## Chapter 7
### Ahle's Use of Chorales

In his comprehensive (albeit slightly outdated) study *Der evangelischen*

*Kirchengesang*, Carl von Winterfeld outlines the influence of chorales in Ahle's

1658 *Lustgarten* collection.[89]  Winterfeld states that Ahle uses fewer chorales in

this collection than the 1657 *Lustgarten* (only seven in thirty pieces, as opposed

to eight in twenty-six), and lists them as follows:

- Was werden wir essen (No. 8)
- Ach mein hertzliebes Jesulein (No. 13)
- Christ lag in Todesbanden (No. 15)
- O Lux beata Trinitas (No. 16)
- O Heiliger Geist du göttlichs feur (No. 23)
- Ich habs gewagt (No. 27)
- Erschienen ist der herrliche Tag (No. 29)

When examining the music, we find that "Ich habs gewagt," while based on a pre-

existing text found in Hassler's *Lustgarten*,[90] does not contain any musical

material borrowed from the source.  The same holds true for "Ach mein

hertzliebes Jesulein;" The text is the thirteenth verse from Martin Luther's "Vom

Himmel hoch." Rathey discusses that this particular verse became common to set

in isolation from the rest of the text, and also notes that in this setting Ahle does

not use the associated melody.[91]  Theoretically, this leaves five pieces in the 1658

*Lustgarten* that have a basis on, or at least use pre-existing musical material.

However, Winterfeld neglects a few pieces that are worth noting:  Rathey

indicates "Fürchtet euch nicht (No. 28)" features elements of the chorale

"Gelobet seist du, Jesus Christ," and that "Wer ist der, so von Edom kömmet (No.

24)" ends in two verses of an unidentified chorale.  Finally, it's worth noting that

---

[89] Winterfeld, *Der evangelischen Kirchengesang im siebzehnten Jahrhunderte*, 298.
[90] Hans Leo Hassler, *Lustgarten Neuer Teutscher Gesäng* (Nürmberg: Paul Kauffmann, 1601), no. 3.
[91] Rathey, *Johann Rudolph Ahle*, 273-275.

"Was ist der Mensch (No. 2)" is based, musically and textually, on "Ich hab mein Sach Gott heimgestellt."[92]  This leaves us with eight pieces seemingly based on both a pre-existing text and melody, with all but one with a clear source.

The two largest scale pieces are "Fürchtet euch nicht" and "O Heiliger Geist."  Both use the chorale melodies differently, but both are fairly conservative in their use of the melodies.  The most strict is "O Heiliger Geist."  Scored for three soloists (cantus, altus, and bassus), a five voice cappella, and featuring sinfonias for four strings and four *flauti*, the piece goes through four verses of "O heiliger Gesit, du göttlich feur" by Melchior Vulpius, which first appeared in *Ein schön geistlich Gesangbuch,* his 1609 hymnal:[93]
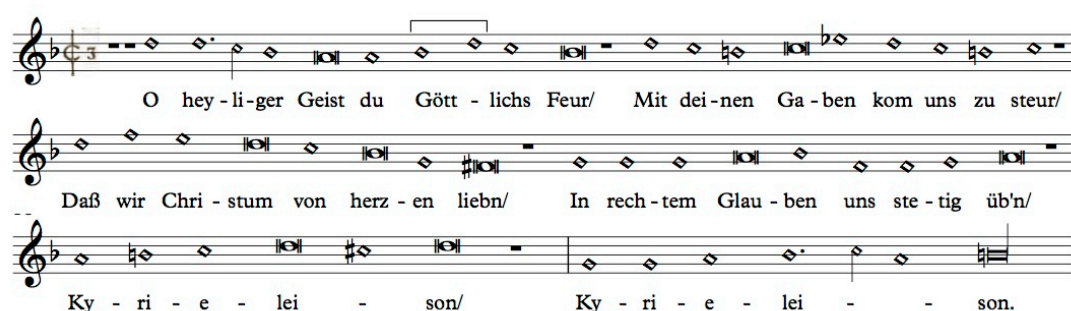
Ahle's piece is divided into two large sections, each with two verses to the same music.  The first begins with a string sinfonia, and following that the soloists sing the opening motive of the chorale repeatedly, echoed by the strings, and overlapping with each other.  While the first note is occasionally altered, the

---

[92] Rathey discusses "Wer ist der" on pg. 308, and mentions the use of the chorale melody and text for "Fürchtet euch nicht" in his index of Ahle's works.  While he mentions the text of "Was ist der Mensch" is based on Johan Leon's "Ich hab mein Sach" he does not mention or discuss the musical elements of this chorale found in Ahle's music.

[93] Melchior Vulpius, *Ein schön geistlich Gesangbuch* (Jena, J. Weidner, 1609).  The majority of the tunes discussed here can be found in this hymnal, which I came across after consulting Johannes Zahn's *Melodien der deutschen evangelischen Kirchenlieder*.I think it is reasonable to suggest Ahle would have had access to this widely circulated and immensely popular book.

falling third on "heiliger" remains the same, and the three voices eventually unite

to complete the opening line.  Directly following that, the strings, chorus, and

soloists join together in a complete statement of the first line of the chorale:



**Figure 20 - J. R. Ahle, "O Heiliger Geist" (No. 23, Lustgarten II, 1658), mm. 28 - 40.**

The piece continues in much the same vain – the three soloists sing brief

segments of the melody, with occasional insignificant note changes, and then the

choir and instruments join together for complete statements of the complete line.  For the final Kyrie's, however, Ahle sets aside the melody given by Vulpius.  While he still uses an ascending fourth, the lines terminate differently, and the tutti statement that closes the first part has no melodic relation to what Vulpius wrote.

The second part of the piece is even more rigid with the original melody.  After a sinfonia for four *flauti*, there is a tutti statement of the first motive of the melody (this time on the text for the third and fourth verses).  The three soloists and the strings echo this statement, and the phrase ends with the strings echoing the last two chords.  Throughout the section, Ahle includes dynamic markings – *forte* for the first utterance, *mezzo piano* for the second, and *pianissimo* for the echo of the two chords.



Figure 21 - "O Heiliger Geist" (No. 23, Lustgarten II, 1658), mm. 145-150.

This formula is used for the remainder of the piece; Ahle applies this echo effect to each line of the melody.  Once again, Ahle uses only his material for the Kyrie's – still a rising fourth motive, but not the material given by Vulpius.  In the end, "O heiliger Geist" comes across as an elaborate setting of the original chorale.  There

is little new musical material, with the exception of the sinfonias, and the chorale melody is easily recognizable throughout.

   "Fürchtet euch nicht**,"** scored for two choirs - the angels (three sopranos and baritone) and the shepherds (alto, two tenors, and a bass) – and four *fagotti* buries the chorale melody a bit deeper, and uses it for a different purpose.  After the opening sinfonia, a solo soprano sings the common text from Luke 2:10-15 ("Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people…").  The rest of the angel choir soon joins, singing "Glory to God, and Peace on Earth," and the shepherds then sing a brief chorus announcing their intent to travel to Bethlehem.  After a second sinfonia, the chorus of shepherds sings a response to the verses from Luke, in the form of the chorale "Gelobet seistu Jesu Christ."
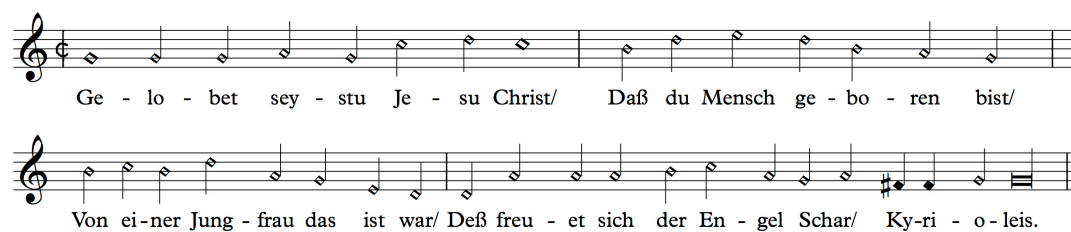
**Figure 22 – "Gelobet seystu Jesu Christ" from Vulpius: Gesangbuch (1609), p. 44.**[94]

---

[94] While the authorship of the text to this chorale is easily attributed to Martin Luther, the music is less easy to identify – Johannes Zahn attributes it Walter, whose hymnal it first appeared in, in 1524.

This is one of the few occasions where Ahle moves the chorale between voices; it begins in the top voice, is barely noticeable for "Jesu Christ," before ending up in the first tenor voice. In his effort to differentiate the roles of the choruses, he has the upper (angel) choir sing "der Engelschaar," repeatedly, until the shepherd chorus finally completes the melody, now in the second tenor voice.



**Figure 23 – "Fürchtet euch nicht" (No. 28, Lustgarten II), mm. 137-162.**

After the first verse, Ahle skips directly to the seventh verse of the chorale. While the upper and lower choirs begin to alternate in larger pieces, the chorale phrases continue to move between parts until the last line, which is not sung by any part.  In lieu of the "Kyrieleis," Ahle concludes with a rousing Amen, more suitable for a joyous Christmas piece.  Even Blume can admit the piece is "a masterful realization in spite of its narrow confines."[95]

One of the finest pieces in the collection, "Erschienen ist der Herrliche Tag" is a perfect example of the seventeenth-century German *chorale concerto*. Ahle reworks the melody through instrumental sinfonias, vocal solos, and choruses, in the piece scored for violins, trombones, soloists, and chorus.  The piece uses the familiar Herman text, but with a lesser known tune:[96]



**Figure 24 – "Erschienen ist der herrliche Tag," from *Geistliche Lieder und Psalmen* (Erfurt: Martin Spagenberg, 1634), XLI.**

Already in the opening sinfonia, Ahle brings out the most noticeable elements of the melody – the characteristic upward leap of a fourth, resolving to the major third.  Ahle choses to set five of the fourteen verses, and the first four follow the same pattern: a vocal solo, with or without instruments, followed by a conservative rendering of the triple meter section.  The first verse, and the most faithful to the melody, is the solo soprano with two violins.  While the melody has light embellishments, the chorale is basically unaltered aside from occasional repetitions.

---

[95] Blume, *Protestant Church Music*, 232.
[96] Rathey identifies this tune as the melodic source in his index to Ahle's works.

**Figure 25 –Cantus and Altus solos from "Erschienen ist der herrliche Tag," (No. 29, Lustgarten II)**

On the second verse (sung by an Alto soloist), Ahle maintains the key notes of the

chorale, so the melody is still recognizable, but reflects more of the text.   A

dissonance is added on "sünd," and the descending figure from the original

melody is used in a different way, to depict a descent into hell and pain.  The

following verse is sung by the tenor, and Ahle chooses to skip to the ninth verse

of the chorale – where life triumphs over death (a nice contrast to the preceding

verse, where death seemed strong).  Continuing to stray further from the original

melody, this verse contains a large amount of original material, even though it

begins with the ascending fourth, which falls to the major third.  Ahle pays

particular attention in this section to the image of war – using the trombones and

the voice to depict fanfares, as well as florid passages for the singer.



**Figure 26 - Tenor and Bassus solos from "Erschienen ist der herrliche Tag," (No. 29, Lustgarten II)**

The bass verse (the thirteenth) has the least melodic material tied to the chorale.

While it opens with the rising fourth, it does not fall to the third, and the rest of

the vocal line bears very little resemblance to the familiar melody, outside of

some similarities in the harmonic structure.  The vocal line never strays far from

the continuo part, but this allows the three trombones above to weave a

beautiful texture.  When the triple returns at the end of this verse, it is once again

a clear rendering of the chorale, except that in this case, it moves between the

alto and tenor soloists.

For the final verse (the fourteenth), Ahle changes the first part of the

melody to fit into a triple meter, and introduces the cappella.  He creates a

similar echo effect to that which he used in "O heiliger Geist" – the choir sings a

phrase, it's echoed by all the instruments, and then the final two chords are

echoed by simply the violins.   When the melody moves to what was originally in

triple meter, Ahle abandons the echo effect, and repeats the passage twice,

culminating and a grand duple final "alleluja!"

While "Christ Lag in Todes Banden" (No. 15) begins in the same vain as "O

heiliger Geist," (fragments of the melody overlapping, before uniting the voices

and instruments in communal statements of the chorale), it can also be assigned

to the category of *chorale concerto,* but on a much smaller scale than "Erschienen

ist."  The piece uses Luther's common text and tune.



**Figure 27 - "Christ lag in Todes Banden," from Vulpius: Gesangbuch (1609), p. 164.**

The composition opens with four independent statements of the opening line of

the chorale, first in the Bassus, then followed quickly by the Altus, Cantus, and

finaly the Tenor.  The voices repeat the text "in Todes Banden," in pairs (still

using the original melody), and then the voices unite for a largely homophonic statement of the complete opening line. "In Todes Banden" is repeated a few more times, in each voice – all voices singing together, but each line staying very close to the original melody. Ahle repeats this procedure for the next line of text and music – overlapping statements conclude in a homophonic rendering of "für unser Sünde gegeben."

After a brief violin interjection, Ahle begins the third line of the text, which traditionally returns to the opening music. Instead, there is a new melody – which eliminates the characteristic opening material, but terminates in the same way as the old melody. This is the only statement in the piece where the traditional melody is so completely disregarded, and also the only one that is not given a tutti treatment. Ahle seems to use this passage as a transitional moment – from the painstakingly wrought statements around death and sin – to the brighter thoughts of Christ arising, and finding new life. The next phrase returns to the treatment pattern of the opening phrases – overlapping individual

statements (this time in a triple meter) are concluded with a corporate homophonic statement (back in the duple meter).

In the second part of the text, Ahle begins to pay more attention to the text, as he did in "Erschienen ist." The original melody is never far from the surface, though, as can be seen in the examples below.



* in examples marked with a star, the note values of the chorale have been halved.

**Figure 29 - Ahle's embellishments on the original chorale melody.**

He begins conservatively, simply adding a dotted figure in the many utterances of "frölich sein," which gives the text motion and excitement. The music soon becomes more elaborate, such as in the depiction of "Gott loben" and "singen," both with melismas. "Und dankbar sein" is consistently rendered (perhaps representing the unending praise) in long and deliberate note values, while the Alleluia's are consistently florid and joyful.

Moving away from the world of the chorale concerto, we come to one of only a few motets in Ahle's 1658 *Lustgarten*. The only chorale-based piece in the

collection to have a Latin text, "O Lux Beata Trinitas" draws musical influence

from a version of the hymn printed in Lukas Lossius's 1553 hymnal.[97]



Figure 30 - "O lux beata trinitas" from *Psalmodia, Cantica Sacra Veteris Ecclesiae*, Norbergae, 1553.

Ahle sets all three of the verses in a six voice motet.  The first part has the

strongest links to the chorale melody – almost every entry in the first fifteen bars

of the piece bears a close resemblance to the chorale.  As in "Christ lag" and "O

heiliger Geist," all parts repeat the first line of the chorale individually, until they

all come together for a corporate statement.  Ahle does the same thing, but to a

lesser extent, with the second half of the first verse.  For the second verse, the

chorale melody is largely abandoned, in favor of an almost polychoral

homophonic texture – Ahle alternates the higher and lower voices to depict the

difference between the morning song and evening prayer being sung (*Te mane

laudum carmine, te deprecemur vespere*).  However, upon arrival at "Te nostra

supplex gloria," Ahle does something new.  The second Cantus sings the chorale

melody in minims, while the other five parts move largely in semi-minims

around it.  The faux-cantus firmus lasts only a few bars, but appropriately re-

appears in the third verse, for the text "et nunc et in perpetuum."  Here it is the

Altus, and then the Bassus holding the chorale melody, while the other parts

dance around in passages of eighth notes.

---

[97] Unable to consult this hymnal, I have relied on the version provided by Johannes Zahn
in his *Melodien der deutschen evangelischen Kirchenlieder*.

**Figure 31 - "O Lux Beata Trinitas," (No. 16, Lustgarten II), mm. 160 -169.**

The smallest scale piece in the 1658 collection to have a basis on a chorale

is the second piece in the collection, "Was ist der Mensch," which is scored for

solo Altus and Continuo.  Fittingly, Ahle does not take the melody of the chorale

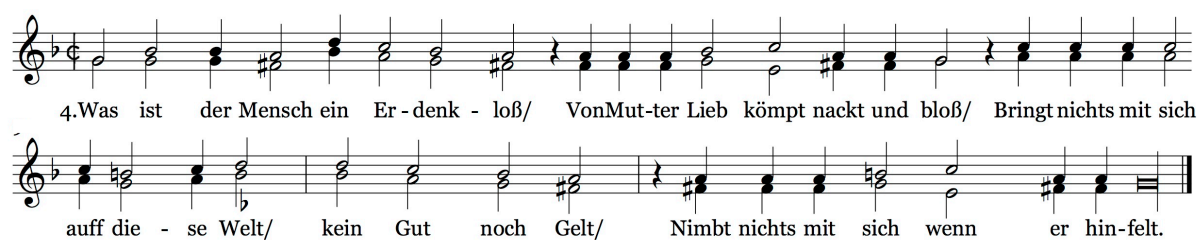from which the text comes, but the Altus line, as printed in Vulpius 1609.

Figure 32 - "Ich hab mein sach Gott heimgestellt," Verse 4, Cantus and Altus, from Vulpius: *Gesangbuch* (1609), p. 508.

Thankfully, Ahle only sets six of the eighteen verses Vulpius provides, beginning with the fourth verse.



Figure 33 - "Was ist der Mensch" (No. 2, Lustgarten II), mm. 1-21.

From the beginning, it is clear Ahle has built his music on this Altus part – he opens with the figure of the semitone descent, and then repeats the semitone descent figure again, a third higher.  In the first and second verse (Vulpius four and ten), the only place where the music deviates from the general melodic

72

structure of the chorale is on "Bringt nichts mit sich auff diese Welt," where Ahle instead uses some more inventive musical material.  The next verse is much freer, with only a few motives noticeably drawn from the chorale.  Ahle's fourth verse, however, is a straight copy of the Vulpius alto part, treated as a cantus firmus.  These twenty bars are unique in the collection – not only because this is the only place where Ahle is so strict with his use of pre-existing material, but also as this is the only place where he provides two lines in the continuo part – one above the other, with the inscription "oder also."

**Figure 34 - "Was ist der Mensch" (No. 2, Lustgarten II), mm. 56 – 75.**

After this excitement, Ahle returns to the methods he used for the first verses.

There is still attention to text setting, such as rests interrupting the repetitions of

"Ach," and for the final verse, "Amen, mein lieber frommer Gott!," Ahle opts for a

jaunty triple meter (but continues to retain the melodic material of the chorale).

The final piece based on a discernable chorale[98] is the eighth piece in the

collection, "Was werden wir essen." Scored for only four solo voices and

continuo, the piece creates a dialog between the four voices, using a variety of

bible passages, and the chorale "Warum betrübst du dich mein Hertz." The tenor

repeatedly sings a passage from Matthew 6:31, asking what we will eat, drink,

and wear, while the bass and the alto alternate with their responses from Psalm

37: hope will keep us modest and fed. Above it all, the soprano sings the chorale

text, to the melody by Seth Calvisius, as if to comfort those questioning below:

> *Why do you grieve, my heart?*
> *Trouble and pain, just for temporary good?*
> *Trust your Lord God, who created all things.*

---

[98] As previously mentioned, No. 24 "Wer ist der, so von Edom kömmet" concludes (as Rathey mentions) with a double choir homophonic passage that seems to be a chorale, but is as of yet unidentified.

**Figure 35 - "Warumb betrübstu dich mein Herz," from Vulpius: Gesangbuch (1609).**

The first soprano entrance comes after the tenor introduction, and the alto response. The soprano sings the entire melody, almost exactly as written in Vulpius,[99] alone for the first line, but quickly joined by the tenor asking questions once again. The soprano begins the chorale melody again (still on the first verse), but never gets past the first two lines. As the other parts begin to enter in, Ahle becomes less strict with his use of the melody, and the soprano sings some material unrelated to the chorale. After all four parts compete for attention for several bars, they all join together in a rendition of the chorale to finish the piece – a striking moment, after being so independent for the rest of the piece.



**Figure 36 - "Was werden wir essen" (No. 8, Lustgarten II), mm. 83 – 94.**

---

[99] Once again, the chorale as written in Vulpius is closer (in terms of rhythm and accidentals) to what Ahle writes than any of the other several versions which Zahn provides, making it seem likely Ahle was using this hymnal as a source.

Just as in "Fürchtet euch nicht," Ahle uses the chorale to musically draw the previously separated voices together, and textually as a way to give an appropriate response to the biblical texts.

In a general sense, each of these examples from Ahle's 1658 *Lustgarten* seem to use chorales to give the listener a moment to cling to something familiar. They are never so obscured as to be unrecognizable – and would allow a 17th century listener to hear something they were accustomed to singing – and this is where the fascination with personal spirituality re-enters the discussion.  His approach to using the chorale varied from piece to piece; while some pieces were based exclusively on chorales, others simply used them as a footnote to Ahle's original material.  They were always used to create unity in the music;  "Was werden wir essen" and "Fürchtet euch nicht" used chorales to create a theological unity, suggesting a response to the passages just heard, using chorales as the basis for larger pieces, such as "Erschienen ist" and "O heiliger Geist," Ahle found a way to create new, exciting music, but still with rousing, familiar chorale elements; his clever re-workings of the melodic elements in "O lux beata trinitas" and "Christ lag in Todes Banden," allowed him to create more intimate music that was unified by the repetitive use of opening motives.  More than unity, though, the use of familiar chorales would have created a connection the listener (or performer) was able to make, allowing them to feel part of the liturgy or of the music.  This personal connection is the thread that connects Ahle's use of texts and chorales, and his use of instruments to highlight the texts – and should shape our conception of the collection.