

HULDRYCH ZWINGLI AND THE REFORMED TRADITION

DANIEL A. AUGSBURGER
Andrews University

The 500th anniversary, in 1984, of Huldrych Zwingli's birth (born on January 1, 1484) was certainly marked with much less pomp than that of Luther the year before. Even in Zurich the commemoration was rather subdued. No major international congress gathered in that city; not even a commemorative stamp was issued. Somehow, Zwingli is considered by many as a reformer of mostly local significance, who did not make a major contribution to the church at large. While there are clearly identified Lutherans and Calvinists all over the world, where are the Zwinglians?

It would be a grave mistake, however, to look upon Zwingli as a man who grew up within the narrow confines of an Alpine valley, far out of touch with the rest of the world. It is true that Zwingli remained a Swiss in language and ways, but his education took him to two of the most vibrant centers of humanism of the time, Vienna and Basel, and he had among his teachers some highly respected humanists. His master at Basel, Amerbach, was the editor of the works of Augustine that Luther used. As a chaplain to Swiss mercenary soldiers in Italy, Zwingli knew Italy as one who had lived there, not merely as a visiting scholar. There he came in contact with some of the worst social cancers of his age. He knew first-hand the dissolution, the greed, the social diseases which accompany troops in a foreign land. When Zwingli came to Zurich, he had a vision that was far wider than that of the men who grew up in the small villages of the Toggenburg. He knew the world, and his ministry and his writings were concerned with the problems of the world. By blending together the concern for truth and life, he is the fountainhead of the reformed tradition. By his insistence on a church doctrine, a church polity, and a Christian society that are clearly and exclusively grounded in the Scriptures, he is the spiritual father of the reformed strand of the Protestant family.

1. *Centrality of God's Word in Zwingli's Thought*

Much of Zwingli's attitude and thought can be explained by what was probably the most significant experience of his life. In his sermon on "The Clarity and the Certainty of the Word of God," he says:

I know for certain that God teaches me, because I have experienced the fact of it: and to prevent misunderstanding this is what I mean when I say that I know for certain that God teaches me. When I was younger, I gave myself overmuch to human teaching, like others of my day, and when about seven or eight years ago I undertook to devote myself entirely to the Scriptures I was always prevented by philosophy and theology. But eventually I came to the point where led by the Word and Spirit of God I saw the need to set aside all these things and to learn the doctrine of God direct from his own Word. Then I began to ask God for light and the Scriptures became far clearer to me—even though I read nothing else—than if I had studied many commentators and expositors. Note that this is always a sure sign of God's leading, for I could never have reached that point by my own feeble understanding. You may see then that my interpretation does not derive from the over-estimation of myself but the subjection.¹

In this passage, Zwingli expresses several ideas of great importance for him and the reformed tradition. First, he holds to a radical concept of *scriptura sola*, with a frank and a thoroughgoing contempt for teachings that are of human origin. For him, traditional theology and philosophy are not only unnecessary; they are detrimental, because they prevent a seeker for truth from learning directly from the Word. Even commentaries should be shunned: one must learn directly from the sacred text itself.

Also, Zwingli is absolutely certain that he understands the Bible properly. It is clear and self-explanatory when one depends on the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, who gives not only an inner witness to the authority of the biblical writings but also the correct

¹In *Zwingli and Bullinger*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, LCC 24 (Philadelphia, 1953), pp. 90-91. On the reformed tradition, see John H. Leith, *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition* (Atlanta, 1977).

interpretation.² This assurance of learning truth from a divine source produces an unspeakable joy because of the conviction that on his own he could never have discovered the proper meaning of the Word. For Zwingli, therefore, the knowledge of truth is the ultimate experience of man. It occupies in his life and thought the place that the assurance of forgiveness of sin and divine favor has in Luther.

With Zwingli, the humanist "ad fontes" takes a totally new dimension of being the key to all spiritual enlightenment. Direct contact with the Scriptures provides a form of mystical ecstasy, the assurance of the proximity of the divine that does away with the need for the "mysteries" of traditional Catholicism, its elaborate ritual in a foreign tongue, and its dependence on music, vestments, and incense to produce an elevation of the soul to God. Zwingli would vehemently reject the accusation commonly heard these days that reformed worship is a barren, didactic experience that says little to the heart or the imagination of the worshiper and fails to provide an experience of the presence of the divine. For the reformer of Zurich, there is no time when God is so near as when he speaks directly to a person through his Word. Thus, Zwingli could substitute preaching for the Mass, the spoken word for the visual experience of a sacrifice on the altar of the church, without fear of impoverishing the spiritual impact of public worship.

With this conviction, he could let go of the *magisterium* of the church, because too often church councils have depended on human reason and compromise to achieve their objectives. To the vicar of the bishop of Constance, who asserted that the church assembled in council in the name of the Holy Spirit cannot err, Zwingli replied: "But when he says what has been decreed by councils and fathers is to be obeyed like the Gospels I say what is as true as the Gospels and in accordance with the divine Spirit one is bound to obey, but

²The witness of the Spirit is usually given as the ground of the authority of Scripture. "We know these books to be canonical and the sure rule of our faith, not so much by the common accord and consent of the Church, as by the testimony and inward illumination of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to distinguish them from other ecclesiastical books upon which, however useful, we can not found any articles of faith" (*The French Confession of Faith*, 1559, Art. IV, in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century*, ed. Arthur C. Cochrane [Philadelphia, 1966], p. 145).

not what is decreed in accordance with human reason.”³ What Zwingli expected to be the collective assent of the church through the illumination of the Holy Spirit was to have the supreme authority. Thus, we have in Zurich the public debates held under the sovereignty of the sacred writings. If there is any disagreement, those writings are the proper arbiter in religious matters. As he speaks to the vicar, he says:

. . . I beg of him for the sake of God and of Christian love to show me the place and location, also of the words of the Scripture, where it is written that one should pray to the saints as mediators, so that if I have erred, and err now, I may be better instructed, since there are here present Bibles in the Hebrew, Greek and Latin languages. These we will have examined by those present who are sufficiently well taught in the above-mentioned tongues. . . .⁴

For Zwingli, trust in the enlightenment that comes to all through the Word does away with the Catholic requirement of implicit faith in the word of the church. It is the duty of each individual to learn for himself, to verify for himself, what he is being taught. This certainly announces the reformed layman, who reads the Scriptures for himself and who can discuss theological issues with opponents of his faith. This justifies also Zwingli's concept of the church. The true church is never an assembly of high church officials, but is a collectivity of individuals who depend exclusively upon the Word and the will of God:

I ask what is meant by “Church?” Does one mean the pope at Rome with his tyrannical power and the pomp of cardinals and bishops greater than that of all emperors and princes? then I say that this Church has often gone wrong and erred as everyone knows. . . . But there is another Church which the popes do not wish to recognize; this one is no other than all right Christians, collected in the name of the Holy Ghost and by the will of God, which have placed a firm belief and an unhesitating hope in God, her spouse. That Church does not reign according to the flesh powerfully upon earth, nor does it reign arbitrarily, but depends and rests only upon the word and will of God, does not seek

³*Acts of the First Zurich Disputation*, in *Ulrich Zwingli: Selected Works*, ed. Samuel M. Jackson (1901; reprint ed., Philadelphia, 1972), p. 84.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 63.

temporal honor and to bring under its control much territory and many people and rule other Christians. That Church cannot err.⁵

Acceptance of the *magisterium* of the Word provides, therefore, an authority that is even greater than that of the church of Rome.

At any rate, this divine illumination is a requirement because man by nature cannot come to faith. The presence of belief is a sure sign of the activity of God:

Since, therefore, it is clear that whoever upon hearing the words "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," immediately believes that the world is the work of God does not come to that through the power of the words or of our intellect (for if the words could effect this, all would be made pious; and, if our intellect could, no one who heard would be impious), it is manifest that the faithful believe that God exists, and that the world is His work, etc., just because they are taught this by God. It is of God alone, therefore, that you believe that God exists and that you have faith in him.⁶

Zwingli contrasts here the power of words and the teaching of God; and he attempts to show that if human formulas could give faith, all men would have faith because, as he states just above, there is really no difference between the endowment of the pious and the impious. Men do not believe merely because they hear someone assert something. More people who hear disbelieve than believe. The presence of faith is, therefore, always the evidence of a divine illumination. For the same reason, truth among Christians and among non-Christians comes from the same source: "If certain men have uttered certain truths on this subject, it has been from the mouth of God, who has scattered even among the heathen some

⁵Ibid., p. 85. Cf.: "We say, then, according to the Word of God, that [the Church] is the company of the faithful who agree to follow his Word, and the pure religion which it teaches; who advance in it all their lives, growing and becoming more confirmed in the fear of God according as they feel the want of growing and pressing onward" (*French Confession*, Art. XXVIII, in *Reformed Confessions*, p. 153).

⁶*True and False Religion*, ed. Samuel M. Jackson (1929; reprint ed., Durham, N.C., 1951), p. 61. Cf.: "We believe that we are enlightened in faith by the secret power of the Holy Spirit . . ." (*French Confession*, Art. XXI, in *Reformed Confessions*, p. 151).

seeds of the knowledge of Himself, though sparingly and darkly."⁷

Man was created to be able to be illumined by God. Being created in the image of God was not only being endowed with mental and moral capacities but especially being driven by a yearning for the experience of hearing the word of God:

[Man] has this in common with God, not merely that he is rational, but that he looks to God and to the words of God, thus signifying that by nature he is more closely related, more nearly akin to God, far more like God, all of which undoubtedly derives from the fact that he is created in the divine image. . . . [Several pages later:] Now if we have found that the inward man is as stated, and that it delights in the law of God because it is created in the divine image in order to have fellowship with him, it follows necessarily that there is no law or word that will give greater delight to the inward man than the word of God.⁸

Zwingli thus swerves from the classical emphasis upon human rationality to the human being's unique capacity to relate to God. To be truly human is to live to hear and understand God's Word. Man will be frustrated and restless as long as he turns to human words. Happiness can only be found in listening to God's communication. The rationale for the reformed obsession with religion, for giving a religious significance to all the acts of life, appears here. To commune with God is not something that is abnormal and which must be reserved to the moments of worship, but it is the purpose of every instant of life. Communing with God is not an extraordinary experience that easily makes the one who does it somewhat peculiar or strange, but it is the most natural function of a being created in the image of God.

It is also easy, according to Zwingli, to distinguish between true and false religion. True religion is suited to the nature of man. It is built on the word of God; false religion is built on the word of man. A pious man cannot rely upon church traditions. His very nature rebels against that. Zwingli sets forth his position as follows:

⁷*True and False Religion*, p. 62.

⁸"Clarity," *Zwingli and Bullinger*, pp. 62 and 67. "On the contrary, God created man good and in his image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness, so that he might rightly know God his Creator . . ." (*Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. 6, in *Reformed Confessions*, p. 306).

The pious man, therefore, is the only one who is fed, refreshed, and comforted by the word of God. Conversely, it follows that the pious man cannot feed on any other word than the divine. For as he trusts in God alone, so he is made sure by His word alone, so he accepts the word of none but God. . . . Nothing, therefore, of ours is to be added to the Word of God, and nothing taken from His word by rashness of ours.⁹

Zwingli's determination can be expected: "The will of God is this that he alone should be the teacher. And I intend to be taught by him and not by men, that is, in respect to doctrine. For in respect of sin and disobedience I will be subject to all."¹⁰

The tragedy of Adam, Zwingli declares, is that he tried to listen to other words than God's words; and the fallacy of the scholastic system is that it attempts to discover truth from both revelation and human speculation, and it must be rejected. All the subtleties of Aristotelian logic are no match for the simple illumination of the Holy Spirit. "The doctrine of God is never formed more clearly than when it is done by God himself and in the words of God."¹¹ Genuine reformation always leads to the Word. In *True and False Religion*, Zwingli calls the reformation the "renascent word."¹²

2. *God's Word in Personal Life and Society*

God's Word had a unique place in Zwingli's personal life. According to Bullinger, he committed to memory the epistles of Paul in the original language.¹³ As soon as Erasmus' Greek NT appeared, he copied it for his personal use.¹⁴ No one, he felt, now had any excuse to be ignorant of the Word:

⁹*True and False Religion*, p. 94.

¹⁰"Clarity," *Zwingli and Bullinger*, p. 92.

¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

¹²*True and False Religion*, p. 98.

¹³Gottfried Locher, "Zwingli and Erasmus," *Erasmus in English: A Newsletter Published by University of Toronto Press*, 10 (1979-80): 4.

¹⁴Jean Rilliet, *Zwingli: Third Man of the Reformation*, trans. Harold Knight (Philadelphia, 1959), p. 37.

But now through the grace of God the divine Gospel and Scriptures have been born and brought to light by means of print (especially at Basel) so that they are in Latin and German, wherefrom every pious Christian who can read or knows Latin can easily inform himself and learn the will of God. This has been attained, God be praised, that now a priest who is diligent may learn and know as much in two or three years concerning the Scriptures as formerly in ten or fifteen years. Therefore I wish all the priests who have benefices under my lords of Zurich or in their counties . . . exhorted that each one is diligent and labors to read the Scriptures, and especially those who are preachers and caretakers of the soul, let each one buy a New Testament in Latin or in German, if he does not understand the Latin or is unable to interpret it. For I also am not ashamed to read German at times, on account of easier presentation. . . . For matters have reached such a state that also the laymen and women know more of the Scriptures than some priests and clergymen.¹⁵

He gives some instruction concerning the order in which the Scriptures should be read:

Let one begin to read first the gospel of St. Matthew, especially the v., vi., and vii. chapters. After that let him read the other gospels, so that he may know what they write and say. After that he should take the Acts. After this the epistles of Paul but first the one to the Galatians. Then the epistle of St. Peter and other divine texts; thus he can readily form within himself a right Christian life, and become more skillful to teach this better to others also. After that let him work in the Old Testament, in the prophets and other books of the Bible, which, I understand, are soon to appear in Latin and German.¹⁶

However, Zwingli is not opposed to the reading of the church fathers. But when something is found in them which is like the gospel, then the gospel should be quoted.

Zwingli's dependence upon the sacred texts leads him to a kind of proof-text use of the Scriptures that is especially observable in his *True and False Religion*. For instance, in the chapter on God, after

¹⁵*First Zurich Disputation*, pp. 106-107.

¹⁶*Ibid.* Cf. the sequence of the books on which Zwingli preached in Zurich; see Gotfried Locher, *Zwingli's Thought—New Perspectives*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought, 25 (Leiden, 1981), p. 27.

a brief "argument" (the name that Zwingli gives to a summary of the topic), he says: "Now is the time to bring forward the witness of the word itself to everything that has been said so far about the wisdom and providence of God."¹⁷ In the discussion of the nature of man, he states: "But it is better to prove the matter by the testimony of the Word of God than by arguments, even though these are founded upon the Word of God."¹⁸ "Now I will come to the testimony of the Word," he writes in the section on repentance, "lest I seem to anyone to have brought forward my own rather than heavenly testimony."¹⁹

This radical dependence upon divine help for the understanding of truth gives to Zwingli's theological writings a unique tone. He interrupts himself at times to ask for divine illumination. For instance, as he is about to discuss the significance of the gospel, he stops and writes: "Since by human discourse, however rich, the untaught mind cannot be persuaded in the things of faith unless the Lord so teach and draw the heart that it delights to follow, we must also appear to him . . . so to illumine the minds of those to whom we would communicate His gospel that they shall be able to grasp the meaning of the gospel. . . . May the Lord put the right words in my mouth!"²⁰

It was around the Word that the prophesyings at Zurich were conducted. Every day at 7:00 a.m., except Sunday and Friday, students and pastors gathered in the cathedral. One person read the text for the day in Latin, another gave the Hebrew, while a third provided the reading in the Greek Septuagint and explained the passage. Then the practical use was shown. Suggestions were made on how to preach on that text, and finally someone would preach a sermon in German on the passage that had been studied.²¹

Zwingli's loyalty to the Word was such that he even countenanced civil disobedience for its sake: "Where the government, therefore, obstructs the free course of the heavenly word, the best men turn away from the government and have regard to everything

¹⁷*True and False Religion*, p. 68.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 132; cf. pp. 74-75.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 106.

²¹Locher, *Zwingli's Thought*, pp. 27-32.

that can preserve the heavenly teaching. Even though it is very hard to do this, yet they do it, because they are unwilling to lose the soul's treasure when it has been found."²² This stubborn commitment to the law of conscience was to become quite characteristic of the reformed faith, which often led its followers to persecutions and to exile.

This high concept of the Word extends to the OT as well as to the NT. Zwingli does not distinguish in the Decalogue between laws grounded on natural law (and therefore binding on all mankind) and laws given exclusively to the Jews. He says: "The law is nothing else than the eternal will of God. . . . The law is therefore nothing else than teachings as to the will of God, through which we understood what He wills, what He wills not, what He demands, what He forbids. But that the will of God is permanent, so that He is never going to change any part of that law which has to do with the inner man, is evident from the words of the lawgiver himself."²³ Freedom from the law is not to be understood in the sense of not being bound to do what the law bids, but in pleasing God from the heart freely: "We do for love that which we know will please God."²⁴

It is interesting that Zwingli affirms the moral guidance of the law more than its condemnation of sin. For him, salvation is much more than the forgiveness of sin and relief from the sense of guilt before God. Defining the gospel, he states: "The gospel . . . teaches us to embrace not only grace but a new life."²⁵ God's plan is to

²²"Dedicatory Letter," *True and False Religion*, p. 53.

²³*True and False Religion*, p. 137. In the *Institutes* 2.8.51, Calvin says: "Now it will not be difficult to decide the purpose of the whole law: the fulfillment of righteousness to form human life to the archetype of divine purity. For God has so depicted His character in the law that if any man carries out in deeds whatever is enjoined there, he will express the image of God, as it were, in his own life."

²⁴*True and False Religion*, p. 141. In the 1538 *Catechism*, Calvin writes: "Now Christians make a far different use of the law than those without faith can make of it. For where the Lord has engraved on our hearts the love of His righteousness, the outward teaching of the law which previously was accusing us of nothing but transgression is now a lantern for our feet to keep us from wandering away from the straight path. It is our wisdom by which we are formed and instructed in complete righteousness. It is our discipline which does not permit us to abandon ourselves in more wicked license" (trans. Ford L. Battles [Pittsburgh, 1972], p. 21).

²⁵*True and False Religion*, p. 172. Cf.: "Hence Christ makes no one just whom He does not also make holy. For those benefits are connected together by an eternal and indissoluble bond" (Calvin, *Inst.* 3.16.1).

change man: "When, therefore, Divine Majesty formed the plan of redeeming man, it did not intend that the world should persist and become inveterate in its wickedness. . . . He proclaims, therefore, at the start, that our lives and characters must be changed. For to be a Christian is nothing less than to be a new man and a new creature [2 Cor 5:17]." ²⁶

The Zurich reformer does not, however, assert that a human being can become perfect. What is renewed is the heart. Through the Holy Spirit, the person knows himself. The power of self-deception of sin is broken. The renewed individual stops trusting his goodness, his wisdom, and puts his hopes in God alone. As the body brings forth carnal works, this person sorrows over the wretched evidence of the power of the "old man" in him, but he refuses to give up. Zwingli states: "This, then, is the Christian life: when the hope in God through Christ never wavers, even though man through the weakness of the flesh is not without sin, yet comes out victorious because he does not surrender himself to it, but as often as he falls always rises again." ²⁷

For Zwingli, not one area of human activity is exempt from the control and purification of the Word. As Gottfried Locher states: "Thus of all the reformers Zwingli is the most conscious reformer not only of the faith of the church, or even of the personal Christian life, but rather of the whole life of Christendom." ²⁸

With respect to public worship, Zwingli's concept was that the worship service must be structured as a response to the witness of the Word. For him, even the order of worship reflects the action of the Word. The prayer of confession must follow the sermon, for confession without a true exposition of the Word is only hypocrisy; but after the Scripture has been heard, it is possible to have genuine common prayer. The promise of forgiveness of sin comes before, rather than after, the sermon. ²⁹

The purpose of God is to create a holy Christian community, Zwingli contends. That is what God seeks when he appoints some-

²⁶*True and False Religion*, p. 120. "We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost, doth regenerate and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life" (*Belgic Confession*, in *Reformed Confessions*, p. 205).

²⁷*True and False Religion*, pp. 149-150.

²⁸Locher, *Zwingli's Thought*, p. 4.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 18, n. 55.

one as a magistrate. Christian love makes man a good citizen and a good magistrate. The state has everything to gain from the influence of the church, and the latter benefits from the protection of the state. "Since therefore, the spirit of Christ has that which the state particularly needs, nothing more auspicious can come to the state than love," Zwingli states (along with Augustine), "and since the gospel brings this with it, it is evident that the state becomes strong and holy only in case good hearts are united with good laws. No state, therefore, will be happier than that in which also true religion dwells."³⁰ This means that the best magistrate is a Christian; in fact, only a Christian can be a good ruler:

Hence, I declare, quite differently from what our friends hold, that a magistrate cannot even be just and righteous unless he be a Christian. Take away from the magistrate, who is above the fear of man, the fear of God and you make him a tyrant. Infuse into the tyrant the fear of God and of his own accord he will do more freely and faithfully what the law orders than any terror could have caused him to, and out of a tyrant you will make a father on the pattern of Him whom as a result of faith he begins to fear and to serve, namely God.³¹

This integration of gospel, life, and society is typical of the reformed tradition. This ideal was expressed in what John Knox called the most perfect school of Christ at Geneva. It was Martin Bucer's dream for England in his treatise for the young king Edward, *De regno Christi*. In the *Institutes*, John Calvin has stated: "For what great zeal for uprightness, for prudence, gentleness, self-control, and for innocence ought to be required of themselves those who know that they have been ordained ministers of divine justice?"³²

The unique authority and importance of Scriptures for Zwingli, therefore, cannot be overemphasized. It stands at the heart of his theology and his actions. We must remember also that in his sermon on the clarity of Scriptures in 1522, Zwingli had joined certainty with the clarity of the Word, which, for the reformer,

³⁰*True and False Religion*, p. 295.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 296.

³²*Inst.* 4.20.6.

came from the Holy Spirit's conveying of the true meaning of the Word.

3. *Changing Approach in Bible Study*

It is interesting to note that this second dimension—this illumination by the Holy Spirit—is greatly toned down in some of Zwingli's later writings. In the *Treatise on Baptism* (1525), he states: "I ask all believers to read and ponder my words with Christian good-will and charity, not allowing themselves to be so hardened by contentiousness or obstinacy that they will not accept that which they clearly perceive, but obscure by controversy."³³ Zwingli does not here attribute clearly that perception to the Holy Spirit. It could be purely the result of persuasion through the evidence that has been offered. In his work *On the Lord's Supper* (1526), he describes the method that he will follow in dealing with this subject:

The whole question has its source in the misunderstanding of the text: "This is my body." Therefore our first task will be to consider these words in the light of the various misinterpretations and to see what errors result. As our second article we will turn to the Scriptures and the articles of the Creed in order to prove that the text cannot have the meaning which a wresting of the words has given to it. As our third, we will establish out of Scriptures the true and natural sense.³⁴

It is interesting that now Zwingli plans to quote the creed before he turns to the Scriptures exclusively.

Similarly, to Francis I, he states in his "Dedication" to his *Exposition of the Faith* (1531): "For we teach not a single jot which we have not learned from the sacred Scriptures. Nor do we make a single assertion for which we have not the authority of the first doctors of the Church—prophets, apostles, bishops, evangelists and expositors—those ancient fathers who drew more purely from the fountainhead."³⁵ Obviously, Zwingli could have reserved these

³³Zwingli and Bullinger, p. 129.

³⁴Ibid., p. 278. On p. 246 of the same work, Zwingli refers to divine knowledge that a man has "in his own experience."

³⁵"Dedicatory Letter," *True and False Religion*, p. 53.

titles for the writers of the Scriptures; but if he did so, he allowed himself to be extremely ambiguous.

In the sermon on the clarity and certainty of Scriptures, he had tried to formulate certain criteria for determining when the Spirit was speaking.³⁶ First, a Christian must pray for the death of the "old man," who depends so much on his own wisdom. That request for humility and for the capacity to study the Scriptures without preconceived opinion must be accompanied by a special desire for complete teachability. The secret of hearing the Spirit is humility, and Zwingli notes that when the Word speaks to us, it exalts the lowly and humbles the one who trusts in himself. The activity of the Spirit is also marked by an unselfish attitude of seeking the good of others, rather than the vindication of one's own ideas. When the Spirit is present, the Word becomes more precious, and there is an assurance of eternal salvation. The fear of God gives joy rather than sorrow. When these conditions are met, the Holy Spirit speaks.

In his dedicatory epistle in *True and False Religion*, Zwingli had provided another evidence: "This word which we preach today is diametrically opposed to the vices in which we abound. It cannot be denied that it is the Word of God."³⁷

However, he found out that others who claimed the Spirit's illumination came to different conclusions. "Though [the Catabaptists] had not a right understanding of the passage they yet said that they had been taught by the Holy Spirit, and that they must obey God rather than man."³⁸

In the *Institutes*, Calvin assigns to the Spirit the role of sealing the truth on the mind. "Therefore the Spirit, promised to us, has not the task of inventing new and unheard-of revelations, or of forging a new kind of doctrine of the gospel, but of sealing our minds with that very doctrine which is commended by the gospel."³⁹ A little further along, he says: "But if through the Spirit it is really branded upon hearts, if it shows forth Christ, it is the word of life. . . . For by a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together

³⁶"Clarity," *Zwingli and Bullinger*, pp. 93-95.

³⁷*True and False Religion*, pp. 50-51.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 299.

³⁹*Inst.* 1.9.1.

the certainty of his Word and of his Spirit so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our minds when the Spirit, who causes us to contemplate God's face, shines."⁴⁰

That new approach is reflected in the *Second Helvetic Confession*:

We hold that interpretation of the 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 agrees with the rule of faith and love, and contributes much to the glory of God and man's salvation."⁴¹

The direct illumination of the Spirit is no longer mentioned. The emphasis lies on the language, on the knowledge of Scriptures, and on comparison with other texts. That is to say, an historico-literary approach is safer than a pneumatic interpretation. And hence, Zwingli's demand for an educated clergy now takes on an immense significance. To understand truth, one must have the proper training. The tradition of a well-educated ministry is very strong among the Reformed.

Thus, the naive trust that anyone who opened the Bible could depend on the Holy Spirit to arrive at the proper meaning of the text and that all who followed that method would agree had to be abandoned. Zwingli's dream of the "blank mental page" that could register the teaching of the Spirit in complete detachment from one's cultural and spiritual background had to fade. Different people who studied the Word with the same trust in the Spirit came to different conclusions. A more objective method had to be used.

But men continued to hold to that ideal of the Spirit's guidance in interpretation, and to the feeling that they could not disregard the truth they had received. It was a mighty spur for discovering new truth, and led to one of the characteristics of the Reformed family of churches, a more and more complex religious pluralism—a trait that manifested itself especially clearly in England. The

⁴⁰*Inst.* 1.9.3.

⁴¹*Reformed Confessions*, p. 226.

effort was not vain, however, for it was one of the greatest incentives for the spiritual descendants of Zwingli to love the Scripture and to be diligent students of its pages. It was also the root of one of the greatest privileges of modern man in many of the Christian lands—religious freedom.