

FACES OF THE REFORMATION

JOHANN VON STAUPITZ

Born: Date unknown | Motterwitz, Germany

Died: Dec. 28, 1524 | Salzburg, Germany



Head of the German Augustinian Observantines and Luther's mentor and confessor

JOHANN VON STAUPITZ WAS THE HEAD OF THE GERMAN AUGUSTINIAN OBSERVANTINES, Luther's mentor and confessor and also the dean of theology at the University of Wittenberg. Staupitz played a pivotal role, though unintentionally, in the Reformation. When a long-standing conflict within the Augustinians arose once again in 1510, Luther and another monk traveled to Rome in order to get a resolution to the conflict from church authorities. While in Rome, Luther began to see some of the corruption in the church regarding the veneration of relics and the almost flippant manner in which the priests there were presiding over the elements of the Lord's Supper. He also felt the futility of his works of penance to free a soul from purgatory. In the end, the resolution favored Staupitz's side of the dispute, and Luther returned to the monastery in Erfurt. Since most of the other monks in Erfurt did not favor Staupitz's interpretation of the Augustinian rules the way Luther did, Staupitz called him from that unsympathetic environment to serve at the University of Wittenberg in 1511.

This was not the only reason Staupitz brought Luther to Wittenberg. For some time, Staupitz had been aware not only of Luther's academic gifts, but also of his struggles with seeking to be "holy enough" for God to love him. As his confessor, Staupitz mentored the conflicted monk and tried to assure him that God was not out to punish him. Staupitz assigned Luther to the task of teaching the Bible at the university. This position also entailed preaching at the monastery in Wittenberg.

Up to this point, both of these academically trained men had concentrated their studies on the writings of theologians and philosophers more than the Bible. Luther now began to study the Scriptures themselves instead of other writings as he prepared his lectures on the Psalms, Romans and Galatians. As he studied in his room in the tower of the monastery, his eyes were opened and he began to realize that God's righteousness was not something that he could ever earn by doing good works. Instead, God gave it freely for the sake of Christ through faith. As the fog of confusion and doubt began to dissipate in the bright warming sun of God's Word, Luther's theology began to form and develop and strengthen.

Although Luther was no longer in need of Staupitz's constant counsel, the two remained close for some time. Interestingly, despite his support of Luther and the Reformation, Staupitz never became a fellow reformer, but remained in the Catholic Church.



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