

## Luther's Coworkers

### I. Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) – Luther's right hand man

#### A. Youth

1. Born in southwestern Germany, family name was Schwartzerd ("Black earth").
2. Child prodigy
3. In 1518 he accepted a position at the University of Wittenberg as a professor of Greek. Began serious theological study, earning a Bachelor of Theology degree in 1519 and taught theology following that.

#### B. Humanist

1. Study of the classics – excelled at Greek and Latin
2. Taught rhetoric.
3. Large interest in educational reform –called the *Praeceptor Germaniae* (the teacher of Germany).

#### C. Luther's co-reformer

1. Assisted Luther at the 1519 Leipzig debate with John Eck
2. Helped in the project to translate the Bible into German
3. Participated in the Marburg Colloquy in 1529
4. While Luther was outlawed by the edict of the Holy Roman Emperor, Melanchthon represented Luther at the Diet of Augsburg.

#### D. Melanchthon's Contributions as a Reformer

1. Personality – irenic, great concern to maintain the unity of the church.  
Luther: "Philip also stabs, but only with awls and needles. Such stabs are hard to heal, and they hurt. I, on the other hand, stab with boar spears."  
Objected to Luther's strong words in the Smalcald Articles, especially regarding the papacy, out of fear that any efforts at agreement with Rome would be undermined. He did sign the Smalcald Articles, but after his signature wrote, "But regarding the pope, I hold that, if he would allow the Gospel, we could agree to his superiority over the bishops, which he has otherwise taken by human right. This would be for the sake of peace and the general unity of those Christians who are also under him and may be under him hereafter."
2. Teaching ability – could take Luther's theology and give it precise expositions and definitions for the sake of clarity. Strong desire for system and order in order to instruct people in God's Word. Luther: "I cannot combine conciseness and clearness as does Philip."
  - a. *Loci Communes* ("Common topics") of 1521. The first book of Lutheran dogmatics, studied by generations of Lutheran pastors.
    - i. Purpose: "There is benefit in having firm and clear testimonies regarding individual articles of Christian doctrine set forth in definite order, as if they were put on a table. Then when our minds are confused or in distress, certain clear statements can be kept in mind which will remove our anxieties, direct our minds, and strengthen and confirm them" (*Loci* 1559, 3).
    - ii. Basis: Scripture alone. Philosophy and reason have no place as a source of theology: "The first thing we must know is this, that to

seek the will of God without the Word of God or in opposition to it is utterly wrong, for God does not wish us to know Him, neither can we know Him, except through the Word which He has given us, as Scripture everywhere teaches.”

- iii. Thus, Melanchthon takes up the “chief topics of theology” which are taught in Scripture, providing the first Lutheran dogmatics:
  - Human Powers (especially free will), Sin, Law, the Gospel, Grace, Justification and Faith, The Distinction between the Old and New Testament and the Abrogation of the Law, Signs (the Sacraments), Love, Magistrates, Scandal
  - “Just as there are some subjects among these that are completely incomprehensible, so there are some that Christ wants every Christian to know most intimately....whoever is ignorant of the other topics—the power of sin, the Law, grace—I do not know how I can call him a Christian. For through these topics Christ is properly known...to know Christ is to know his benefits....This, finally, is Christian knowledge—to know what the Law demands, where to find the power to fulfill the Law, where to claim grace for sins, how to strengthen a wavering soul against the devil, the flesh, and the world, and how to console the afflicted conscience” (*Loci* 1521, 23-25).
- iv. This is also the first writing of the Lutheran approach to Scripture, because Melanchthon operates with these convictions about the source of our theology:
  - Scripture interprets Scripture
  - The intended meaning of Scripture is based on the grammar. This is the basis of any interpretation
  - Scripture is united in what it teaches, summarized under the distinction between Law and Gospel
  - Scripture is clear
  - Scripture alone is the source and norm of all Christian teaching and the power in the Christian’s life

b. *Commentary on Romans*

3. Lutheran Confessions

- a. Two fifths of the Book of Concord come from Melanchthon’s pen:
  - i. Augsburg Confession (1530)
  - ii. Apology of the Augsburg Confession (1531)
  - iii. Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope (1537)

In terms of space, Melanchthon’s writings take up more pages than Luther (the two Catechisms, Smalcald Articles). It is also worth noting that three of the Formula of Concord’s six authors (Martin Chemnitz, Nicholas Selnecker, and David Chytraeus) were devoted students of Melanchthon. This shows that Lutheran theology is not based upon one person (Luther), but the clear biblical teachings that are confessed by multiple persons, and we ourselves.

E. Issues: Free Will, Adiaphora, Lord’s Supper

Melanchthon considered the Augsburg Confession to be a private work that belonged to him, so he felt free to change it. In 1540, he produced an altered version, called the *Variata*. Though in some places things were further clarified, in others, the alterations obscure what was previously a clear confession, allowing multiple positions to be taken.

AC X [1530]: Our churches teach that the body and blood of Christ are truly present and distributed to those who eat the Lord's Supper. They reject those who teach otherwise.

AC X [1540]: Concerning the Supper of the Lord, they [our churches] teach that with the bread and wine the body and blood of Christ are offered to those who eat in the Lord's Supper.

## II. Johannes Bugenhagen (1485-1558) – Luther's pastor

### A. Early life

1. Born in Pomerania (modern Poland)
2. Attended University of Greifswald, rector of a Latin school, ordained a priest
3. Read Luther's earliest published writings (*Babylonian Captivity*).  
Corresponded with Luther, went to Wittenberg in 1521. Studied at the University there

### B. Third most important Wittenberg figure

1. Doctor of Theology at the University of Wittenberg, lectured on many books of the Bible. *Commentary on the Psalms*
2. Pastor of St. Mary's Church (1523-1558)
3. The first reformer to marry (1522)
4. Popularizer of the Reformation: had the gift of making difficult ideas clear and understandable for lay people.
5. Emphasis on good works as the fruit of faith – education and care for the poor

### C. Reformer of the North: took Luther's theology and brought it into the forms and structures of congregational life, not just in Saxony, but all over northern Europe. Put the Reformation into practice.

1. Church Orders for northern Germany and Scandinavia. The most widely traveled of all the Wittenberg reformers, Bugenhagen spent months travelling abroad to take the Reformation to northern lands (Braunschweig, Hamburg, Lübeck, Pomerania, Denmark, Holstein, Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, Hildesheim, from these places, the Reformation went to Iceland, Greenland, Norway)
  - a. Worship
  - b. Education
  - c. Care for the poor

### D. Bugenhagen and Luther

1. Luther's pastor – heard Luther's confessions, provided spiritual counsel during Luther's well-known bouts of *Anfechtungen*.
2. Luther considered him one of the most capable theologians he knew.

3. Ardent defender of Luther's theology – involved in the debates with the Sacramentarians.
4. Preached Luther's funeral sermon.

### III. Johannes Brenz (1499-1570) – The Reformer of the South

#### A. Early life

1. Father was a baker
2. Born near Stuttgart
3. Studied at the University of Heidelberg

#### B. Introduction to Luther

1. Attended the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518 which began a lifelong relationship with Luther
2. Motivated by Luther's teaching to study Scripture rather than philosophy

#### C. As a Reformer – combined theological acumen with practical church leadership

1. Accepted a call to the parish of Schwäbisch-Hall when he realized he would have to undergo a heresy trial if he remained in Heidelberg
2. Introduced the Reformation gradually rather than rashly
  - a. Quietly dropped the Feast of Corpus Christi in 1524
  - b. Transformed the monastery into a school
  - c. Introduced the purified Mass on Christmas, 1525
3. Firm supporter of Luther's theology of the Lord's Supper against the Reformed – Brenz deserves a large measure of credit for South Germany remaining Lutheran rather than Reformed.
4. Christian education
  - i. Produced a catechism one year before Luther's. After Luther's catechisms were adopted, Brenz's questions and answers were appended.
  - ii. Thorough sermons that explained the text of Scripture at a deep level
  - iii. Extensive commentaries on the Bible.
  - iv. Most pastors in this region of Germany learned the Scriptures from Brenz's writings.
5. Authored numerous Church Orders in southern Germany
6. Present at all major events: Marburg Colloquy, Augsburg, even Trent!