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Biblical hermeneutics and the Zurich Reformation

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The Reformation in Zurich began with an encounter with the Word of God and a uniting experience of its clarity and accessibility.¹ In this respect it differs from the Wittenberg Reformation, which, one might argue, began with the religious experience of a single reformer.² From the outset, the issues of biblical authority and, particularly, biblical interpretation were extremely prominent in Zurich. However, the subject of biblical interpretation in the Zurich Reformation has received relatively little attention from scholars, especially in the English speaking world.³ This is particularly regrettable because the debates concerning biblical hermeneutics in Zurich have considerable relevance to some of the questions and anxieties in biblical hermeneutics today, not least because of the location of the Zurich Reformation at the dawn of modernity from which, one might say, many Christian thinkers are now trying to recover.

The question of biblical hermeneutics was prominent in the Zurich Reformation. The reforming work of Huldrych Zwingli began in 1519, in his new post as People's Priest at the Zurich Grossmünster, with an assertion of the sufficiency and perspicuity of Scripture and with a rejection of the lectionary in favour of continuous preaching through the Gospel of Matthew. The principles of scriptural sufficiency and perspicuity governed the two disputations in 1523, as Zwingli's opponents were asked to support their positions using the plain meaning of Scripture alone. As a result of his encouragement of popular reading of Scripture on the basis of its perspicuity, Zwingli later began to encounter opposition from Anabaptists who had read the Bible for themselves, as encouraged, and found that they differed from Zwingli on a number of points. This was essentially a crisis in biblical hermeneutics. Zwingli's response was to clarify how the meaning of Scripture ought to be determined whilst establishing the famous Zurich Prophezei: a school of biblical exposition which placed emphasis upon

1 I am indebted to Dr Andrew Atherstone and Prof. J. D. G. Dunn for comments on this paper. Any errors that remain are entirely my own responsibility.

2 Peter Opitz, 'The authority of Scripture in the early Zurich Reformation (1522–1540)' *Journal of Reformed Theology* 5.3 (2011), 296.

3 Fritz Büsler, 'Zwingli the Exegete: A Contribution to the 450th Anniversary of the Death of Erasmus' in *Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Studies in Honor of Edward A. Dowey, Jr*, edited by Elsie Anne McKee and Brian G. Armstrong (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 175.

the use of literary and grammatical tools. After Zwingli's death, the First Helvetic Confession gave prominence to the idea of defining scriptural authority and its sufficiency as part of a confession of faith. The issue of correct biblical interpretation remained prominent. The Second Helvetic Confession is perhaps the only Reformation statement of faith to move beyond a simple statement of sufficiency to feature a definition of correct interpretation. This definition asserts an understanding of meaning as univocal, fixed or determinate, established through grammatical and historical study of the biblical text. This clear emphasis upon determinate meaning reflects some of the particular debates within Reformation Zurich and distinguishes it from previous interpretation. Lutheran exegesis, like some medieval polemical writing, often assumed determinate meaning, yet the Zurich Reformation often reflected attempts to make the basis of determinate meaning specific.

The Zurich questions of how determinate meaning might be defined (if at all) and who is qualified to discern that meaning have not gone away. Indeed, these questions are at the heart of recent debates concerning biblical hermeneutics, especially in recent attempts to 'recover' biblical interpretation as a specifically Christian and theological discipline. It has often been argued that notions of determinate meaning, especially when related to historical and grammatical study of biblical texts, are simply a product of an anti-theological and historicist approach to the Bible born out of the Enlightenment and nurtured in the liberalism of 19th-century Romanticism. However, an examination of thinking about biblical interpretation during the Zurich Reformation reveals both a theological and practical attempt to define both ideas about the perspicuity of Scripture as well as the determinate nature of its meaning.

This study will consist of three sections. The first examines the teaching of Huldrych Zwingli on biblical interpretation and the second follows the development of that teaching in the work of Heinrich Bullinger with its eventual crystallisation in the Helvetic Confessions. A final section will explore the significance of the debates and ideas relating to biblical interpretation in the Zurich Reformation for contemporary concerns about biblical hermeneutics and the theological interpretation of Scripture.

I. The biblical hermeneutics of Huldrych Zwingli

Nearly all of Zwingli's works provide evidence of his understanding of biblical interpretation, whether his exegetical literature, works specifically related to the practice of biblical interpretation, records of disputations, correspondence with other reformers, or recorded sermons.⁴ Two hermeneutical principles appear

⁴ The literature is vast and could not be discussed comprehensively in a study such as this. A comprehensive and detailed overview of Zwingli's exegetical work, including analysis of dating, is offered by Walter E. Meyer, 'Die Entstehung von Huldrych Zwinglis neutestamentlichen Kommentaren und Predigt-nachschriften', *Zwingliana* 14 (1976), 285–331, though this only covers works relating to New Testament exegesis.

to have been important to Zwingli: the perspicuity of Scripture, and knowledge of the biblical languages. These two principles are in tension with one another since the former implies popular access to the meaning of biblical texts whilst the latter appears to limit such access to those familiar with Greek and Hebrew. The perspicuity of Scripture received most attention at the beginning of Zwingli's Zurich ministry and was founded upon a dualistic division between human reason and divine revelation. Zwingli's view was that human wisdom was incapable of interpreting Scripture. In contrast, he argued that the Holy Spirit alone was able to make Christians understand Scripture clearly. In later writings, after the beginning of the Anabaptist challenge, Zwingli began to emphasise a more scholarly and grammatical approach to interpretation. This change represents something of a shift in focus, rather than the adoption of a new approach, since elements of each emphasis can be found both before and after Zwingli's engagement with the Anabaptists.

The contrast between reason and revelation is immediately evident in Zwingli's opening statement at the First Zurich Disputation, in which he emphasised God's sovereignty either in revealing himself through Scripture or closing human minds to the meaning of Scripture.

Pious brothers in Christ, Almighty God has always shown His divine grace, will and favour to man from the beginning of the world, has been as kind as a true and almighty father, as we read and know from all the Scriptures, so that everlasting, merciful God has communicated His divine word and His will to man as a consolation. And although at some times He has kept away this same word, the light of truth, from the sinful and godless struggling against the truth, and although He has allowed to fall into error those men who followed their own will and the leadings of their wicked nature, as we are truly informed in all Bible histories, still He has always in turn consoled His own people with the light of his everlasting word... This I say to you, dear brethren for this purpose: You know that now in our time, as also many years heretofore, the pure, clear and bright light, the word of God, has been so dimmed and confused and paled with human ambitions and teachings that the majority who by word of mouth call themselves Christians know nothing less than the divine will.⁵

The majority of scholars have tended to view Zwingli's disjuncture between revelation and human reason as reflecting the reformer's debt to Platonism: in particular, a Platonic denigration of materiality. For example, Walther Köhler, perhaps the most prominent Zwingli scholar of the early 20th-century, suggested to his students that the Bible held by Zwingli in the statue outside the Wasserkirche

5 'Acts of the Convention held in the Praiseworthy City of Zurich on the 29th Day of January on Account of the Holy Gospel', in *Selected Works of Huldreich Zwingli the Reformer of German Switzerland*, edited by S. M. Jackson (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia, 1901), 1.47–48.

in Zurich is interspersed with pages of Plato.⁶ Certainly, a dualism of Spirit and matter can explain a great deal in Zwingli's approach to the interpretation of Scripture.⁷ For Zwingli, the Bible could be faithfully interpreted only when the Holy Spirit revealed its true meaning to a reader: the words of Scripture themselves cannot do this. Zwingli posited this radical understanding of the perspicuity of Scripture, most notably in *Die Klarheit und Gewissheit des Wortes Gottes* (*On the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God*) a treatise that started life as a sermon given to the Dominican nuns in the Closter Ostenbach and appeared in print on 6 September 1522. Here, the dualistic basis of his scriptural hermeneutic is observable as a case for perspicuity is made. Zwingli argued that there is a danger, when interpreting Scripture, of fixating on the material aspect of a text, rather than hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit who has created that text to reveal God to humankind. Because correct interpretation comes about through the work of the Holy Spirit, the meaning of Scripture can be clear to any reader: hence, much of Zwingli's preaching places great emphasis upon encouraging his congregations to read the Bible for themselves. As they do so in faith, they will hear God speak. In chapter 1 of Zwingli's much later (1531) *Erklärung des christlichen Glaubens* (*Explanation of the Christian Faith*), this dualism is still evident.

They that trust in the Creator and Source of all things, who never began to be, but called all things into existence, these cannot be convicted of error. This also is certain, that nothing which is a created thing can be the object and basis of that unwavering and indubitable power which is faith. For whatever has begun to be at some time was not. When, therefore, it was not, how could anyone have trusted in what did not yet exist? Things, then, that have had a beginning cannot be the natural object or basis of faith. Only the eternal, infinite, and uncreated Good, therefore, is the true basis of faith.⁸

The sense of dualism in Zwingli's biblical hermeneutic is most obvious when it is compared with that of Martin Luther. For Luther, the words of Scripture, like the sacraments, were a means of grace: an external and material device used by God as an instrument to make known both law and gospel. For Zwingli, the suggestion that God depends upon a material device to communicate his grace robs God of his sovereignty and his glory.⁹ In addition to this, it is tantamount

6 Gottfried W. Locher, *Zwingli's Thought: New Perspectives*, SHCT 25 (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 42–45. Likewise, W. P. Stephens, 'Zwingli's Reforming Ministry' *ExpTim* 93.1 (1981), 7 notes Zwingli's profound admiration for Socrates.

7 See Ulrich Gäbler, *Huldrych Zwingli: His Life and Work* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), 59–60, and W. P. Stephens, 'Zwingli on John 6:63: "Spiritus est qui vivificat, caro nihil prodest"' in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: essays presented to David C. Steinmetz in honor of his sixtieth birthday* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 158, who argues that this distinction is defined by John 6:63.

8 'A Short and Clear Explanation of the Christian Faith', in *The Latin Works of Huldreich Zwingli*, edited by S. M. Jackson (Philadelphia: Heidelberg Press, 1922), 2.238.

9 Locher, *Zwingli's Thought*, 186, and Stephens, 'Zwingli on John 6:63', 183.

to idolatry by attributing special supernatural significance to something in the created order. Just as the sacraments are purely symbolic in Zwingli's theology, the words of Scripture have no value apart from their relation to the Holy Spirit's revealing work. Yet it is not simply the materiality of the scriptural text which is problematic, the interpreting human reader also lacks a secure ontological basis. According to Zwingli in his 1522 apology *Archeteles*, human beings are liars and their reason so blinded by sin that they cannot discern the truth of God's word without the Holy Spirit.

For the things which are of human wisdom, however magnificently coloured and decked out, can deceive, but not the things that are of God.¹⁰

Whilst the dualistic substructure of Zwingli's biblical hermeneutic has typically been seen as an expression of his renaissance humanistic familiarity with Platonism, it is more likely that it represents a sympathy with the medieval nominalist school. It is beyond doubt that Zwingli, like Calvin, had a thorough acquaintance with classical thought and literature. However, nominalist philosophy and biblical hermeneutics provide a more likely explanation of the dualism within Zwingli's approach to biblical interpretation. If the primary source of Zwingli's dualism was Platonism, one might expect to see a denigration of materiality as something comparable with, but inferior to, the divine and eternal. Instead, Zwingli embraced the material as wholly good, encouraging the enjoyment of sausages during Lent and clerical marriage: indeed he struggled immensely with celibacy during his brief ministry in Einsiedeln.

Rather than seeing the material as the imperfect representation of the eternal forms, medieval nominalists like Duns Scotus and William of Ockham posited a complete disjuncture between the material and the eternal. This was not to denigrate the material world, but to see it as distinct from the divine as something wholly other: to posit a created world of cause and effect which did not need to be explained in terms of its resemblance to an eternal and non-material reality. So, for Ockham, because the material world in which humankind lives is distinct from the eternal and divine, the only way God can be known is through revelation: where the wholly other God breaks into the created order of material cause and effect. For Ockham, Scripture is to be understood precisely as part of this revelation of things otherwise unknowable. Consequently, Ockham advocated the sufficiency of Scripture for knowledge of God and the hermeneutical

10 'Defence called Archeteles', in *The Latin Works and the Correspondence of Huldreich Zwingli: Together with Selections from his German Works*, edited by S. M. Jackson (New York: Putnam's, 1912), 1.202. Because of this, Zwingli's approach to employing Patristic theology in argument depended upon the prestige in which it was held by his opponents, as W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 54–55 notes. Stephens also draws attention to the priority given to Greek philosophy in *The Providence of God*, which he describes as a philosophical argument supported by scriptural references.

principle that Scripture be interpreted on its own terms.¹¹ Given that Zwingli, like generations of medieval theologians before him, worked through Lombard's 'Sentences' whilst a parish priest in Glarus, it must be assumed that he was familiar with the dominant schools of medieval theology, such as nominalism.¹² In actual fact, Zwingli is known to have had works by Duns Scotus in his library at Glarus.¹³ At the same time, there is evidence that Zwingli was familiar with the work of the 14th-century Franciscan Nicholas of Lyra and possessed a copy of his *Postilla*. As James Samuel Preus argues, Nicholas of Lyra's emphasis upon the 'literal' and grammatical meaning of Scripture is a symptom of his nominalist interest in particulars and contingent events.¹⁴ It seems unnecessary, therefore, to assume that Zwingli's dualistic hermeneutic is a result of a pure engagement with Platonism.

The perspicuity of Scripture was a consistent feature of Zwingli's preaching and was detailed most clearly in *Die Klarheit und Gewissheit des Wortes Gottes*. Here, Zwingli begins by exploring the nature of humankind and its relation to God. He argues that the *imago Dei* relates to humankind's relation to God exemplified by the hearing of his word. As we read the Bible, Zwingli argues, so we hear God's voice through the Holy Spirit and become what we were created to be: those who hear the voice of God. Yet, perspicuity is never understood by Zwingli as a feature of the objectivity of human language and the potential neutrality of interpretation as it would be in much post-Enlightenment biblical hermeneutics. For Zwingli, the perspicuity of Scripture was a theological concept: Scripture is clear because its subject Jesus Christ, the light of the world, is clear.¹⁵ Scripture is clear because the Holy Spirit himself makes it clear.

By 1525, the perspicuity of Scripture had become problematic, as some of the people of Zurich had read the Bible for themselves, as recommended by Zwingli, and had reached conclusions that clashed with Zwingli's own.¹⁶ It is no-

11 1 *Dial.* 2.1–5, 'Quarum una est quod illae solae veritates sunt reputandae catholicae de necessitate salutis credendae quae in canone Bibliae explicite vel implicite asseruntur, ita quod si aliquae veritates in Biblia sub forma propria minime continentur, ex solis contentis tamen in ea consequentia necessaria et formali possunt inferri sunt inter catholicas numerandae'.

12 As indeed Daniel Bolliger, *Infiniti contemplatio: Grundzüge der Scotus und Scotismuszrezeption im Werk Huldrych Zwinglis*, SHCT 107 (Leiden: Brill, 2003) argues in the case of nominalist notions of finitude.

13 Jean Rilliet, *Zwingli: Third Man of the Reformation*, trans. by Harold Knight (London: Lutterworth, 1964), 37.

14 James Samuel Preus, *From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 65. Cf. Hubert Cunliffe-Jones, *A History of Christian Doctrine* (London: T. & T. Clark, 1978), 355, who notes that Zwingli was familiar with nominalism through the teachings of Gabriel Biel.

15 Jacques Courvoisier, *Zwingli: A Reformed Theologian* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1963), 34–35. Cf. Benjamin Sargent, 'John 4:1–42 and the Clarity of the Bible', *Churchman* 123:3 (2009), 226–34.

16 George R. Potter, *Ulrich Zwingli*, GS 89 (London: The Historical Association, 1977),

table that the very texts Zwingli used to critique the doctrine and practices of the clergy (such as John 10:1–18, Rom. 13:11–14 and Acts 5:29) were soon employed against him by Anabaptists such as Conrad Grebel.¹⁷ Zwingli now had to demonstrate why his interpretations of Scripture were correct, whereas those of the Anabaptists were mistaken. Certainly, to some extent, the increasing emphasis upon biblical languages and the learning of preachers that culminated in the establishment of the Prophezei school, was a response to the Anabaptist threat: claiming that correct interpretation needed the correct exegetical tools. Yet Zwingli's emphasis upon biblical languages can also be seen in his approach to his own education as a biblical expositor, making the then unusual decision to study Hebrew, which he did under Johann Böschenstein. Prior to his ministry in Zurich, Zwingli is perhaps best understood as a humanist and displayed a typically humanist interest in ancient languages. The influence of Erasmus upon Zwingli is undoubted and, indeed, Zwingli's intention, on taking up his ministry as People's Priest at the Grossmünster in Zurich, to preach systematic and expository sermons can be understood as an expression of this humanism.¹⁸ At some point between 1519 and 1522, Zwingli moved beyond the humanism of Erasmus to assert more distinctly reformed ideas.¹⁹ Despite this, much of Zwingli's treatment of the Bible displays an on-going influence of Erasmus. For example, Zwingli's work on the psalter is dominated by the linguistic concerns of a humanist scholar. Whilst Zwingli certainly read the psalter ecclesialogically and Christologically, a significant motivation was the lack of a high-quality Ciceronian Latin translation of the psalms.²⁰ Similarly, Zwingli's general style of exegetical commentary is in the form of notes on a text like Erasmus, rather than the smoother prose of Luther and Calvin's commentaries.²¹

The importance of the biblical languages in Zwingli's view of biblical inter-

26–27; Arnold Snyder, 'Biblical Text and Social Context: Anabaptist Anticlericalism in Reformation Zurich', *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 65.2 (1991), 172–74.

17 Snyder, 'Anabaptist Anticlericalism', 178.

18 Bruce Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation: New Frontiers in History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 49. Cf. John B. Payne, 'Erasmus's influence on Zwingli and Bullinger in the exegesis of Matthew 11:28–30' in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: essays presented to David C. Steinmetz in honor of his sixtieth birthday* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 63–80 argues that the use of 'Come unto me...' at the beginning of many of Zwingli's works is derived from Erasmus's use of that text, as is his identification of the 'burden' with medieval religious law.

19 I. L. Snavely, 'Zwingli' in *The Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 250; Stephens, 'Zwingli on John 6:63', 157.

20 G. R. Potter, 'Zwingli and the Book of Psalms', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 10.2 (1979), 44–48.

21 Fritz Büsser, 'Zwingli the Exegete', 184 who also examines Zwingli's particular debt to Erasmus's *Annotationes in Evangelium Lucae*. Cf. Stephens, *Theology of Zwingli*, 56 and Edward J. Furcha, 'In Defence of the Spirit: Zwingli Authenticates his Reforms in Sixteenth Century Zurich' in *Prophet, Pastor, Protestant: The Work of Huldrych Zwingli After Five Hundred Years*, ed. E. J. Furcha and H. Wayne Pipkin (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1984), 44.

pretation is made explicit in his *On the Education of Youth*, published in German in 1526, where he associates the ability to read biblical texts in the original languages with the gift of tongues at Pentecost. Zwingli placed the learning of biblical languages at the heart of ministerial and general education in Zurich. In doing so, he placed a greater emphasis on the languages than Martin Luther, for whom they were also of vital importance.²² In 1525, Zwingli reorganised the Latin School in Zurich under Jacob Ceperin and later recruited Konrad Pellikan to teach Hebrew as part of the foundation of the famous Prophezei. The Prophezei offered exegetical training between school and university level with a clear concern for public understanding of the Bible. Zwingli's understanding of prophecy was not so much related to the prediction of the future, but to the pronouncement and proclamation of the word of God from the Scriptures. Hence, a morning at the Prophezei would typically consist of an exposition from a Hebrew text, followed by a translation of that text from the Septuagint by Zwingli,²³ and then an address from that text in German, often given by Leo Jud. In 1532, the Prophezei formally became the Schola Tigurina, an institution which would eventually be combined with others to form the University of Zurich in 1833.

Zwingli's treatise *On the Preaching Office (Von dem Predigtamt)* was published at the time of the Prophezei in 1525. Here, Zwingli asserted the role of the educated and authorised pastor as prophet: the preacher of the word. Again, the importance of the biblical languages was emphasised, in this case as related to the gift of tongues in prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14.

Zwingli's emphasis upon biblical languages ought not to be seen as a contradiction of his belief in the perspicuity of Scripture, though it is clear that in time he does place interpretation more in the hands of authorised and scholarly preachers than the people of God in general. In *A Friendly Answer* (1527), directed against Luther's interpretation of the Lord's Supper in the lead-up to the Marburg Colloquy, Zwingli uses the image of a horse controlled by reins to explain the relation between the Holy Spirit's work in making meaning clear and the study of the letter of the scriptural text in its original language. He notes that the mighty horse (the Holy Spirit) is held in track by the reins (scholarly study of the text). Just as reins are useless without a horse, so study of the Bible without the Holy Spirit will be fruitless. Just as an unbridled horse roams where it wishes and will not be known by a rider, so there is no real substance to Anabaptist claims to know the mind of the Holy Spirit without a thorough engagement with the Scriptures, nor is there to Luther's criticism of Zwingli: that he depends too much on human reason (humanistic learning) in his interpretation of Scripture. Another

22 See, for example Luther's letter "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools", in *Luther's Works*, ed. W. Brandt and H. Lehman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 357–66.

23 Zwingli considered the Septuagint to be less corrupt than Hebrew texts, representing a much earlier date. In general, it could be said that Zwingli had an exaggerated view of textual variance in Hebrew texts and an uninformed view of variance in Greek texts.

example of Zwingli's attempt to relate grammatical and spiritual interpretation can be seen in his approach to biblical translation. According to an undated letter from Martin Bucer to Zwingli, at roughly the time when Zwingli was working on his Isaiah commentary, Zwingli seemed to have translated biblical texts with some notion of dynamic equivalence.²⁴ Bucer alludes to a common aversion to translation that attempts to precisely mirror the style and syntax of the original languages. Instead, Zwingli used his literary and grammatical knowledge to disclose a meaning conveyed in and through the particular literary and grammatical features of the biblical text: the meaning given by the Holy Spirit.

So, to what extent was there change or development in Zwingli's approach to biblical interpretation? Edward J. Furcha argues that Zwingli's biblical hermeneutics *consistently* emphasise the calling, office and education of the interpreter of Scripture and thus display little change. However, calling, office and education do not appear to be so significant in *On the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God* as they are, for example, in *On the Preaching Office*.²⁵ That Zwingli's view of biblical interpretation did develop in some manner in response to the Anabaptists has been shown by Jack P. Lewis. Lewis notes that, during his early ministry in Zurich, Zwingli held to the view that unless something is explicitly required by Scripture, it should not be believed or done, yet he later dismissed the Anabaptist request for a proof-text for paedobaptism as unnecessary, arguing that the admission of women to the Lord's Supper is not explicitly demanded by Scripture but is deemed right by all, including the Anabaptists.²⁶ Zwingli would also justify the payment of tithes, despite his early opposition to them, on grounds of practical necessity. Stephens also draws attention to the development in Zwingli's approach to biblical interpretation, though he argues rightly that there was little actual change during Zwingli's ministry in Zurich.²⁷ However, the component features of Zwingli's thoughts on biblical interpretation during his Zurich ministry can be seen together in his treatise *On the Education of Youth*, published in Latin just one year after *On the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God*. Here, Zwingli asserts the importance of the biblical languages for correct interpretation, alongside the fallibility of human wisdom and the necessity of virtuous Christian reading. Perhaps explaining the combination of theological and linguistic approaches is the notion of the biblical languages as particular gifts of the Holy Spirit: tools given by Him to disclose scriptural meaning which is His right alone to disclose.

24 Gerald Hobbs, 'Exegetical Projects and Problems: A New Look at an Undated Letter from Bucer to Zwingli' in *Prophet, Pastor, Protestant: The Work of Huldrych Zwingli After Five Hundred Years*, edited by E. J. Furcha and H. Wayne Pipkin (Allison Park: Pickwick, 1984), 90–91.

25 Furcha, 'Defence of the Spirit', 45.

26 Jack P. Lewis, 'The Silence of Scripture in Reformation Thought', *Restoration Quarterly* (2006), 74–76. Cf. E. Kuenzli, 'Zwingli's Theologische Wertung des Alten Testaments', *Der Kirchenfreund* 83 (1949), 244–48 and 276–84.

27 Stephens, *Theology of Zwingli*, 59.

But a man cannot rightly order his own soul unless he exercises himself day and night in the Word of God. He can do that most readily if he is well versed in such languages as Hebrew and Greek, for a right understanding of the Old Testament is difficult without the one, and a right understanding of the New is equally difficult without the other... No Christian should use these languages simply for his own profit or pleasure: for languages are gifts of the Holy Ghost.

If a man would penetrate to the heavenly wisdom, with which no earthly wisdom ought rightly to be considered, let alone compared, it is with such arms that he must be equipped. And even then he must still approach with a humble and thirsting spirit.²⁸

Another feature of Zwingli's approach to biblical hermeneutics, also prominent in his engagement with the Anabaptists, was his use of a *regula fidei*: a rule of faith akin to that used in much patristic interpretation of Scripture.²⁹ In his 1524 *Whoever Gives Rise to Rebellion (Wer Ursache zum Aufruhr gibt)*, Zwingli introduces the idea of a 'rule of faith and love' to govern reading. It is the true Gospel faith of the interpreter of Scripture, argues Zwingli, which makes the meaning of Scripture clear.³⁰ Zwingli contends here that certain Anabaptist interpretations are wrong since they are offered by those who have rejected the voice of the Holy Spirit by not evidencing true faith and love: fruits of the Holy Spirit. Like Erasmus, Zwingli's rule of faith was defined by the virtues of the Christ-centred life: the *philosophia Christi*.³¹ Yet this insistence upon a rule of faith does not strictly undermine a more inclusive understanding of perspicuity as indicated in *On the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God*. Indeed, something like this rule of faith is witnessed there. Commenting on Matt. 13:12, Zwingli insists upon the importance of the faithful disposition of the reader of Scripture.

'For whosesoever hath, to him shall be given, but whosesoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even what he hath.' The meaning is this: that he who desires the divine message, and has something of the Word of God, to him it shall be given, or better, he who comes to the Word of God, not bringing his own understanding but – as Hilary says – having a mind to learn from the Word of God, that man already has something, that is, he is not looking to himself, but gives himself wholly to God.³²

Consequently, Zwingli's clearer focus upon a rule of faith in his engagement with the Anabaptists does not necessarily represent much of a development or change in his approach to biblical hermeneutics: it is not the defeat of his early advocacy of the perspicuity of Scripture.

28 *Zwingli and Bullinger*, edited by G. W. Bromiley, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 108–09.

29 See, for example, Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*, XIX.

30 Opitz, 'Authority of Scripture', 304–05.

31 Furcha, 'Defence of the Spirit', 44.

32 Bromiley, *Zwingli and Bullinger*, 73–74.

Zwingli stood at the dawn of the modern era and can be seen, even as a reformer, as a humanistic scholar employing the sophisticated literary and grammatical learning that would be a feature of biblical criticism in the modern era. Zwingli's overriding concern was to articulate the basis of determinate meaning, whether in debate with traditional Catholic beliefs, those of the Anabaptists, or those of Luther. This, too, is a concern, or rather an assumption, of biblical criticism in the modern era: that the meaning of Scripture is somehow determinate, a meaning one could potentially be certain of. Yet, unlike biblical criticism in modernity, Zwingli's approach to hermeneutics was always theological. Determinate meaning was seen by Zwingli as dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit who alone gives Scripture its perspicuity. If there remained any doubt, determinate meaning could be disclosed using knowledge of the biblical languages: the gift of tongues given by the Holy Spirit whose word is to be interpreted through them. This interest in defining access to the determinate meaning of Scripture remains a feature of the Zurich Reformation after Zwingli's death on the battlefield of Kappel in October 1531.

II. Heinrich Bullinger and the Helvetic Confessions

The Second War of Kappel had significant consequences for the Swiss Reformation, not limited simply to the death of Zwingli. Zurich was forced to sue for peace and the power of the reformed cantons was severely weakened. The Canton of Aargau was forcibly returned to the Roman Church and, as a consequence, Heinrich Bullinger, the reforming dean of the capitular Church in Bremgarten, was forced into exile in Zurich. Having attended the Zurich Prophezei and having accompanied Zurich delegates to the 1528 disputation in Berne, Bullinger was well known to the authorities of the city and was invited to become Zwingli's replacement at the Grossmünster. In office in Zurich, Bullinger encouraged the interpretation of Scripture in the style of the Prophecy and Zwingli's *On the Preaching Office*. In his writings related to biblical interpretation, Bullinger emphasised the need for literary and grammatical knowledge whilst also upholding a theological account of the perspicuity of Scripture. In the third sermon of the first decade of his hugely popular *Decades* or *House Book*, a sermon entitled 'Of the Sense and Right Exposition of the Word of God, and by what Manner of Means it may be Expounded', Bullinger wrote,

First of all, that God's will is to have his word understood of mankind, we may thereby gather especially, because that in speaking to his servants he used a most common kind of speech, wherewithal even the very idiots were acquainted. Neither do we read that the prophets and apostles, the servants of God and interpreters of his high and everlasting wisdom, did use any strange kind of speech: so that in the whole pack of writers none can be found to excel them in a more plain and easy phrase of writing. Their writings are full of common proverbs, similitudes, parable, comparisons, devised narrations, examples, and such other like manner of speeches, than which there is nothing that doth more move and plainly

teach the common sorts of wits among mortal men. There ariseth, I confess, some darkness in the scriptures, by reason of the natural property, figurative ornaments, and the unacquainted use of the tongues. But that difficulty may be easily helped by study, diligence, faith, and the means of skilful interpreters.³³

According to Bullinger, Scripture can be understood because God intends it to be understood and the manner in which it was written provides evidence that its meaning was intended to be clear.³⁴ However, at the same time, Bullinger also recognises the alien character of Scripture as something linguistically and stylistically removed from readers in the 16th century. Therefore he commends specialised and learned interpretation whilst also, like Zwingli with his *regula fidei*, listing faith as a necessary tool for interpretation. Bullinger's emphasis upon knowledge of literary technique is also evident in his 1532 letter to the Bernese reformer Berchtold Haller. The letter gives instruction on how to hold a formal disputation with Anabaptists and is directed against a perceived Anabaptist rejection of the Old Testament using Heb. 8:13.

Now in this text Paul is speaking only of the ceremonial law, by *synecdoche*. The reference to sacrifice and the priesthood is evident from the context, especially Chapter Seven. Again they reason, 'the Law condemns, therefore the Old Testament condemns'. They fail to see that here 'Law' is used by *metaleipsis* to designate the sin which the Law makes evident (Rom. 4:15, 7:8-11). Thus the Law insofar as it signifies the Scripture and the eternal will of God is not abrogated unless you make a *trope* in using 'abrogated' in the sense of 'fulfilled'. So be careful so to set up the alternatives, either the root significance or the derived meaning, always explaining what 'Law' means in the proof text in question. For unless it signifies 'Holy Scripture', most texts can never be properly understood.³⁵

Like Zwingli, Bullinger sought to combat the threat of Anabaptist biblical interpretation by emphasising the need for a literary and grammatical approach to interpretation. Like Zwingli, Bullinger argued that the determinate meaning of Scripture was widely accessible to the people of God, whilst godly and scholarly

33 *The Decades of Henry Bullinger, Minister of the Church in Zurich: The First and Second Decades*, edited by Thomas Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849), 71.

34 W. Peter Stephens, 'The Interpretation of the Bible in Bullinger's Early Works', *RRR* 11:3 (2009), 311–33 and idem, 'The Authority of the Bible in Heinrich Bullinger's Early Works', *RRR* 10:1 (2008), 11.

35 Heinold Fast, 'How to deal with Anabaptists: an unpublished letter of Heinrich Bullinger', *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 33.2 (1959), 86. In this letter, Bullinger makes an interesting distinction between the literal meaning of certain texts and the meaning disclosed through technical exegetical tools, such as those mentioned in the quotation above. Bullinger suggests that the Zurich reformers do not read the controversial 'this is my body' literally, since the literal, or plain, meaning is absurd. There is no sense that literal meaning may encompass the use of figurative language.

preachers, trained in the biblical languages, were necessary to clarify areas of interpretive difficulty. This is because the determinate meaning of Scripture was essentially grounded within the particular language and stylistic features of particular texts, whether readers had knowledge of these or not. Yet Bullinger would take this emphasis a step further by enshrining it within a confession of faith.

Zwingli was probably the first theologian of the Reformed church to encourage the position of Scripture to be included in a confessional statement. The 1530 Tetrapolitan Confession, written largely by Martin Bucer as an expression of Zwinglian reform, contained a statement on the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, both absent in the earlier Lutheran Augsburg Confession. Shortly after Zwingli's death in 1531, the First Helvetic Confession (1536), derived from Zwingli's work, also included an explicit statement on the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. This would be mirrored by the French Confession (1559), the Belgic Confession (1561), the Scots Confession (1560) and the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion (1563), as well as later confessional statements.³⁶ Whilst Bullinger had been actively involved in the composition of the First Helvetic Confession, the Second Helvetic Confession was written by him alone, originally as a personal statement of faith. The Confession was completed in 1564 and was later translated into German, after which it gained wide acceptance. In it, within article 2.1, Bullinger gives much fuller expression to Zwingli's understanding of biblical hermeneutics.

The apostle Peter has said that the Holy Scriptures are not of private interpretation (2 Pet. 1:20), and thus we do not allow all possible interpretations. Nor consequently do we acknowledge as the true or genuine interpretation of the Scriptures what is called the conception of the Roman Church, that is, what the defenders of the Roman Church plainly maintain should be thrust upon all for acceptance. But we hold the interpretation of Scripture to be orthodox and genuine which is gleaned from the Scriptures themselves (from the nature of the language in which they were written, likewise according to the circumstances in which they were set down, and expounded in the light of like and unlike passages and of many and clearer passages) and which agree with the rule of faith and love, and contributes much to the glory of God and man's salvation.³⁷

36 M. Renwick, 'The Authority of the Bible: the Attitude of the Reformers', *EvQ* 19:2 (1947), 118–19.

37 *Scripturas Sanctas, dixit Apostolus Petrus, non esse interpretationis privatæ. Proinde non probamus interpretationes quaslibet; unde nec pro vera aut genuina Scripturarum interpretatione agnoscimus eum, quem vocant sensum Romanæ ecclesiæ, quem scilicet simpliciter Romanæ ecclesiæ defensores omnibus obtrudere contendunt recipiendum: sed illam duntaxat Scripturarum interpretationem pro orthodoxa et genuina agnoscimus, quæ ex ipsis est petita Scripturis (ex ingenio utique ejus linguæ, in qua sunt scriptæ, secundum circumstantias item expensæ, et pro ratione locorum vel similium vel dissimilium, plurium quoque et clariorum expositæ), cum regula fidei et caritatis congruit, et ad gloriam Dei hominumque salutem eximie facit.*

Likewise, article 2.2 posits the view that the biblical interpretation of the Church Fathers is to be judged against Scripture itself and not necessarily adopted or imitated. Perhaps significantly, the possible rejection of patristic interpretations is justified by citing the Fathers' own intention to be judged according to their faithfulness to Scripture.

Neither do we think that we do them any wrong in this matter; seeing that they all, with one consent, will not have their writings equated with the canonical Scriptures, but command us to prove how far they agree or disagree with them, and to accept what is in agreement and to reject what is in disagreement.

When compared with other confessional statements of the 16th and 17th centuries, it is immediately obvious that the Second Helvetic Confession displays an unusual interest in securing correct biblical interpretation. The 39 Articles of the Church of England, for example, certainly witness the importance of the sufficiency of Scripture (Article VI) and, implicitly, the hermeneutical principle of Scripture as its own interpreter (Articles VII and XX), but are not nearly so explicit when it comes to defining how meaning may be discerned. Article 2 of the Second Helvetic Confession is remarkable in its hermeneutical interest and desire to locate the determinate meaning of Scripture in contrast to the various possibilities offered by the Roman Church and those who hold to their own 'private interpretation'. Here, Bullinger posits the hermeneutics of the Prophezei: Scripture as its own interpreter, the biblical languages as spiritual exegetical tools, the rule of faith and love. Yet, Bullinger possibly goes further than Zwingli and the Prophezei with the phrase *secundum circumstantias item expensæ* ('according to the circumstances in which they were set down'), perhaps suggesting some degree of Scripture's historical contingency, an idea which would certainly foreshadow historical criticism in the coming modernity.³⁸

To some extent, whilst he generally accepted Zwingli's diverse understanding of biblical hermeneutics, Bullinger clarified and developed some of Zwingli's ideas about the nature and authority of Scripture. The distinction between the external word as a means of grace in Lutheran theology and Zwingli's emphasis upon the internal word delivered through the Holy Spirit was set aside by Bullinger in the Second Helvetic Confession. Instead, Bullinger simply asserted that God is the cause of both the internal and external words.³⁹ This implies that Zwingli's criticism of Luther's position (that God's dependence on the external word denies something of his sovereignty) is satisfied by emphasising God's sovereignty over the word external to the believer. Yet Bullinger does not diverge at all from Zwingli's divine and human interpretive distinction in his assertion that the glory of God serves as a rule for reading Scripture and in his view that the preaching of the word of God, following faithful interpretation, is the word of God: *praedicatio verbi Dei est verbum Dei*.

38 Cf. Benjamin Sargent, *David Being a Prophet: The Contingency of Scripture upon History in the New Testament*, BZNW 207 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 129–84.

39 Locher, *Zwingli's Thought*, 187.

Calvin and Bullinger alike understood the authority of Scripture as self-authenticating, employing the Greek term *αὐτόπιστος*.⁴⁰ This understanding of authority reflects not only the widespread understanding amongst the reformers that Scripture is self-interpreting, but perhaps also the specifically Zwinglian impulse to perceive the power of Scripture through an encounter with its clarity in reading. Bullinger develops the notion of the Word's eternity and solidity as the basis for order in society.

III. Determinate meaning: then and now

The attempts to identify a basis for securing determinate meaning in the Zurich Reformation are instructive for thinking about determinate meaning today. Just as in 16th-century Zurich, biblical interpretation has recently been profoundly shaken by intellectual developments to the point where the hermeneutical certainties of the 19th and early 20th centuries seem a long time past.⁴¹ Many have embraced indeterminate meaning whilst others have sought new ways of exploring a secure basis for biblical interpretation. Perhaps the strongest challenge to the biblical hermeneutics of modernity has arisen from the broad school of post-liberal thought. Post-liberal theologians have argued that liberal (post-Enlightenment and Schleiermachiian) hermeneutics, modelled on the natural sciences and orientated towards disclosing history either as event behind the text or authorial experience, are not really Christian. They are not Christian because they are based on understandings of the biblical text and the world of which that text is a part that consciously reject the Christian narrative of both text and world. Because of this, biblical hermeneutics need to be considered afresh in relation to an explicitly Christian narrative of the Bible and its readers. For example, John Milbank argues that historical criticism is founded upon an anti-Christian and anti-theological account of creation which posits a radical disjuncture between God and his creation. For Milbank, this separation of God from his creation begins with Duns Scotus and the development of nominalism with its rejection of universals (or Platonic Forms), thus permitting an understanding of the world as a closed system.⁴² After Scotus, Milbank argues, it was deemed possible to understand the world without looking beyond it to the transcendent universals in the mind of God. The world could be understood on the basis of particulars: on its own terms. Milbank goes on to argue that this disjuncture between God and the world was the essential philosophical shift necessary for the development of the natural sciences that would attempt to study creation

40 Henk van den Belt, 'Heinrich Bullinger and Jean Calvin on the authority of Scripture (1538–1571)', *Journal of Reformed Theology* 5.3 (2011), 310–24.

41 Benjamin Sargent, *Written to Serve: The Use of Scripture in 1 Peter* (LNTS; London: T. & T. Clark, forthcoming 2014), chapter five.

42 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 18–23. Cf. Benjamin Sargent, 'John Milbank and Biblical Hermeneutics: The End of the Historical Critical Method?' *The Heythrop Journal* 52.2 (2012), 253–63.

purely on its own terms. It was Benedict Spinoza, Millbank suggests, who introduced this disjuncture into biblical interpretation by remodelling it upon the natural sciences. Consequently, historical criticism, following Spinoza and viewing biblical meaning as determinate as is the meaning of the natural world, looks for ultimate interpretations which make no recourse to theology but which are entirely consistent with the idea of the Bible as part of the natural world, subject to purely human causality.⁴³ With the demise of modernity and its exclusive claims to scientific truth, historical criticism as a set of methods forged from the presuppositions of modernity, has no right to remain within the toolkit of the contemporary theologian.

Noted biblical scholars committed to historical criticism have sought to defend determinate meaning within biblical interpretation by asserting both the pedigree and intellectual simplicity of interpretation orientated towards grammatical and historical meaning. John Barton and Joseph Fitzmyer have both responded to the post-liberal challenge by offering an historical story of the development of biblical criticism as firmly entrenched within the Christian tradition.⁴⁴ J. D. G. Dunn has argued for a more nuanced understanding of 'historically-responsible' biblical interpretation.⁴⁵ He notes the difficulty of claiming too great a relationship with the methods of the natural sciences since the study of history cannot so easily move from an analysis of historical data to the assertion of historical fact. Like many others, Dunn rejects certain Romantic assertions of authorial intent as often wildly speculative and suggests that a more cautious and text-limited approach to considering the communicative aims of biblical authors is more appropriate.⁴⁶ At the same time, Dunn is keen to promote the theological benefits of an historical approach to the Bible. He argues that when biblical texts are studied in their original languages, there is a much greater possibility of their alterity being preserved: they are less likely to be subsumed into the views of their interpreters. Historical scholarship, then, cannot guarantee a neutral reading of the Bible, where texts are heard and understood exactly as they were meant to be heard, but it can offer some protection from the manipulation of texts at the hands of interpreters desperate to authenticate their own

43 Cf. B. H. McLean, *Biblical Interpretation & Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), 56–57.

44 John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 124–132 and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Interpretation of Scripture: In Defense of the Historical-Critical Method* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2008), 61.

45 James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 102–118 and idem, 'Biblical Hermeneutics and Historical Responsibility,' in *Horizons in Hermeneutics: A Festschrift in Honor of Anthony Thiselton*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Matthew R. Malcolm (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

46 Cf. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'Imprisoned or Free? Text, Status, and Theological Interpretation in the Master/Slave Discourse of Philemon,' in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic of Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 59, and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 149.

beliefs. In a sense, these attempts to secure determinate meaning are closer in sympathy to where the Zurich Reformation ends up: fostering literary and linguistic scholarship and placing interpretation back in the hands of the experts. However, one cannot help but wonder if the battle to secure the dominant position of historical criticism has already been lost, if not entirely within the academy, then certainly within the mainstream of theological education for ministry. Within the British context, very few candidates for ordained ministry within the Church of England, for instance, now face the requirement to study Greek and even fewer given the opportunity and encouragement to acquire knowledge of Hebrew.

Determinate meaning, however, is not only a feature of historical criticism. Theologians associated with post-liberalism have also attempted to articulate ideas of determinate meaning in biblical hermeneutics premised upon distinctly Christian narratives of both the biblical text and the world of which it is a part. For example, Stanley Hauerwas argues that determinate meaning can only be encountered by a reader whose life and reading are transformed to reflect Christian virtues and who reads with the Christian community, the Church. Without the Christian community, Hauerwas argues, and without the correct character of the reader, the Bible will not be clear and self-interpreting.⁴⁷ The assumption that a neutral individual reader is able to discern for him or herself the true meaning of a biblical text places that reader in a position of mastery over the word of God: a position inconsistent with Christian virtue. At once, clear parallels can be seen between Hauerwas and the Zurich journey from the simple perspicuity of *On the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God* to the Second Helvetic Confession.

Whilst Hans Frei does not see the Church as the ground of determinate meaning, he does argue, following the literary pragmatism of Stanley Fish, that interpretative context establishes the possibility of meaning encountered as clear and determinate.⁴⁸ However, like the early Zwingli in Zurich, Frei posits an accessible form of determinate meaning in which the non-scholarly (and in contrast with Hauerwas, non-transformed) reader may encounter the true meaning of the biblical text. Like Zwingli, perspicuity is established as a theological concept, albeit one that is Christological rather than pneumatological. For Frei, just as Christ's essence and actions are inextricably linked, so there is no engagement with the historical events of Jesus's life (recounted in Scripture) without a direct engagement with the true person of Christ.⁴⁹

47 Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 49. Cf. Kevin W. Hector, 'Postliberal Hermeneutics: Narrative, Community, and the Meaning of Scripture', *Expository Times* 122.3 (2010), 107–08.

48 Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, edited by George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 10.

49 Hans W. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 145–55. For the comparison of Frei and Hauerwas, I am indebted to Hector, 'Postliberal Hermeneutics', 109–16.

It is amongst these attempts to understand determinacy as a theological concept, suited to a post-modern situation, that the particular discussions of determinate meaning in the Zurich Reformation might have relevance today. Against the charge that the assumption of determinate meaning is anti-theological and a product of the Enlightenment, the pre-modern and quite theological approach to determinate meaning in the work of Zwingli and Bullinger suggests otherwise. For Zwingli, determinate meaning is premised upon a theological definition of the biblical text as the work of the Holy Spirit. Rather than positing the determinate nature of meaning upon the objectivity of language and readers, Zwingli identifies this nature with the clarity provided by the Holy Spirit, without whom the text loses its perspicuity and its meaning cannot be discerned. Related to this is a theological denigration of human wisdom quite contrary to the later understanding of the reader in much of historical criticism. Yet, whilst Zwingli and Bullinger differ from the exegetical tradition which one could argue follows their humanistic approach to interpretation as they contemplate hermeneutics in conjunction with theology, the grammatical and literary style of exegesis they encouraged can only be seen as a similarity. In the Zurich Reformation, the learning of biblical languages was emphasised, not because of an historical distantiation between the text and its contemporary reader, but because of a theological understanding of those languages. As Zwingli argued in *On the Preaching Office*, the biblical languages represent the gift of tongues given for the building up of the Church. They are given by the Spirit so that his word might be understood.

IV. Conclusion

The issue of biblical interpretation in the Zurich Reformation is deeply instructive at this moment of crisis in biblical hermeneutics. In 16th-century Zurich, one witnesses an attempt to define biblical interpretation as something aimed at disclosing determinate meaning, not in an abstract discussion, but in real debates about tithing and fasting, baptism and the Lord's Supper. At the present moment, Christians are asked to choose between an anti-theological, scientific, modern historical-critical approach to interpretation, and a theological, pre-modern yet post-modern approach. The hermeneutics of Zwingli and Bullinger suggest that this dichotomy might not be necessary. They advocated many of the features of biblical interpretation in modernity: determinate meaning, awareness of language and literary style and perhaps even historical distance. Yet their understanding of these features was decidedly theological and pre-modern: accompanied by theological assertions of perspicuity as well as more traditional elements of Christian interpretation of Scripture, such as the *regula fidei*. An analysis of biblical hermeneutics in the Zurich Reformation might urge us not to throw out the baby of exegetical tools inherited from historical criticism with the bathwater of some of its Enlightenment philosophical presuppositions.