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Martin Bucer's Concerning the True Care of Souls Relevance for Today's Ministry



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Table of Contents

Inhaltsverzeichnis

Contextual Framework	3
Purpose of <i>Von der waren Seelsorge</i>	4
Structure and Content	5
Conclusion.....	13
Bibliography.....	14
Primary Literature.....	14
Secondary Literature	15
Annotation.....	16
The Author.....	18
Study Centers.....	19
Imprint	20

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Contextual Framework

Martin Bucer (1491-1551) born in the city of Schlettstadt (Elsass) was for a long time the most unknown of the German Reformers. Next to Martin Luther (1483-1546) and Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560) is Bucer the only non-Lutheran, but rather reformed sixteenth-century Reformer in the German empire.¹ Bucer's relationship to John Calvin (1509-1564) can be caricatured as older brother or father.² During his exile in Strasbourg (1538-1541) Calvin lived in Bucer's home where they spend a lot of time together. It is here where Calvin became a Calvinist. In Herman Selderhuiss biography of Calvin, he writes: "It was in Strasbourg that Calvin was born", i.e. theologically and as a church leader.³ In 1539 Calvin's second edition of the *Institutio* was revised and published. Thomas Schirrmacher points out the sections on church discipline, marriage (Bucer helped Calvin to get married) among others were revised in Bucer's direction of thinking.⁴ Bucer's influence upon Calvin was enormous and it was in Strasbourg, where their lifelong friendship began. His influence was not lim-

ited to Calvin however, but extended to Anglicans, Reformed Puritans and the rest of the Reformed world as well.⁵

Coming back to the beginning, Bucer became a Dominican monk (1507) and was ordained as a priest in Mainz (1516). In April 1518 Bucer participated in a disputation in Heidelberg, where he met Luther. Luther's victory in the debate impressed Bucer immensely and convinced him of Luther's ideas. Bucer became evangelical and defended his own theological convictions in a disputation in 1519. The Bishop of Speyer excommunicated Bucer in February 1523 and he had to flee to Strasbourg where he became a major figure in the Reformation. In Strasbourg he published his comprehensive doctrine of care of souls and pastoral theology, *Von der waren Seelsorge* (Concerning the True Care of Souls).

Gerhard Gronauer mentions the neglect of considering the pastoral theology and care, particularly regarding the most important writings of the beginning of the Reformation.⁶ Bucer's book on soul care is one of those that received little attention in scholarship,

at least in the English-speaking world. The relevance of Bucer's *Von der waren Seelsorge* (1538) in the ministry today, if any, shall be considered in this paper, placing his book in the context of his time and highlighting his understanding of repentance.

Martin Bucer was all his life a student of Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536) and it should not be ignored how much he learned from him, despite the fact that he followed Luther in his position. Robert Stupperich (1904–2003) links Erasmus booklet *Ecclesiastes sive concionator evanglicus* (1535/36) as foundational to Bucer's *Von der waren Seelsorge* and suggests that it had been vividly in Bucer's memory, if not next to him while writing his own book.⁷ Both Erasmus as well as Luther influenced Bucer theologically. Luther's exposition of Psalm 23 *Der XXIII Psalm/Auff ein abend über Tisch/nach dem Gratias/ausgelegt* (1536) was probably known to Bucer, but certainly the book of Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) *Der hirt* (Shepherd, 1524) confirms Stupperich.⁸ Gerhard Gronauer sees Bucer's book and Zwingli's *Der hirt* as pioneers on soul care and pastoral theology according to evangelical principles.⁹

Purpose of *Von der waren Seelsorge*

After the arrival in Strasbourg in 1523, Bucer published *Das ym selbs niemand, sondern anderen leben soll* (No one shall live for himself, but rather for others,

1523). Bucer's interest in ministering to one another is already visible in that publication. In the preface of this booklet Bucer gives his reason for writing to the citizens. His aim is to encourage them to reach that level of perfection that is possible for us and not just in hearing the words. But by the grace of the father to increase in faith, so that they will be completed in the love towards others.¹⁰ There were some writings before the publication of his book in 1538. However, Bucer's own summary of the content of his *Von der waren Seelsorge* is given in the end of the book. Bucer closes his treatise with the glory of God for which alone we shall live as well as for the improvement of his churches. There is a deplorable scattering of Christ's sheep and there are not many who have recognized the true work of soul caring required for salvation.¹¹

Von der waren Seelsorge was not a book well-prepared or developed over a longer period of time, even though it belonged to his main works in German.¹² What Bucer would like to achieve with his writing is mentioned in the subtitle: Only the shepherd's right ministry can remove the separation and disunity of religion and lead to true unity in the church. Here we see Bucer's ecumenical concern as well as his appreciation of orthopraxis.¹³ Bucer was greatly burdened by the ecclesiastical brokenness of his time and he worked ceaselessly to unite the division between Catholics, Protestants, Lutherans and Zwinglians.¹⁴ This is certainly

a reason why Bucer is sometimes mentioned as a forerunner of ecumenical Christianity in our days. But Bucer's striving for unity must be assessed in his understanding. For him obeying God's Word was the only way to unity and therefore it is necessary to contemplate the essentials of the faith to overcome those sorrowful divisive struggles raging in his days.¹⁵ Bucers's principle can be summarized as: unity in essentials and liberty in non-essentials.

The practical need forced Bucer to write his book. He noticed that the churches decreased in knowing the sense of the essentials, e.g. the order which Scripture prescribes or recommends for the life of the church is not known, the awareness of *communi sanc-torum* is no longer present and even the ministers are ignorant of their responsibilities.¹⁶ What then can be expected from the church? In correction of this situation Bucer's writes *Von der waren Seelsorge*. Stupperich mentions in volume 7 of Martin Bucer's German writings, Bucer's letter in June 2, 1540. In this letter Bucer wrote to the Bishop of the Bohemian brothers, Jan Augusta, and says that the purpose of his work was to tell the necessary things to the people, who saw the Reformation merely as a liberation from papal rule and who did not want to acknowledge Christian discipline.¹⁷ The daily sermons and other writings were not sufficient and so he summarized the essentials, knowing that his work will not exhaust that topic.¹⁸ But before writing this letter Bucer stated the same

motive in his preface.¹⁹ Many confessed the unity of the church in the unity of the saints, but what that kind of fellowship looked like and how far the leadership extended, is rather unknown. The "papal tyranny" accused the believers of separation from the church and the breaking of all discipline and obedience due to the "new" teachings, which is not correct and what Bucer's showed by his treatise.

Von der waren Seelsorge was published first by Wendel Rihel in 1538, later re-prints in German were in 1574, 1592, and in 1964 in volume 7 of Bucer's writings in German. The Czech edition²⁰ was published in 1543 and a translation into Latin was finished in 1577, *Tomus Anglicanus*.²¹ In his testament in 1548 Bucer lists his book on soul care as one of his main works, aware that he is not providing an exhaustive treatise.²²

Structure and Content

Bucer's book *Von der waren Seelsorge* consists of 13 chapters or "articul" (article) as he names them. The title summarizes the book in two general parts: the true care of souls (*Von der waren Seelsorge*, chapters 6-12) and the right ministry of the shepherds (*und dem rechten Hirtendienst*, chapters 1-5). Articul 13 forms the summary of the previous chapters. A more detailed structural division is given by Bucer himself in his preface. He has undertaken "to write this booklet... From which every Christian has to learn thoroughly [1]

what the fellowship of the Church of Christ is, [2] how the Lord Christ alone reigns, [3] what ministry he uses for that purpose, and [4] how the same ministry is to be ordered and carried out against all those who will be brought to the Church of Christ”²³ (own translation). Gerhard Gronauer relates the four topics to the related chapters:²⁴

1. Essence of Christ’s church: Articul 1
2. Leadership of the church: Articul 2
3. Ministry of the church: Articul 3-5
4. Application of the church ministries: Articul 6-9

In articul 1 Bucer defines Christ’s church as the fellowship of those who are called out from the world by the Spirit and the Word and are united as his body. Bucer quotes only NT passages and derived three things from them. First, Christians have a perfect unity, because they are one body and one spirit and are called to one hope. Secondly, the most loyal and diligent fellowship is among Christians, in order to help and support one another in all things. Every Christian is united to Christ and therefore a tool for the Holy Spirit, particularly for the wholesome work on the body of Christ. The priesthood of all believers in the body of Christ is clearly seen in Bucer’s understanding. Thirdly, Christians shall take care for one another in spiritual as well as temporal (material) matters, no one shall suffer from lack of anything truly good. This point overlaps with the first

one, as Bucer mentioned already there, that Christians are to support believers in regards of the necessities of life.²⁵ Bucer concludes that the fellowship of Christ’s church is the best of all.²⁶

Article 2 explains why the leadership in Christ’s church is necessary. As long as we live in this world there is the need to put on Christ more and to live for him more. Therefore, a constant teaching (*lere*) and discipline (*zucht*) is required to drive Christians to devote themselves to Christ. But to Christ belongs the regiment of his church. In the following articles it will be revealed in more details that biblical leadership is essential for proper soul care.

The ministry of the church is explained in article 3-5. Christ is truly present in his church, he leads and shepherds the church, but he does do so from heaven. For us on earth his leadership is being carried out through the ministry of his Word and through his servants. In the following article 4 Bucer depicts how the Lord Jesus uses different servants in his church. For Bucer there are still apostles, even though not so many and not as mighty in spirit as they were back in the 1st century, a view no longer prevailing in Reformed circles. The servants God gives always to his church are shepherds, teachers, and deacons as Bucer states.²⁷ He defends a plurality of elders, but not everyone is suitable to be an elder in the church. Elders, bishops, overseer, soul carer (*Seelsorger*) and shepherds are used as synonyms, although Bucer distinguishes slightly

between bishops and elders.²⁸ Whereas both are overseers of Christ's sheep, the bishops are the supreme overseers. But there are only two offices for Bucer: elders and deacons. Furthermore, he advocates the example in Acts 4 for the church, that believers should have everything in common, no one shall lack anything.²⁹ The desire in Bucer of caring for one another is understandable, but concrete instructions or hints on how the implementation might look like is not further expounded. In article 5 the profile of an elder and his requirements are described, who above all must be prayed for to God.

Chapters 6-9 (application of the ministry) form the climax of the treatise.³⁰ In article 6 Bucer introduces his five-fold work of shepherding God's people. Soul caring is the gathering and preservation of the church of Christ. Soul caring is the tool of election in which God shows gracious bias towards man and by which he works on his elect.³¹ The five-fold works highlight 1. How the lost sheep are to be sought (article 7), 2. How the stray sheep are to be restored (article 8), 3. How the hurt and wounded sheep are to be bound up and healed (article 9), 4. How the weak sheep are to be strengthened (article 10), and 5. How the healthy and strong sheep are to be guarded and fed (article 11). Article 9 about the hurt and wounded sheep forms the longest part. Gronauer concludes, it is especially significant for Bucer.³²

Continuing with article 7, the first work of the shepherd is the searching of all sheep. All man shall be brought to repentance with all endurance and effort. Man does not know who is elected and therefore the gospel must be preached to all. Those who are not of the elect will be revealed when they are driven to Christ with all diligence.³³ Lost sheep are won only when they are brought back to Christ's flock.³⁴ Thus, faithful and irreproachable man have to be called and elected for the high office of the calling and care of lost souls. The thought of a worldwide mission is exceptional among the Reformers in Bucer's days.³⁵

The second work of a shepherd in the short article 8 deals with sheep who are deceived by false doctrine or religion as well as fleshly lusciousness.³⁶ Shepherds have to go after them and bring them back to Christ's church with all love and eagerness convincing them of the truth.

As mentioned before, the third work (article 9) forms the largest part in Bucer's *Von der waren Seelsorge*, where more time shall be spent in comparison to other writers in Bucer's time. In this article the soul caring is moving towards church discipline, where the main focus is repentance.³⁷ Also church members who have sinned belong to the hurt and wounded sheep that have to be healed.³⁸ This is not only a task for shepherds, but all the church is involved in advising and seeking to restore the guilty member.³⁹ Even though all

Christians placed in one church have to take care of one another, it is Christ who bandages and heals the wounded sheep. Because Christ promised to heal his sheep, Christ's work of healing is to be done by those God has assigned for, namely all Christians and in particular the shepherds.⁴⁰ The sinner must be humbled, broken and driven to an acknowledgment of sin, in saying: I have sinned, and I need grace. At this point the sinner is won and shall be restored.⁴¹ Bucer derives this brokenness of sin from Paul's letter to the Corinthians and from the way Nathan restored David after showing true contrition of heart and true repentance. Church discipline is not for punishing the sinner but for caring of his soul, it is medicine (*artzney*).⁴²

While Bucer addresses in his treatise firstly, the right ministry of shepherds, and in a second part the true care of souls, Zwingli's concern is the Swiss confederation of priests, in which he presents under rich biblical imagery the good and the false shepherd (i.e. Catholic priests).⁴³ Thus, Zwingli's *Der hirt*⁴⁴ does not go into details of restoring a sinner. He does not elaborate how sinners are to be brought to repentance and the soul care that a shepherd is to provide. Interestingly, the German term for soul care (*Seelsorge*), which is all over in Bucer's book, does not even appear in his work.⁴⁵ After man has recognized his sin and found salvation in Christ he cannot continue to live in sin (Romans 6:2). Therefore, Zwingli concludes, the shepherd must prevent, a washed sheep

to fall in dung (i.e. sin) again.⁴⁶ Even this reference to soul care is related more to the requirement of the exemplary life of a shepherd, i.e. to be dead to sin and to live for Christ, and not so much to the responsibility of protection of the sheep by the shepherd. Although the responsibility of the shepherd is in no way denied.

In contrast to Zwingli's *Der hirt* Martin Luther's exposition of Psalm 23 published in 1536, sets a different tone. Luther expounds how David compares himself with a sheep where the faithful Lord God takes care of and provides for the sheep.⁴⁷ The language in Luther's exposition of Psalm 23 in the chapter I shall not want resonates in Bucer's *Von der waren Seelsorge*. Luther speaks of all provision spiritual and physical which we receive through the shepherd (i.e. Christ) correlating also to the office of an elder. He speaks of the friendly shepherd who waits for the weak sheep and bandages and heals them. In the nature of Psalm 23 Luther provides a true comfort in the great shepherd and the care of their souls. The weakness of a sheep reflects nicely the frailty of a Christian. Thus, there is no better shepherd and refuge as in the faithfulness of Christ who protects and guides his sheep mercifully. The same thought is found in Bucer's publication from 1538, while he extends the care of the true shepherd, Jesus Christ, through the care of the overseers for his sheep in more detail.

According to Stupperich, however, Bucer was also familiar with non-evangelical literature in pastoral theol-

ogy, namely the writing of the Catholic Gerhardus Lorich (1485-1553).⁴⁸ Bucer even met with Lorich, since Bucer's patron the landgrave Philip of Hesse (1509-1567) intended a reply to be written to Lorich's book.⁴⁹ Bucer's pastoral theological treatise *Von der waren Seelsorge* is the corrective response.⁵⁰ He was also a student of Erasmus like Bucer. Lorich's view in the chapter *Von dem Sacrament der Busz* (the sacrament of repentance) in his book *Pastorale, Pfarramt von allen alten superstitionen und mizbreuchen* (1537) shall be compared to Bucer's understanding of repentance.

Repentance for Lorich consists of three parts: 1. Contrition (*Reue*), 2. Confession (*Beichte*), 3. Satisfaction (*Genugtuung*).⁵¹ All three parts are treated in his chapter while he spends the longest time with confession. Those who have contrition and confession have the gift of the Holy Spirit.⁵² True contrition is a heartily sorrow for losing the highest good, for offending his creator and savior, for hurting the other and the recognition of his sin and guilt. True contrition follows an improvement of life and leaving of sin. Whereas, if the penitent does neglect the verbal confession (*Beichte*), he will be guilty of condemnable sin. Either way, those who do not have true contrition must be brought there.⁵³

Lorich distinguishes two parts in confession. There is a sin done in public in which case the confession must be done publicly. On the other hand, there is also secret sin. This kind of sin must be confessed secretly to the father confes-

sor. The office of the confessor (priest), i.e. the key bearer, implies the authority of the priest to bind or to lose sin on earth (Matthew 18).⁵⁴ The same will be bind or loosen respectively in eternal life. Since the office itself is linked to the working of the Holy Spirit, the binding and loosening is completely independent of the priest. Even if the life of the priest reveals that he does not have the Holy Spirit, the sacrament of ordination to the priesthood imprinted in his soul the power of the Holy Spirit to perform his duty, independent of his own merits.⁵⁵ Binding and loosening are the recognition of the church having that authority.⁵⁶ If someone does not believe that, he will remain bound eternally.⁵⁷ The sinner who would like to confess his sin, Lorich explains, shall not come to confession in a spirit of discussing or disputing his deed. He must mourn over his sin, not excusing it, but accusing himself, surrendering oneself to the church eager to hear the church's punishment, doing what is imposed on him and leaving the sin to newness of life.⁵⁸ Absolution is a sign of comfort, knowing the church has the key to unbind the sin.⁵⁹ Depending on the gravity of public sin, the absolution might not be given at once, but only after having shown publicly true contrition.

The third part of repentance is satisfaction which is also distinguished in a public or secret satisfaction.⁶⁰ The former requires a reconciliation with your neighbor. Whereas secret satisfaction is displayed in weeping, giving alms, praying and fasting. Lorich refers to

Lucas 3. Fruit in keeping with repentance is punishment correlating to sin. This kind of repentance is dissolving godly punishment.⁶¹

In contrast Bucer emphasis on repentance is soul caring. Repentance is not a satisfaction of past sins, but it is a medicine (artzney) against present and future sins.⁶² Satisfaction is to remove the cause for sin and to lock all entries for incentives and desires for sin.⁶³ Bucer is referring to the same examples as Lorich, i.e. the repentance of the sinner in Corinthians (1 Corinthians 5) as well David's adultery and Nathans healing. The medicine given in those examples brought them to repentance and improvement. The Apostolic church has persuaded sinners to godly sorrow with severe punishment, i.e. mourning, weeping, prayer, fasting, and bodily restraints, and plenty of exercises. Guilty sinners have to prove their repentance.⁶⁴ The public confession and repentance had its development there.⁶⁵ Bucer refers to Tertullian, Cyprian and explains the example of bishop Ambrose of Milan (339-397) dealings with the Roman Emperor Theodosius I (379-95) after his massacre of Thessalonica. Church discipline did not arise from the papal tyranny, which Bucer shows by his detailed description of historical evidence⁶⁶. God has ordered this kind of repentance and it did not develop by man. Referring to the apostle Paul the punishment must not be carried out in overwhelming the sinner with excessive sorrow, but in forgiving, comforting, and reaffirming him (2 Corinthi-

ans 2).⁶⁷ Bucer concluded the meaning of humbling and sorrow in praying, fasting, mourning from the apostle Paul which must be done not only by the sinner, but the entire church. In contrast to Lorich's view of Matthew 18 Bucer states clearly that there is no written command of the Lord of who has the authority to bind or to lose or what the church might impose or require from sinners.⁶⁸ He continues to explain the development of public repentance in the church, namely by considering the deeds of the apostles and how they acted out of the Spirit of Christ. The apostles have the command to pasture the sheep and to do what is best for the healing of the them and they did what they learned from the law and the prophets.

Considering the meaning of binding of the church, Bucer states that the churches' binding of a sinner who ignored the redemption of Christ coming to the church, is to bind them to the repentance of sin.⁶⁹ Additionally, encouraging them to seek from their heart, grace and healing with a humbled spirit. The church shall loosen and forgive the sin as from the side of God, but only as far as the church is given to recognize the truth of the repentance. Bucer clarifies that true repentance (*Reue*) is proven by leaving the sin and feeling the pain of sin which is shown in true sorrow.⁷⁰ He mentions the denial of Peter or the sinful woman in Luke 7. Peter stopped denying the Lord and felt bitterly for what he did until the Lord comforted him. The sin-

ful woman left her previous life and as she was at the pharisee she cried publicly until the Lord comforted her. They fell in grievous sin and recognized their sinfulness. They had had the Spirit of adoption and there is where you find all weeping, mourning etc. for sin. Shepherds are soul carers and are responsible to impose temporal punishment to drive sinners to repentance. The keys to heaven shall be brought again in their right use; the binding to repentance, and the loosening to exercising reconciliation. That procedure applies to grievous sins. Bucer distinguishes between minor (*gering*), major (*grob*) and grave (*schwer*) sin.²¹ Minor sins which do not harm others, like neglecting prayer or reading of Scripture, even helping others shall be confessed daily seventy-seven times according to Matthew 18:22. Shepherds shall encourage this kind of repentance via their faithful admonitions. Major trespasses relate not only to harm of the inner man caused by anger, jealousy, gossiping and so on, but also by defaming God, cursing, disobedience of the magistrate etc. Against these kinds of sins admonition alone is insufficient, but sharpness (*scherffe*) is to be used to drive them to repentance. True shepherds will not dismiss the harm done in the sheep of Christ but will gently lead them with firmness to repentance. Grave sins like denying the faith, accepting of false worship, blasphemy, murder, adultery etc. require a more serious approach in the punishment and discernment. There are those who are willing to repent and

those who are unwilling. The former needs the healing medicine (*artzney*) in order not to cause more harm in them. The latter, if not possible to loosen them from their sin, they should be treated as pagans.

Unfortunately, the imposing of punishment turned rather to an outward discipline where bishops did pay more attention to the external exercise than true repentance. Books of repentance were filled with the measure of punishment for each kind of sin, which gave rise to indulgences. All of this occurred due to the negligence of shepherds who concentrate more on external works than on true faith and heartily sorrow. Bucer continues and warns that external works or penitential exercises can be performed by everyone, but true contrition (*Reue*) and improvement no one can do.²² It is only through authentic faith where our heart submits itself to Christ, turning from evil and living for God. Therefore, it is crucial for the church to elect godly elders and pray for those in office, in order to set the right focus and to drive sinners to repentance until they are back in the flock of Christ. Discipline is in an element of care for souls in weighing up the extent to which discipline causes harm or helps overcoming weakness and drives to Christ. In contrast to Lorich's understanding, Bucer states clearly that no one should submit to the priesthood or anyone else in everything, but only to Christ and his Word.²³

Article 10 deals with the fourth work of a shepherd, namely how the weak sheep are to be strengthened. The weak sheep are those belonging to the church, but who turned e.g. (1) faint-hearted under the cross and persecution or (2) seeing the advantages or disadvantages of the world and therefore do not confess Christ, or others (3) who have not yet rightly understood the redemption in Christ. The fourth group of “krankhey” (sickness) are those who give in easily in fleshly desires. All of that is caused by lack of faith and lack of fear of God.⁷⁴ Where the gospel is truly believed, there will be no doubts about the reconciliation with God through Christ and that in him we have received everything. Now our nature is created in such a way that we seek to please and desire mostly that which we hope for and fear mostly, and that which we have mostly before our eyes. Thus, whatever Christians lack, flows from a lack of faith, that is either not knowing enough or not considering earnestly enough what actually should be known. The weak sheep shall be strengthened by all members of the church and particularly whom God has ordered as shepherds.⁷⁵ Those people shall be taught the Gospel of Christ and be reminded to seek our Lord in everything and be content in him.

The fifth work of the shepherd considers how the healthy and strong sheep are to be guarded and fed (article 11). No one is perfect and therefore the strong sheep, i.e. those who live in reverence to God, and remain in God's

church and are eager to live for Christ are still in need to be guarded and fed. Bucer points out that in accordance with the apostle Paul's custom, Christ's teaching shall not only be proclaimed in the church, but also at home in all faithfulness. The admonition is not finished in the pulpit but must continue in teaching and leading the sheep in Christ at home.⁷⁶ In this article Bucer considers also the separation from false sheep. Each obstacle for the healthy sheep must be removed, i.e. leaven shall be cut out before it leavens the whole lump (Galatians 5:9).

Article 12 describes the need for all believers to obey Scripture and Christ's servants who look after the sheep. The Lord does not require anything that is not for the good of the sheep and therefore his servants should be listened to.⁷⁷ Bucer does not create a new way of misuse and tyranny. He makes clear that the obedience, the love, and reverence towards God's servant is in the Lord, and not in man.⁷⁸ As long as the servants themselves are obedient to and servants of Scripture, that obedience shall be rendered. The first part of the book presents what kind of elders and servants are to take care of the souls entrusted to them.

In the last article 13 Bucer summarizes the previous chapters and closes with the miserable situation of the scattered sheep and the need for unity in shepherding faithfully God's sheep.

Conclusion

According to Reinhold Friedrich Bucer's *Von der waren Seelsorge* is the first theological and biblical founded theory of *Seelsorge* (soul care).⁷⁹ It is a systematic approach of defining the caring for souls in different works, which covers even an evangelistic approach of proclaiming the Gospel to everyone in seeking the lost sheep of all nations. Gronauer gives another possible structure to the form of the chapters: Evangelism (art. 7), correction (art. 8), church discipline (art. 9), support in faith and life (art. 10), and preservation/companionship (art. 11).⁸⁰ For Bucer the caring of the soul shall help to overcome the division within Christendom. Soul caring is the work of Christ through and by his faithful servants and also through all believers in his church. The concern for unity as an enterprise of the entire church is remarkable. All Christians should work diligently and devotedly in caring for each other. The priesthood of all believers is quite in opposition to Lorich's view and certainly a helpful reminder for churches today. Church members should be taught, instructed and enabled to reconcile each other in humility and solve discrepancies or sin by themselves, while the pastor intervenes only if all possibilities are exhausted.⁸¹

Further, Bucer's distinction in the five-fold work of caring for souls gives a noteworthy insight in a wholistic approach. Not only in regards of the responsibilities of the counselor, but

also in considering the circumstances and struggles of the soul in need. Often a simplistic approach of soul care is given. If the reader will bear with me an anecdote. I grew up in a Pentecostal church with about 600 members, where the pastor was notorious for his council in almost each and every case: "Pull yourself together!". Unfortunately, time is a rare good and therefore this kind of "wise advice" might not be too uncommon in other churches. Considering Bucer's disputation, ministry, participation in diets, context, and responsibilities his treatise is extraordinary. Even though some interest in this topic might be visible in previous publication (referring to 1523), his publication in 1538 *Von der waren Seelsorge* did not develop over a long time. Bucer must have lived out and practiced this discernment in his ministry, which gave him the input to write his treatise in such a short time. Maybe that is a reason for Gronauer's critique of Bucer's stylistic deficiencies and redundancies. Bucer does not reveal great skills of precise expressions.⁸²

Furthermore, in Bucer there is the differentiation of the gravity of sin. Although there is certainly a danger to go to close to the Catholic teaching⁸³, it is a helpful reminder that sins are different and cannot be met in one general way. Wisdom is required, since the care and not harm of the soul must be in view. The biblical principle of punishment corresponding to sin committed is not to be ignored. Nevertheless, Bucer is going too far in saying, that

faithful servants of Christ should not accept everyone's confession just by stating their regret of committed sin and the desire to improve their lives without prior sincere evidence of repentance to the church.⁸⁴ It is better to err in giving grace than in punishment (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Bucer's overall motive and concern for the unity of Christ's church is challenging. All members of Christ's body, not only the elders, are tools of God's Spirit to perform their duty and to work towards building the church and

care for souls. Would it not be wonderful if every member of the church took the priesthood of all believers seriously in practicing and working for the glory of God and in caring for one another? Does not the Word of God require that we do not only uphold the doctrines of Holy Scripture, but also that our lives be consistent with our confession? Most certainly! May God give that this becomes a reality for all believers of the church, which Bucer's desired to see in Christ's sheep.

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Christi, sonder auch den pfarrern, vnd obren seer nutzlich zu wissen. Rihel, 1538.

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Annotation

Anmerkungen

¹ Thomas Schirrmacher, *Einheit durch Hören auf die Schrift und aufeinander*, MBS Jahrbuch (2001): 12.

² Herman J. Selderhuis, *John Calvin: A Pilgrim's Life*, 1st ed. (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2009), 86.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Thomas Schirrmacher, Richard McClary, and Thomas K. Johnson, *Advocate of Love: Martin Bucer as Theologian and Pastor*, World of theology series vol. 5 (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, Culture and Science Publ, 2013), 56.

⁵ Ibid., 55.

⁶ Gerhard Gronauer, *Reformatorische Schriften zur Pastoraltheologie und Seelsorge im Vergleich*, MBS Jahrbuch (2000): 94.

⁷ Ed. Robert Stupperich, *Martin Bucers Deutsche Schriften, Band 7*, Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, Gütersloh, 1964, 73.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Gerhard Gronauer, *Reformatorische Schriften zur Pastoraltheologie und Seelsorge im Vergleich*, MBS Jahrbuch (2000): 97.

¹⁰ Martin Bucer, *Das ym selbs niema[n]t, sonder anderen leben soll. vnd wie der mensch da hyn kommen mög.*, 1523.

¹¹ Martin Bucer, *Von der waren Seelsorge, vnnd dem rechten hirten dienst, wie der selbige inn der Kirchen Christi bestellet, vnnd verrichtet werden sollen: Hierinn findestu die eygentlichen mittel, durch welche wir von diser so jämerlichen, vnd verderblichen spaltung vnd zertrennung der Religion, wider zu warer eynigkeyt der Kirchen, vnd der selbigen guter Christlicher ordnung kommen mögen. Nit alleyn den gemeynden Christi, sonder auch den pfarrern, vnd obren seer nutzlich zu wissen*, Rihel, 1538, 116.

¹² Gerhard Gronauer, *Zeittafel von Zwingli und Bucer*, MBS Texte 86 (2007): 43.

¹³ Gronauer, *Reformatorische Schriften zur Pastoraltheologie und Seelsorge im Vergleich*, 104.

¹⁴ Stupperich, *Martin Bucers Deutsche Schriften, Band 7*, 71.

¹⁵ Ibid., 72.

¹⁶ Ibid., 69.

¹⁷ Ibid., 70.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Bucer, *Von der waren Seelsorge, vnnd dem rechten hirten dienst, wie der selbige inn der Kirchen Christi bestellet, vnnd verrichtet werden sollen*, 2.

²⁰ Knjha o Oprawdowe Pecy o Dusse a o prawe sluzbe Pastyrskie, yakby w Cjerkwi Krystowe Zrjezena a wykonawana byti mela. Wydana skrze Martina Bucera... W SSzrospruce skrze Wendelinu Rzihele 1538. Nynj w Nowe z nemeckeho Jazyku w cesky prelozena B. 1543.

²¹ Stupperich, *Martin Bucers Deutsche Schriften*, Band 7, 89.

²² Christian Möller, *Geschichte Der Seelsorge in Einzelporträts*, 3 Bde., Ln, Bd.2, *Von Martin Luther Bis Matthias Claudius*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995, 90.

²³ Bucer, *Von der waren Seelsorge, vnnd dem rechten hirten dienst, wie der selbige inn der Kirchen Christi bestellet, vnnd verrichtet werden sollen*, 4b Preface.

²⁴ Gronauer, *Reformatorische Schriften zur Pastoraltheologie und Seelsorge im Vergleich*, 108.

²⁵ Bucer, *Von der waren Seelsorge, vnnd dem rechten hirten dienst, wie der selbige inn der Kirchen Christi bestellet, vnnd verrichtet werden sollen*, 3b.

²⁶ Ibid., 4b.

²⁷ Ibid., 13.

²⁸ Ibid., 19.

²⁹ Ibid., 16b.

³⁰ Gronauer, *Zeittafel von Zwingli und Bucer*, 44.

³¹ Möller, *Geschichte Der Seelsorge in Einzelporträts*, 3 Bde., Ln, Bd.2, *Von Martin Luther Bis Matthias Claudius*, 93.

³² Gronauer, *Zeittafel von Zwingli und Bucer*, 44.

³³ Bucer, *Von der waren Seelsorge, vnnd dem rechten hirten dienst, wie der selbige inn der Kirchen Christi bestellet, vnnd verrichtet werden sollen*, 40b.

³⁴Ibid., 41b.

³⁵Gronauer, *Reformatorische Schriften zur Pastoraltheologie und Seelsorge im Vergleich*, 109.

³⁶Bucer, *Von der waren Seelsorge, vnnd dem rechten hirten dienst, wie der selbige inn der Kirchen Christi bestellet, vnnd verrichtet werden sollen*, 48.

³⁷Möller, *Geschichte Der Seelsorge in Einzelpaträts*, 3 Bde., Ln, Bd.2, *Von Martin Luther Bis Matthias Claudius*, 95.

³⁸Bucer, *Von der waren Seelsorge, vnnd dem rechten hirten dienst, wie der selbige inn der Kirchen Christi bestellet, vnnd verrichtet werden sollen*, 50b.

³⁹Ibid., 51.

⁴⁰Ibid., 51b.

⁴¹Ibid., 52b.

⁴²Ibid., 59.

⁴³Gronauer, *Zeittafel von Zwingli und Bucer*, 14.

⁴⁴Ulrich Zwingli, *Huldrych Zwingli Werke - 30*, accessed March 25, 2020, <http://www.irg.uzh.ch/static/zwingli-werke/index.php?n=Werk.30>.

⁴⁵Gronauer, *Reformatorische Schriften zur Pastoraltheologie und Seelsorge im Vergleich*, 133.

⁴⁶Zwingli, *Huldrych Zwingli Werke - 30*, 19.

⁴⁷Martin Luther, *Der XXIII. Psalm, auff ein abend über Tisch, nach dem Gratias, ausgelegt*, 2, last modified 1536, accessed March 30, 2020, <https://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/0002/bsb00025535/images/index.html?fip=193.174.9.8.30&id=00025535&seite=1>.

⁴⁸Stupperich, *Martin Bucers Deutsche Schriften, Band 7*, 73.

⁴⁹Ibid., 74.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Gerhard Lorich, *Pastorale. Pfarramt von allen alten superstitionen vnd miszbreuchen, auch von aller ungegründter newerung gereynigt, auff eyn Reformation gestelt (etc.)*, 1537, 64b.

⁵²Ibid., 65.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid., 65b.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid., 67.

⁵⁹Ibid., 65.

⁶⁰Ibid., 69b.

⁶¹Ibid., 70.

⁶²Bucer, *Von der waren Seelsorge, vnnd dem rechten hirten dienst, wie der selbige inn der Kirchen Christi bestellet, vnnd verrichtet werden sollen*, 69.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid., 72b.

⁶⁵Ibid., 65b.

⁶⁶Gronauer, *Zeittafel von Zwingli und Bucer*, 45.

⁶⁷Bucer, *Von der waren Seelsorge, vnnd dem rechten hirten dienst, wie der selbige inn der Kirchen Christi bestellet, vnnd verrichtet werden sollen*, 75b.

⁶⁸Ibid., 82.

⁶⁹Ibid., 87b.

⁷⁰Ibid., 66b.

⁷¹Ibid., 63b.

⁷²Ibid., 66b.

⁷³Ibid., 82a.

⁷⁴Ibid., 89b.

⁷⁵Ibid., 92b.

⁷⁶Ibid., 97b.

⁷⁷Ibid., 109b.

⁷⁸Ibid., 113b.

⁷⁹Möller, *Geschichte Der Seelsorge in Einzelpaträts*, 3 Bde., Ln, Bd.2, *Von Martin Luther Bis Matthias Claudius*, 98.

⁸⁰Gronauer, *Reformatorische Schriften zur Pastoraltheologie und Seelsorge im Vergleich*, 35.

⁸¹Ibid., 134.

⁸²Ibid., 108.

⁸³Möller, *Geschichte Der Seelsorge in Einzelpaträts*, 3 Bde., Ln, Bd.2, *Von Martin Luther Bis Matthias Claudius*, 99.

⁸⁴Bucer, *Von der waren Seelsorge, vnnd dem rechten hirten dienst, wie der selbige inn der Kirchen Christi bestellet, vnnd verrichtet werden sollen*, 72b.

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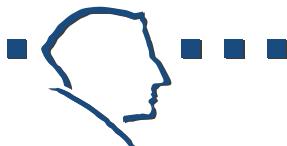
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