

FACES OF THE REFORMATION

PHILIPP MELANCHTHON

Born: Feb. 16, 1497 | Bretten, Germany

Died: April 19, 1560 | Wittenberg, Germany



REFORMATION
2017 It's *Still* All About
Jesus

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Luther's right-hand man and author of the Augsburg Confession

WHO WAS PHILIPP MELANCHTHON? Some argue that he was a staunch defender of the Lutheran faith. Others say he was a weak professor whose battle cry was, "Why can't we all just get along?" The answer may be that he was both. All agree he was a brilliant scholar and systematical theologian.

Melanchthon attended the University of Heidelberg, earning a bachelor's degree in 1511. At age 17, he received a master's degree from the University of Tübingen. His great-uncle Johann Reuchlin recommended him to Frederick the Wise, who was seeking a professor of Greek for his newly formed university at Wittenberg. Melanchthon arrived Aug. 25, 1518, ten months after Luther posted his 95 Theses. Melanchthon was young, only 21, and small and thin in stature. An imposing figure he was not, but the world would know him one day as a giant of the Reformation.

Luther saw and admired the new professor's gifts immediately. Melanchthon's lectures were well attended. Not only students but townspeople and nobles crowded to hear the exceptional orator. He resisted Luther's frequent requests to pursue a doctor of theology degree but acquiesced to at least a bachelor's degree in theology. He finished that degree in his first year at Wittenberg.

Although Melanchthon remained a layman, he and Luther were the closest of friends for the rest of their lives. They did not agree on everything, but were loyal to each other and admired and depended on the gifts the other had been given. Melanchthon was the systematician of Luther's theology. Luther once said of Melanchthon, "I was born to go to war and give battle to sects and devils. That is why my books are stormy and warlike. ... But Master Philip comes softly and neatly, tills and plants, sows and waters with pleasure, as God has abundantly given him the talents."

He is known as *Praeceptor Germaniae* for his role in forming the educational system of Germany and also for his *Loci Communes*, a book of Lutheran theology organized by subject matter. Most significantly, he is the author of the *Augsburg Confession*, the primary explanation of the Lutheran faith and one of the chief documents of the Reformation.

In the spring of 1530, the Emperor called a diet to be held in Augsburg. Luther, Melanchthon and fellow reformer Johann Bugenhagen set out for Augsburg. Luther could not attend in person because the Edict of Worms made him an outlaw in that part of the country. He was instead left at Coburg to sit and stew while the others journeyed on. On June 25, chancellor Beyer read out loud the *Augsburg Confession* to Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Augsburg. Here the protesting princes of Germany swore their allegiance to the Confessions.

Historians often speak of Melanchthon's desire for unity with both the Catholics and Calvinists. He is sometimes described as weak-willed in his defense of Luther's teachings, hoping to find common ground with differing views. As time went by, he modified his earlier works, including the *Augsburg Confession*. This drew the ire of those that disagreed with Melanchthon's alterations. To this day, congregations in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod subscribe to the *Unaltered Augsburg Confession* or UAC. These letters may be found in the cornerstone of your church.

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