

# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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Issue 21: Caspar Schwenckfeld: Forgotten Reformer

## Caspar Schwenckfeld von Ossig: From the Publisher

This is the kind of issue we love to do at Christian History—an issue about a figure whom you should know about, but who has been practically forgotten in the shuffle of Church history.

**Caspar Schwenckfeld** (yes, his name sounds strange) was a reformer who fell out of favor with the “mainstream” of the Reformation. He did not wish to found a Church or separate movement; he had no interest in having political muscle behind his doctrines. He wanted *spiritual* reform—in the inner Christian life. He believed in the purging of error from the Catholic Church, but was discouraged at the small influence Luther’s reform was having on personal morals and individual godliness. (Luther himself lamented the un-Christian lives of many of those who jumped on his reformation bandwagon: many were merely political Protestants.) Schwenckfeld was intensely concerned with the influence of theological ideas on personal practice—on the life of Faith.

Until this century, Schwenckfeld’s small group of followers did not claim to be a church. They simply called themselves *confessors of the glory of Christ*, after Schwenckfeld’s theological emphasis on a glorified Christ. They were a small group with a vital spirituality who had settled in Pennsylvania (part of the so-called “Pennsylvania Dutch” heritage) after being cruelly driven from Europe by intolerant Catholics and Protestants, both of whom rejected them as heretics. Thank God Count Zinzendorf offered refuge to the Schwenckfelders, and has left history a record of mercy, acceptance, and Christian love in a time when, tragically, intolerance *among Christians* was the order of the day.

1989 marks the 500th anniversary of Schwenckfeld’s birth in what was then Silesia, today part of Poland. There are only five Schwenckfelder Churches in existence today, all in a small area of Pennsylvania. They have been careful to learn, preserve, and keep alive their heritage.

As our neighbors, we can almost see the steeple of one of their churches from our offices in the Pennsylvania countryside (trees are in the way). We are glad to honor them and their heritage, on the half-millennium anniversary of Schwenckfeld’s birth, and delight in the opportunity to devote an issue to a subject “near to home,” for our friends.

Our special thanks to Dr. Peter C. Erb of Wilfrid Laurier University, Ontario, Canada, scholar and writer, authority on Schwenckfeld, who was an invaluable resource person for this entire issue; to Dennis Moyer at the Schwenckfelder Library, who was very kind and helpful, and who guided us through their amazing collection of rare documents and pictures and let us see Schwenckfeld’s Bible up-close; to Reverend Jack Rothenberger, of the Central Schwenckfelder Church, Worcester, PA, for his assistance at many points in preparing this issue.

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## The Schwenckfeld Bible

The Reformation was a time of reawakening of Bible study, and Caspar Schwenckfeld was a serious student of the Bible. His personal Bible, pictured here and on our cover was printed in Worms, Germany, in 1529, by Anton Koberger. (Koberger had printed a German translation of the Scriptures in Nurnberg in 1483—the year of Luther’s birth, and 51 years before Luther’s own translation of 1534.)

Schwenckfeld’s detailed notes throughout the text show how exhaustive and penetrating was his reading and reflection on the biblical books. Above is the book of Genesis; the woodcut shows the creation, Fall, and expulsion of Adam and Eve. Below is a portion of the book of Psalms, Schwenckfeld especially loved this part of the Bible and viewed it as prophetic of the coming of Christ.

The notes are those of Schwenckfeld and of his scholarly follower Adam Reissner, who possessed Schwenckfeld’s Bible after his death. This Bible is preserved, along with many other reformation-era documents and later Schwenckfelder writings, in the Schwenckfelder Library in Pennsylvania.

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## The Reformation Era

An old adage says, "To the victors belong the spoils." In no place does this prove truer than in the writing of history. History has most often been written from the point of view of the winners, not the losers. For this reason the writing of the history of the reformation era has always caused difficulty.

Indeed, until the beginning of this century there were few studies of the Reformation not written either from the point of view of the victorious Catholics in the south and east of Europe, or from that of the Lutheran and Reformed church Protestants in the north. And for both these groups, those reformers such as Schwenckfeld, now referred to as **Radical Reformers**, were represented negatively. Designated as **Schwaermer** (German for "swarmers") they were considered to be foolish, impatient revolutionaries with erratic theologies of little interest to anyone. They rightly deserved to be forgotten. If their memories were maintained at all, it was to secure images of what was **not** to be thought or done.

As Reformation studies have progressed, however, it has become clear that such a designation is far too simplistic. The Reformation of the early sixteenth century was not a single unified movement that clearly ascertained the evils of a corrupt institution, determined the best approaches to eradicate them, and moved resolutely in one direction to do so. It was a period not of one reformation, but of many.

At least 25 years before Luther posted his 95 theses, loyal adherents of the traditional faith were working to reform the Church from within. They deliberately chose to work under the episcopal system. The Reformation they inaugurated is today referred to as the Catholic, or Counter Reformation.

With Luther and the Reformed Church movement of the Swiss, the structural framework of reform was shifted. Insisting that there was a need for the reform of doctrine as well as morals, these protesting groups sought support from their local political rulers (magistrates): they sought to carry out their reform with the support of the secular state. As a result it has become customary to refer to these groups (i.e., Lutherans, Zwinglians, Calvinists, and in some sense the Church of England) as the **Magisterial Reformers**.

There were, however, large numbers of Reformers who do not fit either of these patterns. They worked for the most part as individuals or as separatistic local congregations and they differed as much among themselves as they did from the major Catholic and Magisterial Protestant movements.

Categorized generally under the rubric "the Left Wing of the Reformation," or more recently, "the Radical Reformation," they can be divided into four general groups.

The first group sought to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth by the sword and is suitably referred to as Revolutionary. To this group belonged Thomas Müntzer and the Anabaptists who took control of the city of Münster where they were stopped by military force in 1535.

A second group, termed Anabaptists (the ancestors of present-day Mennonites, Amish, Hutterites, and the step-parents of modern Baptists) were small groups who were committed to the peaceful establishment of the Kingdom of God.

The third, an assemblage of rationally oriented thinkers, saw the Kingdom of God as manifest—and

manifested—in that spark of the divine in every human person.

Schwenckfeld is perhaps the best representative of the fourth Radical reformation group, the **Spiritualists**. He and others who are placed in this category tended to make a sharp distinction between spirit and flesh, the spiritual words of the Scripture and the physical letters, the spiriual-invisible universal Church and the physical institutionalized forms of Christianity, the spiritual sacraments and the bread or water.

However, one must always take care not to make too sharp the distinctions between these different groups. The peace-loving and pacifistic Anabaptist Menno Simons had brother, it is said, who joined the revolutionaries. The Anabaptist Pilgram Marpeck had much in common with his opponent Schwenckfeld. And although the Radicals tended to see themselves as joined theologically for the most part with the Magisterial Reformers, most of them held to a view of grace and free will distinctly at odds with that of Luther.

History has most often been written from the point of view of the winners. Luther, Calvin, and other larger-than-life characters have dominated our books on the Reformation. Our interest in them is not misplaced; it is certainly based on the great roles they played.

But the Reformation was much more. And in the tumult of that colorful and complex era we have overlooked and forgotten people whose lives and ideas hold a significance we may have only slightly appreciated.

Caspar Schwenckfeld is such a character. His name, which will sound odd to most, has been usually relegated to footnotes, or mentioned with little explanation of who he was or what he believed.

Yet, fortunately, when God surveys his people as they quickly pass across the stage of history, he sees what our pages cannot record—what is in their hearts. From our pride we have presumed to declare the winners and the losers.

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## The World of Schwenckfeld's Birth

Imagine for a moment that we are able to climb into one of those fabulous time machines of science fiction fable, set the clock back five centuries, and travel across half a millennium to Europe in 1489.

We arrive on a hill overlooking a village, amid green grass and yellow daisies. Before us we can see the red-tiled roofs of houses in the town, their steep slopes broken up by small windowed dormers. Our eyes are almost immediately drawn to the church and its high bell tower, which seems to form the center of the town, and which stands above all the other buildings, as if to direct and draw them up, as it were, into the heavens.

Our initial view is shaped by the romantic illusions we have brought with us from our more complicated technological world of rabid schedules and interminable rush-hour traffic.

The village we see before us is "picturesque"; a village, we imagine, bustling with friendly, healthy, hard-working people, who will surely welcome respectful strangers into their integrated community. These fortunate folk have no need for words like pollution, economic decline, ecological disaster, social despair, or nuclear winter.

The idyllic image, however, passes quickly. Even from a distance, we begin to focus on the dirt houses and the thatch roofs scattered without order around and within the village. (Those quaint red roofs are on the houses owned by the most prosperous inhabitants.) As we wander down from our pleasant, grassy knoll and enter this charming little village, our romantic curiosity turns to shock.

Everything stinks! We alone seem to notice the garbage floating in the rough-cut canals. Our breath is taken away by the mingled odors of smoke, refuse, and cooked cabbage.

The people we see have obviously not bathed. Indeed, they are filthy, and appear never to have washed. The result is only too evident. Their hair is unkempt; they are missing teeth. (They have never heard of nylon combs, toothbrushes, disposable razors, fingernail clippers, steam irons, deodorant, or Kleenex tissues.)

We cannot mistake the rich who appear in the streets. They are dressed in finery—deliberately chosen to mark themselves off from their inferiors; though their clothes, like those of the less-fortunate folk around them, have a somewhat wrinkled look. They travel with a retinue, begetting both fear and contempt in the eyes of the lower classes. However, they are as feeble as anyone before Fortune, who is close to being considered a deity by both rich and poor.

In the thatched roofs we can now and then hear the squeaking and scampering of rats. If the people only knew, as we know, that those rats carry fleas that can transfer the bubonic bacillus to human beings: the black plague.

There appear to be many more crippled people around than in the comfortable society we have left. In this world a broken limb can easily result in death, and if it does not, its mark will always remain; for a broken bone cannot be set properly. In this world, what we consider simple, easily cured diseases, kill or maim permanently.

Everyone is in the narrow streets. It is here where business is done, gossip is exchanged, visiting occurs, fights break out, games are played, news is announced.

And there is much news in 1489. The Turks are moving ever closer. There is almost always a public execution to be spoken of, acts of revenge to be commented upon, warnings that since December 28 (the anniversary of the slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem) fell on a Thursday last year, all the Thursdays in the coming year will be ill-omened. Even more are there warnings about the imminent end of the world.

No one has reason to mention the insignificant birth of a son, three years earlier, to a Saxon miner named Luther, but the church bells (often affectionately given personal names) are always clanging to announce the beginning or conclusion of a life, dangers to come or joys to behold, a religious procession, a pilgrimage, a traveling preacher with a particularly entertaining style.

### **News of Change**

Other great news can be told as well. A new method of printing books is sweeping Europe, and it is said that in a very few years affordable bound volumes will be available on almost every subject imaginable. Talk abounds about new discoveries everywhere. Intelligent youths excitedly discuss the system of "humanistic" learning, and dreams of traveling to Italy where a whole new world of artistic expression is breaking forth in literature, music, architecture, sculpture and painting.

Mention is made of the great possibilities for the study of Greek, since many precious Greek manuscripts are now in Italy, brought by scholars who were forced to flee Constantinople after its capture by the Turks 30 years before.

Also, in spite of the cynicism among a large part of the laity concerning clerical offices, and the decadence of many clerics themselves, there are signs of hope for the reform of a church burdened by weariness and despair.

New orders of dedicated clergy and laity are being formed in Italy and elsewhere. Renewal movements are stirring in most monastic orders. Possibilities for reform exist as never before. But whether reform will remain merely potential or tip forward into reality, few can say for certain.

These hopes which reach forward to a new world are raised up and cast down at almost the same time. This paradox is perhaps best exemplified in the person of Giovanni Battista Cibo, the son of a Roman senator, and the man elected Pope Innocent VIII in August 1484.

### **The State of Rome**

Before entering the priesthood Giovanni had fathered three illegitimate children. After entering the ecclesiastical world he made use of his earlier training at the Court of Naples to win himself influential friends and to secure a bishopric and become a cardinal.

He was a friend of the violent and ruthless Cardinal delta Rovere (the nephew of Pope Sixtus IV). When Rovere, who wanted to be Pope himself, realised he could not win in the election in 1484, he used power and bribery to secure the papacy for Innocent VIII. This way he could control the papacy, by controlling Innocent VIII, until he could get the position himself. (Rovere was elected Pope Julius II in 1503.)

A weak and ineffective leader, Innocent VIII found himself in an impossible situation. The tool of delta Rovere, he was forced to enter quarrels and wars not of his own making. To pay the costs, he expanded

the papal bureaucracy and sold the new posts to the highest bidders. In 1489 he planned a meeting of major European states, hoping to form a united crusade against the Turks.

However, Innocent was not a mere pawn of those politically more aggressive. Although nothing came of his meeting in 1490 for a crusade, he did arrange a sort of truce with the Sultan.

He was also deeply concerned with church reform. He continually attempted to improve clerical morals, and moved firmly against ecclesiastics who made use of their offices for personal gain. But he vacillated between corruption and reform, offering no clear signs to those about him who were willing to play a role in ecclesiastical renewal.

It is said that on his deathbed, he begged the cardinals to choose a person of stronger moral fiber than he had been. Unfortunately, they did not heed his advice, and less than 25 years later a more violent form of social and religious change proved tragically necessary.

### **Schwenckfeld's Early Years**

Into this troubled, expectant world of Innocent VIII, Caspar Schwenckfeld was born at his parents' estate of Ossig in Silesia.

Now a part of Poland, Silesia was then and remained until the end of the second world war, predominantly German-speaking.

We know little of Schwenckfeld's early life, a fact which seems to suggest that it was for the most part normal for his day. (Those who write the lives of persons they consider great, tend not to report the obvious.) In all likelihood he was born in 1489, but we do not know the day or the month.

No one saw fit to report the pattern of his education and although he studied at university for a time, he seems not to have felt it necessary to complete a degree. His life was, in all likelihood, fairly well pre-planned. As the intelligent and socially well-adjusted son of a "good" family, he could gain a reasonable position at one of the courts of Silesia or elsewhere.

It is, thus, not surprising that we find him serving as an advisor to Duke Karl I of Munsterberg-Oels from 1511 to 1515, and undertaking a similar position with Duke George I of Brieg in 1515. In 1518, after this seven-year "apprenticeship" and being almost thirty years old, he raised his status significantly with a move to the Court of Duke Friedrich II of Liegnitz.

It was here at Liegnitz, in the very year of his move, that all the normal expectations that a young and talented civil servant might have had, ended.

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## The Germanic States Before the Seventeenth Century

**SILESIA:** Schwenckfeld was a Silesian nobleman. Silesia was ruled by BOHEMIA (Czechoslovakia). In 1490, after a short period of Hungarian rule, Schwenckfeld's homeland returned, along with MORAVIA, to Bohemian control, and in 1526 came under Hapsburg rule. Silesia is today divided between Poland and Czechoslovakia.

**SAXONY:** Saxony, the German state in which the cities of WITTENBERG and Leipzig were located, was where the Reformation began. Luther's duke, Elector Frederick III of Saxony, gave him protection from the Roman Church. Schwenckfeld traveled to Wittenberg in 1525 to meet with Luther. What was Saxony in Schwenckfeld's day is now mostly within East Germany.

**OSSIG:** Schwenckfeld's birthplace is now Oseik, Poland.

**LIEGNITZ:** This Silesian city was the capital of a duchy ruled by the Piasts. Schwenckfeld was an advisor to Duke Friedrich II of Liegnitz. Now in Poland, the German name Liegnitz has changed to Legnica.

**ULM:** Schwenckfeld spent years at Ulm and died there in 1561. The West German city of Ulm, on the Danube river, was in Schwenckfeld's time a free city in WÜRTTEMBERG.

**TÜBINGEN:** Schwenckfeld and Strasbourg reformer Martin Butzer, who were theological opponents, signed papers of truce in Tübingen in 1535. Tübingen was also located in Württemberg. Philip Melancthon taught at Tübingen University from 1512 to 1518.

**STRASBOURG:** An important intellectual and commercial center, Strasbourg was the major city in ALSACE. A city of toleration, numerous refugees of persecution at various times found refuge here; among them, John Calvin, Michael Servetus, Anabaptists Pilgram Marpeck and Melchior Hoffmann, and Schwenckfeld. Martin Butzer led the reformation in Strasbourg. Johann Gutenberg may have invented the printing press here.

**HERRNHUT:** When the followers of Schwenckfeld were persecuted by the Jesuits, they fled from Silesia to the community of Herrnhut on the estate in Saxony of Count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf, a pious Saxon nobleman who offered them refuge. In 1734, when Lutheran state pressure was increased on Zinzendorf, the Schwenckfelders left Herrnhut and sailed from Rotterdam, Holland, to Pennsylvania.

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## The Life and Thought of Caspar Schwenckfeld von Ossig

Sometime in 1518, or perhaps 1519, Caspar Schwenckfeld experienced what he refers to as a “visitation of the divine” (in German, *Heimsuchung Gottes*, literally “home-seeking of God”). He admits that he was not particularly religious during his early years as a court advisor, but his pattern of behavior changed after 1518.

The visitation to which he refers was not the only change in his life at the time. He was directly affected by his reading of Luther’s writings, and he undertook a serious study of the Scriptures at this point in his life as well. Shortly before September 1519, his father died and not long after that Schwenckfeld began to lose his hearing, an event which forced him to return to his family estate at Ossig (now run by his brother Hans) and to serve Duke Friedrich as only an occasional advisor, although he did remain highly influential at the court.

By 1521 he was seriously supporting the cause of reform, and had won his Duke to his programme by 1522. But from the very beginning Schwenckfeld’s position seems to have differed from Luther’s, and by 1524 the differences were abundantly clear. In June of that year he published an *Admonition* to the Silesian preachers in which he attempted to rectify problems he saw arising from Luther’s theology.

He was concerned above all that the five principles at the center of Luther’s position were misleading the simple people of the day. These were (1) that faith alone justifies, (2) that an individual does not have free will, (3) that we cannot keep God’s commandments, (4) that our works are of no avail, and (5) that Christ has made satisfaction for us.

### The Nature of Faith

Ever concerned with the practical results of theology, Schwenckfeld did not reject these principles out of hand in his *Admonition*. Indeed, he had been initially drawn by their very “practicality” for the reform he supported. But by 1524, he had come to believe that if pressed too far, these keystones of reformation could prove ultimately destructive of their very intent.

To grasp the issue it might be best for a moment to stand back from the specifics of Schwenckfeld’s argument and look at the debate over the first principle, “that faith alone justifies,” in its full context.

The traditional theology that Schwenckfeld had inherited had *always* taught that an individual is justified by grace through faith—that was a Catholic as well as a Protestant position. The problem arose in regard to the *nature of the faith* by which one is justified. Catholics in Schwenckfeld’s day (and ours) teach that justifying faith must be understood in the context of Galatians 5:6: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith *working through love*.”

It was this last phrase, “working through love,” which had led to the problems Luther pointed to.

When simplistically interpreted by some theologians, this phrase had come to mean for many that the faith which availed was *dependent* on the acts of love through which it worked. Worse yet in the hands of ecclesiastical bureaucrats “works of love” came to be understood as the fulfillment of institutionalised religious regulations.

In this setting, one can understand both Luther's and Schwenckfeld's sense of release when they read Ephesians 2:8: "For by grace you have been saved through faith." Here "faith" stood alone; the words "working through love" were missing, and the remainder of the verse emphasized the fact: "this is not of your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works." Faith availed *in itself* for salvation and required no "working through love," certainly not in the sense of keeping the particular rules set down in a code of church law, or by reciting formulaic prayers.

Unlike Luther, Schwenckfeld did not proceed to limit his theology by this insight (Luther's so-called "canon within the Canon"). He was always more concerned with the results of a theological system on the life of individuals and the society in which they lived. He often spoke of his work as a "middle way" between what had become in the early sixteenth century two warring positions. Thus he would continue to uphold the need for Christian works of love while supporting what he considered the central insight of the Wittenberg Movement. The results were to be expected: He was viewed by both sides as supporting their opponents.

### **The Sacramental Center of Faith**

Surprisingly enough, it was not over the issues noted in the 1524 *Admonition* that the real debate between Schwenckfeld and Luther erupted. To find a middle way between two opponents, as was the case in the so-called "faith-works" issue is one thing; it is quite another when a topic arises in which there are three conflicting opinions. This was the case regarding the Lord's Supper.

By the middle of the 1520s this debate was already in full flower. Catholics maintained that when the priest elevated the bread at the altar and pronounced the words of consecration, the bread became the body of Christ (this position is called *transubstantiation*). The Swiss, under the leadership of Ulrich Zwingli, on the other hand, rejected such a position altogether and insisted that the bread merely represented the body of Christ. [*See our earlier issue on Zwingli, Vol. 3, No. 1 for a discussion of Zwingli's view of the Lord's Supper.*]

In a sense, in this disagreement, Luther's position was the middle way. Those who followed him taught that more than simple representation occurred in the sacrament, but they rejected any interpretation which might lead one to think in terms of magical transformation. The body of Christ they taught, was "in, with, and under" the bread (called *consubstantiation*).

For Schwenckfeld all three explanations were unsatisfactory. Once again, what troubled him more than the divisive theologies of the Sacrament were practical results. Those who eat and drink of the body and blood of Christ unworthily, he believed with St. Paul, are "guilty of profaning" the body and blood (1 Cor. 11:27). What constituted unworthy participation more than doing so while anathematizing one's fellow Christians? All three groups celebrated this central rite of Christian faith and unity *while in open warfare* with other Christians.

The situation was an open offence to the Faith, and Schwenckfeld was early concerned with it. He and his learned friend, Valentine Crautwald, had discussed the issue at length and the latter was greatly troubled over it.

Crautwald returned home after attending early communion on 16 September 1525 to consider the matter. After a full day of reflection he fell asleep for a short time and awoke before dawn on September 17. Suddenly all the passages of Scripture relating to the problem were before him, and a "sweet voice" opened them to him.

The vision he experienced and the ten days following it which were spent in detailed examination of its implications, he described in a letter to Schwenckfeld. Schwenckfeld in turn developed the results of the vision along with Crautwald.

The disputed words of institution should be read as follows: "My body is this, namely, food." "It was not until the disciples had eaten the bread and drunk the wine that Christ spoke the words. Bread is not a food until the grain has been grown, threshed, ground, baked and eaten; bread when eaten nourishes and strengthens the body." The word "is" in the words of institution means "is," not "represents," but one must distinguish between the physical and the spiritual. "Give the physical to the body, the spiritual to the poor soul which is spiritual; let physical bread nourish the physical body, ***the invisible [bread], the invisible soul.***"

By faith, then, one truly does eat the spiritual body of Christ, and in time Schwenckfeld and Crautwald would work out the implications of their theology, teaching that the spiritual grain thus eaten by faith grows in the believer, transforming him or her toward the full image of God, the person of Christ.

On 30 November 1525 (two months after Crautwald's vision), Schwenckfeld traveled to Wittenberg to present their findings to Luther [***See Journey to Wittenberg***] He was rebuffed by the great reformer, and from then on their paths would clearly separate.

### **The Suspension ("Stillsand") of the Sacrament**

In spite of Luther's rebuff, Schwenckfeld seems to have remained hopeful that his "middle way" might yet become a reality. He returned to Liegnitz and there with the aid of his duke and the brotherhood that had formed around him, worked avidly for the reform of the church in his area. He supported the foundation of a university in Liegnitz and encouraged extensive catechetical work, both of theoretical and practical nature.

He also continued to write and speak on behalf of his explanation of the Lord's Supper. But what of the ***practice*** of the Supper? Christians were still fighting with one another and now Schwenckfeld as well had entered the fray. On 21 April 1526 he, Crautwald, and the preachers and pastors of Liegnitz issued a circular letter reflecting the tension they then felt, and their solution for the impossible situation in which they found themselves.

"The fact of the matter is this: Since we and many others, including some of the populace, have felt and recognized that little betterment is resulting as yet from the preaching of the Gospel," something must be wrong. And what could be more wrong than the improper celebration of the central Christian rite? "[Since this is the case,] we think that the Holy Sacrament or mystery of the body and blood of Christ has not been observed according to the Gospel and command of Christ." Those who eat and drink unworthily, eat and drink judgement unto themselves, and therefore, "we admonish men in this critical time to ***suspend for a time*** the observance of the highly venerable Sacrament."

The suspension did nothing to ease tensions within Christendom; for the next four years the bulk of Schwenckfeld's writing was directed to this issue. His duke, Friedrich II supported him, but as the heat of the reformation debate increased, Friedrich increasingly found himself in a dilemma. Politically it was necessary for the Silesians to draw closer to the Lutheran position, but with a counselor of so high a profile as Schwenckfeld expressing an anti-Lutheran position, this was difficult.

Finally in 1529, to avoid bringing his duke further embarrassment, Schwenckfeld went into voluntary self-exile. The most reasonable place for him to take refuge was the city of Strasbourg, then undergoing a reform under the direction of Martin Butzer.

### **Time in Strasbourg**

Strasbourg was remarkably tolerant for the time, and as a result attracted persons of widely differing religious opinions. It was here, for example, that Schwenckfeld met the Anabaptist Pilgram Marpeck with

whom he would enter a lengthy debate in the 1540s. It was also here that he seems to have come to know the thought of Melchior Hofmann, whose position on the celestial body of Christ had much in common with his own, although he always maintained that Hofmann had borrowed ideas from him and not he from Hofmann.

Although he maintained a peaceful tone in the debate at the time, Schwenckfeld held a firm debating position. He supported his ideas with learning and care, and he did attract enough followers that his opponents were forced to take him seriously (his position as a member of the nobility also seems to have required this).

Nevertheless, his point of view was a minority one during the period and was never supported by a powerful political leader. What this meant was that he was ever forced to debate without the possibility of winning. That pattern would remain throughout his life.

We must take care not to romanticize the results. Like other supporters of unpopular theological positions at the time, Schwenckfeld undoubtedly suffered persecution, and it is clear that he never settled permanently in one place for the rest of his life. However, he was able for significant periods of time to find the physical stability necessary for the study and production of his numerous theological treatises and letters.

### **Confessor of the Glory of Christ**

In 1541 he was living near the south German town of Kempten and had for his use the library of the Benedictine monastery there. It was here in the same year that he completed his longest and most complex work, *The Great Confession on the Glory of Christ*.

Schwenckfeld's thought on the nature and person of Christ was fully developed by 1538 at the latest, but he had been reflecting on the question from his earliest writings on the sacrament in the 1520s. What he was ever concerned with was that the body of Christ not be disparaged, or, to put it positively, that the glorified body of Christ be properly confessed.

Because Schwenckfeld's christology was not accepted by his contemporaries or later generations (indeed, it was considered heretical by many), it continues to be noted as one of the most "peculiar" aspects of his thought. But, peculiar or not, it was the center-point of his work, and, in honor of this core doctrine, his followers continued to call themselves "Confessors of the Glory of Christ" until the eighteenth century.

The obscure theological details and their source in the writings of the early church need not detain us at this point. Simply put, Schwenckfeld distinguished two natures (a divine and a human) in the person of Christ, as does Christian orthodoxy. But he thought of the human nature in terms of a "celestial flesh."

Jesus' flesh, he taught, was increasingly divinised by his divine nature during his earthly sojourn, so that it was transfigured and thereafter resurrected, taken up, and glorified at the right hand of the Father. It is on this glorified flesh that the believer feeds by faith; it is this flesh which by faith believers spiritually partake of, and which, in turn, grows like a grain of mustard in them as they grow daily in the image of Christ.

Whatever one might think of Schwenckfeld's christology today (whether it can be defended or not as orthodox as he thought it could) is a separate question. What we need to understand is Schwenckfeld's intention in developing such a doctrine. He never thought simplistically or literally. The glorified body of Christ which sits at the right hand of the Father is the body of which one partakes in the Sacrament. It is not to be separated from the body of Christ in which believers live and move and have their being and which they call by the name "Church."

Thus one eats and drinks judgement upon oneself, according to I Corinthians 11:29, when one eats and drinks of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper "without discerning the body"; "body" here referring to the bread which is the spiritual body of Christ—the community of believers throughout the world, or the Church—and referring to the glorified body of Christ itself.

By approaching the sacrament without discernment—without recognizing that the Church is the universal (catholic) body of Christ, and not merely the physical social-political entity made up of those who hold particular doctrines in common against others—one disparages the Glorified Christ.

### **Looking Above for Peace**

It was for this reason that Schwenckfeld so strongly opposed the Anabaptist Pilgram Marpeck. Marpeck and the Anabaptists (later Mennonites) attended to the historical Jesus of Nazareth. Schwenckfeld was not opposed to this attention and certainly not to the Anabaptists' attempt to imitate the life of the earthly Jesus. What he asked of them in addition was that they "lift up their hearts" to the image of the Glorified Christ so as not to become only caught up in concerns for purity of their local and limited congregational life.

And the theology of the Glorified Christ is also the context in which Schwenckfeld's often-noted concern for religious toleration arises. His is not a political position (as is that of, for example, the American Constitution); it is a theological one.

One confesses the glory of Christ not by supposing that all religious opinions are of equal value, and effectively holding that they are makers of taste and that in such maker one person's opinion is as good as another's.

For Schwenckfeld religious toleration depended not on looking below oneself but on contemplating above one's possibilities:

Only when all believers had raised their sights to the One above all others, would the suspension of the sacrament come to an end in reality, a hope toward which he reached throughout his life, and for which he still yearned, we are given to understand, when he died in the home of friends in the city of Ulm in 1561.

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 21: Casper Schwenckfeld: Forgotten Reformer

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## Journey to Wittenberg

In late November 1525, Schwenckfeld traveled almost 100 miles on horseback from Liegnitz to Wittenberg the fountainhead of the reform movement, and met with Martin Luther and some of his Wittenberg colleagues.

He had official business to attend to for his duke, Friedrich II, with "Doctor Martin" and John Bugenhagen ("Pomeranus"), theologian and priest of the Wittenberg castle Church. Schwenckfeld's personal goal, however, was to discuss with Luther the breakthrough he and Valentine Crautwald believed they had achieved on the meaning of the Lord's Supper.

Schwenckfeld would not have approached Luther with trembling, for he himself had the prestige of a nobleman; still, he must have had great respect for the powerful doctor of Wittenberg whose writings were shaking all Europe and had been decisive in his own life (he had been converted after reading Luther). It was during the Peasant's War, a trying time for Luther; it must have taken a degree of courage on Schwenckfeld's part to approach Luther on this topic at this time. He therefore must have traveled through the crisp, chilly Saxon landscape in deep thought and expectation.

Previously, Schwenckfeld had written to Luther laying out twelve arguments for his understanding of the Supper; he had received no reply. His conception was based upon an interpretation that his colleague Crautwald—a scholar in the original languages of Scripture—claimed he had received in a "revelation." The debate about the Lord's Supper turned upon only a few of Jesus' words in the original Greek. It is hard for most of us today to fathom the enormous importance these men placed upon the differences made by the order in which these few words were translated, and the resulting shifts of meaning.

Schwenckfeld believed his interpretation was divinely sent, and he hoped that Luther would recognize in his doctrine a solution to the debate that was causing serious strife and discord among Christians. He was deeply concerned about division in the Body of Christ, and he yearned for unity and peace among believers.

The varying interpretations of the central rite of Christianity caused a great dilemma. Religious practice hinged on these, and it seemed impossible that there could be more than one **correct** understanding. And, of course, each group eventually became sure that their way was **the** right way, and that all others were of the devil.

Schwenckfeld eventually championed a "Middle Way," a "Royal Road" of peace between Catholic and Protestant poles. Because of the discord he saw among those who claimed to be Christians, he halted the practice of Communion among his followers. (Schwenckfeld's "spiritualism"—his belief that physical and spiritual things are incompatible allowed him to take this extreme step.) His followers did not practice Communion again for centuries after his death.

The meetings were polite, and the picture we get of Luther from Schwenckfeld's own account (written down each evening at the inn where he lodged) is of a courteous man willing to freely discuss and penetrate to the heart of the matter. The picture we get of Schwenckfeld from his own account is of a sincere, earnest man whose intention was to find harmony; to stand his ground and not compromise the truth, but not to create discord.

Months later, however, when Luther had firmly concluded that Schwenckfeld's ideas were wrong, he treated Schwenckfeld differently, even referring to him later in his **Tabletalk** as "**Schweinfeld**" (from the

German ***schwein*** for "pig"). Once Luther decided someone was wrong, he apparently viewed them as an enemy of Christ and in league with the devil. He decided that Schwenckfeld's ideas were dangerous to the Faith, and exhorted Schwenckfeld not to publish his errors and lead others astray. Schwenckfeld was branded a ***schwaermer***—a madman.

Schwenckfeld proved a more diplomatic and courteous man. However he didn't spare strong language about Luther later on, and concluded that Luther's teachings were not of the Spirit. His ideas grew farther and farther from those of the man who had once been a major inspiration.

The following excerpts from a letter of Schwenckfeld's containing his account of his meetings in early December 1525 are taken from chapter 3, A Visit to Luther and Its Results, in the biography of Schwenckfeld by Selina Gerhard Schultz.

Friday, December 1, 1525, after we had discharged our Lordship's business and orders with Doctor Martin Luther, in the presence of Pastor Pomeranus [Bugenhagen], and Doctor Martin was accompanying us to the door, I drew him aside to a window and called his attention to the fact that I had previously written to him respecting the article concerning the Sacrament and that I wished to speak with him (he interrupted, saying: Yes, Zwingli!) and give an account of what God had imparted to us in Silesia and how by His grace we had come to a better understanding of the matter. ...

He thereupon replied: Dear Caspar, I will be glad to confer with you, come tomorrow, as early as you wish, six, seven, or eight o'clock. Nothing shall hinder me. We will then give consideration to the matter. ...

The next day, Saturday, I called upon him at seven, at daybreak. I explained my lack of understanding and inability to discuss such an important article with him, and even though God had granted me perception, I could not express myself as circumstances called for. I found comfort, however, in the thought that he was a Christian and despised no one. Undoubtedly he would ponder and take to heart what I would lay before him, since neither money nor property, but God's honor and our salvation were concerned.

... I could easily perceive how during the year many queer persons came to him with strange ideas, but that he, as one well versed in Scripture, knew how to judge everything according to the Word of God. I trusted that in this matter also God's glory and man's salvation alone would be sought.

I wanted to be considered as coming to him as to confessional, hoping he would bear with my simplicity. I was not conscious that I had hitherto sought my own under the name of the Word of God, and hoped that God would in the future shield me against the same....

Neither would I withhold it from him, even though he should regard me suspiciously, that I refused to be bound by anyone's views. Should I adhere to any one person, he would be the first, but God had given me freedom of judgement, to prove all things by his Word, for which I was thankful at all times. Therefore, I did not wish him to be of the opinion that in this matter I was building on Zwingli ....

... I said in addition: My dear sir and brother, be not vexed; I will explain our action and reason, and what transpired, quite candidly, and discuss with you what is in my heart.

Doctor Martin answered: This you shall do, but tell me one thing, do you have a different ground than Carlstadt or Zwingli?

Schwenckfeld: Yes, with regard to the words [*referring to Christ's words*].

Martin: Very well. Continue.

***[Next there was a discussion of the Latin rendering of Christ's words—Hoc est Corpus Meum: "This is my body"—in which Schwenckfeld defended his interpretation. Then Luther pointed out some things in the Greek text. Schwenckfeld soon left and was invited to return for further discussion after Luther had had an opportunity to study and discuss the matter with his colleagues. Later the same day Schwenckfeld had a lengthy talk with Luther's colleague, John Bugenhagen . A few days later, after Luther had considered Schwenckfeld's Twelve Questions, he and Schwenckfeld talked again.]***

First of all, he laid the papers on the table, and said: I have examined your matter, but cannot give a final answer until I have considered the matter with Philip [Melanchthon], who is not at home .... I wish first of all to excuse myself to you and to others who may think ill of me, since the good man (i.e., Valentine Crautwald) wrote to the provost that I was unwilling to yield, of which I am not aware. So far as I perceive the truth, I do not want to be found obstinate. I previously yielded to Carlstadt and others in regard to the intercession of saints and other articles. Why should I not yield in such an important article, if I be sufficiently instructed. God forbid that I should do this! And, as I wrote about myself, I repeat: If anyone should convince me by substantial grounds, I would drop my opinion. But so far it has not happened.

You show me a revelation. I cannot and do not wish to be against God. If we only could be sure that it was God's will thus to understand the matter. Wherefore I beg you not to think hard of me that I cannot so soon agree with you. The matter is important. I exhort you, too, act in the fear of God, pray to him; I will do the same. He has promised me not to let me err. In many things he has been my strong support. I entrust myself to him. He will not forsake me in this matter, and if it be his will thus to understand it, I hope he will grant it to me also. But that I should express myself to favor you, is not fitting. For this is a matter of faith. I must first of all have and feel it in my conscience.

Nevertheless, I will not condemn your opinion, although I cannot accept it, for proof is insufficient. The matter needs further study. If God grant, I will gladly agree with you.

Why should I not consider the matter at more length? There are now three opinions, Carlstadt's, Zwingli's, and yours. In two cases a revelation is claimed. One must be in error. The spirit of the Lord is not a spirit of dissension. Carlstadt assailed me hard and with strong protestation that he was certain of his opinion. I only know that I am also certain.

Your opinion is plausible, it is very good, if it can be proved sufficiently, but you must see to that. It is not sufficient that I have good sense. I must be convinced, particularly in such important articles, that it is to be thus understood and not otherwise.

***[More technical discussion on the order of wording followed.]***

In conclusion he said: Dear Caspar, I have discussed the matter, so far as I can see now, and do not see how I can agree with you, unless you prove your proposition. If you will leave your booklets here, I will discuss the matter with Philip and others more fully and, by God's grace, will report our decision in writing to you.

Finally in parting he said, in the presence of others: You have your answer. But as we were passing out, I besought him alone, at the last moment, to take the matter to heart. Thereupon he whispered in my ear: Wait a while. The Lord be with you.

The trip to Wittenberg was a disappointment to Schwenckfeld; most of his time had been limited to discussions with Bugenhagen. About two months later, around February 1526, Luther returned some of



Schwenckfeld's booklets and a letter which contained the words, "You must stop misleading the people. The blood of those you are misleading must be upon your own head. In brief, either you or we must be the bondsmen of the devil, because we on both sides boast of having the Word of God."

Later that year, in April, Luther wrote again saying, among other things, "It is therefore my friendly petition that you cease from your open error and not increase the number of those who now mislead the world so deplorably. But if it cannot be, go ahead, let God's will happen; but it does grieve my heart nevertheless."

In a letter to Crautwald written the same day, Luther wrote, "... I am innocent of your blood and the blood of those whom you now cause to perish. Farewell! and return to your sane mind, or cease to call us brethren, or to have anything to do in common with us under any appeal to the name of Christ."

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY — —

Issue 21: Casper Schwenckfeld: Forgotten Reformer

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## Schwenckfeld's Aim

From *Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum*, translated by Selina Gerhard Schultz

My conclusive opinion, writing, motive,  
and faith, in brief,  
are directed to the end that we may become true Christians  
and in the sight of God just, upright, and blessed;  
that we may learn to recognize correctly, God the Father  
and Jesus Christ the Son (true God and man)  
as our Lord in the Holy spirit,  
the spirit of grace and the riches of God in our hearts.  
Furthermore, that we may lay off the old Adam,  
efface the inscribed malediction and in its stead  
put on the new man in divine benediction,  
in holiness, righteousness and truth  
unto eternal life;  
and that once for all we may acquire a good,  
trustworthy, happy conscience and be advanced  
ever further in the kingdom of God,  
into the heavenly citizenship of Jesus Christ;  
that we may grow in the peace, love, and unity  
which are in Christ, and live and walk in the fear of God.  
That is the content of my faith,  
my writings, and my entire theology.

It is my petition and wish to God that it

happen to all of us.

Amen.

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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Issue 21: Caspar Schwenckfeld: Forgotten Reformer

## Caspar Schwenckfeld von Ossig: A Gallery of Associates

This Christian History Gallery focuses on associates of Caspar Schwenckfeld, and on his followers who traveled to Pennsylvania to escape persecution.

### Valentine Crautwald

BORN AT NEISSE, Silesia, Crautwald attended the University of Cracow and became secretary to the Bishop of Breslau in 1514. A highly learned scholar, strongly affected by the humanist movement of the day, he met Schwenckfeld in 1523 and two years later, after Schwenckfeld spoke to him about the controversy over the meaning of the Lord's Supper, Crautwald had a vision during which he came to what would be the distinctive Schwenckfeldian understanding of the Supper.

Together with Schwenckfeld he worked assiduously for the reformation in Liegnitz and after the latter's self-exile in 1529, in spite of his increasing isolation in his own country, he wrote and studied in defense of the Schwenckfeldian cause until his death in 1545.

### Adam Reissner

THE EXACT DATES of Reissner's life are unknown. He was born sometime between 1496 and 1500 in Mindelheim in south Germany and died after 1576, but before 1582. He attended the University of Ingolstadt as a young man and there studied Hebrew and Greek under the famous Johann Reuchlin. For some years he was at Wittenberg.

In 1531 he met Schwenckfeld in Strasbourg and became a loyal follower. In spite of this he was able to maintain his position as municipal clerk in his Catholic home-town until 1548. From then until his death he dedicated himself to the Schwenckfeldian movement, serving as secretary to Schwenckfeld and aiding in the publication of his works as well as writing books of his own.

### Michael Hiller

A SILESIAN PASTOR and pro-Schwenckfeldian, Hiller produced sermons with a strong mystical bent. These sermons were among the most copied works next to those of Schwenckfeld himself among later Schwenckfelders. Hiller died in the late 1550s.

### Johann Werner

AN EARLY DEFENDER of Schwenckfeld, Werner was a preacher at the Church of St. Peter and Paul in Liegnitz. His Catechism and Sermons were favourites of Schwenckfelders to the mid-nineteenth century.

### Erasmus Weichenhan

FROM 1538 TO his death in 1598 this strongly pro-Schwenckfeldian Silesian pastor compiled what would be the favourite collection of sermons used by the Schwenckfelders down to this century.

### Antonius Oelsner

A SILESIAN SHEPHERD, Oelsner had read Schwenckfeld in his youth and was converted in 1580.

Thereafter he had visions and began to wander about the Silesian countryside preaching. He was imprisoned for two years and on his release took up his preaching again. He was sentenced as a galley-slave in 1595.

### **Daniel Sudermann**

A RESIDENT OF Strasbourg in the early 1600s, a significant poet and student of mysticism, Sudermann played an important role in collecting and saving Schwenckfeld manuscripts. For a time he owned Schwenckfeld's annotated Bible (now preserved in the Schwenckfelder Library [*see The Schwenckfeld Bible*]).

### **Martin John, Jr.**

PERHAPS THE MOST significant personality among Schwenckfelders in the later 1600s, Martin John Jr. was remarkably well read in the radical theological literature of his day, and was responsible for a renewal among the Schwenckfelder communities which remained in the Harpersdorf area.

In the spring of 1669 he and his wife Ursula made a journey through Germany and into Holland visiting kindred spirits. When the Pietist Awakening began a few years later he came into close contact with many of its adherents and introduced his Schwenckfelder fellow-believers to it.

### **Sybilla Eisler**

THE WIFE OF a councilman in the city of Augsburg, Eisler has the distinction of having received more letters from Schwenckfeld than any other person. Particularly attracted to Schwenckfeld's theology, she not only prodded him to express himself on a number of questions, but played a major role in preserving his correspondence.

### **Agatha Streicher**

A NOTED PHYSICIAN, Streicher was a member of a family especially devoted to Schwenckfeld. She was present at his death in her family's home in 1561 and wrote an account of the last months of his life.

### **George Weiss**

THE FIRST PASTOR among the Schwenckfelders in America, Weiss played a prominent role in defending the Schwenckfelder cause during the Jesuit persecution and directing the emigration to Saxony and America [*see the article Freedom in Pennsylvania*]. An informed theologian he was well-versed in Latin, Greek and Hebrew, worked energetically on the compilation of a Schwenckfelder hymnbook, and worked to bring cohesion into the group in its first six years in America. He died in 1740.

### **Balthasar Hoffmann**

PERHAPS THE MOST astute of the 18th-century Schwenckfelders, Hoffmann was transcribing Schwenckfelder documents when he was eleven years old. In 1721 he travelled with his father Christopher and another representative, Balthasar Hoffrichter, to the Imperial Court in Vienna to plead for toleration in the midst of the Jesuit persecution in Harpersdorf. He remained there for five years before returning home to join the emigration first to Saxony and then to America.

Taking over the leadership role in America after Weiss's death in 1740, Hoffmann continued his pastoral role among the Schwenckfelders both in a formal and informal way until his death in 1775. A prolific copier of manuscripts, poet, and theologian, he produced three large treatises in biblical studies, and a

great many other works.

### **Christopher Schultz**

ONLY 16 YEARS OLD at the time of the 1734 emigration, Schultz came to America as an orphan, and kept the most extensive diary account of the journey to Pennsylvania.

An avid student of Schwenckfelder theology he took a major leadership role in the group in 1764, compiled the first hymnbook of the American Schwenckfelders (published in 1762), wrote the first significant Schwenckfelder history entitled ***Vindication of Caspar Schwenckfeld*** and a large compendium of the Christian faith. With his cousin Christopher Kriebel he helped shape the Schwenckfelder school system. He died in 1789.

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 21: Casper Schwenckfeld: Forgotten Reformer

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## Caspar Schwenckfeld on Spiritual Growth and Living the Christian Life

Schwenckfeld's teachings on the experiential knowledge of God and the School of Christ

Rev. Dr. Jack R. Rothenberger is senior minister of the Central Schwenckfelder Church, Worcester, PA.

Caspar Schwenckfeld was deeply concerned about the development of the personal Christian life; he believed that reformation without reformed lives was meaningless. He also believed that a Christian community, motivated by the direct indwelling of the living Christ, might become an effective agent for change in society.

The focus of Schwenckfeld's life and thought was on the personal experience of the living Christ. For him, God alone is the teacher; He touches the inner life of the seeker by granting experiential knowledge of Christ (what Schwenckfeld called, in German, *Erkenntnis Christi*).

This teaching on experiential knowledge of Christ is the central concept of Schwenckfeld's theology. It is defined by him in a variety of ways, but in no place does he give a precise definition of it. In general, the term he uses for this experience, *Erkenntnis Christi*, defines the maturing awareness on the part of a believer that he or she is empowered daily by Christ to live for God and others.

In this process, maturity is not a static goal that can be achieved at some point in this life, but is a goal toward which the Christian constantly moves as the living Christ becomes more and more evident in his or her desires and actions. This goal is achieved only after death and resurrection, when the believer is glorified in heaven.

As Christians in this life, as we gain personal knowledge of God's creation, of sin, and of God's activity in reaching for sinners, God makes us aware that we cannot achieve maturity on our own. Only the Spirit of God, permeating the believer, can give new awareness of God, ears to hear God's Word, new eyes to see God's activity in his creation, and a new desire to seek more knowledge of God's will for his new creation.

### The School of Christ

When this process is begun, the believer is "enrolled" in the *School of Christ*, and is justified by God. (Metaphors from schooling are important in Schwenckfeldian thought about Christian growth; the experiences of being taught by God and of growing as Christians toward the perfect image of Christ are described as a schooling process.) God alone effects transformation in the natural person (i.e., the person outside of Christ). This spiritual birth affects all human relations.

Through a life-long journey of faith in God, the pupil in the School of Christ gains an intimate awareness of the presence of the risen, glorified Christ. As one experiences this awareness, he or she feels Christ's presence, accepts his power, and affirms his authority by doing his will. This spiritual experience of Christ develops by degrees, or stages, as one journeys through life, feeding on (i.e., learning from) Christ.

Schwenckfeld developed small groups, or conventicles, to nurture believers. In these conventicles, spiritual fellowship was affirmed among the believers. This affirmation was expressed by participating in a nonjudgmental, supportive, "risk-taking" endeavor to study the Scriptures, to pray together, and to seek the well-being of all for the glory of Christ. These conventicles were the social context for participation in

Schwenckfeld's School of Christ.

It is obvious that Schwenckfeld placed emphasis on the individual relationship to God at the expense of the individual's relationship to society. His prime objective was to show the need for a personal experience of Christ, or man's deficiency when unaware of the living Christ. Although Schwenckfeld did not legislate the way in which the growing Christian should relate to society, his letters indicate his practical concern that the believer's new being be visible in a renewed life style.

Schwenckfeld taught that there are measurable marks of the experience of Christ in the lives of true believers. These are: a growing awareness of being accepted by God, a release from tension as a result of being freed from the need to justify oneself as one relies on the grace of God, an awareness that true spiritual struggle begins only after conversion and continues throughout life, and that one is enabled to endure the struggle with greater strength the more one participates in Christ, and in an active involvement in the life and concerns of the spiritual brotherhood.

### **Learning for God**

The experiential knowledge of Christ has been a guiding principle of the Schwenckfeldian tradition and has had a determining influence on its concept of education, even down to educational practices in the present-day Schwenckfelder Church. It is in this experience that the believer grows toward the fullness of the glorified Christ-true God and true man. This experience begins with the individual, then develops within the group, and finally is directed toward the broader community.

Schwenckfeld was not an experiential educator, in the modern sense of the term, but Schwenckfelders have always placed a great deal of emphasis on education. Personal growth, an integral part of the experience of knowing Christ, involves growth in the knowledge of self, others, and the world in which we live. The learning experience, based upon knowledge of Christ, is theological in orientation. That is, in every stage, God is recognized as the true teacher, motivator, and as the one who empowers.

As mentioned at the beginning, Schwenckfeld was very concerned with the practical outworkings of new life in Christ. He emphasized that awareness of self, of the world, and of God as the Creator is the beginning of the process which leads toward the realization of the new human potential available through grace. The non-Christian can become mature as a created and fallen person, but only the Christian can become mature as a created, fallen, and spiritually renewed person.

In modern "human potential" thinking, natural man experiences a "conversion" which leads to a realization of his or her own potential. Such a conversion was impossible according to Schwenckfeld. For him, fallen men and women are brought to a realization of their own fallen natures and are justified by grace through faith. Only after this conversion do believers begin the process of maturation.

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## Freedom in Pennsylvania

When Schwenckfeld died in 1561, a number of small groups of his followers were located in south Germany around Strasbourg, in the Ulm-Augsburg area, and in Silesia.

By the close of the Thirty Years War in 1648, however, only the Silesian remnants remained. At the opening of the eighteenth century there were less than 1,500 persons left in Lower Silesia who adhered to the tradition.

In 1719 the Emperor of Austria established a Jesuit mission to bring these remaining Schwenckfelders into the Catholic Church. The mission was directed by two priests, Johann Milan and Carolus Regent, who immediately began to impose fines and imprisonments.

A deputation sent to Vienna to plea for their case could achieve nothing, so in 1726 over 500 persons fled Silesia, leaving their property and all the possessions they could not carry with them. They filled mangers and feed troughs before they left; it might be days before their absence was realized and the animals would be fed again.

## Help from Zinzendorf

Some found refuge in the Saxon city of Görlitz; others went to the estate in Saxony of Count Nikolaus Ludwig van Zinzendorf who had already offered sanctuary to the Moravians. [*The story of Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians appeared in the first issue of CHRISTIAN HISTORY.*] Here the majority remained until 1734, when political pressures were brought to bear on the Count to withdraw his support.

The largest contingent of the Schwenckfelders (some 180 persons) left Saxony in April 1734, travelling down the Elbe and across to Holland. There they boarded a British vessel, the St. Andrew, and sailed for Pennsylvania where several of their co-believers had fled a few years earlier.

They arrived in Philadelphia Harbor on September 22 and two days later, on 24 September 1734, held a thanksgiving service which they have celebrated annually ever since.

Although their religious thought owed its major thrust to the tradition of Schwenckfeld, there were wide differences among them in its interpretation. Some drew closer to the Moravian tradition, others to radical Pietist groups such as the Church of the Brethren, and yet others were attracted by the theosophical speculation of the influential German mystical writer Jacob Boehme (1575–1624).

## Home in Pennsylvania

Unable to find a single section of land on which to settle, they found themselves spread throughout present-day Montgomery County, the two major groups establishing themselves in what would be called the Lower District, in the vicinity of Lansdale, and in the Upper District near Pennsburg.

Here they soon established prosperous religious and social communities. Later in the century, they built meeting houses and formed schools for educating their own children and those of others. Contact with

their fellow-believers in Silesia was maintained for a time, but slowly ceased. In part this was caused by the decline of Schwenckfeldianism in Europe where the last Schwenckfelder died in 1826.

In eighteenth-century America the Schwenckfelder intellectual tradition remained strong. They continued to copy the books of their tradition, and under the leadership of George Weiss, Balthasar Hoffmann, and Christopher Schultz, they renewed their religious life. In 1762 they published a large compilation of hymns for their use, a great many of which were by Schwenckfelders.

All their leaders continued to write religious treatises and biblical exegesis. At the end of the eighteenth century they published the sermons of Erasmus Weichenhan, which they read weekly in their meetings. Early in the next century they undertook a program to publish the major works of their founder.

### **Preserving a Tradition**

In 1884, the 150th anniversary of the Schwenckfelders' safe arrival in America, Chester David Hartranft, a professor at Hartford Theological Seminary in Connecticut, and a descendant of the original 1734 emigrants, suggested that they undertake a critical edition of Schwenckfeld's works. Along with this project they began a campaign to gather the books and manuscripts scattered among them and to collect major works related to the tradition in Europe.

The edition of Schwenckfeld's works was entitled the ***Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum*** and it was brought to a completion with the publication of its 19th volume in 1961, the 400th anniversary of Schwenckfeld's death.

The leading academic figure in this project was Selina Gerhard Schultz, who began with the project in the early twentieth century as a secretary. She eventually became the editor-in-chief, and saw it through to its end. For her scholarly dedication and achievement she was honoured by the University of Tübingen with a doctorate.

Throughout the final 30 years of the ***Corpus*** project she and others were encouraged with the personal and financial support of Wayne C. Meschter, who had also taken a special interest in the library. In the early 1950s, when the library's holdings outgrew the space available in a building provided through the Carnegie Foundation in 1913, Meschter directed the construction of a new library building to preserve the collection. The present Library collection is comprised of some 25,000 rare books and manuscripts, the earliest dating from the fifteenth century.

The present Schwenckfelder Church has five congregations in southeastern Pennsylvania and some 2,500 members.

## The Hard Journey to America

Pennsylvania offered freedom and peace for the Schenckfelders. Founded by the Quaker William Penn, it was a place where groups who were persecuted and driven away elsewhere were welcomed. But though the journey to freedom was one of hope, it was also one of pain and fear; much that the travelers had known was left behind forever. Ocean travel could be a frightening experience.

The Schwenckfelders settled into their new life amidst other folk with similar tales of persecution and flight; many of them were from Germany (the so-called Pennsylvania Dutch—the “Dutch” is actually from *Deutsch*, the German word for “German”). They were hardworking, industrious farmers. They decorated their homes, furniture, wagons, written documents with colorful, symbolic designs—the folk art we still immediately associate with the “Pennsylvania Dutch” traditions.

Schwenckfelders emphasized learning and were careful to preserve and transmit their rich intellectual tradition, making new copies of their loved books by hand into the 19th century.

One Schwenckfelder who left us an account, in diary form, of the crossing to Pennsylvania was Christopher Wiegner, who was born in Ober-Harpersdorf, Silesia, on February 24, 1712. He died at 33 years in 1745 in Towamencin township in Pennsylvania. The Jesuit persecution of Schwenckfelders arose when Wiegner was a young boy; Schwenckfelders were forbidden to sell their goods or land, or to emigrate; they were denied Christian burial. At 14, Christopher secretly fled with his family to Saxony to escape the persecution. When more trouble arose there they fled to America.

The following account is taken from *The Spiritual Diary of Christopher Wiegner*, translated and edited by Peter C. Erb and published by the The Society of the Descendants of the Schwenckfeldian Exiles, Pennsburg, PA. This excerpt is a shortened selection, beginning from page 87, of Wiegner’s more complete account.

### 1734

June 28 On the 28th we left Rotterdam [Holland] in the evening.

July 10 ... we arrived at Helfort Schleis. The captain came to us.

July 11 On the 11th we went to sea. In the afternoon nearly all of us were sick.

July 12 ... Christopher Kriebel’s child died at night.

July 13 On the 13th it began to be better.

July 17 ... we arrived at Plymouth [England]. In the afternoon we went to the town to refresh our bodies.

July 18–19 On the 18th and on the 19th a woman gave us some money.

July 29 On the 29th we left the harbor ...

Aug 3 On the 3rd Hubner's child died.

Aug 4 On the 4th side wind. Becalmed in the evening. At night a strong contrary wind arose. Because of this we were very ill until the 5th and 6th. On the 5th we had already gone 700 English miles.

Aug 8–9 ... This night Gregorious Schultz's child died.

Aug 11 On the 11th a contrary wind broke off the centre mast.

Aug 14 ... a French populated ship from the West Indies came. [There was great concern among the members on board that it was a pirate ship since it flew no flag and turned around, after passing, and swung toward us as if to take fire...

Aug 17 ... heavy rain and loud thunder.

Aug 18 ... a contrary west wind with rain and thunder. Schubert's child died.

Aug 19–20 ... a contrary wind so strong it threw waves over the ship up to the sail cloth. Many were very ill. I was affected as well.

Aug 22 ... Mrs. David Schubert died. In the evening we were met by an English ship from the West Indies which caused much fear since it did not raise a flag.

Aug 25 On the 25th still contrary winds. The waves struck 10 ells over the ship. Because I was not properly lodged, my head became fevered and my thoughts were not able to remain firm, struggle so hard as I might. It finally caused me much sorrow. I remembered how a Christian must conquer all in Christ. I called to him from the heart for strength. In the evening the dear Saviour took away the struggle and gave me such peace that I thought of nothing nor knew nothing except my: Lamb and Saviour. It was a heavy concern with me to know if it was not my calling to dedicate my life completely to chastity, poverty and voluntary discipleship and service.

Aug 26 ... a little north wind. This day I had a stirring impulse to pray to the dear Saviour to help me in the Pennsylvania trial.

Aug 28 On the 28th Hoffman's George died. Be calmed in the evening...

Aug 30 Once again a ship from New England met us with herring.

Sept 1 On the 1st the wind was still south east. I still lay sick. On the same day a very hot night. Almost everyone slept on the deck. I could not because of my weakness.

Sept 4 On the 4th I promised the dear Saviour without certain knowledge of his will that I would not marry nor purchase farm nor cattle. Be merciful unto me dear Lord Jesus. Teach me and let me not become a disgrace, for I thought it was intended for me out of your grace. Lord Jesus, let me live according to your counsel.

Sept 5 ... becalmed. A very great heat at night ... Mrs. Reinwalt failed.

Sept 9 ... heavy rain with thunder.

Sept 12 ... the wind good, from the north. An English ship from Gibraltar met us. It was going to

Marienland (Maryland). I got a chill again.

Sept 13 ...A Palatine child was buried. They shot several times at a large fish. Several very large ones could be seen beside the ship. They fished. The man-eaters bit at the small fish and ripped off 2 lines ....

Sept 16 ... a good wind. Today I was so angry that I was not able to consider anything other than it had ruined me. The cause was that I wished to eat Stockfisk and my mother gave it away. My heart was greatly moved to contrition and humility. This lasted until evening when I received a friendly glance of grace and that evening I was gladdened.

On the 15th a small bird came to the ship which we believed to be a land bird. It allowed itself to be captured.

On the 16th they shot a big bird but it fell in the water. Before midnight they still did not find the bottom.

On the 17th in the morning around 3 o'clock they found the bottom at 55 fathoms. They hung anchor. At noon the sailors saw land and found the bottom at 16 fathoms. In the afternoon at 15 fathoms. The wind still good.

Sept 18 On the 18th we saw land and forest. The bottom was 5 fathoms.... My heart greatly hungered that Jesus would be for me essential righteousness.

Sept 19 ...we travelled into the stream. An English ship met us with whom we exchanged letters. Two more met us with horses, goats, pigs and sheep.

Sept 20 ... a good wind. Mrs. Reinwalt died.

Sept 21 ... we went by New Castle. There we received the first apples which were very good. In the afternoon the captain left because the sailors didn't return. They held out a lantern on the shipstick and beat the drum. While this was going on they fought near the mast. After this the sailors beat each other frightfully.

Sept 22 On the 22nd we arrived in Philadelphia in the morning. George Scholtz and Klem and afterward Schonfeld came to meet us there.

## From the Archives: Christian Self-Surrender

CASPAR SCHWENCKFELD

... There are good people, who, if they do not constantly experience outward and inward comfort from God as often as they would like, think they are lost, that God has forgotten them completely, or has withdrawn Himself from them. At such times we must take care that we do not seek our own self-interest, but that we remain on the right path to salvation, whether. . in wealth or in poverty. If we seek God only for the sake of His pure goodness, and not desire more than His pleasure, reward will follow without our seeking.

God must be sought without self-interest, apart from the reward, entirely out of a pure spirit and heart. Those who fail to do so, often fall this way and that, and praise God in their works only as long as He does good to them, Ps. 49:18. But when God hides Himself, wants to try them a little, (for the faith of the children of God must be tried in various ways like gold, whether they will praise and serve Him in want, without outward comfort and pleasure and a feeling of weakness and ignorance, when the Lord thus withdraws the brightness of His wisdom, comfort, and goodness, causing them to consider themselves naked and miserable, yes, without any comfort, they become vexed, despondent, and sad and genuine earnestness and zeal fail them.

At this stage they must lift themselves up to God anew, remember all former gifts, awaken these in themselves, and be resigned to God. They are to abide immovably in God, whether He give much or little; they are to seek and crave the giver rather than the gifts, and not fall upon the gifts, works, and favours of God when they are at hand, namely, rest on them, and also veer from His love and kindness when these are not at hand; they are to surrender and offer themselves completely, saying sincerely and truly: O Lord, gracious Father, I do not desire what is Thine, but Thee, Thyself, I crave and seek in my Lord Jesus Christ. Thou art not dearer to me when Thou givest me much and when all is well with me, and not less dear when Thou givest me little and when all is not well with me. It is right and just that Thou shouldst give me much as Thou wilt, and makest of me what Thou wilt. Thou hast the right and the authority. Thou art the Lord; I am but Thy poor, worthless servant. Thou hast the right and the power over me, but not I over Thee. Hence I will ever be conscious of Thee and calm my heart in Thy goodness. I will neither be or not be, neither live nor die, know or not know, have or lack, only what Thou wilt, as much as Thou wilt give me, for that will I wait daily, will adapt and prepare myself thereto, and love Thee equally well. Thy will be done, O my God, Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

From this it follows then that Christians should know themselves so thoroughly that they dare not request or desire anything except that which comes through grace, and they should deem themselves quite unworthy of all that they have received from God, as well as of that which they may yet receive. Then a little ray of grace becomes pure gold and precious stones for them. They accept it with sincere gratitude and thus grow to the fullness of God in a secret, hidden way of which they themselves are not conscious.

Such people make the world too narrow for Satan. Nothing can harm them because they look to God in Christ Jesus through a firm faith. When Satan attacks them, they overcome through such self-surrender in faith, whereby all things are overcome. These are also the genuinely devout Christians and children of God who are moved through the Spirit of God not to set for Him limits of goal, time, or measure, but in all things to diligently pay attention to His impulse and inspiration. They do not follow their own will but the will of the Father who is in heaven; Him they serve, and His Son Jesus Christ, not for the sake of His gifts as do the hirelings but for His own sake. Indeed, if they already knew that they would receive no gift and that there were no heaven or hell, they would nevertheless serve God out of pure love as their Creator,

and Jesus Christ as their Redeemer, purely for His own sake, for the Lord is good; His loving-kindness endureth forever, Ps. 106:1. But with many, a genuine and strong faith is lacking. Therefore we must often call with the disciples: O Lord, increase my faith, Lk. 17:6 ....

Furthermore, it is also necessary that those to whom God distributes His gifts do not take them as their possessions, or appropriate them for themselves, but be quite resigned and consign them again to God. But those who would aspire to be something and regard others as inferior, encroach upon the honor, goodness and omnipotence of God. Therefore humility must have precedence everywhere, and by it all things will be regulated in the spirit of God.

To realize one's sickness, weakness, and ignorance, indeed, to accept the unmortified condition of one's flesh, is a good sign that the spirit of God is at work. But one must always direct one's heart upward, to Christ Jesus, to the fountain of all grace and praise and thank Him in this, not become disheartened, but seek all strength and help with Him, and wait patiently for it. Then the Lord will not remain absent with his visitation, at the opportune time, so far as it is beneficial and salutary for us.

We must study long before we attain perfection. As a result, we must not be so readily grieved if we do not have high spiritual gifts. But we are to be grieved when we anger the Giver....

Entrance into the Christian Sabbath, that is, into divine rest, also has its degree and proportion to the nature of faith. It does not readily occur in the highest degree. However, what it is and when and how it is experienced, I hope the Lord will grant in answer to our diligent prayer and petition, so that we may understand this and all that we need according to His will. Amen.

***Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum,***  
***vol. 6, 1–4***

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## From the Archives: On the Prayer of Faith

VALENTINE CRAUTWALD

*to Caspar Schwenckfeld, his beloved friend and brother in the Lord*

Good health to you Caspar. Be strong in the Lord. As I readied myself to respond to your wishes and prepared to write to you on the prayer of faith, that request of the Lord's disciples came to my mind: Lord teach us to pray. The experience led me to seek with them a similar request from the Lord, but I expanded it more fully: Lord teach us, in the first place, to experience what the prayer of faith is which is given by the spirit of faith and secondly, teach us not only to pray, but grant by your kindness that it be done in faith and according to your will. Amen.

The prayer of faith is mentioned in the fifth chapter of James the apostle: ***And the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up...*** Following the same author we are able to define our subject in the following manner: The prayer of faith occurs when you pray in faith, so that you make no judgements, nor experience anything in your heart other than those things which steadfast and prayerful faith raise in you. It will accomplish its own ends....

From the first epistle of John, the fifth chapter, we are able to say that to pray in faith is to make a request in the confidence which we have before God, that if what we request is according to his will, he will hear us. It is according to the will of the Lord that we seek, and according to his will that we be heard. But why do we not say with the Lord himself? It is prayer in the spirit (from which you have faith) and in truth (through which you pray) which gives you what you request. For the Lord, who often remained through the night in prayer for us and abided in the prayer of faith prescribed what the prayer of faith should be in Matthew 17:21: This kind of devotion, never comes about except through prayer and fasting. Therefore I say this: The prayer of faith is that by which demons are cast out and every power of the adversary is trodden under foot. By true fasting the body of the praying man is chastened so that he prays in his faith for an increment and plenitude of spiritual gifts. From this indeed we learn the power and manner of prayer and, moreover, the nature of faith. Faith prays and faith seeks. Wherefore true prayer is not without faith, nor is faith idle, but it fasts and teaches one to pray.

Moreover in prayer as Christ described and required it, faith everywhere holds the victory palm....

Furthermore it is made clear what the prayer of faith is, namely, believing while praying, knowing and understanding for certain that you will receive what you request. These things indicate as well that every hesitation ought to be absent from our heart in prayer and the certainty present that we shall be heard. In like manner it is pointed out that not every prayer is of faith or in faith nor that prayer in faith is able to be undertaken by everyone, but it is for those in particular who are for the most part mature in the spirit and apprehend more fully the knowledge and truth which is Christ.

For through this prayer whatever God created is made holy (1 Tim. 4:4–5), and in this prayer one must always remain steadfast and succumb (Luke 18:13). Paul urged us to pray constantly. Now someone might note that Paul says that we do not know how to pray as we ought. And this is true, for prayer, unless it be at the instigation of the Holy Spirit, as the following references indicate, will not be powerful enough to be the prayer of faith. Therefore we ought to pray insofar as the spirit of his truth is in us....

I believe it is now manifest that the prayer of faith and the prayer of the Spirit are the same, for Jude in



his letter writes: ***Pray in the Holy Spirit*** and Revelation 5:8 notes that the prayers of the saints are bowls filled with the best perfume for the spirit which is the most precious and eminent being before God.

... Although it is fitting that all are invited to pray and exhorted to persevere in prayer, nevertheless, God alone always knows what is in fact prayer and hears his true worshippers. They are not judged by us but they either pray to the Lord or do not pray to him. Attention must be directed to faith's beginnings. Just as the first movements of the prayer of faith are none other than increments to that faith and from these initial impulses the spirit leads the pious, insofar as they walk from faith into faith, to perfection, so those who pray are strengthened continually in the prayer of faith.

John taught his disciples to pray, as did Christ the Lord of glory, but! Christ required from his disciples not faith in the first place. At times we found them guilty of unfaithfulness. They were growing in faith until they would pray that perfect prayer of faith, and persevering in it, move others to pray likewise ....

From this it is clear that the spirit of God prays in the pious, at times in those beginning, at times in those growing in prayer, at times in fullness of faith and prayer. It prays, supporting our weaknesses, teaching where and when prayer is fitting, raising groans in those who say nothing but who groan and weep in such a way that their minds are not yet moved, their lips are not yet closed nor are their eyes dry and, if they consider other matters, they do not have the spirit of prayer in a false manner. The spirit moves them from these groanings to speak within the heart. After it restores the house of prayer in its tabernacle, it unites to itself the whole mind and those things which are internal in common prayer. In this it adds to the mind, the mouth, tongue, sounds, sighs, clamors. It adds to the clamors so that tears, laments, cries and wails follow. Finally the spirit gives perseverance lest we fall short or tire of bringing our petitions before the throne of grace so that we might receive what we seek and achieve our desires. Yet not content with this it stimulates us to give thanks for those things which occurred either through us or by others in our name. And when it has incited us to give thanks it crowns us with new riches, granting us growth and prayer in faith and making us recipients of heavenly treasure so that we abound even more fully in such wealth.

Thus we are always beggars and always wealthy. We know our wealth because of the magnitude of the goodness and grace of God which he bounteously spreads upon us, yet we are aware of our poverty as well since we are aware of our infirmity and the fact that the sick and the needy are the ones involved in making requests and giving thanks. Moreover, it comes about that we do not seek what pleases us, but rather what pleases him to whom we pray. We do not request those things of which we approve.

However, it is those things which are necessary for us and are worthy for God which take precedent. These gifts far exceed our poverty, which is not in any way able to take in at once the immense power of the riches in the treasury of the Lord and however much one desires that those things for which we pray at once be augmented and fulfilled, we are not able to bring it about. Moreover we are compelled together to look to the Lord who gives and in him, who is able to do all and who controls all, to be wealthy, although he does not always bestow gifts nor offer all things at once ....

I shall pray in the spirit and I shall pray in the mind. I shall sing psalms in the spirit and I shall sing psalms in the mind. Prayer is made by the spirit and prayer is made by the mind joined with the spirit. The spirit prays with its own groanings; the spirit also prays having been united with the mind, so that the spirit, which the faithful receive for what is necessary, and at the same time the mind, by whose ministry along with those things which work with it, the building up of the church is served, have fruit, while the whole person may be subservient to those united members of his or her inheritance.

But concerning the prayer of faith which Christ states is far from the many words of the Gentiles—perhaps, by you especially, it is practiced too much. I, as I said before, pray in the first place with the disciples of the Lord that the Lord teach me to pray, in however small and inferior a manner I with my weaknesses of body and mind am able to be compared to them. Yet, I pray that the prayer of faith might follow in spirit and in truth and finally with perseverance and intent constancy which he is worthy to

bring about, Amen. I ask, unskilled as I am, that if you have any correction or additional things to add, share them with me and fare well in the name of him who teaches his own to pray.

***At Liegnitz, Saturday after the eighth day of the Epiphany, in the year 1529.***

Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum, vol. 2,

pp. 432–39. Translation, Peter C. Erb

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 21: Caspar Schwenckfeld: Forgotten Reformer

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## From the Archives: Christian Patience and Humility

A Letter to a Mother and Her Children

CASPAR SCHWENCKFELD

May God the Father of all consolation and all patience support you in all your anxiety, through Jesus Christ His beloved Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Best-loved in Christ! Since we daily learn that our adversary, the devil, not only goes about like a roaring lion seeking to devour us, but also now as always has aroused his members to fight openly against the friends of God intending to lead them away from the truth that is in Christ, it is necessary to walk in sobriety, that is, in divine wisdom; to watch, to pray, and to look constantly to God; to implore Him with tears and to beg Him not to forsake us, but to watch graciously over the work begun in us ....

Above all things we need the patience of Jesus Christ and of the saints of God, wherein we may daily exercise ourselves and possess our souls, as our Lord admonished. Since it happens through divine providence that we have to be everyone's refuse for Christ's sake, thank God, you must consider how soberly we must walk before God and in what great danger we stand. Wherefore we should be fully prepared every moment and equipped with the armor of God. The Word of life which Paul calls the sword of the spirit, wherewith the Lord also has girded us poor, unworthy sinners, is the beginning of His kingdom. This shall finally help us to conquer all our enemies.

Meanwhile, however, we should perceive what patience is, yea what Christian patience is. The wicked and the world have their patience, if they cannot turn away their injury, cannot better matters, or otherwise seek their own benefit under it. Christian patience is one of the highest virtues on earth, namely, a gentle, kind, benevolent heart toward all those who wrong us. There must be thorough, sincere forgiveness and a ready benevolence toward all our debtors, otherwise we will obtain no forgiveness from our God our heavenly Father, as the Lord Christ taught His disciples: Forgive, and it shall be forgiven you.

I would like to write you something about patience, if only I were sufficiently able and it would pour itself out in my heart according to the measure received. Apart from that, you well know that in the sight of God we can neither write or speak rightly, nor do what is beneficial. It must proceed out of living experience as you no doubt have found in the book: Christian Warfare, the Knighthood of God, and Self-Knowledge. Pray God the Lord, in the name of Christ, that for the sake of His unspeakable mercy, He take away from us poor sinners all impatience and help us to forget every trial and sincerely to forgive everyone, as is done now-a-days, thank God, to the praise of God's grace. To Him be all honor, praise, and glory forever. Amen.

In like manner, however, as Christian patience comes for God the heavenly Father through Jesus Christ alone, so impatience comes from the devil who in the beginning corrupted our flesh in Adam and Eve. Consequently it is by nature full of impatience (although not everyone thinks so, much less perceives it). Satan became impatient that the man Jesus Christ in heaven should become his Lord. Impatience brought on pride and therefore he was cast out. Soon he breathed these two vices into our first parents. He filled them with the spirit of impatience and pride so that they would not wait for God, be resigned to Him, or let Him alone be wise. Hence all flesh, as the fruit of the first tree, became wholly corrupt and poisoned ....

Consider, my loved ones, why Christ came into the flesh, and what it means when He says: Learn of me, for I am lowly in heart (that is, wholly patient, as also patience is called the mother of all gentleness and mercy) ....

Patience and humility guide love. They bring it ever more fully into the heart by the grace of God; they teach it true confession; and by it also the Holy Spirit most of all rules the flesh and makes it subservient; they confirm a Christian, and without them no one can be a Christian. Where these two virtues are not found, there is not weakness, to which the flesh always resorts, but pure malice, vanity, pomp, self-will, and impatience in the old carnal being.

Thus we see two malicious vices and two glorious virtues set over against each other in the first and in the second Adam. Almighty God Himself is an example for us of all patience and humility in that He lets the sun shine on the good and the evil, yea, He tolerates with great forbearance the evil, godless, infamous men who revile, persecute, and esteem Him and His children lightly. He gives His enemies fruitful things, grain, growing plants, rain, wine, and all necessities, and endures those continually who would like to eradicate His name under heaven. Oh! patience beyond patience. Oh! Thou Father of all patience, make us participant of Thy divine patience and forbearance ....

My beloved! This was written for our instruction because we, out of the grace of God have now also come out of captivity and have been transposed into Christian liberty, so that with regard to our conscience we may not be bound here or there, but may praise our God freely and voluntarily and thus may see how matters stand in all parties and may know how to be on our guard (which I write to the honor of Christ, our spiritual Moses). We should not become impatient though the universal visitation and gracious coming of the Lord be long delayed. We should not murmur against the Lord, but rather prepare ourselves in patience and wait patiently for Him though he delay for forty years; we should commend to Him all His affairs and meanwhile sacrifice to the arch-shepherd of our souls, and give honor, praise, and thanks to His grace ....

There are many causes of impatience, all of which, however, are resolved and summed up in self-love. A man's soul often is moved to impatience because of want of temporal nourishment, of poverty, of misery, and because of frustration. But we must remember that we came into this world nude and bare and will be taken away from here nude and bare; also, that the spirit of God admonishes us in Holy Scripture to learn in Christ to disdain the world with all its goods, riches, and honor. The poor always have some advantage in entering the kingdom of heaven, as is written in the gospel ....

***Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum***, vol. 5, 697–709

Translated by Selina Gerhard Schultz

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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Issue 21: Casper Schwenckfeld: Forgotten Reformer

## Caspar Schwenckfeld von Ossig: Christian History Timeline

Significant years and happenings in the life of Schwenckfeld and the Schwenckfelders

1489 Birth of Schwenckfeld in Ossig, Silesia

### 1500

1517 Luther's Posting of the 95 Theses

1518 Schwenckfeld's "Awakening"

1525 Schwenckfeld-Luther meeting

1527 Schleithem Confession (First major Confession of the Anabaptists)

1529 Schwenckfeld's Self-Exile

1530 Time in Strasbourg

•Augsburg Confession (First major Lutheran Statement of Faith)

1535 Colloquy with Butzer and others

1537 Conflict with preachers in Ulm

1540 Foundation of Jesuits under Ignatius Loyola

1541 Schwenckfeld writes his **Great Confession**

1546 Death of Martin Luther

1558 Queen Elizabeth I of England

1561 Schwenckfeld's death; death of Menno Simons

1564 Death of John Calvin

1580s Activity of Martin John Jr. and Antonius Oelsner

### 1600

1610s Activity of Daniel Sudermann

1611 King James Version of Bible

1618 Beginning of Thirty Years War

1648 Treaty of Westphalia ends the Thirty Years War: only Lutheranism, Calvinism and Catholicism legally accepted as religions in Europe

1675 Philip Jacob Spener's *Pia Desideria* initiates Pietism

1680s Activity of Martin John Jr.

## **1700**

1719 Jesuit persecution against Schwenckfelders in Silesia begins

1721 Schwenckfelder representatives sent to Vienna to plea for relief

1726 Schwenckfelders flee Silesia to Saxony

1731 First migration

1733 Second migration

1734 Third and central migration

1735 Fourth migration

1736 Fifth migration

1737 Sixth migration

1765 Towamencin school house erected

1782 Aug.17 Constitution of the Schwenckfelder Society

1790 Hosensack meetinghouse erected for worship; one room for educational purposes—**"the Hosensack Academy"**

1791 Washington meetinghouse erected

1793 Towamencin meetinghouse erected

## **1800**

1825 Kraussdale meetinghouse erected

1836 Worcester meetinghouse erected

1869 Hosensack meetinghouse erected

1884 Initiation of Board of Publication, *Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum*, Schwenckfelder Library

1891 Perkiomen Seminary under Schwenckfelder management

1895 Schwenckfelder Sunday School Mission begun in Philadelphia and Board of Missions organised

1898 Philadelphia Schwenckfelder Church begun

## **1900**

1904 Norristown Schwenckfelder Church begun

1911 Palm Church dedicated (comprises the congregations of Hosensack, Kraussdale, Washington

1916 Lansdale Church dedicated

1921 Organisation of Society of Schwenckfeldian Exiles

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## Caspar Schwenckfeld von Ossig: Recommended Resources

**Readers who wish to learn more about Schwenckfeld and the Schwenckfelders should first turn to:**

Selina Gerhard Schultz, *Caspar Schwenckfeld von Ossig*, 4th edition, Pennsburg, PA, 1977.

Selina Gerhard Schultz, *A Course of Study in the Life and Teachings of Caspar Schwenckfeld and the History of the Schwenckfelder Movement*, Board of Publications of the Schwenckfelder Church, 1964.

Peter C. Erb, *Schwenckfeld in His Reformation Setting*, Pennsburg, Schwenckfelder Library, 1977, This volume contains a useful bibliography.

R Emmet McLaughlin, *Caspar Schwenckfeld, Reluctant Radical: His Life to 1540*, Yale, New Haven, 1986.

**The following publications (along with McLaughlin's book above) have been released since Erb's Schwenckfeld in his Reformation Setting bibliography:**

Peter C. Erb, editor: *Schwenckfeld and Early Schwenckfeldianism: Papers Presented at the International Colloquium on Schwenckfeld and the Schwenckfelders*, September, 1984 (1986)

Peter C. Erb, editor: *Schwenckfelders in America: Papers Presented at the International Colloquium on Schwenckfeld and the Schwenckfelders. 1987* (1987). Editor & translator: The Spiritual Diary of Christopher Wiegner (1978).

Siegfried Knorrlich, *The Refuge Church in Harpersdorf, Silesia*, translated by Sherman L Gerhard, 1982.

W. Kyrel Meschter, *Twentieth century Schwenckfelders: A Narrative History* (1984).

Dennis Moyer, editor, *Schwenckfelder Library Newsletter* (1987).

Andre Seguenny, *The Christology of Caspar Schwenckfeld*, translated by Peter C. Erb and Simone Nieuwolt, Lewiston (1987).

L Allen Viehmeyer, *The Tumultuous years; Schwenckfelder Chronicles, 1580–1750* (1980).

Horst Weigelt, *The Schwenckfelders in Silesia*, translated by Peter C. Erb (1985).

In addition, over 50 books and treatises by Schwenckfeld or other early Schwenckfelders are available in English translation in printed form or on MS-DOS disk. For information contact:



The Schwenckfelder Library

One Seminary Street

Pennsburg, PA 18073

***attention:*** BOOKS

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 21: Casper Schwenckfeld: Forgotten Reformer

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## The Landing of the Schwenckfelders from the St. Andrew

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
September 22, 1734

A painting by artist Adolph Pannash, which hangs in the Schwenckfelder Library in Pennsburge, PA, was painted in 1934 for the bicentennial of the Schwenckfelders' arrival.

The scene has been quaintly idealized by the artist. These newly arrived Schwenckfelders look tidy, cheerful, and well-costumed; the real people probably would have appeared less than neat and refreshed. The journey was frightening, and nine persons died during the trip (see *The Hard Journey to America*). The Quakers who are greeting them here all look like the smiling man on the oatmeal box.

Nevertheless, the scene contains much truth, and is intended justly to glorify the event. The persecuted Schwenckfelders, who brought their gaily decorated wooden chests filled with their belongings, and their beloved books, were welcomed in Pennsylvania by the Quakers—themselves well acquainted with intolerance and persecution.

Two days after their arrival, on September 24, Pastor George Weiss led them in a gathering to give thanks to God for their safe passage and for His deliverance and mercy in providing them with a new home. The meal they held on this day, their thanksgiving meal, is still observed and celebrated each year by Schwenckfelders on September 24th, their ***Day of Remembrance***.

***NOTE: Though George Washington declared November 26th as Thanksgiving Day, the national holiday was not regularly observed in America until 1863, when Abraham Lincoln made it a formal holiday to be observed on the last Thursday in November. In 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt changed it to the third Thursday in November.***

***Possibly the oldest continuously observed day of Thanksgiving in America is the Schwenckfelders' Day of Remembrance.***

The following is early American Schwenckfelder folk art

**Translation of "My Heart"**  
***My heart meditates on the good Word***  
***Your work that King Christ give***  
***Like a feather my tongue will be***  
***for his Holy Ghost***  
***The most beautiful of all people***  
***are you, noble King Jesus Christ***  
***Grace proceeds from your mouth***  
***even as God has blessed you***  
***The sword of the spirit on your side***

***gloriously triumphs in the battle  
Thus as it shows in the Word of Truth  
[it] gains eternal victory and honor\* [\* translation by Hans Huijsing]***

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