

The Civil Magistrate And The ‘*Cura Religionis*’: Heinrich Bullinger’s Prophetical Office And The English Reformation*

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I

John Jewel, Bishop of Sarum, once referred to Heinrich Bullinger as the “oracle of the churches.”¹ While Jewel’s remark conveys a pithy assessment of the Zurichers’ pre-eminent role on the stage of international Reform, it is particularly applicable to the case of England. Throughout his lengthy career as Antistes of the Church of Zurich (1531-1575), Bullinger exercised a unique influence on the Church of England both as theologian and, on a practical level, as counsellor to both princes and bishops. Given the scope of this influence and its remarkable consistency over a considerable period of time (almost forty years), it is now almost commonplace to include Bullinger among the first rank of reformers of the English Church, although this was not always the case.² Indeed it is even arguable that no other divine exercised a comparable degree of continuous influence over all of the principal stages of the English Reformation—from the Henrician and Edwardine reforms, through the crucible of the Marian exile, to the eventual implementation and consolidation of the Elizabethan religious settlement. At every stage Bullinger was engaged as a significant player, and in later years was frequently appealed to as an arbiter of internal disputes and even as a public apologist of the Church of

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¹ John Jewel styled Bullinger “*oraculum ecclesiarum*.” See *Zurich Letters*, 1.70, (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1842), 156. Théodore de Bèze spoke of Bullinger as “the common shepherd of all Christian churches,” in *Icones, id est veræ imagines virorum doctrina simul et pietate illustrium, additis eorundem vitæ e operæ descriptionibus, quibus adiectæ sunt nonnullæ picturæ, quas emblemata vocant* (Geneva, 1580). Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8 The Swiss Reformation (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1892), 3rd edn. revised, 207.

² It is quite astonishing to observe that recent full-length studies of the Elizabethan church completely ignore the central role played by Bullinger in the theological definition of the Settlement. See, e.g., Scott Wenig, *Straightening the Altars: The Ecclesiastical Vision and Pastoral Achievements of the Progressive Bishops under Elizabeth I, 1559-1579* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000) where Bullinger receives no mention whatever!

TORRANCE KIRBY: THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE AND THE ‘*CURA RELIGIONIS*’:
HEINRICH BULLINGER...AND THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

England on the international stage.³ One might even go so far as to say that Bullinger lays a fair claim to being the theologian *par excellence* of the reformed Church of England.⁴

To employ one of his own categories, Bullinger’s distinctive role with respect to the reformation of the Church of England is perhaps best described as “prophetical.” While there is nothing out of the ordinary in the claim that the *Zuricher* saw his general ministerial function in such a light, our present aim is to investigate more closely the peculiarly political, even constitutional emphasis of Bullinger’s “prophetical office” with respect to England. Concerning his prophetical role Bullinger held that there is a reciprocal obligation of magistrates and ministers of religion. In the context of Zurich, the chief public function of the ministers of the Church with respect to the community at large is to proclaim the Word of God freely and uncompromisingly to all, and, in particular, to the magistrates through the formal address known as the *Fürträge*: “To the magistrate is commanded [by God] that he hear the servants of the church. On the other hand, the servant of the church should follow the magistrate in all those things which the law commands.”⁵ As I hope to show, Bullinger in a remarkable way extended the exercise of his prophetical office to include the realm of England. He repeatedly undertook to address England’s rulers in the service of true religion and for the welfare of the Church militant. Throughout the forty-odd years of his support of the cause of religious reform in England, one recurrent theme of his discourse stands out among the rest, and that concerns the very pre-eminence of the civil magistrate’s authority in what Bullinger refers to as “the care of religion” (*cura religionis*). In short, the proposal put forward is that Heinrich Bullinger’s distinctive contribution to the English Reformation is pre-eminently to be a prophet of the Royal Supremacy.

The institution of the Royal Supremacy provides what is arguably the most conspicuous focal point for testing of the function of Bullinger’s prophetical office. Bullinger’s promotion of a ‘high’ view of the civil magistrate’s ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the Church of England can be traced back to the 1530s. In his dedication to Henry VIII of a treatise of 1538 on the authority of sacred scripture,⁶ Bullinger presents one of his earliest attempts to formulate his understanding of the royal exercise of the *cura religionis*. “First and above all it belongs to the ruler to look after religion and faith,”⁷ Bullinger exhorts, and by way of example, he encourages Henry to imitate

³ Bullinger’s judgement proved critical in both the Edwardine and Elizabethan vestiarian controversies. See Walter Phillips, “Heinrich Bullinger and the Elizabethan Vestiarian Controversy: an Analysis of Influence,” *Journal of Religious History* 11.3 (June, 1981): 363-384.

⁴ David J. Keep did in fact go this far when he observed that “there is no theologian who so accurately mirrors the anglican settlement” as Heinrich Bullinger. See his article “Theology as a basis for policy in the Elizabethan Church,” in L.D.G. Baker (ed.), *Studies in Church History*, vol. 2 (London 1975), 265.

⁵ *Decades* (1849) II:6, 323

⁶ *De Scripturæ sanctæ autoritate, certitudine, firmitate et absoluta perfectione, de[que] episcoporum ... institutione & functione, contra superstitionis tyrannidis[que] Romanæ antistites, ad Sereniss: Angliæ Regem Henrychum VIII ... libri duo* (Tiguri, 1538) [HBB I.111]. See Pamela Biel, *Doorkeepers at the house of righteousness: Heinrich Bullinger and the Zurich clergy 1535-1575* (Bern and New York: P. Lang, 1991), 34-37.

⁷ “Nam primum et potissimum quod ad Regnum curam pertinet est Religio ac Fides.” *De scripturæ sanctæ*, dedication [unfoliated]. See Biel, 34. For an account of the reception of Bullinger’s book by Henry, Chancellor Cromwell, and Archbishop Cranmer, cf. Nicholas Partridge to Bullinger, dated at Frankfort, 17 September 1538, in *Original Letters relative to the English Reformation*, ed. Hastings Robinson (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1847), 610-612. See also Nicolas Eliot’s letter to Bullinger dated 21 August 1538, *Original Letters*, 618: “... this one thing you must know as a most certain truth, that your books are wonderfully well received, not only by our king, but equally so by the lord Cromwell, who is keeper of the king’s privy seal, and vicar general of the church of England

TORRANCE KIRBY: THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE AND THE ‘*CURA RELIGIONIS*’:
HEINRICH BULLINGER...AND THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

the ancient monarchies of Israel and Judah in taking up the sword and defending the faith. (Henry, it should be remembered, had been granted the title ‘*Fidei Defensor*’ by Pope Leo X in recognition of his treatise *Assertio septem sacramentorum*, written with the assistance of Thomas More, and in which he had vigorously defended the papal supremacy!) By virtue of his sacred office as the ‘living law,’ the Prince animates the entirety of his realm, both civil and ecclesiastical. As the very ‘soul’ of the body politic the godly prince is charged with the duty of leading his subjects into the way of true religion and virtue and guarding them against the false.⁸

It is also noteworthy that appended to this treatise in defence of the perfection of scripture is a second argument justifying the office and function of episcopacy. In the title of this second discourse, appended to his treatment of the authority of scripture, Bullinger quite intriguingly identifies the Bishop of Rome with the title “*Romanae Antistes*,” the title he himself bore as chief pastor of the Church of Zurich.⁹ In the course of justifying the final juridical separation England had made from Rome through the Act of Supremacy of 1534, Bullinger lends full prophetic support to the preservation of the Henrician episcopal hierarchy subject to the Crown. In his peroration Bullinger asserts that “although the monarch certainly has the ultimate responsibility for the state of the church in his land, the bishops carry some of this weight by virtue of their advisory capacity.”¹⁰ The bishops propose while the king, exercising supreme ecclesiastical jurisdiction, disposes. The bishops, in short, exercise a “prophetic office” of spiritual jurisdiction; whereas it is the monarch’s task to promulgate the necessary laws upon which the continued true worship of God depends.

In his Dedication to a “godly prince” of a treatise on the authority of sacred scripture, we discern an early, but nonetheless definitive instance of Heinrich Bullinger’s exercise of his prophetic office with respect to the reform of the Church of England. In imitation of the more formalised institution of the *Fürträge* in republican Zurich, Bullinger here initiates, *mutatis mutandis*, what was to become his life-long role of advising and exhorting England’s chief magistrate in the interest of promoting true religion after the pattern of the Old Testament prophets admonishing the kings of ancient Israel. From the standpoint of the unitary character of the Covenant, the magisterial function of monarch (or Council, as in the case of Zurich) was for Bullinger really a continuation of the role of these ancient kings, just as the ministerial office of the clergy extended into the present the function of the prophet as the mediator of God’s voice to the rulers.¹¹

... your writings have obtained for you a reputation and honour among the English, so say nothing of other nations, beyond what could possibly be believed. Wherefore I pray Almighty God long to preserve you in safety, and not to suffer you to lack that spirit, by which you may persevere in writing more, not only for the use and benefit of the English alone, but of his whole church.” Eliot was closely connected with Archbishop Thomas Cranmer with whom Bullinger had been cultivating links as early as 1536. Cf. Bruce Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), 300.

⁸ In sermon II.7 of the *Decades*, 1:339, Bullinger defines the magistrate as the “*lex animata*,” the living law. “For laws undoubtedly are the strongest sinews of the commonweal, and life of the magistrates: so that neither the magistrates can without the laws conveniently live and rule the weal public, nor the laws without the magistrates shew forth their strength and lively force ... By executing and applying the law, the law is made to live and speak.”

⁹ “Antistes” is derived from the Greek verb *anhistemi*, “to stand before or over against,” i.e. “to preside.”

¹⁰ Biel, *Doorkeepers*, 36

¹¹ On the relevance of Bullinger’s doctrine of the covenant, see Wayne Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: the other Reformed Tradition* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1980), 119.

II. Royal *Fürträge* In *Sermonum Decades*

Without doubt the most influential of Bullinger's writings in England were his famous *Sermonum Decades*. Initially published in 1552, the fifty sermons gained quasi-canonical status in the two universities after the accession of Elizabeth. A full English translation was issued in 1577 bound together with Bullinger's explosive contribution to the Vestiarian controversy of the 1560s.¹² The full extent of Bullinger's influence on the self-understanding of the Elizabethan church is difficult to gauge, but it is noteworthy that at the Convocation of the Province of Canterbury held in 1586, Archbishop Whitgift required that "every minister having cure, and being under the degrees of master of arts, and batchelors of law, and not licensed to be a public preacher, shall before the second day of February next provide a Bible, and Bullinger's *Decads* [sic], in Latin or English, and a paper book, ... and shall every weeke read over one Sermon in the said *Decads*, and note likewise the chief matters therein contained in the said paper ..."¹³ Bullinger's royal *Fürträge* appears in the *Decades* most explicitly in the form of two dedicatory epistles addressed to the new Josiah, King Edward VI, and in a sequence of sermons in the second decade on "the sixth precept of the ten commandments."¹⁴ Building upon Hollweg's argument that the *Decades* were composed for a largely clerical audience, Pamela Biel has claimed that Bullinger employed these epistles with a view to supplying his clerical readers "a practical model for the prophetic role of the minister. He addressed the ruler, told him what he needed to know, and sought to win him to the cause."¹⁵ In Biel's estimation, however, the dedication serves merely as a literary convention and reflects "the conditions and business practices of sixteenth-century publishing."¹⁶ Nevertheless, without the Prince himself and his Council as intended recipients of simultaneously 'covenantal' and 'constitutional' instruction in these epistles, it is difficult to imagine how the prophetic office as Bullinger explains it could otherwise hope to receive the magisterial hearing necessary to its success on his own *prophetical* terms.

The actual action taken by Prince and Council to reform religion may or may not be taken as a measure of magisterial response to prophetic monition. Be that as it may, the substance of Bullinger's discourse can leave no theoretical doubt concerning the ultimate repository of religious authority. The thesis of the dedicatory epistle is categorical:

¹² *Sermonum Decades quinque, de potissimis Christiane religionis capitibus, in tres tomas digestae, auctore Henrycho Bullingero ecclesiae Tigurinae ministro* (Tiguri: Christoph. Froschaueri, 1552). The first English translation was published in 1577 entitled *Fiftie godlie and learned sermons, divided into fiue decades*, tr. by H.I. (London: Ralph Newberie, cum gratia & privilegio Regiae Maiestatis, 1577); repr. as *The Decades of Heinrich Bullinger*, ed. Thomas Harding (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1849).

¹³ *Synodalia: a collection of articles of religion, canons, and proceedings of convocations in the Province of Canterbury, from the year 1547 to the year 1717*, ed. Edward Cardwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1842), 2:562. Bullinger's Catechism was required reading at Oxford "ad informandum in vera religione juventutem." Anthony à Wood, *Historia et antiquitates universitatis Oxoniensis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1674), 1:296.

¹⁴ The first dedication is prefixed to the third decade, *Decades*, (1849) vol. 2, 3-16. Consisting of just two sermons, the fourth decade was initially incomplete. The second royal dedication is prefixed to the third sermon of the fourth decade in fulfilment of Bullinger's promise in his first epistle to Edward, viz. to "add the other eight sermons of the fourth decadem which are behind." See vol. 2, 16.

¹⁵ Walter Hollweg, *Heinrich Bullingers Hausbuch: eine Untersuchung über die Anfänge der reformierten Predigtliteratur* (Neukirchen: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsverein, 1965), 42-48. Biel, *Doorkeepers*, 39

¹⁶ Biel, *Doorkeepers*, 38

those kings shall flourish and be in happy case, which wholly give and submit themselves and their kingdoms to Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, being King of kings, and Lord of lords; acknowledging him to be the mightiest prince and monarch of all, and themselves his vassals, subjects, and servants : which, finally, do not follow in all their affairs their own mind and judgment, the laws of men that are contrary to God’s commandments, or the good intents of moral men; but do both themselves follow the laws of the mightiest king and monarch, and also cause them to be followed throughout their kingdom, reforming both themselves and all theirs at and by the rule of God’s holy word. For in so doing the kingdom shall flourish in peace and tranquillity and the kings thereof shall be most wealthy, victorious, long-lived, and happy ... the prosperity of kings and kingdoms consisteth in true faith, diligent hearing, and faithful obeying the word or law of God: whereas their calamity and utter overthrow doth follow the contrary.¹⁷

In short, the ministerial or prophetic office is to interpret the law of God; the magisterial or ruling function is to act upon the interpretation. There follows on this a potted history of the kings of ancient Israel and Judah to illustrate the central thesis concerning the *cura religionis*. The happiness of Saul, David, Solomon and the rest, and of their kingdom, are all shown to rest on the self-same prophetic formula. King Uzziah enjoyed “singular felicity and most happy life, so long as he gainsaid not the mouth of God; but when he would usurp and take upon him that office, which God had properly appointed to the Levites alone, directly opposing himself against the word of the Lord, he was stricken with leprosy.”¹⁸ (No doubt the lesson to be drawn here is to avoid the mixing of ministerial and magisterial functions after the manner of the Roman Antistes or the Consistory of Geneva!)

Bullinger dwells conspicuously upon the example of Josiah since “of all the kings of Juda he was the flower and especial crown.” For “neither stayed he to look for the minds and reformations of other kings and kingdoms; but, quickly forecasting the best for his people, he began to reform the corrupted religion, which he did especially in the eighteenth year of his age. [Edward himself was fifteen at the time.] And in that reformation he had a regard always to follow the meaning of the Holy Scripture alone, to the prescribed order of long continuance, nor to the common voices of the greatest multitude. For he assembled his people together, before whom he laid open the book of God’s law, and appointed all things to be ordained according too the rule of his written word.”¹⁹ Bullinger draws his epistle to a close by referring back to his dedication in 1538 to Edward’s father of his treatises *De Scripturæ sanctæ autoritate* and *De episcoporum institutione & functione*. He admonishes Edward to take note of the providential efficacy of kings’ adherence to such sound prophetic advice. The example is King Henry VIII himself: “now by experience know, that that labour of mine brought forth no small fruit within the realm of England,”²⁰—the fruit, of course, is Edward’s own zeal for evangelical reform. The overall conclusion is that the prophet has a definitively ‘public’ office, and that the ruler who wishes to secure his position and bring felicity both to himself and to his people cannot afford to

¹⁷ *Decades*, 2:4, 5

¹⁸ *Decades*, 2:8

¹⁹ *Decades*, 2:10

²⁰ *Decades*, 2:15

ignore the prophetic word. Moreover, as the scriptural history is supposed to demonstrate, true religion is ordinarily brought about conjointly by spiritual and political means—first and foremost by the conversion of the magistrate through the ministerial agency of the prophetic office. Thus, on the basis of his reading of the sacred political history and “to further the cause of true religion, which now beginneth to bud in England, to the great rejoicing of all good people” Bullinger concludes that he is compelled to address himself to the Prince.²¹

In the seventh sermon of the Second Decade, in a more discursive (and less hortatory) fashion, Bullinger explores the extent to which the *cura religionis* pertains to the office of the Magistrate, and “whether he may make laws and ordinances in cases of Religion.”²² Bullinger leads off the discussion by referring to the mysterious figure of Melchizedek, a priest-king interpreted typologically as a messianic precursor of Christ. Once again, the history of ancient Israel is rehearsed, although with an added twist illustrative of Bullinger’s distinctive theology of the over-arching unity of the Covenant: “Those ancient princes of God’s people, Josue, David, and the rest, were Christians verily and indeed ... the examples which are derived from them and applied to Christian princes, both are and ought to be of force and effect among us at this day ... even now also kings have in the church at this day the same office that those ancient kings had in that congregation which they call the Jewish church.”²³ For Bullinger, a single covenant links the world before the Decalogue with the world of Israel’s kings, the world of the Constantinian Christian emperors, and the world of the godly princes of the Reformation. Just as the covenant itself is one and continuous, so also the balancing of the prophetic and magisterial offices are also viewed as subject to a continuous pattern. Referring to the Old Testament account of King Uzziah’s leprosy, suffered on account of his presumption to perform the exclusively Levitical act of making an offering at the altar of incense,²⁴ Bullinger responds to the counter argument of Tridentine polemics that kings, consequent on Uzziah’s example, presume to exercise the *cura religionis* at their peril. For Bullinger, the magistrate’s *cura religionis* is not the mixing of magisterial and ministerial functions, but rather the means of securing the distinction of these offices:

Our disputation tendeth not to the confounding of the offices and duties of the magistrate and ministers of the church, as that we would have the king to preach, to baptize, and to minister the Lord’s supper; or the priest, on the other side, to sit in the judgment-seat, and give judgment against the murderer, or by pronouncing sentence to take up matters in strife. The church of Christ hath, and retaineth, several and distinguished offices (*officia distincta*); and God is the God of order, and not of confusion. Hereunto tendeth our discourse, by demonstration to prove to all men, that the magistrate of duty ought to have a care of religion (*cura religionis*), either in ruin to restore it, or in soundness to preserve it ... The politic magistrate is commanded to give ear to the ecclesiastical ruler, and the ecclesiastical minister must obey the politic governor in all things which the law commandeth. So then the magistrate is not made subject by God to the priests as to lords, but as to the ministers of the Lord: the subjection and duty which they owe is to the Lord

²¹ *Decades*, 2:15

²² *Decades*, 1:323

²³ *Decades*, 1:326

²⁴ 2 Chron. 16:18, 19. *Decades*, 1:328

TORRANCE KIRBY: THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE AND THE 'CURA RELIGIONIS':
HEINRICH BULLINGER...AND THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

himself and to his law, to which the priests themselves also ought to be obedient, as well as the princes.²⁵

As in the dedicatory epistle, Bullinger seeks to clarify the distinction between ministerial and magisterial functions, and consequently to avoid the perils posed by both Rome and Geneva. The magisterial *cura religionis* is itself the very means to secure this distinction of function, and thus to prevent the clerical presumption of magisterial jurisdiction implied by the papal pretension to the "*plenitudo potestatis*"²⁶ or, for that matter, comparable consistorial claims to juridical autonomy asserted by some adherents of Reform.

In addition to the example of the ancient kings of Israel and Judah, Bullinger cites also the ecclesiastical supremacy exercised by the Christian emperors of the early church: Arcadius and Honorius, Gratian, Valentinian, and Theodosius by whose example "we gather that the proper office of the priests is to determine of religion by proofs out of the word of God, and that the Princes' duty is to aid the priests in advancement and defence of true religion."²⁷ Here Bullinger quotes extensively the *Codex Theodosianus* and Justinian's *Novellis Constitutiones* so that scriptural authority is shown to be reinforced by early-church practice and backed by imperial authority.²⁸

The prophetic tone of the royal *Fürträge* becomes more pronounced in the second Dedicatory Epistle prefixed to the third sermon of the Fourth Decade where Bullinger takes up once again the authority of civil magistrates to reform churches.²⁹ Is an individual prince or magistrate justified in presuming to undertake the reformation of religion within his own territory? Or, does the calling of a general council trump the magistrate's care of religion within the boundary of his realm? What are the claims of the unity of Christendom as against those of the unity of the Covenant? Inevitably Bullinger's prophetic theology of the magistracy must address the matter of the division of Christendom.³⁰ On this question the primacy of the authority of scripture, and thus of the unity of the Covenant, is altogether decisive for Bullinger. "The authority of the prophets and evangelists giveth counsel, fully to absolve and perfectly to end the

²⁵ *Decades*, 1:329

²⁶ For an example of this claim, see the opening sentence of Pius V's Bull *Regnans in excelsis*: "Regnans in excelsis, cui data est omnis in coelo et in terra potestas, unum sanctam Catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam, extra quam nulla est salus, uni soli in terris, videlicet apostolorum principi Petro, Petrique successori Romano pontifici, in *potestatis plenitudine* tradidit gubernandam." Transl: "He that reigneth on high, to whom is given all power in heaven and earth, has committed one holy Catholic and apostolic Church, outside of which there is no salvation, to one alone upon earth, namely to Peter, the first of the apostles, and to Peter's successor, the pope of Rome, to be by him governed in *fullness of power*."

²⁷ *Decades*, 1: 331

²⁸ *Decades*, 1:331. Bullinger quotes: *Codex Theodosianus*, 'de religione,' XVI.1.2: "We desire that all the people under the rule of our clemency should live by that religion which divine Peter the apostle is said to have given to the Romans, and which it is evident that Pope Damasus and Peter, bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic sanctity, followed; that is that we should believe in the one deity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with equal majesty and in the Holy Trinity according to the apostolic teaching and the authority of the gospel. Gratian, Valentinian, and Theodosius Augusti." And also Justinian, *Novellis* 3, writing to Epiphanius, archbishop of Constantinople: "We have, most reverend patriarch, assigned to your holiness the disposition of all things that are honest, seemly, and agreeable to the rule of holy scriptures, touching the appointment and ordering of sacred bishops and reverend clerks."

²⁹ *Decades*, 2:115-122

³⁰ See Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490-1700* (London: Allan Lane, 2003).

reformation of religion once begun with the fear of God, out of or by the word of God; and not to look for or stay upon councils which are directed, not by the word of God, but by the affections and motions of men.”³¹ The prophetic office has come to focus sharply on a specific matter of foreign policy. What should the protestant princes look for in the Council of Trent? For Bullinger the path is clear. Since the corruption of “the Roman See of the last four hundred years” can be perceived “more clearly than the sun,” the prophet continues the royal *Fürträge* in the most confident terms; he urges the young King Edward to take decisive action “without staying for man’s [i.e. the Pope’s or Emperor’s] authority:

Thou shalt, most holy king, do wisely and religiously, if, without looking for the determination of a general council, thou shalt proceed to reform the churches in thy kingdom according to the rule of the books of both Testaments, which we do rightly believe, being written by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, to be the very word of God. By now, that it is lawful for every Christian church, much more for every notable Christian kingdom, without the advice of the Church of Rome and the members thereof, in matters of religion depraved by them, wholly to make reformation according to the rule of God’s most holy word, it is thereby manifest, because Christians are the congregation, the church, or subjects of their king, Christ, to whom they owe by all means most absolute and perfect obedience. Now the Lord gave his church a charge of reformation: he commended unto it the sound doctrine of the gospel, together with the lawful use of his holy sacraments ... Therefore Christians, obeying the laws and commandments of their prince, do utterly remove or take away all superstition, and do restore, establish, and preserve true religion, according to the manner that Christ their prince appointed them... Proceed, therefore, proceed, most holy king, to imitate the most godly princes, and the infallible rule of the holy scripture: proceed, I say, without staying for man’s authority, by the most true and absolute instrument of truth, the book of God’s most holy word, to reform the church of Christ in [thy most happy] England.³²

The *cura religionis*—the magistrate’s authority to reform religion and worship—is a power derived immediately from heaven. This power is authenticated by the sacred history of God’s revealed word in the Scriptures (more particularly by the sacred *political* history of the kings of Israel and Judah), and is interpreted by the prophetic word of God’s ministers including Bullinger himself in the royal *Fürträge* of his dedicatory epistle.

III. Bullinger’s Prophetic Office And The Elizabethan Church

In a letter written towards the end of his life to Edwin Sandys, then Bishop of London,³³ Bullinger recapitulates the *leitmotiv* of his “prophetic office” respecting the Church of England in a vigorous defence of the Queen’s jurisdiction over matters of religion or, put more precisely

³¹ *Decades*, Second Epistle Dedicatory, 2:116

³² *Decades*, 2:119-121

³³ Sandys was one of the most influential figures of the Elizabethan establishment. Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University in 1553, he fled to the continent during the period of the Marian exile in the mid-1550s. He visited Strasbourg and Frankfurt, and enjoyed Bullinger’s personal hospitality while resident in Zurich. Under Elizabeth Sandys was appointed successively Bishop of Worcester (1559), London (1571) and Archbishop of York (1577).

TORRANCE KIRBY: THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE AND THE 'CURA RELIGIONIS':
HEINRICH BULLINGER...AND THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

in the terms of the Elizabethan Settlement, the royal title to supreme governance of the Church.³⁴ The context of the letter, dated at Zurich on the 10th of March 1574, is the heated controversy then building up over the publication of the anonymous tract *An Admonition to the Parliament* (1572), probably the work of two young presbyterian radicals, Thomas Wilcox and John Field.³⁵ The *Admonition* rejected the institutions of the Elizabethan settlement to the core and sought to achieve a "further reformation" of the English Church after the pattern of Geneva. The liturgy of the *Book of Common Prayer* was castigated as "an unperfected booke, culled and picked out of that popishe dunghill, the Masse booke, full of all abominations" and "against the word of God;" the jurisdiction of bishops "strange and unheard of in Chrystes church, nay playnely in Gods word forbidden;" and the royal supremacy itself, a two-headed "monstrositie," challenged Christ's sole headship of the Church. The Archbishops' and Commissary courts robbed "Christes church of lawfull pastors, of watchfull Seniors and Elders, and carefull Deacons."³⁶ A key plank in the *Admonition* platform was to replace the existing system of ecclesiastical courts with a presbyterian discipline. In his letter to Sandys, Bullinger expresses marked disapproval of this platform for "further reformation" of the Church of England along lines inspired by the ecclesiastical *disciplina* of Geneva, a platform which maintained, according to Bullinger's summary, that "the Civil Magistrate can have no authority in ecclesiastical matters and, moreover, that the Church will admit no other government than that of presbyters and presbyteries." Such claims advanced by the Disciplinarians, according to Bullinger, rested upon an understanding of the relation between the spheres of magisterial and ministerial jurisdiction "held in common with the papists, who also displace the magistrate from the government of the Church, and who substitute themselves [i.e. the papacy and the church hierarchy] in his place."³⁷

The Admonition Controversy, with its focus upon the institutions of ecclesiastical discipline and the jurisdiction of both magistrate and bishops, was in many respects a replay in England of the disagreement over excommunication which erupted in the Palatinate in the late 1560s. Caspar Olevianus, Court preacher in Heidelberg, had sought a "purer" church with powers of discipline independent of the Magistrate,³⁸ he was opposed by Thomas Erastus who

³⁴ John Parkhurst, Bishop of Norwich, wrote to Bullinger on 21 May 59 to advise that "the Queen is not willing to be called the *head* of the Church of England, although this title has been offered her; but she willingly accepts the title *governor*, which amounts to the same thing. The pope is again driven from England . . ." *Zurich Letters* I.38. The original Act of Supremacy passed by Parliament in 1534 designated Henry VIII "supreme head of the Church in England." After an only partially successful attempt under Queen Mary to dismantle the royal headship, a new Act of Supremacy was passed in 1559 with a change of the title "Supreme Head" to "Supreme Governor," I Eliz. I.c.1. See Claire Cross, *The Royal Supremacy in the Elizabethan Church* (London 1969), 128-129. In the Thirty-Nine *Articles of Religion*, approved by Convocation in 1562 and by Parliament not until 1571, the thirty-seventh reads "The Queen's Majesty hath the chief power in the Realm of England, and over her dominions, unto whom the chief government of all estates of this realm, whether they be Ecclesiastical or Civil, in all causes doth appertain, and is not, nor ought to be, subject to any foreign jurisdiction."

³⁵ (Imprinted we know where, and whan [sic], judge you the place and you can [Hemel Hempstead?]: printed by J.S. [J. Stroud?], 1572); reprinted in Walter H. Frere and C.E. Douglas, *Puritan Manifestoes: A Study of the Origin of the Puritan Revolt* (London: SPCK, 1954).

³⁶ *Puritan Manifestoes*, 11, 21-23, 33

³⁷ *Zurich Letters* I, 156

³⁸ For an account of the differences between Zurich and Geneva on ecclesiastical discipline, see Robert C. Walton, "The Institutionalisation of the Reformation in Zurich," *Zwingliana* XIII, 497-515. In an article published in the proceedings of the previous Bullinger Kongress, Wayne Baker investigates the circumstances of Bullinger's composition of the unpublished "Tractatus de excommunicatione," Gäbler und Herkenrath, 141-159. On the

TORRANCE KIRBY: THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE AND THE ‘*CURA RELIGIONIS*’:
HEINRICH BULLINGER...AND THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

defended the magisterial supremacy. This exchange concerning the disciplinary power of excommunication escalated into a full-scale dispute over the first principles of ecclesiology and the fundamental nature of the authority of scripture. Bullinger interceded with the Elector Friedrich III in support of his erstwhile pupil Erastus and set out reasons for his opposition to the conduct of church discipline by presbyters independently of the civil magistrate which would shortly be reiterated with reference to events across the channel.³⁹ The Heidelberg dispute highlights the difference between the Zurich and Geneva “brands” of Reform on the question of both the distinction and the interconnection between ministerial and magisterial jurisdiction. The result was something of a compromise between the two principal exemplars of a Reformed ecclesiology; by 1570 a presbytery had been established in Heidelberg, although its power to excommunicate was subject to the consent of the magistrate.⁴⁰ Bullinger’s reaction with respect to the English proponents of the *disciplina*—such as Field and Wilcox, as well as Walter Travers and Thomas Cartwright—is to view their challenge to the Elizabethan establishment largely in terms of this continental dispute, and to assure Bishop Sandys of his solid support of the *status quo*. England had become yet another battleground between two competing visions of Reformed ecclesiastical polity with the Queen and her Zurich-trained bench of bishops ranged in support of the Tigurine model now openly challenged by disciplinarian critics of the 1559 Settlement, all sympathisers of the example of Geneva. Bullinger’s 1574 response to Sandys in support of the Elizabethan establishment may be taken as emblematic of the prophetic role he exercised throughout his career.

Meanwhile, on the other major front in the jurisdictional wars, and just two years prior to his correspondence with Sandys, Bullinger had argued publicly at considerable length in support of the Royal Supremacy in his refutation of Pius V’s bull *Regnans in excelsis*.⁴¹ The bull excommunicates Elizabeth and absolves her subjects of their obedience on the ground that the “pretended Queen of England” has “monstrously usurped” the supreme ecclesiastical authority

Heidelberg controversy, see Wesel-Roth, 43-81 and for Bullinger’s role, see also Hollweg, *Heinrich Bullinger’s Hausbuch*, 260-278.

³⁹ 28 October 1568. Autograph: Zurich StA, E ii 341, 3615-3619; cited by Baker, “In defense of Magisterial Discipline: Bullinger’s “Tractatus de excommunicatione” of 1568,” Gäbler und Herkenrath, 143.

⁴⁰ Thomas Erastus, *Explicatio Gravissimae questionis vtrum excommunicatio ...* (Pesclavii 1589). Although the controversy transpired in 1568, Erastus’s tract was not published until after his death. Theodore de Bèze responded to the *Explicatio* in the year after its publication with *De vera excommunicatione et Christiano presbyterio* (Geneva 1590).

⁴¹ *Bullae papisticae ante biennium contra sereniss. Angliae, Franciae & Hybernicae Reginam Elizabetham, & contra inclytum Angliae regnum promulgatae, refutatio, orthodoxaq[ue] Reginae, & vniuersi regni Angliae defensio* (London: John Day, 1571), [HBB I.562]; hereafter referred to as the “*Defensio*.” See also the English translation: *A confutation of the Popes bull which was published more then two yeres agoe against Elizabeth the most gracious Queene of England, Fraunce, and Ireland, and against the noble realme of England: together with a defence of the sayd true Christian Queene, and of the whole realme of England* (London: John Day, cum priuilegio Regiae Maiestatis per decennium, 1572). The *Defensio* was written at the invitation of Richard Cox, bishop of Ely, another of Bullinger’s close associates among the ranks of the Elizabethan episcopate. For a full discussion of the circumstances of Bullinger’s authorship of the *Defensio*, see David J. Keep, “Bullinger’s Defence of Queen Elizabeth,” in Ulrich Gäbler und Erland Herkenrath, *Heinrich Bullinger, 1504-1575: gesammelte Aufsätze zum 400. Todestag* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1975), 231-241; see also Robert C. Walton, “Henry Bullinger’s Answer to John Jewel’s call for help: Bullinger’s exposition of Matth. 16: 18-19 (1571),” Gäbler und Herkenrath, 245-256. For a translation of the bull itself, see Philip Hughes, *The Reformation in England*, 3 vols. (London: Hollis and Carter, 1954), 3:418-420. For Richard Cox’s letter to HB of 10 July 1570, see *Zurich Letters*, ed. Hastings Robinson (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1846), I.221-223.

TORRANCE KIRBY: THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE AND THE ‘CURA RELIGIONIS’:
HEINRICH BULLINGER...AND THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

and jurisdiction and has thereby reduced her kingdom to “miserable ruin.”⁴² In his refutation of *Regnans in excelsis* in the *Defensio*, Bullinger makes an extensive (and, it must be said, somewhat repetitive) argument for the view that the Queen “hath done nothing but that the Lord God himselfe hath commaunded her to do, and which all good Princes among the people of God have done before her. For ... *by Gods ordinaunce* [emphasis added] it is lawfull for kinges and Magistrates to take upon them the care and ordering both of cases and of persons Ecclesiasticall.”⁴³ For Elizabeth to bind her subjects by an oath of Supremacy “to abiure the authoritie and obedience of the Romish Byshop” is, according to Bullinger, no more than “that she ought to do by virtue of her [divinely sanctioned] office.”⁴⁴

Without any doubt Bullinger’s identification of the presbyterian assault on the authority of the magistrate with papal claims to the “plenitude of power” displays a sharp polemical edge within the Reformed camp, an approach which resonates closely with John Whitgift’s officially sanctioned responses to the *Admonition* and to Thomas Cartwright’s *Replie*.⁴⁵ The conflict between Whitgift and Cartwright corresponds closely to that between Erastus and Olevianus; and both are writ large in the competing ecclesiological paradigms of Zurich and Geneva. Viewed in this light, Bullinger’s prophetic role is plainly to promote consolidation of the Elizabethan Settlement with its reformed confession and ecclesiastical discipline secured under the authority of the civil magistrate, consistently with the Zurich model. With an invocation of the Augustinian political theology of the “two cities,” Bullinger goes on to counsel Sandys “I wish there were no lust of dominion [*libido dominandi*] in the originators of this presbytery!” To the theologically trained eye, Bullinger’s reference to the *libido dominandi* implies that by seeking to exclude the Magistrate from the “*cura religionis*” England’s disciplinarian radicals in effect had succeeded in confusing the spiritual aims of the *civitas Dei* with the external ends of the *civitas terrena*. That is to say, the presbyterian *Disciplina* obscured the proper distinction between the spheres of ministerial and magisterial authority, and in such a way as to resurrect the jurisdictional pretensions of the papacy.⁴⁶ Bullinger concludes his letter to Sandys by urging the greatest caution in preserving the “supreme power” in the hand of the civil magistrate. What is particularly revealing in the letter to Sandys is the *theological* weight Bullinger attaches to his arguments in support of the Royal Supremacy.

The heart and substance of Bullinger’s prophetic office with respect to England was to defend, to interpret, and to promote the Civil Magistrate’s pivotal role as the supreme governing power in the ordering of religion in the realm: the royal ‘*cura religionis*.’ Strange though it may

⁴²⁴² *S.D.N. Pii Papae V sententia declaratoria contra Elizabetham praetensam angliae regem, et ei adhaerentes haereticos* (1570). “Sed impiorum numerus tantum potentia invaluit, ut nullus iam in orbe locus sit relictus, quem illi pessimis doctrinis corrumpere non tentarint; adnitente inter caeteros, flagitiorum serva Elizabetha praetensa Angliae regina, ad quam veluti ad asylum omnium infestissimi profugium invenerunt. Haec eadem, regno occupato, supremi ecclesiae capitis locum in omni Anglia, eiusque praecipuam auctoritatem atque iurisdictionem monstrose sibi usurpans, regnum ipsum iam tum ad fidem Catholicam, et bonam frugem reductum, rursus in miserum exitum revocavit.”

⁴³ This passage could be interpreted as alluding to Bullinger’s doctrine of the unity of the covenant in *The Old Faith*.

⁴⁴ *Confutation of the Popes bull*, 54 recto

⁴⁵ For a full historical account, see Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans? Presbyterian and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988). For a theological account of this exchange see W J Torrance Kirby, *Richard Hooker’s Doctrine of the Royal Supremacy* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), ch. 3.

⁴⁶ According to Augustine, the two cities—the *civitas Dei* and the *civitas terrena*—are constituted by two modes of love, viz. *amor Dei* and *libido dominandi*. See *de civitate Dei*, XIV.1.

appear, the institution of the Royal Supremacy with its *hypostatic* conjunction of supreme civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the Prince, constitutes for Bullinger a vivid exemplar of the unitary character of Christian polity, and thus of the cooperation of magisterial and ministerial power. From the standpoint of Bullinger's unique covenantal interpretation of history, it is certainly arguable that the Old Testament exemplar is more completely realised under England's monarchical constitution than under the republican conditions of Bullinger's own city and canton of Zurich. In this sense the institution of the Royal Supremacy in the reformed Church of England provided Bullinger throughout his career with an invaluable testing ground for the principles of his distinctive hermeneutic of salvation history.