

A STUDY OF THE

Protestant Reformation

1517 - 2017

The 500th Anniversary



Introduction: Part 2

In our last lecture, we began our journey of studying the Reformation, beginning with the birth, early life, and education of Martin Luther – all considered within the framework of his family, the German language, and the geographical boundaries within which he lived, played, learned, and developed. From the training he received at home to some of the best preparatory education one could receive in Mansfeld, Magdeburg, and Eisenach, he was well-prepared to enter the University of Erfurt, the most celebrated university in Germany at the beginning of the 16th century, from which he received both his Bachelor's and Master's degrees by 1505 (age 21). Within this young man, there was genius - steadily being acknowledged and admired.



Introduction

“He was not content, like the majority of students, with learning their productions (books, ideas) by heart: he endeavored to fathom their thoughts, to imbibe the spirit which animated them, to appropriate their wisdom to himself, to comprehend the object of their writings, and to enrich his mind with their pregnant sentences and brilliant images. He often addressed questions to his professors and soon outstripped all his fellow-students. Blessed with a retentive memory and a strong imagination, all that he read or heard remained constantly present to his mind; it was as if he had seen it himself. ‘Thus shone Luther in his early years. The whole university,’ says Melanchthon, ‘admired his genius’” (Merle D’Aubigne, 1784-1872).

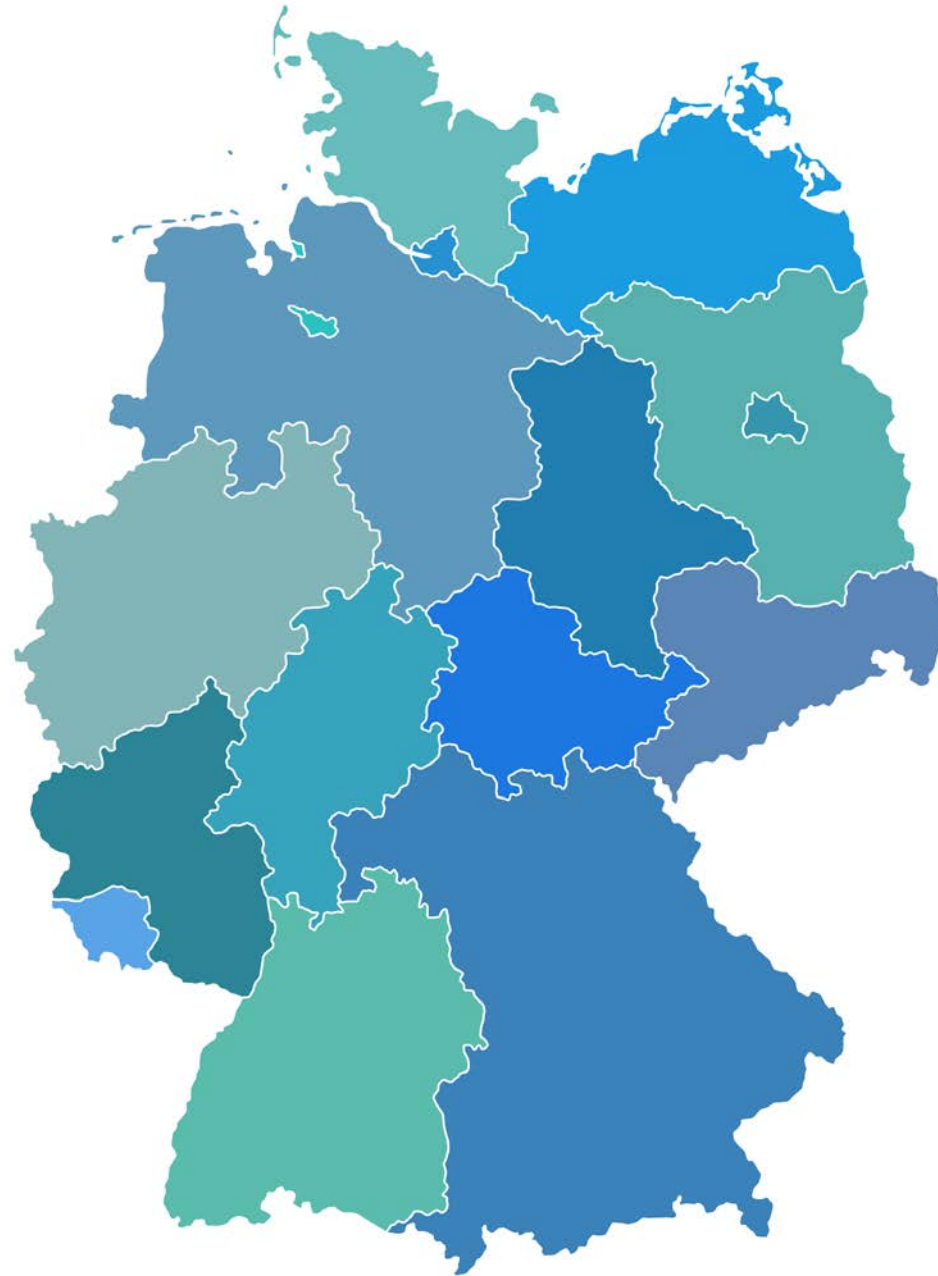
Introduction

Continuing to build upon the biographical portrait of Martin Luther, we find him with two degrees in hand and applying to study Law in Erfurt – a settled matter in the mind of his father, Hans. It has been suggested that “the idle life of the majority of priests was displeasing to the active miner of Mansfeld.” After a brief visit with his family in Mansfeld, Luther began his 53-mile trip back to Erfurt in the summer of 1505. Luther was thrown to his knees in Stotternheim – the “turning point of the Reformation.”

After reviewing the geography of Luther’s world, we will continue to investigate Luther’s life as it unfolds at - and after - Stotternheim.

Germany

16 Constituent States



Eisleben

Hamburg

Germany

Berlin

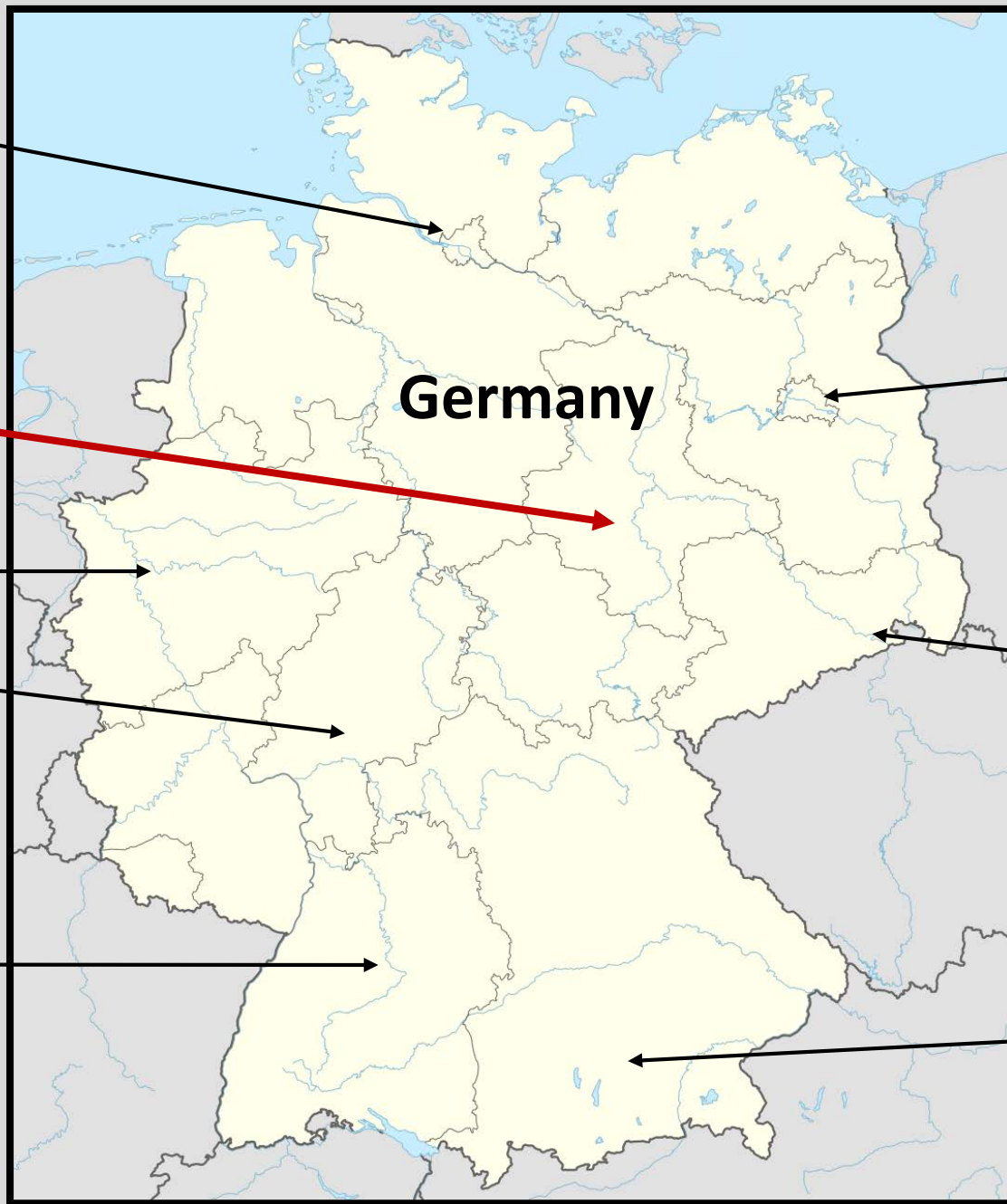
Dusseldorf

Frankfurt

Dresden

Stuttgart

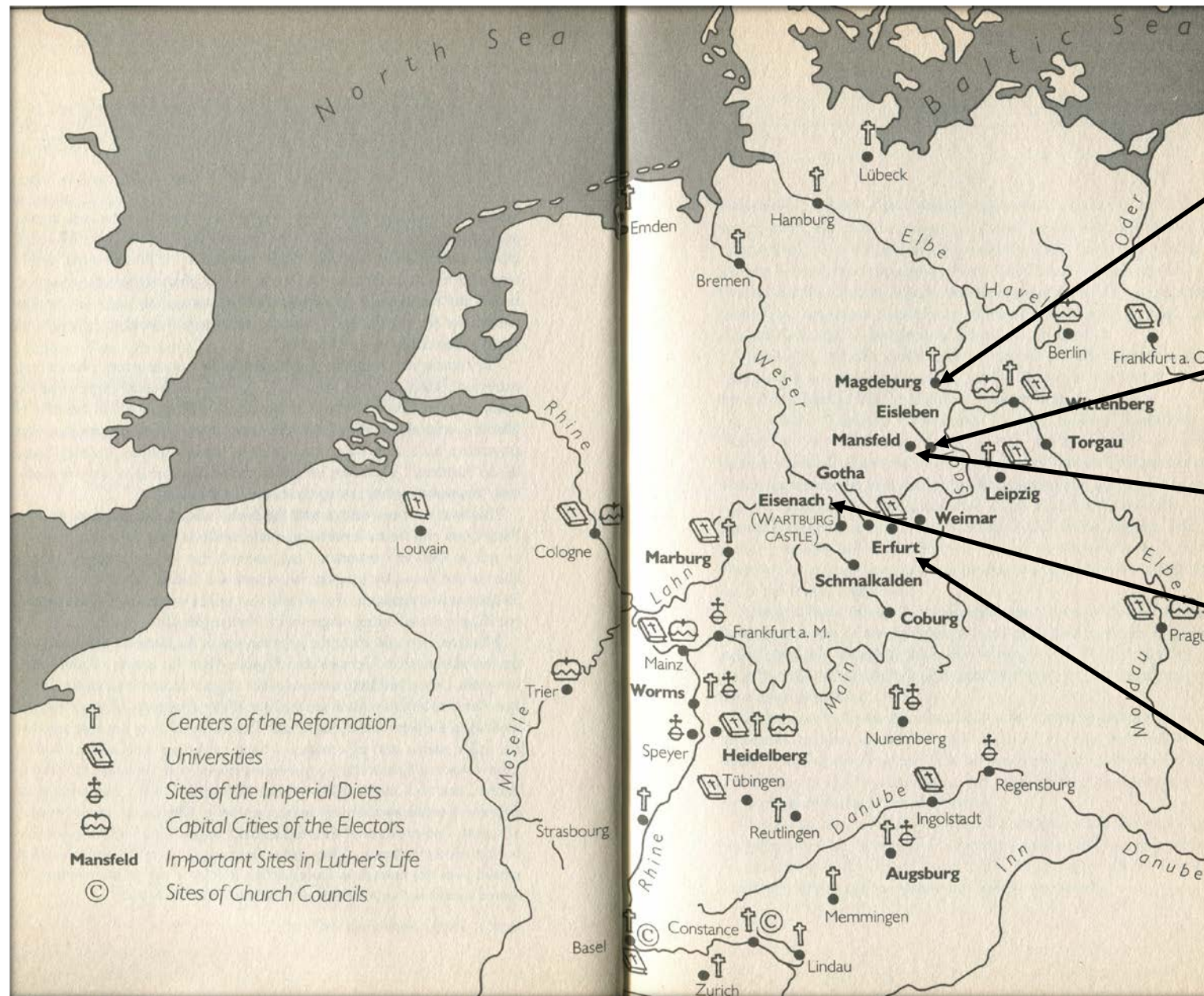
Munich



Distances

Eisleben to Mansfeld: 10 mi.
Mansfeld to Magdeburg: 49 mi.
Mansfeld to Eisenach: 97 mi.
Mansfeld to Erfurt: 53 mi.

This excellent map of Luther's Germany is from Heiko Oberman's biography of Luther.



3

Magdeburg
Cathedral School
(1497)

1

Eisleben
Birthplace of Martin
Luther (1483)

2

Mansfeld
Boyhood Education
(1484-1497)

4

Eisenach
Completed his
preparatory education
(1498-1501)

5

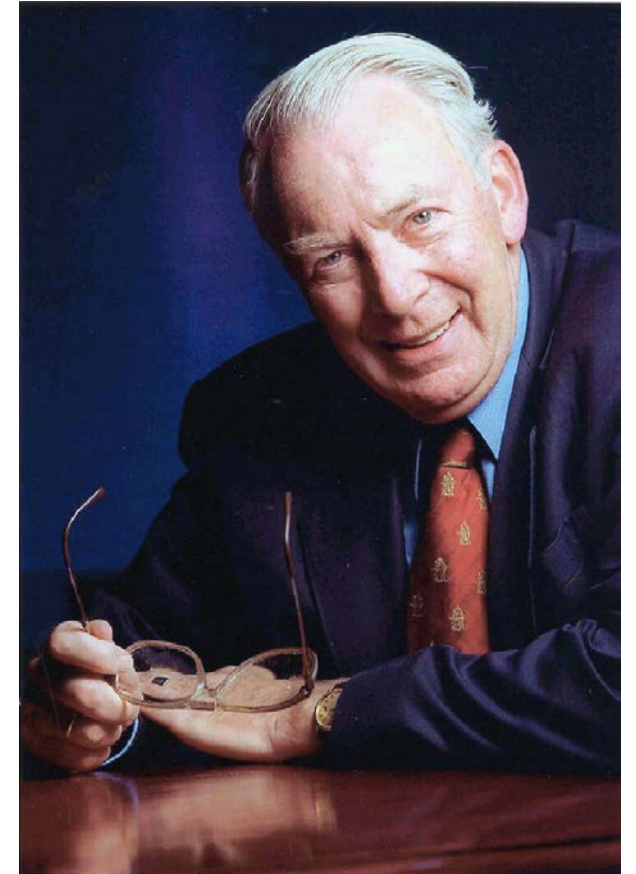
University of Erfurt
1501-1505

Introducing Heiko Oberman

Dutch scholar Heiko Oberman was a leading authority on the late Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Reformation. He was the first historian to make full use of the monumental Weimar edition of Luther's works, begun in the 1880s and now running to about a hundred volumes. His best known work is *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (1982). He took his doctorate in Utrecht in 1957 and held chairs at Harvard, Tübingen (Germany), and the University of Arizona. He wrote as fluently in German as in Dutch and published more than 30 books. He died at the age of 70.

- *The Telegraph*

“There is hardly any authenticated information about those first eighteen years, which led Luther to the threshold of the University of Erfurt.”



Heiko A. Oberman

1930-2001



The University of Erfurt Law School

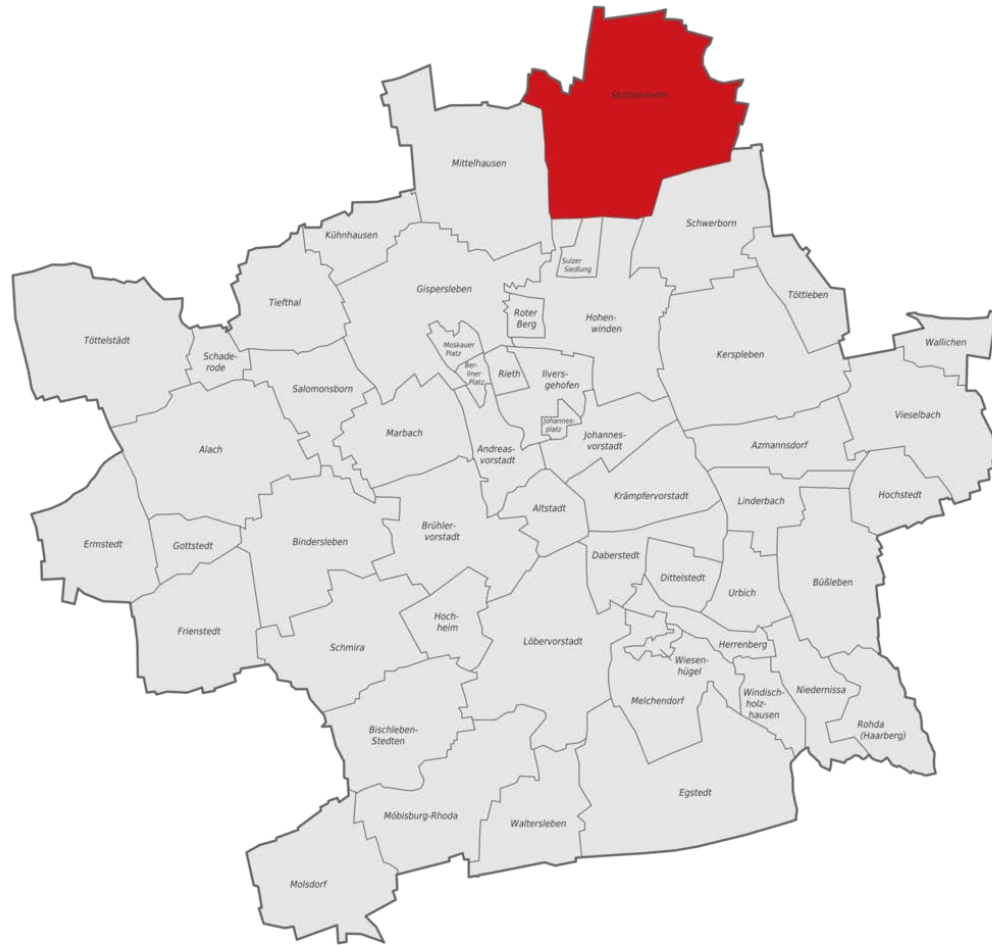
- In May, 1505, Luther registered as a student in the Faculty of Law at the University of Erfurt.
- To prepare him for a career in law, his father gave his son money to buy the most essential books for his law studies. “Hans Luder had gone to considerable expense to offer his eldest son a university education in preparation for a career that might take Martin as high as the post of ‘learned counsel’ and thus to a level of influence in politics.”
- Luther purchased the costly folio edition of the *Corpus Juris Civilis*, the legal code of the Roman emperor Justinian (AD 482-565).



The Thunderstorm Near Stotternheim

- On July 2, 1505, 21-year-old Luther was returning to Erfurt from a visit to his home when he encountered a severe thunderstorm near the village of Stotternheim, an urban district a few miles from Erfurt, and was thrown to the ground by a flash of lightening.
- Dr. Harold Grimm summarizes the event: “Believing at that instant that he would die without the last sacrament, he called upon St. Anne and vowed that he would enter the monastery if he were spared from death.” Dr. Oberman states specifically that he called out, “Help, St. Anne, I will become a monk!”
- After this, Luther returned his *Corpus Juris* books to the bookseller.

Stotternheim, Northern District of Erfurt



Stotternheim Monument

- “Here, on July 2, 1505, Martin Luther was struck by lightening.”
- The other side: “St. Anne help me, I will become a monk!”
- The explanation: “Turning point of the Reformation”





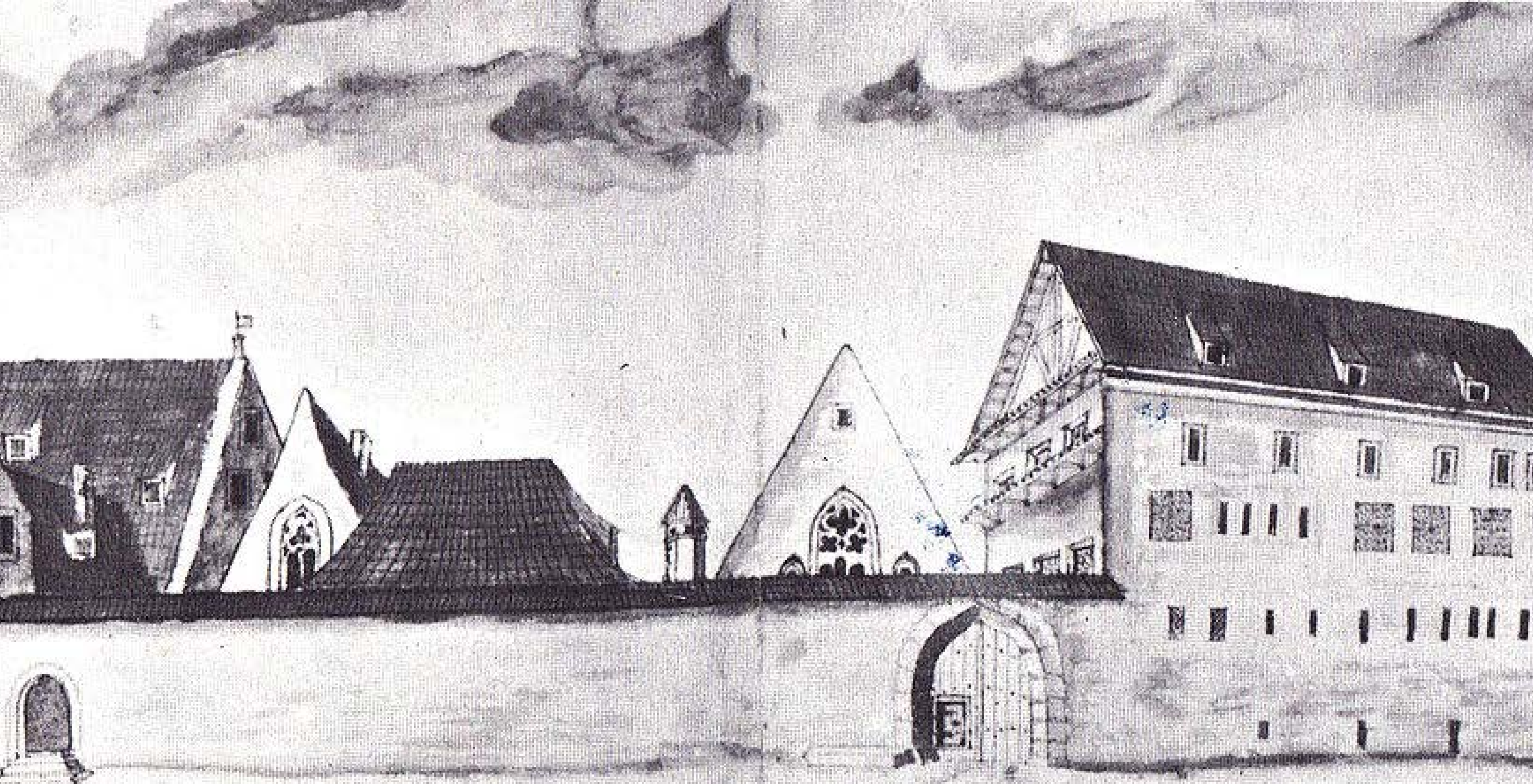
Rubianus, Luther's University Friend

- “Divine Providence looked at what you were one day to become, when on your return from your parents, the fire from heaven threw you to the ground, like another Paul, near the city of Erfurt, and withdrawing you from our society, drove you into the Augustine order.”
- Os Guinness observes that “we start out searching, but we end up being discovered. We think we are looking for something; we realize we are found by Someone. As in Francis Thompson’s famous picture, ‘the hound of heaven’ has tracked us down.”



Two Weeks Later

- On the evening of July 16, Luther held a farewell dinner for his friends and announced his decision to enter the monastery.
- “The next day his friends accompanied him to the monastery and tearfully watched the gates close behind him.” Oberman writes: “The moment of parting had arrived: ‘You see me today and never again.’ He was convinced that he was leaving the world behind him forever, as he had promised St. Anne.”
- His father was infuriated when he learned about Martin’s decision.
- His consent would not be given until a plague had taken two of his younger sons and he received a letter bearing a false report that Martin had also died.



The oldest known exterior of the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt, 16th century

At the Augustinian Monastery Gate



Erfurt Monastery

“Luther asks admittance. The gate opens and closes again. Behold him separated forever from his parents, from the companions of his studies, and from the world! It was the 17th of August 1505: Luther was then twenty-one years old. Luther was with God at last.”



The Novice

The prior stood upon the step of the altar, and Luther would have prostrated himself. The prior then asked, “What seekest thou?” The answer from Luther would have been: “God’s grace and thy mercy.” Then the prior would have raised Luther up and inquired whether he was married, a bondsman (see next slide), or afflicted with secret disease. When Luther said, “no,” the prior described the rigors of the life to be undertaken: the renunciation of self-will, the scant diet, rough clothing, vigils by night and labors by day, mortification of the flesh, the reproach of poverty, the shame of begging, and the tastefulness of cloistered existence. Was Luther ready? “Yes, with God’s help, and in so far as human frailty allows.” A year of probation followed.

What Is A Bondsman? Someone in Debt

“No doubt other religious houses used a procedure similar to that used at Christ Church Priory, Canterbury, whereby candidates about to enter the monastery as novices had to answer, under oath, a series of questions. Some concerned issues affecting their canonical eligibility: Had they contracted marriage? Were they excommunicate? Others were concerned with suitability: **Were they in debt?** Were they suffering from incurable illness or contagious disease? It was only after satisfactory answers had been given to these and other questions that the prior admitted each candidate to his year of probation.”

F. Donald Logan, *Runaway Religious in Medieval England, c. 1240-1540* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 19.

Dr. Logan is Professor Emeritus of History, Emmanuel College, Boston.



Augustinian Eremites at Erfurt

- The order was founded in Italy in the 13th century.
- There were more than 200 of these monasteries in Germany, including the one at Erfurt.
- The vicar-general at the time of Luther's entry was Johann von Staupitz, a man of piety, discipline, and kindness.
- The monastery was known for its exemplary life and for its emphasis on learning.
- Its theological seminary was connected to the University of Erfurt.
- Luther prepared for ordination here, and received the following degrees: Bachelor of Theology, Master of the Sentences, and Licentiate.



Augustinian Eremites at Erfurt

- Even though the monastery bore the name of the great bishop of Hippo – Augustine – they apparently knew little of his evangelical faith and stressed the necessity of man's working out his own salvation (the good work that man does merits divine grace by itself and thus earns him salvation).
- They minimized the importance of Christ's suffering and death.
- It was through the sacraments that the clergy maintained their spiritual authority over the people.
- By the mid 15th century, the number of sacraments had been set at 7 (Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, the Eucharist, Extreme Unction, Marriage, and Ordination).
- The sacraments became an instrument for conveying spiritual grace.

A Tonsured Luther

- Tonsure, *n.*, the shaving of the head or part of it as a religious practice or rite, esp. as a preparation to entering the priesthood or a monastic order (OED).
- The word comes from the Latin, *tonsura*, which means “shearing, clipping.”
- The part of a priest's or monk's head left bare by shaving the hair.
- The practice was abandoned by papal order in 1972.





In Martin Luther's Own Words

“I, Martin Luther, entered the monastery against the will of my father and lost favor with him, for he saw through the knavery of the monks very well. On the day on which I sang my first mass he said to me, ‘Son, don’t you know that you ought to honor your father? Just so it wasn’t a phantom you saw!’ Later when I stood there during the mass and began the canon, I was so frightened that I would have fled if I hadn’t been admonished by the prior. For when I read the words, ‘Thee, therefore, most merciful Father,’ etc., and thought I had to speak to God without a Mediator, I felt like fleeing from the world like Judas. Who can bear the majesty of God without Christ as Mediator? In short, as a monk I experienced such horrors; I had to experience them before I could fight them” (*Table Talk*).

Further Explanation of His Father's Words

“He (Martin Luther) became a monk against the will of his father. When he celebrated his first mass and asked his father why he was angry about the step he took, the father replied reproachfully, ‘Don’t you know that it’s written, Honor your father and your mother? [Exodus 20:12]. When he excused himself by saying that he was so frightened by a storm that he was compelled to become a monk, his father answered, ‘Just so it wasn’t a phantom you saw!’”



Martin Luther was a monk at the Augustinian Monastery in Erfurt from 1505 to 1511.