

HISTORIA ECCLESIAE

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The Reasoning Faith of Melanchton as a Humanist

Melanchton is usually considered as both a Humanist and a Reformer. Many of the books and studies written about him present him as a theologian. It is also worthwhile studying the Humanist intellectual components of his personality, since, after all, a great proportion of his works are ones which present him as a deep thinker, through intellectual, writing with sublime eloquence.

Both theological debates and the newly-organized church profited a great deal from his humanism; and one should mention in this regard the service he rendered in composing and compiling the confessions. Thus, everything that shapes Melanchton's theological work with class, its intellectual nature and proper sublimation to the salvation doctrines, was taken from the so-called pagan-arts. He brought into the domain of the church and the faith the useful and usable parts of the enormous amount of classical knowledge and put them in the service of God's Word, while at the same time subordinating them to the Word.

Melanchton the theologian is also always present in his works written on the topic of the seven liberal arts. To those who know him only through his theological works, his humanism seems exaggerated, and we are almost shocked by the fact that he often refers to these classical authors, expounding these disciplines, or writing eulogies about them. This was self-evident in that age, when scientific work meant quoting the traditions of the classics. The age was that of the late humanism. But Melanchton went further than praising and quoting the classics. He always checked carefully and explored the possibility of building these originally pagan disciplines into the values and education of the Protestant church. In Melanchton's view they provide a useful service in the better understanding and clearer transmission of God's Word.

“*Ut rosa ad florem, flos fructum, fructus odorem, sic schola dat morem, mos sensum, sensus honorem.*” (As the rose produces flowers, the flower bears fruits, and the fruits give off a pleasant smell, this is how the school produces virtue, virtue leads to reason, and reason produces appreciation.) This handwritten note, dated from the beginning of the 17th century, found on one of the pages of Melanchton's Grammar brought by some traveling student to Transylvania, fits perfectly with his personality, because after all, he was a thorough educator and served education with his whole life, both within and outside the school. His textbooks played a crucial role in the development of Transylvanian Protestantism, and later Reformed education in the 16th century. Hundreds of these textbooks are still found in several libraries in Transylvania.

The Humanist Melanchton knew that the disciplines of the trivium, the first section of the seven liberal arts, could only help the reviving Church, if they were used in the service of God's Word. As a result of this rule, the three disciplines of the

trivium were integrated in the following way: Grammar gives us the meaning of the original text of Holy Scripture, Dialectic serves the understanding of the text and the consistency of the sermon's content, while Rhetoric gives us God's Word in a way that makes it vivid and effective.

But for the moment let us take a look at Dialectic alone as clear evidence of the Humanist and Reformer Melanchthon's sublime knowledge. But before we begin a detailed analysis, let us describe briefly the seven liberal arts, to which this discipline belongs.

I always ask my students at the Reformed Theological Seminary in Kolozsvár this trick question: Can you tell me what are the seven liberal arts? My students usually enumerate several art-type activities, like poetry, painting, film etc., which have something to do with the arts of today. So, what are the seven liberal arts?

In higher education in the middle ages, a student yearning for knowledge had to learn quickly this small verse, which would introduce him to the world of the arts (we call them disciplines today): *Gram[matica] loquitur, Dia[lectica] vera docet, Rhet[orica] verba colorat, Mus[ica] canit, Ar[ithmetica] numerat, Ge[ographia] ponderat, Ast[rologia] colit astra.* (Grammar speaks, dialectics teaches facts, rhetoric colors speech, music sings, arithmetic counts, geography measures, and astrology studies the stars). In the early middle ages the sciences were separated into two groups. Depending on the number and character of the disciplines, they called them verbal arts (*trivium*: grammar, dialectics, rhetoric), and mathematical sciences (*quadrivium*: arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy). Obviously the Latin names of these sciences refer to the number of the disciplines in each group. But let us now examine the dialectics of Melanchthon which belongs to the first group, the *trivium*.

I. The Praise of Dialectics

Melanchthon wrote two essays about dialectics. We do not know when the first, *De Dialectica*, was written. He probably composed it in the earlier period of his life. After a general introduction, he emphasizes the significance of this discipline:

Among all the arts of humanism, dialectics is the most important, not only because of its usefulness for studying other arts, but also for making judgments in court-trials and in many other matters we deal with in life. Nothing can be taught systematically or learned perfectly without dialectics, which creates methods for every case, shows the origin, development and the outcome of things. It reveals and searches out confused and ambiguous things, it enumerates and arranges sections, and if something is to be proved, it indicates the sources of the arguments.¹

Dialectics helps us to define the correct relationship between things and helps us to separate disparate elements. Complicated contradictions cannot be solved even by the most intelligent person without this science. "That is why Plato says the following: the only way to teach and learn is transferred by Dialectic, which was given to

¹ *Omnium artium humanarum Dialecticam maxime necessariam esse, non solum ad artes alias tractandas, sed etiam ad controversias forenses, et pleraque alia negotia in vita iudicanda. Nihil, enim, ordine doceri, nihil perfecte disci potest, nisi adhibita Dialectica, quae in unaquaque causa methodum informat, ostendit initia, progressionem, et exitum rerum [...] Confusa et ambigua retexit et partitur, membra enumerat ac disponit, indicat argumentorum fontes, si quid est probandum.* CR 10. 908–909. The present study was a part of the book: *Melanchthon in Europe*. ed. Karin Maag. Grand Rapids 1999.

mankind by the immortal gods, for the useful purpose of teaching each other, and learning from one another everything which is necessary during life.”² Religion, justice, law and many other useful things must be taught to the people. These subjects, however, remain confusing and incomprehensible, unless they are correctly lined up (put in a correct relationship to each other), arranged and united by dialectics. Therefore, this science provides light to every other discipline because it clarifies obscure and unfamiliar things, with that “godly flame, which was brought to the people by Prometheus, as Plato said.”³ “Thus, the art of dialectics is like the *Hermes Trismegistos*⁴ which is the interpreter of the people and gods in the temples, public affairs, schools, the public forum, and the Senate.”⁵ Plato, in his works, always took the opportunity to encourage the sophists of his age to study this discipline, because, if they ignored it, the youth of future generations would learn only useless things.

Melanchthon did not like those who approached the higher sciences without systematic dialectical examination, and stray as though they were wandering in the night on *terra incognita*.⁶ Theologians and jurists were those who brought dialectics from the background to the forefront (*ex umbra in aciem*), because they could not have defended themselves without this tool (*suas personas sine hoc instrumentum tueri possunt*).

Paul taught the handling of the Word of God correctly. How can somebody do this, who does not know the correct method of distinguishing and systematizing things? What can be more monstrous for the doctrines of the Church than mixing and muddling heterogeneous things such as the doctrine of Law and Gospel, the spiritual and the civil duties, the sacraments and the sacrifices? Without a frequent and well timed practice of dialectics no one can study these things with sufficient safety.⁷

Melanchthon was concerned about the Church and theological science because of the frequent lack of system and regularity. Without method only empty stories can be told, not the clear and perfect doctrine (*perfecta doctrina*). At the end of his speech he again encouraged the youth to study dialectics actively and with persistence, approaching it as the instrument of every other higher science.

The date of his second study is known: he wrote it in 1528 for the graduation of Iacobus Milichius, who obtained the degree of Master of Arts in that year. “Since the customs of this school are quite familiar to you, I think, it is no longer necessary for me to

² *Itaque Plato gravissime dixit, unam hanc docendi ac discendi viam, quae in Dialectica traditur, a Deis immortalibus donatam esse generi humano, propter hanc summam utilitatem, ut docere homines inter se ac discere possent, quod in omni vita maxime necessarium est.* CR 10. 909.

³ *Omnibus artibus lumen adfert [scil. dialectica – BD], sicut Plato inquit, a Prometheo aliquo divinitus ad homines perlatam esse, ἅμα φαντάτω τινὶ πυρί.* CR 10. 909.

⁴ The expression: *κοινὸς ἔρμῆς* used by Melanchthon was taken from Aristotle and Menandros, who use it with the following everyday meaning: the revealed thing must be shared with those present. Obviously Melanchthon wants to refer here to the sharing of spiritual things.

⁵ *Est igitur Dialectica veluti κοινὸς ἔρμῆς; interpres Deorum atque hominum, in templis, in foro, in scholis, in iudiciis, in Senatu.* CR 10. 909.

⁶ *Quo magis reprehendi sunt hoc tempore, qui sine Dialectica properant ad superiores artes, in quibus quoniam sine Dialectica methodum reperire nullam possunt, ita errabunt, ut si in ignotissimis regionibus nocte iter facerent.* CR 10. 909.

⁷ *Paulus praecepit verbum Dei ὀρθοτομεῖν. Id quomodo faciet, qui nullam sciet apte distinguendi et partiendi rationem? Quid erit monstrosius, doctrina religionis, si diversi loci miscbuntur, et confundentur, quales sunt, doctrina legis et Evangelii, vitae spiritualis officia, et vitae civilis officia, sacramenta et sacrificia? Neque quisquam satis cautus erit in talibus locis, nisi multum ac diu exercitatus in Dialectica.* CR 10. 909–910. Melanchthon refers here to the second letter of Paul to Timothy (2 Tim 2:15).

prove with large explanations why I step up here to speak,” he began. Later he stated that he was not led by his own purposes in making this speech, but by the instructions of previous wise men who introduced this custom. He felt that he was bound to explain the correct way and methods of studying, correcting at the same time an earlier dangerous mistake which made the studying process impossible because of its harmful method. “While granting Masters’ degrees to these young men whose studies we know, we warn most of the students not to practice science without method and order.”⁸ In the end he followed a similar path to his first speech, only with new ideas and from new standpoints. “How can anyone judge complicated contradictions, who doesn’t study deeply the useful sciences, but only tastes them briefly and hastily, like dogs drinking from the banks of the Nile?”⁹ Order and method in study are what help all of us to get complete knowledge from our favorite science. Melanchthon emphasized frequently that the correct method of studying provides an important role in this information-gathering process, supported with a maxim taken from the work *Oeconomicus* by Xenophon: If something lacks order, it is not worthy of respect, and is useless.

Melanchthon concentrated his attention on pseudo-thinkers, who studied theology and justice without first mastering dialectics. They were like the man mentioned by Cicero, who tried to lift himself up by his own hair. “Plato,” says Melanchthon, “in his work, *The Republic*, calls those who imagine that they get satisfaction from the other arts without dialectics illegitimate philosophers; and since illegitimate children have no right to inheritance, so much more should all who first break into the field of other disciplines without mastering this art, be forbidden, by some kind of praetorian decree, from studying all other sciences.”¹⁰ Continuing his analysis he also said that dialectics was useless if studied briefly by simply learning some of this art’s rules. We need to master it precisely, and achieve some practice in it. And this practice is as important as the knowledge of a science’s principles. “As nobody can be either a painter just by watching Durer paint, or a musician just by seeing Adolph play on the strings, so nobody should believe that he is going to be a master in dialectics without composing something, or disputing, in a word who has no practice in this art.”¹¹ Melanchthon gathered an endless scientific supply of classical writings which praise everything from the fables of Aesop through the wisdom of philosophers, jurists, or the brave and outstanding medical practitioners.

Finally Melanchthon reached the point where dialectics, as a science, could be used in the Church, expounding that, although the essence and content of the holy science was not rooted in philosophy, nevertheless the church sermon, as the external instrument of handling the Word, took its form and frame from dialectics and other arts, so that preaching could only be structured with their help. And because, from his point of view, the theologian needed to be the most informed and skilled in everything, and had to know everything in the best possible way, it was not proper for

⁸ *Cum scholae consuetudo vobis nota sit, non arbitrabar mihi opus esse longa defensione, cur hac ad dicendum accesserim. [...] Nos itaque dum hoc tempore horum adolescentium, quibus Magisterii titulum concedemus, studia cognoscimus, animadvertimus magnam iuventutis partem, sine ratione atque ordine in literis versari.* CR 11. 159–160.

⁹ *Quid autem indicabit de obscurissimis controversiis is, qui non penitus introspectit bonas artes, sed obiter degustavit eas fugiens, velut canes e Nilo bibunt?* CR 11. 160.

¹⁰ *Plato in Republica spurios Philosophos adpellat eos, qui sine Dialectica satisfacere se aliis artibus existimabant, quare sicut spuris non licet haereditatem petere, ita procul ab omnium literarum tractatione praetorio aliquo edicto submoveri debebant illi, qui ante irrumpunt in alias disciplinas, quam hanc artem perceperint.* CR 11. 161.

¹¹ *Sicut non statim pictor est qui Durerum pingentem vidit, nec cytharoadus, qui vidit Adolphum eruditissime tangentem fides: ita non putet se Dialecticam callere is, qui nihil scripsit, non disputavit, demique qui artem non exercuit.* CR 11. 161.

him to neglect studying these arts. For instance, when he was to speak clearly and intelligibly about the nature of man, comparing it to the parts of the human body, he needed to have knowledge of dissertations written on this subject.

How much light can be shed on the holy sciences by somebody who puts the philosophical doctrine about the virtues next to the holy sciences, and does not show what does and does not link the two? I think personally that it is essential to define accurately the character of both sciences [theology and philosophy], to delimit their differences clearly, and to indicate precisely their bounds, in order to stop philosophy from trespassing onto the territory of Christian doctrines, as the jurists would say. If our ancestors had done this, the infection of Church doctrines would not have lasted until now.¹²

A theologian also needs to know history, and the movement of stars and celestial bodies, said Melanchthon, without further explanation. A speech should end with stimulation, illustrating how important the first step of the trivium is to progressing in the fields of the other sciences: Starting well is to be already half-d one, therefore you can also make progress in the higher sciences [the *quadrivium*, e.g. theology] if you start studying it correctly, namely, if you take along with you for the mastering of the other arts the knowledge of the sciences I am speaking about [the *trivium*]. This warning is emphasized at least as well by me as by your other teachers.¹³

II. A Textbook about Dialectics

Given our limitations of space and time we cannot afford to present the *Dialectics* of Melanchthon in its entirety, so we will give you only a description of some specific parts of it.

Following the first edition of his *Rhetoric* Melanchthon immediately started to write his *Dialectics*. Analyzing the text of various editions, one can separate it into three stages, that of 1520, 1528 and 1547. The first edition was published in 1520 in Leipzig under the title *Compendiaria dialectices ratio*. Melanchthon's name is not on the title page, but it appears at the end of the dedication letter addressed to Johannes Schwertfegerus, who taught law in Wittenberg, and died on May 10, 1524. Luther recommended Iustus Jonas to replace him. In the dedication Melanchthon referred to his *Rhetoric* published a year earlier, emphasizing the fact that it could not be treated exhaustively without knowing the dialectics. If dialectics were absent, the speakers could say nothing certain or acceptable. As for the reason for writing the *Dialectics*, he said that the students' persistent demand forced him to write it, because, as he stated, most teachers of the time neglected this science. "Therefore, taking time away from my other studies, I wrote out the method of discussing in the

¹² *Quantum lucis adferet sacris Uteris, qui Philosophorum doctrinam de moribus cum illis conferet et ostendet, quae consentiant, quae non consentiant? Ego vero etiam necessarium esse iudico, ostendere utrumque doctrinae genus et intervalla certa regione describere, et fines eorum regere, ut iureconsulti loquuntur, ne possit iterum in Christianae doctrinae possessionem Philosophia irrumperere. Quod si fecissent veteres, non usque adeo contaminata esset ante haec tempora doctrina ecclesiastica.* CR 11. 162.

¹³ *Quod si dimidium facti qui bene coepit habet, profecto et vos in superioribus disciplinis plus promotebitis, si recte coeperitis, hoc est, si earum literarum, de quibus dico, scientiam ad eas attuleritis. Haec quamquam sedulo praeceptores vestri movent, tamen et ego.* CR 11. 163.

shortest way I could.”¹⁴ This version appeared in 1521 in three places (Basle, Leipzig, The Hague), in 1522 in two places (Basle, Paris), and also in 1523 in three places (Strasbourg, Basle, Augsburg). But other editions are known as well.¹⁵ On June 26, 1529, Melanchthon wrote about his second version to Camerarius, stating that he had emended his *Dialectics* shortly before, rewriting and completing the last two chapters.¹⁶ It seems that he started correcting the first version already in 1527, since Brettschneider seems to have known in a letter dated July 2, 1527 that Melanchthon had written that he had edited it and made it more complete. But there is no point in looking for that letter in that year because of some typographical mistake which caused a 6 to turn into a 7. Thus Melanchthon actually wrote the letter to Ioachim Camerarius in 1526 and mentioned correcting the *Dialectics* and giving the corrected version to his students, having decided to take them through the whole encyclopedia.¹⁷ It seems that he had already finished correcting the book by June 1529, since in his letter dated June 10 he informed Fridericus Myconius that it was a serious test of strength revising the *Dialectics*, which now, in his words, would appear in a much better form.¹⁸ The work thus enriched in content was published that very year (*Dialectices Phil[ippi] Mel[anchthonis] libri quattuor ab auctore ipse de integro in lucem conscripti ac editi. Item rhetorices praeceptiunculae doctissimae*), and later was published seven more times.¹⁹ This version was the one which Paulus Eberus, one of Melanchthon’s disciples, added to and published in 1544 in Wittenberg entitled: *Dialecticae praeceptiones collectae a Philippo Melanphone*, indicating in its introduction that it could hardly please the author, who would surely have rewritten it himself if he had had the time.

Melanchthon’s *Dialectics* gained its final form in 1547, printed in the middle of the year under the title of *Erotemata dialectices, continentia fere integram artem, ita scripta, ut iuventuti utiliter proponi possint. Edita a Philippo Melanphone. Vitebergae, 1547*. The book was highly successful, inasmuch as on October 18, 1547 Melanchthon wrote to his pastor, “The dialectics have been sold in 3000 copies. Now they are reprinting it, and it needs some correction.”²⁰ As for pastor Casparus Aquila,²¹ he wrote on November 10 of the same year that he could not send the *Dialectics* because he was out of town during its

¹⁴ *Neque enim rhetorica citra dialecticorum usum commode tractari absolvi que possunt [...] Haec ut copiose tractarem, studiosi quidam a me contenderunt, quod eo sint loco nostris temporibus, ut et magna professorum pars artisusum ignoret. Suffuratus igitur boras aliquot studiis mei, disserendi rationem descripsi, idque quam potui brevissime.* CR 1. 153–154. Nr. 67. It is worth comparing it with the letter addressed to Bernardus Maurus, in which he gives a fuller account of the relation between rhetoric and dialectics. CR 1. 62–66. Nr. 32.

¹⁵ CR 1 509.

¹⁶ *Dialectica mitto Michaeli, quae nuper recognovi, et posteriores duos libellos retexui, et ita tractavi, ut totam artem complexum me esse putem.* CR 1. 1084. Nr. 624. Preceding this, dated on July 15 we read that he restarted his lectures on dialectics at the request of new students, and that he wanted to complete it with Aristotle’s *Organon*. CR 1. 1081. Nr. 622.

¹⁷ *Ego meam διαλεκτικήν περπολιό. Nunc enim pueris meis trado, quos per universam ἐγκύκλιον ἰδέαν χειραγωγείν statu.* CR 1. 803. For Brettschneider’s reference see CR 13. 507–508.

¹⁸ In this period he worked at a feverish pace, and according to one of Luther’s letters addressed to Iustus Jonas, even his health was at stake because of his exhausting public work. (*Philippus sese macerat cura rei ecclesiasticae et rei publicae usque ad periculum valetudinis.* CR 1. 1074.)

¹⁹ Wittenberg, 1531; Paris, 1532; Wittenberg, 1533, in the same year in the same location again; Wittenberg 1536; Leipzig, 1536 and Strasbourg 1542. CR 13. 509.

²⁰ *Vendita sunt tria millia exemplorum Dialectices. Nunc receditur, et emendatione indiget.* CR 6. 705.

²¹ Aquila was born August 7, 1488 in Augsburg, studied in Italy and Switzerland, in 1516 was elected pastor of Gengen, and from there he went to Wittenberg in 1520. His posts were: 1522 Sickingen, 1523 Eisenach, 1527 Saalfeld where he was elected bishop in 1528. He appears in 1548 in Schmalkalden as an exile and from there returned to Saalfeld in 1552. He died in 1560. CR 10. 334.

printing, and when he came back every single copy had been sold. “Therefore, there will soon be another edition, containing many corrections, since some parts of the material need more careful consideration. But I think, if God helps us, I can send you a copy of this edition within one month.”²²

We can find out about some of Melanchthon’s rewriting from the letter he sent to Joannes Aurifaber.²³ He made essential and structural changes only in the chapter „De loco causerum,” although he was not totally satisfied with the corrections. He was about to go to Leipzig, where he intended to discuss the question with Aurbachius. The small stylistic corrections did not affect the content of the other part of the book.²⁴ The corrected version was rapidly printed, because he wrote at the beginning of December to Hieronimus Baumgartner: “I send you a copy of the *Dialectics*, not as if I wanted you to read some trifles like this, but only because momentarily I have no other lecture to send you.”²⁵ He also sent a copy of the newly-published book to Vitus Theodor’s son in the middle of December.²⁶ This edition was very successful, since it was totally sold out in only two months. This is proved by Melanchthon’s letter written to Mattheus Collinus at the academy of Prague, where he already spoke about the third edition of the book.²⁷ The *Dialectics* were finally published in more than ten editions.

III. Dedication

Melanchthon dedicated the *Dialectics* to Joachim Camerarius’s son John, out of respect for his father. He told the young man that this science helped people to distinguish clearly the reasons and logical process of a text used for persuasion, steering audiences away from falseness by revealing the lies. Following the general introduction he explored more practical domains, pointing to the character of the dialectics to be used in the Church. First of all he wished to convince his colleagues and students not to speak against this use of the science of dialectics, “I encourage them, but also ask them for the sake of God’s glory and

²² *Dialecticos libellos ideo non misi, quia cum ederentur, ego aberam in iugis Herciniis, et me reverso exemplaria omnia vendita erant. Max igitur instituta est secunda editio, in qua multa erunt emendatiora; habui enim de quibusdam materiis δευτέρα φροντιδα (Sag. Mittam igitur eius editionis exempla intra mensem Deo volente. CR 6. 722.*

²³ Aurifaber was born in 1517 in Bratislava. His original name was Goldschmid. He was Melanchthon’s disciple, and later his friend. He began teaching as a lector in the University of Wittenberg. On June 16, 1550 he was awarded a doctorate and later was invited to teach theology at the Rostock Academy, thanks to the recommendation of Melanchthon. Aurifaber was in Regensburg already in 1554, where he also taught theology and led the Consistorium. In 1567 he returned to Bratislava, as the pastor of St. Elisabeth church and the inspector in charge of the supervision of church and schools. He also died there in 1568. CR 10. 336.

²⁴ *In dialecticis περὶ συνεκτικοῦ, in loco causerum a me erratum est. Mutavi eum locum etsi ne nunc quidem mihi aut tibi satisfactum est. Sed iam eo Lipsiam, cum Aurbachio ea de re disputaturus. In alius partibus libelli, etsi quaedam emendavi, tamen res non sunt mutatae. CR 6. 725-26.*

²⁵ Baumgartner was a senator of Nürnberg, born there on March 9 to a wealthy noble family. He studied in his native town of Eittenberg, where he became acquainted with both Luther and Melanchthon. He continued as senator until his death in 1565. CR 10. 337. The fragment of the letter to him states: *Mitto tibi exemplum Dialectices, non quod has nugas a te legi velim, sed quia nunc alia incundiora, quae mitterem, non habebam. CR 6. 749.*

²⁶ Vitus Theodor (formerly Dietrich) was a beloved disciple and friend of both Luther and Melanchthon. This is evidenced by the fact that Melanchthon wrote him 235 letters between 1530 and 1549. He became a pastor in Nuremberg, where he died on March 26, 1549. CR 10. 415. For the letter referring to the sending of the dialectics look at CR 6. 750.

²⁷ *Dialecticam mitto, qualis nunc tertio edita est. CR 6. 816.*

the Church's salvation not to neglect Dialectics, and not to acclaim the silly speeches of people who revile this science and declare it useless for the Church."²⁸ He was convinced that this science became abominable and detested in the age when it was not taught as an art, but as an obscure shadow, or an incomprehensible and unexplainable labyrinth of rules, unfamiliar even to scholars. "But I," said Melanchthon, "teach the real, not the compromised, but the original Dialectics as taken partly from Aristotle, and partly from some of his very clever interpreters, like Alexander Aphrodisiensis or Boetius. And I think it is very useful not only in the public forum and the court of justice, or in philosophy, but also in the Church."²⁹ He referred to the use of this discipline in the Church when he said that even if God's will, law, sin, the gospel and many other important things were evident from the holy books given by God, without dialectics one could hardly speak about them coherently and with structure. Besides, he saw the use of the science not only in clarifying a doctrine's meaning, but in providing understanding for the Church.³⁰ Therefore a discipline like this ought not to be used in the service of arguing, chattering or vanity, but had to be used for a high standard, clarity, science, and the love of truth. He was convinced that this way of intelligent speaking and teaching of the truth was given by God as a gift, and was extremely necessary in the explanation of the holy doctrines, and in the search for truth in other domains.³¹ Again he defended Aristotle against those who attacked his work and thought it useless, recommending to his students to read Aristotle's works in Greek. He thought it useful for the students to reinforce the teachings of this great Greek thinker with the handbooks of Joannes Caesarius and Iodocius Willichus, saying, I also made every effort in this edition to include the whole art, therefore I think this discipline very useful for the youth to study. „I also attached a bibliography to indicate the sources of my teachings."³²

The texts of the following sections can be found in the book published in 1580, in Leipzig. It starts with a short definition of dialectics, „Dialectics is the art or the way of correct, exact and clear teaching, correct definition and division, the rebinding of wrong connections or disproving of errors."³³

The word *dialectics* comes from the Greek word *διαλέγομαι*, which means to speak with somebody while exchanging opinions. As a definition this is obviously a collage of the meanings of the Latin expressions (*disputo, dissero*). This definition is expanded upon in the subtitle, as though in answer to the question, what does dialectics deal with? Melanchthon's answer is "with every topic and question which can be taught to people,

²⁸ *Hos et adhortor, et propter gloriam Dei ac propter Ecclesiae salutem obtestor, ne Dialecticam egligant, nec applaudant insulsis sermonibus eorum, qui vituperant eam, et Ecclesiae inutilem esse clamitant.* CR 6. 655.

²⁹ *Ego veram, incorruptam, nativam Dialecticam, qualem et ab Aristotele, et aliquot eius non insulsis interpretibus, ut ab Alexandre Aphrodisiensi et Boetio accepimus, praedico. Hanc affirmo non modo in foro et in iudiciis, aut in philosophia, sed etiam in Ecclesia valde utilem esse.* CR 6. 655.

³⁰ *Imo Dialectica opus est, non solum ut doctrina lucem habeat, sed etiam ut sit concordiae vinculum.* CR 6. 655

³¹ *[...] veram docendi et ratioinandi viam sciamus Dei donum esse, et in exponenda doctrina coelesti et inquisitione veritatis in aliis rebus necessariam.* CR 6. 656.

³² *Ego quoque in hac editione propemodum integram artem complexus sum, et hanc rationem tradendae artis utilem fore studiis iuventutis excistimo. Et τεχνολογικά quaedam inserui, quae fontes praeceptorum ostendunt.* CR 6. 657.

³³ *Erotemata Dialectices, continentiae fere integram artes, ita scripta, ut iuventuti utiliter proponi possint, Edita a Philippo Melanch[thone]. Lipsiae. (In fine: Lipsiae, imprimebat Ioannes Steinmann Anno M.D.LXXX.) Dialectica est ars seu via recte, ordine, et perspicue docendi, quod fit recte definiendo, dividendo, argumenta vera connectendo, et male cohaerentia seu falsa retexendo et refutando.* CR 13. 513.

like arithmetic, which deals with things concerning counting.”³⁴ Man as a rational being was endowed by God with the notion of numbers, to be able to differentiate things without mixing them and without everything becoming a chaotic mixture (*in unum chaos miscenda*). Therefore it is necessary to know that God is different from the creature, substance from accidentia, or God and his enemy Satan are two different things. “Therefore dialectics does not create new things, it only teaches us the method and form of teaching” (*non nasci res in Dialectica, sed modum et formam docendi tradi in Dialectica*). Melanchthon finished his work by praising the disciple with the maxim of Petrus Hispanus, a definition which Melanchthon fully supported,

Dialectics is the art of arts, the science of sciences, which gives the way to the origin of every method. This sounds foolish, but you need to understand this way: dialectics is the art of arts, which is better not in its dignity, but in its usefulness to serve every art and discipline.[...] Finally says [Petrus Hispanus] it shows the way to the origin of every method, which means that it creates method, or teaches every discipline. [...] If some orator wants to speak about repentance, than he has to provide the definitions, the parts, the reasons, the effects.³⁵

Melanchthon saw the difference between rhetoric and dialectics in the fact that dialectics presents the summary of things but rhetoric expounds them widely, and decorates them with new ideas. He tried to emphasize the importance of studying this discipline partly by means of two quotations taken from Plato and partly with the words of Paul concerning the selection of a bishop. Paul says concerning the selection of a bishop that he must be suitable as a teacher (*idoneum ad docendum*), “and he similarly warns the doctors to handle correctly the word of God, or as he says ὀρθοτομεῖν, which surely means dialectics because it is the correct way of teaching and dividing.”³⁶ Firstly, Melanchthon thought it necessary to be careful and not let different things get mixed. We must make a difference between the Law and the Gospel, the commandments and the promises, the outside order, or the common truth, and the inside order or the truth of the heart. “These show clearly enough that creating correct differentiations and definitions is very necessary, and this is done by dialectics. But this discipline must be taught with restraint, and the youth must get used to the simple explanation of truth, not through the rules of arguing or using finger-pointing and intrigue.”³⁷

³⁴ *Circa omnes materias seu quaestiones, de quibus docendi sunt homines, sicut Arithmetica versatur circa omnes res numerandas.* CR 13. 514. In some of the following explanatory sentences he makes a detailed presentation of the relationship between the two disciplines.

³⁵ *Dialectica est ars artium, scientia scientiarum, ad omnium methodorum principia viam habens. Laudatio videtur ridicula, sed sic intelligatur: Dialectica est ars artium, id est non dignitate antecedens, sed usu serviens omnibus artibus et scientiis. [...] Deinde, inquit, ad omnium methodorum principia viam habens, id est, in omnibus materiis methodos, hoc est, viam docendi instituens.[...] Si concionatori dicendum erit de poenitentia, exponet et ipse definitiones, partes, causas, effectus.* CR13. 515.

³⁶ CR 13. 517. Melanchthon combines here several quotations from the Bible. One is 1 Tim 3: 2, *oportet ergo episcopum [...] doctorem [esse],* the other Tit 1:9, *potens sit [scil. episcopus] et exhortari in doctrina sana et eos qui contradicunt arguere,* and 2 Tim 2:15, *recte tractandum [according to Melanchthon: secare] verbum veritatis [according to Melanchthon: verbum Dei].* The last one is worth quoting in Greek too, because it contains the expression used by Melanchthon: ὀρθοτομοῦντα [ὀρθοτομεῖν] τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας.

³⁷ *Hic satis apparet, valde necessariam esse diligentiam recte dividendi et definiendi, quae sunt opera Dialectices. Sed sobrie tradatur ars, et assuefiat adolescentia ad simplicem veritatis explicationem, non ad studium cavillandi, aut ad sycophanticam. Hactenus προλεγομένα recitata sunt. Nunc, Deo iuvante, artem ipsam inchoabimus.* CR 13. 517.

We have examined how dialectics helps us to organize questions, and how it illuminates the world of notions. The following is a perfect example of how Melanchthon harmonized the two disciplines. God, says Melanchthon's definition, is a formless substance, intelligent, almighty, wise and good, true, gracious, holy, fully independent, the final cause of all nature, order, and the good of nature. He demands that humanity behave according to his will, and punishes those who work against him. It is a definition which can also be made by people outside the church;³⁸ but in the church the following addition is necessary because we need to speak about God as He revealed himself in evident testimonies. Therefore we need to complete the definition with the methodical description of God's person, as follows: the eternal Father, whose son is his own image, and Son, who carries the image of his father, and Holy Spirit in whom God reveals himself, created the heaven and earth and everything in them, and gathers the eternal Church from the human race, and revealed his will in evident testimonies, as through the resurrection of the dead.³⁹

From the point of view of the will another category comes to light, faith as knowledge.

Faith is knowledge, Melanchthon again formulated, and through it we accept every teaching given by God to the Church with solid conviction including the promise of forgiveness, which if we accept it, gives us absolution for our sins. This promise also gives us trust in the Son of God, in whom, if we rest, we will reach high up to God, being sure that he will accept us and hear us; and we pray to him.⁴⁰

On this level Melanchthon's systematic argumentation received an unusual impulse regarding Reformed doctrines. „Hope,” he continued, “is the sure expectation of eternal life given by the Son of God, and awaiting the divine help and assistance during misfortunes. Faith and hope differ, because faith means also knowledge and above all also trust.[...] But hope is the expectation of the future salvation.”⁴¹ Love means obedience to God's commandments through true faith and joy. The apostle John defines love in his first epistle: love for God means submitting to his orders, „We understand this definition better when our heart is set on fire with a fervent love for God.”⁴² Fear of God, called servile fear, is the protector of order and skill, which leads us to fear God's anger, but when combined with faith it becomes a virtue like fear of parents. Patience is a virtue which shows up in obedience to God in hard times

³⁸ *Hanc descriptionem mentes humanae, etiam extra Ecclesiam, et sine singulari revolutione, discunt ex demonstrationibus, et membra praecipua sunt in hac tabella.* CR 13. 530.

³⁹ *Ideo in Ecclesia ad priora membra diserte adduntur personarum nomina: [...] et pater aeternus, qui genuit filium imaginem suam, et filius, qui est imago patris, et Spiritus Sanctus sicut patefecit se divinitas, qui condidit coelum et terram, et caeteras naturas in eis, et in genere humano sibi colligit aeternam Ecclesiam, et suam voluntatem illustribus testimoniis, ut resuscitatione mortuorum, declaravit.* CR 13 530-31.

⁴⁰ *Fides est notitia, qua firmo assensu amplectimur totam doctrinam a Deo traditam Ecclesiae, et is hac etiam promissionem reconciliationis, quam apprehendentes accipimus remissionem peccatorum fiducia filii Dei, et hac fiducia acquiescentes in filio Dei, accedimus ad Deum, et nos recipi et exaudiri statuimus, et eum invocamus.* CR 13 538-539.

⁴¹ *Spes est expectatio vitae aeternae propter filium Dei certa, et expectatio auxilii et mitigationis calamitatum in hac vita, iuxta consilium Dei. Differunt fides et spes, quia fides et noticiam significat, et deinde fiduciam [...] Spes autem est expectatio futurae liberationis.* CR 13 539.

⁴² *Sed si arderent corda nostra magno incendio amoris erga Deum, haec definitio magis intelligi posset.* CR 13. 539.

and teaches us to become perfect, and not to act against God's will when crushed by pain.⁴³

Well, this was the way in which Melanchthon created a step by step science in God's service and for Reformation's goals. I would like to end this contribution with a footnote which I think is appropriate at this point. On August 26, 1636 an unknown admirer of Melanchthon noted in one of his books in Debrecen, *Frustra doctores sine me colluere sorores* that is, "without this discipline no other science can really be practiced."

⁴³ *Timor Dei, qui vocatur servilis, et est custos disciplinae, est habitus, qui inclinatur ut revera expavescamus agnitione irae Dei et poenarum. [...] Tolerantia est virtus obediens Deo in aerumnis, quas docet perferendas esse, ita, ne fracti dolore faciamus contra mandata Dei.* CR 13. 539.