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Prophets and Grammarians

On the Purpose and Method of Higher Education in Reformation Zurich¹

1 The twofold nature of “prophecy”

On the 28th of January 1532, approximately two months after his appointment as “first pastor” (*antistes*) of the Zurich church, the 27-year-old Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575) delivered a solemn oration in Latin in front of his fellow canons and other city clergy. It was “Karlstag,” the memorial day of emperor Charlemagne, who – according to legend – had founded the Grossmünster chapter, and a learned speech of that sort was part of the yearly celebrations.² Bullinger’s oration appeared subsequently in print in March of the same year, under the title *On the prophetic office*.³

- 1 This article is a revised version of a paper the author delivered at the *Fourteenth Annual REFORC Conference on Early Modern Christianity* (Vienna, May 22–May 24 2025). The author would like to thank Prof. em. John Brewer (California Institute of Technology, Humanities and Social Sciences) for kindly proofreading the text and for his precious suggestions to improve language and style.
- 2 On the “Karlstag” see Thomas *Maissen*, “Unser Herren Tag” zwischen Integrationsritual und Verbot. Die Zürcher Kirchweihe (Kilbi) im 16. Jahrhundert, in: *Zürcher Taschenbuch* 118 (1998), 191–236, here 210f.; Dietrich W. H. *Schwartz*, Chorherren – Karlstagfeiern – Neujahrsblätter. Vortrag am Karlstag 1987 (150 Jahre Gelehrte Gesellschaft in Zürich) im Zunfthaus zur Meisen, in: *MAGZ* 60 (1993), 323–334, here 330–332.
- 3 Heinrich *Bullinger*, *De prophetarum officio, et quomodo digne administrari possit, oratio*, Zurich: Christoph Froschauer the Elder, 1532 (VD 16 B 9667). For a detailed analysis of this treatise see Daniël *Timmerman*, *Heinrich Bullinger on Prophecy and the Prophetic Office* (1523–1538), Göttingen 2015 (RHTh 33), 175–222.

Bullinger uses the term “prophet” to designate the bearers of an ecclesiastical office, i.e. the ordained pastors in the Zurich Reformed church. The young *antistes* dwells upon their duties, their education and their demeanour, pointing by way of conclusion to Huldrych Zwingli, whose memory – as he writes – “we [i.e. in Zurich] venerate with holy gratitude”⁴ and whom Bullinger depicts as the prototype of a faithful pastor.

As one would expect, the main duty of pastors is, according to Bullinger, the preaching of the Word of God, and this is precisely the reason why he labels them as “prophets.” For, although a prophet also can be – or, rather, was in the past – someone who predicts future events, his principal duty at present is the exposition of Holy Scripture.⁵ In other terms, pastors are prophets because they address the people of God in his name by interpreting and applying the Word of God as it is contained in the Bible.

In 1532, another short treatise on “prophecy” was printed in Zurich. It also was based upon a speech, which its author, Theodore Bibliander (1505–1564), had delivered on the 11th of January, two weeks before Bullinger’s Karlstag oration.⁶ Bibliander – who was approximately of the same age as Bullinger – had just been appointed *lector publicus*, as a replacement for Huldrych Zwingli, who had died in battle in October 1531. Bibliander’s assignment was to teach Old Testament exegesis together with his senior colleague, Konrad Pellikan (1478–1556): while Pellikan focused on the Hebrew text, Bibliander dealt – as Zwingli had done too – with the Septuagint version, also expanding on the theological implications of the passage under examination.⁷

4 *Bullinger*, *De prophetae officio*, 35r.

5 *Bullinger*, *De prophetae officio*, 3r.

6 Theodore *Bibliander*, *Oratio ad enarrationem Esaiae*, Zurich: Christoph Froschauer the Elder, 1532 (VD 16 B 5328); see also Christian *Moser*, *Theodor Bibliander (1505–1564). Annotierte Bibliographie der gedruckten Werke*, Zurich 2009 (ZBRG 27), 1f.; 25f. On Bibliander’s life and work see the essays collected in: *Theodor Bibliander (1505–1564). Ein Thurgauer im gelehrten Zürich der Reformationszeit*, ed. Christine Christ-von Wedel, Zurich 2005.

7 An extensive account of Pellikan’s and Bibliander’s teaching activity can be found in: Luca *Baschera*, *Die Anfänge des höheren Bildungswesens in Zürich, 1525–1541*, in: 500 Jahre reformierte Theologie in Zürich. Anfänge und Konsolidierung von Zwingli’s “Hoher Schule” (1525–1601), ed. Jan-Andrea Bernhard et al., Zurich 2025, 41–104, here 57–73.

Bibliander's first lecture – which can be considered as the young professor's inaugural address – was meant to introduce a course on the book of Isaiah.⁸ However, only the last four pages are dedicated to a discussion of this specific biblical book.⁹ Before that, Bibliander dwells extensively on matters of more general concern, such as the dignity of Holy Scripture, the principles that should guide its interpretation, and the proper way to study theology. Furthermore, as Bullinger was to do a fortnight later, Bibliander offers comments on the nature of “prophecy” in general.

Fundamentally, Bibliander regards “prophecy” and “theology” as synonyms¹⁰ and defines both as the “proper way of thinking about God and his works and of talking appropriately, piously and sincerely about them.”¹¹ This, moreover, can happen either because of special revelations or on the basis of Holy Scripture. Finally, among the prophets that draw upon Holy Scripture, Bibliander distinguishes between those who instruct others in piety and those who are recipients of such instruction.¹² So, according to Bibliander, there are three kinds of prophets: those who are directly inspired by God, those who study the Scriptures, and those who not only study them but instruct others on their basis too. Unsurprisingly, it is this last group that deserves “primacy.” Bibliander even calls these prophets-instructors “mystes” (i.e. initiate) as well as “interpreters and heralds of God's glorious majesty.”¹³

Although Bibliander does not refer explicitly to himself as a “prophet” it is quite evident from the context in which he delivered his speech that he conceived of his own teaching duties as a kind of “prophecy” in the latter sense mentioned above. This is confirmed by the fact that

8 For a detailed analysis of Bibliander's lecture see Bruce *Gordon*, “Christo testimonium reddunt omnes scripturae.” Theodor Bibliander's Oration on Isaiah (1532) and Commentary on Nahum, in: *Shaping the Bible in the Reformation. Books, Scholars and Their Readers in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bruce Gordon and Matthew McLean, Leiden/Boston 2012 (Library of the Written Word 20), 107–141, here 113–122.

9 *Bibliander*, Oratio, 30v–32r.

10 *Bibliander*, Oratio, 11r; 29v.

11 *Bibliander*, Oratio, 29v: “[...] prophetiam seu theologiam videri modum rationemque tum recte sentiendi, tum rite, sancte syncereque de deo et eius operibus disserendi”

12 *Bibliander*, Oratio, 29v–30r.

13 *Bibliander*, Oratio, 16r: “Primarii vero [sc. prophetae] et velut antesignani sunt mystae illi ac interpretes internunciique amplissimae dei maiestatis, [...] doctores et oratores sacri.”

Bullinger, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, explicitly designates Bibliander's public lectures as "prophecy."¹⁴ At the same time, however, he emphasizes that the lectures are "rather arcane" (*abstrusior*) in comparison to sermons.¹⁵

It is safe to conclude, then, that for both Bullinger and Bibliander "prophecy" meant first and foremost the interpretation of Scripture. In this, they aligned themselves with a long tradition reaching via Zwingli¹⁶ and Erasmus¹⁷ all the way back to Origen.¹⁸ Furthermore, they distinguished between two kinds of prophecy: one is popular, the other scholarly. What both have in common is their general purpose, i.e. to instruct the hearers in God's truth. What distinguishes them, is their addressees and method: preaching was done in the vernacular and aimed at the "populace" (*populus promiscuus*),¹⁹ whereas the public lectures were held

14 Heinrich Bullinger, In priorem Pauli ad Corinthios epistolam [...] commentarius, in: id., *Kommentare zu den neutestamentlichen Briefen. Röm – 1Kor – 2Kor*, ed. Luca Baschera, Zurich 2012 (Heinrich Bullinger Werke 3/6), 229–464, here 419,32f. [on 1Cor 14:26–29].

15 Bullinger, In priorem ad Corinthios, 419,3.

16 Huldrych Zwingli, In priorem ad Corinthios annotationes, ed. Max Lienhard and Daniel Bolliger, in: *Huldreich Zwinglis sämtliche Werke [Z]*, vol. 21, Zurich 2013, 101–186, here 170,15f. [on 1Cor 14:3]: "Prophetare ergo, id est sensum scripturarum populo aperire, insignius quiddam est et magis utile; nam hoc aedificat"; see also *id.*, *Complationis Isaiae prophetae foetura prima*, ed. Oskar Farner, in: *Z*, vol. 14, Zurich 1959, 1–412, here 104,30–35; *id.*, *Ein vorred in die propheten*, ed. Edwin Künzli, in: *Z*, vol. 6/2, Zurich 1982, 283–312, here 295,26–32; *id.*, *Von dem Predigamt*, ed. Georg Finsler, in: *Z*, vol. 4, Leipzig 1927, 382–433, here 395,24f.

17 Desiderius Erasmus, In epistolam ad Corinthios priorem annotationes, ed. M. L. van Poll-van de Lisdonk, Amsterdam et al. 2003 (*Omnia opera Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami [ASD] 6/8*), 39–324, here 266,985f. [on 1Cor 14:1]: "Hoc loco Paulus prophetiam vocat non praedictionem futurorum, sed interpretationem diuinæ scripturae"; *id.*, *Ecclesiastes sive de ratione concionandi*, 2 vols., ed. Jacques Chomarat, Amsterdam et al. 1991/1994 (*ASD 5/4f.*), here vol. 1, 106,530–533: "[...] nam prophetas appello, qui explanant arcanae Scripturae mysteria, et hoc prophetiae genus inter praecipua dona Spiritus commemorat Apostolus, sed requirit industriam nostram, quo per illam non minus sed occultius in nobis operetur."

18 Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, ed. Erich Klostermann, Leipzig 1933 (*GCS 38*), 107,3f. [no. 49]: "[...] docere autem est prophetare"; *id.*, *Commentarii in epistolam ad Romanos*, ed. Theresia Heither, 6 vols., Freiburg i. Br. et al. 1990–1999 (*FC 2/1–6*), here vol. 5, 60,14–16 [on Rom 12:6–8]: "Prophetia ergo dicitur apud Paulum, cum quis loquitur hominibus ad aedificationem et cum loquitur ad exhortationem et consolationem."

19 Bullinger, In priorem ad Corinthios, 420,9 [on 1Cor 14:26–29].

in Latin and aimed at the learned or at students preparing to become preachers themselves. Moreover, in the public lectures the biblical texts were dealt with in depth, drawing on the Hebrew and Greek versions and applying the methods of humanistic scholarship, as these were propagated by Erasmus and others.

But what did this “method” amount to, exactly? As we will presently see, humanists such as Erasmus did basically nothing else than retrieving the old art of “higher grammar” or *enarratio auctorum*, as it had been developed in late antiquity and was widely applied by the Church Fathers to the study of the Bible. Before we come to this, however, it is necessary to dwell a bit longer on the Zurich *lectiones publicae* and their purpose.

2 The Zurich “public lectures:” shape and purpose

From 1532 to 1556, Theodore Bibliander taught Old Testament alongside Konrad Pellikan every morning, from Monday to Thursday as well as on Saturdays. As had been the case from the very beginning, back in June 1525, the lectures were held between 7 and 8 a.m. during Spring, Summer and Fall, whereas in Winter they took place one hour later.²⁰ By the time Bibliander began teaching, however, two more daily lectures had become a permanent feature of the higher education curriculum in Zurich. For since 1526 Johann Jakob Ammann (1500–1573) and Rudolf Collinus (1499–1578) lectured too, the former teaching dialectic and rhetoric from noon to 1 p.m., the latter instructing his students in Greek poetics from 4 to 5 p.m.²¹ We see, then, that when Bibliander started to teach and therefore to act as a “scholarly prophet,” what he did was only one aspect – although in a sense the most important one – of a complex higher education program.

Considered as a whole, the *lectiones* had a common goal: preparing young boys to become part of the ecclesiastical and, more broadly, cultural elite in Zurich. At the same time, it is clear that the biblical lecture in the morning had another, higher quality than the afternoon lectures.

²⁰ *Baschera*, Anfänge, 51f.

²¹ For further details on Ammann’s and Collinus’ career and teaching activity see *Baschera*, Anfänge, 76–86.

What Ammann and Collinus did with their students was the thorough investigation of classical – mostly Pagan – sources such as Cicero, Quintilian, Aristotle or Demosthenes. The aim was for the students to acquire a comprehensive knowledge of dialectic, rhetoric and poetics, also deepening their linguistic skills in Latin and Greek. This, in turn, should not only benefit the exegetical work they did in Pellikan's and Bibliander's morning lecture. Rather, the goal was also to enable students to express themselves elegantly and effectively in speech and writing, both in the classical languages and in German. So, it is fair to say that the two afternoon lectures were primarily concerned with imparting particular skills of a rather technical nature.

The study of Scripture in the morning, on the contrary, was not just about acquiring skills or knowledge. Rather, the general conviction was that by interpreting Holy Scripture the participants were also exposed to its spiritual and existential impact. The students should not only learn to understand with their mind what the Bible says, but also be changed by what they understood. That this was the intention of the morning lectures, is confirmed by the wording of the prayer used to introduce them and which most probably had been composed by Zwingli:

“Almighty, eternal and merciful God, whose Word is a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our paths; open and enlighten our minds [*mentes nostras*], that we may know [*intelligamus*] your mysteries in a pure and holy way, and be transformed into what we have rightly known [*et in illud, quod recte intellexerimus, transformemur*], so that we may in no wise displease your majesty. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.”²²

The connection between understanding and spiritual transformation reminds one immediately of Erasmus. Famously, the Dutchman had called his readers to devote themselves to studying the Bible with the sole aim

22 Huldrych Zwingli, Eröffnungsgebet bei der “Prophezei,” ed. Georg Finsler, in: Z, vol. 4, 365,1–6: “Omnipotens sempiterna et misericors deus, cuius verbum est lucerna pedibus nostris et lumen semitarum nostrarum [cf. Ps 119:105], aperi et illumina mentes nostras, ut oracula tua pure et sancte intelligamus et in illud, quod recte intellexerimus, transformemur, quo maiestati tuae nulla ex parte displiceamus, per Jesum Christum, dominum nostrum.”

“that you [...] may be transformed [*transformeris*] into what you are learning [*discis*].”²³ The presence of such Erasmian overtones in Zwingli’s prayer is hardly surprising, if one considers how widely the Dutchman’s work and ideas were received in Reformed Zurich.²⁴ This applies not least to the central concept of *philosophia Christi* as a way of life encompassing true belief (*doctrina*) and holy demeanour (*vita*), the promotion and cultivation of which formed the overarching goal of the whole Reformation project in Zurich.²⁵

Thus, to summarize, the big difference between the morning lectures, on one hand, and those in the afternoon, on the other, pertains to their specific purposes: whereas the afternoon lectures wished only to *inform* the students, the morning lectures were meant to be *formative* in a more comprehensive and spiritually relevant sense.

3 On “grammar”

However, there is in fact one feature that all three lectures share: the teaching method. For in each of them texts regarded as authoritative were read and expounded. Thus, although the subject matter and – as a consequence – the purpose of teaching differed widely, what happened in the classroom was always *exegesis*. This may come at first glance as a surprise, but the reasons why it was so are quite obvious. In order to understand this, a short excursus is necessary.

Exegesis was in late antiquity the core business of the “grammarians” – not in the sense of elementary language teachers, but of experts in

23 Desiderius *Erasmus*, *A System or Method of Arriving by a Short Cut at True Theology*, in: *The New Testament Scholarship of Erasmus. An Introduction with Erasmus’ Prefaces and Ancillary Writings*, ed. Robert D. Sider, Toronto et al. 2019 (CWE 41), 488–713, here 494.

24 Cf. Christine *Christ-von Wedel*, *Erasmus und die Zürcher Reformatoren. Huldrych Zwingli, Leo Jud, Konrad Pellikan, Heinrich Bullinger und Theodor Bibliander*, in: *Erasmus in Zürich. Eine verschwiegene Autorität*, ed. Christine Christ-von Wedel and Urs B. Leu, Zurich 2007, 77–165.

25 Cf. Luca *Baschera*, *In der “Schule göttlicher Weisheit.” Zu Heinrich Bullingers Horizontbestimmung der biblischen Exegese*, in: *Zwingli*, 50 (2023), 55–108.

classical, primarily literary texts.²⁶ The examination of the texts of great writers, such as Homer, was again carried out in four steps:²⁷

- 1 Reading aloud to practise correct accentuation and intonation (*lectio*).
- 2 If necessary, improvement and correction of the existing – handwritten – copy (*emendatio*).
- 3 Interpretation, with regard to both the wording and the content of the text and with the inclusion of background information (*enarratio*).
- 4 Evaluation of what has been read, in stylistic and other respects (*iudicium*).

To a certain extent, the grammarian's practice of interpretation can be compared with modern philology. However, those who read and interpreted, say, Homer or Virgil in late antiquity, were always interested in learning something "for life" too. Homer and the other classics were not deemed just as "belles lettres." Rather, they contained wisdom cast in narrative form that concerned all possible aspects of life: politics, personal relationships, ethics and even metaphysics.²⁸

In addition, the grammarian's method of interpretation – with its four steps – was also applied to other types of authoritative texts, be they philosophical, medical, rhetorical, or related to other branches of knowl-

26 Raffaella Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind. Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, Princeton/Oxford 2001, 185–188; 205–210; Henri Irenée Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, transl. George Lamb, London/New York 1956, 166–169; 274f.; Heinz Schreckenberg, "Exegese I (heidnisch, Griechen u. Römer)," in: RAC, vol. 6, Stuttgart 1966, 1174–1194, here 1174.

27 Marrou, *History*, 165; Frances M. Young, *The Rhetorical Schools and Their Influence on Patristic Exegesis*, in: *The Making of Orthodoxy. Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, ed. Rowan Williams, Cambridge 1989, 182–199, here 187; Francis H. Colson, *The Grammatical Chapters in Quintilian I. 4–8*, in: *CQ* 8/1 (1914), 33–47, here 34; 41.

28 Cf. Young, *The Rhetorical Schools*, 188: "[...] the study of literature critically meant the discernment of moral good as much as aesthetic good"; Raffaella Cribiore, *Listening to the Philosophers. Notes on Notes*, Ithaca, NY 2024, 5: "Texts were supposed to produce some transformation in young men's lives, and spiritual benefit had to derive from exegesis."

edge. Thus, Plato was interpreted in the Academy, Aristotle in the Peripatos, Chrysippus among the Stoics, while the physicians interpreted Hippocrates and the rhetoricians Demosthenes. No matter what one wanted to learn, one always learned it via exegesis, i.e. through reading and interpreting particular texts according to the rules of “higher grammar.”²⁹

This being the general model of education at the time, it is hardly surprising that it was applied by early Christians in their own schools too. At the same time, there were some differences. A crucial one concerned, quite obviously, the subject matter. For what Origen and others interpreted with their students, was not Pagan authors but Holy Scripture, i.e. those writings that – alone – were considered by Christians to be ultimately authoritative. However, the way in which the texts were interpreted was the same as in all other schools: exactly the same techniques were applied that were used in every field of knowledge for understanding all sorts of authoritative writings.³⁰ And here too, of course, it was not a matter of mere “philology” as we understand it today, but of allowing oneself to be shaped, even reshaped, by the understanding of the Bible.³¹

Although the practice of learning by exegesis remained intact during the so-called Middle Ages, the kind of texts that were interpreted as well as the way in which that happened changed dramatically, especially after the twelfth century. In the field of theology, Holy Scripture lost its monopoly, being often replaced in the classroom by Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*,³² while profane advanced grammar no longer dealt with the

29 Marrou, *History*, 208; Schreckenberg, “Exegese I,” 1183–1188.

30 Peter W. Martens, *Origen and Scripture. The Contours of the Exegetical Life*, Oxford 2012 (Oxford Early Christian Studies), 42–66; Bernhard Neuschäfer, *Origenes als Philologe*, Basel 1987 (SBA 18/1–2), esp. 287–292; Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, Cambridge 1997, 82–89; 292.

31 Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 299: “For the whole enterprise [sc. interpreting scriptures in commentaries and homilies] embraced the concerns we tend to separate out into scholarship, theology, *praxis* and spirituality. The purpose of biblical exegesis, implicit and explicit, was to form the practice and belief of Christian people, individually and collectively?”

32 Jan-Hendryk de Boer, *Kommentar*, in: *Universitäre Gelehrtenkultur vom 13.–16. Jahrhundert. Ein interdisziplinäres Quellen- und Methodenhandbuch*, ed. id. et al., Stuttgart 2018, 265–318, here 275; Sita Steckel, *Theologische Lehrwerke*, in: De Boer et al. (ed.), *Universitäre Gelehrtenkultur*, 319–336, here 322f.

classics and acquired instead the features of a philosophical discipline (*grammatica speculativa*).³³

It was only in the 14th century that a retrieval of the late antique model of grammar set in, gaining momentum especially in the 15th and 16th century. It was the time when humanists such as Francesco Filelfo (1398–1481), Cristoforo Landino (1424–1498) and Angelo Poliziano (1454–1494) began studying classical authors again and publishing commentaries in which they applied the four-step method sketched above.³⁴ By doing this, moreover, they were convinced that they were not just reviving a scholarly practice. In their eyes, being a “grammarian” was to do more with an overall intellectual attitude than with a discipline or a method.³⁵ For – as Poliziano wrote – the task of grammarians is to “examine and explain in detail every category of writers – poets, historians, orators, philosophers, medical doctors, and jurisconsults.” “Our age,” he continues, “knowing little about antiquity, has fenced the grammarians in, within an exceedingly small circle. But among the ancients, once, this class of men had so much authority that grammarians alone were the censors and critics of all writers.”³⁶

It is hardly a coincidence that Poliziano did not count either theologians or the Bible among the authors and works that should be examined according to the rules of ancient grammar. How controversial such a claim could be at the time, became evident when Erasmus and his fellow “Bible humanists” entered the stage.³⁷ It is crucial to recall, however, that

33 Peter *Schulthess*, *Grammatik*, in: *Die Philosophie des Mittelalters*, vol. 4/2, ed. Alexander Brungs et al., Basel 2017 (Ueberweg), 1262–1301, here 1283–1301.

34 Paul F. *Grendler*, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance*, Baltimore MD/London 2002, 237f.

35 Francesco *Caruso*, *On the Shoulders of Grammatica*. John of Salisbury’s *Metalogicon* and Poliziano’s *Lamia*, in: *Angelo Poliziano’s Lamia*. Text, Translation, and Introductory Studies, ed. Christopher S. Celenza, Leiden/Boston 2010 (BSIH 189), 47–94, here 93.

36 Angelo *Poliziano*, *Praelectio in Priora Aristotelis Analytica*, in: Celenza (ed.), *Angelo Poliziano’s Lamia*, 194–253, here 245 [no. 71] (the original reads “grammatici,” which the translator in the edition used here rendered as “philologists.” Since it is clear that Poliziano is referring to ancient grammarians, we preferred to employ the latter term).

37 Erika *Rummel*, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation*, Cambridge/London 1995, esp. 96–125; *ead.*, *Biblical Humanism*, in: *Basel 1516. Erasmus’ Edition of the New Testament*, ed. Martin Wallraff et al., Tübingen 2016 (SMHR 91), 27–42.

Erasmus did not want grammarians – i.e. students of classics – to sit, as it were, in judgment upon Holy Scripture or sacred doctrine. What he wanted was rather for theology to become once again what it had been at the time of the Church Fathers: the pursuit of *philosophia Christi*, i.e. of the only true wisdom, as it was taught by Christ and his Apostles and reached the following generations first and foremost through the Scriptures. Therefore, it was mandatory to return to the Bible as the sole ultimate source of Christian truth and to study it anew as the Fathers had done, i.e. by applying the rules of late antique grammar.³⁸

Against this background it becomes apparent why the Zurich public lectures adopted exegesis as their basic teaching method. Zurich did not have a university and since a Papal or imperial privilege was needed in order to found one in the first place, the rupture ensuing from the Reformation prevented such a foundation. However, it is doubtful that the Zurich Reformers would have wanted to found a university, even if the occasion would have presented itself. For they were, to say the least, skeptical about the kind of theology and, more generally, of the education universities of their time offered.³⁹ Rather, they were guided by a different, twofold model. On one hand, what gave them inspiration was the kind of higher education that Johann Jakob Ammann and Rudolf Collinus had enjoyed in their youth, in Milan – under Ludovico Ricchieri and others – and in Vienna, under Joachim Vadian: the thorough study of classical sources according to humanistic standards.⁴⁰ On the other hand, when it came to the study of theology, they applied Erasmian ideas. Not only did they put at its center the study of the Bible in the original languages, but understood theology as something more than a merely intellectual exercise. Theology was for them, as for Erasmus, the practice of *philosophia Christi*, i.e. a pursuit that was indeed scholarly in nature,

38 James D. Tracy, *Erasmus of the Low Countries*, Berkeley CA et al. 1996, 104–115; Eugene F. Rice Jr., *Saint Jerome in the Renaissance*, Baltimore MD/London 1985 (The Johns Hopkins Symposia in Comparative History), 116–136; John C. Olin, *Erasmus and Saint Jerome*, in: *Thought* 54/214 (1979), 313–321.

39 Cf. Huldrych Zwingli, *De vera et falsa religione commentarius*, ed. Walter Köhler, in: *Z*, vol. 3, Leipzig 1914, 628–912, here 634,34–635,5; Heinrich Bullinger, *De scripturae sanctae autoritate deque episcoporum institutione et functione*, ed. Emidio Campi and Philipp Wälchli, Zurich 2009 (Heinrich Bullinger Werke 3/4), 222,14–223,13.

40 *Baschera*, Anfänge, 76–78.

but should also have a deep transformative effect at the existential and spiritual level.⁴¹

4 God's grammarians

It has been often pointed out that Theodore Bibliander was keen to refer to himself as “grammarian.”⁴² By now, it should be clear that this must be regarded neither as a gentle understatement nor as a relativization of his role as teacher of theology. Rather, it amounted to an avowal. Bibliander was consciously placing himself in continuity with a specific tradition: the tradition of Bible humanism. This, in turn, sought to retrieve the patristic model of doing theology first and foremost in an exegetical mode, applying the rules of ancient “higher grammar.”

Furthermore, Bibliander's self-styling as “grammarian” is not at variance with Bullinger calling him a “prophet” either. For prophets are God's harbingers. They address the people of God in his name in order to deliver his Word to them. Moreover – as the Church Fathers, but also Erasmus, Zwingli and Bullinger knew –, this is accomplished not least by interpreting God's Word as it is embodied in the words of Scripture. Whoever expounds the Scriptures, then, deserves to be called a prophet, regardless of whether he does that as a preacher in an ecclesial context or as a teacher in the classroom.

Thus, when Bibliander engaged with his students in the scholarly study of Scripture, he was, according to this view, acting as a prophet. At the same time, he definitely was a grammarian, since he applied the methods of late antique grammar to the study of the Bible. And finally,

41 Cf. *Baschera*, *Anfänge*, 99f.

42 Christine *Christ-von Wedel*, *Die biblisch-exegetische Theologie Theodor Biblianders*, in: ead. (ed.), *Theodor Bibliander (1505–1564)*, 125–138; Emil *Egli*, *Biblianders Leben und Schriften*, in: id., *Analecta reformatoria*, vol. 2, Zurich 1901, 1–144, here 39; 71. As for Bibliander's statements to this effect, cf. Theodore *Bibliander*, *De monarchia totius orbis suprema, legitima et sempiterna* [ca. 1553], in: Zentralbibliothek Zürich, Ms Car I 92, 1r–16v, here 13r: “[...] grammatisa sum et ponderator verborum et distringens symcomoros variae lectionis, tum sermonis tum rerum notitiam consecrando”; *id.*, *De fatis monarchiae Romanae somnium vaticinium Esdrae prophetae*, Basel: Johannes Oporinus, 1553 (VD 16 B 5323), β2v: “[...] neque propheta sum aut filius prophetae, ut Amos dicebat. Sed professoris linguarum et grammatici munus in ecclesia Christi sortitus.”

since he and his fellow Zurichers conceived of that activity as something much vaster than a mere intellectual exercise, they all were grammarians of a special kind. Just as prophets are no mere harbingers, but God's harbingers, Bibliander and his fellow scholarly prophets were not just grammarians, but God's grammarians.

Abstract: After years of preparation, in June 1525 Zwingli's plan could finally come to fruition: from then on learned scholars would give daily public and free lectures in Latin on theology, rhetoric, dialectic and poetics. This marked the beginning of the history of higher education in Zurich, which was due to culminate in the foundation of the University of Zurich three centuries later. But what was Zwingli's intention in giving birth to those public lectures? Which models inspired him and how should his purposes be fleshed out in the classroom? The article addresses these questions by pointing to the essential connection that, according to the Zurich Reformers, linked prophecy and grammar together.

Keywords: Reformation; higher education; prophecy; grammar; Bible humanism; Zurich