

# *Philip Melanchthon and the Age of Enlightenment: Notes on his Commemoration in 1760*

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*The academic commemoration of Philip Melanchthon, humanist, reformer and ‘teacher of Germany’ (‘praeceptor Germaniae’), occurred for the first time on a large scale in 1760, the two-hundredth anniversary of his death. This article offers a first exploration of the bicentennial. It explores how Melanchthon’s commemorators in central Europe positioned him as a hero of the early German Enlightenment (Aufklärung), singling out and reinterpreting his labours for the ‘improvement of humanity’. Shorn of context, divested of theological and ecclesiastical commitments, Melanchthon became the model scholar and the pride of Lutheran Germany, who transcended confessional particularities to instruct all of Europe.*

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## I

**F**or Philip Melanchthon, the eighteenth century began with an insult. In 1699–1700 Gottfried Arnold, author of the first self-proclaimed non-partisan church history, called him ‘crafty’ and ‘cunning’.<sup>1</sup> Few expressions packed as much freight. With world enough and time, one could unpack them to find the Lutheran confessional censure of so-called crypto-Calvinists as ‘crafty sacramentarians’, that is, the ‘most

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Melanchthon abermal hingegen so listig und verschmitzt’: G. Arnold, *Unparteyische Kirchen- und Ketzer-Historie von Anfang des Neuen Testaments biß auff das Jahr Christi 1688*, Leipzig 1699–1700, ii. 113. Arnold condemned Melanchthon at length in other sections as well, for example at ii. 93–102.

harmful sacramentarians', or going back farther, the deception in Eden by the serpent, one 'craftier than any beast of the field'.<sup>2</sup> The genealogy was intended to be as bad as it was long. By his method and his Aristotelianism, Arnold claimed, Melanchthon had caused Lutherans to turn away from the Bible. In search of proof, Arnold referred to the *Magdeburg centuries*, whose creators had eagerly criticised Melanchthon. Of Wittenberg's theologians, the Centuriators had declared: 'Everywhere, these voices cry: "The Preceptor said it and thought it and wrote it; therefore, it is true."' <sup>3</sup> Adding injury to insult, Arnold larded the account with errors – among the most flagrant: the assertion that Melanchthon never wrote a biblical commentary. In fact, he wrote many commentaries – five on Romans alone, the influence of which one would be hard-pressed to overstate.<sup>4</sup> Arnold's book became a publishing sensation nevertheless.<sup>5</sup>

The eighteenth century neared its end with another provocation. In 1784 Immanuel Kant proclaimed the motto of the Enlightenment: 'Dare to be wise! [*Sapere aude!*] Have courage to use your *own* understanding!'<sup>6</sup> A gloss on Horace, Kant's use of the phrase resonated clearly in its time, beyond classical and more recent rationalist roots, toward Melanchthon's well-known 1518 Wittenberg inaugural address, 'On improving the studies of youth'.<sup>7</sup> But when Melanchthon alluded to Horace, he wanted to avoid the impression that he thought, at age twenty-one and only three days after his arrival, that he needed to bring wisdom to the

<sup>2</sup> 'Etzliche aber seind verschlagene und die aller schedlichste Sacramentierer': Epitome of the Formula of Concord (1577), vii. 4, in *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 11th edn, Göttingen 1992, 796; Genesis iii.1.

<sup>3</sup> 'Da hört man überall diese worte: Der Praeceptor hats gesagt / also hat er geschrieben und statuirt: Ergo ists wahr': Arnold, *Ketzer-Historie*, ii. 96, quoting M. Flacius, J. Wigand and M. Judex, *Nona centuria ecclesiasticae historiae*, Basel 1565, preface at sig. a5v.

<sup>4</sup> T. J. Wengert, 'The biblical commentaries of Philip Melanchthon', in M. P. Graham and T. J. Wengert (eds), *Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560) and the commentary*, Sheffield 1997, 106–48.

<sup>5</sup> S. Dixon, 'Faith and history on the eve of enlightenment: Ernst Salomon Cyprian, Gottfried Arnold, and the *History of heretics*', this JOURNAL lviii (2006), 33–54.

<sup>6</sup> I. Kant, 'Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?', in *Kants gesammelte Schriften. Akademie-Ausgabe*, Berlin 1900–, viii. 35. The literal translation of Kant's *Sapere aude!* follows H. Reiss (ed.), *Kant's political writings*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, 2nd edn, Cambridge 1991, 5. 54 (emphasis original).

<sup>7</sup> For the argument that Kant's usage evoked memories of Melanchthon see S. Lestition, 'Kant and the end of the enlightenment in Prussia', *Journal of Modern History* lxxv (1993), 57–112 at p. 111, and F. Löttsch, 'Zur Genealogie der Frage "Was ist Aufklärung?"', Mendelssohn, Kant und die Neologie', in W. Dietrich (ed.), *Theokratie: Jahrbuch des Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum II 1970–1972: Festgabe für Karl Heinrich Rengstorf zum 70. Geburtstag*, Leiden 1973, 303–22 at pp. 319–20. On the deeper roots to the phrase see F. Venturi, 'Was ist Aufklärung? Sapere aude!', *Revista storica italiana* lxxi (1959), 119–28.

Wittenbergers. So, he praised the educational policies of the Saxon elector, who had called him to fill the new chair. He also commended the students, who would learn to exercise right judgement as they consumed Aristotle, Quintilian and the Elder Pliny; they remained none the less under the ‘tutelage’ of the divine word.<sup>8</sup>

The comments from Arnold and Kant, radical pietist and critical philosopher, respectively, constitute only two chips from their German workshops. But they are also revealing for Melanchthon’s reception history. The Wittenberg professor was remembered still as the consummate ‘teacher of Germany’ (*praeceptor Germaniae*), the title by which he was known in exact or similar formulations already at the time of his death. Originally the designation referred not only to his role in reforming the structure and curricula of countless schools and universities in the sixteenth century, but also to the widespread influence of his leadership and instruction, including in the Bible – in other words, his learning and his confession of the faith.<sup>9</sup> Over time, and for various reasons, the positive theological component, or at least much of it, was discarded. Melanchthon had let reason control his reading of Scripture, betrayed his Wittenberg colleague, Martin Luther, capitulated to John Calvin and the Reformed on the Lord’s Supper, and much more – or so allegations ran. That he penned Protestantism’s first systemic theology, the *Loci communes* (1st edn, 1521), or pioneered the Reformation genre of confession – the *Confessio Augustana* and its *Apology* (1530), and the collection of texts known as the *Corpus doctrinae Philippicum* (1560) – became mostly immaterial.<sup>10</sup> Arguably not one of his co-reformers has had such a contradictory reputation. Some recent scholarship has explored dimensions of this history, raising new questions and proposing new answers.<sup>11</sup> It has drawn strength in part from Heinz Scheible’s prodigious labours in Melanchthon research, which have helped overturn many myths and caricatures that long plagued the literature.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> P. Melanchthon, *De corrigendis adolescentiae studiis*, in *Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl*, ed. R. Stupperich, Gütersloh 1961, iii. 29–42.

<sup>9</sup> Fundamental still is K. Hartfelder, *Philipp Melanchthon als Praeceptor Germaniae*, Berlin 1889.

<sup>10</sup> I. Dingel, ‘Melanchthon und die Normierung des Bekenntnisses’, in G. Frank (ed.), *Der Theologe Melanchthon*, Stuttgart 2000, 195–211.

<sup>11</sup> U. Sträter (ed.), *Melanchthonbild und Melanchthonrezeption in der lutherischen Orthodoxie und im Pietismus*, Wittenberg 1999; G. Wartenberg and M. Hein (eds.), *Werk und Rezeption Philipp Melanchthons in Universität und Schule bis ins 18. Jahrhundert*, Leipzig 1999; G. Frank and U. Köpf (eds.), *Melanchthon und die Neuzeit*, Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt 2003.

<sup>12</sup> In addition to Scheible’s work as editor of *Melanchthons Briefwechsel: kritische und kommentierte Gesamtausgabe*, Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt 1977–, see, for example, H. Scheible, *Aufsätze zu Melanchthon*, Tübingen 2010; *Melanchthon und die Reformation: Forschungsbeiträge*, ed. G. May and R. Decot, Mainz 1996; and (ed.), *Melanchthon in*

There is, however, another instalment in Melanchthon's afterlife in the period between Arnold and Kant, heretofore ignored: the academic commemoration of Melanchthon in 1760, the two-hundredth anniversary of his death. It is this episode with which this article is concerned. In this first exploration of the bicentennial, the emphasis will be on select speeches and other related compositions printed for the occasion in central Europe. The article will show that Melanchthon became a kind of hero of the early German Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) in the eyes of his commemorators, someone seemingly fit for purpose, or capable of being fitted – however much he would have resisted – when it came to the simultaneous promotion of 'cosmopolitan' Enlightenment ideals and 'patriotic' goals.

Initially, what is perhaps most remarkable about the 1760 Melanchthon jubilee is that it happened at all.<sup>13</sup> No such broad commemoration of Melanchthon had occurred prior to it. This is in stark contrast to Luther, whose Ninety-Five Theses (1517) and birth and death dates (1483, 1546) had been observed ceremoniously since his departure. There are, of course, many contrasts between the two when it comes to memory culture, some based in fact, others exaggerated. Even in double portraits and double statues that set Luther and Melanchthon side by side, notes Lyndal Roper, 'the stout Luther confronts the cadaverous Melanchthon': they are 'twinned like Laurel and Hardy' – a depiction intended to convey more than merely dissimilar body types.<sup>14</sup> In different territories, the date of Luther's baptism, of the acceptance of a new Protestant church order (*Kirchenordnung*), or of an initial Protestant worship service also regularly stirred celebrants. Others marked the formal presentation to Charles V of the *Confessio Augustana* (25 June 1530) or the Peace of Augsburg (1555).<sup>15</sup>

Melanchthon's name did appear with regularity during commemorations of the *Confessio Augustana*.<sup>16</sup> But the confession came to belong to

*seinen Schülern*, Wiesbaden 1997; and J. Loehr (ed.), *Dona Melanchthoniana: Festgabe für Heinz Scheible zum 70. Geburtstag*, Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt 2001.

<sup>13</sup> On the German academic and ecclesiastical convention of jubilees generally see W. Müller (ed.), *Das historische Jubiläum: Genese, Ordnungsleistung und Inszenierungsgeschichte eines institutionellen Mechanismus*, Münster 2004.

<sup>14</sup> L. Roper, 'Martin Luther's body: the "stout doctor" and his biographers', *American Historical Review* cxv (2010), 351–84 at p. 351; cf. H. Marx and I. Mössinger, *Cranach: mit einem Bestandskatalog der Gemälde in den Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden*, Cologne 2005, 474–9; F. Bellmann, M.-L. Harksen, and R. Werner (eds), *Die Denkmale der Lutherstadt Wittenberg*, Weimar 1979, 47–8, 178–9.

<sup>15</sup> For a concise overview of these and related jubilees in German Europe in this time see T. A. Howard, *Remembering the Reformation: an inquiry into the meanings of Protestantism*, Oxford 2016, 11–34.

<sup>16</sup> On the 1730 jubilee see W. Hammer (ed.), *Die Melanchthonforschung im Wandel der Jahrhunderte: ein beschreibendes Verzeichnis*, Gütersloh 1967, i. 684–98. See also E. S. Cyprian, *Historia der Augspurgischen Confession ... aus denen Original-Acten beschrieben*,

the Churches as an ecclesiastical document with its inclusion in the Book of Concord (1580), especially; Melanchthon himself remained largely out of view.<sup>17</sup> A full account of Melanchthon's complicated fortunes in the early modern period cannot be given here, but the bitter legacy of intra-Lutheran conflicts between 'Gnesio-Lutherans' and 'Philippists' and the rise of confessional cultures, among other developments, helped push the reformer aside.<sup>18</sup> Thus the milestones in Melanchthon's life went mostly unremembered. The one-hundredth anniversary of his death in 1660, for example, passed by the otherwise 'anniversary-happy realm of Lutheranism' without recognition.<sup>19</sup>

The year 1760 changed all that. Speeches, songs and other tributes poured out in celebration of Melanchthon from a list of locales that appears *prima facie* to fill any atlas: Altenburg, Bayreuth, Chemnitz ...<sup>20</sup> A series of festive events indeed took place in Wittenberg, Leipzig, Tübingen, Ulm, Nuremberg, Görlitz, Grimma and elsewhere. Notably,

Gotha 1730, and G. A. Benrath, 'Ernst Salomon Cyprian als Reformationshistoriker', in E. Koch and J. Wallmann (eds), *Ernst Salomon Cyprian (1673–1745) zwischen Orthodoxie, Pietismus und Frühaufklärung*, Gotha 1996, 36–48 at p. 43. For the major Luther jubilee preceding 1760, namely 1717, see H. Cordes, *Hilaria evangelica academica: das Reformations-jubiläum von 1717 an den deutschen lutherischen Universitäten*, Göttingen 2006, and more broadly W. Flügel, *Konfession und Jubiläum: zur Institutionalisierung der lutherischen Gedenkkultur in Sachsen, 1617–1830*, Leipzig 2005. The 1746 Luther jubilee was seemingly of lesser significance.

<sup>17</sup> R. Kolb, *Confessing the faith: reformers define the Church, 1530–1580*, St Louis 1991.

<sup>18</sup> T. Kaufmann, *Konfession und Kultur: Lutherischer Protestantismus in der zweiten Hälfte des Reformationsjahrhunderts*, Tübingen 2006; R. Kolb, 'Dynamics of party conflict in the Saxon late Reformation: Gnesio-Lutherans vs. Philippists', *Journal of Modern History* 11 (1977), D1289–305; R. Kolb, 'Philipp's foes, but followers nonetheless: late humanism among the Gnesio-Lutherans', in M. P. Fleischer (ed.), *The harvest of humanism in central Europe: essays in honor of Lewis W. Spitz*, St Louis 1992, 159–77; U. Ludwig, *Philippismus und orthodoxes Luthertum an der Universität Wittenberg: die Rolle Jakob Andreäs in lutherischen Konfessionalisierungsprozess Kursachsens (1576–1560)*, Münster 2009.

<sup>19</sup> J. Wallmann, 'Johann Salomo Semler und der Humanismus', in R. Toellner (ed.), *Aufklärung und Humanismus*, Heidelberg 1980, 201–17 at p. 206. The rector of the Elisabeth-Gymnasium in Breslau at least gave a speech on the occasion. On the commemorations at Melanchthon's death in 1560 see R. Kolb, 'Memoria Melanchthoniana 1560: the public presentation of Philip Melanchthon at his death', in I. Dingel (ed.), *Memoria – theologische Synthese – Autoritätenkonflikt: die Rezeption Luthers und Melanchthons in der Schülergeneration*, Tübingen 2016, 89–102.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, [Anon.], *Historischer Beytrag zu dem wohlverdienten zweyhundertjährigen Ehrengedächtniß Philipp Melanchthons worinnen zugleich ein seltenes Buch mit dieses großen Mannes, nach dem Original beygehend in Kupfer vorgestellter, Handschrift zu dessen Vertheidigung bekannt gemacht wird von einem Gewissenshaften Bekenner der Wahrheit*, Altenburg 1760; J. P. Reinhard, *Beyträge zu der Historie Frankenlandes und der angränzenden Gegenden*, Bayreuth 1760; and [J. G. Weller], *Altes und alten Theilen der Geschichte, oder alte Urkunden, alte Briefe, und Nachrichten von alten Büchern, mit Anmerkungen*, Chemnitz 1760. Twenty-eight titles appear, some more than once, in Hammer, *Melanchthonforschung*, i. 778–90.

though, the lion's share of titles came from scholars, usually professors in a philosophy faculty, in Tübingen, Leipzig and Wittenberg: all three places were important for Melanchthon's life; the latter two were also emerging as the regional centres of Enlightenment in Saxon Germany.<sup>21</sup>

As a rule, when the academics paid homage to Melanchthon in 1760, they called to mind his reputation as a Renaissance man, his commitment to humanist scholarship, and the inheritance he left as the preceptor, albeit absent his biblical instruction. There were good reasons for doing so. While he was still a student, Melanchthon had produced an edition of Terence, assembled letters of famous scholars on behalf of his patron, the learned Johann Reuchlin, and received lavish praise from Desiderius Erasmus. He went on to write foundational texts in Greek grammar, rhetoric and dialectics, which remained in constant demand for decades. His career in Wittenberg demonstrated nothing if not profound respect for 'good letters' (*bonae litterae*): from his opening address in 1518 to the hundreds of Greek and Latin poems and orations he penned throughout his lifetime; from his lectures and annotations on Aristotle and Cicero, among other classical giants, to his revision of Wittenberg's curricula; from his interests in world history and law and medicine, to his fascination with astrology, a scientific rather than superstitious pursuit, since the stars, following Galen, were thought to influence human health and reveal aspects of divine providence.<sup>22</sup> The reception of his classical scholarship was not completely immune from the forces of confessional pressure: the case of his Vergil commentary alone, the most frequently printed commentary on the works of Vergil into the seventeenth century, demonstrates this well.<sup>23</sup> But the literature in 1760 expressed more concern for his close association to the humanistic education of the Renaissance.

The attention given to Melanchthon as a reformer, by contrast, paled in significance. References to his theology or role as a churchman remained mostly vague or offered otherwise stylised or distorted accounts. The jubilee participants minimised his involvement in particular doctrinal controversies or reinterpreted his participation in religious colloquies as a sign only of his desire for peace and unity, his commitment to learning, or his

<sup>21</sup> G. Mühlport, 'Wittenberg und die Aufklärung: zu seiner Bedeutung für die Kulturgeschichte der Frühneuzeit', in S. Oehmig (ed.), *700 Jahre Wittenberg: Stadt-Universität-Reformation*, Weimar 1995, 329–46, and 'Die "sächsischen Universitäten" Leipzig, Jena, Halle und Wittenberg als Vorhut der deutschen Aufklärung', in K. Czok (ed.), *Wissenschafts- und Universitätsgeschichte in Sachsen im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1987, 25–50.

<sup>22</sup> S. Kusakawa, *The transformation of natural philosophy: the case of Philip Melanchthon*, Cambridge 1996, 133–44; C. Methuen, 'The role of the heavens in the thought of Philip Melanchthon', *Journal of the History of Ideas* lvii (1996), 385–403.

<sup>23</sup> C. Kallendorf, 'Uncommon commonplaces: Melanchthon's Vergil commentary and the paradox of popularity', *Vergilius* lxx (2019), 99–125.



unfortunate treatment in the hands of adversaries. He became the prime example of a pared-back Lutheranism, Saxony's own great Christian humanist, who soared above the 'mad rage of the theologians' to become the teacher of Germany and the schoolmaster of Europe. His programme, it was argued, finally reached its consummation in the age of Enlightenment.

This article will address the jubilee in three sections. The first will explore the celebrations in Tübingen and Leipzig, which underscored Melanchthon's humanism and sought to explain his legacy in terms which mirrored the interests and ideals of the commemorators themselves. The second will examine the events in Wittenberg, where members of the philosophy faculty simultaneously claimed Melanchthon's rational-humanistic achievements and downplayed his contributions to theology. They did so partly in order to bolster their own credentials over against the theologians in an important episode in the ongoing 'conflict of the faculties' between philosophy and theology for royal authority. The final section will reflect on the broader enthusiasm for Melanchthon in 1760 and on the jubilee's aftermath, with attention to Melanchthon studies, religion in the Enlightenment and predominant narratives of cultural and scientific progress in modern Protestantism.

## II

The Tübingen commemorators began at the beginning: in particular, they stressed Melanchthon's Tübingen roots. The University of Tübingen was the reformer's *alma mater*. He had become *baccalaureus artium in via antiqua* in Heidelberg, where he studied in 1509–11, but because Heidelberg thought him too young to receive his second degree, he followed the Neckar backwards to Tübingen. He matriculated there on 17 September 1512, became *magister artium in via moderna* there on 25 January 1514, and lectured and published there before his call to Wittenberg.<sup>24</sup> There existed other connections too. Tübingen appointed his close friend Joachim Camerarius in 1535. On multiple occasions in 1534–6, Duke Ulrich of Württemberg attempted to coax Melanchthon 'home' to Tübingen in order to teach there. The calls came to naught, but Melanchthon did visit for three weeks and helped Tübingen reform the organisation, structure and nature of its university faculty and curriculum.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> H. Hermelink (ed.), *Die Matrikeln der Universität Tübingen*, Stuttgart 1906, i. 191.

<sup>25</sup> R. L. Harrison Jr, 'Melanchthon's role in the reform of the university of Tübingen', *Church History* xlvii (1978), 270–8.

Each link received special mention in the anniversary publication by Tübingen's Gottfried Daniel Hoffmann.<sup>26</sup> Hoffmann likewise drew attention to the 1560 funerary orations for Melanchthon in Tübingen.<sup>27</sup> He also described the lasting importance of Melanchthon's studies in Greek antiquity and in history broadly, such as the commentary on Tacitus' *Germania*, edited for publication by Melanchthon twice, in 1538 and again in 1551, and the continuation, by Melanchthon and then his son-in-law Caspar Peucer, of the *Chronicon Carionis*, the most important historical textbook of early German Protestantism.<sup>28</sup>

Yet Hoffmann was a jurist and professor of constitutional and feudal law at Tübingen, and the historical and literature reviews served as launching pads from which to assess the legacy of Melanchthon for a broad imperial and state history of Germany.<sup>29</sup> Melanchthon's ideas about history and political order, including the so-called *translatio imperii*, which understood the Holy Roman Empire as the continuation of the ancient Roman Empire and the last of the four monarchies prophesied in the seventh chapter of the Book of Daniel – an idea shared by contemporaries, to be sure – continued to circulate in arguments for the legal foundation of the Empire. The reappraisal of the German legal tradition did not come in the jubilee text, but it contained at least some of the groundwork.<sup>30</sup> The legal thread endured more generally into the nineteenth century. One can see this in multiple places, but especially so in the last paragraph of an 1814 pamphlet that made its author world famous, 'Zum Beruf unserer Zeit für Gesetzgebung und Rechtswissenschaft', by the leader of German law, Friedrich Carl von Savigny.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> G. D. Hoffmann, *Abhandlung von Philipp Melanchthons Verdiensten um die teutsche Reichs- und Staatsgeschichte nebst einem Vorbericht von denen auf seinen Tod herausgekommenen Schriften*, Tübingen 1760.

<sup>27</sup> J. Heerbrand, *Oratio funebris in obitum incomparabilis viri domini Philippi Melanchthonis, habita in Academia Tubigensi, die decima quinta Maii*, Tübingen 1560.

<sup>28</sup> A. Ellis, 'Herodotus magister vitae, or: Herodotus and God in the Protestant Reformation', *Histos* iv (2015), 173–245; A. Ben-Tov, *Lutheran humanists and Greek antiquity: Melanchthonian scholarship between universal history and pedagogy*, Leiden 2009; G. Binder, 'Der Praeceptor Germaniae und die "Germania" des Tacitus: über eine Tacitus-Ausgabe Philipp Melanchthons', in G. Binder (ed.), *Philipp Melanchthon: exemplarische aspekte seines Humanismus*, Trier 1998; M. A. Lotito, *The Reformation of historical thought*, Leiden 2019. See also A. Kess, *Johann Sleidan and the Protestant vision of history*, Aldershot 2008.

<sup>29</sup> *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (hereinafter cited as *ADB*), xii. 592–3. On law and history see N. Hammerstein, *Jus und Historie: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des historischen Denkens an deutschen Universitäten im späten 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 1972.

<sup>30</sup> Hoffmann, *Abhandlung von Philipp Melanchthons Verdiensten*, 48–50, passim; W. Goetz, *Translatio Imperii: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Geschichtsdenkens und der politischen Theorie im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit*, Tübingen 1958.

<sup>31</sup> F. C. von Savigny, 'Zum Beruf unserer Zeit für Gesetzgebung und Rechtswissenschaft', in H. Hattenhauer (ed.), *Thibaut und Savigny*, Munich 1973,



Balthasar Haug was another participant in the commemoration. An erst-while Tübingen theology student, Lutheran pastor in Niederstotzingen northeast of Ulm, and member of Helmstedt's *Herzogliche Deutsche Gesellschaft*, Haug had not yet become 'leader of the Enlightenment in Swabia', as he would be known later in life.<sup>32</sup> But his contribution to the jubilee contained all the seeds thereof. He extolled Melanchthon's virtues in a hymn of thirty-eight verses, which he also performed in Wittenberg and Tübingen.<sup>33</sup> Borrowing from classical antiquity and from recurrent themes in other Enlightenment poetry, Haug described Wittenberg as the new 'Athens on the Elbe', the 'gathering place of the new Greeks'.<sup>34</sup> Haug praised Bretten, Melanchthon's birthplace and thus the setting in which the unique 'black earth' – *Schwarzerdt*, in an allusion to Melanchthon's surname at birth, before Reuchlin inspired its Hellenisation – first sprouted.<sup>35</sup> Heidelberg faced dishonour for letting Melanchthon escape with only a bachelor of arts degree, which wrong Tübingen set right.<sup>36</sup> (Heidelberg redeemed itself in part when Duke Otto Heinrich of the Palatinate tried to poach Melanchthon for the University of Heidelberg; though Melanchthon declined, he did make recommendations for Heidelberg's reform in 1558.) Even more, Saxony had recognised Melanchthon's greatness.<sup>37</sup> There, Haug proclaimed, 'Philip's kindness' transcended 'Luther's zeal'; it was Melanchthon, 'the mild one' (*die Milde*), who held the power and spirit of Elijah.<sup>38</sup> His classroom was all of Germany.<sup>39</sup> Rare was a polymath like Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz – rarer still was a towering philosophical rationalist like Christian Wolff – rarest of all was the great Melanchthon.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, 'through his death, *Germania* was orphaned'.<sup>41</sup>

True, Haug sang out, Melanchthon was the preceptor of 'the German world', but he was also the great teacher of Europe, the counsellor of France and England, revered from 'Gaul' (*Gallien*) to 'Free Britain'

192, quoting Melanchthon, 'Oratio de dignitate legum'. See J. Q. Whitman, *The legacy of Roman law in the German romantic era: historical vision and legal change*, Princeton 1990, 3–40, and G. Kisch, *Melanchthons Rechts- und Soziallehre*, Berlin 1967.

<sup>32</sup> *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vii, 88–9.

<sup>33</sup> B. Haug, *Die Ehre Melanchthons in Tübingen und Wittenberg*, Tübingen 1760.

<sup>34</sup> '[Wittenberg], der Sammelplatz der neuen Griechen': *ibid.* 21.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 11.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 2, 17.

<sup>38</sup> 'Laßt das Gesez in Luthers Eifer drennen, / Und Philipps Güte Plaz gewinnen': *ibid.* 22. Melanchthon's enduring reputation for mild manners owed largely to his students as part of their polemical defence of their teacher. See, for example, T. J. Wengert, "'With friends like this ...': the biography of Philip Melanchthon by Joachim Camerarius", in T. F. Mayer and D. R. Woolf (eds), *The rhetorics of life-writing in early modern Europe: forms of biography from Cassandra Fedele to Louis XIV*, Ann Arbor, MI 1995, 115–31.

<sup>39</sup> Haug, *Die Ehre Melanchthons in Tübingen und Wittenberg*, 18.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 9–10.

<sup>41</sup> '[Melanchthon], durch dessen Tod Germanien verwaißt': *ibid.* 17.

(*freyer Britten*).<sup>42</sup> After all, he held, Melanchthon was a gift from Athene, goddess of wisdom, ‘whom Pallas created ere for Europe’.<sup>43</sup> Thus Haug commanded all of ‘Europe ... from the Tagus to the Belt’, Portugal to Scandinavia, to ‘honour the laurel’ of Melanchthon, which ‘grows from dust and ashes in Wittenberg today’.<sup>44</sup> It was Melanchthon, he mused, who first ‘lit the beacon of reason’, which shone like Pharos, the lighthouse of Alexandria, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.<sup>45</sup> It was Melanchthon who made Cicero sound beautiful.<sup>46</sup> It was Melanchthon who enriched all the sciences and ‘brought them into a system’, just like the universal scholars who were Haug’s contemporaries.<sup>47</sup> And it was Melanchthon, Haug insisted, who called humanity, in biblical paraphrase, to the cedars of Lebanon.<sup>48</sup>

In Leipzig, they agreed. As in Tübingen, the Leipzig participants, such as Johann Christoph Boehme, professor of history, acknowledged Melanchthon’s ties to their city and university: among the many, the directions Melanchthon gave Henry IV, prince of Albertine Saxony, for the reform of the university in 1539, and Melanchthon’s broad influence through Camerarius from 1541.<sup>49</sup> Accordingly, the University of Leipzig’s three higher faculties of theology, law and medicine sponsored a slate of memorial addresses on 17 April 1760.<sup>50</sup> But it was the lower faculty, philosophy, that led the university’s commemoration on 30 April 1760. On the latter date, Johann Gottfried Schenkel, assistant secretary at the Saxon Electoral Library in Dresden, composed an ode in which he praised Melanchthon as the great restorer of the ‘liberal arts’ (*die freye Künste*).<sup>51</sup> Melanchthon was of unrivalled eloquence, of unequalled scholarship, and greater, he argued, than ‘a second Pindar’ – alluding to Melanchthon’s own long engagement with the Greek lyric poet.<sup>52</sup> Johann Friedrich Schröter, from Chemnitz, portrayed Melanchthon as the greatest philosopher of his time. His religious contributions cannot be denied, Schröter admitted, for he was ‘a bright light that chased away the spread of darkness’. Still one must ask of Melanchthon: ‘Could he have achieved such insight and understanding alone’, without, that is,

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 25–7.

<sup>43</sup> ‘den Pallas vor [für] Europa schuf’: *ibid.* 27.

<sup>44</sup> ‘So ehre mit, vom Tagus biß zum Belte, / Den Lorbeer ohne Blut und Zelte / Der heut in Wittenberg aus Staub und Asche grunt’: *ibid.* 1.

<sup>45</sup> ‘[Er] zündet der Vernunft zur Weißheit Pharos an’: *ibid.* 25.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>47</sup> ‘[Er] [b]rachte die Wissenschaften in ein System’: *ibid.* 24–5.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 31.

<sup>49</sup> J. G. Boehme, *De Philippi Melancthonis in academiam Lipsicam insignibus meritis oratio*, Leipzig 1760; cf. Hartfelder, *Melancthon als Praeceptor Germaniae*, 527–8. On Boehme see *ADB* iii. 72–3.

<sup>50</sup> *Recolitus simul mortis Philippi Melancthonis et meritorum eius in Academiam Lipsiensem memoria*, Leipzig 1760. On the speakers see Hammer, *Melancthonforschung*, i. 781.

<sup>51</sup> J. S. Schenkel, ‘Lobgedicht auf den berühmten Philipp Melancthon’, in *Lobreden auf den großen Philipp Melancthon*, Leipzig 1760, 45–56.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 45, 49, 51.

the development of ‘right reason’? ‘Did not philosophy enlighten his mind?’<sup>53</sup> As a humanist, he mastered the Greek and Roman writers and integrated them into the new curriculum: ‘Melanchthon, Melanchthon was the one who brought the disciplines back to full bloom! He worked tirelessly to rebuild the dilapidated system of philosophy, which had lain in ruin for centuries.’ For this, he ‘acquired the immortal name of a great philosopher’.<sup>54</sup>

The main Leipzig address came from Johann Christoph Gottsched, dean of the philosophy faculty.<sup>55</sup> Francophile dramatist, professor of poetry and philosophy, organiser of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft*, a society modelled on the French Academy in Paris, and influential journal editor, Gottsched came to hold the status of quasi-‘literary dictator’ of Germany. He was indeed central Europe’s leading scholarly commentator on the French literary scene.<sup>56</sup> Leipzig placed him at the centre of German culture.<sup>57</sup> He also occupied the foreground of the German Enlightenment as a disciple of Wolff, who in turn had exhibited certain affinities with Christian Thomasius, another preeminent figure of the early *Aufklärung*.<sup>58</sup> Gottsched lectured regularly on the philosophy of Wolff, defending the firebrand against charges of atheism and fatalism, even when it was still dangerous to do so: when Wolff had been sacked from the University of

<sup>53</sup> ‘Es ist nicht zwar zu läugnen, daß er in die Geheimnisse der offenbarten Religion tief eingedrungen, und al sein helles Licht die ausgebreitete Finsterniß verscheuchet habe. Allein würde er wohl zu einer solchen Kenntniß, zu einer solchen Ensicht und Scharfsinnigkeit gelanget seyn? wenn nicht die Philosophie ihm, als ihrem Lieblinge die Hand dargebothen, seinen Verstand erleuchtet, und das rechte Mittel Wahrheiten zu prüfen, geschenkt hätte?’: J. F. Schröter, ‘Rede auf eben denselben’, in *Lobreden auf den großen Philipp Melanchthon*, Leipzig 1760, 24–44 at pp. 25–6.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Melanchthon, Melanchthon war es, der die Wissenschaften wieder in Flor brachte! Er arbeitete ganz unermüdet, das verfallene Lehrgebäude der Philosophie wieder aufzurichten, welches schon viele Jahrhunderte in seinen Ruinen lag... [Er] hat ... den unsterblichen Namen eines großen Philosophen erworben’: *ibid.* 36–7, 26.

<sup>55</sup> J. C. Gottsched, *Ad memoriam communis Germaniae Praeceptoris magni quondam viri Philipp Melanthonis*, Leipzig 1760.

<sup>56</sup> On Gottsched’s role in German literature and aesthetics see F. C. Beiser, *Diotima’s children: German aesthetic rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing*, Oxford 2009, 72–100; in relation to the *Deutsche Gesellschaft* see F. Neumann, ‘Gottsched und die Leipziger Deutsche Gesellschaft’, *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* xviii (1928), 194–212; and as editor see G. Ball, *Moralische Küsse: Gottsched als Zeitschriftenherausgeber und literarischer Vermittler*, Göttingen 2000.

<sup>57</sup> G. Mühlpfordt, ‘Gelehrtenrepublik Leipzig. Wegweiser- und Mittlerrolle der Leipziger Aufklärung in der Wissenschaft’, in W. Martens (ed.), *Zentren der Aufklärung III*, Leipzig 1990, 39–101.

<sup>58</sup> W. Schneiders (ed.), *Christian Wolff, 1679–1754: Interpretationen zu seiner Philosophie und deren Wirkung*, Hamburg 1983; T. Ahnert, *Religion and the origins of the German enlightenment: faith and the reformation of learning in the thought of Christian Thomasius*, Rochester, NY 2006; I. Hunter, *The secularisation of the confessional state: the political thought of Christian Thomasius*, Cambridge 2007.

Halle and banned from Prussia in 1723, ‘virtually the whole of German academe ... slid into bitter wrangling and acrimony’.<sup>59</sup> He also popularised Wolff’s views, including the understanding of a ‘natural religion’ which could be elaborated through reason, in moral weeklies and pedagogical compendia.<sup>60</sup>

Gottsched concentrated on one theme in his speech: Melanchthon’s title as *praeceptor Germaniae*. This honorific alone signalled the Wittenberger’s greatness; it alone conveyed that he was the *nonpareil* of his age, ‘far more important’ than all of the ‘scholastic barbarians, irrefragable doctors, illuminated angels, or seraphim’ of which history could boast.<sup>61</sup> The ground by which Melanchthon came to hold it, Gottsched argued, was essentially threefold. In the first place, an ‘almost unbelievable’ number of auditors had gathered in his classroom – 1,500 in fact, as Jan Łaski, the Polish reformer, once wrote from Wittenberg to Calvin in Geneva, though Łaski added that they came to hear Melanchthon teach the Bible.<sup>62</sup> In the second place, Melanchthon’s advice was more precious than gold. His counsel had led to the better establishment of the universities of Leipzig, Heidelberg and Tübingen, the *Gymnasium* of Nuremberg, and all the schools in Saxony.<sup>63</sup> Finally, his ‘excellent writings’, including his early textbooks of Greek grammar (1517), rhetoric (1519; 1521) and dialectics (1520), had exercised a profound role on the minds of countless students and scholars.<sup>64</sup>

Gottsched declared, moreover, that Melanchthon stood for toleration, freedom and intellectual improvement, each without qualification. This had earned him critics: Andreas Osiander, Matthias Flacius and the

<sup>59</sup> J. C. Gottsched, *Historische Lobschrift des ... Freyherrn von Wolf*, Halle 1755, 75; J. I. Israel, *Radical enlightenment: philosophy and the making of modernity, 1650–1750*, Oxford 2001, 541–62.

<sup>60</sup> Already in 1734 Gottsched had presented a systematic account of Wolffian philosophy: J. C. Gottsched, *Erste Gründe der gesammten Weltweisheit*, Leipzig 1734; the term ‘Weltweisheit’ was taken directly from Wolff. See also H. E. Bödeker, ‘Von der “Magd der Theologie” zur “Leitwissenschaft”: vorüberlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Philosophie des 18. Jahrhunderts’, *Das achzehnte Jahrhundert* iv (1990), 19–57; and R. Meyer, ‘Das Licht der Philosophie: Reformgedanken zur Fakultätenhierarchie im 18. Jahrhundert von Christian Wolff bis Immanuel Kant’, in N. Hammerstein (ed.), *Universitäten und Aufklärung*, Göttingen 1995, 97–114.

<sup>61</sup> Gottsched, *Ad memoriam communis Germaniae Praeceptoris*, p. II; ‘Es hält der H. Pr. diesem Lobspruch, den Melanchthon nun 200. Jahre in dem ganzen gesitteten Europa führet, für weit wichtiger, als aller scholastischer Barbarn Doctores irrefragabiles, illuminatissimos, angelicos und seraphicos’: *Compendium historiae litterariae novissimae oder Erlangische Gelehrte Anmerkungen und Nachrichten auf das Jahr 1760*, xvi (5 Aug. 1760), 259–63 at p. 260.

<sup>62</sup> J. Łaski to J. Calvin, 28 Nov. 1556, in *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia, Corpus Reformatorum*, ed. G. Baum, E. Cunitz and E. Reuss, Brunswick 1877, xlv. 330.

<sup>63</sup> Gottsched, *Ad memoriam communis Germaniae Praeceptoris*, pp. III–VI.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* p. VII.

Centuriators, and many others battered him ‘cruelly’ and ‘malevolently’ for it. There were direct parallels to be drawn between Melanchthon in the sixteenth century and those committed equally to toleration, freedom and improvement, who embodied thereby the ‘spirit’ of Melanchthon, in the eighteenth century.<sup>65</sup> Leipzig’s embattled political condition in the Seven Years’ War (1756–63) partly motivated Gottsched’s pronouncement: Leipzig, Dresden and other major cities, which also served as important Reformation ‘memory sites’ in Electoral Saxony, had fallen to Prussia at the outbreak of hostilities, and Gottsched made the case for peace in his address by emphasising what he held to be a ‘Melanchthonian’ tradition of irenicism and improvement through educational and moral reform.

But Gottsched’s address also had a sharp polemical edge, which emerges when considered both in light of Wolff’s experience (and Gottsched’s defence of Wolff) and alongside another publication of Gottsched’s from the same time as the Melanchthon bicentennial, namely his preface to the 1760 German edition of *De l’Esprit* (1758) by the *philosophe* Claude-Adrien Helvétius.<sup>66</sup> The radically materialist book derided the French monarchy as the home of oppressive ‘sultans’ and ‘viziers’ and mocked papal dogma, including the Catholic Church’s ban on Copernicus and treatment of Galileo, which led Church and State in Paris to declare it heretical and burn it publicly. The German translation of the book, with Gottsched’s introduction, was among the earliest and most widely disseminated ‘radical’ writings of the French Enlightenment in the German lands and was causing a similar scandal throughout central Europe.<sup>67</sup>

It is not the case that the Leipzig commemorators entirely ignored Melanchthon the theologian, but when taken together they did assign that dimension second-rank status. Caspar Damian Grulich, from Freiberg near Dresden and master of theology, presented Melanchthon as the greatest theologian of his time and rebuked all who thought otherwise.<sup>68</sup> Gottsched mentioned Melanchthon’s *Loci communes* in his own speech, but the theological doctrines in the book were not on his mind. Rather, he marvelled how the book managed to win so many proponents, given the ‘rebarbative’ qualities of the sixteenth century outside Renaissance influences, and impressed ‘even Parisians and Italians’.<sup>69</sup> In

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. pp. VII–VIII.

<sup>66</sup> C.-A. Helvétius, *Discurs über den Geist der Menschen ... mit einer Vorrede Herrn Joh. Christoph Gottscheds*, trans. J. G. Forkert, Leipzig 1760.

<sup>67</sup> J. I. Israel, *Democratic enlightenment: philosophy, revolution, and human rights, 1750–1790*, Oxford 2011, 304–6. On the reception of the book see D. W. Smith, *Helvétius: a study in persecution*, Oxford 1965.

<sup>68</sup> C. D. Grulich, ‘Lobrede auf den berühmten Philipp Melanchthon als den größten Theologen seiner Zeiten’, in *Lobreden auf den großen Philipp Melanchthon*, Leipzig 1760, 7–23.

<sup>69</sup> Gottsched, *Ad memoriam communis Germaniae Praeceptoris*, p. VII.

Venice, the *Loci communes* had appeared in translation under the pseudonym *Terra nerra* for ‘black earth’. In Rome, it had sold remarkably well – at least, that is, ‘until some Franciscan monk realized it was “Lutheran and Melanchthonian,” whereupon the copies were feverishly seized and burned’.<sup>70</sup>

### III

The Tübingen and Leipzig affairs produced striking images of Melanchthon. But Wittenberg would not be outdone. Members of the philosophy faculty at the University of Wittenberg initiated and designed their institution’s commemoration to renew the memory of Melanchthon and to honour him properly as their faculty member. In fact, they wielded Melanchthon as a weapon against their orthodox colleagues in the theology faculty.<sup>71</sup> The Seven Years’ War again provided the political background. At the time of the celebration, Wittenberg found itself overrun by the large armies at the command of the freethinking, enlightened philosopher of Sanssouci, Frederick the Great, king of Prussia.<sup>72</sup> In October 1760, only a few months after the Melanchthon jubilee, the symbolic cradle of the Reformation – the very door of the Castle Church – caught fire as a result of imperial bombardment during the siege of Wittenberg and was ultimately destroyed. Haug wrote a companion to his Melanchthon poem on the occasion.<sup>73</sup>

The philosophers’ singular claim to Melanchthon became a *leitmotif* of the anniversary. There were multiple elements to it. The claim related in part to the broader ‘conflict of the faculties’, in which philosophy usurped theology’s medieval role as ‘queen of the sciences’, made famous by Kant in 1798 but in full swing well before then.<sup>74</sup> The name and relative value of academic titles had been debated throughout the

<sup>70</sup> G. T. Strobel, *Versuch einer Litterär Geschichte von Philipp Melanchthons Locis Theologicis als dem ersten Evangelischen Lehrbuche*, Altdorf–Nuremberg 1776, 184–92; C. Manschrek, *Melanchthon: the quiet reformer*, Nashville, TN 1958, 88.

<sup>71</sup> The programme and speeches appear in J. D. Titius (ed.), *Memoria Philippi Melanthonis finite post eius obitum saeculo secundo in solenni doctorum philosophiae promotione d. XXX Aprilis MDCCLX auctoritate ordinis philosophici Wittebergensis celebrata*, Leipzig 1760.

<sup>72</sup> T. Blanning, *Frederick the Great: king of Prussia*, New York 2016, 261–9; W. Friedensburg, *Geschichte der Universität Wittenberg*, Halle 1917, 518–615; A. Kloes, ‘Dissembling orthodoxy in the age of the enlightenment: Frederick the Great and his confession of faith’, *Harvard Theological Review* cix (2016), 102–28.

<sup>73</sup> B. Haug, ‘Ode über den gegenwärtigen Krieg: aus dem Französischen übersetzt’, *Das neueste aus der amnthigen Gelehrsamkeit* iii (1761), 228–38.

<sup>74</sup> I. Kant, *Der Streit der Facultäten*, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, vii. 1–115; M. Füssel, ‘The conflict of the faculties: hierarchies, values and social practices in early modern German universities’, *History of Universities* xxv (2011), 80–110.



early modern period. As the 1508 statutes of the University of Wittenberg show, the doctoral title was already in use there by lawyers and physicians; the title of master was enough for those in the arts and even for theologians, though the latter could also become doctors of the Church. Increasingly, though, in Wittenberg and elsewhere, philosophers began to update their degrees and style themselves doctors.<sup>75</sup> An official report from visiting government administrators in 1742 admonished Wittenberg's lower faculty to abstain from the practice, much to the philosophers' chagrin.<sup>76</sup>

The Melancthon jubilee provided the opportunity for the philosophers to challenge the policy. On 30 April 1760, the day on which its members had arranged the bulk of the jubilee activities, Wittenberg's philosophy faculty began to recognise 'Doctors of Philosophy', or 'Doctors of Philosophy and the Liberal Arts' (*Doktoren der Philosophie und der freyen Künste*), in honour of Melancthon. Christian Crucius, philologist and professor of eloquence, opened the discussion.<sup>77</sup> The dean of the faculty, Johann Daniel Titius, conceded that '*doctor philosophicus*' still sounded unusual, perhaps even outrageous, in the ears of some, and that doctors of the higher faculties would undoubtedly look down with contempt on doctors of philosophy. But the last-mentioned should not be disturbed by this: after all, he argued, referencing the philosophy faculty's statutes of 1666 – a revision of the faculty's statutes that Melancthon had written in 1545 – without 'artists', that is, scholars of the arts and sciences, nothing divine or human could be perceived.<sup>78</sup>

The philosophers' claim also related to Melancthon's professional biography. To break the theology faculty's natural tie to Melancthon, the philosophers mounted their case on the basis of Melancthon's degrees. He had come to Wittenberg as a master of arts. This permitted him to teach on the pagan classics of antiquity and on the Greek New Testament. It was not until September 1519 that he defended baccalaureate theses on the Bible under Luther's direction, which licensed him to teach on the content of the Latin text of Scripture in the theology faculty; he also taught beginning Hebrew for a brief period. What is more, in 1525 Elector Johann the Steadfast of Saxony granted to both Melancthon and Luther permission to teach on any topic at the university. But the debate ignored what Melancthon thought of his work, what

<sup>75</sup> On the rise of the doctor of philosophy degree see W. Clark, *Academic charisma and the origins of the research university*, Chicago 2006, 183–238.

<sup>76</sup> H. Kathe, *Die Wittenberger Philosophische Fakultät, 1502–1817*, Cologne 2002, 355.

<sup>77</sup> C. Crucius, 'Rogatio pro candidatis ad praesidem ordinis in majori auditorio', *Memoria Philippi Melanthonis*, 6–12.

<sup>78</sup> J. D. Titius, 'Ad praecedentem roationem responsio', *ibid.* 12–18; W. Friedensburg (ed.), *Urkundenbuch der Universität Wittenberg*, Magdeburg 1927, ii. 248. See also J. J. Ebert, *De magisterii philosophici dignitate*, Wittenberg 1779, 14.

he actually taught, and how Wittenberg's philosophy and theology faculties related in his time.<sup>79</sup> For the philosophers, Melanchthon possessed an advanced degree in philosophy and never sought a doctorate in theology. That was the bottom line.

Other speakers in Wittenberg's academic commemoration praised Melanchthon as the 'light of the good arts' (*bonarum artium lumen*). His studies in philology and history, philosophy and rhetoric, physics and mathematics, they argued, provided the foundation for contemporary culture. These *studia* should therefore be preserved, expanded and defended. Wherever *humanitas* was valued – even in the Catholic world, they held – Melanchthon was celebrated.<sup>80</sup> The 'universal teacher of Germany' did not belong to theologians or to Lutherans; he was rather 'the great servant of humanity', and belonged to all. In a poem, Benjamin Gottlieb Lorenz Boden, Wittenberg master of arts, one of Crucius' doctoral students, and from 1766 Wittenberg professor of antiquities, commended Melanchthon for the heroic 'struggle against ignorance' and described how he – or his 'spirit' – rose above attacks from Flacius in his own time or Leonhard Hutter in another.<sup>81</sup> Titius inscribed Melanchthon's interest in physics and mathematics, along with his reputation as a star-gazer, into the history of his own intellectual activity: Melanchthon, he claimed, set the scene for the modern discoveries concerning planetary motion.<sup>82</sup>

In addition, Wittenberg held a public memorial service in the Castle Church on 5 May 1760. The university rector and professor of physics, Georg Matthias Bose, presided over the event. Bose's research into electricity, the newly emerging branch of science, brought the full force of Wittenberg's intellectual life to a broader European stage that included London, Paris and St Petersburg. His scientific correspondence embraced Vatican officials in Rome and Muslim scholars in Istanbul. Though he kept abreast of current developments, of course, he also alleged that his predecessor, Melanchthon, 'the most famous scholar of Germany', was his great

<sup>79</sup> For one example of Melanchthon's own perspective on himself as humanist and philosopher, on one hand, and theologian, on the other, see Z. Purvis, C. Carmichael and T. Cook, 'Melanchthon on himself and his books: the preface to his *Operum tomii quinque*, 1541', *Reformation & Renaissance Review* xxii (2020), 158–75.

<sup>80</sup> Kathe, *Die Wittenberger Philosophische Fakultät*, 349.

<sup>81</sup> B. G. L. Boden, 'Melanchthon in barbariem saeculi non lenis, ipso die fatali post duo saecula redeunte celebratur', in *Memoria Philippi Melanthonis*, 37–52. On Melanchthon and Hutter, cf. T. Mahlmann, 'Die Bezeichnung Melanchthons als Praeceptor Germaniae auf ihre Herkunft geprüft', in Sträter, *Melanchthonbild*, 135–222 at pp. 164–74.

<sup>82</sup> J. D. Titius, 'Oratio de meritis Philippi Melanthonis in physicam et mathesin', in *Memoria Philippi Melanthonis*, 19–29. See also A. Kleinerts, 'Johann Daniel Titius (1729–1796): Facetten eines Wittenberger Gelehrten im Zeitalter der Aufklärung', in K. Blaschke and D. Döring (eds), *Universitäten und Wissenschaften im mitteldeutschen Raum in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Leipzig 2004, 227–41.

source of inspiration.<sup>83</sup> Adolph Julian Bose, the rector's son and Wittenberg master, memorialised Melanchthon in similar terms and composed a cantata for the occasion.<sup>84</sup>

The addresses outside Tübingen, Leipzig, and Wittenberg had the same tenor – and often came from those with connections to these same institutions. In two publications from Görlitz, for example, Friedrich Baumeister, an erstwhile lecturer in Wittenberg's philosophy faculty, insisted that the seeds that Melanchthon had sown in his time had at last flowered in the ideas of Thomasius and Wolff.<sup>85</sup> Together, the *encomia* all depicted Melanchthon as Germany's great teacher who operated on a European plane; as the pioneering educational reformer and institution builder; as the most expansive intellect since antiquity; and as the restorer not so much of theology but of the arts and sciences. Reprints and favourable reports of the 1760 addresses circulated widely. Nearly all of them appeared in Gottsched's journal, *Das neueste aus der anmuthigen Gelehrsamkeit*, and other venues. Against the backdrop of the Seven Years' War, when even much of Wittenberg's Castle Church – 'the mother church of all evangelical Lutheranism', as one contemporary theologian put it, that 'beautiful temple' from which 'the teaching of the Gospel had first rung out and spread to the rest of the world' – would be reduced to a pile of ash, the speakers called for peace and the maintenance and promotion of scholarship, grounded in Melanchthon's legacy, for the good of the spiritual unity of the 'German nation' and indeed of Europe.<sup>86</sup> In sum, Melanchthon became an *Aufklärer* before the *Aufklärung*.

#### IV

Multiple developments created the conditions for the transformation of Melanchthon into the harbinger of Enlightenment, not all of which can

<sup>83</sup> G. M. Bose, 'Memoriam Philippi Melanchthonis', in *Memoria Philippi Melanchthonis*, 78–83; R. Lieberwirth, 'Zur Geschichte der Universität Wittenberg im 18. Jahrhundert', in *Wissenschafts- und Universitätsgeschichte in Sachsen*, 111–18.

<sup>84</sup> A. J. Bose, 'Gedächtnißrede auf den Philipp Melanchthon, welche bey dem zweyhundertjährigen Andencken seines Sterbetages am Vten Maii MDCCLX: in der academischen Kirche zu Wittenberg öffentlich gehalten', and 'Cantate welche bey der zum Gedächtniß des vor zweyhundert Jahren allhier verstorbenen Philippi Melanchthonis', in *Memoria Philippi Melanthonis*, 84–95 and 95–8 respectively.

<sup>85</sup> F. C. Baumeister, *Programma de quo Melanchthonis recordationem secundam ex instituto legati Sylvestain pratione solenni renovat*, Görlitz 1759; F. C. Baumeister, *Memoria Melanchthonis*, Görlitz 1760.

<sup>86</sup> 'Also giengen durch das hefftige und unabläßige Bombardiren ... diese Mutter des Evangelischen Zions ... [und] schöne Tempel, aus welchem die Lehre des Evangelii in aller Welt erschollen und ausgebreitet ist ... im Feuer auf': C. S. Georgi, *Wittenbergische Klage-Geschichte*, Wittenberg 1760, 6.

be elaborated here. More narrowly, Melanchthon's image as the preceptor survived the Gnesio-Philippist fights, confessionalisation and the onset of deconfessionalisation in central Europe, the shadings of orthodoxy and pietism, and pietism and *Aufklärung*.<sup>87</sup> If some eyed Melanchthon's theology with suspicion, few forgot that he had held the first chair in Greek at the first Protestant university. Having reared a brood of learned Protestant theologians, fully credentialed citizens of the republic of letters, with deep interests in history, Herodotus and Hellenism, Melanchthon would see his humanist afterlife flicker like a star in the capacious skies preceding the neohumanist revival. His commemorators in 1760 made direct comparison between his erudition and their own, flitting over gaps between sixteenth-century humanism and eighteenth-century criticism and universal scholarship in the course of their partial and stylised appropriation.<sup>88</sup>

More broadly, as newer approaches in the early eighteenth century to religious toleration gained traction, framed by Lutheran philosophers and jurists such as Samuel Pufendorf and Thomasius in Leipzig and Halle, and theologians such as Christoph Matthäus Pfaff in Tübingen, Melanchthon's ostensibly open outlook to different confessions acquired greater significance as a source and model, even if it meant removing him from his Reformation context.<sup>89</sup> The increasingly complex religio-political environment in Saxony left its mark: from 1697, the land which defined itself as the foremost protector of Lutheranism in the Holy Roman Empire was ruled by a Catholic elector in Dresden.<sup>90</sup> The stabilisation of the German language gave further identity to a perceived common Lutheran civic culture, with long-term consequences.<sup>91</sup> Each of these, alongside other processes, had a hand in the evolving relationship between Lutheranism, political life and intellectual culture in the eighteenth century, and, accordingly, in Melanchthon's reception.

Theological trends also contributed, including those that would give form to the early neology movement in late eighteenth-century German

<sup>87</sup> See, for example, M. Gierl, *Pietismus und Aufklärung: theologische Polemik und die Kommunikationsreform der Wissenschaft am Ende des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Göttingen 1997.

<sup>88</sup> A similar point is made, albeit in a slightly different context, in N. Hardy, *Criticism and confession: the Bible in the seventeenth century republic of letters*, Oxford 2017, 23–4.

<sup>89</sup> A. F. Stolzenburg, *Die Theologie des Jo. Franc: Buddeus und des Chr. Matth. Pfaff*, Berlin 1926, 131–7; I. Hunter, *Rival enlightenments: civil and metaphysical philosophy in early modern Germany*, Cambridge 2001.

<sup>90</sup> U. Rosseaux, 'Das bedrohte Zion: Lutheraner und Katholiken in Dresden nach der Konversion Augusts des Starken (1697–1751)', in Ute Lotz-Heumann, J.-F. Mißfelder and M. Pohlis (eds), *Konversion und Konfession in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Gütersloh 2007, 212–35.

<sup>91</sup> E. A. Blackall, *The emergence of German as a literary language*, Cambridge 1959, 102–48; H. W. Smith, *The continuities of German history: nation, religion and race across the long nineteenth century*, Cambridge 2008, 48–52.

religion: the diffusion of Anglican Latitudinarianism across the English Channel; the trickle down of Arminian and Collegiant sensibilities from the Dutch Republic; the perpetuation of an ‘Erasmian’ approach to learning and the Church that claimed to avoid Reformation dogmatism.<sup>92</sup> The slogan, ‘to the sources’ (‘ad fontes’), became for many a catch-all not simply for renewed study of Greek and Latin literature and Scripture but also for human freedom and dignity and the privileging of ethics increasingly separated from its longstanding theological horizon.<sup>93</sup> History as a means of confirming confessional identity began to give way, moreover, to self-proclaimed ‘modern’ and ‘scientific’ methods, which nevertheless had their own biases.<sup>94</sup> In the new times, the learned humanist Melanchthon seemed like a ready-made resource; his reception in earlier figures, such as the irenic seventeenth-century Helmstedt theologian Georg Calixt, controversially contributed to the idea.<sup>95</sup>

But it was Johann Salomo Semler, in particular, who helped to create and then grafted himself onto the family tree of an alleged ‘non-dogmatic’ Christian humanist tradition, whose branches were said to boast the names of Lorenzo Valla, Nicholas of Cusa, Pico della Mirandola, Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples and, of course, Erasmus. Melanchthon came to be seen as no less a bough on the oak. Erudition and ecumenism *avant la lettre* loomed large. During Semler’s honeymoon in 1751, much of which he spent in libraries, he discovered previously unknown letters from Melanchthon and Joachim Camerarius to the Greek patriarch of Constantinople, Joasaph II, concerning a proposed union between Lutheran and Orthodox Churches and their shared antipathy to

<sup>92</sup> M. I. J. Griffin Jr, *Latitudinarianism in the seventeenth-century Church of England*, Leiden 1992; A. C. Fix, *Prophecy and reason: the Dutch Collegiants in the early enlightenment*, Princeton 1991; M. Pohlig, ‘Humanismus als Aufklärung? Erasmus und Melanchthon im 18. Jahrhundert’, in W.-F. Schäufele and C. Strohm (eds), *Das Bild der Reformation in der Aufklärung*, Gütersloh 2017, 300–18.

<sup>93</sup> J. Sheehan, *The enlightenment Bible: translation, scholarship, culture*, Princeton 2005, 118–47; A. Schubert, *Das Ende der Sünde: Anthropologie zwischen Reformation und Aufklärung*, Göttingen 2002.

<sup>94</sup> I. Backus, *Historical method and confessional identity in the era of the Reformation (1578–1615)*, Leiden 2003, 253–394; D. Fleischer, *Zwischen Tradition und Fortschritt: der Strukturwandel der protestantischen Kirchengeschichtsschreibung im deutschsprachigen Diskurs der Aufklärung*, Waltrop 2003; K. Fitschen, ‘Mosheim, Melanchthon und die Irenik in der Kirchengeschichte’, in *Melanchthon und die Neuzeit*, 95–109.

<sup>95</sup> C. Böttigheimer, ‘Das Unionskonzept des Helmstedter Irenikers Georg Calixt (1586–1656)’, in H. Kleuting (ed.), *Irenik und Antikonfessionalismus im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, Hildesheim 2003, 55–70; H. Duchhardt and G. May (eds), *Union-Konversion-Toleranz: Dimensionen der Annäherung zwischen den christlichen Konfessionen im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, Mainz 2000; cf. the classic account of the period in K. Aner, *Die Theologie der Lessingzeit*, Halle 1929, with recent reappraisals, including A. Beutel, *Aufklärung in Deutschland*, Göttingen, 2006.

Rome.<sup>96</sup> Early in his career, he wrote of Melanchthon as his ‘patron’; later, he wrote that Melanchthon had ‘earned immortality’ on account of the breadth, depth and openness of his scholarship and his ‘mild’ and ‘peaceful’ disposition. Melanchthon ‘will remain for us all’, he said, ‘a model of pure life and skill in teaching’.<sup>97</sup>

Even older notions about ‘Melanchthon the confessor’ were soon redefined and overcome. With reference to Melanchthon’s own practice of revising the *Confessio Augustana*, the Protestant pastor, schoolteacher and geographer, Anton Friedrich Büsching, opined that the confession was ‘nothing more than an apology or defence’. Those responsible for the confession, he continued, did not intend it as a ‘complete and clear treatise of Christian teachings. Much less did they mean to create a binding statement of faith, which would limit their own as well as their descendants’ freedom of investigation’. Any such ‘papal remnants’, Büsching argued, could be chalked up to Protestants’ misplaced hope that Catholics could be appeased and unity preserved during precarious moments of the sixteenth century.<sup>98</sup>

Luther experienced, of course, his own epochal paradigm shift in the modern age. As is well known, it was no longer Luther’s theology but his spirit, his call for freedom and his appeal to conscience, that seemingly resonated most with the so-called ‘modern mind’.<sup>99</sup> Yet it is worth observing how Melanchthon’s commemorators applauded him already in 1760 as their forebear and the bridge between Reformation and *Aufklärung*. It is hardly accidental to this history that, to a great extent, the Saxon universities at this time formed the vanguard of Enlightenment thought in German Europe, at least outside Halle and Göttingen. Shorn of context, divested of theological and ecclesiastical commitments, Melanchthon became the model scholar, one whose life was dedicated to the ‘improvement of humanity’, who remained Protestant in some vague sense, and the pride of Lutheran Germany, but also one who somehow transcended confessional particularities and instructed all of Europe. He was

<sup>96</sup> J. S. Semler, *Lebensbeschreibung von ihm selbst angefaßt*, Halle 1781, i. 163.

<sup>97</sup> E. W. Carlsson, ‘Johann Salomo Semler, the German enlightenment, and Protestant theology’s historical turn’, unpubl. PhD diss. Wisconsin-Madison 2006, 111, 178–9.

<sup>98</sup> A. F. Büsching, *Allgemeine Anmerkungen über die symbolischen Schriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche und besondere Erläuterungen der augsburgischen Confession*, Hamburg 1770, 11; M. Printy, ‘The Reformation of the enlightenment: German histories in the eighteenth century’, in C. Ocker and others (eds), *Politics and reformations: histories and reformations: essays in honor of Thomas A. Brady, Jr*, Leiden 2007, 142. See further J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and religion*, II: *Narratives of civil government*, Cambridge 1999.

<sup>99</sup> A. Beutel, ‘Martin Luther in the German enlightenment’, and Z. Purvis, ‘Martin Luther in nineteenth-century theology’, in D. R. Nelson and P. R. Hinlicky (eds), *The Oxford encyclopedia of Martin Luther*, Oxford 2017, i. 538–58, and ii. 681–96, respectively.



reinterpreted like Luther, but his appropriation by philosophers and other Enlightenment intellectuals arguably ran deeper here. In another instance, Melanchthon would be claimed even by Freemasons.<sup>100</sup> Champions of this line of thought came to see the German Enlightenment ‘founded on Wittenberg Lutheranism and based scientifically on the Wittenberg humanism of Melanchthonian, “Philippist” coinage’.<sup>101</sup>

These are not the only paths of Melanchthon reception in the ‘age of reason’, to be sure. In the same period, the Nuremberg pastor Georg Theodor Strobel, for example, let loose a barrage of scholarship on Melanchthon that rebutted the accusations of Arnold and the prejudiced impressions of the jubilee participants, among others, and in consequence helped set modern Melanchthon research on solid ground.<sup>102</sup> The 1760 jubilee represents one eye-catching chapter of Melanchthon’s embattled *Nachleben*: it contributed to the flimsy bifurcation of Melanchthon into ‘humanist’ and ‘reformer’, and marked one critical step, thus far ignored, in the formation of the powerful narrative that identified Protestantism with forms of modern ‘progress’, scientific and otherwise.<sup>103</sup> The preceding remarks are therefore suggestive rather than comprehensive. Full-scale analysis of Melanchthon in the imagination of the German Enlightenment remains a *desideratum* – all the more with the recent careful reengagement with the historical Melanchthon, on the one hand, and the serious return of religion to Enlightenment studies, on the other.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Z. Purvis, ‘When Melanchthon became a Freemason: the so-called 1535 charter of Cologne and its long aftermath’, *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* cxi (2020), 109–42.

<sup>101</sup> ‘Besonders die deutsche Aufklärung in ihrer Eigenart fußte auf dem Wittenberger Luthertum und wissenschaftlich auf dem Wittenberger Humanismus melanchthonscher, “philippistischer” Prägung’: Mühlpfordt, ‘Wittenberg und die Aufklärung’, 329.

<sup>102</sup> *ADB* xxxvi. 603–5.

<sup>103</sup> See, for example, W. Maurer, *Der junge Melanchthon zwischen Humanismus und Reformation*, Göttingen 1967–9. For the paradigmatic statement of the ‘progress narrative’ see E. Troeltsch, *Protestantism and progress: a historical study of the relation of Protestantism to the modern world*, trans. W. Montgomery, London 1912.

<sup>104</sup> A. M. Matytsin and D. Edelstein (eds), *Let there be enlightenment: the religious and mystical sources of rationality*, Baltimore, MD 2018; W. J. Bulman and R. G. Ingram (eds), *God in the enlightenment*, Oxford 2016; S. Grote, ‘Religion and enlightenment’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* lxxv (2014), 137–60; D. Sorkin, *The religious enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna*, Princeton 2008; R. Robertson, ‘Religion and the enlightenment’, *German History* xxv (2007), 422–32; J. Sheehan, ‘Enlightenment, religion, and the enigma of secularization’, *American Historical Review* cviii (2003), 1061–80.