

# THE PALIMPSEST

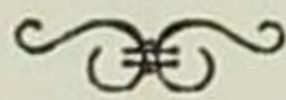
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## Old World Origins

"They can kill the body, but they cannot kill the soul." With these prophetic words, Ulrich Zwingli fell on a bloody Alpine battleground in 1531. He was a German-Swiss chaplain, fighting for the Protestant cause near Cappel. A pear tree marks the spot of his death.

During his twelve years as Cathedral preacher at Zürich, Zwingli had revolutionized the city's religion and morals. Afterward, his co-workers carried the torch he lit to Bern, Basel, Württemberg, and the Rhine Palatinate.

The Zwinglian reform worked a complete change from Catholicism to Protestantism and blended with that effected by John Calvin in French-Swiss territory. Ultimately, Calvinism dominated, though Zwingli's influence has also been a powerful one. The flaming religious ideals and democratic principles he taught have rounded the globe through the work of the German Reformed Church. The spirit of Zwingli's final testimony has been completely vindicated.



Protestantism in sixteenth century Europe had many centers — Wittenberg, Zürich, Geneva, Marburg, Frankfurt, to name but a few — each with its strong leaders. Some of these groups were brutally hostile to one another, though many lived on cordial terms. For example, Philip Melanchthon, a Wittenberg professor, was in agreement with much of Calvin's teaching. Even Martin Luther and Zwingli, in their only conference at Marburg in 1529, agreed on fourteen major points; they differed fundamentally, however, on the fifteenth — the Lord's Supper.

The Reformed Church took the lead in working for unity among the larger Protestant groups. Much was contributed along this line by the young men who studied with Calvin and Melanchthon, and who became the second generation of reformers. Thus, two German Reformed professors, both in their twenties — Zacharias Ursinus, a Silesian, and Caspar Olevianus of Treves in western Germany — became the authors of the famous *Heidelberg Catechism* at the University on the Neckar. Both also cared for the sick and the dying when the smallpox struck the city and many had fled.

Published in 1563 by Elector Frederick III of the Palatinate, the *Heidelberg Catechism* "has Lutheran inwardness, Melanchthonian clearness, Zwinglian simplicity, and Calvinistic fire, all fused together." It was intended to be memorized. It



quickly became and it has since remained the cherished symbol of the Reformed Church in many lands. In all probability, this was the catechism in use by the Dutch and German settlers in New Amsterdam even before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth.

It must be admitted, however, that there were but few places where Lutheran and Reformed could get together in the sixteenth century. Heidelberg was one of them. Equality of status between the two groups did not come generally until 1648, with the Peace of Westphalia. Only much later — in observance of the 300th birthday of the Reformation — did a union of the Lutheran and the Reformed under the name of "Evangelicals" take place. This was brought about by Frederick William III of Prussia in 1817.

The story ran a little differently in France, where Lutheran and Reformed together made common cause against the French monarchy and the Church of Rome. The casualties and destruction among both Protestants and Catholics reached frightful proportions; but that was not an age of toleration, and religious liberty even as an ideal had scarcely been conceived.

French Protestants were very numerous, some estimates giving them one-fourth of the national population. An era of peace dawned in 1598 when Henry IV (formerly a Protestant, afterward a Catholic) issued the famous Edict of Nantes,



granting a measure of tolerance; but before the despotic Louis XIV had it revoked in 1685 persecution broke out afresh on a grand scale. Thousands of Protestants were killed or driven out of France. Some fled to Germany and Holland, where a new blend of the Reformed faith emerged. Then the ambitious king invaded the Palatinate, pillaging homes, despoiling castles and countryside, burning whole cities, and killing the inhabitants by the thousands. Some escaped to England, where in time arrangements were made for their transportation to America.

Of those in the Old World whom persecution, famine, and other disasters had passed over, America was to draw her full share. Well might the colonies serve as the open doorway to freedom and opportunity for the oppressed. In the latter respect none proved more hospitable than the Quaker colony of William Penn. So good, in fact, did Pennsylvania look from the Rhineland that the German Reformed chose it as their church home in the New World.

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