

Article on Bullinger

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Henry Bullinger was a pioneer Reformer who, like his contemporary Martin Bucer, has long remained in the shadows cast by Martin Luther and John Calvin. Happily, modern scholarship is revealing both Bucer and Bullinger to have been top rank Reformers in no way secondary to Luther and Calvin. Indeed, modern research shows that Bullinger was a more thorough and consistent Reformer than both Luther and Calvin. Born in 1504 in Bremgarten, Switzerland to a wealthy priest and his common-law wife who later joined the Reformation movement, Bullinger was already treading Reformed paths by 1521 and within the next seven years had produced 86 works on Reformed doctrine which would be entitled 'Calvinist' today, though they preceded Calvin's works by many years. When Bullinger died in 1574, he had written more works than Luther, Calvin and Melancthon together and was commonly called the Father and Shepherd of the Reformed Churches.

Bullinger's influence in France, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Italy and Holland was immense and in England Reformers such as Jewel, Grindal and Cox called Bullinger *the* pillar of the Church of England and a Second Elijah. His major doctrinal works in Swiss-German were eagerly translated into English by such as Miles Coverdale and Bullinger's Latin works went into hundreds of editions. The Genevan Council insisted that whenever Calvin's works were printed, they should be accompanied by Bullinger's on the same themes so as to preserve a good balance. When Beza took over the Church at Geneva, the Council advised him to walk in Bullinger's, Bucer's and Calvin's footsteps, in that order. Bullinger's major doctrinal work *The Decades*, was made compulsory reading for theological students by Archbishop Whitgift and was quickly translated into many foreign languages. The Reformed Churches throughout Eastern and Western Europe, including Scotland, accepted Bullinger's Second Helvetic Confession as their standard Declaration of Faith.

Bullinger's early treatise on education *Ratio Studiorum* won for Bullinger international fame as an educator and his many reforms in education were copied both at home and abroad. Bullinger pioneered evangelical training colleges for ministers and missionaries and placed missionary strategy on the university's syllabus, chiefly with a view to sending missionaries out to the Islamic countries. Bullinger's Theological Academy was founded whilst the Reformer was still in his teens and thirty years before Calvin followed his example in Geneva.

One of Bullinger's major tasks was to serve as a mediator in national and international affairs. He was able to draw up political agreements with the Roman Catholic cantons which left the Protestants free to practice their own religion and he hindered Calvin from handing over Geneva to either Savoy or France, thus endangering the Reformation in Geneva. So, too, Bullinger mediated in Bern's and Basle's quarrels with Geneva, paving the way for Geneva's acceptance into the Swiss confederacies. It was to Bullinger Calvin turned for mediation when he was exiled from Geneva and through Bullinger's diplomacy, he was able to return. Bullinger also mediated on Calvin's behalf when the Frenchman quarrelled with Caroli, Bolsec, Servetus and Castellio. Farel would have been expelled from Neuchâtel but for Bullinger's mediation between the city's Church and Council. Bullinger put his mediating talents to use in England when he refereed between the two conflicting parties in the Vestment Controversy. The Zürich Reformer also took up his pen to defend Queen Elizabeth against papal criticism.

The Swiss Reformer's method of organising education and employment for the poor literally wiped out poverty in the canton of Zürich and his fight against towns and rich citizens who were selling off the cream of their young men as mercenary soldiers saved many hundreds of lives. So, too, Bullinger opened his own and Zürich's doors to thousands of refugees whether they came from Switzerland, France, Italy, England, Holland, Poland or Hungary. At one time he provided food, accommodation and work for the entire Protestant population of Locarno who had to flee from Roman Catholic terrorism. Most of the English Refugees who had fled from Henry VIII and Mary found themselves at some time or other under Bullinger's roof, some, like John Hooper, staying for several years. When Elizabeth restored the Reformed Church of England to its former status, most of her bishops could be called 'Bullingerites' in theology and the Queen sent a large silver cup to Bullinger and the Zürich citizens, thanking them for supporting those persecuted by her half-sister. All this earned for Bullinger the further title of 'Father of the Afflicted'.

The Reformed churches are eternally indebted to Bullinger for their doctrines of the Word of God, Justification, Sanctification, Christology, Ecclesiology, the Covenant of Grace and for his huge emphasis on preaching and pastoral work. It is high time that his massive contribution to the Reformation of the Church should be duly acknowledged.