

5-1-1947

The Melanchthonian Blight

Richard Craemerer

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Craemerer, Richard (1947) "The Melanchthonian Blight," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 18, Article 28.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol18/iss1/28>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

Concordia *Theological Monthly*

Vol. XVIII

MAY, 1947

No. 5

The Melanchthonian Blight

By **RICHARD R. CAEMMERER**

Luther's Reformation was a movement of truly spiritual vitality. He restored to light some of the most powerful impulses of the Christian religion — salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, the royal priesthood of all believers, the divinity of the Christian calling. Somewhere around 1525, however, this vitality seems to wane. The German princes begin to dominate in the Lutheran movement, and they retain most of the pagan characteristics of their contemporaries. Theologians expend their best efforts in many decades of acrimonious controversy. The German people lag behind their neighbors in cultural and political progress, almost succumb to the ravages of the Thirty Years' War, in subsequent centuries embark on intellectual and political programs which have little relation to the heart of Luther, and in our time undergo a collapse against which the nominal Lutheranism of their nation offered little resistance.

This waning of the Lutheran spirit is one of the classical historical puzzles. A number of answers are before us. One is that the true Luther is the young Luther. Somewhere in the 1520's he sells out to the politicians and repudiates the vigorous personal and congregational piety of his early program for compromise with secular power. That answer is wrong. Luther's vigor of spiritual outlook and practical ethics is unabated to the very moment of his death.

Another answer to the riddle is that the doctrine of justification by grace is otherworldly and non-ethical and hence makes no contribution to man's life in society. That is

a misunderstanding of the central doctrine, not only of Lutheranism, but of Christianity. The doctrine of justification was basic in the Apostolic Age for a vigorous ethic, and it was so for Luther.

This paper sketches another answer to the riddle, namely, the Melanchthonian Blight. This study does not wish to make a scapegoat out of one man, and it does not mean to imply that only Melanchthon was guilty. Melanchthon, however, is a useful case study for the mind of the sixteenth century and its abridgment of the essential vitality of Luther's thought. While other men, in his time and thereafter, contributed to the weakening of that vitality, Melanchthon rightly stands at their head. A review of this fact will serve to correct some of the aspersions upon Luther which have disfigured both European and American thinking in recent years;¹ and it will emphasize the effort being made to segregate the Melanchthonian component in early Lutheranism and its by-products.²

I. THE HUMANIST AND HIS CAREER

Judged by the surface, Melanchthon does not seem to diverge appreciably from Luther. Luther himself dearly loved Philip, said that *Loci* were the best book written since the Sacred Scriptures,³ appreciated his services particularly in public negotiations, and admired his powers of expression.⁴ In later years Melanchthon quite obviously went a new way in synergistic teachings on the doctrine of conversion and in the doctrine of the real presence in Holy Communion. The average student of Melanchthon may not be aware, however, that the aberrations of the Variata were not isolated weaknesses or peculiarities in his thinking, but that they are

¹ Cf. the theological movement of the *Junge Deutschen* and their effort to capture Luther for the Nazi ideology; e. g., Arno Deutelmoser, *Luther-Staat und Glaube*, Jena, 1937; the frequent attacks of Dean Inge upon Luther as the source of Nazi thinking; W. M. McGovern, *From Luther to Hitler*.

² E. g., Franz Hildebrandt, *Melanchthon, Alien or Ally?* Cambridge, 1946, an effort to account for compromising tendencies in Lutheran political thought.

³ WA, TI, v, 5511.

⁴ Luther remarked that he himself was concerned chiefly with his own affairs, but that Philip could undertake the *grandia reipublicae et religionis*. WA, i, 80. Cannily Luther contrasted the great men of his time and their capacities for substantial thought, *res*, and expression, *verba*: *Res et verba, Philippus; verba sine re, Erasmus; res sine verbis, Lutherus; nec res nec verba, Carolostadius*. iii, 3619. On his entire relation to Melanchthon cf. Hildebrandt, *op. cit.*, p. xx.

symptoms of a more general and quite consistent theological point of view.⁵ That point of view is significant in the appraisal not merely of Melanchthon's best-known dogmatical weaknesses. But it enabled him to entertain concepts which contrasted with Luther's, even though both employed the same words; and it established a pattern for the theology of Luther's successors. This point of view was that the supernatural ingredient in the Christian religion was information of divine content and origin, but that the mind apprehending it was not substantially changed by it, and hence the life actuated by that mind was substantially the same as that of natural man. These concepts varied from point to point in Melanchthon's career, but remained definitive in the heritage which he bequeathed to his successors.⁶ The reason for Melanchthon's point of view is that he was initially an exponent of the movement of German Humanism, that he only temporarily and slightly modified his Humanistic outlook, and that he utilized his Humanistic bent to the fullest in his chief task, namely, that of organizing the polity and education of the Lutheran Church of Germany.⁷

Melanchthon was born 1497 in western Germany. He was the grandnephew of Germany's leading Humanist, Georg Reuchlin. He took the degree of bachelor of arts at Heidelberg in 1511 after three years' study. Beginning in 1512, he studied at Tuebingen, where the astrologer Stoeffler exerted enduring influence upon him. Here was the seat of one of the most advanced groups of German Humanists. Their movement is not to be associated with the modern flavor of the word

⁵ Cf. F. E. Mayer, "Ist die Variata synergistisch und majoristisch?" *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, VI (1935), pp. 254-267, for a carefully documented discussion which relates Melanchthon's position to his total background and point of view.

⁶ The most detailed study on the development of Melanchthon's theology is that of Hans Engelland, *Melanchthon, Glauben und Handeln*, Munich, 1931; his reviews analyze Melanchthon before 1522, 1522-1531, and after 1532. The contrasts with Luther are traced in stimulating fashion by R. Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, IV, 1 and 2, Erlangen, 1920.

⁷ The biographer Georg Ellinger, *Philipp Melanchthon*, Berlin, 1902, in temperate fashion highlights the Humanistic background particularly in the educational activity and intention of Melanchthon. The fullest review of his educational theory and career is by Karl Hartfelder, *Philipp Melanchthon*, in v. vii, of *Monumenta Germaniae Paedagogica*, Berlin, 1889. F. Paulsen, *Geschichte des gelehrten Unterrichts*, Leipzig, 1896, 2 ed., v. 1, offers a complete account of the movement of German Humanism and Melanchthon's place in it.

or the ideal of the Renaissance 'that man's self-expression was the highest good. German Humanism was rather a movement in the schools, a revolt against Scholasticism and its method of education. It despised the barbarous Latin of the Scholastic epitomes and commentaries, and urged the reading of the Latin and Greek classic originals. The motive was not so much the desire to restore or to discover new thought; it assumed that the body of knowledge, in philosophy and theology and law and science, was complete. But Humanism sought to emphasize the expression of thought in correct and graceful style. Melanchthon became a leader in the movement. In 1516 he produced an edition of Terence. He wrote the preface to the *Epistolae Clarorum Virorum*, a collection of testimonials gathered by Reuchlin in his controversy with the Dominican inquisitors of Cologne on the freedom of Hebrew studies. When this controversy embroiled the whole galaxy of Humanists and Crotus and Hutten issued the *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum*, lampooning Scholastic ignorance and crudity, Melanchthon was mentioned as one of the Humanistic lights. In 1518 he projected a major Humanistic undertaking, an edition of Aristotle. His list of prospective collaborators was a roll call of Humanism's elite — Reuchlin, Pirckheimer, Simler, Capito, Oekolampadius, Stadianus.

This project fell through, in part because Melanchthon accepted a post at the University of Wittenberg. Reuchlin had recommended him to the Elector, Frederick the Wise, together with a new Hebraist, Boeschenstein. The Elector had founded the university to foster the supply of teachers, lawyers, and clergy for his little territory. Like other princes, Frederick enjoyed the blandishments of the Humanists and fostered their movement in his faculty. In his inaugural speech in 1518 Melanchthon emphasized the importance of reading Aristotle and the Bible in the original languages; "only so Christ can be learned."⁸

The most potent individual in Wittenberg, however, was not a Humanist at all. It was Martin Luther, who was now just entering upon the high tide of religious study and teaching which initiated the revolt from Rome. He was interested in the languages, but only for the sake of their

⁸ CR (*Corpus Reformatorum*, ed. Bretschneider u. Bindseil, Halle, 1834 f.), xi, 15—25, *De corrigendis adolescentium studiis*.

service in unfolding the meaning of the Word, only as a humble means to a high end.⁹ Luther welcomed Melanchthon as a co-worker in his movement, swept him along with the force of his personality, and induced him to study theology. Melanchthon acquiesced and issued an edition of *The Clouds* of Aristophanes to betoken his revolt against philosophy. In 1521 he issued his *Loci communes*. At Tuebingen he had broken with the Scholastic method of logical expression and had espoused the system invented by Rudolph Agricola of collecting materials on a given subject around its commonplaces, or chief topics. This method he now applied to the materials of the new Lutheran theology.¹⁰ At the university he now taught not only Greek, but also theology. He expressed his disdain for philosophy as a source of theology and ethics.¹¹ Though he faced a number of preoccupations for his theological pursuits in this decade, he remained under the influence of Luther and did yeoman service in preparing the great Confessions of the Augustana and the Apology, 1530 and 1531.

The preoccupations, however, were very real. Already in 1522 Melanchthon expressed his sorrow over the decay of classical studies in Germany. By 1525 he was again utilizing Aristotelian concepts. In 1527 he issued an edition of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The Apology pays tribute to Aristotle's ample discussion of civil righteousness.¹² The edition of 1533 of the *Loci* omitted the disparaging remarks concerning philosophy.

Melanchthon's subsequent career brought his Humanism again to full flower. He regarded Greek as the finest language,

⁹ On Luther's relation to Humanism, cf. Paulsen, *op. cit.*, p. 109 ff.; Otto Scheel, *Martin Luther*, 3 ed. Tuebingen, 1921, v.1, pp.16-241.

¹⁰ Cf. Paul Joachimsen, *Loci communes, Eine Untersuchung zur Geistesgeschichte des Humanismus und der Reformation. Lutherjahr-buch*, 1926. — The first edition has been edited and translated by Charles Leander Hill, Boston, 1944, with an introductory survey.

¹¹ CR, xi, 36, 1520, *De studio doctrinae Paulinae*; xxi, 100, *Loci*, ed. 1521. Cf. Herrlinger, *Die Theologie Melanchthons*, Gotha, 1879, p. 222 ff.

¹² *Concordia Triglotta*, St. Louis, 1921, pp.122, 126. It is true that in this discussion Melanchthon points out the valuelessness of human works toward justification. It is not his place to sketch the motives for inherent righteousness of the Christian. In view of his meager account of the evangelical dynamic for action compared with the civil, however, his tribute is significant.

because it was the most beautiful.¹³ He retained his friendship with the great Humanists of the time, notably Erasmus, Pirckhaimer, Turmair, and Johannes Sturm. He developed his principle of *eloquentia*, the Humanistic ideal of clear understanding and perfect expression, developed by expanding the vocabulary.¹⁴

Melanchthon's reversion to Humanism had a cause. It was occasioned by the need for a strong educational program to buttress the new evangelical movement. That need had become clear through the Peasants' War and the enthusiast excesses. Luther and the court of Electoral Saxony turned to Melanchthon to undertake the task.

Part of this task was administrative. It forced Melanchthon to deal with princes, councils, clerics, and jurists. He had to develop a practical ethics that would outline the authority and the program of the government in community and parish. He furnished the pace-setting articles for the Saxon Visitation; he or Bugenhagen provided similar instruments for the initiation of the Reformation in most of the evangelical territories and cities.

Most of the task, however, was educational. At Wittenberg, Melanchthon conducted a Latin school preparatory to university studies. He systematized the Latin school as the fundamental unit in the educational program and gave it the three-form constitution which ultimately developed into the six-form *gymnasium*. His Greek grammar and his editions of the classic philosophers and dramatists were the chief textbooks in the reorganized schools and universities for fifty years. His graduates at Wittenberg went out into most of Germany to establish the Humanist curriculum as the core training of jurists and clergy. He influenced the organization of the universities of Tuebingen, Heidelberg, Jena, Leipzig, Rostock, and others. The pattern was that of a small and compact institution, with less than twenty professors for about

¹³ He regarded the spiritual plight of the Jews to be due to the fact that they had an unregenerate heart and did not know Latin and Greek. Hartfelder, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

¹⁴ *Ea demum est solida eruditio de rebus moribusque recte iudicare posse; deinde quae animo comprehenderit, perspicue et commode explicare atque eloqui. Rerum cognitio ad iudicandum et ad parandam prudentiam est necessaria. Magna inprimis optimorum verborum copia requiritur ad dicendum.* CR, xvi, 627, from the introduction to Cicero, *De officiis*, 1525; other editions, attached to various writings, 1526, 1530, 1532, 1537, 1539, etc.

four hundred students. The prince was the patron of the entire institution, fostering its support and looking to its graduates to implement his aims for the territory. The faculty was one of the prince's chief claims to prestige, and the Humanistic jurists and theologians accepted every challenge to defend that prestige against all comers. When Thuringia was split from Electoral Saxony, Johann Friedrich founded Jena and tried to get Melanchthon to come with him; much of the rancor of the contemporary doctrinal controversies stemmed from his refusal.

Melanchthon put the Humanist emphasis into the training of the clergy. Beginning with 1533, the theological faculty of Wittenberg examined the candidates for the ministry and made final decisions on all cases of doctrinal dispute in the territory; this procedure was imitated by the other territories. The complete course of studies for the ministry included Latin, dialectic and rhetoric, poetics, Cicero, Quintilian, mathematics, physics, leading to the bachelor's degree; then Greek, Aristotle's *Physics*, ethics, mathematics, astrology, completing the master's degree; thereupon, the theological studies, which included Old and New Testament exegesis, the Nicene Creed, Augustine's *De spiritu et littera*, Melanchthon's *Loci*. Church history was merged with the courses in secular history, and ethics with the study of philosophy.¹⁵

Melanchthon's industry and influence inserted intellectualistic trends into the thinking of his contemporaries and successors which are worth the examining.

II. THE EMPHASIS ON INTELLECT IN RELIGION

In his early period, Melanchthon seems to approximate Luther's vivid insight into the total change which the redemption of Jesus Christ and the presence of Jesus Christ makes possible in the child of God.¹⁶ Basic to this insight was the recognition that sinful man is completely incapable of knowing God and doing His will, and the trust that through Jesus Christ God accounts men righteous and initiates the inherent righteousness which will be perfect in heaven.¹⁷

¹⁵ Hartfelder, *op. cit.*, p. 419 ff.

¹⁶ Cf. Seeberg, *op. cit.*, p. 424, n. 2.

¹⁷ The first edition of the *Loci* repudiated any idea of man's free will in spiritual matters, indeed in any respect whatsoever, and denied any capacity to natural man for knowing any spiritual fact about God. Engelland, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-13.

In the course of time, however, Melanchthon gave way to an underlying bent to exalt the intellectual functions of the natural human mind. His Humanistic heritage and his educational preoccupation combined to produce the un-Lutheran but potent oversimplification of Christian knowledge as information, apprehended by a mind which is to all intents and purposes identical with the natural mind. The image of God in man before the Fall consisted primarily in a mental matter, the knowledge of God and His Law; since the Fall this knowledge has been dimmed, but man still is aware of God's judgment against sin and His wrath for sin.¹⁸ Man — man in general, natural man — has one great desire in knowledge, namely, certainty. The sources of this certainty are: the universal experience of mankind, the understanding of fundamental principles, and the process of syllogistic reasoning. The "principles" are insights and modes of thoughts which have been implanted by God like seed into the mind. The Christian religion co-ordinates another source of certainty for the mind, namely, divine revelation in the Word of God.¹⁹ This knowledge and certainty of God through the Gospel is not of a type different from the others, but of a higher quality. The Holy Spirit helps with it, for man cannot know this fact of the Gospel except by revelation. The Gospel gives the information that God is gracious, that He forgives sins, and that He does it for the specific individual. The natural knowledge of God knows that God is gracious only to the just; hence the importance, for certainty, of the Gospel.²⁰

What is the nature of this certainty? Does it betoken a total change in the heart, or is it a simple addition to information in the mind? Melanchthon says that the Gospel actually conquers the "heart." But the "heart," on closer examination,

¹⁸ CR, xxi, 801, *Loci*, 1543: *Imago Dei erat in mente, illa firma notitia de Deo et agnitio Legis et in voluntati conversio ad Deum . . . etsi autem post lapsum voluntas aversa est, et in mente notitia obscurior facta est, tamen manet notitia, ut extet aeternum et immutabile iudicium Dei contra peccatum, testificans Deum irasci peccato.* Similarly xii, 723, *Chronicon Carionis*, 1558.

¹⁹ CR, xiii, *De anima*, 1540, is the most remarkable compend of Melanchthon's psychology. P. 150: *Sunt igitur normae certitudinis iuxta philosophiam tres: experientia universalis, noticiae principiorum, et intellectus ordinis in syllogismo . . . noticiae nobiscum nascentia, quae sunt semina singularum artium divinitus insita nobis.* 151: *In ecclesia habemus et quartam normam certitudinis, patefactionem divinam. . . .*

²⁰ Cf. Engelland, *op. cit.*, p. 225 ff. Useful summaries are the *Loci* of 1533, CR, xxi, 291; *Enarratio in Ev. Joh.*, 1546, xv, 246.

appears to be little more than the mind directed to action, the mind free from doubt.²¹

Melanchthon describes the process of conversion in terms which revolve largely in the domain of simple information. Natural man cannot keep the Law since his heart does not have the impulse for it. Hence he must hear the revealed Law. That has the power through the Spirit to awaken the conscience to terror. The revealed Law accomplishes that because it revives the statutes of the will of God and informs man regarding the penalties of sin. Conscience is natural reason, a judgment approving actions in accord with revealed or natural Law or condemning the opposite. The terrified conscience tells man that he has no recourse and that God must do everything. Now he listens to the Gospel. This tells him that God imputes righteousness to him for Christ's sake. Now the judgment of conscience is stilled.²² Melanchthon would stoutly reject the insinuation that his theology was natural, for he derived it from a supernatural revelation; but he was too wrapped up in his own educational method to observe that he asked his Christian to be content with a rational apprehending and application of information.²³

The mental character of the faith which is at the heart of Melanchthon's system becomes apparent from the rational proofs which he develops for its trustworthiness. He expands upon the doctrine of the miracles as testimonies to the cer-

²¹ CR, xxiv, 903 f., *Postilla*, 1544: *Doctrina non subit animos, nisi simul filio Dei movente corda Spiritu sancto; qui et consolatur nos, quod simus in gratia Dei propter Christum, et flectit corda ad invocationem et obedientiam. . . . Hoc magnum beneficium Dei vera intentione animi, et seria pietate cogitandum est; et sciendum, quod tantum illi coetus sit ecclesia Dei, in quo coetu hoc beneficium petitur et magnifit. . . . Nonne tu saepius sic cogitas? O Domine Deus, da mihi sanitatem, da cetera bona corporalia, quam ut serio petam Spiritum sanctum.*—In the *Enarratio Symboli Niceni*, 1548, xxiii, 279—282, Melanchthon contrasts the error of the enthusiasts, that the Spirit works faith in men *pure passive*, with the alternative which to him is correct, that He does it through the mind.

²² For summaries of Melanchthon's doctrine cf. Seeberg, *op. cit.*, p. 466; Engelland, *op. cit.*, pp. 246—311.

²³ Engelland, *op. cit.*, p. 503, speaks of Melanchthon's doctrine of the conscience as safeguarding supernatural ingredients in the process of conversion; but actually that doctrine is likewise mental. Friedrich Huebner, *Naturliche Theologie und theokratische Schwärmerei bei Melanchthon*, Guetersloh, 1936, seeks to prove that Melanchthon sought to maintain an ecclesiastically validated doctrine as a motive replacing intrinsic Gospel. This was one form which Melanchthon's search for *certitudo* assumed.

tainty of revelation and equates the yielding of the mind to the rational evidence of the miracles with the operation of the Holy Spirit turning the heart to faith.²⁴ He lists also other proofs for the trustworthiness of the revelation of the Gospel: Its antiquity, the purity of its truth commending itself to the natural Law, the remarkable preservation of the Church, the constancy of its confessors, the consolation or happiness of believers, and the punishment of the enemies of the Gospel.²⁵

Melanchthon said that the actual readiness to believe comes only through the Holy Ghost; He must work a praying and assenting quality of faith. However, intrinsically this faith always seems to mean simply the recognition and confidence that God himself says what is believed.²⁶ By contrast the Savior and the Apostles set faith before us as the hold of a whole person, changed into a totally new being through the work of the Spirit, on the redemption of Christ and the love of God; and Luther taught this faith as an exercise of every faculty of newborn man, wholly bent on not merely recognizing, but putting God to the test and experiencing His goodness.²⁷

III. THE NATURAL LAW

In his early period Melanchthon had denied man any capacity for truly knowing God. As Melanchthon embarked upon his educational program, however, and as he again occupied himself more strenuously with classical literature,

²⁴ CR, xiii, 151, *De anima*, 1540: *Pars tamen aliqua generis humani adsentitur, testimoniis miraculorum mota, in qua voce Evangelii Spiritus sanctus hanc lucem accendit, et flectit mentem ad adsentiendum, et mens obtemperat Spiritui sancto, amplectitur vocem Evangelii, et repugnat dubitationi.* Cf. also other citations in Engelland, *op. cit.*, p. 197 ff., who terms this a concept contrary to the Reformation.

²⁵ Cf. the entire list in the letter on Peter Palladius, 1557, CR, ix, 79 ff. The excellence of proof in the miracles he states to be this, that the miracles of the heathen cannot compete in supernaturalness with those of the Scriptures.

²⁶ Peter Peterson, *Geschichte der arist. Philosophie in prot. Deutschland*, Leipzig, 1921, suggests that the shortcomings of Melanchthon's concept of faith lay in the assumption that *intellectus* and *voluntas* have the same substance. Pp. 96, 97. He quotes from the *De anima*, CR, xiii, 171, the statement that the revelation of the Gospel removes doubts in that Jesus Christ shows us a Father whose wrath is appeased.

²⁷ Cf. John 3, 5, 6; Eph. 2; Rom. 3, 5. On Luther cf. Seeberg, *op. cit.*, p. 231, and quotations; e. g., EA, 18, 7 ff.: "Auf eine Kundschaft und Erfahrung unsers Herzens kommt es an. Darum fuehlen wir es nicht, so lasset uns Busse tun, denn Christus ist nicht unser. Die Sicherheit, die jetzt in der Welt ist, ist viel schaedlicher denn alle Ketzereien." On Luther's attitude to miracles, Seeberg, *op. cit.*, p. 161, quoting EA, xiii, 167; WA, xliii, 141.

he began to list rational proofs for the existence of God. At first he did so with the point of view that these proofs were simply an encouragement for the Christian who already knew God; but in the course of time he came to regard them as powerful also for those who do not have the Word. He believed that vestiges and seeds of the knowledge of God are scattered throughout mankind. The proofs of God available to natural man are: Excellencies of the human mind which could reasonably stem only from God; the ability to distinguish between good and evil men; the recognition that God exists; the terrors of conscience; the tendency to organize a politically governed society; the need of a first cause; teleology in nature; portents and astrological signs of future events.²⁸

For Melanchthon the real source of an insight into God without revelation in the Word is the natural Law. Through the natural Law man recognizes that there is a God, understands some of His attributes, and knows even that there is an eternal life. His knowledge is weakened by sin, and hence his will does not always follow it; but the basic knowledge of God's will remains. The Decalog is nothing new, but simply a proclamation of God refreshing the natural knowledge and condemning sin.²⁹

As we have seen, Melanchthon succeeded in sketching a doctrine of justification in which the natural Law made no contribution, and he thus safeguarded the centrality of revelation in the Atonement. It is in the domain of ethics, however, that Melanchthon surrenders unduly to the natural Law. True, he uses language, upon occasion, for the linkage of faith and works which is apt and familiar. The believing man does good works not only outwardly, but because he loves God. They are a necessary part of his character, because God wants him to do them — if he does not do them, his faith is dead. Good works prove the dignity of the Christian's calling. They bring a reward, not earned by the works themselves, but one which is held up by Scripture as a stimulus.³⁰

²⁸ Engelland, *op. cit.*, p. 208 ff., traces the process, beginning with the *Commentary on Romans* of 1532 and in the *Locci* of 1535 and 1543; CR, xxi.

²⁹ Engelland, *op. cit.*, pp. 219—222; Seeberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 438—440. Cf. the extract from the *De anima* above, n. 19.

³⁰ Seeberg, *op. cit.*, p. 472 ff., gives a useful summary.

Yet Melanchthon's basic thinking on the new life is in such contrast to Luther's that many of his expressions become ambiguous. With Luther the doctrine basic to the new life is the concept of regeneration. The man who is justified by faith is not only forensically approved in God's sight, but Christ works a totally new life, concurrently with the faith. For Melanchthon this link is characteristically limited to an operation in the mind. The man whose conscience has been relieved from the threat of punishment through faith in the forgiveness wrought by Christ now tells himself that he must not sin again, since this will make conscience feel bad again. Whereas in the earlier period Melanchthon describes the impulse for good works as the bent of the renovated man, he came to assign a more and more mental sphere to the Gospel as the propulsion for good works, and thus a more and more negative value — a deterrent rather than a dynamic.³¹

For Melanchthon the doctrine of regeneration has scope chiefly for the consolation of conscience.³² For the impulses driving the Christian to active participation in life, in the activities of the Second Table, Melanchthon comes forward with his doctrine of civil righteousness. That area of man's psychology which is involved in the natural Law also operates in the ethical life of the Christian, reinforced by a new deposit of revealed information, but in essence involving the same drives.³³ Basic to this concept is Melanchthon's idea of the will. He recognizes that the will is simply preponderant urge, or drive surmounting every other within man at a given moment. But the motive for this urge or drive, he assumes to be intellectual information; if the individual recognizes a thing to be good, he then wills to do it.³⁴ Melanchthon

³¹ Cf. the *Loci* of 1535, CR, xxi, 458 ff., on the "freedoms" of the Christian man — freedom from the Law as a way of salvation, although he must do good works; confidence that the Spirit stands by to help; freedom from Old Testament ceremonial; freedom from churchly ordinances, although the minister must be obeyed. On the contrasts between the earlier and later positions cf. Engelland, *op. cit.*, pp. 60 ff., 163 ff., 433 ff.

³² Cf. extracts listed by Engelland, *op. cit.*, pp. 320—325. Engelland himself unconsciously falls into a Melanchthonian mold as he terms the bearing of the new life in the Christian as "*rein religioes*" — by inference relegating the tangible aspects of behavior to a non-religious sphere. Cf. also Herrlinger, *op. cit.*, p. 233 ff.

³³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 234 ff.

³⁴ *De anima*, CR, xiii, 153: *Voluntas est potentia, adpetens suprema, et libere agens monstrato obiecto ab intellectu. . . . Vult autem bona, quae aut sunt aut videntur talia. Fugit mala, quae aut sunt aut videntur talia.* Cf. also n. 26 above.

indeed used phrases about the grace of God or the indwelling God as motives for good works. But they are coupled with the intellectualist point of view; and they seem to apply to much less than the total of Christian living.³⁵ He has almost nothing to say about Christian love as the total motive for the Christian life.³⁶ Conversely, the command of God as a dynamic for good works, supplemented by the promise of reward, is developed abundantly.³⁷ Melanchthon is highly aware of the tension between flesh and spirit in the life of the regenerate Christian. He does not develop his treatment of this doctrine, however, in the direction of describing the increasing productivity of the Christian in fruits of the Spirit, but concentrates on the function of the Law for accusing the flesh of sin and producing contrition, which drives to the Gospel and makes dependent on Christ.³⁸ For the drives positively actuating the Christian man to conduct in the practical spheres of living, Melanchthon leaves him to the sanctions of the natural and revealed Law. He thus severs an immediate and personal domain of life from the religious dynamic of the Atonement.³⁹

IV. PRACTICAL ETHICS

The heart of Luther's practical ethics is the doctrine of Christian love, which operates in the service which the Chris-

³⁵ *Apology, Triglot*, p.128: *falsum est et hoc contumeliosum in Christum, quod non peccent homines facientes praecepta Dei sine gratia*. In Art. III, where the bearing of grace on behavior should become clear, Melanchthon shifts consideration from the "outward works of the Law" to a consideration of "the affections of the heart towards God, which are commanded in the First Table" and which "cannot be rendered without the Holy Ghost." His statement is correct; but he refrains from pointing out that the Holy Ghost actuates Christian life in every sphere, p.157 ff. Cf. *Commentar. in ep. Pauli ad Cor.* 1551, CR, xv, 1216: *cum voces Evangelii accepta per filium reconciliamur aeterno patri, simul ab aeterno patre et filio effunditur in corda nostra Spiritus sanctus, et vere habitat in nobis divinitas, liberat nos ex doloribus inferorum, et vivificat nos, incoat novam lucem et sapientiam et motus cum Deo congruentes. . . . Spiritu sancto accedente corda, beneficia mediatoris agnoscuntur, et vera fiducia misericordiae propter mediatorem promissae vivificamur.*

³⁶ Herrlinger, *op. cit.*, p. 239 ff., describes Melanchthon's treatment of love as the reflection in the Christian man of the principle of justice — a result rather than a motive. Ellinger, *op. cit.*, p. 476 ff., describes it as a philosophical concept of virtue rather than the religious dynamic. Melanchthon's word for love is *dilectio*, not *caritas*.

³⁷ Cf. Engelland, *op. cit.*, p. 435 ff.

³⁸ Cf. Engelland, *op. cit.*, p. 448 ff.

³⁹ CR, xvi, 419, *comm. in al. politicos libr. Arist.*, 1530: *Quod evangelium ad cordis iustitiam pertinet, non pertinet ad civilem statum; imo approbat omnes formas rerum publicarum, modo sint consentaneae rationi.* Cf. Hildebrandt, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

tian renders in his calling.⁴⁰ Melanchthon abridges this concept and establishes a dynamic for practical living which is not the atonement of Christ, but the sanctions of Law. This he did in part as a Humanist scholar; he wanted to safeguard a sphere for the morality of the classics. But he did it also as an administrator of the Church and of education. He emphasized the teaching of the doctrine of justification by faith and thus was the instrument for the saving of souls. But in his administrative and educational program he made the works which the Christian does in the civil sphere to be works done under the impulse of civil righteousness. True, we find Melanchthon employing language which seems adequate. He says that the man enlightened by the Spirit does good works which are not words or shadows, but all of his deeds of morality, politics, and ceremonial are actions of the Spirit himself.⁴¹ But the process is one of setting up codes of conduct, to which man must be held by discipline; practically speaking, all men in the community must come under that discipline.⁴²

Hence Melanchthon describes the works of the Christian in family and society as pleasing to God and according to His

⁴⁰ Cf. EA, ix, 290: "Darum soll ein jeder Mensch in seinem Beruf Gott dienen und ihm danken, dass er ihn in seinem Stande auch zu seinem Werkzeuge brauche." Cf. also *On the Freedom of the Christian Man*. The best summary of the contrast is Paul Joachimsen, *Sozialethik des Luthertums*, Munich, 1927.

⁴¹ *Loci*, 1543, xxi, 931: *Cum igitur haec lux in mente Davidis accensa est omnes eius bonae actiones interiores et exteriores, morales, politicae et ceremoniae sunt actiones Spiritus sancti, non sunt literae aut umbrae. . . . Evangelium est ministerium spiritus. . . . Cum mentes perterrefactae audiunt vocem Evangelii et credunt propter Mediatorum vere remitti peccata, concipitur Spiritus sanctus, et nova lux et vita in cordibus accenditur.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 933: *Omnes homines non renatos aut imbecilles coercendos et ad virtutem assuefaciendos esse disciplina iuxta legem Dei, quae ad nos pertinet. . . . prima (caussa) est, quia necesse sit Deo praecipienti disciplinam obedire. Secunda est, ut vitemus poenas, quia Deus violationem disciplinae horribiliter punit, ut omnes mundi calamitates ostendunt. Tertia est, quia reliquis hominibus opus est tranquillitate; non enim tantum nobis vivere nos putemus. Quarta est gravissima, quod videlicet Lex est paedagogus in Christum. Est autem paedagogi officium, non solum coercere, sed etiam docere. . . . de ira Dei, de bonis operibus, assuefaciat nos ad bonos mores, ad studium cognoscendae doctrinae de Deo. . . . 1007: *Evangelium non praecipit, ut nostrae politicae regantur legibus forensibus Moysi, nec novam aliquam corporalem politiam constituit, sed iubet nos praesentibus magistratibus ac legibus obtemperare, quae tamen non pugnant cum legibus naturae, et praecipit, ut praesentes politias tueri et ornare studeamus.**

will, but the motivation thereto is the lawfulness itself.⁴³ His theory of society is founded on natural Law and natural philosophy. As he sees Christians participate in good deeds in society, he measures the worth of their actions, but presumes that that worth is at the same time the motive for the deed.⁴⁴

Implemented by Melanchthon's own specifications for church order and articles of visitation, the German princes became the chief custodians of the Church. They held before themselves the salutary purposes of their government and accepted the assignment of administering the affairs of the Church in their territories even to the point of punishing heresy with the arm of the law.⁴⁵ However, in their functions as princes they were content to be animated by legal sanctions

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 487: *Est igitur ut dixi politicus ordo res bona, pulchra, grata humano generi, singulare Dei opus, quod videlicet homines coniuncti legibus in societate civili vivunt, quod multitudo regitur a Magistratibus, qui sunt custodes disciplinae, exercent iudicia, curant de Deo recte doceri cives, prohibent Epicureos furores et idola, perituria, libidines, iniurias corporum, denique qui curant, ut civitas sit modestissima schola, in qua luceat Dei notitia et exercentur virtutis officia, communis defensio et aliorum beneficiorum communicatio. 1004: Et concessum est Christianis facere oeconomica et politica opera, et necesse est eos iuxta vocationem in illis officiis servire civili vitae. Et cum pii praestant ea officia, ut Deo obediant, placent illa Deo et sunt cultus Dei et complectuntur multas magnas virtutes. Recte igitur et pie facit Christianus, cum iuxta vocationem gerit magistratus, exercet iudicia, militat, accusat nocentem in foro, dicit causam, legitimo supplicio afficit iuste condemnatos. Hae intelligere magistratus et iudices, qui Deum non contemnunt, necesse est.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1005: *Deus condidit genus humanum ad societatem et huius societatis vincula esse voluit generationem, educationem, gubernationem, contractus, artes. . . . Colligata est ergo hominum natura aeternis vinculis. Sed ad quem finem praecipuum? Ad hunc: ut ad generationem et educationem opus est societate, ita coetu opus est ad docendum. Vult Deus agnoscere et celebrari, ut igitur alii alios de Deo et de aliis rebus bonis doceant, conditi sunt homines ad societatem, cuius vincula sunt Magistratus, Leges, Politica officia. . . . 1006: Causa mandans obedientiam in munere politico est Deus. Hic fit mentio causae efficientis. Causa finalis, ut luceat confessio in societate. . . . Causae finales posteriores, ut serviatur proximo, Item, ut defendatur possessio doctrinae coelestis. . . . Harum causarum et effectuum cogitatio ornat vitam politicam et pios consolatur in hac magnitudine laborum et accendit timorem Dei et fidem in mentibus. . . . 1009: Evangelii doctrina adeo severe praecipit de obedientia, ut affirmet peccatum mortale esse, non obedire mandatis legitimi magistratus, si tamen non iubeant facere contra mandata Dei.*

⁴⁵ Cf. Hildebrandt, *op. cit.*, p. 81 ff. Melanchthon approved the execution of Servetus, CR, ix, 133, letter de *Thammero*, 1557. He argued that the State was not influencing faith, but simply the profession of dogma when it curbed heresy; and that was as much under the control of the State as any other external. xii, 697, *Disputationes (de haereticis puniendis per Magistratum)*.

and consciousness of rule rather than by a living Christian ethic.⁴⁶

A weakening of the fundamentally spiritual concept of the Christian calling is apparent in Melanchthon's construction of the nature and function of the Christian ministry. He believed that philosophy was important not merely for the arrangement and teaching of theological ideas, but for the completing of the actual content of theology.⁴⁷ Hence Melanchthon aimed at a ministry equipped with the full panoply of philosophical education and supremely conscious Humanistically of professional excellence.⁴⁸ Hence ministers trained in the Melanchthonian mode became a learned and proud caste, and their theology became a proving ground for dialectic competence.⁴⁹ Melanchthon himself bewailed the *rabies theologorum* under which he had to suffer in his later years; even the opponents of Philippism had learned Philip's pride and technique of controversy. Melanchthon described the ministry as a *honesta aristocratia*.⁵⁰ He made the ministry a body beyond criticism except for grave crimes, provided that it properly taught the Gospel.⁵¹ He wrote obedience to the clergy into the Christian's creed. This was due, in part, to the fact that in Melanchthon's program the minister had to undertake functions which had been a part of episcopal administration and hence had to exercise sanctions and authority.⁵²

⁴⁶ A close survey of the evangelical princes reveals a pitiful ineptitude in employing the vitality of a regenerate Christian character to the responsibilities of their calling; cf. Richard R. Caemmerer, *The Education of Representative German Princes in the Sixteenth Century*. unpubl. dissertation, Washington University, St. Louis, 1944, pp. 94—105; 260—263.

⁴⁷ Cf. CR, xi, 281, *Decl. de philosophia*, 1536: *non tantum propter methodum . . . opus est philosophia, sed etiam multa assumenda sunt theologo ex physicis*. Cf. Seeberg, *op. cit.*, p. 435.

⁴⁸ Paulsen, *op. cit.*, pp. 437, 444, discusses Melanchthon's position that rhetorical and dialectic training was necessary for training men in religious knowledge, quoting the *Elementa rhetorices*, 1521, CR, xiii.

⁴⁹ Hans Sachs, in *Vier Dialoge*, v. 22, Lit. Ver. Stuttg., Tuebingen, 1894, writes bitterly of the disservice done the cause of the Reformation by the contentiousness of the Lutheran pastors.

⁵⁰ E. g., CR, xii, 367, *de ecclesia Christi*, 1560.

⁵¹ CR, xxi, 842, *Loci*, 1543: *sciant, se poenas duros esse deo omnes, qui ministris recte docentibus, si sit mediocritas aliqua in moribus, molesti sunt*. In grave contrast stands the attitude of Luther that the minister does not stand in a higher rank or station than the people at all, but only in a different service and office, WA, xi, 271, and that actually the minister is subordinate to the judgment of the hearer. WA, xi, 410. Cf. Seeberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 271, 294, 452 ff.

⁵² Cf. CR, xxiv, 402, *Postil* of 1544: *Quae sunt signa, seu Notae Ecclesiae? Signa, ex quibus agnoscitur Ecclesia, sunt: Professio verae*

CONCLUSION

The Melanchthon blight is insidious. For it operates with terms and definitions that convey, in part, insights and principles essential to the Gospel; and it is natural to the thinking of men who are in the profession of applying mental processes to the materials of religion.

One antidote is the constant striving to make clear, to oneself and to others, that religious knowledge is more than information, that it is the gift of the grace of God in Christ Jesus by which the Christian becomes aware of God in a fashion different from, and beyond, the scope of natural thinking (1 Cor. 1 and 2; Col. 1); to realize that the Christian faith is not merely assent to facts about Christ and His redemption, but that it is the using of Christ and His redemption with a thirst of the soul and the recognition that only so are we made truly alive (John 5 and 6); to realize that the new life is not simply conformity to code, but the change of the old man to be a totally new person, and one in whom Christ literally dwells (John 15; Rom. 6). Luther:

Look, when the old light, the old reason, the old conceit has died and darkened and turned into a new light, then the whole life and all powers of the man have to follow it and change. For where reason goes, there the will must follow; and where the will goes, there love and desire go along. Hence the whole man must creep into the Gospel, there become new, slough off the old skin like the snake, when its skin gets old. . . . Hence the man must creep into the Gospel and the Word of God, and trustfully follow its say; thus he pulls off the old skin, leaves his light, his conceit, his will, his love, his impulse, his speech, his doing, and becomes another new person, who sees all things otherwise than before, judges differently, conceives differently, wills differently, speaks differently, loves differently, has different impulses, works and lives otherwise than before.⁵³ — By faith we acquire a new and

doctrinae; et usus legitimus sacramentorum; et obedientia erga ministerium. . . . Quando vis iudicare de te et aliis: an sis membrum Ecclesiae, an sis Christianus, cogita de his signis. Esne Christianus? Sum. Quomodo hoc ostendis? Quaero iam de signis. Quia credo Symbolum, et utor Sacramentis, sum baptizatus, et obedio ministerio. CR, xvi, 124, Philosophiae Moralis Epitomes, 1538 (et al.—1546): Omnes enim debemus obedire ministerio verbi, sic magistratus in republica minister et executor est Ecclesiae. Debet enim et ipse obedire ministerio verbi, et id venerari tanquam divinum, iuxta illud: aperite portas principes vestras. Cf. Seeberg, op. cit., pp. 455, 460.

⁵³ Luther, sermon on John 1:1-14, *Epistelpostille*, EA, 10, 207; tr. by author. St. L. XI:194.

clean heart, and God will and does account us entirely righteous and holy for the sake of Christ, our Mediator. And although sin in the flesh has not yet been altogether removed or become dead, yet He will not punish or remember it. And such faith, renewal, and forgiveness of sins is followed by good works. And what there is still sinful or imperfect also in them, shall not be accounted as sin or defect, even for Christ's sake; but the entire man, both as to his person and his works, is to be called and to be righteous and holy from pure grace and mercy, shed upon us and spread over us in Christ.⁵⁴

Another antidote is to realize the evangelical character of the ministry. That means emphasizing the sense of purpose and the will to serve people. It means drawing upon the impulses of the new man in Christ for the functions of the ministry. It means employing a technique of ministry which recognizes the handicaps and the essential paganism in marshaling people to a conformity to code, and instead endeavors to bring the propulsion of the new life through Jesus Christ to bear on men through Gospel and Sacrament.

St. Louis, Mo.

Conference Paper on Romans 4:5

By H. J. BOUMAN

A very personal reason prompts the selection of my topic. In my senior year at the Seminary, I had not yet really learned what Christianity really is. To be sure, I was not a scoffer. Far from it. I yearned for the honor of being a Christian, *but I did not dare*. The sainted Dr. Bente had succeeded in crushing all my pride in human wisdom. In his lectures on the philosophical systems, ancient, medieval, and modern, he had shown us that human reason the moment it tried to explain transcendental problems disregards its own rules of logic in its deductive and inductive reasonings. And the reason for this phenomenon is not so much its inability to explain matters beyond its sphere, but its bias, its being prejudiced by sin, by its innate enmity against God. Thus all the thinking of natural man regarding sin, death, future life, God, etc., is characterized by utter failure. I had lost all pride of, and confidence in, the power of human wisdom.

⁵⁴ Luther, *Smalcald Articles, Triglott*, p. 499.