

## Reformation of the City

[Luther 1483-1546 (63 years old). Zwingli 1484-1531 (47 years old)]

1. Luther's city, Wittenberg, had approx. 3000 inhabitants, ruled by its prince, Friedrich the Wise, who only occasionally occupied its castle. The city had a city council, but the highest authority was a representative of the prince. The city had no political jurisdiction beyond the city itself. Under Friedrich the Wise (died 1525), Luther was not consulted and had no say in political affairs.
2. Zwingli's Zurich (Switzerland) had no university and approx. 5000 inhabitants, but its political jurisdiction included lands and towns with approximately 50'000 inhabitants. The city with its lands was an independent member of the Swiss Confederation. It was ruled by a city council, divided into a large and a small council, and by a still smaller executive. Zwingli was never an elected representative, but, as the Reformation progressed, he was an invited member of this smaller executive. As in other free cities in Switzerland and elsewhere, the economic power in the city was that of the merchant guilds.
3. Reading Luther's early works, Zwingli becomes a reformer of the Church, but he does it in his own way. He becomes the advocate of a state church. Since the Church would not reform itself, and since the city council had already taken significant steps in this direction, Zwingli affirms its authority to reform the Church. He likens the council to the elders in the council of elders and prophets in Acts 15:6. They were (are) men of venerable age, prudence and faith. In a late publication he speaks of such rule as "rule by the best," but a rule than can degenerate into an oligarchy of wealth, as a king may become an evil despot, and as a democracy may degenerate into a host of "seditious individuals".
4. With reference to God's covenant with Israel in the Old Testament, Zwingli said that Zurich was a city in covenant with God. The city council required the baptism of all children in the city (in parallel to circumcision in the Old Testament). And, as was common with city councils elsewhere, ordinances were passed regulating moral behavior. Only God knew the inner person and the genuineness of the person's faith, but this did not matter for the "outward" or social righteousness of the city, the ideal model of which is the kingdom of God.
5. Economic and social problems in and around the city involved two central areas. First was the problem of so-called war "Pensions," pay for Swiss participation in foreign wars. The second problem were fixed heavy taxes and legally established tithes for the Church. Zwingli made justice in these instances an issue for the city. Taxes were adjusted to real income and tithes were mainly redirected to aid for the poor.
6. Zwingli, Christian Guidance (1523). "We speak here of human being and its striving and of its own ability and power, by which it first looks to itself, relating all to itself. It does nothing that is right, but in all things only what benefits itself. That is, sin is self-centeredness, selfishness. ... The law stands fast and can neither be bent nor undone: you shall not desire what belongs to another.

... Selfishness, the high valuation of self-centeredness, is the true sin against God. Faith humbles itself and trusts in God's mercy." ...

"Government authority must require that what is owed to another is right before God, and if not, that it be prohibited or changed. As beneficiaries of the Church are to be reduced to a necessary number, so now belongs their property to the poor, which is done by order of the government and by every congregation of the Church."

### 7. Zwingli, The Pastor (1524)

"The pastor, like Christ, must be willing to lay down his life for the sake of the sheep. He will speak against prince, emperor or pope, not only for an obviously spiritual reason like resisting God's Word, but also if they place unjust temporal burdens on the people. ... The truth must be preached for the powerful and not just for the weak, in such a way that their tyranny will change. ... the Romans had their [elected] tribunes [to counter the power of the consuls], and the German cities had their guild masters, with authority to check the higher rulers [a feature of the late medieval power of the cities], so God has placed pastors in his people to watch and to warn. ... It is love that underlies his care for the sheep and his denial of himself, a love that is rooted in undoubting faith. ... Those who preach the gospel without the cross refuse to attack greed, usury, war, the mercenary system [soldiering in foreign wars], monopolies, and companies that harm the common good."

"In these matters the pastors always acknowledge the lawful magistrate, no matter how much they criticize him when he is at fault. Both prophet and magistrate are instruments of God. ... The magistrate needs the true prophet."

Quotations from W.P. Stephens, The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

8. A radical movement emerged that soon also sprang up in Germany: the Anabaptists. They were baptized "again" (ana) because they rejected infant baptism as non-biblical. They emerged in Germany before and during the Peasants War of 1525 and are associated with its violence. In Zurich they were peaceful, but their demands were radical: all Christian life should be based on the Sermon on the Mount. Only adults who demonstrated a pure Christian life could be baptized and be admitted to the Lord's Supper. The Church rules itself by the New Testament and the Holy Spirit. For Zwingli Anabaptists destroyed the unity of the Church. Like Israel in the Old Testament, the city was in covenant with God, under the leadership of elders and prophets. Only God knew what truly lay in the heart each citizen.

9. Zwingli's death (1531): Protestant missionaries to the inner Swiss cantons/states had been killed or otherwise persecuted. Zwingli and city council responded with cutting the supply of salt (for cows). Inner Swiss cantons respond with attack on Zurich. In the battle Zwingli was killed.

(Philosophical) Reason in Zwingli's Theology

9. Zwingli's first theological education is in the "via antiqua" (old way) of schools in the tradition of Thomas Aquinas. Historians have seen its continuing influence in Zwingli's high regard for natural reason in classical philosophy (Plato, Cicero, Seneca). The second important influence is the great Humanist, Erasmus of Rotterdam. Zwingli knew him in Basel (Switzerland) before the Reformation and later addresses letters to him as "dear Brother."

10. In accord with Erasmus, Zwingli has a high regard for the great philosophers of pagan antiquity.

Zwingli, On Providence. "God is good, therefore his creation is good. Now to go to the root of the matter. It follows necessarily that what is good by nature and good in highest degree, and whatever is good in itself, must also be true. And this the philosophers knew when they attributed at the same time the quality of truth to the good and only one (as for example Plato, in The Republic, VI, 507...). For, of course, the One must be good, they said, but cannot be good unless it is likewise true, that is, pure, genuine, clear, complete single and unchangeable..."

#### On the Education of Noble Youth

"Youth educated in body and spirit by antiquity should, following this, strive as purely as possible to grasp Christ, for then will Christ become for them a rule."

#### Fide Ratio (the reason of faith)

Zwingli describes "the heavenly symposium": "pious Christians and the righteous of the Old Testament" sit together with Socrates, Plato, even Hercules and Theseus. [There is a very similar section in Erasmus' "Colloquies," entitled "The heavenly Banquet."]

For these and similar reasons, the Zwingli historian Walter Köhle calls Zwingli "modern," the "liberal" among the great Reformers. He notes that Zwingli speaks of religion as an inclusive general concept.

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