

Martin Luther (der 10. November 1483—der 2. Februar 1546)

### LUTHERSTADT WITTENBERG: In the footsteps of Martin Luther

of early Protestantism; Reformation beer, wine and liquor; chocolates and noodles shaped into Luther's profile; and socks knitted with the words "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise" — Luther's supposed retort to the powerful officials of the Holy Roman Empire who wanted him to walk back his criticism of the pope and the Catholic Church.

Within the honey-colored walls of the Luther House, the world's largest Reformation museum, it's easy to visualize the more intense world of the early 1500s, when heated theology discussions would have taken place at Luther's popular Table Talks. Faded ocher and blue paint cover the walls, and sunlight streams through circular glass panes. At the center of the room stands Luther's battered-looking wooden table, said to be the original.

Nearby, the house's cavernous lecture hall was the scene for frequent religious discourses allowing Luther a platform upon which to rail against church corruption and the habit of selling penitential indulgences that simultaneously fed Rome's growing budget.

Across Luther Country, from tiny Eisleben, where Luther was born in 1483 and died some 60 years later, to Erfurt, where he attended seminary, from Mansfeld, where Luther lived as a young boy, to Torgau, where his wife, Katharina von Bora, died, museums and monuments remind visitors that Martin Luther was once here. All claim close ties to the reformer. But at times, the links seem nebulous.

"After 500 years, many buildings simply don't survive," says Jochen Birkenmeier, research director and curator of the Luther House museum in Eisenach, where Luther is said to have lived and studied from 1498 to 1501. "It can be difficult all these years later to say precisely which portions of the Luther story are fact and which are legend. But there is a lot that we do know. And clearly Luther's Reformation ideas had a profound effect not only on Christianity, but on the entire Western world."

While Birkenmeier and his team are reasonably certain which rooms Luther occupied at the Luther House in Eisenach, it is the reformer's relationship to the Bible that forms the focal point of the museum. Displays explain the rarity of Bibles in Luther's youth — Luther himself never saw a Bible until entering seminary. And multimedia presentations offer insight into the painstaking processes Luther employed in translating the Bible into German. But the museum also discusses frankly the anti-Semitic views of Luther and some of his followers.

"It's clear that Martin Luther himself was an anti-Semite by the end of his life," says Birkenmeier, adding that many of Luther's writings were used to justify the actions of the Third Reich. "We can't deny this side of Martin Luther, nor do we want to."