**Zwingli, Melanchthon, and Calvin**

Ulrich Zwingli (Swiss, 1484-1531) – He had a warlike disposition. He was a very influential personality. He was educated as a Humanist, receiving his Master’s degree in 1506. He spoke out strongly against the idea of selling indulgences. His life was spared by a plague that struck his city, which made him believe even more strongly that he had God’s approval. He made a final break from the Catholic Church in 1522 because of a controversy concerning the fast of Lent. Zwingli believed that every practice not expressly commanded in the NT should be abolished. All relics, altars, candles, robes, organs, and choirs were removed, and the walls of the churches were whitewashed, covering the paintings of Bible characters, venerated saints, etc. The Bible was the authority for Zwingli, not because it contained the Gospel of God’s forgiveness (as it did for Luther), but because it contains the will of God – what is specifically commanded and what is not. Zwingli insisted on the symbolic interpretation of Jesus’ words, “this is my body”. The failure of Luther and Zwingli to agree on the doctrine of communion prevents a union of the German and Swiss Reformations.

Philip Melanchthon (German 1497-1560) – Luther’s younger, more scholarly, mild-mannered comrade. In 1530, he drafts the Augsburg Confession, a statement of Germany’s religious positions presented to the Catholic Emperor. Main points: Justification by Faith, the Authority of the Scriptures, and the rejection of Medieval Sacraments and superstitions. This document is recognized to this day by all Lutheran churches as the doctrinal standard. Melanchthon himself, however, differed from Luther on the following points: He believed in cooperation of the human will with God’s will in conversion. In other words, he rejected predestination and believed that each person can choose whether to follow God. He believed in only the spiritual and symbolic presence of Christ in the communion, an idea shared by John Calvin. He stressed the necessity of good works, which Luther’s ‘faith only’ stance ignored. These disagreements and Melanchthon’s agreement with Calvin, caused most Lutherans to reject him after Luther’s death. His response to these divisive members was, “Will there be no end to this controversy? If only God would give us the grace to teach only those things in the Church which serve to build, rather than those things that stir up hate and division.” Melanchthon was a man of peace in an age of division.

John Calvin (France, 1509-1564) – About 25 years the junior of Luther and Zwingli, and 12 years of Melanchthon, Calvin is a second-generation reformer. He was raised and educated as a Catholic Humanist. His work was three-fold: Systematization, Organization, and Internationalization. In 1536, he publishes his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as a defense of the French Protestants to King Francis I. The *Institutes* went through considerable enlargement and successive editions until 1559. It became recognized as the greatest systematic theology of the Reformation because of its logic and clarity. After Zwingli died, things in Geneva, Switzerland weren’t successfully held together, and so Calvin is invited there to help organize and reform the city (Note the blurriness of the line between Church and State at this point in history). Calvin did not believe in making government officials into church officials. A controversy of whether the City Council of Geneva or the Church pastors would determine religious policies forced Calvin to flee the city. However, the city eventually invites and even begs him to return because of their repeated failure to organize themselves. Calvin, because of his propensity for organizing both the Church and the education system, turns Geneva into the international center of the Reformation and the model of a reformed city.

The center of Calvin’s theology is the sovereignty of God. Knowledge of God as Creator and Redeemer was the highest goal, and that knowledge could only come by divine revelation of Scripture. Salvation was entirely, and I mean entirely, up to God and completely out of our hands. The Fall of man had obscured his knowledge of God, and left him incapable of good. Calvin taught *Original Sin*. Because of the Fall, man is unable to attain the saving knowledge of God or respond to God’s will. Each person is guilty of Adam’s sin. While an infant has not yet produced the fruits of his or her own unrighteousness, the seed of sin is implanted in him and he deserves condemnation from the God who allows no impurity in his presence. The Fall has corrupted the power to discern good and evil and the power to choose one over the other. Salvation simply comes down to God’s sovereign will. God determined once for all, before the foundation of the world, whom it was His pleasure to one day save and whom it was His pleasure to destroy. Election to salvation is founded on God’s free mercy, without any respect to human will. Calvin denied the right of reason, because human reason was the cause of the Fall. Whatever God does is just, because He is God. The damnation of sinners demonstrates God’s justice, and the salvation of the elect demonstrates His mercy. Thus, every person, believer and unbeliever, becomes of manifestation of the glory of God. Calvin believed that what was not authorized in Scripture was forbidden, and had a more literal interpretation of Scripture than other reformers had.

Organizationally, there are four ministries in Calvin’s view of the Church: pastors, elders, teachers, and deacons. Pastors (preaching elders) and Elders (ruling elders) were equal and thus he instituted a presbyterian (plurality of elders) system of church government. The “sacraments” have two aspects: word and sign. They are not essential to salvation because the promise may be enjoyed by the “word” alone, without the “sign” portion. Calvin essentially makes preaching into a sacrament, because the benefits of a sacrament can be enjoyed by simply hearing them preached. Notice the prominence of the pulpit in Reformed church architecture as opposed to the altar and confessional in Catholic buildings. On the communion, Calvin taught a spiritual presence of Christ rather than the literal presence of Catholicism and Luther. Calvin taught weekly communion, but his doctrine of “word” and “sign” permitted his followers to be content with less frequent observance.

People came to Geneva from other nations because of Calvin’s education system. When they returned to the homelands they tended to bring Calvin’s theology with them. Calvin’s teaching largely absorbed Zwingli’s in Switzerland, and greatly influenced France, Holland, Scotland, and Hungary. Churches that have “Reformed” or “Presbyterian” in their name are Calvinist in their doctrine.