

The cantata is a "dialogue cantata (particularly evident in the final movement where the voices are identified as "Soul" and "Jesus." The overall disposition of the 5 vocal movements is symmetrical.

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

NBA I/3; BC A18

1. S. after Christmas (BWV 152, 122, 28)

\*Galatians 4:1-7 (Through Christ we come of age and are free from the law)

\*Luke 2:33-40 (Simeon and Hanna prophesy of Christ)

Librettist: Salomon Franck (see notes).

FP: 30 December 1714 (Weimar court chapel)

Note: The work has been handed down in two keys because of pitch variability at the time. It is now usually notated in G minor/B-flat major (see notes).

Chamber Dialogue Cantata with unusual instrumentation, no chorus or chorale

## Cantata No. 152

### Tritt auf die Glaubensbahn

Note: Bach made a few changes to the text (highlighted below). Petzoldt argues that they serve to clarify the theology (even at the expense of poetic quality) as do Bach's amendments in the librettos by Mariane von Ziegler. See *Bach-Kommentar* 2:255.

Martin Petzoldt outlines the symmetrical structure:

4. S aria. Cornerstone of faith
5. B recit. Anger of the world at the Son of God
3. B recit. Fall/resurrection of Israel through the Savior
6. S/B duet. Savior, teach me faith
2. B aria. Man, step out on the path of faith
1. Sinfonia. Character of going and discipleship

No chorale!

Petzoldt argues that nos. 2, 3, and 5 are written from the perspective of Simeon's *Nunc dimittis* (which immediately precedes the Gospel reading of the day). See *Bach-Kommentar* 2:255.

Unusual Instrumentation (see note):

Recorder

Oboe

Vla d'amore

Vla da gamba

Soprano

Bass

Continuo

Alfred Dürr notes that "unlike vocal permutation fugues...[this rare instrumental one] includes modulatory episodes." See Alfred Dürr, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, revised and translated by Richard Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 137.

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 152

22. 3) Via d'am

E minor E minor D7 G major B7

28. E minor E minor B minor 4) Via da gamba Continuo

34. B minor A7 D major A# dim.7 B minor B minor


40. D7 (G major) G major G major

46. B major E minor D7 G major G major D major


52. 6) Rec

D major F# major B minor


# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 152

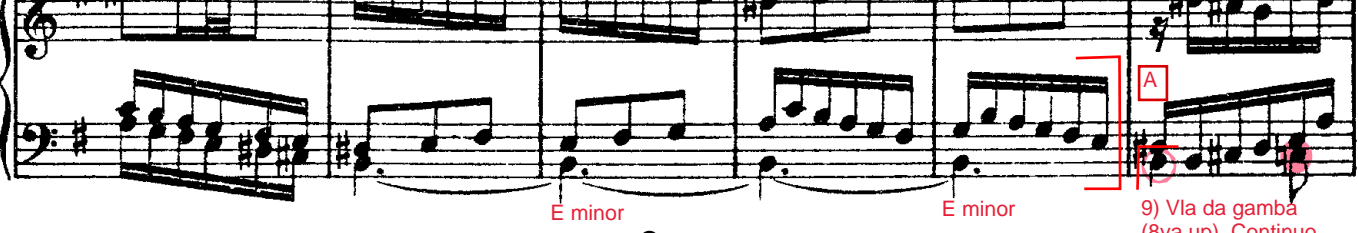
58.    
 A7 D major D major G major

64.    
 7) Vla d'am   
 A   
 G major G major B major E minor D7

70.    
 8) Ob   
 A   
 G major F#7 B minor   
 No bass (similar to an organ piece, when the pedals are silent).

76.    
 (B minor) A7 D major F#7 B minor B minor

82.    
 D7 G major (B7) E minor (G7) (C major) E minor

88.    
 E minor E minor   
 9) Vla da gamba (8va up), Continuo

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 152

94. *Ob*

100. *10) Rec*

106.

111. *Rec*

115. *mf*

120. *Stretto*

120. *12) Ob (8va up)*

*E minor* *D major* *G major* *B7* *E minor*

*E minor* *E minor* *G major* *C major* *B7*

*E minor* *E minor* *E minor*

*B7 B pedal...* *E minor* *B7* *E minor*

*B7* *E minor* *E major* *E7*

*A minor*

*A* *B* *A* *B* *A* *B*

*hemiola*

*11) Rec*

*pp*

*p*

*mf*

*pp*

*Stretto*

*12) Ob (8va up)*

*A* *B* *A* *B* *A* *B*

*A minor*



# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 152

125. *mf*

A minor E minor E minor D7

131. 13) Rec

G major B7 E minor E minor

137. hemiola

D7 G major B7 E minor E minor

**Aria.**

152/2. (Allegro moderato ♩ = 94.) •Cornerstone laid by God: don't stumble but believe! (152/2).

The descending 5-note scale is related to the fugue subject of no. 1.

1. Ob

Ritornello *mf* E minor E minor E(70)

5.

A minor (D7) D7 G major D# dim.7

8. Cross figure

B(7) E minor N6 E minor

The metaphor of Christ as cornerstone (not identified until the following movement) is derived from various biblical passages (see note for the biblical background and Alfred Dürr's explanation of their relevance in the libretto).

This type of aria is called a "Devisenarie" (a term coined by Hugo Riemann) 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. Here the motto (a diatonic descending pattern related to the fugue subject of the opening movement) symbolizes the "Glaubensbahn" ("path of faith").



11. **Basso.** Bass is often the voice of authority / vox Christi.

For word-for-word English translations, see Unger, *Handbook to Bach's Sacred Cantata Texts*.

11. **Tritt auf die Glaubens - bahn,**  
Walk on the path-of-faith"

E minor E minor E7

Word painting: The "path of faith" is further depicted with scalar melismas.

14. tritt auf die Glaubens - bahn.

A minor B7 E minor

Emphatic leaps for "God has set the stone."

17. Gott hat den Stein ge - le - get,

E minor E7 A minor

21. der Zi - on hält und trä - get, tritt auf die Glaubens -

D7 G major

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 152

25.

bahn, tritt auf die Glaubensbahn!

Ritornello

*mf*

G major G major

29.

Gott hat denSteinge - le - get,

*p*

G major E7 A minor

33.

Word painting: Sustained notes interspersed with melismas for "träget" ("carry/bear up").

der Zi-on hält und trä -

G7 C major 7

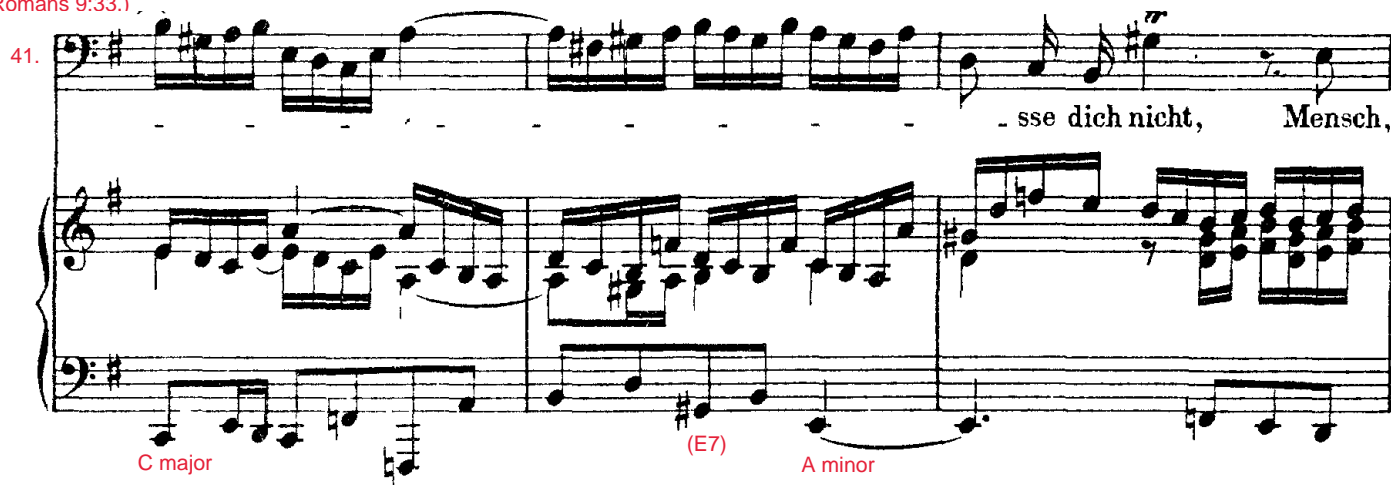
37.

get, Mensch, sto -

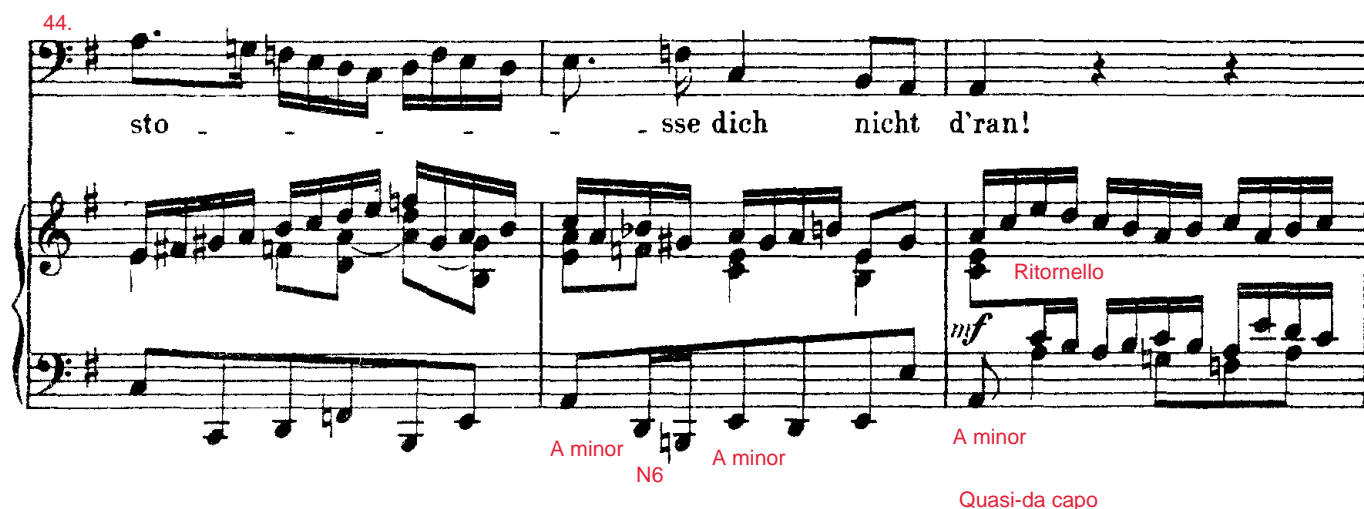
E7 A minor A7

D minor (G7) G7

"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and he who believes in him will not be put to shame." To you therefore who believe, he is precious, but for those who do not believe, "The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner," and "A stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall"; for they stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. (Also Romans 9:33.)

41. 

C major (E7) A minor

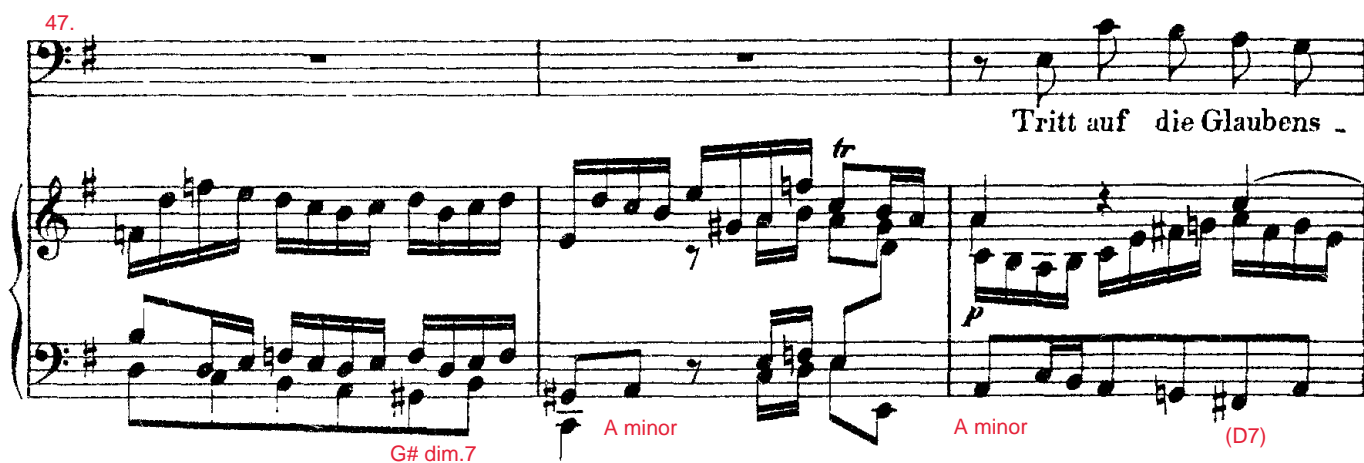
44. 

sto ... sse dich nicht d'ran!

Ritornello

A minor N6 A minor A minor

Quasi-da capo

47. 

Tritt auf die Glaubens ...

G# dim.7 A minor A minor (D7)

50. 

bahn, tritt auf die Glau-bens - bahn,

D7 G major



53. tritt auf die Glau - bens -

(B7) B7 E minor E7

56. bahn. tritt auf die Glaubensbahn!

N6 Secco B7 E minor E minor

**Dal Segno.**

Chromatic saturation  
in the vocal part in  
8 mm.

152/3. **Recitativo.** 1. Basso. B E F# G C A D#

The text alludes to Simeon's prophetic words to Mary and Joseph in the Gospel reading (Luke 2:33-35: Simeon blessed them and said to Mary [Jesus] mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

Der Heiland ist ge - setzt in Is - ra - el zum Fall und Auferstehen! Der

The Savior has-been established in Israel for falling and rising! (This)

Text painting: Emphatic drop of a perfect fifth for "setting the cornerstone."

Dramatically huge drop for "Fall."

E minor B7 E minor

4. ed - le Stein ist sonder Schuld, wenn sich die bö - se Welt so hart an ihm verletzt, ja

noble stone is without fault, even-if - the wicked world so severely against it injures (itself), yes

D major D(7) D7 C# dim.7

For biblical background, see note.

7. ü - ber ihn zur Höl - len - fällt, weil sie boshafte an ihn

over it into hell - falls, because it spitefully against it

D minor E(7)

All of this right hand is an editorial realization...

Patter diction (operatic).

Text painting: Descending cascade for "falling down into hell."

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 152

A motivic arioso ending (with figura corta—see note) differentiates the "blessed Christian" from the "evil world."

(Arioso  $\text{♩} = 72$ )

9. *tr*

ren net und Got tes Huld und Gna de nicht er kennet! Doch se - blessed lie

runs and God's favor and grace (does) not acknowledge! But

A minor

iv6 Phrygian cadence often used for questions.

V

12. *Figura corta*

ist ein aus - elect er-wähl-ter Christ. der seinen Glau bensgrund, der seinen

is an elect Christian, who his faith's foundation, who his

A minor D7 G major A7 D major E minor

Lehms original: "Glaubens=Bau" ("faith structure")

Lehms original: "gründet" ("founded")

Imitation between continuo and bass singer illustrates that "building on Christ the cornerstone" is done by imitation ("imitatio Christi").

Text painting:  
Emphatic drop of a seventh for "basing one's faith on the cornerstone."  
Bach changed text even though it impairs the rhyme.

15. *Text painting*

Glau - bensgrund auf die sen Eckstein le - get, weil er da - durch Heil und Erlösung

faith's foundation on this cornerstone lays, for he thereby Salvation and redemption

G major 19. G major G major

The repeated text is given a new melody with wide intervals for emphasis.

finds findet. Erlö - - sung fin - det, weil er da - durch Heil und Erlö - sung. Heil

G major

22. *mf*

und Erlö - - sung fin - det.

G major G major G major

No. 3 is the central movement in a symmetrical architecture. It presents the heart of the matter: a prayer for help to treasure Christ the cornerstone.

The text alludes to 1 Peter 2:6-8: For it stands in scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious... To you therefore who believe, he is precious...but for those who do not believe... "a stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall."

# Aria. •Prayer: Precious stone, help me to find salvation in thee (152/4).

Since the "stone" is a symbol for Christ, Bach emphasizes its "preciousness" with delicate instrumentation, the instruments interacting with the singer on an equal footing. As in the final duet, the soprano represents the Soul as mystic bride, who sings a love song to Jesus.

152/4. Adagio. (♩ = 54.)

1. Rec

Ritornello derived from vocal line.

Vla d'am

G major

3.

5.

G pedal...

G major

7.

9.

Soprano.

G7 C major

(D7)

D7

G major

Stein.

der ü - ber al - le

Schätze, hilf, dass

Text painting: Ascending steps for "über alle" ("above all [treasures]").

Rec

Vla d'am

G major

12.

ich

al - ler

Zeit

durch den Glauben auf dich

se - tze

mei - nen Grund der Selig -

Text painting: Ascending leap for "auf dich setze" ("upon thee set [my faith]).

Rec

-Rec

Vla d'am

G major

A7

F# minor

A7

For biblical background, see note.



Lehms original: "in dieser" ("in this")

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 152

14. keit!

Rec

Ritornello

D major

D major

(tr)

(tr)

17. Stein,

Vla d'am

D7

G major

19. der ü - ber al - le Schätze, hilf, dass ich zu al - ler Zeit, hilf, dass

Rec

Vla d'am

G major

22. ich zu al - ler Zeit durch den Glauben auf dich se - tze mei - nen Grund der Se - lig-

E7

A minor

A minor

tr

tr



# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 152

Word painting: "Shivering" or "stumbling" ornament for "verletze" ("injure").

24. keit, und mich nicht an dir ver - let - ze, und mich nicht an dir ver - let - ze, Stein, —

-Rec  
-Vla d'am

A minor B7 E minor F#7 B minor

27. der ü - ber al - le Schät - ze!

Text painting: Cascading envelope for "über alle Schätze" ("above all treasures").

Vla d'am

B minor B minor B pedal...

29. -Vla d'am

B7 E minor A# dim.7 (B minor)

31. Hilf, dass ich zu al - ler Zeit durch den Glau - ben auf dich set - ze mei - nen

-Rec

B minor N6 D7 G major

34. Grund der Selig - keit, hilf, dass ich zu al - ler Zeit durch den Glauben auf dich set - ze mei - nen

Rec

G major G major

The image displays a page of a musical score for J.S. Bach's Church Cantata BWV 152. It features five systems of music, each with a vocal line (soprano) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The lyrics are in German. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and ornaments. Red annotations highlight specific musical features: 'Word painting: "Shivering" or "stumbling" ornament for "verletze" ("injure").' points to a trill in the vocal line at measure 24; 'Text painting: Cascading envelope for "über alle Schätze" ("above all treasures").' points to a descending melodic line in the piano part at measure 27; and 'Rec' (ritornello) markings are placed above the vocal line at measures 24, 31, and 34. Chord symbols (A minor, B7, E minor, F#7, B minor, B7, E minor, A# dim.7 (B minor), B minor, N6, D7, G major) are written below the piano part. Performance instructions like '-Vla d'am' and '-Rec' are also present.

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 152

36.

Grund der Se - lig-keit, der Se - lig-keit!

Rec

Vla d'am

Secco

G major

Chromatic saturation  
in the vocal part in  
7 mm.

## Recitativo.

• Foolishness of God is greater than wisdom of world (152/5).

## Dal Segno.

1. Basso. D#

Es är - gre sich die kluge Welt, dass Got - tes Sohn ver - lässt den

(Let) offence-take - clever world, that God's son leaves (his)

Secco

For a discussion of faith versus reason in Lutheran Orthodoxy, see Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory in the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), chapter 8; regarding BWV 152, see pp. 227-229.

E minor

A minor

A#

D

The recitative draws on various biblical passages that contrast divine and human wisdom (see note for biblical background).

3.

hohen Eh - renthron, dass er in Fleisch und Blut sich kleidet und in der Menschheit lei -

lofty throne-of-honor, that he in flesh and blood himself does-clothe and (as-a-member-of) humanity suffers

B major

E minor

F#7

B minor

6.

- det!

Die grösste Weis - heit die - ser Er - den muss

The greatest wisdom of-this earth must

B minor

E7

A minor

Tortured melisma for mention of Christ's suffering.

Bass figure sets up the next sentence.

9.

vor des Höchsten Rath zur gröss - ten Thorheit werden! Was Gott beschlossen hat, kann die Ver -

before the Most-High's counsel (the) greatest foolishness become! What God has-ordained can - reason

G# dim.7

A minor

A minor

D# dim.7

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 152

12. Lehms original: "nie" ("never")

nunft doch nicht er - grün - den: die blind Le - te - rin ver - führt die

indeed not fathom; That blind guide misleads the

E minor Bass runs sets up the last sentence.

E7 C#7 Bach emphasizes the last line (which quotes Jesus) by setting it with a disjunct vocal line and wandering, chromatic harmonies, then repeating it almost identically, a tone higher.

14.

geistlich Blind - den, die blinde Le - te - rin verführt die geistlich Blind - den.

spiritually blind.

B# dim.7 F# minor D# dim.7 C# dim.7 G minor G major

## Duetto.

152/6. Rec. Ob.  
Via d'am  
unison

• Dialogue (Soul & Jesus): How must Jesus be received? (152/6).

Alfred Dürr notes the unique form of the duet: "The dialogue text is divided up into separate passages, each of which takes the musical form of dialogue followed by canon. The introductory instrumental ritornello is also disintegrated into fragments, which are then combined, one by one, with the duet. At the end of the movement—and thus of the whole cantata—there is a reprise of the complete instrumental ritornello."

See *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, translated by Richard Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 137.

Ritornello derived from vocal line.

E minor D7 G major

4. Loure-like. See Meredith Little and Natalie Jenne, *Dance and the Music of J. S. Bach*, expanded ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 257, 303.

G major

8.

B7 A minor A minor D(7) G major

12.

B7 E minor E minor E minor E minor

16. **Soprano.** (Scele) Question/Plea No. 1 (relates to movement no. 5). See note for more.

**Basso.** Wie soll ich dich, Liebster der See-len, um-fas-sen. (Jesus.)

Bach may have chosen canonic structure because of the last exchange, in which the Soul expresses a desire to follow Jesus. (See note for more.)

Du musst dich ver-

Obbligato tacet.

Fine.

E minor (D7) G major B7 E minor E minor

20. Canon at 8va, 3-beat interval, S leads.

wie soll ich dich, Lieb-ster der See-len, um-fas-sen, wie-

leugnen und Al-les verlassen. du musst dich ver-leugnen und Al-les ver-

E minor

23.

soll ich dich, Liebster, wie soll ich dich, Lieb-ster der

las-sen, du musst dich, du musst dich ver-leugnen.

Cf. ritornello mm. 1–2.

Obbligato tacet.

E minor E minor B minor A# dim.7

26. Canon at 5th below, 3-beat interval, B leads.

See-len, um-fas-sen. Canon wie soll ich dich, Lieb-ster der See-len, um-

du musst dich ver-leug-nen und Al-les ver-las-sen, du

B minor B7 E minor



29. *fas\_sen, wie soll ich er\_kennen das e\_wige*  
*musst dich verleug\_nen und Al\_les ver\_lassen!*  
 E minor E minor

33. *Licht, wie soll ich er\_ken\_nen das*  
*Er\_ken\_nemich gläubig und är\_g're dich nicht, er\_ken\_ne mich*  
 D7 G major G major

36. *e\_wi\_ge Licht, wie soll ich er\_ken\_nen, wie*  
*gläu\_big und är\_g're dich nicht. er\_kenn'mich, er\_ken\_ne mich*  
 Cf. ritornello mm. 3-4.  
 G major A major

39. *soll ich er\_kennen das e\_wi\_ge Licht?*  
*gläubig, er\_ken\_ne mich gläubig und*  
 Obbligato tacet.  
 D major D major

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 152

42. Canon at 5th below, 6-beat interval, S leads.

Wie soll ich er-ken-nen das e-wi-ge Licht, wie  
är - gre dich nicht, er - ken - ne mich gläu-big, er -

D major D7 G major G major

45.

soll ich er-ken-nen das e-wi-ge Licht?  
ken - ne mich gläu-big und är - gre dich nicht, er - ken - ne - mich gläu-big und

G major

48.

Komm, leh - re mich, Heiland, die Er - de verschmähen,  
är - gre dich nicht! Komm,

Question/Plea No. 3 (relates to movement no. 3).

Obligato tacet.

G major E7 A minor B7 E minor

51. Canon at 8va, 3-beat interval, S leads

komm, leh - re mich, Hei - land, die  
See - le, durch Lei - den zur Freu - de zu - ge - hen, komm, Seele, durch

E minor E7 A minor

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 152

54. Canon at 5th below, 3-beat interval, S leads.

Er - de verschmä - hen, komm, leh - re mich, Hei - land, die Er - de ver -

Lei - den zur Freu - de - zu - ge - hen, komm, See - le, durch Lei - den zur

E7 A minor E major A minor A7 D minor D7

57. schmähen, komm, Heiland, komm, Heiland, komm, leh - re mich,

Freu - de zu ge - hen, komm, See - le, durch Lei - den zur

E minor G major B7 E major A minor C major E7 A minor

60. Heiland, die Er - de ver - schmä - hen! Chromaticism colors the text. Ach,

Freu - de zu ge - hen, komm, See - le, durch Lei - den zur Freu - de zu ge - hen, -

Obbligato tacet.

G7 A major D minor G# dim.7 A minor

63. Inverted canon at 5th below, 12-beat interval, S leads.

zie - he mich, Lieb - ster, so folg' ich dir nach,

Question/Plea No. 4 (relates to movement no. 2).

dir schenk' ich die Kro - ne nach

A minor A minor

At the reference to crowning the believer after tribulation, Bach inverts the response. This corresponds to the solution required to solve the riddle canon, BWV 1077, inscribed "Christus coronabit Crucigeros" ("Christ crowns the cross-bearers").

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 152

66. Canon at 8va (adjusted first note), 3-beat interval, S leads.

ach, zie - he mich, Lieb - ster, so folg' ich dir nach, ach,  
 Trüb - sal und Schmach, dir schenk' ich die Kro - ne nach Trüb - sal und

69. A minor D7 G major G major  
 zie - he mich, Lieb - ster, so folg' ich dir nach, ach, zie he mich, so folg' ich dir  
 Schmach. dir schenk' ich die Kro - ne nach Trüb - sal und Schmach. nach Trüb - sal und

72. E7 A minor  
 nach, zie he mich, Lieb - ster, so folg' ich - dir - nach, so folg'  
 Schmach, dir schenk' ich die Kro - ne nach Trüb - sal und Schmach, nach Trüb -

75. D7 G major E7 A major B7 E minor G# dim.7 F#7  
 - ich dir nach, ach, zie - he mich, Lieb - ster, so folg' ich dir nach!  
 - sal und Schmach, dir schenk' ich die Kro - ne nach Trüb - sal und Schmach!

Obbligato tacet.

E minor E minor D major B7 C major E minor E minor  
 Dal Segno.