

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

155/1.

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

Recitativo A (♩ = F 3.)

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

Introduction & updates at melvinunger.com.

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.

Chromatic saturation in 8 mm. of the vocal part.

Mein Gott, wie lang, ach lan-ge? Des Jammers ist zu viel, ich sehe gar kein Ziel der Schmerzen und der Sor-gen! Dein süs-ser Gna-den-blick hat un-ter Nacht und Wol-ken sich ver-bor-gen, die Lie-beshand zieht sich, ach, ganz zu-rück! Um Trost ist mir sehr

My God, how long, ah, long? Of misery (there) is too much! I see absolutely no end of sufferings and of sorrows! Thy sweet glance hath beneath night and clouds itself hidden, (Thy) hand-of-love draws itself, ah, completely back! For consolation am (I) very

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.)

viel, ich sehe gar kein Ziel der Schmerzen und der Sor-gen! Dein süs-ser Gna-den-blick hat un-ter Nacht und Wol-ken sich ver-bor-gen, die Lie-beshand zieht sich, ach, ganz zu-rück! Um Trost ist mir sehr

D minor D7 G minor

Lie-beshand zieht sich, ach, ganz zu-rück! Um Trost ist mir sehr

A7 D minor

Lie-beshand zieht sich, ach, ganz zu-rück! Um Trost ist mir sehr

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)...

Biblical Allusion: Psalm 80:4-5: O Lord God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry with thy people's prayers? Thou hast fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure.

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

The day's Gospel account of Jesus asking the servants to fill the wine jugs with water, then turning it to wine becomes a metaphor for God turning the ever-increasing tears into the wine of joy.

12.

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

NBA: das Tränenmaß

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

D7 G minor C# dim.7 D minor

Word painting: Energized melisma with arpeggiated 16th notes in the strings for "joy's wine." But because the wine is depleted, the pulsing bass does not stop.

14.

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

NBA: der Freuden-wein

B-flat major F7 G# dim.7 E7

Text painting: A descending line, which slips downward in halting and syncopated rhythms for more than an octave, depicts the sinking of all hope referenced in the text. It falters to an end before the final chord is reached.

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 ♩ = 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.

Du mußt glauben, du mußt hoffen, du mußt glauben, du mußt

Tenore.
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 -
du musst Gott ge-las -

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

C7 F major E7

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

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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, dich mit Hül - fe...

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

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)

Dal Segno.

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

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

1. **B** **C** **155. E** **G** **B** **A** **NBA: Wenn** **D** **F**

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.

Chromatic saturation in the vocal part in 8 mm.

Bass is often the voice of authority. Because the text is in the third person, it is likely not meant as the vox Christi, however.

3. **C major** **G#** **F#**

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,

Word painting: long note for "compeletely." NBA: wenn

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

G# dim.7 Flourishes in the continuo are like shudders. E7 A minor

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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 #F 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

F major F7 B-flat major C7 F major

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

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.

1. Strings

Ritornello derived from vocal line.

F major G(7) C major F major

The soprano, representing the soul, was despondent in the opening aria. Now it has been comforted and exhorts itself to cast itself into God's arms.

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

Editorial additions are greyed out for clarity.

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.**

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.

F major G7 C major C major

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

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

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.

Biblical allusion: Isaiah 40:11: He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, and gently lead those that are with young. At "Gnaden," the voice sustains a note against the dotted rhythm/triplets, to depict resting one's yoke on Jesus' shoulders as referenced in the text.

29. *mf*

seln sei - ner Gna - den, auf die Ach - seln 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. *mf* *p*

den, le - ge dei - ner Sor - gen Joch und was

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

38. *mf*

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 *tr*

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

50.

C major F major

53.

F major F major F major

Strings sustain the chord against dotted rhythm in continuo.

155/5. **Choral. (Mel.: „Es ist das Heil“.)** (See also 9/7, 186/6.)
 Soprano. 1/5. •Believe his Word rather than appearances (155/5).

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

Ob sichs an-liess, als wollt' er nicht, lass dich es nicht erschrecken,
 denn wo er ist am besten mit, da will er's nicht ent-decken.

Regarding the fermatas, see note.



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

sein Wort lass dir gewisser sein, und ob dein Herz sprach'
 sein Wort lass dir gewisser sein, und ob dein Herz sprach'
 sein Wort lass dir gewisser sein, und ob dein Herz sprach'
 sein Wort lass dir gewisser sein, und ob dein Herz sprach'

F major (G7) C major C major F major

lau-ter Nein, so lass doch dir nicht grauen.
 lau-ter Nein, so lass doch dir nicht grauen.
 lau-ter Nein, so lass doch dir nicht grauen.
 lau-ter Nein, so lass doch dir nicht grauen.

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.