Loci Melanchthon thus narrows or even misconceives Paul’s crucial argument of apostolic self-reflection.

I shall add here a philological remark to Phil 3:9, where Melanchthon quotes the Pauline text, while he only alludes to it in the cases of Phil 3:8 and 3:12 (see above). In the case of Phil 3:9 the Pauline text obviously is of specific theological importance. It seems as if Melanchthon does not have the Vulgata-text in mind but that he himself translates the Greek text: Melanchthon’s Latin text is much closer to the Greek than contemporary Latin translations, especially when it comes to the complicated interpretation of the prepositions that are used here:

The Vulgata-text says: ... sed illam quae ex fide est Christi quae ex Deo est iustitia...

The Greek text, however, says: ... ἀλλὰ τὴν διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει – a phrase that is much better expressed in Melanchthon’s translation in his Loci: ... sed eam, quae per fidem est Christi, quae iustitia ex deo est19 – per fidem equals διὰ πίστεως.

The art of Greek philology finally leads Melanchthon to a significant concept of “faith”: Melanchthon’s translation – even though it might reflect reformatory theology here – is much more than the Vulgata-tradition close to the Pauline Greek in a philological sense. Melanchthon’s expertise as a Greek philologist is an important contribution to the reformatory movement since it attests to the reformatory movement in humanism.20

2.2. **Melanchthon’s exegetical principles in his Loci in light of the “New Perspective”**

In his interpretation of Pauline texts, such as Phil 3, Melanchthon is in his Loci strongly influenced by a “Lutheran hermeneutics.” Melanchthon approaches his reading of Phil 3 through the lenses of the theologoumenon of justification by focusing his interpretation on lex, gratia and iustificatio as key terms. Even if Melanchthon is concise regarding matters of Greek philology, he tends to narrow Pauline thinking to the concept of justification. The suspicion regarding the paradigmatic of a “Lutheran reading of Paul,” raised by the representatives of the “New Perspective,” seem to be legitimate – it even applies to Melanchthon’s exegesis of Pauline texts.

Nevertheless, the NPP-critique of a “Lutheran Paul” that was dominating Protestant exegesis and its preunderstanding of Pauline texts in the sense of a “Western reading” falls much too short. This becomes evident in two points:

---

(1) The critique of the “Lutheran Paul” as articulated by the representatives of the NPP is not new. It is rather typical of protestant theology – in line with Lutheran tradition – to question its dogmatic and hermeneutical framework constantly. One of these self-critical debates took place in 1916 between Wilhelm Bousset (1865-1920) and Paul Wernle (1872-1939). Bousset – in his refutation of Wernle’s critical remarks about Bousset’s monograph “Kyrios Christos” – raised the issue of to what extent protestant theology as a hermeneutical key can legitimately lead Pauline exegesis.21 As Bousset and Wernle, as well as all subsequent protestant theologians, are diverse interpreters of Paul and Luther, the history of (protestant self-)critique still continues. Likewise, Ed P. Sanders and Krister Stendahl have formulated their critique of previous Lutheran theologians and their approaches to Pauline exegesis.

Today we have to continuously work out how we can further develop our research perspective on Paul and Pauline reception history up to the reformation period and its impact on modern Paulinism. The task of interpreting Luther and Paul is per definitionem infinite. Rudolf Bultmann, who was himself frequently under suspicion as a representative of the so-called “Lutheran Paul,”22 was quite sensitive of the various dilemmas of the Paul-and-Luther-reception. Bultmann himself pointed out how Luther’s interpretation of Pauline texts does not only provide helpful insights into the interpretation of Paul’s letter-writing but also tends to narrow or even conceal Pauline thinking:23 Before judging about Luther’s reading of Paul, we have to work on an appropriate understanding of Luther. The “Lutheran Paul,” in other words, cannot be restricted to a fixed paradigm or a concise hermeneutical concept – Luther as an exegete of Paul is himself part of a dynamic process of reception history. We thus have to prepare for a careful understanding of Luther and Luther’s exegesis of Pauline texts first.

(2) At the same time, we cannot take all protestant theologians or all protestant writings with the same brush: We have to distinguish between Luther and Melanchthon as we have to distinguish between the Loci Communes and


22 Cf. M. Zetterholm, Paul, e.g. 75.

23 In 1928, Rudolf Bultmann says: ”The academic research is infinite, because our terminology develops infinitely and therefore each generation is given the task of interpretation. Luther’s exegesis of Paul may be based on a real understanding of Paul; but we cannot settle for it, since we first of all need to interpret Luther,” R. Bultmann, “Bedeutung,” 114-133, 123.