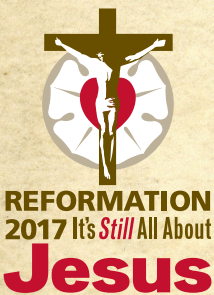
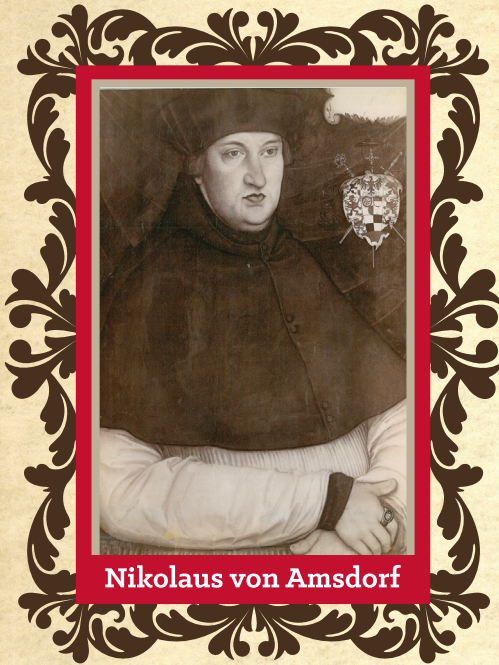


FACES OF THE REFORMATION

NIKOLAUS VON AMSDORF

Born: Dec. 3, 1483 | Torgau, Germany

Died: May 14, 1565 | Eisenach, Germany



LutheranReformation.org

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Luther's faithful friend and defender

BORN TO A NOBLE SAXON FAMILY, NIKOLAUS VON AMSDORF

first studied theology in Leipzig and then was one of the first students at the newly founded University of Wittenberg. There, he obtained his master's degree and a position as a professor. He also often served as rector. He was trained in and taught scholastic theology until he was won for the Reformation by his colleague Martin Luther, whom he accompanied to the Leipzig Debate and the Diet of Worms. His friendship with Luther would be the most definitive aspect of Amsdorf's theological activity.

After visiting Magdeburg with Luther in 1524, Amsdorf was encouraged by Luther to take a call there, where he served for nearly two decades. In Magdeburg, he battled radicals and Papists through his sermons and simply worded pamphlets, and he was instrumental in turning the city and surrounding areas into a bastion for Lutheranism.

At the behest of his prince, John Frederick, and against the wishes of the emperor, Amsdorf was made bishop of Naumberg-Weitz in 1542. Due to the opposition of the clergy in his bishopric, he met with little success and was frustrated in his work. After the Smalcald War broke out in 1546, Amsdorf was driven from his position. Following John Frederick's capture by imperial forces at the battle of Mühlberg, Amsdorf served for a short time as counselor to his prince's sons in Weimar. Thereafter, Amsdorf retired to Magdeburg, where he was a leading voice against the compromises made by Melancthon and his followers to the Augsburg Interim imposed upon Saxony by Emperor Charles V.

From 1552 on, Amsdorf lived in Eisenach, where, though retired, he was engaged in matters of church and academia, including the founding of the University of Jena. Until his death in 1565, he was involved in a number of theological controversies and prodigiously published polemical works. Among the most famous of these controversies was his dispute with Georg Major, who argued that "good works were necessary for salvation." Amsdorf pushed for the other extreme and claimed that "good works" were detrimental to salvation, by which he meant those "good works" that are seen as contributing to salvation. Amsdorf's writing, though it seeks to reproduce Luther's legacy, is simple, unoriginal and lacks the depth and intensity of Luther's work. In some cases, Amsdorf missed the subtlety of Luther's theology, as can be seen in Amsdorf's systematic treatment of predestination, which is similar to the views of Calvin's followers. Nevertheless, Amsdorf's almost singular focus on the exclusive action of God in Christ for our salvation and the prestige he enjoyed as a close friend of Luther's kept the Lutheran movement from drowning in a sea of compromise in the tumultuous years that followed Luther's death.

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