

Regarding the problematic source material, see note.

# Church Cantatas BWV 156

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

Introduction & updates at [melvinunger.com](http://melvinunger.com).

Regarding Picander, see notes.

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)

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 concealed."  
Librettist: Picander (Christian Friedrich Henrici)  
FP: probably 23 January 1729 (St. Nicholas), from  
Bach's fourth Leipzig cantata cycle (the "Picander cycle").

J.S. Bach  
**Cantata No. 156**  
Ich steh mit einem Fuß im Grabe  
Bach often used chiasmic (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** (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.)  
156/1. **Adagio**

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.

Oboe

Strings

F major

F major

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."

3

G7

C major

5 II

C major

F# dim.7

8

D(7)

G minor

10 II

G minor

C7

F major

F7 B-flat major

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 156

(C7) F major C7 F major

F major F major F7

B-flat major B dim.7 C7 F major iv6 C major

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

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.

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

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

Regarding tonally open ritornellos, see note.



Viol. I, II  
e Va.  
all' unis.  
Continuo

Ritornello derived from the vocal line.

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," revised & translated by Richard Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 213.

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

F major G7 C major C major

Bach's double echoes may suggest the body getting weaker, as referenced in the text.



C minor C minor

Slip-sliding line chromatic descent: mm. 8-11, 32-35, 82-84, treated canonically, suggests inevitability.



**Note: This chorale is different from the closing chorale.**

Continuo  
plays tied  
3th notes  
(see full score).

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

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

"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.

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

Original:  
meinem

28.

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.

36.

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

41.



J.S. Bach - Church 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.

44 Stollen 2 of chorale's bar form.

was— ich dich bitt', ver - sag mir  
and— when it comes my time to

fällt, lie.ber Gott, komm, lie - ber Gott, wenn dir's ge - fällt, komm, lie -  
wilt, dear-est God, come, dear - est God, come when— Thou wilt, come, dear -

B-flat major F major F major

48

nicht!  
go,

- ber Gott, wenn dir's ge - fällt,  
- est God, come when Thou wilt,

G7 C major C7 F major G7 C major

52 Chorale Line 4.

Wenn sich mein Seel soll  
with - hold not Thine af -

komm, ich ha - be schon mein Haus be - stellt, komm, lie -  
come, in or - der I my house have set, come, dear -

C major C major

56

schei - den,  
fec - tion;

- ber Gott, wenn dir's ge - fällt, ich ha - be schon mein Haus be -  
- est God, come when Thou wilt, in or - der I my house have

D7 E7 A minor

59

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

A minor A minor A minor

63

Abgesang of chorale's bar form.

Chorale Line 5. so with nimm sie, Herr, in my  
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

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 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 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

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

*Chorale Line 6. ist for*

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

87

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

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

G minor (C7) F major F7

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



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 - lig sein, 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 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



# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 156

156/3. **3. Recitativo** *Secco*

•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).

1. A C# B-flat G E F# D F

Mein Angst und Not, mein Leben und mein Tod steht, liebster Gott, in deinen  
The care, the woe I suffer here be - low, are all, dear God, with-in Thy

Unexpected chord for "death."

4 D minor (for the significance of D minor, see side note). C# dim. B-flat major C B 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

7 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

10 E-flat pedal to depict God's goodness/kindness...

dei-ne Gü-te grö-ßer sein als die Ge-rech-tig-keit! 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

F7 B-flat major G7

Original: versehn

12 II A-flat

sehn, daß mich mein Lei-den soll ver-zeh-ren, ich bin be-reit; dein Wille 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)

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15

scheln, verscho-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.

17

**Arioso**

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

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

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

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

Modified da capo

## 4. Aria

• 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."

1. Ob.

A Section.

Ob. Vln I, II

Ritornello derived from vocal line ("Herr, wie du wilt, soll mir gefallen") in canon between Ob & Vlns.

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

Form (Rhyme: ABCDDBB)  
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

The "Herr, wie du wilt" (Lord as thou dost wilt) 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.

4

Parallel 3rds & 6ths suggest sweetness.

C minor F7 B-flat major C7

6 II

Ob. Vlns.

Reversed structure

F major A major D minor 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 willst, soll mir ge-fal - len, Herr, was du willst, 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)

[illegible]

18

Herr, was du willst, 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

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21

gilt, weil doch dein Rat am be - sten gilt.  
fil, Thy pur - pose wise must I ful - fil.

R.H. here is editorial.

Vlins

Ritornello

F major F major

24

Ob

Continuo repeats "Herr, wie du wilt" figure...

F major D7 G minor C7

Vlins.

27

7

F major A major

30

B Section.

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 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



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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 -

Parallel 3rds & 6ths suggest sweetness.

D7 C# dim.7 D major G minor

Vlns

38

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

Ritornello

G minor G major G7

Ob

40

Vlns

Parallel 3rds...

C minor F7 B-flat major D7

42

Vlns

Ob

G minor

44

B. Section.

Word painting: Energetic melismas for "Freude" (joy).

In der Freu - de, in dem  
Both in glad - ness and in

Vlns L.H.

Parallel 3rds & 6ths suggest sweetness.

G minor G minor G minor G7

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

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

C minor C(7)  
Pulsing bass, "Lord as thou wilt" motive absent.

Convoluted, chromatic vocal line for "in dying, in petition, and in supplication" but accompanied by 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 wilt!  
I all with pa - tience bear, Lord, by Thy will!

Ob

C minor C7 C major

54

F minor B-flat 7 E-flat major F7

56

B-flat major

59

A' Section.

Herr, was du willst, soll mir ge - fal - - - len, — Herr, was du willst,  
 Lord, by Thy will shall I be - guid - - - ed, — Lord, by Thy will

B-flat major

61

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

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66

gilt, Herr, was du willst, soll mir ge - fal -  
 fil, Lord, by Thy will shall I be - guid -

E-flat major F7

68

len, weil doch dein Rat am be - sten gilt, weil  
 ed, Thy pur - pose wise must I ful - fill, Thy

Lowest note.

Obbligato tacet.

70

doch - dein - Rat am - be - sten gilt.  
 pur - pose wise must I ful - fil.

Vlns  
 Ritornello  
 Ob up 8va.

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

Right hand  
 here is  
 editorial  
 realization.



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 Herzen  
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

511

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-dypines 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.

11

schmacht, so bist du, Gott, mein Trost und mei-nes Her-zens Teil!  
 way my God I look to Thee my Com-fort - er to be.

Unexpected chord

D7 G# dim.7 A minor A minor

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."

156/6. **6. Choral (Eigene Melodie)** (See also 73/1.)  
 •Prayer: Thy will be done in living and dying (156/6).

+Oboe Vln I

**Soprano**

Herr, wie du willst, so schick's mit mir im Le-ben und im Ster - ben;  
 al-lein zu dir steht mein Begehr, Herr, laß mich nicht ver - der - ben!  
 Lord, as Thou wilt, so may it be, in life and death pro - tect me,  
 my hope and joy is all in Thee, Lord, Thou wilt not re - ject me.

+Vln II

**Alto**

Herr, wie du willst, so schick's mit mir im Le-ben und im Ster - ben;  
 al-lein zu dir steht mein Begehr, Herr, laß mich nicht ver - der - ben!  
 Lord, as Thou wilt, so may it be, in life and death pro - tect me,  
 my hope and joy is all in Thee, Lord, Thou wilt not re - ject me.

+Vla

**Tenore**

Herr, wie du willst, so schick's mit mir im Le-ben und im Ster - ben;  
 al-lein zu dir steht mein Begehr, Herr, laß mich nicht ver - der - ben!  
 Lord, as Thou wilt, so may it be, in life and death pro - tect me,  
 my hope and joy is all in Thee, Lord, Thou wilt not re - ject me.

**Basso**

Herr, wie du willst, so schick's mit mir im Le-ben und im Ster - ben;  
 al-lein zu dir steht mein Begehr, Herr, laß mich nicht ver - der - ben!  
 Lord, as Thou wilt, so may it be, in life and death pro - tect me,  
 my hope and joy is all in Thee, Lord, Thou wilt not re - ject me.

C major C major C major C major

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 willst, 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 willst, gib  
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Er - halt mich nur in dei - ner Huld, sonst, wie du willst, gib  
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Er - halt mich nur in dei - ner Huld, sonst, wie du willst, 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.