

Heinrich Bullinger's *Der Alt Gloub* ("The Old Faith"): An Apology for the Reformation

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IF HISTORY BELONGS to those who tell its story, authors who have told the story of the Reformation often neglect to give appropriate recognition to some of its most influential and significant figures. In addition to the well-known contributions of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli, a number of important Reformers of the sixteenth century have only recently begun to garner more of the attention of students of the Reformation. These "Reformers in the wings," to use an apt description of David C. Steinmetz, were often viewed by their contemporaries to be as significant as those figures whom history has deemed worthy of greater notice.¹ In some cases, they were regarded in their own day to be as prominent, if not more so, than those whom historians feature in their accounts of the events and developments of the Protestant Reformation. However, they have not received their due in the telling of the story of what transpired during the Reformation of the sixteenth century.

Among these Reformers in the wings, none deserves to receive attention more than Heinrich Bullinger, successor to Zwingli as the *Antistes* or chief pastor of the Reformed church in Zürich, Switzerland. Though Bullinger always labored in the shadow of others, like Zwingli and Calvin,² his contributions to the Reformed

¹David C. Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings: From Geiler von Kaysersberg to Theodore Beza* (2nd ed.: New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

²Cf. Edward A. Dowey, "Heinrich Bullinger's Theology: Thematic, Comprehensive, Schematic," in *Calvin Studies V: Presented at a Colloquium on Calvin Studies at Davidson College and Davidson College Presbyterian Church*, ed. John H. Leith (Jan. 19-20, 1990), p. 42: "Always he has borne the sobriquet 'Zwingli's successor,' and this has frequently been the point of

churches in the sixteenth century can hardly be exaggerated.³ Thrust into a position of leadership among the Reformed churches in Switzerland after the death of Zwingli at the Battle of Kappel in 1531, Bullinger proved to be an able successor to Zwingli and leader of the Reformation in Zürich. From 1531 unto his death in 1575, Bullinger's influence rivaled that of Calvin, not only among the Reformed churches on the continent of Europe but also among the churches of the British isles. During the course of his life, Bullinger produced a number of works that were widely distributed throughout the Reformed churches of Europe. By means of his writings and voluminous correspondence, Bullinger contributed as much as any to the consolidation and advance of the Reformation in the sixteenth century and thereafter.⁴

departure for study of his work.”

³For a comprehensive treatment of Bullinger's life and work, the outstanding sources remain Carl Pestalozzi, *Heinrich Bullinger: Leben und ausgewählte Schriften* (Elberfeld: R. L. Friderichs, 1858); Fritz Blanke, *Der junge Bullinger 1504-1531* (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1942); and Heinrich Bullinger, *Heinrich Bullingers DLARIUM [Annales vitae] der Jahre 1504-1574. Zum 400. Geburtstag Bullingers am 18. Juli 1904*, ed. Emil Egli (Basel: Basler Buch-und Antiquariatshandlung vormals Adolf Geering, 1904). Brief sketches of Bullinger's life and labor are given by Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1980), pp. xi-xxvi; and David C. Steinmetz, “Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575): Covenant and the Continuity of Salvation History,” in *Reformers in the Wings*, pp. 93-99. For recent summaries of the study of Bullinger's work and theology, including the ongoing project to produce a complete critical edition of his works, see Fritz Büsser, *Wurzeln der Reformation in Zürich: Zum 500. Geburtstag des Reformators Huldrych Zwingli* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), 106-98; and Fritz Blanke and Immanuel Leuschner, *Heinrich Bullinger: Vater der reformierten Kirche* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1990).

⁴Cf., for example, the following remark by J. Wayne Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1980), xi: “Heinrich Bullinger was one of the makers of the Reformed tradition. It was Bullinger who preserved the Swiss Reformation after the death of Zwingli, and it was he who assured the essential unity of Reformed Protestantism with the First and Second Helvetic Confessions. During his forty-five-year tenure as leader of the Zürich church his importance in Reformed circles was unsurpassed, except perhaps by Calvin.” Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings*, pp. 98-99, offers a similar assessment: “While the intellectual leadership of the Reformed

Since this year, AD 2004, marks the five hundredth anniversary of the year of Bullinger's birth, it is appropriate that his contribution to the Reformation be acknowledged and celebrated. By means of this modest article on one of Bullinger's early treatises, *Der Alt Groub* ("The Old Faith"),⁵ I would like to contribute in a small way to the commemoration of Bullinger's life and work. This treatise, which articulates one of the characteristic themes of Bullinger's theology, is little known. However, it expresses one of the most significant features of the Reformers' defense of their reformatory labor within the church, and reminds the Reformed churches today of a theme that is frequently neglected or even unknown.

In our consideration of *Der Alt Groub*, we will begin with a brief summary of its place within the corpus of Bullinger's writings. The principal focus of our study, however, will be upon the argument of *Der Alt Groub* itself. We will provide, therefore, a synopsis of the content and argument of this treatise in the main section of this article. Then, in a concluding section, we will offer a few observations regarding the significance of *Der Alt Groub* for an understanding of the distinctive emphases of Bullinger's theology and for the prosecution of the task of Reformed theology today.

The Place of *Der Alt Groub* in Bullinger's Works

Students of Bullinger's life and theology have divided his ministry into three periods: first, his early ministry in Bremgarten and then in Zürich from 1525-1540; second, the middle two decades of his ministry from 1540-1560; and third, the last period of

movement shifted to Geneva, the pastoral leadership did not. Bullinger was the friend and adviser of many of the important figures in church and in state throughout Europe. ... [T]he degree of his influence on the course of the Reformation outside his native Switzerland has not yet been adequately assessed."

⁵Heinrich Bullinger, *Der Alt Groub* (Zürich, 1537). For a complete listing of the various printings and editions of this treatise, see *Heinrich Bullinger Werke*, pt. 1: *Bibliographie*, vol. 1: *Beschreibendes Verzeichnis der Gedruckten Werke von Heinrich Bullinger*, ed. Joachim Staedtke (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1972), #99ff. (Hereafter referred to as HBBW 1). Staedtke lists 772 works of Bullinger, a number that includes all known translations and editions. HBBW, when completed, will likely exceed 100 volumes.

his ministry from 1560-1574.⁶ During each of these periods, Bullinger produced a large corpus of works in the form of letters, treatises, and more comprehensive statements of Reformed theology.⁷ *Der Alt Glaub*, the subject of this article, was an important treatise that Bullinger wrote during the first of these periods. The theme of this treatise, however, was to find a prominent place in Bullinger's writings throughout the whole course of his labor as a Reformer.

In the first period of Bullinger's reformatory work, he wrote several significant treatises that anticipated themes that would be prominent in his subsequent works. Among the more important of these treatises were *On the Only and Eternal Covenant* (1534),⁸ *The Old Faith* (1537), *Orthodox Statement on Both of the Two Natures in Christ* (1534), *On the Authority of Holy Scripture* (1538), and *On the Origin of Errors* (1539). As the titles of these diverse works suggest, Bullinger addresses a wide range of theological topics from the distinctive standpoint of the Reformed faith as it was being developed in the first half of the sixteenth century. None of these works could be described as a comprehensive statement of the Christian faith, though they are written in a clear and systematic manner. Among these occasional treatises, the first two, which address the subjects of the covenant and the antiquity of the Christian faith, are undoubtedly the most significant and develop themes that were especially prominent in Bullinger's theology. Gottlob Shrenk, for example, has described Bullinger's early treatise on the covenant as

⁶Cf. J. Wayne Baker, "Heinrich Bullinger, the Covenant, and the Reformed Tradition in Retrospect," in *Calvin Studies VIII: The Westminster Confession in Current Thought*, ed. John H. Leith (Davidson, NC, Jan. 26-27, 1996), pp. 59-69; Dowey, "Heinrich Bullinger's Theology," pp. 48-56; Fritz Büsser, s.v. "Bullinger, Heinrich," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, ed. Gerhard Krause et al. (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1981), 7:383-4.

⁷Dowey, "Heinrich Bullinger's Theology," p. 47, distinguishes major types of works in Bullinger's corpus: (1) biblical commentary; (2) thematic and polemical treatises; and (3) comprehensive presentations spanning the whole territory of Christian theology. *Der Alt Glaub* clearly belongs to the second type.

⁸*De testamento seu foedere Dei unico & aeterno Heinrichi Bullingeri brevis exposition* (Zürich , 1534) (HBBW 1:1, #54). For an English translation of this treatise, see Charles McCoy and J. Wayne Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), pp. 99-138.

the first in the history of theology to use the covenant idea as a governing doctrinal principle.⁹

After the publication of several occasional treatises in the first period of Bullinger's ministry, the second period from 1540-60 witnessed the publication of two significant comprehensive statements of the Reformed faith: the *Decades* of 1549-1551,¹⁰ and the *Summa Christenlicher Religion* of 1556.¹¹ Edward A. Dowey describes the first of these works, the *Decades*, as “a major Reformation classic ... unchallengeable as [Bullinger's] most full bodied and comprehensive theological work, containing the richness of his scholarship, gathering together themes of all his major writings up to that time, and exhibiting the churchly purpose of being a theological source book for pastors to aid them in the preparation of sermons.”¹² The *Decades*, as their title suggests, were composed of fifty Latin sermons that Bullinger delivered to the pastors of the Reformed churches in Zürich at their *Prophezei*. The purpose of these sermons was to serve the pastors of the Reformed churches with a theological pattern that would guide or regulate their preaching. Due to the pastoral nature of these sermons and their usefulness for the instruction of lay members of the churches, translators of the *Decades* substituted the title *Hausbuch* (“House Book”), which reflects their extraordinarily wide distribution and use among Reformed people during the sixteenth century and thereafter. The second of these works, *Summa Christenlicher Religion*, was described by Bullinger himself as a kind of “epitome” of the

⁹*Gottesreich und Bund im älteren Protestantismus, vornehmlich bei Johannes Coccejus* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1923), p. 40.

¹⁰*Sermonum Decades duae, de potissimis verae religionis capitibus....* (Zürich, 1549; HBBW 1, #179), followed by *Sermonum decas tertia* (HBBW 1, #180) and *Sermonum decas quarta* (HBBW 1, #181) in 1550, and the final volume, *Sermonum decas quinta* (HBBW 1, #182) in 1551. A complete edition, *Sermonum Decades quinque* was first published in 1552 (HBBW 1, #184). The *Decades* are available in English translation: Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades of Henrich Bullinger*, ed. Thomas Harding, 3 vols., (Parker Society, Cambridge University, 1841-52).

¹¹*Summa Christenlicher Religion* (Zurych: Christoffel Froschauer, 1556). (HBBW 1, #283). The *Summa* was translated into Latin (*Compendium christiana religionis*; HBBW 1, #291) and into French in 1556 (HBBW 1, #297); into Dutch in 1562 (HBBW 1, #310); and into English in 1572 (HBBW 1, #314).

¹²Dowey, “Heinrich Bullinger as Theologian,” p. 52.

first and larger work. Written originally in the German and immediately translated into Latin, this work served as a kind of popular digest of Reformed theology, and was also widely used among the Reformed churches of the continent. Consistent with Bullinger's earlier emphasis upon the covenant as an organizing principle for the treatment of the teaching of Scripture, this lay dogmatics is structured according the doctrine of the covenant.

The last period of Bullinger's reforming labor is the period during which Bullinger wrote *The Second Helvetic Confession*.¹³ Originally written in 1561 as a statement of his personal faith, this Confession was attached to Bullinger's will and was intended to be his legacy to the Reformed churches of Switzerland. As a testimony to Bullinger's influence and stature among the churches, this Confession was to become the most international and widely influential of all the confessions of the Reformed churches of the sixteenth century. *The Second Helvetic Confession* was subsequently translated into at least 15 different languages and was issued in more than 100 different editions. The catholic reach of this Confession nicely corresponds to Bullinger's own life-long conviction and emphasis that the Reformed faith is nothing other than the old, catholic faith of the Scriptures and Christian tradition. As a kind of further confirmation of this conviction, this Confession was used as the "organizing document of the *Harmonia Confessionum* of 1581, which showed the catholicity of the Reformed wing over against the Council of Trent and against the Lutheran Book of Concord."¹⁴

This brief overview of Bullinger's ministry and writings provides only a glimpse of the extraordinary labor of this Reformer in the wings. Arguably, Bullinger's contributions to the Reformed churches throughout Europe were only surpassed by those of Calvin. To many of his contemporaries, the practical and pastoral

¹³ *Confessio Helvetica Posteriori* (Zürich, 1566) (HBBW 1, #433). A Latin text of the Second Helvetic Confession is included in Wilhelm Niesel, *Bekenntnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen der nach Gottes Wort reformierten Kirche* (A. G. Zollikon-Zürich, 1938), 219-75. An English translation is provided in *The Book of Confessions*, 2nd ed. (Office of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1966, 1967). For a brief discussion of the significance of this Confession and the purpose for which it was written, see my *Heinrich Bullinger and the Doctrine of Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002), pp. 89-90.

¹⁴ Dowey, "Heinrich Bullinger as Theologian," p. 56.

nature of Bullinger's voluminous writings made him a more familiar figure than any other among the company of Reformers.

A Synopsis of the Content and Argument of *Der Alt Gloub*

As our brief sketch of Bullinger's ministry indicates, it was three years after Bullinger published his significant treatise on the covenant, *De testamento, or A Brief Exposition of the One and Eternal Testament or Covenant of God*, that he published *Der Alt Gloub* in defense of the antiquity of the Christian faith.¹⁵ Bullinger himself linked these two treatises in his *Decades*, since there is a considerable overlap in the content and argument of these two works.¹⁶ Consistent with the claims of his earlier work on the covenant, which is far better known and recognized among his writings, in this treatise Bullinger emphasizes the substantial unity of teaching between the Old and New Testaments, and claims that this represents an important argument for the venerable age of the Christian religion. The full title that Bullinger gave to this work accurately represents its primary thesis: "The old faith, an evident probation out of the Holy Scripture, that the Christian Faith (which is the right, true, old and undoubted faith) has endured since the beginning of the world."¹⁷ As its title and subtitle indicate, Bullinger's aim in this work was to demonstrate that the Christian faith was as old as the world, and that the Reformation understanding of the faith was nothing more than a rediscovery of its truth. Contrary to the Roman Catholic objection that the Reformers were innovators, Bullinger insists in this treatise that the Reformation represented the rediscovery and restoration to its proper place of the old faith, which had been abandoned in

¹⁵Thomas Harding, editor of the English translation of *The Decades*, notes that this treatise "was composed by Bullinger against the boast of the papists, that the defeat at Cappel had proved theirs to be the true and ancient religion" (4:xvii).

¹⁶*The Decades*, 2:229. Cf. Dowey, "Heinrich Bullinger as Theologian," p. 49.

¹⁷*Der alt gloub. Das der Christen gloub von anfang der waelt gewaert habe/ der recht waer alt unnd ungesynlyet gloub sye/ klare bewysung Beinrychen Bullingers.* An English translation of this work was published by Myles Coverdale in 1547 (HBBW 1, #100). In the following synopsis, I will normally cite this translation with minor changes in the spelling and English usage of the original.

significant measure by the innovations and inventions of medieval Catholicism.

The structure of *The Old Faith* clearly discloses its main thesis and the form of Bullinger's argument. After an introduction in which he sets forth the theme of his work, Bullinger offers in the subsequent chapters something of a broad overview of the history of redemption, treating in sequence the subjects of creation, the fall into sin, and the revelation of redemption in Christ. The sequence of headings for each section indicates that *The Old Faith* represents a kind of summary of Christian doctrine, which is structured in primarily historical rather than topical categories:¹⁸

Introduction

Section One: "Of the goodness of God and the wickedness of man."

Section Two: "The first and right foundation of our holy Christian faith."

Section Three: "Of the first faithful Christians, Adam and Eve."

Section Four: "That the holy Patriarchs also were Christians and saved by Christ."

Section Five: "The law of God given by Moses, leads unto Christ, and makes mention of all his works."

Section Six: "The origin of the Holy Scripture and faith thereof."

Section Seven: "All virtuous kings and the people of Israel, trusted unto Christ, and not to the Law."

Section Eight: "All holy prophets do point unto Christ, and preach salvation only in him."

Section Nine: "Of the time of the grace of Christ, and how that he himself testifies, that the salvation of all the world stands only in him."

Section Ten: "That also the elect apostles preached this old faith, and declared, that all salvation is only in Christ."

Conclusion

¹⁸The original has the headings I list, but these are not numbered or identified as distinct chapters or sections. Only the material in quotes is from the original. The page numbering in what follows is also mine, page 1 beginning with the actual text of the Coverdale translation, excluding the preface to the reader.

A cursory review of this outline of *The Old Faith* confirms that Bullinger means to present a sweeping panorama of the biblical story of redemption in Christ. By means of this survey of the biblical revelation of redemption in Christ, who is the sum and center of all Scriptural teaching, Bullinger intends to show that the Reformation's emphasis upon salvation by grace alone through the work of Christ is nothing more than a restatement of the ancient Christian faith. In order to appreciate the way Bullinger formulates his argument throughout *The Old Faith*, we will summarize in what follows the content of each of its successive sections.

In the introductory section of *The Old Faith*, Bullinger begins by noting that many suppose that the Christian faith commenced with the birth of Jesus Christ in the days when Tiberius was Emperor of Judea. Though Bullinger acknowledges that this was the time of the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament, he insists that the old covenant people of God already knew "the same salvation in Christ Jesus" that Christians now know after the coming of Christ (p. 1). The difference between the people of God under the old covenant and the new, is a difference, not in "religion or substance" but in the degree to which salvation in Christ was openly manifest (p. 2). Old Testament believers were, consequently, "Christians" whose faith was substantially identical to that of New Testament believers (p. 2). While this is commonly admitted among Christian writers, including Eusebius in his history of the church, Bullinger concludes by noting that he will prove his main thesis, not by appealing to the writings of church fathers, but by a direct appeal to the Scriptures. In this way, he will dispel the impression that his argument is built upon the teaching of men and not the teaching of the Word of God (p. 3).

Section One: "Of the goodness of God and the wickedness of man." The teaching of Scripture begins with the truth of God's creation of all things, particularly of man as his image-bearer. Though God is the fullness of perfection, who depends upon nothing beyond himself, he freely chose, as an expression of his "own grace and mercy," to create the world in order to reveal "his unsearchable goodness" (p. 3). Among all the creatures whom God freely called into being, man stands alone as an image-bearer of God. When God created man as his image-bearer, he furnished him with every good gift and perfection so that he might live before God in faith and obedience. In his goodness and faithfulness, God also invited man as his

image-bearer to respond to the goodness of his Creator in obedience and thankfulness. For this reason, God stipulated that Adam might not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, promising him life on condition of obedience and threatening him with death on condition of disobedience (pp. 7-8).¹⁹ The “tree of life” was ordained by God to be a kind of “token and sacrament” of the blessedness of human life in obedience to God. However, despite God’s goodness and grace, man fell into sin and has come under the judgment and condemnation of his maker. Giving more credence to the word of the serpent and the woman than to the Word of God, Adam plunged the human race into ruin and death.

Section Two: “The first and right foundation of our holy Christian faith.” At the outset of this section, Bullinger acknowledges that God could have abandoned man in his sin and left him in bondage to the devil. However, the good news is that God has chosen to save his people in Jesus Christ, and in a way that honors his truth and righteousness. This gospel of Jesus Christ is the great foundation of the Christian faith, which God has revealed from the beginning as the only remedy for human sin. A way has been found “whereby the righteousness and truth of God should be satisfied, and in which the mercy of God should especially be exercised and declare itself; that is to say, Christ Jesus, who is given us by the manifest grace of God, was offered for our sins, satisfied and recompensed the righteousness of God, and so delivered us out of the bonds of the devil” (p. 9). When God approached Adam and Eve after they had disobeyed his commandment, he did not approach in order to destroy them in his righteousness, but to promise them salvation from sin through the work of his own Son. Though man had become incapable of any saving good, God announced his purpose to save him by means of the great promise

¹⁹As an early exponent of covenant theology, Bullinger does not expressly speak of a pre-lapsarian “covenant of works,” as in the fully developed covenant theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith. However, Bullinger’s description of the pre-lapsarian state, as well as his understanding of the work of Christ as Mediator in providing a remedy for Adam’s sin, anticipates most of the elements of the later, more fully articulated “federal theology.” For a survey of the debate regarding the place of the covenant in Bullinger’s theology, see my *Heinrich Bullinger and the Doctrine of Predestination*, esp. pp. 27-32; and Dowey, “Heinrich Bullinger as Theologian,” pp. 43-59.

in Genesis 3:15. In this promise, God declared: “I will have mercy upon him, and receive him to grace again; but in order that my truth and righteousness may be satisfied, I will cause my Son to take the very nature of man upon him. Then I will that he take upon himself the curse and damnation, and die, and with his innocent death take away that death and curse, and so to let the generation of man out of death into life, out of the dominion of the devil into his own kingdom, out of darkness into light” (pp. 12-13). Genesis 3:15 announces the “first promise and the first sure Gospel” of salvation through the mercy and mere grace of God in Jesus Christ. This gospel promise, moreover, is repeated throughout the Scriptures by the Patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament, as well as the apostles of the New Testament (p. 14).

Section Three: “Of the first faithful Christians, Adam and Eve.” Consistent with his claim that the gospel of Jesus Christ was first promised to Adam and Eve immediately after they fell into sin, Bullinger affirms in this section that Adam and Eve were the first Christian believers. In confirmation of his faith in God’s promise, Adam named his wife “Eve,” since she would be the “mother of all living” (p. 19). Adam lived from the promise that God would, through the seed of promise, bring life from death, and restore a people for himself to blessedness and salvation. As he lived under the fatherly protection and favor of God, he looked for the coming of his Son, whose passion and death would satisfy God’s truth and righteousness, destroy the power and kingdom of the devil, and gain for him entrance into the kingdom of God (p. 22). Even though Adam and Eve, as our “elders in the faith,” did not enjoy the benefit of the “rites” and “ceremonies” of the church, they nonetheless knew Christ under the form of the “bodily offering,” which was a “representation of the sacrifice of Christ” and the means whereby Cain and Abel came to make sacrifices to the Lord God (p. 22). Like all believers, Adam and Eve were “saved by no other work or merit of man, but only through and in the blessed seed of our Lord Jesus Christ” (pp. 22-23).

Section Four: “That the holy Patriarchs also were Christians and saved by Christ.” The history of the Patriarchs is a history of the fulfillment of God’s promise to Adam, that he would establish enmity between the seed of the woman (Christian believers) and the seed of the serpent (unbelievers). According to Bullinger’s summary of this history in this section, the Christian faith, which was first revealed to Adam after the fall, was preserved by God through a faithful

remnant. In the line of Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God preserved a faithful people in covenant with himself, who lived by faith and hope in the coming of Christ, the promised Messiah. Even when God's wrath was poured out upon the whole world at the time of the great flood, God renewed the covenant first made with Adam by promising salvation to Noah and his progeny. By means of the Ark, which was a "figure of Christ" (p. 30), God saved believing Noah and his family and secured the realization of the promise of a Savior who was to come. Noah was saved, therefore, by Jesus Christ and was the recipient of the same promises earlier given to Adam. Since the idolatry and corrupted religious practices of the heathen arose after the period of the renewal of the covenant with Noah, we are taught that the Christian faith "is older than any other" (p. 33). Similarly, since God further revealed and renewed the covenant with Abraham long before the giving of the law through Moses, the Christian faith "is older than the Jewish faith" (p. 36). Though the Jews "boast themselves of the circumcision, and because they are called Jews and Israel," yet we know that Abraham was justified or reckoned righteous before he was circumcised (p. 36). Abraham is the father of all Christian believers, whose seed is the Christ and whose children are all those who believe in the Savior. Indeed, "our Christian faith is 2048 years older than the circumcision, and 2449 years older than the law, the priesthood and ceremonies of the Jews" (p. 36). The history of the patriarchs, Bullinger notes in conclusion, proves that "from the beginning of the world until the death of Joseph, the right Christian faith endured 2300 years.²⁰ And thus all holy patriarchs before the law, were saved, not through the law, nor by their own strength and deserving, but through the blessed seed our Lord Jesus Christ" (p. 38).

Section Five: "The law of God given by Moses, leads unto Christ, and makes mention of all his works." After God renewed his covenant with Abraham, the children of Israel languished for a long time in captivity in Egypt. God, however, in faithfulness to his covenant brought his people through Moses out of Egypt by his power and grace. When God instituted the rite of the Passover, he gave Israel a

²⁰Thomas Harding, the editor of The Parker Society edition of Bullinger's *Decades*, notes that Bullinger followed, in his biblical chronology, the "vulgar Jewish chronology, upon which the arrangements of Scaliger, Petavius, and Usher were afterwards founded" (*Decades*, 1:42).

figure of the redemption that is through the blessed seed of promise, Jesus Christ. "Therefore the Israelites were not spared because of the blood of beasts, but for the sake of the blood of the blessed seed that was promised to come. And thus the whole deliverance out of Egypt was a figure of the true redemption by which we are delivered from the power of the devil and from everlasting death through Jesus Christ, and brought into the land of promise, even to eternal joy and salvation, which God promised unto our fathers Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (p. 41). When Israel entered the land, God wrote his law upon two tablets of stone. The four commandments of the first table can be comprehended in the great commandment to love God. The six commandments of the second table can be comprehended in the commandment to love the our neighbor. Though these commandments were given to Israel in written form, they contained "no new thing, nor ought that was not before in the world, but rather renewed the old, and the law that he hitherto had written in the hearts of holy men" (pp. 42-3).

The giving of the law of Moses, however, raises a question regarding the gospel promise that God had earlier revealed to his people: Where is now Christ? Where is the faith of the Patriarchs? Why is nothing heard of faith, but much of works (p. 45)? The law's demands and obligations seem inconsistent with the promises of the gospel in Jesus Christ. To this question, Bullinger answers by appealing to the argument of the apostle Paul in Galatians. The law, which was given long after the "testament and bequest" of God, can take nothing away or add anything to the gospel (p. 46). "Salvation is given only of the grace of God through the promise, and not through any deserving at all" (p. 47). The reason God added the law was twofold. In the first place, the law serves as a "schoolmaster" that teaches us to know our sin and unworthiness, as well as our need for a Mediator (p. 48). By exposing our transgressions and sins, the law "brings us from ourselves and from all creatures only unto Jesus Christ. The law therefore confirms the first promises concerning the blessed seed, a teaching that we obtain all salvation in him only" (pp. 48-9). Furthermore, the law also serves as "a rule of our life, informing us what we ought to do, and what we ought to leave undone" (p. 49). Those who find salvation through faith in Christ alone are taught by the law how to love and worship God in a way that pleases him. The law of Moses contains many rites, ceremonies and sacrifices that eloquently

prefigure the atoning work of Christ upon the cross. All of the ceremonies of the law find their fulfillment in Christ and are like “sacraments” that God gave his people to lead them to Christ (p. 52).

Section Six: “The origin of the Holy Scripture and faith thereof.” This section of *The Old Faith* provides a brief summary of the argument thus far, and the Scriptural basis that undergirds it. In his survey of the history of God’s dealings with his people from Abraham to Moses, Bullinger has not invented anything out of his own imagination. All of these things are recorded and taught in the five books of Moses, who wrote by the inspiration of the Spirit of Christ the things that God revealed to him. In the five books of Moses, we are clearly taught that “all the law pointed unto Christ” (p. 58). As Paul says in Romans, “Christ is the end of the law, to justify everyone that believes” (p. 58).

Section Seven: “All virtuous kings and the people of Israel, trusted unto Christ, and not to the Law.” After God’s provision of the law through Moses, he continued to provide for his people through Joshua, Moses’ successor, the Judges whom he raised up to deliver his people from their enemies, and then through the kings of Israel and Judah. The gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ continued to be preserved through these servants of the Lord. However, the greatest figure of this period was king David whose knowledge and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ was most evident. An examination of the Spirit-inspired Psalms of David confirm that he was intimately acquainted with the person and works of Christ, his son after the flesh. For example, in the Psalms of David we find clear testimony to, among other things, the deity of the eternal Son of God and therein the Christian doctrine of the Trinity (p. 64); the glorious and eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ (p. 65); the preaching of the holy gospel to the heathen nations (pp. 65-6); the ordination of Christ to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek (p. 67); the victory of Christ over all his and his people’s enemies (p. 66); and the passion and death of Christ that he endured for his people (pp. 68-9). Anyone who rightly understands the Psalms of David will readily acknowledge that his “faith and understanding of Christ was ever one faith and understanding with the faith we acknowledge” and profess in the articles of the Apostle’s Creed (pp. 69-70).

Section Eight: “All holy prophets do point unto Christ, and preach salvation only in him.” During the period of the divided kingdom, God gave his people much success but also delivered them over into

captivity when they persisted in their disobedience against him. Despite the fact that this period witnessed the decline and growing unfaithfulness of the people of God, the promises of God in Christ remained sure. One remarkable evidence of God's steadfastness of purpose was the provision of prophets whom God sent to "rebuke wrong and idolatry, and to teach all righteousness and true worship of God" (p. 75). Though God raised up many prophets, some greater than others, all of them concur in their preaching of the way of salvation through Christ. "[T]hey all preached the sum of the doctrine and knowledge of the faith that we spoke about before, and wrote in one sum, which faith Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David had" (pp. 76-7). The prophets preached the gospel of free justification through Christ, and not by the works of the law. Indeed, the preaching of these prophets anticipated everything that is taught us concerning the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament (p. 77). For this reason, the evangelists of the New Testament, and the Lord himself, continually appeal to the teaching of the prophets to confirm their words and works. All that is confessed concerning Jesus Christ in the articles of the Apostles' Creed are set forth clearly in their prophecies: his deity and humanity (p. 78); the coming of John the Baptist as his messenger (p. 79); his preaching of God's grace and performance of many signs and wonders (pp. 79-80); his kingdom and the subjection of all peoples to him (p. 80); his passion and death (p. 82); and his burial, resurrection, and ascension (p. 84). Consistent with the previous announcements of salvation through the work of the promised seed, Christ, the prophets announced that God would bring salvation to his people, not by means of the works of the law or their own deserving, but through Christ (p. 84). When the circumstance and state of God's people was at its lowest ebb, and when the promises of God in Christ seemed utterly to have failed, God fulfilled in the coming of Christ all of the promises that were proclaimed by the prophets. "[T]hus, the hearts of all righteous in the old Testament from Adam unto Christ (even 3974 years) have stood fast only upon Christ; in him was their comfort, upon him they trusted; it was he whom they longed for, and in Christ Jesus were they saved. Therefore, our Christian faith has endured since the beginning of the world and is, and continues still, the only true old, undoubted and firmly grounded faith" (pp. 88-9).

Section Nine: "Of the time of the grace of Christ, and how that he himself testifies, that the salvation of all the world stands only in him." Though it has

been amply demonstrated that the Christian faith is the old, undoubted faith, against which nothing can be alleged, a short exposition concerning the time of grace is still needed. The time of the grace of God is the period during which God accomplished the salvation of all, from the beginning of the world until the end, that he “preserved and ordained to salvation” (p. 90). The New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old Testament, but this does not permit us to discard the writings of the Old. Indeed, “the Scriptures of the new Testament hang all together and refer themselves to the Scriptures of the old Testament, so that there can not be right understanding without the other, no more than the gloss [interpretation] with the text. The text is the law and the prophets, the exposition are the Evangelists and Apostles” (p. 91). In the fullness of time, 3974 years after the beginning of the world, Christ was born in Bethlehem in accord with the word of the prophets (p. 91). When the angels announced the good news of the birth of the seed of promise, they reminded the shepherd of the word of promise to Abraham that in his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed (p. 92). In the course of the ministry of Christ, the original promise that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent was fulfilled. Unlike the first Adam, who succumbed to the temptations of the devil, Christ overcame the devil in the wilderness (p. 95). Through the life, passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, all of the promises of the Old Testament find their fulfillment. With the coming of Christ, the ceremonies and rites of the law have not so much been abrogated as perfected and completed (p. 94). The whole of the gospel of Christ can be summed up in three points: first, “that we obtain the remission of sins, true righteousness, and eternal life, only through [Christ] and by his passion and death, and by no other means” (p. 96); second, “that we cannot serve and please God with external sacrifices or any outward pomp, but with such works as proceed of love and mercy” (p. 96); and third, “that all the children of God are bound to keep themselves from the works of darkness and to apply themselves to live in righteousness and in the light” (p. 97). The time of God’s grace in Christ is, therefore, the time of the fulfillment of all that God originally promised his people in Adam and all the elder Christians of the old covenant. Now the works and tyranny of the devil have been defeated, and God’s people wait for the day when they will live with God forever in his eternal kingdom (p. 100).

Section Ten: "That also the elect apostles preached this old faith, and declared, that all salvation is only in Christ." Christ Jesus is the lamb of God who was slain from the foundation of the world, and the only one through whom sinners can be cleansed and saved. This gospel is the old faith that Christ wants to be preached throughout the whole world. For this purpose, Christ commissioned his apostles and furnished them with the Holy Spirit, so that they might declare the true faith to the nations (p. 101). The apostles carried out his task by means of the preaching of the holy gospel and the administration of the two sacraments of the new covenant, baptism and the Lord's Supper (pp. 102-104). The sacraments were added to the preaching of the gospel in order to provide a visible token and sign of God's invisible grace in Christ (p. 104). The sacraments, which were ordained to help believers in their infirmity, provide a visible confirmation of the gospel promise in Christ, though they are not to be confused with the grace they signify nor do they reconcile anyone to God unless they are received by faith (p. 105).

Conclusion. Since the time of the ministry of the apostles, the church of Jesus Christ has endured the presence of many false teachers and "unclean persons" who have corrupted and sometimes abandoned altogether the old, true faith (pp. 107-8). Alongside faithful shepherds who teach the true Word of God, unfaithful shepherds have arisen who have sought to draw the people of God away from the gospel of Christ. These unfaithful shepherds "labored more after riches, than to perform their office and charge" (p. 108). Rather than keeping the church in obedience to the simple gospel of Jesus Christ, they have introduced many new rites and ceremonies unknown to the church of old. The pope with his multitude of followers, for example, has in recent times sought "to suppress the old religion and to set up his own ordinances, which were unknown to our fathers of old time" (p. 110). However, despite the multitude of those who are captive to the inventions and innovations of the pope and his ministers, the true old religion will undoubtedly remain upon the earth until Christ comes again. If faithful believers and ministers should have to suffer for the sake of this old religion at the hands of the pope and his servants, they should remember that this was the circumstance of God's people, including the prophets and our Lord Jesus Christ himself, from the beginning (pp. 110-11). Faithful believers are reminded in such circumstances that Christ will come again to subdue all things unto himself, and that their citizenship is not upon the earth (p. 111).

Concluding Observations

Though *Der Alt Glaub* is one of Bullinger's early and occasional treatises, the themes that this work highlights are themes that students of Bullinger's theology have found throughout the whole corpus of his theological writings. In this early treatise, which was written with the aim to answer the Roman Catholic objection that the Reformation faith was a recent innovation, Bullinger exhibits features of his theological work that were also characteristic of his other, better known writings. Before we conclude with a comment on the significance of the argument of this treatise for contemporary Reformed theology, we would like to identify several of these themes.

As we previously observed, the primary theme of Bullinger's treatise is nicely captured by the title and subtitle of the work. Bullinger maintains that the Reformed faith, which teaches that believers are saved by grace alone through the work of Christ alone, is the ancient and catholic faith of the holy Christian church. From the beginning to the end of the world, there is only one faith that has been taught “everywhere, always, and by all,” and that is the Reformed faith.²¹ There is in this treatise, and throughout Bullinger's ministry and writing, an extraordinary emphasis upon the antiquity and catholicity of the truth of the Reformed religion. Rather than concede the force of the Roman Catholic charge that the Reformers were revolutionaries and innovators, Bullinger turns the tables on the critics of the Reformation and insists that, to the contrary, their opponents had abandoned the old faith of the church. Examples of Bullinger's catholic and conservative sensibility can easily be gleaned from his other writings as well. For example, Bullinger begins his *Decades*, which is generally regarded as his most important theological work, with a lengthy series of citations from the ancient creeds and confessions of the church. By doing so, he intends to illustrate the full conformity of the Reformation faith with the faith of the early church, indeed to the church from its beginning in the days of Adam and Eve. When Bullinger capped off

²¹I am deliberately invoking the language of Vincent of Lérins who defined catholicity in his famous maxim, “What all men have at all times and everywhere believed must be regarded as true” (*Commonitorium*, 434). Bullinger concurs with the substance of this maxim, though he believes the Reformation faith more adequately honors it than the Roman Catholic.

his life's work by writing the Second Helvetic Confession, he chose accordingly to entitle it a “simple confession and exposition of orthodox faith and *catholic doctrine*” (emphasis mine). The theme that was developed at length in *Der Alt Gloub* is also restated in this confession in chapter 13:

And although the teaching of the Gospel, compared with the teaching of the Pharisees concerning the law, seemed to be a new doctrine when first preached by Christ..., yet actually it not only was and still is an old doctrine (even if today it is called new by the Papists when compared with the teaching now received among them), but is the most ancient of all in the world.

Der Alt Gloub represents, therefore, an early treatise in which Bullinger was to present one of the great governing motifs of his life's work and theology, namely, the catholicity of the Reformed faith.

Another feature of *Der Alt Gloub* is its emphasis upon the unity of the Scriptures, which is expressed by means of Bullinger's development of the theme of the one covenant of grace in Christ that is the “sure foundation of the Christian faith.” Students of Bullinger's theology have long recognized his special place in the early beginnings and development of covenant theology. Though Bullinger, following Zwingli, first articulated his doctrine of the covenant in the polemical context of answering the Anabaptists, his doctrine of the covenant is far more than a particular theme that proves that children of the new covenant should be baptized, just as children of the old covenant were circumcised. Those who claim that Bullinger was the author of “the other Reformed tradition,” which emerged as a substantial theological alternative to the predestinarianism of Calvin and Geneva, overstate Bullinger's uniqueness at this point.²² However, they correctly observe that Bullinger was among the first who could genuinely be described a “covenant theologian,” one for whom the biblical doctrine of the administration of the covenant of grace provides an interpretive key to open the whole of the Scriptures. Our synopsis of *Der Alt Gloub* illustrates the pervasively covenantal nature of Bullinger's reading of

²²For a critical evaluation of the claim that Bullinger's covenant theology diverges substantially from the predestinarianism of Calvin and Geneva, see my *Heinrich Bullinger and the Doctrine of Predestination*.

the biblical text. His answer to those who would jettison the Old Testament Scriptures now that the time of God's grace in Christ has come, states the unity of the Scriptures as strongly as is imaginable. According to Bullinger, there is a profound sense in which the text that undergirds the New Testament is the Old Testament. To use Bullinger's striking expression, we may view the New Testament as a "gloss" or interpretation of the Old Testament, since the substance of the truth is given already in the Old.

It should also be observed that Bullinger's *Der Alt Glaub* gives expression throughout to the most basic themes that were sounded by the Reformers of the sixteenth century. After all, the old faith, which Bullinger aims to defend by means of this treatise, is the Reformation faith, namely, that believers are saved by the work of Christ alone, not by their works or deserving. Already in the "mother promise" of Genesis 3:15, Bullinger argues, we see revealed the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the sum and substance of the Scriptures. He is the "seed of promise" who will redeem his people from the guilt of their sins and the tyranny of the devil. Long before God gave his law through Moses to the people of Israel, the gospel of salvation by grace alone, apart from the law or the works of the law, was revealed. Consequently, when Bullinger addresses the common subject of the relation between the law and the gospel, he sounds all of the distinctive notes of the sixteenth century Reformed faith. Christ is the end of the law, because he bore its curse and performed all that the law required and prefigured. Rather than the law undermining the gospel, Bullinger regards the law from the vantage point of its service as a "schoolmaster" that leads believers by the hand to Christ. The great crisis of human sin that began with Adam's sin at the beginning can only be remedied by means of the work of the Mediator, Jesus Christ, whose life of obedience, death and resurrection have obtained freedom from the curse of sin and death and victory over the kingdom of darkness. Though Bullinger never formulated the doctrine of the covenant with the thoroughness of the later, two-covenant "federal theology," even in this early treatise all of the seeds of the doctrine (*sedes doctrinae*) are present. *Der Alt Glaub* confirms the consensus that Bullinger's theology was an early architect of Reformed "covenant theology," even if it is not possible to argue that the doctrine of the covenant was the organizing principle of his theology as a whole.

In addition to noting these themes in *Der Alt Groub*, which are among the most important and characteristic of Bullinger's theology, we wish to conclude with an observation regarding its significance for the method of contemporary Reformed theology. In order to honor Bullinger's legacy as a Reformed theologian, it is not enough to become reacquainted with his work. We also need to consider whether his theology contributes something to Reformed theology today.

If our review of Bullinger's *Der Alt Groub* serves to remind us of some of the characteristic features of his theology, it also reminds us of a significant difference between contemporary Reformed theology and that of the sixteenth century. It is difficult to imagine a Reformed theologian today who would argue for the truth by way of an appeal to its antiquity and catholicity. The Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura*, which properly insists upon the supremacy of Scriptural authority for faith and practice, has often turned into a kind of Biblicalism that has little regard for the inheritances of the past or the long-standing consensus of Christian tradition.²³ Even within the orbit of Reformed churches and theology, few view the ancient creeds and confessions of the church with the kind of esteem that marked the work of Bullinger and the Reformers of the sixteenth century. The principle of Scripture's authority has often been taken captive by an individualistic and revolutionary spirit. The Protestant subordination of tradition to Scripture is interpreted in a "Campbellite" manner to mean that we should read the biblical texts as though we were the first to read them.

The remarkable feature of Bullinger's emphasis in *Der Alt Groub* is that, while Bullinger honors the principle that Scripture is the foremost authority in the church, he insists that the Scriptures must be read in a catholic manner. If the Scriptures are read in a sectarian manner, without regard to the consensus of the church's

²³There is evidence of a growing awareness among some contemporary theologians that the Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura* should not be mistaken for a disparagement of history and Christian tradition. For examples of recent discussions that reflect this awareness, see Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, eds., *Your Word is Truth: A Project of Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Stephen R. Holmes, *Listening to the Past: The Place of Tradition in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002); and Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2001).

creedal and confessional summaries, the likelihood of error and innovation increases dramatically. The issue of biblical authority must be addressed within the framework of a responsible ecclesiology that has a high regard for the attribute of catholicity. Bullinger was by no means an exception among the Reformers of the sixteenth century in this respect. Though his emphasis upon the antiquity and catholicity of the Reformed faith may strike contemporary readers as quaint or even misguided, it was shared by all the other magisterial Reformers, though none expressed it with quite the same zeal as Bullinger.

We are reminded, therefore, by Bullinger's *Der Alt Glaub* to remember the catholic depth and breadth of the Reformed faith, and to avoid all inappropriate sectarianism of spirit or manner. We are also reminded that the Reformed faith does not simply consist of the things wherein it differs from the great tradition of Christian theology. Though Reformed theology may have its "distinctives," these distinctives are to be regarded as elements of the truth that have been lost to others whose grasp of the faith is not as catholic or venerable as it should be. Or, to put the matter negatively, though no less importantly, Reformed theologians today need to eschew the novel, including the recent thoughts of would-be innovators within their tradition who depart from the consensus of the past. While Reformed theologians should recognize that the Scriptures are the final authority for theology, they should also remember that they must be read in the company of others who with them are also members of the one, catholic church. Particularly in a day of theological faddishness, which is often forgetful of the best of the past, Bullinger's esteem for the catholicity and antiquity of the faith must again become a commendable feature of Reformed theology.