

The Church of the Servant King
Soteriology Series

SO_6_Predestination & Election – Part 6 –
The Historical Background – the Reformation Period – Zwingli
& Reformers Other Than John Calvin

Introduction

John Calvin (1509-1564) is often seen as the father of the Reformed branch of Protestantism. However, in reality it was Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) who was the originator of the Reformed branch. This movement began in Zurich, Switzerland under Zwingli and was systematized in Geneva under Calvin. Unlike Luther (who was an ascetic monk and whose struggle with whether he was saved led to his discovery of justification by faith in Romans chapter 1), Zwingli had a lascivious trend even as a priest. He struggled with the issue of chastity.¹ In today's lesson, we will look at the contributions of both of these men to the issue of predestination and election. However, before we do, I want to add a few more comments to our study of Luther last week.

Additional Comments Regarding Luther

There is no doubt that God used each of the Reformers to counter specific errors that had become ingrained in the theology, dogma and practice of the Roman Catholic Church. For that, we owe a debt of gratitude. We also need to examine our own souls and ask ourselves how we would have performed if we were placed under the same set of circumstances in history with the same adversities these men faced. Would we have had the courage to stand against centuries of tradition and use nothing but what we read in Scripture without the aide of commentaries and the efforts of scores of men since to give us guidance and vision?

With that in mind, we can certainly appreciate the Reformers and thank God for such men. However, at the same time, we can look at the lives of these men and evaluate them objectively. In Luther's case, what I see is a man who came to the realization of some critical, soteriological truths, but who also carried around a lot of theological baggage from his Roman Catholic background and who never resolved inconsistencies and developed a systematic theology. Here are some examples:

- Regarding infant baptism – “Although when baptized the infants are not able to exercise faith, Luther said that they are aided by the faith of those who bring them to baptism and that through the prayers of Church when brings the child in faith, the infant is changed, cleansed, and ***renewed by the faith infused*** in it.”² [Italics mine]
- Regarding man's free will – “Man, so Luther held, ***does not have free will***. Man's will is like a beast of burden. It is ridden either by God or by the Devil and does whatever the one who is in the saddle directs.”³
- Regarding the bigamous marriage of Philip of Hesse – Philip of Hesse was a political leader under Charles V. For political reasons, Philip had been married to the daughter of a German prince. Later in the marriage and after several children by her, Philip converted to Lutheranism. However, he continued to have difficulty overcoming

¹ Dr. Garth Rosell, class notes of Steve Ellis in “The History of the Church Since the Reformation,” Institute of Theological Studies for credit at Dallas Theological Seminary, Fall, 2000.

² Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity, Reformation to the Present* (San Francisco, California: Harper Collins Publishers, 1975), Volume II, 713.

³ *Ibid.*, 724.

adulterous affairs. His conscience bothered him horribly. He thought that a second marriage might help. With the consent of his first wife, his mother-in-law, and Luther among a few others, he entered a bigamous marriage with a seventeen-year-old maid. Luther **advised** **“that the second marriage be kept secret**, for being bigamous it was against the law of the land. The marriage was performed by a court preacher, and when the news leaked out Luther advised ‘a good strong lie.’”⁴ Luther based his advice upon the logic that there was polygamy in the Old Testament.

Some Historical Background

We have noted in at least two previous lessons that semi-Pelagianism as a syncretistic compromise between Pelagianism and Augustinianism was the predominant view within the Roman Catholic Church for centuries leading up to the Reformation. Semi-Pelagianism recognized the necessity for the grace of God in salvation while at the same time promoting certain deeds (human works) by man to complement God’s provision. Thus, man contributed to his own salvation through acts of penance and other such deeds.

While semi-Pelagianism was blinding the Church as well as the unbeliever to the all-sufficiency of Christ’s work on the Cross for salvation, the cultural Renaissance was glorifying human capabilities and achievements. Having begun in Florence, Italy in the late 1300’s, it continued into the 1400’s. It eventually spread to Rome where it reached its peak, then to Germany and the rest of Europe.⁵

Other forces were at work during this period throughout Europe that are worthy of note. European society experienced a fascination with demonology and the occult. Enlightened scholars argued about whether witches rode on sticks. In the middle of the 1300’s, the Bubonic and Pneumonic Plagues began sweeping over Europe and lasted for a period of about 50 years or so. It claimed about a third of the European population with some areas being wiped out completely and others spared completely.

Starting in 1348, the bubonic plague ravaged the continents of Europe and Asia, killing an estimated forty million people.

Victims suffered a horribly painful death characterized by fever and dying flesh. Looking to religion, superstition and quackery, people tried to understand and prevent infection from a disease whose origins were a mystery.⁶

John Wycliffe (1328-1384) taught that a visible church was not needed for salvation. Ordinary people could read the Bible without the need for a clergy. In 1382, Wycliffe translated an English Bible, the first English translation in over 1000 years. The Lollards, itinerant preachers that Wycliffe sent throughout England brought about a spiritual revolution. However, this movement was short-lived and the church expelled Wycliffe from his teaching position at Oxford. Forty-four years after he died, the pope ordered his bones exhumed and burned. His teaching was branded heretical and over one hundred years passed before the Reform he sought would occur.⁷

⁴ Ibid., 728.

⁵ Edward McNall Burns, *Western Civilizations, Their History and Their Culture* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973), 373-396.

⁶ See bubonic plague at www.historychannel.com

⁷ Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing, 1982, 1995), 225-32.

Apart from the influence of such men as Wycliffe, the Catholic Church became increasingly subject to corruption (e.g. buying/selling church offices or simony, adultery and fornication by priests, the concept of purgatory and the abuse of indulgences). In addition, society at large as well as the church came under the influence of Renaissance thought. The importance of human development to its fullest potential physically and intellectually was emphasized in educational institutions. Religious humanists began to promote the idea that each individual could have a relationship with God on their own apart from the priest. The most famous of these was Erasmus (1466-1517) whose faith seemed to be more in education and moral improvement than in Christ as the only means for satisfying the righteous standard of God. Erasmus was one of the men who was against corruption in the church and he caused people to question the established church. He thus influenced the later leaders of the Reformation.⁸

The spread of the secular and religious aspects of the Renaissance was no doubt aided by the invention of the printing press in about 1450 by Johanne Gutenberg. The printing press also became a large factor in the spread of Reformation thought.

Thus, by the time of the Protestant Reformation that began on October 31, 1517 with Luther's posting of his 95 theses on the church door at Wittenburg, the stage had been set. Renaissance thought combined with the invention of the printing press and reaction by secular and religious people to the corruption in and abuse of authority within the church led to a situation ripe for a reform movement.

Ulrich Zwingli

Zwingli was a strong Swiss nationalist, a partisan. He supported the successful efforts of the Swiss who fought for independence from Austria and Germany. As a pastor, Zwingli was a courageous man and ministered without fear to those afflicted by yet another plague that was sweeping part of Europe shortly after he began His ministry. In fact, Zwingli became so sick that he nearly died. He grew spiritually as a result of this event and even wrote a song in which he acknowledged the all-sufficiency of God's grace.⁹ Zwingli, Calvin and others became fathers of the Reformed branch of Protestantism, whereas Luther became known as the father of Lutheranism. The chief difference between these two branches in these early days of the Reformation was in regards to the meaning of the Lord's Supper. Luther took Jesus statement – "This is my body" – literally; whereas Zwingli emphasized the memorial aspect – "Do this in remembrance of me."¹⁰ On issues related to our study, they were much more closely aligned.

While Luther and Calvin believed that man was totally depraved and could do no spiritual good on his own, Zwingli viewed man's condition as a disease rather than his being subject to original sin. However, like Luther and Calvin, Zwingli believed that man was in total dependence upon the grace of God for salvation. While Luther believed in double predestination yet manifested a tendency to on occasions deny the doctrine of reprobation and make predestination dependent upon foreknowledge, Zwingli was even more forceful than Calvin in his insistence upon reprobation as a part of the divine decree. Calvin, too, believed in double predestination although he approached the issue more cautiously.¹¹ Zwingli went so far as to contend that sin

⁸ Ibid., 249, 268, 313.

⁹ Rosell, class notes.

¹⁰ Latourette, *A History of Christianity, Reformation to the Present*, 749.

¹¹ Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1937), 148.

was necessary in order that the glory of God could be manifested.¹² At this point in our study, one should readily see that the Reformers were very Augustinian in their views on the subject of the total depravity of man and the absolute necessity of God's grace in the salvation process. These two points will eventually become a part of the paradigm for two of the five points of Calvinism, i.e. the "T" – total depravity and the "I" – irresistible grace.

The Views of Other Reformers of Note Other Than Calvin

Philip Melancthon (1497-1560) was the grandnephew and protégé of the humanist Reuchlin. He was Luther's junior by 15 years and was one of the staff at the University of Wittenberg who rallied behind Luther. He had been newly installed as a professor of Greek when Luther posted his 95 theses. Whereas, most humanists parted from Luther (e.g. Erasmus), Melancthon remained loyal to the movement initiated by Luther. Melancthon wrote the Augsburg Confession which was effectively the official statement of the Lutheran position in response to the request from Emperor Charles V in 1530 that Protestants set forth their beliefs and indicate where they differed from the Roman Catholic Church.¹³ The Augsburg Confession was the formulation of faith to which more Lutherans adhered than to any other. Melancthon avoided the subject of predestination as much as possible and under the pressure of opposition to Luther's doctrine of the bondage of the will began to ascribe a measure of freedom or spiritual power to the will and taught a synergistic theory of regeneration.¹⁴

Theodore Beza (1519-1605) was a protégé of Calvin. As a matter of fact, Calvin died in Beza's arms.¹⁵ Beza would become the representative of the Protestants in France known as the Huguenots when an attempt at reconciliation with the Catholics was urged by the regent of France, Catherine de' Medici.¹⁶

Felix Manz and Conrad Grebel (1498-1526) were two very important figures in the Reformation. Both were heavily influenced by Zwingli, but later desired to go far beyond Zwingli in splitting from the Roman Catholic Church over such issues as infant baptism, abolishing the mass, and the use of images. Grebel gathered a group of followers known as the Swiss Brethren and Grebel and Manz together would become prominent in the movement known as

¹² Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985), 913.

¹³ Latourette, *A History of Christianity, Reformation to the Present*, 710-727.

¹⁴ Berkhof, *History of Christian Doctrines*, 148.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁶ While no agreement was reached, the Protestants were accorded a limited toleration until 1562 when the Wars of Religion broke out and were waged until 1594. The most famous incident in this conflict was the Massacre of St. Bartholomew in August, 1572. Huguenot leaders had gathered in Paris for the marriage of Henry of Navarre, a Protestant, to the daughter of Catherine de' Medici. Under orders from Catherine, thousands of Huguenots were killed. See Latourette, *A History*, 767. Throughout this conflict, the Huguenots were bitterly persecuted. A movement that at one time claimed over 2000 churches was reduced by two-thirds during this conflict. Many fled the country and others went to the mountains. Holland became a refuge for persecuted Reformers (Huguenots from France, Puritans from England, and Covenanters from Scotland) and this resulted in Holland becoming a focal area for much of Reformed thinking. By 1715, Louis XIV declared that this "heresy" had finally been exterminated. Yet, in an old stone quarry in the mountains, remnants of this movement (about 3000) would meet for worship. The Reformed Church of France continues today. See Rosell, class notes.

Anabaptists.¹⁷ The issue of predestination and election was not the major issue with which they dealt.

Conclusion

Hopefully, this lesson has provided us with some flavor for the historical background to our study of predestination and election. We see the influence of Augustinian thought on the Reformers as regards the topics of predestination and election. While our position on this issue will differ significantly from that of the Reformed branch of Protestantism, we can still see and appreciate the significant contribution that leaders of the Reformation made to the advance of salvation by faith in Christ. Next week, we will look at Calvin and some of the significant voices after the Reformation on this subject.

¹⁷ Latourette, *A History of Christianity, Reformation to the Present*, 780.