

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 54

Form: Aria (A) - Recit (A) - aria (A). The cantata follows Italian models. It is one of only 12 extant church cantatas for solo voice; and one of only 9 without SATB ensemble or chorus. Solo cantatas include: for S: nos. 51, 52, 84, 199; for A: 35, 54, 169, 170, 200; for T: 55; and for B: 56, 82. Since Bach added chorales to other librettos by Georg Christian Lehms, Martin Petzoldt suggests adding the 16th stanza of the chorale "Jesu, meiner Seelen Wonne," a 19-stanza hymn by Martin Jan (ca. 1620-1682), using the tune "Jesu, der du alleine Seest." (See side note and below at 54/3.)

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NBA I/18; BC A51

Oculi: 3. S. in Lent (BWV 54 only). Originally without specification (Wolff, "J. S. Bach. The Learned Musician," 163)

*Ephesians 5:1-9 (Exhortation to pure living)

*Luke 11:14-28 (Accusation that Christ drove out demons by Beelzebul)

Alfred Dürr suggests this cantata also suits the 7. S. after Trinity (See Dürr/Jones, 254).

+Romans 6:19-23 (The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life)

+Mark 8:1-9 (Jesus feeds the four thousand)

Librettist: Georg Christian Lehms

Composed in Bach's Weimar period.

FP: perhaps 24 March 1715 (see side note)

Instrumentation:

Vln I, II
Via I, II
Alto
Continuo

Note: Double viola parts are typical of Bach's Weimar cantatas to Easter 1715. See Petzoldt 2:641.

J.S. Bach Cantata No. 54 Widerstehe doch der Sünde

The text of the opening aria alludes to various scriptures (see side note).

The cantata was notated in Chorton. See side note.

The tempting figure rises tantalizingly more than an octave with suspensions adding dissonance.

•Resist sin or its poison will eventually kill you (54/1).

54/1.

1. Aria

Da capo

A Section

Ritornello derived from vocal theme (see below).

Dominant 7th chord tugs like a temptation (see side note for commentary by Alfred Dürr).

B-flat 7 against E-flat pedal with throbbing pulse... E-flat major

Text painting: The violin motive (which may suggest a snake as a symbol for sin) clashes against pulsed pedal tones, to portray the idea of "resisting sin," as referenced in the text. See side note.

E-flat major

E-flat major

B-flat pedal...

B-flat 7 E-flat major

Parallel 6ths denote sweetness...

F7

B-flat (7) E-flat major

E-flat major

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. Bach later re-used this aria in the St. Mark Passion to the text "Falsche Welt, dein schmeichelnd Küssen..." (False world, your flattering kissing...). See note above.

11 **Alto** Both arias in the cantata begin with a dictum followed by 4 lines in an overall rhyme scheme of A-BCCB.

Low range: down to F (e.g., mm. 18, 24)

Devis = Dictum

"Vokaleinbau" (insertion of vocal writing into ritornello)

The cantabile melody is an example of Italian influence in Bach's Weimar cantatas.

wi - der - ste - he doch der Sün - de,
 Christian, ne'er let sin o'er - power thee!

wi - der - Christian,

B-flat 7 chord against tonic E-flat pedal...

piano

D dim.

E-flat major B-flat 7
 E-flat pedal...

E-flat major

E-flat major

1811

Word painting: Melisma with shuddering rhythm for the poison "seizing" a person.

ste - he doch der Sün - de, sonster - grei - - - - - fet dich ihr
 ne'er let sin o'er - power thee! Poi - son in its plea - sure

F7

B-flat major

16

Gift, sonst er-grei-fet dich ihr Gift, sonst er-grei - - - - - fet dich ihr Gift;
 lurks! Poi-son in its plea-sure lurks. Poi-son in its plea - sure lurks.

F7 against B-flat pedal.

B-flat major

C7

F7

B-flat major
 B-flat pedal...

18

Lowest note

wi - der - ste - he doch der Sün - de,
 Chris - tian, ne'er let sin o'er - power thee!

F7 chord against B-flat pedal.

B-flat major

B-flat 7

Vocal range in cantata is f to c".

20

wi - der - ste - he doch der Sün - de, sonst er -
 Chris - tian, ne'er let sin o'er - power thee! Poi - son

E-flat major B-flat major F7 B-flat major

22

grei - fet dich ihr Gift, wi - der - ste -
 in its plea - sure lurks! Chris - tian, ne'

Sustained F in the voice serves the same symbolic function as pedal in bass ("widerstehe" = resist, stand firm [against sin]).

F7 B-flat major (C7)

24

he, er, wi - der -
 Chris - tian,

lowest note

F7 B-flat major B-flat major

26

ste - he doch der Sün - de, sonst er - grei -
 ne'er let sin o'er - power thee! Poi - son in

B-flat 7 E-flat major E-flat 7 A-flat major

Sustained E-flat in the voice serves the same symbolic function as previous pedal tones ("widerstehe" = resist, stand firm [against sin]).

28

fet dich ihr Gift, wi - der - ste
its plea - sure lurks. Chris - tian, ne'

B-flat major E-flat major B-flat 7 E-flat major

30

er he doch der Sün - de, sonst er -
let sin o'er - power thee! Poi - son

E-flat (7) C7 F minor 7b 9 8 7b

32

gri - fet dich ihr Gift.
in its plea - sure lurks.

B-flat 7 chord against E-flat pedal.

Ritornello

B-flat 7 E-flat major D dim. E-flat major A-flat major

34

E-flat 7 A-flat major B-flat 7 E-flat major

37

B-flat 7 E-flat major F7
B-flat pedal...

Alfred Dürr notes, "The middle section of the aria...is also full of harmonic cadences, among which the repeated deceptive cadence is unfailingly effective as a description of the 'curse that is deadly.'" Alfred Dürr, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, trans. Richard Jones, 255.

39
40
41
42
43

B-flat 7 E-flat major
E-flat major

The B section alludes to the day's Epistle reading, Ephesians 5:6-8: "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience...Once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light."

43
44

Laß dich nicht den Sa-tan blen-den, denn die
Let not Sa-tan's arts de-ceive thee! He who

The vocal line becomes more animated...

"Widerstehe" theme

(Fine) E-flat major
C minor
C7
F minor

Text painting: Sudden harmonic shift to depict the deadliness of the curse for profaning God's glory, as referenced in the text. See note regarding a possible incorrect text transmission.

44
45
46

Got - tes Eh - re schän-den, trifft ein Fluch, der töd - lich ist.
tar - nish-eth God's glo - ry draws a curse that dead - ly works!

Ritornello

Alto voices crosses below continuo bass, to emphasize the incredible downfall.

G major
C minor
C minor
G major
7 D7 deceptive

46
47
48

G major
C minor

Petzoldt quotes Konrad Küster, saying the ritornello is given atypical emphasis in that it must compensate for the deceptive cadences. See *Bach Kommentar* 2: 642.

48
49
50

Laß dich nicht den Sa - tan blen - den, denn die
Let not Sa - tan's arts de - ceive thee! He who

C minor
G7
C minor

Text painting: Sudden harmonic shift to depict the deadliness of the curse for profaning God's glory, as referenced in the text.

50

Got - tes Eh - re schän - den, trifft ein Fluch, der töd - lich ist.
tar - nish - eth God's glo - ry draws a curse that dead - ly works!

G minor (7/8) (6) 4/2 C7 F major D7 G minor D major G7 (deceptive)

52

C major C# dim.7 A7

54

D major G minor D7 G major da capo

The da capo is jarring as it moves from G major to B-flat 7 with E-flat pedal.

54/2. **2. Recitativo** • Sin outwardly appealing but like a whitewashed tomb (54/2). Bach sets the text without pause so that the recitativo is a continuous description of "vile sin."

Chromatic saturation in the vocal part in 9 mm.

Martin Petzoldt finds here an allusion to Hebrews 11:25-26. See side note.

Alto

Die Art ver-ruch-ter Sün-den ist zwar von au-ßen wun-der-schön, al-
The hardened race of sin-ners, 'tis true, do pros-per seem-ing-ly. But

G D E-flat F B A-flat C

Continuo

G major G7 B dim.7 C minor



4

lein, man muß her-nach mit Kum-mer und Ver-druß viel Un-ge-mach emp-fin-den. Von
comes the day at last when pen - al - ty they'll pay of tor - tur - ing disenchant-ment. Though

E B-flat D-flat F

C major C7 E dim.7 F minor

Word painting: Inflected note for "Ungemach" (hardship).

Alfred Dürr writes, "The cantata, no. 2, is again boldly descriptive. The phrase 'an empty shadow and a whited sepulchre' has an immediately graphic effect with its lurid harmony. And the arioso conclusion—a feature of numerous recitatives by the young Bach—here draws its significance from the quick, text-engendered continuo runs, which portray the 'sharp sword that pierces through our body and soul.'" See Dürr/Jones, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, 255.

7

G-flat A

au-ßen ist sie Gold, doch will man wei-ter gehn, so zeigt sich nur ein lee - rer
gold's a glitter-ing toy, yet with-er doth it tend? 'Tis but a sub-stance vain and

A-flat major F major F7

The reference to "white-washed tombs" is reminiscent of Jesus' words in Matthew 23:27-28: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. (Also Luke 11:44.)

10

Schat-ten und ü-ber-tüsch - tes Grab. Sie ist den So-doms-äpfeln gleich, und die sich
hol - low, a dec-o - rat - ed tomb. Its fruit is bit - ter to the taste; none but the

Very low note for "tomb."

E dim.7 G-flat (Ger.) aug.6 B-flat minor B-flat minor C7 F minor

Text painting: Chromaticism and lowest range for "empty shadow and white-washed tomb" and "Sodom's apples."

"Sodom's apples" alludes to Josephus IV:483-485: "It is said that, owing to the impiety of its inhabitants, [Sodom] was consumed by thunderbolts; and in fact vestiges of the divine fire and faint traces of five cities are still visible. Still, too, may one see ashes reproduced in the fruits, which from their outward appearance would be thought edible, but on being plucked with the hand dissolve into smoke and ashes." [Translated by H. St. J. Thackeray. See also BWV 95/2, 179/3.]

13.

mit der-sel - ben gat - ten, ge - lan-gen nicht in Got - tes Reich. Sie ist als
fools its poi - son swal-low; they have in heav-en above no place. It threat-ens,

D-flat major 7 B-flat minor C major F major

iv6 V Phrygian cadence often used for questions.

15

Arioso ending...

wie ein schar-fes Schwert, das uns durch Leib und Seel',
like a sharp-ened sword, our life and soul, our life

F7 A dim.7 B-flat minor E-flat 7 C minor F minor

Text painting: Arioso ending with running 16th notes in the continuo that depict the sharp sword piercing body and soul.

Martin Petzoldt (Bach *Contra 2:643*) states that the end of the Simeon's prophecy that a sword would pierce Mary's soul... brought to mind by the end of the day's Gospel reading where a woman shouts that the womb that bore Jesus was blessed. See side note for the biblical passages.

17

durch Leib und Seele fährt.
and soul with lust abhorred.

D-flat major E-flat 7 A-flat major A-flat major A-flat major

The aria employs permutation fugue (common in Bach's Weimar works) in a 4-part texture: a chromatically descending subject (perhaps the tug of sin), a first countersubject (perhaps the devil as a snake), and a second countersubject rising in scalar fashion (perhaps Satan as the father of sin—rearing sin as his child).

54/3. **3. Aria** • Sinners are of the devil; resist him and he flees (54/3).

Form: See side note.

A Section.

A. Subject
Vlns unison
Walking bass
B. Countersubject 1 (snake figure)
C. Countersubject 2 (see mm. 20-21)

E-flat major (E-flat 7) A-flat major (E-flat major)

Why a fugue? Perhaps to depict the rigid enslavement of sin's bonds. See side note.

4

A. Subject

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

The busy string writing is an example of Vivaldi's influence in Bach's Weimar cantatas.

Text begins with verbatim quotation of 1 John 3:8a: "He who commits sin is of the devil..." (compare BWV 40/1, which quotes 1 John 3:8b).

7

Both arias begin with a dictum followed by 4 lines in an overall rhyme scheme of A-BCCB.

Alto

Dictum: Wer Sün - de
The slave of

B. C. A.

E-flat major E-flat major E-flat 7

10

tut, der ist vom Teu -
sin must serve the dev -

A. Vlns
B. C.

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

13.

fel, wer Sün - de
il, the slave of

A. Vins B. C.

F7 B-flat 7 (E-flat 7) A-flat major E-flat major

16.

tut, der ist vom Teu - fel,
sin must serve the dev - il,

Lowest note B. C. A.

E-flat major F(7) B-flat (7) B-flat minor A-flat major E-flat major

Possible allusion to John 8:44 [Jesus]: "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for, he is a liar and the father of lies."

19

denn die - ser hat sie auf - ge - bracht,
his ru - in Sa - tan doth de - sign,
Literally: "For this one has reared it: (i.e., Satan is the father of sin)." B. A. C.

E-flat major E-flat major (A-flat major) E-flat major

22

denn die - ser hat sie auf - ge - bracht; doch wenn man
his ru - in Sa - tan doth de - sign. Then break the

A dim. A-flat major E-flat major B-flat major F(7) B-flat major

B Section begins without intervening ritornello.

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25 Vocal part is more free but instrumental lines continue with the fugal material.

ih - ren schnö - den Ban - den mit rech - ter An - dacht wi - der - stan -
 sin - ful - chains - that bind thee! A - mend, put e - vil ways be - hind -

E-flat major 6 6 6 4 6 7 C minor A. Vlns (4) G major D(7) G7 C7 (F7)

28

den, mit rech - ter An - dacht
 thee! A - mend put e - vil

D7 G minor B. Vlns C7 F7 (B-flat 7)

30 30.

wi - der - stan - den, hat sie sich gleich da -
 ways - be - hind thee! So shall God's grace a -

(E-flat major) C minor G major B. (A minor) C minor (6) C major

32 Text painting: Strings play "dismissal" figures for "davon" (away); i.e., sin takes flight.

von, da - von, da - von, hat sie sich gleich da -
 gain, a - gain, a - gain, so shall God's grace a -

F minor G7 C minor F7 B dim. G7 (6/5) C minor 6

84

von, da-von ge - macht;
gain, a - gain be thine;

A. A. (Stretto)

B.

C minor C minor G minor

86

doch wenn man then break the

B. B. C.

D7 G7 C(7) D7 G minor G major G7

89

ih - re schön - den Ban - den mit rech - ter An - dacht wi - der -
sin - fu chains - that bind thee! A - mend, put e - vil ways be -

A.

C minor C major F minor F7 B-flat 7 G minor

42

stan - den, mit rech - ter
hind thee! A - mend put

B. A. C.

C(7) F(7) B-flat minor C major B dim. F major D dim.

44

Possible word painting: Melisma on "resist" may suggest a shudder or ridicule.

An-dacht wi - der - stan - den, hat sie sich
e - vil ways be - kind thee! So shall God's

C minor G major C minor

47

Text painting: Strings play "dismissal" figures for "davon" (away); i.e., sin takes flight.

gleich da - von, da - von, da - von, hat sie sich
grace a - gain, a - gain, a - gain, so shall God's

E-flat (7) A-flat major B-flat 7

49

gleich da - von, da - von ge - macht.
grace a - gain, a - gain be - thine.

A Section returns, modified.

Ritornello Stretto

E-flat major A-flat major E-flat major E-flat minor

51

Wer Sün-de = m. 9. The slave of

E-flat 7 A-flat major E-flat major E-flat major E-flat 7

54

tut, der ist vom Teu
sin must serve the dev

= m. 10. = m. 11. = m. 12.

B. A.

A-flat major B-flat 7 E-flat major

57

fel,
il,

= m. 13. = m. 14.

A. B.

F7 B-flat 7 E-flat 7 A-flat major E-flat major

59

wer Sün de tut, der ist vom Teu
the slave of sin must serve the dev

different from m. 15.

A. B.

E-flat major F7 A-flat 7 F7 B-flat minor

61

E dim.7 F minor B-flat major E-flat major

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63. C.

- fel, denn die - ser hat sie auf - ge -
 - il, his ru - in Sa - tan doth de -

B-flat major E-flat major

65

bracht, denn die - ser
 sign, his ru - in

(F major) E-flat (7)

67 Highest note *tr*

hat sie auf - ge-bracht.
 Sa - tan doth de - sign.

B-flat 7 E-flat major E-flat 7 A-flat major E-flat major

70 *tr*

E-flat major E-flat major



Since Bach added chorales to other librettos by Lehms, Martin Petzoldt suggests adding the 16th stanza of the chorale "Jesu, meiner Seelen Wonne," a 19-stanza hymn by Martin Jan (ca. 1620–1682), using the tune "Jesu, der du meine Seele." Rudolf Lutz suggests the tune "Werde munter, mein Gemüte. (See side note .)