

Letter-Writing in the Early Swiss Reformation: Zwingli's Neglected Correspondence

(Nigel Harris, Zürich, 7th May 2019)

Is a letter a private document? Well, yes; or so I and probably all of us were brought up to believe. Certainly to this day, if a letter arrives at home addressed to my wife or to one of our children, I will on principle never open it – even if I know who it's from and what it's likely to contain. It just seems wrong. It seems, literally, none of my business. And so my instinct always tells me just not to do it.

With some other kinds of communication, of course, the public/private divide is less clear cut. When I send an e-mail, for example, I can address a great many people at once. Some of them I probably will not know personally. And sometimes, of course, I might end up sending an e-mail by mistake to someone I am very keen actually *shouldn't* read it. Mistaking the 'reply' button for the 'reply to all' button can, as we all know, get you into a lot of trouble. We've probably all been there.

And with still more modern forms of 'social' media, such as Facebook and Twitter, this public/private divide can be still more problematic – so much so, indeed, that I at least shy away from them entirely. The idea of details about my private thoughts or my social and family life being shared, in principle, with absolutely anybody fills me with horror. What on earth has it got to do with anyone else? And, anyway, what gives me the right to imagine that other people are interested in what I'm doing or thinking? Isn't that just arrogant? Well, I suppose that kind of attitude is a generational thing, and I'm showing my age in adopting it. Younger friends and colleagues seem to have no such qualms, after all, and they're not remotely bad people...

So, you are doubtless thinking, what does all this have to do with Zwingli? Well, you could argue not much, but you could also argue a great deal. Because what I want to talk about mainly today is the great man's correspondence. Of which a great deal has been preserved – some 1290 items appear in the five volumes of the *Corpus Reformatorum* complete works of Zwingli devoted to the letters from and, especially, to him – unlike some other sixteenth-century figures, Zwingli didn't keep copies of the letters he wrote, and hence for certain a great many have been lost. Bullinger, by contrast, was a particularly consistent copier of his own letters, and that's one of the reasons why the amount of his correspondence that's still accessible is much greater – over 12,000 items. The majority of letters to or from Zwingli that have been preserved, by the way, are in Latin; there are a very few in Greek and about 20% in German – pretty much the linguistic ratio one would expect for a sixteenth-century reformer, especially perhaps for someone who (as we'll see) remained interested throughout his life in Humanist pursuits.



Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531)

But when Zwingli or Bullinger or some other sixteenth-century luminary wrote a letter, what *sort* of communication was it? What were its intentions likely to be, who will have read it, and how will it have got to them? The best, or at least most succinct answers to these questions I've come across appear in a recent article by Mark Greengrass on what he calls the "epistolary Reformation". "Letters were essential to the Protestant Reformation in almost all of its dimensions", Greengrass writes. "Yet the mechanics of their production and transmission, as well as the fundamental nature of epistolary culture in the sixteenth century, made them nothing like the private forms of communication that we might imagine them to be. Letters circulated within epistolary communities" [you might perhaps also call them 'communication networks']. Anyway, Greengrass goes on, "these communities took on all sorts of forms, reflecting the multiple contexts in which correspondence was transacted. Even the most private letter, one that enjoined the strictest secrecy on its recipient, had the potential to be copied, extracted, collected, printed, used by one's friends and enemies alike, instrumentalized to tarnish a reputation, to advance an argument in a debate, or to ensure a particular outcome." Sixteenth-century letters, then, very much inhabited a kind of semi-private, semi-public domain. You wonder how many parallels there might be here to the production and reception of the letters St Paul wrote to all those first-century churches. And certainly there are modern parallels – though, as I say, probably more in the sphere of semi-public electronic media than in the relatively closed, private world of the old-fashioned letter literally wrapped up in an envelope and delivered by the friendly neighbourhood postman.

While we're talking about postmen, by the way, how might a letter by someone like Zwingli have got to its recipient? Well, there was a very extensive network of what we might now call couriers, or messenger services, in early modern Europe – often

expensive, but also extensive in their geographical range. Sometimes these were linked in with trade routes and much used by merchants, and sometimes not. The first reference to a 'postal service' as such in the German-speaking lands dates to 1490, and is found among the records of Emperor Maximilian I in Innsbruck. It seems to have been around then that a rudimentary network of horse relays based around particular fixed stations, or 'staging posts' developed – the term I've translated 'staging posts' is *positae stationes*, from which we derive our terms *post*, *Post*, *poste*, and so on. One way or another, then, the networks and infrastructure which you need to get a letter from A to B were perhaps already stronger and more robust in the first half of the sixteenth century than we might expect them to be. To quote from Greengrass again: "Printers, booksellers, travelling students, footmen and riders in the service of noblemen provided a complementary and naturally autonomous infrastructure of messengers... The correspondence of the Protestant Reformers often refers to the lack of time and pressure of events that had prevented the writing of a letter; but it rarely refers to the lack of an available messenger to carry it".

Well, so much for today's brief lesson in Media Studies. What about the letters of Zwingli in particular? As I say, even in numbering around 1300 items, his correspondence is by no means the largest corpus preserved from a Protestant reformer; but that doesn't stop it being a very important and, I would argue, in many ways neglected source. So let's just reflect for a few minutes now first on why Zwingli's letters are important, and why they tend to be neglected, at least outside Switzerland.

Obviously you could begin answering these questions by simply stating that Zwingli's correspondence is important because Zwingli is important. No-one seriously doubts that he's the most important first-generation reformer in sixteenth-century Switzerland, and a seminal figure whose influence spread well beyond Switzerland and the sixteenth century. As Peter Opitz puts it: "He is the father of Reformed Protestantism. Although that movement has been equated with and often restricted to 'Calvinism', especially in the English-speaking world, Reformed Protestantism undeniably owes its fundamental design to the Zürich Reformer". So there are plenty of good reasons for taking an interest in *any* aspect of Zwingli's activities.

That said, of course, we can learn – and many people have learnt – a great deal about him from published books, be they his own works, or those of contemporaries, near-contemporaries and generations of later scholars right down to the present day. Zwingli is hardly an unknown quantity. I guess, though, that if you're trying to find out what a person from the past was *really* like, you will also want to have access to their letters. Certainly if I was trying to write a biography of any of you in this room, I'd be very disappointed – and indeed more than a bit worried – if you didn't give me access to any files of correspondence you have. Letters are revealing documents, as indeed are e-mails, as indeed are tweets and Facebook posts. They may not always be entirely private, they certainly won't always be intimate or deeply personal, but they're no less revealing for that.

And in the case of Zwingli, I would argue there are at least four – sometimes related – main areas in which his many letters help us understand him better than other forms of communication can.

Firstly they make you particularly aware of just how much, especially perhaps in his younger years but in many ways throughout his career, Zwingli was associated with and indebted to **Christian Humanism**. By this of course I don't mean Humanism in its modern sense, of an ideology and ethical code that is explicitly non-religious in character and concentrates exclusively on human values. No, in relation to Zwingli and many others of his time we are talking of Humanism essentially as the study of the Humanities, the *studia humanitatis*, which meant particularly the study of the classics, of Greco-Roman antiquity. Humanists of the Renaissance period were people who sought renewal or rebirth in large measure through the study and emulation of the classical period. Not least – Zwingli very much included – they were acutely conscious of the moral and educational value of classical *literature*. Humanism was in many ways about texts – going back to older texts, to the *sources* of civilization, reading them in their original languages, perhaps editing them for the first time or correcting unsound medieval editions, all the time trying to understand them better, to learn from them and apply them to your life. Zwingli brought this approach to bear on his reading of the original texts of the Bible (he says in a letter, for example, that he began to learn Greek as early as 1513), but he applied it also to classical literature and the Church Fathers – of whom Augustine was always his particular favourite.

Now Zwingli's career as a Humanist is uniquely well documented in his correspondence, a lot more so than in his other writings. The earliest letter addressed to him was sent from Cologne in July 1510 by Heinrich Loriti (also known as Glareanus, a Humanist geographer and friend of Erasmus of Rotterdam).



Heinrich Loriti, called Glareanus (1488-1563)

Glareanus begins by addressing Zwingli as “vir humanissime” (most humane or humanist man) and goes on to deal with such matters as a new edition of the geography of Ptolemy and the writings of the arch-humanist Pico de Mirandola, author of the programmatic *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. And this is all very typical of the kind of letter Zwingli gets and receives especially up to, say, 1519 – by which time he had clearly become closely associated with, indeed was perhaps the leading figure in, a group of Humanists centred in Basel.

In Zwingli’s early correspondence we read a lot about his and his friends’ interests in the classical languages and literatures, about their desire to promote a particular kind of Swiss national identity, and about their typically Humanist preoccupation with ecclesiastical abuses. The letters also enable us to realize, however, that Zwingli remained in many ways a Humanist for the rest of his life. Clearly as time went on his preoccupation with classical civilization took something of a back seat first to the specifically Christian outworkings of Humanist ideas propagated by Erasmus, and then by his concern with the Gospel and church reform. But it never went away entirely. As late as 7th March 1526, for example, when he was nothing if not busy with many other commitments, we find a letter from the Basel Humanist and Reformer Johannes Oecolampadius commenting on an introduction that Zwingli has just published to a new edition of Pindar, the ancient Greek lyric poet. Similarly on 30th June of the same year Zwingli responded willingly, gladly and in some detail to an unnamed correspondent who had asked him for a reading list of the most worthwhile classical authors. Written as they were to fellow Humanists, letters like these also give a good sense of Zwingli’s indebtedness to a specifically Humanist Latin style and rhetoric – an elegant, if highly literary and at times slightly overblown type of discourse that tends to surface a bit less often in his more specifically theological works.

Now I’ve already mentioned in passing Erasmus of Rotterdam, the greatest Humanist scholar of his age and someone who had a profound influence on Zwingli’s career. Again, this is true especially of its early stages, but in many ways also throughout.



Erasmus of Rotterdam (c. 1466-1536)

From Erasmus Zwingli learnt above all two related things. First, that the Bible, and particularly the Gospels, should be the main focus of a Christian's study and his or her main source of authority; and second, that true Christian discipleship should revolve primarily around Christ – listening to the voice of Christ and emulating his behaviour wherever possible. *Sola scriptura* and *solus Christus*: this, in outline, is Erasmus's, and indeed Zwingli's notion of a *philosophia Christi*, a philosophy of Christ. Zwingli was plainly very influenced and excited by these ideas well before he came across Luther. But with time he also became frustrated with Erasmus's refusal, as he saw it, to draw the logical conclusions from this Christ-centred biblicism. How, in particular – he thought – can it be reconciled with Erasmus's continuing reluctance to condemn the institution of the Roman Catholic Church, with its authoritarian power structure, its cult of saints and relics, and so on? So with time Zwingli became frustrated with Erasmus as well as in awe of him; and from about 1519 onwards he seems to have seen himself as in many ways a better practitioner of Erasmus's ideas than Erasmus was himself.

Now I'm mentioning all this now because the relationship between Zwingli, Erasmus and Erasmian thought is particularly well documented by the correspondence. Only one letter from Zwingli to Erasmus has survived (from 1516), but we possess six from Erasmus to Zwingli, dating from between 1516 and 1523 (it's highly likely that Zwingli wrote back to these, but that Erasmus destroyed the letters once Zwingli became a dangerous man to know). The letter *from* Zwingli is dated 23rd April 1516, soon after the only actual meeting between the two men, in Basel. Even allowing for the fulsome-ness of Humanist rhetoric, Zwingli seems very much to be in the throes of hero worship. "To Erasmus of Rotterdam, the greatest philosopher and theologian", he begins. "Erasmus, best of men, I am frightened by the splendour of your learning, which demands a more capacious world than the one we see around us; but at the same time I am encouraged by the charming kindness you showed me when I came to see you at Basel not long after the beginning of Spring; for it is no small proof of a generous nature that you did not disdain a man such as me, one who has not acquired the gift of speech ["*infantem hominem*"] or any reputation as an author". You get the idea.

Erasmus always responded well to flattery, and his early letters to Zwingli are full of his usual effusive if somehow non-committal graciousness. But the letters as a whole give a clear indication of the gradual cooling of relations between the two – culminating, perhaps, in the middle of the night of 8th September 1522, when Erasmus breaks off contact in a panicky response to reading Zwingli's *Archeteles*, in which he directly opposes the authority of the Bishop of Constance. Yet many references within letters from throughout Zwingli's career reveal that Erasmus still exerted a powerful influence on him long after their personal contact had ended. His name is mentioned more than 100 times in the correspondence even after the final breach between the two men in 1523. Many of these are by way of brief expressions of frustration or indeed opposition; but still there's no doubt, that, right down to his death in 1531, Zwingli

remained indebted to Erasmus's biblicism, but also his perception of Christ as example and teacher, his pacifism and, not least, his conception of the Holy Spirit.

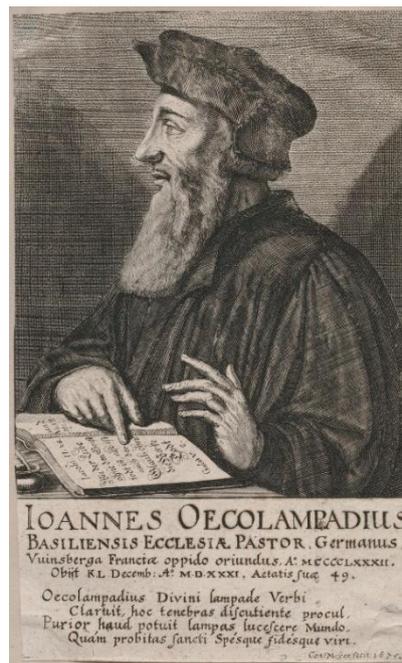
So the letters help us to pinpoint Zwingli rather precisely within the world of early 16th c. Christian Humanism. And – secondly – the same applies to attempts we might make to situate him within the new culture of **Lutheran and Reformed Protestantism** from around 1518 onwards. Crucial elements of Zwingli's reaction to Luther and his doctrines emerge from the letters, for example. Early letters show that he had heard of Luther by December 1518 and, by February 1519, had begun to read his works.



Martin Luther (1483-1548)

Over the years Zwingli wrote several differentiated and sometimes apparently inconsistent statements about such matters as Luther's theology of salvation and of the church; but above all his correspondence is a prime source for exploring in depth the protracted controversy between him, Luther and their followers over the theology of the Eucharist – an issue which may to us today seem almost trivial, but which in the sixteenth century was of existential importance. The Eucharist is the principal subject of the only surviving letter from Zwingli to Luther (1st April 1527), in which he rebukes Luther for behaving intolerantly and arrogantly over the matter. A full account of the differences between Zwingli and Luther in eucharistic questions would also, however, have to take account of at least four surviving letters by Zwingli: those to Thomas Wyttenbach (June 1523), Fridolin Lindauer (October 1524), Ambrosius Blarer (May 1528) and Wolfgang Capito and Martin Bucer (February 1531). Between them, these expound views on questions such as the sacrament's inability to occasion faith, its importance as an 'outer' as well as 'inner' phenomenon, and its essentially symbolic character – superficially esoteric matters which, however, were the cause of many damaging divisions within Protestantism for many centuries to come. It's all there in the correspondence.

Luther was very far from being the only reformer with or about whom Zwingli had epistolary contact, however. He was part of a network that basically included everyone who was anyone in Reformation Europe; and he was right at the centre of an extensive network centred on what you might call Northern Switzerland and the Upper Rhine. His three most frequent correspondents were Bucer and Capito in Strassburg and, in particular, Johannes Oecolampadius in Basel. Zwingli and Oecolampadius were particularly close colleagues from the latter's arrival in Basel in 1522, right up to the eventual implementation of the Reformation there in 1529, and indeed beyond – Oecolampadius died only a few weeks after Zwingli, in November 1531.



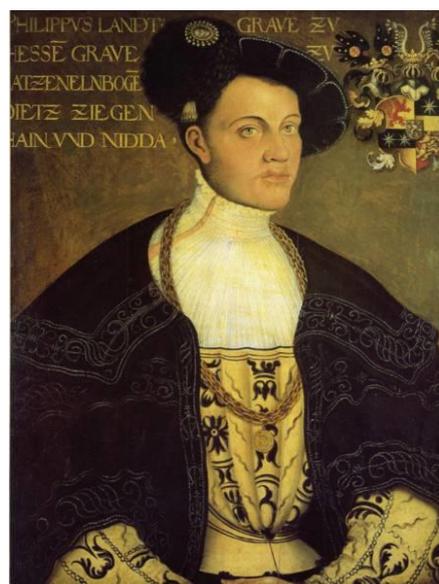
Johannes Huszgen, called Oecolampadius (1482-1531)

What strikes you particularly when reading their correspondence (as usual, there are many more letters *to* Zwingli than *from* him) is how close their views and approaches often are. Zwingli and Oecolampadius were linked by a range of common interests and experiences – neither, for example, had had a sudden conversion experience, but rather they had both developed their mature theologies *out of* Christian Humanism (Oecolampadius in fact knew Erasmus rather better than Zwingli did). They were both also particularly interested in the Church Fathers, especially St Augustine, whom they mention and quote from all the time in their correspondence. And they both have a way of looking at the Bible in a very philological way, based on a good knowledge of New Testament Greek. So the overall impression that emerges from the letters is of a particular kind of Humanist-inspired brand of Protestantism that linked Strassburg and, in particular, Basel very closely with Zürich. And which is also based very much on a deep personal regard between the two major first-generation reformers of the two cities, Zwingli and Oecolampadius. In 1525, for example, Zwingli expresses his delight in the, quote, “harmonious tranquillity” between them, reflecting that “there is no enmity among us, no dissension, no envy, no quarrels or disputes; where else

can such an agreement arise than from Almighty God?”. And when Oecolampadius in turn tells Zwingli shortly before the latter’s death in 1531 that “we are not disunited in any way”, even a habitually sceptical reader is likely still to believe him. Such things demonstrate tellingly, I think, that for all their semi-public nature and problematic practicalities, sixteenth-century letters between reformers can also very much convey the reality of long-term, warm and committed friendships.

So, then, the Zwingli correspondence has a lot to tell us about Zwingli’s, and Zürich’s relationships both to contemporary Humanism and Humanists and to contemporary Reformations and reformers. But there are – thirdly – many other kinds of letters as well, which attest to the extraordinary **range and geographical footprint of Zwingli’s activities**, especially in the latter years of the 1520s. On one level there are letters from and to many lesser-known figures from all over Switzerland, which shape our understanding of the uniquely multi-faceted and authoritative position Zwingli held in Swiss life. He was approached for help and advice seemingly by all and sundry. To take a short period more or less at random: the few weeks of February and March 1529 saw him receive letters on a wide range of subjects from, amongst others, his relative Ludwig Tresp, the Master of the Zürich Guild of Tailors, the town clerk of Lichtensteig, a schoolmaster from Chur, a local politician from Grüningen, and a conscience-stricken Catholic priest from Würenlos. Elsewhere we see Zwingli having to field many letters asking him for references or recommendations, for help in the appointment of new pastors, and for advice or mediation in matters concerning money, inheritance, land, church discipline, or indeed marital disputes.

And at the same time as he had to deal with this kind of thing we see Zwingli’s vision and field of influence expanding well beyond Switzerland. There are numerous letters from the last two to three years of his life that bear witness also to his burgeoning role in European politics. In particular there is a sequence of over 20 letters between Zwingli and Landgrave Philip of Hesse (Landgraf Philipp von Hessen).



Philipp von Hessen (1504-67)

Their contact began in earnest with Philip's invitation to Zwingli to attend the Colloquy of Marburg, at which he had hoped, in vain as it turned out, to engineer a reconciliation between Zwingli and Luther on the theological hot potato that was the Eucharist. But we see an increasing desire on both men's part to work together to counteract the growing determination of the Catholic alliance around Emperor Charles V essentially to snuff out the Reformation(s). So Zwingli and Philip sought in particular to form an all-embracing Protestant alliance involving evangelical reformers in both Germany and Switzerland. In retrospect this was never going to happen, and it never did happen. But the to-ing and fro-ing of letters makes only too plain the remarkable levels of optimism shown by both men, but by Zwingli in particular. He is optimistic for one thing about the extent of Philip's potential influence - he writes as late as June 1531 that Philip is "young, twenty-eight, I believe, but clever beyond his years, very proud and brave; from him we can get almost anything we want". And in correspondence with Philip himself he remains remarkably optimistic, even when the imperial forces are growing and potential allies like the Lutherans and the reformers of Bern are lukewarm at best - so, he writes in July 1530, "do not, good servant of the Almighty and my gracious Lord, do not allow yourself to be prevailed upon in any way, either by threats or by promises. You will see that the storm will completely blow over and come to nothing. And in eternity in heaven before God and all the hosts of heaven and earth, so long as the world endures, he will be praised who now steadfastly upholds the truth". In passages like that there is a fascinating mixture of Christian faith, political naivety and a kind of natural temperamental optimism. I hesitate to present Zwingli as any kind of 'Tigger'; but he was decidedly a 'glass half full' man, even when circumstances and evidence seemed to suggest that the glass under consideration was actually better regarded as half empty.

So, then - Zwingli as Humanist, Zwingli as reformer, Zwingli as all-round public figure. But also, finally, the letters are particularly good for giving us insights into **Zwingli the private individual**. Not that he tends to give all that much away. No doubt that reflects the fact that what to us might seem to be private communications often actually *weren't* that private; and Peter Opitz suggests that Zwingli's personal reticence was also a kind of strategy - a way of creating a new form of reformed piety characterized, not least, by a self-denying reluctance to talk about oneself. That said, you don't need to dig all that deeply into the letters to learn at least some things.

The most famous letter about an aspect of Zwingli's private life, not to say sex life, is of course his missive to Heinrich Utinger, a supportive member of the chapter of the Zürich *Grossmünster*, dated 5th December 1518. This is - for all its intimate detail - a public, or at least semi-public statement, since it concerns Zwingli's suitability or otherwise for the vacant post of *Leutpriester* at the *Grossmünster*. "One of the most learned and amiable of our friends", Zwingli begins, referencing Oswald Myconius, "has written to me [the letter is preserved] that a rumour has been spread in Zürich about me, alleging that I have seduced the daughter of a high official ["*potentis cuiusdam*"]" - and he goes on to defend himself against this accusation in very careful

terms. Three years ago, he says, he made a vow not to touch a woman – but that didn't exactly end well [*"id vero parum feliciter cessit"*]. Zwingli says that he hasn't so much seduced as *been seduced* by someone, but she is a barber's daughter and emphatically no maiden – "a virgin by day and a wench by night", is Zwingli's not exactly gentlemanly description. So sexually experienced, indeed, is this woman that everyone in Einsiedeln knows of her reputation. Zwingli goes on to admit that he has (or may have) made the woman pregnant – "she is now pregnant by me, if she can even know that for sure"; but he stresses that her family is unworried about this. And he also emphasizes that, in spite of all these (shall we say) complexities, he *has* been true to his vow insofar as he has neither committed adultery, nor deflowered a virgin, nor defiled a nun. So that makes it – well, kind of just about all right.

Overall, then, the letter is a slightly strange mixture of disarming honesty, genuine penitence, desperate self-justification and an unattractive if no doubt inevitable rehearsal of some of the social and sexual prejudices of the day. It really isn't Zwingli's finest hour, certainly not in moral terms; but perhaps the main thing is that the letter obviously *worked*. He got the job. And if the *Grossmünster* chapter hadn't accepted his explanation and had disqualified him from the post, then history would have been, as they say, a very different story.

There's nothing else in Zwingli's letters that can compare with that for what you might call juiciness. We do, though, hear a certain amount about his health, especially in the years 1519 and 1520, when he charts his experience of being stricken with the plague (we of course see him writing one such letter in the Stefan Haupt film). He was at one stage very seriously ill, but recovered, only thereafter to experience some unpleasant recurring symptoms. We also read quite a bit about books he's given and received, a set of viols he has ordered, a cheese he has been sent, kindnesses he has shown or been shown, and so on. We get a certain sense of his pastoral skill and personal warmth, for example in two letters to gravely ill people in 1526; and we get a small number of communications from or to his family. There's only one to his wife, Anna Reinhart, sent from Bern in January 1528, and to be honest it's a bit disappointing – certainly to anyone whose appetite might have been whetted by the film to expect some kind of romantic excitement. The sole surviving letter to Anna is all over in nine lines: Zwingli expresses thanks to God that she has experienced a safe and healthy birth (of their second son, also called Ulrich or Huldrych); he then asks her to send a couple of wimples for an unnamed female relative to wear, to give his greetings to various people, and to pray for him and everyone else; and that's it. A couple of letters from his older brother Klaus are also rather crisp and businesslike in tone: one from May 1530, for example, deals exclusively with the fact that Klaus has come by two hundred-weight of saltpetre, which he would like to offer the City of Zürich for a fee to be negotiated, it seems, by brother Huldrych. There are, though, some moments of familial tenderness and indeed poignancy, particularly where Zwingli's young brother Andreas is concerned. Andreas wrote to Zwingli in October 1519 expressing sympathy for his brother's plague-related illness, and Zwingli replied to him twice – first

expressing joy at his own recovery, and then predicting that he, the elder brother, will die before Andreas. In a tragic irony, however, Andreas was dead within a year, at the age of 22, having succumbed to the plague from which Huldrych himself hadn't quite fully recovered.

With regard to the death of Andreas we in fact have a particularly moving letter from Zwingli, addressed to his friend Oswald Myconius and dated 25th November 1520 (Myconius was a decade or so later to become both Zwingli's first biographer and Oecolampadius's successor in Basel):



Oswald Geisshüsler, called Myconius (1488-1552)

"I am doubtful in my mind whether the evils that are befalling me (if they are evils), ought to be communicated to you, who are a man of most clement and merciful disposition. For I fear that if I do not warn you beforehand you will fall into unrestrained grief, so solicitous are you towards me. And yet I beg that you will endure my misfortunes with a calm mind, even as I myself endure them. Because now I endure with equanimity what initially threw me into great lamentation and more than feminine mourning [!], when I was suddenly and unexpectedly overwhelmed with sorrow.... So do take it calmly when I at length tell you of the death of my brother Andreas, a youth of excellent character and great promise, whom the plague killed on St. Elizabeth day... So far am I from remonstrating with God about it that I am ready to offer myself to him also. But enough of this. I am awaiting your letter and those manifold songs recommended by Xilotectus, for which our people here are looking daily." A kind of manly change of subject towards the end there, so as to prevent an undue outpouring of grief; but I think the point is already made. There is in this letter a very tangible depth of affection towards both brother and friend which clearly reflects an important aspect of Zwingli's character - and which also, I think, refutes any idea that the strangely semi-public nature of sixteenth-century correspondence prevented the expression of profound or intimate emotion.

So, then, there we have some reasons at least why Zwingli's letters are such fascinating and valuable documents. But what has all that got to do with me, a Cornishman living in exile in the English city of Birmingham? Well, it has been clear to me for some time that Zwingli's letters aren't as well known as they should be amongst people interested in the Reformation; and that probably the biggest single reason for this is that only a small proportion of them have been translated into English. Most students of the Reformation aren't good at reading sixteenth-century Latin, to say nothing of early modern Swiss German. And so the vast majority of the letters remain, in practice, largely unknown.

For this reason I am hoping as we speak to get funding for a project, based at the two Midlands universities of Birmingham and Warwick and involving a team of some four scholars, specifically to produce modern and properly annotated English translations of the whole of Zwingli's correspondence – divided for convenience into five volumes in the same way as the equivalent volumes of the standard Latin and German edition. If all goes well we shall also end up producing, alongside the translations, the proceedings of an academic conference on Zwingli and his letters, an online inventory of his correspondence, a PDF pack for use in undergraduate teaching, an interactive WordPress blog, and maybe even a short presentational video. If we don't get the required government funding, I fear we'll end up having to do rather less; but there will undoubtedly be some kind of Plan B: the need for such a project seems real, and the timing of it favourable.

Whatever happens in my or our specific case, there is no doubt that Zwingli needs to be much better known outside Switzerland and the German-speaking world. I hardly need to tell you that he was by no means just a Swiss phenomenon. He was a seminal important figure whose influence spread well beyond Switzerland and the sixteenth century – not least in the English-speaking world; and his theological and ecclesiological project combined elements of Christian Humanism and early Protestant ideology in unique and in many ways strikingly modern ways. So the more of his writings we or other people can unlock for the benefit of a world in which English seems destined to remain an international *lingua franca*, the better for us all – and indeed (if it's not presumptuous to say so) the better also for the posthumous reputation of Zwingli himself.