ULRICH ZWINGLI AND THE REFORMATION IN SWITZERLAND

Portrait of Ulrich Zwingli by Hans Kaspur, 1531 - Winterthur Kunstmuseum, Switzerland
Huldrych Zwingli or Ulrich Zwingli (Jan. 1, 1484 – Oct. 11, 1531) was a leader of the Reformation in Switzerland, born during a time of emerging Swiss patriotism and increasing criticism of the Swiss mercenary system.

Pictured above is the Zwingli home in Wildhaus, Switzerland.
Zwingli received the same type of education that most young men of his time received: Latin, grammar and rhetoric.

He studied in Basil, Bern and Vienna.

In Bern, the Dominicans tried to recruit Zwingli to their order, but Zwingli’s father and uncle were not in favor of him joining a monastic order.

Zwingli began studies at the University of Vienna in the winter of 1498 and continued there until 1502, when he transferred to the University of Basel, where he received the Master of Arts degree in 1506.
Zwingli was ordained in Constance, the seat of the local diocese, and he celebrated his first Mass in his hometown, Wildhaus, on Sept. 29, 1506.

As a young priest he had studied little theology, but this was not considered unusual at the time.

His first ecclesiastical post was the pastorate of the town of Glarus, where he stayed for ten years.

It was in Glarus, whose soldiers were used as mercenaries in Europe, that Zwingli became involved in politics.
Switzerland in Zwingli’s day was not a unified nation as it is today.

Like Germany at this time, Switzerland was divided up into small political entities that were largely self-governing.

The Swiss Confederation in Huldrych Zwingli's time consisted of thirteen states (cantons) as well as affiliated areas and common lordships.

This relative independence served as the basis for conflict during the time of the Reformation when the various cantons divided between different confessional camps.
• Up to the time of the Reformation, France had been politically powerful over Switzerland. Switzerland was nominally a part of the Holy Roman Empire, but was essentially independent by 1499.
• Swiss mercenaries (Reisläufer) were notable for their service in foreign armies, especially the armies of the Kings of France, from the later Middle Ages (1200s) into the Age of Enlightenment (1700s).
• Zwingli was opposed, as were many Swiss, to the hire of Swiss men as soldiers for foreign wars.
Zwingli served as a chaplain for Swiss mercenaries for several campaigns in Italy. With ever-shifting alliances between the French, the Papal States and the Habsburgs, he became convinced that mercenary service was immoral and that Swiss unity was indispensable for any future achievements. Many Swiss felt as Zwingli did about the mercenary system, and there was a growing sense of the need for a united Switzerland, with the different cantons forming a federation.
Religious differences played a role as well, with some cantons adhering to the Roman Catholic church, and some cantons embracing the Reformation.

Among other influences, Zwingli was exposed to the works of the Dutch scholar Erasmus and the ideas of humanism that were circulating throughout Europe.

After serving as chaplain to Swiss mercenaries, Zwingli moved to a pastorate in Glarus, in eastern Switzerland.

Zwingli's time as the pastor of Glarus and Einsiedeln was characterized by inner growth and development. He perfected his Greek and he took up the study of Hebrew.
Zwingli’s library contained over three hundred volumes from which he was able to draw upon classical, patristic, and scholastic works.

He exchanged scholarly letters with a circle of Swiss humanists and began to study the writings of Erasmus.

Zwingli took the opportunity to meet him while Erasmus was in Basel between August 1514 and May 1516.

Zwingli's turn to relative pacifism and his focus on preaching can be traced to the influence of Erasmus.

In late 1518, Zwingli was offered the pastorate of the Gross Münster in Zurich, a very important church.
On Jan. 1, 1519, Zwingli gave his first sermon in Zürich.
Zwingli did not follow the usual practice of basing a sermon on the Gospel lesson of a particular Sunday.
Instead he began to read through the Gospel of Matthew, giving his interpretation during the sermon, known as the method of lectio continua.
• He continued to read and interpret Matthew’s Gospel on subsequent Sundays until he reached the end. He used Erasmus’s New Testament for his text.

• He then proceeded in the same manner with the Acts of the Apostles, the New Testament epistles, and finally the Old Testament.

• This kind of expository teaching, given to laypeople, was very unusual in Zwingli’s day.

• It assumed that with the pastor’s help, the laity could hear and understand the Scriptures as well as any scholar, monk, or priest.
• Zwingli's theological stance was gradually revealed through his sermons.
• He attacked moral corruption and in the process he named individuals who were the targets of his denunciations. Monks were accused of indolence and high living.
• In 1519, Zwingli specifically rejected the veneration, or worship, of saints and called for the need to distinguish between their true and fictional accounts.
• He cast doubts on hellfire, asserted that unbaptised children were not damned, and questioned the power of excommunication.
Soon Zwingli was to confront the controversy over indulgences, just as Martin Luther had.

Within the diocese of Constance, Bernhardin Sanson was offering a special indulgence for contributors to the building of St. Peter’s in Rome.

When Sanson arrived at the gates of Zürich at the end of January 1519, parishioners prompted Zwingli with questions.

He responded with displeasure that the people were not being properly informed about the conditions of the indulgence and were being induced to part with their money on false pretences.
This was over a year after Martin Luther published his Ninety-five theses (Oct. 31, 1517).

The council of Zürich refused Sanson entry into the city. As the authorities in Rome were anxious to contain the fire started by Luther, the Bishop of Constance denied any support of Sanson and he was recalled.

In August 1519, Zürich was struck by an outbreak of the plague, during which at least one in four persons died.

All of those who could afford it left the city, but Zwingli remained and continued his pastoral duties.
In September, he caught the disease and nearly died. He described his preparation for death in a poem, Zwingli's *Pestlied*, consisting of three parts: the onset of the illness, the closeness to death, and the joy of recovery. A portion of the first part reads:

Thy purpose fulfil: nothing can be too severe for me. I am thy vessel, for you to make whole or break to pieces.

Since, if you take hence my spirit from this earth, You do it so that it will not grow evil, and will not mar the pious lives of others.
The first public controversy regarding Zwingli's preaching broke out during the season of Lent in 1522.

On the first fasting Sunday, March 9, Zwingli and about a dozen other participants consciously transgressed the fasting rule by cutting and distributing two smoked sausages (the *Wurstessen* in Christoph Froschauer’s workshop).

Zwingli defended this act in a sermon which was published on April 16, with the title ”Regarding the Choice and Freedom of Foods.”
• Following this event, Zwingli and other humanist friends petitioned the bishop on July 2 to abolish the requirement of celibacy on the clergy.

• Two weeks later the petition was reprinted for the public in German titled “A Friendly Petition and Admonition to the Confederates.”

• The issue was not just an abstract problem for Zwingli, as he had secretly married a widow, Anna Reinhart, earlier in the year. Their cohabitation was well-known and their public wedding took place on April 2, 1524, three months before the birth of their first child.
• Ulrich and Anna would go on to have four children: Regula, William, Huldrych, and Anna.
• As the petition was addressed to the secular authorities, the bishop responded at the same level by notifying the Zürich government to maintain the ecclesiastical order.
• Other Swiss clergymen joined in Zwingli's cause which encouraged him to make his first major statement of faith, *Apologeticus Archeteles* (The First and Last Word).
• Zwingli had to defend himself against charges of heresy and disorder. He denied the church hierarchy had any right to judge on matters of church order because they were corrupt.
• Tension grew between church and civil leaders regarding the Reformation in Switzerland and Zwingli’s teachings.

• Two disputations took place between Zwingli and his supporters, on the one hand, and the opponents of the Reformation, on the other.

• The first disputation took place on Jan. 3, 1523. The Zürich city council invited the clergy of the city and outlying region to a meeting to allow the factions to present their opinions. The bishop was invited to attend or to send a representative.
Not much was resolved at this first disputation: The decision of the Zürich city council was that Zwingli would be allowed to continue his preaching and that all other preachers should teach only in accordance with Scripture.

In Sept. 1523, iconoclasm broke out in Zürich.

Again, the city council decided to work out the matter of images in a second disputation. The essence of the mass and its sacrificial character was also included as a subject of discussion.

Supporters of the mass claimed that the eucharist was a true sacrifice, while Zwingli claimed that it was a commemorative meal.
As in the first disputation, an invitation was sent out to the Zürich clergy and the bishop of Constance.

At the second disputation, the lay people of Zürich, the dioceses of Chur and Basel, the University of Basel, and the twelve members of the Confederation were also invited.

About nine hundred persons attended this meeting, but neither the bishop nor the Confederation sent representatives. The disputation started on 26 October 1523 and lasted two days.

Compared to the disputations that took place in Germany with Luther, this one was very “democratic.”
Conflict with the Anabaptists (1525–1527)

• Zwingli came in to conflict with emerging leaders of what would come to be known as the Anabaptist movement.

• Conrad Grebel, leader of the Swiss Brethren, favored abolishing the mass, and baptizing only adults and not infants.

• Zwingli sought a compromise wherein the "Radicals" would stay in fellowship with the Reformers. The Reformers continued to recognize the legitimacy of the civil government, but the Radicals refused to do so.
The Swiss federation of cantons began to fracture along religious lines.

The Christian Civic Union was formed in 1528, initially among the cities of Bern, Constance, and Zürich, which were Reformed.

Previously, the five cantons of Lucerne, Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden and Zug had formed the Five States, which remained Catholic, in 1524.

As the Reformation spread throughout Switzerland, the Five States felt increasingly threatened, and reached out to Austria for support.
• War was declared on June 8, 1529.
• Zürich was able to raise an army of 30,000 men. The Five States were abandoned by Austria and could raise only 9,000 men.
• The two forces met near Kappel, but war was averted due to the intervention of Hans Aebli, a relative of Zwingli, who pleaded for an armistice.
• Switzerland looked to Zwingli for the leadership to establish a peaceful settlement.
• Zwingli advocated for favorable terms for Reformed cantons, but there was little actual resolution.
The Marburg Colloquy (1529)
While Zwingli carried on the political work of the Swiss Reformation, he developed his theological views with, or in spite of, his colleagues.

- The famous disagreement between Martin Luther and Zwingli concerned the interpretation of the eucharist.
- Andreas Karlstadt, Luther's former colleague from Wittenberg, published three pamphlets on the subject, in which he argued that there was no real presence in the elements.
The idea of the real presence in the elements refers to the doctrine that Jesus is really or substantially present in the Eucharist, not merely symbolically or metaphorically.

Karlstadt’s pamphlets, published in Basel in 1524, received the approval of Johannes Oecolampadius and Zwingli.

Luther rejected Karlstadt's arguments and considered Zwingli primarily to be a partisan of Karlstadt.

Zwingli said that Christ had ascended to heaven and was sitting at the Father's right hand, so Christ's humanity could not be in two places at once.
Unlike His divinity, Zwingli reasoned, Christ's human body was not omnipresent and so could not be in heaven and at the same time be present in the elements.

By spring 1527, Luther reacted strongly to Zwingli's views in Luther’s work “That These Words of Christ "This is My Body etc." Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics.”

The controversy continued until 1528 when efforts to build bridges between the Lutheran and the Zwinglian views began.
Martin Bucer, a German Reformed theologian, tried to mediate.  

Philip of Hesse, a German Protestant ruler, who wanted to form a political coalition of all Protestant forces, invited the two parties to Marburg, Germany, to discuss their differences.  

Zwingli accepted Philip's invitation fully believing that he would be able to convince Luther.  

In contrast, Luther did not expect anything to come out of the meeting and had to be urged by Philip to attend.
• Zwingli, accompanied by Oecolampadius, arrived on Sept. 28, 1529, with Luther and Philipp Melanchthon arriving shortly thereafter.

• Other theologians also participated, including Martin Bucer, Andreas Osiander, Johannes Brenz, and Justus Jonas.

• The debates were held from Oct. 1–4 and the results were published in the fifteen Marburg Articles.

• The participants were able to agree on fourteen of the articles, but the fifteenth article established the differences in their views on the presence of Christ in the eucharist.
As one 21st century theology professor has described it: “On this issue, they parted without having reached an agreement. Both Luther and Zwingli agreed that the bread in the Supper was a sign. For Luther, however, that which the bread signified, namely the body of Christ, was present “in, with, and under” the sign itself. For Zwingli, though, sign and thing signified were separated by a distance—the width between heaven and earth.”

(George, Timothy. Theology of the Reformers (p. 156). B&H Publishing Group)

For Zwingli, the idea of literally eating the body of Christ was abhorrent. But Luther put “the chief point of salvation in physically eating the body of Christ,” for he connected it with the forgiveness of sins.
• The same motive that had moved Zwingli so strongly to oppose images, the invocation of saints, and baptismal regeneration was present also in the struggle over the Supper: the fear of idolatry.

• Salvation was by Christ alone, through faith alone, not through faith and bread.

• The object of faith was that which is not seen (Heb 11:1) and which therefore cannot be eaten except, again, in a nonliteral, figurative sense.

• To eat the body and to drink the blood of Christ in the Supper, then, simply meant to have the body and blood of Christ present in the mind.
The failure to find agreement resulted in strong emotions on both sides: “When the two sides departed, Zwingli cried out in tears, “There are no people on earth with whom I would rather be at one than the [Lutheran] Wittenbergers.”” (Huldreich Zwingli, the Reformer of German Switzerland edited by Samuel Macauley Jackson et al., 1903, page 316)

At the end of the meetings, Zwingli and Martin Bucer reached forward their hands to shake Luther’s hand.

Luther refused to shake hands.

Because of the differences, Luther initially refused to acknowledge Zwingli and his followers as Christians, and refused to accept them as part of the Reformation.
Zwingli would undoubtedly have welcomed agreement with Luther for political as well as theological reasons, for he saw a growing danger in the isolation of the reforming Swiss cantons.

The forest cantons had organized themselves against the alliance, and there was a real threat of imperial intervention from the Holy Roman Emperor.

In offensive defense, the Catholic alliance attacked the forest cantons at Kappel, 16 kilometres (10 miles) south of Zürich, in 1529 and enforced terms on the opposing districts.
Attempts also were made to link up with Strassburg and allied reforming cities, but these were at first unsuccessful despite the help of Philip of Hesse.

The results of division were seen at the Diet of Augsburg (1530), in which the evangelical groups presented three different confessions, including Zwingli’s *Fidei Ratio*.

Lacking other friends, Zwingli turned to Venice and France, partly in view of their political hostility to the Holy Roman Empire, and partly in the hope of persuading the rulers to accept evangelical views.
• His *Exposition of the Faith* (1531) was addressed to Francis I of France to clear up misunderstandings and enlist his sympathy.

• The project faded, however, and in 1531 Zwingli urged on the alliance a further reduction of the forest cantons.

• Zwingli's alliance applied an unsuccessful food blockade on the Catholic cantons.

• This simply provoked the foresters to attack Zürich in October 1531.

• Thus began the Second War of Kappel.
In the Second War of Kappel, Zwingli accompanied the Zürich forces as chaplain and was killed in the battle, the spot where he fell being now marked by an inscribed boulder.
Zwingli was a humanist and a scholar with many devoted friends and disciples. He communicated as easily with the ordinary people of his congregation as with rulers such as Philip of Hesse. Although he had a reputation as a stern, stolid reformer, he had an excellent sense of humor and used satiric fables, spoofing, and puns in his writings. He was more conscious of social obligations than was Luther, and he genuinely believed that the masses would accept a
government guided by God's word. He tirelessly promoted assistance to the poor, who he believed should be cared for by a truly Christian community.

Outside of Switzerland, no church counts Zwingli as its founder. Scholars speculate as to why Zwinglianism has not diffused more widely, even though Zwingli's theology is considered the first expression of Reformed theology by some.

Although his name is not as widely recognized as Luther’s, Zwingli's legacy lives on in the basic confessions of the Reformed churches of today. He is often called, after Martin Luther and John Calvin, the "Third Man of the Reformation".