

Dating Huldrych Zwingli's Lectures on the Gospel of John

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Until recently one of the most surprising gaps in Zwingli studies was the absence of any systematic exploration of his New Testament exegesis. This lacuna was filled, however, in 1976 when Walter E. Meyer published an important analysis of the dating and origin of this material.¹ Particularly helpful was Meyer's suggestion that Zwingli lectured on the New Testament at the Fraumünster in Zurich during the afternoons from 1525 to 1531. In all events this article represented a crucial first step for modern researchers' exploration of Zwingli's exegetical works. Nevertheless, given the large number of lectures which Meyer attempted to date (lectures on fourteen books over seven years), it comes as no surprise that later researchers would find it necessary to modify and refine certain portions of his reconstruction. Such is the case with regard to Zwingli's lectures on the Gospel of John.

In the course of a study on the use of Philip Melancthon's *Annotationes in Johannem* from 1523,² it became apparent that an accurate dating of Zwingli's work on John was more difficult to ascertain than had previously been thought. In his article Meyer argued that Zwingli lectured on John from July, 1528 until the end of that year. Among the reasons he gave for such a dating are the following. First, he pointed out that at the end of the manuscript version of Zwingli's lectures on John there is a sermon entitled, "Sermo in Die Ioannis Euang.: ex ore Zuingli Io: 21."³ From this Meyer concluded that Zwingli reached the end of his work on John on December 27th, the Feast of St. John the Evangelist.

Second, because Zwingli lectured on Mark from June, 1527 until July, 1528 and on Matthew during 1529 and into 1530,⁴ he must have preached on John either in 1526, at the end of 1528 or in 1530. Meyer excluded 1526 on the basis of references both to the debate with Luther over the Lord's Supper and especially over Christ's session to God's right hand and to Zwingli's work from 1527, *Amica exegesis*.

¹ Walter E. Meyer, Die Entstehung von Huldrych Zwinglis neutestamentlichen Kommentaren und Predigt-nachschriften: *Zwingliana* 14 (1976) 285–331.

² Timothy J. Wengert, *Vivum Evangelium: Philipp Melancthon's Annotationes in Johannem in Relation to Its Predecessors and Contemporaries* (Ph. D. dissertation, Duke University, 1984).

³ The manuscript is in Zurich's Zentralbibliothek under the call number MS. Car. II 181, p. 265r.

⁴ See Meyer's arguments pp. 294–299.

Third, Meyer opted for a 1528 dating on the basis of the brevity of comments on the Passion Narrative. By the time he lectured on John, Zwingli had in mind to cover these chapters more fully in a harmony of the accounts of Christ's death and resurrection. This he did in lectures which followed his 1529–30 treatment of Matthew.⁵

Finally, Zwingli's comments on John reflect later developments of his own eucharistic theology, in which he insists upon a spiritual presence of Christ in the sacrament.⁶ Meyer concluded that on the weight of both this internal evidence as well as the external evidence described above these lectures must have occupied Zwingli from July through December, 1528.

There are several points at which a closer examination of the two sources for Zwingli's comments on John places Meyer's conclusion in question.⁷ First, as Meyer himself admitted,⁸ the sermon on John 21 is clearly an addition to the original text of the annotations. More precisely, it is a separate sermon which had no connection to the original lectures on John. The differences in handwriting between the annotations and the sermon indicates two separate copyists.⁹ The sermon notes appear below the word "Finis", with which the original hand had concluded the annotations on John 21. Finally, that Zwingli should have preached a sermon on John 21 at the time of the feast of St. John should come as little or no surprise, since that was (and is) the appointed text for that feast in standard pericopes.¹⁰ In short, the appended sermon gives us no clues whatsoever concerning the dating of Zwingli's lectures.

⁵ However, the Johannine passion narrative also received less attention in Melancthon's commentary on John published only a few years earlier. See CR 14:1210–1220, where only nine full columns are devoted to chapters 18–21 of John. In comparison, 160 columns are used for annotations on the first seventeen chapters of the gospel. The brevity of Zwingli's own comments matches that of one of his important reference works!

⁶ Meyer (Anm. 1) p. 302, fn. 74.

⁷ The two sources are the manuscript, Ms. Car II 181, pp. 184r–265v, and the *Annotationes in Evangelium Ioannis*, published posthumously by Leo Jud in 1539 as part of volume four of Zwingli's works. The latter was republished in 1836 by Schuler and Schulthess in S VI/I: 682–766.

⁸ Meyer (Anm. 1) p. 301.

⁹ Ms. Car. II 181, p. 265r. The handwriting of the sermon is much smaller and, for example, uses a different form of the capital letter "A". It matches the handwriting in other marginal comments scattered throughout the manuscript, especially those on John 20.

¹⁰ The fact that Zwingli preached on a text out of the standard pericopes calls into question the assumption of Meyer (Anm. 1) p. 289 and others that Zwingli always preached on the Biblical books straight through. If Zwingli completely rejected the preaching on pericope texts, this sermon on John 21 could come from a very early period in his career.

Second, Meyer did not notice some major discrepancies between the manuscript and Jud's publication of Zwingli's annotations on John. Material on John 1–5 and 7–9 is similar enough to assume that both may have been derived from the same lectures. Material on John 10–14 evinces only occasional parallels, and that on John 15–17 shows only a handful of agreements. In chapter six there are some agreements on the interpretation of the miracle stories but otherwise only sporadic parallels on vv. 26, 27, 29–34, 36. More importantly, the manuscript breaks off its interpretation of chapter six with v. 40, concluding with the words, "Haec (concerning the relation of seeing and believing) in epistola Ioan: in Anno: copiosius. In hoc caput lege de vera et falsa religione."¹¹ At nearly the same point (v. 41) Leo Jud's version of these annotations also changes dramatically. With the exception of fragmentary comments on vv. 41, 51b, 68 and 70b,¹² all the remaining comments come directly from Zwingli's foremost writings on the Lord's Supper: *De vera et falsa religione commentarius*, *Eine klare Unterrichtung vom Nachtmahl Christi* and *Amica exegesis*.¹³ Jud simply took the pertinent texts from those three works and intercolated them verse by verse into the commentary on John.¹⁴

Third, with the realization that there are wide divergences between Jud's reduction of Zwingli's work and the manuscript and with proof that Jud was not beyond radically altering his sources, the linchpin of Meyer's argument for dating the lectures gives way. Taking the manuscript alone, we find no references to *Amica exegesis* (published on February 28, 1527), to Christ's session to God's right hand or to alleiosis – all of which reflect Zwingli's arguments concerning the Lord's Supper after 1527.¹⁵ In fact, in one of the few references to Zwingli's understanding of the Lord's Supper in the manuscript, the arguments have much more in common with Zwingli's earlier statements. Commenting on the phrase in 6:39, "Ego resuscitabo eum in novissimo die", Zwingli notes, "Quid apertius de esu carnis et sanguinis Christi. Nam pater filium suum cibum prestitit et hunc comedentes perpetuo victuros reddit: non iussit ut dentibus atte-

¹¹ Ms. Car II 181, p. 223r.

¹² S VI/I: 712f. (Offenduntur... atque confirmat"), 714 ("Morior... doctrinae est") and 719 ("Quemadmodum... numero" and "Hoc... polliceatur.").

¹³ Thus, among the portions of Zwingli's comments on the Lord's Supper from the annotations on John which Meyer (Anm. 1) p. 302, fn. 74, regarded as simultaneous with Zwingli's later arguments against Luther is a direct quote from the *Commentarius*.

¹⁴ In the *Commentarius* Zwingli divides his remarks on John 6 into four "notae". In his citation of the *Commentarius*, Jud reduces the "prima nota" to a marginal comment. (See the 1539 edition, p. 305.) By omitting the marginalia, Schuler and Schulthess (S VI/I: 714) left Zwingli's "secunda nota" with no predecessor.

¹⁵ A marginal reference to Bucer's commentary on John from 1528 (Ms. Car II 181, p. 244r) was added by the same hand which attached the sermon at the end of the annotations.

ratur.”¹⁶ Unlike Jud’s edition, the manuscript is devoid of specifically anti-Lutheran polemic. Instead, the “Papistae” and “Catabaptistae” bear the brunt of Zwingli’s attacks.¹⁷

Such attacks, common to both the manuscript and Jud’s edition, exclude the enticing possibility forconnecting these annotations on John with Zwingli’s own remark from June 25, 1524, “Als ich ietz von einet das euangelium Ioannis predgen...”¹⁸ More likely, his lectures on John at the Fraumünster followed hard and the heels of his preaching at the Großmünster. Thus, we surmise that Zwingli lectured on John in 1525 or, at the latest, 1526.¹⁹ Meyer’s reconstruction of Zwingli’s lectures leaves the period from 1525 and 1526 rather open. By placing Zwingli’s lectures on John in this time we can allow a longer period for Zwingli’s lectures than the sixth months allowed in Meyer’s article.²⁰

What, then, should be made of differences found in Jud’s manuscript? We cannot exclude the possibility that Jud himself is the source of comments on the Lord’s Supper which reflect the later polemic against the Lutherans. However, that would only account for a small portion of the many divergences between our two sources. Some variations (especially for chapters 1–5 and 7–9) could be the result of Jud’s use of a second set of notes for the same lectures.²¹ Nevertheless, as Meyer argues for Zwingli’s lectures on Luke,²² we would suggest for John as well: that Jud’s annotations represent two separate attempts by Zwingli to interpret the Fourth Gospel, one of which occurred in 1525 or 1526 and the other of which may well have come in 1528 to 1529, between Zwingli’s lectures on Mark and Matthew.²³

¹⁶ Ms. Car II 181, pp. 223r.

¹⁷ Specific references to rebaptism in comments on John 3:36, 7:38 and 15:14 indicates a *terminus a quo* of January 21, 1525, the date of the first rebaptisms. See *F. Blanke*, Ort und Zeit der ersten Wiedertaufe, *Theologische Zeitschrift* 8 (1952) 74–76.

¹⁸ Z III:773.

¹⁹ This coincides with the reference to the annotations on I John, cited above on p. 4. *Meyer* (Anm. 1), p. 315f., dates those lectures to 1526, but he gives little reason why they, too could not have been delivered in 1525. Notice *Meyer’s* description of the content of these annotations (*ibid.*, p. 316), “Erwähnung finden auch hier wieder polemisch nur die Katholiken und die Täufer.”

²⁰ Hence, *Meyer’s* explanation (*ibid.*, p. 302) for why the notes on John, though twice as long as those on Mark, should be given during half the period of time is unsatisfactory.

²¹ See *Meyer’s* painstaking reconstruction of the evidence, *ibid.*, pp. 286–289.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 317–320. Our conclusions, however, contradict his statement on p. 319, fn.151, about the exposition of the other gospels. “Die anderen Evangelien-Auslegungen weisen keine derart auffälligen Kontraste und Frühansätze Zwinglischer Theologie auf. Sie fügen sich ohne weiteres in das gleichzeitige Schrifttum ein.”

²³ The author is indebted to Professor Gottfried Locher for first suggesting this solution to the problem in a private conversation during November, 1980.

The Gospel of John provides a crucial battleground for a variety of theological combatants during the sixteenth century. By redating Zwingli's lectures and suggesting that Jud's edition contains an amalgamation of notes from two separate periods of Zwingli's career, we can shed light on that important time in Zwingli's development from 1525 to 1528, as he begins to demarcate his own territory on the theological map of central Europe. With the dating of these lectures, we can examine the material itself for nuances in Zwingli's developing soteriology and eschatology, as well as look more closely for exegetes who may have influenced his interpretation of this all-important gospel.²⁴

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²⁴ See, for example, the author's dissertation (Anm. 2), pp. 311–319.