

The 500th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation

A Turning Point in World History

“Who had the more convincing argument at the Leipzig Debate: John Eck or Martin Luther?”
by Omolara Uthman

At the Leipzig debate in 1519 in Germany, John Eck, a German theologian and Martin Luther, the Augustinian monk and Protestant reformist, presented two different viewpoints that have continued to divide Christianity. For eighteen days, Martin Luther and John Eck debated and argued over the interpretation of the *Holy Bible* and conditions of the Christian religion and Church. They argued about the “power and authority” of the pope, “free will” and “repentance.” This debate was very important because it would determine the future of the Holy Roman Empire and the Holy Roman Catholic Church.

Martin Luther believed that God rather than the pope or church leaders should be the final authority on everything. He disagreed with the pope and the leaders of the church on many of their practices. He questioned the church’s practice of selling indulgences and whether this was a true path to forgiveness. He believed that forgiveness for one’s sin should come from faith alone. Martin Luther totally and strongly believed in the strict interpretation of the *Holy Bible*. John Eck on the other hand, believed in the importance of the pope as the head of the Church and the importance of Church leaders. He believed that forgiveness for one’s sins comes not only from faith alone, but also through good works.

John Eck and Martin Luther strongly disagreed on the true interpretation of the *Holy Bible*. Martin Luther argued by using evidence based strictly on the words of Jesus Christ in the *Holy Bible*. He also cited the problems with the Roman Catholic Church, namely the lack of moral discipline among the church leaders and the pope, to make his argument more convincing. John Eck used evidence from the Holy Spirit to try to get his point of view across while also stressing the importance of the pope and the bishops. Although John Eck made some good points, Martin Luther had the more convincing argument at the Leipzig debate because he was on point on several issues including the abuse of power by the pope and whether or not indulgence could forgive sins.

Martin Luther had a more resounding argument at the Leipzig Debate because he used evidence strictly based on the exact words of the *Holy Bible*. John Eck's arguments were all over the place. He tried to use evidence of the Holy Spirit and evidence from the *Holy Bible*, thus making his argument far less factual than Martin Luther's. John Eck also wrongly quoted Jesus' words to St. Peter in the Bible when he said, "And I tell you that you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church." (Matthew 16:18). This quote was not from the *Holy Bible*, but was something that Jesus said to St. Peter, statements like this made John Eck's argument harder to accept.

John Eck based a lot of his research of the teachings of Church fathers and councils by using more logic than facts. Martin Luther's arguments challenged the tradition of Church councils. Martin Luther had been more prepared with his 95 theses he had presented a year before the Leipzig Debate making his information very concise. John Eck and Martin Luther both provided necessary information to back up their claims at the Leipzig Debate, but Martin Luther was far more effective in the argument because he used more facts and less conjecture to strengthen the points he made.

One of the biggest arguments at the Leipzig Debate was about the "authority" of the pope. John Eck did not find anything wrong with the pope's authority and thought the pope and church leaders were necessary to properly interpret the Bible for the people. Martin Luther believed that the pope and church leaders had too much power and that they were not trustworthy. Martin Luther used facts to back this up, he provided proof that the pope and church leaders did in fact sell offices, have secret families, and participate in bribery, extortion, and excommunication. In Martin Luther's interpretation of the *Holy Bible*, he found that faith, in the ultimate goodness of Jesus, was all that was needed to save a person's life.

Martin Luther had a more convincing argument at the Leipzig Debate mostly because he argued using only the words from the *Holy Bible*, making his argument clear and concise. He also based his arguments on facts instead of conjecture, providing more than the logical reasoning of John Eck did. His

argument on the interpretation of the *Holy Bible* and his conclusion that God's forgiveness is all that is necessary for eternal salvation was very convincing.

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