

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 73

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Form: Chorus/recit (T/B/S) - Aria (T) - Recit (B) - Aria (B) - Chorale. Bach often used chiasmic (x-shaped/symmetrical) forms, in which center movements (where the mirror image begins) often 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). See side note for Martin Petzoldt's diagram. The cantata's point of departure derives from the day's Gospel reading, in which Jesus agrees to heal a leper. The focus is not on the miracle itself, however, but on alignment with God's will, even in suffering ("A leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.' The libretto is reminiscent of Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: Mk. 14:35-36. [Jesus] said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14:36). Submitting to God's will appears to have been an important life principle for Bach. See 2 side notes. Eric Chafe sees the tonal descent of the movements as symbolic of this principle (see side note).

NBA I/6; BC A35

3. S. after Epiphany (BWV 73, 111, 72, 156)

*Romans 12:16-21 (Overcoming evil with good)

*Matthew 8:1-13 (Jesus heals a leper; the centurion from Capernaum comes to Jesus)

Librettist: Unknown

FP: 23 January 1724 (St. Nicholas; from first Leipzig cantata cycle)

(Chorale: see also 156/6)

Instrumentation: ● God's sovereign will to be trusted even in suffering (73/1).

Ob I, II

Vln I, II

Vla

SATB

Corno ossio organo obbligato

(The horn part is difficult for modern instruments. See note.)

Continuo

Martin Petzoldt suggests that

the cantata's structure and

choice of soloists allows the

3 characters in the Gospel

reading to speak (T = the leper,

B = the centurion,

S = the centurion's sick servant).

See "Bach Kommentar" 2:467

(Coro) Italianate concerto structure

73/1. **(Allegro moderato)** ♩ = 88.

Bassetto technique (removing continuo support) is often used by Bach to depict something heavenly, unearthly, incomprehensible, or without foundation.

Leitmotif: Horn (in later version, organ) with Vln I play first 4 notes of chorale melody in 8th notes ("Herr, wie du willst"), with Vln II, Vla, continuo.

Oboes play a circling figure in sweet parallel 3rds (for sweetness), derived from the chorale's opening interval, presented sequentially at higher intervals. As an

example of "circulatio," the rhetorical figure may represent the circuitous paths of God's will. For more, see side note.

For Alfred Dürr's comments on the first movement, see side note.

9. **Soprano.**

(Mel: „Wo Gott, der Herr, nicht bei uns hält“)

Stanza 1 of 3 in 1582 hymn by Kaspar Bienenmann (1540-1591).

The movement is unified by the pervading 4-note motive ("Herr, wie du willst"; i.e., Lord as thou wilt), harmonized in continually different ways.

12.

schick's mit mir im Le - ben -

schick's mit mir im Le - - -

schick's mit mir im Le - - -

schick's mit mir im Le - - -

Ob I, II

Strings

No continuo

B-flat major B-flat major G7 C minor

The oboes in sweet parallel motion, without continuo (i.e., a bassetto texture) suggest a heavenly perspective (unfathomable to humans), while the horn/string interjections suggest a wordless "Herr, wie du wilt."

15.

und im - - - Ster - - - ben!

- ben und im Ster - - - ben!

- ben und im Ster - - - ben!

- ben und im Ster - - - ben!

Ob I, II

No continuo

[Herr, wie du wilt]

G minor G minor G minor B-flat major

Corno, Vln I (up 8va) + strings interject the "Lord, as thou wilt" figure.

18. **Recitativo.** The tenor perhaps represents the leper in the Gospel reading (see above).
Tenore.

Ach! a - - - ber ach! wie - - - viel lässt mich dein Wil - le

Ob I, II

Corno, Vln I + str.

[Herr, wie du wilt]

C# dim.7 (signals something disturbing to come). C# dim.7

A troping text is inserted into the chorale as a recitative (but in tempo with oboes playing circular figures and the horn & strings interjecting the 4-note motive).

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31. **ben!**

G minor No continuo G minor B-flat major

33. **Recitativo.** **Basso.** The bass perhaps represents the centurion in the Gospel reading (see above). The bass voice is often the voice of authority and here the text alludes to various biblical passages.

Du bist mein Hel - fer, Trost und Hort, so der Be -

B-flat major C7 F major

35. **trüb - ten Thrä - nen zäh - let und ih - re Zu - ver - sicht, das schwa - che**

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

37. **Rohr, nicht gar zerbricht; und weil du mich er - wäh - let, so sprich ein**

Isaiah 42:3: A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench. (Also Matthew 12:20.)

E dim.7 F minor G7

The end of the centurion's statement in the Gospel reading: "Only say the word, and my servant will be healed: (Matthew 8:8) then alludes to Isaiah 41:10: "Fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you (Luther 1545: ich erhalte dich) with my victorious right hand.

39.

Abgesang of chorale's bar form.

Er - halt' mich nur in dei - ner

Er - halt' mich nur in dei - ner

Er - halt' mich nur in dei - ner

Er - halt' mich nur in dei - ner

Word painting: Large leap to highest note for "word of joy."

Trost und Freuden wort!

Continuo plays circular material to underscore the text (the heavenly perspective is now brought down to earth).

C minor F7 B-flat major F major C7

42.

Huld, sonst, wie du

Huld, sonst, wie du

Huld, sonst, wie du

Huld, sonst, wie du

Repeated use of bassetto texture (no continuo) presumably represents the unfathomableness of God's will (see above).

No continuo

Str.

F major F7 B-flat major C major

44.

willt, gieb mir Ge - duld, denn

willt, gieb mir Ge - duld, denn

willt, gieb mir Ge - duld, denn

willt, gieb mir Ge - duld, denn

No continuo
Strings

F major A7 D minor B-flat major

47.

dein Will' ist der be - ste.
 dein Will' ist der be - ste.
 dein Will' ist der be - ste.
 dein Will' ist der be - ste.

Translation:
 Thy will is indeed a sealed book,
 in which human wisdom nought can understand.
 To us, the blessing often seems a curse,
 our discipline, angry punishment.
 That rest which thou hast appointed
 for us one day in the sleep of death,
 seems like an entrance into hell.
 Yet thy Spirit frees us from this error
 and shows us that thy will is healing for us.

No continuo
 Str.

F major G minor G minor G minor

50. **Soprano. Recitativo.** The soprano perhaps represents the centurion's sick servant in the Gospel reading (see above).

Dein Wille zwar ist ein versiegelt Buch, da Menschenweisheit Nichts ver -

[Herr, wie du wilt]
 [Herr, wie du wilt]

G minor B-flat major A7

Corno, Vln I C7 (up 8va) + strings.

53.

nimmt. Corno, Vln I, up 8va + str. Der Se - gen scheint uns oft ein Fluch, die

[Herr, wie du wilt]
 [Herr, wie du wilt]

D minor G# dim.7

Diminished 7th chord for "Fluch" (curse).

55.

Züch - tigung ergrim.m.te Stra - fe, die Ru - he, so du in dem To - des

Corno, Vln I + str.
 [Herr, wie du wilt]

C7

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57. Descending line for "entrance into hell."

schla - fe uns einst be - stimmt, ein Ein - gang zu der Höl - le. Doch

Corno, Vln I + str.

[Herr, wie du willst]

F# dim.7 G minor E-flat 7 C7

59. macht dein Geist uns die - ses Irr - thums frei und zeigt, dass uns dein

Corno, Vln I + str.

[Herr, wie du willst]

F7 B dim. C minor F# dim.7

61. "Heilsam" = healing/wholesome (apparent allusion to the healing of the leper in the Gospel reading).

Wil - le heil - sam sei. — Corno, Vln I + str. Ritornello

No continuo

G minor [Herr, wie du willst] G minor

C 64. Herr, wie du willst, Herr, wie du Herr, wie du Herr, wie du Herr, wie du Herr, wie du Herr, wie du Herr, wie du Herr, wie du Herr, wie du Herr, wie du Herr, wie du

The repeated text was added to the libretto by Bach.

[Herr, wie du willst]

No continuo

Corno, Vln I, up 8va + strings

G minor B-flat major B-flat major B-flat major [Herr, wie du willst]

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66

willt,
willt,
willt,
willt,

No continuo-----

C minor
E-flat major

C minor D7 G minor

69.

[in Le - - - ben und in Ster - - - - - ben]

G minor C7 F major G7 C minor G minor G7 C minor

71.

Herr, wie du willst!
Herr, wie du willst!
Herr, wie du willst!
Herr, wie du willst!

Herr, wie du willst!

G minor G major

Martin Petzoldt observes that the third choral interjection is sung quite atonally in the middle of the unresolved part of the cadence, leaving the impression of a questioning character. See *Bach Kommentar* 2:479. It is as if the voices are affirming something that they do not understand.

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.

Da capo aria 73/2. **Aria.** •Prayer: Pour Spirit of joy into my despairing heart (73/2).

1. **(Lento $\text{♩} = 66.$)** Oboe

Oboe & Continuo

Ritornello is derived from opening vocal phrases (1.5 + 1.5 + 1 mm.)

E-flat major
(This is the only movement in a major key.)

3.

B-flat major F7

5. **Tenore.** Text painting: Descending lines for "Ah, sink (i.e., pour) the Spirit of joy into my heart."

Ach, sen - ke - doch den Geist der Freu - den, den Geist der -

E-flat major

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

8.

Freu - - - - - dendem Her - zen ein!

Ritornello (in free inversion)

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

10.

F minor C minor C7 F minor B-flat 7 E-flat major

Dürr writes, "In the course of the movement the initial motive and its inversion alternate on several occasions. Its frequent modifications are, in the middle section, linked with a shaking figure which represents the word 'wanken' ('waver')." See *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, trans. by Richard Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 203. The opening text paraphrases Psalm 51:12: "Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit" (Luther 1545: freudige Geist).

13.

Ach, sen - ke doch den Geist der Freu - den, den Geist der

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

Konrad Küster argues that, by giving the melodic leadership role to the oboe from m. 7 on, Bach provided a prime example of the fact that he was not merely inserting the vocal line into an instrumental movement but that he conceived it as a model movement in which he could assign its components freely to the participating voices. See Konrad Küster, "Johann Sebastian Bach," 226, cited in Petzoldt, "Bach Kommentar" 2:470.

16.

Freu - den dem Her - zen ein, den Geist der

E-flat major E-flat major

Text painting: Lengthy melismas for "Geist der Freuden" (Spirit of joy).

18.

Freu - den, ach, sen - ke doch den Geist der

E-flat major

21.

Freu - den dem Her - zen ein, dem Her - zen

E-flat major

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23. **ein!** *Ritornello*

E-flat major

26. **B Section**

Es will oft bei mir geistlich

The "joy motive" moves to the bass.

E-flat major G7 C minor E-flat major

29. *Word painting: Melisma for joy.*

Dim. 7th leap down for "spiritually sick."

Kranken die Freude und Hoffnung

C minor C minor

32. *Descending chromatic tetrachord, traditional symbol of lament, for "Zaghaft" (faint-hearted). The syncopation and fermata are further expressions of wavering ("wanken").*

wanken und zaghaft sein,

C minor F# dim.7 G minor A7 D minor G(7) C minor 6 D7

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34.

The reference to being "spiritually sick" is reminiscent of the leper in the Gospel reading.

es will oft bei mir geist-lich Kran-

G minor G minor

36.

Word-painting: Melisma for "joy."

ken die Freu- digkeit und Hoff-nung

B-flat major F(7)

38.

Word painting: Long, swirling melisma (derived from the opening motto of the aria) to depict "wanken" (waver)

wan-

B-flat major B-flat 7 G7 C minor

40.

ken und zag- haft sein.

D7 G minor G minor E-flat major B-flat major B-flat 7

mf

Da Capo dal Segno.

This is the central (pivot) movement in the cantata's chastic form: elements meet or are paradoxically inverted (formal inversion reflects an aspect of reversal or turning in the text). Here the antithetical elements are natural human will and a will that has been transformed by God's Spirit.

This is the only movement where human will is the subject.

Chromatic saturation in the vocal part in 5 mm. for human perversity. See side note for more.



Voice & continuo sing span of dim. 7th in opposite directions.

73/3. **Recitativo.** • Human will perverse: it vacillates & rejects dying (73/3).

1. **Secco Basso.**

A-flat D E-flat F B C F#

Ach, un-ser Wil-le bleibt ver-kehrt, bald trot-zig, bald ver-

The text alludes to Jeremiah 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt (Luther 1545: trotzig und verzagt); who can understand it?" Bach sets it in a highly chromatic manner.

Text painting: A leap up for "defiant," a drop down for "despondent."

3.

B dim.7 E B-flat D-flat A A-flat x6

zagt, des Ster-bens will er nie ge-den-ken! Al-lein ein Christ, in

C minor G major E dim.7 F minor F7 D7

6.

G minor B-flat (7) G7 C minor

Got-tes Geist ge-lehrt, lernt sich in Got-tes Wil-len sen-ken und sagt:

G minor B-flat (7) G7 C minor

Attaca.

Form (Strophic with rhyme scheme ABBA):
 Motto—instrumental episode a
 Verse 1 (head-motive—sigh motives)
 Instrumental episode a1
 Verse 2 (varied head-motive—descending melodic lines)
 Instrumental episode b
 Verse 3 (varied head-motive—pizzicato: "funeral bells")
 Instrumental episode c (bells motive)
 Coda 'Herr, so du willst' (varied head-motive)
 Instrumental postlude a1
 (See Dürr/Jones, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, 203). For more, see side note.

73/4. **Aria.** • God's sovereign will accepted; acceptance of death (73/4).

Since the aria provides the actual prayer referenced in the recitativo, it begins without instrumental introduction. Like movement 1, it is unified by the motto "Lord as thou wilt." However, while the motto was musically inflexible in movement 1, it is malleable here, perhaps suggesting flexibility with regards to God's will. In its initial form, the motive is identical to the opening of "Bist du bei mir," a song by Gottfried Heinrich Stölzel, which Anna Magdalena Bach copied in her 1725 Notebook.

1. **Andante con moto Basso.**

Herr, so du willst,

Vln II Vln I

p *mf* Vla

C minor

Stanza 1.



5.

G7 C minor C minor

Herr, so du willst,

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9.

Herr, so du willst, Herr, so du willst,

Vln I [Herr, so do willst]

C minor C7 F major F7 B-flat major B-flat 7 E-flat major F7

mf

13.

so presst, ihr To - des - schmer - zen, die Seuf - zer aus dem Herzen,

Broken line of sighing/groaning figures...

Text painting: Sighing motives with throbbing chords to suggest resignation and melancholy.

B-flat major E-flat major B-flat major C7 F minor G7 D7

p

18.

wenn mein Gebet nur vor dir gilt.

The harmonic progression for this text could be from the Romantic period.

Vln I [Herr, so du willst]

Vln II [Herr, so du willst]

G minor G minor E-flat major D(7) G7 E-flat major

f

23.

Herr, so du

Stanza 2:

R.H.

C minor 6 (F# dim.7) D7 G minor G minor

p

27.

willt, Herr, so du willt, Herr, so du

C7 F minor B dim.7 G7 C minor

Text painting: Descending lines with chromatic harmonies for "Then lay down my members in dust and ashes."

31.

willt, so le-ge meine Glieder in Staub und A-sche

D7 G minor F7 F7

Throbbing chords suggest resignation and melancholy.

35.

Descent to the remote key of B-flat minor for "lay my members down in dust and ashes."

Text painting: Large upward leap followed by chromatic line for "this highly corrupted image of sin."

As if in response to the image of corrupted human nature, the strings play upwardly struggling sighing figures in imitation (leaps of 4ths and tritones). See Petzoldt, *Bach Kommentar* 2:472.

nie-der. dies höchst ver-derb-te Sün-den-bild.

Vln I
mf Vln II (up 8va) *cresc.*

B-flat minor E-flat minor G-flat major C-flat major A dim.7 F major B-flat minor B-flat major (B-flat pedal...)

40. Stanza 3.

Herr, so du willt, Herr, so du

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

Throbbing chords suggest resignation and melancholy.

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Text painting: Strings imitate the "Leichenglocken" (funeral bells, i.e., deathknell) mentioned in the text with oscillating 8th notes played pizzicato.

For more on "Leichenglocken" and related concepts, see side note.



45.

willt, Herr, so du willt, so schlagt, ihr Leichenglocken.

pizzicato strings

p staccato
pizzicato

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

50.

ken, so schlagt, ihr Leichenglocken, ich folge unerschrocken, mein Jam-

Strings play eighth notes on the downbeats... (here is an editorial continuo realization).

The bass line of pulsing quater notes, descending chromatically suggests resigned and calm descent in death, as referenced in the text.

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

55.

mer ist nunmehr gestillt. Herr, so du

The strings resume imitation of funeral bells. Martin Petzoldt notes that the striking of the hour also represents the hour of God's help as experienced by the centurion's servant in the Gospel reading (Luther 1545: "Und sein Knecht ward gesund zu derselbigen Stunde" [And his servant was healed at that very hour]). See Petzoldt, *Bach Kommentar* 2:473.

Continuo alone

After quiet acceptance, doubt returns in a loud, solitary cry to twisting harmonies.

(D-flat major) B-flat minor (E-flat 7) A-flat major A-flat 7 D-flat major A-flat major (E-flat 7) A-flat major
C minor

Motive as at the beginning.

60.

willt, Herr, so du willt, Herr, so du

Vlns play "Herr, so du wilt" figure in imitation.

Vln II Vln I

Vln II (up 8va)

B-flat 7 G7 C minor C minor

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64.

willt, Herr, so du willst, Herr, so du willst,

Continuo alone... *p*

B dim.7 C minor

68.

Herr, so du willst.

[Herr, so du willst]

mf

G7 C minor C minor A-flat major G7 G minor 7 C7 A-flat major

harmonic ambiguity...

72.

[Herr, so du willst]

F minor G7 C minor C minor

Martin Petzoldt suggests that the Trinitarian text of the chorale functions as a catechismal statement and mirrors the 3-part structure of the opening chorus (3 recitative insertions trope the chorale text of no. 1). The 3 persons of the Trinity are mentioned with their individual roles in the outward workings of the Trinity: the will of the Father as creator, the fullness of goodness and grace in the Son, and the governance of humans by faith. All of these aspects are reflected in the previous movements, making this chorale stanza an apt choice for the conclusion. See "Bach Kommentar" 2:466, 473.

Compare Bach's elaborate setting of this tune in BWV 11/9.

• God's will is to extend grace to us in Christ (73/5). Ninth and final stanza of "Von Gott will ich nicht lassen," a 1563 hymn by Ludwig Helmbold (1532–1598).

73/5. **Choral.** (Mel.: „Von Gott will ich nicht lassen.“)

Soprano. 1.

+Corno, Ob I, Vln I

Das ist des Va - ters Wil - - le, der uns er - schaf - fen

Alto.

+Ob II, Vln II

Das ist des Va - ters Wil - - le, der uns er - schaf - fen

Tenore.

+Vla

Das ist des Va - ters Wil - - le, der uns er - schaf - fen

Basso.

Das ist des Va - ters Wil - - le, der uns er - schaf - fen

C minor C minor B-flat major D major G minor E-flat major

For the significance of C, see side note.

The surprising movement to B-flat for "Father's will" reminds the listener that God's will can be surprising.



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4.

hat; sein Sohn hat Gut's die Fül - le er - wor - ben uns aus Gnad; auch

hat; sein Sohn hat Gut's die Fül - le er - wor - ben uns aus Gnad; auch

hat; sein Sohn hat Gut's die Fül - le er - wor - ben uns aus Gnad; auch

hat; sein Sohn hat Gut's die Fül - le er - wor - ben uns aus Gnad; auch

C minor C minor B-flat major D major G minor E-flat major G7 A-flat major C minor

9.

Gott, der heil' - ge Geist, im Glau - ben uns re - gie - - ret, zum

Gott, der heil' - ge Geist, im Glau - ben uns re - gie - - ret, zum

Gott, der heil' - ge Geist, im Glau - ben uns re - gie - - ret, zum

Gott, der heil' - ge Geist, im Glau - ben uns re - gie - - ret, zum

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

13.

Reich des Him - mels füh - - ret: ihm sei Lob, Ehr' und Preis.

Reich des Him - mels füh - - ret: ihm sei Lob, Ehr' und Preis.

Reich des Him - mels füh - - ret: ihm sei Lob, Ehr' und Preis.

Reich des Him - mels füh - - ret: ihm sei Lob, Ehr' und Preis.

E-flat major F# dim.7 G minor B-flat 7 E-flat major C minor G major C major