

Hallo an alle!

My name is **Katharina Schutz Zell** and I live in the city-state of Strasbourg, between France and Germany. I was born in 1498, and “since I was ten years old I have been a church mother, a nurturer of the pulpit and school.” You see, I have nearly always felt God’s call upon my life. I was prepared to live a holy life of celibacy, like some of my aunts, and I planned to support myself by the art of making tapestries. But God had a slightly different plan for my life.

When I was in my twenties, already happy in my role as unofficial “church mother,” caring for the sick and needy and teaching about God’s Word, Matthew came into my life. He was the parish priest for my family, but he was different – his preaching was so true to scripture! Both he and I had read some of the reformer Martin Luther’s works, and soon we found we saw eye-to-eye on many things, including God’s call to ministry. Soon I realized that we must marry, and that together we could work in ministry.

But it was still illegal for the clergy to marry (even though too many priests had mistresses and even children!) Our marriage would not be received well, so we planned the wedding for six o’clock in the morning, so there would be few to see it.

Soon the rumors started, though, and the church wanted us and the other clergy couples who had married that winter to give up

our posts. The city council prevented that, but they continued with Matthew’s and the other priests’ excommunication.

I was infuriated. Our marriage was based on the holy Word of God! The rumors became worse, accusing poor Matthew of all kinds of things he would never do! So I decided to do something bold – very bold for a woman who had just been called an illegal harlot by the bishop!

I wrote a letter to the bishop. I very carefully explained how our marriage was entirely scriptural, with many citations, and in I must say in a very patient way – at least as patient as I could be. Although “Indeed an evil teaching is more dangerous than a wicked life. Teaching affects *many* others, but with a wicked life the greatest harm is to the self.” So this wicked teaching against marriage affected not only us but all of God’s people.

That letter was one of many I would write. God had provided to me the means to bring God’s truth to light through my education and knowledge of scripture, my many relationships, and even through my blessed Matthew. I embraced the reformers, although I was not afraid to chastise them if necessary! I even chastised Martin Luther once!

So I encourage you bold women to stand up for the truth and for justice and use the gifts and graces God has given you for the Gospel!

Buongiorno!

My name is **Olimpia Fulvia Morata** and I was born in Italy in 1526. From an early age I knew I was intellectually gifted, as did those around me in the family and at court. I was fortunate to live my life at a level of privilege and scholarly sophistication not available to most women. I loved to read and to write, and I really loved languages. I even made my own translation of the psalms. In my early years I hadn't given much thought to religion, but as I grew older and wiser, I left the Catholic faith of my birth and embraced the Reformers. I married the love of my life, Andreas, also a Reformer, and we moved to Germany.

But the land was soon to be in turmoil. We lived in Andreas' hometown of Schweinfurt, where he had a medical practice. Because the divide between Catholics and Reformers had turned from disagreement to warfare, our town came under siege for almost a year. Then it was set on fire and we had to flee for our lives leaving everything behind.

God preserved our lives, but our books and my writings were lost. All around us were the threats of death and destruction. We lived in fear of what would happen next.

Having gone through such loss and terror, I sympathized with the Reformers in France, the Huguenots, who had suffered a massacre on St. Bartholomew's Day at the hands of the Catholics. So using my pen and my wit I resolved to try to help them as best I

could. I wrote to my old friend Anne to urge her to try to help these Christians as she might be able. It was a risk, a bold risk, because Anne was married to a Catholic, one of the leaders of the Catholic party there. Nevertheless, I told her it was her duty to plead for the poor men being burned there because of their faith. If she was worried about what her husband or the other Catholic leaders might think or say, she should remember that "it is better to be hated by men than by God, who is able to torture not just the body but also the soul in perpetual fire."

I was blessed by God not only as gifted, but having the opportunity to use those gifts for the gospel. I was not drawn to the things other women were, and sometimes I felt quite alone. In my struggle for identity I wrote a poem – something useless for most women to do – and said:

"Never did the same thing please the hearts of all,
And never did Zeus grant the same mind to all...
And I, though born female, have left feminine things,
Yarn, shuttle, loom-threads, and work-baskets.
I admire the flowery meadow of the Muses,
And the pleasant choruses of twin-peaked Parnassus.
Other women perhaps delight in other things.
These are my glory, these my delight."

So I say to you bold women, to find and know the gifts God has given you, and be brave in using them for the Gospel!

Guten Morgen!

My name is **Argula von Grumbach** and I was born in Germany in 1492. One of eight children, I was blessed to have a private education and plenty of books to read. In my teens, I lived through the plague which took both my parents. That was only the beginning of my troubles. My guardian would be executed for political plotting! Although I was able to read and write more so than most women of my time, I studied scripture as well as any man. Because I am a woman, my efforts often seemed to only serve to earn me names like “female desperado,” “wretched daughter of Eve,” and “arrogant devil.”

Although I strongly believed in justice for all Christians and embraced the writings of Martin Luther, my husband remained a Catholic and was not supportive of my writings or my efforts. Yet when I observed injustice I had to act!

When I heard that a young student at the University of Ingolstadt was being forced to recant his Reformer views—he had even been imprisoned and might be burned—I wrote to the University to set them straight and defend him. For “What do Luther or Melanchthon teach you but the word of God?” The University professors “condemn them without having refuted them... For my part, I have to confess, in the name of God and my soul’s

salvation, that if I were to deny Luther and Melanchthon’s writing would be denying God and his word.”

While my husband did not support me in this cause, Luther did. He wrote, “...the Duke of Bavaria rages above measure, killing, crushing and persecuting the gospel with all his might. That most noble woman, Argula von Stauffer, is there making a valiant fight with great spirit, boldness of speech and knowledge of Christ. She deserves that all pray for Christ’s victory in her.”

My letter received no answer. That was somehow worse than facing the threat of possible imprisonment or death as a so-called heretic: to be ignored. Yet during my life I made sure my voice was heard, for the Holy Spirit had so empowered me. Indeed, I did not “intend to bury my talent, if the Lord gives me grace.”

Arsacius was not burned, although no one would admit my letter had anything to do with it! Although I would have happily died a martyr’s death, I was able to go on writing and defending the Reformers as bearers of the true faith.

I say to you women of boldness: do not worry that you receive no credit for your efforts for the Gospel, or even no result from your labors. God knows what you are doing! Be bold in doing what you can, be brave and speak out!

Guten Tag!

My name is **Katharina von Bora Luther**, and I was born in 1499 near Leipzig. I was only five or six years old when I was sent to a Benedictine cloister for my education, then to a Cistercian convent. When I was sixteen, I took the veil of a nun.

My life as a nun afforded me some things I might not have learned had I married early. I was well-educated in the Holy Scriptures, and the structure of convent life was such that I became accustomed to keeping schedules and managing the affairs of an institution. I served as a nun for nearly twenty years. While I was there, the Reformation was brewing outside the convent walls.

I knew little of the world outside the convent, except by reading about it. To leave the security of the convent where I had spent all my adult life was a challenge – even frightening! But the opportunity came to escape the convent walls and enter the world outside and I accepted! On Easter Eve I joined eleven other nuns and we climbed into a wagon in the black of night and left the convent forever. We had no idea if life or death awaited us.

My eleven friends found safety fairly quickly. Some returned to their family and some married. But I had nowhere to return to as

a home. Martin Luther found a temporary place for me to stay with the Cranach family. Although I found many suitors, I did not want to marry any of them. I finally said boldly that I would marry only Nicholas von Amsdorf or Martin Luther himself! Not thinking it would happen. But it did.

I married Martin Luther himself, and it was a very good match!

We had six wonderful children and we were truly helpmeets for each other. I managed our large household which also served as something of a boarding-house for travelers or anyone who needed a place to stay. I was not just a house-keeper and wife. I was also the manager of the estate: brewing beer, buying cattle, scheduling building projects! I even found time to proofread Martin's German translation of the New Testament. At Martin's table-talk sessions in our dining-room, there was always a place for me, and a place for my opinion!

So I say to you bold women, even when it seems the odds of the world are against you, remember that God is with you enabling you to act boldly! We can't see into the future but we can trust God to provide. God can surprise us in the most astonishing ways!

RESOURCES

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