

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

The Continental Reformation.

BY THE REV. ALFRED PLUMMER, D.D.

VII.—ZWINGLI AND CALVIN.

LUTHER and Zwingli belong to the first age of the Reformation. They are originators. They are the leaders who started the movement, sustained it, and to a large extent controlled it. The one founded the Lutheran or more Catholic type, the other the Reformed or more Puritan type, of Protestantism. Calvin, both in time and in development of doctrine, belongs to the next generation. He is the organizer and systematizer of what had already been started by others; but his manner of organizing is so original, and the system which he constructed is so powerful, that it may be doubted whether he has not had as much influence on religious thought in Europe as all the other Reformers put together. Melancthon in time, though not always in development of thought, comes between the two great leaders and the great organizer; and to some extent he stands in the same relation to Luther that Calvin does to Zwingli—*i.e.*, he formulated Luther's ideas as Calvin formulated Zwingli's ideas. But there is considerable difference between the two cases.

Melancthon was the personal disciple of Luther, constantly with him and taking counsel with him. Like not a few able disciples of able masters, he greatly influenced his teacher. In some things he was Luther's superior; he was a better scholar, and he had read more. Like Keble and Hurrell Froude, they mutually told on one another. Froude used to say that he was Keble's poker, and that Keble was his fire: he stirred Keble to action, while Keble inspired him with enthusiasm. But with Luther and Melancthon, it was the older man who was eager for action, and the younger one who often suggested consideration and reserve. The teacher had the impulsiveness, the disciple the quietude and the thought.

No such relations existed between Zwingli and Calvin. Calvin was never the personal disciple of Zwingli; and it was impossible for Calvin to influence Zwingli as a Reformer, for before what Calvin calls his "sudden conversion" to Protestantism took place, Zwingli had lost his life in battle. Moreover, although the religion which Calvin systematized was Zwingli's rather than Luther's, yet it is Luther rather than Zwingli that Calvin acknowledges as his master. Of Zwingli he does not speak very respectfully. Indeed, Calvin's was from the first too powerful and independent a mind to receive great and permanent impressions from others after the one great change from Romanism to Protestantism had been made. The man who could write the "Institutes" before he was twenty-seven, and rewrite the book again and again, with modifications and amplifications, but without any important change of view, was not one who was likely to be much influenced by the conversation or writings of other teachers. He was always adding to his knowledge, but the new knowledge confirmed rather than modified his views.

If fame is a thing to be desired, it has been a misfortune for Zwingli that he had a Calvin to formulate his teaching. The formulator has eclipsed the original teacher. If there had been no Calvin, Zwingli's place in history would have been larger. As it is, most of us know something, and are generally ready to know more, about Calvin; but to not a few Zwingli is not much more than a name, and such people do not feel strongly moved to make him more. Nevertheless, in the history of the Continental Reformation Zwingli counts for a good deal. His debt to Luther was probably greater than he himself believed it to be. He had read much of Luther before he left Einsiedeln in 1519. But there is no need to doubt his declaration that he had carefully avoided corresponding with Luther, because, he says, "I desired to show to all men the uniformity of the Spirit of God, as manifested in the fact that we, who are so far apart, are in unison one with the other, yet without collusion." They did not remain in unison, as all the world knows, and it is one of

the many sad facts in the history of the Reformation that Luther declared Zwingli's violent death to be a judgment on him for his Eucharistic doctrine.

There were differences of training and of aim between them from the first. Zwingli was a Humanist, so fond of the classics that he did not see how widely different the moral standpoint of the Greek philosophers is from that of Christianity. Luther had none of this, and every student of Greek philosophy must lament the way in which Luther abuses Aristotle, not merely for his metaphysical works, but even for the "Ethics." Luther hated a philosopher whose moral system was based upon the doctrine that men are free to form habits, and do not lose their freedom until habits are fully formed. He laments that in the Universities "the blind heathen Aristotle reigns. It pains me greatly that the damnable, proud, cunning heathen has led astray so many of the best Christians with his false words." Of all the Reformers, Luther was the most mediæval, and he never quite shook himself free from scholasticism. Zwingli was much less conservative and much more modern. His father placed him in a Dominican monastery for two years for the sake of the educational advantages, but Zwingli would no more have thought of entering a monastery as the best way of saving his soul than Luther would have thought of doing the like as the best way of securing fine music. Both Reformers were very fond of music, and Zwingli said that convent music sometimes did tempt him to turn monk.

Luther's aims were always religious. He said that he had been called to preach the Gospel, as God had brought it home to him, not to mix in politics. Zwingli considered himself to have been called to save the Swiss from misgovernment quite as much as to save their souls. The evils of society, he said, came from selfishness, and the cure for that was to be found in the Word of God. Thus, for somewhat different reasons, both Zwingli and Luther regarded it as their special function to make known the Scriptures; and it was in order to do this more efficiently that Zwingli learnt Greek during the ten years (1506-1516) that

he was parish priest at Glarus. But it was during the three years that he was at Einsiedeln (1516-1519) that the great change in his views took place. It was caused partly by study of Scripture, partly by three visits to Italy as army chaplain, which taught him a good deal about the methods of the Papacy, and partly by the gross superstitions which were sanctioned at the great pilgrimage Church in Einsiedeln. In August, 1518, the Franciscan friar Samson came to Switzerland with the Pope's authority to sell pardons and indulgences; and it seems to be well established that Zwingli protested against the sale of these wares before Luther did. But he did so for a different reason. Luther enlarged upon the presumption of claiming to sell the forgiveness of God. Zwingli simply pointed out the silliness of the transaction. In this he was like Erasmus, who ridiculed the idea that purgatory has a duration which can be measured by calendars, and that so many years and months and days can be bought off by indulgences. But neither Erasmus nor Zwingli had Luther's intense sympathy and pity for the victims of these frauds. There were vicious men who thought that by means of indulgences they could cheat the devil and escape the suffering due to their sins. Such people deserved to be cheated themselves. But there were other poor souls who felt the intolerable burden of sin, and who hoped that indulgences would do something towards freeing them. Luther knew from experience that the peace of a quiet conscience was not to be obtained by any such means, and he was too sorry for those whose delusion must bring bitter disappointment to scoff at them.

But the great difference between Zwingli and Calvin was one of doctrine. Neither could accept the other's teaching with regard to the Presence in the Eucharist. To Zwingli this difference appeared to be of less importance than it did to Luther. He thought that Luther's theory was too near to the Roman doctrine, which both of them rejected as false, but he was much more tolerant of it than Luther was of Zwingli's theory. Luther said that Zwingli's doctrine was a "devilish" perversion of the Word of God. Like many other zealots,

Luther regarded zeal for his own convictions the same thing as zeal for Divine truth ; his cause was God's cause.

To the student of history the importance of this difference between the two Reformers lies in this, that it has resulted in a fatal and abiding schism in the ranks of Protestantism. It is simply tragic that, in the controversies which must arise between thoughtful Christians, it is precisely those mysteries about which the human mind can know nothing which have been made reasons for the most disastrous dissensions ; such as the single or double Procession of the Holy Spirit, and the manner of Christ's Presence in the Eucharist. It is said that the symbolical interpretation of the eucharistic rite was first suggested to Zwingli by the writings of Erasmus, and the statement is intrinsically probable. But from Pico della Mirandola¹ he had learned that a good deal of Roman doctrine was open to serious criticism ; and quite early in his life he had received similar teaching from Thomas Wyttenbach, Professor of Theology at Basle. In the Disputation at Berne in January, 1528, Zwingli formulated his position thus : " It cannot be proved from Scripture that the Body and Blood of Christ are substantially and corporeally received in the bread of the Eucharist,"² and this formula was commonly adopted by the first generation of Swiss Reformers. It is very moderate and wholly negative. It affirms nothing as to what does take place in the Eucharist, or what can be proved from Scripture. It merely states what can *not* be so proved. The miracle of changing the substance of the bread and wine, which the celebrating priest was believed to effect, cannot be proved from Scripture.

It may be doubted whether the common view, that Zwingli regarded the Eucharist as a mere memorial, without any special Presence of Christ, is correct. He held that it was not the repetition of a sacrifice, but the memorial of a sacrifice offered once for all ; and he seems, at any rate in his later days, to have

¹ He died (1494) when Zwingli was ten years old ; but Zwingli read his works.

² " Essentialiter et corporaliter in pane Eucharistiæ percipiatur " (B. J. Kidd, p. 460).

taught a Presence of such a kind that it could be grasped by faith, though not pressed with the teeth. In his "Fidei Ratio,"¹ drawn up some sixteen months before his death, he says, *Credo quod in Sacra Eucharistia verum Christi corpus adsit, fidei contemplatione*. But in Geneva, if not in Zurich, there seems to have been doubt as to what he meant by this, and Calvin, who rejected both the Roman and the Lutheran view, as Zwingli did, yet regarded Zwingli's doctrine as "profane."

The Disputation at Berne in 1528 was between Zwinglians and Romanists; the more famous Conference at Marburg in 1529 was between Zwinglians and Lutherans. The two great leaders of reform, who agreed so heartily about fundamentals, and who owed so much to one another's teaching, here met for the first time. They parted, not only without agreement as to the chief subject in dispute, but to be henceforward opponents rather than allies, although, out of fifteen articles laid before the Conference, they had agreed about all but one. The Conference had been arranged by the Landgrave Philip of Hesse. Luther and Melancthon went to it unwillingly. Luther wrote to Philip that it would be useless, for "I can expect nothing good from the devil, however fine an appearance he puts on." Zwingli went eagerly, and stole away from Zurich in order to be present. Luther began the colloquy by writing on his table, *Hoc est corpus meum*, as if those words, without interpretation, were decisive. That is too like Dr. Johnson kicking the stone to disprove the idealism of Berkeley. After no agreement had been reached on the fifteenth article, Luther declared that two parties which differed on so fundamental a question could not be regarded as brethren. As to the Zwinglians, "we may treat them with charity, but we cannot regard them as members of Christ."² The whole Reformation, as Ranke remarks, was concerned with convictions which admitted of no compromise. To Luther all compromise appeared to be weakness.

¹ Kidd, p. 474.

² See his bitter letter to Jacobus, Provost of Bremen (Jackson, p. 316), and to several others (Currie, pp. 258, 262, 274, 288, 423).

The doctrine which forms one of the strongest links between Zwingli and Calvin is that of Predestination. It was held by Luther also, but with less emphasis. Both Zwingli and Luther denied "the freedom of the will," but on different grounds. Luther denied it in order to safeguard the merit of God in effecting man's salvation. If man is free to take part in saving his soul, then his salvation is not wholly due to the grace of God. Zwingli agreed with this, but his aim was to safeguard the absolute sovereignty of God. If man is free to act as he pleases, then God has not complete control in His own universe. According to Zwingli, God is the only active Being; all activity is His activity, and what we call human activity takes place in accordance with His absolute and eternal decree. Judas and Cain were as much rejected to eternal misery before the foundation of the world as the Blessed Virgin and the crucified robber were elected to eternal bliss.

Zwingli, like Hobbes, sees clearly the conclusion to which his arguments lead, and, like Hobbes, he does not shrink from it. If man has no freedom, and God is the sole cause of human action, then He is the cause of all man's evil conduct, not merely as allowing it, but as compelling it. Men sin because God makes them sin. It is God who makes the robber murder the innocent, and the treachery of Judas is just as much God's work as the conversion of St. Paul. In order to evade the conclusion that in that case God is immoral, Zwingli says that God is superior to the moral law which He has imposed upon man. How can we tell what it is right or wrong for God to do? We know what He does, and if He does it, it cannot be wrong for Him.

This doctrine of Predestination, so terrible in its logical issues and in the practical result of making men reject or abandon Christianity, is commonly associated with the teaching of Calvin. When people talk of Calvinism, they generally mean, or especially include, Predestination. And yet it is quite certain that Calvin did not originate it, but adopted it from Zwingli and Luther. Nevertheless, history has been just in attaching this doctrine specially to the name of Calvin. More than any other teacher

he has caused this doctrine to be, until the present generation, a dominating influence among Protestants. We may reasonably conjecture that, if there had been no Calvin, one of the most blighting beliefs that has ever been supposed to be part of the Christian faith would either have fallen out of men's minds altogether or would have been confined to very few. Luther does not place it in the foreground of his teaching; and if it had been left where Zwingli left it, it would never have attained such general and lasting approval among Protestants. It was Calvin who secured this for it. He did so largely by his consummate ability, which goes for a great deal. This is nowhere more conspicuous than in the "Institutes," which Lord Acton pronounces to be "the finest work of Reformation literature." Of the doctrine therein contained he says: "By the thoroughness and definiteness of system, and its practical adaptability, Calvinism was the form in which Protestant religion could best be transplanted; and it flourished in places where Lutheranism could obtain no foothold, in the absence of a sufficient prop."¹ Secondly, after Calvin had become supreme in Geneva, he was able to preach to all the world in a way that Zwingli was never able to do at Zurich. Not a few people came to Geneva on purpose to hear Calvin; he had competent lieutenants in almost every country, and some of his numerous writings were very widely read, so that his opportunities of teaching what he believed far exceeded those of Zwingli. Again, in teaching this doctrine, Calvin dwells more upon election than upon reprobation. It is the security of the saved, rather than the doom of the lost, that interests him; and therefore those who heard or read him would be attracted by the side which he accentuated, instead of being shocked by that which makes the doctrine so repulsive to us. With regard to the repulsive side, he takes refuge in the ignorance of man. Man is utterly unable to understand, and incompetent to criticize, the will and action of God.

But perhaps the chief reason for Calvin's attaining a success far beyond that which Zwingli attained is the fact that the latter gave

¹ "Lectures," pp. 131, 136.

Predestination a philosophical basis, while Calvin gave it a theological one. From his conception of the nature of God, which Zwingli believed to be dictated by reason, he inferred that man could not be free, but must be predestined to act as he does act. Calvin professed to pay no attention to human reason, but to derive this doctrine simply from Scripture. The Word of God was his authority for it. This gave him an enormous advantage. The appeal to Scripture is still very popular, and it was specially so in Calvin's day. Moreover, to those who believe in the inerrancy of Scripture, the appeal seems to be decisive. The appeal to philosophy has neither of these advantages. Not many of us claim to be philosophers, whereas all of us believe that we are theologians. Calvin's constant calling the Bible as a witness has had an immense effect in popularizing the doctrine of Predestination; and, no doubt, if one may regard all passages of Scripture as equally binding, and if one may pick one's texts, and ignore all that tells on the other side, one can prove this doctrine, and a great many others besides.

When Francis I., in 1525, came back from his captivity in Madrid, he helped the reform party, and the frequency with which he changed his policy towards the Reformation is one of many illustrations of the way in which politics, in all countries, influenced the course of the movement. After one or two fluctuations there came, on October 18, 1534, the incident of the Placards against the Mass, and thirty-five Lutherans were burned. A little later Francis wanted the help of the German Lutheran Princes; so he instructed his ambassador in Germany to tell the Princes that the persons whom he had put to death were turbulent Anabaptists who had rebelled against civil authority. Calvin was indignant that peaceable reformers should be stigmatized as rebels, and he at once published the "Institutes," with a dedication to Francis I.¹ In this he says that his object in addressing the King is "to vindicate from insulting accusation his brethren, whose deaths are precious in God's sight," and to let him know the real tenets of the men who are

¹ Kidd, pp. 528-532.

being so monstrously maltreated. He hopes that "some sorrow and anxiety may move foreign peoples, for the same sufferings threaten many." This prefatory letter to the King is dated August 23, 1535. It is called "a master-piece of apologetic literature."¹ Cardinal Newman used to date the birth of the Oxford Movement from Keble's Assize sermon on National Apostacy, July 14, 1833. If we want a definite date for the birth of Calvinism, we may take the dedicatory Preface to the first edition of the "Institutes," August 23, 1535. The work which it dedicates to Francis is the outline of the Calvinistic system—a system of iron, cast, like the author of it, all in one mould, admitting of no flexibility, and receiving afterwards no important modification.

¹ "Enc. Brit.," eleventh edition ; art. "Calvin," p. 72.

(To be concluded.)

