

The congregation after Ochino

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

The Italian church of Zurich survived the departure of its first minister. It continued to hold services in Italian with ministers drawn from the Italian Reformed diaspora and later increasingly from Zurich-trained clergy who had learnt Italian. Over time, as the second and third generations grew up speaking Zurich German and intermarried with local families, the congregation's linguistic function weakened. Its social function, as a meeting place of the Locarnese families and as a body that administered charitable funds for poorer members, lasted longer.¹ Like other Protestant refugee communities in Switzerland, the Locarnese kept common funds for the support of their members. Such relief funds (*bourses*) were financed from public subsidies, gifts, bequests and collections in church, and they provided temporary relief and medical assistance. These communal funds are the distant ancestors of the family funds and family foundations discussed at the end of this chapter. They show how a refugee community converted solidarity into durable legal form.² The memory of the exile became part of the families' identity. In 1683 Daniel Orelli, a merchant and later director of the Zurich posts, published an account of the "Locarnese persecution" of 1555 that celebrated the faith of the exiles and claimed for them the foundation of Zurich's silk manufacturing.³ In 1797 Salomon von Orelli wrote a biography of the family's founder Aloisio Orelli that ran to more than five hundred pages. Ferdinand Meyer's history of the Reformed community of Locarno and its emigration to Zurich, published in 1836, gave the story its classic nineteenth-century form.⁴ These works were acts of family piety. They are indispensable sources, although they tended to enlarge the role of the Locarnese at the expense of other actors, a point taken up in the discussion of the silk industry below.

1 Notes

1. Meyer, *Die evangelische Gemeinde in Locarno* (above), on the later history of the Italian church in Zurich. ↩

The congregation after Ochino

2. Tosato-Rigo, "Réfugiés protestants" (above): the relief funds (bourses) of the refugee communities, "Financées par des subsides publics, dons, legs et collectes au temple", which provided "secours passagers et assistance médicale". See also Schulthess, Die von Orelli (above). On Swiss family foundations see the last section of this chapter and Art. 335 SCC. ↩
3. Wikipedia, "Daniel Orelli" (above): Daniel Orelli (1653–1726) published Locarnesische Verfolgung 1555 in 1683, which "promoted an inaccurate narrative" about the refugees founding Zurich's silk manufacturing; he was director of the posts from 1687 to 1714. ↩
4. Wikipedia, "Aloisio Orelli", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aloisio_Orelli (consulted 4 October 2026), referring to Salomon von Orelli's idealized biography of 1797 of more than 500 pages; Wikipedia, "Barbara Muralto" (above), on Meyer (1836). ↩

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/lugano-the-congregation-after-ochino