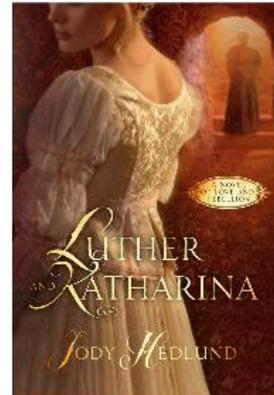


# JODY HEDLUND'S BOOK CLUB COLLECTION

There never yet have been, nor are  
there now, too many good books.  
~ Martin Luther



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## Additional Information about Luther and Katharina

### What was Katharina's family background?

Katharina's father, Hans von Bora, was a knight as indicated by the title "von." His estate near Hirschfeld was a working feudal tenure, meaning that the serfs who lived and worked on his land were required to give back to him a certain amount of their harvest and livestock. However, like many aristocrats, Hans was in financial trouble because of many factors including an agricultural crisis at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

Katharina was born on January 29, 1499 to Hans and his wife Anna von Haugwitz. Katharina had a sister (thought to be named Maria) and three brothers (Hans, Klement, and a third brother whose name is unknown).

Katharina lived with her family on their country estate until her mother passed away in 1505. In the same year, her father remarried a woman named Margarete von Seidewitz who was a widow and had several children of her own.

Due to Katharina's father's financial difficulties and the growing size of the family after his remarriage, the decision was made to send Katharina away to a convent to ease the burden on the family. Such a move meant Katharina would be given a good education, but it was also a life-changing decision. And at age five (or at any age) Katharina wouldn't have had much input into the decision.

### What was cloistered life like for both monks and nuns?

During the Middle Ages, many men and women entered cloistered life. Everywhere throughout Europe, abbeys and monasteries were built and the church at the time encouraged cloistered

life. For men, becoming a monk was a way to gain a good education, to learn to read and write when there weren't many options to do so. Monastic life provided protection from the many dangers of the Middle Ages. And it also was a way to become more spiritual during a time when salvation was thought to be something one could earn or buy.

Women usually didn't enter cloistered life voluntarily, at least during the time of Martin Luther, during the late 1400's and early 1500's. Instead, noblemen often looked at a convent as a place to put their unwanted daughters. Many noblemen, particularly land-rich but monetarily poor knights, couldn't afford a large dowry for their daughters which was required to make a favorable and advantageous match within the nobility. Of course, it was out of the question for those noble daughters to "marry down" in class, to laborers or tradesmen who wouldn't require so hefty a dowry. So rather than try to come up with the appropriate funds to make a noble match, many noblemen decided to put their daughters into convents.

Similar to men who entered monasteries, cloistered life for women was seen as advantageous. So fathers didn't feel too guilty about putting their unwanted younger daughters into a sheltered life of service to God because the convent was a place where they would be safe, fed, clothed, housed, and educated. Young women would learn to sing the Psalms, would learn to read and write (which wasn't common for women at the time), would learn the meaning of church symbols and the liturgy, and would also learn Latin. Although a severe lifestyle, it was relatively easy and comfortable and suited to a woman of noble birth.

### **At the time of the story, how were Luther's teachings and writings already inspiring change and revolution?**

At the start of the book in 1523, Martin Luther had already been declared a heretic by the pope and the church. He'd already nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Wittenberg church (which detailed his concerns about the corruption within the church). He'd already faced an inquisition by important people sent by the pope in the city of Worms. He'd faced the Emperor himself and had refused to recant his teachings and writings. He'd been excommunicated and declared a heretic. And since that time he'd essentially been hunted down so that he could be burned at the stake for his beliefs.

Luther went into hiding for a time, but continued to write and preach. During his time hidden away, his band of followers began to grow exponentially. As Luther's popularity grew, his teachings spread and made their way secretly into the convent where Katharina lived. When Katharina and some of the other nuns heard Luther's views on the unnaturalness of cloistered life and the goodness of marriage, something about his message resonated deeply within them. And their lives (and many others like them) would never be the same again.

It's also thought by some that Luther's teachings incited the peasants in Germany to revolt against authority. Although Luther was of peasant origin and was tempted to side with the peasants, he maintained his relationship with the Elector and a number of other princes. The nobility and rulers finally gave the Reformation and the gospel their allegiance in a move that

likely wouldn't have happened had Luther sided with the peasants during the Peasant Revolt. He had alienated himself from the peasant class, but in doing so had preserved the success of the Reformation.

### **Were marriage consummations really witnessed? And if so, why did Luther and Katharina's need to be witnessed?**

The practice of marital witnesses who stayed in the chamber applied primarily to royalty or important people. The marital act signaled an unbreakable union. Without consummation, the marriage could later be declared null and the couple could be granted an annulment. Thus, witnesses could testify to the validity of the marriage, especially if anyone later questioned it. If the bride became pregnant on the wedding night, the witnesses also helped to defend the legitimacy of the heir.

Why, then, did Martin Luther and Katharina von Bora need to have their consummation witnessed? They weren't royal. They weren't even wealthy.

During my research, I learned that the practice of witnessing consummation of marriage was practiced in the German culture, particularly among nobility. Katharina was of the noble class, but Luther was not, so one would assume that such a practice wouldn't be necessary for them. However, Luther and his advisors likely came to the conclusion that witnesses were essential. Luther had so many enemies who not only wanted him dead but who spread malicious rumors about him and undermined everything he did.

Luther knew his enemies would be especially vicious if he took a wife and would question the validity of his marriage. After all, if he a former monk got married, then he would be sending a very clear message to other monks that he supported the institution of marriage. Such a move could possibly incite them to forsake their vows of celibacy as well, which obviously the pope didn't want.

Luther also had supporters of the Reformation who didn't want him to get married. So having witnesses of his consummation would prevent them from declaring his marriage null.

Since betrothal was considered the official contract of marriage, Luther and Katharina consummated their marriage on the evening of their betrothal ceremony (which was two weeks before the church wedding). Luther asked his good friend Jonas to be the witness in the bed chamber.

### **What happened to Luther and Katharina after the end of the book?**

Katharina was called "The Morning Star of Wittenberg" because she got out of bed every morning at 4 o'clock to begin working, and she often worked late into the evening until 9 o'clock. The first years of her marriage were spent making the Black Cloister livable and self-supporting. She spent her time gardening, brewing, growing fruit, raising and breeding livestock, keeping

bees, cooking, nursing, and hosting the many guests that stayed with them.

Their home soon became known as Lutherhaus. It became almost like a hotel with displaced scholars, students, refugees, and former monks and nuns coming from all over.

Of course Luther continued his preaching, teaching, and writing and often traveled. During his absences, he wrote faithfully to Katharina (and many of his letters are available to read).

Eventually Luther and Katharina went on to have six children. Their first was born in June of 1526 (about a year after their wedding). He was named **Hans**. After his birth Luther said this: *"I am a fortunate husband. The best and dearest wife has presented me with a son. Thanks be to God! I have become a father by the wonderful grace of God."* He also said this about having children: *"Children are the sweetest fruits of marriage; they tie and strengthen the bonds of love."*

In 1527, **Elizabeth** joined the family (nicknamed Elsein). Unfortunately she died eight months later much to the anguish of Luther and Katharina. In 1529, another little girl was born, **Magdalene** (nicknamed Lenchen). She lived through infancy but died at the age of 13, shaking Luther and Katharina deeply. In 1531, they were blessed with the birth of a second son who was named **Martin** after his father. In 1533, **Paul** Luther was born and a year later **Margarete** joined the family.

With such a large family and an expansive ministry, the Luther household was an extremely busy place. As the years wore on, Luther (who was quite a bit older than Katharina) began to experience deteriorating health. He suffered from too many illnesses to name, but a few were: asthma, dysentery, buzzing in his head, ear infections, kidney stones, sciatica, weakness, and depression.

In 1546, Luther was busy traveling, preaching, and settling disputes as he'd always done. He fell ill and without his dearest doctor Katharina there to nurse him back to health, he died. His last words were: *"Into Thy hand I commit my spirit; Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God."*

Later, Katharina went on to say this about her husband: *"He gave so much of himself in service not only to one town or to one country, but to the whole world. Yes, my sorrow is so deep that no words can express my heartbreak."*

Katharina went on to live six more years without Luther. In 1552, while leaving Wittenberg with her family to escape the deadly Bubonic Plague, the horses pulling the wagon were spooked. In an effort to protect her children, Katharina jumped off the wagon hoping to gain control of the horses. Unfortunately she didn't land on her feet but rather fell to the ground hard, sustaining injuries. She lived only three months before dying.

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