Luther and Melanchthon

by Heinz Scheible

Luther and Melanchthon form in the consciousness of their posterity a unique, unchanging pair, closer and even more permanent than that of the principle German poets, Goethe and Schiller. On occasion we find them expanded into four Evangelists with the addition of the independent reformers Zwingli and Calvin and united in stain-glass windows and in books. None of Luther’s co-workers achieved such recognition as Melanchthon, after whom churches and streets are still being named. Luther and Melanchthon. Was it a teacher-pupil relationship? A pair of friends? A yoke of equally strong oxen pulling the train of history? Or all of the above?

That we so often name Luther and Melanchthon in the same breath indicates the great debt we owe to both for shaping their age—a fact no one disputes. In Wittenberg’s Castle Church, the final resting place for two of Saxony’s electors, these two Reformers repose next to each other in equal standing.

Beyond their actual historical significance, however, they have become symbolic figures who, in the struggle of ideas, represent entire theological programs. They even are seen to have established attributes: the strong, faith-filled Luther versus the gentle, mild, anxious Melanchthon. Luther stands for power, the ability to succeed, confidence, an uncompromising attitude; in short, for everything which, in the days when most people were still sympathetic toward soldiering, was understood as “male” virtues. Nineteenth-century statuary portrayed Luther this way. In contrast, Melanchthon is the rational thinker who never fully devoted himself to theology nor gave up (or overcame, depending on one’s assessment), the humanist ideals of his youth.

Such assumptions, such pictures and caricatures, deserve historical investigation because they mirror their own times and have had such an impressive impact of their own. Nevertheless the most important task of the historian remains, in line with von Ranke’s famous dictum, to press onward to the actual event. With Luther and Melanchthon there are enough sources for it. In the scope of an essay, however, we cannot accomplish such an assignment. Thus, we will limit ourselves to those more recent works out of
which we can obtain enough information regarding our theme to subject them to a critical analysis.

The most recent description of Melanchthon’s relationship to Luther appeared recently in the collection, *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers von 1526 bis 1546*, which is the first depiction in eighty years of this later period in Luther’s career. Together with the books of Martin Brecht on the young Luther and Heinrich Bornkamm on Luther in mid-life, it claims a certain canonicity. At any rate, it will have a powerful impact on research and therefore must be taken seriously. In this book, Bernhard Lohse, the church historian from Hamburg, writes on “Philip Melanchthon in his Relationship to Luther.” He will be our most important partner in this conversation. A few months earlier a collection of essays by Erwin Muelhaupt, the emeritus church historian and Luther researcher, appeared with an essay on this theme from the year 1962. In 1961 Wilhelm H. Neuser, the Melanchthon and Calvin researcher, published a short work titled, “Luther and Melanchthon—Unity in Opposition.” This essay will concern itself with these three accounts. Also worth reading is the lecture presented by Wilhelm Pauck at the 1960 Luther Congress and printed in *Luther and Melanchthon*. I will only mention in passing the book of the American scholar, Lowell C. Green, the title of which, *How Melanchthon Helped Luther Discover the Gospel*, already intimates that we are dealing with a very idiosyncratic interpretation of both Luther and Melanchthon. To examine this book would take us too far into technical questions of dogmatics and theology. Also worth mentioning is the book of Martin Greschat, church historian from Giessen. However, it focuses only on the doctrine of justification between 1528 and 1537 and thus also investigates a special theological question.

I.

The relation between Luther and Melanchthon is almost invariably characterized as a friendship. Lohse (403) calls the “deep encounter” between the two men “friendship.” Muelhaupt (121-134) entitles this essay, “Luther and Melanchthon: The History of Friendship.” And he put both in the same category with Schiller and Goethe, another similarly complex relationship, and even with Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm I. With this he greatly broadens the
concept of friendship. The very good collaboration between two personalities of such differing rank and age—Bismarck was seventeen years younger than his sovereign—can hardly be called friendship. We must also pay attention to rank and age in the relations both of Schiller and Goethe—the professor was ten years younger than his minister—and of Melanchthon to Luther—the young master of arts first met the almost thirty-five-year-old doctor of theology when the former was but twenty-one.

To be sure, no one can deny that an intense relationship developed very rapidly between the two men. They worked together in teaching and research. Collaboration on translating and revising the Bible stretched over their entire lives. Indeed, this relationship had a strong emotional component. Muelhaupt (121) would call this "love at first sight" and thinks (122) that Melanchthon had "obviously already caught fire." Lohse (403) talks more cautiously about a deep encounter. We have moving testimony to the reciprocal affection in these first years. "Our Philip Melanchthon, a wonderful person, in fact, one in whom almost everything is superhuman, is nevertheless completely intimate and friendly to me," Luther writes to Reuchlin not even four months after Melanchthon's arrival in Wittenberg. A year later he remarks, "This little Greek surpasses me even in theology." Melanchthon writes this way about Luther during the latter's stay in the Wartburg: "I would rather die than be separated from this man," and "You know how much Alcibiades revered his Socrates; I revere Luther in a completely different, Christian way, and every time I behold him, he surpasses himself."

However, as soon as we make this fascination of their first collaboration, of their learning from each other, of their common struggle in which the outcome was uncertain—we could even say this fascination of their high spirits or even first love—as soon as we make all of this into a measure of statically conceived connection, we obstruct our view of a dynamic, human relationship and must then register tension, changes and "crises." Thus, Muelhaupt counts five crises and two crucial tests of this friendship. Comments like Melanchthon's to Christopher von Carlowitz on April 28, 1548 remain unintelligible, a conundrum.

Formerly, I put up with an almost disgraceful servitude, since Luther often followed more his own temperament, in which there was more than a little pugnacity, instead of paying attention to his prestige or the common good.
These crises are explained by differences in temperament. Thus, at the beginning of his article, Muelhaupt (122) gives a brief psychological sketch of both Reformers. Luther is "the coarse, north-German son of a farmer; Melanchthon is from a cultivated, middle-class, south-German milieu." Luther was, in fact, not a north German; he came from Thuringia. He was also not a farmer's son, although he played up his farming ancestry. Instead, he grew up exclusively in cities, the son of a middle-class mining entrepreneur. Melanchthon's family had not been middle class much longer—probably only one or two generations. His maternal grandfather was clearly richer and socially better established than the social climber, Hans Luther. Nevertheless, the differences between the two families were not as widely divergent as Muelhaupt depicts them. Perhaps Melanchthon's father, the armorer, worked with copper mined by Luther's father from the Harz.

The stylized opposites boil down to the temperaments, choleric and phlegmatic (122f.). I do not wish to enter into a discussion about theories of temperaments. We need only remember that Melanchthon could be impatient and irascible if a student did not know the right answer immediately. On the contrary, Luther was commended for his great patience and friendliness in academic disputations. Muelhaupt characterizes Melanchthon using the unfortunate term, phlegmatic.

A man of slow and dispassionate learning, conservative and unrevolutionary to the core, rational and absolutely disinclined toward excessive, mystical brooding, a patient and tenacious worker in a clearly demarcated field of study, ready to compromise and mediate.

I do not understand how anyone can call Melanchthon, this highly intelligent, precocious scholar, who had at his disposal the entire wisdom of his age, a person of "slow learning." Luther, certainly not unintelligent, needed a much longer time for his development. And conservative? Even Lohse (402) sees things reversed.

In some things Melanchthon separated himself more quickly than Luther from medieval ideas, such as the doctrine of transubstantiation. Thus, the former's critique was based more strongly on reason, while the latter struggled to arrive at his critique through a more circuitous route, starting from the center of his reformational doctrine of justification.

Muelhaupt's way of looking at things leads to a psychologization of history. It is no longer a matter of circumstances, of tasks and
their accomplishment, but rather of temperaments of the persons involved. This is not to deny the psychological approach completely, but it ought not become the point of departure for an interpretation. Instead, this approach can only be employed secondarily, when all other interpretative possibilities have been exhausted. Given the difficulty of characterizing an individual psychologically with a brief formula, the elucidation of the facts must stand at the beginning of any historical study. These facts can then be the building blocks for a psychograph, not the other way around. Wilhelm Neuser recognized this clearly and took it into consideration, unfortunately only for three events in the 1530s. I can in general agree with this realistic sketch, but I hold his programmatic subtitle, "Unity in Opposition," to be exaggerated on both sides. Luther and Melanchthon did not form a unity; but they also never stood in opposition to one another.

II.

Luther's and Melanchthon's comments about each other make for fascinating reading. Thanks to the wealth of information contained in the Table Talk, we have from Luther a whole range of wonderful opinions and bon mots about Melanchthon. Gustav Mix had already assembled them by 1901. Muelhaupt (123ff.) offers a few. They are an important source for how each Reformer viewed the other. But they are subjective, spontaneous and sometimes even full of humorous exaggeration. No one should employ them too hastily to explain their long-standing relationship, although they remain naturally an important index that scholars cannot ignore. Nevertheless, an examination of the direct evidence must be expanded through an investigation of their actual behavior, especially in critical situations. Then we must also correctly relate these situations, with all their nuances, to the daily collaboration which finds no expression in the sources particularly when work is running smoothly.

According to Neuser, critical situations for the relation between the two men include the Wittenberg Unrest of 1521/22, the Lord's Supper Colloquy in Torgau of 1527, the Augsburg Imperial Diet of 1530 and the Lord's Supper Colloquy in Kassel of 1534. The differences first really came to a head in the Cordatus controversy of 1536 and the Schenck controversy of 1537 and in Luther's objection
to the Reformation in Cologne of 1544. Only in these three cases
did their actual separation become an issue. Muelhaupt’s five crises
are (1) Melanchthon’s refusal to change completely over to theo­
logical studies, (2) Luther’s controversy with Erasmus, (3) Luther’s
marriage, (4) the Imperial Diet of 1530, and (5) the doctrine of the
Lord’s supper. In addition he views Melanchthon’s illness in Wei­
mar in 1540 and his care for Luther’s widow as test cases. Lohse
frees himself from this crisis model and offers instead a chronolog­
ical overview of Melanchthon’s life and theological development
not limited simply to the relations between Luther and Melanch­
thon. Nevertheless, despite many accurate formulations, within his
detached, matter-of-fact language lurk several traditional preju­
dices which we must examine critically.

As soon as Melanchthon arrived in Wittenberg, his very close
collaboration with Luther began. Luther improved his Greek with
Melanchthon’s help. Melanchthon started a regular study of theol­
ogy and became a determined follower of Luther. Years later in his
Testament of 1539 Melanchthon confessed with gratitude, “I
learned the Gospel from him.”

Melanchthon’s chief theological work was his *Loci communes re­
rum theologicarum*. Originally a systematic interpretation of the
book of Romans, it appeared in section in 1521. Afterwards he
completely reworked and expanded it into an evangelical
dogmatics—pioneering a new genre of scholarly literature. Luther
praised it excessively: “Next to the Holy Scripture there is
no better book than his *Loci*”; “an unsurpassable book, worthy
not only of immortality but also of churchly approbation.”

Despite Luther’s high praise, Lohse (404) finds even in the early
*Loci* “clear differences from Luther: Melanchthon both intellectu­
alized faith and formalized what for the Reformation was the basic
difference between Law and Gospel.” This observation is doubtless
correct, and it is formulated right to the point. Lohse continues,
“The ensuing differences between Luther and Melanchthon may be
traced back to their roots in the *Loci communes* of 1521.” If, as I be­
lieve, this judgment is also correct, the Melanchthon’s theology ex­
perienced no breaks, so that even after Luther’s death, when
Melanchthon was being attacked on all sides, his theology re­
mained the same as before. But the question must be raised: should not Luther himself have been able to see these differences,
when he lavished such praise on Melanchthon’s book? Did he per-
haps even admire and prize Melanchthon’s greater formal gifts? Did he not construe the terms “intellectualize” and “formalize” more positively than does either Lohse or the majority of modern Luther scholars? Luther himself gives us the answer: “I cannot combine brevity and clarity the way Philip does.” On August 1, 1537 he wrote with chalk on the table-top, “Res et verba Philippus, verba sine re Erasmus, res sine verbis Lutherus, nec res nec verba Carolo-stadius.” Melanchthon’s formal gifts, which recent scholarship has recognized rather contemptuously, were consistently valued highly by Luther. Melanchthon’s great success as a teacher and writer depended in no small way upon these gifts. From his classes students could return home with something down in black and white. We shall see below how Luther reacted to the material difference, which, as Lohse correctly observes, has its roots in the Loci of 1521 and first became obvious later on.

Next we must turn our attention to the Wittenberg Unrest of 1521/22. Neuser is of the opinion that here the contrast between Luther and Melanchthon became obvious. Lohse depicts the events as follows.

A new situation developed for both theologians. Luther found himself after the Diet of Worms in protective custody at the Wartburg from May 1521 until March, 1522, and Melanchthon, who was only twenty-four-years old at the time, had to take over temporarily the leadership of the reformation movement in Wittenberg. Not only because of his youth, but above all else because of his still unclarified theological position and because of his anxious nature, Melanchthon was not equal to the task which fell to him. Regarding Wittenberg’s critical questions concerning the validity of monastic vows, communion in both kinds for the laity, the prophetic claims of the Zwickau prophets and even Wittenberg’s city ordinance of January 24, 1522, Melanchthon allowed himself, at times hesitantly, to be carried along without fully examining the consequences of the emerging problems. So it was that he, more than anyone else, besought Luther to return from the Wartburg and set things right again.

I have cited this passage word-for-word in order to make clear how thoughtless formulations and unreflected prejudices can hide even in an even-tempered, seemingly objective portrayal of events. One can demonstrate this in other works as well. Moreover, these misconceptions, referred to in almost all histories of the Reformation, dominate interpretations of the Wittenberg Movement.

Luther’s stay in the Wartburg cannot be termed “protective custody” (Schutzhäft), since through its misuse during Hitler’s dicta-
torship this word conjures up visions of false imprisonment and torture, that is, of concentration camps. But even overlooking that, Luther was in a position to leave the Wartburg, and, once Junker Joerg's beard had grown long enough for him, he travelled incognito to Eisenach and Wittenberg. Finally, he left his refuge on his own, against the will of his elector. I am also sensitive to the word "leadership" (Führung) of the Reformation movement. Apparently, a movement needs a leader, and, if the leader is absent, a deputy. According to Lohse, Melanchthon was not equal to the task for several reasons: his age, his unclear theological position and his anxious nature. Thus, he "allowed himself, at times hesitantly, to be carried along with fully examining the consequences of the emerging problems." True. Who ever fully examines the consequences of emerging problems? Nevertheless, all the other conclusions do not do justice to the course of events.

Since 1516 Luther had represented in Wittenberg a theology regarded as new, but which he still considered to be the old, Augustinian biblical theology. Through both his critique of the church and his devotional literature, this theology found from the end of 1517 unexpected resonance among the public. Little by little he also questioned the church's doctrinal positions, and this brought him under the ban. However, praxis had changed very little, if at all. Even in Wittenberg, masses were read in great number; relics were viewed and indulgences acquired; mendicants roamed the streets. Not even the humanistic reform of the university had been completed: scholastic subject-matter was still demanded in exams. To be sure, Luther had a great number of supporters among the professors, students and citizenry. Although he now sat in the Wartburg, he could still influence events by writing letters and publishing books.

His supporters in Wittenberg as well as in other places felt themselves under more and more pressure to put into action what they had recognized, either with Luther's help or through their own reflection, as in accord with the Scriptures. Priests married. The Lord's supper was offered and received in both kinds by the laity. Masses for the dead were done away with and the foundations used for social purposes. Monks left their cloisters. Religious pictures were removed. In a city as small as Wittenberg a variety of authorities, which mutually influenced one another, were responsible for these reforms.
Whoever married did so at his own risk. The monastic convents were independent. Among the Augustinian observants, Gabriel Zwilling preached to the friars with, of course, some effect on the townspeople. Wittenberg’s parish church was incorporated into the All Saints’ foundation. Moreover, the city pastor, Simon Heins, was, unlike his brother, George Brück, unimportant and sickly. Thus the ecclesiastical life of the city was determined by the chapter of the All Saints’ foundation, where Justus Jonas, the Erfurt humanist, had just become provost. Therefore, his position was not yet secure. Because of all this, the most powerful man in the foundation and, hence, in the university was the archdeacon, Andreas Karlstadt, doctor of both theology and jurisprudence and the ranking professor of theology. Besides, there was also the city council and, lest we forget, the man in the street, who revealed his own agenda when he occasionally demolished sacred lamps and threw mud at mendicants. Over all this, the elector himself and his counsellors kept watch personally.

And Melanchthon? He had no office that would have given him any influence. Luther and a portion of the townspeople would gladly have enlisted him as preacher in the city church, but, since Melanchthon was not ordained, the provost, Jonas, did not yet want to take responsibility for such a move. Thus, Melanchthon was, so to speak, a private individual, albeit not a completely normal one, but instead a rather young, but nevertheless intellectually superior professor who had championed Luther’s theology orally and in writing. He was also the one who, together with some students, received both kinds in the Lord’s supper as the first laypersons. Moreover, he sat on some commissions, where with Jonas and von Amsdorf he represented a moderate position. And he was a faithful liaison for Luther and, through Spalatin, for the elector’s government.

And the Zwickau prophets? The influence of these three men on the Wittenberg movement is often overestimated. They came on the 27th of December 1521 and, with the exception of Melanchthon’s student and boarder, Mark Stübner, remained only for a few days. Melanchthon and von Amsdorf were basically open to the notion that the work of the Holy Spirit in the end times could give rise to prophecy and miracles. These three men certainly fascinated Melanchthon. But he very quickly recognized that their prophetic claims were shaky. Luther did not need to help him in
reaching such a conclusion. What perplexed him was the assertion that infant baptism could not be proven from the Bible. For someone who was doing battle against Rome using the principle of sola scriptura, this was indeed an unsettling affair. Even Luther himself could not solve this problem satisfactorily, and it is still handled in a variety of ways in present-day evangelical theology.

Therefore, I cannot see how Melanchthon was not equal to some sort of task or another during the Wittenberg Unrest. He participated in a very complex process and, when it seemed necessary to him, he promptly informed both Luther and the government. What he actively supported, in particular communion in both kinds, he was not required to recant. In no sense did Melanchthon play a leadership role. Luther laid claim to such a role after his return, but he succeeded only after a hard and bitter fight against his rival, Andreas Karlstadt.

Lohse in his compact depiction of the Wittenberg Movement sketches a picture of Melanchthon’s anxiety so typical that I cannot ignore it. What Melanchthon fears is never clarified. But that is also not important. Anxiety in his stereotypical epithet. Melanchthon was in no way anxious, instead he was concerned for the future of church and empire—just as we cannot get thoughts of a possible nuclear war off our minds, even though we may not be anxious. Melanchthon’s concerns were not excessive. He was unable to stop the division of the church and, along with it, of the empire. He saw with his own eyes the military defeat of the Protestants. No one could then have foreseen that the Turks would twice be turned back at the gates of Vienna. Finally, even the Thirty Years War was a later consequence of the Reformation.

In his personal life Melanchthon was courageous. For example, in Wittenberg there was always student unrest. In 1512 the rector of the university was even murdered by a student seeking revenge. Whenever such rioting occurred, Master Philip would go out into the street and confront the heated crowd. Once someone even brandished a pike in his face! For his own family and the families of Katherine Luther and George Major he organized and led a flight of refugees during the Smalcald War. (This is Muelhaupt’s second crucial test of his friendship with Luther!) He did not need to fear the Wittenberg Unrest. It was without a doubt much more harmless than historians, who delight in what it symbolizes, want to believe. And it was easily controlled by the city council. Much worse
was the student unrest in the summer of 1520. At that time the elector’s army advanced on Wittenberg—something Melanchthon tried to prevent by defusing the situation. This was nothing compared to what happened in the city of Erfurt in May and June of 1521. A mob demolished the living quarters of the cathedral canons one by one, while the city aldermen turned a blind eye. Such assaults on clerics find no parallel in Wittenberg.

Luther judged Melanchthon’s “anxiety” the same way we do. Small and insignificant things affect me greatly, but not the big things. For think, “That is too high for you; you cannot grasp it, so let it go.” Philip does just the opposite. My concerns do not affect him at all; the great concerns of state and church do. Only personal cares weight heavily on my mind. In this way the gifts are different.\textsuperscript{35}

Luther loved these kinds of contrast. Thus, some things were said for the sake of the comparison itself. For this reason I do not take it as a foregone conclusion that Luther became easily disheartened by minor details. Still, one can gather at least this much from the Table Talk, namely, that Melanchthon’s proverbial worries concerned greater political issues, not everyday occurrences. In these things he was calmer than Luther.

Lohse believes that Melanchthon “underwent a lasting change under the influence of the events of 1521/22.” But he takes this back in the next breath by adding, “through which, to be sure, previously established thoughts and tendencies came back into play.”\textsuperscript{26} I believe these statements contradict each other. If something “previous” comes back into play, then it is not a lasting change, but at best only a 360-degree turn. To be sure this is hair-splitting, but it should make clear how Lohse has woven disparate statements together. Here is the commonplace of a weak-kneed Melanchthon, who always caves in whenever he has to master a difficult situation without Luther—in the Wittenberg Unrest, in the Diet of Augsburg of 1530, in the Interim. Lohse cannot extricate himself from this traditional prejudice. Nevertheless, as an intelligent historian of theology, he sees that there was actually no change, but that one should instead speak of an unfolding of earlier approaches to theology.

Lohse specifies the fruits of the Wittenberg Unrest for Melanchthon’s development as follows: he was from that time immune to religious enthusiasts; he stressed instead the legitimate authority of
the magistrates; and he delved into the tradition of the church fathers. Through his "traditionalism"—a term even Lohse puts in quotation marks—Melanchthon henceforth differentiates himself from Luther. I cannot agree with any of these three assertions. Melanchthon was never susceptible to religious enthusiasm (something that the phrase "from that time immune" implies), but instead he took a good look at the Zwickau prophets and, within a few days, adjudged them to be enthusiasts. Again and again he cited Nicholas Storch as the archetype of an enthusiast. Melanchthon never opposed the legitimate authority of the magistracy, but later he considered possible both the right to revolt and tyrannicide.

And the church fathers? Luther was the one who, even before Melanchthon came to Wittenberg, brought Augustine into the struggle against scholastic theology. The young theology student, Melanchthon, first formulated the principle of sola scriptura in a disputation at the university. Melanchthon never placed any tradition over the Scripture, but instead he measured the church fathers by the Scripture. That is, he personally measured the fathers on the strength of his own theological insight, which was refined and checked both by conversation with like-minded theologians and through the tradition itself. This hermeneutical circle in the reflective association of Scripture and tradition is the Reformation's Scripture principle, upon which all Reformers were united. It stands against the formal authority that may not be questioned. Melanchthon was no traditionalist. Instead, he was a person who thought historically. The same was true for Luther.

III.

In contrast to Neuser and Lohse, Muelhaupt argues that the Wittenberg Unrest did not affect the relation between Luther and Melanchthon. In this I agree with him. However, for Muelhaupt the first crisis in the friendship between the two Reformers begins in 1522 and consists of Melanchthon's stubborn refusal to assume a full-professorship in theology and thus to remove himself from the philosophical faculty. In the end, Luther had to respect, "the peculiarity and individual will of his friend." Their friendship remained untroubled. In this case a difference over a real issue has become a crisis in friendship.

In the background lurks the assumption that Melanchthon was no theologian. The church historian Wilhelm Maurer, whom we
have to thank for his two-volume biography of the young Melanchthon and for his many penetrating studies especially on the Augsburg Confession, also champions this view. Already at the 400th anniversary of Melanchthon’s death in 1960, he described Melanchthon as a lay Christian. In the above-mentioned biography there is a chapter entitled, “Melanchthon’s Crisis of Vocation.” This crisis concerns the fact that Melanchthon wanted to be released from the duties of his theological lectures, which he first assumed as a result of his theological baccalaureate and later continued as a representative of the absent Luther, in order to devote himself more fully to humanistic studies and to the reform of the liberal arts faculty. In the winter semester, 1523/24 he was the rector of the university and carried out the reform of humanist studies. At this time he gave no lectures on biblical exegesis for the entire year.

Undeniably Melanchthon went his own way in these years and freed himself from the specific influence of Luther, even in theology. We can see the results of his theological reflection in his position regarding the dispute between Luther and Erasmus over the freedom of the will. But in his article (421) Maurer believes he has detected “a complete rejection of theology.” He interprets Melanchthon’s undeniable, lifelong participation in the expert opinions of Wittenberg theologians as secretarial activity, in which Melanchthon copied down the theological views of others without ever expressing his own opinion. He even alleges (p. 423) that Melanchthon represented others’ ideas, “as they fit into the situation, and he made every effort to make them fit as well as possible.” Maurer designates him as the lay interpreter “over against [sic] the professional theologians.” In all this Melanchthon is devalued as a theologian at the expense of the historical truth. Perhaps underneath such statements lurks a subconscious refusal to admit that in Wittenberg an independent theologian of highest rank worked next to Luther and was respected by him. For systematic theology to comprehend this fact is obviously so difficult for some Lutherans, that they energetically banish Melanchthon into the propaedeutic of humanistic, linguistic education and seek to describe the relation of Luther and Melanchthon with the sentimental category of “friendship.”

The reality is quite different. Melanchthon held theological lectures throughout his life. The first biblical commentary which he
deemed worthy of publication appeared in 1527. Melanchthon was thirty. In the same year he wrote his theological guidelines for church visitors, having himself participated in such visitations as a theological visitor more often than Luther. The chief confession of the Reformation, the Augsburg Confession, was written by Melanchthon, along with the Apology and the "Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope." Luther, too, contributed only three writing to the official collection of the Book of Concord. Melanchthon also wrote the confession intended for a general council.

What Maurer writes about the expert opinions is false. They bear in most cases the imprint of Melanchthon's theology. Luther served as a co-advisor and, on the top line, as co-signer. The new statutes of the theological faculty from 1533 were not written by the full professors, Luther or Jonas, but by Melanchthon. Melanchthon drew up the form for ordinations, registered beginning in 1537 and performed by Wittenberg's pastor, Bugenhagen. He even occasionally co-signed them. When the Wittenberg theologians were approached, Melanchthon was clearly present, not just as clerk or secretary, but as an actively participating leader, already during Luther's lifetime, but more fully thereafter. He was a ranking professional theologian; no one ought to dispute this.

As Maurer never tires of stressing, Melanchthon was no cleric; he was a layman. I am of the opinion that whoever takes Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers as a basic teaching of the Reformation should use the word "lay" only to describe the hierarchical structure of the Roman Catholic church. One of the most successful teachings of Luther and of all the Reformers was their challenge of a peculiar position for clerics, chiefly in a theological sense, but as a result also in its social implications. When Provost Jonas had the notion earlier to make the layman, Melanchthon, the city preacher, it was still during the beginnings of the Reformation. Jonas considered it basically possible at that time. He just did not wish to cause any unnecessary trouble. Shortly thereafter many un-ordained students were called to ecclesiastical offices. Only later was an evangelical ordination developed, which differentiates itself from Roman Catholic ordination as a call into a particular office, not as the bestowal of a sacral quality. I decisively reject the terminology "lay theologian" or even "lay Christian." The fact that Melanchthon never filled a pulpit stemmed from personal reasons: he suffered from a slight speech impediment (which is why he sim-
plified his complicated name to “Melanthon”), and his voice could probably not have filled a large church. Nevertheless, beginning in the 1530s he held Latin Bible studies on Sundays for the countless foreign students who could not follow a German sermon. Not surprisingly, German-speaking students also attended them. Like Luther’s sermons, Melanchthon’s exposition of the pericopes was also taken down and printed. Thus, Melanchthon, too, produced postils, that is, collections of sermons, only in Latin, not German.

In this context we must understand the results of the struggle over which faculty Melanchthon belonged to. The new elector, John the Steadfast, who raised the salaries of the professors across the board, doubled Melanchthon’s to 200 gulden. That was a great deal of money. Luther, who as a monk had received no support, also received the same amount. Apparently both he and Melanchthon were simultaneously taken out of regular faculty positions and were allowed to lecture on whatever they wished. In contrast to the professors of law, who because of their outside duties as judges and electoral counsellors were so often absent that people complained about the “indolence of the jurists,” Melanchthon’s high salary meant that he actually performed double the work in two faculties. His teaching position in Greek, to which he had been called in 1518, was filled in 1526 or soon thereafter by one of his students, the subsequent vice-chancellor, Francis Burchard.

IV.

For Muelhaupt (128) 1525 was a “difficult crisis year for their friendship. Luther offended Melanchthon in two ways.” He broke with Erasmus, and then there was “a second great concern of Melanchthon: Luther married.” Melanchthon’s first biographer wrote in 1566 that Melanchthon’s distress over Luther’s marriage had nothing to do with the act itself, but with the fact that by marrying Luther became the subject of much gossip. According to that same account, Luther comforted and cheered Melanchthon up. It was to Melanchthon’s friend—in this case a real, personally intimate friend—Joachim Camerarius, that Melanchthon wrote that notorious letter, dated June 16, 1525, just three days after Luther’s surprising and unusually performed marriage (there was no wedding notice given). This letter has raised such a stir because only a hundred years ago was it discovered how much Camerarius had
changed the text in his edition of letters written to him by Melanchthon. The letter appeared so tense because of Camerarius’s prudish rewriting. Melanchthon’s original text states uninhibitedly: the nuns excited Luther, but the rumor that he had deflowered von Bora beforehand, as had been whispered, was fabricated. I cannot see any distress here, simply a sober assessment of the situation. Melanchthon did not criticize the marriage, which he basically approved of as necessary for nature’s sake, but rather the timing: in the midst of the Peasant’s Revolt. Taken as a whole, however, despite a few critical comments about Luther’s peculiarities, the letter defends Luther to Camerarius, whom Melanchthon assumed was confused by Luther’s unexpected step. In his biography, Camerarius then transferred his own attitudes to Melanchthon. Moreover, Melanchthon was not invited to the wedding itself, which took place in the presence of a small circle of friends, but only to a larger celebration somewhat later. This appears to me to be an index for the fact that the relation for these two men was not the much talked about personal friendship.

V.

To deal with the Diet of Augsburg in the necessary detail would require a separate essay. Because of the six-month separation of the two Reformers with its lively exchange of letters, we possess rich sources concerning their mutual relations and their differing assessment of the situation. But these sources must also be carefully interpreted. Several issues must be addressed: (1) Luther’s judgment concerning the Augsburg Confession, where the word “pussy-footing” (Leisetreten) occurs; (2) Luther’s letters of comfort for Melanchthon and their cause; (3) Melanchthon’s special negotiations with some representatives of the opposition and his activity in the committees as these pertain to the question of whether he made any unauthorized agreements; and (4) Melanchthon’s supposed isolation within his own camp.

I am of the opinion (1) that Luther expressed no substantive critique of the Augsburg Confession, although he had the opportunity to do it; (2) that his oft-quoted letters of comfort say more about Luther’s mood than Melanchthon’s; (3) that in all of his negotiations Melanchthon stayed within the terms which Electoral Saxony had laid down before the Diet with Luther’s approval, namely, rec-
ognizing the episcopal jurisdiction in exchange for allowing free evangelical preaching, communion in both kinds and the marriage of priests; and finally (4) that the criticism of Melanchthon came, not from the entire evangelical camp, but from Nuremberg. Episcopal jurisdiction must have been intolerable, not in powerful territories like electoral Saxony, but in evangelical imperial cities like Nuremberg and Strasbourg, where struggle against ecclesiastical domination inside their walls, begun prior to the Reformation, had finally reached its peak. I cannot now provide the proof from the sources for my interpretation or for my quarrel with the secondary literature, since I must still consider the only three conflicts in which, as Neuser says (5), "Melanchthon’s separation from Luther and his departure from Wittenberg" actually came up for discussion.

Neuser describes the particulars. All three cases involve students of Luther who, as Melanchthon mocks them, think of themselves as genuine and who denounce Melanchthon to Luther because of doctrinal deviations. Melanchthon’s close, personal friend from his early Wittenberg days, John Agricola from Eisleben, did this earlier in connection with the church visitation of 1527. In Agricola’s opinion Melanchthon put too much value on penance and the law. A friendly conversation under the direction of Luther prevented the outbreak of a controversy. When Agricola repeated his charges ten years later and extended them to include Luther, Luther struck back hard in his antinomian disputations. Agricola fled Electoral Saxony and went to Berlin, more precisely to Coelln a. d. Spree, where he became the court preacher of the Elector Joachim II.

In the summer of 1536 Conrad Cordatus, one of the earliest of Luther’s adherents who was imprisoned for his reform preaching in Hungary in 1525 and is well-known as a copier of the Table Talk, came from his parish in Niemegk to visit Wittenberg. On June 24, 1536 he heard a lecture of Caspar Cruciger, Sr., a professor of theology. To Cordatus’s amazement, Cruciger stated that contrition and human effort toward faith are to be designated as absolutely necessary causes (causae sin qua non) of justification. Cordatus started a fight with Cruciger and discovered that Cruciger's lecture manuscript came from Melanchthon. On September 18th Cordatus made accusations against both men to Luther and Pastor Buggenhagen. At that very time, Pastor Nicholas von Amsdorf, who
as a Wittenberg professor had been one of Luther's first adherents, sent a letter expressing his own worries. He reported that people were saying that two different doctrines were being represented at Wittenberg: Melanchthon was teaching in the classroom that works were necessary for salvation; Luther was preaching at the same time that rebirth occurs passively as from a mother's womb. At the time Melanchthon was in southern Germany. After he returned he declared himself to be essentially in solidarity with Luther, although he defended his use of dialectical terminology in theology. Cordatus refused to give up. In spite of his determination, he was dismissed by Luther and particularly by the rector of the university, Justus Jonas. In the Spring of 1537 a further denunciation came from the Freiberg court preacher, Jacob Schenck. Melanchthon, in responding to Schenck's inquiry, had advised practicing toleration for the weak at the introduction of the Reformation and, for a time, offering only the bread at the Lord's supper as in Roman Catholic worship. Schenck and Cordatus joined forces and even brought the case before the Saxon court.

Melanchthon did not remain untouched by this criticism of his teaching authority and his undermining the church's unity, on which he placed great worth. He even toyed with the idea of leaving Wittenberg. But one thing did not happen: it never came to a fight with Luther. I do not understand how Lohse, who in general depicts the facts correctly, can call these attacks on Melanchthon, which Luther dismissed, a "fight between Luther and Melanchthon." Worse yet, he calls the Cordatus controversy (41ff.) the "first grave fight between Luther and Melanchthon." Melanchthon judged things completely differently. On June 22, 1537, at the height of the attacks by Cordatus and Schenck, he wrote to the Nuremberg preacher, Veit Dietrich.

As you know, I formulate some things less harshly concerning predestination, the assent of the will [to grace], the necessity of our obedience [after justification], and mortal sin. I know that on all these issues Luther is in fact of the same opinion. But the uneducated people love his coarse formulations too much, because they do not perceive what context they belong in. I do not want to pick a fight with them. They are entitled to their opinion. Only now and then they should also allow me, as an Aristotelian who loves the reasonable middle, not to speak so stoically.

Thus, Melanchthon believes that he is basically in agreement with Luther on predestination and the freedom of the will.
We must now ask if Melanchthon's view corresponds with Luther's words and deeds. Long before Cordatus and von Amsdorf objected, Melanchthon had not only lectured on but had even published his teaching concerning the freedom of the will and its function in justification and sanctification. This teaching appeared in the new 1535 edition of the *Loci*, a book about which Cordatus had said it displeased him as much as it had pleased Erasmus. The teaching had already appeared in the commentary on Colossians of 1527, the first publication of Melanchthon after Luther's dispute with Erasmus, in which he laid out his understanding of philosophy and the freedom of the will. His approach gained such respect that the particular excursus was immediately published in a separate printing in Latin and in German translation. To the German translation of the expanded 1529 Colossians commentary Luther wrote a preface, where the oft-quoted sentence about his and Melanchthon's books stands.

For this I was born, that I must fight and go into battles against mobs and devils. That is why some of my books are very stormy and war-like. I must pull out the stumps and roots, hack away at the thorns and thistles, drain the swamps. And I am the coarse woodsman who must blaze and prepare a new trail. But Master Philip comes neatly and quietly behind me, cultivates and plants, sows and waters with joy, according to the gifts that God has richly given him.

[And earlier in the letter] I prefer Master Philip's books to my own and I prefer to see them both in Latin and German instead of my own.

Concretely this means that Luther regarded Melanchthon's Colossians commentary, with its fundamental statements concerning philosophy and the free will, as more worthy of being read than his book *De servo arbitrio*. I say this although I know that Luther counted this book to be among his best, that is, among the two which he still accepted.

With this quote from Luther we have almost returned to the two different temperaments. I believe, however, that Luther wanted to say more. One certainly cannot suppose that Luther did not recognize the doctrinal differences between himself and Melanchthon. In the final analysis he was a penetrating theologian. As we have heard, this was pointed out to him often enough. Why did he not jump all over Melanchthon as he did his Roman Catholic opponents, the prince of humanists, Erasmus, or even his own student, John Agricola? Why did he protect him?
Luther doubtless knew, and it was also made clear to him by the electoral court, that Melanchthon's departure from Wittenberg would have meant an irreplaceable loss for the university. Luther was the great Reformer, but Melanchthon was no less famous. In educational qualifications he was without a doubt more well-rounded. In the regular classroom training, the great majority of students went through Melanchthon's hands, whereas Luther taught only the relatively few students who studied in the theological faculty, although naturally many more than theologians came to hear his lectures and sermons. I assume, therefore, that it was not just a case of weak nerves for Melanchthon when in the face of these attacks on himself he considered in his letters leaving and occasionally even toyed with the offer of another position. He must have known that these letters would not remain secret, but would be read and copied by many people. In my opinion he consciously raised the question of his continued association with Wittenberg, and he got his way again and again. Of course he could not overdo it; at times he, too, had to step back. In this way we can explain his occasional complaint about the servitude that he had to endure under Luther. On the other hand, he was certainly also proverbially known as conciliatory and ready to compromise.

But the same is also true for Luther. If he suspected grave theological differences between himself and Melanchthon, he certainly would never have spared his colleague simply for the sake of the university's enrollment. We know Luther's feisty temperament well enough from other cases to be able to say this. Nevertheless, Luther possessed the ability, if not to compromise, then at least to tolerate differences. This is the very least he learned in his old age.

I would like to elucidate this point on the question of the Lord's supper and thereby come to Muelhaupt's fifth crisis, which, according to Lohse (416), led to a "severe controversy between Luther and Melanchthon." The whole controversy consists in a single incident. On August 4, 1544 Luther shocked an unsuspecting Melanchthon with an enraged attack against Bucer and the Reformation of Cologne. Melanchthon was the co-author of the writing. Von Amsdorf made Luther aware particularly of the statement on the Lord's supper, which Bucer had formulated. Bucer had been untiring in his efforts to bridge the differences between Luther on the one hand and Zwingli and his followers on the other over the meaning of the Lord's supper. He first came to an agreement with
Then, in the Wittenberg Concord of 1536, he gained general acceptance for the doctrine of the Strasbourgers and other South-German theologians—a doctrine formulated by Melanchthon. When Bucer was again attacked by Luther, Melanchthon must also have felt the blows. In the following weeks he was under terrible pressure because Luther was writing his “Short Confession concerning the Lord’s Supper.” When it appeared, it became clear that Luther was only going to attack the Swiss, who had rejected the Concord, and Caspar Schwenckfeld, but not Bucer and Melanchthon. Thus, this was the entire “severe controversy between Luther and Melanchthon.”

Lohse writes (417), that Luther allowed Melanchthon’s opinion to stand because he “was somewhat more generous toward his friend than toward others.” Here again he has shifted the factual question to a sentimental level. Bucer was certainly not Luther’s friend. There are very derogatory comments by Luther about him. Nevertheless, Luther did not publicly attack him either. In fact, we only know about Luther’s fit of rage because everything about Luther was so carefully written down. After a more sober consideration Luther must have realized that Bucer’s teaching was covered by the Wittenberg Concord. His protection of Bucer and Melanchthon was not a matter of generosity, but instead a matter of adhering to a fixed agreement.

That eight years earlier Luther had entered into the Wittenberg Concord is a result of what I have called his tolerance. He was intolerant of Zwingli’s symbolic understanding of the Lord’s supper, because he could no longer discover there his own basic religious principles. But he was content when Bucer and Melanchthon taught the real presence of Christ in the celebration of the Lord’s supper. How the body and blood of Christ relate to the bread and wine could then be left open, although Luther had his own particular opinion regarding that question. This tolerance also came to light in February 1537, that is, at the very time of the Cordatus controversy, concerning the question of the authority of the pope. Alone among the leading evangelical theologians of Germany, Melanchthon signed the Smalcald Articles with a reservation, in which he distanced himself from Luther’s harsh denunciation of the papacy. Luther took it in stride. I take this not as a good-will gesture toward a friend one loves despite the pain, but as the ability to put up with the individuality of a colleague with whom he felt in basic
agreement. The added conviction that he needed him may have assisted Luther in being able to do this.

In conclusion, I understand the relation of Luther and Melanchthon to be less one of friendship than of friendly collegiality. The symptoms of an almost schwärmerisch, infatuated attraction occurred only for about the first three years after their first encounter. To try to understand twenty-eight years of cooperation from these early sources minimizes the actual power of the two personalities, which had enough in common to be able to exist next to each other, but which were different enough to impart to the history of the German Reformation a wide intellectual range, one which has left its imprint upon Western culture of the past 400 years in so many fruitful ways.

NOTES

1. This lecture was first given at a conference for continuing education sponsored by the Berlin section of the German Federation of History Teachers on October 21, 1983. It was published under the title, “Luther and Melanchthon,” in Information für den Geschichts- und Gemeinschaftskundelehrer 38 (1984): 21–34. The English translation is by Timothy J. Wengert.

2. Leopold Von Ranke, the noted nineteenth-century German historian, wished to write history, wie es eigentlich geschehen ist (how it actually happened). — trans.


9. Lowell C. Green, How Melanchthon Helped Luther Discover the Gospel (Fallbrook, California: Verdict, 1980).

10. Martin Greschat, Melanchthon neben Luther (Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1965).


12. WAB 1:597.


15. CR 6:880.
17. CR 3:827.
22. WA 30:68.
24. Lohse, 404.
25. WA TR 1:80 (from the year 1531).
26. Lohse, 404.
27. Muelhaupt, 128.
31. In this context Lohse considers a fourth case of the antinomian, John Agricola.
32. Gnesioi, from which we derive Gnesio-Lutherans, not, as Neuser and afterwards Lohse have it, Genesio-Lutherans.
33. WAB 7:540.
34. Dietrich had at one time been Luther’s famulus until he had a falling out with Frau Käthe.
35. CR 3:383.
36. WAB 7:543.
37. WA 30:68.
38. WAB 8:99 in a letter to Wolfgang Capito, dated July 9, 1537.
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