CHAPTER ONE

‘CURA RELIGIONIS’: THE PROPHETICAL
OFFICE AND THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE

John Jewel, Bishop of Sarum, once referred to Heinrich Bullinger as the “oracle of the churches.” While Jewel’s remark conveys a pithy assessment of the Zuricher’s pre-eminent role on the stage of international Reform, it is particularly applicable to the case of England. Throughout his lengthy career as Antistes of the Church of Zurich (1531–1575), Bullinger exercised a unique influence on the Church of England both as theologian and, on a practical level, as counsellor to both princes and bishops. Given the scope of this influence and its remarkable consistency over a considerable period of time (almost forty years), it is now almost commonplace to include Bullinger among the first rank of reformers of the English Church, although this is by no means universally accepted. Indeed it is even arguable that no other divine exercised a comparable degree of continuous influence over all of the principal stages of the English Reformation—from the Henrician and Edwardine reforms, through the crucible of the Marian exile, to the eventual implementation and consolidation of the Elizabethan religious settlement. At every stage Bullinger was engaged as a significant player, and in later years was frequently appealed to as an arbiter of internal disputes and even as a public apologist of the Church of England on the


2 One recent and otherwise very useful and informative study of the early Elizabethan church completely ignores the central role played by Bullinger in the theological definition of the Settlement. See, e.g., Scott Wenig, Straightening the Altars: The Ecclesiastical Vision and Pastoral Achievements of the Progressive Bishops under Elizabeth I, 1559–1579 (New York: Peter Lang, 2000) where Bullinger receives no mention whatever, in spite of his having acted as mentor to almost half the bench of bishops!
international stage. One might even go so far as to say that Bullinger lays a fair claim to being the theologian *par excellence* of the reformed Church of England.

To employ one of his own categories, Bullinger’s distinctive role with respect to the reformation of the Church of England is best described as “prophetic.” While there is nothing out of the ordinary in the claim that the Zuricher saw his general ministerial function in such a light, our present aim is to investigate more closely the peculiarly political, even constitutional emphasis of Bullinger’s “prophetic office” with respect to England. Concerning his prophetical role Bullinger held that there is a reciprocal obligation of magistrates and ministers of religion. In the context of Zurich, the chief public function of the ministers of the Church with respect to the community at large was to proclaim the Word of God freely and uncompromisingly to all, and, in particular, to the magistrates through the formal address known as the *Fürträge*: “To the magistrate is commanded [by God] that he hear the servants of the church. On the other hand, the servant of the church should follow the magistrate in all those things which the law commands.” As I hope to show, Bullinger in a remarkable way extended the exercise of his prophetical office to include the realm of England. He repeatedly undertook to address England’s rulers in the service of true religion and for the welfare of the Church militant. Throughout the forty-odd years of his support of the cause of religious reform in England, one recurrent theme of his discourse stands out among the rest, and that concerns the very pre-eminence of the civil magistrate’s authority in what Bullinger refers to as “the care of religion” (*cura religionis*). In short, the proposal put forward is that Heinrich Bullinger’s distinctive contribution to the

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4 David J. Keep did in fact go this far when he observed that “there is no theologian who so accurately mirrors the Anglican settlement” as Heinrich Bullinger. See his article “Theology as a basis for policy in the Elizabethan Church,” in L.D.G. Baker (ed.), *Studies in Church History*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell for the Ecclesiastical History Society, 1975), 265.