By European standards, the University of Zurich is of recent foundation. Established in 1833 by popular referendum, it cannot compare in age to such time-honoured seats of higher learning as Basel and Heidelberg, or Oxford and Bologna. Nevertheless, the origins of Zurich’s university are somewhat older than the founding referendum and can, in fact, be traced back to a tradition dating from the early Reformation. Inspired by Erasmus of Rotterdam who had instituted the ‘Collegium Trilingue’ in Louvain as an independent school without connection to the university, Huldrych Zwingli founded the ‘Prophezei’ in 1525 as an institution for the training of the clergy in Zurich.1 Considerably less dramatic than the name might imply, the school aimed at providing future pastors with a firm grounding in the Biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek as well as Latin.2 The Prophezei quickly developed into an institution of higher learning whose influence and reputation spread within a short time beyond Switzerland to the rest of Europe: namely, the Schola Tigurina.3

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1 The name was derived from ‘prophecy’ following Zwingli’s interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12, 28 and 14, 26–33 and used as term for school in the church ordinance of 1535 (Christenlich ordnung und bruch der kilche Zürich). See Emidio Campi, ‘Prophezei’ in Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, 4th ed., vol. 6 (Tübingen: Mohr, 2003), col. 1716.


The driving force behind this growth was Zwingli’s successor as Antistes of Zurich, Heinrich Bullinger. Among the faculty at the Schola Tigurina, one finds such notable scholars as Jacob Wiesendanger, called Ceporinus, Konrad Pellikan, Konrad Gessner, Theodor Bibliander, Peter Martyr Vermigli, and Josias Simler as well as outstandingly erudite pastors devoted to theological inquiry like Leo Jud, Rudolph Gualther, Otto Werdmüller (alias Myliander), Johannes Wolf, and Ludwig Lavater. Their importance has been largely overshadowed by Bullinger, whose leadership and enormous productivity have thus far been the main focus of modern scholarly interest. In recent years, however, more intensive research has led to increasing recognition of these lesser known, although not less important figures. In particular, Peter Martyr Vermigli has become a frequent subject of research. Why did this Florentine refugee (religionis causa) arouse the interest of his Zurich contemporaries? What did they know about him, about his thought and his writings? What were their hopes and expectations when they appointed him to the chair of Old Testament at the Zurich school? What was his distinctive contribution to the Schola Tigurina? Why did his works form a standard against which future Reformed theology came to be measured?

It is worthy of note that despite the growing interest in Vermigli’s life and thought, and in particular the undeniable importance of his

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