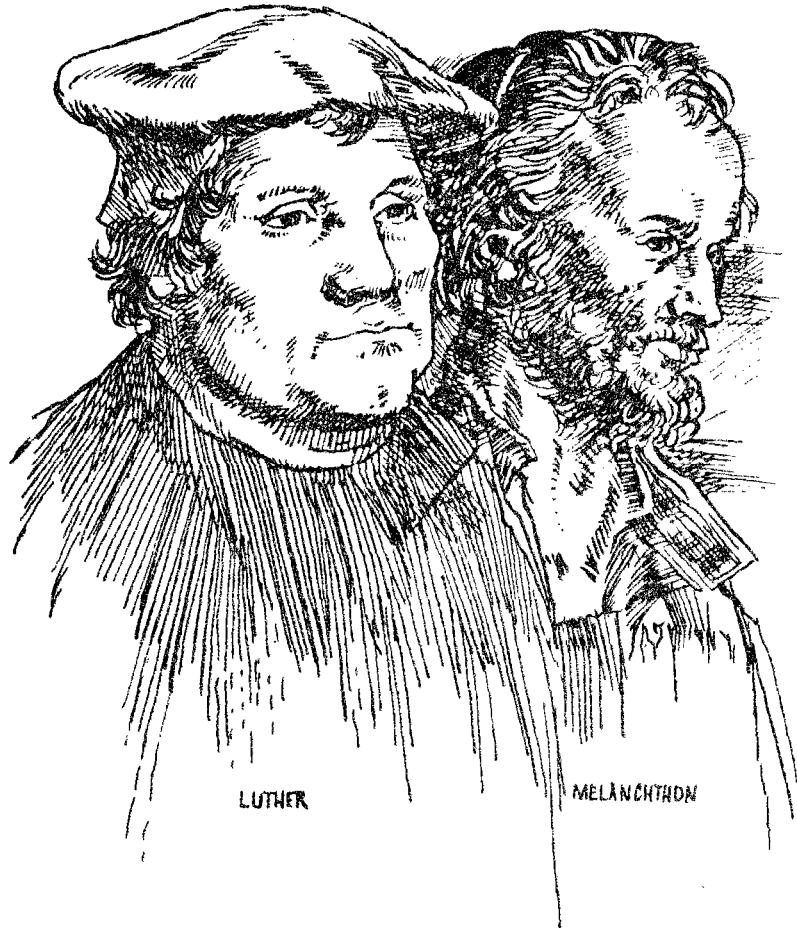


The Relationship Between Luther and Melanchthon with Practical Applications for the Ministry

by James R. Huebner

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Outline

Introduction

I. Historical information concerning the relationship between Luther and Melanchthon

- A. Melanchthon's early years, 1497-1518
- B. Luther and Melanchthon, 1518-1521
- C. Luther and Melanchthon, 1521-1529
- D. Luther and Melanchthon, 1529-1546

II. Evaluation of the relationship between Luther and Melanchthon

III. Application of the relationship between Luther and Melanchthon to the ministry

Transport yourself through time and space to Wittenberg of Saxony during the early years of the sixteenth century. The hammer blows of October 31, 1517, are still ringing throughout central Europe. But count off three hundred days from the posting of the "Ninety-five Theses" to a warm summer's day in August of 1518 and welcome the twenty-one year old newcomer to the university faculty. Blackearth. Schwarzerd. Melanchthon. Note the date well, August 25, 1518. That date marks the beginning of the relationship between two men, a relationship which has been commended and condemned with equal vehemence - the relationship between Luther and Melanchthon.

The fact that the program committee of the Metro South Pastoral Conference assigned the topic under discussion in this paper implies that the relationship between Luther and Melanchthon has some bearing on the Reformation heritage which we so joyously celebrated within the last two weeks. Ask any WELS pastor about Luther and Melanchthon and invariably you will hear a rousing "Hurrah!" for Luther and a contemptuous "Boo! Hiss!" for Melanchthon. Most willingly we press our shoulders next to Luther's and proclaim "Hier stehen wir!" while at the same time we look askance at Melanchthon standing off in some clouded corner, "Da steht er!"

Hindsight is twenty-twenty. We know well the turmoil that rocked the Lutheran church for thirty years after Luther's death. Melanchthon stood in the center of those theological struggles wearing the black hat. He deserved to wear it. There is no question that his ambiguous doctrinal statements caused trouble and needed clarification in the Formula of Concord. But what about Melanchthon before Luther's death? Where did he stand during those years? What did Luther have to say about him? What did he have to say about Luther? Can we unequivocally condemn Melanchthon as a man who brought more hurt than help to the cause of the Reformation? What was the relationship between Luther and Melanchthon, and what does that relationship mean for us who herald the living, life-giving light of our Lord's faithful love?

To answer these questions we intend to explore the historical details that played into the relationship between Luther and Melanchthon up to Luther's death in 1546. We will stop there. The study of Melanchthonianism, as opposed to Lutheranism, after 1546, we leave for another day, another way. Mention must also be made that in the interest of time and space all the specific details of the life of Martin Luther are not included in this essay. However, we will want to step back and trace the early years of Melanchthon. Early years usually have a bearing on the individual's mature expressions. In doing so, we might mention that the Melanchthon researcher encounters a two fold problem - the paucity of biographical information about Melanchthon and the pre-formed bias of those who do try to describe Melanchthon's character. Lowell Green stated correctly:

Good, current literature on Melanchthon is almost nonexistent. Comparatively few scholars have become interested in Melanchthon, and the quality of the work conducted by some of these has generally been below the standards of Luther research. An almost blind hatred toward Luther's co-worker on the part of Lutherans of various parties has seriously hindered historical and theological investigation.¹

Following the historical section of this essay, we will conclude with a brief evaluation of the relationship between Luther and Melanchthon and a section of application. for our ministry.

I.

Historical Information Concerning the Relationship Between Luther and Melanchthon

A. Melanchthon's early years, 1497-1518

John Reuchlin (1455-1522), the famous humanist and Hebrew scholar, had a sister Elizabeth who married the burgomaster of Bretten in the Lower Palatinate, named Hans Reuter. Hans and Elizabeth had a daughter, Barbara, who met and married the skillful armor-maker, George Schwarzerd. George Schwarzerd

hailed from Heidelberg and had training for his craft in Nuernberg. George came to Bretten when hired by the count of the Palatinate. He even had occasion to make a suit of armor for Emperor Maximillian.

God blessed George and Barbara Schwarzerd with two sons and three daughters. The oldest, Philip, was born in Bretten on February 16, 1497, a little more than thirteen years and three months after Luther's birth. Since the armor making business often kept Philip's father on the road, Grandpa Hans Reuter oversaw the young lad's education. When a plague broke out, Hans transferred his gifted grandson from the local school to a private school, putting him under the excellent tutelage of Johann Unger, who guided Philip in the various disciplines of the day, especially Latin.

Tragedy struck in October of 1507. Grandpa Hans and Philip's father both died. Grandma Reuter then assumed the responsibility for Philip's further training. Why his mother did not take over is unknown. Grandma Reuter took Philip, his brother George, and cousin Johann to her hometown of Pforzheim. Philip studied in Pforzheim for two years under George Simler. Besides all the other subjects, Simler tutored his prized pupils, including Philip, in Greek. Philip's great uncle, John Reuchlin, visited Pforzheim frequently. He was impressed by the talents and aptitude of young Philip. He encouraged Philip to study and also to change his name from the German "Schwarzerd" to the Greek "Melanchthon."

In the fall of 1509, Philip enrolled in the University of Heidelberg. There he studied philosophy, rhetoric, astronomy, and Greek. He so excelled in the classic languages that he acquired the nickname, "Greek." At times the lectures seemed unsatisfactory. So Melanchthon did much private reading and study. On occasion he was even asked to write orations for the professors to read.

In June of 1511 Philip earned a bachelor of arts degree. He was fourteen years old. He planned to pursue a master's degree, but was turned down because of his youth. Remember, a master's degree gave an individual the right to teach. His disappointment did not last long. His old teacher, Simler, and great uncle Reuchlin were now on the faculty at the relatively new University of Tuebingen. They urged Philip to enroll. He did in September, 1512.

At Tuebingen Melanchthon drank in the new academic spirit advanced by Reuchlin. He studied logic, rhetoric, jurisprudence, math, astronomy, and medicine. And even though he was not too thrilled with the idea, his thirst for knowledge led him into the study of theology. "But what he got there amounted to little. Thus one of the lecturers, a monk, claimed that even though the whole Bible were lost, you could reconstruct it again out of the 'Ethics' of Aristotle."² At this time Melanchthon continued his private studies, eagerly devouring everything at hand. That included studying the Latin Vulgate which Reuchlin had given him.

Within a year and four months Melanchthon petitioned for his master's degree. First in his class of eleven, he received the master's degree on January 25, 1514, and now had the right and privilege to teach. Shortly before his seventeenth birthday Melanchthon began his lectures on Latin authors; such as Virgil, Terence, Cicero, and Livy. He also kept up his study of Hebrew and Greek and wrote pamphlets, the most famous of which was his "Greek Grammar," printed in 1518. Melanchthon's fame as a scholar, author, and lecturer spread so far and so wide that even the noted humanist, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, offered him high praise.

At this point we direct our attention away from the Lower Palatinate along the Rhine in southwest Germany to Electoral Saxony along the Elbe in north central Germany. The ripples initiated by the "Ninety-five Theses" near the end of 1517 soon swelled to tidal wave proportions. Tetzel and his fellow Dominicans denounced Luther in January of 1518. Their outcry caught the attention of the pope. Even learned, crafty Eck of Ingolstadt could not resist a poke at the Augustinian monk of Wittenberg. But Luther was not in disfavor in Electoral Saxony. He had a father figure friend in John Staupitz, his Augustinian supervisor, and a ready ear in George Spalatin, the advisor to Elector Frederick the Wise. Even without Spalatin's friendly advice how could Elector Frederick disapprove of Luther whose preaching had effectively shut off the flow of coins from the pockets of his people to the coffers of John Tetzel. Luther's message against indulgences kept students and townspeople at home in Wittenberg. And, of course, in Frederick's view it also kept their money in Wittenberg to be spent on the privilege of viewing his vast collection of relics. Was Frederick the Wise purely self-centered? Or was Frederick in favor of Luther's reform efforts because the gospel had warmed his heart?

Those questions need not be answered here. Of interest to us is Frederick's willing assent to the suggestion from Luther, the Wittenberg University faculty, and Spalatin that a professor of Greek and Hebrew was needed to strengthen the university's program. Frederick certainly wanted to improve his university. So, in 1518, he was in the market for a suitable candidate. The venerable Reuchlin proposed the talented, young Master Philip.

By the time Philip left Tuebingen and headed northeast toward Wittenberg in August of 1518, one can only assume that he was well acquainted with Luther's "new" ideas. The "Ninety-five Theses" had sold like hot cakes all around Germany. Luther himself had been in nearby Heidelberg only a few months earlier in May of 1518. At that meeting of Augustinians Luther had not been silenced, as Pope Leo X had wished. Instead, he had won over new friends, men like Brenz and Bucer. There can be little doubt that Melancthon's own study of Scripture and his acquaintance with Luther's statements served as a comfortable background for their meeting on August 25, 1518.

August 25, 1518 - the date mentioned earlier, the date which marks the beginning of the relationship between Luther and Melancthon. Within a few days Melancthon had been installed and he had presented his opening lecture, "De corrigendis adolescentiae studiis." In this lecture he outlined his ideas for a solid curriculum at the university. He proposed these changes: fewer scholastic subjects, more language study, and new lectures on the classics. No wonder Luther raved to Spalatin, "As long as we have Melancthon, I care for no other Greek instructor,"³ and also, "No one living is gifted with such talents. He is to be esteemed. God himself will despise anyone that despises this man."⁴ Melancthon was just what the Doctor ordered. Luther wanted his students rooted in God's Word, and Melancthon could take them "ad fontes."

As far as the outward fruit of the relationship between Luther and Melancthon is concerned, the record demonstrates that their talents blended well. During the summer semester of 1518 the University of Wittenberg had an enrollment of 240; two years later, 333; and in the fall of 1520 Spalatin reported 600 at one of Melancthon's lectures. The relationship between Luther and Melancthon also bore fruit for each man personally. Luther sat in on Melancthon's lectures. Through his new colleague Luther sharpened his Greek and Hebrew skills and broadened his studies in church history. Melancthon owed Luther an even greater debt. From Luther he made the doctrine of justification by faith his own. Luther was Melancthon's source of spiritual growth and insight. Shortly after arriving at Wittenberg Melancthon expressed his affection and appreciation for Luther in this way, "If there is anything on earth that I love, it is the studies of Martin and his pious writings; but above everything else I love Martin himself...Never was there a greater man on the face of the earth; I would rather die than separate myself from this man."⁵

B. Luther and Melancthon, 1518-1521

Not long after Melancthon arrived at Wittenberg, he not only found himself engaged in classroom work, but also engaged in battle. Working with Luther included being cast into the fray. By the end of 1518 word was out that the infamous, venomous John Eck had convinced the Duke of Saxony to arrange a debate with Carlstadt. During the previous spring Carlstadt, a member of the Wittenberg faculty and recently in sympathy with Luther's cause, had taken upon himself the task of responding to Eck's barbs against Luther. Carlstadt published four hundred six theses in opposition to Eck's "Obelisks." So there was no love lost between Eck and Carlstadt. The scheduled debate was to be held at the university in Leipzig in June of 1519. Eck's real plan was to dispose of Carlstadt and get to the main attraction, a debate against Luther himself. What a feather in the cap for the man who could defeat Luther! Part of the pre-debate strategy was to publicize the debate against Carlstadt without so much as inviting Luther to attend. The hope was for Luther to show up unprepared.

Luther did go to Leipzig as a spectator, but he did not go unprepared. Luther studied Scripture, canon law, and church history. In that third category he found Melancthon to be an invaluable resource. In fact, when Luther and Eck finally went at it for about ten days in July, 1519, Melancthon provided added bits of information useful to Luther during debate. Luther wrote to Spalatin:

I return to Philip, whom no Eck can make me hate. In my profession I count nothing better than his favorable testimony. This one man's opinion and authority mean more to me than many thousands of miserable Ecks. I would not hesitate to yield my opinion to this ingenious grammarian if he should disagree with me, even though I am a master of arts, philosophy, and theology, and adorned with nearly all of Eck's titles. I have done this, and do it daily, on account of the divine gift, bountifully blessed, which God has placed in this frail vessel, so contemptible to Eck.⁶

At the close of the debate Melanchthon wrote to his friend Oecolampadius and expressed his disdain for the lack of substance in Eck's remarks. Eck got wind of Melanchthon's comments and dashed off a spiteful attack against the young Wittenberg professor. In August Melanchthon answered. A clearer statement supporting "sola Scriptura" would be hard to find.

I greatly revere the historic leaders of the church...However, the holy fathers often have conflicting views, and when they do, they are to be judged by Scripture, not vice versa. Sacred Scripture has simplicity and unity that can be comprehended by anyone who will carefully follow the text. For this reason, we are told to search the Word. It is an anvil on which to test the doctrines and views of men...The divine and canonical Scriptures alone are inspired and true and pure in all things.⁷

On September 9, 1519, Melanchthon was awarded a bachelor of theology degree. It was the only theological degree he ever accepted. He was twenty two years old. In preparation for the degree he had prepared twenty four statements on justification. Listen to what Luther had to say in a letter to Staupitz:

Philip's theses...are bold, but they are certainly true. He defended them in such a way that he seemed to us all a veritable wonder, and such he is. Christ willing, he will surpass many Martins and will be a mighty foe of the devil and of scholastic theology. He knows their tricks, and also the Rock, Christ.⁸

During the next year tension mounted for Luther and Melanchthon. 1520 was the year of the bull, the papal bull, "Exurge Domine." As we see so often throughout Luther's career, when the tension mounted, his pen flowed. By October Luther had penned "Address to the German Nobility," "Babylonian Captivity of the Church," and "The Freedom of a Christian." About the same time Melanchthon was in poor health. Luther and other colleagues encouraged him to marry. Melanchthon heeded their advice. Wedding bells rang on November 25, 1520. Katherine Krapp became Mrs. Philip Melanchthon.

In October, the papal bull of excommunication was in Luther's hands. Through this worrisome fall of 1520 Melanchthon stood by Luther faithfully. On December 10, it was Master Philip who posted this notice on the university bulletin board:

Let all who are devoted to the study of evangelical truth appear at about nine o'clock near the Chapel of the Holy Cross outside the city walls, where according to an old apostolic custom, the godless books of the papal decretals and of scholastic theology are to be burned; for the insolence of the enemies of the Gospel has assumed such proportions that they have burned the godly, evangelical writings of Luther. Now then, O pious and studious young people, come to attend this spectacle which is in the service of true religion. Perhaps now is the time when the Antichrist is to be made manifest.⁹

The first few days of 1521 brought the official excommunication of Martin Luther from the Roman Catholic Church. The first few months of 1521 saw young Emperor Charles V convene an imperial diet at

Worms. Aleander, the papal legate, pressed for an insertion into the diet's agenda, "Let's snuff out that heretic Augustinian named Luther."

In the meantime Melanchthon was in top form theologically. The first edition of his *Loci Communes* went to print in April of 1521, just about the same time Luther was declaring, "Here I stand!" In this edition of the *Loci* we see Melanchthon at his best. The book was really a dogmatics text based on his Romans and 1 Corinthians lectures. To his surprise, students had published some of those lectures in pamphlet form. So Melanchthon recast the pamphlets and specific doctrines into a logical order and wrote the *Loci*. How good was this first Lutheran dogmatics book? Twenty years after the first edition Luther wrote:

Whoever wants to be a theologian has a great advantage today. For he has the Bible which now is available in so clear a translation that one can read it without any trouble. Then, too, he must read the *Loci Communes* of Philip. With the help of these two, he can be a theologian whom neither the devil nor any heretic can harm. The entire field of theology lies open before him, so that he can read all he wants to for his edification...You cannot find anywhere a book which treats the whole of theology so adequately as the *Loci Communes* do. If you were to read all the fathers and sententiarii, you would find that they are not worth anything. Next to the Holy Scriptures, there is no better book.¹⁰

C. Luther and Melanchthon, 1521-1529

On April 2, 1521, Luther complied with the summons to appear before the imperial diet and set out for Worms. As he left he bade farewell to Melanchthon:

If I should not return, and my enemies should kill me at Worms, as may very easily come to pass, I adjure you, dear brother, not to neglect teaching, nor to fail to stand by the truth. In the meantime also do my work, because I cannot be here. You can do it better than I can. Therefore, my absence will not be a great loss, provided you remain. The Lord still finds a learned champion in you.

What happened to Luther at the Diet of Worms and on the journey home are well known. On April 18, 1521, he took his famous stand. By May 4 he was sequestered at the Wartburg. Melanchthon thought his dear father Luther had died. Imagine his delight when he received a personal note of reassurance eight days after the "kidnapping." But Luther's note also included a warning:

Stand firm, Philip, as a servant of the Word and guard the walls and gates of Jerusalem until they come upon you also. You know your calling and your gifts. I pray for you before all other things, and I do not doubt that my prayers are heard. Do you likewise. Let us bear our burden together. We stand alone in the battle. After me they will fall upon you.¹²

But back in Wittenberg Melanchthon began exhibiting a character trait which we had not seen before. He was afraid, "Our Elijah is not yet with us, but we wait and hope for him...My longing for him tortures me grievously."¹³ Luther penned encouragement, "Even though I should be lost, the gospel will lose nothing by that; for in Scripture you can excel me, and you are Elisha who succeeds Elijah with a double portion of the Spirit, which the Lord may bestow upon you in mercy."¹⁴ For a time Luther's bolstering helped. In October of 1521 Melanchthon even sent out a most sarcastic reply to the Leipzig debate verdict rendered against Luther by the Sarbonne. He so much as called them a bunch of dried prunes. Of course those theologians in Paris did not take Melanchthon's cutting remarks sitting down. It took them two years, but they finally cranked out a reply that slandered Melanchthon as the opposite of what a theologian should be: he was a boy, married, and a

layman. The Sarbonne ventured that there would be no limit to the absurdities in the Elector's university. They would not be surprised if the Elector hired a woman as master of theology!

Yet, in spite of Philip's firm conviction in his writing against the Sarbonne, he had problems. When studying the relationship between Luther and Melanchthon, the struggles of Melanchthon in Wittenberg while Luther was at the Wartburg stick out like a sore thumb. This is the first inkling we get that Luther could carry on his Reformation work and writing without Melanchthon. Luther stood foursquare on God's promises. Melanchthon, however, simply had a difficult time getting along without Luther.

Martin was in hiding. Who was going to take the lead back in Wittenberg? Would it be Amsdorf, Carlstadt, Spalatin, Melanchthon? And just when the question seemed to beg for an answer, look who stepped into the picture - the Zwickau prophets. These Spirit-blabbering, Means of Grace-denying, iconoclastic radicals were all that the misguided Carlstadt and over-zealous Zwilling needed to go beyond forcing the bewildered common people into receiving the Lord's Supper in both kinds. Now Carlstadt and Zwilling led the students and townspeople in even more drastic action, "Drop private masses; toss away the vestments; smash the statues! Who needs the Scriptures? We have the Spirit!"

That kind of leadership the Reformation could do without. So what did Melanchthon do? Did he step forward as Elisha wearing the mantle of Elijah? Did he silence Carlstadt, reign in Zwilling, drive out the Zwickau prophets with a firm demand for the external word to be heard? No. Westerhaus said it so well, "(Melanchthon) showed an attitude, a spirit, for the first time, which he was to display repeatedly later on during his career as a reformer. It was a spirit of uncertainty, hesitancy, and indecision."¹⁵ He wrote to Spalatin and the Elector expressing his desire for Luther to clear up the problem, "I just don't know what to do. To whom shall I turn. If only Luther were here!"

Junker Georg finally got word of the trouble. He was not afraid. He wrote to the Elector announcing his planned return to Wittenberg, absolving Frederick of the responsibility for his safety. Luther sang with David, "Into your hands I commit my spirit. Redeem me, O Lord, the God of truth" (Psalm 31:5). He was back in Wittenberg on March 6, 1522. From the ninth to the sixteenth of that month he delivered his famous "Eight Sermons." The radicals left. Order returned.

But what did Luther do about weak-kneed Melanchthon? Maybe a well read Luther expert could shed some light. I searched in vain for a word of reprimand or even a word of consolation from Luther to his co-worker. This may be an argument from silence, but I sensed a temporary cooling in their relationship - not an end to it - just a cooling in their relationship.

The rest of the decade, 1522-1529, saw a flurry of activity on the theological, social, and political scenes. Luther had to complete the mop up of the radicals. Their hasty, forced elimination of Roman abuses was inappropriate. Changes needed to be made, but slowly, patiently, in love, and based on God's Word. The concern for the gradual elimination of Roman abuses and the installation of evangelical instruction culminated in the church visitations of 1527-1528.

The discovery of the new world and influx of gold into Europe led to a change in social structure. Free cities and the merchants were on the way up. Feudalism and the knights were on the way down. These were dark days for the knights. They had no place to go, nothing to do. When no one listened to their grievances, Ulrich von Hutten and Franz von Sickingen led the knights in a short-lived uprising (1522-1523). They claimed to have the Reformation on their side. Luther denied such a connection in no uncertain terms.

During the summer of 1524, Melanchthon was ill. Luther sent him on a five week vacation to his homeland around Bretten. On the return trip he and his companions passed through Hesse. Landgrave Philip heard of Melanchthon's arrival. He arranged to have Melanchthon "taken captive" and brought to his castle. The Landgrave plugged Philip full of questions about the Reformation all night. As they parted, Philip of Hesse asked Melanchthon to send a written summary of the gospel truths. Melanchthon did just that. The two remained friends for the next four decades.

Melanchthon got back from vacation just in time to catch the beginning of another socially oriented struggle. If the knights suffered under the collapse of feudalism, how much more the peasants! Local, disorganized, Muenzer-inspired revolts sprang up in the fall of 1524. Bitter, bloody battles were waged in the

spring of 1525. Just like the knights, the peasants also claimed to have Luther on their side. He had written "Freedom of a Christian," hadn't he? But Luther wrote against their rebellious attitudes and actions. However, an unfortunate delay in publication put his words into the German tract racks after the peasants had been defeated. Luther's Roman enemies blamed him for the blood bath.

While all these battles were raging, Luther was involved in another battle, a paper battle: Luther versus Erasmus. The celebrated humanist capped off his remarks with "The Freedom of the Will." Luther countered with his classic, "The Bondage of the Will," printed in 1525.

It is not our purpose here to lay out all the historical details of the decade of the 1520's. But we have mentioned in passing the Peasants' Revolt, Luther's controversy with Erasmus on free will, and the church visitations of 1527-1528 because they all had a common thread binding them to the heart and soul of Melanchthon. Let's start with Melanchthon's opinion of Erasmus. Keep in mind that Melanchthon had his roots in humanism.* Luther was a student of the Bible. Erasmus was a humanist. Melanchthon was a Biblical humanist. That tells us something about our friend Philip Stupperich noted:

The controversy (between Luther and Erasmus) became sharper and sharper. This Melanchthon regretted. Despite the break between Erasmus and Luther, however, Melanchthon for his part never cut off his correspondence with the once so admired master. He remained in touch with him until Erasmus' death...In his memorial to Erasmus he later revealed that this dissension between Erasmus and Luther had deeply affected him. In his conception of man and of the freedom of the human will he remained strongly influenced by Erasmus.¹⁶

Professor Peters gives us some insights into Melanchthon's problems.¹⁷ Peters contends that Melanchthon could never rid himself of the old Middle Ages church-states ideas. He traced the development of Melanchthon's problems in this area through the three editions of his *Loci Communes* - 1521, 1535, and 1544. In the first edition of the *Loci* (1521) Melanchthon was clear. We already noted Luther's high praises for this dogmatic text. The 1521 edition had no special chapter on "ecclesia." Under the locus "de lege" he drew no special connection between the Decalogue and the laws of the magistrate or government.

However, after the Peasants' War and after the controversy between Erasmus and Luther, the humanist in Melanchthon came out. In 1525 he confided to his friend Camerarius, "I am conscious of the fact that I have never theologized for any other reason than to improve my morals."¹⁸ In the same year Melanchthon wrote "Declamatio de legibus." He now spoke of the "lex" of the Decalogue in terms of common law. The humanist in Melanchthon wanted to show the philosophical connection between secular ordinances and Christian doctrine.

Riding the fence between Luther and Erasmus, Melanchthon began to utter phrases which ascribed to man free will in civic righteousness. Of course, if Melanchthon was beginning to equate secular laws and divine law, one can see that his opinion concerning free will in secular righteousness would lead him onto some pretty shaky ground. Without trying to get too far ahead of the story, we might just peak ten years ahead at the second edition of his *Loci*. In this 1535 edition the locus on "lex" was increased by two chapters; the locus "de magistratibus" had the added title, "dignitate rerum politicarum;" and Melanchthon added three new loci, "de regno Christi, de ecclesia, de politia ecclesiastica," which, according to Peters, were filled with "Sozialbegriffe" (social ideas). What becomes evident is that Melanchthon's ideas of free will in the moral realm and civil sphere fit in with his Medieval ideas about "ecclesia" so that there might be proper Christian discipline. Note the timing, for Christian discipline fits right in with the Peasants' Revolt of 1524-1525 and the church visitations of 1527-1528.

We will insert here another incident in connection with the church visitations just mentioned. The "cuius regio, eius religio" of the 1526 Diet of Speyer had given Elector John enough reason to support Luther and

* At its best humanism was the study of the classics and at its worst was an attitude or system of thought asserting the primacy of man over abstract principles

Melanchthon in their efforts to bring reform to Saxony in a God-pleasing way. Melanchthon drew up visitation articles. Luther prepared a preface.¹⁹ In his articles Melanchthon emphasized the necessity of preaching the law, and rightly so. The antinomian Agricola objected. He claimed that repentance comes from preaching the gospel. Luther had to arbitrate. Contrition can come from the fear of God's wrath or from the love of God (grief because a person has offended his loving God). Agricola was wrong. No doubt Melanchthon also learned something. We read from the "Apology," article XII (V), #29, "From contrition we separate those idle and infinite discussions, as to when we grieve from love of God, and when from fear of punishment...But we say that contrition is the true terror of conscience which feels that God is angry with sin, and which grieves that it has sinned."²⁰

But why insert this conflict with Agricola when we had been discussing Melanchthon's ideas on free will, civic righteousness, natural law, and church-state relations? The conflict with Agricola was inserted because it raises an interesting question. Agricola was wrong, but did he perceive a weakness in Melanchthon that Luther did not? I have a hunch that he did. For Melanchthon, it was nothing at all to think about church discipline in terms of civic righteousness. He could not separate church and state very clearly. For Luther, however, the distinction could be made, "These two kingdoms must be sharply distinguished, and both be permitted to remain the one to produce piety, the other to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds."²¹

Without belaboring the point, permit a summary. If I was asked to summarize Melanchthon's underlying problem which contributed to his troubles before and after Luther's death, I would have to say this: Melanchthon simply did not comprehend the difference between the Invisible and Visible Church. For him "ecclesia" always meant the Visible Church. An Invisible Church would lead to anarchy. Melanchthon emphasized the need for good order and discipline. There just had to be church politics.

Our discussion of the relationship between Luther and Melanchthon during the years 1521-1529 has not ended. In 1525 Luther married Katie. Some historians get all excited because Melanchthon was not invited. Were they at odds with each other at this time? I think that is an unfair assessment. Stupperich put it this way:

Melanchthon (at first) was dismayed by the news of Luther's marriage. To Luther's marriage he had no objections; it only appeared questionable to him whether the act was wisely timed...Later, Melanchthon was a frequent guest in Luther's house, even though their wives did not get along very well together.²²

Most historians who write about Melanchthon try to pinpoint his weaknesses in two areas - concerning free will and concerning the Lord's Supper. We have briefly touched on the former. The latter also comes up for discussion during the decade of the 1520's. This was the time slot for the famous Sacramentarian controversies. Luther waged a paper battle against the Sacramentarians and capped it off in 1528 with his "Confession Concerning the Lord's Supper."

What about Melanchthon's opinion on the Lord's Supper? He agreed with Luther. Consider his stand at the Marburg Colloquy. The second Diet of Speyer (1529) had repealed the "cuius regio, eius religio" of 1526. Philip of Hesse was determined to face the Catholics with a unified front. That necessitated bringing Luther and Zwingli together. Theological agreement meant political unity. He called for a colloquy at Marburg. Luther was not too excited about the idea. He had written enough. But he consented to go anyway. The theologians met in cordial debate during the first four days of October, 1529. In the end no agreement on the Lord's Supper was reached. While Oecolampadius and Zwingli urgently pleaded their rationalistic arguments, Luther pointed to "hoc est corpus meum." Luther took his stand on Scripture. Melanchthon did, too. But it is interesting to note that Melanchthon also considered that it was important to consult the church fathers. He opposed Zwingli because he was convinced that Zwingli and Oecolampadius contradicted Scripture and the church fathers. Early in 1530, Melanchthon published "Sentences from Some Ancient Writers on the Lord's Supper," a collection of patristic passages in support of the real presence. In the booklet he said that faith depends on the Word of God but the opinion of the church fathers should also be consulted because it would not be safe to disagree with the

ancient church.²³ Notice that he is singing a tune very similar to, but not exactly the same as his beautiful statement on "sola Scriptura" in 1519.

D. Luther and Melanchthon, 1529-1546

As the second Diet of Speyer (1529) indicated, the emperor was getting ready to resolve the religious question in Germany. Sure enough! He called for a diet at Augsburg in June of 1530. The summons to appear at the diet reached the electoral court of Saxony on March 11, 1530. The elector called his theologians together for a meeting at Torgau. Their assignment was to produce articles defending Lutheran reform and exposing Roman abuses. The meeting produced the Torgau Articles. Luther was the chief author.

In the spring of 1530, the Wittenberg theologians headed south to Augsburg. They spent Easter at Coburg. Luther stayed there as the others traveled on. Once in Augsburg the Lutherans learned that the Torgau Articles would not be enough. The diet had been prejudiced by Eck's four hundred four vicious, slanderous articles against Luther. Melanchthon wrote:

Some papal scribblers had disseminated pasquinades at the diet which reviled our churches with horrible lies, charging that they taught many condemned errors, and were like the Anabaptists, erring and rebellious. Answer had to be made to his imperial majesty and in order to refute the pasquinades, it was decided to include all articles of Christian doctrine in proper succession, that everyone might see how unjustly our churches were slandered in the lying papal writings.²⁴

A few articles pointing out Roman abuses would not be enough. As Melanchthon stated, answer had to be made which demonstrated that the Lutheran doctrine was really in line with the ancient apostolic church and no fly-by-night heresy. A positive confession of faith was needed.

Luther was at Coburg. So the burden to produce such a document fell upon Melanchthon's shoulders. In studying the relationship between Luther and Melanchthon two questions arise at the time of the writing and presentation of the Augsburg Confession. First, what role did Luther play in its production? In other words, did Melanchthon's phraseology reflect Luther's teaching? Secondly, was Luther pleased by the outcome?

In answer to the first question let it simply be stated that yes, the Augsburg Confession does reflect Luther's teaching. Later on, the good doctor himself could call it "my confession" and "our confession." Even though Luther was miles away and was not directly involved, yet Melanchthon made use of the material at hand, the Schwabach Articles (written shortly before the Marburg Colloquy), the Marburg Articles (written at the close of the Marburg Colloquy), and the Torgau Articles. All three were essentially written by Luther. Melanchthon, however, was not a brainless parrot. All the way up to the date of the public reading of the Augsburg Confession (June 25, 1530), Melanchthon recast and rewrote the articles, torturing his body and mind with sleepless anxiety to find just the right twist of wording. What Melanchthon succeeded in doing Luther could not have done. The situation called for a positive, non-polemic confession of faith. Surely Luther would have been far more caustic.

On May 11, the first draft was sent to Luther. Melanchthon wrote:

Our 'Apology' (the rough draft of the Augsburg Confession) is being sent you, but in truth it is rather a confession! For the Emperor has not time to listen to lengthy disputations. Yet I have succinctly given nearly all the Articles of Faith, since Eck has circulated the most Satanic slanders against us. Over against these I wished to oppose a remedy. Please give judgment on the whole writing according to your spirit.²⁵

Luther returned the document on May 15 with this comment, "I have read Master Philip's Apology. It pleases me very well, and I know of nothing therein to be improved or changed, nor would it become me, for I cannot step so softly. Christ our Lord grant that it may bring much and great fruit, as we hope and pray."²⁶

The Augsburg Confession did not have articles condemning the divine right of the pope, transubstantiation, purgatory, and indulgence. Some historians point to this as evidence that Melancthon was too mild and willing to make concessions. But Allbeck puts the situation into proper perspective:

The Augsburg Confession by itself is not enough; the rest of the *Book of Concord* is needed to make the picture complete...The positive Lutheran character of the Confession is clear enough...It shows no evidence of modifying Luther's doctrine...In 1530, Melancthon and Luther stood together in doctrine. At Augsburg, Melancthon...wrote the doctrine which was unquestionably Luther's.²⁷

Krauth stated concisely, "To Luther belongs the doctrinal power of the Augsburg Confession, its inmost life and spirit, and to Melancthon its matchless form."²⁸

Was Luther pleased by the Augsburg Confession? The answer is yes. In numerous letters written during June and July of 1530 and also in his "Tabletalks," time and again Luther lauded this confession. Then why do some historians bend over backwards to point out Luther's unsettled and unhappy feelings toward Melancthon's mild and conciliatory manner at the Diet of Augsburg? Let's briefly sketch the circumstances which led to Luther's encouragements for Melancthon to stand firm and not give in.

The diet did not end on June 25, 1530, after Dr. Beyer read the confession. It continued until September of that year. During the last days of June and into July, Eck and other Catholic theologians produced their response to the Augsburg Confession. Their "Confutation" was in the hands of the emperor by mid-July. The Lutherans were not allowed a copy, but Melancthon used notes and began at once to write his "Apology," or defense of the Augsburg Confession. In the meantime Melancthon was also involved in a series of debates and discussions with the opponents. Peace-loving Melancthon got caught in a web of conciliation. He did not want war. He trusted the emperor to establish peace. Melancthon was willing to concede episcopal rule, provided the bishops would act properly and promote sound doctrine, allowing the Sacrament in both kinds, the marriage of priests, and the abolition of the mass. I do not believe that Melancthon was abandoning evangelical principles, but his continued discussions with the Catholic theologians caused his fellow Lutherans to mistrust him. Here is where Luther's support helped Melancthon stand firm. From Coburg Luther wrote:

You are anxious about your life, but you fear for the common cause...Full of confidence I observe outward things, and care nothing about those threatening and raging papists. If we are ruined, Christ also is ruined - he, the ruler of the world! If that happens, I would rather fall with Christ than stand with the emperor.²⁹

In other correspondence Luther urgently called on Melancthon to cut off negotiations. By September of 1530 the message had sunk in. Melancthon realized through the letters of Luther and by personal experience that reconciliation with Rome was impossible at this time. On September 22, the Emperor closed the diet and gave the Lutherans until April 15, 1531 to get back into the Catholic fold. At the close of the diet Melancthon submitted the first draft of the "Apology" and continued to polish it during the next months until April of 1531.

Bente gave us this fine summary of Luther's part in the relationship with Melancthon during the Diet of Augsburg:

What Luther did during his solitary stay in the castle at Coburg cannot be rated highly enough. His ideal deportment during these days, so trying for the church, is an example which at all times evangelical Christians may look up to, in order to learn from him and to emulate him. What he wrote to his followers in order to comfort and encourage them, can and must at all times refresh and buoy up those who are concerned about the course of the church.³⁰

Up to and including the Diet of Augsburg, I believe that we can make the sweeping generalization that Melanchthon was still fairly "echt." We noted his problem about understanding a difference between the Invisible Church and the Visible Church. That ties in with his desire for reconciliation with the Roman Catholics. Purify the one church! Keep the church one! Where Luther had seen the end of a relationship with Rome at Leipzig in 1519, Melanchthon was still not totally convinced in 1530.

Since reconciliation with Rome was out of the picture for the time being, Melanchthon asked himself another question, "What about the other Christians who oppose Rome?" Here, again his unending desire for unity and peace became the overriding consideration. Throughout the 1530's and into the 1540's we see that Melanchthon worked for union with the South Germans (e.g. Martin Bucer), even leaving room for union with the Swiss (e.g. John Calvin).

As we study the years after Augsburg (1531-1546) and consider the relationship between Luther and Melanchthon, we will see Melanchthon drift into a use of ambiguous phraseology that could sweep differences under a rug and serve as an umbrella for both Lutheran and Calvinist. The question that surfaces in this: Did Melanchthon himself still hold to Biblical truth even though he made ambiguous statements for the sake of outward union, or did he personally deny Biblical truth and try to cover his tracks with ambiguities? The historians are divided. I will render my opinion in the evaluation section of this paper.

In the 1530's we read about Melanchthon's activities, and sometimes our opinion of him goes up and sometimes it goes down. On the "up" side, in 1532, he published a commentary on Romans. Luther raved about it. On the "down" side, in the Christmas season of 1534, Melanchthon met with Bucer to discuss union with the South Germans. Here it became evident that Melanchthon was willing to buy Bucer's idea that there can be several opinions about the Lord's Supper in the one true church because the church fathers were not in agreement on this doctrine. In his classic *This Is My Body*, Sasse makes quite a point out of the fact that on this occasion Melanchthon called Luther's understanding of the real presence an "alienum sententia," a strange opinion.³¹ Without trying to persistently defend Melanchthon as being above reproach, I think it is only fair to take Melanchthon's words in the kindest possible way (or as we used to say, "put the best construction on it"). Sasse may be right. Melanchthon's comment about an "alienum sententia" may well be a rejection of Biblical truth. However, he may have used that phrase to point out that the understanding of the real presence in the Lord's Supper is strange or foreign to human reason. Whatever was in his heart at this time God only knows. At any rate, he did work to develop a formula on the Lord's Supper which would be broad enough to include Bucer's teaching about Christ's presence in the Sacrament in only a spiritual way. In the light of the Sacramentarian controversy of 1526-1528 and the Marburg Colloquy of 1529 and in the light of Scriptural fellowship principles, this effort on Melanchthon's part for union without unity was uncalled for.

Melanchthon's revised and ambiguous formula on the Lord's Supper showed up in the second edition of his *Loci*, 1535. We mentioned earlier that this edition also included his fence-riding on the doctrine of free will. Concerning the Lord's Supper he now said, "Christ is truly there." That can be understood correctly. But notice that he did not define how Christ is truly present, which was the key to the Sacramentarian controversy and the Marburg Colloquy. Again, we cannot say for sure that Melanchthon believed something other than what Luther taught. But we do know that he was trying to avoid conflicts and effect union. He wrote to Veit Dietrich:

Concerning the problems of how the body and blood unite with the external elements, one reads nothing in the writings of the fathers, and I do not intend to bring futile disputations into the church either. That's why I have said so little about such questions and fruitless disputations.³²

After Melanchthon's meeting with Bucer in 1534, Bucer worked with the Swiss trying to get them close to Melanchthon's formula. A meeting was to be held in Saxony in May of 1536, in search of agreement between the Saxon Lutherans, the South Germans, and the Swiss. Because Luther was ill, the meeting took place at Luther's home in Wittenberg. For the meeting Melanchthon wrote what is known as the "Wittenberg Concord." Concerning the Lord's Supper he emphasized three points: 1) the body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present (the adverbs were certainly pleasing to Luther); 2) the sacramental union of Christ with the

elements; 3) the reception of body and blood by both the worthy and unworthy. Bucer was willing to sign; the Swiss were not. They did not agree that the body and blood are "truly and substantially present" and that the unworthy also receive Christ's body and blood.

After the Diet of Augsburg and the emperor's demand for the Lutherans to get back into the Catholic fold by April 15, 1531, the evangelical princes feared that the emperor might employ military force to carry out his command. So in the first two months of 1531, Philip of Hesse and Elector John of Saxony organized the Smalcald League for defensive purposes. For many years the Protestants had been hoping for a general, free council to handle the religious problems in Germany. They wanted the council to be truly free of papal control and bias; they wanted it on German soil; and they wanted Scripture to serve as the sole authority for judgment. But the pope claimed that he alone had the authority to call a council. Finally, in 1536, the pope did call for a general council to be held at Mantua in May of 1537. The question for the Lutherans was this: Should they go? Elector John Frederick said, "No, such a council called by the pope will not be free of his control." Luther said, "Why not go? What harm can it do? If anything, we will have another chance to testify about God's truth." Melancthon also felt they should go, but for a different reason. Latent hopes for a reunion still pulsed in his veins.

In order to decide whether to go to the council or not, the princes called for a meeting at Smalcald in February, 1537. In preparation for the meeting John Fred. asked the theologians to meet and write articles which would clearly delineate Roman abuses. Luther wrote these "Smalcald Articles," consulting with the other theologians, and all appended their signatures. To his signature Melancthon added this comment:

Concerning the pope, if he allows the gospel to stand, for the sake of peace and unity of all Christians now under him and those who in the future wish to remain under him, the superiority over the bishops which he now has should also be recognized by us according to human rights.³³

Luther sent the articles to Smalcald in January of 1537. Elector John Frederick was not too thrilled with Melancthon's comment. At the meeting of the Smalcald League, the princes refused to go to Mantua and decided only to attend a council if it met their stipulations. They also subscribed to the Augsburg Confession and the Apology. But Luther's Smalcald Articles were not discussed. Why? - because Luther was ill and not there to lend his considerable support and because Melancthon and Philip of Hesse did not want the harsh language of the Smalcald Articles to offend the South Germans and thus weaken the League. Luther's articles were circulated privately, though, and approved. What a blessing to God's church they proved to be:

Through the Augsburg Confession the church sang 'Peace on earth,' but in the Smalcald Articles, the very Prince of Peace seemed to declare that He had come to bring a sword -- the double-edged sword of truth - the edge exquisitely keen, and the scabbard thrown away...The church, which had committed the olive branch to Melancthon, gave the sword to Luther...In the Augsburg Confession Truth makes her overtures of peace; in the Smalcald Articles she lays down her ultimatum, a declaration of war...At Augsburg our church stood up for the truth, that error might die by the life of Truth; at Smalcald she stood up against the error, that Truth might live by the death of error.³⁴

As the Smalcald meeting wound down, the princes wanted a tract against the power and primacy of the pope. Since Luther was absent, guess who got the job? You bet! - Master Philip. This was the man who had added a conciliatory comment to his signing of Luther's articles; but interestingly enough, he is also the man who now produced the "Tract" on the power and primacy of the pope which is a part of our Book of Concord. How could he make concessions on the one hand and be so confessional on the other? Bente offered this explanation:

In the Tract Melanchthon abandons the idea of a papal supremacy 'iure humano,' which he had advocated at Augsburg in 1530 and expressed in his subscription to Luther's articles, and moves entirely in the wake of Luther and in the trend of the Reformer's thoughts. The Tract was written not so much from his own conviction as from that of Luther and in accomodation to the antipapal sentiment which, to his grief, became increasingly dominant at Smalcald. In a letter to Jonas, February 23 (1537), he remarks, indicating his accomodation to the public opinion prevailing at Smalcald, 'I have written this (Tract) somewhat sharper than I am wont to do.' Melanchthon always trimmed his sails according to the wind; and at Smalcald a decidedly antipapal gale was blowing...It is also possible that he heard of the Elector's criticism of his qualified subscription to Luther's articles. At all events, the Tract amounts to a retraction of his stricture on Luther's view of the papacy. In every respect, Smalcald spelled a defeat for Melanchthon. His policy toward the South Germans was actually repudiated by the numerous and enthusiastic subscriptions to Luther's articles, foreshadowing as it were, the final historical outcome, when Philippism was definitely defeated in the Formula of Concord. And his own Tract gave the 'coup de grace' to his mediating policy with regard to the Romanists. For here Melanchthon, in the manner of Luther, opposes and denounces the pope as the Antichrist, the protector of ungodly doctrine and customs, and the persecutor of the true confessors of Christ, from whom one must separate.³⁵

We are still in 1537. When speaking on justification, Melanchthon had made the statement that repentance and good works were the "conditio sine qua non" of justification. The only possible way to understand such a statement correctly is to say that before a person can appreciate God's declaration of innocence, he first needs the preaching of the law; and once that person believes the law and believes the gospel, the fruits of faith will naturally follow.

Cruciger, one of Melanchthon's former students, began teaching this "conditio sine qua non." A parish pastor named Cordatus called on Cruciger to explain. No satisfactory answer was given. The blame then shifted to Melanchthon, and Cordatus brought accusations of heresy against Philip before Luther, Amsdorf, and the electoral court. Melanchthon was attending to other business out of town. Cordatus spread the rumor that Melanchthon and Luther were at odds. Confusion raised its ugly head in the ranks of the Protestant theologians.

What did Luther do? - nothing. When Melanchthon returned to town, "Luther apparently saw no reason why he should not trust his good friend and accepted his explanation."³⁶ The historian E. E. Flack shook his head in wonder, "Luther no doubt had seen that Melanchthon was going his own way. For friendship's sake he remained silent. It is almost incomprehensible how Luther could do that."³⁷ I agree.

Cordatus continued his ramblings for a time. Justus Jonas finally asked him to be quiet. The matter was laid to rest when Melanchthon restudied justification and dropped the "conditio sine qua non."

During one of his evening lectures on law and gospel C. F. W. Walther was impressing on his listeners the truth that a correct understanding of the distinction from law and gospel is not based on human intelligence but comes from the Holy Spirit. He referred to the aforementioned historical incident as an example:

A simple person like Cordatus, the intimate friend of Luther, unquestionably divided law and gospel a thousand times better than Melanchthon, called Preceptor of All Germany. This view will not be altered by the fact that Melanchthon tried to ridicule Cordatus by calling him 'Quadratus,' a clumsy quadruped, because he had unmasked Melanchthon when the latter had begun to err in doctrine regarding man's free will.³⁸

Not long after the Cordatus accusation, Melanchthon had sent some requested instructions to Pastor Jacob Schenk of Freiburg concerning the distribution of the Lord's Supper. Melanchthon wrote, "You can give communion in one kind to the uninformed." Schenk accused Melanchthon of approaching Roman practice. Chancellor Bruek asked Luther for a private opinion. Again Luther remained silent. A general meeting for all parties concerned was called. Melanchthon was to explain himself in writing. The meeting never took place.

Melanchthon wrote to a friend, "The object of all my work is not to be the founder of a new sect, or to fight against Luther, but for the benefit of youth to develop and state the vital Christian doctrines in a simple and clear manner."³⁹

Twice now we have witnessed Luther react with silence when his Wittenberg cohort was accused of error. I am convinced that Luther was disturbed that his dear friend and colleague seemed to be heading off in his own direction. What pain must have crept into Luther's heart when Melanchthon showed signs of weakness while at the very same time (1537) he was assisting Luther in the renewed battle against Agricola's antinomianism!

As if Melanchthon's strife with Cordatus and Schenk had not caused Luther enough worry, here came a letter from the Roman Catholic Cardinal Sadolet offering friendship to Melanchthon. On top of that, word along the grapevine had it that the cardinal had also written to Jacob Sturm in Strassburg saying, "How nice it is that Melanchthon, Bucer, and Sturm are of the same stripe - not as vehement as Luther." Melanchthon did not make too much of the whole deal. He wrote to Veit Dietrich, "I believe the cardinal actually thought that through his mild letter, as through the lyre of Orpheus, I would be softened and moved to deny our doctrines."⁴⁰ But Luther was still worried. He demonstrated that he knew Melanchthon was a target for the opponents trickery, "If Philip would show willingness to comply...he would and could easily be made a cardinal and would nevertheless be allowed to keep his wife and children."⁴¹

By 1540 the emperor was still hoping to dissolve the differences between the Protestants and Roman Catholics. He gave the order for a convention to be held at Speyer in June of 1540. Because the plague arrived in Speyer before the theologians, the meeting was rescheduled for Hagenau in Alsace. At this point in the story of the relationship between Luther and Melanchthon, Sasse relates this unforgettable event:

One of the most touching scenes in the history of the Reformation occurred in 1540 at Weimar when Melanchthon, on his way to the colloquy that was to be held at Hagenau between Protestants and Catholics, suffered a complete breakdown, partly caused by the excitement to which he was exposed in connection with the bigamy of Philip of Hesse. He was a dying man when Luther arrived and saved him from imminent death through fervent prayer...We must keep this incident in mind to understand Luther's relationship toward his old co-worker, the patience he showed him even when everyone considered a breach between the two men to be inevitable. This was more than a friendship; it was a spiritual relationship that could not possibly be destroyed, even by the worst forebodings that Luther had in the last years of his life. It is a remarkable fact that the year 1540 became the definite turning point in Melanchthon's views on the Sacrament ...This change, which was a gradual departure from Luther's doctrine, had indeed begun years before. But now the deviations from the doctrine which he himself had confessed at Marburg and Augsburg became so serious, and after Luther's death, so dangerous to the Lutheran Church, that the whole existence of Lutheranism was at stake.⁴²

In the quotation above, mention is made of "the turning point in Melanchthon's views on the Sacrament." Just what exactly is meant by that will be understood as we review the events of 1540 and 1541.

The Colloquy at Hagenau, which Melanchthon had been unable to attend because of poor health had produced no results. So Emperor Charles V decreed that another Colloquy was to be held at Worms in the early part of 1541. In preparation for this meeting at Worms Melanchthon had worked on a revision of the Augsburg Confession. You ask, "How dare he do that?" That's a good question. Krauth offers an explanation, Melanchthon made the fatal mistake of treating a great official document (the Augsburg Confession) as if it were his private property, yet preserving the old title, the old form in general, and the old signatures."⁴³ Indeed, Melanchthon had made revisions, hence the name "Variata". (Altered; Changed). These revisions or changes again revealed Melanchthon's desire to state doctrines ambiguously, creating an umbrella for all Protestants to stand under, Lutheran and Reformed alike. Changes were made under article V on free will, and article XX on faith and good works.⁴⁴ Of special interest to us here were his adjustments in article X on the Lord's Supper.

The Latin text (1531) of the Augsburg Confession reads:

De coena Domini docent, quod corpus et sanguis Christi vere adsint et distribantur vescentibus in coena Domini, et improbant secus docentes.

Article X in the Variata reads:

De coena Domini docenti, quod cum pane et vino exhibeantur corpus et sanguis Christi vescentibus in coena Domini.⁴⁵

Keep in mind that four years earlier, in the 1536 "Wittenberg Concord," Melanchthon had said, "cum pane et vino vere et substantialiter adesse." Luther could understand those words correctly. But so could Bucer and the other South Germans. Luther expressed the truth of Christ's real presence more clearly in his Smalcald Articles, "De sacramento altaris sentimus panem et vinum in coena esse verus corpus et sanguinem Christi."

Look again at the wording of the Variata. By the omission of "vere adsint et distribantur," or at least "vere et substantialiter adesse," and by the omission of the "improbatio," Melanchthon was leaving the door open for the possibility of associating with the Swiss.

Many historians make a big deal out of the fact that this revision was passed over in silence, that Luther himself did not castigate Melanchthon. I am not so sure that is true. Who's to say that Luther withheld public reprimand from his beloved Philip while privately discussing the matter. As the record shows, Luther did write one more "Confession Concerning the Lord's Supper" in 1544. I am convinced that he wanted Melanchthon to read it and take his words to heart.

The Catholic theologian John Eck was the first to publicly announce a difference between the Variata and the Augsburg Confession. From his viewpoint the Variata sounded more antipapal and also suggested that the evangelicals did not really know what they were talking about in 1530. The Variata was not publicly denounced in Lutheran circles until Flacius began his alarm-sounding in the 1560's. We have already mentioned that the emperor had called for a colloquy between Protestants and Catholics to be held at Worms in the early part of 1541. Just in case the papal legate might demand that a judgment be submitted to the pope, the Protestant princes asked Melanchthon to write a formal protest. Remember, the Protestants all along had requested a council free of papal control. Melanchthon wrote:

Since the emperor has demanded this discussion of all doctrines, we hope that he wants a public presentation of the truth in order really to help the Church. We promise to do that very thing in simple and plain words, adducing no other testimony than that of the Bible, as God had enjoined, expecting the same also of our opponents. And as we also have already rejected a council called by the pope, so we now also refuse to submit to the judgment of the pope, for the pope has shown and declared himself as our enemy, and we charge and accuse him here of error. And no matter how great the dangers of a separation or split might be, our conscience has forced us to break with the papacy.⁴⁶

As his "Tract" of 1537 had proven, so now Melanchthon demonstrated again that he had indeed broken away from any thoughts of reconciliation with the papacy. Before the formal beginning of the Colloquy of Worms, theologians from each side met informally. The Lutherans were prepared; the Catholics were not. The Colloquy opened on January 14, 1541. It ended four days later. No agreement had been reached. Charles V wanted a colloquy reconvened at Regensburg. He planned to hold an imperial diet there in the spring of 1541 to handle two major agenda items: the threat of the Turk and the religious squabbles in Germany.

In the meantime some men from the Protestant camp were working on a formula of reconciliation with Rome. The men involved were Agricola and Elector Joachim of Brandenburg. Melanchthon called them sceptics and rejected their attempts at reconciliation:

A new generation of sceptics has risen among us which strives after reconciliation with our enemies. I hereby declare bluntly that I accept only those doctrines which our church has laid down in its public confessions. For I hold that only in them the full agreement with the Universal Church of the Son of God is found. Therefore I shall never separate from her and never will agree to a union as long as our opponents insist on their errors.⁴⁷

Luther must have been proud of Melanchthon for that comment. He, too, rejected the formula of Agricola and Elector Joachim and even suggested to Elector John Frederick of Saxony that no Wittenberg theologian be sent to Regensburg, where pressure might be applied to accept the unwanted formula. But Elector John Frederick felt that he had to comply with the emperor's call to meet at Regensburg. So he sent Melanchthon and Cruciger.

We have been focusing our attention on the relationship between Luther and Melanchthon. At this time it is also interesting to note Elector John Frederick's feelings toward Melanchthon. The Elector knew that Philip of Hesse would be at the Diet of Regensburg. He also knew that the Landgrave would be tempted to concede to the emperor's Catholic inclinations in order to take the heat off of himself because of his marriage problems. The Elector also knew that the two Philips were close friends. Elector John Frederick did not trust their alliance. So he sent spies to Regensburg to watch Melanchthon and prevent a meeting between Melanchthon, Philip of Hesse, and the Catholics.

I don't think the Elector had anything to worry about. At least he did not have to worry about Melanchthon conceding to the Catholics. As far as Melanchthon's attitude toward the Reformed was concerned, that's another story. But when it came to reconciliation with Rome Melanchthon stated:

What could be more foolish and dangerous than these repeated attempts at reconciliation, which at the most can lead to a sham-peace? Why don't we declare openly that we believe in that which is written in our confessions...That would be a sensible and manly action. You cannot believe how much this whole affair worries me, when I think of all the tricks, treachery, and sophistry with which our opponents will attack us. And our Paris (Landgrave Philip) is supporting these ways, not only out of fear but also because of a certain evil bent of his heart.⁴⁸

The Colloquy of Regensburg was officially opened on April 5, 1541. The Protestants wanted an open discussion, but the emperor refused. He set up the procedure: a few theologians from each side would be chosen to discuss the issues; then a conclusion was to be submitted to the papal legate, Contarini. The emperor chose spokesmen whom he considered to be moderates. For the Protestants he selected Melanchthon, Bucer, and Johann Pistorius. For the Catholics he chose Pflug and Gropper. He tossed in John Eck just for good measure.

The discussion was just about to begin on the basis of some articles written by the Catholics when the emperor interrupted, presented a booklet called the "Book of Regensburg," and commanded that discussion be limited to this booklet. Now where did this thing come from?

We have to go back a few months to the Colloquy of Worms in January of 1541. From the outset of the meeting Philip of Hesse could tell that the debate was going nowhere. So he induced Bucer to meet secretly with two moderate Catholics, Gropper and Volkruh (an imperial advisor). The three men were all excited. By the end of the Colloquy of Worms (January 18, 1541) Gropper and Volkruh handed twenty-three articles to Bucer and Capito. Bucer sent the booklet to Philip of Hesse and Joachim of Brandenburg. Surprisingly enough, the articles were not quite what Philip of Hesse was looking for. But Joachim was enthusiastic. He sent a copy to Luther. Doctor Martin put the booklet into proper perspective, "These people, that is, the authors, are well-meaning, but the pope, the cardinals, and the bishops can never accept these impossible proposals. It also contains articles which our people will never accept."⁴⁹

At any rate the emperor had a copy. It was called the "Book of Regensburg" and submitted by him for discussion at Regensburg. So Melanchthon had not as yet seen it. After perusal he wrote on the cover of his

copy, "Platonic politics!" He found the book full of ambiguities and derided it as a "Talmud." When the Elector and Luther heard of Melanchthon's comment, confidence in him grew. Luther wrote to Philip:

The Lord who has called you, whose ambassador, disciple, and witness you are in these grave matters, rule you and keep you spotless unto the end, that you might bring forth much fruit. I am with you in the midst of the wolves with my sighs and prayers.⁵⁰

The Colloquy of Regensburg resumed at the end of April, 1541. Melanchthon and Eck were the spokesmen. Of the twenty-three articles of the "Book of Regensburg" the first four dealt with the status of man before the Fall, the freedom of the will, the cause of original sin, and original sin. These articles were not clear but accepted. Melanchthon said that they could be understood correctly.

Then followed a discussion on justification. It stalemated. Melanchthon was ready to quit and go home. Bucer and Sturm persuaded him to continue. At that point Cardinal Contarini proposed his own very long, ambiguous formula on justification as a substitute for the one in the "Book of Regensburg." His formula was weak but did contain two points which Melanchthon liked: justification by faith alone and the necessity of repentance and good works as a fruit of rebirth. Melanchthon agreed to the cardinal's formula. So on May 2, 1541, agreement had been reached on the article of justification.

What was Luther's reaction: ""When Luther found nothing good in the amended formula, he nevertheless asked the princes not to treat Melanchthon too harshly lest he die of grief."⁵¹ Melanchthon had offered Luther this explanation in a letter: 1) If the opponents agreed on the rest of the book's articles, the justification formula could be explained; 2) He had consented to the justification formula in order not to lose everything; 3) Nothing adopted so far had been made final.

But the Elector was not pleased. He charged Melanchthon with submission to the Catholics. Once again he sent spies. This time Amsdorf was to keep Melanchthon on the straight and narrow.

Wranglings over justification continued. Both sides added explanatory phrases. Finally agreement was withdrawn. At this point Eck and Melanchthon wanted to spar on the basis of the Augsburg Confession. The imperial chancellor, Granvella, said, "No. Discussion must continue on the 'Book of Regensburg'." Heated arguments developed. Melanchthon had had enough. Again, he was ready to leave. Granvella went to the emperor and accused Melanchthon of causing the deadlock and of being Luther's puppet. The emperor ordered the discussion to move along. The next topic was the power of the pope, a thoroughly Catholic article from the "Book of Regensburg." Melanchthon was fed up, "When I saw the numerous points, all in one article and craftily put together, I became impatient and rejected the whole article. And there I had a fight on my hands, and not only with Gropper and Granvella but also with Bucer and the Hessian vice-chancellor."⁵²

The Colloquy of Regensburg finally ended on May 22, 1541. The imperial diet, of course, continued. Melanchthon wrote counter articles to the ones in the "Book of Regensburg" and submitted them to the emperor on the last day of May. A few days later the emperor called the Protestant princes and delegates to his house and so much as demanded that they approve the "Book of Regensburg." Joachim and Philip of Hesse were willing to comply. Melanchthon said, "No way!"

So the emperor's plan to effect a union between Catholics and Protestants had failed. In mid July, 1541, he issued a decree putting the "Regensburg Interim" into operation. What this meant is that the Lutherans had only a temporary reprieve; they had limited freedom from military force until a general council could be called. The Protestants still hoped for a council that would meet their requirements: free, German, and based on the Bible's authority. How their hopes were dashed to pieces by the Council of Trent and how the Smalcald League met with defeat is history that carries us beyond the scope of this paper.

In 1542 Melanchthon completed the final redaction of his *Loci Communes*. It was published in 1543 or 1544. His ideas on the Visible Church were now full blown. Professor Peters points out that the humanist in Melanchthon led him to his ideas about a "consistory" and about church administration.⁵³

In 1542 and 1543 the Elector of Cologne, Herman von Wied, was trying to introduce the Reformation in Cologne. He asked Bucer and Melanchthon for help. Bucer wrote the formula for reformation. Melanchthon approved it. But in doing so, Philip was approving this horrible statement on the Lord's Supper:

Lord's Supper is the communion of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which communion we are to remember Him in order that we through faith in Him be strengthened, and completely remain and live in Him and He in us. And since this giving and receiving of the body and blood of Christ Jesus, our Lord, is a heavenly work and an act of faith, people should keep all carnal thought out of this mystery.⁵⁴

The essential, real presence is passed over. The eating and drinking are presented as a matter of faith. Why did Melanchthon accept and defend this? "The more Melanchthon became convinced that all attempts at reconciliation with Rome would end in failure, the more did he desire a union of all the confessors of the gospel of Jesus Christ against the common foe."⁵⁵ He felt bad about Lutheran attacks against the Reformed.

A copy of Bucer's formula got into the hands of Elector John Frederick, from there to Amsdorf, and from Amsdorf to Luther. Melanchthon was worried. He was afraid Luther would raise a new battle cry. And well he should have been worried. Bucer's formula irritated Luther: Concerning the article on the Lord's Supper, there is nothing that pleases me. There is much lacy-winded speech concerning the value, the fruit, and the honor of the sacrament. But concerning the substance it only mumbles, in order that one might not understand what it holds concerning it, in every respect as the enthusiasts do. In no other place does it clearly state whether the true body and blood are really received with the mouth or not. To sum up, the book is not only pleasing to the enthusiasts but also comforting to them. It is truly more favorable to their doctrine than to ours. That's why I am sick and tired of all and thoroughly disgusted. And it is altogether too long, too loquacious, that I really sense the 'blabber-mouth' Bucer in it.⁵⁶

Rumors were flying that Luther was going to write a tract and publicly attack both Bucer and Melanchthon. The Protestant princes were worried, "The rumor of a rift between Luther and Melanchthon spread like wild fire through all of Protestant Germany and filled the hearts of all lovers of peace with sorrow and fear. What a spectacle a break between Luther and Melanchthon would represent! How the papists would gloat and glory over it!"⁵⁷

No public quarrel took place. In 1544 Luther published "A Brief Confession Concerning the Holy Sacrament Against the Enthusiasts." He nailed Zwingli and Oecolampadius. He did not mention Bucer and Melanchthon. Was this friendship winning out? Was Luther just closing his eyes to a problem he did not want to deal with at the end of his life? I think not. Again, there is no written record, but I am convinced that two men as close as Luther and Melanchthon just had to be discussing these matters in private. Why should Luther hang out Wittenberg's dirty laundry for all to gawk and ridicule? Why must we assume that Luther was silent and thus tolerant? Luther knew God's Word and God's will. He used God's Word. I believe that he used it to his dying day, and that included using God's Word when he worked with Melanchthon. Had Luther not done so, the controversies surrounding Melanchthon which led to the Formula of Concord would have been full grown before Luther died.

God spared Luther any more sadness. Our gracious Lord called him to Himself on February 18, 1546. Melanchthon and Luther had parted on January 23, 1546. Luther and Justus Jonas had set out for Mansfeld to settle a quarrel between counts. Melanchthon remained in Wittenberg. He wrote a letter to Luther expressing his respect and gratitude for Luther's work. He called Luther "the restorer of true doctrine and his dearest father."⁵⁸ Luther never saw the letter. He died in Eisleben.

At Luther's funeral on February 22, Melanchthon delivered a funeral oration. With a trembling voice, he put Luther on a par with the apostle Paul and Augustine. He closed with a prayer of thanks to God. Krauth concludes this historical section for us:

Melanchthon's eloquent and moving tribute and oration at Luther's funeral was more than a tribute to a 'fallen Moses.' It was also the occasion for the cutting of Melanchthon's own taproot, his severance from the great oak that had sustained and encouraged him in his progress toward greatness in the company of the outstanding servants of the Lord at Wittenberg.⁵⁹

II. Evaluation of the Relationship Between Luther and Melanchthon

How did Luther and Melanchthon themselves consider their relationship? Well, we can recall some of Luther's high praise for Melanchthon at the time when Melanchthon first arrived at Wittenberg in 1518. We can also recall Luther's praise for Melanchthon's writings, especially his commentary on Romans and the *Loci Communes*.

Melanchthon also thought very highly of Luther. In the historical section of the paper we have noted a few of his lauds for Luther. We submit also these words:

Luther is too great, too wonderful for me to depict in words... If there be a man on earth I love with my whole heart, that man is Luther... One is an interpreter; one, a logician; another, an orator, affluent, and beautiful in speech; but Luther is all in all - whatever he writes, whatever he utters pierces to the soul, fixes its like arrows in the heart - he is a miracle among men.⁶⁰

Luther was also aware of how well they supplemented each other:

I am rough, boisterous, stormy, and belligerent. I am born to fight against innumerable monsters and devils. I must remove stumps and stones, cut away thistles and thorns, and clear wild forests; but Master Philip comes along softly and gently, sowing and watering with joy according to the gifts which God has abundantly bestowed upon him.⁶¹
Melanchthon too can sting you, but he does so with needles and pins; these pricks hurt and are hard to heal. But I stab you with boar's spears.⁶²

Luther and Melanchthon loved and respected one another. Each also had to bear with the other's weaknesses. For Melanchthon, Luther was far too stubborn, rough, crude, and given to temper outbursts. For Luther, Melanchthon was too anxious about big matters (political matters) that were out of his control. When Luther was down, he threw himself on God's promises. When Melanchthon was down he sometimes turned to his hobby, astrology. Luther once said:

Astrology had some significance for Melanchthon, as a drink of strong beer has for me, when his thoughts depressed him... I could never believe that he was really serious about this (astrology). As for me, I do not fear the heavens, for our nature is higher than that of the stars; it cannot be subjected to them... I do not care for dreams and visions I have something more certain, namely the Word of God.⁶³

After all is said and done, dare we condemn Melanchthon as a godless antagonist in Reformation history? Bente approaches that attitude. In his introduction to the *Book of Concord* he compares the two reformers. In his view Luther stood four-square on the gospel. For Luther every theological question was decided by the Word of God. But Melanchthon, according to Bente, always tried to satisfy his human reason and thus wavered and vacillated. Bente concludes with a quotation from Krauth, "We have twenty-eight large volumes of Melanchthon's writings, and at this hour impartial and learned men are not agreed as to what were his views on some of the profoundest questions of church doctrine on which Melanchthon was writing all his life."⁶⁴

We want to remember that Bente is evaluating Melanchthon from a viewpoint which considers also the controversies leading up to the Formula of Concord, the thirty years after Luther's death. We don't want to pass judgment on Bente's summary without restudying those thirty years. But what about Melanchthon before 1546? Earlier I promised to render an opinion as to whether Melanchthon still held to Biblical truth while Luther was alive, more specifically, was Melanchthon still a believer? We cannot judge his heart, but research has pointed to an affirmative answer. I contend that Melanchthon heard the truth, knew the truth, and believed the truth. His lapses into ambiguous statements before 1546 are not so much the result of "wavering and vacillating from the truth," but evident signs that he was weak - weak in particular in regard to understanding the difference between the Visible and Invisible Church.

Is Melanchthon in heaven? I would like to think that it is so. One thing can be said for sure - if Melanchthon is in heaven, his presence there would be a vivid demonstration of God's undeserved love.

III.

Application of the Relationship Between Luther and Melanchthon to the Ministry

At the outset I stated that more often than not our first reaction when hearing about the relationship between Luther and Melanchthon is to cheer Luther and scorn Melanchthon. Philip is cast in the role of the bad guy. He has been variously depicted as spineless, weak, conciliatory, and unconfessional. Thus in a confessional church like ours we run the risk of applying what we know about Melanchthon in a negative way. Pastors have sinful natures, too. One of Satan's most clever tools is to use our sensitive synodical grapevine as a means of spreading gossip and slander. As quickly as rumors can spread, so quickly it can happen that we point a sanctimonious finger at someone for being Melanchthonian.

Granted, identification of error and weakness is essential in building up God's church. That is one reason why we have confessions. But a study of the relationship between Luther and Melanchthon can help us in our application of church discipline. How did Luther deal with Melanchthon? He did not publicly rip Melanchthon to shreds. No, Luther showed love and patience with Melanchthon's weaknesses, and worked to strengthen and encourage him. In 1544, Luther did not publicly reprimand Melanchthon for error on the Lord's Supper. Rather, he publicly aimed at the error itself. At the root of Luther's dealing with his brother in the ministry was a deep-seated love for his Savior. A deep love for his co-worker was only natural.

What if Luther had lived longer and seen Melanchthon fall even farther short of God's glory? I am sure Luther would have continued with loving and patient discipline which may well have included bringing Melanchthon's weaknesses into public light. But Luther did not live during Melanchthon's darkest hours. What we do learn from their relationship, though, is a genuine love for God's guideline concerning one avenue of our thankful living - that guideline which we often call the eighth commandment.

Reference was made to our confessions. By that we mean our Lutheran Confessions. When we review the historical events surrounding the relationship between Luther and Melanchthon, we run headlong into a study of the Confessions. When you have finished a discussion of these men, you have finished a discussion of the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, and the underlying "positiva" and negativa" that led to the Formula of Concord. Add Luther's Catechisms and the three ecumenical creeds, and the *Book of Concord* is intact.

As heirs of the Reformation how can we miss the fact that to be Lutheran means to be confessional? It is the very nature of a Christian to be confessional, in order to state what he believes - "It is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Rm 10:10); "It is written: 'I believed; therefore I have spoken.' With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak" (2 Cor 4:13); "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Ac 4:20). It is the very nature of a Christian to be confessional, in order to identify and associate with fellow believers - "Do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord...But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life - not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace" (2 Tm 1:8-9); "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ep 4:3);

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hb 10:23-25). It is the very nature of a Christian to be confessional, in order to identify and withdraw from those who err - "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor 6:14); "Watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them" (Rm 16:17); "Watch out for false prophets" (Mt 7:15).

Time and again the story of Melancthon showed that a lack of clear and precise confessional statements not only harmed his own reputation, but also harmed the cause of the Reformation. I don't have to tell you that we live in a day and age when true Christian confessionalism is scorned. Especially in a Luther or Reformation anniversary year, people who call themselves Christians love to flaunt their lack of Confessionalism. To stick our noses in the air and Pharisaically develop an elitist or provincial attitude would be a mockery of Christ-like love. To humbly bow our heads in awe of God's mercy and to raise our voices to Him in song because of that mercy is God-pleasing. As we study Luther and Melancthon, we praise God for His mercy on our Wisconsin Synod, and we pray God that He keep us truly confessional.

The relationship between Luther and Melancthon not only directs our attention to our relationship with others, but also directs our attention to more personal matters. Whatever else might be said about Luther and Melancthon, one can safely say that both were scholars. Scholarship is not a dirty word. But when does scholarship become part of our daily schedules? If you are like me, you can find a thousand things to do for home and congregation which seem to be more important than theological, church historical, dogmatic, or exegetical study. I am a relative newcomer to the parish ministry, and already it is obvious that meetings, counseling, visits, and follow-ups can fill up the calendar. I have to ask myself, "What happens when that becomes a habit?" I know the answer. I can spend a lot of time on creative stewardship and evangelism programs but if I neglect to pause over God's Word, chew on the original, and digest the meaning for myself and my members; if I neglect the review of history which puts modern problems into their proper perspective; and if I neglect the systematic gathering of passages under a specific "locus" as an arsenal against the devil's specific cunning - then all the creative programs in the world won't mean a thing; then Bible Class material will be thin and sermons will be boring and repetitious; then the people who have come to be spiritually nourished will either walk away in search of spiritual food elsewhere, subsist on spiritual milk, or continue to be satisfied with their own lunch (their "opinio legis"). Luther and Melancthon teach us to study. It may take an hour in the morning. It may take a half an hour each night. It may take an afternoon out of the week. But it will most certainly take an effort to pound down the sinful nature that makes me think I can exist without persistent study.

When talking about study, the relationship between Luther and Melancthon also has something to say about our synodical school system. Both men were professors, trainers of the future generation of God's heralds. As we look back today, we thank God for giving to His church men like Luther and Melancthon. We thank God that Luther's historical-grammatical approach to exegesis still thrives in Mequon. We thank God that Melancthon's interest in the humanities as a basis for Biblical studies still thrives in Saginaw, Prairie du Chien, New Ulm, and Watertown.

When we think of the close relationship Luther and Melancthon shared and the way they complimented each other, we also pause to thank God for the closeness we share in the ministry. I mentioned synodical schools. That's where it starts. That's where we learn not to take ourselves too seriously. That's where we learn to appreciate the God-given talents and abilities which others possess. That's where we learn to mold our feeble gifts with the considerable gifts of others that God's gospel may go forward from our synod to the glory of His reputation.

Here at conference is where that closeness continues. We are from different towns, different backgrounds. We have different likes and dislikes. We have different talents. We have unique and challenging ministries. But we all share one Savior God whose boundless love has purchased for us an eternity of joy. That same Savior God has also given us the privilege to herald the living, life-giving light of His faithful love. May the study of the relationship between Luther and Melancthon spur us on toward greater love for God's words

and for one another; and may that study keep us humble as we serve our Lord together so that one day, as we stand together in heaven, we will acknowledge our presence there as a vivid demonstration of God's undeserved love. All praise, honor, and glory belong to Him alone!

Endnotes

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