

CHAPTER 4

CALVIN AND THE REFORMATION

The Renaissance provided the cultural background for the Reformers to interpret Scripture by means of its original languages. Renaissance humanism especially had a great influence on the methods of biblical interpretation used by the Reformers who mainly expanded the hermeneutical method of the humanists. Desiderius Erasmus strongly influenced them. Under Erasmus' influence the Reformers stressed the one literal sense over against the fourfold sense of Scripture, and they insisted that Scripture be its own interpreter.

In this chapter I deal with Calvin's attitude toward the other Reformers' interpretation of Scripture,¹ as well as that

¹ For the studies on the Reformers' interpretation of Scripture, see Richard A. Muller, "Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: The View from the Middle Ages," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: Essays Presented to David C. Steinmetz in Honor of His Sixtieth Birthday*, eds. Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 3-22; Donald M. Lake, "The Reformation Contribution to the Interpretation of the Bible," in *Interpreting the Word of God*, ed. Samuel J. Schultz and Morris A. Inch (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), pp. 178-98. Klaas Runia, "The Hermeneutics of the Reformers," *Calvin Theological Journal* 19 (1984): 121-152; Pasmela J. Scalise, "The Reformers as Biblical Scholars," *Review and Expositor* 86 (1989): 23-28; J. A. B. Van den Brink, "Bible and Biblical Theology in the Early Reformation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 14 (1961): 337-352; Paul L. Lehmann, "The Reformer's Use of the Bible," *Theology Today* 3 (1946-7): 328-344; Cornelis Augustijn, "The

of the Anabaptists, and the Libertines. was correct, but the
Reformation scholar's view on the authority of

A. Luther

Before dealing with the hermeneutical principles of Martin Luther, we need to understand what Luther's basic attitude toward Scripture was.

Luther's views on the sole authority of Scripture had its origin in the influence which William of Ockham (1280-1349) exercised on his thinking by his teachers Jodokus Trutfetter von Eisenach and Bartholomäus Arnoldi von Usingen (1462-1532),² and through the writings of Gabriel Biel³ and Pierre d'Ailly.⁴ These Ockhamists were concerned chiefly with stressing the sole authority of Scripture. Ockham did not recognize the pope as the final judge of the question as to

Sixteenth-Century Reformers and the Bible." in *The Bible and Its Readers*, ed. Wim Bekin (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), pp. 58-68.

² Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Sein Weg zur Reformation 1483-1521* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1981), pp. 44-7.

³ On the study for the influence of Biel upon Luther, See Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 22. Here Lohse says, "Luther learned a form of Ockhamism that had been revised by Gabriel Biel (d. 1495), a moderate disciple of Ockham who had taught in Tübingen. . . . Luther's later studies in theology, beginning in 1507, also primarily exposed him to Biel's modified version of Ockhamist theology."

⁴ A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word: Martin Luther, Doctor of Sacred Scripture* (Grand Rapid: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 34.

whether his understanding of Scripture was correct.⁵ But the pre-Reformation Scholastics' stress on the authority of Scripture did not satisfy Luther enough for him to use their method of interpretation. Although there was a certain continuity between their doctrine on the authority of Scripture and that of Luther,⁶ his views on the clarity of Scripture and the method of its interpretation differed from theirs. This discovery of Luther broke the exclusive authority of the Roman Catholic church. Luther's doctrine of the clarity of Scripture made him the pillar of the Reformation.

Luther's hermeneutical method⁷ was influenced by

⁵ M. Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures* (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1944), p. 14. See the Preface to *Compendium Errorum Papae* of Ockham to which Reu refers.

⁶ Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, Holy Scripture*, vol. 2, *The Cognitive Foundation of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), p. 53-5, says: "Scholarship has generally ignored the continuities between the view of Scripture held during the later Middle Ages and the Reformers' view of Scripture and, by extension, has tended to ignore the way in which both medieval scholastic and Reformation Protestant formulations concerning the character, authority, and interpretation of Scripture combine to produce the later Protestant scholastic doctrine of Scripture. . . . We must recognize in Luther's teaching both a certain continuity and discontinuity with the medieval doctrine of Scripture and, again, both a measure of continuity and discontinuity with the later Protestant doctrine as codified during the era of orthodoxy."

⁷ For the studies of Luther's hermeneutics, see Warren A. Quanbeck, "The Hermeneutical Principles of Luther's Early Writings" (Th.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1948); Mark Ellingsen, "Luther as Narrative Exegete," *The Journal of Religion* 63 (1983): 394-413; Raymond E. Surbury, "The Significance of Luther's Hermeneutics for the Protestant Reformation," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 24 (1953): 241-61; Gerhard Ebeling, "The New Hermeneutics and the Early Luther," *Theology Today* 21 (1964): 34-46; O. Walter, "Scripture as

Augustine, Ockham, Lyra, Erasmus, Reuchlin, and the French humanist Lefèvre d'Étaples, known as Faber Stapulensis.⁸ The latter's influence on Luther was exercised through his *Quincuplex Psalterium* which was intensively studied by Luther.⁹ Through this study Luther developed a critical

Viewed by Luther and Calvin," *Bangalore Theological Forum* 7 (1975): 31-6; Ralph W. Doermann, "Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation: Can We Still Use Them?" in *Interpretation Luther's Legacy*, eds. Fred W. Meuser and Stanley D. Schneider (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969), pp. 14-25; A. Skevington Wood, *Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1960); Denis R. Janz, *Luther and Late Medieval Thomism: A Study in Theological Anthropology* (Waterloo: Wilfried Laurier University Press, 1983); Raymond Larry Shelton, "Martin Luther's Concept of Biblical Interpretation in Historical Perspective" (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1974); James S. Preus, "Old Testament *Promissio* and Luther's New Hermeneutic," *Harvard Theological Review* 60 (1967): 145-61; Douglas Carter, "Luther as Exegete," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 32 (1961): 517-521; A. E. McGrath, "Luther," in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 414-6; Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, pp. 322-41; Friedrich Beisser, *Claritas Scripturae bei Martin Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966); Kurt Aland, "Luther as Exegete," *The Expository Times* 69 (1957): 45-48; Rudolf Ficker, "Ut *Simplicissime Tractaretis Scripturas*: Martin Luther as Interpreter of Scripture," *Bangalore Theological Forum* 15 (1983): 175-196; Scott H. Hendrix, "Luther against the Background of the History of Biblical Interpretation," *Interpretation* 37 (1983): 229-239; Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor: Introduction to the Reformer's Exegetical Writings*, pp. 5-134.

⁸ James Comer Howell, "A Hermeneutical Approach to Psalm 90" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1984), pp. 95-6. Here he mentions that in the interpretation of Psalm 90 Luther derived his exegetical information from Lyra, Faber, and Reuchlin.

⁹ On M. Luther's use of Faber Stapulensis, see the introductory article preceding his annotations of Faber Stapulensis (WA 4.463-66, "*Adnotationes Quincuplici Fabri Stapulensis Psalterio manu adscriptae*"). For the study of this copy with many annotations from the hand of M. Luther, see WA 4.466-526. (Faber Stapulensis, "*Adnotationes Quincuplici Psalterio adscriptae*").

attitude toward Lyra¹⁰ and his employment of the fourfold sense of Scripture.¹¹ Luther's dependence on Faber can be

¹⁰ For the study of Lyra's hermeneutics, see James George Kiecker, "The Hermeneutical Principles and Exegetical Methods of Nicholas of Lyra, O.F.M. (CA. 1270-1349)."

Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1349), who was influenced by Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (or Rashi), influenced young Luther's hermeneutical method. In his *First Lectures on the Psalms* Luther followed Lyra in many places. Luther, however, often rejected Lyra's wrong views. For example, in the explanation of Psalm 4 Luther said as follows: "Psalm 4 has the title *To victory with instruments, a psalm of David*. . . . And since this title is often used in the Psalms and is here given for the first time, we ought to look at it a little more closely. But in the first place, I am not one who is willing to accept as true what Nicholas of Lyra reports from his Rabbi Solmon, namely, that it is called "to victory" because when the Levite singers sang this psalm, one chorus tried to outsing another. This is very much like a boyish invention. . . . Therefore that interpretation is absurd and irrelevant." (LW 10. 42).

The fact that in his *Lectures on Romans* Luther quoted Lyra's statements many times makes us realize the influence exerted by Lyra upon Luther's hermeneutical method. Especially Luther was influenced by Lyra's moral interpretation (Ibid., p. 127, p. 281). Luther, however, pointed out the problems of Lyra's interpretation from the perspectives of the grammatical method (Rom. 12:1, Ibid., p. 325), the context (Rom. 5:6), the analogy of Scripture (Rom. 6:6), the themes such as faith, sin, and the justification by faith (Rom. 1:3-4, 3:5, 5:1).

¹¹ Warren A. Quanbeck, "The Hermeneutical Principles of Luther's Early Exegesis," p. 43. Lowell C. Green, *How Melancthon Helped Luther Discover the Gospel: The Doctrine of Justification in the Reformation* (Greenwood: The Attic Press, In., 1980), p. 112, also says, "Faber had rejected the medieval hermeneutics of a fourfold interpretation of Scripture and had focused on the *sensus literalis* or literal meaning. However, he wanted to understand the Psalms not in any historicizing manner but as prophetic witnesses to Christ. This hermeneutic interested Luther greatly and guided him in his early Biblical studies." Cf. Henry Heller, "The Evangelicism of Lefèvre d'Étaples: 1525," *Studies in the Renaissance* 19 (1972): 42-77. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Lefèvre: Pioneer of Ecclesiastical Renewal in France* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 53-64 and "Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (c. 1455-1536) Calvin's Forerunner in France," in *Africa Congress on Calvin Research*, ed. A. D. Pont (Pretoria: University van Pretoria, 1980), pp. 1-21.

noticed in his *Lectures on Romans*¹² and in his marginal notes to the *Quincuplex Psalterium*.¹³ Although they helped to some extent in the development of the method of Luther's interpretation of Scripture, he was to a large extent influenced by his personal study of Scripture and the exegetical insights he gained from it.¹⁴ In his *Lectures on Romans* and in his *Commentary on the Psalms*, Luther was still

¹² In spite of Faber's influence on Luther's method, Luther disagreed with Faber's view of the authorship of Hebrews and the Christological interpretation (Rom. 3:5).

¹³ Ibid., p. 47. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Lefèvre: Pioneer of Ecclesiastical Renewal in France* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), p. 60, says, "Luther's expository writings give abundant evidence of the influence exerted by Lefèvre on his method of scriptural interpretation. In his subsequent labors as preacher and commentator Luther would assign a place of central importance to the christological significance of the text. Like Lefèvre, he devoted his first endeavors in biblical exegesis to the book of Psalms; and from Lefèvre he learned the primary importance of the literal sense and the twofold distinction within that sense. In expounding the Psalter he, too, sought to bring out the native sense—that, namely, intended by both divine and human authors, which he described as the "prophetic" literal sense, and which, as distinguished from the bare "historic" literal sense, pointed to and was fulfilled in the person and work of Christ. For Luther, as for Lefèvre, Christ was the key to the Psalter and to the Scriptures in their entirety."

For the study of Faber's influence on Luther's hermeneutics, see Gerhard Ebeling, "Die Anfänge von Luthers Hermeneutik," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 48 (1951): 182-230. For the study of the relationship Luther to Faber, see Guy Bedouelle. "Lefèvre d'Étaples et Luther: Une Recherche de frontières (1517-1527)," *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 63 (1983): 1-2, 17-31.

¹⁴ A. C. George, "Martin Luther's Doctrine of Sanctification with Special Reference to the *Formula Simul Iustus et Peccator*: A Study in Luther's Lectures on Romans and Galatians" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1981), p. 29; C. Warren Hovland, "Anfechtung in Luther's Biblical Exegesis," in *Reformation Studies*, ed. Franklin H. Littell (Richmond: John Knox, 1962), p. 60.

immersed in the exegetical tradition of the Middle Ages, to the extent that he employed the fourfold interpretation of Scripture along with *glossa* and *scholia*.¹⁵ But soon Luther broke with the traditional methods of interpretation and started applying his own principles of hermeneutics. Wilhem Pauck comments on Luther's own method: "The upshot of all this was that he developed a spiritual exegesis in which he essentially combined the *quadriga* with Faber's method in such a way that the literal-prophetic understanding of the Scripture became connected and interpenetrated with a reading of the text in terms of the tropological or moral sense."¹⁶ Thus Luther's method came from a combination of the philological-grammatical method of the humanists and the tropological interpretation of the Scholastics.¹⁷

Generally Luther had five hermeneutical principles of Scripture. First, he used the principle *scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. This hermeneutical principle came from Luther's assertion that the sole authority and perspicuity of Scripture lies in itself. Luther employed the self-interpretation of Scripture against an interpretation through the teaching and

¹⁵ Gerhard Ebeling, "The New Hermeneutics and the Early Luther," p. 40.

¹⁶ Wilhem Pauck, *Luther: Lectures on Romans*, pp. xxxii-iii.

¹⁷ W. Schwarz, "Studies in Luther's Attitude towards Humanism," *Journal of Theological Studies* 6 (1955): 66-76.

tradition of the Roman Catholic church.¹⁸ For him the true method of interpretation was to put Scripture alongside Scripture in a right and proper way.¹⁹ In chapter 6 I will deal with this first aspect of Luther's hermeneutical method, namely, "*Scriptura sui ipsius interpres.*"²⁰

Secondly, Luther broke with the four-fold sense of scriptural interpretation of the Middle Ages which he used in an earlier period in his life. Instead, he stressed one meaning of the text: the literal meaning arrived at by the historical-grammatical method. Luther said:

The Christian reader should make it his first task to seek out the literal sense, as they call it. For it alone is the whole substance of faith and Christian theology; it alone holds its ground in trouble and trial.²¹

Luther is the first of the Protestant interpreters to employ this method. Luther used this method in his two catechisms. In his interpretation of the Sabbath in the third commandment, for example, Luther uses a grammatical approach:

Our word 'holy day' or 'holiday' is so called from the Hebrew word 'Sabbath,' which properly means to rest, that is, to cease from labor; hence our common expression for 'stopping work' literally means 'observing a holy day or

¹⁸ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, pp. 76-77.

¹⁹ Skevington A. Wood, *Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 21.

²⁰ WA 10.3.238.

²¹ LW 9.24. Luther also said that our effort must be concentrated on arriving at one simple, pertinent, and sure literal sense. Cf. LW 3.27.

holiday.²²

In his explanation of the church in the third article Luther explains the meaning of the original word to his readers:

Thus the word 'church' (Kirche) really means nothing else than a common assembly; it is not of German but of Greek origin, like the *ecclesia*. In that language the word is *kyria*, and in Latin *curia*. In our mother tongue therefore it ought to be called 'a Christian congregation or assembly,' or best and most clearly of all, 'a holy Christian people.'²³

Luther fearlessly advanced the literal meaning in the face of his opponents. Nowhere is this method more apparent than in his controversy with Jerome Emser, Secretary to Duke George of Saxony and a Court Chaplain.²⁴ In the interpretation of the Lord's Supper Luther regarded the literal aspect of the utmost importance. Against Zwingli, Luther, influenced by Augustine, gave the following explanation in this regard:

Now, what is the Sacrament of the Altar? Answer: It is the true body and blood of the Lord Christ in and under the bread and wine which we Christians are commanded by Christ's word to eat and drink. . . . It is bread by and wine comprehended in God's Word and connected with it.²⁵

According to Kolb, Luther showed the usage of a literal interpretation on the Lord's Supper.

He [Luther] presumed that God actually works His saving

²² M. Luther, *The Large Catechism (1529)*, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 375. Hereafter referred to LC.

²³ LC 416-7.

²⁴ A. Skevington Wood, *Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 29.

²⁵ LC 447.

will through elements of the created order which He has selected to do the task, including Jesus' human flesh and oral and written human language, as well as the water of baptism and the bread-body and wine-blood of the Lord's Supper. He presumed the words of institution should be interpreted literally even though he could not understand how that could be.²⁶

On explaining the meaning of observing a holy day literally, Luther continued to say that even though in the Old Testament God set apart the seventh day and appointed it for rest, the commandment was given to the Jews concerning the outward observance²⁷.

Thirdly, Luther stressed the distinction between Law and Gospel in order to understand the meaning of the text correctly. Recently, a number of scholars have emphasized the hermeneutical significance of the Law-Gospel distinction.²⁸ In

²⁶ Robert Kolb, *Teaching God's Children His Teaching* (Hutchinson: Crown Publishing, Inc., 1992), p. 9.

²⁷ LC 375-6.

²⁸ Ralph A. Bohlmann, *Principle of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), especially in chapter 7 deals with the hermeneutical function of Law-Gospel. Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. P. F. Koehneke and H. J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), pp. 6-11; A. Skevington Wood, *Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 29-33; Gerhard O. Forde, "Law and Gospel in Luther's Hermeneutic," *Interpretation* 37 (1983): 240-252; Horace Hummel, "Are Law and Gospel a Valid Hermeneutical Principle?" *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 46 (1982): 181-207. Hummel insists that we should recognize the distinction between Law and Gospel as a hermeneutical principle of Scripture of Luther. Also Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, p. 157, says, "Luther's important distinction between the law and the gospel is also closely related to his interpretation of the Scripture in terms of its center. The Word of God encounters people as law and as gospel, as a word of judgment and a word of grace. . . . And this twofold dimension of the Word of God must be taken

spite of recognizing the distinction between Law and Gospel as a hermeneutical principle in interpreting Scripture, they have not found out their own hermeneutical method. That makes it difficult to interpret the text in terms of this distinction.

In the conclusion of the Ten Commandments in the *Small Catechism*, Luther showed the clear contrast of Law and Gospel.²⁹ The expressions on Law were "God threatens to punish," "We should fear his wrath," and "do what he has commanded," "disobey". The expressions of Gospel were "He promises grace and every blessing to all," "love," and "trust." Therefore, Luther confirmed that an interpreter's starting point was to know the essence of the distinction between Law and Gospel. Luther said, "You see that the Creed is a very different teaching from the Ten Commandments. The latter teach us what we ought to do; the Creed tells what God does for us and gives to us."³⁰ Therefore, in order to interpret Scripture correctly, Luther maintained that an interpreter needed to know the distinction between Law and Gospel from the text of Scripture. This principle did not require one to take a word in its literal sense in interpreting many texts of the Old Testament relating to Christ. Rather this principle was related to a Christological

into account in our interpretation of Scripture as well as in our preaching."

²⁹ M. Luther, *The Small Catechism (1529)*, in *The Book of Concord*, p. 344. Hereafter referred to SC.

³⁰ LC 419.

interpretation centering on Christ. The hermeneutical principle of Law and Gospel of Luther was connected to typology. In the explanation of the meaning of baptizing with water, Luther contrasted the old Adam (the Law) with the new man (the Gospel).³¹ Luther also used typology from the Old Testament in many places. For example, in the interpretation of Psalm 49:2 "All who are earth-born and sons of men" Luther showed a typological interpretation.

The Hebrew has "low-born and high-born." In Hebrew there are three designations for man. The first is Adam. This, strictly speaking, refers to the bodily nature of man and the outside man, according to which he was shaped from the clay of the earth. Adam properly denotes earth, especially reddish earth. And so the apostle says very aptly, Rom. 5:14, that Adam was a type of the One who was to come, for the earthly and physical man is a type of the heavenly (that is, spiritual).³²

Fourthly, one of the most significant principles was that of Christological interpretation. Johann Staupitz, who influenced Luther's "rediscovery" of Christ,³³ told Luther, "One must keep one's eyes fixed on that man who is called Christ. In Christ all treasures are hidden: apart from Him they are closed to us."³⁴ Luther followed the clue to its logical conclusion, so that his theology might be thoroughly Christocentric.³⁵ From this perspective Luther developed his

³¹ SC 349.

³² LW 10.224. Cf. LW 10.151, LW 10.298.

³³ A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word*, p. 169.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Christological hermeneutics.³⁶ Bornkamm defines this method as follows:

The direct application of the Old Testament texts to Jesus Christ, his words and deeds, his death and resurrection, his church and his work in the believer was by far the strongest and most comprehensive theme in Luther's interpretation of the Old Testament.³⁷

Luther thought of the Old and New Testaments as a unit, whose oneness was to be found in Christ crucified.³⁸ Thus he considered Christ as the heart or the center of the Bible.

Luther said,

He who would read the Bible must simply take heed he does not err, for the Scripture may permit itself to be stretched and lead, but let no one lead it according to his affects, but let him lead it to the source, i.e., the cross of Christ. Then he will surely strike the center.³⁹

Although Luther did not often use this method in his Catechisms, his Christological interpretation played an important role in giving a clear exposition. In the explanation of the Ten Commandments in his *Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony* (1528), Luther used the strongly Christological interpretation of

³⁶ Even though Luther's Christological hermeneutics had a little a vulnerable point, this method played a great role in removing the fourfold sense of the interpretation of Scripture employed by the interpreters of the Middle Ages. Cf. David S. Dockery, "Martin Luther's Christological Hermeneutics," *Grace Theological Journal* 4 (1983): 189-203.

³⁷ Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, trans. Eric W. and Ruth C. Gritsch, ed. Victor I. Gruhn (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), p. 101.

³⁸ Raymond F. Surburg, "The Significance of Luther's Hermeneutics for the Protestant Reformation," p. 257.

³⁹ As quoted by Surburg, p. 258. Cf. WA 1.52.15-18.

Scripture. This method appears clearly in his interpretation of the third commandment "You shall sanctify the holy day."

Luther first pointed out the wrong literal interpretation

which the Jews gave to this commandment and stressed a

Christological interpretation. Luther detailed,

Therefore, according to its literal, outward sense, this commandment does not concern us Christians. It is an entirely external matter, like the other ordinances of the Old Testament connected with particular customs, persons, times, and places, from all of which we are now set free through Christ.⁴⁰

Here Luther used the distinction between Law and Gospel to give one Christological interpretation to this commandment. He thought that this method could criticize and correct the wrong interpretation of the Jews.

Fifthly, Luther employed the simple interpretation of Scripture. The principle of simplicity means the natural, straightforward, clear, brief, and plain way. A good example of this method can be found in the dispute with Latomus⁴¹ and "The Bondage of the Will."⁴² Against Latomus and Erasmus, Luther insisted that Holy Scripture is necessarily clearer, simpler, and more reliable than any other writings.⁴³ John Goldingay states on this method: "The insistence on interpreting Scripture in the natural, straightforward way

⁴⁰ LC 376.

⁴¹ LW 32.217.

⁴² LW 33.24, 90.161-3.

⁴³ LW 32.11.

depends upon the prior claim that the Scriptures are, in fact, fundamentally of clear and unambiguous meaning."⁴⁴

Luther regarded the Holy Spirit as the most plain writer and speaker in heaven. Therefore, he said: "His words cannot have more than one sense, the very simplest sense, which we call the literal, ordinary, natural sense."⁴⁵

In the preface to his *Small Catechism*, Luther said that the deplorable conditions which he encountered constrained him to prepare this brief and simple catechism (*catechismus simplicissime et brevissime*).⁴⁶ This expression includes the fact that he would employ brief and simple interpretation. In his *Person Prayer Book* (1522), Luther told that the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer summarized everything with such brevity and clarity that no one could complain or make any excuse that the things necessary for his salvation were too complicated or difficult for him to remember.⁴⁷ The reason why Luther used this simple principle is the following: "This I must explain a little more plainly,

⁴⁴ John Goldingay, "Luther and the Bible," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 35 (1982): 36.

⁴⁵ Martin Luther, *Dr. M. Luther's Answer to the Superchristian, Superspiritual, and Superlearned Book of Goat Emser of Leipzig, with a Glance at His Comrade Murner, 1521*, trans, A. Steimle, Works of Martin Luther, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1930), p. 350.

⁴⁶ SC 340.

⁴⁷ LW 43.13.

so that it may be understood and remembered."⁴⁸ Thus he wanted the common people to understand the meaning easily. "This much, however, should be said to ordinary people so that they may mark well and remember the meaning of this commandment."⁴⁹

Luther showed the characteristic elements of the method of simplicity. Luther showed that the distinction between Law and Gospel helped in finding this simple meaning. After Luther explained the observance of the holy day with the principle of Law and Gospel, he said, " This, then, is the plain meaning of this commandment."⁵⁰ He maintained that this method should be used with the proper language. Luther stated: "This I say plainly for the sake of the young, so that it may sink into their minds for when we preach to children, we must also speak their language."⁵¹ Here he spoke of accommodation which has been used by many interpreters since the Early Church Ages. Luther showed that interpreting the text's meaning with the context connected it to the method of simplicity. Luther presented that the commandment following was easily understood from the preceding one (*Sequentia praecepta intellectu jam sunt facilia ex interpretatione prioris*).⁵² Luther's method related closely to the literal exposition of the words. The

⁴⁸ LC 365.

⁴⁹ LC 367.

⁵⁰ LC 376.

⁵¹ LC 375.

⁵² LC 393.

principle did not twist the meaning of the word, but rather made it natural. On the explanation of the eighth commandment, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

Luther said:

In its first and simplest meaning, as the words stand ("You shall not bear false witness"), this commandment pertains to public courts of justice, where a poor, innocent man is accused and maligned by false witnesses and consequently punished in his body, property, or honor.⁵³

Luther thought that the simple interpretation of Scripture appeared clearly through the use of the language like the verb and the noun. In the exposition of the first petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Hallowed be thy name," Luther argued the following: "This petition, then, is simple and clear as soon as we understand the language, namely, that 'to hallow' means the same as in our idiom 'to praise, extol, and honor' in word and deed."⁵⁴

Although in the epistle dedicatory in his *Commentary on Romans* Calvin did not mention the hermeneutical method of Luther, Luther's influence upon Calvin was proved by the fact that Calvin cited Luther's writings.⁵⁵ The only letter that Calvin wrote to Luther, although Melanchthon did not hand it over, expressed a deep sense of respect of Calvin for

⁵³ LC 399.

⁵⁴ LC 426.

⁵⁵ T. F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin*, p. 156.

Luther.⁵⁶ Calvin showed his endeavor to read the text of Scripture in Luther (*legerem apud Lutherum*).⁵⁷ In spite of this influence, Calvin was not satisfied to imitate Luther, but rather advanced his own method. Fullerton points out the difference between Luther and Calvin:

The most astonishing difference between Luther and Calvin is that, whereas Luther's religious canon of interpretation, the Christocentric theory of Scripture, dominated his exegetical method at every turn, Calvin's dogmatic theories of Scripture controlled his exegesis only to a limited extent. In the case of no great commentator is it more necessary to distinguish between the theologian and the exegete than in the case of Calvin.⁵⁸

Calvin did not follow Luther's interpretation when his view was frivolous and not solid. For example, with regard to interpreting the age of Abraham in his commentary on Gen. 11:27 Calvin rejected Luther's interpretation. "The conjecture of Luther, that God buried that time in oblivion, in order to hid from us the end of the world, in the first place is frivolous, and in the next, may be refuted by solid and convincing arguments. . . . A firm valid argument is also

⁵⁶ CO 12.7.

⁵⁷ CO 9.51.

⁵⁸ Kemper Fullerton, *Prophecy and Authority: A Study in the History of the Doctrine and Interpretation of Scripture* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), p. 133. For the discussion of the comparison between Luther and Calvin on hermeneutics, see K. V. Warren, "Luther and Calvin on the Doctrine of Scripture," *Vox Reformata* 40 (1983): 3-35; Thomas Parker, "Interpretation of Scripture: A Comparison of Calvin and Luther on Galatians." *Interpretation* 17 (1963): 61-75; Pieter A. Verhoef, "Luther's and Calvin's Exegetical Library," *Calvin Theological Journal* 3 (1968): 5-20.

deduced from the age of Sarai"⁵⁹ In the interpretation of Gen 13:14 "And the Lord said unto Abram", Calvin refused Luther's speculation because he did not explain the text from the perspective of the promise and fulfillment in Christ.⁶⁰ Calvin's theological aspect was a covenantal approach in interpreting this text. While Luther distinguished the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament, Calvin emphasized the continuity of both Testaments.⁶¹

Calvin did not entirely reject Luther's interpretation, but did not accept his view in so far as Luther did not interpret the words simply. In the interpretation of Gen. 6:3 "My Spirit shall not always strive." Calvin expressed his attitude toward Luther. "However, I do not entirely reject the opinion of Luther, that God having seen the deplorable wickedness of men, would not allow his prophets to spend their labour in vain. But the general declaration is not to be restricted to that particular case."⁶² In the interpretation of Gen. 11:10 "These are the generations of Shem", Calvin agreed with Luther: "Luther very properly compares the incredible torments, by which they were necessarily afflicted,

⁵⁹ *Comm. on Gen. 11:27*, pp. 335-6.

⁶⁰ *Comm. on Gen. 13:14*, p. 375.

⁶¹ Willem VanGemeran, "Systems of Continuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testament*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1988), pp. 37-62.

⁶² *Comm. on Gen. 6:3*, pp. 241-2.

to many martyrdoms."⁶³

Calvin followed Luther when Luther interpreted the text of Scripture correctly. But he refused Luther's interpretation when Luther's argument did not have a historical-grammatical approach and the interpretation without the unity of the Old and New Testament.⁶⁴

B. Zwingli

The hermeneutical method of Zwingli came originally from his humanistic education, his reformed understanding of Scripture, and the Christian faith.⁶⁵ He, according to

⁶³ *Comm. on Gen. 11:10*, p. 334.

⁶⁴ Although Calvin was influenced by Luther, he rejected Luther's view when Luther's interpretation was too absurd. Cf. CO 15.454. "*Restat iam alterum crimen, quod non ubique Lutheri interpretationibus subscribam. Verum si iam cuique interpreti non licebit de singulis scripturae locis quod sentit in medium proferre, quorsum servitutis recidimus? Imo, si mihi usquam a Lutheri sententia discedere non licuit, munus interpretandi suscipere absurdum fuit ac ridiculum.*" Calvin, *Comm. on Da. 8:23*, p. 119, did not follow Luther who indulged his thoughts too freely.

⁶⁵ W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 59. For the studies of the hermeneutics of Zwingli, see Fritz Büsler, "Zwingli the Exegete: A Contribution to the 450th Anniversary of the Death of Erasmus," in *Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Studies in Honor of Edward A. Dowey, Jr.* pp. 175-196; Gerald Hobbs, "Exegetical Projects and Problems: A New Look at an Undated Letter from Bucer to Zwingli," in *Prophet Pastor Protestant: The Work of Huldrych Zwingli after Five Hundred Years*, eds. E. J. Furcha and H. Wayne Pipkin (Allison Park: Pickwick Publications, 1984), pp. 89-107, and "Zwingli and Old Testament," in *Huldrych Zwingli 1483-1531: A Legacy of Radical Reform*, ed. E. J. Furcha (Montreal: McGill University, 1985), pp. 144-78; Ulrich Gäbler, *Huldrych Zwingli: His Life and*

McGrath, insisted "that the best possible exegetical aids (such as a knowledge of the Hebrew and Greek languages, and of the various figures of speech employed in scripture) should be employed in an effort to establish the natural sense of Scripture."⁶⁶ Especially the influence of Erasmus on Zwingli through the whole of his life might have exercised an effect not only on the methodological and scientific-theoretical elements but rather also on the shape and content of Zwingli's theology.⁶⁷ His approach to the hermeneutics of Scripture in the period 1515-20 was basically Erasmian. Erasmus' influence upon Zwingli can already be seen in his early hermeneutical works, such as his marginal comments of 1516-17 to Erasmus' *Novum Instrumentum*.⁶⁸ In many places Zwingli followed Erasmus: his translation of the text, his textual criticism, his illustrations and his patristic references.⁶⁹

The starting point of Zwingli's hermeneutics was the distinction between the natural and non-literal senses of Scripture. McGrath explains this fact correctly: "In common

Work, trans/ Ruth C. L. Gritsen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 183), pp. 101-3.

⁶⁶ Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, p. 168.

⁶⁷ Fritz Büsser, "Zwingli the Exegete: A Contribution to the 450th Anniversary of the Death of Erasmus," pp. 191-2.

⁶⁸ Adolf Meier, "Zwinglis Übersetzung des Römerbriefs," *Evangelische Theologie* 19 (1959): 40-52.

⁶⁹ Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, p. 168.

with the medieval tradition, he (Zwingli) insists that nothing should be believed which is established on the basis of a non-literal sense of Scripture, unless it can first be demonstrated on the basis of the letter of Scripture. The spiritual senses should be regarded as the embellishment of an exegetical argument rather than its foundation."⁷⁰ First, Zwingli stressed the necessity of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture. He suggested as follows;

Before I say anything or listen to the teaching of man, I will first consult the mind of the Spirit of God (Ps. 84 (A.V. 85): "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." Then you should reverently ask God for his grace, that he may give you his mind and Spirit, so that you will not lay hold of your own opinion but of his. And have a firm trust that he will teach you a right understanding, for all wisdom is of God the Lord. And then go to the written word of the Gospel. . . . You must be *theodidacti*, that is, taught of God, not of men: that is what the Truth itself said (John 6), and it cannot lie.⁷¹

Zwingli believed that the Holy Spirit was indispensable for the interpretation of Scripture, and that we should receive the illumination of the Holy Spirit before we turned to it.⁷² Secondly, Zwingli argued that attention to the immediate context was a prerequisite in interpreting the text.⁷³ In the eucharistic controversy with Luther, according to Stephens,

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Huldrych Zwingli, "Of the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God," in *Zwingli and Bullinger*. ed. G. W. Bromiley, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 88-9.

⁷² W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli*, p. 60.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 64.

Zwingli emphasized "that 'This is my body' must be seen in the light of the words that immediately follow, such as 'Do this in remembrance of me' or 'which is given for you'."⁷⁴ Thirdly, he maintained that faith, or the analogy of faith was necessary for interpreting Scripture. He argued that our reason could not accept God's command unless faith enlightened an interpreter with God's Word.

And that was all of God, who so enlightened him (Abraham with the Word that he knew it to be the Word of God, even though he was commanded to do something quite contrary to God's former promise. The nerves and bones and muscles of faith all braced themselves. His reason could not accept the command, but faith withstood reason (Rom. 4), saying: The one who promised and gave thy son at the first can raise him up again from the dead, or he can use some other means to give the world the Saviour promised through him. . . . And faith gained the victory; note well that it did so by the light which the Word of God had itself brought with it.⁷⁵

Fourthly, Zwingli like Erasmus stressed the moral dimension of the text. His "development of the Erasmian concept of the tropological sense of Scripture" clearly showed his moralist concerns, and set him apart from the young Luther in this crucial respect.⁷⁶

The fact that in his *Institutes* and commentaries Calvin hardly mentioned the interpretation of Zwingli makes it difficult for us to understand Calvin's attitude toward

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ "Of the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God," p. 76.

⁷⁶ Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, p. 169.

Zwingli.⁷⁷

C. Melanchthon

Melanchthon's hermeneutics was closely related to Aristotle's method which he learned from Heinrich Bebel.⁷⁸ He developed his scholarship on Aristotle.

Melanchthon had studied Aristotle with Franz Stadian while a student, and Stadian presented the traditional line of interpreting the *Posterior Analytics* as dealing with a branch of metaphysics. We consider it logic now. . . . Not only that, but Stadian suggested that Melanchthon begin a project for editing Aristotle in Greek and thereby replacing the barbarous Latin translations that had distorted the philosopher for centuries. Despite offers of assistance from Stadian, his old schoolmaster Georg Simler, Reuchlin and Oecolampadius, the venture did not get off the ground. But a seed was planted that the most important and necessary work on Aristotle required complete fidelity to his text. What he had learned as a corrector of books was expanded to faithfulness to the text.⁷⁹

After studying Aristotle, Melanchthon lectured on the ethical and political writings of Aristotle.⁸⁰ He, therefore, was a specialist on Aristotle. But his *Loci Communes* of 1521 showed

⁷⁷ W. J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait*, p. 119, argues that Calvin thought Zwingli's interpretation apt and ready but too free.

⁷⁸ Philip Melanchthon, *A Melanchthon Reader*, trans. Ralph Keen (New York: Peter Lang, 1988), p. 2.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3. On the relationship of Melanchthon to Aristotle, see Franz Hildebrandt, *Melanchthon: Alien Or Ally?* (New York: Kraus Reprint CO, 1968), pp. 1-10.

⁸⁰ Heinz Scheible, "Melanchthon," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, vol. 3, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 41-45.

that he rejected the philosophy of Aristotle and followed Luther's theology. There he clearly betrayed the influence of the rhetorical tradition, especially in terms of the organization of its material. For example, in the argument on the knowledge of the laws of nature he did not agree with the philosophy of Aristotle and the opinion of Cicero.⁸¹ He also departed from Erasmus by basing his thought on Scripture alone and by rejecting a moral universalism.

His commentaries on Scripture broke new ground. They gave up the four senses of the Middle Ages, treated the New Testament like the classics, and stressed the need of history and archaeology for the interpretation of Scripture. But his commentaries were not grammatical-historical, but were full of theological and practical material, confirming the doctrines of the Reformation, and edifying believers. In his *Commentary on Romans* (1522) he employed the method of *loci* as his hermeneutical method. The *loci* method of Melanchthon mainly existed in interpreting a text relating it to the important doctrines of the Reformation. McGrath comments on the method of Melanchthon's *Loci* as follows:

Melanchthon adopts the principle that theology may be organized around a single, saving doctrine, which effectively provides the key to Scripture, That key, according to Melanchthon, is not the Erasmian *imitatio Christi*, but Luther's doctrine of justification *sola fide*. The rhetorical origins of Melanchthon's *loci* are evident in his 1519 treatise on rhetoric, in which he

⁸¹ Philip Melanchthon, "*Loci Communes Theologici*," in *Melanchthon and Bucer*, ed. Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), p. 50.

makes reference to the principle of the *locus didacticus*.⁸²

Calvin always praised Melanchthon's learning, genius, and industry. "Philip Melanchthon, who by his singular learning and industry, and by that readiness in all kinds of knowledge, in which he excels, has introduced more light than those who had preceded him."⁸³ Calvin recognized Melanchthon as an excellent interpreter. "Philip Melanchthon, who excels in genius and learning and is happily versed in the studies of history, makes a double computation."⁸⁴ But Calvin did not agree with Melanchthon's hermeneutical method. Calvin commented on the method of *loci*. "But as it (the commentary on Romans of Melanchthon) seems to have been his object to examine only those things which are mainly worthy of attention, he dwelt at large on these, and designedly passed by many things which common minds find to be difficult."⁸⁵ Calvin did not criticize the interpretation of Scripture of Melanchthon. But he pointed out that Melanchthon did not interpret every passage one by one.⁸⁶ The direct reason why Melanchthon did so was that he wanted to interpret the passage

⁸² Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, p. 67.

⁸³ "The Epistle Dedicatory," p. xxv.

⁸⁴ *Comm. on Da. 9:25*, p. 209.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ John Robert Walchenbach, "John Calvin as Biblical Commentator: An Investigation into Calvin's Use of John Chrysostom as an Exegetical Tutor," p. 161.

from the perspective of the important theological themes. In his *Commentary on Romans* Melanchthon stressed the passages relating to the doctrinal themes such as the justification by faith, grace, the distinction between Law and Gospel, sin, faith, and good works. Therefore Melanchthon's interpretation of Scripture was doctrinal rather than straightforwardly exegetical.⁸⁷

D. Bucer

Bucer intensively studied the writings of Erasmus, so that the hermeneutical method of Erasmus had a great influence on that of Bucer. Bucer used "das antithetische schema *externa/spiritualia*" as a hermeneutical principle to find the moral application of the text from its historical sense.⁸⁸ Thus he turned the historical meaning of the passage into the spiritual.⁸⁹ But he rejected the allegorical interpretation of

⁸⁷ For studies on the hermeneutics of Melanchthon see. John R. Schneider, *Philip Melanchthon's Rhetorical Construct of Biblical Authority: Oratio Sacra* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellon Press, 1990); Rolf Schäfer, "Melanchthons Hermeneutik im Römerbrief-Kommentar von 1532," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 60 (1963): 216-235; Robert D. Preus, "Melanchthon the Theologian," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 31 (1960): 469-475; Peter F. Barton, "Die Exegetische Arbeit des Jungen Melanchthon 1518/19 bis 1528/29: Probleme und Ansätze," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 54 (1963): 52-89.

⁸⁸ Johannes Müller, *Martin Bucers Hermeneutik* (Heidelberg: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1965), pp. 169-78

⁸⁹ Alister McGrath, "Reformation to Enlightenment," in *The Science of Theology*, vol. 1, ed. Paul Avis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 124.

Scripture, and stressed the literal meaning. Following Erasmus, Bucer emphasized the tropological meaning of Scripture - the moral application of the text of Scripture to the specific historical situation of his readers.⁹⁰ The tropological interpretation of the text was especially important for Bucer's Old Testament approach.

Scholars have already recognized the central role of pneumatology for Bucer's theology.⁹¹ Bucer clearly stressed the role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture.⁹² Bucer said,

This Spirit, both through the Scriptures and through hidden inspirations, leads his own unto every truth and instructs them in every good work. For he is the Spirit of wisdom, i.e., the one who gives a firm cognition of God and of his works and judgments. He is the Spirit of

⁹⁰ Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, p. 53.

⁹¹ Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 75.

⁹² *Ibid.*, P. 76. Here H. G. Reventlow says: "It is evident that for Bucer 'the Spirit works mainly on the level of the intellect', though the fact that the Holy Spirit cannot be controlled guarantees that God's approach is completely grace. This understanding of the Spirit also had a decisive influence on Bucer's hermeneutics. Luther's indissoluble identification of word and spirit is expressly rejected by Bucer; by themselves the outward scripture (the 'letter') and the proclaimed word are useless, unless inner illumination through the Spirit given by God discloses their true understanding. In this division between Spirit and letter we can clearly see the legacy of dualism in Bucer. On the other hand, in contrast to the extreme Spiritualists Bucer did not give up scripture but explicitly related the knowledge given by the Spirit to the understanding of scripture. This again leads to a two-stage pattern: the first thing needed is illumination by the Holy Spirit; understanding of the word of scripture then follows from this."

understanding, imparting a true and salutary understanding of the works and judgments of God.⁹³

Bucer used the principle *Scriptura sui ipius interpres* for no prophecy in Scripture was a matter of our own interpretation.⁹⁴ He interpreted the Old Testament from the New Testament.⁹⁵ His important method of hermeneutics was that all Scriptures applied to Christ. This method was closely related to Bucer's use of d and his opposition to allegory.⁹⁶

Calvin praised Bucer's scholarship of the interpretation of Scripture. In his epistle to Grynaeus in the *Commentary on Romans*, Calvin expressed his respect as follows;

In the last place comes Bucer, who, by publishing his works, has given as it were the finishing stroke. For in addition to his recondite learning and enlarged knowledge of things, and to the clearness of his mind, and much

⁹³ Martin Bucer, "De Regno Christi," in *Melanchthon and Bucer*, pp. 194-5.

⁹⁴ *Martin Bucers Deutsche Schriften*. 2.59.4-10 (R. Stupperich: Gütersloh/Paris, 1960-1981). Hereafter cited as BW.

⁹⁵ BW 1. 253.5-12.

⁹⁶ W. P. Stephens, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Martin Bucer* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1970), p. 149. For studies on Bucer's hermeneutics, see R. Gerald Hobbs, "How Firm a Foundation: Martin Bucer's Historical Exegesis of the Psalms," *Church History* 53 (1984): 477-91, and "Martin Bucer on Psalm 22: A Study in the Application of Rabbinic Exegesis by a Christian Hebraist," in *Histoire de l'exégèse au XVIe siècle*, pp. 144-63; Hastings Eells, *Martin Bucer* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1931), pp. 65-9; Irena Backus, "Introduction," in *Martini Bucer Opera Latin* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988); August Lang, *Der Evangelienkommentar Martin Butzers und die Grundzüge seiner Theologie* (Leipzig: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1972); Bernard Roussel, "Bucer exégète," in *Martin Bucer and Sixteenth Century Europe*, vol.1, eds. Christian Krieger and Marc Lienhard (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), pp. 39-54.

reading and many other excellencies, in which he is hardly surpassed by any at this day equalled by few and excelled by still fewer - he possesses, as you know, this praise as his own - that no one in our age has been with so much labour engaged in the work of expounding Scripture.⁹⁷

Calvin agreed with Bucer's correct interpretation.⁹⁸ In the interpretation of Rom. 1:7 "Grace to you and Peace", for example, Calvin followed Bucer's suitable interpretation. "There are those who prefer to regard the word peace as signifying quietness of conscience; and that this meaning belongs to it sometimes, I do not deny: but since it is certain that the Apostle wished to give us here a summary of God's blessings, the former meaning, which is adduced by Bucer, is much the most suitable."⁹⁹ Calvin followed Bucer's interpretation which agreed with the context.¹⁰⁰ "I agree with Bucer, who proves that the argument is not made to depend on one expression, but on the whole passage."¹⁰¹ Calvin stated that Bucer appropriately quoted the text of the Old Testament in order to interpret the meaning of the text of the New Testament.¹⁰²

Although Bucer did not use the *loci* method of Aristotle,

⁹⁷ "The Epistle Dedicatory," in *Comm. on Rom.* p. xxv.

⁹⁸ *Comm. on Mt.* 2:23, 26:17; *Comm. on Lk.* 24:27.

⁹⁹ *Comm. on Rom.* 1:7, p. 51.

¹⁰⁰ *Comm. on Rom.* 1:12, p. 58.

¹⁰¹ *Comm. on Rom.* 4:4, p. 158.

¹⁰² *Comm. on Jn.* 1:33, p. 69.

Calvin pointed out that Bucer's interpretation was prolix. Calvin argued that it was very diffuse for busy men to read his commentary and too academic for simple men to understand it.¹⁰³

E. Bullinger

When Heinrich Bullinger studied the Fathers like Chrysostom, Ambrose, Origen, and Augustine, he felt the impact of Erasmus, Luther, Melanchthon, and Zwingli. After Zwingli's death at Kappel in 1531, the defeat at Kappel forced Bullinger into refuge at Zurich, and here he succeeded Zwingli as virtual leader of church life in both city and canton.

Bullinger emphasized the centrality of Scripture, and insisted that the interpretation of Scripture was to be sought from itself alone, so that it might itself be the interpreter.¹⁰⁴ Bullinger used the analogy of Scripture like Luther employed the hermeneutical principle *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. He also suggested the necessity of an interpreter's spirituality because Scripture could not "be understood by one who is opposed to God or careless of him, but only by one whose heart is devoted to God."¹⁰⁵ He

¹⁰³ "The Epistle Dedicatory," in *Comm. on Rom.* p. xxvi.

¹⁰⁴ T. H. L. Parker, *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans 1532-1542* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark LTD, 1986), p. 18.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

recognized the significance of the grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture. He maintained that an interpreter should consider the general rules of rhetoric and the circumstances of the text of Scripture.¹⁰⁶ In order to interpret Scripture correctly, Bullinger stressed "brevity, literalness, faithfulness to the original, attention to the context, making the ancient Scriptures relevant to a new age, and the correction of error."¹⁰⁷ Bullinger had sought brevity in his works, and did not write at greater length, but aimed at an active brevity in order for the reader not to be burdened by his expositions.¹⁰⁸ In spite of the fact that Bullinger used brevity, Bullinger did not develop its use as his hermeneutical method.¹⁰⁹

In his Epistle to Grynaeus Calvin considered Bullinger's *Commentary on Romans* as positive. "Then follow Bullinger, who has connected plainness, for which he has been highly commended."¹¹⁰ Calvin did not criticize Bullinger's hermeneutical method because of this fact.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ For the study of this debate, see Richard C. Gamble, "Calvin as Theologian and Exegete: Is There Anything New?" p. 191.

¹¹⁰ "The Epistle Dedicatory," in *Comm. on Rom.* p. xxv.

¹¹¹ For studies of Bullinger's hermeneutics, see Susi Hausammann, *Römerbriefauslegung zwischen Humanismus und Reformation: Eine Studie zu Heinrich Bullingers*

F. The Anabaptists

In the hermeneutics of Scripture the Anabaptists had much in common with the Reformers. They stressed one of the Reformers' hermeneutical principles of Scripture, *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. For example, Balthasar Hubmaier, one of the founders of the Anabaptists, said:

Searching the Scriptures does not take place with unspiritual chatter about innovations, nor with wordy warfare fighting until one is hoarse, but rather by illuminating the darker texts of Scripture with the clearer. This is just what Christ taught us when he explained the Scripture of Moses concerning Levirate marriage by reference to the Scripture on resurrection.¹¹²

Römerbriefvorlesung von 1525 (Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1970); Istvan Tokes, "Bullingers Hermeneutische Lehre," in *Heinrich Bullinger 1504-1575: Gesammelte Aufsätze zum 400 Todestag*, eds. Ulrich Gäbler und Erland Herkenrath (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 1975), pp. 161-189; Ernst Koch, "Paulusexegese und Bundestheologie: Bullingers Auslegung von Gal. 3, 17-26," in *Historie de l'exegese au XVIIe siecle*, ed. Oliver Fatio et Pierre Fraenkel (Geneve: Librairie Droz, 1978), pp. 432-50; Joel E. Kok, "Heinrich Bullinger's Exegetical Method: The Model for Calvin?" in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, pp. 241-254.

¹¹² Balthasar Hubmaier, "Theses against Eck," in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, trans. and ed. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1989), p. 53. On the historical background of Hubmaier's text Pipkin and Yoder say as follows: "Dr. John Maier from Egg (1586-1643), usually Eck, was previously Hubmaier's university teacher and now the leading Catholic polemicist against the Zwinglian Reformation. On August 13, 1524, Eck addressed to the Swiss Confederacy a "Missive and Petition" against the innovations of the Reformation. Zwingli's answer to Eck was dated August 31 and Hubmaier's parallel reaction, the present text, was in Eck's hands by September 18; Hubmaier must therefore have written it during the first days of his stay in Schaffhausen or even his last days in Waldshut." (Ibid., p. 49).

But there were some basic differences on the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament, the degree to which Scripture was the unique authority, and the extent to which the interpretation of Scripture was dependent on obedience to Christ. These differences between the Reformers and the Anabaptists derived from their own views of Scripture and the Holy Spirit.¹¹³ The most serious problem of the Anabaptists was that they rejected the simple identification of the Word of God with Scripture. They thought that the Word of God was the voice of God speaking through the Holy Spirit. We see this figure from Hans Denck's *Recantation* (1528). In the first article of his *Recantation* he confessed his view on Scripture.

I hold the Scriptures dear above all of man's treasures, but not as high as the Word of God which is living, strong, (Heb. 4:12) eternal and free of all elements of this world; for inasmuch as it is God Himself, it is spirit and not letter, written without pen or paper so that it can never be erased. Consequently, salvation is not bound to Scripture even though Scripture may be conducive to salvation (2 Tim. 3:16). The reason is this: Scripture cannot possibly change an evil heart even though it may make it more learned. A pious heart, on the other hand, i.e., one which has a spark of divine zeal, can be improved by all things. Thus Scripture serves believers unto salvation and toward the good. To unbelievers it is unto damnation as are all other

¹¹³ Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World*, pp. 49-72. He says: "God's Spirit, which the Anabaptists believed themselves to possess, is the ultimate authority which first gives authority to the written word of the Bible. Here, however, was a danger of making the principle of the Spirit so independent that as with the extreme Spiritualists (say Sebastian Franck), scripture can in fact become completely superfluous" (Ibid., p. 53).

things.¹¹⁴

For the Anabaptists a great part of interpreting Scripture was imitating it. For example, one of the Anabaptist leaders, Melchior Hofmann who was opposed to the Reformed doctrine of justification, stressed "sanctification, the imitation of the life of Christ."¹¹⁵ Irena Backus says, "The Anabaptist tended to find in scripture a direct and historical model, so that scriptural passages constitute an intrinsic part of their writings."¹¹⁶ Their method, therefore, became

¹¹⁴ Hans Denck, "Recantation," in *Selected Writings of Hans Denck*, ed. Walter Fellmann, Edward J. Furcha, and Ford Lewis Battles (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1975), pp. 123-4.

¹¹⁵ "Melchior Hofmann," in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* (Scottsdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1956).

James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1976), p. 211, says: "Melchior Hoffman, a Swabian furrier, began his ministry in 1523 when he preached the gospel of Martin Luther in the Baltic lands. In 1523 he was clearly on the side of Luther and the princes against Thomas Müntzer and the peasants. Frequently involved in jealous disputes with the learned in his own religious camp and always preoccupied with the apocalyptic and prophetic parts of the Bible, he eventually alienated Luther, who would have no part of his "fanatical speculations". In 1529 he disputed in Holstein for a more or less Zwinglian interpretation of the communion and for this reason was at first received in Strassburg as a welcome ally. It was not long, however, before he was advised by the Reformed pastors to return to his furrier's trade. Instead, in 1529 and 1530 in Strassburg, then the Reformation's open city for the exchange of radical Protestant ideas, Hoffman became a Melchiorite, that is, the leader of his own sect."

¹¹⁶ Irena Backus, "Biblical Hermeneutics and Exegesis," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, vol. 2, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 152.

the hermeneutics of obedience.¹¹⁷ In his writing *Restitution* (1534) the Anabaptist Bernhard Rothmann developed his own hermeneutical method of Scripture. He argued that one did not need a written interpretation by men in glosses or postils, but rather to this he added that God and his Spirit should be the master.

It may well be that sometimes I will consider the interpretation of man and grasp the understanding of the interpreter and then be able to speak about it in flowing words. However, since God's kingdom, does not consist in words but in power. I will never achieve the power of the knowledge of God unless God's Spirit drives me with power, teaches me, and leads me into the Scriptures.¹¹⁸

Rothmann suggested that in order to understand Scripture correctly, an interpreter should honor and fear God the almighty in Christ his Son. This can be called the hermeneutics of obedience. He says:

But if you wish to understand the Scriptures correctly, very well, for this we will give you good advice. The content of the whole Scriptures is briefly summarized in

¹¹⁷ Ben C. Ollenburger, "The Hermeneutics of Obedience: Reflections on Anabaptist Hermeneutics," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation Anabaptists-Mennonite Perspectives*, ed. Willard M. Swartley (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1984), pp. 45-61. For the studies of the hermeneutics of Anabaptists, see Walter Klaassen, "Anabaptist Hermeneutics: Presuppositions, Principles and Practice," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation Anabaptists-Mennonite Perspectives*, pp. 5-10; John H. Yoder, "The Hermeneutics and Discipleship," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation Anabaptists-Mennonite Perspectives*, pp. 11-28; C. J. Dyck, "Hermeneutics and Discipleship," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation Anabaptists-Mennonite Perspectives*, pp. 29-44; William Klassen, "Anabaptist Hermeneutics: The Letter and the Spirit," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation Anabaptists-Mennonite Perspectives*, pp. 77-90.

¹¹⁸ Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources* (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1981), p. 150.

this: Honor and fear God the almighty in Christ his Son. This is the beginning of all wisdom. And in the same breath, that as Christ was obedient to the Father and fulfilled his will, we too should fulfill his will with trembling and quaking. Whoever understands this and proves it by his deeds is not blind but has understood the whole Scriptures.¹¹⁹

They made many mistakes when they interpreted the Old Testament and its apocrypha with typology and allegory. On the hermeneutical problems of Melchior Hofmann, Williams and Mergal say:

Hofmann interpreted the Old Testament, including its apocrypha, as containing the types of the institutions of the New Covenantal Church of the Spirit. But when his thinking was applied in Münster, his allegorization of the law thickened once again into the law of a regenerated and regulated remnant engaged in the rebuilding of a Jerusalem in Westphalia.¹²⁰

Hofmann thought that the Revelation of John (interpreted in the light of the Old Testament apocalypse) was the key to the history of the World "from the beginning of the New Testament until the end of the Second Coming."¹²¹ His wrong doctrine of eschatology made his hermeneutics radical.

Calvin emphasized the hermeneutical problems of the Anabaptists. In reacting to the Anabaptist position, Calvin in the first place pointed out that the most serious problem of their hermeneutics was that it rejected the relationship

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal, *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 29.

¹²¹ Hofmann emphasized the imminence of the end of the world in his Revelation exegesis of 1530. See James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*, pp. 212-226.

between the Old and the New Testaments. Calvin criticized their view by advancing the concept of the covenant.

Indeed, that wonderful rascal Servetus and certain madmen of the Anabaptist sect, who regard the Israelites as nothing but a herd of swine, make necessary what would in any case have been very profitable for us. . . . So, then to keep this pestilential error away from godly minds, and at the same time to remove all the difficulties that usually rise up immediately when mention is made of the difference between the Old and the New Testament, let us look in passing at the similarities and differences between the covenant that the Lord made of old with the Israelites before Christ's advent, and that which God has now made with us after his manifestation.¹²²

Here Calvin recognized both the similarities and the differences. He maintained that the differences between two Testaments did not remove the basic unity of Scripture.¹²³ He stated that the two were actually one and the same. "Both can be explained in one word. The covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same."¹²⁴ Calvin freely admitted the differences in Scriptures. "I say that all these pertain to the manner of dispensation rather than to the substance."¹²⁵ In the interpretation of Ac. 2:17 "I will pour out my Spirit," Calvin attacked the Anabaptists' view that the

¹²² *Inst.* 2.10.1, p. 429.

¹²³ Willem Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, trans. William Heynen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), p. 310.

¹²⁴ *Inst.* 2.10.2, p. 429. Cf. CO 2.313, "*Ac uno quidem verbo expediri utrumque potest. Patrum omnium foedus adeo substantia et re ipsa nihil a nostro differt, ut unum prorsus atque idem sit.*"

¹²⁵ *Inst.* 2.11.1, p. 450.

Old Testament was inferior because God's people did not have the Holy Spirit. Here Calvin argued that this text intended "to prove that the Church can be repaired by no other means, saving only by the giving of the Holy Spirit."¹²⁶ By emphasizing the context in the interpretation of a passage, Calvin pointed out the problem of the hermeneutics of the Anabaptists.

Secondly, Calvin stated that the Anabaptists exhibited an extreme dependence on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. "Certain Anabaptists of our day conjure up some sort of frenzied excess instead of spiritual regeneration. The children of God, they assert, restored to the state of innocence, now need not take care to bridle the lust of the flesh, but should rather follow the Spirit as their guide, under whose impulsion they can never go astray."¹²⁷ They insisted that the Holy Spirit commanded us to follow Him.¹²⁸

Thirdly, Calvin noted that the hermeneutics of the Anabaptists disregarded the context of Scripture.¹²⁹ An example of this is found in his discussion of the Anabaptists' teaching on oaths in Mt. 5:34 "Swear not at all". Here Calvin showed the problem of their hermeneutics.

¹²⁶ *Comm. on Ac. 2:17*, p. 84.

¹²⁷ *Inst. 3.3.14*, p. 14.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Francis M. Higman, *The Style of John Calvin: In His French Polemical Treatises*, p. 33, also points out that the Libertines did not use context and parallel texts correctly.

The Anabaptists, too, have blustered a great deal, on the ground, that Christ appears to give no liberty to swear on any occasion, because he commands, Swear not at all. But we need not go beyond the immediate context to obtain the exposition: for he immediately adds, neither by heaven, nor by the earth. Who does not see that those kinds of swearing were added by way of exposition, to explain the former clause more fully by specifying a number of cases?¹³⁰

In his *Against the Anabaptists* Calvin added to this by saying "Nevertheless, it is necessary to expound the words of our Lord Jesus, because it does seem at first that He intends to prohibit all swearing. Now, in order to understand it correctly, it is necessary to understand the occasion which prompted Him to speak as He did."¹³¹ Here Calvin correctly pointed out that the interpretation of the text of Scripture of the Anabaptists did not consider the context of a passage.

Fourthly, Calvin criticized the fact that by interweaving different points, they cited only fragments of Scripture. Therefore they were "so pleased with this (approach) that they make themselves believe that there is far more majesty in speaking this grossly than there is in developing their case in an orderly manner."¹³² Calvin responded to this approach by emphasizing the method of *brevitas et facilitas*. "No better way exists than to expound and contradict the issues clearly

¹³⁰ *Comm. on Mt. 5:34*, p. 294.

¹³¹ John Calvin, "Brief Instruction for Arming All the Good Faithful against the Errors of the Common Sect," in *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, ed. and trans. Benjamin Wirt Farley (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), p. 97.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 156.

and to restate in an orderly manner one point after the other. Indeed, examine and consider closely the sentences of Scripture in order to discover their true and natural sense, using simple and clear words that are familiar to common language."¹³³ They forced the text, and rejected its simple interpretation.¹³⁴

G. The Libertines

Calvin knew that Libertinism developed in Holland, Brabant (Belgium), and Lower German.¹³⁵ Calvin protested against the French-speaking Libertines like Coppin, "a native of Lille, who began propagating the sect's views around 1525 in the region of his birth."¹³⁶ Coppin was succeeded by Quintin who later became the acknowledged founder of the Libertines.¹³⁷ Furthermore there were Quintin's followers, Moulins and Perceval. Calvin reported that he personally met Quintin near Paris.¹³⁸

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 156-7.

¹³⁴ *Comm. on Jer.* 31:34, p. 135.

¹³⁵ John Calvin, "Brief Instruction for Arming All the Good Faithful against the Errors of the Common Sect of the Anabaptists," in *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, p. 163.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., Cf. CO 7.159.

Calvin called the Libertines a pernicious sect.¹³⁹ Calvin attacked their wrong method of the interpretation of Scripture. Higman also correctly points out that Calvin's Scriptural argument with the Libertines was "in fact an argument on Scriptural interpretation, on exegetical method primarily."¹⁴⁰ First, Calvin correctly pointed out that the Libertines' basic hermeneutical method was the wrong presupposition "the letter kills but the spirit gives life." This principle made them change Scripture into allegories. Calvin described their incorrect approach. "For they consistently maintained this principle: that Scripture, taken in its natural sense, is but a dead letter and only kills. Thus they abandon it in order to come to the life-giving Spirit."¹⁴¹ In order to pursue their purpose, they rejected the simple sense of Scripture, and accepted allegorical interpretation.¹⁴² Calvin argued that they tried to find out new revelations. "They mean that one should not be content with what is written, or acquired in it at all, but one should speculate higher and look for new revelation."¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 190.

¹⁴⁰ Francis M. Higman, *The Style of John Calvin: In His French Polemical Treatises*, p. 32.

¹⁴¹ "Against the Fantastic and Furious Sect of the Libertines Who are Called Spirituals," in *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, p. 222.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Secondly, Calvin criticized that their interpretation was more diabolical. "For they seek to turn us away from Scripture in order to make us err by following their imaginations, or rather in order to lead us beyond the limits of Scripture to the end that each might follow his own interests and the devil's illusions instead of following the truth of God."¹⁴⁴ Calvin pointed out that their view of the work of the Holy Spirit was serious. Calvin maintained that the Spirit did not create new doctrines, rather He confirmed Christ's apostles in the gospel which was preached to them.¹⁴⁵ Stressing the fact that "Spirit and Scripture are one and the same,"¹⁴⁶ Calvin attacked the wrong view of the Libertines who extremely stressed the Spirit. With great haughtiness exalting the teaching office of the Spirit, they wrongly appealed to the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁷ For Calvin the Holy Spirit was recognized in His agreement with Scripture,¹⁴⁸ and Word and Spirit belonged inseparably together.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 223-4.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Inst.* 1.9.1, p. 94.

¹⁴⁸ *Inst.* 1.9.2, p. 94.

¹⁴⁹ *Inst.* 1.9.3, p. 95.