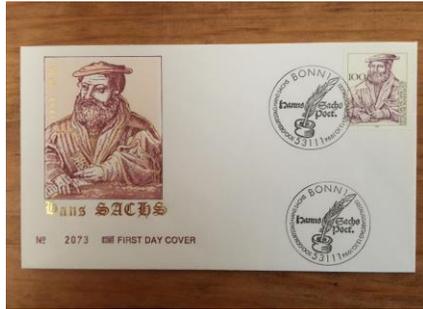


## Free in Christ: Hans Sachs and Katie Schuermann

Dr. Roni Grad and Pastor Jonathan Sachs

As we continue to remember the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the events at the beginning of the Reformation, we are pleased to present to you the third in a series of stories of Reformation-era laypeople who lived out their vocations in Christian freedom,



paired with the stories of contemporary laypeople in LCMS congregations who are doing the same. This vignette profiles the literary figures Hans Sachs, and Mrs. Katie Schuermann. As was the case in the last two vignettes, you will read of two individuals who lived in different times and circumstances, but who both have similarly used their God-given gifts in service to His Church.

German stamp commemorating Hans Sachs issued in 1994 (Scott no. 1870). The stamp is postmarked on its first day of issue. Photo by Roni Grad of the item in his possession

## Hans Sachs

When Rev. Paul McCain and his team at Concordia Publishing House assembled the material for the Readers' Edition of the Book of Concord, they included a woodcut of Hans Sachs, noting his "example of the faithful laity who supported and spread Lutheranism in the sixteenth century."<sup>1</sup> Although he is not as well known today as are many of his Reformation-era contemporaries, Sachs' literary contributions were as instrumental to the spread of the Reformation as were the artistic contributions of Lucas Cranach the Elder.

### Sachs' Life

Hans Sachs was born on November 5, 1494 in Nuremberg, Germany. Nuremberg was a wealthy "free" city within the Holy Roman Empire, able to mint coins, control its own borders, establish alliances and acquire territory. Its geographic setting was quite advantageous, allowing it to become the location for meetings of the imperial diets, as well as a major trading center on the route between northern and southern Europe.<sup>2</sup> As the Renaissance spread northward from Italy, Nuremberg's location and wealth made it a fertile environment for the cultivation of the arts, and indeed numerous artists and craftsmen flourished there at the time, most notably Albrecht Dürer.<sup>3</sup> Catherine Winkworth (1827-78), translator of German hymnody into English, describes the Nuremberg of the time as follows, "It was a great free city, whose social polity was the pride of its citizens and the admiration of strangers, wealthy and full of stirring and successful commercial enterprise; the home of the great mechanical and scientific inventions of the day and rich in treasures of Gothic art in its streets and churches."<sup>4</sup> When Hans Sachs was born, the city was facing the

challenge of an outbreak of the plague, one of many that afflicted Nuremberg during the fifteenth century, leading to massive population loss. To have survived infancy in that setting was a clear harbinger that God had major plans for him!<sup>5</sup>

Hans Sachs' father was a tailor, which meant that Hans was born into an upper middle-class family. Winkworth describes the Sachs parents as having been industrious and God-fearing.<sup>6</sup> He was educated at the local *Lateinschule* (Latin School), then between the ages of 14 and 17 apprenticed as a shoemaker, since his parents feared that his health was not robust enough to continue his formal education.<sup>7</sup> At age 14, Sachs met the Nuremberg weaver and renowned *Meistersinger* Leonard Nunnenbeck. The *Meistersinger* craft (*Meistergesang*) was the late medieval and early Renaissance German art of singing original poems, mostly on Biblical subjects, to (usually) original tunes. The craft followed strict and complicated rules (*Tabulatur*). The *Meistersinger* formed guilds that flourished in German cities during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and claimed artistic descent from the *Minnesinger* of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, who were knights whose songs paid homage to their maidens. Nunnenbeck discerned that Hans Sachs had the potential to become a gifted *Meistersinger* and took him in as a pupil.<sup>8</sup>

Between the ages of 17 and 22, Sachs embarked on his “journeyman years” (*Wanderjahre*) in Innsbruck, Salzburg, Munich and Leipzig.<sup>9</sup> While much of his time during these years was spent honing his skills as a shoemaker, he also visited *Meistersinger* schools in Mainz and *Straßburg* (Strasbourg), and taught the form in Frankfurt and Munich.<sup>10</sup> Of note, as he travelled, Hans Sachs became known as one who was pure and temperate.<sup>11</sup> At age 22, he returned to Nuremberg, was admitted to the shoemaker guild and settled down for the remainder of his life. He married Kunigunde Creutzer (1502-60) on September 1, 1519. All seven of their children died prematurely. Following Creutzer's death, Sachs was remarried on September 2, 1561 to the young widow Barbara Harscher. Hans Sachs became a *Meistersinger* at the school at Nuremberg at age 26 in 1520, eventually becoming its head in 1554.<sup>12</sup> In spite of his childhood frailty; he would live to age 81.

Hans Sachs divided his time between his working as a shoemaker, as a writer and composer, and as an instructor in the art of composition. He was quite prolific, in 1567 (age 72) he estimated his own output to that point at the following: 4275 *Meisterlieder* (master-songs), 208 dramas (his greatest dramatic activity being in the years 1550-1560), plus 1558 comic stories, fables, histories, figures, comparisons, allegories, dreams, visions, lamentations, controversial dialogues, psalms and religious songs, street and tavern songs, and a few prose dialogues. Included in this number are 81 *Fastnachtspiele* (Shrovetide or Carnival plays), a genre in which a spirit of misrule and social inversion prevails for a time, but order is



Memorial to Hans Sachs in Wittenberg, Germany. The sign reads, “Do not despise me the masters and honor me their art. Hans Sachs, master shoemaker and *Meistersinger*” Photo by Roni Grad

always restored by the end. In all, Sachs estimated that he had composed 6048 pieces, large and small.<sup>13</sup>

### **Sachs and the Reformation**

Hans Sachs was an early supporter of Dr. Luther, and his work helped bring the Reformation to Nuremberg. In 1523, he penned the 700-line verse-allegory poem on the Lutheran Reformation, *Die wittenbergische Nachtigall* (The Nightingale of Wittenberg). Sachs' intended audience was those who did not know Dr. Luther's writings, those who did and those who rejected them. The poem is divided into three parts. The first part (lines 1-333) is described beautifully by Winkworth as follows, "... described the state of Christendom by picturing the miseries of a poor flock of sheep which have fallen among wolves, and are especially exposed to the rapacity of a lion (Leo X), that had craftily undertaken to defend them. Suddenly they hear the clear notes of a nightingale, foretelling the day-dawn, and the sheep who follow this voice are led out into a lovely sunny, safe meadow." The second part (lines 334-439) is comprised of an exposition of the core Reformation teachings, including original sin, salvation by grace alone through faith alone, and the meaning of good works. The third part (lines 440-700) presents a history of the Reformation up to the Edict of Worms, with an exhortation to remain in the true faith even in the face of opposition from Rome.<sup>14</sup>

In 1524, Sachs penned four Reformation prose dialogues. The prose dialogue was popular in the early 1520s, showing the reader how opinions are formed, and in turn influencing the reader's own opinion on the topic at hand. The first of these, *Disputation zwischen einem Chorherrn vnnnd Schuchmacher* (Disputation Between a Canon and a Shoemaker), was the most popular and printed 11 times in 1524, with translations into Dutch and English as well. Following on Dr. Luther's assertion that, "A simple layman armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or a council without it,"<sup>15</sup> Sachs presents a dialogue between a church canon and a lay shoemaker on several foundational concepts in Lutheran teaching, including justification by grace through faith, and the good works that flow only from having been justified. By bringing arguments from Scripture rather than simply church tradition and practices, the shoemaker outperforms the canon and *de-facto* becomes the teacher in the dialogue. The canon over time becomes angry and is tempted to resort to violence, while the shoemaker remains calm and conciliatory.

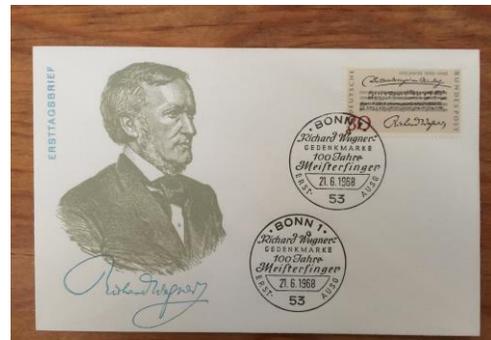
The second of Sachs' Reformation dialogues addresses the false works of the clergy of the time, and the third dialogue concerns greed. In his fourth Reformation dialogue, *Ain gesprech eins Evangelischen christen mit einem Lutherischen* (The conversation of an Evangelical Christian with a Lutheran), Sachs presents a conversation between the shoemaker and a newly converted Protestant on how to present the faith to those who are as yet unconverted. Citing 1 Corinthians 8, the shoemaker explains the importance of gently and patiently guiding the weak in the faith, and always explaining the reasons behind particular teachings and practices, always with love for the neighbor (*Nächstenliebe*). Thus, for example, the newly

converted man should not antagonize his Roman Catholic father-in-law by eating meat on a Friday in his presence; in the end, it is precisely the gentle and patient teaching that begins to win him over! At first, the Sachs dialogues were censored in Nuremberg and had to be printed elsewhere, but they received a wide circulation in the city and were instrumental in swaying popular opinion so that the town council openly threw in its lot with the Reformation.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout his life, Hans Sachs regularly addressed theological issues in his works. In 1533, he began writing Biblical dramas, and among these are several works focusing on Adam and Eve, original sin, the banishment from the Garden, and their children.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps this is not so surprising coming from a man who was so influenced by Dr. Luther, who had begun his *95 Theses* with, “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ (St. Matthew 4:17), He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance”!<sup>18</sup> Following Dr. Luther’s death, Sachs wrote of “Theology weeping over the coffin of the man of God,” expressing sadness over the Reformer’s death, thankfulness for the doctrine of the Reformation, and at the same time concern for the dissensions amongst Christians, with his fervent hope that all would cling to the pure Gospel.<sup>19</sup> The 1550 Sachs *Fastnachtspiel, Der farenndt Schuler im Paradeiß* (The Wandering Student in Paradise) addresses in part the errant Roman Catholic practice of intercession for the dead.<sup>20</sup> These are but a few examples of Sachs’ contributions to the theological dialogue of his time.

## Sachs’ Legacy

Hans Sachs continued writing through 1569. During his lifetime, his work was very influential, and through this, the Nuremberg *Meistersinger* school became a template for the surrounding area, as well as the more distant cities of Magdeburg, Augsburg, Breslau and *Straßburg*. Sachs was clearly the most gifted and famous of all of the *Meistersinger*, and the only one (or one of the very few) remembered today. While his *Meistersinger* poetry and music were greatly appreciated at the time, modern literary critics have largely panned the work as constraining and uninspired. Additionally, commentators of our day criticize Sachs’ relative lack of detail in his narratives, rudimentary character and plot development, and arbitrary termination of the acts in his plays. Yet, critics and historians recognize his *Fastnachtspiele* as presenting a good portrayal of life in 16<sup>th</sup> century Nuremberg, and many of these are still staged today. Like Lucas Cranach in his art, Sachs addressed every-day situations as he described the laity as integral to the life of the church. Of note, Sachs’ influence can still be seen in the peasant plays of Upper Bavaria, Hungary and Silesia.<sup>21</sup> After his death, Hans Sachs was virtually forgotten, but was rediscovered by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), who



German stamp issued in 1968 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the premiere of *Die Meistersinger* (Scott no. 987). Photo by Roni Grad of item in his possession

popularized him in the poem *Hans Sachsens poetische Sendung* (Hans Sachs' Poetic Mission), written in 1776 on the bicentenary of his death.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, Sachs is the principal character in several operas, most famously in Richard Wagner's (1813-83) 1868 *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Of note the opening verses of *Die wittenbergische Nachtigall* are sung in Act 3 Scene 5 of the Wagner opera.<sup>23</sup>

## **Katie Schuermann**



The contemporary layperson with whom we matched Hans Sachs is Mrs. Katie Schuermann. Mrs. Schuermann's husband, Rev. Michael P. Schuermann is pastor at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Sherman, IL (Central Illinois District), and through God's gifts to her, Mrs. Schuermann is very well known throughout our Synod. Her three-part *Anthems of Zion* series beautifully portrays God's work in the lives of the sinner-saints at the fictional Zion Lutheran Church. Her twelve-part women's Bible study *Pew Sisters* examines God's work in the lives of contemporary women who are facing serious challenges. Her work *He Remembers the Barren*, now in its second edition, powerfully examines infertility in the Christian marriage through the lens of who we are in Christ. In addition to her books, Mrs. Schuermann has authored articles for a number of publications, including *Reporter Online*, *Lutheran Witness*, *Lutheran Women's Quarterly*, and *The Federalist*. She serves as blog host for *A Writer's Life*, and co-host for *He Remembers the Barren*. Her website is <http://katieschuermann.com>. God has truly gifted His Church through Mrs. Schuermann, and we are honored and privileged to be able to feature her here.

### **Describe your faith journey**

My parents brought me to the waters of Holy Baptism less than a month after I was born. I have been a Christian ever since.

### **Describe your congregation:**

I am married to my pastor. We live in a small bedroom community just north of Springfield—the capital of Illinois—and our mid-sized LCMS congregation is made up primarily of state employees, farmers, teachers, professionals, and their families. Our congregation is about thirty-five years old, so we are actively transitioning from a mission plant to a congregation that is better able to look outward in service to its community.

### **Describe your vocational callings/how God is using you:**

I am a wife, daughter, sister, aunt, godmother, and friend. In my free time, I sing professionally and write books.

### **in your home**

In the House of Schuermann, my husband serves as the Minister of the Exterior, and I am the Minister of the Interior. It is my joy and pleasure to cook, clean, do laundry, and make our home a comfortable place in which to live and receive guests.

### **in your church (congregation, district, Synod)**

I lead Sunday school music and serve on the altar guild at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. For the Synod, I sometimes serve as a contract writer for *Reporter* and *Lutherans Engage the World*.

### **in your community (through your secular job/career and any non-church volunteer work)**

Besides doing journalistic work for various publications, I also write books for Concordia Publishing House and Emmanuel Press. With that also come opportunities to speak at conferences, retreats, and other events. My presentations usually last about an hour, so the majority of my time on the road is spent listening to my brothers and sisters in Christ tell me about their lives—the blessings and the burdens they've been given by our Lord.

### **What joys have you experienced in your vocational callings?**

It is a precious job, this listening to my family in Christ. My husband and I have not been blessed with the gift of children, so I very much appreciate the opportunity to serve my family in Christ by listening to them, sharing in both their joys and their sorrows. As the sainted pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote in his book, *Life Together*: "Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear. So it is His work that we do for our brother when we learn to listen to him ... the ministry of listening has been committed to them by Him who is Himself the great listener and whose work they should share. We should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the Word of God."<sup>24</sup>

### **What challenges have you experienced in your vocational callings?**

Compassion fatigue is a perpetual struggle for me. Listening to and communicating with hundreds of new people a month sometimes drains my emotional and physical resources. I have to be careful not to overspend my energies on the road so that I can fully participate in the lives of the neighbors God has given me to serve at home. I am still learning how to manage this successfully.

## **What advice do you have for the youth and young adults of our church?**

Do not neglect the hearing of the Word. Run to where Christ's Word is preached in its truth and purity, and faithfully partake of His Supper. Sanctify every day, as Luther recommends, with the Word of God. Daily spend time memorizing Scripture and hymn texts. Turn to the Lord in prayer in all things and at all times. God's promises for life and salvation are for you, and He keeps His promises. He is worthy of your time and trust.

## **What is your favorite Bible Verse? Hymn? Why?**

I go through phases when it comes to favorite Bible passages and hymn texts. My favorite is usually whatever I am reading/singing at the moment. Presently, I am deeply moved by "Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands" (LSB 458) and by Jesus' words to Peter in Luke 22:31-32: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

Though Peter denied Christ three times during His passion, Jesus did not deny him before His Father in heaven. Jesus prayed for Peter, forgave him, and kept him in the faith, as He promised. To think that our Lord prays for us and keeps His promises to us today! Though Satan would sift us like wheat, Jesus intercedes on our behalf before our Father in heaven and keeps us in the faith. Thank you, Lord Jesus!

## **Summary**

Once again, we have an example of two laypeople separated by 500 years, whom God richly gifted and whose works are considered among the treasures of His Church! One of the great accomplishments of the Reformation was to bring the laity back into the life of the church. Through the work of both authors, we see this play out as God works through the ordinary stories of ordinary people living out their vocations in His Royal Priesthood. The stories of both authors ultimately point to Christ and Him crucified! We celebrate the service in Christian freedom of Hans Sachs and Mrs. Schuermann in their homes, their church and their communities!

## **End Notes**

1. See Paul Timothy McCain, ed. *Concordia, The Lutheran Confessions, A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006) p. 460
2. For more detail, see the article *Nuremberg* at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuremberg> (accessed 1 February 2018)
3. Robert Cole, *A Traveller's History of Germany* (Northampton: Interlink Books, 2004) p. 65-7
4. Catherine Winkworth, *Christian Singers of Germany* (Philadelphia: MacMillan and Company, 1869) p. 128
5. *Nuremberg*, *ibid.* Of note, 105 years later, Philipp Nicolai wrote his powerful

- hymns *Wake, awake, for night is flying* (LSB 516) and *O Morning Star, how fair and bright* (LSB 395) in the setting of a devastating outbreak of plague in Unna, Germany; see Mark A. Preus, "Teach Us to Bear Your Blessed Cross: An essay on Philipp Nicolai's joy in the face of death" in Ross Edward Johnson and John T. Pless, eds. *The Mercy of God in the Cross of Christ: Essays on Mercy in honor of Glenn Merritt* (St. Louis: Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, 2016) p. 209-307
6. Winkworth, *Christian Singers*, p.129
  7. Winkworth, *Christian Singers*, p.129
  8. Winkworth, *Christian Singers*, p. 129. See also George Martin, *The Opera Companion* (London: John Murray Publishers Ltd, 1984) p. 178, 179, 310-20, 349-50. Of note, the *Minnesinger* are featured in Wagner's 1845 opera *Tannhäuser*. The *Tabulatur* are very helpfully spelled out by Richard Wagner [1813-86] in Act 1, Scene 2 of his 1868 opera *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. These specific instructions include the types of tones and melodies for various colors, flowers, fruits, trees and animals, proper singing technique and the absolute necessity for the *Meistersinger* to write both his own words and his own music. The libretto for the opera can be found at [http://www.murashev.com/opera/Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg libretto English German](http://www.murashev.com/opera/Die_Meistersinger_von_Nürnberg_libretto_English_German) (accessed 3 May 2018)
  9. The journeyman years followed the time of apprenticeship. During an apprenticeship, the trainee spent all of his time in one place with one master, and during the journeyman years, the trainee moved from one town to another to learn from several workshops, developing his skills as a master craftsman.
  10. Winkworth, *Christian Singers*, p. 129
  11. "... he led a singularly pure and abstemious life." Winkworth, *Christian Singers*, p.129
  12. See the article *Hans Sachs* at [http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans Sachs](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Sachs) (accessed 1 February 2018), also *Hans Sachs* at [www.britannica.com/biography/Hans-Sachs](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Hans-Sachs) (accessed 1 February 2018)
  13. Aryeh Oron, *Hans Sachs (Poet, Composer)* at [www.bach-cantatas.com/Lib/Sachs-Hans.htm](http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Lib/Sachs-Hans.htm) (accessed 2 February 2018). See also Madeleine Brook, *Hans Sachs* at <http://sites.google.com/site/germanliterature/early-modern/sachs> (accessed 2 February 2018). Some of Sachs' *Fastnachtspiele* are still staged today.
  14. Winkworth, *Christian Singers*, p. 130. Also see Madeleine Brook, *Die Wittenbergisch Nachtigall* at <http://sites.google.com/site/germanliterature/early-modern/sachs/die-wittenbergisch-nachtigall> (accessed on 2 February 2018). The complete German text of the poem is available at <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/hans-sachs-ausgewahlte-poetische-werke-5219/34> (accessed on 2 February 2018). The English translation by C.W. Schaefer was published in 1883 by Brobst and Diehl, Allentown.
  15. Quoted in Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville:

- Abingdon Press, 2013 [book originally published in 1950]) p. 107
16. Madeleine Brook, *Reformation Dialogues* at <http://sites.google.com/site/germanliterature/early-modern/sachs/reformation-dialogues> (accessed on 8 February 2018); also Charlotte Hartmann, *Disputation zwischen ainem Chorherrn vnnd Schuchmacher* at <http://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/taylor-reformation/category/hans-sachs/> (accessed on 8 February 2018)
  17. Aryeh Oron, *Hans Sachs, ibid.*
  18. The text of the 95 *Theses* can be found at <http://www.luther.de/en/95Thesen.html> (accessed on 9 February 2018)
  19. Winkworth, *Christian Singers*, p. 131
  20. Madeleine Brook, *The wandering student in Paradise* at <http://sites.google.com/site/germanliterature/early-modern/sachs/the-wandering-student-in-paradise> (accessed on 9 February 2018)
  21. Aryeh Oron, *Hans Sachs, ibid.* An additional example of a critical response to the *Meistersinger* work, see Cole, *Traveller's History*, p. 54.
  22. The original German text of the poem may be found at <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/gedichte-9503/354> (accessed on 9 February 2018). An English translation may be found at [http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/johann\\_wolfgang\\_von\\_goethe/poems/10195](http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/johann_wolfgang_von_goethe/poems/10195) (accessed on 9 February 2018)
  23. See the libretto at [http://www.murashev.com/opera/Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg libretto English German](http://www.murashev.com/opera/Die_Meistersinger_von_Nürnberg_libretto_English_German) *ibid* (accessed on 3 May 2018)
  24. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954) p. 97-9