

EARLY CRITICS OF MARTIN LUTHER:
THE CASE OF CASPAR VON SCHWENCKFELD

A paper presented by E.J. Furcha, Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill to the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Society of Church History (CSCH), Vancouver, B.C. June 1983.

Note: The following paper is an attempt to single out contemporaries of Martin Luther who critiqued some or all of his several theological and reformatory positions. It looks at the individual writers without prejudice and outside the often rather negative attitude toward them that was adopted by earlier histories, thus failing to do justice to their own respective positions.

To survey the current flood of Luther publications--particularly in Germany--is to reach the conclusion that the great Reformer of the sixteenth century is above criticism and reproach. Volume after volume explores for public or scholarly consumption Luther's influence then and now and his many-faceted contributions to literature, the German language, politics, music, theology, etc. Invariably the verdict is positive.

In view of such extensive affirmation of a person who undoubtedly towered above his age and has cast his shadow well into our own time, one might be permitted to review some criticism of Luther and his work on the sidelines of events, as it were, roughly between 1523 - 1561. The critic under review

is Caspar von Schwenckfeld, 1489-1561, Silesian nobleman and lay theologian.

It almost goes without saying, of course, that Schwenckfeld acknowledged the debt he owed Luther (CS IV, 822ff--a statement from about 1533). He never forgot Luther's great achievement in breaking down walls and introducing a reformed understanding of the Christian faith. In at least one instance, he was prepared to state agreement with Luther on twenty points (CS XI, 234f, dated 1553).¹ Nonetheless, from the vantage point of his own view on the nature of the church, the power of the internal word of God and the need to find the fruits of the spirit in the lives of the followers of Christ, he felt compelled to challenge Luther and some of his exponents. Instead of change and renewal their efforts seemed to him to lead once again to the tyranny of a dead faith (Cf Letter to Friedrich II, Count of Liegnitz, Oct. 1528--CS III, 103ff; and CS V, 822.11-16 and many other passages).

Schwenckfeld may not have been the first follower of Luther, turned critic, but he is certainly among the most persistent. He chides the Reformer for not being radical enough in his efforts to reform the church,² for rejecting the papacy, while accepting some of its teaching,³ for vacillating on points of teaching⁴, and last, but not least, for

Luther's failure to recall that God can make wise men of fools--"as a doctor ought to know" (CS IX,54.27ff).

There were those, of course, who earlier had charged Luther of heresy and blamed him for leaving the true teaching of the church. From among his own ranks, Carlstadt, Spalatin, Agricola and Thomas Muentzer--to name but a few--expressed objections and/or criticism.⁵ They shall not concern us here. There is plenty of material in Schwenckfeld's own work referring to Luther and things Lutheran to hold our attention for the remainder of this paper.⁶

Perhaps more than any other contemporary theologian, Luther fascinated the Silesian nobleman. Even when he disagreed with the Wittenberg reformer he often insisted on the bond of friendship between them and acknowledged the lasting influence Luther had exerted upon him. Unfortunately, the feeling was not always mutual. Luther's attitude toward Schwenckfeld, especially in later years, was either one of indifference or anger. He obviously did not take him seriously as a theologian and simply lumped him with other enthusiasts. In fact, he may frequently not even have read what Schwenckfeld had to say.

As we noted elsewhere, three phases in Schwenckfeld's critique of Luther and Lutheran teachings may be

distinguished.⁷ During the first, which ended about 1529--the year of the Marburg Colloquy--the two men are in agreement. While not all of Luther's tenets are accepted by Schwenckfeld, he is relatively gentle in his criticism and seeks to affirm similarities rather than stress differences.

With Schwenckfeld's opposition to union negotiations at any price, the second phase is generally delineated. Several major writings of this period contain heated exchanges in which Schwenckfeld ascribes flaws in Luther's thought to a faulty Christology. More likely than not, though, they may be rooted in Luther's anthropology in which the enslaved will plays such a prominent role. As we shall see later, the nobleman seems to side with Erasmus, though he shifts the emphasis by relating free will to the regenerate person.

Additional pressure to sharpen his criticism and clarify his position comes from a rather stinging attack on Schwenckfeld's views by a group of theologians and pastors meeting at Schmalcalden during February/March 1540. The attack is directed against both Franck and Schwenckfeld. The former is charged with errors regarding the doctrine of the church. Some of his paradoxes are singled out for censure.

Schwenckfeld's offence is said to be a faulty Christology in that he allegedly denies the humanity of Christ (C.R. 111.983-986). The nobleman replies in 1541 in the Confession und Erklerung vom Erkandtnus Christi....to which he appended a detailed response to each of the clauses in the Schmalcalden Articles that referred to his teaching (CS VII, Doc. 354, especially pp 500-509; the booklet, incidentally, is one of Schwenckfeld's major writings). A bitter taste lingered for a long time. As late as 1553 in A Letter to Sybilla Eisler he refers to this "ganging up" on him by Melanchthon, Bucer, Bugenhagen and others (CS XI11,253ff).

In the third phase, Schwenckfeld emerges as one who speaks for the "true" Luther over against distortions in other Luther exponents. This phase begins in the late forties and probably reaches its peak in the mid-fifties with a rather drawn-out exchange of pamphlets between the Silesian and Flacius Illyricus, 1520-1575.⁸

When we undertake to review Schwenckfeld's critique, we are not seeking to undermine Luther's prestige. Nothing would prove to be more futile than such a venture. However, the criticisms of Luther by his contemporaries are worth hearing, especially when they come from within the camp, as it

were, and are aimed not so much at bringing Luther back to his former ways, as they are to advance his cause and to assure a sound Biblical foundation to his evangelical stance. We shall follow Schwenckfeld's critique in roughly chronological sequence.

Ere we do so, a brief word on Schwenckfeld himself may be in order. The Silesian has definitely been on the sidelines of Reformation history. Until recently most historians dismissed him--along with Carlstadt, Denck and Franck, et. al.--as an enthusiast or radical Spiritualist. Largely through the dedicated work of the Schwenckfelders of America who searched out extant works and commissioned the nineteen volume Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum his literary output is now available. Scholars like Karl Ecke, E. Ellwein, Julius Endriss and more recently Joachim Schoeps and the late Reinhold Pietz, have gradually rehabilitated Schwenckfeld. The biography by Selina G. Schultz, recently re-issued, is still the best account of his remarkable life.

The nobleman was what Europeans call a diletant. He loved theological pursuits and obviously enjoyed discursive treatments of key tenets in letters and pamphlets. Though in his early years he had been in the employ of a Silesian Duke, he later seemed to

propagate Pacifist notions. His spiritualist understanding led him to a form of universalism similar to that of Denck and Franck.

As far as we know, Schwenckfeld never married. For the greater part of his mature years, from about 1529 to his death in 1561, he moved about the countryside, visiting with benevolent ladies of means, enjoying the hospitality of broadminded abbots, and possibly reaping the benefits of his extensive publications.⁹

The Silesian nobleman is to be numbered among the so-called twice born. He had a religious experience which he fondly referred to as a "gnaedige Heimsuchung".¹ Whether this gracious visitation gave the impetus to Schwenckfeld's increased internalizing of the Christ event or whether it was preoccupation with some of the Medieval mystics, there is a definite thrust in his writings toward separating spirit and matter in the life of faith and in any attempts to speak theologically.

The temptation is great to read into Schwenckfeld's position a kind of universalism that would undermine the significance of the atonement. However, he is quite explicit that only the elect receive the divine seed. Only when the eternal word, Jesus Christ, is conceived internally--without the aid of any externals--can a new birth, the second birth, come about in the

receptive heart of a believer (CS 111,832; V,410,501f). Individuals who are thus renewed from within will then become instruments of the renewal of the church. Any other kind of reform of the church appears to him to be inadequate and affected by human measures. This would merely lead to a new dogmatism.

One of the difficulties that presents itself in reading Schwenckfeld is the discursive nature of his tracts and letters. In addition, he often attacks Luther's followers, alleging that they held a position like that of their master. It is often next to impossible therefore, to single out what is intended to be criticism of Luther's own position and what is aimed at a system, roughly identifiable as "Lutheran".

As Schwenckfeld matures in his own theological understanding and approximates his theology to that of the Medieval mystics and to those exponents of Scripture and early Christian traditions who stress the spiritual nature of God's dealings with his creatures, the gap between him and Luther widens. On the nobleman's part, criticism of Luther gets to be more clearly focussed on specific theological tenets and on the way of reform which allegedly is stuck in externals. On Luther's part, one notes an ever growing animosity because of the stubbornness

and audacity with which this relatively uneducated gadfly of theological notions interferes with the orderly progression of Luther's significant work.¹¹ With this brief sketch of Schwenckfeld's life and work, we may now venture into specific criticisms he makes of Luther.

Perhaps one of the first criticism of Luther comes from the year 1525. It is recorded in a rather rambling letter to a relative, dated May 8, 1540. The letter is preserved in a printed Epistolar of 1570. Allegedly the information it contains is drawn from diary entries, made in 1525 but no longer extant. This weakens the reliability of the document. A recollection--though based on accurate information--is coloured by the intervening years and the different perspective of a person in his fifties.

One remarkable feature of the account, however, is its irenic tone and the relative equanimity with which the author reflects on his first enquiry of the scholar Luther and the pastor Bugenhagen (Pomeranus). Schwenckfeld represents himself as a humble learner whose scholarly qualifications do not allow him to be too decisive on any point. Nonetheless, he ventures to query and even contradict both Luther and Bugenhagen on the meaning of the relevant words in the Eucharist

when translated into German. The influence of Zwingli's "spiritual" reading of Luke 22.19 is apparent and acknowledged,

Meum corpus, quod pro vobis datur, est
hoc scilicet quod panis fractus, comestus, etc.

One dimension of the ever-growing discrepancy between a reformed understanding of the text and its Medieval interpretation shines through the dialogue, especially when the Silesian is moved to exclaim, "es ist unmoeglich das des Bapstes Reich soll undergehen weil dieser Artickel des Fleisches und Bluts im Sacrament des Brots und Weins stehet." (11,247, 9-11).

In subsequent years Schwenckfeld critiques the Lutheran eucharistic teaching regularly and with poignancy. One of the chief sources he draws on is John 6. For the right understanding of the words of institution this text is crucial. It figures prominently in the writings of Valentine Crautwald, a professor of theology at the University of Liegnitz, as it does in the Epistola Christiana of the Dutch lawyer Cornelius H. Hoen (died before April 1524).¹² As the nobleman gains confidence in his own theological understanding, he assails Luther's attempt to reconcile Medieval teaching with newly won Biblical insights. On occasion, he points to Luther's own arguments in support of an understanding of the eucharist which

takes seriously the spiritual nature of the living Christ who communicates in/through the believing heart.

Another important document in the eucharistic debate is Schwenckfeld's 1527 edition of Crautwald's De Caena Dominica (CS 11,422ff). Equally significant is Schwenckfeld's Anweisung (CS 11,440ff). It contains arguments against the four dominant views held at the time, namely the Anabaptist, Curialist, Lutheran and Zwinglian positions. Again, the document is not published until 1570, though it seems to have been circulated in manuscript form since approximately February of 1527.

The nobleman continues his campaign for spiritual reform. By 1528 he adds to his critique of Luther's eucharistic position, concern over easy compromises in so-called union discussions. He seems to think that the Marburg Colloquy (1529) is a sell-out of what he believes to be the genuine evangelical teaching.

He objects further to Luther's teaching on free will, preferring a middle position between the two initial antagonists, Erasmus and Luther, "per iudicium Spirituale", as he puts it in an undated letter, probably addressed to John Rurer, a Liegnitz professor (CS 111, Doc. 57, p. 24ff and Doc. 59, p. 37ff, probably from the same year).

Though, as we noted above, Schwenckfeld had distanced himself from Luther by 1533 to the extent that he did not even like to be classed among Luther disciples, the final break did not come--it would appear--until the Tuebingen Colloquy in May 1535. This particular meeting involved him with Blaurer of Constance, Bucer and Frecht of Ulm on issues which range from right preaching to union negotiations which compromised evangelical liberty as the nobleman perceived it. Other issues dealt with were the concept of the church, infant baptism, the nature of Christ, the eucharist, etc. Several extant letters, pamphlets and reports of occasional meetings suggest that the road to this particular encounter with leading Lutherans had been arduous. While I have glanced at the documentation on Schwenckfeld's side (largely contained in CS V, especially documents 170, 186-194), I am not prepared at this point to pursue the matter further. Suffice it to say that Schwenckfeld gradually shifts his attacks away from Luther to one of his exponents and to a challenge of the practice of Lutheran preachers.

Not infrequently, he takes up the defence of his position indirectly by counselling enquirers or adherents on how Luther ought to be understood or how his "erroneous ways" might be corrected once again.

In 1527/28 Schwenckfeld takes issue with Luther's theory of ubiquity (CS 111,250ff)¹³ and considers him in error when ascribing divine qualities to bread and wine (CS 111,633). In a 1530 publication, Schwenckfeld alleges that Luther misunderstood the mystery of the incarnation (Vom wahren und falschen Verstand und glauben, CS 111, Doc. 97).

Again and again he returns to the charge that Luther is concerned with external things and that he allows too great a freedom to the unregenerate to be involved in the eucharist though they are unworthy and lack discernment of the body of Christ.

Another topic on which the nobleman publicly differs from Luther is the manner in which he understands the believer to be nurtured and affirmed in the faith. With reference to Galatians 3.2 Schwenckfeld reads "by the hearing of God's word". The difference seems to be significant enough to allow Schwenckfeld to build on it the separation of externals from internals in matters of faith (CS 1,148--in a letter, probably as early as 1523, to the sisters in the Cloister of Naumburg). He seems to agree with Franck when he argues that the spirit must be present to illumine the word, while for Luther the spirit is given in the reading and hearing of the word.

To Schwenckfeld the internal nature of the word of God and its freedom from any externals is a significant tenet above all others, it would seem. Since the gospel is not a law but the teaching of God in the heart, it cannot be received through the external hearing--a teaching Luther is alleged to have maintained.

Related to this argument is Schwenckfeld's criticism of Luther's view of the church. Here the nobleman is concerned with the notion that only the truly regenerate persons are "brothers in Christ" (CS IV,818).

Naturally, he affirms a holy, universal church. He objects, however, to defining this church in terms of a local community (CS V,336-337).

Das Volck im Newen Testament wird je ein
geistlich Volck genennt...
Denn die im fleisch noch kinder sein
nur zeitlich guter nemen ein (CS XIll,6lff).

Though he distinguishes himself in his ecclesiology both from Luther and the mainline reformers and from the Anabaptists, he does not fall into the trap of conventicalism altogether. There is, however, the tendency in his position toward disembodiment that borders dangerously close in docetism in his christology and insists on an elusiveness from the world that makes the church he espouses virtually invisible (cf. E.J.

Furcha, Schwenckfeld's Concept of the New Man,
p. 114ff and 180f).

Schwenckfeld's poetic attempts to exalt the glorified state of the Son of God and with him to elevate the bride of Christ to a realm considered to be beyond reach led to the suspicion by many of his contemporaries that he was actually denying the fulness of Christ affirmed by Chalcedon. Schwenckfeld resented this charge. To allow us to see for ourselves and to draw our own conclusions, I shall juxtapose a few statements by the nobleman and by Luther.

In his Abelainung und Verantwortung (1544), he makes the following claims. These are compared to excerpts from Luther's writings of the years 1525-30¹⁴

A. Luther

B. Schwenckfeld

1. Physical and spiritual eating of the Lord's Supper is distinguished. God's presence would be of no avail to man, unless there is a visible sign of his presence (WA 23.182).

Indeed, even if the flesh of Christ were beef, as long as God's word bids us eat it, it would be of avail for the sake of the word (WA 23.257/258).

2. Christ has won forgiveness on the Cross; it is available only in the Eucharist. To find forgiveness, one has to go to the Sacrament (WA 18.203).

1. Schwenckfeld objects to the obvious separation of the teaching of Jn. 6 from what is given to the disciples in the Eucharist (IX, 39:23ff). Such outward eating cannot be confirmed by Scripture (IX, 38:12ff).

2. To place the power of Christ's suffering in the visible sacrament is to introduce a new kind of indulgence (IX, 40:16ff).

3. They all have eaten of the same spiritual food (1 Cor. 10:3). Therefore everyone who eats the Sacrament, partakes of Christ's body (WA 28.288).

4. The right hand of God is everywhere, yet at the same time nowhere. Christ's body is in heaven and among men. He binds himself to the sacrament that men need not go a hunting everywhere (WA 23.150-152).

5. On the basis of Ps. 42:4 (!), Luther urges his adherents to be the throng and to receive the Sacraments as a sign of thanksgiving in time of spiritual barrenness. For to spurn God by not participating in the Sacraments is to run the risk of being spurned by God (WA 30.II. 605-618).

3. Schwenckfeld is opposed to such a view. He finds it to be the result of mingling the body of Christ and the material objects, given as a memorial (IX, 39:12ff).

4. Schwenckfeld objects to such physical limitation as unscriptural and dangerous (Christ himself has warned against such localization, Mt. 24:23) (IX, 41:29-42:6).

5. Such insistence is to make an idol of the Sacraments. It is to tie salvation to works and to place confidence in the sign and equate it to Jesus Christ, the sole giver of all grace and salvation (IX, 41:12ff).

The trend of Schwenckfeld's thought is clear. The more he observes a hardening of Luther's views, the more he reminds his readers of the Reformer's earlier leaning toward spiritual renewal. In the Kirchenpostille of 1522 (WA X.I.1,186), Schwenckfeld reads of Luther's affirmation of the power of God's word as transmitter of the divine nature. At that time Luther stressed its difference from perishable human words. In the publications under discussion, however, Schwenckfeld discovers a tendency to mingle external and internal word. He concludes therefrom that Luther's reform attempts have obviously not

gone beyond the Sacramentarianism which Schwenckfeld had feared since 1525 (CS II, 247.5--248.5).

	gospel		the letter
	spirit		reason
	faith		a phantom (ein wahn)
Luther's	sacrament	is	creature
	people		carnal
	godliness		false and imaginary (CS IV, 52.3-9)

Luther must not be surprised if he finds many people objecting to his teaching on the Lord's Supper (CS V, Doc. 184). What had begun as a worthy enterprize in correcting the errors of the papacy, threatens to turn into a new tyranny (CS III, 103.26ff). Schwenckfeld's verdict is that Luther's evangelical reforms do not rise above carnal liberty: they rely on an invented faith and the dead letter.

He is concerned with maintaining internal discipline within the church. He makes that a prerequisite for rightful participation in the sacrament.

Why does he object to Luther's position as he understands it? A clue may be found in a fragment conjecturally dated 1535, though it may be earlier (CS V. Doc. 184, pp 273/74). Here the Silesian advances seven arguments for not wishing to accept Luther's teaching on the matter. Foremost is the observation that Luther's eucharist involves both a spiritual and a physical manducation. Schwenckfeld by now is definitely advocating a Stillstand, i.e. abstention from participation in the eucharist, until the issues

are clarified and a conclusive theological position has emerged. Though he rejects being labeled non sacramental, he comes rather close to a denial of any visible manifestation of Christian unity and communion.

Schwenckfeld further objects to Luther's lifting of the bread during the eucharistic celebration--a gesture which he interprets as a remnant of the Medieval practice of veneration of the body (the practice according to Baum, Capito and Bucer, p. 513 was continued in Wittenberg until at least June 1536).

Thirdly, in Luther's eucharist both the worthy and the unworthy are given the bread. In his own leaning toward a Donatist view of the church, Schwenckfeld finds such a practice unacceptable.

One more of the seven points deserves mention here. It is the suspicion on the part of the Silesian that Luther's words of institution function as a bringing of the body of Christ from heaven into the bread. Does he allude here to what is widely known as Luther's consubstantiation (the "in-with-and-under-the-bread" presence of Christ)? (Cf WA 26.287.288 for Luther's position).

Schwenckfeld seems to find some agreement with his views in Bucer. In methodology, at least, Bucer

seems to have borrowed the Silesian's approach when he juxtaposes the early and the later Luther arguing that the latter is a regrettable departure from the former. (He speaks in defence of Schwenckfeld in section 20 of the Vergleichung. Cf Martin Bucers Deutsche Schriften, 11, p. 363f).¹⁵

After Marburg, Schwenckfeld's agreement with Bucer and others of the Strasbourg circle seems less evident. The relationship between them is certainly less cordial. Bucer circulated allegations to the effect that the Silesian was dangerous to the Protestant cause because of his heretical views. Schwenckfeld, in turn, set out to defend himself. Two such writings are the Schutzschrift (CS IV, Doc. 142) and Protestation, (CS IV, Doc. 138) both of 1533. Taken together the two pamphlets reflect succinctly Schwenckfeld's position at the time (see also, Krebs/Rott, Elsass 11, p. 75ff).

The change in leadership within the Lutheran camp after Luther's death, shifts the thrust of Schwenckfeld's criticism to the positions of some of the advocates of Lutheran teaching whom he suspects of infidelity to the cause. Interestingly enough, most of his attention is directed to Flacius whom we mentioned earlier.¹⁶ The arguments are contained

in at least five pamphlets written by the nobleman or someone close to him between 1553-1555.¹⁷ A sketch of the most pertinent points must suffice here. I have limited myself to delineating the position of Flacius as found in a copy of his Von der heiligen Schrifft...wider Caspar Schwenckfeld (1553).¹⁸ Several other counter arguments by Schwenckfeld are preserved in volumes XI11 and XI V of the Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum.¹⁹

<u>Illyricus</u>	<u>Schwenckfeld</u>
1. Schwenckfeld misreads Rom. 10.15 when he considers that faith comes from the inward hearing (XI11, 379;12ff; 380-381).	1. No one comes to the Father unless he is drawn (Jn. 6:44, 45) (XI11, 515:31). Illyricus does not know how God speaks in the heart (XI11, 526:12). ²⁰
2. Schwenckfeld denies that Scripture is the word of God (XI11,380:26;432).	2. Illyricus introduces new idol worship, when he substitutes anything else for the one Word by which all things are made, viz. Jesus Christ (XI11,514:20ff). ²¹
3. To posit the inward communication of God in a believer's heart is heretical (XI11,381,382).	3. All men are taught by God (Jn. 6:45). To ground faith in the preached or written word is an error (XI11, 516:19ff). ²²
4. Christ and 'word of God' cannot be equated (XI11,387ff).	4. Illyricus is a literalist, like the Jews. He does not know that Christ is the Word (XI11,518:23ff). ²³
5. To say that God does not use media in the conversion of the sinner is false (XI11, 403,413,427).	5. Illyricus errs with Sophists and Thomists when he states that God works our salvation through media (XI11,515:20ff). ²⁴

6. Sacraments and the ministry of apostles and preachers now are valid (Xl11,435).

7. Conversion is not justification (Xl11,443).

8. Faith is not God dwelling in a believer's heart (Xl11, 443/444).

9. Even Christians cannot keep the Law of God perfectly (Xl11, 446).

6. Illyricus errs in ascribing the same power to the preaching of the Apostles and to that of humble preachers (Xl11, 516:34ff).²⁵

7. Illyricus does not know what it means to be converted (Xl11,517:20ff).²⁶

8. God works the conversion of the sinner inwardly through himself (Xl11,536:4ff).²⁷

9. Christ liberates (Jn. 8:32) and brings to life what was dead (Xl11,568:35).²⁸

We could multiply charge and counter charge at will. However, the above examples are sufficient evidence of the fierce struggle that raged at this time among Lutheran theologians. Their concern was with the right interpretation of Luther's stance. Were we to include Maior's²⁹ arguments and consider the controversy between Illyricus and Osiander, we would have sufficient material for a rather extensive analysis. We are perhaps on track in suspecting that Illyricus fights what he hears Schwenckfeld is saying rather than what Schwenckfeld actually says. The nobleman, too, seems to be attacking a caricature of the preachers rather than Illyricus, himself. However, he is accurate enough in summarizing his opponent's argument to deserve credit for having read his books.

Three points of difference are of particular interest in this context. The first is a tendency

on the part of Illyricus to make the inward renewal dependent upon an exact course of outwardly observable factors. He hopes thereby to safeguard the smooth progress of the Evangelical church against the onslaught of Sectarian deviations. From the same motive of keeping pure what had begun in the Spirit of God, Schwenckfeld (and the Maiorists for that matter), claims priority for the inward operation of God's Spirit.

Somewhat related to this problem is Illyricus' insistence on the differentiation of conversion (renewal) and justification. For Illyricus--as Haikola points out--renewal follows immediately after justification. Both are to be rigidly separated from obedience (which is not God's work but ours).³⁰ That Illyricus had to consider Schwenckfeld's position a form of synergism is apparent. When one overlooks that the nobleman treats *renovatio*, *regeneratio* and *vivificatio* as synonymous expressions for the divine act of reclaiming fallen humanity by coming to dwell in a person's inward being, one might mistake his theology of regeneration for synergism. With Osiander (against whom Illyricus polemized in his De Justificatione),³¹ Schwenckfeld shares an understanding of rebirth which includes the forensic and empirical aspects of justification. He agrees with Illyricus that God

demands perfect righteousness--a demand which cannot be met by sinful people. However, he is convinced from his reading of Scripture and the testimony of the early church that renewal and rebirth are essential prerequisites of justification. Illyricus has misinterpreted Schwenckfeld's intention when he accuses him of having made some mediating qualifications the condition of justification. Nowhere in his theological 'system' does he in fact come closer to arguing for the immediacy of the God-human relationship than in his doctrine of rebirth. God works throughout, to effect and accomplish his own purposes. Schwenckfeld clearly defines justification. "Justificatio (i.e. justifying and making just) is God's gracious dealing with us in order to accomplish his salvation....In (this act) a sinner is converted, born anew, made godly, righteous and holy" (Xl111,867:4ff).

On the basis of Rom. 3:28-30; Gal. 2:16; 3:24 and 5:14, the nobleman defines 'justificare' to mean 'aus einem gotlosen ungerechten Sunder einen gotseligen, frommen, gerechten menschen machen' (XIV, 791:3ff). "By justification, a sinner is made God's beloved servant--a dear child who is regenerate" (Xl111,672:10ff).

Illyricus vehemently defends evangelical imputation to guard himself against the accusation of positing an arbitrary God in the act of declaring a sinner

righteous. With similar force, Schwenckfeld, on the other hand, declares that any 'imputativa justitia extra nos' is unscriptural and a miserable deception through false teaching (XVI,17).

The third difference, if not as vehemently defended on either side as the second, is of importance, nonetheless. It is the question of a valid definition of 'word of God'. In 1551, Schwenckfeld had written an extensive treatise in which he differentiates between external and internal word.³² On the Lutheran side, he found strong claims made for the 'verbum vocale' of the preachers that seemed to equate the living word of God with human words. The difference between him and the Lutherans is one of degrees. Schwenckfeld refuses to bind the living creative and recreative word of God to externals. Scripture and the preached word are authoritative only insofar as they are authenticated by the witness of the Holy Spirit.

The Lutherans of his day, on the other hand, accepted Scripture and the preached word as the norm by which to 'test the spirits'. In their understanding, the Spirit of God was seen to be operative in the very act of reading Scripture; the written word of God was regarded as an aid in the process of renewal. For Schwenckfeld, on the other hand, the Bible

remained a book of seven seals to the unregenerate person. "Without Christ and his Spirit, Holy Scripture cannot be understood, as Paul testifies to the Corinthians" (2 Cor. 3:14-17) (X11, 427:30ff).

"Believers, however, ought to use it for instruction, reproof, correction and punishment" (X11,433:15ff). Even then, one must remember that these 'tools' are helpful to the external being only (X11, 434:23ff), and that Christ alone is the sole foundation of the new life (X11,436:1ff). "Wherever the Lord is present, there is his word, even though there were no Scripture" (X11,453,margin).

The misunderstanding between Schwenckfeld and Illyricus was not resolved during their life time. In fact, the same problem of interpretation became apparent in the work of all Reformers who had attempted to define rebirth and renewal in terms of God's breaking into human existence to reclaim it from its fallen state, and had then proceeded to confine the redemptive power within institutional boundaries. They invariably found that the reality of the institutional church--even though it had been purged from numerous blemishes--was far from the ideal body of Christ. Yet this body alone had been ordained to be the 'divine' agent of God's recreative work. To

To accept the truth of the continuation of Christ's atoning work and to lay claim to his power in renewing human life, was to take seriously the question to what extent this new birth became effective here and now.

Schwenckfeld chose the one alternative. He removed the 'boundaries' of the new life beyond the confines of human institutions. He risked misunderstanding. The magisterial Reformers took the other extreme. They defined the 'new life' within the categories of reason and the visible boundaries of the institutional church. Perfection and fulfilment were placed beyond the experiential level of the here and now. Despite apparent coherence, they risked fragmentation of the body of Christ. Both paths are still live options.

FOOTNOTES

¹Among the agreements listed are, Faith justifies and not works; By nature we do not have a free will to do the good; God's grace alone brings about what is good in us; God's grace is the beginning of our salvation; Christ is sole mediator and our only saviour.

²This charge appears among other allegations in V.Doc. 184, likely from the year 1535.

³In a circular of 1531 Schwenckfeld notes the contradiction in Luther's position when he rejects the papacy, yet praises some of the teaching promulgated by it. (Cf. C.S. IV, 197).

⁴Cf. volumes XVll, p. 488 where Luther is accused of being more changeable than a cameleon and XVlll, 227-235 where contradictory statements on the matter of the sacrament are pointed out by Schwenckfeld. Both writings come from a time between 1542 and 1559.

⁵The Carlstadt-Luther debate at Jena in 1524 is perhaps one of the early indications of internal tensions; cf. Sider, Karlstadt's Battle with Luther, pp. 38-48. See also G. Rupp, Patterns of Reformation. Tension with Agricola are reflected in WA 39/1 pp. 334ff; this dates to the period from between 1537-40. According to S. Ozment, Mysticism and Dissent, p. 66 Muentzer may be the first to charge Luther's concept of grace with being "cheap grace". G. Spalatin, 1484-1545 argued that Luther's emphasis on justification by grace alone would lead to neglect of good works; Cf WA 6.196 and WA 40 11.60.

⁶Of the twelve hundred and fifty two items in the Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum, though not all from the pen of the nobleman, many take issue with one or more of Luther's concepts.

⁷Cf E.J. Furcha, Schwenckfeld's Concept of the New Man, p. 129ff.

⁸See p. 20f below.

⁹I am not aware of any account he kept of income from his literary output, but judging from the popularity of his writings well into the 17th and 18th centuries his popularized theology sold well and financial benefits must have been good.

¹⁰S.G. Schultz, Op. Cit., p. 6ff, puts the date as early as 1518. I am inclined to place the experience sometime between 1525-29. Cf Furcha, Op. Cit. p. 13.

¹¹S. quotes a statement by Luther from around 1543/44 in his own Von de Creatur beim Erkanstmus

¹²Von der Creatur beim Erkanntnus Christi und Luthers Malediction, C.S. IX, 33. "Uber das feret er zu mit

seyner Eutycherej und Creaturlichait macht die Kyrchen irre. So ihm doch Gott nichts bevolhen noch gesanndt. Und der unsynlige Narr vom Teuffell besessen versteet nichts, waiss nicht was er lallet. Will er aber nicht aufhören, so lass ermich mit seinen Biechlein die der Teufel aus ihm scheisset und speyet ungehewet.

¹²O. Clemens has argued that Luther rejected Hoen's view as early as 1521 when the Epistola Christiana was brought to him by Hinne Rode. The editors of Z IV, however, question the traditionally held chronology of events. When Zwingli published the document with his own comments in 1525 (Z IV.505ff) he may have meant to address Erasmus rather than Luther. It is possible even that Hoen never intended his own publication for Luther at all.

¹³Cf 11, Doc 40 and L11,240ff Luther is said to judge carnally in the matter of the real presence of Christ in the sacrament.

¹⁴The four treatises are: Wider die himmlischen Propheten ... (1525) (WA XVlll), Dass diese Worte 'Das ist mein leib' noch feststahn (1527) (WA XXll), Vom Abendmahl Christi, Bekenntnis (1528) (WA XXVl), and Vermahnung zum Sacrament des Leibes und Blutes Christi (1530) (WA XXX).

¹⁵The work he defends is Ein anwysunge das die opinion der leyplichen gegenwertgheyt unsers Herren Jesu Christi jm Brote oder under der gestalt dess Brots gericht ist. CSlll.1f. The same pamphlet was published by Zwingli in August of the same year with a short preface by the editor.

¹⁶For a recent study of the theological position of Illyricus, cf. Lauri Haikola; Gesetz und Evangelium, Lund: 1952. Unfortunately, Haikola disregards almost completely the feud between Illyricus and Schwenckfeld, although it extended over a period of years and touched on some of the problems which were central in the thought of Illyricus, viz. faith and justification, the degree of sin in a new man, and the relation of Law and Gospel.

¹⁷The five treatises are: a. Juditium eines predigers in der Schlesien (1553). This is likely not by Schwenckfeld (Xlll,545). b. Vom Worte Gottes (1554);

c. Vom Unterschayde des worts Gottes und der hayligen Schrift (1554); d. Confutatio und Ablainung (1554). All four documents are in Volume XlII. The fifth treatise appeared in 1555, after Illyricus had produced yet another book against Schwenckfeld. Schwenckfeld's reply is the Beschluss und Valete (XlV,514ff).

¹⁸The text is from a reproduction of a copy which had been used by Schwenckfeld in his refutation (XlII, 361ff).

¹⁹I have not listed all the documents here. They are easily accessible in volumes XlII and XlV of the Corpus.

²⁰See also XlII,533:20ff; 535:25ff. and frequently elsewhere.

²¹See also XlII,516:29ff.

²²Cf also VI,296; XlII,527:34ff.

²³Cf also XlII,515:39ff; 519:8; 538:1ff.

²⁴Cf also XlII,515:5ff; 516:15ff.

²⁵Further reference: XlII,564:29ff.

²⁶Cf also XlII,533:5ff.

²⁷Similar remarks in: XlII,519:36ff; 531:18ff; 535:25ff.

²⁸Similar remarks: IV,719:28; V,815:9; XlII,557:25; 566ff.

²⁹Maier (1502-1574) was a Lutheran theologian who stood opposed to Illyricus in his insistence on the reality of justification and the beginning of the new life here on earth. One might say that he defends the early Luther (of the Kirchenpostille and the Psalmenvorlesung), whereas Illyricus builds his system on the theology of the later Luther.

³⁰Haikola; Op. Cit. chapter VIII.

³¹Haikola; Op. Cit. pp. 315ff.

³²Von der Hailigen Schrift was likely begun earlier but appears in circulation only during the early part of 1551. XI, 417ff. See pp. 28, 43ff. and 184ff. Schwenckfeld contends that Scripture becomes illuminating by the agency of the Spirit only. Apart from the revelatory activity of the Spirit, Scripture remains a "dead letter". To the believer it is of four-fold use, namely to edify, to admonish, to improve and to punish. In this context it is essential to recall the distinction between Holy Scripture and the Word of God. In other words, the nobleman subscribes to a modified "Biblicist" position whereby Scripture is the norm to a believer who is guided by the Spirit of God in his understanding of what Scripture contains for him.