

FACES OF THE REFORMATION

JOHANN ECK

Born: Nov. 13, 1486 | Egg an der Günz, Germany

Died: Feb. 13, 1543 | Ingolstadt, Germany



Luther und Eck.



REFORMATION
2017 It's *Still* All About
Jesus

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Staunch defender of the infallibility of the Pope and Luther's most outspoken adversary

LUTHER FELT HURT AND BETRAYED; THE NEW “FRIEND” WITH WHOM HE HAD BEEN EXCHANGING LETTERS—professor and vice-chancellor at the University of Ingolstadt Johann Eck—had written a scathing attack on Luther's 95 Theses on indulgences. Luther responded to Eck in a private letter requesting that Eck address him personally before making such vilifying remarks in public. Eck, for his part, claimed the writing was meant to be private and was written at the request of his bishop. Soon Luther's fiery colleague Andreas Karlstadt jumped into the fray, attempting to defend Luther against Eck's attacks. Although the budding friendship had been soured, Luther worked to keep things cordial, meeting with Eck in Augsburg to help arrange a public debate between him and Karlstadt. When Eck attacked Karlstadt in writing with arguments that were clearly aimed at Luther, the situation escalated, and Luther was drawn into a debate, which proved to be critical in defining an issue at the heart of the Reformation: the authority and infallibility of Scripture.

Before the debate in Leipzig, Eck had accused Luther of being a follower of Jan Hus, the Bohemian reformer condemned as a heretic by the Council of Constance and burned to death in 1415. This accusation resonated with Duke George of Albertine Saxony, who made sure that the debate took place under his control. Memories of the Hussite revolution of the previous century made the duke uneasy. Eck, a seasoned debater, seized upon this and focused his attacks on Luther's challenge to the authority of the pope and Church councils. Defending Hus' belief in the Bible as the highest authority in the Christian Church, Luther was forced to clearly state that Scripture alone is infallible.

After the Leipzig debate, Luther's one-time friend became his most outspoken enemy. A prodigy who began university studies at age 12, Eck engaged in a wide variety of pursuits, including commentaries on treatises by Aristotle and Petrus Hispanus. The debate with Luther was, however, a turning point in his career; afterward he devoted his energy to drumming up opposition to Luther and other Protestants. He travelled to Rome where he drafted, and was tasked to enforce, the papal bull *Exsurge Domine*, which condemned Luther's teachings. Eck was among the Catholic theologians present at Augsburg in 1530 who drafted the Roman Catholic *Confutation against the Augsburg Confession*. Although he staunchly defended a number of medieval Catholic doctrines against Luther, including purgatory, the cult of the saints and the primacy of the pope, Eck advocated a limited number of reforms. He published a German translation of the Scriptures in the Bavarian dialect and called for a more educated clergy. Although he died only a few months after the Council of Trent convened, Eck was a harbinger of the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation that the Council later solidified.

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