

Church History (21): The Locations of the Reformation (1)

Two events prepared the stage for the Protestant Reformation. First, the invention of the printing press (c.1440). "Whereas Wycliffe's religious ideas spread very slowly through hand-written copies, Luther's ideas blanketed Europe within months" (Lindberg).¹ Second, the Renaissance. Covering the 15th and 16th centuries, this concerned "a rebirth of interest in antiquity fed by the rediscovery of ancient texts and the development of the ability to translate them" (Ferguson).² In addition to these texts, Erasmus published a new addition of the Greek text. "Young scholars devoured it with enthusiasm. No longer did they need to read or hear the gospel secondhand but as the Apostles preached and taught it" (Ferguson).³

I. The Locations of the Reformation

1. *Germany*. "Germany invented the art of printing and produced the Reformation" (Schaff).⁴ (1) Martin Luther (1483-1546). "Of all the Reformers Luther is the first. He is so closely identified with the German Reformation that the one would have no meaning without the other" (Schaff).⁵ "After Augustine, no single churchman theologian has influenced the Western church more than Luther over the centuries. Not only did his pastoral protest in the sixteenth century precipitate the shattering of the medieval church, but many of his own particular concerns—the clarity of Scripture, the centrality of the preached Word, justification by grace through faith, and the Lord's Supper—helped to define Protestantism in relation to Roman Catholicism" (Trueman).⁶ "The first Reformer was an Augustinian monk who nailed Ninety-five Theses against the Roman Catholic practice of selling indulgences to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31, 1517. His name was Martin Luther" (Lawson).⁷

Luther was a giant of history; he was so significant he was once described as an 'ocean.' Some believe he was the most significant European figure of the second millennium. Luther was the pioneer Reformer, the one whom God first used to spark a transformation of Christianity and the Western world. He was the undisputed leader of the German Reformation. In a day of ecclesiastical corruptions and apostasies, he was a valiant champion of the truth; his powerful preaching and pen helped to restore the pure gospel. More books have been written about him than any other man of history except Jesus Christ and possibly Augustine.⁸

(2) Phillip Melanchthon (1497-1560). Thirty years Luther's junior and "Luther's right-hand man," Melanchthon may have surpassed Luther in intellect (Luther called him the 'greatest theologian ever'). He was the primary author of the Augsburg Confession (1530), a key statement of Lutheran belief. His *Common Places in Theology (Loci Communes)*, was the first fully Protestant systematic theology, and his commentary on Romans (1519, revised in 1532 and 1540), was the "foundation of all 80-plus Romans commentaries written in the Reformation." If Luther placed his emphasis upon our righteous standing in Christ, Melanchthon stressed the need of a righteous life in harmony to the law. "The history of the third use of the law begins with Melanchthon, Luther's co-worker and right-hand support. In a

¹ Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, 36

² Sinclair Ferguson, *In the Year of our LORD*, 158

³ Sinclair Ferguson, *In the Year of our LORD*, 158

⁴ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 6:97

⁵ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 6:105

⁶ Carl Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, 21

⁷ Steven Lawson, *Pillars of Grace*, 334

⁸ Steven Lawson, *Pillars of Grace*, 335

formal sense he increased the number of functions or uses of the law from two to three for the first time in in a third edition of his work on Colossians published in 1534 – two years before Calvin produced his first edition of his *Institutes*. Melancthon argued that the law coerces (first use), terrifies (second use), and requires obedience (third use). 'The third reason for retaining the Decalogue,' he writes, 'is that obedience is required'" (Beeke).⁹

Our churches teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works. People are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in His sight.

Our churches teach that this faith is bound to bring forth good fruit. It is necessary to do good works commanded by God, because of God's will. We should not rely on those works to merit justification before God. The forgiveness of sins and justification is received through faith. The voice of Christ testifies, 'So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.' (Lk.17:10). The Fathers teach the same thing. Ambrose says, 'It is ordained of God that he who believes in Christ is saved, freely receiving forgiveness of sins, without works, through faith alone.'¹⁰

(3) Martin Bucer (1491-1551). Originally a member of the Dominican Order, under Luther's influence, Bucer annulled his vows and gave himself for the Reformation in Germany (and later England, when exiled in 1549). "Next to Luther, Melancthon, Zwingli, and Calvin, he was the most influential of the Protestant Reformers."¹¹ "Bucer is perhaps best remembered for his contribution to the Reformation's understanding of the doctrine of the church. Six years after he died, his views were published in his most important book, *The Reign of Christ (De Regno Christi)*" (Beeke).¹² "The immediate outreach of Bucer's book was small. His book, a copy of which his wife had taken back from England to Germany, was printed in 1557 only in Basel (Switzerland). A year later there appeared in Strassburg a German translation, and then Geneva, possibly under the sponsorship of John Calvin, a French translation."¹³ Within this work, Bucer described the reign of Christ as within His church, over His elect and beloved people.

The Kingdom of our Savior Jesus Christ is that administration and care of the eternal life of God's elect, by which this very Lord and King of Heaven by his doctrine and discipline, administered by suitable ministers chosen for this very purpose, gathers to himself his elect, those dispersed throughout the world who are his but whom he nonetheless wills to be subject to the powers of the world. He incorporates them into himself and his Church and so governs them in it that purged more fully day by day from sins, they live well and happily both here and in the time to come. But perhaps it would be helpful for this definition of the Kingdom of Christ to be elaborated on at a little greater length and more clearly, once it has been comprehended in these few words.

It is, therefore, the administration and care of the eternal life of the elect of God in this world, by which the only-begotten Son of God, after sending them his gospel through

⁹ Joel Beeke, *The Banner of Sovereign Grace, Volume 48, Issue 3*, 1998

¹⁰ Augsburg Confession, *Article, IV and VI*

¹¹ The Library of Christian Classics, *Melancthon and Bucer*, 155

¹² Joel Beeke, *The Reformation Heroes*, 53

¹³ The Library of Christian Classics, *Melancthon and Bucer*, 170

ministers chosen by him for this purpose and the breathing forth of his Spirit, gathers them to himself from the world (although he wishes them to be subject for good to the powers of the world, indeed, to all men in the world, to whom he himself has made them neighbors); those so gathered he incorporates into himself and his holy Church which is his body by most holy Baptism and the compact and sanction of the solemn divine covenant, that is, adoption into sonship. And thus he rules and governs those who have been incorporated into himself and his Church, purging them daily more and more from sins and establishing them in all piety and righteousness and hence eternal life. He also shapes and perfects them, using for this purpose the ministry of his word and sacraments through fitting ministers, in public, at home, and in private, and also by the vigilant administration of his discipline.¹⁴

2. *Switzerland.* The Reformation in Switzerland can be divided into three sections: German speaking Zurich, French speaking Geneva, and the radical Anabaptists. (1) Zurich. The Reformation in Switzerland centered in the capital city of Zurich, under the leadership of Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) and Henry Bullinger (1505-1575). (a) Ulrich Zwingli. "What Luther was to the German Reformation, Zwingli was to the Swiss Reformation" (Beeke).¹⁵ "Zwingli was born in a small Swiss village in January 1484, less than two months after Luther. He studied in Basel where humanism was thriving. He then became a priest in the village of Glarus, where he began to study Erasmus' Greek New Testament" (Gonzalez).¹⁶ "More and more, the Holy Spirit opened Zwingli's eyes to the errors of Rome. He grieved over the sin and corruption of the clergy, over the ignorance and disregard for God's Word on the part of the people, and over the disrespect for God and for His law. The Holy Spirit was working a love for God and for His Word in the heart of the priest of Glarus" (Beeke).¹⁷ He then began to preach "powerfully from the Scriptures, expounding its blessed truths. He did not so much denounce the Roman Catholic Church as he held up the Word of God as the only supreme truth" (Beeke).¹⁸ In 1519 he became pastor of the church in Zurich, stating in his first sermon, "To Christ will I lead you: He is the source of salvation. His word is the only food I wish to nourish your hearts and lives with."¹⁹ In 1531, a large army of Catholics invaded Zurich. "Zwingli, himself armed, accompanied the Zurich forces into battle. During the rout of the Zurich forces, Zwingli was seriously wounded and left on the battlefield. Later recognized by the Catholic forces, he was given a mortal blow; the next day he was quartered (the punishment for traitors), and then the parts of his body were burned with dung so that nothing of Zwingli would be left to inspire other Protestants" (Lindberg).²⁰

Two years earlier, he met with Luther in 1529 at Marburg in an attempt to find harmony between the two camps. "The two Reformers appeared face to face, along with Martin Bucer, Melancthon, and other Protestant leaders. They agreed in principle to fourteen of the fifteen items put before them: the church-state relationship, infant baptism, the historical continuity of the church, and more. But no agreement could be reached regarding the Lord's Supper" (Lawson).²¹ The meeting was organized by Philip of Hesse (1508-1567), the young Lutheran prince of Hesse in western Germany. "Philip had sympathies with Zwingli's doctrine of the Supper; he also believed strongly in the need for a political

¹⁴ Martin Bucer, *The Reign of Christ*, Book I, Chapter 5

¹⁵ Joel Beeke, *The Reformation Heroes*, 54

¹⁶ Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 2:57

¹⁷ Joel Beeke, *The Reformation Heroes*, 56

¹⁸ Joel Beeke, *The Reformation Heroes*, 56

¹⁹ Joel Beeke, *The Reformation Heroes*, 58

²⁰ Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, 197

²¹ Steven Lawson, *Pillars of Grace*, 369

alliance between German and Swiss Protestants" (Needham).²² Following the colloquy, Zwingli wrote to a friend: "There were four sessions in all in which we contended successfully. We challenged Luther that he had made the following utterly foolish statements which needed explanation: that Christ suffered in His divine nature and that the body of Christ is everywhere." In turn, Luther commented on the colloquy in a letter to his wife: "We have reached agreement virtually on every point, except that our opponents wanted to have mere bread in the Lord's Supper and acknowledge Christ spiritually in the bread." He concluded by saying, "I think God has blinded their eyes so that they could not present any arguments."²³

When they met face to face at Marburg—once, and only once, in this life—they came to agree in fourteen out of fifteen articles, and even in the fifteenth article they agreed in the principal part, namely, the spiritual presence and fruition of Christ's body and blood, differing only in regard to the physical presence, which the one denied, the other asserted. Zwingli showed on that occasion marked ability as a debater, and superior courtesy and liberality as a gentleman. Luther received the impression that Zwingli was a 'very good man,' yet of a 'different spirit,' and hence refused to accept his hand of fellowship offered to him with tears. The two men were differently constituted, differently educated, differently situated and equipped, each for his own people and country; and yet the results of their labors, as history has proved, are substantially the same.²⁴

The other thing which I have undertaken to set forth here is this – that that natural, material body of Christ's, in which He suffered here and now sits in heaven at the right hand of the Father, is not eaten literally and in its essence, but only spiritually, in the Lord's Supper, and that the teaching of the Papists, that Christ's body is eaten by us having the size and the exact qualities and nature it had when He has born, suffered, and died, is not only frivolous and stupid but impious and blasphemous. Finally, I oppose our adversaries in their assertion that the natural, substantial body of Christ is eaten in real presence, because piety denies that also. The greater and holier faith is, the more is it content with spiritual participation, and the more thoroughly that satisfies it, the more does a religious heart shrink from bodily consumption.²⁵

(b) Henry Bullinger (1505-1575). "While studying at Cologne University, Bullinger had been converted to Protestantism by reading Luther and Melanchthon and comparing their teachings with the Bible and the early Church fathers" (Needham).²⁶ Because of persecution, Bullinger took refuge in Zurich, and succeeded Zwingli at 26. He had a large influence over the Reformation. He was once called "the common shepherd of all Christian churches," as he had "an international reputation which, in his day, nearly equaled Luther's and may have surpassed Calvin's" (Ella).²⁷ In fact, Bullinger was converted to the Reformed faith ten years before Calvin and outlived him by twelve years. "Bullinger had a reputation as a Reformed teacher and writer over ten years before Calvin took up his pen to defend the Reformed faith, and his 124 books, not counting his thousands of tracts and letters, were initially in greater demand than Calvin's" (Ella).²⁸ Within the sixteenth century at least 400 editions of Bullinger's works were printed in Switzerland alone and some 230 editions in other countries, including England. On August 26, 1575 (after losing his wife, three daughters and several grandchildren to the

²² Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power*, 3:159

²³ *The Reformation: A Narrative History Related by Contemporary Observers and Participants*, 162-163

²⁴ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8:87

²⁵ Zwingli, *Fidei Expositio* (1531), Chapter IV

²⁶ Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power*, 3:162

²⁷ George Ella, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, Volume 1, x

²⁸ George Ella, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, Volume 1, xii

plague in 1564), he realized his pilgrimage was over. "He called all the ministers, professors, and teachers in Zurich to his study for a final admonition. In a long, well-prepared speech, he exhorted his friends and brethren to keep the unity of the Spirit and remain faithful to their testimony, calling, and ministry" (Ella).²⁹ He fell asleep in the Lord on September 17, and was buried at the side of his beloved wife, Anna.

Two of Bullinger's greatest literary contributions was the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), and his *Decades* (50 sermons in 5 sets of ten). "*The Decades* derives its name from being a series of fifty theological sermons, which are divided into five groups or "decades" of ten sermons each. Each sermon is a helpful, detailed exposition of an important doctrine" (Beeke).³⁰ The first addition of *The Decades* came out in 1552 in Latin. The original title page read: *Five Decades of Sermons, Concerning the Most Essential Heads of the Christian Religion, Digested in Three Volumes, by Henry Bullinger; Minister of the Church of Zurich with a copious index.* "Bullinger's sermons became lengthier as *The Decades* progressed. The first decade of sermons averages sixteen pages per sermon; the last decade averages fifty-two pages" (Beeke).³¹ Bullinger himself often apologized for having spoken too long. "I have with somewhat too long a sermon, dearly beloved, by more than the space of two whole hours detained you here."³²

(2) Geneva. The Reformation in (French-speaking) Geneva took place under the leadership of John Calvin (1509-1564) and Theodore Beza (1519-1605). (a) John Calvin. Born in Northern France, Calvin passed through Geneva in 1536 (at 27yrs old) in rout to Stassburg Germany. William Farel, a fiery and gifted preacher, convinced him to stay and lead the reform in Geneva, making it the "unofficial capital of the Reformation" (Beeke).³³ "Just as the Lord put Luther and Melanchthon together, so He put Calvin and Farel together. Both Luther and Farel were firm, bold, strong workers for the Lord's cause, while Melanchthon and Calvin were quieter and meeker. They needed partners to encourage and support them in their efforts. The Lord was wise to put these men together in this great work" (Beeke).³⁴ (b) Theodore Beza. Born on June 24, 1519 in Northern France, converted in 1539, Beza fled France to Geneva. "In Geneva, Beza studied diligently under Calvin, joyfully soaking in the blessed truths of God's Word. By 1559, he had become a professor of theology and a rector at the Genevan Academy which Calvin founded. He also accepted a call to become the pastor of one of several churches in Geneva" (Beeke).³⁵ Beza taught actively until 1597, dying eight years later on October 13, 1605. "Of him the Lord surely said, 'Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy lord' (Beeke).³⁶

(3) Anabaptists. It was Zwingli who paved the way for the Anabaptists in Switzerland. "The birthplace of Anabaptist Radicalism is normally seen as Zwingli's Zurich" (Needham).³⁷ As Zwingli struggled with the nature of the sacraments, and the fact that faith was necessary for their efficacy, the question arose: Why give baptism to those without faith? "It was this inner tension of Zwingli's theology that would be laid bare in Zurich by the first Anabaptists" (Gonzalez).³⁸ Thus, the first Anabaptists were disciples of Zwingli who sought to take his beliefs further. "The Swiss Reformation was disturbed and

²⁹ George Ella, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, Volume 1, lxvi-lxvii

³⁰ Joel Beeke, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, Volume 1, lxxiii

³¹ Joel Beeke, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, Volume 1, lcii

³² Henry Bullinger, *The Decades*, 3:432

³³ Joel Beeke, *The Reformation Heroes*, 123

³⁴ Joel Beeke, *The Reformation Heroes*, 123

³⁵ Joel Beeke, *The Reformation Heroes*, 129-130

³⁶ Joel Beeke, *The Reformation Heroes*, 132

³⁷ Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power*, 3:255

³⁸ Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 2:64

checked by the radical excesses. Zwingli applied to the Radicals the words of St. John to the antichristian teachers: 'They went out from us, but they were not of us.' He considered the controversy with the Papists as mere child's play when compared to that with the Ultraprotestants" (Schaff).³⁹ The Radical movement began in Zurich in 1523, and lasted until 1532. Their teaching spread over Switzerland and into South Germany and Austria. "The Anabaptists were driven from place to place, and travelled as fugitive evangelists. They preached repentance and faith, baptized converts, organized congregations, and exercised rigid discipline" (Schaff).⁴⁰

The first and chief aim of the Radicals was not (as is usually stated) the opposition to infant baptism, still less to sprinkling or pouring, but the establishment of a pure church of converts in opposition to the mixed church of the world. The rejection of infant baptism followed as a necessary consequence. They were not satisfied with separation from popery; they wanted a separation from all the ungodly. They hoped at first to carry Zwingli with them, but in vain; and then they charged him with treason to the truth, and hated him worse than the pope.⁴¹

The Anabaptists suffered severe persecution. "At first Zwingli tried to persuade them in private conferences, but in vain. Then followed several public disputations (1525-1527). "The magistracy decided against them, and issued an order that infants should be baptized as heretofore, and that parents who refuse should leave the city with their family and goods" (Schaff).⁴² When the Anabaptists persisted, "the magistracy proceeded to threaten those who stubbornly persisted in their error, with death by drowning. He who dips, shall be dipped – a cruel irony" (Schaff).⁴³ Many Anabaptists fled to Germany and Austria, where they their too endured several persecutions. "In Germany and in Austria and the Anabaptists fared still worse. Throughout the greater part of Upper Germany the persecution raged like a wild chase. The blood of these poor people flowed like water so that they cried to the Lord for help. But hundreds of them of all ages and both sexes suffered the pangs of torture without a murmur, despired to buy their lives by recantation, and went to the place of execution joyfully and singing psalms" (Schaff).⁴⁴ Several Anabaptist leaders met in February 1527, in the Swiss town of Schleitheim to write their Confession. "This Confession dealt exclusively with matters of morality and Church order. In this respect, it served to highlight the crucial moral and ecclesiastical differences between the majority of Anabaptist Radicals and the Magisterial Reformation" (Needham).⁴⁵

Baptism shall be given to all those who have learned repentance and amendment of life, and who believe truly that their sins are taken away by Christ, and to all those who walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and wish to be buried with Him in death, so that they may be resurrected with Him and to all those who with this significance request baptism of us and demand it for themselves. This excludes all infant baptism, the highest and chief abomination of the Pope. In this you have the foundation and testimony of the apostles (Matt.28; Mark.16; Acts 2, 8, 16, 19). This we wish to hold simply, yet firmly and with assurance.⁴⁶

³⁹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8:71

⁴⁰ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8:74

⁴¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8:75

⁴² Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8:82

⁴³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8:82

⁴⁴ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8:84

⁴⁵ Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power*, 3:263

⁴⁶ *Seven Articles of Schleitheim* (1527), Article 1