

# Lord Thee I Love With All My Heart – LSB 708

Though not well known outside Lutheranism, “Lord, Thee I love with all my hearth” ranks among the most powerful texts in all hymnody. The depth of feeling has led commentators inevitably to mention the use of stanza 3 as the final chorus of Bach’s *St. John Passion* (1724). The hymn’s pastoral power emerges first from its historical context and then from its theological sources.

Written by Rev. Martin Schalling (1532-1608) who served as a pastor first in Regensburg Germany, where he arrived in 1554. There this peaceful pastor was forced to make a choice between faithfulness, opposing the Flacian heresy, and his livelihood. He chose the former and was required to leave the city. Throughout his entire life, he was forced to suffer for his faithfulness. He staunchly remained Lutheran despite pressure from the civil government to become a Calvinist.

The hymn itself was written in 1569, and is found in Schalling’s original hand following the text of his Easter Sunday Vespers sermon manuscript. The sermon’s conclusion connects the sermon to the hymn with the idea that we must be ready when God comes, for we will then inherit eternal life.

Five main themes of this hymn emerge from the circumstances of Schalling’s life.

- Hope and faith can be placed only in Christ (“Lord, Thee I love”) because nothing else is constant in this life (“earth has no pleasure”).
- The worst evil, death itself, may not be far off in a war-torn, cruel world (“And should my heart for sorrow break”).
- In the midst of “this poor life of labor,” God’s strong presence is a sacramental reality (“Thy precious blood my soul has bought”). God is therefore present not in an abstractly spiritual sense, but in the certainty that His “rich bounty gave my body, soul, and all I have.”
- The temptations and threats against one’s faith are so real that a prayer for God’s strength takes on urgent tones (“Let not false doctrine me beguile...Give strength and patience”).
- In the Christian’s perspective, the end of this life is the beginning of joy in the next (“Lord, let at last Thine angels come”). The light of hope for this life shines from that future glory and creates a trust that “I may die unfearing,” only to rise again and “praise Thee without end.”

These themes generate a holistic vision of Christian life in three stanzas. In stanza 1, Christians acknowledge the need for the Lord’s presences and affirm their trust in the saving blood. In stanza 2, they acknowledge the Lord as the source of all good things and ask for a life that will glorify Thy lavish grace... and serve my neighbor.” In stanza 3, the Christian faces death unfearing, even welcomes it, anticipating now the joy of being in God’s glorious presence.

Singing this hymn is a way to acknowledge our deepest fears in life today, answering them with the hope that comes only through a vision of the Redeemer, now seated in glory, who will call us to share that glory when we rise from the dead.

Text: Martin Schalling, 1532-1608; tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1827-78, alt.  
Tune: Zeyher Bücher... Tabulatur, 1577, Strassburg  
Text and tune: Public domain