

# Intersections

Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture

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# The Reception of Erasmus in the Early Modern Period

*Edited by*

Karl A.E. Enenkel

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Cover illustration: Portrait of Desiderius Erasmus with his god "Terminus" (ca. 1538). Woodcut by Veit Spocklin, 286 × 148 mm.

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UNIVERSALISM AND TOLERANCE IN A FOLLOWER OF ERASMUS  
FROM ZÜRICH: THEODOR BIBLIANDER

Lucia Felici

The Zürich theologian Theodor Bibliander is portrayed in the *Historiae ecclesiasticae Novi Testamenti* by Johann Heinrich Hottinger as a 'fully Erasmusian'<sup>1</sup> man. However, his role as Erasmus's heir, as well as his own achievements, has until recently remained unacknowledged.<sup>2</sup> Such oblivion is fully unjustified in view of both Bibliander's personal activities and his importance in the reception of Erasmus's thought. Bibliander espoused several central ideas of Erasmus – from free will to the limitless mercy of God – and also included a fundamentally ethical and a-dogmatic notion of Christianity, as well as the tolerant, pacifist, and universalistic vision deriving from it. On these bases, however, he created an original and bold conception, showing himself to be a worthy follower of his master's anti-dogmatism.

Bibliander's thought and cultural activities led him to widespread fame and to an avant-garde position in relation to his times. As Zwingli's successor to the Chair of Holy Scripture at Zürich, Theodor Buchmann, called Bibliander (1505–1564), consecrated himself to theology and exegesis, giving them sound foundations through the critical-philological method and the study of classical and oriental languages. He became the major European Hebrew scholar and the 'father' of modern exegesis.<sup>3</sup> His activity was framed within a cultural vision forged by Erasmus and by Neo-Platonism, which aimed to examine knowledge of the divine in its different historical manifestations, as well as the recomposition of fragments of truth within a unitary and universalistic framework. Christianity, conceived of in its ethical essence, was the unifying factor; linguistic knowledge and theological

<sup>1</sup> Hottinger, Johann Heinrich, *Historiae ecclesiasticae Novi Testamenti, Pars prima* (Hannover, Michael Schaufelberger, 1656), vol. VIII, 689.

<sup>2</sup> The only monographic study on Bibliander is the rather old volume by Egli U., *Analekten Reformatoria, Theodor Bibliander* (Zürich: 1901), vol. II, 1–144. See also *Theodor Bibliander (1505–1564), Ein Thurgauer im gelehrten Zürich der Reformationszeit*, ed. Christ-von Wedel C. (Zürich: 2005). Further bibliography in the following notes.

<sup>3</sup> Hottinger, Johann Heinrich, *Schola Figurarum Carolina* (Zürich, J.H. Hamberger, 1664) 48, 72.

knowledge were the tools; the reconciliation of the whole of humanity in the religious and political sphere was the ultimate goal. The realization of this event was projected by Bibliander onto the apocalyptic scenario of the coming of the future kingdom of Christ, an eternal kingdom destined to welcome all men. Bibliander's conception was Christian-centric and Eurocentric – the problem of the *indios* was foreign to him, and he principally devoted his attention to the three monotheistic religions, of which he considered Christianity the superior one. However, he formulated the theoretical basis for a reappraisal of religions and cultures of all types and from all time periods, and for their ultimate acceptance into the *regnum Dei*. The idea of tolerance emerging from his conception was boundless, and the attitude toward the 'other', because of its incipient comparative perspective, was innovative. Pierre Bayle therefore rightly defined Bibliander 'un homme fort universel' and considered him a protagonist of sixteenth-century universalism.<sup>4</sup>

Bibliander produced an extremely vast scholarly output, most of which is still unpublished.<sup>5</sup> Among his most important publications were a Hebrew grammar (1535, the best at that time), the first Latin edition of the Koran accompanied by a monumental corpus of writings on Islamic civilization (1543), *De ratione communi omnium linguarum et litterarum commentarius* (1548), a revolutionary project on linguistic and religious unification by means of the identification of laws common to different faiths and idioms, *De fatis monarchiae romanae somnium vaticinium Esdrae prophetae* (1553), an interpretation of Esdras's prophecy in view of a vast work of evangelization and pacification of all of the peoples of the world anticipated by the Holy Roman Empire. Also worth mentioning are his attempts to translate the Bible into Arabic and his study of other civilizations, starting with the Islamic one.

Bibliander dedicated his whole life to the project of religious concord, and he sacrificed his old age for it, since he was forced to leave his university position because of the opposition of Pietro Martire Vermigli, a champion of the predestination doctrine. His youthful education under the guidance of the theologians Johannes Oecolampadius and Oswald

<sup>4</sup> Bayle Pierre, *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (Rotterdam, Reinier Leers: 1697), vol. I, 1, 584. On his universalism, see Rotondo A., "Anticristo e Chiesa romana. Diffusione e metamorfosi d'un libello antiprotestante", now in Rotondo A., *Studi di storia ereticale* vol. I, 59–69; Felici L., "Al confini della Repubblica Christiana. La visione irenica di Theodor Bibliander", in Herрманin C. ... Simonutti I., (eds.), *La centralità del dubbio. Un progetto di Antonio Rotondo* (Firenze: 2011) vol. II, 898–920.

Myconius, as well as of the great Greek and Hebrew scholar Conrad Pellikan (all of whom had shared with Erasmus intellectual pursuits as well as cultural and religious ideals),<sup>6</sup> was decisive. The stimuli received from them were further expanded upon in Zurich, where Bibliander became a pupil of Leo Jud and Ulrich Zwingli.

Under the influence of its leaders, Zwingli and Bullinger, the Reformation in Zurich was characterized by a profound connection to the humanistic movement, particularly to Erasmus. The Dutch humanist was considered a leading figure of biblical exegesis – of which he always remained *the* authority – but also an essential point of reference in a religious and pedagogical ambit. Erasmus never visited Zurich, but his works enjoyed considerable success there even after his falling-out with Luther. Their penetration was helped by the translations and publications started by Jud in 1521. Zurich printing presses were responsible for the appearance of the *Enchiridion*, the *Querela pacis*, the *Institutio principis Christiani*, the *Novum instrumentum*, and the *Paraphrases* (accompanied by an exposition of the *Apocalypse* by Pellikan). The education of the young elite in Zurich was based on Erasmus's texts, from the didactic book on Latin to the editions of the classics and of the Fathers of the Church, while the fully glossed *Novum instrumentum* and the *Paraphrases* were the basis for the exegetic and pastoral activities of the Reformers. It is perhaps superfluous to remind ourselves of the importance that the writings of Erasmus had in the elaboration of Zwingli's theory of the Eucharist, and in his critique of the Roman church. As a last sign of homage, the image of Erasmus was included among the portraits of scholars and Reformers frescoed in the house of Christoph Froschauer the Younger.<sup>7</sup>

In Bibliander's case, too, the reception of Erasmus is highly visible, even without the systematic textual comparisons carried out in this article. In Basel and Zurich Bibliander not only assimilated the Erasmian philological method – which he then applied in his exegetical work<sup>8</sup> – but learnt to

<sup>6</sup> The only comprehensive study on the two theologians is Hagenbach K.B., *Johann Oekolampad und Oswald Myconius. Die Reformatoren Basels. Leben und ausgewählte Schriften* (Erlerbeld: 1859). On Pellikan, see Zürcher C., *Konrad Pellikan's Wirken in Zürich, 1526–1556* (Zürich: 1975); and also the older study by Silbenstein E., *Konrad Pellikan. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Studien der hebräischen Sprache im 16. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: 1900).

<sup>7</sup> Christ-von Wedel C. – Leu U.B. (eds.), *Erasmus in Zürich. Eine verschwiegene Autorität* (Zürich: 2007). Photos of the frescos on 95off.

<sup>8</sup> Christ-von Wedel C., "Erasmus und die Zürcher Reformatoren. Huldreich Zwingli, Leo Jud, Konrad Pellikan, Heinrich Bullinger und Theodor Bibliander", in *Christ-von Wedel*

use it as a critical tool against theologians and as the pillar of a new religion: for Bibliander, as for Erasmus before him, 'grammatical', conceived of as a means of restoring the original truth of the sacred texts, was firmly set against doctrinal interpretations that were distant from the evangelical message and a source of continuous and lacerating controversies.<sup>9</sup> Dogmatic thoughts were replaced with the Erasmusian *philosophia Christi*, centred on the imitation of Christ and on his message of love and charity. Indifferent to dogmatism and external rituals and institutions, this religion is freely chosen through uncorrupted reason, which is illuminated by God, and is confident in the universal extension of salvation thanks to the immensity of divine grace.<sup>10</sup>

If the religious conception of Erasmus was the basis of Bibliander's theological reflection, the radical universalistic outcomes at which he arrived were fully original. His starting point was the postulate of universal election to salvation, an act freely willed by an immensely charitable God and manifested in the law of nature inscribed in human reason, ideas that Erasmus had defended in *De libero arbitrio diatriba sive collatio* and in *De immensa Dei misericordia concilio* (1524).<sup>11</sup> However, Bibliander later foresaw a *Respublica Christiana* open to all potential receivers of the evangelical message of love and charity, each valued as an expression of the perennial divine revelation. Bibliander developed Erasmus's originalism<sup>12</sup> not only into a powerful weapon against reformed predestination theories,

<sup>9</sup> Bibliander Theodor, *De monarchia totius orbis suprema, legitima, et sempiterna quod requiritur est et sacerdotum Messiae filii Davidis secundum carnem, filii autem dei vivi aeterna generatione* (unpublished: 1553) [ol. 13r: 'Non theologiae doctor [...] non pastor et magister ecclesiae, non evangelista, non propheta [...] sed grammatica sum, et ponderator verborum']. See also the letter to Myconius, 1535, in Hestinger, *Historiae ecclesiasticae* VIII, 691 f. On Erasmus, see Asso C., *La teologia e la grammatica. La controversia tra Erasmo ed Edward Lee* (Florence: 1993).

<sup>10</sup> The concept of the *philosophia Christi* was, as it is known, presented in the *Inchiridion nihilis Christiani*, developed in the *Ratio verae Theologiae*, and celebrated in the *Paraclesis*. From the enormous bibliography on Erasmus I. only refer to some fundamental contributions: Banton R. H., *Erasmus of Christendom* (New York: 1969); Augustijn C., *Erasmus. His Life, Works, and Influence* (Toronto: 1991); Hulkin I.-E., *Erasmus. A Critical Biography* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1994); Rummel E., *Erasmus* (London-New York: 2004).

<sup>11</sup> On *De libero arbitrio*, see Finiaucada De Michellis F., *Tra Erasmo e Lutero* (Rome: 2001); Winters A., *Erasmus' Doctrine on Free Will* (Jackson, TN: 2005). On the *Concilio*, see Seidel Menchi S., *Erasmus in Italia, 1520-1580* (Torino: 1987), chap. VI; Felici L., *L'immensa bonità di Dio. Diffusione e addattamento dell'idea erasmiana in Italia e in Svizzera*, in Baldini A.E. – Fippo M. (eds.), *Politica e cultura in Erasmo da Rotterdam* (Rome: 2012) 129–157.

<sup>12</sup> Godin A., *Erasmus lecteur d'Origène* (Geneva: 1982). More broadly on Erasmusian cosmopolitanism, see Thompson C.R., 'Erasmus as Internationalist and Cosmopolitan', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 46 (1955) 167ff.; Scucumarra L., *I confini del mondo. Storia del*

but also into a principle capable of undermining the fundamentals of ecclesiastical institutions, theological doctrines, and consolidated mental habits toward otherness.

The centrality of this conception for Bibliander is affirmed by its constant presence in his works, starting with the earliest, the *Oratio ad enarrationem Esatae prophetarum principis*. The oration was delivered by Bibliander at the Grossmünster in Zürich in January 1532 to inaugurate his Chair of Holy Scripture, and it was dedicated to his masters Pellikan and Jud.<sup>13</sup> The text already contains a defined cultural and religious program. The main subject was the problem of prophecy, but the analysis branched out to include the fundamentals and modality of revelation, in order to then enunciate the principles of the universalistic conception. The reflection on prophecy would prove fundamental for Bibliander's future exegetic activity, particularly in terms of the elaboration of his apocalyptic and, broadly speaking, religious vision; it therefore deserves particular attention. Moreover, although charisma was not particularly important in Erasmus's thought, his ideas contributed to Bibliander's discourse, motivating its development and outcomes.

Bibliander identified prophecy with theology. This coincidence between direct revelation and speculation on God was in itself unconventional and full of consequences for dogmatism and ecclesiastical institutions, since it negated the very possibility of a monopoly on the sacred by all churches, while simultaneously opening an extremely wide horizon regarding the relationship between man and God. To Bibliander's reflection, Erasmus's positive emphasis on the immediacy and spirituality of this relationship – to the detriment of its institutional and ritual manifestations – and his search for principles on which to base it and the idea of a global *ecumene*, as well as his methodological and exegetic *habitus*, were potent stimuli.

Bibliander supported his thesis with recourse to the Bible and to a rigorous etymological analysis. Charismatic activity could be defined in terms of *propheta, visio*, or *theologia*, since in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew the prophet was he who by divine inspiration foresaw the future and penetrated into 'divine things': in Greek prophets were also called theologians because, following the etymology of the word (θεός and λόγος), they knew 'the path, the way, the reason to hear and talk righteously to God'.<sup>14</sup> True theologians, however, were first pious and then wise ('not only θεολόγους,

but above all θεοεπέεσι), given that their comprehension of truth was a result of spiritual enlightenment: for Bibliander the spirit represented the guide to religious and exegetic activity, the source of the norms of life.<sup>15</sup> The sphere of action of prophetic-theologians was extended by Bibliander (in this manner following Zwingli) to the *res gestae*, that is, to symbolic or real acts anticipating those of Christ and the apostles.<sup>16</sup>

For Bibliander, the truth of prophecy was absolute.<sup>17</sup> The heavenly provenance of the prophetic message made it 'most full and absolute' and 'eternal', even if it was spoken by unworthy persons – including emissaries of Satan<sup>18</sup> – or expressed in an obscure and indeterminate manner. The obscurity and indeterminacy of revelations were led back to the attempt at translating the divine message into a language consonant with the times, while all eschatic component 'in the customs of the fanatics'<sup>19</sup> was excluded. This attempt to historicize the manifestations of prophecy perhaps anticipated Spinoza's critique of the supernatural<sup>20</sup> and kept within the framework of the Erasmian critical method. For Bibliander, the prophet represented 'the salt of the earth, the light of the world' and was invested by God with the high responsibility of showing the path of truth to the faithful, surpassing the often fallacious and limited human interpreters.<sup>21</sup>

The role assigned by Bibliander to prophetic charisma was therefore crucial in his religious discourse: prophecy, or direct revelation from God, was the true *vox Dei*, the main means of communication with and interpretation of divine truth, a beacon orienting the path of humanity and the fullest expression of the science of the divine. Such centrality of direct and universal communication from God led, obviously, to a major subversion of traditional conceptions and hierarchies. It is true that Bibliander felt the need to legitimize the existence of ecclesiastical functions (his aim, he said, was to 'seek truth, not flaunt novelty')<sup>22</sup> but he forcefully

<sup>15</sup> Bibliander, *Oratio* fol. 13r.

<sup>16</sup> Bibliander, *Oratio* fols. 28r–29r. Bibliander based himself on the *Annotationes in Genesim, Exodum, Esaiam et Leviticum prophetas*.

<sup>17</sup> Bibliander, *Oratio* fol. 29v.

<sup>18</sup> Bibliander, *Oratio* fols. 22r, 28r.

<sup>19</sup> Bibliander, *Oratio* fol. 29v.

<sup>20</sup> Spinoza Baruch, "Tractatus Theologico-Politicus", chap. VI, in Spinoza Baruch, Opera, ed. C. Gebhardt, 4 vols. (Heidelberg: 1925, reprinted Heidelberg: 1972).

<sup>21</sup> Bibliander, *Oratio* fols. 16r, 23v, 28r.

demonstrated the limitlessness of divine revelation and the multiplicity of its manifestations outside of religious institutions.

Bibliander's rigorous analysis of Holy Scripture also bore proof that prophecy had brought life to the whole history of the Christian church.<sup>23</sup> He did not limit the title of prophet to ecclesiastics, but extended it to those who operated for the promotion of divine truth ('spiritual doctors, sacred orators, teachers of life', etc.).<sup>24</sup> Moreover, neither God's revelation nor his salvation design was restricted to the Christian citadel, since 'in all times and in all peoples' there have been men who, because of their distinction in ethical and religious principles, became guides in the sacred and the profane, revealing themselves to be active elements in God's providential plan.<sup>25</sup> The similarities among prophetic lives from 'the most different times and places' were presented as proof of the unity of God's design of salvation.<sup>26</sup>

Numerous examples were discussed by Bibliander to demonstrate the existence of the divine plan: the vast world of ancient and oriental civilizations, from Persia to India, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, as well as the barbaric territories with their own expressive, poetic, and oracular forms, offered a vast array of 'seekers of truth' who are to be considered 'instruments' of God.<sup>27</sup> By uttering 'many things [...] on God consonant with sacred doctrines', these figures had revealed their nature as messengers of eternal truth, and on these grounds they could not be excluded from salvation; on the contrary, 'How could I say that God wanted to exclude them? He most ardently desired to teach His word, to swiftly bring to all men the knowledge of truth and to make them participant in eternal salvation'.<sup>28</sup> Bibliander conceded that their language and behaviour had not always been exempt from ambiguity and error. On the other hand, the word of God had constantly been susceptible to corruption by false interpreters. However, he held the firm conviction that God spread his gifts everywhere, like 'gems among basilisks and scorpions, gold in dung, silver among vile metals', and that a Christian had the most daunting duty of individuating celestial truth in this 'mare magnum' of errors, and then announcing it.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Bibliander, *Oratio* fol. 15v.

<sup>24</sup> Bibliander, *Oratio* fol. 16r.

<sup>25</sup> Bibliander, *Oratio* fols. 16v–17r.

<sup>26</sup> Bibliander, *Oratio* fol. 17r.

<sup>27</sup> Bibliander, *Oratio* fols. 18r ff.

<sup>28</sup> Bibliander, *Oratio* fol. 20v.

The idea of the universal extension of divine revelation rests on a potent assumption – the notion of God as a ‘commonwealth’ of creation, as the giver of the universal law of nature and salvation. The image of an extraordinarily merciful and caring godhead which did not exclude anybody from eternal life was so described by Bibliander: ‘He leaves nothing outside of His goodness and providence, He provides for and regulates, governs all and nothing can exist outside of Him’.<sup>30</sup> The oneness of the principle, of course, did not eliminate the variety of its manifestations, which reached greater or lesser degrees of clarity according to circumstances.<sup>31</sup> The echo of Erasmus’s *Concio* is here most clear: ‘In the prophetic books God in frequently called ‘merciful’ and ‘the merciful one’, because of the surpassing magnitude of His mercy’.<sup>32</sup>

The universal reality of salvation appeared to Bibliander to be undisputable in view of the laws of nature inscribed by God in mankind: ‘Hence God is the commonwealth of truth, the usufruct of which He conceded to ethnic peoples also, and He impressed the laws in their heart. And such laws we call the laws of nature’.<sup>33</sup> Laws of nature imprinted religious, normative, and ethical principles in accordance with divine will, and were present in the whole of mankind.<sup>34</sup> The position that Bibliander assigned them within the human body made his perspective even more audacious: the classic formula ‘in the heart of man’ hid human reason, the foremost instrument of investigation into creation because of its divine nature. Human reason, Bibliander declared, echoing an important theme of the *Enchiridion*, was comparable to divine reason because of the ‘divine spark’ it harboured: ‘this spark placed by the mind of God, creator of all, in the mortal breast, is similar, since it is the divine face reflected in the human mind’.<sup>35</sup> In conclusion, in Bibliander’s thought, religion – that is, Christianity – appears to find its nucleus in ethics and its instrument in reason, losing dogmatic and confessional traits in order to become a universal rule of life.

Such a concept was reaffirmed by Bibliander in a later work, significantly titled *Christianismus sempiternus, verus certus et immutabilis, in quo*

<sup>30</sup> Bibliander, *Oratio*.

<sup>31</sup> Bibliander, *Oratio*.

<sup>32</sup> Erasmus of Rotterdam, *A Sermon on the Immense Mercy of God, Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto-Buffalo-London: 1998), vol. 70, 88 (LB V 563B).

<sup>33</sup> Bibliander, *Oratio* fol. 177v.

<sup>34</sup> Bibliander, *Oratio* fol. 177v.

<sup>35</sup> Bibliander, *Oratio* fol. 225v; Erasmus of Rotterdam, *The Handbook of the Christian Soldier*,

*solo possunt homines beari*. Therein he demonstrated the existence of a ‘science of righteous living’, which since the beginning of time had been shared by Christians, Jews, Muslims, and pagans, and hence represented the basis for religious concord. The particular form of this science was Christianity.<sup>36</sup>

The quest for the dispersed tesserae of the divine mosaic, already championed by humanists and Erasmus, reveals the central role that Bibliander assigned to knowledge in both religious and cross-cultural terms. Such an attitude lies at the root of his work on Islamic civilization, inaugurated with the first Latin publication of the Koran. On the religious front, knowledge allowed the elimination of deviations from Christianity, above all those relating to divine predestination. Such doctrine was seen as deriving from ignorance of the universal destiny of salvation and leading to an incorrect appraisal of human behaviour. In the *Oratio* Bibliander limited himself to this latter problem, to conclude that human errors were not signs of predestination to damnation, but rather the result of free will and susceptible to pardon by the Lord.<sup>37</sup> As Erasmus had already done in the controversy with Luther, Bibliander balanced the affirmation of an optimistic image of God and of human destiny with a vindication of the role of free will.

The publication of the *Oratio* marked the beginning of a long struggle against the doctrine of predestination and its supporters. Foremost among them was the leader of the Basel church Oswald Myconius, with whom Bibliander had a vigorous epistolary exchange between 1535 and 1552; it was only thanks to Bullinger’s intervention that this exchange did not become public.<sup>38</sup> Following this interaction, Myconius stated that Bibliander was ‘fully Erasmus’.<sup>39</sup> That his beliefs on predestination were closer to those of Erasmus than those of Luther was already known.<sup>40</sup> In his letters Bibliander grounded his categorical refusal of predestination in

<sup>36</sup> Published in Zurich by Christoph Froschauer in 1556. Bibliander highlighted the exegesis of the Gospels as the way to solve the thorniest doctrinal questions among various religions and Christianity itself. For an exposition of his ideas, see *Præfatio* 2–6. Significantly, he praised Erasmus’s *Paraphrases* as a fundamental text for both scholars and pious men: Bibliander, Theodor, *Sermo in monte Sinai* (Basel, Johannes Oporin: 1552) III.

<sup>37</sup> Bibliander, *Oratio* fols. 22v–23r.

<sup>38</sup> Bullinger’s letter to Bibliander, 1552, in Hottinger, *Historiae ecclesiasticae* 716ff. The letter is published by Kainer II, in Theodor Bibliander, *Ein Thurgauer* 139–143. On the controversy, see Egli, *Theodor Bibliander* 70ff.

<sup>39</sup> Hottinger, *Historiae ecclesiasticae* 706.

<sup>40</sup> Hottinger, *Historiae ecclesiasticae* 689, 705. F. Hottinger reported Jacob Alting’s tes-

Erasmus's idea of the infinite mercy of God. In open opposition to Zwingli, he defined predestination as an 'inopportune, untimely, inept, dull, frivolous, false, pestilential' concept leading to 'aversion to mercy' and lacking foundations in Holy Scripture.<sup>41</sup> His drastic judgement was born out of his belief in the benign nature of God and of his design, revealed and fulfilled by Christ with his sacrifice. 'What indeed is more absurd than God sentencing his creatures to death, given that justice and clemency are his foremost attributes?'<sup>42</sup> The Scriptures, as the 'book of life', simply indicated the 'way of life'. With a polemical *vis* reminiscent of the *Encomium moriae*, Bibliander attacked those who used the sacred text as a field for theological disputes rather than as a source of spiritual and moral teachings, 'as if the kingdom of God were in the sermon rather than in virtue'.<sup>43</sup>

The controversy with Myconius and the following one with Vermigli led Bibliander to further delve into the problem of predestination and divine prescience in his published and unpublished writings. Marking a strong discontinuity with Zwingli and similarly to Erasmus, he distinguished between God's prescience of events and the selection *ab aeterno* of humans. The existence of prescience was allowed for by Zwingli as deriving from the omniscience of the Father. It allowed God to foreknow the destiny of humans, particularly that of the individual's faith in Christ, by virtue of which the process of justification, election, and salvation could take place.<sup>44</sup> The gift of faith was universal, but the decision of whether to cultivate it was, according to Bibliander, an act of free will. This choice was defining with respect to predestination to salvation or damnation.<sup>45</sup> Divine prescience was therefore a kind of foreseeing knowledge different

hauserat errores ipsius, imprimis de praedestinatione'. See Alting Johann Heinrich, *Theologia historica*, 4 vols. (Amsterdam, 1664), vol. IV, 300.

<sup>41</sup> Hottinger, *Historiae ecclesiasticae* 693 f. [etc.].

<sup>42</sup> Hottinger, *Historiae ecclesiasticae* 694 f.: '(Quomodo potest veracissimus, sanctissimus, optimus, immutabilis Deus aliud cogere, aliud mandare? Quomodo erunt intelligendae voces divinae: Deus nolo iniquitatem; Hinc est voluntas Dei, sanctificatio vestra. Nolo mortem peccatoris, sed magis ut convertatur et vivat? [...] Quid vero absurdum, quam dici de Deo, aliud velle, aliud agere. Nam in permittendo malefacta, cum placeant sancta, inbenigne sancta, conspicua est iustitiae ratio'.

<sup>43</sup> Hottinger, *Historiae ecclesiasticae* 693. Erasmus of Rotterdam, *Praise of folly*, *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto-Buffalo-London: 1986), vol. 27, 126ff. (LB IV 402C ff.).

<sup>44</sup> Bibliander, Theodor, *De summo bono, et hominis felicitate summaque perfectione sive de perfecta restitutione generis humani per dei filium incarnationem* (s.d., but probably post 1550), at Zurich in the Zentralbibliothek, Ms. Car. 1 93. The manuscript pages are not numbered.

<sup>45</sup> Bibliander's letter to Oswald Myconius, 1535, in Hottinger, *Historiae ecclesiasticae*, 691ff., in particular 697–699.

from determinism. Conversely, the idea that God could predestine his creatures to a fate of damnation appeared to him to be antithetical to Christianity, the basic tenet of which is that 'the promise of grace is universal and immutable'.<sup>46</sup>

For Bibliander the relationship between man and God was not founded on the 'horrible decree' of predestination, but on the hopeful abandonment to the 'most clement and holy goodness and justice' of the creator and to the awareness of divine omnipresence in creation.<sup>47</sup> Erasmus had similarly expressed himself in the *Contra*, individuating in the sinking into the abyss of divine mercy the only means to heal the corruption derived from original sin.<sup>48</sup>

Neither Erasmus nor Bibliander, however, believed that original sin had totally perverted human nature. This theme was addressed in *De summo bono, et hominis felicitate summaque perfectione sive de perfecta restitutione generis humani per dei filium incarnationem*, a voluminous unpublished work (unknown date of composition).<sup>49</sup> Herein, free will was considered an element 'naturally' present in human nature, since it was God's will that mankind reach 'goodness and salvation'. The existence of free will is certified through a scrupulous doctrinal and philological discussion of theological texts (primarily Augustine) and biblical passages. In the *Christianae disciplinae liber primus*, also written at an unknown date and never published, Bibliander embarked on a lofty panegyric of man and his divine nature, grounded in the free will accorded to him by God.<sup>50</sup>

Bibliander wrote to Myconius that sinning was a free act through which man chose to deviate from the 'righteous will' given to him by the Father, and therefore its consequences fell on him alone.<sup>51</sup> Possibly to give more weight to his arguments (bearing in mind, however, that the composition

<sup>46</sup> Bibliander, *De summo bono*.

<sup>47</sup> Hottinger, *Historiae ecclesiasticae* 690 f.

<sup>48</sup> Erasmus of Rotterdam, *A Sermon* 98 (LB V, 586C).

<sup>49</sup> Some passages are published in Segesvary V., *L'islam et la Réforme. Études sur l'attitude des réformateurs zurichois envers l'islam 1510–1550* (San Francisco-London: 1998, 1 ed., 1978) 237. Erasmus of Rotterdam, *A Sermon* 92, 102 ff. (LB V 565C, 570D ff.) and *A Discussion of Free Will*, *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto-Buffalo-London: 1998–2000) 76–77.

<sup>50</sup> The text is at Zurich Zentralbibliothek, Ms. Car. 1 93; sheets are not numbered. The thesis was demonstrated herein with recourse to biblical, philosophical, and wisdom texts.

<sup>51</sup> Hottinger, *Historiae ecclesiasticae* 700 f.: 'Iux verbis Dei aestimo facta hominum et voluntates partim bonas, partim malas [...] iam ex instituto Dei optimi, sapientissimi, acutissimi, liberalissimi, ex bonis causis, boni affectus consequuntur: ex malis mali [...] Non tamen statuo merita velut nostrarum virtutum, non beneficia Dei minuto vel obscuro, non ergo mentem in arrogantiam, gloriolationem, iactationem'.



date is not known), he also dedicated to this question the whole of the *Expositio precatiois Nchemiae* [...] in qua exponuntur causae bonorum et malorum operum, quae homines agunt, itemque bonorum et malorum, quae homines patiuntur, et quae illis obveniunt tam in hoc saeculo quam in futuro.<sup>52</sup> The concepts of the innocence of the Father and of human responsibility were therein expressed with great biblical and speculative lucidity, always retaining at the core a positive conception of mankind and of God.

In this text, as in Erasmus's<sup>53</sup>, Christ was given a central role in the 'correction' of the inclination toward evil. Christ was the fulcrum of Bibliander's theology because he was 'the highest and maximum good' to man, the only 'saviour and dispenser of salvation to all humanity', the culmination of God's design of salvation by way of the purity and immortality he had given man.<sup>54</sup> Faith in the Messiah represented for Bibliander the only means to the path of election, regeneration, and salvation: 'divine election rests with the Lord Jesus Christ, our God and Saviour, and not without Christ, or outside of Christ, or before or after Christ.'<sup>55</sup> Faith, born out of grace, pushed man to imitate Him, thus becoming 'new creature' in the image of God.<sup>56</sup>

Bibliander saw faith as boundless. He believed that the benefits of the cross extended to the whole of humanity, without spatial or temporal limitation, and that the Gospel offered to each man the grace of God, the remission of sins, justice, salvation, and eternal life.<sup>57</sup> Similarly to other sixteenth-century universalists (with the sole exception of Jean Bodin), Bibliander never crossed the borders of the *Respublica Christiana*. Even in *De summo bono*, which sketched through a rich array of testimonies (from the Sibyls to the Bible, Church Fathers, and Reformation theologians) the vision of a 'holy and catholic church of God', including men of all faiths, places, and times, the requisite for participation was individuated in the

<sup>52</sup> Idem, *Scholae Tigurinae* 48: 72. The work is in Zürich, Zentralbibliothek, Ms. Car. 1, fols. 93r-271v.

<sup>53</sup> Already present in the *Enchiridion militis Christiani*, this concept is also developed in the *Conatio* and in the first part of *De libero arbitrio*.

<sup>54</sup> Bibliander, *De summo bono*.

<sup>55</sup> Bibliander, *De summo bono*.

<sup>56</sup> Bibliander, *De summo bono*: Vult enim Deus appellari et haberi Pater omnium: igitur vult, ut certo sciamus, nos omnes loco filiorum esse [...] in primis in filio suo unigenito et clarissimo Christo Iesu nobis praebuit exemplum, ut vestigis ipsius hissumus, et quoties spiritu et gratia Dei aduti renovemur ad istam perfectissimum Dei patris imaginem, ut aliquando ipsius ope sumus revera novus homo et nova creatura!.

<sup>57</sup> Bibliander, *De summo bono*.

'spiritual and sacramental fruition' of the body of Christ through the Gospel. That said, his conception of Christianity as a religion accessible in its basic principles to all peoples of the earth considerably widened the horizons of the *regnum Dei*.

In mapping the divine kingdom on earth, Bibliander paid particular attention to Islam, in his time the greatest threat to the Christian West.<sup>58</sup> His most important initiative, publishing the Koran in Latin and an 'encyclopaedia' on Muslim civilization, was motivated by the necessity to individuate a way to convert Islam through mutual religious knowledge and the rejection of 'holy war'.<sup>59</sup> Bibliander did not think within a framework of parity: his missionary goal was to be realistically attained through the translation of texts, but also through the spread of the Gospel. His opinion on Islam remained negative (he considered it the worst of heresies). This notwithstanding, his basic thesis was that 'knowledge was the best weapon' and that it must concern itself with all cultures in order to fully comprehend the divine providential design. His cognitive attitude toward the 'other', his refusal to demonize him, and his drive to legitimize the historical and religious values of different experiences led to a considerable advance in the development of modern thought.<sup>60</sup>

This missionary and cultural goal was pursued in *Ad nominis Christiani socios consultatio quam ratione Turcarum potentia repellit possit* (1542), where he rejected the use of violent means to fight the Turks, following the argument that God could transform into good Christians 'Turks, Saracens, Tartars, Jews, as He had once created Abraham's sons out of stones', and make them members of the divine, indivisible, and universal community

<sup>58</sup> On his work as an Islamist, see Segesváry V., *L'Islam et la Réforme*, chap. VII; Bobzin H., *Der Koran im Zeitalter der Reformation. Studien zur Frühgeschichte der Arabistik und Islamkunde in Europa* (Beirut: 1995), chap. III; Christ G., 'Theodor Biblianders Türken-schrift. Ein Reformator und Humanist über Religion, Moral und kriegerischen Erfolg', in Christ-von Wedel-Leu (eds.), *Erasmus in Zürich 399-326*; Felici L., 'L'Islam in Europa. L'edizione del Corano di Theodor Bibliander (1543)', *Cronotipi* 11 (2006) 1-32; eadem, *Profilo di riforma e idea di concordia religiosa. Visioni e speranze dell'esule piemontese Giovanni Leonardo Sartori* (Florence: 2009), chap. III (with bibliography). Interesting observations also in Pellet J.-V., *Martha Bucer. Etudes sur la correspondance avec de nombreux textes inédits* (Paris: 1962), vol. II, 341f.

<sup>59</sup> Bibliander Theodor, *Machametis Saracenorum principis, eiusque successorum vita, ac doctrina, ipsaque Alcoran* (Basel, Joannes Oporinus: 1543, 1550), *Apologia*, fols. 3r ff. For the French edition of the *Apologia*, see Lamarque H. (ed.), *Le Coran à la Renaissance: playdoyer pour une traduction*, Introduction (Toulonaise: 2007).

<sup>60</sup> Segesváry, *L'Islam et la Réforme* 175.

where the 'seed of religion and wisdom' – that is, love toward God and the moral principles present in each man – could flourish.<sup>61</sup>

Bibliander's perspective also encompassed the Jews and the great multitude of oriental peoples. With the intent of including them in the *ecclesia Dei* and of healing confessional fractures detrimental to both society and the conscience of Christians, Bibliander devoted himself to seeking a common religious and cultural base. Particularly important in this connection was the extraordinary work *De ratione communi omnium linguarum et literarum commentarius*, the complete title of which significantly reads: *Cui adnexa est compendiaría explicatio doctrinae rectae beataeque vivendi, et religionis omnium gentium atque populorum, quam argumentum hoc postulare videbatur*. The connection between the quest for linguistic unification and universal concord is, in this text, apparent.<sup>62</sup> Considering the intrinsic connection between language and religion – Christ is, after all, God's *logos* – Bibliander identified, through a comparative analysis of classical languages and Arabic and an analysis of the common principles of the three monotheistic faiths, a common original language. Such shared elements were numbered around ten and concerned mainly the immortality of the soul, the spiritual essence of man and religion, and the existence of a single, omnipotent, eternal godhead that created, governed, and judged the universe, guided human society through his inspired intermediaries, and acted as an object of spiritual cult and as a normative principle in public and private life. These philosophical and spiritual ideas were not exclusive to one people but belonged to all humanity, even if they were differently expressed. Their reception and practice gave access to the universal 'community of saints' regardless of faith, culture, or social or professional condition. The work also delineates the political contours of such a community, advancing the idea of a supreme sovereign, emissary of God, endowed with the fullness of temporal and spiritual powers.

Bibliander further expounded upon the features of this monarchy in a series of writings dating back to 1553, in particular *De fatis monarchiae*

<sup>61</sup> The *Consultatio* was published in Basel by Nicolaus Bryllinger in 1542; see fol. 63v. The subtitle of the work reads: *Reportes hic quoque lector, de rationibus, quibus solida concordia concordia et pax in ecclesia et republica Christiana constitui possit, deque ortu et incrementis imperii Turcici, item de supersessione Mahumetana, et aliis quibusdam rebus lectis et cogitata plane dignissimis*.

<sup>62</sup> Published in Zurich by Christoph Froschauer in 1548, and recently by H.-M. Kirm and I. Backus (Geneva: 2011). See Segessary, *Islam et la Réforme* 245 ff.; Egli, *Theodor Bibliander* 80 ff.; Baur, *Der Turmbau von Babel. Geschichte der Meinungen über Ursprung und*

*Romanae somnium vaticinum. Esdrae prophetae and De monarchia totius orbis suprema, legitima, et sempiterna quod regnum est et sacerdotium Messiae filii Davidis secundum carnem, filii autem dei vivi aeterna generatione*, which was a preface to the *Vaticinia domini Jesu Christi, patriarcharum, prophetarum, apostolorum, Christianae ecclesiae doctorum, Judaeorum, Mahumeticorum et Gentilium*.<sup>63</sup> The idea of a 'unum ovile et unus pastor' – that is, a sovereign capable of universal reconciliation – was widespread in the first half of the sixteenth century because of the deep uncertainties linked to wars, religious conflict, and the crisis of the Church and of the Empire.<sup>64</sup> Albeit unaffected by charismatic temptations (contrary, for instance, to his friend Postel),<sup>65</sup> Bibliander was not alien to a climate of fervent expectations.

In *De monarchia* he announced, on the basis of biblical prophecies, the imminent advent of the 'supreme, legitimate and eternal' monarchy of the Messiah and the coming of a kingdom of justice and peace. His addressees were multiple, including all Christians, Jews, Muslims, princes, ecclesiastics, and theologians of Europe, Africa, Asia, and kingdoms and

<sup>63</sup> The *Vaticinia*, the complete title of which is *Quae Theodoris Bibliander non privata contentione, sed demonstratione historica et theologica illustravit et universis Christianis, Mahumeticis atque Iudaicis oltitit studio provehendi notitiam et gloriam Dei, et ad pacem atque salutem omnium gentium et populorum*, also contained the work *Vaticinia de suprema legitima et sempiterna monarchia Jesu Christi, filii Dei et Mariae virginis stirpe Davidica, deque hostibus Christi, praesertim vero de Pseudochristo*. Both *De monarchia* and *Vaticinia* are unpublished manuscripts in the Zentralbibliothek (Zürich), Ms. Car. 1 92 e 93 (sheets partially not numbered). The *Vaticinia de Gog et Magog sive Antichristo et Pseudochristo* do not appear to be part of the same work. They are collected in *ibid.* (immediately following but indicated separately) in the table of contents. On these works, see Egli, *Theodor Bibliander* 90 ff.

<sup>64</sup> Important studies on prophecy in the sixteenth century are Reeves M., *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages. A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford: 1969); *idem* (ed.), *Prophetic Rome in the High Renaissance Period* (Oxford: 1992); Vasoli C., *Profetia e ragione. Studi sulla cultura del Cinquecento e del Seicento* (Naples: 1979); Williams H. (ed.), *Prophecy and Millenarism: Essays in Honour of Marjorie Reeves* (Ithaca: 1980); Niccoli O., *Profeti e popolo nell'Italia del Rinascimento* (Bari: 1982); Barnes I. B., *Prophecy and Gnosis. Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation* (Stanford: 1988); Zatti G., *Le sante vive. Profetie di corte e devozione femminile tra '400 e '500* (Turin: 1990); McGinn B., *The Growth of Mysticism. A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: 1994); Felici, *Profetie di riforma*.

<sup>65</sup> On the French visionary and scholar who had indicated the King of France as universal sovereign, see Bouwsma W. J., *Concordia mundi. The career and thought of Guillaume Postel (1570-1588)* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1957); Kunz M. L., *Guillaume Postel Prophet of the Resurrection of All Things. His Life and Thought* (The Hague: 1981); Scucchiarra, *I confini del mondo* 253 ff. On his relationship with Bibliander, see Rotondo A., *Guillaume Postel e Basilea*, now in *idem*, *Studi di storia ereticale del Cinquecento*, 2 vols. (Florence: 2008).

cities 'all over the globe'; the motivation of his choice is familiar, and it revolves around the universality of grace and the basic religious unity of the human race in light of the shared laws of nature.<sup>66</sup> Here, too, the refusal of predestination doctrine is categorical.<sup>67</sup> However, this work is also notable for a new civic and political tension and a heightened awareness of the problem of religious conflict within Christianity and with the Ottoman Empire, as well as for an ardent desire to find a solution to this situation (most likely a result of Bibliander's experiences as a theologian and as a 'faithful citizen' of the Holy Roman Empire).<sup>68</sup> Bibliander urged his audience to exert maximum efforts to heal the religious fracture, thus obliterating its tragic spiritual, political, and social consequences, and to operate through peaceful means in view of the 'great consensus' among religions on the fundamental principles of salvation.<sup>69</sup> He tried to demonstrate the concordance among the three faiths concerning the essential attributes of Christ, who therefore appeared as the legitimate common 'monarch'.<sup>70</sup> The coming of the Messiah was seen as imminent with the realization of the apocalyptic prophecy, the return of Gog and Magog, the defeat of the Antichrist, the conversion of all humanity to Christ, and the beginning of Christ's reign as foretold by Isaiah.<sup>71</sup> In *De Monarchia* it was seen as the union of large and opulent states predicted by Babylonian, Egyptian, Persian and Roman oracles.<sup>72</sup>

In 1553 two more works helped spread Bibliander's beliefs, the *De factis* and the *De legitima vindicatione Christianismi veri et sempiterni*; in both, the work of evangelization was entrusted to the Holy Roman Emperor and

to the English King Edward VI. Another work composed ten years later, titled *De conversione Iudaeorum ad Christum*, remained in manuscript form.<sup>73</sup> The project of a translation of the Bible into Arabic was also left at a preliminary stage; after the Latin edition of the Koran, it embodied Bibliander's belief in a dialogue between the Christian West and other world civilizations with a view toward world peace. Bibliander pursued this goal until his last work, a historically founded exposition of Christian truth based on an analysis of two sermons of Luka on evangelical history from antiquity to its most recent representatives.<sup>74</sup> After illustrating his key ideas in terms of *loci* – the universality of both free will and the evangelical promise etc. – Bibliander sketched a project of reform of the church, significantly supplied with an appendix on the rites of Christians in Asia and Africa. Only in this chorus, in this plurality of voices, could Erasmus's ideas on the renewal of Christian society and on a peaceful spread of the evangelical message come to full realization.

<sup>66</sup> Bibliander, *De monarchia*, fols. 1v–2v. God did not have 'respectum personarum, sed in quavis gente quicumque timet deum, ac operatur iustitiam gratum illi et acceptum esse'; he had created 'omnes homines [...] ad optimam atque perfectissimam ipsius operis dei et parentis imaginem'. All mankind was destined 'ad unum finem bonorum [...] ex aeterno suae benevolentiae consilio ut deum parentem et universitatis gubernatorem sapientissimum, benevolentem, iustum, cunctis providentem' by an extraordinarily generous God, who offered 'ex immenso thesauro honoris suae', 'universis et singulis offert atque pollicetur suam beneficentiam'. As creator and governor of the universe, God have inscribed in the humans the 'leges bene beatique vivendi, et regulas [...] quae subinde illos eximulatum ad gerendum ea, quae honesta, et deo placita, et ipsis salutaria sunt'.

<sup>67</sup> Bibliander, *De monarchia*, fol. 2v. He claimed that supporters of predestination were 'barbarous and ferocious', full of 'utmost impudence and wickedness' because of their will to substitute themselves for divine judgement.

<sup>68</sup> Bibliander, *De monarchia*, fol. 14r.

<sup>69</sup> Bibliander, *De monarchia*, fols. 6v; 12r–v; 15v.

<sup>70</sup> Bibliander, *De monarchia*, fols. 3v; 4v ff.; 6v; 7v ff.

<sup>71</sup> Bibliander, *De monarchia*, fols. 7v ff.; 16r.

<sup>73</sup> The *De legitima vindicatione* was published in Basel. On these works, see Egli, *Theodor Bibliander* 94ff. The manuscript of *De conversione* is in Zurich, Zentralbibliothek, Ms. Car. I 89 (sheets not numbered).