

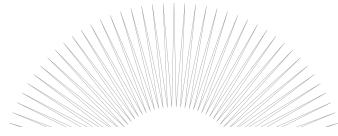
R A D I A N T  
FIFTY REMARKABLE WOMEN IN  
CHURCH HISTORY

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*To my wife*





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# I N T R O D U C T I O N

*Those who look to him are radiant;  
their faces are never covered with shame.*

—Psalm 34:5

**F**rom the days when Mary and Martha opened their home to Jesus, the Christian church has relied on the steadfast faith and tireless work of women. Women were the last to leave the scene of Christ's crucifixion and the first to proclaim His resurrection. Lydia, a successful businesswoman, was the first person in Philippi to turn to Christ through the Apostle Paul's preaching. Her home became Paul's headquarters and the location of the first Christian church in the region. Priscilla and her husband helped Paul found the church in Ephesus and led Apollos to a deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit's work in the hearts of believers. The Roman philosopher Celsus mocked

the fast-growing Christian faith in the Roman Empire saying women spread Christianity “by gossiping Christ at the laundry.”

In the fourth century, Libanius, the famous pagan orator who assisted Emperor Julian’s efforts to revive paganism in the empire, was forced to say, “Good heavens! What remarkable women are found among the Christians.”

Stories of the heroes of the church’s past can touch the hearts and minds of believers in powerful ways. It is the Bible’s own way of communicating truth by setting before us flesh and blood examples of God’s people. The role played by women, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the conversion of souls from every nation, tribe, people and language is not as well known as it should be. The following sketches trace the witness of women through two thousand years of church history—from brave souls who died as martyrs in the arena to zealous medieval queens leading their husbands and their subjects to Jesus—from Western missionaries forsaking the comforts of home to bring the gospel to the four corners of the globe to native women in remote lands, pointing their fellow tribesmen to Christ.

These short sketches simply scratch the surface of the women’s lives. Effort was made to honestly depict them in the midst of their unique time and circumstances. However, it was not possible within a few pages to thoroughly explore their strengths and weaknesses, faith and doubts, truths and errors. To learn much more about these Christian women, follow the trail marked out in “For Further Reading” at the end of the book. It is my hope that the reader—boy or girl, man or woman—will be inspired, by the grace of God, to follow in their steps as they followed in Christ’s.



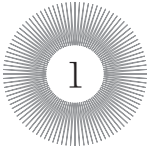
# E A R L Y   C H U R C H

## P E R S E C U T I O N   A N D   E X P A N S I O N

**D**uring the first three hundred years of the church, Christians experienced seasons of calm and periods of storm. Under some Roman emperors and governors who believed that devotion to paganism meant loyalty to the government they suffered intense persecution. Christians who refused to bow down to the pagan gods of Rome suffered cruel public deaths as enemies of the state. Perpetua and Crispina were two of hundreds of women who died for Christ in the arena. At other times, the state left Christians largely alone, and the faith was often advanced by influential women from the great aristocratic families of the empire.

After Emperor Constantine made Christianity legal in the empire, mothers like Monica and Anthusa were free to raise their children in the Christian faith without interference from the

government. When the Roman Empire collapsed, women played a prominent role in bringing the good news of Christ to the far-flung peoples that the Romans called “barbarians.”



## PERPETUA

*Not in Her Own Power, but in God's,  
181–203*

In 202, the Roman governor at Carthage in North Africa ordered the arrest of Christians. Among those rounded up was Perpetua, the young mother of a one-year-old boy. She came from a noble family—her father was a pagan and her mother a Christian. Her husband was no longer around, either he had died or he had abandoned her because of her Christian beliefs. At that time, Christians could escape punishment by offering a sacrifice to the emperor as a god. After her arrest, Perpetua was held with four Christian friends, including her pastor, Saturus, in a private home under a strong guard. Her father came and pleaded with her to deny Christianity. “For the sake of your child and our family,” he said with tears in his eyes, “reject Christ.”

Perpetua pointed to a pitcher sitting on a shelf and said, “Father, can that pitcher change its name?”

“No,” her father answered.

“Neither can I call myself anything else than what I am—a Christian.”

Her determined reply made his heart pound and his cheeks flush red. Grabbing her by the shoulders, he shook her, demanding that she renounce her faith. “I am a Christian,” she said.

Seeing that his daughter could not be persuaded either by pleadings or threats, he went away, hanging his head.

A few days later, guards moved Perpetua and her friends from the house and cast them into the dungeon of a large prison. The heat and stench from the prisoners packed together like cord wood was nearly unbearable. “Oh, the horror and darkness,” Perpetua said, “I have never been in such a place.”

Soldiers cursed and whipped the prisoners at will, but worse than the physical torture was Perpetua’s concern for her baby. After a few days, the chief jailer moved them to a less crowded section of the prison, and a friend brought her infant son to her. She thanked God for the ability to nurse her famished child. Then she directed her friend to place her son in the care of her mother.

After several days, word spread that the Christian prisoners would soon stand trial. Perpetua’s father came to her in prison, his face pale and drawn, and his eyes red and swollen. “Daughter,” he said, “have pity on your father, if I still deserve to be called your father. Do not deliver me up to the scorn of men. Think of your mother and your brothers. Have compassion on your child that cannot live without you. Lay aside your courage and resolve—for we cannot bear the thought of your suffering.”

Then he knelt at her feet, kissed her hands and sobbed, saying, “My lady, please relent.”

Perpetua bit her lip and fought back tears. “Father, do not grieve,” she said. “Nothing will happen, but what pleases God. Know that we are not placed in our own power, but in God’s.”

Sighing and bowing his head, he left her.

The next day, guards led Perpetua and her four friends to the town hall, crowded with gawking spectators. The Christian prisoners stood before the provincial governor. First, he questioned the three men, and each one boldly professed Jesus Christ. While the governor was examining the men, Perpetua's father appeared, holding her son. Pulling her aside, he whispered, "Perpetua, please consider the misery that you will bring on this innocent child."

As Perpetua gently refused her father's request, the governor overheard their conversation. "What!" he bellowed. "Will neither the gray hairs of a father whom you are going to make miserable, nor the tender innocence of a child which your death will leave an orphan, move you?"

Stretching an opened hand toward her, the governor said, "Just make a sacrifice to the emperor and you shall be freed."

Perpetua looked him in the eyes and said, "I will not do it."

"Are you a Christian then?" he asked.

"I am a Christian," Perpetua answered. The governor ordered a soldier to strike her face for her obstinacy. The blow knocked her back, but she would not deny Christ nor offer incense to the emperor.

Sweeping his gaze over the Christian prisoners, the governor said, "Then you shall all be condemned to die by wild beasts." Their execution would be part of the games in the arena for the entertainment of the crowds.

Guards brought them back to prison. For several days, they were chained with their hands and feet in stocks. "The Holy Spirit inspired me to pray for nothing but patience under bodily pains,"

Perpetua said. But then the chief jailer, seeing how the Christians bore their torments with such courage and grace, took pity on them. He removed them from the stocks and allowed them to have visitors. Perpetua's father—looking haggard and exhausted—came to see her. Throwing himself on the ground, he begged her to recant her faith to save her life. "I cannot," she told him, "I am a Christian." After he left the prison, tears streamed down her cheeks and she said, "I was ready to die with sorrow to see my father in such deplorable condition."

One of the prisoners condemned to die with Perpetua was a young woman named Felicitas who was in her eighth month of pregnancy. As the day of their execution approached, Felicitas and Perpetua and the other Christian prisoners gathered together to pray that God would deliver her of her child. They had scarcely finished their prayer when Felicitas went into labor. When she shrieked from the pain of the contractions, one of the guards chided her, "If you cry out in pain during childbirth, what will you do when you are thrown to the wild beasts?"

"Now it is I who suffers," Felicitas said, "but then there will be Another in me that will suffer for me because I suffer for Him."

Moments later her baby daughter was born. Felicitas put her in the care of a Christian woman who raised her as her own. By this time, even the chief jailer himself had turned to Christ through the example of Perpetua and her friends. He secretly did all that he could for them. "I found the Lord's kindnesses to be very great," Perpetua said.

In the days leading up to the games, their cell block was full of people—prisoners and visitors—curious to see these Christians





7 CLOTILDA,  
QUEEN OF THE FRANKS  
*A Servant of God, c.474–545*

In 493, nineteen-year-old Queen Clotilda cradled her lifeless infant son in her arms, weeping and praying. Just hours after he was baptized, the baby suddenly died while still wearing the white baptismal robe. Her husband Clovis, the pagan king of the Franks, had agreed to Clotilda's request that their first-born child be baptized. Then Clovis came to her, his eyes red and his teeth clenched. Pointing at his wife he said, "Your God is the cause of our son's death. If he had been consecrated to my gods, he would still be alive."

"I give thanks to Almighty God," Clotilda said through her tears, "that He has not considered me unworthy to be the mother of a child admitted into His heavenly kingdom. He will rejoice in the presence of God through all eternity."

A year later, she gave birth to their second son. Reluctantly, Clovis allowed him to be baptized. But a few days after his baptism, he fell gravely ill. As the baby grew weaker and weaker, Clovis told his wife, "Can we expect any other fate for this child than that of his brother? He was baptized in the name of *your* Christ, he is certain therefore to die."

Clotilda did not answer her husband, but bowed her head in prayer, begging God to spare the child's life. Not long afterward—to

the relief of both parents—the baby recovered. Clotilda thanked the Lord, and Clovis stopped criticizing his wife's faith. This was the first step on the road to the conversion of the Franks.

Clotilda, the daughter of a Burgundian king, was raised by her mother, Caretena, to love and fear the Lord. Caretena taught Clotilda and her siblings to read the Scriptures, pray, fast and do works of mercy. When her husband died, Queen Caretena brought Clotilda and her sister to the court of her relative, the King of Geneva. He became the guardian of the two princesses. Caretena and her daughters became well known for their kindness and generosity to the poor of Geneva.

Envoys from King Clovis often came to the court of Geneva. They brought back to the young king glowing reports of Clotilda's beauty and her sterling character. Soon Clovis asked for Clotilda's hand in marriage. It must have been flattering to the young princess to receive an offer of marriage from the most powerful king in Western Europe. But Clovis was a pagan—could Clotilda in good conscience marry someone who was not a follower of Christ? The King of Geneva told her to marry Clovis as an important political alliance. She and her mother sought out their bishop for counsel. He advised her to accept the proposal under the condition that she have the freedom to practice her Christian faith and raise their children to be Christians. He challenged her to consider what great things might come if she could lead her husband to faith in Christ. "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife," he said, quoting the Apostle Paul.

In 492, they were married in a lavish ceremony at Clovis's court in Soissons. Later, he made Paris his capital. A deep affection

quickly grew between them. Clotilda's cheerful spirit and tact won her husband's admiration. Gently and patiently, she told him of the love of Jesus Christ for sinners. "I beseech you above all things," she said, "to adore God Almighty who is in heaven."

"You ask that I should forsake my gods and adore yours," he told her, "that is a difficult thing to do."

After four years of marriage, Clovis still clung to his idols, but Clotilda kept speaking to him and praying to God for his salvation. Then King Clovis led his troops in battle against the Allemanni, a fierce Germanic tribe living on the banks of the Rhine River. Clovis wielded his sword at the head of his men as the two great armies clashed. Soon, the Allemanni gained the upper hand and forced the Franks to pull back. Many Franks fell. Some began to run from the field. Clovis knew that if his army suffered defeat his whole kingdom would fall. Then, when all seemed lost, Clovis remembered his wife's God, Jesus Christ the victor over sin and death. In his despair he cried out, "Jesus Christ, You who are, according to Clotilda, the Son of the living God, I call on You. Help me in my distress. I desire to believe in You. Rescue me from my enemies."

Moments later, fresh courage reinvigorated his men. Clovis regrouped his troops and charged. In the desperate fighting that followed, they killed the Allemanni king. Seeing their leader dead on the field, the Allemanni soldiers broke ranks and ran. Those who did not surrender, the Franks cut down. Clovis's stunning victory was complete.

When he returned triumphant from the battlefield, Clovis told Clotilda what had happened. She rejoiced more in her

husband's budding faith than in the victory. Seizing the moment, she sent for Bishop Remi to instruct the king in the Christian faith. Meeting in secret, Remi taught the king the fundamentals of Christianity. "Stop worshiping idols," he said, "repent and turn to the living and true God, creator of all things and to Jesus Christ His Son."

"I'm ready to listen to you," Clovis said, "but my followers will not forsake their gods."

He was concerned that, should he leave the gods of his people, his faithful bodyguard—the cream of his army and the core of his support—would fall away. Clovis was bound to these brave men by blood oaths of loyalty taken in the names of their gods. He feared that if he declared his allegiance to Christ, his men would abandon him and he would lose the throne. "I must speak to them about this," he told the bishop.

Clovis called a meeting of his closest advisors and his leading warriors. He told them of his battlefield prayer to Clotilda's God. "I am considering forsaking the gods of our fathers and following Christ," he said. "What do you think?"

To his surprise, most of his men declared that they were ready to follow him in the new faith. Bishop Remi arranged for Christian ministers to teach these men and their families. On Christmas Day 496, Clovis and three thousand Franks marched in procession through the streets of Reims to the cathedral. Clotilda, her face beaming, walked beside her husband. Every house along the route displayed ornate banners. Embroidered linens stretched across the street, creating a colorful canopy for the marchers. Dignitaries, whom Clovis invited from across his

realm, witnessed his baptism in the crowded cathedral. The sanctuary glowed with the light from thousands of candles and the aroma of incense filled the air. As a hymn sung by a great choir echoed through the church, Clovis turned to Bishop Remi and asked, "Is this the kingdom of heaven that you promised me?"

"No," answered the bishop, "but it is the beginning of the road that leads there."

Then he asked the king, "Do you renounce Satan and all his works and all his empty promises?"

"I do," Clovis answered.

"Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth?"

"I do."

"Do you believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?"

"I do," Clovis replied.

"Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?"

"I do."

"God, the all-powerful Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has given us a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit and forgiven all our sins," the bishop prayed. "May He also keep us faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ for ever and ever."

After Remi baptized Clovis in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, a cadre of Christian ministers came forward and baptized three thousand of the king's followers. The



MRS. SMITH OF  
COVENTRY

*Mother and Martyr, c. 1485–1519*

One evening in 1519, Mrs. Smith, a widowed mother, sat with her children around the hearth of their cottage in Coventry, England.\* She was reading to them from the Gospel of Luke and teaching them to recite the Lord’s Prayer in English. They worshiped secretly with a small group of Lollards who read the Bible in English and followed the teachings of John Wycliffe. About 150 years earlier, Wycliffe, a professor at Oxford University, studied the Word of God in Latin and discovered a welcoming Savior, not an aloof judge. He came to find that many of the teachings of the Roman church—purgatory, prayers to saints, indulgences and many others—were contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures.

Wycliffe began to teach his students that the church’s unbiblical doctrines hid the good news of Jesus Christ. “Church Law has no force,” Wycliffe wrote, “when it is opposed to the Word of God.”

At that time, the Latin Vulgate was the only Bible translation allowed by the church, but only the educated elite understood Latin. Wycliffe longed for the people to hear and read the Scriptures in their own language. So, with the help of his

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\*The Coventry authorities in 1519 did not record Mrs. Smith’s first name. In the 1560s when the reformer John Foxe was writing his book on the Christian martyrs, he did not include her first name either.

students, he translated the Bible into English. He sent out his helpers to preach and distribute hand-written portions of the Scriptures. The Lollards, as they were called, won thousands of Englishmen to Christ, but the bishops convinced the king to crush them. Hunted and hounded for decades, scores of Lollards were burned at the stake. They went underground, worshiping behind closed doors and secretly passing out hand-copied passages of the Bible.

In reaction to Wycliffe's efforts, the authorities enforced severe punishments for translating the Bible into English or reading the Scriptures in English. But persecution by the Church and the Crown could not fully extinguish Wycliffe's Bible or the Lollards.

One hundred thirty years after Wycliffe's death, when Martin Luther in Germany began using the Scriptures to boldly challenge the teachings of the Roman church, leaders in England feared that their island kingdom might be infected by the German Reformation. They had good reason for concern. The English had long resented papal taxation and the unrestricted powers of church courts where a dungeon cell awaited those who dared bring complaints against the clergy. Immoral and greedy priests made a mockery of Christ's commands.

"What a trade is that of the priests!" William Tyndale, the English reformer, wrote, "They want money for everything: money for baptism, for weddings, for buryings, for images, penances, and soul-masses. Poor sheep! The parson shears, the vicar shaves, the parish priest polls, the friar scrapes, the indulgence seller pares. We lack but a butcher to pull off the skin."

As Luther's writings rolled off the printing presses in Germany, they were smuggled into England and then spread throughout the kingdom by merchants and booksellers—many of them Lollards. The Bishop of London warned, "There have been found certain children of iniquity who are endeavoring to bring into our land the old and accursed Wycliffite heresy and along with it the Lutheran heresy."

Young King Henry VIII, enraged by Luther's criticism of the Roman church, called the German reformer "a serpent, a cunning viper." He said that Luther's writings "sprung from the depths of hell." Henry ordered them publicly burned in London, and made it clear that English supporters of these ideas would face persecution. A crackdown on Lollards soon followed.

In the spring of 1519, the Bishop of Coventry received word that certain families were teaching their children the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments in English. The bishop ordered the arrest of Mr. Hatchets, Mr. Archer, Mr. Hawkins, Mr. Bond, Mr. Wrigsham, Mr. Landsdale and Mrs. Smith. While they were held at an abbey outside of town, their children were brought to Greyfriar's Monastery in Coventry. The boys and girls were made to stand before Friar Stafford, the abbot. One by one, Stafford interrogated the children about their parents' beliefs. "Now then," he told them, "I charge you in the name of God to tell me the whole truth—you shall suffer severely for any lies you tell or secrets you conceal."

"What do you believe about the church and the way to heaven?" he asked them. "Do you go to the services of the parish church? Do you read the Scriptures in English? Do you memorize the Lord's Prayer or other Scriptures in English?"





16

MARGARET,  
QUEEN OF NAVARRE  
*Protector of the Persecuted, 1492–1549*

In Paris on January 21, 1535, Francis I, King of France, led a great procession from the Louvre to the Cathedral of Notre Dame. Bareheaded and holding a lighted torch, Francis walked along with hundreds of others. All the high officials of the royal court, university professors, members of parliament, cardinals, bishops, priests and monks marched in line, carrying relics from all the churches of the French capital. The Bishop of Paris carried a consecrated host protected under a crimson canopy held aloft by the king's three sons and a duke.

When they reached Notre Dame, they celebrated high mass. After the service, the king addressed the assembly. With tears in his eyes, he told the immense crowd that he would resist the Protestant reformers whom he called “enemies of God.” “And if my own right arm,” he said, “were infected with the radical pestilence, I would cut it off and cast it from me. And if one of my children were so miserable as to favor it, I would with my own hand deliver him up to the just fate of a heretic and blasphemer.” Applause erupted from the congregation, as they looked forward to the main event—the burning of several people who had accepted the Reformation teaching that sinners are justified by faith in Christ alone.

The procession and the king's speech had been prompted by the placing of placards on church doors across Paris. The posters condemned the Roman church's teaching that the bread of the Eucharist was the physical body of Christ. Placards were even affixed to the front gates of the king's palace. Church leaders and government officials had long complained that King Francis was too lenient with his subjects who accepted the ideas of Luther and other reformers. "The detestable doctrines of Luther are everywhere finding fresh adherents," one bishop lamented to the king. "Condemn them to be burned alive."

The "Affair of the Placards" was just the excuse they needed to get the king to act.

Shortly after Francis's speech, six French Protestants were burned slowly at the stake in front of a large gathering of leaders of church and state. One was a school teacher who ate meat on Friday, a day set aside by the Roman church for abstaining from meat.

The executioner suspended them above the fire with an iron chain and drew them in and out of the flames to prolong their agony. In the crackdown against French Protestants that followed, thousands were killed and thousands more fled the country.

Conspicuously absent from the procession and the executions was the king's sister, Margaret, Queen of Navarre. Raised in a royal house that embraced the Renaissance, Margaret received a classical education. The tall, blond-haired princess mastered Italian, Spanish and Latin, and she learned a little Greek and Hebrew. Her diligent study of literature, philosophy and theology made her one of the best educated women in Europe.

As a young adult, Margaret embraced many of the ideas of the Protestant reformers. She loved to read the Scriptures in French from the translation by Jacques Lefevre. Although the doctors of the Sorbonne in Paris, the world's oldest university, condemned Lefevre's writings, Margaret hailed him as a bright light for the Christian faith. Lefevre won many disciples, including William Farel, Gerard Roussel and John Calvin. In 1522, the bishops asked the French assembly to condemn Lefevre as a heretic. Margaret urged her brother the king to use his power to halt the proceedings, and he did. With the enthusiastic support of Margaret, Francis established the College of France to expand the Renaissance and create an alternative to the Sorbonne. The king endowed professorships in Greek and Hebrew. "To study Greek and to meddle with Hebrew is one of the greatest heresies of the world," a Sorbonne professor said.

Margaret was very close to her brother. Her love and loyalty for him often clouded her judgment. "The king is more than ever inclined to aid the reform of the church," she once wrote to Lefevre. But she didn't understand that King Francis would never accept the reformation of the church. To do so, Francis told an advisor, "would prejudice my estate."

With openness and generosity, Queen Margaret and her husband King Henry ruled the Kingdom of Navarre, a small principality closely allied with France located between Spain and France. They founded hospitals and orphanages throughout the kingdom. Margaret made it her practice to visit the sick and the poor. She walked through the streets of the capital, Nerac, in plain clothing, talking with the people and striving to relieve

their needs. Margaret and her husband spent most of their income helping orphans and the elderly. “No one,” Margaret said, “should leave sad or disappointed from the presence of a prince, for kings are the ministers of the poor—not their masters.”

“To see her you would never have thought she was a queen,” said one observer, “for she went about like an ordinary woman.”

In the early years of Francis’s reign—through the encouragement of Margaret—he tolerated the reformers and defended them against the religious establishment, especially if he thought he could use it to his advantage. But after the Affair of the Placards, he turned against the Protestants. Francis unleashed a widespread persecution. When reformers were accused of heresy and fled from France, many came to Navarre for Margaret’s protection. “The truth of God is no heresy,” Margaret said. Jacques Lefevre, Clement Marot, who translated the Psalms into French, the reformers John Calvin and Gerard Roussel, and others found sanctuary and support there.

Margaret appointed Roussel to be a royal chaplain. In the palace at Nerac they celebrated mass in French rather than Latin as ordered by Rome. Worshipers received the bread and the wine during communion, and no mention was made of the Virgin Mary or the saints during the service. Those who attended such services in France, Spain or Italy could face the death penalty. French bishops complained that Navarre was throwing off the true faith of the holy Church of Rome. A high official told Francis, “If your majesty really wishes to exterminate the heretics of his kingdom, he ought to begin with his nearest relative, her highness Queen of Navarre.”



KATHERINE VON BORA  
*Wife of Martin Luther, 1499–1552*

In the spring of 1523, an old fishmonger led his horse-drawn cart through the city gate and onto the cobblestone streets of Wittenberg, Germany. He carried a full load, but it wasn't his usual cargo of pickled herring or salted trout. No, this day, he was hauling a cartload of nuns who had just left their convent in a nearby town. These women—like thousands of monks and nuns across Germany—had trusted in the work of Christ on the cross alone for their salvation and not their own good works. They had come to this faith through the writings of the German reformer, Martin Luther, and by reading his German translation of the New Testament.

Luther had also written a paper criticizing the Roman church's promise that the surest way to heaven was to live behind cloistered walls—telling young men and women that the single life of a monk or nun was holier than the married life of a husband or wife.

The nine women in the fish wagon had recently asked for Martin Luther's help in leaving the convent to start a new life. Luther had arranged with the fish seller to bring them to Wittenberg. They arrived at Luther's home—a defunct monastery that was taken over by Wittenberg University. Luther, a doctor of theology and university professor, lived there with a number of his students. Luther's heart went out to these