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Timothy J. Wengert

# Defending Faith

Lutheran Responses to Andreas Osiander's  
Doctrine of Justification, 1551–1559

Mohr Siebeck

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I dedicate this book to all my students, who preach the blessed gospel.

Riverton, New Jersey, USA  
Eve of the Commemoration of St. Olaf,  
King of Norway, 2011

Timothy J. Wengert



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## Abbreviations

- ADB *Allgemeine deutsche Biographie*. 56 vols. Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1875–1912.
- BC *The Book of Concord*. Edited by Robert Kolb & Timothy J. Wengert. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000.
- Bds. Philip Melancthon. *Philippi Melancthonis epistolae, iudicia, consilia, testimonia aliorumque ad eum epistolae quae in corpore reformatorum desiderantur*. Edited by Heinrich Bindseil. Halle: Gustav Schwetschke, 1874.
- BSLK *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986.
- CA The Augsburg Confession
- CR Philip Melancthon. *Corpus Reformatorum: Philippi Melancthonis opera quae supersunt omnia*. Edited by Karl Bretschneider and Heinrich Bindseil. 28 vols. Halle: A. Schwetschke & Sons, 1834–1860.
- GA Andreas Osiander. *Gesamtausgabe*. 10 Vols. Edited by Gerhard Müller & Gottfried Seebaß. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1975–1997.
- HAB Herzog August Bibliothek
- Kaufmann, *Bibliographie* Thomas Kaufmann. *Das Ende der Reformation: Magdeburgs „Herrgotts Kanzlei“ (1548–1551/2)*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003. Appendix 1: „Bibliographie der zwischen 1548 und 1552 in Magdeburg erschienenen Drucke.“ Pp. 493–554.
- Koehn Horst Koehn, „Philip Melancthons Reden: Verzeichnis der im 16. Jahrhundert erschienenen Drucke.“ *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens* 25 (1984): 1277–1495.
- MBW Philip Melancthon. *Melancthons Briefwechsel: Kritische und kommentierte Gesamtausgabe: Regesten*. Edited by Heinz Scheible. 12+ vols. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1977–.
- MSA Philip Melancthon. *Melancthons Werke in Auswahl [Studienausgabe]*. Edited by Robert Stupperich. 7 vols. Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1951–1975.
- PG *Patrologiae cursus completus, series Graece*. Edited by Jacques Paul Migne. 161 vols. in 166. Paris, 1857–1866.
- PL *Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latina*. Edited by Jacques Paul Migne. 221 vols. Paris, 1844–1890.
- Seebaß Gottfried Seebaß, ed. *Bibliographia Osiandrica: Bibliographie der gedruckten Schriften Andreas Osianders d. Ä. (1496–1552)*. Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1971.
- Texte Philip Melancthon. *Melancthons Briefwechsel: Kritische und kommentierte Gesamtausgabe: Texte*, Edited by Heinz Scheible, et al. 11+ vols. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1991–.
- TRE *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*. Edited by Gerhard Krause & Gerhard Müller. 39 vols. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977–2000.

- VD 16 *Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienenen Drucke des 16. Jahrhunderts*. 24 vols. Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1969–2000.
- WA Martin Luther. *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe [Schriften]*. 65 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993.
- WA DB Martin Luther. *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Bibel*. 12 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1906–61.
- WA Br Martin Luther. *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Briefwechsel*. 18 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1930–1985.
- WA TR Martin Luther. *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Tischreden*. 6 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1912–21.
- WBIS *World Biographical Information System*, <http://db.saur.de/WBIS/biographicMicroficheDocument.jsf>. K. G. Saur Verlag.

## Introduction

“Iustificatio articulus stantis et cadentis Ecclesiae est.” Justification is the article on which the church stands or falls. Although Martin Luther never quite said it that way,<sup>1</sup> this phrase well summarizes the attitude of sixteenth-century Lutherans as they attempted to clarify and defend what Luther had confessed as the central message of the Bible. After all, in the preface to his 1535 commentary on Galatians, Luther did write about

the infinite and horrible profanation and abomination that has always raged in the Church of God and today does not cease to rage against this unique and solid rock, which we ourselves call the topic of justification. That is, how not through ourselves (and surely not through our works, which are less than ourselves) but through the assistance of another, through the only begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ, we are redeemed from sin, death and the devil and given eternal life.<sup>2</sup>

No wonder, then, that when an important Lutheran theologian, Andreas Osiander, expressed this doctrine using altogether different language and concepts than Lutherans were accustomed to hearing, a pitched battle arose over this article only five years after Luther’s death. The published record of that dispute is the subject of this monograph.

In 1972, Jörg Rainer Fligge published a typescript copy of his doctoral dissertation, *Herzog Albrecht von Preussen und der Osiandrismus*.<sup>3</sup> It has remained, until now, the only full-length study of the reactions to Andreas Osiander’s proposals for understanding the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith. As its title implies, however, Fligge’s approach focuses far more on the political intrigue at the Prussian court than simply on the reactions of Osiander’s opponents in Königsberg and the Empire. It overlooks much of the more complicated aspects of the theological debate. Moreover, Fligge’s remarkably thorough study took place before publication of some very important research tools, including VD 16, the edition of Osiander’s works (GA) and the ongoing work on Melancthon’s correspondence (MBW). It also came before the flood of scholarly discussion on confessionalization and also lacked a clear analysis of the specific role the print-

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<sup>1</sup> See, however, the statement in the Smalcald Articles, II.i.5: “von diesem Artikel kann man nichts weichen oder nachgeben, es falle Himmel und Erden oder was nicht bleiben will.”

<sup>2</sup> WA 40/1: 33, 14–20.

<sup>3</sup> Jörg Rainer Fligge, *Herzog Albrecht von Preussen und der Osiandrismus: 1522–1568* (Bonn: Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität, 1972).

ing press played in forming theological public opinion on this issue. Thus, forty years later, it is time to examine once again how Lutherans of the mid-sixteenth century fought over this “unique rock,” justification.

This study focuses on the flurry of published attacks on Andreas Osiander and his supporters, which saw the light of day between 1551 and 1559. Its interest revolves around the theological debates over the meaning of justification, redemption, faith and Christology and the ways in which theologians chose to promulgate and defend their positions to the theological public emerging among Evangelicals during this time.<sup>4</sup>

This monograph began as a footnote to a larger work on Philip Melanchthon – an attempt to understand Melanchthon’s repeated mention of Osiander in his correspondence with Albrecht Hardenberg during the early 1550s. Discovering more and more responses to Osiander, it seemed that within the bounds of this one dispute scholars would have a perfect window into the way Evangelical theologians built a remarkable consensus among themselves on this all-important doctrine. Although one may also identify political and social motivations among the individual writers, the sheer number and variety of responses and their surprising respect for one another pointed to the oft-neglected theological side of confessionalization. How did Evangelical theologians from various principalities within and outside the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation come to agree with each other in the absence of direct, unified political control? How important were their arguments for each other?

This study also arose from a second, in this case, theological motivation. In the last twenty-five years, a so-called “new” school of Luther research arose, centered in Finland involving Tuomo Mannermaa and his students, which, in combination with the “new” Pauline studies,<sup>5</sup> has attempted to revise or even attack standard Lutheran understandings of justification.<sup>6</sup> In conversations with the Finnish Orthodox Church, which like Eastern Orthodoxy in general has no specific doctrine of justification, Mannermaa proposed that a point of contact existed between Luther and the Orthodox on the question of *theosis* (divinization) and that Luther’s position on justification could best be understood in

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout this study, we will favor using the word “evangelical” (capitalized) to designate what one otherwise might (anachronistically) call Lutherans.

<sup>5</sup> For a trenchant analysis of the “new” Pauline school, see Erik Heen, “A Lutheran Response to the New Perspective on Paul,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 24 (2010): 263–91. Most of their arguments echo similar positions articulated by St. Jerome and Erasmus of Rotterdam (and criticized by Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon).

<sup>6</sup> In English, see Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). A fine criticism in English comes from Carl Trueman, “Is the Finnish Line a New Beginning? A Critical Assessment of Reading of Luther Offered by the Helsinki Circle,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003): 231–44. In relation to Melanchthon, see Anna Briskina, “An Orthodox View of Finnish Luther Research,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 22 (2008): 16–39.



these terms. Alongside this argument ran a sharp criticism of nineteenth- and twentieth-century German Lutheran theology with its rejection of essentialism and its purported reliance on what came to be existentialism to interpret Luther – a reliance, it was claimed, that blinded many scholars to the ontological underpinnings of Luther's thought. Although critics have pointed out certain parallels between the Finnish position and Osiander's insistence upon the indwelling of Christ's divine nature as the source of Christian righteousness, no one has fully examined Osiander's opponents to explore how their criticisms of him might shed light on the current debate.

Indeed, there is reason to suspect that Karl Holl's thesis on Luther's doctrine of justification (that Luther discovered a sanative doctrine only to have it usurped by Philip Melancthon's forensic doctrine)<sup>7</sup> not only influenced the Finnish approach but has also continued to make it nearly impossible to explain the overwhelming rejection of Osiander in favor of forensic justification by not just Melancthon and his closest disciples but nearly all Evangelical theologians of the 1550s. Indeed, Holl's hypothesis played a central role in the description of Andreas Osiander's theology by one of Holl's most famous students, Emanuel Hirsch.<sup>8</sup> Remnants of Hirsch's conclusions continue to influence later work, especially Martin Stupperich's *Osiander in Preussen*, despite his best efforts to distance himself from them.<sup>9</sup>

By insisting on the centrality of the equivalent of *theosis* in Luther's thought, the Finnish school has constructed a curious historical conundrum. How can one properly construe Luther's influence in the sixteenth century, given the rejection of Osiander's reading of Luther by an overwhelming majority of his contemporaries in favor of a forensic understanding of justification? How can one argue that Luther was such a brilliant teacher if nearly all of his closest students completely misunderstood his teaching on justification by faith and if the only person to understand his position never sat in his classroom and was universally vilified by the very students who did? Moreover, the construction of an imagined nineteenth- and twentieth-century German cabal of philosophers and theologians misreading Luther also fails under careful scrutiny – especially when many of the current arguments over Luther's view of justification go back not simply to the nineteenth century but to the sixteenth. The point of this current study, then, is not so much to criticize specifics of the Finnish school as it is to demonstrate that when it came to justification by faith, *all* of the important Evangelical theologians of the 1550s rejected Osiander's position in favor of forensic justification in one

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<sup>7</sup> Karl Holl, "Die Rechtfertigungslehre in Luthers Vorlesung über den Römerbrief mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Frage der Heilsgewißheit," in: Karl Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 1: *Luther* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1932), 111–54.

<sup>8</sup> Emanuel Hirsch, *Die Theologie des Andreas Osiander und ihre geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1919).

<sup>9</sup> Martin Stupperich, *Osiander in Preussen: 1549–1552* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1973), 3–12.

form or another. If Luther employed *theosis* in his theology (itself a questionable thesis), then at least it was not in relation to the doctrine of justification as nearly all of his theological heirs understood it.

The present work focuses in large part on *published* reactions to Osiander's claims regarding justification. It concentrates on the public event caused by the printing press. Thus, this study will not examine Osiander's theology *per se*, in part because Hirsch and Stupperich, among others, have already accomplished that task. Indeed, despite certain weaknesses in both works, one can glean from them a fairly consistent picture of Osiander's theology. In this work, only chapter 1, which introduces the dispute, and chapter 6, which compares Osiander's use of Luther to his opponents', will examine Osiander's texts in detail. Even in those chapters, however, the purpose of investigating Osiander is simply to elucidate his opponents' points of view.

The Osiandrian controversy is unique in several ways. First, participants debated what they universally regarded as the central doctrine of the church. Thus, neither side ever claimed that the debate was superfluous, as had happened in the struggle over adiaphora, where Philip Melancthon and his allies consistently claimed that their opponents' attacks were over unimportant matters. Second, the other debates that broke out in the decade after Luther's death did not involve such a wide variety of theologians from so many different traditions within the Evangelical camp – all lining up on the same side. Third, bitter enemies in other controversies nevertheless defended one another and united in their rejection of Osiander and his followers. Thus, we discover that Matthias Flacius and Philip Melancthon, bitter enemies in the debate over adiaphora, stood on the same side in this dispute. Indeed, the traditional (and sometimes questionable) categories of gnesio-Lutheran (genuine Lutherans) and Philippist (followers of Melancthon) do not obtain in this dispute. On one side, we find Andreas Osiander and a handful of epigones; on the other, nearly all Evangelical theologians, who not only disagreed with Osiander but also wrote about it in no uncertain terms. Even the one slight exception to this united front, Johannes Brenz of Württemberg, who tried in vain to mediate the dispute and called it a war of words, made it clear that he did not agree with Osiander's language or with his interpretation of St. Paul's epistle to the Romans.

The very breadth of the theological consensus over against Osiander allows the intellectual historian opportunity to examine the process of confessionalization from a rigorously theological point of view while at the same time developing an approach to the topic that honors the very specificity of the theological debate and thus may be applicable to other disputes of the period as well.<sup>10</sup> Historians

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<sup>10</sup> One historian who has pioneered such an approach is Thomas Kaufmann, especially most recently in his *Konfession und Kultur: Lutherischer Protestantismus in der zweiten Hälfte des Reformationsjahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006) but also his *Universität und*

can easily reduce the process of confessionalization to sweeping movements across history's stage: the consolidation of princely power; the development of imperial pretensions; the rationalization of church life; the (over-)systematization of theology. In one way, however, these global theories may obscure individual events upon which such historical developments were built.<sup>11</sup>

As important as the grander social and political aspects of confessionalization are, theological agreement in particulars still represented the *conditio sine qua non* for all participants in the process. If doctrine had played little or no role in building a confessional church, then it would be better for historians not to employ the term "confession" at all, even when such words as *Konfession* or *Konfessionalisierung* simply could be translated as "denomination" and "denominalization."<sup>12</sup> Whatever modern sensibilities may dictate regarding theology, it mattered in sixteenth-century central Europe in very concrete ways. And however much an intellectual elite shaped that theology, what they taught to other theologians they also preached from their pulpits, summarized in their catechisms and *corpora doctrinae*, and, finally, subscribed to in their confessions. Thus, from the very beginning a public side to Evangelical theology developed that involved all manner of folks. Consensus then formed through the common discussion of theology and acknowledgment of agreement and not simply through political compulsion (these theologians came from different territorial churches controlled by different, independent princes).

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*lutherische Konfessionalisierung* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1997), which concentrates on the University of Rostock. See also the collection of essays, edited by Irene Dingel and Günther Wartenberg, *Politik und Bekenntnis: Die Reaktionen auf das Interim von 1548* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> See Heinz Schilling, *Konfessionskonflikt und Staatsbildung: Eine Fallstudie über das Verhältnis von religiösem und sozialem Wandel in der Frühneuzeit am Beispiel der Grafschaft Lippe* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1981), especially 15–23. See also Robert Kolb, *Luther's Heirs Define His Legacy: Studies on Lutheran Confessionalization* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), ix, where he quotes Schilling's definition of confessionalization in Heinz Schilling, "Die Konfessionalisierung im Reich, Religiöser und gesellschaftlicher Wandel in Deutschland zwischen 1555 und 1620," *Historische Zeitschrift* 246 (1988): 1–45, especially 6 and 30: "a fundamental process in society, which ploughed up the public and private life of Europe in thoroughgoing fashion." Kolb goes on to explain that this process involved not only ecclesial and theological aspects but also "a myriad of political, social, economic, and cultural factors." Bodo Nischan, *Prince, People, and Confession: The Second Reformation in Brandenburg* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 2, acknowledges the work of Schilling and Ernst Walter Zeeden and combines their words in this definition of *Konfessionsbildung*: "the mental and organizational consolidation of the diverging Christian confessions after the breakdown of religious unity into more or less stable denominations with their own doctrines, constitutions, and lifestyles," thus designating "the fragmentation of the unitary Christendom (*Christianitas Latina*) of the Middle Ages into at least three confessional churches – Lutheran, Calvinistic or 'Reformed', and post-Tridentine Roman Catholic."

<sup>12</sup> Because German has two words for "confession" (*Bekenntnis* and *Konfession*), it may be easier for German-speaking researchers to remove the confessing moment from *Konfession*.

First and foremost, there need be no search for heroes and villains in this story. It is tempting (as some have done) to reduce the controversy to a battle between Philip Melanchthon and Osiander or Joachim Mörlin (his main opponent in Prussia) and Osiander or, perhaps, Matthias Flacius and Osiander. Yet such a narrow focus would eliminate many important contributors to this debate, including theologians from Saxony, Brandenburg, Pomerania and Nuremberg, to name just a few, all of whom wrote their own refutations of Osiander's work from their own points of view. This is not to say that Melanchthon, Brenz, Flacius and Mörlin were not crucial participants and opinion shapers in this dispute, as if their contemporaries did not listen carefully to their arguments and borrow from them for their own work. Unless the full scope of Evangelical reactions to Osiander comes under balanced scrutiny, however, analysis of theological consensus building becomes lopsided. In this study, the eighth chapter's bibliographic essay provides a crucial chronological rundown of all published attacks against Osiander, and chapter 3 outlines the basic theological points made by these authors.<sup>13</sup> Chapters one and two examine the very earliest reactions from what were often lesser-known authors.

Equally important, however, the dispute with Osiander quickly became a struggle over authority – the authority of Scripture, of Luther, of the Wittenberg doctorate and of the judgments of individual churches. Thus, there was, in particular, one “hero,” Martin Luther, whose authority became a major point of debate throughout the controversy. As will become clear in chapter 6, the struggle over Luther's role in this conflict allowed participants to formulate and debate a proper hermeneutic for reading his works.<sup>14</sup> Concern for theological authority, far from being a given consistently trumped by political authority, marks another important theological facet of confessionalization.

At the same time, two titans of mid-century Evangelical church life, Philip Melanchthon and Johannes Brenz, clashed both over the nature of the conflict (Brenz insisted that it was more a war of words than of substance) and over the best way of handling the potential rupture in Evangelical ranks (with Brenz looking for compromise and Melanchthon insisting upon convergence). Yet their published responses reveal few differences in approach and only modest attempts to address each other's divergent views, as we will see in chapter 5. Thus, their delicate attempts to spare one another and avoid direct confrontation, what I

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<sup>13</sup> In his much earlier work on German imperial cities, Bernd Moeller pleaded for more careful examination of the way the Reformation developed *in concreto* rather than simply in the mind of Luther. See his *Imperial Cities and the Reformation: Three Essays*, ed. and trans. By H. C. Erik Midelfort and Mark U. Edwards, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1982), especially 3–16.

<sup>14</sup> See Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther as Prophet, Teacher, and Hero: Images of the Reformer, 1520–1620* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), especially 103–20, in relation to later disputes over the Lord's Supper.

have anachronistically labeled differentiated consensus, form an important aspect of building lasting agreement in the service of confessionalization.

The specific chronological contours of the published record in this dispute (see especially chapters one, two and eight) reveal that the publication event was a public event. Some of the opinions of churches in this affair were first delivered to Duke Albrecht of Prussia in line with his request for the churches' judgments on Osiander's understanding of justification, especially as expressed in his *Confession* of 1551. Some writers, like Melanchthon, only spoke indirectly to the *Confession* and tried to maintain some distance in their critique. Others, like Justus Menius and Nicholas von Amsdorf, wrote both official judgments and published their own attacks. Still others, like Mörlin, had trouble publishing anything at all, so that a document finished in December 1551 was not published until May of the following year. Some churches only published their responses when it became clear that Osiander refused to stop attacking his opponents. The mediating position of one church, Württemberg, found its way into print only at the hands of others (Melanchthon, Flacius and Duke Albrecht's chief advisor Andreas Aurifaber). Matthias Flacius, by contrast, not only published his "official" refutation of Osiander's work immediately, but he also kept up a continuous barrage of attacks – first on Osiander and then, after the latter's sudden death, on his followers.<sup>15</sup>

Three theologians produced far more publications in this debate than the others: Matthias Flacius, Joachim Mörlin, and Philip Melanchthon. Philip Melanchthon's contributions took the form of speeches (three), open letters (two) and biblical commentary among other genres. Because the recently published work of Anna Briskina comparing Osiander and Melanchthon completely omitted the initial speech of 1551 (on the meaning of *iustitia* in Clement of Alexandria) and the final commentary (on Romans, published in 1556), separate space is devoted here to exploring Melanchthon's unique contribution to this dispute (chapter 7) and especially his outspoken, decisive attack on the Osiandrists in Nuremberg (chapter 5, in contrast to Brenz). By analyzing Melanchthon's contributions, we discover another theological aspect of confessionalization: the ways in which university and church life – as reflected here in speeches, commentary, letters and official hearings – shaped the formation of an ecclesial identity and theological consciousness.

In Mörlin's case, the bulk of publications came after he had been expelled from Prussia in 1553 and targeted not only Osiander, who died in 1552, but also Duke Albrecht's advisors and Mörlin's direct successor in office in Königsberg, Matthias Vogel. Flacius, however, published more responses to Osiander and

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<sup>15</sup> This was in contrast to a theologian like Justus Jonas, a signer of the *Censurae*, to be sure, but whose attack on Osiander was first published in the nineteenth century. See Gustav Kawerau, ed., *Der Briefwechsel des Justus Jonas*, 2 vols. (Reprint: Hildesheim: Olms, 1964), 2: 309–19.

his followers than any other single theologian. The fact that Flacius worked for Magdeburg's printers explains in part why he produced so many tracts, each one aimed at a particular exegetical or theological or, after Osiander's death, ecclesial issue.<sup>16</sup> One even defended Melancthon against Osiander's attack. All told, Mörlin and Flacius, along with Nicholas Gallus, comprised the Osiandrists' most determined and prolific attackers. Yet their output also defined what might be called a particularly confessional response to the controversy (see chapter 4). That is, going public through publication marked one way to continue to confess the faith against all odds.<sup>17</sup>

This "confessional" side to the dispute meant that going public also had a theological moment to it. Luther's connection between the Augsburg Confession of 1530 and the act of confessing the faith – demonstrated both in his early use of Psalm 119:46 to describe what happened there (a verse that later came to grace Latin versions of the text) and in his sermon at Elector John's funeral in 1532 (where he contrasted John's *real* death confessing in Augsburg to his *Kindersterben* two years later) – became for these genuine Lutherans a constant *modus operandi*.<sup>18</sup> In the face of Osiander's new heresy, one was once again required to confess the true faith. Thus, at least for these theologians (and doubtless for countless others), confessionalization entailed the act of confessing the faith in continuity with earlier confessors. Thus, especially for Mörlin, Flacius and Gallus, publications against Osiander denoted going public with the gospel itself and refuting dangerous errors – "I will also speak of your decrees before kings, and shall not be put to shame" (Psalm 119:46).

This longing to confess the faith, which clearly involved not only these three gnesio-Lutherans but also many of the other participants in this theological drama, lies at the heart of confessionalization and its intimate connection to publication. Indeed, whatever the role of the printing press in spreading Martin Luther's thought, this study demonstrates that without the printing press any process of confessionalization is unimaginable. The need to "go public" with one's theological arguments was not a superfluous part of a political or ecclesial process or an example of Lutheran theologians behaving badly. Instead, it stood at the very heart of the matter. The lively public debate that ensued around Andreas Osiander and his followers marked clearly how confessional consensus, so necessary for developing united churches, came about. Here readers of these tracts could recognize, in the very act of reading, comrades in the faith and thereby

<sup>16</sup> See Thomas Kaufmann, *Das Ende der Reformation: Magdeburgs "Herrgotts Kanzlei" (1548–1551/2)* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> See Robert Kolb, *Confessing the Faith: Reformers Define the Church, 1530–1580* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1991), 63–98.

<sup>18</sup> WA Br 5: 442, 14–18 (letter to Conrad Cordatus, dated 6 July 1530); WA 30/2: 398, 15 f. & 31 f. and 399, 1 f. & 15 f. (open letter to Cardinal Albrecht of Mainz, dated 6 July 1530. For the sermon, see WA 36: 246, 8–10 & 28–31; 247, 1 & 11 f.

develop common approaches to Biblical texts, to Martin Luther's authority, and to scholarly training.

Yet the public, published nature of the theological side to confessionalization involved, especially for Lutherans, only one aspect of the process, namely definition of and agreement in right doctrine. With the exception of Osiander and his supporters, Lutherans in this dispute (and in others like it) also always asked what the effect of such doctrine would be.<sup>19</sup> As Philip Melanchthon himself often pointed out in his commentaries on Romans, after Paul defined justification in chapters three and four of Romans, he then immediately turned to the question of its effect in Romans 5:1 ("Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God"). Not only Melanchthon and his immediate students but also many others in this dispute insisted that the correctness of a doctrine had to be measured not simply by its faithfulness to Scripture but by its ability to provide comfort to distraught, terrified consciences.

This vital tie between meaning and effect (i.e., justification and consolation) delineated an important aspect in almost all of the attacks on Osiander – an approach that Osiander himself did not use in this dispute. But it also revealed another motivation for publishing their refutations. When theologians, especially people like Joachim Mörlin, the banished pastor of Königsberg, wrote against Osiander, they always included in their line of argument how comforting the forensic understanding of justification really was. At the same time, they were providing that very comfort, so they thought, in their writings to people robbed of it by Osiander's teaching. To be pronounced righteous by another on behalf of God is itself a public event, an act of saying aloud to the sinner the divine judgment of forgiveness. When this very public act comes under attack, the only viable defense is to go public – early and often – against any view bent on silencing the very gospel (and ipso facto its comfort) that stood at the center of all Evangelical church life and theology.

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<sup>19</sup> The same issue arose over the doctrine of predestination and the Lord's Supper, as the Formula of Concord made clear.

## Chapter 1

### Why Some Pastors Should Not Become Professors: The Origins of the Osiandrian Controversy

This study focuses not so much on the thought of Andreas Osiander as on the reactions to and condemnations of it. For the better part of the 1550s, Evangelical theologians of all sorts throughout the Holy Roman Empire refuted and condemned Osiander and his followers. Despite Osiander's claims to the contrary, this response was not the carefully orchestrated plot of a single theologian (Philip Melancthon) or the mindless following by epigones of that same *Praeceptor Germaniae*. Instead, all kinds of theologians, some of whom otherwise were busy writing tracts against one another, arose en masse to denounce Osiander and his handful of followers, so that by 1560 (or certainly by 1567) there were few if any supporters left anywhere in the Evangelical pulpits or lecture halls of central Europe.

We will deal with these massive outpourings against Osiander throughout this book. This chapter, however, investigates how exactly the publishing war began and how it was Osiander who brought this outpouring of resentment and censure upon himself by his own eagerness to defeat his enemies (in Königsberg, Wittenberg and Nuremberg) in print. This eagerness fanned the flames of his opponents' antipathy toward him and led step by step to the conflagration that followed. Thus, it was not simply what Osiander taught and wrote but how (and how often) he taught, wrote *and published* it that brought things to the boiling point. Add to that Duke Albrecht of Prussia's request to the Empire's Evangelical princes for their theologians to respond to Osiander's *Confession* from October 1551 and the duke's inability to get Osiander to refrain from attacking his enemies, and the conditions were ripe for a massive literary explosion.

#### A. Mr. Osiander Goes to Königsberg

On 24 October 1550, Andreas Osiander, the "primarius" professor of theology (as he often referred to himself) at the recently founded University of Königsberg, presented and defended before a packed house eighty-one theses on justification by faith. Justification, he argued, must be viewed as a making alive by divine indwelling and not as a forensic declaration of forgiveness. It consisted of two parts,



forgiveness and reconciliation. Skipping over forgiveness (which Christ had won on the cross 1500 years earlier), Osiander concentrated on reconciliation, which meant for him union with Christ's righteous, divine nature. Without such a view of justification, he argued, Zwingli's teaching on the Lord's Supper was unavoidable. Forgiveness alone did not adequately describe justification, which had to include the indwelling of Christ's divine nature. Only this divine righteousness, understood as effecting righteousness in us, could properly define justification.<sup>1</sup>

Osiander was now a year into his position as university professor in Königsberg after having been driven out of his pastorate in Nuremberg because of the Evangelical defeat in the Smalcald War and the resultant harsh measures passed at the Imperial Diet in Augsburg in 1547–1548. In part, he intended these theses as a sharp correction of the theology of Philip Melanchthon and his pupils – and for several good reasons. Osiander was completely surrounded by theologians trained in Wittenberg. Not only had Joachim Mörlin and Peter Hegemon, pastors in Königsberg, received doctorates of theology under Luther's presidency there, but many other professors, including Georg Sabinus (Melanchthon's son-in-law), Michael Isindor (who had received his Wittenberg degree in theology on 8 November 1548 by defending theses),<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Staphylus (M. A., 1541), Matthias Lauterwald (who as late as 19 February 1549 was involved in Wittenberg's academic exercises)<sup>3</sup> and Martin Chemnitz, also studied there. Georg von Venediger, another opponent of Osiander, received his doctorate in theology in Wittenberg on 2 October 1550.<sup>4</sup> Already when Osiander held his earlier, inaugural disputation on law and gospel in 1549, some of these Wittenbergers had raised objections.

Osiander had another motivation for setting his sights on Wittenberg theologians. As had Melanchthon, von Amsdorf and a host of others, in 1548 Osiander joined the chorus of attacks against the Augsburg Interim, that decree of the Imperial Diet agreed to by the Brandenburg theologian Johann Agricola which

<sup>1</sup> See GA 9: 422–47 and especially the useful summary on pp. 422–23. For Osiander's position, see, among others, Emanuel Hirsch, *Die Theologie des Andreas Osiander und ihre geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1919), 172–203; Jörg Rainer Fligge, *Herzog Albrecht von Preussen und der Osiandrismus: 1522–1568* (Bonn: Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität, 1972), 86–109; Martin Stupperich, *Osiander in Preussen: 1549–1552* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973), 110–223; Claus Bachmann, *Die Selbstherrlichkeit Gottes: Studien zur Theologie des Nürnberger Reformators Andreas Osiander* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1996), 153–209; Anna Briskina, *Philipp Melanchthon und Andreas Osiander im Ringen um die Rechtfertigungslehre: Ein reformatorischer Streit aus der ostkirchlichen Perspektive* (Frankfurt/Main: Lang, 2006), 80–109, 145–91, 214–42; Olli-Pekka Vainio, *Justification and Participation in Christ: The Development of the Lutheran Doctrine of Justification from Luther to the Formula of Concord (1580)* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 95–117.

<sup>2</sup> See CR 12: 548–54 and CR 11: 783–88 (the oration; Koehn, no. 148), dated 12 November 1548.

<sup>3</sup> See CR 10: 785–90.

<sup>4</sup> For Osiander's relation to Wittenberg, see Stupperich, *Osiander in Preussen*, 95–105 & 183–86.

permitted the Evangelicals little more than married priests and communion in both kinds until a general council could meet.<sup>5</sup> A year later, however, in a memorandum to Duke Albrecht of Prussia, Osiander also attacked, without naming names, the writings of two students of Melanchthon: Georg Major and Johannes Pfeffinger.<sup>6</sup> Although never published in the sixteenth century, this memorandum demonstrates Osiander's rejection of Wittenberg's attempts at coming to terms with the hated Augsburg Interim through compromise on matters of adiaphora (what in the course of that intra-Lutheran controversy became known incorrectly as the Leipzig Interim).<sup>7</sup> Thus, attacks concerning adiaphora against Melanchthon and Wittenberg by others may have emboldened Osiander to criticize what he viewed as Wittenberg's weak understanding of justification.

Then there was the matter of Bernhard Ziegler. Ziegler was an unassuming professor of Hebrew at the University of Leipzig who occasionally functioned as Melanchthon's mouthpiece in the struggles with Matthias Flacius and others over adiaphora and the so-called Leipzig Interim.<sup>8</sup> At the end of some theses concerning John 14:23, debated in Leipzig on 6 June 1549 under Ziegler's presidency, Ziegler had added comments about Psalm 68:6 and the word *בערבות* ("in a dry land"). Osiander (apparently mistakenly) thought that these comments were directed at him and at the University of Königsberg's dismissal of Matthias Lauterwald (another Wittenberg student). As a result he wrote a scathing attack on Ziegler, which was published on 20 October 1549.<sup>9</sup> Negotiations with the

<sup>5</sup> See Thomas Kaufmann, *Das Ende der Reformation: Magdeburgs "Herrgott Kanzlei" 1548–1551/52* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), "Bibliography," 494–503 (1548) for those authors whose works appeared in Magdeburg in 1548: Adler, a–b; Aepinus, a–b [see also 1549, a–e]; Alberus, a; von Amsdorf; Bauerschmidt, a–b [see also 1549]; Bericht [of the theologians assembled in Meissen], a–b; Christlichen [Magdeburg clerics?]; Flacius, a–f; Interim, a–b; Magdeburg, a–c; Mansfeld-Hinterort [Count Albrecht VII], a–b; Melanchthon, b–g; Osiander, a–b [GA 9: 140–59]; Pasquillus [Anon.]; Prediger [Preachers to John Frederick's sons; see also 1549, a–b]; Schönes ... Lyed [Anon.], a–b. Osiander's attack came in the summer of 1548. For an even more complete listing, see <http://www.litdb.evtheol.uni-mainz.de/datenbank/index front.php>.

<sup>6</sup> GA 9: 369–401, with an attached letter (no. 419, dated 12 August 1550), 9: 402–06. GA 9: 370 states that these writings could not be found. However, for Johannes Pfeffinger, it is most likely his *Von den Traditionibus, ceremoniis oder Mitteldingen christlicher wahrer Bericht* ([Frankfurt/Oder: Wolrab, 1550) and for Georg Major perhaps his *Auslegung des Glaubens* (Wittenberg: Rhau Erben, 1550), which includes attacks on Flacius. See Timothy J. Wengert, "Georg Major (1502–1574): Defender of Wittenberg's Faith and Melanchthonian Exegete," in: Heinz Scheible, ed., *Melanchthon in seinen Schülern* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997), 129–56, especially 136 f.

<sup>7</sup> See the introduction by Irene Dingel in: Irene Dingel, ed., *Reaktionen auf das Augsburger Interim: Der Interimistische Streit (1548–1549)*, vol. 1 of *Controversia et Confessio: Theologische Kontroversen 1548–1577/80, kritische Auswahl* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 14–16.

<sup>8</sup> See especially, Koehn, no. 155.

<sup>9</sup> *Andreae Osiandri epistola, in qua confutantur nova quaedam et fanatica deliramenta*. See GA 9:221–41. Ziegler's theses (Z 02 [1549]) in the HAB (925.17 Theol. [18] and K 291.8° Helmst. [18]) are titled *De dicto quod extat in capite XIII. Iohannis, si quis diligit me, sermonem meum servabit etc. Capita ad disputandum proposita a Bernardo Ziglero D. Theologiae. Ad diem Iunij*

Prussian court were inconclusive and ended with a letter by Ziegler, dated 25 June 1550, maintaining his innocence in the affair.<sup>10</sup>

In 1549, however, Ziegler had also been busy with other matters. On 15 February he presided at a disputation in Leipzig over justification, the theses of which were published both at the time and also later in the year with an undated second set of theses on good works.<sup>11</sup> Both bore Melanchthon's imprint. Indeed, Melanchthon wrote the first set, as his correspondence demonstrates.<sup>12</sup> Each printing also included other Hebrew "*Problemata*," where the ones at the end of the articles on justification examined the translation of Isaiah 26:2–3 and the ones at the end of the articles on good works discussed the meaning of Shiloh in Genesis 49:10.<sup>13</sup> Thus, Osiander, certainly aware of Ziegler's work, would have known the latest "Electoral Saxon" position on justification – not just from the standard sources but also from Ziegler's (that is, Melanchthon's) pithy theses for debate. Indeed, it would seem that Osiander took dead aim at these theses in his own, as if to show that Wittenberg's theology had changed – contrary to Melanchthon's own opinion that Ziegler's theses "show that we have not changed our kind of teaching."<sup>14</sup> That is, coming at the very time Osiander was expressing criticism of Ziegler and of the so-called Leipzig Interim, his theses on law and gospel and the ones on justification a year later staked out his own position over against the Saxons.

What had Melanchthon's (Ziegler's) theses said? Thesis 2 argued that three things were included when one speaks of *Iustificatio*: "remission of sins, imputation of righteousness and the gift of the Holy Spirit who makes hearts alive

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*sextum* (Leipzig: Bapst, 1549). There may have indeed been some connection between Ziegler and Lauterwald through Wittenberg, where Lauterwald published two tracts against Osiander in 1552. A student at Wittenberg in 1540, Lauterwald left for Königsberg in 1549 to fill a position in mathematics but was quickly caught up in theological disputes with Osiander. He returned to Wittenberg in 1550 or so. See MBW 5743. He would later fall into disfavor with Wittenberg's theologians as well. See Stupperich, *Osiander in Preussen*, 36–79.

<sup>10</sup> It is unclear how widely this letter or its contents may have been circulated.

<sup>11</sup> Z 01 (1549): *Disputationes duae prima de iusticia fidei, secunda de bonis operibus ... habitae Bernardo Ziglero* (Leipzig: Bapst, 1549), in HAB: K 291.8° Helmst. (12). The first set had already been published earlier in the year as *De hac sententia, fide iustificari homines coram deo absque merito operum, capita ad disputandum proposita ... ad diem XV. Februar.* (Leipzig: [V. Bapst, 1549]), now in K 291.8° Helmst. (19). All three sets of theses in the HAB were gifts of Nicholas Gallus to Matthias Flacius. These two disputations are printed (without the *Problemata*) in CR 12: 664–77.

<sup>12</sup> MBW 5446 (CR 7: 334 f.), Melanchthon to Michael Meienburg in Nordhausen, dated from Leipzig 13 February [1549], which indicates that the theses were already printed by 13 February, and MBW 5451 (CR 7: 336 f.), Melanchthon to Franz Burchard [in Weimar], dated [from Wittenberg] 17 February [1549]. See also MBW, *Regesten*, 10: 597. For other similar theses composed by Melanchthon at the same time, see CR 12: 543–66.

<sup>13</sup> On A 7r–A 8v, Ziegler provided the renderings of the Hebrew by Jerome, Oecolampadius, Zwingli, Pagninus, Münster, and the Zurich Latin Bible before coming to his own conclusion.

<sup>14</sup> MBW 5451 (CR 7: 336), a letter to Franz Burchard.

by faith (that is, by trust in the Mediator).<sup>15</sup> Theses 3–8 insisted that sins were forgiven not on account of our doing well [*benefacta*] but on account of Christ, gratis through faith. After providing proof texts in Romans 3 and Acts 10, the theses went on to distinguish between law and gospel. Having fallen into sin, Adam and Eve knew that, given the immutable righteousness of God, they were damned. By this logic of the law, then, no one would be saved were it not for the Son who, moved by mercy for the human race, satisfied God's righteousness, becoming a sacrifice for us, as was already revealed in Genesis 3:15.<sup>16</sup>

Theses 9–17 spelled out the importance of the exclusive term, *gratis*, which preserved God's honor and brought consolation to the conscience. It was not as if the will did nothing, since *gratis* did not exclude "concurrent movement" in us of contrition, faith and new life. Indeed, excluding such things would remove God as the source of these good things and would make the promise uncertain, giving rise to carnal security or doubt.<sup>17</sup> Theses 18–26 attacked the [Roman] opponents. To be justified "*gratis*" did not mean that one had to doubt the promised forgiveness or that "*gratis*" one received new [infused] qualities [in the soul] for doing the good, as if faith were simply knowledge of Christ's work.<sup>18</sup> Against this *philosophica speculatio*, where philosophers distinguished heroic from common virtues, the theses insisted that the terrified conscience needed to be taught not how well it was doing before God but rather that the ministry of the gospel revealed God's will toward us: reception into God's mercy through faith – a faith that was not mere knowledge but believing "that all my sins are forgiven on account of the Mediator."<sup>19</sup>

Having dealt with *gratis* and objections to it, theses 27–30 dealt with *fides*. Here, too, the theses addressed the adversaries' notion of doubt. The imputation of righteousness was nothing, according to them, so that a person had instead to become righteous by his [or her] own fulfilling of the law. "Although the promise is universal, nevertheless when doubt is commanded, then this consolation is taken away, since the mind in doubt thinks in a pagan mode: 'Perhaps the promise does not pertain to me.'<sup>20</sup> Faith, by contrast, occurred when someone applied the promise to himself [or herself], as thesis 30 proved with reference to Romans 4 (faith, not doubt, was necessary), John 5 (otherwise the promise was given in vain), Romans 5:1 (the conscience had peace with God), and Romans 5:2 (otherwise the Mediator was useless).<sup>21</sup> The concluding two theses (31–32) contended that only those who had experienced faith realized the truth of these

<sup>15</sup> CR 12: 664.

<sup>16</sup> CR 12: 664–65.

<sup>17</sup> CR 12: 665–66.

<sup>18</sup> CR 12: 666. Here Melancthon had especially Trent in mind.

<sup>19</sup> CR 12: 666.

<sup>20</sup> CR 12: 667.

<sup>21</sup> CR 12: 667–68.

matters, while those who denied such things and insisted on doubt simply revealed themselves to be pagans, no better than the godless king described in the *Aeneid*.<sup>22</sup> The doubts of believers were overcome precisely through the divine promise itself.<sup>23</sup>

## B. Silence in the Heavens for One-Quarter Hour

From these immediate causes (the Wittenberg students, the Saxon view of adiaphora, and the peculiar role of Ziegler) issued Osiander's explosive reaction and (eventually) an equally explosive counter-reaction. But Osiander's first moves developed slowly. His opening address to the university (theses on law and gospel) came on 5 April 1549, less than two months after Ziegler's first set of theses on justification. Osiander's written response to Ziegler appeared in October, 1549, some four months after Ziegler's supposed attack. By mid-1550 this small tempest had died down. Then, after writing the (unpublished) memorandum against the "adiaphorists" in August 1550, Osiander defended his own position on justification in October, presumably against these same adiaphorists. Then there was next to nothing. Despite the weak objections of Michael Isinder, Peter Hegemon, and the court librarian Martin Chemnitz, Osiander may well have deemed the theses on justification a success.<sup>24</sup>

Only with the return of Friedrich Staphylus to Königsberg shortly after the disputation (who informed Philip Melancthon straightway of the situation there) did objections to Osiander's particular understanding of justification begin to take shape. Viewed from the printing presses of Königsberg, Magdeburg, Wittenberg or Nuremberg, where the bulk of the later tracts would appear, however, there was no response to Osiander's teaching until the summer of 1551.

Indeed, all of the earliest struggles over this teaching took place, as one would expect, in Königsberg's university and the Prussian court. However, it was Osiander himself who took this dispute out of academia and into the public realm. Here Nuremberg played a significant role. Osiander learned from his son-in-law Jerome Besold, in a letter dated 24 December 1550, that many in Nuremberg (where Osiander had been a pastor until driven out by the Augsburg Interim and where Besold still lived and worked as a preacher) suspected him of teaching incorrectly about the doctrine of justification. Osiander responded with his publication of *Bericht vnd Trostschrift: an alle die: so durch das falsch/ Heimlich schreiben/ schreien vnd affterreden/ etlicher meiner feinde/ als solt ich von der Rechtfertigung des Glaubens/ nicht recht halten vnd leren/ geergert/ oder betrübet*

<sup>22</sup> Vergil, *The Aeneid*, 4.22: "Nos munera templis, Quippe tuis ferimus, famamque fovemus inanem" (We certainly bring offerings to your temples and caress an empty fame).

<sup>23</sup> CR 12: 668.

<sup>24</sup> See Stupperich, *Osiander*, 112–13, and GA 9: 423–24.

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