



## Huldrych Zwingli's Reformation Theology: Church-State Relations and Sacramental Pedagogy as a Response to The Crisis of Modern Faith Education

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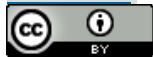
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### ABSTRACT

The crisis of modern faith education is characterized by religious learning that tends to be cognitive, individualistic, and insufficiently transformative, causing faith education to lose its dimensions of spiritual formation and social responsibility. In this context, the Reformation thought of Huldrych Zwingli offers an important contribution to the reconstruction of the paradigm of Christian Religious Education (CRE). This article aims to analyze Zwingli's Reformation theology, particularly regarding church-state relations and sacramental pedagogy, as well as its relevance to the renewal of contemporary faith education. This study employs a literature review method using a historical-theological literature review approach through an examination of Zwingli's primary works and relevant secondary sources in the fields of Reformation theology and Christian education.

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of modernity, secularization, globalization, and digital culture has brought new challenges to Christian faith education. In many contexts, Christian Religious Education (CRE) has increasingly been reduced to the mere transfer of religious knowledge without deep spiritual and character formation. Faith education often emphasizes cognitive aspects more than processes of life formation, resulting in a disconnection between faith understanding and everyday praxis. This crisis is reflected in the weakening relationship between faith and social responsibility, the diminishing role of the church as a formative community of faith, and the emergence of educational paradigms that prioritize information over spiritual transformation (Pazmiño, 2008).

The crisis of modern faith education is fundamentally not only a methodological issue but also a paradigmatic crisis. Religious education that focuses excessively on doctrinal transmission tends to neglect the dimensions of spirituality, community, and character formation. Consequently, faith education frequently fails to produce genuine life transformation in learners. In this context, Christian Religious Education requires a reconstruction of its paradigm so that it becomes not merely instructional, but also formative, communal, and transformative (Smith, 2016).

In an effort to reconstruct this paradigm of faith education, the Protestant Reformation tradition becomes an important source of theological reflection. The Reformation was not merely a movement for doctrinal renewal within the church, but also a movement aimed at shaping the lives of believers through the Word of God, the faith community, and social transformation. One Reformation figure who made significant contributions in both theological and pedagogical dimensions was Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531). As a Swiss reformer, Zwingli emphasized the supremacy of Scripture (*sola scriptura*) as the foundation for the renewal of both church and society.

Unlike Martin Luther, whose emphasis centered more on the doctrine of justification by faith, Zwingli's Reformation developed within social, political, and educational dimensions. For Zwingli, church reform could not be separated from the renewal of social life. This perspective is evident in his concept of church–state relations, which viewed both the church and civil government as institutions jointly responsible for building a just and godly public life. Such a perspective demonstrates that faith education possesses social and transformative dimensions rather than being merely private and individualistic.

Moreover, Zwingli's understanding of the sacraments reveals an important pedagogical dimension in the formation of Christian faith. In Zwingli's theology, the sacraments are understood as signs and memorials pointing to the work of Christ. Sacraments are therefore not merely ecclesiastical rituals, but practices of faith formation that shape the memory, identity, and spirituality of the believing community. Consequently, faith formation occurs not only through verbal instruction but also through symbolic and liturgical practices that are formative and communal in nature.

Previous studies on Zwingli have generally focused on the historical aspects of the Reformation (McGrath, 2012), sacramental controversies (Stephens, 1992), or the socio-political dimensions of the Zurich Reformation (Gordon, 2021). However, studies that interpret Zwingli's theology as a pedagogical paradigm for modern faith education remain relatively limited. In particular, few studies have connected Zwingli's concepts of church–state relations and sacramental pedagogy with the crisis of contemporary Christian Religious Education.

Based on this background, this article seeks to analyze Huldrych Zwingli's thought concerning church–state relations and sacramental pedagogy, as well as its relevance as a response to the crisis of modern faith education. This article argues that Zwingli's Reformation theology possesses not only historical value within the Protestant Reformation tradition, but also offers a pedagogical paradigm relevant to the renewal of contemporary Christian

Religious Education. Therefore, this study aims to: (1) analyze the concept of church–state relations in Zwingli’s theology; (2) examine the concept of sacraments as faith pedagogy; and (3) explain the relevance of Zwingli’s thought for the development of formative, communal, and transformative Christian Religious Education.

## **METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative approach using the library research method. The approach applied is a historical-theological literature review aimed at analyzing Huldrych Zwingli’s thought within the context of the Protestant Reformation and its relevance to the crisis of contemporary Christian Religious Education. This method was chosen because the study focuses on the analysis of theological and pedagogical concepts through the examination of various literary sources related to Zwingli’s thought.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include the works of Huldrych Zwingli, particularly Sixty-Seven Articles and *On the Lord’s Supper*, which are used to understand Zwingli’s fundamental ideas concerning church–state relations and the concept of sacraments. The secondary sources include books and scholarly articles related to Reformation theology, the history of the Swiss Reformation, Christian education, as well as studies on faith formation and Christian pedagogy. Literature from McGrath, Stephens, Gordon, Pazmiño, and Smith is used as the theoretical foundation for interpreting the relevance of Zwingli’s thought to modern Christian Religious Education.

Data analysis was conducted descriptively, analytically, and interpretively through several stages. First, the researcher identified the main concepts in Zwingli’s theology related to church–state relations and sacramental pedagogy. Second, theological-pedagogical interpretation was carried out to understand the contribution of these concepts to Christian faith formation. Third, a critical synthesis was developed to explain the relevance of

Zwingli’s thought as a response to the crisis of modern faith education, particularly in the development of formative, communal, and transformative Christian Religious Education.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Huldrych Zwingli’s Reformation and the Paradigm of Faith Renewal***

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century emerged as a response to the crisis of ecclesiastical authority and the corruption of religious practices during the late Middle Ages. In the Swiss context, Huldrych Zwingli asserted that the Word of God constituted the highest authority for the life of both church and society. In Sixty-Seven Articles, Zwingli declared that Christ is the sole head of the church and that all aspects of life must submit to the authority of the Word (Zwingli, 1984). This principle of *sola scriptura* became the primary foundation of the Reformation he developed.

Unlike Martin Luther, who emphasized the doctrine of justification by faith, Zwingli highlighted the social and transformative dimensions of the Reformation. Stephens (1992) explains that the Zurich Reformation was not merely a renewal of church doctrine, but also a comprehensive renewal of society. The Reformation was understood not simply as a theological change, but as the formation of public life renewed by divine values. Wendel (2001) further emphasizes that Zwingli’s Reformation was not only theological in nature, but also extended to the renewal of social and ecclesiastical life.

Gordon (2021) argues that Zwingli’s Reformation possessed a strong ethical and educational vision, in which the Gospel was understood as a transformative force for society. In this context, the proclamation of the Word, catechesis, and community formation were regarded as means of educating believers. The Reformation thus became a pedagogical movement that shaped ways of thinking, moral life, and social spirituality. Furthermore, Gordon (2002) demonstrates that the Swiss Reformation developed through the integration of ecclesiastical renewal and social life.

These perspectives indicate that Zwingli viewed faith education as an integral part of both church and society. Education was not merely a means of doctrinal transmission, but a process of forming human beings who live under the authority of God's Word. This perspective remains relevant in contemporary Christian education, which often becomes trapped within instructional approaches while neglecting character and spiritual formation.

Moreover, Zwingli's Reformation demonstrates that faith renewal cannot be separated from communal renewal. The church was understood not merely as a religious institution, but as a community that educates believers through teaching, discipline, and communal life. In this sense, Zwingli's Reformation may be understood as both a theological and pedagogical movement oriented toward life transformation. McNeill (1954) explains that the Reformed tradition developed through the integration of faith education and the formation of Christian community.

### ***Sacraments as Faith Pedagogy***

One of Zwingli's major contributions lies in his understanding of the sacraments. In *On the Lord's Supper*, Zwingli rejected the notion that sacraments automatically transmit grace. Instead, he understood the sacraments as signs and memorials pointing to the work of Christ (Zwingli, 1953). This understanding positioned the sacraments not as magical acts, but as means of confessing faith and remembering God's saving work.

Zwingli's view has often been interpreted as mere symbolism. However, Stephens (1992) explains that Zwingli's symbolism possesses strong communal and formative dimensions. The sacraments function pedagogically by educating believers through remembrance, participation, and the formation of communal identity. In the Lord's Supper, believers not only remember Christ's sacrifice, but are also renewed in the unity of the body of Christ as a community of faith. Wendel (2001) further emphasizes that Zwingli's sacramental understanding has an educational

function in shaping the spiritual life of the congregation.

From a pedagogical perspective, the sacraments may be understood as practices of faith formation. Spiritual formation occurs not only through sermons or verbal teaching, but also through symbolic and liturgical actions that shape memory and life orientation. Thus, the sacraments possess an educational function because they continually shape the mindset, spirituality, and identity of believers through worship practices.

Smith (2016) argues that liturgical practices shape human desires and identities. This perspective strengthens the pedagogical relevance of Zwingli's thought. The sacraments become means of embodied and communal spiritual formation in which believers learn through experience, participation, and shared reflection.

For Christian Religious Education, this concept provides a corrective to educational models that focus excessively on cognitive aspects. Faith education should be understood as a formative process involving experience, participation, and character formation. Consequently, faith learning should not be limited to information transfer, but should also involve practices that shape the spiritual lives of learners. Pazmiño (2008) emphasizes that Christian education must be oriented toward the formation of spirituality and character rather than merely the transmission of religious information.

This understanding indicates that Christian education needs to provide greater space for liturgical dimensions, spiritual experience, and community formation. Within church and Christian school contexts, worship, prayer, and sacramental practices may therefore be understood as essential components of holistic faith education.

### ***Church-State Relations in Pedagogical Perspective***

Another important aspect of Zwingli's theology concerns church–state relations. Zwingli did not separate church and state absolutely, but viewed both as institutions under the sovereignty of God (Zwingli, 1984). In his thought, both church and civil government shared responsibility for building a just, orderly, and godly society.

Stephens (1992) explains that the Zurich Reformation developed through close cooperation between the church and the city council. The Reformation was therefore not merely an internal church project, but also involved social and political transformation. Within this perspective, the state possessed a moral responsibility to support just public life and encourage the moral formation of society. Gordon (2021) likewise argues that Zwingli's Reformation possessed strong socio-political dimensions aimed at building society upon Christian values.

Skinner (1978) views Reformation political thought as an important foundation for Christian engagement in public life. This perspective demonstrates that Zwingli's thought was concerned not only with church renewal, but also with the formation of social ethics and just communal life.

This perspective carries important implications for Christian education. Faith education should not be understood solely as a private or internal church matter, but as part of the formation of a moral and responsible society. Christian education possesses a public dimension because it is related to the formation of social character.

Within the context of modern education, this paradigm critiques tendencies toward individualism and the privatization of faith. Christian education should therefore form not only personal spirituality, but also social responsibility and public engagement. Christian faith should not end in personal piety, but should be embodied in social life reflecting the values of the Kingdom of God.

Furthermore, Zwingli's thought demonstrates that the church bears responsibility for participating in the formation of society. Christian education should develop social awareness, public ethics, and responsibility toward others. Thus, faith education becomes a means of forming learners capable of embodying Christian values within social life. McNeill (1954) explains that the Reformed tradition developed through the active involvement of the church in shaping the moral and social life of society.

Church–state relations in Zwingli's thought therefore open an educational paradigm that integrates faith, ethics, and social transformation. Christian education is understood not merely as the development of religious knowledge, but as the formation of individuals capable of contributing to societal renewal.

### ***The Crisis of Modern Faith Education***

The crisis of modern faith education is not merely related to teaching methods, but also to a paradigmatic crisis. Religious education is often reduced to the transmission of religious knowledge without the formation of spirituality and life praxis. As a result, learners may possess doctrinal understanding without experiencing genuine life transformation.

The development of modernity and digital culture has also influenced how people understand faith and spirituality. Education increasingly emphasizes academic achievement and information mastery, while the dimensions of character and spiritual formation are frequently marginalized. In many contexts, faith education becomes overly theoretical and fails to provide space for spiritual experience and communal life. McGrath (2012) explains that social change and modern developments create new challenges for the church and Christian education in maintaining the relevance of faith amidst cultural transformation.

Pazmiño (2008) emphasizes that Christian education that loses its formative dimension will experience an identity crisis. Christian education must not merely communicate information about faith, but should shape lives that reflect Christian values. Likewise, Smith (2016) explains that human formation occurs not primarily through information, but through practices that shape desires and life orientation. This perspective demonstrates that faith formation requires spiritual experience, communal practices, and habits rooted in Gospel values.

In this context, Zwingli's thought offers a critique of reductionistic faith education. Faith education must once again be rooted in the Word of God, the faith community, and social responsibility. Christian learning therefore needs to move from approaches that merely emphasize intellectual aspects toward holistic and transformative education. Stephens (1992) argues that Zwingli's Reformation aimed not only to reform church doctrine, but also to shape lives renewed by the Word of God.

The crisis of modern faith education also highlights the importance of the church as a pedagogical community. The church functions not merely as a place of worship, but also as a space for spiritual and character formation. Through the Word, sacraments, and communal life, the church shapes the identity and life practices of believers. Gordon (2002) demonstrates that within the Swiss Reformation tradition, the church played an essential role in shaping the moral and spiritual life of society through teaching, discipline, and communal living.

### ***The Relevance of Zwingli's Theology for Contemporary Christian Religious Education***

#### **a. Formative Paradigm**

Zwingli's theology emphasizes that faith education aims to shape lives renewed by the Word of God. Christian education does not merely communicate doctrine, but forms disciples of Christ holistically. This paradigm places spirituality and character formation at the center of the educational process. Zwingli (1984) emphasized that the Word of God must become

the foundation for the entire life of the church and believers.

This formative paradigm places the proclamation of the Word, catechesis, and practices of faith as means of spiritual and moral formation. Christian education is understood as a process of shaping identity and life orientation based on Gospel values. Consequently, Christian Religious Education must move from an instructional paradigm toward a formational paradigm. Pazmiño (2008) explains that the essence of Christian education lies not merely in transmitting religious information, but in shaping lives that reflect Christian faith holistically.

Within the contemporary context, this paradigm is relevant in responding to educational tendencies that are overly academic and neglect character formation. Faith education should therefore provide learning experiences capable of shaping spirituality, morality, and the social lives of learners. Smith (2016) argues that human formation occurs through practices and habits that shape desires and life orientation.

#### **b. Communal Paradigm**

Zwingli's thought also emphasizes the importance of community in faith formation. The church is understood as a pedagogical community that educates believers through the Word, sacraments, and communal life. Faith formation does not occur individualistically, but through relationships and participation within the believing community. Stephens (1992) demonstrates that Zwingli's Reformation positioned the church as a community actively shaping the spiritual and moral lives of believers. This paradigm corrects individualistic educational models. Faith education does not occur only in classrooms, but also within the life of the church community. Through worship, ministry, discipline, and fellowship, believers experience an ongoing process of spiritual formation. McNeill (1954) explains that the Reformed tradition developed through communities of faith emphasizing education, discipline, and Christian character formation.

Within the context of Christian Religious Education, the communal paradigm highlights the importance of cultivating a shared learning culture rooted in church life and faith community. Christian education should therefore foster relationships, solidarity, and shared responsibility in the process of faith formation. Gordon (2002) further demonstrates that the Swiss Reformation positioned the church community as the center of moral and spiritual formation within society.

c. Transformative Paradigm

Church–state relations in Zwingli’s theology demonstrate that Christian education must possess a socio-transformative dimension. Faith education aims to form individuals who are not only personally pious, but also socially responsible. Zwingli (1984) viewed the church and civil government as institutions jointly responsible for building a just and godly public life.

This paradigm is relevant in responding to the crisis of faith education that often separates spirituality from social reality. Christian education should therefore form learners into agents of transformation capable of embodying justice, love, and social responsibility within society. Skinner (1978) explains that Reformation thought provides an important foundation for Christian engagement in public life and societal formation.

Thus, Zwingli’s theology offers an important contribution to the renewal of contemporary Christian Religious Education through formative, communal, and transformative paradigms. These three paradigms demonstrate that Christian faith education must be rooted in the Word of God, shaped through faith community, and embodied in social transformation. Gordon (2021) emphasizes that Zwingli’s Reformation aimed not only at renewing the church, but also at shaping society according to Gospel values.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and analysis presented in this study, it can be concluded that Huldrych Zwingli’s Reformation theology provides a significant contribution to the renewal of contemporary Christian Religious Education. Zwingli’s Reformation was not merely a movement of doctrinal renewal within the church, but also introduced a pedagogical paradigm that placed the Word of God, faith community, and social transformation at the center of Christian formation.

Zwingli’s understanding of church–state relations demonstrates that faith education cannot be understood solely as a private or internal ecclesiastical matter, but must also be related to the formation of a just, moral, and godly social life. This perspective emphasizes that Christian Religious Education possesses public and socio-transformative dimensions in shaping learners who are responsible toward society.

On the other hand, the concept of sacraments as memorials and covenantal signs demonstrates that faith formation occurs not only through verbal instruction, but also through liturgical practices that are formative and communal in nature. The sacraments function pedagogically by shaping memory, identity, spirituality, and participation within the faith community. Consequently, Zwingli’s sacramental theology contributes significantly to the development of a more holistic paradigm of faith education.

This article further demonstrates that the crisis of modern faith education is fundamentally not merely a methodological issue, but a paradigmatic crisis. Religious education that focuses excessively on cognitive aspects tends to neglect the dimensions of spiritual formation, community, and life transformation. In this context, Zwingli’s thought offers a critique of reductionistic models of faith education while simultaneously presenting formative, communal, and transformative educational paradigms.

Therefore, the legacy of Huldrych Zwingli's Reformation possesses not only historical significance within the Protestant Reformation tradition, but also contemporary relevance as a theological-pedagogical paradigm for addressing the challenges of Christian Religious Education in the modern era. Zwingli's thought provides a conceptual foundation for the development of faith education centered on the Word of God, shaped through faith community, and embodied in social transformation.

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