

## Various Sources discussing the credibility of Luther Nailing his Theses to a Church/Castle Door

"The drama of Luther walking through Wittenberg with his hammer and his nails is very, very unlikely to have happened," says Professor Andrew Pettegree, an expert on the Reformation from the University of St. Andrews, Scotland. "The castle church door was the normal noticeboard of the university. This was not an act of defiance on Luther's part, it was simply what you did to make a formal publication. It would probably have been pasted to the door rather than nailed up."

Peter Marshall would go even further. A historian of the Reformation at Warwick University, England, he believes there's a strong case to be made that the Theses were never posted at all, and that the story was invented to suit the political needs of people who came later. "The incident was first recorded nearly 30 years after," he says. "Luther himself never mentioned it. There was very little discussion of the nailing of the Theses before the first Reformation anniversary of 1617."

In 1617, with the [Thirty Years' War](#) on the horizon, a local ruler in the Rhineland area had the idea of organizing a centenary celebration to drum up Protestant solidarity, to increase his chances in the forthcoming fight with the Catholic Habsburgs. "It's a very good example of history being made because of a current need to create a historical event," says Pettegree, with an air of admiration.

BY [BILLY PERRIGO](#) OCTOBER 31, 2017 9:00 AM EDT

The new consensus is that he [mailed](#) his theses to an archbishop on October 31, but he probably didn't nail them to the door to drive the point home.

The reason this is such a big deal is because the image of Luther nailing his 95 Theses to a church door is one of the main historical events people associate with the Reformation. Yet in a recently published book, *1517: Martin Luther and the Invention of the Reformation*, Reformation historian [Peter Marshall argues](#) that Luther probably didn't deliver his theses so theatrically. And according to Joan Acocella's *New Yorker* [article](#) on Martin Luther's influence, much of the latest scholarship agrees that the event likely didn't happen.

“Not only were there no eyewitnesses; Luther himself, ordinarily an enthusiastic self-dramatizer, was vague on what had happened,” Acocella [writes](#). “He remembered drawing up a list of ninety-five theses around the date in question, but, as for what he did with it, all he was sure of was that he sent it to the local archbishop.”

The fact that he might've mailed his theses rather than nailing them to the church door, while perhaps a bit disappointing, doesn't change their impact.

BY: [BECKY LITTLE](#)

[Becky Little](#) is a journalist based in Washington, D.C.

<https://www.history.com/news/martin-luther-might-not-have-nailed-his-95-theses-to-the-church-door>

Luther sent the Theses enclosed with a letter to Albert of Brandenburg, the Archbishop of Mainz, on 31 October 1517, a date now considered the start of the Reformation and commemorated annually as Reformation Day. **Luther may have also posted the Theses on the door** of All Saints' Church and other churches in Wittenberg **in accordance with University custom** on 31 October or in mid-November.

---

The main portal was often used by the university staff to pin up messages and notices; it is generally believed that on 31 October 1517, the eve of All Saints' Day, Martin Luther posted his Ninety-five Theses on the doors of All Saints' Church. This act, meant to promote a disputation on the sale of indulgences, is commonly viewed to be a catalyst for the Protestant Reformation. Whether the event actually took place or not, however, cannot be conclusively established. **Nevertheless, Luther sent his objections in a letter to Archbishop Albert of Mainz on the same day.** [Wikipedia - 'All Saints' Church, Wittenberg'](#)

---

In the heading of the letter, Luther makes it clear that his 95 theses (see below) will be 'defended' at his ordinary lectures at Wittenberg. It is therefore the *notification of an event yet to take place*, and therefore quite a justifiable document to pin up outside the Castle Church building, according to common practice.

<https://christianity.stackexchange.com/questions/60503/did-martin-luther-really-nail-his-95-theses-to-the-church-door>

Simply put, it's unlikely the door episode ever happened. It certainly didn't happen as portrayed in [popular history](#) and [classic paintings](#).

A serious [new history](#), published this anniversary year by Richard Rex, professor of reformation history at Cambridge University, explains that "Bizarrely, there is almost no reliable evidence for this well-known story. There is no credible evidence that Luther actually went and nailed them to the church door that day, and every reason to believe he did not."

In case one think Rex's take is simply a revisionist version by a troublesome secularist, evangelical Eric Metaxas parallels Rex's take precisely in his important [new book](#) on Luther. Nearly all serious Luther historians agree on this. The only posting Luther did that day was of two private letters to two bishops under whose authority he stood. Both were dated October 31, 1517. He went to bed that night never having taken up a hammer nor approached any church door with a document and nail.

BY: GLENN T. STANTON

OCTOBER 30, 2017

<https://thefederalist.com/2017/10/30/luther-didnt-actually-nail-95-theses-curious-reformation-day-facts/>