

“Dr. Diane Poythress has written the sole work that reveals for the English-speaking world the significant contributions of Oecolampadius. Here is a man who, as a fountainhead of the Reformation, championed and developed widely known Protestant doctrines and practices, strengthened those beliefs by appealing to patristic support for them, had a hand in the 1516 edition of the Greek New Testament of Desiderius Erasmus, interacted with luminaries like Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli, exerted significant influence on John Calvin and his reforming measures in Geneva, successfully confronted the corrupt Catholic Church of his day, and transformed Basel into a Reformed city (while restructuring the city government, schools, and university), interceded for the Anabaptists, and much more.

“So how does one describe a book that is in a category by itself? Definitive? Indispensable? Pioneering? Essential? Perhaps better than providing a description, let me offer thanks to Diane Poythress for her labor in preparing this unique gift. And let me urge all who love the Reformation and/or desire to know what has been up to now an overlooked theologian of that movement to read this exceptional, well-researched, and well-written book.”

—Gregg R. Allison, *Professor of Christian Theology,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and author of
Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*

“Those with a nodding acquaintance with the name and ministry of Johannes Oecolampadius have longed for a fuller introduction in English of this sixteenth-century Reformer’s life and thought. This is what Dr. Diane Poythress’s book provides. Usually associated with his contemporary German-Swiss Reformer Ulrich Zwingli, partly for his participation in the Marburg Colloquy of 1529 and partly for his death at age forty-nine just six weeks after Zwingli was killed in battle in 1531, Oecolampadius is shown here to have anticipated many of the reforming insights and activities of Martin Bucer and John Calvin. These appear in such areas as church discipline, the role of the elder, exegesis, and biblical theology. This scholarly and godly figure is one that twenty-first-century ministers and theologians can profit from knowing and emulating.”

—William S. Barker, *Emeritus Professor of Church History,
Westminster Theological Seminary*

“Contemporary of Ulrich Zwingli and Protestant leader of Basel, Johannes Oecolampadius is arguably the most important of the forgotten first-generation Reformers. His numerous commentaries on Scripture and writings on the Lord’s Supper and church discipline informed the leading lights of subsequent Reformers like Calvin, Bucer, and Melancthon. Poythress artfully re-introduces Oecolampadius to twenty-first-century readers by leading them on a well-rounded tour of his life, reforming activities, hermeneutics, Reformed convictions, and commentaries. *Reformer of Basel* houses a wealth of historical and theological detail and will prove to be an important addition to Reformation studies. A must-read for all those who cherish their Reformation heritage.”

—Robert Caldwell, *Assistant Professor of Church History,
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary*

"It is almost incredible that no book-length monograph has ever been published in English on this exceedingly important Reformer of the Basel church, Johannes Oecolampadius, who played such a decisive role in the formation of the later Presbyterian-Reformed church polity, especially in the inception and establishment of eldership among the church officers.

"This new book by Diane Poythress, thanks to her linguistic brilliance in the sixteenth-century Swiss German and Latin, sheds a new light on this Reformer, not just as an academic or a scholar but more as a pastor or, in German, a *Seelsorger* (caretaker of souls), by way of the autonomous discipline of excommunication, as John Calvin later named it. Through this book, the readers will learn that Oecolampadius's prayer was centered solely around the rediscovery and remedy of the lost sheep back to Christ's fold.

"I am convinced that this book will prove a great contribution to the Reformation research in English-speaking countries. It will be my great joy to see it enjoy an extensive circulation for years to come."

—Akira Demura, *Professor Emeritus of Church History,
Tohoku Gakuin University, Sendai, Japan*

"Recent years have witnessed the publication of many monographs and scholarly articles dedicated to serially neglected Reformed theologians of the sixteenth century. One such figure is Johannes Oecolampadius, a first-generation Reformed theologian and civic reformer who, when mentioned at all, is frequently depicted as a minor figure among better-known contemporaries such as Ulrich Zwingli and Martin Bucer. Diane Poythress has helpfully filled this lacuna with this new introduction to Oecolampadius's career and convictions. Her discussion of the Reformer's relationships with his more famous contemporaries, particularly his probable influence on Calvin himself, is particularly helpful. The sections on Oecolampadius's approach to biblical interpretation and the introduction to his core theological convictions are most welcome. Poythress's study will be the starting place for English-speaking students and scholars interested in studying the life and doctrine of this key early Reformed leader."

—Nathan A. Finn, *Associate Professor of Historical Theology,
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary*

"This scholarly book on Oecolampadius will be a necessary addition to any library of sixteenth-century works. Dr. Poythress has brought to life this lesser-known Reformer by painting a vivid picture of his life and contributions in the context of essential Protestant themes. She connects his theology to that of other Reformation personalities and provides a thorough review of all his published works. For Poythress, Oecolampadius is a model pastor-scholar who offered a fresh vision for renewing the church in his day and ours."

—S. Donald Fortson, *Professor of Church History,
Reformed Theological Seminary (Charlotte)*

"In *The Reformer of Basel: The Life, Thought, and Influence of Johannes Oecolampadius*, Diane Poythress provides a fresh reason to probe the lives and thinking of little-acknowledged figures of the Protestant Reformation. Oecolampadius, literally, the 'house lamp,' brought to light what became the distinguishing features of Reformed Christianity. In this excellent biographical and thematic study of the Reformer of Basel—one of the very few in English—Poythress probes his pioneering work in original languages, exegetical and historical studies, liturgy, church discipline, guidance to pastors, and balance of intellect and pious devotion. Commentator on over twenty biblical books, historian unpacking the labors of early fathers such as Chrysostom, John of Damascus, and Augustine, the Reformer of Basel foreshadowed what was best to be found in Bucer and Calvin. Zwingli had ample reason to call Oecolampadius's works a 'cornucopia.' An additional benefit of this fine work is Poythress's summaries of Oecolampadius's interaction with his contemporary Reformers and his influence on reformations occurring in other European countries."

—Andrew HOFFECKER, *Emeritus Professor of Church History,
Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson)*

"Thanks to Diane Poythress I must substantially modify my rather truncated lecture on Calvin's education in Strassburg under Martin Bucer. Poythress expands the Reformed axis by demonstrating a strong Basel-Strassburg and Genevan connection. The Reformer of Basel, Johannes Oecolampadius, was in fact the theologian behind many of the ideas Calvin embraced, including the relationship of church and state, church discipline, Reformed liturgy, and aspects of the Lord's Supper and union with Christ. Any subsequent study of the Lutheran and Reformed branch of the Reformation must include Oecolampadius. This book is the place to begin."

—Dale Walden JOHNSON, *Professor of Church History, Erskine Theological Seminary*

"In *Reformer of Basel* Diane Poythress introduces us to a generally overlooked early Reformer who was, in her apt metaphor, a 'funnel' who collected the wisdom of the past and poured it into his times. She documents the importance of Oecolampadius in the development of typological exegesis, his striving to reform the discipline of the church, and his remarkable capacity for friendship with other first-generation Reformers. As Dr. Poythress observes and ably demonstrates, if John Calvin is the father of the Reformed churches, he is also the son of Johannes Oecolampadius."

—John R. MUETHER, *Professor of Church History,
Reformed Theological Seminary (Orlando)*

"This work on Oecolampadius by Diane Poythress is an enchiridion on the Reformation. The life of the subject himself is a wonder of providence. His connections through personal contact or by theological and literary influence with the other major Reformers give an instructive picture of the organic relations of ideas in the development of Reformation thought and demonstrate the pivotal substantive nature of his influence on all aspects of the Reformation."

Poythress has done a masterful job of laying out the linguistic skills of the Basel Reformer as well as the more subtle and broadly demanding aspects of his full hermeneutical method. She has given a succinct yet sufficiently nuanced presentation of his Reformation theology and the relentless way in which he discussed all doctrine from a christocentric interpretation of the biblical text. Her presentation of Oecolampadius's instructions, and practice, about the importance of preaching is a sobering and encouraging word to any generation. In an immaculately scholarly and trustworthy presentation, Poythress has also managed to be highly accessible to readers, transparently devoted to Reformation theology, and seriously encouraging to biblical piety."

—Tom J. Nettles, *Professor of Historical Theology,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*

"In his day, Oecolampadius attracted the likes of Erasmus and Luther. It's not too much of a stretch to claim that his exegetical and grammatical work in Hebrew and Greek stands behind the return to the Bible and the world-changing preaching of the Reformation. Yet he has become a forgotten soul today. This book corrects that. Thanks to the tireless and deft efforts of Dr. Diane Poythress, this great voice from the past once again speaks to the church with clarity and conviction. Oecolampadius and we too are in her debt."

—Stephen J. Nichols, *Research Professor of Christianity
and Culture, Lancaster Bible College*

"In this carefully researched study, Diane Poythress has opened for her readers the fascinating world of Johannes Oecolampadius, an important but often overlooked sixteenth-century pastor, teacher, and *Reformer*. *Reformer of Basel: The Life, Thought, and Influence of Johannes Oecolampadius* makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the Protestant Reformation and one of its most interesting leaders."

—Garth M. Rosell, *Professor of Church History,
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary*

"Dr. Diane Poythress has produced a book that is both informative and inspiring. Informative because she brings needed data to our attention about a too-little-known figure of the Reformation in Basel, who not only influenced better-known Reformers but also did important theological work, especially in hermeneutics, ecclesiology, church polity, and even church and state. Inspiring because Oecolampadius was both learned and godly, and focus upon such a life is sure to encourage other pilgrims in their journey. Diane is to be thanked and congratulated for foregrounding Oecolampadius and translating some of his rarely read work so that we can all get to know him and the God that he sought to glorify better."

—Alan D. Strange, *Associate Professor of Church History,
Mid-America Reformed Seminary*

Reformer of Basel

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JOHANNES OECOLAMPADIUS

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THE LIFE, THOUGHT, AND INFLUENCE OF
JOHANNES OECOLAMPADIUS

Diane Poythress



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To my husband,

Dr. Vern S. Poythress,

the only person who has supported me through eleven years of a doctorate and twenty years of rewriting my dissertation. He has patiently read and reread paragraphs I've given him for inspection. He has helped me over translation difficulties. He has repeatedly fixed the obstreperous computer. And he has always prayed for and encouraged me. Besides this, he has always been the houselight in our home who explained the Bible, pointed to God, and lived a faithful and godly life. In all of this, he has loved me, which is the most overwhelming grace I have experienced apart from Christ Himself.

And to my parents,

Harold and Lucille Weisenborn,

and my sister,

Denise Weisenborn.

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Observe here, whoever acts as a preacher, [the nature of] your office. For the task is, that with Isaiah you may first be a disciple rather than a teacher, and may be among those who have seen God, whom Scripture calls “theodidaktous” [taught by God]. May you also be called by God, as was Aaron, and not like Nadab and Abihu, and Korah and others. May the desire of Uzziah first die to you, who intruded into sacred things from his own audacity. [Such desire] dies, however, if you do not receive glory from people. For from arrogance is born in the mind the contagious disease of leprosy, which is a symbol of heresy. That you also may see, with Moses that earthly filthiness and dirtiness of passions, for you will not be fitting to them, in order that you may be sent or may teach. That you also may be a surety of election, the task is, that in you may be prostrated Saul, and may rise up Paul; that you may no longer seek the things which are of the flesh, the things which belong to pharisaical righteousness, the things which are yours, but those of Jesus Christ, and those of others [who are] in Jesus. Withdraw, you also, with Ezekiel to the river Chebar, lest you seek to be praised by people and to be called “rabbi.” And when you know God and see how great is His majesty, beyond profound and inscrutable judgment, and how great is His goodness, then, if the vision be to that [such a calling], teach, lest you be among those who run but are not sent, and instead of the Word of God you offer the trash of your dreams. In Scripture, however, if you search them, you will see God.... As therefore the Seraph was sent to Isaiah, in order that he might be cleansed, might learn, and might teach; so Isaiah or another [is sent] to us, that we might be cleansed, might learn, and after that we might undertake the office of teacher.

—Johannes Oecolampadius, commenting on Isaiah 6:1

CHAPTER ONE

From Germany to Switzerland

THE LIFE OF JOHANNES OECOLAMPADIUS



“IT IS ONE OF SATAN’S most cunning and consistent strategies.” That was my friend’s remark when I showed him an extraordinary painting done by a little known Christian artist of the nineteenth century. Satan tries to bury in obscurity the stunning work by believers throughout history. Such is the case with Johannes Oecolampadius, the Reformer of Basel. His life of boldness, piety, and pathos alone should be read to inspire Christians today. A small glimpse of the pastor shepherding his own family, the faithful, the sick, the wayward, and the unbeliever should suffice to challenge all Christendom as a model. But such a limited portrait would ignore his historical significance as arguably the spiritual father of Calvin and the entire Reformed church. One particular aspect of his influence, soundly documented yet also forgotten, is his initiation of church discipline and reinstitution of the office of elder. His fluency in languages, exacting exegesis, and hermeneutics led scholars into proper biblical investigation. Personally, Oecolampadius’s intimate love for God and understanding of His ways, as evidenced in his commentaries, have often sent me to my knees.

Oecolampadius drew words from the deep spiritual well of Scripture, words which have yet to be drunk by modern readers. None of his commentaries on Genesis, Job, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Matthew, Romans, Colossians,

Hebrews, and 1 John have been translated into English. Perhaps one day this treasure box will be fully opened to modern readers. Until then, let us satisfy ourselves with this survey of the life and thought of this saintly man.

1482–1514

A great light in God's church shone through a baby, born in 1482, whose surname in God's providence meant "house lamp." Johannes Hausshein (or Oecolampadius in Greek) was born in Weinsberg, Germany. His father, Johannes, originally intended him to be a tradesman, but chose a law career for his son when the boy proved brilliant. His mother, Anna, encouraged her only surviving child in his studies and influenced him by her example of piety and practical charity, ministering to him until her death in 1528.

Young Johannes probably began his education at a local German school, then proceeded to a Latin school in Heilbronn where promising young men prepared for university. A typical day began at 5 a.m. with Latin. Atypically, his schoolmaster trained students in the humanist revival. This method involved a return to reading classical sources in original languages, covering grammar, logic, and rhetoric in a manner opposed to medieval Scholasticism.

At age seventeen, Johannes began university studies at Heidelberg. There he heard more humanist teaching from a forerunner of the Reformation, Jakob Wimpfeling, who passionately lectured on moral reform in the church. Young Johannes even wrote a Latin poem in honor of this teacher:

To a youth, that he may begin to love God at the right time,
the first effort of John Heusegen of Weinsberg: Love with
your whole heart the word-bearing Christ, Who is the fount
and garden of pious righteousness. Sweet marjoram must be
sought in this Hyblaeon field; For here lies the great grace of
the almighty God.¹

1. Ernst Staehelin, *Briefe und Akten zum Leben Oekolampads* (Leipzig: M. Heinssium Nachfolger, 1927; New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1971), 1:1–2, #2. See also Diane Poythress, "Johannes Oecolampadius' Exposition of Isaiah, Chapters 36–37," 2 vols. (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1992).

In 1501, at age nineteen, he received his B.A., followed by his M.A. after two more years of study. The latter came amid the complication of the entire university being removed to another city for a year because of the Plague (i.e. the bubonic plague, the Black Death). Then a family tragedy occurred. Sent by his father, Johannes went to study Roman law in Bologna. But the man entrusted with his tuition absconded with the money. However, God turned this seeming disaster into a great blessing, for Johannes returned to Heidelberg to pursue theology, with a small income acquired from teaching.

Upon graduation, a question presented itself: What does a late medieval major in theology do for work? As often happened at that time, he was hired by a nobleman to tutor four sons, ages twelve, eighteen, nineteen, and twenty. For four years, Oecolampadius trained these young men in deportment, higher education, languages, and how to maintain proper times of waking and retiring. But he especially prepared them for the church offices their father had purchased. One child had been a church prior since turning seven years old. So his charges had to practice daily prayers and church attendance.

The high social connections of this home brought Oecolampadius into contact with influential politicians and clerics. Occasionally he received offers to lecture at the nearby university, but he leaned toward a quiet pietism.

In 1510, he returned home to Weinsberg, where his family's influence brought him a preaching position, a new office at that time. This work required completing ordination regulations for the priesthood. Church positions were often bought for the mere profit of clerics, which meant that worship services and preaching frequently lay neglected. Poor young men could be hired cheaply to substitute. Karl Hammer sees this as the beginning of the centrality of preaching as practiced in the Protestant church today.² In God's plan that meant for the first time, fresh humanist graduates filled pulpits with a vigor for moral reform and biblical exposition.

2. Karl Hammer, "Der Reformator Oekolampad (1482–1531)," in *Reformiertes Erbe* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1993), 157–170, esp. 158–159.

Thus, foundations were laid on which later Reformation principles could be built. In fact, Oecolampadius himself was appointed to his preaching office by Duke Ulrich of Wurtemberg, who was methodically placing young humanists in positions throughout Germany.

Oecolampadius's significant sermon series from this time, "On the Passion of the Lord," found a printer in Strassburg in 1512. He first submitted the work to his old mentor, Wimpfeling, for approval. It contained some typical medieval divisions, yet it also held unusual insights into Christ as priest. For example, he compared Aaron's donning of priestly garments (which he said belonged to Jesus) to Christ's being stripped of His garments; he then contrasted that with the rich vestments of sixteenth-century priests. He spoke of the thief on the cross being justified by faith, as was Abraham, and of the thief being a sign in heaven that whoever believes in Christ will receive the same honor of being justified. This early emphasis on faith alone for salvation is noteworthy. Oecolampadius said that Christ's petition, "Father, forgive..." demonstrated His work as the God-man priest who offers Himself on behalf of humanity. Finally, he bound together these thoughts with a prayer to Christ for faith, knowledge of sin, forgiveness of sin, purity of understanding, holiness, and a view of Christ in His blessed glory. Many scholars mark this sermon as the sign of his true conversion. It also typified his future methodology of striking at human depravity, as Augustine had done, rather than attacking ecclesiastical authority, as other forerunners had done.³

Despite this auspicious beginning as preacher, Oecolampadius resigned his position in 1512, feeling unqualified for the responsibilities.⁴ In spring 1513, he began studies at Tübingen, where he met Philip Melanchthon, fifteen years his junior, and Melanchthon's great uncle, Johann Reuchlin, one of the greatest humanists and finest Hebraists of the day. Now two streams joined to form a powerful

3. Hammer, "Der Reformator Oekolampad," 160. Hammer notes this was also a trait of Oecolampadius's "pupil," John Calvin.

4. Hammer, "Der Reformator Oekolampad," 161. Hammer quotes Wolfgang Capito as saying, "[Oecolampadius] considered himself not sufficiently mature for the office entrusted to him," which Hammer points out as rare humility of character.

river. The moral reform of Wimpfeling flowed into the original biblical language exposition of Reuchlin. Oecolampadius sped on into the implications of these two streams for the church.

The thrilling necessity of understanding the Bible as God spoke it evidently turned him back to Greek and Hebrew studies at Heidelberg in 1514. There he met Wolfgang Capito, who had also studied law along with theology and later became a significant German Reformer. With Capito, he shared books, manuscripts, and ideas like a brother. Neither could know the battles they would wage as comrades, their parallel roles as Reformers of two great European cities, or the events that would bring one to marry the widow of the other and raise his children.

At this time, Johannes, ever the teacher, also began lecturing in Greek, having written his own grammar, which saw significant use for almost a century. It is said that he spoke German, Greek, Latin, Aramaic, some Swiss German, Italian, French, and Hebrew, even rivaling Reuchlin.⁵

1515–1521

It appears that this fluency in languages elicited a call from Desiderius Erasmus for Oecolampadius to come labor with him in Basel, Switzerland, on a Greek New Testament. Erasmus, famous as a scholar and humanist even then, had chosen Basel to publish his work because of its reputation for beautiful fonts. By 1501, Basel had seventy printers, including Johann Froben, who published in both Latin and Greek, and Adam Petri, who printed mostly in German, including Luther's Bible. Erasmus did not have the capability in Hebrew to check Old Testament references, so he hired Oecolampadius to check the references, write theological annotations, proofread the print sheets, discard any heretical opinions, and write the postscript for *Novum Testamentum*, the printed Greek New Testament that was later the basis for the King James Bible. This was no small collaboration, since both men were risking their reputations

5. John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 55.

and lives by correcting various corruptions carried into the church's traditional Latin texts. So it was through Erasmus that God introduced Oecolampadius to Basel in the summer of 1515. His ministry would change the city's history forever.

About ten thousand citizens lived in this center of learning in the early 1500s. Oecolampadius, age thirty-three, had come as Erasmus's aide, but he simultaneously began studies at the University of Basel for his first theological degree (*baccalaureus biblicus*). He studied intensively in order to receive his doctorate in three years rather than the normal twelve. The matriculation meant that he could begin lecturing at the university, which he did, beginning with Obadiah, followed the next week by Ephesians. At that point, he received a promotion (*baccalaureus sententiaris*), which allowed him to lecture on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. His lectures on the first book of the *Sentences* ended in early 1516, at which time he received his next degree (*baccalaureus formatus*). The Greek New Testament work with Erasmus ended around the latter part of March that year.

From then until August 1516, he preached in his home town of Weinsberg and lectured on the other three books of Lombard's *Sentences*. This could be compared to seminary field work assignments today. Two months later, he sustained a battery of exams, including a disputation on the *Sentences* and a licensure exam, leading to his *licentiatatus theologiae*. It appears he then returned to Weinsberg to continue preaching and to serve as penitentiary priest for the whole diocese. Alongside other duties, he managed to write the index to Erasmus's fifteen-volume edition of Jerome, in 1516. This tome, published in 1520, included a preface by Capito.

Apparently through Capito's arrangement, Oecolampadius came to Basel again in 1518 as penitentiary priest. He occasionally preached at the cathedral along with Capito.⁶ While there, he completed his doctoral work, receiving his degree November 27, 1518, at the age of thirty-six.

Within a couple of weeks, the imperial city of Augsburg called him to be the cathedral preacher. Apparently Bernard Adelmann,

6. McNeill, *History*, 55.

who was canon of Augsburg and belonged to the Lutheran persuasion, influenced this hiring.⁷ The cathedral position required presenting theological lectures as well as preaching. Through Reuchlin's urging, he had also applied to be Hebrew professor at Wittenberg. However, the institution cut him from its short list, and he was rejected because of his humanist ties.

Association with the humanist movement did not embarrass him. Rather, almost immediately upon being installed at Augsburg, he published a treatise, for which Capito wrote the preface, that attacked the common practice of preaching a humorous sermon the Sunday after Easter. In this treatise, he also noted how current practices of penance had only a slim basis. Then, in 1519, he stated in a pamphlet that Roman Catholic theologian Johann Eck's argumentation was untenable, that Luther came closer to the gospel, and that indulgences were wrong.⁸

In 1520, he translated and published with comments a manuscript, provided through Adelmann, by John of Damascus: "How Much Do the Good Works of the Living Benefit the Dead." The article dealt with prayers for the dead. Along with John of Damascus, Oecolampadius asserted that any works done on behalf of the deceased are done in vain, including prayers.⁹ The Reformer's booklet proved so popular that it was published five times in thirty-four years.

7. Adelmann and Oecolampadius were declared to be friends and supporters of Martin Luther in a letter from Guy Bild to Luther, dated April 16, 1520. Guy Bild, "Bild an Luther," *Zeitschrift des Historischen Vereins für Schwaben und Neuberg*, vol. 20, #160 (Augsburg: Ludwig Schulze, 1893), 221–222. Accessed at http://periodika.digitale-sammlungen.de/schwaben/Band_bsb00010266.html, Aug. 19, 2010.

8. Olaf Kuhr (*Die Macht des Bannes und der Busse: Kirchengzucht und Erneuerung der Kirche bei Johannes Oekolampad, 1482–1531* [Bern: Peter Lang, 1999]) seems to ignore Oecolampadius's independent Reformed stance prior to 1520, which was even acknowledged by peers Adelmann and the university at Wittenberg.

9. The Latin title is "Quantum defunctis prosint viventium bona opera sermo Ioannis Damasceni, Ioanne Oecolampadio interprete." The thesis of Irena Backus (in "What Prayers for the Dead in the Tridentine Period?" in *Reformiertes Erbe* [Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1993], 13–24) is flawed in that 1) the word *only* is actually implied in the Greek; 2) Oecolampadius would not *pragmatically* risk his reputation as a scholar nor his integrity before God by adding words not existent in his manuscript; 3) his scholarship was precise, not sloppy, as she herself admits (p. 22); 4) without a manuscript, the entire argument is merely speculative; 5) she ignores his similar meticulous gathering without revision of Patristics on the Eucharist; and 6)

Oecolampadius held the exalted position of cathedral preacher in the imperial city of Augsburg less than two years. A mysterious interlude followed. Oecolampadius entered a German monastery in Altomunster on April 23, 1520. No one knows why.¹⁰ Did it perhaps have something to do with the counsel he gave a young woman about entering a convent for holiness? Did he feel confused by the political winds blowing through the church doors concerning reformation? Did he long for a less public, more pietistic life? Did he think he could change the church more effectively by scholarly writing and research?

Another possibility is that he felt threatened by an impending condemnation of his position. He had anonymously edited a reply supposedly by Adelmann to Eck after the latter's debate with Luther. This led Eck to place both Luther and Adelmann on Pope Leo's list of accused. Oecolampadius later confessed to Melancthon that he had personally accepted Eck's challenge for someone to refute him and had authored the defense of Luther's position. In it, he used a sermon by Basil the Great (Basilius) against usury and several other translations of the Fathers.¹¹ Eck was so infuriated that he wanted the authors and supporters burned. But Wittenberg's rector and their senate interceded, along with Reuchlin. When Eck later discovered the true author, he urged Oecolampadius to nullify the publication. When Oecolampadius refused, Eck in 1522 denounced the Reformer to Rome as more dangerous than

Oecolampadius's quote on p. 14 does not require tampering with evidence, but rather underlines the applicability of ancient evidence. That quote is "But in order that the ungodly should be rebuked by this sermon, so the inventions of superstitious people are not approved." Staehelin, *Briefe und Akten*, 1:132–133, #90.

10. Hans Guggisberg suggests that Oecolampadius was torn between Reformation idealism and pragmatic realism, desiring a quiet retreat where he could study the issues more carefully. See Guggisberg, "Johannes Oekolampad," in *Die Reformationzeit*, vol. 1, Martin Greschat, ed. (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1981), 117–128, esp. 120. Hammer concurs that he needed to think through Luther's ideas and the implications of reformation. Hammer, "Der Reformator Oekolampad," 162.

11. Hammer notes that in contradiction to the sociologists who see the Reformation as originating in society, this publication of Oecolampadius in particular, with its discussion of usury, proves a religious foundation and origin. "Der Reformator Oekolampad," 164.

Luther. Oecolampadius may have seen the writing on the wall and moved into the cloister fortress.

Capito wrote to Melancthon concerning Oecolampadius's decision to enter the monastery: "A man otherwise cautious and prudent, who burdened a melancholy spirit with unaccustomed labors in the cause of religion, acted indiscreetly...it must be endured since it cannot be changed."¹² In the end, only God knows how He was moving on the nascent Reformer's heart at that time.

The Augustinian monastery he entered fell into the more Lutheran outlook, but Oecolampadius argued for greater reforms. A special agreement allowed him privileges: to leave the convent to preach, to obey only those convent rules that did not contradict the gospel, to live freely according to God's Word, to miss convent prayers and worship, and to be given a study area. Hammer writes that on his part, he agreed to be a confessor priest at the convent.¹³ Adelman brought him reading glasses so he could study by candlelight and write. Here he wrote a 120-page treatise on confession, proposing confession only to God, the church, and one another, but not to a priest alone. He wrote, "If it is not liberating, it is not Christian confession."¹⁴ This publication contained mature theological formulations. For example, he defined sin as not loving God or man, with the conclusion that there is never a moment we do not sin. He argued that every deed done in unbelief is a mortal sin. Among Reformers, he was unique in ordering confession along the same lines as Augustine, i.e. public confession for public sin, brotherly confession when sin is against a brother, and private confessions to God for private sin.

Ever the scholar, he also began a lifelong work of translating John Chrysostom's homilies while completing several translations of works by John of Damascus. In addition, he finished other

12. Akira Demura, "Church Discipline According to Johannes Oecolampadius in the Setting of His Life and Thought," (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1964), 36. See also James M. Kittelson, *Wolfgang Capito: From Humanist to Reformer* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), 55–56.

13. Hammer, "Der Reformator Oekolampad," 162.

14. Bernd Moeller, *Imperial Cities and the Reformation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 51.

sermons, papers, and translations, composed a verdict on Luther's teaching, and wrote about the Eucharist. He exchanged letters with those beyond the monastery walls, such as Erasmus, Melancthon, Veit Bild, Adelmann, Nikolaus Ellenbog, Konrad Peutinger, and others. In August 1520, Oecolampadius wrote to Bernard Adelmann concerning Luther:

Now concerning Martin, I speak freely as always before that he approaches nearer to Gospel truth than his adversaries.... Bishops may see whether they damn me or stop condemning me. I do not speak concerning everything Martin has written, for I have not read everything. But what I have read is falsely rejected, so that injury is done to sacred Scriptures which he sincerely expounds. And many of the things said by him are so certain to me that, even if heavenly angels contradicted them, they would not change my convictions.¹⁵

Given this espousal of support, it must have been a shock when, in May 1521, Luther was declared to be cut off from the church. No one was allowed to buy his books, and all adherents were to be treated as outcasts and their property confiscated. By implication, Oecolampadius thus became severed from the church. His possessions technically already belonged to the monastery. Rumors arose that the local prince might have him arrested. Therefore, for what appear to have been prudent political reasons, he remained in the monastery most of this tense time, while Luther hid in a castle (May 1521–March 1522).

If Oecolampadius thought he would be safe in the monastery, he misjudged. God did not want him comfortable but crucified. Oecolampadius came to see that the ruling against Luther had placed him outside the church, as well. No longer could reform take place from within the church. Therefore, he determined to leave the monastery. Suddenly and somewhat secretly, the bishop gave him permission to leave. Therefore, he did not violate his vows by leaving. Still, in one sense, he had been banished by the church itself. But what would it mean to leave: dishonor or death? He left on

15. Staehelin, *Briefe und Akten*, 1:134, #91.

January 23, 1522, writing to Pellican, “To enter a monastery is not so serious; but to go out, to be ridiculed as apostate and heretic, to have no sure home or employment—that is not without pain.”¹⁶

Outside the monastery, he found himself stripped of home, job, reputation, respectability, credibility, his beloved church, and even his books and reading glasses. All he had was God and His Word. But that was all he needed to embolden him to face warfare, since now he had nothing left to lose except life itself.

1522–1525

Oecolampadius learned that safety did not exist anywhere outside the refuge of Christ Himself. For a few months, cathedral preacher Caspar Hedio hid him in Mainz, where Capito resided. He was offered a professorial position in Ingolstadt if he would distance himself from the Lutheran position, but he declined. Then, in April, he was named resident chaplain at a castle in Ebernberg. The castle belonged to Franz von Sickingen, who was leading the German knights in preparing for a revolt and was himself under a papal ban. Here Oecolampadius led a daily Reformed chapel service, reading from the Gospel and Epistle lessons in German. He reformulated the liturgy, and the Mass in particular, in a way that was “seen widely as revolutionary.”¹⁷ It was published as “The testament of Jesus Christ formerly called the Mass brought into German by Oecolampadius.” He also took the time to translate a codex given him in Mainz by Capito containing 150 sermons by Chrysostom.

Martin Bucer hid simultaneously in the same castle, while Luther continued to hide at a castle in Wartburg. However, Luther returned to Wittenberg in March without repercussion. So in November 1522, Oecolampadius also ventured out, hoping to return to Augsburg and his publisher, Sigmund Grimm. This attempt proved unwise. However, in God’s providence the outcast turned to Basel. Still, his safety could not be guaranteed there either, since just that year St. Albans priest, Wilhelm Roubli, was expelled from the city

16. Staehelin, *Briefe und Akten*, 1:167, #118.

17. Hammer, “Der Reformator Oekolampad,” 165.

when he protested the Mass and purgatory, broke lent, and carried the Bible instead of the Eucharist in the Corpus Christi procession.

Doctor Johannes Oecolampadius was an acclaimed scholar, an expert in the Patristics, a renowned linguist, and a former imperial city preacher and university lecturer, but at forty years of age he was alone, with no job and no social position, shunned by the church, and a German refugee. Thus, he came as a beggar to his former publisher, Andreas Cratander. His old friend offered a room in his home on Petergasse and a job proofreading at the presses.

The Basel printing presses carried great esteem. Erasmus had chosen to live and publish there because of the Basel printers' beautiful fonts. Luther's German translation of the New Testament had just come off the presses in Basel two months previously, to be followed the next year by his Old Testament translation. The city bore an enviable reputation as a center for humanist and Reformation publications. Beginning in 1522, Cratander published Oecolampadius's translations of Chrysostom, which included notes on contemporary applications such as rejection of papal succession, since Christ is the only foundation of the church; the importance of clergy being servants, not rulers; church and civil orders; caring for the poor; rejection of any use of force to produce faith; separation of church and civil rule; excommunication understood not as anathema but as a curative discipline by the church body; and the difference between the true and false church.

Before November passed, another employment opportunity presented itself. The congregation of St. Martin's Church in Basel unanimously called Oecolampadius to be its vicar, replacing an ailing preacher. Assuming he applied in Basel the same reforms instituted at Ebernberg—an altered meter, a canon read aloud, the Gospel and Epistle lessons read in German, and a non-sacrificial Eucharist—it is possible that the earliest Reformed liturgy was practiced in Basel. There is no evidence that Oecolampadius presented Mass as a sacrifice. We know an assistant performed this task at an early stage. Oecolampadius had written to William Farel to encourage him about changing the words spoken publicly at the

Eucharist.¹⁸ Luther also had urged the omission of words that called the Eucharist a sacrifice during worship.¹⁹ Thus, it seems likely that Oecolampadius instituted these reforms at St. Martins, making it the earliest Protestant liturgy.

Before the end of December, Oecolampadius began lecturing, without a professorial post, at the University of Basel on Isaiah and Jeremiah in German, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Speaking often in the common language of the populace, he included discreet attacks on the errors of the church. Within two months, his presentations drew as many as four hundred listeners at one time. "Hundreds flocked to Oecolampadius's lecture theater and his devotees wished to risk body and soul for him, when respected citizens demanded daily Bible studies in the Franciscan Church. Everywhere it was a matter of fellowship with spiritual power which knew no compulsion, a free-will rallying around the word of the preacher."²⁰ The powerful university sophists tried to get his lectures banned, as they had Pellican's. But no one could stop the mighty work God initiated through this instrument refined through the fires of affliction.

By January 1523, Pope Hadrian VI pronounced that the Reformed "heresy" must be eradicated, Luther's books burned, and all Lutheran preachers banished. This did not sit well with the Baslers, whose town was the main source for Lutheran and Reformed publications. In addition, they had enjoyed the freedom and dignity of living in an imperial city with a bishop's seat for centuries. Through God's grace, Baslers were being revived along with all structures of basic life: church, university, government, marriage, and family. So they refused to acquiesce to Rome.

Undaunted by threats, Oecolampadius preached a controversial Easter series from Isaiah, some of which is found in this book. Opponents pulled in outsiders to validate their more Catholic positions.

18. Aime Louis Herminjard, ed., *Correspondence des Reformateurs dans les pays de langue française*, 9 vols. (reprint; Nieuwkoop: DeGraaf, 1965–66), 1:335. Previously printed in Geneva, 1878.

19. Martin Luther, *Luthers Sämmtliche Schriften*, ed. John Georg Walch (St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia Verlag, 1890), vol. 20, column 80.

20. Rudolf Wackernagel, *Humanismus und Reformation in Basel* (Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1924), 346.

However, in April, the City Council took a decided stand for the Reformation by opposing the pope's pronouncement. Instead of banishing their "Lutheran" preacher, the City Council appointed him as teacher of theology and professor of biblical exegesis at the university—but not under the auspices of the university.

In a matter of five months, Oecolampadius had been raised by God from the status of a transient pauper to the exalted rank of head theological professor, city preacher, and leader of the Reformation in Basel. His fiery but seasoned sermons led other preachers to turn pulpits into propaganda platforms.

The city churches, university, and Council each divided over Reformed versus traditional ideas. Without consensus, the City Council could only order that preaching should be scriptural and no one should call another man "heretic" without biblical basis.

The ailing priest at St. Martin's grew so disabled by the spring of 1523 that Oecolampadius took over the entire parish preaching. This work joined other tasks, such as lectures on Isaiah (interrupted for a Christmas series on 1 John), a published commentary on Isaiah, translation projects, proofreading, sermons, and professorial duties that lay heavily on his shoulders. In fact, his physical and spiritual stature stood in strong contradiction. According to one report, he appeared emaciated, with a yellow face, big nose, babbling falsetto, and retiring behavior.²¹ In addition to the burden of momentous issues, he dealt with personal distractions. His two friends and co-Reformers, Hedio and Capito, broke fellowship with one another because Hedio received an appointment to the Strassburg cathedral that Capito had coveted. Evidently Oecolampadius scolded Capito for pouting.²²

Beginning the same year of 1523, the priest at St. Ulrich's in Basel celebrated Mass with a new liturgy, offering Communion in both elements. Oecolampadius was the first to receive such Communion from him. Others followed this example, so by July of the following year, Oecolampadius himself offered the chalice to believers.

21. Kittelson, *Capito*, 95–96.

22. Kittelson, *Capito*, 95–96.

By 1524, the Reformation picked up speed in Basel. In his Latin and German lectures at the university, Oecolampadius concentrated on Romans. His ideas quickly spread through publications. He attacked church accretions more pointedly and strongly opposed free will in a sermon. Ever after, a rift grew between him and Erasmus, who had argued with Luther in print in favor of free will. Printers who were arrested for publishing a tract attacking Luther's view of consubstantiation appealed to the fact that Oecolampadius, who had been the publisher's reader, found nothing amiss. By November, it became known that Oecolampadius and Ulrich Zwingli shared similar views on the Eucharist. Also this year, a married priest in Basel posted five theses against clerical celibacy, which no one refuted.

Basel, being a university center, was characterized by a studied approach to every issue. This city on the Rhine had been the eleventh covenant member of the Swiss Confederacy, not joining until 1501. Prior to that, the town's identity had been wrapped around the prestige of being an imperial city with kingly privileges, even boasting a bishop's chair from the time of Roman settlement. An imperial city in the Holy Roman Empire subjected itself to no authority except the emperor himself. Now, as the empire declined, the Baslers faced the question of whether to define themselves as an imperial city or a Swiss city. The answer would decide their ecclesiastical stance. Remaining with the empire meant maintaining traditional allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church; becoming independently Swiss probably meant yielding to the popular Reformation. The City Council judiciously and irenically sat on the fence as long as possible. Every Swiss canton held debates. When, in January 1525, six traditional Swiss cantons sent a delegation to Basel requesting help to quell a rebellion, Basel characteristically urged them to make peace, refusing any overt alignment. The Council replied to inquiries concerning its Swiss allegiance by saying that it believed questions of belief should be decided internally by each city, with each pulpit preaching the Scriptures. In effect, the Council supported the Reformation by not censoring it.

In the meantime, Oecolampadius continued the work of reforming. In 1525, he produced one of the earliest German Protestant

liturgies, remolding the missal to state, "May those be excommunicated from us who...will not let the Word judge in the matter of faith."²³ In addition, he refused to have Communion at St. Martin's Church when no communicants presented themselves. He took the position of people's priest with the proviso that he be given freedom in preaching. Previously, he had established two worship services: an evangelical morning service at which he presided and a traditional evening one led by an assistant. The Council members agreed to such changes as long as he first presented new ideas to them for approval. He also refused to say Mass for the dead; in one case, the Mass had already been paid for by a brother and sister, but the Council merely transferred the money and responsibility to a papist church in town.

A new Catholic preacher, Augustinus Marius, took up the challenge of defending the papist position that year. After the priest's first sermon, Oecolampadius visited him with an irenic letter urging that they might confer amicably together. Marius refused, claiming he could not associate with heretics. He then began such a virulent campaign that it brought protests even from his own supporters.

The year 1525 brought more Council concessions. Oecolampadius and Pellican received promotions to empty theological chairs at the university. This aided the credibility of Oecolampadius's arguments concerning the Eucharist. His exhaustive written work on Communion, *De Genuina Verborum Domini*, published in Strasbourg, circulated widely that summer of 1525. But the Council, after consulting two lawyers, Erasmus and Ludwig Bar, confiscated the work within Basel.

What caused this strong reaction? Perhaps it was the condemnation of the work by the University of Paris. Yet with many other inflammatory publications coming off the presses, why the censure? Within this heavy volume, Oecolampadius compiled all the Patristic citations concerning the Lord's Supper, thereby proving the papist position to be an erroneous innovation. Every orthodox father could be called to witness the truth of the Reformed position. These

23. Demura, "Church Discipline," 55.

included Chrysostom, Cyril, Hilary, Epiphanius, and Ambrose, with the only possible exception being John of Damascus.²⁴ Eventually the convincing arguments of the book even put a wedge between Luther and Melancthon.

Despite the forbidden sale of this book in Basel, others rolled off the presses. That summer saw the publication of Oecolampadius's sixty-six translated sermons of Chrysostom on Genesis. Appended to this were four of his views proffered for public debate: the prime authority of Christ and His Word (*sola Scriptura*); justification by faith (*sola fide*); no invocation of saints; and the liberty of Christians as brothers. Following this, the papist champion, Eck, challenged the Swiss cantons to a debate, specifically mentioning Oecolampadius and Zwingli.

Earlier in 1525, the Reformer had written a letter concerning liturgical changes he wanted and which he probably had begun implementing. His worship order included confession, preaching and prayers, hymns, the Trisagion ("holy, holy holy"), silent meditation, the Lord's Prayer said together, a call to participate in Communion, a deacon's warning to test the conscience (anyone admonished two to three times who remained unrepentant was denounced and denied the Lord's Supper unless he repented and was reconciled), then the Lord's Supper, followed by a commendation to aid the poor and do charity, then dismissal.²⁵

In the summer, while preaching sermons, he spoke of the Anabaptists as a sect. Several adherents met with him the first week in August.²⁶ Oecolampadius thought that since Scripture did not com-

24. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300–1700)*, vol. 4 in *The Christian Tradition: A History in the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 198. See also Eric W. Northway, "Patristic Reception and Eucharistic Theology in Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531), with Special Reference to the *Adversus Haereses* of Irenaeus of Lyons" (PhD diss., University of Durham, 2009), and his forthcoming critical edition of *De Genuina Verborum Domini*.

25. Staehelin, *Briefe und Akten*, 1:345, #239.

26. Despite the similarity of nomenclature, Anabaptists are not the forefathers of the Baptists, but rather of the Hutterites and Mennonites. Their confession refused oath-taking, so that they could not swear to the defense of the city nor to obedience to its laws. They also refused all participation in government. Baptists are more closely related to English Puritans.

pellingly forbid or command infant baptism that both paedobaptism and believer's baptism could exist within the church, particularly for the sake of church unity in love. Summarily, Anabaptists wanted church purity by means of baptism and Oecolampadius wanted it by means of Communion. He pointed out that adult baptism did not make one more pure or morally better, and that no one could see into the heart of an infant or an adult. Both sides agreed that one is not saved by baptism. In addition, Oecolampadius argued that the soul of a child could not properly be cared for outside the church. A church child should be cared for differently than a child of the world. In conjunction with this discussion, he set forth three criteria for abandoning a traditional church practice: 1) the Bible forbids the practice; 2) the practice is disputed throughout church history; and 3) the practice is against love and faith.²⁷

Many connections may be traced between Oecolampadius and the Anabaptists. In fact, the Reformer had to defend himself in a 1525 letter to Wilibald Pirkheimer concerning his friendly relation to Thomas Muntzer.²⁸ Most notably, he was a friend of Hans Denck, who had been a student of Oecolampadius, attending his lectures on Isaiah in 1523.²⁹ Probably Denck's idea that an unbeliever received further condemnation by hearing Scripture came from the Reformer's stance on fencing the Scripture.³⁰ Some peers also contended that Denck's concept of the inner word derived from Oecolampadius's Isaiah lectures.³¹ The student evidently had had several private, non-theological discussions with Oecolampadius.³² Oecolampadius had recommended Denck for

27. See Edmund Pries, "Anabaptist Oath Refusal: Basel, Bern and Strasbourg, 1525–1538" (PhD diss., University of Waterloo, 1995), esp. 56, 80–84. Pries exaggerates similarities between Oecolampadius and Karlin, and seems to agree with Anabaptists that the goal of church membership is purity, so the weak must not be admitted (78).

28. Staehelin, *Briefe und Akten*, 1:364f.

29. Staehelin, *Briefe und Akten*, 1:364f.

30. Jan J. Kweit, "The Life of Hans Denck (ca. 1500–1527)," *Menmonite Quarterly Review* 31, no. 4 (October 1957): 227–259, esp. 240.

31. John Horsch, "The Faith of the Swiss Brethren (2)," *Menmonite Quarterly Review* 5, no. 1 (January 1931), 17n115.

32. Staehelin, *Briefe und Akten*, 1:364.

appointment as headmaster at a Nuremberg school. At the end of Denck's life, he wrote to ask his former teacher to intercede for him to be allowed to live in Basel. Upon coming to Basel, in 1527, he wrote a confession and recantation of his Anabaptist beliefs given to Oecolampadius and attested by the Reformer.³³

A debate arranged by Oecolampadius for June 25, 1527, concerning Anabaptist tenets did not happen. The discussion would have included the imprisoned Karlin (a.k.a. Karl Brennwald) on one side with Oecolampadius and his assistant, and the Catholic priest Marius and his assistant on the other side. Marius refused to participate. Papers, however, were presented to the Council, with Oecolampadius's being published by Cratander during the same year.³⁴

1526–1528

By 1526, the Eucharist discussion moved to center stage. Johann Brenz wrote *Syngramma Suevicum*, defending the Lutheran position. Undaunted, Oecolampadius replied with thirty-nine chapters in *Antisyngramma*, arguing that someone who honors an "imbreaded" god does not remain free from false religion, since God committed Himself to no other creature than the flesh of Christ.³⁵ Earlier that year, he had published a booklet in Augsburg on conducting a biblical baptism and Lord's Supper, and ministering to the sick.

At about this time, God honored Oecolampadius and his church with something spectacular. Normally a choir gave short responses in Latin at various prescribed liturgical moments in the worship service. However, on Easter Sunday, the congregation of St. Martin's spontaneously broke out in German singing during the service. Nothing like this had happened anywhere. The Council immediately forbade such

33. Staehelin, *Briefe und Akten*, 2:111–112. Also Huldreich Zwingli, *Huldreich Zwinglis sämtliche Werke*, vol. 8. Ed. Emil Egli et al. (Leipzig: M. Heinsius Nachfolger, 1914). [CR 95], 9:318.

34. Pries, "Anabaptist Oath Refusal," 70–74. Oecolampadius also replied to Balthasar Hubmaier's retort in 1527. See Staehelin, *Briefe und Akten*, 1:356, #243.

35. Gottfried Locher, *Zwingli und die schweizerische Reformation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1982), 303.