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CHRISTOLOGY IN THE APOCALYPSE: BULLINGER'S SERMON ON REVELATION 10:1-4

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I. INTRODUCTION

The sermon on Revelation 10:1-4 by the Swiss reformer Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) provides a window into his christology. In particular, Bullinger identified the “mighty angel” with Christ. The sermon is number 43 of one hundred sermons in his *In Apocalypsim Iesu Christi* (*On the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*).¹ Throughout these sermons Bullinger referred *inter alia* to key christological themes, such as to the Trinity and the *filioque*.² Bullinger's sermons on The Apocalypse reveal how he read the biblical canon from both a salvation historical and a biblical theological perspective.

Bullinger recorded in his *Diarium* that he commenced preaching on The Apocalypse (on Tuesdays) on 21 August 1554 which had followed on from successive series on Haggai and Malachi. He completed this series on 29 December 1556.³ Bullinger had carefully read The Apocalypse when he was very young in his time at Kappell am Albis and, over the years, noted how its message corresponded with the prophecies of the Old Testament prophets and the message of the apostles so it was not surprising that he would devote an extended sermon series to the book.⁴ It is not widely known that Bullinger's sermons on The Apocalypse became one of Bullinger's most popular publications. This was particularly so in England as it was published when the Marian exiles were in Zurich.⁵ Prior

¹ Heinrich Bullinger, *In Apocalypsim Iesu Christi, revelatam quidem per angelum Domini, visam vero vel exceptam atque conscriptam a Iohanne Apostolo & Evangelista, conciones centum* (Basel: Oporinus, 1557), *HBIBl* I, #335;

² Sermons #3, #24, #65.

³ Emil Egli (ed.), *Heinrich Bullingers Diarium* (Basel: Basler Buch und Antiquariatshandlung, 1904), pp. 46 and 50. Having published a book on Daniel (*De hebdomadis, quae quod apud Daniele sunt opusculum* (Zurich: Froschouer, 1530), *HBIBl* I, #27), Bullinger preached 66 sermons on Daniel on Tuesdays from 15 March 1563 to 15 June 1565.

⁴ Fritz Büsser, “Bullingers 100 Predigen über die Apocalypse,” *Zwingliana*, 27 (2000), 117-131 (p. 118).

⁵ Richard Baukham, *Tudor Apocalypse, Sixteenth Century Apocalypticism, Millenarianism and the English Reformation. From John Bale to John Foxe and Thomas Brightman* (Oxford: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1978); “Heinrich

to this volume on the sermons on The Apocalypse he had written on the last judgment (*Das Jüngste Gericht*) in 1555.⁶ This was followed by another work on the last judgment, *De sine seculi et iudicio venturo* (*Concerning without a time frame that I will come as judge*), which focuses on Matthew 24, Daniel 7, 2 Timothy 3 and the very turbulent reigns of the popes.⁷ There were two Latin editions of the sermons on The Apocalypse (1557, 1559), a German edition (1558),⁸ a French edition (1558)⁹, an English edition (1561)¹⁰ and a Dutch edition (1567).¹¹ The English edition, which was one of a few works of Bullinger that were published in English, was widely disseminated and read in England. Bullinger's sermons on The Apocalypse were fitting for the age as, from about one hundred years prior, treatises on "the art of dying" (*ars moriendi*) were widely distributed and read.

The significance of Bullinger's sermons on The Apocalypse in his day is ably reflected in Richard Bauckham's detailed comparison of the annotations to The Apocalypse in the Geneva Bible of 1560 with Bullinger's sermons.¹² Those who read this mini tome were perhaps attracted by the major themes touched on by Bullinger. These included *inter alia* the true church of Christ, the end of the world, Christ's victory over the Antichrist,

Bullinger, l'apocalypse et les anglais," *Etude théologiques et religieuses*, vol. 74 (no 3 1999), pp. 351-377.

⁶ Heinrich Bullinger, *Das Jüngste Gericht Unsers Herren Jesu Christi* (Zurich: Froschouer, 1955), *HBBibl* I, #281. This consisted of two sermons on Matthew 24 and 25. See Bruce Gordon, "«Welcher nit gloubt der ist schon verdampft»: Heinrich Bullinger and the Spirituality of the Last Judgement, *Zwingliana*, 29 (2002), pp. 29-53.

⁷ Heinrich Bullinger, *De sine seculi & iudicio venturo Domini nostri Iesv Christi* (Basel, 1557), *HBBibl* I, #320. For a detailed discussion of this work together with Bullinger's sermons on The Apocalypse as it relates to the pope as Antichrist see Christian Moser, "Papam esse Antichristum: Grundzüge von Heinrich Bullingers' Antichristkonzeption," *Zwingliana*, 30 (2003), 65-101, pp. 84-87.

⁸ Heinrich Bullinger, *Die Offenbarung Jesu Christi Anfangs durch den heiligen Engel Gottes* (Müllhausen, 1558), *HBBibl* I, #327.

⁹ Heinrich Bullinger, *Cent sermons sur l'Apocalypse de Iesus Christ, reveleé par l'Ange du Seigneur* (Jean Crespin, 1558), *HBBibl* I, #341. This is the text used by Irena Backus in her meticulous work *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse: Geneva, Zurich and Wittenberg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Heinrich Bullinger, *A hundred sermons upon the Apocalips of Jesu Christe reueiled in dede by Thangell of the Lorde* (1561), *HBBibl* I, #355.

¹¹ Heinrich Bullinger, *De Openbaringhe Jesu Christi. Ten eersten door den heyli-gen Engel Gods* (1567), *HBBibl* I, #352.

¹² Bauckham, "l'apocalypse et les anglais," pp. 367-377.

the one thousand year kingdom and the new Jerusalem. Bullinger wrote the work to encourage Protestant believers in the pressing context of wars, the plague, famine, the ever present threat of the Turks as well as severe weather events. For example, in his *Diarium*, Bullinger referred to a mini ice age in 1570.¹³ Not only did Bullinger consider that the Apocalypse was the “bookend” of the biblical canon, but also from a pastoral perspective, he saw that its alternating themes of joy and pain before the imminent eschaton were very relevant for his generation. Throughout his sermons, Bullinger sought to encourage believers to remain faithful in view of the victory assured in Christ as they would have to face various attacks on their faith from different quarters.

This article gives an overview of Bullinger’s sermons on The Apocalypse and looks specifically at how the themes that are highlighted in sermon # 43 represent a microcosm of the themes developed in all of the sermons.

II. THE CONTEXT OF BULLINGER’S ONE HUNDRED SERMONS ON THE APOCALYPSE

Canonicity of the books of the Bible was a major focus of the reformers. Without exception, they rejected as Scripture the Apocrypha or the Deutero-canonical books of the Old Testament that were received by Rome as Scripture. However, some of the reformers had doubts about the canonicity and authorship of The Apocalypse. In this, they were probably influenced by the *Annotations* of Erasmus (1469-1536).¹⁴ Luther (1483-1546) wrote two prefaces on The Apocalypse (1522 and 1530) for his translation of the Bible. Both were somewhat negative although the second preface was less so. The second of these prefaces was more extensive than the first. Luther penned an analysis of the various sections of The Apocalypse in which he sought to identify the “evil angels,” the “beasts” as well as other images in the book.¹⁵ The first preface was clearly in mind when Bullinger wrote his sermons on The Apocalypse. In the preface and the first sermon Bullinger roundly defended the canonicity and the apostolicity of The Apocalypse. Without actually mentioning Luther by name, Bullinger

¹³ Otto Ulbricht, “Heinrich Bullinger, sein *Diarium* unter der Beginn der Kleinen Eiszeit-Phase von 1570 bis 1630,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 110 (no.1 2020), 200-236. The entry is in *Heinrich Bullingers Diarium*, p. 104.

¹⁴ See Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse*, pp. 3-6 for an analysis of Erasmus’ view of the Apocalypse.

¹⁵ Martin Luther, “Preface to the Revelation of St John,” in E. Theodore Bachman (ed.), *Luther’s Works, Volume 35: Word and Sacrament I* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), pp. 399-411.

was clearly responding to his view of The Apocalypse. The following is the relevant section from Luther's first preface:

First and foremost, the apostles do not deal with visions, but prophesy in clear and plain words, as do Peter and Paul, and Christ in the gospel. For it befits the apostolic office to speak clearly of Christ and his deeds, without images and visions. Moreover there is no prophet in the Old Testament, to say nothing of the New, who deals so exclusively with visions and images. For myself, I think it approximates the Fourth Book of Esdras; I can in no way detect that the Holy Spirit produced it...

My spirit cannot accommodate itself to this book. For me this is reason enough not to think highly of it: Christ is neither taught nor known in it. But to teach Christ, this is the thing which an apostle is bound above all else to do; as Christ says in Acts 1 [8], "You shall be my witnesses." Therefore I stick to the books which present Christ to me clearly and purely.¹⁶

Zwingli's close colleague and companion, Leo Jud (1482-1542), prepared an extended paraphrase on The Apocalypse.¹⁷ However, in his *Sixty Seven Articles*, Zwingli (1584-1531) himself wrote somewhat dismissively of The Apocalypse in the context where he was taking issue with an argument made by Roman Catholic scholars who were citing Revelation 5:

First of all, I want to show that the Apocalypse was not reckoned by the early church to be among the sacred books, as Jerome indicates. Secondly, it is ascribed to John who was the Bishop of Ephesus, for it does not have the manner, heart and spirit of the evangelist. For this reason I should reject the proofs presented to me.¹⁸

Bullinger saw many connections between The Apocalypse and the books of the Old Testament, especially Daniel and Isaiah. He considered that the plagues of Egypt described in Exodus were paralleled by the judgments outlined in The Apocalypse. In sermon # 97 he not only affirmed the authorship of The Apocalypse by the apostle John, he further underscored that it is "the last book of the canonical Scripture." In sermon # 100 Bullinger reaffirmed canonicity of The Apocalypse declaring that it was inspired by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, "self-authenticating" as Scrip-

¹⁶ Martin Luther, "Preface to the Revelation of St John," *LW*, vol. 35, pp. 398-399.

¹⁷ See Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse*, pp. 88-93.

¹⁸ Huldrych Zwingli, *Auslegen und Gründe der Schlußreden*, Z, II, pp. 208-209; E.J. Furch (ed.), *Huldrych Zwingli Writings Volume 1: The Defense of the Reformed Faith* (Allison Park, Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publications, 1984), p. 166

ture and not dependent on a decision of a church council.¹⁹ Moreover, Bullinger's *De omnibus sanctae scripturae libris expositio* (*Exposition of all the books of holy Scripture*) had already been inserted into the preface of the 1539 edition of the Zurich Latin Bible. In this work Bullinger asserted both the apostolicity and the canonicity of The Apocalypse. Throughout the sermons Bullinger repeatedly underscored the importance of proclaiming the true gospel and the true message of the canonical books.

One of Bullinger's colleagues, the linguist Theodor Bibliander (1509-1564), preached in Zurich on The Apocalypse commencing 10 December 1543. These sermons were published as the *Relatio Fidelis* (*Faithful Relationship*) in 1545.²⁰ Bullinger was clearly conversant with this work as he referred to it several times in his sermons on the Apocalypse. It appears that Calvin (1509-1564) did not write a commentary on the Apocalypse. In this regard, T.H.L. Parker explains:

Yet I believe that a theological reason may have deterred him from attempting Revelation. For him, the Old Testament proclaimed Christ in an obscure manner, but in the New Testament Christ had appeared in complete clearness. It was the difference between twilight and noon-tide...But he may have considered that apocalyptic is foreign to the New Testament as if it involved a re-veiling of the clear and unambiguous Gospel.²¹

Thus, it needs to be noted that Bullinger's approach to The Apocalypse differed from Luther, Zwingli and Calvin. This is yet another pointer to the fact that he was not a *Nachfolger* of Zwingli who blindly and uncritically followed him. It also illustrates another subtle difference between Bullinger and Calvin.²² Bullinger's appreciation of The Apocalypse in the biblical canon affirms his commitment to both *sola Scriptura* and *tota Scriptura*. Bullinger's overall *oeuvre* is voluminous. His strength was not

¹⁹ Bullinger, *In Apocalypsim*, p. 147v. The superscript declares that Christ himself is the author.

²⁰ Theodor Bibliander, *Ad omnium ordinum republicae christianae principes viros populunque christianum Relatio Fidelis* (Basel: Oporinus, 1545).

²¹ T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* (2nd edition) (Louisville: Westminster, 1971), p. 119.

²² Without mentioning the names of Luther, Zwingli and others, Bullinger made this comment about the Apocalypse: "This book has been hidden for a time, despised also by good and learned men, who however have preached what is contained and taught in it," W.P. Stephens, "Bullinger's Sermons on the Apocalypse", in Alfred Schindler and Hans Stickelberger (eds.), *Die Zürcher Reformation: Ausstrahlungen und Rückwirkungen* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2001), 261-280, p. 262. This was Bullinger's way of underlining that the message of the Apocalypse was essentially the same as the rest of the canon.

so much innovation but that he read widely and critically and incorporated what others had written into his own conclusions based on his own careful examination of the biblical texts. Hence, Backus observes of Bullinger's sermons on The Apocalypse:

Not claiming to say anything new, he sees himself as one in a long line of commentators, and, to prove this, he carefully lists his authorities: Bibliander, Arethas, Augustine, Primasius, Thoma Aquinas, the *Glossa ordinaria*, Meyer, Lambert, Luther, Erasmus, and Valla.²³

III. BULLINGER'S HISTORIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH TO THE APOCALYPSE

Influenced *inter alia* from his reading of Irenaeus, Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* and Augustine's *The City of God*, Bullinger saw a dualistic focus in both the book of Daniel and The Apocalypse between two peoples and two cities. With respect to The Apocalypse, Bullinger saw throughout the book the opposition between God and the devil, Christ and Antichrist, angels and demons, the city of God and the city of the devil, Jerusalem and Babylon,²⁴ the woman in the desert and the great whore as well as the faithful and heretics.²⁵

Bullinger rejected the chiliasm of the ante-Nicene fathers.²⁶ In sermon #87 Bullinger pointed out that the "keys" (understood as the preaching of the true gospel) were given by Christ to the apostles and the church and that the "chains" that bound Satan was also the preaching of the gospel. Thus, at the beginning of sermon #88 Bullinger explained that the one thousand years of Satan being bound had long passed:

²³ Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse*, p. 104.

²⁴ In sermon #19 Bullinger refers to the church of the elect as both the city of God and the spiritual Jerusalem.

²⁵ This section is dependent on the detailed analysis of Bullinger's historiographical approach to The Apocalypse of Aurelia A. Garcia Archilla in his *The Theology of History and Apologetic Historiography in Heinrich Bullinger: Truth in History* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), pp. 132-165. For Backus' understanding of Bullinger's structure of The Apocalypse see her *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse*, pp. 104-105.

²⁶ In sermon #87 Bullinger regards Papias as one of the originators of chiliasm which he dismisses as a heresy by citing Book 3 of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, *In Apocalypsim*, p. 127r. Backus refers to Bullinger "willingly ignoring the chiliasm of the ante-Nicene Fathers," *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse*, p. 105.

So, the beast and its image would shine for the one thousand years. During the one thousand years the gospel of Christ would continue to shine as Satan would be bound in chains but, nevertheless, not all would receive the gospel nor would the future be tranquil. Rather, the saints would endure the persecution of the beast on account of the truth of Christ and although many would not believe the gospel but they would rather oppose him (the beast) and perish. Yet in the meantime the devil will not have such power as he had obtained in those precise one thousand years nor would the gospel be so obscured for the thousand years as it was to be afterwards corrupted and adulterated.²⁷

Basically, Bullinger regarded the one thousand years as a period when Satan was chained, though he hastened to explain that this should not be taken in a literal sense. In other words, although Satan was active opposing the church he was severely curtailed resulting in the preaching of the gospel to the then known ends of the world. Throughout this period the risen Christ continued to be with the elect through his Spirit and the first "beast" (the beast from the sea) that Bullinger identified with Rome was active.²⁸ With respect to the second "beast" (the beast from the earth) and its number 666, following Bibliander, Bullinger added 666 to the date on which the apostle John wrote The Apocalypse. This gives a date of 763 which he viewed as the momentous occasion when Pepin the Short submitted to the papacy. This coincided with the donation of Pepin which resulted in temporal power given to the papacy. This beast had "two horns like a lamb" which Bullinger interpreted that the papacy, from this time on, sought to hold both temporal and spiritual power. In doing so, the papacy was usurping Christ's rightful place as King and High Priest. Thus, throughout the sermons on The Apocalypse, Bullinger detested the pope calling himself the "vicar of Christ" as he wrongly assumed that Christ is not present. In reality, Christ requires no vicar as he is present spiritually.

Without being dogmatic, Bullinger suggested in sermon #87²⁹ three calculations for the millennium. The first was to date the commencement

²⁷ Bullinger, *In Apocalypsim*, p. 129r. Unless otherwise stated translations from *In Apocalypsim Iesu Christi* are those of the author.

²⁸ In sermon #32 Bullinger mentions the persecutions under Nero, Domitian and Trajan with reference to both Tacitus and Pliny. In sermon #61 Bullinger identifies the second beast with the rise of the Carolingians. By adding 666 to the date of the Apocalypse (97) yields the year 763 the approximate date of the donation of Pepin the Short to Pope Paul I.

²⁹ The superscript for sermon #87 is "Concerning the illustrious evangelical truth which the work of the apostles spread throughout the whole world for a thousand years," Bullinger, *In Apocalypsim*, p. 126r.

of the millennium from the ascension of Christ (34) to the election of Pope Benedict IX in 1034. Benedict IX was accused of using black magic and selling the papacy to Gregory VI. The second was to date the commencement from Paul's imprisonment in Rome (60) to the papacy of Nicholas II (1060). The third was to date from the destruction of Jerusalem (73) to the papacy of Gergory VII in 1073. Gregory's papacy was likened to the devil reigning. The point that Bullinger sought to make was that from the apostolic age until about the middle of the 11th century the true gospel had a measure of freedom to be proclaimed but that from the middle of the 11th century onwards Satan used the Church of Rome to suppress the truth and persecute true believers.³⁰ Poignantly, the middle of the 11th century was when Berengar of Tours (died 1088) was forced to make a recantation concerning the elements of the eucharist.

In parallel to this interpretation of the one thousand years, Bullinger saw three periods of restitution of the chosen people of God. The first period of restitution was from Cyrus to Pompey the Great. The second period of restitution was from the advent of Christ to the Antichrist. The third period of restitution is from the restitution of the gospel until the *eschaton*.³¹ Bullinger regarded that this third period of the restitution, taking place in his time, as commencing with the fall of Rome in 1527.³²

This extended quotation from Archilla is a helpful analysis of Bullinger's historical approach vis-à-vis the Apocalypse and sets the context for sermon #43:

...For Bullinger truth is Jesus Christ, promised by God to us for the remission of sins. This is the **logos** of history. Therefore the truth of history emerges from outside of history to impinge within it: the preaching of the Gospel of salvation is that constant inbreaking of Christ's truth into the world, an inbreaking which we saw most clearly in the incarnation, and which will become definitive judgment in his Second Coming. Here again is present the contact with the ancient Neoplatonist concept of **aletheia**: the truth comes from a higher sphere and is reflected into this world. Thus historical truth, the Middle Ages and the rise of the Papacy cannot be interpreted in any other way but as a function of the effects of that supra-historical truth upon humanity, in particular its effects through the preaching of the Gospel. Thus

³⁰ Bullinger, *In Apocalypsim*, 127v. The dates cited are those given by Bullinger himself.

³¹ Archilla, *The Theology of History*, pp. 145-146.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 146-147. Archilla points out that this schema is similar to Melchior Hofmann's (German Anabaptist, 1495-1543) threefold pattern in terms of church history viz (i) apostolic times to the reign of the popes, (ii) the period of the unlimited power of the popes and (iii) the period of the Spirit commencing with Jan Hus (1369-1415). See *Ibid.*, p. 151, fn 43.

we can understand too Bullinger's appeal to the reader in both commentaries (ie Daniel and the Apocalypse) to correlate the Word of God in the prophecy with contemporary history. Objectivity and intra-historical truth are always a function of the Word of God: the **logos** of history making sense, and giving sense, to history through the proclamation of the Word.³³

Bullinger's understanding of the millennium was in stark contrast to the Anabaptists' concept of a golden millennium prior to the end of the world. A few years after his sermons on The Apocalypse, Bullinger directly refuted the Anabaptists' view in his *Adversus Anabaptistas* (*Against the Anabaptists*) where he directly referred readers to these sermons:

But the Anabaptists in this matter convince themselves that all the ungodly will be abolished before the final judgment and that in these lands there will be a new kingdom of Christ and a golden age. We have refuted above in chapter two of book 1 what they adduce from the Apocalypse of John for establishing this attractive opinion of theirs. We expounded them in the sermons on the Apocalypse of John which we have published.³⁴

IV. CONTOURS OF BULLINGER'S CHRISTOLOGY IN HIS SERMONS ON THE APOCALYPSE³⁵

In comparing Bullinger's sermons on The Apocalypse with Bibliander's *Relatio fidelis*, Backus assessed that the sermons "are correspondingly much more Christocentric. To Bullinger, The Apocalypse is an account of Christ himself, who is sitting at God's right hand, of all the misfortunes that the church will have to endure from the Ascension until the Last Judgment."³⁶ Bullinger presented Christ in many of the sermons in a manner of direct opposition to Antichrist. As the sermons focus on the true gospel as opposed to the false gospel of Rome and on truth as opposed to heresies that have sought to undermine the church, Bullinger referred to several christological heresies, *inter alia*, the Ebionites, the Manicheans, the Arians, the Pelagians and the Monothelites. Many of the christological truths affirmed by the councils of the church are mentioned by Bullinger in the sermons. These include, the deity of Christ and that he is homoousios with the Father (sermons #6, #28, #97, #100),

³³ Ibid., pp. 143-144, fn 31.

³⁴ Heinrich Bullinger, *Adversus Anabaptistas Libri VI* (Zurich: Froschouer, 1560), 62; *HBBibI*, I, #396.

³⁵ For a helpful overview, see Stephens, "Bullinger's Sermons on the Apocalypse," pp. 261-280.

³⁶ Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse*, p. 103.

the Trinity (sermons #3, #24), the virgin birth (sermon #24), the *filioque* (sermons #3, #24), the two natures in Christ (sermons #12, #19, #27), that Christ reverses the Fall (sermon #20) and against the ubiquity of Christ's resurrected body (sermon #5).

In the very last sermon (sermon #101) Antichrist is described as the "ape" (*simia*) of our Lord Christ.³⁷ Because Antichrist in every generation has been and is successful in deceiving many, the elect need to be certain that they know who the true Christ is. This explains the heightened focus of Christ as King, High Priest and Saviour throughout all the sermons.

Bullinger wrote against Antichrist beginning with his earliest works.³⁸ In his time at the monastery at Kappel am Albis he had already identified Antichrist with the "man of lawlessness" of 2 Thessalonians 2:3³⁹ in his lectures on Thessalonians (1526). This was to be further developed in his commentary on Thessalonians (1536) which came after his work on *Concerning the Weeks of Daniel* (1530).⁴⁰ His earlier work on Daniel indicates that he did not shy from the apocalyptic material in the canon but, rather, sought to interpret it historically. In his commentary on 2 Thessalonians 2:3-5 Bullinger has a detailed and extensive discussion and analysis on the civil leaders (from the Romans, the Carolingans and beyond) vis-à-vis the papacy and the various manifestations and guises of the Antichrist.⁴¹ By the time of his Thessalonians commentary Bullinger had begun to identify the rise of Islam as another Antichrist besides the papacy. Bullinger appeared to oscillate between focusing on the Roman papacy as the Antichrist and on Islam as the Antichrist.⁴²

Some five years after Bullinger's commentary on Thessalonians, Melchior Ambach, a pastor in Frankfurt, translated a work of Bullinger's into

³⁷ Bullinger, *In Apocalypsim*, p. 149r.

³⁸ For a detailed study of this with extensive bibliography see Christian Moser, "Pappam esse Antichristum."

³⁹ Instead of the Vulgate's *homo peccati* (man of sin) Bullinger chose the Latin translation *homo ille scelerosus* (that criminal man) from the Zurich Bible.

⁴⁰ Heinrich Bullinger, *De hebdomadis quae apud Daniele sunt opusculum* (Zurich, Froschouer, 1530), *HBBibl*, I, #27. Bullinger was later to produce his *Sermons on Daniel* (1565) a few years after his sermons on The Apocalypse (Heinrich Bullinger, *Conciones in Daniele* (Zurich: Froschouer, 1564), *HBBibl*, I, #428).

⁴¹ Luca Baschera and Christian Moser (eds.), *Heinrich Bullinger Werke Band 8: Kommentare zu den neutestamentlichen Briefen 1-2Thess – 1-2Tim – Tit – Phlm* (Zurich: Theologische Verlag Zurich, 2015), pp. 61-87. A detailed analysis of this may be found in Moser, "Pappam esse Antichristum," pp. 67-79.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 73-75.

German with the title *Concerning Antichrist and his kingdom* (1541).⁴³ Most of the material in this work is to be found in his 2 Thessalonians commentary and repeated in his sermons on The Apocalypse. What is significant is the explanation that “Antichrist” is not limited to one particular person. Moreover, Bullinger also alternated in his understanding of the Antichrist as a particular individual or as a power of the age as he concluded: “It is thus inevitable that the small horn, that is, the Antichrist, be read as the figure of an empire, and not of a man: it should be understood as the universal whole which fights against Christ, His laws, principles, moral teaching and followers. The horns obviously mean disorder and chaos.”⁴⁴

Furthermore, there is much emphasis in *Concerning Antichrist and his kingdom* on the rising threat of Islam to the gospel. As Antichrist seeks to usurp Christ’s rightful place so Bullinger regarded both Muhammed and the pope as seeking to take the place of God (*Gott gleich*). As might be expected, this work also has an unmistakable focus on the donation of Pepin to Gregory VII which took place some 124 years after the death of Muhammed.

It is beyond doubt that Bullinger was quite knowledgeable about Muhammed and Islam early on, which is why he was alert to see Islam as a major threat to the elect. In his treatise on the covenant in 1534 (*De testamento*), written in his early period as Antistes in Zurich,⁴⁵ he had already referred to Muhammed side by side with the papacy as threats to the true church. Bullinger sought to warn the elect that Muhammed blasphemed the truth while the papacy obscured the precepts of Christ.⁴⁶ Then, in a work in his later years, *Antwort auf Sieben Klagerartikel* (*Answer to seven*

⁴³ *Vom Antichrist unnd seinem Reich, wahrhafftige unnd Schrifftliche erweisung Der Ander Capitel, der Andern Epistel S. Pauli zu den Thessalonichen. Mit eyner schönen außlegung/Henrychi Bullingeri* (Frankfurt: Cyriaco Jacobi zum Bart, 1541).

⁴⁴ Sándor Óze, *Apocalypticism in Early Reformation Hungary* (1526-1566) (Budapest-Leipzig: Magyar Napló, 2015), p. 203.

⁴⁵ This is only five years after the Muslim armies had reached the gates of Vienna.

⁴⁶ Heinrich Bullinger, *De testamento seu foedere Dei unico et aeterno* (Zurich: Froschouer, 1534), p. 48r, *HBBibI*, I, # 54. For a summary of how Bullinger viewed Islam as an insidious threat because of its false betrayal of Christ as “The Koran was put together with the help of a heretical monk and the advice of perverted Jews and false Christians, corrupted by heretics such as Arians, Macedonians and Nestorians” see W. Peter Stephens, “Understanding Islam – in Light of Bullinger and Wesley,” *Evangelical Quarterly*, 81 (no. 1, 2009), 23-27.

charges, 1574),⁴⁷ Bullinger made repeated references to the Qur'an. This confirms that Bullinger was well read with respect to Islam, with respect to its origin, its teachings and its practices. Indeed, Bullinger had access to the specialised knowledge of his Zurich colleague Theodore Bibliander who was a noted Hebraist and Arabist. In 1543 Bibliander edited the translation of the Qur'an by Robert of Ketten (1110-1160). Almost certainly, Bullinger read the Qur'an himself. His two major works that deal with the Turks or Islam are *The Turk*⁴⁸ and a communication (*Sendschrift*) to the Hungarian churches.⁴⁹ The communication to the Hungarian pastors was very timely as Hungary had been overrun by the Turkish armies in 1529. The attack of Islam on Zurich was a threat but it was a reality for the Hungarian church. *The Turk* contains much detailed historical background concerning the rise of Islam. Its main overarching emphasis is that Muhammed is a false prophet vis-à-vis Christ who is the true prophet.⁵⁰

V. SERMON #43

Sermon #43 expounds The Apocalypse 10:1-4 using the text of the Zurich Bible (1531).

The superscript to the sermon

For each one of the sermons, Bullinger has a superscript. The superscript for sermon #43 is: "Christ the strong angel is set against Antichrist and he is splendidly described, and shining in the darkness of the church with comfort."⁵¹ Key themes of all the sermons on The Apocalypse are referred to in this superscript. Christ is set in direct opposition to Antichrist. He is a shining light as opposed to the spiritual darkness in the church caused by Antichrist. Christ is present to give strength and comfort to the church of the elect in the days leading up to the Final Judgment.

⁴⁷ *HBBibl* I, # 584.

⁴⁸ Heinrich Bullinger, *Der Türgg: Von Anfang und Ursprung des Türggischen Glaubens* (Zurich: Froschouer, 1567), *HBBibl*, I, #557.

⁴⁹ Heinrich Bullinger, *Epistola ad ecclesias Hungaricas earumque pastores scripta* (1559), *HBBibl*, I, pp. 383-385. Bullinger's writings and ecclesiastical statements on Islam are listed in Emidio Campi, "Early Reformed Attitudes towards Islam," *Theological Review of the Near East School of Theology*, 31 (2010), p. 143, fn26.

⁵⁰ See Daniël Timmerman, "Bullinger on Islam: Theory and Practice," *Unio cum Christo*, 3 (no 2, 2017), 119-135 for a lucid discussion on this.

⁵¹ Bullinger, *In Apocalypsim*, p. 60v.

The description of Christ

Bullinger considered the exalted description of Christ in these verses is not matched elsewhere in Scripture except in Isaiah and the Gospels (especially John). The “strong angel” is interpreted as referring to Christ in a similar way that he interpreted some of the references to “the angel of the LORD” in the Old Testament as references to the pre-incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity.⁵² In other sermons, Bullinger does explain why he interprets the word “angel” the way that he does in those contexts.⁵³ In referring to Hebrews 1 and 2 Bullinger points out that Christ is “much greater than angels as he is the Lord of angels.”⁵⁴ In fact, he is the angel of the heavenly council of God and the ambassador of the Father sent to the elect.⁵⁵ Bullinger’s identification of the “strong angel” becomes clearer when he outlines the differences apparent in these verses between Christ and Antichrist. The point that Bullinger is emphasizing is that, despite the doubts and fears of the elect, Christ is indeed present nonetheless with the church. However, he is present spiritually and not corporally. His presence and his activity must be seen though the eyes of faith.

Christ is present according to Bullinger, despite the threats of Antichrist in its varied guises. As the ever-present king and bishop, Christ empowers the ministers of the word and animates his faithful with his Spirit and his word. With reference to Isaiah 45 and 60 Bullinger views that the fact that Christ is wrapped with a cloud indicates his deity. Moreover, the rainbow on Christ’s head is understood as Christ’s crown pointing to him as the king of peace who reconciles all things to God. Not only is the rainbow Christ’s crown, it is also a sign of God’s covenant and bond with the elect. As might be expected, Bullinger saw the sun-like radiance of Christ’s face in terms of the transfiguration of Christ recorded

⁵² Amongst modern commentators, G.K. Beale in his *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 522-530 also identifies this strong angel with Christ with an extended and detailed discussion remarkably similar to that of Bullinger.

⁵³ The beginning of sermon #87 is one such example where “angel” is taken to be a messenger or preacher such as Paul was. In sermon #43 he uses the term “angel” in a qualified sense (*In Apocalypsim*, 61r) which is made clear in the French translation – “Il est vray qu’il n’est point Ange, de nature ou de dignité” (*Cent sermons sur l’Apocalypse de Jesus Christ* (Geneva: Iean Bonnefoy, 1565), p. 186r) “it is true that he is not an angel by nature or dignity.” Bullinger also distinguishes this “strong angel” from the strong angels mentioned in The Apocalypse 5:2 and 18:21.

⁵⁴ Bullinger, *In Apocalypsim*, p. 61r. Bullinger apparently identified the archangel Michael with Christ.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 61r.

in Matthew 17.⁵⁶ In referring to 2 Corinthians 3 and 4 and gazing upon the face of God unveiled, Bullinger sought to encourage believers to keep on looking to Christ as they face the deep darkness of opposition to the truth while waiting faithfully and obediently for the final judgment. The fact that one foot of Christ is on the sea (*super mare*) and one on the land (*super terram*) indicates that, as king, both are his possession and both are subject to him.

The description of Antichrist

Bullinger described Antichrist by means of antithesis to Christ. Antichrist is the black angel who ascends from the bottomless pit, Christ is the shining angel who descends from heaven. Antichrist is clothed and wrapped with the dark smoke of the bottomless pit in seeking to present himself as a deity, Christ is robed in a cloud which unmistakably points to his true deity. Antichrist has a crown which he has stolen by devious means and which he tenaciously holds on to by his craft, Christ has a rainbow as his crown. Antichrist brings woe, desperation, anguish and sore affliction to the elect, Christ brings consolation and peace of the conscience. Antichrist has tails of scorpions full of poison, Christ has feet that are pillars of fire. Antichrist wants to have the book of the gospel shut and closed and darkened, Christ holds an open book in his hands which cannot be shut by Antichrist.⁵⁷ With the Antichrist is associated the noise of chariots in his wings, with Christ who roars like a lion there is the theophanic sound of thunder. To achieve his purposes Antichrist uses all his power, might and deception, Christ's force, on the other hand, is demonstrated in the faithful ministry of the Word by his ministers. As king and high priest, Christ animates all his faithful with his spirit and word.

Bullinger commences sermon #43 by referring to the fifth and sixth trumpets and the happiness and glee of the wicked at what the elect have been, are and will be suffering because of the papacy and the forces of Islam. Up to this particular sermon Bullinger had often put the papacy and Islam in apposition. In sermon #43 he referred to "the servitude or bondage of Muhammed, a tyranny of the pope or Antichrist."⁵⁸ Elsewhere in the sermon he referred to "in the most dangerous battle of Antichrist

⁵⁶ Matthew 17:5 is printed on the title page of all of Bullinger's works.

⁵⁷ In this sermon Bullinger refers to the fact that John is commanded to eat the scroll, which means he is to proclaim its message which will strengthen the elect against Antichrist. John is to proclaim that Christ shall return unto the church with great glory and power.

⁵⁸ Bullinger, *In Apocalypsim*, p. 60v – *cum servitus Mahomedica et papae vel Antichristi tyrannis* (the French version has "ces deux Antechrists," *Cent sermons*, p. 184v.

and Muhammed and, finally, of all the heretical adversaries.”⁵⁹ Bullinger left no doubt that he considered Islam as a type of Antichrist.

Bullinger's exhortation to the elect

Throughout his extensive *oeuvre* Bullinger often referred to the elect as the “faithful” (*fideles*).⁶⁰ He constantly emphasized the true church or the true people of God in both Old Testament and New Testament times. In his sermons on The Apocalypse, he underlined the true gospel as opposed to the false gospel, the true prophet as opposed to the false prophets, the true Christ as opposed to Antichrist. In view of the fact that it appeared that Antichrist and his cohorts were victorious time after time, the elect needed to look to Christ and to call upon him in the midst of the grievous perils and afflictions they faced. That is why there is such an exalted and glorious description of Christ in this pericope.

The elect were urged to be patient because God, in his time, would keep his promises to reward the righteous and punish the evil. Just as the Exile only lasted seventy years, there would be a definite end to the current afflictions. They were not to lose heart wrongly thinking that the papacy would reign for ever and that Islam would continue to conquer unabated with the result that the elect would be miserable for ever. Indeed, they were to distance themselves from the attitude of Asaph to affliction as expressed in Psalm 73. Moreover, they were warned not to give in to the temptation to cleave to the papists, the Turks or any other enemies of the true gospel. On the contrary, they were to fight against Antichrist with spiritual weapons. Christ would empower the ministers of his word. Indeed, when the gospel is preached against Antichrist correctly and with authority it will be to the terror of God's enemies. Bullinger made a point to underscore the sufficiency of Scripture for the maintenance of true religion against ungodliness. He saw the reference to the “seven thunders” as a reference to the Holy Spirit. As the open scroll signified the word of God, Bullinger thus saw the fundamental importance of the ministry of the word and Spirit.

⁵⁹ Bullinger, *In Apocalypsim*, p. 61r. The French has “contre l'Antechrist, le Pape, Mahomet, les heretiques, bref contre tous leur adversaires,” *Cent sermons*, p. 186v. Other places where Bullinger places Muhammed in apposition with the Antichrist are “the catholic and Christian truth shall...do battle against the Antichrist and the Muhammedical doctrine...the persecutions of Antichrist and Muhammed...Antichrist, the pope and Muhammed are strong in the fifth and sixth trumpets,” *In Apocalypsim*, p. 61r.

⁶⁰ *Electos* appears in the superscript for the very next sermon, sermon #44.

CONCLUSION

Bullinger's sermons on The Apocalypse were first published a year before the demise of Mary Tudor. The sermons were thus a source of comfort for Protestants in England and for the Marian exiles. The sermons were published between the Second Session of the Council of Trent (1551-1552) and the Third Session (1562-1563). This was just after the Augsburg Peace (1555) and after Charles V's abdication in favour of his brother Ferdinand I (1556). A major focus of Ferdinand's reign was conflict with the Ottomans. Furthermore, he was a supporter of the Counter Reformation. Thus, these sermons were aptly directed to European Protestants facing many challenges, opposition and afflictions in the emergence of early modern Europe.

In sermon #43 are underscored themes that are repeated throughout all of Bullinger's sermons on The Apocalypse. There is a glorified description of Christ, his deity, his absolute power and the assurance that God will keep his promises as he is the God of the covenant. The Antichrist, in its various guises, is indeed powerful but not to be feared. He can be opposed and defeated by the faithful ministry of the true gospel. Until the *eschaton* there will be alternating phases of joy and affliction for the elect. The elect are urged to remain faithful and not to be deceived or bullied by the schemes of the Antichrist. Rather, they are to trust in God's promises and to believe that the course of history is in God's hands and that it is headed to his set end point. There may not have been much that was innovative in Bullinger's sermons on The Apocalypse. Nonetheless, they were a timely source of comfort and reassurance for his readers.