

LUTHER'S ORIGINS AND CHILDHOOD

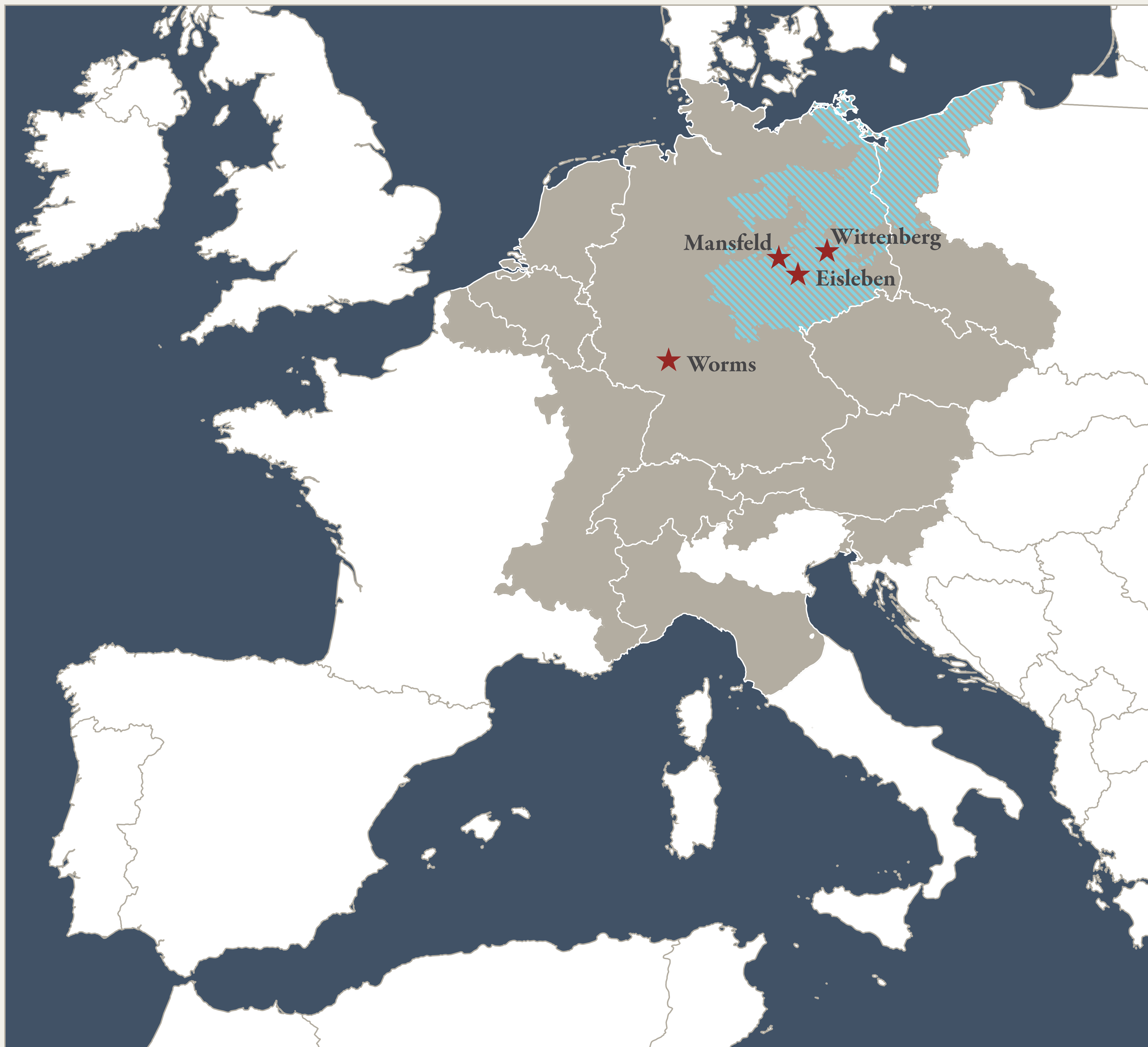


Bird-shaped whistle, Mansfeld, Luther's parents' home, Lutherstraße 24–26, about 1500, white fired clay, State Office for Heritage Management and Archaeology Saxony-Anhalt, State Museum of Prehistory, Halle

Martin Luther was born on November 10, 1483, in the Saxon town of Eisleben, in what is now Germany, and grew up in the nearby copper mining town of Mansfeld. His parents were Hans and Margarethe Luder—Martin changed the spelling of his name during his university years. Though Luther later claimed humble origins, archaeological and archival research has revealed that Hans was a prosperous mining entrepreneur and that Margarethe came from a prominent local family. Nonetheless, Martin's

upbringing was typical for an upper-middle-class boy. He played with friends and family, served as an altar boy, and attended a local Latin school. When he was about 14 he went away to school in Magdeburg, then to Eisenach, where he completed his secondary education in 1501. His father had great ambitions for him and wanted him to be a lawyer to advance the family's interests. Martin was not a happy student, but he complied with his father's wishes.

GEOGRAPHY OF MARTIN LUTHER: ART AND THE REFORMATION



★ Cities connected to Luther Holy Roman Empire, c. 1512 Saxony Current Borders

FEUDAL POWER AND COURTLY ART



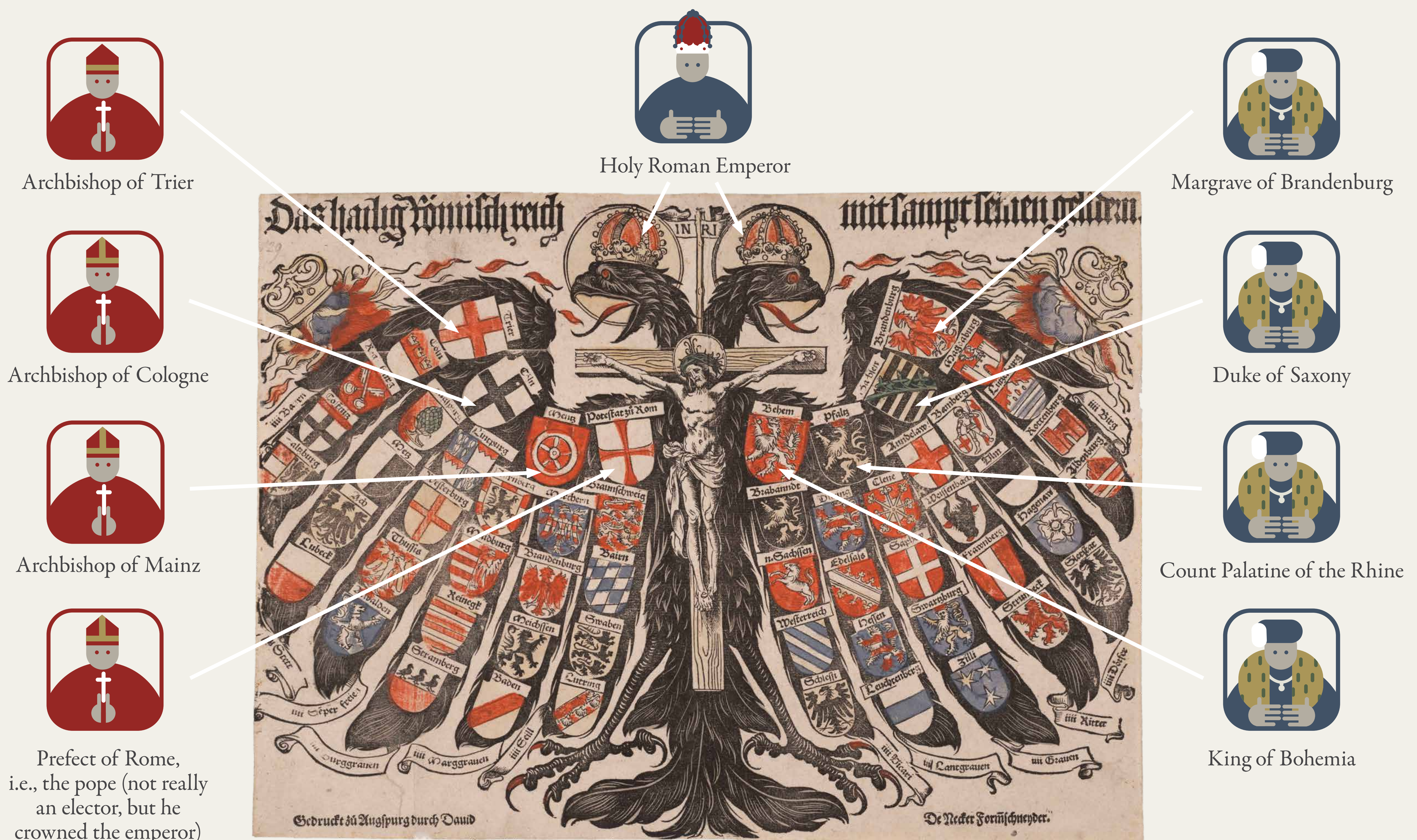
Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Frederick the Wise*, 1525–1527, oil on ash, Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum

Martin Luther lived in a world governed by aristocrats with elaborate rankings of status and power. The Electorate of Saxony, where Luther lived as an adult, was an irregular patchwork of lands controlled by a line of dukes. It was called an electorate because the reigning duke had the right to cast one of seven votes determining who would be emperor, or supreme ruler, of the Holy Roman Empire that encompassed Saxony. The scope of the Empire varied, but it included modern-day

Germany, Switzerland, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, the Czech Republic, and other regions.

Luther had direct contact with the most powerful men of his time. Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony and his successors became Luther's patrons and protectors. He stood before Emperor Charles V and refused to recant his beliefs. These leaders all used art not just for personal pleasure but to express and retain their might.

THE IMPERIAL EAGLE WITH THE COATS OF ARMS OF THE ELECTORS



This is a symbolic organization chart of the Holy Roman Empire. The eight larger shields at the top of the wings represent eight electors, even though there were only seven. The electors were the powerful men who elected the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Three electors were archbishops and four were laity. This underscores the fact that church and state were one in Europe at this time. The extra elector represented here is the “prefect of Rome”—meaning the pope, who wasn’t an elector, but who crowned the emperor.

The other shields are various imperial estates that fell under the rule of the electors.

PRE-REFORMATION PIETY



Albrecht Dürer, *Cardinal Albert of Brandenburg*, 1519, copper engraving, Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum

God was the all-powerful ruler in Martin Luther's time. To please Him was the overriding goal of daily Catholic life. Attendance at Mass, regular prayer, acts of charity—the faithful engaged in all of these, hoping for salvation on Judgment Day. Art played a central role in paying homage to God. For patrons and artisans, commissioning and creating religious objects were considered gifts to the Creator. Objects also helped people draw nearer to God. Images were thought to host the presence of the saints they depicted, and saints could communicate with God on behalf of the prayerful. Even more valuable were relics—remnants of the bodies of holy men and women or bits of their clothing—because holy spirits resided in these physical remains.

One of the most powerful, prominent, and ambitious church officials in Germany was Albert of Brandenburg. Albert was a great patron of the arts. He was also Luther's boss, and soon enough they would become each other's enemies.

INDULGENCES— FOLLOW THE MONEY



ALBRECHT OF BRANDENBURG

Cardinal Albert of Brandenburg wants more power. He wants to rule over more dioceses.



POPE

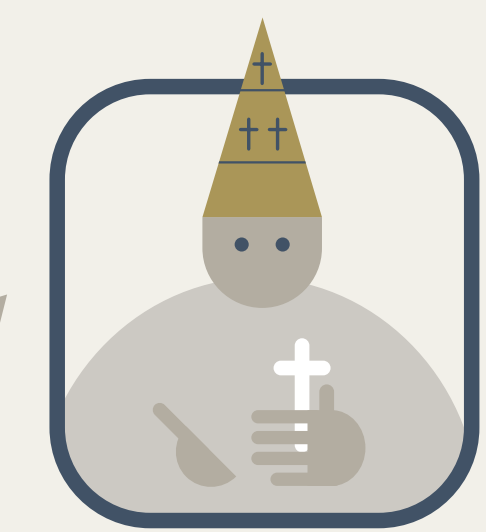
The pope wants to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.



BANK



ALBRECHT OF BRANDENBURG



POPE

Albert of Brandenburg borrows money from a banking business and gives it to the pope.



POPE



LAND



ALBRECHT OF BRANDENBURG

The pope gives Brandenburg rule over more territories.



POPE

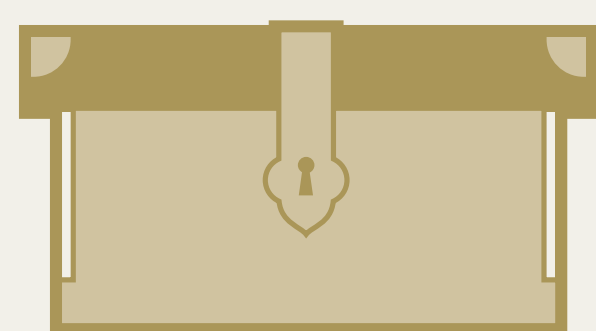


ALBRECHT OF BRANDENBURG

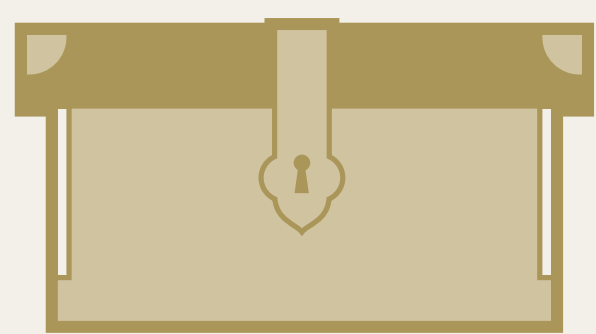
The pope gives Brandenburg the "okay" to sell indulgences in his territories.



BANK



An indulgence was granted to the faithful who paid money to the Catholic Church to reduce punishment in the afterlife.



Indulgence profits were split between Brandenburg and the pope.



ALBRECHT OF BRANDENBURG



POPE

Brandenburg was then able to pay off his loans to the bank businesses he borrowed from.

LUTHER AS A MONK, SCHOLAR, AND PREACHER



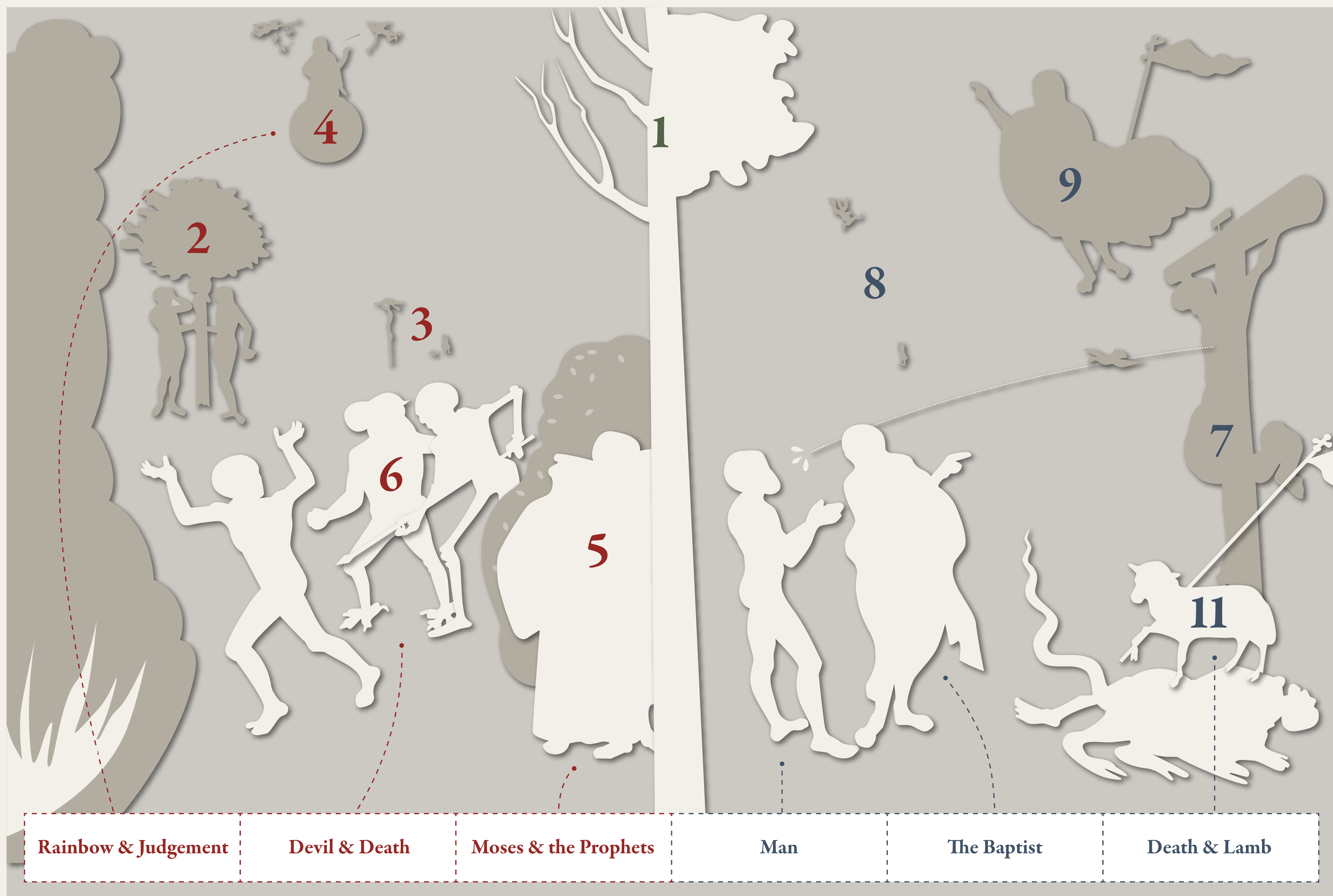
Lucas Cranach, *Martin Luther as an Augustinian Monk*, 1520, copperplate engraving, 3rd state, Thriver Financial Collection of Religious Art

Martin Luther said that his life took a sharp turn on July 2, 1505. Caught in a violent storm, he prayed to Saint Anne, traditionally regarded as the mother of Mary, Jesus' mother, promising to become a monk if she saved his life. He survived, and two weeks later he left law school to enter a cloister. His serious pursuit of religious wisdom impressed his superiors. In 1507, he became a priest, and soon the relatively new University of Wittenberg invited him to study and teach there.

Luther's study of the Bible led him to question certain practices of the Catholic Church, especially the sale of indulgences—a certificate that claimed to reduce a person's punishment in the afterlife. Luther came up with *Ninety-Five Theses* (provocative arguments) against indulgences and, according to legend, nailed them to the door of the university church. Luther only meant to stir academic debate, but his critique of the Catholic Church, including the Pope, shook all of Europe.

Whether he wanted to or not, Luther was soon leading a religious revolution. When his proposed reforms of the Catholic Church were met with heated conflict, he and his followers broke away to form a new church. Through his preaching, Luther served as the principal voice of the new way.

GOD, LAW, AND GRACE



THE SIDE OF LAW

The left half of the picture shows scenes from the Old Testament. They illustrate human life under divine law and show a judging Jesus.

1. The Tree

A tree at the center, one side dried up, the other green, divides the picture into two parts.

THE SIDE OF GRACE

The right half of the picture shows scenes from the New Testament. They illustrate God's grace. It cannot be earned, but is bestowed on humankind.

2. The Fall of Man

Adam and Eve in paradise eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. By violating God's prohibition, they become mortal and are expelled from paradise.

3. Nehushtan, the Bronze Serpent

As a punishment for the sins the Israelites had committed, God sent venomous snakes. But those who looked at Nehushtan, the bronze serpent Moses had erected, survived the bite.

4. The Last Judgement

Heralded by two angels playing the trombone, Jesus is enthroned on the globe. The sword of justice and the lily of grace identify him as the judge.

5. Group of Prophets

Encircled by other prophets, Moses points at the tablets of the law. Violating this law will result in one's damnation.

6. Hell

Humans cannot observe the law by themselves. Therefore, death and the devil drive the sinner into hell.

7. Crucifixion

For believers, salvation and eternal life come from Jesus' sacrificial death, his crucifixion, and resurrection. Through the saving blood flowing from the wound in Jesus' side God acts on man, who depends on his grace.

8. Annunciation to the Shepherds

An angel announces to the shepherds the birth of Jesus, which brings about the time of grace.

9. Resurrection

The risen Jesus is floating above the empty rock tomb; he has overcome death.

10. John the Baptist

He refers the naked person to Jesus on the cross. The sinner turns toward Jesus in prayer.

11. The Lamb of God

The Lamb of God, a symbol of Jesus, crushes death and the devil, whom Jesus has overcome.

LUTHER IN WITTENBERG



Hans Brosamer, after Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Katharina Luther, née von Bora*, 1530, woodcut, colored, typographic text, Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

Wittenberg was Luther's home throughout his adult life. As the seat of sympathetic Electors and home to a university, the city offered fertile ground for the Reformation. This in turn made Wittenberg one of the most important places in the Holy Roman Empire in the 1500s. When Luther's ideas caused the Augustinian monks to abandon their monastery, Elector Frederick the Wise gave the building and its farmland to Luther. Now the Luther House museum, it became home to Luther and his bride, the former nun Katharina von Bora, and later their six children. Katharina ran the busy household, and Luther used it as his base of operations. Students boarded there and studied with him. He completed his translation of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and wrote many other important publications in the house. He was in constant communication with religious and political figures, near and far. If Wittenberg was the hub of the Reformation, Luther's house was its nerve center.

WITTENBERG



LUTHER'S HOUSE

Construction of the "Black Monastery" of the Augustinian monks was begun in 1503/04. When the monastery was dissolved in the wake of the Reformation, Martin Luther lived here with his family.

THE NEW COLLEGE

To increase the university's capacity, the construction of the New College, located opposite the Old College, was begun in 1509. Most of the academic events took place here.

THE OLD COLLEGE

The Leucorea University was founded in 1502. The name is derived from the Greek word for "white mountain," i.e., Wittenberg.

CRANACH'S PRINTING SHOP

Among the works printed in Cranach's printing shop is Luther's first translation of the New Testament.

CRANACH'S HOUSE

Lucas Cranach the Elder was a Wittenberg painter and entrepreneur.

TOWN HALL AND MARKET SQUARE

The construction of the town hall lasted 20 years and was finished in 1541. It was the meeting place of the City Council of Wittenberg.

ELECTORAL CASTLE

In Luther's time, Saxony was ruled by Elector Frederick the Wise. He built an early modern castle with a Castle Church.

CASTLE CHURCH

In exceptional cases, the Castle Church was also used as the auditorium of the university. Legend has it that Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to its portal.

LUTHER'S THEOLOGY



Heinrich Füllmaurer, workshop, *Gotha Altar* (detail), 1539–1541, mixed media on fir panel, Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

Martin Luther believed that the Bible was the only authoritative word of God. He found nothing in the New Testament to support putting priests above ordinary worshippers, and he concluded that each Christian was responsible for his or her own faith. For Luther this meant that every Christian needed a Bible in an accessible language. Hence Luther's greatest mission was to translate the Bible into German.

The issue of “justification” is central to Luther's theology. Justification is the process that frees a soul from the burden of sin and the fate of damnation. Catholic theology required perfect charity and love of God;

Luther believed that such perfection was impossible. Searching for answers to this problem, he studied the apostle Paul's Letter to the Romans and came away believing that justification is not earned by one's good work, but is received as a gift from God to those who faithfully accept it. Only by the grace of God could a soul be saved; the prayers of others and the aid of saints no longer applied. Luther termed this concept “Justification through Faith.”

Luther's new theology required new types of art. The new art had to instruct, adhere to Biblical scripture, and encourage a direct relationship with God. Out went the saints and fluttering angels. In came illustrations of Bible stories and theological concepts.

CONFLICT



Unknown German artist, *Picture puzzle: Fool and Voppart*, c. 1525, colored woodcut, typographic text, Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

The Reformation stirred conflict—lots of it. What began as Martin Luther’s call for academic debate in Wittenberg started to shred the cultural fabric of Europe. Religious disputes spilled over into politics, economics, and social structures. Art played a major role in the disputes and itself became a matter of contention. A tidal wave of satirical prints flowed from the presses. Biting texts, including those by Luther himself, still have the power to provoke hostility.

Not all the wars were fought with words and images, however; the Reformation triggered executions, uprisings, and warfare. Whether or not Luther truly nailed his theses to the door of a church, we can still hear the banging of the hammer.

LUTHER'S LEGACY



Bartholomaeus Rosinus, *Confessionsschrift* (*Confessional Writing*), 1599, paper, gold-embossed leather binding, laquer, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha der Universität

Martin Luther left the world with a powerful and sometimes contradictory legacy. He tackled the greatest issues of his time, yet he loved the simple pleasures of home. He believed all are equal in God's eyes, yet he had an authoritarian streak. His central message was love, but his warm heart often boiled over with hatred. This very mortal man triggered theological, political, and cultural change in Europe that would soon spread to other continents, including North America.

When Luther died, on February 18, 1546, it was major news. Artists rushed to capture his deathbed likeness. Duke John Frederick planned a grave fit for a prince. His likeness began to appear on everyday wares, such as stove tiles and beer mugs. People wanted objects associated with him, even slivers of wood cut from floors he had walked on. New legends endowed his portraits with miraculous powers. Such veneration, usually reserved for saints and sovereigns, may have been an inevitable fate for this Protestant leader given the seemingly universal need for tangible connection to one's faith.

INTERFAITH ADVISORS

Mia formed a local advisory group representing Christian (Roman Catholic and Lutheran), Jewish, and Muslim perspectives to help us avoid bias in the content of this exhibition, accurately describe religious conflicts, and address difficult topics raised by some of Luther's writings.

While the religious arguments of the 1500s may seem distant, present-day rhetoric around religion remains dangerously divisive. Perceiving those with different beliefs as the "other," as Luther wrote of Jews and Muslims, still happens and negatively impacts the lives of our neighbors and community members.

Through honest and respectful dialogue, our advisors are working toward a more inclusive society, and believe that exhibitions such as this one can foster similar conversations leading to understanding and empathy. We encourage you to have those conversations and find what binds us together—while celebrating our differences.

We sincerely thank our advisors for their time, openness, and thoughtful contributions:

Rabbi Norman Cohen, *Rabbi Emeritus*, Bet Shalom Congregation

Mary Jane Haemig, ThD, *Professor of Church History and Director of the Reformation Research Program*, Luther Seminary

Steve Hunegs, *Executive Director*, Jewish Community Relations Council for Minnesota and the Dakotas

Reverend Darrell Jodock, PhD, *Professor Emeritus*, Gustavus Adolphus College

Johan van Parys, PhD, *Director of Liturgy and the Sacred Arts at the Basilica of Saint Mary*

Hanadi Shehabeddine, *Communication Expert and Speaker*, Islamic Resource Group

Carol Throntveit, *Director of Adult Education and Ministries*, Mount Olivet Lutheran Church