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5. SALVATION ACCOMPLISHED: HEINRICH BULLINGER ON THE GOSPEL

Martin Foord

The story of the Reformation cannot properly be told without mentioning Heinrich Bullinger (1504–75). Unfortunately, today he is still something of an unsung Reformation hero. Bullinger is too often seen as simply the consolidator of Zwingli's reform programme in Zurich. But Bruce Gordon believes Bullinger 'was of seminal importance to both the European Reformation and the development of the Reformed tradition'.¹ Why so? First, Bullinger exerted enormous influence through his networking. He was at the centre of an extensive communications system spread throughout Europe.² Where Calvin's extant letters number some 4,300, Bullinger's are over 12,000. He was 'one of the most widely consulted figures of the age'.³ Second, Bullinger was theologically influential via his prolific writings. He wrote more than Luther and Calvin combined!⁴

1. B. Gordon, 'Heinrich Bullinger', in Carter Lindberg (ed.), *The Reformation Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Modern Period* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 170.
2. B. Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 348.
3. B. Gordon, 'Introduction: Architect of the Reformation', in Bruce Gordon and Emidio Campi (eds.), *Architect of the Reformation: An Introduction to Heinrich Bullinger, 1504–1575* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 17.
4. Victor Shepherd, 'Heinrich Bullinger, Reformer (1504–1575)', *Touchstone* 23, no. 1 (2005), p. 28.

Bullinger produced commentaries on many books of the Bible. His work *On the One and Eternal Testament or Covenant of God* (1534) was the first to address the principal nature of the covenant in biblical theology. It had a remarkable impact on the Reformed tradition.⁵ Bullinger's largest work of systematic theology, the *Decades* (1549–51), had a wide-ranging impact being translated into German, Dutch, French and English. It especially influenced England. In 1586 Archbishop John Whitgift decreed that all lower clergy read and be examined on Bullinger's *Decades* in his province of Canterbury.⁶ Furthermore, Bullinger authored the most widely received confession amongst the sixteenth-century Reformed communities, the Second Helvetic Confession (1566). This Swiss pastor was an indispensable figure in the sixteenth-century Reformation. This chapter will examine how Bullinger's influence is stamped even on the Reformation doctrine of the gospel.

The reformation of the gospel

Whatever else the Reformation achieved, it was a revolution in the doctrine of the gospel. That is why the Reformers initially called themselves 'evangelicals' years before being named 'Protestants'.⁷ 'Evangelical' indicated something about their beliefs: the gospel (*evangelium*) was central to their reading of Scripture and their theology as a whole. Given this, it is striking that so little research has been given to the Reformers' understanding of the gospel. Much ink has rightly been spilt over the Reformers' understanding of justification by faith alone and the supreme authority of Scripture alone. However, we fail to grasp Reformation theology properly without an attentiveness to the Reformation gospel.

The magisterial Reformation resulted in the formation of two traditions: Lutheran and Reformed. The Lutheran tradition arose from the influence of

5. See Charles S. McCoy and J. Wayne Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991); J. Wayne Baker, 'Heinrich Bullinger, the Covenant, and the Reformed Tradition in Retrospect', *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 29, no. 2 (1998), pp. 359–376.
6. D. MacCulloch, 'Heinrich Bullinger and the English Speaking World', in Emidio Campi and Peter Opitz (eds.), *Heinrich Bullinger, Life – Thought – Influence: Zurich, Aug. 25–29, 2004, International Congress Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575)*, Vol. 2 (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2007), p. 932.
7. D. MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490–1700* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. xx.

one central person: Martin Luther. On the other hand, the Reformed tradition developed from a number of key figures, such as Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531), Martin Bucer (1491–1551), Heinrich Bullinger (1504–75), Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531), Wolfgang Musculus (1497–1563) and John Calvin (1509–64). The two traditions had much common theological ground and so are both rightly called evangelical or Protestant. But differences between them became important enough to ensure their official separation. By the close of the sixteenth century the Lutheran and Reformed traditions had crafted separate confessions which set their own distinct standards of doctrinal orthodoxy.

The Lutheran and Reformed confessions contained doctrines of the gospel with much in common. But there were also subtle differences. As we will see, Heinrich Bullinger played a decisive role in the Reformed confessional understanding of the gospel. However, in order to understand the nuances of his position, it needs to be compared and contrasted with the medieval Catholic and Lutheran doctrines of the gospel. To these we now turn.

The medieval Catholic gospel

The genre of systematic theology reveals something of the medieval church's understanding of the gospel. Systematic theology seeks to summarize and elucidate the principal doctrines of the entire Christian faith. The chief textbook of systematic theology in the high and late medieval era was Peter Lombard's *Four Books of Sentences*.⁸ And the dominant genre of systematic theology in this same era was the commentaries that numerous theologians wrote on the Lombard's *Sentences*.⁹ Peter Lombard included a brief discussion of the gospel at the close of his third book (III.40). Hence further reflection on the gospel can be found in the many *Sentences* commentaries that examine this section.

8. Philipp W. Rosemann, *The Story of a Great Medieval Book: Peter Lombard's Sentences, Rethinking the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Philipp W. Rosemann, *Peter Lombard, Great Medieval Thinkers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Marcia Colish, *Peter Lombard, Studies in Intellectual History*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1994).
9. For more on the commentaries, see G. R. Evans, *Mediaeval Commentaries on the Sentences of Peter Lombard: Current Research*, Vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Philipp W. Rosemann (ed.), *Mediaeval Commentaries on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), Vols. 2 and 3.

What do we discover about the gospel in the medieval *Sentences* tradition? There appears to be a common understanding of the gospel and its relationship to the law (amidst differences).¹⁰ The gospel was seen fundamentally as the 'new law' (*lex nova*).

The gospel was 'new' in a salvation-historical sense. Medieval theology (generally) divided salvation history into three basic stages. The first era of 'natural law' was the period prior to the giving of Torah at Sinai. The second epoch of the 'old law' began with the delivery of the Torah for Israel. And the third age of the 'new law' was inaugurated with the coming of Christ.

If 'new' referred to an era of salvation history, 'law' related to administration. The category of 'law' concerned the way God's people were governed. The 'old law' arranged Israel's life. Christ gave a 'new law' as a way to govern God's new people, the church. Hence, the 'new law' contained, amongst other things, moral instruction. This was particularly seen in the Sermon on the Mount.¹¹ The 'new law' (or gospel) also supplied seven new sacraments, as opposed to the plethora of sacraments in the 'old law'. The seven sacraments provided grace (or spiritual power) to obey the moral teaching of the new law and so merit salvation. Thus, the medieval gospel (new law) was distinguished from the law (old law) by salvation history and content.¹²

10. It would probably be impossible to consult all the *Sentences* commentaries because a vast minority are available in modern critical editions; the majority exist as medieval manuscripts in variegated locations. The commentaries by the following authors that discuss *Sentences* III.40 have been consulted for this chapter: Stephen Langton, Alexander of Hales, Richard Fishacre, Albert the Great, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, Robert Kilwardby, Durandus of St Porcaine, Richard of Middleton, John Duns Scotus, Peter Aquila, William de la Mare, Henry of Gorkum, Denys the Carthusian, Gabriel Biel and Jan Hus.

11. For example, Bonaventure, *Bonaventurae Doctoris Seraphici Opera Omnia*, 10 vols. (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1882), 3:885 col. 2; Duns Scotus, *Opera Omnia* (Civitas Vaticana: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1950), 10:346.48–57; Denys the Carthusian, *Doctoris Ecstatici D. Dionysii Cartusiani Opera Omnia*, 44 vols. (Monstrolii: Typis Cartusiae S. M. de Pratis, 1896), 23:644D col. 2 – 645A col. 1.

12. For further discussion on this, see Martin Foord, "A New Embassy": John Calvin's Gospel', in Michael Parsons (ed.), *Aspects of Reforming: Theology and Practice in Sixteenth Century Europe* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2014), pp. 139–140.

The confessional Lutheran gospel

Martin Luther's discovery of justification by faith alone went hand in hand with a new understanding of the gospel as well as the law/gospel distinction.¹³ Where the medieval understanding of law (old law) and gospel (new law) were of the same kind (they were both law), Luther came to see them as radically opposed in kind: the law commanded and the gospel promised. For Luther, the law demanded works whereas the gospel promise could only be received by faith. As Luther said in his 1535 Galatians commentary:

For this I must consult the Gospel and listen to the Gospel, which does not teach me what I should do – for that is the proper function of the Law – but what someone else has done for me, namely, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has suffered and died to deliver me from sin and death. The Gospel commands me to accept and believe this, and this is what is called 'the truth of the Gospel'.¹⁴

And because no-one could follow the law perfectly, Luther believed its function was to drive sinners to the gospel.

But, second, where the medieval distinction between law and gospel was salvation historical (the law was confined to the OT and the gospel was confined to the NT), Luther maintained that law and gospel were found in both Testaments: 'Here we must point out that the entire Scripture of God is divided into two parts: commandments and promises.'¹⁵ In other words, Luther's understanding of law and gospel was also hermeneutical.¹⁶ One must be aware if the part of Scripture one was reading was law or gospel, and not confuse the two.

Controversy soon arose amongst Luther's followers over the relationship of repentance to the gospel. Did the call to repentance belong to law or gospel? Luther's close colleague Philipp Melancthon began to teach that repentance was included in the gospel.¹⁷ He claimed this from the second edition onwards of his influential systematic theology, the *Loci communes*:

13. Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), p. 267.

14. Luther, *Lectures on Galatians* (1535), 2:4–5, *WA* 40:168.20–26; *LW* 26:91.

15. Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian*, *WA* 7:52.24–25; *LW* 31:348.

16. R. Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith*, Christian Theology in Context (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 50–55.

17. It seems that Melancthon's position developed out of the so-called Antinomian controversy with Johannes Agricola. For this controversy, see Timothy J. Wengert,

Christ defines the gospel in the final chapter of Luke, as plainly as an artist, when he commands [his disciples] to teach 'repentance and forgiveness of sins' in his name [Luke 24:47]. Therefore, the gospel is the preaching of repentance and promise.¹⁸

Other thinkers such as Erasmus Sarcerius (1501–59), Johann Spangenberg (1484–1550), Victor Strigel (1524–69), Paul Crell (1531–79) and Christoph Pezel (1539–1604) followed Melancthon.

However, another stream of thinkers, such as Matthaeus Judex (1528–64), Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1520–75) and Johann Wigand (1523–87), opposed Melancthon's position. They argued that if the gospel called people to repentance, which was a work, then justification would not be by faith alone. Hence, it was law not gospel that demanded repentance. When Christ in Luke 24:47 told his disciples to preach 'repentance and forgiveness of sins', they read this as a preaching of *both* law (repentance) and gospel (forgiveness).

This debate was resolved for the Lutheran tradition in the *Formula of Concord* (1577). The authorized confessions of Lutheranism were collected into the *Book of Concord* (1580), of which the *Formula of Concord* was one. The official Lutheran position on the relationship of repentance and gospel was defined in Article 5 of the *Formula*. It addressed the controversy in these words:

Whether the gospel is properly only a preaching of the grace of God, which announces to us the remission of sins, or whether it is also a preaching of repentance, rebuking the sin of unbelief, as one which is not rebuked by the Law, but only by the Gospel.¹⁹

The *Formula* answered the question by giving two definitions of the gospel. The first meaning of 'gospel' was the 'entire teaching of Christ'. When understood this way, the gospel is 'a proclamation of both repentance and the

(note 17 cont.) *Law and Gospel: Philip Melancthon's Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over Poenitentia*, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997).

18. Philip Melancthon, *Philippi Melancthonis Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, Corpus Reformatorum (Halis Saxonum: Apud C. A. Schwetschke et Filium, 1854), 21:734.
19. *The Formula of Concord* V.1, in Irene Dingel (ed.), *Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche: Herausgegeben im Gedenkjahr der Augsbургischen Konfession 1930*, 13th edn (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 790.10–16; P. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. 3, *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, 1876 repr. edn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), p. 126.

forgiveness of sins'.²⁰ The *Formula* finds this usage of 'gospel' in Mark 1:15 and Acts 20:24:

'The time has come,' [Jesus] said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news [gospel]!' (Mark 1:15)²¹

²¹ [Paul] have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus . . . ²⁴ However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the good news [gospel] of God's grace. (Acts 20:21, 24)

But the *Formula* affirms a second meaning of 'gospel' and it is the 'proper' or 'special' (*proprie*) definition. This understanding of the gospel is 'the delightful proclamation of the grace and favour of God, won through Christ's merit'.²² It conveys to law-breaking sinners what a person 'ought to believe', namely that Jesus Christ has made satisfaction for sins and obtained forgiveness and perfect righteousness 'without any merit of the sinner'.²³ This second understanding of the gospel does *not* contain a call to repentance, which the *Formula* states in uncompromising terms:

We reject, therefore, as a false and perilous dogma, the assertion that the Gospel is properly a preaching of repentance, rebuking, accusing and condemning sins, and that it is not solely a preaching of the grace of God. For in this way the Gospel is transformed again into Law, the merit of Christ and the Holy Scriptures are obscured . . .²⁴

So the theological reason why repentance is not a call of the 'proper' gospel is because it made repentance a work the sinner must do to obtain salvation. Thus,

20. *The Formula of Concord* V.6, in Dingel, *Die Bekenntnisschriften*, 791.5–17.

21. All Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the NIV.

22. *The Formula of Concord* V.6, in Dingel, *Die Bekenntnisschriften*, 791.29–31; R. Kolb and T. Wengert (eds.), *The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), p. 500.

23. *The Formula of Concord* V.5, in Dingel, *Die Bekenntnisschriften*, 791.5–17; Schaff, *Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, p. 127.

24. *The Formula of Concord* V neg. 1, in Dingel, *Die Bekenntnisschriften*, 792.34–41; Schaff, *Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, p. 130.

the work of repentance would add to Christ's merit. Justification would not be because of Christ alone through faith alone. Hence, the 'proper' doctrine of the gospel, in the Lutheran tradition, does not call its hearers to repentance. Repentance must be a command of the law.

Bullinger and the confessional Reformed gospel

When we turn to the Reformed tradition of the sixteenth century we discover a variety of positions on the gospel. For example, Theodore Beza had similarities with the Lutheran tradition.²⁵ And Wolfgang Musculus believed the gospel had three basic 'parts': repentance, faith and obedience.²⁶ However, a group of Reformed thinkers, such as Martin Bucer, Johannes Oecolampadius, John Calvin, Zacharias Ursinus and Heinrich Bullinger, shared a similar understanding of the gospel. Heinrich Bullinger would ensure it became confessional.

The Reformed tradition did not develop one set of official confessions like the Lutheran *Book of Concord*. Rather, a variety of confessions were formally accepted by the different geographic Reformed communities. The chief confessions are shown in Table 1. The Second Helvetic Confession was also endorsed by the Reformed churches of France (1571), Hungary (1567), Poland (1571 and 1578) and Scotland (1566). Thus, it was the most widely accepted Reformed confession in the sixteenth century. Two Reformed confessions address the doctrine of the gospel. The first is the Heidelberg Catechism which contains a simple abridgement.²⁷ The other is Heinrich Bullinger's Second Helvetic Confession which includes a fuller description.²⁸ The two accounts are in agreement. We now turn to Bullinger's explanation of the gospel in the Second Helvetic Confession.

25. Theodore Beza, *Confessio Christinae Fidei* (Genevae: Excudebat Eustathius Vignon, 1576), pp. 56–72; Theodore Beza, *Confession de la foy chrestienne* (À Genève: Par Jacques du Pan, 1563), pp. 81–100; Theodore Beza, *The Christian Faith*, trans. James Clark (Lewes: Focus Christian Ministries Trust, 1992), pp. 40–49.

26. Wolfgang Musculus, *Loci Communes Theologiae Sacrae, Iam Recens Recogniti & Emendati* (Basileae: Ex Officina Heruagiana: per Eusebium Episcopium, 1567), pp. 373–374.

27. 'The Heidelberg Catechism', Question 19, in Schaff, *Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, p. 313.

28. If the Heidelberg Catechism is included.

Table 1: Chief confessions of Reformed communities

Name	Date	Reformed community
Gallic Confession	1559	France
Scots Confession	1560	Scotland
Belgic Confession	1561	The Lowlands
Heidelberg Catechism	1563	The Palatinate
Thirty-Nine Articles	1563	England
Second Helvetic Confession	1566	Swiss cantons, Palatinate

The Second Helvetic Confession on the gospel

Bullinger had addressed the gospel as a topic in his two earlier systematic theologies: *Decades* (1549–51) and *Summary of the Christian Religion* (1556).²⁹ He also presented a doctrine of the gospel in the introduction to his Matthew commentary, complete with an exposition of the word's meaning in classical Greek literature, the Hebrew Old Testament and the New Testament.³⁰ However, the Second Helvetic Confession represents Bullinger's mature thought.

Two meanings

The gospel is addressed in Article 13 of thirty in the Second Helvetic Confession.³¹ In it, Bullinger believes there are two meanings of the gospel. The two are distinguished by salvation history. The first concerns promise, the second fulfilment.

The first meaning relates to the gospel's existence in the Old Testament era. Bullinger explained that the gospel existed in the Old Testament as 'evangelical promises'. The first evangelical promise was Genesis 3:15, 'The seed of the women will crush the serpent's head'.³² The Reformers regularly appealed to this

29. Bullinger, *Decades* 4.1; Bullinger, *Summary of the Christian Religion* 6.23. The latter work was originally published in German as Heinrich Bullinger, *Summa Christenlicher Religion* (Zürich: Christoffel Froschauer, 1556). The Latin edition soon appeared as Heinrich Bullinger, *Compendium Christianae Religionis Decem Libris Comprehensum* (Tiguri: Apud Froschoverum, 1556).

30. Heinrich Bullinger, *In Sacrosanctum Iesu Christi Domini Nostri Evangelium Secundum Matthaeum Commentariorum Libri XII* (Tiguri: Apud Froschoverum, 1542), 1b–3a. Author's translation.

31. The Latin text used here is Schaff, *Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, pp. 237–306. An English translation is located in *ibid.*, pp. 829–909.

32. Bullinger, 'The Second Helvetic Confession', 13.1, *ibid.*, p. 260.

verse as the original gospel promise from as early as the first Reformation system of theology, Philipp Melancthon's *Loci communes* (1521).³³ Bullinger's further examples of evangelical promises include:

In your seed all nations will be blessed (Gen. 22:18).

The sceptre will not be removed from Judah, until Shiloh comes (Gen. 49:10).

The Lord will raise up a prophet from among [their] brothers (Deut. 18:18).³⁴

Bullinger clarified that some Old Testament promises referred simply to temporal matters such as Israel inheriting Canaan and their victories against enemies in war.³⁵ However, he claimed that other Old Testament promises involved 'heavenly and eternal issues' like the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Why does Bullinger need to make this point? Many medieval Catholic doctors held that the Old Testament promises related only to temporal matters. Thus, they concluded that the gospel was not 'literally' found in the Old Testament. These medieval theologians argued that the gospel could only be found in the Old Testament when the promises were interpreted 'spiritually' (or symbolically).³⁶ Hence, in the Second Helvetic Confession Bullinger seeks to clarify that the gospel indeed exists literally in the Old Testament. It is in promise form (*modus*) which is precisely what the New Testament teaches (Rom. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:10).³⁷

The second and proper meaning of the gospel, for Bullinger, focuses on fulfilment.³⁸ It is the message that

God has now fulfilled what he promised from the beginning of the world, and has sent, indeed given, to us his only Son and in him [we have been

33. Philipp Melancthon, *Loci communes* (1521), *Quid Evangelium*, in Melancthon, *Philippi Melancthonis Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia* (Halis Saxonum: Apud C. A. Schwetschke et Filium, 1854), 21:141.56a.17–19.

34. Bullinger, 'The Second Helvetic Confession', 13.1, in Schaff, *Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, p. 260.

35. Bullinger, 'The Second Helvetic Confession', 13.2.

36. For example, see Bonaventure, *In Tertium Librum Sententiarum* XL.ii.con, in Bonaventure, *Bonaventurae Doctoris Seraphici Opera Omnia*, 3:888–889.

37. Bullinger, 'The Second Helvetic Confession', 13.2, in Schaff, *Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, pp. 260–261.

38. *Ibid.*, 13.3.

given] reconciliation with the Father, forgiveness of sins, all fullness and eternal life.³⁹

There are several noteworthy points here. First, this second understanding of the gospel did not exist in the Old Testament. It is a *new revelation*. Bullinger states that it was 'first' preached by John the Baptist, then Christ, and afterwards by the apostles and their successors. Thus, the second meaning of the gospel speaks of something altogether new which cannot be found in the Old Testament. Second, the New Testament gospel message includes the element of *fulfilment*. It fits into a larger narrative from which it cannot be divorced. Third, the gospel is a message about salvation fully *accomplished*. In Christ's person and work is 'all fullness'. The medieval Catholic gospel did not make a distinction between salvation accomplished and applied. For Rome, human works contributed to a person's final salvation (even if they were Spirit-produced) and so were included in the gospel message. But for Bullinger, the gospel was a message of redemption accomplished only, not redemption applied. Emphasizing salvation accomplished by Christ (*solo Christo*) helped highlight that humans could not contribute to their salvation (*sola fide*). This in turn accentuated God's grace (*sola gratia*) in salvation.⁴⁰

Given that for Bullinger the gospel was a message of fulfilment, the historical accounts by the evangelists which narrate this are fittingly named 'gospel'. He says:

Therefore, the history described by the four evangelists, which explains how these things [reconciliation, forgiveness, fullness and eternal life] were done or fulfilled in Christ, what he taught and did, and that they who believe in him have all fullness, this [history] is rightly called the gospel.⁴¹

Moreover, Bullinger claimed that the preaching and writings of the apostles, when they convey how the Father gave the Son, in whom are 'all of life and salvation', are also 'rightly called the gospel'.⁴²

39. *Ibid.*

40. Bullinger emphasizes this particularly in *Summary of the Christian Religion* 6.18, in Bullinger, *Compendium Christianae Religionis Decem Libris Comprehensum*, 93a.

41. Bullinger, 'The Second Helvetic Confession', 13.3, in Schaff, *Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, p. 261.

42. *Ibid.*

Bullinger finishes his article on the gospel with two points. First, the Spirit works through the preaching of the gospel in people's hearts, something the law was unable to do.⁴³ So the New Testament calls the ministry of the gospel simply 'the Spirit' (2 Cor. 3:6). And second, against the Roman Catholic objection that the Reformation gospel was a recent invention by the Reformers, Bullinger claims it is 'the most ancient of all in the world' because it originated in God's eternal counsel (2 Tim. 1:9–10).⁴⁴

Repentance

Does Bullinger include the call to repentance in the gospel? Yes, in the following article (14) on repentance: 'The gospel has the doctrine of repentance joined to it.'⁴⁵ Bullinger justifies this affirmation with the much-used Luke 24:47: 'In my name must repentance and forgiveness of sins be preached to all nations.'⁴⁶ In his commentary on this verse Bullinger is clear:

Next, in these two headings, repentance and the forgiveness of sins, is summed up or is contained the whole preaching of the Gospel, so that you will rightly define the gospel to be the preaching brought forth from heaven which announces to all humans repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of Christ.⁴⁷

Bullinger explicitly retains repentance in the gospel in his *Decades* and *Summary of the Christian Religion*.⁴⁸ Furthermore, early Reformed thinkers like John Calvin, Wolfgang Musculus, Pierre Viret and Zacharias Ursinus all include repentance in the gospel.⁴⁹

43. *Ibid.*, 13.4.

44. *Ibid.*, 13.5–7, p. 262.

45. *Ibid.*, 14.1.

46. *Ibid.* Author's translation.

47. Heinrich Bullinger, *In Luculentem et Ss. Evangelium D. N. Jesu Christ Secundum Lucam Commentariorum Lib. IX* (Tiguri: Apud Christ. Froshoverum, 1546), p. 146.

48. Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades of Heinrich Bullinger: The Fifth Decade*, trans. H. I., 4 vols. (Cambridge: The Parker Society, 1852), IV.i, p. 35; Bullinger, *Summa Christenlicher Religion*, 6.18.93a–b.

49. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. F. L. Battles, ed. J. T. McNeill, Library of Christian Classics (London: SCM, 1961 [1559]), III.iii.1; Musculus, *Loci Communes Theologiae Sacrae, Iam Recens Recogniti & Emendati*, pp. 20, 373–374; Pierre Viret, *Instruction chrestienne en la doctrine de la Loy et de l'Evangile* (À Genève: Par Jean Rivery, 1564), 14.1, p. 67; Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr Zacharias Ursinus*

But how can Bullinger keep repentance in the gospel without compromising justification by faith alone? Would not repentance become a work that contributes to salvation? No, because repentance is *evidence* of justification, not a means to justification. Repentance is not an instrument of salvation, but a thankful *response* for salvation. Bullinger says: 'Similarly, the gospel preaches repentance to all who are born again . . . that after grace received they should conduct themselves as true sons of God.'⁵⁰

Bullinger is unyielding that Christ alone has accomplished the fullness of salvation and that no other human works contribute to it. However, he also believes that repentance must be included in the gospel, otherwise there is no formal connection between the gospel and a resulting Christian lifestyle. The inclusion of repentance ensures that the gospel renews lives.

Conclusions

The Lutheran and Reformed traditions both affirm in their confessions a 'proper' gospel that preaches salvation because of Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone. However, as we have seen, there are differences between the two traditions. Both the *Formula of Concord* and the Second Helvetic Confession affirm two meanings of the gospel. However, despite common ground, the meanings in each do not exactly match. The confessional Reformed gospel places greater emphasis on salvation history, of promise and then fulfilment in Christ. Moreover, a stark difference between the two traditions is the inclusion or not of repentance in the 'proper' gospel. For the Lutherans, repentance turned the gospel into law. For Bullinger, it safeguarded the transformation of Christian lives.

A celebration of the Reformation gospel

Having examined Heinrich Bullinger's doctrine of the gospel against the backdrop of medieval Catholicism and Lutheranism, it is worth reflecting on why this topic is so important.

First, the gospel can never be assumed. The old adage is critical: the first generation discovers the gospel, the second assumes it and the third loses it. One sign the gospel has become assumed in our own time is that most systematic

on the Heidelberg Catechism, trans. G. W. Williard (Columbus: Scott & Bascom, 1852), 19.1, pp. 101–102.

50. Bullinger, *Compendium Christianae Religionis Decem Libris Comprehensum*, 93b.

theologies do not contain a formal topic on the gospel itself. They may contain explanations of various parts of the gospel, such as the atonement or the resurrection. But the gospel as a theological doctrine in its own right (evangeliology) is regularly absent. This was not so in the systems of theology produced in the sixteenth century. The Reformers were right to explore the theological anatomy of gospel.

Second, too often people think the Reformers understood the gospel as simply justification by faith alone, or that justification by faith alone was the very centre of their theology.⁵¹ The case of Bullinger proves this to be false. In the confessional Reformed tradition, the gospel focuses on 'Christ alone' accomplishing salvation in fulfilment of the Old Testament (*solo Christo*). When this message is unpacked, justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) follows naturally, itself a part of the gospel. But the gospel can be preached without mentioning justification by faith alone. 'Faith alone' serves to safeguard 'Christ alone'. 'Faith alone' clarifies that the gospel is salvation accomplished, not salvation applied.

Moreover, if the gospel focuses on salvation accomplished by Christ in fulfilment of the Old Testament, then the four Gospels themselves have a crucial significance in the life of the church. That is why the Reformers wrote commentaries on them and preached their way through them. We must eschew the common notion that the Reformers were too focused on Paul at the expense of Jesus in the Gospels.

Third, Bullinger reminds us that the gospel calls people not simply to faith but also to repentance (Acts 14:15). The Roman Catholic Church contended that 'faith alone' would lead to licentiousness. Including repentance in the gospel protects against this. But when repentance is preached without the gospel, the result is legalism. The proper place for repentance is in the gospel.

Finally, the gospel, as Bullinger said, is indeed 'glad and happy tidings' for believers.⁵² It is ultimately a message about God the Father himself. Christ's accomplished work superlatively reveals the kind of love that characterizes God: grace (*sola gratia*). Such gracious love is fathomless, such that it becomes the believer's greatest treasure. And, as Jesus says, 'where your treasure is, there your heart will be also' (Matt. 6:21).

51. For example, "The traditional view, fostered by the Reformers and perpetuated by generations of Protestants, is that "justification by faith" is the key to Paul's theology", Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), p. 11.

52. Bullinger, 'Second Helvetic Confession', 13.3, in Schaff, *Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, p. 857.

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6. MARTIN BUCER: THE CATHOLIC PROTESTANT

Stephen Tong

Introduction

Martin Bucer died in Cambridge on 28 February 1551 at the age of fifty-nine. He was a religious refugee, did not speak English and did not appreciate the English climate or cuisine.¹ Before coming to England, Bucer already considered himself a feeble old man. Beset with many illnesses, including chronic coughing, rheumatism, lithiasis, intestinal ailments and leg ulcers, he complained that his 'bowels are in an obstinate state'.² Despite these setbacks, Bucer had been Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University since December 1549.³ And in combination with Peter Martyr Vermigli, the Italian Reformer who was Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford (1549–53), Bucer exercised a significant

1. H. Robinson (ed.), *Original Letters Relative to the English Reformation*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1847), 2:550–551; H. J. Selderhuis, *Marriage and Divorce in the Thought of Martin Bucer*, ET (Kirkville: Thomas Jefferson University Press at Truman State University, 1999), pp. 126–127; D. MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 469–471.
2. Robinson, *Original Letters*, 2:548.
3. All official communication at the two universities was conducted in Latin during this period.