

Pietism and the Christentumsgesellschaft

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Alongside the rational Enlightenment of Iselin, Basel was a centre of Pietism, the movement of religious renewal that emphasised personal conversion, devotion, Bible reading and practical piety. Pietist circles met in private houses for prayer and study and maintained connections with Pietist centres in Württemberg, Herrnhut and elsewhere. In 1780, the German Christentumsgesellschaft, a society for the promotion of true Christianity, was founded in Basel by the Augsburg pastor Johann August Urlsperger. It became a centre of the Pietist network in the German-speaking world.¹

The Christentumsgesellschaft gave rise to a series of religious and charitable institutions in Basel in the early nineteenth century: a Bible society, founded in 1804; a missionary society, the Basel Mission, founded in 1815; institutions for the education of poor children and the care of the sick. These institutions were financed by donations from the Basel elite, in particular from Pietist members of the *Daig*, and they gave Basel a reputation as a centre of Protestant piety and missionary zeal. Chapter V examines the Basel Mission and its trading company.

The coexistence of Enlightenment and Pietism in Basel is characteristic of the city. The same families produced rationalist reformers and devout Pietists, and many individuals combined elements of both. What united them was a sense of responsibility for the use of wealth, whether understood as a duty of reason or a duty of faith. The ethos of the *Daig* was thus shaped by both traditions: a sober, practical, responsible attitude to wealth, suspicious of display and committed to its use for the common good.

1 Notes

1. On the Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft, founded in Basel in 1780 on the initiative of Johann August Urlsperger, and its role in the Pietist networks of the German-speaking world, see HLS, article "Christentumsgesellschaft". To be verified. ↩

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