

I. Zwingli 1484-1531

A. INTERESTING FACTS

Born eight weeks after Martin Luther. Although Luther gets more attention, Zwingli and Luther were co-starters of the Reformation.

He played six musical instruments.

He kept a concubine in the early years of his priesthood.

Although they never met, he was, a theological father to John Calvin, and long-term, Calvinism has been much more influential than Lutheranism.

Before the Reformation he was a chaplain with Swiss mercenary troops in Italy.

Died in battle in 1531, at age 47.

He was a loyal Swiss where he lived his entire life.

Map of the Swiss Cantons.

B. EDUCATION

Born in Switzerland.

Attended the U. of Vienna and U. of Basel. Influenced by the new humanism, especially the writings of Erasmus.

From Erasmus he absorbed "*Ad Fontes*," and a desire for *moral* renewal in the church.

C. MINISTRY

In **1506** he was ordained a RC priest. The village of Glarus called him to serve as their priest. He took a secret concubine, the barber's daughter.

(1509 Calvin is born in France. Luther was finishing his B.A. in Bible at Wittenberg).

1516 the Swiss village of Einsiedeln called him to preach.

He purchased a copy of Erasmus' Greek NT and taught himself Greek. He memorized large portions of the NT in Greek.

During this time, he gained a growing reputation as a preacher.

1517 Luther nails his 95 theses.

In the meantime, Zwingli repented of his concubine.

1519 the great cathedral in Zurich called him to be their people's priest. He would spend the rest of his life serving this church.

In Zurich Zwingli rejected the Catholic liturgy and began to preach through the NT starting with Matthew 1:1.

Zwingli published his own 67 Theses. They were the first Protestant attempt to publish a coherent theology.

Thesis #49 *"I know of no greater scandal than that priests may not marry, but may keep a mistress if they pay a fine to the bishop."*

After two disputations, he eventually broke with Rome insisting that he discovered the gospel independently of Luther.

Zwingli opposed the indulgence trade.

He opposed the mercenary trade of Swiss soldiers.

As he increasingly saw the implications of the gospel, he began to shed RC traditions and ceremonies—purgatory, Prayers to saints, Mariology, image worship, justification by works, the mass, the seven sacraments, the primacy of the pope, etc.

While his Reformation teaching was remaking Zurich the plague was killing 30% of the population. Zwingli caught it, was sick for three months, but eventually recovered.

1521 Zwingli rejected Lenten fasting by eating sausages in public during the fast. Some of the other Swiss cantons objected. He responded—

“For God’s sake,” he told the Cantons, “do not put yourself at odds with the Word of God. For truly it will persist as surely as the Rhine follows its course. One can perhaps dam it up for awhile, but it is impossible to stop it.”¹

¹ Mark Galli and Ted Olsen, ["Introduction."](#) in *131 Christians Everyone Should Know* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 217.

The city council defended him.

1522, he secretly married a wealthy, influential widow with three children, Anna Reinhart.

1524 Zurich officially becomes Protestant.

He married Anna Reinhart publicly.

Glen Sunshine: “Although Zwingli’s and Luther’s doctrines were quite similar, the Swiss reformer emphasized preaching and teaching the Bible even more than did Luther. Among other things, this meant that Zurich had a much more austere approach to worship. Images and organs were removed from churches as being either idolatrous or a distraction from the pure preaching of the Word...Zwingli’s humanist training also made him more concerned with external behavior than Luther, whose background in the monastery made him allergic to giving “works” any role in religion except as an expression of thanks to God.²

1525 Zurich abolished the Mass. Zurich also abolished the monasteries and gave the money to the poor.

D. THE ANABAPTISTS

The Anabaptists and the Magisterial Reformers were two of the three major streams of the early Reformation.

Anabaptist refers to rebaptism.

The anabaptist leaders were Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, and several others. They were friends of Zwingli living in Zurich. They were initially known as *The Swiss Brethren*.

They began to question not the basic content of the reform, but the *speed* with which it was being carried out. Zwingli was more conservative. He was a gradualist. Grebel and Manz were ready to wipe out all abuses at one blow.

² Glenn S. Sunshine, [The Reformation for Armchair Theologians](#), First edition, Armchair Theologians Series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 64–65.

Sunshine: The Swiss Brethren rejected the notion of reforming the church altogether, arguing that the church was so hopelessly corrupt that reform was impossible. Instead, the church needed to return to the model of the book of Acts, where the church existed as a *voluntaristic community of faith in an evil world*³

1. Magisterial Reformers.

Medieval people assumed that European society was a Christian society, often referred to as the “corpus Christianum.”

They assumed that each member of society entered the church through infant baptism.

They assumed that church and society were one, that the Reformation should cooperate with the Civil Magistrate. These ideas had the effect of “baptizing” the civil government.

The local magistrate decided what religion his people would practice.

Last, they assumed that Europe and the K. of G. were synonymous. They believed that the church is a mixed bag containing both a visible and invisible church. They got this from Matthew’s Gospel.

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn (Matthew 13:24–30).’

However, this made the practice of church discipline difficult.

³ Glenn S. Sunshine, [The Reformation for Armchair Theologians](#), First edition, Armchair Theologians Series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 65.

It also obscured religious freedom within a particular magistrate's rule.

2. Anabaptists:

They were the first to reject infant baptism.

This led to the separation of church and state.

They assumed that church and European society are two different animals.

The church is a voluntaristic community of faith separate from, and living within, the fallen world. Each Christian separates from the world and enters the church through faith and repentance—signified by adult baptism.

They rejected the idea of a “baptized” civil government. The church and the magistrate have nothing to do with each other.

Therefore, they rebaptized adults upon a profession of faith.

This was a massive threat to the unity of the European Medieval society. It meant religious pluralism, and the medieval mind had no place for this concept.

Ana-Baptist advantage? Church was defined. Discipline was effective.

But the Anabaptists also accepted many perversions of scripture—pacifism, legalisms, rejection of OT, polygamy, etc.

Some turned to radicalism. They took over the city of Munster, Germany, established mandatory polygamy, draconian laws, etc.

Magisterial Protestants eventually over-ran the city.

Conrad Grebel died of natural causes, but his successor, Felix Mantz, and other Anabaptist leaders were often executed by drowning.

Persecution scattered the anabaptists throughout Germany and Holland.

Most were intensely sincere and brave. Here is a true example.

Facing arrest as an Anabaptist, Dirck Willems fled for his life across a frozen lake. When his pursuer broke through the ice, Willems gave up his chance to escape by turning to save his persecutor. He was then captured, imprisoned and burned at the stake in 1569.⁴

⁴ *Christian History Magazine*, “The Anabaptists,”

The Anabaptists fragmented into, Mennonites, Amish, Hutterites, Dukaboors, etc.

Baptists resurfaced in England in the mid 17th century.

Of the surviving Anabaptists, the Mennonites are the largest and most orthodox.

E. 1529 MARBURG COLLOQUY

In an attempt to unify the various Protestants, Zwingli and Luther finally meet at Marburg in 1529. They were both in their late forties.

Ironically, the sacrament designed to express unity became the greatest source of controversy.

Sunshine: “The two sides reached agreement fairly quickly on [14 of the 15] issues that separated them...they agreed on the basic tenets of the gospel, on *sola scriptura*, and on all of the other key doctrinal points that distinguished Protestants from Catholics. *But they drew the line at the Lord’s Supper.* Luther reportedly took out his knife (carried by everyone in those days for eating, miscellaneous cutting chores, self-defense, etc.) and carved on the table, *Hoc est corpus meum* (Latin for “**This is my body**”); he said that Christ said that the bread was his body and that was good enough for Luther.⁵

Zwingli said he could compromise on the Lord’s Supper, but Luther felt that, on a subject this important, that this meant that Zwingli wasn’t a real pastor.

Mark Galli “Luther said **Zwingli was of the devil and that he was nothing but a wormy nut. Zwingli resented Luther’s treating him “like an ass.” It was evident no reconciliation was possible.**”⁶

Zwingli taught that the Lord’s Supper was a memorial. “This is my body,” was metaphorical.

⁵ Glenn S. Sunshine, [The Reformation for Armchair Theologians](#), First edition, Armchair Theologians Series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 76–77.

⁶ Mark Galli and Ted Olsen, [“Introduction.”](#) in *131 Christians Everyone Should Know* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 219.

“Zwingli thus argued that the elements *represent* Christ’s body and blood, and that Christ was present spiritually, in a special, “sacramental” way in the Lord’s Supper. This view is usually called *spiritual presence*⁷

When all was said and done, Zwingli and Luther put different emphases on four theological subjects.

1. Iconoclasm
2. Music
3. The Lord’s Supper
4. Social Concern

F. DEATH

In 1531 the Swiss cantons that were RC attacked the Zurich Canton. The battle of Kapel resulted. Zwingli served as a chaplain in the protestant army and was killed.

Zwingli’s friend, Myconius, described his death this way.

After being wounded Zwingli said, “They can kill the body but not the soul.” After these words, he fell asleep in the Lord. After the battle, when our forces had withdrawn to a stronger position, the enemy had time to look for Zwingli’s body, both his presence and his death having been quickly reported. He was found judgment was passed on him, his body was quartered and burnt to ashes.”

He was only 47.

Glenn Sunshine: “Kappel was a disaster for Zurich and for the advance of Protestantism in Switzerland. Zurich’s ambition to become the dominant power in Switzerland was ended; [Swiss] territories pressured into Protestantism were permitted to return to Rome; Catholic cantons were not to be targets for missionary activity. The mercenary trade continued as well.

⁷ Glenn Sunshine, [The Reformation for Armchair Theologians](#), First edition, Armchair Theologians Series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 74.

But Swiss Protestantism was still alive and well. Bern remained strong, and Zurich continued to play a major role in international Protestantism under its new religious leader, Heinrich Bullinger.⁸

Under Bullinger Zwingli's ideas spread from Zurich westward to Berne and then to Geneva.

When Zwingli died in 1531 John Calvin was a 22-year-old Frenchman on the threshold of conversion.

In 1536 Calvin publishes the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

Later that same year Calvin came to Geneva.

In 1534 Henry the VIII declared himself head of the church of England.

In 1534 Ignatius Loyola founded the Jesuit order and began the Counter Reformation.

G. LESSONS/APPLICATION

Preaching is God's tool for change.

Today Zwingli's understanding of the Lord's Supper is the consensus Protestant understanding.

Most Protestants also accept Zwingli's views on statues and images.

Zwingli erred with the Anabaptists. At the time everyone assumed the union of church and state.

Luther's response to Zwingli puts an exclamation mark on the truth that *how we say something is as important as what we say*. "Life and death are in the power of the tongue."

What Zwingli started Calvin finished.

⁸ Glenn S. Sunshine, [The Reformation for Armchair Theologians](#), First edition, Armchair Theologians Series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 84.

H. RESOURCES

The Reformers and Their Stepchildren. Verduin and Littel

The Anabaptist Story, William Estep

Zwingli, God's Armed Prophet, Bruce Gordon.

The Reformation For Armchair Theologians, Glenn Sunshine.