

DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.26565/2220-7929-2023-63-01>

**Serhiy Karikov**

Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor

National University of Civil Defense of Ukraine

94 Chernyshevska Str., 61023, Kharkiv, Ukraine

Email: karikov.nuczu@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5121-4103>

**JOHANNES BUGENHAGEN'S ACTIVITIES IN THE 1530S TO 1550S:  
THE UNITY OF THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF LUTHERAN  
CONFESSIONALIZATION**

*The article discusses the activities of the outstanding Lutheran reformer Johannes Bugenhagen in the 1530–1550s. The main directions of Bugenhagen’s pursuits in the ecclesiastical, theological, political, and organizational spheres are analyzed. It is shown that Bugenhagen played a key role in the drafting and approval of a number of evangelical church ordinances. It is noted that the model of the church charter developed by Bugenhagen was widely adopted in a number of evangelical territories in Germany and abroad. It is argued that Bugenhagen’s reform of church law along Reformation principles was associated with changes in other branches of law. Bugenhagen’s approaches to theological problems were determined by the desire to affirm the ideas of Lutheranism in all aspects of church life. It is emphasized that after the Schmalkalden War in 1546-1547 Bugenhagen remained one of the leaders of the evangelical group and continued his reform work in churches and the University of Wittenberg. In the 1550s, he actively collaborated with representatives of the “second generation” of Lutheran supporters, as shown in his correspondence. The author concludes that Bugenhagen achieved considerable success in many spheres, combining theory and practice in dealing with the most important theological, political, and organizational problems. The reformer’s principal achievements were the production of a number of evangelical charters, further development of the Lutheran dogma, and participation in the educational reform. His work strengthened Wittenberg’s connections with*

*other centers of the evangelical movement and was a great contribution to the spread of Lutheran confessionalization in Germany and other European countries.*

**Key words:** Johannes Bugenhagen, Reformation, Lutheran confessionalization, Wittenberg, evangelism, church ordinance, theology.

The work of Johannes Bugenhagen (1485-1558) represents an important page in the history of the Reformation and Lutheran confessionalization. For over thirty years, Bugenhagen lived and worked in Wittenberg, the main center of the evangelical movement in Germany. He became one of the leading associates of Martin Luther and gained wide popularity in other German territories.

Meanwhile, in the historiography of the Reformation, Johannes Bugenhagen traditionally receives less attention than such figures as Luther and Philip Melanchthon. Despite the appearance of a number of biographical studies (Zietz 1834; Vogt 1867; Hering 1888; Schwarz Lausten 2011; Ruccius 2018) and works that deal with specific aspects of the reformer's life (Leder 2002; Lorentzen 2011), clarifying the contribution of *Doctor Pomeranus* (as he was called by Luther) to confessional development in Germany remains a pressing task. This is due to both the scale of Bugenhagen's activities and their significance for the Reformation.

Our article will not attempt to exhaustively analyze the entirety of Johannes Bugenhagen's contribution to the spread of the Reformation, because it would be impossible to explore all aspects of his long, complex, and diverse labors aimed at creating and strengthening the evangelical dogma in one investigation. The purpose of the article is to determine the most important areas of Bugenhagen's activities in the era of Lutheran confessionalization. Special attention will be paid to the period of the 1530s to 1550s, when the foundation of the evangelical church organization was laid in various German territories, with the direct participation of Bugenhagen.

In our opinion, the milestone that marked the start of Johannes Bugenhagen's participation in the evangelical movement on a pan-German scale was his work in Braunschweig (1528), Hamburg (1529), and Lübeck (1531). The implementation of the Reformation in these cities was inseparable from Bugenhagen's work in producing evangelical church ordinances, which became the basis for a number of similar documents going forward.

As noted by H. Lück, during the Reformation era, after the burning of the papal bull in 1520 by Luther as a symbol of the break with the previous canonical norms, the question remained open as to what should replace the annulled right of the Catholic Church. The development of new legal norms in the spirit of the reformed identity took place gradually, in response to the urgent need to resolve specific situations (Lück 2017, 33).

Under these circumstances, Johannes Bugenhagen acted simultaneously as a creator and systematizer of Reformation law (Lück 2011, 177). Thanks to the work of Bugenhagen as organizer, the ecclesiastical legislation of the evangelical regions assumed clear forms. Revising medieval canon law, the Wittenberg reformer filled old structural elements of church ordinances with new ideological content (Sprengher-Ruppenthal 1989, 400). The first steps along this path were the activities of the "Pomeranian Doctor" in the cities of Northern Germany.

The Braunschweig, Hamburg, and Lübeck church ordinances connected the resolution of numerous practical issues in the activities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the foundation of which was only being laid at that time, with the substantiation of the essence and key principles of the new dogma, such as confirmation of the independence of the Lutheran church organization from Rome and proclamation of the significance of the Sacraments of Baptism and Communion and the leading role of preaching in evangelical worship. In addition, in the Braunschweig, Hamburg, and Lübeck church ordinances, Bugenhagen put forward ideas for transforming the charity system and developing Luther's idea of "general funds" based on contributions from citizens, revised the curriculum of municipal schools, and confirmed the leading role of territorial authorities in ecclesiastical transformation.

These principles were decisive for further confessional evolution in the Evangelical territories of Germany. Thanks to this, the church ordinances written by Bugenhagen and his followers began to play a leading role in the transformation of church organization in the era of the Reformation and Lutheran confessionalization. Evangelical church ordinances, drafted by theologians or jurists and approved by heads of states and cities, acquired the status of laws in which the central matters of church life were harmonized with the principles of the Lutheran confession (Lück 2017, 34–35). At the same time, these documents reflected various issues of not only ecclesiastical, but also imperial, land, urban, and natural law, forming a set of norms for the legal practice of the Reformation era (Lück 2011, 195). As a result, the evangelical church ordinances went beyond the confines of church legislation proper, covering a wide range of problems in German social life.

It is important to note that each church ordinance written by Johannes Bugenhagen was an original and independent work, not a copy of previous similar documents. The Pomeranian (1534/1535), Schleswig-Holstein (1542), Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel (1543), and Hildesheim (1544) evangelical church ordinances reflected the specifics of historical development in general and the Reformation in particular in these territories. In some cases, they were adopted because the territorial rulers took the side of the Reformation (Pomerania, Schleswig-Holstein); in others, they came into force after opponents of the evangelical movement were removed from power (Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, Hildesheim). Accordingly, in some church ordinances emphasis was

placed on the affirmation of the principles of evangelical dogma and worship, and in others – on eliminating the remnants of Catholic influence from the practice of church life. Johannes Bugenhagen, who was well acquainted with the ideological heritage of Rome and directly organized the church community of Wittenberg, was successful in both directions of reform work.

In our view, the role of Johannes Bugenhagen as an intermediary in the transfer of reform principles from the center to the regions, considered by R. Schmidt based on the specific example of the relationship between the Electorate of Saxony and the Dukedom of Pomerania, deserves an in-depth study (Schmidt 2007, 334). This is due both to the complexity and diversity of the directions of the Reformation and to the scale of the reformer's activity in evangelical regions. We believe that repeated appeals of German territories to Wittenberg as the leading center of the Reformation for help in implementing evangelical transformations are explained by the desire of adherents of the evangelical confession in various regions to adopt the current scheme of the Lutheran church organization. And it is natural that Johannes Bugenhagen, the first evangelical pastor of the Wittenberg community, made a key personal contribution to the spread of the principles of Lutheran confessionalization throughout Germany.

Researchers single out organizational work and the drafting of evangelical church ordinances as the main achievements of Johannes Bugenhagen as a reformer. His position was crucial in the establishment of evangelical structures across Germany (Hauschild 2005, 127). If Melanchthon received the honorary title of "Mentor of Germany" due to his active and versatile pedagogical work, then Bugenhagen deserves the title of "Pastor of Germany" as the greatest Lutheran theologian and missionary of the 16th century.

At the same time, it should be emphasized that the activities of the Wittenberg reformer extended far beyond the German lands, contributing to the establishment of the Reformation in Europe. In particular, the efforts of Johannes Bugenhagen contributed greatly to the spread of Lutheranism in Scandinavia and the Baltic regions (Ruccius 2018, 121).

The signal achievement of the Lutheran Reformation in Scandinavia was the evangelical transformation in Denmark, accomplished with the direct participation of Johannes Bugenhagen. The final report on Bugenhagen's reform activities in Denmark is his letter to the Saxon elector Johann Friedrich, written the day after his return to Wittenberg on July 5, 1539. The reformer, in particular, informed the elector about the events of the Reichstag in Odense, where a church ordinance translated into Danish from a Latin text written by Bugenhagen was solemnly sealed by the Danish king Christian III and the royal council (Vogt 1966, 195–197). This document became the basis for the further development of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, at the same time confirming the viability of the Wittenberg model of Lutheran confessionalization not only in Germany, but also in other European countries.

However, Bugenhagen's frequent trips outside Wittenberg did not mean that he was neglecting his daily duties in the main center of the Lutheran Reformation. Thus, he was a member of the editorial committee for the publication of a translation of the Bible into German, jokingly called the "Sanhedrin", which began to meet regularly in Luther's house from 1539. Johannes Bugenhagen played a leading role in the activities of the "Sanhedrin" due to his profound knowledge of Latin, which proved an essential resource for the group in working with the Latin versions of the Old and New Testaments. It was Bugenhagen who proposed to celebrate September 21 (St. Matthew's Day) as Bible Day, because the New Testament in German was first published on this day in 1522. In addition, in the Hamburg Church Rule, Bugenhagen proposed that October 31 be celebrated as Reformation Day (Ruccius 2018, 121). This was supposed to contribute to the establishment in the public mind of the understanding of the paramount role of the events in Wittenberg for the evangelical movement.

Johannes Bugenhagen, as Luther's closest friend and colleague, supported his position in the antinomian dispute with Johann Agricola in 1537–1540s regarding the correlation of the Old Testament law and the provisions of the Gospel in the sermon, which was evidenced by his signature under the final conclusion of the Wittenberg theologians. This approach reflected the desire of the "Pomeranian Doctor" to preserve and strengthen the unity of the evangelical forces. At the same time, Bugenhagen's active support for Luther's ideas did not mean blind admiration on his part for the leader of the Reformation. His personal ideas were so similar to those of Luther that in most cases both reformers considered issues from the same positions; in those cases when Bugenhagen came to different conclusions, he did not hesitate to express them (Ruccius 2018, 121).

After the death of Martin Luther in 1546, Johannes Bugenhagen endured many trials, both public and personal. In 1546-1547, he witnessed the bloody battles of the Schmalkaldic War, which ended in the defeat of the evangelical group and the entry of Catholic troops into Wittenberg. It is difficult to overestimate both the symbolic significance of these events, which seemed to the contemporaries to signal the collapse of all hopes of Reformation supporters, and the real threats that the Lutherans faced after the end of the Schmalkaldic War.

Adopted at the Reichstag on May 15, 1548, the Augsburg Interim (a temporary religious compromise) rejected the principles of the Evangelical dogma (in particular, the recognition of the truth of only two of the seven Sacraments – Baptism and Communion), and most elements of the Lutheran cult. Acquiring the status of an all-imperial law before the convening of a church council to resolve controversial theological issues, the Augsburg Interim, in fact, provided for a large-scale re-Catholicization of the Evangelical territories of Germany.

Johannes Bugenhagen had no illusions about the contents of the Augsburg Interim. His reaction to the first news of the Reichstag decree of 1548 was sharply negative: in communication

with other Wittenberg reformers, Bugenhagen noted that it was easier to choose exile or die than to accept the status quo. However, realizing his responsibility towards the community of believers and the entire Lutheran church, of which Bugenhagen was a minister, he made the decision to continue his pastoral activity (Kohnle 2011, 223–224).

Perceiving the provisions of the Augsburg Interim as a catastrophe for all Lutheranism, the reformer made active efforts to change the situation. Together with Melanchthon and a number of other Wittenberg theologians, Bugenhagen took part in the Interview at Altzell in November 1548, and then in the drawing up of the Leipzig Interim, a softened version of the Augsburg Interim, approved in 1549 as a temporary position for the churches of Saxony. The Leipzig Interim declared the preservation of the principles of the Evangelical doctrine, but at the same time recognized the restoration of Catholic ceremonies in the Electorate of Saxony (Hauschild 2005, 152). The Wittenberg theologians, in working out the Leipzig Interim, strove to avoid the harshest formulations of the Augsburg Interim, but were unable to eliminate many of the fundamental differences between the ideas of Lutheranism and the principles of Catholicism.

In the conditions when the very existence of Lutheranism in the German territories was under threat, Johannes Bugenhagen, remaining one of the ideological leaders of the evangelical group, spoke from a position of moderation, in contrast to the irreconcilable opponents of Catholicism (Mathias Flacius, Nikolaus von Amsdorf). In his notes on the events of the Schmalkaldic War, he wrote of the need to preserve the evangelical worship, churches, and higher education in Wittenberg, even in the changed political environment (Hasse 2011, 216–217).

Remaining in Wittenberg, Johannes Bugenhagen continued to teach at the university. In a letter to Christian III dated October 13, 1548, the reformer noted: "... We in our lands still study the dear Gospel in churches and schools, as before. Our high school is also, praise God, growing; we also ordained preachers for Hungary" (Vogt 1966, 430). Thus, despite persecution from the imperial authorities, evangelicals continued the struggle to preserve and spread the principles of the Reformation.

After the victory of the evangelical forces in the Princes' War of 1552, the possibility of a full-scale continuation of Lutheran confessionalization in Germany was revived. However, during the 1550s active work became increasingly difficult for Johannes Bugenhagen due to the gradual deterioration of his health, and the reformer virtually did not leave Wittenberg. Nevertheless, he dealt with the organizational issues of the daily life of the evangelical community, and also continued theological work.

In a letter to the Danish king Christian III dated April 30 to May 1, 1556, the reformer, referring to the decisions of the Augsburg Reichstag regarding the establishment of religious peace in the Holy Roman Empire, expresses thoughts about the need to further strengthen Lutheranism

based on the principles of the "Augsburg Confession". It is indicative that Bugenhagen lists "the papacy, the Turks and all heretics" among the opponents of Christian doctrine (Vogt 1966, 562). This proves that the reformer did not consider the provisions of the Augsburg Religious Peace of 1555 as a possible concession to the ideas of Catholicism – the creed of the Roman Church remained for him a distortion of the meaning of the true religion of the "Lord Jesus Christ".

It is noteworthy that in the 1550s Johannes Bugenhagen actively corresponded not only with Lutheran rulers (King Christian III, Duke Albrecht of Prussia, Duke Johann of Schleswig-Holstein, Prince Joachim of Anhalt), but also with representatives of the "second generation" of Lutheran adherents – Andreas Wolf (Vogt 1966, 538–541), David Hitrois (Vogt 1966, 548–549), Martin Chemnitz (Vogt 1966, 558–559), and Paul Eber (Vogt 1966, 573–574).

The "second generation" of German reformers included men who were educated in schools and universities reformed on the basis of the Lutheran creed during the 1520s to 1540s. On the one hand, thanks to this, their path to the recognition of evangelism was less controversial than that of the founders of the reform movement, since the support of the latter facilitated the acquisition of experience, assimilation of knowledge, and strengthening of convictions. On the other hand, representatives of the new generation of reformers had to make significant personal efforts to implement the key ideas of Lutheranism under the new historical conditions, when it was necessary not only to withstand pressure from adherents of Catholicism, but also to overcome serious differences between supporters of different versions of the Evangelical dogma (Karikov 2017, 211). In this situation, the reception by the younger generation of reformers of the principles of evangelism directly from its founders, including Johannes Bugenhagen, played a particularly important role, ensuring continuity in the spread of Lutheran confessionalization.

The treatise *Appeal to All Pastors and Preachers of the Gospel in the Electorate of Saxony* (1556) became a kind of ideological summation of all the reformation activities of Johannes Bugenhagen. The main idea of the work was the call to every Christian to recognize his sins and atone for them by faith in God's mercy. Considering Augustine's teaching about two kingdoms, earthly and heavenly, Bugenhagen noted that the struggle for the establishment of the principles of Christianity continued and should lead to the victory of the heavenly kingdom (Bugenhagen 1556, 4–5).

Thus, until the last years of his life, Johannes Bugenhagen continued active reformation work. Its versatility secures for the reformer a place among the outstanding founders of the evangelical church organization. Bugenhagen achieved significant success in multiple areas, combining theory and practice in addressing the most important theological, political, and organizational issues. The reformer's principal achievements were the production of a number of evangelical statutes, the further development of the Lutheran dogma, and participation in the

transformation of university education. The activities of Johannes Bugenhagen strengthened Wittenberg's ties with other centers of the evangelical movement, thus contributing to the spread of Lutheran confessionalization in Germany and beyond.

### Список джерел та літератури / Sources and literature

Bugenhagen, J. *Vermanung an alle Pastoren vnd Predicanten des Euangelij im Churfürstenthumb zu Sachssen*. Wittenberg, 1556.

Hasse, H.-P. Bugenhagen und der Schmalkaldische Krieg. In: I. Dingel, S. Rhein (Hg.) *Der späte Bugenhagen*. Leipzig, 2011, s. 197–217.

Hauschild, W.-D. *Lehrbuch der Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte*. Bd. 2. Gütersloh, 2005.

Hering, H. *Doctor Pomeranus, Johannes Bugenhagen. Ein Lebensbild aus der Zeit der Reformation*. Halle, 1888.

Karikov, S. A. Osnovni napriamy diialnosti «druhoho pokolinnia» liuteranskykh reformatoriv. *Virtus: Scientific Journal*, no. 17, 2017, s. 211–214. (In Ukrainian).

Каріков, С. А. Основні напрями діяльності «другого покоління» лютеранських реформаторів. *Virtus: Scientific Journal*, № 17, 2017, с. 211–214.

Kohnle, A. Johannes Bugenhagen und das Interim. In: I. Dingel, S. Rhein (Hg.) *Der späte Bugenhagen*. Leipzig, 2011, s. 219–227.

Leder, H.-G. *Johannes Bugenhagen Pomeranus – vom Reformator zum Reformer*. Frankfurt am Main, 2002.

Lorentzen, T. *Johannes Bugenhagen als Reformator der öffentlichen Fürsorge*. Tübingen, 2008.

Lück, H. 2011: “Recht” und “Gesetz” in den Kirchenordnungen Johanneses Bugenhagens. In: I. Dingel, S. Rhein (Hg.) *Der späte Bugenhagen*. Leipzig, 2011, s. 177–195.



Lück, H. Reformatsyia kak ympuls dlia kodyfykatsyy prava v Evrope v XVI v. In: *Relyhyia y ystoria: materyaly V Mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-praktycheskoi konferentsyy*. Mynsk, 2017, s. 32–39. (In Russian).

Люк, Х. Реформация как импульс для кодификации права в Европе в XVI в. В сб.: *Религия и история: материалы V Международной научно-практической конференции*. Минск, 2017, с. 32–39.

Ruccius, W. M. *John Bugenhagen Pomeranus. A Biographical Sketch*. Philadelphia, 2018.

Schmidt, R. Johannes Bugenhagen als Mittler in den politischen Eheverhandlungen zwischen Pommern und Sachsen 1535/36. Ergänzungen zum Bugenhagen-Briefwechsel. In: Schmidt R. *Das historische Pommern: Personen – Orte – Ereignisse*. Köln – Weimar – Wien, 2007, s. 334–353.

Schwarz Lausten, M. *Johannes Bugenhagen. Luthersk Reformator i Tyskland og Danmark*. København, 2011.

Sprengler-Ruppenthal, A. Bugenhagen und das kanonische Recht. *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte*, Bd. 106, 1989, s. 375–400.

Vogt, K. A. T. *Johannes Bugenhagen Pomeranus. Leben und ausgewählte Schriften*. Elberfeld, 1867.

Vogt, O. *Dr. Johannes Bugenhagens Briefwechsel*. Hildesheim, 1966.

Zietz, J. H. *Johannes Bugenhagen – zweiter Apostel des Nordens, nach seinen Lebensschicksalen und seiner Wirksamkeit für die Gestaltung der evangelischen Kirche: Ein biographischer Versuch*. Leipzig, 1834.

## **Сергій Каріков**

доктор історичних наук, професор

Національний університет цивільного захисту України

Вул. Чернишевська, 94, 61023, Харків, Україна

Email: karikov.nuczu@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5121-4103>

## ДІЯЛЬНІСТЬ ЙОГАННА БУГЕНХАГЕНА У ПЕРІОД 30–50-Х РР. XVI СТОРІЧЧЯ: ЄДНІСТЬ ТЕОРІЇ ТА ПРАКТИКИ ЛЮТЕРАНСЬКОЇ КОНФЕСІОНАЛІЗАЦІЇ

### Резюме

*У статті розглянуто діяльність видатного лютеранського реформатора Йоганна Бугенхагена (1485–1556) у період 30–50-х рр. XVI ст. Представлено основні підходи до діяльності Бугенхагена в історіографії XIX – початку XXI ст. Проаналізовано основні напрями активності Бугенхагена в церковній, теологічній, політичній, організаційній сферах. Показано, що Бугенхаген відіграв першорядну роль у створенні і затвердженні низки євангелічних церковних статутів. Зазначено, що схема церковного статуту, яку він розробив у Брауншвейгу, Гамбургу, Любеку, набула поширення на багатьох євангелічних територіях Німеччини та за її межами; зокрема, приділено увагу реформаторській діяльності Бугенхагена в Данії. Наголошено, що реформування Бугенхагеном церковного права на засадах Реформації було пов'язано зі змінами в інших сферах права. Підкреслено, що після Шмалькальденської війни 1546–1547 рр. Бугенхаген залишався одним з лідерів євангелічного угруповання і продовжував реформаторську діяльність у церквах та в університеті Віттенберга. У 50-х рр. XVI ст. він активно співпрацював із представниками «другого покоління» прибічників лютеранства Паулем Ебером, Мартіном Хемніцем, Андреасом Вольфом, Давидом Хітройсом, що відображено в листуванні Бугенхагена. Схарактеризовано підходи Бугенхагена до розв'язання теологічних проблем, що визначалися прагненням утвердити ідеї лютеранства в усіх аспектах церковного життя; зокрема, розглянуто творчість реформатора останніх років життя. Зроблено висновок, що Йоганн Бугенхаген досягнув значних успіхів у всіх напрямках діяльності, яка поєднувала теорію і практику розв'язання найважливіших теологічних, політичних, організаційних питань. Найбільш важливими досягненнями реформатора у період 30–50-х рр. XVI ст. були створення низки євангелічних статутів, розроблення догматики лютеранства, участь у перетвореннях університетського навчання. Його активна й багатогранна діяльність зміцнила зв'язки Віттенберга з іншими центрами євангелічного руху, тим самим сприяючи поширенню лютеранської конфесіоналізації в Німеччині і в інших країнах.*

**Ключові слова:** Йоганн Бугенхаген, Реформація, лютеранська конфесіоналізація, Віттенберг, євангелізм, церковний статут, теологія.

*Текст надійшов до редакції 30.10.2022.*

*The text was received by the editors 30.10.2022.*

*Текст затверджено до друку 25.11.2022.*

*The text is recommended for print 25.11.2022.*