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Melanchthon and Servet

Surveying a controversy

Abstract: In 1521, Melanchthon preferred to adore the Trinity rather than investigate it. However, already in 1523 he revealed his conception of his object of adoration to be a fairly classical and Augustinian one. Michael Servet emerged in 1531 with his critique of the classical doctrine of the Trinity, in which he reduced the concept of „person“ to a mere speaking part or representation of the Deity. Melanchthon became aware of Servet’s doctrines in 1533 and immediately became involved in studying Servet and developing his theology in a defense of the classical doctrine of the Trinity. His first major argument was that the Bible describes Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as divine and simultaneously distinct from God the Father. The second was that the Bible demanded the adoration of Christ and that to adore was to accord the honour of divinity. Melanchthon’s doctrine of the Trinity proved to be practically-minded and was thus a presupposition for the crucial doctrine of justification. Melanchthon presented the same argument in a letter addressing sympathisers of the Reformation in Venice in 1539, demonstrating that Servet’s books were already known in the city at the time and that Melanchthon perceived a need to combat them.

On a first view one might think that both, Melanchthon, the young Melanchthon, and Servet were Antitrinitarians, and one might wonder why a controversy developed between them.

In his first theological chief work, the „*Loci communes rerum theologicarum seu hypotyposes theologicae*“ from 1521, Melanchthon formulated the famous sentence „We do better adore the mysteries of the Deity than to investigate them.“¹ Among these „mysteries of the Deity“ he includes the doctrine of Trinity. Other doctrines concern the manner of the incarnation, the creation, and the doctrine of God in general.² One might interpret this reserve in speaking of the Trinity as a quasi Nicodemite way of concealing an objection to the classical, Nicene doctrine of the Trinity. But in fact,

1 „*Mysteria divinitatis rectius adoraverimus quam vestigaverimus*“, Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl, hg. von Robert Stupperich [Studienausgabe = St.A.], vol. 2,1, ed. by Hans Engelland, continued by Robert Stupperich, Gütersloh 1978, p. 19, ll. 30 f.; English translation: Melanchthon and Bucer, ed. by Wilhelm Pauck, Philadelphia 1969, p. 21.

2 St.A. 2,1, p. 20, ll. 10 f., and p. 21, ll. 14–16; Pauck (see note 1), pp. 21 f.

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Melanchthon and Servet became opponents regarding the doctrine of Trinity, Melanchthon defending the classical doctrine, Servet rejecting it.

First, I show Melanchthon's way of thinking about the Trinity up till his encounter with Servet's writings, second, I present Servet's doctrine of the Trinity, and finally, I give an account of Melanchthon's critique of Servet's doctrine, including Melanchthon's argumentation. I also briefly address the presence of this controversy in Italy.

1 Melanchthon between 1521 and 1530

Let me make a remark at the outset: to say that it is better to adore the Trinity than to investigate it need not mean an objection of the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity. It does not even mean an objection to any doctrine of the Trinity. Strictly speaking, one cannot adore something without knowing it in any way. „Adoring“ is in this notorious sentence of 1521 the counterpart of „investigating“. And Melanchthon wants the doctrines of sin, the law, and grace to be investigated. These doctrines taken together form the complex of the doctrine of justification: How is man justified and liberated from sin? He is accused for his sin by the divine law and justified by grace because of the death of Jesus Christ.³ For Melanchthon the term, „investigating“, does not imply exploring an object with a distant mind, but rather a way of knowing in which the subject surrenders to that which he recognizes: „to know Christ means to know his benefits“,⁴ that is, what he has done for mankind through his atoning death, which is the justification and liberation from sin.

Melanchthon does not reject a knowledge of the Trinity, and he shows that he maintains the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity in aspects that become crucial in his controversy with Servet. The opportunity to speak of such matters is provided in his exegesis of the prologue of John's gospel, the classical biblical text in an argument for the Trinity. In his „Annotationes in Evangelium Ioannis“ from 1523, Melanchthon says: „The Father [God the Father] sketches, in contemplating himself, his image, which is called the Word, and as it is a perfect image, the whole substance of the Father shines in it, so that the image, in which the Father shines, is in its nature no less God than the Father himself.“⁵

³ St.A. 2,1, pp. 20 f.; Pauck (see note 1), pp. 21 f.

⁴ „... hoc est Christum cognoscere beneficia eius cognoscere ...“, St.A. 2,1, pp. 20, ll. 27 f. – Melanchthon continues: „non, quod isti [scholastici theologistae] docent, eius naturas, modos incarnationis contueri“ / „and not, was they [the scholastics] teach, to reflect upon his natures and the modes of his incarnation“, Pauck (see note 1), pp. 21 f.

⁵ „... pater, sese intuens, concipit sui imaginem, quae verbum dicitur: et quia perfecta imago est, tota substantia patris in eo relucet, ita ut non minus sit natura Deus quam ipse pater“, Philippi Melanthonis, Opera quae supersunt omnia, ed. by Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider and Heinrich Ernst

Melanchthon has probably received this concept of the Trinity from Hilary of Poitiers.⁶ In his exegesis of Colossians 3:9, „Scholia in Epistulam Pauli ad Colossenses“ from 1527, Melanchthon also follows Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity.⁷

Thus Melanchthon had already shown himself to be a Trinitarian, a Nicene Trinitarian, when he first came across Antitrinitarianism, that is, the rejection of the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity. The first Antitrinitarian he met was not Servet, but a Dutch, Johannes Campanus (about 1500 – after 1574), who visited Wittenberg in 1528 and 1529.⁸ In a letter to Friedrich Myconius dating to the end of February 1530, Melanchthon writes that Campanus has sent a „horribile disputation against the Trinity“.⁹ In explaining what he finds so horrible in Campanus, Melanchthon already states what he will reject in Servet.¹⁰ Christ is not God, the Holy Spirit also is not God, original sin is an empty expression. There is nothing, says Melanchthon, which is not transformed into philosophy.¹¹

Melanchthon's critique is illuminating as it connects the two hemispheres of theology, which he has distinguished in his „Loci communes“ from 1521: sin, and also justification, imply a recognition of the Deity of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. One cannot have a cogent doctrine of justification without a cogent doctrine of the Trinity. Melanchthon's critique of Servet will demonstrate what he meant.

In the „Confessio Augustana“, which Melanchthon writes a few months later in 1530, he puts the confession of the Trinity in article 1. He does not mention Campanus there, but he mentions Paul of Samosata, a bishop of Antiochia, who was deposed

Bindseil, Braunschweig 1834–1860 (Corpus Reformatorum = CR), vol. 14, p. 1050. The whole paragraph on trinity there: pp. 1049–1051.

6 Cf. Timothy Wengert, Philip Melanchthon's *Annotationes in Johannem* in Relation to its Predecessors and Contemporaries, Genève 1987 (Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance 220), p. 80.

7 St.A. 4 (Gütersloh 1963), p. 285, ll. 9–20.

8 On Campanus: Horst Weigelt, Campanus, Johannes, in: TRE 7 (1981), pp. 601–604, on his visits in Wittenberg: *ibid.*, p. 601, ll. 46–50. Campanus's chief work, at the same time, his only work, which was totally preserved, was his *Göttlicher und heiliger Schrift ... Restitution*, 1532. A critical edition is done by Chalmers MacCormick, *The Restitution of John Campanus*, Diss. Harvard 1959, pp. 147–293.

9 CR 2, p. 17 f., no. 664; Melanchthons Briefwechsel, ed. by Heinz Scheible, vol. 1, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1977 [= MBW], no. 868, text in MBW T vol. 4,1, p. 62, l. 50; also mentioned, but without Campanus' name, in the letter to Caspar Aquila, begin March 1530, CR 4, p. 972, no. 674b; MBW no. 871. Text in MBW T vol. 4,1, p. 66, ll. 5–7.

10 In the letters MBW no. 7025; CR 8, p. 174 f., no. 5499 and MBW no. 7026; CR 8, p. 175 f., no. 5500 (both from November 24, 1553), he thinks, that a recently anonymous published book which renews the error of Paul of Samosata, was written by Campanus. It is probable, that it was Servet's *Apologia* (*De mysterio Trinitatis et veterum disciplina, ad Philippum Melanchthonem, et eius collegas, apologia*). In his late comment of 1559, MBW no. 8886; CR 9, p. 766 (no. 6705), he says, that he has refuted the errors of Campanus and Servet in his letter to Venice from 1539, MBW no. 2136; CR 3, pp. 748–750 (no. 1831). This letter explicitly only contains a critique of Servet. This shows, that Melanchthon perceived Campanus and Servet from the same perspective.

11 To Friedrich Myconius, March 27, 1530, CR 2, pp. 33 f., no. 676; MBW no. 882.

by a synod in 286 because of his false doctrine of the Trinity.¹² Paul of Samosata is a model for the kind of teaching that he encounters in Campanus, and soon thereafter in Servet. Melanchthon speaks of „the Samosatenes, old and new, who, contending that there is but one Person, sophistically and impiously argue that the Word and the Holy Ghost are not distinct Persons, but that ‚Word‘ signifies a spoken word, and ‚Spirit‘ signifies motion created in things.“¹³

Only one year later, a new proponent of this teaching, which is called by modern historians „modalism“, appears, and this is Miguel Servet (1509/11–1553).

2 Servet's doctrine of the Trinity

Servet publishes his „De trinitatis erroribus libri septem“ in 1531 in Hagenau in the Alsace, and in 1532 his „Dialogorum de trinitate libri duo“.¹⁴ Servet advocates a Trinity of Father, Son (or Word) and Holy Spirit, but he does not construe them in the same way as the council of Nicea does. He claims to prove his understanding with the Bible, but also with the teaching of the early church fathers before the council of Nicea. This council was, in his perception of church history, the turning point when things became worse in the church. In Servet's opinion, Irenaeus of Lyons, writing in the 2nd century, and Tertullian, writing during the turn from the 2nd to the 3rd century, display the understanding of the Trinity that is correct.¹⁵

Servet defines the central concept in the doctrine of the Trinity, the concept of „person“ in this way: „As for what they say of Person, it is a great misuse of the term to say that one Person is an aggregate of two beings, or of two Natures united into one mass. But properly speaking, one being is called the person of another, as Job's friends, assuming the person of God, wished to speak and to judge as though they

12 Michael Slusser, Paulus von Samosata, in: TRE 26 (1996), pp. 162–164. Melanchthon's knowledge of Paul von Samosata originates from Epiphanius von Salamis, Epiphanius, Panarion haer. 65, 1,5, ed. by Karl Holl, Berlin 1985. 2nd revised ed. by Jürgen Dummer, Berlin-Boston 2011 (Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte [= GCS] 237, 3,9–12); 65, 5,8f. (GCS 237, 8,12–14); 65, 1,7f. (GCS 237, 4,1f.); The Panarion of St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis. Selected Passages, New York-Oxford 1990, pp. 218–220.

13 Confessio Augustana, English translation: The Augsburg Confession, <http://bookofconcord.org/augsburgconfession.php>; 12.4.2022.

14 De trinitatis erroribus libri septem. Per Michaellem Serveto, alias Reves ab Aragonia Hispanum. Anno M.D.XXXI (= De Trin.), Dialogorum de trinitate libri duo / De iusticia regni Christi, Capitula Quatuor. Per Michaellem Serveto, alias Reves ab Aragonia Hispanum. Anno M.D.XXXII (= Dial.), Reprint Frankfurt a. M. 1965. – On these works, the circumstances of their genesis and the first reactions cf. Roland Herbert Bainton, The Hunted Heretic. The Life and death of Michael Servetus, Boston 1953, pp. 21–74. A survey and literature gives Jerome Friedman, Servet, in: TRE 31 (1999), pp. 173–176.

15 Jerome Friedman, Michael Servetus. A Case Study in Total Heresy, Genève 1978 (Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance 143), pp. 97–101.

were themselves Gods; and the false apostles speak in the person of the apostles, and Satan speaks in the person of a good angel, when he fashions himself to an angel of light. And wisdom speaks in the person of CHRIST, David and the Prophets often speak in the person of CHRIST, and CHRIST in the person of the Church ... For in a way altogether similar we say that the Word in the Person of CHRIST was once the Son, and that CHRIST was with the Father from the beginning in the Person of the Word; and CHRIST is the Person of the Word, and the Word is the Person of CHRIST, and there is but one Person and one aspect, because the very thing that shone forth in the Word is CHRIST himself.¹⁶

One may distinguish several concepts of „person“ that Servet is using. First, „person“ can be something like the speaking part of an actor.¹⁷ This concept is unilateral: A is the person of B means: A is the form or the figure in which B is speaking. A shows himself as B. Second, „person“ means a representation, and this concept is bilateral. Not only can A represent B, but also B can represent A. „The word is in the human person of Christ the son“ means: Christ is the representation of the Word. „Christ is in the person of the Word in the beginning at the Father“ means: the Word is the representation of Christ.¹⁸ Both are „persons“, through which God is speaking. The meaning of „person“ that is excluded in this understanding is that „person“ means a distinct being, a being that can be distinguished as a being from other beings, that which in Latin is expressed by the word „res“.¹⁹

In his exegesis of the commandment of baptism in Matth. 28:29, Servet says that the Father „is the prime, true and original source of every gift“, the Son is present „because through him we have reconciliation of this gift“, and the Spirit is present,

16 „Quod de persona dicunt, magna est vocabuli abusio, dicere unam personam esse aggregatum ex duabus rebus, ut duabus naturis in unum cumulum unitis. Sed proprie loquendo, una res dicitur persona alterius, ut socii Iob sumpta Dei persona, quasi ipsi essent Dii, volebant loqui et iudicare, Iob 13 et pseudo apostoli in persona apostolorum loquuntur, et satanas in persona boni angeli loquitur, dum se transfigurat in angelum lucis. Et sapientia in persona CHRISTI loquitur, David et Prophetae in persona CHRISTI, et CHRISTUS in persona ecclesiae saepe loquuntur ... Simili omnino modo, Verbum in persona CHRISTI olim fuisse filium dicimus, et CHRISTUM in persona Verbi ab initio apud patrem fuisse, et CHRISTUS persona Verbi, et Verbum persona CHRISTI, et non est nisi una persona et unus aspectus, quia id ipsum quod in Verbo relucebat, est ipse CHRISTUS ...“, De Trin. 4, pp. 93b–94a; translation: The two Treatises of Servetus on the Trinity, translated by Earl Morse Wilbur, Cambridge, Mass. 1932 (Harvard Theological Studies 16), pp. 144 f.

17 Melancthon, in interpreting Servet, recognizes this meaning and points to Cicero, *Orationes Philippicae* VIII, x, 29; cf. Melancthon, *Loci*, 1559 (1543) (see note 31), St.A. 2.1, p. 205, ll. 15–23.

18 Servet, employing Irenaeus for this point of view, denies, „that the Word of God is a kind of a philosophical being; but he declares that JESUS of Nazareth, the very one who was born of Mary, was the Word of God after the Word became flesh“, De Trin. 2, p. 48b; Wilbur (see note 16), p. 77.

19 „They misuse the term [Person] when in this metaphysical fashion they speak of the Nature of the Word. But properly speaking one says, the Nature of God, and not, the Nature of the Word.“, De Trin. 4, p. 92b; Wilbur (see note 16), p. 142.

„because all that are baptized in his name, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit“.²⁰ Servet conceives the relationship between the three as follows: „the Father is the whole substance and the one God from whom these degrees and personations proceed. And they are three, not by virtue of some distinction of beings in God, but through an οἰκονομία of God in various forms of Deity; for the same divinity which is in the Father is communicated to the Son, JESUS CHRIST, and to our spirits, which are the temples of the living God; for the Son and our sanctified spirits are sharers with us in the Substance of the Father, are its members, pledges, and instruments; although the kind of deity in them is varying, and this is why they are called distinct person, that is, manifold aspects, divers forms and kinds, of deity.“²¹ God shows himself in different ways during the course of the history of salvation. Servet now employs the concept *οἰκονομία* or *dispositio* used by Irenaeus and Tertullian: „the older tradition of the Apostles understands by the mystery of the Word a kind of disposition or dispensation in God, by which it pleased him to reveal to us the secret of his will. And Tertullian very often calls οἰκονομίαν, and Irenaeus calls it *dispositio*. And just as the speech was God, so also according to Irenaeus the Father himself when he speaks is said to be a *logos*; and they may be distinguished from each other just as a being and the disposition of the being; as though the being itself were unseen, but were made evident through the sound of words.“²²

20 De Trin. 2, p. 28b; Wilbur (see note 16), pp. 44 f.

21 „... pater est tota substantia et unus Deus, ex quo gradus isti et personatus descendunt. Et tres sunt non aliqua rerum in Deo distinctione, sed per Dei οἰκονομίαν variis Deitatis formis, nam eadem divinitas quae est in patre, communicatur filio IESU CHRISTO, et spiritui nostro, qui est templum Dei viventis, sunt enim filius et sanctificatus spiritus noster consortes substantiae patris, membra, pignora, et instrumenta, licet varia sit in eis deitatis species, et hoc est quod distinctae personae dicuntur, id est, multiformes deitatis aspectus, diversae facies et species“, De Trin. 1, p. 29a; Wilbur (see note 16), p. 45.

22 „... antiquior Apostolorum traditio per sacramentum Verbi intelligit quandam in Deo dispositionem seu dispensationem, qua placitum est ei arcanum voluntatis suae nobis revelare. Et hoc Tertullianus οἰκονομίαν, et Irenaeus dispositionem saepisse appellant. Et sicut Deus erat ille sermo, ita etiam secundum Irenaeum ipsemet pater loquens dicitur esse logos, ut sic distinguantur, sicut res ipsa et rei dispositio, quasi res ipsa lateat, et per sonitum verborum patefiat ...“, De Trin. 2, p. 48a; Wilbur (see note 16), pp. 76 f.; cf. Dial. 1, p. A3b. Servet might think of Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean* 2: „Deum credimus, sub hac tamen dispensatione quam οἰκονομίαν dicimus, ut unici Deus sit et filius, sermo ipsius qui ex ipso processerit, per quem omnia facta sunt ...“ / „We believe ... in one only God, yet subject to this dispensation (which is our word for ‚economy‘) that the only God has also a Son, his Word who has proceeded from himself, by whom all things were made ...“, Tertulliani *Adversus Praxean Liber*, ed. and translated by Ernest Evans, London 1948, p. 90, ll. 15–18, translation: *ibid.* p. 131. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV, 33,7: „dispositiones eius, per quas homo factus est filius Dei, assensio firma, quae est in Spiritu Dei, qui praestat agnitionem veritatis, qui dispositiones patris et filii exposuit secundum quas aderat generi humano, quemadmodum vult pater.“ / „the ‚economies‘ through which the Son of God was made man, and in the Spirit of God, who gives knowledge of the truth, who makes known to men the ‚economies‘ of the Father and the Son in each generation, as the Father wills.“, Irenäus von Lyon, *Adversus Haereses / Gegen die Häresien*, übersetzt und ein-

So when Father, Son and Spirit are invoked, three distinct beings are not invoked, but three admirable dispositions of God.²³ The Trinity is also for Servet a mystery. However, this mystery does not consist in the question of how three distinct but homogenous beings called „persons“ can be one being, one God. It is the mystery, the secret, of God's will, the „arcanum voluntatis suae“.²⁴ To believe in Christ is to acknowledge God's will who is revealed in Christ as his person“. This faith leads to the activities of love, by which God's will is fulfilled. The Lutheran concept of faith, however, leads to sleepiness.²⁵ Now we have gained the perspective in which the connection between the Trinity and justification becomes apparent.

3 Melanchthon's response to Servet

Melanchthon rather quickly noticed Servet's writings. In a letter to Joachim Camerarius in Nuremberg dated February 9, 1533, he mentions Servet for the first time. He responds to a question by Camerarius regarding what he thinks about Servet. He writes: Servet is very clever and sharp-witted in the discussion, but he does not have gravity. He has confused imaginations. It is obvious that he has crazy thoughts on justification. Camerarius knows, that he, Melanchthon, has always feared, there would erupt something concerning the Trinity. „Which tragedies will this question rise, if the Word is a *hypostasis*, if the Spirit is a *hypostasis* ...“.²⁶ Melanchthon's fear was to be confirmed.

Only weeks later, on March 15, 1533, Melanchthon writes again to Camerarius. He reports that he is reading a lot of Servet. His attention is now drawn to Servet's presentation of the early church fathers Tertullian and Irenaeus. Apparently, Melanchthon had not read, or carefully read, them regarding the theology of the Trinity. The sources of his understanding of the Trinity had thus far been the Holy Scripture and the Creed of the council of Nicea, along with Augustine as an influence regarding

geleitet von Norbert Brox, griech.-lat.-dt., Bd. 4, Freiburg u.a. 1997 (Fontes Christiani 8,4), p. 262, ll. 11–15; translation by Robert M. Grant, Irenaeus of Lyons, London 1997, p. 161. Cf. Friedman (see note 15), pp. 103–112: „The Patristic Function“.

23 „trinam divini nominis invocationem, quia tres sunt admirandae Dei dispositiones“, De Trin. 1, p. 28b.

24 De Trin. 2, p. 48a, cited above.

25 De Trin. 4, pp. 99a–100a.

26 „De Serveto rogas quid sentiam. Ego vero video satis acutum ac vafrum esse in disputando, sed plane gravitatem ei non tribuo. Et habet, ut mihi videtur, confusas imaginationes, nec satis explicatas earum rerum, quas agitat, cogitationes. De iustificatione manifeste delirat. Περί τῆς τριάδος scis me semper veritum esse fore ut haec aliquando erumperent. Bone deus, quales tragoedias excitabit haec questio ad posteros, εἰ ἐστὶν ὑπόστατις ὁ λόγος, εἰ ἐστὶν ὑπόστατις τὸ πνεῦμα!“, MBW no. 1305 [3], MBW T vol. 5, p. 382, l. 24–p. 383, l. 32 (CR 2, p. 630, no. 1094).

how to understand Scripture. As Melanchthon was convinced there was continuity in doctrine from the Scriptures to the great councils of the early church, it was important for him to find support for this continuity in the pre-Nicene church fathers.²⁷ Melanchthon asserts that Servet has completely misunderstood Tertullian; Irenaeus is less clear, and Melanchthon is still studying him.²⁸

The next letter concerning Servet, almost completely dedicated to him, is to Johannes Brenz in Schwäbisch Hall, July 1533. Melanchthon writes that in Servet many features of a fanatic spirit are found. He again criticizes his doctrine of justification and his doctrine of the Trinity and claims for himself Tertullian, and now, with some reservation, also Irenaeus. He expects that there will soon be a great controversy on the doctrine of the Trinity. Melanchthon then turns to the question whether Christ is the natural and real son of God, calling this the center of the controversy. Melanchthon finishes by reporting that he is reading his „Loci“ now in a revised version.²⁹ This new version of the „Loci“, which first appeared in the form of a lecture which he had started on May 23, 1533, and was printed in 1535, begins with the doctrine of God and covers all topics that he had declared in the „Loci communes“ of 1521 to be mysteries, topics that are not to be investigated.³⁰ Melanchthon held to this presentation of the

27 Cf. Gottfried Hoffmann, *Kirchenväterzitate in der Abendmahlskontroverse zwischen Oekolampad, Zwingli, Luther und Melanchthon. Legitimationsstrategien in der innerreformatorischen Auseinandersetzung um das Herrenmahl*, Göttingen 2011 (Oberurseler Ergänzungshefte 7), pp. 247 f., cf. Eginhard Peter Meijering, *Melanchthon and Patristic Thought. The doctrines of Christ and Grace, the Trinity and the Creation*, Leiden 1983 (Studies in the History of Christian Thought 32).

28 „Servetum multum lego. Tertulliano prorsus facit iniuriam, cum citat eum in hanc sententiam, quasi sentiat τὸν λόγον non esse ὑπόστασιν. Ille vero clarissime scribit hoc, quod publice sentimus: τὸν λόγον esse hypostasim, non ut interpretatur Servetus, sed ut nos loquimur. Ireneus subobscurus est. Sed de his rebus tecum coram brevi, ut spero“, MBW no. 1311 [4], MBW T vol. 5, p. 396 (CR 2, p. 640, no. 1099).

29 „In Serueto multae notae comparent fanatici spiritus. Nam de iustificatione vides eum deridere doctrinam fidei neque aliud docere quam Augustini qualitatem. ... iniuriam facit Tertulliano et, ut mihi videtur, etiam Ireneo. Diligenter enim horum inquisivi sententias ... hoc mihi nequaquam placet, quod Servetus non facit Christum vere naturalem filium γνήσιον Dei, hoc est habentem σωματικῶς aliquid substantiae Dei. Hoc est illius controversiae caput καὶ σύνεχον. ... Praelegeo nunc iterum locos communes, ut novam editionem atque emendationem adornem. In his etiam haec attigi“, MBW no. 1351, MBW T vol. 5, pp. 467 f. (CR 2, pp. 660 f., no. 1123).

30 The fragments of this lecture, noted by Johannes Bugenhagen, are edited in CR 21, pp. 253–332, based on the manuscript SB Berlin, Ms. theol. lat. 80 42. Cf. Bindseil, CR 21, pp. 251 f. below, O. Vogt, *Über Melanchthons loci*. Aus Bugenhagens Handschriften, in: *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 58 (1885), pp. 747–749; Valentin Rose, *Die Handschriften-Verzeichnisse der königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*, Bd. 13,3 (= *Die lateinischen Handschriften*, Bd. 2,3), Berlin 1905, 1359–1361, no. 69; Weimarer Ausgabe der Briefe Luthers [= WA], Br. 14, 105, no. 224 f.; Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Iter Italicum*, vol. 3, London-Leiden 1983, p. 471. The printed version, Philip Melanchthon, *Loci communes recens collecti et recogniti*, Wittenberg 1535, is edited in CR 21, pp. 333–558.

doctrine of the Trinity until the last version of this work, which he published in 1559, one year before his death.³¹

With regard to the antitrinitarism in Italy at the time, another letter of Melanchthon is of great interest, written at the beginning of January 1539 to Venice; it is addressed in the first printing „ad Senatum Venetum“. ³² Doubts have been raised whether the letter was written by Melanchthon, because the Venetian ambassador, Francesco Contarini, reported that Melanchthon denied he had written the letter in a conversation they had in 1541, but Melanchthon probably only wanted to conceal the recipients of the letter from the ambassador.³³

In Venice the works of Luther, Melanchthon, and other reformers had been distributed since 1518.³⁴ Luther had written a letter to Gabriel Zwilling in Torgau dated March 7, 1528, in which he stated that he was happy the Word of God was received in

31 Now in a revised edition and translated into German: Philipp Melanchthon, *Loci praecipui theologici* 1559, Latin-German, vol. 1, Leipzig 2018, ed. and translated by Peter Litwan and Sven Grosse, assisted by Florence Becher-Häusermann, p. 24, l. 9–p. 86, l. 16. There is also an English translation of the later *Loci*, *The Chief Theological Topics. Loci praecipui theologici* 1559, translated by Jacob Aal Ottesen Preus, St. Louis Missouri 2011, but it is based on a reprint of the *Loci* 1559 in the *Loci* of Martin Chemnitz. – A late explicit discussion of Servet's ideas was his attachment to the 2nd edition of his *Responsiones ad articulos Bavaricae inquisitionis, a Refutatio erroris Servet et Anabaptistarum*, St.A. 4 (Gütersloh 1955), pp. 365–377.

32 MBW no. 2135; CR 3, pp. 748–750 (no. 1831), MBW T vol. 5, pp. 284–289, the address in p. 284, l. 1. First print Nuremberg 1539. In the printed edition Straßburg 1541 the address is given: „Epistola Philippi Melanchthonis ad Venetos quosdam Evangelii studiosos.“ In Pezel's edition of 1600 the title is: „Ad Senatum Venetum. Commendatio Repurgatae Doctrinae Evangelii: Et Refutatio blasphemii dogmatis Servetii περί τοῦ λόγου“, cf. MBW T vol. 5, p. 284. Friedrich Trechsel, *Die protestantischen Antitrinitarier vor Faustus Socin. Michael Servet und seine Vorgänger*. Vol. 2: Lelio Sozini und die Antitrinitarier seiner Zeit, Heidelberg 1844, p. 38, note 1, presumes, that the concrete addressees of the letter were members of the senate of Venice.

33 Karl Benrath, *Notiz über Melanchthons angeblichen Brief an den venetianischen Senat (1539)*, in: *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 1 (1877), pp. 469–471; id., *Wiedertäufer im Venetianischen um die Mitte des 16. Jahrhunderts*, in: *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 58 (1885), pp. 9–67, pp. 9f., and id., *Geschichte der Reformation in Venedig*, Halle 1887 (*Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte* 5), pp. 18f., with note 19 on p. 117, denies that Melanchthon has written this letter. He appeals to Giuseppe de Leva, *Storia documentata di Carlo V in correlazione all'Italia*, vol. 3, Padova 1875, p. 327, note 2, that Melanchthon denied in a conversation with the Venetian ambassador Francesco Contarini 1541, to have written this letter. Heinz Scheible in MBW, vol. 2, p. 408, objects, that this letter was printed in the edition of Melanchthon's *Declamationes* 1541 and that Melanchthon mentions in the letter CR 9, p. 763, no. 6705, the letter to Venice as his own work. He presumes that Melanchthon wanted to conceal the addressees of the letter before the ambassador.

34 Trechsel (see note 32), pp. 17f.; *ibid.*, pp. 32–52 on „the gospel in Venice“, pp. 37–41 on Melanchthon's letter to Venice. Calvin spent 1536 a time in Ferrara, *ibid.*, p. 18; Karl Benrath, *Reformation in Venedig* (see note 33), pp. 2f. Cf. Susanna Peyronel Rambaldi, *Propaganda evangelica e protestante in Italia (1520 c.–1570)*, in: Philip Benedict/Silvana Seidel Menchi/Alain Tallon (Eds.), *La Réforme en France et en Italie. Contacts, comparaisons et contrastes*, Roma 2007, pp. 1–31.

Venice.³⁵ In 1530 an Italian translation of the New Testament was published in Venice by a Florentinian, Antonio Brucioli.³⁶ In the same year, an Italian translation of Melanchthon's „Loci“ was published in Venice under the title „I principii de la theologia“; Melanchthon had received the name „Ippofilo da Terra negra“ for this translation.³⁷ In Melanchthon's letter addressed to Venice, a man whom he calls „Braccietus“, this is Michele Brachiolus / Brucioli and perhaps a brother of the bible translator Antonio Brucioli,³⁸ had studied with Melanchthon in Wittenberg in 1538,³⁹ and this relationship prompted Melanchthon to present his reformation thought to an auditorium of persons who had responsibility in Venice. It is revealing that the second part of this long letter, almost half the letter, is dedicated to a refutation of Servet's doctrine of the Trinity and of Christ. The reason is, as Melanchthon says, that Servet's „libellum“ is carried around in Venice.⁴⁰

35 Trechsel (see note 32), pp. 33 f.; WA, Br. 4, 404,2–4, cf. 405, note 1; in 1529 Luther hosted Martin Richter, a very close friend of the German humanist Jakob Ziegler, who resided at that time in Venice and was a partisan of Luther's reformation: Luther, Letter to Justus Jonas from May 6, 1529, WA, Br. 5, 63. By a misunderstanding, some scholars kept Richter for Veit Dietrich and thought, he was Ziegler's adoptive son: Karl Schottenloher, Jakob Ziegler, Münster 1910, pp. 100 f., with note 3.

36 Trechsel (see note 32), p. 17; more precise Benrath, Reformation in Venedig (see note 33), p. 15: The translation of the whole bible was finished in 1532. Antonio Brucioli was not a partisan of the reformers, but a translation of the bible into a vernacular language promoted in this situation sympathies for the reformation. The name is sometimes also written „Bruciolli“. Concerning this bible translation cf. Gigliola Fragnito, *La Bibbia al rogo. La censura ecclesiastica e i volgarizzamenti della Scrittura* (1471–1605), Bologna 1997, pp. 23–74.

37 Trechsel (see note 32), p. 34, note 1; Helmuth Claus, *Melanchthon-Bibliographie 1510–1560*, vol. 1, Gütersloh 2014 (*Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte* 87,1), no. 1530.35, p. 385. The translator is perhaps Lodovico Castelvetro.

38 This was the conjecture of Johann Georg Schelhorn, *Ergötzlichkeiten aus der Kirchenhistorie und Literatur*, vol. 1, Ulm-Leipzig 1762, pp. 420–427: Muthmassung über zwey Briefe Philipp Melanchthons. Schelhorn presumes, that the Braccietus von MBW no. 2135 is identical with the Michael Bracchiolus of MBW no. 1981; CR 3, p. 481, no. 1645 to Veit Dietrich and therefore maybe is a brother of Antonio Brucioli. He also argues, that the address „ad Venetos quosdam Evangelii studiosos“ is the right one, but Scheible's argument, that Melanchthon wanted to conceal the true addresses makes it probable, that the first address „ad Senatum Venetum“ contains some truth, see above note 32. Trechsel (see note 32), p. 37, note 1, follows Schelhorn; Benrath, *Reformation in Venedig* (see note 33), pp. 18 f., note 18, however denies, that he was Brucioli's brother, and states, he was a spy of the Roman Curia. Schelhorns' conjecture, that Braccietus is Michele Braccetto, was confirmed by Lothar Vogel, *Italien*, in: Philipp Melanchthon. *Der Reformator zwischen Glauben und Wissen*, ed. by Günter Frank, Berlin-Boston 2017, pp. 730 f. Cf. Salvatore Caponetto, *Melantone e l'Italia*, Torino 2000; id., *La Riforma protestante nell'Italia del Cinquecento*, Torino 1992, pp. 133 f. („Melantheone e Venezia“).

39 MBW no. 2135, MBW T vol. 5, p. 284, ll. 2 f.

40 „Intellexi autem isthic circumferri Serveti libellum“, *ibid.*, p. 286, l. 87.

This letter demonstrates that at that time there were supporters of the Wittenberg reformation in Venice, that Servet's books were spread in the city, and that Melanchthon saw the necessity to clarify the position of the Wittenberg reformation.

In the first part of the letter Melanchthon states that in his area of influence the doctrine of penitence was repudiated and human satisfactions rejected so that the benefits of Christ could be seen more clearly and the doctrine of faith by which the forgiveness of sins is received could be highlighted.⁴¹ In the second part of the letter, Melanchthon repeats the arguments that he presented in his letter to Camerarius in 1533, and points to his new version of the *loci*.⁴²

Melanchthon's argumentation has two parts which are interlocking. On the one side, he shows that the Word, the Logos, is not the Father, insofar as he is thinking or creating something,⁴³ but is a „hypostasis“ or „persona“ a distinct being. The proof is that John 1:14 asserts the Word became flesh, and that he therefore has to be something or someone and not only the Father insofar as he is thinking.⁴⁴ Also the verse, „he was in the world and the world was made by him“, John 1:10, shows that the Word cannot be the human nature of Christ, as Servet thinks.⁴⁵

The other side of Melanchthon's argument is the practice of the adoration of Christ, which is testified by Paul and other places in the Bible.⁴⁶ To adore someone, however, means to give him the honour of divinity.⁴⁷

So there are three different divine beings, called „persons“, but only one God, a mystery, which as Melanchthon says, not even the angels are able to understand.⁴⁸ But where the investigating intellect hits a boundary, the practical consequences are clear, and here we see how the two hemispheres of theology, which Melanchthon had spoken about in his „*Loci*“ of 1521, are connected. Differentiated as distinct persons, Father and Son are vis-à-vis, which they cannot be in Servet's theology. There is one God, who as the Father, sends the Son.⁴⁹ This Son is the promised branch of David, whose name is „The Lord our justifier“ (Jer. 33,16), the servant of God of whom Isa. 53:11 says, „To know him will justify many.“⁵⁰ Therefore we can ask the Father to have mercy on us because of the Son. Likewise the Holy Spirit is vis-à-vis God the Father and God the Son, when in prayer he moves us to trust in the mercy that the Father has

41 Ibid., p. 286, ll. 55–58.

42 Ibid., p. 287, l. 82; p. 289, ll. 155–157.

43 Ibid., p. 287, ll. 103 f.; p. 288, ll. 121 f.

44 Ibid., p. 288, ll. 122 f.

45 Ibid., p. 288, ll. 124–134.

46 Ibid., p. 287, ll. 112–115.

47 „Tribuit autem invocatio divinitatis honorem“, ibid., p. 278, ll. 115 f.

48 Melanchthon, *Loci* 1559 (1543) (see note 31), St.A. 2,1, p. 206, ll. 15–20.

49 *Loci* Lecture 1533 (see note 30), CR 21, p. 267, on the *officia Christi*.

50 „Dominus iustificator noster“ (Jer. 33,16); „Notitia eius iustificabit multos.“ (Isa. 53,11, *Loci* Lecture 1533 (see note 30), CR 21, p. 265. Melanchthon clarifies thus the „Dominus iustus noster“ of the Vulgata translation Jer. 33,16.

promised because of the Son.⁵¹ There cannot be justification, in the sense Melanchthon has believed and taught already in 1521, if there is no Triune god. In the „Loci“ of 1521 Melanchthon focused on the process of justification, which involved an action on the part of man, the supplication for mercy. But in this doctrine of justification, the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity was already inherent. Melanchthon was not a Nicodemite in 1521, but already the theologian who would stand up to contradict Servet.

51 „exuscita fidem et agnitionem misericordiae, quam nobis aeternus Pater Domini nostri Iesu Christi propter Filium promisit“, Melanchthon, Loci 1559 (1543) (see note 31), St.A. 2,1, p. 239, ll. 29–35, in the prayer to the Holy Spirit.