



ULRICH ZWINGLI 1484-1531

Ulrich Zwingli was an important figure in the Protestant Reformation which was taking place in Switzerland while Martin Luther was implementing many of the same reforms in Germany. Zwingli was ordained a priest in an age when priests were often unfamiliar with the Scriptures. He obtained his own copy of the Bible and having studied and memorized large portions of it, began to preach from it rather than the church-prescribed lectionary each week. His Bible-based sermons inspired reforms that soon put him at odds with the Catholic Church.

Zwingli believed that many of the medieval doctrines of the Catholic Church had no basis in Scripture. He also saw much abuse and corruption in the Catholic Church. In those days, the government was heavily involved with matters of faith and doctrine and Switzerland was receptive to change. As the city chaplain, Zwingli was able to convince the city council of Zurich to issue decrees which emphasized Christ first and to give the Bible preeminence in church practice. Zwingli fought for a simple theology: If it can't be found in the Bible, don't believe it and don't do it.

He soon implemented reforms to replace the Catholic Mass with a simple service that included the Lord's Supper as a symbolic memorial, to remove the images of Jesus, Mary and the saints from the churches, and to allow pastors to marry. His changes were well-received in a climate where several countries were trying to get out from under the powerful political control of the Catholic Church.

Zwingli's reforms took hold in the major urban areas of Switzerland, but unfortunately, a strong disagreement between Martin Luther and Zwingli over the symbolism of the Lord's Supper prevented the uniting of the German and Swiss Protestant reform movements. Zwingli and Luther parted as enemies over the issue. Meanwhile Catholic resistance to the Protestant reforms led to strong civil strife and wars broke out in many areas. Zwingli joined the Zurich troops in fighting the Catholics in war and was killed in battle in 1531. But Zwingli's reforms did not die with him. His work was carried on by his followers and laid the groundwork for John Calvin's reforms in Geneva.

He is known to have said this: "For God's sake, do not put yourself at odds with the Word of God. For truly it will persist as surely as the Rhine follows its course. One can perhaps dam it up for awhile, but it is impossible to stop it."