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MARTIN BUCER AND THE ANABAPTIST CONTEXT OF EVANGELICAL CONFIRMATION

AMY NELSON BURNETT*

Martin Bucer has long been called "the father of evangelical confirmation" because of the ceremony he prescribed for the territory of Hesse in 1539. After being called to Hesse by Landgrave Philip to combat the spread of Anabaptism in his lands, Bucer drafted both the Ziegenhain disciplinary ordinance, which gave the rationale and general procedure for confirmation, and the Kassel church ordinance, which contained an agenda for the ceremony. Studies of Bucer's confirmation ceremony have frequently drawn attention to Anabaptist influence on the proposal, that influence coming from Anabaptists in both Strasbourg and Hesse.1

However, it is one thing to assert that Anabaptists inspired Bucer's proposal for confirmation; it is another to determine which Anabaptists. Over the past two decades research on the "Radical Reforma-

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1. On the Hessian confirmation ceremony, see W. Diehl, Zur Geschichte der Konfirmation: Beiträge aus der hessischen Kirchengeschichte (Giessen: Ricker, 1897), 2-13; on the development of Bucer’s ideas about confirmation, see René Bornert, La Réforme Protestante du Cîte à Strasbourg au XVIe siècle (1523-1598), Approche sociologique et interprétation théologique, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, 28 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 362-67. Kenneth R. Davis looked more broadly at the disciplinary provisions, including confirmation, of the Hessian ordinance in “No Discipline, No Church: An Anabaptist Contribution to the Reformed Tradition,” Sixteenth Century Journal, 13 (1982), 43-58. Scholars have pointed to other sources of Bucer’s ideas on confirmation as well, particularly Erasmus, Luther, and Zwingli. – See: Wilhelm Maurer, Gemeindezucht, Gemeindeamt, Konfirmation: Eine hessische Sakularerinnerung, Schriftenreihe des Pfarrervereins Kurhessen-Waldeck, 2 (Kassel: Stauda, 1940), 43-81; Bjarn Hareide, Die Konfirmation in der Reformationzeit: Eine Untersuchung der lutherischen Konfirmation in Deutschland, 1520-1585, Arbeiten zur Pastoraltheologie, 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), 110-24. I do not intend to assert that Bucer was not influenced by any of the above but rather to define more precisely what impact the Anabaptists had on his understanding of confirmation.
tion" has documented the various origins and divergent views within the movement called Anabaptism. This diversity has implications for the question of the origins of evangelical confirmation. Despite the obvious parallels between Bucer's confirmation ceremony and the believers' baptism advocated by most Anabaptists, Anabaptist leaders showed a wide range of disagreement concerning the significance of baptism. As Balthasar Hubmaier himself stated, "The baptism which I teach and the baptism which [Hans] Hut espouses are as far apart as heaven and hell, east and west, Christ and Belial." 2

Just as important as the question of Anabaptist influence is the evolution in Bucer's own thought regarding confirmation. Even if the Strasbourg reformer ultimately derived his evangelical confirmation ceremony from others, he did not simply adopt ideas or practices without change. Instead, he adapted them to mesh with his own developing views on the church, the ministry, the sacraments—especially baptism but also the Lord's Supper—and church discipline.

One key to understanding the evolution of Bucer's proposal for an evangelical confirmation is the terminology he used to describe an important component of the ceremony. In Bucer's words, each child was "to commit himself to the fellowship and obedience of the church." The concept of committing or surrendering oneself (sich begeben/sich ergeben) was frequently used by Anabaptists in conjunction with adult baptism. Bucer's use of the concept reflects his awareness of the positions espoused by the various Anabaptist groups who flourished in Strasbourg during the later 1520s and early 1530s. His commitment to the magisterial church and to infant baptism prevented him from endorsing any of the Anabaptist positions. Nevertheless, although Bucer vigorously opposed these radical movements, he was remarkably open to some of their ideas.

This article explores the influence of Anabaptist teachings on the development of Bucer's ideas about confirmation. It summarizes the views of baptism prevalent within the various Anabaptist groups which formed in Strasbourg during the later 1520s and early 1530s and it focuses on their emphasis on the individual's surrender or commitment to Christ. Then it traces Bucer's use of this idea in the years leading up to the Hessian ordinances, particularly with regard to the idea's relationship to a public profession of faith. By following the develop-

ment of Bucer's understanding of confirmation, I hope to shed light on the way the Strasbourg reformer tried to strengthen the magisterial church by adapting and modifying a tenet shared by many Anabaptists.

I

The sectarian groups which formed in Strasbourg during the late 1520s and early 1530s reflected the diversity within the Anabaptist movement itself. By 1530 an interested observer like the Spiritualist Caspar Schwenckfeld could identify eight different Anabaptist sects in Strasbourg; others identified three main groups, corresponding roughly to the three sources of Anabaptism identified by modern scholars: the separatist and pacifist Swiss Brethren, the south Germans who were more influenced by medieval mysticism and revolutionary apocalypticism, and the followers of Melchior Hoffman. The Strasbourg pastors, noting the disunity among the Anabaptists, claimed with some disgust that "when ten of them meet together, they often have eleven different opinions." These differences of opinion included even the practice which gave the movement its name, the issue of baptism. While all of the radicals rejected infant baptism, they disagreed on the interpretation—and the necessity—of rebaptism. Their debates on the issue provided the context in which Bucer developed his proposal for evangelical confirmation.


5. TA, Eissel I, 216.5-7.

6. The Anabaptists, of course, insisted that since infant baptism was not a valid ceremony their administration of baptism to adults was not a rebaptism. However, it was precisely this second baptism, with its implication that only those so baptized were true Christians, which made them a threat to the magisterial church. On the social and ecclesiastical consequences of the distinction between the rejection of infant baptism and the advocacy of rebaptism, see J. F. G. Goeters, "Taufaufschub, Endzeitvorweltung und Wiedertaufe: Erwägungen zur Vorgeschichte des Täuferrechts von Münster" in Willem van 't Spijker, ed., Calvin: Erbe und Auftrag: Festschrift für Wilhelm Neuser zu seinem 65. Geburtstag (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1991), 305-17, esp. 305-06.
The earliest Anabaptists to come to Strasbourg were those influenced by Balthasar Hubmaier and the Zürich circle, later known as the Swiss Brethren. Within Strasbourg Wilhelm Reublin was the leader of this group, but Michael Sattler also exercised some influence on them during his brief stay in the city at the end of 1526. The proto-Swiss Brethren were rigidly separatistic, arguing that "there was nothing in common between Christ and Belial." They regarded adult baptism as the act which created the church community and marked the separation of the believer from the world. As such, baptism required a conscious decision. As Hubmaier expressed it in his earliest defense of adult baptism, once the individual had acknowledged his sin and recognized God's mercy in granting forgiveness:

he surrenders himself to God [ergibt er sich Gott] and inwardly pledges himself in his heart to lead a new life according to the order of Christ. But so that he can demonstrate his heart, mind, faith and intention to other believers in Christ, he gives himself into their brotherhood and church [gibt er sich inn jr bruederschaft und kirchen] ..., gives a public testimony of his internal faith and is baptized with water. 8

Through his baptism the individual testified publicly "that he has surrendered himself to live henceforth according to the ordinance of Christ" and acknowledged that "his sisters, brothers and the church" have the right "to admonish, punish, ban and reaccept him" if he sins. 9

This position affected the Swiss Brethren's well-known Schleitheim Confession of 1527, which stated that the ban was to be used only on those "who had surrendered themselves to the Lord to live according to his commands, and with all those who have been baptized into one body of Christ." 10

The proto-Swiss Brethren were not the only advocates of adult baptism. During the later 1520s another Anabaptist group gathered around

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7. For Sattler's letter to Capito and Bucer, stating why he felt conscience-bound to leave Strasbourg, see TA, Elsass I, 69.33-34 (No. 70, late 1526 to early 1527). On the important place of separation from the world in Sattler's thought, see Klaus Deppermann, "Die Strassburger Reformatoren und die Krise des oberdeutschen Tauffertums im Jahre 1527," Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter, 30 (1973), 24-41; on the growing importance of separation generally for the Swiss Brethren, see Martin Haas, "Der Weg der Täufer in die Absonderung," in Umstrittenes Taufertum, 1525-1975: neue Forschungen, ed. Hans-Jürgen Goertz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 50-78.


9. Ibíd., 145. For Armour's discussion of Hubmaier's position in the context of his debate with Zwingli, see Anabaptist Baptism, 40-44.

Jacob Kautz, a follower of Hans Denck.\textsuperscript{11} Denck was apparently the first to describe baptism as a sign of the believer’s covenant with God, an idea which was in turn adopted by other Anabaptist leaders. On the other hand, Denck’s followers did not insist as strongly as the proto-Swiss Brethren did on strict separation from the world or the disciplinary consequences which followed from rebaptism.\textsuperscript{12} Despite the theological differences between the Reublin and Kautz groups, their followers still met together. Along with about a dozen others, Reublin and Kautz themselves were both arrested during a gathering in October of 1528, and the two men presented a common confession of faith to the Strasbourg Council the following January.\textsuperscript{13}

Bucer recognized the differences between these two Anabaptist circles.\textsuperscript{14} Although he saw both as threats to the Strasbourg church, he was more outspoken in his criticism of Denck and his followers. In the summer of 1527 he published a refutation of seven articles by Jacob Kautz, articles which echoed Denck’s teachings on the sacraments and on the relationship between the internal and external word. Bucer condemned Denck as “a grave enemy of the salvation of Christ, the light of Scripture and the divine ordination of the magistrate.”\textsuperscript{15} He had a much higher opinion of the Swiss Brethren’s Michael Sattler, writing that Sattler was “a dear friend of God . . . [for he believed] that faith alone saves one.” Moreover, Bucer wrote, Sattler “asked for and was willing to receive instruction from the Bible. Therefore we do not doubt that he is a martyr for Christ.”\textsuperscript{16}

However, despite his favorable impression of Sattler, Bucer harshly criticized the separatism associated with the Swiss Brethren: their refusal to swear oaths or bear arms, their rejection of a Christian magistrate, and especially their refusal to recognize as Christians those who had not been re-baptized as adults.\textsuperscript{17} In addition, the high

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Denck won over a circle of followers during his two-month stay in Strasbourg at the end of 1526; Kautz arrived in the city in 1528. On Denck and his influence on Kautz, see Williams, \textit{Radical Reformation}, 260-63; on Denck’s view of baptism, see Armour, \textit{Anabaptist Baptism}, 62-64.
\item \textsuperscript{12} According to Depermann, the Reublin and Denck circles disagreed on the atoning nature of Christ’s death, on the priority of Christian love vs. separatism, and on the normative use of scripture (\textit{Melchior Hoffmann}, 166-67).
\item \textsuperscript{13} Schieß, I, 169-70; on the confession of faith, see \textit{TA, Elsass I}, 197-99.
\item \textsuperscript{14} The Strasbourg pastors noted in a memo to the council that Kautz and Reublin did not agree on every issue (\textit{TA, Elsass I}, 195.28-31).
\item \textsuperscript{15} BDS, II, 234.22-26.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 253.20-30. Sattler had been burned at the stake about a month earlier at Rottenburg.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 252.15-25. The pastors’ summary of Kautz and Reublin’s confession: “In Strasbourg there are no Christians and there will not be any as long as they baptize children rather than only those who have heard the gospel and then first commit themselves to Christ [dem nach sich erst Christo begeben]” (\textit{TA, Elsass I}, 217.24-26).
\end{itemize}
standards of conduct expected from those who had been re-baptized led the Strasbourg reformers to accuse the Anabaptists of falling back into the same trap of reliance on works which had inspired the monastic movement. Both Bucer and Capito compared the Anabaptists to a new monastic order.18

Meanwhile, as a new flood of refugees arrived in the city during 1528 and 1529, the configuration of the Anabaptist groups in Strasbourg was changing.19 Pilgram Marpeck came to Strasbourg in the fall of 1528 and by 1531 had become the leader of the group originally associated with Reublin, who had been expelled from the city in 1529.20 Marpeck described baptism in terms of a covenant or pledge in which an individual promised to turn from sin and live a new Christian life.21 In a debate with the Strasbourg preachers at the end of 1531, Marpeck argued that "each Christian must commit himself [sich begeben] to the word and work of Christ, . . . [that the Christian] must give himself [sich geben] into the obedience of Christ," and that baptism was "the witness to this obedience of faith."22 Because children could neither have faith, die to themselves, nor promise obedience, they were not to be baptized. Like the Swiss Brethren, Marpeck regarded adult baptism as an event which created a new church community. He argued that the Lord's Supper was given by Christ to "those who had come under the obedience of faith through baptism."23 Marpeck was not as extreme as Sattler had been in his views of separation from the world; he himself joined the guild of gardeners and took the oath of citizenship in Strasbourg. Nevertheless, Marpeck's advocacy of rebaptism had the same

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19. Bucer called Sattler "a leader in the baptists' order" (BDS, II, 253.22-23). Capito criticized Sattler because "through external confession he wanted to make pious Christians, which we regard as the beginning of a new monasticism" (TA, Elsass I, 82.5-7). The parallels between Anabaptist rebaptism and a monastic profession may have been made more obvious by the fact that Sattler himself was a former Benedictine monk.

20. On Marpeck's stay in Strasbourg, see Stephen B. Boyd, Pilgrim Marpeck: His Life and Social Theology, Duke Monographs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 12 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 43-67. Deppermann distinguished between the groups associated with Marpeck and with Reublin (the proto-Swiss Brethren) on the grounds that the former retained a Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith alone and opposed the stringent use of the ban by the Swiss Brethren (Melchior Hoffman, 241). However, Marpeck's real disagreements with the Swiss Brethren stemmed from the 1540s (Boyd, Pilgrim Marpeck, 107-15). The differences between the two groups in Strasbourg during the early 1530s were not as great as the gap separating them from other circles associated with Hoffman and Schwendfeld.


23. TA Elsass I, 352.32-37.
consequence of separation from the Strasbourg church, for he refused to have fellowship with those who baptized their children.\footnote{24. TA Elsass I, 497.1-498.3. For Bucer’s complaint about the separatism of “Pilgrim and those like him,” see TA Elsass I, 522.33-523.5.}

In addition to maintaining the separation of his followers from the official church, Marpeck contributed to the growing differentiation between his followers and those from the group originally associated with Jacob Kautz, who was expelled in 1529. The Kautz circle also faced competition from the followers of Melchior Hoffman, who came to Strasbourg in 1529. In Strasbourg Hoffman’s teachings assumed their final shape, with his acceptance of Denck’s doctrine of free will, his development of a monophysite christology, his exposure to the apocalyptic visions of Lienhard and Ursula Jost, and his adoption of the principle of rebaptism.\footnote{25. On the important developments in Hoffman’s thought during this stay in Strasbourg, see Klaus Deppermann, “Melchior Hoffman’s Weg von Luther zu den Täufern,” in Goertz, ed., Umstrittenes Täufertum, 173-205. Hoffman’s teachings bore enough similarity to those of Denck and Hut that there was some blurring between the boundaries of the two groups. Deppermann noted that friendly relations continued between the followers of Hoffman and Kautz until the disappearance of the latter group around 1532 (“Hoffmans Weg,” 191).}

Although, like Marpeck, he used covenantal terminology to describe baptism, Hoffman’s interpretation of baptism bore more resemblance to the apocalyptic and mystical views of Hans Hut.\footnote{26. On Hoffman’s baptismal theology, see Armour, Anabaptist Baptism, 97-112.}

In his 1530 treatise The Ordinance of God Hoffman discussed baptism in mystical and allegorical terms, describing how Christ’s followers were to

bind themselves also publicly to him, and in truth submit themselves to him and betroth themselves through the covenant of baptism . . . that is then such a true and certain covenant as takes place when a bride with complete, voluntary, and loving surrender and with a truly free, well-considered betrothal, yields herself in abandon and presents herself as a freewill offering to her lord and bridegroom.\footnote{27. Melchior Hoffman, The Ordinance of God, in George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergel, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, The Library of Christian Classics, 25 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), 187.}

Hoffman repeatedly linked baptism with the concepts of covenanting, betrothing, and giving oneself.\footnote{28. Ibid., 188-90, 193. It is impossible to determine Hoffman’s original terminology with certainty; The Ordinance of God, which survives only in Low-German translation, uses the terms übergeben and untergegeben.—Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica, 5, ed. S. Cramer, Geschriften uit den Tijd der Hervorming in de Nederlanden (Nijhoff: ’s-Gravenhage, 1909), 151, 152-53, 155, 156. A German treatise summarizing Hoffman’s arguments against infant baptism at the 1533 Strasbourg synod does use the term sich ergeben (TA Elsass I, 106.5).} In his discussions of baptism he
was primarily concerned with the individual, and any consequences regarding the formation of a separate church community he left unspecified. Because Hoffman did not regard adult baptism as essential for the establishment of the congregation of believers, he could order its administration suspended for two years, after several of his followers were executed in the Netherlands. In this respect Hoffman and his followers differed from the proto-Swiss Brethren in Strasbourg. Later events would demonstrate the significance of this difference.

At the same time that Hoffman was propagating his new understanding of adult baptism, another prominent figure among Strasbourg's radicals was working out his views on baptism. In several works written over the course of 1530 Caspar Schwenckfeld discussed baptism, the validity of infant baptism, and his attitude towards the Anabaptists. Schwenckfeld had had only limited contact with Anabaptist groups before his arrival in Strasbourg; his theological debates had been primarily with the Lutherans over the issue of the Lord's Supper. However, after coming to Strasbourg he became acquainted with many of the prominent sectarians there, including both Hoffman and Marpeck. Schwenckfeld's contacts with the Anabaptists were not his only incentive to work out his position on baptism, for apparently Bucer also questioned him about his views. Bucer's desire to know more about Schwenckfeld's position is understandable, given that already in 1528 the Silesian had criticized the Strasbourger's defense of infant baptism and the measures he advocated against the Anabaptists.

In his writings Schwenckfeld grew progressively more critical of infant baptism, and by October of 1530 he described it as "a detestable abomination and destruction of the church of Christ." Baptism, he decided, was to be administered only to those who had professed their faith after instruction in it and who were ready to promise to live as Christ had commanded.

29. Deppermann, Melchior Hoffman, 204-05.
30. Ibid., 285-86.
32. Schwenckfeld wrote to Bucer in July, 1528 that "we have no dealings with the Anabaptists, nor does anyone here teach who is from among them" (CS, III, 79.22-24).
34. CS, IV, 242.36-243.5.
35. CS, III, 80.19-82.11.
36. Ibid., 858.16.
37. Ibid., 820.6-11; 821.21-25.
To explain his view of baptism Schwenckfeld, like the Anabaptists, used the concept of surrender or commitment to Christ. To be baptized in Christ Jesus was “to surrender wholly and completely to Christ, the captain of faith, and through him to offer oneself up to God”; in the sacrament of baptism Christians “committed themselves to Christ their Lord and pioneer to follow him to conformity.” An individual about to be baptized first had to know “what he promised in the voluntariness of the Spirit, which Lord he obligated himself to serve henceforth, and to what he committed himself.” On the other hand, Schwenckfeld deliberately used the concept of yielding oneself to Christ more broadly to oppose the Anabaptist use of the term. Thus when a friend who had just “surrendered himself to Christ” urged him to be (re)baptized Schwenckfeld responded that “several years ago I completely surrendered myself [sich untergeben] to Christ and through him committed myself [sich begeben] . . . to God the heavenly Father in his discipline, work, school and instruction . . . which I still do by means of his grace!” Schwenckfeld implied that surrender to Christ was not just a one-time act but also an ongoing process. Moreover, despite his support for believers’ baptism, Schwenckfeld refused to endorse the rebaptism advocated by the Anabaptists. Instead he was critical of the Anabaptists because they either regarded baptism as merely a sign or confused it with external obligations, “so that I fear that they do not properly know how to distinguish the inner from the outer baptism.” Because he clearly understood that Anabaptists used baptism as a mark of identification, he steadfastly refused to be rebaptized—just as he refused to be identified with the Catholic, Lutheran, or Zwinglian churches.

The issue of baptism was a burning question in Strasbourg from 1526 on. The years 1529 to 1531 proved to be crucial for the development and propagation of these competing interpretations of baptism. Baptism must have been a frequent topic of conversation in Anabaptist circles at that time, since Melchior Hoffman was persuaded to endorse believers’ baptism and Caspar Schwenckfeld was able to familiarize himself with Anabaptist teachings as he worked out his own understanding of the sacrament. Bucer not only was aware of this discussion concerning baptism but was an active participant in it—questioning Schwenckfeld

38. CS, IV, 162.5-9, 25-26; cf. 161.27-33.
39. Ibid., 181.25-33.
40. Ibid., 775.20-25; for other more general uses of the term, see CS, III, 572.1-3; 574.12-14; 658.25, 33-34; 663.18, and CS, IV, 221.33-34; 233.18-22; 234.4-5.
41. CS, III, 832.29-33.
42. Cf. his letter to Georg Pfersfelder, who had urged him to “yield himself to Christ,” thereby implicitly equating this with adult baptism (CS, IV, 774-76).
about his views and setting forth his own position on baptism in his lectures and commentaries on the Bible. At the turn of 1531 to 1532 he engaged Marpeck in both oral and written debate. During the synod called to establish the doctrinal norms and institutional basis for the Strasbourg church held in 1533, Bucer held public disputations with Schwenckfeld and Hoffman. All of these exchanges included discussions concerning the interpretation of baptism and the validity of infant baptism.

By 1533 the various parties had articulated several related interpretations of baptism. Although not as extreme as Sattler, Marpeck advocated the view held by the Swiss Brethren that rebaptism constituted separation from the world and the official church, entrance into the community of believers, and the individual’s obligation to deny self and live in obedience to Christ. Showing less concern for the ecclesiological consequences of baptism, Hoffman emphasized instead its mystical and apocalyptic aspects. Schwenckfeld acknowledged the importance of external baptism as a sign of an individual’s surrender to Christ, but he refused to identify himself with the Anabaptists either by being rebaptized himself or by advocating rebaptism for others. All three men used the concept of surrendering or committing oneself to Christ to describe a conscious decision which was attested to by rebaptism; however, Schwenckfeld preferred to use the term to describe a more general attitude or mind-set. These were the opponents to whom Bucer was forced to respond in his defense of infant baptism and of Strasbourg’s official church.

II

Bucer’s discussions of baptism and of the Christian life during the later 1520s reflect his ongoing debates with various sectarian leaders in Strasbourg. He adapted Anabaptist terms to argue that infants were consecrated to Christ (ergeben Christo) through their baptism and to oppose the exclusivity implied by the surrender to Christ (sich ergeben Christo) symbolized by adult baptism.43

43. Unfortunately it is not possible to express the parallelism of the German verbs in English. I have chosen to translate ergeben as “to consecrate” because Bucer used consecrate in his Latin works in the same way that he used ergeben in German. Although sick ergeben could be translated as “to consecrate oneself,” a better and less awkward translation is “to surrender (or yield) oneself.” The English “to give/to give oneself” conveys the same parallelism as ergeben/sich ergeben, but it does not convey as strong a sense of giving over or giving up as the German verbs do. For Kurt Frör’s discussion of Bucer’s use of these terms, see “Zur Interpretation der Kasseler Konfirmationsordnung von 1539,” in Reformation und Confession: Festschrift für D. Wilhelm Maurer zum 65. Geburtstag am 7. Mai 1965, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Kantzenbach and Gerhard Müller (Berlin:
Bucer first used the concept of consecration to Christ through baptism in his *Reasons and Causes from Divine Scripture for the Innovations . . . Introducing in Strasbourg*, a work published at the end of 1524, a few months after Andreas Karlstadt’s brief visit to the city had first raised questions about the value of infant baptism. According to Bucer, the Strasbourg pastors taught that “external baptism is a sign of the true baptism of Christ, that is the internal cleansing, rebirth and renewal, through which they . . . have been consecrated to Christ and have obtained such an internal new birth.”

This cleansing and consecration applied also to infants who were baptized; indeed, “it was a reason for parents and others to teach children [about] Christ, as those who have been consecrated to him in baptism, as soon as the children are able.” Bucer’s insistence that children be consecrated to God through baptism remained an essential argument in all of his subsequent discussions of infant baptism. Equally strong was his assertion that a necessary consequence of infant baptism was the instruction of children in the fundamentals of their faith as soon as they were old enough to understand them.

Bucer’s use of *sich ergeben Christo* was more nuanced. He used the phrase in his *Reasons and Causes*, where he contrasted the early church, “in which no one was baptized and accepted into the church unless they had surrendered themselves completely to the word of Christ,” with the Strasbourg church, in which “many hear the sermons but have not yet surrendered themselves wholly and in all things to the word but have only just been born to Christ.” This use of self-surrender occurred only a month before the first adult baptism in Zürich and before the publication of Hubmaier’s treatise linking individual surrender with rebaptism.

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45. BDS, I, 258.4-9.

46. BDS, I, 260.17-19.

47. His discussion of infant baptism in the 1527 Gospels commentary is reprinted in August Lang, *Der Evangelienkommentar Martin Buczers und die Grundzüge seiner Theologie*, Studien zur Geschichte der Theologie und der Kirche, 2/2 (Leipzig, 1900; rpt. Aalen: Scientia, 1972), 428. For his defense of infant baptism against Pilgram Marbeck, see TA Elsass I, 398.39-399.4; 408.1-6. For his notes to Marpeck’s *Confession*, see TA Elsass I, 476.28-35, 477.20-25, 478.17-19, 501.32-502.21. For Bucer against the Münster Anabaptists, see BDS, V, 212.21-23; 236.5-12; and SMGT 3, p. 12.

48. BDS, I, 245.7-10.
In the wake of these events, over the next few years Bucer was much more circumspect in his use of *sich ergeben.* He used it in two different ways, both intended as critiques of the separatism implied by rebaptism. In a polemical sense he turned the phrase against the Anabaptists, charging that “they do not consider anyone to be a Christian, unless they have surrendered themselves entirely to their spirit without Scripture, thereby scaring many away from Christ.” In a more positive sense Bucer used the phrase in a way meant to persuade the Anabaptists that there were Christians who had “surrendered themselves to Christ” without having been re-baptized. Thus when he gave a sermon in Bern whose hearers included a group of Anabaptists who had come to participate in the 1528 disputation, Bucer stressed that “nothing which is on earth or in heaven may help our souls find rest but only surrender to Christ.” However, such surrender resulted not in Anabaptist separatism but rather implied greater dedication to the local church: “We must surrender and abandon ourselves wholly to Christ and lay aside everything else that is in heaven and earth, word and deeds, gladly hear God’s word, maintain holy fellowship in the Lord that much better, receive the sacraments with all reverence and devotion, maintain our bodies in discipline, pray and fast much . . . [and] seek in all our deeds without ceasing to practice brotherly love.” In Strasbourg itself Bucer responded to criticism of the city’s church which Kautz and Reublin had leveled in their confession of faith. In doing so he pointed out that “through our preaching of the gospel here many have surrendered to Christ”—even if they had not been (re)baptized.

Bucer also used the related phrase *sich begeben,* which had connotations of a more specific and binding commitment than did *sich ergeben.* Although he occasionally used *sich begeben* with reference to Christ or God, he more frequently wrote of a devotion or commitment to service,

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49. Bucer’s caution may reflect the fact that Hubmaier had cited Bucer’s words in *Reasons and Causes* in his own defense of adult baptism.—*Der Lehrer Urteil* (TA, Hubmaier, 236). Whether or not Bucer knew of this work, Hubmaier’s citation of Bucer illustrates how easily the advocates of adult baptism could make use of Bucer’s words to support their own views.

50. *BDS,* 256.34-36. See his denunciation of sectarian “arch-hypocrites,” who, “even though they have never truly known or sought after God, devote themselves [sich begeben] to a notable appearance of piety” (*BDS,* III, 218.1-4).

51. *BDS,* II, 289.4-6. Irena Backus mentioned that one of the goals of the series of sermons preached at Bern was to refute the Anabaptists.—The Disputations of Baden, 1526, and Bern, 1528: Neutralizing the Early Church, Studies in Reformed Theology and History, 1 (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1993), 99.

52. *BDS,* II, 290.32-291.3.

53. *TA Elsass I,* 218.5. Against Marpeck Bucer asserted that the Anabaptists had separated themselves “from those who indeed seek after God and have surrendered themselves under the obedience of the divine word” (*TA Elsass I,* 408.28-32; cf. 426.20-25).
to civic unity and duties, or to marriage. In his criticisms of the Anabaptists, however, he often linked the two words. As Bucer stated in his debate with Marpeck:

> we cannot . . . commit ourselves [sich begeben] to God unless we have first recognized through true faith what he has done, does and will do for us and how he has given himself [sich ergeben] to us through his son. It is an old error to think that when people bind themselves so greatly, this does something. From this has arisen so many oaths among priests and such glorious professions among the religious orders.

The identification of the two phrases is understandable, given the Anabaptist view that the individual's surrender to Christ was made concrete and visible through the act of believers' baptism.

From about 1530 onward Bucer began to use both sich ergeben and sich begeben more frequently and in contexts not specifically associated with the Anabaptists. For instance, in the Tetrapolitan Confession he defined the church as "the society and community of those who have surrendered themselves to Christ." Both phrases occurred several times in all of the major works Bucer wrote in the wake of the Strasbourg synod of 1533. Although on occasion he used the two verbs synonymously, most often he continued to use the verb sich ergeben in the abstract sense of self-surrender to Christ or (more rarely) to God, while he preferred the more concrete connotations of sich begeben to describe a commitment to obedience, to repentance, and/or to reform. By 1534 the related concepts of self-surrender and commitment had become a standard part of Bucer's theological vocabulary, and from then on they occurred in almost all of his writings.

54. On commitment to service, see BDS, I, 61.30; on commitment to civic unity and duties, see BDS, I, 202.20; on commitment to marriage, see BDS, II, 438.33, 444.16, and BDS, III, 96.2-7. For his interchangeable use of sich begeben and sich ergeben in a memorandum written in the spring of 1526, at the time the first Anabaptists were arriving in Strasbourg, see: BDS, II, 492.19; 493.1-6; also his debate with Marpeck, TA Elsass I, 408.11-12, 516.25. The stronger sense of sich begeben is clear from the parallel Bucer draws between self-commitment and an oath in his description of the sacraments as signs "with which one yields to Christ and, as it were, takes an oath of allegiance [das man mit solchen Christo begeben vnd im all vyl als gehulde]," BDS, III, 120.3-6.

55. TA Elsass I, 408.11-17.

56. BDS, III, 112.8-11.

57. In Furbergung, Bericht, Handlung and his first catechism, all written 1533-1534, Bucer used the verb sich begeben twelve times: six times to refer to repentance and/or reform, three times to Christ or Christ's spirit, and once each to obedience, to worship, and to "what your salvation is." He used sich ergeben 34 times: 23 times to refer to Christ, God, or the Spirit; twice each to obedience and to the congregation; and once each to God's grace, to "our salvation," to "what pleases God," and similar phrases. In his introduction to Von Ampt der Oberkait, Dialogi oder Gesprach and in his second Catechism, all written 1535-1537, Bucer used sich begeben 21 times: five times to refer to the congregation
The various sectarian groups within Strasbourg influenced Bucer in more than just his terminology, however. Although still bitterly opposed to Anabaptist doctrines, Bucer also acknowledged the positive features which made those doctrines so attractive to many of Strasbourg's inhabitants. In the discussion of baptism in the second edition of his Gospels commentary published in 1530, he made it clear that the Anabaptists were dangerous not because of their rejection of infant baptism per se but because of their sectarianism. Moreover, because Anabaptists often led blameless lives, "which is the only thing the crowd looks at," they gained a high reputation and were able "to call many away from the common worship of the true church, and from the more pure doctrine which is taught there, who then with them condemn the whole flock of Christ, have themselves rebaptized and boast that they alone are Christians." 58

In order to prevent further defections from the city's church, Bucer was willing to make concessions to Anabaptist sensibilities. For instance, while he continued to uphold the validity of infant baptism, he also began to stress that when adults were baptized they had to profess their faith in Christ. The discussion of baptism in the second edition of his Gospels commentary contained several clarifications linking adult baptism with a profession of faith. 59 A year later Bucer went further in a proposal made to Ambrosius Blarer and other pastors who were meeting to discuss a common church order for the south-German churches. Bucer suggested that they should consider "whether it would be useful to establish a public profession of Christian faith in the church following formal catechization, in which place, it seems, papistic confirmation has insinuated itself; for this especially makes many good people

58. 1530 Gospels, reprinted in A. Lang, Evangelienkommentar, 427. In his letters to Margaret Blarer, Bucer specifically named Pilgram Marpeck and his wife as individuals whose personal lives were above reproach.—Schief II, 791 (Aug. 15, 1531). The pastors also admitted to the Strasbourg Council in December of 1531 that Marpeck "had many wonderful gifts and a solid, good zeal in many things" (TA Elss A, 360.1-5).

59. Lang notes or italicizes these changes in the second edition of Evangelienkommentar, 413, 422-23, 424.
hostile to infant baptism, because there is no public profession of Christian faith." 60

In his debate with Marpeck, Bucer also acknowledged the appeal of a church in which only those were baptized “who confessed and desired it”—particularly since believers’ baptism would promote the greater purity of the church. 61 Disparaging the significance of individual confession of faith, he emphasized instead the doctrine of election and the priority of divine grace. Christians were to pray for purity and to try to achieve it through admonition and church discipline, neither of which was hindered by the baptism of infants. Nevertheless, he added, “If it is thought that individual confession is so important, that the people will be kept in greater security and that they will admonish one another that much more, then we can do all of this, even when they have been baptized as children, if there is otherwise the proper spirit and will.” 62

A year and a half later Bucer repeated the same arguments in a treatise refuting the teachings of Melchior Hoffman. Again he addressed the question of whether church discipline would be easier to impose if only those were baptized “who promised to lead a Christian life.” His response reveals that he was not opposed to the promise of obedience itself but rather to the separatism which it implied: “Why are such promises worth more before rather than after baptism? If God gives the increase, shouldn’t we accomplish as much through them [i.e., the promises] towards those people who have been baptized and consecrated to God according to his ordinance, as when they had not yet been baptized? Baptism does not hinder anything in the use of teaching and admonition if only there is enough spirit to set about it boldly.” 63

Bucer thus gave no theological significance to the individual profession of faith. However, such a profession could be introduced into the official church so long as its separatistic implications were avoided by the continuation of infant baptism and the practice of fraternal admonition and church discipline towards all. In his debates with Marpeck and Hoffman Bucer did not mention a confirmation ceremony; but before the year was out he would suggest the introduction of a confirmation ceremony as a means of satisfying Anabaptist demands for a public profession of faith. 64

60. Schieß, I, 245.
63. BDS, V, 105.8-20.
64. Hareide suggests that Schwenckfeld proposed a confirmation ceremony in his debate with Bucer during the 1533 synod (Konfirmation, 121-24). He bases his suggestion on T. W. Röhrich’s statement that Schwenckfeld wished “that at least a ceremony
The immediate background for this proposal was the growing Anabaptist movement in Münster. In December of 1533 Bucer wrote an open letter to Bernd Rothmann, the leader of the Münster radicals, describing *What Ought to be Thought about the Baptism of Infants*. Three months later he published a longer *Report from Holy Scripture* on the sacraments and ministry of the church—a response to Rothmann’s *Confession Concerning Both Sacraments*. In both works Bucer suggested that baptized children be catechized, thereby preparing them to affirm their faith. Then, he continued:

we could re-establish with them the old practice from which confirmation arose, when the bishops laid their hands on those who had been baptized and bestowed on them the Holy Spirit according to the example of the apostles in Samaria, about which practice we read in Jerome’s dialogue *contra Luciferianos*. It would be no hindrance to this that they had been baptized as infants, just as it was no hindrance in the early church.\(^{65}\)

In the catechism he published a month later Bucer described the same origin of confirmation and linked it even more closely with preceding catechetical instruction.\(^{66}\)

Bucer clearly saw the re-introduction of confirmation as a concession to Anabaptist demands. In both of the works directed at the Münsterites, he proposed the ceremony in the event “that it is thought that it should be so important that individuals at one time make a profession and promise of Christian deeds, renounce the devil, [and] surrender

\(^{65}\) BDS, V, 176.4-10 (Bericht); cf. *Quid de baptismate*, SMCT 3, p. 33, where Bucer states more clearly that “individuals, after they had reached adolescence and been sufficiently instructed in the faith, professed [their faith] before the bishops and were confirmed, as it were, with the imposition of hands by the bishop.” Interestingly, Hubmaier cited Jerome’s *contra Luciferianos* in defense of adult baptism (TA, Hubmaier, 231).

\(^{66}\) BDS, VI.3, 92.10-20.
themselves to Christ." By contrast, in his catechism, he simply described the practice and then almost dismissed it by stating that "nothing is left of this than the child’s play, holding God in contempt, of confirmation by a suffragan bishop." He indicated no desire to restore the practice in the Strasbourg church.

Moreover, Bucer had not lost his skepticism about the claim that a public profession of faith would guard the purity of the church. As he told the Münsterites, most people would have their children make a public profession of faith, "since the whole mob [would] want to be [considered] Christian, just like now," and the pastors would have no right to prevent their participation. Bucer continued to believe that the best way to bring about the reformation of the entire church was not through requiring a public profession of faith from adults but through the vigorous use of church discipline towards all.

Despite his willingness to concede the use of a public profession of faith, Bucer remained steadfastly opposed to the covenantal view of baptism espoused by both Marpeck and Hoffman. His understanding of the continuity of God’s covenant in the Old and New Testaments and his equation of baptism with circumcision as the sign of acceptance into that covenant prevented him from endorsing such a view. To the Anabaptists who argued that God’s covenant included only those who confessed their faith and renounced Satan, he replied that the promise God made to Abraham, to be his God and the God of his children, applied to Christians and their children as well. Bucer acknowledged that when adults who converted to Christianity were brought into the covenant through baptism, they were first required to confess their faith; but because God’s gracious promise was then extended to their children, it was not necessary for their children to make the same con-

67. BDS, V, 175.39-176.2; cf. Quid de baptismate, "If we think so much of restoring a public profession, let us restore the old rite . . ." (SMTG 3, p. 33).
68. BDS, VI.3, 92.19-20.
69. BDS, V, 217.12-17.
70. Against Marpeck, TA Elsass 1, 395.30-396.7; 397.30-34; against Hoffman, BDS, V, 97.38-98.26; against Rothmann, BDS, V, 172.7-173.3. During the early 1530s Schwenckfeld drew a sharp line between the Old and New Testaments, in opposition to Bucer’s view that there was only one covenant between God and his people, revealed to a different degree in the two testaments. Although at this time Schwenckfeld and Marpeck rejected Bucer’s position on the unity of the covenant, a decade later Schwenckfeld and Marpeck attacked each other for their respective views on the relationship of the Old and New Testaments, among other issues. For a description of Marpeck’s view of the two covenants, as well as for summaries of Bucer’s and Schwenckfeld’s positions, see William Klassen, Covenant and Community: The Life, Writings and Hermeneutics of Pilgram Marpeck (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 110-36, 156-76. Torsten Bergsten described the later controversy between Marpeck and Schwenckfeld in "Pilgrim Marbeck und seine Auseinandersetzung mit Caspar Schwenckfeld," Kyrkhistorisk Arsskrift, 57 (1957), 39-100; 58 (1958), 53-87.
ession of faith. The Anabaptists erred by concluding that what was true in some cases (i.e., that adult converts had to make a profession of faith before they could be baptized) was required in all cases (i.e., that everyone had to make a profession of faith before they could be baptized).  

In some ways the events and controversies of 1533-1534 marked the end of one stage and the beginning of another in Bucer’s career. His dispute with the sectarians during the synod, followed by Hoffman’s imprisonment, Schwenckfeld’s departure from Strasburg, and the adoption of a new church ordinance in 1534, gave the Strasbourg church a new stability and more effective measures for counteracting the spread of Anabaptism in the city. Bucer did not again suggest a confirmation ceremony until his drafting of the Hessian disciplinary ordinance in 1538.

On the other hand, having overcome any previous inhibitions about the concept of surrendering or committing oneself to Christ, Bucer now made regular use of the phrases in his works. In particular, he increasingly stressed the stronger and more concrete idea of commitment to the congregation, to obedience, and to discipline. The phrases sich ergeben/sich begeben occurred with striking frequency and insistence in two of Bucer’s works from 1538—a set of three sermons on the text of Matthew 11:28-30 and his treatise On True Pastoral Care. In one of the sermons Bucer defined “taking the yoke of Christ upon you” as “committing yourself to the obedience of Christ in his church and to the discipline of the same.” And in explaining the metaphor of pastoral care on which On True Pastoral Care was based, Bucer stated that “lost sheep” were won when they were “brought into the entire fellowship of the church and surrendered themselves entirely to their pastor Christ.” Throughout On True Pastoral Care Bucer referred approvingly to Christians who “truly trusted in Christ and had committed themselves to the obedience of the gospel from their hearts.” Much of the book described how the pastors could lead others “to commit them-

71. BDS, V, 197.12-38; cf. 179.26-180.8.
72. “Commit themselves to the fellowship of Christ [sich in gemeinschaft Christi begeben],” Dialog oder Gespräch, BDS, VI:2, 149.7; cf. 158.1. “We commit ourselves into the obedience of the holy gospel [wir... begeben uns in gehorsam des heilige Evangelii],” Vom Amt der Oberhaupt, BDS, VI:3, 33.8-9; cf. 1537 Catechism (BDS, VI:3, 202.38). “I gladly commit myself to this church discipline and obedience [ich mich diser Kirchenzucht und gehorsame gern begeben],” 1537 Catechism (BDS, VI:3, 194.25).
73. BDS, VII, 41.24-26.
74. Ibid., 144.24-26.
75. Ibid., 97.9-11; cf. 192.36-37 (begeben); 98.19-21 (ergeben); 103.5-9 (begeben).
selves to all obedience of his [Christ's] word.”76 Alfred Niebergall has described Bucer’s use of sich ergeben/sich begeben in this work as “nothing other than an expression for the Christian life, the distinguishing feature of which . . . is that it binds those who accept the word in faith with Christ and with their brothers.”77

At the same time that Bucer was becoming more forceful in his emphasis on the need for individuals to commit themselves to obedience, he was also re-thinking the role of a public profession of faith. In a document proposing “the instituting of church discipline,” written sometime during the second half of the decade, the Strasbourg pastors proposed requiring all children to make a public profession of faith when they reached the age of discretion.78 They should repeat the profession in private to the pastor every year thereafter, so that people could be reminded of what they had learned and so that heresy could be more easily detected. Along with other proposals in the document, the profession of faith was intended to aid the pastors in their responsibilities for the doctrinal and moral oversight of their parishioners. For their part the parishioners were to be reminded “what they or others on their behalf promised to God and the church” at their baptism. Although the ministers believed that the obligations assumed at baptism included the willingness to accept instruction, admonition, and discipline from the pastors, the laity did not seem to take these obligations seriously. In his sermons and pastoral treatise Bucer’s heartfelt exhortations to obey the gospel or the church reflected resistance from the laity to these disciplinary measures. From practical experience he was learning that he was mistaken in his earlier assumption that the conscientious exercise of discipline would be sufficient to preserve the purity of the church.

At this point in his career Bucer was asked by Landgrave Philip to help counter the growth of the Anabaptist movement in Hesse. As in Strasbourg, the Anabaptists in Hesse were a diverse group, including Hutterites, Swiss Brethren, disciples of Melchior Rinck (a former Hessian pastor who had been imprisoned since 1531), and followers of Melchior Hoffman. Bucer’s contacts in Hesse were almost entirely with the

76. Ibid., 94.8 (begeben). Cf. 229.23-26; 146.15-17 (ergeben); 193.30 (ergeben); 198.2-4 (ergeben); 198.8-14 (ergeben, ergeben, begeben); 229.25-26 (begeben); 234.11-12 (ergeben).

77. “Kirche und Seelsorge nach Bucers Schrift 'Von der waren Seelsorge,'” Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für Niedersächsische Kirchengeschichte, 63 (1965), 33-73; citation at 47. Niebergall does not distinguish between Bucer’s use of sich ergeben and sich begeben.

78. Strasbourg, Archives Municipales, Archives du Chapitre de Saint-Thomas 173 (V.E. VIII), 166v-172v. On the dating of this document and the context in which it was written, see Amy Nelson Burnett, The Yoke of Christ: Martin Bucer and Christian Discipline, Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies (Kirkville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal, in press), ch. 4.
last group. Soon after his arrival in Hesse he held a public disputation
with several Melchiorite leaders who had been arrested two years earlier. As a result of the disputation Bucer was sought out by yet
another prominent Melchiorite, Peter Tasch, who now wished to be
reconciled with the official church. At a synod in Ziegenhain at the
end of November Tasch reached an agreement with Bucer and the
Hessian clergy. As a result of that agreement, all of the Melchiorite
leaders signed a confession of faith and ended their separation from
the Hessian church.79

An important prerequisite for the reconciliation of the Melchiorites
was the disciplinary ordinance drafted by Bucer which introduced a
confirmation ceremony and gave precise directions for the exercise of
discipline in the Hessian church. The confirmation ceremony required
not only that children be questioned about "the chief articles of the
Christian faith" but that they also be asked "to surrender themselves
publicly to Christ the Lord and his church."80 The agenda for the con-
firmation ceremony was even more specific. As a part of the confession
of faith, the children were asked "what the fellowship of the church
entails." The correct answer included "obedience to the divine word,"
attendance at public worship services, willingness to give or accept fra-
ternal admonition concerning sin and to refer recalcitrant sinners to
the pastors and elders, and recognition of the ban when pronounced by
the pastors and elders. Each child was then asked, "Do you believe and
confess, and will you also commit yourself to the fellowship and obedi-
ence of the church of Christ?"81 In a very concrete sense the child's
"commitment to fellowship and obedience" meant being integrated into
the local congregation and accepting a disciplinary system which was
based on mutual admonition but was ultimately the responsibility of
the pastors and elders.

79. Werner Packull, "The Melchiorites and the Ziegenhain Order of Discipline, 1538-
1539," in Walter Klaassen, ed., Anabaptism Revisited: Essays on Anabaptist/Mennonite
the two articles by Packull, "Peter Tasch en de Melchiorieten in Hessen," Doopsgezinde
Bijdragen, 12-13 (1986-1987), 107-38; and "Peter Tasch: From Melchiorite to Bankrupt
ordinance, see also: Williams, Radical Reformation, 668-76; James C. Stainaker,
"Anabaptism, Martin Bucer and the Shaping of the Hessian Protestant Church," Journal

80. BDS, VII, 264.16-19. Children "are confirmed into the Christian congregation [gmeine] upon their own confession and submission to Christ" (BDS, VII, 290.29-30).

81. "Wiltu dich auch in die gemeinschaft und gehorsam der kirchen Christi begeben?" The agenda specified that one child could give the responses explaining the
Creed and the fellowship of the church, but each child was asked individually to make
the public commitment "as you have now heard that this child believes and confesses and
commits himself to the church of Christ" (BDS, VII, 311.31-312.28).
In return for accepting a confirmation ceremony and the more conscientious exercise of church discipline, the Hessian Melchiorites agreed not to criticize infant baptism, although they did not endorse its practice. This concession satisfied Bucer, whose chief criticism of the Anabaptists arose from the separatist consequences of rebaptism. The willingness of Tasch and his associates to compromise on this issue illustrates the gap separating them from the Swiss Brethren and other groups who regarded separation from the world as the logical consequence of adult baptism.

Having succeeded in winning the Hessian Melchiorites back to the official church, Bucer was eager to try the same strategy with Melchior Hoffman himself and his Strasbourg followers. He was delayed in implementing this plan by his involvement in new attempts to end the religious schism in the empire. From Hesse Bucer went directly to Leipzig, where he participated in a religious colloquy sponsored jointly by the Landgrave, the Elector of Saxony, and the chancellor of Ducal Saxony. Bucer summarized the results of the colloquy in fifteen articles on faith and practice. Article Six advocated the reform of the confirmation ceremony according to the practice described by Jerome, specifying that it should be administered to baptized adolescents “after they had been sufficiently instructed in the Christian faith and had given themselves into the obedience of the church.” Not only would the restoration of this ceremony further “the fellowship and obedience of the church”; it would also eliminate the arguments by which “the Anabaptists persuade people to accept their errors.”

On the one hand Bucer’s reference to Jerome and his mention of the usefulness of confirmation in countering Anabaptist influence echoed his reasoning five years earlier in his writings against the Münsterites. But on the other, his concern that baptized adolescents “give themselves to the obedience of the church” reflected his growing conviction in the intervening years that individuals must consciously commit themselves to the church and its discipline. The linkage of these two arguments in a document written so soon after the drafting of the Hessian ordinances suggests that the Hessian confirmation ceremony was not simply a concession made to help reconcile the Melchiorites with the official church. Bucer also regarded

83. Cf. the statement of Peter Riedemann, a Hutterite missionary in Hesse in early 1539 who ascribed the large-scale defection of the Hessian Anabaptists to their being led astray by “lost, erring spirits” (quoted in Packull, “Melchiorites,” 21).
84. The article is reprinted in Ludwig Cardauns, Zur Geschichte der Kirchlichen Unions- und Reformbestrebungen von 1538 bis 1542 (Rome: Loescher, 1910), 97.
confirmation as a useful means of disciplinary authority of the pastors and the obedience of the laity.

From Leipzig, Bucer traveled home to Strasbourg, but he was only in the city for a few weeks before he left again for Frankfurt to serve as theological advisor for the Strasbourg delegates in negotiations which led to the Frankfurt Suspension of April, 1539. He finally returned to Strasbourg at the end of April and quickly summoned a synod to be held at the end of May. At the same time he actively supported attempts by Peter Tasch and Johannes Eisenburg, another former Melchiorite, to persuade Melchior Hoffman to give up his errors.

During this time Bucer's interpretation of confirmation continued to evolve. This evolution is most clearly revealed in a later account of Bucer's debates with the Strasbourg Melchiorites. According to this account Bucer appealed to Melchiorites by "conceding some things to them in part while keeping safe the whole truth." One of Bucer's most significant concessions concerned the rationale for a public profession of faith and obedience. Earlier, Bucer had rejected the idea that God required everyone to profess their faith and swear to obey his covenant before baptism. The children of Christians entered into God's covenant through baptism just as the children of the Israelites had entered into God's covenant through circumcision, and neither act required the conscious assent of the child. Now, however, Bucer extended his parallel between the Israelites and the church to include the renewal of the covenant described in the Old Testament. After their return from Babylon the Israelites had not only restored temple worship but had renewed the covenant once entered into with God, but impiously broken by them, and had bound themselves with an oath to keep it faithfully.

85. Bucer arrived in Strasbourg on Jan. 21, 1539 and left for Frankfurt on Feb. 9. The summons for the synod was dated May 8, barely a week after Bucer arrived home. Packull has pointed to the connection between the second Strasbourg synod and renewed efforts to reconcile the Strasbourg Melchiorites with the official church ("Peter Tasch: From Melchiorite," 284-86). This connection is strengthened by the fact that the six-month gap between Bucer's Hessian experiences and the second Strasbourg synod can be explained by Bucer's absence from Strasbourg.

86. TA Elsass III, 319-22. Bucer did, however, express his doubts about the conditions that the Strasbourg Council attached to Tasch and Eisenburg's visits with Hoffman (TA Elsass III, 320.8-13).

87. TA Elsass III, 325.29-30. The account comes from Nicolaus Blesdijk's biography of David Joris. It echoes Bucer's terminology so closely that, like other portions of Blesdijk's work, it must have been based on documents now lost. Blesdijk was the son-in-law of David Joris who revealed that the latter had lived in Basel under the assumed name of Jan van Brugge until his death in 1556.

88. Cf. his statement in his 1534 Catechism that the children of Christians were to be considered as members of God's covenant people "unless they prove with their deeds that they have broken [the covenant] and do not wish to keep it" (BDS, VI:3, 75.8-11).
henceforth.” In like manner, the Strasbourg clergy taught that they
were:

to make their own profession of faith and declare their offering
and devotion to the obedience of Christ and the church. In addi-
tion ... no one ought to be admitted to participation in the Lord’s
Supper except those who, having first been instructed in the true
religion, had devoted their name to Christ the Lord and the
church and had professed that they would henceforth maintain
themselves in true faith and pure worship towards God and obe-
dience towards the church.89

Bucer had not abandoned his belief that children entered into the
covenant through baptism. However, just as the Israelites had
renewed their covenant with God, so individuals baptized as infants
would renew their covenant with God through their own profession of
faith and obedience.

Bucer’s comparison between the Israelites’ covenant renewal and
Christians’ public profession of faith was a significant development in
his thought. In earlier discussions of God’s covenant with his people,
or of baptism as a sign of that covenant, he had said nothing about the
possibility that the covenant could be renewed.90 However, if the con-
firmation ceremony could be identified with the Israelites’ formal re-
newal of the covenant, Bucer would then have scriptural precedent for
requiring a public profession of faith and obedience from everyone who
had been baptized as an infant.

In a document written in the wake of the 1539 synod Bucer referred to
scripture to justify the introduction of a confirmation ceremony in the
Strasbourg church, writing:

the almighty God demands in the New and Old Testament that
each believer should himself confess his faith in the church when
he has come of age and should surrender himself to the Lord. For
this reason the old, apostolic church required that all those who
were baptized as children, as soon as they had learned the cate-
chism and had reached a Christian understanding of their bap-
tism and of Christian fellowship, were to confess their faith pub-

89. TA Elsass III, 326.5-17.
90. See, for instance, his discussion of the covenant and of baptism and circumcision as
its signs, and of the mystery of baptism in his Romans commentary, Metaphrases et
enarrationes perpetue epistolam D. Pauli Apostoli ... Tomus primus: Continens
metaphrasim et enarrationem in Epistolam ad Romanos (Strasburg: Rihel, 1536), 150-64;
288-97. During his public debate in Marburg with the Hessian Melchiorites, Bucer
compared the celebration of the Lord’s Supper with the Israelites’ renewal of the
covenant through their celebration of the Passover, but this was something different from
the formal renewal of the covenant (Franz, ed., Urkundliche Quellen, 229).
licly in the church and surrender themselves into the obedience of Christ.\textsuperscript{91}

His arguments were in vain, for the council rejected the proposal concerning confirmation as contained in the articles adopted at the synod.\textsuperscript{92} However, once he was convinced of the scriptural and patristic authority for confirmation, Bucer continued to advocate its implementation. In the church ordinance he drafted for the archiepiscopal territories of Cologne in 1543, he prescribed a ceremony similar to the one instituted in Hesse, and he justified it on the same basis of scriptural command and patristic example.\textsuperscript{93} The catechism which Bucer published for the Strasbourg church the same year included confirmation as one of "the special practices and actions" of the church. As part of the confirmation ceremony, those baptized as children "should confess [their faith] with their own heart and mouth before the whole Christian congregation and thereby commit [themselves] to the covenant of the fellowship of the Lord and the obedience of the church."\textsuperscript{94} Bucer's last published work before he was exiled from the city in 1549 was his summary of doctrine taught at Strasbourg. The summary included an article stating that baptized infants were to be confirmed after they had been catechized and had made a profession of faith before the congregation.\textsuperscript{95} From his new position at Cambridge, Bucer both argued for the necessity of a public profession of faith and obedience and attempted to reshape the existing confirmation rite in the Book of Common Prayer to meet the requirements for this public profession.\textsuperscript{96}

III

From the evolution of Bucer's understanding of confirmation, what can we learn about the influence of Anabaptist and sectarian thinkers

\textsuperscript{91} BDS, VI:2, 203.3-9. The editors date this document from the summer of 1538 (BDS, VI:2, 201), but I think it more likely that it was written after the synod and before May, 1540; cf. the discussion of dating in Burnett, The Yoke of Christ, ch. 7. Packull also expresses some question about the editors' dating of this memorandum, in "Peter Tasch: From Melchiorite," 285 n. 52.

\textsuperscript{92} TA Eissos III, 331.19-23.


\textsuperscript{94} BDS, VI:3, 247.17-26. Again, Bucer cited scripture as the basis for this profession of faith and obedience.

\textsuperscript{95} BDS, XVII, 134.9-14.

on his thought? In general, the concept of self-surrender or commitment to Christ occurred only rarely in Bucer’s writing during the 1520s. He seemed reluctant to write about surrendering oneself to Christ because of the association the phrase had with believers’ baptism. Bucer staunchly opposed the separation implied by rebaptism. Anabaptists showed such separatism by refusing to attend sermons or to receive the sacraments in their parish churches, and by restricting admonition and the ban to those who had been rebaptized. They thereby implied that they were the only true Christians in the city. In so doing they destroyed the unity of the church by ignoring scriptural commands to love one another and to bear with their weaker fellow-Christians. Moreover, with their emphasis on the obligation assumed at baptism to live a model Christian life, the earliest Swiss Anabaptists seemed to be restoring a sort of works-righteousness—or, as the Strasbourg reformers called it, a new monastic order.

Bucer’s greater willingness, beginning around 1530, to use the concepts of self-surrender or commitment to Christ seems to have grown out of his contacts with Marpeck and Schwenckfeld. The earliest Anabaptist groups in Strasbourg were rather unstable and ill-defined, and Bucer believed the best strategy to eliminate them was to denounce them from the pulpit and lecture hall. However, with the arrival of Marpeck and with the maturing and differentiation of the Anabaptist groups, Bucer realized that his tactics would have to change. Marpeck was no wandering Anabaptist preacher as many of the early sectarian leaders had been, but a citizen of Strasbourg employed by the council and respected for his pious life. His writings reveal a degree of theological reflection which the Strasbourg clergy had to take seriously, not dismiss out of hand.

Schwenckfeld’s influence on Bucer was due more to the already existing similarities in their thought. Although Bucer had backed away from the spiritualist tendencies expressed in his earliest works, there were still broad areas of agreement between the two men. The Silesian’s view of self-surrender corresponded to the broad and abstract use of the term by Bucer against separatistic Anabaptists during the 1520s. Both men had long advocated the catechization of children, although they disagreed about whether catechization should precede baptism or proceed from it. Both shared a deep concern that faith in Christ was to result in sincere repentance and genuine obedience to the gospel—a

mindset which Schwenckfeld described with the terms *sich ergeben/sich begeben*. Although by November of 1530 Bucer was warning other pastors about Schwenckfeld's views on infant baptism, the language which both Bucer and Schwenckfeld used to describe the attitude appropriate to the individual Christian is strikingly similar.

The point at which the Strasbourg church was most vulnerable to Anabaptist and sectarian criticism was the failure of the evangelical gospel to produce fruit in the lives of its hearers. In his debates with Anabaptist leaders Bucer was repeatedly forced to admit that "there are unfortunately great failings in our church." This made the upright moral lives of the sectarians even more obvious and lent credibility to their argument that only a voluntary church, entered through baptism after a public profession of faith, could be a truly Christian church. During the early 1530s Bucer tried to render this argument harmless by adapting it to the official church. He regarded a public profession of faith as a neutral act if it could be purged of its ecclesiological significance through the continued use of infant baptism. In a sense, the public profession of faith functioned as a placebo. That is, it did not necessarily lead to a better Christian life (which was the work of God, not of the individual); but it might make people feel more inclined to accept admonition and discipline. Moreover, identifying the public profession of faith with confirmation gave the ceremony a greater degree of legitimacy on the basis of patristic practice. Nevertheless, although Bucer was willing to concede the establishment of a confirmation ceremony in theory, he saw no need for its introduction in the Strasbourg church at the time of the first synod in 1533.

By 1538 the situation was different. Although Bucer believed that mutual admonition and discipline would lead to the improvement of the church, his attempts to promote their use in Strasbourg found little response among his parishioners. Called to Hesse, he became involved in discussions with leaders of the Anabaptist faction whose individualistic, rather than ecclesiological, view of baptism made them more open to being reconciled with the official church. Under these circumstances, it was possible to work out a compromise which would meet the Melchiorite demand for a public commitment to Christ and which would at the same time promote the use of admonition and discipline.

After proposing a confirmation ceremony as a compromise with the Hessian Melchiorites, Bucer then attempted to introduce the ceremony in his own church during the second Strasbourg synod. Bucer's success in

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98. TA Elsass I, 229.11-12.
99. TA Elsass I, 525.36; TA Elsass II, 80.1-5.
winning the Hessian Melchiorites back to the official church must have caused him to think that the same might be possible in Strasbourg itself, particularly in light of Tasch's willingness to help in converting his former comrades. But there was more to it than simply converting the Anabaptists. The first synod with its resulting church ordinance of 1534, plus more stringent city mandates against the Anabaptists issued that same year, had already weakened the sectarian movement in Strasbourg. Furthermore, the Melchiorites were not the only sectarians in the city. What made Bucer such a staunch proponent of confirmation was precisely its nonsectarian nature, since it was expected from all those who had been baptized as infants. Moreover, the specific "commitment to the fellowship and obedience of the church" set it apart from the more abstract surrender or commitment to Christ associated with rebaptism. Adult rebaptism implied an obligation to live a Christian life in general, but Bucer's commitment was made to the church—or, from a practical standpoint, to the ministers of the church. Consequently it became a means of increasing the pastors' disciplinary authority over all members of the official church.

However, the most striking change was that Bucer now saw the public profession of faith and obedience as something which God, in scripture, required of all Christians. By likening the public profession of faith and obedience in a confirmation ceremony to the periodic renewal of the covenant by the Israelites, Bucer was able to have the best of both worlds. He could retain his position that God's covenant extended to the children of believers, who were brought into the church through baptism; he could also answer the claim of the Anabaptists that God's covenant required the individual's conscious assent. In the confirmation ceremony, those baptized as infants would acknowledge the obligations laid upon them by their baptism, just as in the covenant-renewal ceremony the Israelites acknowledged the obligations laid on them by their circumcision. The result would be a congregation committed to active participation in corporate worship, to mutual admonition, and to the exercise of church discipline, and also a congregation subject to the oversight of the clergy.

Of course, in the final analysis Bucer's confirmation ceremony differed fundamentally from Anabaptist baptism. Instead of being the consequence of an individual's freely-chosen "surrender to Christ," Bucer's public profession of faith and obedience was a means of encouraging each individual to make a "commitment to the obedience of the church"—which presumably would then foster a general attitude of "surrender to Christ." Nevertheless, his adoption and adaptation of Anabaptist terminology and procedures in a public confirmation ceremony were more than a decoy designed to lure the sectarians back to the
church. Confirmation assumed an important place in Bucer’s mature theology. Moreover, the ceremony established in Hesse served as a model for other Lutheran territories over the next few decades.\textsuperscript{100} Without Bucer’s debates with the Anabaptists on the meaning of commitment to Christ and the church, the history of evangelical confirmation would have been much different.

\textsuperscript{100} The editor of the Hessian disciplinary ordinance notes its influence on church ordinances for Württemberg, Calenberg-Göttingen, Waldeck, and Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel \textit{(BDS, VII, 264 n. 25)}. 