

First wives club: twenty-first century lessons from the lives of sixteenth century women

Heath-Whyte, C.

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First Wives' Club

Clare Heath-Whyte



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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	13
INTRODUCTION	15
CHAPTER ONE <i>Katie Luther:</i> A Life-Long Learner	21
CHAPTER TWO <i>Anna Zwingli:</i> A Downtrodden Disciple	45
CHAPTER THREE <i>Argula von Grumbach:</i> A Battling Believer	67
CHAPTER FOUR <i>Katharina Zell:</i> A Compassionate Co-worker	89
CHAPTER FIVE <i>Wibrandis Rosenblatt:</i> A Wonderful Wife	113
CHAPTER SIX <i>Idelette Calvin:</i> A Misguided Marriage?	137
EPILOGUE	161
NOTES	165

CHAPTER ONE



Katie Luther

1499–1552

A Life-Long Learner

As time goes by it gets harder to break old habits. Even as Christians it's easy to excuse ungodly behaviour because 'that's just what I'm like – I was born that way'. Whether it's a bad temper or a sharp tongue, extravagance or negativity, we can become so used to our unchrist-like personality traits that we

don't even expect to change. As a young woman Katie Luther was known to be difficult and bossy and was determined to get her own way; by her death she was revered as a model of Protestant piety. She was still feisty, hardworking and stubborn, but these qualities had been harnessed to serve Christ and His people. As she studied God's Word she allowed the sword of the Spirit to do its painful work – changing and moulding her to reflect God's likeness.

In 1525 in Wittenberg, Germany, Katharina von Bora married Martin Luther, the man who had stood alone to challenge the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, and so had launched what we now know as the Protestant Reformation. Luther was one of the most famous, and infamous, men of his generation. He was adored by those who had accepted his teaching – those who had been set free from ritual and legalism to enjoy a relationship with Christ on the basis of God's grace alone. He was loathed by those who felt he was destroying the basis of Christian civilisation by attacking Roman Catholic doctrine. He was also a monk who had made a vow of celibacy. Whoever married Martin Luther was going to be thrown into the limelight. During her twenty-one years of marriage Katie¹ would find herself copied and despised in equal measure as she tried to show that it was possible to please God as a married woman fully involved with the world around her.

That might seem obvious to us, but in the early sixteenth century women who wanted to please God were expected to join a convent, make vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, and renounce the world. In fact that was exactly what Katie herself had done – although not entirely voluntarily. She had been packed off to a Benedictine convent when she was just five years old after her father's remarriage. That meant the family had one less mouth to feed and no dowry to pay in the future. She moved to a Cistercian cloister when she was nine, where a relative was the abbess and her Aunt Lena also lived. When she was fifteen, on 8 October 1515, Katie took her vows and became a nun. Life in a convent was not as grim as we might expect. In an age when there were few opportunities for women to be educated, Katie learnt to read and write in German and even a little in Latin. As well as prayer and study the nuns also had to manage all the practical tasks in the convent – raising animals, organising menus and doing the accounts – and these were skills that Katie would find very useful in later life. What Katie had never experienced – and never expected to experience – was family life.

Katie and some of the other nuns somehow managed to get their hands on a number of Luther's writings. His teaching criticised not only the immorality of many monks and nuns but also questioned the biblical basis of the whole system. He was very critical of enforced

celibacy and argued that being shut away in a convent or monastery was less pleasing to God than living for Him in the outside world. Around Germany monks and nuns were leaving their cloisters — some freely, others after daring escapes. Unfortunately for Katie her convent came under the jurisdiction of Duke George of Saxony, who had recently had a man executed for helping some fleeing nuns. It looked as though Katie was destined to live out her life in the convent. However, after a group of the discontented nuns had been refused help from their families, they decided to write directly to Luther. In April 1523 an escape plan went into action. Leonhard Koppe was a fish merchant who regularly delivered to the convent. The nine nuns were hidden among the barrels in the back of his cart and smuggled back to the safety of Wittenberg, Luther's home town. Soon four had been taken back by their families, but the rest needed to find homes as soon as possible. Wolfgang Schiefer, who lived in the town, wrote to a friend, 'Several days ago a wagon arrived here with a load of vestal virgins, as they are now called. They would like to marry as much as to stay alive. May God provide them with husbands so that in the course of time they won't run into greater need!'²

Some found husbands more easily than others — and Katie was particularly difficult to marry off. For an ex-nun, abandoned by her family and forced on the charity of strangers, she was extraordinarily fussy.

She was not considered beautiful, and her personality was too forceful for some. An early suitor was warned off by his family, who were horrified by the idea of a respectable man marrying a nun. Although she didn't expect to marry for love, she was not prepared to marry just anybody — particularly not the elderly Dr Glatz, who Luther had in mind for her. Luther's friend Amsdorf wrote bluntly, 'What in the devil are you up to that you try to persuade good Kate and force that old skinflint, Glatz, on her. She doesn't go for him and has neither love nor affection for him.'³ Luther replied unsympathetically, 'If she doesn't like this one, she will just have to wait a while for another.'⁴ Amsdorf knew that Katie had other plans when he wrote to another friend that Katie was 'complaining that Doctor Martinus⁵ was trying every which way for her to consent to Doctor Glatz. Yet for him she had neither interest nor love. Rather (if it could so happen and be God's will) she would marry either Doctor Martinus or Domine Amsdorf.'⁶ Ideally Katie wanted to marry Luther, the great man himself

Luther didn't want to marry anybody. Just four years earlier he had been appalled by the very idea of a monk marrying, exclaiming, 'Good heaven! will our Wittenberg friends allow wives even to monks! Ah! at least they will not make *me* take a wife.'⁷ Even after Katie had arrived in Wittenberg in 1524, he wrote, 'God may change my purpose, if such be his pleasure; but at present I

have no thought of taking a wife.⁸ He explained why in a letter to Argula von Grumbach: 'It is not that I do not feel my flesh or sex, since I am neither wood nor stone, but my mind is far removed from marriage, since daily I expect the death and punishment due a heretic.'⁹ Even though he had encouraged colleagues, such as the young Philipp Melanchthon, to marry to make a point to the Catholic authorities, Luther, at forty, seemed to be a confirmed bachelor.

So how come Katie and Martin Luther were married just a few months later in June 1525? It seemed to take Luther himself by surprise as he wrote, 'Suddenly, while I still had other thoughts, God in a wondrous way threw me into matrimony with Katharina von Bora, the nun.'¹⁰ It certainly wasn't for romantic love. Politics definitely played a part. With the Peasants' War raging, the Reformation and Luther's life were in danger. By marrying, Luther would make the point that he had no intention of turning back to the Catholic Church, whatever happened. There were other more personal reasons. Luther wrote to his friend Amsdorf, who had encouraged the match, explaining, 'I married to gratify my father, who asked me to marry and leave him descendants ... I was not carried away by passion, for I do not love my wife that way, but esteem her as a friend.'¹¹ Katie had not even been his first choice of the run-away nuns. Years later he wrote, 'Had I wished to marry fourteen years ago, I should have chosen Ave

von Schonfeld, now wife of Basil Axt. I never loved my wife but suspected her of being proud (as she is), but God willed me to take pity on the poor abandoned girl ...'¹² (Katie at the time was twenty-five.) Luther's friend Melanchthon, perhaps in a huff at not being invited to the small private ceremony, was less generous: 'The man is very facile and the nuns tried to inveigle him. Perhaps the much intercourse with the nuns softened and inflamed him, noble and magnanimous as he is.'¹³ Henry VIII attributed even worse motives to him: 'At the instigation of the devil, the suggestions of the flesh, and the emptiness of your understanding, you have not been ashamed to violate with your sacrilegious embraces a virgin devoted to the Lord.'¹⁴ It seems that other friends did support the marriage, but not his choice of wife! Seven years later Luther wrote, 'If I had not married secretly, all my friends would have cried, "Not this woman but somebody else!"'¹⁵ Katie's strong personality did not go down well with some of the older generation.

At the start of her married life Katie had to cope not only with an indifferent husband and his unsupportive friends but also a vitriolic pamphlet campaign against her. One, which was widely distributed, was addressed to Katie and went like this:

Woe to you, poor fallen woman, not only because you have passed from light to darkness, from the

*cloistered holy religion into a damnable, shameful life, but also that you have gone from the grace to the disfavour of God, in that you have left the cloister in lay clothes and have gone to Wittenberg like a chorus girl. You are said to have lived with Luther in sin. Then you have married him, forsaking Christ your bridegroom. You have broken your vow, and by your example have reduced many godly young women in the cloisters to a pitiable state of body and of soul, despised of all men.*¹⁶

Such hostility could have destroyed a weaker woman. Only someone as strong willed as Katie could possibly have turned the situation, and her reputation, around to become, within a few years, the much-loved role model for women of her, and future, generations.

Katie was certainly strong willed. Luther wrote, 'If I were to marry again, I would carve an obedient wife out of a block of marble, for unless I did so, I should despair of finding one.'¹⁷ She hardly seems the model of a submissive wife. A few days after her wedding Amsdorf reported that she said, 'I have to train the doctor a little differently, so that he does what I want.'¹⁸ Both Katie and Luther had lived in single-sex communities for many years and had little, even second-hand, experience of married life. Both were used to doing things *their way*, and were equally determined. Initially Katie's attitude

alienated others in Luther's circle. A contemporary wrote, 'She was of a lofty spirit, wilful and proud; so that she did not cultivate much acquaintance and friendship with other wives, because she accounted herself above them, on account of the fame of her husband.'¹⁹ Humanly speaking the marriage did not have great prospects. It had its unromantic origins in theology, politics and family duty, and, with two such powerful personalities involved, the relationship was never going to be conflict-free. However, within a year Luther wrote, 'She is gentle and in all things obedient and agreeable, thank God much more than I had dared hope, so that I would not exchange my poverty for the riches of Croesus.'²⁰ In time Katie even managed to win over most of her husband's friends and colleagues. In 1536 the Reformer Wolfgang Capito wrote, 'She has been created to keep up your health so that you may serve the church born under you, that is, all that hope in Christ ... She is deservedly esteemed because as Hausfrau she cares for our common teacher with gentleness and diligence.'²¹ Over the years the marriage became far more than just a practical arrangement as Martin and Katie came to love each other deeply and delighted in the joys of family life that neither had ever expected to experience. Towards the end of his life Luther wrote, 'I love my Kate; yes I love her more than myself; that is really true; I would die rather than she and the family should die.'²²

From such an unpromising start how was it that Katie was able to make the marriage a success and in the process become a role model for biblical womanhood? First she was determined to base her life on her growing understanding of God's Word. She wrote, 'Wedlock grounded on God's Word and a house in which God's Word comes upon the table like the daily bread, that is a blessed house.'²³ In the convent she had not been brought up to study the Bible – in fact the practice was frowned upon by the Catholic authorities. Her Latin was minimal so, until Luther himself translated the Bible into German, her access to Scripture would have been limited. Yet as soon as she could, she was determined to learn: 'I attentively listen to the reading and preaching of the Word, and I read portions of it every day; so that I am able to repeat from memory many passages from it.'²⁴ To encourage her, Luther bet Katie fifty guilders that she couldn't read the entire Bible by Easter one year. She wasn't satisfied just to have read it: 'I hear it enough, also read it daily, and could talk about it. Would to God I also did according to it.'²⁵ Katie Luther's life shows how someone can be transformed through God's grace, a determination to obey God's Word and the working of the Holy Spirit. We might feel that we are far too busy to find time to read God's Word and pray day by day – and be disappointed by the lack of growth in our Christian lives. Katie found time – even when, as we shall see,

her life was overwhelmingly busy. There was no electric lighting – so reading in the evening by rush lights would have been hard. There were no electronic devices to make Bible reading more accessible – her Bible would have been vast, heavy and primitively printed. She would have faced endless interruptions and constant noise as she tried to read and pray – but she did.

The Luthers' successful marriage was certainly built on a determination to build their family life on the Bible, but also relied on Katie's capacity for hard work. After years in the monastery Martin was thoroughly undomesticated. Before he got married he would only change his sheets around once a year. Being married to Martin Luther was going to be tough – particularly as his domesticity never improved. Years later he cut up a pair of his son's new breeches so that he could patch a pair of his own – at least he was trying to help! Most of the practical side of the marriage was going to be down to Katie. Luther was very honest when he wrote, 'I'm no good at running the house, can't get used to it. Had we not this sex, the women folk, housekeeping would go to pieces. In the house I leave the rule to Kate.'²⁶ Thankfully Katie enjoyed a challenge. As a wedding present the couple were given the Black Cloister, Luther's monastery, as their very own place to live – as well as access to the Wittenberg wine cellars for a year! The Black Cloister was vast, with forty rooms on the first floor and with monastic cells on the floor

above. As the monks had gradually left in response to Luther's teaching, the buildings and the gardens had been neglected. Many of the cloister's furnishings and fittings had been stolen, and as an ex-monk and ex-nun Katie and Martin had no possessions of their own with which to fill it. Her first task was to create a family home out of a semi-wrecked cloister meant for forty monks.

Money for the job was going to be an issue. Having taken a vow of poverty, Martin had never had to deal with money, was ridiculously generous and permanently in debt. Shortly before his marriage he wrote, 'I am becoming day by day more overwhelmed with debt. I shall be forced to beg alms by and by.'²⁷ The monks had been used to receiving gifts from lay people who hoped that their generosity would win them favour with God. An unfortunate result of Luther's teaching that God's favour was a gift, and could not be bought, was that charitable giving dried up. Luther still refused to accept payment for any of his preaching or writing. He wanted his printed works to be cheap to buy so that even the poor could read the good news of the gospel. (The printers had other ideas, charged high prices and kept what would have been Luther's cut for themselves.) He was reluctant to accept gifts, unless he knew they could be used to help those in greater need than himself. Had he been left to his own devices, the situation would have been disastrous. As he wrote, 'I manage my household affairs strangely, and consume more than I

receive. I expend five hundred gulden in the kitchen to say nothing of clothing, ornaments and alms-giving; while my annual income is but two hundred gulden.'²⁸ He needed Katie's help.

Katie used her initiative from the start. She accepted at least one generous wedding gift behind Luther's back, and discouraged him from giving others away. Somehow she managed to keep track of all their incomings and outgoings. Immediately she established a kitchen garden to provide them with fruit and vegetables, and even managed to get Martin to help out. He wrote to his friend Spalatin, 'I have planted a garden and built a well very successfully.'²⁹ In time she persuaded Luther to buy some land with a stream running through it from which she made a fish pond that provided perch, carp, trout and pike. In 1542 we know she owned eight pigs, five cows, nine calves as well as chickens, pigeons, geese and their much-loved dog Tolpel. She also brewed her own beer, which Luther missed when he was away. In 1540 he bought a small farm for her, from her brother, at Zuhlsdorf, a few days' journey from Wittenberg, where she spent several weeks each summer. With what she produced she was able to feed the household, and sell the surplus to provide much needed extra cash.

This was particularly important as the number of people living in the Black Cloister grew. Luther was not just

a preacher and leader of the international evangelical movement, he was also Professor of Theology at Wittenberg University. Like other lecturers he took in students, who for a *small* fee would get board and lodging and the benefit of his company and pearls of wisdom at meal times. Soon all the rooms were full, not only with students but also with the Luthers' own growing family (six or seven orphaned nieces and nephews, various relatives of Katie's, including Auntie Lena from the convent, and four children whose mother had died of the plague) as well as a constant stream of visiting reformers and refugees fleeing Catholic persecution. Both Martin and Katie had been used to living in large communities, but now the care of the huge household rested entirely on their, and particularly Katie's, shoulders. Her training in the convent was put to good use and she was clearly an excellent hostess as friends, students and ex-students vied for the privilege of being married from the Black Cloister, and later to have Luther as godfather to their children. Each occasion meant more expense. Katie herself had to lay on banquets for baptisms, weddings and other celebrations, sometimes for hundreds of people. Eventually she taught her husband to say 'no'. After one more request for a wedding reception, he wrote, 'My dear fellow, we just can't manage it. I would suggest that you have your banquet at Freiburg or later on here on a very modest scale.'³⁰

Katie took the command to be hospitable very seriously, but some guests were easier than others. There was the regular group of theologians – or Sanhedrin as Luther called them – who came to talk over the issues of the day. There were also unexpected visitors. The aristocratic Elizabeth of Brandenburg, the King of Denmark's sister, had been locked in her room by her husband for converting to Protestantism. She escaped in the back of a peasant's cart and came to the Black Cloister for protection and sympathy, which the Luthers were happy to give. Rosina von Truchsess was another matter. She claimed to be a noble nun with nowhere to live following the closure of her convent. She was taken in and continued to stay even after it was revealed that, in fact, she was a widow whose husband had been executed as a rebel. She repaid their kindness by stealing, cheating and sleeping around. When she asked one of the Luthers' servants to help her with an abortion, enough was enough and she was sent packing – only to spend her next years slandering the family who had been so good to her!

It must have been hard for Luther and Katie to care for so many people, while also bringing up a young family of their own. It would have been easy for their children to have been neglected with all the other demands of ministry. Neither of them had expected to have children, and Katie had very little knowledge of what family life should look like – her mother died when she

was tiny and she was sent away to a convent when she was only five. So it is extraordinary that the Luther's home became seen as the ideal godly household. They had no older role models to copy and no 'how to' guides to Christian parenting. They just got on with it. They showed that it was possible to follow Jesus faithfully in the mess, muddle, fun and frustration of family life, not just in the isolation of the cloister. They had six children in the space of eight years, and loved even the less appealing bits of parenthood. Martin wrote, when one of the children was in the process of being potty trained, 'Child, what have you done that I should love you so? What with your befouling the corners and bawling through the whole house?'³¹ He compared Katie's love for the children with God's love for him: 'Surely God must talk with me even more fondly than my Katie with her Martinichen.'³² They enjoyed time as a family. Luther built a bowling alley so he could play with family and friends. He was quite competitive – he commented, 'Melanchthon is a better Greek scholar than I am, but I beat him at bowling.'³³ They had musical evenings where the children sang. Luther tried to bring back presents for the family from his many trips. As parents they were a great team. Luther praised Katie at dinner, and the comment was written down by one of his admiring students and published in the famous *Table Talk*: 'The greatest happiness is to have a wife to whom you can trust your business and who

is a good mother to your children. Katie you have a husband who loves you; many an empress is not so well off.'³⁴

Family life was not always smooth. Perhaps their example proved more powerful as they had to cope with the pain as well as the joys of parenthood. In the sixteenth century death in infancy and childhood was common, and something that most families had to deal with. It didn't make losing a child any less heartbreaking. The Luthers' second child, Elizabeth, died when she was only a year old. Their grief was lived out in public. Katie was still having to cater for a house full of students, and one recorded, 'Because his wife was very sad [and] cried and howled, Dr Martin Luther said to her, "Dear Käthe, think about where she is going! She comes to good!"'³⁵ Luther too, was, grief-stricken: 'It is amazing what a sick, almost woman-like heart she has left to me. So much has grief for her overcome me ... Never before would I have believed that a father's heart could have such tender feelings for his child.'³⁶ Their third child, Magdalena, died when she was just thirteen. As any parents would, they battled to keep their feelings in line with their theology:

My wife and I should only give thanks with joy for such a happy departure and blessed end, by which Magdalena has escaped the power of the flesh, the world, the Turk, and the devil; yet the force

*of our natural love is so great that we cannot do this without weeping and grieving in our hearts or even without experiencing death ourselves ... Even the death of Christ ... is unable totally to take this away, as it should.*³⁷

The Luthers were honest about their struggles. They were open with others and let them see their pain. Living in a large community and having such outgoing personalities meant they probably never thought of behaving in any other way. Had they tried to hide their grief and present a perfect façade to the world, their example would have been far less powerful. God is more glorified when we acknowledge our weakness than when we pretend to be strong!

The Luthers' other daughter, Margarethe, also almost died in a measles epidemic, which killed two of the students in the house. Katie herself was seriously ill following a miscarriage when she was forty-one. After finally recovering, having spent three months in bed, she then had to care for ten students dangerously ill with a fever. If her extended family wasn't enough to deal with, she also visited those who were sick in the rest of Wittenberg. Thankfully the three boys, Hans, Martin and Paul, were all quite healthy! Martin was not.

Throughout Martin's married life he suffered from

kidney stones, acute earache and depression, as well as other sporadic illnesses. In a time before painkillers and antibiotics even minor ailments could be unbearable. Anyone who has suffered earache will sympathise with Luther's condition: 'The pain attacked my life. The unbearable pains pressed tears out of me – Something I don't easily do; and I said to the Lord, "Either put an end to the pain or put an end to me."³⁸ Katie fed him, cared for him and sometimes bullied him into health – and at times prepared for his possible death. His depression was probably the hardest thing for her to deal with. At the best of times he could be difficult, as he admitted: 'I know full well Dr Martin Luther is a poor sinful man and has brought into the wedded life also his sin, especially his violent, explosive temper.'³⁹ His low moods were harder to bear. Even when he was well, he would lock himself in his study for days with nothing to eat; when he was not well, the Cloister's whole atmosphere would change. Katie developed her own strategies for coping. On one occasion she hired a locksmith to remove his study door. On another she dressed in black mourning clothes. When Luther asked her who had died, she replied that God had! She stated, 'He must have died, or my Martin would not be so sorrowful.'⁴⁰ Those tactics might not have worked with everyone, but they did with Luther.

Undoubtedly Martin lived longer and was able to work more effectively because of Katie's care, common

sense and practical hard work. The letters he wrote to her show how much he valued all she did. He addressed letters not only to his 'Dear Katharina' and his 'Dear wife' but also 'To the rich lady of Zulsdorf, Frau Doctor Katherine Luther ...' or 'To my heartily beloved wife Katherine Luther, Zulsdorfian-Doctress, swine-marketian, and whatever else she may be ...'⁴¹ He wrote to her about his health and her beer, but also about the theological issues he was discussing with the Zwinglians when he was in Marburg. He expected her to understand, and valued her opinions.⁴² Eventually Luther's poor health caught up with him when he was away travelling once again. Katie was worried about him – Martin addressed one of his final letters 'To the saintly, anxious-minded lady Katherine Luther'. He teased her that by worrying she had caused a series of bad things to happen. Certainly by worrying she couldn't stop the thing she dreaded. On 18 February 1546, soon after writing her a last letter, he died.

Katie was devastated. She wrote to her sister, 'I am truly so cast down that I cannot tell the troubles of my heart to anyone and do not know what to make of it all. I cannot eat or drink or sleep.'⁴³ Martin had always worried about what would happen to her after he died. Despite the international spread of his ideas, the people of Wittenberg had become half-hearted and resented the reformers' stress on personal faith and high standards of morality. Once Luther had

gone he was worried, quite rightly, that Katie would not be welcome. He had left debts, which creditors hounded her to pay. In his will he had, very unusually, left everything to Katie, rather than the children. The chancellor of Wittenberg disputed the will and tried to deny Katie custody of the children. To top it all the Schmalkaldic War broke out between Lutheran and Catholic states, forcing the family to flee. They returned during a lull in the fighting to find that their home and all their property had been ruined. Soon they had to escape the war zone again, and when she finally returned, Katie was shunned. Nobody wanted to help the wife of the great reformer with Catholic troops in the neighbourhood. Ever practical, she restored a small house they owned in the town, and once again took in lodgers. An ex-boarder at the Black Cloister wrote, 'I often think on that man of God, Dr Martin Luther, how he made his wife commit to memory Psalm xxxi, when she was young, vigorous, and cheerful, and could not then know how this psalm would afterwards be so sweet and consolatory to her. But her beloved spouse did this with good reason, for he well knew that after his death she would be an afflicted and miserable woman, and would greatly need the comfort contained in that psalm.'⁴⁴ The words of this psalm are in many ways similar to those of Luther's famous hymn 'A mighty fortress is our God', which is based on Psalm 46. Both speak of God's protection in the midst of opposition and danger.

*A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never
failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills
prevailing:
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great, and, armed with
cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal ...
That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to
them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him
Who with us sideth:
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.⁴⁵*

Katie needed that eternal perspective as the last years of her life continued to be stressful and insecure. Just a few years later she had to flee her home once again, this time because of the plague. Travelling in a cart with all her worldly goods, the horse bolted, throwing Katie into a ditch. Although she was faithfully nursed by her eighteen-year-old daughter Margarethe, she never recovered. She died in December 1552. The preacher at her funeral took the opportunity to attack

the townspeople for the shameful way she had been treated. Luther's friend Melancthon praised her faith: 'During all her illness she had found comfort in God's Word, calmly looking for another life, commending her children to the Lord, and praying the Holy Spirit to re-establish that unity of doctrine which had been the object of the efforts of her pious husband.'⁴⁶

Katie would have most appreciated Martin's earlier tribute to his wife: 'When I look at all the women in the world, I find none that I can praise as I can praise mine with a cheerful conscience.'⁴⁷ A woman who started life as a nun, the ideal woman of medieval Catholicism, had almost single-handedly created a new ideal for the Protestant age – a godly woman, working alongside her husband, supporting him in ministry and bringing up their children to trust in Jesus. That she also managed to run a farm, a brewery, a hotel and a hospital, as well as deal with a charismatic, depressive husband in the forefront of international events, makes her a fairly terrifying role model – for a role few now would want to fill. Looking at her amazing life it is easy to miss how her example can inspire every one of us – whatever our gifts, status or gender – by how an ordinary, self-centred and wilful sinner was willing to obey God's Word and be transformed by God's Spirit into the person He wanted her to be.