Irene Dingel, Robert Kolb, Nicole Kuropka,
and Timothy J. Wengert

Philip Melanchthon

Theologian in Classroom, Confession, and Controversy



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Abbreviations

Ap	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
ARG	*Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte/Archive for Reformation History*
Bds.	*Philippi Melanchthonis epistolae, Iudicia, Consilia, Testimonia aliorumque ad eum Epistolae quae in Corpore Reformatorum desiderantur.* Heinrich Ernst Bindseil (Ed.). Halle: Schwetschke, 1874
Book of Concord	*The Book of Concord.* Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Ed.). Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000
BSLK	*Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*. 11. ed. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992
CA	Augsburg Confession
CR	*Corpus Reformatorum [1 – 25]. Philippi Melanthonis Opera quae supersunt omnia.* C. G. Bretschneider and H. E. Bindseil (Ed.). Halle and Braunschweig: Schwetschke, 1834 – 1860
CR/CO	*Corpus Reformatorum, Calvini Opera.* G. Baum, E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss (Ed.). Braunschweig: Schwetschke, 1863 – 1900
FC	Formula of Concord
Ep	Epitome
SD	Solid Declaration
LQ	*Lutheran Quarterly*
LW	*Luther's Works.* Saint Louis/Philadelphia: Concordia/Fortress, 1958 – 1986
MBWR/MBWT	MBW = *Melanchthons Briefwechsel.* Heinz Scheible (Ed.). Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: fromann-holzboog, 1977–; R = *Register* volumes, T = *Texte* volumes
MPG	*Patrologiae cursus completus: series Graece*, 161 vol. J.-P. Migne (Ed.). Paris: Petit-Montroye, 1857 – 1866
MPL	*Patrologiae cursus completus: series Latina*, 221 vol. J.P. Migne (Ed.). Paris & Turnhout: Gamer Fratres, 1844 – 1864
MSA	*Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl* [*Studienausgabe*]. Robert Stupperich (Ed.). 7 vol. Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1951 – 1975

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RE^2	*Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*. 2. Ed. J. J. Herzog and G. L. Plitt (Ed.). Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1877 – 1888
SCJ	*The Sixteenth Century Journal*
SM	*Supplementum Melanchthoniana. Werke Philipp Melanchthons die im Corpus Reformatorum vermisst werden.* Leipzig: Haupt, 1910 – 1926
TRE	*Theologische Realenzyklopädie.* Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Müller (Ed.). Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977 – 2007
VD 16	*Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienenen Drucke des XVI. Jahrhunderts.* Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in München and the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel (Ed.). Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1988
WA	*Martin Luthers Werke.* Weimar: Böhlau, 1883 – 1993
Br	*Briefe*
TR	*Tischreden*
ZKG	*Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*

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Introduction

Philip Melanchthon was a Renaissance man. He is often acknowledged as a biblical humanist: indeed, he was a man of many talents. It is true that he did not fashion works of art or new inventions with the hands that so mightily wielded a pen, but that pen promoted learning in theology, the communication arts, philology, ancient literature, history, physics, psychology, and astronomy. As his students began to call him soon after his death, he indeed became the *Praeceptor Germaniae*, Germany's preceptor. Myriad assignments from his university and his prince sent him personally and via correspondence into far corners of Europe. The influence of his learning has not ceased to this day. His service as an ecclesiastical diplomat and a counselor and consultant of kings and clergy, of schoolmen and scholars, across northern and central Europe (and beyond) promoted the reform of the church and society, of educational institutions and scholarly discussion.

And yet Melanchthon, having only recently become a focus of interest among German scholars (see the detailed bibliographical review of studies that appeared in connection with the observance of the five-hundredth anniversary of Melanchthon's birth in 1997 in Junghans: 2000, Junghans: 2003, cf. Dingel: 2012), has not commanded very much detailed attention from English-speaking researchers at all. The literature on his roles in church and society is not adequate to offer those students who wish to explore his thought and action in depth a reliable basis if they read best in English. Moreover, much of the available literature on the *Praeceptor Germaniae* in English repeats old and false clichés and does not reflect clearly the scholarly exposition of Melanchthon in the last quarter century. Therefore, this volume, growing out of conferences and research occasioned by the four-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of his death in 1560, presents twelve essays by four Reformation scholars on three areas of his career as a theologian in service to university, church, and prince.

A constellation of events brought Melanchthon into the situation of becoming a "Wunderkind" in German intellectual circles by his twentieth birthday. His early mentor and befriender Johannes Reuchlin, a relative by marriage and patron of the fatherless boy, set in place the mind that was able to gain much from instructors of lesser gifts and accomplishments at the Universities of Heidelberg and Tübingen. His father's place in the employ of princes gave him a sense for negotiating the shoals of life at a princely court

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and helped prepare him for serving the electors of Saxony and the other Evangelical princes who were able to command his services from time to time. His decision in the summer of 1518 to join the adventure in the study of humanities and theology that the University of Wittenberg was becoming made a decisive difference in his life as his vision of reform in school and society joined Martin Luther's vision of reform in church and society. The two became a team, and they gathered around them other team members, above all, Justus Jonas and Johannes Bugenhagen, at the core of a larger corps of reformers who complemented one another as they led and spread the efforts to call the church and society to repentance and faith, and thus to a faithful Christian life.

This volume grows out of a conference sponsored by the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel and organized by Professors Johannes Schilling (Kiel) and Timothy J. Wengert (Philadelphia) in May 2010. The volume includes four essays read at that conference, as well as other essays by three of the participants. Two German scholars join two from the United States in assessing aspects of Melanchthon's contribution to the church and the discipline of theology. Their studies focus on three facets of Melanchthon's public activity, his activities as a theological educator, his pioneering confession of the Wittenberg theology in the public arena, and his involvement in doctrinal controversy, with special focus on the controversies surrounding his understanding of the freedom of the human will and the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. The three sections of this volume do not, however, represent discrete or separate spheres of Melanchthon's public service. He confessed and waged controversy in the classroom; his learning and his zeal for educating pastors informed his public teaching in both controversy and confessional documents. These sections only serve to focus on three distinct accents in his calling as professor and public servant.

Praeceptor ecclesiae

Above all, Melanchthon found his native environment in the "classroom" or lecture hall. He was a learner and teacher almost by nature. He dedicated his energies and his public life first of all to teaching, in line with humanist thinking to pure teaching, the cultivation of truth and uprightness – piety – in his students. He produced best-selling textbooks on grammar (Latin and Greek), rhetoric, and dialectics (logic). The university formed the fertile ground from which his learning instructed students from German-speaking territories and beyond in various disciplines. But he viewed himself above all as a teacher of the church. In the classroom he sought to convey not only the information students needed for practicing their callings across the spectrum of educated society. He also strove to cultivate their ability to convey that information and to live a life of dedicated service to God and his world. He

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fruitfully taught the skills and principles of clear, effective communication. In addition, he taught in the public forum as he presented his own and his colleagues' theological convictions to the wider church and society. He fashioned the genre of the confessional document, as represented above all by the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, as an important instrument for his wider audience. His insistence on the truthfulness and necessity of faithful conveyance of this message led him into controversy with those who disagreed with him.

His careful training of his students came back to haunt him in 1549 and subsequent years as some of his students found that his support for a policy of compromise in neutral practices (adiaphora) in the life of the church (in the so-called "Leipzig Interim" of 1548) compromised the effective confession of the gospel as well as mere outward ritual and custom. His conviction, which he believed matched Luther's, that these compromises were necessary to save Saxon pulpits for Evangelical preachers aroused objections from students who had gained a different vision of how communication of a message functions beyond simply couching the truth in politically acceptable form. His concern for the receiver of the message led his students to argue that the laity's reception of such compromises in "merely external" matters would view these old practices, once abandoned, then reintroduced, as an abandonment of the Wittenberg message and way of life. They aroused Melanchthon's bitter critique of their betrayal of him, just as he had aroused their bitterness and sense that he had betrayed the gospel by pursuing this policy of compromise. But even in the midst of controversy over his compromises, he remained confessor and teacher of the faith.

In the Classroom

Melanchthon's engagement with the thought of Aristotle has provided tinder for controversy in the last century and a half. Nicole Kuropka, winner of Bretten's Melanchthon Prize in 2009, whose larger study of this subject deserves careful attention, clears away misunderstanding of the Wittenberg professor's use of the Stagarite. As significant as Melanchthon was in other areas of learning, alongside his recently highlighted activities as an instructor in several disciplines of the humanities, his efforts in behalf of reform of the theological curriculum had a profound impact on the education of pastors. That is the subject of an essay by Robert Kolb, delivered first in German at a conference on Melanchthon and the university in Wittenberg in October 2010. Timothy J. Wengert, winner of Bretten's Melanchthon Prize in 2000, composed a pioneering analysis of Melanchthon's exegetical lectures and publications, which rounds out this section of the volume.

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In Confessing the Faith

One sign of Melanchthon's continuing influence arises from his following the logic of the Wittenberg understanding of reality into the development of a new way of defining the church and its public teaching: confession of faith in the form of a published document. The Word of God occupied a central position in Melanchthon's understanding of reality. Therefore, in 1530 it was natural that he should change the title of his explanation of why the Evangelical governments were introducing Wittenberg reform from "defense" – *apologia* – to "confession." In doing so, he found a new way of defining the public teaching of the church. He combined the communicative power that the printing press put at his disposal with his conviction that the message of Scripture, particularly the gospel of the forgiveness of sins, delivers God's power to change the reality of sinners' identities. His concern for proper teaching combined with his burning desire to console troubled consciences with that gospel. His diplomatic assignments placed upon him the burden of formulating the Wittenberg theologians' teaching and understanding of the life of the church in ways that conveyed it to others far beyond their own circle. Some of the points of greatest influence in the course of his career arose when he was called upon to state and restate in formal confessional documents what he and his fellow theologians in Wittenberg believed the life-giving truth of the gospel meant for the people of their age.

This section begins with Timothy J. Wengert's analysis of Melanchthon's reputation as a compromiser, on the basis of his relationship with the papal legate, Lorenzo Campeggio, especially as the relationship unfolded at Augsburg in 1530 and in Melanchthon's Apology of the Augsburg Confession. Irene Dingel has investigated a variety of occasions on which Melanchthon continued the activity he had performed so well at Augsburg, the public confession of the Christian faith, as proclaimed by the Wittenberg reforming team. Three of her essays, two of which have not previously appeared in English, appear here, opening up aspects until now unexplored in his career as confessor: his use of confession of the faith in conjunction with the diplomatic efforts of Evangelical governments, his attempts to reconcile disputing parties within the Wittenberg circle through conciliatory formulations of biblical teaching, and his pioneering assembly of confessional documents into a *corpus doctrinae* [body of doctrine]. Alongside these essays stands one by Kolb, on the Praeceptor's doctrinal confession that he intended would serve as his theological last will and testament, his critique of the visitation instructions for what Melanchthon labeled the "inquisition" initiated in parts of Bavaria in 1557.

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In Controversy

For a "man of peace," as he is often called (see the opening paragraphs of Irene Dingel's essay, "The Creation of Theological Profiles," essay 12, below), Melanchthon fell again and again into controversy. He publicly challenged the positions of Roman Catholics, Antitrinitarians, Anabaptists, of theologians from Andreas Osiander to Ulrich Zwingli, to say nothing of Friedrich Staphylus and Caspar von Schwenckfeld. Tragically, he fell into sharp exchanges with a number of his own students, among them some of the brightest and best. Modern scholars have sometimes praised Melanchthon's "ecumenical spirit" for suffering such sharp attacks, but they often fail to recognize that his striving for peace and harmony never took place in separation from his convictions regarding the necessity of purity of teaching and forthright confession of God's Word. His reputation for mild manners, largely created by his students as part of their polemical defense of the Preceptor after his death (Wengert: 1995), was coupled with and contradicted by his inability to suffer gladly those whom he regarded as fools, especially when, as his students, they had learned better from him. His flight from "rabid theologians" reflected his weariness with the battles he experienced and betrayal he felt, but he had never hesitated, when he thought it called for, to move through the assemblies of theologians with sharp elbows himself.

Melanchthon's life-long struggle to maintain the Wittenberg tension between an understanding of God's grace and the biblical teaching regarding humanity's call to fulfill God's plan and purpose for life came to something of a head in the controversy over the freedom of the will in the 1550s and 1560s. Foundational for this debate, which Melanchthon's students continued after his death, was the Preceptor's formulation of his position on the subject in the 1530s. Timothy J. Wengert carefully surveys the precise paths he followed in experimenting with the best articulation of the Wittenberg definition of how the Holy Spirit works with the human will in conversion and repentance.

Among the most significant of the controversies in which he became entangled, one of the most stubborn to unravel was the controversy over his views of the Lord's Supper, a subject which still divides scholars trying to determine precisely what he did believe among the tangled web of utterances arising at different times from difference contexts. Wengert assesses Melanchthon's controversial interpretation of Colossians 3:1–2 from his lectures of 1557 and its place in his later Christology, with serious implications for his doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Kolb offers an examination of his Gnesio-Lutheran students' criticism of his position on the sacrament. Dingel analyzes how the Formula of Concord sorted out various elements of Melanchthon's doctrine of the Lord's Supper. The three essays covering this controversy certainly do not give a complete profile of the role of controversy in Melanchthon's life, but they do provide fresh insights into Melanchthon's

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struggle for proper teaching and the impact he had on the formulation of public teaching on this subject.

Readers will note different accents and interpretations among the authors. This should spur further analysis and discussion of the structure and impact of Melanchthon's theological contributions. In some essays editorial updating has added bibliographical items not available at the time of publication. Previously published essays have also been changed to conform them to the style of documentation in this series. Bibliographical listings at the end of each essay do not include references to works in the editions of authors listed in the table of abbreviations. Editorial revisions have been undertaken to correct typographical errors and similar mistakes in the originals and to conform the essays to the style of the publisher of this volume.

These sharply focused studies of Melanchthon's thinking and activities intend to offer readers a fuller picture of the intricate and complex nature of his career of public service and the continuing development of his thinking. As fruitful and lively as his thought was, it is certain that current scholarly judgments need continual refinement and revision. The authors hope that this volume encourages further careful study of the texts and contexts that will enable the *Praeceptor Germaniae* to continue teaching well beyond Germany's borders into the twenty-first century.

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Essay 1: Nicole Kuropka: "Melanchthon and Aristotle." Pp. 16 – 27. In: *Lutheran Quarterly* 25 (2011).

Essay 3: Timothy J. Wengert: "The Biblical Commentaries of Philip Melanchthon." Pp. 106 – 148. In: M. Patrick Graham and Timothy J. Wengert (Ed.). *Philip Melanchthon (1497 – 1560) and the Commentary.* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997.

Essay 4: Timothy J. Wengert: "Philip Melanchthon's Last Word to Cardinal Lorenzo Campeggio, Papal Legate at the 1530 Diet of Augsburg." Pp. 457 – 483. In: Johann Loehr (Ed.). *Dona Melanchthoniana: Festgabe für Heinz Scheible zum 70. Geburtstag.* Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog, 2001.

Essay 5: Irene Dingel: "Melanchthon und Westeuropa." Pp. 105 – 122. In: Günther Wartenberg and Matthias Zenter (Ed.). *Philipp Melanchthon als Politiker zwischen Reich, Reichsständen und Konfessionsparteien.* Wittenberg: Drei Kastanien Verlag, 1998.

Essay 6: Irene Dingel: "Melanchthons Einigungsbemühen zwischen den Fronten: der Frankfurter Rezeß." Pp. 121 – 143. In: Jörg Haustein (Ed.).

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Essay 8: Irene Dingel, German original: "Melanchthon und die Normierung des Bekenntnisses." Pp. 195 – 211. In: Günter Frank (Ed,). *Der Theologe Melanchthon.* Stuttgart: Thorbecke, 2000; translated as "Philip Melanchthon and the Establishment of Confessional Norms." Pp. 146 – 169. In: *Lutheran Quarterly* 20 (2006).

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Philip Melanchthon in Classroom

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Nicole Kuropka

Philip Melanchthon and Aristotle

1. Aristotle in the Crossfire of Criticism

In the spring of 1518 Luther announced at the Heidelberg Disputation that "whoever wants to philosophize in Aristotle without danger must necessarily beforehand become in Christ completely a fool" (WA 1: 355, 2 – 3; LW 31: 41, thesis 29). A half year later Philip Melanchthon arrived in Wittenberg to begin his duties as a professor of Greek. In his inaugural lecture he pleaded for a true understanding of Aristotle, discovered anew in the original sources (*De corrigendis adolescentiae studiis*, 1518, in: MSA 3: 35 [29 – 42]). In this connection Melanchthon had brought with him from Tübingen a variety of research projects relating to Aristotle. His intention, as he wrote to Georg Spalatin shortly after his arrival in electoral Saxony, was to purify philosophy, so that he might be able to approach theology well armed (12 October 1518, MBWT 1: 82 ff., §29).

In the persons of Luther and Melanchthon two critics of Aristotle converged, each with completely different bases for their criticisms. Luther formulated a theological criticism of Aristotle because the Aristotelian understanding of virtue had completely twisted the biblical understanding of human righteousness into pure works righteousness. On the other side, Melanchthon demanded – as had many other humanists – replacing the distorted Latin Aristotle with one again gleaned from the Greek sources. Theological criticism encountered a philological critique.

Already in his Tübingen days Melanchthon had expressed the desire to publish a purified edition of Aristotle. His move to Wittenberg put an end to these plans, at least in the beginning. Luther's Evangelical view of the human being's righteousness before God quickly fascinated Melanchthon and seized his interest. In his preface to Luther's 1519 commentary on Galatians he praised the superiority of biblical philosophy and complained that, despite its superiority, people struggled with Aristotle, who actually had barred entry to Christ's teaching (Otho Germanus [=Melanchthon] to the Reader, Preface to Martin Luther's *In epistolam Pauli ad Galatas commentarius* [Wittenberg, April 1519] in: MBWT 1: 121 – 24, §54). According to Melanchthon, the Apostle Paul had already warned against philosophy and its influence on theology (to Nicholas von Amsdorf, Preface to Aristophanes' *Nubes* [Wittenberg, April 1520] in: MBWT 1: 204 f., §89). In the following months

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Melanchthon agreed more and more with the theological criticism of Aristotle, one that finally culminated in this provocative question, written in the first edition of his *Loci communes* from 1521: "What difference does it make to me what this wrangler said?" ("Quid enim ad me, quid senserit ille rixator?" MSA 2,1: 42).

Without a doubt the Greek philosopher stood in the crossfire of criticism, in which Melanchthon also participated. His writings and letters demonstrate that a positive evaluation of the Stagirite completely disappeared from his works between 1519 and 1525. Melanchthon's colleague from his days at the University of Tübingen, Martin Cellarius, expressed his concern during this period in a letter. He had heard, he wrote, that Melanchthon had become an enemy of philosophy, but he could not believe it (August 1519, in: MBWT 1: 150 – 57, §66). (Melanchthon's response, if there was one, is unfortunately no longer extant). But it is certain that Melanchthon's change after his move to Wittenberg was not quite so extreme. Melanchthon never completely became an enemy of philosophy. Nevertheless, the authority of Aristotle for Melanchthon wavered, as shown even in his textbooks on rhetoric and grammar, where every explicit reference to Aristotle disappeared (Kuropka: 2002, 24 – 27). Melanchthon, however, never questioned "Philosophy" in the sense of the liberal arts (Scheible: 1996, 99 – 114; cf. Scheible: 2010, 125 – 51).

Shorn of Aristotle, the arts faculty at the University of Wittenberg faced a critical problem: how should the philosophical disciplines be taught without referring back to the Greek philosopher? With the renunciation of Aristotle, the *Nicomachean Ethics* as well as the doctrine of categories and the second book of the *Analytics* became unusable. Thus, the vacuum of authorities struck especially hard at the subjects of dialectics and ethics. Melanchthon continued to insist upon the necessity of the liberal arts, and thus he refashioned these textbooks accordingly (Kuropka: 2002, 27 – 29). Aristotle had been eliminated, but which philosopher should be used in his place? Melanchthon saw plenty of philosophers that in his view dedicated themselves to nonsensical or overly complicated things. In Plato's works, according to Melanchthon, one found countless insights, to be sure, but his understanding of virtue eradicated the boundaries between Christian and civil righteousness. For this reason Plato could mislead the inexperienced reader into false doctrine. The Stoics erred in their notion that virtue was the only good. Contrariwise, Melanchthon argued, God had designated the entire creation that he made as good (Gen 1:31). The fact that the Epicureans taught the mortality of the soul and desire as the highest good was completely unchristian (e. g., *In ethica Aristotelis commentarius* [Wittenberg: J. Klug, 1529], fol. A3b, b2b, c4a). For Melanchthon the only philosopher remaining was the Roman author Cicero, who was distinguished by two factors. For one thing, his ethic did not contradict the second table of the Decalogue, and for another he did not theorize abstractly about moral duties and virtues but

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explained them on the basis of his practical experience (cf. Melanchthon's *De legibus oratio*, 1525, CR 11: 66 – 86, esp. 79).

While the Greek philosophers indulged in theoretical speculation, the Roman Cicero taught on the basis of his experience with a practical orientation. Because, in Melanchthon's opinion, education was never an end in itself but instead served to cope with issues in daily life, Cicero, with his orientation to life in *De officiis*, was an adequate successor to Aristotle, who had presumably been withdrawn from the curriculum. In the curriculum of 1526 Melanchthon took this insight into account: Cicero's *On Duties* was now declared to be the basic textbook in place of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Friedensburg: 1926, 147, §148). With this Aristotle's exit from Wittenberg seemed to be sealed. But in this case appearances turned out to be deceiving.

2. The Rediscovery of Aristotle

Beginning in the middle of the 1520s, Melanchthon showed a renewed interest in Aristotle. Above all, his textbooks on dialectics demonstrated the intensive process of his struggle with Aristotle. On the basis of the (yearly!) new editions of this textbook, one can trace how Melanchthon achieved a new understanding of Aristotle step-by-step – without betraying or softening his Reformation theology (Kuropka: 2002, 21 – 40). The engine for this development was the ecclesiastical and political disputes that made it necessary for Melanchthon to rethink and reformulate his epistemology.

In theology Melanchthon had subscribed to the Reformation Scripture principle of *sola Scriptura* although he had not yet published an authorized biblical commentary. This changed with his commentary on Colossians from 1527. It contains an extensive excursus on Colossians 2:8 ("Do not let yourselves be led astray by philosophy"). Here Melanchthon laid out the fundamentals of his distinction between secular philosophy and biblical theology, using a variety of examples and pictures. In this he also pointed out the necessity and importance of philosophical knowledge, rightly understood. A gospel-oriented theology can only be learned from Holy Scripture, and reason can be used as God's good creation in the basic questions of mathematics, ethics, architecture, medicine, and those things accessible to reason (*Scholia in epistulam Pauli ad Colossenses*, 1527, MSA 4: 230 – 44; cf. Wengert: 1998, 82 – 87.

Although reason cannot judge the will of God without God's Word and the Holy Spirit, nevertheless reason is God's good creation, which was created to judge whatever is subjected to the senses and whatever serves to preserve this bodily life. If

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someone repudiates something of these matters that reason explains with convincing proof, that person rejects God's work.[1]

With this statement Melanchthon clearly defined the limits of reason. Using reason alone a person could perhaps come to the conclusion that there must be a god. Yet reason could only wildly confabulate what attributes this god possessed. For logical understanding could never understand Jesus' crucifixion or God's triune existence. This is an insurmountable limit of reason. However, reason can—on the basis of experience and certain theoretical analysis—recognize what is true and right (*Scholia in epistulam Pauli ad Colossenses*, MSA 4: 223). As Melanchthon was elucidating the possibilities and limits of reason in his biblical commentary, he explained in his dialectical textbook the epistemological axioms—and now not any longer with Cicero but with the rediscovered Aristotle. As Cicero is a master of true knowledge on the basis of common experience, Melanchthon discovered in Aristotle the master of theoretical knowledge, that is, of knowing on the basis of proper, logical syllogisms and definitions (*De dialectica libri quattuor* [Wittenberg, J. Klug, 1529], a4b – a5a). Thus, not only are the lessons learned from experience true: so are those based on the conclusions of logic.

To be clear, Melanchthon's use of reason has nothing to do with theoretical games, as it may appear at first glance. With his renewed orientation toward Aristotle Melanchthon unfolded a methodology that was intellectually certain, one that became the guarantor of true knowledge. Melanchthon declared dialectics, as in Aristotelian dialectics, to be the basic methodology for all branches of knowledge. On top of that, each of these branches, even theology, had its own methodology. According to Melanchthon, the church needed a methodologically certain and linguistically precise theology. The fundamental method for such a theology is to be found in the book of Romans.[2] Moreover, wherever a contradiction between reason and the witness of Scripture arises, one, of course, must follow the Bible (*De dialectica*, 1529a, d7b–d8a).

1 *Commentaria in ethica Aristotelis Philippi Melanchthonis* (1531), a4a–b: "Quamquam enim ratio de voluntate Dei iudicare ac statuere sine verbo Dei, et sine spiritu sancto nequeat, tamen est bona Dei creatura condita ad iudicanda ea quae sensibus subiecta sunt, quaeque ad hanc corporalem vitam reinendam ac regendam conducunt, quibus in rebus siquis ea quae ratio certa demonstatione deprehendit, aspernatur, is aspernatur Dei opus."

2 *De dialectica* (1529a), k8a–b: "Veteres methodum vocant rationem recte atque ordine docendi iuxta praecepta dialectices, ac saepe monent ut in omnibus negociis, controversiis, artibus demus operam, ut methodum teneamus, quia necesse sit animum vagari incertum, nisi hac ratione regatur. Ac in uno quoque genere semper foelicius docent hi, qui callent methodum, quam qui non callent, quantumvis abundent ingeniis. Utilior est Aristoteles discentibus moralem aut naturalem philosophiam, quam Plato, quia Plato non observavit iustam methodum, tametsi is hoc nomine exagitet Gorgiam, et similes, quod non satis periti sint dialectices. In medicina amatur ab omnibus Avicenna propter methodum. In iure civili propemodum methodus est liber Institutionum. In sacris literis methodus est epistola Pauli ad Romanos. Nulla res est enim, quae penitus perspici possit, nisi animus noster methodum sibi quandam informet, quam in eius rei cogitatione, inquisitione, et explicatione sequatur."

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Furthermore, Melanchthon declared his own opposition to a theology of human logic. In the same way he also spoke out against an anti-rational theology and against theologians who did not properly interpret the Bible and neither argued precisely nor judged accurately. With this we touch on the ecclesial and political background for this development. At the end of the 1520s Melanchthon singled out two causes for the ecclesiastical struggles: a deficient orientation toward Holy Scripture and a complete lack of linguistic precision in such controversies. For Melanchthon it was without question that whoever properly interpreted Romans would come inexorably to the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Melanchthon first delivered lectures on this textual analysis of Romans in 1529 (*Dispositio orationis in epistola Pauli ad Romanos* [1529/1530]; cf. CR 15: 443 – 92 and Kuropka: 2002, 138 – 57). In the ensuing years of ecclesial disputes, he wrote and published again and again a new commentary on Romans to address the central issues in the ecclesiastical debates.[3]

Aristotle is the primary master of theoretical knowledge, Cicero is the master of practical knowledge, and Paul is the master of theological knowledge! This approach rehabilitates Aristotle, without permitting him to sneak into theology through the back door. Melanchthon thereby cut the Gordian knot regarding Aristotle, and he dedicated himself with new energy – and with a new perspective – to his old Aristotle projects. Within a few years his first commentaries on Aristotle's *Politics* and his *Nicomachean Ethics* appeared, as we shall discuss more fully below.

3. Aristotle and the Disputes within the Church

Around 1529 Melanchthon had clarified his understanding of Aristotle and remained true to this perspective—save for a few small changes[4]—until the end of his life. His two orations on Aristotle, for example, prove this

3 In February 1530, as the Diet of Augsburg was approaching, a complete version of his *Dispositio* appeared. The commentary on Romans from 1532 reflected the theological disputes at the Diet itself (MSA 5), in which the preface made direct reference to the Nuremberg Armistice of the same year. At the time of the imperial religious colloquies in Worms and Regensburg, an expanded and revised new edition of the 1532 commentary appeared (CR 15: 495 – 796). In 1556, in the wake of the Osiandrian controversy and the Council of Trent, Melanchthon published a completely new commentary, the *Enarratio* (CR 15: 797 – 1052).

4 For example, this state of affairs is demonstrated in Melanchthon's judgment concerning Aristotle's *Physics*. In the beginning he condemned the book completely (Melanchthon to Georg Spalatin, 13 March 1519 in MBWT 1: 109 f., §46). In the 1530s he reported on his project to write his own textbook on physics, given that there was nothing of use in Aristotle (Melanchthon to Leonard Fuchs, 30 April 1534 in MBWT 6: 79 ff., §1430). In the preface to the *Physics* of 1549 Melanchthon finally defended Aristotle, whose textbook was thin gruel, to be sure, but at least it portrayed the basis for the entire study of physics and was thus suitable for instruction (Mel-

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consistency, with the one published in 1537 (*Oratio de vita Aristotelis, dicta in promotione Magistrorum a Phil. Mel. M.D.XXXVII* [1537]; CR 11: 342–49, delivered by Melanchthon around 12 January 1537) and the other in 1544 (*Oratio de Aristotele … cum decerneret gradum magisterii philosophici aliquot honestiis et eruditis viris* [1544]; CR 11: 647–58, delivered by Erasmus Floccus, the dean of the arts faculty, on 31 January 1544). In these orations he not only gave credence to the life and work of this philosopher, but he also explained Aristotle's central role and masterly contributions to philosophy to his hearers and readers. Whoever was trained from the cradle, as was Aristotle, to understand and analyze things properly would develop two virtues, namely, the love of truth and carefulness in method.[5] These virtues are particularly needed in the church, as Melanchthon wrote in his second oration:

> Why, then, do we believe that Aristotelian philosophy is especially useful for us in the church? I am of the opinion that the following is certain: amid everything else we need in the church, above all else dialectic, which offers a correct method that defines things cleanly, divides things properly, binds together suitable arguments, and subdivides and judges awful connections in arguments. All who do not master this art rip to shreds the topic in need of explanation.[6]

Melanchthon's increased valuing of Aristotle and his increased criticism of theologians in his own camp and on the Roman Catholic side arose from his questioning their abilities to argue precisely – now derived *not* from a rhetoric of argumentation but from a logic of argumentation. At the 1530 imperial diet of Augsburg Melanchthon criticized the Roman side for its lack of intellectual rigor, which blocked the opponents from true knowledge and effectively prevented church unity. In sum, he called this state of affairs *pueriliter*, completely puerile (MBWT 4,2: 522–525, §1014, to Martin Luther, dated 6 August 1530). Ten years later, at the religious colloquies in Worms and Regensburg, Melanchthon criticized the phrase-thrashing of rhetorical word-fencing. In the colloquies a war of words over terminology, rather than a struggle over the truth, prevailed. That meant for Melanchthon that the goal of unity would not be reached. This criticism Melanchthon summarized in a single word, a Greek technical term, which is also a citation from the Bible,

anchthon to Michael Meienburg, preface to *Initia doctrinae physicae, dictata in Academia Vitebergensi* [1549], 29 September 1549, in MBWR 5:519 f., §5641 [CR 7: 472–77]).

5 CR 11: 348: "Itaque cum esset Aristoteles ab ipsis cunabulis assuefactus non ad inanes et perplexas logomachias, sed ad rerum agnitionem et ad quaerendas causas, ex hac puerili consuetudine duas egregias virtutes, et in primis dignas viro docto consecutus est, videlicet, diligentiam in quaerenda methodo et amorem veritates, abeunt enim studia in mores."

6 CR 11: 654: "…cur Aristotelicum maxime nobis in Ecclesia usui esse arbitremur. Constare arbitror inter omnes, maxime nobis in Ecclesia opus esse Dialectica, quae methodos recte informat, quae dextre definit, iuste partitur, apte connectit, iudicat et divellit monstrosas connexiones. Hanc artem qui non norunt, lacerant mateterias explicandas."

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logomachein, that is, to fight over words.[7] This Greek concept appears in the New Testament only in Paul's epistles, where he wrote in 2 Timothy (2:14): "Do not engage in wars of words, which benefit nothing but only leads to the consternation of the listeners." Fighting over words helps nothing; indeed, it is harmful.

Melanchthon is indeed not the wishy-washy diplomat he is often portrayed to be. When the official documents of the religious colloquies were published, Melanchthon stressed the following: He treasured the (Aristotelian) virtue of the golden mean a great deal, but this was not to be confused with indecisiveness and faulty attempts at reconciliation, as happened in Regensburg (MBWT 10: 512 – 16, especially 516, lines 103 – 14, §2816, from September 1541). What is needed in the church in the face of unsolved disputes and endless wars of words is not instruction in overly erudite disputation about the formulation of concepts and also not teaching in overblown, quarrelsome, and dazzling speech. Instead, one needs a language that loves the truth, and for this purpose there is dialectics, on which Melanchthon bestowed a high level of distinction. Writing in the preface to his newly written textbook, he stated that dialectic in the church is the bond of unity (*vinculum concordiae*) (MBWR 5: 172, §4875, CR 6: 655, addressed to Joachim Camerarius and dated 1 September 1547).

The church needs Aristotle – but *not* as a theologian! For his entire life Melanchthon maintained the distinction between Aristotle and theology, as may be seen in the case of the Marburg professor, Theobald Thamer. At the insistence of Landgrave Philip of Hesse, Thamer came to Wittenberg in 1553 and presented his teaching before Melanchthon. Thamer had abandoned justification by faith alone in favor of the opinion that God was better recognized in the writings of Aristotle than the writings of Luther because Aristotle contained all articles of faith in that he described the way to God as a way of virtue so that righteousness in God's sight was attained through proper behavior (MBWR 7: 48, §6775 [digest of the copy in the Munich Staatsbibliothek], a memorandum concerning Theobald Thamer, dated 26 March 1553). Melanchthon demanded an unconditional recantation of this erroneous teaching. The measuring stick for theology is neither reason nor Aristotle but Scripture alone, centered in the epistle to the Romans.

Only in the tension created by a strict distinction of theology from philosophy and at the same time a clear use of reason (as well as philosophy) in the practice of theology can Melanchthon's relation to Aristotle be described and understood. In his commentaries on the Aristotelian corpus he paid homage to both points.

7 MBWT 9: 467 ff., here lines 12 – 15, §2557, to Urbanus Rhegius, dated 19 November 1540: "De his nescio, quid scribam, nolo enim studia quorundam mediocria vituperare, sed in his aliqui scioli persuadere nobis conantur totam dissensionem tantum esse 'λογομαχίαν.'"

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4. Melanchthon's Commentaries on Aristotle

In June 1528 Melanchthon wrote to Joachim Camerarius that he had had to expend a great deal of energy in preparing an edition of the *Nichomachean Ethics*, which was to be published in Wittenberg (MBWT 3: 335, lines 15 – 21, §693). These plans for a text edition never came to fruition. Instead, a year later the printer Joseph Klug published the commentary, *In ethica Aristotelis commentarius.* The commentary began, as in all of Melanchthon's philosophical writings, with a detailed treatment of the difference between theology and philosophy. Only after this basic question had been thoroughly discussed and explained, did Melanchthon turn to the actual commentary, using the following pattern. First, Melanchthon summarized the chief statements. Then, on occasion, he cited the central passages in Greek and pointed out Aristotle's methodology for analyzing a particular topic. When necessary, Melanchthon investigated disputed questions, demarcated his position vis-à-vis other expositors, and stressed above all where Aristotle differed from a Christian worldview and lifestyle. Regarding the pedagogical goal for reading the *Ethics*, Melanchthon listed the formation of private morals, the development of powers of judgment, and, above all else, the enabling of governmental leadership (Kuropka: 2002, 176 – 82).

In the first edition Melanchthon only commented upon the first and second books of the *Nichomachean Ethics.* Two years later a commentary on the fifth book came out, followed a year later by an exposition of the third book (Kuropka: 2002, 239 – 43). These then covered the basic scope of the books of the *Nichomachean Ethics* that Melanchthon was to interpret for the rest of his life. In terms of content he covered the following themes: the basic question of ethics and the happiness of the human being (Book I), the teaching of virtues (Book II), secular righteousness (Book V), and the doctrine of the will in external, civil works (Book III). In this basic form his Aristotle commentary went through several new editions in the next three decades with individual revisions and improvements.[8]

As the Diet of Augsburg was approaching in 1530, Melanchthon wrote his first commentary on Aristotle's *Politics* (*Commentarii in aliquot politicos libros Aristotelis* [1530]; cf. CR 16: 417 – 52). In the introduction he again placed a guide for distinguishing theology and philosophy. The gospel did not serve the establishment of a Christian form for the state but revealed the

8 Melanchthon worked throughout his life on the exposition of the *Nichomachean Ethics.* On this point, see Frank: 2008, 1: XXIX-XXV. In this volume Frank also provides a bilingual edition of the commentary on bks. I & II. CR 16: 277 – 88 gives the commentary on the *Nichomachean Ethics*, bks. I–III according to 1546 edition and book V according to the 1560 edition. The footnotes cite at length passages from the earlier editions, but readers cannot always trust the correctness of either the dating or the texts. Until now, reference back to printings of the sixteenth century is indispensable. See also Kraye: 1997, 195 – 214.

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spiritual and eternal righteousness of the human being. Politics, in contrast, taught about property, contracts, and laws, which all take on different forms in different nations. Thus, Aristotle can and ought only speak about these things, which are areas subject to reason.

In the course of the commentary Melanchthon unfolds the difference between politics and the gospel for the secular realm, and he distances himself from all the revolutionary movements of his time. Melanchthon stands in judgment on Wycliff, the Swiss and Strasbourg theologians, the Anabaptists, and the papists. They must all answer to Melanchthon's criticism that they have meddled in the business of politics and, by virtue of overstepping their area of authority, have endangered the functioning of societal processes. Over against this Melanchthon shows in his exposition that precisely at the moment when the biblical commandments seem to contradict the now standard laws involving feudal service, commerce, and matters of interest (Book 1), the division of property (Book 2), or the form of government (Book 3), Christians must conform themselves to the prescribed societal structures (Kuropka: 2002, 182 f.).

In the dedicatory epistle Melanchthon places his commentary in the context of university life and stresses its usefulness in educating students (MBWT 3: 677 – 80, §855, to Ulrich Schilling, preface to *Commentarii in aliquot politicos libros Aristotelis* [1530], dated late 1529/early 1530). But the actual moment of its publication – shortly before the 1530 Diet of Augsburg – points toward a further use within the ecclesial struggles of the time. What Melanchthon presented to his students offered a defense of Wittenberg theology as an emperor-friendly doctrine (by no means antagonistic toward government), whose adherents, as good citizens, were of the highest value to the state. This commentary, however, was never reprinted.

Melanchthon's high watermark [*Hauptaugenmerk*] was thus his commentary on the *Nichomachean Ethics*, whereby he also regularly referred to Aristotle's arguments in other works that served as textbooks for the students, such as those on dialectics, physics, and even geometry. Melanchthon, however, never fulfilled his goal of publishing a purified working edition of Aristotle. Nevertheless, he had – with deep engagement and theological sensitivity – fulfilled his promise to purify philosophy in order to be able to approach theology well equipped, as he had written to Spalatin in the autumn of 1518.

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