

College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University

DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU

School of Theology and Seminary Graduate
Papers/Theses

School of Theology and Seminary

8-2006

A Woman of the Reformation

Megan S. Enninga

College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/sot_papers



Part of the [History of Religions of Western Origin Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Enninga, Megan S., "A Woman of the Reformation" (2006). *School of Theology and Seminary Graduate Papers/Theses*. 16.

https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/sot_papers/16

This Graduate Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Theology and Seminary at DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. It has been accepted for inclusion in School of Theology and Seminary Graduate Papers/Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csbsju.edu.

A Woman of the Reformation

By

Megan S. Enninga

1209 SW 15th St.
Willmar, MN 56201

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the School of Theology of Saint John's University,
Collegeville, Minnesota, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of
Arts in Liturgical Studies.

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
Saint John's University
Collegeville, Minnesota

August 2006

This Paper was written under the direction of

Signature of Director

Martin J. Connell

Name of Director

Megan S. Enninga
has successfully demonstrated the use of
German and Spanish
in this paper.

Signature of Director

Martin J. Connell

August 2006

A Woman of the Reformation

Description of the Project: Katharina Schütz Zell (1497 or 8-1562) influenced Strasbourg, Germany and the surrounding area by her marriage to a clergyman, publishing a hymnal and other writings, and by serving as a strong advocate for those less fortunate than herself. By looking at some of her writings, the climate of the society in this period in regards to clerical marriage, and some of her acts of social activism, Katharina Schütz Zell will be proven to be a remarkable woman and most likely the only woman of this period in Strasbourg who had such a wide variety of contributions during this period of the Reformation.

This paper may not be duplicated.

Signature of Student Writer

Date

The history of women in the liturgy is a rare topic in traditional church history books such as systematic theological treatises, official rites and texts, and learned commentaries. Evidence of feminine influence is more often found in the margins of such books. More often than not the presence of women is noted in Christian worship through letters, diaries, and autobiographies written by the women themselves. One of the earliest women whose writings have actually survived is Egeria, who wrote in her travel diaries about the liturgical life of the church in the Holy Land in the 4th century. Some of the letters that were written by powerful clerics to women have been saved. Letters written by St. Benedict, the founder of the Order of St. Benedict and writer of the Benedictine Rule to his sister St. Scholastica still influence Benedictine communities today. Most modern day theologians would find it difficult to name even ten women in the early Church and lay people most likely know even fewer. These few examples show just some of what women have faced to get their story heard throughout history. Although overlooked and often ignored, women have played a large part in the writing of the hymns and prayers of the Church. Furthermore, the activism and strong character of women was poignant during the years of the reformation as they upset the societal balance by marrying clergymen and supporting the reformers in their work. There is also the material evidence of women at work in the Church present in such things as the shrines that they built, the pictures that they painted, and the numerous prayer cards and Sunday hats they purchased.

A Woman of the Reformation

Katharina Schütz Zell (1497 or 8-1562) by her marriage to a clergyman, publishing a hymnal and other of her own writings, and by her strong advocacy for those less fortunate than herself helped to transform the role of women in Strasbourg, Germany. Katharina, who happened to be born into a turbulent time in the history of Christian worship, chose to speak out

amidst the many voices vying to be heard during the age of religious reform. Katharina virtually was the only woman in this period to do all of these things thus creating a huge impact.

Katharina was born in 1498 and although known for her strong religious background was never a nun, a member of any established religious community or the child of a well to do family. The daughter of Elisabeth Gerster and Jacob Schütz, Katharina had nine brothers and sisters who survived infancy.¹ Her father was an artisan (woodworker) and Katharina was given a good education although she never learned the Latin which would have helped her in learning what the Roman Catholic Church was trying to say during the liturgies. Katharina grew up in a Church where she had to memorize prayers to feel that she was a part of what was happening and experienced much frustration about the state of the Church. By memorizing the prayers, Katharina had her only connection with what was happening during the liturgies and she knew in her heart that there could be more to the liturgy than just memorization. At the age of ten, she dedicated herself to God and in her teens lived a life of celibacy, participated in the sacraments and did good works, and lived in her own home. Katharina went to confession, did charitable acts, and went to Mass. Though she lived out all of the things that the Church taught would bring her to salvation, she yearned for more. Even with all of her studies, Katharina felt like the woman in the Gospels who had an incurable flow of blood which no doctors could help; hers was a kind of sickness until death.² Katharina chose to fill her need by reading the Bible although clergy at the time did not encourage this. Before Katharina had reached the age of twenty, women sought her out to teach them about the pursuit of salvation. By the time Katharina reached adulthood and women were beginning to search for their own position in their

¹ It is unclear on the exact number of siblings that Katharina had due to the high rate of infant mortality and lack of records.

² Elsie Anne McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell: The Life and Thought of a Sixteenth-Century Reformer*, vol. 1 (Boston, MD: Brill, 1999), 28 (footnote 57).

church, her own spiritual struggles enabled her to fully understand their desire to learn more about Jesus.

Clerical Marriage

Katharina's first large act of rebellion against traditional society was to be one of the first women to marry a clergy person in Strasbourg. She married Matthew Zell on December 3 or 4, 1523 at 6AM.³ Matthew, one of the newest clergymen in the community to research the "Lutheran" ideas that Martin Luther was speaking about in March of 1521 began preaching his conclusions. Katharina found solace in the joyous liberating message that God's salvation is purely a gift through the grace of Christ.⁴ Reformers supported marriage of clergy as a way of ending the separation of clergy from the rest of the society. Because marriage involved a reciprocal, responsible relationship, women who married clergy were given a new status.⁵ The marriage of the clergy in the community caused a huge uproar due to the position that women held in society and the clerical structure. Women in Germany in the late Middle Ages had a completely different status from women in France or Italy.⁶ They were left to the task of caring for their husband and the home and were kept out of anything in the public life. With this uproar about the marriage of clergy, family members felt that their daughters and sisters were being scandalized by the clerics and thus canons were beaten up. Some women claimed that they had

³ Miriam Usher Chrisman, *Strasbourg and the Reform: A Study in the Process of Change*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), 133. McKee lists the date of the Zell marriage as the 4th of December while Chrisman uses the 3rd as the date of the marriage taking place.

⁴Elsie Anne McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell: The Life and Thought of a Sixteenth-Century Reformer*, vol. 1 (Boston, MD: Brill, 1999), 40.

⁵Chrisman, Miriam Usher. "Women and the Reformation in Strasbourg, 1490-1530" Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte 62 (1972): 148. Chrisman chooses to use Katherine in referring to Katharina Schütz Zell and Matthias in referring to Matthew Zell. Mattheus is another name given for Matthew. For this paper I have chosen to use the names Katharina and Matthew. In a footnote in one of Chrisman's books, *Strasbourg and the Reform: A Study in the Process of Change*, she writes that French historians use French forms and German historians name people in German, thus giving people two names and thus suggesting one of the reasons for the variance in the names between authors in writing about Katharina. For this paper I have chosen to use the names Katharina and Matthew.

⁶ Ibid., 143.

been beaten when they did not submit to the wishes of the clerics. This hostility that had been sizzling for over thirty years was finally brought to a head with the first marriages of clergy in the community. The clerics who supported marriage had witnessed the problems caused by clerics who took mistresses and they and the women who supported them revolted against this. An order had been issued in the city in 1471 against clerical concubinage, but in 1514 this same mandate was reissued.⁷ Rather than getting married it was common for clerics to keep mistresses. Those who married were called before the bishop to defend their conduct and the newly married couples faced ridicule and slander by fellow community members although some were supportive. Katharina and Matthew knew what they were getting into when they married. They headed straight into the battleground.

Martin Bucer, an influential reformer who worked closely with Katharina and her husband Matthew was the first clergy person to be married in Strasbourg. He married in the middle of 1523 and began preaching and publishing defenses for the justification of marriage. Bucer believed that men and women were dependent on each other and had a joint task in creating a Christian society.⁸ For Bucer, his wife's freedom in making her decision to marry him was as important to him as his decision to marry her. He desired a strong marriage covenant. Bucer stated that if he had been merely interested in sex, he could have found any number of mistresses easily and cheaply in Strasbourg. But he feared God and wished to enter into a deeper relationship that was enduring and constant.⁹

Though Katharina's marriage to a priest was against canon law, it led in Strasbourg to six more priests getting married by the end of the year. Katharina received the Eucharist under both species for the first time on her wedding day at the Mass that followed the wedding. Nicholas

⁷ Ibid., 144.

⁸ Ibid., 149.

⁹ Ibid., 149.

Gerbel, a lawyer and an early supporter of the reform, wrote of the wedding of Matthew and Katharina that no event had so revealed the bitter hatred dividing the community: there were so many guests at the wedding that it was difficult for the guests to even move.¹⁰ Their union led to a true partnership in ministry between two very dedicated servants of the Lord. Matthew saw Katharina as an equal, and Katharina described the basis of the marriage as a shared faith and commitment to knowing and confessing God, and the expression of this purpose was shown through serving God in the Church and among their neighbors.¹¹ These shared values and the egalitarian relationship that Katharina and Matthew had was held up for many years in the community. There was no dowry noted, but rather Matthew commissioned Katharina to be a mother to the poor and refugees.¹² Katharina writes that Matthew did not marry her for beauty or wealth, but for the sake of her zeal and action and faith.¹³ Matthew refers to her as his *Helffer* or assistant minister.

Katharina set her own standards for her ministry and stated that the only role she did not believe a Christian woman was called to do was to preach from the pulpit. Katharina enjoyed debating theological points and invited fellow ministers and theologians to the family home. In his diary, one Strasbourg Roman Catholic priest, Jacques von Gottesheim, noted that Katharina invited him to dinner in order to dispute with him.¹⁴ The Zells welcomed followers of Luther, Zwingli, Schwenckfeld, Baptist brethren, and their Roman Catholic neighbors into their home.

¹⁰ Ibid., 151.

¹¹ Elsie Anne McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell: The Life and Thought of a Sixteenth-Century Reformer*, vol. 1 (Boston, Md.: Brill, 1999), 50. Also refer to Lorna Jane Abray, *The People's Reformation: Magistrates, Clergy, and Commons in Strasbourg, 1500-1598* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 217-218.

¹² Elsie Anne McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell: The Life and Thought of a Sixteenth-Century Reformer*, vol. 1 (Boston, Md.: Brill, 1999), 50.

¹³ Elsie Anne McKee, "Katharina Schütz Zell: A Protestant Reformer" as in *Telling the Churches' Stories: Ecumenical Perspectives on Writing Christian History*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert and Charles W. Brockwell, Jr., (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 77.

¹⁴ Elsie Anne McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell: The Life and Thought of a Sixteenth-Century Reformer*, vol. 1 (Boston, Md.: Brill, 1999), 80.

Matthew was a strong supporter of Katharina's ministry and if his support had not been there her writings and contributions to the local society would not have been possible. Matthew was one of the first clergymen to be married in Strasbourg and throughout his life, notwithstanding the disagreements between the bishop and the local city council; he remained the city's most popular Protestant preacher. Matthew preached the following at the marriage of a fellow clergyman who married three weeks before Katharina and him:

Clerical marriage is not an innovation but a restoration of the right, true ordinance established by God the Holy Ghost which has been set aside for a long time Through the work of Satan...it has been placed outside of our customs and usages, removed from our eyes and therefore forgotten but now it will be restored...In recent times God's commandments...have been permitted to fall into such disuse that he who loves God is now considered to be a sinner while the man who lives in open sin, lust and whoredom, which God praised...Therefore dear friends, this act should not be thought of as an innovation and you should not be angered by it, rather you should praise God that your eyes have seen this, that these two...have turned from...evil, have courageously broken the bonds of the devil and Antichrist, have bravely taken the sword of God's work in their hands and thus defended themselves and those dependent upon them.¹⁵

The early deaths of Katharina and Matthew's two children, who both died before the age of four, allowed Katharina more freedom to serve outside of the home. The heartbreak over their death did influence her hymn writing and other writings. This marriage may not seem to have been an act of faith, but in 1523 it was clearly an affirmation of commitment to the gospel for a respectable young woman from a good guild family to marry a Catholic priest who was preaching "Lutheran" teachings.¹⁶ Not having any children who survived childhood is a strong reason that Katharina was able to devote so much time to her writing and social activism. The

¹⁵ Chrisman, Miriam Usher. "Women and the Reformation in Strasbourg, 1490-1530" *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 62 (1972), 150.

¹⁶ Elsie Anne McKee, "Katharina Schütz Zell: A Protestant Reformer" as in *Telling the Churches' Stories: Ecumenical Perspectives on Writing Christian History*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert and Charles W. Brockwell, Jr., (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 75.

combination of the support of Matthew and the death of her children gave Katharina the needed road to success in her ministry of writing and social activism.

Katharina's "hot letter" to the bishop defending clerical marriage established her views on this subject and soon after she published a version of this letter.¹⁷ What the bishop thinks of this letter is quite unknown, but considering that she was a priest's concubine¹⁸ and was not even legally married because Matthew did not pay the required tax for her, the bishop likely did not take the letter seriously. Her letter was written quickly after Bishop William von Honstein ordered the city's six married priests to court to be defrocked. Matthew appealed to the city council for protection, but the six priests are eventually excommunicated. Her marriage to Matthew led to the writing of a pamphlet in January 1524, entitled *An Apologia of Katharina Schütz for Master Matthew Zell her husband, a Pastor and Servant of the Word of God in Strasbourg, concerning the great lies spread about him*.¹⁹ The city council voiced their anxiety about the letter and told Matthew that his wife should stay quiet and that her letter should not be printed. Katharina goes ahead with the publishing of a pamphlet. It is unclear if the pamphlet of 1524 is the same as or based on the letter she wrote to the bishop - most likely it is. This pamphlet defended clerical marriage and the Protestant faith. It also addressed the larger issues of scripture versus the Church and faith versus works. This pamphlet was not written for the people of Strasbourg but primarily for those outside of the city who Katharina felt needed to know the whole truth about clerical marriage.

¹⁷ Ibid., 76.

¹⁸ Elsie Anne McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell: The Life and Thought of a Sixteenth-Century Reformer*, vol. 1 (Boston, Md.: Brill, 1999), 51.

¹⁹ Ibid. 330. The full text of this is available in Elsie Anne McKee's second volume on Katharina Schütz Zell in its original language of German. (p. 20-47)

Writings of Katharina

Through Katharina's excellent writings she reached those not being touched by the clergy or other Christian writers of the period. She stands out from other writers of the period because of the length of time she published works, from 1524-1558.²⁰ This is longer than most lay religious authors of this period as they discontinued public publication of their writings around 1530. The vastness and diversity of her writings were unique among early modern women writers and certainly among lay persons of the period.²¹ She wrote devotional meditations, pastoral counsel, religious instruction for polemical theology, autobiographical and historical apologetics, a hymnbook, sermons, petitions to Strasbourg's city council for civic reform, and personal correspondence.²² The modern day scholar Peter Matheson notes the remarkable unity and educated theological thoughts of her literary achievement:

We have to rub our eyes with utter astonishment at her achievement in developing a rounded and consistent theology, unmistakably hers, bricks out of veritable straw. Surprised into speech, she produced a language all her own, a new hermeneutic of Scripture, a passionate vision of a new Church and a just society, a new style of leadership.²³

The invention of the printing press in 1450 helped Katharina share her writings with a larger audience and gave her much better options for distributing the hymnbook she helped to organize.²⁴ Without having the printing press available to distribute her writings, these writings would not have reached as many people as they did and Katharina's influence would not have been as far reaching as it was.

²⁰ Ibid., xii.

²¹ Ibid., xii.

²² Ibid., xii.

²³ Peter Matheson, "Argula von Grumbach (c. 1490-c. 1564)," in *The Reformation Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2002), 96.

²⁴ James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 1993), 106.

Katharina did not stop writing after her first pamphlet was distributed but continued in spreading her message with a printed work that was published in Strasbourg in July 1524 and was entitled *To the Suffering Believers in Christ, the Women of the Congregation at Kentzingen, my sisters in Christ Jesus*. This was reissued in November and was the only one of her writings to be reissued in her lifetime. The women that she is writing to were separated from their husbands and persecuted for their Protestant faith. Katharina complimented and admired them for their work in sharing their faith. Katharina wrote many things defending those who believed in the reformation.

The death of Katharina's two children may have led to the writing of an exposition on the Lord's Prayer in 1532. This was written for two women from a nearby town, Barbara Semler and Elisabeth Bomer, who felt that they could not live according to God's will. Katharina emphasized how the special closeness of parents and children matched the formal relationship found in the Old Testament between God and the people and how this lives on in God's Son Jesus Christ. Katharina writes:

For no lord with his servant and no woman with her maid listens so quickly and responds so friendly as the father and mother with their child... A woman who has never borne a child, never experienced or known the pain of labor and the love of nourishing a nursling: who would love, care for, and have pity on the helpless children as the true mother can and does?!²⁵

Being fed by the scripture and in the supper of fellowship are both very important to Katharina. Katharina's interpretation of the Lord's Prayer is probably more Zwinglian than anything that Luther would have accepted in 1532.

The Zells-both Katharina and Matthew played an important part in the Reformation in Strasbourg and were close friends with many of the most noted reformers of the period. In 1538,

²⁵ Elsie Anne McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell: The Life and Thought of a Sixteenth-Century Reformer*, vol. 1 (Boston, Md.: Brill, 1999), 87. (*Den Psalmen* 342:34-343:6)

the Zells journeyed to see Martin Luther and his wife Katherine. During this trip they also met many of their fellow workers in the vineyard of the Lord including Philip Melanchthon and Nicholas Amsdorf. Katharina was not left at home for this trip or any of the other trips but seems to have joined in with the conversations that the reformers were having as much as possible. Even by participating in services with these many reformers helped to shape Katharina's theological interpretations. Martin Luther dies in February of 1546 and Matthew Zell followed in January of 1548 leaving Katharina, Matthew's "assistant minister" to tend the flock. Matthew and Katharina enjoyed 24 years together as husband and wife. She deeply mourned Matthew's passing, but continued on serving the Lord until her own death on September 5, 1562.

Katharina quickly stepped to the forefront, a grieving widow, to speak at Matthew's grave after Martin Bucer's sermon. The people yearned for more than what Bucer gave them in his sermon and so Katharina began her sermon with an account of Zell's ministry, told of his faith and his love for his people, summarized his preaching, his rejection of the pope and Roman Catholic worship, and his confession in Christ alone.²⁶ This is later compiled by Katharina's friends and distributed under the title *Lament and Exhortation of Katharina Zell to the People by the Grave of that Devout Man Master Matthew Zell, Pastor in the Cathedral at Strasbourg....* This graveside preaching by Katharina led to a gathering of Psalm texts (51 and 130) to share with other troubled souls seeking evidence of God's mercy in the midst of pain which she compiled in 1558.²⁷

²⁶ Ibid., 128. (*Klag* p76ff)

²⁷ Elsie Ann McKee, "Katharina Schütz Zell (1498-1562)," as in *The Reformation Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2002), 229.

Many of Katharina's public speeches were compiled and published so that they could reach more people than the initial audience. Although she did not feel that preaching was the ministry of a woman she did allow herself to preach from the grave because she considered this different from preaching from the pulpit. Many hearers and readers of what Katharina said at her husband's grave were quite pleased although most thought that preaching by a woman should not become a regular practice. Katharina reflected on the issue of women's preaching later on in her life in private correspondence and in some published texts and wrote that women and lay Christians should have the authority to preach based on their Biblical knowledge and Christian maturity. Katharina stated that some people, women or men, are capable of preaching - teaching because they are learned in the faith. This learning is not academic or abstract...fundamentally Biblical knowledge, maturely considered over years of personal study and public sermons and consultation with the best interpreters. The person must exercise Christian love.²⁸ She had to defend herself saying that she hadn't sought ordination or preached from the pulpit and only did what she was called to do by her husband. These statements show the outrage and need that the men must have felt to show that they were still in power. They seem to have been threatened by her strong presence, leadership, and theological writings. Even for women of the community having another woman preach must have been an unusual change. Katharina was called to preach in many unofficial ways and was even called upon by the Scher family to bury two of their family members, because the clergy had refused to officiate at the funeral saying that the family was not religious enough.²⁹ Katharina felt a strong love for her neighbors and out of necessity due to the preaching obligation of clergy, that if one can not do it others must step up to

²⁸ Elsie Anne McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell: The Life and Thought of a Sixteenth-Century Reformer*, vol. 1 (Boston, Md.: Brill, 1999), 417.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 418.

fill the role, preached at the two funerals for this family. She felt that if clergy did not fulfill their role that qualified lay Christians must act.

Not only did Katharina write essays and theological discourse but she also compiled and created a hymnbook. Susan J. White, a leading theologian in the United States, describes Katharina as the first important woman hymn-writer of the continental Reformation.³⁰ Katharina was surrounded by hymns having a theology that was not believed in by the reformers. These hymns reflected the Roman Catholic view on the Eucharist, the saints, and the Virgin Mary. The hymns seemed to be the least important thing for the reformers to tackle as they had plenty of work to do in stripping the liturgy of all things considered unbiblical. Public worship had moved to the vernacular and a reformed celebration of the Lord's Supper and Baptism had been implemented as a few of the changes. Humanist Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) condemned the practice of liturgical music as unintelligible and a waste of time and resources.³¹ This was probably due to the extensive melismatic decoration music of the time period as the music was polyphonic in style and used Latin texts. Producing, both writing and singing medieval liturgical music was also fundamentally a role held by clerics.

Katharina certainly had her audience and the poor musical resources available to the laity in mind when she was developing her hymnbook. As did most Protestants, Katharina wanted to include the laity and have the laity understand the text and sing in unison. Katharina shared another concern of the reformers to replace bad songs with good, and probably had situations like the deficient choral repertoire of the Strasbourg orphans in mind when she published her hymnbook.³² Choir boys during this period of history sang for about an hour a day while

³⁰ Susan J. White, *A History of Women in Christian Worship*, (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003), 252.

³¹ Elsie Anne McKee, "Reforming Popular Piety in Sixteenth-Century Strasbourg: Katharina Schütz Zell and Her Hymnbook," *Studies in Reformed Theology and History* 2, no. 4 (1994): 6.

³² *Ibid.*, 11.

orphans sang for alms. Katharina set to work to transform this lack of focus on having theologically sound hymns based on the teachings of the Reformation and particularly the points of view of Zwingli and Calvin and publishes her own hymnal entitled *Von Christo Jhesus Lobgsang* in Strasbourg around 1534 adapted from the work of Michael Weisse, the German translator-editor of this Czech hymnbook for the Bohemian Brethren. Michael Weisse was an elder of the Brethren from Silesia. This hymnbook was the first German-language hymnbook of the *Unitas Fratrum* or Bohemian Brethren, which was a sect that grew out of the work of the fifteenth-century reformer Jan Hus.

Katharina followed Weisse's instructions of keeping the words exactly as written and chose to only make alterations to the words to help them flow and write her own preface. Katharina had the orthography recast in a German closer to Strasbourg speech. She also followed Weisse's instructions of allowing editors to alter the music and/or change the melodies. Katharina kept all 157 hymns of Weisse's and added two others. One was a vernacular hymn translation of a medieval hymn taken from a Lutheran hymnbook and the other was a German version of Psalm 133. Katharina kept Weisse's divisions of the hymns which were: incarnation, birth, circumcision, epiphany, ministry and suffering, resurrection and ascension of Christ, the Holy Spirit, praise hymns, prayer hymns, teaching hymns, hymns for various times of the day, for children, for the fallen or sinners, hymns for the burial of the dead and for the last judgment, hymns about the right honoring of saints, and about the Lord's testament (supper).³³

Katharina strongly believed that the people should have a voice in the liturgy and also should be able to live out their faith in their homes and thus created a hymnbook that was going to be useful in attaining this. Early hymnbooks of the reformation needed to biblically defend the right of people in the pews to sing due to the current lack of participation of the lay people in

³³ Ibid., 18.

singing in the Roman Catholic Church. Katharina's hymnbook was no exception to this common thread of the period. She did not have any difficulty defending this right of the people.

She writes:

Indeed, I ought much rather to call it a teaching, prayer, and praise book than a songbook, although the little word "song" is well and properly spoken, for the greatest praise of God is expressed in song, as when Moses sang a glorious song of praise to God when the Lord brought him and his people through the sea, Exodus 15:1-18. And the holy Anna the same way sang thanks and praise to God the Lord when he had given her Samuel, 1 Kings 2 (1 Samuel 2:1-10). As also David made so many glorious Psalm songs, and used often the expression: We should sing to the Lord, and the like. Thence have also come all the songs of the Church, where they have been kept in the right way and with the right heart, as they were by the first singers.³⁴

Katharina believed Martin Luther and his thinking that beautiful music was God's good gift. She wanted to give people an opportunity to sing enthusiastically and with clear voices. By singing enthusiastically ordinary people are learning about the gospel for themselves and if they are singing around others they are teaching them about the faith. Katharina believed strongly in lay vocation, something that even today Churches have difficulty with. She has strong sympathies for the mother caring for her children and suggests singing hymns to a child to quiet them.

And teach them that in doing this; they please God much better than any priest, monk, or nun in their incomprehensible choir song, as they lifted up some foolish devotion of useless lullaby to the organ. A poor mother would so gladly sleep, but at midnight she must rock the wailing baby, and sing it a song about godly things. That is called, and it is, the right lullaby (provided it is done in the faith) that pleases God, and not the organ or the organist. He is no child, and you may not silence Him with piping and singing! But silence yourself; He requires something else.³⁵

Her wish to maintain the sacred was shown by her desire to write "religious" tunes instead of using the secular tunes. It may have been Katharina or she may have just been the

³⁴ Ibid., 27.

³⁵ Ibid., 40.

editor. Knowing her strong support of this project and her innovation to get things done in the face of difficulty, she most likely took on the project herself. All of the tunes are religious melodies in origin except for one. This was a profane tune that had already been used in the 15th century in a hymn to the Virgin Mary. She made changes in fifty of the hymns which are nearly one-third of the total hymns in the collection.

Katharine used five primary sources for the melodies she chose to use and did not limit herself to only music created by the reformers but reached back into her Roman Catholic heritage to use some treasures. The first source was liturgical in origin and used such things as the TeDeum, some hymns or antiphons, sequences, and tropes of the Latin mass. The second source was paraliturgical music or music that was outside of the liturgy originating in the later middle ages. This is music that had been translated from Latin to the vernacular. Some of the hymn tunes were tunes of the Bohemian Brethren. One was a Lutheran translation of a medieval hymn with its melody that had been in Strasbourg since 1525. The rest are of unknown origins. The majority of the hymns are written tonally rather than modally which shows a lot of vision as she was writing right in the shift between modal and tonal music in the Middle Ages.

Katharina divided her hymn book into four smaller and less expensive pamphlets which allowed those who were not the wealthiest members of society and those not being reached by main stream religious leaders to actually acquire these pamphlets. The pagination was consecutive so that the different sections could be bound together in one book.³⁶ Her introduction in the front of the books helped to instruct the singers to use the book as a guide to prayer, praise, and doctrine, a kind of teach – yourself - catechism or lay sermon book.³⁷ The

³⁶ Katharina Schütz Zell, *Church Mother: The Writings of a Protestant Reformer in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, ed. and tr. Elsie Anne McKee, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 91.

³⁷ Elsie Anne McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell: The Writings, A Critical Edition*, (Boston: Brill, 1999), 56.

division of the hymnbook was completed in 1534 and printing was completed in 1535. Book two was also published in 1535. Books three and four were published in 1536. The last book was the longest and most diverse. Some of the hymns have words written out with indications of which hymn tunes to use to sing them with. Other hymns actually have the notes written out and sometimes both the notes and a named tune are supplied. She includes many references to feminine figures or images. By including feminine images and figures, women were able to more easily understand the call to Christianity and how it related to them.

Katharina worked to bridge the gap between the Roman and Reformed tradition by creating hymns that would serve this purpose. Most lay Christians felt they had been deprived on singing entirely and they mourned the loss of the traditional holy days. Katharina responded to this deprivation by providing texts suitable for reformed Christians' private devotion. These hymns would also help teach the people about their faith. Katharina wrote:

Since, however, now so many scandalous songs are sung by men and women and also by children throughout the world...it seemed to me a very good and useful thing to...convey the whole business of Christ and our salvation in song, so that people may thus, enthusiastically and with clear voices, be exhorted to their salvation, and the devil with his songs may not have any place in them.³⁸

Katharina's audience was primarily Lay Christians. Through her hymns she called them to a Christian life and encouraged their role as teachers of the faith. She believed that literate people especially are responsible for their households and that all lay Christians should be able to declare their faith. As did many women hymn writers of the period, Katharina wrote a funeral hymn for the loss of children. Many women in this period faced the untimely and early deaths of their children and these hymns offered a Christian perspective on how to respond to these deaths.

³⁸ Susan J. White, *A History of Women in Christian Worship*, (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003), 252.

Katharina's hymnbook was never republished and none of her tunes were taken and used in other Protestant hymnals. This is not something to bemoan as her work served as a bridge between the early Reformed tradition and the Roman tradition and her work appeared at an important time during the reformation in Strasbourg thus creating a source for people to learn about their faith. In a very short time official Church publications were prepared and hymnals were done with more hymns for the feasts of the Church. This might have been because of Katharina's work and support of reform in this area. The people of Strasbourg most likely used her hymnbook for many years to come because of their love and appreciation for the work and labors of Katharina.

Social Activism

Katharina's biggest ministry throughout her life was to take care of the poor, destitute, and all religious refugees, even if they did not hold the same faith beliefs as the Zells. Katharina felt compelled to aid those less fortunate and those persecuted by the reformation. Both Matthew and Katharina felt a strong desire to take into their home people who were facing difficult times. They worked to find these unfortunate people food, shelter, and jobs. Katharina visited those in prison and those who were sick and cared for poor children and abandoned orphans.

Katharina may have unknowingly begun some of the first threads of liberationist theology and would be a good model for liberationist theologians to look to as changes are proposed for all to have basic human rights. Although the term liberation theology was not articulated until around 1930 by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Katharina Schütz Zell can be noted for her work in bringing about justice for all by giving to the people an understanding of scripture. She knew that in order for all people to know God and to find their place in history they needed to be educated. Thus she provided not only her hymnbook and other writings, but also worked among

the poor and those hurt by the Reformation, always keeping an even and balanced approach to her ministry. Her ministry to women who were not considered equals in the society and her egalitarian marriage that was very uncommon during this period of time are crucial to understanding her importance. By supporting and dialoguing during the Reformation about religion Katharina helped to cause changes that led to an evaluation of what all churches were doing to lead people to God. Juan Luis Segundo, a modern day Uruguayan theologian, in his text "Liberation Theology" states what Katharina lived out and wrestled with in her life:

El proyecto de una sociedad distinta incluye también la creación de una nueva persona humana, cada vez más libre de toda servidumbre que le impida ser agente de su propio destino en la historia. Esto lleva a cuestionar las ideologías dominantes que hoy modelan a las personas en nuestra sociedad. En esas ideologías están presentes ciertos elementos religiosos. Solo en el cuadro del cuestionamiento al conjunto del orden establecido es posible comprender la crítica a la religión en tanto que esta aparece como reforzando la dominación sobre los sectores explotados y marginados.

Este reconocimiento de la importancia del condicionamiento social para nuestra vida cristiana y la reflexión teológica lleva a una seria preocupación por la relación entre teología e ideología. Esta es una obligada cuestión para quien intenta una reflexión desde los ausentes de la historia.³⁹

Katharina was sensitive to the busy household lives of the lay people, women's work, and the daily work of the people. She worked to create a balance - enticing them and educating them

³⁹ The project of [creating] a different society also includes the creation of a new human person, more and more free of all enslavement which impedes being an agent of one's own destiny in history. This brings us to question the dominant ideologies which today are modeled by persons in our society. In these ideologies are present certain religious elements. Only in the area of questioning the established order in its entirety is it possible to understand the critique of religion as far as it (religion) appears to reinforce the domination over the exploited and marginalized sectors.

This recognition of the importance of the social conditioning for our Christian life and theological reflection carries us to a series of concerns for the relation between theology and ideology. This is an obligatory question for anyone who tries to reflect from the perspective of those left out of history. Translation by Megan Enninga and Dr. Paul Neufeld Weaver. Juan Luis Segundo, *Teología de la liberación en Colombia*, © 1997 Lucas Morea / Sinexi S.A., available from <http://www.monografias.com/trabajos12/teolibe/teolibe2.shtml#NACIM>; internet; accessed 28 July 2006.

about their faith but also providing them with music and writing that would catch their attention. Her hymnbook was a perfect acknowledgement of this balance as she wanted to have something that would be praise, prayer, and tool to teach. Also, the psalms she writes about are ones of comfort and forgiveness. Katharina speaks of the need of the community to support those who are weak and afflicted with illness. For instance, Katharina wrote to a Christian man named Juinker Felix Armbruster, whom she probably knew, to comfort him in his sickness and interpreted the psalms for him. Armbruster was of a much higher social rank than the Zells, because of his illness Katharina was able to share her faith with him. She writes:

Dieweil wir lang/ ja schier dreysig jar/ einander erkannt haben/ da durch ich bewegt worden/ eüch in ewern langen/ und nun onauffhoerlichen ser beschwerlichen kranckhait/ heim zusuchen/ welche haimsuchung/ ihr/ so mit grossem danck/ trost und freuden angenomen haben/ und ich eüch verhaissen ettwan mehr haimzusuchen. Dieweil ich aber nit vil (wie ich gern wollte) zu eüch kommen kan/ vor meinem armen ja elenden krancken/ mit dem mich Gott beladen hat mit schwerer arbeit.⁴⁰

Armbruster would have known the Zells since he believed many of the same things that they did concerning religion. The psalms she writes about are ones of comfort and forgiveness. Katharina speaks of the need of the community to support those who are weak and afflicted with illness.

Katharina felt it necessary to give protection in her home to all who were persecuted and misunderstood. Strasbourg's reformers were not as outspoken or as charismatic as Luther, who insisted people accept his beliefs or leave.⁴¹ Also they did not follow strongly either Luther's

⁴⁰ Translated by Joseph Eikmeier and Megan Enninga. Meanwhile we have known each other nearly thirty years through which I have been concerned for you for a long time and now you have a constant troublesome illness. So I am truly with you in spirit and ask God that his spirit would live with consolation and patience all the time with you and that he would also comfort you in the misery of lonesomeness and the affliction of abandonment and hold loving dialogue with you in your heart. Text from Elsie Anne McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell-Volume Two: The Writings, A Critical Edition*, (Boston: Brill, 1999) 311-312.

⁴¹ Miriam Usher Chrisman, *Strasbourg and the Reform: A Study in the Process of Change*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), 191.

teachings or the Zwinglian teachings. There was no distinct liturgy or particular form of worship or definitive doctrine and thus the Anabaptists found their way to Strasbourg. Not missing anything in the debate about infant baptism or any of the teachings that the Anabaptists had was Katharina who chose to open her home to the Anabaptists who Martin Bucer thought should be handled firmly by the civil authorities. Katharina felt it necessary to give protection in her home to all who were persecuted and misunderstood even the Anabaptists who were hated in Strasbourg.⁴² Matthew did not stop her and may have even changed his outlook on the debate with the Anabaptists because Katharina was so willing to care for all. Katharina witnessed attacks on Catholics and the Lutheran clergy even referred to Caspar Schwenckfeld as *Stenckfeld*, a term of ridicule. She wrote that what was lacking was any sense of Christian charity in the whole debate.⁴³

Conclusion

This brief glimpse into the life and some of the writings of Katharina Schütz Zell hardly gives due reward and acknowledgment to the work of this woman of the early modern reformation period. Her writings are in a vast array of literary forms. Her theological understandings are for a lay person in this period remarkable. Katharina wrote and published more than many of the male reformer preachers of her time. Her strength in marrying a clergyman and their shared values and faith is a model for what marriage of clergy in modern days could look like and was even used as a model for what an egalitarian marriage between lay people could look like. Even as a woman, she connected liturgy and popular piety and bridged the path between clergy and laity. She stood on a balance beam between the clergy and the laity; understanding both sides. Katharina used the resources available to her as a wife of a minister to

⁴² Miriam Usher Chrisman, *Strasbourg and the Reform: A Study in the Process of Change*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), 191.

⁴³ Lorna Jane Abray, *The People's Reformation: Magistrates, Clergy, and Commons in Strasbourg, 1500-1598*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press), 175.

share with the ordinary Christians. Katharina Schütz Zell is a remarkable woman of the reformation who even today should be looked to for her strength in persevering in faith, praised and admired for her excellent writing skills, and for the equality she achieved in marriage. She rebelled against the traditions of the society to create changes in the church and the social hierarchy of the community of Strasbourg and surrounding area. Katharina's voice was heard and should still be heard today for the contributions that she made during the reformation.

Works Cited

- Abray, Lorna Jane. The People's Reformation: Magistrates, Clergy, and Commons in Strasbourg, 1500-1598. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Chrisman, Miriam Usher. Strasbourg and the Reform: A Study in the Process of Change. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967.
- Chrisman, Miriam Usher. "Women and the Reformation in Strasbourg, 1490-1530" *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 62 (1972): 143-167.
- Matheson, Peter. "Argula von Grumbach (c. 1490-c. 1564)." The Reformation Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Modern Period. Ed. Carter Lindberg. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, Inc. 2002. 94-108.
- McKee, Elsie Anne. "Katharina Schütz Zell (1498-1562)." The Reformation Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Modern Period. Ed. Carter Lindberg. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, Inc. 2002. 225-238.
- _____. Katharina Schütz Zell-Volume One: The Life and Thought of a Sixteenth-Century Reformer. Boston: Brill, 1999.
- _____. Katharina Schütz Zell-Volume Two: The Writings, A Critical Edition. Boston: Brill, 1999.
- _____. "Katharina Schütz Zell: A Protestant Reformer". Telling the Churches' Stories: An Ecumenical Perspectives on Writing Christian History. Ed. Timothy J. Wengert and Charles W. Brockwell, Jr. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995. 73-90.
- _____. Reforming Popular Piety in Sixteenth-Century Strasbourg; Katharina Schütz Zell and Her Hymnbook. *Studies in Reformed Theology and History* 2, no. 4. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1994.
- Segundo, Juan Luis. "Liberación de la teología," *Teología de la liberación en Colombia*, 1997, 1997 Lucas Morea / Sinexi S.A., available from:
<http://www.monografias.com/trabajos12/teolibe/teolibe2.shtml#NACIM>
 Internet; accessed 28 July 2006.
- White, James F. A Brief History of Christian Worship. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.
- White, Susan J. A History of Women in Christian Worship. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003.
- Zell, Katharina Schütz. Church Mother: The Writings of a Protestant Reformer in Sixteenth-Century Germany. Series: *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe*, ed. and tr. by Elsie Anne McKee. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

