

ANNEX

Magazine of the Reformierte Presse 2004

HEINRICHVS BULLINGERVS
QVNDECIMIAM NVNC LABVNTVR SYDERA LVSTRI,
HÆC ÆTAS, FORMAM PICTA TABELLA REFERT
NIL EGO VEL FORMAM VEL VITÆ TEMPORA SPECTO,
SED CHRISTVM, VITÆ QVI MIHI FORMA MEÆ EST.

The Successors

On the 500th anniversary
of Heinrich Bullinger's birth

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the Anabaptists
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The name Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli's successor as chief pastor of Zurich, is likely to be on everyone's lips this summer. The 500th anniversary of his birth on 18 July is marked by countless special events that started in May and continue until well into the autumn. Most of these will centre on Zurich and Bremgarten, the small town in which Bullinger was born. (For more information on the programme of events, please go to www.bullinger500.ch and www.dernachfolger.ch).

Surely this is going to extraordinary lengths for a man whom even today's clergy know very little about? Well, if all that our plans amounted to were pious lip service, then the charge would be a fair one. But if we take Bullinger for the theologian he was (and that he was a theological heavyweight will quickly become evident from the article on pages 3–6) and dare to challenge him on precisely these terms and to let him challenge us too, then at the end of the day, our efforts will have proved worthwhile. With his Old Church ways and conservative traits, Bullinger would doubtless be something of an oddity in today's church. He was certainly not a proto-liberal visionary, as his attitude to the Anabaptists shows (see pages 10–12), nor would he have approved of today's freedom of religion. But are we really more free simply because we choose to dispense with a single, binding confession and instead empower our clergy with the definition of what our faith actually is (see pages 13–15)? What better opportunity could we have of engaging with Heinrich Bullinger and grappling with his ideas than this anniversary year! Let us hope that this is indeed what happens.

Stephan Landis

Front and back covers:
The successor and his successor: Heinrich Bullinger as portrayed by Hans Asper, 1550 (Zurich Central Library) and the Head of the Zurich Reformed Church Council, Ruedi Reich (photo: Gion Pfander)

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Text: Emidio Campi. Photos: Gion Pfander **Any in-depth study of Bullinger's theological world is bound to bring rich rewards. The Eucharist, covenant theology and the doctrines of predestination and justification are four areas in which Zwingli's successor came to hold – and defend – some truly remarkable views.**

Heinrich Bullinger the Theologian

Whenever someone famous is commemorated, whether on a round birthday or on the anniversary of his or her death, one of the most pressing questions raised is that of relevance. How did the person in question change the course of history and what does this mean to us today? There can be no



Emidio Campi: "Bullinger developed his ideas independently."

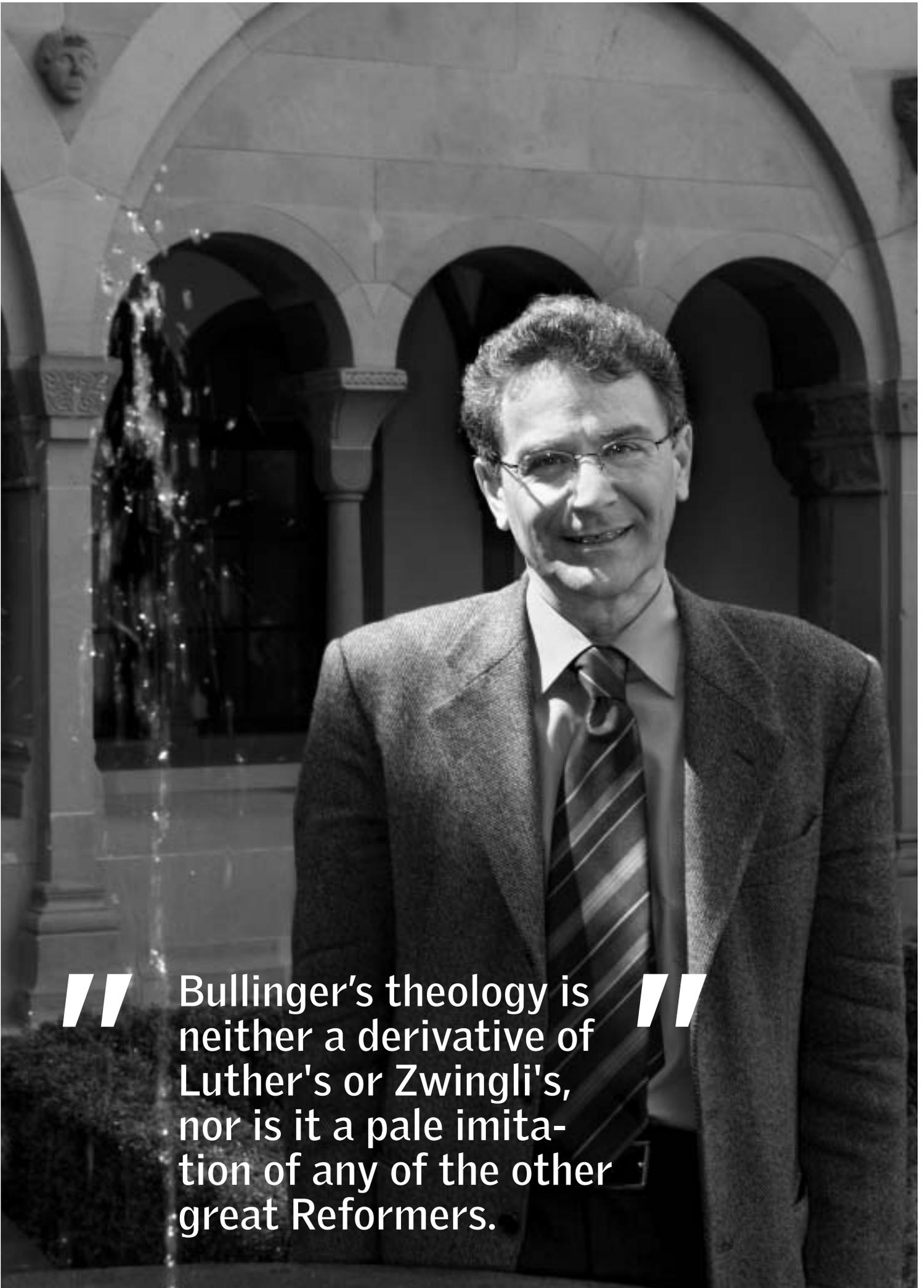
doubt that Heinrich Bullinger lacked many of the character traits ascribed to his fellow Reformers – the burning zeal of Zwingli and dramatic defiance of Luther, for example, Calvin's aristocratic airs, Bucer's diplomatic skills and the tragic stature of Ver-

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migli. He led an unadventurous and seemingly uneventful life (the longest journey he ever undertook while chief pastor of Zurich being a trip to Basel) that was so shot through with earnest perseverance, indefatigable hard work and, above all else, his overwhelming sense of duty, that the office he held and the man who held it can scarcely be told apart.

While many aspects of Bullinger's thinking were products of the age in which he lived and are therefore only of historical interest to us now, the deeper one ventures into the whole body of his works, the more one is struck by just how rich in fundamental theological insights they are. And having been left by and large untouched for five hundred years, these nuggets are now just waiting to be unearthed. The works I am referring to include both the Second Helvetic Confession and a theological jewel of a work called the Dekaden ("The Decades"). This is a collection of 50 sermons published between 1549 and 1551 which, together with Calvin's *Institutio* and Vermigli's *Loci communes*, must rank among the most influential expositions of Christian dogma in the early days of Reformed Protestantism.

So which of the Reformers inspired Bullinger's theology? Well, he referred repeatedly to Luther and Melancthon, to Zwingli and Oecolampadius, to Erasmus and Luis Vivés and by no means least to the Church Fathers. Yet his theology is neither a



“ Bullinger’s theology is neither a derivative of Luther’s or Zwingli’s, nor is it a pale imitation of any of the other great Reformers. ”

"His theology is not epigonal."

derivative of Luther's or Zwingli's, nor is it a pale imitation of any of the other great Reformers. It is neither monotonous nor epigonal, but viewed dispassionately, can indeed be deemed a theological achievement in its own right. Bullinger developed his ideas independently and by adopting an approach that took account not only of the shift that had taken place in theological thinking, but also of the realities of church life. This will be explained in more detail in the four examples that follow.

The Lord's Supper:

a strong synthesis of symbolism and fact

For all the superficial similarities, Bullinger's eucharistic theology differed fundamentally from that of Zwingli. Whereas his predecessor began by apprehending the Lord's Supper as a symbolic act of remembrance and fellowship and only later, from

1529 onwards, came to view the Eucharist as an offering at which Christ himself was present, so the young Bullinger developed an understanding of the sacrament which, influenced by his covenant theology, went far beyond the purely symbolic, seeking instead a synthesis of symbolism and fact. Premising the Old and New Testaments to be two halves of a whole, Bullinger regarded both the Jewish Passover and the Lord's Supper as symbolic acts, the purpose of which was to draw attention to God's covenant of grace with man and it was this, or so he argued, that lent them their redemptive significance. This theological singularity – far more than Bullinger's loyalty to Zwingli – goes a long way towards explaining why the First Helvetic Confession of 1536, in the drafting of which Bullinger had such an important role to play, defines the Lord's Supper in terms which, by building on Zwingli's later assertions, increasingly home in on the sacrament's function as a signifier.

The same can be said of Bullinger's "True Confession of the Servants of the Church in Zurich", a typically moderate response to a defamatory pamphlet published by Luther in 1544, in which the author had lashed out at the so-called "Sacramentarians". In his response, Bullinger had no qualms about

stressing the presence of Christ at the Eucharist and even went so far as to claim that what believers ate and drank at the Lord's Supper was indeed Christ's body and blood, albeit subject to the qualification that Christ's presence be understood as a "spiritual" presence that was certainly not confined to the Eucharist alone and that Christ was received not by the mouth, but by the "faithful heart".

It is greatly to his credit that Bullinger did not remain enslaved to this interpretation either. Believing Protestantism to be at risk following the Augsburg Interim and influenced by his intensive discussions with Calvin, Bullinger eventually arrived at the mature understanding of the sacrament

that would later be defined in Calvin's Consensus Tigurinus of 1549. Both men went to inordinate lengths to hammer out this consensus, exchanging numerous letters and drafts

and meeting on three different occasions for consultations in Zurich, at which Guillaume Farel was also present. The fruit of their labours was a theological agreement which not only upheld a number of Zwingli's central tenets, but also attached considerable weight to Christ's presence at the Eucharist, the gift of salvation being understood categorically as the work of the Holy Spirit. Not only did this lend Zwingli's eucharistic doctrine a new theological profile, but it also constituted the first Reformed eucharistic doctrine – the classical wording of which would later find its way into the Heidelberg Catechism and the Second Helvetic Confession.

Development of covenant theology in its own right

Much the same thing happened with the Biblical concept of God's covenant, which Bullinger adopted from Zwingli and went on to elaborate. What is relevant for our purposes is the way in which Bullinger, in his early writings, used this concept first and foremost as underpinning for his interpretation of the sacraments.

By the Dekaden, however, his concept of the covenant had extended far beyond the sacraments, having become an all-encompassing category with which to "elucidate the fundamental situation of man in relation to God," as Peter Opitz puts it. The subject reached full maturity when Bullinger began to focus on the christological nature of the covenant and above all man's reconciliation and renewal in Christ. Not only is the widely held assumption that Bullinger apprehended the covenant as a kind of mutual agreement between God and man – a view that incidentally casts him in the role of precursor of the Other Reformed Tradition – a mere *fable convenue* that distorts the theological impact of his thinking, but there is also plenty of evidence to suggest that his understanding of the covenant actually came very close to what, by then, had become the predominant Augustinian-Calvinist theology.

That covenant theology understood in this way can indeed give rise to a binding, quasi-legal contract with God goes without saying and is doubtless also the reason why federalist theology, the main author of which was Bullinger himself, became so widespread first in Reformed Protestantism (Coccejus) and later among secular thinkers such as Grotius and Hobbes as well.

Double predestination yes, determinism no

With regard to the doctrine of predestination, Bullinger generally worked on the assumption of double predestination. He, too, took the view that "Predestination is the eternal decree of God by which he elects either to save us, once the goal he has determined for our lives has been achieved, or to condemn us to death" (Dekaden IV, 4, 217r).

As chief pastor of Zurich, however, he categorically rejected all forms of speculation and determinism and instead shifted his focus to the universality of God's grace in Christ. Furthermore, Bullinger proves to have been more acutely aware of the problems inherent in predestination than was either Zwingli or Calvin inasmuch

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as in his writings on this subject, he makes no attempt to rationalize either God's sovereign power to save us or the universality of the salvation promise. The picture to emerge is one of pastoral caution: Predestination for Bullinger means being chosen in Christ, the question of whether we are saved or not being determined solely by our fellowship with Christ, as manifested in faith.

Justification as adoptio and vivificatio

Bullinger's line of argument on the crucial – and theologically controversial – problem of justification is especially remarkable. While on the one hand, he upholds the Reformist understanding of justification as justice from without, as the divine acquittal that spares us a verdict of damnation, he does not share Luther's view of justification by faith as the quintessence of all Christian doctrine. Obviously under the influence of the shift in the theological debate

that had taken place following the first session of the Council of Trent, he equates justification with that complex process that comprises both our salvation through God alone and a new life in spiritual communion with Christ. Bullinger, therefore, describes justification both as God's adoption of us as his children (*adoptio*) and as the vehicle by which our lives are transformed and a new life in Christ made possible (*vivificatio*).

This is where Bullinger's decisive contribution to theology is most apparent: His understanding of justification emphasizes God's activity and man's passivity, but at the same time explains salvation as a necessary consequence of God's love. While Bullinger draws a distinction between these two aspects, he nevertheless regards them as far more closely linked than did Luther.

Inasmuch as this interpretation deprived salvation of its sacrificial quality, however,

it also smoothed the way for a return to codification, a danger that Reformed Protestantism has not always been able to avert.

An irenicist and European bridge-builder

Even at this juncture, one cannot help but suspect that any in-depth study of Bullinger's theological world would be bound to bring rich rewards. Yet it must also be added that it was not only Bullinger's skills as a theologian, nor indeed his position as chief pastor of a large church, but rather – and above all else –, his gentle, irenic mentality that made him such an important figure in Reformed Protestantism. In an age of religious dissent in which Protestantism itself was being rifted apart by schisms, Bullinger was one of those few who endeavoured to defuse their quarrels and overcome their differences. It was this that made him one of Europe's great bridge-builders.



Text: Patrik Müller Bullinger for once from a rather different perspective – not as a theologian, but as a man who built himself a solid social network without which his achievements would scarcely have been possible.

Bullinger – the Family Man

The two supporting pillars upon which Bullinger's life and work rested were his faith on the one hand – an unshakable faith, founded on deeply held theological convictions –, and his family on the other, it being in the latter of the two that his personality most shines through. Whereas Luther and Zwingli both married at the age of 40 and hence comparatively late and only after much personal agonizing, Bullinger was already thinking about marriage at the tender age of 20. He was never in any doubt that this was what he wanted, nor could he imagine life without a family.

As a child, he had experienced the value of family life at first hand. Although a priest, Bullinger's father had entered into a long-term relationship with Anna Wiederkehr, who had become his wife in every respect except the legal one, Heinrich being the youngest of the couple's five sons. It is a measure of the respect accorded to Bullinger's father that he was able to rise as high as he did, despite keeping a concubine. Heinrich's mother, meanwhile, was not only a housewife and mother, but as the common-law wife of a dean, was frequently called upon to play the part of hostess – as well as tending to the poor and sick of the little town of Bremgarten in which they lived. That Heinrich was never torn on the issue of whether or not he should commit himself to a life of celibacy therefore comes as no surprise.

Having been granted leave to pursue his studies in Zurich in the summer of 1527, the young Heinrich made the acquaintance of a former nun called Anna Adlischwyler. Instead of wooing her through a go-between, as was customary in those days, he sent her a written proposal of marriage in which he extolled marriage as a chance "to exercise all virtues: faith, love, compassion, hope, patience, moderation, discipline and all godliness in Christ" before moving on to the proposal itself: "You alone are the only one I have fixed upon. God alone knows whether

you are meant for me and my choice rests on your manner of speaking and your conduct. Over time, therefore, I have come to imagine you as a woman of breeding in whom the fear of God dwells and with whom I would like to live in love and in suffering and in everything God wills." He then recommended himself as not "ordained" (ie. not a priest) and as a man of good reputation and in good health who might perhaps have a hot temper, but was certainly not pigheaded and neither a drunk nor a gamester. The couple became betrothed four weeks later, although they were unable to marry until Anna's mother died in the summer of 1529, she having been the only one to oppose the marriage. As a wedding gift, Heinrich wrote his wife a song in which, far from being dry and academic as we often imagine him to be, he shows himself to be a man of strong feelings:

You are my solace, my joy and refuge,
haven to my heart,
worshipped alone, loved alone,
for I am yours, solely yours.

A happy marriage

The marriage was very happy. Anna supported her husband not only by sharing his worries and responsibilities, but also by entertaining the countless visitors from all over Europe the Bullingers regularly received, some of whom even took up residence with them for a while. Most important of all, however, she raised their eleven children. Just how much Bullinger loved her is evident from his journal entries and when his "dearly beloved wife Anna Adlischwyler" succumbed to the plague on 25 September 1564, he felt her loss acutely. Although he survived her by eleven years, she remained such a vital and powerful presence in his life that he never once con-

sidered remarrying. Bullinger was also very fond of his children and took a keen interest in their lives. Not that he was above using family ties as a way of cementing friendships and of becoming well connected to some of Zurich's leading personalities. This much is borne out by the fact that the children's godparents were all handpicked men of the cloth, professors and politicians. The extent to which the Bullingers helped

choose spouses for their children is much more difficult to judge, especially as they kept such an open house. The fact is, however, that their eldest

daughter, Anna, married Zwingli's son, their second daughter, Margaretha, a son of Mayor Lavater and Heinrich the younger a granddaughter of Zwingli, who was also the daughter of Bullinger's successor as chief pastor. The list goes on and on. Veritas, for example, married twice and both her husbands were burgomasters.

Heinrich Bullinger obviously knew how to turn private connections to professional advantage. His theological convictions justified marriage as a Christian institution and the family as a natural, God-given blessing. His position in Zurich assured him a good income and a fine house next to the Grossmünster, right in the heart of the city. It must also be said that Bullinger's family supported him in his work and that the family ties he had to Zurich's political and clerical elite undoubtedly strengthened his position in that city. Without this bedrock of a family to build on and without this constant cross-pollination of professional and private interests, it is unlikely that Bullinger would have been appointed Zurich's chief pastor at the age of 44 or that he would have led such an extraordinarily productive life as he did.

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Bullinger the Liturgist a

**Text: Roland Diethelm Public
worship and social justice were
two sides of the same coin for both
Bullinger and Zwingli. Reformers
apprehended worship as a spiritual
act of faith for the glorification of
God. As an exercise of Christian life
and faith, it is at the very heart of
Bullinger's works.**

That Huldrych Zwingli's Reformation could have something important to contribute to Christian worship even today is something that many find hard to believe. Ever since Fritz Schmidt-Clausing and Markus Jenny published their research findings, however, it should have been evident – at least to experts in church history – that not only was Zwingli driven to his reforms above all by liturgical zeal, but that he can even be regarded as a creative liturgical innovator. Heinrich Bullinger remained true to this legacy and not only defended it, but also used it to establish a Reformed Christian community. His theological defence of the practice of worship in Zurich is a major achievement in its own right, from the point of view of both ecclesiastical and liturgical history. He also made significant contributions to the development of public and private prayer, while by no means least worthy of mention is the way in which he breathed life into Zwingli's liturgical reforms by placing the sermon at the heart of the church service and by distributing the Holy Scriptures throughout Zurich both to admonish and to indict, to teach and to provide comfort.

Like Martin Luther, so Huldrych Zwingli always insisted that preaching the truth was necessary in order to prepare people for the

social and ritual reforms ahead, which should then be instituted in an orderly fashion by the powers that be. What was not in dispute in Europe on the eve of the Reformation was that not only the church, but also society as a whole were both in urgent need of reform. Ever since late antiquity, liturgical reform had invariably meant social reform – and vice versa – and by the late Middle Ages if not before, the reform of both church and society had become a topic of ceaseless debate.

Vehicle of reform

The sermon as a vehicle of reform had been rediscovered as far back as the 13th century, when soon after their founding, both the Franciscans and Dominicans took to preaching – including in Zurich. The mendicant orders retained their leadership as sermonizers only until the 14th century, however, when they were obliged to hand over this role to various Prädikaturen or "preacherships". Whereas some of these were set up by bishops and others by civic elites, their mission was always the same – namely to preach the Christian message to

both educated citizens and the clergy using the ancient skills of rhetoric and scientific discourse. The Prädikaturen of Basel and Strasbourg both became famous far and wide and by 1475, even Winterthur had its own preachership.

The only big centre not to have a preachership was Zurich, although it did of course have the office of Leutpriester or "people's priest", whose pastoral duties included the preaching of sermons. In this city, too, therefore, the year 1523 saw the beginning of a number of visible institutional reforms.

After the iconoclasm and institutional upheavals of the year 1525, Zurich began to pursue a path very different from that of Wittenberg, where Luther had put a stop to attempts by Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt to foment excesses of a similar nature. In Heinrich Bullinger's view, it was this that caused the Lutheran Reformation to lose momentum half way through, as he explained in the preface to his vast, liturgically oriented apologia of the Zurich Reformation. Drawing on such ancient Christian authorities as Lactantius and Augustine, he went on to prove that whereas simple public worship was conducive to a just and God-serving city state, extravagant and highly ritualized ceremonies inevitably led to idolatry and social injustice.

Simplicity of practice

Simplicity of practice modelled on that of the early apostolic church thereafter became one of the hallmarks of the Zurich Reformation. While Zwingli was castigating the blatant hypocrisy of a church that had commercialized God's grace, repeatedly drawing attention to the yawning discrepancy between outer cultus (tradition) and inner engagement – a discrepancy that must have been glaringly obvious to all attentive Christians by the late 15th and early 16th centuries –, Bullinger's chief concern was with the legitimacy of the cultus and the public laws to which it

“Bullinger's chief concern was with the legitimacy of the cultus and the public laws.”

and Preacher

had given rise. What both men had in common was their belief that public worship and social justice were two sides of the same coin.

Indeed, all the great Reformers shared the view that true worship, as Christ taught the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4, 23 ff., was a spiritual act of faith in which the individual acknowledged God as a good and compassionate God and himself as a sinner, pardoned and given the gift of life by that same God. Bullinger analysed this act in Sermon No. 35 of his *Dekaden* of 1552. Whereas the inner process was an act of faith visible only to God, the purpose of the external act, or so he argued, was not only to exercise that faith, but also to glorify God and hence to testify before others. As the motivation underlying the external act was invisible, hypocrisy was bound to be a risk. Yet wherever the commandment to love thy neighbour was not lived in practice, Bullinger continued, so the (invisible) love of God must likewise be open to doubt.

These two characteristics of worship also describe the Reformation's two primary concerns – namely to prevent hypocrisy on the one hand and to promote Christian charity on the other. The emphasis given to the didactic purpose of worship ("ethical worship") was merely an outward manifestation of the underlying motivation, which was to glorify God and to obey his twin commandments to love God and love thy neighbour. The solidarity of a community of worshippers was no replacement, in Bullinger's eyes, for the cultus. After all, he argued, both were an expression of the same invisible inner worship and could even be said to enhance the same.

This brings us very close to the Catholic Counterreformation with its Baroque ideology, even if this is one conclusion that Bullinger himself, with his humanistic interest in simplicity and inspired by the Early Church Fathers, would certainly not have drawn. For him, the submission of the hu-

man to the divine will was a purely spiritual matter which the non-spiritual trappings of divine worship would almost certainly disrupt. Instead, the spirit was glorified and elevated precisely by serving its creator.

Contrary to popular supposition, therefore, the Reformation deliberately chose not to reduce the number of public services held, although it did bring about a concentration of these on Sundays and on the Christian feasts that had shaped the medieval year. In other words, the Lord's Supper was henceforth celebrated only at Easter, Pentecost and Christmas and not every Sunday in the month, as Calvin tried to have it in Geneva and as is still the case in Lutheran areas even today.

Worship during the week

Church services during the week were a commonplace occurrence in Reformation Zurich. Even if one counts only those services that included a sermon, one still arrives at a figure of 624 a year for the Grossmünster alone. The city's three main churches, the Grossmünster, Fraumünster and St. Peter's, together with the Spitalkirche ("Zuo den predigern"), were viewed as a

team whose collective mission it was to provide the "Christian city" with a regular supply of sermons. Between them, the four churches supplied the 5,000 inhabitants of Zurich with six services on Sunday, three on Saturday and one morning and one evening service on weekdays (except on market day, Friday, when there was just one, early morning sermon), this translating into some 18 services a week. The situation was similar in Basel, Strasbourg and many other towns in southern Germany.

Besides defending the Reformed faith, Heinrich Bullinger also took up the cause of educating the Protestant clergy, as is evident from innumerable writings of his in which "church discipline" is applied first and foremost to those responsible for spreading the word and leading the congregation in prayer. What these writings also prove is that public worship was not merely important to Zwingli's successor, but in fact was at the very heart of all his endeavours.

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A look back at the history of the Reformation: The iconoclast as depicted in Bullinger's *Chronicle of the Reformation*, copied by Heinrich Thomann 1605 (Zurich Central Library, Ms 316, f. 134r)

Text: Urs B. Leu **The persecution of the Anabaptists by both Zwingli and Bullinger is bound to prove a contentious issue in this 500th anniversary year. The programme of events therefore includes a one-day symposium devoted exclusively to the baptism controversy to be held on 26 June – an event which Baptists from all over the world have been invited to attend. How should Bullinger's attitude to and treatment of the Anabaptists be judged, bearing in mind the larger historical context? The author of this article is unsparing in his verdict.**

Bullinger and t

The Anabaptists, the fourth of the new churches to emerge from the Reformation after the Lutherans, the Reformed church and the Anglicans, were themselves split into the most diverse factions and groups. This much is evident from comments by one of their leaders, Balthasar Hubmaier of Waldshut, who said that the doctrine of baptism he himself taught differed from that of the Anabaptist mystic, Hans Hut, as did "heaven from earth, east from west, Christ from Belial."

Historians differentiate between the various factions according to either theological (Zealots, Spiritualists, Anitrinitarians etc.) or regional criteria (the Swiss Anabaptists, Austrian-South German Anabaptists, Dutch-North German Anabaptists). Yet there were various theological schools of thought even within these regional groupings.

Because of this heterogeneity, Baptism cannot be traced back to one single person, nor can it be reduced to a socio-revolutionary movement. Those Anabaptists with whom Bullinger was concerned were above all the Anabaptists of Zurich, who belonged to – or rather founded – the so-called Swiss Brethren.

Doctrinal differences

While the Zurich Reformers perceived the church as a *Volkskirche* – a mass church

open to all comers, the Anabaptists argued that a church could only exist where there was a fellowship of true believers who had committed themselves to follow Jesus without compromise. On the question of authority, they both agreed that the church derived its authority from God himself and must therefore be obeyed. Bullinger took this a step further inasmuch as he believed it was the duty of a Christian government not only to obey the church, but even to defend it by force of arms, if necessary – including by the imposition of the death penalty on exceptionally recalcitrant heretics. The Anabaptists, on the other hand, drew a clear distinction between church and state and hence categorically rejected all forms of authoritarian intervention and punishment on matters of faith or conscience.

The main doctrinal bone of contention, however, was of course the question of paedobaptism versus credobaptism. In theological terms, Bullinger did not advance much beyond Zwingli and on the question of infant baptism remained a staunch advocate of his predecessor's views. While not such an original thinker as Zwingli, Bullinger was a brilliant and stimulating teacher, a persuasive writer, efficient organizer and astute politician who succeeded in lending a European dimension to the Reformation that Zwingli had until then centred almost exclusively on Zurich.

The Anabaptists preached the doctrine of credobaptism or baptism of the faithful, as explained in Chapter 6 of the Epistle to the Romans, in which Paul explains that only those who have understood the gospel and who wish to commit themselves to Jesus should be baptized. Even Zwingli once admitted that he, too, had at one time felt that children should not be baptized until they were old enough to understand the meaning of the sacrament.

Zwingli's disputation with the Anabaptists

Zwingli's first disputation with the Anabaptists was in December 1524, when he published his "Wer ursach gebind zu ufruren". After conceding that there was indeed no unequivocal mention of infant baptism in the New Testament, he continued as follows "We therefore have to see whether there is anything on this subject in the Old Testament. And though we find nothing on baptism, we do find something on an equivalent custom, namely that of circumcision. This is a sign of the faith that Abraham had before he was circumcised, as in Romans 4 [Romans 4, 12]. Indeed, this sign was given to infants on the eighth day, who could not of course know anything of faith; and yet circumcision is a sign of faith. That baptism has now been introduced instead of circumcision, continues the custom of giving the faithful a sign. Paul also touches on this in his Epistle to the Colossians, [Colossians 2,

"Zurich was certainly not a centre of tolerance."

11]: "In him (Christ) also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with him in baptism etc." I know very well what Paul is talking about here. I cite this, however, merely as an instance of baptism being regarded as the equivalent of circumcision. As in Old Testament times, therefore, circumcision was given to children and as baptism has come to replace

circumcision, it follows that Christian children should also be baptised."

According to Zwingli, circumcision in Old Testament times was a sign of the covenant, a function that in the New Testament passes to baptism. Bullinger adopted Zwingli's interpretation and began espousing these views himself as early as November 1525, when they formed the subject of a long and detailed letter to Heinrich Simmler of Berne.

Tolerance?

In addition to Bullinger's countless handwritten drafts, notes, tracts and letters of advice, two of those of his published works that have survived also contain attacks on the Anabaptists. The first of these, "Von dem unverschampten fraefel, ergerlichem verwyrren unnd unwarhafftem leeren der selbgsesandten Widertoeuffern", appeared first in German in 1531 and then in Latin in 1535, while the second, "Der Widertoeuffer-

he Anabaptists

The disbanding of a nocturnal Anabaptist assembly near Altstetten ZH 1574 (Zurich Central Library, Wickiana, Ms. F23, p. 393 f.)





A look back at the history of the Reformation: The Kappeler Milk Soup, from Bullinger's Chronicle of the Reformation, copied by Heinrich Thomann 1605 (Zurich Central Library, Ms 316, f. 418v)

en ursprung, fůrgang, Secten, waesen", which is considered to be his main work on this subject, was published in 1560 in both German and Latin. When one considers his writings in their entirety, however, it soon becomes clear that the problem posed by the Anabaptists was one the chief pastor wrestled with throughout his theological career, if not for his own church, then on behalf of other Protestant churches and pastors both in Switzerland and abroad.

Bullinger never wavered either in his belief in infant baptism or in his rejection of various Anabaptist doctrines and was equally consistent in his views on how they should be punished. Seen through his eyes, the Anabaptists' refusal to accept church order posed a threat to the social order too, meaning that they were to be regarded not as mere troublemakers, but rather as seditious revolutionaries. As Bullinger well knew, it was the duty of the authorities to take action against such rebels and even to put them to death, if necessary. The Anabaptists in Zurich were indeed persecuted and imprisoned and those too obdurate to recant, even when pastors were dispatched to set them right, could expect banishment at the very least and in some cases even death. Like the civic authorities in Zurich,

Bullinger, too, was still straitjacketed by a medieval way of thinking on this point.

Zurich was certainly not a centre of tolerance, despite claims to the contrary by Delio Cantimori, the famous Italian church historian whose 1949 work on the religious refugees who sought asylum there credits Bullinger himself with having championed their cause. Although only two Anabaptists were executed during Bullinger's time in Zurich – both of them in 1532 –, some of the sources preserved in the city archives suggest that those incarcerated in Zurich's prisons were not just interrogated, but tortured as well.

Not that this was something peculiar to Bullinger's term of office, for the methods in question lingered on for many years thereafter. Sources from the 17th century, for example, tell not only of the execution of the Anabaptists' leader, Hans Landis, but also of other atrocities, such as the use of thumbscrews on children to force them to betray their Anabaptist parents' whereabouts. Those who raised their voices in protest at the practice of condemning people to death on purely religious grounds even as early as the 16th century, one of whom was the humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam, were largely ignored in Zurich.

The larger historical picture

Bullinger also suspected the Anabaptists of Zurich of being in league with the Thuringian revolutionary, Thomas Můntzer, who in 1525 was beheaded following the collapse of the uprising he had fomented against the established order and hierarchies. While the chief pastor of Zurich had not always held this view and was certainly not alone in his suspicions, there can be no doubt that he was the most influential person to make such false claims concerning the Anabaptists, nor did he have any qualms about publicizing them in the later of his two anti-Anabaptist works. We also know from a list in Bullinger's hand preserved in the city archives that Bullinger had planned to present this work to such illustrious personalities as Queen Elizabeth I of England, King Maximilian II of Bohemia and Elector Frederick III of the Palatinate, to mention but a few. Remarkably, the 101 names on the list include not just Protestants, but Catholics too – even as far afield as France, Poland, Austria, Scotland and Lithuania.

This was the work that caused Bullinger's distorted picture of the Anabaptists in general and of the Zurich Anabaptists in particular to be read and – even today – accepted as gospel truth all over Europe. The venerable North American church historian, Donald F. Durnbough, once commented on the spread of this falsehood as follows: "The two movements [Můntzer and the Zurich Anabaptists] can only be placed in the same camp by ignorance or prejudice." Having witnessed the emergence of the Zurich Anabaptists at first hand, Bullinger should have known better!

This year's 500th anniversary of Bullinger's birth is an excellent opportunity for us to take a more self-critical and discriminating look at the various Anabaptist groups than we have done in the past. Not everything that takes place outside the Volkskirche is a sect, as Bullinger – and many of our contemporaries – would have us believe. Church history is full of examples to prove that *bona fide* Christian life need not be confined to the big state churches.

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Interview: Stephan Landis, Photos: Gion Pfander
Is Bullinger merely a heavyweight historically or are his views on church leadership, doctrine and the ministry still relevant to the Reformed Church of today and to his own successor and Head of the Zurich Reformed Church Council, Ruedi Reich?



The Successor's Successor

Reformierte Presse: As Head of the Zurich Reformed Church Council, you are – so to speak – a successor of Heinrich Bullinger, who held the office of “Antistes” or chief pastor. Whereas Bullinger himself was in favour of a synodal church order, in practice he proved himself to be a strong leader. How do you view Bullinger’s legacy in this area and is it relevant to the Episcopalian debate now taking place within the Reformed Church?

Ruedi Reich: A synodal church order and spiritual leadership are not a contradiction in terms. The authority Bullinger exercised was a spiritual one and hence Episcopal – in the very best sense of the term. Not only was he head of the synod, but he was also chief pastor at the Grossmünster in Zurich. This was at a time when people wanted to hear their church leaders preach as well.

For me personally, having long been familiar with Bullinger even before this anniversary year, this combination of the two offices is indeed a model

worthy of emulation. That in the late 1960s, the Head of the Zurich Reformed Church Council became a full-time functionary of whom no preaching was required and hence no real contact with a church or, of course, with parishioners, is something I have never understood, especially as it runs counter to the Reformed Church tradition. Yet the duties of the Head of the Zurich Reformed Church Council are not merely administrative, for whoever holds the post is invariably taken to be the “voice of the church” – not only within the Reformed Church itself, but also at the ecumenical level and in our relations with both the state and the public at large. In spite of my secular title, I still try to fulfil the duties of my office first and foremost as a theologian. For although there are no rules that might prevent the appointment of a layperson to this office, in practice, the incumbents have always been theologians. This is a clear indication that the synod, which itself consists largely of lay people, still wants to



“ A synodal church order and spiritual leadership are not a contradiction in terms. ”

have a theologian at the helm. What the office is called is unimportant in my view. Everyone in Canton Zurich knows that the Head of the Zurich Reformed Church Council is a pastor, albeit a pastor without a flock.

Sharing the same creed was essential to the Reformers. Does the fact that our church has no single binding creed mean that we prefer to discuss unity in terms of practice rather than beliefs?

I would be even more scathing and say that we often have trouble agreeing even on the practice. The 19th century's abolition of the liturgical creed in favour of a creed to be defined and used at the pastor's discretion was a big mistake in my view and actually helped foster the very thing the Reformers had wanted to prevent, which was a clerical elite with powers extending even beyond their medieval role as ministers of the sacraments. Henceforth, it was up to the pastor either to use or not to use a creed of far-reaching ecumenical significance. This misguided decision was doubtless at least in part a consequence of the late 19th century tendency to misinterpret the creed in fundamentalist terms. Confessions of faith, however, must be interpreted and reinterpreted again and again and can neither be imposed nor withheld merely according to the pastor's whim. The Reformers' own confessions of faith, including Heinrich Bullinger's "Second Helvetic Confession", differ from the liturgical use of the creed of the early church in that they were intended primarily as a starting point for theological discourse and hence carry most weight there, rather than in church. Yet even these confessions have been largely forgotten among Switzerland's Reformed Churches.

The "Prophezei", the precursor of the theological faculty in Zurich, was important to Bullinger as a place of theological preparation for pastoral work, and this

was a matter especially close to his heart. What are your views on the loosening of the ties between theological doctrine and the church?

We should perhaps use the past tense when talking about this, given that the drifting apart you mention was at its most pronounced in the 1970s and 1980s. What has happened during the past 10 years, on the other hand, is for me a source of hope. Theological study groups have begun springing up at parish level and theological issues are becoming an increasingly important component in the further training of our pastors. We enjoy excellent relations with the theological faculty here in Zurich and know from experience how important it is to the faculty to hear our opinion on various matters – including appointments. This is not policymaking behind closed doors, but rather a concerted effort to ensure the continued presence of the Reformed tradition in the religious discourse of the day.

Going beyond Zwingli and refuting – at least up to a point – Calvin's doctrine of the fourfold ministry, Bullinger greatly strengthened the pastor's role as preacher. In Zurich, however, the trend is towards a spreading of the various roles among more than one person. What are your views on this?

What is important to the Reformed Church is that the concepts of the Reformers are not inscribed in stone. While Calvin's fourfold ministry can be read as a caution against an excessively pastor-centric church, Bullinger was anxious to stress the sheer variety the ministry inevitably entailed. And it is precisely because of this that I regard the distinction now being drawn between the different aspects of the ministry to be an opportunity, even if it is difficult to know where to draw the line – and in some cases not even helpful to do so, either. Excessive specialization among parsons is much more of a problem in my view. Some young theologians these days prefer to go into chaplaincy work, rather than

// I regard the theological and the parochial as two halves of a whole. //



having a parish of their own, although I personally regard the theological and the parochial as two halves of a whole – the whole being a career which is at the same time a calling. The ministry is as varied as it is challenging, but whether one works in a parish, in a hospital or a prison, what is important is that one still feels that inner spark without which no one can become a pastor.

Bullinger's harsh treatment of the Anabaptists is an especially contentious issue at present. What are your feelings about this – and about the reconciliation with the Baptists planned for this anniversary year?

I regard the way in which both Zwingli and Bullinger treated the Anabaptists as nothing less than a betrayal of the gospel. As important as it is for the Zurich Reformed Church to face this issue head on, it would be equally wrong to view it in purely black and white terms, or to allow the debate to degenerate into a lamentation of our past failings. I was brought up to perceive the Reformed Church and the Nonconformists not as incompatible, but as complementary traditions. I have also learned a lot from the church historian, Fritz Blanke, who while acknowledging the core of the Baptists' message, nevertheless felt free to criticize in no uncertain terms the way in which they distance themselves from society – by refusing to hold public office, for example. Our meeting with the Mennonites, therefore, as the Anabaptists' successors, will be taken up not so much with some ritualized act of reconciliation, as with talks centred on the responsibility we now share in today's multicultural society.

And what about the international dimension? Does the Zurich Reformed Church still have the influence it once had – by no means least thanks to Bullinger's correspondence with leading personalities all over the continent?

During Bullinger's time as chief pastor, Zurich was indeed the leader of the Reformed Church in Europe, a role that later passed to Geneva. A lot has changed since then, of course, and the strength of the Reformed Churches today resides more in their parochial roots than in their international influence. Perhaps it is not by chance that when people in the 19th century began to take a renewed interest in Zwingli, they recast him as a "liberal theologian" and "patriotic hero". Meanwhile, Bullinger, who would have been a very poor choice indeed for any focus on the fatherland or on parish pump politics, was largely forgotten. Having said this, the Zurich Reformed Church continued to make waves both in Switzerland and beyond even well into the 20th century. I'm thinking of people like the refugees' pastor, Paul Vogt, and of our commitment to the aid organization of the Protestant Churches in Switzerland, which is also headquartered here in Zurich. These ties have given rise to contacts all over the globe that we continue to cherish even now. Then there is our institutional work on behalf of Switzerland's Reformed Churches, which includes a theological publishing house here in Zurich as well as a number of other interesting projects, such as the Zurich Bible Translation. I believe, moreover, that parish level awareness of the international dimension of the Christian message has increased in recent years. People today are part of a globalized world and they know that this has something to do with the gospel and with our tradition. Not that this is something peculiar to Zurich, of course. We have strong ties to the Federation of Protestant Churches in Switzerland, to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, to numerous aid organizations and missions and what all these ties point up is the truly global dimension of our work and of our responsibility to the Reformed Church as a whole – very much in the spirit of Heinrich Bullinger.

