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ULRICH ZWINGLI ZURICH AND THE REFORMATION IN SWITZERLAND

by Geoffrey H. Buchler, Ph.D.



(*Photograph by courtesy of Radio Times – Hulton Picture Library*)

In the late Middle Ages the area known as Helvetia was considerably smaller in size than the Switzerland of today and was almost entirely German-speaking. Geneva, of course, was an episcopal state apart, and bound to be absorbed by Savoy, or so it seemed. The Grisons was a wild, independent, semi-lawless community; the canton of Vaud had recently been over-run by a Bernese force, but was still nominally part of Savoy; and the Valais, the bishopric of Basle and the Abbey of St. Gallen were all still outside the Confederation.

Exactly what this Confederation, "Der Bund", was, is hard indeed to describe. These communities had no common law, no capital, no president or head of state, no coinage, no flag, no common seal, no legislature. Yet from 1291, and earlier, the three lake-side communities of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden had been in the habit of

acting together in self-defence, for the preservation of their ancient liberties and for keeping clear the recently opened road over the St. Gotthard. Together they had defeated Duke Leopold I of Austria at Morgarten on November 15th, 1315. Lucerne in 1332, Glarus and Zug in 1352 then joined them and in 1353 the potentially powerful Berne was also brought within the charmed circle. Fribourg and Solothurn in 1481, Basle and Schaffhausen in 1501 with little Appenzell (1513) make up the XIII "Orte" which ruled until 1798. Thirteen, that is, including Zurich, which was the nearest place to a capital, and the nearest approach to a hegemonic state, that the Swiss possessed prior to the 19th century. Its history had been exciting.

The growth of Zurich

A community was bound to form itself at the point where the Limmat

broadens into the great lake of Zurich, round whose shores men had settled in antiquity. There had been a Roman customs base at Turicum (Zurich); Charlemagne had visited it and had founded the great collegiate church known as the Grossmünster, and his grandson, Lewis, had founded there the equally great nunnery known as the Fraumünster. Peasants gathered there for defence, and merchants for protection and to enjoy the opportunities for water-borne trade. After the death of the last feudal ruler, Bertold V of Zähringen, in 1218, Zurich became a free imperial city, ruled by the Abbesses of the Fraumünster.

As with much of north and central Switzerland, the real difficulty in the 13th century was to avoid the bear-like embrace of the House of Habsburg, particularly under the grasping rule of Rudolf I. After his death, the city acted sometimes with the Habsburgs against the Southerners, as at Morgarten in 1315, and sometimes with its neighbours against the Imperialists. However, in the 14th century, a decision was reached so that on May 1st, 1351, Zurich entered into a perpetual union with the Waldstätte, and so entered the Confederation. This was due to a civic revolution that affects the whole of later Swiss history. Prior to 1336 the effective control of Zurich had been in the hands of the neighbouring landowners of noble birth, and a few rich families in the city who were either goldsmiths or engaged in the expensive silk industry. The remainder of the guilds, and all the handworkers and shopkeepers, were completely unenfranchised. A discontented leader of noble birth, however, changed all that. The ambitious, passionate and far-sighted adventurer, Rudolf Brun, led a revolt in 1336 which resulted in Zurich becoming controlled, like Basle later, by the thirteen guilds or trade unions. During his lifetime Brun became a kind of civic tyrant, as did his successor in the 15th century, John Waldmann. In each case civic liberties ultimately increased; Zurich embarking on an expansionist policy that made it by 1500 a great canton, as Swiss cantons went, wealthy and ruling considerable areas round the lake as well.

Yet, the whole Confederation had been in serious danger between 1473 and 1477: of control, or even actual occupation, by the Burgundian Charles the Bold. This had been overthrown by the military valour and organisation of Berne, aided by Zurich and the Waldstätte. A combination of circumstances had, in effect, made these obscure peasants and townsmen the most advanced of soldiers. They had learned

their discipline and tactics against the Austrians. The halberd and the pike (those great twelve- to eighteen-foot spears) which they wielded, could resist any cavalry charge and fight through almost any infantry line. They were supported by deadly accurate crossbowmen; men who were anxious and willing to obtain wealth and renown abroad. These soldiers, who were relentless fighters, became from the middle of the 15th century the finest mercenaries in the world.

A forceful priest

Arriving at the opening of the 16th century, immense possibilities confronted the confederated states. The elimination of Burgundy had left a vacuum comparable to the disappearance of Austria - Hungary in 1918 - it was possible, even likely, that Alsace and the Franche Comté at least, if not Lorraine, would come under Swiss control as allies; whilst across the Alps lay the rich inviting plains of Lombardy. The men of Uri could also not fail to perceive that Milan might be within their grasp. In all this Zurich alone could provide the leadership and continuity that everyone would accept - Berne, tied to a western expansionist policy, did not have sufficient following, nor were its resources great enough. Thus it was through Zurich at the beginning of the 16th century that the Reformation came to Switzerland, shaped and moulded by the career of Ulrich Zwingli. Zwingli was born on January 1st, 1484, of ordinary,

rather undistinguished parents. He grew up a peasant boy with country manners and a country accent, fond of music, with a powerful memory, an eloquent tongue and a great love for his home town of Glarus. After studying at the new and small university of Basel where he absorbed the current realist and Aristotelian philosophy, he saw and heard much of Basel's most celebrated visitor, Erasmus. By 1505 he was a good Latin scholar; he had learned some Greek and Hebrew, had read a good deal of the Bible and the Fathers and was rightly reputed to be one of the foremost Swiss humanists of the day. In the best sense, and after the manner of the age, he was also something of a rationalist - never ceasing to be interested in education.

In 1506 the parish of Glarus accepted Zwingli as its parish priest. That Zwingli was a genuinely religious man his early writings clearly show, although some of his publications prevailed upon the authorities in Zurich to renounce the practice of hiring out mercenaries in the European Wars. Even though some of his parishioners and friends had fought for the Pope, Zwingli still made the journey to Rome where he was created a kind of honorary chaplain. When he returned home, it was to renew his Bible study, particularly of the Gospels and the Pauline letters. In December, 1518, he was elected in the great collegiate Church at Zurich as People's Priest. The post was an important public position in the largest city of the Confederation - the equivalent of the Deanery of St. Paul's (in

England). Zurich, being the most highly populated Swiss city with 7,000 inhabitants, always wanted complete internal independence, and the civic authorities regarded themselves as in some way responsible for the beliefs as well as the conduct of their citizens.

On his arrival there Zwingli announced that he proposed to preach the gospel from the pulpit of the City Church and to deal regularly and methodically with the Gospel according to St. Matthew. Hence the assertion made later that the Reformation in Zurich began on January 2nd, 1519. Certainly the pulpit was immensely influential: it was the television and the Press of the day, and what was said in the City Church was soon known and talked about in the narrow streets and alleys. Zwingli preached and acted with a good deal of caution; he knew what orthodoxy was and he desired to avoid excommunication and the ban of the Holy Roman Empire, which was one of the reasons for his insistence that he was not a Lutheran. He was a scholar who had learned so much from Erasmus. "I will not have the Papists call me Lutheran," he said, "for I did not learn the teachings of Christ from Luther, but from the very word of God. I will be called the follower of no man, save of Christ alone."

Rejecting the Roman doctrine

Zwingli was early acquainted with Luther's writings, and, like Luther, he was immensely influenced by St. Augustine, but his thought was more

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independent. The Pope, Leo X, also dealt more leniently with Zwingli than he did with Luther; for the Pope needed, almost desperately, the services of Swiss soldiers to protect the Papal States. Zwingli whose thought developed steadily and consistently, continued to preach against fasting, saint worship and the celibacy of priests; producing at the same time (during 1522) his first considerable writing the "Architeles", "the beginning and the end", in which he sought by a single blow to win his spiritual freedom from the control of the bishops.

All through 1523 Zwingli expounded his fervent ideas, meeting his opponents in public debate, and insisting on the complete and exclusive authority of the Bible. Compulsory payment of the tithes was thus abolished; images were removed from the churches; monks and nuns began to leave the cloister; but it was not until April, 1525, that the mass was abolished. This lapse in time arose through a strong opposition to the Reformation, especially in the forest cantons — Lucerne, Zug, Schwyz, Uri and Unterwalden — and the Zurichers now felt it necessary to form a league to its defence. They were particularly anxious to gain Berne, and Zwingli challenged the Romanists to a public disputation. The result of the debate was that Berne was won over to the side of the reformer. Zwingli maintained that the congregation, and not the hierarchy, was the representative of the Church, so seeking to reorganise the Swiss constitution on the principles of representative democracy.

Following his marriage in April, 1524, Zwingli, in August of the same year, printed a pamphlet in which he set

forth his views of the Eucharist. They proved the existence of a conflict with Luther which was never settled, but more attention was attracted by Zwingli's denunciation of the worship of images and of the Roman doctrine of the mass. A further congress decided that images were forbidden by Scripture and that the mass was not a sacrifice. So all images were removed from the churches and many ceremonies and festivals were abolished.

Quarrel with Luther

At this time, however, growing tension between Zurich and the neighbouring Catholic Cantons led to preparations for the first "Kappel" War. Help was sought from the uncommitted cantons — Basle, Glarus, Berne, Appenzell, Solothurn; Schaffhausen must be coerced into neutrality; the alliance with St. Gallen and the Grisons must be closer; negotiations must be opened with France, the enemy of the Habsburgs, and a public statement of policy issued indicating to the world that the greatest Swiss canton would defend the Evangelical faith, and, it was hoped, with South-German help, make the Confederacy the bulwark of Protestantism. It did not quite so come to pass but Zurich, advised by Zwingli, swung over to religious-political activity unknown before. At this point the controversy between Luther and Zwingli became more serious. In March, 1525, Zwingli brought out his "Commentary on the True and False Religion". He declined to accept Luther's teaching that Christ's words of institution required the belief that the real flesh and blood of Christ

co-exist in and with the natural elements.

A reconciliation between the two leaders of the Protestant faith was essential and Philip the Magnanimous of Hesse, who had visited Zurich and Zwingli in November, 1524, tried his utmost to bring it about. In some secrecy Zwingli went to Marburg where he conferred with Luther. About images, clerical marriages, monastic vows and the need for communion in both kinds they agreed easily enough, but Zwingli could still not accept the position that Christ had intended to leave anything incomprehensible to the ordinary mortal. An agreement was signed in the end, but compromise was in fact impossible. Nor was there to be any united Swiss front. Basle had indeed been won over, and Zurich despatched an armed force against the Catholic states in June, 1529. After two weeks of inaction a truce had been arranged promising a general freedom of worship which each side knew could not be implemented. The long-felt strain between opposing cantons led at last to civil war. In February, 1531, Zwingli himself urged the Evangelical Swiss to attack the five cantons, and on October 11th, there was fought at Kappel a battle disastrous to the Protestant cause and fatal to its leader — for it was here that the Reformer of Switzerland was slain.

A great boulder, standing today a little off the road, marks the place where Zwingli fell. It is inscribed: "They may kill the body but not the soul". So spoke on this spot Ulrich Zwingli who for truth and the freedom of the Christian Church died a hero's death. Yet Zwingli's work remained. No Swiss canton that had accepted the new faith abandoned it. His influence in England and the Netherlands



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was comparable to that of Calvin — Modern Presbyterianism being a compromise between Zwinglianism and Calvinism. Zwingli as thinker, teacher,

theologian and politician had made his mark, which time has since not destroyed, but has sought rather to renew and enhance.

music installations, there are also separate film, TV and games rooms and a library. Full board and lodging in the collective sleeping quarter costs 25 francs per night, 30 francs for bunks and 40 francs for beds. Use of the indoor pool and fitness room costs extra. For inscriptions, write to: Hotel Glogghuis, CH-6061 Melchsee-Frutt (Tel: 041/67 11 39).

SWISS WINTER ATTRACTIONS

All-inclusive rates in Swiss towns during the winter season

It is especially tempting to discover an unknown town in winter — its theatres, museums, shopping streets and local atmosphere. Visitors to the Federal capital should make the most of its exclusive winter programme "Berne à la carte". This includes accommodation, breakfast, one meal voucher and thirty more vouchers at 78 francs upwards for two nights and 101 francs upwards for three nights. Two nights in the medieval town of *Bienna* at the foot of the Jura mountains, at the hotel of one's choice including two meals and vouchers, cost between 90 francs and 110 francs. Seven nights at *Brigue* in canton Valais costs 205 francs (bed and breakfast) and 429 francs (half board) including a general ticket on aerial cableways and swimming in the salt-water pool at Breiten above Mörel. All-inclusive daily rates run from 35 francs to 70 francs at Christmas time (21.12.74–6.1.75) at *Brunnen* on the Lake of Lucerne. Two, three or four day stays are also being organised at the international city of *Geneva*, with accommodation, half board and visits to cultural institutions (price for two days in a second-class hotel without bath, 154.50 francs upwards and up to 298 francs in a luxury hotel). The Ticino is equally attractive in winter. Eleven hotels in

Locarno have all-inclusive winter weeks: seven overnight stays with half board and two guided tours cost 270 francs upwards. One week at *Lugano* including accommodation, breakfast and other benefits costs 120 francs or 205 francs upwards with half board. Four more hotel categories are available for more demanding guests in both resorts. In *Lugano* a 50% reduction is made for children up to seven years of age and 30% for those up to 12 years. "A weekend for two" is the theme in Lucerne. This stay, including accommodation in a double room with shower or bath, breakfast from Friday to Sunday, a regal dinner on Saturday evening and sightseeing trips to Lucerne, costs from 76 francs to 140 francs per person.

First Swiss Youth Sports Hotel at Melchsee-Frutt

Switzerland's first youth sports hotel, the "Glogghuis" will be opened on the Melchsee-Frutt (canton Obwalden) at the end of December, 1974. It consists of a main building and a wing, with mattress space for eight to 20 people, rooms with two and four bunks as well as rooms with four beds. Each building has its own sanitary installations and showers. Besides two large dining rooms and lounges with

Tenigerbad — now open in winter as well

Due to the big success it had during its first summer season, the mineral bath of Hotel Tenigerbad in the Somvixer valley (Grisons) will also remain open during winter (December 15th till Easter, 1975). Guests will have access to the entire spa including the mineral bath (35°C) and the open-air pool (30°C). The drinking, swimming and combined cure is good for healing rheumatic illness, stress and old-age symptoms and for convalescence. There are ski slopes and loipes for winter sports fans in the nearby Oberalp region. Many cultural activities will also be taking place there. Address: Tenigerbad AG, CH-7172 Rabiussurrhein, GR (Tel: 086/8 11 13).

"Events in Switzerland, Winter 1974/75"

Those wanting to know what is happening next winter in Switzerland should consult the brochure "Events in Switzerland, Winter 1974/75" which has just recently been issued by the Swiss National Tourist Office. It contains information about cultural occasions, local and folkloric festivities, exhibitions and fairs, international conventions and seminars, language courses and sportive events.

