

A revolution by the guilds

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

On 9 February 1529, armed members of the guilds of Basel gathered on the market square, forced the council to accept their demands and then went through the churches of the city, tearing down images, smashing altars and burning statues. Within a few weeks, the mass was abolished, the Catholic members of the council were excluded, the monasteries were dissolved and a new order of worship and morals was proclaimed. On 1 April 1529, the council issued the Reformation Ordinance, which laid down the principles of the new church and the new civic order.¹

The Reformation of Basel was a religious event, but it was also a political and economic revolution. It shifted power within the city from the old patrician families and the merchants who had hesitated to break with the Church to the guilds and the reformed preachers. It ended the last remnants of the bishop's authority and severed the ties with Rome. It transferred the property of the Church to the city. It reorganised poor relief, education and moral discipline. And it placed Basel in the Protestant camp of the Swiss Confederation, alongside Zurich and Bern, in the confessional conflicts that would divide the Confederation for three centuries.

This chapter examines the Reformation of 1529 from the perspective of the civic order and its finances. It describes the path to the Reformation, the role of Johannes Oecolampadius, the events of 1529, the new church order, the secularisation of church property and the long-term consequences for the economic culture of the city. The next chapter turns to the theological and ethical questions of credit and interest, which link Basel with Calvin and Geneva.

1 Notes

1. On the events of 8–9 February 1529 (armed assembly of the guilds, iconoclasm) and the Reformation Ordinance of 1 April 1529, see HLS, article "Reformation", section on Basel; Burckhardt, *Geschichte der Stadt Basel*, 1942; Wackernagel, vol. 3, 1924. Dates to be verified. ↩

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