

School of Ministry

Week 3 – Reformation Church History – The Lay Reformation

Things to ponder...

What is the current relationship between Church and State?

What *should* the relationship be?

The Lay Reformation (The Magisterial Reformation / The Swiss Reformation)

This title refers to the second wave of reformation that occurred in several urban areas in Switzerland and Southern Germany (the free cities of the Holy Roman Empire). The main personalities involved were Zwingli, Bucer, Bullinger and Oecolampadius. This impetus for reformation was characterised by greater lay involvement in the form of the city councils being influenced from the pulpit.

Causes of a sense of alienation and exploitation among urban lay people

1) The psychological burden of medieval Catholicism

The abuse and excesses of the Catholic penitential system are thought to be the root cause of this disenfranchisement. These include:

- the questions asked in the confessional
- the level of detail required in their confessions
- the imposition of a penalty to be performed to satisfy their moral debt – rather than a declaration of forgiveness.

The confessor acted more like the judge and jury rather than as a pastor and guide...

2) The financial burden of the church was seen as excessive

It included:

- tithes
- papal taxes
- fees for performing baptisms, burials, legitimising children, etc.
- the sale of indulgences to reduce time in purgatory

3) The clergy was regarded as a lazy privileged class

The clergy enjoyed extensive exemptions from taxes and civil duties (including civil justice and military service).

There was also widespread clerical absenteeism. Important ecclesiastical offices were often sold to the highest bidder... but the requirements of residency were sometimes waived or at least not enforced, and may hold more than one such office. Often bishops were from the nobility and were more interested in politics than the church.

The General trend in Reform

- leading citizens and council members were influenced by Biblical preaching
- they resisted and repudiated interference by the bishop
- disputations were held in the vernacular and Scripture was the only authority that could be appealed to
- the city council would legislate to reform churches and parishes with the advice of their chief pastors
 - o to allow clerical marriage
 - o to remove superstitious images and relics

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- to suppress monasteries and use their endowments for education
- to order a simplified and vernacular liturgy
- the council followed with regulations to reform public morals

Zurich: the prime example

Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) was appointed the people's priest at the Great Minster in Zurich in Jan 1519. He was nearly opposed because of some moral lapses (which was eventually deemed a non-issue because the woman in question was known to be a prostitute and not the daughter of a prominent citizen as had first been supposed!?) and his opposition to the mercenary trade.

He began preaching sermons directly from the Bible, on the book of Matthew, instead of the official sermons and scholastic commentaries he had used previously. These sermons were such as had not been heard previously in Zurich, and eventually became the standard in 1520 for all preachers in Zurich.

The Reformation's success in this area stems from the widespread and official regard for the Bible's authority. The test of scripture became Zwingli's basic reform principle. Indeed Zwingli wrote:

I came at length to trust in no words so much as in those which proceeded [from the Bible]. And when miserable mortals... tried to palm off their works as God's. I looked to see whether any means could be found by which one could detect whether the works of man or of God were the better, especially as I saw not a few straining every nerve to make the simple-minded accept their own views as divine even though they were at variance with or in direct opposition to the words of God. Seeking a touchstone, I found the stone of offense and the rock of scandal [Jesus Christ, 1 Peter 2:7]... I began to try every doctrine by this touchstone. If I saw that a teaching could bear the test, I accepted it; if not, I rejected it... I began to discover whether... anything was added to the real doctrine... and then I could not be driven by any force or threats to put in human things... the same trust as in the divine.¹

Zwingli recognised that the central message of the New Testament was the redemption of the world in Christ. And as he preached through Scripture questions were raised regarding fasting, veneration of the saints, purgatory, tithes, images, vestments, church music etc.

Zwingli only reformed things as he convinced the city council through his preaching. However, reformation was precipitated in earnest as some members of what was to become the 'radical reformation' broke the Lenten fast of Feb 1522. They felt that reform was not as extensive and rapid as they wanted. They ate sausages in protest, for which they were arrested.

Zwingli ended up condemning them for upsetting those with weaker consciences. But also in his preaching, a sermon entitled "On the choice and freedom of foods' showed the lack of scriptural warrant for not eating sausages in Lent.

¹ In *The Latin Works and the Correspondence of Huldreich Zwingli, 1510-1522*, ed. Samuel M. Jackson (New York 1912), 1:204-205. Cited in S. Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550*, New Haven: Yale Uni Press, 1980, 323-24.

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The next major issue of contention came over clerical marriage. Zwingli was in favour of it – to prevent the abuse of clerical concubinage. But the Bishop of Constance became involved. The council responded by calling a disputation (or debate) which was to have the following character:

- argument in German not Latin
- the Bible was the only authority

These conditions meant that the outcome was essentially determined from the outset to go in Zwingli's favour.

Eventually the Zurich officials came to agree and Zwingli was allowed to reform cautiously 'in accordance with the word of God'. The city became identified as a Protestant City.

Reflection

- How was this reform different to the reform we saw under Martin Luther?

Points of Contention within the Reform Movement

Split with the Radical Reformers

Caution in reform galvanised the radical elements who indicated their dissent through iconoclasm, the destroying church interiors. This led to a second disputation in which Zwingli argued and won in the name of moderation. It then took another two years for the council to end up removing images from the churches, and the mass.

Over Sacraments

With the Lutheran Reformers

Unity with the Lutheran reformers was threatened over the issue of Christ's presence at the Lord's Supper.

The early reformers such as Luther saw the sacraments as exhibiting the principle of accommodation (divine accommodation to human weakness). Whereby God accommodated himself and his truths to visible signs – to help us understand. They were viewed as promises with signs attached. They are signs that can even generate faith. So the bread and wine reassure us of the reality of the divine promise of forgiveness, making it easier for us to accept, and having accepted it, to hold firmly to it. Luther with regard to Christ's presence at the Lord's supper couldn't get away from Matthew 26:26 'This is my body'. He thought if Jesus said it, then it was in some way his body and not a symbol of his body.

Thus, this sacrament still had great importance (as important as Scripture) so the Lord's supper was held every week, along with a sermon in the Sunday service.

Side by side
Jesus *on* the table

Sacraments –
Bread and Wine
(signs of Christ's
visable body)

Word of God

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Zwingli on the other hand thought that sacraments demonstrate the existence of faith in the believer. It is about our pledge of loyalty and obedience to God (not God's pledge of faithfulness to us). He used an illustration of this from his time as a chaplain to the army of the Swiss confederacy.

A white cross, sown on to one's garment is a proclamation of one's wish to be a confederate. A pilgrimage to Nähenfels on the first Thursday in April (the location of a particularly significant victory in the formation of the nation) is a testament that he is a confederate indeed. These actions parallel the baptism and then participation of the Lord's Supper in the life of a Christian.

He thought the sacraments were subordinate to the Word of God. So the Lord's Supper was only held four times per year. The preaching of the Word of God brings faith into existence, and the sacraments merely provide an occasion by which this faith may be publicly demonstrated.

Word of God takes priority
Jesus *at* the table

Word of God

Sacraments –
Bread and Wine
(signs of Christ's
visible body)

Zwingli thought that the Lord's Supper was a commemoration in Jesus' absence. He thought that given that Jesus was seated at God's right hand in heaven, he couldn't be in church in the bread. He thought that 'This is my body' meant 'this signifies my body'. And that Jesus was speaking metaphorically. [Zwingli thought that Jesus' session at the right hand of God was metaphorical. In the end it seems that they couldn't agree which one was the metaphor.]

Things to Ponder...

- Is your View of the Lord's Supper more like Luther or Zwingli?

Bucer was determined that this disagreement ought not to damage the unity of the reformation movement. He, with the aid of Philip of Hesse, sought to bring together the Germans and the Swiss for the *Marburg Colloquy* (1529).

They were able to agree on fourteen points of doctrine including: the Trinity, the person of Christ, justification by faith, baptism, good works, confession and secular authority. In the fifteenth point regarding the Lord's Supper they were able to agree on the rejection of transubstantiation, the idea of the mass as a sacrifice, and they thought that the laity ought to receive both the wine and the bread. They were not able to agree however on the nature of Christ's presence in this sacrament. And rather than being a unifying event it only served to divide the protestants.

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With the Radical Reformers

Further divergence with the radical reformation occurred over the sacrament of baptism, particularly in regard to the practice of baptising infants.

Zwingli saw baptism as the ‘circumcision’ of the new covenant. As such it was a sign of belonging to the Christian community. Since church and state were very closely tied in these free cities, baptism became tied up with signifying loyalty to the city community. Refusing to have your children baptised became a reason for expulsion from the city.

This stemmed from two different conceptions of the nature of church stemming from the fourth century. Augustine saw the church as being a mixture of saints and sinners (Matthew 13:24-31) which could not be differentiated in this life. His opponents the Donatists, thought that Christians should separate themselves from those who were not. This kind of thinking results in ‘sects’ – groups of believers separated out from the world.

In the Swiss Reformation, Zwingli had the more Augustinian outlook (with the church ultimately being in bed with the state), whilst the Anabaptists were like a sect (only for ‘true’ believers).

Things to ponder...

- Is your view of Church more like the Augustine or the Donatists?
- Is your view of Baptism more like Zwingli or the Anabaptists?

On the relationship of Church and State

Luther: saw life in terms of two kingdoms. The Roman Catholics viewed the world in terms of two estates: the temporal and the spiritual. Luther however strongly held to the priesthood of all believers, and that any differentiation between the clergy and the laity was only in terms of office or function not status. Thus he saw the world in terms of the spiritual and worldly governments. The Christian is guided by the word of God and Holy Spirit (persuasive), so the believer needs no other guidance to regulate their behaviour (eg. Phil 1:27). The pagan however, needs the worldly government to regulate their behaviour through laws and their enforcement (coercive). The worldly government is effected through kings etc. but has no authority in matters of doctrine but is nevertheless performing the will of God. So believers are governed by the spirit and pagans by the sword. And believers are encouraged to tolerate (or at least not oppose) unjust social structures – the way was open for eventual domination of the church by the state (see the *Peasants Revolt* – and McGrath contests perhaps the failure of the Lutheran church to challenge the ‘legal’ rise of Nazism)².

Luther’s
Two Kingdoms of Life

**Spiritual
Government**
Guided by
Word of God
through his
Spirit

**Worldly
Government**
Guided by
laws and
enforcement

² A. McGrath. *Reformation Thought*. 3rd ed. p226.

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Zwingli: saw the church and state as virtually equivalent. Both the ruler and the preacher are under God, entrusted with establishing his rule. Zwingli was (like Luther) a political pragmatist, and for his context required the support of the city council. He almost spiritualised their existence. Zurich was virtually a theocracy, as the council made decisions as the Scriptures were preached and applied to the city. Zwingli recognised that the Christian's primary obligation is to obey God, and then the civil rulers. Thus he tended to prefer the aristocracy as the means of government. For in an aristocracy there is the option for replacing tyrants other than regicide (killing of a king) in the case of a monarchy – there are other options besides killing the monarch... Thus he had the option of a peaceful means of deposing unjust rulers in his system.

Church Government Led by Preacher (under God) Preaching the Word of God...	State Government Led by Ruler (under God) ... was enacted by the Princes and magistrates
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Over matters which the Bible is silent

Luther insisted that there were some matters which were 'indifferent' to the Christian – such as the use of Candles. His interest was in the clear preaching of the Word of God and the obedience of the 10 Commandments.

Zwingli suggested that nothing was indifferent to the gospel and so if anything interfered with the clear preaching of the Word of God it should be removed.

The result was that the Swiss simplified their church buildings and rid them of medieval trappings to worship to a far greater extent than the Lutherans.

Things to ponder...

- In the light of our study of the Swiss Reformation, what should be the relationship between Church and State?

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