

A church without a pastor, 1549–1554

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After Beccaria's departure the community was led by laymen. Taddeo Duno and Martino Muralto assumed its spiritual direction.¹ Duno himself was not continuously present. While practising medicine at Asso, in the territory of Como, he was denounced to the Inquisition in 1551 and returned to Locarno with his family only in 1553.² The community thus lived for several years without an ordained minister in the town, depending on visits to the Mesolcina, on correspondence with Zurich and on the authority of educated laymen who read and expounded Scripture in their houses. It was a form of church organization that the later Italian refugee congregations in Zurich, Basel and the Grisons would recognize: small, lay-led, literate and dependent on the protection of a foreign magistrate.

The community's numbers in this period are uncertain. Schaff, again following Meyer, speaks of a Protestant congregation of nearly two hundred members in the middle of the sixteenth century.³ The historical dictionary, more cautiously, records that over a hundred Locarnese left the town on 3 March 1555. The figure of the emigrants is discussed in detail below. The difference between the two figures reflects partly those who recanted and stayed, partly those who left later or went elsewhere, and partly the uncertainty of the sources.

1 The confession of faith of July 1554

In the summer of 1554 a new *landfogto* arrived in Locarno: Esaias Röchli of Zurich. Campi describes his arrival as the occasion that the community had awaited.⁴ In July 1554 the Locarnese drew up a written confession of faith, which Campi attributes, with good reason, to Taddeo Duno and Lodovico Ronco, the latter responsible for the final text. Together with a covering letter from the bailiff, the confession and an accompanying document were presented to the council of Zurich on 9 July 1554. The text

has a trinitarian structure borrowed from the Apostles' Creed and a separate section on the sacraments. Its key sentence for the legal history of the episode is the declaration that the Locarnese did not differ "even by a finger" from the churches of their lords of Zurich, Bern, Basel and Schaffhausen.

The declaration was a legal argument in theological form. By aligning themselves expressly with the churches of the four Reformed ruling cantons, the Locarnese claimed to be co-religionists of a part of their sovereigns and invited those sovereigns to protect them under the terms of the federal settlement. They also distanced themselves from the radical currents of the Italian Reformation, the Anabaptists and the antitrinitarians, whom the Reformed cantons persecuted themselves. Campi stresses that the confession represented a theology assimilated by laymen, an expression of the Protestant principle of the priesthood of all believers.⁵ It was written a year after Michael Servetus had been burnt in Geneva, at a moment when Reformed authorities were particularly anxious to separate orthodox refugees from heretics.

2 Why the confession provoked a crisis

The confession made the community visible as a church, and that visibility forced the ruling cantons to act. The Catholic cantons regarded the Locarnese as subjects who had fallen away from the faith in a bailiwick where, under the Second Landfrieden, the Catholic religion was protected. Zurich regarded them as brethren who had confessed the faith of its own church and who deserved at least the right to live unmolested. A memorandum from a Zurich bailiff transmitting a confession to his own government was, from the Catholic perspective, an attempt by one co-sovereign to create facts in a common lordship. From the Zurich perspective it was a request for protection from subjects of the twelve cantons. The two Diets of 1554 were the forum in which these perspectives collided.

Essentials. The Reformed community of Locarno formed after 1535 around the humanist schoolmaster Giovanni Beccaria and a group of noble and burgher families, among them the Orelli, Muralto and Duno, and included exiles from Milan and Piedmont. The disputation of 5 August 1549 before the *landfogto* went against the Reformed. Beccaria was briefly imprisoned and left for the Mesolcina. Lay leaders, above all Taddeo Duno, Martino Muralto and Lodovico Ronco, held the community together. The written confession of July 1554, presented to the Zurich council on 9 July 1554 with a letter from the Zurich bailiff Esaias Röuchli, declared the community's

full agreement with the churches of Zurich, Bern, Basel and Schaffhausen and turned the community's existence into a federal question.

3 Notes

1. Pauli Falconi, "Muralto, Martino" (above) ("Dopo la partenza del Beccaria (1549) assunse la guida spirituale della comunità unitamente a Taddeo Duno"). ↩
2. Crivelli, "Duno, Taddeo" (above). ↩
3. Schaff, History of the Christian Church, vol. VIII, § 40 (above) ("a Protestant congregation of nearly two hundred members"). ↩
4. Campi, "Lutero e la Riforma a Sud delle Alpi" (above) ("L'occasione si presentò nell'estate del 1554, con l'arrivo del nuovo balivo, lo zurighese Esaja Röuchli"; "Questi due documenti, corredati da un lettera d'accompagnamento del balivo Röuchli, furono [presentati] il 9 luglio 1554 al consiglio di Zurigo"; authorship by Duno and Ronco; "che non dissentiamo nemmeno un dito dalle Chiese dei nostri Signori di Zurigo, Berna, Basilea e Sciaffusa"). ↩
5. Campi, "Lutero e la Riforma a Sud delle Alpi" (above). ↩

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