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WAS BULLINGER'S GOSPEL SYNERGISTIC OR UNIVERSALISTIC? AN EXAMINATION OF SERMON IV.1 OF *THE DECADES*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The impact of the Swiss Reformer Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) on Scottish political theory has been well documented.¹ What is less appreciated is his impact on the Scottish church. For example, in 1554 he gave some advice to John Knox concerning the complex issues that Knox was wrestling with in respect to how believers should view the monarchy biblically.² Bullinger may well have had some significant influence on the Scottish church but documentary evidence for this is scant.

In point of fact, Bullinger's writings have often been misunderstood. In particular, he has been wrongly adjudged to have taught both a synergistic and a universalistic gospel. This article seeks to examine how the Zurich Reformer unpacked his understanding of the gospel in *The Decades* with a particular reference to sermon IV.1 in order to counter these claims.

The fact that Bullinger's works have often been wrongly read and incorrectly quoted can be illustrated by the way the Remonstrants cited Bullinger in their defence at the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) when they sought to claim that his writings revealed a proto-Arminian stance.³ The

¹ Andreas Raath and Shaun de Freitas, 'From Heinrich Bullinger to Samuel Rutherford: The Impact of Reformation Zurich on Seventeenth-Century Scottish Political Theory', in *Heinrich Bullinger: Life, Thought, Influence* ed. by Emidio Campi and Peter Opitz (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2005), pp. 853-79.

² Jane Dawson, *John Knox* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), pp. 85-6; Ryan M. Reeves, *English Evangelicals and Tudor Obedience, c. 1527-1570* (Studies in the History of Christian Traditions, 167; Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 139-40.

³ Walter Hollweg, *Heinrich Bullingers Hausbuch: Eine Untersuchung über die Anfänge der reformierten Predigliteratur* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag,

then *Antistes* of Zurich, Johann Jacob Breitingner, who led the Swiss delegation, had to defend Bullinger's views in a speech to the Synod.⁴ Breitingner pointed out that Bullinger had signed the *Zürich Gutachten* ('Zurich Opinions') which were drawn up in 1560 to defend Hieronymus Zanchius (Girolamo Zanchi 1516-1590) regarding his doctrine of predestination. But as Emidio Campi has observed of Breitingner's speech at Dort: 'Nowadays we know that the question is more complex than Breitingner had led his contemporaries to believe.'⁵ J. Wayne Baker had earlier, incorrectly in our opinion, doubted that Breitingner was correct in asserting that Bullinger subscribed to double predestination. Because Baker was mistakenly convinced that Bullinger did not hold to reprobation, he concludes: 'In short, Bullinger was no scholastic. At Dort he would have been completely out of place. Bullinger would have disagreed with Breitingner on Bullinger.'⁶

Moreover, many scholars, following in the footsteps of Baker, conclude that, for Bullinger, God's covenant with mankind was a bilateral pact or treaty with conditions to be fulfilled by both sides. Baker further suggests that Bullinger was leaning towards synergism or semi-Pelagianism or that the covenant conditions had to be fulfilled before receiving the blessings of the covenant.⁷ This is somewhat ironic in view of the fact that, in the context of explaining the biblical understanding of grace in sermon IV.1 of *The Decades*, Bullinger specifically referred to the conflict between Augustine and Pelagius.⁸ However, despite the embracing study of Cornelis Venema,⁹ many scholars, nonetheless, interpret Bullinger's

1956), pp. 294-338.

⁴ James I. Good, *History of the Swiss Reformed Church Since the Reformation* (Philadelphia: Publication and Sunday School Board of the Reformed Church in the United States, 1913), pp. 22-4.

⁵ Emidio Campi, 'Probing Similarities and Differences between John Calvin and Heinrich Bullinger', in *Calvinus Clarissimus Theologus: Papers of the Tenth International Congress on Calvin Research*, ed. by Herman J. Selderhuis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), p. 94.

⁶ J. Wayne Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1980), p. 48.

⁷ In addition to *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant*, see Baker's 'Heinrich Bullinger, the Covenant, and the Reformed Tradition in Retrospect', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 29 (1998), 359-76.

⁸ Peter Opitz, *Heinrich Heinrich Bullinger Theologische Schriften*, Band 3, *Sermonum Decades quinque de potissimum Christianae religionis capitibus* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2008), p. 496.

⁹ Cornelis P. Venema, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Doctrine of Predestination: Author of 'the Other Reformed Tradition'?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).

works as attesting to a form of synergism. Stephen Strehle is representative of such scholars.¹⁰ Furthermore, because many believe that Bullinger downplayed election in his works they conclude, incorrectly, that Bullinger was universalistic or that his writings were open to a hypothetical universalism interpretation. In this connection, Richard Muller, for example, deduced that 'Clear statements of nonspeculative hypothetical universalism can be found (as Davenant recognized) in Heinrich Bullinger's *Decades* and commentary on the *Apocalypse*'.¹¹

This study seeks to affirm that Bullinger's understanding and exposition of the gospel was clearly in the centre of the reformed tradition. His was not 'the other reformed tradition' as claimed by Baker. On the contrary, this study reveals that Bullinger emphasized the same basic tenets of the gospel and the outworking of the gospel as taught by the other reformers, *viz.* reconciliation with God, union with God, imputation of Christ's alien righteousness, adoption, the three solas and election.

Bullinger never wrote in a vacuum. Sermon IV.1 of *The Decades* was effectively a polemic against Rome's departure from the gospel as outlined in the canon of Scripture and as taught by the church Fathers. At the same time, this sermon was a necessary corrective to the extreme views of sanctification promulgated by the Anabaptists.

II. THE GOSPEL IN *THE DECADES*

The Decades was Bullinger's most extensive work. As it was written against the background of the Council of Trent, it is clear from the terminology used that Bullinger hoped to win converts from the Roman faith to the Reformed faith. It was also written just prior to his major tome against the Anabaptists, *Der Widertoeufferen Ursprung* (1561). Although the gospel was referred to by Bullinger several times earlier in *The Decades*, he set

¹⁰ Stephen Strehle, *Calvinism, Federalism, and Scholasticism: A Study of the Reformed Doctrine of Covenant* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1988), pp. 134-40; *The Catholic Roots of the Reformed Gospel: Encounter Between the Middle Ages and the Reformation* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 53-8.

¹¹ Richard A. Muller's review of Jonathan D. Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), in *Calvin Theological Journal* 43 (2008), 149-50. Cf. Peter White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic Conflict and Consensus in the English Church from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 79.

out a full and extended discussion of the gospel in sermon IV.1 which had been flagged as a 'treatise on the gospel' in sermon III.9.¹²

Bullinger gave sermon IV.1 the title: *Of the gospel of the grace of God who gave his Son to the world and in whom is given everything for true salvation that those who believe in him might obtain eternal life*.¹³ It is evident, as in his *The Old Faith* (1534), that Bullinger was making a stark contrast between 'true' faith and 'false' faith. Following on from Zwingli's *True and False Religion* (1525), Bullinger underscored in *The Decades* that the reformed faith is *vera, vetus, indubitata, authentica, orthodoxa & catholica*.¹⁴

In sermon IV.1, of some 22 folios in length, Bullinger outlined a summary of the gospel on two separate occasions:

The gospel is the heavenly preaching of God's grace to us, through which, to the whole world, which is under the wrath and indignation of God, is declared that God the Father of heaven is reconciled in his only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, whom as he promised to the holy fathers, he has now exhibited to us in him fully all things for a blessed life and eternal salvation inasmuch as who for us was incarnate, died, raised from death again and taken up into heaven and made our only Lord and Saviour if only, through acknowledging our sins, we believe in him.¹⁵

This is the summary of the whole gospel: that we are justified, that is, absolved from sins, from the sentence of death and damnation, and sanctified and indeed adopted into the number of the sons of God by faith, that is, by trust in the name of Christ, who was given by the Father to be our only Saviour. And here by name works are excluded, lest we be given any opportunity to entangle faith with works or to attribute to works the glory which is due to faith alone or rather to Christ the Lord, upon whom faith depends and is bound to.¹⁶

From these two citations it is evident that Bullinger's gospel was clearly reformed. It is about reconciliation with God and forgiveness of sins through the propitiation of his wrath achieved through the incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, his only begotten Son, our only Saviour as was promised to the holy fathers. The gospel is of heav-

¹² Opitz, *Decades*, p. 432. Unless otherwise stated, translations are those of the author.

¹³ Ibid., p. 491.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 492.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 516.

only origin and all of God's grace with the result that works are explicitly excluded as a basis for salvation. Bullinger made a point to emphasize that 'the only cause and true source of the gospel' is the free love of God.¹⁷ There appears to be an indirect rejoinder here to the various 'causes' for justification outlined in chapter 7 of the Decree of the Sixth Session of the Council of Trent. Bullinger further clarified that God loves mankind on account of the Son (*propter filium*) and not for any other cause.¹⁸ Moreover, the gospel is to be proclaimed to the whole world to challenge men and women to repent and believe in Jesus. Believers are justified, sanctified and adopted as sons of God. In step with the other reformers, Bullinger asserted that there is assurance of salvation for the true believer in the here and now.¹⁹

Bullinger made a point of citing the use of *euangelisasthai* in the LXX of Isaiah 61:1 and Luke 4:18 as indicating that the gospel was already proclaimed proleptically in the Old Testament. Bullinger was basically reiterating what he had set forth in *De testamento* (1534) and *The Old Faith* (1537), viz. that the saints of the Old Testament were saved by the same gospel of the New Testament through faith (proleptically) in Christ. He also emphasized that the 'gospel is in the exposition of the law'.²⁰ This reflects his understanding of the overall message of the canon which he had earlier expressed in *The Old Faith* as follows: 'The law and the Scriptures of the prophets constitute the text, the exposition is the Scriptures of the evangelists and the apostles.'²¹ Thus Bullinger viewed one gospel proclaimed in both the Old Testament and the New Testament as he referred to 'the same historical gospel'.

Bullinger's understanding of the gospel reflected an understanding of the economic Trinity. Out of his grace, the Father had prepared a way for the elect to be reconciled to him through his Son. The elect respond in faith through the inner working of the Holy Spirit. In this connection, Bullinger further made a deliberate point to refer to the two natures of Christ. Indeed, the incarnation is foundational to Bullinger's understanding of the gospel.²² Bullinger's specific reference to the two natures

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 496.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 495. *Vide* Opitz, *Decades*, pp. 494, 496 (x2) for Bullinger's use of *propter Christum*.

¹⁹ Opitz, *Decades*, p. 506.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 491.

²¹ Heinrich Bullinger, *Der alt gloub. Das der Christen gloub von anfang der wält gewart habe / der recht waar al vnnd vngezwyflet gloub sye / klare bewysung Heinrychen Bullingers*, (Zürich 1539), sig. Gv(r).

²² There appear to be some parallels with Irenaeus' emphasis on the incarnation which is also apparent in Zwingli. See G.W. Bromiley, *Zwingli and Bullinger*

in Christ served, on one level, to respond to Luther's charge of Nestorianism against Zwingli and the Zurichers.²³ The fact that Bullinger referred several times to the crushing of Satan and the release of believers from his grasp in conjunction with an emphasis on the deity and humanity of Christ indicate unmistakable echoes of both Anselm's *Christus Victor* and *Cur Deus Homo*. Bullinger further explained that the Holy Spirit prepares the elect to receive the Son and believe in him. Indeed, the Holy Spirit 'is poured into our hearts', leads men and women to faith, brings about the second birth and effects union with Christ.

III. THE GOSPEL AND RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation was clearly an integral aspect of Bullinger's gospel. What was on view here, for Bullinger, was both the reconciliation of mankind to God as well as the reconciliation of God to mankind. As was his usual practice, which he commenced in 1523, on the title page of *The Decades* Bullinger cited Matthew 17:5 with *placata* ('reconciled') instead of *placita* ('pleased'). Significantly, in sermon IV.1 of *The Decades* Bullinger used *placatus* rather than *placitus* as many as six times.²⁴ Thus, Bullinger's understanding of the theological significance of Matthew 17:5 clearly underlies his first statement about the gospel, cited above.²⁵ Moreover, Bullinger declared: 'The heavenly Father truly set forth his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, for our propitiation, certainly to be our reconciliation (*reconciliatio*), on account of God being reconciled (*placatus*) we might be adopted into the (number of the) sons of God.'²⁶ He further explained that: 'However many believe in Christ, assuredly because of him, the Father is reconciled to us and because of him we are considered to be just (*iusti*) and holy (*sancti*).'²⁷

The citing of Matthew 17:5 in the same manner on the title page of all his works points to Bullinger's understanding of Christ as the goal of the whole canon. For Bullinger, Christ's transfiguration in the presence

(Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), p. 347, notes 16, 25, 27. See Opitz, *Decades*, p. 390: 'God who is rich in mercy and goodness sent his Son into the world, so that he being incarnate might die for us and take away the sins of our imperfection and transfer to us, in faith, his perfection who is the perfection and fulfilment of the law.'

²³ Bruce Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 76-7.

²⁴ Opitz, *Decades*, pp. 492, 493, 497, 505, 506 (×2).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 492.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 514.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 515.

of Moses and Elijah indicated that the Torah and the Prophets find their climax in Christ and were fulfilled in him. It is evident, therefore, that Bullinger cited Matthew 17:5 to make it clear to the reader that the elect are partakers of Christ by faith and, thereby, reconciled to God. He emphasized that reconciliation with God is only possible if only one were to be in Christ. In this connection, Peter Opitz notes that Bullinger's understanding of Matthew 17:5 'characterizes also his exegesis of Romans. But listening to Christ means having faith in Christ, which is possible only in pneumatical union with Christ, that is, in participation in Christ's spirit of love.'²⁸

IV. THE GOSPEL AND UNION WITH CHRIST/UNION WITH GOD

Union with Christ was clearly a foundational aspect of the outworking of the gospel for Bullinger. This is reflected, for example, in several sections of the *Consensus Tigurinus* (1549).²⁹ It is also clearly to be seen in the title of sermon IV.1 (*in hoc verae salutis omnia*). Bullinger's focus on union with Christ mirrors his insistence that the covenant is not so much about God giving his promises or his blessings but, rather, God giving himself. In his most direct comment on union with Christ in sermon IV.1 Bullinger stated: 'Eternal salvation is the seeing and enjoying the eternal God and consequently being joined in inseparable union with him.'³⁰

For Bullinger, the outworking of the gospel in a believer's life is union with Christ through the Holy Spirit. Indeed, union with Christ as an outworking of the gospel was of fundamental importance for Bullinger's understanding of the reality of salvation. Thus union with Christ or union with God was emphasized repeatedly in this sermon.³¹ It is why Burrows distils Bullinger's understanding of the gospel in terms of *Christus extra nos sed intra nos vivens* where, on the one hand, Christ's alien righteousness is imputed to the believer while, on the other hand, the believer is united to Christ who lives in the believer through the Spirit.³²

²⁸ Peter Opitz, 'Bullinger on Romans', in *Reformation Readings of Romans*, ed. by Kathy Ehrensberger and R. Ward Holder (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2008), p. 155.

²⁹ Articles 5, 6, 9, 10, 14 and 19. Cf. Emidio Campi and Ruedi Reich, eds., *Consensus Tigurinus: Heinrich Bullinger und Johannes Calvin über das Abendmahl* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2009), pp. 258-67.

³⁰ Opitz, *Decades*, p. 507.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 502, 507, 510, 511 (×2), 512, 513, 521.

³² Mark. S. Burrows, '“Christus intra nos Vivens”: The Peculiar Genius of Bullinger's Doctrine of Sanctification', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 98 (1987), 48-69.

It is also to be noted that one of Bullinger's favourite phrases occurs several times in sermon IV.1, viz. '(God) wholly poured himself with all his good things (*cum omnibus bonis*) into believers'.³³ Here Bullinger was appropriating Augustine's understanding of the infusion language of Romans 5:5 through the prism of Lombard's *Sentences*. The key point is that Romans 5:5 was understood by Bullinger not so much as God pouring his love (*caritas*) into the hearts of believers but, rather, God pouring himself into the hearts of believers through the Holy Spirit. In doing so, Bullinger was clearly interacting with terminology used at Trent which spoke of the infusion of hope, faith and love. That Bullinger referred to *gratia infusa*³⁴ in tandem with *sola fides* is a pointed corrective to chapter 7 of the Decree of the Sixth Session of Trent. The deliberate choice of this terminology taken over from Augustine served to point to the fact that salvation is all of God and all from God.

This perspective of Bullinger's understanding of the dynamics of salvation is reflected by the fact that in sermon IV.1 he also asserted that, by faith, believers 'are made partakers of all the good things (*omnium bonorum*) of Christ'.³⁵ Bullinger further declared that, in Christ, God has given believers 'all things fully for a blessed life and eternal salvation'.³⁶ Indeed, in one of his summaries of the gospel, Bullinger stated that God has given believers, in Christ, 'all things for a blessed life' (*omnia vitae beatae*).³⁷ A parallel phrase was employed when he explained that God gives us his treasures (*thesauros*) in Christ.³⁸ In the same breath, he pointed out that true preaching of the Gospel will proclaim that through Christ the Lord, who is the true Messiah, is the only source of 'all things (*omnia*) for salvation and life'.³⁹ He employed a similar phrase elsewhere both in *The Decades* and in *De testamento*. For example, at the end of sermon I.8 he wrote, 'From there (i.e. the right hand of the Father in heaven) he pours into us the abundance of all good things (*omnium bonorum copiam*): his Holy Spirit, and communicates himself wholly to us joining us to him with an indissoluble bond'.⁴⁰ The title of sermon IV.1 declares that in Christ is

³³ Opitz, *Decades*, p. 502.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 497.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 510.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 497—in *quo etiam dedit nobis plene vitae beatae et salutis aeternae*; a few lines earlier Bullinger has *in ipso omnia plene beatae vitae aeternaeque salutis*. The former phrase is repeated on p. 506. *Nobisque omnia vitae et salutis plene exhiberet* is used on p. 509.

³⁷ Opitz, *Decades*, p. 492.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 509.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 99.

verae salutis omnia. This is further explicated in the sermon itself where Bullinger explained that 'God the Father has given us in his Son entirely all things (*plene omnia*) for a sanctified life and eternal salvation'.⁴¹

Indeed, several times in sermon IV.1 Bullinger referred to the believer receiving *omnia* through union with Christ. This must be viewed through the perspective of Bullinger's reference to God as *cornucopia* and Christ as *omnis plenitudo*. Opitz also notes that Bullinger regards that Paul highlights Christ as *omnis plenitudo* in Romans, Galatians and Hebrews.⁴² Bullinger's point is that with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit most abundantly in the age of the new covenant, Christ, who is *omnis plenitudo*, dwells in the heart of the believer and, thereby, God (*cornucopia*) is united to the believer who thus receives his blessings.

V. THE GOSPEL AND THE IMPUTATION OF CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

For Bullinger, 'Christian righteousness is imputative'.⁴³ Citing Titus 3:5 in sermon IV.1, Bullinger differentiated between the righteousness that comes from God and the righteousness that mankind deems it can merit through its works.⁴⁴ Like the other reformers, Bullinger underscored that salvation is only possible through the gift of righteousness from God through faith in Christ. Hence, towards the end of sermon IV.1 Bullinger has a section that highlights the imputation of Christ's alien righteousness to believers. This section, which has the marginal comment *Christianorum iustitia imputativa* (the righteousness of Christians is imputed), emphasizes *iustitia extra nos posita* several times.⁴⁵ Bullinger not only affirmed here the forensic nature of justification but he also squarely placed the imputation of Christ's righteousness alongside the believer's relationship with and participation in Christ. He thus emphasized the imputation of alien righteousness in tandem with participation in Christ, indicating his understanding of the participational character of justification. Bullinger phrased it in terms of 'God truly communicated his righteousness to all believers'.⁴⁶ For Bullinger it was *iustitia Christi extra nos, sed Christus in nobis*.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 506.

⁴² Opitz, 'Bullinger on Romans', p. 154.

⁴³ Opitz, *Decades*, p. 517.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 495 refers to *non ex operibus iustitiae nostrae*.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 517-518 (x2).

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 515.

VI. THE GOSPEL AND ADOPTION

Julie Canlis has correctly identified that adoption is a key theme in Calvin's understanding of the gift of salvation.⁴⁷ Not surprisingly, the theme of adoption is also present in Bullinger's unpacking of the gospel. Including Scripture references to Christ as the 'Son' or the 'Son of God', the word *filius* occurs as many as sixty times in the sermon. It is in this context that one must view the several times where Bullinger reiterated that, through the gospel, believers are adopted as sons of God. Election is clearly on view because he emphatically declared that it is adoption 'into the number of the sons of God'. Indeed, he stated that: 'For we learn indeed that justification is only but sanctification (*beatificatio*), the forgiveness of sins and adoption into the number of the sons of God'.⁴⁸ Union with Christ is effected in the elect through the Holy Spirit and is the basis of their justification and sanctification. As the adopted sons of God, believers receive the riches of the covenant blessings given by God, *El Shaddai*, who is *cornucopia*. They are heirs of eternal life.

VII. THE GOSPEL AND *SOLA GRATIA*, *SOLA FIDES*, AND *SOLUS CHRISTUS*

There is an unmistakeable emphasis on *sola gratia* in sermon IV.1. The word *gratia* appears in the title of the sermon ('Of the gospel of the grace of God') and as many as ninety-four times throughout the sermon, while the phrase 'mere grace' (*mera gratia*) occurs six times.⁴⁹ 'The free grace of God' (*gratuita dei gratia*) occurs in the summary at the end of the sermon.⁵⁰ What is particularly striking is the number of marginal comments that mention *gratia*.⁵¹ Bullinger pointedly indicated that he was very cognisant of the medieval writings on *gratia*. But he was more concerned for the biblical understanding of and use of *gratia*. In place of an analysis of the medieval discussions on *gratia* which undergirded the Roman church at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Bullinger chose to 'rather cite sentences of holy Scripture (which is the one and only rule to make an opinion or to judge rightly) so thereby, I maintain, Scripture prescribes how we should think (that is, about *gratia*)'.⁵² Significantly, on several of

⁴⁷ Julie Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 130-6.

⁴⁸ Opitz, *Decades*, pp. 518-9.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 497, 513-4 (×3), 518.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 522; cf. also ibid., pp. 495-6.

⁵¹ *Gratia, gratia dei qui sit, caussa gratia divinae, operatio gratiae divinae, gratia iustificamur, in Christo exhibit suam nobis gratiam deus.*

⁵² Opitz, *Decades*, p. 497.

the occasions when Bullinger referred to *mera gratia*, he made a point to hammer home that salvation is not at all attributed to any work or merit. Furthermore, Bullinger cited Augustine who taught that if anyone joined together humility or obedience as a help to grace then that person is contrary to the teaching of the apostle Paul.⁵³ Against those who argue that there is even a hint of synergism in Bullinger's thought, the following citation should silence such a hasty conclusion:

In fact by no means is it admitted that justification is attributed partly to faith and partly to the mercy of God, partly to the works of faith and partly to our merits. If this were the case then the gospel is plundered. Therefore I decree to all of us solely and unceasingly to urge that the faithful are justified, saved or sanctified by faith without works, by the grace and mercy of God, I repeat, through Christ alone.⁵⁴

Moreover, echoing what he had explained in sermon III.9 that justification is neither by works nor faith plus works,⁵⁵ in the section which has the marginal comment 'Christ is received by faith not by works' Bullinger declared:

For we are freely saved through faith without any regard to our works either prior or subsequent (to faith). And although this argument has been treated again and again in our sermons because, all the same, on it revolves the hinge of evangelical doctrine, in fact this dogma (namely Christ is received by faith and not by works) is fiercely attacked by many.⁵⁶

Bullinger also clearly taught that the gospel is *sola fides*. That faith is at the heart of the gospel is evidenced by the fact that Bullinger referred to *fides* as many as seventy-six times in sermon IV.1. Indeed, he declared that: 'Sincere faith takes hold of the mere grace in Christ'.⁵⁷ On three separate occasions in the sermon he referred to *sola fides*.⁵⁸ In his discussion of Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus, Bullinger declared that 'no one should be in any doubt whatsoever' that 'by faith we are made partakers of Christ'.⁵⁹ Bullinger brought to a close his discussion of the importance of *sola fides* by citing five reasons for the importance of this doctrine, viz. the testimony of the saints and the councils of the church over the

⁵³ Ibid., p. 496.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 519.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 433.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 512.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 497.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 513, 516, 519.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 513.

centuries; it points to the glory of Christ; its link with the certainty of our salvation; the image of God is repaired in us and our understanding of sin. Quite pointedly, Bullinger concluded the sermon with what appears to be a direct attack on Rome: 'I could add to these more reasons why it is fitting for all men to strive and endeavour that this doctrine (the grace of God in God's only begotten Son through faith and not by works justifies the catholic church) be kept sincere and uncorrupted in the church.'⁶⁰

Bullinger further understood the gospel in terms of *solus Christus*. In sermon IV.1 Bullinger clearly highlighted the sacrifice of Christ in terms of propitiation in order to reconcile mankind to God. Moreover, he reiterated five times in the sermon that salvation is through Christ alone.⁶¹ It is through Christ alone that we can come to the Father. Forgiveness of sins and eternal life is only through Christ alone. Christ alone is the life and salvation of the elect. Righteousness is through Christ alone and is received by faith.⁶² Bullinger sought to assure his readers that 'Christ alone is our life and salvation, that is to say, our most absolute (*absolutissima*) salvation and life'.⁶³

VIII. THE GOSPEL AND THE PROTOEVANGELIUM

The linking of the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15 and the covenant through which God calls and reconciles the elect is a recurring theme in Bullinger's works.⁶⁴ In sermon IV.1 of *The Decades* Bullinger referred to the *protoevangelium* on several occasions.⁶⁵ Bullinger declared that the gospel is of heavenly origin and that God had preached to Adam and Eve that his promised Son would crush the serpent's head.⁶⁶ He reiterated that there is one gospel in human history. There is also frequent unmistakable reference to *The Old Faith* (1537) where the *protoevangelium* is particularly highlighted. Indeed, Aurelio Garcia Archilla observes that 'Bullinger's exegesis of Genesis 3:15 has found in it the whole New Testament Gospel: virgin birth, two-natures Christology, justification by faith alone'.⁶⁷ According to Bullinger, the gospel was already proclaimed

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 522.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 507, 508 (x3), 515.

⁶² Ibid., p. 508.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 507.

⁶⁴ Apart from sermon IV.1 Bullinger refers to the *protoevangelium* in *The Decades* at Opitz, *Decades*, pp. 85, 300, 345-6, 390, 635, 646, 799, 1014.

⁶⁵ Opitz, *Decades*, pp. 493, 498 (x2). See Opitz, *Bullinger als Theologe*, pp. 80-2.

⁶⁶ Opitz, *Decades*, p. 493.

⁶⁷ Aurelio A. Garcia Archilla, *The Theology of History and Apologetic Historiography in Heinrich Bullinger: Truth in History* (San Francisco: Mellen Research

directly by God to Adam and Eve immediately after the Fall. This promise is 'the pillar and foundation of all Christian religion and preaching of the gospel'.⁶⁸

Significantly, in sermon IV.1 of *The Decades* Bullinger made a point to drive home the fact that Christ is, first and foremost, the seed of Mary, thereby indicating his Mariological interpretation of the *protoevangelium*.⁶⁹ Bullinger also clarified that the promise at the heart of the *protoevangelium* finds its goal in Christ who is the seed of Adam as well as the seed of Eve and who thus fulfils both Genesis 22:18 and Galatians 3:16. Following the targums, Bullinger further interpreted Genesis 49:10 messianically with the promised coming of 'Schilo' whom he pointed out is 'the source of all good things (*copiae cornu*) and the abundance of all good and excellent things. In fact, Christ is the treasury of all good things'.⁷⁰ In so doing, Bullinger pointed to Christ as the one who would fulfil the covenant of God with mankind as expounded by him in his *De testamento* where he emphasized that God is *cornucopia* and who initiates and fulfils the covenant because of his grace.

IX. THE GOSPEL AND ELECTION

Bullinger's understanding of the faithful remnant of Israel or true Israel within Israel⁷¹ is reflected when he underlined (of all true believers) that 'we are the chosen nation'.⁷² He referred to 'all the faithful of both the testaments'.⁷³ He cited both 1 Timothy 2:4 and Titus 2:11⁷⁴ where his understanding of 'all men' points to the fact that the gospel is for all nations.⁷⁵ The gospel is to be preached to 'the whole world'. Significantly, in citing the Timothy passage, Bullinger has *cunctos homines* instead of the Vulgate's *omnes homines*. He also has *cunctos homines* in his commentary on

University Press, 1992), p. 23.

⁶⁸ Opitz, *Decades*, p. 498.

⁶⁹ Garcia Archilla, *History*, p. 21.

⁷⁰ Opitz, *Decades*, p. 499 (*Thesaurus enim omnium bonorum Christus est*).

⁷¹ This is a theme touched on by Bullinger in both *De testamento* and *The Old Faith*.

⁷² Opitz, *Decades*, p. 505.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 515.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 510. 1 Timothy 2:4 is cited in other sermons at pp. 32, 41, 48, and 144.

⁷⁵ This is clear from the marginal comment *Omnium esse salutem evangelicam*, Opitz, *Decades*, p. 509. Cf. Martin Foord, 'God wills all people to be saved—or does he? Calvin's reading of 1 Timothy 2:4', in *Engaging with Calvin: Aspects of the Reformer's Legacy for Today*, ed. by Mark D. Thompson (Nottingham: Apollos, 2009), pp. 192-3.

1 Timothy.⁷⁶ Bullinger made a point of distilling the import of Ephesians 1:3-14 where he explained that Paul 'referred to the whole gamut of election and salvation, together with all its parts, to the grace of God'.⁷⁷

Clearly, Bullinger had in mind the salvation of the 'faithful' or 'all the faithful' in sermon IV.1. This is evident from the marginal comment *Salvantur fideles*.⁷⁸ Those who are saved are all who truly believe (*omni quidem credenti*).⁷⁹ Only believers are purged of their sins through Christ.⁸⁰ Christ is the absolute fullness (*plenitudo absolutissima*) of believers.⁸¹ Indeed, Christ is the door for the sheep and 'those, therefore, who ever strive towards eternal life and salvation through other means than through Christ are thieves and robbers. For they rob from Christ his glory, who is and remains the only Saviour, and massacre their own souls'.⁸² Pointedly, Bullinger frequently referred in sermon IV.1 to 'the number of the sons of God'.⁸³ Those who put their trust in God and his promises 'are received into the number of the sons of God'.⁸⁴ Indeed, 'by God's eternal counsel (*aeterno suo consilio*)' Christ was sent that believers 'might be adopted into the (number of the) sons of God'.⁸⁵ Bullinger asserted that not all will be saved as indicated by the marginal comment *Quare non salventur omnes homines*.⁸⁶ In this section he cited Matthew 20:16, the parable of the banquet (Luke 14:15-24), and John 3:19 which refers to the reprobate who not only do not believe but who also choose darkness rather than light.⁸⁷ Moreover, the elect confess Christ and believe in him only through the 'pouring in and inspiration of the Holy Spirit'.⁸⁸ Conversely, those who are not saved are those who do not believe the Word of

⁷⁶ Heinrich Bullinger, *In omnes apostolicas epistolas, divi videlicet Pauli XIII, et VII. canonicas, commentarii Henrychi Bullingeri, ab ipso iam recogniti, et nonnullis in locis aucti* (Zürich, 1537), p. 564.

⁷⁷ Opitz, *Decades*, p. 496.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 510.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 492, 500, 508, 515, 522.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 507.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 508.

⁸² *Ibid.* Although there is no marginal indication, it is possible that Bullinger was thinking of Psalm 118:19, 20 here. Bullinger does, however, appear to have in mind Article 3 of Zwingli's 67 *Articles* (1523), *Huldrych Zwingli Schriften II* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1995), pp. 31-3.

⁸³ Opitz, *Decades*, p. 516.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 512.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 514.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 510.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 496.

God preached to them and who despise and reject it.⁸⁹ In this connection, Bullinger made a point in this sermon to refer to Romans 1:5 and 16:26. It is only the elect from all nations who will respond in terms of the 'faith of obedience (*in obedientiam fidei*)'.⁹⁰

There is also in sermon IV.1 a significant comment on predestination to which the Remonstrants appealed at Dort. This section is cited here in full:

And although by all these it may be concluded, one way or another, to whom that salvation belongs and to whom grace is seen to be preached, however, the very matter itself demands that we show expressly and eloquently that Christ and the grace of Christ belongs to be introduced and announced to all (*ad omnes*) through the gospel. We should not imagine that in heaven there are placed two books, in the one are read the (names) inscribed of those who are to be saved who are saved, of necessity, even though they struggle against the word of God and commit atrocious crimes it is refutable that they will be saved. In the other book, however, is contained (the names of) those sealed for damnation who, whatever they do, however devoutly they live, are to be damned. Let us hold, rather, that the holy gospel of Christ preaches generally to the whole world (*universo mundo*) the grace of God, the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.⁹¹

This is, clearly, not the only place in *The Decades* where Bullinger touched on the topic of predestination. Building on the groundwork of Peter Walser,⁹² Venema has ably identified that Bullinger referred to predestination in *The Decades* in five sections, *viz.* the definition of predestination, the question of personal election, the problems of doubt and certainty, the means of election and the importance of faith and trust.⁹³ Venema's conclusion and analysis is that: 'Bullinger's doctrine of predestination in the *Decades*, while it appears to be quite strong in his formal definition—possibly a doctrine of double predestination—is actually quite moderately stated by contrast to comparable works of Calvin, Luther and Zwingli'.⁹⁴ This indicates Bullinger's commitment to express doctrine, as much as possible, in terms and expressions used by the Bible rather than by logical extrapolation from Scripture.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 493.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 492, 510.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 509.

⁹² Peter Walser, *Die Prädestination bei Heinrich Bullinger* (Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag Zürich, 1957).

⁹³ Venema, *Predestination*, pp. 43-9.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 49.

Sermon IV.1 echoes one of the features of *The Old Faith*: the frequent reference to an Augustinian view of the two cities. Believers are of the seed of Christ while unbelievers are of the seed of the devil. Bullinger explained that because ‘the heel of the virgin’s seed is well trodden upon’ thus, throughout salvation history, the seed of Christ would strive with the seed of the devil. Moreover, for Bullinger, the faithful preaching of the Gospel to ‘all’ people will draw out the elect while those who are the seed of the devil will choose to reject it.

In almost the final comment of sermon IV.1, with a clear allusion to John 3:36, Bullinger made a direct reference to the reprobate: ‘Those who indeed because of their unbelief and hardness of heart do not receive Christ are given over to eternal punishment and chains. For the wrath of God remains on them.’⁹⁵

X. PREACHING AND THE GOSPEL

That preaching and the gospel are intimately linked is evident from Bullinger’s summary of the gospel cited above where he explained: ‘The gospel is the heavenly preaching of God’s grace to us...’. God is the source of the gospel but Christ is its focus: ‘For Christ is king and high priest, that is, he is our saviour, the scopus, the star and the very sun of the preaching of the gospel.’⁹⁶ Several times throughout the course of the sermon Bullinger emphasized that the gospel is to be preached to all nations. He unpacked how Christ preached the gospel to Nicodemus and that in Christ’s own preaching he elicited repentance and faith.

This same pattern of preaching was also seen by Bullinger in Paul’s preaching. In citing Paul’s farewell speech to the Ephesian elders he identified that the goal of preaching is that it produces ‘repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus’. Furthermore, in order to underscore his point about *sola gratia* Bullinger even phrased what he wanted to say in a negative way: ‘Hence, by the way, we conclude that the gospel is not sincerely preached when it is taught that we are made partakers of the life of Christ on account of our works or merits.’⁹⁷ Indeed, Bullinger made a point to have a section on the ‘insincere preaching of the gospel’ or preaching that does not truly proclaim the finished work of Christ and the benefits given to believers through faith in him.⁹⁸ For Bullinger, true preaching is preaching the very Word of God. Furthermore, ‘even today, the heavenly voice (of God) resounds to us through the mouths of minis-

⁹⁵ Opitz, *Decades*, p. 522.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 497.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 512.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 509.

ters when they sincerely preach the gospel'.⁹⁹ There are two responses to this preaching: 'those who believe, believe the word of the eternal God. Those who do not believe despise and reject the word of God'.¹⁰⁰

XI. CONCLUSION

Bullinger's gospel was neither synergistic nor universalistic. Like the other reformers, his gospel clearly reflected *sola gratia*, *sola fides* and *solus Christus*. Furthermore, Bullinger's approach was both *sola Scriptura* and *tota Scriptura* as he saw the gospel proclaimed in both the Old Testament and the New Testament as the outworking of the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15. His view of the message of Scripture was truly christoscopic.¹⁰¹ Bullinger further underscored the imputation of Christ's alien righteousness (*iustitia extra nos posita*) to the believer in tandem with the believer's union with Christ (*Christus intra nos vivens*). This union with Christ is effected through the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer. Moreover, in the face of the teaching of Rome, Bullinger underlined that believers have assurance of salvation because in the here and now they have a sure hope. This was a clear rejoinder to chapter 9 of the Decree of the Sixth Session of Trent ('Against the vain confidence of heretics').

In all his writings, Bullinger encouraged his readers to live righteously in view of who they are in Christ. That is why his works are characterised by focus on the *pietatis praxis*. For Bullinger, pious living arises from a right understanding of the gospel and its implications. In sermon IV.1 of *The Decades* Bullinger made it clear that the gospel he proclaimed is not only faithful to a true interpretation of Scripture but that it is also the same gospel proclaimed by the church fathers. It is this gospel which had been subsequently corrupted by the Church of Rome. He further used this sermon to emphasize, against the Anabaptists, that believers are not yet perfect even though they may be termed *iustus*. Nonetheless, the elect are called to live righteously (*integer*) in the present world as they are engrafted into Christ (*insiti Christo*). Bullinger constantly reminded his readers of the progressive dimension to sanctification and urged them to live as faithful members of the new covenant community established by Christ and his blood. Hence, in his preaching, Bullinger challenged men and women with a view to repentance to God and faith in the Lord Jesus through the in-working of the Holy Spirit.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 494.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 493.

¹⁰¹ This term has been coined by Jeff Fisher in his *A Christoscopic Reading of Scripture: Johannes Oecolampadius on Hebrews* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).