

Huldrych Zwingli

Biography / Overview

Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) was a Swiss pastor and theologian who led the Protestant Reformation in Switzerland—separately from Martin Luther, though around the same time. Born in the village of Wildhaus in the Swiss Alps, Zwingli studied in Vienna and Basel, where he developed a strong interest in both classical learning and Christian theology.

In 1519, he became the pastor at Zurich’s main church, the Grossmünster, and quickly began pushing for reform. He called for removing religious images, ending the Catholic Mass, and returning to Scripture as the highest authority. While he agreed with Luther on many things, they famously clashed over the nature of the Eucharist—Zwingli believed it was symbolic, not the literal body and blood of Christ.

His reforms shaped what became the Reformed tradition in Protestantism. Zwingli died in battle during a conflict between Protestant and Catholic regions of Switzerland in 1531.

Sources:

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Huldrych-Zwingli>

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/zwingli/>

<https://www.reformation500.csl.edu/bios/huldrych-zwingli/>

Bibliography / Primary Sources

Major Works:

Sixty-Seven Articles (1523) – His core theological points, presented during the Zurich Disputation

Commentary on True and False Religion (1525) – A detailed argument for reform and Scripture-based faith

Fidei Ratio (1530) – His statement of belief written for the Diet of Augsburg

Sermons and Letters – Show his practical concerns as both a pastor and political reformer

Birth / Death Dates

Born: January 1, 1484 – Wildhaus, Switzerland

Died: October 11, 1531 – Kappel am Albis, Switzerland (killed in battle during the Second War of Kappel)

Sources:

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Huldrych-Zwingli>

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/theologians/ulrich-zwingli.html>

Best Known For

Launching the Protestant Reformation in Switzerland

Arguing that Scripture alone should guide faith and practice

Getting rid of Catholic traditions like the Mass, indulgences, and religious images

Clashing with Luther over the Lord's Supper at the Marburg Colloquy (1529)

Helping lay the foundation for Reformed and Calvinist traditions

Famous Quotes

"In matters of faith, the will of God alone is to be followed."

"Christ is the only mediator between God and man."

"The Gospel is not a doctrine of the tongue, but of life."

Major Works / What's Inside

Sixty-Seven Articles (1523):

Zwingli's public statement of beliefs, arguing for:

Salvation through grace and faith

The rejection of papal authority

Ending clerical celibacy, indulgences, and transubstantiation

Commentary on True and False Religion (1525):

Calls for a Church rooted in Scripture

Attacks Catholic rituals as false and idolatrous

Fidei Ratio (1530):

A clear and concise summary of Zwingli's beliefs

Written in response to efforts to unify Protestant doctrine at the Diet of Augsburg

Influences / Intellectual Context

Inspired by humanism, especially the works of Erasmus

Read Augustine and early Church Fathers but emphasized returning to the Bible

Agreed with Luther on key points but moved in his own direction

His ideas helped shape thinkers like John Calvin and Heinrich Bullinger

Legacy and Why He Still Matters

Founder of the Swiss Reformation and an early voice in the Reformed tradition

Shaped later Protestant theology, including the ideas of Calvin and the Puritans

Blended religious reform with political change, especially in Zurich

His break with Luther over communion showed the diversity of thought within the Reformation

Continues to influence Reformed churches, especially in areas of worship, governance, and biblical preaching

Modern Impact

Remembered in Switzerland as a national religious figure

His symbolic take on the Eucharist influenced many Protestant denominations

Zwingli's model of reform—biblical, communal, and civic—still shapes how people think about church and society

His legacy is part of ongoing theological and interfaith conversations

Zwingli (2019) – A Swiss film that brings his story to a modern audience

Suggested Reading and Resources

Books and Writings:

The Latin Works of Huldrych Zwingli, trans. Samuel Jackson (1912)

G.R. Potter, Zwingli (Cambridge, 1976)

W.P. Stephens, The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli (Clarendon, 1986)

Gottfried W. Locher, Zwingli's Thought: New Perspectives (Brill, 1981)

Online Resources:

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy – Zwingli

Reformation 500 Project

Christian Classics Ethereal Library – Zwingli Texts

Zwingli Museum, Zurich