

Osiander – a Man for All Churches in an Ecumenical Age

By Edward C. Fredrich

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The first of the two major obstacles encountered in carrying out this interesting assignment was the difficulty of obtaining actual writings of Osiander to work with. Osiander wrote much but few of his books are available. This essay, it must be remembered, has that important strike against it.

The essayist was able to lay hands on three of Osiander's writings but none were particularly relevant or helpful in carrying out the assigned theme. One of these available writings was Osiander's Marburg report reprinted in Luther's Works.¹ Another was the commentated Vulgate which Osiander put out in his Nuernberg years, 1522 to be exact, and which could be called the first Protestant Vulgate.² The third, somewhat more helpful, was a brief polemic of 35 Latin pages that was put out at Koenigsberg in 1549.³ This rare book treasure of the Seminary library is so little used that it lacks even a draw-out card.

It should be mentioned, as a counterbalance to this lament regarding the dearth of original Osiander writings, that generous quotations are available. The familiar *Triglotta* supplies numerous direct quotations in its discussion of "The Osiandrian and Stancarian Controversies."⁴ Several of the older church histories consulted in the research, cited in the writing and catalogued in the appended bibliography offer even more extensive direct quotations. The histories of Arnold, Hartknoch, Salig, and Walch were in this regard especially helpful.⁵ Arnold supplies the rationale of such quotations when he introduces a verbatim rendering of some 40 of Osiander's justification theses with the remark: *Damit aber Osiandri Sinn von einem begierigen Leser erkannt werden möge, will ich allhier diese gedachte seine erste Disputation, wie er sie selbst A. 1550 publiciret, und hernach A. 51 den 12 Sept. deutsch zu Konigsberg herausgegeben, hieher setzen, und lautet dieselbe von Wort zu Wort also:*⁶

This essayist can only hope that the quotations used are accurate and contextual. He realizes the danger of encountering the opposite when a hated heretic is being quoted by his opponents. He comforts himself with the view that Osiander is so far-out, and that so frequently, that no manipulation of quotations should really be needed to make the orthodox case against him.

Another major difficulty involved in this writing task is the sheer bulk of material that falls under the scope of the assigned theme. This essayist has learned and remembers the caution of able homiletical, catechetical and essay-writing instructors that the parts should be few: four at the most, five only *in extremis*. In this writing, as the outline shows, there are nine parts.

This is not the fault of the essayist nor of the theme committee. This is the fault of Andreas Osiander. He has been called "a creative and independent theologian."⁷ He was so "creative" that he spawned so many odd-ball opinions that he can truly be termed "a man for all churches in an ecumenical age." This happy theme terminology is not the essayist's creation. The most he can claim is that it was transmitted to him by one whose name and initials are identical. Disclaiming creation of the theme does not mean that there is disagreement with its thought and thrust.

Osiander is so wide ranging in his activities and attitudes that he has something for just about everybody on the ecclesiastical and ecumenical scene. He has something even for us conservative Lutherans, as will be noted in an appropriate place. First, however, attention should be given to his contribution to the Lutheran denomination as a whole.

Part One: Something for the Lutheran Denomination

¹ LW, XXXVIII, pp. 62-73. Osiander's report to the Nuernberg city council is found in "The Marburg Colloquy and the Marburg Articles," pp. 15-89.

² The edition in our library was put out at Tuebingen by Georgius Gruppenbachius in 1600.

³ Consult the bibliography for this *Andreae Osiandri Epistola*.

⁴ This sixteenth section of the "Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books is presented in *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921) pp. 152-161.

⁵ The appended bibliography supplies the detail.

⁶ Arnold, p. 925.

⁷ David C. Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971) p. 98. Cited hereafter as *Steinmetz*.

Andreas Osiander was proud to claim inclusion in the ranks of the first generation of reformers. Born near Nuernberg in 1498, he was able to complete his theological studies and begin his work, first as a Hebrew teacher at an Augustinian cloister and then from 1522 on as pastor of Nuernberg's St. Lorenz Church, just in time to be a pioneer in the ranks of the Reformation adherents.

In 1523 he preached against the Antichrist at a service at which 3000 people received the cup for the first time. He dared to offer Communion in both kinds to Denmark's Queen Isabella, the sister of Charles V, even while Papal Legate Campeggio was on the scene. To disavow celibacy he married as early as did Luther in 1525.

Osiander was willing to acknowledge Luther's leadership and looked to him for advice. In his Marburg report he himself states: "Early on Tuesday the prince (Philip of Hesse) departed. We too got under way that afternoon. Tuesday and Wednesday we accompanied Luther on horseback, taking the road that led to Schlaitz in order to consult him about several problems, like the unnecessary parts of the mass and other ecclesiastical usages. Early on Thursday we took the shortest road to Nuernberg."⁸

It was another thing when, after Luther's death, the heir apparent, Philip Melanchthon, became embroiled with Osiander over justification. Well known is the remark attributed to Osiander after he heard of Luther's death: "Now that the lion is dead, I shall easily dispose of the foxes and hares."⁹ When Arnold attributes this remark to Osiander, he is careful to point out the time lapse involved, a time lapse during which the Interim troubles fell to supply a better reason for an Osiander-Melanchthon clash.¹⁰ Osiander does object vehemently when Melanchthon is quoted against him.¹¹ He obviously thought of himself as in the first rank and place of those who were following in Luther's footsteps. After referring to a number of Osiander's letters Salig sums up the matter in this way: *Dass aber Osiander von Luthern sehr viel, von den so genannten Lutheranern aber und Philippisten wenig, gehalten, siehet man aus seinen Schriften.*¹²

This is the place to refer to certain of Osiander's contributions to the earliest writings of our denomination. Even though it is a "first" in some sort of Protestant chapter in a book of "firsts," his Vulgate edition supplies little that needs to be praised. Of greater significance is the early and trail-blazing church order that he with the assistance of others produced.

This is the *Brandenburg-Nuernbergische Kirchenordnung vom Jahre 1533*. It supplied the basis for numerous other significant church orders, among them that of Wuerttemberg (1536) and of Mark-Brandenburg (1540). One of the seed documents of this church order was supplied by Osiander and he, with Brenz, did the final editing of the compilation. The final form has two parts: a *Lehr-und Gottesdienst ordnung* and then a *Catechismus oder Kinderpredigt*.¹³

This *Catechismus* or *Kinderpredigt* merits special consideration. Osiander speaks of it as "ours," referring to some aid from a fellow pastor of the area, Schlepner. Osiander, however, seems to have been the main author. When each of you in pre-confirmation instruction reaches the section, "Ministry of the Keys," you could well be personally grateful to Andreas Osiander. It is in the Nuernberg catechism section of the church order that one first encounters a "Keys" catechism part. This eventually found its way into our versions of Luther's Small Catechism.¹⁴

In addition to the previously described contributions of Osiander to the Lutheran cause in general there are others to be mentioned that relate especially to one or the other of the wings or branches of Lutheranism. It can be noted, first of all, that Osiander supplies

⁸ This material is on p. 73 of the first citation in these notes.

⁹ *Triglotta*, p. 153. Note 4 is to be consulted for the detail for this and for all other *Triglotta* citations. *Arnold* (p. 924), *Walch* (p. 86), *Hartknoch* (p. 510) all attribute this remark to Osiander. See the bibliography for the complete version of these abbreviated citations.

¹⁰ *Arnold*, p. 924.

¹¹ *Salig*, p. 936.

¹² *Salig*, p. 936.

¹³ *Tschackert* (p. 584 ff.) supplies the detail.

¹⁴ See *Triglotta* (p. 88) and *Tschackert* (p. 587).

Part Two: Something for Confessional Lutherans

In the gatherings that produced four Lutheran Confessions, the *Augustana* with its Apology and the Smalcald Articles with their *Tractatus*, Osiander was conspicuously present. As has already been indicated, he had been a participant at the Marburg Colloquy. As a representative of Nuernberg he sat at the colloquy table with Brenz and Agricola next to Melanchthon and Luther. The Marburg Articles, which Luther drew up, were printed by Frederick Peypus at Nuernberg through the offices of Osiander.¹⁵

At Augsburg in 1530 Osiander made his presence felt by criticizing Melanchthon's pacific posture in discussions and documents.¹⁶ He was, as is well known, in good company in this basic viewpoint. That is not to say that the tactful Luther would have approved the chip-on-the-shoulder tactics for which Osiander already then was winning a reputation. It seems that Osiander's refutation of the *Confutatio* had little influence on the Apology.¹⁷

At Smalcald in 1537 Osiander participated in the discussions and signed the Articles with the terse, *Andreas Osiander, Ecclesiastes Nuernbergensis subscribo*. It is known that, in reference to Melanchthon's qualifications to his Smalcald subscription, *si evangelium admitteret*, Osiander said, "That is, if the devil would become an apostle."¹⁸ His firm theological stance seems to have remained constant. His theological manners, on the other hand, were deteriorating. At Marburg, he had risked in his preaching turn to repeat Luther's justification text and use it for improvement purposes.¹⁹ At Smalcald he openly criticized Luther in the sermon he preached.²⁰

Osiander's finest hour, from the viewpoint of confessional Lutheranism, came in the troubled years after the Smalcald War and the imposition of the Interims. He did not participate in drawing up the Interims. He resigned his Nuernberg post in protest after an honored tenure of over a quarter century.²¹

It is not as though the subsequent Koenigsberg position was assured and immediately available. For some time Osiander lived at Nuernberg and at Breslau, the place from which Duke Albert of Prussia called him to a dual post at Koenigsberg of pastor and theological professor. In his Nuernberg farewell Osiander referred to the need of obtaining peace for his own conscience and security for his wife and children. It was a case of casting bread on the water, not just once but doubly so.

Very soon Duke Albert of Prussia came to his aid. Way back in the early Nuernberg years evangelical sermons preached by Osiander had won over this Albert to an energetic career of Reformation advancement. In an April 30, 1540 letter Albert acknowledged to Osiander, his spiritual father: "You alone are the tool whereby we have arrived at a godly, correct and true knowledge, which benefit we so highly regard that we cannot express it, much less compare it to anything else."²²

Unfortunately, the Koenigsberg posts were to be the site of the worst Osiandrian controversies and aberrations. This sad record is introduced by the reminder that Osiander has

Part Three: Something for the Other Lutherans.

Osiander allowed himself to become patron saint and spiritual father of all Lutherans who want to water down or set aside serious commitment and subscription to the Confessions. In his 1552 polemic against his opponents at Koenigsberg and Melanchthon, *Widerlegung der ungegruendeten undienstlichen Antwort Philippi*

¹⁵ LW, XXXVIII, p 72n.

¹⁶ Steinmetz, p. 93.

¹⁷ Triglotta, p. 40.

¹⁸ Triglotta, p. 54.

¹⁹ Hartknoch, p. 310.

²⁰ Steinmetz, p. 93.

²¹ Hartknoch, p. 311; Salig, p. 920.

²² Tschackert's *Herzog Albrecht*, p. 14.

Melanchthonis ... wider mein Bekenntnis Osiander developed just about every argument ever raised against a *quia* subscription to the Confessions.

Wittenberg had already in 1533 developed a subscription formula that made normative for preaching and teaching the Augsburg Confession and the creeds of the first ecumenical councils from Nicea to Chalcedon. When Osiander's opponents in Koenigsberg appealed to Melanchthon and enlisted his support in combating Osiander's errors, the latter replied in a diatribe which included the attack on the Wittenberg subscription formula.²³

Osiander complains, on the one hand, that the confessional basis is too narrow and, consequently there is too much appealing to the judgment of Wittenberg teachers regarding extra confessional questions. On the other hand, Osiander fears that any confessional commitment will result in this that the confessional pledge will "tear from the Holy Scriptures and bind to the Symbols and the teaching of Philip" and will produce teachers and preachers who "look more to the word of men than the Word of God and thereby bring great harm to Christendom."

It should be noted that these expressions arise in a controversial situation and may not represent the better judgment of their author. In calmer and better days Osiander himself could take the lead in producing a church order that would, very much like confessional subscription, direct and delimit preaching and teaching.

Especially deplorable, however, is Osiander's employment of his anticonfession arguments to bolster his erroneous justification teachings. He argues in the writing previously mentioned:

It is clear as the light of day that the three symbols, which Luther translated and had printed offer no word as to what justification is and in what form we are justified through faith; and the Augsburg Confession in Articles IV and V speaks of this matter too briefly and obscurely ... From these words of the Confession no one can ever with certainty conclude how we are justified and what the justification of faith is, since one person will always conclude differently than the other ... Our controversy (over justification) is treated in the Confession obscurely, evasively, doubtfully and moreover too briefly with the result that a person can interpret in various ways and actually as he pleases.²⁴

The previous quotation refers to the justification problems that Osiander had. This is his chief error. It will be treated extensively in subsequent sections on Osiander's contributions to Romans and Reformed. At this place it will suffice to point out that in this matter Osiander also offers something to "other Lutherans." No better way of pointing this out could be found than quoting from the comprehensive treatment of Article VIII of the Formula of Concord and the Osiandrian errors supplied by Carl Lawrenz's essay in the recently *published No Other Gospel*. It is a privilege to make these first references in a writing to the article and the book. Carl Lawrenz writes:

Osiandrianism lives on in all who resort to theological speculation to devise a doctrine of justification which modern man will find more relevant and acceptable than the scriptural one set forth in the Formula of Concord. The 1963 Helsinki Convention of the Lutheran World Federation had set justification as its theme, but found it impossible to agree on a common statement. Many proposals were offered. The speculation goes on ...

Lawrenz also in this connection quotes two paragraphs from *Lutheranism, The Theological Movement and Its Theological Writings* by LCA writers, Eric Gritsch and Robert Jensen. The Gritsch-Jensen paragraphs state:

²³ An extensive treatment of the previous and subsequent items is found in *Tschackert*, pp. 374-380.

²⁴ The reader is reminded that this quotation and the previous material are to be located in *Tschackert*, pp. 374-380.

How do we now come to participate in the benefits of Christ's past work? They could not adopt the medieval solution: that we participate by our *cooperation* with grace. So the regular Lutherans created the doctrine of justification "in the heavenly court": we participate in the fruit of Christ's past work by a sort of bookkeeping entry in which God omnipotently reckons Christ's merits to our account. Osiander, who found this as unsatisfactory as most contemporary persons will, proposed instead that we come to participate in the work of the past human person Jesus by the spiritual indwelling of the divine person united with him.

Clearly, neither solution will do. The problem is that the question reprints the medieval pattern of thought, which relates past, present, and future by a scheme of foundation, appropriation, and fruition. The gospel cannot be clearly interpreted by this scheme. If what I am is decided by what is said to me, then the essential determinants of my life are not set by a foundation at my beginnings, but may very well enter my life later, as repentance and forgiveness and new birth.²⁵

Part Four: Something for the Romans

Osiander has repeatedly been accused of harboring a Roman doctrine of justification. His views were rejected by the Formula of Concord as contrary to the *Augustana* and Apology and thus identified as views of the other camp. Moehler, the well-known symbolics expert of the previous century, flatly declares that Osiander's views of justification "are completely Roman when his murky phraseology and his own obscurities are clarified."²⁶

Osiander's enemies accused him of inconsistency when he in the Koenigsberg years publicly espoused his justification views. He insisted, however, that these views were what he had always believed and taught. On January 24, 1552 he even sent to the publishers his *Beweissung: dass ich nun ueber dreissig Jahr allweg einerlei Lehr von der Gerechtigkeit des Glaubens gehalten und gelehret habe, nemlich, dass unser Herr Jesus Christus Gottes und Marien Sohn, wahrer Got und Mensch nach seiner Goettlichen Natur unser, der Rechtgläubigen, Gerechtigkeit sei.*²⁷ In this writing he harked back to Nuernberg clashes with Romans in 1525 and Augsburg discussions with Melanchthon in 1530.

The truth may well lie somewhere in between. The bold unfolding of his views at Koenigsberg was something new for others. For Osiander it may well have been just another step on a long intellectual and speculative journey of his fertile imagination.

Unfortunately the issue lay in the all-important doctrinal area and unfortunately it played into Roman hands and disturbed Lutheran hearts. The Reformation stood squarely on the *sola gratia* plank. Osiander was for grace but he was also for an additive, the addition of which changes gospel to no gospel and turns Lutheranism back to a time when it was not.

A reference to the justification theses that Osiander published at Koenigsberg in 1550 and issued in translation in 1551 can serve to make the point. Thesis 58, discussing John 6 states: "But to eat his flesh and to drink his blood means in this passage nothing else but to believe that he has offered up our sins in his body and has shed his blood for the forgiveness of sins; but also that we through this faith become one flesh with him and by his blood are cleansed of our sins." Scripture citations are I Peter 2, Matthew 26, Ephesians 5, Revelation 1.²⁸

What might appear to be a scriptural justification statement is followed and threatened by Thesis 59 stating: "Thereby are we glorified by his essential divinity; for he who prays, 'Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began,' the selfsame also says, 'I have given them the glory that you gave me, John 17.'"

²⁵ Lawrenz, pp. 172-173.

²⁶ Tschackert, p. 496n.

²⁷ Salig, pp. 977-978.

²⁸ This thesis and those following are found in Arnold, p. 926.

The meaning of the whole becomes clear when one reaches Thesis 73. There Osiander maintains: “Those present teachings colder than ice who teach that we are regarded as justified alone because of the forgiveness of sins and not also because of the righteousness of Christ that through faith dwells in us.” To put the matter bluntly, justification according to Osiander is not just grace, not just forgiveness but something more. No matter how devoutly the “more” is endowed with such terminology as “indwelling Christ” and “divine righteousness,” the end result is an addition to grace that violates the gospel, as Paul teaches the Galatians, and is in conflict with the *particulae exclusivae* of the Formula’s Article III.

Osiander plays into Roman hands also by making his additions to *sola gratia* about the closest thing to an infused and developing righteousness, a la Roman made, that the human mind could devise. As has been demonstrated, the key in the process is the indwelling righteousness of Christ, limited to the righteousness of the divine nature. This is, theologically described, a confusion of the respectable doctrine of the *unio mystica* with the totally different doctrine of justification. In lay terms, it amounts to a sell-out to Rome—lock, stock and barrel.

The Formula aptly and briefly summarizes the big and ugly error in these words:

For one side has contended that the righteousness of faith, which the apostle calls the righteousness of God, is God’s essential righteousness, which is Christ Himself as the true, natural, and essential Son of God, who dwells in the elect by faith and impels them to do right, and thus is their righteousness, compared with which righteousness the sins of all men are as a drop of water compared with the great ocean.²⁹

A clear and conclusive declaration of righteousness is replaced by an indwelling and compelling process. Score a plus for Romans and a minus for the justification of the Bible, of Luther and of the Lutheran Confessions. Score a plus also in this connection for the Reformed who have always needed a substitute for the crippled Gospel that is the only one they know. Osiander provides the substitute.

Part V: Something for the Reformed

It seems that the doughty foe of the Reformed, who stood against Zwingli at Marburg and who is opposed by Calvin in his *Instititio*, did not realize how much comfort and aid he was giving the enemy.³⁰ Limited atonement and double election have placed Calvinists in the difficult position of seeking a replacement comfort for the lost gospel. A first finding is a hope, often termed “analytical justification,” that God will accept an assumed, a promised, a foreseen righteousness as a kind of pledge for the finished product.

This is exactly what Osiander provides. In the series of justification theses previously cited, Thesis 79 declares: “And just as he who is justified, should in a larger measure be justified, so this occurs by no means by our work but with the knowledge of the Son of God through faith, through whom we are from day to day and more and more united with him, until we all come to this that we are perfected according to the measure of the perfect Christ, Revelation 20.”³¹

Notice that there is no flat declaration of justification. There is a pledge and a promise, there is a justification of past, present and future. There is a studied effort to abide by biblical terminology—“justified, by no means by our work, through faith”—but the end-product is an insecure justification that is remarkably akin to the Reformed variety.

The whole approach of the Reformed and of Osiander is that of the inward look. God wants his children to look away from themselves and their sins and their works to a Christ not *in* but *pro eisdem*, to a gracious promise and not a personal achievement, to an assurance from without and not a product of studied

²⁹ Formula of Concord; Thorough Declaration, Article III, 2.

³⁰ See *Tschackert*, p. 496, for a mention of the Calvin opposition.

³¹ *Arnold*, p. 926.

introspection. The Reformed tell the sinner to “make his election sure” by a subjective realization of a second birth and an assured election. Membership in the church hinges on such inner conviction and external evidence.

Way back in the Nuernberg years in the late 1530’s Osiander was already demonstrating a reluctance to pronounce the general absolution because he feared that there were those in the assembly who unworthily without true repentance staked a claim on forgiveness. At that time he obtained a Wittenberg whitewash to this effect: “He (Osiander), as well as his opponents, have faithfully and with good Christian hearts conducted themselves in this matter and are seeking therein nothing else but the improvement of all.”³²

It is true, improvement is needled and desired, but that improvement dare not rest on introspection. Later it became evident that Osiander sought exactly that. Thereby he achieved the impossible of creating an opposition alliance of such unlikely partners as Amsdorf and Flacius and Melancthon.

That was then. In our day there are more who specialize in the inward look than there were in 1550. There are the neo-orthodox, the existentialists, the charismatics and the drop-outs and many others. Since Schleiermacher’s day this idolatry of the inward look has reigned rampant in the Christianity of modern times.

Part VI: Something for Modern Misinterpreters

So much attention centered on Osiander’s justification aberrations that his odd approach to what Scripture is and how it is to be properly interpreted was passed by with little attention. In those good old days a healthy respect for Scripture was almost assumed. Apart from the scanty enthusiasts, all contending parties were assumed to be obedient to the authority of the Word. No confessional paragraphs on that point were deemed necessary.

Osiander’s Scripture view, however, merits some attention. It involved a sharp distinction between an outer and inner Word. Arnold claims that this approach received its impetus from Osiander’s image errors. He writes: “Out of this teaching (image of God) then indeed there flowed additionally this that he (Osiander) especially centered on the inner (Word) and insisted that it be distinguished from the outer. Because of this it has been noted that he spoke much too insistently about this and in this peculiarity followed mystic writers.”³³

A direct Osiander quotation is then supplied in this wording:

I presuppose an inner and outer Word and say of the outer that it is voice which vanishes in the ear of the hearer, which cannot be called the Word of God, for God’s Word cannot vanish to nothingness as does the voice which ceases.

We first of all hear the outer Word in human language which then vanishes in our ears. But when we understand the inner Word which is concealed in it, mark and retain it until we believe it, we truly thereby lay hold by faith of that selfsame inner Word, which is true God and man and it remains and dwells in us.

When Christ is presented to us by the outer Word, we thus receive him by faith to our justification and know that we thus certainly have him in the inner Word which remains in our hearts.

Secondly, the holy gospel in the outer Word brings us the inner Word of God the Father which he in himself and out of himself begat in eternity, which also is true God and very God as John 1 says ...

This Word, however, does not come to us in stark essence (*ganz und gar bloss*), as it is small in its divine nature (*wie es in seiner gottlichen natur klein ist*), for then we could not grasp it, but as it is incarnate and is our dear Lord and Savior and Mediator Jesus Christ who dwells by faith in us.³⁴

One would dearly appreciate the chance to discuss with Osiander just what all this means. There is truth contained in the statement. There is also hyperbole, confusion and invitation to error. The Wittenberg reply to

³² Arnold, p. 927.

³³ Arnold, p. 927-928 supplies this material as well as what follows.

³⁴ By paraphrase Salig, p. 952, substantiates this quotation.

Duke Albert's request for a *Gutachten* regarding this *Bekennntnis* of Osiander, it is reported, contained in its listing of the features it found reprehensible this fourth point: Osiander teaches both an inner and outer Word.³⁵

This point of doctrine, it seems, was never fought out to a finish. The overriding concern remained the justification problem. Osiander died suddenly of a stroke before this issue could be considered. Even the most charitable evaluation, however, would have to point out that the views expressed, or the wordings in which they are expressed, open a theological Pandora's Box.

Osiander himself could force Scripture into a tight mold of his own devising. At the suggestion of Cranmer, a secret relative by marriage, he produced a gospel harmony that pushes harmony too far. In a Smalcald sermon he made the opening verses of I John 4 reach beyond incarnation to his pet point of essential indwelling righteousness.

Osiander was far in advance of his time. Bring him back to life in this century with his inner-outer Word and he would have something for just about every variety of misinterpreter. The enthusiast and the Quaker could find delight in the "inner" Word. The neo-orthodoxists and the existentialist would revel in the notion of an "outer" Word being transformed into an "inner" Word within themselves. There would be ample room for gospel reductionism when the "inner" Word is identified with Christ. Historical criticism would welcome a view that put down the "outer" Word. One could go on and on. You name it, Osiander supplies it. He even has

Part Seven: Something for the Scientifically Inclined

As you all know, the astronomical astronomy writing of Copernicus, *De revolutionibus orbium coelestibus*, was published in Nuernberg in Osiander's years there. It was Osiander who saw the work through the press.

Previously a layman's version produced by Georg Rheticus, a young Wittenberg professor, had been sent to Melanchthon for approval. He in an October 16, 1541, letter vented his disgust in this fashion: "Some think it a distinguished achievement to construct such a crazy thing as that Prussian astronomer who moves the earth and fixes the sun. Verily, wise rulers should tame the unrestraint of men's mind."³⁶ Had Polish jokes then been in vogue, Melanchthon no doubt would have told several. When Rheticus, the Copernicus booster, tried to promote the heliocentric view of the universe in this Wittenberg classroom, he was, we are told, "ordered" to lecture on the more conventional *Sphaeri* of Sacrobosco. One 'wonders about the origin of this "order." Did it come from the very top?

In any event, Osiander rushed in where Melanchthon and perhaps Luther, feared to tread. In his usual bull in the china shop fashion, he managed to alienate the followers of Copernicus while doing their cause a notable service. Without authorization and identification he wrote a preface to the Copernicus work which introduced it as hypothesis, not declaration.

Copernicus and his friends were committed to their view without equivocating or hypothesizing. They were offended by the preface. Osiander, however, thereby brought the book a century of life. As hypothesis it escaped Index listing, for that long a time and was able to survive the long ban that followed.

In the interest of bringing the essay back from science and astronomy to theology and theme, one might well add the comment that Osiander should have been more willing to use the hypothesis approach in his own far-out theological notions than to the scientific findings of others. On second thought, a good Lutheran would even then have been revolted in most instances. Fortunately, some of these far-out aberrations have not yet been fully exploited. With the reluctance of a Cassandra the essayist points this out as he adds

Point Eight: Something for Tomorrow's Errorists

³⁵ Salig, p. 995.

³⁶ Durant, quoting Kesten's *Copernicus*, recounts this interesting episode as well as those that precede and follow, pp. 858-860.

Osiander had a strange view of the image of God. It involved the claim that even without the fall into sin there would have been an incarnation.³⁷ This view is not an Osiander original. Biel and others had propounded it in earlier centuries. The point here, however, is what could be done with this notion that an incarnation was essential for the total fulfillment of human beings, given the theological climate and the religious scene, in this year of our Lord.

Speculation was the vice of Osiander. So that it might not become ours, we refrain from prophetic conclusions. The same caution applies in another Osiander oddity, not yet fully exploited.

Osiander's first public promulgation at Koenigsberg involved his inaugural dissertation on repentance in which he omitted any reference to faith.³⁸ Admittedly, many in the area were riled about Osiander's quick promotion to a double post of ranking pastor and professor through the patronage of Duke Albert.³⁹ Admittedly, Melancthon on this occasion got Osiander off the hook by approving and praising the theses of Osiander and dismissing the differences as matters of terminology.⁴⁰

Yet the possibility exists that this matter might also be exploited and enlarged. If contrition, confession and correction were the whole of the matter, situational ethics or the ethical situationist could have a field day. Instead of antinomians, a breed of anti-gospelers would arise to plague the church. The possibilities loom large, but the promise has been to ride herd on speculation. To do that very thing a ninth and final something is added.

Part Nine: Something for Today's Students of Theology

Even this cursory overview of Osiander's doing and writing must make his theological foes react with some admiration for his tireless energy and remarkable output. Osiander was a work-aholic, a write-aholic and a wrangle-aholic. Not many have equaled him in any one of the three obsessions. Only a very few have surpassed him in the troika. His voluminous writings range from the creation image to a *Coniecturae de ultimis temporibus*. He contended with all comers over both points and all in between.

He was a dedicated and hard worker. Melancthon was of the view that Osiander shortened his life through inordinate study habits and Melancthon himself was no slacker in the study.⁴¹ In younger years it was Osiander's habit to study from 9 P.M. to 1 or 2 A.M. When the noon meal was already on the table, he would get up and descend the stairs, often with his trousers in his hand. In such circumstances Melancthon would greet him, "Domine Andrea, you almost missed the soup." Osiander would answer, "My timing is perfect," and then demonstrate his considerable talents as trencherman.

After the meal he would spend an hour or two walking. By mid-afternoon he was back at his desk for a study stint that would last until the evening meal. His study time was not limited by an eight-hour day or a forty-hour week. That is how he got so much writing done.

Somebody has said that genius is 90% hard work. The other 10% in Osiander was a fertile, hard-working imagination. As example in this respect Osiander offers some good news and some bad news. The point could not be more tellingly made than by Carl Lawrenz in his *No Other Gospel* article. There it is stated:

Osiander was a decidedly original thinker. Originality can be a valuable asset also for a theologian if it is used to devise fresh and effective ways of expressing and communicating God's revealed truths. Yet human originality can not produce the substance of Christian theology. Its truths must be taken humbly and reverently from the Holy Scriptures just as God has revealed them to us. In setting forth God's saving truths a sound theologian can not say more, nor can he say less, than God has actually and clearly

³⁷ Arnold, p. 924. He puts these words into Osiander's mouth: *Man koente aus der wahren Lehr vom Ebenbilde Gottes sehen, dass der Sohn Gottes doch würde Mensch sein worden, wenn wir gleich nicht gesuendigt haetten.*

³⁸ Hartknoch, p. 312.

³⁹ Every available history, whether for or against Osiander, reports this unfortunate development.

⁴⁰ Salig, p. 923.

⁴¹ Hartknoch, p. 354. This is the reference that also supplies the matters that follow.

revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures. Osiander was inclined to be speculative. Within sufficient and often specious scriptural support, he developed some of his speculative theological ideas into an elaborate system. Those who approve this kind of theologizing are wont to think of him as the first systematizer of the Reformation Age. Contemporaries with greater Christian humility saw in this tendency an evidence of pride, of an inordinate desire to show off his supposedly deeper insights and his superior learning. Michael Noting, a Nuremberg schoolmaster highly revered by Melancthon, wrote, "It was always one of Osiander's characteristics to want to know things differently and better than others." These traits and tendencies already made Osiander somewhat controversial during his twenty-six years of activity at Nuremberg. They became particularly evident during the final three years of Osiander's life at Koenigsberg, where under attack he publicly unfolded his peculiar doctrine of justification.⁴²

Osiander's problem is that he allowed his imagination and originality to run riot when the issue was doctrinal. When so much is provided for so many in that field, there cannot but be problems. The repudiation of Osiander that began at Koenigsberg in the 1550's and that was solemnized at Bergen in 1577 must continue in this time. It must continue because our ecumenical age simply itches to scratch the exposed surface and the unmined nerves of Osiander's *corpus doctrinae*, rather *corpus erroris*.

⁴² *Lawrenz*, p. 153.

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