

«The world always perishes, the church will last forever»

Church and eschatology in Bullinger's sermons on the book of Daniel (1565)

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1. Introduction

Modern biblical scholarship has located the book of Daniel at the crossroads of the older prophetic tradition in Israel and the newer genre of apocalyptic literature. As prophetic literature it conveys the eschatological hope for the restoration of Israel and gives a description of the prophetic figure of Daniel. As apocalyptic literature it reveals by means of heavenly visions and the interpretation of an angelic intermediary the imminence of the final destruction of the wicked and the resurrection of the saints. Building upon older traditions, the book in its present form was composed to encourage and empower the Jewish community in the post-exilic period.¹

After its integration into the Christian canon, the book of Daniel has found many new interpretations within the community of the church. The present essay aims to highlight the contribution of the sixteenth-century theologian Heinrich Bullinger to the interpretation of this book within the context of sixteenth-century Protestant Europe. This exercise will not only tell us something about the book of Daniel and sixteenth-century Protestantism, but will also contribute to a better understanding of the life and thought of Bullinger who, not unlike the prophetic figure of Daniel, understood himself to be an interpreter of God's will for his own community.²

Bullinger's interest in the book of Daniel dates back to at least 1530, when he wrote a commentary on Daniel 7.³ This essay, however, will be devoted to the 66 sermons on the book of Daniel that Bullinger published in August 1565.⁴ From his «Diarium» we know that he preached on the book of Daniel

¹ E.g. Rolf Rendtorff, *Theologie des Alten Testaments: Ein kanonischer Entwurf*, vol. 1: *Kanonische Grundlegung*, Neukirchen 1999, 359–362.

² Within weeks of accepting his position as *antistes* of the Zurich church, Bullinger defined the prophetic task of the Protestant preacher in his 1532 treatise «*De prophetarum officio*» (cf. Heinrich Bullinger *Bibliographie*, Bd. 1: *Beschreibendes Verzeichnis der gedruckten Werke von Heinrich Bullinger*, ed. Joachim Staedtke, Zürich 1972 [Heinrich Bullinger Werke I/1] [cit. HBBibl 1], no 33).

³ *De Hebdomadis, quae apud Daniele sunt, opusculum* (cf. HBBibl 1, no 27).

⁴ *Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, qui a vetustis polyhistor, id est multiscius est dictus, expositus homiliis LXVI, quibus non tam sensus prophetae redditur, quam usus et fructus prophetiae ostenditur, adeoque omnibus in ecclesia docentibus commonstratur, quomodo per-*

on Tuesdays, beginning May 18, 1563.⁵ Bullinger hoped that the publication of these sermons would prove useful for the church in general, and for its ministers in particular.⁶ This hope was severely tested in 1564 when the plague not only compelled him to lay down all of his activities, but even made him fear for his life. After his unexpected recovery, Bullinger was struck by a passage in Jerome, in which the church father reveals that he devoted himself to writing a commentary on the prophets after recovering from a serious illness. Bullinger followed Jerome's example and resumed his sermons on Isaiah and Daniel in January 1565.⁷ In June of the same year, he completed his work on Daniel. In addition, the Zurich preacher reworked a twenty-year-old manuscript treatise on world and church history, his «Epitomen temporum et rerum ab orbe condito».⁸ In August 1565, the two works were published in one volume by the Zurich publisher Christoph Froschauer Jr.

Several authors have discussed parts of Bullinger's «Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta» in detail.⁹ In this article I will try to sketch the outlines of his concept of the church as the eschatological community of believers as it appears throughout the entire work.¹⁰ After examining the historical situation of the church in Bullinger's own time (1), in its eschatological dimension (2),

spicue, iusto ordine et cum utilitate populo Dei, hic propheta praedicari possit (cf. HBBibl 1, no 428). For this paper, the 1576 edition has been used (cf. HBBibl 1, no 429).

⁵ Heinrich Bullingers Diarium (Annales vitae) der Jahre 1504–1574, ed. Emil Egli, Basel 1904 (Quellen zur Schweizerischen Reformationsgeschichte 2) (repr. Zürich 1985), 72.

⁶ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, aa1r [title]: «expositus homiliis LXVI, quibus [...] omnibus in ecclesia docentibus commonstratur, quomodo perspicue, iusto ordine et cum utilitate populo Dei, hic propheta praedicari possit.»

⁷ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, aa2v; Diarium, 79–80. Starting in 1562, Bullinger preached a series on Isaiah on Sundays, cf. Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, aa2r; Diarium, 71.

⁸ Cf. HBBibl 1, no 430.

⁹ Irena Backus, The Beast: Interpretations of Daniel 7.2–9 and Apocalypse 13.1–4, 11–12 in Lutheran, Zwinglian and Calvinist Circles in the Late Sixteenth Century, in: *Reformation and Renaissance Review* [2] (2000), 59–77; Emidio Campi, Über das Ende des Weltzeitalters: Aspekte der Rezeption des Danielbuches bei Heinrich Bullinger, in: *Europa, Tausendjähriges Reich und Neue Welt: Zwei Jahrtausende Geschichte und Utopie in der Rezeption des Danielbuches*, ed. Mariano Delgado et al., Freiburg/Stuttgart 2003 (Studien zur christlichen Religions- und Kulturgeschichte 1), 225–238; Aurelio A. García Archilla, The theology of history and apologetic historiography in Heinrich Bullinger: Truth in history, San Francisco 1992, 117–165; Anja-Silvia Göing, Schulausbildung im Kontext der Bibel: Heinrich Bullingers Auslegungen des Propheten Daniel (1565), in: Emidio Campi, Peter Opitz (eds), *Heinrich Bullinger: Life – Thought – Influence 1*, eds. Emidio Campi and Peter Opitz, Zürich 2007 (Zürcher Beiträge zur Reformationsgeschichte 24), 437–458; Thomas Krüger, Heinrich Bullinger als Ausleger des Alten Testaments am Beispiel seiner Predigten über Daniel 1 und 2, in: *Zwingliana* 31 (2004), 91–104; Christian Moser, «Papam esse Antichristum»: Grundzüge von Heinrich Bullingers Antichristkonzeption, in: *Zwingliana* 30 (2003), 65–101.

¹⁰ Cf. Peter Opitz, Heinrich Bullinger als Theologe: Eine Studie zu den «Dekaden», Zürich 2004, 432–436; Herman J. Selderhuis, Kirche am Kreuz: Die Ekklesiologie Heinrich Bullingers, in: *Campi/Opitz, Heinrich Bullinger*, 515–536.

I will consider his view on the nature of the church (3). This will lead into a discussion of the central message of consolation and admonition for the faithful (4) as well as of the function of prophetic revelation (5), followed by a short evaluation (6).

2. *The historical situation of the church*

For a correct understanding of an apocalyptic text, it is necessary to identify the historical situation of the community in which it was first created and transmitted (*Sitz im Leben*). Or at least, how the author evaluated the situation of his community. The same procedure applies to later interpretations and actualisations of this kind of literature. Thus, before turning to the central message of the book of Daniel, we must first attempt to gain an impression of the situation of the audience for which Bullinger held his sermons, or of the readership of the printed homilies.¹¹

In their original setting, the prophecies of Daniel aimed to encourage the Jewish people, either in advance as a preparation for future distress, or in the face of present persecution and oppression. Bullinger decidedly rules out the possibility that the visions concerning Antiochus were a *vaticinium ex eventu*, which would have been a return to the old error of Porphyry.¹² Although he is determined to locate the origin of the book of Daniel in the context of the Jewish community in exile, his concept of Biblical theology in which the unity of God's covenant with his people under both the Old and New Testament is emphasized, allows him to relate prophecies and visions to the situation of the Christian church in general and to that of his own day in particular. Bullinger argues that the Church was just as much in danger as the Jewish people were during the period of captivity in Babylon, or during the period of the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes. This raises the question as to how he evaluated the situation of the community of Zurich, or the Protestant movement in general around 1565. Did Bullinger have any particular problems in mind while preparing his sermons on the book of Daniel?

Bullinger dedicated his «Conciones» to five English bishops who had stayed in Zurich for some time during the reign of Mary Tudor: Robert Horne (1513–1579, bishop of Winchester), John Jewel (1522–1571, bishop of Salisbury), Edwin Sandys (1519?–1588, bishop of Worcester), John Parkhurst (1511?–1575, bishop of Norwich), James Pilkington (1520–1576, bishop of Durham).¹³ In the prefatory epistle, however, there is no reference to the past

¹¹ In the prefatory epistle Bullinger states that a preacher should accommodate his message to the situation of his audience (Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, aa4r).

¹² Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 1v; cf. 129v.

¹³ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, aa2r. In his prefatory epistle, Bullinger recalls the «collo-

persecution of English Protestants. Rather, Bullinger congratulates the former Marian exiles with their present fortune under queen Elisabeth.¹⁴

Around 1565 the situation in France was much more precarious than it was in England. Since the Edict of Tolerance (1562) had been enacted, the French Protestants were engaged in a civil war with their Catholic opponents. It is likely that Bullinger was very well informed about the situation in France, because France was both a traditional ally of the Swiss confederation against aggression by the Habsburgs and a possible stronghold for Protestantism in continental Europe.¹⁵ In sermon 27 he refers to the war in France: «It is now already the third year that we see the sky is burning. We see that France is engaged in an internal conflict with much bloodshed and burnings, mainly for religious reasons».¹⁶ On one occasion Bullinger explicitly refers to the problems of the *Hugonothi* who were being accused of both despising any form of traditional authority and of rejecting the legitimacy of the papacy.¹⁷ Although Bullinger seems to be well aware of the situation in France, he does not often refer to the situation of the French Protestants.

More frequently does Bullinger refer to the problematic state of Christianity in general, without reference to a particular situation or place. Oppression and persecution appear to be the general state in which the church finds herself. The visions in the second part of the book of Daniel «describe the situation (*status*) of the church, or the people of God, and what the saints should always expect to occur – wars and persecutions – and how they are to conduct themselves in this situation.»¹⁸ Oppression and persecution are constant factors throughout the history of the church.¹⁹

quorum dulcium quae inter nos mutuo conserebamus, dum ante annos aliquot Anglia exiles religionis ergo, in Helvetia Tiguri apud nos plus minus triennio viveretis» (aa5a). Towards the end of the epistle, he sends his regards to another thirteen former exiles with whom he was acquainted (aa5v). For background information on these «Marian exiles», cf. Carrie Euler, *Couriers of the Gospel: England and Zurich, 1531–1558*, Zürich 2006 (*Zürcher Beiträge zur Reformationsgeschichte* 25), esp. 102–103. It is sometimes assumed that the future bishop of Ely, Richard Cox, visited Zurich as well. However, in the light of Euler's remark that there is «no solid evidence» that Cox was ever in Zurich, it is quite remarkable that Bullinger does not mention his name in either the dedication or the prefatory epistle (cf. Euler, *Couriers*, 103, note 216).

¹⁴ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, aa5a: «Gratulabamur quidem vobis, ut par erat, de felici vestro in patriam reditu, et in primis de felicissimis regni auspiciis Serenissimae reginae Elisabethae.»

¹⁵ In a 1569 «Fürtrag» – an address from the city's preachers to the Zurich city council – Bullinger shows himself to be well aware of the situation in France and pleads for financial support for French refugees in Geneva, cf. *Schriften zum Tage*, ed. Hans Ulrich Bächtold et al., Zug 2006 (*Studien und Texten zur Bullingerzeit* 3), 283–86.

¹⁶ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 56r.

¹⁷ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 67v.

¹⁸ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 73r–v: «Adeoque describitur status ecclesiae vel populi Dei a Daniele, quid expectant perpetuo sancti, bella et persecutiones, denique quomodo se

Therefore, Bullinger regularly refers to the vicissitude of the fate of the church.²⁰ In Israel a pious king was often succeeded by an ungodly ruler. Nebuchadnezzar first acknowledged the true God, but afterwards persecuted his servants.²¹ After a period of blessing and growth, a period of persecution or temptation follows. Bullinger draws a parallel between the persecution of the church under the Roman empire and the situation of Christianity in his own time. From Nero to Constantine the Great there were 256 years of cruel persecution and unrest turmoil for the church. Afterwards the church flourished under Christian rulers. For Bullinger, this historical fact contains a message of consolation for the faithful. History shows that worldly enemies will perish, but the hope of the saints will not be destroyed.²² At the same time, believers should not be amazed if the enemies of the gospel rise up again, and if the church and the preaching of the gospel appear to be eradicated, even if at this moment the gospel appears to triumph.²³

Theologically, the vicissitude of the church is rooted in God's providence. God wants to test and purify his church, to strengthen true believers and to punish the hypocrites and the wicked.²⁴ We are in God's hand and his providence will guide and save us. But he can also cast us away into the hands of our executioners.²⁵ Nothing in this world happens by chance, but God governs everything in a most wise and righteous manner.²⁶ For Bullinger the

in his gerant, sperent utique in Deum, perseverent in vera religione, invocent Deum, cui omnes res suas credant, a quo vicissim nunquam sint deserendi.»

¹⁹ Cf. Bullinger's «De calamitatibus miseriisque variis patienter preferendis. Item de spe et multiuga fidelium consolatione», in: Heinrich *Bullinger*, Sermonum Decades quinque de potissimis Christianae religionis capitibus (1552), ed. Peter Opitz, Zürich 2008 (Heinrich Bullinger Werke III/3.1–2), 286–312. This relatively long sermon is incorporated in a discussion of the Ten Commandments, indirectly following the explanation of the eighth commandment («You shall not steal»). For Bullinger, necessity and hardship are the natural condition of man.

²⁰ E.g. Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 112r–v: «admiranda ecclesiae Dei vicissitudo.»

²¹ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 25r.

²² Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 78r: «Proinde dum hodie quoque cernimus configere inter se mundum, et affligi fideles, illud maxime consoletur nos, quod mundus perit, spes autem sanctorum non interit.»

²³ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 25r: «Quid ergo mirum tibi videatur, si hodie quoque nunc videatur evangelium triumphaturum et triumphare [...], mox tamen reviscentibus iterum evangelii hostibus, videantur hi omnes ecclesias cum ipsa praedicatione evangelii radicatus evulsuri? [...] Ergo qualis qualis sit sors et species ecclesiae, semper respicientes ad verbum Dei, per patientiam et fidem perseverant in vera religione.»

²⁴ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 129r. Cf. 65v, where he mentions the «Nicodemitae, Georgiani ac Davidiani [followers of the Dutch spiritualist leader David Joris] cum Libertinis».

²⁵ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 2v.

²⁶ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 99v.

doctrine of God's providence is part of the central meaning of the book of Daniel: the consolation of believers.²⁷

Although persecution and oppression are the result of God's providential guidance, it is clear for Bullinger that the errors of the Roman papacy are the cause of all misery. The head of the Roman Catholic church has in fact become the enemy of the true church. It appears that the cruelty exercised by the papacy is just another manifestation of the perpetual oppression of the saints. Commenting on Daniel 3 (*De vera et falsa religione*) and the attempt on the lives of Daniel's friends after their refusal to commit idolatry, Bullinger raises the following question: «Do we hear anything else today? Horrible, cruel and vaporous decrees are enacted for the sake of the papists, in order to burn and torture without clemency all who dare to stand up against the church of Rome.»²⁸ In sermon 14 Bullinger sees a close parallel between the sceptical attitude of rulers like Nebuchadnezzar and Sennacherib towards Jewish religion, and the Roman Catholic persecution of heretics like John Wycliffe. The papists confront their evangelical prisoners, who are condemned to death either by imperial or ecclesiastical law, with the necessity of obedience to the church: «What hope is left for you, since there is no salvation outside the church? But you have apostasized from the church and are like branches that have been cut off from the vine.»²⁹ Speaking in the past tense, Bullinger reminds his audience in sermon 59 of the cruelties of their enemy: history tells of, and our own sad and wavering experience testifies to, the miserable and cruel fate of many teachers of the church and their disciples in Italy, Germany, France, Spain and England. «There is no kingdom in the Christian world in which the persecution by the Antichrist has not raged, and has still not stopped after so much innocent blood has been shed.»³⁰ For Bullinger these past and present outbursts of antichristian aggression resemble many signs of the eschaton.

²⁷ E.g. Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 10r: «Pertinet autem haec doctrina de Deo gubernante omnia et Christo eiusque regno aeterno vitaque et salute fidelium: principio quidem ad confirmationem promissionis divinae, qua orbi Christus est promissus servator, denique ad consolationem afflictissimi populi Iudaici iam in Babylone captivi.»

²⁸ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 26r-v: «An vero alia hodie audiuntur? Eduntur edicta horrida truculenta et fumantia pro papismo, comburendum nempe et trucidandum esse absque misericordia omnem, qui se Romanae rebellem obiecerit ecclesiae.»

²⁹ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 28r: «Quid spei vobis est reliquum, cum extra Ecclesiam non sit salus, vos autem defeceritis ab Ecclesia, et sitis veluti palmites a vite resecti?»

³⁰ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 128v: «Sanguine martyrum inundavit Italia. Carceres diu per Germaniam fidelium suspiriis et gemitibus eiulatibusque intonuerunt. Quot vero pali erecti, quot rogi extracti, horrendique passim ignes incensi sunt in Gallia, Hispania, Anglia? Nulla est regio in orbe Christiano, in qua non saevierit Antichristiana persecutio, et ne nunc quidem post tantum cruorem innoxium fustum saevire desinit.»

3. *The eschatological dimension of the church*

Bullinger's concentration on God's providence and the vicissitude of the church's fate throughout all ages leaves hardly any room for a pronounced or even apocalyptic concept of eschatology. As Emidio Campi has rightly observed: «Wie fast nicht anders zu erwarten, fehlt bei Bullinger jeder fakultative und apokalyptische Zug. Der Einbruch des Reiches soll nicht vergessen lassen, dass durch die Verkündigung des Wortes die gläubige Existenz schon dem Eschaton ihrer Vollendung in Gott zu entsprechen beginnt.»³¹ However true this characterization of Bullinger as a prototype of an existentialist interpretation of the eschaton may be, there is yet another, more historical line in his eschatology.

For Bullinger the prophetic book of Daniel is largely an account of world history. Following Jerome³², he addresses the ancient prophet in the first sermon – *De vita et opera Danielis* – as a «polyhistor», or universal scholar. Bullinger uses this title because the prophet «mentions many events, in such a remarkable way that he gives a coherent exposition of the *χρονικά*, or the main points of world history, starting from the Babylonian reign, and recounting events up to the end of the world».³³

This explains why he publishes his chronological work, the «*Epitomen temporum et rerum ab orbe condito*», in one volume with the collected sermons. In addition, Bullinger adds an excursus on the chronology of the 70 year-weeks after his sermons on Daniel 9,25–26a.³⁴ He admits that chronological details have interested him since he was a boy.³⁵ The historical conceptuality of Bullinger's thought³⁶ gives his eschatological portrait of the church a distinct flavor.

According to Bullinger's concept of history, something went seriously

³¹ Campi, *Über das Ende des Weltzeitalters*, 235.

³² Cf. Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae, ed. Isidorus Hilberg, 2nd. rev. ed., Vienna 1996 (*Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 54), 461: «temporum conscius et totius mundi φιλοῦστωρ»

³³ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 1v: «nuncupatur et recte quidem ab Hieronymo πολυῖσ[τ]ρω, ut qui multiscius est et multa commemorat, adeoque *χρονικά*, vel epitome mundi mirifice contextit, incipiens a regno Babylonico et deducens res usque ad finem mundi». Cf. Bullinger, *Sermonum Decades* quinque, 38: «Ac Daniel recte a vetustis appellatus est polyhistor. Nam quae a suo saeculo ad tempora usque Christi, imo ad extremum usque iudicii diem fiant ac facta sunt in omnibus fere regnis mundi, in populoque dei, tam significanter ille praedixit, ut videri possit historiam contextuisse rerum praeteritarum.»

³⁴ «Exactor copiosiorque supputatio LXX hebdomadam Daniels, et de Interpretationum varietate, Auctarium», in: Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 103v–107r.

³⁵ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 104r.

³⁶ Cf. Edward A. Dowe, Heinrich Bullinger as Theologian: Thematic, Comprehensive, Schematic, in: *Architect of Reformation: An Introduction to Heinrich Bullinger, 1504–1575*, eds. Bruce Gordon and Emidio Campi, Grand Rapids 2004 (*Text and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought*), 36.

wrong in the Christian world after pope Gregory the Great (ob. 604).³⁷ The most peaceful cooperation of church and state after emperor Constantine was disturbed by the papacy. Quite like many of his contemporary Protestant colleagues, Bullinger is convinced that the papacy is in fact the eschatological Antichrist.³⁸ Although this does not lead to any apocalyptic fever, Bullinger is convinced that his own century is under greater eschatological tension than before. «For the last 30 years and even longer, we have seen that the blood of the martyrs that was shed under the reign of the Antichrist, as if the Lord's acre has been enriched with compost».³⁹ In sermon 52, commenting on Daniel 10, 14 where an angelic messenger says that Daniel's vision relates to «the last days», Bullinger states: «The vision concerns the end of times. Therefore it pertains to us and our own days, and we see that the last part of this vision has been written for our sake.»⁴⁰ The outburst of opposition from the Antichrist is a clear indication for Bullinger that the end of times are near.

Leaving open the possibility that it is the Turks who are the Antichrist⁴¹, he gives a dual identification of the final enemy in the second half of Daniel. Historically it referred to Antiochus Epiphanes, but in Bullinger's own time it is the papacy. This dual identification leads to a historical parallelization of Antiochus and the pope, rather than an apocalyptic apotheosis. Just like Antiochus once occupied the promised land, the Antichrist lays his hands on all that is good and righteous:

«He has ruined the truth in this country as well, founded very infectious schools, condemned the study of sacred literature and the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, burned pious books, ruined brilliant teachers of the church and men who were well known for their perseverance in faith, and did not stop persecuting the people who confessed the doctrine of the gospel.»⁴²

³⁷ Cf. Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 78v; De origine erroris (1539, cf. HBBibl 1, no 12), 76v–77r.

³⁸ For Bullinger's view on the Antichrist in general, cf. Moser, «Papam esse Antichristum».

³⁹ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 59r: «Postremo vidimus nos iam ab annis 30. et amplius sanguine martyrum, qui sub Antichristo est effusus, ceu laetamine impinguatam esse agrum dominicum.»

⁴⁰ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 115r: «Pertinet enim ad finem usque saeculi. Unde et ad nos et nostra tempora pertinebit, videmusque et postremam huius visionis partem propter nos esse scriptam.»

⁴¹ Cf. Bullinger, Comm. 2 Thes 2, 3–5: In omnes apostolicas epistolas commentarii (ed. 1582, cf. HBBibl 1, no 89), 404–411; Comm. 1 John 2, 18b: In omnes apostolicas epistolas commentarii, 627. According to Moser, «Papam esse Antichristum», 74, Bullinger's twofold exegesis of the Antichrist as both Islam and the papacy was inspired by Oecolampadius.

⁴² Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 93r: «Caeterum veritatem adfligit et hic in terram, scholas instituit corruptissimas, linguas sacras et interpretationes sacrorum librorum doctrinamque synceram damnat, libros pios comburit, stellas denique, illustres in ecclesia doctores et viros claros in fide conculcatos perdit, et populum confitentem doctrinam evangelicam persequi non desinit».

This parallelism is most fully developed in the discussion of Daniel 11. The «contemptible person» (verse 21) is either Antiochus or the papacy. However, in line with Jerome⁴³, Bullinger reads the end of Daniel 11 (from verse 36 onwards) as an exclusive reference to the eschatological Antichrist. A discussion of twelve *notae antichristi* serves to support his conclusion that the prophecy of Daniel is being fulfilled in the Roman papacy. The bishop of Rome has removed the doctrine of the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice by a doctrine of a real and expiatory sacrifice in the mass. The inquisition burns books, and tortures those who are found to be in possession of a New Testament.⁴⁴

Although this identification of the papacy with the Antichrist could easily lead to the expectation of the imminent consummation of the world in an apocalyptic judgment, Bullinger's historical approach rather seems to suggest that the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecies is taking place in a process lasting centuries. At the same time, he is convinced that the development of the papacy as the Antichrist marks a definitive point in history.⁴⁵ This makes his eschatology both highly imminent as well as rather timeless. Even the highly actual reference to the eschatological Antichrist is embedded in a general characterization of the state of Christianity over the last centuries up until Bullinger's own days. Yet history has a final destination: the moment that God will sit in judgment over the world. When God has completed the number of the elect, he will bring the persecution of the church to an end. Believers should resist curious questions and wait patiently for the completion of history.⁴⁶

4. *The nature of the church*

Bullinger's most explicit description of the nature of the church can be found in his sermons on Daniel 2 – Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The key for his interpretation of this chapter is his fundamental distinction between earthly kings and rulers, and the reign of Christ. Although all kingdoms are ordered and

⁴³ Cf. *Jerome*, Comm. Dn 11, 36–39: *Commentariorum in Daniele libri III <IV>*, ed. Franciscus Glorie, Turnhout 1964 (Corpus Christianum Series Latina 75a), 925–928.

⁴⁴ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 127v.

⁴⁵ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 129v: «Ita minime agnoscitur hodie antichristus, tametsi constet prophetias de illo omnes esse adimpletas, et adimpleri quotidie, constet denique si alius venturus sit antichristus, hoc tamen praesente turpiorem esse non posse.»

⁴⁶ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 137r–v: «Videtur autem haec admonitio omnes fideles hortari ad patientiam, ut relictis quaestionibus curiosis omnibus in fide et patientia perseverantes, cogitent non de tempore et articulis temporum, sed de cruce fortiter ferenda, et mundo atque antichristo vincendo tantisper dum liberator et redemptor e coelis veniat»; cf. 58r; 133v.

governed by God, only the kingdom of Christ is eternal.⁴⁷ Sermon 11 is a discussion of the «rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands» (Daniel 2, 45). For Bullinger it is clear that this rock must be a reference to Christ, in line with the interpretation of the stone in Isaiah 28, 16 in the New Testament (e.g. Matthew 16, 18 and 1 Peter 2, 6). That the rock was cut out of a mountain refers to both the two natures of Christ – the mountain symbolizing both heaven and the people of God – and to the reign of Christ. This mountain «became huge and filled the whole earth» (verse 35), since Christ has established a large kingdom throughout the entire world. Referring to Zion as the place where, according to Isaiah 2, 2–3, all nations will gather, he identifies the kingdom of Christ with the church which is «being expanded throughout the entire world, so that she is not fixed or confined to any particular place».⁴⁸ After identifying the reign of Christ with the church he makes an important distinction:

«Although it is one and the same, yet the kingdom of Christ is called the kingdom of grace on earth, and the kingdom of glory in heaven. The kingdom of Christ is present in this age, as that church of Christ that relies on God's grace and is being preserved through the practice of humility and piety, for as long as she lives in this age. Christ reigns in them [sc. true believers] by his Spirit and Word.»⁴⁹

The kingdom of glory is, of course, the eternal heavenly bliss of the faithful. Both kingdoms, on earth and in heaven, are established by God for the elect believers and cannot be destroyed by human power. Even the church militant, afflicted as she may be, can never be ruined. The Lord will preserve a pure church for himself amidst the furies and blasphemies of this world, just like it was in the days of Elijah (cf. 1 Kings 19).⁵⁰

The church as we see her is a church at war, but for Bullinger this militant character of the church is not accidental. Since God governs the earth and guides the faithful, hardships and internal strife are part and parcel of his providential preparation of the church for the final battle. «The end of all things will not come, before the army – that is, the church of the faithful – is prepared for battle against Satan, the world and the Antichrist, and is first rightly and harshly broken, harassed and humbled.»⁵¹ The history of the re-

⁴⁷ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 10r; 17r–v.

⁴⁸ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 21r: «Caeterum ecclesia regnum est Christi: ecclesia illa per universum terrarum orbem expanditur, nec ulli est affixa aut conclusa loco.»

⁴⁹ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 21r: «Recte enim dicitur Regnum Christi, etsi unum et idem sit, dici tamen et Gratiae in terris et Glorae in coelo. Gratiae est in praesenti saeculo, ipsa Christi ecclesia, gratia Dei subnixa et conservata, donec vivit in hoc seculo, in humilitate et pietatis exercitio. Regnat in his Christus per spiritum et verbum.»

⁵⁰ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 21r.

⁵¹ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 137r: «Non venturum finem rerum omnium, nisi exercitatus, id est ecclesia fidelium, instructa ad pugnam contra sathanam mundum atque antichris-

building of the temple in the days of Nehemiah offers Bullinger a good example of the continuous struggle of the church. He calls it «an example (*typus*) of the church of Christ, that cannot be built up in this age without a thousand hazards and incessant harshness and labor.» Therefore, «if the storm of suffering arises, we should consider that this is the normal situation for God and the church, and persist in the unity and the truth of the church and never fall back from the Christian truth into the impious world because of these tribulations.»⁵² Although the world sometimes rightfully seems to claim the victory, «the world always perishes, the church will last forever».⁵³

Within Bullinger's image of the people of God there is no room for contemporary Judaism.⁵⁴ Quite remarkably in the light of his well-known concept of covenantal unity⁵⁵, in sermon 50 he expresses the view that God has abolished the old covenant and established a new one, confirmed by the blood of his Son. The Jews should not hope for a religious or political restoration, because their desolation is eternal. His discussion of Judaism urges him to warn his audience not to follow the example of the Jews.⁵⁶

5. *The central message of consolation and admonition*

In the first sermon, Bullinger rejects the opinion of those who argue that there is no room for preaching the prophetic books of the Old Testament in the church of Christ. In contrast, the Zurich church leader finds it very useful to explain the prophecies of Daniel for the Christian community. In the first place, because it illuminates the reign of Christ, and shows that the kingdoms of the world are vain and vulnerable. In the second place, the book of

tum, probe et saevissimis prius modis fuerit afflicta lacerata et contrita, adeoque nisi ecclesia prius fuerit in plurimas dissecta factiones, haeticorum utique, Iudaeorum, Gentium, Mahumetanorum, et Romanistarum.»

⁵² Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 102r–v: «Praetulerunt haec typum ecclesiae Christi, quae non nisi per mille discrimina, et per labores durissimos perpetuosque in hoc saeculo extruitur. [...] Utile est autem horum meminisse frequenter, ut dum tempestas afflictionum oboritur in ecclesia, cogitemus hunc esse Dei et ecclesiae morem, ideoque in omnibus calamitatibus perseveremus in unitate et veritate ecclesiae, et nusquam propter tribulationes deficiamus a veritate Christiana ad impium mundum.»

⁵³ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 75r: «adeoque semper perit mundus, permanet ecclesia».

⁵⁴ Cf. Achim *Detmers*, «Sie nennen unseren Retter Christus einen Hurensohn und die göttliche Jungfrau eine Dirne»: Heinrich Bullingers Gutachten zur Duldung von Juden 1572, in: *Die Zürcher Reformation: Ausstrahlungen und Rückwirkungen*, eds. Alfred Schindler and Hans Stickleberger, Bern 2001 (*Zürcher Beiträge zur Reformationsgeschichte* 18), 229–259.

⁵⁵ E.g. *De testamento seu foedere Dei unico et aeterno* (cf. *HBBibl* 1, no 54), 28r–34v.

⁵⁶ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 108r–111r.

Daniel should be explained for the ‹people of God›, because true believers ‹will be comforted in their miseries and misfortunes, and the depressed souls of the pious will be encouraged› by it.⁵⁷ Although this is not a formal description of the *argumentum* of the book of Daniel, the other 65 sermons confirm that for Bullinger, the consolation and admonition of the church is the main *scopus* of these Old Testament prophecies.

In a direct address to his audience, Bullinger remarks that the Holy Spirit does not merely inform the church about events in the time of Antiochus the Great. We could learn this from Livy or any other historian as well. The Spirit's true purpose is that God's afflicted people will be instructed amidst all turmoil and will receive consolation from the fact that God clearly guides all things and shows special care for his church. Bullinger concludes: ‹We should observe this as the sole scope of this prophecy or vision, like I have often summoned you to do.›⁵⁸ The fact that God guides history should comfort the church when she is suffering from oppression or persecution. If God wants to build and comfort his oppressed church, he will not be destitute of the wisdom and power to do so.⁵⁹ Bullinger finds a message of consolation in almost every element of the visions of Daniel. The deepest consolation is Christ himself, ‹who has always been a refuge, and still is a refuge for all who are afflicted. In him one finds the greatest comfort. Without him nothing is safe, and there is no true consolation›.⁶⁰

When the church is flourishing and does not have to fear opposition from the Antichrist, the visions of Daniel are an admonition to be prepared and not to marvel when persecution does arise. For example, in Daniel 7,8 we find a description of a terrifying, frightening and very powerful animal, with a small horn on its head that speaks boastfully – according to Bullinger a clear reference to the Antichrist that is the papacy. He remarks:

‹The prophets tells us all these things – which we must constantly repeat like the single scope of everything [in these prophecies] – so that we may be forewarned by God and are not captured by astonishment because of the power and fortune of this kingdom. We should not lose our faith in Christ and his holy gospel, discour-

⁵⁷ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 1v: ‹Atqui Daniel Christi regnum praedicat et ornat, regna vero mundi vana atque caduca esse ostendit. Rursus praedicanda sunt populo Dei, quae fidem veram foveat, consolantur in casibus tristibus, et erigunt animos piorum depressos.›

⁵⁸ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 121r: ‹Unde vult colligi Deum etiam sua auxilia in perturbatissimis illis temporibus non negaturum afflictis. Sed de hoc huius vaticinii aut visionis scopo unice observando, iam saepe admonuimus.›

⁵⁹ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 23r.

⁶⁰ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 99v: ‹Et Christus a seculo fuit asyllum, sicut et hodie est asyllum omnium afflictorum. In eo invenitur plenissima consolatio. Extra hunc nihil est tutum, nulla consolatio firma.›

aged by persecutions, miseries and the incessant cross, but rather we should call upon God, the ruler of all kingdoms, and invincibly persist in the confession of the truth of the gospel, bravely resist the Antichrist and his reign, and expect the day of redemption and the restoration of all things.»⁶¹

This implicit formulation of the *scopus* of Daniel's prophecies in sermon 37 betrays one of Bullinger's main concerns: the consolidation of Protestantism, perhaps in the face of resurgent Catholicism in the aftermath of the first session of the Council of Trent. He is writing for an audience that has accepted the message of Protestantism, but may be in danger of losing faith (*deficiamus*). Therefore, the book of Daniel is not only a consolation for believers under persecution, but also an admonition to persist and resist (*perstemus, pugnemus*).⁶² They should prepare themselves for the imminent temptations, hardships and persecutions.⁶³

6. *The function of prophetic revelation*

In his study of the «Decades», Peter Opitz has argued that Bullinger's ecclesiology was built around the central principle of *solus Christus audiendus*, «so dass die Kirche dem von sich aus redenden Christus gegenübersteht als ihm gegenüber verantwortliche Hörgemeinschaft.»⁶⁴ In the eschatological situation of persecution and temptation, the church needs the consolation and exhortation of God's word. This leads to the fifth aspect of Bullinger's image of the church in the sermons on Daniel: the function of prophetic revelation.

In the title of the sermons Daniel is introduced as a most wise prophet (*Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta*), as if Bullinger follows the opinion of modern scholarship that the first chapters of Daniel contain elements from the tradition of wisdom literature. In his first homily on Daniel 2 he develops

⁶¹ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 78v: «Et haec quidem omnia recitantur nobis a propheta (qui sane velut unicus scopus omnium subinde est repetendus) ut praemoniti a Deo, non capiamur admiratione potentiae felicitatisque huius regni, fractique persecutionibus miseriis et cruce assidua, deficiamus a Christo, et sancto eius evangelio, sed invocantes Deum omnium regnorum gubernatorem, invicti perstemus in confessione veritatis evangelicae, fortiterque pugnemus contra Antichristum et regnum eius, expectantes diem illam redemptionis et restitutionis omnium.»

⁶² Cf. Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 30v: «constanter perstare in confessione sincerae veritatis»; 49v: «constanter perseverare in vera religione».

⁶³ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 138r: «ut omnes pii, qui inciderint in illa tempora, animos suos praeparent ad futuros tentationes, offensiones et persecutiones vel vitandas vel superandas»; cf. 49r; 61r.

⁶⁴ Opitz, Bullinger als Theologe, 425.

the antithesis of true and false wisdom as a major hermeneutical principle. The false wisdom of the Babylonian *magi* is paralleled by the human philosophy of the doctors and masters of the papacy. They lack true wisdom because they do not partake in divine illumination. In the second sermon on Daniel 2 that true wisdom comes from God and is not the result of human efforts but can be received through prayer. Although Bullinger does not deny the relevance of dreams and the revelation of hidden secrets, it is most important that believers should ask for «faith and true knowledge of God and his Christ». From the other sermons on Daniel 2 we learn that God has revealed the mystery of salvation in the gospel for the sake of the church.⁶⁵ The church lives by the word of God, as it is mediated by the prophet. In Bullinger's days, the authority of the prophet has been taken over by the Scriptures.⁶⁶ Therefore, in an implicit refutation of Tridentine theology, Bullinger clearly denies that the authority of Scripture is dubious without approbation by the church.⁶⁷

The content of this divine wisdom can be summarized with the dual terminology of prophetic promise and historical fulfilment. The visions in chapters 10–12 are in their entirety «a prophetic forecast and a summary of historical events» from which believers can learn in retrospect the trustworthiness of the Scriptures.⁶⁸ Bullinger never gets tired of pointing to the certainty and reliability of God's promises.⁶⁹ Anticipating a doctrine of verbal inspiration, Bullinger states that the prophets could never predict future events with such great evidence, if the Holy Spirit had not driven both their minds and their pens.⁷⁰ The certainty of the divine promises appears clearly from their fulfilment in the course of history, for which he finds ample evidence in the work of secular historians.⁷¹ As a historian Bullinger is eager to point to the fulfilment of Daniel's prophecies in the era of Antiochus, Jesus, or in his own days.

Yet it is not only the historian's duty to testify to God's work in history. Nebuchadnezzar's acknowledgement of Daniel's divine inspiration brings

⁶⁵ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 17r: «Ergo propter Ecclesiam revelatur veritas, et quidem a solo Deo, non ab ulla carne».

⁶⁶ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 74r.

⁶⁷ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 136r: «Videant ergo quid cornicentur, qui disputant scripturas citra ecclesiae approbationem esse dubias aut autoritatis dubiae.»

⁶⁸ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 111v: «Est haec prognosticon propheticum et compendium historicum earum rerum, quas operae precium erat scire ecclesiam.»

⁶⁹ E.g. Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 19v; 87v; 92r; 94r; 122v; 136r.

⁷⁰ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 19v: «Nisi enim spiritus Dei impulsisset et animum et stilum prophetarum, nunquam potuissent tanta evidentia, praedicare futura.»

⁷¹ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 87v, referring to the histories of Orosius: «Quae quidem modis omnibus congruens cum vaticinio simplex et sincera expositio, confirmat nobis oraculorum vel verbi Dei veritatem atque certitudinem»; cf. 117v.

Bullinger to the remark that many kings, like David, Salomon and several Christian emperors, were «preachers of God's works and God's word». He even calls Nebuchadnezzar a *doctor ecclesiae*. If these kings were in fact preachers, why would the church's prelates feel ashamed to do what they did – to preach?⁷² Although Bullinger might have hoped to inspire the government of Zurich with these biblical and historical examples, there is no doubt that his main interest is to promote the preaching office of the Reformed ministers.

The appearance of angels in the book of Daniel occasions Bullinger to discuss the ministry of angels or men in the process of salvation and revelation. God uses the ministry of creatures more often than not.⁷³ Although angels, judges, apostles and teachers of the church are sometimes called «saviours», it is in fact God who saves through the ministry of his servants.⁷⁴ For Bullinger the importance of the ministry of men – rather than angels – is clear. His own century faced the cruel and horrible rage of the Antichrist, but God sent many faithful and excellent teachers (*doctores*) to his church. «I will not give a list of their names, it is obvious for anyone who reads the histories of the past seventy or eighty years».⁷⁵

Bullinger clearly holds the preaching office, or at least certain contemporary preachers, in high esteem. Preachers of the word imitate the angels in their own, limited measure.⁷⁶ The ministry of God's word is an essential function for Christianity. Commenting on Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he remarks that God did not only give the Scripture to the world, but also «at all times suitable interpreters, who could adapt the Scripture for the salvation of their audience, with consideration of person, place, time and content.»⁷⁷ Just like Daniel himself, who needed an angel to interpret the vision of the four great beasts (cf. Daniel 7,16), the church in Bullinger's age needs interpreters to understand the meaning of the «divine oracles». In fact, she needs a twofold interpretation through the inner illumination of God's Spirit and the outer explanation of the Word by faithful teachers. «Let us therefore be aware lest we by our corrupted disposition

⁷² Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 38r.

⁷³ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 34r; 39v; 98r.

⁷⁴ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 33v–34r.

⁷⁵ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 128v: «Porro universo illo tempore quo saeviiit truculenter et horribiliter in ecclesia Antichristus, non desiit bonitas Dei excitare ac mittere ecclesiae suae fideles atque praeclaros doctores. Horum catalogum hic non contexam, obuius est legentibus historias, iam inde a septingentis et octingentis annis.»

⁷⁶ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 113r.

⁷⁷ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 41r: «Ita vero universo terrarum orbi Deus benignus pater scripturam dedit sanctam. Ei etiam adiungit omnibus aetatibus idoneos interpretes, qui pro ratione personarum, locorum, temporum, et rerum illam applicent ad salutem auditorum.»

may block the road for sound doctors and faithful interpreters who have been sent to us by God»⁷⁸.

Finally, the church in the eschaton needs the study of the sacred Scriptures. In sermon 65 Bullinger remarks that the study of holy writ contains the promise of an abundant knowledge of things concerning the end times.⁷⁹ At this point the visionary and apocalyptic revelation in the book of Daniel is subjected to a remarkable metamorphosis. For Bullinger the proper heir of the prophetic figure of Daniel is the student of the sacred languages, Hebrew, Greek and Latin, and theology. As Anja-Silvia Göing has shown in her analysis of the sermons on Daniel 1, the didactic-pedagogical interpretation of prophetic wisdom is a distinct feature of Bullinger's exegesis.⁸⁰ He relates the interpretation of apocalyptic visions by Daniel, the *sapientissimus Dei propheta*, to the needs and demands of the Reformed church in his own time. This is where eschatology meets ecclesiology.

6. Evaluation

Bullinger's ecclesiology is fraught with eschatological tension. The church is part of the heavenly reign of Christ, and yet subjected to oppression and temptations in this age. She boldly denounces the Antichrist, the papacy, but yet feels the need to prepare herself against possible persecution and oppression. She is solely dependent on the Word of God, and yet being actively built up by the ministry of men. Yet this tension very much resembles the situation of the faith community in which the book of Daniel was first handed over and written down.

According to Bullinger, the central message of Daniel was to comfort and exhort the people of God, the church of all ages. For Bullinger the effectiveness of this message depended on the evidence for the fulfillment of God's promises in the past, which gives his interpretation a distinct historical flavor. At the same time, his sermons are firmly rooted in the contemporary setting of the sixteenth-century faith community as a community of hearers – of both his audience in Zurich and of the larger readership of the printed

⁷⁸ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 84r: «Caveamus ergo ne corruptis affectionibus nostris, praeludamus viam venientibus ad nos sanis doctoribus fidelibus interpretibus, a Deo ad nos missis.»

⁷⁹ Daniel sapientissimus dei propheta, 138v: «Promittunt haec studiosis sacrarum literarum et suae salutis non negligentibus, cognitionem harum rerum, scitu videlicet necessarium, de rebus ultimi saeculi abundantem, adeoque ostenditur pios ultimi saeculi futuros sacrarum literarum studiosissimos, diligentesque in propaganda scientia sana sincerae religionis, et quae sunt de fine saeculi.»

⁸⁰ Göing, Schulausbildung, 457.

homilies – because he is able to translate and expand the meaning of Daniel's visions in such a way that they become highly relevant for those who are facing the fire of persecution or – as might have been the case for many among Bullinger's audience – for those who are in danger of extinguishing the fires of their enthusiasm for the gospel.

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