Luther had stated laconically before his death: "After me, many sects will be born, and Osiander will found one of them."¹ The Osiandrian controversy broke out only four years after Luther's death, and was in many ways traumatic and internally damaging for Lutherans. Self-confident as he was, Osiander wanted to play the role of the genuine interpreter of Luther and save reformation from the hands of Melanchthon, whom he perceived as corrupting Lutherans with his teaching on justification. However, Osiander’s own teaching on justification was so different from Luther’s that he never managed to obtain general support from other reformers.

One of the most important antagonists of Osiander was Matthias Flacius Illyricus, who tried to rescue Luther from the hands of Osiander. Osiander’s and Flacius’s interpretations of Luther were as opposite as night and day. Osiander emphasized essential communion with Christ in faith so strongly that he almost embraced subjectivism. Flacius, however, did not allow anything intrinsic and human to enter the doctrine of justification which would threaten the reality of salvation.

4.1. Osiander’s Attack on Melanchthon’s Teaching on Justification

4.1.1. Justification as Participation in Christ’s Divine Nature

In 1550 Andreas Osiander² challenged Melanchthon’s doctrine of justification by holding a disputation on justification in Königsberg.

¹ WA TR 4, 478, 6–20.
² Osiander was a close colleague of Luther and Melanchthon. In 1523, when the eucharist was served in both forms in Nuremberg for the first time, Osiander was there. Two years later, when the city of Nuremberg officially joined the reform movement, Osiander had a great influence on its development. Osiander sided with Luther in the discussion on the eucharist against Zwingli, and at the Diet of Augsburg he looked
(Disputatio de justificantione). His official opponents were Melchior Isinder and Martin Chemnitz. Through his disputation and other examinations on the subject, Osier wanted to demonstrate his loyalty to Luther’s teaching and his ability to correct Melanchthon’s aberrations. He constantly referred to Luther to prove his point.

In his disputation, Osier claimed that justification involved becoming alive and righteous (vivification) through Christ’s living presence in the individual through faith. Osier did not deny the role of imputation, claiming that “Christ’s righteousness will be imputed to us (imputetur after Melanchthon, preventing him from conceding too much to the Catholics. In 1532, Osier and Brenz established the church orders for Nürenberg-Brandenburg. He was present at Schmalkalden in 1537 where Luther published his articles and fiercely opposed the internists, having been exiled from Nürenberg for his views. Until the controversy, he had been a reputed reformer and a Gnesiolutheran. See Rainer Hauke, Gott-Haben—um Gottes Willen. Andreas Osier’s Theosigedanke und die Diskussion um die Grundlagen der evangelisch verstandenen Rechtfertigung (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang 1999), pp. 82–110, 280; Martin Stupperich, Osier in Preussen 1549–1552 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1973); Carl Lawrenz, “On Justification, Osier’s Doctrine of the Indwelling Christ (FC, III)” in No other Gospel. Essays in Commemoration of the 400th Anniversary of the Formula of Concord 1580–1980, ed. Arnold J. Koelpin (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House. 1980, 150–153; F. Bente, Historical Introductions to the Book of Concord (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House 1965), pp. 152–153.


4 These include a lengthy examination on justification, Von dem einigen Mittler Jhesu Cristo und rechtfertigung des glaubens bekannts (1551) (AO 10, 49–300), where Osier furthers the analysis he had begun in Disputatio, and the reply to Melanchthon’s criticisms, Widerlegung Der ungegrundten undienstlichen Antwort Philipp Melanchtoni 1552 (AO 10, 561–670). See also AO 9–10, which contain Osier’s correspondence and other writings from 1549–1552.


6 Von dem einigen Mittler especially contains numerous quotes from Luther’s writings. See, e.g., AO 10, 174 (Mitter). On the comparison between Luther and Osier, see Zimmermann, “Die Thesen”, pp. 233–244; Peura, “Gott und Mensch”; Hauke, Gott-Haben, pp. 280–285. Also an interesting piece of work is Excerpta quaedam doctorum de justificantione facile in commentario super epistolam Pauli ad Galatas domini Martini Lutheri (1551), in which Osier repeats Luther’s core passages of the Commentary on Galatians. See AO 9, 577–581.

7 AO 9, 428, 1–2 (Disputatio, thesis 2); “Nihil enim justificant, quid non et vivificant. Nihilque vicissim vivificant, quod non simul etiam justificant.” (thesis 4) “Justificare enim propria et primaria institutione significat ex impio iustum facere, hoc est mortuum ad vitam revocare.” (thesis 9) “Anima enim ut peccato dominante mortua est, ita Christo per fidem inhabitante vivit.” See also theses 31, 32, 36–41.