

Reformation Reflections



It was a warm August day as Philipp Schwartzerdth walked to his first class at the University. By the look of the slender young man, one would have thought he was a student. He was not. He was the new professor of Greek literature.

The year was 1518, the University was that in Wittenberg, Electoral Saxony, and the young man in question – better known as **Philipp Melancthon** (his last name translated into Greek) – was just 21 years old.

Philipp would quickly become indispensable to the university's most famous professor, Dr. Martin Luther. Just ten months before, Martin had posted his 95 Theses on the door of St. Mary's Church. Now he had a brilliant young co-worker to help him as the Reformation picked up speed. He would not be the only one.

Johannes Bugenhagen had been a priest and lecturer at a monastery in Pomerania when he first encountered Luther's writings. A year later, in April of 1521, he left his post and headed for Wittenberg to study theology. On October 25, 1523, he was called to be the pastor of St. Mary's in Wittenberg, making him Dr. Luther's pastor and confessor.



Johannes would be tapped by Luther to assist him in his translation of the Old and New Testaments into German. He would play an

integral role in numerous debates and colloquies among the various Protestant factions. In addition, his administrative skills were frequently put to use throughout northern Germany and even Denmark, where he help territorial churches reorganize and reform.

He was the first of the Wittenberg reformers to marry and was the one who officiated at the wedding of Martin Luther and Katharina von Bora. He would also be the one to preach at Martin's funeral, as well as look after the good doctor's widow and children.



Georg Burkhardt, who went by the name **Spalatin** (from his hometown of Spalt), was tutor to Elector Frederick the Wise's nephews when Luther was first appointed a professor at Wittenberg. Although ordained a priest, theology did not interest him much. Instead, he moved from tutor to librarian to, finally, court chaplain and secretary. It is uncertain just when he made contact with Luther, but what a connection that would turn out to be.

His name shows up in nearly all the early events of the Reformation. As a close advisor to the Elector, for example, he was there at the Diet of Worms in April of 1521, when Luther appeared before Charles V and refused to recant his writings. And though he would frequently implore Luther not to write things against the Papacy that would inflame the situation even more, Spalatin would be the first to back him up, as well as to translate what Luther had written in Latin into German for the Elector. Following Frederick the Wise's death in 1525, Spalatin left to be a pastor in Altenburg, but was frequently called upon as a highly valued advisor by the next two electors.

When the Lutherans were called to Augsburg for the Diet in 1530, it would not be Luther who would write their statement of faith to be presented to the emperor. He had to be left behind, due to the price on his head. Instead, the task fell to Philipp, who took the initial work Luther, Bugenhagen, himself, and others had done earlier and crafted what became the Augsburg Confession. Of this seminal document, Luther would write to a friend:

I am tremendously pleased to have lived to this moment when Christ, by his staunch confessors, has publicly been proclaimed in such a great assembly by means of this really most beautiful confession.

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