

Heinrich Bullinger, the Covenant, and the Reformed Tradition in Retrospect

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My book, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition*,¹ was published sixteen years ago. Though it generally has been well received, my interpretation of Bullinger has also been the focus of some criticism. The purpose of this paper is to respond to the criticism.

When I wrote the book, I based my interpretation on a very wide reading of Bullinger's writings. In preparing this paper, I have again consulted the writings of Bullinger, and I intend to allow him to speak for himself as much as possible. Unfortunately, the constraints of time force me to relegate many of his thoughts to the footnotes. I wish to allow Bullinger to make his own testimony concerning what appears to me to be the fourfold focus of the criticism of my interpretation: (1) whether the covenant was the leading idea in his theology; (2) whether his concept of the covenant was bilateral or conditional; (3) whether he differed significantly from Calvin on predestination; and (4) whether his was a Reformed tradition different from Calvin's.

THE CENTRALITY AND NATURE OF THE COVENANT IN BULLINGER'S THOUGHT

I will first deal with the issues of the centrality and nature of the covenant in Bullinger's thought. Six years ago at this meeting, Professor Edward Dowey presented a paper entitled, "Heinrich Bullinger as Theologian: Thematic, Comprehensive, Schematic." In it, he criticized me for presenting Bullinger as "a rigorously systematic theologian, ... with ... the centrality of the covenant as his leading thought."²

In 1992, Aurelio A. Garcia Archilla published his book on the theology of history in Bullinger's thought in which he accused me of reading a conditional or bilateral covenant into Bullinger's thought and thus giving the human partner freedom of the will.³

Most recently, Richard Muller reviewed *Fountainhead of Federalism*,⁴ which I coauthored with Charles McCoy. He objects to the assertion that the covenant was the leading idea in Bullinger's thought, stating that Bullinger's *Decades* evidences little interest in the doctrine of the covenant and that the doctrine is almost entirely missing from *The Second Helvetic Confession*.

¹ Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980.

² "Heinrich Bullinger as Theologian: Thematic, Comprehensive, Schematic," *Calvin Studies V* (January 19-20, 1990), pp. 45, 58.

³ In his treatment, he accuses me of 1) making the covenant the ruling concept in Bullinger's thought; 2) and thus putting the human partner on an equal footing with God; and, therefore, 3) presupposing that Bullinger started from a semi-Pelagian stance. *The Theology of History and Apologetic Historiography in Heinrich Bullinger: Truth in History* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), pp. 17, 42-43, 50-51, 67, 314.

⁴ *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition. With a Translation of De testamento seu foedere Dei unico et aeterno (1534) by Heinrich Bullinger* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991).

His conclusion is, "Covenant is hardly the organizing principle of Bullinger's theology in general."⁵

In dealing with the issue of the covenant in Bullinger's thought, I will break his ministry into three periods: 1) from 1525 through the 1530s, the period in which he wrote *De testamento*; 2) the 1540s and 1550s, when he wrote the *Decades*; and 3) 1560 to 1575, the period of *The Second Helvetic Confession*.

1. 1525-1540

During the earlier part of the first period, from 1525 to 1533, Bullinger used the covenant idea repeatedly. Without taking the time to be more specific, the covenant was important in five manuscripts and three letters from 1525 to 1527.⁶ In addition to these texts, Bullinger also made use of the covenant idea in his first four publications,⁷ and again in 1532 in *The Office of the Prophet*.⁸

⁵ *Anglican & Episcopal History* LXIII (1994): 89-91

⁶ He first addressed the concept of the covenant in his manuscript treatise, "Von dem Touff" in 1525. Most of the elements of his later, fully developed doctrine of the covenant are already present. ("H. Bullinger an Heinrich Simler von dem Touff" [Nov-Dec 1525. Zurich ZB, Ms. A 82, fol. 75r-81r]). For a description of the argument, see Bullinger and the Covenant, pp. 5-8.

He then dealt with the concept at some length in three letters, two in 1526, and one to his fiancée in 1528. (1) To Mathias Schmid, 8 Feb. 1526 (*Heinrich Bullinger Werke. Zweite Abteilung. Briefwechsel* I: 1, #15 [Hereinafter cited as HBBW II]); (2) To Christoph Stültz, 27 Feb. 1526 [HBBW II: 1, #16]; (3) To Anna Adlischweiler, 24 Feb. 1528 [HBBW II: 1, #27]). For descriptions of the contents of these letters, see *Bullinger and the Covenant*, pp. 8-11.

He further developed the notion in three additional important manuscripts between 1525 and 1527. (1) "De institutione et genuino eucharistiae" (10 Dec. 1525. Zurich ZB, Ms. A 82, fol. 81r-89r); (2) "Antwort an Burchard" (1527? Zurich ZB, Ms. A 82, fol. 56v-73v). (For descriptions of the contents of these two manuscripts, see *Bullinger and the Covenant*, pp. 8-9, 11-14.) (3) "Scoliorum in evangelium hist. Lucae" (1527. Zurich ZB, Ms. D 149, 212 pp. [see Introduction, fol. lv-2v]).

In his "Studiorum Ratio" of 1527 (Burgerbibliothek Bern, Ms. 657), the covenant is given an extremely prominent place. After discussing the canon and the text of the Scripture, he turns to the "single scope of Scripture toward which all the biblical books return." It is "the eternal covenant." Therefore, "all the books of the holy Scripture have this one, common scope, the covenant of the Lord." *Heinrich Bullinger. Studiorum Ratio--Studienanleitung. I. Text und Uebersetzung*, pp. 74-77. The text has been edited and translated by Peter Stotz. Volume 2, *Einleitung Kommentar Register* consists mostly of Stotz's comments on Bullinger's text. See especially, pp. 195-203. Toward the end of the manuscript, Bullinger lists some 250 theological topics; the list is headed by a number of topics related to the covenant. *Studiorum Ratio* I: 128-129; II: 283-284.

⁷ He mentioned it briefly in two of them. *Vergleichung der uralten und unser zytten kaetzeryen* (1526), sig. bi(v) (*Heinrich Bullinger Werke. Erste Abteilung Bibliographie* I: 1, #1 [Hereinafter cited as HBBW I]); *Fruentliche ermanung zur Gerechtigkeit* (1526), sig. Ciii(v) (HBBW I: 1, #2). He used the concept prominently in the other two. *Anklag und ernstliches ermanen Gottes* (1528), esp. sig. Cii(v)-Civ (HBBW I: 1, #3). *De origine erroris in divorum ac simulachrorum cultu* (1529), sigs. B2-B7 #1 (HBBW I: 1, #11).

⁸ Here he again states that the entire scope of Scripture is the covenant that God made with the human race. Bullinger also professes here that God used Zwingli, like the Old Testament prophets, to restore "the chief points ... of the eternal covenant." *De prophetiae officio* (1532), fol. Iiv-VIir, XXXIIIr-XXXIIIv (HBBW I: 1, #33).

It was, however, in 1534 that Bullinger wrote his most famous work on the covenant, *De testamento, or A Brief Exposition of the One and Eternal Testament or Covenant of God*.⁹ In this extended treatise, he puts together all of the elements of the doctrine of the covenant that he had stated repeatedly since 1525. There are five major points that Bullinger makes about the covenant in *Q testamento*. 1) There is but one covenant in history, first made with Adam, renewed with Abraham and throughout the Old Testament, fulfilled and renewed by Christ, and taught by the Apostles. 2) This covenant is bilateral. In it, God promises to be all sufficient; this is fulfilled in Christ. The conditions of the covenant for humans are faith and love. 3) This covenant is the subject of all Scripture. All Scripture is the record of the covenant and all Scripture aims at the covenant. The covenant is the scope of all Scripture. 4) The old sacraments of the covenant, circumcision and the Passover, were replaced by Christ with baptism and the Eucharist. 5) The Christian faith is the essence of the covenant that was first made with Adam; the Reformation is but a renewal of the covenant after a long period of apostasy; therefore, the Reformed faith is the true Christian faith, the oldest religion of all, extending back to Adam.

Three years later, Bullinger published *The Old Faith*.¹⁰ Here he underscores his point about the antiquity of the Christian faith by saying that the message of faith, the Christian gospel, was first given to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15. He goes on to say that this faith was held throughout the Old Testament by the patriarchs and the prophets, and in the New Testament by the apostles, and was being renewed by the Reformation. It needs to be emphasized, however, that it was three years earlier, in *De Testamento*, that Bullinger affirmed the antiquity of the Christian faith and the catholic orthodoxy of the Reformed faith within the context of the covenant.

Bullinger also published his commentary on the New Testament epistles in 1537. The text of *De Testamento* was appended to this edition of the commentary and to every subsequent edition in Bullinger's lifetime.¹¹ This was in keeping with his statement in *De Testamento* that the covenant is the scope of all Scripture, or the "target at which all Scripture aims."¹² Bullinger published three

⁹ *De testamento seu foedere Dei unico & aeterno Henrychi Bullingeri brevis expositio* (1534) (HBBW I: 1, #54.) For an English translation, see McCoy and Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism*.

¹⁰ *Der alt gloub* (1537) (HBBW I: 1, #99).

¹¹ *In omnes apostolicas epistolas, divi videlicet Pauli XIII. et VII. canonicas, commentarii Henrychi Bullingeri ab ipso iam recogniti, & nonnullis in locis aucti*. (1537, 1539, 1544, 1549, 1558) (HBBW I: 1, #84-88).

¹² *De Testamento*, fol. 16-17.

additional works in the late 1530s in which the covenant played a prominent role.¹³ So, by 1540, the covenant was an extremely well established theme in his thought.

2. 1540-1560

In the middle two decades of his ministry, Bullinger continued his heavy use of the covenant idea. He briefly deals with the covenant doctrine in two of his commentaries on the gospels, on Matthew in 1542, where he affirmed the eternal covenant and referred his reader to *De Testamento*,¹⁴ and on Luke in 1546.¹⁵ In the 1550s, Bullinger used the covenant theme liberally. Although I cannot take time to deal with seven of the works in which he deals with the covenant,¹⁶ I want to detail three

¹³ (1) *De scripturae sanctae auctoritate certitudine firmitate et absoluta perfectione* (1538) (HBBW I: 1, #111). Though Prof. Dowey claims that “there is no mention of the covenant” in this writing (“Heinrich Bullinger as Theologian,” p. 49), Bullinger does introduce the covenant briefly (fol. 6r), just before his discussion of the moral law; he brings the covenant up again in connection with the law of God and the true gospel (fol. 55r-55v); he deals with the antiquity of the true faith (from Adam) and the purpose of the Levitical priesthood and ceremonial law being to help the Jews keep the conditions of the covenant (fol. 67r-70v); dealing with the sacraments, he refers to the Ark of the Covenant as “a testimony of the covenant struck between God and the people” and mentions the tablets of the covenant that were kept in the Ark (fol. 89r). It is true, however, that there is no extended discussion of the covenant.

(2) *De omnibus sanctae scripturae libris eorumque praestantia & dignitate* (1539) (HBBW I: 1, #114). This short treatise features the covenant. The Scripture is the record of the eternal covenant. The Decalogue and the Love Commandment detail the conditions of the covenant (sig. Aiii(v)-Aiv).

(3) *De origine erroris libri duo* (1539) (HBBW I: 1 #12). In this greatly enlarged version of two earlier titles, Bullinger lays out the entire covenant doctrine early in the treatise (fol. 19r-26v); it is just under the surface in much of the text; and Bullinger brings it up again when he deals with the sacraments (fol. 190v-191v).

¹⁴ Commenting on the “Parable of the Marriage Feast,” in Matthew 22: 1-14, he states, “Observe in this and other parables that there is one marriage, only one vineyard, and therefore only one covenant and testament. I speak about this in my book *De unico & aeterno testamento*.” *In sacrosanctum Iesu Christi Domini nostri Evangelium secundum Matthaeum Commentariorum libri XII*. (1542), fol. 197-197b (HBBW I: 1, #144).

¹⁵ Here he explains that God used the human custom in making covenants when he freely bound himself to humanity. God confirmed the covenant with an oath: it was “a promise and a contract (pactio) confirmed by the oath of God” (Genesis 17). The promise was the coming redemption of humankind by Christ. The proper human response to God’s goodness and grace in the covenant was a life of purity and righteousness. Comment on Luke 1:72-75. *In luculentum et sacrosanctum Evangelium domini nostri Iesu Christi secundum Lucam Commentariorum lib. IX*. (1546), fol. 24-24b (HBBW I: 1, #173)

¹⁶ (1) In 1552, he published his *The Evangelical Churches Are Neither Heretical Nor Schismatic But Clearly The Orthodox Churches Of Jesus Christ*. The thesis, stated in the title, goes back to *De Testamento*: the faith and doctrine of the Reformed church goes back to the original promise and covenant between God and Adam in Genesis 3:15. The covenant and its conditions, renewed and restated throughout the Old Testament and then by Christ and the Apostles, was still in force in the Reformed church of Bullinger’s day. *Ecclesias evangelicas neque haereticas neque schismaticas sed plane orthodoxas & catholicas esse Iesu Christi ecclesias* (1552), pp. 27-30, 86-92 (HBBW I: 1, 258).

(2) In *Von raechter hilff und erretung in noeten* (1552), sig. Cii(v), he deals with assurance of salvation in terms of the covenant (HBBW I: 1, #260).

(3) *He considers the matter of true salvation in terms of the covenant in Von rechter buoss oder besserung dess suendigen menschens* (1552), sigs. dvi(v)-ei (HBBW I: 1, #267).

(4) The establishment of the covenant in Genesis 3:15 and its renewal throughout the Old and New Testaments serves as the framework for his discussion of the sacraments in *Von dem heiligen Nachtmal unsers Herren Jesu Christi* (1553), sigs. biii(v), ciii di (HBBW I: 1, #268).

major works of the 1550s in which the notion of the covenant is quite prominent: his *Decades* of 1549-1551; his *Summa* of 1556; and his *Catechism* of 1559.

First I will treat his *Summa of the Christian Religion*. The covenant is prominently displayed. Bullinger intended it for the layman, and it is a summary of his earlier *Decades*. Early in the first section, on Scripture, he states that God relates with his people, both before and after Christ, by means of the covenant, and that the books of the Old and New Testaments are "the books of the covenant" (*pundsuecher*).¹⁷ In the second section, on God, he recounts how, after the fall, God reunited humans with himself by means of the covenant, which "the holy Scripture exhibits everywhere." Here Bullinger deals with the eternity of the single covenant, with the sacraments as the seals of the covenant, and with the conditional nature of the covenant. To keep the conditions of the covenant is to engage in true worship, which is to keep God's commandments, which are summarized in the Love Commandment.¹⁸ The covenant is also prominent in the section on the law. The law is God's will. It was given to Adam and summarized in the Decalogue, which in turn is summarized in the Love Commandment.¹⁹ In the section on the sacraments, Bullinger again returns to the covenant and its conditions. To be baptized is "to be inscribed in the register of the confederates and children of God." Baptism "is a testimony of our covenant with God," and it "reminds us, throughout our entire lives, of our duty and obligation" to walk in innocence of life. Similarly, the Lord's Supper reminds us "of our duty and obligation" to live a life of piety.²⁰ Finally, dealing with good works, Bullinger says that the guide for good works is the Decalogue, which briefly stated, is "the love of God and the neighbor."

(5) The covenant also plays a significant role in his discussion of grace in *De gratia Dei* (1554), fol. 18b-20b (HBBW I: 1, #276).

(6) In *Von dem Heil der Gloeubigen* (1555), passim (HBBW I: #278), he again argues for the antiquity of the Christian faith and the covenant from Adam through Christ and the Apostles. The faithful are obligated, by the seal of the covenant (circumcision in the Old Testament, baptism in the New), to obey God's commandments in faith.

(7) His *Sermons for the Feast Days of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* of 1558 contains twenty-four sermons. In the fifth sermon, on the circumcision of Jesus, he highlights the covenant, outlining the same five basic points that he developed in *De Testamento*. (1) There is only one eternal covenant, first made with Adam and renewed with Abraham, then fulfilled by Christ, who is the substance of the covenant. (2) It is a bilateral covenant. God's part is to give every spiritual blessing as well as corporal blessings to His faithful. In return, "These things are required from the confederates of God: soundness of faith, and sincere love and holy innocence of life, and simple obedience, in the firmest hope." (3) The covenant is the scope of Scripture: "These obligations are copiously expounded in the Decalogue and in the rest of holy Scripture." (4) Baptism replaces circumcision as the sign of the covenant. Christ wishes to be "circumcised with the old people and then baptised with us" because he is the "savior of both people." (5) The Christian faith is as old as humankind is implied in the prior quotation. *Festorum dierum dominini et servatoris nostri Iesu Christi Sermones ecclesiastici* (1558), pp. 40-44.

Bullinger also mentions the covenant in the first sermon (p. 2). In another sermon, he presents the Lord's Supper as a sign and seal of the covenant, which replaces the Passover (pp. 67-70). Finally, the covenant is important in his discussion of the Anabaptists (pp. 172-173).

¹⁷ Bullinger explains that there was an oral tradition before Moses; all of the Patriarchs from Adam up to Moses knew the word of God and belonged to the church of God. *Summa Christenlicher Religion* (1556), fol. 2b-4, 10-10b (HBBW I: 1, #283).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. 30b-32b.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 46-51.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 146-147, 156.

Clearly, the covenant is a major focus in this 368 page *summa* of the Christian religion. All five of the major points of *De Testamento* are present: (1) the eternity of the covenant; (2) its bilateral nature; (3) the entire Scripture as the “books of the covenant”; (4) the role of the sacraments of the covenant; and (5) the antiquity of Christianity. The question now is, if the covenant is so prominent in the *Summa*, which is a summary of the *Decades*, why is it, as Muller insists, that the *Decades* evidence little interest in the doctrine of the covenant? The answer is that the *Decades* do evidence considerable interest in the covenant.

In fact, the covenant is the thread that ties the *Decades* together. Beginning with the first sermon of the first Decade, “On the Word of God,” Bullinger illustrates the eternal covenant within the context of the oral tradition of the Patriarchs before Moses. He says the patriarchs taught that “God came together with the human race by a covenant, and He obligated himself to the faithful as the faithful obligated themselves to him.”²¹ The covenant appears again in sermon four when Bullinger discusses justification by faith, in which he states that nothing should be added or subtracted from the covenant that God made with Abraham and his seed. Abraham was justified by faith (Gal. 3: 16-18), and so are all of God’s faithful, whose faith will produce love, which is the fulfillment of the law.²²

In the last sermon of the First Decade, Bullinger returns to love of God and the neighbor as an introduction to the next fourteen sermons dealing with the Decalogue.

In sermon two of the Second Decade, Bullinger begins his treatment of the moral law. When God declared to Moses, “I am the Lord your God” (Exod. 20: 2—at the very beginning of the first commandment), He repeated the same promise of the covenant that He made to Abraham (Gen. 17: 1)—i.e., that He would be the abundant fullness to all the faithful. Secondly, Bullinger goes on to state that we must understand “what the good Lord demands from us in return and what our duty is” (*quid vicissim a nobis requirat bonus dominus quod nam sit nostrum officium*). Bullinger explains that the first table of the moral law details the duty of humans to God, the second table, their duty to the neighbor.²³ The conditions of the covenant thus become the framework for his discussion of the moral law. This is detailed in thirteen sermons, up through sermon four of the Third Decade.

Bullinger chooses to give an extended exposition of the covenant in the Third Decade, sermon six, where he treats the Jewish sacraments under the title, “The Ceremonial Laws of God.” He explains that God followed the human custom in making mutual covenants and leagues when He first made the covenant with the human race, with Adam, after the fall. He renewed the covenant with Abraham and Moses, and fulfilled it and renewed it with Christ. This covenant is eternal; its chief points have never changed. There are “two chief points or conditions” of the covenant. The first is what God promises—that He will be all-sufficient to his people, which includes “the

²¹*Sermonum Decades duae* (1549), fol. 3b (HBBW I: 1, #179). *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*. Edited for the Parker Society. Four volumes (Cambridge: University Press, 1849-1852) I: 44 (Decade I, Sermon 1) (Hereinafter cited as Parker I [I:1]). After this statement, Bullinger discusses the writing down of the tradition by Moses, the message of the prophets, the clarification of the word of God by Christ, and the amplification of it by the apostles. In succeeding sermons, Bullinger makes the point that the Old Testament is also Christian Scripture, that in fulfilling the law Christ changed circumcision into baptism, and that the Scripture must be interpreted according to the Love Commandment. *Decades* (1549), fol. 8b, 14. Parker I: 58-59, 76-77 (I:2, 3).

²²*Decades* (1549), fol. 26-28. Parker I: 115-121 (I: 4).

²³*Decades* (1549), fol. 57-57b. Parker I: 214-217 (II: 2).

remission of sins, the renewal of life, and eternal glory.” Bullinger continues, “The second condition of the covenant made between God and humans prescribes to man what he must do and how he must conduct himself.” The condition for humans is to walk before God and live their lives according to the will of God. These conditions are specified in the two tables of the law. Circumcision was added as an outward sign or seal of the covenant by which God gathered his people “into one church.”²⁴

In the eighth sermon of the Third Decade, Bullinger again deals with the topic of the covenant. He explains that he will help his readers understand “that there is one covenant of the old and new church of God” and that “there is one means of true salvation” for all humans in history.²⁵ After nearly twenty pages discussing these issues, Bullinger concludes that he hopes that he has given sufficient proof that the old and the new people are one people of God.²⁶ Then, after turning to a short treatment of how “the New Testament differs from the Old,” Bullinger refers his readers to his treatises *The Old Faith* and *De Testamento* “which I know are very well-known among you.”²⁷

In the Fourth Decade, the subject of the covenant comes up in sermons one, two, three, five, and eight.²⁸ In the Fifth Decade, the covenant continues to be an important theme. In the introduction to sermon two, “On the Unity of the Church,” Bullinger explains, “There is only one church of the old people before the coming of Christ and ours or the new people after the coming of Christ.” Then, rather than specifying the differences, he refers the reader back to the eighth sermon of the third decade, where, as we have seen, he went into detail about the covenant and mentioned *De Testamento* as a primary source of his teaching on the covenant.²⁹

²⁴*Sermonum Decas tertia. Tomus secundus* (1550), fol. 47-48b, 49b; see also fol. 51b (HBBW I: 1, #180). Parker II: 168-173 (III: 6).

²⁵*Decades* (1550), fol. 68b. Parker II: 236 (III: 8).

²⁶He writes, “the ancient fathers had the same sacraments, the same invocation of God, the same hope, expectation and inheritance, the same spirit, the same faith and teaching that we have; and that ... the faithful fathers of the Old Testament and we, the believers of the New Testament, are one church, one people, all of whom are saved under one fellowship, under a single covenant, and only one means of salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ.” *Decades* (1550), fol. 86. Parker II: 293 (III: 8).

²⁷*Decades* (1550) fol. 88. Parker II: 299 (III: 8).

²⁸In sermon one, Bullinger discusses the first preaching of the gospel to Adam and the renewal of the promise to Abraham and his seed. Parker III: 13-19; cf. 44-45. In sermon two and in sermon eight, he quotes Jeremiah 31: 34 in terms of the promise of the covenant. Parker IV: 91, 318. In the third sermon, on the knowledge of God, he introduces the covenant in connection with the name *Shaddai*, used in Genesis 17:1 when God made the covenant with Abraham. Parker IV: 135-136. In sermon five, he defines true religion in terms of the covenant with God. Indeed, he says, religion is synonymous with the covenant. Parker IV: 232.

²⁹*Decades* (1552), fol. 282 (HBBW I: 1, #184) Parker IV: 50-51 (V: 2).

Bullinger devotes sermons six through nine to the sacraments. The “eternal covenant” comes up several times in sermon six.³⁰ He continues his general discussion of sacraments in sermon seven, comparing the sacraments of the Old and New Testament in terms of the covenant.³¹

Throughout sermon eight (“Of Baptism”), the covenant plays a very prominent role when he compares baptism with circumcision. In defining “the people of God,” Bullinger argues for infant baptism on the basis of the covenant and against the Anabaptists. For Bullinger, baptism initiates people into the covenant and thus into the church, and it reminds “us of the duties of piety,” that is “to live innocently and to love our brothers ... with whom we have come together by means of a mutual covenant³² into one body through baptism.”³³

The topic of sermon nine is “The Lord’s Holy Supper,” which replaces the Passover as a sacrament of the covenant.³⁴ At the very end of the sermon, he warns that Satan is always trying to make the Supper a matter of contention, though it has been instituted “in the church as a sign of **that covenant which will never be annuled.**”³⁵

After this survey of the *Decades* it should be clear that the covenant is the substructure (substratum) of the entire fifty sermons. Though there is no sermon devoted entirely to the covenant, Bullinger introduced the covenant in the very first sermon, dealt with it in detail several times in the next forty eight sermons, and referred to it numerous times. Certainly, the eternal covenant is the thread that ties the *Decades* together.

The covenant also forms the structure for Bullinger’s catechism of 1559, his *Catechesis pro adultioribus scripta*. In the very first section, Bullinger explains that Scripture is called the Old and

³⁰In one place he refers to the covenant as “the pact and agreement (*pactum & conventio*) between God and men that has certain conditions and chief points.” *Decades* (1552), fol. 333b; see also fol. 323, 325b, and 335-335b (HBBW I: 1, #184). Parker IV: 280; see also 231, 244-345, 289 (V: 6).

³¹He deals with the sacraments as seals of the covenant and the promises of God; and he again specifies how, “by the power of the covenant,” both circumcision and baptism gather God’s people “into one church.” *Decades* (1552), fol. 336-337b; 341b-343; 345 (HBBW I: 1, #184). Parker IV: 294-301; 318-324; 333-334 (V: 7).

³²*compacti*, from *compaciscor* rather than *compango* since Bullinger uses *sum* with it. According to Karl Ernst Georges, *Ausführliches Lateinisch-Deutsches Handwoerterbuch* I: 1332: “*durch gegenseitigen Vertrag uebereinkommen.*”

³³In the conclusion of the sermon he states, “By baptism we are gathered together into the assembly (*coetus*) of the people of God. Whence by some it is called the first step or the sign of initiation by which the way into the church is opened. Not that we did not previously belong to the church. For whoever participates in that eternal covenant of Christ and the promises of God belongs to the church.” *Decades* (1552), fol. 359-359b (HBBW I: 1, #184). Parker IV: 399-400 (V: 8).

³⁴When discussing the meaning of the breaking of bread, he says, “At times, the most enduring covenants are consecrated by the breaking of bread.” The Supper unites the church and the members of the church with each other. It is “the testament of God and of our Lord” in the sense of a last will and testament. “Christ is the testator. All the faithful of Christ are appointed heirs.” Christ himself called the Supper a testament, “the new testament,” which is “the remission of sins,” as both Jeremiah (Jere. 31) and Paul (Heb 8) testify. *Decades* (1552), fol. 360 (HBBW I: 1, #184). Parker IV: 402-403 (V: 9). Bullinger’s use of the idea of testament in terms of a last will and testament goes back to his earliest expositions of the covenant idea in 1525 and 1526 (Baker, *Bullinger and the Covenant*, pp. 8-11).

³⁵*Decades* (1552), fol. 377b (HBBW I: 1, #184). Parker IV: 477-478 (V: 9). Emphasis added.

In the middle of sermon nine, Bullinger explains that “the promise and communion of Christ was not offered for the first time to us in the Supper.” For God promised “life and remission of sins” to Adam. Then He renewed the promise with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the other fathers. *Decades* (1552), fol. 367 (HBBW I: 1, #184). Parker IV: 434 (V: 9).

New Testament “because they are written about the testament or covenant of God.”³⁶ The third section of the catechism is entitled, “Concerning the covenant of God, which God made with humans, and concerning the true worship of God,” where the entire five points of his doctrine of the covenant are spelled out.³⁷ From here the Catechism moves to the law of God and the Decalogue, “by which the chief points of the covenant are more abundantly explained..., and true religion and the true worship of God are clarified...”³⁸ After covering the ten commandments, the catechumen concludes that the moral law teaches what humans owe to God and the neighbor and that the Love Commandment is the sum of all law.³⁹ The covenant thus forms the structure for the catechism of 1559, the same covenant that Bullinger had been teaching since 1525.

3. 1561-1575

The final period of Bullinger’s ministry is the period of The Second Helvetic Confession. Those (e.g., Dowey and Muller) who argue that the covenant was not so prominent in Bullinger’s thought generally point to the insignificant role that the covenant seems to play in The Second Helvetic Confession.

Bullinger hints at the idea of the eternal covenant in chapters eleven and thirteen of the Confession where he asserts that Christ is the only Savior of humankind from the beginning to the end of the world and that the gospel was known since the promise in Genesis 3: 15. Indeed, echoing his early writings, *De Testamento* and *The Old Faith*, Bullinger writes, “It is evident that the evangelical religion and teaching ... is the most ancient of all.”⁴⁰ Later, in chapter eighteen, he makes his familiar contrast between the old people (to whom God sent the patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets) and the new people of the new covenant (to whom He sent His only Son and the apostles).⁴¹

He uses the same terminology of “old” and “new” people in introducing the sacraments in chapter nineteen: “Some sacraments are of the old people, others of the new people. The sacraments of the old people were circumcision and the paschal lamb The sacraments of the new people are baptism and the Lord’s Supper.” Inasmuch as Christ is the substance of all these sacraments, “the sacraments of both people are equal.” But since Christ has come, the old sacraments have been replaced.⁴² This leads Bullinger into the chapter on baptism, the only place where he refers unequivocally to the covenant: “To be baptized in the name of Christ is to be

³⁶*Catechesis pro adultioribus scripta* (1559), fol 2 (HBBW I: 1, #377).

³⁷God’s promise was made initially to Adam, then to Abraham and his seed, that is, to all the faithful. The conditions or human duties in the covenant are faith in God and love of the neighbor. Those who stand firm in the covenant are called “religious ones, confederates, friends, and associates of God.” In fact, the word “religion” refers to the “bond of piety” and thus to a life of obedience. *Catechesis pro adultioribus scripta* (1559), fol. 6-8b (HBBW I: 1, #377).

³⁸The catechism explains further that the law is the will of God and the Decalogue is the compendium of all law. The first table of the Decalogue pertains to what duties humans owe to God in the covenant; the second table, what duties the faithful owe to the neighbor. *Catechesis pro adultioribus scripta* (1559), fol. 9-10 (HBBW I: 1, #377).

³⁹*Catechesis pro adultioribus scripta* (1559), fol. 27b, 29b (HBBW I: 1, #377).

⁴⁰*Confessio Helvetica Posterior*, XIII: 6. Philip Schaff (ed.), *The Creeds of Christendom* III: 262.

⁴¹*Confessio Helvetica Posterior*, XVIII: 4-5. Philip Schaff (ed.), *The Creeds of Christendom* III: 279.

⁴²*Confessio Helvetica Posterior*, XIX: 2, 5, 7. Philip Schaff (ed.), *The Creeds of Christendom* III: 285-287.

inscribed, initiated and received into the covenant and the family and indeed the inheritance of the sons of God.”⁴³

So, except for the instance I have just cited, why is the covenant itself is not a significant feature of the *Confession*? I believe Bullinger considered his use of this theological idiom unique enough that he felt that he should not include it as an organizing concept in a confession that he hoped would unify the Reformed churches. He felt that those who already knew his thought would see how the covenant fit in, but he also figured that the *Confession* was not the place to introduce the covenant idea to those unfamiliar with it. By the early 1560s, no confession of faith had utilized the doctrine of the covenant in any significant way. *The Heidelberg Catechism*, published in 1563, made scant reference to the covenant. The same is true of the *Scottish Confession* and *Belgic Confession* of 1560. When *The Second Helvetic Confession* was published in 1566, Bullinger was the only Reformed leader who had written a treatise on the covenant. It was not until the 1570s and 1580s that Ursinus and Olevianus began to make significant use of the concept. In fact, it is not until the *Westminster Confession of Faith* of 1647 that the covenant becomes a prominent feature in any Reformed confession. By that time, the concept of covenant was firmly rooted in Reformed thought.

During the 1560s, the period of the publication of *The Second Helvetic Confession*, Bullinger's use of the covenant did not abate. His three Old Testament commentaries from these years are shot through with the covenant. His commentary on Jeremiah of 1561 contains significant material on the covenant in comments on six chapters,⁴⁴ with a seventh, major discussion in his comments on chapter 31.⁴⁵ Bullinger also has an extensive discussion of the covenant in his Daniel commentary of 1565.⁴⁶ In his Isaiah commentary of 1567, the covenant appears briefly in nine sections,⁴⁷ in addition to which there are three extensive discussions of the covenant.⁴⁸ Then, in his *Epitome* of 1565, he uses the covenant as his unifying principle to

⁴³*Confessio Helvetica Posterior*, XX: 2. Philip Schaff (ed.), *The Creeds of Christendom* III: 290.

⁴⁴ The covenant is central to his comments on chapters one, two, three, four, eleven, and fifty. *Ieremias fidelissimus et laboriosissimus Dei propheta expositus per Heinrichum Bullingerum ministrum Ecclesiae Tigurinae Concionibus* CLXX (1575), fol. 10 13b, 21-22b, 29b, 84-86b, 266 (HBBW I: 1, #361).

⁴⁵ He develops his entire covenant doctrine commenting on verses 31 through 34. *Ieremias*, fol 187-190.

⁴⁶ In his comments on chapter nine, verse twenty-seven. *Daniel sapientissimus Dei propheta qui a vetustis polyhistor id est multiscius est dictus expositus Homilijs LXVI* (1565), fol. 109-110 (HBBW I: 1, #428).

⁴⁷ In his comments on chapters seven, eighteen, forty, forty one, forty-three, forty-five, fifty-five, fifty-nine, and sixty one. *Isaias excellentissimus Dei propheta, cuius testimoniis Christus ipse Dominus et eius apostoli creberrime usi leguntur expositus Homilijs CXC* (1567), fol. 41b-42, 89, 195-195b, 198b, 210, 226b, 277b, 310-310b, 319b (HBBW I: 1, #558).

⁴⁸ (1) Commenting on chapter twenty-four, Bullinger discusses punishments for violations of the covenant. (2) In chapter thirty three, he deals with the covenant in terms of faith and works. (3) In chapter fifty-six, he considers the conditions of the covenant, the duty of magistrates to enforce the conditions of the covenant, and salvation through God's grace in the covenant. *Isaias*, fol. 112b-113b, 158b-160, and 181-183.

summarize history from creation to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.⁴⁹ Clearly the doctrine was still important to Bullinger at the very time that the Confession was being written and published.

Following the publication of *The Second Helvetic Confession*, during the last years of his life, the covenant doctrine is important in several additional writings, in 1569,⁵⁰ in 1571,⁵¹ in 1573,⁵² and in 1574.⁵³

Considering Bullinger's continual and repeated use of the covenant motif for fifty years, from 1525 until the year before his death in 1574, I wish to ask the question again, **Was the covenant central in Bullinger's theology?**

Professor Dowey points to three statements in my book, *Bullinger and the Covenant*, where he believes that I overstated the importance of the covenant in Bullinger's thought.⁵⁴ In my second

⁴⁹ First made with Adam, the covenant was renewed with Abraham and with Moses. The conditions of the covenant, faith and sincerity of life, which are summarized in the Decalogue, remained the same throughout history. *Epitome temporum et rerum ab orbe condito ad primum usque annum Iothan regis Iudae* (1565), fol. 4, 13b-14b, 19 20 (HBBW I: 1, #430).

⁵⁰ In his *Bekehrung* of 1569, commenting on the conversion and baptism of the eunuch in Acts 8: 36-38, Bullinger treats baptism as "a covenant sign," and refers to those who have been baptized "into the new covenant" as God's "confederated people" through God's grace, who are now required to "lead a new life in all holiness, innocence and piety." He says that baptism "declares to us what blessings God gives to us and what He requires from us in return or what our obligation and duty is." Then he continues to discuss baptism in covenant terms. *Von der Bekehrung dess menschen zuo Gott und dem waeren Glouben* (1569), fol. 83b-89b (HBBW I: 1, #561).

⁵¹ This is Bullinger's treatise on the sufficiency and authority of Scripture in which he deals with the topic of the covenant. *De scripturae sanctae praestantia dignitate excellentissimaque autoritate perfectione, vel sufficientis* (1571), fol. 11-18b (HBBW I: 1, #565).

⁵² This is his history of persecution, where he makes extensive use of the covenant idea. He begins with the church before Christ. All of God's people since Adam and Eve were saved through faith in Christ alone. The promise of Genesis 3 was "repeated, renewed and clarified" throughout the Old Testament—to Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets. There was persecution of God's people in the Old Testament, and this persecution was continued in the time of Christ. The young innocents slaughtered by Herod "were under the grace and mercy of the promise of God, in the covenant of God; therefore, they also had the covenant sign, circumcision, in them, and were the children of God. . . ." *Vervolgung. Von der schweren langwirigen vervolgung der Heiligen Christlichen Kirchen* (1578), fol. 11b-18 (HBBW I: 1, 576).

⁵³ Here Bullinger again treats the covenant in connection with Christ in a sermon on the 130th Psalm. *Zwo Prediaen ueber cxxx. ouch cxxxiii Plalmen Davids* (1574), fol. 10b-11 (HBBW I: 1, #582). 21

⁵⁴ *Bullinger and the Covenant*,

(1) In chapter one, I wrote of Bullinger in 1525, "Perhaps it is too early to call Bullinger a covenant theologian, but unquestionably the covenant became the first principle of his theology in the next two years, during which time he used the covenant idea in a variety of circumstances." pp. 9-10.

Then after dealing with those writings in which he highlighted the covenant during 1526 and 1527, (2) I concluded that by 1527 "the covenant had become the key interpretive motif of Bullinger's theology, the principal formative and organizing factor in his thought." p. 14.

(3) Finally, in chapter two, while dealing with predestination, I wrote that his "doctrine of predestination must be understood within the context of his covenant idea, for his system, such as it was, centered around the covenant.-- And his covenant notion was based on his biblical exegesis and his understanding of how God worked in history, not on logical categories and dogmatic formulations. That is to say, the covenant was not a dogmatic principle...; it was, however, the cornerstone and organizing principle of his thought." p. 48.

book, *Fountainhead of Federalism*, Muller feels that I compounded my error by writing: “[Bullinger’s] entire theological system was organized around the idea of a bilateral, conditional covenant, made first by God with Adam, a covenant that would endure until the end of the world.”⁵⁵

Even though I attempted to distance Bullinger from later covenant theology, I was perhaps not as careful with language as I should have been. Nevertheless, I did not say Bullinger himself stated, “The covenant is the leading thought which totally rules my theology!” Rather, I made my judgments as an intellectual historian, based on the evidence that I have just presented from Bullinger’s own writings.

In his 1990 paper, “Heinrich Bullinger as Theologian,” Professor Dowey developed what he calls the “Pervasive Convictions of Bullinger’s Theological Lifework.” They are three in number: 1) The Antiquity of the Christian Faith; 2) The One Eternal Covenant; and 3) Catholic Orthodoxy.⁵⁶ I am quite willing to accept the idea of “Pervasive Convictions,” but I think that the first and the third belong under the major heading of “The One and Eternal Covenant of God.” For it was in *De Testamento* that Bullinger affirmed the antiquity of the Christian faith and the catholic orthodoxy of the Reformed faith within the context of the covenant.

BULLINGER’S DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION

In reviewing Bullinger’s use of the covenant idea in his writings, it becomes clear that Bullinger taught a conditional, bilateral covenant. But the problem of conditionality is also related to the third issue connected with my work, whether Bullinger differed from Calvin on predestination. In addition to Garcia, who accuses me of doubting Bullinger’s commitment to sola fide,⁵⁷ Cornelius Venema feels that Bullinger was closer to Calvin than I have stated in my

⁵⁵ p. 24.

⁵⁶ p. 59.

⁵⁷*The Theology of History and Apologetic Historiography in Heinrich Bullinger: Truth in History*, pp. 17, 42-43, 50-51, 67, 314. In the Prologue to *Bullinger and the Covenant*, I wrote, “For Bullinger, the covenant was the exclusive vehicle through which God worked in history with His people. Bullinger held to a conditional covenant on the one hand and to sola fide encased within a carefully stated doctrine of single predestination on the other hand. He interpreted both sola fide and sola gratia in covenantal terms, without falling into the semi-Pelagian stance that logic might have seemed to demand.” *Bullinger and the Covenant*, p. xxiii. Garcia quotes this passage and then another passage from one of the appendixes where, he claims, I put Bullinger’s thought into a semi-Pelagian framework. *The Theology of History and Apologetic Historiography in Heinrich Bullinger: Truth in History*, pp. 42-43. The quotation from Appendix A (*Bullinger and the Covenant*, p. 185) follows my discussion of Melanchthon’s “synergism.” When I wrote, “Melanchthon’s stipulation of the covenant was not so different from Bullinger’s conditions of faith and piety,” I certainly did not mean to imply that Bullinger’s thought was semi-Pelagian.

work.⁵⁸ Muller has also expressed doubt that Bullinger presented “a doctrinal alternative to Reformed predestinarianism.”⁵⁹

Garcia is, simply, mistaken. It is Bullinger, not I, who sometimes sounds like a proto-Arminian. In fact, the Arminians of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries appealed to him and claimed to be his followers. Though I do not agree with that interpretation of Bullinger, there is definitely a tension within his thought when it comes to predestination. Writing in the mid 1520s, Bullinger had it both ways. On the one hand, he stated his “universalism,” when he wrote: “God included everyone under sin so that He might show mercy to all and the entire world might glorify and praise Him.” On the other hand, he went on to affirm *sola gratia* in the same writing: “Here also all free will, . . . all work and all merit is rejected. . . . Therefore this salvation is not in our will, running, work, or merit.”⁶⁰

In my book, *Bullinger and the Covenant*, I devote an entire chapter to predestination. In it, I summarize Bullinger’s teaching at midcentury, based on the *Decades*. First, Bullinger asserts that the offer is universal: the gospel is offered to all; the grace of Christ is offered to everyone. Those who reject it do so freely, not because of God’s decree. But then he also affirms that those who experience faith are of the elect; they are saved by God’s free grace. In essence, election means inclusion in the people of God, but it does not threaten exclusion.⁶¹

Bullinger did not change his opinion on predestination. He continued to hold to his moderate view to the end of his life.⁶² In 1554, Bullinger asserted that faith is the proof of election, he affirmed the universal atonement, and he repeated his insistence that people are rejected only because of their own sin and lack of faith.⁶³ In 1558, he emphasized the universal atonement and

⁵⁸Though he covers much of the same material as I did in my book and comes to similar conclusions about Bullinger’s own doctrine of predestination, he has two criticisms of my treatment. First, he objects to my perception that there was a close connection in Bullinger’s thought between covenant and predestination. Secondly, he feels that Bullinger and Calvin were closer to each other’s position on both predestination and covenant than my interpretation allows. “Heinrich Bullingers Correspondence on Calvin’s Doctrine of Predestination, 1551-1553,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* XVII (1986): 435-450.

⁵⁹Anglican & Episcopal History LXIII (1994): 89-91.

⁶⁰Quoted in Joachim Staedke, *Die Theologie des jungen Bullinger* (Zurich, 1962), pp. 136-137.

⁶¹In the *Decades*, Bullinger wrote, “Predestination is the eternal decree of God by which He determined either to save or to destroy men, a most certain end of life and death already having been provided.” But in another place, he explained, “Christ and the grace of Christ announced or declared by the gospel belongs to everyone. For no one should imagine that two books are put aside in heaven, in the first of which those are inscribed who are ordained to be saved, and even must be saved by necessity, without question. . . ; and in the second those recorded to be condemned are kept, who cannot escape condemnation, no matter how piously they might live. Let us rather hold that the holy gospel of Christ proclaims the grace of God, the remission of sins, and eternal life in general to the entire world.” *Bullinger and the Covenant*, pp. 31-34.

⁶²It has been argued by several scholars that Bullinger finally accepted Calvin’s double predestination. See Alexander Schweizer, *Die protestantischen Centraldogmen in ihrer Entwicklung innerhalb der reformierten Kirche, Ist halb: Das 16. Jahrhundert* (Zurich, 1854), pp. 291, 459; John Patrick Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli’s Doctrine of Grace* (Leiden, 1976), p. 184; and Juergen Moltmann, *Praedestination und Perseveranz: Geschichte und Bedeutung der reformierten Lehre “de perseverantia sanctorum”* (Neukirchen, 1961), pp. 100-103.

⁶³*De gratia Dei*, fol. 6, 12-13, 28-28b.

warned against speculation about the secret counsel of God.⁶⁴ In 1563, he warned against dissension over the doctrine of election. Christ excluded no one. A person should pray and ask for faith and the grace of God.⁶⁵

He continued this focus in his 1567 Isaiah commentary. Commenting on chapter one, Bullinger emphasizes God's free election in Christ, *sola gratia*,⁶⁶ but then three pages later, he writes, "God does not will the death of sinners, but rather that they might be converted and live."⁶⁷

In his comment on verse 1 of Chapter 50, his concern is the goodness of God. God is not the author of sin. "We are the authors of sin; and we are condemned because of our sin and corruption. We know that with God there is predestination and election, free and most holy; he elects those whom he wishes and rejects those whom he wishes and justly so...." But Bullinger does not intend for us to infer from this that God damns the reprobate with hatred and that He works against them. He believes they are condemned because of their own corruption, "not at all because of God's capriciousness.... And those who are saved are saved by grace.... God... loves men." Therefore, Bullinger asserts, we ought to have hope as the gospel is preached, rather than being concerned about rejection, "as though we were rejected by God from eternity and cannot be saved in any way at all. A moderate debate about election and predestination and rejection will not be beneficial unless it is closely connected with Christ." Salvation is entirely by God's grace, with no works at all. "Therefore, we ought to pray that the Lord will infuse our hearts with true faith, that he will unite them with Christ, that we might be purified and saved, who might otherwise have been lost because of our corruption.... Most truly, the cause of rejection is

⁶⁴*Sermones*, fol. 8-10, 172.

⁶⁵*Fundamentum firum* (1563), fol. 33-34b (HBBW I: 1, #425).

⁶⁶*Isaias*, fol. 7b. He also refers to God's free election in Christ in his comment on chapter 38, verses 1-8: "There are mandates or decrees of God pronounced by God without condition: wherefore he promised the blessed seed, and in that one seed he elected all those who are to be saved; wherefore he established the eternal kingdom in the blessed seed; wherefore by his death the blessed seed redeemed the elect of God; wherefore our bodies will be resurrected and that blessed seed will judge the entire world. These are the immutable decrees of God." (*Esse mandata vel decreta Dei sine conditione a Deo pronunciata, ut quod semen benedictum promisit, & in uno hoc semine elegit salvandos omnes, quod aeternum regnum constituit semini benedicto, quod morte sua semen benedictum redimat electos Dei, quod resuscitabuntur corpora nostra & iudicabit universum orbem semen illud benedictum. Haec esse immutabilia Dei decreta.*) *Isaias*, fol. 183.

⁶⁷*Isaias*, fol. 10b. In his comment on Isaiah 6:10-13, he asserted that God's judgment was just when he rejected the Jews. God is not the author of evil; the Jews were rejected because of their own sin. The same is true of individuals. The elect are those faithful ones in both the Old and New Testament who turn to God through Christ the blessed seed; God repudiates those who remain in sin and unbelief. *Isaias*, fol. 35-36b.

Then, commenting on chapter 7, verses 9, Bullinger emphasizes the importance of faith: "First of all, the Lord requires faith from us, by which we share in and are confirmed in the gift of God, so that we might be firm. We cannot please God without faith.... The teaching about faith must not be weakened. For if we should say that God guarantees the promise to us absolutely whether we believe or do not believe, very many people say, 'Why do you preach to me about faith when the promise of God can become mine without faith?' For that reason, since promises sometimes have additional conditions, and everywhere faith is required from us and taught, it must be taught that God is angry with the unfaithful, that He denies them His blessings, that God does not give His gifts to us if we do not believe. Therefore, we have to believe." *Isaias*, fol. 39b-40.

unbelief and impiety and rebellion,” for Christ calls everyone to him, “but men do not receive him. This is the cause of our rejection.”⁶⁸

In his comments on chapter 53, Bullinger affirms the universal atonement of Christ: “The sins of every human in the world of every age are atoned for through Christ, by his death, and we have in him the most complete remission of every sin and eternal life.”⁶⁹ Then, commenting on chapter 55, he specifically teaches the universal call. God calls **everyone**, though many do not respond.⁷⁰

Bullinger then connects the universal call with the eternal covenant: “For life comes from that eternal covenant.... The nature of the eternal covenant is shown in these very words, ‘the steadfast mercies of David.’ Here, I say, is the sum of the covenant. He says ‘mercies’ in plural number, not ‘mercy.’ These mercies are the forgiveness of sins and the conferring of God’s grace. The promise to David is Christ. All people of all ages are called to Christ.”⁷¹

This was Bullinger’s position on predestination. He held to a carefully stated doctrine of single predestination that preserved both God’s goodness and human “responsibility.” His position on predestination did not change **substantially** during his ministry. He did not become “Calvinist” in his doctrine of predestination, but he did have to deal with Calvin and the Calvinists on the issue. This leads me to the third and concluding portion of this paper.

WERE THERE TWO REFORMED TRADITIONS?

The fourth issue connected with my work is brought up not only in the critiques of Venema and Muller, but also by Lyle Bierma, who objects to the entire idea of two traditions in sixteenth-century Reformed federal theology.⁷² Were there two Reformed traditions?

It is, perhaps, the subtitle of my first book that most bothers many scholars of the Calvinistic persuasion: *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition*. The controversy has focused on two related issues. (1) Did Calvin also hold to a conditional covenant? I do not believe that he did, but I cannot deal with this question in the time allotted. I refer the

⁶⁸*Isaias*, fol. 250b-251.

⁶⁹*Isaias*, fol. 266b. In this comment on chapter 53, verse 6, the margin note reads “NOTA.”

⁷⁰*Isaias*, fol. 275b. God calls “everyone of all times, of every age, of every sex and human condition, without discrimination” to Christ. This is clear in the Old Testament in the universal promise given to Abraham and in The Great Commission in the New Testament. Why do not all believe then? “Is the call of God ineffective? It is not ineffective. For he calls singly and expressly those who are thirsty. Whereas all are not thirsty but rather sated and satiated with drink, not everyone drinks from the fountain of salvation.” In this comment on chapter 55, verse 1, there is not a word about predestination.

⁷¹*Isaias*, fol. 277b. This is a comment on chapter 55, verse 3. One more piece of evidence on the sort of response that Bullinger had for the Calvinists on predestination comes from a publication in 1569, where he explained that even though the origin of conversion is the grace of God, one comes to faith through the divinely ordained means of the preaching of the word. Though it is true that God knows his elect, no one should take a fatalistic attitude. Christ commanded to preach the gospel to everyone. The promise is given to everyone. Though many are lost, all humans are called to salvation. Everyone is offered the hope of conversion. Those who refuse to believe are responsible for their own destruction. *Von der Bekehrung*, fol. 2b-8b.

⁷² He questions the contrast that I draw between Bullinger and Calvin on the covenant, and my treatment of Olevianus. He concludes that there were no significant differences between Zurich and Geneva on the covenant. “Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century: Two Traditions?” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 304-321.

reader to my treatment of this issue in my book.⁷³ (2) The second issue concerns the differences between Bullinger and Calvin on predestination, or as Muller puts it in his review of *Fountainhead of Federalism*,⁷⁴ whether Bullinger presented “a doctrinal alternative to Reformed predestinarianism.”

Actually, I do not argue that Bullinger presented an alternative. Rather, I argue that Calvin presented the alternative doctrine on predestination within the Reformed tradition. The original Reformed point of view was Bullinger’s carefully stated, moderate predestinarianism.

It was only in the early 1550s, during the Bolsec affair in Geneva, that predestination began to become an issue of some controversy in Reformed circles. During the Bolsec Controversy, it became very clear that Bullinger did not agree with Calvin’s position. His own correspondence with Calvin over the Bolsec issue as well as the other letters from Zurich are quite critical of Calvin. In his letters, Bullinger comes close to supporting Bolsec, inasmuch as their doctrines of predestination are fairly similar. Bullinger was especially offended by Calvin’s teaching that “God not only foreknew, but also predestined and arranged the fall of Adam” and the idea that God actually blinded men to the truth and that “the universal promises of God” were meant only for the few.⁷⁵

In Bullinger’s correspondence with Bartholomew Traheron on the issue of predestination in 1553, he was quite critical of Calvin’s doctrine, suggesting that Calvin’s extreme teaching went beyond Scripture. Finally, also in 1553, Bullinger defended his colleague Theodore Bibliander, against Calvin’s criticisms, and he continued to defend him until Bibliander’s death in 1564.⁷⁶ Bullinger’s correspondence with Calvin and others during the 1550s thus shows us that he was disturbed by the manner in which Calvin and others stated their “new,” more extreme doctrine of predestination. I am suggesting, then, that it was Calvin who initiated another branch of the Reformed tradition. Incidentally, Philip Holtrop’s recent study of the Bolsec controversy contains voluminous proof that Calvin’s doctrine was perceived by many to be quite extreme, and that Bullinger (and several others) held a point of view more compatible with Bolsec’s than Calvin’s.⁷⁷

Though Bullinger himself never became a Calvinist, Zurich began to move in that direction when Peter Martyr Vermigli became professor of Old Testament in 1556. Zurich was fully in the Calvinist fold within a decade or so after Bullinger’s death. In the later sixteenth century, the Remonstrant movement began to thrive in the Netherlands. Their point of view on the covenant and predestination might well be traced back to Bullinger. At least they thought so; the Remonstrants of the early seventeenth century cited Bullinger to defend their viewpoint on predestination. There is certainly irony, then, in the fact that Bullinger’s successor as leader of the Zurich church defended Bullinger’s good name at the Synod of Dort in 1618. In answer to the

⁷³ Appendix B, “Covenant and Testament in Calvin’s Thought,” *Bullinger and the Covenant*, pp. 193-198.

⁷⁴ *Anglican & Episcopal History* LXIII (1994): 89-91.

⁷⁵ *Bullinger and the Covenant*, pp. 34-38. The letters from Basel and Bern were also critical of Calvin’s position.

⁷⁶ *Bullinger and the Covenant*, pp. 36-40. Bibliander’s doctrine was proto-Arminian.

⁷⁷ Philip C. Holtrop, *The Bolsec Controversy on Predestination, from 1551 to 1555. The Statements of Jerome Bolsec, and the Responses of John Calvin Theodore Beza and Other Reformed Theologians* (Lewiston, NY, 1993), pp. 69-74, 344-353, 562-599, 809-813, and passim.

Remonstrants' assertion that Arminius was a follower of Bullinger, Breitinger argued that Bullinger fully agreed with Calvin on predestination.⁷⁸

Neither was correct. Bullinger could not have felt comfortable with either side at Dort. Thirty years later, at the Westminster Assembly, he might have felt more comfortable. Aspects of *The Westminster Confession* would have appealed to him, although someone would have had to have explained what a "covenant of works" was. In any case, the doctrine of predestination in the Confession is not Bullinger's—it is a product of the Calvinistic Reformed tradition.

CONCLUSIONS

Preparing this paper was an extremely interesting process. As I began again to pore over Bullinger's works on microfilm, many of which were supplied to me by Professor Dowey, I wondered whether I would find a Bullinger similar to the Bullinger that I found nearly twenty years ago. As I pondered those four issues with which I began this paper, I was not sure what my conclusions would be.

(1) **Was the covenant the leading idea in Bullinger's theology?** Bullinger was not a covenant theologian in the same way that later thinkers were. His understanding of the covenant was historical rather than philosophical or logical. As I have already said, I have no problem with referring to the covenant in Bullinger's thought as the leading "Pervasive Conviction" in his thought, along with "The Antiquity of the Christian Faith" and "Catholic Orthodoxy."

(2) **Was Bullinger's concept of the covenant bilateral or conditional?** My conclusion on this issue is unchanged. Bullinger clearly taught a bilateral covenant with human conditions or stipulations.

(3) **Was Bullinger's doctrine of predestination significantly different from Calvin's?** Again, my conclusion is unchanged. If anything, after reading Holtrop's work, I feel even more strongly that Calvin's doctrine was an innovation in the Reformed tradition.⁷⁹

(4) **Did Bullinger represent an earlier Reformed tradition that was different from Calvin's?** Though there are certainly many similarities in the theology of Bullinger and Calvin, there were also some areas in which they clearly disagreed. Beginning in the 1550s, predestination was an important area of disagreement. In connection with the issue of predestination, I believe that they also differed somewhat on the nature of the covenant, on whether it was conditional or unconditional. They also differed on the matter of church discipline, which I have not been able to deal with in this paper.

I considered including the phrase, "preserving Bullinger from the Calvinists," in the title to this paper. Had I done so, the phrase would have had a double meaning, referring both to the sixteenth century Calvinists and to Calvinists in the late twentieth century.

⁷⁸J.J. Moerikofer, *J.J. Breitinger und Zuerich* (Leipzig, 1873), pp. 24-37.

⁷⁹Bullinger was clearly affected by the new Calvinist emphasis on double predestination. He began in the early 1550s, during the Bolsec controversy, to express a real concern about making God responsible for the rejection by the reprobate, and he expressed this concern repeatedly for the next twenty years. Also, he began to place a heavier emphasis on the divinely ordained means of preaching in bringing the elect to faith. This was, I think, a focus of his later life that was perhaps due to the greater pressure to conform to a "Calvinistic" doctrine by 1570.

Twentieth century Calvinists seem to resist recognizing the differences and disagreements between Bullinger and Calvin. But, you see, we must allow Bullinger to speak. It is not I who criticize Calvin for being too extreme. It is Bullinger! Shall we ignore the statements of the men involved? We must take care not to do so. As historians, we must listen to Bullinger. We must be careful not to smooth out the "Reformed Tradition." To do so is to limit it to Calvin and to make sure that other important early leaders, like Bullinger, walk in Calvin's footprints. Bullinger resisted that approach in the sixteenth century, and I shall continue to help him resist it in the late twentieth century.