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MELANCHTHON'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE WILL
IN THE LOCI COMMUNES

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is a commonplace among many Lutheran theologians that Philip Melanchthon was a synergist. The purpose of this study is to evaluate this theological judgment on the basis of Melanchthon's Loci of 1521, 1535, 1543, 1555, and 1559. The conclusion of this study is that Melanchthon's writings do not support the charge of synergism which has been directed against him. It is not the intention of the author to ascribe malevolence or lack of scholarly integrity to those who have described Melanchthon's position as synergistic. There are reasons for the historical judgment that Melanchthon was "the father of synergism in the Lutheran Church."¹ One is the ambiguity in Melanchthon's theological formulations. C. P. Krauth writes:

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.²

A second reason is that some of his students and other theologians utilized these ambiguities to teach doctrines at

¹Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 4 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 3:22.

²Charles P. Krauth, The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1899), p. 291.

variance with the theology of the Lutheran church and there has been a tendency to identify Melanchthon with those who have appealed to him. Thirdly, Melanchthon has often been not read in the context of his own work. Theological distinctions not common to his time have anachronously been applied to his theological statements and as a consequence, some of Melanchthon's terminology has been misinterpreted. Fourthly, although it was always Melanchthon's intention to be faithful to God's Word and Luther's teaching, Master Philip and Doctor Luther were by personality and profession quite different. Dr. Erwin Leuker expressed this difference in this simple way, "Luther, the miner's son, dug the rich ore of the reformation. Melanchthon, the smith's son, forged it into form."³

Luther appreciated the difference and did not criticize Melanchthon's theological writings, although he recognized Melanchthon's irenic spirit and innate desire to achieve theological consensus. Melanchthon's timidity and accomodation to theological and political pressures have provided yet another reason why later theologians have viewed his teaching with suspicion. Our evaluation of Melanchthon's theological integrity will be based on the internal evidence of his own writings. This is the assumption with which this study begins.

In arguing for a revision of the verdict on Melanchthon's alleged synergism, the following method will be used. An introduction to Melanchthon as theologian, humanist, and educator will be utilized to establish the pragmatic and pedagogical predilection

³Erwin L. Lueker, "Luther and Melanchthon," Concordia Theological Monthly 31 (August 1960):477.

of his theological work. Melanchthon's purpose in his Loci was to formulate a Christian dogmatics undergirding the validity of evangelical teaching on the basis of Scripture and the teachings of the orthodox church fathers.⁴ Melanchthon's theological approach had the practical concern of increasing Christian piety and formulating statements of pure doctrine for Christian instruction. It is significant in this respect that Melanchthon introduced the concept of the third use of the law in his 1535 Loci in order that the evangelical doctrine of forensic justification might not be understood as an excuse for license and impiety, a frequent Roman and enthusiast accusation. Melanchthon's formulations regarding the will in his later Loci share this same concern, that the "pure passive" of justification not be interpreted to indicate that the regenerate Christian was excused from willing those things pleasing to God. The main body of the thesis will consist of a study of Melanchthon's concept of the human will, beginning with the 1521 edition of his Loci, and continuing through the revisions of 1535, 1543 (second edition), 1555 (German, third edition) and the last revision of 1559 (Latin, third edition).

Having analyzed Melanchthon's theology in the Loci regarding free will, a summary study of the Formula of Concord, Article II will be offered. This is done for two reasons: first, to view in perspective how Melanchthon's Loci concerning free will has been misinterpreted by fellow Lutherans following Luther's death

⁴The definitive study in this area is Peter Fraenkel, Testimonia Patrum (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1961), passim.

in 1546 and secondly, to evaluate whether it was Melanchthon's teaching which was denied in the Formula of Concord, or rather, aberrations of his theology taught by others. Finally, conclusions will be offered. Franz Pieper, who described Melanchthon as the "Father of synergism in the Lutheran church," also wrote that ". . . Melanchthon never really believed his synergistic theory."⁵ It is the purpose of this paper to investigate what in fact Melanchthon did teach concerning human will and its powers.

A definition of terms is necessary, in order that the reader may have a common understanding with the author regarding what is meant by justification, sanctification, conversion and synergism. Dr. Pieper's Christian Dogmatics will be utilized to provide these definitions because this work is a classic reprinting of orthodox Lutheran theology and because it has achieved a position of theological authority, especially among theologians of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.

Definitions

For a complete definition of justification the reader is referred to Pieper's description of "The Terminology Employed in Presenting the Doctrine of Justification."⁶ In summary, Pieper writes that God justifies, "by grace, through faith, for the sake of Christ," in a forensic sense, by which is meant, "the person who is in himself unrighteous is declared righteous."⁷ All works

⁵Pieper, 1:30.

⁶Ibid., 2:522-41.

⁷Ibid., 2:524.

are excluded. When God justifies a person, he justifies that person completely. "There are no degrees of justification. Justification is not a gradual process."⁸ The effect of justification is the total forgiveness of sin.

Justification takes place outside man. God declares a man righteous who is in himself not righteous. . . . The whole function of faith in justification consists in apprehending a righteousness which lies outside man, namely the righteousness which is provided by Christ's vicarious satisfaction and proclaimed and offered in the gospel.⁹

Sanctification in its wide sense,

comprises all that the Holy Ghost does in separating man from sin and making him again God's own that he may live for God and serve him. It concludes with the bestowal of faith, justification, sanctification as the inner transformation of man, perseverance in faith, and the complete renewal on Judgment Day.¹⁰

Ordinarily, however sanctification is used in the narrow sense by which is meant,

the sanctification which follows upon justification. . . . In sanctification God changes the unrighteous into a righteous man. He works in man, to use the dogmatical terms, a iustitia inhaerens, habitualis, vitae, operum distinct from the iustitia imputata given in justification.¹¹

Pieper emphasizes that justification (iustitia imputata) and sanctification in the narrow sense (iustitia inhaerens) are indissolubly connected and are separated only for purposes of teaching: "however, last things must not be put first. Sanctification must not be placed before justification. Sanctification is the consequens, never the antecedens of justification."¹²

⁸Ibid., 2:535.

⁹Ibid., 3:6.

¹⁰Ibid., 3:3.

¹¹Ibid., 3:6.

¹²Ibid., 3:12.

Regarding conversion, Pieper distinguishes among semi-pelagianism ("man beginning and God completing the work of conversion"), synergism ("God beginning and man completing the work of conversion"), and divine monergism ("God alone effecting conversion").¹³

Synergism teaches that man's conversion and salvation depend on his "right conduct," "self assertion," "lesser guilt in comparison with others," etc. -- that is the same as Armenian "co-operation" -- and thus blocks the entrance of saving faith into the heart.¹⁴

God alone effects conversion ("divine monergism").

The sinner's return to God . . . is effected in the moment when, turning away in despair from his own mortality or his own righteousness, he accepts the grace of God offered to him in the Gospel, or believes the Gospel.¹⁵

However, the word "conversion" is also used in a wide sense, "when it includes the God-fearing life, the believer's obedience to the law (which) is the effect of his conversion to the Gospel."¹⁶ Conversion in the narrow sense as the moment of the sinner's return to God is distinguished from conversion in the wide sense as "the God fearing life" using the terms conversio prima and conversio secunda. "In the first conversion the kindling of faith, man remains 'mere passive' while in the second conversion the new man co-operates unto good works with the Holy Ghost."¹⁷ The term conversio continuata is also used to distinguish the conversion of repentance that continues throughout the life of the believer from the initial conversion by which a man becomes a Christian.

¹³Ibid., 2:456.

¹⁴Ibid., 1:30.

¹⁵Ibid., 2:454.

¹⁶Ibid., 2:455.

¹⁷Ibid. 2:467.

When the Savior found that his disciples, who were already converted, were giving way to carnal pride, he admonished them, "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3) The wicked flesh still adheres to God's children . . . and so they daily need to turn with a contrite heart from unbelief and its evil fruits to the free grace of God for the remission of their sins and the renewal of their lives. The conversio continuata is the same as "daily repentance," the same as the continuata regeneratio, resuscitatio, illuminatio.¹⁸

The reader is asked to keep these definitions and distinctions in mind as Melanchthon is read, especially in the later 1555 and 1559 Loci. It will be on the basis of these definitions that judgment will be rendered as to whether Melanchthon on free will takes a position that is synergistic.

Melanchthon: Pedagogue, Humanist, Theologian

A brief explanation is in order for this excursus on Melanchthon as pedagogue, humanist, and theologian. The following discussion serves four purposes necessary to a fuller appreciation of Melanchthon's work and provides a background to the interpretation of his Loci. First, this discussion is a brief attempt to distinguish the role of Melanchthon from that of Luther in the early life of the evangelical church. Secondly, it is an introduction to the philosophic orientation of Philip Melanchthon. One of Melanchthon's important contributions to the church of the Augsburg Confession was enabling philosophy to be used as a tool in the task of doing evangelical theology, freeing philosophy from its synthetic and speculative role in the schoolmen so that it might have a legitimate function and purpose in the explication of Christian doctrine

¹⁸Ibid.

based on the Scriptures alone as norm. Thirdly, understanding Melanchthon requires an appreciation of his humanist background. Sharing the humanist cry ad fontes Melanchthon contributed philological skills to the interpretation of Scripture as well as a humanist concern for pure doctrine and Christian piety. Finally, this brief excursus serves as an introduction to Melanchthon's theological methodology in the Loci Communes. Through this epitomizing form of theological definition, Melanchthon accomplished his goal of providing a dogmatic text book for the instruction of the evangelical clergy.

Melanchthon was recognized as "one of the most promising humanistic scholars of the day."¹⁹ He has been described as "par excellence the evangelical, Lutheran humanist" and it has been said that "his reputation was universal, equal to, if not greater than, that of Erasmus."²⁰ His humanist orientation began with his education at Heidelberg University where he received his Bachelor of arts at age 14 after only two years of study.²¹ He received his Master of Arts degree at Tuebingen where he became acquainted with Aristotle, William of Ockham, Johann Wessel, Virgil, Cicero, Terence, Lily and even the Bible.²²

¹⁹Clyde L. Manschreck, Melanchthon on Christian Doctrine: Loci Communes 1555 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. viii.

²⁰Carl S. Meyer, "Melanchthon as Educator and Humanist," Concordia Theological Monthly 31 (September 1960):533.

²¹Robert Stupperich, Melanchthon, trans. by Robert Fischer (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965), p. 29.

²²Robert Stupperich, "The Development of Melanchthon's Theological-Philosophical World View," Lutheran World 7 (September 1960):170.

Like the Florentine Platonists, Philip believed that medieval scholasticism had not only perverted the gospel but had also warped the thought of ancient Greece and Rome. His task was to cleanse Aristotle from the many "absurd opinions" of the medieval Aristotelians and to grant this cleansed Aristotelianism its proper place in the training of the young.²³

Reuchlin, Melanchthon's great uncle, recommended him to the Elector for the chair of Greek at Wittenberg. The young pedagogue thus came to Wittenberg, "not with the purpose of collaborating with (Luther) qua reformer. He came as a professor of Greek."²⁴ In his inaugural speech, De corrigendis adolescentiae studiis, Melanchthon stressed a firm foundation in Latin, Greek and Hebrew so that students might be enabled to return to the ancient sources (ad fontes).²⁵ He announced lectures on Homer and the Letter to Titus. His latter lecture series was most successful and less than four months after arriving at Wittenberg, Luther wrote to Reuchlin, "A wonderful man, in whom everything is well nigh supernatural, -- my most cherished and intimate friend. . . ."²⁶ Recognizing Melanchthon's potential Luther encouraged him to give up his work on a magnum opus of Aristotle and to devote his teaching to theology.²⁷

²³Jaroslav Pelikan, From Luther to Kierkegaard: A Study in the History of Theology (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), p. 29.

²⁴Quirinus Breen, "The Two-Fold Truth Theory in Melanchthon," Review of Religion 9 (January 1945):116.

²⁵Michael Rogness, Philip Melanchthon: Reformer Without Honor (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House), p. 7.

²⁶Theodore E. Schmauk and C. Theodore Benze, The Confessional Principle and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church as Embodying the Evangelical Confession of the Christian Church (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911), p. 612.

²⁷Pelikan, p. 28.

Melanchthon's desire to return to the sources was compatible with Luther's stress on the primacy of Scripture as the only theological norm. His expertise in Hebrew and Greek facilitated his desire to obtain a better understanding of the Sacred Scriptures.

By taking up the ideas which prevailed in the world of Wittenberg, Melanchthon deepened his own perspectives and began to build up a system in which the idea of natural science began to give way to that of biblical revelation. The way lead from Aristotle to the Apostle Paul and finally to a philosophia Paulina.²⁸

The fruit of this new attachment to biblical theology was the publishing in 1521 of the first edition of the Loci. Highly praised by Luther, the Loci of 1521 was the first protestant dogmatic textbook and had the intended purpose of organizing Luther's thought for the education of the clergy.²⁹

Melanchthon's interest in philosophy was pedagogic and pragmatic, not speculative or synthetic. Philosophy was helpful in ordering thought and activity among men, but it could not relate men to God, although God's revealed truths might be defined in philosophical terminology.

Melanchthon purified his teachings from the speculative elements of the school men. He depreciates the undue ascendancy of Aristotle instead of Christ in his own day, as he does the undue influence of platonism in the ancient church.³⁰

In his aversion to speculative philosophy, Melanchthon came to view

²⁸Stupperich, "Development," p. 170.

²⁹Richard R. Cammerer, "The Melanchthonian Blight," Concordia Theological Monthly 18 (May 1947):327.

³⁰Schmauk and Benze, p. 619.

Augustine as the great reformer of the ancient church, purging the church of the platonism which crept into it via Origen, and Luther as the great reformer of the sixteenth century church, purging the church of the aristotelianism which crept into it via scholasticism.³¹

Peter Petersen in his Geschichte der Aristotelischen Philosophie im Protestantischen Deutschland terms Melanchthon a philosophic "eclectic." By this Petersen does not mean that Melanchthon is not basically aristotelian. Petersen affirms that for Melanchthon, aristotelianism was the clearest philosophy, especially in its gift of dialectic, and Melanchthon appreciated Aristotle for his practical uses. But Melanchthon was selective in his use of Aristotle.³² Quirinus Breen questions whether Melanchthon truly understood Aristotle.

It is true that he so favored Aristotle because he considered him the ace of dialecticians and a rhetorician, in fact, something of a "ciceronian." Had he not so looked on him I doubt if he would have defended him.³³

That Melanchthon considered himself indebted to Aristotle is not in doubt. His works are replete with Aristotelian terminology.

Phrases like causa finalis, causa proxima, causa instrumentalis occur more and more frequently (in his Loci). . . . In response to objections or apparent contradictions, the author often has recourse to the distinction between form and matter or substance

³¹ Fraenkel, pp. 52-109.

³² Peter Petersen, Geschichte der Aristotelischen Philosophie im Protestantischen Deutschland (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1921), p. 101.

³³ Quirinus Breen, "The Terms 'Loci Communes' and 'Loci' in Melanchthon," Church History 16 (December 1947):205.

and accident without bothering to mention that these concepts are borrowed from Aristotelian philosophy.³⁴

Melanchthon's definitions of substance and accident are of importance for later Lutheranism. Victorinus Strigel used a part of Melanchthon's definition in maintaining his synergistic opinion and Martin Chemnitz quotes Melanchthon's definitions of substance and accident (written in the Egotemata Dialectices) in his argument against the position of Flacius.³⁵

The terminology of Aristotle used freely by Melanchthon reflects his concern with theological methodology. According to Melanchthon's thought, there are three norms for wisdom: universal experience, knowledge of the inborn principles, and a conclusion based in ordered thought. But above these three norms, Melanchthon has a fourth normative principle, the divine revelation in the prophetic and apostolic books which is guaranteed through clear and unerring witness. It was because of Luther's strict adherence to this fourth norm of wisdom that Melanchthon always held Luther in the highest esteem and identified Luther's teaching with that of the apostles and the true church, seeing Luther in the line of reformers, doing for the church of his time what Augustine had done for the early church. Melanchthon identifies "Gottes Wort und Luther's Lehrer."³⁶ In his writing "On Luther and the Paris Theologians" Melanchthon maintains:

³⁴Pelikan, p. 59.

³⁵FC, SD, II, 52-62, The Book of Concord, trans. and ed. by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), pp. 517-19.

³⁶Heinrich Bornkamm, "Melanchthons Menschenbild," Philip

We call the church that which has been founded by the Word of God, which is nourished, fostered, and ruled by the Word and in short, that which compares all things according to the Gospel and judges all things according to the Gospel. . . . And besides, since the church has been born of the same divine Word, there's no doubt that she must be nourished by the same.³⁷

Melanchthon maintained that it was the scholastics of the Sorbonne and not Luther who had perverted the gospel. "Luther sings his own song, that is, he proves his doctrine to the whole Christian world by the supports of the Scriptures."³⁸ Philosophy is helpful in the process of clear thinking and definition, but the church lives under the unerring witness of the Scriptures. This remained Melanchthon's position in his later Loci as well. "Ipsium verbum Dei est iudex et accedit confessio verae ecclesiae."³⁹

Melanchthon's theological method has the practical concern, how best to articulate the truths of the Christian gospel in formulations which will further Christian instruction and piety. The method he used was the loci form of definition by which a proposition is affirmed or denied on the basis of ordered thought and demonstration from external evidence. His work in this area has been called by Heppe, "die Krone aller protestantischer Systeme des 16.

Melanchthon: Forschungsbeitraege zur vierhundertsten Wiederkehr seines Todestages dargeboten in Wittenberg 1960, ed. Walter Elliger (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), p. 77.

³⁷ Philip Melanchthon, Melanchthon: Selected Writings, trans. by Charles Leander Hill, ed. by E. E. Flack and L. J. Satre (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962), p. 81.

³⁸ Bornkamm, p. 86.

³⁹ Cited in Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "Melanchthon the Confessor," Concordia Theological Monthly 31 (September 1960): 543.

Jahrhunderts."⁴⁰ Melanchthon characterized himself as, "Sammler and Ordner von Erkenntnissen, die andere, besonders Luther, gewonnen haben."⁴¹ Schmauk says of Melanchthon, he was "not a mere stylist but a born dialectician. His definition of logic as 'the art of divining, dividing, and arguing,' reveals his mind and method in theology."⁴² In his theological work he was guided by the same principles as in his philosophical work: logic and explication. In theology truth is not an entity to be sought, but a given, found through revelation of God in the Scripture. Dr. Robert Preus praises Melanchthon's method and system.

(Melanchthon had) an intense desire for system and order, not system in the sense of an alien synthesis being imposed on revealed doctrine, but order and method for instructive purposes. This theological method is unique. In philosophy there is method, demonstrated in nature, proceeding from basic principles; in theology the only method called for is an adequate arrangement of revealed doctrine. In philosophy certainty comes by way of experience and demonstration. Again, theology differs; God's revelation offers us certainly a revelation which is true and self authenticating. Melanchthon actually identifies such method with exposition, interpretation. And this method of collecting in an orderly way the main points or topics (praecipui loci) so that doctrine may be expressed in summary form (in summa) is nothing new.⁴³

Theology by epitomy and definition suited Melanchthon's concerns as a pedagogue and avoided the speculative conclusions of scholastic theology. Master Philip considered his Loci to be nothing other than an orderly exposition of the revealed truths of

⁴⁰ Realencyklopaedie fuer Protestantische Theologie und Kirche, ed. Albert Hauck (Leipzig: J. C. Hindrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1903), s.v. "Melanchthon," by Landerer and Herrlinger, vol. 12, p. 534.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Schmauk and Benze, p. 618.

⁴³ Robert D. Preus, "Melanchthon the Theologian," Concordia Theological Monthly 31 (August 1960):469-70.

Scripture. He did not intend to construct a large theological and philosophical system, but subordinated philosophy as a speculative science to philosophy as oration. Philosophy and theological methodology became consequently a hermeneutical tool to be used in the exposition and proclamation of the gospel. By definition, summary, and dialectic Melanchthon desired to epitomize the teaching of the church in a form amenable to the process of education.

As a teacher of logic and in theology, except for discussion, Melanchthon was not germinal, but reflexive and practical, without an inner and constant principle of organic unfolding. He was progressive in the apprehension of philological, historical, and logical investigation.⁴⁴

Melanchthon was a teacher. His contribution to the evangelical church rested not in the nature of his theological insights, but in his thoughtful explication of Luther's teaching. "Seine wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten sind in dem Inhalt nach nicht immer neu, originell und tief, aber zweckmaessig, verstaendig, klar, nicht selten sinnig und fein."⁴⁵

Accordingly, Melanchthon was deeply concerned with the articulation of evangelical doctrine.

The young church continually looked to him for formulations and definitions, and he was, in Luther's own opinion, the man superbly fitted for the task. If he laid heavy emphasis on doctrine, it was in response to the immediate needs of the church.⁴⁶

Doctrinal awareness was very much a part of the theological climate at Wittenberg. If the reformation did not concern pure doctrina,

⁴⁴Schmauk and Benze, pp. 620-21.

⁴⁵Realencyklopaedie, 12:533.

⁴⁶Rogness, p. 161.

what excuse was there for the evangelical party? But pure doctrina was not an end in itself. It was necessary for the assurance of the gospel, the beneficia Christi and the remissio peccatorum.

The marks which attest the existence of the "true visible church," and at the same time assure to faith the presence of "a church of the regenerate" within the former, are therefore the true evangelical doctrine and the proper administration of the sacraments. . . ."⁴⁷

Melanchthon's Loci consequently have the practical and pedagogical purpose of explicating the evangelical doctrine of the beneficia Christi. True knowledge of Christ is not knowledge with which to debate "(Christ's) natures and the modes of his incarnation," that is, theology used speculatively. True knowledge of Christ means "to know his benefits," "what Christ has done for you."⁴⁸

This study now relates itself specifically to Melanchthon's understanding of the human will and its powers, having an acquaintance with his philosophical presuppositions and methodology, his concern for pure doctrine and Christian piety, and his commitment to evangelical doctrine as taught by Martin Luther on the basis of Sacred Scripture.

⁴⁷Reinhold Seeberg, Text-Book of the History of Doctrines, 2 vols., trans. by Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1952), 2:355.

⁴⁸Philip Melanchthon, Loci Communes 1521, trans. L. J. Satre, pp. 21-22.

CHAPTER II

THE LOCUS ON FREE WILL: EARLY EDITIONS

Melanchthon was appointed to the University of Wittenberg as an instructor in Greek and in classical literature. Influenced by Luther and responding to the needs of the evangelical church, Melanchthon's work between 1520 and 1535 centered largely in an exposition of evangelical doctrine, leaving little time for philosophical studies. In the three decades following 1530 Melanchthon became convinced of a legitimate ministerial function for philosophy in explicating evangelical doctrine. This included also an emphasis on the practical explication and use of aristotelian philosophy. This simplified, selective use of Aristotle is well evidenced in such writings as the Epitome Philosophiae Moralis, De Anima, and De Dialectica. The Liber De Anima, published in 1553, has been described as "a reconstruction of aristotelian philosophy from a theological point of view."¹ In De Anima Melanchthon articulates his dependence on Aristotle for the psychological categories of the intellect, the will, the affections, the heart, and the freedom of the will. Quirinius Breen complains that, "To Melanchthon,

¹ Philip Melanchthon, Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl (Studienausgabe) (hereafter cited as St.A.), 7 vols., ed. Robert Stupperich (Guetersloh: Mohn & Co., 1953), 3:305.

philosophy was a kind of automaton in the service of theology."² This servant role of philosophical distinctions is evident in De Anima. The chapter entitled De Voluntate³ is based on an interpretation of Aristotle's understanding of the will in the Nicomachean Ethics, Book III. However, when Melanchthon proceeds to a discussion of De Libero Arbitrio⁴ the citations are almost all from the Old and New Testaments. Melanchthon's interest in philosophy is subordinate to his concern for piety and evangelical doctrine. As one traces the doctrine of the will through the expanding editions of the Loci, although the later editions clearly reflect an evolution in clarifying the theology of the evangelical church according to the framework provided by aristotelian philosophy, Melanchthon's intention remains the same, to put in useful, dogmatic form the scriptural doctrine of the evangelical church.

From the 1521 "Loci"

The first comprehensive statement of the evangelical church on the subject of free will is found in Melanchthon's 1521 edition of his Loci.⁵ There are two parts to man, the cognitive faculty by which one discerns through the senses, understands, thinks, compares and deduces, and the voluntary faculty which is called the

²Quirinus Breen, "The Two-Fold Truth Theory in Melanchthon," Review of Religion 9 (January 1945):132.

³St. A., 3:343.

⁴St. A., 3:349.

⁵Philip Melanchthon, "The Power of Man, Especially Free Will," Loci Communes Theologici in Melanchthon and Bucer, trans. Lowell J. Satre, ed. William Pauck (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), pp. 22-30. Citations and translations will be from the Satre edition.

will (voluntas) or the affections (affectus) by which one either turns away from or pursues the things known. "Knowledge serves the will (voluntas) and thus one calls the will (voluntas) joined with the knowledge or with the understanding of the intellect by a new name, "free will" (arbitrium).⁶ Melanchthon identifies "reason" with "free will." Ethically, Melanchthon says that the knowledge of what must be done, the law, appertains to the cognitive faculty. Virtue and sin belong to the affective faculty. "Freedom is the ability to act or not to act, the ability to act in this way or in another."⁷ But since all things happen through necessity, according to divine predestination, the human will (voluntas) has no liberty. Consequently there is no free will (arbitrium). According to human reason there is free will in external things. "But Scripture tells nothing of that kind of freedom since God looks not at external works but at the inner disposition of the heart."⁸ Internal affections are not under human power for by experience people discover that the will (voluntas) cannot in itself control love, hate or similar affections, but affection is able to be overcome only by more powerful affections. Since the will is itself the source of affections, Melanchthon opposes the scholastic teaching that the will (voluntas) "by its very nature opposes the affections, or that it is able to lay an affection aside whenever the intellect so advises or warns."⁹

⁶Ibid., pp. 23-24.

⁷Ibid., p. 24.

⁸Ibid., p. 27.

⁹Ibid.

Although one affection can overcome another affection, Melanchthon denies, "that there is any power in man which can seriously oppose the affections."¹⁰ Since God requires purity of heart (in biblical language) and will (in philosophical language) whatever freedom man may have in external acts is of no importance, for he cannot control the internal affections. Therefore Melanchthon summarizes his teaching as follows:

If you relate human will (voluntas) to predestination, there is freedom neither in external nor internal acts, but all things take place according to divine determination.

If you relate the will (voluntas) to external acts, according to natural judgment there seems to be a certain freedom.

If you relate the will (voluntas) to the affections, there is clearly no freedom, even to natural judgment.

When an affection has begun to rage and seethe, it cannot be kept from breaking forth.¹¹

In evaluating the first locus on free will, the following observations are worthy of note. First, although Melanchthon is cognizant of what previous philosophical and theological writers have written, his understanding of the cognitive and affective nature of man is distinct. Whereas Aquinas affirmed that the intellect moves the will by presenting its object to it, Melanchthon denies the power of the intellect to oppose the affections (will). "Knowledge serves the will. . . ."¹² Consequently there is no free will (arbitrium), because the affections are not free. The will is not free, "since all things happen according to divine predestination."¹³ In order that he might not be misunderstood,

¹⁰Ibid., p. 29.

¹¹Ibid., p. 30.

¹²Ibid., p. 23.

¹³Ibid., p. 24.

Melanchthon avoids the use of works like "reason" and "free will," choosing instead to speak of the "cognitive faculty" and "the faculty subject to the affections." In the following locus on sin, one sees how closely the question of free will and sin are drawn together. Melanchthon describes sin as "a depraved affection, a depraved activity of the heart against the law of God."¹⁴ This depraved affection is the result of an innate force in man toward sinning and there is no will in natural man to oppose this affection.¹⁵ However, "in those who have been justified by the Spirit, good affections struggle with bad. . . ."¹⁶ Melanchthon asks of "hypocritical theologians"

What works of free will (arbitrium) will you preach to us and what power of man? Do you not imagine that you are denying original sin when you teach that a man is able to do something good in his own strength? A bad tree cannot bring forth good fruit can it?¹⁷

At the conclusion of his locus on sin, Melanchthon epitomizes his theology, writing:

16. The reason why the scholastics deny that all works of men are sins is that they fix their eyes only on the external works and on the veiled countenance of Moses. They do not judge the affections. But God judges the heart and the affections.
 17. For the same reason they have inverted free will (arbitrium) for they have seen that in certain spheres of external works there is a kind of freedom. For thus the flesh judges external works. On the contrary, the Spirit teaches that all things come to pass necessarily according to predestination.
 18. Experience teaches that there is no freedom in the affections.¹⁸

¹⁴Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 35. (from the locus on "Sin").

¹⁸Ibid., p. 48. (from the locus on "Sin").

In summary one can say that Melanchthon denies free will because the affections of natural man have been perverted by sin, and the cognitive faculty in man cannot conquer the affective faculty (man's sinful heart). Man cannot will or do what is good. He has no free will. Even in those who have been justified by the Spirit, the good affections must struggle with the bad. This struggle within the regenerate man will receive expanding attention in later editions of the Loci.

From the 1535 "Loci"

Melanchthon describes the psychology of man in his second edition of the Loci similarly to the 1521 edition. There are two parts to man, a power of knowing, including the senses and intellect (vis cognoscendi) and a power of desire including sensual desires and higher desires (vis appetendi). The intellectual power is the higher understanding because it comprehends and distinguishes between truth and falsehood. The desires either follow after or flee from what is offered. The will is only able to command external works and its own sensual desires.¹⁹

Evangelical doctrine destroys free will because it teaches that in man there are horrible corruptions which naturally fight against the law of God, and these corruptions the will is not able to destroy on its own. The will of natural man is not able to

¹⁹ Philip Melanchthon, Corpus Reformatorum (hereafter cited as CR), 28 vols. compiled by Carolus G. Bretschneider, ed. Henry Bindsell (Brunswick and Halis: C. A. Schwetschke and Son, 1842-1858), 21:274-81. Translations in the text are the author's own.

effect or fulfill obedience to the law of God. Without the Holy Spirit, the will is not able to dispel doubts about God or to have true fear of God or to take hold of true faith in the mercy of God. It is not obedient in death or in other afflictions and it does not desire to do the law of God. Scripture teaches everywhere that man's nature is subject to sin and is not able without the Holy Spirit to grasp spiritual things, the fear of God and true faith (fiducia). Neither is the human will without the Holy Spirit able to make the natural man spiritually alive. The natural man without the Holy Spirit cannot please God, cannot have righteousness or eternal life. But Melanchthon does acknowledge that the will has some liberty in the natural man, so that without regeneration he is able to effect the external works of the law. Melanchthon labels as false the scholastic teaching that men are able to satisfy the law of God without the Holy Spirit. He condemns as an error those who do not see an inherent sin in man. In error also are those who say that man is pronounced righteous before God for the sake of his good morals or de congruo or de condigno. In error are those that believe that for their works of mercy they receive the forgiveness of sins. And in error are those who say that man is able without the Holy Spirit to love God above all things and to have true faith in God and similar spiritual motions. To the contention of the scholastics that it would be absurd for God to give a law man could not keep, Melanchthon responds with citations from St. Paul in Romans and Galatians.

It is pertinent at this point to note that it was in the 1535 edition of the Loci that Melanchthon introduced a third use to describe the functions of the law. In the Apology to the Augsburg Confession Melanchthon had maintained the continuing validity of the law for the regenerate man.

Good works should be done because God has commanded them and in order to exercise our faith, to give testimony and to render thanks. For these reasons good works must necessarily be done. They take place in a flesh that is partly unregenerate and hinders what the Holy Spirit motivates, fouling it with its impurity. Because of faith they are nevertheless holy and divine works, sacrifices, and the reign of Christ whereby he shows his rule before the world.²⁰

Throughout the Apology Melanchthon describes the law as having two functions: the creation of civil obedience and the condemnation of sin. In the 1543 Loci he reaffirms a third use of the law.

The third use of the Law is for those who by faith are justified and it teaches them of good works, which are works pleasing to God, and it instructs in certain works in which they are trained in obedience toward God.²¹

Melanchthon explains that although the Christian is freed from the law as it relates to the justification of the sinner, as it relates to obedience, the law remains in force. It is necessary that the justified man is obedient to God, yet this obedience begins from something other than the doing of the law. The intent here is to show that the law, nevertheless, has a continuing validity for the Christian. While good works are the result of the Holy Spirit's work, the law has a continuing validity for the regenerate man

²⁰Ap., IV, 189-90 (Tappert translation).

²¹GR, 21:406 (1543 edition).

because he is not completely obedient, and so falls under the law's accusation.

In his 1555 German edition of the Loci Melanchthon reiterates his position. "The third use of the preaching of the law is concerned with those saints who are now believers who have been born again through God's Word and the Holy Spirit."²² In this edition, however, Melanchthon more strongly emphasizes the pedagogical function of the law.

Although God now dwells in these and gives the light and causes them to be conformed to him, nevertheless, all such happens through God's Word, and the law in this life is necessary, that saints may know and have a testimony of the works that please God.²³

However, the law is still viewed primarily in terms of its accusing power and the necessity of repentance.

Since all men in this mortal life carry in themselves much weakness and sin, daily penance before God ought to increase and we ought ever more to lament our false security and impurity.²⁴

Trusting in the law is still false security because it is the function of the law to punish.

In his final edition of the Loci (1559), Melanchthon maintains his position concerning the third use of the law. He is concerned with answering the question, what is the use of the law for the regenerate? He maintains that he has already demonstrated the extent to which those who have been reborn by faith are freed from the law. "They are indeed free from the law, i.e., from the

²²Loci Communes 1555, p. 127.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

curse and condemnation, from the wrath of God which is set forth in the law."²⁵ Yet the law has a continuing validity,

it shows how one is to give up sin, so that he gains in recognition of sin and in repentance, and at the same time the Gospel of Christ is proclaimed, so that faith grows. Indeed, the law is set down for the reborn, so that it teaches certain works in which God wills us to exercise obedience.²⁶

Even though the Christian is freed from the law, it continues to instruct in obedience, because the Christian remains a sinner,

We are freed from the law, from condemnation, because we are justified by faith for the sake of the Son of God. However, so that the just might attain to obedience, the Law remains, because it commands God's orderly arrangement so that the justified are obedient to God.²⁷

Melanchthon's concern here is the same concern he voiced in the first edition of the Loci, "For in those who have been justified by the Spirit, good affections struggle with bad. . . ." ²⁸ His third use of the law then functions for him as did Luther's simul dichotomy. In his pedagogical approach to all of Christian teaching, it is not surprising that Melanchthon should have developed a third category of the law by which he sought to maintain the continuing validity of the law for the Christian. Christian piety was important to Melanchthon and he feared that "justification, by grace, through faith, for the sake of Christ alone," might be interpreted by some as justification for license and abrogation of the law. Fearing the polarities of legalism and antinomianism, Melanchthon sought to protect the Christian distinction between

²⁵CR, 21:719 (1559 edition).

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Loci Communes Theologici (1521), p. 29.

law and gospel without detracting from the gospel or abrogating the law. It was also important that the evangelical party be understood as insisting that the law always stands over against man, even the Christian man, as accusation, even when instructing in righteousness. This same concern for Christian piety brought about a significant change in the formulation of his locus on free will in the 1543 edition. The regenerate man must choose to do the law of God and this is an act of the will.

From the 1543 "Loci"

Melanchthon uses a different vocabulary in describing the two parts of man in the 1543 locus on Free Will. In man there is reason, that is, a mind which judges, and a will, which is either obedient or fights against that judgment. The will commands the lesser powers of man, the senses, sensual desires or affections. The freedom of the will is conjoined with the power of reason. The law of God requires not only external civil obedience, but perpetual and perfect obedience of the human nature. If natural man were not corrupted by sin, he would have certain and clear knowledge of God. He would have true fear, true faith, and obedience to the law. Now, however, man is oppressed by death, filled with doubt and error and he does not truly fear God.

Melanchthon asks, "By what means is human will able by its own strength, without renewal in some way, to do the external works of the law?" He answers that question saying, "This is free will (voluntas) which the philosophers rightly attribute to man." Because the scriptures teach there is some carnal righteousness,

Melanchthon concedes that human will is able to effect civil righteousness without renewal.²⁹

But in human nature there is a horrible corruption, which fights against the law of God. This corruption the human will is not able to eliminate from its nature. Therefore man is not able to satisfy the law of God. The divine law requires not only external obedience, but internal beauty, fear, faith, highest love of God, then perfect obedience, and it prohibits all corrupt affections. Human will without the Holy Spirit is not able to effect the spiritual affections which God requires, such as true fear of God, true faith in the mercy of God, obedience and tolerance of affliction, love of God and so forth.

The Holy Spirit is efficacious through the Word as St. Paul writes in Romans 8:26: "The Spirit helps us in our infirmity." "The human spirit (anima) is encouraged so that it is enabled to retain the Word. It is not discouraged, because it is taught that the promise is universal and that we ought to believe." Of the above example, Melanchthon writes: "We see conjoined these causes, the Word, the Holy Spirit, and the will, which is certainly not idle, but fights against its infirmities." Citing Basil, "Only will, and God has come beforehand," Melanchthon continues, "God anticipates us; he calls, he moves, he delights, but we shall have seen and shall not have resisted. Sin constantly begins with us and not from the will of God." Chrysostom says, "He draws, but he draws the one who wills." Melanchthon warns his readers, "we

²⁹CR, 21:373-78.

ought not indulge in indifference or natural desires."³⁰

Melanchthon concludes his locus with the understanding that obedience to the law is possible through grace. This interpretation is necessary so that one might understand that the obedience of the pious is distant from the perfection of the law but that people are pleasing to God for the sake of Christ.³¹

Three basic developments can be identified in this edition of the locus on free will. First, Melanchthon uses "mind" and "will" rather than "cognitive faculty" and "voluntary faculty" in describing the two parts of man. Fagerberg suggests that this is the result of aristotelian influence and a desire to adopt a more precise terminology.³² The will and the affections which were identified with one another in the first edition are now separated and the affections subordinated to the will. The will commands "the lesser powers of man, the senses, sensual desires, or affections."³³ Secondly, Melanchthon specifically allows for free will in works of civil righteousness without the addendum in the first edition that ". . . there is freedom in neither external nor internal acts, but all things take place according to divine determination."³⁴ Thirdly, Melanchthon emphasizes the role of the will in the regenerate with a sentence that has been repeated in many

³⁰Ibid., 21:376.

³¹Ibid., 21; 378.

³²Holsten Fagerberg, A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions, trans. by Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), p. 127.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Loci Communes Theologici (1521), p. 30.

textbooks as evidence of his "synergism." "We see conjoined these causes, the Word, the Holy Spirit, and the will, which is not idle, but fights against its infirmities."

The question, of course, is whether Melanchthon is speaking of a participation of the will in the initial conversion of the Christian or whether he is speaking of the function of the will in the regenerate life of the Christian. Luther made no objection to the formulation, which it is safe to assume he would have done if he had understood these words as evidence of synergism. More importantly, the context of these words is one which is speaking of the Christian life. The following are cited as reasons for this opinion: first, Melanchthon's strong affirmation in the paragraph preceding this sentence that the will cannot satisfy the law of God or bring about faith, love of God or the other spiritual affections God desires and requires; second, Melanchthon's citation of Romans 8:26, a text which in context addresses itself to the Christian condition, not the initial conversion of the unregenerate; third, that the Holy Spirit helps the Christian spirit "retain the Word"; fourth, that the immediate context following this sentence is one in which Melanchthon exhorts the Christian not to indulge in indifference and natural desires; fifth, that the locus concludes with a discussion of how obedience to the law is possible through grace so that the pious are pleasing to God for the sake of Christ. This is also the emphasis in the locus concerning the third use of the law. Melanchthon reiterates this passage of the three causes in his later editions of the Loci and it is appropriate that

the author interpret himself. Further discussion of this passage, therefore, will be offered in the context of these later editions.

CHAPTER III

THE LOCUS ON FREE WILL: LATER EDITIONS

The third edition of the Loci (German, 1555; Latin, 1559) give expanded attention to the locus on free will. The 1555 edition has received more attention among English speaking people because it has been translated from the German by Clyde L. Manschreck.¹ It will be treated in summary here with more attention being focused on the Latin edition of 1559, published only one year before Melanchthon's death.

From the 1555 "Loci"

Although the locus is entitled "On Human Strength" (Kraften) Melanchthon's definition of free will speaks of weakness. "When we speak of free will, we are simply talking about the deterioration of human strength through sin, man's inability to free himself from sin and death, and about the works that man is able to do in such a state of weakness."² In his explication on free will, Melanchthon begins with creation. Originally man was created full of love for God, free from all evil desires. "His will was free, so that he could choose to keep God's law, and

¹Clyde L. Manschreck, Melanchthon on Christian Doctrine: Loci Communes 1555 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. viii.

²Loci Communes 1555, p. 51.

his heart and external members could be fully obedient without any hindrance."³ Free will includes understanding and will. With the fall, "God withdrew from mankind and man's natural powers became very weak." Not only did man's natural powers become weak, but "all virtues toward God in the heart and will were also lost -- love of God, trust in God, and true fear of God."⁴ God is now only received through the Holy Spirit; man cannot by his natural powers be obedient. "When we speak about this great ruin of human powers, we are talking about free will, for man's will and heart are wretchedly imprisoned. . . ."⁵

Melanchthon distinguishes between the external works of man and the inner disposition of the human heart, affirming free will in external works in that man has the ability to conduct himself in conformity with right reason (rechter Vermunft) and natural law. This is the doctrine of St. Paul and is a gift of God who desires that "all men . . . curb themselves with true morality."⁶ He gives four reasons why man is to do these external works: (1) "on account of the divine commandments"; (2) "to escape punishment in this and in the next life"; (3) so that other people may have peace; (4) because, as St. Paul says, "The law is a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ. . . ." "External morality is necessary, for in a life filled with dissolute, immoral, persistent adultery, gluttony, robbery, and murder, there can be neither instruction in the gospel nor acquaintance with it."⁷ Melanchthon underscores

³Ibid., p. 52.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 54.

⁷Ibid., pp. 54-55.

that such external morality has no power to save, but that one is saved only through the grace and mercy of God.

Although it is certainly true that all men are obliged to live in external morality and that God earnestly punishes external depravity in this life, and in the next life will punish all those who do not become converted, we must also know that external morality cannot merit forgiveness of sins and eternal life. It is not a fulfillment of the law, and neither is it the righteousness by which a man is justified and received before God. Only the Son of God has merited forgiveness of sins for us, and for his sake we are received out of mercy and grace, by faith, without our deserving it.⁸

No man by his natural power can take away death and the in-born evil tendency of his nature. The natural man does not have power to keep God's law, "we cannot begin inward obedience in our hearts without divine help and without the Holy Spirit."⁹ ". . . If only natural power is active in us, we face empty despair and eternal death. . . ."¹⁰ This is not the condition of the saint because he has been claimed by God and has been given new obedience by the power of Christ and the Spirit.

Thus the Son of God, through his gospel and the Holy Spirit, is continually active in his saints in his church; he will be with them and dwell in them. We should acknowledge this gracious presence of God in us and heartily thank God that he receives this miserable, weak nature so graciously, for the mediator's sake; that he dwells in us, kindling faith, light, and true obedience in our souls and hearts, healing our weakness, taking away sin and death, bringing about eternal life, and shielding us so that the devil does not overthrow and assassinate us.¹¹

One is to take refuge in the Son and comfort himself with the promise, "in this the Son of God, through the Holy Spirit, is certainly working and kindling in the heart right belief and trust in

⁸Ibid., p. 57.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 58.

¹¹Ibid.

him. . . ."12

When converted, a man learns what law and sin are, but also the nature of faith, the comfort of Christ's grace and righteousness. This happens when the Christian through the Holy Spirit contemplates the gospel. Melanchthon cites scriptural evidence for this position and then continues,

The passages about divine activity were spoken to us for comfort. We should not think that a man is a piece of wood or a stone, but as we hear the Word of God, in which punishment and comfort are put forth, we should neither despise nor resist it. We should immediately rouse our hearts to earnest prayer, for the Lord Christ says, "How much more will your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to you if you ask him." He is not speaking to the scorners who continue in their sins against their conscience, who resist punishment and comfort. It is very necessary to remember this.

.....
Chrysostom says that God draws man. However he draws the one who is willing, not the one who resists.¹³

One should carefully note the context of this paragraph. Melanchthon is speaking of Christians, not "scorners." He is exhorting the Christian to apply himself unto salvation by hearing God's address in his Word, and arousing his heart to prayer. The citations from Chrysostom and Basil, introduced in the 1543 Loci, are cited here clearly in the context of the Christian life of repentance (conversio secunda, conversio continuata) and not in the context of the initial conversion of the Christian (conversio prima). In support of the above statements, Melanchthon immediately cites Revelation 3:20: "I stand at the door and knock. Whoever hears my voice and opens to me, I will come in to him. . . ." In the

¹²Ibid., p. 59.

¹³Ibid., p. 60.

next paragraph Melanchthon speaks explicitly of those who are weak in their faith.

This is a promise to comfort the weak who feel in their hearts a small spark and longing to be in the grace of God again; they should know that God both made the beginning in them and will further strengthen them, but they should at the same time exercise the faith they have and pray, as Christ says, "Ask and you shall receive."¹⁴

A practical and pastoral concern motivates Melanchthon at this point. Many are alarmed with doubt not knowing if God pays attention to them. Some complain that the teaching about the powerlessness of man's will in spiritual things makes people lazy and leads them to despair. ". . . The reborn have the help of Christ and his protection against the devil." After regeneration has begun the heart and will are active.¹⁵

Thus far Melanchthon has denied natural man free will in spiritual things, affirmed that natural man and regenerate man have free will in external things, and he has encouraged the regenerate man to exercise his heart and will actively seeking God through his Word and exercising faith through prayer. In the next section of his discussion, Melanchthon goes on to question the meaning of free will according to Scripture. He begins with Proverbs 16:9. "Man's heart devises a way, but God directs his steps." Some might conclude that this and similar passages eliminate free will. "Such an interpretation is too coarse. Solomon himself says that man has a plan, and so he devises something. However, accomplishment requires much more, namely God's will and gracious help."¹⁶ If God

¹⁴Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 62.

does not assist the regenerate man, then his plans, labor, power and everything are too weak. Therefore we should call on God for help, as the Psalmist writes, Psalm 37:3-5. Only, "divine grace and help move men to good works, but nevertheless, so that the will follows and does not resist."¹⁷ Melanchthon also cites a passage from Ecclesiastes, "God first created man and gave him power to choose good and evil. . . ." He contends that the pelagians have over-extended the meaning of this passage. There is only one way in which this passage is true; that is, if it is a description of the man under the grace of Christ.¹⁸

For this reason in our obedience, calling, and labor should we not more earnestly cry out daily to God and with a firm faith ask him for the sake of his Son Jesus Christ to forgive us our sins, accept graciously our weak poor humanity, and bestow upon us his Holy Spirit for guidance. . . .¹⁹

Even the saints cannot fulfill the law in this life.

"Cursed are all who teach that God's law could be kept without grace." We should rightly understand this sentence. First, we should know that the word "grace" means more than just help which the Holy Spirit effects in man. Grace also means mercy and gracious reception for Christ's sake, even though the works are still weak and impure. It is not sufficient to explain this sentence by saying, "if the Holy Spirit helps, then man can keep the law"; for even though obedience has begun in those who are reborn, much weakness, impurity and sin still remains in them in this life, and even that, notwithstanding, they are pleasing to God through grace.²⁰

Melanchthon concludes his locus on free will with a repudiation of "papal and monkish teaching."

Comments on this locus will be reserved for the discussion of the 1559 locus, which gives Melanchthon's final and most

¹⁷Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., p. 66.

comprehensive position on the question of free will. Suffice it here to note that Melanchthon has given considerably more time to the question of free will as it relates to the need for the Christian to exercise the new heart and will he has received by divine grace. His statements on the inability to keep the law, even for the Christian, remind one strongly of Luther here. The citations which are often quoted out of context to indicate that man participates in his initial conversion (conversio prima) are seen to be in context exhortations to the Christian to seek the Holy Spirit through the Word and to exercise faith through prayer and obedience and trusting confidence in God's grace.

From the 1559 "Locii"

Melanchthon begins his treatment of free will with an attack on "stoic opinions."²¹ The stoics see man as a beast or a basic element, having no freedom. Thus they disparage any concept of free will. This opinion must not be brought into the church. Neither should one defend the necessity or fatality of all things. Rather, it must be conceded that some things are contingent.²²

²¹Melanchthon's understanding of "stoic opinions" would be in accord with that provided in the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord, Article II, concerning free will. There the stoics are described as holding "that everything must happen as it does; that man acts only under coercion; that even in external works man's will has no freedom or power whatever to achieve a measure of external righteousness and honorable behavior and to avoid manifest sins and vices; or that the will of man is coerced into doing such wicked acts as lechery, robbery, and murder." FC, SD, II, 74 (Tappert translation).

²²Philip Melanchthon, Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl (Studienausgabe) (hereafter cited as St.A.), 7 vols., ed. Robert Stupperich (Guetersloh: Mohn & Co., 1953), vol. 2, part 1, p. 236.

Neither is the debate concerning free will to be associated with questions of divine determination. When the question of free will is answered using human powers one merely treats of human weakness. Man's mind and heart are in darkness and in his questions man only considers his own feebleness. This doctrine concerning man's weakness is put forth by the church, not as the stoics compose their opinions and not as the mind implies, by perplex and complicated argumentation, but as shown for man's benefit by the Son of God, who was sent that he might destroy the work of the devil, who has made a deplorable wound (triste vulnus) in human nature.²³

Melanchthon is aware that the question of free will has intrigued man through the ages. The natural philosophers (physicis) have made varied distinctions and named various processes by which choices are made in their psychological investigations. These distinctions are partly of human origin; others were given by the prophets and apostles. In man there is a part which knows and judges, which is called mind (mens) or intellect (intellectus) or reason (ratio). This is knowledge (notitia). The other part, desiring (appetens), is called will (voluntas), which is judged to be either compliant or resistant. Under the will are the sensual desires, that is, the affections (affectus), which are subject to and find their source in the heart. Sometimes these affections are congruent with the will. The affections are under the will and excite motion toward the desired object.²⁴

²³Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, p. 237.

²⁴Ibid.

Melanchthon begins his discussion of free will with a definition. "Free will (libero arbitrio) is the mind (mens) and will (voluntas) together. Free will is that faculty of the will (voluntas) which is able to choose and to desire what is pointed out to it, or to reject it." The will does this according to the faculty in its unbiased, unprejudiced nature (nature integra) by which it gives its opinion. There are impediments in this process, which Melanchthon promises to treat later. Nonetheless, man has this free will. Not only do the ancients attest to it, but this same vocabulary is used by the prophets and apostles when they speak of the mind and heart which correspond to the philosophers' use of intellect and will.²⁵

While some philosophers may doubt that the human will is free, the concern in the church is whether human will is able to obey the law of God because of man's natural infirmities. Melanchthon answers that man is not able to judge this question because of the greatness of the sin in which he is born. Moreover, unless a man knows the law of God, he is not able even to do outward civil deeds, but perpetually and perfectly obeys the whole of human nature which is corrupt. Man is to love God with his whole heart. If human nature were not corrupted by sin, if human nature had a most clear and strong knowledge concerning God, if it did not doubt concerning the will of God, if it had true fear, true trust, then it would be outstanding in its complete obedience to the law. In natural man, a firm light would be set up concerning God and the

²⁵Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 237-38.

impulses of all consciences would be with the law of God. However, natural man is oppressed by the illness of his ancestry; he is full of doubt concerning God. Neither does he truly fear God or trust in him, nor is he incited to love God, but "the many flames of the affections are corrupted." Suffice it, therefore, that it is evident that the natural man by no means is able to satisfy the law of God. What then is the will able to do?²⁶

First, Melanchthon contends there remains in natural man a certain amount of judgment and a certain amount of choosing among the things that are subject to reason and the senses; there remains some choosing in the outward things of civil works. Therefore human will is able by its own strength, without being renewed, to some extent to do the outward works of the law. This is the free will (libertas voluntatis) which philosophy rightly attributes to man. Paul himself distinguishes between carnal and spiritual righteousness, acknowledging that those who are not reborn do have choice, to some extent, and can do, to some extent, the outward works of the law. For example man is able to keep his hand from murder, from robbery, from plunder. Paul calls this carnal righteousness.²⁷ The law teaches the unregenerate man and it regularly punishes his violations, as it reveals and punishes the sorrowful sins of this life like incest and murder. "The law is set down for the unjust." That is, the law is to coerce the unregenerate and to punish stubbornness. Likewise, "the law is a

²⁶Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, p. 238.

²⁷Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 238-39.

teacher." That is, it coerces and teaches. This teaching does not merit the remission of sins, neither does it justify ("by which we are declared to be righteous before God"); however, it is necessary, for by it the church in the meantime is able to teach concerning Christ. Neither is the Holy Spirit efficacious in those who are stubborn, those who persevere in delinquency against the conscience. Melanchthon here is not interested in discussing the functions of the law or its necessity, but he has used the law here to show that there is some kind of choosing, that there is freedom in the unregenerate to do the outward works of the law.²⁸

This freedom to do the law however is circumscribed. Melanchthon maintains that it is greatly impeded by two causes: the infirmities with which man is born and the devil. Because the corrupt affections in man are sharply stimulated and greatly incited by the soul, man is often obedient to that which is contrary to the counsels of the mind. The devil is very active in the impious. He impedes government and he impels many things which come to ruin. Melanchthon cites from Biblical and secular history examples of the devil's destructive influence. He concludes that the frailty of man is very great since all of history and indeed one's daily experience ("in which so much misery is seen") teach that man's wisdom is only so much confusion from which the most dismal death results. Nevertheless, despite these impediments (man's nature

²⁸Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, p. 239.

and the devil) there remains set aside some liberty in the average mind when outward morals are reborn.²⁹

The church however is not concerned with free will in regard to external morals, but with the law imprinted in the heart. The mind of carnal man is doubtful concerning God. Those who are not fully renewed are without true fear of God, without trust in God and have an inborn opposition to the law of God.

Though the natural man is oppressed by sin and death the greatness of this evil is not seen by human judgment, but in the revealed Word of God. It is certain that man does not have the freedom to set aside this privation, which is with him from birth, or to set aside death. This great and chief evil of mankind becomes evident when free will was weakened. The will is not able to burn out the privation in us from birth, nor is it able to satisfy the law of God because the law of God not only concerns outward discipline and somewhat darkened works, but it also demands an inner obedience of the heart, as the law says: "Love the Lord your God with your whole heart and with all your strength." The law judges and condemns sin in the natural man that is not removed. And just as we are not able to deprive death of all its power, so also we are not able to burn out the privation with which we are born. This evil can be acknowledged only when one perceives the beneficia Christi, who removes sin and death and renews natural man. Thus the will is captive, not free, except of course to exalt natural privation and death.³⁰

Natural man has a captive will and in his weakness cannot understand his own condition. His will is free only to violate the law of God and to merit the curse of the law, death.

Melanchthon's third point concerns the spiritual actions of regenerate man. There have been, since the beginning of the world, and there are even now, those who are members of the church. These are guided not by human strength or human weakness, but are

²⁹Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 239-40.

³⁰Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 240-41.

illuminated to spiritual impulses by the Holy Spirit, fearing, believing and loving God. In some this is true to a greater extent than in others. Philosophers and pelagians may ridicule the notion, but the Spirit of God has been outpoured on the hearts of believers.

Great and indescribable is the benefit of God, who has promised us the help of the Holy Spirit. As Christ said, "How much more shall your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask." Unless we are helped by the Holy Spirit, many sad lapses and the atrocious chaos of death will strike us. This sentence, however, is true and must be maintained. Human will is not able to bring about the spiritual effects which God demands, except by the true fear of God, true trust in the mercy of God, true love of God, and endurance and strength in affliction and approaching death.³¹

The will, even in the regenerate, is subject to falling and unable to do what God demands apart from faith. The continual activity of the Holy Spirit is the power of the Christian life. Melanchthon maintains that this witness refutes pelagian claims so that "we ourselves might be set on fire to petition the Holy Spirit, and that we might teach that he who is not ruled by the Holy Spirit is not an active member of the church." Melanchthon thus accents the activity of the Holy Spirit, not only in coming to faith, but in living that Christian faith in a life of obedience.³²

Melanchthon continues his discussion of the Christian life on the basis of various biblical texts, beginning with Romans eight: "Those who are lead by the Spirit of God are the sons of God." "If one has not the Spirit of Christ, he is not of Christ." These two sentences are "clear and plain witnesses of the gift of eternal life and the rule of the Holy Spirit." In his exegesis

³¹Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, p. 241.

³²Ibid.

Melanchthon maintains that "Spirit of God" does not signify reason but the Holy Spirit from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ proceeding and sent in the hearts of the pious, and inciting recognition of God through the gospel and the proper influence of the law of God. Melanchthon then turns from Romans to 1 Corinthians 2: "The natural man does not perceive those things which are sent from the Spirit of God." He understands homo psychikos to signify the natural man with his natural senses and reason without the Holy Spirit. Paul is said to distinguish between the natural (animalem) and spiritual (spirituali) life. Although a certain knowledge is naturally impressed on man concerning divine law, nevertheless man approaches with many doubts concerning the providence of God and concerning the gospel. Man says to himself: perhaps we are regained, perhaps we are heard clearly, but perhaps not. Each man considers the darkness of his heart; he considers God's wrath, he considers whether he is regained, whether he has heard clearly, whether he delights in affliction. It is in the context of these considerations concerning security and freedom of the soul versus fleeing God that this saying of Paul is to be understood. "The natural man does not perceive the things which are of the Spirit of God." The natural man does not truly perceive God's wrath with sin, nor does he sense peace or truly fear God. Melanchthon underscores this point with the use of John 3 and 6. "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he is not able to enter the Kingdom of God." "No one is able to come to me, unless the Father draws him." "Without me, you can do nothing." Note

the emphasis in these verses on the monergism of divine grace in the conversion of natural man.³³

Melanchthon continues his exegetical investigation with a reference from Isaiah 59. He maintains that these words contain "a most sweet description of the church and teach who is and where is the church and teach who has received the benefits of God." The church is that gathering which sounds forth the gospel tradition of the prophets and apostles. Where there are living members of the church possessing the Holy Spirit, there is also possessed this benefit, namely the Word of God, the remission of sins, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. These are the possessions of those who are the church.³⁴ Melanchthon next seeks to see how they are used by the Christian in this renewed life.

This section of Melanchthon's discussion is one of the most controversial, especially when read with reference to the 1543 and 1555 editions of the Loci. Melanchthon maintains here that the Holy Spirit is efficacious through the heard voice of the Gospel, as it is taught in Galatians 3. Note that the context of discussion is the regenerate life, Melanchthon having already discussed free will in relation to the unregenerate and in terms of the church previous to this point.

It is taught that understanding concerning God ought to begin with the Word of God, for God is not sought apart from his Word. At any time we begin with the Word, there are three concurrent causes of good actions (tres causae bonae actionis), the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and the human will assenting

³³Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 241-42.

³⁴Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, p. 242.

to and not resisting the Word of God. It is possible, indeed to discard it (human will) as Saul himself voluntarily discarded it (human will). But when the mind, hearing and sustaining the Word of God does not resist, does not indulge it (the Word) with indifference, but understands it, (the will) is enabled to assent by the Holy Spirit. In this certainly the will is not idle.³⁵

Melanchthon continues his discussion citing the same references as in the 1543 and 1555 editions.

The ancients said, "Grace leads the way, the will only accompanies to do good works." So also Basil says, "Only will, and God has come beforehand," (monon thelason, kai theos proapanta). Will a little and God has already come into the thoughts. God anticipates us; he calls, he moves, he delights, but we shall have seen and shall not have resisted. Sin constantly begins with us and not from the will of God. Chrisostom says, "He draws, but he draws the one who wills," (o de elkon ton boulomenon elkei). Just as in this same place John writes, "All who have heard the Father and would learn, come to me."³⁶

All this is said, not of the unregenerate man coming to faith, but of the regenerate man who wills the will of God. Grace comes first, the will accompanies it to do good works. "Christ commands us, 'Teach,' that is, 'hear the Word and do not resist,' but assent to the Word of God and do not give way to indifference." The regenerate man has received the Word "unbidden, even as the will struggled against it." Nor would it have helped if the will had been as a statue. The only time the will does not struggle against God and his Word is when it too has become holy. Even the regenerate man must struggle against his natural depravity.

With those who are holy, however, there is certainly great and difficult times, still, the will is not idle, but assents feebly and would fall down in desperation, except for the promises and examples among those who are called and are repeatedly called and delighted by the Spirit.

³⁵Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, p. 243.

³⁶Ibid.

Only the continuing activity of the Spirit keeps the Christian from falling.³⁷

Melanchthon at this point attacks the Epicureans who would maintain that, if things are as you say then I may indulge in indifference and other depraved affections. Neither will Melanchthon allow the "crazy Manicheans" who maintain that there are some men for whom conversion is not possible. Melanchthon maintains, "Conversion did not happen for David as if the lapsed were turned into a fig tree, but it happened with some free will in David when he heard rebuking and the promise, and then willed to be free of the offense." It is important to note here that Melanchthon is using "conversione" in the sense of conversio continuata. David was certainly already one of the people of God, but he had sinned against God. It is David's repentance that Melanchthon is here terming "conversion." Melanchthon continues, quoting St. Paul. "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation." This is the case when it is not resisted, when its promises are not thought light of, but assented to and believed. How is this gospel "assented to and believed?" "The gospel is the ministry of the Spirit. We receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." What Melanchthon is resisting is the notion that faith is some kind of "infused quality" within man. Since God through the Spirit brings the Christian to faith, the Christian in faith must respond.³⁸

³⁷Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 243-44.

³⁸Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 244-45.

If so much is to be expected of this infused quality without any of our action, like the enthusiasts and manicheans imagine, it is not the work of the gospel and there is no light in the soul. But God instituted his ministry and it is heard so that the mind might know the promises and embrace them. Then we may resist indifference, because the Holy Spirit is efficacious in us at the same time.³⁹

To those who excuse their delaying in responding to God's gracious gift of faith in a life of good works, Melanchthon responds, "The mandate of God is eternal and immovable, the voice of the gospel must be obeyed, the Son must be heard, the mediator must be acknowledged." If a man says, "I cannot," Melanchthon answers, "In some way you are able, when the voice of the gospel sustains you, when you are helped by God. I beseech and I know that the Holy Spirit is efficacious in being a consolation in you."⁴⁰

Melanchthon continues in the next paragraph still to those already in faith, "I know God in this same manner converts us when, exalted by the promise, we struggle with ourselves, when we call upon and resist our indifference and other depraved affections." There is a struggle going on in the Christian man: The Word, the Spirit and the regenerate will of man versus man's natural depravity and depraved will, his indifference to God, and the devil.

Free will in man is the faculty to apply oneself to grace. That is, one hears the promise and is able to assent and to give up sins against the conscience. This does not happen when one is in league with the devil. . . . Since the promise is universal and since there is in God no contradiction of the will, it is necessary that there be in us some cause of discrimination, why Saul was cast down and David was received. Therefore, it is necessary that there is a dissimilar action in these two. Properly understood this is true and is used in the exercise of faith and in true consolation, when the souls rest

³⁹Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, p. 245.

⁴⁰Ibid.

in the Son of God shown in the promises. It illustrates this joining of causes: Word of God, Holy Spirit, and the will.⁴¹

Melanchthon states that the "free will" of which he has been speaking is that free will possessed by those who rest in the Son of God in the exercise of faith. Moreover, he states that he is using the example of Saul and David as an illustration of the "joining of causes" he earlier used in the context of bonae actionis.

Melanchthon continues his discussion of free will in the context of "the total life of the pious." "Even if the weakness is great, nevertheless, there is still free will, when indeed already by the Spirit, one is able to help and to do something in the external guarding against falling." It is evident that Melanchthon is continuing to speak of the problem of obedience in the Christian individual. His point is that the Christian, although imputed righteous, remains weak and must perpetually guard against falling by the power of the Spirit and the use of his own regenerate will. He cites the example of Joseph, who was able to resist the allure-ment of adultery. There were two causes why he was able to resist this sin: one, the "Word of God and the Holy Spirit influencing the mind, so that the Word might be ardently understood"; two, "the mind's understanding, depending upon how much it is ruined when the devil is obeyed." Even for the regenerate, then, there may be a loss of gifts, the eternal wrath of God, punishment in this life and in the future and many lapses and scandals. But the Holy Spirit working in man's regenerate will strengthens the Christian

⁴¹Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 245-46.

in his weakness and restrains the flames of the heart. He incites fear of God and faith which rests in God. "In this the will is not idle, but resists such allurements and handles the eyes and feet so as to avoid occasional lapses. . . . These examples show clearly the causes of good actions."⁴²

Melanchthon concludes this third section of the locus on free will by emphasizing that bonae actionis are (1) increased by the help of the Holy Spirit, and are (2) stimulated by our diligence, as Christ said, "He gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask." Melanchthon condemns, "those who disdain, are idle, who resist, who petulantly throw others to wickedness." He reminds his Christian readers, "Paul orders us to be on guard, so that it is not in vain that we receive grace," and exhorts them "diligently to remember how much Christ promises kindness and how many times and how often he commanded us to pray, 'Ask and you shall receive.'" If the Christian does this, then he will know how to make progress in a life of good works. Faith is incited to petition and to pray. If the Christian does not do so, "indifference is increased, because we neglect the understanding of these precepts and promises of Christ."⁴³ Melanchthon's concern here is pastoral and homiletical. He is not arguing a theological point so much as he is addressing the daily needs of his Christian readers.

In the fourth part of this locus on free will Melanchthon addresses "the many things which happen to man which are

⁴²Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, p. 246.

⁴³Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 246-47.

incomprehensible to human judgment, and are certainly not begun in us. . . ." There are aspects of this life over which we have no control, and this limits human free will. Joseph had no control over his banishment into exile by his brothers. Other things which happen are errors of men in judgment, as when Josiah pondered what was the right thing to do when he made war with the Egyptians. The prophets prophesied concerning this danger in various places. Moses was called to lead the people out of Egypt, but by no means foresaw that they would spend forty years in the desert, or that the multitude would wander around without water or food because of the sins of the people and the sedition of their leaders. Moses only knew that he would have no success by himself, but that he would be leading by God's command. All this goes together to show, as Jeremiah said, that the way of man is not in man's power and that it is not possible to direct one's way and calling by human counsel or human diligence, nor can one lead successfully unless God helps.

Thus also the Baptist says, "Man is not able of himself to undertake anything, unless it is given to him from heaven." Hezekiah was successful in governing, because he was helped by God. Ahijah was not successful because he was not helped by God. Anthony desired to rule alone, but it was not given to him from heaven, but it was given to Augustus. These writings do not abolish freedom of the will, which pertains to the choosing of those things which have been foreseen, but is said concerning objects outside us and concerning events which happen at the same time as those various other causes in addition to our own will, as the will of Pompey alone was not able to be the cause of victory.⁴⁴

Thus, while there is freedom of choice it is limited by these external impediments. Man should be taught to put his trust in God

⁴⁴Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 247-48.

and to ask for help from God, since many things which happen are incomprehensible to man. Melanchthon quotes Jehoshaphat, "When we do not know what to do, let us turn our eyes to you, O Lord." Christ himself promises, "I will not leave you orphans." The same is said in the Psalms, by Paul, and the Lord. "You may be sure you will be successful in your endeavor, when God helps you." For this assistance, the Christian is to pray.⁴⁵ The reason for confusion concerning this question is that, ". . . Men for the most part act as if they were drunk and without discipline, without diligence, and they live without any exercise of faith and of calling. How are they then able to discern concerning actions or objectives?" Melanchthon answers that question by pointing to Paul. Paul recognizes that his understanding is a gift of God alone and is not mixed with ignorance or error nor is it entangled with corruption of doctrine and other evils. "Thus he prays that his great cares would be ruled and helped by God."⁴⁶

At this point Melanchthon recapitulates what has been asserted concerning free will.

1. The corruption of man's nature, because of which the knowledge of God in man's heart is obscure and man's heart and will are aberrant before God. Man does not fear, trust, or love God, but is rather seized by many corrupt emotions.
2. The devil, who with horrible hatred of Christ⁴⁵ exposes each opportunity by which he implicates man in various snares and sins and increases passion for dangerous crimes, as he did in Cain, Saul, Judas, and others."
3. This life's confusing trouble. "This life is one of trouble

⁴⁵Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, p. 248.

⁴⁶Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, p. 249.

and danger in which many daily experience unexpected and confusing opinions, as David did not foresee the sedition of his son. And it is said by the masses, 'You don't know what the late evening brings.'⁴⁷

If man's nature were unimpaired, "he would not be impeded in his freedom, nor would he be in darkness and perversion, nor would he be disturbed by the devil or by trouble." Rather, "he would be most free to choose and would have the faculty to act." But this indeed is not the case.

The law of God is not incited without the Holy Spirit. The lowest outward discipline is often impeded. Therefore if one contends that the saying of the church concerning the present nature is to be accepted, it is necessary to add many restrictions. . . . But through God man is able to hurl down evil and he is able to do rightly when encouraged by the Holy Spirit. Now and then the will is not idle, nor does one have a will as if one were a statue. . . . The will is made one of helping the Holy Spirit in great freedom, that is, being circumspect and a constant agent and ardently calling upon God.⁴⁸

Melanchthon concludes his discussion of free will with a look at two quotations from Jerome. "Let him be anathema, if anyone says that it is impossible for God to have foreknowledge."

Melanchthon maintains that, if anyone would say that God does not have foreknowledge, it is certain that that man does not understand why the law of God was given. Certainly political law judges that law should do a certain thing, and it does. But the law of God was given chiefly because it shows the judgment of God against sin. God desires to look with His wrath upon the man in sin and He shows sin "by the voice of the law." The righteous man loves God with his whole heart. But because man is not able to do this, the law judges and accuses man and declares its wrath against man. The

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 249-50.

second reason the law was given is that of obedience to the law begun in Christ, who is called the mediator, because men are reconciled and their obedience is begun in him by the help of God. Thus, when one hears it said, "the law is impossible," it is not about political wisdom or civil righteousness that this is being said, for Paul denies that man is able to satisfy the wrath of God or to satisfy the law in this weak nature. At this point Melancthon makes an excursus on Romans 3. Melancthon maintains that Paul here acknowledges that works do happen, but these are outward acts, and Paul denies that, for the sake of these works, a man is justified or that he satisfies the law. When it is said that "the law is impossible" it is meant that due to man's corrupt nature the law judges both inward and outward sin. Finally, the benefits of Christ must be recognized, for it is He alone who removes sin. The law does not remove sin; rather, it accuses man of sin. Christ is called the mediator, because it is for his sake that man is declared righteous. By the law no man is righteous. "Therefore Christ gives to us the Holy Spirit, so that in our infirmities the law is begun and makes us somewhat wholesome, and the teaching of the devil against all mankind is suppressed." For the natural man, the law is impossible. But for the regenerate man, the law is God's will for his people.⁴⁹

Melancthon then considers the second saying of Jerome, "Let him be anathema, if anyone says he is able to do the law without grace." He understands this saying to mean that grace is to

⁴⁹Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 250-51.

be understood not only as including the imputation of grace, grace for the sake of Christ, but also the continuing activity and help of the Holy Spirit. The imputed grace would necessarily preclude any works in its recognition of Christ and by its faith in the satisfaction of Christ. First, Melancthon would maintain, it must be said of grace that, "the law of God happens through grace." By this he means that for the sake of Christ man is received and becomes a member of Christ. In this it is certain that, already, man pleases God, just as if he had done the whole law. By the imputation of grace man is received, though unworthy, and overcomes sin. Secondly, grace is to be understood as the many faceted work of the Holy Spirit. "Minds are incited to the true light and preserved in the Word of God. The movements of faith in the heart are excited, minds are moved so that they undertake what is beneficial for us and for others." Man is to pray therefore that he might always do what pleases God and is useful for himself and for the church. But he is unable to do this unless God helps and guides him. It is certain, however, that God wills to be with the believer and to make him strong when he prays, as Christ clearly says, "How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask." But man seldom prays for help. Rather, in desperation he flees from God and seeks human counsel. This is why men do not come to a recognition of the promises and benefits of Christ. Therefore the regenerate man should cast off his indifference and ignorance and understand the greatness of his misery and danger so that he might incite himself truly to call upon God. The promises

of God are true, "Ask and you shall receive." "God is near to all those who call upon him in truth. Jerome writes:

"Law works through faith," that is, by imputation for the sake of Christ and by the help of the Holy Spirit, so that when obedience is begun, though we are far from perfection in the law, nevertheless we are accounted righteous for the sake of Christ.

The law is established both by imputation in the initial conversion of the Christian (conversio prima) and by the Holy Spirit in the continuing conversion (conversio secunda, conversio continuata) which characterizes the Christian life.

The law is established through faith, first by imputation because for the sake of Christ we receive reconciliation, without which the law is the voice of condemnation, and secondly, because by faith we receive the Holy Spirit and he begins and continues obedience for the sake of Christ.⁵⁰

This concluding paragraph of his locus on free will summarizes Melancthon's position throughout the entire locus. It is evident that law is used here not only in its accusatory function, but also as the will of God for the regenerate man (third use of the law). This will of God is established in man first by faith; that is, it is imputed to man for the sake of Christ. Secondly, the will of God is established in the Christian life through the activity of the Holy Spirit. In the first case, the righteousness of imputation, man is entirely a passive agent, fulfillment of the law is imputed to the sinner. God for the sake of Christ imputes the benefits of Christ's vicarious satisfaction. In the second case, however, the Christian man, having received the benefits of Christ, is now enabled by the Holy Spirit to begin and to resolve active

⁵⁰Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 251-52.

obedience to God's will, for Christ's sake. Melanchthon thus affirms the primacy of God's act, but, in accordance with St. Paul, affirms that once God has acted, man must respond (Romans 6-8). Man makes this response by the power of the Holy Spirit. To understand Melanchthon's locus on free will one must understand that Melanchthon is directing himself to this second case: man's response to God, and that the first case (conversio prima) is presumed. One should also note the recurring emphasis that Melanchthon gives to the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of the redeemed Christian. The conversio continuata must be a life in the Spirit of God.

Importance of the 1559 "locus" on free will

The context of Melanchthon's discussion concerning free will is of fundamental importance because that context determines whether Melanchthon's statements are synergistic or scripturally appropriate descriptions of Christian renewal. The importance of the 1559 locus on free will, then, is two fold. First, it is Melanchthon's most lengthy discussion of free will and shows very clearly how he understands the problem. Secondly, it provides an unambiguous standard by which to examine some of the less precise statements made in earlier editions of the Loci and in the Examen Ordinandorum.

Melanchthon, in speaking of three concurrent causes, the Word, the Spirit, and the assenting will, places these in the 1559 edition in the context of bonae actionis (conversio secunda) and not in the context of justification (conversio prima). Likewise, when he calls free will "the faculty to apply oneself to grace,"

he speaks in the context of "the exercise of faith" and describes those who have this faculty as the souls which "rest in the Son of God shown in the promises." Throughout his presentation, Melancthon is very careful to maintain that even the bonae actionis of the Christian are not the basis of his righteousness. The basis of the Christian's righteousness is ever and only the beneficia Christi imputed to him. The good actions of the Christian man remain imperfect because the Christian man is not yet perfect, but for the sake of Christ he receives the imputed righteousness of Christ's perfect obedience to the law, and the forgiveness of sins. Although the Christian is justified by the beneficia Christi and not by his own bonae actionis, nevertheless, these bonae actionis must characterize the Christian life in response to the imputed grace of God.

Melancthon's expressions in the 1543 and 1555 editions of the Loci can be easily misread if not carefully read in context. In the 1543 edition Melancthon had written:

In hoc exemplo videmus coniungi has causas, Verbum, Spiritum Sanctum, et voluntatem, non sane otiosam, sed repugnantem infirmitati suae.⁵¹

In this example we see joined these causes: the Word, the Holy Spirit, and the will, which is certainly not idle, but resists its infirmities.

This parallels Melancthon's writing in the 1559 edition.

hic concurrunt tres causae bonae actionis, verbum Dei, Spiritus sanctus, et humana voluntas assentiens nec repugnans verbo Dei. . . . Sed cum mens audiens ac se sustentans non repugnat, non indulget diffidentiae, sed adiuvante etiam

⁵¹Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, p. 243.

Spiritu sancto conatur assentiri, in hoc certamine voluntas non est otiosa.⁵²

There are three concurrent causes of good actions, the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and the human will assenting to and not resisting the Word of God. . . . But when the mind, hearing and sustaining the Word of God does not resist, does not indulge it with indifference, but is enabled to assent by the Holy Spirit, in this certainly the will is not idle.

Not only do these phrases parallel one another very closely, but their immediate context is identical. In all three editions Melanchthon immediately quotes Basil and Chrysostom followed by an exhortation that "we ought not indulge in indifference or natural desires."⁵³ It is reasonable to conclude that these editions are addressing themselves to the same problem. The context of all three editions is that of sanctification, the Christian life, but only the 1559 edition explicitly states that these three causes occur in bonae actionis. Unfortunately, these statements, especially in the 1543 edition, are not read in context and some conclude that Melanchthon here is addressing himself to the question of justification (conversio prima) rather than the necessity of renewal (conversio secunda) in the Christian life. Michael Rogness, looking at these editions of the Loci, concludes,

it is apparent that we are not dealing with the first moment of conversion, but with aspects of the ongoing Christian life. No one disputed that man's will is active in the Christian, preceded and guided by the first two "causes" nor did Luther voice disagreement with Melanchthon's statement.⁵⁴

However, Melanchthon himself complicated the issue in his Examen Ordinandorum (1552). In the Examen, he writes:

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³CR, 21:377.

⁵⁴Rogness, pp. 126-27.

Concurrunt igitur in conversione hae causae, verbum Dei, Spiritus sanctus, quem Pater et Filius mittunt, ut accendat nostra corda, et nostra voluntas assentiens, et non repugnans verbo Dei.⁵⁵

Therefore in conversion three causes join together, the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father and the Son sent that our hearts might be incited, and our assenting will, which does not reject the Word of God.

Here Melanchthon states in so many words that in conversion the Word, the Spirit, and man's assenting will are active. The question, of course, is what does Melanchthon mean by conversione? Does he mean the conversion of the unregenerate man, initial conversion (conversio prima) or does he mean the daily rebirth of the Christian (conversio secunda, conversio continuata)? The context again is essential. Having said that these three concur in conversion, Melanchthon immediately continues, speaking of indifference, repentance, and the promise of continuing grace, much as he does in the 1559 edition. He concludes the paragraph in which this formulation is found, saying,

God desires that we believe the Son, and he promises grace to all who take refuge with the Son and who ask for help, as the Psalm says, "Blessed are all those who place their confidence in him." Therefore, we should not oppose, but we should assent to the promise and continually repeat this prayer, "I believe in the Lord, but my strength is exactly weakness."⁵⁶

It is apparent that Melanchthon is using conversione in its second sense (conversio secunda) and not with reference to the justification of the natural man (conversio prima). As the final sentences of the paragraph explicate, Melanchthon is speaking of the constant

⁵⁵CR, 23:15.

⁵⁶Ibid., 23:16.

need for rebirth in the Christian, which rebirth takes place continually through the Word, the Spirit, and man's assenting will. As one surveys the entire section of the Examen concerning free will, one finds that Melanchthon is affirming that, without the Spirit and without the gospel man is unable to obey the law, to come to faith, to fear or love God, or to live righteously. Melanchthon quotes the words of Jesus, "Without me, you can do nothing." He maintains that it is not possible for the natural man to satisfy the law of God. He affirms the impossibility of the law to justify. He maintains that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Thus Melanchthon reiterates the innate weakness of man, both before and after regeneration. It is for this reason that the regenerate man constantly needs the Word and the Spirit in willing a life of daily repentance and faith. Far from asserting a synergistic position, Melanchthon is asserting the continual primacy of God in his Word, through His Spirit in the life of the Christian. Rogness writes of this passage in the Examen,

Melanchthon's idea of conversion was the life-long process of continually repenting, turning to God, being justified, and obeying. It was not limited -- as it was in later usage -- to the first moment of "conversion," when faith in the believer is first worked by God. It would, of course, be quite "un-Lutheran" to say that the human will contributes to or is a cause of the first moment of conversion, but Melanchthon neither said nor intended to say that. In his writings he was unbendingly explicit in denying man any ability to believe in God on his own. But after God has "converted" him, then the believer's will must be actively guided by the Spirit.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Rogness, pp. 127-28.

Melanchthon describes the problem of free will in relation to the regenerate man who has need for continuing reconciliation to God. This does not mean that Melanchthon does not treat of the bondage of the human will, he does.⁵⁸ But his primary emphasis is on the necessity of the regenerate man using his now, by grace, free will in continually living a life pleasing to God. Melanchthon fears that the sola fide may be misunderstood and made the tool of license. He fears that some may say that since I am justified by faith, without works, my works do not matter. Indeed, part of Melanchthon's great conflict with Flacius centered in Melanchthon's contention that "good works are necessary to salvation."⁵⁹ Properly understood, this had always been the teaching of the reformers.

Melanchthon and Luther were addressing entirely different problems relating to free will. In De Servo Arbitrio Luther was speaking of the bondage of the will in natural man, maintaining the sola gratia, sola fide against any form of pelagianism or synergism in the initial conversion (conversio prima) of unregenerate man. Melanchthon, acknowledging the captivity of unregenerate human will, focuses his discussion on the responsibility regenerate man has to will the will of God in obedience to the law (third use). Perhaps the titles of their respective works (Luther: De servo arbitrio; Melanchthon: De humanis veribus seu de libero arbitrio) provide a key in understanding the difference of focus and direction

⁵⁸St. A., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 240-41.

⁵⁹CR, 9:498.

found in Luther and Melanchthon. Luther in his work is speaking of the justification of the sinner; Melanchthon is speaking of the sanctification of the saint. In one case, the will is captive. In the other, the will is free. Both positions are scriptural. Luther must affirm that the unregenerate will is mere passive; Melanchthon must affirm that the regenerate will is responsible to God and capable of choosing. The 1559 edition shows very clearly that this is the position from which Melanchthon discusses the freedom of regenerate man's will. Typically, Melanchthon is functional, practical, and pedagogical in his concern. What is the role of the human will in the Christian's life? What powers does it have? How is it to use these powers? Melanchthon responds that it assents to the promises of the gospel and by the aid of the Holy Spirit, desires to live in accordance with the law of God. Melanchthon's use of the "three concurrent causes" expresses then his approach to the same problem Luther has in mind when he uses his paradox concerning the Christian man, that he is simul justus et peccator. Both recognize the Christian, as saint, has free will and must choose to do the will of God. Both also recognize that the righteousness of the Christian is an imputed righteousness and that the depravity of the natural man yet remains with the Christian. According to the law, the Christian is totus peccator. By grace, through faith, the Christian is totus justus. In the Christian life, as the Christian grows in Christ, ingressus in Christum, he is partim justus, partim peccator. The paradox of the Christian life is not only that he is simultaneously totally saint and totally

sinner, but that he is also simultaneously partly saint and partly sinner. Peccator et Iustus, totus et partim the saint stands before God as one who is and is not yet a saint.⁶⁰ Melanchthon uses the continuing validity of the law (third use) to express the same concern. Luther is prophetic in the dynamic of grace and love he describes with his peccator et justus paradox. Melanchthon the schoolmaster is seeking a more simple description. For both men it is essential that justification and sanctification not be separated from each other, but distinguished. They must be distinguished for the purposes of teaching, but in reality, justification without sanctification is unthinkable and sanctification without justification is impossible. Elert writes in this regard,

from the very beginning Luther and Melanchthon . . . had discussed the problem (of faith and works, justification and sanctification) from one angle when they inquired into the relationship between faith and works. For in so doing they had not only excluded works so far as validity before God is concerned; but at the same time they had demanded them as a necessary result of faith and had thereby maintained nevertheless that faith, when understood transcendentally, affects directly what is empirically concrete in man.⁶¹

Melanchthon's insistence that the imputation of grace must result in an amended life of love and obedience is certainly characteristic of the evangelical church.

⁶⁰Wilfred Joest discusses the "simul" paradox in the context of the third use of the law in his Gesetz und Freiheit: Das Problem des Tertius usus legis bei Luther und die neutestamentliche Parainese (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), pp. 55-68. Helpful in understanding the threefold paradox of the "simul" language in Luther ("totus-partim", "justus-peccator", "partim justus-partim peccator") is John R. Loeschen, Wrestling with Luther (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1976), pp. 59-79.

⁶¹Werner Elert, The Structure of Lutheranism, trans. by Walter Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), p. 142.

Secondly, the 1559 locus on free will gives a final reference point for viewing Melanchthon's other statements concerning free will which are more ambiguous. When Melanchthon links the will with the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, he makes it very explicit in the 1559 locus that he is speaking of the renewal of the Christian life ("bonae actionis"), and not of justification. Since this is the last edition of the Loci, written only a year before his death, we may assume that this is Melanchthon's most mature utterance on the subject. The Word, the Spirit, and the will concur in producing the bonae actionis of the Christian life. Melanchthon maintains that regenerate man does have a free will, to a certain extent, to do the will of God (that is, to obey the law of God). He acknowledges the continuing weakness of man's nature, even after the conversion of unregenerate man, and thus he calls for a continuing conversione as a man daily repents and is renewed by the promise for a life of obedience.

CHAPTER IV

THE FORMULA OF CONCORD, SOLID DECLARATION,

ART. II, FREE WILL

The second article of the Solid Declaration (SD) cannot be treated apart from the first. They grew out of the same controversy and concern opposite sides of the same problem, the "paradox of exclusive divine action and complete human participation."¹ Bente writes, "the Flacian controversy sprang from, and must be regarded as a episode of, the Synergistic controversy."² Epitome II contends that man and his free will can be viewed from four distinct states: before the fall, after the fall, after regeneration, and after the resurrection of the flesh. The SD sets forth the issue at hand. Man's will before the fall, man's will after the fall concerning external things, and man's will after regeneration are not the subjects under discussion.

The chief issue is solely and alone what the unregenerated man's intellect and will can do in his conversion and regeneration, by those powers of his own that have remained after the fall,

¹Robert Preus, "The Significance of Luther's Term Pure Passive as Quoted in Article II of the Formula of Concord," Concordia Theological Monthly, 29 (August, 1958):561.

²F. Bente, "Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church," in Concordia Triglotta (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 144.

when the Word of God is preached and the grace of God is offered to him.³

The SD then lists the two parties with which it disagrees.

The one party held and taught that, although by his own powers and without the gift of the Holy Spirit man is unable to fulfill the commandment of God, to trust God truly, to fear and to love him, man nevertheless still has so much of his natural powers prior to his conversion that he can to some extent prepare himself for grace and give his assent to it, though weakly, but that without the gift of the Holy Spirit he could accomplish nothing with these powers but would succumb in the conflict.⁴

.....
On the other hand, both ancient and modern enthusiasts have taught that God converts man through the Holy Spirit without any means or created instruments (that is, without the external preaching and hearing of the Word of God) and brings them to the saving understanding of Christ.⁵

In connection with the first party, the names of Victorinus Strigel, John Pfeffinger and Philip Melanchthon are often linked. That this represents the position of Pfeffinger and Strigel is probably accurate. That it represents the position of Melanchthon is a matter of dispute.

Whatever may be our opinion of the position of Melanchthon there can be no doubt of the fact that some of his students gave a decidedly synergistic interpretation to his phrases. In speaking of the third factor in his theory, they said that man's will is not merely not resisting but actually adapting itself to the working of the Spirit in conversion. It is clear, therefore, that there were philippists who were synergists and that there were phrases of Melanchthon which, though not clearly synergistic, were capable of such an interpretation.⁶

³FC, SD, II, 2 (Tappert translation).

⁴FC, SD, II, 3 (Tappert).

⁵FC, SD, II, 4 (Tappert).

⁶Willard Dow Allbeck, Studies in the Lutheran Confessions (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), p. 268.

The other position rejected by the writers of the SD was the Enthusiasten, who maintained that God converts men through the Holy Spirit without means or instruments. Against both the synergists and the enthusiasts, the SD maintains that the true teachers of the Augsburg Confession have taught that,

through the fall of our first parents man is so corrupted that in divine things, concerning our conversion and salvation, he is by nature blind and does not and cannot understand the Word of God when it is preached, but considers it foolishness; nor does he of himself approach God, but he is and remains an enemy of God, until the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Word, which is preached and heard, purely out of grace and without any co-operation on his part, he is converted, becomes a believer, is regenerated and renewed.⁷

Accordingly the SD maintains that man is "entirely and completely dead and corrupted as far as anything good is concerned," and that, "according to its perverse disposition and nature the natural will is mighty and active only in the direction of that which is displeasing and contrary to God."⁸ Proof for this position centers in three statements representing the teachings of Scripture, of Luther, and of other writers in the church.

First it is maintained that man's reason or natural intellect while having "a dim spark of the knowledge that there is a God as well as teaching of the law" is nonetheless still so "ignorant, blind and perverse" that even the most learned and intelligent of men cannot understand the gospel by their own powers.⁹ Indeed, unless the Holy Spirit assists them, try as they may, they will not understand the gospel, but will consider it foolishness and fables.¹⁰

⁷FC, SD, II, 5 (Tappert).

⁸FC, SD, II, 7 (Tappert).

⁹FC, SD, II, 9 (Tappert).

¹⁰Ibid.

Those who are dead spiritually can no more come to life spiritually than can a man dead physically come alive again physically.¹¹ "Unless God himself is our teacher we cannot study and learn anything pleasing to him and beneficial to us and others. . . ."¹²

Secondly, the Scriptures testify that the intellect, mind and will of unregenerate man is not only turned away from God but is actually turned against God and toward evil.¹³ The will of man prior to his conversion is obstinately opposed and hostile to God's law and will.¹⁴ Luther is quoted:

In secular and external matters affecting the nurture and needs of the body, man is very clever, intelligent, and extremely busy. In spiritual and divine things, however, which concern the salvation of his soul, man is like a pillar of salt, . . . like a log or a stone, like a lifeless statue. . . .¹⁵

But man has a capacitatem for conversion. Of this capacity the Latin text adds parenthetically that it is "non activam, sed passivam."¹⁶ This phrase, omitted in the German text, underscores that this capacity of man for conversion is not some supernatural endowment, but is a natural endowment "involved in man's rationality and persisting in man in spite of the fall and distinguishes man from a log, a stone, or a wild beast."¹⁷ The "passive" underscores that this capacity in man is not active, but passive, that is,

the emphasis is on the fact that man does nothing, but that something is done to him. The term does not indicate that this passivity is a deliberate, a good or meritorious attitude.

¹¹FC, SD, II, 11 (Tappert).

¹²FC, SD, II, 16 (Tappert).

¹³FC, SD, II, 17 (Tappert).

¹⁴FC, SD, II, 18 (Tappert).

¹⁵FC, SD, II, 20 (Tappert).

¹⁶FC, SD, II, 23.

¹⁷FC, SD, II, 20 (Tappert).

It merely means that man is a creature who can be converted (subjectum convertendum).¹⁸

Therefore the SD emphasizes that before conversion man can do nothing in spiritual things, he can do as little as ein Stein order Block order Ton. Indeed, he is in worse shape than these three, for he is resistant and hostile to the will of God, unless the Spirit is active within him.¹⁹

Thirdly, the Scriptures ascribe conversion solely to the divine operation of the Holy Spirit, and in no way to the activity of man.²⁰ This is the doctrine not only of the Scriptures, but has been clearly taught by the evangelical party, especially in the Augsburg Confession, Article XX; the Apology, Article XVIII; the Smalcald Articles, Part III, Articles I and III, the Large Catechism, Part II, Article III, the Small Catechism, and in other writings of Luther, notably the Maiore Confessione de sacrosancta coena and De Servo Arbitrio.²¹

These testimonies indicate clearly that we cannot by our own powers come to Christ, but that God must give us his Holy Spirit, who enlightens, sanctifies, and brings us to Christ in the true faith and keeps us with him. These testimonies make no mention whatever of our will and co-operation.²²

The writers of the SD note that this doctrine of the monergism of divine grace has been abused by "enthusiasts and Epicureans" and "as a result of their statements many people have become dissolute and disorderly, lazy and indifferent to such

¹⁸FC, SD, II, 20 (Tappert).

¹⁹FC, SD, II, 24.

²⁰FC, SD, II, 25.

²¹FC, SD, II, 29, 31, 33-44.

²²FC, SD, II, 42.

Christian exercises as prayer, reading, and Christian meditation."²³ It is significant that the SD should note this phenomenon, for it is precisely this concern which motivated Melanchthon to maintain the responsibility of man after conversion (conversio continuata). Melanchthon maintained that "new obedience is necessary," indeed, "he advised that the qualifying words, 'to salvation' on account of the possibility of interpreting them as involving the idea of merit be used only in connection with faith."²⁴ The Formula of Concord also evidences this concern in its article on the third use of the law. Altogether, the "epicureanism" of some was of great concern to the evangelical party.

Of equally great concern were the enthusiasts.²⁵ For this reason the SD stresses that the Spirit works mediately upon man, not immediately. Starting with the universality of God's love for man, it proceeds to indicate the instruments by which God dispenses his grace to men. He has gathered to himself an eternal church.

And it is God's will to call men to eternal salvation, to draw them to himself, convert them, beget them anew, and sanctify them through this means and in no other way -- namely, through his holy Word . . . and the sacraments.²⁶

It is through these means that God is active and draws a man to himself so that he might experience the gracious forgiveness of Christ.

²³FC, SD, II, 46.

²⁴Seeberg, 2:365.

²⁵Enthusiasm was used by Luther, Melanchthon, and others of the church of the Augsburg Confession to describe those "who imagine that God draws men to himself, enlightens them, justifies them, and saves them without means, without the hearing of God's Word and without the use of the holy sacraments." FC, Ep, II ("Free Will"), 13 (Tappert translation).

²⁶FC, SD, II, 53.

Only in this way is the Spirit introduced into the heart.²⁷

Of course, a man may resist this activity of God by which he draws a man to himself. Man is not coerced. At the Weimar Disputation Strigel had maintained that the exclusion of all human powers in conversion necessitated viewing conversion as coercive. Therefore he stressed that man is a free agent and must be able to choose if he is able to reject. Against Strigel the SD maintains both the monergism of divine grace and conversion as non-coercive.²⁸ Those who resist will not be converted, for a man may resist the Spirit, but he has no ability to seek the Spirit or to assist in conversion.²⁹ Only after conversion, only when the Holy Spirit dwells in the heart of a man, can man will what is good and cooperate with God.³⁰ Even then however this will is imperfect and his works are imperfect.³¹ But the SD does not dwell on the regenerate man; its concern is the relation of the Spirit of God and the will of unregenerate man. What is this relationship? The SD affirms that,

as soon as the Holy Spirit has initiated his work of regeneration and renewal in us through the Word and Sacraments, it is certain that we can and must cooperate with the power of the Holy Spirit, even though we still do so in great weakness.³²

That this cooperation itself is the work of the Spirit and not of man's natural powers is underscored in the following sentence.³³

²⁷FC, SD, II, 54.

²⁸FC, SD, II, 60.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰FC, SD, II, 63.

³¹FC, SD, II, 64.

³²FC, SD, II, 54.

³³FC, SD, II, 67.

Those who are baptized are able to assent to the Word of God, "even though it be with great weakness." One notes the similarity between this language and that employed by Melanchthon in his Loci. Luther's emphasis that in the life of sanctification man is partim justus partim peccator is brought to mind. Man is viewed as becoming in a life of sanctification.³⁴ Some Christians are strong, some are weaker, but all have received only "the first fruits, and regeneration is not as yet perfect. . . ."³⁵ Nevertheless, in conversion, there must be a change in the intellect, heart, and will.³⁶ Two points should be noted here. One is that it is not only the will of man which is depraved and in need of the converting activity of the Spirit; perverted also is man's intellect and heart. Secondly, it should be noted that the reformers here are using the psychological schema of Aristotle³⁷ precisely as Melanchthon had earlier in his editions of the Loci, distinguishing between the intellectual, volitional, and affective phases of the mind and will.

Against the enthusiasts, the causa efficiens of man's conversion is found in the mediated activity of the Spirit through the Word and sacraments. In this regard Strigel, at the Weimar Disputation between Flacius and himself, had maintained that man

³⁴Ernest B. Koenker, "Man: Simul Justus et Peccator" in Accents in Luther's Theology, ed. by Heino O. Kadai (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), pp. 115-17. See also Joest, pp. 62-68.

³⁵FC, SD, II, 68. ³⁶FC, SD, II, 70 (Tappert).

³⁷Loci Communes Theologici (1521), pp. 22-30.
Allbeck, p. 269.

has a modus agendi, a rationality that distinguishes man from beasts. How a man used this modus agendi determined whether or not he would respond to the call of the gospel.³⁸ Strigel was stressing man's responsibility, meaning by "responsibility" both the ability to respond to God's call and being responsible before God. The question became, is God alone the efficient cause (causa efficiens) of man's conversion or is the modus agendi of man involved?³⁹ The SD answers unequivocally that the Word and sacraments are the causae efficiens of man's conversion, and that man has no modus agendi in the realm of his conversion. Rather, the Spirit works through these appointed means to bring a man to faith. God himself thus becomes the causa formalis of man's conversion, although the SD does not make this point in such terms.

The SD, having presented the evangelical doctrine concerning free will, now confronts eight errors it considers to be antithetical to the evangelical position. First is condemned the determinism of the stoics and manicheans, who maintain that man has no freedom, even in external things, either to do good or to avoid evil, but that the will of man is coerced.⁴⁰ Secondly, the pelagians, who taught that a man may convert himself and live a life of regeneration without the gift of the Holy Spirit, are condemned. Thirdly, the semipelagian position of the papists (in the Council

³⁸ Book of Concord, Tappert translation, pp. 532-33, fn. #5.

³⁹ FC, SD, II, 71-72. Book of Concord, Tappert translation, p. 535, fn. #3.

⁴⁰ FC, SD, II, 74.

of Trent, Session VI) and the scholastics (Peter Lombard, Sentences II, Gabriel Biel, Collectarium ex Occamo II and III) is condemned; that is, that a man can make a beginning but is too weak to complete it and is thus aided by the Holy Spirit. The synergists (Pfeffinger, Strigel, the Philippists) are condemned as well as any form of perfectionism (Council of Trent, Session VI, canon 32) which would contend that a man after conversion can keep the law perfectly in this life. Those who teach that God draws men to himself without means (enthusiasts) are condemned as well as those (Flacians),

who imagine that in conversion and regeneration God creates a new heart and a new man in such a way that the substance and essence of the Old Adam, and especially of the rational soul, are completely destroyed and a new substance is created out of nothing.⁴¹

In addition the imprecise statement is also rejected that "Man's will before, in, and after conversion resists the Holy Spirit, and that the Holy Spirit is given to them who resist him."⁴² Rather, the SD maintains that there is no coercion in conversion. Though the unregenerate man resists the Spirit of God, the regenerate man, "delights in the law of God. . . ."⁴³

The expression, "Man's will is not idle in conversion but also does something," and "God draws, but he draws the person who wills" are viewed as "contrary to the article on God's grace."⁴⁴ As has already been seen, these expressions of Chrysostom and Basil are quoted by Melancthon in the context of sanctification

⁴¹FC, SD, II, 76-80.

⁴²FC, SD, II, 82.

⁴³FC, SD, II, 85.

⁴⁴FC, SD, II, 87.

and the regenerate life of good works ("bonae actionis"). Later writers, especially Strigel, were not so careful and used these expressions in the context of justification as well. For this reason the expressions are condemned, not as Melancthon had originally intended them, but as they had later been used by those of a synergistic bent. The position of the SD is that, in conversion, God makes willing people out of unwilling people and that, only after conversion, is the will active in cooperating with the Spirit.⁴⁵

Luther is quoted in support of this position, when he maintains that man in conversion is pure passive.

When Luther says that man behaves in a purely passive way in his conversion (that is, that man does not do anything toward it and that man only suffers that which God works in him), he did not mean that conversion takes place without the preaching and the hearing of the divine Word, nor did he mean that in conversion the Holy Spirit engenders no new impulses and begins no spiritual operations in us. On the contrary, it is his understanding that man of himself or by his natural powers is unable to do anything and cannot assist in any way toward his conversion, and that man's conversion is not only in part, but entirely the operation, gift, endowment, and work of the Holy Spirit alone, who accomplishes and performs it by his power and might through the Word in the intellect, will and heart of man.⁴⁶

Obviously this statement is directed against all enthusiasts, but the SD is concerned also about synergism. For this reason the SD contends that,

The young students at our universities have been greatly misled by the doctrine of the three efficient causes of unregenerated man's conversion to God, particularly as to the manner in which these three (The Word of God preached and heard, the Holy Spirit, and man's will) concur.⁴⁷

⁴⁵FC, SD, II, 88.

⁴⁶FC, SD, II, 89.

⁴⁷FC, SD, II, 90.

It will be remembered that Melanchthon had taught in his Loci of 1559, "Hic concurrunt tres causae bonae actionis, Verbum Dei, Spiritus sanctus, et humana voluntas assentiens nec repugnans verbo Dei."⁴⁸ Here it is evident that Melanchthon is speaking of the will in the regenerate, not the cooperation of the unregenerate will in initial conversion. In the Examen Ordinandorum, as has been seen, Melanchthon puts the three efficient causes in the context of conversion. As pointed out at that time, both the immediate context of that passage and Melanchthon's use of conversione indicates that he did not intend for this passage to in any way undercut the divine monergism of God's grace. Nevertheless, the certain ambiguity to these expressions permitted others who came after Melanchthon to use these phrases (in particular Strigel) in a way so as to ascribe to the will a place in the initial conversion of the unregenerate. In light of the historical development of the use of this phrase ("three concurring causes") the SD finds it misleading. Understood as Melanchthon had used the phrase it is not rejected; but understood as later synergists had used it, it undercuts the monergism of divine grace and is therefore rejected. Man is converted, he does not convert himself. Therefore the SD concludes with the evangelical position regarding free will:

the will of the person who is to be converted does nothing, but only lets God work in him, until he is converted. Then he cooperates with the Holy Spirit in subsequent good works by doing that which is pleasing to God. . . .⁴⁹

⁴⁸St. A., vol. 2, part 1, p. 243.

⁴⁹FC, SD, II, 91.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Was Melanchthon a Synergist?

The allegation that Philip Melanchthon was a synergist must be evaluated in two ways. It must be asked whether Melanchthon, in asserting a freedom of the will, is speaking of that freedom in the context of the initial conversion of the Christian (conversio prima) or of the renewal which is a part of Christian regeneration (conversio secunda). If he is speaking of the participation of the will in the initial conversion of the Christian, he is, by definition, a synergist. If he is speaking of the participation of the will in the conversio continuata of the Christian life, he is not a synergist. Secondly, when Melanchthon speaks of the freedom of the will in relation to the unregenerate, it must be asked whether he is speaking of external obedience to the law of God (first use of the law) or the inner renewal the law requires (second use of the law). If Melanchthon contends that unregenerate man has the free will to chose to do the external works of the law, although imperfectly, his position is not synergistic. If it is his position that the unregenerate can please God apart from faith, or that his works contribute to his justification, or that he has free will to choose or reject God, then his position is synergistic.

Based on a careful reading of Melanchthon's locus on the free will in his 1521, 1535, 1543, 1555, and 1559 editions of the Loci, it is the conclusion of this writer that Melanchthon does not affirm free will in man in spiritual things prior to conversion, but only in regenerate man as he is lead by the Holy Spirit through the Word. Even in the regenerate, the freedom to choose spiritual things is very weak, hindered by man's innate sinful condition and the devil himself. The regenerate must use their free will therefore to apply themselves to God's grace through the Word and Sacraments and must discipline themselves in obedience to the law of God (third use). When Melanchthon addresses the question as to why some are restored and others are lost, he asks the question only in the context of those who have been regenerated. David was saved and Saul was lost. Both had been chosen by God. When David sinned, he repented and was restored. Saul did not repent. Therefore Melanchthon concludes, the regenerate must use their free will to turn from disobedience and in contrition and repentance seek the forgiveness of sin and the vivification of the Holy Spirit. Melanchthon does not apply this understanding to the unregenerate, nor does he indicate that there is something in the unconverted that is the reason for their salvation. The unregenerate have no free will and therefore cannot repent or turn to God. Their conversion is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit, by grace through faith, for the sake of Christ, using the instrument of the Word, the Sacred Scriptures. Melanchthon always describes justification as an "imputed" righteousness and a "forensic" declaration.

Justification is entirely God's act. Thus justification as forensic declaration is distinguished from renewal, regeneration, and vivification in the Spirit, by which the Christian is enabled to please God and to choose the will of God. One cannot appreciate Melancthon's understanding of the role of free will without understanding how carefully he distinguishes between the forensic nature of justification and the regenerative nature of sanctification. In justification man is entirely passive. In sanctification man must be actively seeking the will of God. For the regenerate Christian good works are necessary for salvation. Thus the third use of the law plays a prominent role in Melancthon's description of regenerate free will. Without free will in the Christian there would be no third use of the law. Without free will, the only function of the law would be to accuse and condemn sin, also in the regenerate. But because the Holy Spirit has regenerated man's ability to choose God's will, the Christian can seek in the law that which pleases God and is efficacious for Christian renewal. With that freedom to choose also comes responsibility and the Christian who uses his will to choose against God's law will suffer the same fate as did Saul. Therefore the Christian is to "apply himself unto grace"; that is, when he hears God's promise of grace he is to endeavor to assent to it and to abandon all sins against God's law and his Christian conscience. Consequently, Melancthon concludes, there are three concurrent causes of good actions, the Word, the Holy Spirit, and the will, which is not idle, but assents to the promises of God in the gospel and chooses the will of God in the law. The

human being is never merely a block of wood or a piece of stone or a statue in relation to God. Unregenerate man is totally and completely opposed to God in everything and is incapable of moving toward God. His sinful affections overwhelm him and he cannot conquer them. Regenerate man has the free will to choose to hear God's Word, to hear God's address of law and gospel, to seek the forgiveness of sin and the benefits of Christ. The Lord said that a man is either for him or against him. Melanchthon's affirmation is that unregenerate man is only against God and that the Christian must continually be for God in the choices of his regenerate will, recognizing that there is great weakness also in the regenerate and that growth in sanctification is a life-long process.

It is not possible nor would it be helpful to attempt to evaluate all the objections which various authors have raised to Melanchthon's teaching concerning free will and its alleged synergistic implications. Some of those who maintain Melanchthon's synergistic tendencies do so because that supposed synergism accords with their own theological positions. The discussion of free will by Clyde Manschreck in his biography of Melanchthon would represent this approach.¹ Of greater concern for Lutheran theology is the understanding of those confessional scholars who find in Melanchthon's writings the genesis of later theological aberrations regarding free will. They properly recognize in the tenets of synergism a denial of the divine monergism and the erosion of the sola gratia

¹Clyde Leonard Manschreck, Melanchthon: The Quiet Reformer (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), pp. 293-302.

and sola fide which undergird biblical, evangelical theology. A representative of this group of confessional Lutherans would be Dr. Bente, who in his "Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books" describes Melanchthon as the progenitor of synergism in the Lutheran church.² Agreeing with Dr. Bente's concern to protect evangelical theology from synergistic errors does not mean agreement, however, in his interpretation of Melanchthon. A brief survey of Bente's criticism of Melanchthon will serve two purposes. First, it will provide a summary of the objections raised to Melanchthon's formulations regarding free will, and second, it will provide an opportunity to evaluate the judgment that Melanchthon's formulations are synergistic.

Bente is careful to cite generous portions of Melanchthon's writings in the Loci and other works. He dates Melanchthon's departure from teaching divine monergism to a date shortly after the publishing of the Apology.

In the revised editions of 1535 and 1543 he plainly began to prepare the way for his later bold and unmistakable deviations. For even though unable to point out a clean cut and unequivocal synergistic statement, one cannot read these editions without scenting a Semi-Pelagian and Erasmian atmosphere. What Melanchthon began to teach was the doctrine that man when approached by the Word of God, is able to assume either an attitude of pro or con, i.e. for or against the grace of God. The same applies to the Variata of 1540, in which the frequent "adiuvari" there employed, though not incorrect as such, was not without a synergistic flavor.³

Bente "scents" a "synergistic flavor" to these two editions of the Loci and the Variata, although he is not able "to point out a clean cut and unequivocal synergistic statement." His concern is that

²Bente, pp. 124-31.

³Ibid., p. 128.

Melanchthon is putting unregenerate man prior to justification in a position of choosing for or against the grace of God. His error is that Melanchthon in fact nowhere accords unregenerate man that capacity. Melanchthon does put regenerate man in that position of choosing or rejecting God's promises and forgiveness. This is also his position in the Variata.

De libero arbitrio docent, quod humana voluntas habeat aliquam libertatem ad efficiendam civilem iusticiam, et deligendas res rationi subjectas. Sed no habet vim sine Spiritu sancto efficiendae iusticiae spiritualis. . . . Efficitur autem spiritualis iusticia in nobis, cum adiuvamur a Spiritu sancto. Porro Spiritum sanctum concipimus, cum verbo Dei assentimur, ut nos fide in terroribus consolemur.⁴

Melanchthon is speaking of those who have received the Holy Spirit, affirming that the Christian is able to work spiritual righteousness when he is helped by the Holy Spirit through the Word. Melanchthon is not speaking of the unregenerate co-operating with the Holy Spirit in conversion. Man has no power of the will to effect spiritual righteousness without the Holy Spirit. At the time of its publication, it was not criticized by Luther or other evangelicals as synergistic.

In support of his position, Dr. Bente cites Tschackert, commenting on the 1535 edition.

"Melanchthon here wants to make man responsible for his state of grace. Nor does the human will in consequence of original sin lose the ability to decide itself when incited; the will produces nothing new by its own power but assumes an attitude toward what approaches it. When man hears the Word of God and the Holy Spirit produces spiritual affections in his heart, the will can either assent or turn against it. In this way Melanchthon arrives at the formula, ever after stereotype with him, that there are three concurring causes in the process of

⁴CR, 26:362.

conversion: 'the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and the human will, which indeed is not idle, but strives against its infirmity.'"⁵

The reader is referred to the discussion of the 1543 edition of the Loci (which seems to be the edition referred to, the three concurring causes not being found in the 1535 edition). The context for the "three causes" is not that of "the process of conversion" but of Christian renewal and sanctification. Melanchthon on the contrary affirms that the human will is not able to eliminate the horrible corruption of original sin which fights against the law of God. Melanchthon does not speak of a "process" of conversion. One is converted by forensic declaration in a moment of time, and the conversion that continues after that point (conversio continuata) is that of regeneration and renewal. But the conversio prima must be distinguished from the conversio secunda. When the Holy Spirit produces "spiritual affections" in the heart (that is, the regenerate Christian will) the Christian can then "either assent or turn against" the life of renewal which comes through the address of the Word in law and promise. Because the Christian remains always a sinner, his regenerate will is "not idle" but "strives against its infirmity." Melanchthon's assertion of free will has been put in the wrong context. The fault lies not in Melanchthon, but in the interpretation.

Bente reserves his harshest judgments for the later editions of the Loci and Melanchthon's writings after the death of Luther.

⁵Bente, p. 128.

. . . During the life of Luther, Melanchthon made no further progress towards synergism. . . . After Luther's death, however, he came out unmistakably and publicly also in favor, endorsing even the Erasmian definition of free will as 'the power in man to apply himself to grace.' He plainly taught that, when drawn by the Holy Spirit, the will is able to decide pro or con, to obey or to resist.⁶

It is true that Melanchthon used the expression "faculty to apply oneself to grace" in the later editions of the Loci.

Liberum arbitrium in homine facultatem esse applicandi se ad gratiam, id est, audit promissionem et assentiri conatur et abiicit peccata contra conscientiam.⁷

Free will in man is the faculty to apply oneself to grace. That is, one hears the promise and is able to assent and to give up sins against the conscience.

It is also clear that Melanchthon is not speaking of the will being able to decide pro or con about God prior to conversion.

Melanchthon is speaking of one who is converted and able to hear the promise, to assent, and to give up sins against the conscience.

While Melanchthon formerly (in his Loci of 1543) had spoken of three causes of a good action (bonae actionis) he now publicly advocated the doctrine of three concurring causes of conversion. Now he boldly maintained that, since the grace of God is universal, one must assume, and also teach, that there are different actions in different men, which accounts for the fact that some are converted and saved while others are lost.⁸

One should note that in the 1543 edition the three conjoined causes are used not with reference to "conversion" or "good actions," but in explication of Romans 8:26, "The Spirit helps us in our infirmities," a text speaking of Christian renewal. More importantly, it is in this same paragraph in the last edition of the Loci where

⁶Ibid., p. 129.

⁷St. A., vol. 2, part 1, p. 245.

⁸Bente, p. 129.

Melanchthon also speaks of free will as the faculty in man to apply oneself to grace, that he also speaks of the universal grace of God.

Cum promissio sit universalis nec sint in Deo contradictoriae voluntates, necesse est in nobis aliquam discriminis causam, cur Saul abiiciatur, David recipiatur, id est, necesse est aliquam esse actionem dissimilem in his duobus. Haec dextre intellect vera sunt, et usus in exercitiis fidei et in vera consolatione, cum acquiescunt animi in Filio Dei monstrato in promissione, illustrabit hanc copulationem causarum, verbi Dei, Spiritus sancti et voluntatis.⁹

Since the promise is universal and since there is in God no contradiction of the will, it is necessary that there be in us some cause of discrimination, why Saul was cast down and David was received. Therefore it is necessary that there is a dissimilar action in these two. Properly understood, this is true and is used in the exercise of faith and in true consolation, when the souls rest in the Son of God shown in the promises. It illustrates this joining of causes: Word of God, Holy Spirit, and the will.

Melanchthon affirms the universal grace of God, but not with the intent of answering the unanswerable, "Why some and not others?" His frame of reference is the people of God. Why are some cast down and others received? The answer is in the exercise of faith and the true consolation of forgiveness. Melanchthon's affirmation is that the regenerate will must co-operate with the Word of God and the Holy Spirit in an ongoing life of repentance and forgiveness, of growth in grace and Christian renewal. Melanchthon does not posit the will of man as determining why "some are converted and saved while others are lost." He is speaking of why some who have been renewed fall from grace and others grow in grace, and he correctly maintains a position later affirmed in the Formula of Concord.

⁹St. A., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 245-46.

The will of the person who is to be converted does nothing, but only lets God work in him, until he is converted. Then he cooperates with the Holy Spirit in subsequent good works by doing what is pleasing to God. . . .¹⁰

Bente supplies extensive quotations from the last edition of the Loci to demonstrate his contention that the statements of Melanchthon are synergistic. These citations relate to why David was restored and Saul lost, that the free will is not idle, but resists its infirmities, the faculty to apply oneself to grace. These issues have already been discussed above. But it is important to note his contention that Melanchthon's alleged synergism cannot be explained away by saying that all these passages relate to the regenerate will. He begins by acknowledging that:

At the colloquy of Worms, 1557, Melanchthon, interpellated by Brenz, is reported to have said that the passage in his Loci of 1548 (first revision of the third and final edition) defining free will as the faculty of applying oneself to grace referred to the regenerated will (voluntatis renata) as, he said, appeared from the context.¹¹

Bente rejects this interpretation, asserting against Melanchthon that the "context clearly excludes this interpretation."

In the passage quoted (selections from the 3rd edition of the Loci) Melanchthon, moreover, plainly teaches:

1. that in conversion man, too, can do and really does, something by willingly confessing his fault, by sustaining himself with the Word, by praying that God would assist him, by wrestling with himself, by striving against diffidence, etc.;
2. that the nature of fallen man differs from that of the devils in this, that his free will is still able to apply itself to grace, endeavor to assent to it, etc.
3. that the dissimilar actions resulting from the different use of this natural ability accounts for the fact that some are saved and some are lost.¹²

¹⁰FC, SD, II, 91.

¹¹Bente, p. 130.

¹²Ibid.

Bente's assertions have already been answered in large part. Suffice it to say in response to objection number one that what Bente ascribes to Melanchthon in the context of synergism Melanchthon clearly places in the context of regenerate behavior. Regarding the second objection it is clear that Melanchthon in context does not assert that fallen man is able to apply himself to grace or to assent to it, but only that regenerate man must assent to the Word and apply himself to grace in a life of Christian renewal. Finally, in the third objection, Dr. Bente is ascribing to Melanchthon a position he does not hold. In speaking of David and Saul, Melanchthon is not speaking of "natural abilities" but of a difference in how these two men, once renewed, responded to the law and promises of God. One repented and was restored. The other did not repent and was lost. Melanchthon is saying nothing other than what the Formula of Concord says when it insists that,

as soon as the Holy Spirit has initiated his work of regeneration and renewal in us through the Word and holy sacraments, it is certain that we can and must cooperate by the power of the Holy Spirit, even though we still do so in great weakness.¹³

The SD describes it as "self evident that in true conversion there must be a change" in the intellect, heart, and will of the regenerate Christian.¹⁴ Melanchthon is not speaking of "natural abilities" but of the first fruits and regeneration of the Holy Spirit expressed in an ongoing life of growing sanctification.

In the examples cited thus far, Bente's error has been in assigning to the unregenerate man the free will that Melanchthon

¹³FC, SD, II, 65.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 70.

ascribes to the regenerate only. If Bente's interpretation were correct, Melanchthon would indeed be guilty of synergism. But Bente has interpreted Melanchthon out of context. Melanchthon is affirming the proper role of the free will in Christian renewal. He is affirming free will in spiritual matters only to those who have been declared righteous (iustitia imputata) and given the renewing gift of the Holy Spirit through the Spirit and have now the iustitia inhaerens of vivification in the Spirit. Bente, however, also misunderstands Melanchthon when Melanchthon speaks of the free will of the unregenerate in works of civil righteousness (first use of the law). Melanchthon is speaking of the external obedience to the law which to some extent even the unregenerate can give. Bente interprets it as a freedom to choose or resist God's call.

In 1553 Melanchthon inserted a paragraph (in the Loci) which says that when approached by the Holy Spirit, the will can obey or resist. We read: 'The liberty of the human will after the fall, also in the non-regenerate, is the faculty by virtue of which man is able to govern his motions, i.e. he can enjoin upon his external members such actions as agree or do not agree with the law of God. But he cannot banish doubts from his heart without the light of the gospel and without the Holy Spirit. But when the will is drawn by the Holy Spirit, it can obey or resist.'¹⁵

Melanchthon is merely distinguishing between the non-regenerate who is able "to govern his motions" to do the external works of the law of God and the regenerate, "whose will is drawn by the Holy Spirit." The regenerate man can choose to obey or to resist the law of God; he can "banish doubts and evil inclinations from his

¹⁵Bente, p. 130.

heart" because he has received the Holy Spirit and has the free will to "obey or resist" the innate opposition of original sin to the spiritual will of God. Melanchthon is not speaking of that moment when the unregenerate is confronted with the gospel through the working of the Holy Spirit. The unregenerate will cannot choose to "obey or resist." Only the regenerate will can choose "to obey or resist" the Spirit of God. Melanchthon reiterates this position repeatedly in every edition of the Loci.

Bente summarizes his position with these words.

According to the later Melanchthon, therefore, man's eternal salvation evidently does not depend on the gracious operations of God's Holy Spirit and Word alone, but also on his own correct conduct toward grace. In his heart, especially when approaching the mercy-seat in prayer, Melanchthon, no doubt forgot and disavowed his own teaching and believed and practiced Luther's sola-gratia-doctrine. But it cannot be denied that, in his endeavors to harmonize universal grace with the fact that not all, but some only, are saved, Melanchthon repudiated the monergism of Luther, espoused and defended the powers of free will in spiritual matters, and thought, argued, spoke, and wrote in terms of synergism.¹⁶

However well intentioned Bente's concern may be to protect the ever vulnerable sola-gratia of the evangelical Lutheran Church, that Melanchthon taught a synergistic doctrine of salvation is not evident. To the contrary, Melanchthon insisted that justification is always an imputation of righteousness by divine grace. Indeed, the Lutheran church has received its "forensic" vocabulary of justification in no small part from his writings. From the point of the divine declaration of forgiveness of sin, however, a new man is born, with a new heart and a new will, a heart that loves God and a will that is free to choose to obey God's law.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 129.

Summary

In the succeeding editions of the Loci, Melanchthon modifies the determinism of the first edition, teaching that the will is able to choose or reject in external things that which the mind points out to it. This includes an evolution of terminology so that in his later editions, Melanchthon posits a cognitive (mens) and volitional (voluntas) aspect in his psychology of man. But Melanchthon maintains that one cannot understand free will by using human powers, for these powers treat only of human weakness. To speak of free will one must distinguish between those things which are subject to reason and the senses, and those things which involve the heart of man. In external things, man is able to choose to some extent, although there are other forces in history which impede this choice. Using Paul's distinction between "carnal" and "spiritual" righteousness, Melanchthon maintains that those who are not reborn do have a certain amount of choice in doing the external works of the law. In no way does this "carnal" or civil righteousness merit the forgiveness of sins or justification. And this freedom of choice even in the external works of the law is constantly impeded by man's innate infirmities and the devil.¹⁷ God moreover demands more than mere external discipline; he requires an inner obedience of the heart which the unregenerate man cannot give. Consequently he is judged by the law and condemned in his sin. There is no way that man can overcome his innate infirmity (original sin). "This evil can be acknowledged only when

¹⁷St. A., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 239-40.

one perceives the beneficia Christi, who removes sin and death and renews natural man. Thus the will is captive, not free, except, of course, to exalt natural privation and death."¹⁸

Regenerate man may choose to obey the law of God in a life of "spiritual righteousness" and in giving to God the obedience he desires, but the will of the unregenerate is captive with regard to "spiritual righteousness" because man on his own cannot overcome his spiritual privation. Those who have this spiritual righteousness are those who are illuminated to spiritual impulses by the Holy Spirit and who fear, believe, and trust God. Human will, even in these regenerate, is not able to bring about the spiritual effects God demands, unless it is helped by the Holy Spirit. God is not to be sought apart from his Word; therefore, there are always three causes of bonae actionis in the regenerate, the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and the human will, "assenting to and not resisting the Word of God."¹⁹

When Luther wrote his De Servo Arbitrio, it was in the context of the conversion of the unregenerate. Can the will of natural man contribute anything to the restoration of the relationship between God and man? Luther's unequivocal reply was "no." In Melancthon's discussion concerning libero arbitrio the context is not that of initial conversion (conversio prima), as was Luther's, but the continuing conversion (conversio secunda) endemic to the

¹⁸Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 240-41.

¹⁹Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, p. 243.

Christian life.²⁰ One who does not recognize the difference in context and "opponent" in these writings is likely to misinterpret Melanchthon. Only the Christian may freely choose to obey the law in love and thus live a life pleasing to God and in conformity with the law. But the obedience of the regenerate is also imperfect, and it is not because of his obedience that he is termed "spiritually righteous" but because he has received by faith the beneficia Christi, the remissio peccatorum. Therefore the context of Melanchthon's discussion is that of the conversio continuata of the Christian life, and not that of the initial conversion by which one is brought to faith. When Melanchthon speaks of conversion, he does so in the context of the already existing Christian life.²¹ God alone converts man and man's initial indifference to God is replaced through the Spirit of God with faith and repentance, so that "one hears the promise and is able to assent and to give up sins against the conscience." The Christian life then centers in the renewing act of God, the continuing ministry of the Holy Spirit through Word and sacrament. As a Christian, regenerate man has the capacity to choose to do the will of God or to reject God's will. This is why Melanchthon affirms that there are three causes of bonae actionis: the Word, the Spirit, and the regenerate will.

If we speak of the total life of the pious, even if the weakness is great, nevertheless, there is still free will when, indeed,

²⁰Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 243-44.

²¹Rogness, pp. 126-29.

already in the Spirit, one is able to help and to do something in the outward guarding from falling.²²

In speaking of free will to choose or reject the law and the promises, Melanchthon is speaking only of the "life of the pious." Melanchthon counters the arguments of the enthusiasts and manicheans who suppose that men do not have free will. The enthusiasts are in error because they do not recognize that God is not to be sought apart from his Word. The manicheans are in error because they deny the Christian man's ability to choose and make him merely a pawn for the forces of good and evil, a pawn who has no power to seek the good or to repress the evil. In this Melanchthon is anticipating some of the concerns of the writers of the Formula of Concord. While the unregenerate may have some freedom to choose to do the external works of the law, only the Christian can truly love and trust God, which is the true, internal fulfillment of the law. Melanchthon often quotes the words of Christ, "He gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask." The Christian is constantly to petition God for the power of the Spirit which alone enables man to will and to do God's law, God's will.

Melanchthon's preoccupation in the loci on Free Will is not how man comes to faith, but how man lives in the faith. His concern is that the sola fide may be misunderstood in an epicurean fashion; that is, that a man may feel that it does not matter how one lives, but only that one believes. Melanchthon reflects the epistles of Paul and the epistle of James in affirming that one

²²St. A., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 243-44.

shows what one believes by how one lives. If a Christian does not push away spiritual indifference and other vices of the flesh he cannot trust solely in God. One's faith must have an impact on one's life so that the believer is able to live with afflictions and troubles, even the pain of death, in conformity with God's good will. If the Christian gives in to affliction and trouble and fears death, then his will is not in conformity with God's will and the impediments of life have separated the believer from God. Even after regeneration man's nature remains corrupted and the devil and his horrible hatred of Christ implicates the Christian in many sins. The troubles and afflictions of this life bring uncertainty, darkness and perversity. But against these impediments the Christian will is helped and strengthened by the Holy Spirit and the regenerate will becomes a circumspect and constant agent against these impediments as it calls ardently upon God.

Because Melanchthon has this great emphasis on the functional aspect of the regenerate human will, its practical application in the life of the believer, his locus de libero arbitrio continually speaks of the function of the law as it impinges in the life of the regenerate. To the natural man, the law is a curse. For the spiritual man who has received the promise, the beneficia Christi, the law is the will of God to be sought out and performed in love. Even for the Christian, however, Melanchthon is quick to affirm that his righteousness rests not in the fulfillment of the law, but in the benefits of Christ. In this position

Melanchthon expressed precisely the doctrine of the Formula of Concord regarding the third use of the law. The imputed righteousness of God impels the spiritual man to seek out the will of God and to live according to the law of God in love. When the spiritual man fails to live according to God's law, the law accuses him and declares its wrath to him. It is for this reason that Melanchthon contends that "the law is impossible," for it is the judgment of God judging both outward sin and internal sin (man's lack of faith and trust in God). At the same time, Melanchthon constantly reiterates that the Christian is not a man of the law but of the promise. The benefits of Christ which the law is not able to take away remain with the regenerate. This is why Christ is the mediator, because, for his sake, sinful man is declared righteous. By the law is no one made righteous, for the purpose of the law is to show sin. "Therefore God gives to us the Holy Spirit, so that in our infirmities, nonetheless, the obedience of the law is begun and makes us somewhat wholesome, and the teaching of the devil is suppressed."²³

In carrying through his dual emphasis on what Christ has done and what man by the power of the Spirit must do, Melanchthon speaks of the grace received by the Christian from two perspectives. First he speaks of imputed grace, which is grace received for the sake of Christ by which a man is declared just. In being justified, it is certain that a man pleases just as if he had done the whole law. But secondly, Melanchthon wishes to speak of grace

²³Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 250-51.

as the continuing activity of the Holy Spirit. It is this grace which sustains the Christian life.

Minds are incited to the true light and preserved in the Word of God. The movements of faith in the heart are excited, minds are moved so that they undertake what is beneficial for us and for others. . . . Always, therefore, we pray that we might do what pleases God and is useful for us and for the church. And neither way is one able to do anything unless God helps and guides us.²⁴

This is the libero arbitrio of the Christian.

Melanchthon's theology, properly understood, is thus in full agreement with the formulations given in the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord, article II. The concern of the Solid Declaration is in part a concern with synergism, a concern Melanchthon shares in his writings against the Roman scholastic position which denied that justification was a declaration or imputation of righteousness by grace through faith, for the sake of Christ. The Solid Declaration is also concerned with the epicureanism of those who denied that the declaration of righteousness required a change in life. This is the primary focus of Melanchthon's later loci on free will: the need for the forgiven sinner, having received the benefits of Christ, to discipline his life according to the law of God. This he cannot do on his own, for he is afflicted with the affections of sin. Only a new heart, made alive by the Spirit of God through the Word of promise, can bring about renewal and the capacity for true piety and obedience. Thus the freedom of the regenerate will and the third use of the law complete one another in the psychology of Christian obedience.

²⁴Ibid., vol. 2, part 1, pp. 251-52.

This also is the emphasis of the Formula of Concord, article VI, where it is recognized that the regenerate in the struggle between flesh and spirit live "not under but in the law."²⁵

It is unfortunate that the theology of Philip Melanchthon has been made suspect by the errors of those who have claimed him as their own and by the misreadings of those who sought to maintain the divine monergism of the reformation "soli." In fact, Melanchthon's insistence that justification is an imputation and declaration of righteousness in a forensic way has become a part of the dogmatics vocabulary of the evangelical church, and his concern that the renewal of the regenerate be distinguished from, but not separated from, that declaration of righteousness, is essential for correct teaching regarding justification and sanctification. In this Melanchthon codified the biblical insights of Luther for succeeding generations of "Lutherans." In his doctrine of free will in the regenerate, Melanchthon answered those who criticized the reformation as antinomian. More importantly, he gave the evangelical church the necessary corollary to justification as a forensic declaration by grace through faith, in his insistence that sanctification is the conjoining of the Word, the Holy Spirit, and the regenerate human will in a life pleasing to God, also by grace, through faith.

²⁵FC, SD, VI, 18.

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