The Morgan Library & Museum

Press Release

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# NEW EXHIBITION AT THE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM EXPLORES THE WORLD OF MARTIN LUTHER IN TEXT AND ART

***Word and Image: Martin Luther's Reformation***
*October 7, 2016 through January 22, 2017*

**New York, NY, September 9, 2016 —** Five hundred years ago a monk in a backwater town at the edge of Germany took on the most powerful men in Europe—the Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope—and he won.

Martin Luther's Reformation ranks among the most successful religious movements in history, altering western society and culture forever, and was a testament to his creative use of communications, notably rapidly evolving print technology, to promote his views. To mark the historic anniversary of Luther posting the Ninety-Five Theses to the church door in Wittenberg in 1517, *Word and Image: Martin Luther's Reformation***,** a new exhibition opening at the Morgan Library & Museum on October 7**,** explores the evolution of his movement and its triumphant propagation in text and art. The exhibition will remain on view through January 22.


Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Martin Luther,* 1529. Oil on panel. 41.9 x 28.5 cm. © Fotothek Stiftung Schloss Friedenstein Gotha, Cat. No. 227.

*Word and Image* includes more than ninety objects, highlighted by one of the six existing printed copies of the Ninety-Five Theses, and nearly forty paintings, prints, and drawings by the celebrated German Renaissance artist Lucas Cranach the Elder. Also on view will be Luther's manuscript draft of his famous Old Testament translation, sculptor Conrad Meit's exquisite statues of Adam and Eve, and over thirty of Luther's most important publications. The majority of the works in the show are loans from German museums and have never before been exhibited in the United States.

“The Morgan is internationally recognized for its outstanding collections of early printed books and Northern European prints and drawings, so an exhibition on Martin Luther’s deft use of such material to spread his views is an important and exciting opportunity for us,” said Colin B. Bailey, the museum’s director. “Luther understood that his ideas and public image required textual and visual support on a large scale to engage a mass audience. He took advantage of new developments in printing and befriended accomplished artists such as Cranach the Elder to help him in this effort. The result was a sophisticated melding of word and image, that helped launch a religious and cultural revolution.”

## THE EXHIBITION

### I. Young Martin

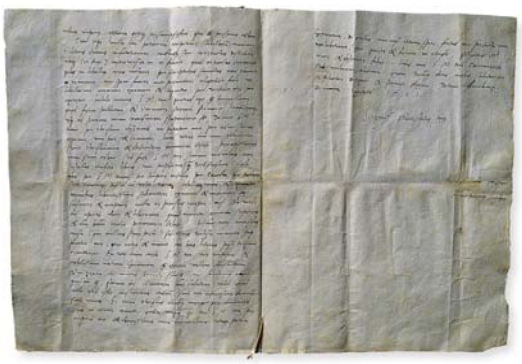
Martin Luther (1483–1546) was raised in Eiselben, Saxony. His father Hans Luder (later changed by Martin) came from a wealthy farming family, and Margaretha Lindemann, his mother, was from a middle-class background. Hans was a respected and influential mining operator in Mansfeld. The family was quite prosperous judging from the size of their home and the material found there through archaeological digs. Martin was sent to the best schools and brought up in a world structured by Christianity. Devotion was expressed through daily prayers and performing a set of prescribed rituals or good works (attending Mass, going to confession and on pilgrimage, buying indulgences). Artworks, books, and all manner of visual material focused piety on the active presence of the divine in daily lives. The fear of sin was real. There was a constant need to seek the aid of Christ and the saints to save you from the fires of Hell. This was the world Martin was born into.

### II. Indulgences and the Ninety-Five Theses

Martin Luther was not the first to speak out against the sale of indulgences, which were customarily prayers or fasts undertaken to reduce punishment and seek forgiveness for sins, but in time evolved into the payment of fixed sums of money attached to various offences. Many at the time thought that the practice of purchasing salvation was an abuse of faith and merely a way to fill papal coffers. Through his groundbreaking lectures on the Bible at the University of Wittenberg, Luther came to doubt the validity of indulgences and other Church practices that were not explicitly supported by Scripture.

In 1517, Luther summarized his views on how to reform the church in his landmark Ninety-Five Theses, which he boldly nailed to the church door at Wittenberg Castle, as would be done for any other university announcement. The heading of Luther’s Theses states that they were a series of points for a university debate on the scriptural validity of the practice of selling and buying

indulgences. Luther's criticisms partly reacted to a popular notion that buying an indulgence was akin to a 'get out of jail for free' card. The disputation never happened, however, as news of Luther's criticisms reached his ecclesiastical superiors, both through Luther's own actions and the fact that the theses were printed and distributed in single-sheet broadside and pamphlet editions. In addition to two broadside editions, the Theses also appeared in quarto (pamphlet) format from a press in Basel, nearly 450 miles away. The printing press helped Luther's words spread far beyond Wittenberg, which turned a local university debate into an international event. In this case, it is both Luther's words and their method of distribution that are important to understanding *how* the Reformation happened. We do not know how many copies of the Ninety-Five Theses were originally printed—perhaps 100 or less for each edition—but today only 6 copies of the broadsides exist and 15 of the quarto.



Top: Luther House, Wittenberg. © Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt. Middle: Martin Luther, The Ninety-Five Theses (broadside), Österreichisches Staatsarchiv/Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv. Bottom: Martin Luther, Letter to Emperor Charles V, signed Friedberg, April 28, 1521. Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt, Cat. No. 174.

**III. Luther Goes to Trial**

Luther willingly submitted his Theses and other writings to his superiors. However, arguing against centuries of Church tradition, even when claiming the Bible as primary source material, was dangerous. Ultimately, Luther was called before Emperor Charles V and the full assembly of imperial nobles at the Diet of Worms in 1521 to defend himself and his publications against the charge of heresy. Both in his trial and his dealings with the pope and emperor, Luther stood firm in his conviction that all religious doctrine and practice should be based upon Scripture and that everyone was entitled to share in the grace of God.

While his famous statement, "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise," is a later interpolation, it nonetheless perfectly encapsulates his conviction that what he wrote was

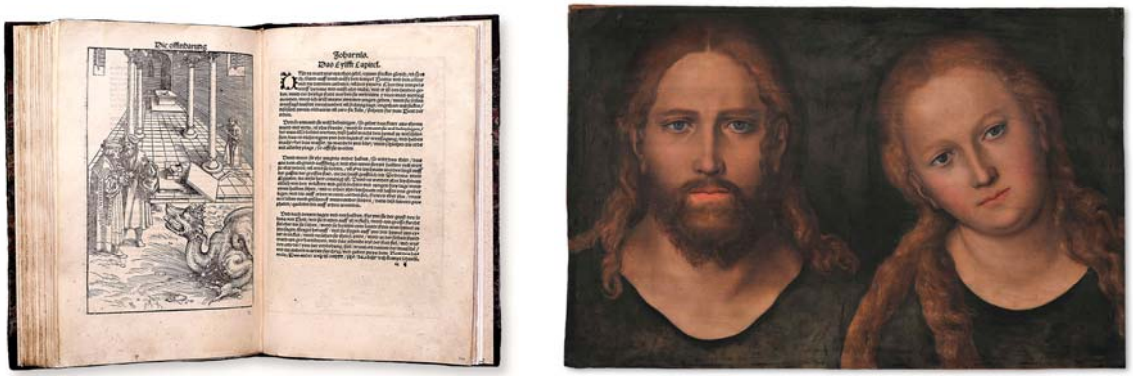
based on Scripture, and Luther could not recant what he wrote without denying Scripture, which was ideologically impossible.

**IV. Luther's Translation of The Bible**

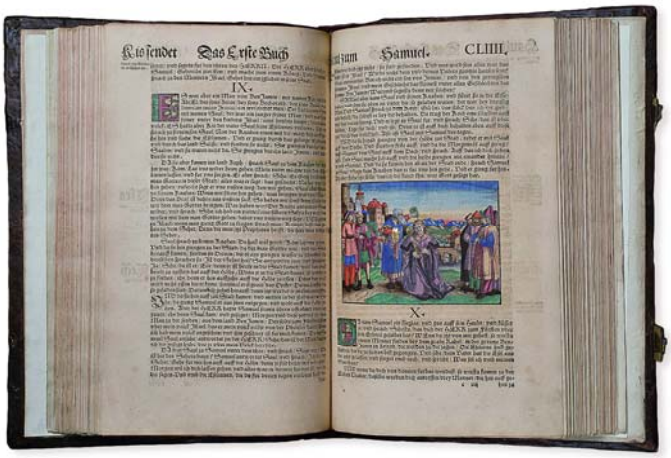
After leaving Worms, Luther was 'kidnapped' by his friends and taken to Wartburg Castle to protect him from the emperor. Artist Albrecht Dürer, a strong adherent to the Lutheran movement, feared that Luther was dead. Removed from the demands and dangers of the outside world, however, Luther now had uninterrupted time to focus on his most important endeavor: translating the Bible into German. Scripture held ultimate authority for Luther, and he recognized that the doctrine lay in the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament and Greek of the New Testament rather than in the Latin Vulgate or existing German versions. To this end, he wanted a clear and accurate translation of the Bible available in the popular tongue, so that it could be easily understood by the common man. Luther thought that the printing press was God's greatest gift for the spreading of the Gospel, and he employed the relatively new technology to print and disseminate his Bible in German.

**V. Art of the Reformation**

Contrary to popular opinion, Luther was not against art. He thought that religious imagery was of the utmost importance when it supported Scripture. Fortunately for Luther, he lived down the street from Lucas Cranach the Elder, the court painter of the electors of Saxony. The two men developed a very close personal relationship, and Cranach was instrumental in crafting Luther's public image. Due to his rapid and prolific production, Cranach was known as *pictor celerrimus*, the fastest painter. In addition to creating the famous images of Luther, the artist also produced portraits of his Reformation colleagues as well as Protestant and Catholic dignitaries, works on



Left: Martin Luther, December Testament, *Das Newe Testament Deutzsch* (The New Testament, in German), Wittenberg: Melchior Lotter the Younger, December 1522. Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt Cat. No. 207. Right: Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Christ and Mary,* ca. 1516–20, Oil on parchment on panel. Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha, Cat. No. 98.





Left: Martin Luther, *Biblia: das ist die gantze heilige Schrift, Deutsch* (Bible, That Is the Complete Holy Scripture, in German), Wittenberg: Hans Lufft, 1541. Evangelische Marktkirchengemeinde, Marienbibliothek, Halle, Cat. No. 215. Right: Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Martin Luther as a Monk,* 1520, Engraving. Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt, Cat. No. 154.

religious and secular-themed subjects, and designs for hundreds of woodcuts for book illustration. Art in Northern Europe in the early 1500s stood at the bridge between medieval and modern conceptions of the individual and religion, and this imagery conveyed Protestant ideas to a wide public in tandem with Luther's own words.

**VI. Spreading the Word**

The printing press revolutionized mass communication, and Luther's message likely would have fallen flat had it not been for the new technology. From the dissemination of his Ninety-Five Theses to the intended promotion of specific sermons and theological arguments, the Reformation was as much a product of the printing press as it was Luther himself. Every aspect of the Reformation came out in print. The two sides unleashed scathing polemical texts on each other, both in short pamphlet format and single-leaf broadsides with eye-grabbing illustrations that clearly conveyed their message. Luther had to put the Reformation into words, from his composition of key theological points, such as the Augsburg Confession, to guides on how to perform a church service and appropriate church music. The Reformation is not only a reflection of Luther's message, but also the medium that communicated that message.

**VII. Luther Archeology**

A series of archeological digs in 2003–2008 at locations connected with Martin Luther uncovered a treasure trove of material related to the reformer and his family. Never before had Luther's material culture been so well documented, and the finds radically altered some perceptions about his life. Coins, jewelry, tablewares, and toys recovered from his parents' house prove that—unlike Luther's claimed later in life—his family was actually rather affluent. Digs at the Luther House,

Cranach's workshop, and other sites around Wittenberg uncovered early sixteenth-century home décor that reveal how Luther and his colleagues lived. The finds from the Luther House include a vast array of decorative tiles, common local as well as imported housewares and glasses, and, not surprisingly, a large amount of writing and book paraphernalia, all of which help us to understand the home life of Martin Luther.

**Public Programs**

**GALLERY TALK**

**Word and Image: Martin Luther's Reformation**
John T. McQuillen, Assistant Curator, Printed Books & Bindings

**Friday, October 21, 6 pm and Friday, December 16, 1pm**
**Tickets: Free with museum admission; no tickets or reservations necessary.**

**PANEL**

**Martin Luther and Anti-Semitism**
**Dean P. Bell, Martin Hauger, and Mark R. Silk**
In his early works, Luther discouraged mistreatment of the Jews and advocated their conversion by proving that the Old Testament could be shown to speak of Jesus Christ. As the Reformation continued, Luther lost hope in large-scale Jewish conversion to Christianity and grew more and more hostile toward the Jews. A panel featuring Mark R. Silk, Trinity College, Hartford; Dean P. Bell, Spertus Institute, Chicago; and Martin Hauger, High Consistory of the Evangelical Church in Germany, will examine Martin Luther's changing opinion on Jews as well as the impact of the Reformation on Christian-Jewish relations in the 16th century. This program is co-presented with the Leo Baeck Institute, Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Paul, and the Consulate General of the Federal Republic of Germany. A reception follows.

**Sunday, November 13, 2:30 pm***
**Tickets: $15; $10 for Morgan and Leo Baeck Institute members**

*The exhibition will be open for program attendees during museum hours, 11 am–6 pm.

**PANEL**

**Martin Luther, Social Media, and Activism**
**Euan Cameron, Andrew Pettegree, and Serene Jones**
Noted scholars will address how print and mass media were used during the Reformation and the impact of this legacy on contemporary social media and activism. Participants include Serene Jones, President and Johnston Family Professor for Religion and Democracy at Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York; Euan Cameron, Henry Luce III Professor of Reformation Church History, Union Theological Seminary; Andrew Pettegree, Professor and Founding Director, St. Andrews Reformation Studies Institute, Scotland; and others to be announced.

**Monday, December 5, 6:30 pm***
**Tickets: $15; $10 for Morgan members and affiliates of Union Theological Seminary.**

*The exhibition will open at 5:30 pm for program attendees.

**GALLERY TALK**

**Word and Image: Martin Luther's Reformation**
John T. McQuillen, Assistant Curator, Printed Books & Bindings

**Friday, December 16, 1 pm**
**Tickets: Free with museum admission; no tickets or reservations necessary.**

## Organization and Sponsorship

The curator of the exhibition is John T. McQuillen, Assistant Curator of Printed Books & Bindings at the Morgan Library & Museum.

*Word and Image: Martin Luther's Reformation* is made possible with the support of the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany within the framework of the Luther Decade in cooperation with the Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt, the Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, and the Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha, under the leadership of the State Museum of Prehistory, Halle, and in coordination with the Morgan Library & Museum, New York.

It is also made possible with generous support from the Johansson Family Foundation and Kurt F. Viermetz, Munich, and assistance from the Arnhold Foundation.

Federal Foreign Office

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD
LUTHER 2017
500 YEARS OF REFORMATION

HERE I STAND...

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The programs of the Morgan Library & Museum are made possible with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

## The Morgan Library & Museum

A complex of buildings in the heart of New York City, the Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today it is a museum, independent research library, music venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. A century after its founding, the Morgan maintains a unique position in the cultural life of New York City and is considered one of its greatest treasures. With the 2006 reopening of its newly renovated campus, designed by renowned architect Renzo Piano, and the 2010 refurbishment of the original library, the Morgan reaffirmed its role as an important repository for the history, art, and literature of Western civilization from 4000 B.C. to the twenty-first century.

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