

**The Spiritual Marriage between
Christ and His Church and
Every One of the Faithful**

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Girolamo Zanchi

Translated and introduced
by Patrick J. O'Banion



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The Spiritual Marriage between Christ and His Church and Every One of the Faithful
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For Isabel

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Preface

The origins of this translation date back more than two decades to my studies in historical theology at Westminster Seminary California, where I first encountered Girolamo Zanchi. To be honest, I think that he initially intrigued me because the notion of a Protestant Reformer with an Italian name seemed so peculiar and unexpected. The deeper I dug, the more intrigued I became, and I soon realized that I had not only stumbled across a fascinating and significant historical figure but also struck upon a rich vein of theological reflection and piety. Unfortunately, at the time I could only access Zanchi's massive corpus by way of a microfilm reader. Subsequent digitization projects brought his works to the Internet but, even so, they were not particularly readable. Even for the handful of writings that had been translated into sixteenth-century English, early modern orthography, prose style, and typography conspired with semantic shifts to deter all but the most intrepid literary explorers.

My primary motivation for bringing *Spiritual Marriage* to press is the hope that it will encourage readers to meditate on what it means to be united with Christ so that they might learn to love the church's Bridegroom more deeply and express that love by living "soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:12). My secondary motivation is to make Zanchi better known. The last three decades have seen more scholarship produced on the Italian than the previous three centuries combined, but virtually all of it is found in scholarly journals, doctoral dissertations, and academic monographs. Only those with lending privileges at a good research library or an expansive personal budget for books

can lay hold of such resources. And, of course, for those without Latin, almost all of Zanchi's writings remain out of reach.

I hope this new English translation of *Spiritual Marriage*, which seeks to be true to the original while being readable (and perhaps even pleasant), will be a small first step toward making Zanchi and his work better known and more accessible to a wider audience. It was made primarily using the 1591 Herborn edition published by Christopher Corvinus as *De spirituali inter Christum et ecclesiam singulosque fideles, connubio, liber unus*. It was not made on the basis of a critical edition of the Latin text and does not seek to account for textual variations, but comparisons were made with other Latin editions, as well as with the older English (1592) and the French (1594) translations.

Bringing any work from one language into another is a complex endeavor, and several idiosyncrasies of the original treatise and this translation of it should be noted. First, Zanchi quotes Scripture in ways that were typical for his contemporaries but that may be a challenge to modern readers. He frequently inserts parenthetical glosses and interpretations in the midst of a Scripture quotation. In this translation, those interpolations are enclosed in parentheses. Furthermore, his quotations of Scripture are often elliptical, meaning he only gives a small portion of a larger text; paraphrastic, meaning he offers the gist of a passage without seeking to reproduce it word for word; or emphatic, meaning he quotes in such a way as to emphasize a specific element of a passage. Consequently, the same verse may be quoted multiple times with minor variations. This translation renders Scripture as it appears in the text of Zanchi's Latin treatise rather than quoting from a standard English translation of the Bible.

Another challenge has to do with masculine nouns and pronouns, which Zanchi often used inclusively to refer to both men and women. While he sometimes speaks of "humankind" (*humani generis*) or "people" (*populi*) generically, he more often uses "mankind" or "men" (*homines*) to refer to people of both genders. Whenever possible, this translation has maintained the gendered language in order to stay close to the original text but occasionally the inclusive meaning of a term is emphasized in a footnote.

Additionally, Zanchi understood that the name that God revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14–19 was properly rendered “Jehovah.” He dismissed the common Jewish practice of substituting “Adonai” in place of the divine name and believed that the Hebrew vowel points subsequently added to the text by Jewish copyists provided the correct pronunciation for the tetragrammaton. Nowadays most biblical scholars disagree, seeing “Yahweh” as representing a more likely pronunciation than “Jehovah,” but it seems heavy-handed to correct the text in view of Zanchi’s strong opinion on the matter.

One final note regarding the translation is in order. In an effort to make this text more accessible to modern readers, it has very occasionally proved necessary to add material in order to clarify meaning or provide background and context. Most editorial insertions in the body of the text have been indicated by placing them within brackets. The exception is that several section headings have been added to the text to improve the visible consistency of the text’s structure and aid the reader in tracking Zanchi’s argument. All material placed in the footnotes is also editorial, with the following exception: When Zanchi quotes sources in Greek, an English translation has been inserted into the body of the text and the original Greek has been placed in the accompanying footnote.

On a personal note, I have profited over the years from talking about Zanchi with a number of scholars who have contributed—directly or indirectly—to this project, among them John Farthing, Richard Muller, Karin Maag, Paul Fields, Dolf te Velde, Stefan Lindholm, Benjamin Merkle, Christopher Burchill, and Scott Clark. As this project neared completion, I received helpful feedback from Elliot Clark, Jared Mulvihill, Kim Kuhfuss, and Michael Seufert. Richard Bishop kindly helped me navigate some of the patristic sources that Zanchi engages. I am grateful to Jay Collier of Reformation Heritage Books for getting behind this project and to Drew McGinnis, whose labors have made it a better book. My colleagues at Training Leaders International, our students around the world, and those who support our ministry have contributed in ways that defy simple explanation. Suffice it to say, I am honored to spend my workdays in partnership with them.

As I thought about Zanchi's theology of marriage—both physical and spiritual—and as I reflected on his family life, my own wife and children were often on my mind. It has been my greatest earthly joy to share life with them, and I look forward to growing toward maturity in Christ together. I dedicate this little book to Isabel, the littlest one among us, praying that she might remain steadfast in her love for the One who has loved her beyond all measure.

Abbreviations

- ANF* *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325.* Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 10 vols. Reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999.
- CO* John Calvin. *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia.* Edited by William Baum, Edward Cunitz, and Edward Reuss. 59 vols. *Corpus Reformatorum*, 2nd series, 29–87. Brunswick: Schwetschke, 1863–1900.
- NPNF1* *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church.* Edited by Philip Schaff. 14 vols. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989–1994.
- NPNF2* *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church.* Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. 14 vols. 2nd series. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.
- OOT* Girolamo Zanchi. *Omnia opera theologorum.* 8 tomes in 3 vols. Geneva, 1619.
- PRRD* Richard A. Muller. *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520–1725.* 2nd ed. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.

Introduction

Girolamo Zanchi (1516–1590) and *Spiritual Marriage*

During the second half of the sixteenth century, Girolamo Zanchi, a pious and learned pastor, teacher, and theologian, bridged the early and later phases of the movement we call the Protestant Reformation in several critical ways. As the founding generation of Reformers died—Zwingli (1531), Luther (1546), Bucer (1551), Melancthon (1560), Calvin (1564)—responsibility for leadership fell on the shoulders of successors like Zanchi, who helped guide the Protestant churches of Europe toward maturity. And as the religious landscape shifted rapidly, Protestants found that they needed to develop “a normative and defensible body of doctrine consisting of a confessional foundation and systemic elaboration.”¹ If that process sounds dry or obscure, all it means is that, in order to survive, Protestants had to take Reformation insights that had been formulated for pulpits and public debates and recast them for the classroom and in confessional documents.

In order to capture and communicate Reformation ideas in new ways, theologians and educators formulated new pedagogical methods and harnessed old ones to new content. They learned to communicate those ideas at a highly technical academic level so that future ministers could preach the gospel clearly, shepherd Christ’s sheep well, and defend the church from error and attack. In practice, this meant the construction of a carefully organized theological system based on Scripture (hence, “orthodox”) that could be taught in an orderly fashion in educational contexts like schools and universities (hence, “scholastic”). Along with other late

1. *PRRD*, 1:27.

sixteenth-century theologians, such as Zacharias Ursinus (1534–1584), Theodore Beza (1519–1605), and Amandus Polanus (1561–1610), Zanchi played a major role in bridging the gap between the Reformation and the era of Reformed orthodox scholasticism (ca. 1560–ca. 1725).

Zanchi, however, was no talking head or dry-as-dust ivory-tower type. He lived a fascinating life, full of emotional highs and lows, during challenging times. And if, as a scholastic theologian, he tried to talk about God using precise language, he did this out of a deep love for and devotion to Christ and His church. Everyone agreed that Zanchi had a remarkable head for theology. More often than not, however, observers recognized that his theological studies flowed from and into heartfelt piety.

In 1599, for example, when Hendrik Hondius (1573–1650) published a memorial image of Zanchi alongside other luminaries of the Protestant Reformation, Hondius described Zanchi as “second to none in piety.”² The Puritan Edward Pearse (1633–1673) called him a “learned man” and an “eminent divine,” but saw in Zanchi’s learning and divinity a finger pointing people toward Christ their heavenly Bridegroom.³ Pearse’s countryman Henry Nelson (fl. 1614) was even more effusive, for he knew Zanchi’s academic theology to be “exceeding effectuell” for “all sorts of men.” It prevented “curiositie” and speculation and led them “to abandon securitie” outside of Christ. It “rowzed up the drowsie Christian” and helped to “detect the Temporizer; to kindle zeale; to worke vigilancie; to enforce repentance; to minister consolation; to teach the wise; to hearten the weake; to confirme faith and hope of heaven and Happinesse; to daunt ungodlinesse.”⁴ What a cornucopia of spiritual fruit! And Zanchi’s *The Spiritual Marriage between Christ and His Church and Every One of the Faithful* showcases what it looks like for devotional piety and theological precision to be joined in fruitful union.

2. Hendrik Hondius, *Icones virorum nostra patrumque memoria illustrium* (The Hague, 1599). See Patrick J. O’Banion, “Jerome Zanchi, the Application of Theology, and the Rise of the English Practical Divinity Tradition,” *Renaissance and Reformation*, n.s., 29 (2005): 97–98.

3. Edward Pearse, *The Best Match: or, the Soul’s Espousal to Christ* (1673; repr., London: Thomas and Ward, 1839), 8–9, 12, 18, 25, 33, and 64.

4. Girolamo Zanchi, *Speculum Christianum, or, a Christian Survey of the Conscience*, ed. and trans. Henry Nelson (London, 1614), A7v–A8r.

Life and Times

Italy

Girolamo Zanchi was born in the town of Alzano in northern Italy on February 2, 1516.⁵ His father was a historian, poet, and lawyer, and his mother was from an ancient family with a good name. He was their only son, and both parents died early—his father when the boy was twelve and his mother three years later—leaving him an orphan. Zanchi had three cousins and an uncle who were part of the religious house of the Augustinian Canons Regular of the Lateran Congregation (not to be confused with Luther’s mendicant religious order, the Order of Saint Augustine) located in nearby Bergamo. Everyone agreed that it would be a good place for the boy to learn good morals and good letters. Zanchi, who had enjoyed his studies thus far, was drawn to the house’s magnificent library. He soon became a novice and eventually a full member of the congregation.

Around 1536 he went off for additional education, probably to Padua, which boasted a renowned university. Over the next five or so years he studied “Aristotle, languages, and scholastic theology,” especially Thomas Aquinas, who became an important influence. By 1541 Zanchi had been ordained a priest and appointed to the office of public preacher for the Lateran congregation, an honor that paved the way for future advancement in the community. In that same year, he was assigned to reside in the Lateran house of San Frediano in Lucca, about two hundred miles south of Bergamo. Sixteen others went with him to Lucca, among them a close friend from Bergamo named Celso Martinengo (1515–1557). They found themselves under the leadership of the house’s newly appointed prior, Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562), who was well known for his evangelical ideas and who would soon become a trail-blazing Reformed theologian.

Vermigli strongly influenced many of the canons at San Frediano. In 1565 Zanchi remembered how the prior had “publicly commented on the letter to the Romans and privately expounded the Psalms” such that the

5. Zanchi’s first name is sometimes anglicized as Jerome or latinized as Hieronymus. His last name sometimes appears in its Latin form as well: Zanchius.

members of the community “began to devote [themselves] to the study of the Holy Scriptures, then to the study of the Fathers, especially Augustine” and, finally, “to reading the most learned commentators” of their own day.⁶ Zanchi remarked that Vermigli, while he was in Lucca, “loved me and taught me the gospel before any other thing.”⁷ For Zanchi, Celso, and others the result was that they came to embrace that gospel personally.

Unfortunately, Vermigli’s time in Lucca was brief. In 1542, little more than a year after his arrival, the prior and several others fled north into Protestant Europe with the Inquisition on their heels. The reforming work at San Frediano continued but in a diminished capacity and more warily. As Zanchi commented, “For several years we preached the Gospel of Christ in the purest way possible, although [Celso] was guided by the Spirit of God more than me; he always did it more openly and freely.”⁸ Zanchi also continued his studies and, one way or another, laid his hands on works by Protestant theologians like Philip Melancthon (1497–1560), Martin Bucer (1491–1551), Wolfgang Musculus (1497–1563), Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575), and John Calvin (1509–1564). He read the church fathers, mastered Hebrew, and began to study medieval Jewish interpreters of the Old Testament. But by 1549 inquisitorial pressure drove Celso to Geneva, where the town’s Italian congregation called him as pastor. Zanchi followed him north two years later and, after an extended Swiss sojourn (during which he met many leading Reformers) and several months of study in Geneva, he landed in Strasbourg as professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at the College of St. Thomas.

Strasbourg

Zanchi was staunchly Protestant in his theological sensibilities, but he recoiled at the notion of being attached to one sect or another. “I am not a Zwinglian,” he declared, “or a Lutheran or a Calvinist or a Bucerian, but a Christian.” And again, “I am neither a Zwinglian nor a Lutheran, since I follow neither Zwingli nor Luther. But I am a Christian, since

6. Prefatory letter of Zanchi to Landgrave Philip I of Hesse, October 15, 1565, in *OOT*, 7:4.

7. Girolamo Zanchi to Laelio Zanchi, April 2, 1565, in *OOT*, 8:204–5.

8. Girolamo Zanchi to Laelio Zanchi, April 2, 1565, in *OOT*, 8:204.

I follow Christ.”⁹ His commitment was to Christ and His church. He read and taught the Scriptures as part of what we would now call the Great Tradition of Christian theology, that is, along with the church universal throughout the ages. Fortunately, his position at the college afforded him the privilege of teaching “freely” (*libenter*), according to his conscience and the Word of God. Unfortunately, under the leadership of Johann Marbach (1521–1581), the city’s chief pastor and Zanchi’s senior colleague at St. Thomas, Strasbourg was being transformed into a Lutheran stronghold.

A preview of future troubles played out on the day after Zanchi’s arrival in Strasbourg. He was invited to dine with several of his new colleagues at the home of Johann Sturm (1507–1589), the rector of St. Thomas. Among the attendees was Marbach, who asserted that praying for the pope is pointless, since he would never convert. Zanchi, however, noted that the only one beyond hope of repentance is he who has blasphemed the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31–32; 1 John 5:16). Since none of the attendees at the dinner party knew for certain whether the current pope had committed that sin, they could continue to pray for him. Marbach responded that the pope is the Antichrist, the “man of sin” referred to in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Zanchi disagreed.¹⁰ This awkward meeting proved the first in a long series of conflicts between the two men.

In the classroom, Zanchi acquired a reputation for moving through the biblical text at a glacially slow pace. His method was rigorous and expansive, in part because he sought to integrate doctrinal and exegetical theology with biblical theology, polemics, and apologetics. He was tasked with lecturing on the Old Testament beginning with the Latter Prophets, but after nearly a decade in the classroom he had covered only the first twelve chapters of Isaiah and all of Hosea, along with some psalms and part of 1 John. Yet, he was no sluggard. In addition to his regular teaching

9. *Miscellaneorum liber primus*, in *OOT*, 7:262, 265. In his inaugural lecture at Strasbourg, Zanchi made a similar point (*OOT*, 8:221).

10. Joseph N. Tylenda, “Girolamo Zanchi and John Calvin: A Study in Discipleship as Seen through Their Correspondence,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 10 (1975): 105–7; and Charles Schmidt, “Girolamo Zanchi,” *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 32 (1859): 630–31.

obligations, he lectured on Aristotle's *Physics*, presided over more than twenty public disputations, and was frequently called upon to cover his colleagues' courses.

Other demands occupied Zanchi's attention outside of the classroom. In late 1553 he was called to serve as an elder for the city's refugee congregation, and he preached regularly to the small group of Italian attendees. As part of this work, he spearheaded efforts to raise money to care for refugees and also threw himself into efforts to promote unity within the visible church. No less significantly, Zanchi married. His bride was Violanthis Curione, the daughter of an old friend from his days in Lucca. Sadly for Zanchi, who was deeply committed to marriage both theologically and personally, domestic life entered a long rough patch. The couple suffered a first miscarriage in May 1554 after barely seven months together. A second miscarriage followed in March 1555, which caused partial paralysis in Violanthis's body. She never fully recovered. He wrote to Heinrich Bullinger in Zurich, "My wife miscarried and sickened almost unto death, and my heart was greatly disturbed as were my studies, but the Lord was merciful—not only to her but also to me (for now she is beginning to improve)."¹¹ Various expensive remedies were attempted, putting the household in an embarrassing financial state. Yet, in November 1556, after three years of marriage, Violanthis died. Some months later, Zanchi received word that his old friend Celso had died as well.

We might consider it shocking that Zanchi remarried quickly, probably within a year of Violanthis's death, but this was not unusual for his context. His second wife was Livia Lumaga of Piuro in the Rhaetian Freestate north of Italy. The groom claimed in a letter to Calvin that he could have had a German wife from a noble family with a large dowry, but out of love for his "own nation" he instead chose a poor Italian to wed.¹² By November 1558 she had given birth to twin sons, both of whom died within three months. Zanchi wrote to Wolfgang Musculus

11. Christopher J. Burchill, "Girolamo Zanchi in Strasburg 1553–1563" (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 1980), 50.

12. Zanchi to Calvin, March 30, 1559, in CO, 17:484.

of his own grief but especially of his wife's: "She is a woman; she is young; she is a new mother; she is in a foreign country." Unable to understand the language, she could not even receive the consolations offered by those around her.¹³ A daughter was born in 1559, but she died three years later. In due course, children came and survived to adulthood, but the couple's first years were heavy with grief.

These marriages and deaths played out for Zanchi alongside a frustrating series of conflicts with Marbach. During Zanchi's time at St. Thomas in Strasbourg, Lutheran theologians came to a consensus on a variety of theological issues, among them the doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Beginning in the 1550s some Lutherans began formulating a doctrine of ubiquity to explain Jesus's words at the Last Supper, "this is My body" and "this is My blood" (Matt. 26:26, 28). In other words, when asked the question, What happens to the bread and wine? these Gnesio-Lutherans (as they became known) responded that they truly remained bread and wine. But they went on to argue that in addition to bread and wine, communicants also received Christ's physical body in, with, and under the elements. How? His human nature appropriated the divine attribute of immensity so that it was physically present everywhere, albeit in a special way in the Lord's Supper.

Gnesio-Lutherans formulated their position against Roman Catholics on the one hand (who believed that the bread and wine were miraculously transformed into the body and blood of Christ) but also against Reformed theologians like Zwingli (who regarded the bread and wine as signs pointing to Christ) and even Calvin (who argued that believers received Christ's body spiritually in the Supper by faith but that He was not physically present in the bread and wine). For Gnesio-Lutherans, it was ubiquity or nothing. In Strasbourg this position was particularly controversial since the town's first generation of Reformers—men such as Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr Vermigli—had embraced neither ubiquity nor the Gnesio-Lutheran understanding of the Supper that followed from it.

13. See Zanchi to Wolfgang Musculus, November 1558, in *OOT*, 8:146.

Not surprisingly, then, Marbach had good reason to suspect that Zanchi, with his strong ties to Zwingli's Zurich, Calvin's Geneva, and Vermigli himself, would balk at the doctrine of ubiquity. To nip that problem in the bud, in 1554 Marbach demanded that Zanchi subscribe to the Lutheran Augsburg Confession (1530). The Italian was reluctant to do so because he believed that, if he signed, he would no longer be able to teach freely, according to his conscience and the Word of God. After several months of delay, he finally consented but with the proviso that he bound himself to the confession only, as he stated in his subscription, insofar as it was "understood in an orthodox manner."¹⁴ Marbach regarded this as the equivalent of Zanchi signing with his fingers crossed.

By January 1561 Marbach had lodged formal complaints against his colleague, claiming that Zanchi erred in his teaching on the sacraments, election, the perseverance of the saints, and eschatology. Marbach directly questioned Zanchi's integrity, orthodoxy, and salvation. He labeled him a Zwinglian and Calvinist but also (and more offensively) a Schwenckfeldian, Anabaptist, and Novatian. According to one sympathetic observer, despite all that he had to endure, Zanchi "persevered strongly, bravely, and vigorously in the work of the Lord."¹⁵ The complex controversy that ensued consumed more than two years of Zanchi's life. In the end, he was exonerated, as theologians from around Protestant Europe rallied to support him. Even the Lutheran professors at Tübingen refused to accuse him of heresy. But despite winning the debate in the wider court of theological opinion, Zanchi lost within the local contexts of Strasbourg's city church and the College of St. Thomas.

Rhaetia

Over the years, Zanchi had been offered pulpits and lecterns at Geneva, Bern, Lausanne, Zurich, Lyons, Marburg, and Heidelberg but had refused them all, believing that his "primary responsibility lay with the church in Strasbourg."¹⁶ Now, to the relief of many, a new opportunity presented

14. Zanchi to Calvin, July 1563, in *OOT*, 8:153.

15. François Hotman to Heinrich Bullinger, January 11, 1558, in *CO*, 16:384.

16. Burchill, "Zanchi in Strasbourg," 189.

itself. Zanchi was offered the pastorate of the Reformed congregation of Chiavenna in the Rhaetian Freestate, near his wife's hometown. The Strasbourg Senate granted him permission to leave. With some reluctance and many regrets for what might have been, he accepted the call and departed in November 1563. His opponents celebrated their victory. The theological fault lines that separated Marbach and Zanchi in Strasbourg eventually hardened into the divide that still separates Lutheran and Reformed churches.

For Zanchi, being a pastor in Chiavenna turned out to be just as frustrating as being a professor in Strasbourg. His congregation included not only the local Reformed community but also a wide variety of exiles from Italy seeking refuge. These included both orthodox Protestants and "all kinds of enthusiastic spirits, humanistic freethinkers, and rationalists."¹⁷ To make matters worse, Zanchi also had to deal with an incumbent assistant pastor who believed that his time served should have entailed seniority over the new man. The next few years saw Zanchi (and his congregation) weather division, plague, and heresy. He was frustrated to discover various streams of anti-Trinitarian theology filtering into the region along with some of the Italian refugees. "It's not difficult to see," he lamented, "whence comes the evil and who promotes it—Spain produces the hens and Italy hatches the eggs; we can already hear the chicks peeping."¹⁸

The troubles came to a head in 1567 when a large contingent in his congregation, stirred up by the assistant pastor, colluded to exclude all foreigners from election to church office. Zanchi called it an "open schism" and protested that qualified candidates could not be denied simply on the basis of where they had been born.¹⁹ He refused to back down and, although Zurich, Geneva, and a local synod endorsed his position,

17. Lukas Vischer, "Girolamo Zanchi, reformierter Prediger in Chiavenna," *Bündnerische Monatsblätter* 10 (1951): 290.

18. Zanchi to Bullinger, August 19, 1565, in *Bullingers Korrespondenz mit den Graubündern*, ed. Traugott Schiess (Basel: Basler Buch und Antiquariatshandlung, 1905), 2:627. The reference to Spain was, presumably, meant to indict Miguel Servetus (d. 1553), who rejected classical Trinitarian theology.

19. Vischer, "Reformierter Prediger," 297.

he lost his pulpit. Deeply disappointed and hurt, he wrote to Bullinger, “I have never experienced anything more unfair.”²⁰ Bullinger agreed, lamenting to a friend that Rhaetia “didn’t have many Zanchis” and could hardly afford to lose this one.²¹

Yet, Zanchi landed on his feet and in September 1567 accepted an offer from Elector Frederick III of the Palatinate (r. 1559–1576) to teach at the University of Heidelberg. By February of the following year, he and Livia were ensconced in their new home and his inaugural lecture had been delivered. He needed a doctorate to occupy the chair in theology, so in June Frederick granted him one. Zanchi joked to Ludwig Lavater of Zurich that, previously, he had been a theologian without a ring or a license or a cap but that now he was a lord doctor—ringed, capped, and licensed.²²

Heidelberg

These were fruitful and pleasant years for Zanchi. His job was to teach theology “from holy scripture and the church fathers, by means of common places,” which proved to be a good fit for his talents and interests. His colleagues, students, and patron appreciated his work.²³ Zanchi thrived among them and was appointed rector for 1571. He and Livia also filled their home with children. In July 1576, at age sixty-one and nearly ten years after arriving in Heidelberg, he wrote to an old acquaintance from his Strasbourg days that he was “still alive,” and “by the blessing of God in good health for [his] age.” He heartily thanked God for the gift of “a wife and five children, besides one who, I hope, will shortly make its appearance.” He requested prayer that God would “both replenish [Zanchi’s family] with the gifts of His Spirit and supply

20. Zanchi to Bullinger, June 23, 1567, in *Bullingers Korrespondenz*, 3:14.

21. Bullinger to Tobias Egli, July 4, 1567, in *Bullingers Korrespondenz*, 3:15. As for the assistant pastor, he “soon proved intolerable” to the fickle Chiavennese congregation and was dismissed. Vischer, “Reformierter Prediger,” 300.

22. Zanchi to Lavater, June 22, 1568, in *OOT*, 8:185.

23. Luca Baschera and Christian Moser, introduction to *De religione christiana fides – Confession of Christian Religion*, by Girolamo Zanchi, ed. Baschera and Moser (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 1:10.

them with what is needful for their passing honorably through this present life."²⁴

During these years not only was Zanchi teaching and raising a family, he was also finding that he had a gift for writing. In the summer of 1570 Frederick III was startled to discover that anti-Trinitarianism was spreading in his lands, and he commissioned Zanchi to write a defense of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. With astonishing speed (given his pace in the lecture hall), Zanchi composed and published a massive treatise in two volumes entitled *On the Three Elohim, or, on the Eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, One and the Same Jehovah*.²⁵ Rather than a straightforward defense of the Trinity responding to contemporary debates, Zanchi's book was a positive, elaborate, and exegetically based formulation of the doctrine that signaled "a return to the theological tradition, to the fathers and to the medieval theologians—and even to the classical philosophers—in the interest of establishing a correct use of the terminology of trinitarian doctrine in the exposition of its scriptural foundations."²⁶ The book was a success. And if Reformed Protestantism's commitment to classical orthodox Trinitarianism now seems natural, this is in no small part thanks to Zanchi.

He had always been a careful and deep thinker, but something of a plodder, often unoriginal in his conclusions and hesitant to put anything in print.²⁷ While at Strasbourg, he had explained his failure to publish:

There seemed to me almost more writers these days than readers. Nor could I fail to notice the deplorable situation that our city has more teachers than students, the forests have more hunters than beasts, and the courts have more lawyers than clients. There was another reason [for not publishing]: my disposition is such that I

24. Zanchi to Edmund Grindal, July 22, 1576, in Hastings Robinson, ed., *The Zurich Letters*, 2nd series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1845), 498.

25. *De tribus Elohim, sive de uno vero Deo aeterno, Patre, Filio et Spiritu Sancto, uno eodemque Iehova* (Frankfurt, 1572).

26. PRRD, 4:84–85.

27. On Zanchi's failure to publish during the Strasbourg years, see Christopher J. Burchill, "Girolamo Zanchi: Portrait of a Reformed Theologian and His Work," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 15 (1984): 191–92.

prefer to read the writings of others to publishing my own works for others to read, especially since I observed that our age has so many carping critics that not even the most careful and definitive works are safe from their nitpicking. Thirdly, so many learned and wise men are publishing scholarly and polished works that I was not only ashamed to put forward my own writings, but I also saw that my writings were probably unnecessary and of little value to today's Church. I put off publication for the day when it could profit the Church more than now. Finally I would never have thought that the doctrine which I have taught and defended from the beginning would sometime come to be questioned and condemned by anybody here, otherwise I would have published it and submitted it to the judgement of the churches.²⁸

But now Zanchi found he had something to say, and over the remainder of his life he became remarkably productive. His collected works contain some 6,000 folio columns of small and tightly packed type—biblical commentaries, polemical works, a confession of faith, treatises on discrete theological topics, addresses and lectures, and several volumes of a massive but sadly incomplete Reformed *Summa* of theology—most of it written in the last eighteen years of his life and all of it published after his fifty-fifth birthday.

Neustadt

Zanchi's sojourn in Heidelberg eventually came to an end as well. Most sixteenth-century Europeans assumed secular magistrates were responsible for supporting true religion and suppressing false ones. Thus, when Frederick III's son and successor as Elector Palatine, Ludwig VI (r. 1576–1589), declared himself a Lutheran, it spelled trouble for Zanchi and his colleagues. Following Frederick's death in 1576, the university's Reformed professors were purged for "teaching Calvinism up to this point."²⁹

28. Zanchi to the Strasbourg Scholarchs, n.d. [1563], in OOT, 8:157. I quote from John Patrick Donnelly's translation in his "A Sixteenth Century Case of Publish or Perish/Parish," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 6 (1975): 112–13.

29. Kenneth Austin, *From Judaism to Calvinism: The Life and Writings of Immanuel Tremellius (c. 1510–1580)* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2007), 170.

Fortunately, Frederick's second son, Johann Casimir (1543–1592), favored the Reformed and established a new school, known as the Casimirianum, in a former Augustinian monastery on the other side of the Rhine River at Neustadt an der Hardt. The honor of giving the inaugural lecture in May 1578 fell to Zanchi, who also occupied the chair of New Testament. In the classroom, he began a series of lectures on the Pauline Epistles that took him through Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and 1 Thessalonians.

When Elector Ludwig died in 1584, his son and successor Frederick IV (1574–1610) was too young to rule, so the reins fell into the hands of his uncle, Johann Casimir, Zanchi's lord and patron. Invited to return to his duties at Heidelberg, the old Italian found the offer less appealing than it might once have been, for he had begun to show his age. Zanchi described himself as "a decrepit old man but nevertheless in good health by God's grace."³⁰ In fact, his eyesight was failing and he suffered from other ailments as well, all of which slowed his scholarly work and must have made teaching laborious.³¹ Having traveled enough for one lifetime, he chose retirement and remained behind in Neustadt, living at a property he purchased with proceeds from *On the Three Elohim*.³²

In 1590, now completely blind and relying entirely on the aid of an amanuensis to continue writing and editing, Zanchi sent one last treatise to the printers for publication, *The Spiritual Marriage between Christ and His Church and Every One of the Faithful*.³³ He had written several works focused on Christology during the final years of his life, and *Spiritual Marriage* was part of that effort. It had its origins, we assume, in his Neustadt lectures on Ephesians 5:25–30, but at heart it was a defense against the Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity. In the months before his death, Zanchi revised the material and, in August, penned a dedicatory letter to

30. Zanchi, *De religione christiana fides—Confession of the Christian Religion*, ed. Luca Baschera and Christian Moser (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 1:92.

31. See his comments in *De spirituali inter Christum et ecclesiam, singulosque fideles connubio* (Herborn, 1591), iir–v.

32. Burchill, "Portrait," 204–5n106.

33. *De spirituali inter Christum et ecclesiam, singulosque fideles connubio* (Herborn, 1591).

Horatio Palavicino (ca. 1540–1600), a wealthy Genoese merchant living in Elizabethan England.

That fall, with the manuscript of *Spiritual Marriage* off his desk, Girolamo Zanchi made a final trip to visit friends in Heidelberg. He was seventy-four years old, completely blind, limited in mobility, and in failing health. He died peacefully on November 19, 1590, and his body was interred in Heidelberg’s university church. Those who raised his epitaph knew him well enough to prioritize his heart’s deep affection above the massive tomes he had written:

Here lies buried Hieronymus Zanchius,
 exiled from Italy, his fatherland, for the love of Christ.
 How great a theologian and philosopher he has been,
 is witnessed by his many books,
 by those whom he taught in the schools,
 and by those who heard him instruct the churches.
 And now, although his spirit has departed,
 yet he has remained with us by his illustrious name.³⁴

After a lifetime in exile, his soul found its true home, at last, in his Savior.

Spiritual Marriage

Spiritual Marriage seems to have begun its literary life as a theological excursus in Zanchi’s massive commentary on the book of Ephesians. But that commentary was only published years after Zanchi’s death, when his sons and heirs worked through his notes and laboriously published almost everything he had ever composed—whether previously published or not—in an eight-volume *opera omnia*. As we saw, Zanchi sent the stand-alone manuscript of *Spiritual Marriage* to the printer in 1590. We do not know why he chose to extract this specific material from his lecture notes on Ephesians. Nor do we know how substantially he revised the material he had originally delivered to his students.

34. This translation is by Otto Gründler, “Thomism and Calvinism in the Theology of Girolamo Zanchi (1516–1590)” (ThD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1961), 15.

Shortly after its initial publication in 1591, just months after Zanchi's death, *Spiritual Marriage* was translated into English and published in Cambridge by the university's printer. Two years later it appeared in French from Geneva.³⁵ In the sixteenth century, the rapid translation and republication of a theological treatise from Latin into multiple vernacular languages signaled its potential value and appeal to a broad audience—not just scholars and ministers but laypeople too. Those who came after Zanchi also found his reflections on spiritual marriage valuable, and we can hear echoes (and sometimes find actual citations) of his work in later publications on similar themes. So, what was it about this particular treatise that appealed to publishers, translators, readers, and writers? And why bother to make it available in modern English translation after more than four centuries?

The Heavenly Bridegroom and His Bride

The short answer to both questions is its lively depiction of a spiritual reality: that Christ is the church's one and only Bridegroom and that the church collectively—that is, every person who has true and living faith in Christ individually—is Christ's bride. What is more, although *Spiritual Marriage* draws readers into highly complex theological debates, it is neither abstract nor speculative. Instead, Zanchi took a pastoral approach, emphasizing the significance—both immediate *and* eternal—of the subject matter for Christians. Like the apostle Paul, he labored to beget Christ in his readers again and again (Gal. 4:19; 1 Cor. 4:15). By reminding them of what was true—that Christ always loves and cares for His bride, that no better Husband could exist—he endeavored to “nourish the growth of believers in faith and love, and thus to deepen the intimacy and assurance of their union with Christ.”³⁶

35. It was also, of course, included in the various Latin printings of the Ephesians commentary (1594, 1601, 1888–89), which was incorporated into volume 6 of the various editions of Zanchi's OOT (1605, 1613, 1617–19, 1649).

36. John Farthing, “*De coniugio spirituali*: Jerome Zanchi on Eph. 5:22–33,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 24 (1993): 651. J. V. Fesko has also explored Zanchi's theology of spiritual union in “Jerome Zanchi on Union with Christ and Justification,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 2 (2010): 55–78; Fesko, *Beyond Calvin: Union with Christ and Justification in Early*

Describing the relationship between Christ and his church as a marriage may feel somewhat unusual to us. Surely, we think, we wouldn't want to push *that* metaphor too far! We may be more comfortable with categories like justification, sanctification, and glorification. Zanchi liked those terms too; he deployed them as part of his understanding of the Christian faith, integrated them into his theological system, and distinguished them from union with Christ. But he was often drawn to talk about spiritual marriage, probably because it provided a rich source of biblical vocabulary with which to describe what it meant to be a Christian. In this, he was no innovator.

Over the centuries, Christian writers have found the marriage metaphor to be a rich source for meditating on God's love for His people and the nature of the relationship into which He has drawn them in His Son. And exegetes have long recognized the heavenly Bridegroom as a major theme in Scripture that is useful for the church's encouragement and comfort. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), for example, made much of it in his sermons on the Song of Songs, where he saw the passionate union of lover and beloved as symbolic of the equally passionate love between Christ and the church.³⁷ Calvin made hearty use of the theme of spiritual marriage in his Ephesians commentary and elsewhere.³⁸ Other writers and preachers found the marriage theme prevalent in Psalm 45; Hosea 2; Matthew 25:1–13; Mark 2:18–22; Luke 5:33–35; John 3:22–36; 1 Corinthians 6:12–20; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:22–33; and Revelation 21–22, among other passages. Whatever our level of comfort, following the lead of Scripture, the church has long recognized the suitability of marital language for talking about our relationship with Christ, for meditating on its significance, and for framing our prayer.

Modern Reformed Theology (1517–1700) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 207–26; and Fesko, "Girolamo Zanchi on Union with Christ and the Final Judgment," *Perichoresis* 18 (2020): 41–56.

37. See, for example, Bernard's "Sermons on the Song of Songs 83," in *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 257–61.

38. See Farthing, "De coniugio," 646–47; cf. Dennis E. Tamburello, *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 84–101.

Love and Marriage

Some readers may be uncomfortable using marital language to describe our union with Christ because even the best earthly marriages are very imperfect. Husbands can domineer or withdraw. Wives can subvert or manipulate. Both parties retreat emotionally and physically. We know too many stories of loveless marriages that stay intact “for the sake of the children” only to collapse when the nest is emptied, just as we also know couples who lose their passion for one another and seek fulfillment elsewhere, regardless of the children. In an age of easy divorces, starter marriages, and shacking up, it is sometimes difficult to see the point of matrimony. All we need is love, or so we’re told. And if we have it, we tell ourselves, we have enough. But what if that satisfyingly warm feeling of contentment and connection with the one lying next to us diminishes? Should we not be true to ourselves and get on with finding it somewhere else? Many enter into marriage with the assumption—either tacit or explicit—that they will remain united only so long as they feel themselves to be “in love.”

That feeling of being in love, which too often passes for the reality, is a fleeting thing. It is a far cry from how Scripture envisions love and is not what we should expect from our own marriages. The problem is not merely that we have too low a view of marriage but also that we set the bar of our expectations for marriage too high. We place too heavy of a burden upon the union by expecting our spouse to satisfy the deepest longings of our heart. Once we realize our spouse cannot—first, because that’s not his or her job and, second, because our hearts were not designed to find ultimate fulfillment in any creature—our eyes begin to wander; we look elsewhere for satisfaction. The biblical mandate that calls a husband to love his wife as his own body, giving himself up for his bride as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25–28), and that calls a wife to submit to her husband as to Christ (5:22), offers a rather different perspective.

For Paul in Ephesians 5, and for Zanchi, our earthly marriages are like a mirror. They fulfill their truest purpose by drawing our attention toward the real thing: the spiritual marriage between Christ and His church. In other words, our earthly marriages only make sense when our union with Christ remains in view. We begin to understand something

of that higher and heavenly union by paying attention to the biblical witness—to the Genesis account of Adam’s marriage to Eve, to pertinent Old Testament laws, and to the teachings of Jesus and His apostles. These make us aware that the temporary earthly unions we encounter here below reflect a heavenly pattern. They point away from themselves. The delicious irony is that, ultimately, we can only understand and fully enjoy our earthly marriages when we view them in light of our spiritual union with Christ.

That truth was something that Zanchi knew experientially as well as theologically. We might wonder, for example, how he found it within himself to care for an incapacitated wife who required constant attention for nearly their entire marriage. Why did he virtually bankrupt himself, spending his savings and Violanthis’s dowry on doctors, medicines, and treatments to alleviate her suffering? How could he (and his wives) endure miscarriages, stillbirths, and the deaths of their young children? He could do it because he was looking to and trusting in his heavenly Bridegroom and not his earthly brides. Zanchi did not expect Violanthis or Livia to satisfy him at the deepest levels of his heart. This reality opened the way for a rich domestic life filled with enduring love and joy.

We should not imagine that Zanchi’s home was idyllic, but he genuinely enjoyed marriage and fatherhood, and he remained committed to his family through thick and thin. He sought the prayers of his spiritual friends on his family’s behalf and lamented the loss of those who predeceased him. Thirty years into his second marriage, he still doted on his “venerable Livia,” lauding her as “the most loving mother of all our children” and, to him, “my most dear wife in the Lord.”³⁹ He spoke in “glowing terms” of the privileges and benefits of life together and viewed procreation as only one of the many “comforts and blessings” that accompanied marriage.⁴⁰ After Zanchi’s death, his sons and sons-in-law (with, one must imagine, the encouragement of his daughters) spent nearly three decades transforming their father’s notes into a coherent and publishable collection of theological treatises and a monument to his memory for the

39. Zanchi, *De religione*, 1:100.

40. Farthing, “*De coniugio*,” 651.

benefit of the church. The prodigious amount of time, money, and energy invested in that project signals their devotion to him even more clearly than their words in the dedicatory letters of those volumes.

Men and Women

In addition to Zanchi's use of marital language to describe the relationship between Christ and the church, another reason why we might be tempted to disregard what he has to say is that some of it feels dated. Many modern readers—even those who embrace what we now call traditional gender roles—may chafe at some aspects of how Zanchi characterizes the relationship between husbands and wives. For example, he speaks of the husband as the wife's "lord and savior"—not language that we regularly appropriate for earthly marriages. Likewise, although Zanchi recoils at the notion of a woman being forced into matrimony against her will, he assumes that marriages are primarily contracted between the bride's parents and her prospective groom. He anticipates that her consent proceeds primarily out of her deference to the will of others. In short, he often casts women merely as supporting actors; they seem to exist mostly in relationship to their husbands or fathers.

If, on that account, the book feels dated, that is because it is four hundred years old. Zanchi and his *Spiritual Marriage* need no defense for having been shaped by their own times and cultural context. But we should, nevertheless, be willing to listen carefully to what Zanchi says, for so much of it is fresh and invigorating. As C. S. Lewis reminds us, reading old books is like having "the clean sea breezes of the centuries blowing through our mind," and we often are better able to recognize the errors of our own age having been given a dose of something from a previous one.⁴¹

Moreover, it is worth noting that if Zanchi characterized the relationship between husband and wife as one that involved both headship and submission, he did so—following Paul in Ephesians 5:23—because Christ is the head of the church, which is His body. Zanchi's purpose was to recall the close connection between our marriages here below and the heavenly and eternal one between Christ and His church. Because

41. C. S. Lewis, introduction to *On the Incarnation: The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, by Athanasius (Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 5.

Christ is the church's Lord and Savior, Zanchi was willing to apply those same terms to earthly husbands with respect to their wives. This interpretive move allowed him to highlight the spiritual significance of earthly marriage and set it apart as a special institution established by God that matters here and now because it points both men *and* women to the gospel. For, when it came to the individual believer's union with Christ, Zanchi was clear that gender was not an issue. Women were just as truly and immediately united to Christ by faith and by the Spirit as were men.

Note, too, that Zanchi believed earthly marriage was meant to be a happy estate for both parties. It was not good for either of them to be alone. In marriage everything that belonged to one spouse became the joint property of the other—both in prosperity and adversity. He wrote, “There are various crosses and troubles” to be endured, among them “poverty, death, exile, cares, injuries—suffered both at the hands of those close to home as well as at the hands of strangers.” Zanchi's household experienced its fair share of these crosses and knew they were better faced together than alone. Of course, they also knew “many consolations and blessings,” and these were the sweeter for being enjoyed together.⁴²

Exegesis and Interpretation

A final challenge that faces readers of *Spiritual Marriage* is Zanchi's exegetical method. Early modern Reformed exegetes agreed that Scripture was to be read according to its “literal sense,” but discerning that literal sense did not mean for them (as it may for us) simply reading the text “according to the constraints of grammar, history, literary method.”⁴³ Recognizing that Scripture had both human and divine authors, they did not think it possible to properly interpret it merely by determining what the human author meant. Thus, they understood the literal sense to be “constructed” or “compounded.” That is, the biblical texts have both a “simple literal sense” that “consists of the immediate grammatical, historical and literary meaning of the very words of Scripture”

42. Zanchi, *De connubio*, 39–40.

43. Herman J. Selderhuis, “Introduction to the Psalms,” in *Psalms 1–72*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis, vol. 7 of *Reformation Commentary on Scripture*, ed. Timothy George and Scott M. Manetsch, Old Testament (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2015), xlvii.

and a “spiritual sense” consisting of the “meaning of the very words of Scripture in light of the full form and content of Scripture.” These were inseparable but distinguishable, and the simple served the spiritual.⁴⁴

Various rules restrained how expositors like Zanchi read and interpreted the Bible. The so-called rule of faith—the “trinitarian, christological, and evangelical scope of Scripture’s content and the meaning that arises from it and in turn makes sense of the whole and the parts” was one important principle.⁴⁵ But following a ruled interpretation of the Bible did not mean that everyone read each text in exactly the same way. In fact, a spectrum of interpretative approaches existed among Reformed readers of Scripture. Calvin, for example, focused on grammatical and historical considerations before moving on to christological readings when the text provided warrant for doing so, and he dismissed “some of the more imaginative ruled readings as ‘too forced.’”⁴⁶ But other orthodox Reformed theologians interpreted the Bible in a more straightforwardly Trinitarian, christological, and evangelical way.

Although Zanchi respected Geneva’s Reformer immensely and looked to him as a mentor, his approach differed from Calvin’s.⁴⁷ Knowing ahead of time that all of the Scriptures were about Jesus (Luke 24:27), when Zanchi read the Bible, he expected to find Christian theology, and Christ Himself, in the text of both the Old and New Testaments. Sometimes this commitment led him to discern scriptural allegories, shadows, and mysteries that pointed to Christ but that would not have been apparent to Calvin. In this, Zanchi was also influenced by the more allegorical traditions of medieval exegesis, which he imbibed as a canon of the Lateran Congregation and while studying theology at university. Calvin, having been formed more as a Renaissance humanist than a medieval theologian, had neither of those experiences.

44. Selderhuis, “Introduction,” xvii. See also David C. Steinmetz, “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis,” *Theology Today* 37 (1980): 27–38.

45. Craig S. Farmer, “Introduction to John 1–12,” in *John 1–12*, ed. Craig S. Farmer, vol. 4 of *Reformation Commentary on Scripture*, ed. Timothy George and Scott M. Manetsch, New Testament (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2014), li.

46. Selderhuis, “Introduction,” li.

47. See Tylenda, “Girolamo Zanchi and John Calvin,” 101–41.

This means that we may be surprised by some of Zanchi's interpretations. According to him, Adam's rib signified Christ's deity, and the flesh that filled the empty cavity when it was removed signified His humanity. Similarly, Zanchi follows a long tradition of interpreters who concluded that Eve was not made from the bones of Adam's feet (lest she be trampled underfoot) nor from his skull (lest she exercise dominion over him) but rather from his rib, specifically so that he would love her from his heart. While this interpretation is delightful in its fancy, few modern readers find warrant for it in the text.

Interpretations like these might cause us to raise our eyebrows and wonder whether or not we can trust Zanchi as a faithful expositor. As his readers, however, we should reflect on three important points that will help us get the most out of what he has to say. First, Zanchi read the Bible as part of a long tradition of interpretation stretching back to the church fathers and coming, by way of medieval theologians (of whom he was both critical and appreciative), into the sixteenth century. He was even up to speed on Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament. In other words, if we decide that he went wrong in his readings, at least he wasn't just making things up as he went along. Second, Zanchi was more hermeneutically self-aware than many of his contemporaries. Part of the reason why he plodded along so slowly in the lecture hall was because he followed a carefully mapped-out course for interpreting biblical texts.⁴⁸ We need not delve into the details of that method here; the point is simply that he had one. His method grounded his biblical exegesis and restrained truly fanciful interpretations. Third, and finally, just because Zanchi's interpretation of a text strikes us as unusual or differs from the way we have learned to read Scripture, we should not assume that we are right and he is wrong. It may be that the history of interpretation took a wrong turn somewhere during the last four centuries and that an old Italian exile approaching the end of his days still has a thing or two to teach us.

48. Zanchi described his approach to interpreting Scripture, which drew upon the methodological work of the logician Jacopo Zabarella (1533–1589), in his 1568 inaugural lecture at the University of Heidelberg (*OOT*, 8:212–19).

**The Spiritual Marriage between
Christ and His Church and
Every One of the Faithful**

Dedicatory Epistle

To the most noble man Horatio Palavicino,¹ gilded knight,
Girolamo Zanchi prays for grace and peace.

As the proverb says, most noble and generous Horatio, “Better late than never.” And, “Soon enough done, if well enough done.” Therefore, I will not have been entirely and absolutely worthy of criticism for withholding until now this public congratulations, which I owed to you long ago to congratulate you after your successful undertaking before both of our most illustrious princes, for that office with which your most serene queen adorned you, that you might truly be Her Majesty’s gilded knight. For, although I desired it, it was not possible more quickly either for my secretary to transcribe this book or for it to be brought to light by the printer. Add also the many troubles of mind and the considerable number of inconveniences that have befallen and frequently do befall me in my old age and that slow my honest study and pious endeavors a great deal. In fact, from experience I daily learn and perceive that statement to be most true: “Fear old age, for it does not come alone.”²

1. Palavicino (ca. 1540–1600) was a Genoese merchant and aristocrat who moved to England during the reign of Mary Tudor (r. 1553–1558). He became immensely wealthy and served Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603) as an ambassador, spy, investor, and royal financier both in England and on the Continent. He was knighted by Elizabeth in 1587. See Ian W. Archer, “Palavicino, Sir Horatio (c. 1540–1600),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed. (Oxford University Press, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/21153>.

2. φοβού τὸ γῆρας, οὐ γὰρ ἔρχεται μόνον.

What good man and knight will, therefore, blame an old man just because he walks less quickly than a youth? So what if old age is united with blindness, weakness of the legs, and other diseases too? Among the planets, to be sure, Saturn never complains that it completes its course more slowly than the others, since it is moved according to its own natural order and position. Therefore, my congratulations, although late, nevertheless ought neither to be blamed by anyone nor to go unappreciated by you. Should not this, which, as you see, was accomplished by a slow-paced and feeble old man (albeit one not yet entirely destitute of all the warmth of natural inclination), be all the more agreeable and delightful for being the later and, therefore, the less expected by you? For I consider not only the office itself—as it is in itself and how great it is—but also, and this first of all, I weigh who bestowed it upon you and for what reasons. And for all of this I consider that congratulations must be given to you, and I heartily congratulate you.

To be the gilded knight of some prince or other is, certainly, a great office. Moreover, to be the knight of a queen is greater. But by far the greatest is to be of such a queen who is neither the least nor the smallest jewel of the Christian world. The queen is Elizabeth, born of kings into a kingly court, and trained in royal customs and the pure and true religion, in great erudition of letters, in the knowledge of languages, and, finally, adorned with royal and heroic virtues: with the greatest piety, incredible clemency, invincible courage, and abundant generosity to pious men. In a word, she is a queen most dear to the Lord Jesus Christ. What more could you want?

Christ made obvious and manifest to the whole Christian world His love for her by many and great benefits (pertaining to both the soul and the body as well as to external things), all of them gathered together in her, such that I need not list or exhibit them, especially to you, who knows all these things better than me. Certainly, on its own a steadfast profession and defense of true Christian piety, and a manner of life in accordance with it, should satisfy us and each of the pious. For this divine gift of true piety is a sure testimony of Christ's eternal and constant benevolence toward us. Nevertheless, I beseech you meanwhile to consider that the Lord Jesus Christ snatched her, that is, Elizabeth, from the jaws of the

lioness,³ saved the one He snatched, and made a queen of the one He saved. Through this one whom He made queen, He restored to Himself His pure teaching and true worship, ruled the people happily, and preserved them in the greatest peace for many years—about thirty-two at present. He exposed and averted innumerable crafty snares of the devil against her and her kingdom; scattered the most atrocious machinations and wicked councils of her foes; shattered the greatest strengths of her enemies and routed them; also defended neighboring people; and fostered, sustained, saved, and continues to sustain and save pious princes. How great is that testimony?

Moses was beloved by God and chosen for the redemption and the great preservation of God's people. Therefore, when all the male infants of the Hebrews in Egypt were destroyed, on account of the tyrannical command of the king—and that for no other reason than because they were Hebrews and in order that, at last, the whole people of God might finally be extinguished—Moses's life was preserved by the marvelous providence of God through the midwives themselves, who were otherwise foreigners to the people of God.⁴ He was rescued from the waters. He was adopted as a son by the daughter of the king. He was educated in the royal court as the king's progeny. He was adorned and protected by heroic and truly divine virtues, power, wisdom, fortitude of soul, and other innumerable gifts. He was established as the liberator and leader of the people. He preferred to suffer with the people of God than to live in royal finery with the wicked [Heb. 11:25]. He, therefore, saves the people.

3. Presumably, Zanchi refers to Mary Tudor, Elizabeth's half sister, a zealous persecutor of Protestants, and queen of England from 1553 to 1558. As heir apparent to the throne and a suspected Protestant, Elizabeth represented both a political and religious threat to her sister's regime. Consequently, Mary kept Elizabeth under close watch and often under house arrest.

4. Zanchi follows a Jewish tradition that understands the midwives in Exodus 1:15–21 to have been Egyptians not Hebrews. The tradition runs through the Septuagint (ταῖς μαίαις τῶν Ἑβραίων; Ex. 1:15), Josephus (*Antiquities*, 2.205), the Vulgate (*obstitreces Haebrorum*), and various rabbinic interpreters and is argued on the basis of variant vocalizations. See Moshe Lavee and Shana Strauch-Schick, "The 'Egyptian' Midwives," *TheTorah.com*, December 27, 2015, <https://thetorah.com/article/the-egyptian-midwives>. I am indebted to my colleague Dr. Paul Smith for clarifying this otherwise obscure point.

He withstands the tyrant. He drowns him in the Red Sea with his whole army. He destroys the enemies. He receives the law from God. He delivers the heavenly teaching to the people. He renews His true worship. He removes idolatries. He cleanses everything. He revives the true invocation of God. Finally, he leads the people in committing themselves to the right way of submitting and of obtaining the inheritance promised to the patriarchs.

These things God did through Moses. But has He not clearly declared to all how great was His love toward Moses and all of His people? Indeed, concerning those things that were done and handed down in the Old Testament, the apostle says, “Whatever things were written, were written for our instruction, in order that through patience and the consolation of the Scriptures, we might have hope” [Rom. 15:4]. Certainly, nowadays, when I behold—having others guide my eyes—your queen, I consider that something not dissimilar has happened and is happening. And I understand clearly that such a one might be God’s handmaiden, or rather the bride of Christ, through whom He supplied, and today still supplies, so many great things to His church.

Is it not enough then, O most distinguished man, to have made yourself such a servant of such a queen? With those things supplied to you by the wisest and most prudent queen, I now join⁵ this congratulations, so as not to have supplied it to you rashly. For she saw that the dignity of your nobility, of your strength, of your faithfulness and diligence in executing her affairs was justly deserving, lest the dignity with which you shine be any less than that which adorns you, that you might not be less worthy of it than it is of you. For that best of queens did not by this honor ennoble you from ignobility. Rather she ennobled you from nobility, and while she wanted to bestow a new dignity upon you, she repaid your merits. And likewise, our friendship demanded that I congratulate you for all this. Do you see, then, most prudent Horatio, that my congratulations, although late, nevertheless cannot and ought not deservedly be unpleasant to you? And for that reason, it should be

5. *coniungo*. This word plays an important role in Zanchi’s subsequent discussion of spiritual marriage.

most acceptable to you, for hardly do I send it to you naked but rather clothed and, indeed, covered with a noble garment.

For I send with it a certain treatise of mine concerning the spiritual marriage between Christ and the church and every one of the faithful. It is contained in a certain small book, but is, nevertheless, most honorable and most noble on its own and by itself.

But I wish this dedicated to your name chiefly for a twofold purpose. First, that some perpetual testimony might exist in the church of my regard for you and, in turn, that my soul might be encouraged by remembrance of your regard for me and for my books, especially for the one that, accepted into your trust and care, you have taken with you to the most honorable and most noble kingdom of England. Second, that amid such and so many controversies at this time concerning the Christian religion, you might have a summary from me of our salvation with which you might be able to defend and protect yourself against all enemies.

For our entire salvation consists in this spiritual and divine marriage. For Christ the Bridegroom always delights in His bride. He is her Head and everlasting Savior, that she might not utterly fall away from Him. He says by the prophet, "I will betroth you to Me forever" [Hos. 2:20]. And, says Christ, "I prayed for you, Peter, ἵνα μὴ ἐκλίπη your faith" [that your faith may not fail; Luke 22:32]. Indeed, with faith that never utterly fails, who will be lost? Just so, by this steadfast faith, true union with Christ is so contracted, fostered, and safeguarded that it will never be destroyed. It will be most gratifying to me to have known that my congratulatory gift has, indeed, been gratefully received by you, that the Graces might not be wholly naked.⁶

For, indeed, the world does not lack those who love the inscriptions of good books and procure thanks that thereby they might see something added to the fame and glory of the splendor of their names. But, to say the least, they who care excessively for such things reveal by words and deeds that they do not care for themselves. But, most excellent Horatio,

6. ἵνα μὴ παντάπασιν αἱ Χάριτες γυμναί. Zanchi here combines an allusion to the Luke 22:32 reference above (ἵνα μὴ) with the ancient Greek proverb "the Graces are naked," which is roughly the equivalent of "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth."

it is less your true and ancient nobility and ancestral virtue than your individual piety and your devotion to obtaining eternal salvation through Christ that causes me to think and hope something rather different of you. So, read and reread.

Farewell, and continue to love me, as you do, and to have my son Titus Cornelius commended to you, which is a mark of your steadfastness in loving and doing good.

Neustadt. The first of August, in the year of Christ 1590, but the seventy-fifth year and sixth month of the author.