

LutherFacts #21

In 1519, after Martin Luther's contentious debate with Johann Eck, he found himself in the center of growing controversy. At such times, he often turned to the written word to advance his views. During the following year, he produced three remarkable documents: The Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation, Prelude on the Babylonian Captivity of the Church, and On the Freedom of A Christian. These publications advanced his view that a



break with Rome was inevitable in order to rescue Christians from their "captivity" by the Pope. He again argued for a Christianity based on faith rather than works, and further developed the concept of the "priesthood of all believers" in contrast to a church administered by the papal hierarchy. As the conflict between Luther and the papacy intensified, Eck travelled to Rome where he assisted the Pope in drafting a response to Luther. Entitled the Exsurge Domine, and issued on June 15, 1520, the document demanded that Luther recant forty-one of the ninety-five theses that the Pope found unacceptable, even "scandalous" in their content. Luther rejected the papal bull, as it was called, and on December 10, 1520, he cast the document, along with other books, into a fire that he identified as "the eternal flames of Hell." In response, the Pope excommunicated Luther on January 3, 1521. The stage was now set for a final showdown.