

Sunday, October 14, 2012—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 75 The Life and Times of E.W. Bullinger

Introduction

Despite having already spoken at length about E.W.B.'s theology, virtually nothing regarding his personal life has been discussed. Therefore, prudence dictates that we share some things regarding the remarkable and interesting life of Dr. Bullinger.

The Life and Times of E.W. Bullinger

Early Life and Childhood

- “Ethelbert William Bullinger (1837-1913) was born on December 15 in Canterbury, England. He was a distant descendant of Johann Heinrich Bullinger, a covenant theologian who succeeded Zwingli in Zurich in December of 1531.” (Richards, 66)
- William Bullinger, E.W.'s father owned a successful grocery business and lived above the shop with his wife, Mary and their five children: James (1828), Hester Ann (1831), Eliza (1834), Zillah Jane (1836), and Ethelbert the youngest (1837). (Carey, 29)
- “The Bullingers were members of the Methodist Church; in fact, in later life William Bullinger would refer to himself as a “Wesleyan Preacher” as well as a grocer. . . Each of the Bullinger children was baptized in St. Peter’s Chapel. Ethelbert’s baptism, performed by Rev. Samuel Webb, took place on March 11, 1838. . . The fact that the Bullinger family was Methodist tells much about the tenor of Ethelbert’s childhood. The following account gives a glimpse into Methodism in early Victorian days, the time of Ethelbert’s childhood:
 - The call of the Methodists of the period was for disciplined, simple, pious lives removed from worldly pleasures and centered on home, chapel and business. The duty of hard work, the evils of luxury and extravagance, the virtues of foresight and thrift, moderation and self-discipline, were instilled into ordinary church members and provided an undergirding to the moral earnestness characteristic of Victorian England.” (Carey, 29-30)
- Music was to play a major role throughout E.W.B.'s life. He had a fine singing voice and had displayed musical talent while still quite young. His father had great ambitions for the boy and wanted him to become a church organist. Anxious to further Ethelbert’s musical abilities his father secured a position for his son in the Canterbury Cathedral choir. When it became clear that E.W.B. would rather be a minister, William made his son promise never to neglect his music while serving in ministry. (Carey, 30)

Education, Marriage, Family, and Ordination

- On October 5, 1859, E.W.B. took the entrance exam to gain acceptance to the Theological Department of King's College in London. The exam required a working knowledge of: 1) the four gospels in Greek; 2) the historical books of the Old Testament; 3) the church Catechism and Scripture proofs; 4) one Greek and one Latin book; 5) Latin and Greek grammar; 6) one standard book in English literature; and 7) a small pamphlet on the Hebrew alphabet by Rev. A. McCaul, D.D. (Carey, 34-35)
- E.W.B. was admitted to King's College for the Lenten term beginning January 24, 1860. He was placed in the third class, which was made up of those who had ranked lowest on the entrance examination. His course of study was quite strenuous: 1) Dogmatic Theology; 2) Ecclesiastical History; 3) Exegesis of the Old Testament; 4) Hebrew and Rabbinical Literature; 5) Exegesis of the New Testament; 6) Personal and Liturgical Theology; 7) Evidences of Christianity; 8) Latin; 9) Theory and Practice of Vocal Church Music; 10) Public Reading; and 11) Laws of Health and Disease in Their Relation to the Ministerial Office. (Carey, 35)
- E.W.B. completed the required six terms, for which two years were allotted, in a year and a half. On June 22, 1861, he received the degree of Associate of King's College, which admitted him as a candidate for holy orders. The excellent instruction and E.W.B.'s own diligence had paid off; he was placed in the first class, the section for those with the highest grades. More importantly, he left King's College a sound Greek scholar with a mastery of Hebrew. (Carey, 37)
- "On July 7, 1861, in the Chapel within Farnham Castle, the Bishop of Winchester admitted Ethelbert William Bullinger into the Holy Order of Deacons according to the manner and form prescribed and used by the Church of England. This brought Ethelbert one step closer to his goal; to be an ordained clergyman in the Church of England." (Carey, 37-38)
- On Tuesday, October 15, 1861, Ethelbert Bullinger married Miss Emma Dodson. Ethelbert was twenty-three years of age, and Emma, daughter of John and Mary (Miller) Dodson of Epping, Essex, was thirty-five. Their union produced two sons, Ethelbert Augustine (July 18, 1862) and Bernard Stratton (December 2, 1866). In 1864 tragedy struck the Bullinger family, Emma's brother Henry Dodson died leaving his wife Hannah to look after three children. In 1868, Hannah passed away leaving her children Harry, George, and Elizabeth to be divided between family members that could care for them. A few years later Ethelbert and Emma adopted Elizabeth. (Carey, 39, 41,45)
- On Sunday, July 6, 1862, E.W.B.'s dream was realized as he was ordained into the Holy Order of Priesthood of the Church of England by the Bishop of Winchester. Time and space will simply not permit a detailed discussion of every Parrish that Bullinger ministered in; interested parties are encouraged to read *E.W. Bullinger: A Biography* by Juanita S. Carey for more detailed information.

Writing Ministry Begins and Honorary Doctorate Degree Bestowed

- It is, however, important to note that, while serving in the Parrish of Notting Hill in 1868, Bullinger was working on his first major literary work, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance of the English and Greek New Testament*.
- “In 1877, nine years after its beginning in Notting Hill, Rev. Bullinger completed his first major publication, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*. The first edition was published by Longmans, Green & Co., in London. The dedication page of this first edition read as follows:
 - This work is dedicated to, and designed for, ALL ENGLISH BIBLE STUDENTS, and is so arranged as to be understood also by those who are unacquainted with Greek.” (Carey, 59)
- The publication of the *Lexicon and Concordance* was a major achievement and it marked the beginning of the work for which Bullinger would be remembered for years to come, his writing ministry. E.W.B. wrote small works and large—books, pamphlets, poetry, and hymns until his death thirty-six years later.
- Bullinger’s *Lexicon and Concordance* received high praise with the scholarly community.
 - Dr. Plumtre, professor of Pastoral Theology at King’s College publically recommended the book in a speech he gave on October 12, 1877, “Such a book as. . . that very admirable and elaborate English Greek Concordance to the New Testament just published by Mr. Bullinger. . . honestly studied and used will lead the student of the Word of God to a more enlarged apprehension of its meaning”. (Carey, 60)
 - *The British Quarterly Review*, October 1877 wrote, “The first impression on turning over the pages of this work is a feeling of wonder at the vast amount of literary labour which it represents. The author tells us in his preface that it is a labour which has extended over nine years; and we are sure the labour must have been both hard and continuous given such a result. The plan of the work is new; its aim is to combine Greek and English vocabulary, lexicon, and outline of grammar, Greek index, textual criticism, and even etymology, in one volume.” (Carey, 60)
 - *The Review* wrote, “This work of great industry, and of great usefulness. . . We heartily commend it as a valuable help to New Testament study.” (Carey, 61)
 - Archibald Campbell Tait, Archbishop of Canterbury and Head of the Church of England, wrote Bullinger to congratulate him on the publication of his *Lexicon and Concordance*, “I trust that it will be found useful by the persons to whom it is designed and that many tend to a better knowledge of the New Testament, a knowledge with which the name of Bullinger is already appreciated.” (Carey, 61)

- August 17, 1881, four years after the publication of the *L & C*, the Archbishop issued the following ecclesiastical order to his representative:
 - “Having thought fit upon the recommendation of the Bishop of St. Albans to confer the Degree of Doctor of Divinity on the Reverend Ethelbert William Bullinger, Vicar of St. Stephen’s Walthamstow in the Country of Essex (and Diocese of St. Albans) in recognition of his eminent service in the Church in the department of Biblical criticism.

These are to Order and require that you issue forth Letters Testimonial of his creation in that Faculty under your Seal of office according to the usual and accustomed form in the like cases observed for your so doing this shall be your warrant.

Given at Lambeth Palace this 17th day of August in the year of our lord One thousand eight hundred and eighty-one.” (Carey, 62)

- “The Lambeth Degrees, initiated in 1534, were for the most part theological; degrees in law, medicine, and music were granted only in very rare cases. The following guidelines were in effect for conferring the Lambeth Degree in theology:
 - To men who have attained eminence in the Foreign and Missionary World of the church by some special service, generally of a literary character, e.g. translating the Scripture into a new language; and, in some cases *dignitalis causa* to enable an eminent man to hold some office for which the Degree in question is technically required.” (Carey, 62)
- “The Degree of Doctor of Divinity was conferred upon the Reverend Mr. Ethelbert William Bullinger on August 31, 1881, after he had signed the Book of Degrees and taken the required oath of allegiance to the Monarch and the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England.” (Carey, 62) On September 9, 1881, from Westminster Palace, Queen Victoria issued an official proclamation that put the official Royal seal upon the Archbishop’s order and Bullinger’s honorary degree. (Carey, 63)

Secretary of the Trinitarian Bible Society

- “In the spring of 1867, Rev. Bullinger, then twenty-nine and assistant curate in St. Peter’s Notting Hill, was accepted for the office of clerical secretary to the Trinitarian Bible Society. Ethelbert Bullinger’s affiliation with the society was to be long and fruitful, lasting the rest of his life and deeply influencing both parties.” (Carey, 71)
- “The Trinitarian Bible Society came into being on December 7, 1831. It was an institution born of protest. A look at the history of its parent institution, the British and Foreign Bible Society, will explain what occurred. The British and Foreign Bible Society was established in 1804, during a time of great upsurge in foreign missionary work. . . The first difficulty to seriously trouble the ranks was the question of which version of the Bible should be distributed under the

name of the British and Foreign Bible Society. The King James, or Authorized Version had been used exclusively . . . By 1814, however, the Society's branches in predominantly Roman Catholic and Lutheran countries had greatly increased in number. To accommodate them, the original regulations were relaxed to include sending the Apocryphal versions that had been in use in those denominations. When this practice came to light among the members of the Society, much disagreement ensued." (Carey, 72)

- "The second major difficulty arose several years later when it became apparent that the membership of the Society now included large numbers of Unitarians. Unitarianism, which denies the deity of Christ, had spread rapidly in Europe in the early part of the nineteenth century. . . At the same time, it became quite popular in Christian circles to open meetings with prayer. When this question came up within the British and Foreign Bible Society, the leadership refused to commit itself." (Carey, 72)
- From here events snowballed and eventually on December 7, 1831, more than two thousand people gathered at Exeter Hall in London to found a new Society and very explicitly to affirm its basic beliefs.
 - "That it is the opinion of this Meeting that a Society engaged in circulating the pure word of God, and upon which devolves the responsibility of preparing and issuing new translations of the Holy Scriptures, must be considered decidedly a religious Society, and one that should be conducted on scriptural principal; and that those only who are Protestants and acknowledge the scriptural doctrine of the Holy Trinity, can consistently be admitted as members to such a Society, or be fit agents to conduct or carry on such a work." (Carey, 75)
- The appointment of E.W.B. to the position of clerical secretary marked the beginning of a new era for the Trinitarian Bible Society. In Bullinger, the Society found a man whose intelligence, energy, and resourcefulness could put it above water financially and, more importantly whose adherence to principle matched their own. Bullinger served in this position for forty-six years until his death despite heavy parish duties and an ever increasing literary output. (Carey, 77)
- Bullinger was a forceful advocate for the Authorized Version by opposing the British and Foreign bible Society's policy of accepting other versions. (Carey, 78) E.W.B.'s time at the Bible Society was highlighted by the publication of the Old and New Testaments in Hebrew. In 1885, the first edition of the Hebrew New Testament was released and sold out within a month. In 1886, 110,000 copies of a second edition were released and circulated as far as North Africa, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Germany, and Russia. Dr. Bullinger and Reverend John Wilkinson were instrumental in opening up the Russian Empire to the distribution of more than 100,000 Hebrew New Testaments. (Carey, 87)

Monument to William Tyndale

- It was in May of 1911 during a trip to Vilvoorde, Belgium that E.W.B. first conceived of a monument to William Tyndale, a man to whom all English-speaking people who loved the Bible are deeply indebted. Bullinger was deeply dismayed to find that, although there were statues honoring Tyndale in England, no monument stood at this spot, the place of his execution. Together with Monsieur L. Valat, secretary of the Belgian Bible Society, Dr. Bullinger inquired in town and found considerable interest in this distinguished Englishman who had been imprisoned in the Castle of Vilvoorde and had died a martyr's death. At the town hall they were received graciously and were encouraged to begin making plans for a monument. (Carey, 189)
- “Leaving Monsieur Valat to make the necessary arrangements in Belgium, Dr. Bullinger returned to London and, with his usual enthusiasm and energy, set about designing the monument and raising the necessary funds. He wanted the following to be inscribed on the monument in English, French, Flemish, and Latin:
 - William Tyndale, who suffered martyrdom under Spanish rule on Oct. 6th, 1536, was first strangled and then burnt in the Grande Place de Vilvoorde. Among his last words were these: “Lord, open the eyes of the King of England.” This prayer was answered within a year by the issue, under Royal Authority, of the whole Bible in English.” (Carey, 189)
- “On October 26, 1913, a large crowd gathered in Vilvoorde, Belgium, for the unveiling of the monument honoring William Tyndale, a project that had been dear to the heart of Dr. Bullinger. Rev. F. Cecil Lovely, now the secretary of the Trinitarian Bible Society, took part in the ceremony as did Monsieur L. Valat. . . and representatives of religious societies in France, Belgium, England, Norway, Sweden, and Finland, as well as Belgium civil authorities. The vital part played by the late Dr. Bullinger in the project from its beginning was noted repeatedly by many of the speakers.” (Carey, 214-215)

The Victorian Era

- Juanita S. Carey, the chief biographer of Bullinger, writes that 1837 (the year E.W.B. was born), was also the year that Victoria assumed the throne of England. Consequently, this time of English transition from yesteryear to modern times was the context of Bullinger's life. (Carey, 13)
- “The term Victorian has come to signify not only the era of Victoria's reign but also the morality of that time—a morality known for its narrow-mindedness and prudishness. Perhaps more than any other characteristics, this strict moral code has become the hallmark of the Victorian Age. It was a code based on duty and self-restraint shared by most groups in society, including scientists, creative artists, and intellectuals. Institutions like the school, the voluntary organization, the trade-union, and, above all, the family, emphasize the maintenance of those values which held society together.” (Carey, 15)

- The spread of prosperity during the early years of Victoria’s reign boosted her popularity. At this time, Britain was the world’s workshop, shipbuilder, carrier, and banker. By the sixtieth anniversary of Queen Victoria’s coronation in 1897, England’s prestige was at its peak.
- Many of the forces at work within Victorian society could be observed within the Church of England as well. The Anglican Church had been England’s official church since Henry VIII broke with Roman Catholicism in 1532. Historians have noted that, by the beginning of the Victorian Era, the Anglican Church had become stagnant, materialistic, and isolated from the life of the people. By the late 1830s, reform—in the guise of two fiercely competitive groups, both bent on revitalizing the Church in their own way—began to make itself felt. The first of these groups was called the Evangelical, or Low Church Party. The second was known as the Oxford Movement, or High Church Party. The Low Church Party found its origins in the Methodist movement, and took a low view of the Sacrament, rejected baptismal regeneration and the Eucharist as a sacrifice. In contrast, the High Church Party wanted the Anglican Church to become more like the Roman Catholic Church. The group advocated for what they called an Anglo-Catholic Church or “middle way” between the Anglican and Catholic Churches. Drawing its inspiration from the Catholic Church, the High Church Party advocated for ritual Mass, vestments for clergy, belief in Purgatory, confession to a priest, and prayer to the saints. Tension between these two groups impacted the religious atmosphere of Bullinger’s day. (Carey, 18-22)
- It was also during this time period that Biblical “higher criticism” was born. This viewpoint advocated starting from a point of skepticism about the authorship, date, place of origin, and composition of the books of the Bible. In contrast, lower criticism examined the internal evidence of the bible and concentrated on unraveling translational difficulties while still maintaining a basic belief in the accuracy of the Bible. High criticism, with its accompanying doubts and challenges to the traditional faith of the church, became the norm in many universities. (Carey, 23)
- “There can be little doubt that Ethelbert Bullinger knew of the restlessness that permeated the society in which he lived. . . Bullinger’s staunch, lifelong defense of the principles of lower criticism and his, at times, quite fierce rejection of higher criticism become more understandable when seen in the light of the intellectual atmosphere of his day, as does his relentless campaign against Roman Catholicism, his frequent warnings about the dangers of spiritualism, and his cautions against the random adoption of untried scientific theories.” (Carey, 25)

Works Cited

Carey, Juanita S. *E.W. Bullinger: A Biography*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000.

Richards, Brian K. “E.W. Bullinger,” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1996.