

Understanding Islam - in the Light of Bullinger and Wesley

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Islam is one of the greatest challenges facing the church today. In our approach to Islam and our relations to Muslims, we can learn from the insights that come from our tradition. Besides looking to scripture and the early church, we look particularly to Wesley and the reformers. Among the reformers we shall examine Bullinger, Zwingli's successor in Zurich.¹ Bullinger's account of Islam is extremely critical, but he also offers more positive insights into the faith and life of those outside the people of God. Our emphasis will be on these more positive insights in Bullinger and Wesley, although we begin with the critique.

Bullinger and Islam

For the reformers the Muslim armies had not only captured four of the five great centres of the early church (Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, and Jerusalem), but also in 1529 had reached the doors of Vienna, the heart of Christian Europe. The reformers' knowledge of Islam, therefore, came from contemporary reports as well as from the Koran and other books.²

Although there are some variations among the reformers, Bullinger's The Turk in 1567 may be taken as a typical critique of Muslim faith and practice.³ (It shows that with the other reformers he shared the medieval view of Islam as a Christian heresy.⁴) We consider in particular what he says about the Koran and Mohamed.

For Bullinger, Mohamed perverted scripture and invented a new teaching, changing, falsifying, and adding to the saving bases of the Christian faith (Turk A iv r - v r). In Bullinger's judgment Islam was not profitable to salvation, but impure and false in every part (A viii r). He contrasts it with the Christian faith, the one true, ancient, holy, and indubitable faith, which had lasted from the beginning of the world. Without this faith, moreover, which is contained in the twelve articles of the creed, no one can be saved. By contrast Muslims do not confess a single article of the true faith as one should. (A vii v) Bullinger describes Islam as an attempt to create a faith which is acceptable to people (A iv r).⁵

Bullinger ascribed the Koran to Mohamed, not to God. He rejected Mohamed's claim to be a prophet, maintaining that he invented his revelations and visions. Indeed for Bullinger the Koran was put together with the help of a heretical monk and the advice of perverted Jews and false Christians,

¹ Studies of Bullinger's attitude to Islam include R. Pfister, 'Antistes Heinrich Bullinger Ueber den "Tuergg"', Evangelisches Missions-Magazin N.F. 98 (1954), pp. 69-78 and 'Reformation, Türken und Islam', ZWA 10 (1956) pp. 345-75. V. Segesvary, L'Islam et la Réforme: Étude sur l'attitude des réformateurs zurichois envers L'Islam (1510-1550) (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1978), and Katya Vehlow, 'The Swiss Reformers Zwingli, Bullinger and Bibliander and their Attitude to Islam (1520-1560)' in Islam and Christian – Muslim Relations 6 (1995) pp. 229-54.

² They had not all read the Koran, but Bullinger certainly had, and he also benefited from Bibliander's specialist knowledge and his publication of the Koran and works on Islam. On occasion Bullinger make detailed references to the Koran, for example, Reply to Seven Charges (1574) 34v-35r and 46v-47r. For full details of Reply, see Joachim Staedtke (ed.), Heinrich Bullinger Werke I Bibliographie (abbreviated HBBibl) (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1972) Vol. 1 No 584.

³ For The Turk see HBBibl 1 No 557. There are references also to Reply.

⁴ Among his sources, Bullinger (Turk A iii v) cites John of Damascus. He profoundly influenced the medieval and Reformation understanding of Islam as a heresy or as apostasy from Christianity. See, for example, Pfister, 'Reformation' pp.356-57, 365 and Segesvary, p.121.

⁵ Luther presents Mohamed as offering a faith acceptable to human reason, by rejecting Christ's divinity and saving death; see, for example, H. Vossberg, Luthers Kritik aller Religion (Erlangen/Leipzig, 1922), p.98.

corrupted by heretics such as Arians, Macedonians, and Nestorians. (A iv r-v) He wondered how an intelligent person could believe the Koran which he dismissed as a disordered, unlearned, blasphemous book, full of the perversion of divine truth, fables, dreams, lies, and deceit. Mohamed fulfilled the word of Christ, 'I have come in my Father's name and you did not receive me. When someone else comes in his own name, you receive him.' (John 5:43) (Reply 34 r - v)⁶

The Koran rejects such central doctrines of the Christian faith as the person and work of Christ and the trinity. It denies that Jesus is the Son of God, regarding him only as a messenger of God. (Reply 35 r) (Mohamed, indeed, placed himself above Christ and all the saints. (Turk A v v)) With the denial of Christ's sonship goes the denial of the trinity. Against Muslim belief in the Father alone, Bullinger quotes John's statement, 'Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father.' (1 John 2:23) The Koran also denies the death and resurrection of Christ and his being the only mediator. This rejection of the work of Christ meant the rejection of 'the chief doctrine of the Christian faith', justification through faith alone in Christ. Bullinger charges Mohamed with inventing ways through which people deserve and gain the forgiveness of sins, such as fasting, prayer, alms, fighting nobly, and dying in battle for the sake of Islam. For Bullinger, Muslim belief in salvation by works, like papal indulgences, is Pelagian. (A vii v and v v – vi r)

Bullinger challenges the Koran's understanding of eternal life, worship, marriage, and government, as fundamentally opposed to the Christian faith. It presents eternal life, but in a fleshly way, just as pagan fables do. It promises those who live according to the Koran that they will have honour, success, and riches here, and hereafter bodily delight, the best food, the finest drinks, and beautiful maidens. (A vii r, cf A viii r and Reply 47 r) The Koran destroys marriage with its polygamy and subjects innocent women to the pleasure and whim of men (A vi v). Mohamed regarded Christ's giving a law of peace as unhelpful to government. By contrast the Saracens saw themselves as heirs of Sara, to whom therefore all the kingdoms of the world are promised. They used the sword to achieve this, so that Bullinger compares them with the Münster anabaptists. (A vi r-v) Mohamed spread his new faith against the true faith with the sword (B i v) and commanded his followers to persecute those who disputed the Koran (A vii r). In the historical section of the book Bullinger describes the inhuman cruelty of the Turks, their shameful treatment of women and girls, and their dismembering and disembowelling of pregnant women and young boys (D iv v). There are many other points where Bullinger shows how Islam diverges from Christianity, for example, in its rejection of the sacraments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Lord's Day. (A vi v).

On occasion the reformers speak positively of Muslims and negatively of the lives of Christians. Bullinger uses the evil lives of Christians to explain the rise and success of Islam. Bullinger explains Islam's success by analogy with God's punishing Israel in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament God punished his people through unbelieving heathen when they did not remain with God's word and law. Bullinger notes that the rise of Islam co-incided with disputes in the church about Christ, images, the power of bishops, and whether Constantinople or Rome was the head of all churches. (A viii v – B i r) After this Bullinger sketches the history of Islam from the beginning to his own time. (B i r – D vii r) He concludes with a long prayer, in which he rehearses the infidelity of Christians in their faith and the disobedience of Christians in their life and work. For this God has given them the Turk as a teacher and executioner, as he did with Nebuchadnezzar and others. Bullinger's prayer is that as a result of this the people will repent. (D vii r – v) There is the further prayer that God will convert Mohamed to Christ, who is the light and saviour of the whole world (D viii r, cf A viii r). Bullinger associates Mohamed and Muslims, like the papacy, with anti-Christ, that is the powers which are opposed to Christ.⁷

Bullinger's comments on Islam offer little basis for a positive understanding of Islam. It could be, however, that Bullinger would have written differently, if he had thought of Islam as a religion rather than as a Christian heresy. What he says about those who were not part of Israel offers insights, which could

⁶ Segesvary (pp.127-28) refers to Bibliander's stating that no one possessing sound reason could believe the fables in the Koran.

⁷ See his commentary on 2 Thessalonians (HBBibl 1 No 81) 54 v – 56 r. The translation of this commentary into English two years later shows the importance of Bullinger's apocalyptic writings.

perhaps be applied to Islam, if we do not define it as a Christian heresy.⁸ Yet it must be acknowledged that he was concerned essentially with those living before Christ or at the time of the apostles.

Bullinger engaged with this issue of the salvation of the heathen in a chapter of True Confession, in which he defended Zwingli against Luther.⁹ Luther had dismissed Zwingli as a heathen for the vision of heaven in Exposition of the Faith in which he included figures from classical antiquity, such as Numa, Socrates, and Aristides, who – according to Luther - knew nothing about Christ, the sacraments, or the Christian faith. It is, he says, as if people can be saved by their own faith.

The title of the chapter expresses Bullinger's fundamental concern: the fact that Zwingli had not become a heathen and the question whether all heathen outside the people of Israel who die without the sacraments are damned. His defence is essentially in four parts. The first considers whether Zwingli was a heathen, and the others consider the more general question of heathen outside God's people. In his defence of Zwingli, Bullinger asserts that Zwingli did not say that people can be saved in their own faith. He did not say that those remaining godless are saved, nor that people are saved by their own power without the grace or mercy of God and apart from Christ. Bullinger argues against Luther that the heathen named were good and that their goodness came not from them, but from God's grace, and then, interpreting Zwingli somewhat freely, he maintains that Zwingli hoped that God, having granted them his grace, had not withdrawn his grace and mercy, but had given it more richly. God saved them by his grace, though not without Christ. Zwingli counts them as saved, not as heathen but as those who have received God's grace. (16 r – 18 r)

Although Bullinger defends Zwingli, his own view is not identical with Zwingli's. He argues more biblically and carefully than Zwingli, and does not, unlike him, maintain that particular heathen are saved. Moreover, while defending Zwingli, he speaks of Zwingli's hoping for, not of his asserting their salvation, and also he explicitly relates this to God's mercy and grace, although Zwingli did neither of these in the passage concerned.

Next, Bullinger considers the general issue of heathen outside God's people: first, that scripture does not damn them, and then that this view does not do away with Christ, or word, or sacrament. Bullinger develops a twofold case from the bible for the salvation of the heathen carefully understating it by using a double negative: that scripture does not damn all heathen outside the people of Israel. He maintains that God's revelation comes to them in some measure, as it did in a unique way to Israel. With revelation there is the hope of grace and faith, for God's word cannot be without fruit (Is. 55:10-11). In support, first, he refers to God's revelation in Romans 1:18-19 and also to Romans 2:10-11 and 14-15 which place Gentiles alongside Jews, as they do good and show the law written on their heart. Second, he gives biblical examples of heathen both outside Israel and before Abraham and the institution of the sacrament of circumcision, who were saved through the grace of God, but without the sacraments. Bullinger mentions all kinds of heathen in scripture, for whose salvation we may hope. He lists more than a dozen believing and godly heathen from different countries, adding that there were surely some also among the Greeks and Romans. (Those whom Zwingli mentioned were, of course, Greeks and Romans.) After basing his case on scripture Bullinger characteristically supports it from the fathers, citing Augustine's declaration that not all people outside Israel were lost. (18 r – 19 v)

Bullinger's case for the salvation of the heathen appears to deny the role of Christ and the place of word and sacrament in salvation. Bullinger insists, however, that none of the heathen is saved without Christ and God's revelation and inspiration. The presupposition underlying this is that Adam's fall affected everyone and that no one is saved without Christ, the second Adam. Furthermore, he supports his view that the word and revelation of Christ are given in some measure to heathen with various examples. Thus God revealed himself to Job by inward inspiration (indeed without God's inspiration, Job could not have proclaimed Christ, the forgiveness of sins, resurrection, and eternal life), to Naaman by an Israelite girl,

⁸ See W.P. Stephens, 'Bullinger and Zwingli on the Salvation of the Heathen', Reformation and Renaissance Review 7 (2005), pp 284-301.

⁹ For True Confession (1545), see HBBibl 1 No 161. The book is concerned primarily with the sacraments, an emphasis that is reflected in this chapter.

and to the Magi by a star. After this Bullinger cites the non-biblical case of the Sibylls and their prophecies of Christ, for which characteristically he draws support from Augustine, Lactantius, and Justin Martyr. (19 v – 21 v)¹⁰

Finally, Bullinger considers Luther's criticism that Zwingli's view meant that there was no need of the sacraments, if the heathen were saved without them. He maintains that the sacraments were not done away by this as they were not given to the heathen, but to God's people. He argues from Romans 2: 25-29 that Paul did not do away with circumcision, yet also did not damn uncircumcised heathen who by God's grace lived piously. If they keep the law they will be regarded as if circumcised. (21 v – 22 r)

Elsewhere in his writings Bullinger explores and clarifies his view of some of the issues involved in the salvation of the heathen. In his 1526 commentary on Romans Bullinger portrayed the virtues of the heathen as sins. He dismissed 'the patience of Socrates, the strength of Cato, and the purity of Xenocrates', for 'everything is sin which is without faith and comes from reason and nature'.¹¹ In 1533, however, he states that we should ascribe to the divine wisdom what is honest, true, and just among the heathen. (Romans 41 r)¹² The issue is clarified in 1550 when there is an unexpected use of election in reference to the salvation of the heathen. Bullinger asks whether their works, which appear good and righteous, are sins or good works. Bullinger answers that the elect among them such as Cornelius had the Spirit and faith and that their works, being done in faith, were good and not sins. Of the others he says that they are 'not to be despised' and points to the way they have benefited others.¹³

The faith of the heathen is examined in the discussion of Cornelius in Acts (1533).¹⁴ In response to the question how Cornelius could be godfearing and yet need Peter as a teacher, Bullinger refers to the heathen in Romans 1 and 2. His faith is shown in his praying to God and giving alms. (Indeed, 'there can be no true religion and no fear of God without faith'.) It is a faith which grew to full measure by the preaching of the word, but which was imperfect before that. (Acts 120 r v) For Bullinger God's grace and Christ's merit are fundamental to the salvation of the heathen. He maintains that 'if they pleased God before Christ and the apostolic preaching to the heathen, they pleased him because of righteousness and piety'. Yet as 'no piety or righteousness is perfect without the Son of God', they pleased God 'by the grace of God and the merit of Christ'. (Acts 128 r) In a sermon in 1550 Bullinger uses a quotation from Augustine about the nature of faith, a quotation applying to heathen named and not named in scripture: 'without the faith therefore of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, none of the ancient just men could be cleansed and justified... not only among the children of Israel, as the prophets were, but also without that people, as Job was' (Decades 170 r v; ET 2.400-401).

Bullinger's approach to the salvation of the heathen in True Confession is fundamentally biblical, based on examples of godly heathen, mostly in the Old Testament but also Cornelius in the New, and on particular texts in Romans 1 and 2. (Significantly, Bullinger speaks only of hoping for their salvation because of God's mercy.) Characteristically, Bullinger also appeals to the fathers, especially Augustine, who were of course steeped in classical antiquity. With them Bullinger held that goodness and truth in the heathen came from God, though in 1526 he saw their goodness negatively as sin. The heathen who were discussed were godly not ungodly, but they are not saved because of their godliness. Their godliness is,

¹⁰ Bullinger stated that the heathen were said to be without God (Eph. 2:12), because knowledge of Christ was not so common among them. He argued that it is impossible to deny that many heathen pleased God, and that they cannot, therefore, have been entirely without Christ, as no one can please God without Christ. (Ephesians 137 v – 138 r – see HBBibl 1 No 84)

With Job, as with the Sibylls, Bullinger instances the detailed prophecies about Christ.

¹¹ Joachim Staedtke et al (eds.), Heinrich Bullinger Werke III Theologische Schriften (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1983) 1.68.

¹² For the details of the commentary, see HBBibl 1 No 42.

¹³ Decades 173 v – 174 r, English translation 2.418-19. For the Latin text, see H B Bibl 1 No 184, and for the English translation, Thomas Harding (ed.), The Decades of Henry Bullinger (Cambridge, 1849-52), Nos 223-26.

¹⁴ See HBBibl 1 No 43.

rather, seen as arising from their faith, which is a gift of God. Salvation, as with Christians, depends on God's grace and Christ's merit, Christ's merit being related to his saving death. At different points Bullinger clarifies the nature of their faith, which is seen as imperfect or incomplete until they hear and respond to the preaching of the gospel. Bullinger can refer to election in a discussion of the heathen, but its role is subordinate and explanatory. Its absence from his case is more striking than its occasional presence

Bullinger's defence of Zwingli implies broad agreement between them. Zwingli's position is, however, different at certain significant points and those points are part of the Reformed inheritance. The most important element is election¹⁵, but Zwingli also points to the role of the Spirit¹⁶ and the universal reach of the redeeming work of Christ, the second Adam.¹⁷

When we turn to Wesley we shall find some common ground, though not, of course, in the use of election.

Wesley and Islam

Unlike the reformers, John Wesley appears to regard Islam as a distinct religion rather than as a Christian heresy, and this may account for a somewhat different approach from theirs. This is also one reason why what he said about the heathen can in principle be applied to Muslims.¹⁸ Moreover, he does not appear to distinguish between the heathen before and after Christ, although he does make that distinction with Jews.¹⁹

It is particularly in the sermons that Wesley refers to Muslims and Islam and his comments are mostly very negative. At the beginning of 'The General Spread of the Gospel', he quotes Brerewood that, if you divide the world into thirty parts, nineteen are 'professed heathen', six are 'professed Mohametans', and

¹⁵ Zwingli's major argument when considering the salvation of the heathen is election, used not least to show the dependence of salvation on God and not on the sacraments, 'The bliss of everlasting life and the pain of everlasting death are altogether matters of free election or rejection by the divine will'. Z V 377.31-33; Works 2.10. For Zwingli's works, see Emil Egli Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke (Berlin, Leipzig, Zurich, 1905 -) and The Latin Works of Huldreich Zwingli (Philadelphia: Heidelberg Press, 1922). For a fuller discussion of Zwingli, see R. Pfister, Die Seligkeit erwählter Heiden bei Zwingli (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag Zurich, 1952) and W.P. Stephens, 'Zwingli and the Salvation of the Gentiles', in W.P. Stephens (ed.), The Bible, the Reformation and the Church (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1995), pp. 224-44. Although election is fundamental in Zwingli and also is used in the passages in Luther, to which Bullinger refers in True Confession, Bullinger gives no place to it.

¹⁶ The work of the Spirit is related to election when Zwingli writes: 'the heavenly Spirit created... not Palestine alone but also the universe. Therefore he nourished piety even among those he elected wherever they are.' (Z IX 458.25-459.4) Although Bullinger also ascribes piety to the Holy Spirit, he does not use the doctrine of the Spirit as an argument for the salvation of the heathen.

¹⁷ Zwingli argues from Romans 5.19-21 for the salvation of children of Christian parents and tentatively of the children of the heathen, for 'whatever evil Adam did through sinning has been dealt with through the grace of Christ'. (Z V 388.3 - 389.4)

¹⁸ On relations with those of other faiths, see Colin W. Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today (London: Epworth Press, 1960), S. Wesley Ariarajah, 'Evangelism and Wesley's Catholicity of Grace', in M. Douglas Meeks (ed.), The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), and four articles in T. Macquiban (ed.), Pure Universal Love: Reflections on the Wesleys and Inter-faith Dialogue (Westminster Wesley Series No 3, Summer 1995) (Frank Whaling, 'John Wesley's Premonitions of Inter-Faith Discourse', pp.15-31, Tim Macquiban, 'John Wesley's Practice of Intra-Faith Love', pp.33-43, Martin Forward, "'Pure Universal Love Thou Art": God, Christ and the World's Religions', pp.45-61, W. Roy Pape, 'The Grace That Serves: A Response', pp.63-70) and Elizabeth Harris, 'Wesleyan Witness in an Interreligious Context', in Philip R. Meadows (ed.), Wesleyan Theology in Today's World (Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Sermon 106 I (5) (6) in Sermons by the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1876) Vol. III pp. 221-22. The sermon numbers quoted are the same in the bicentennial edition (BCE) of Wesley's Works, with the exception of sermon 125 which is 130 in BCE.

five are 'nominally Christians'. Wesley regards Muslims as only a little above the heathen in religion and 'as utter strangers to all true religion as the four-footed brethren; as void of mercy as lions and tigers; as much given up to brutal lusts as bulls or goats: so that they are in truth a disgrace to human nature, and a plague to all that are under the iron yoke'. (We should note that Wesley then describes some Christians as little, if at all, better than 'Mohametans or pagans'.)²⁰ Charles Wesley also writes negatively of Islam, as in the verse:

'The smoke of that infernal cave,
Which half the Christian world o'erspread,
Disperse, Thou heavenly Light, and save
The souls by that impostor led,
That Arab-thief, as Satan bold,
Who quite destroy'd Thine Asian fold.'²¹

Wesley's judgement is, however, qualified. He does not dismiss Muslims absolutely. He can at points speak positively about them and can regard them as sincere, although mistaken. As they have not heard the Christian message, they are not to be judged in the same way as Christians. Moreover, texts of the New Testament which apply to those who have heard the gospel cannot be applied to those who have not. One idea that frequently recurs in Wesley is that of responding to the light one has and being judged in accordance with that response. In his sermon 'On Faith' he states that 'their not believing the whole truth, is not owing to want of sincerity, but merely to want of light'. He quotes the Indian Chief, Chicali, 'you have the great Word, and we have not'. For Wesley, 'No more therefore will be expected of them (the reference is to the ancient heathen, but he associates their faith with that of Muslims) than the living up to the light they had'. He then refers to those 'taught of God, by his inward voice, all the essentials of true religion', adding 'and so was that Mohametan' who wrote the life of Hai Ebn Yokdan. Wesley, like the reformers, can refer positively to the lives of Muslims, which 'shame many of us that are called Christians', although he says that he has 'at present nothing to do' with them.²²

The lives of Christians are not just a cause of shame. They are also a witness against the gospel and stand in the way of Christian mission. In 'On the Spread of the Gospel' Wesley states that 'the grand stumbling block' for Muslims in becoming Christian is 'the lives of the Christians'. For Malabarian heathen – and so presumably for Muslims also – 'the holy lives of the Christians will be an argument they will not know how to resist'.²³ Critical as he is of Islam and Muslims, Wesley is careful not to act as judge and certainly not to determine their eternal destiny. This leads him to expound his understanding of God and of God's dealing with mankind, as well as of certain biblical texts. God is not the God of some but of all, and his attitude to all is one of mercy. He argues in his sermon On Charity that they, as all people, are accountable not to him, but to God, for God is God of all.

In this sermon in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, the question is posed whether the heathen are not excluded from salvation, as they do not believe, and the gospels state that those who do not believe will be damned. (This focus on faith is related to Wesley's argument that love of neighbour comes from love of God, which in turn comes from faith.) Wesley, as the reformers, regarded the text on which this argument was based ('He that believeth not will be damned') as applying only to those to whom the gospel has been preached. He held that the judgment about others is to be left to God who is the God of the heathen also. Then, in a characteristic way, he describes God as "'rich in mercy to all who call upon him," according to the light they have; and that "in every nation, he, that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him".²⁴

²⁰ Sermon 63 (1) (3) – (6) (Sermons II pp. 315-17).

²¹ George Osborn (ed.) The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1868-72) Vol. 6 p. 137.

²² Sermon 106 I (3) (4) II (3) (Sermons III pp. 221,226). He also says he has nothing to do at present with heathen and Jews and not much more with Roman Catholics.

²³ Sermon 63 (21) (22) (Sermons II pp.323-24).

²⁴ Sermon 91 I (2) (3) (Sermons III pp. 53-54).

Wesley made the same point in 'On Living Without God'. He insisted that he had 'no authority from the word of God "to judge those that are without [the Christian dispensation]" and that no one has 'a right to sentence all the heathen and Mohametan world to damnation'. He focuses this time on faith as belief, a faith which is an assent of the mind, rather than saving faith. Saving faith is faith which is active in love. The evidence of such faith is a changed life. He rejects the view that only those who affirm the central Christian doctrines can benefit from Christ's atoning death. For Wesley, 'God respects the goodness of the heart, rather than the clearness of the head'. He will not damn a person whose heart is 'filled (by the grace of God, and the power of his Spirit) with the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man'.²⁵

Wesley, as the reformers, was concerned to emphasize that salvation is entirely from God. It was particularly important for him to insist on this in debate with Calvinists. A classic example of this comes in his letter of 22 March 1771 to John Fletcher, written to assure the Countess of Huntingdon that he was not 'an enemy to grace'. Wesley affirms man's 'utter inability to do any good of himself; the absolute necessity of the grace and Spirit of God to raise even a good thought or desire in our hearts; the Lord's rewarding no work and accepting of none but so far as they proceed from His preventing, convincing, and converting grace through the Beloved; the blood and righteousness of Christ being the sole meritorious cause of our salvation'.²⁶ This is Wesley's fundamental position and what he says about the salvation of the heathen pre-supposes this.

The salvation of the heathen and indeed of any without Christian faith raises the fundamental question of the relation of their salvation to Christ. Wesley, like Bullinger and Zwingli, relates the salvation of the heathen to Christ's atoning death. First, his death is seen as universal in its reach and as not dependent on people's knowledge of that death for them. Its benefit, however, does depend on their response, as it depends on faith in believers. In a letter of 10 February 1748 on Quakerism and Christianity Wesley writes, 'The benefit of the death of Christ is not only extended to such as have distinct knowledge of His death and sufferings, but even unto those who are inevitably excluded from this knowledge. Even these may be partakers of the benefit of His death, though ignorant of the history, if they suffer His grace to take place in their hearts, so as of wicked men to become holy'.²⁷

In expounding 'But in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him', Wesley insists that the person's acceptance is 'Through Christ, though he knows him not.' This acceptance is not the same as the enjoyment of salvation. Without knowledge of Christ a person does not have the fullness of salvation. Wesley argues this from the example of Cornelius. Wesley maintained, 'He is in the favour of God, whether enjoying his written word or ordinances or not. Nevertheless the addition of these is an unspeakable blessing to those who were before in some measure accepted. Otherwise God would never have sent an angel from heaven to direct Cornelius to St. Peter'.²⁸ In the minutes of the 1745 Conference Wesley states that their good works were not done 'without the grace of Christ'. (He rejects the view that they were only 'splendid sins'.)²⁹ But this does not mean that they had faith in Christ,

²⁵ Sermon 125 (14) (15) (Sermons III pp. 396-97).

²⁶ John Telford (ed.), The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. (London: The Epworth Press, 1931) Vol. 5 p. 231. This quotation manifests the trinitarian character of Wesley's theology which is evident in an examination of God's working in the heath

²⁷ Letters 2.118.

²⁸ The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (London: Joseph Smith, 1839) p. 344 (on Acts 10:35).

²⁹ Minutes of 2 August 1745 (question 8) in Publications of the Wesley Historical Society No. 1 (1896) p.21. Elsewhere Wesley mocks the Calvinist idea of the splendid sins of the heathen in a comment on the parable of the sheep and the goats. In an attack on predestination he points out the sort of response the goats might have made if the Calvinist view of splendid sins were true. 'Lord we might have done the outward work; but thou knowest it would have but increased our damnation. We might have fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, and covered the naked with a garment. But all these works, without thy special grace, which we never had, nor possibly could have (seeing thou hast eternally decreed to withhold it from us) would only have been "splendid sins". They would only have heated the furnace of hell seven times hotter than before.' Thomas Jackson (ed.) The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. (Third Edition) (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1829-31 - reprint Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1872) Vol. X pp. 221-22. Not surprisingly Wesley omitted Article 13 'Of good works before

as is clear in Wesley's comment on Cornelius.³⁰ The relationship of Christ to the salvation of the heathen is illuminated by a consideration of conscience or prevenient grace and faith.

Wesley interprets conscience in terms sometimes of Christ's working in us and sometimes of prevenient grace. In his sermon 'On Conscience', Wesley says that what is called 'natural conscience' is natural in being found in everyone, though it is not strictly speaking natural, but a supernatural gift of God. It is, he adds, 'not nature, but the Son of God, that is "the true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world"'.³¹ In his sermon 'On Working Out Our Own Salvation', Wesley refers not to Christ but to prevenient grace. He states that natural conscience 'is more properly termed, preventing grace' and that 'Every man has a greater or less measure of this, which waiteth not for the call of man'. Earlier in the sermon he has maintained that salvation begins with preventing grace which includes 'the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first transient conviction of having sinned against him. All these imply...some degree of salvation....'³² The reference to 'some degree of salvation' implies that God's saving work has begun in those of other faiths who are responding to the light of Christ. It depends, however, for its fullness on their response to the gospel.

Another way in which Wesley indicates that Christ's saving work has begun in the heathen is in his description of their having the faith of a servant. This is the faith which he ascribes to Cornelius in his sermon 'On Faith'. Though it is not the faith of a son which is saving faith, it is 'the infant state' of saving faith. Wesley admits that fifty years before Methodist preachers had asserted that those who do not know their sins forgiven are children of the devil, whereas properly they are only servants, not children of God. Moreover, unless 'they halt by the way', they will receive 'the faith of the children of God, by his revealing his only-begotten Son in their hearts'. The nature of Wesley's argument here means that Muslims could have the faith which enables them, to 'fear God and work righteousness'.³³ With Cornelius they would need to respond to the gospel for them to have saving faith.³⁴

Conclusion

Bullinger and Wesley both attack Islam, but Bullinger's attack is much more comprehensive and detailed, especially in relation to Mohamed and the Koran. The other important difference is that Bullinger clearly regards Islam as a heresy, whereas Wesley does not, but rather as a religion. This no doubt affects their evaluation of Islam. For Bullinger it is quite simply not profitable for salvation and so his comments on it are negative. Wesley, however, is less condemnatory in his references, perhaps in part because he

Justification' (which says 'they have the nature of sin') in the 1784 version of the articles for America. See, J.S.Simon, John Wesley and the Methodist Societies (London: Epworth, 1923) p.259.

³⁰ New Testament p.341 (on Acts 10:4).

³¹ This is related in the same paragraph to the Holy Spirit (Sermon 105 I (5) in Sermons III p. 211). Compare New Testament p.240 (on John 1:9). God's revelation to the heathen is likewise ascribed to this light (New Testament p.409 on Romans 1:19).

Wesley, also relates God's work among non-Christians to the Holy Spirit. Unlike Bullinger, he takes 'without God' (Eph. 2:16) as meaning that people were 'wholly ignorant of the true God, and so in effect, Atheists'. He adds, however, that more or less all people have been ignorant, 'till they know God, by the teaching of his own Spirit'.

³² Sermon 85 II (1), III (3) (Sermons II pp. 578-79, 582). Paul's statement about the Gentiles doing the law by nature (Rom. 2:14) is interpreted by Wesley in terms of preventing grace. Preventing grace is related to Christ's atoning death. (New Testament p.413).

³³ Sermon 106 (10)-(13) (Sermons III pp. 223-24).

³⁴ The implication of Question 7 in the Minutes of 2 August 1745 (Publications of the Wesley Historical Society 1 (1896) p.21) and of Wesley's comments on Acts 10: 4,35, and 44 (New Testament pp. 343-45). Martin Forward (p.58) misinterprets Wesley in saying, 'The love of God accepted, as saving faith, the good works of those whose faith was not Christian.' Wesley's comments on Cornelius in Acts 10:35 do not refer to saving faith. Such people have the faith of a servant and not the faith of a son. They enjoy a degree of salvation, but come to saving faith in their response to the gospel.

comments more on Muslims than on Islam. In their discussion of Muslims they can both speak negatively of Christians, but this seems to be at least in part for apologetic purposes. Thus Bullinger explains the rise and success of Islam by the evil lives of Christians, comparing this with God's punishing Israel in the Old Testament. For his part, Wesley saw the lives of Christians as standing in the way of Christian mission.

Fundamental in any attempt to relate Bullinger's theology to Islam and Muslims today is his emphasis on the goodness and goodwill of God.³⁵ God's goodness leads to Christ's atoning death for the salvation of humanity, while his will is that all should be saved. This is the context in which one may set the general case he makes for the salvation of the heathen, for he does not deal specifically with Muslims. (Bullinger does not argue abstractly about the salvation of the heathen, but biblically, basing his case on what the bible says about the nature of God and the examples it gives of those outside God's people.) Bullinger argues largely from the Old Testament that God does not damn all who are outside Israel, but at the same time he insists that they are not saved apart from Christ. Although he makes his case for the salvation of the heathen (or rather the possibility of salvation for some of them) from the bible alone, he also quotes the fathers in support. In no way is anyone's salvation based on their goodness or godliness – indeed even with the biblical examples he gives Bullinger speaks only of hoping for their salvation on the basis of God's not withdrawing his grace and mercy from them. Besides God's goodness and goodwill, Bullinger points on occasion to God's election, though election is also, of course, for Bullinger an expression of God's goodness and goodwill.³⁶ The doctrine of election means that the good works of those outside God's people are not 'splendid sins' in those who are elect. Moreover, even in those not elect they are presented positively as benefiting others.

The example of Cornelius offers critical insight into Bullinger's theology here. Cornelius is said to have pleased God. As no one can please God without faith, Cornelius must have had faith before he heard the gospel. It was not, however, until he responded to the gospel that he had the full measure of faith and therefore could be said to have received salvation. It is possible that Bullinger would have spoken of Muslims in this way, if he had regarded Islam as a religion rather than as a Christian heresy. Yet, this does not mean that he would have seen Islam as offering salvation.

In common with the reformers Wesley held that salvation is the work of God, not man, and - more particularly with Bullinger – that God's will is the salvation of all. With them he maintained that there is no salvation without Christ and, though this became a matter of debate in the Reformed tradition, that Christ's death was for all. Wesley also saw God as working outside Israel, as the example of Abimelech shows, though with a qualification.³⁷ In his discussion of those of other faiths, sometimes referring specifically to Muslims, Wesley sounded certain characteristic notes, in particular that God is the God of all not of some, that his attitude to people is one of mercy, that he is the judge of all, so that we are not to pass judgment on others (and explicitly not to damn all Muslims), and that he judges according to the light which people have, not according to a message which they have not heard. In Wesley there is also an emphasis on the life lived (the heart rather than the head) and for him people's changed lives were evidence of God's work in them and of their acceptance by God. He repudiates the notion of 'splendid sins' since, with Bullinger, the good which people do comes from God. In that sense God rewards his own work in us.

³⁵ See, for example, W.P. Stephens, 'Confessing the Faith: the Starting Point for Zwingli and Bullinger'.

³⁶ Although Bullinger shares with Zwingli an emphasis on the sovereignty of God, there is a stronger emphasis on it in this context in Zwingli. For Zwingli the salvation of everyone depends on the freedom of God's election and the salvation of those outside Israel is related to the freedom of the Spirit. This does not mean separating salvation from Christ, as Zwingli insists that no one is saved apart from Christ and that – in keeping with Romans 5 – Christ's redemption is as extensive in its effects as Adam's fall.

³⁷ Wesley, as the reformers, recognizes with Abimelech that God can work outside his people, though he adds a qualification. 'It appears by this that God revealed himself by dreams ... not only to his servants the prophets, but even to those who were out of the pale of the church; but then usually it was with some regard to God's own people.' He is ready to admit that 'There are many places and persons that have more of the fear of God in them than we think they have....' For his comments on Genesis 20:3 and 11, see Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament (Bristol: Pine, 1765) Vol. 1 p.79.

God's working in those outside his people is related particularly to conscience. Wesley stresses that conscience is not strictly natural, but that it is a supernatural gift of God – indeed it refers to Christ who is the light which enlightens everyone. This is an example of prevenient (or 'preventing') grace. Wesley, like the reformers, drew on Romans 2, though his interpreted it in terms of prevenient grace.³⁸ From prevenient grace come, for example, the desire to please God and the sense of sin. (These could clearly come to people through Islam, though Wesley makes no reference to other religions here.) They are evidence of the beginning of God's saving work in them. The fullness of salvation comes only in response to the gospel of Christ. (Wesley's interpretation of Cornelius Acts 10 is similar to Bullinger's.) His distinction between the faith of a servant and the faith of a son expresses the difference between faith and saving faith or the full measure of faith. For him, as for Bullinger, saving faith comes as we respond to the preaching of the gospel.

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Discussion of the salvation of those of other faiths has been challenged in different ways. Lesslie Newbigin regards the question as unbiblical in focussing salvation on the salvation of individuals³⁹ and Martin Forward regards focussing on salvation rather than say Christ as unbiblical.⁴⁰ This is not the place to examine these questions, although it is evident that salvation in the bible is much more than the salvation of individuals and that salvation cannot be separated from other doctrines of the Christian faith or treated in isolation from them. Nevertheless, there are clear examples of a concern with the salvation of individuals in the New Testament, such as Luke 19:9 and Acts 16:30, and the understanding of salvation is not limited to the term salvation but includes terms such as redemption and eternal life and is intimately bound up with the doctrines of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Salvation, of course, was central in the preaching and teaching of the reformers and the Wesleys.

³⁸ God's teaching by his inward voice is similar to his work through conscience and allows for his working outside his people, but does not necessarily imply his working in other religions.

³⁹ Lesslie Newbigin, 'Christian Faith and the World's Religions', in G. Wainwright (ed.) Keeping the Faith: Essays to Mark the Centenary of Lux Mundi (London: SPCK, 1989), pp.310-40

⁴⁰ One may question the statement that the Wesleys were 'entranced by, even obsessed with, soteriology', but agree with Forward that 'the issue of salvation was controlled by the nature of God; only in its light did any discussion about soteriology make sense' (Forward, pp.54-55).