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# Martin Bucer: a reformer and his times

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students' continued study and vocation. In the interim that positive opinion of Westerholm's work has not changed.

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### **Martin Bucer: A Reformer and his Times**

Martin Greschat

Translated by Stephen E. Buckwalter

Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004 (1990).

Pp. xii + 334, \$42 Paperback

Westminster John Knox Press has performed a commendable service in producing this English translation of Martin Greschat's definitive work on the Strasbourg reformer Martin Bucer *Martin Bucer: Ein Reformator und seine Zeit* which came out fifteen years ago. Although studies of Bucer have fallen habitually into the category of second-level reformers, one notch below such giants as Luther and Calvin, Greschat's work underscores the opinion of numerous academics (self included) who believe that Bucer stands out in the period as another such giant both in his influence at the time and in his vision so often alien to his time. Although the author himself does not take this position in an obvious way he does demonstrate it with a wealth of detail and analysis.

Although I find some significant weaknesses in the book, my opinion of it remains overwhelmingly positive. For me, the major weakness is one I find in all too many books. The author seems relatively unaware of any significant role played by women in the Strasbourg Reformation. Katharina Zell, controversial wife of the city pastor Matthieu Zell, receives a bare mention only three times. Even though Dr. Greschat calls her "the indomitable Katharina Zell (225)," we find virtually no fleshing out whatsoever of her influential correspondence, her courageous support of Reformation pluralism which well surpassed that of Bucer, her writings, and her care for marginalised people including refugees from the Peasants' War. Although the book is a biography of Bucer, most other male reformers mentioned receive more substantial analysis than

Katharina Zell. Yes, the book came out fifteen years ago, yet one finds in his bibliography reference to Bainton's work on Reformation women; as well he lists and even highlights Elsie McKee's definitive work on Zell. Thus, his almost dismissive dealing with Katharina Zell deserves a clear critique. Also there is an ambivalence around using inclusive language, though this may reflect the translator's hand rather than the author's.

Although I consider the above criticisms as serious and an abiding concern in my field, I feel compelled to praise this fine work of Reformation scholarship. It remains faithful to the biographical model without lapsing into the heroic individualism of all too many books of this genre. One finds Bucer grounded seriously in his epoch and *Sittim-Leben* from Bucer's younger days in Sélestat, and we are treated to serious analyses of other major urban centres in their political, economic, social and ecclesiastical realities, especially that of Strasbourg the Reformer's home base. I found especially helpful and creative Greschat's compelling description of the dangers and hardships of travel in these perilous times (pp. 129- 132). His extensive descriptions of Bucer's theology in all its contextual adaptability is never handled independently of its context. Nor are we left to guess about Greschat's admiration for Bucer, both for his time and now; at the same time it is a balanced and thoughtful admiration devoid of hagiography. Though often insensitive to the more popular elements of the Reformation and perhaps too ready to respect the powers that be, Bucer emerges as a man of dialogue and theological collaboration. Perhaps Bucer does not appear as a giant because he embodied such a collaborative approach both at home and in his many journeys, more to his credit that. Strasbourg stands out as the major Reformation city that welcomed collaborative theological efforts from some very high-powered theologians – the Zells, Caspar Hedio, Wolfgang Capito, to name just a few of the Magisterial Reformation crowd. Greschat not only fills a huge gap in Reformation scholarship, but he does it exceedingly well, including a postscript which demonstrates both continuing Bucer scholarship and a crying need for the same. Reformation historians and teachers this book is for you.

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