

world, especially the downfall of the Pope and the destruction of Rome. He was also in the habit of consulting the stars with reference to himself, his family and to the progress of events and shaped his conduct upon these astrological data. If Melanchthon had lived at this day, he would have been a *Spiritualist*, a holder of séances, a supporter and defender of “mediums,” and a habitual communicator with departed spirits. He also believed in and was influenced by the visions and prophecies of other visionary men.

Melanchthon was not mentally unbalanced; he was a visionary enthusiast. He was learned, talented, amiable, and conscientious, but he was lacking in judgment, stability, and mental discipline. He was sincere in his religious convictions, but constitutionally and abnormally credulous, visionary, and erratic. If circumstances had made him a businessman instead of a theologian, his visionary tendencies, his trust, his love of novelty and change, his speculative turn, and his general instability would have involved him and his business connections in certain financial ruin. As a statesman his peculiar qualities would have plunged his administration and his country into innumerable embarrassments and disasters. As a theologian and an innovator, he was always wavering, and changeable, but readily controlled, for good or evil, by those around him. In whatever position he might have been placed, he would have been regarded as an amiable and genial man, but he never could have inspired confidence in his judgment, his competency, or his reliability. He was true and ardent in his friendships, and was inclined to sympathize deeply, and to relate closely with his trusted friends in all things moral, intellectual, religious, and personal. His heart was open,

generous, and confiding, and thus he became a victim to the strong will of Luther.

During his last years, Melanchthon suffered continually from his own doubts, and from the clashing and ever-changing opinions of the self-styled Reformers. Each one had his peculiar views upon the various doctrinal points; each one differed from the other, so that unity, harmony, and stability was out of the question. Melanchthon died praying, quietly and peacefully, without apparent struggle, in 1560. His last wish was that the churches might become reunited in Christ.

¹*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. X, p. 152.

² Newman C. Eberhardt, C.M., *A Summary of Catholic History*, Vol. 2, p. 155.

³ *Ibid*

Pope John Paul II Society of Evangelists

14818 Ranchero Road

Hesperia, California, USA

Telephone: 760-488-2919

FAX: 760-948-7620

E-mail: pjpiisoe@earthlink.net

www.pjpiisoe.org

Pamphlet 427

Philipp Melanchton

“The Father of Evangelical Theology”

Victor R. Claveau, MJ

Philipp Schwarzerd (Melanchthon), (b. at Bretten, 16 February 1497--d. at Wittenberg, 19 April 1560), was of respectable and well-to-do parentage. In 1509 Melanchthon, not yet 13 years of age, entered the University of Heidelberg. He obtained the baccalaureate in 1511, but his application for the master's degree in 1512 was rejected because of his youth. In 1514 he won the master's degree as first among eleven candidates, and was made an instructor in the university. He studied patristics (The writings of the early Church Fathers) on his own account and studied the New Testament in its original language. In 1519 he received a Bachelor of Theology. He taught at the University of Wittenberg for 42 years. He is considered to be the father of evangelical theology.

Melanchthon was naturally truthful, pious, sincere, and earnestly desirous of doing his duty to his God and to his fellow man. He was ardent, enthusiastic, credulous, and easily influenced by eloquence, novel ideas and by his personal associations and friendships. Having heard Martin Luther in his heyday of popularity and power, he was attracted and fascinated by his vehement, but eloquent harangues, his verbal denunciations of Catholicism, and his announcement of his novel theological hypothesis. He finally became an unwilling victim during his whole life, to these sad persuasions of Satan. When Luther heaped vulgar abuse or ranted and raved against those who opposed his will, it was the gentle

Melanchthon who trembled with doubts and apprehensions as to the source of these furious and vindictive sentiments. During these trying scenes, his soul often reverted to Catholicism, the blessed religion of his childhood, for consolation and hope. Amid the bitter rantings of Luther against a religion, which had been the only true light of the world for more than fifteen centuries, Melanchthon often reflected that Satan was one of Luther's counselors. In his letters to his intimate friend, Camerarius, he gave expression to these doubts and fears. Yet the explanations and apologies of friends prevailed in the end, and kept him until death within the confines of Protestantism, always doubting, wavering, and trembling, at the terrible responsibility he had assumed. Among those who aided in sustaining him in the delusions of Luther was Erasmus, who declared that the world had become so obstinate and hardened in its opinions, that a rude, dictatorial, and crazy mind like that of Luther, was necessary, in order to revolutionize the religious opinions of men. What an admission respecting the universality and firmness of the religious faith of the period! What a commentary on an innovation which was destined to divide and distract the Church, disturb its unity, and fill the world with schismatics, rationalists, and atheists.

While Luther claimed the Catholic Church was doomed by God, just as were the devil and his kingdom and vehemently denounced the Papacy and its followers, Melanchthon warned pastors against reviling the pope or bishops. Melanchthon preached the doctrine that faith alone justifies and that God would forgive sins for the sake of Christ without works on our part. Yet, on the other hand he added that we must nevertheless do good works, which God has

commanded. He invariably sought to preserve peace among the warring factions and no one took so much to heart as he, the break between the churches.

At the Diet of Augsburg, held in 1530, several innovators presented their own private articles of faith. Among them were Martin Bucer, Melanchthon, and Ulrich Zwingli. Each confession of faith comprised the private views of its author, each one was at variance with the other, and each had its array of zealous advocates. In his confession (*confessio Augustana*), Melanchthon tried to prove that the Protestants, in spite of their innovations, still belonged to the Catholic Church and had a right to remain in her fold. To this end he provided in defense of Protestant doctrine the Scriptures and quoted recognized Catholic authorities. The innovations in question were represented as merely a reformation of abuses, which had crept into the Church. His desire for peace appears in this basic document of Protestantism and he was often reproached for his lack of vigor in opposing the Catholic Church. He declared, in justification of his course: "I know that the people decry our moderation; but it does not become us to heed the clamor of the multitude. We must labor for peace and for the future. It will prove a great blessing for all of us if unity be restored in Germany."(1) Because he feared the overthrow of all order, he made concessions to the Catholics at subsequent debates and conferences. He seemed to have been driven by the dream of an Evangelical-Catholic Church and thought that it would be possible to remain in the Catholic Church and still hold to the new theology.

The *Augsburg Confession* contained twenty-one articles and became the official Lutheran creed. Melanchthon, in some cases with Luther's

connivance, concealed many Lutheran tenets under ambiguous phrases. He went so far as to declare: "We have no dogmas which differ from the Roman Church; ...we reverence the authority of the pope of Rome."(2) Luther did not believe this but permitted his disciple to publish it, remarking: "When once we have evaded the peril and are at peace, then we can easily atone for our tricks."(3)

A majority of the diet was in favor of the Confession of Melanchthon, and it was accordingly adopted. This majority made the momentous discovery that all the great councils of the Church, with their thousands of the most learned, talented, and holy men which fifteen centuries had produced, had all been mistaken in their interpretations of the Scriptures. They believed that the Augsburg assembly had been brought into existence to rearrange and reestablish Christianity! Men like Saints Polycarp, Clement, and Ignatius, who had received their instructions directly from the lips of Christ and His inspired apostles, and the thousands of holy fathers who alone had transmitted the Christian religion through the early and middle ages of the Christian era, were scoffed at and ignored. This handful of dissenting Germans at Augsburg adopted a new confession of faith and established a new religion!

Melanchthon believed in dreams, visions, astrology, and prophecies. Unusual terrestrial and celestial phenomena were considered solemn warnings from heaven of coming events, and regulated his life in accordance with this fantastic hypothesis. He often cautioned his friends to give heed to these wonderful phenomena, which were constantly occurring. The birth of a calf with two heads, or other freaks of nature, or the overflow of the Tiber, in his estimation were important occurrences, and portended great changes in the