



Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart

Text: Martin Schalling (1532-1608)

Tune: *Orgeltabulatur-Buch*, Straßburg, 1577

The Church's song is always her sung confession. As Martin Franzmann classically penned, "Theology is doxology. Theology must sing." He went on to say: "A spiritual song must therefore breathe the air of eternity, must have a scent of heaven about it. It must be the prelude and the beginning of that new song which the Church Triumphant shall one day sing in the New Jerusalem. ... If our songs are to be spiritual, they must confess; they must speak of the hope that is in us; they must tell of the mighty deeds of God in Christ on our behalf. Doxology, we say again, must be doctrinal: it must be theology." (Martin Franzmann, *Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets*, ©1994 Concordia Publishing House.) One of the finest hymns to meet Franzmann's description of good hymnody is Martin Schalling's only known hymn, "Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart."

Martin Schalling was born at Straßburg on April 21, 1532. He went to the University of Wittenburg in 1550, where he quickly became a favored student of Philip Melanchthon (initially one of the Lutheran Reformers) and a friend of Nicholas Selnecker (a later Lutheran Reformer, co-author of the Formula of Concord, and also a hymnwriter). After earning his Master's Degree, Schalling continued for a few years at the University as a lecturer. In 1554 he became a Deacon at Regensburg. However, in 1558 he was forced to resign for preaching against Matthias Flacius Illyricus, who was teaching that, after the Fall, man was in the image of Satan, not God. Soon after, he became a Deacon at Amberg, Bavaria. However, that stay was also short-lived, as the Elector, Friedrich III, became a Calvinist and ordered the Lutherans to stop using Lutheran orders of service. Schalling was among the Lutheran clergy who refused and in 1568 were expelled. However, the Elector's son, Duke Ludwig remained a Lutheran and asked Schalling to stay nearby to minister to those who remained Lutheran. When Ludwig received a promotion to the position of Regent of the Oberpfalz, he brought Schalling with him to serve as court preacher and later superintendent of the Oberpfalz.

However, when the clergy at Oberpfalz were compelled to sign the Formula of Concord, Schalling refused. Though sympathetic with their position, he was, early on, a student and friend of Melanchthon, and large portions of the Formula of Concord were written against Melanchthon, who was adopting Calvinistic doctrines. Though Schalling was removed from office in 1583, in 1585 he was appointed pastor of St. Mary's Church in Nürnberg, where he served until his blindness made it impossible to work any longer.

One hymn commentator, Eduard Koch, said, "This hymn, 'a prayer to Christ, the Consolation of the soul in life and in death,' after Psalms 18 and 73, is a treasure bequeathed to the Church from the heart of Schalling." And *A Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal* lauded, "Fortunate is the congregation that has learned to sing [this hymn] and appreciate it."

This hymn truly is one of the finest, and shows the proper use of the personal pronoun, "I." The hymn, while it uses first-person language, is never about *me*, but is about what *Christ* has done *for me*. In the first stanza, we confess that, without Christ, everything is useless: "Earth has no pleasure I would share, yea, heaven itself were void and bare if Thou, Lord, wert not near me." Stanza one also brings the entire hymn into focus. The reason for this sung confession, for our sure confidence in heavenly bliss is because, "Thy precious Blood my soul hath bought." In this, we sing what God in Christ has done on our behalf.

The second stanza, while it acknowledges God as the gracious Giver of all we have, it also teaches the doctrine of Vocation. Vocation is what God gives to each Christian, a position where, regardless of what they do, each person is able to "glorify Thy lavish grace and serve and help my neighbor." Stanza two concludes with a petition that the Holy Spirit keep us, as we ask to be kept from false doctrine and to be given strength and patience "to bear my cross and follow Thee."

Finally, we breathe the air of eternity and smell the scent of heaven in the third stanza. We pray, "Lord, let at last Thine angels come," asking for a blessed death and eternal joys in heaven where we see, "O Son of God, Thy glorious face, my Savior and my Fount of Grace." This stanza was used by J.S. Bach to conclude his monumental *A Passion according to St. John*. It sends us back to stanza one, reminding us that, because of Christ's precious Blood, death is a peaceful sleep, and our soul is carried to its Savior and Throne of Grace, whom it will praise without end.