

The Early Swiss Reformers



The Reformation in Switzerland began with Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich, but was accomplished by an interconnected network of gifted men. Most of them were born about the same time, many knew each other from their school days. These men brought reformation to the churches of most of the Swiss Cantons, and the nearby cities of Southern Germany within the span of the decade between 1521 and 1531. **Erasmus** was at Basel from 1521 – 1529. There he published his New Testament (1516) and had much interaction with the Swiss Reformers, though he never joined them. **Frobenius** printed at Basel the works of Luther and other Reformers. **Thomas Wytttenbach**, a disciple of Johannes Reuchlin, taught Zwingli and Juda and sowed the seed of the Gospel.



Key events of the Swiss Reformation:

- 1523 – Zwingli debates the 67 Articles at Zurich
- 1525 – Second Disputation at Zurich adopts the Reformation
- 1526 – The Disputation at Baden – John Eck wins the debate, but with bombast rather than sound arguments.
- 1528 – The Disputation at Berne – The Ten Theses – Most of the Swiss Reformers attended .
- 1529 – Bloodless revolution in Basel -- Christian Civic League formed against Catholic Forest Cantons
- 1531 – Death of Zwingli at Cappel, death of Oecolampadius soon after.
- 1532 – Synod of Berne

Ulrich Zwingli, Johannes Oecolampadius, Heinrich Bullinger and **Martin Bucer** are the best know Early Swiss reformers. But the following, though less known, were equally significant fellow-laborers with them in the work of the Swiss Reformation. Through their combined efforts, Zurich declared for the Reformation in 1525; Berne and St. Gall in 1528; Basel and Schaffhausen in 1529 ; and the South German Imperial Free cities of Constance, and Strasburg also became a part of this reformation movement.

Wolfgang Capito (1478 – 1541)

Professor and Preacher at Basel. Capito had three Doctorates in Law, Medicine and Theology. In 1512, he was invited to become the Cure of Cathedral at Basel. Rome's errors were revealed to him while preaching through Romans, resulting in his quitting the Mass in 1517. His preaching on Matthew had an impact on Basel, that was continued by Hedio when Capito was invited by the Archbishop to become his chaplain at Mainz. In 1523, Capito went to Strasburg, where Matthew Zell convinced him to join in reformation efforts. He had a prominent role in the Synod of Berne in 1532. His first wife Agnus had died in 1531. At Basel he met and then married Oecolampadius' widow, Wilibrandis Rosenblatt and together they had five children before his death in Strasburg of the Plague in 1541.



Leo Juda (1482-1542)

The son of a priest of Alsace, diminutive in stature, but intelligent and bold – he was Zwingli's closest friend from their school days in Basel – both loved music and truth. He followed Zwingli at Ainsiedeln and then to St. Peter's in Zurich 1523 Translated the Bible into the Swiss dialect (1524, 1530), as well as a Latin version of the Old Testament. Juda aided Zwingli in the Second Disputation at Zurich, and in the controversies with the Anabaptists and Luther. He married in 1523, his industrious and pious wife was affectionately known as "Mutter Leuin". They had a large family, and though his salary was meager, they frequently helped the poor and entertained strangers. Though the leadership at Zurich was offered to him after Zwingli was killed at Cappel, he declined in favor of Bullinger. He was an advocate of strict discipline and the separation of religion from politics.



Berthold Haller (1492 – 1536)

Haller was a native of Wurtemberg and a friend and fellow student of Philip Melancthon. An instructive preacher and cautious reformer of mild disposition, he settled in Berne as a teacher in 1518, was elected chief pastor in 1521 and labored there till his death in 1536, though often his life was in danger and he wished to retire. He defended the Reformation with Oecolampadius against John Eck at Baden (1526), where Eck’s high-handed tactics won the debate, but backfired, as several undecided Cantons joined the Reformation as a result. Haller drew up the Ten Theses which Zwingli revised for adoption at the Disputation in Berne in 1528. Haller was assisted at his efforts at Berne by **Francis Kolb**, a grey-haired Cathusian Monk, who preached an evangelical message.

Oswald Myconius (Geishauser) (1488 – 1552)

Myconius was trained as a Lawyer and was never ordained. A classical teacher and friend of Erasmus. Rector at St. Peter’s School in Zurich. Cathedral School 1516 – brought Zwingli to Zurich Myconius attempted to bring the reformation to Zucerne, but despite his courageous efforts, he was banished in 1522, and returned to Zurich. Later, Myconius succeeded Oecolampadius in Basel as pastor of St. Alban (1531). Myconius finished The First Basel Confession of Faith begun by Oecolampadius (1534). He welcomed, then struggled with the extremist Calstadt, who had left Wittenberg in disgrace (1534). He showed much hospitality to refugees from France including Farel and Calvin. He took the middle ground between Zwingli and Luther at Marburg, and aided Bucer in his union efforts with the Wittenberg Concord (1536).

Caspar Hedio (Heil) (1491 – 1552)

A meek and mild preacher, he followed Haller at Berne, continuing his preaching from the Gospels and setting the stage for Oecolampadius who would follow him. Having a Doctorate of Divinity from Mainz, he went to Strasburg in 1521 where he taught NT, Greek and Church History, working with Bucer and Melancthon in establishing the Reformation in Southern Germany. His preaching and teaching was popular, though he had reputation for being long winded. He was at the Marburg Colloquy supporting Zwingli and Bucer in their views. Married, he lost all five of his children in the plague in Strassburg in 1541.



Joachim Vadian(us) (von Watt) (1484 – 1551) A physician and Burgomaster (Mayor) at St. Gall. The son of a wealthy merchant – portly and dignified, he was a noted humanist, poet, historian, physician, statesman and reformer. Vadian corresponded with Erasmus, Von Hutten and Zwingli. From 1518 to 1551, he was a physician at St. Gall, and was elected nine times to the high office of Burgomaster. He presided over the Disputation at Berne in 1528. It was largely due to his efforts that St. Gall joined the Reformation. A Statue honors his memory in St. Gall.

John Kessler (1502 – 1574)

Kessler had studied at Wittenberg and Basel. An ordained minister, he supported his work as a saddler; a married man, he also had a wife and eleven children to support. Nine would survive him. He was one of the two Swiss students who interviewed the disguised Martin Luther at the Black Bear Tavern in Jena, the one time Luther had good words concerning the Swiss.

Sebastian Hofmeister (1476 – 1533), a Franciscan Monk, and Doctor of Theology at Constance, and **Sebastian Meyer**, a fellow Franciscan from Berne were the leaders in the Reformation of Schaffhausen, which declared for the Reformation in 1529. Later as the Anabaptists stirred up trouble, they were be banished, but despite these troubles, the Reformation would triumph in Schaffhausen.