IV

Labors for Church and School

8. Transition to New Tasks

The labors that burdened Melanchthon had greatly undermined his health. His friends were anxious for the Master, who knew only work without regard for his outward welfare and circumstances. Luther accordingly wrote to Spalatin as early as the summer of 1520 that the young professor needed a wife who would take care of him and a homelife in which he could be happy. The Wittenberg climate and the heavy diet, moreover, did not suit him. Melanchthon himself at first rejected the demands of his friends, since he feared that he would have to cut down his studies if he were to devote enough attention to a wife. His friends, however, did not give up. The wedding took place on November 25, 1520. Melanchthon married Katherine, the daughter of the Wittenberg burgomaster and tailor Hans Krapp. Through this marriage he became a brother-in-law of his two colleagues Augustine Scheurl and Sebald Münster. Katherine Krapp was the same age as her husband, an upright and faithful wife whom Melanchthon could not praise highly enough. To be sure, it was difficult for him at first to adapt himself to his new situation. Soon, however, he realized what grace God had imparted to marriage in giving each of the partners the

opportunity to be concerned for the other. Katherine Melanchthon had only one fault: she did not know how to manage a household. There was never money in the house, because she was just as liberal as her husband. Sometimes, therefore, chaos would have prevailed in the home if Melanchthon had not had in John Koch the most efficient assistant (*famulus*) that he could imagine. This man not only helped him in scholarly labors but also assisted in the housekeeping. From year to year the family grew. Melanchthon was attached to his children with deep love. Visitors sometimes saw him with a book in his hand, sitting at the baby's cradle. For his pupils and guests also, however, he always had time.

Two qualities of Master Philip must be particularly emphasized: his capacity for concentration and his conscientiousness. His achievements are understandable from the fact that he was able to work quickly and without interruption. Students streamed to his lectures, which he never canceled without good reason. His hearers learned about his wedding through the following poetic notice:

> Today Philip happily takes a holiday from studies.
> He will not lecture to you on Paul's holy doctrines.

In 1520, Spalatin counted over five hundred students in his theological lectures alone, and in all his lectures together over fifteen hundred. No one else in Wittenberg had such academic success. Melanchthon had thrown himself unreservedly into his tasks, and had not spared his energies. Now Luther, too, thought it appropriate that he should take a rest in his homeland. The elector granted him a leave of five weeks. Accompanied by four friends, including Camerarius, Melanchthon made this journey by horse in the summer of 1524. Through Leipzig, Fulda, and

Frankfurt led the road to his native Bretten. Camerarius reports that when Melanchthon caught sight of the little town he dismounted from his horse, knelt, and cried out with deep emotion: " O my native land! How I thank thee, Lord, that I may set foot in it! " While his friends rode farther to Basel in order to visit Erasmus and Oecolampadius, Melanchthon remained at his mother's home. There were definite reasons, however, why he did not pay a visit to Erasmus. The controversy of Erasmus with Luther over freedom of the will had cast its shadows ahead, so that he preferred to avoid a cool reception in Basel.

Unexpectedly there came to him in Bretten an honor from the University of Heidelberg. As emissaries of the faculty of arts, Hermann von dem Busche and Simon Grynaeus delivered to their now-famous colleague a silver goblet. The faculty wished to make him forget that he had once been denied the master's degree. He received another visit also. From Stuttgart appeared Frederick Nausea, the secretary of Lorenzo, Cardinal Campeggio, who by order of the legate made offers to induce him to go over to the other side. Melanchthon's answer was clear, much as he emphasized his love of peace. He would continue to set forth the pure doctrine, and wished only that all who had the church's welfare at heart would unite to amend the intolerable conditions in the church. For the legate Melanchthon jotted down a brief note on Luther's doctrine. " The world errs if it says that Luther wanted to abolish church practices. Luther does not fight over outward things. His concern is the righteousness of God. Scripture alone, to which he appeals, can confirm the conscience against the gates of hell. Human traditions contribute nothing toward the righteousness of God. In the Mass there are so many abuses that they cannot be overlooked. If no changes are

made in it, then men who are far from being Luther's pupils will arouse people against the church."

When Melanchthon's traveling companions returned from Basel, he made the journey back with them. In the Odenwald not far from Frankfurt they met the young landgrave, Philip of Hesse. Philip was reputedly an opponent of the new teaching. He amused himself by alarming Master Philip. He took him captive. Then he asked him to accompany him to his inn. A whole night they kept up a conversation over questions of faith. In the morning the prince released him with the condition that Melanchthon should soon send him a written statement of the Evangelical faith.

This task Melanchthon took very seriously. Immediately after his return he wrote for the landgrave an *Outline of the Restored Evangelical Doctrine.* In it he refers to the fact that many misunderstandings in regard to Luther's doctrine are current among his contemporaries. The gospel alone furnishes the test for this teaching, whose focuses are to be found in righteousness and in works. The Christian's righteousness consists in the fact that his terrified conscience receives consolation through faith in Christ. This consolation of the forgiveness of sins becomes his through the gospel. Therefore the gospel must be preached and not suppressed. It remains an open question whether this *Outline* settled Landgrave Philip in his decision and thus prepared the way for the Reformation in Hesse, which was introduced soon thereafter. The landgrave's personal relations with Melanchthon continued from then on through four decades. Though Melanchthon declined a call to the University of Marburg, founded in 1527, he remained on many occasions the adviser of the landgrave.

The journey to his homeland had revived Melanch-

thon's connections with the Palatinate. When the peasants' uprising burst upon the land in the spring of 1525, the peasants themselves had proposed him as arbitrator between them and the lords. Elector Ludwig had promised them to have their Twelve Articles examined, and then had begged Melanchthon to perform this service, either by coming to Heidelberg himself or by preparing a written memorandum. Though Melanchthon was prepared to acknowledge several demands of the peasants as justified, he differed not a little from Luther in his judgment. In many respects he was more conservative than Luther. Since the peasants appealed to the gospel, he first held up to them the true doctrine. Christian faith is something other than force and coercion. Here is required the obedience which men owe to the government. As a humanist he strongly emphasized the natural law. Melanchthon stated the opinion that through the law the peasants were bound to their established burdens. Among them he even reckoned serfdom. While he called the peasants to obedience, he exhorted the lords to mildness. The first step should be church reforms, then social difficulties would gradually be worked out. But this counsel came too late. The land was already up in flames with the Peasants' War, and force had to decide the issue.

During the most violent days of the Peasants' War, which Luther viewed in the light of the Judgment Day, he determined to lay before the world a last confession. On June 13, 1525, he betrothed himself to Katherine von Bora, a refugee nun from the cloister at Nimbschen. Melanchthon, who had had no hint of this move, was dismayed by the news. To Luther's marriage he had no objections; it only appeared questionable to him whether the act was wisely timed. He emphasized, however, that his relation

to Luther's doctrine remained unaffected, whether Luther had erred in his personal life or not. When, according to the custom of the time, Luther held the wedding celebration fourteen days later, Melanchthon was among the guests. Between the friends no alienation was caused by Luther's marriage. Afterward as well as before, Melanchthon was a frequent guest in Luther's house, even though their wives did not get along very well together.

The controversy between Erasmus and Luther over free will left a marked impression upon Melanchthon. Melanchthon, who regarded himself as a pupil of Erasmus, had tried ever since his arrival in Wittenberg to see to it that no antagonism should develop between Erasmus and the Wittenbergers. He had even induced Luther to write again to Erasmus, and to influence him to avoid a controversy. But Erasmus had already committed himself. He could not retreat. The treatise *On Free Will* had to appear. Although Melanchthon was no longer an Erasmian in the same sense as before, still he inevitably felt himself affected as a humanist. He himself desired that the unsettled questions between humanism and the Reformation might be discussed for once in competent fashion. Already in the summer of 1524 he had declared that on such an occasion the predestination of man and the question of personal freedom of decision should be treated. Now Erasmus had recognized and taken up this question as the most important of the unsettled problems. And Luther testified in his answer that Erasmus had hit the nail on the head. Here, indeed, lay the real core of the difference in views. Erasmus had informed Melanchthon of his intention. Melanchthon in his reply by no means dissociated himself from Luther, but declared himself in agreement with him,

and promised a calm and objective rejoinder by Luther. The situation did not remain at this point. Both Luther and Erasmus contributed to the fact that the controversy became sharper and sharper. This Melanchthon regretted. Despite the break between Erasmus and Luther, however, Melanchthon for his part never cut off his correspondence with the once so admired master. He remained in touch with him until Erasmus' death.

Melanchthon did not continue to be a passive spectator in this controversy. In his memorial to Erasmus he later revealed that this dissension between Erasmus and Luther had deeply affected him. In his conception of man and of the freedom of the human will, however, he remained strongly influenced by Erasmus. In his inclination to draw sharp lines and in his effort to work pedagogically, he succeeded in combining the solution of an Erasmus with that of Luther. The doctrine of predestination was too obscure and too deeply surrounded by mystery for the simple man of the people to understand. Since Melanchthon's starting point was human experience, his view, for which he claimed the support of Rom. 2:14-15, had to leave room for a freedom of the will in the realm of " civil righteousness." For him, too, of course, everything in the inner life was traced back to God's immediate action. In this way much of the humanistic outlook was maintained and some features of Luther's views were attenuated.

In his commentary on the letter to the Colossians, which Melanchthon published in 1527, this mediating line is drawn. The two realms — civil existence and religious existence — must not be mingled. That is what the fanatics had attempted, and Melanchthon still had a vivid recollection of the controversies with Thomas Müntzer and with Karlstadt. Müntzer's letter to Melanchthon at Eastertime

in 1524 had been clear enough. Henceforth he taught more fully about free will, and underscored its use in questions of outward righteousness. Here he approaches the question psychologically and retreats from his original theological position. Man has freedom to do good and avoid evil, but this freedom is hindered by the devil. "This is important to know, that the people may learn how weak and wretched a man he is who does not seek help from God." With Luther he did not part company over this teaching, yet there were pupils of Luther's who accused him of having turned to a view different from Luther's. Some regretted the polemic in the *Visitation Articles;* others took offense at the exposition of the doctrine of repentance and the necessity for the preaching of the law. John Agricola, in Eisleben, emphasized, on the contrary, that both repentance and faith come from the gospel; the law is annulled by the gospel — this, he insisted, was Luther's teaching. Melanchthon's view he saw as a defection from the doctrine of justification. Luther had to arbitrate. He found here a quarrel over words. At bottom it is a pedagogical question whether man is said to be led to repentance by fear of divine wrath or whether repentance arises from love of God and his righteousness. Melanchthon was vindicated when Luther declared that faith involves the conscience and must be included in repentance. So Luther also taught in his two catechisms.

Melanchthon might regard himself as awkward and impractical, but through the pressure of current events he was forced to turn his attention to practical tasks. If the Enthusiast movement in Wittenberg had caused him to occupy himself with questions of church order, he also had occasion later to take up the questions of education and of Christian moral standards.