

# *Luther's Marriage in its Theological Setting*

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## Abstract

*Luther's marriage took some of the Reformer's companions by surprise. Indeed, Luther had for a long time attempted to get Katharina married to someone else, but this did not work out. The Reformer's own resistance to marriage might have been overcome through his parents' influence. Luther drew his foremost understanding of marriage, as a remedy against sin, from Peter Lombard's Sentences, thus demonstrating that the Lutheran theology of marriage was more a transformation of medieval thought than a break from it. The marriage of a monk and a nun caused an uproar and was an example of Luther's new understanding of Christianity.*

The year 2025 includes several 500-year anniversaries of Reformation events. Of course, the Peasants' War should receive a good deal of attention. The debate with Erasmus over free will should rightly draw some analysis by theologians as well. However, we must not forget June 13, 1525. This is the day when Luther was married to Katharina von Bora, who had left the monastery of Nimbschen scarcely two years before. The following essay will report only enough of this familiar story to add nuance to the traditional accounts. A look at its place in Luther's biography may add perspective on his personal development, in particular his relationship with his father. As the bridegroom was a theologian, we will also look at his theology of marriage, and uncover ties to the Middle Ages that are sometimes overlooked. Of course, the marriage of a monk and a nun was provocative, so we will end with a look at polemical reactions to the event.

## *An Untimely Wedding*

Katharina was no doubt an unusually self-confident woman in her time. However, we should not give her too much credit as if she herself had directly arranged the marriage.<sup>1</sup> We know that she had fallen deeply in love with Hieronymus Baumgärtner. Later, when he wrote

letters to Baumgärtner in 1530 and 1541, Luther still called him Katherina's "old flame."<sup>2</sup> This was more than gentle teasing by an old man. Already when Katharina and Baumgärtner were apparently engaged and Baumgärtner began hedging, Luther admonished the Nuremberg patrician on October 12, 1524: "After all, if you want to keep your Ketha von Bora, hurry up and act before she will be given to someone else who is at hand. She hasn't yet overcome her love for you."<sup>3</sup> The timing is interesting here. When Katharina, according to her counselor and protector and later husband, still was in love with Baumgärtner, a decisive talk occurred that *seems* to show Katharina's powerful and self-determined path to her marriage with Martin Luther.

In September of 1524,<sup>4</sup> Katharina met with Nicholas von Amsdorf with concerns about her marriage, that is, if we can trust a relatively late account.<sup>5</sup> At this time, Luther was trying to match her to Kaspar Glatz, the pastor who served the Orlamünde congregation in place of Andreas Karlstadt after the latter's expulsion from Saxony. Katharina defied this attempt, and Amsdorf was supposed to help her. It appears that Luther's later remark was correct, that Katharina was still in love with Baumgärtner and resistant to any other liaison. When he wrote to Baumgärtner only a few weeks later, he understood that Katharina was sticking with Baumgärtner, and that she not only did not want Glatz as her spouse but also denied any other suitor except the young man from Nuremberg. Taking the later "Lutherin" seriously, we have to conclude that whatever she said to Amsdorf about potential husbands, including Luther, it was not meant as a real plan to be fulfilled.

The general assumption that Katharina was not inclined to marry anyone sheds light on what she said to Amsdorf, which under other circumstances could be read as an indication that she aimed to marry Luther. According to Amsdorf's report, Katharina, upset about the Reformer's attempt to marry her to Glatz, vowed that she "rather wanted (if ever possible and God's will) to take him (Doctor Martin) or Lord Amsdorf as her spouse."<sup>6</sup> Katharina did not launch her marital plans for Martin Luther here but rather spoke of something seemingly impossible.<sup>7</sup> As the Doctor himself would note, her heart belonged to Baumgärtner. She played high stakes just to clarify that

she would never think of any possible spouse except Hieronymus Baumgärtner in Nuremberg.

As we know, the impossible became real. This is no proof, however, that we must imagine Katharina angling for Luther in that dialogue. That would have been an awkward courting, for she mentioned two names, one of them the person she was talking to at the moment. Neither is it likely that she wanted Amsdorf to feel romanced by her nor can we imagine that he was supposed to carry a message of love to someone mentioned in the same breath with himself. Luther was even less a possible candidate, as he was still clearly a monk, an Augustinian friar. Hence, none of the interpretations that take Katharina's word as a genuine expression of her affirmative desires makes sense. Rather, the opposite seems to be the case. As neither Amsdorf nor Luther could possibly be a suitable candidate for marriage, she would marry Baumgärtner, or no one. The plan failed. Baumgärtner's family did not agree with him marrying a runaway from the monastery.<sup>8</sup> And Katharina did not conclude her life unmarried but would enjoy two decades of marriage filled with love and joy, and, above all, respect.

The path to the wedding in June of 1525 still was not completely open. Not only was Katharina's heart bound to Baumgärtner, but Luther's heart still was bound to his monastic existence. We should not forget that Martin Luther at this time was very palpably a monk, as Wolf-Friedrich Schäufele has shown.<sup>9</sup> As late as in May of 1524, he began reflecting about putting off his monastic habit.<sup>10</sup> The issue arose when he was talking about priests and monks getting married, so that we have a clear context here that relates these reflections to later actions. We know from Spalatin's *Chronicle* when and how Luther removed his monastic garments, namely, in October of 1524. "Dr. Martin Luther preached without the cowl in Wittenberg on Sunday after St. Francis. On Gallus Sunday, before lunch, he came again to the fore in his cowl for his sermon, but after lunch, he preached without a cowl."<sup>11</sup>

Some moments of change come by surprise. Lunch time makes the difference here, but it is hard to believe that the decision was related to the meal in any way. In particular with respect to the back and forth in Luther's decision, and the relation to his earlier

letter to Spalatin, we might assume that the moment when he finally doffed his traditional monastic clothing after almost twenty years came about out of a mixture of sudden decision, second thoughts, and simple chance. The time period in which this happened, however, is interesting. October of 1524 appears to be the time when Luther's general musings about leaving the monastery and becoming married grew more concrete. By the end of November, Luther received a letter from Argula von Grumbach, encouraging him to get married.<sup>12</sup> He distinctively denied that he was on the lookout for love: "My mind is remote from marriage," he argued, because he had to expect death from his persecutors every day.<sup>13</sup> Frankly, he admitted that he felt his flesh and sex,<sup>14</sup> which indicates that not only his theology of sexuality had changed but his way to deal with it as well. This is the same Luther who only a few years later would shyly admit that he never felt lust as a monk and only sometimes experienced a nocturnal emission unwittingly.<sup>15</sup>

Now, there was no sense of lust, even if not yet on the path to fulfillment, neither in general nor with respect to a particular woman, let alone Katharina von Bora.<sup>16</sup> However, with a bit of psychological speculation, we might find a relationship with her. The two Sundays mentioned in Spalatin's *Chronicle* as the time when Luther first removed his monastic garb cover the week from October 9 to October 16. Wednesday of that week was the day Luther wrote to Baumgärtner about Katharina. She was on his mind at this time, even if in the sense of someone whom he with all honesty tried to match with someone else, following her wishes.

Collecting all that we have seen so far, in late summer and fall of 1524 the way for Katharina opened up to marry someone other than Baumgärtner, even if against her wishes. At the same time, Luther, even if upholding his fierce defiance of any marriage, ended two decades under his monastic vow. This means that a way to marriage was open to him as well, and people around him like Argula von Grumbach noted the new possibilities. Not that Katharina had serious thoughts about marrying Luther, nor he about marrying her. There was only an abstract possibility, expressed in tentative and general words by Katharina and far from reality in the eyes of both involved.

This was not the beginning of a love story, but it ended up with them getting engaged only half a year later. Still, their route was a rocky one. Luther began playing with options. In April of 1525, he wrote a letter to Spalatin, in which he boasted to have sent away two women who aspired to marry him, still having another one on his left arm.<sup>17</sup> The two brides presumably went by the same name, Ave.<sup>18</sup> Luther would call Ave Alemann his former fiancée only half a year after his marriage,<sup>19</sup> and when he sneered about Katharina in a table talk in the late thirties, he would mention that initially he had preferred Ave von Schönfeld over his later wife from the group of nuns escaped from Nimbschen.<sup>20</sup> The third woman here might be his Käthe. The way he is introducing her is a bit crude, as the relation of marriage to the left arm usually indicates a concubinate.<sup>21</sup> This is a disrespectful remark, to say the least. The entire passage, though, seems to be a collection of puns rather than a reference to actual events in Luther's life. It does indicate that Luther thought a lot about marrying at this time, merely two months before his wedding, and yet he was not clear about Käthe as his future wife. Instead, the now former monk called himself one "whose mind is furthest from marriage" (*alienissimo animo a conigio*).<sup>22</sup>

Then, in only a few weeks, something momentous must have happened. On May 4 or 5, Luther sent a letter to Johann Rühel, a counselor in the county of Mansfeld, indicating that he would marry Katharina: "To defy him [the devil], I will take my Käthe in marriage."<sup>23</sup> There is no indication of making plans here, but rather a steadfast resolve. What happened appears to be a visit with his parents. On the same day that he wrote to Spalatin about refusing any attempt to marry, he departed from Wittenberg together with his colleague Melanchthon.<sup>24</sup> The destination was Eisleben. They visited with the Count of Mansfeld, but Luther could also seek out his parents' home there to see his mother and father.<sup>25</sup> Their role in Luther's decision was pivotal, as we will see. For now, it is enough to note that Luther, together with Katharina, was on the way to marriage. Martin Brecht is right to conclude that the Reformer did not expect the Peasants' War to reach Thuringia by the middle of April.<sup>26</sup> His resolve to marry was not related to these events in any way. However, the growing violence influenced the quick implementation.

The brief engagement period would see Luther writing not only his *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants*<sup>27</sup> but also his *Terrifying Story of Thomas Müntzer and God's Judgment upon Him*, composed before Luther knew of Müntzer's death on May 27.<sup>28</sup> Even Melanchthon thought some might view it as inappropriate to celebrate a wedding in an "unauspicious time" (*infelici tempore*) like this, when Luther should focus more on the fate of the nation than on his private life.<sup>29</sup> Conversely, Luther would argue that "Müntzer and the peasants" (*munzer et rustici*), by oppressing the gospel, made new action necessary, meaning marrying a former nun.<sup>30</sup>

However, Melanchthon, as he notes, was not included by Luther in his plans, who "had not spoken to any friend about this event in advance."<sup>31</sup> We do not even know when they agreed to their plans. Heinrich Boehmer had good reasons to surmise that Luther's letter to Spalatin of June 10 indicates that he and his future spouse were on the edge of taking the plunge.<sup>32</sup> He talks about people who slow-walk their decision to marry, and fiercely invokes reasons from ancient literature, the Bible, and proverbs.<sup>33</sup> This sounds like good advice. It also sounds like someone preaching to himself. This may indeed, as Boehmer concluded, indicate that Luther knew of Katharina's consent. It was very late as there were only three days left to the ceremony.

Officially, they got engaged on the same day they also would consummate their marriage. The witnesses appear to have been caught by surprise, as the pastor was. As Melanchthon, who was not present that evening, reports, Lucas Cranach,<sup>34</sup> the lawyer Johannes Apel, and Bugenhagen joined Luther for dinner on June 13, 1525, when Luther started the nuptials. Right in the sentence before, Melanchthon said that none of the friends got notice of Luther's plans. Either the three were exceptions to this rule, together with Justus Jonas who also was in Luther's house that evening,<sup>35</sup> or they were as surprised as the others were. Even Spalatin with whom Luther wrote so much about his marital plans, only received word from Justus Jonas the next day.<sup>36</sup> The wedding followed immediately after the betrothal, and we must use the word "copulation" for this situation.<sup>37</sup> Part of the medieval rite was the consummation of a marriage, and this had to take place in public. Not that sexual intercourse always happened. In many cases, this event had turned into a symbolic act.<sup>38</sup> There are

multiple ways to understand Justus Jonas when he frankly tells Spalatin: "I witnessed the bridegroom laying in his conjugal bed."<sup>39</sup> This might have been merely a symbolic staging. It can have been more, however, when we reflect on Luther's testimony. In a letter to invite some friends to the more festive ceremonies of his wedding, Luther said two days later that he consummated his marriage with Katharina, "for this should not be forestalled."<sup>40</sup> Still, we cannot rule out a purely symbolic meaning. Ruth Tucker might be right that "Luther wanted the proof of consummation to be heralded abroad."<sup>41</sup> The bottom line of these observations is that we have some reason to assume that Luther's wedding not only took his friends by surprise, but also gave him the completely new experience of sexuality: a meaningful moment in the life of a former friar, as we will elaborate a bit more in the second part of this essay.

For now, it is enough to conclude the story of the wedding. Public orders demanded a twofold celebration. A marital service in the parish church was mandatory, but only to celebrate the wedding itself that had already happened outside the church, preferably in front of its portals, but in Luther's case, as we have seen already, in his home.<sup>42</sup> A festive banquet would follow.<sup>43</sup> When browsing Luther's letters for this ceremony on June 27,<sup>44</sup> we might be surprised (or not) that he made much more of the meal than of the worship. So much had to be organized. He needed venison for the meal and hoped to receive it from Spalatin<sup>45</sup> by the help of an influential friend,<sup>46</sup> Hofmarschall Hans von Dolzig.<sup>47</sup> In the end, the meat arrived in Wittenberg, brought there by an envoy on a horse.<sup>48</sup> Of course, beer from Torgau might have played a role.<sup>49</sup> Luther's obsession with the food does not mean that nothing happened in the church. When he speaks of a *pompa* in a letter to Spalatin,<sup>50</sup> he clearly indicated the procession from the couple's house to the church and back. His wedding, as any wedding in this time, was a public event. The public was broader in his case, however. All Germany thought and debated what happened in Wittenberg in June of 1525. They had reasons to do so, because this marriage was more than a private event. It was a public demonstration of Luther's theology, and a high point of his biography so far. Luther married, "to confirm in fact what I have taught," as he wrote to Amsdorf.<sup>51</sup>

### *The Biographical Setting*

As we mentioned above, Luther's change from resistance against marriage to courting Katharina officially came right at the time when he visited his parents. We learned that Luther first mentioned her name to Johann Rühel when his Wittenberg friends still had not noticed the growing liaison. Rühel, a counselor of the Count of Mansfeld in Eisleben, was so close to the Reformer's family that Luther invited him to come to his wedding "together with my beloved father and mother,"<sup>52</sup> and he even called him his "*Schwager*,"<sup>53</sup> a word usually reserved for the brother-in-law. In Eisleben, as we said, something momentous happened. The disclosure of Katharina's name was part of the event. The most important aspect was that Hans Luther, the Reformer's father, urged his son to agree to marry. Luther noted that doing so, he followed his father's desire.<sup>54</sup>

We have to exercise caution when dealing with Luther's *Table Talks*, but one text provides a clue as to what happened here. Recalling his entry into the monastery in Erfurt, he said (according to the collection of Dietrich and Nikolaus Medler):

Furthermore, when the father was invited by the son to the first mass, and he was asked during the feast how he liked the event, the father answered: "Don't you know that it has been said: 'Honor your father and your mother?'" When he later left the monastery, how excited the father was and he convinced the son to take a wife.<sup>55</sup>

In a few brief lines, Luther, or the reporters of the *Table Talk*, link his later decision to marry to his former disobedience to his father. We do not need to repeat the long and grim story about the conflict between the two around Luther entering the monastery. It is well known that the father was deeply disappointed by his son's decision to enter a monastery instead of going down the expected route of a future lawyer. The insulting scene during the celebration of Luther's first mass, as briefly alluded to here, underscored that the father still did not approve of the son's decision but disguised it, at least to a certain degree. Martin Luther grappled during his lifetime with this conflict.

When he was working on his *On Monastic Vows* during his time at the Wartburg, he added a preface in the form of an open letter to his father. His words played with admitting his father's right and yet denying it. The father was right in sticking to God's will, but he did not yet know what that will was. Luther quotes the same dialogue in which his father exhorted him to be obedient to his parents,<sup>56</sup> and he even agreed: "Divine authority is on your side, and human presumption on mine."<sup>57</sup> In the end, however, the father was not right, because he knew as little about God's will as the son knew at that time. The father wished a lawyer's career for his son, and, quite interestingly, he already planned to arrange an affluent marriage for him to prevent him from entering the monastery.<sup>58</sup> Against Hans Luther's background as an up-and-comer in social terms, there might have been some personal interest in his wishes as well, in particular with regard being viewed as "affluent." In any case, he wanted to get his son to marry back then—twenty years before he urged him finally and successfully to get engaged.

God's will for Martin Luther back then was not to follow the parents' will and get married, but rather to undergo all his experience in academia as well as in the monastery to find out what God's will really was.<sup>59</sup> When writing this preface at the Wartburg, Luther still did not think of marriage. Now, in 1525, the time had come to reunite the father's initial will and God's will. Luther needed some detours to understand that the father's will in the end was indeed God's will, and the father needed some detours to understand what God's will was behind his parental wish. Now, the son could follow him, because his father's will and God's will finally coincided. In this sense, the wedding with Katharina was also an event between son and father, and a decisive one. The father's will in 1505 finally came true in 1525.<sup>60</sup>

Of course, it was a decisive moment for a former friar to marry. As noted, he had not had much sexual experience before. A whole new world opened for him, beginning with this strange marital night in public; "make an effort, when I give the feast, to help my bride give a good testimony about what a man I am."<sup>61</sup> This remark follows directly another note in which Luther calls himself "plaited into her braids,"<sup>62</sup> which gives a bodily context and makes the sentence a bit

saucy.<sup>63</sup> This holds even more when we consider that “braids” for Luther appear to have been suggestive of a sexual experience. In a *Table Talk*, he said frankly:

Once someone has been constituted in marriage, he has awkward thoughts in the first year. When he sits at the table, he thinks: look, you were on your own for a while, now you are together. In bed, when one looks around, he sees some braids, which he hasn't seen before.<sup>64</sup>

The entire experience of love, closeness, being together comes through in these words, and while they still are quiet about sexuality, Luther was more outspoken at other opportunities. He played with the German word “*Bahre*,” which means bier in English, and the name of Katharina's noble family Bora, saying: “I am lashed to Kethe and captivated, and I lie on the bier (Bora) as if dead to the world.”<sup>65</sup> As in the earlier letters, we find Luther here surprisingly suggestive. He not only disclosed his preferred sex position, but also compared his erotic experience to death, implying a double sense. First, he seems to come close to the modern understanding of orgasm as “*petit mort* (little death),” an understanding to which Augustine already came quite close.<sup>66</sup> While this might titillate modern readers, more relevant for his time was the second layer of understanding. Dying to the world was the ideal of traditional monastic ethics. The ascetics fled the world. Now Luther, who had left his order, fled the world as well, yet in total contradiction to monastic life. Not entering the monastery but leaving it made him distant to the world. Furthermore, the strongest fleshly experience unbound him from the flesh. While not a sacrament in Luther's view, marriage had theological meaning. Whatever Luther did in the year 1525, whatever he experienced, it resonated deeply with his theological insights into what marriage can be.

### *Theological Frame*

When Luther wrote to Spalatin in June of 1525 that a young couple should not delay their marriage too long, he stated frankly that “temporals are temporals indeed.”<sup>67</sup> This sentence makes us

think of another famous saying, that matrimony is an exterior worldly thing, as he wrote in his treatise *On Marriage Matters* (*Von Ehesachen*) in 1530.<sup>68</sup> Two aspects are important here to understand. First, marriage was entirely subject to the temporal government, as he added.<sup>69</sup> This might explain why he not only in his famous (or infamous) recommendation for Landgrave Philipp of Hesse but also in a thoroughly theological treatise like *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* felt free to argue that bigamy—a male having more than one wife, not the other way around—was not forbidden by divine Law.<sup>70</sup> Luther did not encourage this way of life, but he could grant permission for it in exceptional cases, as he deemed Philipp's case to be. Second, Luther highlighted that matrimony is an “exterior worldly thing.” The juxtaposition of interior and exterior traces as far back as Luther's treatise on *The Freedom of a Christian*, where he distinguishes the interior and the exterior human being.<sup>71</sup> In fact, the roots go even deeper, back to Augustine and even Paul, who used the phrase of the inner man in Romans 7:22, Ephesians 3:16, and, abbreviated, in 2 Corinthians 4:16. As Garreth B. Matthews has shown, Augustine drew from these passages “to refer to only that part of a man which is separable from the body at death, viz., his mind or soul.”<sup>72</sup> The *Theologia Deutsch*, a mystical treatise famously first published by none other than Martin Luther, gave another twist to this couple of words. The anonymous author began his examination with Christ's eyes.<sup>73</sup> The savior had two eyes, he said, the right one looking to eternity, the other looking at creation. These eyes were related, according to this deliberation, to two men, an interior man in Christ, and an exterior. He concludes, “now, man's created soul also has two eyes,” one related to eternity, the other related to what is here on earth. Compared to Augustine's model which interpreted Paul's concept by means of a dichotomous philosophical anthropology, the *Theologia Deutsch* introduced an anthropology of relations. These two sources explain why Luther was far from being clear in his thoughts. While he clearly introduced the distinction of exterior and interior human being by reference to soul and flesh,<sup>74</sup> scholars have long argued that he understood the distinction between exterior and interior rather by relation than

by a dichotomous anthropological structure.<sup>75</sup> Both are true. The first aspect comes from Augustine, the second, which is decisive for Luther, is grounded in his mystical readings.

However, as a result, Luther can define everything whose place is in the exterior and fleshly world as something not relevant for salvation, in contrast to spiritual realities. In *The Freedom of a Christian*, he takes eating and drinking as examples for outward activities that do not affect the soul's salvation.<sup>76</sup> Later, he would use the very same examples to explain the status of matrimony, which is comparable to these acts of digestion when related to eternal glory.<sup>77</sup>

As a worldly thing, however, marriage is joyful and praiseworthy. Let us begin with the joy. Luther not only enjoyed his own desires as he expressed in those almost childish remarks about his early experience of sexual intercourse. He also accepted fleshly desires as a matter of fact in the natural constitution of a human being. No one should be condemned because of their desires and pleasure in others, Luther said in his sermons on the Sermon on the Mount,<sup>78</sup> although he admitted in the same sermon that these thoughts were sinful.<sup>79</sup> Against this background, Luther could even say: "God has created male and female, so that they come together with pleasure and love, with will and with all their heart. Marital love or marital resolve is something natural, planted and given from God."<sup>80</sup>

In Luther's world, both in his theological world and no less in his everyday life, there is room to see sexual desire as conforming with God's will. Some researchers try to emphasize how radical Luther's view on sexuality was.<sup>81</sup> As in many cases, we might choose a more nuanced way to describe Luther's complex relation to the Middle Ages. I prefer to speak of slight transformations rather than of radical newness.<sup>82</sup> Of course, lust, pleasure, and joy were pervasive in medieval lay culture.<sup>83</sup> The idea that clergy and theologians suppressed sexual pleasure does not hold for all of them. Luther's idea that sexuality within the boundaries of marriage was established by God was far from new. As Rüdiger Schnell puts it regarding the twelfth century: "The medieval Church knew that love (*amor*)—understood as sexual desire—is a useful presupposition for marriage and a concomitant that you cannot easily exclude from most marriages."<sup>84</sup>

We will not be surprised that Peter Abelard (1079–1142) was among those theologians who praised carnal love or at least, like Luther, approved of it,<sup>85</sup> by using the same examples as Luther: food and sexuality. Both, he argued, were conceded since creation, which means already in the state of innocence.<sup>86</sup> Of course, he knew the common objection that sexuality, and eating as well, was only allowed in a way that excluded pleasure.<sup>87</sup> Abelard answered frankly that this could never happen.<sup>88</sup> He referred even to 1 Corinthians 7:3 (“The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband”) to underpin that sexuality in itself could not be sinful, even if it again implied pleasure.<sup>89</sup> There cannot be any shameful guilt, he added,

[if] we enjoy something, where we, when it happens, necessarily feel pleasure. An example is a monk, compelled to lie bound in chains among women. He feels pleasure when he touches the smoothness of the bed and the women around, even if he doesn't give consent: Who would dare to call this pleasure that nature evokes guilt?<sup>90</sup>

Abelard was not always an outlier. Even Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274) agreed with him, again using the same combination of examples which we later would see in Luther. As food can be used without sin, when it is used for its reasonable purpose to conserve the human individual, sexual intercourse can be performed “without any sin” (*absque omni peccato*) when it is used for producing progenies,<sup>91</sup> and Thomas even can say that a husband loves his wife “principally because of the carnal conjunction” (*principaliter ratione carnis coniunctionis*).<sup>92</sup>

We can also add a pope to our list, even if he wrote his appraisal before stepping onto the ladder of a clerical career. Peter of Spain (Petrus Hispanus), later elected Pope John XXI (1276–1277), was a universal genius of his time. He was not only the author of one of the most famous treatises on logic,<sup>93</sup> but also a trained doctor.<sup>94</sup> He had to say a lot about sex, which he certainly described as a pleasure, going very much into detail, including caressing the female breast,<sup>95</sup> direct sexual intercourse, and the demand to have the female partner experience an orgasm like the male partner, because this inspires them to perform this “noblest work” (*nobilissimum opus*).<sup>96</sup>

More statements in appreciation of human sexuality from medieval theologians could be added, to say nothing of those from doctors and poets.<sup>97</sup> Of course, none of them spoke about love out of wedlock. Nor did Luther. What we find in Luther's appreciation of fleshly love is more a result of medieval theology than contradicting it. The common reference to the comparison of eating and having sex, that traces back even to Augustine,<sup>98</sup> shows much more commonality than difference. This result might be surprising at first glance. Luther had no reasons to highlight this commonality. Maybe he was not even very aware of it, because his way of approving carnal intercourse as an important basis for marriage came rather through the development of canon law rather than through theology,<sup>99</sup> which also underlines that Luther transformed medieval developments more than he broke with them. We can even argue that he was a bit more conservative<sup>100</sup> than his late-medieval predecessors were in a certain respect,<sup>101</sup> returning to a position that had held sway around 1200, before consent would become the decisive element to constitute matrimony.<sup>102</sup> With respect to secret engagements, where young people consented to marry without their parents' approval, he argued against the Pope who approved the verbal consent on its own as enough to establish a marriage.<sup>103</sup> In general, Luther argued, the father's will should be followed, except in the case where the young spouses had already "sat together" (*zusammengesessen*),<sup>104</sup> which is a euphemistic parallel for sleeping together. Again, this might underline how important sexuality is in Luther's understanding of marriage.

So far, we have dealt with joy in Luther's understanding of matrimony, and we have seen that this was not new when compared to the Middle Ages. Now, as promised, let us look at his praise of matrimony. Again, we have to recognize that marriage was in high esteem in the Middle Ages. Since 1274, matrimony was deemed a sacrament, which underlines even more that it could not be regarded sinful as such. Matrimony was different from other sacraments by constitutional factors, however. While other acts received their sacramental character through the priest's action, for marriage only the priest's presence was needed. The consent of the spouses established

the sacrament: "Consent makes the matrimony," as Gratian's *Decree* held it, following Isidore of Seville.<sup>105</sup> The claim that marriage is ultimately established by consent laid the groundwork for the aforementioned clandestine marriages. And, as we have seen, Luther agreed with the Middle Ages on the consent at least. But, famously, he did not agree that marriage was a sacrament. He could make his argument very short in *The Babylonian Captivity*.<sup>106</sup> There was no single word in scripture to call matrimony a sacrament, he said,<sup>107</sup> pushing aside the possible objection that Ephesians 5:32 reads "*Sacramentum hoc magnum est*" with reference to matrimony. The Council of Florence had taken this as a biblical argument for a sacramental character of matrimony in 1439.<sup>108</sup> However, medieval authors had known of the symbolic meaning as we can see in Aquinas, who even referred this verse to the Eucharist as a symbol of the unity of Christ with his church.<sup>109</sup> For Luther, this was sufficient reason to explain frankly that this verse was not enough to establish matrimony as a sacrament. On the contrary, shortly before writing *The Babylonian Captivity* he disclosed the argument in his *Disputation on Infused and Acquired Faith* that this verse only meant the union between Christ and the church, and *not* the carnal union of male and female, as he might have learned from Erasmus.<sup>110</sup> The lack of biblical evidence had been enough for Luther to deny sacramentality to matrimony. In order to have a more comprehensive argument, he added that both of the two criteria needed to deem something a sacrament were missing in this case. There was neither a promise of salvation through matrimony nor any visible sign instituted by God.<sup>111</sup>

Even if not a sacrament in itself, matrimony came close to the realm of sacramentality for Luther, as we can see in the Order of Marriage for Common Pastors (*Traubüchlein für die einfältigen Pfarrherrn*) of 1529:

Lord God, who hast created man and woman and hast ordained them to matrimony and blessed with the fruits of the womb and therein signified the sacrament of your beloved son Jesus Christ and the Church, his bride, we ask your gratuitous mercy that you would not allow the order and blessing of your creation to be disturbed or destroyed, but rather preserve them mercifully through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.<sup>112</sup>

Of course, matrimony is not deemed a sacrament itself here. Yet it is more than only a worldly, secular thing, so that Luther can even call it *sanctum*, sacred.<sup>113</sup> Luther was not always consistent in his thoughts, including in this case. Catholic theologian Klaus Suppan frankly marks a “discrepancy” (*Zwiespalt*) here,<sup>114</sup> and he seems to be right. We should not attach too much weight to these remarks, however. In sharp contrast to the aforementioned declaration from the medieval church that matrimony is only legitimate in the form of monogamy,<sup>115</sup> Luther used the word *sanctus* also for the matrimonyes of the fathers in the Hebrew Bible,<sup>116</sup> knowing that they lived in bigamy which, as we have seen, was a palatable form of marriage to him. The argument here was different. Luther highlighted that matrimony in the church was not different from marriages in the Old Covenant and even among the Gentiles.<sup>117</sup> Calling it sacred therefore does not mean that it purports any kind of salvation.<sup>118</sup> The reason to call it sacred, as we heard from the *Traubüchlein*, is that matrimony counts among the three orders or estates: church, politics, and economy,<sup>119</sup> which is the household with matrimony at its core.<sup>120</sup> As such, matrimony is not given as a path to beatitude, but rather represents God’s help and support. Before the fall, the purpose of copulation was the propagation of humankind.<sup>121</sup> Obviously, this is still the case. But the sense of matrimony or economy has been changed by the fall. Now matrimony, or, as Luther even says with an asymmetrical masculine twist, the wife is a remedy against sin (*remedium peccati*).<sup>122</sup> We find this blunt expression in Luther’s late lectures on Genesis. Yet the idea was shaped early in his writings. As early as 1519, Luther called matrimony a “hospital for the sick . . . to avoid the fall into deeper sin;”<sup>123</sup> in 1523, he spoke of it as a “medicine” (*ertzney*) against the flesh’s burning.<sup>124</sup> The underlying anthropology thinks of a male driven by sinful lust because of the fall, and, in particular when referring to the understanding of the wife as a remedy, of the female as being an object to fulfill the man’s desire. The basic concept of marriage as shown here is not a symmetrical one, and directly contradicts modern understandings of equitable partnership. Peter of Spain had more to say about female participation in the sexual act than Luther had in his definition of marriage.

Yet Luther did refer to medieval sources. In his lectures on Genesis, Luther praised Peter Lombard for rightly having defined matrimony as *remedium*. He even followed the medieval master of the *Sentences* in calling matrimony an "*officium*."<sup>125</sup> We cannot follow deeper into Luther's doctrine of the three estates here beyond making the point that there seems to be some relation to the teaching from the Middle Ages precisely in this doctrine that forms the heart of Lutheran social ethics. For now, we might conclude that Luther's understanding of matrimony shows itself as a transformation of medieval theology in every respect. Stripping its classification as a sacrament was a major shift, as was the abolition of celibacy for both monastics and priests. This was a provocation, and it kindled a broad and sharp response in the Roman Catholic world.

### *Public Uproar*

We cannot present all the fascinating ways Roman Catholics responded to Luther's marriage.<sup>126</sup> The late Siegfried Bräuer and others have gathered many of the sources,<sup>127</sup> and I will pick up only some of them. The most famous caustic detractor was Johannes Cochlaeus with his *Commentaria* on the acts and writings of Martin Luther, which built a comprehensive and unfavorable biography. When Cochlaeus came to Luther's time as a monk, he directly responded to Luther's aforementioned open letter to his father, which formed the preface of *De votis monasticis*. The letter shows, as Cochlaeus rightly said, that Luther did not enter the monastery voluntarily but rather as driven by fear of death.<sup>128</sup> Cochlaeus' argument is that the motive behind Luther's decision shows that he was not a true monk from the beginning, so that this decision's reversal, the resolve to leave the monastery, was nothing else than a natural consequence, an offspring from a lack not only of obedience, but also of chastity.

Cochlaeus' *Commentaria* represents a refined and learned version of the overall polemics. The author himself had concocted a playlet under the pseudonym of Johann Vogelsang a few years earlier in 1538. The title does not immediately disclose the drama's nature:

"A Secret Talk about the Tragedy of John Hus." Cochlaeus stages several wives of the reformers hassling about their marriages. Prisca, Melanchthon's wife, who was also called Katharina, claimed to be the only one who was married legitimately because in her case no rupture of celibacy had taken place.<sup>129</sup> Cochlaeus found a counter-image in the Luther couple. Not only was their marriage illegitimate because both had broken their vows, but the case was even worse according to Cochlaeus. This is because while Luther blamed his wife for having some (sexual) teachers before him, she also doubted that he had entered wedlock as a virgin.<sup>130</sup> Cochlaeus was not the only one who enjoyed feeling a bit saucy. His polemical writing resonated with the furor that we can observe in Albertine Saxony almost immediately after Luther's wedding, and Katharina was more and more harshly targeted than her husband.

The tone of the polemics was bawdy, to say the least. As early as 1526, Petrus Sylvius, a Leipzig Dominican, wrote a satirical poem in which the songs of hell mock Luther as the one who had not only left his order but also solicited others to do so. In a vulgar verse, he wrote, making a pun of Luther's name, and also using a sound sequence in which "ritz" means "to carve" for salacious purpose: "Luther is his [Lucifer's] brother. The ri rum ritz. He plays in his slut (*luder*). The ri rum ritz."<sup>131</sup> In another poem, disguised as a wedding poem, Hieronymus Emser picked at the breaking of the vow and blamed the couple for tearing apart the chastity belt.<sup>132</sup> Katharina's chastity was more of an issue than Luther's. When Johann Hasenberg wrote a play about their marriage in 1528, he staged a chorus of virgin saints—Cecilia, Thecla, Agatha, Agnes, and Eustochium—who appeared in Katharina's dream to warn her away from the wedding.<sup>133</sup> They convinced her, and she shouted against Luther "through him, I have been turned from Christ's bride into a cesspool"<sup>134</sup> and returned to the monastery. We add only as a last example Simon Lemnius' poem in the carefully elaborated humanist Latin that bore the telling name *Monachopornomachia*.<sup>135</sup>

The world was full of polemics, in particular the Saxon world. The reformers had an answer, however. Still in the year 1525, Lucas Cranach, who, as we have learned, had been a witness himself, began painting double portraits of both Luther and his wife. This was a

typical form of self-fashioning in bourgeois circles since the late Middle Ages.<sup>136</sup> The portrait of Martin and Katharina Luther provided a testimony to show how legitimate their marriage was.<sup>137</sup> Cranach's workshop produced an entire series of them.<sup>138</sup> The peaceful image of the couple was the strongest answer to all the polemics. A marriage, the image said, even of a former monk and a former nun, was a simple worldly thing, and yet exciting.

### *Conclusion*

Luther's marriage did not invent the German parsonage. We should not overload it with the idea of being the starting point for a long and important history, in particular for the simple reason that their wedding was far from the first among the reformers.<sup>139</sup> The story of this wedding was at first hand a very personal one. Luther had taken a long time to leave his former state as a monk. The wedding marks the point of no return. In a very particular way, it reunited Luther with his father from whom his decision to enter the monastery had estranged him. The story of this wedding was a theological one as well. Luther, as he put it, did what he taught. And he taught that the wedding was something awesome and mundane at once. Both are true for this wedding, that happened all of a sudden, surprising even his closest friends. The wedding was a story of conflict as well. More than everything else, it marked Luther's personal decision to leave the legal and moral framework of the medieval church. His thoughts did not mean a break with theological traditions, as we have seen. There was "no revolution but a change in emphasis," as Susan Karant-Nunn has put it, for a monk marrying a nun obviously broke canon law.<sup>140</sup> The wedding was the start of a new epoch in Luther's life. For the rest of the years he spent on earth, he would be a husband, a father, and after all, a person whose life, notwithstanding all the celebrity around him, was not that different from other laymen's lives.

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## NOTES

1. However, some authors, like Rudolf K. Markwald and Marilyn Morris Markwald, *A Reformation Life: Katharina von Bora* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), highlight Katharina's agency strongly. The Markwalds speak in their comprehensive biography about "Katharina's Choice." This conception traces back to the early days; rumors spread quite early that she had fallen in love with Martin Luther and had kindled his loving response. See Sabine Kramer, *Katharina von Bora in den schriftlichen Zeugnissen ihrer Zeit* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016), 252.

2. *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Briefwechsel*, 18 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1930–1985) (hereafter cited as WA Br), Luther to Baumgärtner, October 1, 1530, 5:641.23 (Nr. 1728); Luther to Baumgärtner, August 18, 1541, WA Br 9:497.13, Nr. 3657.

3. Luther to Baumgärtner, October 12, 1524, WA Br 3:358.7–9, Nr. 782: "Caeterum si vis Ketham tuam a Bora tenere, matura factum, antequam alteri tradatur, qui prae manibus est. Necdum vicit amorem tui."

4. See Kramer, *Katharina von Bora*, 252, who dates it "mit Amsdorf kurz vor dessen Weggang 1524 aus Wittenberg." Compare Ernst Kroker, "Luthers Werbung um Katharina von Bora: Eine Untersuchung über die Quelle einer älteren Überlieferung," in *Lutherstudien zur 4. Jahrhundertfeier der Reformation* (Weimar: Böhlau 1917), 140–150, 142f.

5. See Kroker, "Werbung," 141, 143. Kramer, *Katharina von Bora*, 252. Kroker and Kramer are confident that the report contains valuable material.

6. Kroker, "Werbung," 142: "lieber wolte (Do es geschehen könnte und Gottis wille were) ihn, Doctorem Martinum, oder Dominum Amsdorffium ehelich zunehmen."

7. See the interpretation as a "bold proposal" in the popular account of Michelle de Rusha, *Katharina and Martin Luther: The Radical Marriage of a Runaway Nun and a Renegade Monk* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 134f.

8. Baumgärtner was engaged in 1525 to Sibylle Dichtel, the 15-year-old daughter of a Bavarian official, and married her in 1526. See the source evidence in J.K. Seidemmann, "Katharina von Bora. 1523. 1524. Nürnberger und Wittenberger Persönlichkeiten," *Zeitschrift für historische Theologie* 44 (1874): 544–574, 558f.

9. See Wolf Friedrich Schäufele, "'... iam sum monachus et non monachus' Martin Luthers doppelter Abschied vom Mönchtum," in *Martin Luther—Biographie und Theologie*, eds. Dietrich Korsch and Volker Leppin, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 119–139, 136f. On the other hand, Luther began to question monastic existence long before he wrote *On Monastic Vows*, as Heiko A. Oberman, "Martin Luther contra Medieval Monasticism: A Friar in the Lion's Den," in *Ad fontes Lutheri: Toward the Recovery of the Real Luther: Essays in Honor of Kenneth Hagen's Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Timothy Maschke et al. (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001) 183–213, 188–193, has shown.

10. Luther to Spalatin, Mai 25, 1524, WA Br 3:299.21–23 (Nr. 748).

11. Spalatin, *Chronicon sive annales* (SCRIPTORES | RERV | GERMANICARVM, | PRAECIPVE | SAXONICARVM | (EDIDIT) | IO. BVRCHARDVS MENCKENIVS (. . .) TOMVS II, Leipzig: Martin, 1728, 637; compare WA Br 3:301 (Nr. 6): "Doct. Martinus Lutherus Dom. post Francisci sine cuculla *Vuittenbergae* predicavit. Dominica Galli ante prandium rursus in concionem cucullatus prodiit, post prandium vero sine cuculla concionatus."

12. Luther to Spalatin, November 30, 1523, WA Br 3:394.17 (Nr. 800): "Quod Argula de uxore ducenda mihi scribit, gratias ago." Luther mentioned another (?) letter from Argula on October 30, WA Br. 3:364.3f (Nr. 787).

13. Luther to Spalatin, November 30, 1523, WA BR 3:394.23–25 (Nr. 800): “sed animus alienus est coniugio.”

14. Luther to Spalatin, November 30, 1523, WA Br 3:394.22 (Nr. 800).

15. *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Tischreden*, 6 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1930–1985) (hereafter cited as WA TR), 1:46.15–17 (Nr. 121); Of course, table talks are a slippery basis for historical assumptions; compare Ingo Klitzsch, *Redaktion und Memoria: Die Lutherbilder der “Tischreden”* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020); *Martin Luthers Tischreden. Neuansätze der Forschung*, eds. Katharina Bärenfänger, Volker Leppin, and Stefan Michel (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013). The note quoted here might relate more to Luther's followers' view of the Reformer than to his genuine remembrance. But the blunt reflection on corporality seems to deviate from what we usually know about concoctions in the Table Talk tradition. Thus, this might have a bit of Luther's original voice in it.

16. For a short biographical overview, see Laura Jürgens, “Katharina von Bora (1499–1552): Morning Star of Wittenberg,” in *Women Reformers of Early Modern Europe: Profiles, Texts, and Contexts*, ed. Kirsī I. Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2022), 53–62.

17. Luther to Spalatin, April 16, 1525, WA Br 3:475 (Nr. 857).

18. See WA Br 3:476 (Nr. 8).

19. Luther to Amsdorff, January 2, 1526, WA Br. 4:3.7f (Nr. 960).

20. WA TR 4:503.19f (Nr. 4786); Ruth A. Tucker, *Katie Luther, First Lady of Reformation: The Unconventional Life of Katharina of Bora* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 57, rightly points to the fact that, according to this Table Talk tradition, Luther claimed here that he married Katharina only out of pity: “sed Deus ita voluit ut derelictae misericordiam praestarem” (WA TR 4:503.21–22). Kirsī Stjerna, “Katie Luther: A Mirror to the Promises and Failures of the Reformation,” in *Caritas et Reformatio: Essays on Church and Society in Honor of Carter Lindberg*, ed. David M. Whitford (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1989), 27–39, 32f., reminds us of the many suitors of Katharina who might arguably prove that she was not merely “a pitiable leftover bride whom Luther had to rescue.”

21. See WA Br 3:476 (Nr. 10).

22. Luther to Spalatin, April 16, 1525, WA Br 3:475.21f. (Nr. 857).

23. Luther to Johann Rühel, May 4 or 5, 1525, WA Br 3:483.81 (Nr. 860): “ihm zum Trotz, will ich meine Käte noch zur Ehe nehmen.”

24. Melanchthon to Joachim Camerarius, April 15/16, 1525, *Melanchthons Briefwechsel*, vol. T 2, ed. Heinz Scheible (Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog, 1995), 287 (Nr. 390.45f.). Heinz Scheible, “Luther and Melanchthon,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 4 (1990): 317–339, 331f., has emphasized the fact that the Latin version of this letter was somehow distorted by Camerarius' translation from the Greek which might affect Melanchthon's description of feelings about the wedding rather than his stating of matters of fact, including Melanchthon not being not invited to the ceremony (mentioned *ibid.* 332).

25. See Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, Bd. 2: *Ordnung und Abgrenzung der Reformation 1521–1532* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1986), 196.

26. Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 2:174.

27. Written in the beginning of May 1525, see *Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 73 vols., eds. J. F. K. Knaake et al. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009) (hereafter cited as WA), 18.344.

28. WA 18:362.

29. Melanchthon to Joachim Cameraris, June 16, 1525, *Melanchthons Briefwechsel*, T 2:330 (Nr. 408.7). Luther's counterpart Johannes Cochlaeus happily used the clash of Luther's decision to marry with the Peasants' War to blame the Reformer even more

COMMENTARIA | IOANNIS COCHLAEI DE ACTIS | ET SCRIPTIS MARTINI LVTHERI SAXONIS (St. Viktor bei Mainz: Behem, 1549), 118. Compare Christoph Burger, "Der Bettelmönch wird Ehemann: Wahrnehmungen und Polemik im 16. Jahrhundert," in *Luther: Zankapfel zwischen den Konfessionen und "Vater im Glauben"?* *Historische, systematische und ökumenische Zugänge*, eds. Mariano Delgado and Volker Leppin (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016), 29–51, 36f.

30. Luther to Johannes Brißemann, August 15 (?), 1525, WA Br 3:555.13–16 (Nr. 911); compare Marjorie Elizabeth Plummer, *From Priest's Whore to Pastor's Wife: Clerical Marriage and the Process of Reform in the Early German Reformation* (Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 124. This resonates with Luther's letter to Albrecht of Mainz in which he encouraged the Cardinal to get married, at least partly to quell the uproar of the peasants. Luther, *Send-schreiben sich in den ehelichen Stand zu begeben*, WA 18:408.10–20; Wolfgang Breul, "Es ist verloren der geystlich standt": Luthers Eheschließung im Kontext des Aufstands von 1525," in *Martin Luther – Biographie und Theologie*, 153–167, 161–164. Armin Kohnle, "Deus ita voluit, ut derelictae misericordiam praestarem." Luthers Eheschließung: ein Theologisches Zeichen?" in *Martin Luther—Biographie und Theologie*, 141–151, 145, ponders Luther's awareness that he could soon die due to the Peasants' War as another reason for the seemingly untimely event. Plummer, *Priest's Whore*, 123, has raised another connection between the Peasants' War and the clerical estate: some priests who wanted to join the revolt were urged to show their commitment by marrying their concubine, sometimes even unwillingly.

31. Melanchthon to Joachim Camerarius, June 16, 1525, *Melanchthons Briefwechsel*. T 2:330 (Nr. 408.4): "nullo amicorum ea re prius communicata." Breul, "Luthers Eheschließung," 154, notes the slight disappointment in Melanchthon.

32. Heinrich Boehmer, "Luthers Ehe," *Luther-Jahrbuch* 7 (1925): 40–76, 63f.

33. Luther to Spalatin, June, 10, 1525, WA Br 3:525.6–39 (Nr. 886).

34. See Steven Ozment, *The Serpent & the Lamb: Cranach, Luther, and the Making of the Reformation* (New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 2011), 114.

35. Justus Jonas to Spalatin, June 14, 1525, *Der Briefwechsel des Justus Jonas*, ed. Gustav Kawerau, vol. 1 (Halle, 1884), 94 (Nr. 90).

36. Jonas to Spalatin, June 14, 1525, *Briefwechsel des Justus Jonas* 94 (Nr. 90).

37. Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 2:197.

38. Boehmer, "Luthers Ehe," 49.

39. Jonas to Spalatin, June 14, 1525, *Briefwechsel des Justus Jonas* 94 (Nr. 90): "vidi sponsum in thalamo iacentem."

40. Luther to Johann Rühel et al., June, 15, 1525, WA Br 3:531.15 (Nr. 890, 15): "das nicht verhindert würde." Another allusion we might find is in Luther to Leonhard Koppe, June 17, 1525, WA Br 3:534.6f (Nr. 894). If the editor's explanation is right that by using the word "Heimfahrt" for the feast on June 27, Luther indicated that Katharina had returned to Cranach's house after the wedding, see WA Br 3:531 (Nr. 890). The strongly bodily metaphor of being "plaited into her braids" ("in die Zöpfe geflochten") can only refer to June 13, which would not sound plausible for just a symbolic encounter.

41. Tucker, *Katie Luther*, 81.

42. Boehmer, "Luthers Ehe," 49.

43. Boehmer, "Luthers Ehe," 49f.

44. Luther to Johann Rühel et al., WA Br 3:531.17 (Nr. 890).

45. Luther to Spalatin, WA Br 3:533.7 (Nr. 892).

46. Luther to Spalatin, June 21, 1525, WA Br 3:540.8f (Nr. 899).

47. Luther to Dolzig, WA Br 3:538.16 (Nr. 897).

48. Luther to Dolzig, WA Br 3:538 (Nr. 897).
49. Luther to Koppe, June 21, 1525, WA Br 3:539.8 (Nr. 898); this letter's authenticity is debated, but Luther to Spalatin, June 25, 1525, WA Br 3:543.4 (Nr. 901) mentions a "*conuiuium*" at least, even if not specifying the kind of drinks taken.
50. Luther to Spalatin, June 25, 1525, WA Br 3:543.5 (Nr. 901).
51. Luther to Amsdorff, June, 21, 1525, WA Br 3:541.6 (Nr. 900, 6): "ut confirmem facto quae docui."
52. Luther to Johann Rühel et al., June, 15, 1525, WA Br 3:531.22f (Nr. 890): "samt meinem lieben Vater und Mutter."
53. Luther to Johann Rühel, May 4/5, 1525, WA Br 3:480.1 (Nr. 860).
54. Luther to Johann Rühel et al., June 15, 1525, WA Br 3:531.14 (Nr. 890): "aus Begehren meines lieben Vaters;" Luther to Amsdorff, June, 21, 1525, WA Br 3:541.5 (Nr. 900): "obsequium parenti meo."
55. WA TR 1:439.30–440.4 (Nr. 881): "Praeterea cum a filio pater ad primam missam esset invitatus atque inter prandendum a filio pater interrogaretur, quomodo placeret ei hoc suum institutum? respondit pater: Wisst jr nicht, das man vater vnd mutter ehren sol? Post ubi exivit monachatu, valde exhileratus fuit pater ac suasit filio, ut duxeret uxorem." Veit Dietrich has a parallel in different wording, but we find the connection of entering the monastery against the father's will and the father later urging Luther to marry as well, WA TR 1:294 (Nr. 623). This might indicate that both reports have a common ground in a table talk that actually took place, according to the chronology as based on Veit Dietrich in the fall of 1533.
56. Luther, *De votis monasticis*, WA 8:574.12–15.
57. Luther, *De votis monasticis*, WA 8:574.33f.: "A parte tua stat autoritas divina, a mea parte stat praesumptio humana."
58. Luther, *De votis monasticis*, WA 8:573.24.
59. Luther, *De votis monasticis*, WA 8:574.11–31.
60. Compare Volker Leppin, "Martin Luther: vom Mönch zum Familienvater," *Saeculum* 68 (2018): 361–378, 372f.
61. WA Br 3:534.8–10 (Nr. 894): "(. . .) schicket Euch, wenn ich das Prandium gebe, daß Ihr meiner Braut helft gut Zeugnis geben, wie ich ein Mann sei."
62. WA Br 3:534.6 (Nr. 894): "in die Zöpfe geflochten." Luther calls Katharina his "Metzen" here. This must not in any case mean "concubine," as Tucker, *Katie Luther*, 76, puts it for this passage, following Plummer, *Priest's Whore*, 126. I would prefer the reading as a virgin in general here (see *Grimmsches Wörterbuch* s.v. 3], 4] [<http://dwb.uni-trier.de/de/>; accessed 01/28/2025]). We can find Luther's more neutral if not positive understanding, e.g., in his, *In Genesin Declamationes*, WA 24:570.16: "du feine freundliche metze."
63. This was not uncommon for Luther. Matthew Becker and Mickey Mattox reminded me of another remark by Luther at the North American Luther Forum Conference at Duke: "cum in thoro suavissimis amplexibus & osculis Catharinam tenueris, ac sic cogitaueris: En hunc hominem, optimam creaturulam Dei mei, donauit mihi Christus meus, sit illi laus & gloria. Ego quoque, cum diuinauero diem, qua has acceperis, mox ea nocte simili opere meam amabo in tui memoriam & tibi par pari referam." WA TR 3:635.23–28 (Nr. 952): "When you sleep with your Catherine and embrace her, you should think: 'This child of man, this wonderful creature of God has been given to me by my Christ. May He be praised and glorified.' On the evening of the day on which, according to my calculations, you will receive this, I shall make love to my Catherine while you make love to yours, and thus we will be united in love." Translation following Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, (New Haven / London: University Press, 2006), 276.

64. WA TR 2:165.13–17 (Nr. 1656): “Aliquis constitutus in coniugium, hatt einer das erste jar seltzame gedanckhen. Wenn einer am tisch sitzt: Sich, denckt einer, ein weil war-estu allein, ytz selb ander. Im bett wenn einer sich umbsicht, sicht ein bar zepff, quae prius non vidit.”

65. WA Br 3:549.10–12: “Ich bin an Kethen gebunden und gefangen, und liege auf der Bore, scilicet mortuus mundo.”

66. See Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 30f.

67. Luther to Spalatin, June 10, 1525, WA Br 3:526.20 (Nr. 886): “temporalia vere temporalia sunt.”

68. Luther, *Von Ehesachen*, WA 30III:205.12: “das die ehe ein eusserlich weltlich ding ist;” compare already Luther, *Vom ehelichen Leben*, written in 1522, WA 10II:283.8f.: “das die ehe ein eußerlich leylich ding ist wie andere weltliche hantierung.” For a broader discussion of these issues, see Volker Leppin, “Ehe bei Martin Luther. Stiftung Gottes und weltlich Ding,” *Evangelische Theologie* 75 (2015): 22–33; Leppin, “Konsensehe. Der Status der Sexualität in und für die Ehe im späten Mittelalter und bei Martin Luther,” *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 33 (2018): 223–237.

69. Luther, *Von Ehesachen*, WA 30III:205.13.

70. Luther, *De captivitate Babylonica*, WA 6:559.20f.; *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 80 vols., eds. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut T. Lehmann, and Christopher Boyd Brown (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress Press, 1955ff.), 36:105–6 (hereafter cited as LW). Luther and Melancthon to Philipp of Hesse, WA Br 8:638–644 (Nr. 3423); it is noteworthy that they did not call their writing a confessional counsel (“Beichtratschlag”) as it is usually referred to, but rather a dispensation, WA Br 8:640.20f. (Nr. 3423), using a term which the Pope had used for his ways to excuse people from deviating from canon law in marital matters.

71. Luther, *Von der Freiheit*, WA 7:21.11–17; LW 31:344.

72. Garreth B. Matthews, “The Inner Man,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 4 (1967): 166–172, 167. In footnote 9, Matthews explains that “Augustine identifies the inner man indifferently as a man’s soul (*anima*), his rational soul (*animus*), and his mind (*mens*).”

73. See *Theologia Deutsch*, ch. 7 (“Der Franckförter”), ed. Wolfgang von Hinten (Munich / Zurich: Arteis, 1982), 77–79.

74. Luther, *Von der Freiheit*, WA 7:21.13–15; LW 31:344.

75. See Wilfried Joest, *Ontologie der Person bei Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1967).

76. Luther, *Von der Freiheit*, WA 7:21.25; LW 31:345.

77. Luther, *Vom ehelichen Leben*, WA 10II:283.9f.; Luther, *Von Ehesachen*, WA 30III:205.13.

78. Luther, *Sermon on Matthew* 5:27–29, WA 32:373.6–8.

79. Luther, *Sermon on Matthew* 5:27–29, WA 32:373.8–30.

80. Luther, *Von Ehesachen*, WA 30III:236.9–12: “Denn Gott hat man und weib also geschaffen, das sie mit lust und liebe, mit willen und von hertzen gerne zusamen komen sollen. Und ist die braut liebe odder Ehewille ein natuerlich ding, von Gott eingepflantz und eingegeben.” It is noteworthy that for Luther propagation of children was not a separated act but always imbedded in marital love; see Scott Hendrix, “Luther on Marriage,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 14 (2000): 335–350, 337.

81. Olavi Lähteenmäki, *Sexus und Ehe bei Luther* (Turku: Uunden auran Osakeyhtiön kirjapaino, 1955), 43; compare Jane Strohl, “Luther’s New View on Marriage, Sexuality and

the Family," *Lutherjahrbuch* 76 (2009): 159–192. This study lays the groundwork for our understanding of Luther's concept of marriage, even if I differ from Strohl in the emphasis on newness.

82. See Volker Leppin, *Transformationen. Studien zu den Wandlungsprozessen in Theologie und Frömmigkeit zwischen Spätmittelalter und Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018); examples of my method can be found in Leppin, *Sola: Christ, Grace, Faith, and Scripture Alone in Martin Luther's Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2024). I might slightly disagree with Christian Witt, "Luthers Reformation der Ehe als kulturgeschichtliche Zäsur," in *Kulturelle Wirkungen der Reformation | Cultural Impact of the Reformation: Kongressdokumentation Lutherstadt Wittenberg August 2017*, vol. 2, ed. Klaus Fitschen et al. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2018), 163–171, who identifies a break ("Zäsur") here.

83. See the broad overview in Katherine Harvey, *The Fires of Lust: Sex in the Middle Ages* (London: Reaktion Books, 2021).

84. Rüdiger Schnell, *Sexualität und Emotionalität in der vormodernen Ehe* (Cologne et al.: Böhlau, 2002), 235: "Der mittelalterlichen Kirche war demzufolge klar, daß Liebe (*amor*)—als sexuelles Begehren verstanden—eine nützliche Voraussetzung für eine Ehe und eine kaum auszuschließende Begleiterscheinung vieler Ehen darstellte."

85. Michael Parsons, *Reformation Marriage: The Husband and Wife Relationship in the Theology of Luther and Calvin* (Edinburgh: Rutherford, 2005), 88–91, reminds us, however, that even Abelard not only straightforwardly praises sexuality but still holds a kind of ambiguity when evaluating it.

86. Abelard, *Scito te ipsum* § 11 (CChr.SL 190,11,289f.); for Abelard, compare Arnold Angenendt, *Ehe, Liebe und Sexualität im Christentum. Von den Anfängen bis heute* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2015), 105f.

87. Abelard, *Scito te ipsum* § 12 (CChr.SL 190,12,312–314).

88. Abelard, *Scito te ipsum* § 13 (CChr.SL 190,12,315f.): "ita fieri concessa sunt, quomodo nullatenus fieri possunt;" of course, Abelard here implied a certain view on the idea of the immaculate conception which, following his view, never could take place.

89. Abelard, *Scito te ipsum* § 12 (CChr.SL 190,12,318–13,2).

90. Abelard, *Scito te ipsum* § 12 (CChr.SL 190,13,327–332): "in eo nos delectari, quo, cum peruentum sit, delectationem necesse est sentiri. Veluti si quis religiosum aliquem uinculis constrictum inter feminas iacere compellat, et ille molliciae lecti et circumstancium feminarum contact in delectationem, non in consensum trahatur: quis hanc delectationem, quam natura necessariam facit, culpam appellare presumat?" Luther's own reading of 1 Corinthians 7 resonated with Abelard's somehow, against a mainstream that would read the passage in favor of celibacy. Hendrix, "Luther on Marriage," 338.

91. Thomas, *Summa theologiae* II–II q. 153 a. 2 r. (Editio Leonina 10,208); compare Angenendt, *Ehe*, 107.

92. Thomas, *Summa theologiae* II–II q. 26 a. 12 ad 4 (Editio Leonina 8, 221).

93. Peter of Spain, *Summulae Logicales*, ed. I. M. Bocheński (Turin: Marietti, 1947).

94. For sexuality in medieval medicine see Harvey, *Fires of Lust*, 19–26.

95. Heinrich Schipperges, *Arzt im Purpur. Grundzüge einer Krankheitslehre bei Petrus Hispanus (ca. 1210 bis 1277)* (Berlin et al.: Springer, 1994), 46.

96. Schipperges, *Arzt im Purpur*, 44.

97. For examples see Angenendt, *Ehe*, 105–109.

98. Thomas, *Summa theologiae* II–II q. 153 a. 2 r. (Editio Leonina 10,208) rightly refers to Augustine, *De bono coniugali* 16,19: "Quod enim est cibus ad salutem hominis, hoc est concubitus ad salutem generis, et utrumque non est sine delectatione carnali, quae tamen

modificata et temperantia refrenante in usum naturalem redacta libido esse non potest” (CSEL 41,210,21–24); compare Augustine, *Retractationes* II, XXII (XLVIII).2 ad locum (CChr.SL 57108,23–30). This might, at least to a certain degree, excuse Augustine from being blamed for his merging of sex and sin (see Harvey, *Fires of Lust*, 12f.).

99. We owe Christian Volkmar Witt, *Martin Luthers Reformation der Ehe: Sein Theologisches Eheverständnis vor dessen augustinisch-mittelalterlichem Hintergrund* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 67–117, great thanks for unveiling how important canon law was for Luther’s concept of marriage.

100. Parsons, *Reformation Marriage*, 297, uses the same term to categorize Luther’s understanding of marriage.

101. Luther even clashed about this with the more progressive lawyers; see Hans Erich Troje, “Das matrimonium clandestinum in Humanismus und Reformation,” *Glossae rivista de Historia del derecho Europeo* 4 (1992) 191–210, 195f.

102. Harvey, *The Fires of Lust*, 48.

103. S. D. 27 q. 2 c. 2: “consensus cohabitationis,” not sexual intercourse, is decisive for marriage (*Corpus iuris Canonici*, ed. Emil Friedberg, Leipzig: Tauchitz, 1879, Bd. 1, 1063); see Luther arguing against this: Luther, *Kirchenpostille*, WA 1011:642.22–643.1.

104. Luther, *Kirchenpostille*, WA 1011:643.2–6.

105. C. 27 q. 2 (*Corpus iuris Canonici* 1, 1062): “Consensus facit matrimonium;” compare Lombardus, Sent. l. 4 d. 27 c. 4 (Petri Lombardi *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae*. Bd. 2, Grottaferrata: Collegium Sanctae Bonaventura 1981, 423,6f); compare Witt, *Luthers Reformation der Ehe*, 69f.

106. Still in 1519, Luther held matrimony to be a sacrament; see Hendrix, “Luther on Marriage,” 336. For the argument in *The Babylonian Captivity*, see Johan Buitendag, “Marriage in the Theology of Martin Luther—Worldly Yet Sacred: An Option Between Secularism and Clericalism,” *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 63 (2007): 445–461, 448f.

107. Luther, *De captivitate*, WA 6:550.22f.

108. Decree for the Armenians *Exsultate Deo*, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, ed. Peter Hünnerman, 45th ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 2017), Nr. 1327.

109. Thomas, *Summa theologiae* III q. 65 a. 3 r. (Editio Leonina 12, 60).

110. Luther, *Disputatio de fide infusa et acquisita concl.* 17, WA 6:96.30, 36). Erasmus, NOVVM IN-| strumentum omne, diligenter ab ERASMO ROTERDAMO | recognitum et emendatum non solum ad gr(cam ueritatem, ue-| rumetiam ad multorum utriusque lingu( codicum, eorumque ue-| terem simul et emendatorum fidem (. . .); Basel: Froben 1516, 533 (Annotationes) frankly states: “Siquidem particula exclusiva, Ego autem, satis indicat hoc magnum mysterium ad Christum & ecclesiam pertinere, non ad maritum & ad uxorem”; I am grateful to Timothy Wengert who kindly referred me to this text. Thomas Aquinas, despite agreeing on the foremost spiritual sense of the verse, could use it as an argument for sacramentality of matrimony; see Thomas, *Summa theologiae* III q. 61 a. 2 arg. 3 (Editio Leonina 12,15).

111. Luther, *De captivitate*, WA 6:550.25–32.

112. Luther, *Tiaubüchlein*, WA 30III:80.8–11: “Herre Gott, der du man und weib geschaffen und zum ehstand verordenet hast, dazu mit fruechte des leibs gesegnet, Und das Sacrament deines lieben sons Jhesu Christi und der kirchen, seiner braut, darinn bezeichent, Wir bitten deine grundlose guete, du wollest solch dein geschepff, ordenung und seggen nicht lassen verrucken noch verderben, sondern gnediglich ynn uns bewahren durch Jhesum Christ unsern Herrn, Amen;” compare Strohl, “Luther’s New View,” 172. Paul Drews, *Studien zur Geschichte des Gottesdienstes und des gottesdienstlichen Lebens. IV. u. V.*

*Beiträge zu Luthers liturgischen Reformen. I. Luthers lateinische und deutsche Litanei von 1529. II. Luthers deutsche Versikel und Kollekten* (Tübingen: Mohr 1910), 103f., has named the medieval reference in the *Missa pro sponso et sponsa*: “a. Propinciare domine supplicationibus nostris et institutis tuis, quibus propagationem humani generis ordinasti, benignus assiste: ut quod te auctore iungitur, te auxiliante servetur. Per etc. b. Deus qui potestate tua virtutis de nihilo cuncta fecisti, qui dispositis universitatis exordiis homini ad tuam imaginem facto: ideo inseparabile Mulieris adiutorium condidisti, ut femineo corpori de virili dares carne principium, docens, quod ex uno placuisset institui, nunquam liecere disjungi. Deus qui tam excellenti mysterio conjugalem copulam consecrasti, ut Christi et ecclesiae suae sacramentum praesignares in foedere nuptiarum. Deus, per quem mulier coniungitur viro etc.”

113. Luther, *Sermon on the first Sunday after Epiphany* 1532, WA 36:91.5, 20. Klaus Suppan, *Die Ehelehre Martin Luthers: Theologische und rechtshistorische Aspekte des reformatorischen Eheverständnisses* (Salzburg / Munich: Pustet, 1971), 20f., sharply argues that Luther denied marriage to be a part of the “order of redemption” (“Erlösungsordnung”), instead he established it being a part of the “order of creation” (“Schöpfungsordnung”). As such, it is according to Suppan still part of the “order of salvation” (“Heilsordnung”). Given the fact that the difference between salvation and redemption is not always clear, this might not be helpful to understand the particular sense of Luther’s doctrine.

114. Suppan, *Ehelehre*, 36.

115. *Confession of Emperor Michael to Pope Gregor X* (*Enchiridion* 860).

116. Luther, *De captivitate*, WA 6:550.35–37.

117. Luther, *De captivitate*, WA 6:550.37–551.5.

118. Luther, *Sermon on the first Sunday after Epiphany* 1532, WA 36:91.7, uses the word “seligkeit” here, but we should not stress this too much. First, this word appears only in Rörer’s manuscript, not in the Nuremberg manuscript which we find on the same page. Second, the context seems to be rather colloquial than strongly theological, meaning something like fortune rather than beatitude.

119. Luther, *Vorlesungen über 1. Mose*, WA 43:30.13f.

120. According to Luther, *Vorlesungen über 1. Mose*, WA 42:79.6, economy was established when God created Eve as Adam’s consort. Kirsi Stjerna, “Luther on Marriage, for Gay and Straight,” *Seminary Ridge Review* 16 (2014): 64–85, 71f., rightly reminds us that this means that marriage began before sin, which means, as such is no sin.

121. Luther, *Vorlesungen über 1. Mose*, WA 42:87.13f. Of course, fertility is an important aspect in Luther’s understanding of matrimony. We should not overstate it, though, as seems to be the case in Brandt C. Klawitter, *A Forceful and Fruitful Verse: Genesis 1:28 in Luther’s Thought and its Place in the Wittenberg Reformation (1521–1531)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2023); see my review in *Luther* 95 (2024): 192f.

122. Luther, *Vorlesungen über 1. Mose*, WA 42:88.6f. Trevor O. Reggio, “Martin Luther on Marriage and Family” (2012), Faculty Publications. Paper 20; <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/church-history-pubs/20>; accessed 01/28/2025, 209f. Reggio states that Luther did not leave much room for pleasure in his concept of sexuality.

123. Luther, *Ein Sermon von dem ehelichen Stand*, WA 2:168.3: “spital der siechen (. . .), auff das sie nit yn schwerer sund fallen.”

124. Luther, *Das siebente Kapitel S. Pauli zu den corinthern*, WA 12:114.11f.

125. Lombardus, *Sent. l. 4 d. 26 c. 2* (Lombardus, *Sententiae* II 417,5f); compare Luther, *Vorlesung über das 1. Buch Mose*, WA 42:88.10f. On a more contemporary note, Suppan, *Ehelehre*, 22, states that Luther’s understanding of matrimony comes close to the Catholic concepts of matrimony as sacred by nature (“Naturehe”).

126. For this section of the essay, compare Volker Leppin, "Luthers Mönchtum in allgäuliger Polemik," in Leppin, *Transformationen*, 507–518, 510–513.

127. Siegfried Bräuer, "Katharina, die Lutherin – im Urteil der Zeit," in *Mönchshure und Morgenstern. Katharina von Bora, die Lutherin. Eine Frau weiß, was sie will*, ed. Peter Freybe (Wittenberg: Drei Kastanien Verlag, 1999), 9–35; Kramer, *Katharina von Bora*, 202–226; Burger, "Bettelmönch," 31–37.

128. Cochlaeus, *Commentaria*, 44; for Cochlaeus' critique of Luther's failed life of a monk see Kramer, *Katharina von Bora*, 214f.

129. Johann Vogelsang (Cochlaeus), *Ein heimlich Gespräch von der Tragedia Johannis Hussen. 1538*, ed. Hugo Holstein (Halle: Niemeyer, 1900), 35: "O der omechtigen p(lge, der stinckenden Münch vnd Pfaffen hΓrn, wie halten sie so hoch vnnd vil von ynen selbst, Ich allein hab mit Got vnd mit ehren eynen rechten Ehemann, vnder ihnen allen."

130. Cochlaeus, *Gespräch*, 32.

131. Sylvius, *Ein erschrecklicher Gesang der luziferischen und der lutherischen Kirche, Flugschriften gegen die Reformation 1525–1530*, ed. Adolf Laube (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000), 217,2f.: "Der Luther ist sein bruder. Das ri rum ritz / | Er spilt in seynem luder. Das ri rum ritz."

132. See Cochlaeus, *Commentaria*, 118: "Rumpe pudicitiae zoonam uotumque fidemque."

133. LVDVS LVDENTEM LVDERUM LV= | dens, quo Ioannes Hasenbergius Bohe-mus in Bacchanalib. | Lypsiæ, omnes ludificantem Ludionem, omnibus | ludendum exhibuit. Anno M. D. XXX., o.O. o.J., f. A iv<sup>v</sup>.

134. *Ludus* f. B ii<sup>v</sup>: "hinc ego ex sponsa Christi facta sum tua cloaca."

135. Simon Lemnii Latratus Poetici Monachopornomachia. Threni Joannis Eckii, Brussels, 1866; compare Anna-Katharina Höpfinger, "'Euch beyden zu verdammis.' Katharina von Bora und Martin Luther in ausgewählten Darstellungen des 16. Jahrhunderts," in *Bild—Geschlecht—Rezeption : Katharina von Bora und Martin Luther im Spiegel der Jahrhunderte*, eds. Carlotta Israel and Camilla Schneider (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2021), 22–63, 45–49.

136. Bräuer, "Katharina die Lutherin," 14.

137. Kramer, *Katharina von Bora*, 223; Höpfinger, "'Euch beyden zu verdammis,'" 24.

138. See the overview in Cranach, *Luther und die Bildnisse. Thüringer Themenjahr "Bild und Botschaft,"* ed. Günter Schuchardt (Regensburg: Schell & Steiner, 2015), 38–42; compare Ozment, *Serpent*, 178f.

139. For the first weddings, see Stephen Buckwalter, *Die Priesterehe in Flugschriften der frühen Reformation* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998); Plummer, *Priest's Whore*, 52–89.

140. Susan C. Karant-Nunn, "The Transmission of Luther's Teachings on Women and Matrimony: The Case of Zwickau," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 77 (1986): 31–46, 45.