

MARTIN BUCER.

IN the cathedral hall at Halle on the Saale, which was built in 1912, there is a relief by a local artist showing, along with other figures and symbols of reformed Protestantism, the three reformers Zwingli, Calvin and Martin Bucer of Strassbourg. Even thirty years ago it would have aroused amazed surprise to suggest that the last named should be given a place alongside the two acknowledged leaders of the Swiss Reformation. But recent historical research—I may be allowed to mention here my own book, *Der Evangelienkommentar Martin Butzers und die Grundzüge seiner Theologie*, Leipzig, 1900—has rescued from long oblivion the unique and creative thought of the Strassbourg scholar; and it is now acknowledged that, apart from his lifework, Reformed Protestantism would have lacked its historical character. For Bucer was not only the connecting link between Zwingli and Calvin; he was actually the spiritual father of the Genevan Reformer. In the whole conception of the life of faith, in the treatment of Justification and Sanctification, Predestination and the Doctrine of the Sacraments and of the Church, the religious principles and even the phraseology are identically the same in Bucer and in Calvin. Nay more, the true meaning of certain doctrines of the Genevan theologian (*e.g.* Predestination), and of certain currents in the after development of Reformed Protestantism (*e.g.* the early rise of Pietism) can only be understood through Bucer. The existence of this historical connection has, as might have been expected, found little recognition in France, but in Holland, America and Scotland it has been acknowledged by representative scholars of the most divers schools of thought.

Recent German research has slowly worked out the thesis that Bucer was the forerunner of Calvin. Numerous names might be mentioned, but I shall refer here only to the latest work that sets Bucer's influence in clear light; Wilhelm Pauck, assistant Professor of Church History at the Theological Seminary of Chicago, has written a book entitled, *Das Reich Gottes auf Erden, Utopie und Wirklichkeit. Eine Untersuchung zu Butzers De regno Christi und zur englischen Straatskirche des 16.*

Jahrhunderts.¹ The book shows great care, wide knowledge and keen acumen. It is divided into two parts. One presents the leading ideas of Bucer with regard to the Kingdom of Christ and provides welcome proof of the extent to which the practical proposals of the Reformer were adapted to the actual conditions then prevailing in England. The second part traces the evolution of State and Church and shows how that evolution proceeded in the time of Queen Elizabeth under the guidance of men like Jewel, Whitgift and Hooker. Here Pauck confines his attention almost exclusively to the Anglican Church and practically ignores the contemporary rise of Puritanism. He reaches the conclusion that, while on the whole the Reformer's ideal of a State Church was not realised, the religious spirit of Bucer continued to influence the religious consciousness of the English nation as it gradually expanded into British religious Imperialism. In my opinion this account of the history exhibits two defects. On the one hand, Pauck has not completely grasped the peculiar features of Bucer's position. Further, he is unduly precipitate in his verdict regarding the influence of Bucer's thoughts and aims on the English nation and the part it has played in history. It will not do to ignore Puritanism, which was the most vigorous and powerful form of British religious thought. I should therefore like to set down here some supplementary and critical remarks, so as to show clearly what Bucer had in view and also to emphasise the value for the present day of Bucer's important work on the Kingdom of Christ (*de regno Christi*). That work will, it is hoped, appear shortly in a German translation. It certainly deserves to be studied not only by all who are interested in Church History, but by all who take an interest in the ecclesiastical problems of our own time.

As is well known, Bucer had to leave his native land after the unhappy outcome of the Schmalkald war. At the invitation of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer he found refuge in England, where he became a professor at Cambridge and played a brief but important part as counsellor in connection with the reforming activity of Edward VI. The most valuable service which the German refugee rendered to the country which had so hospitably

¹ Pauck's volume is No. 10 of the series of works on Church History edited by Hirsch and Lietzmann, Berlin and Leipzig, de Gruyter, 1928. A brief review of it by me will appear in the *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*. (The title of the book in English would be: "The Kingdom of God on earth, Utopia and Reality. A study of Bucer's Latin work on the Kingdom of Christ and of the English State Church of the sixteenth century.")

received him was the writing of his book on the Kingship of Christ. Shortly after he had finished it, he died on February 28th, 1551.

Why did he give his book this title? Pauck endeavours to answer this question, but, without sufficient consideration, he obliterates the distinction between the Kingdom of Christ and the Kingdom of God. The very title of the book indicates that he regards Bucer's aims as "utopian" and in his last sentence he finds himself forced to the conclusion that "on earth the Kingdom of God cannot be realised; at least, a conception of the Kingdom of God like that of Bucer is fundamentally utopian, because in his Christian optimism he sets religion a task which other secular powers and functions are better fitted to carry through" (page 205). But Pauck has failed to recognise with sufficient clearness the peculiar idea of the Kingship of Christ. The "Headship of Christ," which Bucer first expounded in his book *Von der wahren Seelsorge und dem rechten Hirtendienst* ("On the true care of souls and true shepherding"), 1538, has nothing whatever to do with "Christian optimism regarding the amelioration of the world." The Headship of Christ has been most purely realised at times when its supporters, oppressed and persecuted, had no influence on the life of the State. The doctrine of the sole Headship of Christ means only that the elect, as members of His body, are led first to faith in Him, to consciousness of their election, to justification and sanctification and are then gathered under their Head into an active and militant fellowship. Bucer himself says, "The King Himself rules His people, feeds and pastures them. He leads the wandering and wayward sheep into His fold. But those who are already in the Church He keeps and leads and guides, in order that by and by they may be gradually purified and delivered from sin and from the misery which sin entails, and led forward to every kind of goodness and salvation" (cf. my work on Bucer, p. 309). Every member of the Body of Christ is meant to contribute his own personal share to the well-being of the whole. Christ works in each elect individual, and each individual, with his special gift, is an instrument of the Holy Spirit. Thus, through Christ's Word and Spirit, there arises the care of souls and the disciplined fellowship in which each member recognises it as his special task not only to see to his own growth in grace, but also to the salvation and edification of his neighbour's soul. The Kingdom of Christ is thus seen

first in the constant call to that evangelistic and missionary activity which, from the Reformer's days down to the present time, has characterised Reformed Protestantism, and which has repeatedly burst forth afresh after times of relaxation and worldliness. But, further, Christ is King not only of the invisible Church, but also of the visible. That implies that every living follower of Christ, especially the office-bearers of the Church—preachers, elders and deacons—must have in view, not only the spiritual salvation of others, but also the welfare of the entire man. In virtue of the love which pervades the Christian community, that community must also have at heart the social condition of their members and be interested in the economic and political aspects of their lives, so that no one may be kept back from Christ by distress, and that every one may “live well and happily (*bene beateque*) here and hereafter.”

If this be in brief the meaning of “the Headship of Christ,” few evangelical Protestant Christians to-day will pronounce it “utopian.” The individualistic basis of Protestant Christianity, the salvation of the individual soul through Christ's Word and Spirit, the union of believers (or of the “converted” or of the “elect”—different words which are nearly synonymous) into living communities (or “fellowships in worship, in pastoral care and loving activity,” as Article 4 of the new constitution of the Protestant Church of Prussia calls them), the missionary duty of each member, the independence of the Church under her divine Head, sympathetic interest in social life, the succour of those in distress, as well as a certain amount of attention to and co-operation in political affairs—all these are things with which we are all familiar and which seem to us to be included in the duty of individual Christians and of Christian communities. And that that is the case we, no less than the Anglo-Saxon Protestants, owe largely to the working out by Bucer of the biblical conception of the “Headship of Christ.”

But at the time of the Reformation this conception was conjoined with another, towards which we of to-day with good reason take up a more critical attitude—I mean, the theocratic conception of the State. Whereas the Headship of Christ was formulated in identical terms by Calvin and Bucer, and was originally peculiar to these two alone, the conception of the Theocracy was accepted by all the Reformers of Switzerland and of Wittenberg and by the founders of the Anglican State Church.

As is well known, that conception was a legacy from the Middle Ages, with the sole difference that the State was degraded to be the servant of the Roman Church ruled by the Vicar of Christ and itself exhibiting the appearance of a secular power. All the world knows how Luther delivered the State from this serfdom. He declared that the State, as well as the Church was an important and valuable divine institution, but the theocratic element was retained in as far as the duty was laid upon the State of guarding by its sanctions the commandments of the first as well as of the second table of the Law. In keeping with this the State was accorded the right of reformation and the supreme control of the Reformed Church. The State Church grew naturally out of the fundamental theocratic conception that was almost universally held at the time. Bucer too followed this theocratic idea that prevailed throughout Reformed Christendom. Without conscious bias he put his book into the hands of the youthful Edward VI to help him in drawing up his plans for the rearrangement of Church and State in England according to the new interpretation of the Word of God. Bucer promised Edward that if England would but seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and obediently follow the laws of divine truth, all other needful things would be added to her in abundance. England, he added, would be feared of all her foes, "because the Lord Himself would be her guide and ruler" (*De regno Christi*, p. 158). With this goal in view Bucer laid down numerous detailed instructions as to how the Reformation should be carried through, how the Gospel should be preached and the Church governed, and how all open opposition to the saving truth of God should be suppressed. But he also took account of the whole life of the nation, and had much to say about marriage, care of the poor, schools, agriculture, commerce, industry, luxury and idleness, public officials, and the administration of law. This shows clearly how acceptance of the "Headship of Christ" means and implies a complete carrying through of the theocratic conception of the State. In exactly the same way Calvin in Geneva not only insisted on complete acceptance of the theocracy, but put it into practice as far as he possibly could. The close affinity between him and Bucer is also shown by the fact that the ideal of Church and State which Bucer sketched for England very closely resembles that aimed at by Calvin in Geneva.

It must be admitted that, with all the blessings it brought to the city itself and to large parts of the Protestant world, the Genevan theocracy had its defects. The theocratic conception of the State proved to be impossible in face of the new mentality that accompanied the Reformation. Only by brute force could it be maintained. Pauck, as we have seen, shows that Bucer's plans, carefully adapted as they were to the actual conditions of the time, remained largely a dead letter. The violent measures of the Tudors, including those of the great virgin queen, were supported by an appeal to the powers which the theocratic conception of the State put into the hands of the government. But if Elizabeth's frequent declaration that her only aim was the honour of God and the maintenance of true religion was not exactly hypocrisy, it was to a large extent outward show. The whole Church policy of Elizabeth was meant to secure the unity of the English people, and this in turn led to the increase of the political power. It was the State that governed the Church; it was not the Church that made its theocratic aims effective. The Anglican Church soon submitted, and its theologians—men like Jewel, Whitgift and Hooker—justified this course in writings of great brilliance.

This account of the history of the time—it is Pauck's version—overlooks two things. First, that Elizabeth's measures undoubtedly served the Kingdom of God, because they enabled her to defeat Spain and the Counter-reformation and thereby saved Protestantism from complete destruction not only in the west, but perhaps also in Germany. But with regard to the inner conditions in England, Pauck has failed to estimate aright the services rendered by the Puritans—the true heirs of Calvin and therefore also of Bucer. Among the Puritans there arose as early as the sixteenth century a small group, the Brownists, persecuted by the State Church, who lost faith in the theocratic conception of the State, or at least they condemned as anti-Christian State influence on religion and on freedom of conscience.¹

As a result, in spite of the relapse caused by the English Revolution and by the foundation of New England in America, there gradually arose a new conception of the State, while on the other hand the "Headship of Christ" continued to be held in

¹ See my essay, *Der Kongregationalistische Kirchenbegriff in Die Frage nach der Kirche*, lectures delivered during the first theological week of the Reform. Bund, Barmen, 1925, pp. 48ff.

undiminished strength by the original congregationalists. Is there not here a suggestion for us to-day with regard to the solution of the burning question of the Kingdom of God on earth? On the one hand, complete recognition of the Headship of Christ, *i.e.* the unconditional carrying out of the will of Christ in the Church, the cleansing of the Church from all that is worldly according to the written Word of Truth, and the permeation with the Gospel Spirit of the entire national life, its business and its politics. But on the other hand, the emancipation of the State; the abandonment of the theocracy and of the opinion that there can ever really be a Christian State; extreme care on the part of the Church lest it share responsibility for wrong measures or laws, or, as is happening nowadays, invoke political means and sanctions to attain its purposes. That is to say, the Headship of Christ without Theocracy. But is this possible? Does it not do injustice to the State? Much might be said on this subject, but limits of space forbid. But if it be true, as Pauck says in his concluding sentence (p. 204), "The Kingdom of God cannot be realised on earth," still the fellowship of believers will use all the gifts and powers that come to them from their Head and labour as if it *were* possible to bring in the Kingdom of God. It was just this "urge" to obey the Gospel, and this appeal for brotherly love, that Bucer had in mind when he spoke of the Headship of Christ and of the *regnum Christi*. He thus disclosed an aspect of Protestant Christianity which must always be kept in view, especially in our own day, when so many people have lost not only the conception of a Christian State, but the Christian view of life.

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