

Events:

Swiss Reformation

- Switzerland in the 16th century consisted of 13 independent city-states or “cantons” and had almost no sense of national identity.
- Huldreich Zwingli (1484 – 1531) was born in Switzerland. He studied humanism (the classics) at the University of Vienna, received a Master of Arts from the University of Basel in 1506, was ordained and gave his first mass later that year.
- In 1519, Zwingli began preaching in Zurich. He began a series of sermons by reading through the Gospel of Matthew and explaining what he had read every week. He used exhortation to preach moral and church reform similar to Erasmus but with his own twist.
- His theology developed over the period from 1519 to 1521 and differed from both Erasmus and Luther. He attacked several practices of the church: indolence and the high living of monks, veneration of the saints, and discernment between their real and fictional lives. He cast doubts about hell, excommunication and tithing. He taught that unbaptised children were not damned.
- He claimed all of his authority on the sole basis of the Scriptures.
- Zwingli’s own encounter with indulgences came from Berhardin Sanson, who tried to enter Zurich in early 1519 but was prohibited by the town council. Zwingli taught that the indulgences had not been carefully explained and that the people were being cheated out of their money.
- He abolished the yearly Mass in 1525 in favor of a quarterly observance of the Lord’s Supper.
- His view of the Lord’s Supper was a “memorial”, a communal profession of faith and a celebration of thanksgiving. He taught that Christ was not present during the Eucharist, but that it was a sign by which believers declared that they had received grace and belonged to the body.
- He participated in several attempts to unite the Protestant beliefs, but all these efforts failed. He continued to write and defend the faith, but these went mostly unread by the European nobility.
- Zwingli died in battle in 1531 while helping 1,500 soldiers defend Zurich against an attack by 8,000 Catholic soldiers from neighboring cantons.

Heroes:

John Calvin

- Born Jean Cauvin in 1509 in northern France. Died in 1564.
- Not as many details are known of Calvin’s life as are known of Luther’s because Calvin never wrote a book of memoirs like Luther did. Those that are known come from personal letters to friends and other acquaintances.
- Where Luther was “shorter and rounder”, Calvin was “tall and gaunt”.

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- Calvin wanted to study for the priesthood, but his father wanted him to study law. He enrolled at the University of Orleans and later at the University of Bourges to study law and humanist (classical) studies.
- Sometime around 1530, Calvin underwent a religious conversion and broke with the Roman Catholic Church.
- Calvin was implicated in a dispute led by Nicholas Cop, a critic of Catholicism, and they were forced to flee France. They settled in Basel, Switzerland.
- Calvin published his first edition of the Institutes of the Christian Religion in 1536. It was much smaller than his later editions, and it was written as an apology of his Protestant faith, a statement of his doctrine of theology, and an instruction guide to the Christian religion.
- Calvin set out in 1536 to visit Strasbourg, a Holy Roman imperial city that was a refuge for the reformation, but situations forced him to detour south to Geneva. Another French reformer, William Farel, “convinced” Calvin to remain in Geneva by pronouncing a “curse” on him if he did not.
- Calvin and Farel drafted a confession and an articles of faith to present to the city council, but these were not well received. The Bern (Zwinglian) church wanted to enforce uniformities in the church services with which Calvin did not agree.
- Calvin and Farel refused to administer the Lord’s Supper on Easter 1537, a riot broke out, and they were both forced to leave Geneva. They appealed in Zurich, but were refused re-entry into Geneva.
- Calvin was invited by reformer Martin Bucer to lead a church for French refugees in Strasbourg in 1538. Calvin accepted the offer and remained there until 1541.
- While in Strasbourg, he completed the second edition of his Institutes in 1539, changing its structure and increasing its size three-fold. He also published his Commentary on Romans in 1540. He preached every day of the week and twice on Sundays.
- Friends wanted Calvin to marry, and they presented him with several candidates. He claimed that he would not marry “unless the Lord had entirely bereft me of my wits.” He finally married Idelette de Bure, a widow with two children, just a few months later in August 1540.
- Church attendance in Geneva had dwindled and its bond with Bern had loosened. The Geneva council wanted Calvin back, and they were willing to pay. They offered Calvin a large furnished house, about twice the salary of an ordinary preacher, a supply of wheat, and about 250 gallons of wine per year.
- Calvin said he “would [rather] submit to death a hundred times than [return] to that cross on which I had to perish daily a thousand times over.”
- But he did return to Geneva, and the Lord’s calling, in the summer of 1541. He remained in Geneva until his death in 1564.
- Calvin’s “Ecclesiastical Ordinances” established four church offices: pastors to preach and administer sacraments, doctors to instruct believers in the faith, elders to provide discipline and deacons to care for the poor and needy.
- The Consistory (a church court) was formed from of ministers and elders, but it needed the council to carry out sentencing.

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- In 1542, Calvin revised his Geneva Psalter and wrote the “Catechism of the Church of Geneva” based on Bucer’s catechism.
- Calvin preached three times a week and twice on Sundays. In 1549, a scribe was assigned to record Calvin’s sermons. These were typically over an hour and were delivered extemporaneously without the use of notes. His style was consistent and changed little over time.
- In 1546, a group of “libertines” and others in the council arose to oppose Calvin. He and the Consistory lost many arguments. Calvin asked to resign in 1553, but the council refused.
- Michael Servetus was a Spanish physician who made an international name for himself by rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity. The Spanish Inquisition already wanted him arrested. When he came to Geneva (for reasons unknown), Calvin had him arrested. The council tried him, but they dragged out the proceedings because they did not want to take responsibility. With the entire world watching, they sought the consent of several other Swiss councils in order to share the burden. He was finally condemned and executed by burning on a pyre of his own writings. Calvin had asked to have him beheaded (it was more merciful), but the council refused.
- After Servetus, Calvin gained more support from the council. They gave back the power of excommunication to the Consistory and granted him more power than they had previously. The “libertines” were defeated in the elections of 1555.
- Calvin’s final years until his death were peaceful. He allowed many refugees to enter and live in Geneva, including John Knox.
- During the rest of his life in Geneva, Calvin maintained friendships with many of his earlier acquaintances including Cop, Farel and Luther’s aide Melancthon. His friend Bucer had died in 1551.
- Calvin’s theology is thoroughly, well, “Calvinistic” ☺
 - Though he did not write the “Five Points of Calvinism” or its acronym “TULIP” – Total Depravity of man, Unconditional Election by God, Limited Atonement of Christ, Irrresistible Grace of the Spirit, and Perseverance of the Saints, they summarize Calvin’s beliefs quite well.
 - Calvin believed in only two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.
 - In the Lord’s Supper, Calvin believed that the body and blood of Christ is really and spiritually (not physically) present in the outward and visible elements. It is a real means of grace in which Christ through the Holy Spirit communicates himself to us. It is more than a “memorial” (Zwingli) but is not “bloody” (Roman Catholic) or “monstrous” (Luther).
 - Calvin wanted to serve the Lord’s Supper weekly, but the Geneva council, under the influence of Bern and Zwingli, only allowed it quarterly.

Audio CD: #8 – John Calvin

Discussion