

**Remembering “The Lutheran Reformation:
500 Years Later Symposium” at Hanover College**

Commemorating the 500th Anniversary of

Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses,

October 31, 1517 — October 31, 2017

INTRODUCTION

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As the fall of 2017 and the 500th anniversary of the posting of Martin Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* (October 31, 1517 – October 31, 2017) approached, I decided to offer an introductory Luther seminar in which the students, in addition to a few select secondary articles and Roland Bainton's bestselling biography, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, would spend most of their time closely reading original works by the reformer in translation. This would allow them critically to discuss works such as the *Ninety-Five Theses*; Luther's sermon, *Two Kinds of Righteousness* (1519); some of his major treatises, including *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), *Appeal to the German Nobility* (1520), *On the Freedom of the Christian* (1520), *On Secular Authority* (1523), and *On the Keys* (1530); Erasmus's essay *On the Freedom of the Will* (1524) alongside Luther's blistering response, *On the Bondage of the Will* (1525); Luther's controversial diatribe during the Peasants' War of 1525, *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants*; his two Catechisms of 1529 along with his revisions of the Catholic Mass in Latin and German, the *Formula Missae* (1523) and *Deutsche Messe* (1526); and a selection of Luther hymns, including "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

Just prior to that fall and still during the summer of 2017, Hanover College President Lake Lambert III suggested that we might also have gift funds available for a rare Luther publication exhibit in Duggan Library overseen by Hanover College Archivist Jennifer Duplaga that would both complement the seminar and also would call attention publicly to the upcoming 500th anniversary of that single event which above all others, seen with hindsight, had marked the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. These rare works included a 1530 first edition of Luther's *On the Keys* printed at Wittenberg by Hans Lufft, a 1520 edition of Luther's *On Usury* printed at Basel by Adam Petri, and two Luther sermons from the funeral of Elector John of Saxony printed at Nürnberg in 1532, all obtained on loan from the Remnant Trust. To these were added a facsimile edition of the 1534 *Luther Bibel* from my own collection, along with other related materials and select copies of the American Edition of *Luther's Works*, the official English translation for which Hanover College Professor Miriam Pittinger's father, Jaroslav Pelikan, had long served as general editor.

Since we were now planning both a Luther seminar and a Luther rare book exhibit, it seemed only logical that we should expand this further to host a symposium celebrating the 500th anniversary itself on October 31st (All Hallows' Eve, better known today as All Saints' Eve). The program for *The Lutheran Reformation: 500 Years Later Symposium* is printed below (pp. 101-116). As part of the program, I had announced to the students enrolled in the Luther seminar on the first day of the semester (Monday, September 4, 2017) that, because of the upcoming anniversary, their first research paper would be due just four weeks later and that the authors of those whose essays were judged to be the best would be invited to revise and read their polished papers at the Luther Symposium on October 31st. Only one of these students had studied Luther or the Protestant Reformation prior to enrolling in this course, and three of them were first-semester freshmen at Hanover College. In the end, to these students' credit, six were chosen

from the seminar, along with one other student from another class, to present at the symposium. They continued editing and improving their essays right up until the day of the symposium, and they also worked hard as they honed their oral skills in advance of their presentations. Each of the remaining students in the class assisted with the symposium in various other ways, ranging from setting up tables, directional signs, and preparing packets for the symposium to playing Martin Luther in a mock reenactment of the supposed posting by Luther of his *Ninety-Five Theses* to the door of our chapel (in lieu of the Castle Church at Wittenberg). Several Hanover College faculty members also participated in the symposium in various capacities, ranging from presenting conference papers and giving the keynote luncheon address to introducing speakers or panel discussions and helping in other less prominent ways. Meanwhile, many guests and Hanover College students attended the various sessions scheduled throughout the day. That evening, we were all privileged to a fine dinner at the home of President and Mrs. Lambert, followed by the Cornelius and Anna Cook O'Brien History Lecture, "The Importance of Luther's 95 Theses: Then and Now," given by John D. Roth, Ph.D., Professor of History, Goshen College, and Director of the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism, who had recently participated in a Luther seminar at Wittenberg and who also had been a strong advocate for reconciliation between Lutherans and Anabaptists.

When considering what, if anything, from this important symposium to include in the 2018 *Hanover Historical Review*, the Editorial Board ultimately decided that we should publish the program from the symposium along with the texts of the seven Hanover College student papers, exactly as they were presented at the symposium on October 31, 2017, without any further expansion or revision, as a matter of permanent record. As noted above, six of these papers were researched, drafted, edited, and, ultimately, presented at the symposium within a span of eight weeks as part of the Luther seminar. While the pressing time factor precluded more expansive research at the secondary level (that is, interpretive articles and books written by modern scholars), these essays more than compensate in their close reading and critical analyses of the respective Luther texts under consideration. Indeed, each of the seven essays addresses a different, albeit critical doctrinal issue in the early teaching of Martin Luther. Collectively, they offer a composite picture of the complex reformer during the impactful initial decade of the Protestant Reformation.