand [with one foot in the grave]"; descending bass line on off-beats suggesting a staggering into the grave.

Note: This chorale is different from the closing chorale.

Continuo plays tied 8th notes (see full score).

Tenore

Aria Lines 1–2. Ich steh' mit einem Fuß im
My o - - - - - - -pen grave I see be -

p Bass staggers downward...

C major C7 F major F7 B-flat major F major

Choral (Eigene Melodie)

"Mach's mit mir…" is an acrostic hymn (1628) written by the J. H. Schein (1586–1630), for the funeral of the wife of a Leipzig town councilor and churchwarden at St. Thomas, Margarita Werner. See note for more.

Soprano (Capella)

Stollen 1 of chorale's bar form.

Setting the chorale in triple meter gives it a certain lightness.

The descending 16th-note figure reappears in the second aria.

Chorale Line 1. Mach's mit mir, Gott, nach dei - - ner
God grant that I, while here be -

Gra - - be, bald fällt der kranke Leib hin - ein, ich steh
fore me, soon falls my wea - ry corpse there - in, my o -

F major

Text painting: Descending runs depict the body falling into the grave, as referenced in the text.

Güt;
low,

mit einem Fuß im Gra - - - - - - - - - -
- pen grave I see be - fore

G7 C7 C major F major G7 C major

Chorale Line 2.

Original: meinem

hilf mir in mei - - nem
may live in Thy pro -

- be, bald, bald fällt der kranke Leib hin - ein, der kran -
me, soon, soon falls my wea - ry corpse there - in, my wea -

C major C7

"While the tenor voice represents the ambivalent attitude to dying and death (realistic knowledge of dying, putting one's house in order, uncertain prayer for God's coming and for a blessed end), the soprano voice shows a self-evident serenity, determined by faith in the promise of God's help through prayer." Martin Petzoldt, *Bach Kommentar* 2:496, trans. M. Unger. Both aria and chorale are prayers, which meld into one.

28.

Lei - - - - den,
tec - - - - tion,

- ke Leib hin - ein. bald fällt der kranke Leib hin - ein,
- ry corpse there - in, soon falls my wea - ry corpse there - in,

D7 G7 C major C7 F major G7 C major

Chromaticism and descending line for "soon the sick body falls [into the grave]."

Word painting: Slip-sliding line chromatic descent for "the sick body falls," treated imitatively. Compare mm. 9–11, 82–84.

32

bald fällt der kran - ke Leib, der kran - - - ke Leib hin -
soon falls my wea - ry corpse, my wea - - - ry corpse there -

C minor A-flat major C minor C minor

36

ein.
in,

Aria lines 3–4.

Komm,
Come,

C major C major F major

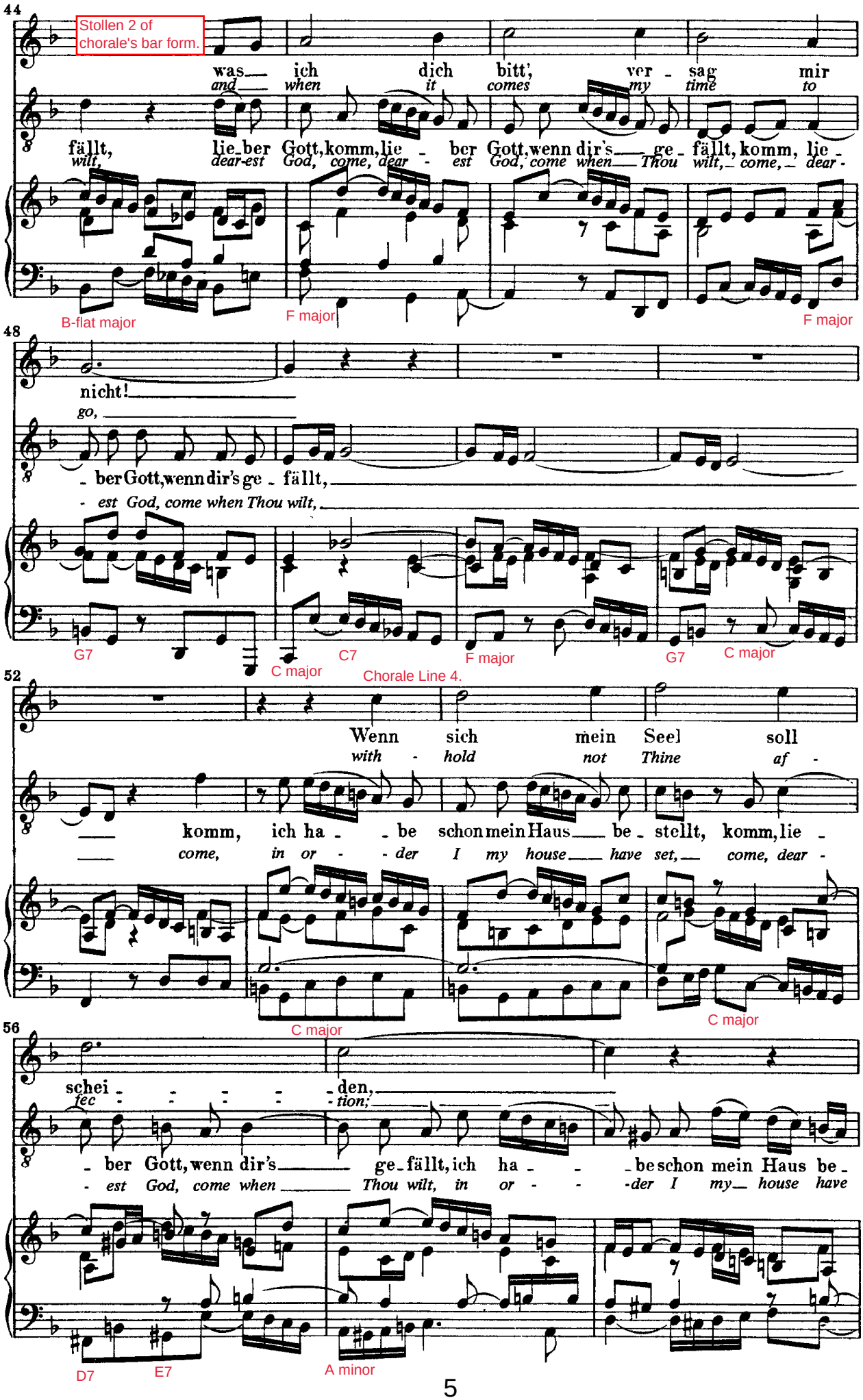
41

Breaks in the tenor line, suggests labored breathing...

lie - ber Gott, wenn dir's ge -
dear - est God, come when Thou

F major F7 B-flat major

Chorale Line 3. Although the chorale is in bar form, the repetition of the first 2 phrases is written out to allow for variation in accommodating the accompanying aria text.



The reference to putting one's house in order alludes to Isaiah 38:1: Isaiah the prophet…came to [King Hezekiah], and said to him, “Thus says the Lord: Set your house in order (Luther 1545: bestelle dein Haus); for you shall die, you shall not recover.” (Also 2 Kings 20:1, 2 Samuel 17:23.)

59

stellt, komm, lie - - ber Gott, wenn dir's ge-fällt, ich ha-be
set, come, dear - - - est God, come when Thou wilt, in or-der

A minor A minor A minor A minor

63

Abgesang of chorale's bar form.

Chorale Line 5. so nimm sie, Herr, in
with help - - ing hand my

Aria Lines 3–4 are repeated by the tenor. Together, the lines form a prayer of relinquishment, alluding to Psalm 31:5, repeated by Jesus on the cross (see note).

schon mein Haus be - stellt; komm, lie - ber Gott, wenn
I my house have set, come, dear - est God, come

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

67

dei - - ne Händ':
care dis - pel,

dir's gefällt, ich ha-be schon mein Haus be-stellt, komm, lie-ber Gott, ich ha -
when Thou wilt, in or-der I my house have set, come, dear-est God, in or -

F major F major G7 C major C7

71

- be schon mein Haus bestellt, komm, lie - ber Gott, komm, wenn dir's ge -
- der I my house have set, come, dear - est God, come, come when Thou

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

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 156

Repeated movements from minor to the major mode for "Let my end be blessed" (aria) / "All is good if good the end" (chorale).

75

fällt, *wilt,* Aria Line 5. nur laß mein En-de se - lig sein, *Ah! let me meet Thee saved from sin,*

D7 G minor D7 G major B dim.7

79

nur laß mein En-de se - lig sein, nur laß mein *Ah! let me meet Thee saved from sin, Ah! let me*

G7 C minor

Slip-sliding line chromatic descent: mm. 8–11, 32–35, 82–84, treated imitatively.

83

Chorale Line 6. ist *for*

En - de se-lig sein, nur laß mein En - - de se - lig *meet Thee saved from sin, Ah! let me meet Thee saved from*

C minor A-flat major F# dim.7 D7

87

al - - les gut, wenn gut das End'. *all is well that end - eth well.*

Regarding the historical and musical significance of this text phrase, see note.

sein, nur laß mein En - de se - - - - - - - - *sin, Ah! let me meet Thee saved*

G minor (C7) F major F major F7

Relinquishment appears to be symbolized by a gradual reduction of parts: the soprano ends with the last chorale phrase in m. 91, the oboe begins to falter in m. 97–100, the tenor drops out in m. 101, before the ritornello ending.

91

- - - lig sein, se - - - - - - - - - -

from sin, saved

B-flat major B-flat major C7

95

- - - lig sein, nur laß mein En - de

from sin, Ah! let me meet - Thee

Ob. tacet.

F major F minor C(7) F major

99

se - lig sein!

saved from sin!

Ob. tacet.

f

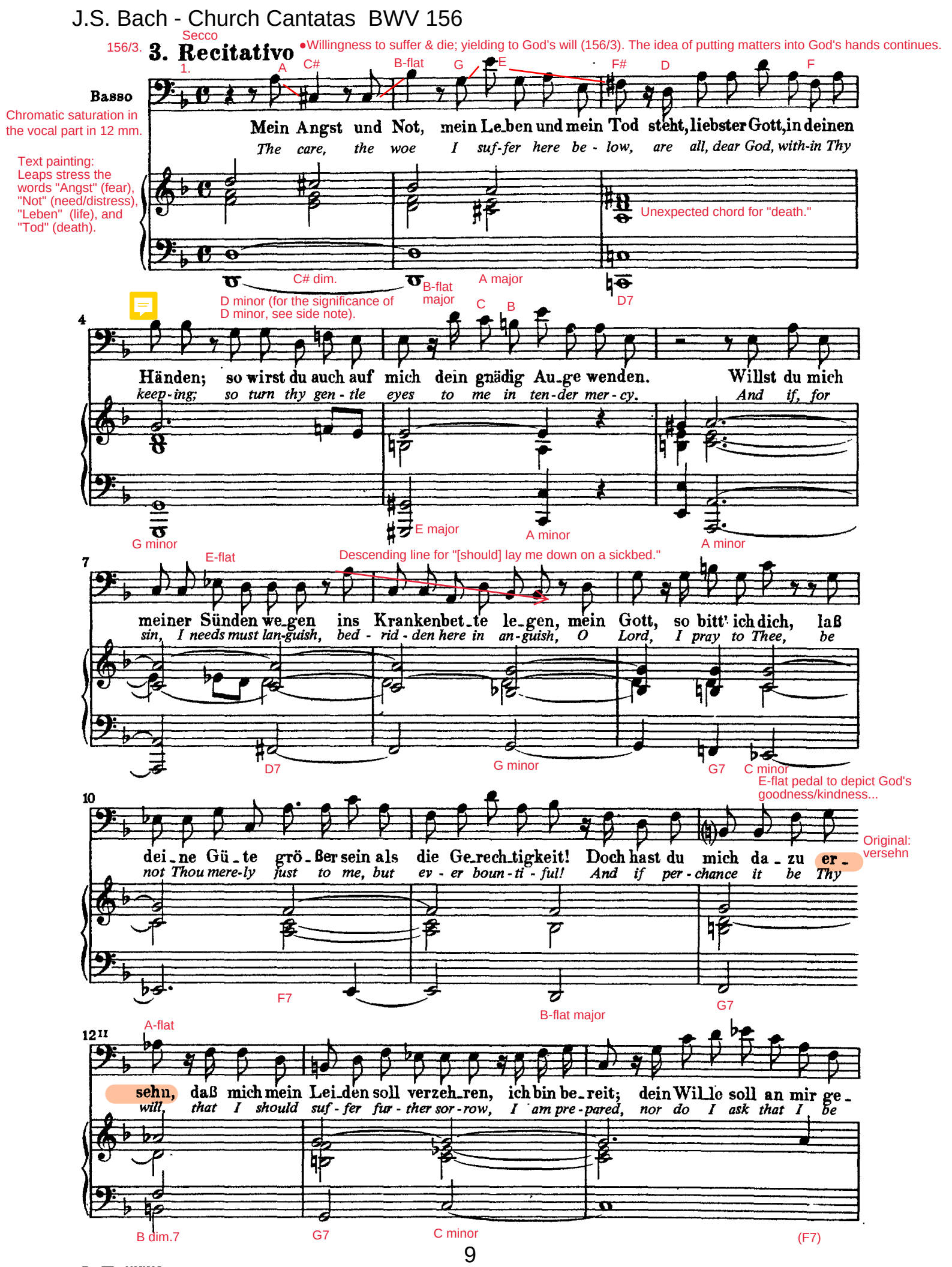
F major F7 B-flat major B-flat 7 E-flat major F7 B-flat major

104

B-flat major C7 F major F major

108

C7 F minor D-flat major G7 C major F minor F minor F major


156/3.
Secco
3. Recitativo
•Willingness to suffer & die; yielding to God's will (156/3). The idea of putting matters into God's hands continues.
Basso
Chromatic saturation in the vocal part in 12 mm.
Text painting: Leaps stress the words "Angst" (fear), "Not" (need/distress), "Leben" (life), and "Tod" (death).
Mein Angst und Not, mein Le_ben und mein Tod steht, liebster Gott, in deinen
The care, the woe I suf-fer here be - low, are all, dear God, with-in Thy
Unexpected chord for "death."
C# dim.
D minor (for the significance of D minor, see side note).
B-flat major
A major
D7
Händen; so wirst du auch auf mich dein gnädig Au_ge wenden. Willst du mich
keep-ing; so turn thy gen - tle eyes to me in ten-der mer - cy. And if, for
G minor
E major
A minor
A minor
E-flat
Descending line for "[should] lay me down on a sickbed."
meiner Sünden we_gen ins Krankenbet_te le_gen, mein Gott, so bitt' ich dich, laß
sin, I needs must lan-guish, bed - rid - den here in an-guish, O Lord, I pray to Thee, be
D7
G minor
G7
C minor
E-flat pedal to depict God's goodness/kindness...
dei_ne Gü_te grö_ßer sein als die Ge_rech_tigkeit! Doch hast du mich da_zu er_
not Thou mere-ly just to me, but ev - er boun - ti - ful! And if per - chance it be Thy
Original: versehn
F7
B-flat major
G7
A-flat
sehn, daß mich mein Lei_den soll verzeh_ren, ich bin be_reit; dein Wil_le soll an mir ge_
will, that I should suf - fer fur - ther sor - row, I am pre - pared, nor do I ask that I be
B dim.7
G7
C minor
(F7)

15

scheln, ver-scho-ne nicht und fah-re fort; laß mei-ne Not nicht lan-ge
spared; what lot Thou send-est I will bear, but grant that soon my trial be

B-flat major | A major | C# dim.7 | A7

The final line, set as arioso, appears to allude to 2 Corinthians 5:6–8: We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord…We would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. Leaps in opposite directions depict these words.

Arioso

17

wäh-ren, je län - ger hier, je spä - ter dort!
o - ver, the long - er here, the la - ter there!

Ascending diatonic fourths in the continuo appear to symbolize ascent to future glory. See side note for more.

D minor | D major | E dim. | D minor | A(7) | B-flat major | D minor

156/4.

Modified da capo

Regarding the fusion of concerto form with da capo form, see side note.

●Prayer of submission to God's will in all things (156/4). This is the central (pivot) movement in the cantata's chiastic form, where antithetical elements meet or are paradoxically inverted (formal inversion reflects an aspect of reversal or turning in the text). Here the poet turns from accepting God's will in death to desiring his will in health (both physical and spiritual). The text echoes the leper's request to Jesus in the day's Gospel reading: "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."

4. Aria

A Section.

1. Ob.

Ob.
Viol
all' soll mir gefallen")
Continuo

Ritornello derived from vocal line ("Herr, wie du wilt,

Vln I, II

B-flat major | B-flat major | B-flat 7 | G7

The "Herr, wie du willt" (Lord as thou dost will) motive begins a canon between oboe and violins; it is repeated sequentially in the continuo bass. Shaped like a bowing or nodding motion, it signifies agreement, as referenced in the text.

Form (Rhyme: ABCCDDB)
A. Ritornello (mm. 1-9) B ♭ M
Lines 1-2 (9-23) B ♭ M-FM
Rit. (23-30) FM
B. Lines 3-7 (31-39) FM-GM
Rit. (39-44) GM-Gm
Lines 3-7 (44-53) Gm-CM
Rit. (53-59) CM-B ♭ M
A'.Lines 1-2 (59-72) B ♭ M
Rit. (72-79) B ♭ M

4

Parallel 3rds & 6ths suggest sweetness.

C minor | F7 | B-flat major | C7

6 II

Ob.

Vlns.

F major | A major | D minor | F major | F major | F7

Alto is often the voice of the believing soul or church. See Martin Petzoldt, *Bach Kommentar* 1:176, 541, 2:917, etc. The alto part is characterized by leaps and a very wide range (from low F in m. 68 to high E-flat), perhaps to signify the all-encompassing nature of God's will. See Petzoldt, *Bach Kommentar*, 2:498–99.

9 Alto

Herr, was du willt, soll mir ge_fal - len, Herr, was du willt, soll mir ge_
*Lord, by Thy will shall I_ be_guid - ed,_ Lord, by Thy will shall I_ be_*

Ob.

The descending 16th-notes cross reference the figure in the first aria.

B-flat major

B-flat major

The phrase "Lord, as thou wilt" Is reminiscent of Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42; see also Matthew 26:39, Mark 14:36).

Word painting: Long melisma for "[shall] please [me]."

12

fal - - - - - - - - - len_ weil doch dein Rat _ am besten
guid - - - - - - - - - ed,_ Thy pur - pose wise_ must I ful -

Continuo repeats "Herr, wie du wilt" figure.

F7

B-flat major B-flat 7 G(7)

15

gilt, weil doch dein Rat am be_sten gilt, Herr, was du willt, Herr, was du willt,
fil, Thy pur - pose wise must I ful - fil, Lord, by Thy will, Lord, by Thy will,

C minor A-flat 7 B-flat 7

E-flat major

F7

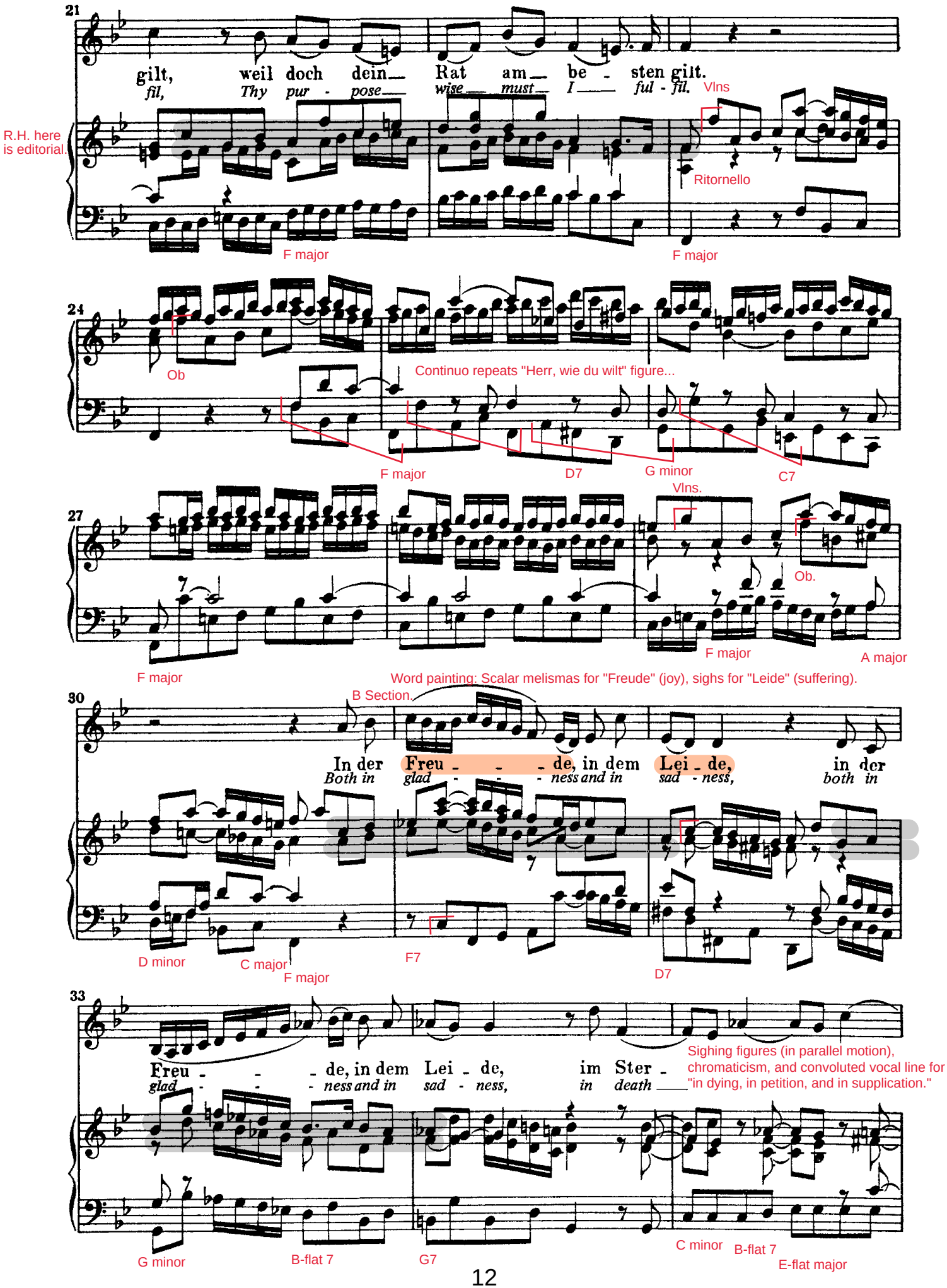
18

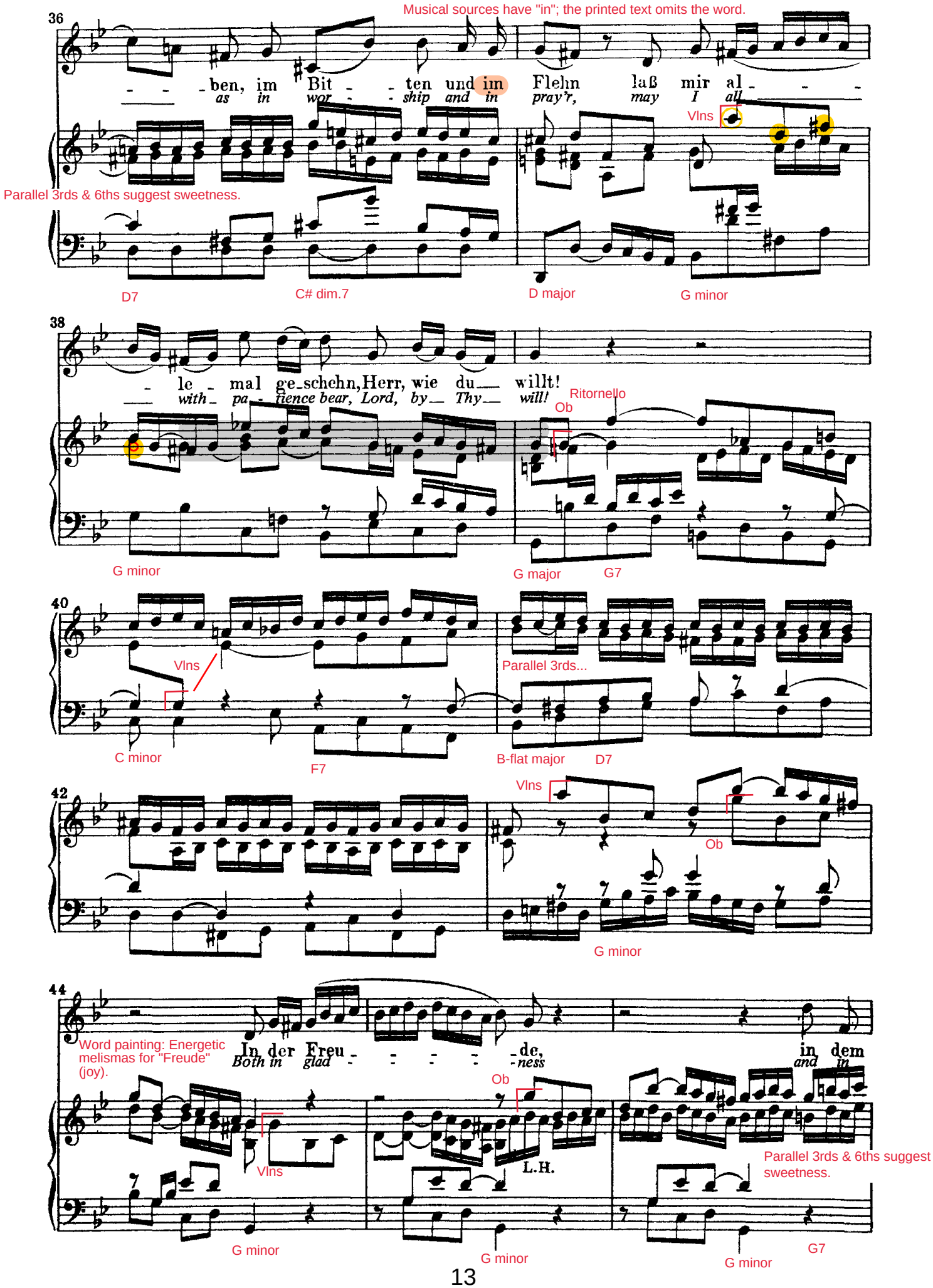
Herr, was du willt, soll mir ge - fal - len, weil doch dein Rat am besten
Lord, by Thy will shall I_ be_ guid - ed, Thy pur - pose wise must I ful -

Ob & Vlns in sweet parallel motion.

B-flat major

C7


21
gilt, weil doch dein Rat am be - sten gilt.
fil, Thy pur - pose wise must I ful - fil.
Vlns
R.H. here is editorial.
Ritornello
F major
F major
24
Ob
Continuo repeats "Herr, wie du wilt" figure...
F major
D7
G minor
C7
27
Vlns.
Ob.
F major
F major
A major
Word painting: Scalar melismas for "Freude" (joy), sighs for "Leide" (suffering).
B Section.
30
In der Freu - - - de, in dem Lei - de, in der
Both in glad - - - ness and in sad - ness, both in
D minor
C major
F major
F7
D7
33
Freu - - - de, in dem Lei - de, im Ster -
glad - - - ness and in sad - ness, in death
Sighing figures (in parallel motion), chromaticism, and convoluted vocal line for "in dying, in petition, and in supplication."
G minor
B-flat 7
G7
C minor
B-flat 7
E-flat major


Musical sources have "in"; the printed text omits the word.
36
ben, im Bit - ten und im Flehn laß mir al -
as in wor - ship and in pray'r, may I all
Vlns
Parallel 3rds & 6ths suggest sweetness.
D7
C# dim.7
D major
G minor
38
le - mal ge-schehn, Herr, wie du willt!
with pa - tience bear, Lord, by Thy will!
Ritornello
Ob
G minor
G major
G7
40
Vlns
Parallel 3rds...
C minor
F7
B-flat major
D7
42
Vlns
Ob
G minor
44
Word painting: Energetic melismas for "Freude" (joy).
In der Freu - - - - de,
Both in glad - - - - ness
in dem
and in
Ob
Vlns
L.H.
Parallel 3rds & 6ths suggest sweetness.
G minor
G minor
G minor
G7

The joyful tone of the aria is briefly disturbed, though the parallel motion in the obbligato instruments continues...

47

Lei - - - - - - - de, im Ster -
sad - - - - - - - ness, in death

C minor C(7)

Convoluted vocal line for "in dying, in petition, and in supplication" but with continued parallel 3rds and 6ths to suggest sweetness.

49II

- - - - - - ben, im Bit - ten und im Flehn laß
as in wor - ship and in pray'r, may

F minor A-flat major B dim.7 G7 F# dim.7 G major G7

Adding the motto phrase "Lord, as thou wilt" at the end of the B section (which has listed many adverse conditions) suggests Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42; see also Matthew 26:39, Mark 14:36). See Martin Petzoldt, "Bach Kommentar" 2:500.

52

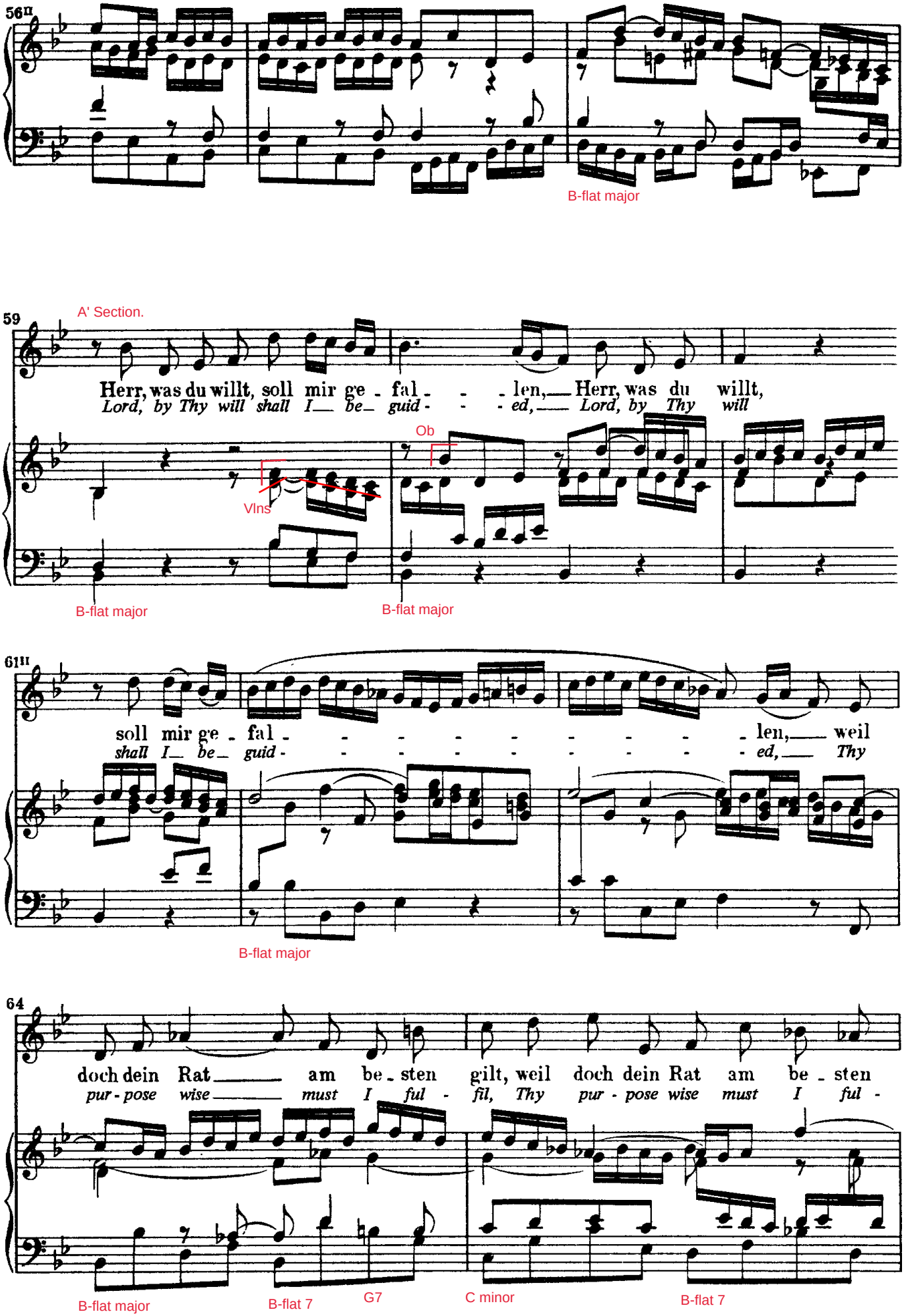
mir al - le - mal ge - schehn, Herr, wie du willt!
I all with pa - tience bear, Lord, by Thy will!

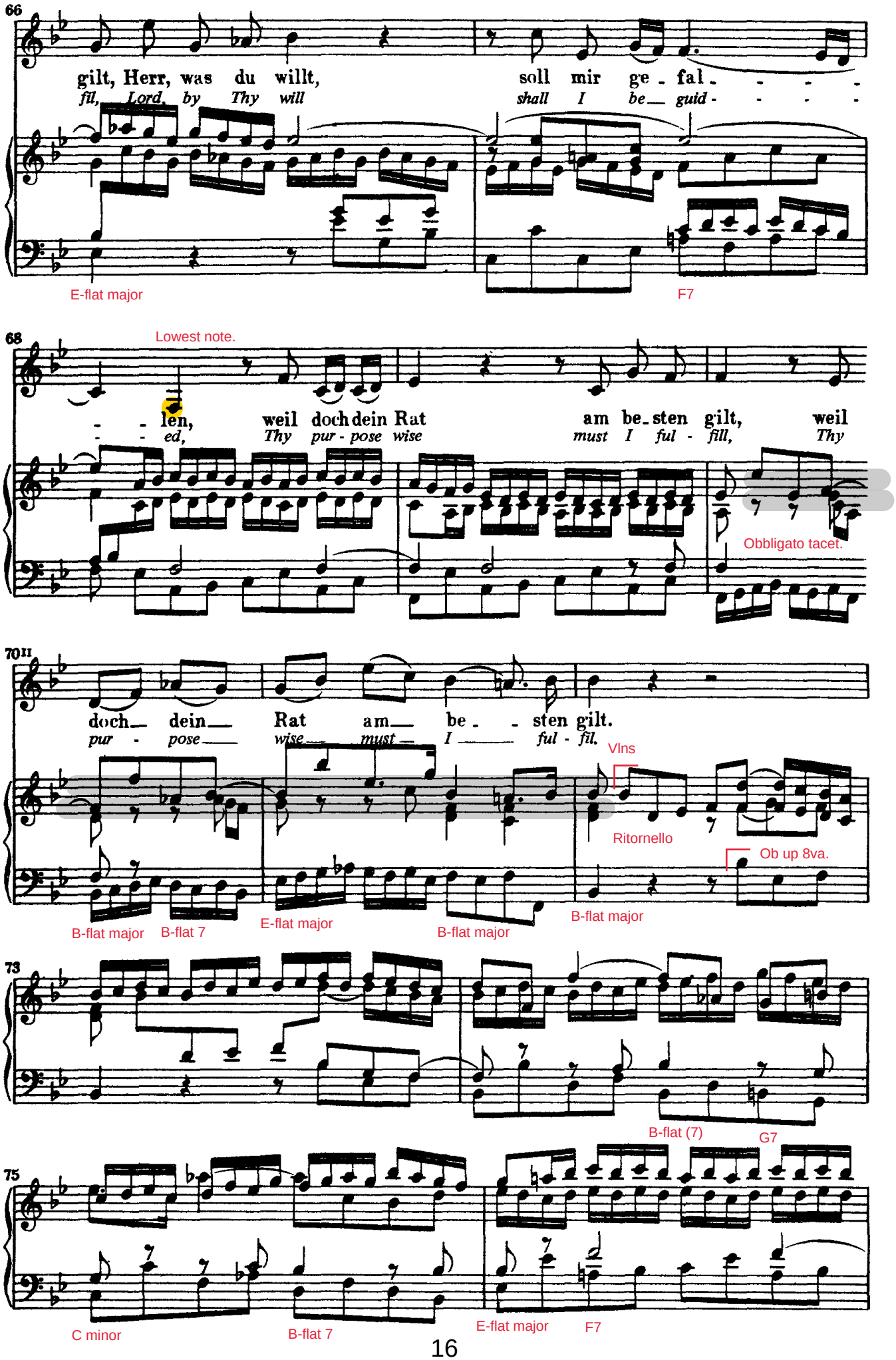
Ob Ritornello

C minor C7 C major

54

F minor B-flat 7 E-flat major F7


56II
B-flat major
59
A' Section.
Herr, was du willt, soll mir ge - fal - - - len, Herr, was du willt,
Lord, by Thy will shall I be guid - - - ed, Lord, by Thy will
Ob
Vlns
B-flat major
B-flat major
61II
soll mir ge - fal - - - - - - - - len, weil
shall I be guid - - - - - - - - ed, Thy
B-flat major
64
doch dein Rat am be - sten gilt, weil doch dein Rat am be - sten
pur - pose wise must I ful - fil, Thy pur - pose wise must I ful -
B-flat major
B-flat 7
G7
C minor
B-flat 7


66
gilt, Herr, was du willt,
fil, Lord, by Thy will
soll mir ge - fal - - - -
shall I be guid - - - -
E-flat major
F7
68
Lowest note.
- - len, weil doch dein Rat
- - ed, Thy pur - pose wise
am be - sten gilt, weil
must I ful - fill, Thy
Obbligato tacet.
70II
doch dein Rat am be - sten gilt.
pur - pose wise must I ful - fil.
Vlns
Ritornello
Ob up 8va.
Right hand here is editorial realization.
B-flat major
B-flat 7
E-flat major
B-flat major
B-flat major
73
B-flat (7)
G7
75
C minor
B-flat 7
E-flat major
F7

Brief move to G minor suggests momentary unrest or indecision.

77

B-flat major

B-flat major

Secco

156/5. **5. Recitativo**

•Spiritual health desired more than physical health (156/5). This movement is the counterpart to no. 2 in the cantata's chiastic structure. Having there accepted God's will in death, the poet now expresses a commitment to God's will in health (both physical and spiritual).

1.

Und willst du, daß ich nicht soll kranken, so werd' ich dir von Her_zen
If, Lord, Thou keep me well and thriv - ing, ro - bust and strong for stud - dy

D(7) G minor

3

dan_ken; doch a_ber gib mir auch da_bei, daß auch in meinem frischen
striv - ing, my praise and thanks are due to Thee; keep Thou my bod - y hale and

G minor C major

5 II

Lei_be die See_le sonder Krankheit sei und al_le_zeit ge_sund ver_blei_be.
sound, from ail - ment and dis - or - der free to Thee in love for - ev - er bound.

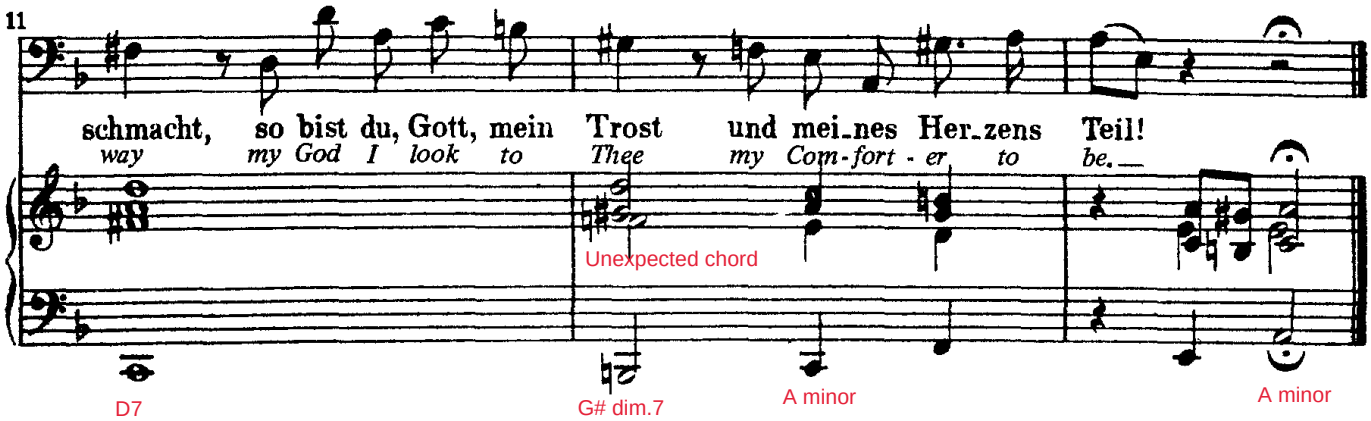
A(7) D minor

8

Nimm sie durch Geist und Wort in acht, denn dieses ist mein Heil, und wenn mir Leib und Seel ver_
Pre - serve my soul un-marred and whole, its mal-a - dies al - lay, and when this bo - dy pines a -

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

Almost verbatim quotation of Psalm 73:26: My flesh and my heart may fail (Luther 1545: verschmachtet), but God is the strength of my heart and my portion (Luther 1545: Trost und Teil) for ever.

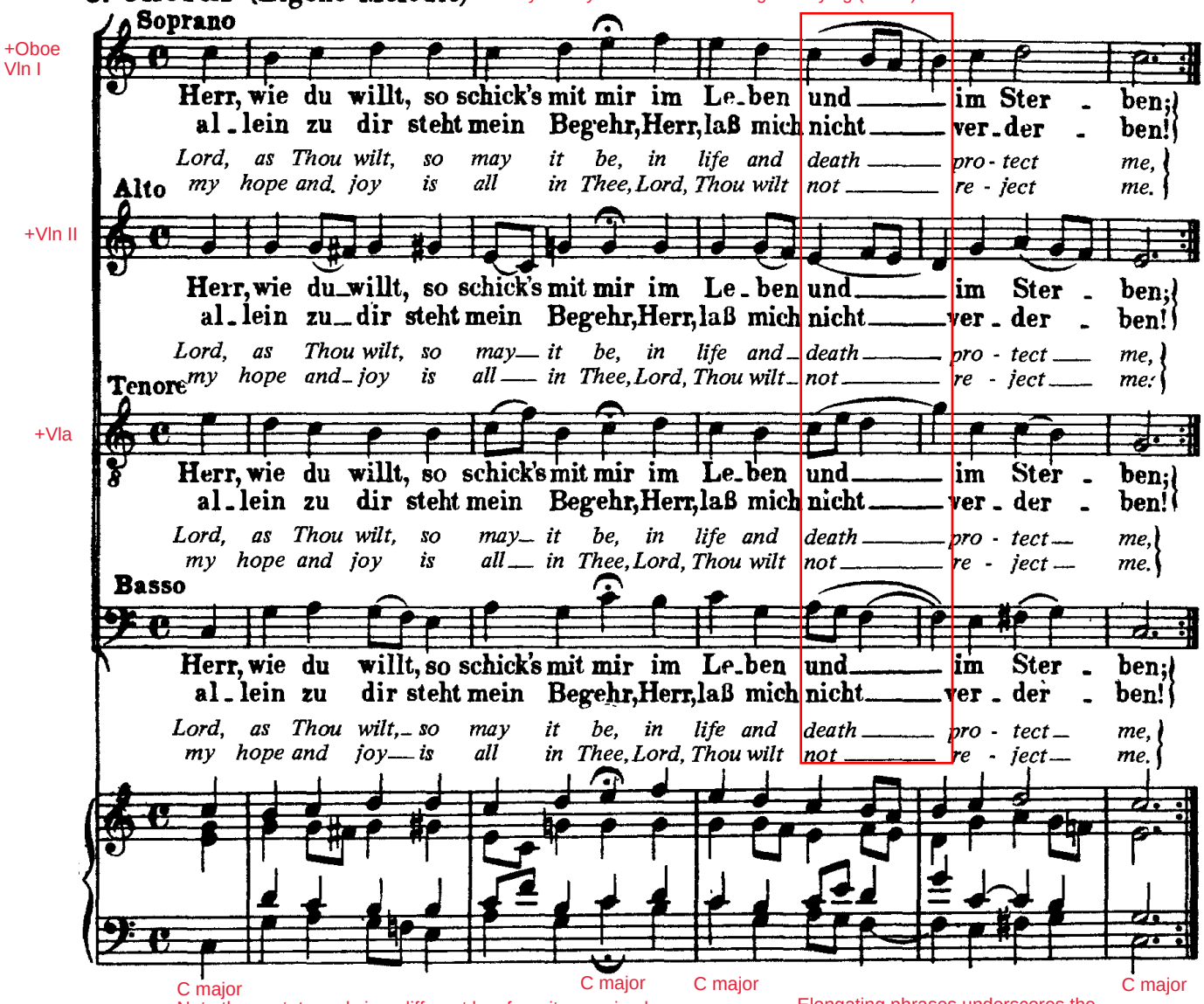


This is the opening stanza of three in the 1582 chorale by Kaspar Bienemann (1540–1591), also named Melissander. The chorale represents a catechismal response to the foregoing movements. It is the same chorale text that Bach combined with recitatives for the opening movement of BWV 73, the cantata Bach wrote for the same Sunday in 1724 (23 January). There it appeared to the tune of "Wo Gott, der Herr, nicht bei uns hält."

(See also 73/1.)

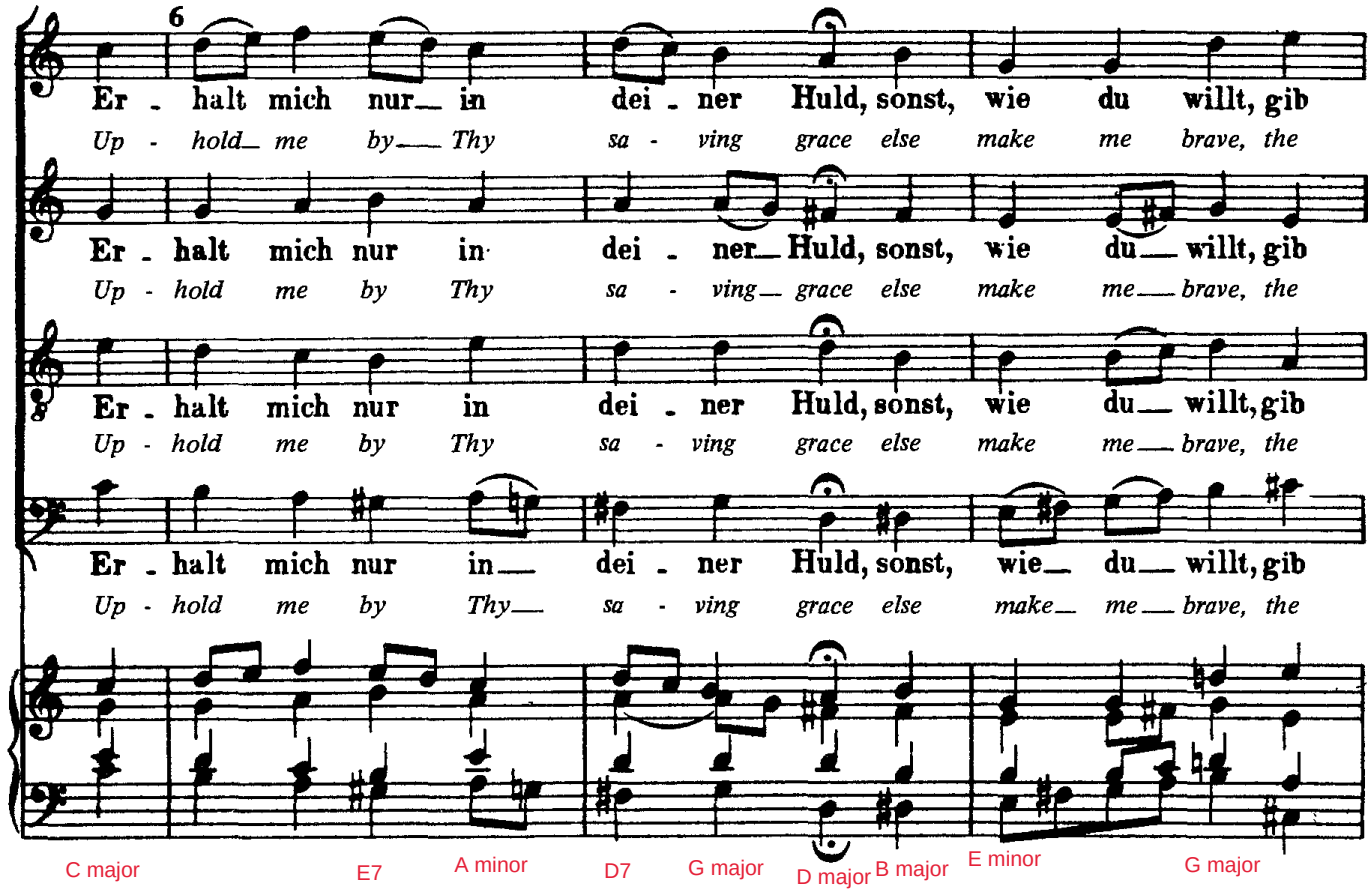
156/6. **6. Choral (Eigene Melodie)**

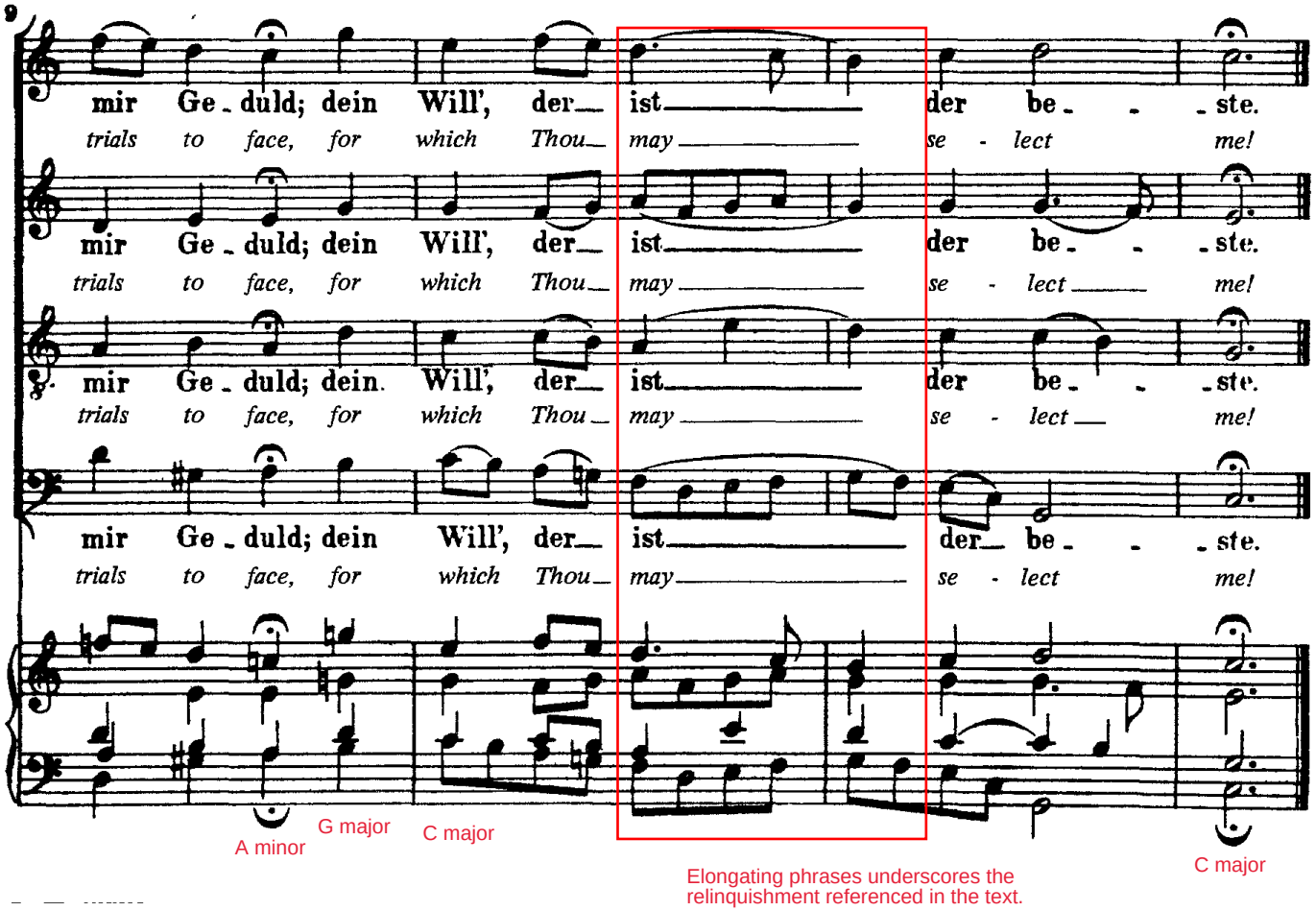
•Prayer: Thy will be done in living and dying (156/6).



Note the cantata ends in a different key from its opening key.
For the significance of C, see side note.

Elongating phrases underscores the relinquishment referenced in the text.


6
Er - halt mich nur in dei - ner Huld, sonst, wie du willt, gib
Up - hold me by Thy sa - ving grace else make me brave, the
Er - halt mich nur in dei - ner Huld, sonst, wie du willt, gib
Up - hold me by Thy sa - ving grace else make me brave, the
Er - halt mich nur in dei - ner Huld, sonst, wie du willt, gib
Up - hold me by Thy sa - ving grace else make me brave, the
Er - halt mich nur in dei - ner Huld, sonst, wie du willt, gib
Up - hold me by Thy sa - ving grace else make me brave, the
C major
E7
A minor
D7
G major
D major
B major
E minor
G major


9
mir Ge - duld; dein Will', der ist der be - ste.
trials to face, for which Thou may se - lect me!
mir Ge - duld; dein Will', der ist der be - ste.
trials to face, for which Thou may se - lect me!
mir Ge - duld; dein Will', der ist der be - ste.
trials to face, for which Thou may se - lect me!
mir Ge - duld; dein Will', der ist der be - ste.
trials to face, for which Thou may se - lect me!
A minor
G major
C major
C major
Elongating phrases underscores the relinquishment referenced in the text.