

Women in Zwingli's World

by EDWARD J. FURCHA

Traditional Zwingli scholarship has been fairly unanimous in the assumption that women did not play a significant role in Zwingli's life. The records are strangely silent on the matter. Neither his writings nor his activities suggest that Zwingli was greatly involved with women and their specific concerns. In fact, one of the archivists of the Zurich Staatsarchiv expressed surprise some years ago when I asked for catalogue entries under the subject heading «women in Zwingli's world».

Nonetheless, the possibility of gaining new insights into the role women played in Zwingli's world led us to re-examine a number of available sources. Would they yield the desired information and reveal the reformer's attitude toward women – his wife, Anna Reinhart, his mother, his sisters, his daughters or female acquaintances? What was Zwingli's relationship with women in his capacity as pastor and leader of ecclesiastical reforms in Zurich between 1519 and 1531?

Certain rumours seem to have persisted among his contemporaries that in his youth, at least, Zwingli had an eye for women and did not adhere to vows of celibacy as strictly as he might have. However, corroboration for these occasional allusions has not been readily available.

Some years ago, *Edwin Künzli* published an article on «Der Mann bei Zwingli»¹ in which the author demonstrated Zwingli's appeal to and his general success in dealing with men. Was the reformer equally successful with women? Could he offer them spiritual counsel? How did women respond to him?

Although one might wish to speculate on his success with women as priest and pastor, or as husband and father, history cannot simply be rewritten in this fashion. Zwingli challenged many of the existing socio-political structures and showed great sensitivity in response to some of the burning problems of the day. Yet, one cannot confidently deduce from this general observation what might have been his attitude to women, since he seems to have said little on the matter.

His extant correspondence contains no more than seven letters addressed to him by six female correspondents. No reply from the reformer to any of these women has come down to us, though one of Zwingli's letters of 22 April 1523 to Margareta Fehr of Einsiedeln has survived in manuscript form². It is quite a remarkable letter to a woman who appears to have been somewhat of a busy-body and a scold and may have suffered from depressions over the state of things. Zwingli's tone is pastoral, yet pointed when he suggests that she might allow some of the tranquility that comes from being grounded in Scripture to govern her own «short» life. She would then show forth to others how much «calmer and sounder

¹ *Edwin Künzli*, *Der Mann bei Zwingli*, in: *Zwingliana* XI/6, 1961/2, 351-371.

² *Z VIII*, no. 300, p. 71-73.

Christians are than unbelievers.» From Zwingli's comments to her we also learn of the high esteem he had of marriage. He assures Margareta that nothing in Scripture prohibits a married priest from serving communion to his wife and suggests to her that regret over envy, bitterness, quarrelsomeness and anger would be more appropriate than worries about regulations made by human beings. He does not omit, however, to compliment her on her eagerness to learn more about the faith and on her diligent reading (presumably of the Scriptures and of some of the booklets he had written).

The only other known letter from Zwingli addressed to a woman, is a short note to his wife Anna; it tells us little about Zwingli or Anna.

Of the seven letters to Zwingli mentioned above, the earliest was from Margaretha von Wattenwyl, dated 14 March 1523³. A joint letter from Margaretha and her sister Katherine to Zwingli was written probably around 1524/25⁴ when both were still residents of a cloister of Claires in Königsfelden. At the time of writing the formerly strict rule of the cloister had been relaxed sufficiently so that their convent functioned in part as a tourist home for sisters on their way to becoming laicized. Indeed, both women seemed ready themselves to give up cloistered life for matrimony. Margaretha became engaged to Lucius Tschärner of Chur while she was still in the cloister, probably as a result of Zwingli's mediation. In August of 1525, Tschärner declared to the Council of Berne his intention to marry her and by 31 March 1526 the couple was expecting a child, as may be concluded from a thank-you letter to Zwingli in which Tschärner asked the Zurich pastor to find him a mature woman who might manage the household during Margaretha's confinement. He acknowledged his unfamiliarity with kitchen duties⁵.

Margaretha's sister Katherine also left the cloistered life to marry the noble-born Junker Jörg May of Berne. Theirs seems to have been a lengthy union; she is reported to have died in 1576 after several years of widowhood.

The third female correspondent was Barbara Trüllerey, abbess of the cloister Schänis, near Glarus. Her letter is dated 24 February 1524⁶. Barbara came from a patrician family of Schaffhausen and Aarau and was a cousin of Vadianus, the reformer of St. Gallen. Zwingli might have been acquainted with her ever since his years in the parish of Glarus, though we know nothing specific about their relationship at that time.

In her short letter she urges Zwingli to provide spiritual counsel for a young relative and she assures him that she would secure every possible material help so that the boy might grow up to become a solid citizen. In passing, the abbess asks Zwingli to give her an exposition of Matthew 20,16, «The last will be first and the

³ Z VIII, no. 289, p. 49f.

⁴ Z VIII, no. 357, p. 284f.

⁵ *M. Thomann*, Vier Frauenbriefe an Zwingli aus den Jahren 1523-26, ein Beitrag zur Charakteristik des Reformators, in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 1 January 1925, no. 1, 4, 8 [abbr.: Thomann, Frauenbriefe]. Z VIII, no. 357, p. 284 n. 1.

⁶ Z VIII, no. 328, p. 154f.

first will be last», and of 22,14, «Many are called, but few are chosen». She implores him to pray for her that she might be affirmed in the «holy gospel». In the epistolary address she refers to Zwingli as «preacher of the holy word of God in the praiseworthy city of Zurich».

What we know about Barbara Nithart, the fourth correspondent, is based almost exclusively on her letter of 13 September 1526⁷. She seems to have been a widow at the time, concerned with her student son who was in need of money. Zwingli is asked to assure the son's continued diligence and application to studies, without which the family foundation might stop supporting the young man. Though her intended meaning is not always clear to the modern reader, the tone of the letter would suggest that Barbara Nithart was not too pleased with the prospect of an idle nineteen-year old son. Rather than encourage idleness, she herself would withdraw any financial support and even «disown» her son. How Zwingli responded to this rather uncompromising stance of a concerned mother, and what he might have done to keep the young man on the straight and narrow path to becoming educated are not known. It would seem, however, that the student turned out all right since his name appears between 1538 and 1542 among the members of the Lesser Council of Constance⁸.

The short note by Zwingli to his wife Anna Reinhart is dated Berne, 11 January 1528⁹. The letter is devoid of any «private» matter. It contains no reference to their domestic situation. The few words of comfort expressed in the letter are rather conventional and allow for no conclusions about Zwingli's relationship to his wife. The only interesting point in the letter is Zwingli's request to have his work coat sent to him.

Three of the extant letters from female correspondents were written during the last two years of the reformer's life. One is a short note from a Margaretha Züst written late in 1529 after Zwingli's return from the Marburg Colloquy¹⁰. The writer asks Zwingli to resume oversight of her son and to inform her by return messenger of how the boy was faring. Zwingli seems to have known her through one of her relatives, the school teacher Rellikan.

Barbara Thormann, widow of the prominent Bernese guild master John von Weingarten, corresponded with Zwingli in the years 1530/31. Two of these letters have survived¹¹. Much of what we know of her belongs to the realm of probability. Because she was related, through her marriage, to Benedict of Weingarten of Aarberg, Canton Berne, who served as a member of the Great Council of Berne in 1488 and whose brother Hans, Landvogt of Erlach, was a committed supporter of

⁷ Z VIII, no. 526, p. 711-713.

⁸ Thomann, Frauenbriefe.

⁹ Z IX, no. 682, p. 346f; no. 683, p. 349, n. 9. Cf. also: *Rudolf Steck*, Ursula Tremp, Zwinglis Base, in: *Zwingliana* IV/2, 1921/2, p. 46.

¹⁰ Z X, no. 936, p. 340.

¹¹ Z XI, no. 1153, p. 291f; no. 1268, p. 597.

Zwingli, the latter would probably have known her and her sons¹². Her two letters concern themselves with the well-being of her step son (John Steiger), and his slightly younger half-brother George von Weingarten, whom the mother hopes to be able to apprentice, and to place in boarding, respectively. The second letter of 30 August 1531, suggests that the arrangement for the elder of the two was successfully made, while the second, at the time of writing, had not been appropriately settled.

Barbara Thornmann's request and some of the other letters we referred to clearly suggest that Zwingli extended his pastoral concern beyond preaching, theological disputes and city politics to such mundane matters as «acting like a father» to fatherless boys. While such tasks placed no financial stress on the Zwingli household, they required time and probably some delicate negotiations.

Although the above letters offer refreshing insights into Zwingli's concern for very mundane matters, they give few, if any, clues to his attitude towards women. Whether his wife Anna played any part in the negotiations and «care» of the boys commended to his care is not apparent from the extant correspondence.

Since only two Zwingli letters to women have survived, we cannot comment on how much of the appreciation of learned women he shared with contemporary humanists. While theirs was a highly positive, not to say supportive, attitude toward noble-born and educated women, Zwingli's extant writings reveal little of his personal opinion on the matter.

In fact, apart from a sermon on the Blessed Virgin Mary (17 September 1522) Zwingli makes few comments on womankind. And this sermon cannot serve as a gauge of his views on women since it was obviously intended to show his orthodoxy. It was dedicated to his brothers in Wildhaus whose own orthodoxy was being questioned because of Zwingli's alleged heresy. In the sermon he sought to dispel any doubt about his devotion to Mary by asserting that her specific merit lay in the fact that she «gave birth to the redeemer of the world». He leaves no doubt that no greater honour can be given her than «knowing him for what he is».

I am not aware of any other sermon material by the reformer in which Zwingli touches on the virtues or vices of women. He says nothing on the training of young girls or even on how to prepare young women for Christian marriage. Would he have written a different «Instruction to the Young» had Anna Reinhart's eldest child from her first marriage been a girl? Zwingli has no word of advice to the daughters of Anna's first marriage nor to the two daughters born to Anna and himself.

We know, of course, that Zwingli was not unaware of women. He took an aggressive position against enforced celibacy. By his own admission he found it difficult to live without maintaining some intimacy with a woman, though we know of no paternity suit against him¹³. However, whether he concerned himself with

¹² Cf. Die Berner-Chronik des Valerius Anshelm, 6 vols., Bern 1884-1901, vol. 6, index: Weingarten.

¹³ Cf. Zwingli's letter to Henry Utinger, 5 December 1518, in: Z VII, no. 48, p. 110-113.

women beyond the traditional «Kinder, Kirche, Küche» as devout and worthy helpmeets of men and as integral to God's created order of things, remains open to conjecture. He appears to have been comfortable with prevalent notions regarding the respective role of men and women as long as these appeared firmly grounded in Scripture and were underscored by good Patristic tradition.

We may assume then that he was motivated to marry Anna Reinhart – the allegedly very attractive widow of Gerold Meyer von Knonau and daughter of a Zurich innkeeper and his wife – in order to realize some of the above purposes for men and women. When he «wedded» Anna «secretly» in early 1522, she had been widowed for about five years and was the mother of three children. The public blessing of their marriage took place in 1524, shortly before their first child was born. Four children in all were born to them during the seven years of their marriage. Regula (1524-64), the eldest, became the wife of Rudolph Gwalter, minister at St. Peter's and antistes of the Zurich church after Bullinger's death (their daughter Anna, incidentally, later married Henry Bullinger, Jr.). Regula and Anna are immortalized in a rather idyllic portrait by Hans Asper, painted when the mother was about twenty-five and the daughter about seven.

Few Zwingli biographers have touched on his family life. *Oskar Farner*¹⁴ is one of the few. He devotes the entire seventh chapter to the subject. *Gottfried W. Locher*¹⁵, the doyen of contemporary Zwingli scholars, on the other hand, does not discuss Zwingli's attitude to women.

While undue preoccupation with a topic of relative insignificance in Zwingli's own world could falsify our assessment of the reformer, it is possible that new insights might be gained, and forgotten sources reassessed, in the attempt to see this familiar person in a new constellation.

Our reading of the pertinent material allows us to conclude with some certainty that Zwingli was not a feminist. His view of women seemed more in line with traditional views than with those of some of the humanists of his day. He echoed St. Paul in stating that the «greatest adornment of a woman is the ability to keep silent»¹⁶ and he appeared somewhat arbitrary when he wrote that in Scripture prophecy means «listening to sermons»¹⁷.

Though he denounced enforced celibacy and chose marriage for himself, he also held that «if we could do without wives, we would avoid great pain»¹⁸. His own ambivalence is probably most clearly stated in a comment on Mark 10: «To marry a woman is dangerous – to remain single is equally dangerous»¹⁹. On the

¹⁴ *Oskar Farner*, *Huldrych Zwingli, der Schweizerische Reformator*, Emmishofen 1917.

¹⁵ *Gottfried Wilhelm Locher*, *Huldrych Zwingli in neuer Sicht, zehn Beiträge zur Theologie der Zürcher Reformation*, Zürich 1969.

¹⁶ Z IV 153.

¹⁷ Z IV 414f.

¹⁸ Z V 12; Z III 17f.

¹⁹ *Aus Zwinglis Predigten zu Matthäus, Markus und Johannes, ausgewählt und übers. von Oskar Farner*, Zürich 1957, (Veröffentlichungen der Rosa Ritter-Zweifel-Stiftung, Religiöse Reihe), 294f.

other hand, Zwingli's ideal woman would be «so pleasant in nature as to soften a rough man»²⁰.

To round out the picture of prevailing attitudes toward women in Zwingli's world we will now turn to selected sources from outside the confines of Zurich and beyond the Reformer's own writings and correspondence. One potential mine of information, the Vadian Correspondence²¹ offers few clues. Of some four hundred and ninety letters, only nine were written by women, most of them on subjects related to their state of health and containing comments on the effectiveness of the doctor's prescribed medical treatments.

Henry Bullinger's literary legacy, on the other hand, provides richer material on the topic²². As chief minister of the Zurich church after the death of Zwingli his views were significant in shaping the early stages of the «reformed» tradition. By the same token, it is safe to assume that his ideas reflect many of the prevalent views of his day.

Among his correspondence with women is an exchange of letters between him and his future wife, Anna Adlischweiler, which includes his proposal of marriage. In 1528 he produced a treatise on the morality and conduct of the ideal Christian woman. Of some interest also is Lucretia, a kind of morality play which he wrote when he was a young school teacher, between 1523 and 1528. Finally, three sermons in his «Decades» of 1550 bear closer scrutiny in this context²³. The exchange of letters between Henry and Anna began when the former was a student of about twenty-three and the latter, along with her mother, had just entered the sister house at Ötenbach to live «dedicated to God». Bullinger obviously attempted to dissuade the young woman from such a course by proposing to marry her. He tried to convince Anna (without harming her tender conscience), that marriage is an honorable estate. Rather soberly he listed his strengths and weaknesses, asking her to do the same in return. Unlike many of his contemporaries, it would seem, Bullinger could claim to have maintained a celibate life (despite opportuni-

²⁰ Z VI/I 434.

²¹ Joachim von Watt (Vadianus), humanist, medical doctor and reformer of the church in St. Gallen, was born 28 December 1481 and died 6 April 1551. His extensive correspondence is edited: *Die Vadianische Briefsammlung der Stadtbibliothek St. Gallen*, ed. by *Emil Arbenz* and *Hermann Wartmann*, 7 vols., St. Gallen 1890-1913, (*Mitteilungen zur Vaterländischen Geschichte* 14-30a).

²² Among the many works on Bullinger is still helpful: *Raget Christoffel*, *Heinrich Bullinger und seine Gattin nach ihrem segensreichen Wirken in ihrer Familie, Gemeinde und gegen verfolgte Glaubensgenossen*, Zürich 1875 [abbr.: *Christoffel*, *Bullinger*]. Primary Bullinger material is being published since 1972 as «*Heinrich Bullinger Werke*»; several volumes have appeared to date.

²³ Cf. HBBW I, no. 24, p. 126-141; nos. 26-27, p. 145-176. Bullinger's «*Von weiblicher Zucht und wie eine Tochter ihr Wesen und ihr Leben führen soll*» was published by *Christoffel*, *Bullinger*, 36-45. The «*Decades*» published in numerous editions in Latin, German, English and French enjoyed great popularity in England during the reign of Elizabeth I. Cf. HBBibi I, nos. 179-227, p. 88-113. Note especially, sermons 21-23 in the 1550 edition.

ties to do otherwise). He assures Anna that his mind is set on her alone. We learn that Bullinger saw his intentions as fully justified and as «willed of God».

Regrettably, Anna's response has not survived. It would seem, however, that in her letters to him she was less inclined to respond favourably to his earnest plea than she might have been in personal encounters. Obviously under pressure from her mother and probably from her brother who stood to lose from a marriage between Anna and Henry, she turned Henry down. Henry was not to be dissuaded easily. He took the matter to marriage court for alleged breach of promise. Persistence paid off. After the death of Anna's mother, the marriage finally took place.

If the number of children born to Henry and Anna is any indication, theirs must have been a happy marriage. They were blessed with eleven children. Unfortunately, we know little of this remarkable woman other than the fact that she was praised as an ideal pastor's wife. She is cited for having helped to alleviate the plight of numerous refugees who had come to Zurich during the ministry of her husband. In addition, she took an active part in caring for orphans, a task which earned her the endearing title «Zürimutter».

As Anna Reinhart before her, so Anna Adlischweiler, too, did not receive the limelight treatment which wives of public figures are given in our day and age. Hence, their feelings and sentiments were not open to scrutiny and their relationships to their husbands not a matter of public record.

Ambrosius Blarer, reformer of the church in Constance, also courted by correspondence. He sought to win the favour of a nun by sending her, among other things, a «Christian love letter» in twenty-seven stanzas²⁴. Unlike Bullinger, Blarer was in his early forties when he and his many friends considered it a sign of evangelical prudence to find a wife suitable to a «bishop of the church». Blarer's choice of Katherine Walter seems to have been a good one. They were wedded in August 1533. Many indicators point to their marriage having been a happy one, among these were a number of spiritual songs in which Blarer extols the benefits of married life²⁵. Not only does he point to the negative effect celibacy has on priests, but he also suggests how a god-given chaste woman helps dispel loneliness and misery, for which qualities the writer encourages his readers to be grateful to God.

As may have become apparent from the cases we cited, women in cloisters seem to have had qualities that proved particularly attractive to ex-priests or budding ministers of the divine word. The majority of these women during the early

²⁴ Blarer's songs were published in 1562. For a good biography of the reformer of the city of Constance, cf. *Theodor Pressel*, *Ambrosius Blaurer, nach handschriftlichen und gleichzeitigen Quellen*, Elberfeld 1861, (Leben und ausgewählte Schriften der Väter und Begründer der reformirten Kirche 9) [abbr.: Pressel, Blaurer]. On 93f of his work *Pressel* provides a copy of Blarer's «Ein christlicher Bulbrief». Cf. also: *Der Konstanzer Reformator Ambrosius Blarer, 1492-1564, Gedenkschrift zu seinem 400. Todestag*, ed. by *Bernd Moeller*, Konstanz 1964.

²⁵ Cf. Pressel, Blaurer, Appendix V. Three of the reprinted «spiritual songs» focus on the happy estate of Christian marriage, 585, 586f, 606f.

twenties and thirties of the sixteenth century came from homes of burghers of some standing and means and from the ranks of the noble-born. Some of the sisters had brought substantial resources with them when they entered the religious community of their choice. The majority of them appear to have been literate. They corresponded with learned contemporaries from within their cloisters, engaged in extensive socio-political activities and, on occasion, wielded a fair amount of power and influence. Both the Oetenbach and Fraumünster cloisters had a tradition of learning and influence that reached back into the fifteenth century.

While much of the reading available in cloisters may have been of the devotional kind – often in the mystical tradition – we know that the houses in the Zurich area were also acquainted with the new religious and spiritual trends of their day, with sisters clearly taking sides for or against. Extant court records would suggest that the settling of property matters was generally a difficult issue when some sisters chose the outside world while others preferred to remain true to their vows and to the patterns of spirituality they had learned to love and respect. The independence of spirit of cloistered women showed itself most fully when upon the pending dissolution of a sister house its occupants refused, or politely declined, trusteeship by all-too-willing city councils.

Outside of convent walls women at the time of Zwingli (and for several decades beyond) seem to have had fewer opportunities to function as equals to men in learning, business affairs and in «public life». However, daughters of craftsmen and shop keepers were taught the necessary skills to manage a complex household. On the farm as well, women learned to carry out the duties of cooking, sewing, gardening and how to participate with the men in doing the daily chores. In most respects social conditions in Switzerland do not appear to have been markedly different from conditions to the north and south, even though public opinion in Swabian lands had it that Swiss peasants were somewhat uncouth.

Did the liberty of the gospel bring any changes to sixteenth century society in Zwingli's Zurich and in other areas under Protestant influence²⁶? Obviously, the office of pastor was not open to women any more than were trade guilds. Though some women attained a high level of academic training, encouraged by men of humanist leanings, no woman was given a teaching position or professorship. In literary productions and in social activities such as the care of orphans, the elderly and the sick, and in alleviating the plight of refugees, some women left their mark and were given appropriate recognition²⁷.

²⁶ *Robert Stupperich* discusses publication activities of women in the sixteenth century with particular reference to the German situation. Cf. *Robert Stupperich*, *Die Frau in der Publizistik der Reformationszeit*, in: *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 37, 1955, 204-233. There seem to be many similarities to the situation in Switzerland at that time.

²⁷ See *Albert Bruckner*, *Weibliche Schreibtätigkeit im schweizerischen Spätmittelalter*, in: *Festschrift Bernhard Bischoff, zu seinem 65. Geburtstag* hrsg. von *Johanne Autenrieth* und *Franz Brunhölzl*, Stuttgart 1971, 441-448. *Hansueli F. Etter* und *Jürg E. Schneider*, *Zur Stellung von Kind und Frau im Frühmittelalter*, in: *ZSA* 39, 1982, 48-57. A recent study which we could not use for this paper was published by *Angelika*

One of the spheres of social interaction that seems to have undergone changes for the better was marriage. Noteworthy is the introduction in Zurich in 1525 of the so-called Ehegericht – a form of marriage court – which was soon imitated by other sixteenth century cities. The largely untapped records of this novel social institution would suggest, even on cursory examination, that women had a very definite place in the social fabric of the day, with some advantages, definite responsibilities and, as yet, limited power and influence. It must be acknowledged, of course, that contemporary caricatures of marriage do not always paint too rosy a picture of the married state; wife beating, on the one hand, and hysterical house dragons, on the other, were seen as inevitable by-products of the close interaction between the sexes. Nonetheless, marriage was considered normative and was entered upon at a relatively early age. Second and third marriages were not uncommon, since men often died young on mercenary missions and women lost their lives in the course of child bearing. Young women often married men considerably older and on occasion some rather complex entanglements were the result.

One such was the case of a certain Michael Back from Cannstatt in Württemberg²⁸. He had come to Zurich with a woman who allegedly was his wife. It turned out that Back, a priest, had taken the woman in when she sought refuge from the tyrannical behaviour of her husband, the city clerk of Cannstatt, who not only beat her regularly but carried on with the maid servants as well. Because of his position in the community he apparently managed to evade the law, leaving the woman no option but to walk out on him. Everything worked well as long as she and Back stayed in Zurich. When they returned to their homeland for some unexplained reason, the woman was charged, convicted and eventually sentenced to death by drowning. Ambrosius Blarer, reporting the matter to Bullinger (7 July 1536) regretted the course of events, but accepted the consequences with the rather laconic remark: «Sie starb als eine Christin» (She died as a Christian woman).

Sixteenth-century society did not readily tolerate live-in arrangements «without the benefit of clergy». Through the Eheordnungen private marriages were outlawed, but in Zurich, at least, marriage breakdown was accepted when unfaithfulness, adultery, or departure by one of the partners from the common residence could be clearly established. In such instances laws prevailed which protected the woman as much as the man and which stipulated the most equitable division of property²⁹. We must comment – ever so briefly – on pre-marital sex.

Nowicki-Pastuschka, Frauen in der Reformation, Untersuchungen zum Verhalten von Frauen in den Reichsstädten Augsburg und Nürnberg zur reformatorischen Bewegung zwischen 1517 und 1537, Pfaffenweiler 1990, (Forum Frauengeschichte 2).

²⁸ Cf. *Gustav Bossert*, D. Johann Mantels Lebensende und der Eheprozeß des Michael Back und seiner Gattin, in: ARG 12, 1915, 161-204.

²⁹ It is also true, of course, that tightened regulations brought with them a certain harshness to the point of clergy concerning themselves with the behaviour of parishioners and morality courts legislating on what they deemed to be appropriate clothes and behaviour patterns for women and men. Most of these now seem either repressive or

While it was not condoned, the reality of deflowering was faced fairly realistically. It was generally tolerated as a step that would lead to marriage. Where marriage proved to be out of the question, specific penalties were imposed on the «guilty» party, if the case was brought to family court.

Generally speaking, sixteenth century society coped with the potentially harmful consequences of male-female relations by discouraging close interaction between men and women outside marriage other than in such accepted situations as the doctor-patient, pastor-parishioner, and increasingly the scholar-student relationships (the latter, in particular, was encouraged by those humanists who worked toward overcoming prevalent prejudices pertaining to such encounters). Insinuations and caricatures pointing to the hilarious or dangerous aspects of these relationships were ever present, of course³⁰.

The last source which yields information regarding prevalent attitudes toward women is the morality play. Two such plays in particular enjoyed some popularity in Switzerland in Zwingli's era. The first was written by Sixtus Birck and entitled «Eyn schön geystlich Spiel ... Got zu lob und allen frouwen und jungfrouwen zu eeren und bestendigkeit jrer kuenschheit (sic), etc»³¹. Susanna, the heroine, is depicted as a «righteous and God-fearing woman» of some standing in the community. The plot of the play centres on two men who seek to entice her into an extra-marital relationship with them. They try to rape her. However, Susanna's virtue and steadfastness is such that she not only resists their advances successfully, but miraculously causes them to be struck with blindness. A scandal ensues. The heroine has to be »examined» (obviously, the playwright must lay to rest any suspicions). She is vindicated, of course. This allows the playwright to wax eloquent on feminine virtue and morality and to end his play happily.

The second play we reviewed was written by Bullinger when he was a young schoolmaster at Kappel. It is an indigenized version of Lucretia and Brutus³². The

ridiculous. Women were losing power as they left cloistered life or when monastic properties that had been under their sole control were placed in the charge of male trustees. Cf. *Alice Zimmerli-Wütschi*, *Frauen in der Reformationszeit*, Diss. phil. I Zürich, Zürich 1981, 80ff.

³⁰ Cf. *Leo Zehnder*, *Volkskundliches in der älteren schweizerischen Chronistik*, Basel 1976, (Schriften der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Volkskunde 60). The author notes some of the most prominent rules, laws and traditions pertaining to accepted social practices, the proper clothing and activities appropriate to men and women respectively. To cite one of the many examples he gives, a woman wearing men's clothing would face stiff penalties and in extreme cases the death penalty. See especially p. 108f.

³¹ Cf. Sixtus Birck, *Eyn schön geystlich Spiel*, Zürich 1532.

³² H. Bullinger, *Ein schön spil von der geschicht der Edlen Römerin Lucretiae unnd wie der Tyrannisch künig Tarquinius Superbus von Rhom vertriben und sunderlich von der standhaftigkeit Junij Bruti des Ersten Consuls zuo Rhom*, (HBBibI I, Nr. 39-41, p. 24f). The play was published in Basel by Thomas Wolff in 1533, though it was written a few years earlier. Also dealing with the legend of Lucretia, Hans Sachs of Nuremberg produced his «Tragedia von der Lukretia» around 1527; but the play was not published

heroine is described as «gantz zuechtig und schamhaft... mit zimlicher bekleydung in schwartz, on allen pracht». Like Birck's play, this one, too, extols the virtues of a Christian woman and reflects what seem to have been prevalent attitudes concerning men and women in their licit relationships.

Two plays cannot be used as conclusive evidence of dominant notions and attitudes. Their moral tone does, however, tally with the picture of women at the time of Zwingli that has emerged from the other material we examined.

What conclusions about women in Zwingli's world may we draw on the basis of the above review of selected extant sources?

It is clear, above all else, that life afforded few joys or luxuries for either men or women. Rules and regulations proscribed dancing, excessive eating and drinking and frequent occasions of public amusement (our own notion of earning money to enjoy life at the ball park or at cottage or beach would have been totally alien to respectable citizens of Zurich or elsewhere during the early part of the sixteenth century). The noble-born, living behind castle walls, seem to have followed somewhat different rules of conduct.

When one looks at the Hans Asper portraits of prominent men or women of Zurich society one is impressed, however, by an air of well-being and self-confidence which suggests that women in these circles were not second-class citizens. They occupied a place of honour and respect within the private sphere of their homes and held an acknowledged place within the public domain in which their husbands played out their roles. Burghers' wives who enjoyed such standing and wealth were, of course, in the minority. Women on their own were not as yet socially acceptable and a certain paternalism undoubtedly prevailed, protecting women as the weaker sex. In some instances women were thus «put in their place» and put down³³. On the positive side, sixteenth-century paternalism expresses admiration of feminine beauty, wisdom, or wealth and the sentiment that women ought to be cherished. One may recall in this connection Luther's promise to reward his Kate, should she read the Bible diligently³⁴. In a similar vein, Urbanus Rhegius assured his readers that the answers he provided in his «Dialogus von der trostreichen Predigt» (1530) were given in response to questions put to him by real women. Not less condescending was Kessler in his «Sabbata»³⁵ when, after describing the execution of a Protestant woman he quips «God be honoured and praised for having effected such strength in so feeble a vessel, to his honour and to our salvation».

until 1561. See Heinrich Bullinger, Hans Sachs, Lucretia-Dramen, ed. by *Horst Hartmann*, Leipzig 1973 (Bibliographisches Institut, Textausgaben).

³³ Kessler speaks of women as contributing to «grusame und vermessenliche irrthumb» (Johannes Kesslers Sabbata mit kleineren Schriften, ed. by *Emil Egli*- und *Rudolf Schoch*, St. Gallen 1902 [abbr.: Kessler, Sabbata], see *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz*, vol. 2: Ostschweiz, ed. by *Heinold Fast*, Zürich 1973, p. 618).

³⁴ WA Br 7, 317.

³⁵ Kessler, Sabbata II 141.

While some in Zwingli's world appear to have reached the conclusion that women were not fully human, others addressed them as «sisters in Christ» and saw them as equal to men, though ordained by God to be in subordinate positions in the natural order of things.

Evangelical teaching and humanist tenets together did not come close, during the first half of the sixteenth century, to emancipating women. It seems that, on the whole, women were encouraged to accept their status with equanimity. It took several more generations before the theological tenet of Christian liberty became a dominant force enabling men and women to accept changing roles, and centuries, before the equality of women and men was firmly established in Western thought.

Prof. Dr. Eward J. Furcha, McGill University, 3520 University Street, Montreal, PQ, Canada H3A 2A7