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Summary Article: **Bucer, Martin (1491-1551)**

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Martin Bucer (German, Butzer; Latin, Martinus Bucerus), German Protestant Reformer of Strasbourg, was the most important German-speaking Reformer of the first generation after Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon. Well known for trying to reunite a Christianity that was breaking apart, he was also the author of many books on dogmatics, ethics, counseling, and church organization, and of bible commentaries. Originally a Dominican, Bucer was won for the Reformation when as a student he heard Luther speak at the Heidelberg Disputation in 1518. For decades he was the leader of the Reformation in Strasbourg at the French border and the spokesman for the Reformation in the whole of southern Germany.

Bucer wrote 96 books, among them the first written pastoral theology. He laid the foundation for a new Protestant view of marriage and divorce, wrote well-known commentaries on Romans (the first verse-by-verse commentary) and Psalms (1529; from the Hebrew text), and owned the largest private library of his time. His major works are a theological defense of the Strasbourg Reformation, *Grund und Ursach* (1524), and *De Regno Christi*. No Reformer traveled more to organize the Reformation in other places or wrote more books and pamphlets for other Reformers. In southern Germany he organized the Reformation in several major cities. In Cologne and Bonn, for nearly two years he tried to introduce a smooth Reformation on behalf of the Archbishop of Cologne, which failed when the Bavarians captured Bonn.

Throughout his life Bucer organized religious talks (*Religionsgespräche*) between different wings of Protestantism as well as between Catholics and Protestants, the most famous being the Colloquy between Luther and Zwingli in Marburg in 1529, which failed, like most of his efforts to unite different Protestant groups and Catholic and Protestant churches. In 1548 an agreement of both confessions was near, and the emperor summoned him to Augsburg to sign the Augsburg Interim, which had been built on Bucer's ideas. After changes of the text opened him up to persecution in Germany, he stoutly opposed the project and accepted Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's invitation to make his home in England, where he came a professor at Cambridge and where he died. In 1557 the Catholic Queen Mary's commissioners exhumed and burned his body and demolished his tomb. The grave was later restored at the order of Queen Elizabeth I and Bucer's remains moved to Westminster Abbey.

Clearly Bucer has to be seen as a gentle Reformed theologian, but in terms of his confession he cannot be classified with the other Reformers. Today he is seen as a forerunner of ecumenism and a pioneer of the idea of a European culture (the European Union declared him a European father and dedicated a stamp to him). Martin Bucer was the only Reformer of the 16th century who had a great impact on all branches of the Protestant Church, Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, and even to a certain extent the Anabaptists. He was highly respected among Reformed, Lutheran, and Anglican theologians, his theology being a combination of Reformed and Anglican elements as well as of French, German, and English influences.

Calvin stayed with Bucer in Strasbourg for three years when he was expelled from Geneva, and it was then that he learned from Bucer his teaching on predestination, the Eucharist, presbyters, and lay leaders, as well as the ecumenical idea to bring together the different wings of the Reformation. Bucer

was a profuse biblical commentator and his practice of exegesis verse by verse — which marked the beginning of modern exegesis — was an inspiration for Calvin's lectures and commentaries on the whole Bible.

Bucer introduced into Hesse in 1539 the rite of confirmation to replace the Catholic first communion for teenaged children, to help the Anabaptists remain in the state church, which was formative for Lutheranism. Later Pietism propagated his idea in Strasbourg of Bible study house groups.

In his desire to emphasize the practice of the ancient church Bucer retained the old church orders and liturgies and removed only the superstitions that had been added in more recent centuries. He wrote a detailed program for reorganizing the archdiocese of Cologne, which was never put into practice, but he took the concept to England, where his student and friend the English Reformer Thomas Cranmer drew a lot from his texts and ideas. At Cambridge he wrote his major treatise *De Regno Christi* (1550) for the English king Edward VI, which required the church to reform every part of society so as to bring it under Christ's rule. It was to be his testament.

Bucer's collected writings are published in three series: the *Opera Latina*, edited by François Wendel et al. (1955-); the *Deutsche Schriften*, edited by Robert Stupperich et al. (1960-); and the correspondence, edited by Jean Rott et al. (1979-). However, there is no modern edition of many of his biblical commentaries. A volume known as the *Tomus Anglicanus* (Basle, 1577) contains his works written in England.

SEE ALSO: Calvin; John; Cranmer, Thomas; Ecumenism; Luther, Martin; Reformed Churches; Vermigli, Peter Martyr; Worship; Zwingli, Ulrich

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