

# The Reformer as Husband—Luther and his Wife (1529, 1534, and 1546)

## Abstract

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Martin Luther married Katharina von Bora (1499–1552) in 1525, two years after she had given up her life as a professed Cistercian nun. He wrote letters to her when he traveled, which he did quite frequently. The three letters reproduced below are typical of his correspondence. Luther mixes reports of his activities and experiences with expressions of humor and affection, sending kisses to the two children and giving Katharina the humorous epithets “holy,” “professor,” “doctor,” and “preacher.” Luther wrote the first letter (October 4, 1529) from Marburg, in Hesse, where he and Ulrich Zwingli of Zurich debated, in the interest of Protestant unity, their differing interpretations of the doctrine of the Eucharist.

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### 1. Martin Luther to his Wife

[Marburg] October 4, 1529

To my kind, dear Master Katharina Luther, Doctor, Preacher in Wittenberg

Grace and peace in Christ, dear Master Käth! Know that our friendly colloquy in Marburg has ended, and we have agreed on nearly all points, except that our opponents vainly insist that only bread is present in the Lord's Supper, though they acknowledge the spiritual presence of Christ therein. Today, the landgrave [Philip I of Hesse] is endeavoring [to determine] whether we could become united, or, if we remained divided, whether we could at least consider each other brethren and members of Christ. The landgrave is working very hard at this. But while we do not wish to be brethren and members, we do want peace and good will. I reckon that tomorrow, or the day after, we shall set out and journey to Your Gracious Lord in Schleit in Vogtland, whither His Electoral Grace has summoned us.

Tell Mr. Pommer that the best arguments were those of [Ulrich] Zwingli, that *corpus non potest esse sine loco, ergo Christi corpus non est in pane* [the body cannot be without place, therefore the body of Christ is not in the bread], and those of [Johannes] Oecolampadius, that *Sacramentum est signum corporis Christi* [the sacrament is the sign of the body of Christ]. I reckon that God has blinded them so that they have nothing more to put forward. I still have much to do, and the messenger is in a hurry. Bid good night to all and pray for us! We are all still well and healthy and are living like princes. Kiss Lenchen and Hänschen for me! On the day of St. Francis, 1529.

Your willing servant

Martinus Luther

p.s. John Brenz, Andrew Osiander, Doctor Stephen of Augsburg have also come here.

People here are mad with fear of the [English] sweating plague. Yesterday about fifty people fell ill, one or two of whom have died.

Source of original German text: “Luther an seine Frau. [Marburg,] 4. Oktober 1529,” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*. Weimarer Ausgabe (Sonderedition). Part 3: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. 5, pp. 15354. Available online at: Carl

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Alfred Hase (ed.), *275 Luther-Briefe: in Auswahl und Übersetzung* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1878), 204–05, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nnc1.1002649683>.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

## 2. Martin Luther to his Wife

[Dessau] July 29, 1534

To my kind, dear Master, Lady Katherina von Bora, Mrs. Doctor Luther in Wittenberg

Grace and peace in Christ! Dear Master Kethe! I do not know what to write to you, since Master Philip and all the others are coming home. I must remain here longer for the sake of the pious prince. You may wonder how long I must stay here, or how you might free me. I think that Master Franciscus will set me free again, just as I set him free, but not so quickly. Yesterday I had a vile drink, so that I had to sing: “If I don’t drink well, I am sorry, for I really like to do it.” And I thought about what good wine and beer I have at home, and in addition a beautiful woman, or (should I say) master. And you would do well to send me the entire cellar full of my wine, and a bottle of your beer, as soon as you can. Otherwise I shall not come home before the new beer is ready. I hereby commend you to God, along with all our children and all the servants, Amen.

Wednesday after Jacobi, 1534

Your beloved

Mart. Luther D.

Source of original German text: “Luther an seine Frau. [Dessau] 29. Juli 1534,” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Weimarer Ausgabe (Sonderedition). Part 3: Briefwechsel. Vol. 7*, pp. 91–92. Available online at: Carl Alfred Hase (ed.), *275 Luther-Briefe: in Auswahl und Übersetzung* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1878), 283, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nnc1.1002649683>.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

## 3. Martin Luther to his Wife

[Eisleben] February 10, 1546

To the b[lessed], anxious L[ady] Kat[therin] Luth[er], Doctor of Zulsd[orf] at Wil[tenberg], my g[racious], dear wife

Grace and peace in Christ! My most blessed Lady Doctor! We thank you most kindly for your great concern, which has prevented you from sleeping. For since you started worrying about us, a fire at our inn, right outside my chamber door, nearly engulfed us. And yesterday—no doubt through the power of your concern—a stone almost fell on our heads and crushed us, as in a mouse trap. For in our private chambers, lime and mortar crumbled above our heads for two days, until we sent for some people, who merely touched the stone with two fingers, causing it to fall down. It was big as a large pillow and as wide as a large hand. For this, we would have had to thank your holy worries, had the dear angels not been guarding [us]. I fear that if you do not cease worrying, the earth will finally swallow us up and all the elements will persecute us. Is this how you learned the catechism and faith? Therefore, pray and leave it to God to worry, you have not been commanded to look after me or yourself. It is said: “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee,” as in Psalm 55 and many other places.

We are, thanks be to God, hale and healthy, except that we are growing weary of the whole business. And

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[Justus] Jonas so desperately wanted to have a bad leg that he bumped into a chest; so great is human envy that he begrudged me being the only one with a bad leg. With this, I commend you to God. We would now like to leave and go home, God willing. Amen.

On the day of St. Scholastica, 1546

Your Holiness' willing servant

M. L.

Source of original German text: "Luther an seine Frau. [Eisleben,] 10. Februar 1546," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*. Weimarer Ausgabe (Sonderedition). Part 3: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. 11, pp. 290–92. Available online at: Carl Alfred Hase (ed.), *275 Luther-Briefe: in Auswahl und Übersetzung* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1878), 418–19, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nnc1.1002649683>.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

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