

Jon Balsarak / Jim West (eds.)

# From Zwingli to Amyraut

Exploring the Growth of  
European Reformed Traditions

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# Reformed Historical Theology

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## Contents

Jon Balsarak / Jim West	
Editorial Preface. Zwingli to Amyraut: Exploring the Growth of European Reformed Traditions . . . . .	7
Jordan J. Ballor	
The Reformation's Constantinian Moment: The Significance of Luther's Futile Appeal to Imperial Authority . . . . .	9
Pierrick Hildebrand	
Zwingli's covenantal turn . . . . .	23
Jim West	
Zwingli and Bullinger Through the Lens of Letters . . . . .	37
Rebecca A. Giselbrecht	
Cliché or Piety: Heinrich Bullinger and Women in Alsace . . . . .	43
Joe Mock	
Bullinger and The Lord's Holy Supper . . . . .	57
Hywel Clifford	
The 'Ancient Jewish Church': the anti-Unitarian exegetical polemics of Peter Allix . . . . .	79
Emidio Campi	
Giovanni Diodati (1576–1649), translator of the Bible into Italian . . . . .	105
Jon Balsarak	
Inventing the Prophet: Vermigli, Melanchthon, and Calvin on the Extraordinary Reformer . . . . .	123

Stefan Lindholm  
Reformed Scholastics Christology: A Preliminary Sketch . . . . . 137

Alan C. Clifford  
Amyraldian Soteriology and Reformed–Lutheran *rapprochement* . . . . . 157

Author Bios . . . . . 179

Jon Balsarak / Jim West

## Editorial Preface

Zwingli to Amyraut:  
Exploring the Growth of European Reformed Traditions

As we approach 2017, the editors of this volume sought to collect essays which explored a wide range of subjects. In particular, we wanted to take the opportunity provided by the occasion of this year, which marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the German monk and reformer, Martin Luther, posting his 95 theses on October 31 1517, to probe less-explored corners of the Reformation. To be sure, Martin Luther himself receives attention in this volume. But our aim here is really to take the occasion provided by the increased attention paid to the Reformation during this year to explore other theologians, movements, and ideas. The expanding of the scholarly mind and opening up of new vistas often overshadowed by larger figures, like Luther, can only be good for the study of the Reformation and Early Modern era.

This volume explores a number of themes. On the Bible, exegesis, translation, and the Republic of Letters, one finds in the chapters below essays such as Emidio Campi's which examines Giovanni Diodati (1576–1649), translator of the Bible into Italian. Hywel Clifford has also contributed an essay that looks at the “‘Ancient Jewish Church’: the anti-Unitarian exegetical polemics of Peter Allix.” Both of these chapters examine the cutting-edge work done in the Early Modern era on sacred texts. Pushing the boundaries of this theme, two contributions look at the relationships that formed around texts. Jim West's “Zwingli and Bullinger Through the Lens of Letters” looks at the interaction between Zwingli and his protégé as seen through previously-untranslated letters. Likewise, Rebecca A. Giselsbrecht's “Cliché or Piety: Heinrich Bullinger and Women in Alsace” explores correspondence between Heinrich Bullinger and a number of women, most notably Anna Alexandria zu Rappoltstein and Elisabeth von Heideck.

Various aspects of Christian soteriology also receive attention. Stefan Lindholm works carefully and quite meticulously through the scholastic element of Christology in Reformed thought in his “Reformed Scholastics Christology: A Preliminary Sketch.” Alan C. Clifford explores the rise and development of Amyraldian soteriology in the Continent and the British Isles in “Amyraldian Soteriology And Reformed–Lutheran rapprochement.” And Joe Mock considers



Bullinger's understanding of the Lord's Supper and compares it to that of many of Bullinger's own contemporaries.

Finally a number of broad, sweeping themes that emerge during the Reformation receive the notice they merit in this collection of essays. Jordan Ballor has written on the "Reformation's Constantinian Moment," examining "Luther's Futile Appeal to Imperial Authority" in his efforts to reform the Christian church. Pierrick Hildebrand examines the covenant in a chapter entitled, "Zwingli's Covenantal Turn." And Jon Balsarak looks, in "Inventing The Prophet; Vermigli, Melanchthon, and Calvin on The Extraordinary Reformer," at the category of prophecy and the development, by some thinkers, of a new type or class of prophet.

Though only so much can be accomplished in a small volume such as this, it is the hope of the editors that the contributions we have collected together here will contribute to the ever-growing interest in a wider-range of Reformation-oriented topics.

We certainly wish to thank our colleagues for their excellent and informative work and we also wish to thank Herman Selderhuis for including this collection in the present series of very highly regarded books. Naturally, we are also happy to thank our publisher, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht.

We dedicate this work to the named and unnamed, known and unknown, remembered and forgotten Reformers whose efforts were and remain as significant to the course of the Reformation's development as Luther's and Calvin's and Zwingli's.

Jon Balsarak  
Jim West

Jordan J. Ballor

## The Reformation's Constantinian Moment: The Significance of Luther's Futile Appeal to Imperial Authority

When it became clear to Martin Luther that the prospects for reform within the clerical hierarchy were unlikely, Luther appealed to civil authorities, and particularly the emperor, to reestablish their sacred authority and work for the reform of the church. When viewed within the context of the centuries-long developments preceding his action, it becomes apparent that Luther was advocating for a reversal of what Harold J. Berman has called “the Papal Revolution,” in which “the emperor’s constitutional role within the church was greatly reduced; he became a mere layman” (1983, 484).

The significance of a “Constantinian moment” in the early years of the Reformation, specifically between Luther’s publication of the 95 Theses in 1517 and the Diet of Worms in 1521, is not only that an appeal to the emperor to reassert a long-departed authority in the sacred sphere was plausible, or even possible. The failure of such an appeal illustrates decisively that coinciding with the evaporation of imperial authority in the church was a diffusion of power in the civil sphere as well. The Holy Roman Emperor was increasingly constrained by legal, political, and economic realities in the wake of the Papal Revolution. Otto von Gierke describes the decline of imperial prestige through the early modern period: “It was as but a lifeless phantom that the ‘imperium mundi’ was dragged along by the imperialistic publicists” (1966, 262; see also Kuyper: 2016, 377).

Even by the dawn of the sixteenth century, princely power was gaining ground against imperial authority as well as feudal sovereignty:

Everywhere in Europe, however, royal power over the feudal nobility was increasing, secular authority was asserting itself against ecclesiastical authority, and territorial loyalties were intensifying. Everywhere in Europe strong voices were advocating reduction of ecclesiastical power and reformation of both church and state. Everywhere the cities were seeking greater autonomy. (Berman: 2003, 38)

The dynamics of Luther’s appeals between 1517 and 1521 evince this new situation. In these years Luther shifts between the established authorities of pope and emperor, seeking a solution to the religious and economic oppression of the

German people. These appeals were to be futile, not only because of recalcitrant religious and theological sensibilities (accompanied by economic incentives), but also because of developments within the political and legal landscape over the previous five hundred years.

The failure of Luther's appeals only became apparent in 1521 with the clear decision of Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms to support the papacy and declare Luther to be a heretical outlaw. Luther had appealed to Charles V to act as Constantine had done, to convene a free council and to reform the church. The result of Luther's failure was something new, however. After 1521 there was an increasing rise to prominence of the "lesser" magistrate, territorial sovereignty, and the role of Christian conscience in spurring individual acts of responsibility. Luther's appeal to the emperor, because it was grounded in the realities of the legal environment of his time rather than being a principled argument from divine ideals about the particular form of civil order, inherently allowed for adaptation and development under new circumstances. When stymied by both pope and emperor, Luther's new targets as agents for religious reform were Christian princes and magistrates, as well as other laypersons more broadly. Where the medieval struggles between church and state had largely been fought between popes and emperors (and their proxies), Luther's reform became a legal revolution in its own right by expanding the field of players to include princes as well as university administrators, abbots, city councils, burgomasters, parents, and, in the end, individual Christians and their consciences.

This essay will examine in closer detail the dynamics of the period between 1517 and 1521 and the corresponding "Constantinian moment," as it might be called, in which Luther held out real hope for religious reform led by the Holy Roman Emperor. Historiography often tends to skip over this revealing period, in part because the futility of such appeals is readily apparent after the fact. What is really significant for many is the new situation that arises after 1521. But it is also revealing that the conditions for the legal and religious revolution that would take greater shape after 1521 were already in place beforehand. As Berman describes Luther during this period:

At first he hoped that the Roman Catholic hierarchy itself would accept his new teaching. His first appeal was, in effect, to the pope himself. When he found no support from Rome, he turned to the emperor and to the imperial nobility for help. In this, too, he was unsuccessful. When the emperor outlawed him, his own prince protected him but did not endorse his views. (2003, 48)

John Witte Jr. observes that:

Luther had, at first, hoped that the emperor would endorse the Reformation, and accordingly included in his early writings some lofty panegyrics on the imperial au-

thorities of the Holy Roman Empire of his day and of the Christian Roman Empire of a millennium before. (2002, 110)

Likewise James M. Estes writes that even before Luther:

church reformers, having lost their hope for a general reform of the church by pope and council, and knowing that the emperor could not deliver a national reform, devoted themselves instead to efforts to local reforms carried out under the authority of the princes, whom they encouraged in the belief that they were responsible for the spiritual as well as the temporal welfare of their subjects. (2005, 3)

When seen in this light, Luther's appeal to the emperor is the last and ultimately futile attempt to employ older institutions (the papacy, councils, the empire) to address the new challenges of religious reform. As Estes puts it:

Any assessment of Luther's thought on the role of secular rulers in ecclesiastical reform has to begin with the observation that it was only after more than two years of public effort on behalf of reform that Luther made his decision to invoke the aid of princes and nobles. (2005, 7)

Berman, Witte, and Estes cover what I have called the "Constantinian moment" in these brief sentences; other surveys often skip over this pivotal period and emphasize the novelty of later developments in Lutheran political thought. Luise Schorn-Schütte, for instance, locates the origins of Lutheran political thought within the context of conflict between Charles V and the imperial princes, but identifies the "early phase" of this development with the period 1529–1550 (2016, 108).

After briefly sketching the larger context of the strife between pope and emperor leading up to Luther's early work, I will examine two pivotal works from 1520 in turn. The first of these, *On the Papacy in Rome* (1520a), is a broadside by Luther against the corruptions of the papacy and its pretensions to temporal as well as spiritual supremacy (1970, 55–104). The second, Luther's address *To the Christian Nobility* (1520b), is Luther's substantive appeal to the emperor as well as the rest of the German nobility on the basis of these concerns about the papacy (1966, 123–217). Luther's efforts in this period, culminating in the finding against him by the emperor at Worms in 1521, form the basis of transition from an older model of pope against emperor to a new dynamic in the modern relationship between church and state.

## The Emperor and the Papal Revolution

For Harold J. Berman, the Papal Revolution of 1075–1120 represents the inauguration of the first truly Western system of law: canon law. Berman’s conception of revolution is “total,” in the sense that such revolutions

involved not only the creation of new forms of government but also new structures of social and economic relations, new structures of relations between church and state, and new structures of law, as well as new visions of the community, new perspectives on history, and new sets of universal beliefs and values. (1983, 20)

The Gregorian Reform, or the Papal Revolution, is the first legal revolution in the West (Berman identifies five others: the German [Lutheran] Revolution of the sixteenth century; the English Revolution of the seventeenth century; in the eighteenth century, the American Revolution and the French Revolution; and the Russian Revolution of the early twentieth century). Canon law was developed under Gregory VII as a response to the ecclesiastical and political challenges of his time. Thus Gregory

denounced the imperial and royal law by which the Church had been governed—laws which permitted bishops and priests to be appointed to their posts by the secular authorities, church offices to be bought and sold, and the clergy to marry. (Berman: 1983, 21)

The Papal Revolution was, in this sense, a revolution against the prevailing authority of secular figures, including emperors, kings, and princes. The Papal Revolution displaced secular authorities from the church, creating a binary between sacred and secular realms. After the conversion of Constantine and the subsequent Christianization of the empire under Theodosius in the fourth century, the split between the Western and Eastern portions of the Roman empire limited the territory of Western emperors until the decline of the Western empire in the fifth century.

Afterwards, the preeminent ruler in the Christian West eventually came again to be known as the emperor, but the geographic jurisdiction of this authority was limited to the Latin West, and the kind of authority enjoyed by this figure was also different from his ancient counterparts. The Western empire

was not a territorial entity but was the sphere of authority—the *imperium*—of the person of the emperor, who represented the religious unity of Western Christendom and its military resistance to Norse, Arab, Slavic, and Magyar attacks. (Berman: 1983, 483)

As Berman describes it:

In the twelfth century, the empire itself came to be called, for the first time, the Roman Empire; by then, however, papal supremacy over the church had been established, and

the word 'Roman' in the title of the empire symbolized its political and legal unity and authority in the secular sphere. (Only in the thirteenth century did it come to be called the Holy Roman Empire and, finally, in the fifteenth century, the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.) (1983, 483)

Two features of the imperial office after the Papal Revolution are particularly noteworthy. First, the emperor's authority was essentially secularized. Thus, writes Berman:

The Papal Revolution significantly altered the nature of the imperial office, and with it the scope and character of imperial law. On the one hand, the emperor's constitutional role within the church was greatly reduced; he became a mere layman, albeit a powerful one since bishops and abbots, though no longer invested by him with their ecclesiastical powers, remained his feudal vassals. (1983, 484)

Second, although Berman traces the origin of secular statecraft to this limitation of the emperor's authority to the civil realm, it is also the case that as the centuries passed the imperial office became more constrained even within the context of civil authority. As popes and emperors vied for supremacy, princes and other nobles mediated between the two and became increasingly independent (Berman: 1983, 485). James M. Estes observes that during the developments of the fifteenth century as conciliarism was on the retreat,

the popes joined hands with the crowned heads of Europe to consolidate its victory over the conciliar movement. In Germany this meant that, in return for declarations of support for papal supremacy in the church, the popes formally conceded to many German territorial rulers, starting with the emperor himself in his Austrian hereditary lands, those rights in ecclesiastical affairs that they had already assumed or were attempting to assume for themselves. (2005, 3)

So the emperor did enjoy some ecclesiastical authority, but it was not primarily due to his imperial office but rather connected to his territorial holdings.

Berman notes at the dawn of the sixteenth century:

Everywhere in Europe, however, royal power over the feudal nobility was increasing, secular authority was asserting itself against ecclesiastical authority, and territorial loyalties were intensifying. Everywhere in Europe strong voices were advocating reduction of ecclesiastical power and reformation of both church and state. Everywhere the cities were seeking greater autonomy. (2003, 38).

The emperor was not determined by genealogical succession, but was rather elected by a select group of nobles. Thus, "the emperor became wholly dependent on the dukes and other princes of the empire for his election" (Berman: 1983, 485).<sup>1</sup> It was to this group, the emperor as well as his increasingly powerful

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1 See also Witte, "The law of the Holy Roman Emperor was increasingly subject to the local control of the German princes, cities, and estates.... But in circa 1500 neither the Holy Roman

imperial electors and broader nobility, that Luther would address his appeal in 1520: “To His Most Illustrious, Most Mighty, and Imperial Majesty, and to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation” (1966, 124). But earlier that same year, Luther would lay out his complaint against the papacy in a scathing tract, *On the Papacy in Rome*.

## On the Papacy in Rome

Luther’s publication of his theses against indulgences in 1517 inaugurated a flurry of publishing activity. Defenders of the papacy would oppose Luther with treatises, and Luther would take up the pen to answer. 1520 was a particularly active year in which Luther, “published five books that offered a platform for reforming Christendom” (Hendrix: 2015, 85). Luther wrote treatises on good works, the papacy, the civil authorities, the “Babylonian captivity” of the church, and Christian liberty. Although these works share common concerns, *On the Papacy in Rome* and the address *To the Christian Nobility* deal more directly with church and civil political realities, and thus are worth close attention in dealing with the question of the relationship between pope and emperor.

*On the Papacy in Rome* is Luther’s response to an attack by Augustin von Alveltdt (1480–c. 1535), a Franciscan at Leipzig, who had written both a Latin (1520a) and later a vernacular (1520b) defense of the divine institution of the papacy (see also Hendrix: 2015, 87). Luther took up the question, “*Whether the papacy in Rome, possessing the actual power over all of Christendom, as they say, is derived from divine or from human order*” and the corresponding issue, “whether it would be a Christian statement to say that all other Christians in the whole world are heretics and schismatics” who, despite unity in sacramental practice and confession of faith, “honor the pope without spending money for the confirmation of their bishops and priests” (1970, 57–58).

Among the arguments that Luther takes on and rejects is what he calls an argument from “natural reason,” which posits that any social body must have a single head (1970, 62). It was this logic that led to the conflict between the pope and emperor as each strove for primacy, to be the only head of Christendom to which all others must be subjected.

Luther makes both a theological and an empirical argument against this view. Theologically, Luther asserts that Christ is the single head of his body, and that his lordship over all the earth must be distinguished from his headship over those to whom he is bound organically and spiritually. Luther thus distinguishes be-

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Emperor nor any of these local princes or city councils could match the power or the prestige of the Church and its canon law” (2002, 34).

tween “spiritual” and “material” unity, finding that in the former case, such unity as it exists is found in Christ as head of the church. But this church is not understood as institutionally or externally unified. Rather:

This community or assembly means all those who live in true faith, hope, and love. Thus the essence, life, and nature of Christendom is not a physical assembly, but an assembly of hearts in one faith. (Luther: 1970, 65)

In terms of material or temporal unity, however, Luther asks:

How many principalities, castles, cities, and families can be found where two brothers or lords rule with equal power? Even the Roman Empire and many other empires in the world for a long time governed themselves very well without a single head! (1970, 64).

Luther may be referring here to the Roman polity as divided between eastern and western empires, or the even more distant time of the Roman republic, which indeed was not politically unified under a single political ruler. He also points positively to contemporary examples and in reference to the Swiss confederacy he wonders, “How do the Swiss govern themselves in our own time?” (Luther: 1970, 64). The conclusion from all this is that

there is no single overlord in worldly regiment since we are all one human race and have come from one father, Adam. The kingdom of France has its king; Hungary, Poland, Denmark each have their own. But they all are still one people of the worldly estate within Christendom, even though they do not have a single head; nor does this cause these kingdoms to disintegrate. (Luther: 1970, 64)

Luther likewise makes the case for the diversity of church political forms by appealing to churches outside of Roman influence that must still be considered churches.

In this way Luther contradicts the claim of natural reason that all bodies, whether civil or ecclesiastical, must be united under a single head. The significance of this is that while Luther accepts the office of Holy Roman Emperor, he does not view it as a divinely mandated office. Neither does he grant the papacy an ontic status superior to that of civil authority.<sup>2</sup> While it may be politically appropriate and expedient in a particular time and place to have an emperor, as it might also theoretically be possible to have a pope if understood rightly, it is not a divinely ordained or required institution. Different times and places require different forms of government: “Many countries have many customs” (Luther: 1970, 75).

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2 In this way Luther’s argument upsets the medieval “Dionysian” account of reality that holds the spiritual authority as a necessary mediator between God and temporal sovereigns. Here Luther anticipates significant later developments in Protestant political thought (see Kirby: 2007, 68; and Kirby: 2004, 291–304).



In Luther's distinction between the spiritual and material aspects of human existence, we have an early expression of Luther's *zwei Reiche lehre*, his doctrine of the two kingdoms, articulated within the context of his ecclesiology:

Therefore, for the sake of better understanding and brevity, we shall call the two churches by two distinct names. The first, which is natural, basic, essential, and true, we shall call 'spiritual, internal Christendom.' The second, which is man-made and external, we shall call 'physical, external Christendom.' Not that we want to separate them from each other; rather, it is just as if I were talking about a man and called him 'spiritual' according to his soul, and 'physical' according to his body, or as the Apostle is accustomed to speak of an 'internal' and 'external' man. (1970, 70)

The two kingdoms relate to the spiritual and material aspects of human beings, respectively.

A key feature of the papacy's corruption, for Luther, is its pretensions to rule not only in the spiritual but also in the temporal, material realm. Speaking spiritually, "The head must instill life. That is why it is clear that on earth there is no head of spiritual Christendom other than Christ alone" (Luther: 1970, 72). But not only has the papacy arrogated spiritual supremacy to itself; it has also aimed at temporal dominion and, in particular, economic advantage:

Why then does the Roman see so furiously desire the whole world? Why did it steal and rob country, city, indeed, principalities and kingdoms, and now dares to produce, ordain, dismiss, and change as it pleases all kings and princes, as if it were the Antichrist? (Luther: 1970, 84)

Neither pope nor emperor rule as a single head over Christendom by divine right: "all of Christendom has no other head than Christ, even on earth, because it has no other name than the one derived from Christ" (Luther: 1970, 68). The offices of pope and emperor must be understood, then, as providential ordinations, either of judgment or mercy, which have particular responsibilities and duties defined by human convention. The natural conclusion for Luther is that where ecclesiastical authorities, and the papacy in particular, have proven unable to reform, the civil authorities would take up the responsibility for reform. The spiritual and economic oppression of the German people is such that, "if the German princes and the nobles do not do something about it soon, and with decisive courage, Germany will be desolated or forced to devour itself" (Luther: 1970, 60). Luther concludes with a call for "kings, princes, and all the nobles" to expel Roman influence from Germany, and cease to, "let such a horrible disgrace of Christendom gain the upper hand. Yet they see that the people in Rome think of nothing but becoming more and more senseless and increasing all misery, so that there is no more hope on earth except with worldly power" (1970, 103). These concerns presage those developed in Luther's subsequent appeal to Charles V and the German nobility.

## To the Christian Nobility

To say that the legal situation in Germany at this time was complex would be something of an understatement. As Berman summarizes the context:

In the year 1521, the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation consisted, in hierarchical order, of the emperor, the seven prince-electors, 50 archbishops and bishops, 83 ecclesiastical prelates (chiefly abbots and abbesses), 31 secular princes, 138 counts and lords, and representatives of 85 imperial free cities—almost 400 political jurisdictions in all. (2003, 36)

Charles V had acceded to the imperial throne in June of 1519, and Luther's appeal indicates a measure of hopefulness that the new emperor would be willing to take on the difficult demands of religious reform. "God has given us a young man of noble birth as head of state, and in him has awakened great hopes of good in many hearts," writes Luther, "Presented with such an opportunity we ought to apply ourselves and use this time of grace profitably" (1966, 125). Luther goes on to note the example of previous emperors who had valiantly attempted, but ultimately failed, to undo papal tyranny. Recognizing that the practical prospects for reform seemed dim, Luther encourages Charles to be faithful according to faith in God rather than relying on human reason:

I fear that this is why the good emperors Frederick I and Frederick II and many other German emperors were in former times shamefully oppressed and trodden underfoot by the popes, although all the world feared the emperors. It may be that they relied on their own might more than on God, and therefore had to fall. (1966, 125)

Luther locates the responsibility of the Christian nobility, including the emperor, to reform religion in the common calling of Christians to defend and promote the gospel. Thus, says Luther, "it is the duty of every Christian to espouse the cause of the faith, to understand and defend it, and to denounce every error" (1966, 131). Because the princes and emperor bear the sword of temporal justice, they are to use their power in service of Christ and his kingdom:

everyone must benefit and serve every other by means of his own work or office so that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, just as all the members of the body serve one another. (Luther: 1966, 130)

This is as true for the cobbler as it is for the emperor.

By virtue of the Christian emperor's spiritual membership in the church, the temporal power has been given a spiritual significance and responsibility. In this way:

Inasmuch as the temporal power has become a member of the Christian body it is a spiritual estate, even though its work is physical. Therefore, its work should extend without hindrance to all the members of the whole body to punish and use force

whenever guilt deserves or necessity demands, without regard to whether the culprit is pope, bishop, or priest. (Luther: 1966, 131)

In this treatise, Luther expresses hope not only that the emperor will act, with the support of the rest of the Christian nobility, but that he will do so in accordance with the precedents set by previous Christian emperors. Constantine is held up as a model for Charles V, as Luther observes

the Council of Nicaea, the most famous of all councils, was neither called nor confirmed by the bishop of Rome, but by the emperor Constantine. Many other emperors after him have done the same, and yet these councils were the most Christian of all. (1966, 137)

On this basis the new emperor should act in his own time, as

when necessity demands it, and the pope is an offense to Christendom, the first man who is able should, as a true member of the whole body, do what he can to bring about a truly free council. No one can do this so well as the temporal authorities, especially since they are also fellow-Christians, fellow-priests, fellow-members of the spiritual estate, fellow-lords over all things. (Luther: 1966, 137)

Echoing the complaints of economic injustice and spiritual abuse he had described in *On the Papacy in Rome*, Luther wonders:

How is it that we Germans must put up with such robbery and extortion of our goods at the hands of the pope? If the kingdom of France has prevented it, why do we Germans let them make such fools and apes of us? We could put up with all this if they stole only our property, but they lay waste to the churches in so doing, rob Christ's sheep of their true shepherds, and debase the worship and word of God. (1966, 142)

This is an outrage that the emperor and princes should neither tolerate nor allow to continue.

Thus, urges Luther:

the German nation, bishops and princes, should consider that they, too, are Christians. They should rule the people entrusted to them in temporal and spiritual matters and protect them from these rapacious wolves in sheep's clothing who pretend to be their shepherds and rulers. (1966, 144–145)

Although he is not optimistic about the worldly prospects for success, Luther is committed to remaining true to what he sees as his primary responsibility as a theologian: faithful exposition and application of the Word of God (Hendrix: 2015, 48, 66). Luther vows, "I shall sing my fool's song through to the end and say, so far as I am able, what could and should be done, either by the temporal authority or by a general council" (1966, 156).

In the second half of the treatise, Luther moves from general complaints and appeals for religious reform to specific issues and proposals. In each case the remedy is clear: the temporal authorities, and above all the emperor, need to act:

Every prince, every noble, every city should henceforth forbid their subjects to pay annates to Rome and should abolish them entirely. (Luther: 1966, 156–157)

The Christian nobility should set itself against the pope as against a common enemy and destroyer of Christendom for the salvation of the poor souls who perish because of this tyranny. (Luther: 1966, 158)

An imperial law should be issued that no bishop's cloak and no confirmation of any dignity whatsoever shall henceforth be secured from Rome, but that the ordinance of the most holy and famous Council of Nicaea be restored. (Luther: 1966, 158)

The temporal authorities, therefore, should not permit sentences of excommunication and exile to be passed where faith and morality are not involved. (Luther: 1966, 160)

In the end, concludes Luther, “the emperor and his nobles are duty-bound to prevent and punish such tyranny” (1966, 164).

Although Luther addresses his appeal to the emperor as well as the nobility, he does allow for the possibility that, just as the pope had failed to do his duty to reform the church, the emperor and princes might fail to act as well. Luther thus carries through the logic of relying on the nearest responsible authority to its conclusion:

Every town, council, or governing authority not only has the right, without the knowledge and consent of the pope or bishop, to abolish what is opposed to God and injurious to men's bodies and souls, but indeed is bound at the risk of the salvation of its souls to fight it even though popes and bishop, who ought to be the first to do so, do not consent. (1966, 183)

Should the emperor, the princes, and the nobility fail to act, lesser authorities ought to act. And if even these ordained authorities should fail, other authorities, notably those of the universities, and even individual Christians, must act out of faithful obedience to God.

Luther's radical relativizing of the offices of pope and emperor allow him to move quickly and prudentially to address other sources of authority and reform. As Witte writes, “Luther had no firm theory of the forms of political office. He did not systematically sort out the relative virtues and vices of monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy” (2002, 111). Luther's immediate and plaintive appeal in 1520, however, is to the emperor:

Let the German emperor be really and truly emperor. Let neither his authority nor his power be suppressed by such sham pretensions of these papist deceivers as though they were to be excepted from his authority and were themselves to rule in all things. (1966, 211–212)

## Conclusion: The Christian Prince, Conscience, and the Care of Religion

In his 1520 appeal to Charles V to embrace his historical role as emperor to reform the church, Luther is essentially asking for a return to the situation before the Papal Revolution nearly five hundred years before. As Berman puts it,

Prior to the Papal Revolution, of course, the emperors appointed abbots and bishops (including the Bishop of Rome), called and presided over church synods, and even occasionally promulgated ecclesiastical canons of both a theological and a legal character. (1983, 484)

Given the political, economic, and social developments in the intervening centuries, however, there was no going back to a time of imperial supremacy over the church. The office had declined in its influence and, in fact, no civil power would be capable of maintaining a unified Christendom in the face of religious upheaval and external danger.

What began as a movement for reform within the church thus became a revolution only when all other measures of recourse had been exhausted.<sup>3</sup> The pope proved unwilling or unable to address the corruptions and decadence of the papacy. Likewise, the Holy Roman Emperor decided “to reestablish the concept of the Christian unity of Europe under papal and imperial leadership” (Berman: 2003, 37). Neither pope nor emperor would be capable of making changes necessary to maintain a united Christendom, and this is the immediate context for the futility of Luther’s efforts at reform between 1517 and 1521. Thus, writes Berman,

This, indeed, was the revolutionary situation: that the apocalyptic vision of the Papal Revolution had failed, and that the political legal order, whose inner tensions had produced an overwhelming pressure for fundamental reform, was inherently incapable of accomplishing that reform. (2003, 39)

Practically speaking, then, the temporal unity of Western Christendom was in such decline that even if Luther’s appeal to Charles had been successful, the end result would have likely been the same: a confessionally divided continent presaging the rise of nation-states.<sup>4</sup> Something like a Roman Catholic Schmalkaldic League would undoubtedly have been formed, and as was evidenced in the later defeat of the Lutheran alliance and the subsequent and unstable Peace of Augsburg in 1555, the problem of the Reformation was not to be solved by the temporal sword.

3 Berman, “Thus when one speaks of the German Revolution, one must have in mind a total upheaval, a ‘turning around’ of a whole people and a whole culture. The Revolution constituted a lasting transformation of the very nature of the German people, both collectively and individually, and not only of the German people but also eventually of Western society as a whole” (2003, 32).

4 On the later possibility of a Lutheran emperor, see Berman: 2003, 52.

The Reformation's "Constantinian moment" passed with the Diet of Worms in 1521. And despite other reformers' interest in the models of the godly magistrate, and even the Christian emperor, a reassertion of imperial supremacy appears to have been only a passing and fleeting possibility.<sup>5</sup> Luther's futile appeal to imperial authority set the stage for a thoroughgoing reformation of not only the church but indeed all of society, one that would in fact be a revolution, in which new legal and social institutions would come to prominence. The care of religion would devolve to the "lesser" magistrate, and as the power of the papacy and the emperor declined, the confessional territory and eventually nation-state would appear.

As the Christian prince became more powerful, the role of individual conscience also was asserted. Luther's appeal was not only to the German nobility in support or in lieu of imperial action. It was, in the end, an appeal for responsible action to protect and promote true religion that devolved to every individual Christian, first to the emperor and if necessary to the cobbler. Luther's appeal to everyone, no matter his or her station, to defend and promote the gospel as was possible, is in accord with sentiments expressed throughout the works of 1520. Estes, quoting Luther's treatise on good works, writes,

In these circumstances, 'anyone who is able to do so' should help in whatever way he can. There are doubtless 'bishops and spiritual prelates' who would like to combat the infamy of Rome, but they are paralyzed by fear. It is thus the solemn duty of everyone else to offer whatever resistance they can. (2005, 10)

As Luther appealed to his conscience in his appearance before Charles V at Worms, so too did he depend on the Christian prince Frederick III for temporal protection. The increasing prominence of these two realities, the Christian prince and the Christian conscience, thus marked the passing of the Reformation's "Constantinian Moment" and the decline of both papal and imperial power.

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5 By the middle of the century, other reformers such as Wolfgang Musculus would redefine sovereignty and the corresponding care of religion to rest primarily not with imperial authority but rather with lesser, civil magistrates (see Ballor: 2012, 193–194). On the broader Reformation approaches to Christian magistracy and the model of Christian emperors within the context of excommunication, see Ballor: 2013, 106–107.

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Pierrick Hildebrand

## Zwingli's covenantal turn<sup>1</sup>

### Past Research

Gottlob Schrenk, one of the earliest scholars of the historical-theological development of Reformed covenant theology<sup>2</sup> who acknowledged Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) to be the initiator of this theological tradition,<sup>3</sup> wrote in the first quarter of the 20th century that “the conflict with the Anabaptists and the will for a state church are the moving forces which lie behind these thoughts.”<sup>4</sup> He went so far as postulating the very emergence of the covenant concept in Anabaptist circles, which Zwingli opportunely took over to polemicize against infant baptism. Schrenk based his thesis on only three writings of the Reformer dated not earlier than 1526.<sup>5</sup> The thesis, that Zwingli developed his theology of the covenant for the pragmatic purpose of justifying pedobaptism against the sectarianism of the Anabaptists, has been widely reasserted in the scholarly research of the last century.<sup>6</sup> It has an explanatory scope that definitely merits consideration.

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1 This essay is the outworking of a short paper presented at the fifth annual RefoRC conference in Leuven (Belgium) in May 2015.

2 “Reformed covenant theology” does not precisely refer here to covenant theology in a generic sense which would be per se “Reformed”, but to the theological outworking of the biblical motif of the covenant *within* the Reformed tradition beginning with Zwingli. As Horton justly points out, “the Reformed tradition hardly has a patent on this widely attested biblical motif.” Horton: 2008, ix.

3 The first to recognize (or ever consider) Zwingli as standing at the very beginnings of Reformed covenant theology was von Korff in 1908. Cf. Von Korff: 1908, 10: “Suchen wir nun nach den Anfängen der Foederaltheologie, so ist zurückzugehen bis auf Zwingli.”

4 Schrenk: 1923, 36: “Der Kampf gegen die Täufer und der Wille zur Volkskirche sind die treibenden Kräfte, die hinter diesen Gedanken stehen.” See further Schrenk: 1923, 36–40.

5 The writings considered by Schrenk are *De peccato originali declaratio* of 1526 (Cf. Zwingli: 1935), *In catabaptistarum strophas elenchus* of 1527 (Cf. Zwingli: 1961) and *Fidei ratio* of 1530 (Cf. Zwingli: 1964). Cf. Schrenk: 1923, 37, footnote 4.

6 That even Gottfried W. Locher, probably the most influential Zwingli-scholar in the twentieth century, discussed covenant unity in chapter XIII called “Die Täufer” under “7. Aus Zwinglis Entgegnungen” is symptomatic. Cf. Locher: 1979, 261–263. See also more recently McCoy,



Zwingli's denying of any ontological-transformative value to the sacraments *ex opere operato* left himself compelled to find another rationale for baptism – especially for infant baptism – which was, in western theology at least since Augustine (354–430), related to the removal of original sin.

From the first Anabaptist controversies in 1523 on, the sources show a continuing and struggling development in Zwingli's theological thinking on this matter.<sup>7</sup> However, it does not necessarily follow from the fact that Zwingli's use of the biblical idea of covenant became the key theological concept in arguing for pedobaptism, that covenant theology has been developed *ad hoc* for that purpose. Relying on insights from Jack W. Cottrell's unpublished yet unsurpassed dissertation on Zwingli's covenantal thinking, namely *Covenant and Baptism in the Theology of Huldreich Zwingli* (Cottrell: 1971),<sup>8</sup> this essay will actually challenge this predominant view, drawing upon a less known source: the *Subsidiary Essay on the Eucharist* (Zwingli: 1525) of August 1525.<sup>9</sup> In this polemical writing on the proper interpretation of the Lord's Supper, Zwingli challenges Roman Catholics in arguing for the very first time from covenantal continuity and lay thereby the ground for the subsequent development of covenant theology in the Reformed tradition.<sup>10</sup>

There actually exist, so far, only two monographs on Zwingli's covenant theology. The first one is Cottrell's (just mentioned above), which in its first and essential part consists of a historical-chronological account of its development starting from the primary sources. His focus on the relation between covenant and baptism has a heuristic end, and is indebted to Schrenk's legacy, with which Cottrell eventually disagrees. The second one is Scott A. Gillies' unpublished thesis "*Huldrych and the origins of the covenant: 1524–1527*" (Gillies: 1996), of which a summarizing article was published in 2001 (Gillies: 2001). His thesis is basically a variant of Schrenk's, in that he borrows some of Cottrell's insights, but reframed them after the former's pattern. He asserts that Zwingli's covenant theology is due to a reactionary and scholarly hermeneutic encompassing a new

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Baker: 1991, 21: "[...] for Zwingli, the covenant motif remained essentially a basis for his reply to the Anabaptist teachings on baptism."

7 For a short overview on the development of Zwingli's thinking on baptism see Stephens: 1986, 194–217.

8 See also a sort of excerpt thereof in Cottrell: 1975, 75–83.

9 For the original Latin work of 1525 *Subsidium sive coronis de eucharistia*, see Zwingli: 1927, 458–504. We'll use in the main text Preble's English translation: Zwingli: 1984, 191–227. It will be referred to as the *Subsidiary* in the essay.

10 Against Hagen and Baker, who take Zwingli's *Antwort über Balthasar Hubmaiers Taufbüchlein* of November 5<sup>th</sup> to be the first source testifying covenantal thinking, cf. Hagen: 1972, 18–19: "Later in the year there is a noticeable shift in Zwingli's evaluation of the Old Testament and the New Testament's relationship to it ('Antwort über Balthasar Hubmaiers Taufbüchlein,' 5 Nov. 1525)."; Baker: 1980, 181: "The Zurich covenant notion finds its earliest notion configuration in Zwingli's 'Reply to Hubmaier' of November 5, 1525".

appraisal of the Old Testament, for the sake of defending infant baptism against an Anabaptist democratic and New Testament-monistic hermeneutic, to which Zwingli as an Erasmian humanist would have previously adhered. In our view there are several weaknesses in Gillies' work, which cannot be discussed here at length. The main problem lies in his "reversed" methodological approach, which tends to be circular. He essentially starts from secondary sources, which he takes for granted and uses them as a framework for his interpretation of the development of Zwingli's theology of the covenant.<sup>11</sup> Another problem with Gillies' thesis is the misquoting and misinterpretations of Cottrell's work – especially in the thesis – although clearly indebted to it in respect to the historical-chronological outline.

Before we begin our argumentation there is a basic issue to begin with, namely the definition of Reformed covenant theology. We cannot determine Zwingli's move *from testamental discontinuity to covenantal continuity* – what we call here his *covenantal turn* – before defining what covenant theology actually is. And there is still disagreement among scholars on an appropriate definition.<sup>12</sup> I will propose here a cautious working definition ad hoc, which admittedly does not take every nuance into account, but gets to the core of our issue: *we can speak of Reformed covenant theology when the covenant of grace as the New Testament of Christ is said to already be effective back in the Old Testament.*

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11 Drawing heavily on secondary literature Gilles has basically three assumptions. (1) He assumes, that Zwingli did not depart from Erasmus' hermeneutics, especially from his highly depreciative view of the Old Testament, before being in conflict with the Anabaptists. (2) He refers to the commonly called *Baker-thesis* in order to determine Zwingli's move from the theology of a unilateral testament to one of a bilateral covenant. Here, he seems to have miss Baker's very point, who never posited any genuine theology of a bilateral covenant by Zwingli (McCoy/Baker: 1991, 21), which he ascribes first to Bullinger. I can't see how Baker can be of any help to him here. (3) He assumes Zwingli's departure from a democratic reading of Scripture commonly shared with the Anabaptists to a scholarly (i. e. authoritative) reading of the Scriptures once the conflict had broken, giving rise to the Prophezei. Gillies does not, in our view, provides sufficient evidences from primary sources to backup this assertions. I will here only point out that Zwingli had learnt Hebrew (contrary to Erasmus) already in 1522, that the very depreciative claims found by Erasmus on the OT are missing in the zwinglian sources, and that Zwingli's emphasis on the theological education of pastors and the project of a theological seminary antedates (September 1523) the open conflict with the Anabaptists. Lastly, Gillies gives no explanation at all in light of his own thesis, why the very first evidences (with datable certainty) of a genuine covenant theology by Zwingli are to be found in a writing on the Eucharist addressed to Roman Catholics.

12 For an overview of the different definitions proposed so far, see Lillback: 2001, 26–28.