



## Thee Will I Love, My Strength, My Tower

**Text: Johann Scheffler (1624-77)**

**Tune: Unknown, *Harmonischer Lieder-Schatz*, Frankfurt, 1738**

Seventeenth century Lutheran hymnody saw a shift from the heavily catechetical hymns of the sixteenth century. Hymnwriters such as Paul Gerhardt, Johann Heermann, and Johann Scheffler ushered in a period where hymnody served as the voice of faith, extolling the gifts of God. Where the “I” can easily be misunderstood today, this seventeenth century German “I” is not the speaking of natural man, but rather the voice of faith speaking by the Holy Spirit.

Johann Scheffler was born in 1624 in Breslau (today Wrocław, Poland). Trained as a doctor, Scheffler received his M.D. in 1648 from the University of Padua. His life took him far from his Polish homeland because of his adherence to Lutheranism, while Poland was hostile to Lutheranism at the time. After completing his education he returned home to serve as court doctor for Duke Sylvius Nimrod



Johann Scheffler

of Württemberg-Oels. The Duke was a staunch Lutheran, but Scheffler soon found his personal theology at odds with Lutheran theology. While studying he became familiar with the writings of Jakob Böhme, whose theology was heavily mystic. Mysticism is the desire to have knowledge of God by personal experiences, such as trances, visions, and speaking in tongues. A majority of theologians in that era denied mysticism, but some embraced it. Eventually Scheffler left the Lutheran Church and in 1652 was officially received into the Roman Catholic Church and changed his name to

Angelus Silesius. He became a priest in 1661, and in 1671 retired to the monastery of St. Matthias in Breslau, where he died in 1677.



Katherine Winkworth, the translator of this hymn and countless others.

Scheffler’s hymns found wider acceptance and use among Lutherans than Roman Catholics. His hymns were some of the finest poetry of the time. His mystical tendencies, however, were largely kept moderate in his hymns where the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit received the greatest emphasis. Scheffler wrote several hymns which we still use today, including “Jesus, Savior, Come to Me” (*TLH* 356), “O Love, Who Madest Me to Wear” (*TLH* 397), “Thee Will I Love, My Strength, My Tower” (*TLH* 399), and “Come, Follow Me, the Savior Spake” (*TLH* 421). Scheffler’s hymns were published in several hymnals, many which Scheffler released himself. However, the most notable hymnal he produced was *Heilige Seelenlust*, “Holy Desires of the Soul.” Most of the hymns seem to be written before his ventures into mysticism, and focus heavily on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

“Thee Will I Love, My Strength, My Tower” is no different. Considered one of Scheffler’s best-known hymns, it extols the person and work of Jesus Christ as well as the Holy Spirit. Several stanzas also serve as excellent prayers for the Christian, asking that the Holy Spirit keep us “watchful, then, and humble” (st. 4) and that we would love as Christ loves us (st. 5). Finally, the hymn ends with the Theology of the Cross: No matter what crosses and trials life gives, the Holy Spirit keeps us steadfast in the faith “so long as life is mine,” keeping us until eternal life is ours.

The version in *the Lutheran Hymnal* omits two stanzas, between what we have as three and four:

Alas! that I so late have known Thee  
Who art the Fairest and the Best;  
Nor sooner for my Lord could own Thee,  
Our highest Good, our only Rest!  
Now bitter shame and grief I prove  
Over this, my dying love.

I wandered long in willing blindness,  
I sought Thee, but I found Thee not,  
For still I shunned Thy beams of kindness;  
The creature-light filled all my thought.  
And if at last I see Thee now,  
'Twas Thou to me didst bow!