CHAPTER FIVE

JOACHIM MÖRLIN AND MARTIN CHEMNITZ:
TOWARDS A SYNTHESIS OF EXTREMES

Martin Chemnitz, Melanchthon’s student and a specialist in patristic theology, was one of the leading figures in early Lutheranism. His formulation of the doctrine of justification can be positioned in a category between Osiander and Flacius. Like Flacius, Chemnitz wanted to maintain justification as an objective event yet simultaneously relate it to communion with Christ. The same idea can be found in the texts of Joachim Mörlin, a close friend and a colleague of Chemnitz.

5.1. Joachim Mörlin: Incarnated Christ as the Righteousness of the Sinner

While there are only a few studies available on Joachim Mörlin (1514–1571), his theology had a great impact on early Lutheran theology in two ways. First, he was one of the leading figures of the anti-osiandrian front. His letters and examinations on the development of the controversy formed the impressions of other Lutherans for a long time, even after the conflict. Second, he worked closely with Chemnitz, who took

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1 Mörlin studied in Wittenberg under Luther and Melanchthon. Luther especially considered Mörlin a promising theologian, and states about him that “if anyone will follow my teaching after I have passed away, it’ll be this man.” After his promotion (1540), Mörlin served as superintendent in Arnstadt and Göttingen. In 1550 he fled to Königsberg for the sake of the Interim, where he made friends with Osiander. In 1554 Mörlin was selected as superintendent of Braunschweig. During his office he participated actively in theological discussion, even vainly trying to heal the rift between Melanchthon and Flacius. Mörlin was not polemical like many other Gnesiolutherans.

2 One of the reasons for the small number of studies is the lack of source material. This study uses Mörlin’s Historia and Repetitio, which, however, are relatively short. The most important source is Mörlin’s correspondence with Osiander (OA 9).

advantage of some of his theological formulations. Especially interesting is Mörlin’s response to Osiander’s doctrine of justification.

When Mörlin arrived in Köningsberg in 1550, where the conflict surrounding Osiander was just gaining momentum, he considered Osiander to be in agreement with Luther. For a while Osiander and Mörlin were close friends. Osiander rejoiced in this, since now he had a friend with whom he could defend the genuine (γνήσιον) teaching of Luther. However, the friendship ended as the controversy deepened. Although Mörlin had first defended Osiander, he became his fierce opponent. While Mörlin criticized Osiander extensively he never denied Osiander’s thesis on the relation between Christ’s indwelling and justification. In his own texts Mörlin also emphasized the indwelling of Christ in faith. In spite of this, he saw dangerous aberrations in Osiander’s teachings. Mörlin depicted the development of the crisis and the teachings of the various parties in his most prominent work Historia Welcher gestalt sich die Osiandrische schwermerey im lande zu Preussen erhaben (1554). Historia lists fifteen theses that united the anti-osiandrian front.

I. Christ is not our salvation ‘by half’ so that we would have no more than forgiveness of sins through Him, as the Interimists imagine. II. But He is wholly our righteousness so that we receive through Him both forgiveness of sins and imputation of righteousness; i.e., in justification there is nothing that belongs to the sinner but everything belongs to Christ or is Christ himself. III. This righteousness is received only through the word. III. And this word of justification does not bring with itself any other than Christ, Son of God and Son of Mary. V. The only way to apprehend and grasp this word is through faith. VI. I.e., through faith everyone actually receives Christ the Mediator as their own. VII. In whom we also are righteousness before God. VIII. This is not through infused virtues dwelling in our person, or virtues flowing from us. IX. And not because of the great glory and value of the faith. X. But in the person of Christ XI. However, not outside of us. XII. But for the sake of Him.

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2. Scholars have considered Luther’s and Mörlin’s doctrines almost identical. According to Stupperich (Osiander in Preussen, p. 195): “Rechtfertigung und Heiligung wollte (Mörlin) nicht in zwei akte auseinandergerissen werden, sondern er betonte im Sinne von Luthers “fröhlichen wechsel” die Einheit von Rechtfertigung und Heiligung, die sich in einem Zuge vollzögen…” See also Roth, “Ein Braunschweiger Theologe”.
3. AO 9, 448, 7–10 (Osiander an Mörlin 24.8.1550).
5. Mörlin, Historia, Eil–Fii. See also Stupperich, Osiander in Preussen, p. 115.