

Church History, Lesson 19

(This lesson is based on The Story of Christianity by Justo Gonzalez and Theology of the Reformers by Timothy George.)

The doctrine of the Lord's Supper:

- The Catholic Doctrine of Transubstantiation – The “substance” of the elements changed to the body and blood of Christ while the “accidents” did not change and were still bread and wine.
- Luther's understanding of the Lord's Supper – Because Luther saw the Lord's Supper as related to the incarnation of our Lord, he insisted that Jesus' body was still literally present “in, on, under, and behind” the elements of the Lord's Supper.
 - Luther believed that this was experienced in a mysterious way that is beyond human understanding. But when challenged by Zwingli, he explained his belief that because Jesus is omnipresent, He is present in the elements of the Lord's Supper, just not through transubstantiation.
- Zwingli's understanding of the Lord's Supper – Zwingli believed that Christ was present in the Lord's Supper because His body and blood are called to the minds of the believers receiving communion. This is a real experience of the presence of our Lord, but it is spiritual and symbolic, not literal and physical.
- This was especially contentious at the “Marburg Colloquy” in 1529.

Ulrich Zwingli and the Swiss Reformation:

- Ulrich Zwingli was born in Switzerland in January 1484.
- He studied privately under an uncle, then attended the University of Vienna.
- In 1506 he received his Master of Arts degree and became the priest of the Swiss village of Glarus.
- After 10 years of serving in Glarus, he moved to become the priest of a place where many people went on pilgrimage. He started preaching against these pilgrimages. He stated that there were no pilgrimages in the New Testament and that they could not bring someone salvation. This preaching drew official attention to him.
- By 1518 he moved again to become a priest in Zurich. By this time he had come to similar conclusions as Luther regarding salvation by faith alone and the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church. He especially objected to:
 - the superstitious practices that passed as Christianity in much of Europe...
 - the exploitation of common people by the hierarchy of the church...
 - and mercenary armies (something especially relevant to the Swiss)...
- As a priest in Zurich, Zwingli was under the authority of the bishop of Constance. This bishop accused Zwingli before the “Council of Government” because he preached against the traditional Catholic practice of fasting and abstinence (such as during Lent). He also was preaching that priestly celibacy wasn't Scriptural and those who required it didn't practice it themselves.
- Because Zwingli defended his beliefs from the Scripture, the “Council of Government” didn't remove him. In addition, the papal representative that was sent to debate him refused to respond to Zwingli's Scriptural arguments.
- Because Switzerland at the time was a loose confederation of states, some of them remained Catholic and some became Protestant. When 5 Catholic states mounted a surprise attack on Zurich in October of 1531, Zwingli was killed in battle.
- Compared to Luther, who came to his evangelical convictions by a great crisis of conscience, Zwingli was driven more by study of the Scriptures and a desire to return to the origin of Christianity.

Anabaptist Movements:

- Luther basically believed that only things which the Scriptures forbid needed to be purged from the church (such as the idolatry of prayers to the saints). Zwingli believed that only those things which the Scriptures endorsed should be allowed to remain (now, this is called the “regulative principle”).
- However, it wasn’t long before some groups were pointing out to Zwingli that because he continued to allow babies to be baptized in their infancy he was being inconsistent because this infant baptism is not explicitly endorsed in the Scriptures.
- These believers wanted Zwingli to push his reforms further, but when he refused, they separated and started their own groups. On January 21, 1525 Conrad Grebel baptized George Blaurock, a former priest, in the fountain in the city square of Zurich. Blaurock then baptized several other people.
 - At this point, they were not baptizing by immersion; that came later.
 - But they were emphasizing that someone cannot belong to the true church without personal faith and the idea of baptizing infants (who cannot exercise personal faith) into the church should be rejected.
 - Because they “re-baptized” people, these groups became known as Anabaptists.
- The Anabaptists were seen as subversive to society for several reasons:
 - Their rebaptism of people as adults called into question the whole social fabric of “Christian” Europe.
 - Most Anabaptists were pacifists. In Germany where the Turks were a regular threat, and in Switzerland where the Catholic states were a threat to the Protestant states, pacifism was seen as too radical.
 - They taught that “the church” was a voluntary body completely separate from the state. In a culture where everyone was seen to be a Christian by virtue of their infant baptism and where the civil authorities often had religious authority, the implication that some are Christians and some are not and therefore should not be members of the church was a threat to the social fabric of the time.
 - The Anabaptists were also quite egalitarian. In their groups, the poor and rich were equal and men and women were equal.
- Because these groups were seen as treasonous against the state as well as heretical, they were severely persecuted. In 1525 the Catholic regions of Switzerland began condemning them to death. The following year, the Protestant regions also began.
 - Some estimate that more people were killed for being Anabaptist than all the Christians killed by the Roman Empire before Constantine!
 - Many were drowned, some were burned, others were tortured to death.
- **Revolutionary Anabaptists** – The first generation of Anabaptist were led by educated men and they were almost all pacifists. However, they were killed in the persecution and more radical, less educated leaders arose. They appealed to the unrest among the lower classes and gathered revolutionaries around them.
 - Melchior Hoffman announced that he would be imprisoned for 6 months and then the new Jerusalem would come to Strasbourg. He also said that as the end approached the children of God would have to take up arms. He did go to prison but never got out.
 - Then someone suggested that the New Jerusalem would come to Munster. So many revolutionary Anabaptists flocked there that they took over the government and expelled the Catholics and moderate Protestants. Eventually, the leaders were executed.
- **Mennonites** – Menno Simons was a Dutch priest who embraced Anabaptism in 1536. He and his followers were persecuted because they refused military service and refused to take oaths. They taught that Christians should obey the civil authorities as long as that obedience didn’t violate Scripture. Finally, they taught that neither baptism nor the Lord’s Supper conferred grace but were rather outward signs of what takes place inwardly between God and the believer.