



Reviewed by Jason Eden

In a lively and engaging manner, this book tells the story of Catharina von Bora, the woman who married Martin Luther. The author utilizes contextual evidence, imagination, and primary and secondary sources to create an emotionally gripping narrative related to a key figure of the Protestant Reformation. Unfortunately, the book does not systematically or thoroughly address issues of interest to egalitarian readers. It also does not cite or draw from some of the most important and relevant scholarship on its subject matter. For these reasons, I cannot recommend it for Christians for Biblical Equality's ministry.

Daughter of the Reformation is extremely well-written and it includes a few fascinating pieces of information regarding the life of Catharina von Bora. The author manages to insert essential information about the Reformation without boring readers familiar with the basics and without overwhelming readers who lack expertise. The narrative is engaging, illuminating, and, for the most part, quite gripping. Readers will learn a lot about life in the Middle Ages, including life for women. One can feel the agony and sacrifice of Catharina and her family as she goes to the abbey to become a nun.

Near the end of the book (especially on pages 182-213), there is fascinating information about the Luthers' marriage. Catharina was, apparently, a strong and capable woman. She managed the family's finances, in some cases preventing Martin from giving away essential assets. She grew food, produced beer, and participated in lively theological discussions with other Protestants during social occasions. The book also contains fascinating information about Martin Luther's will, which departed from traditional customs of the time by empowering Catharina and granting her control of the family's assets. These few insights occur on only a few of the book's pages, however.

Even as the book includes some material on Catharina that might seem inspiring to egalitarians, as a whole, the text fails to systematically promote or address egalitarian issues. In a

quantitative sense, huge sections of the book, perhaps even a majority, address Martin Luther and the Reformation while bypassing or ignoring Catharina. One might argue that this stems from a lack of sources or a need to provide historical context, but the simple reality is that the book covers a lot of familiar ground without adding much in terms of women's history or egalitarianism.

The book also could have done a lot more in terms of addressing the Reformation's effects on women's experiences or family life. What did the closure of abbeys mean for women in terms of Christian ministry? How did the Reformation's critical stance regarding the veneration of Mary and other female saints impact women? Other scholarship, including a collection of essays titled *Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe: Public and Private Worlds* (1989), have addressed these issues in depth but the author does not draw from them at all.

The book also presents its fascinating information about the potential egalitarianism of the Luther family but offers no endorsement, commentary, or significant analysis of this reality and what it might mean for Protestants today. This omission is glaring, especially given the fact that some Lutheran synods remain patriarchal. Perhaps the author wanted to avoid controversy, but if this was the case, this book represents a missed opportunity for egalitarianism. Finally, and perhaps symbolically, the book's title is somewhat unfortunate. One would expect a biography to include the name of the person being studied, but this text instead merely refers to the *wife* of Luther as a *daughter* of the Reformation. Neglecting to use Catharina's name in the title and referring to her as a daughter seems to lessen her importance as a historical figure and adult woman, something egalitarians would find troubling.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the bibliography/research is skimpy and inadequate for a historical biography. The text seems to resemble Natalie Zemon Davis' *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983) or Laurel Ulrich's *A Midwife's Tale* (1991) in terms of its blending of imaginative story-telling with historical research. It does not cite these works as methodological examples, however, and regrettably departs from their approach to historical subjects in crucial ways. A lack of careful citation, perhaps stemming from publisher's requirements, means that readers are often left wondering which details are factual or fictional. At times, such as on pages 155-157, the author explains what is known or unknown from available sources, but these instances are too rare. As it is, the book is somewhat inspirational but also simply not trustworthy as a source of historical information.

The author also sometimes advances myths and stereotypes about medieval life, referring too often to this time period as "The Dark Ages," for example, when historians long ago discontinued such simplistic characterizations. The book also neglects to cite numerous studies of gender, family, theology, and other relevant subjects. There is no mention of Rudolf and Marilyn Markwald's *Katharina Von Bora: A Reformation Life* (2002), Kirsi Stjerna's *Women and the Reformation* (2008), M.E. Wiesner's *Working Women in Renaissance Germany* (1986), or Joel Harrington's *Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation Germany* (1995). These are basic scholarly works on the subject that need to be consulted for a study of this type.

Overall, in spite of its gripping narrative and modest relevance for egalitarians, this book should not be included as a title for CBE's ministry. It does not unequivocally or systematically advance egalitarianism and it lacks scholarly rigor and reliability.