

Heinrich Bullinger on Union with Christ and Justification

By J. V. Fesko

INTRODUCTION

In a recent study, *Imputation and Impartation*, William Evans makes a number of claims concerning the relationship between the doctrine of union with Christ and the *ordo salutis*. In particular he argues that the formulations of John Calvin (1509–64) were inherently superior to the soteriologies of subsequent Reformed theologians. Evans explains that Calvin gave causal priority to union with Christ, in that justification and sanctification were communicated through union; union with Christ is the instrumental basis of both justification and sanctification. Justification should not have logical priority over sanctification, but rather union with Christ should have logical priority over both justification and sanctification. Evans argues that Calvin's soteriology was later eclipsed as subsequent Reformed theologians coordinated union with Christ with the *ordo salutis*. Evans explains: "On Calvin's view, salvation is an organic unity communicated *in toto* through spiritual union with Christ. On the *ordo salutis* model, however, salvation is bestowed through a series of successive and discrete acts."¹ Justification and sanctification were organized in a logical sequence, which assured the priority of justification.² Evans' interest in showing Calvin's superior doctrine of union with Christ over and against the doctrine of subsequent Reformed theologians is not merely a historical judgment. At the end of his study Evans writes that the "soteriology of Calvin offers a significant and positive alternative to the bipolar approach of *ordo salutis* federal theology."³ Evans' interests are not purely historical—they are inherently dogmatic.

There are a number of assumptions in Evans' basic claims that deserve attention. First, Evans assumes that the *ordo salutis* and union with Christ are somehow incompatible ways of understanding redemption, as he pits his understanding of Calvin's doctrine of union

with Christ against subsequent formulations. Second, despite all of the recent literature refuting the Calvin vs. the Calvinists arguments of old, Evans opposes Calvin against subsequent Reformed theologians, even claiming that seventeenth-century *ordo salutis* theology vitiated Reformed thought.⁴ Third, the overall structure of Evans' study all but ignores the contributions of other Reformed theologians who labored before and contemporaneously with Calvin. Evans' study starts with Calvin and moves straight into Reformed Orthodoxy. This essay will bypass the question of Calvin's views on union with Christ and justification and fan out to the broader Reformed tradition to explore the views of Heinrich Bullinger (1504–79) on union with Christ and justification. As a key first-generation Reformer, Bullinger was one of the more influential Reformed theologians, one who shaped the Reformed tradition in ways similar to Calvin. This exploration of Bullinger's views will demonstrate that union with Christ conjoined with an *ordo*

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1. William B. Evans, *Imputation and Impartation*. Studies in Christian History and Thought (Carlisle/Eugene: Paternoster/Wipf & Stock, 2008), 81.

2. Evans, *Imputation and Impartation*, 38–39.

3. Evans, *Imputation and Impartation*, 262.

4. Evans, *Imputation and Impartation*, 265. Cf. Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), 63–104.

salutis understanding of soteriology is not incompatible or a late development in the Reformed tradition. One should keep in mind that by the term *ordo salutis*, I do not mean a technical and elaborate unfolding of the elements of redemption but the logical priorities that Bullinger sets forth in his soteriology. Bullinger affirms the importance of union with Christ but also accords theological priority to the doctrine of justification by faith alone over sanctification. The essay will first briefly survey the life and key works of Bullinger. Second, we will look at the particulars of Bullinger's soteriology—his *ordo salutis* and the priority of justification. This essay will conclude with some observations about the doctrines of union with Christ and justification and the Reformed tradition.

BIOGRAPHICAL AND BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Heinrich Bullinger was a humanities student in Cologne where he first broke with the Roman Catholic Church. Though Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) made quite a splash on the international theological scene as a Reformer, Bullinger was first drawn to the works of Martin Luther (1483–1546) and Philip Melancthon (1497–1560) and concluded that their theology was in greater harmony with Scripture and the church fathers than the theology of the Rome. These Lutheran theologians were instrumental in his conversion in 1522. Bullinger had intended to join a Carthusian cloister, until his conversion to Protestantism. In 1523 he did, however, become a teacher of Bible and classics at a Cistercian monastery in Kappel. Bullinger was such an effective teacher that he

persuaded the monks to embrace the Reformation; and four years after he arrived, the monastery dissolved and became a Protestant parish. Bullinger labored in Kappel for two more years as a pastor. Bullinger first met Zwingli in 1523, as he aided the more famous Reformer in his controversies with the Anabaptists in 1525 and later accompanied him to a disputation in Bern in 1528. Bullinger and Zwingli worked together on the doctrine of the covenant in their disputes with the Anabaptists.⁵ In 1531 Zwingli was killed at Kappel, where he accompanied Protestant forces into battle against forces loyal to the Roman Catholic Church. In the wake of Zwingli's death, Zurich sought a replacement to continue the work of reformation and chose Bullinger to succeed their fallen leader. History would later confirm that the Reformed church in Zurich had made the right choice.⁶

As a first-generation Reformer, Bullinger was very influential, more so than his predecessor, and perhaps almost as influential as the second-generation reformer, Calvin. Bullinger was among the authors of the First Helvetic Confession (1536), which was written in response to Pope Paul III's call for a church council in 1537. The confession, written in relatively short order and ratified by all of the key Swiss cantons, remained the officially accepted confession and authoritative profession of the Swiss Reformed church until it was replaced in 1566 by the Second Helvetic Confession (SHC), authored entirely by Bullinger.⁷ At the insistence of Theodore Beza (1519–1605), Calvin's successor at Geneva, the Swiss Reformed churches adopted Bullinger's confession. Far beyond Switzerland, the confession was adopted by Reformed churches in Scotland and Austria, became the chief confession of the Churches of Hungary and Poland, and was widely circulated in France, England, and the Netherlands.⁸ In fact, the confession was translated into seventeen different languages and published in over 115 editions.⁹

Beyond Bullinger's confessional writing, he was also the author of several influential theological works. The best-known of these is his *Decades*, a series of fifty doctrinal sermons organized in five groups of ten that were published between 1549–51. This work spread the Reformed faith throughout Europe.¹⁰ The sermons were originally intended to assist clergy in their sermon preparation, but people soon realized their benefit for laymen. The *Decades* merited the title of *Hausbuch*, a catechetical work that laymen kept in their homes and used for personal theological instruction. The *Decades* covered the topics of Scripture, justification, the Apostles' Creed, the Law, the Gospel, and the nature of worship. Bullinger's work was so highly esteemed that

5. See Charles S. McCoy and J. Wayne Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition. With a Translation of De testamento seu foedere Dei unico et aeterno (1534)* (Louisville: W/JK, 1991). Though Bullinger should be classified as a covenant theologian, at the same time the doctrine of the covenant does not pervade his *Decades* nor the Second Helvetic Confession (see Edward Dowey, "Heinrich Bullinger as Theologian: Thematic, Comprehensive, and Schematic," in *Architect of Reformation: An Introduction to Heinrich Bullinger, 1504–75*, ed. Bruce Gordon and Emidio Campi [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004], 53).

6. David C. Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971), 133–42.

7. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss, eds., *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, 3 vols. (New Haven: Yale UP, 2003), 2.280–81; Bruce Gordon, "Introduction: Architect of Reformation," in *Architect of Reformation: An Introduction to Heinrich Bullinger, 1504–75*, page 19.

8. Pelikan and Hotchkiss, *Creeds*, 2.458–59.

9. Dowey, "Bullinger as Theologian," 60.

10. Peter Opitz, "Bullinger's *Decades*: Instruction in Faith and Conduct," in *Architect of Reformation: An Introduction to Heinrich Bullinger, 1504–75*, page 101.

Reformed synods recommended that ministers and groups of laymen in towns too small to hire a pastor read Bullinger's sermons aloud on the Sundays when a preacher could not conduct worship. Bullinger also prepared a condensed version of his *Decades*, which was published as *Compendium of the Christian Religion* in 1556. All told, Bullinger's *Decades* was published in thirty-two editions and the *Compendium* in thirty editions by 1670.¹¹ The only other theological works that outsold and were published in more editions were Calvin's *Institutes* and Melancthon's *Loci Communes*. Melancthon's *Loci* appeared in 115 editions by 1560 and was the single most published Protestant work in the sixteenth century.¹² While Bullinger's reputation as a key first-generation Reformed theologian has not registered with some historians and theologians, the record of his historical influence in the sixteenth and seventeenth century is indisputable. In fact, historian Philip Benedict argues that the three most influential first- and second-generation Reformers were Johannes a Lasco (1499–1560), Calvin, and Bullinger.¹³ Benedict also concludes that of all the Reformed confessions of the sixteenth century, Bullinger's SHC was the most authoritative statement of the essential theology of the Reformed tradition by the end of the second generation.¹⁴

Hence, as we proceed we should be aware of Bullinger's influence as a first-generation reformer, whose work extended well into and defined second-generation Reformed theology. To that end, we will ascertain his views from three of the four previously mentioned documents: the SHC, *Decades*, and his *Compendium*. Bullinger's writing corpus is expansive, especially when his fifteen thousand-plus collection of letters is taken into account—ten times as many letters as Zwingli, and more than three times as many as Calvin.¹⁵ However, Edward Dowey has concluded the *Decades* more comprehensively reflects the theology of Bullinger than any other writing.¹⁶ On the other hand, Cornelis Venema has suggested that the SHC represents Bullinger's definitive expression of the Christian faith.¹⁷ Rather than choose between the two works, it seems that employing both, with assistance from the *Compendium*, enables one to construct a composite portrait of Bullinger's view on the relationship between union with Christ and justification.

UNION WITH CHRIST AND THE ORDO SALUTIS

In Bullinger's three key works, there is little evidence to show that Bullinger places a significant amount of emphasis upon the doctrine of union with Christ. In

comparison with Jerome Zanchi (1516–90), for example, Bullinger does not devote a separate chapter, locus, sermon, or treatise to the subject of union with Christ.¹⁸ Bullinger does affirm the doctrine, but one must sift through Bullinger's works to ascertain what he has to say on the subject.

PREDESTINATION

Bullinger believed that divine election, or predestination, was "in Christ": "Therefore, although not on account of any merit of ours, God has elected us, not directly, but in Christ, and on account of Christ, and those who are now engrafted into Christ by faith were also elected. But those who are outside of Christ were rejected."¹⁹ From this brief quotation a distinct pattern emerges regarding the nature of redemption. Those who are *extra Christum* are not saved, whereas those who are saved are *in Christo*. Redemption is characterized and described as being *insiti Christo*, engrafted into Christ. In the *Decades*, Bullinger explains:

The end of predestination, or fore-appointment, is Christ, the Son of God the Father. For God has ordained and decreed to save all, how many soever have communion and fellowship with Christ, his only-begotten Son; and to destroy or condemn all, how many soever have

11. Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002), 58–59.

12. Benedict, *Christ's Churches*, 74, 90–91.

13. Benedict, *Christ's Churches*, 115–16.

14. Benedict, *Christ's Churches*, 118. For similar assessments of the impact and significance of the SHC see Gordon, "Architect," 21; Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings*, 141; Cornelis Venema, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Doctrine of Predestination: Author of the Other Reformed Tradition?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 89; Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 44.

15. Benedict, *Christ's Churches*, 63.

16. Dowey, "Bullinger as Theologian," 62.

17. Venema, *Bullinger and Predestination*, 90.

18. See Jerome Zanchi, *De religione Christiana Fides – Confession of Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. Luca Baschera and Christian Moser (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 1.26–28.

19. SHC 10.2, in Pelikan and Hotchkiss, *Creeds*, 2.473, translation modified: "Ergo non sine medio, licet non propter ullum meritum nostrum, sed in Christo et propter Christum, nos legit Deus, ut qui jam sunt in Christo insiti per fidem, illi ipsi etiam sint electi, reprobi vero, qui sunt extra Christum" (idem, *Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff [1931; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990], 3.252). All subsequent Latin quotations of the SHC are taken from Schaff's *Creeds of Christendom*. Cf. idem, *Reformed Confessions Harmonized: With an Annotated Bibliography of Reformed Doctrinal Works*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 28.

no part in the communion or fellowship of Christ, his only Son. Now the faithful verily have fellowship with Christ, and the unfaithful are strangers from Christ.²⁰

Bullinger once again casts the doctrine of election in terms of union with Christ—the decree is not a bare choice but is connected to his doctrine of Christ. The decree is Bullinger’s bridge to the rest of his soteriology, but especially to his doctrine of justification.²¹ This line of connection will be manifest as we explore Bullinger’s understanding of justification, for his doctrine of election ensures that redemption, and justification in particular, is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.²² Bullinger highlights the centrality of

Christ in redemption in the SHC by treating the person and work of Christ immediately after his chapter on predestination.²³ The question that naturally arises is how Bullinger understands the execution of the decree of election as it relates to the salvation of the sinner.

FAITH

In the structure of the SHC, Bullinger moves from predestination to Christ, the Law, the Gospel, repentance and conversion, justification, and faith and good works.²⁴ Though Bullinger divides his explanation of redemption in this manner, it does not mean that each chapter is theologically isolated from the other. That Bullinger treats conversion prior to faith does not mean, therefore, that he believed that conversion was logically prior to faith. In other words, Bullinger’s *ordo docendi* should not be confused with his understanding of the *ordo salutis*. For example, Bullinger defines repentance as: “The recovery of a right mind in sinful man awakened by the word of the gospel and the Holy Spirit, and received by true faith, by which the sinner immediately acknowledges his innate corruption and all his sins accused by the word of God.”²⁵ Bullinger treats repentance first, likely because it is the first thing observable in common experience. Nevertheless he states that the ability to repent is received through faith. Faith, according to Bullinger, is “a pure gift of God” effected by the Holy Spirit.²⁶ Another illustration of the *ordo docendi* comes from Bullinger’s *Compendium*: he treats justification (which appears in book five, the grace of God), the Apostles’ Creed (book six), prayer (book seven), sacraments (book eight), and good works (book nine). The chapter on good works has three chapters in between, but this does not indicate that Bullinger believed that good works were so separated in a person’s redemption.

When is the believer united to Christ? At a number of points in his *Decades* and *Compendium*, Bullinger explains that the believer is united to Christ in faith. For example, he writes: “When we name faith, we do not name simply the quality of believing which is in our minds, but we have an eye to Christ himself, our Lord and Savior, together with his righteousness and heavenly gifts; upon whom alone, as upon a base and sure foundation, our faith does rest and firmly stand.”²⁷ Here Bullinger perhaps echoes Luther, who argued against Roman Catholicism that Christ is the form of faith, not charity or love.²⁸ Elsewhere in his sermon on the gospel Bullinger more clearly declares: “The promise is received by faith, and not by works: therefore the gospel, and *Christ in the gospel*, are received by faith.”²⁹ A similar

20. Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, 2 vols. (1849–52; Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004), 4.4 (3.186). Note, citations refer to the decade and then sermon number; page numbers according to the Parker translation pagination and volume number are in parentheses. See idem, *Sermonum decades quinque, de potissimis Christianae religionis capitibus, in tres tomos digestae* (London: Impensis Radulphi Newberii, et Hugonis Iaksoni, 1587): “Finis autem, sive decretum vitae et mortis breve est et omnibus piis perspicuum. Finis praedestinationis vel praefinitionis, Christus est Dei patris filius. Decrevit enim Deus servare omnes quotquot communionem habent cum Christo unigenito filio suo, perdere autem omnes quotquot a Christi filii sui unici communione alieni sunt.”

21. Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 41–42.

22. Venema, *Bullinger*, 46–47.

23. Pelikan and Hotchkiss, *Creeds*, 2.473–75.

24. Pelikan and Hotchkiss, *Creeds*, 2.483–91.

25. SHC 14.2: “Per poenitentiam autem intelligimus menis in homine peccatore respicientiam, verbo Evangelii et Spiritu Sancto excitatam, fideque vera acceptam, qua protinus homo peccator, agnatam sibi corruptionem peccataque omnia sua, per Verbum Dei accusata, agnoscit” (Schaff, *Creeds*, 3.262).

26. SHC 16.1.

27. Bullinger, *Decades*, 3.9 (2.333): “Cum enim fidem dicimus, non qualitatem in animis nostris haerentem dicimus, sed ipsum cum iustitia et donis suis Christum Dominum: cui ut unico fundamento innititur fides nostra.”

28. Cf. Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, 4 vols., trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2007–), 3.23.3: “Fides autem qua creditur, si cum caritate sit, virtus est, quia caritas, ut ait Amrosius, mater est omnium virtutum, que omens informat, sine qua nulla vera virtus est. Fides ergo operans per dilectionem virtus est qua non vis creduntur” (idem, *Sententiae in IV Libris Distinctae*, 2 vols. [Grottaferrata: Collegii S. Bonavenurae Ad Claras Aquas, 1981], 2.142); Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 31, *Faith*, trans. T. C. O’Brien (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1974), IIa IIae q. 4 art. 3: “Fides autem per dilectionem operatur. Ergo dilectio caritatis est fidei forma” (pp. 124–25); Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535*, in *Luther’s Works*, vols. 26–27, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 26.88; idem, *In Epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas Commeatrius*, in *D. Martin Luther’s Werke*, vols. 40.1–2), 40.1:164.

29. Bullinger, *Decades*, 4.1 (3.36), emphasis: “Caeterum promissio fide non operibus recipitur, ideoque evangelium et in evangelio Christus fide recipitur.”

statement appears in the SHC: “For as we receive food by eating, so we participate in Christ by believing.”³⁰ The believer receives, or is united to, Christ by faith. Faith unites the believer to Christ, but this union is not brought about apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. Interpreters of Scripture have long identified John 15 as a key passage that expounds the doctrine of union with Christ. Bullinger is no exception, but in his explanation of the passage he emphasizes the work of the Spirit:

And God does by his Spirit and by faith in Christ Jesus renew all men so that they, being once regenerate, do no longer their own, that is, the works of the flesh, but the works of the Spirit, of grace, and of God himself. For the works of them that are regenerate do grow up by the good Spirit of God that is within them; which Spirit, even as the sap gives strength to trees to bring forth fruit, does in like manner cause sundry virtues to bud and brand out of us men, as the Lord himself does in the gospel testify, and say: ‘I am the vine, you are the branches. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abide in the vine; so cannot you also, unless you abide in me.’³¹

So, then, the sinner is brought into union with Christ by the work of the Spirit, and this is accomplished through regeneration and faith, both of which are a gift of God.³²

JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

Given all that Bullinger says regarding faith and union with Christ, one might suspect that his doctrine of union is undifferentiated. By *undifferentiated* I mean a holistic doctrine that does not make distinctions between justification and sanctification or that he does not prioritize justification over sanctification. A detailed study of Bullinger’s doctrine, however, reveals important distinctions and evidence that he gives justification priority. Bullinger’s definition of justification contains the common elements found in most sixteenth-century Reformed theology. Bullinger believes that justification involves the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believer. For example, he states: “We are made partakers of his grace by true faith, and being grafted in Christ, are truly counted of God, righteous and clean for Christ his name and sake.” Bullinger elaborates: “You must know that the perfect righteousness of Christ is properly imputed unto you by God, wherefore if you have faith in Christ, you are righteous and perfect in him.”³³ Bullinger holds that the

believer is *perfect* because of the imputed righteousness of Christ, which as we will see below, is contrasted with the imperfect but progressive nature of sanctification. Bullinger also connects the doctrine of adoption to his doctrine of justification: “This term of justification is taken in this present treatise for the absolution and remission of sins, for blessedness, and adoption into the number of the sons of God.”³⁴ Historically, adoption is considered a forensic act, so Bullinger’s inclusion of adoption under justification merely reflects the coordination of these two forensic benefits.

Thus far we have the following elements: the believer is united to Christ by faith through the work of the Spirit and is also justified by faith, through which he receives the forgiveness of sins, the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, and the title of son of God. How does Bullinger relate these elements one to another?

Bullinger carefully distinguishes between the forensic and transformative aspects of the believer’s union with Christ. Concerning the forensic, he explains: “There is that singular grace, whereby he does, for his only-begotten Christ his sake, adopt us to be his sons: he does not, I mean, adopt all, but the believers only, whose sins he reckons not, but does impute to them the righteousness of his only Son our Savior.” Bullinger adds that the imputed righteousness of Christ “is that grace which does alone justify us in very deed.” In other words, Bullinger grounds justification upon the alien righteousness of Christ. He contrasts imputed righteousness with the righteousness of sanctification: “There is a grace,

30. SHC 15.4: “Nam sicut manducando cibum recipimus, ita credendo participamus Christum” (Schaff, *Creeeds*, 3.267).

31. Bullinger, *Decades*, 3.9 (2.322): “Regenerat autem hic omnes per spiritum suum, et per fidem in Dominum Iesum, ut renati iam non sua propria, id est, carnis, sed spiritus, gratiae, adeoque Dei ipsius opera faciant. Opera enim renatorum enascuntur ex inhabitante Dei spiritu bono, qui ut succus vitalis plantas vegetat ad proferendos fructus, ita ille varias ex homine progerminat virtutes, attestante Domino et dicente in Evangelio, Ego sum vitis: vos palmites estis. Sicut palmes non potest ferre fructum a semetipso, nisi manserit in vite: sic nec vos nisi in me manseritis. Qui manet in me, et ego in eo, hic fert fructum multum: quia sine me nihil potestis facere.”

32. Cf. SHC 9.6, 8.

33. Heinrich Bullinger, *Common Places of Christian Religion* (London: 1572), 5.6 (p. 111): “Interim et gratiae eius vera fide participes reddamur, et Christo insiti, vere a Deo Christi nomine et causa iusti purique reputemur. . . . Prorinde scias perfectam Christi iustitiam a Deo tibi proprie imputari, quamodrem si fidem in Christum habeas, in illo iustus” (idem, *Compendium Christianae Religionis* [Tiguri, 1556], 66–67). Cf. SHC 15.1–6.

34. Bullinger, *Decades*, 1.6 (1.104): “Principio demonstrabo iustificationis vocabulum in praesenti causa usurpari pro absolutione sive remissione peccatorum, pro beatificatione et adoptione in numerum filiorum Dei.”

which, being poured into our minds, does bring forth good works in them that are justified. This grace does not justify, but does engender the fruits of righteousness in them that are justified.” Bullinger subordinates the grace of sanctification to that of justification when he concludes concerning these two benefits of union with Christ: “We confess and grant, that good works belong to grace, but after a certain manner, order, and fashion.”³⁵ We will see below in what way works (or sanctification) follow the grace of justification.

Though Bullinger prioritizes justification over sanctification, he does not rend them asunder. Both justification and sanctification are aspects of union with Christ. He also shows that they are united but distinct: “But grace or faith and works, justification also and sanctification, are so joined together, that they cannot be severed one from another.... I verily neither dare nor do in any ease gainsay, that faith and works do cleave together.”³⁶ So for Bullinger, justification and sanctification are inseparably joined together, but

35. Bullinger, *Decades*, 3.9 (2.330): “Deinde est gratia singularis illa, qua gratis nos propter filium unigenitum adoptat pro filiis: non omnes quidem, sed credentes duntaxat, quibus videlicet peccata non reputat, iustitiam vero filii sui unigeniti imputat. Et haec vere et sola iustificat. Rursus est gratia, quae diffusa in animos nostros, opera bona per iustificatos profert. Haec non iustificat, sed ex iustificatis iustitiae fructus progignit. Concedimus ergo ad gratiam pertinere bona opera sed sua ratione, suo modo et ordine.” Cf. Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 41.

36. Bullinger, *Decades*, 3.9 (2.330): “Verum gratia vel fides et opera, item iustificatio et sanctificatio inseparabiliter coniuncta sunt.... Ac nullo quidem modo inficias eo fidem et opera inter se cohaerere.”

37. Bullinger, *Decades*, 3.9 (2.330): “Solis lumen quanquam nunquam separetur a calore, attamen calor non est. Nec sequitur, Sol orbem illuminat, ergo calor omnia illuminat. Quia in Sole sunt calor et lumen indissociata. Quinimo Sol secundum lumen orbem illuminat, interim minime illuminat secundum calorem. Et tamen Sol calefaciens illuminat etiam. Sic iustificamur gratuita Dei misericordia propter Christum Dominum gratis, non secundum gratiae opera: licet haec progignantur et provehantur per illam.” Cf. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, vols. 20–21, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.11.6; Jerome Zanchi, *An Excellent and Learned Treatise of the Spiritual Marriage between Christ and the Church* (Cambridge: 1592), 134; idem, *Commentarius in Epistolam Sancti Pauli Ad Ephesos*, 2 vols., ed. A. H. Hartog, Bibliotheca Reformata, vol. 5 (Amsterdam: 1888), 2.378.

38. Bullinger, *Decades*, 3.9 (2.330): “Opera vero nostra semper aliquid vitii, ut ne quid dicam acerbius aliud, habent aspersum, propter morbum nobis omnibus agnatum.”

39. Bullinger, *Decades*, 3.9 (2.330): “Fides enim quanquam sit imbecillus et imperfecta in nobis, nititur tamen perfectione Christi, huiusque solius, et eatenus iustificat.”

40. Bullinger, *Decades*, 3.9 (2.326): “Unde manifestum est quod iustificatio praecessit opera iustitiae. Iustus enim operatur iustitiam, ut iustitia iusti sit fructus. Gratis quidem homo iustificatur, non per opera, quae iustificationem sequuntur.”

neither are they confused. To illustrate the unity but nevertheless different functions of justification and sanctification, Bullinger offers the analogy of the heat and light of the sun, an analogy also used by Calvin, though other Reformers employed this illustration. Bullinger writes:

Although the light of the sun is not separate from the heat thereof, yet is not the light the same that the heat is. Neither is it a good consequence to say, The sun gives light to the world; therefore the heat of the sun gives light to the world, because in the sun the heat and light cannot be separated. Yes rather, the sun in respect of his light does lighten the world, not in respect of the heat that it has. And yet the sun does both warm and lighten the earth at once. In like manner we are freely justified by the merciful grace of God, for Christ his sake, our Lord and Savior, not in respect and consideration of the works of grace, that he found in us; although these works are engendered and brought forth by that free grace.³⁷

So justification and sanctification come to the believer through his union with Christ, but they are nevertheless distinct.

But what reasons does Bullinger give for this prioritization of justification over sanctification? Bullinger does not teach a temporal or chronological order but a logical or theological order. Two chief reasons support this claim. First, Bullinger explains that our works have a sprinkling of vice and the sparkle of error in them, which is due to the abiding presence of original sin.³⁸ This abiding presence of sin that taints our good works, therefore, requires that believers rely “upon Christ his perfection alone, and so far forth it does justify us.”³⁹ The imputed righteousness of Christ covers the imperfect and incomplete nature of sanctification. Hence, Bullinger writes of the priority of the forensic: “Justification did always go before the works of righteousness: for the just man does work righteousness; so that righteousness is the fruit that the just do bring forth. Man, verily, is justified freely by grace, and not by works, which follow after justification.”⁴⁰ In the SHC Bullinger explains the priority of justification in the following manner:

We do not share in the benefit of justification partly because of the grace of God or Christ, and partly because of ourselves, our love, works, or merit, but we attribute it wholly to the grace of God in Christ through faith. For our love and our works could not please God if

performed by unrighteous men. Therefore, it is necessary for us to be righteous before we may love and do good works. We are made truly righteous, as we have said, by faith in Christ purely by the grace of God, who does not impute to us our sins, but the righteousness of Christ, or rather, he imputes faith in Christ to us for righteousness.⁴¹

In a word, justification has priority over sanctification because it is the lens through which the believer and his works are always viewed.

A second reason that Bullinger gives for the priority of justification is the parallel that exists between Adam and Christ. Bullinger explains that Paul places the two Adams in parallel to highlight that the first Adam brings forth nothing but sin, wrath, and death. Paul highlights the effect of Adam's work so that no one would seek righteousness and life by works. By contrast, Paul explains that by Christ believers have righteousness, grace, life, and the forgiveness of sins.⁴² Bullinger lays a forensic foundation both for damnation and salvation as they are tied to the respective federal heads of Adam and Christ. Bullinger highlights the priority of justification in redemption by showing that the forensic verdict secures a person's salvation; though this is not to say that Bullinger believes that justification completes a person's salvation. I use a distinction between *securing* and *completing* one's salvation. For Bullinger, salvation is grounded upon Christ's work for us, not Christ's work in us. This conclusion is evident when Bullinger explains Ephesians 2.8–10, and particularly the phrase, "you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast himself." This text is typically cited vis-à-vis a holistic view of redemption, one that includes sanctification. But Bullinger enlists this Ephesians text in the service of justification.⁴³ Bullinger comments: "For these testimonies are more clear than the noon-day, and do most evidently testify, that we are justified by faith, and not by any works."⁴⁴ Bullinger goes as far as to say that we are saved apart from works: "For we are freely saved through faith, without respect of any works of ours, either first or last."⁴⁵ Bullinger also protects the priority of justification by explaining that even at the final judgment *before* the works of believers are evaluated, God will declare to believers: "Come, you blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you since the beginning of the world" (Matt. 25.34).⁴⁶

But giving justification priority over sanctification does not mean Bullinger leans in an antinomian

direction. Bullinger warns his readers concerning the significance of Hebrews 12, 1 Thessalonians 4, and Ephesians 4.5: "Here also contains sanctification and purification of soul and body from all pollution or filth of the flesh, the devil, and the world. Without his sanctification, no man shall see God."⁴⁷ Bullinger believed both justification and sanctification were benefits of union with Christ but nevertheless distinguished between the two, as in his illustration of heat and light. Bullinger's explanation of Ephesians 2.8–10 shows that he believed that good works have their place and dignity in the church, though he was careful to protect the *sola* of *sola gratia* in redemption. Bullinger did not want people to think that their good works in any way contributed to their salvation—rather, they were the fruit of their salvation. Indeed, echoing Paul, Bullinger explains that believers are created unto good works.⁴⁸

In some of his most explicit imagery, Bullinger emphasizes that antinomianism is unacceptable because of the believer's union with Christ: "For Christ died for us, and was in his body offered up to be a sacrifice, or oblation, to cleanse and purge our sins, that we might thenceforth be united and coupled to him; and that we, being conceived and made with child with the Holy Spirit, may travail, bring forth, and be delivered of an excellent issue and holy fruit of good works."⁴⁹ Bullinger

41. SCH 15.5: "Itaque justificationis beneficium non partimur, partim gratiae Dei, vel Christo, partim nobis, aut dilectioni operibusque, vel merito nostro, sed insolidum gratiae Dei in Christo per fidem tribuimus. Sed et non possent Deo placere dilectio et opera nostra, si fierent ab iniustis; proinde oportet nos prius justos esse, quam diligamus aut faciamus operi iusta. Iusti vere efficitur, quemadmodum diximus, per fidem in Christum, mera gratia Dei, qui peccata nobis non imputat, sed iustitiam Christi adeoque fidem in Christum ad iustitiam nobis imputat" (Schaff, *Creeds*, 3.267).

42. Bullinger, *Decades*, 1.6 (1.113).

43. Peter Martyr Vermigli has a similar gloss of Ephesians 2.8–10: "A man is justified by faith and that not of yourself, lest anyone should boast" (Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Predestination and Justification*, The Peter Martyr Library, vol. 8, trans. and ed by Frank A. James III [Kirkville: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 2003], 125; idem, *Loci Communes* [London: 1583], 3.4.24 [p. 591]).

44. Bullinger, *Decades*, 1.6 (1.118): "Sunt enim luce meridiana clariora, et clarissime testantur fide nos non ullis operibus iustificari."

45. Bullinger, *Decades*, 4.1 (3.36): "Nam gratis sine omni respectu operum nostrorum, sive praecedentium, sive sequentium, per fidem salvamur."

46. Bullinger, *Decades*, 3.9 (2.346).

47. Bullinger, *Common Places*, 9.4: "Atque, hic locum habet sanctificatio et purificatio animae atque, corporis, ab omni pollutione carnis, Satanae et mundi. Absque hac sanctificatione nemo Deum videbit" (*Compendium*, 135).

48. Bullinger, *Decades*, 1.6 (1.118–19).

49. Bullinger, *Decades*, 3.9 (2.309): "Christus enim mortuus est pro nobis, oblatum in expiationem peccatorum nostrorum corpore suo,

extrapolates the union analogy of Christ's marriage to the church, and argues that the fruit of good works is a result of Christ's copulative union with his bride. Good works, therefore, are certain, but the believer's redemption does not hinge upon them—his redemption hinges upon the works of Christ. Another way to state this point is to employ a common sixteenth-century distinction, though Bullinger does not use it. Namely, good works are not an antecedent cause or condition of salvation but rather a consequent condition of salvation. Justification, on the other hand, is an antecedent cause or condition of salvation because it rests upon the works of Christ, not those of the believer.

Beyond these two chief reasons behind the priority of justification, the perfect nature of justification versus the imperfect nature of sanctification, and the parallel between the two Adams and the imputation of their respective work, Bullinger goes on to summarize the nature of the gospel:

This is the sum and breviary of the whole gospel, that we are justified, that is to say, absolved from sins, from the definitive sentence of death and damnation, and sanctified and adopted into the number of the sons of God, by faith, that is, by an assured confidence in the name of Christ, which is given by the Father to be our only Savior. And here are works by name excluded, to the end there should be given to us no occasion to entangle the faith with works, or to attribute to work the glory and title due to faith alone, or rather to Christ, upon whom our faith is grounded and upheld.⁵⁰

So for this reason, Bullinger concludes that the doctrine of justification should be at the bottom of every believer's heart.⁵¹

ut porro ipsi copulemur, impraegnatiq[ue] spiritu eius, pariamus pulcherrimam bonorum operum prolem vel sanctissimum fructum.”

50. Bullinger, *Decades*, 4.1 (3.43): “Haec summa est et brevissima totius Evangelii, iustificari nos, id est, absolvi a peccatis, a lata mortis vel condemnationis sententia, sanctificari autem et adoptari in numerum filiorum Dei, fide, id est, fiducia in nomen Christi, qui datus est nobis salvator a patre unicus. Et hic nominatim excluduntur opera, ne ulla nobis suppeditetur occasio implicandi fidem operibus, aut operibus eam tribuendi gloriam, quae uni fidei vel potius Christo Domino, cui fides innititur, debetur.”

51. Bullinger, *Decades*, 3.9 (2.327).

52. Bullinger, *Decades*, 3.9 (2.330).

53. There is doubt concerning Evans' general conclusions regarding Calvin's view of union with Christ and an undifferentiated relationship between justification and sanctification. See, e.g., Cornelis Venema, “Union with Christ, the ‘Twofold Grace of God,’ and the ‘Order of Salvation’ in Calvin's Theology,” in *Calvin for Today*, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2009): 91–114.

CONCLUSION

This essay began with Evans' claims that later Reformed theologians vitiated Calvin's formulation of union with Christ by introducing the concept of the *ordo salutis*. According to Evans, when redemption is dispensed according to the *ordo salutis*, justification is separated from sanctification or sanctification is merely an effect of justification. Evans believes Calvin's formulation is superior because the benefits of justification and sanctification flow from the believer's union with Christ, and not from one to the other. One problem with Evans' claims, however, is that he began with Calvin and assumed that there were no other Reformed theologians contributing to the development of Reformed thought. This essay has demonstrated that Evans' construction of the relationship between Calvin and the subsequent Reformed tradition requires greater nuance and exploration of the work of other Reformed theologians such as Bullinger. Bullinger clearly affirms the doctrine of union with Christ, which features prominently in his doctrine of election, since those elected are *in Christ*. But he also does so in conjunction with his basic *ordo salutis*, which accords justification priority over sanctification. Bullinger prioritizes justification by giving it chief place—that which secures our salvation and is the lens through which the believer is always viewed—but he does not emphasize it to the exclusion of sanctification. Rather, “good works belong to grace, but after a certain manner, order, and fashion.”⁵² The concerns for a proper understanding of the *ordo salutis* lie at the foundational level of the Reformed tradition and cannot be placed at the feet of theologians who came after Calvin. Hence, *if* Evans' reading of Calvin is correct, then at a minimum there are at least two distinct, but nevertheless genuinely Reformed understandings of the relationship between union with Christ and justification, those of Bullinger and Calvin.⁵³ ■