

Philip Melanchthon on Bible Translation and Commentaries

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In his *Unparteyische Kirchen- und Ketzer-Historie*, Gottfried Arnold attacked Philip Melanchthon in 1699 as the cause of the Lutheran church's turning away from biblical truth.¹ Assailing Melanchthon's method and commitment to Aristotelian philosophy, Arnold concluded that Wittenberg's theologians were completely led astray by human constructs. "[For Wittenberg theologians] only what Melanchthon had set down was correct. Scripture and the Holy Spirit could even have supplied such correct rules [for him]."² To support his biases against Lutheranism, Arnold referred to the *Magdeburg Centuries*, which contrasted interpreting scripture with scripture to Wittenberg's approach. "Everywhere, these voices cry: 'The Preceptor said it and thought such and wrote such; therefore it is true.'"³ Even the positive assessment of Melanchthon's exegesis by Johann Franz Buddeus in 1727 bemoaned the fact that few exegetes of his day knew Melanchthon's work, for which he blamed the Roman Catholic historian of biblical interpretation, Richard Simon.⁴ These attacks led Theodor Strobel, the first true Melanchthon scholar, to contrast Simon's dismissal to others who cherished the *Præceptor's* exegetical work.⁵ Strobel's reconstruction of Melanchthon's exegetical work indicates how difficult it is to catalogue his biblical interpretation even today.

Modern interpreters have fallen prey to old distortions. Kurt Aland argued that Melanchthon rarely held theological lectures.⁶ Wilhelm Maurer manufactured a "crisis of vocation" in 1523, when Melanchthon rejected biblical lectures in favor of (Erasmian) humanism.⁷ Such theories stand in stark contrast to the historical record of Melanchthon's unbroken commitment and contributions to biblical interpretation.

The Scope of Melanchthon's Biblical Interpretation

When Melanchthon arrived in Wittenberg in August 1518, he was not authorized to lecture on the meaning of the biblical text. To do

that, he obtained a Bachelor of Bible degree in 1519 by defending theses at a disputation presided over by Martin Luther.⁸ Already in his inaugural address on 28 August 1518, however, he announced lectures on Titus—by which he meant lectures on the Greek text of that book.⁹ As professor of Greek and Master of Arts, he had the right to do this. At the same time, while Wittenberg's faculty was searching for a permanent professor of Hebrew, Melanchthon also taught the rudiments of Hebrew at least until Matthäus Aurogallus (ca. 1493–1543) took the chair in 1521.

On 19 September 1519 Melanchthon was promoted to Bachelor of Bible on the basis of successfully defending theses ten days earlier.¹⁰ He was thus licensed to lecture on the content of the Latin text of Scripture, although he also continued to lecture on the Greek text.¹¹ He began with lectures on Matthew (1519–1520),¹² followed by lectures on Romans (1520–1521), 1 & 2 Corinthians (1521–1522)¹³ and John's Gospel (1522–1523).¹⁴ When Martin Luther forced publication of the Pauline lectures in 1522 and the lectures on John in 1523, an enterprising printer in Basel also published the lectures on Matthew. These annotations were part of Wittenberg's effort to produce commentaries on nearly the entire New Testament.¹⁵ During this same time, Melanchthon's brief notes on some chapters of Genesis and Exodus were also published.¹⁶

After a brief hiatus from 1523–1524, during which time Wittenberg had a surfeit of theological lecturers and Melanchthon himself was rector of the University (from 18 October 1523 through April 1524) and oversaw a reform of the arts curriculum, Melanchthon returned to lecturing on the Bible, beginning with Proverbs in 1524–25 (published in 1525).¹⁷ The introduction to Proverbs began: "All Scripture teaches either law or the gospel." Proverbs, too, he argued, contained both and was centered on fear of and faith in God. Melanchthon turned his attention to Colossians in 1526, producing in 1527 the first New Testament commentary published directly by him (and substantially revised in 1528 and 1534) and titled the *Scholia*.¹⁸ By this time, the Elector John the Steadfast had granted both to him and to Luther extraordinary status, so that they were free to lecture on any topic at the University.¹⁹ Thus, Melanchthon held lectures in both the Arts and Theology faculties until

his death. In 1528, in addition to work on Daniel,²⁰ the Psalms (1–4 and 110–133)²¹ and a second commentary on Proverbs (published in 1529),²² Melanchthon again turned his attention to Romans, producing first a rhetorical analysis of the book (published in an incomplete version in 1529 and a complete one in 1530) and then a commentary (published in 1532).²³

In the 1530s, other commentaries also appeared. In 1534 the third edition of the *Scholia* on Colossians came out, the first of Melanchthon's writings containing reference to three uses of the law.²⁴ In the 1530s Melanchthon held Sunday lectures in Latin on the appointed Gospel for the sake of the foreign students in Wittenberg who could not understand the German sermons. These continued until his death and were attended by not only foreign students but also many others. In addition to his *Postil* published in 1544 and based upon these lectures, there are many manuscripts of this material, some of which were collated and published by Christoph Pezel in 1594–1595.²⁵

With the reorganization of the theology faculty in 1533 based upon statutes written by Melanchthon, other theologians, notably Caspar Cruciger, Sr., also held regular courses in the Bible, as had Johannes Bugenhagen earlier and Georg Major later.²⁶ In late 1535, Cruciger lectured on 1 Timothy. When Konrad Cordatus accused him of teaching that good works were a *sine qua non* for salvation, Cruciger admitted that he had based his lectures on notes from Melanchthon. Although the degree to which this commentary (published in 1540) was Melanchthon's remains in dispute, it clearly represented the "Wittenberg school" of biblical interpretation and was heavily influenced by Melanchthon's method.²⁷ Certainly when Sebastian Froeschel, the preacher at St. Mary's in Wittenberg responsible for sermons on Matthew at the Wednesday vespers, approached Melanchthon for help in 1540, Melanchthon provided comments over the ensuing years, which Froeschel then published in 1558.²⁸ Also in 1540 a completely revised version of Melanchthon's *Commentarii* on Romans appeared, perhaps based upon lectures from the late 1530s.²⁹ In 1543 Melanchthon published a commentary on Daniel, based on earlier lectures.³⁰

With Melanchthon's return to the reopened University of Wittenberg in 1547, he again took up various responsibilities for biblical lectures. These included the Psalms (delivered in 1547–1548 and published by Caspar Peucer in Melanchthon's *Opera*),³¹ Proverbs (also delivered in 1547–1548 but published in 1550 and revised in 1552 and 1555),³² Ecclesiastes (delivered in 1548–1549 and published in 1550 with revisions in 1551),³³ Romans (delivered in 1552–1553 and published in 1556 with a lengthy attack against Andreas Osiander's understanding of justification),³⁴ Colossians (delivered in 1556 and published in 1559)³⁵ and 1 & 2 Timothy (lectures from 1550–1551 published posthumously in 1561).³⁶ He also wrote lectures in 1551 on 1 & 2 Corinthians for Paul Eber, who published them in 1561.³⁷ Smaller pieces on the Hebrew prophets also stem from this period.³⁸ Doubtless he held other lectures on the Bible that never found their way into print or were simply updated versions of earlier published lectures. The latter would have particularly been true for Romans, a required course in the revised theological curriculum.

Melanchthon's Method of Interpretation

To interpret the biblical text Melanchthon used his training in the arts, placing it in service to Lutheran hermeneutical principles. This resulted in a unique blending of humanist sensibilities and evangelical commitments that marks all his biblical commentaries.

Grammar

His deep knowledge of Greek classical literature, grammar and syntax allowed him to read the New Testament with new eyes toward the peculiarities of style and expression. Among other things, like other biblical humanists (including Erasmus and Martin Luther), this made him especially sensitive to Hebraisms in the New Testament texts, including Paul's use of *dikaiosune* (righteousness), an argument that first appears in his 1532 *Commentarii in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos* and consistently thereafter.³⁹

But grammar also served as the basis for Melanchthon's rejection of the four-fold method of biblical interpretation made popular in

the Middle Ages, the so-called *Quadrige*. In his preface to his 1529 *Nova Scholia . . . in Proverbia Salomonis*, he wrote: “Some, who are not content with one interpretation for individual passages [*sententiis*], weave for themselves as spiders four or more meanings [*sententias*]: literal, allegorical, tropological and I don’t know what else—even though the meaning [*sententia*] of Scripture is univocal and simple, namely as the grammatical method [*ratio*] uncovers.”⁴⁰ Melanchthon always used tools of grammar, syntax, rhetoric and dialectic to discover the simple, straightforward meaning. This did not preclude his use of allegory (especially with parables and miracles), which he viewed more as a rhetorical ornament, designed to connect the text to the overarching point of scripture: faith in God’s promises.⁴¹

Rhetoric

Beyond his grammatical expertise, Melanchthon also used the tools of rhetoric to interpret the text. The most important contribution came in his recognition that Paul’s letters, especially Romans, were written by a writer knowledgeable of rhetorical principles and able to employ them in constructing his arguments.⁴² Already in the *Annotationes* on Romans published in 1522, we see this insight at work. To be sure, many assumed that Paul, as a human author, shaped his own writings. However, most did not emphasize the role of the author *qua* author. Moreover, medieval scholastics favored the division of the text using dialectical categories but ignoring Paul’s rhetorical side. Erasmus, following Jerome, argued that the Pauline arguments of chapters 1–11 were passé and dealt with issues surrounding the end of *ceremonial* law. Only chapters 12–15, with their many moral exhortations, applied directly to Christians today. By contrast, Melanchthon’s 1522 commentary on Romans insisted that the entire letter must be read as a whole, carefully constructed by Paul out of rhetorical and dialectical elements and dealing with the central Christian gospel (justification) in chapters 1–8, a secondary issue in chapters 9–11 and an application of justification in the closing chapters. Far from reflecting a now settled theological argument about ceremonial law, Paul’s carefully constructed rhetoric of the opening chapters outlined the heart of Christian theology.

So convinced was Melanchthon of this Pauline rhetorical structure that he devoted a separate set of lectures to it, the *Dispositio orationis in Epistola Pauli ad Romanos* (Haguenau: Setzer, 1529; completed edition: Wittenberg: Klug, 1530). His preface of March or April 1529, written while attending the second imperial diet in Speyer and sent from there to the former Wittenberg student, Setzer, demonstrates just how unique this approach to Paul was—a kind of literary- and genre-critical approach first revived in the nineteenth century.⁴³ He indirectly attacked “some” (Erasmus) who simply excerpted a few important ideas and miss the whole point. Such an approach ignored the symmetry of the author’s argument and interpreted writings against the authors’ own intentions. He then stated the basic Wittenberg approach to Romans as the one book that handled the chief locus of Christian doctrine and contained a “*methodus*” for all scripture.⁴⁴ Thus, one was to read this letter as a whole and to consider how the various parts cohered. By paying attention to the order of the speech (“*ordo orationis*”) readers could recognize the topics. Both recent and ancient authors did not pay attention to this structure and thus veered away from Paul’s intention. By 1529, however, Melanchthon knew that some derided his approach “because I force Paul’s prose into common rules of speaking.” This criticism was absurd, since all speakers try to order their thoughts. Because even Melanchthon’s opponents thought Paul had a common point to make, it only made sense to use the rules of speaking to figure it out. Thus, although some recognized Paul’s use of Greek figures of speech, they went astray by ignoring the structure of Paul’s argument.

Melanchthon never wandered from this basic principle that biblical authors used commonly recognized rules of speech to organize their ideas and communicate them to their readers. His 1532 *Commentarii* outlined Paul’s *dispositio* of his letter, beginning with an exordium (Rom. 1:1–15), a *propositio* (1:16–3:20), the *status* of the entire letter (3:21–31) followed by the *confirmatio* (4:1–5:11), a digression (5:12–8:39, where Paul used logical arguments), a new question (9–11) and finally precepts (12–15), concluding with salutations (16).⁴⁵ For all the changes to the 1540 edition, Melanchthon

still followed the basic rhetorical outline. In the 1556 *Enarratio* he no longer emphasized this structure to the same degree.

This concern was not restricted to Romans. Melanchthon made similar comments about structure in his early lectures on the Corinthian correspondence, on John and in his commentaries on Colossians.⁴⁶ Moreover, in his *Enarrationes* on the Psalms from 1528, he began each psalm with a comment on its genre. Psalm 1 was a description; Psalms 3, 119, 120–123, 130 and 132 were prayers; Psalm 110 matched the demonstrative genre; Psalms 111 and 112 the persuasive genre; Psalms 115, 116, 124 and 129 were thanksgivings; and Psalm 133 was an encomium. Although Melanchthon did not deny the Christological center to some psalms (especially 2, 110 and 118), he clearly took the Psalter as the work of believers using a wide variety of genres to address various aspects of the life of faith.⁴⁷ Melanchthon's use of this rhetorical approach freed the psalms from an exclusively Christological interpretation and emphasized their affective context as matching Luther's concern expressed in the preface to the Psalter for the German Bible, from 1528.

Melanchthon was convinced that using rhetoric to divine the author's method and meaning broke the scholastic stranglehold on biblical interpretation. A text's meaning arose from the human author's encounter with God's word, and the faith, prayer and praise that that word evoked. Moreover, the author's main point became the chief focus of any interpretation. This allowed Melanchthon, in his Romans commentaries and elsewhere, to skip verses—a practice that clearly upset John Calvin, whose legal training with Andreas Alciati (1492–1550) led him to interpret biblical texts line by line.⁴⁸ For Melanchthon, however, such an approach could easily miss the author's overall point and make each chapter and verse of equal worth for the reader, when instead the opposite was the case. Finding the *summa* or *scopus* of a book or, in the case of Romans, of the entire Bible was for him a central principle of interpretation.

Rhetoric also provided a variety of insights into individual turns of phrases and techniques employed by the author. Melanchthon's interpretations often referred to rhetorical tropes and "inventions," as did those of contemporaries, including Faber Stapulensis, Erasmus, and Reuchlin. In his glossary to Melanchthon's 1532 *Commentarii*

on Romans, Rolf Schäfer identifies over ninety technical terms from rhetoric and dialectics used in that commentary alone. Melanchthon knew that his readers were acquainted with these terms, and his various handbooks on rhetoric gave definitions, often using both Greek and Latin terminology and, especially in later editions, used biblical and theological arguments as examples.⁴⁹

One form of Renaissance commentary was paraphrase. In his 1519 *De rhetorica libri tres* [three books on rhetoric], Melanchthon praised Erasmus for this kind of interpretation present in paraphrases of New Testament books. Although Melanchthon himself never produced a paraphrase of any biblical book, his efforts to publish the ancient paraphrase of John by Nonnos Panopolis and his paraphrase of a few psalms indicated support for this technique.⁵⁰ Moreover, as Luther often did in his sermons and commentaries, Melanchthon also paraphrased individual verses, usually introduced with the phrase, “quasi dicat” (“as if [the author] were saying”).⁵¹ This approach also aimed at the reader’s affections and swept them up into the interpretation, so to speak, so that they could hear the author or speaker addressing them directly.

Dialectics

In addition to rhetoric, Melanchthon also used certain aspects of dialectics to interpret texts. In 1528 he acknowledged his debt to Aristotle’s *Analytics*, bk. 2, and introduced standard questions for analyzing a thing.⁵² While Melanchthon eschewed the question “Whether a thing exists” (*an sit*), he especially concentrated on two questions: what a thing is (*quid sit*) and what its effects are (*quid effectus*).

But Melanchthon also used other portions of dialectics in biblical interpretation. Aristotelian interest in genus and species served as the logical basis for Melanchthon’s construction of *loci communes* (commonplaces) in his exegesis. In his *Ratio seu Methodus* Erasmus had argued that readers of the Bible should sort the text into proper *nidulae* (nestlets), for which the Dutch humanist provided a hodgepodge of chiefly ethical *loci*. In opposition to this approach, Melanchthon, influenced by Rudolf Agricola’s *De inventione dialectica* of 1479, defined the term as the main theme or underlying structure

of a work.⁵³ A biblical author presented in individual chapters or verses the *species* of a particular concept that the exegete then could connect to the appropriate *genus* or *locus communis*. Thus, at the same time that Melanchthon's rhetorical method sought to reconstitute the overall continuity of a biblical author's argument, the search for appropriate *loci communes*, while based upon the author's own intention, threatened to disintegrate biblical commentary into lengthy excursions on a text's overarching theological ideas. Unlike John Calvin, who for the most part separated theological discussions (placed in his *Institutes*) from biblical interpretation, Melanchthon's biblical works often appear interrupted by lengthy theological discussions.⁵⁴ Yet Melanchthon insisted that such excursions were part and parcel of the meaning of the biblical text itself, since any specific text always maintained a relation to the general topic that it addressed. This blending of rhetoric and dialectic meant that Melanchthon's biblical interpretation respected both the arguments and style of the individual author while embedding texts in the context of the biblical canon.

As with rhetoric, Melanchthon also discovered specific instances of dialectical method in biblical writers. Alongside pointing out biblical authors' syllogisms, the most famous example comes in Romans 5:12–8:39. Already in the 1522 *Annotationes* Melanchthon had called attention to this shift in Paul's analysis from more rhetorical to dialectical arguments. In the 1532 *Commentarii* he introduced the shift with the headings: *Finis disputationis; Sequitur analysis* (The end of the debate; analysis follows),⁵⁵ where the "analysis" was for him the breaking down of an argument (given in the preceding part of Romans) into its constituent parts by investigating the individual terms—sin, law and grace—and their effects. Thus, while he discussed the main parts of Paul's speech in Romans 1:1–5:11 (with its exordium, propositions, confirmation and epilogue), in Romans 5:12–8:39 he analyzes specific terms according to the letter's own *methodus*.

Theological Implications

Melanchthon's concentration on definition and effect, mentioned above, served the central tenet of Lutheran biblical interpretation: distinguishing law and gospel. Romans provided Melanchthon with

an example of such a move, where Paul first defined justification by faith (3:21ff.) and then in Romans 5:1 discussed faith's effects.⁵⁶ This same movement from definition to effect is found throughout the 1521 *Loci communes*.⁵⁷

The fact that sin, law, gospel, and faith took on meaning not simply from their proper definitions but only in combining such definitions with a discussion of their effects, powers and fruits, reflects a so-called "law/gospel hermeneutic." Melanchthon, Luther and other Wittenberg exegetes did not reduce scriptural interpretation to a search for commands and promises (or, in today's language, imperatives and indicatives). Nor did they simply equate "law" with "Torah" or gospel with an end to the Old Testament. Instead, they interpreted texts by determining what a biblical text says *and* what it does to its hearers—terrifying the sinner and comforting the believer in God's mercy.⁵⁸

Of course, as their theology developed, Luther and Melanchthon discovered other functions (or uses) of the law. Luther first introduced a first or civil use of the law in comments on the epistle for New Year's Day (Galatians 3:23–29) in his *Christmas Postil*, published in 1522. Melanchthon quickly picked up on this addition, so that one finds discussion of these two uses, for example, in his 1527 *Scholia* on Colossians.⁵⁹

In 1534, at the same time he was preparing a third edition of his Colossians commentary, Melanchthon encountered reform-minded members of the Roman party in Leipzig, who insisted that, because of Jesus' statements about a new law in John 13, the gospel itself contained law.⁶⁰ To counter this opinion (and to continue to distinguish his understanding of law from that of Johann Agricola, who held that believers were free from the law), Melanchthon for the first time defined three functions of the law in that commentary. This passed into his 1535 *Loci communes* where the three uses were: 1) to maintain order and restrain sin; 2) to condemn sin and drive to Christ; 3) to instruct believers as to true good works (as opposed to human inventions) and thereby to continue to restrain sin in believers and drive them to Christ. In all of his works, however, Melanchthon insisted that the chief function of the law was the second, theological use—unlike John Calvin's *Institutes*, which gave priority

to the third use. Moreover, Melanchthon tried not to import “law” into the “gospel,” as he believed his Roman opponents were doing.

Melanchthon’s interest in the effect of biblical texts as law and gospel matched not only his dialectical *methodus*, as he moved from *finitio* to *effectus*, but also a deeper interest, shared with Luther, in emphasizing the affective side of theology.⁶¹ Already in the first edition of the *Loci communes* of 1521, he rejected scholastic speculation in favor of the effects of the gospel on the theologian: “To know Christ is to know his benefits.”⁶² This same phrase graced the opening paragraph of his 1522 *Annotationes* on Romans, “For no one knows Christ without knowing his benefits.”⁶³ This key component of rhetoric—concern for what moves the heart—marked all of his biblical interpretation. For example, in his introduction to the 1540 *Commentarii* on Romans, he wrote: “For the exclusive phrase, ‘grace on account of Christ’ chiefly makes the distinction between law and gospel. However, as I have said, penitence and other virtues are not excluded but the precondition of worthiness or merit is, so that terrified minds may have firm consolation. Promises do not become sweet to souls unless we always include the little word ‘grace’ for them.”⁶⁴

There were, of course, places where Luther and Melanchthon’s interpretation diverged. For the most part, this did not upset these theologians. Thus, in a 1527 discussion at the Torgau with Johann Agricola over Galatians 3, Melanchthon acknowledged differences and dismissed their importance.⁶⁵ Regarding the Lord’s Supper, however, these differences led Melanchthon into difficulty after Luther’s death. For one thing, Melanchthon clearly applied his concern for the effect and benefit of a thing to the Supper itself, where for him the presence of Christ was meaningless outside its comforting effects.⁶⁶ For another, while agreeing with Luther on the basic synecdoche in the Supper, Melanchthon seemed to draw the line at Luther’s single-minded use of the Words of Institution (“This is my body”), instead emphasizing the language of *koinonia* in 1 Corinthians 10:16 as the proper gloss on the Words of Institution, combining that text with Christ’s promise to remain with believers (Matt. 28:20). In his 1559 *Enarrationes* on Colossians, he

also insisted that Christ bodily ascended, while at the same time preserving the argument that the right hand of God was a non-spatial designation. This pleased neither side in the later debates over the Lord's Supper.⁶⁷

The Exegetical Tradition

A final aspect of Melanchthon's interpretation of scripture involves his use of the exegetical tradition.⁶⁸ In 1519 Melanchthon gained a reputation for his knowledge of the church fathers, passing references to Luther during the Leipzig debates.⁶⁹ In the same year, Erasmus criticized him for *not* knowing the Fathers well enough, a charge that had far more to do with Erasmus's hurt feelings at being criticized by Melanchthon than by any lack of knowledge.⁷⁰ Melanchthon, unlike Erasmus and others of the Roman party, did not pretend that proper exegesis harmonized the exegetical tradition. Nor did he simply list different opinions as equally valid, although on occasion he did. Instead, Melanchthon used the gospel itself as a criterion by which to judge the Fathers: not only using their "testimonies" in support of his arguments (cf. Augsburg Confession, art. XX), but also rejecting their views when he thought they strayed from the truth of the gospel. This did not represent a kind of eclecticism, as some have argued, but rather a strict application of law and gospel to the Fathers' sayings.⁷¹

Perhaps the most important rejection of patristic exegesis came in the early 1530s, when (against Johannes Brenz) Melanchthon delineated his understanding of forensic or imputative justification over against that of Augustine.⁷² For Melanchthon justification was always *extra nos* (outside of us) and thus not simply an imputation of the believer's own righteousness from the future. Thus, it was an imputation of alien righteousness (Christ's) rather than the proper righteousness from the human heart. The latter always resulted from faith and could never be thought of as the cause of righteousness, since the effect on the doubting believer would always be despair. In the believer's life the only certain thing remained Christ's righteousness, not his or her own. Here, consolation for the doubters shaped Melanchthon's use of and, in this case, rejection of the fathers.

Translation

For the Wittenbergers, Bible translation consisted of three distinct parts: rendering of the text from the original languages into German, introductions to the various parts and books of the Bible and marginal glosses to explain the text's meaning. The idea of producing a text without the second two components was completely foreign to their understanding of translating scripture into another language.

Translation of foreign texts was popular during the Renaissance, as the cry to return *ad fontes* and improvements in printing whetted scholars' appetites for original texts. Building on the earlier work, Wittenberg was committed to using the original texts to understand the Bible. Martin Luther returned from the Wartburg in 1522 with a completed translation of the New Testament from Greek. While no one knows the state of that original translation, Philip Melanchthon saw the translation through the presses and discussed with associates the meaning of Greek biblical terms.⁷³

What is less often recognized is the degree to which his *Annotationes* on Romans from 1521, published by Luther in November 1522, contributed to Luther's preface to the same book in the *September Testament*.⁷⁴ A comparison of the two texts reveals a number of striking parallels to Melanchthon's method of biblical interpretation: the definition of Pauline terms, the rhetorical analysis of the document and the centrality of the early chapters of the book in interpreting the whole.⁷⁵

Whatever contributions Melanchthon may have made to the *September Testament*, he was from that time on an integral part of the Wittenberg "team" that produced subsequent translations and, after 1534, continued to revise the text, glosses and introductions. Given that Melanchthon's preface to Daniel of 1527 preceded Luther's by three years, it remains to measure its influence on Luther.⁷⁶ What we do know, from later reports by Johannes Mathesius and from Georg Rörer's own protocols, is the degree to which the team collaborated in translating and glossing the biblical texts.⁷⁷ In a letter to Joachim Camerarius dated 15 June 1528, for example, Melanchthon mentioned his work on Isaiah.⁷⁸ Small wonder that when Luther

burst into Melanchthon's sickroom in Weimar in 1540, he referred to the patient as his *organon*, instrument for acquiring knowledge.⁷⁹

In his 1773 *Historisch-Litterarische Nachricht von Philipp Melanchthons Verdiensten um die heilige Schrift*, Georg Theodor Strobel mentioned that Melanchthon was responsible for the German translation of 1 & 2 Maccabees. He relied on a report by David Chytraeus, one of Melanchthon's students from the 1550s.⁸⁰ Although this claim has been disputed, it shows how Melanchthon's students viewed his commitment to Wittenberg's most important translation project.⁸¹

Given this close cooperation among Wittenberg's theologians, Melanchthon must have had a hand in crafting glosses to the biblical texts. It is impossible to reconstruct with any degree of accuracy his particular contributions. At the very least, it may be best to refrain from calling this work the "Luther Bible" and more accurately name it the Wittenberg Bible, since so many theologians were deeply involved in its publication and revision. When combined with Melanchthon's remarkable commentaries on scripture and those of his colleagues and students, one can speak without hesitation of a Wittenberg "school" of biblical interpretation—one committed to using the very latest historical and literary techniques (while merging them seamlessly into Wittenberg's theology and hermeneutic) and led by two equally important exegetes: Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon.

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NOTES

1. Gottfried Arnold, *Unparteyische Kirchen- und Ketzer-Historie von Anfang des Neuen Testaments biß auff das Jahr Christi 1688*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Fritsch, 1699), 2:93–102. His attacks continue into other chapters as well. For this essay, see especially Timothy J. Wengert, "The Biblical Commentaries of Philip Melanchthon," M. Patrick Graham and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560) and the Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 106–48, based in part upon the earlier work of Peter F. Barton, "Die

exegetische Arbeit des jungen Melanchthon 1518/19 bis 1528/29: Probleme und Ansätze," *Archiv für Reformationgeschichte* 54 (1963), 52–89. Henceforth, ARG.

2. Arnold, *Unparteyische . . . Historie*, 93.

3. Quoted in Arnold, *Unparteyische . . . Historie*, 96, citing the preface to the *Nona Centuria Ecclesiasticae Historiae* (Basel: Oporinus, 1565), a 5v, signed by Matthias Flacius, Johannes Wigand and Matthäus Judex.

4. Johann Franz Buddeus, *Isagoges historico-theologicae liber posterior* (Jena: Fickelscherr, 1727), 1675, reacting to Richard Simon's *Histoire Critique des principaux Commentateurs du Nouveau Testament* (Rotterdam: Leers, 1693), 693–99, which dismisses Melanchthon's exegetical work as too rhetorical.

5. Georg Theodor Strobel, *Historisch-Litterarische Nachricht von Philipp Melanchthons Verdiensten um die heilige Schrift: worinn von allen dessen exegetischen Arbeiten und derselben verschiedenen Ausgaben nähere Anzeige gegeben wird* (Altdorf & Nuremberg: Schüpfel, 1773).

6. Kurt Aland, "Die theologische Fakultät Wittenberg und ihre Stellung im Gesamtzusammenhang der Leucorea während des 16. Jahrhunderts," *Kirchengeschichte Entwürfe* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1960), 283–394, here 326–27.

7. Wilhelm Maurer, *Der junge Melanchthon zwischen Humanismus und Reformation*, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967–69) 2:421–23, refuted in Heinz Scheible, "Luther and Melanchthon," *Lutheran Quarterly* 3 (1990): 317–39.

8. *Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl* [Studienausgabe], ed. Robert Stupperich, 7 vols. (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1951–1975), 1:23–25. Henceforth, MSA.

9. MSA 3:29–42, here 41, 34–42, 1.

10. MSA 1:23–25. It included a thesis on the authority of Scripture (25, 1–2). For the chronology, see *Melanchthons Briefwechsel: Kritische und kommentierte Gesamtausgabe: Regesten*, ed. Heinz Scheible, 12+ vols. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1977–), 10:271. Henceforth, MBW.

11. See Ernst Bizer, ed., *Texte aus der Anfangszeit Melanchthons* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1966), 39–85, for the *Rapsodiai en Paulou ad Romanos*.

12. MSA 4:133–208.

13. MSA 4:15–132.

14. *Corpus Reformatorum: Philippi Melanthonis opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. Karl Bretschneider and Heinrich Bindseil, 28 vols. (Halle: A. Schwetschke & Sons, 1834–1860), 15:1043–1220. Henceforth, CR.

15. See Timothy J. Wengert, *Philip Melanchthon's 'Annotationes in Johannem' of 1523 in Relation to Its Predecessors and Contemporaries* (Geneva: Droz, 1987), 31–42 & 255–58. Missing were commentaries on Mark, James, 2 & 3 John, Hebrews and Revelation, not surprising given that commentators thought of Mark as a condensed version of Matthew and that the authorship of James, Hebrews and Revelation were questioned in prefaces to the 1522 *September Testament*. See *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Bibel*, 12 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1906–61), 6:10. Henceforth, WA DB.

16. Published by Johann Setzer in Hagenau. See Wengert, "Biblical Commentaries," 117–18. For Melanchthon's Old Testament interpretation, see Hansjörg Sick, *Melanchthon als Ausleger des Alten Testaments* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1959).

17. For the translation with marginal notes: *Solomonis sententiae versae ad Hebraicam Veritatem a Phil. Melan.* (Hagenau: Setzer, 1525). For the preface, dated by MBW to April/May 1525, see MBW no. 394, in: *Melanchthons Briefwechsel: Kritische und kommentierte*

Gesamtausgabe: Texte, 15+ vols. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1991–), 2: 294–302. Henceforth, *Texte*. For the commentary, see *IIAPOIMIAI sive Proverbia Solomonis filii Davidis, cum Adnotationibus Philippi Melancthonis* (Haguenau: Setzer, 1525).

18. For details see Timothy J. Wengert, *Law and Gospel: Philip Melancthon's Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over "Poenitentia"* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997); *Human Freedom, Christian Righteousness: Philip Melancthon's Exegetical Dispute with Erasmus of Rotterdam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). See MSA 4:209–303 for the 1527 version and MBW no. 547 (*Texte* 3:64–65) for the preface to Alexander Drachstedt, dated before 20 May 1527. Subsequent editions did not contain a preface.

19. Heinz Scheible, *Melancthon: Eine Biographie* (Munich: Kaiser, 1997), 40–43.

20. Only the preface to King Ferdinand was published. See MBW no. 769 (*Texte* 3:474–80), dated before 11 April 1529.

21. *In Psalmos aliquot Davidicos . . . Enarrationes doctissimae* (Haguenau: Setzer, August 1528).

22. MSA 4:305–464. For the preface to Magnus von Mecklenburg, dated January/February 1529, see MBW no. 750 (*Texte* 3:439–44).

23. For the rhetorical analysis, *Dispositio Orationis*, see CR 15:443–92. For its preface, see MBW no. 767 (*Texte* 3:470–73). For the 1532 *Commentarii in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, see MSA 5. For the preface to Albrecht von Brandenburg, archbishop of Mainz, see MBW no. 1276 (*Texte* 5:336–40).

24. Wengert, *Law and Gospel*, 177–210.

25. See Georg Buchwald, "Zur Postilla Melancthoniana," ARG 21 (1924): 78–89. The 1544 edition is in CR 14: 161–528 (for the epistle dedicatory see MBW no. 3546); Pezel's edition is in CR 24–25. For Melancthon's biblical orations for Georg von Anhalt, see Horst Koehn, "Philipp Melancthons Reden," *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens* 25 (1984): 1277–1486, esp. no. 282 (1415–16).

26. For Georg Major, see Timothy J. Wengert, "Georg Major (1502–1574): Defender of the Wittenberg's Faith and Melancthonian Exegete," *Melancthon in seinen Schülern*, Wolfenbütteler Forschungen, 73, ed. Heinz Scheible, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1997), 129–56.

27. Timothy J. Wengert, "Caspar Cruciger (1504–1548): The Case of the Disappearing Reformer," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 20 (1989): 417–441, and "Caspar Cruciger Sr.'s 1546 'Enarratio' on John's Gospel: An Experiment in Ecclesiological Exegesis," *Church History* 61 (1992): 60–74. Georg Spalatin translated a portion of the 1 Timothy commentary in 1538.

28. See CR 14:535–1042.

29. CR 15:493–796. It was dedicated to Landgrave Philip of Hesse (dated 1 January 1540). See MBW no. 2336 (*Texte* 9:27–32).

30. CR 13:823–980. Its preface, dedicated to Duke Moritz of Saxony and dated 1 January 1543, is in MBW no. 3131.

31. CR 13:1017–1472.

32. *Explicatio Proverbiorum Salomonis* (Frankfurt: Brubach, 1550) in CR 14:3–88, with a preface to Duke Johann Albrecht von Mecklenburg, dated before 15 April 1550, in MBW no. 5771 (CR 7:705–10).

33. *Enarratio brevis concionum libri Salomonis* (Wittenberg: Klug, 1550) in CR 14:89–160, with a preface to Joachim Moller, dated 1 October 1550 in MBW no. 5912 (CR 7:669–73).

34. *Enarratio epistolae Pauli ad Romanos* (Wittenberg: Kreutzer, 1556) in CR 15:797–1052, with a preface to Ulrich Mordeisen, dated first half of April 1556, in MBW no. 7785 (CR 8:737–41). For his attack on Andreas Osiander, see Timothy J. Wengert, *Defending Faith: Lutheran Responses to Andreas Osiander's Doctrine of Justification* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 330–51.

35. *Enarratio epistolae Pauli ad Colossenses* in CR 15:1221–82, with a prefatory letter addressed to Herluf Troll and dated 16 February 1559 in MBW no. 8862 (CR 9:745–747).

36. *Enarratio Epist. 1. ad Timotheum et duorum capitum secundae* (Wittenberg: Crato, 1561), in CR 15:1295–1396, with an epistle dedicatory by Paul Crell to Dukes Heinrich and Wilhelm von Braunschweig-Lüneburg is dated 19 April 1561 (one year to the day after Melanchthon's death).

37. *Brevis et utilis Commentarius in priorem epistolam Pauli ad Corinthios et aliquot capita secundae* (Wittenberg: Crato, 1561), in CR 15:1053–1220, with an epistle dedicatory to Count Palatine Wolfgang, dated 1 January 1561.

38. These were first published by Peucer in Melanchthon's *Opera*. See CR 13:989–1004. See Wengert, "The Biblical Commentaries," 124–29.

39. MSA 5:39. His *Dispositio* of 1529 simply distinguishes divine and human righteousness. See, for example, CR 15:451.

40. MBW no. 750 (*Texte* 3:441, 27–31).

41. For an extensive discussion of this issue, see Wengert, *Melanchthon's Annotationes in Johannem*, 194–98.

42. Melanchthon used Ciceronian rhetoric. Rudolf Bultmann recognized that Paul used a uniquely Hellenistic rhetorical form, the diatribe. Without acknowledging it, Bultmann was sowing in ground already extensively plowed by Melanchthon. See Rudolf Bultmann, *Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die kynisch-stoische Diatribe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), 1, where he mentions only Joachim Camerarius and Matthias Flacius. See Timothy J. Wengert, "Philip Melanchthon's 1522 Annotations on Romans and the Lutheran Origins of Rhetorical Criticism," *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, ed. Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 118–140.

43. MBW no. 767 (*Texte* 3:470–73), dated between 13 March and 25 April 1529 and addressed to Count Hermann von Neuenahr (1492–1530), a Cologne humanist with contacts to Johannes Reuchlin and Erasmus.

44. This is another jab at Erasmus, whose own preface to the New Testament, *Ratio seu Methodus*, not only attached to editions of the Greek and Latin New Testament starting in 1519 but also published separately. It offered a very different, moralizing center for Scripture. "Method" was a characteristically humanist term for the overarching structure or approach to a topic. For a contrasting view of the relation of Melanchthon and Erasmus, see Manfred Hoffmann, "Rhetoric and Dialectic in Erasmus's and Melanchthon's Interpretation of John's Gospel," Graham and Wengert, eds., *Melanchthon and the Commentary*, 48–78.

45. See the glossary and outline in MSA 5:373–92; Rolf Schäfer, "Melanchthon's Interpretation of Romans 5:15: His Departure from the Augustinian Concept of Grace Compared to Luther's," Graham and Wengert, eds., *Philip Melanchthon*, 79–104; Schäfer, "Melanchthons Hermeneutik im Römerbriefkommentar von 1532," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 60 (1963): 216–35.

46. For the latter two, see Wengert, *Melanchthon's Annotationes in Johannem*, 170–82, and *Human Freedom*, 48–64.

47. See Abraham Sick, *Melanchthon als Ausleger*. Melanchthon followed a similar strategy in his later lectures on the Psalms. See CR 13:1017–1472.

48. See John R. Walchenbach, “John Calvin as Biblical Commentator: An Investigation into Calvin’s Use of John Chrysostom as an Exegetical Tutor” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1974) and Timothy J. Wengert, “‘We Will Feast Together in Heaven Forever’: The Epistolary Friendship of John Calvin and Philip Melanchthon,” *Melanchthon in Europe: His Work and Influence Beyond Wittenberg*, edited by Karin Maag (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 19–44, esp. 42–43.

49. For the earliest see, from 1519, *De rhetorica libri tres*, from 1521, *Institutiones rhetoricae*. See Nicole Kuropka, *Philipp Melanchthon: Wissenschaft und Gesellschaft, Ein Gelehrter im Dienst der Kirche (1526–1532)* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).

50. See Wengert, *Melanchthon’s Annotationes in Johannem*, 64–65. For Melanchthon’s preface, see MBW no. 548 (*Texte* 3:66–67), dated before 20 May 1527, where he especially noted how strictly Nonnos adhered to the rules of paraphrase.

51. For the impact of paraphrase on Luther’s interpretation, see Timothy J. Wengert, *Reading the Bible with Martin Luther: An Introductory Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 108–10.

52. See his *De dialectica libri quatuor*, first published in 1528, citing the 1539 version published by Kraft Müller in Strasbourg, p. 71–78 (online: <http://www.mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn/resolver.pl?>; accessed 1 January 2015), where he also lists questions regarding a thing’s causes and parts. In his *Erotemata dialectices* (CR 13:573–74) of 1547, Melanchthon lists ten questions.

53. See especially Siegfried Wiedenhofer, *Formalstrukturen humanistischer und reformatorischer Theologie bei Philipp Melanchthon*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt/Main: Lang, 1976), 1:373–79, where he argues that in his *exegetica*, Melanchthon used *loci communes* as both general topics of a speech or text and also basic principles of content standing behind a speech or text. For an analysis of how Melanchthon used these categories in his exegesis, see Wengert, *Melanchthon’s Annotationes in Johannem*, 182–91. Rudolf Agricola also pioneered an approach to dialectics that wedded it to rhetoric, an approach that Melanchthon used in developing a fourth genre of speech in 1521, the *genus didaskalion*.

54. For example, in the *Scholia* on Colossians of 1528, his discussion of Col. 2:23 went on for fifty pages. See Wengert, *Human Freedom*, 110–36. In his 1556 *Enarratio* on Romans, he refuted Osiander. See Timothy J. Wengert, “Commentary As Polemic: Philip Melanchthon’s 1556 *Enarratio ad Romanos* against Andreas Osiander,” *Hermeneutica Sacra: Studies of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Torbjörn Johansson, Robert Kolb and Johann Anselm Steiger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 147–63.

55. MSA 5:169. For Melanchthon’s outline in the 1532 *Commentarii*, see also MSA 5:373–78.

56. MSA 5:155–58. See Peter Fraenkel, “Revelation and Tradition: Notes on Some Aspects of Doctrinal Continuity in the Theology of Philip Melanchthon,” *Studia Theologica* (Lund), 13 (1959): 97–133; Sick, *Melanchthon als Ausleger*, 52; Wiedenhofer, *Formalstrukturen*, 195–96, 215–33, 370–71. See also the *Augsburg Confession*, art. XX, which refers to Rom. 5:1.

57. MSA 2/1:31 (“Quid peccatum”), 35 (“Vis peccati et fructus”), 55 (“De lege”), 83 (“Quid evangelium”), 90 (“De vi legis”), 100 (“De vi evangelii”), 106 (“De iustificatione et fide”), 131 (“De fidei efficacia”).

58. See also the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, art. XII, par. 28–58.

59. For the origins in Luther, see Timothy J. Wengert, *A Formula for Parish Practice: Using the Formula of Concord in the Parish* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 78–79. For the sermon on Galatians 3, see *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe [Schriften]*, 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993), 10/1/1:460–61. Henceforth, WA. See the Augsburg Confession, art. XXI which connects Charles V and King David.

60. For this paragraph see Wengert, *Law and Gospel*, 177–210.

61. For Luther, see Birgit Stolt, “*Laßt uns fröhlich springen!*”: *Gefühlswelt und Gefühlsnavigation in Luthers Reformationsarbeit* (Berlin: Weidler, 2012), 13–142.

62. MSA 2/1:20, 26–29.

63. According to the 1523 reprint, *Annotationes . . . in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos unam, et ad Corinthios duas* (Strasbourg: Herwagen, May 1523), 3r.

64. CR 15:513. For an example from the *Enarratio* on Romans, see CR 15:808.

65. Wengert, *Law and Gospel*, 121. See MBW no. 615 (*Texte* 3:198–202), sent to Johann Agricola and written at the end of October 1527.

66. Peter Fraenkel, “Ten Questions concerning Melanchthon, the Fathers and the Eucharist,” Vilmos Vajta, ed., *Luther and Melanchthon in History and Theology of the Reformation* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1961), 146–64.

67. Timothy J. Wengert, “Philip Melanchthon’s 1557 Lecture on Colossians 3:1–2: Christology as Context for the Controversy over the Lord’s Supper,” Irene Dingel, et al., *Philip Melanchthon: Theologian in Classroom, Confession, and Controversy* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 209–35.

68. Peter Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum: The Function of the Patristic Argument in the Theology of Philip Melanchthon* (Geneva: Droz, 1961).

69. Scheible, *Melanchthon*, 58.

70. Timothy J. Wengert, “‘Qui vigilantissimis oculis veterum omnium commentarios excusserit’: Philip Melanchthon’s Patristic Exegesis,” *Die Patristik in der Biblexegese des 16. Jahrhunderts*, ed. David C. Steinmetz (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999), 115–34.

71. For the alternative view, see E. P. Meijering, *Melanchthon and Patristic Thought: The Doctrines of Christ and Grace, the Trinity and the Creation* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 108. For an analysis of Melanchthon’s use of the Cappadocians, see Ashley Hall, *Philip Melanchthon and the Cappadocians: A Reception of Greek Patristic Sources in the Sixteenth Century* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014).

72. MSA 5:100–02.

73. See Wengert, “The Biblical Commentaries,” 112, esp. n. 43 for the references in Melanchthon’s correspondence.

74. See the seminar report from the Ninth International Luther Congress, held in Heidelberg, Germany, Thomas Wabel with Timothy J. Wengert, “Argumenta in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos,” *Luther-Jahrbuch* 66 (1999): 298–301.

75. See *Annotationes Philippi Melanchthonis in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos unam, Et ad Corinthios duas* (Strasbourg: Herwagen, 3 May 1523), 3v: “Secundum, prior pars epistolae octo capitum, Gratiam, Legem, Peccatum tractat. Idque aptissimo ordine, & plane Rhetorica methodo. Status cauae: iustificari nos fide, quae sententia probatur multis argumentis . . .”

76. WA DB 11/2:2–131 (prefaces to Daniel). See also WA DB 7: 406–21 (prefaces to Revelation).

77. See Birgit Stolt, “*Laßt uns fröhlich springen*,” 251–73.

78. MBW no. 693 (*Texte* 3:335, 13–14), cited in WA Bi 2:xi–xii. For Job, see WA 30/2:636, 15–20, where Luther also mentioned Aurogallus.

79. CR 28 (pt. 2):69–70.

80. Strobel, *Nachricht*, 19–20, quoting from Gustav Georg Zeltner, *Kurtz-gefaßte Historie der gedruckten Bibel-Version und anderer Schriften D. Mart. Lutheri, in der Beschreibung des Lebens und Fatorum Hanns Luffts* (Nuremberg: Tauber, 1727), 25–26, n. “p”, which cited David Chytraeus, *Onomasticon theologicum, recens recognitum* (Wittenberg: Schleich & Schön, 1578), 486, where his discussion of the books of Maccabees concluded: “In Germanicis autem Bibliis, duo primi tantum Maccabaeorum libri, ex Graeca in Teutonicam linguam conuersi sunt a Philippo Melanphone. Quem uersionis Germanicae authorem, etiam oratio propria & purissima, & multo simplicior & facilior, quam in caeteris Bibliorum libris demonstrat.” Zeltner also referred to Martin Mylius, *Chronologia Scriptorum Philippi Melanthonis* (Gorlitz: Fritsch, 1582), B 8r: “In bibliis germanicis Philippus autor est uersionis durorum librorum Maccabaeorum.”

81. For counter-arguments, see Birgit Stolt, “Melanchthon als Übersetzer der Makabäerbücher?,” *Dona Melanthoniana: Festgabe für Heinz Scheible zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Johanna Loehr (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2001), 425–31. On the other side, see Hans Volz, “Melanchthons Anteil an der Lutherbibel,” *ARG* 45 (1954): 196–233, and Heinz Scheible, *Melancthon*, 145–47.