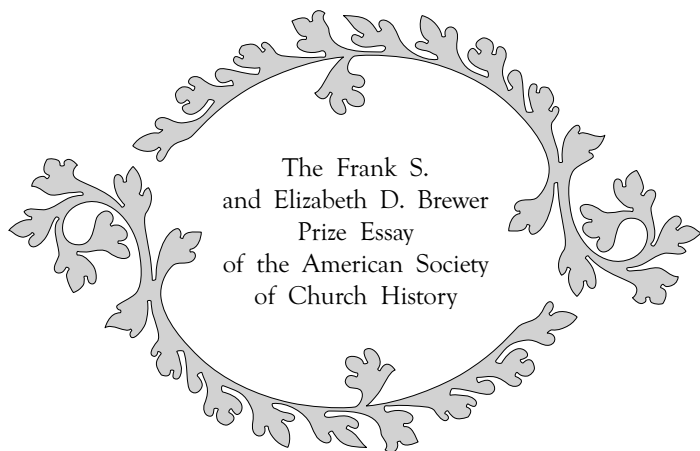


*The Yoke of Christ:
Martin Bucer and Christian Discipline*



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Amy Nelson Burnett
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Abbreviations



- ARC *Acta Reformationis Catholicae ecclesiam Germaniae concernentia Saeculi XVI. Die Reformverhandlungen des deutschen Episkopats von 1520 bis 1570.* Ed. Georg Pfeilschifter. 6 vols. Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1959–1974.
- ARG *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte.*
- AST Archives du Chapitre de Saint-Thomas, in the Archives Municipales of Strasbourg.
- BCor *Correspondance de Martin Bucer.* Martini Buceri Opera Omnia, Series III. Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979–.
- BDS *Martin Bucers Deutsche Schriften.* Martini Buceri Opera Omnia, Series I. Ed. Robert Stupperich. Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1960–.
- BOL *Martini Buceri Opera Latina.* Martini Buceri Opera Omnia, Series II. Paris/Gütersloh, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1955–.
- BSLK *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirchen.* 9th ed. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982.
- CO *Iohannis Calvinii opera quae supersunt omnia.* Ed. W. Baum, E. Cunitz and R. Reuss. Corpus Reformatorum 29–87. Braunschweig: Schwetschke, 1863–1900.
- CR *Philippi Melancthonis opera quae supersunt omnia.* Ed. Karl Bretschneider and H. Bindseil. Corpus Reformatorum 1–28. Halle/Braunschweig: 1834–1860.
- DTC *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique.* Ed. A. Vacant, E. Mangenot and E. Amann. 15 vols. in 30. Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1915–1950.
- Friedberg Friedberg, Emil, ed. *Corpus Iuris Canonici.* 2 vols. 2ded. Leipzig: Tauschnitz, 1879–1881.
- Herminjard Herminjard, Aimé-Louis, ed. *Correspondance des réformateurs dans les pays de langue française recueillie et publiée avec d'autres lettres relatives à la Réforme et des notes historiques et biographiques.* Geneva: H. Georg, 1865–1897; repr. Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1965.
- LB *Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami Opera Omnia.* 10 vols. Ed. Joannes Clericus, Leiden, 1703; repr. London: Gregg, 1962.

- Lenz Lenz, Max, ed. *Briefwechsel Landgraf Philipp's des Grossmüthigen von Hessen mit Bucer*. 3 vols. Publikationen aus den königlichen preussischen Staatsarchiven, 5, 28, 47. Leipzig: G. Hirzel, 1880–1891.
- MGEDE *Fragments des anciennes chroniques d'Alsace*. Mittheilungen der Gesellschaft für Erhaltung der geschichtlichen Denkmäler im Elsass, II. Reihe 13–15, 17–19, 22–23. Strasbourg: R. Schultz, 1888–1911.
- MPG Migne, J. P., ed. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Graeca*. Paris, 1857–1936.
- MPL Migne, J. P., ed. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Latina*. Paris, 1844–1864.
- PC *Politische Correspondenz der Stadt Straßburg im Zeitalter der Reformation*. 5 vols. in 6. Urkunden und Akten der Stadt Straßburg, Abth. 2. Strasbourg/Heidelberg: Trübner/Carl Winter, 1882–1933.
- Psalms Bucer, Martin. *Sacrorum Psalmorum libri quinque*. . . . Strasbourg: Georgius Vlricherus Andlanus, 1532. Stupperich #25b.
- QGTS 2 *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz*. Vol. 2: Ostschweiz. Ed. Heinold Fast. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1973.
- RP *Ratsprotokolle*. Minutes of the Rat und XXI in the Archives Municipales of Strasbourg.
- SA Bucer, Martin. *Scripta Anglicana fere omnia . . . collecta*. . . . Basel: Petrus Perna, 1577. Stupperich #115.
- Schieß Schieß, Traugott, ed. *Briefwechsel der Brüder Ambrosius und Thomas Blaurer 1509–1567*. 3 vols. Freiburg i. Br.: Fehsenfeld, 1908–1912.
- Sentences Petrus Lombardus. *Sententiae in IV Libris Distinctae*. 2 vols. 3d ed. Spicilegium Bonaventurianum 4–5. Grottaferrata (Rome): Collegium S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aguas, 1971–1981.
- Stupperich Stupperich, Robert, ed. *Bibliographia Bucerana*. Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 169 (58/2). Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1952.
- Sum. Theol. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. Cura et studio Instituti studiorum medievalium Ottaviensis, ad textum S. Pii pp. V iussu confectum recognita. Ottawa: Studium generalis O.P., 1941.
- TAE Krebs, Manfred, Hans Georg Rott, et al., ed. *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer. Elsass I.–IV. Teil. Stadt Straßburg*. 4 vols. Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte 26–27, 53–54. Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1959–1988.
- TB *Thesaurus Epistolicus Reformatorum Alsaticorum*. Copied by Johann Wilhelm Baum, et al. Manuscripts in the Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire de Strasbourg.
- TRE *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*. Ed. Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Müller. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1977–.

- WA *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe.* Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883–1983.
- WABr *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Briefwechsel.* Weimar: Herman Böhlau, 1930–1983.
- Z *Huldreich Zwinglis sämtliche Werke.* Ed. E. Egli et al. Corpus Reformatorum 88–. Berlin/Leipzig/Zürich, 1905–.
- 1527 Gospels Bucer, Martin. *Enarrationum in evangelia Mattaei, Marci, & Lucae, libri duo.* . . . 2 vols. Strasbourg: Johannes Herwagen, 1527. Stupperich #14.
- 1530 Gospels ———. *Enarrationes perpetuae in sacra quatuor evangelia, recognitae nuper & locis compluribus auctae.* . . . Strasbourg: Georgivs Vlrichers Andlanvs, 1530. Stupperich #28.
- 1536 Gospels ———. *In sacra quatuor evangelia, Enarrationes perpetuae, secundum recognitae, in quibus praeterea habes syncerioris Theologiae locos communes.* . . . Basel: Ioannes Hervagivs, 1536. Stupperich #28a.

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Matthew 18:15-20

¹⁵Moreover, if thy brother shall trespasse against thee, goe and tell him his fault betweene thee and him alone: if he shall heare thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

¹⁶But if he will not heare thee, then take with thee one or two or more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, euery word may be established.

¹⁷And if hee shall neglect to heare them, tell it vnto the Church: But if he neglect to heare the Church, let him be vnto thee as a heathen man, and a Publicane.

¹⁸Verily I say vnto you, Whatsoeuer ye shall bind on earth, shall bee bound in heauen: and whatsoeuer yee shall loose on earth, shall bee loosed in heauen.

¹⁹Againe I say vnto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall aske, it shall bee done for them of my father which is in heauen.

²⁰For where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them.

Introduction



Near the end of his life, the exiled reformer Martin Bucer expressed his fervent prayer that the Strasbourg church “would willingly accept [the Lord’s] most easy yoke, i.e. his discipline, without which the church will certainly not be able to last.” The “discipline of Christ,” he continued, consisted in this,

that all the members of Christ recognize and embrace each other most intimately and lovingly, and that they build one another up in the knowledge of and obedience to the son of God most zealously and efficaciously, and that the ministers of the churches know, care for and tend the individual sheep of Christ, as the chief pastor Christ set the example. . . . In countless places in Scripture, the Lord described and set forth for us this [discipline] which we also have proclaimed so clearly for so many years in life and writings and sermons.¹

Bucer had indeed devoted much of his life, writings, and sermons to establishing a system of discipline in Strasbourg and elsewhere which he believed would conform to the teaching of Scripture. The system of Christian discipline which he advocated was much broader than simply the punishment of sinners.² As his words imply, discipline was the means by which the entire life of each and every Christian was shaped and guided. It included not only excommunication but contained other elements, such as catechetical instruction and confirmation, which together formed an integrated system for religious instruction, moral oversight, and pastoral care. The goal of this system was the internalization of religious values and moral norms which would ultimately lead to a new, Christian society whose members lived in accordance with evangelical teachings.

Bucer’s understanding of Christian discipline, like other aspects of his theology, evolved over the course of his career. It grew out of certain fundamental theological convictions expressed in his earliest writings, but it was also shaped by his long experience as pastor, teacher, and church organizer. From childhood he was exposed to two powerful intellectual currents, humanism and the teachings of Thomas

¹CO 13:237–238 (no. 1177, April 26, 1549).

²For this reason I use the phrase “Christian discipline” to describe Bucer’s system and limit “church discipline” to the measures applied by the church specifically for the correction of sinners.

Aquinas, which would shape his later thought.³ Born in 1491, Bucer probably attended the famous Latin school in his home city of Schlettstadt (Sélestat) in Alsace before entering the Dominican order at the age of fifteen.⁴ As a Dominican friar he was thoroughly grounded in Thomist theology, but he retained his early humanist interests and was an avid admirer of Erasmus. A list of books in his possession in 1518 includes most of the works of the Dutch humanist along with Thomas' *Summa Theologiae*, his commentary on the *Sentences*, and several of his commentaries on Aristotle.⁵

Bucer's encounter with Martin Luther started the young Dominican down a new path. In April 1518, Bucer attended Luther's disputation at the University of Heidelberg; he enthusiastically described both the disputation and his subsequent meeting with Luther in a letter to Beatus Rhenanus written a few days later.⁶ Bucer's staunch support for Luther made his position within the Dominican order untenable, and in the spring of 1521 he obtained papal dispensation from his religious vows. He served briefly as chaplain to the Count-Palatine Friedrich, then became a parish pastor in territory under the jurisdiction of Franz von Sickingen. During this time he testified to his evangelical convictions by marrying Elisabeth Silbereisen, a former nun. In early 1523 Bucer took the post of evangelical preacher in the small city of Wissembourg and remained there until May, when he was forced to flee after von Sickingen's defeat and death. He took refuge in Strasbourg, where his father was a citizen.

In the months following his arrival in Strasbourg, Bucer published his first works—a summary of what he had preached at Wissembourg, a self-defense in response to charges brought against him by the bishop of Strasbourg, and a pamphlet entitled, *That No One Should Live for Himself but for Others, and How We May Attain This*. The pamphlet reflected not only Bucer's commitment to the evangelical message of justification by faith alone, but also his deep concern for the responsibility of

³Martin Greschat, "Der Ansatz der Theologie Martin Bucers," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 103 (1978):82–96; Friedhelm Krüger, *Bucer und Erasmus. Eine Untersuchung zum Einfluss des Erasmus auf die Theologie Martin Bucers (bis zum Evangelien-Kommentar von 1530)*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für europäische Geschichte Mainz 57 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1970), 38–51; Lambert Leijssen, "Martin Bucer und Thomas von Aquin," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 55 (1979):266–296.

⁴Martin Greschat, *Martin Bucer, Ein Reformator und seine Zeit* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1990), discusses Bucer's background and his early years, 13–32; this biography is the most detailed presentation of Bucer's life. Hastings Eells, *Martin Bucer* (New Haven: Yale, 1931), the only biography of Bucer in English, contains many errors of detail.

⁵BCor 1:42–58 (April 30, 1518; no. 2); cf. Martin Greschat, "Martin Bucers Bücherverzeichnis von 1518," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 57 (1975):178–185; idem, "Martin Bucer als Dominikanermönch," in *Bucer und seine Zeit: Forschungsbeiträge und Bibliographie*, ed. Marijn de Kroon and Friedhelm Krüger, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für europäische Geschichte Mainz 80 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1976), 30–53.

⁶BCor 1:58–72 (May 1, 1518; no. 3); cf. Martin Greschat, "Die Anfänge der reformatorischen Theologie Martin Bucers," in *Reformation und Humanismus, Robert Stupperich zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Martin Greschat and J. F. G. Goeters (Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1969), 124–140; Ernst-Wilhelm Kohls, "Martin Bucer als Anhänger Luthers," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 33 (1977):210–218.

each Christian for others. “God has created all things according to his will,” the treatise began, and “because he has created us and all creatures so that his goodness becomes known, . . . we, his creatures, should be of service to him in the administration of his goodness. That is, each created being is to serve all others for good with all that God has made and given it.”⁷ The original harmony of the created order was broken by sin, but through faith in Christ it could be restored. As a consequence of this restoration, “we serve and accede to God gladly in all acts of love towards our neighbors, which he has demanded above all from his people. Because we are ourselves saved as children and heirs of God, it is certain that we will suffer no lack here and in the future life; we also have this requirement to serve our brothers in all true and unadulterated love from faith.”⁸ Bucer’s emphasis on love for one’s neighbor and the responsibility of each Christian to serve others remained a hallmark of his theology, and it played a central role in his understanding of Christian discipline.⁹

Bucer quickly became involved in the turmoil of events which led to Strasbourg’s acceptance of the Reformation. In the spring of 1524, the parishioners of St. Aurelien chose him as their pastor in a landmark case which resulted in the city council’s assuming control of pastoral appointments in the city. Over the next several years Bucer became the unofficial leader of the Strasbourg church. During the early years of the Reformation, he directed his energies against the remnants of Catholic worship in Strasbourg. Although the city was essentially Protestant by 1525, the mass continued to be read in the collegiate churches until, after years of petitioning by the pastors, the magistrate finally abolished it in 1529. In the meantime a new threat had arisen in the form of various Anabaptist and sectarian groups which had spread to the city. Bucer attacked the positions held by these radicals both in popular pamphlets and in the biblical commentaries he published during the later 1520s. Gradually he became convinced that the city’s church needed an officially recognized creed and a fixed institutional structure in order to withstand the challenges posed by the radicals. Accordingly, he helped direct the Strasbourg synod of 1533, which resulted in the city’s first ecclesiastical ordinance.

Bucer’s importance for the Strasbourg church was reflected by the positions he held within it. In 1531 he was appointed pastor of St. Thomas, a large and important parish church in the center of Strasbourg, whose college of canons was the only one in the city to accept the Reformation. Ten years later he was elected to the chapter of St. Thomas, and in 1544 he was chosen as its dean. That same year his place as leader of the Strasbourg church was officially recognized when he was named president of the *Kirchenkonvent*, the body of pastors and assistants which met biweekly to discuss the needs of the church.

⁷BDS 1:45.13, 29–46.4; cf. Greschat’s description of the work, *Martin Bucer*, 68–70.

⁸BDS 1:63.1–10.

⁹Marijn de Kroon has described *pietas*, defined as faith in Christ and love for neighbor, as a “key concept” for Bucer’s theology, *Martin Bucer und Johannes Calvin, Reformatorische Perspektiven, Einleitung und Texte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 125–141; cf. Karl Koch, *Studium Pietatis: Martin Bucer als Ethiker*, Beiträge zur Geschichte und Lehre der Reformierten Kirche 14 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1962), 43–50; 99–106.

Outside of Strasbourg Bucer became known for his role in the eucharistic controversy which dominated the 1520s. Although his earliest works reveal his debt to Luther, the outbreak of the controversy made Bucer aware of his affinities with Ulrich Zwingli through the common bond of Erasmian humanism. In works published during the 1520s Bucer upheld the Swiss interpretation of the sacrament against the Lutherans. Nevertheless he was convinced that agreement on the issue of the Lord's Supper was possible. In 1529 he attended the meeting at Marburg between Luther and Zwingli, and after obtaining Luther's grudging consent at the time of the Diet of Augsburg, he devoted himself to bringing about a reconciliation of the two parties. His efforts finally achieved partial success in the signing of the Wittenberg Concord in 1536.

Bucer's theology was thus elaborated in response to Catholic, Anabaptist, and Lutheran positions, and his interaction with these different groups led to a significant evolution of his own views. This evolution is best demonstrated by his changing conception of the relationship between internal and external.¹⁰ In his earliest writings Bucer stressed the internal working of the Holy Spirit on the individual believer and criticized external rituals and practices as useless or even harmful because they promoted reliance on one's works. He also emphasized the spiritual and invisible nature of the church as opposed to the institutional and visible structure defended by Catholic theologians. The dichotomy of internal/spiritual and external/institutional affected other areas of Bucer's theology as well, including his understanding of the sacraments. However, the extreme spiritualism of many of the Anabaptists he encountered during the later 1520s caused Bucer to rethink his position and to place more emphasis on the link between external sign and internal significance. His growing rapprochement with the Lutherans on the issue of the Lord's Supper during the early 1530s both made possible and was a result of his increased appreciation of the concept of sacramentality. The greater importance which Bucer was willing to grant to external actions had implications for his system of Christian discipline.

By the mid-1530s Bucer was one of the most prominent Protestant churchmen in Germany. The Strasbourg magistrate relied on his theological expertise at meetings of the Schmalkaldic League and at several imperial diets, while Landgraf Philip of Hesse came to regard him as one of his most trusted advisors. During the 1540s Bucer worked actively to reunite the German church, representing the Protestant side at the religious colloquies held between 1539 and 1541. His support for concord led to an invitation from the Archbishop of Cologne, Hermann von Wied, to participate in the reformation of the territories under his secular jurisdiction. Despite the eventual failure of the Cologne reformation, Bucer continued to advocate the reform

¹⁰The importance to Bucer of his pairing of internal and external, especially in his early years, is discussed in most studies of his theology; see especially Johannes Müller, *Martin Bucers Hermeneutik, Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte* 32 (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1965), 169–178; René Bornert, *La réforme protestante du culte à Strasbourg au XVI^e siècle (1523–1598): Approche sociologique et interprétation théologique*, *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought* 28 (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 306–322.

and reconciliation of the entire German church, publishing pamphlets and participating in colloquies until the outbreak of the Schmalkaldic War in 1546. With the defeat of the Protestants and the imposition of the Augsburg Interim, Bucer was forced to leave Strasbourg. He went to England at the invitation of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer and was appointed Regius Professor of theology at Cambridge. The constant theme of his preaching and teaching there was the need for discipline.

A topic so central to Bucer's theology as discipline has frequently been discussed in more general studies of the reformer's life and thought. At the turn of this century August Lang drew attention to the evolution of Bucer's theology, including his understanding of the church's ministry and the power of the keys as reflected in the three editions of his commentary on the Gospels.¹¹ Some three decades later Jaques Courvoisier published his study on the development of Bucer's ecclesiology which highlighted the important place Bucer gave to church discipline in his mature theology.¹² Most recently, Willem van't Spijker has discussed the power of the keys and church discipline as important elements in Bucer's understanding of church office.¹³ Because these works have examined Bucer's views on discipline in the context of a larger topic, whether his theology as a whole, his ecclesiology, or his view of the ministry, they have not been able to give the reformer's understanding of discipline as much attention as it clearly deserves.

Erich Roth, in *Die Privatbeichte und die Schlüsselgewalt in der Theologie der Reformatoren*,¹⁴ has considered one element of Bucer's system of Christian discipline more directly. Roth's book focuses primarily on Luther and includes shorter sections on the Swiss reformers Zwingli, Oecolampadius, and Bullinger, and on Bucer and Calvin. His analysis of Bucer's understanding of confession and the power of the keys, based on two works from the later 1530s,¹⁵ presents only a partial picture of the Strasbourg reformer's views. Roth does not discuss how Bucer's ideas developed before 1536, nor does he show how they continued to evolve during the 1540s. This is a significant shortcoming, given the extent to which Bucer's views on Christian discipline changed over time. Moreover, Roth's analysis of Bucer is severely hampered by his use of Luther's theology as the standard against which all else is measured. Bucer and Calvin are depicted as taking the "middle ground" between Saxony and Switzerland, but Bucer receives a fair amount of criticism for not having attained the enlightenment of Luther with regard to the power of the keys and private absolution.

¹¹August Lang, *Der Evangelienkommentar Martin Butzers und die Grundzüge seiner Theologie*, Studien zur Geschichte der Theologie und der Kirche II/2 (Leipzig, 1900; repr. Aalen: Scientia, 1972), 181–187; 298–316.

¹²Jaques Courvoisier, *La Notion d'Église chez Bucer dans son développement historique*, Études d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses publiées par la faculté de théologie protestante de l'université de Strasbourg 28 (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1933), 22–40.

¹³*De Ambten bij Martin Bucer*, 2d ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1987), passim.

¹⁴Eric Roth, *Die Privatbeichte und die Schlüsselgewalt*. . . (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1952.)

¹⁵Roth uses extracts from the third edition of Bucer's Gospels commentary published in 1536 and from the 1538 treatise *Von der waren Seelsorge* contained in a nineteenth-century collection of *loci communi* drawn from the writings of the reformers.

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