

The Reformed alliance

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

The Reformation created new alliances between the Protestant cities. In 1528 and 1529, Zurich, Bern, Basel, St Gallen, Schaffhausen, Biel, Mulhouse and the Imperial city of Constance concluded a series of treaties known as the Christian Civic Union, the *Christliches Burgrecht*, which bound them to mutual defence of the Reformed faith.¹ When the Catholic cantons responded with an alliance with Austria, the tension led to the two wars of Kappel. After the defeat of Zurich in 1531, the Christian Civic Union was dissolved, but the Reformed cities continued to cooperate.

Geneva became part of this Reformed network. The city concluded alliances with Bern and Fribourg in 1526. After its Reformation in 1536 it relied on Bern for protection against Savoy. The relations between Geneva and the Reformed Swiss cities, including Basel, were close: pastors, students, printers and refugees moved between them, while the churches exchanged letters and consulted each other on questions of doctrine and discipline. The companion volume describes Geneva's position in this network.

The Reformed network extended beyond the Confederation, to Strasbourg, the Palatinate, the Netherlands, Scotland, the Huguenot communities of France and the Reformed churches of Hungary and Poland. It was a network of faith, but it also became a network of trade and credit. Reformed merchants trusted each other, did business with each other and married into each other's families. The Huguenot bankers who settled in Geneva, Basel, Amsterdam and London after the persecutions in France formed a Protestant International of finance, which dominated European banking in the eighteenth century. Part C examines Basel's place in this network.

1 Notes

1. On the Christian Civic Union (Christliches Burgrecht) of 1527–1531 among Zurich, Constance, Bern, St Gallen, Biel, Mulhouse, Basel, Schaffhausen and later Strasbourg, see HLS, article "Christliches Burgrecht". Membership and dates to be verified. ↩

For general information only. This article does not constitute legal or tax advice, does not replace advice on an individual case and creates no lawyer-client relationship. It reflects the legal position as of September 2026.

Online version: helveticaregister.com/basel-the-reformed-alliance