

MARTIN BUCER - THE GERMAN WHO GAVE ENGLAND ITS LITURGY

Bonn is the former residence of the Archbishop of Cologne. His huge castle nowadays is used by one of the major universities of Germany and as virtually the whole university is located in the inner city, students and professors make the image of the city more than the German government (til the year 2000) and the offices of the United Nations. The Bonn office of Martin Bucer Seminary near the Cathedral where Bucer preached is located in the inner city of Bonn.

Martin Bucer, Reformed Reformer of Straßbourg, lived, preached and wrote in Bonn for one year to prepare the reformation of the state of Cologne on behalf of the Archbishop until the Archbishop was dismissed. Later his proposed church order and liturgy for Cologne was used by Archbishop Cranmer in the Reformation of England. At the end of his life Bucer fled to England, taught at Cambridge, helped Cranmer to revise the Book of Common Prayer and wrote his major treaties 'De regno Christi' (1550), an ethics demanding the Church to transform every part of society under Christ's rule. Martin Bucer is the only Reformer of the 16th century who had a great impact on all three branches of the Protestant Church, Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican. His theology is a combination of Reformed and Anglican elements as well as of French, German and English influences.

Martin Bucer (1491-1551) was born of humble parentage in Sélestat and was schooled as a Dominican in humanism and Scholasticism. He became first a follower of Erasmus of Rotterdam and than, after moving to Heidelberg, one of the earliest followers of Luther through Luther's disputation in 1518. He was released from his order in 1521 and in 1522 was one of the first of the Reformers to marry. Excommunicated in 1523 he fled to Strasbourg to become the leader of the Reformation there for two decades.

He organised churches, church discipline, the training of pastors, the liturgy (printing a prayer book and the psalms), schools and many more things. As the magistrate restricted the scope of his plans, the fullest realization of his programme are to be found in Hessen (Lutheran), Geneva and in Scotland (both Reformed). No Reformer was more on the road to organise the Reformation at other places and wrote more books and pamphlets for other Reformers. Bucer would help Lutherans, Reformed and even Catholics.

Thus the Archbishop of Cologne Hermann von Wied, one of the seven men to elect the Caesar and the most important Catholic Bishop beside the Pope, called Bucer to Bonn (near Cologne) in 1542/1543 to preach in Bonn Cathedral weekly and prepare and organise the Reformation of Cologne and its provinces. Bucer, sometimes helped by Philipp Melanchthon, produced everything: a small Systematic Theology, a book of church order, a book of church discipline, a book of common prayer, a book reintroducing the ordination rites and offices of the Ancient Church and more. But he had to flee, when Bavarian and Imperial troops captured the Archbishop. Nevertheless the work of Bucer was not in vain, as Archbishop Cranmer used this material to plan the Reformation in England and everybody reading the programme for the Reformation in Cologne will easily realize that he is reading the programme for the Reformation in England! As Bucer wanted to reemphasize the practise of the Ancient Church he kept the old church orders and liturgies and only deleted those superstitions that were added in the centuries prior the 16th century. He did not want to throw out every tradition but only those traditions which were not rooted in the Bibel and the Ancient Church. This was the goal Cranmer had as well. As Cranmer did not want his church to split into several Protestant camps, Bucer's approach to cooperate with all Reformers, to learn from everybody and to find as much common ground as possible with other Christians, was just what Cranmer needed.

But Bucer influenced other branches of the Reformation as well. John Calvin sat at Bucer's feet for three years during his exile from Geneva, notably in his theological views of the Church, the Eucharist and the ecumenical idea to bring the different wings of reformation together. Bucer was a profuse biblical commentator and his way of doing

exegesis verse by verse - the beginning of modern exegesis - became a source for Calvin's lecturers and commentaries on the whole Bible (with the exception of Revelation).

Martin Bucer was Reformed, even though he never understood himself to be Reformed in the narrow sense of later Reformed confessionalist, but more in the broad sense of the English Church. Bucer was the leader of those Reformed cities and states that wanted to live in harmony with Lutherans and even Anabaptists as far as possible.

Bucer is best known as a Christian diplomate trying to achieve the unity of the Protestant or even all Christians. He played a major role in virtually every meeting of Lutherans with Reformed, initiating the discussion of Luther and Zwingli in Marburg (1529). In the late 1530s and early 1540s he was the leading Protestant negotiator for agreement with the Catholic Church in Germany, especially in the conferences of Leipzig (1539), Hagenau and Worms (1540), and Regensburg (1541).

Thus no reformer had more connections to the Reformation in all European countries and to all branches of Christianity. Bucer had the whole Christian world, yea, even the whole world in view and never was satisfied to have problems solved for himself, if others still needed help.

Because he did not agree with the Imperial settlement of 1548 he had to flee to England, where he immediately became regius professor at Cambridge till the end of his life in 1551. The University of Cambridge conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Theology. It is amazing how much he influenced the English Reformation during those three years.

He mediated in the vestment controversy, helped to introduce confirmation (his own idea to replace Catholic communion originally realised in Hessen), recommended the tutor to Princess Elisabeth, corresponded with the major leaders in Church and State on necessary reforms, left his impress on John Bradford, Matthew Parker and later John Whitgift. But his major contributions were two books.

One is his major treatise 'De regno Christi' (The Kingdom of Christ) (1550), written for Edward VI, an ethics demanding the Church to transform every part of society under Christ's rule. This blueprint of a Christian society for a long time influenced English politics.

The second is his 'Censura' (1549), a detailed comment on the draft for the Second Book of Common Prayer. When Bucer arrived in England, Cranmer was still working on the First Book of Common Prayer. This actually was to a great extent a translation of Bucer's liturgy for Cologne and of Bucer's 'De Ordinatione Legitima'. Thus the German Reformer gave England its Liturgy! The Book of Common Prayer thus is not only a revision of the liturgy of the Ancient English Church, but includes many elements of the tradition of the Ancient Church in Continental Europe transmitted by Bucer, who, by the way, was a great patristic scholar.

Many of the changes in the draft for a revision of the Second Book of Prayer, which soon became necessary, were a result of Bucer's long discussions with Archbishop Cranmer, even though we never will know the details of this process. The 'Censura' furthermore heavily influenced the Book of Common Prayer, but again we lack the documentation to prove in detail, where Cranmer followed Bucer. Nevertheless it is no exaggeration to say, that the Book of Common Prayer is mainly a result of Cranmer's discussions with his close friend Martin Bucer.

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