

Johannes Oecolampadius

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The leader of the Reformation in Basel was Johannes Oecolampadius, whose name is a Greek rendering of his German name Hausschein, or perhaps Heussgen. Born in 1482 in Weinsberg in Württemberg, he studied at Heidelberg, Bologna and Tübingen and became a scholar of Greek and Hebrew. He worked in Basel in 1515 and 1516 as a corrector and editor for Froben and helped Erasmus with the edition of the New Testament. After a period as a preacher in Augsburg and a brief stay in a monastery, he returned to Basel in 1522, joined the reform movement and became professor of theology at the university and preacher at the church of St Martin.¹

Oecolampadius was a scholar of great learning and a preacher of moderate temperament. His theology was close to that of Zwingli, with whom he corresponded and collaborated. In the dispute on the Lord's Supper that divided the reformers in the 1520s, he took the side of Zwingli against Luther, arguing that the bread and wine were signs of the body and blood of Christ. He also participated in the Marburg Colloquy of 1529, where Luther and Zwingli failed to reach agreement on this question. In 1526, he represented the reformed side at the disputation of Baden in the Aargau, where he debated with the Catholic theologian Johann Eck; the disputation ended with a victory for the Catholic side in the judgement of the organisers, but it strengthened Oecolampadius's reputation among the reformed.²

Oecolampadius was also a church organiser. He sought to establish a church discipline that would allow the community to exclude unrepentant sinners from communion. He argued that the church itself should exercise this discipline, through elders chosen from the community. The council of Basel, like the councils of Zurich and Bern, preferred to keep the discipline in its own hands, so that Oecolampadius's ideas were only partly realised. They would later influence Calvin, who established in Geneva a consistory

of pastors and elders that exercised discipline independently of the council, as the companion volume describes.

1 Notes

1. On Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531), his biography, his work with Froben and Erasmus and his role as reformer of Basel, see HLS, article "Oekolampad, Johannes". To be verified. ↩
2. On the disputation of Baden (May–June 1526), in which Oecolampadius debated with Johann Eck, and the Marburg Colloquy (October 1529), see HLS, articles "Badener Disputation" and "Marburger Religionsgespräch". To be verified. ↩

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