

KATHARINA SCHÜTZ ZELL: THE RELIGIOUS VOCATION OF A FEMALE REFORMER
IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY STRASBOURG

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ABSTRACT

Katharina Schütz Zell lived in the free imperial city of Strasbourg during the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Commitment to a lifelong faith led Katharina to embrace early protestant beliefs: salvation by faith and grace, the sole authority of Scripture, and the priesthood of all believers. In 1524, she joined the reform movement and began sharing her beliefs. This study argues that Katharina Schütz Zell established herself as a reformer who served God through Christ with love and compassion. Katharina's early writings convey her steadfast values of Christian living. In times of chaos and uncertainty, her unwavering faith provided continuity for believers in Strasbourg. In later writings, her belief in the priesthood of all believers and her extensive religious knowledge supported Katharina's authority against criticisms. Katharina Schütz Zell continually served God by teaching other believers about His love and grace.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: STRASBOURG	14
CHAPTER TWO: KATHARINA SCHÜTZ ZELL	24
CHAPTER THREE: KATHARINA SCHÜTZ ZELL AS AN EARLY REFORMER	33
CHAPTER FOUR: KATHARINA SCHÜTZ ZELL AND THE LEGACY OF THE EARLY REFORM MOVEMENT	52
CONCLUSION	73
BIBLIOGRAPHY	75

INTRODUCTION

The sixteenth century was a period of religious upheaval beginning with the German Reformation during the first half of the century. In 1517, Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk, publicly presented his ninety-five theses, which advocated reform of Catholic teachings and practices. In the years following 1517, the Catholic Church showed no signs of bending to the demands of reformers; instead, it sought to defend its position as the true church. Leaders of the reform movement, such as Martin Luther and Huldrych Zwingli, gathered many followers from German-speaking lands. These first-generation reformers encouraged men and women to have faith in God's saving grace, to accept the sole authority of Scripture, and to understand themselves to be members of the priesthood of all believers. Their interpretations of Scripture inspired many men and women to take control of their spirituality and participate in the Reformation. By 1530, the reformers became known as Protestants for protesting against the doctrine of the Catholic Church.

The Reformation created an opportunity for women to be heard. Women entered the public sphere by participating in religious riots, speaking out in church, and writing pamphlets. Katharina Schütz Zell joined the reform movement in 1524. She became a prominent reformer who shared her protestant beliefs with her fellow believers, through her actions and words. Women's public participation, by mid-sixteenth century, began to decline as Protestants developed distinct doctrines.

Internal conflict arose among the next generation of reformers. Divisions on interpretation and practices of faith established among the Protestant leaders in the 1520's led to strife in the second half of the sixteenth century. In 1548, second-generation Protestants became increasingly intolerant of each other as they began defining their confessions. Each protestant

group viewed the other groups as heretical. Dissension grew within these groups; Lutherans were even divided as to how they would honor Luther's legacy. The internal conflict of the second generation only came to a close when the Formula of Concord established the Lutheran confession in 1577. Some reformers whose lives spanned both the first and second generations of the Reformation maintained their early understanding of Scripture. Other Protestants modified their understanding as the reform movement evolved.

In response to the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church initiated a counter-reformation movement to reform the Catholic Church and re-catholicize those who had abandoned the Catholic faith. Through internal reforms, the Catholic Church sought to end the criticisms of the protestant reformers and establish its position as the true church. To that end, the Council of Trent was convened three times between 1545 and 1563. The Council of Trent clarified Catholic doctrine and practices, reformed the discipline of the clergy, and attempted to re-establish the Church as the sole authority on Scripture. The efforts of the Council failed to mend the schism: "Growing differences in their devotional practices and styles of piety and feeling created a psychological gap between Catholics and Protestants even wider than the doctrinal gap so precisely defined by Calvin and the Trent fathers."¹ By late sixteenth century, a resolution of these differences was no longer possible.

Amidst the turmoil of the Reformation, Katharina Schütz Zell, a laywoman of Strasbourg, rejected traditional female roles by pursuing knowledge, marrying a former Catholic priest, and becoming a reformer in her own right. She served her husband's parishioners and ministered to those in need. She wrote letters and published pamphlets. She truly understood

¹ Eugene F. Rice and Anthony Grafton, *The Foundations of Early Modern Europe, 1460-1559*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1970), 175.

herself to be a member of the priesthood of all believers and never abandoned the teachings of the early protestant reformers.

This thesis argues that Katharina Schütz Zell established herself as a reformer by serving God through Christ with love and compassion. Through her life and writings, she acted as a servant of God by guiding her fellow Protestants to His Word and salvation. Finding her authority as a reformer in her knowledge of the Gospel and as a member of the priesthood of all believers, Katharina encouraged her protestant neighbors to have faith in the authority of Scripture and God's saving grace. Katharina remained inclusive of all Protestants as she taught about the values of Christian life. Her work, in the name of God, helped Katharina circumvent the confines that limited the religious options of early modern women.

Throughout her life, Katharina gained religious knowledge through personal study and discussion. As part of an established artisan family, she was taught to read and write in German. She was among a small number of women who were literate in the sixteenth century. Traditionally, women received their religious instruction through the sermons and rituals of the Catholic Church. Katharina was different; she seized the opportunity offered by the early reform movement by studying the Bible, in particular the Gospels, and becoming active in the movement. Married to a prominent pastor, she debated Scripture and faith with several theologians, which set the foundation for her Christian values of love, compassion and service.

Three early protestant beliefs—salvation by faith and grace, sole authority of Scripture, the priesthood of all believers—were the cornerstone of her life as a reformer. These fundamental interpretations of the first-generation reformers guided Katharina's lifelong, unwavering faith. Salvation by faith and grace was a fundamental difference between Protestant and Catholic teachings. Protestants believed that they were made righteous before God by faith

and grace through Jesus Christ. While a Christian does good works, such works are not reckoned as righteousness.² Catholics insisted that human beings were justified by faith, good works, and merits.³ By the end of the medieval period, however, faith seemed to play a lesser role than good works as a way to salvation. The second early protestant belief insists on the authority of Scripture. Borrowing from the humanist movement, reformers viewed Scripture as the original and only true source of Christian knowledge. God's Word provided instruction for Christian living. The third important early protestant belief for Katharina is the priesthood of all believers. Believers no longer relied on the interpretations of the Catholic Church for their spiritual growth but were encouraged to develop and grow in their own faith through personal study of Scriptures. Katharina views herself as a member of the priesthood; thus, she takes control of her spiritual growth and encourages the spiritual growth of others. These three beliefs guided the work and teachings of Katharina Schütz Zell throughout her life.

Katharina was a living example of the Christian values of love, compassion, and service. Throughout her life, she advocated loving thy neighbor. While her teachings of love and tolerance for other Protestants aligned her with first-generation reformers, it conflicted with the intolerance displayed by the second generation. She showed compassion to those who suffered and encouraged them to remain steadfast in their faith. Katharina sees herself as a servant of Christ called to serve others through her writings and hospitality. The hospitality of the Zell household was well known to reformers, travelers, and the afflicted. Katharina served God by

² Romans 3:21-25, 5:1-2.

³ Council of Trent, Session 6, "The Fruits of Justification, That Is, The Merit of Good Works, and the Nature of That Merit," Decree Concerning Justification, Chap. 16 in *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. by H. J. Schroeder (Rockford, Illinois, Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1978), 40-42.

following Christ's example of love and compassion. Unlike Christ, who advocated loving all people, her tolerance and love were limited to her fellow Protestants.

Throughout her life, Katharina Schütz Zell's work was both praised and criticized by reform leaders. During the early years of the Reformation, she established her faith and began writing. Her early writings advocate love, compassion, and service among Protestants, who were in conflict with the Catholic Church. Her writings were generally well received by other first-generation reformers. However, by the end of the 1540s, the second generation of reformers began to criticize Katharina Schütz Zell for her defense of her inclusive understanding of protestant values and beliefs. Katharina rejected their growing intolerance and criticism and continued to be a servant of God in her community in Strasbourg.

During the Reformation, women who publicly shared their faith needed to prove their authority. By insisting on the priesthood of all believers and knowing herself supported by her husband, Katharina Schütz Zell asserted her authority as a reformer who aided others in the development of their faith. Her marriage to Matthew Zell, a parish pastor, provided her with a "lifetime partnership in ministry."⁴ Matthew Zell bestowed three designations on his wife, which lend authority to her work as a reformer: "wedded companion," "assistant minister," and "mother of the afflicted." These designations defined the relationship between Katharina and Matthew as well as the role she played in his parish. It was not until after Matthew's death that Katharina began to use his designations as a source of authority for her work. Toward the end of

⁴ Elsie Anne McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell. Volume Two: The Writings, a Critical Edition*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, no. 69: part 2 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), 65.

her life, Katharina added more appellations, such as “fisher of people” and “church mother.” She used each designation to support and defend her work and authority as a reformer.

This analysis of Katharina Schütz Zell’s life and writings contributes to the history of women and their experiences of the Reformation. The study of women’s history began in the 1960s as part of social history. In the 1960s, social movements for civil rights and feminism led to an interest in the histories of race, class, and women. Departing from political and intellectual history, social-cultural history also explores the margins of society and develops a historical narrative and understanding of the experiences of men, women, and children not studied before. Beginning as a subfield of social history, women’s history has grown to include studies of women’s experiences and involvements in intellectual, political, economic, military and diplomatic histories.

Literature on women and the Reformation focuses on women’s experiences of the movement. According to Susan Karant-Nunn, “Roland Bainton launched the ship... of women and the Reformation with his sweet vignettes that crossed several frontiers.”⁵ Bainton’s study, *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy* (1971), consists of several biographies of women, both Protestant and Catholic, during the sixteenth century. Each biography emphasizes the importance of the home and women as obedient, pious housewives. His monograph provides insight into the experiences of well-known, literary women who lived during the Reformation. These Protestant women, including Argula von Grumbach and Katharina Schütz Zell, were married to reformers or reform-minded men and wrote pamphlets, letters and other texts in support of Protestantism. Bainton’s work began the study of literary women who left evidence

⁵ Susan C. Karant-Nunn, “Changing One’s Mind: Transformations in Reformation History from a Germanist’s Perspective,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (Winter, 2005): 1107.

of their experiences in writing. Intrigued by the lives of these women, other scholars expanded the knowledge of the female experience, especially that of women who were less literate. As a result, biographies gave way to studies on women's roles in society and the family unit, male perceptions of feminine behavior and their reflection on women, and women's religious experiences and options.

Studies on the impact of the reform movement on women's social roles continued in essay collections, such as Natalie Zemon Davis' *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (1975). Natalie Zemon Davis argues that women's status did not benefit from either the Protestant or Catholic reform movements. Women continued to be placed in the role of obedient housewife. In 1989, Jean R. Brink and Sherrin Marshall published *The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*. According to Brink, "defenders of women promoted images of the busy and productive housewife, but a housewife remained subordinate to her husband's governance."⁶ In this collection, Sigrid Brauner and Allison Coudert discuss how early modern European patriarchal society upholds the role of the good housewife, an ideal female who was obedient and disciplined as opposed to insubordinate and disruptive. Although women were considered subordinate to their husbands, Brauner asserts that women were given power within their families through the religious education of children by their pious examples.⁷ Coudert, similarly, argues that Protestantism reinforced sixteenth-century patriarchal society as women were

⁶ Jean R. Brink, Allison P. Coudert, and Maryanne C. Horowitz, eds. *The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1989), 9.

⁷ Sigrid Brauner, "Martin Luther on Witchcraft: A True Reformer?," in *The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Jean R. Brink, Allison P. Coudert, and Maryanne C. Horowitz (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1989), 34.

encouraged to participate in the Reformation from their homes.⁸ The scholars in Brink's compilation conclude that the Protestant Reformation reinforced a patriarchy threatened by women's public involvement in the movement.

The authors in Sherrin Marshall's collection of essays, *Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe: Private and Public Worlds* (1989), explore the contexts within which women express themselves. Marshall acknowledges that women were taught to be "chaste, silent, and obedient"; however, in a religious context women were freed: "To the extent that they [women] pursued – for themselves individually and collectively in the service of God – new activities and created definitions of spirituality not limited by gender, they were liberated."⁹ Their liberation was exemplified by their religious education and roles as pious women. Merry E. Wiesner's essay, "Nuns, Wives, and Mothers: Women and the Reformation in Germany," looks at definitions of women in society. Wiesner argues that religion and family were public spheres of sixteenth-century society, and through these public spheres women were able to express their personal experiences. As part of the family, women were obedient to their husbands, but teachers and caretakers for their children. Wiesner calls women "domestic missionaries," due to their ability to share religious beliefs with their children and other women during the Reformation.¹⁰

⁸ Allison P. Coudert, "The Myth of the Improved Status of Protestant Women: The Case of the Witchcraze," in *The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, eds. by Jean R. Brink, Allison P. Coudert, and Maryanne C. Horowitz (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1989), 69.

⁹ Sherrin Marshall, ed. *Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe: private and public worlds*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 7.

¹⁰ Merry E. Wiesner, "Nuns, Wives, and Mothers: Women and the Reformation in Germany," in *Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe: private and public worlds*, ed. Sherrin Marshall (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 18.

A few decades later, Wiesner-Hanks published additional research on the roles of women. *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (2008) is a survey of early modern women. Wiesner-Hanks explores the meaning of gender in the life cycle of women as well as women's options in a patriarchal society. Women were viewed as inferior to men and received less education in the patriarchal society. Laws and restrictions made it difficult for women to participate in society and made them dependent on men. Women had difficulty working in the public sphere outside the home, due to guild laws and preferential treatment toward men. Thus, women worked in their private households. Similarly to their limitations in the public sphere, women's religious opinions were generally dismissed or negatively received by men. Women were allowed to follow a religion, but not minister or lead it. Some religious women, like Katharina Schütz Zell, requested to be viewed as people filled with the Holy Spirit instead of as women.¹¹ Religious men continued to dismiss these women as inferior because of their sex, and they deliberately ignored their writings. Wiesner-Hanks' work describes the limitations society imposed on women in early modern Europe.

Through biographies, essays, and monographs, scholars have opened up the study of women and their experiences of the Reformation for further investigation. The experiences of women varied depending on the options and opportunities they seized. Studies of individuals, like Katharina Schütz Zell, help scholars to understand what circumstances aided women's participation in the Reformation. Continued study of both individuals and groups will add knowledge of the lives and experiences of women who participated in the reform movement.

¹¹ Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 217.

This thesis has greatly benefited from the work of Elsie Anne McKee, a professor of Reformation Studies and the History of Worship at Princeton Theological Seminary. In 1999, McKee published the two-volume *Katharina Schütz Zell: The Life and Thought of a Sixteenth Century Reformer* and *Katharina Schütz Zell. The Writings: A Critical Edition*. The first volume includes a comprehensive biography of Schütz Zell's life and a close analysis of her thoughts as a reformer, as evident in her writings. The second volume consists of German transcriptions of Schütz Zell's writings. In 2006, McKee published English translations of Katharina Schütz Zell's prominent writings, *Church Mother: The Writings of a Protestant Reformer in Sixteenth-Century Germany*. McKee's work benefits both scholars and students interested in the exceptional life and work of Katharina Schütz Zell, the turbulent history of Strasbourg and the Reformation, and the important role of women in this sixteenth century movement.¹²

This work is a synthesis using three analytical claims by McKee. First, the foundation for Katharina Schütz Zell's reform thought was set in early protestant beliefs established in the 1520s: The sole authority of Scripture, salvation by faith and grace, and the priesthood of all believers. Second, Katharina's relationship with others follows the biblical commandment "Love thy neighbor."¹³ The third claim, which aligns with the first, is that Katharina considers herself to be a member of the priesthood of all believers, which together with her lifelong religious study qualifies her to minister to her fellow believers, men and women, both privately

¹² Elsie Anne McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell. Volume One: The Life and Thought of a Sixteenth-Century Reformer*. Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, 69:1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999); *Katharina Schütz Zell. Volume Two: The Writings, a Critical Edition*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, no. 69: part 2 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999); *Church Mother: the writings of a Protestant reformer in sixteenth century Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006).

¹³ Luke 10:27; Mark 12:31; Romans 13:9

and publicly. McKee's research discusses each of these as part of Katharina Schütz Zell's life and thoughts. A closer look at McKee's three claims informs this discussion of Katharina writings.

According to McKee, protestant beliefs established in the 1520s shaped Schütz Zell's life as a reformer. For Katharina, the authority of Scripture governed her work as a reformer and her devotion to her faith. Her writings use Scripture as guidance, evidence, and encouragement. As a young girl, Katharina struggled and questioned the assurance of her salvation. She found confidence in Luther's teachings. Luther taught that salvation was the result of faith and God's grace. He rejected the notion that good works might also make human beings righteous before God. Luther's teachings of salvation by faith and grace contributed to Katharina's confidence and devotion. The third belief to shape Katharina's religious thought and vocation was Luther's concept of the priesthood of all believers. Luther held that all Christians were equal in their faith through baptism and the authority of the Gospel; priests were no longer spiritually superior to the laity. In Schütz Zell's view, all members of the priesthood should be witnesses for faith. Katharina had the "conviction that all Christians are qualified by faith to pray for others, all are called to praise God and teach about Him, and they should do these things as they go about their daily mundane tasks."¹⁴ Katharina Schütz Zell practiced what she preached.

Love, compassion, and service are three values of Christian life summed up in the New Testament commandment to "Love your neighbor as yourself." McKee argues that by following this commandment to love others, Katharina served her fellow Protestants with love and compassion. Schütz Zell aided the poor and sick, housed refugees, taught about God, and wrote

¹⁴ McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell. Volume One*, 270.

words of encouragement to others suffering far away. This study will examine how the three Christian values are expressed in Katharina's writings and life as a servant of Christ.

Katharina Schütz Zell believed her vocation was to serve Christ by sharing her faith with others. Although all believers could share their personal faith with others, only those who met certain qualifications could teach others: "The religious knowledge necessary for salvation and for teaching others can and must also be learned and proclaimed by lay Christians, led by the Holy Spirit to understand Scripture and aided by the creeds and best interpreters."¹⁵ Through her continuous study of Scripture and protestant teachings, Katharina established herself as both a witness and a teacher. Using McKee's assessment, this study explores how Katharina, through her writings, defended her authority as a teaching member of the priesthood of all believers.

The final aspect of this study investigates the continuity in Katharina Schütz Zell's teachings from the first to the second generation. The first generation of reform began with Luther's 95 Theses in 1517 and lasted until the Augsburg Interim in 1548; the second generation started in 1540 and ended in 1570. Using the two reform generations as a division for Katharina's writings, this study will look at how her Christian values and early protestants beliefs, formed during the first generation, remained steadfast throughout conflict in the second generation.

This synthesis uses McKee's definitive work to investigate Katharina Schütz Zell as a reformer in the sixteenth century. Using McKee's English translations of Katharina's writings, this study looks at the Christian values of love, compassion and service as they appear in her writings, her views of herself as a member of the priesthood of all believers, and the continuity

¹⁵ McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell. Volume One*, 295.

of her message over two generations of reform. In addition, McKee's work supplies biographical information on Katharina Schütz Zell.

This study argues that Katharina Schütz Zell established herself as a reformer who served God through Christ with love and compassion. The first chapter focuses on the dynamic city of Strasbourg where Katharina lived and worked. Strasbourg, a free imperial city and major trading center, was diverse and welcomed the new religious options of the Reformation. The next chapter looks at Katharina's unique life, the development of her early protestant beliefs and values, and her role as a reformer. Her family and her husband encouraged her pursuit of religious knowledge and devotion to her faith. The third chapter is an analysis of Katharina Schütz Zell's first-generation writings, which explores her values and beliefs as the foundation of her teachings. In her early writings, she establishes herself as a first-generation reformer and a member of the priesthood of all believers. The fourth and final chapter includes an analysis of Katharina's second-generation writings, which provide continuity in her teachings and defend her work as a reformer. Katharina Schütz Zell expresses unwavering dedication to her faith and Christian values of love, compassion, and service throughout both generations of reform.

CHAPTER ONE: STRASBOURG

Katharina Schütz Zell lived in Strasbourg, a free imperial city in the Holy Roman Empire. Today, the city is in the Alsace region of northeastern France. A free imperial city was under the authority of the Holy Roman Emperor instead of a local princely or ecclesiastical power. Located on the Ill River, a tributary of the Rhine, Strasbourg enjoyed economic stability as a major transportation center during the sixteenth century. In addition, money lending contributed to the city's stable economy. Guild systems established economic, social, and political order. As a free imperial city, Strasbourg's government sought to maintain order and avoid the emperor's wrath during the chaotic decades of religious reform movements in the sixteenth century. Despite being subjects of Emperor Charles V, a staunch Catholic emperor who rejected Luther's reform movement, a majority of Strasbourg citizens were Protestant by the middle of the sixteenth century. The city found value in the protestant movement both politically and socially; on a political level the government gained more power over the Catholic clergy; on the social level, the people felt a certain freedom to express their religious preferences. Economic stability aided the growth of the Reformation in Strasbourg.

A well-established guild system secured Strasbourg from economic hardship during the religious turmoil of the Reformation. As a major transportation center, the city's economy was dominated by the shipping and merchant guilds. The guild system governed the labor force in the city: "The guild still controlled the training of the labor force, the forms and processes of production, and the distribution of all goods manufactured and sold in Strasbourg."¹⁶ The guilds

¹⁶ Miriam Usher Chrisman, *Strasbourg and the Reform: a Study in the Process of Change* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 6.

played an important role in Strasbourg's municipal government by supplying many of its magistrates. Although the city was not a major financial center, money lending was another important economic and social activity because it established close ties between Strasbourg's wealthy citizens and "princes and nobles [who] came from all the surrounding regions to borrow money at Strasbourg."¹⁷

In the thirteenth century, Strasbourg conflicted with Catholic authority as it set up its municipal government. Strasbourg received its title as a free imperial city in 1205. The title carried privileges for the city including "tax exemptions... new areas of revenue... and extended judicial powers of laity."¹⁸ Although Strasbourg acquired an imperial title, the bishop governing the city did not give up control until he was defeated at the Battle of Hausbergen in 1262.¹⁹ At that point, Strasbourg became a city governed by local patricians and guildsmen.²⁰ Twenty guilds held the majority of the magistrate positions. Guildsman Hans Schütz, Katharina Schütz Zell's uncle, held a magisterial position, which provided the family with political and social recognition.²¹ With two privy councils focused on domestic and foreign affairs, the magistrates, both patrician and guildsmen, sought to maintain Strasbourg's successful economy as well as order within the city. For Strasbourg to change religious affiliation and break with the emperor, the government needed the benefits of the reform movement to outweigh the emperor's wrath.

Prior to the Reformation, Strasbourg's government sought control over the Catholic clergy. Following the bishop's defeat, the Catholic Church's presence and authority in the city

¹⁷ Thomas A. Brady, Jr., *Ruling Class, Regime and Reformation at Strasbourg, 1520-1555*, *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought*, 22 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 155.

¹⁸ Chrisman, *Strasbourg and the Reform*, 16.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

²¹ McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell. Volume One*, 5.

were separated from the civic authority of the municipal government: “The church formed a state within a state, having its own lands, its own government, and its own courts within the confines of the city.”²² The spiritual authority held by bishops and clergy placed them beyond the city’s secular control; yet the clergy benefited from the protections Strasbourg offered. One of the city’s early attempts at control was to insist that the clergy pay for their protection: “by 1480 the right of the city to collect a fee from an ecclesiastical unit for its protective services had been established de facto.”²³ Like the citizens, the clergy were forced to contribute to their protection. However, the clergy remained a separate entity outside of the city’s jurisdiction.

The Reformation rejected Catholic hierarchy and the superior, privileged status of the clergy. In 1524, Strasbourg’s government seized opportunity and “ordered all clergy to assume Bürgerrecht, placing them directly under its jurisdiction.”²⁴ Bürgerrecht made citizens out of the clergy. As citizens the clergy received protection, and the city gained power over their institutions. By mid-1530s, the government had abolished Mass and closed monastic orders. Parishes turned from the Catholic Church to protestant pastors.

In the 1520s, reformers began preaching God’s Word and early protestant beliefs to congregations in Strasbourg. Four men led the movement: Martin Bucer, Wolfgang Capito, Matthew Zell, and Caspar Hedio. They taught God’s Word to the people: “evangelicals took their case to the common people instead of working only among the educated and the powerful.”²⁵ The new preachers also taught the early protestant beliefs: salvation by faith and

²² Chrisman, *Strasbourg and the Reform*, 34.

²³ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

²⁵ Lorna Jane Abray, *The People’s Reformation: Magistrates, Clergy, and Commons in Strasbourg, 1500-1598* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 32.

grace, the sole authority of Scripture, and the priesthood of all believers. Powerful preaching encouraged all believers to pursue religious knowledge and faith.

The reformers defined the role of the clergy as servants. While the Catholic clergy had insisted on their spiritual and social superiority, reformers considered themselves servants like Christ. They called on the clergy to teach the people with servant hearts: “A simple Bible-based religion that everyone could understand, good morals that everyone could appreciate and practice, a church in which the clergy served the laity and not the contrary-to secular Lutherans in Strasbourg this was the essence of the reformation.”²⁶ Early reformers gained a large following in Strasbourg as they served the people. The success of the reform movement in the city opened doors for other protestant groups.

During the 1530s and 1540s, Strasbourg saw an influx of protestant groups. The followers of Caspar Schwenckfeld and Anabaptists were drawn to the city by its perceived tolerance. At the start of the Reformation, Strasbourg practiced “freedom of conscience,” which allowed citizens to have their individual religious beliefs with the caveat that they could not act on their belief if the act would disrupt the peace in the community.²⁷ This policy on the freedom of thought was interpreted as tolerance: “Strasbourg attracted Anabaptists because of its civic reputation for clemency and moderation.”²⁸ The city government allowed freedom of conscience, but not freedom of practice. However, as the movement progressed these protestant groups faced adversity from followers of Luther’s teachings and the city government. Some

²⁶ Abray, *The People’s Reformation*, 182.

²⁷ Lorna Jane Abray, “Confession, Conscience and Honour: the Limits of Magisterial Tolerance in Sixteenth-Century Strassburg,” in *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation*, eds. Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 97-98.

²⁸ Chrisman, *Strasbourg and the Reform*, 180.

groups, such as the Calvinists and followers of Zwingli, gained a measure of acceptance and recognition into the second half of the sixteenth century.

The presence of multiple protestant faiths created tension in the city. The city government intervened to eliminate the threat of civil unrest stemming primarily from Anabaptist beliefs: “The heart of their doctrine lay in their different view of the nature and purpose of the church—essentially they believed that civil society was extraneous, that the true Christian needed only the church, which should be a voluntary association, free of any hierarchy.”²⁹ The Anabaptist faith rejected the loyalty demanded by the civic authorities; thus, the Strasbourg government saw it as a threat to civic peace and order. Some reformers, like Katharina Schütz Zell, advocated leniency; however, their pleas for compassion fell on deaf ears. The city government expelled all Anabaptists from Strasbourg in 1526.³⁰

Strasbourg’s government took a pragmatic stance towards the reform movement. Although some members immediately accepted the reform movement, the government as a whole refrained from fully committing to the movement so as not to alienate itself from the emperor: “Some magistrates showed an enthusiasm for the new gospel early in the twenties, but as a group they were loath to accept the consequences of an open break with the emperor’s church.”³¹ The city’s response to the Reformation protected its imperial status and contributed to its increased authority. To maintain order in the city, magistrates resisted officially aligning the city with the reform until 1529 when they abolished Mass. Their hesitancy was due to Strasbourg’s status as a free imperial city and their fear of the emperor’s wrath. In 1530

²⁹ Chrisman, *Strasbourg and the Reform*, 178-179.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 191.

³¹ Abrey, *The People’s Reformation*, 34.

Strasbourg's representatives attended the Diet of Augsburg where German Protestant princes and cities united against the emperor and adopted the Augsburg Confession. Strasbourg took this opportunity to declare itself Protestant, but rather than adopt the Augsburg Confession, its reform leaders authored a different doctrinal document called the Tetrapolitan Confession.

Capito and Bucer differed from Luther, and tended toward Huldreich Zwingli's interpretation of the Eucharist as a symbol of Jesus' body, rather than an actual physical presence of his body. As such, they authored the Tetrapolitan Confession, which delineated the doctrinal stance of four cities, Strasbourg, Memmingen, Constance, and Lindau, and which struck a middle ground between the Lutheran and Zwinglian confessions.³²

Strasbourg's attempt to bridge the gap between Luther and Zwingli's doctrines left the city vulnerable to the emperor's wrath. The city was isolated from the Protestants in the Empire: "Although Strasbourg was not far from the Swiss cities that most closely shared its theology, it directly bordered the Catholic lands of France, the bishop of Strasbourg, the Habsburg emperor, and other local Catholic landowners in Alsace."³³ Surrounded by Catholics, Strasbourg's magistrates signed the Augsburg Confession to gain political security as part of the Schmalkaldic League, a protestant alliance.³⁴ The alliance with the Schmalkaldic League and the adoption of the Augsburg Confession did not replace Strasbourg's ties with the Swiss cities and their joint confession. Instead Strasbourg pragmatically followed both the Tetrapolitan Confession and the Augsburg Confession to satisfy internal theological concerns and external political pressures.³⁵

³² Kaplan, Debra, "Our City is Seen as Greatly Superior: Strasbourg and Its Reformation," in *Beyond Expulsion: Jews, Christians, and Reformation Strasbourg* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 20.

³³ Kaplan, 20.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

After sixty years, Strasbourg's next generation of reformers advocated for the city to commit to Lutheran doctrine, and in 1598, Strasbourg committed solely to the Augsburg Confession.

In response to the formation of the Schmalkaldic League in 1530, Charles V sought to return religious unity to his empire. In the 1540s, it became clear that there would be no peaceful religious unification.³⁶ Emperor Charles V decided forcefully to impose religious unity; thus, in 1546 the First Schmalkaldic War began. Inadequate resources led to Protestant defeat in 1547. The Schmalkaldic League had been viewed as the last line of defense for Protestants; many viewed its defeat in apocalyptic proportions. In 1548, Charles set up the Augsburg Interim in order to unify the differing religions in the empire. The Interim reinstated Catholic Mass and practices throughout protestant areas. It was a chaotic and unstable time for the Protestants.³⁷ Protestants anxiously faced the future: "The mood of crisis and impending disaster that the civil war and the crushing military defeat had brought about continued as the emperor insisted that the Protestants put the *Interim* into effect."³⁸ In Strasbourg, the magistrates and the bishop decided how to put the Interim into effect: "The terms of this agreement mandated that three of the seven parish churches—including the cathedral—revert to Catholic use, and that Catholic practice be tolerated openly in the city."³⁹ The coexistence of Catholic and Lutheran practices in Strasbourg lasted the next ten years. City magistrates continued to maintain order despite internal and external conflict.

³⁶ James, D. Tracy, "The First Schmalkaldic War, 1546-1547," in *Emperor Charles, Impresario of War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010), 204.

³⁷ Nathan Baruch Rein, "Faith and Empire: Conflicting Visions of Religion in a Late Reformation Controversy – The Augsburg Interim and its Opponents, 1548-1550," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71 no. 1 (March, 2003): 45.

³⁸ Baruch Rein, 61

³⁹ Kaplan, 22.

The Reformation exposed people to a variety of protestant beliefs and practices, increased opportunities for religious instruction, and venues for personal, spiritual expression. During the early years, Strasbourg's citizens encountered a variety of protestant beliefs. Lorna Jane Abray imagines the experience of a common layperson on a Sunday:

Imagine walking through the city on any Sunday in the middle thirty years of the century. In a parish church we find the Lutherans at prayer. Walk down another street and we hear refugees singing Clement Marot's translations of the Psalms. Look quickly and we catch someone slipping off to hear mass. Follow another person and we end up in a forest clearing, listening to someone read Scripture to a gathering of Anabaptists.⁴⁰

The variety of religions inside and outside the city exposed the population to varying beliefs and practices. This religious dynamic encouraged laypeople to gain more knowledge about their faith and to grow in their spirituality.

Protestants advocated reading from Scripture and learning from catechisms. Luther wrote catechisms for believers to use in their households to grow in their faith. Literacy was encouraged so believers could read and study God's Word. Reformers advocated that boys and girls receive a primary education in reading and writing. However, further learning at the secondary and university levels was only available to boys. Religious instruction provided citizens with the ability to engage in reform discussions.

Strasbourg's population engaged in the reform movement by expressing their religious views in different manners. Men and women participated in congregational activities, such as singing during services, and they selected their preachers.⁴¹ The literate preferred the print medium to express their religious beliefs. As a printing center, Strasbourg provided a venue for writers to publish a variety of religious works.

⁴⁰ Abray, *The People's Reformation*, 165.

⁴¹ Chrisman, *Strasbourg and the Reform*, 292.

The technological advancement of the printing press in the fifteenth century contributed to the spread of protestant beliefs. The presence of the printing press gave Strasbourg technological prestige: “The existence of three or four active printing presses before the turn of the century indicates the level of technological development.”⁴² In Strasbourg, reformers, such as Katharina Schütz Zell used the printing press to spread the new teachings to the masses. They preferred pamphlets to do so because they were inexpensive to produce and distribute. This new medium assisted the reform movement as people could easily access the new teachings to grow in their faith: “...at specific moments in the sixteenth century pamphlet literature played a part in the primary task of creating new churches: it accompanied an upsurge of fresh thinking, and encapsulated some of the core messages of the new movements.”⁴³ Theologians and laypeople used the burgeoning pamphlet culture of the Reformation to address the beliefs and the controversies of the movement.

Katharina Schütz Zell shared her message through published and unpublished writings. She was one of a few lay pamphleteers who published past the early years of the movement: “Lay pamphleteers were common in the early Reformation, especially 1521-1525, but few continued to be published later.”⁴⁴ As a laywoman writer from an artisan background, she was unique. Most women writers were noble, aristocratic, or from religious orders.⁴⁵ In thirty-four years, Katharina Schütz Zell published five of her writings. Many letters and other writings went unpublished and may have been circulated in a hand-copied format. Her publications were

⁴² Chrisman, *Strasbourg and the Reform*, 5.

⁴³ Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 163.

⁴⁴ McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell. Volume Two*, ix.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

rarely reprinted and sometimes censored. They covered various genres, such as “pastoral and homiletical, biblical and catechetical, devotional and musical, polemical theology and personal meditations, with historical and autobiographical themes throughout.”⁴⁶ Katharina’s writings circulated in and around Strasbourg throughout two generations of the Reformation, offering guidance to Protestants in their faith.

Strasbourg, a major transportation and trading center, remained economically stable throughout the chaos and turmoil of the Protestant Reformation. The guild system and economic activities such as trading, shipping, and money lending allowed the municipal government to focus on maintaining order as internal and external pressures on the city mounted. In addition, Strasbourg’s government took a pragmatic approach to maintaining internal order. The defeat of the Schmalkaldic League led Strasbourg into a period in which the Catholic and Protestant faiths coexisted. Throughout this time the population and the city government became more involved in religious affairs, while the clergy was absorbed into secular society. By the end of the sixteenth century, Strasbourg declared itself officially Lutheran. Reformers, like Katharina Schütz Zell, used the technological advancement of the printing press to spread Protestant beliefs in the city. Strasbourg provided a venue for Katharina Schütz Zell to share her values and beliefs with fellow Protestants through her writings.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO: KATHARINA SCHÜTZ ZELL

Katharina Schütz Zell was born in 1498 to Jacob Schütz and Elisabeth Gerster.⁴⁷ The Schütz family, a well-established, devout artisan family, lived in the cathedral parish of Strasbourg. Jacob Schütz successfully provided for his family as an accomplished woodworker. According to Elsie Anne McKee, all four of the Schütz daughters had dowries, which confirmed the family's established status.⁴⁸ Despite being well educated and secure from financial concerns, the devout Schütz family, like so many Christians, lived in fear of damnation, insecure about their ability to gain salvation.

As members of the cathedral parish, the Schütz family sought spiritual guidance from priest Johann Geiler von Kayserberg. Geiler taught in the cathedral parish from 1478 to 1520. His teachings challenged parishioners to dedicate themselves to faith and good works, and to reject worldliness.⁴⁹ In keeping with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, Geiler taught that good works were essential to salvation: "For Geiler, Christ's grace is all, and yet Christians also have something to contribute, they are also required to do as much as they are able."⁵⁰ Geiler's parishioners believed that abstaining from sinful habits and doing good works secured their salvation. The Schütz family followed their priest's teachings by refraining from carnival and other worldly celebrations associated with holy days. The aversion to such celebrations influenced Katharina's world view: "The young Katharina developed a fixed distaste for all this worldliness; her family did not consider it proper, and she grew up very grateful that she had

⁴⁷ McKee, *Church Mother*, 14.

⁴⁸ McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell. Volume One*, 7.

⁴⁹ Chrisman, *Strasbourg and the Reform*, 68.

⁵⁰ McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell. Volume One*, 16.

been trained to despise the world and separate herself from its irreligious behavior.”⁵¹ Inspired by Geiler’s teachings and her family’s piety, Katharina’s faith anchored her young life.

Growing up, Katharina committed herself to a devout, Christian life. Between the ages of seven and ten, she began pursuing religious knowledge: “Certainly, these three years were a time of personal religious growth, beginning the study of scripture and matters of faith which would occupy her for the rest of her life.”⁵² Katharina learned to read and write in German at a local girl’s school: “She read and wrote fluently in German and became quite knowledgeable in the area of Christian history and texts.”⁵³ She developed a minimal understanding of Latin, particularly its use in religious practices. Katharina’s literacy aided her personal study and comprehension of Scripture and religious texts. According to McKee, “the religious commitment and spiritual learning so expressed were central to her life-long self-understanding.”⁵⁴ Young Katharina viewed a celibate life as fulfillment of her personal commitment to her faith: “In keeping with the ideal of holiness of her youth, dedication to the church meant celibacy.”⁵⁵ Katharina decided to live a celibate life. A single, pious life was not untraditional in her family. In fact, prior to Katharina’s birth some of her female relatives from her mother’s family made the same decision.⁵⁶

Traditionally, women who chose to live in celibacy had two options, either to become a nun or a beguine. Nuns were cloistered in convents under the authority of Rome. Similar to

⁵¹ McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell. Volume One*, 27.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 13-14.

⁵³ Kirsi Stjerna, “Katharina Schütz Zell, 1498-1562 – A Publishing Church Mother in Strasbourg,” in *Women and the Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 111.

⁵⁴ McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell. Volume One*, 12.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁶ McKee, *Church Mother*, 3.

nuns, beguines were members of a community of religious women who devoted their lives to prayer, good works, and celibacy. However, beguines resided in cities and never took religious vows, which allowed them to leave the community for marriage. Following the example of her female relatives, Katharina rejected these structured communities of religious women. Her high regard for the simple, direct conveyance of biblical truth fueled her suspicions of the elite, eloquent religious women of these groups and their “smooth speech.”⁵⁷ Her rejection of these two groups suggests her personal commitment as an individual seeking Christ’s truth. Katharina financially supported her celibate lifestyle with tapestry weaving.⁵⁸ In the sixteenth century, unmarried women were “unnatural” and viewed with suspicion: “Both Protestant and Catholic authorities increasingly viewed marriage as the ‘natural’ vocation for women – for all women in Protestant areas and for most women in Catholic areas – so that women who did not marry were somehow ‘unnatural’ and therefore suspect.”⁵⁹ Katharina’s plan to remain single was contrary to society’s expectations of women. Unbeknownst to her, these plans would drastically change after meeting kindred-spirit Matthew Zell, who became a preacher in Strasbourg in 1518.

In 1521, Matthew Zell introduced protestant beliefs to Katharina and the cathedral parish. A member of an established family from Kayersberg, he was mentored as a parish priest by Johann Geiler von Kayersberg. Similar to his mentor, Matthew taught pious living and the rejection of worldliness in his sermons. However, he also introduced protestant beliefs. His preaching of these new beliefs made him popular with his congregation: “this pastoral activity was the source of both his greatest attraction for his parish and his greatest annoyance to his

⁵⁷ Elsie Anne McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell. Volume One*, 10.

⁵⁸ McKee, *Church Mother*, 11.

⁵⁹ Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 82.

superiors.”⁶⁰ Matthew’s sermons resonated with Katharina as she was also drawn to the sole authority of Scripture, and other early protestant beliefs. Following Protestant beliefs, Matthew and Katharina abandoned their celibate lives and married in 1524.

Clerical marriage, in particular the marriage of Catholic clergy, was a hotly debated between sixteenth century Protestants and Catholics. The Protestant rejection of celibacy and the Catholic backlash reached a boiling point in 1524. Protestants viewed celibacy as unnatural and viewed marriage as the duty of men and women. The Roman Catholic Church rejected clerical marriage and upheld celibacy as a pious and necessary state. According to The Code of Canon Law, celibacy should be honored as a “special gift of God.” Moreover, any attempt to marry was invalid: “Those in sacred orders invalidly attempt marriage.”⁶¹ Catholic authorities conveyed their anger with harsh language such as that of Abbot Simon Blick who denounced the protestant advocacy of clerical marriage referring to nuns and monks who married as “whores” and wicked heretics.⁶² Katharina and Matthew were aware of the tensions surrounding clerical marriage, and used their marriage to support early Protestant beliefs. Katharina published a defense of her marriage in 1524. McKee observes that Katharina Schütz Zell set herself two tasks in her written defense: “one was to prove that scripture teaches the rightness of clerical marriage, and the other was to disprove the superior holiness of celibacy as an invention of the church.”⁶³

⁶⁰ McKee, *Church Mother*, 34.

⁶¹ Code of Canon Law, Canon 247, par. 1, Canon 1087, accessed September 14, 2016, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_P3Y.HTM.

⁶² Simon Blick wrote a harsh pamphlet attacking Luther’s rejection of clerical celibacy. Gerritdina D. Justitz, “The Abbot and the Concubine: Piety and Politics in Sixteenth-Century Naumburg,” *Archiv Für Reformationsgeschichte* 92 (2001): 151.

⁶³ McKee, *Church Mother*, 57.

Through their marriage, Katharina and Matthew formed a partnership committed to a life of faith and Protestant ministry.

Katharina and Matthew's marriage was a mutually respectful, multifaceted partnership. According to McKee, Matthew gave Katharina three designations: "wedded companion," "assistant minister," and "mother of the afflicted."⁶⁴ These titles represented the life that Katharina lived. As a "wedded companion," Katharina helped her husband by maintaining the household and having children. These wifely duties fit with Luther's views on the wife's role in marriage: "a wife is created for the man to be a companionate helper in all things...."⁶⁵ However, the Zell marriage was unique in that it was a partnership. The couple supported each other in their lifelong vocations as servants of Christ. Katharina acquired the title of "assistant minister" by aiding Matthew in his ministry. Schütz Zell writes about helping her husband: "In these years I have been his helper according to my means and ability: in his house and also in his office and service."⁶⁶ She aided Matthew with his pastoral responsibilities and cared for his parishioners. Matthew's third designation describes Katharina as "mother of the afflicted." She cared for the physical and spiritual needs of the poor and downtrodden. The Zell household welcomed faithful Protestants with food and shelter. Lodgers would eat with the Zells and discuss religious perspectives and beliefs. Just as mothers instructed their children, Katharina ministered to those under her roof. In one of her later writings, Katharina summarizes her motherly actions:

⁶⁴ McKee, *Church Mother*, 18.

⁶⁵ Martin Luther, *A Sermon on the Estate of Marriage* (1519), in *Luther on Women: a Sourcebook*, eds. and trans. Susan C. Karant-Nunn and Merry E. Wiesner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 90.

⁶⁶ Katharina Schütz Zell, "Lament and Exhortation of Katharina Zell to the People at the Grave of Master Matthew Zell," in *Church Mother: the writings of a Protestant reformer in sixteenth century Germany*, ed. and trans. Elsie Anne McKee (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006), 106.

And the work that fell on me, in the house and out, those who now rest in God and those who still live can well testify to it, and to how I have helped build up the Gospel, received refugees, comforted the sorrowing, and loved and furthered the church, pulpit, and school.... I have honored, loved, sheltered so many fine learned men....⁶⁷

In addition to her hospitality, her correspondences and published writings encouraged those who suffered to find solace in their faith. Katharina continued to live out her designation as “mother of the afflicted” the rest of her life.

Katharina bore two children, but their deaths cut short her hopes of nurturing and raising them to adulthood. Their first child, born in 1526, died early in 1527.⁶⁸ With the death of their second child in the early 1530s, the only two children of Katharina and Matthew Zell were buried. According to McKee, Katharina viewed her children’s deaths as punishment.⁶⁹ Similar to Job, this punishment was a test of faith for Katharina. Like Job, Katharina lost her children. Like Job, Katharina held fast to her faith.⁷⁰ In her sorrow, Katharina taught others biblical truths as she would have instructed her own children. She assumed a motherly role in her husband’s parish. She gave herself the title “Church Mother.” Early modern mothers were put in charge of the domestic sphere and children’s religious education. According to Allison P. Coudert, Protestants viewed women as spiritual leaders in the home.⁷¹ In her household and her husband’s parish, which she considered her extended home, Katharina assumed the role of a spiritual leader. She viewed both the parishioners and the afflicted in Strasbourg as her children in need of her hospitality and spiritual guidance.

⁶⁷ McKee, *Church Mother*, 227.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁶⁹ McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell. Volume One*, 84.

⁷⁰ Job 1: 18-22.

⁷¹ Allison P. Coudert, “The Myth of the Improved Status of Protestant Women: The Case of the Witchcraze,” in *The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe* by Jean R. Brink (Kirksville, MO.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1989), 69.

Katharina Schütz Zell was widowed in 1548. On the eve of his death, Matthew entrusted Katharina with the mission to continue ministering to his parish and guard his legacy of early Protestant beliefs. She struggled to uphold the values of the first generation of reformers amidst the stratification of protestant movements after the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. The divisions between Protestants on a local level created discord among the laity. By the end of the century, the disputes and debates between Protestants resulted in each protestant group establishing its own religious culture and doctrine of beliefs.⁷² Second-generation reformers created discord in Strasbourg, and disrupted Katharina's spiritual guidance of Matthew's parish. Ludwig Rabus and Caspar Schwenckfeld challenged Katharina's life of service and spiritual guidance.

Matthew's successor, Ludwig Rabus, claimed that Katharina disgraced Matthew's legacy. Katharina clashes with Rabus about his preaching against other Protestant beliefs, labeling them heretical. She claims that Rabus, in fact, is the disgrace to Matthew's legacy. Matthew's last request was that his successor "not preaches against Schwenckfeld and the [Ana] Baptists."⁷³ Katharina asserts that Matthew supported her religious writings and actions; thus, she could not be a disgrace. After receiving a scathing letter from Rabus, Schütz Zell responded by publishing all their letters of disagreement for the judgment of Strasbourg's citizenry. In doing so, Katharina informed the citizens of Rabus' true character and established herself as the keeper of Matthew's legacy.

Katharina continued to minister to Matthew's parish despite other contentions to her faith. To her displeasure, reformer Caspar Schwenckfeld claimed her as one of his followers.

⁷² Mack R. Holt, "The Social History of the Reformation: Recent Trends and Future Agendas," *Journal of Social History* 37 no. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2003), 138-139.

⁷³ McKee, *Church Mother*, 215.

Schwenckfeld's theology differed from Lutherans in that he interpreted the Lord's Supper as purely spiritual and rejected external displays of faith, including baptism.⁷⁴ At this time, the majority of Strasbourg's clergy were Lutheran. Being labeled a follower of Schwenckfeld alienated Katharina from Strasbourg's clergy and the city's Lutheran population. In a letter, she disassociated her work and beliefs from Schwenckfeld's controversial theology. The dispute with Schwenckfeld "established the idea of Schütz Zell's reputation as a dissident."⁷⁵ In an effort to continue ministering to the people of Strasbourg, Schütz Zell responded that she would not be yoked to one confession and in doing so she became a "dissident" in the reform movement of the second generation. She continued to accept all who believe in Jesus as the Savior and in the sole authority of Scripture. McKee describes this practice as controversial during the second generation of reform, because many doctrinal differences among Protestants created outcasts:

The problem was that sometimes others did not welcome those whom the Zells received because of their dissident religious views. In the first generation of the reform, this stance does not seem to have provoked any significant comment; by the time that Matthew's widow stood alone, however, being a "mother to the exiled and poor" has begun to be controversial.⁷⁶

Despite controversy, Katharina upheld the Zells' views on hospitality. McKee states that their policy was simple; those who accepted the sole authority of the Scripture and "Jesus Christ as sole savior" were welcomed.⁷⁷ Katharina honored her commitment to serve those in need. Her refusal to commit to any specific confession supported her inclusive spiritual guidance and aid to

⁷⁴ William Klassen and Peter C. Erb, "Schwenckfeld, Caspar von (1489-1561)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1989, accessed February 7, 2017, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Schwenckfeld,_Caspar_von_\(1489-1561\)](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Schwenckfeld,_Caspar_von_(1489-1561)).

⁷⁵ McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell. Volume One*, 146.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 447.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

fellow believers. Although Katharina Schütz Zell experienced discord during the second generation of the Reformation, she remained strong in her faith and ministered to the people of Strasbourg until her death in 1562.

Katharina's life spanned two generations of the Reformation, the first generation from Luther's 95 Theses in 1517 to the Augsburg Interim of 1548, and the second generation from approximately 1540 to 1570 during which Protestant factions fractured into strictly defined confessions. During both generations, the Protestant Reformation stirred up chaos and anxiety among the German people. Katharina became active in the Reformation during the first generation of the movement. During this time, she began to share her Christian values of love, compassion, and service. The Schmalkaldic War in 1547 and the burden of the Augsburg Interim weighed heavily on German Protestants of the second generation. Protestant groups sought security in defining their doctrines and practices. Tensions and intolerance grew. Despite conflicts with second-generation reformers, Katharina continued to share her first-generation beliefs and her Christian values.

Throughout her life, Katharina Schütz Zell shared her faith through her writings and acts of service. She was a prolific, female writer in the sixteenth century, who received familial guidance to pursue a life dedicated to faith. All of her writings are based in her religious knowledge of Scripture. Supported by her husband, Katharina thrived as an active participant of the Protestant Reformation. She shared her Christian values as she ministered to the afflicted. Katharina's writings demonstrate her acceptance of first-generation protestant beliefs and rejection of second-generation doctrinal differences. During a period of religious change, Katharina Schütz Zell served Strasbourg as an unwavering advocate of the values and beliefs she internalized during the first-generation reform movement.

CHAPTER THREE: KATHARINA SCHÜTZ ZELL AS AN EARLY REFORMER

Katharina Schütz Zell shared her religious convictions with the citizens of Strasbourg through her publications. As an active member of the first generation of the Reformation, she published letters, pamphlets, devotionals and a hymnbook to share her faith with her fellow believers. Her writings carefully addressed believers' needs and the debates of the Protestant movement. Katharina's diplomatic, passionate writing conveys strong religious conviction. McKee refers to Schütz Zell's diplomacy as "a very finely crafted set of arguments expressed with courtesy but clear independence by a strong, intelligent, and very articulate woman."⁷⁸ The following analysis focuses on Katharina's published writings during the first generation of the reform movement. In her first three writings published in 1524 and 1535, she establishes her message of Christian values and her Protestant beliefs.⁷⁹ Through a life of Christian love, compassion and service, Katharina advocated for the authority of Scripture, salvation by faith and grace, and the priesthood of all believers.

Three early protestant beliefs are found in Katharina's writings: salvation by faith and grace, the sole authority of Scripture, and the priesthood of all believers. Salvation, according to Scripture, is achieved by grace through faith: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through

⁷⁸ McKee, *Church Mother*, 180.

⁷⁹ *Letter to The Suffering Women of the Community of Kentzingen, Who Believe in Christ, Sisters with me in Jesus Christ; Katharina Schütz's Apologia for Master Matthew Zell, Her Husband, Who is a Pastor and Servant of the Word of God in Strasbourg, Because of the Great Lies Invented about Him; Some Christian and Comforting Songs of Praise About Jesus Christ Our Savior, His Incarnation, Birth, Circumcision, Etc., Out of a Very Fine Songbook About Which More Will be Said in the Foreword.*

faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”⁸⁰ Martin Luther advocated the importance of grace over good works as a means of salvation. The authority of Scripture developed out of the academic, humanist movement, which insisted on returning to the original sources instead of using interpretations. For the early reformers, Scripture, alone, governed Christian faith and life. They rejected Catholic interpretations of Scriptures; instead, they promoted the reading of God’s Word. The priesthood of all believers encouraged the faithful to take charge of their spiritual journeys. This belief empowered Protestants to read and interpret the Bible and to aid others with the development of their faith. Katharina viewed herself as a member of the priesthood of all believers empowering her to teach others her values and beliefs.

Katharina Schütz Zell lived by three core values: love, compassion, and service. Based in Scripture, these values are the foundation of Christian living and Katharina’s faith. For Katharina, a believer should follow Jesus’ teachings on love: “You must love the Lord you God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind...Love your neighbor as yourself.”⁸¹ Her early religious commitment confirms that she wholeheartedly loved the Lord. She expresses love for her fellow believers as she encourages their faith and guides them toward salvation. Compassion for the afflicted and downtrodden led Katharina to be a voice of comfort. By publishing her writings and extending hospitality to travelers, Katharina served the Lord. Many protestant reformers found shelter at the Zell house, and Katharina viewed it as an act of Christian service to welcome fellow believers to her table. These Christian values return in her writings as she advises others in their faith.

⁸⁰ Ephesians 2:8.

⁸¹ Matthew 22:37-38.

Katharina Schütz Zell began her involvement in the Reformation with her publications in 1524 and 1535. Her publications share her early protestant beliefs and discuss different aspects of the early reform movement. In 1524, Katharina published a letter to protestant women suffering at the hands of the Catholic bishop in the nearby city of Kentzingen in Breisgau. In the same year, she published her defense of clerical marriage. These two documents show Katharina's early engagement with the reform movement. In 1535, she published a hymnbook with songs and instructions of faith to serve Protestants of Strasbourg.

Letter to the Suffering Women of the Community of Kentzingen, who Believe in Christ, Sisters
with me in Jesus Christ

Katharina wrote her *Letter to the Suffering Women* after Jacob Otter, an evangelical preacher, was expelled from Kentzingen. Otter faced opposition from the Catholic bishop, but he initially enjoyed the support of Kentzingen's city council. In May 1524, however, the city council imposed limitations on Otter to appease the bishop. Otter was allowed to stay in Kentzingen, "on the condition that he neither administered communion in both kinds nor celebrated Mass or baptism in German."⁸² Still, the bishop pressured the council to remove Otter, and one week later their ruling changed to exile. As Otter left town, members of his congregation, mainly women, met him at the gate and forced him to stay.⁸³ It was not until the threat of military action that Otter and armed male members of his congregation left Kentzingen.

⁸² Tom Scott, *The Early Reformation in Germany: Between Secular Impact and Radical Vision* (London: Routledge, 2016), 122.

⁸³ Scott, 123.

They found refuge in Strasbourg. In her letter, Katharina encourages the women to be strong in their faith in the absence of their men. She reminds the women that God works in mysterious ways for the well-being of his children. By mid-September 1524, many of the exiled were pardoned and allowed to return, ending the women's suffering.

Published in 1524, Katharina Schütz Zell's *Letter to the Suffering Women* consoles the women of Kentzingen with God's Word and protestant beliefs. According to Elsie McKee, Katharina's letter "combines consolation with admiration and encouragement based on exposition and personal appropriation of scripture."⁸⁴ Through her study of Scripture, Katharina views the women's suffering as a sign of God's will and love.⁸⁵ Out of love and compassion, she shares Christian values and early protestant beliefs to comfort and encourage the women to be strong in their faith.

Katharina views the women's suffering as a sign of God's fatherly love. She claims that suffering is a sign of discipline from God, similar to parental discipline. In the sixteenth century, women were responsible for raising children in the home; thus, they could understand the close relation between parental love and discipline. In support of her claim that God's love may be shown through suffering, Katharina quotes apostle Paul from his letter to the Hebrews:

If you endure the discipline, God takes you for His children. Where is a son whom the father does not chastise? If you do not experience chastisement, then you are bastards and not legitimate children. All discipline when it is being experienced is not regarded as a happy but as a sad thing; but afterwards it will give a peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised in it.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Elsie Anne McKee, *Church Mother*, 47.

⁸⁵ Katharina Schütz Zell, "Letter to the Suffering Women of the Community of Kentzingen," in *Church Mother: the writings of a Protestant reformer in sixteenth century Germany*, ed. and trans. Elsie Anne McKee (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006), 50.

⁸⁶ Katharina Schütz Zell, "Letter to the Suffering Women of Kentzingen," 53.

According to Katharina, a father disciplines his legitimate children; thus, the women should consider themselves true children of God and embrace their suffering. The result of discipline for the legitimate children of God, according to the passage from Hebrews, is the “peaceful fruit of righteousness” signifying salvation and God’s love and favor. Conversely, the illegitimates, those of the world who reject God’s discipline, are condemned. Katharina exhorts the women to cling to this comforting notion during their trials and endure God’s discipline on earth. She asserts that by doing so the women will reap the benefits of God’s love and grace in salvation. As apostle Paul writes, “No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening-it’s painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.”⁸⁷ Through biblical examples, Katharina argues that God’s love, reflected through His discipline, leads to the grace and righteousness found in salvation. The assurance of God’s love and salvation in suffering comforted and empowered the women to remain strong in their Protestant faith.

Katharina advises the women to deepen their faith and understanding of the Lord in response to their suffering. The apostle Paul addresses faith and suffering in his letter to the Romans:

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.⁸⁸

Following Paul, Katharina believes that trials lead to hope for salvation and assurance of God’s love. The hope that comes from suffering is a gift from God. She states that unbelievers will not

⁸⁷ Hebrews 12:11.

⁸⁸ Romans 5: 3-5.

understand that suffering is such a gift. They prefer to cling to their place in the world instead of choosing a spiritual life. Referencing the book of Hebrews, Katharina calls people living worldly lives illegitimate children of God, who do not understand his love through discipline.

Understanding God's discipline separates the worldly unbeliever from the spiritual believer:

For indeed to an unbeliever it would look strange that God should give such gifts [as hardship and suffering] to His children whom He loves! Such an unbeliever would much rather not be God's child but a child of the world, which does not treat its children that way: the world disciplines its children softly and tenderly. It is true, as Paul says, that faith is not everyone's thing and the worldly, that is, the carnal person cannot understand what is godly. But the spiritual, that is, the believing person, understands that God deals marvelously, surprisingly, with His own, completely contrary to the world and its children.⁸⁹

Katharina suggests that unbelievers who live carnal lives include those who persecute the protestant women of Kentzingen, as well as those who enjoy their many worldly possessions. She separates the women as Protestant believers from their Catholic persecutors to encourage steadfast faith in their struggles. She views God's discipline through suffering as a source of happiness. No worldly possessions can rival such great honor:

Would that God would regard me with such grace and favor, and favor me with such great honor so that I should have gifts unlike yet also like yours, to suffer such things with His dearest Christ and with you. Then I would be more happy, proud, and glad than all the nobles at the Strasbourg fair in their golden chains and necklaces.⁹⁰

Katharina views suffering as a way to grow close to God. By experiencing suffering, with God's dearest Christ, the believers may know God's grace and salvation.⁹¹ She encourages the women to draw close to God in times of joy and times of sadness: "He wants to have us with Him in suffering and in joy."⁹² Hope is found in God; drawing close to God means leaving behind

⁸⁹ Katharina Schütz Zell, "Letter to the Suffering Women of Kentzingen," 50.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁹¹ Ephesians 2:8.

⁹² Katharina Schütz Zell, "Letter to the Suffering Women of Kentzingen," 54.

darkness and despair. Katharina viewed suffering as part of life and found hope in Scripture: “He does not lay on you more to bear than is good and necessary for you.”⁹³ Katharina’s ministry to the women of Kentzingen counsels perseverance through faith because God is with them.

Throughout her letter, Katharina uses both feminine and masculine imagery to highlight the importance of her belief in the priesthood of all believers. Early in her letter, Katharina uses child rearing to help the women understand God’s discipline. This female activity helps the women relate to her message about God, discipline, and grace. Later in her letter, Katharina shifts to masculine imagery to encourage strong faith in God’s plan. She uses the story of Abraham’s faith to assure the women that God is with them in their suffering:

Do you not think that Abraham also suffered when God told him to kill his only son?! When He told Abraham to do it himself! – to kill the son in whom also the blessing of human beings was promised. Yes, indeed, he was very grieved, for he was also flesh and blood like all of us; but he knew (as the scripture says) that God could bring his son back to life.⁹⁴

Katharina equates the women’s persecution to Abraham’s suffering. Abraham relied on his faith for strength to follow God’s mysterious command. Katharina challenges the women, as wives and mothers, to be like Abraham and rely on their faith despite the loss of their husbands and sons. According to McKee, biblical, masculine imagery in Katharina’s letter is meant to empower the women to be courageous in their faith.⁹⁵ Katharina challenges the women to show courage:

So I beg you, loyal believing women, also to do this: take on you the manly, Abraham-like courage while you too are in distress and while you are abused with all kinds of insult and suffering. When you may meet with imprisonment in towers, chains, drowning,

⁹³ Ibid., 55.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 51.

⁹⁵ McKee, *Church Mother*, 49.

banishment, and such like things; when your husbands and you yourselves may be killed, meditate then on strong Abraham, father of us all; struggle after him as a good child should follow his father in a faith like the father's.⁹⁶

In encouraging the women to have “manly, Abraham-like courage” when they suffer persecution, Katharina’s words suggest that the women are the spiritual equals of men and thus members of the priesthood of all believers.

Katharina Schütz Zell wrote her letter out of love and compassion for the suffering women. She counseled the women to view their suffering as a sign of God’s love. By encouraging the women to stay strong in their faith, she hopes to lead them toward salvation. In addition, she urges the women to join her in the priesthood of all believers through masculine and feminine imagery and examples of faith. In this first publication, Katharina introduces many of the values and beliefs of the first generation of the reform movement and shows herself to be a member of this movement.

Katharina Schütz’s *Apologia for Master Matthew Zell, her Husband, who is a Pastor and Servant of the Word of God in Strasbourg, because of the Great Lies Invented about Him*

With her second publication, *Apologia for Master Matthew Zell*, Katharina enters the debate on clerical marriage by defending her marriage to Matthew. The debate pitted the authority of God’s Word against the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Early reformers, like Martin Luther, advocated a biblical basis for clerical marriage: “At the outset, marriage was fundamentally affirmed. Man and woman are God’s creation. Being fruitful and multiplying is

⁹⁶ Katharina Schütz Zell, “Letter to the Suffering Women of Kentzingen,” 51.

God's work."⁹⁷ Controversy arose when these reformers claimed that marriage would eliminate immorality amongst the clergy.⁹⁸ At this time, the Catholic Church insisted that celibacy was the most spiritual way of life and required of the clergy. However, concubinage was not uncommon among them. By 1524, pamphleteers brought the debate to the laypeople. Finding wives among the laity was difficult for the newly protestant clergy. Parishioners were hesitant to reject the Catholic Church's authority and let their daughters marry priests. Katharina was "the first respectable woman in Strasbourg to marry a priest."⁹⁹ With no protest from her family, Katharina married Matthew Zell. Other priests followed Zell's example and were married. By January 1524, six of Strasbourg's priests were married. In response to the marriages, Strasbourg's bishop ordered the married priests "to appear at an episcopal court to be stripped of their benefices."¹⁰⁰ The six priests gained protection from the city as citizens. In March 1524, the bishop excommunicated the married priests. In response to their excommunication, the former priests wrote a joint defense of their positions. Katharina Schütz Zell's *Apologia* is her response to the bishop's orders.

In her *Apologia*, Katharina argues for clerical marriage and defends her own marriage. Agreeing with early reformers, Katharina establishes herself as a staunch defender of clerical marriage based on the sole authority of Scripture. Her defense of Matthew seeks to establish a biblical basis for clerical marriage. According to McKee, Katharina's publication ministers the

⁹⁷ Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 91.

⁹⁸ Brecht, 92.

⁹⁹ McKee, *Church Mother*, 58.

¹⁰⁰ McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell. Volume One*, 51.

truth to the “simple Christians” of Strasbourg, who are being told lies about clerical marriage.¹⁰¹ By supporting clerical marriage with Scripture, Katharina accepts the sole authority of God’s Word and rejects the authority of the Catholic Church. Even though her publication was confiscated after a few months by Strasbourg’s city council, copies of it reached Martin Luther and other reformers, who complimented her argument.¹⁰² Using her protestant beliefs on salvation by faith and grace, the sole authority of Scripture and the priesthood of all believers, Katharina defends Matthew’s decision and their marriage.

Katharina begins her *Apologia* by stating that its purpose is to defend Matthew from the writings of Dr. Murner, Dr. Johannes Cochlaeus, and Brother Conrad, who sought to discredit preachers who have rejected celibacy and chosen to marry. These three Catholic theologians wrote in support of the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Their writings also attacked the Protestant movement, especially its leaders and their beliefs. According to Katharina, these clerics created lies, which harm the “simple Christians”: “I have considered the doubt and fear that many a simple, honest person receives from such untrue sayings, when he hears such unchristian things spoken with such great mischief and authority.”¹⁰³ Claims that the Protestant preachers were “unchristian” made people doubt their teachings and the movement. Katharina warns that false teachings turn people away from the authority of God’s Word as taught by the reformers and, therefore, from God’s grace and salvation. Those who hear God’s Word have

¹⁰¹ McKee, *Church Mother*, 61. “Simple Christians” in this context are literate but not learned Christians.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁰³ Katharina Schütz Zell, “Katharina Schütz’s Apologia for Master Matthew Zell, Her Husband,” in *Church Mother: the writings of a Protestant reformer of sixteenth century Germany*, ed. and trans. Elsie Anne McKee (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006), 63.

faith, and faithfulness leads to salvation.¹⁰⁴ She writes, “for I know of no more harmful stumbling block than one that turns people away from the faith.”¹⁰⁵ In her defense of Matthew, Katharina consistently uses Scripture to argue that her opponents promote false teaching. In doing so, she reassures Matthew’s congregation that his teachings are based in God’s Word.

Matthew and Katharina held different views on the need to defend clerical marriage. Katharina believes a public defense is needed to show clerical marriage is supported by Scripture. According to Katharina, Matthew did not believe a defense for clerical marriage was necessary. Respectful of her husband’s position, Katharina distances him from any consequences of her publication by stating that he did not know about it:

What I say is true, although he [Zell] does not seek any defense and does not even know about this writing of mine. And I certainly believe that if he were to learn of it he would not allow me to do such a thing, for he bears in mind the words of Christ that he daily preaches, where He says in Mt 5, “Blessed are you when people insult and persecute and speak all kinds of evil against you, when they lie about you for my sake; rejoice and be glad, you will be well repaid in heaven.”¹⁰⁶

For Matthew, clerical marriage was based in Scripture and thus needed no defense. He relied on his faith and rejoiced in being blessed. Katharina, however, rejects Matthew’s silence, as his silence may be understood as an admission of guilt: “That is, it is proper to (and part of) being a Christian to suffer, but it is not all proper for him to be silent, for the silence is half a confession that the lies are true.”¹⁰⁷ Consequently, Katharina refutes lies about Matthew being unchristian and warns against the teachings of the Catholic Church.

¹⁰⁴ Romans 10:14-17.

¹⁰⁵ Katharina Schütz Zell, “Apologia,” 65

¹⁰⁶ Katharina Schütz Zell, “Apologia,” 64.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Katharina warns against false Catholic claims, which are unfounded in Scripture. Out of love, she speaks out in defense of the early reformers and their teachings:

Otherwise by keeping silence I give him [a hateful neighbor] grounds to continue in his trumped up lies, and that, in my judgment is against brotherly love. For I would be unwilling to be left in error and lies without instruction; why should I not also in turn correct the error and lies that my neighbor believes? Especially for the honest people who in every way seek the truth, so that they may be instructed.... Therefore, then, I write here to good people and bad. To the good for use and love, so that they may be instructed in the truth and know how to protect themselves from such children of the devil and not to trust their words...I write this also for the wicked in this and other lands, to their shame because they have invented such unbecoming, farcical lies and have been found out as liars so that they must be ashamed of themselves.¹⁰⁸

Katharina Schütz Zell teaches good and honest Christians to reject the defamatory lies spread by Catholic clergy. She depicts Catholic clergy as children of the devil and condemns their teachings as untrustworthy and false, as opposed to the true teachings of Protestant preachers. Referring to the three clerics writing against her husband as “messengers of the devil,” Katharina boldly points to their corruption and dishonesty.¹⁰⁹ She juxtaposes them with the honorable Luther and Zell, who like Joshua and Caleb were the messengers of God. According to Katharina, these Catholic clerics are unable to support their claims with Scripture:

Then the devil’s messengers malign the teaching of God’s messengers, saying that it is dangerous, and also malign the way God’s messengers live, saying how immoral and wicked it is. And yet these messengers of the devil are not themselves honest and learned enough to prove one of their lies from the Holy Biblical scripture (although they are still always referring to it). In fact, they *could* not prove them from the scripture.¹¹⁰

The juxtaposition of the devil’s messengers with God’s messengers creates an image of a clash between heaven and hell over the souls of parishioners. Salvation is at stake; thus, Katharina resorts to strong, warlike writing to emphasize the importance of victory. The authority of

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 66-68.

¹⁰⁹ Katharina Schütz Zell, “Apologia,” 67.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

Scripture supporting the teachings of the Protestant messengers of God determines the victor of the fight between light and darkness. For Katharina, the Catholic clergy are not trustworthy. Their inadequate defense of celibacy and attack on clerical marriage cannot be proven with Scripture. Katharina's reliance on Scripture to defend clerical marriage teaches believers to follow the sole authority of Scripture.

Katharina Schütz Zell also viewed marriage as an opportunity to guide others toward salvation. She asserted that she married Matthew to save him from the corruption promoted by Catholic teachings and to serve God as an example of faith for others:

With God's help I was also the first woman in Strasbourg who opened the way for clerical marriage, when I was then still not consenting or wishing to marry any man. However, since I saw the great fear and furious opposition to clerical marriage, and also the great harlotry of the clergy, I myself married a priest with the intention of encouraging and making a way for all Christians-as I hope has also happened.¹¹¹

For Katharina, marriage honored God. In her reasons for marriage, she implied that Matthew needed to be saved from "the great harlotry." Protestants attacked the Catholic Church by stating that it was the great harlot, a tool of the devil, as shown in the book of Revelation.¹¹² By marrying Matthew, Katharina meant to save him from sexual corruption, to gain his soul for God, and to honor God through their marriage:

I do not want to answer about how he [Matthew] kept house before I became his wife. He behaved then just as pope and bishop want: those who forbid the marriage that God commanded and permit harlots whom God forbade. That is also why I married him: having considered his life and that of others, I dared by God's grace and power to try to gain his soul and many others, as I hope I have done for God.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Katharina Schütz Zell, "Apologia," 77.

¹¹² Revelation 17:3-6, 18.

¹¹³ Katharina Schütz Zell, "Apologia," 79.

In a very public way, Katharina used her marriage to defend clerical marriage as a means to eliminate sexual corruption in the clergy and as a path towards their salvation.

In sixteenth-century society, the immorality of the Catholic clergy affected not only the clergy, but also their illegitimate children. Katharina cleverly argues that the laws governing inheritance put the souls of illegitimate offspring in jeopardy: “When a married couple dies, their legitimate children take the inheritance. If the children are not legitimate, the relations take the inheritance and throw out the bastard; what does it matter to them that the devil carries off the souls of the children?”¹¹⁴ Katharina argues that the illegitimate children of Catholic clergy and their concubines would not only be outcasts with no physical inheritance, but also, and more importantly, they would have no spiritual inheritance. These children faced eternal damnation due to the sins of their parents. They were born out of wedlock into an adulterous union highly offensive to God; thus, the illegitimate children, through no fault of their own, were led astray by corrupt clergy. Katharina argues that marriage would make illegitimate offspring legitimate and save them from damnation. For this reason, she claims that clerical marriage aids salvation.

In addition to her defense of clerical marriage, Katharina Schütz Zell also defends her own marriage against false claims. Slanderers of Matthew Zell spread three lies about his marriage:

1) They say that he treats me so badly, with blows and the like, and has often chased me out. 2) They have shamefully lied that I have found him with the maid, and when I would not tolerate that behavior, he struck me and chased me out of the house. 3) They say that I went weeping to the Ammeister and stayed away from him eight days in my father’s house. And more of the same, and still different lies, so that what is said in one place is different from what is said in another.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 76.

¹¹⁵ Katharina Schütz Zell, “Apologia,” 78.

These claims of an abusive, adulterous marriage were meant to discredit Matthew and his protestant teachings. Katharina addresses these lies through a description of her and Matthew's partnership in marriage. She simply claims that Matthew never hit her nor looked at their servant in any lustful way. She writes about the loyalty and respect in her marriage: "He and I have never had a quarter of an hour, that is, in summary no time at all when we have not been at one.... But since I became his wife I want to defend him and risk my honor, body, and life for him."¹¹⁶ The loyalty and respect between the Zells empowered Katharina to defend her husband and her marriage.

In her defense, Katharina advocated the benefits of clerical marriage to individual believers and the faith community. Katharina believed that her marriage honored and served God and His Word. She agreed with Luther and other reformers, who claimed marriage was the best defense against corruption, and "turned away God's punishment from society."¹¹⁷ By removing corruption through marriage, the collective community would grow stronger in faith and righteousness. At the end of her *Apologia*, Katharina writes that her purpose was to save others with the help of God: "For I seek nothing other than that we may be saved together with each other. May God help us to do that, through Christ His beloved Son."¹¹⁸ Using God's Word, Katharina Schütz Zell compassionately sought to guide others towards salvation by defending clerical marriage.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 78-79.

¹¹⁷ Brecht, 92.

¹¹⁸ Katharina Schütz Zell, "Apologia," 82.

Some Christian and Comforting Songs of Praise about Jesus Christ our Savior, his Incarnation, Birth, Circumcision, etc., out of a very Fine Songbook about which More will be Said in the Foreword.

In 1535 and 1536, Katharina published her third writing, a hymnbook. The Protestant Reformation encouraged congregational participation through song. As songs about saints and Catholic celebrations were removed, Protestants looked for religious songs in vernacular German to aid the faithful in their individual relationships with God. In 1531, Michael Weisse translated from Czech to German the Hymnbook of the Bohemian Brethren to meet the need for religious songs. Katharina Schütz Zell thought the hymnbook a good source of religious knowledge and republished it for the people of Strasbourg. She added a foreword, a few more songs, and annotations as spiritual instruction.¹¹⁹ She had the hymnbook published in four sections from 1535 to 1536. Each section cost pennies, so that all the people in Strasbourg could afford at least one for their household. Although Katharina thought the hymnbook would be a great addition to the growing body of music of the reform movement, the original hymnbook became associated with the controversial Caspar Schwenckfeld and was never reprinted in Strasbourg. Katharina's foreword addresses the people of Strasbourg as members of the priesthood of believers who have personal relationships with God and are called to serve Him.

In her foreword to the Hymnbook of the Bohemian Brethren, Katharina Schütz Zell assures the people of Strasbourg that it is a reliable source of godly songs: "I found such an understanding of the work of God in this songbook that I want all people to understand it.

¹¹⁹ McKee, *Church Mother*, 90-91.

Indeed, I ought much rather call it a teaching, prayer, and praise book than a songbook.”¹²⁰

Through her religious studies and knowledge of Scripture, Katharina deemed the hymnbook a biblically based source of religious instruction and a good contribution to public worship. She challenges her fellow believers to sing godly songs and share them with others.

Katharina believed that believers could guide others toward God and salvation by living out their faith:

So now (in response to this clear call that God makes to the world) encourage your children and relatives to sing godly songs in which they are exhorted to seek knowledge of their salvation. And teach them to know that they do not serve human beings but God, when they faithfully (in the faith) keep house, obey, cook, wash dishes, wipe up and tend children, and such like work that serves human life and that (while doing this very work) they can also turn toward God with the voice of song.¹²¹

Praising God with song while performing mundane, ordinary tasks aided spiritual growth and built trust in God’s grace and salvation. Katharina’s challenges Protestants to sing these new godly songs instead of old songs to saints. The veneration of saints was a Catholic practice rejected by the Protestants. As Protestants sought relationships with God, personal devotion and religious instruction became essential to their faith. Katharina’s publication of the hymnbook provided instruction in faith and devotion for all protestant believers.

Katharina Schütz Zell encouraged both men and women to share their faith with their neighbors by singing God’s praise. Katharina earlier implied the notion of spiritual equality through the priesthood of all believers in her letter to the women of Kentzingen. In the hymnbook, she uses it to empower all believers to share their faith through godly songs. As

¹²⁰ Katharina Schütz Zell, “Some Christian and Comforting Songs of Praise about Jesus Christ Our Savior,” in *Church Mother: the writings of a Protestant reformer of sixteenth century Germany*, ed. and trans. Elsie Anne McKee (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006), 93.

¹²¹ Katharina Schütz Zell, “Some Christian and Comforting Songs,” 95.

members of the priesthood of all believers, Protestants sought personal relationships with God through spiritual growth. Faith was nurtured by public worship; thus, Katharina encourages believers to sing songs of praise and share these songs with others. Doing so will remind the faithful of God's love and help them draw closer to their heavenly Father: "Therefore now let us sing these songs, which express so admirably God's love toward us and exhort us so faithfully not to neglect the salvation offered to us."¹²² Through song, men, women, and children could share and grow in their faith with fellow believers.

Love and compassion for her fellow Protestants moved Katharina to publish the hymnbook in an affordable manner so that even the poorest congregants had access to religious songs. She viewed her publication as a means for the laity to share their faith: "Katharina Schütz Zell decided to supply her neighbors – all members of the priesthood of believers – with the proper instruction to do this home-style "lay preaching" by making available good biblical songs with attractive music."¹²³ Instructions found in her foreword encouraged laity to share their faith with others through song, effectively spreading the reform message throughout Strasbourg. By sharing their faith through songs, Protestants served each other and God. With the hymnbook, Katharina found one more way to share her faith with Strasbourg's faithful and guide them toward their salvation and God's kingdom.

These three documents show Katharina Schütz Zell publicly sharing her values and beliefs, which are the core values of the first generation of reformers. She writes out of love and compassion. The writings share a deep concern for the salvation of others. Her writings are a testament to her belief in the sole authority of Scripture. Each document serves as an example of

¹²² Ibid., 94.

¹²³ McKee, *Church Mother*, 90.

her service to God by ministering to others. She views her audience as members of the priesthood of all believers and writes to encourage and empower them in their faith. Katharina Schütz Zell's values and protestant beliefs establish the foundation for her subsequent writings as she continues to minister into the unstable second-generation of reform.

CHAPTER FOUR: KATHARINA SCHÜTZ ZELL AND THE LEGACY OF THE EARLY REFORM MOVEMENT

Katharina Schütz Zell continued to serve God and the Protestants of Strasbourg by sharing her values and beliefs during the chaos of the second generation of the reform movement. By 1548, bitter internal disputes, war, and the deaths of the first-generation reformers gave the movement a bleak future. Divisions and discord arose among the protestant reformers and their followers as they defined their doctrines. Katharina, however, continued to follow the Gospel teachings of love, compassion, and service, and her writings reminded Protestants of the teachings on God's love and grace by the early reformers. The continuity of her writings provided stability for her husband's parishioners and other believers. Even though she continued to share her values and beliefs, the majority of her later writings defined and defended her work as a reformer from criticisms of second-generation reformers.

Katharina Schütz Zell shared her values and beliefs, and asserted her authority as a reformer in four writings during the second generation of reform.¹²⁴ They were written between 1548, when she was widowed, and 1558, for years before her death in 1562. In her *Lamentation*

¹²⁴ *Lament and Exhortation of Katharina Zell to the People at the Grave of Master Matthew Zell, Minister at the Cathedral in Strasbourg, Her Upright Husband, over his dead body, the 11th of January 1548; To Caspar Schwenckfeld, My Gracious Dear Sir and Old Friend: to His Own Hands; A Letter to the Whole Citizenship of the city of Strasbourg from Katharina Zell, Widow of the (Now Blessed) Matthew Zell, the former and first Preacher of the Gospel in this City, Concerning Mr. Ludwig Rabus, now a Preacher of the City of Ulm, Together with Two Letters: Hers and His. May Many read These and Judge without Favor or Hate but Alone take to Heart the Truth. Also A Healthy Answer to Each Article of His Letter; The Miserere Psalm Mediated, Prayed, and Paraphrased with King David by Katharina Zell, The Blessed Matthew Zell's Widow, Together with the Our Father with its Explanation, sent to the Christian Man Sir Felix Arbruster for Comfort in his Illness, and Published for the Sake of Afflicted Consciences that are Troubled by Sins. Some Sayings from the Psalms and Prophets.*

(1548), Katharina encouraged Matthew's parishioners to remain firm in their Protestant faith and to reject Catholic reconversion. As internal conflict heightened between Protestants, Katharina taught tolerance. Her *Letter to Caspar Schwenckfeld* (1553), she argued against internal discord and intolerance amongst Protestant groups. She defended her teachings by asserting her authority as the protector of Matthew's legacy and refused to choose a specific Protestant group. She continued to defend her authority as a reformer with designations that describe her life and work as God's servant in her *Letter to the Whole Citizenship of Strasbourg* (1557). In 1558, Katharina's final writing was a devotional book addressed to Sir Felix Armbruster, who was afflicted with leprosy. Her last writing provided pastoral comfort and teaching reminiscent of her early publications. Criticized in the tumultuous times from 1548 to her death in 1562, Katharina defended her values and beliefs, acted as a servant of God, and served the Protestants of Strasbourg through her actions and teachings.

Lament and Exhortation of Katharina Zell to the People at the Grave of Master Matthew Zell, Minister at the Cathedral in Strasbourg, her Upright Husband, over his Dead Body, the 11th of
January 1548

Prior to the Augsburg Interim of 1548, Matthew Zell expressed concern for the future of the Protestant movement. In his last days, he worried that his parishioners would reconvert to Catholicism, due to the inexperience of the next generation of reformers. In his last sermon, he cautioned against the reinstatement of Mass, in his opinion an abomination. On the night he died, he entrusted his ministry to Katharina and asked her to continue serving the people of

Strasbourg.¹²⁵ Matthew Zell died January 1548 on the eve of the Augsburg Interim. According to Elsie McKee, the crowd at the beloved pastor's funeral ranged from 3,000 to 6,000.¹²⁶ As some of the crowd dispersed after Martin Bucer's sermon, a grieving Katharina felt compelled to comfort those who stayed. Acknowledging the uncertainty surrounding the reform movement, she reminded the parishioners of Matthew's legacy and urged them to remain strong and constant in their faith: "Like Matthew's own recent sermons, the words of his partner in ministry were intended to strengthen Strasbourgers' determination to recognize clearly and resist firmly the perils of the return of the Mass, which hovered on the edge of sight."¹²⁷ The return of the Mass during the Augsburg Interim was part of the Catholic counter-reform movement, which would continue throughout the remainder of the sixteenth century. Katharina's *Lamentation* provided comfort and continuity to Matthew's parishioners so that they could reject Catholic reconversion.

Katharina Schütz Zell comforted Matthew's parishioners with his legacy. She emphasized the importance of Matthew's teachings, hospitality, and compassion; a legacy she honored and protected until her death: "I cannot fail to remind you and myself of the teaching and life that my good husband led and exhort all of us not to disregard the witness of his death or forget his teachings."¹²⁸ In remembrance of her husband, Katharina implored his parishioners to stay true to Matthew's teachings on salvation and faith, so that they may be protected from evil and worldliness represented by the Augsburg Interim. Katharina recognized the threat

¹²⁵ McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell. Volume One*, 119-123.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 127

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹²⁸ Katharina Schütz Zell, "Lamentation and Exhortation of Katharina Zell to the People at the Grave of Master Matthew Zell," in *Church Mother: the writings of a Protestant reformer in sixteenth century Germany*, ed. and trans. Elsie Anne McKee (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006), 103.

reinstatement of Mass posed to the reform movement and warns against it. So as to calm the parishioners' anxiety and fear about the future of their faith, Katharina relied on Matthew's teachings.

Matthew taught that salvation came through God, and he rejected "all sanctification by works and false worship"¹²⁹ Katharina emphasizes the importance of remembering Matthew's ministry both for the salvation of the parishioners and the continuation of his legacy:

That is what I wanted to exhort you about, dear friends, that you should not so quickly forget this your faithful shepherd. Not for the sake of his body, but because of his teaching that he so faithfully preached to you and because he was so zealous for your salvation, that the abomination and idolatry might not come again into his work and field through the enemy, that his work in you might not be muddied and trampled down....¹³⁰

Her forceful exhortation to Matthew's parish to remember his teachings reflects her own efforts to preserve his legacy in Strasbourg. The Catholic Church was the enemy and its doctrines "the abomination and idolatry." Her strong language emphasizes Protestant opposition to the Catholic Church and the Augsburg Interim. As Matthew's widow, she feels responsible for the preservation of his teachings and the protection of his flock.

Katharina preserves Matthew's legacy by staying true to her values of compassion and service. She reflects on Matthew as an example of a faithful man, who was compassionate and hospitable to others. Throughout their marriage, compassion for and service to others through hospitality were valued by Matthew: "He was frugal in his use of food and drink but opened his home and gladly kept a free table for all refugees, the poor, and good friends in the faith."¹³¹

Honoring Matthew's dying request that she continue to serve the people of Strasbourg, Katharina

¹²⁹ Ibid., 107.

¹³⁰ Katharina Schütz Zell, "Lamentation," 112.

¹³¹ Katharina Schütz Zell, "Lamentation," 105

welcomed those in need to her table. In her widowhood, Katharina continues Matthew's legacy of compassion and service towards the less fortunate.

Katharina Schütz Zell believes she is now responsible for the salvation of Matthew's parishioners. To protect the parishioners from Catholic reconversion, she urges them to recall Matthew's devotion to their salvation. She assures the parishioners that even in death Matthew continues to teach:

For he [Zell] was much concerned for his people, to whom he had hitherto taught the truth through the inspiration and teaching of the Holy Spirit, that after his death these same people might not be seduced through the inspiration and teaching of the devil, who has possessed the man of sin and who still carries on his business in the children of unbelief.¹³²

Katharina warns the parish not to be drawn back into Catholicism, because for her the Catholic Church and its clergy were the messengers of the devil. By recalling Matthew's devotion and his teachings, she seeks to protect the parish from religious discord and any attempts by the Catholic clergy to reconvert the Protestants. Katharina reminds the parish that salvation is the purpose of their faith. Through Matthew's teachings, the parishioners came to understand and accept the "true teachings" of the Gospel. Thus, if they turn away from his teachings, they turn away from God's truth and fall into the darkness represented by the Catholic Church. She asks them to devote themselves to Matthew's legacy in order to avoid temptations: "I exhort and beg you with great earnestness, as upright little sheep, to honor your shepherd by keeping his teaching and acting according to it, that you never allow it to be torn from your hearts..."¹³³ In this time of uncertainty, it would have been tempting for members of the parish to return to the Catholic faith. However, by remembering and following Matthew's teachings, the parish is following

¹³² Ibid., 109.

¹³³ Katharina Schütz Zell, "Lamentation," 114.

“true teachings” towards their salvation. Katharina Schütz Zell assumes Matthew’s concern for his parishioners by providing comfort, offering stability, and preserving his legacy.

To Caspar Schwenckfeld, My Gracious Dear Sir and Old Friend: to his own Hands

After the chaos of the Schmalkaldic War and the Augsburg Interim, Protestants sought stability by defining their teachings. As each faith established its doctrine of beliefs, intolerance grew between them. An example of this intolerance is the division among Lutherans. After Luther’s death, his followers split between the Philippists who were followers of Philip Melancthon and the Gnesio-Lutherans who were led by Matthias Flacius Illyricus; each Lutheran group staked claim to Luther’s legacy through their theological interpretations. Philippists compromised with imperial demands by incorporating some old medieval rituals, ceremonies and customs into their religious practices.¹³⁴ Conversely, Gnesio-Lutherans considered themselves genuine Lutherans rejecting all forms of compromise and removing rituals and religious ceremonies with superstitions or papal history.¹³⁵ In addition to being intolerant of each other, these groups were antagonistic to other protestant faiths.

Chaos surrounded Katharina Schütz Zell when reformer Caspar Schwenckfeld claimed her as one of his followers in 1553. Although he was a friend of the Zells for over twenty years, his controversial beliefs caused problems for Katharina during the second generation of

¹³⁴ James D Tracy, *Europe’s Reformations 1450-1650* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 93.

¹³⁵ Robert Kolb, “Dynamics of Party Conflict in the Saxon Late Reformation: Gnesio-Lutherans vs. Philippists” in *Journal of Modern History* 49 no. 3, On Demand Supplement (September, 1977), D1289-D1305.

reform.¹³⁶ He believed in only the divine nature of Christ, which contradicted the orthodox Lutheran teaching that Christ is both divine and human. In addition to his rejection of Christ's human nature, he also rejected external displays of faith. His radical interpretations of protestant teachings led to conflict with Martin Luther's followers. As an alleged Schwenckfeldian, Katharina faced severe criticism from the Lutheran preachers of Strasbourg, who claimed she was disgracing her husband's Lutheran legacy. The most prominent among them was Ludwig Rabus, Matthew's successor. Rabus' criticisms injured Katharina personally. During his doctoral studies, Rabus lived with the Zells. Matthew was his fatherly mentor, and Katharina was like a mother to him. Being labeled a dissident for her association with Schwenckfeld, Katharina was thrust into the discord between the Lutherans and other protestant groups.

In her *Letter to Caspar Schwenckfeld*, Katharina Schütz Zell diplomatically states she is not part of any specific protestant faith and addresses criticisms from Schwenckfeld's followers and Lutheran preachers. Katharina begins her letter by stating the criticisms:

Since, however, there are many complaints about me from both parties, I must nevertheless here briefly name the issues; please pardon me this. The one party [the Lutheran preachers] says that I should not shame my good husband by being so "Schwenckfeldian" and withdrawing from and despising the church's preaching and sacraments. The other [Schwenckfelder] party says that I am not willing to forsake the preachers and move wholly to the truth on the right side, although I already know and understand it, because I was a preacher's wife....¹³⁷

In response to these complaints, Katharina rejects joining a specific protestant group so she can continue to share her Christian values and beliefs with all believers: "With His help that is what I

¹³⁶ McKee, Elsie. "The Defense of Schwenckfeld, Zwingli, and the Baptists, by Katharina Schütz Zell" *Zwingliana* [Online], Volume 19 Number 1 (1 January 2010) (Accessed March 18, 2017): 251

¹³⁷ Katharina Schütz Zell, "To Caspar Schwenckfeld," in *Church Mother: the writings of a Protestant reformer in sixteenth century Germany*, ed. and trans. Elsie Anne McKee (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006), 192.

will do: I will demonstrate my love and service everywhere to whoever seeks it, but I will not give myself as a prisoner to anyone.”¹³⁸ The second-generation Lutheran preachers claimed that Katharina shamed her husband by consorting with non-Lutheran Protestants. She counters their claim by noting that Matthew was well aware of the books she read and her correspondences. During his life, he did not stop her from reading Schwenckfeld’s works or corresponding with him on religious matters. For Katharina and Matthew, the Holy Scriptures were key to the foundation of their faith: “I have also never had anything secret or hidden from my dear husband, especially in spiritual matters; for we always had, for the most part a like understanding and judgment in the Holy Scriptures...”¹³⁹ Katharina defends her inclusive values and beliefs from the criticisms and attacks with recollections of her and Matthew’s partnership.

Answering Lutheran complaints, Katharina criticizes Ludwig Rabus for not upholding Matthew’s legacy. She accuses him of lacking hospitality and compassion, thereby shaming his predecessor:

Matthew Zell, who loved and sheltered pilgrims who had been driven out of their homes, who was a comforter and protector of the innocent – he never practiced the pastoral office as you do! You ate out of his plate, received his teaching and work, but now you trample him in the ground. The words of his teaching and confession in the breaking of bread you have thrown out, and those people whom he loved and never hated or scolded you now condemn so terribly and revile and abuse so slanderously....¹⁴⁰

Katharina describes Rabus’ disregard for Matthew’s legacy of hospitality, love, and compassion as no less than traitorous and a betrayal to the memory of his mentor. Casting Rabus into a Judas-like role, she highlights Matthew’s compassion as a Christ-like quality. Katharina is appalled that Rabus’ teachings would stray so far from Matthew’s. She shunned Rabus after his

¹³⁸ Ibid., 192.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 193.

¹⁴⁰ Katharina Schütz Zell, “To Caspar Schwenckfeld,” 199-200.

betrayal of her own motherly generosity and hospitality. Katharina's withdrawal led to harsh criticisms. Addressing Lutheran complaints, Katharina reasserts herself a protector of Matthew's legacy.

Critics among Schwenckfeld's followers questioned and attacked Katharina's spiritual commitment. For Schwenckfeldians, commitment to Christ and salvation was an internal process without need of external institutions.¹⁴¹ Claiming their spiritualist interpretations as "true teachings," they conflicted with Katharina, who believed the only true teaching was the Gospel. Refusing to appease her critics, Katharina declares she will only submit to God's truth, which is based in Scripture, not in differing protestant confessions:

But considering that I must appropriately be submissive under the man's office, according to the teaching of St. Paul, I myself seek to hear others and be exhorted as far as they speak the truth! But where that is not so, then I would tell you and not keep silent, but speak, point out, and answer your wrong preaching and insulting words about the innocent.¹⁴²

In this passage, Katharina strays from apostle Paul's instructions to the Corinthians, which claim that women should be silent in church meetings regardless of the circumstance.¹⁴³ Her need to speak God's truth supersedes social norms; as a member of the priesthood of all believers, if truth is not spoken then she must speak. Although she claims Scripture as the sole authority for truth and life, she refuses to follow the teachings of apostle Paul from Scripture when they hinder her from speaking God's truth. Katharina shares her faith with believers, despite restrictions placed on her gender. She finds truth in God's Word and teachings, which outweigh the

¹⁴¹ William Klassen and Peter C. Erb. "Schwenckfeld, Caspar von (1489-1561)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1989, accessed February 14, 2017, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Schwenckfeld,_Caspar_von_\(1489-1561\)](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Schwenckfeld,_Caspar_von_(1489-1561)).

¹⁴² Katharina Schütz Zell, "To Caspar Schwenckfeld", 196-197.

¹⁴³ 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.

confessions claiming to be the true side. Katharina is willing to confess her faith in God over a specific Protestant confession:

Now further, they say that I will not side with the truth on the right side, that is, I cannot and will not spin to suit everyone- although the one who says this does not himself act in all things in right faith and judgment of love. God allows me daily to see so much! Because of that I thank Him and will not allow anyone to bind me. Nor will I, without foundation and the understanding of my heart, copy them like a monkey putting on shoes or like a child copying the mother in praying the “Our Father in Heaven” who still knows only the earthly father.¹⁴⁴

Katharina chooses to follow God’s will in her life over the confessions. She compares the followers of Schwenckfeld to mimicking monkeys and children. In her comparison, Katharina states that she will not follow the second-generation reformers. Her religious conviction to follow God’s will is too strong to be confined to a specific doctrine. In her widowhood and old age, she finds freedom in her faith and rejects a confessional straitjacket. Katharina criticizes blind followers who attack her for her early protestant beliefs and values.

In her *Letter to Caspar Schwenckfeld*, Katharina Schütz Zell opposes second-generation reformers who no longer treasure her values of Christian love, compassion, and service. Dedicated to Matthew’s legacy, she continues to care for fellow believers. Caught between different confessions, she chooses to side with God’s truth through Scripture. Katharina upholds her early protestant beliefs amidst pressures from second-generation reformers.

¹⁴⁴ Katharina Schütz Zell, “To Caspar Schwenckfeld”, 204.

A Letter to the Whole Citizenship of the City of Strasbourg from Katharina Zell, Widow of the
(Now Blessed) Matthew Zell, the Former and First Preacher of the Gospel in this City,
Concerning Mr. Ludwig Rabus, now a Preacher of the City of Ulm, together with two Letters:
hers and his. May Many Read these and Judge without Favor or Hate but Alone take to Heart
the Truth. Also a Healthy Answer to each Article of his Letter.

Katharina Schütz Zell argued with Ludwig Rabus about his responsibilities for Matthew's parish and legacy. In 1556, Ludwig Rabus left his position in Strasbourg to become the superintendent and pastor of the church in Ulm. However, Rabus did not inform the city of Strasbourg, his employer, of his departure. His parishioners and the city viewed Rabus' move to Ulm as abandonment of his post. Rabus stated differing reasons for his departure. One reason, which was given to Ulm, was that he needed "a change of scene for health reasons."¹⁴⁵ The other reason, which Rabus gave to Strasbourg, was that "his primary concern was to seek a place where the government did not tolerate Roman Catholic worship."¹⁴⁶ Despite the city of Strasbourg's attempts to keep Rabus as one of their parish pastors, he moved his family to Ulm in 1557. Although Katharina and Rabus had become distant acquaintances of each other since her letter to Caspar Schwenckfeld, she felt compelled to resume their correspondence in light of his recent departure. According to McKee, Katharina "sent her former foster son a very pained letter, asking him to explain and justify his action."¹⁴⁷ In this letter, she called into question his motives for moving to Ulm. She claimed ambition as a primary motive. Her letter received a

¹⁴⁵ McKee, *Church Mother*, 216.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 217.

sharp response from Rabus. In his harsh reply, Rabus called Katharina “an apostate and heretic, a false witness, and one inspired by the devil, who had caused trouble for the church and her husband from the beginning.”¹⁴⁸ His short response accused Katharina of heresy and was a “blanket denial of any wrongdoing” by Rabus. Rabus called Katharina a fool and told her not to contact him again: “From now on leave me alone with your lying and slanderous writing. If you think this letter is too harsh, remember that one must answer the fool as he deserves.”¹⁴⁹ Katharina retaliated by publishing their entire correspondence for the whole church community to read.

As a foreword to the publication, she wrote a separate letter to the citizens of Strasbourg. In this *Letter to the Whole Citizenship of the city of Strasbourg*, Katharina writes an autobiographical defense of her work as a reformer. She uses several designations, including those from Matthew, to highlight the different aspects of her faith life. After being called a fool, Katharina defends her character, religious knowledge, and actions. She emphasizes her role as a reformer during the two generations of reform and criticizes Rabus and the second-generation reformers.

Katharina claims eight designations to define her spiritual journey and describe her work as a first-generation reformer: “wedded companion,” “assistant minister,” “mother of the poor and exiled,” “Matthew’s rib,” “fellow worker,” “fisher of people,” “church mother,” and “her identification with Anna.”¹⁵⁰ Each appellation defines a part of Katharina’s life. Matthew’s designations describe her early involvement in the reform movement:

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 219.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 234.

¹⁵⁰ McKee, *Church Mother*, 221.

I have dealt faithfully according to the measure of my understanding and the graces given to me without deception, and I have earnestly sought what is of the Lord Jesus. So when I was still young all the parish priests and those related to the church loved and feared me. Therefore also my devout husband Matthew Zell, at the beginning of his preaching of the Gospel, sought me as his wedded companion. I was also a faithful help to him in his office and household management, to the honor of Christ, who will also bear witness to this before all believers and unbelievers on the great day of His judgment, when all will be revealed.¹⁵¹

Katharina suggests that at a young age, she was drawn into a religious, devout life. The love and fear of parish priests implies Katharina had strong religious convictions at a young age. Her powerful faith stems from her yearning for spiritual truth and knowledge, which she satisfied through lifelong learning. When she married Matthew Zell, she embraced her first two appellations, “wedded companion” and “assistant minister.” Katharina implicitly references her role as “mother of the afflicted,” when she states that she showed compassion and hospitality to fellow protestants.

Her designations “Matthew’s Rib” and “fellow worker” reflect her closeness to the first generation of reformers. As part of “Matthew’s Rib”, she is an extension of her husband in his parish. She parallels Eve, created from Adam’s rib and designated as Adam’s helper in the Garden of Eden.¹⁵² Thus Katharina justifies assisting Matthew with his ministry as God’s will. “Fellow worker” relates to her camaraderie with fellow first-generation reformers, who visited Matthew in Strasbourg and who, like Zwingli and Schwenckfeld, stayed for weeks with the Zell

¹⁵¹ Katharina Schütz Zell, “A Letter to the Whole Citizenry of the City of Strasbourg from Katharina Zell,” in *Church Mother: the writings of a Protestant reformer in sixteenth century Germany*, ed. and trans. Elsie Anne McKee (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006), 224.

¹⁵² Genesis 2:18-23.

family.¹⁵³ She interacted with many prominent first-generation reformers, including Martin Luther, who sent her a letter praising her faith and her marriage to Matthew:

That God has so richly given you His grace so that you not only personally see and are acquainted with His kingdom, which is concealed from so many people, but also that he has given you such a husband, through whom you daily and unceasingly are better able to learn and hear this....¹⁵⁴

Luther's praise of Katharina came one year after her marriage to Matthew. Her defense of clerical marriage supported many of Luther's arguments in the debate, thus contributing to his high regards.

After Matthew's death, the widowed Katharina became the protector of his legacy and a servant to the people of Strasbourg. She promises to serve Strasbourg until her death:

Meanwhile, then, O Strasbourg, my good husband, who served you for thirty years in the office of preacher, who loved you so much and cared for you so faithfully.... And I also have loved and served you, Strasbourg, from my youth, as I still also do in my old age.... And I seek to serve you until the end, while I am able, and also to defend you with mind and body.¹⁵⁵

She assures the citizenry of Strasbourg that she cares about their salvation and will defend them from false teachings. Katharina builds trust with the people of Strasbourg by reminding them of her partnership with Matthew and his ministry. In addition, she sees herself as a "church mother," who nurtures spiritual growth in the parish through God's love.¹⁵⁶ Katharina uses these designations to continue sharing her faith with the people of Strasbourg.

¹⁵³ McKee, "The Defense of Schwenckfeld, Zwingli, and the Baptists, by Katharina Schütz Zell," 251.

¹⁵⁴ Martin Luther, "To Katharina Zell, from Wittenberg, 17 December 1524," in *Luther on Women*, edited and translated by Susan C. Karant-Nunn and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003), 206-207.

¹⁵⁵ Katharina Schütz Zell, "Letter to the Whole Citizenry," 225-226.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 226.

As an honorable widow, Katharina Schütz Zell relates herself to the widow Anna from Scripture. Anna, a prophet in the temple of Jerusalem, recognized Jesus as the Lord, when he was only a child. She worshipped God day and night in the temple.¹⁵⁷ By taking the role of Anna, Katharina expresses her devotion to God and her community as a calling:

Through His special grace and undeserved love, this Christ called me, a poor woman, to the holy and true knowledge of Him. Yes, from my youth on He drew me to Him, and so it is fitting that I extol and praise His holy name and always speak of His love and goodness... With the holy old Anna in the temple of God, I praise the Lord and speak of His Son Christ to all who wait with me for redemption and the coming of His glorious appearing.¹⁵⁸

Anna also spread the message that the Lord had come, which parallels Katharina's focus on the salvation through grace. Katharina's devotion to God is strong and long lasting.

As a "fisher of people," Katharina aided other believers in their spiritual growth.

Katharina's quest for God's truth led her to answer Christ's call to be a fisher of men: "And I have striven day and night that I might grasp the way of the truth of God, which is Christ the Son of God."¹⁵⁹ Katharina continually sought God's truth and shared it with others, taking on a role similar to the disciples who answered Jesus' call to follow Him. By turning the disciples into fishers of men, He called on them to spread his teachings to others so they, too, might know God.¹⁶⁰ As part of her duty to the citizens of Strasbourg, Katharina shares her designations as proof of her trustworthy authority and faith, which never waiver under the intolerance and criticisms of the second-generation reformers and Rabus.

¹⁵⁷ Luke 2: 36-38.

¹⁵⁸ Katharina Schütz Zell, "Letter to the Whole Citizenry," 223-224.

¹⁵⁹ Katharina Schütz Zell, "Letter to the Whole Citizenry," 227.

¹⁶⁰ Luke 5:9-11.

In addition, Katharina informed the people of Strasbourg of her religious instruction and personal interactions with early reformers, which contribute to her authority. She developed a sense of camaraderie with the first-generation reformers who shared her early protestant beliefs:

I must show how in my younger days I was so dear to the fine old learned men and architects of the church of Christ.... They never withheld from me their conversation about holy matters and they gladly heard mine. I devoted myself to that conversation about holy matters and gave no place to any worldly foolishness. Since I was waiting for the kingdom of God, my desire, longing, and joy was always only to speak of and be busy with these same things. Therefore also the dear saintly men sought my company and took pleasure in it- to God be all the glory.¹⁶¹

Referring to her younger days at the beginning of the reform movement, Katharina elaborates on how her relationships with the first-generation reformers cultivated her devotion to the authority of Scripture, as well as her rejection of worldliness in her search for God's truth. These men had a profound impact on Schütz Zell, as they inspired her to learn more about God and his kingdom. They encouraged her religious learning with conversations about the Protestant reform movement and Scripture. Her religious foundation was set in a thorough understanding of first-generation beliefs and Christian values.

In her old age, Katharina Schütz Zell conflicted with second-generation reformer Ludwig Rabus over her values and beliefs. She states that Rabus had disregarded her hospitality and compassion:

Now, however, in my old age, this is all forgotten and disregarded by these clergy, as well as all the honor, faithfulness, love, and motherly heart that I have shown to them themselves. Yes it is not only forgotten but reckoned as disgrace and outrage, although not by all, but only by some, and namely one....¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Katharina Schütz Zell, "Letter to the Whole Citizenry," 228.

¹⁶² Katharina Schütz Zell, "Letter to the Whole Citizenry," 228.

In her opinion, Rabus disrespected her and her husband's legacy by disregarding their Christian values of love, compassion, and service. In addition, Rabus used nasty, angry language to attack Katharina: "Your heathen, unchristian, stinking, lying letter reached me on April 16, Good Friday, when I was busy and much laden with preaching.... Your letter was produced not from the Spirit of God, who is a Spirit of truth, but from the devil's spirit, who was a liar from the beginning."¹⁶³ In response, Katharina defends her character and faith and shows the people of Strasbourg Rabus' true nature:

Now, dear Strasbourg, read this letter that Mr. Ludwig Rabus sent to me and judge without any favor and ill humor toward him or me. If I am owed this and have behaved as he describes, then I will gladly bear my punishment.... I am also assured in my heart that I stand before my Lord Christ and His heavenly Father in a fitting way through the power of His Spirit; I stand before Him through the great and high merit of Christ in whom I believe, who also will bring to light this wicked letter or witness by Mr. Ludwig (which lies about me) on the great day of His glorious appearance.¹⁶⁴

Katharina remains confident in her devotion to God and her values. Although she states that God is the ultimate judge of her faithfulness, she puts her correspondence with Ludwig in front of the citizens of Strasbourg, so that they may also judge the matter. By defending her purity of faith against Rabus' accusations, Katharina proves the strength of her religious convictions when faced with criticism.

In her *Letter to the Citizenship*, Katharina defends her character with her religious knowledge and involvement in the reform movement. She describes her authority in faith with eight designations, which define her role as a reformer. While reflecting on the first generation,

¹⁶³ Ludwig Rabus, "Letter of Ludwig Rabus to Katharina Schütz Zell (April, 1557)" in *Church Mother: the writings of a Protestant reformer in sixteenth century Germany*, ed. and trans. Elsie Anne McKee (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006), 233.

¹⁶⁴ Katharina Schütz Zell, "Letter to the Whole Citizenry," 231.

she informs the citizens of her religious instruction and camaraderie with early reformers. After conflicting with Rabus, she shares all with the people Strasbourg to prove her faithfulness.

The Miserere Psalm Meditated, Prayed, and Paraphrased with King David by Katharina Zell, the Blessed Matthew Zell's Widow, together with the Our Father with its Explanation, Sent to the Christian Man Sir Felix Armbruster for Comfort in his Illness, and Published for the Sake of Afflicted Consciences that are Troubled by Sins. Some Sayings from the Psalms and Prophets.

In 1558, four years before her death, Katharina Schütz Zell's last publication was printed. It was a devotional book in which she shared her reflections on the Lord's Prayer and the Psalms. She addressed it to Sir Felix Armbruster, a former member of Strasbourg's government afflicted with leprosy. After falling ill in the early 1550s, Armbruster lived isolated from his family and community. Only Katharina ministered to him, and in her old age her visits were increasingly infrequent. Her devotional provided material to comfort and fortify his faith. It was "a source of comfort for troubled souls."¹⁶⁵ Katharina published her devotional book for afflicted people in Strasbourg. Although its contents were considered relatively non-controversial, her devotional was printed with no place or publisher listed and never re-published, due to Katharina's personal controversial status.

Katharina Schütz Zell's final publication was reminiscent of her first writings, which shows the continuity of her thinking and teaching. It taught her values and beliefs rather than defended her work against criticism. Each Christian value presented in her writing revisits

¹⁶⁵ McKee, *Church Mother*, 124.

themes from her first-generation works. Compassion was the motive behind her dedication to Sir Felix Armbruster. Through her discussion of God's fatherly love, she argued believers should reciprocate His love by serving God and others. Katharina provided comfort to the afflicted through her words.

Moved by compassion, Katharina visited Sir Felix in his home to help him find comfort in his faith:

I have been moved to visit you at home in your long and now endless, very distressing illness. You received my visits with great thanks, comfort, and joy, and I promised to visit you now and again. However, although I cannot come to you as much as I would gladly do because of my poor, indeed pitiful sick boy, for whom God has laid on me great labor, still I am always with you in heart. And I pray God to dwell with you...¹⁶⁶

Katharina acknowledges how her visits have helped Armbruster during his illness. She informs him her visits will be less frequent because she has to take care of her sick nephew. Her old age and additional responsibility do not keep her from sharing her faith. Her compassion and love for Sir Felix Armbruster, an afflicted child of God, motivate her publication of her devotional book.

Katharina reassures Sir Felix Armbruster and others of God's love. God, the heavenly Father, loves each of his children and aids them in their need. Katharina encourages her fellow believers to take comfort in God's love, and trust He will answer their prayers: "Thus, being comforted and happy, we should pray and call out, "Our Father in heaven...", for He loves us and knows what we need before we ask... Pray with confidence and faith as a child calls on his father, so He cannot and will not turn his countenance away from you."¹⁶⁷ Trust in God and He

¹⁶⁶ McKee, *Church Mother*, 131.

¹⁶⁷ Katharina Schütz Zell, "The Miserere Psalm Meditated, Prayed, and Paraphrased with King David by Katharina Zell..., Sent to the Christian Man Sir Felix Armbruster," in *Church*

will provide for you. In times of personal distress, Katharina trusted God's will in her life. Her trust in God's fatherly love strengthened her faith, and she responded by sharing His love and serving others.

Publishing her private meditations on the Psalms and the Lord's Prayer is an example of Katharina serving others in her old age. An extension of herself, Katharina's devotional provides comfort and encouragement in her absence: "So I sought in my reflections some way to be present with you to comfort and in part to help bear your cross—spiritually if not physically—or to lighten it with as much spiritual comfort as God as given to me when, in my need, He has also admonished and comforted me about my acts."¹⁶⁸ Although specifically addressing Armbruster, her publication provided comfort and encouragement to all who read it.

In serving others, Katharina served God and His will. In her reflections, she shares her views on serving others in faith. Serving others with a pure heart pleases God:

Then everything: all honor and service to You and to the neighbor, when it comes out of such a purified heart (purified by You), will please You. Then You would continuously teach me Your justice so that I might offer You the complete sacrifice of all my inward strength and thoughts, all my outward deeds, what I do and do not do: yes, body, soul, and spirit.¹⁶⁹

Katharina praised God as she served Him and her neighbors. Christ is the ultimate example of serving others with a pure heart. In response to Christ's selfless sacrifice, Katharina urges her fellow believers to serve each other in their faith:

As Christ gave up Himself on the cross to pay for us and wagered His soul in death for us, so also may we offer ourselves for all people and brothers, Your disciples, our brothers and sisters, in their accidents, exile, poverty, sickness, and all need: to stand by

Mother: the writings of a Protestant reformer in sixteenth century Germany, ed. and trans. Elsie Anne McKee (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006), 155.

¹⁶⁸ Katharina Schütz Zell, "The Miserere Psalm," McKee, *Church Mother*, 133.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 144.

them, to counsel and help them in the face of sin, poverty, exile, and all affliction, with our goods, honor, body, and life.¹⁷⁰

For Katharina serving others is a response to Christ's sacrifice and a form of praise to God.

Caring for God's kingdom and His children is part of being a follower of Christ. Throughout her life, Katharina continually served God by serving others.

During the turmoil of the second generation of reform, Katharina Schütz Zell remained true to the Protestant values and beliefs, which she accepted and professed during the first generation of the reform movement. In particular, she continued to see herself as the teacher, a member of the priesthood of all believers, who served with love and compassion. However, these beliefs and values conflicted with those of the second generation of reformers. Given the turbulent times, they pragmatically no longer emphasized the priesthood of all believers and criticized those who did.

In her publications, Katharina defended herself against the harsh criticisms from the second-generation reformers. Using eight designations, she showed the development of her faith and values. She remained confident of God's will and His love and faithful to her calling. For forty years, and during two generations of the reform movement, she provided continuity to the people of Strasbourg through her unwavering faith and her loving, compassionate service.

¹⁷⁰ McKee, *Church Mother*, 166.

CONCLUSION

Katharina Schütz Zell established herself as a reformer, who dedicated her life to serving God through Christ with love and compassion, while sharing her beliefs and values with the people of Strasbourg. At an early age, Katharina committed herself to a life of faith. Strong religious convictions led her to embrace early protestant beliefs: salvation by faith and grace, the sole authority of Scripture, and the priesthood of all believers. Strengthened by her beliefs and ongoing religious studies, she ministered God's Word to the people of Strasbourg and lived by the Christian values of love, compassion, and service. The presence of the Protestant Reformation in Strasbourg gave Katharina ample opportunities to become a reformer. As the reform movement flourished in the free imperial city, perceived religious tolerance attracted many Protestants. Strasbourg provided a venue to share the new faith. As a member of the priesthood of all believers, Katharina grew in her faith and gained knowledge through personal study of the Scripture. Katharina Schütz Zell served God by teaching other believers about His love and grace.

The seven documents analyzed in this study reflect Katharina's development as a reformer. Three documents written during the first generation of reform established her early protestant beliefs and values. The next set of documents establish that she never abandoned these beliefs and values, but continued to share them into her old age, notwithstanding the turmoil and the pressure exerted on her by second-generation reformers. In the latter writings, Katharina defends her involvement in the reform movement and her authority as a reformer.

As the field of women's history grows, the study of women during the Reformation will continue to analyze women's participation in the reform movement, the impact of the movement on women, and perceptions of early modern women. Studies of individual women, such as Elsie

Anne McKee's work on Katharina Schütz Zell, provide insight into female experiences and thoughts about the reform movement. Most individual women left little evidence of their early modern lives, so historians analyze information from other sources and disciplines, such as art, music, and studies in cultural anthropology. Broader studies have emerged from the research on women in the early modern period. These studies focus on the impact of the Reformation on women and social perceptions of early modern men and women. Using historical manuscripts and other resources, these studies allow us to better comprehend complex social roles. In addition, the study of gender and perceptions of masculinity and femininity contributes to our understanding of male and female experiences in early modern Europe. Each woman experienced life and faith differently. New information and analysis will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on women and the sixteenth century reform movement. Placing women into the overall narrative of the Reformation adds an important dimension to our understanding of the role of religion and development of personal faith in the sixteenth century.

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