

Martin Luther's Swan Song: Luther's Students, Melanchthon, and the Publication of the Lectures on Genesis (1544–1554)*

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One fascinating contribution of postmodern philosophy to the study of historical documents is the analysis of written texts in terms of their readers and reception. Readers, according to the basic theory, interact with a text in such a way that its meaning is not strictly limited by the intention of its author or the *Sitz im Leben* of its original audience. A text itself has a history, and this history becomes a subject for historical investigation.

With Martin Luther's lectures on Genesis, which the Reformer delivered from his University of Wittenberg podium between 1535 and 1545, there are several layers between author-speaker, original auditors, recorded texts, published text, and the text's subsequent history through various editions and their reception. Nearly eighty years ago Peter Meinhold applied modern historical methods to the critical edition of Luther's Genesis Lectures and concluded that the students who recorded and later published the lectures were creative redactors who introduced what Meinhold called an »alien theology« into the published exposition; what appears in the text is not entirely genuine Luther material but reflects more the different theology of Luther's younger colleague, Philip Melanchthon.¹ Even while disagreeing in part with Meinhold's conclusions, Jaroslav Pelikan in his introduction to the first volume of the lectures in the American Edition of

* I thank Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert for their comments on an earlier draft of this essay, and James Kellerman for assistance with translation of the Latin prefaces.

1 P. MEINHOLD, *Die Genesisvorlesung Luthers und ihre Herausgeber*, 1936, 5.370–428.

*Luther's Works*² presents the problem to readers in such a way that this question must surely loom at least for critical readers: »Does this text convey what Luther taught or have Luther's vast thoughts and words on Genesis been lost, replaced at least in a certain degree by this so-called ›alien theology‹?«

Elsewhere I have investigated the content of the lectures in terms of Luther's mature thought and the events of the last decade of his life, concluding that we do indeed have in the published text of the Genesis Lectures a window into Luther's university classroom.³ My purpose in this essay is to investigate another layer in this series of deposits from author's (or speaker's) words to published text and its readers, by asking how the first readers of the Genesis Lectures were introduced to their reading by way of the prefaces to the four volumes of the original edition. None of these prefaces, including Luther's own preface to the first volume, which first appeared in 1544, was published in the American Edition of *Luther's Works*. Even in the Weimarer Ausgabe only Luther's preface appeared as a preface, that is, in its position at the beginning of the text of Luther's lectures. The dedicatory prefaces to the four original volumes were printed together as part of the frontmatter of the final volume.⁴ Thus we are immediately confronted with the fact that the historical readers of the numerous printings of the original edition were introduced to their text in a way quite different from readers today, both in translation and in the critical edition. In short, modern editions of Luther's works, by misplacing these prefaces or omit-

2 J. PELIKAN, Introduction to Volume 1 (in: Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 1955–1983, 1, x–xii). It should be noted that despite his own reservations regarding the text induced by Meinhold's conclusions, Pelikan nevertheless calls the Genesis Lectures »an indispensable source for our knowledge of Luther's thought« (xii).

3 Cf. J.A. MAXFIELD, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis and the Formation of Evangelical Identity*, 2008. Other recent works that view the Genesis Lectures as a reliable source for Luther's mature thought include U. ASENDORF, *Lectura in Biblia. Luthers Genesisvorlesung (1535–1545)*, 1998; and M.L. MATTOX, »Defender of the Most Holy Matriarchs«: Martin Luther's Interpretation of the Women of Genesis in the Enarrationes in Genesin, 1535–1545, 2003.

4 Luther's preface appears in WA 42; 1–2 while the dedicatory prefaces appear in WA 44; XIV–XXXVII. For criticism of the Weimar edition and the importance of investigating Luther's biblical lectures in their original published form, see K. HAGEN, *Luther's Approach to Scripture as Seen in His »Commentaries« on Galatians, 1519–1538*, 1993.

ting them entirely, have obscured the ways Luther's expositions of Genesis were read and utilized by the generations in the later 16th century who received the Reformer's teachings and on this basis developed an Evangelical-Lutheran church life and culture in Germany and beyond.

This essay will focus on the original edition of Luther's Genesis Lectures and explore how the prefaces for these four volumes presented Luther's exposition of Genesis in a distinct intellectual and historical context that illuminates the early stages of Lutheran memory of the Reformer as the greatest interpreter of the Bible whose voice must be heard in the midst of present circumstances. Two of the prefaces to the original volumes were authored by Philip Melanchthon, the one introducing the first volume of the lectures and the other introducing the third volume, first published in 1552. Melanchthon was not one of the editors but had a close relationship with them and indeed can be described as one of the prime movers in the drawn-out effort to present Luther's vast exposition of Genesis to the reading public. Both prefaces were used by Melanchthon to describe and promote Luther's unique understanding of the book of Genesis as God's own testimonies about the church as it existed in the days of the patriarchs. The preface for the second volume (1550) was authored by Michael Roting, a teacher in the Latin school in Nuremberg, while the fourth volume (1554) was introduced with a preface by Jerome Besold, a pastor in Nuremberg.⁵ When the Genesis Lectures were later published in volume six (Latin text, 1555) and volumes ten and eleven (German translation, 1558) of the Wittenberg edition of Luther's works, these original prefaces were not included but were replaced by new ones prepared by Melanchthon (for the Latin edition) and by the German translators, Basilius Faber and Johannes Guden. But that is a different story.⁶

That the preface to the first volume is given under the name of Vitus Theodorus (Veit Dietrich) and not Philip Melanchthon need not detain us

5 The original four volumes each received multiple printings, the latest in 1563 (both vol. 1 and vol. 3, which according to the title page retained its preface by Melanchthon [WA 42; XVI]). For the printing history of the original editions see WA 42; XI–XVIII.

6 On the Wittenberg edition see R. KOLB, *Martin Luther as Prophet, Teacher, Hero: Images of the Reformer, 1520–1620*, 1999, 141–146; and E. WOLGAST, *Die Wittenberger Luther-Ausgabe. Zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der Werke Luthers im 16. Jahrhundert* (Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens 11, 1971, 1–336).

long. Meinhold proved from correspondence between the two that Melanchthon acted as a ghostwriter for Dietrich.⁷ Dietrich was at the time the coordinator of the publishing project; for years he had devoted much of his professional life to the preservation of the Reformer's legacy for the Evangelical churches in Germany through the recording of Luther's oral speech and the editing and publication of his sermons and lectures.⁸ In December 1535 Dietrich had left Wittenberg to serve as pastor in Nuremberg, but he later coordinated the editing of the Genesis Lectures until his death in 1549. His name appears as the dedicator of the first volume of the lectures to Duke John Ernest of Saxony but Melanchthon's rhetorical genius was solicited for the task of composition.

Melanchthon's rhetoric in this first preface immediately leads the reader to anticipate a much more comprehensive philosophical discussion than might normally be expected in a commentary on Genesis. The preface fits very well into the picture drawn by Sachiko Kusakawa of Melanchthon developing a Lutheran natural philosophy to complement, support, and defend Luther's theological program and reform from the late 1520s onward.⁹ Here we see the philosopher and rhetorician Melanchthon introducing Luther's theological exposition of the first book of Moses with a discussion of God and creation from the traditions of natural philosophy that so interested Luther's younger colleague. Yet, just as Kusakawa observes in her analysis of Melanchthon's philosophical writings in the 1530s and 40s, here too in the preface to Luther's lectures on Genesis Melanchthon is keen to

7 MEINHOLD (see n. 1), 11–13.

8 See B. KLAUS, *Die Lutherüberlieferung Veit Dietrichs und ihre Problematik* (ZBKG 53, 1984, 33–47); and DERS., *Veit Dietrich. Leben und Werk*, 1958.

9 S. KUSUKAWA, *The Transformation of Natural Philosophy: The Case of Philip Melanchthon*, 1995. Through analysis of a variety of Melanchthon's philosophical texts, Kusakawa holds that Melanchthon re-devoted himself to philosophy and the liberal arts as necessary means for upholding true theology and obedience to divinely instituted civil government in the wake of radical movements, from the Zwickau prophets' visit to Wittenberg in 1522 to the Anabaptist movements in the 1530s and 40s. Her conclusions emphasize that Melanchthon's appeal to and uses of texts by philosophers such as Aristotle were subordinated to his concern to uphold and support the principles of Luther's theology. On Melanchthon's philosophy see also G. FRANK, *Die theologische Philosophie Philip Melanchthons* (1497–1560), 1995.

emphasize the limits of reason and philosophy when approaching the subjects of God and creation. Philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics may be cited in support but their views are also criticized. Melanchthon's focus throughout is to emphasize the role of Holy Scripture in conveying the truth regarding God, creation, divine providence, and human experience.

Melanchthon opens his preface by exulting in creation: »these most beautiful bodies of the world – the heavens, stars, elements, plants, and animals –« were created and ordered by God so that humankind might know God and the »law of life« implanted in his human creatures in order that they might worship God as he wills. Yet immediately Melanchthon turns to the »wretched darkness« and »mental blindness concerning the nature and will of God, divine providence, and the governance of events« that is revealed in human doubts about God and his providence.¹⁰ Here Melanchthon is emphasizing the corruption of human intellect, experience, and will as a result of Adam's fall.

He goes on to cite the philosopher Plato, who was compelled through the »laws of celestial motion and other testimonies [...] to confess that this world has been made by a Creator who is eternal Mind« (*ut hunc mundum ab aeterna mente opifice conditum esse fateri cogamur*).¹¹ It is difficult to determine with certainty which specific text(s) Melanchthon might have been citing. Plato's *Timaeus* was known throughout the Middle Ages and interpreted in ways making it compatible with the Christian doctrine of God and creation.¹² Yet its contents do not seem to reflect Melanchthon's words here. More likely, Melanchthon is referring to or citing the broader tradition of Plato's understanding of God (or the Good) filtered through Cicero, Plotinus, and the 5th-century Neoplatonist commentator Macro-

¹⁰ WA 44; XIV. The translations are my own, with thanks to James Kellerman for his assistance. I have also utilized and compared the preface to the first volume that appeared in a 19th-century English translation of the Genesis Lectures: MARTIN LUTHER, *The Creation: A Commentary on the First Five Chapters of the Book of Genesis*, trans. H. COLE, 1858, 6–20.

¹¹ WA 44; XIV.

¹² See J. PELIKAN, *What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem? Timaeus and Genesis in Counterpoint*, 1997; and A.O. LOVEJOY, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea*, 1936, esp. 24–98.

bis. Specifically, Melanchthon's later scathing reference to »the human delirium that tied God to secondary causes, as if to the Homeric chain«¹³ suggests the Neoplatonic concept of a great chain of being discussed by Macrobius:

Since, from the Supreme God Mind arises, and from Mind, Soul, and since this in turn creates all subsequent things and fills them all with life, and since this single radiance illumines all and is reflected in each [...]; and since all things follow in continuous succession, degenerating in sequence to the very bottom of the series, the attentive observer will discover a connection of parts, from the Supreme God down to the last dregs of things, mutually linked together and without a break. And this is Homer's golden chain, which God, he says, bade hang down from heaven to earth.¹⁴

If indeed Melanchthon had Macrobius's commentary in mind (he had received from his friend Joachim Camerarius the latter's edition of the text in April 1535),¹⁵ he was conflating the first two of three hypostases (God, Mind, and Soul) denoted by Macrobius.¹⁶ More important, however, is that while the Platonic tradition focused on the origin of all things in the Good and connection to the Good through the great chain of being, for Melanchthon the miseries of the human condition cast a cloud over this conviction also among the philosophers. As he goes on to note in the preface, various opinions have arisen

¹³ WA 44; XV.

¹⁴ MACROBIUS, *Comment. in Somnium Scipionis* I, 14, 15, quoted in LOVEJOY (see n. 12), 63. The important portions of the Latin text read: »[...] ex summo deo mens, ex mente anima fit, anima vero et condit et vita compleat omnia quae sequuntur, [...] inveniatur pressius intuenti a summo deo usque ad ultimam rerum faciem una mutuis se vinculis religans et nusquam interrupta conexio. Et haec est Homeri catena aurea, quam pendere de caelo in terras deum iussisse commemorat.« As Lovejoy notes regarding the reference to Homer, »This, of course, was *not* Homer's golden chain.« Ibid., 341 n. 53. Cf. HOMER, *Iliad* 8, 18–24.

¹⁵ MBW T 6, 342f; cf. CR 2, 868, Melanchthon to Camerarius, 13 April 1535. Thanks to Timothy Wengert for providing me with this reference. Camerarius's edition of the Commentary was published in Basel by J. Herwagen. See Joachim Camerarius (1500–1574). *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Humanismus im Zeitalter der Reformation*, hg. v. F. BARON, 1978, 235.

¹⁶ On Macrobius, who is described as »a Neoplatonist in the fullest sense of the word,« see S. GERSH, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism: The Latin Tradition*, 1986, 2, 493–595 (quote at 493).

from these doubts of the philosophers, of which some, like the Epicureans, absolutely denied that there is a God. Others, like Aristotle and the Stoics, even though they believed that God is eternal Mind, nevertheless [...] bind God to secondary causes and do not attribute any action to him except as the usual union of secondary causes bears and directs it.

That is, their god does not *act*, and so, »their minds bewitched by this delirium, they can neither ask nor expect good things from God.«¹⁷ Later Melanchthon draws a sharp distinction between the conclusions of pagan philosophy and the revelation of Scripture:

The philosophers know nothing about the cause of sin, about the cause of death and of the terrible calamities of humankind, nothing about restoration and eternal life. How often do they seek whence came such great miseries to so outstanding a nature [as that] of humankind! How often they cry out, deploring such passionate and blazing impulse toward vice. They see how weak the virtues are and how easily they vanish [...]. Aristotle seeks the cause of death, both of other living things and of human beings, in their material nature [*in material*]. For this reason he regards privation to be among the principles of natural things, in order that he might in whatever way maintain a continual slipping of decaying matter into other forms.¹⁸

Several conclusions about Melanchthon's view of philosophy in relation to God and creation can be supported from these opening paragraphs. First, Plato, Aristotle, and other philosophers from the ancient world are not viewed as authorities (in the Scholastic sense), in natural philosophy any more than in theology, but rather are ancient witnesses who thought in sometimes helpful ways about the existence and nature of God in relation to creation. As in the Scholastic uses of Aristotle in the Middle Ages, the peripatetic philosopher is interpreted as part of a broader Platonic tradition of philosophy filtered through later thinkers such as the Neoplatonists of the third century and after. Different from the Schoolmen, however, was that Melanchthon was not focusing on reconciling various ancient authorities with Scripture through the method of the *quaestio*, but rather simply citing their ideas, often with criticism, as he presents a view based on the Bible and emphasizing the centrality of the Bible for understanding God

¹⁷ WA 44; XIV.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

and man.¹⁹ Melanchthon uses pagan philosophers (the church fathers and Scholastic theologians are noticeably absent) both as witnesses to the truth and as examples of false views to be criticized, but his purpose was to elevate the book of Genesis as the revelation of God. As he states explicitly in the next paragraph:

But this Book [of Genesis] reveals a very different cause of human death and of vices, namely the turning away from God in a human nature that has been cast off from light and life and from the knowledge of God, and brought upon itself confusion of its powers and the tyranny of the devil, and Death.²⁰

Melanchthon had previously explained that in the midst of this darkness occasioned by the fall of humankind into sin, God »disclosed himself with a clear voice and with new testimonies.«²¹ Not only the creation of the human race but also the promise of eternal life and salvation through the Son of God who assumed human nature are at the heart of the testimonies of God's own voice in the book of Genesis. The record in Genesis, therefore, is one of the greatest benefits (*beneficia*) given by God to humankind, for »God from the very beginning committed to writing the history of humankind and testimonies by which he has revealed himself, and he willed [these] to be preserved in enduring monuments.« After naming Mohammedans and Plato as believers in a Creator, who are nevertheless ignorant of or hostile to God's will regarding who and why this Creator receives the unworthy, Melanchthon conveys the rationale for his long *Exordium*:

That we may know that the true church of God is nowhere but among those who have and who embrace the prophetic and apostolic books, nor is God rightly invoked except where the doctrine of these books shines. [...] the whole Mosaic *politia* was ordained for the preservation of these books! What was it but a school and library of these books?

Moreover, the source [*fons*] is the first book of Moses, whose title is Genesis [...].²²

19 Thus we find Melanchthon in this preface doing what Kusukawa noted regarding Melanchthon's *loci communes* method in his various philosophical works: »No attempt was made on Melanchthon's part to reconcile differences among authorities or to follow a single classical author. This was perhaps due to his recognition that most classical authors have erred in one way or another and that human knowledge was always fallible. Melanchthon simply selected what was useful for his purposes.« KUSUKAWA (see n. 9), 174.

20 WA 44; XVI.

21 Ibid., XIV.

22 Ibid., XV.

The opening paragraphs of the dedicatory preface are couched in highly rhetorical language and shaped by humanist arguments for a natural philosophy that are more extensive than the philosophical discussions present in Luther's lectures on the early chapters of Genesis, but the point is the same: this is a book about the true church of God.²³ Melanchthon through this preface places Luther's published lectures into the historical context of the mid-1540s, as the ecclesiastical and civil authorities of Evangelical Germany continued precariously their support of the Reformation in the midst of political pressures from both papal hierarchy and imperial government, appealing to Holy Scripture as the basis of their authority to institute reforms and to regulate church life according to their theologians' understanding of the gospel.

Melanchthon also utilizes the humanist appeal to antiquity in his preface, displaying the book of Genesis as the *fons par excellence*, the earliest and therefore most authoritative of sources, which answers an argument as ancient as that put forward by the Roman patrician Symmachus, namely that the oldest doctrine must be the most true.²⁴ Genesis also displays the true nature of the church and its growth and renewal. The church is not

a worldly kingdom or *politia*, surrounded by armed guards, but dispersed assemblies [*coetus dispersos*] – not, however, obscure but bearing the divine voice, [...] leading many everywhere to the true worship of God, even though meanwhile they are ridiculed, cast out, and driven away by tyrants and by the majority of men.²⁵

The preface goes on to describe under six topics the nature of the church as it appears in the Genesis narrative.²⁶ (1) The doctrine of the early patriarchs is drawn from these earliest sources, and from these histories our forefathers learned about Christ, as Luther's commentary frequently points out. (2) The miracles recorded in these accounts serve as testimonies of what kind of doctrine and teachers God approves. (3) This church is preserved by God, not

23 On Luther's concerns with ecclesiology in the Genesis Lectures see MAXFIELD (see n. 3), 141–214. These concerns were also a preoccupation among others in the Wittenberg circle; see, e.g., T. WENGERT, Caspar Cruciger Sr.'s 1546 *Enarratio* on John's Gospel: An Experiment in Ecclesiological Exegesis (Church History 61, 1992, 60–74).

24 WA 44; XVI.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., XVII–XIX.

by human laws, as the patriarchs gathered a church by the voice of God and by the Holy Spirit. (4) The continual succession of the church is preserved (as it was in Jacob's time) by the retaining of the Word from heaven, while Cain, Ishmael, and Esau arrogated to themselves lordship and superiority in the church by human titles and honors. Here Melanchthon also compares the Babylonians' claims concerning God, based on their inhabiting of the most ancient dwelling places of the patriarchs, to the claim of his contemporary bishops and *collegia* of the papal church, on account of their succession, »that they cannot err, that they are the dwelling place and pillars of the truth.« »Let us not be moved by titles of dignity, by place, by an ordinary succession,« Melanchthon urges his readers, »with the result that we reckon as the church that assembly which is opposed to the gospel and kills honest men on account of their confession of godly doctrine, as Cain did.«²⁷ (5) Readers of Genesis should consider the lives of the characters in the narrative, for here Moses records the history of the church as its members lived out their vocations (civil and domestic) for the purpose that »superstitions might be refuted.« Here Melanchthon articulates an obvious polemic against traditional Catholic forms of piety, specifically mentioning laws about celibacy and distinctions between foods, practices of self-torture, and asceticism. He concludes, »Opposed to these insanities are the political and domestic habits of the fathers – full of examples of faith, full of the most honorable duties toward men, full of *φιλόστοργος* [familial affection].«²⁸ (6) Finally, readers should consider the record in Genesis of the faults and failures of these great men, while noting also a »distinct difference«:

The godly, as I have said, take heed not to rush into things contrary to their conscience. When they fell into sin they deplored the weakness of humankind and learned those benefits promised for the sake of the coming Redeemer. They believe that God receives them in mercy for the sake of that promised Redeemer.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid., XVIII.

²⁸ WA 44; XVIII. The patriarch Abraham is Melanchthon's example of a faithful *Paterfamilias* in this section, despite the fact that this first volume of Luther's lectures covered the material in Genesis only through 11:26. As indicated in the subsequent mention of other characters in Genesis through the Joseph narrative, Melanchthon was using this preface to introduce Luther's exposition in its (anticipated) entirety, and not only the material covered in the first published volume.

²⁹ WA 44; XIX.

After thus urging readers to consider these six topics of the Genesis narrative as it describes the patriarchal church, Melanchthon turns to introduce Luther's commentary itself as a spiritual exposition that highlights the presence of God amongst these ancient believers, for the edification of believers in every generation. The reader is led to consider the Evangelical church as the true church, identified as »our church,« distinct from the superstitious, persecuting, and self-aggrandizing church of the Roman bishops. The preface presents Martin Luther as the faithful teacher who interprets the Bible as a witness to God's presence with the true church. Melanchthon urges the preface's dedicatee Duke John Ernest to follow the example of his late father, Elector John, Duke of Saxony,³⁰ who as a civil ruler ranks with the pharaoh of Joseph's day as one instructed in the true knowledge of God and who »cherished and adorned the churches and at the same time with great moderation adapted his counsels for the common peace of Germany.«³¹

Melanchthon's preface conveys a picture of the self-identity of Evangelicals in Germany in the year 1544, and leads the original readers of Luther's Genesis Lectures to carry into their reading the central idea that here in Luther's exposition of the patriarchal narratives is a mirror of their own experiences as believers in Christ, the true church of God. Melanchthon notes how Luther's students had collected their teacher's utterances and committed them to writing so that they might be handed down to posterity. He gives a defense for the fact that the commentary appears not as a whole but in separate volumes because of the great labor involved in collecting it, promising that the remainder shall follow. »For God wants [this teaching] to be proclaimed both by voice and by the writings of his church [...] [and] that we faithfully and with purity hand down to posterity the doctrine made known by him.«³² Melanchthon's preface thus intro-

30 There is a delightful play on words here between Elector John, Duke of Saxony, and the leaders (Duces) Melanchthon has cited as exemplary in the book of Genesis: »[...] exemplo tui Patris, integerrimi Principis, Ducis Saxoniae [...]. Quanquam enim inferior fuit illis summis nostris Ducibus, quos antea recensui, [...] tamen annumerare tuum Patrem illi Aegyptio Pharaoni licet [...]« Thanks to James Kellerman for drawing my attention to this.

31 WA 44; XIX–XX.

32 Ibid.

duces Luther's Genesis Lectures to his contemporaries as part of this testimony of God for all generations of Christian believers.

As it turned out, the subsequent volumes of Luther's exposition of Genesis did not appear until over half a decade later, after the Reformer's death, in 1550, 1552, and 1554, respectively. By this time dramatic change had occurred for the Evangelical churches in Germany.³³ Beginning with the securing of papal support in June 1546 and continuing through the Spring of 1547, Emperor Charles V had conquered Saxony and other Reformation-endorsing territories and cities through a religious war, undertaken under the pretext³⁴ of countering the »rebellious« princes of the Smalcaldic League, with the aid also of Duke Moritz of Albertine Saxony, who received as his reward the electoral dignity in place of his imprisoned cousin, Elector John Frederick. During the war Melanchthon repeatedly expressed the fear, and soon its realization, that the war's destruction of the homeland would interrupt the progress of studies and church life.³⁵ He grew highly critical of

33 On the events of the Smalcald War, the Interim policy of Charles V, and subsequent controversies among Evangelicals in Germany, see I. DINGEL, *The Culture of Conflict in the Controversies Leading to the Formula of Concord (1548–1580)* (in: *Lutheran Ecclesiastical Culture 1550–1675*, ed. by R. KOLB, 2008, 15–64); I. DINGEL/G. WARTENBERG (Hg.), *Politik und Bekenntnis. Die Reaktion auf das Interim von 1548*, 2006; and H. SCHEIBLE, *Melanchthon. Eine Biographie*, 1997, 170–191. My interpretation of the events is also based on a careful review of Melanchthon's correspondence from the years 1547–1552 as summarized in the *Regesten* volumes (5 & 6) in MBW. For an account of this period critical of Melanchthon's actions and analyzing Flacius's criticism, see O.K. OLSON, *Matthias Flacius and the Survival of Luther's Reform*, 2002.

34 Charles V himself referred in a letter to his sister Maria of Hungary (9 June 1546) to his charges against Hesse and Saxony as a pretext for starting this war to coerce religious unity in the Empire: »If we did not strike now all the Estates of Germany would be in danger of falling away from the faith, and so would the Low Countries. After weighing all this again and again I have decided to go to war against Hesse and Saxony as the disturbers of the peace [...]. And although this pretext will not deceive anyone for any length of time about the fact that it is a question of religion, it will at least help to divide those who have seceded.« Quoted in H. JEDIN, *A History of the Council of Trent*, trans. E. GRAF, 1961, 2, 203.

35 See, e.g., MBW 4550 (CR 6, 363–364), Melanchthon to Heinrich Besold, 14 January 1547, where he offers the thought that the cities will provide a home for the churches and schools. Characteristic of Melanchthon's apocalyptic worldview, as seen also in his correspondence during this period of strife, is his 1543 hymn *Dicimus grates tibi*, in which

the policies of the princes of the Smalcaldic League, especially Elector John Frederick, even as he published various defenses of the right of political resistance.³⁶

Following the imprisonment of Elector John Frederick and the capitulation of Wittenberg, secured under the threat of John Frederick's execution, Melancthon made the fateful decision to return to the University of Wittenberg as the subject of the new Elector Moritz, who promised to renew the University and that there would be no substantive changes in his religious policy supporting the Reformation in Saxony. As Emperor Charles V sought to impose a return of Evangelical Germany to the jurisdiction of the papal hierarchy, crafting the policy known as the Augsburg Interim after its promulgation by the imperial Diet at Augsburg in April 1548, hundreds of Evangelical pastors fled or were forced into exile where the Interim was enforced, chiefly in South Germany. But in Saxony the new Elector Moritz, seeking the support of his theologians and counselors, attempted a compromise policy, the so-called Leipzig Interim, aiming to conform sufficiently to the Emperor's policy to stave off an occupation of imperial armies (as had happened in the South) while at the same time preserving the evangelical character of religion in his realm, as the Emperor had assured him (orally) that he would be permitted to do.³⁷

two of the stanzas read: »The ancient Dragon is their [the angels'] foe; / His envy and his wrath they know. / It always is his aim and pride / Thy Christian people to divide. // As he of old deceived the world / And into sin and death has hurled, / So now he subtly lies in wait / To ruin school and Church and State.« Translation in W.G. POLACK, *Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal*, 31958, 186f. The hymn first appeared in: *De Angelis Duo Hymni*, Wittenberg 1543.

³⁶ See, e.g., MBW 4533 (CR 6, 343–344), Melancthon to Joachim Camerarius, 4 January 1547. On Melancthon's writings regarding resistance during the war, see LUTHER D. PETERSON, Justus Menius, Philipp Melancthon, and the 1547 Treatise, *Von der Notwehr Unterricht* (ARG 81, 1990, 138–157), and the literature cited there.

³⁷ The Interim documents, with brief introductions, appear in *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord*, ed. by R. KOLB/J.A. NESTINGEN, 2001, 144–196. It is important to note that the so-called Leipzig Interim, given that name in the critiques of Flacius, was never approved as such by the Saxon Diet and so is better termed the Leipzig Proposal (cf. DINGEL, *Culture of Conflict* [see n. 33], 21–22). Flacius's polemic was so successful, however, that the controversy over adiaphora sparked by the document was at the root of numerous other intra-Lutheran controversies in this period. See *ibid.*, 22–54.

By early 1550, when the second volume of Luther's Genesis Lectures was being prepared for publication, Evangelicals in Germany were deeply divided into what would eventually come to be known as »Gnesio-Lutheran« and »Philippist« parties. Nicholas von Amsdorf, Erasmus Alber, Matthias Flacius, and Nicholas Gallus, theologians active in the city of Magdeburg, were leading a powerful propaganda campaign against the Interim law and were on the polemical attack against Philip Melanchthon and other »adiaphorists« who at Wittenberg were seeking by careful compromises to support and to influence theologically Evangelical church life in Electoral Saxony under the protection of the new Elector.³⁸ The Magdeburgers were choosing political (and eventually military) resistance as a means for defending the free preaching the gospel and their city's liberties against an aggressive emperor and his alliance with the papal Antichrist. In contrast, Melanchthon, cautious and fearful of the devastation that yet another war would bring, was combatting »the chaos of these last days« through the renewal of schools, his teaching and theological leadership in Wittenberg, and seeking protection of pastors and congregations, all of which he viewed as dependent on the patronage of the ruling class in the cities and in the territories of the princes.

Melanchthon had planned to write the preface for the second volume of Luther's Genesis Lectures, but on 15 February 1550 he wrote to Heinrich Besold that he could not fulfill the task.³⁹ So Michael Roting, who after Dietrich's death was working together with Besold to bring the publication of the lectures to completion, took up the pen and dedicated his preface »To the Holy Catholic Church, which in all its dispersion recognizes the voice

38 On the Magdeburg campaign see T. KAUFMANN, *Das Ende der Reformation. Magdeburgs »Herrgotts Kanzlei«* (1548–1551/2), 2003; OLSON (see n. 33); and N. REIN, *The Chancery of God: Protestant Print, Polemic and Propaganda against the Empire, Magdeburg 1546–1551*, 2008.

39 MBW 5698 (CR 7, 515); MBW 5730 (CR 7, 547–548). In May, in a letter to Johann von Berg thanking him for his copy of the published volume, Melanchthon promised that he would come through with a preface for the next installment. MBW 5784 (CR 7, 588). Veit Dietrich, who had prepared the first volume for publication, had died in 1549 but not before furnishing most of the edited material for this second volume, as Roting notes in the preface (WA 44; XXIII).

of our Lord Jesus Christ, its pastor.«⁴⁰ Writing from a city of Nuremberg deeply pressed under the emperor's Interim policy, prophetic and apocalyptic themes are at the heart of Roting's brief message to the reader.⁴¹ He draws on the curious example of Jesus' praise for John the Baptist when the latter was imprisoned: »Why now does [Jesus] want to be so eloquent in the praises of this man, since he was in the hands of a tyrant, and in the future was not going to return to the assembly of the church?« Roting answers this question by presenting John as the messenger of repentance, the second Elijah (Mt 11:14–15), whose office and ministry continue to be the ongoing task of the church until the »final anathema« of the Lord on Judgment Day.⁴²

The preface describes how the church would face the same and even greater difficulties in this office of preaching repentance than both the first and second Elijah had faced: »For the history of the church testifies about what perverting of the divine testimony occurred, through various superstitions and blasphemies, concerning [the teaching of] repentance and the gospel.« Such perversions would occur until the »last wound that was described by Christ and the apostles surpasses all sorrows« – the church's oppression »under the godless rule of one violent man,« who »uses imperial edicts and laws« to oppose Christ and who therefore is the very Anti-christ.⁴³ In mercy God had sent Martin Luther in the midst of this apocalyptic warfare, filling him

with a spirit of power and boldness [δυνάμιος *et* παρρησίας], to publish this doctrine [of repentance and the gospel] with great liberty and zeal, on account of the final danger of the church, to protect this right [*Ius*] of the church that had collapsed under unjust lords and the greatest and most painful disputes, and to deliver it.⁴⁴

40 WA 44; XXI.

41 Roting's is by far the shortest preface of the four volumes. While Melanchthon's preface to the first volume of the lectures takes up seven pages in the WA, Roting's is three pages. The prefaces for volumes 3 and 4 are six and just over seven pages, respectively.

42 WA 44; XXI–XXII.

43 *Ibd.*, XXII.

44 *Ibd.*, XXIII.

Luther's exposition of Genesis, among his many labors in interpreting the prophetic and apostolic writings, is presented as »especially useful for the church.«⁴⁵

Roting then highlights the work of Veit Dietrich, Luther's fellow-worker whom the Reformer lauded as his own »*gnesio* [γνήσιον]⁴⁶ disciple,« who had published the first volume of the lectures and who before his death had prepared the bulk of this second volume as well. The last lines of the preface complete this picture of the contemporary church engaged in the final, apocalyptic contest, describing Luther's role in it as carrying on the spirit and power of (both the first and the second) Elijah:

[...] we dedicate [this volume] to you, O holy church, to whom not only did Luther devote everything he could for your salvation, but whom God gave to you so that you might have a Messenger of your salvation, and an Elijah, who having recalled the doctrines of the fathers and apostles would turn the hearts of the sons to the fathers and vice versa, and that you also might know your right [*ius*] against the profane ones sitting in the temple of God, that it should not be lost by you in the coming wrath and final anathema. Since the time of this judgment seems by all signs to be not far off, may you consider that this revelation was solemnly spoken by Jesus Christ our Lord even to you now: »He who has ears for hearing, let him hear, and he who reads, let him understand.«⁴⁷

The preface thus encourages its readers to gird up their loins for the present struggle of Evangelicals in Germany, in the face of attempts by an emperor victorious on the battlefield to coerce their return to the papal fold, with the imperial Interim law to govern the Evangelical churches throughout the empire until the Council of Trent could render final decisions for doctrine and reform of the Catholic Church. An Evangelical ecclesiology is presupposed throughout, as the Holy Catholic Church is described as a persecuted and suffering dispersion, called to heed the voice of its present Elijah, even

45 Ibid.

46 The use of this term is probably ironic and polemical (depending on when the term was first used for theologians opposed to the Wittenberg circle around Melanchthon), given that Dietrich, Roting, and Besold had been working in cooperation with Melanchthon in the publication of Luther's Genesis Lectures. In any case, Roting is emphasizing Dietrich's close relationship to Luther.

47 WA 44; XXIII; cf. Mt 11:15; 24:15.

as Christ the pastor of this church is present in it through the preaching of the gospel.⁴⁸

Despite Melanchthon's repeated attempts in his correspondence of this period to characterize the controversy over adiaphora (and therein criticisms of his conduct in crafting and supporting Elector Moritz's compromise policy in Saxony) as a trifling matter, it was precisely this controversy and the political unrest that accompanied it that eventually led Moritz to reconsider his allegiances.⁴⁹ In November 1551 Moritz finally came to a peace agreement with the besieged city of Magdeburg, but it was an agreement between the city and Moritz, not the Emperor.⁵⁰ On 15 January 1552 Moritz together with other Evangelical princes signed a treaty with King Henry II of France, a clear break with the Emperor and his Interim policy that would eventually lead to another war.⁵¹

When on 25 January Melanchthon penned his preface to the third volume of the Genesis Lectures, this historical context is evident in his text and it is clear that he viewed Luther's exposition of Genesis as an important contribution to his program for ecclesiastical and societal renewal in the wake of war and imperial repression of the Reformation, with another war looming. At this time Melanchthon was in Nuremberg, awaiting orders to travel to Trent to join Saxon ambassadors as part of a Protestant delegation

48 »For just as he always joins with himself his gospel, which displays Jesus Christ to the church and shows him present (although he himself is not here anymore after he rose), so he deduces the ministry of the gospel out of the example of John. For just as the Messenger himself was before the face of God, namely, the Elijah who turns the hearts of the fathers to the sons and those of the sons to the fathers, so this ministry (which Christ ascribes to the gospel along with the Holy Spirit) exists as a constant duty: continuously until Christ comes to judge the living and the dead, so that there may be a Messenger before the face of the Lord who might prepare his way, when he announced a repentance to be converted to God, and commands him to do works worthy of repentance.« WA 44; XXI.

49 For analysis of Elector Moritz's predicament in maintaining order in his realm in the face of resistance to the Emperor's Interim policy and his own attempts at compromise, see esp. REIN (see n. 38), 127–177; and OLSON (see n. 33), 207–218.

50 REIN (see n. 38), 172 f.

51 On Melanchthon's negative appraisal of Moritz's plan, see H. SCHEIBLE, *Ein Irrtum Melanchthons: seine Warnung vor dem Fürstenkrieg 1551/52* (in: DERS., *Aufsätze zu Melanchthon*, 2010, 277–286).

at the Council. (Instead the order eventually came for him to return to Wittenberg as the Princes' Revolt erupted and the Council was suspended.) But in his opening paragraph of the preface to Luther's Genesis, Melanchthon invites his readers to consider the plan of God and to give him thanks

that in the midst of such ruins of governments, the destruction of cities, and scattering of humankind, this his doctrine is not permitted to be extinguished. He has rather revealed illustrious testimonies [...] so that we might know for certain both that GOD exists and that he has gathered together for himself a church, and also that this steadfast doctrine which he has passed down is the truth.⁵²

Melanchthon asserts that this doctrine finds its deepest source in the first book of Moses:

sources that everyone must know very well indeed, because in any doctrine it matters greatly that the beginning and [original] source is correctly known, just as it is said, 'The beginning is half of the whole, indeed more than half.'

With the obvious aim of refuting the claims of both papal and conciliar authority apart from Scripture, the preface describes the office of teaching in the church as instituted by God »not so that anyone might bring forth a new teaching, but so that the readers may accurately read aloud to the people these very prophetic and apostolic books.« Melanchthon describes Luther's ministry as a means by which God has again cleansed the church. Luther's expositions should be passed down to posterity »not only so that the prophetic and apostolic books might be made clear, but also that the testimonies of this man, whose soul was guided by the Holy Spirit, might be made known [...] in the midst of disputes about dogma.«⁵³ The uneasy alliance between the papal church and Charles V and the threat of imposing the decrees of Trent within the empire lurk behind Melanchthon's descriptions of governing powers that »oppress the assembly which guards the gospel« – all prophesied in the opening chapters of Genesis where it states that God places »enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent« (Gn 3:15).⁵⁴

⁵² WA 44; XXIV.

⁵³ Ibid., XXIV–XXV.

⁵⁴ Ibid., XXV.

The polemic against Trent and the threat of imperial repression of the Evangelical church does not remain only in the background, however. This third volume of the Genesis Lectures conveys Luther's rich evangelical exposition of the narrative of Jacob (Genesis chapters 25–36). As Melanchthon waxes eloquent on Jacob's later prophecies of righteousness and eternal life through Shiloh (Gn 49:10), who will crush the head of the serpent and abolish sin and death, he does so »for this purpose only«:

that at the outset I might admonish the young that in these histories not only should they seek examples of household and political life, but especially a kind of doctrine – even the consensus of the first teachers of the church – to be contemplated in faith and in prayer, so that we might encourage ourselves by their consensus. The same hearers, witnesses, and propagators of the gospel are Adam, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for now this blessing of God sounds forth in those churches that embrace the doctrine of Luther, which he sets forth in these commentaries and elsewhere.⁵⁵

Later in the preface Melanchthon lays in sharp contrast to this ancient consensus the new teaching which empire and papal church are seeking to impose upon the faithful churches of God in Germany, as Melanchthon reflects both on political events and on decrees that have emerged from the Council of Trent:

At this time, discord among those most closely related persistently occurs in private, and publicly the true church is attacked by various kinds of enemies – Turks, popes, kings, and princes who are accomplices of popes try by sword and fire to destroy it. [...] Herein, as they are now more fully able to go about by power of arms and with a greater multitude of unanimity, they establish decrees in the Synod of Trent, of which many are patently false, more are truly ambiguous and sophistical. In order to establish these, kings add edicts written in blood.

Till now for so many years they hold out in our face like the head of Gorgon the name of church, of synods, the catholic consensus, by which even if many are moved, nevertheless all who truly worship God understand the fraud and learn to refute this deception. There is one clear and steadfast rule, which demolishes this delusion: »If anyone teaches another gospel, let him be anathema.«

But the facts themselves speak, manifestly to combat certain Tridentine decrees with the gospel and with these very sources of the sermons of Abraham, where it is said: »Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.«⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Ibid., XXVI–XXVII.

⁵⁶ Ibid., XXVII–XXVIII. Cf. Gal 1:8; Gn 15:6.

Throughout the remainder of the preface, two more pages of densely rhetorical prose, Melanchthon refutes the decrees of Trent. At the center of Melanchthon's argument is the doctrine of justification and its corollary, the certainty of salvation for believers. In Melanchthon's view Trent's decree on justification judges »that all people should remain in doubt.« This proves, Melanchthon asserts, that its authors are »enemies of the church of God« who »misuse these names: church, synod, and catholic consensus.«⁵⁷ This categorical rejection of the council's authority and the papal church's claim to represent the universal church must have impressed the readers of Luther's *Genesis Lectures* in 1552 and in the decades thereafter. So that their »good minds« can be strengthened, the preface exhorts them to »read studiously the monuments of Luther, among which this commentary on Moses is like a swan song.«⁵⁸

The image of Luther as a swan is reminiscent of the Reformer's own comments regarding a prophecy attributed to Jan Hus (though actually conflated with words of Jerome of Prague).⁵⁹ Luther had said in 1531, »Saint Johannes Hus prophesied about me, when he wrote from the prison in Bohemia [actually, Constance]: 'They will now roast a goose (since Hus means a goose), but in over a hundred years they will hear a swan sing.«⁶⁰ By naming Luther's *Genesis Lectures* as the Reformer's »swan song,«⁶¹ Melanchthon's preface presents Luther's published words as the continuing trumpet of the

57 WA 44; XVIII.

58 *Ibid.*, XXIX.

59 See A. HAUFFEN, *Husz eine Gans – Luther ein Schwan* (in: *Untersuchungen und Quellen zur germanischen und romanischen Philologie*. Johann von Kelle dargebracht von seinen Kollegen und Schülern, Zweiter Teil, ND 1975, 1–28), esp. 4–7.

60 WA 30,3; 387,18–22 (my translation). On Luther's identification with Hus's movement see also S. HENDRIX, »We Are All Hussites: Hus and Luther Revisited (ARG 65, 1974, 134–161); and H.A. OBERMAN, *Hus and Luther: Prophets of a Radical Reformation* (in: *The Contentious Triangle: Church, State, and University*. FS G.H. Williams, ed. by R.L. PETERSEN/CALVIN AUGUSTINE PATER, 1999, 135–166).

61 The literary image of a swan singing shortly before its death goes back to Aeschylus (458 B.C.) and has a rich history. See W.G. ARNOTT, *Swan Songs* (in: *Greece & Rome* 24:2, 1977, 149–153). For more on Luther and the swan image, see *Luther mit dem Schwan. Tod und Verklärung eines großen Mannes. Katalog zur Ausstellung in der Lutherhalle Wittenberg anlässlich des 450. Todestages von Martin Luther vom 21. Februar bis 10. November 1996*, hg. v. LUTHERHALLE WITTENBERG in Verb. mit G. SEIB, 1996.

Reformer for the embattled church beyond his own lifetime. He was thus claiming Luther's authority for his own activity of constructive engagement with the Saxon government for a renewed Evangelical church within the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, activity that included a public response to imperial policies seeking the restoration of a unified Roman Catholic Church within the empire as well as a response to the decisions that had been made at the Council of Trent.⁶²

Like his elder colleague Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon believed that his time was an apocalyptic age: »this delirious old age of the world« in which »many characters are ambitious and seditious, and the madness of the Devil is also greater« – for he knows the time is short before the Son of God appears to »adorn his church with eternal glory.«⁶³ Threats to the true church from empire and papal church must be met with bold rebuttal as well as careful diplomacy.

But there is also the threat of internal discord and barbarism. More subtle in the rhetoric of this preface than his polemics against papal church and council, but nevertheless clear, is Melanchthon's deep feeling of betrayal by those closest to him and to the Wittenberg Reformation. First there was the controversy over the Interim and the attacks of the Magdeburgers, in particular Flacius. But in 1552 Melanchthon and Flacius found themselves on the same side in a significant dispute over the doctrine of justification with Andreas Osiander, formerly of Nuremberg and since 1549 »the ›primarius‹ professor of theology (as he often referred to himself) at the recently founded University of Königsberg.«⁶⁴ It seemed clear to Melan-

62 As noted insightfully by Heinz Scheible in his biography of Melanchthon, Melanchthon's rationale in returning to Wittenberg as the subject of the new Elector, instead of accepting any of several other (more attractive) offers for employment, was based on his conviction that the University of Wittenberg was symbolic as a theological and ecclesiastical center of the Reformation in Germany, and that any public rebuttal of the Council of Trent or imperial religious policy would have been dangerous to the imprisoned Duke John Frederick and his sons, should Melanchthon have remained in the service of Ernestine Saxony as it sought to develop a new Hochschule at Jena. See SCHEIBLE, Melanchthon (see n. 33), 176–182, esp. 181f.

63 WA 44; XXIX.

64 On the Osiandrian controversy see especially T.J. WENGERT, *Defending Faith: Lutheran Responses to Andreas Osiander's Doctrine of Justification, 1551–1559*, 2012 (quote,

chthon that in these last days the devil was having a heyday in Germany with fickle temperaments and ambitious and seditious characters. The persistent, private »discord among those most closely related« that Melanchthon had mentioned at the head of his polemic against Trent⁶⁵ was Melanchthon's way of bemoaning the often bitter strife among Evangelicals in an era of discord. These are »the wounds of the church« incited by demons, illustrated in the history of Genesis by such atrocious crimes as Reuben's incestuous intercourse with his father's wife and the attempt of Joseph's brothers to kill him. Jacob's most hostile enemy is his own brother, Esau, »who by nature is nearest to him, trained by paternal discipline for the same profession regarding God, for the same worship, and for practice of all virtues.« No pain is so great as »when division of relatives and friends becomes customary in the church, [...] for no wound is more cruel, says Sophocles, than the defection of a friend.«⁶⁶

As in Luther's exposition of Genesis, where the patriarchal history provides a spiritual commentary on the faith journeys of the Reformer and the students in his classroom, so also in Melanchthon's prefaces to the published Genesis Lectures readers are invited to see their own experience mirrored in the lives of the patriarchs.⁶⁷

For this reason it is very useful to consider often and diligently the worship and sermons of these fathers, so that you might truly know that you are the companion of their redemption, faith, and worship, and co-heir of eternal glory.⁶⁸

p. 10). Wengert sees Melanchthon's polemic against Trent in the 1552 preface as bearing throughout a subtext against Osiander: »In this preface, he also managed to separate Osiander's interpretation of justification from Luther's. Righteousness was imputed (not infused); it was equated with forgiveness of sin (not doing righteous things); new light and obedience and peace [cf. Rm 5:1] came as a result of justification (not as a cause).« *Ibid.*, 311.

65 See above at n. 56.

66 WA 44; XXVII.

67 On Luther's practice of interpreting the patriarchal narratives in Genesis as a mirror of the experience of Christians in his own day, see MAXFIELD (see n. 3), 12–31.59–72, and the literature cited there.

68 WA 44; XXVII. John Calvin used a similar image as that used by Melanchthon here; see K. GREENE-MCCREIGHT, »We are Companions to the Patriarchs« or Scripture Absorbs Calvin's World (*Modern Theology* 14, 1998, 213–224).

Any sense of historical distance between present reader and historical text is purposefully submerged. As this erasing of historical distance was also Luther's practice in lecturing on the biblical text, the text of Luther's Genesis Lectures did not need creative redacting in order to serve Melanchthon's and the editors' purposes. Through the renewed effort to publish Luther's lectures on Genesis in the early 1550s, Melanchthon and his collaborators were presenting the late Reformer's greatest and most extensive biblical exposition to their contemporaries and to posterity as a means of fortifying believers of the true church of God in the midst of demonically inspired attacks from a false church and its pope and council, from an emperor lately turning tyrant, and from brethren who, in Melanchthon's eyes, have been overtaken by fickleness, ambition, sedition, and in some cases false doctrine. Deeply wounded by the attacks of fellow Evangelicals, Melanchthon shows in his preface to the volume published in 1552 that he was not about to surrender either to the attacks of fellow Evangelicals on his theological leadership in Wittenberg or to the false teaching of Osiander on the chief article of Christian doctrine, even as he was not about to surrender to an emperor's Interim law for the German Evangelical churches or to the decrees that had been issued at the Council of Trent.

Two years later the final installment of the lectures would appear, with a preface »to the godly and faithful reader« by the volume's editor, Heinrich Besold. The first half of the preface rehearses the history of publishing these lectures of Luther, »our dear teacher,« emphasizing the wish of the Reformer that they be preserved to serve posterity and acknowledging the role of the students taking the notes and especially Veit Dietrich in commencing the publication effort.⁶⁹ Like Melanchthon, Besold calls the Genesis Lectures Luther's swan song, which should no longer lie hidden.⁷⁰ Slipping into German, Besold describes the book of Genesis as precious (*köstlich*), a history where the LORD has spoken.⁷¹ Indeed in all the scripture the LORD speaks, pushing forward more testimonies of the Son than of the Father, even in the Old Testament.⁷²

69 WA 44; XXX.

70 Ibid., XXXI.

71 Ibid., XXXII.

72 Ibid., XXXII–XXXIII.

These would all have been familiar themes to the readers of the previous prefaces, but just past midway through the preface Besold turns to his main interest: exposing (much more overtly than Melanchthon had done in 1552) and refuting the »empty talk [κενοφωνία] of Osiander on the doctrine of justification.«⁷³ Though Osiander had died in 1552, Nuremberg remained a center both for his followers and for active opponents of his doctrine, Besold (Osiander's own son-in-law) among the latter. Indeed, Timothy Wengert in his recent analysis of Lutheran responses to Osiander characterizes the text as »Besold's own fiery, anti-Osiandrian preface« and views it as the catalyst for a formal complaint and investigation of the Nuremberg pastor.⁷⁴ Space does not permit analysis of Besold's arguments⁷⁵ but the point is made: this preface, just as the previous three, enlists Luther's Genesis Lectures in the ongoing struggles of the Evangelical churches in Germany. The Reformer was God's instrument whose works must be preserved so that they continue to speak. As Besold writes near the end of his preface:

For this very reason the Son of God, sitting at the right hand of the Father, in these last times raised up Luther and other faithful interpreters in the household of God. Their expositions and confessions of pure doctrine must be preserved so that we are strengthened by their most vehement admonition and are not driven to and fro, carried about by every wind of doctrine through the craftiness of men, through the subtlety by which they assail us, with the result that they seduce us.⁷⁶

Each of the four original volumes of Luther's Lectures on Genesis was prefaced by a text that introduced the Reformer's exposition as an instrument of pure teaching of the Word of God for the needs of the contemporary Evangelical churches of Germany. From Melanchthon's use of natural philosophy in his effort to support Luther's understanding of the gospel and the life of the church in 1544, to his and the editors' clear appropriation of Luther's authority as an expositor of God's Word in the midst of the various crises of the Reformation churches in the early 1550s, these authors introduced Luther's evangelical commentary not simply as a source of the Re-

73 Ibid., XXXIV.

74 WENGERT, *Defending Faith* (see n. 64), 224.

75 See *ibid.*, 220–226 and 413 for analysis of this portion of Besold's preface in the context of the Nurembergers' role in the Osiandrian controversy.

76 WA 44; XXXVI; cf. Eph 4:14.

former's mature thought but as a kind of revelation of God for the church in their own day.⁷⁷ Presenting this vast and rich exposition of Genesis as a faithful accounting of the old professor's teaching in his university lecture hall for the contemporary church, indeed as Luther's »swan song,« they published these volumes so that the Wittenberg Swan would continue to sing.

77 As late as 1858, when the first English translation of Luther's exposition of the first five chapters of Genesis appeared, this traditional approach to Luther's published lectures was preserved in a fascinating way: at the top of the title page the words »LUTHER STILL SPEAKING« appear, as well a quotation from the epistle to the Hebrews, »By it, he being dead, yet speakth« (sic). There follows a preface by the translator that conveys rhetorically an appeal to the contemporary church to hear the Reformer that is in this respect similar to the original prefaces. See LUTHER, *The Creation* (see n. 10).