

# Bullinger's *The Old Faith* (1537) as a Theological Tract

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## Abstract

The Swiss Reformer Heinrich Bullinger wrote *The Old Faith* (1537) to be read alongside his treatise on the covenant, *De testamento* (1534). His aim was to convince a wide audience that the Reformed faith was in conformity with a correct reading and interpretation of the biblical message and the church fathers. The work displays insight into key biblical and theological themes and, as with Irenaeus's *The Demonstration*, has apologetical, catechetical, and polemical purposes. We can learn with Bullinger to read and exegete the text of the biblical canon and learn from faithful exegetes of the past.

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**T**his article presents the biblical and theological themes that Swiss Reformer Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575) wove into the fabric of *The Old Faith*, in which he demonstrates that the Reformed faith is “old” because it has its roots in Adam, that it is reflected in the writings of church fathers Irenaeus and Augustine, and that it is “catholic” as the faith of believers over the centuries. In many ways the book reveals that Bullinger follows Irenaeus’s defense of the faith against the Gnostics.

Bullinger became Huldrych Zwingli’s successor as *Antistes* or chief minister at Zurich upon Zwingli’s untimely death in 1531, and he continued at

that post until his own death in 1575. A contemporary of John Calvin, he was a prolific writer, and more than twelve thousand of his letters are extant. He is known in the English-speaking world as the author of *The Second Helvetic Confession* (1566) and *The Decades* (1549–1551). The latter, which consists of fifty sermons in Latin, is probably his best-known work; known as the “house book,” it was widely used in England, Germany, and Holland.<sup>1</sup> Because of his pastoral concern for the churches in Europe and England, he has been referred to as “the common shepherd of all Christian churches.”<sup>2</sup> Bruce Gordon observes that Bullinger was “one of the most widely consulted figures of the age.”<sup>3</sup>

His work on the covenant, *De testamento* or *A Brief Exposition of the One and Eternal Covenant of God* (1534),<sup>4</sup> was often bound together with his commentaries on the Epistles (*In omnes apostolicas epistolas*, 1537) as well as his treatise *An Orthodox Assertion of the Two Natures of Christ* (1534). This compendium was an important tool for pastors. *The Old Faith* was directed at the laity, as it was written in German,<sup>5</sup> though a Latin translation was made by Cellarius in 1544.<sup>6</sup> It is evident from *The Decades* that Bullinger regarded *The Old Faith* as a work that he expected his readers to be familiar with.<sup>7</sup>

Edward A. Dowey made somewhat critical comments about *The Old Faith*, which he views as essentially the opposite of *The Decades*. He considers *The Decades*

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Harding, ed., *The Decades of Henry Bullinger* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 207.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Gordon and Emidio Campi, eds., *Architect of Reformation: An Introduction to Heinrich Bullinger, 1504–1575* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Charles S. McCoy and J. Wayne Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 99–138; Heinrich Bullinger, “Of the One & Eternal Testament or Covenant of God: A Brief Exposition,” in Peter A. Lillback and Richard B. Gaffin Jr., eds., *Thy Word Is Still Truth: Essential Writings on the Doctrine of Scripture from the Reformation to Today* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 245–70.

<sup>5</sup> Heinrich Bullinger, *Der alt gloub* (Zurich, 1539); cf. Joachim Staedtke et al, eds., *Heinrich Bullinger Werke: Bibliographie* (Zurich: TVZ, 1972–2004), no. 100 (HBBib). The author’s own translations are used in this article. An English translation may be found in *Writings and Translations of Myles Coverdale*, The Parker Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1844; repr., New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 1–83 (hereafter, Coverdale). Coverdale gave the work the title *The old faith, an evident probacion out of the holy scripture, that the christen fayth (which is the right, true, old and undoubted faith) have endured sens the beginnyng of the worlde. Herein hast thou also a short summe of the whole Byble, and a probacion, that al virtuous men hath pleased God, and were saved through the christen fayth.*

<sup>6</sup> Heinrich Bullinger, *Antiquissima fides et vera religio* (Zurich, 1544); cf. HBBib 103.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Opitz, *Heinrich Bullinger Theologische Schriften*, Band 3, *Sermonum Decades quinque de potissimus Christianae religionis capitibus* (Zurich: TVZ, 2008), 418.

a major Reformation classic ... unchallengeable as his 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.<sup>8</sup>

Dowey's evaluation of *The Old Faith*, however, is that "it is often intricate in details and sometimes confusingly nuanced."<sup>9</sup> He further concludes that *The Old Faith* "may be considered a good example from Bullinger's work of his idiosyncratic treatment of one of the main themes of Christian theological reflection, the relation of the Old and New Testaments."<sup>10</sup> He also refers to the "crass particularity of [Bullinger's] interpretation of 'seed,' 'woman,' 'heel' and 'head.'"<sup>11</sup> Dowey's assessment is in stark contrast to the warm and positive appreciation of *The Old Faith* shown by Cornelis Venema, who sought to draw lessons from it for contemporary Reformed theology.<sup>12</sup> In his comparison of *The Old Faith* with *The Decades* and *The Evangelical Churches Are neither Heretical nor Schismatic but Completely Orthodox and Catholic*,<sup>13</sup> Peter Stephens notes that Bullinger defended the Reformed faith as "old" over against the papal doctrine, which was "new" because it had departed from the teaching of both Scripture and the church fathers.<sup>14</sup>

As well as addressing Dowey's negative assessment, we will examine the biblical and theological themes that Bullinger referred to in *The Old Faith* to see what lessons apply to us today.

## I. Overview of The Old Faith

The significance of *The Old Faith* may be overlooked, as the style is deceptively simple. Not only is it an apology for the Reformed faith against the attacks of Rome, it is also a polemic against the Anabaptists, with an unmistakable focus on the Old Testament as a foundation, not the background,

<sup>8</sup> Edward A. Dowey, "Heinrich Bullinger as Theologian, Thematic, Comprehensive, and Schematic," in Gordon and Campi, *Architect*, 49–50.

<sup>9</sup> Edward A. Dowey, "Comments on One of Heinrich Bullinger's Most Distinctive Treatises," in Willem van't Spijker, ed., *Calvin: Erbe und Auftrag: Festschrift für Wilhelm Neuser zu seinem 65. Geburtstag* (Kampen: Kok, 1991), 271.

<sup>10</sup> Dowey, "Comments," 277.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Cornelis P. Venema, "Heinrich Bullinger's *Der alt gloub* ("The Old Faith"): An Apology for the Reformation," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 15 (2004): 11–32. See also Aurelio A. Garcia Archilla, *The Theology of History and Apologetic Historiography in Heinrich Bullinger: Truth in History* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), 7–36.

<sup>13</sup> Heinrich Bullinger, *Ecclesias evangelicas neque haereticas neque schismaticas sed plane orthodoxas et catholicas* (Zurich, 1552); cf. HBBib1 258.

<sup>14</sup> W. Peter Stephens, "Bullinger's Defence of the Old Faith," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 6 (2004): 36–55.

for Christian faith. The work has ten sections, which follow the historical outline of the canon, between an introduction and a conclusion.

There is little doubt about the historiographical significance of this work. As in *Epitome temporum et rerum ab orbe conditio* (1565), Bullinger presents how biblical history unfolds according to God's plan for the salvation of the elect.<sup>15</sup> *The Old Faith* seeks to bolster the antiquity, orthodoxy, and catholicity of the Protestant faith in the face of the attacks of Rome. Bullinger points out that "our Christian faith has endured since the beginning of the world and is and remains the one and only true, original, indubitable, and certain faith."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, later in *The Decades* he echoes this assertion by emphasizing that the Reformed faith is "true, old, indubitable, authentic, orthodox, and catholic."<sup>17</sup> His presentation of the faith as being "from the beginning of the world" indicates that his argument is *a primordio* or *ab antiquitate* in quasi-rabbinic style.

*The Old Faith* was written towards the end of the first of three periods of Bullinger's ministry and after major commentaries on the Pauline epistles and just prior to two major treatises, *De scripturae sanctae autoritate* (1538) and *De origine erroris libri duo* (1539).<sup>18</sup> Although it does not have the form of a theological treatise, *The Old Faith* is not the work of a theological dilettante. Bullinger fully grasps the significance of the incarnation: the transcendent God, the "horn of plenty" (*cornucopia*), has personally acted in history for the salvation of mankind. God's words (specifically, his promises) and his acts declare his eternal purposes for the elect. *The Old Faith* is Bullinger's effort to convey this to a wider audience.

The theme of the covenant is prominent in *The Old Faith*, and so it complements his treatise on the covenant, *De testamento* (1534), which is directly quoted.<sup>19</sup> The various themes referred to in *The Old Faith* have been examined by several studies, and Roland Diethelm has identified the following: the goodness of God and the wickedness of mankind, righteousness and God's mercy, sin, grace, punishment, God's promises, faith, the gospel of Jesus Christ, justification, and the struggle of the believer.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Christian Moser, *Die Dignität des Ereignisses: Studien zu Heinrich Bullingers Reformationsgeschichte* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 20–25.

<sup>16</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Giiir; Coverdale, 69.

<sup>17</sup> Opitz, *Decades*, 34.

<sup>18</sup> Fritz Büsser, "Bullinger, Heinrich," in Gerhard Krause et al., eds., *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (New York: de Gruyter, 1981), 7:383–84.

<sup>19</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Cviir (this is omitted in Coverdale's translation).

<sup>20</sup> Roland Diethelm in Emidio Campi, Detlef Roth, and Peter Stotz, eds., *Heinrich Bullinger Schriften I* (Zurich: TVZ, 2004), 175.

## II. *The Word of God Incribed on the Heart*

God's accommodation to mankind is a recurring theme in *De testamento*, where Bullinger points out that when God initiated the covenant he was pleased to use human expression (*humana appellatione*) and human custom (*humanum morem*) on account of the weakness (*imbecillitatem*) of human nature.<sup>21</sup> Although the term "accommodation" is not actually used, it is presumed throughout *The Old Faith* because of repeated references to God speaking to the saints of the Old Testament whether directly or by the prophets. It is also clear that Bullinger firmly believed that God can and does illuminate men and women inwardly. In this, Bullinger followed Zwingli.<sup>22</sup> For example, despite a full description of the folly of the sin of Adam and Eve, Bullinger points out that God spoke directly to them and promised to reverse the consequences of the fall. He further explains that Adam and Eve were receptive and obedient: "As for Adam and Eve, they lacked none of these things, though they had not the matter in writing for God spoke it all to them himself, and wrote it on their hearts."<sup>23</sup> Moreover, he emphasizes that Adam and Eve proclaimed God's Word to the next and subsequent generations. This represents a type of oral tradition. Section 8 has the heading "All holy prophets exhibited Christ and proclaimed that salvation is to be found only in him." Not only was the word of God proclaimed to all people, but it was written on the hearts of the elect so that they could respond appropriately. Several times Bullinger emphasizes that the inscripturation of the Torah at the time of Moses was not an added extra, as God had already written it on the hearts of the patriarchs, and that because the Israelites had hearts of stone, the Torah was inscribed on tablets of stone. In many ways, therefore, an understanding that "the preaching of the word of God is the word of God" (*Praedicatio verbi Dei est verbum Dei*)<sup>24</sup> was present, in embryo, in *The Old Faith*.

<sup>21</sup> Heinrich Bullinger, *De testamento seu foedere Dei unico et aeterno* (Zurich: Christoph Froschauer, 1534), 4v; cf. HBBib1 54; Aurelio A. Garcia Archilla, "Bullinger's *De testamento*: The Amply Biblical Basis of Reformed Origins," in Emidio Campi and Peter Opitz, eds., *Heinrich Bullinger: Life—Thought—Influence* (Zurich: TVZ, 2007), 674; Joe Mock, "Biblical and Theological Themes in Heinrich Bullinger's »De Testamento«," *Zwingliana* 40 (2013): 5–8.

<sup>22</sup> Gottfried W. Locher, *Zwingli's Thought: New Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 282–85.

<sup>23</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Bvii; Coverdale, 27.

<sup>24</sup> *The Second Helvetic Confession* 1.4. See Locher, *Zwingli's Thought*, 277–85.

### III. *The Word of God, tota Scriptura*

The heading of section 6, “The origin of Scripture and faith,”<sup>25</sup> indicates that the purpose of Scripture is to point men and women to faith, specifically faith in Christ. Bullinger explains that God “harnessed” Moses to write the Pentateuch.<sup>26</sup> The deliberate choice of this verb serves to show that God himself is the author of Scripture, which he further explains by stating that as Moses wrote, “he was inspired by the Holy Spirit.” Bullinger observes, “In these five books given us of God by Moses is the whole ground of our holy faith.”<sup>27</sup> Because of his conviction that Scripture is the word of God, he was concerned about the message of the Bible as a whole, *tota Scriptura*. All of Scripture was written to lead men and women to a life of faith in Christ. Bullinger emphasized that the treatise is a summary of the message of the Bible as a whole, as he states on the title page of *The Old Faith*: a “short history and depiction of the age of holy faith, its most important events and those who confess faith and of its spread and decline.”<sup>28</sup>

As Dowey correctly indicates, *The Old Faith* reiterates throughout the organic relationship and unity between the Scriptures of the Old Testament and those of the New Testament. In fact, Bullinger calls those who jettison the Old Testament “ignorant and unlearned fools,”<sup>29</sup> clearly a polemic against the Anabaptists, who are singled out together with the Manichaeans.<sup>30</sup> He affirms that “there is nothing read concerning the Lord in the New Testament which the prophets have not prophesied before.”<sup>31</sup>

That is why the Scriptures of the New Testament refer to and take up wholly the Scriptures of the Old Testament so that neither can rightly be understood without the other. So, conversely, the interpretation cannot be understood without the underlying, foundational text. The Law and the Scriptures of the prophets constitute the text; the exposition is the Scriptures of the evangelists and the apostles.<sup>32</sup>

Bullinger essentially rephrases what he wrote as early as November 1523 in his *De scripturae negotio*.<sup>33</sup> It was his familiar hyperbolic way of stating

<sup>25</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Eiiir; Coverdale, 48.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Eiiiv; Coverdale, 49.

<sup>28</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Aiv. The title page is not translated by Coverdale.

<sup>29</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Giiiv–Gvr; Coverdale, 70–71.

<sup>30</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Eiiiv; Coverdale, 51.

<sup>31</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Fvv; Coverdale, 62.

<sup>32</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Gvr; Coverdale, 71.

<sup>33</sup> Hans-Georg vom Berg, Bernhard Schneider, and Endre Zsindely, eds., *Heinrich Bullinger Theologische Schriften*, Band 2, *Unveröffentlichte Werke der Kappeler Zeit* (Zurich: TVZ, 1991), 25.

the importance of the Old Testament in the context of the unity between the Testaments.

It is not surprising, therefore, that *The Old Faith* particularly highlights the prophecy of Daniel. As in his other writings, Bullinger sees in Daniel 9 a prophecy of the death of Christ,<sup>34</sup> concerning the ministry of Christ in the context of the covenant.<sup>35</sup> He also refers to the Writings, showing from Psalms 33 and 110 that David had knowledge of and faith in Christ.<sup>36</sup> From these two particular psalms, Bullinger deduces the twelve articles of the Apostles' Creed, maintaining that many of its articles are referred to in other psalms of David. He also sees in Psalm 110 references to Christ as prophet, priest, and king, and in verse 6 an allusion to the treading down of the head of the serpent in the *protoevangelium*.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, following Irenaeus and Justin Martyr, Bullinger sees in verse 7 a reference to the passion of Christ through the drinking of the "cup," followed by his exaltation as declared by Paul in Philippians 2.<sup>38</sup> In doing so, he perceives a deliberate word play on "head" (*rosh*) in these two verses.<sup>39</sup> It is not without significance that *rosh* underlies his comment concerning the victories over the enemies of Israel that Joshua, as a figure of the Messiah, won as "a chief head and as an instrument and vessel of God."<sup>40</sup> Bullinger's hermeneutic approach thus indicates that he viewed the Old Testament to be both christocentric and christotelic.<sup>41</sup>

Bullinger was convinced of the unity between the Old Testament and the New because of the one divine author. Therefore, he frequently uses typology, as is attested by the number of times the term "figure" appears in the text. But because there are occasions where Bullinger's typology is not specifically mentioned in the New Testament, Dowey comments negatively on what he considers "the crass particularity of his interpretation of 'seed', 'woman', 'heel' and 'head.'"<sup>42</sup> However, Bullinger was convinced by the humanist approach to reading the Bible as a whole that the different parts of Scripture were interrelated and that there was one overall message for the canon.

<sup>34</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Fviiiir, Giir, Giiiv; Coverdale, 65, 68–69.

<sup>35</sup> Garcia Archilla, *History*, 128–29.

<sup>36</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Evv–Fiir; Coverdale, 53–58.

<sup>37</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Eviiiiv; Coverdale, 56.

<sup>38</sup> J. Armitage Robinson, *St. Irenaeus: The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (London: SPCK, 1920), 113 (section 48 of *Epideixis*); Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 33:20–21.

<sup>39</sup> Genesis 3:15 is cited a few lines later on.

<sup>40</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Eiiiir; Coverdale, 51.

<sup>41</sup> Following Jeff Fisher, "christoscopic" would also be an appropriate term; Jeff Fisher, *A Christoscopic Reading of Scripture: Johannes Oecolampadius on Hebrews* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).

<sup>42</sup> Dowey, "Comments," 277.

#### IV. Bullinger and Irenaeus's Message of the Canon

None of Irenaeus's works appear to have been in Bullinger's personal library.<sup>43</sup> Throughout Bullinger's works there are only occasional references to the church father, such as his mention of Irenaeus's view about the Johannine authorship of Revelation.<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, the way he deals with the Anabaptists reflects Irenaeus's strategy confronting the Gnostics in *Adversus Haereses*, outlining as fully as possible the views of the plethora of Anabaptist groups that had arisen to systematically expose their errors and refute them theologically. In the opening paragraph of *Der Widertoeufferen* (1561) against the Anabaptists, Bullinger directly cites the strategy of Irenaeus to combat the Gnostics.<sup>45</sup> Joachim Staedtke is convinced that he was influenced by Irenaeus (although he acknowledges that Bullinger hardly mentions Irenaeus in his work) and concludes that the allusions and quotes from *Adversus Haereses* show implicit knowledge of Irenaeus's work. Staedtke concludes that the main themes in Irenaeus are reflected in Bullinger, namely, the close connection between soteriology and Christology, with an emphasis on the significance of the incarnation, as well as the concept of recapitulation and its importance for understanding salvation history and covenant theology. Staedtke's observations are thought provoking, but he provides no documentary evidence for them.<sup>46</sup> However, it does seem likely that Bullinger was aware of Irenaeus's understanding of the unity of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Bullinger appears to have used a hermeneutical approach similar to that of the church father. Restating an observation by Robert Grant,<sup>47</sup> John O'Keefe and Russell R. Reno identify three terms from classical rhetoric applied by Irenaeus to biblical interpretation: *hypothesis*, *economy*, and *recapitulation*.<sup>48</sup> The same pattern is reflected in Bullinger, as his commentaries focus on the "big picture" or the message of a section or a book as a whole; he thus seeks to elicit the *hypothesis* of a work. He also focuses on the fact

<sup>43</sup> Urs Leu, "Heinrich Bullingers Privatbibliothek," *Zwingliana* 30 (2003): 5–29. Of the 21 volumes of the church fathers in Bullinger's personal library, none is by Irenaeus.

<sup>44</sup> W. Peter Stephens, "Bullinger's Sermons on the Apocalypse," in Alfred Schindler and Hans Stichelberger, eds., *Die Zürcher Reformation: Ausstrahlungen und Rückwirkungen* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2001), 266.

<sup>45</sup> Heinrich Bullinger, *Der Widertoeufferen Ursprung* (Zurich, 1561; repr., Leipzig: Zentralantiquariat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1975), 1r.

<sup>46</sup> Joachim Staedtke, *Die Theologie des jungen Bullinger* (Zurich: TVZ, 1962), 43.

<sup>47</sup> Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (London: Routledge, 1997), 46–53.

<sup>48</sup> John O'Keefe and Russell R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 34.



that God is a God of order, highlighting parallels between the old and new covenants. Because of his strong conviction of the unity of Scripture he seeks the *economy* of the way God works in and through salvation history. Furthermore, he uses language similar to that of Irenaeus's *recapitulation*.

The 1904 discovery of an Armenian translation of Irenaeus's *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching (Epideixis)* reveals some similarities with *The Old Faith*. Susan Graham's rhetorical analysis of *The Demonstration*<sup>49</sup> concludes that it has the form of a bipartite Hellenistic introductory treatise (*eisagōge*) similar to Origen's *Peri archōn*, with apologetic, catechetical, and polemical purposes. This triple purpose is evident in *The Old Faith*. In her analysis, the first part of *The Demonstration* summarizes the topic while the second part treats it from a different perspective. Graham further establishes that *The Demonstration* refers to the biblical covenants more systematically than *Adversus haereses*, presenting them in a "historically organized framework."<sup>50</sup> She concludes that "Irenaeus builds his history between Creation and the Incarnation around covenant narratives concerning Noah, Abraham and Moses (*Epid.* 8–29), truncating or eliminating most other events in that history altogether." *The Old Faith* and Irenaeus's *Demonstration* are salvation historical accounts that highlight the continuity between the Old and New Testaments and the old and new covenants. Moreover, both expound the Old Testament and its fulfillment and goal in Christ.

The significance of the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15 is pivotal in Irenaeus's *Adversus haereses*. Notwithstanding the Vulgate's translation of the pronoun at the beginning of the second sentence of this verse as *ipsa* (*she*),<sup>51</sup> Irenaeus followed Justin Martyr in interpreting the verse in a Mariological sense with Christ as the promised seed who would crush the head of the serpent.<sup>52</sup> That Bullinger's emphasis on the significance of Genesis 3:15 for salvation history is similar to what Irenaeus wrote in *Adversus Haereses* can be seen, for example, in 3.23.7, which refers to the seed prophesied to be born of Mary who shall "trample down the lion and the dragon."<sup>53</sup> But the section in *Adversus haereses* that shows the most striking parallels to *The Old Faith* is to be found in 5.21.1:

<sup>49</sup> Susan Louise Graham, "Structure and Purpose of Irenaeus' *Epideixis*," *Studia Patristica* 36 (2001): 210–21.

<sup>50</sup> Susan Louise Graham, "Irenaeus and the Covenants: 'Immortal Diamond,'" *Studia Patristica* 40 (2006): 393–98.

<sup>51</sup> This is followed by Luther in his *Babylonian Captivity of the Church: Ipsa conteret caput tuum*.

<sup>52</sup> *Apology*, 100; *Dialogue with Trypho*, 102.

<sup>53</sup> Note Irenaeus's references to Ps 91:13 and Rev 20:2.

He has therefore, in His work of recapitulation, summed up all things, both waging against our enemy, and crushing him who has at the beginning led us away captives in Adam, and trampled upon his head, as thou canst perceive in Genesis that God said to the serpent, “and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; He shall be on the watch for thy head, and thou on the watch for His heel.”<sup>54</sup>

If Bullinger did indeed adapt Irenaeus’s approach in *The Demonstration*, then the rather truncated attention given to the New Testament (sections 9 and 10) would represent the second part of an *eisagōge*. This understanding of the dynamic of Bullinger would address the concern of Dowey, who speaks of *The Old Faith* in terms of “the extreme and unprecedented step of regarding the Old Testament as ‘text’ and the New as ‘commentary,’ and the New as ‘nothing other than the interpretation of the Old.’”<sup>55</sup>

## V. Justification by Faith Alone

Justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is the central theme in Bullinger’s works. The customary citation of Matthew 17:5 on the title page of *The Old Faith*, where Bullinger has “reconciled” (*placatus*) rather than “pleased” (*placitus*), is a reminder that one is reconciled to God if one is in Christ. In section 4 of *The Old Faith* Bullinger quotes the words at the baptism of Christ in Matthew 3:17: “This is my beloved Son in whom I am reconciled.”<sup>56</sup> Significantly, *The Old Faith* commences with the declaration that through the Christian faith alone “all God-fearing people please God and are saved.”<sup>57</sup>

Romans 16:20 for the Zurich Reformer refers to the imminent treading down of the devil: Christ, as the fulfillment of the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15, is the promised “Blessed Seed” in whom alone is salvation given. The number of times the word “seed” occurs in *The Old Faith*, especially as “Blessed Seed,” reflects the importance of the *protoevangelium* in Bullinger’s grasp of salvation history.<sup>58</sup> Salvation is often depicted in Anselmic terms. At the start of section 2 he explains that through Christ coming in the fullness of time “a way was found to satisfy the righteousness and truth of God. ... Christ Jesus, who is given us by the manifest grace of God, was offered for our sins, satisfied, and recompensed the righteousness of God

<sup>54</sup> *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against Heresies* (n.p.: Ex Fontibus, 2010), 608.

<sup>55</sup> Dowey, “Comments,” 277.

<sup>56</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Ciiiiiv; Coverdale, 33. This is repeated on Gviir; Coverdale, 73.

<sup>57</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Aiiir; Coverdale, 13.

<sup>58</sup> “Seed” is mentioned 67 times.

and so delivered us from the bonds of the devil.”<sup>59</sup> God acts in human history for the salvation of mankind on the ground of his truth and righteousness,<sup>60</sup> which are satisfied through Christ.<sup>61</sup> There are echoes of both *Cur Deus Homo* and *Christus Victor* in that God’s truth and righteousness are fulfilled in his Son taking on true manhood;<sup>62</sup> and redemption is achieved through deliverance from the power of the devil.<sup>63</sup>

Bullinger further explains substitutionary atonement in tandem with *Christus Victor*:

One obtains forgiveness of sins, true righteousness, and eternal life only through him, his passion, and his death and not through any other means. That is to say, he is the only mediator, priest, intercessor, comforter, the one and only righteousness, satisfaction, redemption and sanctification and the one and only eternal sacrifice, pledge of grace and salvation.<sup>64</sup>

The above reference to grace indicates an underpinning theme in *The Old Faith*: salvation is “of the pure grace of God.”<sup>65</sup> Thus, alluding to Galatians, Bullinger states that because salvation is based on God’s promise and grace it is based on neither “our own strength nor works of the law.”<sup>66</sup> Indeed, “Salvation is ascribed only to the grace of God,”<sup>67</sup> and “only through Jesus Christ through faith.”<sup>68</sup> Several times Bullinger insists that ceremonies have no part in the salvation of Old Testament saints and were done away with when Christ came as the promised Blessed Seed.<sup>69</sup>

For Bullinger, justification by faith is found in the Old Testament, as the Old Testament saints were saved proleptically through faith in Christ. From Adam onwards they looked forward to Christ. This is clear from the title given to the 1547 printing of Myles Coverdale’s English translation of *The Old Faith*: “Looke from Adam and behold the Protestants faith ... that all holy men who have pleased God, have been saved through this Christian faith alone.”<sup>70</sup>

<sup>59</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Aviiir; Coverdale, 18.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Bir, Biv; Coverdale, 20.

<sup>62</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Biv; Coverdale, 20.

<sup>63</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Div; Coverdale, 39.

<sup>64</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Gviii; Coverdale, 74.

<sup>65</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Diiiiv; Coverdale, 41.

<sup>66</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Diiiiv; Coverdale, 42.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Eiiiiv; Coverdale, 42.

<sup>69</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Bviiiv–Bviii; Coverdale, 27.

<sup>70</sup> London: Printed by Iohn Haviland, for Thomas Pavier, 1624. See the discussion in J. Wayne Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980), 55–79.

Bullinger points out that the prophets announced the gospel of the *proto-evangelium*, which Adam and Eve had taught their children. Thus, they taught the people not to trust the works of the law or their own efforts, but rather Christ. This is evident in the title Bullinger gives to section 8, “All the holy prophets exhibit Christ and preach that salvation is in him alone.”<sup>71</sup> There was nothing new with the inscripturation of the law at the time of Moses, for it was already written by God on the hearts of the patriarchs.<sup>72</sup> Concerning the testimony of the prophets, Bullinger refers to Jeremiah 23, which prophesies that the righteous blossom would come and execute judgment and righteousness.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, he concludes that there is nothing in the New Testament about Christ not already spoken by the prophets.<sup>74</sup> The prophets do indeed teach “true righteousness and serving of God.”<sup>75</sup> Following Jerome, Bullinger calls Isaiah an evangelist.<sup>76</sup> Salvation is by faith in Christ, without works or ceremonies, as the believer responds:

For those who say: Is it enough and does it satisfy everything, if I acknowledge that I am a sinner and am saved only through the Blessed Seed? It is so answered here and clearly given to understand, that all those who place their trust upon the Blessed Seed, take upon themselves the ways of the Seed and hate the ways of the Serpent, that is sin, will also struggle for ever and ever in their lives against the world and the devil, and truly strive in themselves after what God wills.<sup>77</sup>

The understanding of righteousness is not just forensic. For example, speaking of Abraham, Bullinger explains that Abraham was God’s friend and that he was “justified or made righteous” (*gerechtfertiget oder fromm gemacht ist*).<sup>78</sup> The key to understanding at this point is to appreciate his terminology. Quoting Veronika Günther,<sup>79</sup> Mark Burrows points out that in the early sixteenth century *fromgheit* and *grechtigkeit* were essentially interchangeable, so that for Bullinger, the righteousness and holiness of

<sup>71</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Fiii; Coverdale, 59.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. the similar conclusion of Irenaeus in *Haer.* 4.13.1; 4.15.1. It is significant also that both Bullinger and Irenaeus speak of the time between Sinai and Christ as somewhat of a “detour” in salvation history. Compare Bullinger, *De testamento*, 29r–31r with Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.25.1.

<sup>73</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Fv; Coverdale, 63.

<sup>74</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Fv; Coverdale, 62.

<sup>75</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Fiii; Coverdale, 61.

<sup>76</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Fviii; Coverdale, 66.

<sup>77</sup> Garcia Archilla, *History*, 22; *Der alt gloub*, Biii; Coverdale, 23.

<sup>78</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Cv; Coverdale, .35

<sup>79</sup> Veronika Günther, *‘Fromm’ in der Zürcher Reformation: Eine wortgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Aarau: Sauerländer, 1955), 208–14. Günther also cites examples where Zwingli and Bullinger view these two words as interchangeable.

Christ is imparted to the believer.<sup>80</sup> So when Bullinger contrasts the seed of Christ with the seed of the devil, the contrast is between “the righteous” (*die frommen*) and “the unrighteous” (*die unfrommen*).<sup>81</sup> Moreover, referring to Paul’s sermon in Acts 13:39, Bullinger points out that no one was justified through the law of Moses, but those who believe in Christ are justified.<sup>82</sup> Significantly, on the title page of *The Old Faith* Bullinger states that the treatise expounds how the “pious” or the “righteous” please God and are saved through Christian faith. The patriarchs are “made righteous through the Blessed Seed”; they “are pious and righteous” (*fromm und gerecht sind*).<sup>83</sup> Bullinger also describes believers as “having been made righteous” (*unser gerechtmachung*).<sup>84</sup> He also uses “made righteous” (*gerechtmachung*) to say that Psalm 110:4 predicted what is made plain in Hebrews 5–10: that Christ is the mediator for the faithful for whom he is the only salvation, redemption, and righteousness, resulting in their sins being forgiven and their being made righteous (*gerechtmachung*).<sup>85</sup> Abel, was righteous through faith and made righteous in Christ,<sup>86</sup> as “only by the grace of God through Jesus Christ are the elect cleansed and made righteous.”<sup>87</sup> In the Latin translation of *The Old Faith* Abel is said to be *iustus*, and in the same breath Abel was both “truly righteous” (*vere iustus sit*) as well as “justified” (*iustificatus sit*).<sup>88</sup>

The Latin text also indicates that salvation is “through Christ, and by his grace all are justified and purified [*per Christum et eius gratiam omnia iustificari et purificari*].”<sup>89</sup> Thus, justification and sanctification appear to be complementary. That Bullinger’s understanding of justification is not merely declarative or forensic can be seen in the fact that Noah knew “that he had all good things from God.”<sup>90</sup> This is a direct reference to the prelapsarian status of Adam and Eve, who had “been furnished with the unspeakable riches of God’s goodness.”<sup>91</sup> Bullinger describes salvation on the first page of *The Old Faith* in terms of “all the glorious treasures of

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<sup>80</sup> Mark S. Burrows, “‘Christos intra nos vivens’: The Peculiar Genius of Bullinger’s Doctrine of Sanctification,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 98 (1987): 48–69.

<sup>81</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Evv; Coverdale, 52.

<sup>82</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Hiiiir; Coverdale, 79.

<sup>83</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Bviiiv; Coverdale, 28.

<sup>84</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Diiiv; Coverdale, 41 This is translated as *iustificazione nostri* in *Antiquissima Fides*, 28r, and as *unsere Rechtfertigung* in *Heinrich Bullinger Schriften*, 1:211.

<sup>85</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Eviiiir; Coverdale, 76.

<sup>86</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Bviiiv; Coverdale, 28.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. *Heinrich Bullinger Schriften*, 1:196.

<sup>88</sup> *Antiquissima Fides*, 14v.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Ciiiir; Coverdale, 33.

<sup>91</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Aiiiir; Coverdale, 14.

Christ so richly proclaimed and communicated to all people as they were never before.”<sup>92</sup> Receiving “all good things” (*omnia bona*) and receiving Christ himself through union with him through faith appears to parallel the reference to God as the “horn of plenty” (*cornucopia*) in *De testamento*, to Christ as “all the fullness” (*omnis plenitudo*) in his commentaries on the Pauline epistles, and to his frequent references to “all Christ’s blessings” in the sermons on the sacraments in *The Decades*. In section 1 of *The Old Faith* Bullinger speaks of God as “sufficient to all perfection.”<sup>93</sup> It is through the gospel that “all the glorious treasures of Christ are so richly declared and poured out among all people.”<sup>94</sup> Although section 1 does paint a very beautiful picture of the world created for Adam and Eve before the fall, Bullinger’s major thrust is that through faith in Christ, God himself, and all his goodness, is given to the elect, rather than simply God’s good gifts.<sup>95</sup>

As in all his works, Bullinger emphasizes the right response to the grace of God in granting salvation to the elect. Believers are urged to live uprightly (*integer*) before God, to love and obey him.<sup>96</sup> They are to die daily to evil.<sup>97</sup> He seeks not only to teach his readers about God’s plan of salvation for the elect, with its initial phase of realization in the postlapsarian *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15. All his works encourage his readers to live in covenant faithfulness with the Creator.

## VI. *The Covenant*

The major section on the covenant in *The Old Faith* is to be found in section 4, where it is referred to by the word *pundt*.<sup>98</sup> For Bullinger, there is only one covenant in the canon.<sup>99</sup> The same covenant was renewed throughout

<sup>92</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Aiiiir; Coverdale, 13.

<sup>93</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Aiiiir; Coverdale, 14.

<sup>94</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Aiiiir; Coverdale, 13.

<sup>95</sup> Peter Opitz, *Heinrich Bullinger als Theologe: Eine Studie zu den «Dekaden»* (Zurich: TVZ, 2004), 160–70.

<sup>96</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Avir; Coverdale, 17.

<sup>97</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Bvii; Coverdale, 27.

<sup>98</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Ciiiv; Coverdale, 32.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* For Bullinger and the covenant, see Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant*; Baker, “Heinrich Bullinger, the Covenant, and the Reformed Tradition in Retrospect,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 29 (1998): 35–48; Emidio Campi, “Theological Profile,” in Amy Nelson Burnett and Emidio Campi, eds., *A Companion to the Swiss Reformation* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 480–86; Garcia Archilla, “De testamento,” 671–91; Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin’s Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 110–25; Lillback, “The Early Reformed Paradigm: Vermigli in the Context of Bullinger, Luther and Calvin,” in Frank A. James III, ed., *Peter Martyr Vermigli and the European Reformation: Semper Reformanda* (Leiden: Brill 2004), 70–96; Andrew A. Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenant-*

God's salvation-historical plan unfolded in Scripture. God entered into covenant with Adam in the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15 even though the term "covenant" does not appear in the text. Bullinger was aware that the first time the word appears in the canon is in the account of Noah. This is reflected in his assertion that God declares that the covenant he establishes is "my covenant" and that the promises of the covenant with Adam are also those "of my covenant." Moreover, the use of the Hiphil form of the verb *qum* in the canonical text, expressing causation, thus underlines that *the* covenant with Adam was renewed with Noah.

[God declared to Noah,] "However, with you I will cause my covenant to stand." He did not say, "I will make a covenant with you," but, rather, "I will cause my covenant to stand." That means, "Whatever pertains to my covenant and whatever I have agreed with Adam I will constantly keep."<sup>100</sup>

Not only does Cellarius's Latin translation of *The Old Faith* translate *pundt* in this section by *foedus*, but there is additional material in the text. For example, the reference to 1 Peter 3:20–21 is added to reinforce the typology between salvation through the ark and salvation through Christ. Bullinger indicates that the covenant was given to Adam immediately after the fall and that throughout the history of Israel it was renewed and confirmed by God.<sup>101</sup>

For Bullinger, at the center of the covenant is the fact that God binds himself to his elect.<sup>102</sup> One of the characteristics of this understanding is that God gave *himself* rather than just covenant blessings to his people. Bullinger reflects this when he describes the giving of the Mosaic law to renew the covenant already established with Adam. God personally spoke the law with his own mouth and wrote it with his own fingers.<sup>103</sup>

Whereas the Jews boasted of circumcision as their major ceremony, for Bullinger, Abraham's circumcision was not so much a sign of the covenant but proleptically, the confirmation of holy, Christian faith. It was neither a sign of the law nor a Jewish ceremony, but a *testament* to which nothing can be added or subtracted.<sup>104</sup> The covenant is a testament fulfilled in the death

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*al Thought* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 228–49.

<sup>100</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Ciiiv; Coverdale, 32–33.

<sup>101</sup> A consideration of the usage by Bullinger of the Latin terms for "covenant" (*foedus*, *testamentum*, and *pactum*) may be found in a previous study of *De testamento*. Mock, "Biblical and Theological Themes," 28–31.

<sup>102</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Div; Coverdale, 39.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Diiiir; Coverdale, 42. Joe Mock, "Bullinger and the *Circumcisio Christi*," *Reformed Theological Review* 73.2 (2014): 107–8.

of Christ, the testator, and it points forward to Christ, who is not only its goal but also its *raison d'être*.

The *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15 encapsulates the postlapsarian covenant between God and mankind, the promise of Christ, and the origin of the two “cities” or two “nations” arising from the two “seeds.” Here are unmistakable echoes of Augustine, the church father most cited in Bullinger’s works. He states it starkly: “For the righteous are the seed of Christ, the unrighteous and unfaithful are the seed of the devil.”<sup>105</sup> He indicates repeatedly that because “the heel of the virgin’s seed is well trodden upon,”<sup>106</sup> the seed of Christ will strive with the seed of the devil throughout salvation history.

Aurelio Garcia Archilla concludes 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.”<sup>107</sup> It is clear for Bullinger that here lies the origin of “true and false religion”:

There will be two different peoples, one will cling to Christ the Blessed Seed, the other will cling to the Devil. And these two generations will not get on with each other but will be at odds with respect to faith and the worship of God.<sup>108</sup>

The *protoevangelium* is “the first promise and the first thorough gospel.”<sup>109</sup> “Promise” is synonymous with “covenant,” and its frequency in *The Old Faith* indicates that covenant is an underpinning theme.<sup>110</sup>

## VII. *Divine Election*

The sovereignty of God underlies Bullinger’s thought in *The Old Faith*. He explains that God’s “wise” plan for the salvation of mankind was “without doubt determined from everlasting” and revealed only after the fall.<sup>111</sup> Several phrases indicate that he refers to the elect, namely, “all that believe,”<sup>112</sup> “his (Christ’s) faithful,”<sup>113</sup> “the faithful in Christ,”<sup>114</sup> “faithful Christian,”<sup>115</sup> “one

<sup>105</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Evv; Coverdale, 52.

<sup>106</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Gviii; Coverdale, 75.

<sup>107</sup> Garcia Archilla, *History*, 23.

<sup>108</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Bviii; Coverdale, 28.

<sup>109</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Biv; Coverdale, 21.

<sup>110</sup> “Promise” in both nominal and verbal forms occurs 21 times in *Der alt gloub*.

<sup>111</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Avii; Coverdale, 18.

<sup>112</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Biii; Coverdale, 23.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Biii; Coverdale, 25.



who faithfully believes,”<sup>116</sup> and “true believer.”<sup>117</sup> On several occasions, following Augustine’s “two cities” theme, Bullinger refers to true citizenship in the city of God, and mankind is classed as either “children of God” or “children of man, the issue of the serpent.” He also speaks of the “faithful remnant.”<sup>118</sup> Adam and Eve are “the first faithful Christians.”<sup>119</sup>

An important message in the context of the widespread sale of indulgences was that those who are saved are ordained and preserved for salvation.<sup>120</sup> Bullinger refers to both election on the one hand and God’s enabling on the other, so that the elect persevere to the end. Moreover, quoting Paul’s sermon (Acts 13:39), he affirms that those who believe in Jesus are justified, stressing that those called to salvation are kept in the faith through the faithful preaching of the word of God.<sup>121</sup>

## Conclusion

The manner in which Bullinger develops biblical and theological themes in *The Old Faith* reveals that he deals with the attacks of Rome just as Irenaeus countered the Gnostics in his *eisagōge*, *The Demonstration*. As an adapted *eisagōge* for sixteenth-century Europe, he wrote for apologetic, catechetical, and polemical purposes.

A two-sided apologetic is an important facet of the treatise. The first aspect is that the Protestant faith, founded on the correct reading of the biblical texts, is the faith of the saints of Scripture and of the early church fathers. The second aspect is an apology for the Protestant faith against Roman dogma, leading to the conclusion that the Reformed church is the true “catholic church,” the “faithful remnant” of the people of God over the ages.

The catechetical purpose is reflected in the many repetitions throughout the treatise. The evil of the seed of the serpent (the focus on Cain against Abel) is a warning for true believers to remain faithful to the “true original religion which has been maintained since the beginning of the world and by which all holy men have ever loved, worshiped and served God.”<sup>122</sup> Bullinger persistently warns his readers not to follow the folly of Israel by tragically falling into idolatry. *The Old Faith* was in German to reach a wider audience and also for this catechetical purpose.

<sup>116</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Bvii; Coverdale, 27.

<sup>117</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Bviii; Coverdale, 29.

<sup>118</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Cviii; Coverdale, 38.

<sup>119</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Biiii; Coverdale, 24.

<sup>120</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Giiii; Coverdale, 70.

<sup>121</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Hiii; Coverdale, 79.

<sup>122</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Hvii; Coverdale, 83.

The polemical focus of *The Old Faith* is far more incisive than that of *De testamento*. There is pointed reference to “citizens of the devil’s city”<sup>123</sup> and “great poison in the church,”<sup>124</sup> to the “abomination of the pope’s power”<sup>125</sup> and “his wanton spirituality.”<sup>126</sup> An extensive list of “abominations”<sup>127</sup> exposes “the kingdom of Antichrist.”<sup>128</sup> Nonetheless, God has “his own holy flock,”<sup>129</sup> whose members are called to be faithful and to persevere in the truth in view of the imminent second coming of Christ. In the meantime, true believers are challenged to be faithful under persecution.

*The Old Faith* is, in no small measure, a theological tract that demonstrates perceptive theological insight. Those of the Reformed faith can learn from Bullinger to read and understand the message of the biblical canon and humbly learn from such faithful exegetes of the past.

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<sup>123</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Hvir; Coverdale, 81.

<sup>124</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Hviv; Coverdale, 82.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Hviiv; Coverdale, 83.

<sup>127</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Hviv; Coverdale, 82.

<sup>128</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Hviiv; Coverdale, 83.

<sup>129</sup> *Der alt gloub*, Hviir; Coverdale, 82. There is a clear reference to the “faithful remnant” at the time of the Reformation.