

A STUDY OF THE Protestant Reformation

1517 - 2017

The 500th Anniversary





Introduction: Part 11

After Miltitz's visit with Luther on January 4-6, 1519, his meeting with Spalatin, and his subsequent confrontation with Tetzel, the scholastic professor at Ingolstadt University, Johann Eck, renewed the battle against the reformer. Formerly Luther's friend, he was a strong supporter of the papacy and longed to have a disputation with Luther. After writing his theses against Luther's doctrines, Luther was deeply moved and felt that he could not honorably avoid Eck. Soon, the relationship became antagonistic, and Eck made the first move to suggest a disputation in Leipzig. Our task today is to introduce the Leipzig Disputation and prepare you for investigating the issues that arose in this 20-day debate in the summer of 1519.

Johann Eck (1486-1543)



Johann Eck
1486 - 1543

- He was born Johann Maier at Eck, in southeast Germany, but became known as Johann Eck.
- Though he had been Luther's friend, he became Luther's first German opponent.
- He had a forceful public personality.
- "Despite his butcher's face and bull's voice, he was a man of prodigious memory, torrential fluency, and uncanny acumen" (Bainton).

Bust of Johann Eck in Munich's *Hall of Fame*



Johann Eck (1486-1543)

3. University of Heidelberg
(1 year)

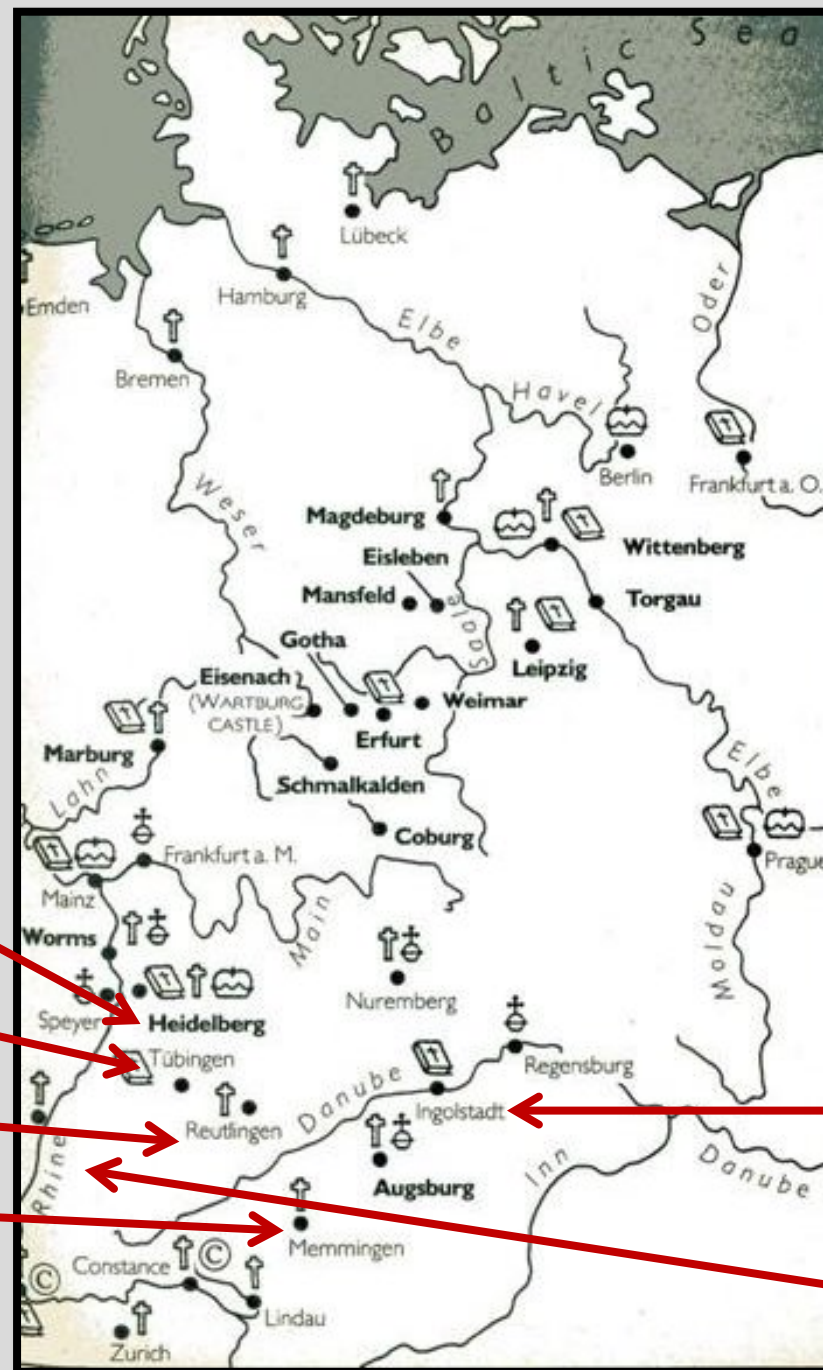
4. Tübingen
Master's Degree, 1501

2. Early education in Rottenburg

1. Born in Eck, near Memmingen in Swabia on November 13, 1486, (just over an hour from Augsburg)

6. Professor at Ingolstadt University
1510-1543

5. Freiburg University





D'Aubigne's Portrait of Johann Eck

Eck “was sincerely attached to the papacy, but seems to have had no true religious sentiments, and to have been one of that class of men, so numerous in every age, who look upon science, and even theology and religion, as the means of acquiring worldly reputation. Vain glory lies hid under the priest’s cassock no less than under the warrior’s coat of mail. Eck had studied the art of disputation according to the rules of the schoolmen, and had become a master in this sort of controversy. While the knights of the middle ages and the warriors in the time of the Reformation sought for glory in the tournament, the schoolmen struggled for it in syllogistic disputations - a spectacle of frequent occurrence in the universities. Eck, who entertained no mean (low)



D'Aubigne's Portrait of Johann Eck

idea of himself, and who was proud of his talents, of the popularity of his cause, and of the victories he had gained in eight universities of Hungary, Lombardy, and Germany, ardently desired to have an opportunity of trying his strength and skill against the reformer. He had spared no exertion to acquire the reputation of being one of the most learned men of the age. He was constantly endeavoring to excite some new discussion, to make a sensation, and aimed at procuring, by means of his exploits, all the enjoyments of life. A journey that he had made to Italy had been, according to his own account, one long series of triumphs. The most learned scholars had been forced to subscribe to his theses. This experienced gladiator fixed his eyes on a new field of battle, in which he thought the victory already secure."

Eck's Desire to Conquer Luther

- Eck published thirteen theses against the doctrines espoused by Luther.
- The 13th Thesis: “We deny that the Roman Church was not raised above the other churches before the time of Pope Sylvester; and we acknowledge in every age, as the successor of St. Peter and the vicar of Jesus Christ, him who has filled the chair and held the faith of St. Peter.”
- Sylvester lived during the time of Constantine the Great; by this thesis, Eck denied that the primacy enjoyed by Rome had been conferred on it by that emperor.



Luther's Response to Eck

“Let it be understood that when I say the authority of the Roman pontiff rests on a human decree, I am not counseling disobedience. But we cannot admit that all the sheep of Christ were committed to Peter. What, then, was given to Paul? When Christ said to Peter, ‘Feed my sheep,’ he did not mean, did he, that no one else can feed them without Peter’s permission? Nor can I agree that the Roman pontiffs cannot err or that they alone can interpret Scripture. The papal decretal by a new grammar turns the words of Christ, ‘Thou art Peter’ into ‘Thou art the primate.’ By the decretals the gospel is extinguished. I can hardly restrain myself against the most impious and perverse blasphemy of this decretal.”

Introducing the Leipzig Debate



Duke George the Bearded
Elector of Saxony

- Eck approached the patron of Leipzig, Duke George the Bearded, to consider a debate.
- The Duke agreed that Eck should debate with Wittenberg Professor Andreas (“Andrew”) Carlstadt at Leipzig, but not with Luther.
- However, “Eck had no mind to fence with the second. He openly baited Luther...”
- The debate was scheduled for June 27-July 16, 1519, with Carlstadt against Eck.



Luther's Responses to Eck's Theses

- “This man calls Carlstadt his antagonist, and at the same time attacks me. But God reigns. He knows what He will bring out of this tragedy. It is neither Doctor Eck nor myself that will be at stake: God’s purpose will be accomplished. Thanks to Eck, this affair, which hitherto has been mere play, will become serious, and inflict a deadly blow on the tyranny of Rome and of the Roman pontiff.”
- To the Elector: “Now Doctor Eck attacks me, and not only me, but the University of Wittenberg also. I cannot suffer the truth to be thus covered with opprobrium” (disgrace or shame).



Luther's Responses

- To Eck: “Now, my dear Eck, be brave and gird thy sword upon thy thigh, thou mighty man! If I could not please thee as mediator, perhaps I shall please thee better as antagonist. Not that I imagine I can vanquish thee; but because, after all the triumphs thou hast gained in Hungary, Lombardy, and Bavaria (if at least we are to believe thee), I shall give thee opportunity of gaining the title of conqueror of Saxony and Misnia [Meissen, “the cradle of Saxony”], so that thou shalt forever be hailed with the glorious title of August [Augustus].”
- Luther's friends were alarmed; Spalatin was filled with anxiety; and Frederick the Wise was uneasy.



Luther's Responses

- To Duke George: Luther wrote letter after letter to Duke George, in whose states Leipzig was situated, asking him to give him permission to go and take part in the disputation; but he received no answer.
- He refused to let Luther take part in the debate; he would only allow him to come as a spectator.
- Duke George believed as Eck did about the papacy.
- There was much pressure to prevent the disputation by the bishop of Merseburg and all the Leipzig theologians – but nothing could prevent the combat. “Each man got his arms ready.”

Eck and Luther Arrive in Leipzig

- Eck entered Leipzig on June 21 robed in his sacerdotal garments and at the head of a large procession.
- On June 24, Carlstadt arrived in his carriage and, behind him in the next carriage, Luther and Melanchthon. The wheel of Carlstadt's carriage fell off and threw him, unhurt, to the ground.



Palace of Pleissenburg
Leipzig, Germany



The Arrival Fanfare

- Eck, “the Goliath of the Philistines,” came first and walked in the *Corpus Christi* (“body of Christ”) procession (celebrates the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist - transubstantiation). He was provided by the town council with a bodyguard of 76 men to protect him day and night.
- Luther, Carlstadt, and Melanchthon and other doctors arrived with 200 students armed with battle-axes.



New Town Hall, Leipzig
Site of the Pleissenburg Palace



Eck Immediately Visits Luther in Leipzig

- **Eck:** “What is this! I am told that you refuse to dispute with me!”
- **Luther:** “How can I, since the duke has forbidden me?”
- **Eck:** “If I cannot dispute with you, I care little about meeting Carlstadt. It was on your account I came here. If I can procure you the duke’s permission, will you enter the lists with me?” (English idiom: take part in a contest or argument).
- **Luther:** “Joyfully. Procure it for me, and we will fight.”
- Eck immediately went to the duke, with assurances of his victory, and gained the required permission from Duke George.
- On June 25, Eck and Luther met at the palace to hear the regulations.



The Disputation Hall Prepared

- A large hall in the Pleissenburg Palace was prepared for the disputation.
- Two pulpits were erected opposite each other.
- Tables were place for the notaries commissioned to take down the discussion.
- Tapestry-decorated chairs and benches were arranged for the spectators.
- A portrait of St. Martin was suspended over Luther's pulpit, while a representation of St. George the champion over Eck's.
- "Everything announced the importance that was attached to this contest."



Leipzig Disputation

By Julius Hübner (1806-1882)

Oil on linen

New Masters Gallery, Dresden



“There are men who by the force of circumstances are always brought upon the stage.”

- J.H. Merle D'Aubigne



The Disputation Regulations

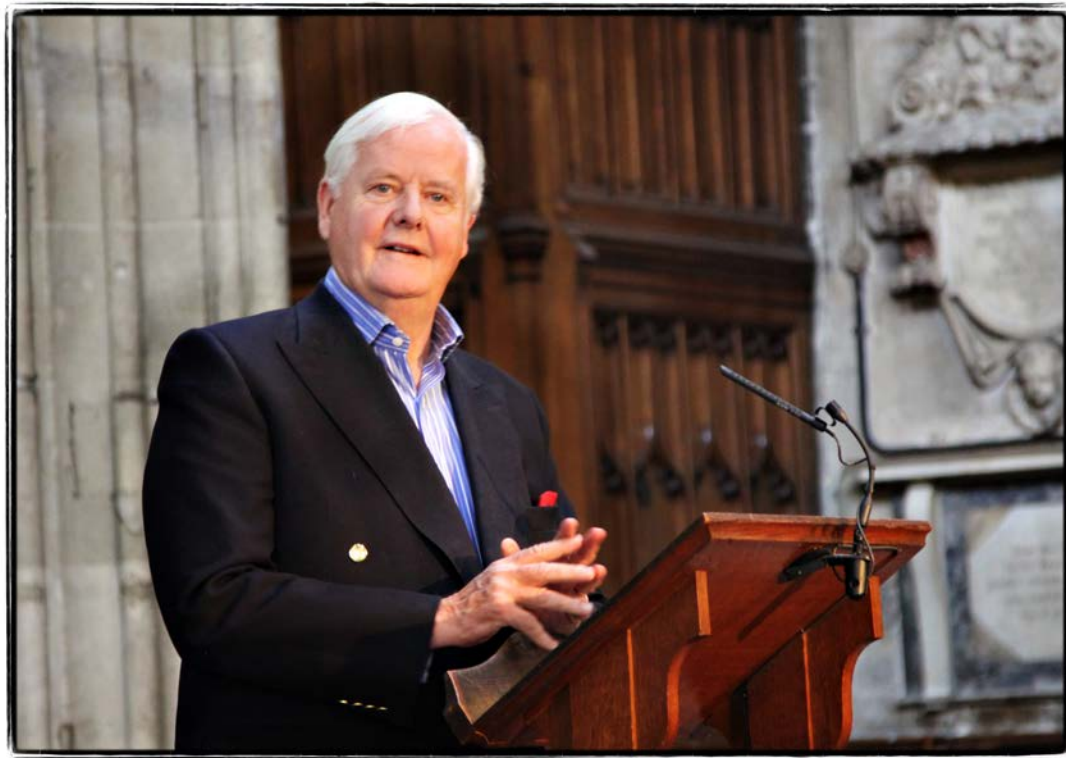
- As has been stated, on June 25, both parties met at the palace to hear the regulations that were to be observed.
- Eck demanded that they would debate extemporaneously and that no one would “take down our words in writing.”
- Carlstadt reminded him that “it has been agreed that the disputation should be reported, published, and submitted to the judgment of all men.” Eck was obliged to consent.
- Luther: “Does then the truth of Doctor Eck and his followers dread the light?”



Reminders to Eck and Luther

- A Greek and Hebrew scholar from the University of Leipzig, Peter Mosellanus, was personally asked by Duke George to open the Leipzig Disputation and did so with an excellent address.
- “If you fall to quarrelling, what difference will there be between a theologian in discussion and a shameless duelist? What is your object in gaining the victory, if it be not to recover a brother from the error of his ways?....It appears to me that each of you should desire less to conquer than to be conquered.”

Os Guinness



“Nothing is more precious and potent than truth, but nothing is more dangerous than to debate such arguments in the public square. Before long the different sides will go for the jugular, and verbal violence will issue in conflicts that are as ugly as they are insoluble.”



An Example During Leipzig

- Eck: “The reverent father is a very poor cook; he has made a terrible hodge-podge of Greek saints and heretics; so that the odor of sanctity in the one prevents us from smelling the poison of the others.”
- Luther: “The worthy doctor is becoming abusive. In my opinion, there can be no communion between Christ and Belial.”



What Can We Know About the Disputation?

The proceedings of the Leipzig Disputation was recorded by four different people; the documentation is abundant.





Mosellanus' Descriptions

Luther: “Martin Luther is of middle stature, and so thin, in consequence of his studies, that his bones may almost be counted. He is in the prime of life (35 years old), and has a clear and sonorous voice. His knowledge and understanding of the Holy Scriptures is unparalleled; he has the Word of God at his fingers’ ends. Besides this, he possesses [a] great store of arguments and ideas. One might perhaps desire a little more judgment in arranging his subjects. In conversation he is pleasing and affable; there is nothing harsh or austere about him; he can accommodate himself to every one; his manner of speaking is agreeable and unembarrassed. He displays firmness, and has always a cheerful air, whatever may be his



Mosellanus' Descriptions

adversaries' threats; so that it is difficult to believe that he could undertake such great things without the Divine protection. He is blamed, however, for being more caustic, when reproofing others, than becomes a theologian, particularly when putting forward novelties in religion."

Carlstadt: Carlstadt is of shorter stature; his complexion is dark and sun-burnt, his voice unpleasing, his memory less trust-worthy than Luther's, and he is more inclined to anger. He possesses, however, though in a smaller degree, the qualities that distinguish his friend.

Eck: "Eck is tall, broad-shouldered, and has a strong and thorough German voice. He has good lungs, so that he would be heard well in a



Mosellanus' Descriptions

theatre, and would even make an excellent town-crier. His accent is rather vulgar (common) than elegant. He has not that gracefulness so much extolled by Fabius and Cicero. His mouth, his eyes, and his whole countenance give you the idea of a soldier or a butcher rather than of a divine. He has an excellent memory, and if he had only as much understanding, he would be really a perfect man. But he is slow of comprehension, and is wanting in judgment, without which all other qualities are useless. Hence, in disputing, he heaps together, without selection or discernment, a mass of passages from the Bible, quotations from the Fathers, and proofs of all kinds. He has, besides, an impudence (shamelessness or disrespect) almost beyond conception.



Mosellanus' Descriptions

If he is embarrassed, he breaks off from the subject he is treating of, and plunges into another; he sometimes even takes up his adversary's opinion, clothing it in other words, and with extraordinary skill attributes to his opponent the absurdity he had been himself defending."

The Leipzig Disputation

June 27, 1519 was the opening day of the disputation. Next week we will consider the details of this important debate and come to our own conclusions about which of these two men won.