

The Discovery of a Melanchthon Letter

by Carl E. Maxcey

With the discovery of a dated letter of Melanchthon new light is shed on the controversial life of the well known sixteenth century theologian. The letter is located in the L. Franklin Gruber Collection, Krauss Library, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. An undated letter (only March 26) is found in the *Corpus Reformatorum* Volume 10, p. 15, No. 6996.

Variants between the CR letter and this one (the Gruber letter) are predominately found in the punctuation. Unlike the CR letter the Gruber letter: a) has no comma in line 3, b) has no period in line 6, c) has no capital M in *mediocribus* in line 7, d) has no comma in line 9, e) has no capital D in line 11, f) has no comma or capital P in line 14, g) has *εσλός* rather than *εσθλός* in line 16, h) has *ἀντίον* rather than *ἀντίον* in line 17, i) has the greeting to Sturtz following the salutation to Lang rather than preceding it, j) has the year 1540 following the day of 26 March.

The letter is addressed to John Lang in Erfurt and concerns some unidentified source of dissension. Melanchthon appeals to Lang's wisdom in the matter and laments his own suffering when he feels he is doing service to the church. A quote from Pindar (*Nemean* 1. 24.) indicates that he felt himself being handed over to those who were reproaching him. He appeals to his own irenic attempts to maintain unity among the churches, while informing Lang that he continues to pursue unity. He concludes with a greeting to Georg Sturtz.

The controversy Melanchthon refers to is difficult to establish for several reasons. First of all, the *istic* in line 4 of the letter usually means *there*, that is, the problem is at Erfurt. It can, however, refer to a controversy where Melanchthon is writing from. Secondly, given the date, one would think that the problem might be the bigamy of Philipp the Landgrave, but it is most unlikely that Melanchthon would write to Lang concerning such a delicate matter, when no extensive correspondence exists between the two, and not a close friend like Camerarius. In addition, the correspondence concerning the bigamy came later. Finally, Erfurt source materials do not indicate a controversy in which Melanchthon would be involved at this time. This may well indicate that the date is of another hand and incorrect. Even though the lower right hand corner of the letter appears to have been stained by some liquid, the 1540 date looks to be from a different ink than the rest of the letter. More pronounced still is the reverse impression of the date on the opposite side of the letter, unlike any other word or letter. This would indicate a different ink and/or pen.

S. D. Reverende vir et amice cariss(ime)
 Etsi magno cum dolore legi querelam
 tuam de fontibus simultatum quae
 istic ortae sunt, tamen scio ea
 te gravitate esse et sapientia, ut
 talibus malis arte mederi studeas
 mediocribus officijs et ad Ecclesiae
 utilitatem, et ad ipsius decus flectere illum ipsum
 de quo scribis studui. Et spero
 aetatis maturitatem aliqua emendaturam
 esse. de me si parum amanter loquitur,
 etsi ipse in me ipso multa
 reprehendo, tamen quod ad hunc
 attinet illud pindaricum
 dici posse arbitror, *λέλογγε*
μεμφομένοις, ἐσλός, ὕδωρ κάπνω
φέρειν ἀντίον. Ego certe Ecclesiarum
 nostrarum concordiam omni studio alere conatus
 sum, et mediocriter ea in re philoso(-)
 phatum me esse puto. Idem deinceps
 faciam. Bene et foeliciter vale. 26 Martius an(no) 1540
 salutem opto d. Sturciadae

Philippus Melancthon

