

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 181

Form: Aria (B) - Recit (A) - Aria (T) - Recit (S) - Chorus.  
 The original printed libretto divides no. 2 into 3 movements: 2a) "O unseliger...", 2b) "Es werden...", and 2c) "Es wirkt...", making this third 6-line section (rhyme scheme ABCABC) the central movement in a 7-movement symmetrical work. Bach's restructuring makes the tenor aria central, changing the central focus from the power of Christ's word to a warning that God's word choked by thorns of earthly concerns (as referenced in the Gospel reading (Jesus' parable of the sower and the seed) will face eternal judgment (see note).

NBA I/7; BC A45

Sexagesima (BWV 18, 181, 126)

\*2 Corinthians 11:19-12:9 (God's power is made perfect in weakness)

\*Luke 8:4-15 (Parable of the sower)

Librettist: Unknown. Movement 5, perhaps other movements, too, based on an earlier work.

FP: 13 February 1724 (Leipzig: St. Nicholas, together with BWV 18: see note).

## J.S. Bach Cantata No. 181 Leichtgesinnte Flattergeister

BWV 181 (perhaps a parody) is indebted to the devices of comic opera—quick tempo, syllabic declamation, short motives, staccato articulation, and an abundance of trills.

Instrumentation:

Tromba in D  
 Flauto traverso (added later, doubling Vln I)  
 Oboe (added later, doubling Vln I)  
 Vln I, II  
 Vla  
 SATB  
 Continuo, Organo

Form (Rhyme: ABCCB)  
 Ritornello (mm. 1-8) Em  
 A: Lines 1-2 (3x: 9-23) Em-GM  
 Rit (23-27) GM  
 B: Lines 3-5 (2x: 28-38) GM-Bm  
 Rit (38-41) Bm-Em  
 A': Lines 1-2 (2x: 42-51) Em  
 Rit (52) Em  
 B': Lines 3-5 (2x: 53-63) Am-Em  
 Rit (1-8) Em

### 1. Aria

Vivace 1.

181/1.

Ritornello derived from vocal theme.

Bourée-like

Chromatic, wandering harmonies...

Alfred Dürr writes, "With its nimble staccatos, the opening aria gives a graphic depiction of the 'frivolous flutter-spirits' of the text. The introductory instrumental motive, to which the opening words are later set, pervades the entire movement: In the B section, the name 'Belial' is sung with fine effect within the caesuras of the instrumental theme. The overall form is not tripartite, as in most arias, but in two halves with the B section also repeated: A B | A' B'." See *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, 236-237.

B7

D# dim.7

B7

C major G major E minor

Bass is often the voice of authority.

The term "Flattergeister" alludes to Psalm 119:113: I hate double-minded men (Luther 1545: Flattergeister) but I love thy law. The term literally means "fluttering spirits." Using poetic license, these people are identified with the birds/devil in Jesus' parable (see note).

Patter diction approaching the style of comic opera (see note for Martin Petzoldt's interpretation).

Text painting: Fluttering melody depicts the "superficially-minded fickle spirits."

E minor B7 C major

E minor E minor

E minor D major E7 A minor

Word painting: Sustained note followed by melisma for "power [of the Word]."

B7

E minor

C major A minor

E minor

B7

E minor

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13

Kraft. leichtge.

D# dim.7      B7      B7      E minor      E minor

16

sinnte Flattergeister, leichtge-sinnte Flattergeister rauben sich des Wor-tes Kraft,

E7 A minor      A minor      (B7) E minor      E minor      E minor

19

leichtgesinnte Flat- Word painting: Fluttering melisma for "fluttering spirits." -tergeister rauben

G# dim.7      A minor      C# dim.7      A7      F# dim.7      D7

22

sich des Wortes Kraft. rau - ben sich des Wor-tes Kraft.

Ritornello

G major      G major      G7      C major

The text alludes to Jesus' parable: "The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, that they may not believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12). Belial is identified as the devil in 2 Corinthians 6:15: What accord has Christ with Belial?

25

Be - li -

A7 D major D7 G major

28

B. Lines 3-5.

al, Be - li - al, Be - li - al mit seinen Kindern sucht

Word painting: "Belial" depicted with foreboding repetition in the vocal part, descending cascades in the continuo arriving on diminished 7th chords. Fluttering figures pervade...

G# dim.7 E7 A minor A# dim.7 F# major D# dim.7 B7 E minor

31

oh - ne - dem zu hin - dern, daß es kei - nen Nut - zen schafft, ——— keinen Nutzen

C#7 F# major B minor

33II

schafft, kei - - nen Nut - - - zen schafft, Be - li - al mit seinen Kindern sucht

B minor A# dim.7 F#7

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36

oh-nedem zu hindern, daß es kei - nen Nutzen, kei - nen Nutzen schafft.

Ritornello

F#7 B minor B minor

39

Leichtge-

A'. Lines 1-2.

B7 E minor E minor

42

sinnte Flatter-geister, leichtge - sinnte Flatter-geister rauben sich des Wor - tes

= m. 9. = m. 10. = m. 11.

E minor D major A minor B7 E minor

44 II

Kraft, des Wor - tes Kraft,

= m. 12. = m. 13.

B7 D# dim.7 B7 D# dim.7 B7

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47

= m. 14. = m. 15. leichtge - sinnte Flattergeister, leichtge - = m. 16.

(B7) E minor E7 A minor A minor

50

sinnte Flattergeister rauben sich des Wortes Kraft.

= m. 17. Ritornello

(B7) E minor E minor E minor E minor

52 II

B'. Lines 3-5.

Be - li - al, Be - li - al, Be - li -

= m. 28 transposed. [29]

p tr

G# dim.7 A minor A minor A minor

55

al mit seinen Kin-dern sucht oh - ne - dem zu hin - dern, daß es

[30] [31]

tr

A minor D# dim.7 E minor



57  
 kei - nen Nut - zen schafft, kei - nen Nutzen schafft, kei -  
 [32] tr [33] tr  
 E minor E minor

59  
 - nen Nut - zenschaft, Beli - al mit seinen Kindern sucht ohne - dem zu  
 [34] [35] [36]  
 E minor D# dim.7 B7

61 II  
 hindern, daß es kei - nen Nutzen, kei - nen Nutzen schafft.  
 [37] [38]  
 E minor E minor dal segno

**2. Recitativo** • Word that falls on hard hearts is ineffective (181/2).

181/2. Alto C D# E F# A G# E# B C#  
 O unglückselger Stand verkehr - ter Seelen, so gleichsam an dem We - ge  
 O unhappy state of-wayward souls, who as-it-were on the path  
 voice of faith. (perverted)  
 Secco  
 D# dim.7 C#7  
 Text painting: "perverted" chord progressions...

3 II  
 sind, und wer will doch des Satans List er - zählen, wenn er das Wort dem Herzen  
 are, and who could indeed - Satan's cunning tell, when he the Word out-of-the heart  
 F# minor B7 D# dim.7 B major B7  
 6

Chromatic saturation in the vocal part of the recitative sections in 13 mm.

The text alludes to a host of biblical passages and/or images (see note)



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6

**D** **B-flat**

raubt, das, am Ver-stan-de blind, den Scha-den nicht ver - steht noch glaubt.  
 steals, which, in discernment blind, the harm not discerns nor believes?

E7 G# dim.7 C# dim.7 G# dim.7 A minor

Compare the sequence in "Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis" (BWV 21). Here the progression turns perverse (m. 11).

**Arioso**  
**Andante**

Text painting: Inflexibly repeated notes depict knocking on the unyielding hearts as hard as stone (cf. Revelation 3:20).

9

Es werden Felsen - herzen, so boshaft wider - stehn, ihr  
 (Now) will hearts-of-stone, which wickedly resist (God's call), their

A minor A minor A minor F#7 B minor B major

Word painting: "laughing" melisma for "verscherzen" ("joke about" or "frivolously forfeit.")

Original printed libretto had "zu Trümmern gehen" ("go to ruins"). Bach saves this reference for the Andante.

12

eigen Heil ver - scherzen, ihr eigen Heil ver - scher - - - zen und einst zu - grunde  
 own salvation frivolously-forfeit their own salvation frivolously-forfeit and one-day be-ruined.

E minor E minor A# dim.7 B minor

15

**(Recit.)** **Andante**

geh. Es wirkt ja Chri - sti letz - tes Wort, daß  
 (Now) works indeed Christ's final word, that  
 [Jesus' last words: "It is finished."]

Right hand is editorial addition.

B major D# dim.7

The account of an earthquake following Jesus' last words and death is found in the Gospel of Matthew (Lent 1724) Bach was presumably working on the St. John Passion, in which he interpolated this Matthew account of the earthquake (BWV 245/33).

17

Fel - sen selbst zer - sprin - gen; des  
rocks themselves split-in-pieces; the

D# dim.7 B major G#7

18

En - gels Hand be - wegt des Gra - bes Stein, ja, Mo - sis Stab kann  
angel's hand moves the grave's stone, yes, Moses' rod can

R.H. is editorial.

G#7 D# dim.7 G#7 C#7 =C (lowest cello note)

Matthew records an earthquake at the resurrection, so Bach continues the continuo's jagged figure, descending downwards sequentially at the text's reference to the resurrection. Regarding the significance of the sharps, see note.

20

dort aus ei - nem Ber - ge Was - ser bringen. Willst du, o Herz, noch här - ter sein?  
there out-of a mountain water bring. Wouldst thou, O heart, still harder be (than these)?

E# dim.7 C#7 F# major D# dim.7 E minor C#7 F# major

Text painting: Descending cascade of notes for water.

Bach restructured the libretto so that this movement became the center in the symmetrical form (see note at no. 1).

Phrygian cadence, often used for questions.

### 3. Aria

181/3. 1. Word sown among worldly thorns, which will burn (181/3).

Alfred Dürr notes that this aria "survives in an incomplete state: in all probability, as demonstrated in the *Bach-Jahrbuch* for 1960 (pp. 32-6), it lacks a solo violin part." See *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, 237. For more, see note.

Ritornello *piano e staccato per tutto*

B minor A major D major

9

F# major B minor



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.

16

A# dim.7      D major      E7      A7      F#7      B minor

22

E7      A minor      N6      F#7

28

F#7      B minor

34 **Tenore**      The text references the thorns that choke out the Word in Jesus' parable.

8

Der schäd - li - chen Dor - nen un - end - li - che Zahl,  
 The harmful thorns' infinite number,

B minor      B minor      B minor

40

8

der schäd - li - chen Dornen un - end - li - che Zahl,

B minor      B minor      B minor

46

die Sor-gen der Wollust, die Schät-ze zu meh-

The cares of pleasure, (one's) treasures to multiply,

G major A7 D major F#7

52

- ren, die wer-den das Feu-

These will the fire

B minor B minor E(7)

Word painting: Flickering melisma for "hell's flames."

58

- er der höl-li-schen

of hell's

A major F#7 B minor C#7 F# minor

64

Qual in E-wig-keit näh-

torment in eternity feed.

F# minor F# minor F# minor B minor

Word painting: Long note for "eternity."

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71

Text painting: Flickering melismas for "feeding hell's flames."

ren, das Feu -

(E major) A aug. D major C(#7) F# minor F# major

77

er der höl-li - schen Qual

B minor F# minor E# dim.7 C#7 E# dim.7

83

in E - wig - keit näh - ren.

hemiola

F# minor F# minor

89

F# minor F#7 B minor C#7 F# minor

96

Der schäd - li - chen Dornen un - end - li - che Zahl, die

F# minor B7 E minor

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102

Sorgen der Wollust, die Schät-ze zu meh-ren, der schäd-li-chen

A# dim.7 F#7 F#7 B minor

108

Dornen un - end - li - che Zahl, die Sorgen der Wollust, die Schät-ze zu

A7 D major F#7 B minor

114

meh - ren, die wer-den das Feu -

Ascending scalar motive (but in descending sequence) contrasts with descending scalar melisma in mm. 51-52.

Word painting: Flickering melisma for "hell's flames."

B minor E7

120

er der höl - li - schen Qual

Chromatic inflection for "höllischen Qual" ("hell's torment").

F#7 B minor N6 C7

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126

in E - wig-keit näh -

Word painting: Long note for "eternity."

F#7 B minor

132

Text painting: Flickering melisma for "feeding hell's flames."

B minor

138

- ren.

B minor B7 E minor A7

144

D major F#7

149

B minor B minor



Secco

4. Recitativo

181/4. 1. Soprano •Seed lies dormant unless soil is prepared (181/4).

Von die - sen wird die Kraft er - stickt, der ed - le Sa - me liegt ver -  
 By these is (its) strength choked, the noble seed lies fruitless

D major

Despite the negative sentiment at the beginning, the recitative begins and ends in the major mode, moving the focus to those who embrace the Word in Jesus' parable.

ge - bens. Wer sich nicht recht im Gei - ste schickt, sein Herz bei - zeiten zum  
 Whoever himself not truly in-the Spirit (devotes), his heart in-god-time into

E minor

C# dim.

gu - ten Lan - de zu be - rei - ten, daß unser Herz die Sü - ßigkeiten schmecket, so  
 good soil to prepare, so-that our heart the sweetness tastes, which

B minor

E7

A major

The text alludes to Hebrews 6:4-5. ...Those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come...

uns dies Wort ent - decket, die Kräf - te dieses und des künft - gen Lebens.  
 to-us this Word reveals, the powers of-this and of-the future life.

A7

D major

D7

G major

A major

D major

Da capo

(Apparently based on an earlier work.)

181/5. 5. Coro •Prayer: Make soil of our heart receptive to thy Word (181/5).

Trumpet  
 Strings  
 +Transverse flute  
 (later performance)  
 +Oboe (later  
 performance)  
 Continuo

Ritornello  
 (largely unrelated  
 to vocal  
 sections).

D major



3II (65II)

6 (68)

9 (71) Soprano 1. Subject 1. Awkward text underlay suggests this text was adapted to earlier music.

Laß, Höch - - ster, uns zu al-len Zei - ten des Herzens Trost, dein hei - - lig

Alto Double fugue with additional thematic ideas. The rich harvest of the Word sown in receptive hearts as referenced in Jesus' parable is depicted with permutational combinations of thematic ideas and with full orchestration. (even though this music evidently existed previously with a different text). This structure presents a clear contrast to the "flightiness" of the first movment.

Tenore 2. Subject 2. Laß,

Basso Laß, Höchster, uns zu al-len Zei - ten des Herzens Trost, dein hei - lig

The text uses language from Jeremiah 15:16: Thy words became to me a joy and the delight (Luther 1545: Freude und Trost) of my heart...

(p) Continuo alone...

D major

12 (74) 3. Sustained note for "all" [times].

Wort, zu al - len Zei - - - - -

Höch - - ster, uns zu al - len Zei - ten des Her-zens Trost, dein

4. Long melisma for "all" [times].

Wort, zu al - - - - -

Laß, Höchster, uns zu al - len Zei - - ten des Her-zens Trost, dein

E7 A major

A major

5. Short rising melisma treated in sequential imitation.

14.

ten des Herzens Trost, dein heilig Wort, dein heilig  
 heilig Wort, des Herzens Trost,  
 - len Zeiten des Herzens Trost, dein heilig  
 heilig Wort, des Herzens

A major A7 D7 G major

16 (78)

Wort: laß, Höchster, uns zu allen Zeiten des  
 dein heilig Wort, zu al-  
 Wort, dein heilig Wort, dein heilig Wort: laß, Höchster, uns zu allen Zei- ten des  
 Trost, dein heilig Wort, zu allen Zei-

A7 D major

19 (81)

Herzens Trost, dein heilig Wort, des Herzens  
 - len Zeiten des Herzens Trost, des Herzens  
 Herzens Trost, dein heilig Wort, des Herzens Trost,  
 - ten des Herzens Trost, dein heilig Wort, dein

A D major

22.

Trost, dein heilig Wort, zu al-  
 len Zei-  
 ten des Her- zens Trost, dein heilig Wort,  
 laß, Höch- ster, uns zu al- len  
 heilig Wort; laß, Höch- ster, uns zu al- len

24(86) F#(7) B minor

len Zei- ten des Her- zens Trost,  
 dein heilig Wort, des  
 Zei- ten des Her- zens Trost, dein heilig Wort,  
 des Zei- ten des Her- zens Trost, dein heilig Wort,  
 des

26<sup>II</sup>(88<sup>II</sup>) B minor B7

dein heilig Wort, zu al- len Zei-  
 ten des Her- zens Trost; laß, Höch- ster, uns zu al- len  
 dein heilig Wort; laß, Höch- ster, uns zu al- len  
 des Her- zens Trost; laß, Höch- ster, uns zu al- len

E major E7    A major A7    D major D7    G major

29.

ten des Herzens Trost,  
Zei - tendes Herzens Trost, dein hei - lig - Wort,  
- len, al - len Zei - ten des  
Zei - ten des Herzens Trost, dein hei - lig Wort, des Her - zens Trost,

(p)

32 (94)

G major

G major

A7

laß, Höch - ster, uns zu al - len Zeiten des  
des Her - zens Trost, - zu al - len Zei - tendes  
Her - zens Trost, laß, Höchster, uns zu al - len Zei - tendes

(f)

35 (97)

D major

D major

Herzens Trost, dein hei - lig - Wort!  
Her - zens Trost, dein heilig Wort!  
Herzens Trost, dein hei - lig - Wort!  
dein heilig Wort!

Ritornello

D major



38(100)

D major

41(103)

44(106) **B** Soprano B. Section set for two vocal parts only. Parallel 6ths and 3rds suggest sweetness...  
 Alto Du kannst nach deiner All -  
 Du kannst nach deiner All -  
**B**  
 (p) Continuo alone...

46II D major F#7

-machts hand allein ein fruchtbar gu - tes Land in unsern Her - zen  
 -machts hand al - lein ein fruchtbar gu - tes Land in

49 B minor E7 A major C#7 F# minor

zu - be - rei -  
 unsern Herzen zu - - be - rei -

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52/

ten, du kannst nach dei- - - ner All- - machts-hand al - lein.

ten, du kannst nach dei- - - ner Allmachts-hand al -

F# minor F# minor E7 A major A7

54II

ein fruchtbar gu-tes Land, ein fruchtbar gu-tes Land in unsern Herzen zu-be-

lein ein fruchtbar gu-tes Land, ein fruchtbar gu-tes Land in unsern Herzen

D major D major F#7

57/

rei-

zu-be-rei-

B minor A# dim.7 B minor

59II

- ten, in un - sern Her - - zen zu - be - rei - ten.

- ten, in un - - sern Her - - zen zu - be - rei - ten.

B minor B minor da capo