

# Melanchthon's 1521 *Loci Communes*: The First Protestant Apology

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**Antony C. Reed**

Philip Melanchthon's *Loci Communes* have received little attention in this country. This is partly because their author is little known, and also because the Lutheran tradition as a whole has tended to be ignored. Calvin's *Institutes* have dominated the scene as the Protestant Apology par excellence, for, as well as being more exhaustive and better ordered than the *Loci*, their theology is more familiar to the English reader. Also, whereas Calvin's magnum opus is known in its final definitive edition, Melanchthon's work is known primarily by the earliest edition, written when he was only twenty-four years of age. The reason for this is the important historical position of this edition; here was an apology for the Reformation at the time of its infancy, when it had not yet entered into the period of internal disputes and a new Protestant Orthodoxy. Thus the later editions of the *Loci* tend to be more explicitly Lutheran in character.

There is another reason why scholarship in particular has concentrated on the 1521 edition. The traditional Lutheran view has long been that in the early years of his career Melanchthon was heavily influenced by Luther, but in later years deviated considerably and developed a different theological standpoint, encouraging heterodoxy in his followers and dissensions within Lutheranism. Such a view is no longer tenable. Firstly, the young Melanchthon was never simply Luther's amanuensis. There were great differences between the two men even at this stage. Certainly Melanchthon came quickly under the almost magical power of Luther's dominance of personality and depth of theological insight, but it is hardly surprising for such a young man with a colleague fourteen years his senior. And he was soon converted to the evangelical cause. Yet the influences that the two men had on each other's theology is far more subtle than this, nor could Melanchthon ignore his own educational background. Luckily modern research has highlighted more clearly this difference between the two men, present from the beginning of their work together, however much it may have developed further in later years.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, we are not presented here with two complete theologies—young Melanchthon and mature Melanchthon. Rather we see one man developing his thought within the context of the eventful third decade of the sixteenth century. And of course these early years 'were a time of sifting, noting and considering various kinds of theological expression'.<sup>2</sup> Thus the 1521 *Loci* are also important for Melanchthon himself, not because they are to be considered superior on all counts to his later theology, but because they come at the climax of this early period of trial and error. They point both back to his earliest development, and forward in the direction to which both external events and his own educational heritage were drawing him.<sup>3</sup>

Melanchthon arrived in Wittenberg in August 1518 at the age of 21 on his appointment as Professor of Greek at the University. Indeed, his previous educational career, an exceptionally brilliant one, had been not in Theology but in the seven Liberal Arts. It was as a Humanist, in the tradition of Erasmus and his own great-uncle Reuchlin that he was known. His introductory lecture was a plea for greater study of the classics, Aristotle in particular, as a basis for what Pauck calls 'true authentic learning' and 'a broad moral reform of life'<sup>4</sup>

These two points were to remain the principal goals of his life, and go far to explain subsequent shifts of emphasis in his thought.

But soon a new dimension was added. We know nothing of Melanchthon's conversion to Evangelicalism. He appears to have been a typically zealous young man, violently opposed to the old-fashioned system of scholasticism and the ignorance he believed it bred. Yet the title Humanist in the sixteenth century did not imply any lack of religion. Melanchthon was intensely pious and moral; neither did he possess the rather flippant sense of humour of an Erasmus. Most likely his earnest desire for integrity in both morals and educational principles endeared him to the evangelical cause. In the doctrine of Justification by faith alone he found the answer to his own desires. Thus Melanchthon's conversion is often supposed to have been a psychological one.<sup>5</sup> He was presented with a new doctrine of man and his capabilities, and a new doctrine of grace to give a man certainty. For Melanchthon, trained as he was to accept classical and medieval ideas of the need for a uniform view of knowledge to embrace all disciplines,<sup>6</sup> certainty was an absolute necessity. Doubt was the cardinal sin; under it nothing could be achieved. And the new theology offered the very counterblast to this doubt that the crumbling ruins of scholasticism seemed to be fostering.

In 1519 Melanchthon attended the Leipzig Disputation with Luther and Carlstadt, and shortly after, joined the Theology Faculty. The change was not so startling as it would appear now. Clearly a man of his vast knowledge, especially in the ancient languages, would be of invaluable service. He was no stranger to theological reasoning, nor was the dividing line between faculties all that broad. But this did not imply any rejection of Humanism per se. Despite new anti-philosophical tendencies, especially a new hatred for Aristotle (or at least his invasion into the sphere of metaphysics) he never ceased to lecture on the classical authors, nor on the humanistic arts of Rhetoric and Dialectic. Rather were these accomplishments now to be used in the service of theology. In 1519 and 1520 in particular this could lead to a confusion of ideas, a strange mixture of Paul and Plato.

The speech given on *St. Paul and the Scholastics* demonstrates this well:

And in this Paul is even more apt for shaping character because not only does he prescribe laws for living, but he also reveals Christ, from whom you may obtain, from whose wounds you may drink up, the spirit of virtue.<sup>7</sup>

This amply displays his foremost goal, to link evangelical theology to the search for moral virtue. Already this is taken to be in the form of law. There is no contrast between Law and Spirit, as in the young Luther. Rather are they united, as theology and philosophy also strive to the same goal:

Christ bestows his spirit, who absolves us from what the Law demands and so imbues us mortals with a certain celestial pleasure and moistens us with some divine nectar, that whatever is foreign to law becomes bitter, foul and detestable.<sup>8</sup>

Here we have an early example, admittedly as yet in a confused form, of several cardinal points in the young Melanchthon's theology. The Spirit is the new driving force behind our search for virtue. The starting-point is hardly Christological, Christ appearing largely as the donor of a humanistic bliss.

On entering the Theology Faculty, Melanchthon received a B.D. degree, for which he prepared a series of theses, as the custom was.<sup>9</sup> In these a very radical picture is presented. Transubstantiation is explicitly rejected (one year before Luther was to do so) as is the idea of historical faith. This, the basic Catholic idea of faith, is 'a mere opinion', Melanchthon asserts (Thesis 19). Furthermore, it is also stated that 'all of our righteousness is a gracious imputation of God' (Thesis 10). Some have seen this as the beginning of the breakthrough to a truly forensic notion of Justification, Melanchthon again being the pace-setter for Luther, but it is more likely to be an isolated remark, rather than an integral part of his theology,<sup>10</sup> and these theses were topics for debate, rather than firm dogmatic statements. Nevertheless, this does demonstrate the radical line his thoughts were following.

Other theses are more traditional. The identity between divine and natural law is assumed. The aim of both is 'that God must be loved for his own sake' (Thesis 3). The difference here is that law is now seen as something negative; it causes us to hate God (Thesis 6). Yet even this Pauline concept is seen in psychological terms. The key concept is that of the affections. As an ethical affection (love) is demanded, so the faith which answers this demand is ethical in character. Indeed, it is seen as higher ethics, involving the highest faculty, the mind, thus already acquiring a rational intellectual content, as primarily 'assent' (Thesis 15). This is directly linked to the Platonist psychology of the absolute unity of reason and will; only now, the exact reverse of his earlier humanist principles, the will, the seat of the affections, dominates the rational powers. Evil affections must be removed and the new pure affection of love be restored by means of the affection called faith. Although he has grasped Luther's theology, Melanchthon has by no means rejected his own cultural background.

The decisive factor in Melanchthon's theology at this time is his discovery of Paul, in particular the Epistle to the Romans. The precursors of the *Loci* are in fact commentaries or rather notes on this epistle, the *Theologica Institutio* of 1519 and the *Capita* of 1520. Already Melanchthon is developing the main doctrinal problem set before him. In the *Institutio* Justification and renewal are almost identical. Both are the giving of the Spirit, again in terms of the gift of new affections. This could really be termed Justification by Invocation. Much of this ambiguity is removed in the *Capita*, where the forgiveness of sins and God's mercy become more important. This is expressed in terms of the distinction between Law and Gospel: 'The Gospel proclaims promises just as the Law demands deeds.'<sup>11</sup> Thus for the first time the promises of God are employed as the objective basis upon which the conscience may rest in faith. God's mercy must be the cause of our Justification, and not any virtue in ourselves. Yet several difficulties remain, notably a confused situation over the doctrine of law. The life of love is still the basic goal, and this ethical concern blurs the force of the new stress on forgiveness. Furthermore, this is still described in a spiritual, almost antinomian manner: 'Thus works of their own accord, and through a great inextinguishable love proceed infallibly from faith.'<sup>12</sup> The problem of the relationship between faith and works, always an acute one for Melanchthon, comes to the fore, and the precise role of the Law is not clear. Indeed, he is not concerned here with the theology of law itself; at present it merely serves as a contrast to the Gospel of the Spirit.

The *Capita* were in fact published, not by Melanchthon, but by several of his students, from lecture-room notes.<sup>13</sup> Rather naturally, he was not pleased with the result, and this event showed the need to publish a rather more weighty summary of Pauline theology, in the form of both a statement of the evangelical interpretation of the cardinal doctrines, and an attack on Catholic and scholastic opinions. He thus set out to write the *Loci* in the confused atmosphere of the Summer of 1521. With Luther absent, Melanchthon had become the virtual

leader of the Wittenberg Reformation. Yet troubles were already beginning from the radical wing, from Carlstadt and the Zwickau prophets. Thus the *Loci* do more than merely develop the thoughts of the earlier works. For the first time Melanchthon has to meet dangers from two fronts, and already his theology begins to reflect this. It is in this way that the 1521 *Loci* constitute a turning-point for him.

### *His Content*

The *Loci* are by no means a systematic theology, and much is omitted. Only the main points of contention are raised; otherwise traditional Western orthodoxy is assumed. Thus Melanchthon rejects the need to debate the modes of the Incarnation: 'To know Christ is to know his benefits.'<sup>14</sup> His method is to concentrate on the three 'basic concepts'<sup>15</sup> of Sin, Law and Grace. These are the heart of the Christian Gospel, the scheme which was later to be simplified into the dialectic of Law and Gospel.

### *Free Will*

Closely tied to the concept of sin is free will, and it is here that Melanchthon begins. His extreme predestinarianism at this time is famous. In Stoical manner he rejects any idea of free will. Yet the important point is that, to substantiate his position, Melanchthon again uses psychological arguments. The clearest example of this is in his summary on the section: 'If you relate the will to the affections, there is clearly no freedom, even according to natural judgment' (p. 30). The argument is in terms of affections and will (*affectus* and *voluntas*, cf pp. 23ff) the latter being enslaved to the former, so that we are ruled by our own desires. Furthermore, this psychological terminology is closely linked to the three basic concepts. For, within the context of accepted psychology, law is attached to cognition and sin to the affections. This is to link the basic salvation process to knowledge, cognition itself tending to assume a neutral role. The change in the affections is the ultimate goal.

The precise nature of Melanchthon's doctrine of the enslaved will has, therefore, often been overlooked. Furthermore, he does allow important limitations: 'There is a certain freedom in outward works' (p. 26). This assertion is not as yet developed, but it allows a significant exception, which a few years later Melanchthon was to develop more fully. That he was seemingly able to change his ideas on free will so drastically was precisely because they rested on philosophical grounds, rather than on Christological, as in Calvin. As Bizer points out: 'Melanchthon does not prove that man is incapable of faith, but that, in everything he does, he is at the mercy of his affections.'<sup>16</sup>

### *Sin*

'Sin' writes Melanchthon, 'is a depraved affection, a depraved activity of the heart against the Law of God' (p. 31). As in his argument on free will, therefore, he expresses himself in psychological terms, in this context of a predominantly moral character. Original sin is a depraved desire, it is defined by a series of moral defects. Sin is an inability to fulfill the Law (p. 39) and this is worked out in a context of the contrast between flesh and spirit. This contrast, and not the doctrine of Justification, becomes in fact the principal theme in Romans for Melanchthon, as Maurer asserts.<sup>17</sup> In the face of this particular view of sin he must stress

the gift of the Spirit, who inflames us to love the Law (p. 40). The real change is thus from evil affections to good. Luther avoids this and manages to keep Justification as the central point of his theology because he sees sin as unbelief, an entire false attitude or direction in man, rather than a merely legal defect. For Melanchthon, the key text is always 'Sin is lawlessness' (1 Jn. 3: 4). To understand what this entails, we must turn to his doctrine of Law.

### *Law*

Law is a necessary part of God's action towards man. As we have seen, it plays a vital cognitive role in salvation. Yet, as Melanchthon's attitude towards law remains ambivalent, the nature of this role is far from clear. On the negative side, the Law is to work repentance, as it brings 'the knowledge of sin' (p. 49). Because the Law commands as it does, we are unable to fulfill it (p. 45). In this Theological Use of the Law Melanchthon is being fully Lutheran.

But the positive side of Melanchthon's view of law is of more interest, and shows the danger of exaggerating his rejection of Humanism at this time.<sup>18</sup> For his assumptions in this area remain those of the humanist, especially concerning Natural Law. The difference from the mature Melanchthon is not the concept of Natural Law, but rather its content. Whereas in future years Aristotle was to dominate his thought, here Platonism remains to the fore. This can be seen in his three basic laws:

1. God must be worshipped.
2. Since we are born into a life that is social, nobody must be harmed.
3. Human society demands that we make common use of all things (p. 51).

Although the identity of divine and natural law is assumed, Melanchthon attempts to illustrate these laws solely by recourse to the Scriptures. Thus the first is proved from Rom. 1, and the second from Gen. 2: 18.<sup>19</sup> Rather we should say, these verses are the source of the laws, for the dominant note is the command to love (Mk. 12: 30). Thus the third commandment in particular must frequently give way to the second, by the Law of Love. That is to say, it is usually necessary for there to be private property, otherwise, because of sin, chaos would reign, to the harm of all. God has given us a kind of secondary natural law, to avert this problem of sin. Thus the magistrate and his rule are also God's gracious gift, to keep sinful man in check.

Melanchthon's central point, however, is that all these laws are summed up in the Decalogue. Especially he stresses the first table, the centre of Divine Law in its primary sense. His danger here is to identify natural law or right (*ius divinum*) with the law of love. At this point in his career this leads inevitably to a spiritualisation of ethics, and a counsel of perfection. He is far from the mature, pragmatic, Aristotelian Melanchthon, when he envisages an evangelical law forbidding litigation (p. 61) and interest (p. 76).

Melanchthon again defines the first table of the Decalogue in terms of the affections. The first commandment<sup>20</sup> is, as always, the sum of one's Christian duty, demanding faith, fear and love. The danger here is that faith is turned into a quality—and usually a quality of the

mind—that is demanded of us. Trust in God can be defined by the Law. This inevitably weakens the strict distinction between Law and Gospel, as both would demand the same thing.

Melanchthon sums up on the power of the Law only after he has dealt with the Gospel, further proving his desire to reemphasise its positive nature. Fear of antinomianism and ‘carnal liberty’ is driving him into a defence of law within the only structure he knows, that of Humanism. And, because he sees obedience to the Law in terms of individual affections, his definition of the Law itself is also fragmentary. Law is basically positive law.

Thus the dominance of the negative side of law in Luther’s theology is already brought into question: ‘The Law was given that we might live’ (p. 80). In essence, if not in its use, the Law is on the side of Spirit, rather than of flesh.<sup>21</sup> The Law remains God’s perfect will for us. Thus the problem that the Gospel must deal with is precisely that of fulfilling the Law.

### *The Gospel of Promise*

To effect a contrast with the Law, Melanchthon defines the Gospel in terms of Promise. This is seen as the promise of the forgiveness of sins, and has always been the way of salvation for God’s people, grounded on the prophecy in Gen. 3: 15 (p. 72). This is of course perfectly orthodox hermeneutics, but Melanchthon meets problems.

Firstly there is the relationship between temporal and spiritual promises. Melanchthon seems to make no real distinction.<sup>22</sup> Both types of promises have the same goal, the temporal promises concealing the spiritual within them:

These are not only symbolic of spiritual promises, but are per se testimonies of the grace and mercy of God. They are meant to console and encourage the conscience (p. 73).

This is because they all require faith, for ‘None but the righteous believe from the heart the material promises’ (p. 96). God’s mercy and His providence are thus fused in an attempt to enforce a total unity and single purpose in the Old and New Testament.<sup>23</sup> Apart from the obvious danger of Platonism—that the material promises cannot stand on their own, but must point to the eternal—the doctrine stated in this way raises a second problem.

If God the Creator and God the Redeemer are to be totally identified in this manner, where does Christology enter in?<sup>24</sup> For Melanchthon is really unable to provide any *essential* link between the promises and Christ as their fulfillment. True, he emphasises that this is the case. But Christ seems to be little more than the pledge of the promises, and not their substance.

This forms part of a general externalisation of Christology. Ethics and forgiveness are not fundamentally linked, because the former are based, not on Christ, but on the Decalogue as the sum of Natural Law. As Rogness has it: ‘Christ’s earthly life had little to do with redemption’.<sup>25</sup> Thus Christology is dominated by the Cross. Atonement theology is also externalised; Christ is ‘The One who merited the mercy of God for us’ (p. 104), ‘the One who has placated the Father’ (p. 118). The idea of Victory, it is true, still looms large, but neither is this linked organically to the new life. Christ’s Cross forgives sins, he is a donor of grace, but, as we shall see, our new life itself is far from Christologically conceived. This problem arises from his concept of the Promises. Because they are not fundamentally promises of

Christ, they are not sufficiently removed from the concept of law. Thus Melanchthon defeats his own purpose—to distinguish between Law and Gospel through the idea of the Promises.

### *Grace and Faith*

It is often asserted that Melanchthon tends to think of Justification by grace rather than by faith. Yet at this point both are equally emphasised.

The *Loci* represent Melanchthon's first real attempt to stress the centrality of the remission of sins. This he sees is essential to any doctrine of Justification: 'To sum it all up, grace is nothing but the forgiveness of sins' (p. 88). In opposition to Catholic notions, grace is an attitude of God, a new relationship in which He favours us, rather than any quality in us: 'God's goodwill to us, or the will of God which has mercy on us' (p. 87). Grace and mercy are thus identical.

The problem here is obvious. We have already encountered it in his views on Christ's Atonement; how does the new life relate to this? Melanchthon's answer at this stage is not, as he later attempts, to divide Justification into various parts, but to emphasise the place of the Holy Spirit. The definition of Justification itself is thus far from clear. On the one hand, it is solely an act of God's mercy (p. 105). Faith, as that which recognises this righteousness from God, is thus reputed to be our righteousness (p. 99). On the other hand, Melanchthon retains many hints that he is still thinking of Justification as a continuing process, which, because of sin, has only just begun (p. 106). This is nearer to the concept of Vivification, or an Augustinian idea of our Justification before God.<sup>26</sup> Yet faith is still the binding factor: 'The righteousness of the entire life is nothing else than faith' (p. 106).

The nature of this faith is difficult to assess. As we have seen, Melanchthon is prone to link it to the first precept of the Decalogue, as 'an affection of the heart' (p. 90) the root of the virtues (p. 110). In such a context the corresponding assertion that faith is our righteousness can be misleading. Faith is mostly defined as trust, but this too is an affection. And the idea of assent is also strong. Faith is, 'constantly to assent to every word of God. . . . Further the word of God is both Law and Gospel' (p. 92). This faith is, therefore, not only cognitive, but includes fear (of the Law) as well as trust (in the Promises).

Yet what does remain clear is the object of Justification, the fulfillment of the Law. At first sight, indeed, faith appears as a guiding principle:

This trust in the goodwill or mercy of God first calms our hearts and then inflames us to give thanks to God for His mercy so that we keep the Law gladly and willingly (p. 92).

Our obedience arises infallibly from our faith; surely the very opposite of legalism. This is what many claim to be Luther's doctrine.<sup>27</sup> The difference is that Melanchthon does not see this spontaneity of the Christian life in terms of Faith, but rather in terms of the Spirit.

This is because his idea of faith is not faith in Christ. His examples of faith come mostly from the Old Testament, and the two testaments are bound together by the same Spirit (p. 95). Again, Christology is not to be the binding factor. Thus a highly spiritual theology emerges. Within the context of his flesh-spirit dichotomy, it is the Spirit which deals with the problem of sin. Faith, although it is the instrument of forgiveness, does not deal with sin itself, nor

give us the victory over sin. There are indeed very Lutheran passages: 'Those who believe in Christ . . . have all temporal blessings in him.' And: 'Faith enters into all the vicissitudes of our life and death because we use no creature rightly unless we do so through faith' (p. 103). Yet it is important to see the context of such remarks. This passage follows on from the section on temporal promises that we have already discussed. The idea is legalistic, a humanistic promise that the believer possesses temporal happiness because of his faith. In Luther these phrases have a mystical ring. Melanchthon never showed any leanings towards mysticism.

Thus it is clear why Melanchthon had no answer to the Zwickau prophets who invaded Wittenberg at this time with their antinomian doctrines. These, the first of the Anabaptist opponents of the Reformation, believed that only the Spirit could guide a Christian into the truth. No outward authority at all was to be accepted. Such ideas led of course to chaos. But Melanchthon's problem was that he had no clear answer to them. Luther immediately saw the confusion of Law and Gospel that was involved. But in the *Loci* Melanchthon writes:

Those who have been renewed by the Spirit of Christ now conform voluntarily even without the Law to what the Law used to command. The Law is the will of God; the Holy Spirit is nothing else than the living will of God and its being in action (p. 123).

On the section on the difference between the two testaments (pp. 120ff) Melanchthon vehemently stresses the abrogation of the Law. Faith shows itself in love, that is all that is needed. As yet, he feels no great need to give our obedience and good works any other form but this.

Yet Melanchthon has the key to the problem within this very quotation. If the Spirit is the Living Law, then, in some way or another, the new life can be viewed in terms of law. Basically only the Law's right to accuse us has gone (p. 121). Or, as Melanchthon also has it:

Therefore, the Law has been abrogated, not that it not be kept, but in order that, even though not kept, it not condemn, and then too in order that it be kept (p. 125).

The main development within the next few years was that in this identity of Spirit and Law the latter became the dominant feature rather than the former, as in 1521. The doctrine of the Spirit was gradually to recede into the background.

Even now Melanchthon's humanistic idea of law is beginning to assert itself. The idea of the affections is a prime example. Both sin and obedience are fragmented so that they become quantitatively instead of qualitatively opposed. The idea of Positive Law is not laid aside. This is seen even in the doctrine of love. Love only fails to justify 'Because no one loves as he ought' (p. 112). It is our inability to love *enough* that separates us from God. In line with his educational upbringing, Melanchthon will tend to think of the new life not so much as a New Creation, but rather as a return to the old in its purity, a restitution. The Spirit brings us the Law which we can now keep as it should be kept, whilst Christ outside us restores to us this Spirit.

Melanchthon thus assumes that our works, even if they are works of the Spirit, can to some extent fulfill the Law. This of course follows on from the view of law as a series of individual norms corresponding to individual affections. 'Luther, on the other hand, was quite explicit, declaring that both our righteousness and the fulfillment of the Law are Christ's.'<sup>28</sup> As

Rogness here states, there is only One who has fulfilled the Law, and our good works are a result of this fulfillment and not part of it.

Modern scholarship tends to see Luther's famous phrase, 'Simul iustus et peccator (at the same time righteous and a sinner)' as a summary of his whole theology. The Christian remains both, he is in fact two people simultaneously. He is totally just, in Christ. Yet the old Adam remains, so that he is also a total sinner, and *in this context* is under the Law. In the *Loci* Melanchthon attempts to take over this notion (pp. 130ff). He of course sees it more in terms of flesh and spirit. Thus the Law is active in our mortification.<sup>29</sup> Yet this dichotomy is basically that of Luther. The flesh is 'the whole "natural" man . . . one who is governed by the natural affections and emotions' (p. 130f). The new man is 'both the Holy Spirit himself and also his activity in us'.<sup>30</sup> Yet Melanchthon has critics even here, for such language seems rather to imply two different sorts of affections within us, good and bad.<sup>31</sup> He is troubled by the fact that sin remains, and is not as happy as Luther simply to assert a 'simultaneity'.<sup>32</sup> For Luther saw that at this point the Christian life is one of tension. Melanchthon has not as yet grasped the problem of God as revealed in Law and Gospel. Even later, when he was to stress this distinction more carefully, he does so in a humanistic manner. He can contrast two elements rhetorically, but still seeks for a clear simple solution. It was difficult for one trained as a Humanist to grasp any idea of tension in the Christian life.<sup>33</sup>

### *His Method*

Many of Melanchthon's problems stem from his methodology. In order to obtain the concise clarity desired—for the *Loci* are as much pedagogical as they are apologetic—he had to rely mainly on classical models.<sup>34</sup> But in taking a 'basic concept' from St. Paul he naturally tends to interpret these individual words in the context of late medieval thought (the most obvious example is that of the affections). And it is in any case doubtful whether St. Paul himself wrote in this manner. Melanchthon is also rather eclectic, for he fails to include Paul's doctrine of 'in Christ' at any point. This is a significant omission. It goes far to explain his lack of any Christological base to give unity to his theology. His Christology is surely at the root of many of his other problems. His difficulty in defining faith and Justification and in linking the forgiveness of sins to the new life stems largely from the present Spirit rather than the absent Christ being the key to our regeneration. The Spiritual Law remains the only true link between Justification and Sanctification. Thus the former is in danger of becoming simply the reception of this Spirit in order to fulfill the Law. The goal is ethical, viewed in anthropological terms, rather than eschatological, in terms of our eternal relationship to God.

It is perhaps too easy to criticise Melanchthon. At this stage he is still clearly showing the signs of youthful exuberance. Yet many scholars see the spontaneity of this immature often very naive document as far preferable to the later Melanchthon, more precise and careful and thorough, yet somehow infinitely more boring. And the 1521 *Loci Communes* retain their important historical position. Luther was to give them quasi-canonical status in his fulsome praises. And they considerably strengthened the position of the evangelicals and their doctrine of faith alone. Despite the difficulties that future generations might have, for a spiritually hungry generation, yearning for salvation from sin, the *Loci* came as a refreshing change from the arid obscure tomes of most theologians of the day. Luther at least was sure of this, and knew why, for he saw the most significant point in Melanchthon's favour: 'For he has the knowledge of Christ Jesus.'<sup>35</sup>

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### Endnotes:

- 1) Especially important is Wilhelm Maurer's weighty biography of the young Melanchthon: *Der Junge Melanchthon. Band 2: Der Theologe, Göttingen*, 1969.
- 2) Michael Rogness, *Melanchthon, Reformer without Honor*, Minneapolis, 1969, p. vi. This is the only available modern book in English on Melanchthon's theology, but in its present form has been so popularised that only in the footnotes is there much substance.
- 3) The best brief account in English of this period of development is Wilhelm Pauck's introduction to *Melanchthon and Bucer*, Library of Christian Classics, Vol. 19, London, 1969. Here, the work of Melanchthon translated is in fact the 1521 *Loci* and it is generally a very useful translation. The introduction also is quite valuable, although some of the theological remarks tend to over-simplify the issues.
- 4) Pauck, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
- 5) See especially Adolf Sperl, *Melanchthon zwischen Humanismus und Reformation*, Munich, 1959.
- 6) The best English treatment of this is the article by Carl S. Meyer, 'Melanchthon as Educator and Humanist' in *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. XXXI, No. 9, St. Louis, September 1960. Dr. Meyer is a scholar, who lays particular stress on Melanchthon's role as an educator, an aspect of the reformer that is too easy to overlook. It must be constantly emphasised if his theology is to be viewed in perspective.
- 7) 'C. L. Hill, *Melanchthon; Selected Writings*, Minneapolis, 1962. p. 41. This book is a translation of several 'Reformation writings' of Melanchthon, mostly early works, taken from the first volume of the new Stupperich edition of his works, *Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl*, Gütersloh, 1951ff. This work has the original cumbersome title of *Declamatiuncula in Divi Pauli Doctrinam*.
- 8) *Selected Writings*, p. 39.
- 9) Baccalaureate Theses. *Selected Writings*, pp. 17f.
- 10) Rogness, *op. cit.* n. 142, p. 151.
- 11) Bretschneider, C. G. & Bindsell, H. E., *Corpus Reformatorum, Philippi Melanchthonis opera, quae supersunt omnia*, Halle, 1834ff, Vol. 21, pp. 37f.
- 12) *Ibid*, pp. 47f.
- 13) Cf Pauck, p. 7.
- 14) *Melanchthon and Bucer*, p. 21. In future I shall simply refer to the page numbers of this edition.

This particular statement has been hotly debated. Some have seen it as gross subjectivism—Christ is known only by his effect on me. The American scholar C. L. Hill can even ascribe to Melanchthon 'the spirit of individualism', an incredible claim (C. L. Hill, *Loci Communes*,

1521, Boston (Mass.) 1944, p. 37). More commonly the term 'benefit' (*beneficium*) is seen as a part of his humanistic heritage, from Cicero and especially Erasmus. (Cf Maurer, *op. cit.*, p. 242.)

- 15) This is the best translation of the words *loci communes*, though similar sixteenth century English works were styled *Commonplaces*. This is an Erasmian method, of breaking down a work—in this case the Epistle to the Romans—by taking its basic topics and developing the argument from them by the use of the arts of Dialectic and, for Melanchthon especially, Rhetoric.
- 16) Ernst Bizer, *Theologie der Verheissung. Studien zur Theologie des jungen Melanchthon*, (1519-1524), Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1964, p. 78.
- 17) Maurer, p. 271.
- 18) Cf Pauck, p. 8.
- 19) The use of this verse is especially interesting, as it illustrates the new Lutheran stress on marriage as the central ordinance of society.
- 20) The Lutherans retained the medieval numbering of the Decalogue, which differs from the English numbering. Thus the first commandment includes our first two, the first table containing only three commands. The number is made up by dividing the last commandment in two.
- 21) For Luther on the other hand Law is always included among the enemies of man. It is Law, as well as sin and death, that Christ defeats in his victory on the Cross.
- 22) Later he was to distinguish sharply between the promises of Law and of Gospel. The former contained rewards given because of our merits, the latter *gratis*, and because of Christ.
- 23) Maurer in fact asserts that 'Justification is therefore a special case of the doctrine of the providence of God'. W. Maurer, 'Melanchthon als Humanist' in *Philipp Melanchthon*, ed. W. Elliger, Göttingen, 1961, p. 131.
- 24) This is not to suggest that God is not both Creator and Redeemer. Melanchthon's problem is that he always has a more precise picture of the former than of the latter.
- 25) Rogness, p. 27.
- 26) As Pauck remarks (p.10) Melanchthon is still very Augustinian in his theology of grace. Later he was to react sharply against such ideas as destructive of the certainty of our forgiveness.
- 27) Melanchthon was later to develop the Third Use of the Law, i.e. the idea that the Law has a special use for the Christian in informing him of the nature of his obedience towards God. The Law was to become both the motivation for and the substance of this obedience. (Rogness, see p. 44, tries to trace this notion back to the 1521 *Loci*, but this is not very probable.) It is still a subject for hot dispute whether Luther ever thought in these terms. Certainly to this day Lutheran and Reformed theologians disagree on this point. For a summary of the history of the term in Melanchthon, see G. Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, tr. J. W. Leitch, London, 1963, pp. 62ff.
- 28) Rogness, p. 38.

- 29) This is the key to the opposition to the Zwickau prophets. They had confused the new man with the regenerate man. The two are not identical for Luther and Melanchthon, for the regenerate man still sins and thus has both old and new man struggling within him.
- 30) I.e. Melanchthon rejects a three-fold division of man. 'Spirit' is not the highest part of our human nature, but God's grace in us.
- 31) Cf Maurer, p. 261.
- 32) Cf Pauck, p. 11. The Germans refer to 'Gleichzeitigkeit'. This is the nearest English equivalent, but does not possess quite the same force.
- 33) Modern scholars characteristically blame Melanchthon's lack of Eschatology here. In the *Loci* he shows virtually no interest in it at all, and even later is concerned only with the more futuristic elements. Luther grasped the Johannine stress: 'The hour is coming and now is . . .'  
(Cf Jn. 4: 23, 5: 25).
- 34) Cf Pauck, p. 12.
- 35) *Luther's Works*, Weimar Edition, Table Talk, Vol. 4, No. 4985.