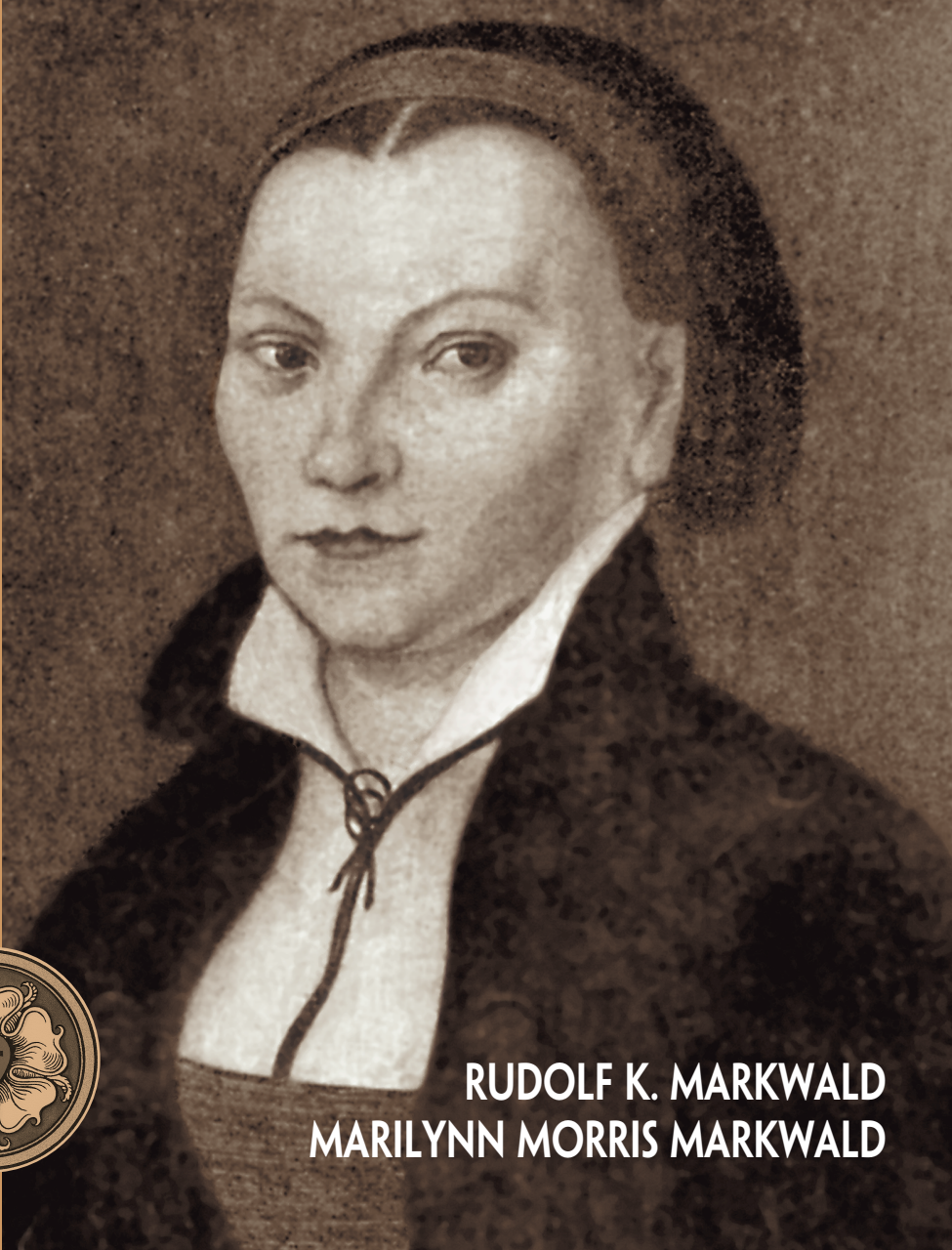


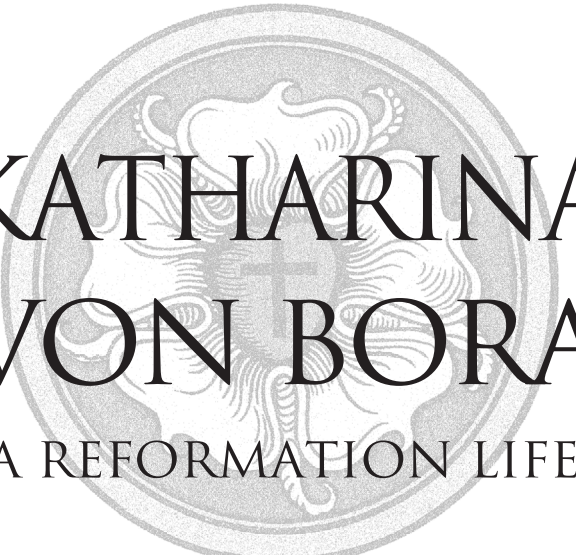
A REFORMATION LIFE

KATHARINA VON BORA



RUDOLF K. MARKWALD
MARILYNN MORRIS MARKWALD

KATHARINA VON BORA



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A REFORMATION LIFE

Rudolf K. Markwald
and Marilyn Morris Markwald

To our children—Paul Gerhard, Christine Hope, Elizabeth Lynn—to the memory of Ruth Mary; to our grandchildren; and to all the family members who have encouraged us to write this book.

Many of the original works about Katharina von Bora Luther referenced in this book appear in languages other than English. The translations of these quotations are Rudolf Markwald's, unless otherwise indicated.

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FOREWORD

It is the fine custom in some congregations to invite all who come for worship on All Saints' Day or the Sunday on which this feast is celebrated to record the names of persons for whom they wish to give particular thanks to God. I cherish this remembering of those "in the nearer presence" of God who have been of particular significance in the Holy Spirit's calling me through the Gospel into the gift and life of faith.

Katharina von Bora Luther is always on my list. Always. She is there in her own right, as a saint who lived out her sainthood in an extraordinary way in ordinary life. How much we can learn from her about the sacred character of our "ordinary" settings, relationships, and activities! I name her, also, because of her central importance in the life and witness of her Martin, whose name is, also, always on my All Saints' list.

For too long we have been impoverished by the paucity of material in English about Katie and by our lack of knowledge about her apart from Martin. Therefore, we can be grateful to my excellent friend Pastor Rudolf K. Markwald and to Lynn for this informed and readable introduction to Luther's "Lord Katie." Welcome to the growing company of those who know and love her and who join in our thanks to God for her witness on All Saints' Day and on our transformed ordinary days!

—Franklin D. Fry
Summit, New Jersey

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many;

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... and pastors and friends at Luther Memorial Church, Madison,
Wisconsin.

CHRONOLOGY

1499	January 29	Born in Hirschfeld, near Meissen, Saxony (according to recent research).
1505		Sent to the Benedictine boarding school at Brehna after mother died and father remarried.
1509		Entered Cistercian nunnery Marienthron at Nimbschen
1514		Began her novitiate.
1515		Consecrated as nun
1523	April 6/7	Flight with 11 other nuns from Marienthron via Torgau to Wittenberg. Began friendship with Jerome Baumgärtner.
1523 TO 1525		Lived and worked at the Reichenbach and Cranach homes.
1525	June 13	Marriage to Martin Luther. Black Cloister became the Luther parsonage.
1526	June 7	Birth of Johannes (Hans).
1527	December 10	Birth of Elizabeth.
1528	August 3	Death of Elizabeth.

KATHARINA VON BORA

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|------|-------------|---|
| 1529 | May 4 | Birth of Magdalene. |
| 1531 | November 9 | Birth of Martin the Younger. |
| 1532 | February 4 | Elector donated the Black Cloister to the Lutherans. |
| 1533 | January 29 | Birth of Paul on Kate's 34th birthday. |
| 1534 | December 17 | Birth of Margarete. |
| 1535 | | Major remodeling of the Black Cloister. |
| 1536 | | Death of Magdalene von Bora (Muhme Lene), Kate's aunt. |
| 1540 | | Purchased Zülsdorf estate. Serious illness after miscarriage. |
| 1542 | | Death of Magdalene. |
| 1546 | February 18 | Death of Luther. |
| | June 18 | Flight with children to Magdeburg via Dessau. |
| 1547 | | Second flight to Magdeburg and Braunschweig. Lawsuits. |
| 1552 | December 20 | Death at Torgau after serious accident during flight from Wittenberg. |
| | December 21 | Funeral and burial at St. Mary's Church in Torgau. |

CHAPTER 1

KATHARINA'S ANCESTRY

Saxony. Land of thinkers and poets—Klopstock, Lessing, and Körner. Land of music and composers—Schütz, Bach, Weber, Schumann, Mendelsohn, and Wagner. Land of Reformation and theologians—Johann von Staupitz, Martin Luther, Paul Gerhardt, and K. F. D. Walther. Seat of Germany's second oldest university.

In the heart of Europe, Saxony shared common borders with Brandenburg, Anhalt, Thuringia, Tschechnia (Chech), and Poland. Saxony was situated halfway between Warsaw and Brussels, directly between Berlin and Prague, and about 1,100 kilometers from Rome. Its history spans more than one thousand years, and members of the House of Wettin reigned continuously between A.D. 1089 and A.D. 1918 as margraves, electors, and kings.

In 1158, silver was discovered in the Erzgebirge region, and the ensuing mining boom had a major impact on Saxony. People poured in from all directions, seeking and extracting from deep in the mountains not only precious metals, but also tin ore for household utensils, copper for tools, iron for armor, cobalt for the blue of Delft tiles, and kaolin, the white clay used for Meissen porcelain. Rich beds of coal were also mined. Among

the diversified peoples migrating to Saxony from the east were the Wends, descendants of the Sorbs. These Slavic people were probably the ancestors of Katharina von Bora.

Katharina's ancestors were absorbed into the feudal system and at some point became affiliated with the German knights, a class of mounted professional soldiers. This class had developed on the basis of the old Germanic concept of *Gefolgschaft*—the closest meaning is “adherent” or “disciple”—and it connotes the opposite of individuality. The knights had been associated with the nobility since the days of the Carolingians, and to this group were added the servant-attendants (ministerials) who had been drafted for knightly duties. In time the ministerials obtained equality with the free knights and became the nucleus of the lower nobility. As the new cities and industry flourished in late medieval Germany and throughout Europe and as popular fervor for the crusades waned, making knights in armor obsolete, the feudal system declined. Descendants of the system, however, were determined to maintain their positions of nobility and their aristocratic lifestyle.

The descendants of the knightly class often had to eke out an existence on small feudal estates, which may have been the plight of Katharina von Bora's father. Just as great was the distress of a poor knight's wife, who was supposed to share in the honor of nobility, albeit of lesser status. Herrmann von der Aue pictured the future of this class as one of resignation: A poor knight, in deference to his wife and to manage his affairs, becomes a gentleman farmer of moderate means. Every time a guest visits, he groans over his domestic cares and complains that bad weather forced him to buy additional grain. This former knight might tell his guest he could get rid of his farm, but what would become of his wife and children? Into such a milieu Katharina von Bora was born.

The von Bora family tree has been extensively researched. Although most scholars agreed that Katharina descended from old Saxon nobility with Slavic roots, the exact background of her

family remained controversial. The ambiguity was the result of the wide embranchment of the von Bora family¹ and the coincidence that two noblemen by the name of Hans von Bora lived at about the same time.

One source of Katharina's lineage is the "Hirschfeld Family File"² because the Hirschfelds were related to the von Boras. According to this document, Katharina was a daughter of Hans von Bora and Anna von Haugwitz. The document placed the ancestral home of the von Bora family near the town of Hirschfeld, about 15 miles west of Dresden, near the twin villages of Wendischbora and Deutschenbora in the Meissen area.³ (The Wendish word *Bor* means "fir," and the name *Bora* probably derives from the fir trees that formed the heavy woods in that territory.) According to German historian Ernst Kroker, the surname *Bor* appeared as early as the eleventh century as the family name of a wealthy nobleman.⁴ The von Bora coat of arms supports this supposition with its knightly symbols. This noble crest, which is engraved on Katharina's tombstone at Torgau, depicts a lion with a raised paw, standing upright against a golden background, and a knight's helmet crowned with a peacock feather.

From these twin villages, the von Boras branched out into many places in Saxony. Because a Hans von Bora assigned to his wife the village of Sale as her retirement property (a transfer typically made on the day one married), many historians assumed that Katharina von Bora was born on this Lippendorf estate. However, these historians included qualifying adjectives, such as *apparently*, *seemingly*, and *presumably*, when discussing Lippendorf as Katharina's birthplace. Further research at the location is no longer possible because the estate was destroyed in a 1945 air attack. Discovered in the rubble after the attack was a tablet with the inscription: "Katharina von Bora was born here on January 29, 1499." A former owner of the estate attached it to his main building at Lippendorf. When the damaged site was replaced by a power plant, the tablet was removed to the Lip-

pendorf parsonage, where it is currently on display.⁵

Wolfgang Liebehenschel's book *Der Langsame Aufgang des Morgansterns von Wittenberg* (*The Gradual Rising of the Morning Star of Wittenberg*) cleared up any uncertainties concerning Katharina's ancestry.⁶ With a pivotal focus on the genealogy of Katharina von Bora, Liebehenschel traces her family back to 1332. The book gives sufficient evidence for Liebehenschel's claim that the village of Hirschfeld, near Deutschenbora, in the district of Meissen, was Katharina's birthplace. This research was certified on April 28, 1998, by the Saxon State Archive at Leipzig, Section German Central Office of Genealogy, with the observation that "Hans von Bora and Anna von Haugwitz must be Katharina von Bora's parents, and Hirschfeld is to be accepted as the birthplace of Luther's wife."⁷ In 1998, the same governmental agency assisted in furnishing evidence that "Anna, nee Haugwitz, is Katharina von Bora's mother, that the knight's estate Hirschfeld is her birthplace, and that Hans von Bora (is to have) owned [the property] until 1525/30."⁸ Furthermore, Liebehenschel's book contains an opinion by Oliver Dix, president of the Academy for Genealogy, Heraldry and Related Fields, stating that "Anna (von Haugwitz) married Hans von Bora and that they are the parents of Katharina von Bora, from Hirschfeld near Deutschenbora, close to Nossen . . ."⁹

To better understand Katharina's background, we need to look at the territorial complexity of Saxony during her lifetime. Before the Reformation, Saxony included what is now known as Saxony, Thuringia, and Saxony-Anhalt. In 1485, 14 years before Katharina was born, Saxony was divided between two sons of the Wettin aristocracy: Ernest and Albert. The Ernestine princes, which included Frederick the Wise, Luther's protector, would become leading figures in the Protestant Reformation. These princes were designated "electors," which gave them the right to cast a vote in the election of the sovereign of the Holy Roman Empire. The Albertine princes were "ducal," which assured them titles but no vote. The two aristocracies drew up

a Contract of Inheritance that confirmed this division. Besides the right of electorate, this contract awarded to the Ernestine princes the territory of Wittenberg, which included the larger part of Thuringia with the principal cities of Wittenberg, Torgau, Grimma, Weimar, Gotha, Eisenach, Zwickau, and Coburg. The Albertines, who would oppose the Reformation, were given the Meissen territory and Northern Thuringia with the cities of Meissen, Dresden, Chemnitz, as well as a narrow corridor from Leipzig to Erfurt.

The residents of Electoral Saxony were inclined to show disdain for their Albertine neighbors, who were merely ducal. An old satirical rhyme preserves the animosity: “Die Meissner sind Gleissner” [*Meissners* are hypocrites]. Although it was not true, it probably indicates the racial discrimination prevalent at the time.¹⁰ Katharina von Bora, as a native of the Albertine dukedom, was a Meissner. Martin Luther, born in Eisleben, was a Mansfelder and a citizen of an electoral town. After their marriage Luther often complained to Kate about her sovereign, Duke George the Bearded, who constantly feuded with the reformer. Luther’s typical complaints brought up the duke’s malicious writings against Luther or his persecution of evangelicals living in the territory of Meissen.¹¹ At one point while Luther was still very much alive, rumors spread throughout Leipzig of his death. Luther teased Kate, saying, “Your compatriots, these know-it-all Meissners, are the ones who fabricate such tales.”¹²

One more important piece of information helps to identify the general location of Katharina’s birthplace. Her funeral announcement, which was prepared by Philipp Melancthon and Paul Eber, states that Katharina “was born into a noble knightly estate in Meissen,” which probably meant the territory of Meissen, not the city of Meissen.¹³