

Annual Reformation Lecture 2015

Martin Bucer: Reformer in Between

Martin Who?

Bucer was “next to Luther and Melanchthon, the most important leader of Protestantism in Germany, his role in the crucial events of his time until recent years, been overlooked by the vast majority of Protestantism. . . Yet in his own lifetime Bucer was one of most influential religious figures on the continent of Europe.”¹

What can you say about a historical figure who knew and learned directly from Luther, was friends with Zwingli and Oecolampadius, mentored Calvin, helped Cranmer revised the book of Common Prayer and shaped the Reformed Church in England and Scotland and the Low Lands? Bucer was a networker *par excellence*. What can you say about a pastor who worked to reconcile Luther and Zwingli, to reconcile Protestants with Anabaptists and even Roman Catholics? To say that Bucer was a towering figure in the Reformation is an understatement. But why have we largely forgotten him?

Thomas Linday wrote, “Peacemakers are often forgotten, while the strenuous fighting men of their time live in the memory of the generations that follow; and yet, how often the hardest work of the warrior would be without permanent result if it were not for the compromises of the diplomat, grudgingly accepted and soon forgotten.”²

One of the challenges of studying Bucer is the lack of primary source materials in English. The biographies are few and the actual works of Bucer are few. This is not a problem with Luther or Calvin. So there is a heavy reliance on secondary sources. An excellent resource is Martin Greschat, *Martin Bucer, A Reformer and His Times* (WKJ, Eng. translation, 2004; original German, 1990).

Early Life

Born Nov. 11, 1491 in Schlettstadt (Selestat), Germany. The town itself was sensitive to church abuses and resisted the practice of ecclesiastical benefices. This was the practice of establishing church positions which were financed by church property and endowments. Income would go directly to a bishop, who lived off of this income. The bishops or other church officials, would not be local, so their ecclesiastical duties, for which they were presumably being paid, would not be fulfilled by them. They in turn would hire priests or chaplains for performing religious duties. Often these subordinates could barely “mumble through a mass.”

¹ David C. Steinmetz, *Reformers in Wings*, second edition (Oxford University Press, 2001), 85.

² Thomas M. Linday, “Martin Bucer and the Reformation,” *Quarterly Review* 220 (1914), 116.

Incompetency, illiteracy and high turnover was the result of this corrupt system known as ecclesiastical benefices. The Bucers' town was intolerant of such hirelings and demanded clergy that would be able to serve a pious townspeople.³

Bucer's father was a simple cooper, that is, he made wooden casks and barrels, for the wine industry which thrived in their region. Coopers were not influential or wealthy, like the winegrowers. Nevertheless, the Bucers sacrificed for Martin to attend an outstanding Latin school. The leadership of the Latin school had been profoundly shaped by the *devotio moderna*, which was a medieval piety movement that had captured lay people. The school was a robust institution that taught Latin, philosophy, as well as Greek language and literature. The French humanist Lefevre d'Estaples was studied rigorously. Hans Witz, leader of the school, took the school from 250 students to 900, but was fired later for his support of the Reformation.

Martin excelled in school. He could read and speak Latin fluently, he also had learned the art of rhetoric (he was educated in the trivium) and could express himself with accuracy and precision. Martin would go on to join the Order of Preachers, who are also known as the Dominicans or Friars. Since the Bucers were not wealthy, this was a way that Martin could receive higher education. Not only that, but there was the possibility of social advancement, since the Dominicans were a respectable order.

In 1508 Martin took the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Since the Dominicans were considered the scholarly order, Martin was able to continue his studies. He would study Aristotle, the Old and New Testaments and of course, Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. There is no way to exaggerate the importance of the *Sentences* in medieval studies. This was *the* textbook on dogmatics. Written in the 1100's, the *Sentences* were commented on more than the Bible. Thomas Aquinas's commentary on the *Sentences* was required reading.

Martin studied both in Heidelberg and Mainz, where he was ordained a priest. The world in which he studied was being pulled in different directions. There were the competing schools of thought between scholasticism and humanism. Scholasticism was filled philosophical speculation. It was divided into schools, the *via moderna* (Nominalism) and the *via antiqua* (Thomists, or the Realists). Humanism on the other hand sought to return to the sources, *ad fontes*. The leading humanist of Bucer's day was of course Desiderius Erasmus, the Dutch

³ Martin Greschat, translated by Stephen E Buckwalter, *Martin Bucer, A Reformer and His Times* (WJK, 2004), 5-6.

humanist scholar. Bucer would gravitate towards Erasmus and the humanists, as did many of the early Reformers,⁴ although he would never be free of Aquinas's influence.

Martin Meets Martin

Bucer was studying in Heidelberg in 1517. In April 1518 Martin Luther arrived to give his Heidelberg Disputation.⁵ Future reformers were among the vast audience, not the least of which was one Martin Bucer. Bucer was excited by what he heard. Bucer in a letter to a friend, speaking of Luther, said, "I return to the topic of Martin Luther; although our foremost men refuted him with all their strength, he was not moved a finger's breadth from his propositions. His charm in responding was wonderful, his patience in listening was incomparable, in his elucidations you would have recognized the acumen of Paul, not of Scotus; with his answers so brief, so ingenious and drawn out from the stocks of Holy Scripture, he easily persuaded everyone toward admiration of him. On the following day, away from witnesses, I had a familiar and friendly conversation with the man, and also a dinner prepared with the most chosen doctrines rather than food. He lucidly explained whatever I asked."⁶

The Disputation vigorously denied man's ability to do good, denied man's free will, rejected the Law as a way to salvation and extolled the weakness of the Cross as the means by which God saves sinners.⁷

Bucer spoke with Luther and was captivated by Luther's message and embraced it. Bucer was not a blind adherent to Luther however. Bucer emphasized and develop the ethics of the life of faith more than Luther, he emphasized the relationship between love for God and love for neighbor, which was the expression of the Law and Spirit in the life of the believer. The issue of Christian ethics and neighbor love would play a central role in Bucer's theology. Bucer was delighted when he saw these truths in Luther's 1520 Commentary on Galatians. But, as Greschat notes, "If Luther emphasized the unsurpassed importance of the sinner's justification by God, Bucer stressed the intimate connection between justification and the gift of an ethically renewed better life all the more. It is for this reason that

⁴ See 2013 Annual Reformation Lecture, "Before Luther" <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=1121306160> and 2008 Annual Reformation Lecture, "Luther's Theology of the Cross" <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=915131517138>

⁵ See "Luther's Theology of the Cross" for a study of his Heidelberg Disputation.

⁶ Brian Lugoio, *Martin Bucer's Doctrine of Justification: Reformation Theology and Early Modern Irenicism* (Oxford,) 10.

⁷ *Luther's Works*, XXXI, American Edition. Edited by Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 39-70.

he perceived and developed theology as ethics. This remained a guiding principle of his thought and action from this time on.”⁸

Luther stirred things up at Heidelberg. The situation with Luther was no academic tempest in a teapot. The Dominicans at Heidelberg were shaken and even confused. There was a resonance with their humanist and Erasmian learning, but Luther clearly went farther than Erasmus. The papacy itself stood at the center of the conflict. Luther had already received his papal bull denouncing his teaching. It was on between Luther and the Pope. The papacy, in order to shore up its loyalties, commanded the Dominicans to go actively preach against Luther. Bucer would not comply, in fact, he would support Luther. Even though Bucer had expressed support for Luther, his superiors still promoted him, paving the way for him to earn the most prestigious degree, the Doctor of Theology. Interesting enough, as Bucer assumed his responsibilities of teaching, he did not lecture on Lombard’s *Sentences*, rather he decided to lecture on the Psalms. His students complained, his superiors offered to rebuke or word of correction.

Bucer finally asked to be released of his vows. In April, 1521, he was released. At this time he sought refuge with other Reformation men at the Castle of Ebernburg.

The Labors of the Reformer

Some think that Bucer witnessed Luther at Worms in 1521. He moved on to Nuremberg, which was a large city. By this time, he was building his contacts among like-minded men. In 1522 he married Elisabeth Silbereisen, a former nun. In that same year, he uncompromisingly came out in support of the Reformation. “Christians were called to confess Christ openly and to preach the Gospel, even if it meant incurring the hatred of men and the accusation of inciting revolt.”⁹

He started his labors in Wissembourg. He preached once a day, twice on Sundays, and he preached consecutive expository sermons on the books of the Bible. Bucer’s love for the church grew, as did his vision. “For Bucer, the church was primarily and especially the community of those bound to one another by the same trust in God and the same spirit of commitment to their fellow human beings, to their neighbors.”¹⁰ Bucer was accused of inciting rebellion and of holding the Lutheran heresy. He was excommunicated and his life was in danger. He escaped, with his pregnant wife, to Strasbourg in 1523.

⁸ Greschat, 31.

⁹ Greschat, 40.

¹⁰ Greschat, 43.

Strasbourg

What does a married, excommunicated priest do? Wolfgang Capito, the leading Protestant theologian of Strasbourg, said, ‘Strasbourg is the city of refuge for the expelled brethren. Everybody who’s persecuted somewhere comes here, and from here they are sent out again to serve the Word of God.’¹¹ So Bucer and his wife arrive in Strasbourg. There was a strong anti-clerical sentiment by the hard-working people of the town. They looked upon the begging monks and priests as too affluent and too numerous. The townspeople and the city council had grown in its distrust and opposition to the Catholic church, and they wanted reform. This desire was exhibited in that by the time Bucer arrived, all the city’s printers, except one, were printing reformation material.

The city had two strong reformers already, Wolfgang Capito and Matthew Zell. Zell in particular urged the city council to demand that the Gospel be preached openly to all since it is the only way for people to be saved. Although there was some opposition, the reform movement in Strasbourg was strong.

Bucer was looking for work and although he was guaranteed protection by the Strasbourg city council, he was denied citizenship. He petitioned Zwingli to find him a position in Switzerland. He also petitioned Zell, who had Bucer work as his unofficial chaplain. Bucer wasted no time in teaching, in Latin, on the Pastoral Epistles and Philippians. When the crowds outgrew the facility, Zell made sure that Bucer had a larger venue. He went on to lecture on 1 and 2 Peter and John, this time in German. The council did not object!

We will look at some of Bucer’s theology shortly, but it deserves pointing out that Bucer had a heavy emphasis on ethics, in particular, neighbor love and politics.¹² Christ is Savior, but He is also the Restorer of creation.

Finally, Bucer was allowed to preach to a congregation. There was a parish church which was made up predominantly of gardeners. European cities were often divided up into guilds. Some guilds, like wine growers, were wealthy and powerful. Other guilds like coopers or gardeners, were poor and uninfluential. Bucer took up the call with great energy and zeal. The gardeners wanted him not only to preach, but to be their pastor. The city council had to approve it and it was not easy since Bucer was an excommunicated and married priest.

Bucer over time proved himself to Zell and Capito and all of Strasbourg. He was brilliant, he was a hard worker, laboring to improve conditions in both church and society. His piety was above reproach.

Once the city council accepted the reformation, Bucer began reforming the worship services. Wittenberg and Zurich were serious influences in Bucer’s

¹¹ Quoted in Greschat, 83.

¹² 2013 Annual Reformation Lecture: Politics and the Reformation – The Reformers’ Views of Church and State
<http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=111121134321>

thinking (although Zurich more so). He rejected the sacrifice of the Mass, the altar, vestments and other rituals and established a simply table (the laity received both the bread and wine), prayers, the Psalms sung in German and a sermon as the elements of worship.

*The Anabaptists*¹³

Persecuted Anabaptists started arriving in Strasbourg as early as 1524. Bucer engaged the Anabaptists in theological discussion. He certainly was concerned about their influence in the city, but believed that theological conversation and debate would win the day. This attitude led to some debates with Michael Sattler, one of the leading Anabaptist thinkers. Sattler won over Bucer and Capito with his piety, but not his theology (although Capito did for a short time entertain Anabaptist principles, which put Bucer into high gear to stop him).

Later, when Sectarian Anabaptists began to flood Strasbourg, Bucer saw the danger, and although he was moved by the piety of the leaders, he saw their isolationism as dangerous. Bucer's sternest criticisms came, not because the state, but because such isolation led the Anabaptists to depart from the true Christian doctrine of seeking the good of one's neighbor and the community.

The Lord's Supper

Luther and Zwingli were fighting strenuously over the Lord's Supper. Bucer was in the middle of it to some extent because of his relationship with them and others. Bucer saw something at stake in this fight and that the unity of the Protestant churches. Bucer certainly had his views of the Supper, but he wanted to bring the Wittenbergers and Zurichers together for the sake of peace in the body of Christ.

Bucer himself had abandoned the idea of physical presence and this through Luther's sermons from John 6! Bucer put the emphasis on faith, as Zwingli and Oecalampadius. Luther had dug in. Whoever disagreed with his view of physical presence was of course, according to him, denying justification and probably in league with Satan.¹⁴ Bucer pled for mutual acceptance that there will be differing views. "Solving the controversy over the Lord's Supper became his overriding concern, for he was convinced that it was nothing more than a trivial squabble over words that was distracting the Reformation movement's attention from more important things and destroying the unity much needed to confront supports of the

¹³ 2001 Annual Reformation Lecture: The Anabaptists – The Stepchildren and the Radical Reformation
<http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=922131222367>

¹⁴ Greschat, 73.

traditional church.”¹⁵ Bucer would say, “It is sufficient for our dear brethren if others agree with us on the fundamentals of the church, those being: that we are all nothing and that God wants to save us and make us holy through Christ alone.”¹⁶

Bucer made some missteps in his efforts, some which cost him some credibility with the Lutherans. These missteps actually demonstrated that Bucer was not a person to dismiss his own position or convictions about the truth, as some have asserted. Bucer continued to work for reconciliation. At this point, he was closer in friendship and position with Zwingli than with Luther.

We jump ahead to 1529 and the Marburg Colloquy. When the talks began to break down between Luther and Zwingli, Bucer was called in to keep them on track. Luther of course rejected Bucer’s proposals. He would say to Bucer something similar he would say to Zwingli, “Your spirit and our spirit do not coincide.” Regardless of his efforts, both parties left unreconciled. However, Bucer refused to give up.

Although Bucer had his views, he labored to work through language that would be acceptable to both sides. In a 1530 commentary, he wrote in the introduction a backhanded rebuke, “If you immediately condemn anyone who doesn’t quite believe the same as you do as forsaken by Christ’s Spirit, and consider anyone to be the enemy of truth who holds something false to be truth, who, pray tell, can you still consider a brother? I for one have never met two people who believed exactly the same thing. This holds true in theology as well.”¹⁷ Bucer saw this as a debate that was fueled by sticking to the letter, instead of sticking with the Spirit. The Spirit can grant us love and liberty and understanding, the letter will continue to divide.

Headway was made however. Oecalampadius worked with Melancthon and the outcome was 9 theses, summarized by Bucer. These were sent to Luther and the Strasbourg City Council. Bucer and Luther met, and Bucer regained Luther’s trust and respect. Although Luther did not embrace the theses, he encouraged Bucer to continue. However, Zwingli (and this is the rest of the Marburg story) was not so kind. He believed Bucer conceded too much and made some strong accusations about Bucer’s motives. Bucer was wounded deeply, apologizing to Zwingli for wearying him with all of his labors for reconciliation and telling Zwingli in a letter that he would no longer bother him with his toil. Zwingli’s response was to cut off the relationship with Bucer.

Shortly after, Zwingli would lay dead on a battlefield and Oecalampadius would die in the plague. Bucer would mourn the loss of his dear friend from Basel. Bucer would continue his labors writing on the Lord’s Supper. In response to one

¹⁵ Greschat, 74.

¹⁶ Quoted in Greschat, 75.

¹⁷ Quoted in Greschat, 94.

of his works, Luther lashed out with invectives. Bucer again was deeply wounded. But wrote, “In any case, we must seek unity and love in our relationships with everyone – regardless of how they behave towards us.”¹⁸

Bucer and Melanchthon came to an agreement a few years later, although Melanchthon was under strict orders from Luther himself not to negotiate or deviate from his position. The trouble was that Melanchthon already had come into agreement with Bucer. The two knew that winning over Luther would be the challenging part. In 1534 the Wittenberg Concord was held. There was great hope that there would be peace at last and then if the Swiss could be brought on board, all would be well. A letter from Luther was read, which of course was filled with the same old insults, some reserved especially for Bucer. Capito replied with great skill and tact, as did Bucer. Bucer urged moving past the same old insults and actually do something. This long bumpy road ended with the Wittenberg Concord. Luther himself made the rounds asking each participants of their agreement. From my point of view, the Concord seemed to be using language that appeased Luther but could be held in good conscience by others who did not share Luther’s opinion. The Zurich theologians, as expected, rejected the Concord.

Bucer as Peacemaker

Bucer would not only seek to reconcile factions within Protestantism, he would also make efforts to reconcile with Catholics. These efforts would culminate with Melanchthon and Bucer meeting with papal delegate Cardinal Contarini in Regensburg. These efforts failed.

Although his efforts frequently led nowhere, Bucer believed that strong convictions about the truth were not irreconcilable with making efforts to lovingly win over your opponents. He would write later, “I do hope, however, that there are many dear children of God on both sides, improperly named after men and thus kept divided. Instead, we should attempt as much as possible to find and use all ways and means in order that all God-fearing persons in all camps become united in Christ, our Lord.”¹⁹

Social Reformer

Bucer believed that the state should be involved in education. It was their duty to provide instruction in the things of God. He saw the establishment of Latin schools and German schools for children, both boys and girls, so that they would know God and benefit society. He also lectured to the Dominicans who still occupied a monastery. Later, a tuition free institution for the training pastors would

¹⁸ Greschat, 100.

¹⁹ Quoted in Greschat, 104.

be opened. All of the educational institutions Bucer had a role in all had the same goal, “learned piety.”

He also spoke out against exploitation of the poor and certain unjust practices of the rich. His tireless labors caused a large group of churchmen to demand from the city council that Bucer be relocated to a home in the center of the city so that he would not have such a long commute to his Bible classes and other duties. Greschat says, “It is not an exaggeration to observe symbolic significance in this move. Bucer was definitely no longer at the margins, but had found his place at the very ecclesiastical and political center of town.”²⁰

Bucer as Exegete and Theologian

Bucer excelled as an exegete. He was an expert both in Greek and Hebrew. He believed that studying the text should be driven by discovering the author’s meaning through grammatical and even historical analysis. So for instance, in Bucer’s OT studies, they were infused with the consultations of Jewish commentators who would often give historical information and background. Bucer was a biblical commentator and a biblical expositor, *par excellence*. He worked on both academic and popular levels in his speaking and writing. Educating people, whether laymen or scholars, in the Word of God was his passion.

Bucer as Pastor and Mentor

Bucer, as noted, loved the church. His vision of the church grew over the years. Whatever the influences, Bucer saw the church as the fellowship of believing Christians, which both individually and corporately was created by the Holy Spirit. He saw the importance of fellowship, instruction and discipline. He also saw the importance of the church being in charge of its own affairs. These convictions were expressed in a book, reprinted recently by the Banner of Truth as *Concerning the True Care of Souls*. Bucer said there were five main duties in caring for souls:

1. Lead the estranged, whether through carnal excess or false worship, to Christ.
2. To restore those who have fallen away through sins of the flesh or doctrine.
3. Assist in the true reformation of Christ’s church.
4. Re-establish the weak in faith, restore to health and strength.
5. To protect the flock of Christ, to encourage perseverance in their Christian walk.²¹

²⁰ Greschat, 81.

²¹ David Wright’s summary, “Historical Introduction” *Concerning the True Care of Souls* (Banner of Truth), xvi.

Although this pastoral care is the responsibility of the shepherds, it is also the responsibility of each in the flock for one another. Although Bucer seemed to gravitate back towards a more sacramental view of the church, he also had this other perspective of the church being true believers who strove in faith and fellowship together. “It goes without saying that the city council did not take kindly to Bucer’s treatise. Hardly a work of the Strasbourg reformed, who by this time had attained great fame far and wide, was ignored more deliberately than this one. His book struck the council at a sore spot, for its own interests lay in preventing the rise of a church that independent from the state and had its own ecclesiastical jurisdiction.”²²

Bucer received a foreign student in 1538 who studied with him for three years. His name was John Calvin. Calvin was already famous. You might remember, Calvin was on his way to Strasbourg when he was shanghaied by Farel in Geneva. Calvin had been ousted from Geneva and finally made it to his destination. He studied under Bucer and led a French refugee congregation. It was heaven for Calvin. But of course, he was beckoned back to Geneva after 3 years. Geschat summarizes their friendship, “The young Calvin found in Bucer a trustworthy counselor and friend who was almost like a father. In the following years, this relationship of mutual trust survived in spite of tensions and many crises. For Calvin certainly did not hesitate to criticize Bucer severely for example, for his willingness to make generous concessions to the Catholics, or for the vagueness of his statements on the Lord’s Supper. But Calvin also could find remarkable words of praise for his senior and mentor.”²³

*Bucer on Justification*²⁴

Bucer dealt with justification in his Romans Commentary (1536) and also in his reconciliation efforts at Regensberg. Some have characterized Bucer’s view as a double-justification. Double justification posits the idea that there are two formal causes in justification, imputed righteousness and inherent or infused righteousness. Bucer has been accused of double-justification, which was an effort to harmonize the imputation of righteousness and the work of the Spirit. It seems that for Bucer justification was both declarative and effective.²⁵ Bucer quotes Melancthon approvingly that “justification is our free acceptable before God, whereby he pardons our sins, imputes righteousness to us, and bestows on us eternal life; this life is begun here and now and daily increased in us by the Spirit,

²² Geschat, 150.

²³ Geschat, 148.

²⁴ Since Bucer’s work on Romans is not yet available in English, I am relying on secondary sources, especially Lugioyo and Leithart.

²⁵ Lugioyo,

who is the implanter and cultivator of righteousness and good works.” Bucer also sees in the declarative act something in addition to a simple forensic declaration, but rather also a declaration of belonging to God’s family. Thus, the declaration is also effective because of the presence of the Spirit. The primary evidence of the Spirit in the believer’s life is neighbor love. For Bucer, faith and works are like fire and heat, they are inseparable.

It appears that Bucer taught two phases of justification, the first is based solely on God’s grace and goodness; the second is based on God’s enabling grace to do good works. Since faith is the instrument of justification, and faith and works are inseparable, Bucer believed he could hold to *Sola Fide* and good works.

I am not qualified to assess Bucer’s view due to the lack of access to the primary sources. However, Bucer did seem insistent that of the following:

1. Right standing with God was on the basis of God’s grace alone.
2. There is a declarative sense to justification, which includes the forgiveness of sins, the imputation of divine righteousness, and acceptance into God’s family.
3. This declaration sense is also transformative. The faith which receives it is an active faith which works through love. The actual declaration itself transforms the believer and the presence of the Spirit causes the believer to love God and neighbor.
4. This transformative result of the declaration fits into justification somehow. Lugioyo seems to emphatically deny that Bucer saw it as an additional secondary cause. If Bucer simply means that works verify the reality of saving faith at the judgment, then that is within the bounds of Reformed orthodoxy. However, it seems to me that whatever he meant, his language was so overly nuanced for the sake of gaining acceptance that it creates more problems than it solves.

Addendum, in further research and in being able to read a translation of the 5th article at the Diet of Regensburg, which deals with justification, it is noteworthy that Calvin although believing Bucer and Gropper yielded much, they “retained the substance of the true doctrine.” On the other hand, both Luther and the Pope rejected the article.²⁶

Bucer’s last years

Bucer’s last years were spent in great frustration. Travelling the awful roads of Europe to this conference or that colloquy or to meet with princes. He was

²⁶ Scott M. Manetsch, “Is the Reformation Over? John Calvin, Roman Catholicism, and Contemporary Ecumenical Conversations,” *Themelios*, Vol 36, Issue 2, August 2011, 185-202.

laboring for the church and the empire, laboring for unity. We must remember that political unity at this time was a matter of survival for Europe as the Ottoman Turks continually threatened. It not only was a time of loneliness and frustration, but he was often maligned and slandered by his own Protestant brethren. A plague would take his wife, five of his children and his long-time friend Wolfgang Capito. The Schmalkaldic war would force him to leave his beloved Strasbourg. The Schmalkald League was a religious and political alliance of Protestant Princes within the Holy Roman Empire. In 1546-47 Charles V and his allies fought against the princes.

As war approached Strasbourg, Bucer called on the church to repent and trust in God's Word. The council needed to repent for entertaining reCatholicizing. This sounded like fanaticism to the council, who was already upset with Bucer. Bucer, who had always been very politically minded, now sounded like Jeremiah the Prophet. Bucer was dismissed from his pastorate and once again became a refugee. Bucer went to England, although he did have invitations from both Wittenberg and Geneva.

When Bucer arrived in England, he was welcomed by Thomas Cranmer, Peter Martry Vermigli and other reformers. He was quickly introduced to the Protestant boy King, Edward VI. Although he became a lecturer at Cambridge, his final days were still filled with controversy. He helped Cranmer revise the Book of Common Prayer. He wrote *De Regno Christi*, focusing on the role of civil powers and the duties of the church. The binding principle of both was love for one's fellow man.

"Bucer would never feel at home in England."²⁷ He would complain to friends back on the continent of the food, the language, the weather, the customs, the housing and whatever else there was to English life. In a letter to Calvin, he said, "I am spending my old age in exile, far away from native country, banished from my church I loved so dearly, my school and my city – where I was able to accomplish a few things by God's grace – separated from my beloved friends and brethren: all of this in order to live now in a country that may be kind and gracious to me, but whose language I do not know, whose food I cannot get used to, whose way of life is unfamiliar – and, finally a country in which I see no clear perspective of achieving something for the Lord through my efforts."²⁸

Bucer died Feb 28, 1551 at the age of 59. One year later, after England had been reCatholicized by Queen Mary, she had Bucer tried as a heretic. His casket was disinterred, chained to a stake at the Cambridge marketplace and burned with

²⁷ Geschat, 245.

²⁸ Geschat, 245-246.

his books. Four years later, Protestant Queen Elizabeth I had a brass plaque placed on the floor of the church where Bucer was originally buried.

Reformer in Between

“Bucer occupied a space ‘in between.’ He lived between Wittenberg and Zurich, and near France and on the edge of Germany. He was neither Lutheran nor Reformed. He saw himself as a follower of Luther and a mentor to Calvin. He was a humanist and theologian, pastor and diplomat, author and disputer. He mediated between Protestants, Anabaptists, and Catholics. He was a reformer in between.”²⁹

As one writer put it, “No matter how principled or consistent he remained in efforts for reconciliation and dialogue, Bucer was caught between two popes – one in Rome another in Wittenberg.”

Lessons to Learn from Bucer

1. Bucer never separated the work of the Spirit and ethics from the Gospel.
2. Bucer longed for unity and peace among Christians. Although at times he was imprudent with his words or pen, he truly tried to live as a peacemaker. Even when Luther, who had been so brutal and unjust with him so many times, died in 1548, Bucer would write, 207-208
3. Bucer worked hard on his friendships. He had close friends and kept many of them through the years. He was willing to pour himself into the lives of others.
4. He was a tireless laborer for Christ’s Kingdom.
5. At times he allowed his desire for unity to override his better judgment.

Reading Bucer

Concerning the True Care of Souls (Banner of Truth, 2009).

Instruction in Christian Love (Wipf and Stock, 2008).

Melanchthon and Bucer (Library of Christian Classics, 1969). This contains Bucer’s *De Regno Christi*.

A Review of the Book of Common Prayer, Drawn Up at the Request of Archbishop Cranmer (Oct. 2015).

²⁹ Brian Lugoio, *Martin Bucer’s Doctrine of Justification: Reformation Theology and Early Theology and Early Modern Irenicism* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 8.

Reading About Bucer

Martin Greschat, *Martin Bucer, A Reformer and His Times* (WKJ, Eng translation, 2004; original German, 1990).

David Lawrance, *Martin Bucer: Unsung Hero of the Reformation* (Westview Publishing, 2007).

Brian Lugioyo, *Martin Bucer's Doctrine of Justification: Reformation Theology and Early Theology and Early Modern Irenicism* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

Articles:

Peter J. Leithart, "Double Justification?" in First Things,
<http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/leithart/2013/12/double-justification>

Martin Bucer, <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/martin-bucer>