

Freed & RENEWED in Christ 500 YEARS OF GOD'S GRACE IN ACTION

Reformation ABCs

M is for Melanchthon, Philip (1497–1560)

A close friend and colleague of Luther, considered the first systematic theologian of the Reformation. He studied widely in languages, the humanities and sciences before being called by Luther to serve as professor of Greek at the University of Wittenberg though only 21 years old. A lay person, he devoted himself primarily to teaching and writing. Encouraged by Luther, he published *Loci Communes Rerum Theologicarum* (Theological Commonplaces), the first systematic treatment of Reformation ideas, in 1521. His greatest work was as the principle author of the Augsburg Confession. Presented to Holy Roman Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, it outlined 21 articles of faith shared by believers and 7 “disputed articles, listing the abuses that have been corrected” by Evangelical leaders, including offering both bread and cup at communion, allowing priests to marry and opposing the secular power of bishops. He went on to write the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (1531), the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope (1537) and the Smalcald Articles (1537), collected with Luther’s Small and Large Catechism and other Lutheran confessions in the Book of Concord (1580). Some critics considered Melanchthon too willing to compromise to preserve peace and unity among Christians, but Luther wrote of him, “If it please Christ, Melanchthon will make many Martins and a most powerful enemy of scholastic theology; for he knows their folly and the Rock of Christ as well.”



Pastor Bruce Davis, Wilmington, Delaware

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M is for Muhlenberg, Henry Melchior (1711-1787)

Patriarch of Lutherans in America. He studied theology, languages and music at Gottingen. Drawn to the Pietist movement led by August Franke in Halle, he went there to teach and help establish an orphanage. Ordained in Leipzig in 1739, he was encouraged by Franke to accept the call from German-speaking Lutherans in Pennsylvania who had been asking for a pastor for ten years. After a voyage of three months, he arrived in South Carolina in 1742, describing the horrors of slavery there in his meticulous journals and predicting God's judgment on people who allowed such cruelty. Arriving in Pennsylvania he found congregations in disarray, following a variety of worship styles and theologies. In 1743, he laid the cornerstone for Augustus Church in Trappe, Pennsylvania, outside of Philadelphia; the church still stands. Following his motto, "the church must be planted," he travelled widely, preaching in English, Dutch, German and Latin as needed. He helped plant more than eighty congregations in the colonies and recruited more pastors to come and serve them. He convened the Ministerium of Pennsylvania, the first Lutheran body in America, drafted the first uniform order for worship and compiled a new hymnal. He and his wife Anna Marie had eleven children, including Peter, who served as a general in the Continental Army and in Congress; Fredrick, who served as the first Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives; and Henry Ernst, an early scientist, who helped establish what is now Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He is buried in the cemetery of Augustus Church where his gravestone reads (in Latin) "Who and what he was, future ages will know without a stone."



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Statue on Philadelphia Campus of United Lutheran Seminary



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M is for Müntzer, Thomas (1489-1525)

Müntzer's name is inextricably linked to his inept intervention in the Peasants' War, 1524-1525, the largest social uprising in the German lands before the French Revolution. Born in Stolberg and educated in the University of Frankfurt an der Oder, Müntzer became a fiery and angry preacher in Zwickau, a cloth-working center, the inspiration behind the Prophets of Zwickau whom Luther would condemn as "false brothers." Müntzer combined a mystical theology – he believed in God's continuous revelation – with an apocalyptic vision of social revolution. He believed that God's will would fulfill itself in human history. In 1524, Luther published his Letter to the Princes of Saxony Concerning the Rebellious Spirit linking Müntzer's teaching to violence and rebellion.

"Don't let your sword get cold," Müntzer would write. He would lead a small army of 300 from Mühlhausen to join the larger peasant army in Frankenhausen already at work plundering convents and castles. On the day of battle, Müntzer reportedly rallied his troops to trust in God, telling them that the enemy's shots would not harm them. They were slaughtered, as many as 6,000 on 15 May 1525 by the combined forces of Hesse, Brunswick, and Saxony. Müntzer fled, was captured, tried, likely tortured, and executed on the 27th of May. To the end of his life Luther regarded Müntzer as the very soul of rebelliousness.

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Reformation ABCs is a project of the Delmarva North Conference of the Delaware-Maryland Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We invite you to use, reprint, and circulate these weekly posts as we observe Reformation 500!