Church History ~ The Reformation, Pt. 2 – Huldrych Zwingli and the Anabaptists

I. Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531)

1. His Early Life

* Zwingli is the “third man of the reformation,” after Martin Luther and John Calvin.
* *Why is he important?*
* *Why is he not so well-known?*

1. His Pastoral Ministry
2. His Post ~ Dec 11, 1518

* “In the beginning of the sixteenth century Zurich numbered seven thousand inhabitants. It was the centre of the international relations of Switzerland, and the residence of the embassadors (sic) of foreign powers which rivalled with each other in securing the support of Swiss soldiers. This fact brought wealth and luxury, and fostered party spirit and the lust of gain and power among the citizens. Bullinger says, ‘Before the preaching of the gospel [the Reformation], Zurich was in Switzerland what Corinth was in Greece.’”[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. His Preaching

* On New Year’s Day, 1519, Zwingli gives his first sermon.
* Zwingli’s criticisms

1. His Pastoral Care

* August 1519, Zurich struck by the plague.
* Elected canon of Grossmunster Church on April 29, 1521.

1. The Catholic Controversies
2. Lenten Fasting ~ Mar 5, 1522
3. Clerical Celibacy ~ July 1522
4. Break from the Church ~ 1522
5. The Zurich Disputations (1523)

**Excerpts from Zwingli’s 67 Conclusions**

16. From the gospel we learn that the doctrines and traditions of men are of no use to salvation.

17. Christ is the one eternal high-priest. Those who pretend to be highpriests resist, yea, set aside, the honor and dignity of Christ.

18. Christ, who offered himself once on the cross, is the sufficient and perpetual sacrifice for the sins of all believers. Therefore the mass is no sacrifice, but a commemoration of the one sacrifice of the cross, and a seal of the redemption through Christ.

22. Christ is our righteousness. From this it follows that our works are good so far as they are Christ’s, but not good so far as they are our own.

24. Christians are not bound to any works which Christ has not commanded. They may eat at all times all kinds of food.

49. I know of no greater scandal than the prohibition of lawful marriage to priests, while they are permitted for money to have concubines. Shame!

50. God alone forgives sins, through Jesus Christ our Lord alone.

57. The Holy Scripture knows nothing of a purgatory after this life.

1. The 1st Zurich Disputation ~ Jan. 29, 1523

* “On the same day the magistracy passed judgment in favor of Zwingli, and directed him ‘to continue to preach the holy gospel as heretofore, and to proclaim the true, divine Scriptures until he was better informed.’ All other preachers and pastors in the city and country were warned ‘not to preach anything which they could not establish by the holy Gospel and other divine Scriptures,’ and to avoid personal controversy and bitter names.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. The 2nd Zurich Disputation ~ Oct. 26, 1523

* Called to address issues of the mass and images in worship
* After a third *private* disputation on Jan 20, 1524, the city council approved the following:
* By June 20, 1524, images, including pictures, statues, crucifixes, candles, were to be removed.
* Decorated walls were whitewashed
* Bones of saints were buried.
* Altars were replaced by tables.
* Organs in churches were dismantled and singing by choirs was abolished.
* Gold and silver were melted from crucifixes, crosses and relics.
* Monasteries were transformed into places for care of the homeless and the education of the youth.

1. Abolition of the Mass ~ April 16, 1525
2. Other Ministry Accomplishments

* Zwingli and Leo Jude produced a NT in the Swiss dialect in early 1524.
* Instituted a special church-state court for marital issues and later, all private, moral matters.
* Founded a very influential school for Reformed ministers on June 19, 1525, called the *Carolinum*

1. His Death
2. The First “War” of Kappel ~ 1529

* Formed a confederation called the *Christian Civic Alliance*, consisting of seven “cantons.”[[3]](#footnote-3)
* Catholics formed a counter-alliance known as the “Forest Cantons,” consisting of 5 cantons[[4]](#footnote-4)

1. The Second War of Kappel ~ 1531

II. The Anabaptists

1. Background
2. Divisions and Definition
3. Key Issues for the Anabaptists
4. Zwingli and the Growing Schism
5. Zwingli’s Split with His Disciples
6. Zwingli on the Attack

C. Zwingli’s Disputation with the Anabaptists ~ Jan. 10 and 17, 1525

* Zwingli’s Position:
* “The sons of the sons of God must be children of God”
* Infant baptism is to be parallel with circumcision in the OT Both are intended to mark individuals as part of the family of God.
* The household baptisms of Acts 16:33, etc support this.
* The NT does not teach re-baptism
* Zwingli argued to retain what was not condemned in Scripture.
* Christ’s blessing of the little children supports infant baptism
* Children are made holy in their parents (1 Cor 7:14)
* Anabaptist responses:
* These sons are not yet believers. They require believer’s baptism.
* NT Baptism is not related to OT circumcision.
* Household baptisms do not refer to infant baptism.
* The Brethren did not teach re-baptism but one first “believer’s baptism.”
* Why is infant baptism needed if all are Children of God?
* Children are made holy thru the teaching of the Word not baptism.

1. First Anabaptist Church ~ Jan. 21, 1525

* At the home of Felix Manz (1498–1527) in Zollikon
* George Blaurock (1492–1529) ~ went house to house, witnessing and teaching repentance, faith, and baptism.

1. Persecution of Anabaptists

III. Key Anabaptist Leaders

**Andreas Karlstadt** (c. 1486–Dec 24, 1541)

* Fellow faculty member with Luther at Wittenberg
* Preached while Luther was at Wartburg; encouraged the removal of icons
* Luther later opposed him as a radical, though Karlstadt denounced violence
* Anticipated many Anabaptist ideas

**Thomas Müntzer** (c. 1488–May 27, 1525)

* German radical reformer who turned against Luther
* Early leader of the Peasant’s Rebellion (1524-1525)
* Claimed to be a prophet; not a true Anabaptist, but often wrongly associated with the gorup
* After being defeated in the Rebellion, he was tortured and killed
* Before his death, he supposedly recanted.

**Casper Schwenckfeld** (1489–Dec. 10, 1561)

* Influenced by Luther, and also Münzer and Karlstadt
* Rejected infant baptism, Lutheran communion, war, denominations, etc.
* Instead of “real presence,” taught a “spiritual presence” (believers feed on Christ spiritually) in communion
* Followers are known as *Schwenckfelders* (in PA, US)

**Jacob Hutter** (c. 1500 – 1536)

* Lay preacher; formed several congregations in the Puster Valley of Tyrol (in Italy)
* Arrested, tortured, and burned at the stake on Feb. 25, 1536.
* Followers are *Hutterites*

**Münster Rebellion** (1532-1535)

* Attempt made to establish a theocratic kingdom at Münster, Germany; not a true Anabaptist
* John of Leiden (c. 1509-1536) was made king and declared himself a descendant of David
* His army was defeated in June 1535, by German Catholic forces; he was tortured and killed
* Tainted Anabaptist movement for years to come
* After the Münster Rebellion, Anabaptists generally embrace pacificism, religious liberty, and the separation of church and state

**The Swiss Brethren**

* Originally, all disciples of Zwingli
* Considered by most to be the fountainhead of the Anabaptist movement
* Split off from Zwingli and the state-church over state’s authority over church practice, especially infant baptism

**George Blaurock** (c. 1491 – Sep. 6, 1529)

* Aligned with Zwingli’s more radical followers; desired to follow only what the Bible prescribed
* Rejected the mass, infant baptism, religious images
* Expelled from Zurich when his friend Felix Manz was executed
* Went into Tyrol region (in Italy) to preach and establish churches; burned at the stake in Italy

**Felix Manz** (c. 1498–Jan. 5, 1527)

* One of the first to be baptized, along with Conrad Grebel and George Blaurock
* Executed by drowning

**Conrad Grebel** (c. 1498–1526)

* Considered the “Father of the Anabaptists”
* Performed the first adult baptism (on George Blaurock)
* Died of natural causes

**Balthaser Hubmaier** (c. 1480–Mar. 10, 1528)

* Noted preacher; ministered in Austria
* Met with Zwingli in 1523; in Zurich, he defended obedience to the Scriptures
* Abandoned infant baptism; baptized on April 1525
* Fled to Zurich to escape Austrian police, but was arrested and tortured in Zurich; executed in Vienna

**Menno Simons** (1496–Jan. 25, 1561)

* Trained as a Catholic priest
* Began to study the Bible over the issue of communion
* In 1536, he fully embraced the Anabaptist position.
* Emphasized separation from the world and pacifism
* Followers known as *Mennonites*

IV. Lineage of Anabaptism

Anabaptist groups include:

* Swiss Brethren (the original group)
* Mennonites
* German Baptists
* Hutterites
* Schwenkfelders
* Amish
* Neo-Anabaptists ~ emphasis on pacifism; social justice

V. Assessments and Application

A. Zwingli

1. Strengths

* Taught the true gospel of Christ of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone
* Taught sovereignty of God in creation and salvation.
* The Bible trumps human tradition
* Emphasis on expository preaching
* True religion must supersede ceremonial piety.
* The Lord’s Supper is memorial.

1. Defects

* Magisterial Reformer who retained the state-church paradigm and suffered doctrinally as a result.
* The church and the state go hand in hand because the magistrate and the minister are both servants of God who must work together in harmony to further the kingdom.
* Extremely harsh to his opponents, both Catholic and Anabaptist.

1. The Anabaptists
2. Defects

* Disengagement from the world (some)
* Can have legalistic tendencies regarding lifestyle choices
* Can be very strong on pacifism or anti-militarism
* Can be strongly anti-hierarchical

1. Strengths

* True church is composed of those who believe in Christ
* Emphasis on personal faith in Christ
* Believer’s baptism
* Freedom of religion, or the liberty of conscience
* Separation of church and state
* Separation from or [nonconformity to the world](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nonconformity_to_the_world), or personal holiness
* Priesthood of all believers
* Where men believe in the freedom of religion, supported by a guarantee of separation of church and state, they have entered into that heritage. Where men have caught the Anabaptist vision of discipleship, they have become worthy of that heritage. Where corporate discipleship submits itself to the New Testament pattern of the church, the heir has then entered full possession of his legacy.[[5]](#footnote-5)

1. Philip Schaff. *The History of the Christian Church. Vol. 8. Chapter III*, p. 39. Logos online ed. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Schaff. Vol 8, Ch. III, p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Constance, Bern, St. Gallen, Biel, Muhlhausen, Schaffhausen and Basel [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden, Lucerne, and Zug [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. William Estep. *The Anabaptist Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Erdmans), 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)