



When Ulrich Zwingli called Martin Luther the Hercules of the Reformation, his generous attribution sidestepped a major difference between the two men. Both had worked forcefully to advance the Protestant reforms of the medieval church. Born within a year of each other, they lived parallel lives of action. They shared a common agenda, one that stressed the primacy of the Bible, called for church reorganization, and pressed for an informed laity.

They clashed, however, over the meaning of communion. For Zwingli, bread and wine—"This is my body, this is my blood"—served as a metaphor for the Last Supper. He viewed the sacrament as the symbolic honoring of Christ as Redeemer and Lord. Luther saw the sacrament quite differently. He believed that communion always incorporated the real presence of Jesus. In this regard, Luther broke not only with Zwingli but also with the medieval church's belief that the bread and wine was the actual body and blood of Christ. For Luther, God's presence in communion was neither figurative nor literal; rather it was a living reality that lifted the heart and redeemed the soul. The two reformers were never able to bridge their differences over the rite. As a result, two major but differing Protestant traditions—Reformed and Lutheran—emerged within the Reformation movement.