

The Reformation Ordinance of 1 April 1529

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The council gave the new order a legal form in the Reformation Ordinance of 1 April 1529. The ordinance regulated worship, the sacraments, the appointment and conduct of pastors, marriage, education, poor relief and public morals. It abolished the mass and replaced it with a service centred on preaching and the reading of scripture in German, with the celebration of the Lord's Supper several times a year. It allowed pastors to marry. It established a marriage court, the *Ehegericht*, which took over the jurisdiction over marriage from the bishop's court. And it imposed a strict moral discipline on the citizens, prohibiting adultery, gambling, drunkenness, cursing, excessive luxury and absence from sermons.¹

The ordinance, an act of the civil authority, placed the church under the control of the council. The pastors were appointed and paid by the city, while their conduct was supervised by the council. The church of Basel became a state church, integrated into the government of the city. It remained so until the separation of church and state in the canton at the beginning of the twentieth century. This integration of church and state, which Basel shared with Zurich and Bern, distinguished the Swiss reformed churches from the model that Calvin would establish in Geneva, where the consistory enjoyed a greater autonomy.

The ordinance also established the principle that the civic community was a Christian community, whose members were bound by the law of God as interpreted by the reformed preachers. This principle gave the council a moral mandate that extended to every area of life, including economic behaviour. The council regulated prices, wages, interest rates, luxury, gambling and the observance of Sunday, justifying these regulations by the duty to maintain a godly community. The moral economy of the medieval city, described in Part A, acquired a new religious foundation.

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1 Notes

1. On the content of the Basel Reformation Ordinance of 1 April 1529 (worship, marriage court, moral discipline, poor relief), see HLS, article "Reformation"; the edition of the ordinance in the collections of Basel legal sources. To be verified. ↩

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