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The publication of a critical edition is always a welcome event, and this volume is no exception. The title of the fourth volume in the
series of Bullinger’s theological works might lead one to assume that it is yet another evangelical attack on *Menschensatzungen* and the corruption of the Roman church. Bullinger does indeed address these topics, but his treatise is much more than simply another anti-Catholic polemic. Written in 1538 and dedicated to King Henry VIII of England, *De scripturae sanctae authoritate* covers a broader range of topics than its title implies and reveals the reformer not just as a theologian but also as a historian and scholar of the classics.

As the full title indicates, the treatise consists of two books. They are of unequal length: the second book is half again as long as the first. Both books follow a pattern Bullinger used elsewhere, first describing the origin and historical development of a concept or practice, then presenting its correct understanding or ideal form, and finally criticizing the errors or abuses that have distorted it in the present day. His chief concern in Book I is to assert the superiority of Scripture against the Roman church’s claim to judge Scripture and to be the custodian of extra-scriptural tradition. Bullinger does this by attesting both to Scripture’s antiquity – God spoke to Adam and the patriarchs long before Moses put the first books of the Bible into writing, let alone before the church established the canon – and to its completeness, since it contains all that is necessary for piety.

Book II deals with more practical matters of church structure. Bullinger describes how the leadership of God’s people was entrusted first to the prophets, then to the levitical priesthood, and finally to the ministers of God’s word, who are bishops or overseers. Bullinger’s understanding of the church’s leadership is non-hierarchical: his only distinction is between the ministers and those he calls »clerics,« the deacons or assistants and disciples or students who are preparing for the ministry. As a consequence, his discussion of »the institution and function of bishops« is a broad description of the preparation for and the tasks of ministry. He includes in it a plea for adequate financial support for ministers and emphasizes the need to maintain the schools and libraries essential for educating the boys who will enter the ministry. Bullinger focuses on the chief responsibilities of ministers – to preach, to pray, and to administer the sacraments – but he also refers to the
more specialized functions of prophets, who expound God's word, and doctors, including professors and schoolteachers. Last but certainly not least, he rejects the claims of the bishop of Rome to headship over the church, providing his own exegesis of the Scripture texts used to support papal primacy, describing how the church fathers regarded the bishop of Rome, and condemning the corruption of the Roman hierarchy from the pope on down.

Scattered through both books are discussions of a number of other issues, some of them as tangents, others as more detailed treatment of the topic being discussed, such as the nature of the sacraments, the proper approach to preaching, a defense of ecclesiastical law, and so on. A recurrent theme is the responsibility of the ruler or magistrate for overseeing religion, which is not surprising in a book addressed to the king who had broken with Rome and now claimed headship over the English church.

The annotations of the critical edition are relatively brief, devoted primarily to identifying individuals and works mentioned by Bullinger. This does not mean, however, that there are few annotations, for Bullinger constantly cites the writings of others. His knowledge of the church fathers and the early church historians is impressive, and he does not hesitate to quote classical authors and historians where they suit his purposes. He devotes one chapter to the portions of canon law used to support papal authority – which he then dismisses by stating that he finds «no antiquity, erudition, piety or judgment in them, and so they are not worthy of response» (p. 190). Bullinger also refers several times to Erasmus's handbook for preachers, Ecclesiastes, which had been published three years earlier, even incorporating lengthy quotations from it into his text.

The editor's introduction is brief but sufficient to orient the reader to Bullinger's connections with England and the circumstances surrounding the writing of the treatise. The volume has indices of persons and places as well as of Scripture and other sources cited. Included with the book is a CD-ROM with the complete text, which allows one to do word searches within the text. In these days of budget-cutting and belt-tightening, especially in the humanities, it is encouraging to see that support continues for the scholarship required to produce a critical edition such as this one.

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