The End is Nigh: Reflections of Philipp Nicolai’s Eschatology in BWV 1 and BWV 140

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ABSTRACT

The End is Nigh: Reflections of Philipp Nicolai's Eschatology in BWV 1 and BWV 140

A thesis presented to Department of Music

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
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In his mission to create a better repertoire of "well-regulated church music to the Glory of God," J.S. Bach utilized every aspect of his craft. Aside from the rich texts penned by his anonymous librettist, Bach intentionally utilized specific musical gestures to intertwine the Gospel into each layer of his compositions. In the case of BWV 1 and BWV 140, Bach makes compositional choices that allow him to depict the eschatological viewpoint of Phillip Nicolai, the Lutheran theologian who penned the chorales used as the basis of these chorale cantatas. By analyzing Bach's use of such devices as large-scale harmonic patterns, melodic motives, and the structural use of chiasm, the depiction of motion between the realms of Heaven and Earth becomes clear. More than simply "church music," Bach's cantatas are musical sermons of intricate detail.
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When analyzing the works of Johann Sebastian Bach, one cannot help but delve into the theology of Martin Luther. While some will argue that Bach was "a musician who happened to land in the church" and who did not strive to "support his music with theology," it is widely accepted that Bach, while primarily a musician, also intertwined theological meaning into his works.¹ His music embodies Lutheran theology, presenting it through form, harmony, melody, and tonality. Each of these methods can be demonstrated by an analysis of two of his sacred chorale cantatas, BWV 1 and BWV 140. Both cantatas are based on chorales by Philipp Nicolai and depict his theological views as a devout follower of Luther during the Reformation.

The Protestant Reformation cannot be thoroughly discussed without some consideration of the great repertoire of hymnody produced by Martin Luther and his tradition. Throughout his writings, Luther can be quoted placing music alongside theology as a crucial aspect of worship and as an important element in developing an understanding of the difference between Old Testament Law and New Testament Gospel. This fundamental distinction is central to Luther’s theology. The importance placed on music by Luther is evident in Tischreden (Table Talk), a compilation of statements made by Luther in conversation with his students and colleagues, edited and published by Johann Aurifaber in 1566. This compendium of quotes is structurally divided into 82 sections, each corresponding with an aspect of Lutheran

¹ Joyce Irwin. *Neither Voice nor Heart Alone: German Lutheran Theology of Music* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 141.
dogmatic theology. Luther’s commentary on the importance of music is not restricted to the portion devoted to music, but can be found throughout the volume.²

Luther based his promotion of music on the early Israelite psalmists as "the first to grasp the importance of music as a means to communicate an understanding of God."³ For Luther, music was a universal means of expressing divine truth, not restricted by time or place but capable of being comprehended by all people. Sacred music in general, but specifically the Psalms, were meant "to preach the mystery of the kingdom of heaven and to exhort people to a good spiritual life."⁴ In fact, according to Luther, music's primary function was to proclaim the gospel message. Compositions were essentially musical sermons. As such, communal singing allowed the congregation to collectively declare the Gospel in a manner such that everyone could participate. This inclusivity was often the reasoning behind Luther's choice of melody. He set original words in the vernacular language to familiar tunes. By using a recognizable tune and simple text, Luther wrote songs which were easy to remember. The Gospel message was now accessible even to the illiterate. It is through music that the ideas of Luther's Reformation spread across Europe, even entering into Catholic strongholds where Luther's writings were banned. Physical books were not permitted to cross the borders, but common melodies could not be so easily censored.⁵

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As Luther's ideas spread, they inspired many musicians. Philipp Nicolai was one such devout Lutheran theologian, poet, and composer. Born in Mengeringhouse in 1556, he wrote several theological treatises and books of poetry over the course of his life. Several of these writings are attacks on forms of Christianity outside of Lutheranism, including Calvinism and Catholicism. He spoke out so vehemently against the Sacramentarians, opponents of Lutheranism who rejected all ideas of transubstantiation in favor of a metaphorical embodiment of Christ in the Eucharist, that the University of Warburg denied him his doctorate. He was awarded the degree four years later in Wittenburg, 1594. Two years following the receipt of his degree, he was called to a pastorate in Unna as a defense against the Calvinists.  

Nicolai’s 1599 treatise *Der Freudenpiegel des ewigen Lebens*, written during an outbreak of plague during his time in Unna, is especially notable for its inclusion of Nicolai’s only known compositional output. Of the various musical works scattered throughout the treatise, two chorales found at the end became staple hymns of the Lutheran tradition.  

Wie Schön leuchtet die Morgenstern and Wachet auf ruft uns die Stimme would come to serve as the basis of Bach chorale cantatas BWV 1 and 140, respectively.

In writing the texts of his chorales, Nicolai honored one of his young students who died of plague. The first letter of each stanza of *Wie Schön*, W - E - G - U - H - Z - W, are an acrostic for Wilhelm Ernst Graf Und Herr Zu Waldeck. Similarly, the letters which begin each stanza of *Wachet auf*, W - Z - G, form an acrostic in reverse. When placed in the correct order these

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letters stand for "Graf Zu Waldeck." These references to the Count of Waldeck are a tribute to this young man who died in 1598, the year before Nicolai published Der Freudenspiegel.

While the texts of these chorales were original works by Nicolai, the melodies were mostly borrowed. The melody of Wie Schön is a compilation of three phrases from Wolf Köphel’s 1538 setting of Psalm 100, one phrase from Resonet in laudibus, a well-known Christmas carol, and two original phrases by Nicolai. 9 Wachet auf also derives from several sources, including phrases from Hans Sach’s Silberweise, Nikolaus Decius’ O Lamm Gottes unschuldig, and the tune In dulci jubilo. 10

The style of both hymns can be connected to the Meistersinger tradition. Aside from their use of bar-form, Nicolai’s compositional method was similar to that of the Meistersingers. The practice of borrowing multiple melodic fragments and joining them together as the melody for an original poetic work was developed by the Meistersingers. Nicolai’s use of this method earned him the title "the last Meistersinger." 11

Nicolai’s theology was primarily concerned with the Second Coming of Christ, which Nicolai believed to be imminent. He emphasized the spiritual connection between Christ and his faithful followers, and described heavenly eternity as a reality that could be experienced by the pious in the present life. Several of his treatises focused on eternity and its present day manifestations. The joy of an eternal heaven is the focus of the treatise in which Wie Schön and

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11 Ibid. 56.
Wachet auf appear, as it was written to uplift Nicolai's congregation from the fear and grief of the raging plague. This focus on the eternal is important to the analysis of both the chorales and Bach's cantata settings.

Nicolai's emphasis on Christ's return to earth places his theology into the category of eschatological interpretation. Scriptural analysis during the Middle Ages could be divided into two classes, the second further dividing into three sections. The first category of scriptural analysis, the Literal (or Historical), takes the words of Scripture exactly as they are. The second category allows for symbolic interpretations and can be split into three divisions: Allegorical, Tropological (or Moral), and Eschatological (or Anagogical). These methods of Scripture reading focus on the Bible as it applies to the Church, the individual, and eternity, respectively. Caplan effectively clarifies the distinctions between these classes by providing the following interpretation of the word "Jerusalem" according to each of the above methods (Example 1).

**Example 1: Interpretation of "Jerusalem" according to the Four Scriptural Senses***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scriptural Sense</th>
<th>Interpretation of &quot;Jerusalem&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literal/Historical</td>
<td>&quot;the city of that name&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allegorical</td>
<td>&quot;the Holy Church&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tropological/Moral</td>
<td>&quot;the faithful soul of whoever aspires to the vision of eternal peace&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eschatological/Anagogical</td>
<td>&quot;the life of the dwellers in Heaven who see God revealed in Zion&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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These four methods of scriptural interpretation can also be expressed musically. The scared cantatas of Bach are filled with allusions to the scriptural senses. Melodic patterns, large and small scale harmonic plans, mode, chromaticism, and form are all used by Bach to illustrate his desired interpretation. The choice of voice type is particularly informative, as each voice is generally accepted to have carried its own symbolic character in regards to spiritual subject matter (Example 2). Although not directly relevant to this study, numerology is often cited as another aspect of Bach's musical symbology.

Example 2: Voice Types and their Characterization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice Type</th>
<th>Symbolic Characterization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soprano</td>
<td>Soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alto</td>
<td>Holy Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenor</td>
<td>Evangelist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass</td>
<td>God or Jesus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Particularly notable in BWV 1 and to some extent in BWV 140 is Bach's allegorical use of tonality. Patterns of harmonic descent and ascent are used to symbolize both divine and human spiritual motion, such as movement in a flat direction marking the coming of the Holy Spirit to the early Christians at Pentecost, or a shift in the sharp direction aligned with a reference to human praises and prayers rising to heavenly ears. This pattern is also used to depict salvation history, with descent marking the fall of humanity into sinfulness followed by ascent with the coming of Christ and humanity's redemption through Christ's death and resurrection. This
aligns with Luther's antithesis of Law and Gospel. Bach's large scale tonal framework in these cantatas is not haphazard, but is a carefully planned depiction of spiritual life.\textsuperscript{14}

Bach composed BWV 1 for Sunday, March 25, 1725. According to the liturgical calendar, this Sunday was designated for celebrating the Annunciation. Occurring nine months before Christmas, the Feast of the Annunciation reflects upon the appearance of the angel Gabriel to Mary and his proclamation that she will bear the Messiah. The frequent placement of this feast day during the observance of Lent adds to its contemplative nature. This is especially evident in the connection some scholars draw between the appearance of Gabriel to Mary and the temptation of Eve by the Serpent. The Serpent's deception of Eve led to the fall of mankind, but Gabriel's proclamation to Mary led to humanity's salvation. Without the first, there would be no need for the second.\textsuperscript{15}

In contrast, Nicolai's chorale was originally intended for use during the observance of Epiphany. Taking place 12 days after Christmas, Epiphany focuses on the visitation of the Magi to the young Jesus and celebrates Christ's descent into human form.\textsuperscript{16} While the Annunciation focuses on a different portion of the Gospel, both Annunciation and Epiphany place emphasis on the descent of the Divine to earth.

The liturgical readings used for Annunciation are Isaiah 7:10-16 and Luke 1:26-38 (Example 3). Aside from the obvious usage of the Luke passage describing Gabriel's appearance to Mary, a reading prophesying the Messiah's coming is also prescribed. This passage from Isaiah includes a message of hope from the prophet to King Ahaz circa 750 BC. The kingdom of

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
Judah was under threat of invasion from Damascus and Samaria. Despite Isaiah's continued pleadings to trust in God's protection, King Ahaz had enlisted help from Assyria. While the Assyrian forces successfully protected Judah from the invading armies, Judah's reliance on foreign aid placed the kingdom under Assyrian control. In this passage, Isaiah reminds the king that someone greater is coming who will truly free the people.\textsuperscript{17}

Example 3: Liturgical Texts for Annunciation\textsuperscript{18}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isaiah 7:10-16</th>
<th>Luke 1:26-38</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, &quot;Ask a sign of the Lord your God; Let it be as deep as Sheol or high as heaven.&quot; But Ahaz said, &quot;I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test.&quot; Then Isaiah said:&quot;Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.&quot;</td>
<td>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.’ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’ Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’ The angel said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.’ Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{17} "Isaiah 1-7," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Online.  
\textsuperscript{18} All biblical translations from the New Revised Standard Version.
The liturgical theme of divine descent is prevalent in the Nicolai text and is preserved in Bach's libretto. This descent, along with other eschatological themes, is also depicted musically in Bach's melodic and harmonic choices. This is evident from the very beginning of the cantata. Scored for two horns, two oboe di caccia, two solo violins, strings, and continuo, Bach's instrumentation lacks the more common upper voices such as trumpets, flutes, and oboes. These have been replaced by the two solo violins, whose high shimmering lines can be considered illustrative of the shining Morning Star.\(^{19}\) The text of the first movement is an anthem of praise, similar to the Psalms (Example 4). It is written as the voice of the soul, comparing Christ to the morning star and using the analogy of Christ as the soul's bridegroom.

Example 4: Movement 1 Text\(^{20}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German Text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern</td>
<td>How beautiful shines the morning star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voll Gnaden und Wahrheit von dem Herr</td>
<td>Full of grace and truth from the Lord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die süße Wurzel Jesse!</td>
<td>The sweet root of Jesse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Du Sohn Davids aus Jakobs Stamm,</td>
<td>The son of David of Jacob's tribe,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mein König und mein Bräutigam,</td>
<td>my king and my bridegroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hast mir mein Herz besessen,</td>
<td>Thou has possessed my heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lieblich, Freundlich, Schön und Herrlich</td>
<td>Lovely, Kind, beautiful and glorious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>groß und ehrlich, reich von Gaben,</td>
<td>great and honorable, rich in gifts,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoch und sehr prächtig erhaben.</td>
<td>high and very magnificently elevated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nicolai set the text in 10 uneven phrases, varying in length from as few as 2 notes up to a maximum of 12 notes. The unusual phrase lengths were adopted by Bach as well. These

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unconventional musical settings are not unintentional. When illustrated graphically, the number of syllables per phrase creates the shape of a wine goblet (Example 5). Wine was a common eschatological symbol for eternal fulfillment of the soul and was linked to the Gospel in the sermons of Luther. The goblet shape could also be linked to the famous engraved goblet that was given to Bach by a wealthy patron. However, the date of that gift is uncertain and, based on the workmanship of the goblet itself, likely took place later in Bach's career.

Example 5: Syllabic Image of the Wine Goblet

![Syllabic Image of the Wine Goblet](image)

Following the standard chorale cantata formula, the first movement of BWV 1 preserves verse one of the original Nicolai text. Nicolai's original chorale melody can be found in augmentation in the soprano melody as well as in the first horn line. Written in F Major, the triadic nature of the melody keeps the entire movement firmly rooted in the tonic. The shape of the melody is designed to imitate Psalm tones, rising to the sixth scale degree and descending. This shape is also a common trait of watchman songs and is evident in Wachet auf, as will be discussed later.

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Each of the 10 phrases of the first movement are freely composed, with phrases 4-6 repeating the material used in phrases 1-3. The 12 measure opening ritornello re-appears in its entirety following phrases 3 and 10, in addition to an abbreviated 9 measure interlude based on the ritornello following phrase 6. Phrases 1-6 maintain an imitative texture at various intervals. The first major texture shift occurs in phrases 7 and 8. These two phrases each consist of two notes and are set homophonically. The imitative texture then returns for the final two phrases, with the addition of an overlapping rhythmic pattern between the alto and tenor voices in the final phrase.

Movement 2 begins the textual references to descent while continuing the Psalm-like praise of the first movement. The text looks to Christ's coming to earth through Mary as promised by the angel Gabriel (Example 6). The appropriateness of this text for the Feast of Annunciation does not require further explanation. Coinciding with this first reference to the human Christ is the first point of harmonic descent in the cantata, the flat motion from d minor to g minor. This movement also continues the Eucharistic symbolism begun with the wine reference discussed above from movement one. In this text, the second element of Eucharist is directly mentioned when the singer lauds Christ as "the Bread of Heaven."

Example 6: Movement 2 Text

\begin{quote}
  \textit{Du wahrer Gottes und Marien Sohn,}
  \textit{Du König derer Auserwählten,}
  \textit{Wie süß ist uns dies Lebenswort,}
  \textit{Nach dem die ersten Väter schon}
  \textit{So Jahr' als Tage zählten,}
  \textit{Das Gabriel mit Freuden dort}
  \textit{In Bethlehem verheißen!}
  \textit{O Süßigkeit, o Himmelsbrot,}
\end{quote}

Oh thou true God and Mary's son
Thou king of the chosen ones,
how sweet this word of life is to us
according to which the first fathers already
years as days counted,
which Gabriel with joy
there in Bethlehem promised!
Oh sweetness, oh Bread of Heaven,
This downward motion from movement 2 is continued in the third movement, a ternary form aria for soprano. The lowest point of descent, 2 flats, is reached again during this movement, which begins in the original F major but moves in the flat direction through d minor, g minor, and finally Bb Major. This motion aligns with the first mention of the Holy Spirit in the cantata, which until this point has focused on the physical, human embodiment of God in Christ but now calls for the Spirit's descent as well.

Luther's eschatological concept of an earthly experience of heavenly joy is most explicitly expressed in the text of this movement (Example 7). The sensual nature of the text is reminiscent of the writing style found in Song of Solomon. This semi-erotic language helps contextualize the unusual orchestral decision to pair a tenor-pitched instrument with a soprano voice, as the oboe di caccia is often used to symbolize love. This is the first text that is not directly tied to the Annunciation story, but is instead linked to Pentecost with its comparison of the Holy Spirit to fire.

Example 7: Movement 3 Text

Erfüllet, ihr himmlischen göttlichen Flammen, Fill up, you heavenly divine flames
Die nach euch verlangende gläubige Brust! these believing breasts that long for you!
Die Seelen empfinden die kräftigsten Triebe

Our souls experience the most powerful urges
Und schmecken auf Erden die himmlische Lust.
and taste on earth the pleasures of heaven.
Movement four is a secco recitative for bass with continuo. The text is set syllabically with the exception of two small melismas on the words _Freudenschein_ (light of joy) and _Erquickung_ (restoration). The preceding descent to two flats is maintained throughout the movement, beginning in g minor and concluding in Bb Major. Movement 4 reminds the worshiper that, although celebrating the Annunciation and looking forward to Advent, they are still in the somber liturgical season of Lent. The text of this movement makes the first and only reference to the blood and death of the human Christ (Example 8). The eschatological lens is continued through references to humanity's pre-determined longing for the divine. Faith and an abundance of blessings will move the human spirit to praise and worship God because God pre-ordained the soul to worship. The experience of worshipping is one of the means through which humanity can experience the eternal joy of Heaven while on earth. Once again, eternal joy is not a distant goal, but something that can be experienced in the present.

Example 8: Movement 4 Text

\begin{align*}
\text{Ein irdscher Glanz, ein leiblich Licht} & \quad \text{A worldly luster, a corporeal light} \\
\text{Rührt meine Seele nicht;} & \quad \text{stirs my soul not} \\
\text{Ein Freudenschein ist mir von Gott entstanden,} & \quad \text{A light of joy from God has arisen to me} \\
\text{Denn ein vollkommnes Gut,} & \quad \text{for a perfect possession,} \\
\text{Des Heilands Leib und Blut,} & \quad \text{The Savior's body and blood,} \\
\text{Ist zur Erquickung da.} & \quad \text{is for restoration there.} \\
\text{So muß uns ja} & \quad \text{So must indeed} \\
\text{Der überreiche Segen,} & \quad \text{the overflowing blessing,} \\
\text{Der uns von Ewigkeit bestimmt} & \quad \text{which was determined for us from eternity} \\
\text{Und unser Glaube zu sich nimmt,} & \quad \text{and which our faith takes to itself,} \\
\text{Zum Dank und Preis bewegen.} & \quad \text{move us to thanksgiving and praise.}
\end{align*}
The fifth movement da capo aria for tenor returns to the original key of F Major, but wanders harmonically during the B section with cadences in d minor, E Major (as the dominant of a minor), a minor, g minor, and Bb Major. Scored for solo violins and strings, there is a consistent solo/tutti relationship between the sections much like that of a concerto grosso. Textually, movement 5 returns to the Psalm-like praises from earlier movements (Example 9). As in movement 3, the text provides an explanation for Bach's choice of instrumentation. It is only fitting that an aria calling for praises to be played to God on the strings would be accompanied by a full string section. The addition of the solo violins to the existing strings increases this imagery. The text expresses the soul's commitment to the eternal praise of God, a task which begins with life and continues throughout a heavenly eternity. In contrast to the harmonic descent which occurred during earlier references to various manifestations of the divine descending to earth, movement 5 ascends to the original key of F Major as it depicts human praises rising to heavenly listeners.

Example 9: Movement 5 Text

Unser Mund und Ton der Saiten
Sollen dir für und für
dank und Opfer zubereiten.
Herz und Sinnen sind erhoben,
Lebenslang mit Gesang,
Großer König, dich zu loben.

Our mouth and the sound of strings
shall prepare for thee forever and ever
thanksgiving and sacrifice.
Heart and senses are lifted up,
lifelong with song,
Great King, to praise thee.

The sixth and final movement again preserves Nicolai's original text, this time verse 7 of the chorale. Similar to the opening movement, the F Major melody is triadic with the characteristic uneven phrase lengths discussed above. With the exception of the second horn,
all of the instruments double the voices. The second horn however, has a lively independent part that stands out over the largely homophonic chorale.

This movement has the most eschatological text of the cantata (Example 10). Instead of the Psalm-like praise found in earlier movements, this movement provides a personal statement of faith that looks forward to the foretold second-coming of Christ. This is the only movement that deals exclusively with a heavenly eternity without focusing on methods of experiencing that eternity during earthly life. Finally, a brief linguistic observation: The choral movements are the only instances where the text is given in a first-person singular narrative. Interestingly, the solo movements use plural language.

Example 10: Movement 6 Text

Wie bin ich doch so herzlich froh,  How am I indeed so heartily glad
Daß mein Schatz ist das A und O,  That my treasure is the Alpha and Omega,
Der Anfange und das Ende;  the beginning and the end;
Er wird mich doch zu seinem Preis  He will indeed, to his glory
Aufnehmen in das Paradies,  Take me up into Paradise.
Des klopf ich in die Hände.  For this I clap my hands.
Amen! Amen!  Amen! Amen!
Komm, du schöne Freudenkrone,  Come, thou beautiful crown of joy,
bleib nicht lange,  tarry not long.
Deiner wart ich mit Verlangen.  For thee I wait with longing.

The above textual analysis alludes to a unique characteristic of the chorale that inspired BWV 1. Although Nicolai’s chorale was written specifically for Epiphany and was adapted into an Annunciation cantata, it is appropriate for many liturgical occasions. Throughout the course of the cantata references are made not only to Annunciation, but also to Advent, Lent, Pentecost, and the Second Coming. This wide range of appropriate uses may be one of the
reasons that *Wie Schön* became one of the most frequently used chorales in the Lutheran tradition, including multiple appearances in various Bach cantatas. For example, the "Abgesang" (phrases 7-10) of the final strophe of the chorale appears in the final movement of Cantata 61. Written for the first Sunday of Advent, BWV 61 discusses the first coming of Christ to earth. The themes of descent form a natural connection with Nicolai’s work. The original Nicolai text also makes numerous appearances. Some examples include the use of verse 4 in the final chorale of BWV 172, verse 5 in the second chorale of BWV 37, and verse 6 in the final chorale of BWV 36 part 1.

It would be seven years before Bach returned to a Nicolai chorale as the basis of a cantata. By the time of the later work, he had shifted away from the large scale descent-ascent cantatas of his early Leipzig years. The allegorical characteristics of BWV 140 are more subtle, often arriving in melodic patterns and visual representations. While the musical depictions are less pronounced in their eschatological ramifications, the text is explicitly focused on the End Times and the Second Coming of Christ.

BWV 140 was composed for a Sunday that only occurred two times during Bach's time in Leipzig. There is a 27th Sunday after Trinity only in years where Easter falls before March 27. Bach composed BWV 140 for this Sunday in 1731, possibly reusing it when the opportunity arose again in 1742. Although he had finished his chorale cantata cycles in 1725, this uncommon liturgical occasion provided Bach the chance to further supplement his repertoire of chorale cantatas.\(^\text{23}\) According to the liturgical calendar, Trinity Sunday takes place on the Sunday following Pentecost. The Sundays between Trinity Sunday and the beginning of Advent

are marked only by their distance from Trinity Sunday and are more commonly referred to collectively as Ordinary Time. As the final Sunday of Ordinary Time and the Sunday preceding Advent and its focus on Christ's initial coming to Earth, the theme of divine descent is, not surprisingly, strongly present in the liturgy. This allows the liturgical seasons to seamlessly flow from one to the next.

Both of the liturgical readings for the 27th Sunday after Trinity discuss the Second Coming of Christ (Example 11). In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, Paul gives instructions to the Christians of Thessalonica concerning the proper way to wait for the foretold return of Christ. He reminds them to be ever vigilant so that they are not caught unprepared. This directly corresponds to Jesus's parable of the ten virgins from Matthew 25:1-13. In this parable, Jesus compares the Church to virgins awaiting the arrival of their bridegroom, himself. After a long night of waiting, five of the virgins have run out of lamp oil. When they leave to obtain more, the bridegroom arrives and takes with him the five remaining virgins who had brought enough oil to last through the night. This overall themes of preparation and waiting through the night connects with the text of Nicolai's chorale.

**Example 11: Liturgical Texts for the 27th Sunday after Trinity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11</th>
<th>Matthew 25: 1-13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you</td>
<td>“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ Then all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Nicolai’s original text is written in the style of a Watchman’s song. In Medieval Europe, towns employed musicians to serve as night watchmen. These individuals would mark the time by playing music at specific hours and were responsible for waking the villagers in the morning. They were also watchmen in the literal sense, guarding the town and playing loudly to alert the sleeping citizens of danger. As towns grew, a more formal guard was required and the musical watchmen became civically employed musicians, playing for the court and at special events.²⁴ Nicolai’s chorale is the song of a night watchman waking the people of Zion for the arrival of the awaited Bridegroom - eschatologically, the triumphant shout of the heavenly host to the waiting Church at the return of Christ.

As source material, Nicolai’s chorale is unusually short. With only three verses, it did not supply enough text for Bach’s librettist. Instead of the typical practice of keeping the outer verses while paraphrasing the inner ones, the librettist instead maintained all three. These verses frame the cantata in movements 1 and 7, while marking the midpoint in movement 4.

The text of the remaining movements primarily comes from the day's prescribed Gospel reading, along with many references to Song of Solomon.

The first movement of BWV 140 is a narration of the watchmen waking the city for the arrival of the Bridegroom (Example 12). Bach's setting features Nicolai's chorale melody as a cantus firmus in the Soprano voice. In contrast to the sustained notes in the soprano, the lower voices provide a lively imitative accompaniment and occasionally embody the role of the watchman in chordal exclamations of "Wach auf!"

Example 12: Movement 1 Text

\begin{align*}
\textit{Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme} & \quad \text{'Wake up!' call the voices} \\
\textit{Der Wächter sehr hoch auf der Zinne;} & \quad \text{Of the watchmen very high upon the battlement} \\
\textit{Mitternacht heißt deise Stunde;} & \quad \text{Midnight is called this hour;} \\
\textit{Sie rufen uns mit hellem Munde;} & \quad \text{They call to us with bright voices;} \\
\textit{Wo seid ihr klugen Jungfrauen?} & \quad \text{Where are you O wise virgins?} \\
\textit{Wohl auf, der Bräutgam kömmt;} & \quad \text{Arise then, the Bridegroom is coming;} \\
\textit{Steht auf, die Lampen nehmt!} & \quad \text{Rise up, take your lamps!} \\
\textit{Macht euch bereit} & \quad \text{Make yourselves ready} \\
\textit{Zu der Hochzeit,} & \quad \text{For the Wedding;} \\
\textit{Ihr müsset ihm entgegen gehn!} & \quad \text{You must go forth to meet Him!}
\end{align*}

The movement is set in Eb Major, and the chorale melody is therefore transposed down a tone from Nicolai's original key of F Major. The orchestral ritornello opens with block chords that develop into independent lines for the first oboe and first violin with violino piccolo doubling. Dürr describes these two lines as a dialogue, foreshadowing the conversational

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quality of the duets in movements 3 and 6. The first violin and violino piccolo outline an ascending tonic triad rising to the sixth scale degree, the same motion as the opening line of Nicolai’s chorale. This shape, also found in the melody of *Wie Schön*, is a common trait of traditional watchman songs.

In contrast to the harmonic progressions around the circle of fifths used to depict various forms of divine descent and ascent in BWV 1, the musical symbolism in BWV 140 is primarily composed of melodic motives particularly those of ascent. While the text heavily emphasizes the descent of Christ to his waiting Church through the metaphor of the Bridegroom coming to his Bride, the music depicts the rising of the Church to meet with Christ. This is most easily apparent in the ascending melody of the chorale theme. The orchestral accompaniment also has an ascending motive, both in the independent lines and in the chordal parts which often feature dotted eighth patterns outlining rising triads.

Movement 2 is the first to establish the roles of the solo voices. As previously discussed, the tenor holds the role of Evangelist. In the allegorical setting of the Bridegroom and the waiting Virgins, the Evangelist takes the role of the Watchman. This secco recitative with continuo gives voice to the shout of the Watchman, calling for the "daughters of Zion" to prepare themselves to receive their Bridegroom (Example 13).

Example 13: Movement 2 Text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Er kommt, er kommt,</em></td>
<td>He comes, He comes,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Der Bräutgam kommt!</em></td>
<td>The Bridegroom comes!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ihr Töchter Zions, kommt heraus,</em></td>
<td>You daughters of Zion, come forth:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sein Ausgang eilet aus der Höhe</em></td>
<td>His journey hastens from the heights</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In euer Mutter Haus.
Der Bräutgam kommt, der einem Rehe
Und junger Hirsche gleich
Auf denen Hügeln springt
Und euch das Mahl der Hochzeit bringt.

Wacht auf, ermuntert euch!
Den Bräutgam zu empfangen!
Dort, sehet, kommt er hergegangen.

Into your mother's house.
The Bridegroom comes, who like a roe
And young buck,
On the hills leaps
And to you the banquet of the wedding brings.

Wake up, rouse yourselves
The Bridegroom to receive!
There, lo, he comes approaching!

Written in c minor, this movement utilizes the same key signature as the first and does not demonstrate the harmonic fifth motion found in BWV 1. It does, however, exhibit significant melodic motion emphasizing the interval of a fifth. Exclamations of "Er kommt" and "er Bräutgam kommt" depict the arrival of the Bridegroom (the return of Jesus to earth) by outlining descending fifths, sometimes with the third filled in. Contrastingly, shouts of "Wacht auf" and textual references to the ten Virgins (the Church) are set with ascending fifths, using both intervallic leaps and five note scalar ascents, presumably to symbolize the faithful souls of those who are "caught up in the clouds together...to meet the Lord in the air" at the Second Coming of Christ. In addition, phrases that make reference to the sphere from which the bridegroom descends—"aus der Höhe in euer Mutter Haus" and “Dort, sehet, kommt er hergegangen”—depict the spheres of “above” and “below” with the juxtaposition of high and low pitch spheres.

It is in the third movement that the voices of the Soul and Jesus are finally heard. In what Dürr refers to as "among the most beautiful love duets in the musical literature of the

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27 1 Thessalonians 4:14, NRSV
world" the soprano and bass soloists call out as they approach one another (Example 14). The Bridegroom/Virgin metaphor is less pronounced in this movement, as the soloists refer to each other as "Jesus" and "lovely soul." However, a reference to lamp oil is retained from the parable.

Example 14: Movement 3 Text

\[
\begin{align*}
S: & \text{ Wenn kommst du, mein Heil?} & \text{When comest thou, my Salvation?} \\
B: & \text{ Ich komme, dein Teil.} & \text{I am coming, thy portion.} \\
S: & \text{ Ich warte mit brennendem Öle.} & \text{I wait with burning oil.} \\
S: & \text{ Eröffne den Saal} & \text{Open the hall} \\
B: & \text{ Ich öffne den Saal} & \text{I open the hall} \\
Both: & \text{ Zum himmlischen Mahl} & \text{For the Heavenly banquet.} \\
S: & \text{ Komm, Jesu!} & \text{Come, Jesus!} \\
B: & \text{Komm, lieblichte Seele!} & \text{Come, lovely soul!}
\end{align*}
\]

Set as a \textit{da capo} duet with continuo and violino piccolo accompaniment, this movement foreshadows the harmonic motion to come in movement 5. Although it begins and ends in the three flat key signature of c minor with occasional glimpses of Eb Major, the tonality temporarily moves upward to g minor. This brief ascent occurs as the mood shifts from longing to excitement between lines 3 and 4. The soprano (the soul) and bass (Christ) dialog throughout the movement, with the soprano typically featuring incomplete cadences (half closes) as it questions the bridegroom, and the bass answering by completing the cadences. At the return of the opening text, the tonality moves two steps in the flat direction to f minor. This shift marks the return of the sense of longing from the opening and serves as a reminder that the

\footnote{Alfred Dürr, \textit{The Cantatas of JS Bach with their Librettos in German-English Parallel Text} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 652.}
Bridegroom is not yet united with his Bride. At the *da capo*, the harmony returns to its original c minor, giving the entire movement a harmonic turn figuration.

Movement 4 returns to Nicolai’s text with the second stanza of his chorale (Example 15). Here again it is the tenor who provides the narration. It is at this midpoint that Christ and His Church are reunited and go forth together to the Heavenly banquet. The sense of longing from the earlier movements is replaced with rejoicing and exultation at the Bridegroom’s arrival.

Example 15: Movement 4 Text

> Zion hört die Wächter singen,  
> Zion hears the watchmen sing,
> Das Herz tut ihr vor Freuden springen,  
> Her heart leaps for joy,
> Sie wachet und steht eilend auf.  
> She keeps watch and rises quickly.
> Ihr Freund kommt vom Himmel prächtig,  
> Her friend comes from heaven glorious,
> Von Gnaden strak, von Wahrheit mächtig,  
> In grace strong, in truth mighty;
> Ihr Licht wird hell, ihr Stern geht auf.  
> Her light becomes bright, her star rises.
> Nun komm, du werte Kron,  
> Now come, thou precious crown,
> Herr Jesu, Gottes Sohn!  
> Lord Jesus, God’s Son!
> Hosianna!  
> Hosanna!
> Wir folgen all  
> We follow all
> Zum Freudenstaal  
> To joy’s hall
> Und halten mit das Abendmahl.  
> And hold together the evening meal.

This movement returns to Nicolai’s chorale not only through the use of his text, but through the use of the original melody as well. The tenor sings an embellished version of the chorale melody and is accompanied by continuo and unison string trio comprised of violin 1, violin 2, and viola. In later years Bach selected this movement as one of his six “Schübler” chorales for organ solo; it has deservedly become the most famous of the set. The three flat key signature is carried through this movement, but with a return to the original Eb Major from the c minor of the preceding two movements. Similar to the motive found in movement 2, textual references to the coming of Christ are generally, but not exclusively, aligned with the melodic
pattern of descending fifths found in the melody. However, this is Nicolai's melody, not Bach's, so the text setting does not necessarily carry the same allegorical meaning.

It is in movement 5 that the Bridegroom and Soul are finally joined together in the wedding ceremony. The bass soloist, still representing the voice of Jesus, proclaims his eternal devotion to the waiting Soul and promises to erase all pain (Example 16). References to Song of Solomon are again prominent in this movement, most notably the well known words of Song of Solomon 8:6. This text, "Set me as a seal upon your heart...," has enjoyed significant popularity among composers.

Example 16: Movement 5 Text

So geh herein zu mir,                So come in to me,
Du mir erwählte Braut!             Thou my chosen Bride!
Ich habe mich mit dir               I have myself to thee
Von Ewigkeit vertraut.             From eternity betrothed.
Dich will ich auf mein Herz         Then would I on my heart,
Auf meinen Arm gleich wir ein Siegel setzen
und dein betrübtes Aug ergötzen.   Upon my arm like as a seal set
Vergiß, o Seele, nun               And thy troubled eye delight.
Die Angst, den Schmerz,            The fear, the pain,
Den du erdulden müssen;            That you hast had to suffer;
Auf meiner Linken sollst du ruhn,  Upon my left hand shalt thou rest,
Und meine Rechte soll dich küssen. And my right hand shall thee kiss.

A recitative with full string accompaniment, this movement marks the point at which the “bridegroom” leads the soul, its “chosen bride,” into the eschatological *Freudensaal*. As the Soul is joined with Christ, its Bridegroom, the tonality shifts from f minor (m. 5) to Bb Major, in which the movement ends, setting up the key of the second duet. This motion—f minor in m. 5,
A flat Major in m. 9, E flat Major in m. 13 and B flat Major in m. 14—aligns with the textual transition from Christ's loving promises to a more imperative tone. As the Soul is instructed to forget past suffering, the harmony begins to move upward toward the final Bb. The harmonic progression at the word "betrübtes" is especially intriguing. Here Bach moves from the subdominant of the prior F minor cadence (b flat minor) through a diminished seventh chord on D to settle on an augmented-sixth chord on F flat (Fb, Ab, Cb and D) before cadencing to A flat major (Example 17). This striking passage, hinting at a flat minor before turning to Major, is well-fitted to the textual juxtaposition of “betrübtes” (troubled) and “ergötzen” (delight). From this point on the harmony moves through major fifth-related keys to B flat.

Example 17: Harmonic Progression on the Text "betrübtes“

The text of movement 6 (Example 18) also opens with a familiar quotation from Song of Solomon. Multiple verses (2:16, 6:3, and 7:10) include a version of the phrase "My beloved is mine and I am his." This particular arrangement of the text is interesting due to its division between the soprano and bass voice. Grammatically, the bass response to the soprano's "My beloved is mine" should be "and I am hers," but Bach retained the original pronouns from the scripture, making the phrase "and I am his." While this choice of pronoun is not correct according to the narrative portrayed in this particular cantata, it is Biblically accurate.

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All scores consulted and/or pictured are from the Bach-Gesellschaft Ausgabe. In the passage cited in Ex. 18 the upper strings play D natural.
remainder of the movement is a blissful love duet between Christ and the Soul. The text could easily be applied to earthly romantic love as well, reflecting Nicolai’s belief that the faithful could experience heavenly joy while on earth, particularly through love.

Example 18: Movement 6 Text

\[
\begin{align*}
S: & \text{ Mein Freund ist mein,} \\
B: & \text{ Und ich bin sein,} \\
Both: & \text{ Die Liebe soll nichts scheiden.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
S: & \text{ Ich will mit dir in Himmels Rosen weiden,} \\
B: & \text{ Du sollst mit mir in Himmels Rosen weiden,} \\
Both: & \text{ Da Freud e die Fülle, da Wonne wird sein.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{My friend is mine,} & \\
\text{And I am his,} & \\
\text{This love shall nothing sever.} & \\
\text{I will with thee in heaven's roses pasture;} & \\
\text{Thou shalt with me in heaven's roses pasture;} & \\
\text{Where joy in fullness and where bliss will be.} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

This second duet maintains the elevated key of Bb major, reflecting the ascension of Christ with his bride, the Church. While the B section of the da capo form moves to g minor, the single flat key signature is maintained. Accompanied by continuo and oboe, this lively duet has a dance-like feel reflecting the joy of the united couple and symbolizing the heavenly ecstasy of the faithful upon their eventual arrival in Paradise. Whereas the earlier duet was in minor and featured a dialoging question/answer pattern in which the soul, still uncertain, was reassured by the “bridegroom,” this duet features both soloists singing together, often in parallel thirds or sixths, their phrases virtually identical.

As is common practice in chorale cantatas, the final movement is a full chorus setting of the final verse of Nicolai’s chorale. This anthem of praise (Example 19) is given in the voice of the faithful still waiting on Earth for the return of Christ. The hymn calls for praises to be sung to God both on earth and in Heaven and looks hopefully toward the eventual arrival of the true
believer in Heaven. It is filled with imagery of the heavenly city, complete with gates of pearl and crowds of angels rejoicing around the throne of God for all of eternity.

Example 19: Movement 7 Text

Gloria sei dir gesungen
Mit Menschen- und englischen Zungen,
Mit Harfen und mit Zimbeln schon.
Von zwölf Perlen sind die Pforten,
An deiner Stadt sind wir Konsorten
Der Engel hoch um deinen Thron.
Kein Aug hat je gespürt,
Kein Ohr hat je gehört
Solche Freude.
Des sind wir froh,
Io, io!
Ewig in dulci jubilo.

Glory be to thee sung
With human and angelic tongues,
With harps and with cymbals sweet.
Of twelve pearls are the portals;
In thy city we shall be the consorts
Of angels high around thy throne.
No eye hath yet perceived,
No ear hath ever heard
Such joy.
Over this are we glad,
Io, io!
Ever in dulci jubilo.

Set homophonically and almost entirely in half notes, the upper voices in this movement provide an example of *Augenmusik*. Where early madrigal composers would often use darkened notes to depict night or sadness, here Bach is using open notes to depict the brightness of Heaven. The bass voice provides the only significant vocal motion in the movement, with predominantly quarter note rhythmic values against the more sustained lines in the upper voices. As is typical in these movements, each voice is doubled with one or more instruments so that there is no independent accompaniment. As this movement depicts the voices of the believers still remaining on earth, the key returns from Bb Major to the original Eb Major. This lowering of key marks the transition from heavenly voices to earthly ones.

Throughout his repertoire of cantatas, Bach's choice of form is highly organized and intentional. As discussed above, BWV 1 is a descent-ascent cantata. In this specific instance, the harmonic pattern allowed Bach to musically depict movement of the Divine between heavenly
and earthly realms. Other occurrences of this form focus on salvation history. In BWV 140, it is the textual structure that is most striking. The strategic placement of Nicolai’s texts in the outer movements and at the midpoint of the cantata create a chiastic structure. Using the fourth movement as the axis, the parallel pairs of movements reflect on each other. For example, both movements 3 and 5 feature words of reassurance and love from the Bridegroom. Movements 2 and 6 focus on the Soul's longing and fulfillment, first in waiting for the Bridegroom then in blissful union. The outer movements match in their collective voice.\textsuperscript{30} Chiastic structure is utilized to highlight important theological themes. This occurs at the axis point. All events prior to the axis point are preparatory, while those following are reactionary.\textsuperscript{31} Movement 4 of \textit{Wachet auf} heralds the triumphant arrival of the Bridegroom, the moment that has been awaited throughout the first 3 movements and which will lead to the celebrations of the final 3 movements.

While Bach’s religiosity is easily evident at the surface level in his sacred compositions, deeper analysis reveals his intentional incorporation of theological concepts throughout his works. Tonal plan, melodic contour, and form join with his chosen texts to create works that embody Luther’s concept of musical sermons. While some theorists may discount Bach's devotion to faith in exchange for a focus on his brilliant musicianship, these intentional compositional choices speak to his mission to create a better repertoire of “well-regulated church music to the Glory of God.”


