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"Melanchthon, Christ's Witness" (Editorial Comment)

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"Melanchthon, Christ's Witness"

This was the theme of a chapel address with which Prof. Henry W. Reimann introduced the observance at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, on April 19—21, of the quadricentennial of Melanchthon's death. This issue presents three short papers read at this occasion; others are scheduled for later issues. The papers were not written for publication and are presented substantially as read, along with such documentation as had been added to the papers. Some of the leading thoughts of Professor Reimann's address may fittingly introduce this little symposium.

Philip Melanchthon was Christ's witness in doctrine and in life. Even those Lutherans who find in Melanchthon tendencies toward sacramentarianism, synergism, unionism, or intellectualism also find in him a notable witness of Jesus Christ. . . . But Melanchthon's was pre-eminently a theological witness, and that means a very rational, scholarly witness. At the same time his was a Biblical witness. He wanted only to lead more deeply and more truly into the written Word of God, fully cognizant of the fact that only Christ and His Spirit opened "men's understanding that they might understand the Scriptures." The Holy Scriptures, not reason, even Christian reason, were the ultimate test of God's doctrine in the church. . . . This witness was to the glory, benefits, and consolations of Christ. "The one Christ, true God and true man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried" must not be buried again by scholastic views of merit. . . . Moreover, his was also a catholic witness. Far from pitting Scripture against tradition, Melanchthon set Scripture and the Church Catholic against the false traditions that had corrupted the church. No matter what one

holds about Luther's catholicity, Melanchthon's catholicity cannot be expunged from the Lutheran Confessions. . . . And of course his is an ecumenical witness. In fact, he might be given the honorable title "Father of Ecumenicity." Throughout his life Philip Melanchthon wanted to be a witness who promotes church harmony without sacrificing doctrine, who promotes the quest for theological precision without sacrificing the certainty of faith, who promotes some sort of synthesis between Christ and culture without denying the uniqueness of the Gospel. . . . Finally, Melanchthon's was also a pious, pastoral witness. To know Christ is to know His consoling benefits. Therefore Melanchthon was more willing to adore than to investigate the mysteries of the divinity. The theological topics of the *Loci communes* were the pastoral topics of sin and grace, Law and Gospel. Christ truly rose from the dead to reign, but He has to be used as Mediator. No one can love God unless remission of sins is apprehended through faith which justifies, quickens, and liberates through the Word. . . . Certainly Melanchthon's witness had flaws, perhaps we must say errors. No one was more conscious of his fallibility than Philip himself. But he was still Christ's witness, a special witness without whom the Reformation would not have been the same. . . . Ultimately our question is not: Was Melanchthon a faithful witness? but the question: Am I, Lord? We have received the same powerful Gospel. We live under the same crucified and risen Lord. We have the same command: Be My witnesses. The Son of God, risen to reign, sends us out too. Melanchthon's witness helps us in that task. Luther once wrote Spalatin: "I do not laud Philip, for he is a creature of God. I revere in him the work of my God." So do we.