



In Thee Alone, O Christ, My Lord

Text: Johannes Schneesing (1497-1567)

Tune: Unknown, Wittenberg, 1541

We must always be refocused. In this world, surrounded by sin, death, and the devil, it is too easy to lose our way and to lose our focus on Christ and His cross. So we pray daily that our hope would remain in Christ alone, and that our focus would be the forgiveness of sins He died to give us. That is one of the main purposes of the “Confession and Absolution” section of our hymnal. While the hymns often do focus on our sin, they always serve as prayers that the Holy Spirit would lead us into Christian lives in which Christ’s redeeming work stands at the center of our heart and mind. “In Thee Alone, O Christ, My Lord” is a perfect example of that kind of theme. In fact, Wilhelm Nelle (1849-1918), a German teacher of liturgics and hymnody, called this hymn, “A presentation of the Christian life in a nutshell.” C.C.J. Bunsen, a mid-19th century hymnologist, said that this hymn is “an immortal hymn of prayer of a confident faith.” Even Martin Luther found this hymn of high value and insisted that it be included in the Babst hymnal of 1545.

The authorship of this hymn was debated for some time, as its original publication—an undated broadsheet from Nürnberg—did not include an author. It was also printed without attribution in a Low German hymnal, the Magdeburg *Gesangbuch* of 1542. Later a man named Konrad Hubert was put forward as an author. However, Hubert’s only association with the text was making a few edits to it. Eventually Mark Wagner, a student of Johannes Schneesing, said that Schneesing wrote the text.

Johannes Schneesing is firmly in the Reformation era of German history. He was born in Frankfurt am Main, and later served as

vicar (traveling Pastor in a region) of Gotha, and finally served as Pastor of the Lutheran church in Friemar. While he was attending school he was influenced by Johannes Stigelius, a composer of Latin poetry, who sparked Schneesing’s interest in writing and musical composition. Records from the Lutheran Visitation of 1534, part of Luther’s efforts to make sure doctrine was being taught correctly, record that Schneesing was “faithful, diligent, pious, and a godly man.” He was especially interested in the spiritual wellbeing of his parish’s children. He wrote a catechism for them, and wrote numerous hymns to help teach them the faith. Sadly these hymns have been lost. He died in 1567, while still actively serving his parish in Friemar.

His hymn “In Thee Alone, O Christ, My Lord,” became very popular. In 1724 Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) began a project to write a Cantata for every Sunday after Trinity. For the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, Bach chose this hymn as the basis for his cantata for the day. He saw the connection between the Parable of the Good Samaritan and the necessity of relying only on Christ for our forgiveness and eternal life.



The score for the opening movement of Bach’s Cantata

Stanza one is a perfect connection between us and the man left for dead in the Parable. In it we confess “No strength of man, no earthly stay can keep me in the evil day; Thou, only Thou canst aid supply.” Only by Divine aid can we be kept no matter what evil befalls us. Stanza two moves into the application of the Parable. Its opening explains that what rises against us are our sins. Only by Christ’s Blood interceding for us can we be kept from sin’s crushing burden. The third stanza implores God’s grace in living a Christian life. We ask for the consolation which the Spirit gives, fervent love toward God and one another, and peace at our last day. Finally, stanza four brings a doxology, praise and prayer to the Trinity to keep us until we reach the “sinless sphere.”