

thematische Einordnung der Resultate ein kurzer Vergleich mit der kirchenpolitischen Entwicklung im schweizerischen Gesamtrahmen hilfreich gewesen. Bei den vielen Informationen und umfangreichen Erläuterungen zur Entwicklung des «Vereins der Freunde Israels» hätte man sich einen noch etwas aufschlussreicheren Einblick in den praktischen Alltag der Missionarsarbeit gewünscht. Ein umfangreicher Anhang mit statistischem Material bildet zusammen mit dem ausführlichen Literaturverzeichnis den Abschluss einer 595-seitigen Studie. Alles in allem ist dieses mit hoher wissenschaftlicher Kompetenz verfasste Werk von Sara Janner einer themenspezifisch interessierten Leserschaft wärmstens empfohlen.

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Pierrick Hildebrand. The Zurich Origins of Reformed Covenant Theology, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024 (Oxford Studies in Historical Theology), XII & 427 p. – ISBN 978-0-19-760757-2.

This book is an elaboration of a dissertation defended at the University of Zurich in 2019. For an author's first monograph publication it is a remarkable achievement. Whereas scholarship tends to focus on specialized and detailed subjects, Pierrick Hildebrand explores in a broad overview the nascence of an entire theological tradition. He has done so with expert knowledge of the sources, a clear presentation, and an informed and well-reflected opinion on existing scholarship, while at the same time guarding his readership from drowning in the quagmires of academic and ecclesial debates on Reformed covenant thought.

The outline of the book is clear. After an introduction, the three main parts of Hildebrand's study respectively deal with Zwingli as initiator, Bullinger as developer, and Calvin and the Heidelberg theologians as recipients of the Zurich covenant tradition. Rather than closing with a general conclusion, the book ends with a succinct epilogue sketching perspectives for future research. For a summation and evaluation of the

author's findings, readers should consult the conclusion of each individual chapter.

In the introduction Zurich is portrayed as the birthplace of the Reformed tradition, which is subsequently characterized by covenant theology as "part of the DNA" of this particular branch of the Protestant movement (1). Moreover, Hildebrand argues that the Zurich theologians Zwingli and Bullinger have influenced later Reformed federalism more fundamentally than previously assumed. Subsequently, against the current of preceding scholarship, Hildebrand presents the thesis of a substantial continuity between the Zurich theologians Zwingli and Bullinger on the one hand, and the early orthodox Heidelberg federal theologians Ursinus and Olevianus on the other.

Methodologically, Hildebrand follows the approach of intellectual historian Quentin Skinner and advocates a reading of the sources that seeks "to let the terms speak for themselves, exploring the context in which the original authors intended them to be understood" (3). Accordingly, the study focuses on covenant terminology, in its inner textual relations to cognate terms and its intertextual development in a broad selection of sources. For this purpose, the author draws on a vast range of sixteenth-century works in different genres by Zwingli, Bullinger, Calvin, Ursinus, and Olevianus. In the case of Bullinger, he also explores many new or previously overlooked sources, both in manuscript form and in early-modern printed works. No less than 135 pages, about thirty percent of the book, are devoted to partial transcriptions of eight manuscripts in the reformer's difficult handwriting. For this reason alone, Hildebrand's study will serve a reference point for all future research on the subject.

In the first part, on Zwingli as the initiator of the Reformed covenant tradition, Hildebrand signals a paradigmatic change around 1525 in the reformer's treatment of the covenant. The discussion closely follows the focal points of eucharist and baptism, corresponding to the controversies with respectively Lutheran and Anabaptist theologians. In his earliest statements the reformer emphasized the discontinuity between the old and new testaments, in much the same way as the Wittenberg theologians juxtaposed law and gospel. From the 1525 *Subsidium sive coronis de eucharistia* onwards Zwingli rather argued for a single, eternal covenant of grace made with Abraham and all believers, harking back even to

the *protoevangelion* of Genesis 3:15. This finding implies that Reformed covenant thought was not necessarily developed in defense of infant baptism, as Gottlob Schrenk and others have argued. Rather, Hildebrand argues that the roots of Zwingli's covenantal turn are located in the exegetical work on the book of Genesis, commencing mid-1525 for the theological *lectiones* at the Grossmünsterstift. In a similar vein, the author finds no support for Kenneth Hagen's influential thesis that Zwingli transformed Luther's unilateral testament theology into a bilateral theology of the covenant. In this regard, there was no paradigm shift, only a difference of emphasis.

Encapsulated in the discussion of Zwingli's covenantal thought are several insights on other theological topics. In particular, attention is paid to the church, as the visible manifestation of the elected covenant people. Also in view is the notion of a prelapsarian covenant with Adam (in the commentary on Hosea 6:7), resulting in a reflection on the reformer's hamartiology and the notion of natural law. Towards the end of chapter 2, the author observes that Zwingli did not see law and gospel in antithesis, like Luther and Melancthon, but rather differentiated between a literal and a spiritual reading of the law. At this point, I would have liked a brief reference to research on the theology of the Wittenberg reformers and to Zwingli's indebtedness to Erasmus. The discussion of the two comprehensive accounts of the Zurich reformer's thought, *Fidei ratio* and *Fidei expositio*, reveals that the covenant did not develop into an overarching locus in his theology. Hildebrand interestingly asks whether Zwingli's reticence on the covenant could be related to the church-political context of these writings. This line of questioning is not pursued further.

The second part of the book opens with the thesis that Heinrich Bullinger went ahead where Zwingli halted by developing the concept of covenant into an overarching concept in his theological thought. The three chapters on Bullinger follow a chronological sequence, hinging on two important publications: *De testamento seu foedere Dei unico et eterno* (1534) and the *Decades sermonum quinque* (1551). Again, Hildebrand discusses a broad range of works, demonstrating "the width, indeed elasticity, of Bullinger's covenant theology when it came to its application. The covenant is quasi-omnipresent and used in an eclectic range

of genres" (126). At the same time, as the reformers did not have a *Zentraldogma*, Bullinger's ordering of theological *loci* reveals "a high level of flexibility" (156).

Central to Hildebrand's argument is the observation that Bullinger added a dimension to the already existing concept of the covenant. Not only did he expand the accepted "historical-legal" aspect of the covenant that is the redemptive-historical unfolding of the one covenant of grace, culminating in Christ's vicarious atonement, but also recognized an "organic-mystical" aspect to the covenant, that was seminally present in Zwingli, amounting to the "communal, ecclesial, and spiritual life of the covenanted people in their union with Christ" (111).

With this thesis Hildebrand distances himself from several other narratives of Bullinger's covenant thought. For a start, the author rejects J. Wayne Baker's influential distinction between an unconditional and unilateral *testamentum*, and a conditional and bilateral *foedus*. The first position was supposed to characterize Zwingli and would have resulted in a Reformed theological tradition grounded in the doctrine of election. By contrast, Bullinger would have authored another Reformed tradition rooting in the notion of a bilateral covenant. Against this line of thought, Hildebrand argues for a "fundamental continuity" between Zwingli and Bullinger with respect to the covenant (115). Based on a lexical analysis of Bullinger's writings on the covenant, he does observe a differentiation and development in the reformer's use of covenant terms, to the extent that his concept can be characterized as a "testamental covenant" (160). In the remainder of the part on Bullinger, the author frequently recognizes a covenantal semantics in other terms like *societas*, *unio*, *coniunctio*, *cultus* and *religio*, particularly relating to the church and the sacraments. The interchangeability of these terms is so strong, that Hildebrand claims that even when the "obvious terms such as *foedus* and *testamentum* are missing, Bullinger's covenantal theology is still very present" (188).

Interestingly, Hildebrand also departs from the more recent synthesis proposed by his *Doktorvater*, Peter Opitz. The latter's study on Bullinger's *Decades sermonum quinque*, argued for the notion of communion (*Gemeinschaft*), both with Christ and within the fellowship of the church as the overarching concept in the reformer's most influential systematic work. Hildebrand in turn capsizes this argument by subsuming com-

munion under what he understands as the organic-mystical aspect of Bullinger's covenantal thought.

Throughout this study, Hildebrand shows an interest and proficiency in questions of systematic theology. For instance, in the second chapter of part two it is noted that protology and eschatology are interwoven in Bullinger's thought. In the reformer's sermon notes on the book of Genesis 1–3 the original relation between God and creation is described in terms similar to the later concept of a prelapsarian covenant of works. More specifically, the "tree of life" (Gen 3:22) occasions a reflection on the subject of "non-redemptive eschatology" and the relation between natural law and Decalogue in Bullinger's thought. In a similar vein, discussing the notes on Genesis 17, Hildebrand argues that the Zurich reformer's covenant theology has a genuine unilateral aspect grounded in election. This is not unlike Calvin's 1554 commentary on the same passage, whose understanding of the Abrahamic covenant also reveals elements of bilaterality. Finally, with regard to the *Decades sermonum quinque*, Hildebrand reflects on Bullinger's sacramentology as the ultimate expression of the unity of the covenant, in which the unilateral-historical-legal and bilateral-organic-mystical dimensions of the covenant find their synthesis.

The third part deals with the receptions of Zurich covenant thinking in the theologies of John Calvin, Zacharias (not Zacharius, as he is introduced on p. 276) Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus. Quantitatively, this part is rather brief, taking up about thirteen percent of the body of the study. Nevertheless, Hildebrand elaborates an impressive number of sources and research literature. With respect to Calvin, the author builds on the work of, among others, Peter Lillback, but moves beyond the scholarly consensus to argue "that Calvin basically adopted his covenantal thought from Bullinger and, further, that he did not substantially develop it beyond where the Zurich Reformer had taken it" (243). This is a complete inversion of Baker's supposition of two reformed traditions, one headed by Bullinger and championing a bilateral covenant, the other by Calvin and working from a unilateral covenant, based in election. Hildebrand's reading of the Genevan reformer zeroes in on four areas "that were of critical importance for the original development of Reformed covenant theology in Zurich," namely, covenantal continuity, the organic-mystical

aspect, the relation with the sacraments, and the prelapsarian covenant (244). From a methodological perspective, I wonder if this one-way comparison is sufficient to validate the claim that Calvin did not substantially develop covenant theology beyond its origins in Bullinger's thought.

The discussion of Ursinus and Olevianus in chapter 7 focuses on Ursinus's catechism-style *Summa theologiae*, which is famous for its reference to a prelapsarian *foedus naturale*. Hildebrand shows that this work is mostly in line with Bullinger and Zwingli, with their understanding of natural law as the expression of God's perfect being, and as the norm by which humans reflect the *imago Dei*, rather than as the first half of a law-gospel-antithesis. His balanced historical conclusion is that it is not possible to prove either direct influence, or discontinuity between Zwingli's and Bullinger's utterances on the prelapsarian covenant on the one hand, and the doctrine of a covenant of works in early Reformed orthodoxy on the other.

The appendices are a valuable source for further study of Bullinger's theology and enable us to follow the author's argumentation in the main text. In the introduction, Hildebrand remarks that the transcriptions are not intended as a full-fledged edition. Indeed, at the level of transcription, word composition and orthography, I have noted quite a few question marks in the margin of the text. For example, the principle of normalization of u/v according to their phonetic value does not seem to have been applied consistently.

Hildebrand is a skilled guide who leads his readership with a steady pace through the often-bewildering landscape of early Reformed thinking on the covenant. He does so by showing his readers a well-considered, broad selection of highlights, rather than immersing them in endless detail. Inevitably, travelers who have been in the region before will start to miss things along the way. At several points, they would have been helped with a brief indication and explanation of trajectories that are not taken up in this study. By way of evaluation, I will point at a number of themes that are conspicuously outside the author's focus.

In the first place, Hildebrand tacitly equates the "Zurich origins" of Reformed covenant theology with the theological thought of two of the city's leading theologians. Yet, at least up to Bullinger's death in 1575, Zurich hosted a vibrant theological communication culture and was home

to many other creative and influential theologians. Their possible contribution to the earliest development of Reformed covenant theology is not explored in any detail. An example is the author's brevity on the catechisms of the Zurich church from the 1530s, which were authored by Zwingli's companion Leo Jud (1482–1542) and were clearly structured by the notion of God's covenant with believers. In a similar vein, Hildebrand does not explore his interesting observation that Jud added material on the covenant in his Latin translation of Bullinger's influential anti-Anabaptist work *Von dem unverschämten Frevel* (137, n. 166). These reflections do not suggest that the author should have added a chapter on Jud (or any other Zurich theologian). However, a brief indication of the broader theological discourse in Zurich would have been helpful.

Another conspicuously absent topic in Hildebrand's study is, in my phrasing, the socio-political aspect of Reformed covenant theology. This aspect is closely connected, yet also clearly distinguishable from what Hildebrand has labelled the legal-historical and organic-mystical aspects of covenant thought. The socio-political aspect relates both to the contextualization of covenant terminology in the historical context of Zurich and among the Swiss *Eidgenossen*, and to the development of political federalism in early modern Europe and beyond.

For a start, there is a significant body of research literature on the socio-political dimensions of Reformed federal theology, in both its origins in the early-modern context of Zurich and its proliferation in political federalism, eventually preparing the way for modern political thought. An obvious example is J. Wayne Baker's study on Bullinger and covenant. Hildebrand's work engages deeply (and critically) with the first half of Baker's thesis – Bullinger's supposed authorship of another Reformed tradition characterized by the bilateral covenant –, but is silent of the other half, concerning the reformer's leading role in the development of political federalism. In a similar vein, we are not informed about the work of Torrance Kirby, who has argued that Bullinger's discussion of the *cura religionis* of the Christian magistrate in *Decades* 2.7, rooting in his concept of a single covenant, has influenced political theology in Tudor England. The same observation applies to publications by Andries Raath and Shaun de Freitas, in which Bullinger is portrayed as the first to formulate an explicit covenantal political theory. Hildebrand may or

may not find this a valid line of enquiry, but as readers we are not informed about his opinions.

The author's focus on the more systematic-theological dimensions of the concept of covenant seems to affect his treatment of the source material. Two examples from chapter three may illustrate this point. First, Hildebrand briefly notes Bullinger's 1525 *Anklage und Mahnrede* (published in 1528). This work does not receive a full discussion, apparently because the text contains only a few instances of explicit covenant-terminology. However, the text functions on the assumption of the equation between the Old Testament tribes of Israel and the early-modern Swiss states as covenanted nations. For the reformer, salvation history, as covenant history, is seamlessly continued in the confederation of early modern Switzerland. Accordingly, *Anklage und Mahnrede* presents a clear example of the socio-political implications of the unity of the covenant for the communal life of the "liebe Eidgenossen," who are bound together by the sacrament of baptism as if by an oath. Furthermore, it shows that covenant theology has immediate consequences for pressing contemporary issues, such as the relation between magistrate and church ministry, the recruitment of mercenaries, and the taking of oaths.

A further example concerns Bullinger's 1527 manuscript work *Von warrer und falscher Leer*. Hildebrand gives a partial transcription of this work and briefly discusses its statements on the covenant in relation to the eucharistic controversy. He also notes that Bullinger portrays Zwingli as "unser Josias" – the great Old Testament king and reformer –, who was sent by God and has restored "de[n] pundt, den wir mitt Gott habend." Through a footnote we learn that the association of Zwingli with the political figure Josiah "does not refer to the theological notion of the 'covenant' per se" (199, n. 26). Here, I wonder what Hildebrand's definition of a "theological notion" is, in relation to the thought-world and outlooks of sixteenth-century theologians. Would they not consider the divine ordering of a covenanted Christian society a highly theological matter?

As it stands, Hildebrand's study is somewhat biased towards the systematic-theological dimensions of the covenant. Although this is a perfectly legitimate approach, in my opinion, it would have been even better if the author had briefly touched upon the socio-political dimension of the covenant and accounted for his choice to focus on other aspects.

Finally, a word on Hildebrand's theological method. One of the hinges in the author's line of reasoning is that "the theological weight of the covenant cannot be assessed by purely quantitative means, based on word occurrences" (198). Therefore, he detects the presence of covenant theology, especially in its "organic-mystical dimension," even in contexts where terms such as *foedus* and *testamentum* are missing. Without denying the validity of this observation, this semantic approach also raises new questions.

To begin with, when we accept the implicit presence of the covenant in many contexts, from a theological-historical perspective the question remains why an author refrained from explicit use of covenant terminology in these particular situations, while continuing to use it elsewhere. As Hildebrand has argued convincingly, covenant theology was not a by-product of the discussions on the eucharist and paedobaptism. Nevertheless, it remains relevant to ask whether the employment or non-employment of covenant terminology was influenced by the theological and/or church-political context of a source. For instance, could it have been the case that Bullinger primarily continued his explicit use of covenant terminology for the internal market of his own Zurich context? Readers of Hildebrand's study receive snippets of information on these contextual questions, but they are not systematically addressed.

Moreover, as Hildebrand's detailed analysis elucidates, in the later works Bullinger freely used other terms to describe the relation between God and humanity, such as *communio*, *cultus*, or *religio*. What does this tell us about the relative importance of the covenant for the entirety of his theological thought? In this respect, I find Hildebrand's reversal of Opitz's synthesis (who argued that the covenant was subsumed under the overarching notion of *Gemeinschaft*) not entirely conclusive.

Similar questions arise in chapter seven, concerning the relation between Ursinus's *Summa theologiae* and the Heidelberg Catechism. In reaction to Willem van Vlastuin's observation that the Heidelberg Catechism changed the concept of the covenant to belonging to Christ, Hildebrand argues that for Ursinus participation in Christ "was already an essential aspect of the covenant" (284). If anything, this shows that there was no clean break between the Heidelberg Catechism and the preceding Zurich based covenant tradition. Still, the question remains why the Heidel-

berg theologians in their specific church-political and theological context did not give the covenant a prominent role, in stark contrast to the well-known catechisms by Jud and Bullinger.

Has Hildebrand spoken the final word on the Zurich origins of Reformed covenant theology? As he modestly admits, no narrative or model can “embrace the whole complex reality” (291). Instead, his aim was to present “a more nuanced and more complex picture of the development of Reformed covenant theology,” opening up trajectories of future research. In this respect Hildebrand has made a profound accomplishment, setting a landmark for all subsequent studies in this field.

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Anmerkung der Herausgeberschaft

Dr. Daniël Timmerman VDM, Jahrgang 1978, ist am 25. September 2025 unerwartet verschieden.

Indem wir mit vorstehender Rezension den letzten Text, den er zu den *Zwingliana* beisteuern konnte, veröffentlichen, gedenken wir zugleich eines langjährigen Mitstreiters in der Erforschung der Schweizerischen Reformation. Seine Forschungen zu Martin Bucer und Heinrich Bullinger markieren wichtige Beiträge zum Verständnis reformatorischer Theologie und Schriftauslegung. Den *Zwingliana* ist er als Rezensent und Autor verbunden gewesen; zum Zeitpunkt seines Hinschieds arbeitete er an einer historisch-kritischen Edition von Heinrich Bullingers catechetischen Schriften im Rahmen der Bullinger-Gesamtausgabe.

«Selig die Toten, die im Herrn sterben von jetzt an! Ja, spricht der Geist, sie sollen ausruhen von ihren Mühlen, denn ihre Werke begleiten sie.» (Offb 14,13)