

## CHAPTER VII

### ZWINGLI AND CALVIN

During the sixteenth century, Lutheranism became the prevailing religion in almost two-thirds of the states of Germany. It spread to the Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Norway and Denmark; it became the prevailing religion of Iceland and of the Baltic provinces of Livonia and Estonia; and it made some progress in Hungary and Transylvania. But not all Protestant states were Lutheran because there developed at the same time another type of Protestantism which we call “Reformed Protestantism,” a type which traces its origin not to Luther, but to Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin.

#### 1. Life of Zwingli

Ulrich Zwingli was born in Wildhaus, Switzerland on New Year’s Day 1484, just about seven weeks after Martin Luther. Zwingli grew up in an intellectual atmosphere and was much impressed by the “new learning” of the humanist Erasmus to which we referred in the first chapter. About the time Martin Luther was taking his vows as a monk, Ulrich Zwingli was being ordained to the priesthood. Though Luther had had a serious personal problem concerning sin and salvation which was solved when he discovered justification by faith, Zwingli arrived at his religious conviction through a much more gradual and intellectual process. In 1519 he was transferred to Zurich. It was here that he experienced his so-called definite “conversion” to evangelical truth. Like Luther, he accepted the Bible rather than tradition or decrees of the pope as authority in religious and moral matters, and like Luther he taught that man is justified alone by faith and not by works. Zwingli differed from Luther in that he conceived the idea that he had a perfect right to rule the state as well as the church, and his reforms were of a political as well as of a religious nature.

#### 2. The Marburg Colloquy

Inasmuch as Luther and Zwingli held much in common, the German prince, Philip of Hesse, urged that the two movements be united, since in union there would be strength. Luther was not opposed to the idea, but insisted that it must be done on the basis of agreement in doctrine. Accordingly a meeting was arranged between Luther and his colleagues on one hand, and Zwingli and his colleagues on the other. This meeting was held in Marburg in 1529 and is known historically as the Marburg Colloquy.

Fifteen points of doctrine were discussed. On fourteen points Luther and Zwingli seemed to agree, but on the fifteenth they did not. This point was concerning the Lord’s Supper. Zwingli held that the bread and wine were mere symbols of the body and blood of our Lord, and Luther held that the body and blood of our Lord are truly present in the Lord’s Supper. Zwingli argued on the basis of reason that the body of Christ was in heaven and could not be present in the holy communion. Finally Luther took a piece of chalk and wrote on the table before him the words of Christ’s institution, “This IS my body” and “This IS my blood.” To all of Zwingli’s arguments from reason, Luther replied that the Bible said “This IS” and not “This represents.”

It was evident that the two groups could not agree on this point, yet Zwingli desired that they join hands nevertheless, but Luther refused.

### **3. Lutheran vs. Reformed Today**

The historic differences between Lutheranism and the Reformed faith as evidenced at Marburg in 1529 still exist today. Lutherans still believe in the real presence of Christ body and blood in the Lord Supper, and the “Reformed,” which has come to mean all non-Lutheran Protestants, still regard the Lord’s Supper symbolically. Lutherans still hold to the Word of God whether it seems reasonable or unreasonable, while there is still a tendency among the Reformed to interpret the Word of God in the light of human reason. Lutherans still insist that a God-pleasing union of church groups must be based on a unity of doctrine, while the Reformed on the whole still are eager to “agree to disagree,” and nevertheless unite. There is no better study of distinctive Lutheranism than a study of the Marburg Colloquy. Sad to say orthodox Lutherans are in the minority.

### **4. Zwingli’s Death**

Ulrich Zwingli died just two years after the Marburg Colloquy in a battle against the Roman Catholics. An army of 8000 Catholics marched from the Forest Cantons of Switzerland upon Zurich. Zwingli quickly collected a force of 1500 men and met this army at Cappel. He accompanied this army as chaplain, but soon fell on the field of battle. Two of the Catholic soldiers found him wounded and bleeding, lying under a pear tree. They told him to confess to a priest or to call upon the saints. When he refused, they said, “Die then, obstinate heretic,” and thrust him through with a sword. His body was burned, and his ashes thrown to the wind.

### **5. Calvin and His Work**

The work of Zwingli was taken up by John Calvin, a Frenchman, who was born in Picardy in 1509. John Calvin studied and taught at the University of Paris. When he espoused the cause of the Reformation, he was forced to flee. After wandering about for some time, in 1536 he came to Geneva, Switzerland, where he spent the remainder of his life. The year previous, while in Basel, Switzerland, he wrote the great work entitled, “The Institutes of the Christian Religion.” This was perhaps one of the greatest, if not the greatest, theological work of his age. Calvin was a scholar, well trained in law as well as in theology. He had been converted to the new doctrine of the Reformation through the reading of the works of Erasmus and Luther.

Nevertheless, Calvinism differed from Lutheranism on several important points. Calvin more or less followed Zwingli in his doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, though he went a little beyond Zwingli in his explanation. Calvin taught that while a believer partakes of the bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper, his soul is mysteriously transported to heaven where it feeds on the body and blood of Christ, but that the unbeliever receives nothing but bread and wine. The Lutheran Church, on the other hand, teaches that in, with and under the bread and wine both believers and unbelievers receive the true body and blood of Christ, the believers to their soul’s eternal good, and the unbelievers to their own judgment. In light of Calvin’s doctrine of the soul

going to heaven to feed on Christ's body and blood, we can understand what Dr. Luther had in mind when he penned the words:

Deem not that you to heaven can rise  
To meet your Savior there,  
He comes in mercy from the skies  
That you His bliss may share.

The test of the Lutheran doctrine of communion is always to ask the question, "What does the unbeliever receive?" A Calvinist will always reply, "Only bread and wine," while a Lutheran will reply, "Christ's body and blood." The belief that the unworthy communicant receives only bread and wine accounts for the fact that Calvinistic or Reformed churches are ready to invite people so freely to their communion altars and practice open communion."

## **6. Calvin's Predestination**

Calvin taught salvation by grace alone, while Luther made the grace of God the center of his teachings, Calvin made the sovereignty of God the center of his teachings. In order to explain why not all people are saved, he espoused the doctrine of absolute predestination. He taught that God from all eternity looked at lost humanity, and determined to show both his grace and his justice. In order to show his grace, God arbitrarily chose out of the lost a certain group called the elect. For those elect he sent his Son to pay the price of their sin with his blood, to those he comes with his "almighty grace," converts them, keeps them in faith and finally brings them to himself in heaven. The non-elect he allows to continue on the way of sin and finally receive the just reward of their sins, eternal damnation. Whether you are saved or lost, therefore, depends on what side God put you in that eternal election. A man once asked Rev. Jonathan Edwards of New England, a devout follower of John Calvin, what a man could do if he were sure he was on the side of the non-elect, and Edwards replied, "If you are saved, it is to the glory of God's grace, and if you are lost, it is to the glory of God's justice, and any man ought to be glad to be damned for the glory of God."

## **7. Luther, Calvin and the Scriptures**

Calvin took a different attitude toward the Scriptures than did Luther. Luther taught that as long as the Scripture did not condemn a thing, that thing was permissible if it tended toward edification, but Calvin taught that unless Scripture expressly commands a thing either by precept or example, that thing is wrong and sinful. This explains why the Lutheran Church has retained such things as altar crosses, crucifixes, the sign of the cross, stained glass windows, liturgies, while the Calvinistic churches were opposed to all these things. It also explains why hymnology grew in the Lutheran Church, while the Calvinistic churches insisted for a long time that only the Psalms could be sung.

## **8. Spread of Calvinism**

Calvinism became the religion of Protestant Switzerland; it spread to Bohemia and Moravia, to the Rhineland region of Germany. The Dutch Reformed religion of Holland is a form of Calvinism. The Huguenots of France and the Scottish Presbyterians are Calvinists.

Calvinism greatly influenced the Church of England, and was the religion of the Puritans and Independents of seventeenth century England, those groups from which the Pilgrim Fathers and Puritans of New England came.

**FOR DISCUSSION:**

1. How did Zwingli's development differ from Luther's?
2. How does the Lutheran church differ from the Reformed on the Lord's Supper? How did Calvin differ from Zwingli on this point?
3. What is predestination, and what is the Lutheran attitude toward it?
4. What is the difference between the Lutheran and the Calvinistic attitude toward the Scriptures and what has been the result of this difference of attitude?

**SUGGESTED READINGS**

Read *Luther, Biography of A Reformer*, Chapter 11, "That They May Be One," pp. 175-196.

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