

Topic Page: [Zwingli, Ulrich, 1484-1531](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/zwingli_huldreich_1484_1531)

Summary Article: **Zwingli, Ulrich (1484-1531).**

From *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*

After Luther and Calvin, the most important early Protestant reformer. Zwingli was born in Wildhaus, St. Gall, Switzerland, and showed early promise. He studied at Berne and Vienna before matriculating at the University of Basel, where he was captivated by humanistic studies. At Basel he also came under the influence of reformer Thomas Wyttenbach, who encouraged him in the directions that would eventually lead to his belief in the sole authority of Scripture and in justification by grace through faith alone. Zwingli was ordained a Catholic priest and served parishes in Glarus (1506-16) and Einsiedeln (1516-18) until called to be the people's (or preaching) priest at the Great Minster in Zurich.

Sometime around 1516, after diligent study in Erasmus's Greek NT and after long wrestling with the moral problem of sensuality, he experienced an evangelical breakthrough, much like Luther was experiencing at about the same time. This turned him even more wholeheartedly to the Scriptures, and it also made him hostile to the medieval system of penance and relics, which he attacked in 1518. One of the great moments of the Reformation occurred early in 1519 when Zwingli began his service in Zurich by announcing his intention to preach exegetical sermons beginning with the Gospel of Matthew. In the final decade of his life he shepherded Zurich to its declaration for reform (1523). He wrote numerous tracts and aided in the composition of confessions to promote the course of the Reformation (e.g., the Ten Theses of Berne, 1528); he established solid relationships with other Swiss reformers, including Oecolampadius in Basel; he inspired and then broke with the rising Anabaptist movement; and he had a momentous disagreement with Luther over the Lord's Supper (expressed most sharply at the Colloquy of Marburg in 1529). Zwingli lost his life while serving as a chaplain to Zurich troops engaged in warfare with other Swiss cantons.

Zwingli's Protestantism was a more rationalistic and biblicistic variation of Luther's theology. His discussions with German Protestants about the Lord's Supper led him to doubt Luther's belief in a sacramental real presence of Christ in Communion, and even Martin Bucer's belief in a real spiritual presence, in favor of a nearly memorialistic view. To Zwingli the Lord's Supper was primarily an occasion to remember the benefits purchased by Christ's death. In his approach to theology and practice Zwingli looked for strict and specific scriptural warrant, even though this led him into embarrassment when early Anabaptists demanded proof texts for the practice of infant baptism. Zwingli's strict adherence to the Bible caused him in 1527 to remove the organ from the Great Minster, since Scripture nowhere mandated its use in worship (and this in spite of the fact that Zwingli was an accomplished musician who otherwise encouraged musical expression). He was strongly predestinarian in his theology, but did not display the consummate sense of Scripture's thematic relationships which Calvin employed in the discussion of election. Zwingli had no qualms in seeking reform through the authority of the Zurich council. Even after his death the Zurich city government under his successor, Heinrich Bullinger, exercised a dominant role in church affairs. This model of church-state relations eventually appealed to England's Queen Elizabeth, even as Reformers Calvin and John Knox fought for the autonomy of the church over its own affairs.

Zwingli's noble character, his firm commitment to scriptural authority, and his diligent propagation of evangelical reform, even more than his writings, marked him as one of the Reformation's most

appealing leaders.

See *also* Marburg Colloquy.

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