

Education: the Prophezei, the Latin schools and stipends

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The second great purpose to which the secularised wealth of Zurich was devoted was education. Here the key asset was the Grossmünster chapter, the one ecclesiastical corporation that survived the Reformation. By a council mandate of 29 September 1523, the canonries of the Grossmünster were to be converted, as they fell vacant, into theological and philological teaching posts. On 19 June 1525 the resulting institution began its lectures as a school of theology with scholarly aspirations. Following Paul's discussion of prophecy in the first letter to the Corinthians, Zwingli called the method of public biblical exegesis practised there *Prophezei*, a name that attached itself to the school. The model was Erasmus's *Collegium Trilingue* in Louvain, founded in 1517. Its curriculum placed Hebrew, Greek and Latin at the service of the exposition of scripture.¹

The economic significance of this arrangement is easily missed. The Grossmünster chapter continued to exist until 1832 as a legal and economic unit, with its lands, tithes and rents managed by a lay administrator and cellarer. What changed was the use of its income. The prebends that had supported canons singing the office were redirected, one by one, to support professors and preachers. After the Reformation the chapter maintained a Latin school and a theological institute.² The municipal archive describes the result as the establishment of schools within the reorganised chapter, among them the Carolinum, also called the Prophezei.³ In financial terms, Zurich created its higher school by changing the purpose of an existing endowment while leaving the endowment intact. The capital of the chapter was preserved and its yield reallocated. That is the technique a modern foundation supervisor applies when a foundation's original purpose has become impossible or obsolete and the purpose is amended to preserve the foundation.

The school prospered. Under Bullinger it became known, from 1559, as the *Schola Tigurina*, gaining a reputation for exegesis, translation and oriental studies and competing with the Geneva Academy until the late sixteenth century. In 1601 it was reorganised as the *Collegium Carolinum* with theological, philological and philosophical divisions.⁴ When the chapter was finally dissolved in 1832, in the liberal regeneration of the canton, its assets were released for the new cantonal school and the University of Zurich, founded in 1833, whose theological faculty took over the role of the Carolinum.⁵ The endowment of a ninth-century collegiate church thus passed, through a Reformation conversion and a liberal dissolution, into the foundation capital of a modern research university. Few assets anywhere can show a comparable chain of purpose changes without interruption of the capital.

Below the Carolinum stood the Latin schools at the Grossmünster and the Fraumünster, which prepared boys for higher studies. Alongside it developed a system of stipends. The Reformed academies founded from 1525 in Zurich, Bern, Lausanne and Geneva, in whose founding and financing the secular authorities were decisively involved, established stipends which were at first reserved for students of theology.⁶ The Almosenordnung itself already provided for poor scholars, who shared the Mushafen's porridge with the poor of the city. The former Cistercian abbey of Kappel am Albis, dissolved in 1527, housed a school at which poor citizens' sons were supported between 1528 and 1547. Its pupils included future leaders of the Zurich church such as Rudolf Gwalther and Heinrich Lavater. Bullinger himself had taught at Kappel before his call to Zurich. According to the same account, the support of scholars was later concentrated at the Fraumünster and cost the city several hundred gulden a year.⁷

The stipend is a small institution with a large legacy. It combines a capital fund, a selection procedure, a defined beneficiary class and an obligation—in the sixteenth century, usually the obligation to serve the Zurich church after ordination. It was the means by which the Reformed state recruited and trained its own clergy and, through them, its teachers and many of its administrators. The investment in human capital financed by the former Church property produced, within two generations, a literate Reformed elite whose members would staff the chancery, the schools and, eventually, the commercial houses of the city. Although the connection between the Zurich Reformation and the later economic success of the city is often sought in doctrine, it is at least as plausible to seek it in this very concrete conversion of ecclesiastical endowments into educational ones.

1 Notes

1. Wikipedia (German), “Collegium Carolinum (Zürich)”, [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collegium_Carolinum_\(Z%C3%BCrich\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collegium_Carolinum_(Z%C3%BCrich)), for the mandate of 29 September 1523, the opening on 19 June 1525, the name Prophezei and the Louvain model; the dates of 1523 and 1525 are also given in Wikipedia (English), “Reformation in Zürich”, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reformation_in_Z%C3%BCrich. ↩
2. HLS, “Grossmünster”, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/012123/2008-03-06/>. ↩
3. Stadt Zürich, Stadtarchiv, Wissensportal, “Beginn und Durchsetzung der Reformation in Zürich”, <https://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/de/stadtleben/stadtportraet/zuerichs-geschichte/stadtarchiv/wissensportal/reformation-in-zuerich.html>. ↩
4. Wikipedia (German), “Collegium Carolinum (Zürich)”, [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collegium_Carolinum_\(Z%C3%BCrich\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collegium_Carolinum_(Z%C3%BCrich)). ↩
5. Meinrad Suter, Von der Zunft und vom Hohen Schulkonvent zum Mittelschul- und Berufsbildungsamt (offprint from Zürcher Taschenbuch 2014, 2013), https://www.zh.ch/content/dam/zhweb/bilder-dokumente/organisation/bildungsdirektion/mba/amt/von_der_zunft_und_vom_hohen_schulkonvent_zum_mittelschul-und_berufsbildungsamt.pdf. ↩
6. HLS, “Stipendien” (Hans-Ulrich Grunder), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/010397/2013-11-26/>. ↩
7. Huonker, “Bemerkungen zur Reformation in Zürich”, <https://www.thata.ch/bemerkungenzureformationinzuerich.pdf>, section on scholarships. The date of Kappel’s dissolution (1527) is the standard one. ↩

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