**History & Theology – Church History**

**Class 6 – Reformation Unleashed: Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli (1483- 1546)**

### Main Point:

* The Protestant Reformation recovered the supremacy of Scriptures as the true center of Christian union and only infallible authority for matters of faith and doctrine.

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### Class Goals:

* Use political debates over conciliarism and papal authority, the corruption of the church, and the rise of humanism to set the context for the Reformation.
* Give an overview of the first half of Martin Luther’s life, his conversion, and reluctant break with Rome.
* Introduce Ulrich Zwingli as a contemporaneous reformer and example of how cities across Europe were transformed through the preaching of God’s Word.
* Explain the differences between Luther and Zwingli’s views of the Lord’s Supper and the tragedy of irreconcilable differences.

# Introduction: Divisions that Still Haunt Us Today

“Is the Reformation Over?” That is the question asked by Notre Dame historian, Mark Noll, in his 2008 award-winning book with that very same title: *Is the Reformation Over?: An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Baker Academic, 2008).[[1]](#footnote-0) This is a question a lot of people are asking. In an increasingly secular and hostile world, where Protestants and Catholics share an ever-growing set of beliefs, not only theological views about the Trinity, the Incarnation, and Resurrection, but also basic views about gender, marriage, and the family, is it really necessary for us to remain divided?

After all, as Noll reasons, “Catholics tend to… worry as much about the advance of godless secularism in the world as evangelicals do about the advance of theological modernism.”[[2]](#footnote-1) So why should we continue to be divided by the past? Can’t we just let bygones be bygones? Isn’t unity in the church what Jesus prayed for in John 17: “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (17:21). Based on Jesus’ words, isn’t the *dis*unity between Catholics and Protestants just an impediment to world evangelization? In any case, it’s been over 500 years now. Haven’t we had enough? Is the Reformation over?

What I hope to show you in this class, as we begin to examine the Protestant Reformation, is that the main problem is not divisions in the church. The problem is dividing the church over the wrong issues. To explain this, let me just read one article from our church’s own statement of faith, Article 1, “The Scriptures.”

**I. The Scriptures**

We believe that the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction; that it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture of error for its matter; that it reveals the principles by which God will judge us; and therefore is, and shall remain to the end of the world, *the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions should be tried*.

This claim that Holy Scriptures are“the true center of Christian union” has been called the “Formal Principle” of the Reformation. The problem at the time of the Reformation—a problem that remains to this day—was the act of the Church of Rome to require people to believe that which was not taught by Scripture. If you want to rend Christendom, that’s always the recipe. Require Christ’s sheep, on threat of damnation, to believe that which the Scripture denies. The act of the Bishop of Rome to claim supremacy over Bishops, and even over the Scriptures as we saw last week, is undoubtedly the greatest cause of division in the history of Christ’s church.

And as we will see in today’s class, it eventually forced a breaking point. But before we look at Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli, arguably the most colorful figures of the Protestant Reformation, I want to re-cap a few things from last week to set the stage for the Reformation.

## Context: Councils and Humanism

### Conciliarism

A long-standing debate in the medieval church had to do with the question of the relative authority of the Pope in relation to Church Councils. We saw last week how the authority of the Bishop of Rome gradually grew throughout the Medieval Church. This meant that the office of Pope became hotly contested because of its source of political influence—kind of like Presidential elections today. At one point, between 1378 and 1417, a period known as the “Western Schism,” there were three people simultaneously claiming to be the Pope and to have authority to excommunicate each other.

Finally, the kings of Europe had enough. Emperor Sigismund summoned the Council of Constance (1414-1418) to depose the existing popes and appoint a new one.[[3]](#footnote-2) This was a huge “vote of no-confidence” for the credibility of the Papal office which was at an all-time low.[[4]](#footnote-3) And it set in motion a series of limitations on Papal authority. For example, Constance demanded that Councils be held at regular intervals in perpetuity because “popes could not be counted upon to handle properly their own affairs and the affairs of the church.”[[5]](#footnote-4) Future councils set limits on the number of Cardinals Popes could appoint, and the number of relatives they could appoint to church offices. A Council in Basel in 1432 and 1434 declared that general Councils were the supreme authority of the church, and in 1439 insisted that denying the authority of councils over the Pope was heresy.[[6]](#footnote-5)

In the years that followed, Popes began to conveniently “forget” to call the Councils that Constance had demanded. Meanwhile, Papal Theologians promulgated arguments of papal supremacy over councils—such as the forged Donation of Constantine that we considered last week. Meanwhile a movement known as Conciliarism was gaining momentum.

Conciliarism was the movement, associated with Marsilius of Padua and others, that asserted that church councils were superior in authority to popes.[[7]](#footnote-6) Some of the proto-Reformers that we considered last week, like Hus and Wycliffe, very much fit within this tradition. Since Councils had acted to restrict Papal power previously, Popes began to fear councils in general and conciliarism in particular above all else.[[8]](#footnote-7)

### Humanism

While the political and religious rulers were grappling with debates over the relative authority of the Pope, another movement was gaining momentum—humanism. The rallying cry of the humanists was *“Ad Fontes”*—back to the sources! Humanists believed that the world was in moral and cultural decay and that the solution lay in recovering the wisdom of Classical Antiquity—the wisdom of the Greeks and the legal and political expertise of the Romans. At the forefront of the humanist movement was a scholar of unparalleled greatness, Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536).

#### Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536)

Erasmus was a Catholic priest and scholar who lamented the abuses of authority and widespread immorality within the Roman Church.[[9]](#footnote-8) He criticized the Roman Church at length in his satirical essay, *In Praise of Folly,* published in 1511. But his greatest contribution to the Protestant Reformation was his translation and publication of a Greek New Testament.[[10]](#footnote-9)

Before Erasmus, students of Scripture relied on a Latin translation of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures completed by Jerome in 382 A.D. While a remarkable feat, the Latin “Vulgate” as it became known —after ‘vulgar,’ a reference to the native tongue of the Roman peoples—was riddled with errors, such as Jerome’s translation of Jesus’ words in Mark 1:15 as “Do penance,” rather than “repent.”[[11]](#footnote-10)

Drawing on the scholarship of Lorenzo Valla from a generation earlier, Erasmus drew on a variety of ancient Greek manuscripts to create the world’s first critical edition of the New Testament in Greek, with a facing Latin translation.[[12]](#footnote-11) When the *Novum Instrumentum* appeared in 1,200 copies in Basel in early 1516, it struck the world like lightning. Finally, theologians and scholars could more readily examine the language of the New Testament for themselves!

Two young Priests who acquired early copies of Erasmus’s Greek New Testament and began devouring its contents were Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli.

# Martin Luther (1483-1546)

## Life & Background: the Terror of God’s Righteousness

Martin Luther was born, educated, and raised in a world dominated by these forces—conciliarism and papal authority, humanism and a desire to recapture ancient wisdom. Born in Eisleben on November 10, 1483[[13]](#footnote-12) to Hans and Margaret Luther, Martin Luther was the son of a wealthy miner, but very much a common man of the people.[[14]](#footnote-13) Luther’s father hoped he would leave the rural world of manual labor and become a lawyer.[[15]](#footnote-14) But as a student at the University of Erfurt, at age 21, Luther found himself caught in a lightning storm and cried out, “St. Anne help me! I will become a monk.”[[16]](#footnote-15) To his father’s horror, he followed through with his oath, and on July 17, 1505 entered the Augustinian order in Erfurt.[[17]](#footnote-16)

### Luther the Monk

Luther became, in his words, a “monk’s monk,” devoting himself near constantly to the most rigorous forms of prayer, fasting, and work.[[18]](#footnote-17) “If ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery, it was I,” he said. “If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading, and other work.”[[19]](#footnote-18)

Luther tried to find peace with God, but could find no assurance through the Roman penitential system of confession, penance, and good works.

“I tortured myself with prayer, fasting, vigils, and freezing cold. The cold alone could have killed me. It caused me pain such as I will never inflict on myself again, even if I could?”[[20]](#footnote-19)

Luther once said, “If I could believe that God was not angry at me, I would stand on my head for joy.”[[21]](#footnote-20) “What else did I seek by doing this but God?”[[22]](#footnote-21)

This spiritual terror at God’s transcendent holiness and his own sinfulness—an experience Luther referred to as *anfechtungen,* or religious dread—came to a head in May 1507 when Martin Luther was to say his first mass as a Priest. If you remember from last week, Luther believed that as he said the words of consecration at Mass, the bread and wine became the body and blood of Jesus Christ. As he stood shaking at the Altar, he later recounted that upon addressing God in public prayer,

“I was utterly stupefied and terror-stricke. I thought to myself ‘With what tongue shall I address such Majesty, seeing that all men ought to tremble in the presence of even an earthly prince? Who am I, that I should lift up mine eyes or raise my hands to the divine Majesty? … For I am dust and ashes and full of sin and I am speaking to the living, eternal and the true God.”[[23]](#footnote-22)

### Luther the Professor

Wisely, Luther’s mentor and friend, Johann von Staupitz suggested that Luther earn his doctorate and begin teaching theology. While shocked at the idea that a spiritual mess like himself could possible instruct others, Luther dutifully submitted, and, in October 1512, received Doctor of Theology from the newly established University of Wittenberg, and immediately began to teach theology.[[24]](#footnote-23)

This is where everything began to change. As a professor, Luther only lectured on books of the Bible. This is what it meant to teach theology in the university in his time.[[25]](#footnote-24) From 1513-14 he lectured in the Psalms.[[26]](#footnote-25) Do you see God’s Wisdom in leading scrupulous Luther first to the Book of Psalms? He studied passages like Psalm 22:3 and read, “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” The same experience that Luther knew so well, had been experienced by Christ as well, on the cross. But Christ, unlike Luther, was righteous. Why would the Son suffer the way sinners suffered?

Then, from April 1515 to September 1516, God led Luther to teach the Epistle to the Romans.[[27]](#footnote-26) Now, do you recall what had happened during these pivotal years of 1516-1517? Erasmus’s Greek New Testament had been published. Pouring through the Epistle to the Romans, with the help of Erasmus’s New Testament, Luther finally understood the gospel.

“I greatly longed to understand Paul’s Epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, ‘the justice of God’, because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant. Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that the ‘just shall live by faith’. Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning and whereas before the ‘justice of God’ had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven.”[[28]](#footnote-27)

After finishing Romans, Luther’s convictions were strengthened as he turned to lecture through Galatians.[[29]](#footnote-28)

## Indulgence Controversy

All of this came to a head, famously, in 1517, over the sale of indulgences. If you recall from last week, the Roman Church distinguished between “Mortal Sins”—like murder and adultery, which, if unconfessed and unrepented left the sinner eternally damned—and “Venial Sins,” which were lesser sins like lustful thoughts. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “venial [sins] … must be purified either here on earth or after death in the state called Purgatory.” Purgatory is a place where the sinner is purged—not as the eternal punishment for sin—but a cleansing from the presence of sin and its temporal effects.[[30]](#footnote-29) This is where indulgences come in. “Through indulgences,” the Catechism teaches, “the faithful can obtain the remission of temporal punishment resulting from sin for themselves and also for the souls in Purgatory.”[[31]](#footnote-30)

During the years surrounding Martin Luther’s conversion, the sale of indulgences was widespread as a way of raising funds to pay for the construction of St. Peter’s in Rome.[[32]](#footnote-31) But these indulgences promised more than relief from the temporal punishments in purgatory—Pope Leo X stated that these indulgences offered “a plenary and perfect remission of *all sins*.” They would restore sinners to “the state of innocence which they enjoyed in baptism.”[[33]](#footnote-32)

To Luther this was too much. So on October 31, 1517, Luther, now 33 years old, posted *95 Theses*, written in latin, for debate against the practice and sale of indulgences.[[34]](#footnote-33) Now, posting thesis for debate was standard academic practice.[[35]](#footnote-34) Luther wasn’t saying he believed every thesis he wrote, but he was raising important questions. For example:

[Thesis 27] They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory.[[36]](#footnote-35)

[Thesis 45] Christians are to be taught that he who sees a needy man and passes him by, yet gives his money for indulgences, does not buy papal indulgences but God's wrath.[[37]](#footnote-36)[[38]](#footnote-37)[[39]](#footnote-38)

After being translated to German without Luther’s knowledge by a nearby printer, these Theses spread like wildfire. Before he knew, it Luther was at the center of a theological and political firestorm.

In the years that followed, Luther was given opportunities to defend and clarify his views in a series of disputations, first at Heidelberg in 1518,[[40]](#footnote-39) then at Leipzig in 1519, before finally, in April of 1521, being summoned to appear before the Imperial Court at Worms.

### The Diet of Worms

Now, by leaving the safety of Saxony for the Imperial Court at Worms, Luther realized he was putting his life in jeopardy. True, he was promised safe passage, but so had Jan Hus a hundred years earlier, but nevertheless been condemned to death by the Council of Constance. Luther entered the city of Worms on April 16th and was summoned before the Diet the following day. Entering the Bishop's Court at 4pm on Sunday, April 17, 1521, when Luther was brought before the emperor, the electors, and a portion of the estates, the Emperor is reported to have declared, “That fellow will never make a heretic of me!”[[41]](#footnote-40) Johann Eck, asked Luther only two questions:

1. Do you, Martin Luther, recognize the books published under your name as your own?

2. Are you prepared to recant what you have written in these books?

With bated breath, Luther responded, “The books are all mine, and I have written more.” Asked by Eck whether he would “defend them all, or do you care to reject a part?” Luther responded by asking for more time: “This touches God and his Word. This affects the salvation of souls. Of this Christ said, ‘He who denies me before men, him will I deny before my father.’ To say too little or too much would be dangerous. I beg you, give me time to think it over.”[[42]](#footnote-41) The rest of April 17th, and the long night that followed, Luther spent alone in reflection and prayer.

The following day, April 18, 1521, Luther appeared again before the Diet at 6 PM. When the questions of the previous day were reiterated (are these your books, will you recant them), Luther responded by classifying his books into three sorts. This skillful move allowed Luther to make a speech rather than giving a simple yes or no.[[43]](#footnote-42)

Responding to Luther, Eck continued to press him to give a clear “yes” or “no” in regards to his books. “I ask you, Martin—-answer candidly and without horns—do you or do you not repudiate your books and the errors which they contain?”

It was this final press that provoked the response of Luther that has echoed through the centuries:

“Since then Your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.”[[44]](#footnote-43)

Though eventually condemned by the Imperial Court and declared a fugitive, he was provided protection by his prince, Frederick, and spent the next few years in hiding, writing, and translating the Old and New Testaments into German.

I hope it is clear to you in all this, that at the heart of Luther’s conflict with Rome, was the authority of Scripture. Luther was not content to depend on the Pope’s authority for what is true—he understood Scripture to be authoritative over Popes, Councils, Church’s and any human authority.

Now, interestingly, the very man who got Luther started on the path of Reformation, Erasmus, ended up being called upon to respond to what some people thought was an overemphasis on the freeness of God’s grace in salvation. In his 1524 book *The Freedom of the Will*, Erasmus argued against Luther that conversion and salvation were a shared work of human free will and divine grace.[[45]](#footnote-44) But again, we have to thank Erasmus here. Because that work provoked Luther to write the greatest and most forceful treatise of his life, *The Bondage of the Will* in 1525. If you want to know where the Reformation comes from, as always, look no further than Desiderius Erasmus.

Which brings us to our second reformer today, Ulrich Zwingli. But before that, let me pause for a moment for any questions.

# Ulrich Zwingli (1484 - 1531)

Zwingli was a contemporary of Martin Luther and the Reformer of the city of Zurich in Switzerland. If Martin Luther is the spiritual father of Protestantism, then Zwingli is arguably the spiritual father of the Reformed movement within Protestantism. Though never as well-known as Luther, and certainly not as well-liked, Zwingli’s impact is enormous.

## Life and Background

Zwingli was born on New Year's Day 1484—(6 weeks after Luther was born)—in the village of Wildhaus in the territory of Saint-Gall in what is today referred to as Switzerland. At that time, the Swiss lands were divided into politically independent Cantons.[[46]](#footnote-45) Raised surrounded by the unspeakable beauty of the Swiss Alps, Zwingli very much longed for a return to the “Golden Age” that humanism seemed to promise.

Educated in the humanist tradition at the University of Vienna (1498) and then Basel (1502-1506), he became a devotee of Erasmus, whom he regarded as a mentor and friend.[[47]](#footnote-46) In 1506, at the age of twenty-two, Zwingli was ordained a priest and began his ministry first at Glarus, then at Einsiedeln.[[48]](#footnote-47)[[49]](#footnote-48) In the cool of the country mountains, Zwingli devoted himself to study the works of antiquity, and of course, the Scriptures.[[50]](#footnote-49)

He later wrote that around 1515 or 1516, the same time the Luther was teaching through the Psalms and Romans in Wittenburg, “I undertook to devote myself entirely to the Scriptures…. Led by the Word and Spirit of God I saw the need to set aside [philosophy and theology] and to learn the doctrine of God direct[ly] from his own Word.”[[51]](#footnote-50)

He later wrote,

“Before anyone among us had heard the name of Luther, I had begun in 1516 to preach the Gospel of Christ. When I entered the pulpit, I did not preach the words of the Gospel lesson appointed for the mass that morning, but rather from the biblical text alone.”[[52]](#footnote-51)

Zwingli’s growing reliance on Scripture as his authority shaped every aspect of his life, but most of all his preaching. This especially became apparent when, in 1519, at age 35, he was called to be the “People’s Priest” of the Great Minster Church in Zurich. In less than twelve hurried years, between the commencement of his preaching ministry in Zürich on January 1, 1519 and his death on October 11, 1531, Zwingli saw the Swiss city of Zürich transformed into a Protestant city. In the time that follows, I want to share four themes that characterized Zwingli’s ministry: Preaching, patience, and gospel-partnerships.

## Expositional Preaching

Zwingli famously began his preaching ministry at the Grossmunster church in Zürich by commencing a series of consecutive expositions through the Gospel of Matthew. In this, he argued that he was not innovating, but returning to the ancient method of *lectio continua* advocated by his mentor Desiderius Erasmus and practiced by John Chrysostom and others. Each week, he picked up in the text where he had left off the previous week, beginning in Matthew, preaching through the rest of the New Testament, before turning to the Old.

In contrast to other churches that based their sermon topic on the church calendar and festivals, Zwingli emphasized simplicity over skill, Sundays over holidays, and King Jesus over the Saints. As his biographer Bruce Gordon explains,

“The Reformation’s reduction in the number of religious holidays was accompanied by an increased emphasis on Sundays… in order that the whole community might gather to hear the Word preached.”[[53]](#footnote-52)

Each Sunday, Zwingli arrived in the pulpit carrying only his Bible. For about an hour or so, he preached extemporaneously without any notes.[[54]](#footnote-53) As he explained, his goal in preaching was always “to call my flock absolutely away, as far as I can, from hope in any created being to the one true God and Jesus his only begotten Son, our Lord.”[[55]](#footnote-54) While he was not afraid to denounce injustice or make passionate appeals for social change, the heartbeat of Zwingli’s preaching was joy in Christ. In Gordon’s assessment, “No contemporary reformer spoke so frequently and fervently about the joy of a Christian.”[[56]](#footnote-55) As Zwingli explained, “All our work, who preach the Gospel… consists only in preaching how we find the assurance of our salvation in the death of the living Son of God.”[[57]](#footnote-56)

## Patient Reforming Work

Zwingli, like Luther, understood that Reformation was God’s Work, so he preached God’s Word and waited patiently for fruit. As a shepherd, Zwingli understood his responsibility for the flock as a whole. Drawing on images familiar to the rural sheep-herding Swiss villagers in his *Commentary on True and False Religion*, Zwingli explained 1 Peter 5:1-3 by writing, “Behold the grandeur of the Christian shepherd! He feeds the flock with painstaking watchfulness, and does not constrain except as far as the word itself constrains.”[[58]](#footnote-57)

Two of the main areas of controversy during Zwingli’s early years in Zürich’s pulpit were the abolition of the mass and the removal of images and icons. While Zwingli opposed the mass and preached accordingly, he believed that it could only be abolished gradually. As Zwingli and advised the City Council, “the mass should be abolished and replaced by an evangelical service, but out of respect for weaker brethren this change should be made slowly.”[[59]](#footnote-58) Zwingli was a realist.

Such insistence on patience, however, earned Zwingli enemies in unexpected places. For many, Zwingli’s patience looked like compromise. In fact, Zwingli’s fiercest local detractors were not the Catholic-sympathizing residents of Zürich who opposed evangelical reforms, but the rural preachers, iconoclasts, pacifists, and Anabaptists who insisted on a complete and immediate reformation of the church, without delay.

Eventually, however, Zwingli’s gradualist approach to reform won the day. On June 8, 1524, the Zürich City Council agreed to remove images from churches, in their words, “so that many [may] turn themselves from the idols entirely to the living true God.[[60]](#footnote-59)

## Partnerships with Friends

From his earliest days as a humanist, Zwingli was part of a circle of friends who all became Protestant Reformers in key cities around the Swiss Cantons. In Zürich, Zwingli’s closest friend and confidant was his fellow preacher Leo Jud. Always at his side, Jud often wrote letters for Zwingli, read and summarized books for him, preached at the Grossmünster church in his absence, and defended Zwingli’s reputation after his death.[[61]](#footnote-60)

Beyond Zürich, Zwingli’s friendships extended through an epistolary network of Reformers throughout Switzerland, France, and Germany. There was his friend Johannes Oecolampadius (1482-1531) in Basel who often appealed to Zwingli “not to engage in things that had little to do with the gospel,” but loved and supported him when few others would.[[62]](#footnote-61) There was Martin Bucer in Strasbourg (1491-1551), who always sought to bridge the divide between Zwingli and the Lutherans, and never gave up on the hope of Christian unity. There was Guillaume Farel (1489-1565), who would later play a significant role in John Calvin’s life. Farel visited Zwingli in 1524, read his works, and maintained correspondence with him throughout his life.[[63]](#footnote-62) Also noteworthy were Ambrosius Blarer in Constance (1492-1564), Oswald Myconius in Basel (1488-1552), and Joachim Vadian in Bern (1484-1551).[[64]](#footnote-63)

At the same time, Zwingli tragically failed to build a friendship with Martin Luther. One of the paradoxes of Zwingli’s life is that he kept his friends close and his enemies even closer. He was a man of remarkable affection, but if you found yourself on his bad side, there was little hope of reconciliation. The conflict with Martin Luther included many things—including language, cultural, and geographical differences—but centered on their differing understandings of the Lord’s Supper.

Now, both rejected transubstantiation and the special power of the priest to perform this so-called miracle. Both rejected the idea that the eucharist was a sacrifice which had the power to secure God’s grace for those for whom it was offered, even when they did not take part.And both rejected the medieval Catholic practice of adoring the sacramental bread after the priest had pronounced the words “This is My body”.

Moreover, both demanded that the cup be given to the laity.

However, Luther held that the body and blood of the Savior were mysteriously but actually present “in, with, and under” the bread and wine, and were eaten and drunk by everyone who took part in communion, whether they had faith in Christ or not.[[65]](#footnote-64) This has been called “consubstantiation.” Luther believed that the words “This is My body” required that Christ's body must be objectively present in the bread.[[66]](#footnote-65)

Zwingli, whose view is sometimes called the “Memorial View” of the Lord’s Supper, maintained that the word “is” in “This is My body” meant “represents” — “This represents My body.’[[67]](#footnote-66) As for eating Christ's flesh and drinking His blood, this for Zwingli simply meant believing in Christ — a view samme up in the Latin phrase *edere credere*, “to eat is to believe’. In holy communion, therefore, believers alone “ate” Christ, that is, exercised *faith*; any unbelievers who took part received only bread and wine. Christ was present in the Lord’s Supper, Zwingli argued, not as man, but as God — not in His humanity, but in His omnipresent deity.[[68]](#footnote-67)

In October 1529, a German prince (Philip of Hesse) hoped to bring Luther and Zwingli to come to agreement at a meeting known as the Marburg Colloquy. Luther, Melanchthon, Zwingli, Bullinger, Bucer, and many others gathered together. They reached agreement on *fourteen of fifteen doctrinal points*. They just could not agree on the fifteenth point—the Lord’s Supper.

They parted separate ways. There would be no united Protestantism.[[69]](#footnote-68)

Tragically, on October 11, 1531, at the *Battle of Kappel*, Zwingli died leading a poorly equipped army of Zurich to defend itself against a surprise attack from neighboring Swiss states. He was 47 years old. Despite his untimely and tragic death, Zwingli’s ministry in Zürich is a model of what Reformation can look like. Through preaching, patience, and partnerships, gospel-transformation can take over a church and a city. Even after Zwingli’s death in 1531, Zürich remained a refuge for reformers and exiles from across Europe, a center of theological training, and a model of a truly reformed church and city throughout the world.

# Conclusion: The Woodcut

A woodcut in the Froschauer Bible, published in 1531, contains a picture that perfectly captures what we’ve seen in this class. It depicts a “godly mill” where Christ is represented as the miller, pouring his Word between the millstones. Erasmus can be seen, as Christ’s humble aid, putting the flour of the Word into sacks representing the Greek New Testament. These, in turn, are handed to Luther who bakes the bread into Bibles, which another assistant, Zwingli and other preachers, distribute to the people through preaching.[[70]](#footnote-69) This is how the Reformation happened. This is how Reformations still happen today.

So, to return to our question from the start of the class, is the Reformation over? I would submit to you that no, the Reformation is not over, because the work of Reformation is never over. As long as God is not silent but continues to speak by His Word; as long as churches remain unreformed and unhealthy; and as long as the risen Lord Jesus tarries, not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance, the answer that we must give is No! The Reformation is not over; it cannot be over; until Christ returns to save his church and rescue his people—and until that day, it is our task, to recommit ourselves to the same principles for which the Reformers lived and died: Salvation by grace alone, through faith, alone, in Christ alone, as taught by God’s Word alone, to the glory of God alone.

Let’s pray.



1. Mark Noll, *Is the Reformation Over?: An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Baker Academic, 2008), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Noll, 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. John W. O’Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Harvard University Press, 2013), 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. O’Malley, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. O’Malley, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. O’Malley, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. O’Malley, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. O’Malley, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. See F. Bruce Gordon, *Zwingli: God’s Armed Prophet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 35-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (New York, NY: Viking, 2003), 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Abingdon Press, 2013), 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. The manuscripts that make up the basis for Erasmus’s Green New Testament are referred to as the Textus Receptus. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. Dates in Luther’s life that follow are generally taken from Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Abingdon Press, 2013); McKim, Donald K., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*. Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations*. 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). See also the timelines in Herman Selderhuis, *Martin Luther: A Spiritual Biography* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 11-13; Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (1989; reprint, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 355-363. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. Carl R. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life: Cross and Freedom* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2015), 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. “Luther’s name was entered into the ledger of the university [Erfurt] three times: in 1501, when he matriculated and paid the tuition in full; in 1502, after completing requirements for the Bachelor of Arts degree; and in 1505, after passing the Master of Arts exam. In all three entries, the oldest documentary evidence for Luther’s life, he was identified as “Martinus Luder” from Mansfeld.” Scott H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* (New Haven ; London: Yale University Press, 2015), 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
16. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 15. Cf. Oberman, 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
17. Oberman, 124. It is important to not miss the huge role that Augustine played in the life of Luther (154, 158-161). See also Selderhuis, 83-84, 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
18. Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
19. Bainton, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
20. Cited in Selderhuis, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
21. Cited in Oberman, 315. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
22. Cited in Selderhuis, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
23. Bainton, 30. Cf. Oberman, 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
24. “As his very own creation Elector Frederick the Wise had established a new university in Wittenberg in 1502, for which the imperial privilege had been granted whereas papal confirmation of the university was not given until 1507. Albrecht Beutel, “Luther’s Life” in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
25. Hendrix, 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
26. Hendrix, 50; Bainton, 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
27. We cannot know for sure when Luther came to his reformation views. Scholars have debated this topic and the range is from 1512 to 1518. The best evidence suggests that “Luther’s insight came gradually during the year of 1515, when he was preparing and delivering his lectures on Romans” (Hendrix, 52). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
28. Bainton, 49-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
29. “In 1519, as the Reformation was beginning to gather pace in Wittenberg but while Luther was still clarifying his thought, he lectured on the letter and thereby set out his emerging theology of justification. In 1531 he returned to the letter, this time with a finely tooled and matured Reformation theology. These lectures were then published as his great commentary on the letter in 1535” (Trueman*,* 75). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
30. CCC 1472. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
31. CCC 1498. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
32. Bainton, 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
33. Bainton, 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
34. Selderhuis, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
35. Martin Luther, “The 95 Theses or the Disputation for Clarifying the Power of Indulgences,” in *The Roots of Reform*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert, *The Annotated Luther*, Vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
36. Wengert, 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
37. Wengert, 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
38. Oberman, 149: “But it was not the moral decay, the vice and immorality at the center of the Church, that made Luther start to doubt whether the pope was indeed the vicar of Christ.... His misgivings began with the indulgence controversy in 1518-19, when he had to recognize that God’s grace was for sale in Rome.” Cf. 146-150 for Luther’s trip to Rome and climbing up the Santa Scala where this became even clearer to him. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
39. Wengert, 38. For example, Thesis 47 says, “Christians are to be taught that buying indulgences is a matter of free choice, not commanded.” [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
40. MacCulloch, 122. One of the fascinating side-stories of the Heidelberg Disputation is that a Dominican observer present named Martin Bucer was captivated by the ideas he heard from Luther. Bucer went on to be a major figure in the Reformation. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
41. Bainton, 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
42. Bainton, 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
43. Bainton, 142-143. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
44. Bainton, 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
45. Trueman, 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
46. Gordon, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
47. Gordon, 36-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
48. Carlos M. N. Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450-1650* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
49. Robert Benedetto and Donald K. McKim, “Zwingli, Huldrych” in *Historical Dictionary of the Reformed Churches* 2nd Ed. (Lanham, UK: The Scarecrow Press, 2010), 539. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
50. Gordon, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
51. Gordon, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
52. Gordon, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
53. Gordon, 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
54. Godon, 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
55. Zwingli’s Works vol. 1, 286, 11-14; Latin Works, vol. 1, 239. Cited in Gordon, 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
56. Gordon, 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
57. Zwingli’s Works, vol. 3, 140, 12-24. Cited in Gordon, 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
58. *Commentary on True and False Religion* in *Zwingli’s Works*, vol. 3, 728, 28-32; Latin Works, vol. 3, 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
59. Gordon, 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
60. Gordon, 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
61. Gordon, 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
62. Gordon, 257. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
63. Gordon, 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
64. Gordon, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
65. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 4:200. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
66. Pelikan, 4:160. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
67. Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* 3rd Ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 181-182. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
68. Donald K. McKim, *Theological Turning Points: Major Issues in Christian Thought* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1988), 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
69. Eire, 242-244. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
70. Gordon, 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)