

Martin Bucer's Eucharistic Development

By Brian H. Nicholson

With John Calvin and Peter Martyr Vermigli, Martin Bucer helped to shape the distinctive Reformed understanding of the Lord's Supper over against the Lutheran and Zwinglian eucharistic theologies. Much of Bucer's reforming career was focused on articulating a eucharistic position that possessed exegetical sophistication, historical insight, ecumenical perspective, and doctrinal balance.

EARLY EUCHARISTIC VIEWS

Bucer was sent by his superiors in the Dominican Order to Heidelberg in 1517 to study for his doctorate.¹ In the spring of 1518, Martin Luther came to Heidelberg for a disputation within the Augustinian Order. Out of curiosity, Bucer attended this disputation and he developed a favorable impression of Luther and had personal conversations with him. Won to the Reformation cause, Bucer began to defend Luther's ideas within the Dominican Order. By 1521, he had left the Dominicans and had become parish priest in the village of Landstuhl where he married a former nun, Elizabeth Silbereisen.²

In 1522, he left Landstuhl and settled at Wissenburg, in Alsace. He became the preacher there, but was opposed by the local Franciscan friars. The political disruption caused by the reform movement in Alsace caused Bucer to relocate to Strasbourg as a refugee in 1523. There, he allied himself with the reforming preachers—Matthaus Zell, Caspar Hedio, and Wolfgang Capito—who had begun to preach “the pure Word of God.” By the spring of 1524, the evangelical preaching of these men had persuaded the populace to petition the *Rat*³ to provide evangelical preachers in five parishes of the city.⁴ Bucer was subsequently appointed to the church of St. Aurelia and remained there for the next twenty years.

In 1523, Bucer was teaching a very simple concept of the real presence of Christ in the Supper. He wrote to the people of Wissenburg, “I have said to you several

times of the mass; that it . . . is nothing else then the reception of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . it is clear that we receive his body and blood as did also his disciples.”⁵ Bucer's views at this stage paralleled those of Luther, who had both attacked the theory of transubstantiation in his *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), and yet maintained the real presence of Christ in the Supper. Luther did not set forth the theory of ubiquity until after 1526, when Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, together with the Zurich and Basel reformers, criticized his real presence view. Luther's view prior to the controversy was quite simple and appears to have been accepted readily by Bucer.

In the summer of 1524, Bucer published *De coena dominica*. This was a pamphlet defending Luther's view of the Supper against Thomas Murner, a Franciscan

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1. The baseline eucharistic theology to which Bucer would have held in the years before he met Luther was that of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274 A.D.), a theologian of the Dominican Order who in his *Summa Theologica* (III.73–83) developed the eucharistic realism of 1) Ambrose of Milan (337–397 A.D.) in his *De sacramentis* and in *De mysteriis*, 2) Paschasius Radbertus of Corbie (785–865 A.D.) in his *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini*, and 3) The Fourth Lateran Council (1215 A.D.) which in Canon One reads in part, “His body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine, the bread and wine having been changed in substance, by God's power, into his body and blood . . .”.

2. Hastings Eells, *Martin Bucer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931), 11–12.

3. *Rat*—the city council, derived from the word *Magistrate*.

4. Miriam Usher Chrisman, *Strasbourg and the Reform: A Study in the Process of Change* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1967), 138.

5. Martin Bucer, *Martin Butzers an ein Christlich Rath . . .* (1523), cited by Hastings Eells, “The Genesis of Martin Bucer's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper,” *Princeton Theological Review* 24 (1926): 226.

satirist, who opposed the reforming movement.⁶ Hazlett summarizes, "... until October 1524, Bucer's theology of the Mass and the Lord's Supper is to all intents and purposes conditioned by the earlier writings of Luther on the subject."⁷

THE LETTER OF CORNELIUS HOEN AND THE
ABENDMAHLSSTREIT⁸

Bucer underwent a profound change of mind when tracts written by Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt reached Strasbourg and when Karlstadt himself visited there the last week of October 1524. The next month saw the arrival of Hinne Rode, a Dutchman who carried a letter entitled *Epistola Christiana tractans Coenam Dominicam* from Cornelius Hoen, a Hague lawyer, to various cities in Germany and Switzerland. Hoen had studied the works of Wessel Gansfort and had derived from them a new understanding of the Lord's Supper. His basic insight was that in the words of institution—"This is my body"—the verb "is" conveys the meaning "symbolizes" or "represents."⁹ Gansfort himself had actually held to transubstantiation. Thus, Hoen's doctrine was constructed from selected insights gleaned from Gansfort and not from Gansfort's entire eucharistic theology.

Rode visited Basel and Zurich with the Hoen letter in 1523. Consequently, by the summer of 1524, both

Oecolampadius and Zwingli became proponents of eucharistic symbolism. In November 1524, Zwingli wrote two important letters expressing his new understanding—one to Matthew Alber and one to the city of Strasbourg.¹⁰ The combined witness of the Karlstadt tracts, Rode's visit, and the two Zwingli letters were decisive for Bucer. He took up the symbolic interpretation of the eucharist and defended it with even more zeal than he had Luther's views. The first expression of his new understanding of the Supper can be seen in *Grund und Ursach*, written in the final two months of 1524.¹¹ It explained and defended the changes in worship that had occurred in the city of Strasbourg.

Luther's reaction to the new views of Bucer, Zwingli, and Oecolampadius was shaped by his vehement reaction against Karlstadt. He labeled them all *Schwärmer*, a derogatory term, which he applied broadly to Anabaptists and to the Swiss sacramentarians.¹² Luther's treatise, *The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ—Against the Fanatics*, appeared in that same year (1526). In it, Luther maintained a restrained tone with respect to his opponents. However, he said of them,

"The pope took away from us one element of the sacrament. These people, however, leave us both elements; but they make a hole in the nut, in order that we may lose the body and blood of Christ."¹³

He asserted his doctrine was the only way to understand the Lord's words and insisted of his opponents, "... they cast to the winds the words: 'Eat, this is my body which is given for you.' The words mean nothing to them; they rumble by over their heads."¹⁴

At Bucer's urging, a treatise was published in 1527 by Zwingli, entitled *Amica exegesis, id est expositio eucharistae negotii ad Martinum Lutherum*.¹⁵ Zwingli elaborated on the trope concept in the words of institution, and insisted that a human body always requires a place; therefore, this precluded the omnipresence of Christ's body.¹⁶ The treatise was filled with invective and, together with his bitter letter to Luther of April 1, 1527, a dramatic change took place in Luther's tone toward Zwingli. Luther was convinced that Zwingli was a fanatic, a disturber of Christ's Church, and demonic. Luther answered within a month with *That These Words of Christ, "This is My Body" etc. Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics*. The next year (1528) he continued his attack with *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*. In this work, he exhorted his readers,

Whoever will take a warning, let him beware of Zwingli

6. Ian Hazlett, "The Development of Martin Bucer's Thinking on the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in its Historical and Theological Context, 1523–1534" (Dissertation, Münster, 1975), 40.

7. Hazlett, Development, 67.

8. *Abendmahlsstreit* means Supper strife.

9. The text of Hoen's letter can be found in Heiko Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation*, 268–78; also: Bart J. Spruyt, *Cornelius Henrici Hoen (Honijs) and his Epistle on the Eucharist (1525)* (Brill, 2006).

10. W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 37.

11. Martin Bucer, *Grund und Ursach 1524*; English translation in Ottomar Frederick Cypris, *Martin Bucer's Grund und Ursach: a commentary and translation* (Yulee, FL: Good Samaritan Books), 2017.

12. *Schwärmer* means "Gusher" Another derogatory term also used during the Supper Strife was *Suwermerian*.

13. Martin Luther, "The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ—Against the Fanatics," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) 326. Hereafter cited as Luther, *Sacrament*.

14. Luther, *Sacrament*, 327. In 1525 Oecolampadius published his *De genuina verborum Dei, 'Hoc est corpus meum' iuxta verustissimus autores expositione liber*.

15. Huldrych Zwingli, *Friendly Exegesis, that is Exposition of the Matter of the Eucharist to Martin Luther* (February 1527). In *Selected Writings of Huldrych Zwingli, Volume Two: In Search of True Religion: Reformation, Pastoral and Eucharistic Writings*. Translated by H. Wayne Pipkin, (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1984), 233–306.

16. Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career 1521–1530* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 530.

and shun his books as the prince of hell's poison. For the man is completely perverted and has entirely lost Christ.... The insane spirit has dreamed this up in order to rob us of Christ for he does not prove it to you nor can he do so.¹⁷

Luther then presented the Christological basis for his own sacramental convictions. First, he stated that the right hand of God is everywhere. Hence, Christ's body is everywhere.¹⁸ With this assertion, Luther attempted to refute the figure of speech, which the Swiss set forth as the explanation of the words of institution.¹⁹ He saw this as the crux of their argument: "Their teaching cannot be established until they have made this clear and certain, for on this their teaching rests."²⁰ Luther was certain that the Scriptures teach that the whole Christ, as a unified person, suffered on the cross: "Dear brother, instead of *alleosis* you should teach: because Jesus Christ is true God and man in one person, in no passage of Scripture is one nature taken for the other."²¹ Luke 24:26 is the text he employed, "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory?" He insisted that the Swiss must rely upon *alleosis* to explain this text and substitute for the word "Christ" the words "the human nature of Christ."

Luther was certain that the concept of *alleosis*,²² when applied to Christ's natures arises from reason and not from faith:

Now if the old witch, Lady Reason, *alleosis*' grandmother, should say that the deity surely cannot suffer and die, then you must answer and say: That is true, but since the divinity and humanity are one person in Christ, the Scriptures ascribe to the divinity, because of this personal union, all that happens to humanity and vice versa.²³

Luther was not a Eutychian, for he affirmed the distinctness of the two natures in Christ. However, Luther's doctrine did lean toward the unitive side in the spectrum of Christologies, with Nestorianism on one end and Eutychianism on the other.²⁴ He held that the divinity suffered "in the humanity of Christ." In this, Luther approached very close to the fence of the Chalcedonian formula, "unmingled, immutable, indivisible, inseparable."²⁵ While not "mingling" the two natures of Christ, Luther taught that the properties of the two natures were communicated, one to the other.²⁶

Further, Luther maintained that the suffering of the divine nature in Christ was an essential component of His passion, to make atonement for men:

Beware, beware I say of this alleosis, for it is the devil's mask since it will finally construct a kind of Christ after whom I would not want to be a Christian, that is, a Christ who is and does no more in his passion and his life than any other ordinary saint. For if I believe only the human nature suffered for me, then Christ would be a poor Savior for me, in fact he himself would need a Savior. In short, it is indescribable what the devil attempts with this alleosis!²⁷

If it should no longer be said: God died for us, but, instead, only a man, then we are lost.²⁸

This unitive Christology enabled Luther to attribute omnipresence to Christ's human nature, *i.e.* His body. He understood the Swiss as finding the glory of God in His transcendence. On the other hand, Luther found the glory of God in His condescension. He explained,

The glory of our God is precisely that for our sakes he comes down to the very depths, into human flesh, into the bread, into our mouth, our heart, our body; moreover, for our sakes he allows himself to be treated ingloriously both on the cross and on the altar.²⁹

17. Martin Luther, "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper." In Timothy F. Lull editor, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 375. Hereafter Luther, *Confession*.

18. Luther, *Confession* 376.

19. The Swiss insisted that the word *est* in the words of institution *Hoc est corpus meum* did not mean to indicate equivalence or identity but rather representation—"This represents my body."

20. Luther, *Confession*, 377.

21. *Ibid.*, p.378.

22. The term *alleosis* expresses the idea that although only one of Christ's natures has in fact performed an act, one may say that the whole person of Christ has performed that act. When we say, "Christ suffered for us," we mean his human nature suffered.

23. Luther, *Confession*, 379.

24. Nestorius and Antiochene Christology separated the natures in Christ over against Eutychus, the Cappadocians and the Alexandrian tradition that united them. See Justo Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought, Vol. I* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971).

25. Gonzalez, 272.

26. Later Lutheran and Reformed dogmatics will describe this with the term *communicatio idiomatum*. See Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids; Baker Book House, 1985), 72-74.

27. Luther, *Confession*, 378-379.

28. Martin Luther, cited by G. C. Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), 277. Berkouwer does not provide a proper citation for Luther's statement.

29. Martin Luther, WA 23, 155, 157; LW 37, 71ff., cited by Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1966), 398.

Although the *Abendmahlsstreit* was primarily carried on between Luther and the Swiss theologians, Martin Bucer participated as well. He published his *Apologia Martini Buceri* on March 8, 1526. This work earned Bucer the lasting hatred of the strict Lutherans Johannes Brenz and Johannes Bugenhagen, who denounced Bucer's sacramental theology.³⁰ In *Apologia*, Bucer made some strategic errors in dealing with these men and their writings, thereby incurring their hostility.

Bucer also made a serious blunder when he translated Luther's sermons on the Gospels and Pauline Epistles. In the preface, and other notes within the fourth volume, he apologized for Luther's "pugnacious bitterness." He pointed out Luther's errors on the sacrament and added an explanation of what he regarded as "the truth" about the doctrine. Bucer then added a "Letter to the Christian Reader" at the beginning of First Corinthians, chapter nine. After praising Luther as an exegete, he advised the readers to read Oecolampadius' *Apology* as the best discussion of the sacrament.³¹ Luther reacted,

... he has contaminated the gift of fecundity and intelligence, yea, lost it in that pestilent poison of the monstrous blasphemy of the sacramentarian spirit ... he could not restrain himself from boasting and propagating his own interpretation, and in an incredible madness of a covetous spirit—first in a virulent and sacrilegious preface, then in noxious notes he crucified my work.³²

However, a fundamental shift was about to take place that would move Bucer away from Zwinglianism. Bucer attentively read Luther's *Vom Abendmahl Christi, Bekenntnis* (1528) and found in it a concept that would alter his eucharistic theology. This was the concept of sacramental union (*unio sacramentalis*). Luther distinguished three modes of presence: 1) circumscriptive (an object

exists in a space of the same dimensions; e.g., water filling a cask), 2) definitive (an object is in a place in an uncircumscribed manner; e.g., angels and demons occupying a house or a person), and 3) repletive (an object is present in all places whole and entire; e.g., God who fills all space).³³ Whereas Zwingli insisted that Christ's human nature was only capable of circumscriptive location, Luther maintained that the power of God enabled the body of Christ to be localized in the definitive mode as well. He referred to Christ's passage through the door of the upper room as an example of non-circumscriptive or definitive location.³⁴ For Luther, Christ's body accompanied the elements of bread and wine by virtue of a sacramental union.

Bucer saw in the *Bekenntnis* that Luther was not insisting on a physical or material presence of Christ. Bucer still objected to Luther's ideas of an invisible corporal presence and of the *manducatio impiorum* (unbelievers receive the body of Christ in the sacrament).³⁵ However, he saw potential in Luther's distinction and began to draw on it in other aspects of his theology. For instance, Bucer began to emphasize that there is a twofold eating that takes place in the sacrament: the mouth feeds on bread and the mouth of faith feeds on Christ. This parallelism or dualism became characteristic of Bucer's approach to the sacrament.

THE MARBURG COLLOQUY—OCTOBER 1–4, 1529
Philip, the Landgrave of Hesse, together with the Elector of Saxony, Duke George, had entered into a secret defensive agreement against the Emperor, along with the cities of Nurnberg, Strasbourg, and St. Gall. These cities had sided with Zurich in the interpretation of the sacrament of the Supper. Philip's motivation stemmed from the mounting pressure of Emperor Charles V and the papacy against the Lutheran and Reformed movements. Philip also hoped to attract both Catholic France and Venice into an alliance against the Hapsburgs. Luther, however, was strongly opposed to the entire project and supported the rights of the Emperor. The alliance depended to a large degree on theological unity between the Lutheran and Swiss reformers. Therefore, Philip attempted to forge an agreement among the Swiss and Wittenberg reformers by bringing them together at Marburg October 1–4, 1529.³⁶ At the end of this discussion and debate, Luther insisted that the corporeal presence of Christ in the Supper was an essential doctrine and that the Swiss, who denied this point, were not Christian brothers. Luther's resistance toward conciliation at the guaranteed the failure of the anticipated Protestant alliance.

30. Eells, *Bucer*, 76.

31. Eells, *Bucer*, 80.

32. E. L. Enders, *Dr. Martin Luther's Briefwechsel V.* (Kalw. and Stuttgart, 1884), 384, cited by Eells, *Bucer*, 81.

33. Luther, *Confession*, 384–85.

34. Luther, *Confession*, 389.

35. Ian Hazlett, "Eucharistic Communion: Impulses and Directions in Martin Bucer's Thought," in *Martin Bucer: Reforming Church and Community*, ed. D. F. Wright (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 73.

36. For accounts of the Marburg Colloquy and the events leading up to it, see: G. R. Potter, *Zwingli* (Cambridge: University Press, 1976), 316–342; Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career 1521–1530* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 501–552; Joseph McLelland, "Lutheran-Reformed Debate on the Eucharist and Christology," in *Marburg Revisited: A Reexamination of Lutheran and Reformed Traditions*, ed. Paul C. Empie and James I. McCord (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966); and Herman Sasse, *This is My Body* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1959).

Philip requested that a common confession be drawn up. Luther complied with a document of fifteen articles. The Swiss could agree to fourteen of these articles and to much of the fifteenth on the subject of the Supper.³⁷ Both parties signed the confession, but because of Luther's hostility, the spirit of the Colloquy was not cordial and the event did not produce the desired unity among the reformers. In fact, Luther was adamantly opposed to either recognition of or tolerance for the Swiss theologians. He despised almost everything about them—their republican politics, their Rhenish cosmopolitan culture, and their rude dialect. Furthermore, his opinion of Zwingli's education, his secular priestly status, and his eucharistic theology kept Luther from even extending brotherly recognition to the Swiss reformer. To his credit, Zwingli did not reciprocate toward the Wittenberg reformer, and even pleaded with him in tears to preserve unity within the movement: "There are no people on earth with whom I would rather be at one than the Wittenburgers." It was not to be; Luther would not budge. He replied, "You have another spirit than ours."³⁸ Later, his invective was even more extreme against Zwingli. He labeled him "an enemy of the holy sacrament and a full-blown heathen"³⁹ and explained, "For myself, I believe and maintain that Zwingli and all his teaching is unchristian because he holds and teaches nothing right which Christians believe."⁴⁰

Luther lumped Martin Bucer, Johannes Oecolampadius, Ulrich Zwingli, and Konrad Kurzer (Pellikan), in the same category as Karlstadt, who he regarded as a fanatical enthusiast possessing little understanding of Scripture and no appreciation for the miraculous element of the Eucharist. Luther contemptuously called them all "sacramentarians."⁴¹ The Colloquy did not move Luther one inch toward the Reformed view of the sacrament, nor did it forge mutual sympathy between the Wittenberg and Zurich-Strasbourg-Basel reformers.

The Colloquy of Marburg is generally portrayed as a failure in unifying the Protestant movement; a permanent divide that solidified the rift between Wittenberg and Zurich. If the focus is exclusively on the relationship between Luther and Zwingli, or on the failure of ecclesiastical and political union between the Swiss and the Wittenbergers, that conclusion is valid. The two men made firm their positions and dashed Philip's goal of a unified Protestant front against the Catholics. However, Marburg must also be seen as a step toward the Wittenberg Concord of 1536. Bucer listened to both sides of the argumentation at Marburg and saw merit in elements of both Luther's and Zwingli's exegesis. Further, Melancthon developed a deep respect for

Oecolampadius' scholarship such that, in 1530, when the Basel reformer published a response to Melancthon's patristic exegesis, it was received with respect by Melancthon. Consequently, Marburg's effect upon both Bucer and Melancthon led to the development of a distinctive Reformed type of eucharistic theology that differed from the Zurich theology of Zwingli. If evaluated as a step in the development of doctrine, Marburg was a crucial development for it set to work the minds of two creative theologians on the eucharistic problem.

Evidence of Bucer's more developed eucharistic position can be seen in two symbols which he composed in the next half decade – the *Confessio Tetrapolitana* of 1530,⁴² and the *Cassel Declaration* of 1535.⁴³

BUCER'S CONFESSION ON THE EUCHARIST IN APHORISMS (1550)

In 1550, near the end of his life, Bucer wrote another short eucharistic work which reflects his mature thought. This was his *Confession on the Eucharist in Aphorisms*. Bucer's brief sojourn in England began with his arrival on April 23, 1549 and ended with his death on March 1, 1551.⁴⁴ He had been invited to England by Thomas Cranmer and the young King Edward VI and been appointed as Regius Professor of Divinity at

37. The relevant section of the fifteenth article is contained in Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church: The German Reformation*, Vol. VII (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 646.

38. H. G. Hailie, *Luther: An Experiment in Biography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1980), 125. Hailie relies on Walter Koehler, *Das Marburger Religionsgesprach* 152. (SVR 48, 1929).

39. "... nicht allein ein Feind des heiligen Sacraments, sondern wird auch gantz und gar zum Heide," WA 54:143, cited by Paul E. Rorem, *Calvin and Bullinger on the Lord's Supper* (Nottingham: Grove Books Limited, 1989), 18.

40. "Ich bekenne fur mich, das ich den Zwingle fur einen unchristen halte mit aller seine lere, denn er helt und leret stuck des Christlichen galubens recht," WA 26:342 (translated by BHN), cited by G. R. Potter, *Zwingli* (Cambridge: University Press, 1976), 340, n.4.

41. McLelland, "Lutheran-Reformed Debate," 41.

42. Chapter 18 of the *Confessio Tetrapolitana* (uniting Strasbourg, Konstanz, Memmingen, and Lindau) reads in part, "In this ordinance Christ offers His true body and blood as spiritual food and drink, whereby souls are nourished to everlasting life, so that now he may live and abide in them and they in Him." Alexander Barclay, *The Protestant Doctrine of the Lord's Supper: A Study in the Eucharistic Teaching of Luther, Zwingli and Calvin* (Glasgow: Jackson, Wylie & Co., 1927), 99. Hereafter cited as Barclay, *Protestant Doctrine*.

43. The *Declaration of Cassel* describes the bread and wine of the sacrament as, "Exhibitive signs involving by sacramental union, the simultaneous presence of Christ's body and blood." Barclay, *Protestant Doctrine*, 107.

44. For a complete account of Bucer's activities in England, see: Constantin Hopf, *Martin Bucer and the English Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1946). For a briefer account, see: Basil Hall, "Martin Bucer

Cambridge University. There, he corresponded with John Calvin and expressed both his approval and alarm at the signing of the *Consensus Tigurinus* (May 1549), a compromise document on the eucharist developed by Bullinger and Calvin.⁴⁵

Cranmer and King Edward had also invited John à Lasco to England to establish a church in London as a model of advanced, continental Reformed practices, but à Lasco was a vehement Zwinglian. He, together with a group of young English reformers, was concerned that Bucer might begin a eucharistic war in England among those who were committed to Reformation principles and who were trying to influence the Archbishop.⁴⁶ Bucer, sure that a compromise could be reached, proposed that he and à Lasco meet to discuss their views. The meeting took place in September 1550. However, à Lasco's intense Zwinglian views precluded agreement. This meeting led to Bucer's writing his *Confession on the Eucharist in Aphorisms*.⁴⁷

The *Confession* has a very narrow focus—a defense of the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament. It is a series of fifty-four short, numbered paragraphs in which Bucer set forth his position and defends it. The thesis to be proved is stated in aphorism #5, “[Christ] affirms that three things are here imparted and received: the symbols of bread and wine, the body and blood of the Lord and the confirmation of the new covenant and of the remission of sins.”⁴⁸

The Supper consists of more than just the symbols of bread and wine as held by à Lasco and the Zwinglians. in England,” in *Martin Bucer: Reforming Church and Community*, ed. D. F. Wright (Cambridge: University Press, 2002), 144–60. Hereafter cited as Hall, “Bucer in England.”

45. Bucer was alarmed that the *Consensus* did not go far enough in addressing the weaknesses of the Zurich position. Martin Bucer, Letter to Calvin, August 1549, cited by Hall, “Bucer in England,” 152.

46. Basil Hall, “Bucer in England,” 152.

47. A later, uncompleted work was his *Treatise on the Sacraments: Martin Bucer's ... Reply to Dr. J. à Lasco, by way of an enlargement upon his Aphorisms on the sacrament of the eucharist*. This was first published by J. V. Pollet, *Martin Bucer: Etudes sur la Correspondance*, Vol. 1 (Paris, 1958), 285–96. In this work Bucer sought to answer à Lasco's objections to the real presence.

48. Martin Bucer, “Confession of Faith in Aphorisms,” in *The Common Places of Martin Bucer*, ed. D. F. Wright (Appleford: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972), 388. Hereafter cited as Bucer, *Confession*.

49. Bucer, *Confession*, Aphorism #54, 398.

50. Bucer, *Confession* Aphorisms #24 and #31, 391–92.

51. Bucer, *Confession* Aphorism #6, 388.

52. Stephens observes this same accent in Bucer's *Schweinfurt Confession*. W. P. Stephens, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Martin Bucer* (Cambridge University Press, 1970), 252.

53. Bucer, *Confession* Aphorisms #1, 3, 9, 14, 19, 25, 28, and 37.

54. Bucer, *Confession*, Aphorism # 14, 390.

55. Bucer, *Confession*, Aphorism #7, 388–389.

Christ imparts and the believer receives His body and blood. In aphorisms 6–51, Bucer defended this doctrine. In aphorisms 52–54, Bucer restated his thesis and maintained that he has proved that in the Supper, “the Lord's body and blood are given rather than just signified, and that the bread is here a presenting sign of his body and not simply a sign.”⁴⁹

Apparent throughout this work is Bucer's understanding that the Supper is not a work that man performs. Rather, it is the giving of a gift by God to man.⁵⁰ There is, therefore, a giving and a receiving of the benefits of the Supper. This Godward focus pervaded Bucer's doctrine of the Supper: “... by these signs he was imparting to them his body sacrificed for us and his blood shed for us.”⁵¹ W. P. Stephens has observed this accent in Bucer's eucharistic theology and comments: “the action of the sacrament is essentially God's action through his Holy Spirit, rather than man's action in believing and remembering.”⁵² This perspective is crucial in comparing Bucer's thought to that of the Zwinglians, where the emphasis falls on man's action in remembering. Bucer's initial presupposition then sets the stage for his conclusion – in the sacrament, something is given to believers.

Bucer was conscious of our human limitations in understanding how Christ can be present. He employs the term “mystery” several times to express this.⁵³ For instance, he stated,

But we must on the other hand take care not to lessen the force and majesty of the mysteries of Christ, which have been set before us by the Holy Spirit to be believed rather than investigated—by our own reasoning.⁵⁴

Divine mysteries are therefore to be affirmed and believed and are not subject to full scrutiny or to explanation by man's reasoning.

A distinctive feature of Bucer's eucharistic theology is his understanding of union with Christ. This is the means by which the Christian enjoys the presence of Christ. The eucharist is a

... *koinonia* of the body and blood of Christ whereby all we who partake of the one bread and the one cup of the Lord, though many, are one bread and one body—the body that is whose head is Christ and into which we are baptized. For by regeneration we are made members of his body, flesh of his flesh, bone of his bones, and one flesh with him.⁵⁵

The denotation of the word “this” in Christ's words,

"This is my body," was understood by Bucer as a term, like others, that presents "insensible realities by means of sensible signs." The meaning would then be, "This that I give you by this sign is my body which is delivered up for you." Bucer compared this sign language to the way in which we handle images. For instance, we may hold up a picture of the emperor and say, "Look, this is the emperor who conquered France," when, in fact, we actually mean that the emperor is represented by the image. When this sign language is applied to the words of institution, "Take, this is my body ... my blood," Bucer stressed the parallel between Christ's words, "This cup is the new covenant ..." and the words spoken by God to Abraham, "This (i.e., circumcision) is the covenant." He also employed the statement about Christ—"The Word was made flesh." Bucer reasoned that these statements teach neither "the cup was transformed into the new covenant (*testamentum*)" nor "circumcision into the covenant (*foedus*)" nor "the divine Word into flesh." Accordingly, one may not infer that Christ's words, "Take, this is my body," necessitate the transformation of the bread into the body of Christ. The papists, therefore, have no warrant to press the words of institution to teach transubstantiation.⁵⁶

Bucer denied that Christ is received "really and substantially." He also denied the converse—that Christ is received "imaginarily and accidentally" (*ficta et accidentaliter*).⁵⁷ Bucer rejected the use of all these words as descriptive of the mode of reception. He did concede that the words "really and substantially" may be used if it is understood that the mode of reception is only by faith. This is a crucial distinction in that Bucer precluded a presence of Christ as a substance in the external order in any way tied to the bread and wine. However, by faith one may receive Christ "in reality and in his substance."⁵⁸ Hence, for Bucer, there was contact with the substantial body and blood of Christ by faith. The words "carnally" and "naturally" were rejected because "they imply reception by the senses."⁵⁹

Bucer's emphasis on faith as the mode of reception of the substantial body and blood of Christ is what sets his theology apart from that of Lasco and Bullinger. For these later Zwinglians, the Supper was indeed a means of grace. Furthermore, they were willing to say that the Christian truly feeds upon Christ in the Supper. However, for them, the setting of the sacramental action was in the mind of the believer. The sacrament is a human effort and work. In contrast, for Bucer, the sacrament involved a divine action bringing the presence of Christ in his complete human nature to the believer. The signs of bread and wine signified a

true reception of Christ by faith not an empty sign to be pondered.

The natures of Christ are distinct and not blended or commingled. Christ's human nature cannot be physically joined with the bread and wine because, "the Lord has left this world."⁶⁰ Bucer explained that the natures of Christ are distinct but they must not be divided: "... we must mentally observe and verbally express the distinctive properties of the natures in such a way that the hypostatic union is not divided in our thoughts."⁶¹ The human nature of Christ resulted when "the Word became flesh." Christ was "truly earthly man and died and rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven." He is now "heavenly, sitting at the Father's right hand and governing and filling all things and will return on the clouds visible to the whole globe, and will judge the living and the dead ..." Therefore, the heavenly location of Christ requires that he "be apprehended by us by faith alone."⁶²

Regarding eating by the ungodly, Bucer's doctrine necessarily infers that unbelievers cannot partake of Christ's presence because they do not possess faith. He expressed this clearly: "In my judgment those who are completely ungodly receive nothing of Christ from the holy Supper."⁶³ When the unbeliever consumes the signs "without living faith in Christ, so far from receiving any of the nourishment the Lord here bestows on his own, [he] takes hold instead of death and damnation for himself."⁶⁴

How is the glorified and ascended body of Christ in heaven joined with "perishable bread confined to earth and to a discernible location?" Bucer answered that this is a covenantal conjunction. The same relationship is observed in baptism between water and regeneration. It is also seen in the relation between the Holy Spirit and Christ's breath. Those who physically partake of the signs therefore "with true and living faith truly receive in a spiritual manner the strengthening and increase of communion in the body and blood of the Lord."

Bucer regarded the Supper as a means of grace, which has the effect of strengthening Christians. When they partake with faith, because of their union with Him, they become "more perfectly his members."⁶⁵ Bucer

56. Bucer, *Confession*, Aphorism #51, 397.

57. Bucer, *Confession*, Aphorism #38, 394.

58. Bucer, *Confession*, Aphorism #39, 394.

59. Bucer, *Confession*, Aphorism #40, 394.

60. Bucer, *Confession*, Aphorism #39, 394.

61. Bucer, *Confession*, Aphorism #17, 390.

62. Bucer, *Confession*, Aphorism #15, 390.

63. Bucer, *Confession*, Aphorism #49, 396.

64. Bucer, *Confession*, Aphorism #48, 396.

65. Bucer, *Confession*, Aphorism #47, 396.

did not explore this strengthening any more than to declare that it does take place and that it is the intended result of the Supper.

The Gospel, explained by Luther at the Heidelberg Disputation in 1519, awakened faith in the heart of the young Dominican friar from Alsace. Bucer became an enthusiastic disciple of the Saxon reformer, but as the Reformation matured, the Swiss and Rhineland reformers departed from the eucharistic views of the great reformer of Wittenberg. The conflict engendered by the strong personalities of Karlstadt, Luther, and Zwingli led to a bitter schism. Martin Bucer's ecumenical spirit was the key to his exploring a better and more Scriptural way to explain the eucharist than had been done by either the Zurich or the Wittenberg reformers. His deepest concern was to preserve the unity of Christ's Church.

Along with Hoen, Karlstadt and Zwingli, Bucer

understood that Christ's words of institution had symbolic significance. The elements of the Supper signified the reality of Christ's body and blood. However, for Bucer, the relationship of the believer to the reality of Christ's body and blood was not to be understood as a mental or a psychological operation. The sacrament was a true gift of grace, the Holy Spirit bringing Christ's crucified and risen body and blood into spiritual contact with the believer, enabling him to feed on Christ, and thereby producing deeper faith and gratitude. Bucer's final position on the Lord's Supper thus moved back somewhat toward Luther's position, but without embracing the idea of ubiquity with its Christological distortions. It was this *via media*, first worked out by Bucer and then embraced by his colleagues, John Calvin, and Peter Martyr Vermigli that in the ensuing decades, would become the dominant and central Reformed doctrine of the eucharist. ■



Martin Bucer (age 53), by René Boyvin (1525–1598), from Jean Mary Stone, *Reformation and Renaissance (circa 1377–1610)* (1904), 223.